



## What's in this issue

**O**n page 2 there's an article containing some interesting facts regarding World War II. I trust that you will find them as interesting as I did.

Page 6 has a story on answers given by American university and college students to history questions. And you thought our lot was not that bright.

Page 8 contains a few photographs from my misspent days as a conflict journalist.

Lastly, on page 12, we have our regular page of amusing photographs. This month they have a bit of a Moth theme to them.

Please remember that if you have any Shellhole news or maybe an article you would like to include in the Halifax Herald, e-mail it through to [matt@hipe.co.za](mailto:matt@hipe.co.za) and we will do our best to include it in a future edition.



**M**ost of us will be ready to admit that we sometimes have what is known as “a bad day”. Except for Moth John Verster who claims he's having a “bad life”.

This past week has been a “bad week” for me. Every month I publish two online magazines. This normally involves a fair amount of work putting it all together. I'm also responsible for three television channels on YouTube. And naturally I do the Halifax Herald as well.

Two days before my monthly deadline my computer started acting up. I only just managed to get the magazines up before the computer died on me.

I had to get it repaired and this took a full week before it was up and running. I only got it back yesterday and then had to frantically catch up on my work. Quite a few of my clients haven't paid me yet. So I'm so poor I can't even afford to pay attention.

Just to add to my woes I came down with a nasty case of flu.

Still, I managed to do the Halifax Herald and get it out before my deadline (before the monthly Shellhole meeting).

It's something that I really enjoy doing and it's my small contribution to our Shellhole. I trust that you find it as enjoyable as I do.

YUTH, Matt Tennyson

# Strange WWII facts

## Some interesting facts about World War II

Few of us do not know the details of World War II. After all it was a conflict that cost the highest number of lives of any war.

Yet there are some facts and figures from that war that make interesting reading. Here are just a few of them.

German sailors brought a black and white patched cat on board the battleship *Bismarck*. His job was to catch mice. A few hours after the *Bismarck* had been torpedoed and sunk the cat was found clutching driftwood. He was taken aboard the British destroyer *HMS Cossack* and given the name Sam. Later that year the *HMS Cossack* was also torpedoed and sunk. Once again the cat survived and was given the nickname Unsinkable Sam. He was transferred to the aircraft carrier *HMS Ark Royal* which, less than a month later, was also torpedoed and sunk. Once more Sam was found clinging to a floating plank, apparently “angry but quite unharmed”. Sam was eventually retired later that year to a domestic home in Belfast, where he lived until dying of natural causes in 1955.

Two weeks after Adolf Hitler’s suicide, Allied and Axis forces fought together in the only record of such an event happening during the six year war. The battle took place at Castle Itter in Austria, where several high-profile prisoners were being detained,

such as former French presidents, prime ministers and even sports celebrities. 14 American soldiers teamed up with around 20 German Wehrmacht troops to defend the castle from an onslaught by an SS squadron. They held out until help arrived in the form of the American 103rd Infantry Division.

The youngest person to serve in the US Military during World War II was Calvin Graham. He was only 12 years old. He lied about his age and was later wounded in action and awarded the Purple Heart medal (age 14) before they discovered his real age.

Total casualties for World War II were between 50 and 70 million people, 80% of who came from only four countries — Russia, China, Germany, and Poland. Over 50% of the casualties were civilians, with the majority of those being women and children.

In 1935, British engineer Robert Watson-Watt was working on a “death ray” that would destroy enemy aircraft using radio waves. His “death ray” instead evolved into radar—or “radio detection and ranging.

During World War II a Dutch minesweeper evaded the Japanese for eight days disguised as an island. The crew covered the decks in cut trees and painted exposed surfaces to look like rocks. They moved only at night and anchored closed to shore by day, even-



**HIGH PRICE TO PAY:** Only 20% of the males born in the Soviet Union in 1923 survived the war.

tually escaping to Australia.

American pilot Owen J. Baggett became legendary as the only person to shoot down a Japanese aircraft with a .45 calibre M1911 pistol. Baggett had bailed out of his aircraft and was parachuting when a Japanese aircraft headed straight at him. He fired three shots with his pistol and one of them hit the Japanese pilot in the head, killing him instantly.

We’ve all heard the stories about how ruthless German U-boats would surface and machine gun survivors of ships they had torpedoed. Yet until late 1942, it was common for German U-boats to provide torpedoed survivors

with food, water, and the direction of the nearest landmass. This ended when a U-boat towing lifeboats and flying the Red Cross flag was attacked by a US bomber.

During WWII the Allies discovered that the Germans were using the Leaning Tower of Pisa as an observation post. A U.S Army Sergeant that was sent to the tower to confirm the presence of German troops was impressed by its beauty and decided to not order an artillery strike on it.

During the Invasion of Normandy, Scottish Bagpiper, Bill Millin, contrary to British Command, in the thick of battle, marched up and down the

beach playing his Pipes. When his unit captured German snipers, they asked why Millin wasn't shot. They said they didn't shoot him because he was clearly insane.

In the Western desert the German Luftwaffe built a fake airfield near one of their heavily camouflaged airfields. This was so that the Royal Air Force would be tricked into bombing it. The buildings, vehicles and aircraft at the airfield were all made of wood. Shortly after it was completed the RAF attacked the airfield, dropping wooden bombs on it. About half an hour later the real airfield was attacked. This time with real bombs.

Prior to the Allied invasion of Sicily they came up with a number of deception plans to convince the Germans that the landings would take place elsewhere. One of these plans was named Operation Mincemeat. It involved releasing the body of a person dressed as a Royal Marine Major off the coast of Spain. The body contained documents revealing that the Allies were planning on invading Greece. The Spanish returned the body, and the documents, to the British Embassy. But not before they were copied by the Germans. The Germans fell for the deception hook, line and sinker. The person that dreamt up the plan was a British Naval Intelligence officer by the name of Ian Fleming. Yes, the same man that would later bring us James Bond.

The idea that eating carrots helps you see in the dark was a lie invented by the British Royal Air Force in

WWII, in order to explain how British air raids were so successful in the dark without tipping the Germans off on the existence of radar.

25 Russian soldiers under the command of Yakov Pavlov defended a building during the Battle of Stalingrad so well that it never fell. Vasily Chuikov, general of the Soviet forces in Stalingrad, later joked that the Germans lost more men trying to take "Pavlov's house" than they did taking Paris.

The American pilot who dropped the first atomic bomb died aged 92 – with no regrets. He said he never lost a single night's sleep. Pilot Paul Tibbets dropped the bomb on Hiroshima that killed 78,000 people instantly but by the end of 1945 the death total had reached 140,000.

While on the subject of Hiroshima you have to take pity on the elderly Japanese man that managed to survive the bombing of Hiroshima. He decided that it was pointless to stay on in the ruined city and that he would go and stay with a relative in another city. He took a train and arrived in Nagasaki shortly before it was struck by the second atomic bomb. Remarkably he survived the second explosion as well.

Joan Pujol Garcia was a Spaniard that worked for German intelligence as an agent. He was, however, a double agent and was actually working for the British. Ironically he was the only person to be awarded both the Iron Cross from the Germans and an MBE from the British.

Franz Von Werra, a Nazi POW who was transferred to Canada to deter his multiple escapes and recaptures, escaped again in less than a month, traveling through the US, Mexico, Brazil, Spain and Italy to become the only Western held POW to return to combat. On 25 October 1941 Von Werra took off in Bf 109F-4 on a practice flight. He suffered engine failure and crashed into the sea north off Vlissingen and was killed. His body was never found.

Japanese military leader Tojo Hideki was put on trial as a war criminal at the end of World War II. While in prison he attempted suicide. It took the Americans a great deal of time, effort and money to resuscitate him and get him back to health. After which they hanged him.

The last prisoner of war from World War II to be repatriated was a Hungarian soldier who was taken prisoner by the Red Army in 1944, then discovered living in a Russian psychiatric hospital in 2000.

In WWII a woman-only Soviet bomber regiment were nicknamed the "Night Witches" by German soldiers. For a successful bombing run, the Witches would cut the engine of their archaic and noisy aircraft. Gliding in, they would release their bombs before the enemy even knew they were there.

And to close this article here are a few snippets of trivia relating to World War II.

- Over 100,000 Allied bomber crewmen were killed over Europe.
- Polish Catholic midwife Stanisława

Leszczyńska delivered 3,000 babies at the Auschwitz concentration camp during the Holocaust in occupied Poland.

- In World War II, British soldiers got a ration of three sheets of toilet paper a day. Americans troops got 22.
- Four of every five German soldiers killed in the war died on the Eastern Front.
- Only one out of every four men serving on U-boats survived.
- The Siege of Stalingrad resulted in more Russian deaths (military and civilian) than the US and Britain sustained (combined) in all of World War II.
- Adolf Hitler's nephew, William Hitler, served in the US Navy during World War II.
- To avoid using the German sounding name 'hamburger' during World War II, Americans used the name 'Liberty Steak.'
- Most kamikaze died in vain. Only one in nine kamikaze pilots hit their targets during WWII.
- Queen Elizabeth II served as a mechanic and driver during WWII.
- During World War II, German prisoners of war in Canada were treated so nicely that they didn't want to leave Canada when released after the war ended.
- The first bomb dropped on Berlin by the Allies killed the only elephant in the Berlin Zoo.

I trust you found this interesting.

# Bet you never knew that

**History records, recalls and retells events from the past. But some people have a pretty fuzzy recollection when it comes to history.**

It was George Santayana that said, “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.”

I recently came across a book that contained answers to exam questions as given by American college and university students. Some of them make our students look like geniuses. And let’s face it, that takes some doing to say the very least.

Some of these answers defy belief, but at least they must have given those poor souls that had to grade the papers a bit of amusement. And I somehow suspect that many of these students would have been doomed to repeat history the next year. Take a look at some of the answers given.

*“The Germans took the by-pass around France’s Marginal Line. This was known at the ‘Blintz Krieg’. The French huddle up and threw sneers at the Germans. Japan boomed Pearl Harbour, the main U.S. base in Southern California. American sailors watched in shock as the sky filled with Japanese zebras.”*

There you have it; World War II summed up in a few sentences. But, if I may, I would like to point out a few minor errors.

The French defensive line was known as the Maginot Line. The

Germans did by-pass it by attacking through Belgium and going around the Maginot Line. The Germans used a tactic known as Blitzkrieg (Lightning War).

I also believe that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour, not boomed it. The US Navy does have a base in San Diego, Southern California. Pearl Harbour, however, is 6,521 km away on the island of Oahu, Hawaii.

And lastly, the sky was probably filled with zeros and not zebras. The Mitsubishi A6M Zero was a long-range fighter aircraft used by Japan.

*“Hilter’s attack on Russia was secretly called ‘Operation Barbarella’. The German invaders were popular for a while in Russia, but their habit of slaughtering innocent civilians tended to give them an image problem. The Russians defended Stalingrad feercely as the city was named after Lenin.”*

The German invasion of Russia was code-named Operation Barbarossa. Naturally when you go around slaughtering innocent civilians it is going to give you an image problem.

Stalingrad was, of course, named after Joseph Stalin himself. You’ll probably find that Leningrad was named after Lenin.

*“Hitler, who had become depressed for some reason, crawled under Berlin.*

*Here he had his wife Evita put to sleep, and then shot himself in the bonker.”*

Hitler had become depressed. Who what have imagined it. By April 1945 the war was almost over and Hitler had lost.

By January 1945 Hitler had retreated to the Führerbunker under the Reich Chancellery. On the evening of April 30, 1945 Hitler committed suicide.

His wife committed suicide a few minutes before him. Her name was Eva Braun and Hitler had only married her the day before.

So Hitler actually shot himself in the bunker, and not the bonker.

*“Unfortunately, the Second World War was not concluded until 1957.”*

It actually ended with the surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945.

*“War screeched to an end when a nukuleer explosion was dropped on Heroshima.”*

First of all, you can’t drop an explosion. You can, however, drop a bomb that will cause an explosion.

This is what happened on August 6, 1945 when the Americans dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The bomb caused an atomic explosion, not a nuclear one.

## **The Modern Era**

*“Wars fought in the 1950’s include the Crimean War, Vietnam, and the Six-*

*Minute War. John F. Kennedy worked closely with the Russians to solve the Canadian Missile Crisis.”*

Wrong on all accounts. The Crimean War did take place during the 50s, but it was the 1850s (October 1853 – February 1856).

The Vietnam War lasted between 1955 and 1975, but it was only in the 1960s that America become heavily involved.

The 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab nations was named that because the war only lasted six days - not six minutes.

John F. Kennedy did not work closely with the Russians. In fact he threatened them. The Russians had set up nuclear missile bases on the island of Cuba. Kennedy felt that these were a direct threat to America and he told the Russians to take them down and remove the missiles back to Russia. Otherwise he would consider military action.

The US Navy and Coast Guard set up a blockade around Cuba. It was perhaps the closest that the world ever came to a nuclear war. Eventually the Russians backed down. This incident became known as the ‘Cuban Missile Crisis’.

So there you have it. History rewritten by some of the greatest college and university minds the United States has to offer.

God bless America.

# Through the lens

While being a conflict journalist did have its dangers, it also had its perks says Matt Tennyson.

As many of you know, or may not know, I spend 25 years of my life as a conflict journalist. This meant that I travelled from war to war writing articles, taking photographs and shooting video.

One of the major advantages of the job was that there was always a conflict going on somewhere. In fact since World War Two ended on September 2, 1945 there has never been a single 24 hour period where there wasn't a conflict going on somewhere in the world.

Someone once told me how lucky I was to travel all over the world and see so many different places. During my 25 years I was shot twice, stabbed once, burnt with napalm and at one stage had so much shrapnel in my body I would set off the metal detectors at the airport. I have been locked up in 26 countries, deported from 17 and am still a prohibited immigrant in three. Remind me again how lucky I was.

Still, the job did have its perks at times. I once spent three weeks doing a story on women in the IDF (Israeli Defence Force). The guys in Israel have to do three years national service while the women have to do 18 months.

During the time I spent doing conflict journalism I met quite a few soldiers of the fairer sex. Most of them I met while they were on active duty and many of them were in combat units.

Many of them should have been gracing the front of magazine covers or strolling down the fashion ramps, not wearing uniforms and carrying weapons. Still, I wasn't complaining. It did give the opportunity to take some photographs that were different to the ones I normally shot.

Here are just a few of them I met during my travels.

Mama mia! This young lass was part of an Italian mechanised company. This photo, to the best of my memory, was taken in Bosnia.



She was a captain in the Belgian Army and worked as a reporter and photographer for their official magazine. How come none of my colleagues looked like this?



A member of the French Air Force carries out maintenance work. She was a qualified aircraft mechanic. If I was a French pilot I would be deliberately breaking my plane just so she could repair it.





No, this is not a model. She's an actual rescue diver with the US Navy. Tell me Servaas, did we have any divers in our navy that looked anything like this?

English Rose. A member of an infantry unit. Many women did service in the Gulf during Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom.



French flair. While she may have been as tough as nails, I never saw any nails that looked this good.

She was a member of a peacekeeping force from Norway. I didn't even realise that Norway had an army.



During my time serving with the SADF I knew saw a tiffie that looked anything remotely like this.



Pride of Portugal. If they all looked like this I would have been willing to join the Portuguese Army.



# By the left, quick laugh



**TAXI:** “Uncle Pat are you sure this is the right bus to get us back to the shellhole” asks Moth Colin Calmeyer.

**BAD SERVICE:** According to Moth Brian Porter he wasn’t very impressed with the snacks served at the shellhole he visited.



**ROOM FOR ONE:** I think Moth John Verster is trying to indicate that there is room for one more on the Namacurra patrol boat.



**ME, TOO OLD:** Moth Pat Tate reacts with horror when he is told that he is being kicked out of boy band *One Direction* because they feel he no longer qualifies as a teen heart throb.

