



# THE SOUTH AFRICAN LEGION

## NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT ELIZABETH BRANCH

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### Branch news

Well the Cape Town Branch has a web site up and running. My comments are that even if I do not fully agree with it, it is a SA Legion Web Page and it is up and running. A great start! What we need to decide now is if this web site is to be just for the Cape Town Branch, or for the SA Legion in general. Personally I believe all major Branches should have their own web site, or at least a few pages on a national site, but this is for the top boys to fight over. One must always be aware of criticising some one else's efforts, because they do not fully agree with your own, and especially if you have not the ability to actually complete your idea. So for now well done well-done Cape Town, you have this editors support. The web site is at [www.salegion.co.za](http://www.salegion.co.za).

Now lets get a national site and other advertising material. Remember Legionnaires, we are in a do or die situation, so stop hiding your talents, come out from behind the wood work and lets develop a national advertising campaign, that will be effective in getting our message across, and recruiting the thousands of serving soldiers, as well as the many more thousands of retired, time served military personal. 🍀

### Little known facts about WWII

#### Miscellaneous facts during 1945.

**Suicides.** Relatively few Jewish prisoners committed suicide while in the concentration camps, but after liberation, many hundreds took their own lives. The guilt they felt for being alive, while so many of their people died, was worse than the daily threat of death and torture they faced in the camps. Many survivors gave up their faith after the war and refused to believe their Rabbis who tried to explain that the Holocaust was the *'Will of God'* a necessary sacrifice to the establishment of the state of Israel.

**Flag raising.** The first US flag, the Stars and Strips, raised on Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima, was considered too small (54 by 28 inches) for such an important victory. Another, much larger flag (96 by 56 inches) was procured from a beached Tank Landing Ship, LST-779, and raised on the Mount on February 23, 1945, just as press photographer Joe Rosenthal took his famous picture. The two flags were preserved by the marines and are now displayed in the US Marine Corps Museum in Quantico, Virginia. The first flag raising was photographed by combat photographer Louis Lowrey, but being a less dramatic picture was never given the publicity of the Rosenthal photograph. In the bloodiest fighting of the Pacific war, 4,554 Americans were killed, including 170 Navy frogmen

who died attempting to clear beach defences. Japanese casualties included around 21,900 dead.

**Okinawa.** April 1 to June 21, 1945. The only invasion of the Japanese homeland. The 82-day battle for the island in the Ryukyus caused losses totalling 107,500 among the Japanese garrison. The US 10<sup>th</sup> Army casualties were 7,374 killed and around 4,600 wounded. For the first time in the Pacific War, large numbers of enemy troops surrendered, a total of 7,400. In all, 234,183 persons were killed. This included Japanese and US soldiers, Korean labourers and Okinawa residents. All their names can be seen today inscribed on 114 stone Memorials. It was here on Ie Shima, near Okinawa, that American war correspondent Ernie Pyle (aged 44) was shot dead by a sniper on April 18.

**Bombing mission.** On Saturday, March 3, 1945, fifty-six RAF B25 Mitchell bombers appeared over The Hague in Holland. Their mission was to bomb the V-2 rocket sites situated in the woods just outside the city. Inadvertently the bombs started to fall on Bezuedenhout, a residential suburb of the city and at least a mile from the V-2 sites. Over 3,000 houses were destroyed and 511 of its citizens killed. In all, around 12,000 people were rendered homeless. An inquiry by the RAF revealed that the tragedy was the fault of the aircrew-briefing officer who had read the horizontal and vertical co-ordinates the wrong way round. The officer concerned was later court martialled and punished.

**The largest bomb.** On March 29, 1945, the railway viaduct at Bielefeld, Germany, was attacked by RAF Lancaster's of 617 Squadron, (The Dambusters). The bombers were specially modified to carry the *'Grand Slam'* the monster 22,000 lb (9,979 kg) bomb designed by Barnes Wallace. At almost 10 tons, the Lancaster could only carry one bomb at a time. Piloted by Squadron Leader C Calder, his Lancaster, one of the 33 converted, dropped the bomb about thirty metres from the viaduct, the resulting explosion caused powerful shock waves to radiate outwards destroying two arches each 1,100 feet in length. The bomb was the largest ever-used in war, it could penetrate seven meters (23 feet) of reinforced concrete as it did on the U-boat pens near Bremen. The Grand Slam measured 7.7 meters in length and contained 4,144 kg of explosive. A total of 41 of these bombs were dropped during the war.

**Operation Carthage, March 21, 1945.** At the request of the Danish resistance movement, a force of RAF Mosquito's, from 487, 464 and 21 Squadrons of 140 Wing, escorted by Mustangs of Fighter Command, attacked the Gestapo Headquarters in Copenhagen. The Gestapo had

taken over the five storey Shell House, the pre-war HQ of the Shell Petroleum Company. On the day of the raid it housed a large number of Danish resistance fighters who had been arrested and were being interrogated as the first bombs fell. Some prisoners were killed, but 30 escaped during the bombing. Some 151 Gestapo agents and their Danish collaborators were also killed.

Although the raid was a success, a horrific tragedy occurred nearby. One of the Mosquito's, on its bombing run, struck a light mast in the railway goods yard, veered to the left and crashed in a ball of fire near the Jeanne d'Arc Catholic School. The fire and smoke from the crash was mistakenly targeted by the next wave of Mosquito's, which dropped their bombs on and around the crash site. The resulting fires soon spread to other buildings and eventually engulfed the school, which burned to the ground in less than two hours. Eighty-six children and ten teachers lost their lives in this tragedy, and sixty-seven were injured. When rescuers reached the school cellars they found the bodies of forty-two children huddled together. They had all drowned in water from the firemen's hoses.

**Anti-red.** On March 27, 1945, sixteen prominent anti-communist Poles were invited to a conference with Russian officials to discuss political matters. All were arrested on arrival, sent to Moscow, and imprisoned. Thus, the mighty Soviet Union eliminated the last vestige of anti-communist leadership in Poland.

**End of an era.** On March 29, 1945, the British Empire Air Training Scheme was officially ended. Training schools were located in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Southern Rhodesia. Trained in these schools were 168,662 aircrew including 75,152 pilots, 40,452 navigators, 15,148 bomb aimers, and 37,190 other miscellaneous aircrew categories, many of whom were trained in South African Air Force schools.

**Radio Werwolf.** On April 1, 1945, the German station '**Radio Werwolf**' began broadcasting for the first time. It was created by Propaganda Minister Goebbels to rally the population to suicidal resistance. Its theme, repeated over and over again was "**Besser tot als rot**" (Better dead than red).

**German 'kamikazes'.** On April 7, 1945, the first German '**kamikaze**' attacks on Allied aircraft took place west of Hanover. Driven by desperation, the volunteer pilots in their ME-109s fired their cannons at point blank range into a stream of American bombers and then ramming them. Twenty-three bombers were destroyed this way and another twenty-eight shot down by the escorting jet fighters during the battle. On the eastern Front, twelve Luftwaffe pilots, led by Rudolf Escherich, from the Fighter Squadron Udet, volunteered to form a suicide mission to crash their planes into bridges spanning the river Oder. The mission was a failure, many of the planes being shot down before they reached the target, and others failed to find the bridges as the area was blanketed with smoke. With the Red Army across the Oder, further suicide

missions were abandoned.

**Bomber wing kg-200.** A top secret wing of the Luftwaffe commanded by bomber ace Werner Baumbach. It was within this wing that the Luftwaffe established its own suicide (kamikaze) units. In February, 1944, KG-200 was responsible for all strategic and covert aerial missions. Operational orders came direct from Hitler's own intelligence service, the SD. Many of the planes flown by KG-200 were captured Allied aircraft, such as the American B-17 and B-24. These were given Luftwaffe markings and colours. But not all, some retained their original Allied markings and colours, which completely fooled Allied pilots and ground ack-ack gunners. The most secret weapon of KG-200 was the Mistal bomber, usually a Junkers 88A with four tons of explosives packed into the cockpit. Mounted on top of the bomber was a Messerschmidt BF 109F fighter, both planes controlled by the pilot of the 109F. The bomber was aimed at its target before release. They were intended to destroy bridges over the Elbe and Oder rivers thus delaying the Allied advance on Berlin. However, though some bridges were attacked, in the end they proved to be a dismal failure.

**Treasure trove.** The Kaiseroda Salt Mine at Merkers, north of Frankfurt, gave up its secret to the men of the 358<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion of the 90<sup>th</sup> US Infantry Division on April 8, 1945. Under shaft No 3 and 1,600 feet below ground, the American soldiers discovered a veritable treasure trove. Among the hundreds of kilometres of tunnels and chambers they found in vault NO 8 almost the entire gold and currency reserves of Hitler's Third Reich. More than 700 numbered sacks were stored, each containing between 55 lbs and 81 lbs of gold bars and coins, laid out in twenty rows. Currency to the value of \$241,113,302 was also found in sacks in vault No 20, this included 110,000 English pounds, and in 711 sacks were US twenty dollar gold coins, \$25,000 to a sack. In addition to this treasure, SS loot, stolen from the occupied countries of Europe was also stored here. This included over 1,000 paintings, objets d'art, and 189 boxes and suitcases filled with coins, jewellery, and silverware. In one vault were over two million books including the Goethe library from Weimar. The removal of this treasure, estimated at 400 tons, involved the use of thirty 10-ton trucks to transport the hoard to the American Exchange Depository building on the Adolf Hitler-Allee in Frankfurt.

**First helicopter rescue.** In April, 1945, Captain James Green of the US Army Air Force, became the first person in history to be rescued by a helicopter. While searching for a downed transport plane in the Naga Hills in Burma, the light plane in which he was flying ran out of fuel and crashed in the jungle. A week later a search team reached the crash site to find Green barely alive. Badly injured, he could not be carried out. Back at the airfield at Shinbuiyang a small Sikorsky helicopter was available, and the pilot, Lieutenant R Murdock, decided to attempt a rescue. Barely clearing the mountains, the helicopter managed to land and airlifted Captain



after spending some time in prison she was pardoned by President Gerald Ford.

**Jail break.** Richard Sakakida was a native of Hawaii and son of Japanese parents. As a naturalized American he joined the CIC (US Counter Intelligence Corps). Sent on a secret mission to the Philippines, he was taken prisoner when the Japanese invaded that country. While working for the enemy as an interpreter, he was able to arrange meetings with the guerrilla forces. Their leader, Ernest Tupas, and many of his followers were locked up in Muntinglupa prison in Manila. Sakakida and a group of guerrillas, dressed in Japanese uniforms, entered the prison and overpowering the guards, released Tupas and nearly 500 of his followers, most of whom fled to the mountains to continue their guerrilla activities. After the war, Richard Sakakida was awarded the US Bronze Star for his part in one of the greatest jail breaks of the war.

**The lost division.** This was the name given to the American soldiers who had deserted in France and in Germany at the end of 1945. They numbered around 19,000, many living on farms and working as labourers, as black market racketeers, or in safe hiding places in their new-found girl friend's houses. By 1948, about 9,000 had been found. In 1947, the British Government announced an offer of leniency for British deserters and 837 gave themselves up.

**Jewish soldiers.** Among the 5,000 European Jews who emigrated to Palestine before the outbreak of war, 734 were killed in action after volunteering for the British armed forces. As the only Jewish fighting unit in the war, they saw action against the Wehrmacht in North Africa, Greece, Crete and in Italy. In Poland, after the German invasion in 1939, around 61,000 Jewish soldiers were among the 400,000 Polish Army men taken prisoner when Poland surrendered. They were separated from their Polish comrades-in-arms and sent to Germany as slave labourers. Not many survived the hunger and brutality imposed on them.

**The Jewish Brigade.** In 1944, the Jewish Brigade, consisting of three infantry battalions and commanded by Brigadier Ernest Benjamin, became part of the British Army under its own official Zionist flag. After the war, The Brigade carried out many clandestine operations as secret vengeance squads seeking out former concentration camp guards and SS officers who had gone into hiding when the war ended. Their method was straightforward, first apprehend the victim for questioning, drive him to a safe location in a wood and there the Brigade identified themselves and then passed out a death sentence. The victim was then strangled or in some cases shot.

**A long war.** The last Japanese soldier to surrender was Captain Fumio Nakahira who held out until April, 1980, before being discovered at Mt Halcon on Mindoro Island in the Philippines. Before that, there was Onoda Hiroo, discovered in the jungle of Lubang Island on March 11, 1974, twenty-nine years after the war ended. He has since published a book

**'No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War'.** Nakamura Teruo was discovered on the island of Morotai on December 18, 1974, still believing the war was on. Sergeant Yolo Shoichi survived in the jungles of Guam until found on January 24, 1972. He died in September, 1997 at the age of 82.

**Suicide attacks.** Prior to the proposed invasion of mainland Japan ('Operation 'Olympic' on November 1, 1945) the Japanese military speeded up its preparations to attack the Allied invasion force while still at sea, coming up with some very desperate ideas for suicide attacks of differing kinds:

- Thousands of volunteer pilots were hastily trained for airplane suicide attacks. Over 500 aircraft of all types were available for these kamikaze missions.
- Around 400 Koryu and Kairyu suicide submarines (five and two-man versions of the Kaiten) would set out on their one-way journey.
- Also prepared to sacrifice their lives were 300 volunteers for the Shinyo human torpedoes.
- Most bizarre of all were the hundreds of strong swimmers who would swim out with deadly mines strapped to their backs to explode against the hulls of the Allied ships.

Just when all was set for the greatest military mass suicide in history, the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. On August 14, 1945, the Japanese ordered all kamikaze operations to cease. The originator of the first kamikaze attack, Vice Admiral Takijiro Ohnishi, committed suicide by disembowelling himself. By the end of the Pacific war on September 2, 1945, a grand total of 1,228 Japanese suicide pilots had given their lives for their Emperor. Their score was 34 US ships sunk and 288 damaged. These included three escort carriers and fourteen destroyers. No battleships or cruisers were sunk.

**Re-enactment.** One evening in the summer of 1946, some members of the Chancellery Group, those who were captured in May, 1945, by the Russians in and around Hitler's bunker in the grounds of the Reich Chancellery, were flown back to Berlin from their prisons in the Soviet Union. In Berlin they were made to re-enact the events of the last day in the Bunker for a Russian film company. They were in Berlin for some twenty-four hours before being flown back to Moscow, there to remain in various prisons for the next ten years. The film '**actors**' that day included Hans Baur, Heinz Lange, Major Guenche, General Mohnke and Sergeant Rochus Misch. 🤖

## **Disclaimer**

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