

World War II - facts, figures & trivia

A few facts, figures and trivia about World War II. It's sad to think that there are not a lot of people still around that fought in that conflict.

Every year on November 11 we remember those that made the ultimate sacrifice during the two World Wars and other wars.

Yet just how much do we really know about those conflicts? Hopefully this article will give you a slightly better knowledge of World War II.

Largest armed forces of World War II

1. USSR - 12,500,000
2. USA - 12,364,000
3. Germany - 10,000,000
4. Japan - 6,095,000
5. France - 5,700,000
6. UK - 4,683,000
7. Italy - 4,500,000
8. China - 3,800,000
9. India - 2,150,000
10. Poland - 1,000,000

Allowing for deaths and casualties, the total forces mobilised during the course of the war is, of course, greater than the peak strength figures: that of the USSR, for example, has been put as high as 20 000 000, the USA 16,354,000, Germany 17,900,000, Japan 9,100,000 and the UK 5,896,000.

Smallest armed forces of World War II

1. Costa Rica - 400
2. Liberia - 1,000
3. El Salvador - 3,000, Honduras - 3,000, Nicaragua - 3,000
6. Haiti - 3,500
7. Dominican Rep. - 4,000
8. Guatemala - 5,000
9. Bolivia - 8,000, Paraguay - 8,000, Uruguay - 8,000

The smallest European armed forces was that of Denmark, with a maximum strength of 15 000, just 13 of whom were killed during the one-day German invasion on 9 April 1940.

Several South American countries did not declare war until the closing stages, in order to become eligible to join the fledgling United Nations.

Great strategy. "You say the war is ending tomorrow. Who's losing? Okay, let's declare war on them. Let's start printing victory medals for our brave troops."

Greatest military losses of World War II

1. USSR - 13,600,000
2. Germany - 3,300,000
3. China - 1,324,516
4. Japan - 1,140,429
5. British Empire - 357,116
6. Romania - 350,000
7. Poland - 320,000
8. Yugoslavia - 305,000
9. USA - 292,131
10. Italy - 279,800

The actual numbers killed in World War II have been the subject of intense argument for the past 70 years.

The immense level of the military casualty rate of the USSR, in particular, is hard to comprehend. Most authorities now reckon that of the 30 million Soviets who bore arms, there were 13.6 million military deaths.

This includes a battlefield death toll of approximately 7.8 million, plus up to 2.5 million who died later of wounds received in battle and disease and,

of the 5.8 million who were taken prisoner, as many as 3.3 million who died in captivity.

It should also be borne in mind that these were military losses: to these should be added many untold millions of civilian war deaths, while recent estimates have suggested an additional figure of up to 25 million civilian deaths as a result of Stalinist purges, which began just before the outbreak of war.

Greatest civilian losses of World War II

1. China - 8,000,000
2. USSR - 6,500,000
3. Poland - 5,300,000
4. Germany - 2,350,000
5. Yugoslavia - 1,500,000
6. France - 470,000
7. Greece - 415,000
8. Japan - 393,400
9. Romania - 340,000
10. Hungary - 300,000

During World War II, many deaths among civilians, especially in China and the USSR, resulted from famine and internal purges. In fact Stalin killed more of his own people than the Germans did.

Worst military ship losses of World War II

1. Wilhelm Gustloff (Germany) - 7,800 lives lost
2. Goya (Germany) - 6,202
3. Cap Arcona (Germany) - 6,000
4. Junyo Maru (Japan) - 5,620
5. Toyama Maru (Japan) - 5,400
6. Arcona (Germany) - 5,000
7. Lancastria (Great Britain) - 3,050

8. Steuben (Germany) - 3,000
9. Thielbeck (Germany) - 2,750
10. Yamato (Japan) - 2,498

While many ship losses resulted from sea battles, some of the highest death tolls were caused by the bombing or torpedoing of vessels carrying refugees and other civilians.

The German liner Wilhelm Gustloff, laden with civilian refugees and wounded German soldiers and sailors, was torpedoed off the coast of Poland by a Soviet submarine, S-13, on 30 January 1945. Although imprecise, some sources even suggest a figure as high as 9,400, the probable death toll being some five times as great as that of the Titanic.

Top British and Commonwealth Air Aces of World War II

1. Sqd Ldr Marmaduke Thomas St John Prattle (South African) - 40+
2. Gp Captain James Edgar 'Johnny' Johnson (British) - 33.91
3. Wing Cdr Brendan 'Paddy' Finucane (Irish) - 32
4. Flt Lt George Frederick Beurling (Canadian) - 31.33
5. Wing Cdr John Randall Daniel Braham (British) - 29
6. Gp Capt Adolf Gysbert 'Sailor' Malan (South Africa) - 28.66
7. Wing Cdr Clive Robert Caldwell (Australian) - 28.5
8. Sqd Ldr James Harry 'Ginger' Lacey (British) - 28
9. Sqd Ldr Neville Frederick Duke (British) - 27.83
10. Wing Cdr Colin F. Gray (New Zealander) - 27.7

Uniquely to Western air forces in World War II, kills that are expressed as fractions refer

to those that were shared with others, the number of fighters involved and the extent of each pilot's participation determining the proportion allocated to him.

Ivan Kozhedub was the top Soviet ace with 62 kills and Richard I. Bong was the top American with 40 kills.

Tetsuzo Iwamoto of the Japanese Imperial Air Force was the top Japanese ace with 87 kills.

A total of 104 German Luftwaffe (Air Force) pilots claimed over 100 kills. The top German ace, and top ace of the war, was Erich "Bubi" Hartmann with a remarkable 352, most of them over the Eastern Front.

World War II Trivia

- The first German serviceman killed in the war was killed by the Japanese (China, 1937).
- The first American serviceman killed was killed by the Russians (Finland 1940).
- At the time of Pearl Harbor, the top US Navy command was called CINCUS (pronounced "sink us"), the shoulder patch of the US Army's 45th Infantry division was the swastika, and Hitler's private train was named "Amerika". All three were soon changed for PR purposes.
- It was a common practice on fighter planes to load every fifth round with a tracer round to aid in aiming. That was a mistake. The tracers had different ballistics so (at long range) if your tracers were hitting the target, 80% of your rounds were missing. Worse yet, the tracers instantly told your enemy he was under fire and from which direction. Worst of all



TOP GUN: German Luftwaffe ace Erich Hartmann was the top ace of World War II with 352 kills.

was the practice of loading a string of tracers at the end of the belt to tell you that you were out of ammo. That was definitely not something you wanted to tell the enemy. Units that stopped using tracers saw their success rate nearly double and their loss rate go down.

- German Me-264 bombers were capable of bombing New York City but it wasn't worth the effort.
- The Russians destroyed over 500 German aircraft by ramming them in midair (they also sometimes cleared minefields by marching over them). "It takes a brave man not to be a hero in the Red Army". - Joseph Stalin.
- When the US Army landed in North Africa, among the equipment brought ashore were three complete Coca Cola bottling plants.
- Among the first "Germans" captured at Normandy were several Koreans. They had been forced to fight for the Japanese Army until they were captured by the Russians and forced to fight



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

for the Russian Army until they were captured by the Germans and forced to fight for the German Army until they were captured by the US Army.

- Most members of the Waffen SS were not German.
- The only nation that Germany declared war on was the USA.
- Nuclear physicist Niels Bohr was rescued in the nick of time from German occupied Denmark. While Danish resistance fighters provided covering fire he ran out the back door of his home stopping momentarily to grab a beer bottle full of precious "heavy water". He finally reached England still clutching the bottle, which contained beer. Perhaps some German drank the heavy water.
- One of the American light cruisers anchored at Pearl Harbour during the Japanese attack of December 1941 was the Phoenix. The Phoenix survived the attack virtually unscathed, however,

more than 40 years later she was torpedoed and sunk by the British submarine Conqueror in the South Atlantic. The Phoenix, at the time of her demise, was of course known then as the General Belgrano.

- Although many people refer to the Allied D-Day landings in Normandy as "Operation Overlord", the operation was actually called "Operation Neptune". The landings were originally known as Overlord, but in September 1943 the codename was changed to Neptune, and Overlord from then on was used to refer to the general Allied strategy in northwestern Europe.
- Despite what you might see in the movies, the regular German Army (Wehrmacht) did not usually use the Nazi salute. Only after the July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life were they forced to use the Nazi salute as standard.
- German sailors brought a black and white patched cat on board the battleship Bis-

marck. 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.
- 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.
- 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, eventually 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 tow-

ing 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



Commander Ian Fleming

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.

- 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

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 explo-

1941 Von Werra took off in Bf 109F-4 on a practice flight. He suffered engine failure and crashed into the sea north of 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

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.
- Max Heiliger was the fictitious name the SS used to establish a bank account in which they deposited money, gold, and jewels taken from European Jews.
- The longest battle of WWII



PACKING A PUNCH: The most powerful artillery gun created by any nation and used in WWII was named Karl by its designer General Karl Becker. Used mostly against the Russians, the huge gun could shoot a 2.5 ton shell over three miles. The shells were almost 61 cm wide and could go through three metres of concrete.



HIGH ATTRITION RATE: Only one out of every four men serving on U-boats survived the war.

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

sion 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 German 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

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.

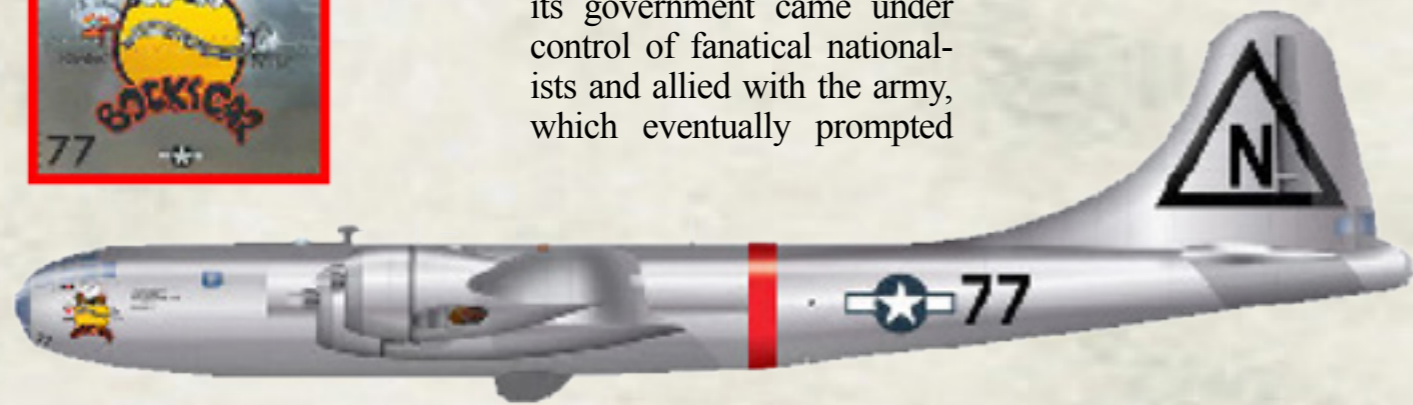
- In WWII a woman-only Soviet bomber regiment were nicknamed the "Night Witches" by German soldiers. For a successful bombing run, the Witches would cut the engine of their archaic and noisy aircraft. Gliding in, they would release their bombs before the enemy even knew they were there.
- Over 100,000 Allied bomber crewmen were killed over Europe.
- Polish Catholic midwife

was the Battle of the Atlantic, which lasted from 1939-1945.

- Approximately 600,000 Jews served in the United States armed forces during WWII. More than 35,000 were killed, wounded, captured, or missing. Approximately 8,000 died in combat. However, only two Jewish soldiers were awarded the Medal of Honor in WWII.
- The Battle of the Bulge is the largest and deadliest battle for U.S. troops to date, with more than 80,000 American casualties.
- During WWII, the Japanese launched 9,000 "wind ship weapons" of paper and rubberized-silk balloons that carried incendiary and anti-personnel bombs to the U.S. More than 1,000 balloons hit their targets and they reached as far east as Michigan. The only deaths resulting from a balloon bomb were six Americans (including five children and a pregnant woman) on a picnic in Oregon.
- The Japanese Kamikaze ("divine wind") tactic was suggested on October 19, 1944, by Vice-Admiral Onishi in an attempt to balance the technological advantage of invading American forces. Though the numbers are disputed, approximately 2,800 kamikaze pilots died. They sunk 34 U.S. ships, damaged 368, killed 4,900 sailors, and wounded 4,800.
- Many historians believe that the Battle at Stalingrad (1942-1943) is not only arguably the bloodiest battle in history (800,000-1,600,000 casualties), but also the turning point of WWII in Europe.
- From 1940-1945, the U.S. defense budget increased from \$1.9 billion to \$59.8 billion.
- The Air Force was part of the Army in WWII and didn't become a separate branch of the military until after the war.
- German U-boats sunk 2,000 Allied ships at a cost of 781

U-boats destroyed.

- The Germans used the first jet fighters in World War II, among them the Messerschmitt ME-262. However, they were developed too late to change the course of the war.
- At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, there were 96 ships anchored. During the attack, 18 were sunk or seriously damaged, including eight battleships. There were



BOCK'S CAR: The Enola Gay became well known for dropping the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, but few people know the name of the B-29 that bombed Nagasaki. It was Bock's Car, named after the plane's usual commander, Frederick Bock.

2,402 American men killed and 1,280 injured. Three hundred and fifty aircraft were destroyed or damaged.

- The Nazis pirated the Harvard "fight song" to compose their Sieg Heil march.
- Several famous actors were decorated during WWII. For example, Henry Fonda won a Bronze Star in the Pacific, Walter Matthau was awarded six battle stars while serving on a B-17, and David Niven was awarded the U.S. Legion of Merit. Christopher Lee was a pilot in the Royal Air Force and also won a number of awards.
- John Wayne (Marion Robert Morrison) starred in 14

WWII movies; however, due to a football injury, he never actually served in the war.

- On January 31, 1945, Private Eddie Slovik was shot for desertion, the first American executed for the crime since the Civil War and the only one to suffer this punishment during WWII.
- Although Japan fought on the side of Britain, France, and the U.S. during WWI, it felt cheated by its failure to gain much territory when the peace treaty was composed. Additionally, in the 1920s, its government came under control of fanatical nationalists and allied with the army, which eventually prompted

Japan to side with Germany.

- The most decorated unit ever in U.S. history is the 442nd regimental Combat Team, whose motto was "Go for Broke." It consisted of Japanese-American volunteers. Together they won 4,667 major medals, awards, and citations, including 560 Silver Stars (28 of which had oak-leaf clusters), 4,000 Bronze Stars, 52 Distinguished Service Crosses, and one Medal of Honor, plus 54 other decorations. It also held the distinction of never having a case of desertion.
- Norvell Gillespie, the garden editor of Better Homes and Gardens, designed the cam-

ouflage print for U.S. service uniforms in WWII.

- The greatest tank battle in history occurred between the Germans and Russians at the Kursk salient in Russia from July 4-22, 1943. More than 3,600 tanks were involved.
- The largest Japanese spy ring during WWII was not in the U.S. but in Mexico, where it spied on the U.S. Atlantic Fleet.
- Prisoners of war in Russian camps experienced an 85% mortality rate.
- Germany had a total of 3,363

generals during the war while the U.S. had just over 1,500.

- If it became necessary to drop a third atom bomb on Japan, the city that would have been the target was Tokyo.
- In the 1928 elections, less than 3% of Germans voted for the Nazi party. In 1938, Hitler was Time magazine's man of the year.
- Large, inflatable barrage balloons were used to protect major towns and cities in Britain from air raids. The balloons were launched before a raid and trailed a network of steel cables beneath them. Bombers had to fly high to avoid becoming tangled in the cables, thus reducing their accuracy.



STALIN ORGAN: On July 14, 1941, the Soviets introduced a new weapon, the Katyusha, which could fire 320 rockets in 25 seconds. More than 50 years later, the Katyusha remains an effective weapon.

- Because the Norway leader Vidkun Quisling (1887-1945) actively collaborated with Germany after its occupation, his name has entered the Norwegian language as a word for "traitor."
- Japan and Russia never formally ended hostilities after WWII. Plans for them to sign an official peace treaty in 2000 failed because Japan wanted Russia to return four offshore islands it had taken after the war.
- Author Ian Fleming based his character "007" on the Yugoslavian-born spy Dusko Popov (1912-1980). Popov spoke at least five languages and came up with his own formula for invisible ink. He was the first spy to use microdots, or photos shrunk down to the size of dots. He obtained information that the Japanese were planning an air strike on Pearl Harbor, but the FBI did not act on his warning. Popov later lived in the U.S. in a penthouse and created a reputation as a playboy. He wrote an account of his

wartime activities in his novel *Spy, Counterspy* (1974).

- From 1942, U.S. Marines in the Pacific used the Navajo language as their secret code. The language didn't have the vocabulary for existing WWII technology, so existing words had to be given new meanings. For example, the word for "hummingbird" (da-he-ti-hi) became code for fighter plane. Around 400 Navajo Indians (Code Talkers) were trained to use the code, and the Japanese never cracked it.
- During an attack on an Italian position in North Africa the South African Infantry launched a bayonet charge. One of the attacking South Africans fell into a shell hole, hitting his head and rendering him unconscious. When he regained consciousness a minute or two later he found six Italians sitting in the hole with him. They had their hands in the air and were waiting to surrender to him.
- The Victoria Cross was awarded 182 times to 181 recipients during World War

II. 85 of them were awarded posthumously. Captain Charles Upham, a New Zealander, was the only person during World War II to be awarded the VC twice. Five South Africans were awarded the VC during World War II. George Gristock was a company sergeant major with the Royal Norfolk Regiment. John Nettleton was a squadron leader with the Royal Air Force (RAF). Gerhard Norton served with the Hampshire Regiment. Quentin Smythe was a sergeant with the Royal Natal Carabineers. And Edwin Swales was a member of the South African Air Force and later of the elite RAF Pathfinder Force. Both Gristock and Swales won the award posthumously.

- The most important medical advance that saved soldiers' lives during WWII was the blood transfusion.

I trust you found this interesting.