



Military Despatches

Vol 66 December 2022

It's a traditonal thing

Some of the ways the military celebrates Christmas



Fact or Fiction?

Ten wartime urban legends

The origin of 'Taps'

It's not what you think it is

Raid on Pebble Island

The SAS raid during the Falklands War

For the military enthusiast



Click on any video below to view

Military Despatches



Paratrooper Wings Quiz

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.

Military Despatches




Military Firearms Quiz

Military Firearms Quiz

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

Military Despatches



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.

Military Despatches



Army Speak 101

Military slang from the SADF and around the world

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 Despatches



Elite Military Units Quiz

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.

Military Despatches



Who said that?

Famous military quotes quiz

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.



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World War II tanks

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Please remember to subscribe to our channel.

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



Editor's Sitrep

So this is the last issue of the magazine for this year. I want to try and take a bit of a break over December. I need it.

This will be the first Christmas in a few years where we won't be restricted by COVID-19 limitations. Although, to the best of my knowledge, we're still under Stage One restrictions. Or did they lift it at some stage.

Is it just me, or have things become far more expensive? Yesterday the petrol light on the car came on and I decided to fill the tank. What a shock, it came to over R1,100 to fill the tank.

I love a cup of coffee with Ideal Milk. It reminds me of army days. A few weeks ago it cost R22.99 for a tin. Then, for no good reason, the price increased to R29.99 overnight. I sometimes wonder how people are managing to survive.

This is especially true for a lot of military vets, the vast majority of them who are on pension. It makes me want to cry.

This year I'm planning on doing my traditional Irish Christmas lunch and, for the first time in a few years, inviting some of my mates over.

There is a catch, because I do

Christmas lunch on the evening of Christmas Eve. That means on Christmas day no-one has to worry about spending most of the day slaving over a hot stove, trying to get everything ready for Christmas lunch. I can relax and eat left-overs for the next few days.

Then again, one needs to ask the question, will Eskom keep the lights on for Christmas Eve? They say there won't be any loadshedding over Christmas, but I don't trust them further than I can throw them.

I'm not planning on going away over December. It's too crowded and too damn expensive. I'll probably take my bike out for a trip or two, but they will be day trips.

That's about it from me for this year. I trust that all our Christian readers will have a good Christmas and I wish all of our readers a safe and happy New Year.

Until next year, stay safe and stay healthy.

Matt

Hipe! media

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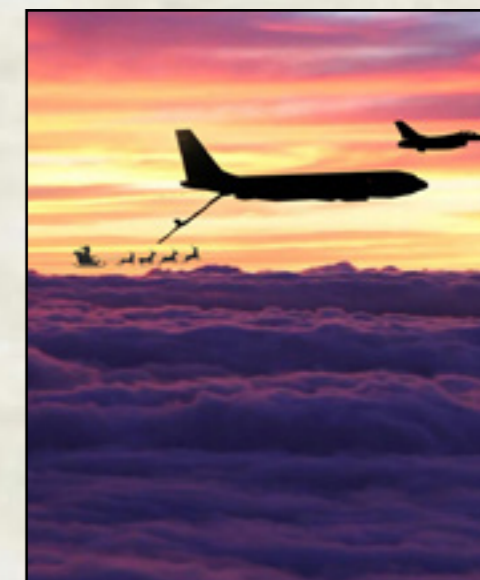
Good reads these holidays

Some interesting reading material for the holidays.

Front Cover

Even Santa needs a hand.

I made this image using four separate images. A shot of a sunset from above the clouds, a Boeing KC-135 Stratotanker, an F-16 Tomcat and an image of Santa's sleigh.



INCOMING

Letters to the editor

Have your say. Want to leave a compliment or a criticism? Request that we do an article about a particular subject, or point out an error that we may have made. Ask a military related question. Then this is the section to do it. Send an e-mail to matt@hipe.co.za and we will try our best to publish it. Please mark your e-mail with 'Incoming' in the subject line.

Dear Matt

As a retired soldier with more than 30 years service I am still enthusiastic with regards to military history.

I discovered your magazine quite by chance and have since become an avid reader. I have been on to your website and read every back issue.

First of all, may I congratulate you on an excellent publication. I rate it as being one of the best online military magazines currently available.

Secondly, I understand and sympathize with the frustrations you have putting the publication together each month.

When I retired I also had the idea of putting together a monthly military publication.

It would have been far too expensive to have printed, so I also went the online route. After five years I had 17,000 regular monthly readers.

I understand the amount of work that goes into doing a project such as this. First of all you need to decide exactly what articles you are going to feature in an issue. Then you have to research these articles and find photographs and graphics to go with them.

Doing the actual layout of the magazine also takes a fair

amount of time. Not only that, there is also a cost involved. I assume that you are using Adobe Indesign and Photoshop to do the layout.

As you well know, you can't even purchase this software anymore. You have to pay a monthly cost to use it. This equates to an exorbitant monthly cost in Dollars, so I can only imagine what it costs you in your currency.

After absorbing these costs for five years, I asked my readers if they would be willing to pay \$1.00 a month to receive the magazine. This was far less than the price of a cup of coffee.

The result? Out of 17,000 readers, only seven bothered to respond. And of those seven, four said that they would be happy to support me. That's when I decided to call it a day.

So I really do understand when you say that you are thinking about not doing the magazine anymore.

I do hope that you continue to publish Military Despatches and I will not only read it each month, I will promote it as far and wide as possible.

I know that my thoughts may be a bit long for a letter, so feel free to edit it where necessary.

Have a peaceful and prosper-



ous Christmas and New Year.

Regards,
William L. Mason
US Army (Ret)

Thank you for your letter. It feels good to know that someone does understand my frustrations.

As you mentioned, it is not only the amount of time spent each month putting the magazine together, it is also the cost.

Currently Indesign and Photoshop each cost \$10.99 a month. And that's if you take a 12 month subscription. So translated into the South African currency of Rand, it costs me R8,609 a year just to do the layout of the magazine. This is something that most people do not realise or take into account.

I will bring out an issue in January, February and March and then re-evaluate the situation after that.

Best wishes to your and your loved ones for Christmas and New Year.

Regards,
Matt

Hi Matt

A quick question. Which medal has been awarded the most - the British Victoria Cross or the American Congressional Medal

of Honour. I've looked at a few sources but they seem to differ.

Thanks,
Len Goddard

The Victoria Cross, or VC, was established on 29 January 1856 by Queen Victoria to honour acts of valour during the Crimean War.

The first VC was awarded to Charles Davis Lucas on 26 June 1857. Since then the medal has been awarded 1,358 times to 1,355 recipients. This means

that three people were awarded the Victoria Cross twice.

Since World War II only 15 medals have been awarded, with the last award being on 26 February 2015.

To date, no women have ever been awarded the VC.

The Medal of Honor (MOH) is sometimes erroneously referred to as the 'Congressional Medal of Honor'. This is because it is awarded by the US President but awarded "in the name of the United States Con-

gress'.
The medal was first awarded on 25 March 1863 and to date 3,525 MOH have been awarded to 3,506 recipients. This means that 19 people won the medal twice.

The last MOH awarded was on 16 December 2021. Only one woman, Dr Mary Edwards Walker, has been awarded the Medal of Honor.

I trust you found this helpful.
Regards,
Matt

Note from the editor

There is a song by a group called 'Whitesnake' that is titled *Here I Go Again*. And it somehow feels apt for this note. Because here I go again.

I seem to spent a lot of time either complaining to our readers or asking them to do something. And when I say 'asking them', what I mean is going on my knees and begging them.

"Please subscribe to our You-

Tube Channel", "Please let us know your thoughts about a particular subject", and so on.

It was suggested that we start a 'letters' page in the magazine. I thought that this was an excellent idea. So I earmarked two pages of the magazine each moth for a letters to the editor section.

In the first month that we ran this section, we received a number of letters. In the second month this had dwindled to five letters.

This month I received only two letters to the editor.

So once again I am faced with the same old problem - a total lack of response from our readers.

Listen, I do realise that nobody is compelled to respond to anything in the magazine. Fair enough. Then again, it's difficult to do a letters page if there are no letters. Just a thought to ponder.

The Sunday Breakfast Zone



Catch Military Despatches editor Matt Tennyson every Sunday morning from 09h00 to 12h00 on the 'Sunday Breakfast Zone' on Zone Radio. Bringing you the best music of the 60s, 70s and 80s.

On Sunday morning at 09h30 you can catch the Retro Top 20 and listen to the Top 20 hit singles on the South African charts for a particular week or even a particular year.

Click here to listen live

Top Ten Wartime Urban Legends

War is often filled with confusion, propaganda, and disturbing rumours. It's often difficult to tell fact from fiction. Here are ten disturbing wartime urban legends.

This month we're taking a look at ten disturbing urban legends that originated in wartime.

Some of them were no more than propaganda to show the enemy in a bad light. Others were as a result of rumours and hearsay. And others were as a result of the "fog of war".

The fog of war is the uncertainty in situational awareness experienced by participants in military operations.

The term seeks to capture the uncertainty regarding one's own capability, adversary capability, and adversary intent during an engagement, operation, or campaign.

The word "fog" in reference to uncertainty in war was introduced by the Prussian military analyst Carl von Clausewitz in his posthumously published book, *Vom Kriege* (1832), which appeared in English translation in 1873 under the title *On War*.

Here are our Top Ten Disturbing Wartime Urban Legends.

10. German corpse factory

The legend of the German corpse factories was arguably one of the most infamous anti-German propaganda stories circulated in World War I by the British.

According to the story, the *Kadaververwertungsanstalt* was

a special installation supposedly operated by the Germans in which, because fats were so scarce in Germany due to the British naval blockade, German battlefield corpses were rendered down for fat, which was then used to manufacture nitroglycerine, candles, lubricants, and even boot dubbin.

It was supposedly operated behind the front lines by the DAVG — *Deutsche Abfall-Verwertungsgesellschaft*.

After the war, in 1925, John Charteris, the British former Chief of Army Intelligence, allegedly stated in a speech that he had invented the story for propaganda purposes, with the principal aim of getting the Chinese to join the war against Germany.

It was later used by the Nazis as part of their own anti-British propaganda.

9. Whale Parade

During the Cold War, a rumour circulated that the American CIA had a bizarre secret weapon — a dead fin whale named Jonah.

Caught by Norwegian whalers in the 1950s, Jonah was mounted on a truck and toured all over Europe in the 1960s.

Exactly why anyone would want to parade a dead whale around the place is anyone's

guess. It seems an odd kind of thing to do. But conspiracy theorists argued that the whole thing was a cover-up for a more cunning purpose. Especially after the whale arrived in Hungary.

Allegedly, the CIA wanted to test if the roads of Hungary could handle the weight of nuclear missiles loaded on trucks.

According to conspiracy theorists, the truck carrying the whale eerily resembled ones used to carry nuclear missiles.

However, no concrete proof was ever presented. And the strangest thing of all is that the Hungarian people loved Jonah and tickets were sold out everywhere he went.

8. Beliye Kolgotky

Stories about the *Beliye Kolgotky*, or White Tights, started circulating during the Chechen Wars in Russia.

The White Tights were allegedly a group of women who were paid to assassinate officers. Their method of killing was, how should we put it, rather unique.

During the First Chechen War it was reported that the rebels were paying the White Tights \$2,000 per officer killed, with a very specific request — to eliminate the Russians by blowing their genitals off.



TERROR OF THE NIGHT: During World War II, Italian households believed that Pippo was a ghostly plane that would appear at night to bomb your house.

Though the stories of the White Tights seem a little far-fetched, they do have a ring of truth about them. It's a well-known fact that even during the Russian Civil War in 1918, the Russians trained and employed woman as snipers.

Not only were they patient and calculating, they could also easily infiltrate certain areas, particularly when they were carrying a child with them. During World War II, many of the top Russian snipers were female.

7. Pig Blood Bullets

During the 1900s when the Americans fought and subsequently occupied the Philippines, they had stiff opposition from the ethnic Muslims, called Moros.

Attacks by Moro religious

zealots became so frequent that military commander John Pershing came up with an unusual and sneak solution.

The story goes that Pershing played up on the belief that any Muslim who touched a pig would not be able to enter heaven. Prior to a scheduled execution of 50 Moro insurgents, he ordered his men to dip their bullets in pig's blood before shooting the insurgents.

After the executions had been carried out he buried the men along with dead pigs and spared the life of one man, in the hope he'd pass on the story to his comrades. Pershing's actions single-handedly stopped further attacks for the rest of the American occupation.

However, to this day, historians debate how much of this

story is true. Reports from 1911 suggest the Pershing actively attempted to negotiate peacefully with the Moros people.

6. Pippo the Ghost Plane

Nearly every culture has tales about scary things that frequent the night. They all have their own Boogie Man. Yet during World War II Italian households had Pippo, the night terror plane.

No one knew where Pippo came from, what type of plane it was, or who piloted it. But it was alleged he dropped explosive device and bombed homes as he flew over villages, towns and cities.

People also claimed that the sound coming from his engines was unmistakably his own, and once you heard them, you

would know it was Pippo.

Italian mothers would frighten their children by telling them that if they did not behave, Pippo would come and get them at night.

Historians actually believe that the legends about the night terror plane came from the real night fighters which operated over Italy at the time, such as the Bristol Beaufighter or the de Havilland Mosquito.

5. Angels of Mons

One of the most popular, but far-fetched legends is about a group of angels who supposedly protected members of the British Army during the Battle of Mons at the outset of World War I.

According to an article in the London Evening News by British author Arthur Machen published in 1914, just as German soldiers were about to step in for the kill they were suddenly confronted by angels in the form of English archers who blocked their path. The angels pointed their bows at the Germans and released their arrows.

This apparition caused the Germans to retreat in terror and allowed the English enough time to regroup.

Machen himself later declared the story as a fabrication, but it gradually became accepted as fact among British soldiers and the British public because for them it was clear proof that God was on the British side.

Sceptics were quick to dismiss the whole incident as nothing more than mass hysteria.

Achtung
WARNING!
alerte!

See advertisement page 86

xx 12 24 0 7 5

MONARCH PUBLISHING CO.
NEW YORK

COINCIDENCE OR NOT: Just a board game, or a coded message by the Japanese?

4. Deadly dice

Two weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, an advert was published in an issue of New Yorker magazine. This ad was said to have predicted the entire event.

The story goes that the ads for a dice game called 'Deadly Double' contained a coded message warning about the attack.

It featured two dice displaying a selection of numbers. Two of the most prominently visible were 12 and 7. And of course the date of the attack on Pearl Harbour was 7 December. The remaining numbers were allegedly references to the time of the attack.

Later during the war, navy transport pilot Joseph Bell was flying with an intelligence officer who told him that many in the intelligence community considered this ad a secret warning.

The officer had been assigned to investigate the matter, but every lead had led to a dead end. Was it simply a coincidence, or was there something more sinister behind it?

Was it perhaps a sophisticated coded message from Japan to warn co-conspirators of the Pearl Harbour attack?

To this day it still remains a mystery.

3. Wild deserters

One of the most imaginative myths from the Great War was that of a band of soldiers, deserters from both sides, who were living in No Man's Land.

According to the accounts, these men were ghoulish in appearance and behaved in a most diabolical manner. They only came out at night, raiding corpses for clothing, rations and weapons. There was even talk of cannibalism.

Legends about these World War I wild deserters were first recounted in the memoirs of British cavalry lieutenant Ardern Arthur Hulme Beaman in 1920, and later in an autobiography written by Army Captain Sir Osbert Sitwell.

Sitwell stated that after World War I ended and the troops withdrew, these wild deserters were gassed because they would never have been able to be rehabilitated back into normal society.

In hindsight, such stories may have originated from the occasional cry of wounded men which could be heard from No Man's Land, while looting of bodies was commonplace on both sides.

2. Ransom collecting pigeons

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq a rather strange story began doing the rounds about kidnappings and homing pigeons.

Iraqi police reported cases in which kidnappers had left homing pigeons in cages on the doorsteps of houses where

someone had recently been kidnapped.

A note was placed on the cage with instructions for the families to attach cash to the bird's legs and release it at a specific time. The pigeons would then deliver the ransom to the gang's hideouts.

Kidnappers had supposedly begun to use this new tactic as a way of avoiding being caught by

police, since it would be difficult for the police to follow the pigeons back to their location.

While the story may seem far-fetched, an article in the Telegraph recounted stories of families who had to pay off ransoms via pigeons for the release of kidnapped children.

One such family attached \$10,000 in \$100 notes to the legs of five homing pigeons, which they found in a cage left on their doorstep. Soon after they released the birds their 12 year old son returned home.

1. The Crucified Soldier

According to this bizarre legend, soldiers from both sides of the First World War crucified their captured opponents in a place that was visible to the prisoner's comrades.



Allegedly, the Germans started this practice when they crucified a Canadian soldier with bayonets to a barn door. When word spread about this atrocity, the Canadians crucified a German soldier in retaliation.

Soon after, the Germans also accused Belgian soldiers of crucifying their captured prisoners.

Evidence to suggest that any of the crucifixions were anything other than hearsay was never found, but the grisly tale still became embedded in the Canadian national consciousness.

Following the war, artist Francis Derwent Wood made a bronze statue called Canada's Golgotha, which showed a Canadian soldier being crucified and mocked by German soldiers.

Raid on Pebble Island

In the third of a series on classic Special Forces operations we look at Britain's Special Air Service raid on Pebble Island during the Falklands War.

- **Date:** 14–15 May 1982
- **Location:** Pebble Island, Falkland Islands
- **Unit involved:** Special Air Service (United Kingdom)



The Raid on Pebble Island was a raid by British Special Forces on Pebble Island's airfield during the Falklands War, and took place on the night of 14–15 May 1982. Pebble Island is one of the smaller Falkland Islands, lying north of West Falkland.

The site was being used as a forward operating base for T-34 Mentor and Pucara aircraft of the Argentine Air Force.

British Special Air Service (SAS) operatives were tasked with destroying the aircraft on the ground, in an operation that echoed back to some of the unit's first missions

during the North African Campaign of World War II.

SAS elements, then embarked on HMS Hermes, were tasked with eliminating the airfield, with naval support from the Type 22 frigate HMS Broadsword as Hermes defensive escort and the County-class destroyer HMS Glamorgan to provide naval gunfire support with its Mark 6 4.5 inch guns.

During the night of 14 May, two Westland Sea King HC4 helicopters of 846 Naval Air Squadron

departed with 45 members of D Squadron on board.

The force infiltrated the airfield without alarm allowing them to lay charges on seven of the aircraft. Once all the aircraft had been prepared the raiding team opened fire on the aircraft with small arms and L1A1 rockets.

All of the aircraft were damaged, with some having their undercarriages shot away. Following this cue Glamorgan began shelling the Argentine positions on the airfield using high-explosive rounds, hitting the ammunition dump and fuel stores.

The defending force did not engage until the entire raiding party had re-grouped and were preparing to move out. One British soldier was wounded by an Argentine IED while the raiding party returned fire, resulting in the death of the Argentine commanding officer (according to British assessments) and the suppression of any defensive effort.

The wounded man was hauled back to the recovery site with the raiding party reaching the aircraft by the required time for transportation back to Hermes before daybreak.

Background

Immediately after the Argentinians had seized the Falkland Islands they established a small airbase, *Aeródromo Auxiliar*



Calderón, on Pebble Island (Argentine name: isla Borbón) using the local airstrip on which were based Argentine Air Force's FMA IA 58 Pucará and some Argentine Naval Aviation's T-34 Mentor light ground attack aircraft.

Reconnaissance by these aircraft could have compromised the Royal Navy's manoeuvres before its intended landing on East Falkland.

SAS elements, then embarked on HMS Hermes, were tasked with eliminating the threat, with naval support from the Type 22 frigate HMS Broadsword as Hermes' defensive escort and the County class destroyer HMS Glamorgan to provide naval gunfire support with its Mark 6 4.5 inch guns.

The Naval Gunfire Support Forward Observer (NGSFO) who was responsible for co-ordinating the naval gunfire support was Captain Chris Brown RA of 148 Battery 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery.

Planning

Initial intentions were for a squadron-strength air insertion

from Hermes using personnel from D Squadron, 22 Regiment.

The raiding party would destroy the deployed aircraft, radar site, ground crew, and force protection garrison before exfiltrating by helicopter to return to Hermes before daybreak.

Reconnaissance for the raid was conducted by personnel from the Boat Troop of D Squadron, who infiltrated by Klepper canoe.

The patrol found that strong headwinds would increase the time taken to fly in from Hermes, delaying time on target and reducing the available offensive window to thirty minutes from the planned ninety.

In light of this information, the planning emphasised the importance of destroying the aircraft as a priority, with support personnel as a secondary priority.

The Raid

During the night of 14 May, two Westland Sea King HC4 helicopters of 846 Naval Air Squadron departed with 45 members of D Squadron on board. The delivery point was six kilometres from the airstrip on Pebble Island.

Mountain Troop was tasked with the destruction of the Argentine aircraft, while the remaining personnel acted as a protection force, securing approaches to the airstrip, and forming an operational reserve.

The raiding party unloaded over 100 L16 81mm Mortar bombs, explosive charges, and Rocket 66mm HEAT L1A1 Light Anti-tank Weapons to carry into the engagement zone from the helicopters, with each

man in the raiding party carrying at least two mortar bombs.

For small arms, M16 rifles were used, some with under-slung M203 grenade launchers. Approach navigation was conducted by a member of the Boat Troop who had carried out the reconnaissance.

Action

As the raiding party approached the target, they spotted an Argentine sentry but were not seen, allowing them to lay charges on seven of the aircraft.

Once all the aircraft had been prepared, the raiding team opened fire on the aircraft with small arms and rockets. All of the aircraft were damaged, with some having their undercarriages shot away.

Following this cue, Glamorgan began shelling the Argentine positions on the airfield using high-explosive rounds, hitting the ammunition dump and fuel stores.

The defending force did not engage until the entire raiding party had re-grouped and were preparing to move out. One British soldier was wounded by an Argentine IED.

The raiding party returned fire using small arms and M203 grenade launchers, resulting in the death of the Argentine commanding officer (according to British assessments) and the suppression of any defensive effort.

The Argentine version states that their marines remained in shelters during the shelling by Glamorgan, so they were unable to face the SAS in combat.

The British soldier's injury

was the result of shrapnel from exploding charges planted by the Argentines under the air-strip in order to deny its use to the enemy. The blasts were triggered in the belief that the operation was a full-scale assault to take over the air base.



SCRAP METAL: All that is left of an Argentinian Beechcraft T-34C Mentor after the raid on Pebble Island.

Exfiltration

The wounded soldier was hauled back to the recovery site with the raiding party, who reached the aircraft in time for transportation back to Hermes before daybreak.

The party decided to proceed with exfiltration instead of returning to attack the defending force.

- One Short SC.7 Skyvan utility transport aircraft (Coast Guard)
- Destruction of the ammunition dump
- Destruction of the fuel dump

The raid was considered a complete success, reminiscent of the type of operation carried out by the SAS in the Second World War.

One of the officers involved, Captain Hamilton, was later killed in another SAS action near Port Howard.

The Argentine forces continued occupying the position until they were evacuated later in the war; the last troops were recovered on 1 June 1982 by two Argentine Navy Sea King helicopters.

Aftermath

Assets destroyed during the raid totalled:

- Six FMA IA 58 Pucarás (Air Force)
- Four Turbo Mentor trainer/

SAS Weapons used during the raid

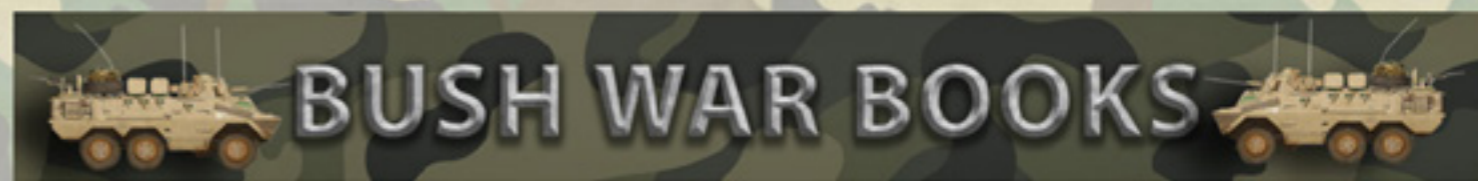


M16 with 203mm grenade launcher

- Calibre: 5.56×45 mm NATO
- Rate of fire: 45–60 rounds/min semi-automatic
- Effective range: 550 metres

66mm HEAT L1A1

- Calibre: 66 mm
- Rate of fire: Single shot
- Effective range: 200 metres



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”

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. 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. 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.

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.

With much love from Boy.

On 11 November 2008, the first official Truce memorial was unveiled in Frelingheim, 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.



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



The courageous chaplains

Armed largely with their faith and a selfless desire to serve, these nine US chaplains earned their country's highest award for bravery - the Medal of Honour.

Throughout history religion has always played an important role in the military, as have those charged with conducting religious services and providing counselling for their adherents.

They are known by many different titles - Chaplain, Padre, Father, Pastor and so on. Often they will wear military uniform and some will be given a military rank or equivalent.

They will offer spiritual guidance and counselling, often when it is needed the most.

In this article we will look at nine members of the US military clergy that not only served the troops on the front lines, but also went on to win the Medal of Honour. They are presented in alphabetical order.



Vincent Capodanno

Date of award: 7 January 1969.

Born in Staten Island, New York, Vincent Capodanno was

ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1958. He joined the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps in 1966 and, after completing Officer Candidate School, was immediately posted to Vietnam, where he was attached to the U.S. Marine Corps.

During his service Capodanno established a reputation for selfless dedication to servicemen, sharing their hardships, and working for their spiritual and practical welfare.

Capodanno was so beloved by the men that he acquired the nickname "The Grunt Padre."

On the morning of 7 September 1967, Lieutenant Capodanno was with his Marines as they engaged in Operation Swift, a mission to rescue two Marine companies which had been ambushed in the Que Son Valley.

During the operation, Capodanno's battalion was ambushed by a large North Vietnamese Army force. When he heard that two platoons in a company of his battalion were under attack and in danger of being overrun, Capodanno rushed to assist them.

He ran through the intense enemy fire so that he could administer last rites and give medical aid. Capodanno then ran toward a wounded Sergeant Lawrence Peters, one of the platoon leaders.

Despite being struck in the right arm by mortar shrapnel, Capodanno gave Peters his Last Rites and stuck by his

side, comforting the man until he died.

Peters would later receive the Medal of Honour posthumously. While nearby Marines were yelling, "Father get down!" Capodanno came to the aid of five more wounded Marines.

Despite his wounds, Capodanno then dragged Sergeant Howard Manfra to safety - an action that saved Manfra's life. As the sun began to set on a long day, Capodanno was not done being of service to his men.

With cries of "Corpsman! Corpsman!" filling the air, both the corpsman, Armando "Doc" Leal, and Vincent Capodanno raced over to the side of Corporal Ray Harton.

Shortly after arriving at Harton's side, Doc Leal was hit by nearby gunfire and mortally wounded in the upper leg. Capodanno moved quickly to Leal's side and was killed instantly by rounds from an enemy machine gun just yards from his position.

Some Marines close by would later claim that the chaplain purposely interposed his body between the machine gun and the wounded nearby.

And it was not just his aid and ministry that was of such value to the Marines - his intrepid example also inspired many. In addition to recognizing Capodanno with a Medal of Honour, the warship USS Capodanno bore his name for over twenty years.



Francis B. Hall

Date of award: 16 February 1897.

On the morning of May 3, 1863, the 16th New York Regiment found itself amidst the intense shot and shellfire of the Battle of Salem Church.

This intense battle, part of the larger Chancellorsville Campaign, was fought in and around the Salem Church, a rural chapel outside of Fredericksburg, Virginia.

For Reverend Hall, this would be his first taste of combat, and he did not shirk from aiding his fellow soldiers of which 154 would become casualties this day.

As reported by Major John C. Gilmore of the 16th in his letter recommending Hall for the Medal of Honour, "Chaplain Hall did voluntarily come, during the hardest fighting with his horse...and carried wounded men upon his horse to the rear for proper care and attendance. I saw him do this several times during the engagement... I have never mentioned this matter to chaplain Hall in any way whatsoever, and knowing him as I do, he is the last man in the

world who would ever think of being rewarded for his act."

Reverend Francis Hall would survive the Civil War and died at the age of 75 in Plattsburgh, New York.



Milton Lorenzo Haney

Date of award: 3 November 1869.

Chaplain Milton Haney was with the 55th Illinois Regiment during the Battle of Atlanta (Peachtree Creek), on July 22, 1864.

During one of the critical times of the battle, Haney picked up a musket and joined the ranks of the regiment, fighting to retake a Union breastwork that had recently fallen to the Confederate forces.

Haney's actions this day led to his being called "The Fighting Chaplain" by the Illinois men. The records state that he was renowned for his "great personal bravery" and "his zealous performance of professional duties."

Haney would survive the war and later live in California, until his death in 1922. Haney is buried in Altadena, California.



James Hill

Date of award: 15 March 1896.

1st Lieutenant James Hill was serving in the 21st Iowa Regiment during the Battle of Champion Hill - the largest and bloodiest battle of Ulysses S. Grant's campaign to encircle Vicksburg, Mississippi in May of 1863.

During some of the heaviest fighting during the battle, Hill, who was alone, stumbled upon three Confederate pickets in the dense woods. Outnumbered 3 to 1, Hill recognized that he was in "a nasty position."

Thinking quickly, Hill ordered the three Confederates to "ground arms" and issued loud orders to an imaginary Union detail in the woods.

Foiled by Hill's ruse, the Confederates became prisoners and were marched to the rear while Hill continued to issue commands to his phantom guard. For this action and his quick thinking at Champion Hill, 1st LT Hill would earn the Medal of Honour.

It was only afterward that Hill would become the regiment's chaplain. Born in England, Hill

had become a farmer and Baptist minister in the Cascade region of Iowa. Hill lived until 1899 and is buried in the Cascade Protestant Cemetery in Cascade, Iowa.



Emil Kapaun

Date of award: 11 April 2013.

Kapaun served as an Army Chaplain in both World War II and Korea. Always seeking to serve near the front lines, Father Kapaun earned a reputation amongst the troops as a fearless man, ready to repeatedly risk his life so that he could minister to the needs of his men.

Kapaun used a US Army jeep as a portable altar in the field and famously had his smoking pipe shot out of his mouth by an enemy sniper.

On 2 August 1950, Kapaun earned a Bronze Star for actions where he rescued a soldier out in front of the lines who had been wounded by machine gun fire. Assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division,

Kapaun advanced further into North Korea with the division where it began to encounter Chinese soldiers in great numbers. At the Battle of Unsan

Chinese assaults inflicted thousands of American and South Korean casualties.

It was during this battle that Captain Kapaun calmly walked through withering enemy fire in order to provide comfort and medical aid to his comrades and rescue friendly wounded from no-man's land.

During the night of 1 November 1950, Kapaun and others were captured by advancing Chinese troops who surrounded the regiment that Kapaun was with.

Kapaun managed to escape his captors, but on the following day, he made the fateful decision to stay with the wounded soldiers who could not be evacuated.

Subsequently recaptured by Chinese forces, Kapaun pushed aside a Chinese soldier preparing to execute an American sergeant, Herbert A. Miller, whose injuries prevented him from walking on his own.

Father Kapaun carried and supported the hobbled sergeant over the more than 96 kilometres they marched to the POW camp. Kapaun's continued support saved Miller's life and inspired the other American captives around him.

While at the POW camp, Father Kapaun ministered to the sick and weakened American POWs. Famously Father Kapaun bravely scrounged and stole scarce food to bring back to the starving men.

Prior to each of these risky missions, Kapaun would say a prayer to St. Dismas, the good thief, for protection.

Sadly, the chaplain died from pneumonia in the prison camp

in May of 1951. His heroism and selflessness inspired people for decades, and in the 2000's U.S. Representative Todd Tiahrt successfully campaigned to have Kapaun awarded the Medal of Honour.

In March of 2021, the remains of Father Kapaun were identified by the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) in Hawaii and he was interred at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Wichita, Kansas in September 2021.

In 1993, Pope John Paul II recognized Father Kapaun as a "Servant of God", which opened his pathway to possible sainthood.



Charles Liteky

Date of award: 19 November 1968.

Charles "Angelo" Liteky was in Vietnam on December 6, 1967, near Phuoc-Lac, when his company came under heavy attack from a battalion-sized enemy force. Liteky saw wounded men close to an enemy machine gun and moved to place himself between the gun and the men.

He then managed to drag them to safety. Chaplain Liteky then

began moving upright through the enemy fire, administering Last Rites to the dying and evacuating the wounded as his company rallied.

Throughout the fighting, he repeatedly exposed himself to danger to rescue wounded and trapped men. It was not until the next morning that Liteky was found to have been wounded in the neck and the foot.

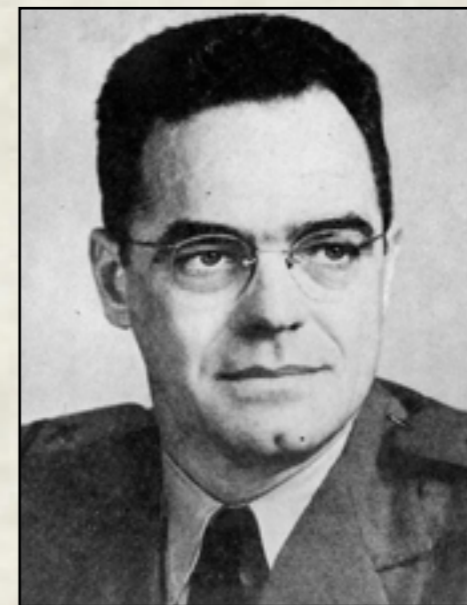
Despite these injuries, Liteky had personally carried over 20 men to safety. Liteky survived the war and later left the priesthood in 1975.

As a vocal anti-war figure, Liteky made the fateful decision to renounce and return his Medal of Honour. Liteky placed his medal in an envelope addressed to President Ronald Reagan and on 29 July 1986, left the envelope at the base of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC.

Concerned over US foreign policy in Central America, Liteky led a protest at Fort Benning, Georgia. He was later convicted and sentenced to prison twice – once in 1986 and also in 2000 – for defacing portraits at Fort Benning with blood.

Since the Medal of Honour was first awarded on 25 March 1863, a total of 3,525 people have been awarded the medal. To date Charles Liteky is the only person ever to have returned his medal.

Liteky passed away on January 20, 2017, at the age of 85.



Joseph O'Callahan

Date of award: 23 January 1946.

Chaplain O'Callahan was serving aboard the USS Franklin near Kobe, Japan on 19 March 1945, when the ship was attacked by Imperial Japanese forces.

A twin-engine bomber struck the Franklin with two 550-pound, semi-armour piercing bombs. The damage done to Franklin left her badly damaged and the crew fighting valiantly to keep her afloat.

O'Callahan moved through darkened and smoke-filled corridors to an open flight deck only to find the ship being rocked by secondary explosions as fires burned uncontrolled.

He ministered to the wounded and dying, he organized and led firefighting crews into the blazing inferno on the flight deck, and he directed the jettisoning of live ammunition and the flooding of the magazine.

Inspiring the men around him, O'Callahan fought heroically with the crew of Franklin to save the ship and get her back to port.

After World War II, O'Cal-

lahan returned to Holy Cross University in the fall of 1948 as the head of the Mathematics Department.

He died on 16 March 1964, at the age of 59. The destroyer USS O'Callahan bore his name for nearly thirty years.



Charles Watters

Date of award: 4 November 1969.

During the Battle of Dak To, on 19 November 1967, Chaplain Watters was moving with one of the battalion's companies when was attacked by an enemy battalion.

Unarmed and completely exposed, he moved among, as well as in front of the advancing troops, giving aid to the wounded, assisting in their evacuation, giving words of encouragement, and administering the Last Rites to the dying.

Seeing a shocked paratrooper Watters picked the man up on his shoulders and carried him to safety. Watters exposed himself to both friendly and enemy fire between the two forces in order to recover two wounded soldiers.

He went so far as to leave a

perimeter established after a retreat to rescue wounded men despite the danger from enemy fire.

There were even efforts to try to restrain Chaplain Watters from his heroic and courageous deeds because of his vulnerability to fire.

It was only once he was sure that all the wounded were inside the perimeter that he started aiding the medics by applying field bandages to open wounds, obtaining and serving food and water, and giving spiritual and mental strength and comfort.

Watters was giving aid to the wounded when he himself was mortally wounded.

He now rests in Arlington National Cemetery.



John Whitehead

Awarded the Medal of Honour: April 4, 1898

John Milton Whitehead enlisted in the 15th Indiana Regiment as a 39-year-old preacher from Westville, Indiana.

Whitehead and his regiment were at the centre of the heavy fighting at the Battle of Stones River near Mufreesboro, Tennessee towards the end of 1862. Whitehead wrote of his experiences on the battlefield that

fateful day,

“Three times we charged Jackson’s Brigade and three times we put the enemy to flight... But this was accomplished only with a fearful loss of life. Of my own regiment every other man was killed or wounded; that is, half were gone....”

Following with his battle-scarred unit, Whitehead disregarded the shot and shells flying all about and worked to evacuate the wounded and dying to the rear. After bringing the mortally wounded Calvin Zenner, commander of Company G, back to the Union lines he offered a prayer for him and sang ‘O Sing to Me of Heaven.’

For his life-saving actions on the battlefield, Whitehead became known as The Angel of Stones River and would receive the Medal of Honour for his acts on 31 December 1862.

Whitehead travelled to Topeka, Kansas after the war and continued to be a Baptist minister until his death in 1909.

The U.S. Army Chaplain Centre and School presents the John M. Whitehead Award to the student earning the top score on the Army Physical Fitness Test and demonstrating mental and physical toughness throughout the course.



John Weir Foote



During World War II the Victoria Cross was awarded 182 times to 181 recipients. Captain Charles Upham, a New Zealand soldier, was awarded the VC twice.

Yet only one chaplain was awarded the Victoria Cross during World War II. He was Captain John Foote and he was a Canadian.

He enlisted in the Canadian Army in December 1939 and was posted to The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (Wentworth Regiment) (RHLI) as the Regimental Chaplain.

He was awarded the VC for his actions on 19 August 1942 at Dieppe, France.

Captain Foote coolly and calmly during the eight hours of the battle walked about collecting the wounded and carry them to safety.

At the end of the battle he climbed from the landing craft that was to have taken him to safety and deliberately walked into the German positions in order to be taken prisoner so that he could help those men who would be in captivity until the end of the war.



World War II tanks

These 15 tanks all saw action in World War II. You tell us what they are. You’ll find the answers to the quiz on page 88. The photos are from 1/35 scale models made by modeling company Tamiya.



The origin of 'Taps'

Taps is a bugle call normally played at American military funerals. You will often hear the sad and touching story of how it originated. The only thing is that this story is false.

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.

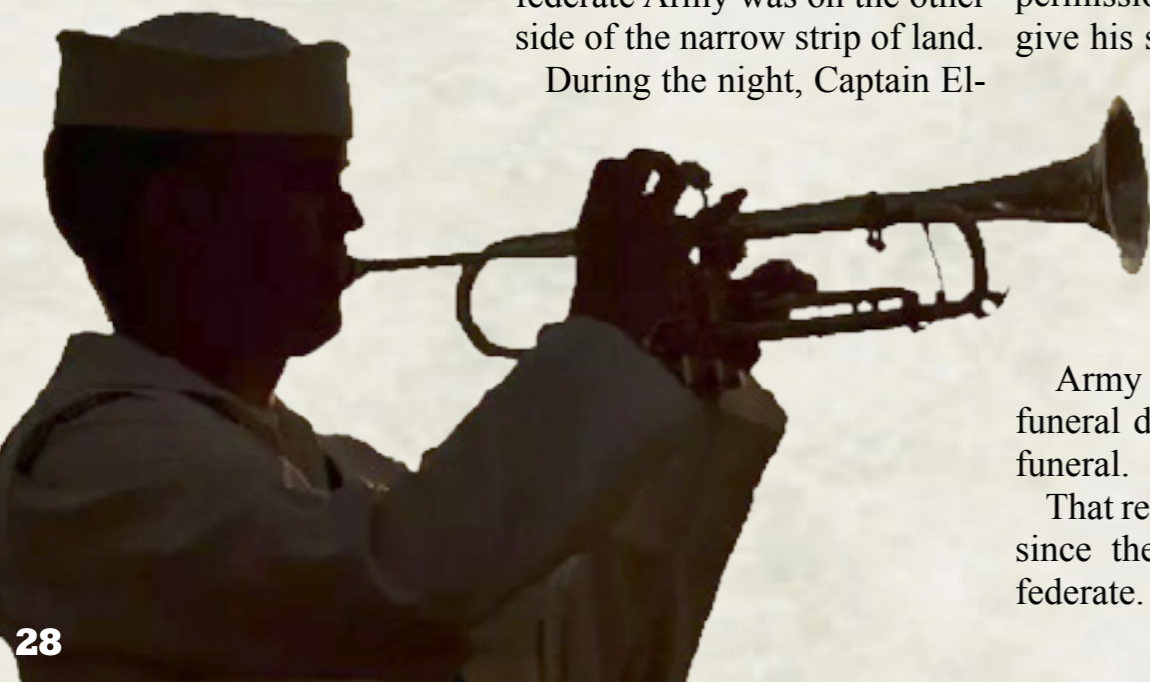
If there is no bugler or trumpeter available then the first verse of the song is normally sung *a capella*.

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'.



It's a traditional thing

For anyone in the military, spending Christmas on duty or away from home is never great. Yet there are some that at least try and make it easier.

I am pretty sure that there are numerous readers that spent at least one Christmas on duty. While others were enjoying time with friends and family you may have been the duty officer, duty NCO, or even standing guard somewhere.

Many others may have been on operational deployment. This is nothing new and has been around ever since Christmas was first celebrated and wars were first waged.

One of the things about war is that it doesn't stop over weekends or on special days of the year - including the traditional day of 'Peace and Goodwill'.

There have been occasions in history where those involved in the fighting took matters into their own hands and declared a Christmas truce. One of the most well-known of these occasions was the Christmas Truce of 1914.

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 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.

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.

Naturally the top brass on both sides were not all that amused about this. After all, didn't the

troops realise that there was a world war going on?

Now days, however, there are very few, if any, truces declared

over Christmas. Yet those in operational areas usually have certain traditions that are observed over the Christmas period.

Anyone that served in the South African Defence Force

(SADF) and spent a Christmas in the operational area will have fond memories of the Southern Cross Fund.

Led by Elizabeth Albrecht, this remarkable organisation was formed in 1968. They were nicknamed the *Dankie Tanies* (Thank you aunties). They raised funds to take care of the welfare of the South African armed forces.

At Christmas every member of the SADF serving in an operational area would receive a Christmas parcel from the Southern Cross Fund.

Chris was

18 when he did his national service. He spent Christmas 1977 on the border and still remembers the Christmas gift he received from the Southern Cross Fund.

“It was the first Christmas I had ever spent away from my family,” he recalls. “All of us were given a gift from the *Dankie Tanies*. It was a small black writing bag with the Southern Cross Fund logo on it. Inside was a Parker pen, some writing paper, envelopes, a few Christmas cards, a packet of chewing gum, and a pocket knife. There was also a tee-shirt with an image and the words ‘I was there/ Ek was daar’.

Most of us really appreciated the gift.” Douglas also spent a Christmas on the border and also received a gift from the Southern Cross Fund. The manner in which he received the gift was a little different.

“My company was stationed at a place by the name of Okalongo,” he says. “Because my platoon would be out on patrol on Christmas Day, we had our Christmas brunch on 22 December.

“Our chef went to a lot of trouble and it was actually a damn good meal. What really made the whole thing special, however, was our company sergeant major.

“We all received a gift from the Southern Cross and it was given to each of us personally by the sergeant major. The best was that he was wearing a full-on Santa suit complete with hat and big white beard. We were rolling on the floor with laughter.

“When he gave me my pres-

ent I asked him if I could sit on his knee and tell him what I wanted for Christmas. He gave me this glare and said, ‘Troop, ek sal vir jou so hard bliksem dat jou ma sal begin huil.’ (Troop I will hit you so hard that your mother will start to cry). The whole thing really made our Christmas that year.”

Some of the Christmas lunches at the larger base camps were pretty elaborate affairs and the food was of the highest quality. Certain units had traditions regarding the Christmas meal, as David (18) explains.

“We had a tradition in our unit that on Christmas day the officers and senior NCOs had to serve the troops lunch.

“We all sat down at these long tables that were covered with white table clothes and were decorated with Christmas crackers. Everyone got a little paper hat to wear and there were bottles of wine on the table.

“Then our OC and RSM led in the officers and senior NCOs to serve the food. They came around with trays and served us individually. It was really great fun.

“Our company sergeant major was a scream. He came in wearing his army boots, a paper hat, and a white apron and nothing else. By the looks of it, he had enjoyed a good bit of Christmas cheer before lunch.



Here he was walking around bare-arsed asking if we’d had enough to eat. I laughed so much that I nearly choked on my food. I think that it was an excellent tradition and I wonder if they still do things like that today?”

British traditions

The British Armed Forces have traditions that stretch back centuries. These include Christmas traditions. One of these is ‘Gunfire’.

The drink is traditionally served to soldiers in their beds by their officers on Christmas Day. It is not, however, a drink for the faint-hearted. It is a cup of hot, black tea laced with a healthy shot of rum.

For troops away on deployment every attempt is made to make the Christmas meal special. Troops will sit down to a festive lunch together and, as is tradition, the officers will often serve the soldiers.

In 2012, troops serving in Lashkar Gah in Afghanistan organised the Lash Dash, a five



CHEERS: A troop is served ‘Gunfire’ by an officer on Christmas morning.

kilometre run for charity.

Participants and spectators alike sported festive costumes for the event.

Lash Dash organiser Captain Emma Wardall said: “We thought it would be a good excuse to get out of the office on Christmas morning and into the sunshine. All of the money we’ve raised will go to the Black Rat brigade charity and the Lashkar Gah orphanage.”

During the Christmas Truce of 1914, British and German troops played a game of soccer in no-man’s land.

In 2014, on the 100th anniversary of the Christmas Truce, British and German soldiers deployed in Afghanistan gathered in a dusty field for a commemorative game of football.

Brigadier James Stopford said: “A hundred years on to see German soldiers and British soldiers again on operations do this is just symbolic of progress and what can be achieved.”

American traditions

During the American Revolution, troops were not stationed overseas, of course, but since

travel was mostly by foot and horseback, it was hard for soldiers to return home for Christmas and get back to the battlefield in a timely manner. They were forced to celebrate wherever they were, including fighting battles on Christmas Day.

George Washington crossed the Delaware Rive on 25 December 1776. After the Battle of Trenton was over, General Washington did his best to give his soldiers a bit of rest and time to celebrate among themselves.

The American Civil War was unique because families were split across both Union and Confederate lines. It was not uncommon for brothers to celebrate Christmas on opposite sides of the battlefield, often within sight of each other, one wearing blue, the other grey.

On Christmas Day in 1862, President Abraham Lincoln visited injured soldiers in various hospitals to brighten their spirits. Santa even appeared to Union troops one year.

Thanks to the growth of the aviation industry, air freight made sending care packages to troops in the European and Pa-

cific theaters easier and faster during World War II.

Presents, including homemade food, reached troops in time to celebrate and help them feel a bit closer to home so far away.

In addition to getting presents, troops not stationed on the front were treated to holiday meals anywhere there was no active fighting.

Many of the soldiers themselves donated their home-sent gifts to children in war zones whose homes had been destroyed in the bombing.

The conflicts in Korea and Vietnam continued the tradition of sending gifts and eating meals together but added one new layer - phone calls back home.

Thanks to advances in telecommunications technology, soldiers in certain areas could make a quick phone call back home and talk to loved ones rather than sending letters and waiting for weeks, sometimes months for a reply.

By the time Operation Desert Storm started in 1991, overseas calls to troops was common practice, and e-mail was starting to take hold on a large scale.

Today, soldiers on foreign deployment can stay in regular touch with folks back home via Skype, FaceTime, and other instant connections. Most laptop computers have video cameras which allow face to face communication.

For all those that will be on deployment away from home this year, we at Military Despatches wish you a happy, peaceful, and safe Christmas.

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 to the relevant oversight committee 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*



Rudolph

*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 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 rein-
deer*

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.

They said it!

Over the years people have had a lot to say about Christmas and they've also had a lot to say about Santa. We look at a few classic quotes.

In the United States Christmas has become the rape of an idea.

Richard Bach

In the old days, it was not called the Holiday Season; the Christians called it 'Christmas' and went to church; the Jews called it 'Hanukkah' and went to synagogue; the atheists went to parties and drank. People passing each other on the street would say 'Merry Christmas!' or 'Happy Hanukkah!' or (to the atheists) 'Look out for the wall!'"

Dave Barry

"Christmas Shopping: A Survivor's Guide"

Dear Lord, I've been asked, nay commanded, to thank Thee for the Christmas turkey before us... a turkey which was no doubt a lively, intelligent bird... a social being... capable of actual affection... nuzzling its young with almost human-like compassion. Anyway, it's dead and we're gonna eat it. Please give our respects to its family...

Berke Breathed

I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year.

Charles Dickens
"A Christmas Carol"

Next to a circus there ain't

nothing that packs up and tears out faster than the Christmas spirit.

Kin Hubbard

Christmas begins about the first of December with an office party and ends when you finally realize what you spent, around April fifteenth of the next year.

P. J. O'Rourke

The perfect Christmas tree? All Christmas trees are perfect!

Charles N. Barnard

Christmas, children, is not a date. It is a state of mind.

Mary Ellen Chase

What I don't like about office Christmas parties is looking for a job the next day.

Phyllis Diller

I once bought my kids a set of batteries for Christmas with a note on it saying, toys not included.

Bernard Manning

"My idea of Christmas, whether old-fashioned or modern, is very simple: loving others. Come to think of it, why do we have to wait for Christmas to do that?"

Bob Hope

"Christmas can be celebrated in the school room with pine

trees, tinsel and reindeers, but there must be no mention of the man whose birthday is being celebrated. One wonders how a teacher would answer if a student asked why it was called Christmas."

Ronald Reagan

The Supreme Court has ruled that they cannot have a nativity scene in Washington, D.C. This wasn't for any religious reasons. They couldn't find three wise men and a virgin.

Jay Leno

"When did wishing someone a Merry Christmas become politically incorrect?"

Suzanne Woods Fisher,
A Lancaster County Christmas

"At Christmas, tea is compulsory. Relatives are optional."

Robert Godden

"If you ever have to steal money from your kid, and later on he discovers it's gone, I think a good thing to do is to blame it on Santa Claus."

Samuel Butler

"The one thing women don't want to find in their stockings on Christmas morning is their husband."

Joan Rivers

"The Little Drummer Boy" was playing in the background for what seemed like the third time in a row. I fought off an urge to beat that Little Drummer Boy senseless with his own drumsticks."

Dana Reinhardt,
How to Build a House

"The worst gift I was given is when I got out of rehab that Christmas; a bottle of wine. It was delicious."

Craig Ferguson

There are some people who want to throw their arms round you simply because it is Christmas; there are other people who want to strangle you simply because it is Christmas.

Robert Staughton Lynd

And now a few quotes about Santa.

Let me see if I've got this Santa business straight. You say he wears a beard, has no discernible source of income and flies to cities all over the world under cover of darkness? You sure this guy isn't laundering illegal drug money?

Tom Armstrong

I stopped believing in Santa Claus when I was six. Mother took me to see him in a department store and he asked for my autograph.

Actress Shirley Temple Black

Santa Claus has the right idea. Visit people once a year.

Victor Borge

I never believed in Santa Claus because I knew no white

man would be coming into my neighborhood after dark.

Dick Gregory

Santa Claus wears a Red Suit, he must be a communist. And a beard and long hair, must be a pacifist. What's in that pipe that he's smoking?

Arlo Guthrie

I played Santa Claus many times, and if you don't believe it, check out the divorce settlements awarded my wives.

Groucho Marx

"The Groucho Phile"

"One of the problems we have in this country is that too many adults believe in Santa Claus, and too many children don't."

Jack Handy

Santa is even-tempered. Santa does not hit children over the head who kick him. Santa uses the term folks rather than Mommy and Daddy because of all the broken homes. Santa does not have a three-martini lunch. Santa does not borrow money from store employees. Santa wears a good deodorant.

Jenny Zink

To Santa's hired for a mall.

The main reason Santa is so jolly is because he knows where all the bad girls live.

George Carlin

And a few anonymous quotes.

"When you stop believing in Santa, you get underwear or socks for Christmas."

"I'm like a Christmas candy cane - sweet but twisted."

"Please note: Christmas has been cancelled this year. Apparently you sent Santa a note saying that you had been good this year. He died laughing."

"Dear Santa, all I want for Christmas this year is a very fat bank account and a very slim body. Please don't mix the two up like you did last year."

"Christmas - buying junk that no-one needs with money you don't have for relatives you don't even like."

"When someone says, 'Where's your Christmas Spirit' it's wrong to point to the liquor cabinet."

"Dear Santa, I can explain..."

"I wasn't planning on buying anyone a gift this year until I heard about those exploding Samsung Galaxy phones."

And finally, the words of a few Christmas songs that have been rewritten.

"Last Christmas I gave you my heart, but the very next day you body rejected the transplant and you died."

Last Christmas

Wham

"I'm dreaming of a white Christmas, but if the white runs outs I'll drink the red."

Bing Crosby

White Christmas

"All I want for Christmas is ~~you~~ money."

Maria Carrey

All I Want Is You

Hitching a ride

Many national servicemen in the SADF were no strangers to hitchhiking. Yet not many of them hitch hiked home from the Operational Area in the then South West Africa. Steve did it not once, but twice.

For many members of the South African Defence Force (SADF), hitchhiking or thumbing a lift was often the only means they had to get home for weekend pass.

Some of them would even hitch between Pretoria and Cape Town, a distance of 1,461 km by road.

Yet few of them attempted to hitch hike back home from the Operational Area in South West Africa. Steve was 19 when he did his national service and he did the trip not once, but twice. He tells his story.

Along with two of my friends, Bruce and Mike, I had started running as a sport. We were based in Ondangwa and there was a large enough area for us to go running every afternoon.

Bruce found out that the SADF Cross Country Championships were to be held in Pretoria and that any member of the SADF could enter as long as they had run a qualifying marathon.

A few weeks earlier the three of us had competed in the Tsumeb Marathon and had run a qualifying time. I heard opportunity knocking very loudly.

If we entered for the SADF Championships then they would have to send us to Pretoria and we could at least get a few days at home.

The three of us went to see the sports officer and told him that we wished to enter. He sent a telex off and the reply came back saying that our entry had been accepted.

We went down from Ondangwa to Grootfontein and then we ran into a major problem.

While we had been given six days leave to compete in the Championships, we were unable to get space on a SAFAIR flight going down to Pretoria. All flights were fully booked.

Our leave began on a Tuesday and on the Monday evening we were still sitting in Grootfontein.

It was Mike that suggested that we should try and hitch hike down to Pretoria. It was a crazy idea, but it was better than spending our six days leave sitting in camp.

Bruce suggested that we leave early the following morning but Mike and I argued that we wanted to leave right there and then.

It was about 6.00 pm and just starting to get dark when we asked the duty driver to drop us off at the outskirts of Grootfontein.

It was July and the nights were cold. We stood on the side of the road for about twenty minutes when a Chevrolet van stopped for us. It was one of those vans that had a canopy on the back with no windows.

Three very suspect looking black guys said that they could give us a lift to Windhoek and told us to climb in the back of the van.

Although we were all armed with our R1 rifles, I was a bit nervous about getting into the back of this van because if we did, we would be trapped. I suggested that one of us should sit up front with them while one of them climbed into the back with us.

Bruce got to sit in front and Mike and I climbed into the back with one of the blacks. He had a huge Afro hairstyle and an even bigger smile.

Once we were in the back of the van the driver closed the door, shutting the three of us in.

We pulled off and the black guy sat eyeing Mike and I with an apprehensive look. There was a blanket in the corner of the van and I put my hand on it. I swear I could feel that shape of an AK-47 assault rifle. It only served to confirm my suspicion that the three blacks were SWAPO.

It was Mike that inadvertently broke the tension. He had a 'Ghetto-Blaster' radio/cassette and he put a tape on.

"Underground music," the black said, his eyes opening wide with delight.

It was a Jethro Tull tape and the black, who introduced him-



GROOTIES: The entrance to Grootfontein Military Base. It was from there that both hitch hiking trips began.

self as Simon, told us how much he loved 'underground' music. He reached under another blanket in the van and brought out a gallon jar of 'Old Brown Sherry'.

"Have some my friends," he told us after he had taken a healthy slug from the bottle. When we eventually pulled up in Windhoek a few hours later Simon, Mike and I were singing away at the top of our voices, as drunk as skunks.

The driver opened the back of the van and I could see a very worried looking Bruce standing there.

He sidled up to me and hissed into my ear. "I think these guys are Gooks."

"I'm sure they are Bruceie," I roared with laughter. It's strange how a third of a bottle of Old Brown Sherry can give you such insight.

We said goodbye to our newfound friends and Mike gave Simon the Jethro lull cassette.

Simon assured us that whenever he played it he would think

of us.

It was about 9.00 pm and we found a cafe that was open. We were hungry and bought a *Katkop* (Cat's Head) and a couple of bottles of Coke. A *katkop* was a wonderful thing when you were hungry. It consisted of a half loaf of bread that had been hollowed out and then filled with hot chips. The ideal thing to do with a *Katkop* was to wrap it in newspaper, lay it on the ground, and then drive a vehicle over it. Then you unwrapped the newspaper and revealed the now squashed bread and chips.

Two national servicemen came into the cafe and ordered something to eat. I asked them where they were going and they replied that they were from a base about 20 kilometres outside of Windhoek.

I asked them if they could give us a lift to the main road. Bruce and I were both corporals, so they could hardly say no to us.

At about 9.45 pm they dropped us off when they turned off the

main road towards their base. We were approximately eight kilometres outside of Windhoek. So far, so good.

At midnight we were still standing in the same spot. Only one vehicle had passed us and it did not even slow down, let alone stop.

It was freezing cold and Bruce and I decided that we needed a fire. There was a small tree not far from where we were standing and within half an hour we had used all the branches from this tree.

There was a game fence running parallel to the road and Bruce suggested that we use some of it for our fire.

"No ways Bruce, that's some farmer's game fence. We can't use that," I told him.

Ten minutes later I relented and helped Bruce pull some of the slats off the fence. "But we mustn't take too much," I said, feeling a bit guilty.

By 6.00 am the following morning the farmer was missing about a kilometre and a half of his fence.

Shortly afterwards a car stopped for us. I can still remember it clearly. It was a mustard coloured Datsun 120Y. The driver was the thinnest person I have ever seen and in the passenger seat was the largest woman I had ever seen. They were husband and wife.

The three of us piled into the back seat, along with our rifles and kit bags. The woman had her seat pushed right back and my legs were being crushed. Still, it was better than standing on the side of the road. I was wrong about that, believe me. Standing on one leg on the side

of the road would have been better.

This guy drove at fifty kilometres an hour and if he went one kilometre an hour faster than that his wife would start shouting at him. They had the heater on full blast and all of the windows were closed. I asked if he wouldn't mind opening a window and his wife gave me a dirty look and said no.

About two hours later we approached a small town and we asked if they could drop us off. All three of us had suffered enough of Jack Sprat and his wife.

The town that we stopped off at was called Kalkrand and maybe calling it a town was complimenting it a bit too much. It consisted of a church, a police station, a hotel, a bottle store and a few houses. We went into the hotel and asked if they were still serving breakfast. This caused a staff conference because I don't know if they understood the concept of breakfast.

The manager informed us that breakfast would cost us R1.50 each. We happily agreed and went to sit down in the dining room. I have never since eaten a breakfast that could even begin to compare with what we were served that morning.

First off they brought a huge jug of freshly squeezed orange juice to the table. Then we had a huge bowl of porridge before they brought the main breakfast.

This consisted of six rashers of bacon, a large piece of boerewors, a massive piece of beef steak, two fried eggs, mushrooms, fried tomato, fried onions, and baked beans.

As if that was not enough

there was also about two loaves of bread that had been toasted. The bread came with fresh butter, Marmite, peanut butter, and about four different types of jam. The breakfast was concluded by a large pot of coffee.

I nearly fell over when the manager came along with a worried look on his face and asked if we had had enough to eat.

We eventually waddled out of the hotel and resumed our position on the side of the road. At about 11.30 am a small bakkie stopped and asked where we were going. The driver and his wife burst out laughing when we said that we were heading for Johannesburg. They were on their way to a farm in the middle of nowhere and said they would give us a lift.

Two dogs were sitting on the back of the bakkie and we shared the space with them. It was pretty cold and before long Bruce, Mike and I had 'borrowed' the dog's flea-ridden blanket.

At about three that afternoon the driver pulled to a stop and told us that he was now going to turn off the main road. They wished us luck and headed off.

For the next three hours we did not even see a car. This was hardly surprising because we were really in the middle of nowhere. We began arguing amongst ourselves.

"This was your stupid idea," Bruce said, pointing an accusing finger at me.

"Crap," I replied, "It was Mike's idea. Anyway, I didn't hear you complaining at the time."

"Well I've had enough of this rubbish. I'm going back," Bruce

sulked.

What transpired next would not have been out of place in any comedy film.

I was standing on one side of the road with my arm extended and my thumb raised. Bruce was doing exactly the same, but on the opposite side of the road. I really don't know why we were bothering because we hadn't seen a vehicle in either direction for three and a half hours.

Mike was sitting in the middle of the road with his Ghetto Blaster. The batteries were going flat and the 'Bad Company' tape he was listening to sounded exactly that, very bad.

I noticed that there was a railway line about a half a kilometre away and that it ran parallel to the road. This gave me an idea.

"Hey guys, why don't we go down to the railway line and wait until a goods train comes past. Then we try and jump the train. After all, it must be going somewhere."

"Good idea," agreed Mike, "but how will we know when there's a train coming?"

We had spotted a small corrugated iron hut standing next to the railway line and Mike and I decided to go and investigate. Bruce was still sulking and refused to go anywhere.

When we arrived at the hut an old man emerged and he greeted us in Afrikaans. His features led me to believe that he was a Bushman.

"Good evening young masters," he greeted us. "Can I be of help to you?"

We asked him if any trains were due to come past. He invited us into his shack and, as it was getting dark, he lit a candle.



ROAD TO NOWHERE: Many hours were spend standing next to the road, waiting for any vehicle to pass.

The hut was sparsely furnished with a bed, cupboard, table and two chairs. He told us to please take a seat and he sat down on his bed.

Then he reached under the bed and removed a small suitcase, like the ones that you used to use at primary school, and he took a timetable from it.

The date on the front of the timetable showed that it was from 1959. He consulted his 'timetable' and told us that there should be a train the following day.

"But now you must have some tea young masters. I don't get visitors very often."

He put a teapot on his paraffin stove and took out three chipped mugs from his cupboard.

We learnt that his name was Piet and that his mother had been a coloured woman, while his father was a Bushman.

Piet had been working for South African Railways for the past 32 years and his job was to check the railway line and report any faults.

Who he was supposed to report to, or where, I had no idea and I wondered if the Railways even knew that he still existed.

He was about to pour us some tea when he looked at the mugs and shook his head.

"Please forgive me young masters," he exclaimed. "I am forgetting my manners. How can I let you drink out of these mugs?"

He removed a box from beneath his bed and took out a brand new tea service that was made from genuine bone china.

Then he took a tin of Bully Beef from the cupboard and cut it into slices. He served the Bully Beef with our tea.

I sipped at the tea and I swear I could feel the enamel coming off my teeth. I don't know how many spoons of sugar he had used but the tea was very sweet. The condensed milk he had used didn't help either.

What anyone would have made of that scene I just don't know? Here were two young white boys in their army uniforms sitting in a shack in the middle of nowhere sharing a candle light tea with an elderly Bushman. We were sipping hot, sweet tea from real china cups and munching on slices of Bully Beef. It all seemed so surreal. As far as I was concerned, it

was better than having tea with the Queen of England.

This old Bushman and his hospitality had strangely touched both Mike and me. As we drank our tea Piet told us story after story about his life and his many wonderful adventures.

The Mad Hatters Tea Party was interrupted by the sound of Bruce shouting at the top of his voice. Mike and I went outside to see what was going on and we immediately noticed that there were headlights up on the road.

"Come on you guys," hollered Bruce. "I've got us a lift!"

We said goodbye to Piet and gave him two ten Rand notes. You must realise that this was back in 1978 and twenty rands was still worth something in those days. Piet stood there with tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Goodbye young masters," he sniffed. "You must come and visit old Piet again sometime."

It was too much for me and as I walked off I felt that my own eyes were moist.

On our arrival at the road I was greeted by the strangest sight. A large Mercedes flat-bed truck was standing there and it was filled with furniture.

Bruce told us that the driver of the truck, an elderly man, was moving to Upington and that he would give us a lift. The driver had what appeared to be his entire family in the front of the truck with him and we had to find space on the back amongst the furniture.

The truck was piled with furniture and goods of all descriptions. Something that really tickled me was a cage made of chicken wire. Inside the cage

were four hens, a rooster, and a grey domestic cat.

Shortly before 11.00 pm that night we could see the lights of Upington in the distance. Mike switched on his radio and we were amazed when it actually picked up reception.

“We must be near civilisation,” laughed Mike.

I still remember the song that was playing at the time. It was a woman by the name of Patsy Gallant and she was singing a song titled ‘*From New York To LA*’.

When we arrived in Upington we found a steakhouse that was still open and we went in and sat down to a burger and chips.

The owner of the steakhouse was a Greek guy and he came over to our table and started chatting to us.

After we had eaten he asked if any of us could play chess. Bruce and I fancied ourselves as rather decent players and the owner challenged first Bruce then myself to a game.

Before we started playing he first closed and locked the restaurant. Then he brought out a bottle of Greek Ouzo liqueur.

By the time we left the restaurant at 2.00 am the following morning we were in high spirits. I must admit that we were also full of Greek spirits. By 3.00 am we found ourselves yet again on the main road at the outskirts of Upington.

There was nothing resembling traffic on the road and we prepared for another cold night of waiting. Mike noticed an eighteen wheeler parked on a grass patch next to the road and we decided to investigate further.

The truck had a bed behind

the driver’s cabin and we could see someone sleeping.

Feeling optimistic we sat next to the vehicle, waiting until the driver woke.

Just before 4.00 am there was signs of life in the cabin of the truck and we saw that the driver was a youngish black guy. Our enquiries revealed that he was heading for Johannesburg but when we asked him for a lift he said that it was against his company’s policy to pick up hitchhikers.

We tried reasoning with him but that didn’t work. Then we resorted to begging him and that didn’t work either. The twenty rands that we offered him did work though and fifteen minutes later we were on our way.

Bruce sat in the passenger seat while Mike and I shared the bunk behind the seats. For the rest of the day the three of us took turns sharing the bunk and the passenger seat.

Just before 7.00 pm that evening we arrived in Johannesburg and Bruce phoned his mother and told her to come and fetch us.

It had taken us 48 hours to hitch the 2,228 km from Grootfontein to Johannesburg and we had shared some experiences that I will never forget.

Okay, I tell you what I do...

That was not the end of hitchhiking for Steve. Towards the end of the year he was to try it again, with strange results.

It was just before Christmas that year, December 22 to be precise, and I was told that I would be reporting in January for a course at the Army Gym-

nasium. A PF corporal by the name of Jan Steyn would be going on the same course as I was and we had both been given leave until the course began in January.

We had a slight problem though because there was no way we could get on a flight from Grootfontein. They were all fully booked until the new year.

There was no way that I wanted to spend Christmas in Grootfontein, not when I had the opportunity of being home instead. I then had an idea.

“Listen Jan,” I told him, “why don’t we hitchhike down to Windhoek and then catch a SAA (South African Airways) flight from there to Johannesburg. We’ll have to pay for it ourselves, but it’s still better than sitting around here.”

Jan was all for the idea and we decided that we would set off the following morning, 23 December.

At 7.00 am the following morning the duty driver dropped us off just outside of Grootfontein. While we were still taking our bags off the back of the Land Rover a VW Kombi pulled to a stop.

It contained two women with what transpired to be their three children. They said they were going halfway to Windhoek and they would give us a lift. Only too happy to accept, we climbed into the Kombi and set off.

When they arrived at their turn off they puled to the side of the road to let us out. As we were taking our bags from the Kombi and thanking them, another Kombi pulled up. This one contained five German nuns and



WHICH WAS IS OUT: We were heading for Johannesburg, but we didn’t even know how to get out of Windhoek.

they said that they would drop us off in Windhoek.

The South African Airways office in Windhoek had bad news for us. All flights were fully booked for the Christmas period and the first available flight would be on 27 December.

Jan and I were bitterly disappointed and found a small coffee shop to discuss our next step.

“I don’t want to spend Christmas in Windhoek,” Jan told me.

I agreed with him.

“Listen Jan, there is one thing we can try. We can attempt to hitchhike from here to Jo’burg, but I must warn you that it’s not easy. There’s a strong possibility that we could spend Christmas sitting on the side of the road somewhere.”

“Let’s do it then. I’d rather spend Christmas on the side of the road than here.”

I was faced with another problem. I had no idea of how to get to the main road from where we were. We were in the Windhoek CBD and the main road could

have been anywhere.

I stopped a passer-by and asked if he could tell us how to get to the main road. He looked like a typical South West African farmer with his khaki shorts, long socks, *veldskoene*, and wide brim hat. When he spoke he had a very strong German accent.

“You want the main road ja?” he nodded his head. “Okay, I tell you what I do. I have to go to a shop to pick up a new mattress. You help me carry the mattress to my truck and I give you a lift to the main road, ja?”

Jan and I agreed to help him carry the mattress. It must have looked a strange sight with two guys in army uniform carrying this mattress down the road while being led by someone that looked like a refugee from the Boer War.

He owned one of those old Ford F-10 pickup trucks and it looked in excellent condition. We loaded the mattress into the back of the vehicle and then

climbed into the front with him.

“Okay, I tell you what I do. I will drop you off about 10 kilometres outside of town and then you are on the right road ja?”

We were very grateful and thanked him. When we had driven about 15 kilometres out of Windhoek he turned to us and nodded his head.

“Okay, I tell you what I do. There is a pub about 200 kilometres from here and I sometimes go for a drink there ja. I go now and have a drink with you and then you can get a lift from there. It is on the main road ja.”

We couldn’t believe our luck. All we had wanted was directions to the main road and this guy was taking us 200 kilometres along the way. The best thing about it is that we were moving towards home and it was a good feeling.

We must have had about four or five beers each and this guy wouldn’t even let us pay for a drink. He insisted that it was on him. After we had finished our drinks we went outside and we shook hands with him, thanking him once again for his help.

“Okay, I tell you what I do,” he said, glancing at his wristwatch. “I take you and drop you off in the next town. It is better to get a lift from there ja.”

Jan and I looked at each other totally astounded. Was this guy for real?

True to his word, he took us to the next town, a distance of about 120 kilometres. What he said next almost caused me to fall over.

“Okay, I tell you what I do. I go drop you off in Upington ja. But maybe one of you drive now for awhile because I am

getting tired ja.”

Upington was halfway from Windhoek to Johannesburg. This was absolutely marvellous. I took the wheel and he sat in between Jan and I and promptly fell asleep. Jan and I switched seats twice during the trip to Upington.

The old German guy only woke up once or twice.

“Both hands on the steering wheel ja,” he scolded me before going back to sleep.

We arrived in Upington at about 3.00 am and I pulled into a service station. They had a 24 hour take away and I bought some coffee for the three of us. I woke the German and told him that we were in Upington.

He drank his coffee and looked more asleep than awake. The coffee seemed to revive him and he climbed out of the truck.

“I go piss now ja,” he told us before heading off for the toilet. When he came back he had a serious frown on his face.

“Okay, I tell you what I do now. I was thinking that it has been many years since I visited Johannesburg. Maybe I want to see how it has changed ja. I take you to inside Johannesburg ja.”

He gave me a wad of notes and told me to put petrol in the truck as soon as the service station opened. Then he climbed into the back of the truck, lay on the mattress and went back to sleep.

In those days they still had the petrol restrictions. Remember them? The garages were only allowed to sell petrol between 6.00 am and 6.00 pm and were not allowed to sell petrol over the weekends.

This meant that we would have to sit for three hours before we could refuel the vehicle. I wasn’t all that keen on sitting in Upington for another three hours. Anyway, what if the guy woke up and changed his mind.

“Listen Jan,” I said, “follow my lead and play along.”

We took our rifles and went to wake up the petrol attendants. Jan stood with his rifle in his shoulder, barrel pointing at the ground.

“Morning,” I greeted them, flashing my SADF identity card. “We’re on official SADF business. We need to refuel our vehicle now. We will pay for the petrol. If you have any problem with that you must phone this number and speak to the Minister of Defence.”

I rattled off a telephone number with a Pretoria dialling code. I have no idea of what number I gave them because I made it up on the spot.

They must have been impressed with my speech because they opened up a pump and filled the tank. I think I must have been very impressive because they didn’t even want to accept payment. I had to insist that they take the money. It was bad enough that I was lying to them and I didn’t want them to have to pay for the petrol out of their own pocket.

With the tank full, Jan and I climbed into the truck and set course for Johannesburg.

At about 8.00 am the German awoke and banged on the back window, telling us to pull over. He then climbed into the front with us and took the wheel.

“Now I feel good ja. At the next town we stop and have

some breakfast.”

That afternoon the German guy dropped Jan and I in front of my aunt’s house in Bedfordview. I invited him in for coffee and he accepted.

My dear old aunt was fascinated by him. She couldn’t believe that he had given us a lift all the way from Windhoek. To be honest, neither could I. I still couldn’t work out if he was the nicest person I had met, or whether he was as mad as a hatter.

It had taken us less than 30 hours to hike from Grootfontein to Johannesburg and I’m sure that this must have been some sort of a record. With our thanks ringing in his ears, the old German boy said his goodbyes and that was the last I ever saw of him.

The following morning my cousin’s boyfriend dropped me off at the old Jan Smuts airport and I caught a SAA flight down to Durban. I was home for Christmas.

Jan lived in Witbank and the same morning my cousin’s boyfriend dropped him off on the highway. Jan phoned me later that afternoon to let me know that he was also safely at home. It was a good Christmas after all. I’ve always promised myself that one day I was going to drive from Johannesburg up to Windhoek just to see how many of the places I can remember.

I’m 64 now, so maybe I had better get around to it soon.

The military does Christmas

Throughout time those that have served in the military have often spent Christmas away from their home, family and loved ones. Yet it doesn’t mean that they don’t celebrate the fact, often with music.

Christmas is usually a time for being home with family, friends and loved ones. Yet for those in the military this is not always possible.

Many soldiers may find themselves on duty on Christmas Day, or they may be on deployment far from home. There is always a possibility that they many caught up in a war. Wars do not stop and take a break just because it’s Christmas (except on rare occasions such as in December 1914).

Yet that doesn’t mean that those in the military don’t celebrate the fact that it is Christmas. Over the years many units and regiments have developed their own Christmas traditions. One way of celebrating is through the medium of song.

In this article we will look at just a few songs and videos that have become popular with those serving in the military. Click on the blue underlined links to view a video of the song.

[Stop the Cavalry](#)

Set in the trenches of the First World War, Stop The Cavalry by British singer Jona Lewie, was released in 1980 and is now heard as a Christmas song.

Lewie said that the song was never intended as a Christmas hit, and that it was a protest song.

[Christmas 1915](#)

Celtic Thunder is an Irish singing group and stage show known for its eclectic, theatrical style show.

Their song Christmas 1915 is based on the famous Christmas truce during World War I.

[Baba Yetu](#)

This song was composed as the theme song for the 2005 video game Civilization IV. It is the Lord’s Prayer in Swahili.

It has since become a popular song, especially over Christmas. Here it is performed by the United States Navy Band.

[So This Is Christmas](#)

Made popular by Céline Dion, this is a version done by the Trinidad Armed Forces.

[All I Want For Christmas](#)

When the Royal Navy amphibious assault ship HMS Ocean was on deployment in the Middle East over Christmas 2011, the crew decided to make a video.

It was uploaded to YouTube and since then has been viewed more than five million times.

[I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday](#)

Not to be outdone, the Royal Navy Type 23 ‘Duke’ class frigate HMS Argyll made their own video while on deployment in the Far East over Christmas 2018.

[White Christmas](#)

This evergreen Christmas favourite was one of Bing Crosby’s signature songs.

Here it is performed by the US Navy Band.

[Bluegrass Christmas Medley](#)

The popular US Army Band performs a medley of Christmas hits in a bluegrass style.

[We Are The World](#)

Released in 1985 to raise money for charities, We Are The World was performed by USA for Africa, a group made up of some of America’s top singers and musicians. In 2014 the Norwegian Army did their own cover version of the song.

It was clear that none of them should give up their military careers.

[Battle Hymn Of The Republic](#)

This song is popular throughout the year, including Christmas. Here it is performed by the US Army Field Band.

[Last Christmas](#)

Last Christmas was a hit song for British duo Wham. This is a cover version by the National Guard of the Russian Federation (Rosgvardia), better known as the Russian National Guard.

Trust you enjoyed these.

Christmas gifts for the outdoors man

Many military veterans tend to love camping and the outdoors. As if they didn't get enough of it during their service. Here's a few gift ideas for those veterans.



Tactical - All in One Survival Kit

What's in the box

- 1 x Tactical torch Flashlight
- 1 x Survival Paracord Bracelet
- 1 x Foldable Tactics Military Knife
- 1 x Compass
- 1 x Emergency thermal blanket
- 1 x Flintstone, Whistle
- 1 x Water Bottle Clip
- 1 x Tactical Camo Pouch
- 1 x roll Plaster
- 1 x roll bandage

BioLite Wood Burning Camp Stove

You're out in the bush and your cellphone or tablet dies. What if the heat from your camp fire could be used to generate electricity to give you unlimited access to power?

The BioLite CampStove 2 uses a thermoelectric generator to convert the heat from your fire back into reusable electricity so that you can charge out to your handheld devices. Access that power right away or store it for later with its integrated battery. Using only twigs, pine combs or brush as fuel, this portable smokeless camping stove can boil a litre of water in under five minutes. The LED dashboard gives real-time feedback on fire strength, fan speed, and power output, making it super easy and convenient to use.



Cree rechargeable High-Power Headlamp

With all of our current loadshedding, this powerful LED light is a must to have around the home and not just for camping.

The light has four different modes. The last mode causes the lights to flash rapidly and trust me, this makes it useful for self-defence. Shine it directly into someone's eyes and it will temporarily impair their vision and disorientate them.



11-in-1 Survival Gear Kit

What's in the box

- 1 X Professional Flashlight (Battery not included)
- 1 X Heavy-Duty Tungsten-Pen with Carbide Tip
- 1 X Compact Wood Cutter
- 1 X Emergency Blanket
- 1 X 11-IN-1 Multi-Function Pocket Card
- 1 X Large Ferrocerium rod flint
- 1 X Paracord Bracelet
- 1 X Compact Water Proof Durable Carrying Case
- 1 X Water Bottle Clip
- 1 X Carabiner
- 1 X Military Knife

Gerber Dime Multi-Tool

If you're going to use a multi-tool then you can't go wrong with Gerber.

This model includes 10 tools: Needle nose spring-loaded pliers, Wire cutter, Fine edge blade, Retail package opener, Scissors, Medium flat screwdriver, Crosshead screwdriver, Bottle opener, Tweezers, File.



LifeStraw Steel Personal Water Filter

This is something that can save your life in a survival situation. Put the straw into almost any water, no matter how polluted, and drink.

Stainless steel LifeStraw water filter features 2-stage filtration system that eliminates contaminants as well as odours and tastes

Durable and compact food-grade stainless steel straw meets FDA standards and is ideal for hiking, camping, backpacking, travel, and outdoor survival

Removes minimum 99.9999% of water-borne bacteria and 99.9% of water-borne protozoan parasites, and filters to 0.2 microns; surpasses EPA filter standard

Replaceable carbon capsule provides 2-stage filtration that reduces chlorine, organic chemicals, odours and bad tastes

Filters up to 1,000 litres and does not require batteries, pumping, or chemicals

Up close and personal

Throughout World War I, assaults on enemy positions almost inevitably ended in hand-to-hand combat in the confined spaces of trenches and dugouts.

Pistols came into their own in such circumstances, but were issued mainly to officers. Individual soldiers armed themselves with the rifle-and-bayonet, yet they were often difficult to use in confined spaces.

Weapons such as knives, axes, spades and clubs were chosen for their ability to disable or kill at a single stroke.

The design of early grenades, although not entirely satisfactory, soon improved dramatically.

The P08 or "Parabellum" - was the German officer's handgun of choice during World War I. Its 9mm Parabellum round (9×19mm) was more powerful than others of similar dimensions.

Most American officers preferred the .45 Colt New Service revolver over the Colt 'automatics' because they felt they were less likely to jam.

British officers prized the Webley Mk VI for its rugged reliability.



Luger P08



Colt New Service



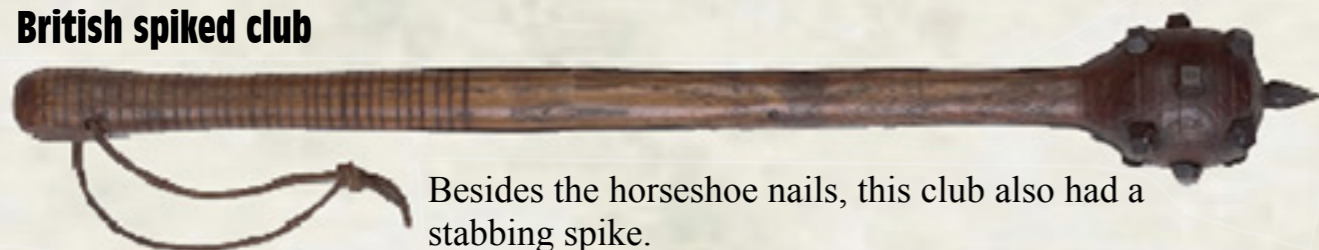
Webley & Scott Mk VI

The German stielhandgranate became one of the Stormtroopers iconic weapons. The handle gave the thrower a significant range advantage over other grenades.



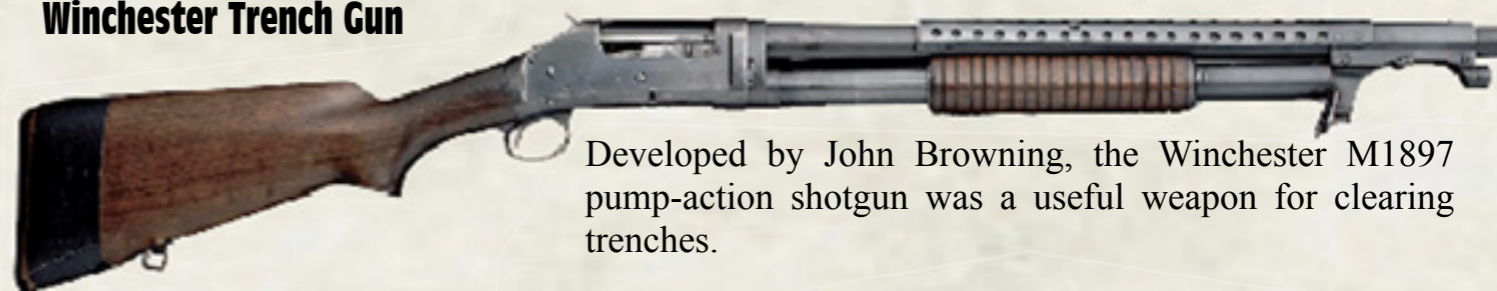
Stick grenade

British spiked club



Besides the horseshoe nails, this club also had a stabbing spike.

Winchester Trench Gun



Developed by John Browning, the Winchester M1897 pump-action shotgun was a useful weapon for clearing trenches.



Nailed cosh

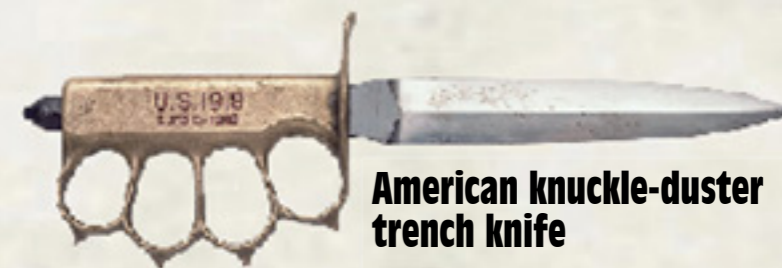
The simplest trench-fighting weapons were clubs and truncheons, often - as in this example - with nails or spikes added to increase their lethality, and usually with a retaining loop.



German 'Ersatz' knife bayonet



French trench knife



American knuckle-duster trench knife



Trench axe

The battlefields of World War I were festooned with barbed-wire entanglements, and many methods for dealing with this were tested. One involved fitting sprung cutting jaws to the muzzle of an SMLE rifle, but this proved ineffective.



SMLE Mk III Rifle with wire-cutting attachment

Weapons & Equipment: WW I

This month we compare the weapons and equipment of the major combatants in the First World War.

British Army

The British Army during World War I fought the largest and most costly war in its long history.

At the outbreak of the war in August 1914, the British regular army was a small professional force. It consisted of 247,432 regular troops organised in four regiments of Guards (Grenadier, with three Battalions; Coldstream, with three Battalions; Scots, with two Battalions; Irish with one Battalion), 68 regiments of the line and the Rifle Brigade (despite its name, this was an infantry regiment), 31 cavalry regiments, artillery and other support arms.

Up until conscription was introduced in January 1916, British soldiers were volunteers.

The standard uniform had changed since the lessons learnt during the Anglo Boer Wars. No longer did they wear the traditional 'red coat', but rather a khaki uniform.

Most troops were armed with bolt-action rifles, such as the Lee-Enfield.

With the introduction of gas to the battlefield, gas masks became vital items.

Another unique weapon was the trench knife. If troops managed to breach an enemy trench, the fighting would be at close quarters, and knives and clubs

were useful for this type of combat. Some trench knives incorporated a 'knuckle duster'.

Infantry Equipment

- A - Combat boots.
- B - Brodie helmet.
- C - Lee-Enfield Mk I.
- D - Webley Mk IV.
- E - Mills bomb.
- F - Lee-Enfield Bayonet.
- G - Trench knife.
- H - Gas mask and case.
- I - Canteen.
- J - Trenching tool.
- K - Mess kit.
- L - Puttee.
- M - Ammo bandolier.
- N - Backpack.

German Army

The Deutsches Heer (German Imperial Army) was the name given to the combined land and air forces of the German Empire.

The Germans wore a field grey uniform. At the start of the war most troops still wore the *pickelhaube*, a spiked helmet. This was later replaced by the distinctive *stahlhelm* (steel helmet).

The Germans used a number of bolt-action rifles during the war, with the Gewehr 98 become the standard issue.

Many troops would make use of a sidearm and a trench knife for *mêlée* combat.

The gas mask was also a vital component of equipment for German troops.

The trenching tool was not only used to dig holes. It was also useful for *mêlée* combat. Some troops would even sharpen the edges of the shovel.

While the standard hand grenade was the M1915 *Stielhandgranate*, the M1917 *Eierhandgranate* was also popular because it was smaller and easier to throw.

Infantry Equipment

- A - Combat boots.
- B - Stahlhelm (Steel helmet).
- C - Gewehr 98.
- D - Mauser C96.

- E - M1915 Stielhandgranate.
- F - Gewehr 98 Bayonet.
- G - Trench knife.
- H - Gas mask and case.
- I - Canteen.
- J - Trenching tool.
- K - Mess kit.
- L - Ammo bandolier.
- N - Backpack.

Pickelhaube



French Army

During the early months of the war the French still wore blue coats and red pants. This, however, was soon changed.

They adopted a uniform that was a light grey/blue.

The standard infantry weapon was the Lebel M1886 bolt-action rifle. Some troops would also use sidearms such as the Ruby M1914.

One of the unique weapons used by the French was the 'French Nail'. These were locally fabricated and converted

bayonets, knives and stabbing weapons. They were crude stabbing spikes made by adding a point to a steel stake which had its rearmost section heated and bent into a crude handle. Three French Nail's could be made from a single Lebel bayonet.

The early M2 gas mask was not very effective and these were later replaced by the Ars gas mask.

Infantry Equipment

- A - Combat boots.
- B - M15 *Casque Adrian* helmet.

- C - Lebel M1886.
- D - *Pistolet Automatique* "Ruby".
- E - F1 grenade.
- F - Lebel Bayonet.
- G - 'French Nail' trench knife.
- H - Ars Gas mask.
- I - Canteen.
- J - Mess kit.
- K - Ammo bandolier.
- L - Backpack.

US Army

U.S. service members in World War I came to be dubbed doughboys - the term most typically was used to refer to troops deployed to Europe as part of the American Expeditionary Forces.

The standard infantry weapons was the bolt-action Springfield M1903.

The most popular sidearm was the Colt M1911, a pistol that remained in service for many years.

The AEF gas mask and respi-

rator was standard issue to US troops.

Like the British, the Americans favoured a trench knife that was also a 'knuckle duster'. It was effective for *mêlée* combat.

Like the British and the French, US troops wore puttee., a name adapted from the Hindi *paṭṭī* (bandage). The consisted of a long narrow piece of cloth wound tightly and spirally round the leg from the ankle to the knee. They served to provide both support and protec-

tion.

Infantry Equipment

- A - Combat boots.
- B - Steel helmet.
- C - Springfield M1903.
- D - Colt M1911.
- E - Mk I Grenade.
- F - Springfield M1903 Bayonet.
- G - Trench knife.
- H - Gas mask and case.
- I - Canteen.
- J - Trenching tool.
- K - Mess kit.
- L - Ammo bandolier.
- N - Backpack.





United Kingdom



Germany





France



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



I



H



J



K



L



United States



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



J



I



H



K



L



Douglas Bader

Group Captain in the Royal Air Force, World War II fighter ace, prisoner of war, holder of the Distinguished Flying Cross and bar, the Distinguished Service Order and bar, a Knight Bachelor and double amputee. This was Douglas Bader.

It would be understandable if someone involved in an aircraft accident lost their enthusiasm for flying. Especially if the accident almost cost them their life and did result in them losing both of their legs. Unless, of course, your name was Douglas Bader.

Group Captain Sir Douglas Robert Stuart Bader, CBE, DSO & Bar, DFC & Bar, DL, FRAeS was a Royal Air Force flying ace during World War II. He was credited with 22 aerial victories, four shared victories, six probables, one shared probable and 11 enemy aircraft damaged.

These awards, honours and achievements would be noteworthy by any standards. Yet what makes Bader's achievements even more noteworthy was the fact that Bader was a double amputee, having lost both legs before the war.

Early life

Douglas Robert Stuart Bader was born on 21 February 1910 in St John's Wood, London. He was the second son of Frederick Roberts Bader and his wife Jessie Scott MacKenzie.

Until he was two years old, Bader was raised by relatives on

the Isle of Man. Bader's father was a civil engineer and had returned, along with his wife and first-born son, to work in India. Bader would join them at the age of two.

A year later the family returned to England and settled in Kew.

Bader's father saw action in the First World War in the Royal Engineers, and was wounded in action in 1917. He remained in France after the war, where, having attained the rank of major, he died in 1922 of complications from those wounds in a hospital in Saint-Omer.

Bader's mother remarried to the Reverend Ernest William Hobbs. The mild-mannered reverend did not become the father figure that Bader needed. His

mother showed little interest in Bader and he would often be sent to his grandparents. Without guidance he became an unruly boy.

He was sent as a boarder to Temple Grove School, regarded as one of the top five English prep schools.

Bader received his secondary education at St Edward's School in Oxford, where he thrived on sport - especially rugby and cricket.

In mid-1923, at the age of 13, Bader visited his aunt Hazel, who was marrying RAF Flight Lieutenant Cyril Burge, adjutant at RAF Cranwell.

It was during this visit that Bader got his first look at an Avro 504, a World War I biplane. Although he enjoyed the visit and took an interest in aviation, he showed no signs of becoming a keen pilot.

Back at school Bader focused his attention on sport and took less of an interest in academics. Bader received guidance and

encouragement from a Warden Kendall and he soon began to excel at his studies.

He was later accepted as a cadet at RAF Cranwell. Soon afterwards, he was offered a place at Oxford University, but turned it down as he preferred Cambridge University.

His mother refused to allow Bader to attend Cambridge in December 1927, claiming she could not afford the fees. A master at St. Edwards, a Mr Dingwall, helped pay these fees in part.

Due to his new connection with Cyril Burge, Bader learned of the six annual prize cadetships offered by RAF Cranwell each year. Out of hundreds of applicants, he finished fifth. He left St Edward's in early 1928, aged 18.

Entering the service

In 1928, Bader joined the RAF as an officer cadet at the Royal Air Force College Cranwell in rural Lincolnshire. He continued to excel at sports, and added hockey and boxing to his repertoire.

Motorcycling was tolerated at Cranwell, though cadets usually took part in banned activities such as speeding, pillion racing and buying and racing motorcars. Bader was involved in these activities and was close to expulsion after being caught out too often, in addition to coming in 19th out of 21 in his class examinations; however, his commanding officer (CO), Air Vice-Marshal Frederick Halaahan gave him a private warning about his conduct.

On 13 September 1928, Bader took his first flight with his instructor Flying Officer W. J. "Pissy" Pearson in an Avro 504. After just 11 hours and 15 minutes of flight time, he flew his first solo, on 19 February 1929.

On 26 July 1930, Bader was commissioned as a pilot officer into No. 23 Squadron RAF based at Kenley, Surrey. Flying Gloster Gamecocks and soon after, Bristol Bulldogs, Bader became a daredevil while training there, often flying illegal and dangerous stunts.

While very fast for its time, the Bulldog had directional stability problems at low speeds, which made such stunts exceptionally dangerous.

No. 23 Squadron had won the Hendon Air Show "pairs" event in 1929 and 1930. In 1931 Bader, teamed with Harry Day, successfully defended the squadron's title in the spring that year.

In late 1931, Bader undertook training for the 1932 Hendon Air Show, hoping to win a second consecutive title. Two pilots had been killed attempting aerobatics. The pilots were warned not to practise these manoeuvres under 610 metres and to keep above 150 metres at all times. Bader took this as an unnecessary safety rule rather than an order to be obeyed.

Nevertheless, on 14 December 1931, while visiting Reading Aero Club, he attempted some low-flying aerobatics at Woodley Airfield in a Bulldog Mk. IIA, K1676, of 23 Squadron, apparently on a dare.

His aircraft crashed when the

tip of the left wing touched the ground. Bader was rushed to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, where, in the hands of the prominent surgeon J. Leonard Joyce, both his legs were amputated - one above and one below the knee. Bader made the following laconic entry in his logbook after the crash: "Crashed slow-rolling near ground. Bad show."

Bader was transferred to the hospital at RAF Uxbridge and fought hard to regain his former abilities after he was given a new pair of artificial legs.

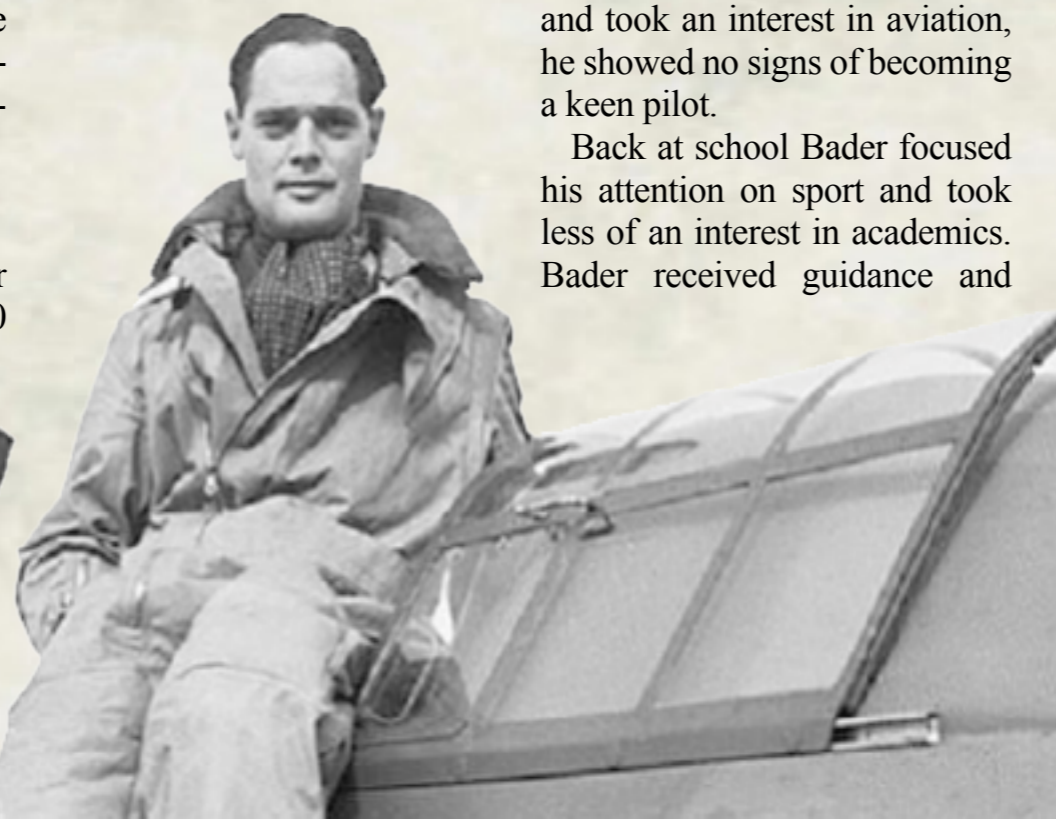
His convalescence was painful and exhausting and he needed morphine for pain relief. But for Bader there was no thought of just giving up.

In time his efforts paid off and he was able to drive a specially modified car, play golf, and even dance. During his convalescence there, he met and fell in love with Thelma Edwards, a waitress at a tea room called the Pantiles in Bagshot, Surrey.

Bader got his chance to prove that he could still fly when, in June 1932, Air Under-Secretary Philip Sassoon arranged for him to take up an Avro 504, which he piloted competently.

A subsequent medical examination proved him fit for active service, but in April 1933 he was notified that the RAF had decided to reverse the decision on the grounds that this situation was not covered by King's Regulations.

In May, Bader was invalided out of the RAF, took an office job with the Asiatic Petroleum Company (now Shell) and, on 5



October 1933, married Thelma Edwards.

Return to the RAF

Most people would have given up, but Bader continued to request that the Air Ministry accept him back into the RAF and give him a posting.

The increasing tensions in Europe worked in Bader's favour and he was finally invited to a selection board meeting at Adastral House in London's Kingsway.

Bader was disappointed to learn that it was only "ground jobs" that were being offered. It appeared that he would be refused a flying position, but Air Vice Marshal Halahan, commandant of RAF Cranwell in Bader's days there, personally endorsed him and asked the Central Flying School, Upavon, to assess his capabilities.

On 14 October 1939, the Central Flying School requested Bader report for flight tests on 18 October. He did not wait; driving down the next morning, Bader undertook refresher courses.

Despite reluctance on the part of the establishment to allow him to apply for an A.1.B. (full flying category status), his persistent efforts paid off.

Bader regained a medical categorisation for operational flying at the end of November 1939 and was posted to the Central Flying School for a refresher course on modern types of aircraft.

On 27 November, eight years after his accident, Bader flew solo again in an Avro Tutor; once airborne, he could not resist the temptation to turn the biplane upside down at 180 metres inside the circuit area. Bader sub-

sequently progressed through the Fairey Battle and Miles Master (the last training stage before flying Spitfires and Hurricanes).

World War II

In January 1940, Bader was posted to No. 19 Squadron based at RAF Duxford near Cambridge, where, at 29, he was older than most of his fellow pilots. Squadron Leader Geoffrey Stephenson, a close friend from his Cranwell days, was the commanding officer, and it was here that Bader got his first glimpse of a Spitfire.

It was thought that Bader's success as a fighter was partly because of his having no legs; pilots pulling high g-forces in combat turns often blacked out as the flow of blood from the brain drained to other parts of the body, usually the legs. As Bader had no legs he could remain conscious longer, and thus had an advantage over more able-bodied opponents.

Between February and May 1940 Bader practised formation flying, air tactics, and undertook flights over sea convoys. Bader found opposition to his ideas about aerial combat. He favoured using the sun and altitude to ambush the enemy, but the RAF did not share his opinions. Official orders/doctrine dictated that pilots should fly line-astern and attack singly. Despite this being at odds with his preferred tactics, Bader obeyed orders, and his skill saw him rapidly promoted to section leader.

Leigh-Mallory made Bader a flight commander of No. 222 Squadron RAF a few weeks later which also meant an advance from flying officer to flight lieu-

tenant.

Bader had his first taste of combat with No. 222 Squadron RAF, which was based at RAF Duxford. On 10 May the *Wehrmacht* invaded Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium and France.

The campaigns went badly for the Western Allies and soon they were evacuating from Dunkirk during the battle for the port. RAF Squadrons were ordered to provide air supremacy for the Royal Navy during Operation Dynamo.

Bader got his first kill, a Messerschmitt Bf 109, on 1 June 1940 while patrolling the coast near Dunkirk. Bader was also credited with a Messerschmitt Bf 110 damaged.

After flying operations over Dunkirk, Bader was posted to command No. 242 Squadron RAF as acting squadron leader on 28 June 1940, a Hawker Hurricane unit based at RAF Coltishall, mainly made up of Canadians who had suffered high losses in the Battle of France and had low morale.

Despite initial resistance to their new commanding officer, the pilots were soon won over by Bader's strong personality and perseverance, especially in cutting through red tape to make the squadron operational again.

242 Squadron distinguished itself during the Battle of Britain and claimed 62 aerial victories. Bader had become an ace during the battle, with more than five kills.

On 14 September, Bader was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for his combat leadership. On 24 September, he had been promoted to the war

substantive rank of flight lieutenant.

On 12 December 1940, Bader was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for his services during the Battle of Britain. By this time, he was an acting squadron leader.

On 18 March 1941, Bader was promoted to acting wing commander and became one of the first "wing leaders". Stationed at Tangmere with 145, 610 and 616 Squadrons under his command, Bader led his wing of Spitfires on sweeps and "Circus" operations (medium bomber escort) over north-western Europe throughout the summer campaign.

These were missions combining bombers and fighters designed to lure out and tie down German Luftwaffe fighter units that might otherwise serve on the Russian front. One of the wing leader's "perks" was permission to have his initials marked on

his aircraft as personal identification, thus "D-B" was painted on the side of Bader's Spitfire. These letters gave rise to his radio call-sign "Dogsbody".

Between 24 March and 9 August 1941, Bader flew 62 fighter sweeps over France. On 9 August 1941, Bader was flying a Spitfire Mk VA serial W3185 "D-B" on an offensive patrol over the French coast, looking for Messerschmitt Bf 109s from Abbeville or Wissant. He was without his trusted wingman Alan Smith, who was unable to fly on that day due to a head cold.

Just after Bader's section of four aircraft crossed the coast, 12 Bf 109s were spotted flying in formation below them and travelling in the same direction. Bader dived on them too fast and too steeply to be able to aim and fire his guns, and barely avoided colliding with one of them.

He levelled out to find that he was now alone, separated from

his section, and was considering whether to return home when he spotted three pairs of Bf 109s a couple of miles in front of him.

He dropped down below them and closed up before destroying one of them with a short burst of fire from close range. Bader was just opening fire on a second Bf 109, which trailed white smoke and dropped down, when he noticed the two on his left turning towards him.

At this point he decided it would be better to return home; however, making the mistake of banking away from them, Bader believed he had a mid-air collision with the second of the two Bf 109s on his right that were continuing straight ahead.

Bader's fuselage, tail and fin were gone from behind him, and he lost height rapidly at what he estimated to be 640 km/hr in a slow spin. He jettisoned the cockpit canopy, released his harness pin, and the air rushing past the open cockpit started to suck



him out, but his prosthetic leg was trapped.

Part way out of the cockpit and still attached to his aircraft, Bader fell for some time before he released his parachute, at which point the leg's retaining strap snapped under the strain and he was pulled free. A Bf 109 flew by as he neared the ground.

Although Bader believed for years that he had collided in midair with a Bf 109, two other possibilities have later been put forward; that he was shot down by a German Bf 109, or alternatively that he may have been a victim of friendly fire.

Recent research shows no Bf 109 was lost to a collision that day, and there is also doubt that a German pilot was responsible for shooting him down.

Prisoner of War

Bader became a prisoner of war. The Germans treated Bader with great respect. When he baled out, Bader's right prosthetic leg became trapped in the aircraft, and he escaped only when the leg's retaining straps snapped after he pulled the ripcord on his parachute.

General Adolf Galland notified the British of his damaged leg and offered them safe passage to drop off a replacement. Hermann Göring himself gave the green light for the operation.

The British responded on 19 August 1941 with the "Leg Operation" - an RAF bomber was allowed to drop a new prosthetic leg by parachute to St Omer, a Luftwaffe base in occupied France, as part of Circus 81 involving six Bristol Blenheims and a sizeable fighter escort including 452 Squadron.

The Germans were less impressed when, task done, the bombers proceeded on to their bombing mission to Gosnay Power Station near Bethune, although bad weather prevented the target being attacked.

Bader escaped from the hospital where he was recovering by tying together sheets. Initially the "rope" did not reach the ground; with the help of another patient, he slid the sheet from under the comatose New Zealand pilot, Bill Russell of No. 485 Squadron, who had had his arm amputated the day before. Russell's bed was then moved to the window to act as an anchor. A French maid at the St. Omer hospital attempted to get in touch with British agents to enable Bader to escape to Britain. She later brought a letter from a peasant couple (a Mr. and Mrs. Hiecques), who promised to shelter him outside St. Omer until he could be passed further down the line. Until then, their son would wait outside the hospital every night until there was a chance of escape. Eventually, he escaped out of a window. The plan worked initially.

Bader completed the long walk to the safe house despite wearing a British uniform. Unfortunately for him, the plan was betrayed by another woman at the hospital and Bader was recaptured.

Over the next few years, Bader made himself a thorn in the side of the Germans. He often practised what the RAF personnel called "goon-baiting". He considered it his duty to cause as much trouble to the enemy as possible, much of which included escape attempts. He made so many escape attempts that

the Germans threatened to take away his legs.

In August 1942, Bader escaped with Johnny Palmer and three others from the camp at Stalag Luft III B in Sagan. Unfortunately, a Luftwaffe officer of JG 26 was in the area. Keen to meet the Tangmere wing leader, he dropped by to see Bader, but when he knocked on his door, there was no answer. Soon the alarm was raised, and a few days later, Bader was recaptured.

He was finally dispatched to the "escape-proof" Colditz Castle Oflag IV-C on 18 August 1942, where he remained until 15 April 1945 when it was liberated by the First United States Army.

Postwar

After his return to Britain, Bader was given the honour of leading a victory flypast of 300 aircraft over London in June 1945. On 1 July, he was promoted to temporary wing commander.

Bader was given the post of the Fighter Leader's School commanding officer. He received a promotion to war substantive wing commander on 1 December and soon after was promoted to temporary group captain.

Unfortunately for Bader, the fighter aircraft's roles had now expanded significantly and he spent most of his time instructing on ground attack and co-operation with ground forces.

Also, Bader did not get on with the newer generation of squadron leaders who considered him to be "out of date". In the end, Air Marshal James Robb offered Bader a role commanding the North Weald sector of No.



NO ESCAPE: Colditz Castle, known as Oflag IV-C, in Saxony, Germany. It housed Allied prisoners of war and Bader spent almost three years there.

11 Group RAF, an organisation steeped in Fighter Command and Battle of Britain history.

It is likely Bader would have stayed in the RAF for some time had his mentor Leigh-Mallory not been killed in an air crash in November 1944, such was the respect and influence he held over Bader, but Bader's enthusiasm for continued service in the RAF waned.

On 21 July 1946, Bader retired from the RAF with the rank of group captain to take a job at Royal Dutch Shell.

Bader considered politics, and standing as a Member of Parliament for his home constituency in the House of Commons. He despised how the three main political parties used war veterans for their own political ends. Instead, he resolved to join Shell.

His decision was not motivated by money, but a willingness to repay a debt. Shell had been ready to take him on, aged 23, after his accident. Other companies had offered him more money, but he chose to join Shell on principle.

There was another incentive.

Joining Shell would allow him to continue flying. He would travel as an executive, and it meant he could fly a light aircraft.

Bader became Managing Director of Shell Aircraft until he retired in 1969. That same year, he also served as a technical advisor to the film, *Battle of Britain*.

Bader travelled to every major country outside the Communist world, becoming internationally famous and a popular after-dinner speaker on aviation matters. In 1975 he spoke at the funeral of Air Chief Marshal Keith Park.

Controversial character

When the film *Reach for the Sky* was released, people associated Bader with the quiet and amiable personality of actor Kenneth More, who played Bader. Bader recognised that the producers had deleted all those habits he displayed when on operations, particularly his prolific use of bad language.

Never a person to hide his opinions, Bader also became controversial for his political interventions. A staunch conserv-

ative with traditional Victorian values, his trenchantly expressed views on such subjects as juvenile delinquency, apartheid and Rhodesia's defiance of the Commonwealth (he was a strong supporter of Ian Smith's white minority regime) attracted much criticism.

Bader was known, at times, to be head-strong, blunt and unsophisticated when he made his opinion known. During one visit to Munich, Germany, as a guest of Adolf Galland, he walked into a room full of ex-Luftwaffe pilots and said, "My God, I had no idea we left so many of you bastards alive".

Death

Bader's first wife, Thelma, died in January 1971 and he remarried in January 1973.

Bader's health was in decline in the 1970s, and he soon gave up flying altogether. His workload was exhausting for a legless man with a worsening heart condition. On 5 September 1982, after a dinner honouring Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris at the Guildhall, at which he spoke, Bader died of a heart attack while being driven through Chiswick, west London, on his way home.

Among the many dignitaries and personalities at his funeral was Adolf Galland. Galland and Douglas Bader had shared a friendship that spanned more than 42 years since their first meeting in France. Although Galland was on a business trip to California, he made sure to attend the memorial service held for Bader at the St Clement Danes Church in the Strand.

de Havilland Mosquito

Nicknamed the “Wooden Wonder”, in 1941 it was one of the fastest operational aircraft in the world. Originally conceived as an unarmed fast bomber, the Mosquito would evolve during the war into many roles and would be forged in battle.

The de Havilland DH.98 Mosquito is a British twin-engined, shoulder-winged multi-role combat aircraft, introduced during the Second World War.

Unusual in that its frame is constructed mostly of wood, it was nicknamed the “Wooden Wonder”, or “Mos-sie”.

Lord Beaverbrook, Minister

to medium-altitude daytime tactical bomber, high-altitude night bomber, pathfinder, day or night fighter, fighter-bomber, intruder, maritime strike, and photo-reconnaissance aircraft.

The crew of two, pilot and navigator, sat side by side.

A single passenger could ride in the aircraft’s bomb bay when necessary.

The Mosquito FBVI was often flown in special raids, such as Operation Jericho – an attack on Amiens

The Mosquito flew with the Royal Air Force (RAF) and other air forces in the European, Mediterranean and Italian theatres. The Mosquito was also operated by the RAF in the Southeast Asian theatre and by the Royal Australian Air Force based in the Halmaheras and Borneo during the Pacific War. During the 1950s, the RAF replaced the Mosquito with the jet-powered English Electric Canberra.

Background

By the early to mid-1930s, de Havilland had a reputation for

of Aircraft Production, nicknamed it “Freeman’s Folly”, alluding to Air Chief Marshal Sir Wilfrid Freeman, who defended Geoffrey de Havilland and his design concept against orders to scrap the project.

In 1941, it was one of the fastest operational aircraft in the world.

Originally conceived as an unarmed fast bomber, the Mosquito’s use evolved during the war into many roles, including low-

Prison in early 1944, and precision attacks against military intelligence, security, and police facilities (such as Gestapo headquarters).

On 30 January 1943, the 10th anniversary of the Nazis’ seizure of power, a morning Mosquito attack knocked out the main Berlin broadcasting station while Hermann Göring was speaking, putting his speech off the air.

innovative high-speed aircraft with the DH.88 Comet racer. The later DH.91 Albatross airliner pioneered the composite wood construction used for the Mosquito.

Based on his experience with the Albatross, Geoffrey de Havilland believed that a bomber

with a good aerodynamic design and smooth, minimal skin area, would exceed the P.13/36 specification.

Furthermore, adapting the Albatross principles could save time. In April 1938, performance estimates were produced for a twin Rolls-Royce Merlin-powered DH.91, with the Bristol Hercules (radial engine) and Napier Sabre (H-engine) as alternatives.

De Havilland settled on designing a new aircraft that would be aerodynamically clean, wooden, and powered by the Merlin, which offered substantial future development.

The new design would be

anti-aircraft guns more likely. Instead, high speed and good manoeuvrability would make evading fighters and ground fire easier.

On 7 October 1939, a month into the war, the nucleus of a design team under Eric Bishop moved to the security and secrecy of Salisbury Hall to work on what was later known as the DH.98.

The DH.98 was too radical for the ministry, which wanted a heavily armed, multirole aircraft, combining medium bomber, reconnaissance, and general-purpose roles, as well as capable of carrying torpedoes. With outbreak of war, the ministry became more receptive, but still sceptical about an unarmed bomber.

promise, de Havilland made no changes..

With design of the DH.98 started, mock-ups were built, the most detailed at Salisbury Hall, where E0234 was later constructed.

Initially, the concept was for the crew to be enclosed in the fuselage behind a transparent nose (similar to the Bristol Blenheim or Heinkel He 111H), but this was quickly altered to a more solid nose with a conventional canopy.

The construction of the prototype began in March 1940, but work was cancelled again after the Battle of Dunkirk, when Lord Beaverbrook, as Minister of Aircraft Production, decided no production capacity remained for aircraft like the DH.98, which was not expected to be in service until early 1942.

Beaverbrook told Air Vice-Marshal Freeman that work on the project should stop, but he did not issue a specific instruction, and Freeman ignored the request.

faster than foreseeable enemy fighter aircraft, and could dispense with a defensive armament, which would slow it and make interception or losses to

To appease the ministry, de Havilland built mock-ups with a gun turret just aft of the cockpit, but apart from this com-

In June 1940, however, Lord Beaverbrook and the Air Staff ordered that production should



focus on five existing types, namely the Supermarine Spitfire, Hawker Hurricane fighter, Vickers Wellington, Armstrong-Whitworth Whitley, and Bristol Blenheim bombers.

Work on the DH.98 prototype stopped. Apparently, the project shut down when the design team were denied materials for the prototype.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Britain, the original order was changed to 20 bomber variants and 30 fighters. Whether the fighter version should have dual or single controls, or should carry a turret, was still uncertain, so three prototypes were built: W4052, W4053, and W4073.

The second and third, both turret armed, were later disarmed, to become the prototypes for the T.III trainer. This caused some delays, since half-built wing components had to be strengthened for the required higher combat loading. The nose sections also had to be changed from a design with a clear perspex bomb-aimer's position, to one with a solid nose housing four .303 machine guns and their ammunition.

On 3 November 1940, the aircraft, painted in "prototype yellow" and still coded E0234, was dismantled, transported by road to Hatfield and placed in a small, blast-proof assembly building.

Two Merlin 21 two-speed, single-stage supercharged engines were installed, driving three-bladed de Havilland Hydromatic constant-speed controllable-pitch propellers. Engine runs were made on 19 November.



WOODEN WONDER: Pilots and crew pose in front of a Mosquito. Note the four .303 machine guns in the nose.

On 24 November, taxiing trials were carried out by Geoffrey de Havilland Jr., the de Havilland test pilot. On 25 November, the prototype made its first flight, piloted by de Havilland Jr., accompanied by John E. Walker, the chief engine installation designer.

Operational history

The de Havilland Mosquito operated in many roles, performing medium bomber, reconnaissance, tactical strike, anti-submarine warfare and shipping attacks and night fighter duties, until the end of the war.

In July 1941, the first production Mosquito W4051 was sent to No. 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU), at RAF Benson. The secret reconnaissance flights of this aircraft were the first operational missions of the Mosquito.

On 15 November 1941, 105 Squadron, RAF, took delivery at RAF Swanton Morley, Nor-

folk, of the first operational Mosquito Mk. B.IV bomber, serial no. W4064.

Throughout 1942, 105 Squadron, based next at RAF Horsham St. Faith, then from 29 September, RAF Marham, undertook daylight low-level and shallow dive attacks.

Apart from the Oslo and Berlin raids, the strikes were mainly on industrial and infrastructure targets in occupied Netherlands and Norway, France and northern and western Germany.

The crews faced deadly flak and fighters, particularly Focke-Wulf Fw 190s, which they called snappers. Germany still controlled continental airspace and the Fw 190s were often already airborne and at an advantageous altitude.

Collisions within the formations also caused casualties. It was the Mosquito's excellent handling capabilities, rather than pure speed, that facilitated those evasions that were successful.

From mid-1942 to mid-1943, Mosquito bombers flew high-speed, medium or low-altitude daylight missions against factories, railways and other pinpoint targets in Germany and German-occupied Europe.

From June 1943, Mosquito bombers were formed into the Light Night Striking Force to guide RAF Bomber Command heavy bomber raids and as "nuisance" bombers, dropping Blockbuster bombs - 1,800 kg "cookies" - in high-altitude, high-speed raids that German night fighters were almost powerless to intercept.

As a night fighter from mid-1942, the Mosquito intercepted Luftwaffe raids on Britain, notably those of Operation Steinbock in 1944. Starting in July 1942, Mosquito night-fighter units raided Luftwaffe airfields. As part of 100 Group, it was flown as a night fighter and as an intruder supporting Bomber Command heavy bombers that reduced losses during 1944 and 1945.

In another example of the daylight precision raids carried out by the Mosquitos of Nos. 105 and 139 Squadrons, on 30 January 1943, the 10th anniversary of the Nazis' seizure of power, a morning Mosquito attack knocked out the main Berlin broadcasting station while Commander in Chief Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring was speaking, putting his speech off the air. A second sortie in the afternoon inconvenienced another speech, by Goebbels.

Lecturing a group of German aircraft manufacturers, Göring said:

"In 1940 I could at least fly as far as Glasgow in most of my aircraft, but not now! It makes me furious when I see the Mosquito. I turn green and yellow with envy. The British, who can afford aluminium better than we can, knock together a beautiful wooden aircraft that every piano factory over there is building, and they give it a speed which they have now increased yet again. What do you make of that? There is nothing the British do not have. They have the geniuses and we have the nincompoops. After the war is over I'm going to buy a British radio set - then at least I'll own something that has always worked."

From 1943, Mosquitos with RAF Coastal Command attacked Kriegsmarine U-boats and intercepted transport ship concentrations.

The Mosquito also proved a very capable night fighter. Some of the most successful RAF pilots flew these variants. For example, Wing Commander Branse Burbridge claimed 21 kills, and Wing Commander John Cunningham claimed 19 of his 20 victories at night on Mosquitos.

The Mosquito flew its last official European war mission on 21 May 1945, when Mosquitos of 143 Squadron and 248 Squadron RAF were ordered to continue to hunt German submarines that might be tempted to continue the fight; instead of submarines all the Mosquitos encountered were passive E-boats.

The last operational RAF Mosquitos were the Mosquito TT.35's, which were finally

retired from No. 3 Civilian Anti-Aircraft Co-Operation Unit (CAACU) in May 1963.

No fewer than 21 countries, including South Africa, operated Mosquitos at some stage.

There are approximately 30 non-flying Mosquitos around the world with four airworthy examples, three in the United States and one in Canada.

The largest collection of Mosquitos is at the de Havilland Aircraft Heritage Centre in the United Kingdom, which owns three aircraft, including the first prototype, W4050, the only initial prototype of a Second World War British aircraft design still in existence in the 21st century.

Specifications (B Mk.XVI) General characteristics

- Crew: 2 (pilot, bombardier/navigator)
- Length: 13.56 metres
- Wingspan: 16.51 metres
- Height: 6.31 metres
- Gross weight: 8,210 kg
- Engines: 2 x Rolls-Royce Merlin 76 V-12 liquid-cooled piston engine, 1,710 hp
- Propellers: 3-bladed constant-speed propellers

Performance

- Max speed: 668 km/h
- Range: 2,100 km
- Service ceiling: 11,000 metres
- Rate of climb: 14.5 m/s

Armament

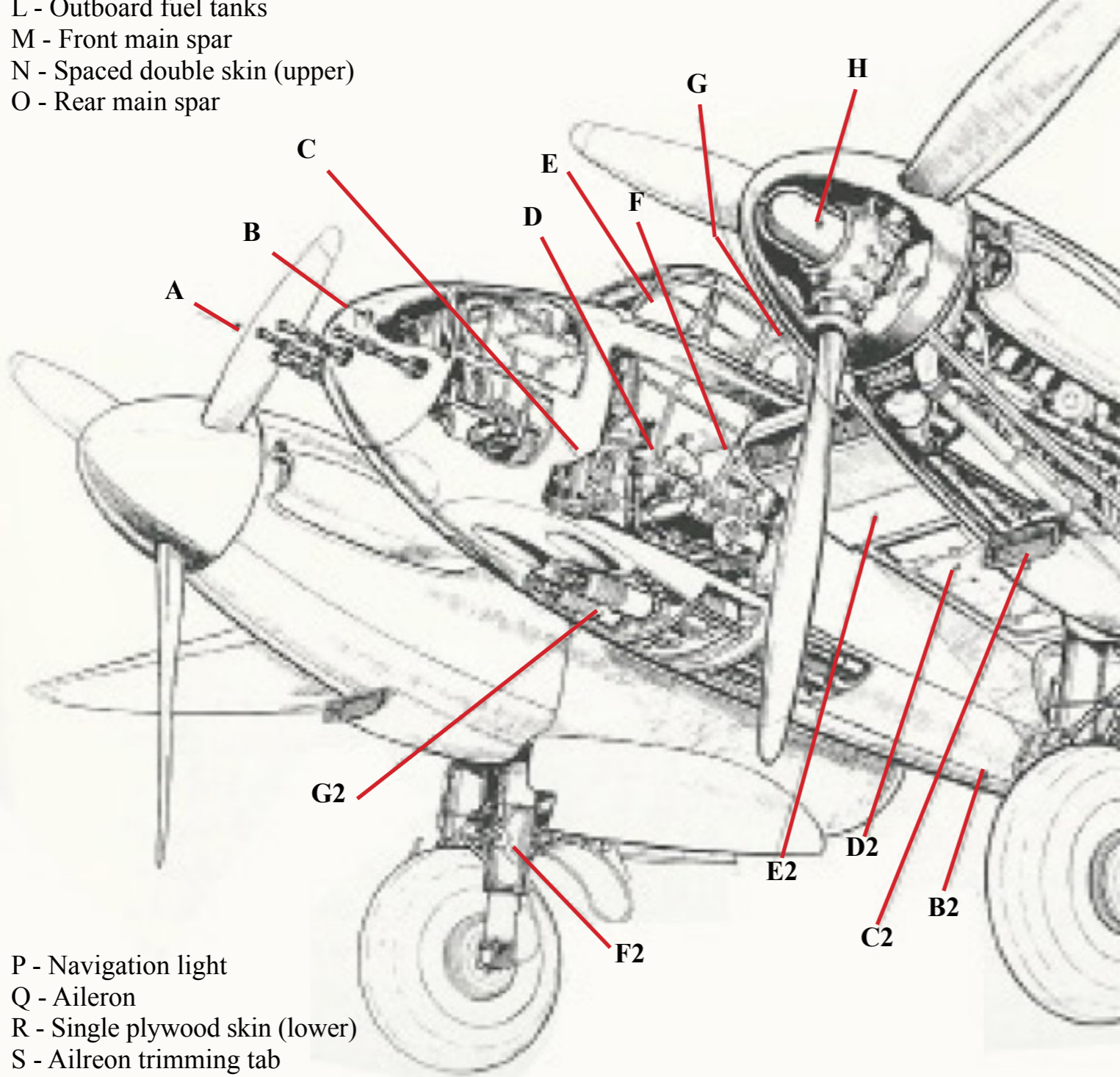
- Bombs: 1,800 kg

Avionics

GEE radio-navigation

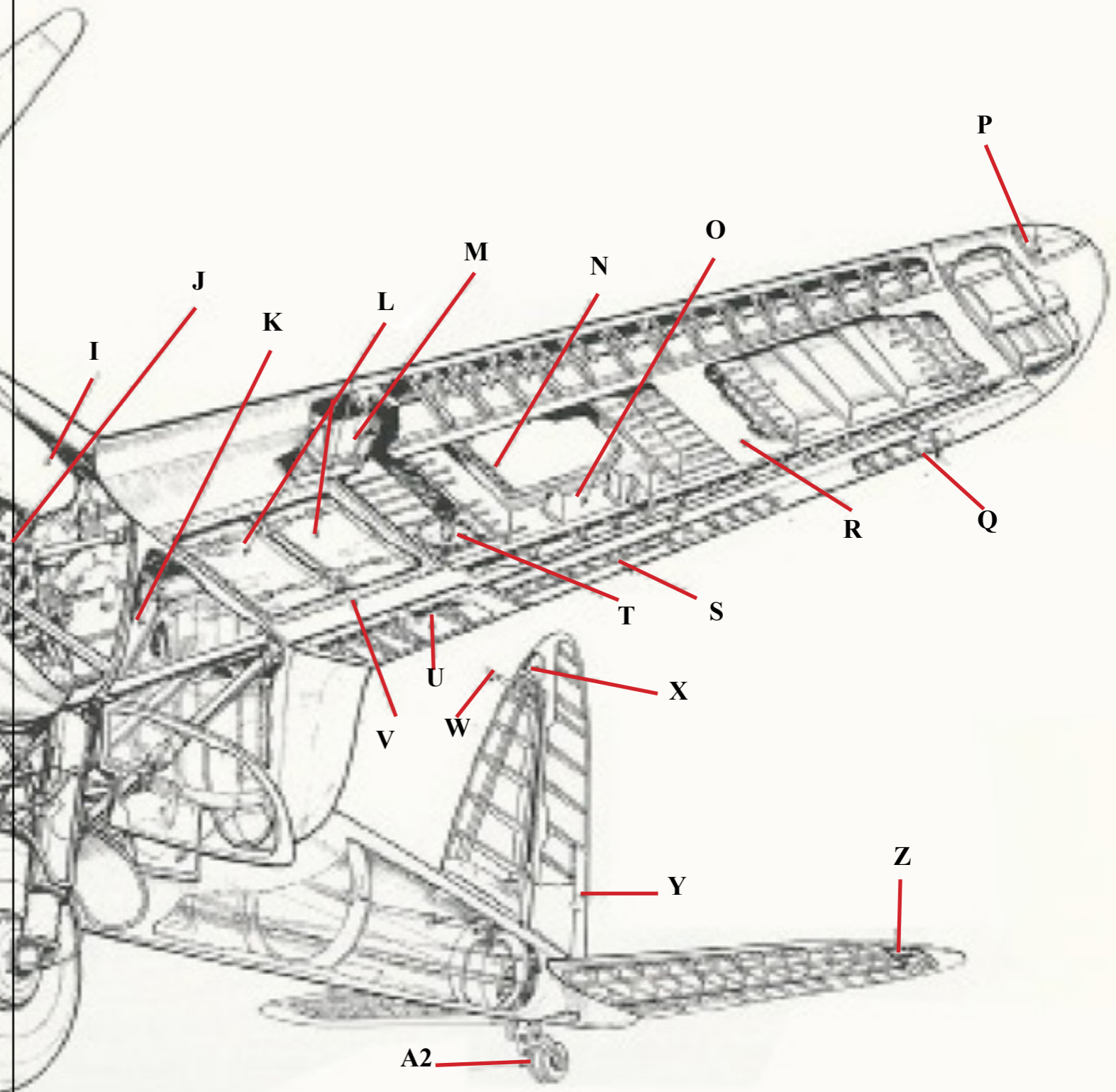
- A - Four .303 machine guns
- B - Camera
- C - Ruder pedals
- D- Control column
- E - Bullet proof screen
- F - Pilot's seat
- G - Oil and Glycol radiators
- H - Hydromatic airscrews
- I - Exhaust flame damper
- J - Rolls Royce Merlin engine
- K - Undercarriage hydraulic jack
- L - Outboard fuel tanks
- M - Front main spar
- N - Spaced double skin (upper)
- O - Rear main spar

- X - Rudder mass balanced
- Y - Rudder trimming tab
- Z - Elevator mass balance
- A2 - Retractable tail wheel
- B2 - Gun bay folding doors
- C2 - Carburettor air intake
- D2 - Inboard fuel tanks
- E2 - Radiator shutter
- F2 - Compression rubber undercarriage leg
- G2 - Four 20 mm cannon



- P - Navigation light
- Q - Aileron
- R - Single plywood skin (lower)
- S - Ailreon trimming tab
- T - Landing light
- U - Flap
- V - Petrol tank cover
- W - Pitot head

de Havilland Mosquito



The Battle for Castle Itter was the only known time during the war in which Americans and Germans fought side-by-side. Popular accounts of the battle have called it the strangest battle of World War II.

The Battle for Castle Itter was fought in the Austrian North Tyrol village of Itter on 5 May 1945, in the last days of the European Theater of World War II.

Troops of the 23rd Tank Battalion of the 12th Armoured Division of the US XXI Corps led by Captain John C. "Jack" Lee, Jr., a number of *Wehrmacht* soldiers led by Major Josef "Sepp" Gangl, *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Kurt-Siegfried Schrader, and recently freed French prisoners of war defended Castle Itter against an attacking force from the 17th SS *Panzer* Division until relief from the American 142nd Infantry Regiment of the 36th Division of XXI Corps arrived.

The French prisoners included former prime ministers, generals and a tennis star. It is the only known time during the war in which Americans and Germans fought side-by-side. Popular accounts of the battle have called it the strangest battle of World War II.

Background

Itter Castle (*Schloss Itter*) is a small castle situated on a hill near the village of Itter in Austria. After the 1938 *Anschluss*, the German government officially leased the castle in late 1940 from its owner, Franz Grüner.

The castle was seized from Grüner by SS Lieutenant General Oswald Pohl under the orders of Heinrich Himmler on 7 February 1943.

The transformation of the castle into a prison camp was completed by 25 April 1943, and the facility was placed under the administration of the notorious Dachau concentration camp. The prison was established to contain high-profile French prisoners valuable to the Reich.

Notable prisoners included tennis player Jean Borotra, former prime ministers Édouard Daladier and Paul Reynaud, former commanders-in-chief Maxime Weygand and Maurice Gamelin, Charles de Gaulle's elder sister Marie-Agnès Cailliau, right-wing leader and close-

et French resistance member François de La Rocque, and trade union leader Léon Jouhaux.

Besides the VIP prisoners, the castle held a number of Eastern European prisoners detached from Dachau, who were used for maintenance and other menial work.

The Battle

On 3 May 1945, Zvonimir Čučković, an imprisoned Yugoslav communist resistance member from Croatia who worked as a handyman at the prison, left the castle on the pretence of performing an errand for the prison's commander Sebastian Wimmer. Čučković carried with him a letter in English seeking Allied assistance he was to give to the first American he encountered.

The town of Wörgl lay eight kilometres down the mountains but was still occupied by German troops. Čučković instead pressed on up the Inn River valley towards Innsbruck 64 km distant.

Late that evening, he reached the outskirts of the city and encountered an advance party of the 409th Infantry Regiment of the American 103rd Infantry Division of the US VI Corps and informed them of the castle's prisoners.

They were unable to authorize a rescue on their own but promised Čučković an answer

from their headquarters unit by morning of 4 May.

At dawn, a heavily armoured rescue was mounted but was stopped by heavy shelling just past Jenbach around halfway to Itter, then recalled by superiors for encroaching into territory of the U.S. 36th Division to the east. Only two jeeps of auxiliary personnel continued.

Upon Čučković's failure to return, and the death at the prison of the former commander of Dachau Eduard Weiter under suspicious circumstances on 2 May, Wimmer feared for his own life and abandoned his post.

The *SS-Totenkopfverbände* guards departed the castle soon after, with the prisoners taking control of the castle and arming themselves with the weaponry that remained.

Failing to learn of the result of Čučković's effort, prison leaders accepted the offer of its Czech cook, Andreas Krobot, to bicycle to Wörgl mid-day on 4 May in hopes of reaching help there.

Armed with a similar note, he succeeded in contacting Austrian resistance in that town, which had recently been abandoned by *Wehrmacht* forces but reoccupied by roaming *Waffen-SS* troops. He was taken to Major Josef Gangl, commander of the remains of a unit of *Wehrmacht* soldiers who had defied an order to retreat and instead thrown in with the local resistance, being made its head.

Gangl sought to maintain his unit's position in the town to protect local residents from SS reprisals. Nazi loyalists would shoot at any window displaying

either a white flag or Austrian flag, and would summarily execute males as possible deserters.

Gangl's hopes were pinned on the Americans reaching Wörgl promptly and surrendering to them. Instead, he would now have to approach them under a white flag to ask for their help.

Around the same time, a reconnaissance unit of four Sherman tanks of the 23rd Tank Battalion, 12th Armoured Division of the US XXI Corps, under the command of Captain Lee, had reached Kufstein, Austria, 13 km to the north.

There, in the town square, it idled while waiting for the 12th to be relieved by the 36th Infantry Division. Asked to provide relief by Gangl, Lee did not hesitate, volunteering to lead the rescue mission and immediately earning permission from his HQ.

After a personal reconnaissance of the Castle with Gangl in the major's *Kübelwagen*, Lee left two of his tanks behind but requisitioned five more and supporting infantry from the recently arrived 142nd Infantry Regiment of the 36th. En route, Lee was forced to send the reinforcements back when a bridge proved too tenuous for the entire column to cross once, let alone twice.

Leaving one of his tanks behind to guard it, he set back off accompanied only by 14 American soldiers, Gangl, and a driver, and a truck carrying ten former German artillerymen. Six kilometres from the castle, they defeated a party of SS troops that had been attempting to set up a roadblock.

In the meantime, the French prisoners had requested an SS officer, Kurt-Siegfried Schrader, whom they had befriended in Itter during his convalescence from wounds, to take charge of their defence.

Upon Lee's arrival at the castle, prisoners greeted the rescuing force warmly but were disappointed at its small size. Lee placed the men under his command in defensive positions around the castle and positioned his tank, Besotten Jenny, at the main entrance.

Lee had ordered the French prisoners to hide, but they remained outside and fought alongside the American and *Wehrmacht* soldiers.

Throughout the night, the defenders were harried by a reconnaissance force sent to assess their strength and probe the fortress for weaknesses.

On the morning of 5 May, a force of 100 *Waffen-SS* launched their attack. Before the main assault began, Gangl was able to phone Alois Mayr, the Austrian resistance leader in Wörgl, and request reinforcements.

Only two more German soldiers under his command and a teenage Austrian resistance member, Hans Walzl, could be spared, and they quickly drove to the castle.

The Sherman tank provided machine-gun fire support until it was destroyed by German fire from an 88 mm gun; it was occupied at the time only by a radioman seeking to repair the tank's faulty radio, who escaped without injury.

Meanwhile, by early afternoon, word had finally reached the 142nd of the desperation of



the defenders' plight, and a relief force was dispatched.

Aware he had been unable to give the 142nd complete information on the enemy and its disposition before communications had been severed, Lee accepted tennis star Borotra's offer to vault the castle wall and run the gauntlet of SS strong-points and ambushes to deliver it.

He succeeded, requested a uniform, then joined the force as it made haste to reach the prison before its defenders fired their last rounds of ammunition.

The relief force arrived around 16:00, and the SS were promptly defeated. Some 100 SS prisoners were reportedly taken.

The French prisoners were evacuated towards France that

evening, reaching Paris on 10 May.

Aftermath

For his service defending the castle, Lee received the Distinguished Service Cross. Gangl died during the battle from a sniper rifle bullet while trying to move former French prime minister Reynaud out of harm's way and was honoured as an Austrian national hero, and a street in Wörgl was named after him.

He was the sole defender to die during the battle, although four others were wounded. Popular accounts of the battle have dubbed it the strangest battle of World War II.

The battle was fought five days after Adolf Hitler had committed suicide and only two

days before the signing of Germany's unconditional surrender. It was also the only battle where Americans and Germans fought alongside one another during the war.



Distinguished Service Cross



SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

SAAFA is an all-ranks Association formed to perpetuate a tradition of comradeship, knowing no distinction of rank, race, language, gender or creed, which has developed over the years among members of the South African Air Force.

Click on the logo above to visit the SAAFA website



Springbok



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.

The Springbok is the official journal of the South African Legion. Read the December 2021 issue of Springbok by clicking on the cover to the left.

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: R219 (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: R279 (on Steam)





Wargame: Red Dragon

The game is set in East Asia during an alternate history Cold War where the Soviet Union doesn't collapse.

The concept of the game is easy enough. You have a map that is divided up into various zones. You control one of these zones and the enemy controls another one of the zones. By the end of the game you need to control all of these zones.

Besides the single player campaigns you can also play in skirmish mode. Here you can

set up and fight battles of your choosing.

This is one of the few games where you get to play as the South African Defence Force (SADF).

My only complaint is that there are no traditional opponents to fight against. Nor do any of the maps remotely resemble terrain where the SADF saw combat. Still, a good game well worth playing.

Price: R485 (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

Ghost Recon: Wildlands

This game is what is known as a tactical shooter. It is set in 2019 in Bolivia. The country has become increasingly unstable as a Mexican drug cartel known as the Santa Blanca Cartel gains more power and influence within the country and turns Bolivia into the world's largest producer of cocaine.

A task force, consisting of you and three others are sent in to take the cartel down. The map is 400 square kilometres



and you can get around the map using cars, trucks, dirt bikes, boats, light aircraft and helicopters.

You have to take down local *buchon* (local bosses) before you can take on the head honcho named El Sueño.

Some missions will require stealth, others brute force. It will keep you occupied for hours.

Price: R829 (on Steam)

U-Boat

U-Boat is exactly what it says it is, a submarine simulator. In a nutshell, you are given command of a Type VII submarine during World War II.

Unlike other submarine games you are not in charge of the submarine itself, but rather in charge of the men controlling the submarine. You act as the U-Boat captain.

Your job is to manage the morale, discipline and trauma of the crew and make sure all the crew come back alive at the

end of a mission.

Before you leave port you are given a mission briefing. You need to check that your boat is in good condition, and take on supplies include torpedoes, fuel, food, water and any other necessary rations and equipment.

You will be required to make all the decisions and handle any situations that may crop up. This is a challenging sim.

Price: R175 (on Steam)

Total War: Shogun 2

As daiymo (warlord) of a Samurai clan your objective is to take on the other clans and become the shogun - the supreme military leader of Japan.

You start with a single territory and the objective is to take over enough territories until you become the most powerful daiymo in Japan.

You will have to build up a strong enough army to invade other territories as well as defend your own. You will need to construct military buildings



to train your troops.

But you also need to look after the civilian population of your territories and provide them with food, education and spiritual guidance. All this costs money.

Collect taxes, loot other provinces or trade with them. Use diplomacy, make and break alliances. Do what needs to be done.

Price: R299 (on Steam)

Tank Mechanic Simulator

You start off with a workshop where you can repair and restore tanks. You also have a tank museum.

People will send you an e-mail and offer you a contract to repair or restore a tank. If you accept the contract then the tank will be delivered to your workshop. Nearly all of the tanks you receive will be covered in rust.

The tank is placed over an inspection pit and is ready for

you to start work. Also in your workshop you have an engine stand and a turret stand.

You need to strip the tank down and repair or replace all of the parts that are damaged.

As you progress you will gain access to better tools and workshop functions. Once you're done you get paid. You can also discover and repair old tanks to either sell or place in your museum.

Price: R130 (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.



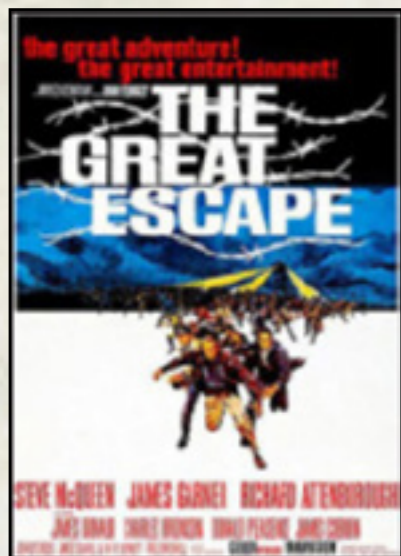
Enemy at the Gates



A Bridge too Far



Siege at Jadotville



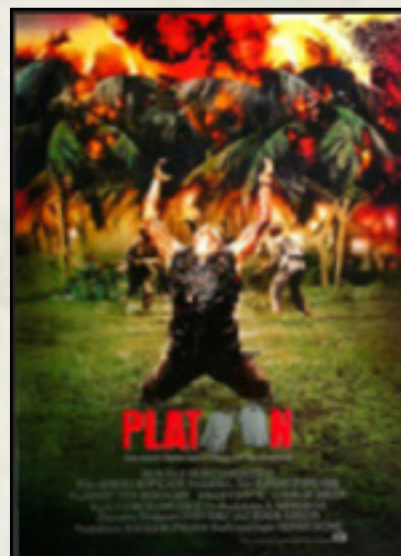
The Great Escape



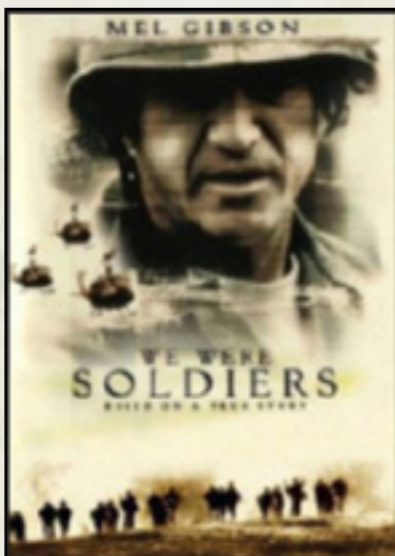
My Father's War



Das Boot



Platoon



We Were Soldiers



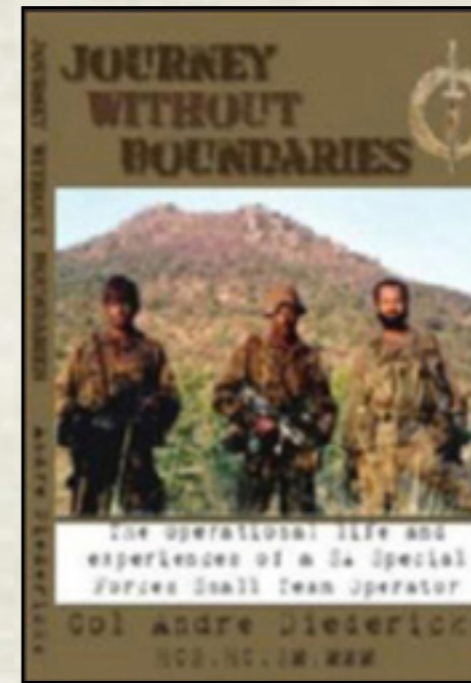
Full Metal Jacket

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



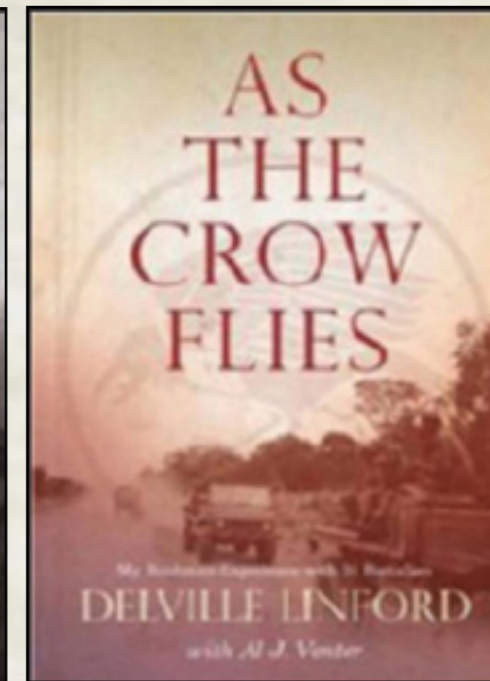
We Fear Naught But God
Paul Els
R395



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](#)

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.

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 Kafriarian 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 Ualual (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 Waterloof 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 Wannenberg HCS (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 Uppington. 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, killing nearly 800 crewmen.



Adolf Eichmann

- **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 bat-

ties 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 Viv-

- **1982** - Lance Corporal Johnny Alvern Booyesen 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

- **1982** - Lance Corporal Johnny Alvern Booyesen from the South African Cape Corps was accidentally drowned at Rundu during an off-duty excursion. 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 derails 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 Her-

cules 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 to death by persons un-



Franklin D. Roosevelt

known 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 Honor.
- **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 Battle of Colenso aimed at



Saddam Hussein

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 Kvangoland 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 government.

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. Kritzing 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 mandate 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 of Defence asserts that the

Glenn Miller



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 under 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 Kamunga (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. involvement and ended with a Com-

munist 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 Union had 21 states and a pop-

ulation 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 Dzhughashvili.
- **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 accident. 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 Locker-

bie, 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 Ac-

tion 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 Bormman 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 Montgomery, commander of the Al-

lied 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 to Battle Group Orange



Hideki Tojo

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 Sibusiso 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 beginning 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 Dunottar 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** - Cariango, 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 the running fight.



Mikhail Kalashnikov

- **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 Bronkhorstspruit 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). Rifleman 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 miners 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 Nicolaas Nel from the 70 Mobile Radar Unit was acci-

dentally 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 explosion while serving in



Mikhail Kalashnikov

- 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 Schrönen (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.



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7. Panzer III (Germany)
8. T34/76 (Russia)
9. Cruiser Mk VIII Cromwell (Britain)
10. Panzer V Panther (Germany)
11. M10 Wolverine (USA)
12. Joseph Stalin-2 (Russia)
13. Panzer VI Tiger 1 (Germany)
14. M4 Sherman (USA)
15. Mk IV Churchill (Britain)



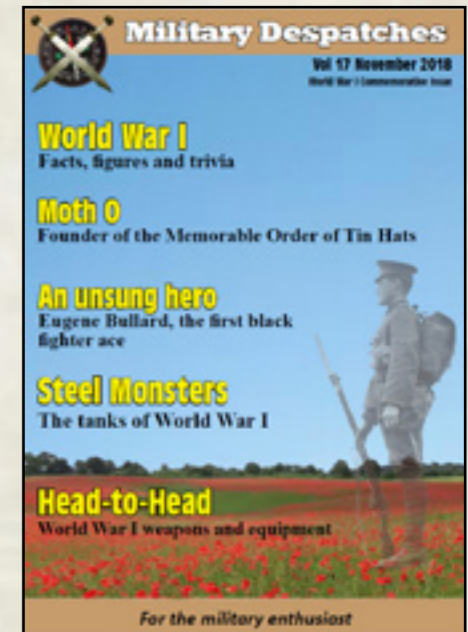
Useful links

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.



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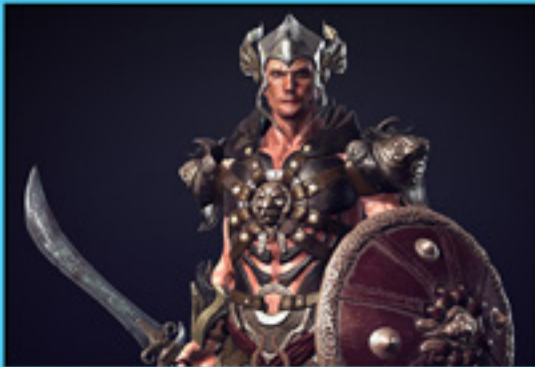
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