Military Despatches

Vol 13 July 2018

Ten misconceptions about WWII

Things about WWII that you thought were true

Military Manifestations

The most haunted battlefields and military installations

The plot(s) to kill Hitler

There were at least 28 attempts to assassinate Hitler

Battlefield - Operation Babylon

The surgical airstrike on Iraq's nuclear reactor

Heinrich Himmler

Hitler's most loyal sycophant

For the military enthusiast

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Hipe's Wouter de Goede interviews former 28's gang boss David Williams.

How much do you know about movie theme songs? Take our quiz and find out.

The old South African Defence Force used a mixture of English, Afrikaans, slang and techno-speak that few outside the military could hope to understand. Some of the terms were humorous, some were clever, while others were downright crude.

Part of Hipe's "On the couch" series, this is an interview with one of author Herman Charles Bosman's most famous characters, Oom Schalk Lourens.

A taxi driver was shot dead in an ongoing war between rival taxi organisations.

Hipe spent time in Hanover Park, an area plagued with gang violence, to view first-hand how Project Ceasefire is dealing with the situation.

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Cover Photograph
Under the cover of smoke, members of the SANDF launch an attack on an enemy strong point. The photo was taken by the editor during a training exercise near Cape Town.

Editor's Sitrep

Well my eye surgery was a huge success (thanks for asking). Being able to now see out of both eyes has been amazing.

It's hard to believe that one year ago we published the very first issue of Military Despatches online. For those that may have missed any issues of the magazine, you can now find all of them at www.hipe.co.za. Just click on the underlined link above to get access to them.

You may notice a small change this month. In the past 12 issues we looked a various "Famous Figures in Military History". These have featured four people from World War I, eight from World War II, as well as a dog (Just Nuisance).

This month we decided to look at not a famous figure, but rather an infamous one - Heinrich Himmler. So in the future we will also look at people that may not have been the nicest characters - infamous rather than famous. But all still an important part of military history.

There's an interesting article on page 44 this month. In our "Forged in Battle" section we look at the Hunter Group.

They were started by a citizen force officer who was the OC of the South African Irish Regiment.

Commandant Gil van Kerckhoven got the idea back in 1966 to put together a specially trained group of men. A group that was trained to deal with the new type of guerilla warfare. In 1968 the Hunter Group was formed. They were, in essence, the SADF's first Special Forces unit.

Paul J. Els, the author of the article, has written a book about the history of the group, Saturday Soldiers - The Hunter Group. You can find out how to order a copy of the book on page 47.

That's about it for this month. I trust that all of you in the Cape are enjoying the rain. Let's hope we get a bit more of it before then end of winter.

Until next month.

Matt

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10 misconceptions about World War II

Ten things about World War II that most people believe. But how many of them are misconceptions?

History is sometimes defined as a continuous, systematic narrative of past events as relating to a particular people, country, period, person, etc., usually written as a chronological account.

It is through history that we know so much about past events and people. This is also true when it comes to military history.

Yet often the narrative of past events may not accurately relate what really happened. Even eyewitness accounts will sometimes differ. Oral history that was passed down from generation to generation often becomes distorted over time. And sometimes the narrative can be downright lies.

It was Winston Churchill that said, "History is written by the victors." Now it stands to reason that if you're the one writing the history of something, you're going to make yourself look good and your opposition look bad.

Joseph Goebbels

Often what we take to be history was actually propaganda. Winston Churchill also said, "In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies."

Joseph Goebbels. Nazi politician and Reich Minister of Propaganda of Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1945, also had some interesting things to say about it.

"If you tell a lie long enough, it becomes the truth." "The bigger the lie, the more it will be believed." "The truth is the greatest enemy of the State." These were all quotes from Herr Goebbels.

Yet there are some things we know without doubt that are true. Take the following facts from World War II.

- According to most Americans, World War II was the "good war" and most American troops were volunteers.
- France meekly surrendered to Germany in 1940 because the French were cowards.
- US President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew that the attack on Pearl Harbour was going to take place. He allowed it to happen as a pretext for war.
- The German SS in World War II, with their blonde hair and blue eyes, were the cream of Aryan manhood.
- German war crimes during World War II were committed only by the SS.
- The US Navy developed technology to make ships invisible, in the "Philadelphia Experiment".
- Adolf Hitler's real name was actually Adolf Schicklgruber.

All very interesting, but with one slight flaw - none of the above is true. They are all misconceptions that many people believe to be true.

For example, during World War II nearly 70% of American troops were drafted into service. Yet during the Vietnam War, the so-called "bad war", two-thirds of American troops were volunteers.

Winston Churchill

BLITZKRIEG: It was not a revolution, but rather an evolution.

As for the thing about the German SS being the cream of Aryan manhood. More than 60% of them were not even German.

Let's take a slightly more in depth look at some other misconceptions about World War II.

German Blitzkrieg

The world *blitzkrieg* (lightning war) is a word synonymous with World War II. Especially the early German victories at the start of the war.

The Battle of France was won in six weeks, something the Germans could not achieve during the entire First World War from 1914 to 1918. Yet there was never any blitzkrieg strategy.

According to Karl-Heinz Frieser in "The war in the West, 1939-1940: an unplanned Blitzkrieg", he states: "the 1940 campaign in the West may be considered the Blitzkrieg par excellence. In reality, however, it was not at all planned as such. Hitler was counting, instead on a years-long struggle, as in the First World War."

Frieser goes on to say that the so-called *Blitzkrieg-Denken* (Blitzkrieg concept) developed only after the campaign in the West.

The word Blitzkrieg was rarely used by the Germans before the war. There are very few times it is even mentioned in pre-war literature and even then it isn't clearly defined.

Even after the war Heinz Guderian, considered the father of the Panzer Army, mentioned the word only once in his memoirs. "After the initial success of rapid blows at the beginning of the Second World War, our opponents spoke about Blitzkrieg." Another famous panzer general, Erich von Manstein, never used the word once in his memoirs.

Yet not only does the notion of a German Blitzkrieg concept or doctrine survive in popular consciousness and popular literature, it persists with many professional historians too..

Many people believe that blitzkrieg was something completely new or at least revolutionary. Many are also under the illusion that what happened between 1939 and 1941 was a complete new form of warfare. They are wrong on both accounts. One needs to look at the bigger picture.

In his article "Blitzkrieg: Revolution or Evolution", Weichong Org states, "To the Germans however, blitzkrieg was never a revolution, but the incremental development of concepts and doctrines that originated from the campaigns of Frederick the Great, Blücher, Moltke the Elder, and those of the First World War."

A closer look at Prussian and German military history shows a number of themes that run through it. First is the focus on short wars won by decisive battles. Second is the concept of surprise, mobility and operational manoeuvre. There is a strong emphasis on outflanking the enemy. Third is an aggressive stance, even in defence.

If you take the above into account, then blitzkrieg was an evolution rather than a revolution. You also have to consider that when the Third Reich went to war, its army's latest general field manual had been published in 1933. It had been written before rearmament had gained momentum and before the first panzer division was established.

So the whole concept of "blitzkrieg" was as traditional as it gets. It was nothing more than good old fashioned Prussian *bewegunskrieg* (manoeuvre warfare). It was merely organised and merged with new technologies such as the panzer, aircraft and, probably most importantly, the radio.

Operation Sealion

If the Germans had won the Battle of Britain, they would have been able to launch *Unternehmen Seelöwe* (Operation Sealion), the amphibious invasion of Britain, and the British would have been faced with no choice but to surrender. A misconception if ever there was one.

Let's start off by looking at the Battle of Britain. Some people still think that it was a close call. On 15 September the Germans launched *Adlertag*, which was the first day of *Unternehmen Adlerangriff* ("Operation Eagle Attack"), which was the codename of a military operation by Nazi Germany's *Luftwaffe* (German air force) to destroy the British Royal Air Force (RAF).

By 16 September the German believed they had driven RAF Fighter Command down to 177 effective fighters. The true number was actually 300% higher. The RAF could still put 216 Spitfires and 356 Hurricanes into the air.

In the "Cambridge History of the Second World War. Volume 1, John Ferris and Evan Mawdsley wrote in their article "The war in the West, 1939-1940. The Battle of Brtain?" – "These assumptions shaped the Luftwaffe's turn from attacking airfields and C3I (Command, Communications and Intelligence) to London. While this was an error, it is less significant than is often claimed. Those early attacks inflicted little damage. Had the Germans continued them, they would still have lost, just less quickly or badly."

ENGLAND IS THAT WAY: Barges are packed with supplies in preparation for Operation Sea Lion.

Yet even if the Germans had won the Battle of Britain it would have made little difference to the success of Operation Sealion.

When the Allies landed in Normandy on D-Day in 1944, it took the Americans and British years to prepare. These forces included two of the leading naval powers at that time. They had experience in amphibious landings and had gained a naval and air superiority, close to supremacy, in the Normandy region. And D-Day was still no walk in the park.

So even if the Germans had gained air superiority they would have had no chance of gaining naval superiority.

In Summer 1940 the Germans had three cruisers and four destroyers operational. In stark contrast the British Home Fleet had five capital ships, one aircraft carrier, eleven cruisers and eight destroyers. There were also another seven capital ships, two aircraft carriers, seven cruisers and 30 destroyers in the Mediterranean Fleet.

In short, the Germans lacked ships, had untested amphibious vehicles, no experience in amphibious landings, and no amphibious logistics.

Considering that the US and the British, that had plenty of experience in all of those areas, still battled on D-Day, it is highly likely that Operation Sealion would have succeeded unless the Royal Navy had somehow disappeared.

The Holocaust's death toll

As much as some people may try and deny that it ever happened, the Holocaust was a reality. It is unequivocally clear that approximately six million Jews perished at the hands of the Nazis.

Yet that figure is not, as many people believe, the total death toll of the Holocaust. It doesn't take into account the further five millions civilians coming from many diverse groups including communists, Roma, Serbs, Polish intelligentsia, homosexuals, priests, the disabled, and more.

In fact anyone that the Nazis considered *untermenschen* (subhuman) were fair game to them.

MECHANISED MIGHT: The Germans actually had more horses than they did vehicles.

After the invasion of Poland in September 1939, the secret Action T4 euthanasia programme – the systematic murder of German, Austrian, and Polish hospital patients with mental or physical disabilities – was initiated by the SS in order to eliminate *Lebensunwertes Leben* (life unworthy of life), a Nazi designation for people who had no right to life.

In 1941, the experience gained in the secretive killing of these hospital patients led to the creation of extermination camps for the implementation of the Final Solution.

The Nazis distinguished between extermination and concentration camps. Concentration or prison camps has been set up in Germany prior to World War II for people defined as 'undesirable'.

These included camps such as Bergen-Belsen, Oranienburg, Ravensbrück, and Sachsenhausen. From March 1936, all Nazi concentration camps were managed by the *SS-Totenkopfverbände* (the Skull Units, SS-TV). From 1941 they operated the extermination camps as well.

The prime function of the *vernichtungslager* (extermination camps) or *Todeslager* (death camps) was genocide. While tens of thousands died at camps such as Bergen-Belsen, Oranienburg, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen, Mauthausen, Dachau, and Buchenwald, these were not considered by the Nazis to be extermination camps.

A total of eight camps were built with the specific purpose of genocide. They were Auschwitz–Birkenau, Treblinka, Bełżec, Chełmno, Sobibór, Majdanek, Maly Trostinets, and Sajmište.

World War II started in 1939

Come on, we all know that World War II started on 1 September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. Some Americans probably believe that it only started on 7 December 1941 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour.

Yet many historians are of the opinion that World War II started earlier than September 1939.

Some believe it started with the Soviet-Japanese fighting in Mongolia in May 1939. Others suggest even earlier starting points such as the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, or even the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931.

However, as Churchill said, a war's victors are always the ones who later write its history. And so it stands to reason that the world powers on the winning side of World War II ultimately pegged the start of the war as the moment when they got involved.

German Army Mechanisation

The German Army was highly mechanised. Just look at any photographs or film footage of the German's rolling into Russia and you will see panzers, assault guns and halftracks as far as the eye can see. Yet this is another misconception.

Most of the photographs and footage was for propaganda purposes in which the Germans, quite understandably, showed off their best troops and equipment. To illustrate this, let's look at the composition of the German Army in June 1941, just prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union.

The number of divisions was as follows.

- 21 Panzer divisions.
- 13 Motorised infantry divisions.
- 3 Motorised brigades.

- 95 Infantry divisions suited for all operations.
- 62 Infantry divisions in states of lower combat effectiveness.

Still not convinced? Let's look at the number of vehicles for Operation Barbarossa.

The German Army assembled 600,000 motor vehicles and 625,000 horses. So there was more horse power than horsepower.

So the Germans were nowhere near as mechanised as people believe. Once again this was a misconception promoted by the Nazi propaganda machine.

HITTING THE BEACHES: Despite what some may believe, America did not win World War II on their own.

The US won the war

The United States were the reason that the Allies won World War II. Well, that's what a lot of Americans will tell you.

They beat the Germans, beat the Japanese, led the D-Day invasion, and dropped the big one - the atomic bomb.

There are many reasons why this notion is false, but let's go straight to the most obvious one.

When World War II ended, the Cold War began. There was no way that the United States and its Western Allies were going to write a history of the war that attributed the lion's share of their victory to their former ally who was now their enemy.

More than any other single country, the soviet Union was responsible for the defeat of the Nazis. The ratio of total military losses on the Eastern Front versus the Western Front was a staggering nine to one. More than 80% of German military deaths occurred in the east.

This came at a high cost to the Soviet Union. They lost around 10 million military personnel, and let's not forget the 13 million or so civilians. The US, on the other hand, lost about 400,000 troops.

As for the Americans leading D-Day, this is another misconception.

True, the operation's ultimate commander, Dwight D. Eisenhower, was American. But its architect, service chiefs, air commander, and naval commander were all British.

The commander of the naval forces was Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay. The commander of the air forces was Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory. The commander of the land forces was General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery. All were British.

A total of 52,889 American sailors took part in D-Day compared to 112,824 British sailors.

As for the men landed on the beaches, 57,500 American troops landed at Utah and Omaha, while 75,215 British and Commonwealth troops landed at Gold, Juno, and Sword.

As for D-Day's vehicles, both Britain's warships and landing craft outnumbered America's more than four to one, and British planes accounted for two-thirds of the aircraft. In fact, one-third of the supplies used by American troops during D-Day came from Britain.

So, while the USA played an invaluable role in winning World War II, they didn't win it all on their own.

The US was neutral

Until Japan launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, the United States was neutral and stayed out of World War II. Don't believe that for one minute.

Let's look at a law that was passed in America, as well as a quote from US President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

In March 1941 Roosevelt announced an act to promote the defence of the United States. It

SINNER OR SAINT? Considered by many to be one of the greatest statesmen, Churchill did have his flaws.

is commonly referred to as the Land Lease Act. This act allowed the United States to support with equipment any country whose defence the President deems vital to the defence of the United States.

After various incidents between US warships and German U-Boats, Roosevelt announced during his Fireside Chat to the Nation on 11 September 1941, "That means, very simply, very clearly, that our patrolling vessels and planes will protect all merchant ships – not only American ships but ships of any flag – engaged in commerce in our defensive waters." And it should be noted that its defensive waters were not just the US coastline.

The US ultimately sent the modern equivalent of $659 billion worth of supplies to overseas allies fighting the war.

Furthermore, it was America's economic sanctions against Japan in 1941 that directly precipitated Pearl Harbour. In fact in late 1941 more than 52% of Americans believed there would be a war with Japan.

Churchill, revered war hero

There is no doubt that Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill was a great statesman who led Britain through World War II. But was he a universally revered wartime hero?

If Churchill was the beloved wartime leader some historians say, why would he and his Conservative Party suffer the single largest defeat in British history in the 1945 elections. And this was before the treaty with Japan, bringing World War II to an end, was even signed.

During World War I he was the First Lord of the Admiralty. He oversaw the Gallipoli Campaign and, after it proved a disaster, he resigned from government and served in the Royal Scots Fusiliers on the Western Front.

As British Prime Minister during World War II, his wartime response to the 1943 Bengal famine, which claimed an estimated three million lives, has caused controversy, and he sanctioned the 1945 bombing of Dresden, which caused tens of thousands of civilian deaths and continues to be debated.

Churchill was a fervent anti-communist. He never quite trusted Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and he publicly warned of an "iron curtain" of Soviet influence in Europe and promoted European unity.

He became irrationally hawkish as the war was finally about to end. One of his plans was the appropriately named Operation Unthinkable in mid-1945.

This mission, obviously never executed, would have immediately sent American, British, and, craziest of all, re-armed German forces into a full-scale invasion of the Soviet Union.

Widely considered one of the 20th century's most significant figures, Churchill remains popular in the UK and Western world, where he is seen as a victorious wartime leader who played an important role in defending liberal democracy from the spread of fascism.

Yet others considered him to be an imperialist and racist. So not everyone revered him as a hero.

Operation Barbarossa failed because it was delayed

Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union could have succeeded if it had not been delayed. The answer is no, nein and het.

Barbarossa failed due to many different factors. But the main cause was the assumption by the Germans that the Soviet Union would collapse after a few weeks.

While the early gains in territory were significant and the Soviets suffered huge losses in men and equipment, it was not

a decisive blow. The Soviets had both territory and troops to spare. Another factor is that the Germans suffered substantial losses as well.

It is important to note that looking at the number of German losses can be misleading. Barbarossa was started with roughly three million men, but they were not all combat troops. A large number of them were construction troops and others in non-combat roles.

Yet a large number of the German losses were experienced combat units that had fought in Poland, France, Norway, Greece and other places. So the loss of these troops in 1941 decreased the combat effectiveness of the Germans far more than the actual loss figures may suggest.

Take a look at the figures given by the German High Command. On 20 June 1941, before the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Germans had 136 divisions available that were suited for all operations. On 30 March 1942 they had eight divisions.

The invasion was originally set for 15 May 1941, though it was delayed for over a month in allowing for further preparations and possibly better weather.

It was finally launched on 22 June 1941, more than a month later than had been planned. Many believe that if it had been launched on time the Germans would have not been caught out by the early onset of the Russian winter. In reality it would have made little difference. In short the German Army was stopped by the Red Army, and not the Russian winter.

RULERS OF THE SKY: The Germans had more fighter aces than any other country.

German air aces were better

The records reflect that the Germans had more air aces than any other country. In fact the top 120 aces of the war were all German.

Erich 'Bubi' Hartmann was the top ace of the war with a remarkable 352 kills. But were the German aces really better than anyone else?

The reason why the Germans had more aerial victories than anyone else was explained by Gunther Rall, the third highest ace of the war with 275 kills.

German pilots flew until they died, whereas Allied pilots normally returned home after they had flown a certain amount of sorties.

Secondly, to shoot something down you need to have an enemy. While German may have been short of many things, they were not short of enemies.

Thirdly, when a German plane did show up they were normally heavily outnumbered. So there would be plenty of Allied planes going after a single fighter. The chances of a new Allied pilot getting a kill were pretty slim to say the least.

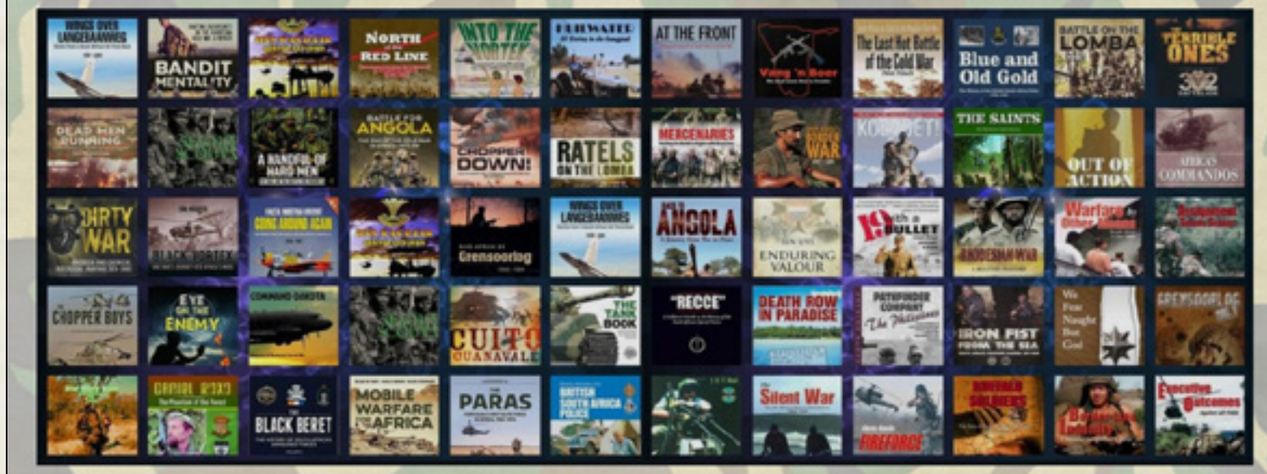
German pilots gained plenty of early war experience. Many of them had cut their teeth in the Spanish Civil War and the Battles of France and Britain. So those that did survive until the middle and end of the war had far more experience than the average Allied pilot.

So the notion that German aces were better is a misconception. Under the same circumstances Allied pilots would have probably achieved a similar number of kills.

In conclusion

There are many misconceptions about World War II. Probably hundreds of them.

These are just ten of them, but they do give food for thought.



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"

Military Manifestations

If there are such things as ghosts, lost spirits and supernatural manifestations, then it stands to reason that battlefields will be some of the most haunted places on the planet. **Matt O'Brien** *takes a closer look at things that go bump in the night.*

How many of you have seen a ghost? Or maybe you've experienced the strange and supernatural. Then again, maybe you're convinced it's just a load of malarkey.

Personally, I'm a bit of a sceptic. The only spirits I've had dealings with normally come in a bottle marked 'Bushmills'.

Yet while I say that, I must confess that I once did have an experience that left me more than a bit perplexed.

I was privileged to visit the Delville Wood South African National Memorial near Longueval in France.

Afterwards I took a walk into the actual woods where the battle had taken place. I stood there with my head bowed, trying to imagine what it must have been like back in 1916.

As I stood there, something strange happened. I didn't see anything. Nor did I hear anything out of the ordinary. Yet I was overcome by an overwhelming feeling of sadness. I started to sob like a baby.

Now while I don't believe in things that go bump in the night, there are many people that do. And even I have to admit that there may be more to it than meets the eye.

If things such as ghosts, spirits, apparitions and like do exist, then it makes sense that battlefields would have their fair share of them. After all, most of them are places where people met an untimely and often violent death.

So let's take a look at some of the most haunted battlefields and military installations.

Fort Meigs

William Henry Harrison was the ninth president of the United States. Yet before that he had been a military man. A general to be exact.

During the War of 1812 he established Fort Meigs in Ohio. For over a year he defended it against British attacks before it was finally abandoned and burnt down.

In 1974 it was reconstructed and opened to the public. Since then many people have claimed to hear cannon fire, muskets, and the sounds of fifes and drums being played.

Still more people have stated they hear footsteps and, when walking around outside, have seen apparitions staring at them through the windows.

It's believed that over 500 dead American, British, and Indian soldiers are buried in unmarked graves around and underneath the fort.

Battle Abbey

If you know your history then you will remember that the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066.

King Harold II, along with 7,500 of his Saxons, went up against the invading Normans who were led by William, Duke of Normandy. Or course William was better known as William the Conqueror and sometimes William the Bastard.

William defeated Harold and went on to become the first Norman king of England.

An abbey was built on Senlac Hill with the high altar said to have been placed on the exact spot where King Harold was slain.

Now building an abbey on the site of that much bloodshed was probably not the brightest idea. Over the years there have been numerous bizarre reports.

Most of the sightings have been of ghostly monks rather than soldiers.

There are some other claims, such as the high altar bleeding and a soldier marching through the Great Hall carrying a sword, but those tales are considerably less substantiated.

Marston Moor

As we all know, politics can sometimes become a bit heated. Throughout history it has often led to civil war.

The English actually had three civil wars in a row, fought mainly about how the government should be run.

The wars were fought between the Parliamentarians ("Roundheads") and Royalists ("Cavaliers")

The First English Civil War took place between 1642 and 1646. The Second English Civil War lasted from 1648 to 1649, and the Third English Civil War was fought between 1649 and 1651.

The three civil wars cost more than 84,000 people their lives. More than 100,000 civilians also died as a result of the English Civil Wars.

The Battle of Marston Moor took place on 2 July 1644. The Royalists suffered a heavy defeat, with some 4,000 of them being killed.

The Parliamentarians were led by Oliver Cromwell. He used the Old Hall as his base of operations and, according to legend, he's still there to this day.

And that's not even mentioning the fact that, apparently, the spirits of the Royalists that were slain in the battle still roam the area.

There have been reports over the years of phantom soldiers marching in Marston Moor, including possible sightings in 1932, 1968, and 1992, when people reportedly observed long haired, finely dressed soldiers marching along the roads.

BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS: It looks peaceful enough now, but Antietam Creek was the scene of one of the bloodiest battles of the US Civil War.

Dieppe

Before the invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944, the Allies wanted to test the feasibility of an amphibious landing on an enemy coastline.

To this end they launched Operation Jubilee, which was also known as the Dieppe Raid.

On 19 August 1942 a force consisting mainly of Canadian troops, along with some British and a few Americans, landed on the French coast at Dieppe. The operation was a spectacular failure.

From the time they landed at 05h00 until they retreated back across the English Channel at 14h00 they suffered more than 4,000 casualties.

Now let's fast forward nine years later to 1951. A pair of tourists are enjoying their summer holiday in Puys, nearby to Dieppe. At 04h00 they are awakened by what sounded like heavy gunfire. Then there is small arms fire, shouting voices and other sounds of battle. It is coming from the beach nearby their hotel.

For the next three hours they document all of the sounds they heard. Later the Society for Paranormal Research determined that their notes matched up, almost to the second, to the events of the Dieppe Raid, which had taken place on that exact beach.

Antietam

The American Civil War resulted in the deaths of between 785,000 and a million people. Many of the battles were notable for the high number of casualties that occurred. The Battle of Antietam was no exception.

The battle took place on 17 September 1862 at Antietam Creek in Maryland. The battle only lasted four hours and was fought in a very confined area. Yet more than 23,000 men were killed, wounded or reported missing.

Today, the small road near Antietam Creek is known as Bloody Lane. And for good reason. Visitors have often reported hearing the sound of gunfire and getting the smell of gunpowder. Others claim to have both seen and heard spirits in the area.

Virtually everything surrounding the Battle of Antietam has had reports of haunting, from Burnside's Bridge, where Ambrose Burnside's Union soldiers pushed back the Confederates and where the dead were quickly buried in shallow, unmarked graves, to the nearby St. Paul Episcopal Church, which was used as a Confederate hospital in the aftermath of the battle.

According to the local legends, the floorboards of the church are so stained in blood that not even sandpaper will take it out.

Gettysburg

Fought from 1 July to 3 July 1863 in the small town of Gettysburg in southeastern Pennsylvania, the Battle of Gettysburg is viewed as the turning point for the Union in the Civil War. The battle resulted in more than 50,000 casualties.

Since then almost everyone that has visited Gettysburg will have some spooky story to share.

At the Daniel Lady Farm, which served as the Confederate field hospital, it is believed that more than 10,000 deceased soldiers still haunt the grounds.

Cashtown Inn, where the first soldier in the Battle of Gettysburg was killed, also has some bizarre tales, and the owners claim to have photographic evidence of spirits on the premises, as well as guests reporting hearing knocking on doors, lights turning on and off, and doors locking and unlocking themselves.

Those are only a small sampling of the alleged ghostly sightings, which have also been reported at the Gettysburg Hotel and the Baladerry Inn, as well as on the battlefields themselves.

Passchendaele

The Battle of Passchendaele, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres, lasted just over three months between July and November 1917.

The Germans were pounded by artillery, with as many as one million rounds being fired. The Germans were up against a force consisting of British, Canadian, New Zealand and South African troops. Australian forces joined in as well.

DOOMED CITY: If cities can be haunted, then Stalingrad has to be a candidate. More than two million people died there in five months of fighting during World War II.

Due to the countless shell holes, heavy rains and thick mud, the battlefield was difficult to navigate. One wrong slip and you could disappear into the mud, never to be seen again.

Nearly 400,000 would die on all sides and almost 100,000 soldiers who died were never identified.

Now, it's said the village is haunted with sounds of battle, screams, gunfire and other phantom noises that can be heard at random times.

Culloden

The Battle of Culloden marked the crushing of the Jacobite Rebellion in the mid-1700s.

The Scottish clans were heavily outnumbered by the troops of Bonnie Prince Charles. The terrain did not favour the Scots and some reports say that the battle was over in under an hour.

The anniversary of the battle is 16 April and it's said that on that day, the ghostly fallen soldiers reappear, and sounds of battle, including clashing swords, can be heard. Some tales say individuals have encountered fallen soldiers on the battlefield, as well as one soldier who roams the area in a stunned state.

It's also reported that birds do not sing near the burial mounds, due to the creepy atmosphere.

Little Bighorn

Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer of the US 7th Cavalry really knew how to pick a fight.

Twelve companies of the 7th Cavalry were involved in a campaign against the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho tribes.

On 25 and 26 June 1876, five companies, a force of about 700 cavalarymen and scouts, engaged in battle against the Indians.

Under the command of Custer, they faced a foe numbering around 2,500. In the Battle of Little Bighorn, sometimes known as Custer's Last Stand, the cavalry were annihilated.

These days hauntings are widely reported at the sight of the battle. Visitors say they instantly become overwhelmed with a feeling of hopelessness. Others say they experience hallucinations of the battle. One grounds keeper says her on-site home was haunted by a Calvary soldier.

THE CASTLE: Most people that have spent time at the Castle will have at least one good ghost story to tell.

Stalingrad

It has often been called one of the most deadly battles in all of human history. And with more than two million deaths, it certainly earned the title.

The battle lasted for just over five months, from 23 August 1942 to 2 February 1943. German troops, supported by Romanian, Italian, Hungarian and Croatian troops fought the Russians for control of the city. Many say that this was where Germany lost World War II.

Today the city is called Volograd, named after the Volga River.

Now, entire sections of neighborhoods in the city are said to be extremely haunted by the dead.

It's reported that the dead have continued living their normal lives as ghostly figures, roaming the places where they once lived, fought, and died.

Towton

Early we mentioned the three English Civil Wars that took place between 1642 and 1651. Well, it wasn't the first time that the English had tried their hand at civil War.

From May 1455 to August 1485, a total of 30 years, two English rival branches of the royal House of Plantagenet: the House of Lancaster (associated with a red rose), and the House of York (whose symbol was a white rose), fought for control of the throne. It comes as no big surprise to discover that it was called the War of the Roses.

Eventually, the wars eliminated the male lines of both houses.

One of the bloodiest battles of the War of the Roses took place in early 1461 at Towton. As many as 80,000 men were involved in the battle that lasted for 10 hours. Approximately 30,000 individuals died, in total. The battle is said to have taken place during heavy snowfall.

Now, it's reported that, every seven years, the town of Towton will experience a similar heavy snowstorm. If one walks out into the storm, to the site of the battle, they'll see the two armies fighting for a little more than three hours.

Castle of Good Hope

Lastly, we head for Cape Town and our own Castle of Good Hope.

Built by the Dutch East India Company between 1666 and 1679, the Castle is the oldest existing colonial building in South Africa. The Castle was the centre of civilian, administrative and military activity at the Cape for 150 years and also the site of gruesome punishments, torture and executions. Obviously this has left a legacy of disturbed and restless spirits.

Most people that spent time at the Castle will have a ghost story or two to tell. Stories have been told of footsteps pacing along the battlements between the two bastions of Leerdam and Buren.

National servicemen that did guard duties at the Castle would refuse to go past the D*onker Gat* (dark hole) dungeon when making rounds late at night. They said it felt as if a powerful force or vacuum wanted to suck them in.

If you have any 'spooky' stories from your time in the military, drop us an e-mail and we will do a follow-up story.

A matter of survival - facing disaster

Over the next few months we will be running a series of articles looking at survival, something that has always been important for those in the military. This month we look at survival stresses and the basic needs for survival.

The scary thing about disaster is that it can strike quickly and unexpectedly. One minute everything is all sunshine and roses, the next you're in a fight for you life.

When facing a disaster it's easy to collapse to the ground and be consumed by self-pity. But just giving up or burying your head in the sand and hoping that this bad dream will soon pass is not really an option. That is, if you want to survive.

The right attitude can often be the difference between surviving and dying.

A healthy, well-nourished person can physically tolerate far more than we think. Often when you think you've reached the end of your tether, you will find that the body can still keep going.

Even a sick or injured person can handle and recover from seemingly impossible situations. A lot depends on self-confidence and determination.

Survival Stresses

Yet no matter how determined you are, you have to realise that a survival situation will put you under pressure both physically and mentally. You will have to overcome some or all of the following stresses.

- Fear and anxiety.
- Pain, illness and injury.
- Cold and/or heat.
- Thirst, hunger and fatigue.
- Sleep deprivation.
- Boredom.
- Loneliness and isolation.

Assessing the situation

Almost every survival situation is different and this has to be taken into account when assessing the situation.

The first thing you need to look at is the context of the situation. This can often be a determining factor.

Let's say, for example, that you're in a light aircraft that has had to make a forced landing in the middle of nowhere. Not only has the aircraft been badly damaged, it caught fire and has burnt out. Congratulations, you're in a survival situation.

Now let's look at the same situation in a different context. You're a member of the armed forces in a light aircraft that has had to make a forced landing in the middle of nowhere - behind enemy lines. Not only do you have a survival situation to contend with, but you're in hostile territory.

Trust me when I say that the heavily armed people that are searching for you are not doing so because they want to rescue you.

Stay or go?

Back in 1982 a band named The Clash had a hit with a song titled "Should I Stay Or Should I Go?" And in a survival situation it's a rather appropriate song.

Let's look at the aircraft crash scenario as an example. Once again there are a number of factors that you need to look at before making a decision.

Sometimes you will have no choice but to move. This is especially true if you are in hostile territory.

If there is a chance of you being rescued fairly soon, then it is often advisable to remain where you are. If, for instance, you were on an aircraft that has gone down, the pilot would have filed a flight plan.

When the aircraft does not arrive at its destination within a specific time period, a search operation will be launched. The first place they will begin the search is along the flight path that was filed.

In many mountain and wilderness areas, hikers are required to sign a register. This will often contain contact details, how many are in your party, where you are going, and when you expect to get there. When you leave you are required to sign out. If a person or group is overdue, a search will begin.

They will search the route or path that you intended to take. So staying on or close to the path is a good idea.

If, however, you are in a situation where you know there is little hope of being found or rescued, you will have to make your own way to assistance.

No matter whether you decide to stay or go, there is a lot to consider. Physical fitness plays an important part. The fitter you are, the better you will survive.

Initially you may have to go without sleep to ensure that you are in a safe location, or you may have to make a long march in dangerous conditions.

You will be working hard to procure food and water. They will relieve hunger and thirst, but finding them will tire you and you will need to find adequate shelter to enable you to rest and recover from your efforts. There is a possibility that you will have to deal with injuries. This is where training and knowledge kicks in.

Knowledge

It was Abraham Verghese that said, "Knowledge is power." When it comes to survival, knowledge may just be the thing that keeps you alive.

An important part of this is pre-planning. Did you remember to pack your survival tin and your survival pouch? Is everything still in working order and has any food or medicine expired?

Do you know how to use the items packed in your tin and pouch? Can you actually make a fire using a flint and striker? The best way is to practice beforehand and not wait until you're in a real situation to try it out.

If you're going to be travelling to an area, find out as much about it as possible. What is the terrain like? Is water readily available and is it drinkable? What wildlife can you expect to find in the area. What plants can you eat or use as medicine? Is the area populated and are the locals friendly or hostile?

Do you know how to trap or hunt wildlife? Would you be able to skin and cook whatever you catch?

Would you be able to build a shelter that will keep you warm and dry in the wet, or out of the sun?

Ideally you should practice doing these things before you need to do them for real.

The more information and knowledge you have, the greater your chances of survival.

Basic needs

The main elements required for survival are water, food, fire and shelter. Their order of importance will depend upon where you happen to be.

In the desert or arid regions, water will head the list. In cold regions shelter and fire will be top of the list. Ordering your priorities is one of the first steps to survival.

It takes a healthy person quite a long time to die of starvation. This is because the body can use up its stored resources.

Yet exposure to wind, rain and cold can be fatal even in temperate climates. And death comes in minutes in the icy water of the poles. So food is rarely the first priority.

Even in those areas where food is difficult to find, there are usually other problems to face first. Shelter will often be the prime necessity in extremes of climate or temperature. And this is not just in the frozen polar regions or baking deserts, but even for hikers trapped by mist on a hillside. The need for fire is closely linked to the need for shelter.

Water is something that most of us take for granted. You turn on a tap, and out comes fresh, drinkable water.

Yet in a survival situation water can often mean the difference between life and death.

You may be a survivor at sea, surrounded by water that is not drinkable. You may be in a place where, unless it rains, no obvious water is available.

Water is universally important and in the next article we will look at finding water.

Rank Structure - WWII Japan

Over the next few months we will be running a series of articles looking at the rank structure of various armed forces. This month we look at the Japanese Military in World War II

The Imperial Japanese Army and Navy used the following ranks before and during World War II.

These designs were worn on shoulders as passants (shoulder straps) between the years 1911 and 1938, then on collars afterwards until 1945, when the army was dissolved.

The same officer ranks were used for both the Imperial Japanese Army and Imperial Japanese Navy, the only distinction being the placement of the word *Rikugun* (army) or *Kaigun* (navy) before the rank. Thus, for example, a captain in the navy shared the same rank designation as that of a colonel in the army: *Taisa* (colonel), so the rank of *Rikugun Taisa* denoted an army colonel, while the rank of *Kaigun daisa* denoted a naval captain.

Imperial Japanese Army

The colour of the collar tab indicated the corp.

Infantry **Engineer** **Cavalry**

Artillery **Medical** **Supply**

Non-commissioned Officers (NCO) and Warrant Officer

Nitōhei
(Private)

Ittōhei
(Private First Class)

Jōtōhei
(Superior Private)

Heichō
(Lance Corporal)

Gochō
(Corporal)

Gunsō
(Sergeant)

Sōchō
(Sergeant Major)

Jun-i
(Warrant Officer)

Officers

Rikugun-Shōi
(Second Lieutenant)

Rikugun-Chūi
(First Lieutenant)

Rikugun-Tai-i
(Captain)

Rikugun-Shōsa
(Major)

Rikugun-Chūsa
(Lieutenant Colonel)

Rikugun-Taisa
(Colonel)

Rikugun-Shōshō
(Major General)

Rikugun-Chūjō
(Lieutenant General)

Rikugun-Taishō
(General)

Gensui-Rikugun-Taishō
(Marshal)
Worn with enamel breast badge

Daigensui-Rikugun-Taishō
(Grand Marshal)

Imperial Japanese Navy

Service Branch Colours

The branch of the Navy in which non-executive personnel served was indicated by a colour code. For officers, including midshipmen, it was the colour of cloth placed as background to the cuff stripes, on both sides of the gold lace on the shoulder boards, and as longitudinal piping on the collar patches. Midshipmen and cadets wore a coloured anchor on the cap, which cadets wore on the shoulder boards as well. The branch of enlisted men was denoted by the colour of the Chrysanthemum flower on their rank patch; line personnel using the default gold

Colour	Branch
Violet	Engineering
Brown	Ship and Engine Construction
Purple-Brown	Ordnance Construction
Red	Medical
Pale-Green	Legal
White	Paymaster
Black	Survey Officers
Light Blue	Aviation and Hydrography
Green	Chief Carpenters (Warrant Officers)
Grey Blue	Bandmaster (Warrant Officers)

Non-commissioned Officers (NCO) and Warrant Officer

Nitōsuihei
(Seaman Recruit)

Ittōsuihei
(Ordinary Seaman)

Jōtōsuihei
(Able Seaman)

Suiheichō
(Leading Seaman)

Nitōheisō
(Petty Officer Second Class)

Ittōheisō
(Petty Officer
First Class)

Jōtōheisō
(Chief
Petty Officer)

Kaigun shōi kōhosei
(Midshipman)

Heisōchō
(Warrant
Officer)

Officers

Kaigun-shōi
(Ensign)

Kaigun-chūi
(Sub Lieutenant)

Kaigun-daii
(Lieutenant)

Kaigun-shōsa
(Lieutenant
Commander)

Kaigun-chūsa
(Commander)

Kaigun-daisa
(Captain)

Kaigun-shōshō
(Rear Admiral)

Kaigun-chūjō
(Vice Admiral)

Kaigun-taishō
(Admiral)

Gensui-kaigun-taishō
(Grand Admiral)
Worn with enamel breast badge

Dai-gensui
(Lord High Admiral)

Grand Marshal/Lord High Admiral

Dai-gensui (grand marshal) was the highest rank of the Greater Imperial Japanese Army and the Imperial Japanese Navy from the 1870s to 1945, when the Empire of Japan was dissolved. The rank was only ever held by the Emperor of Japan as commander-in-chief of the Empire's Armed Forces.

Japanese Aviation

Japan did not have an air force during World War II. Japanese pilots flew either for the *Dai-Nippon Teikoku Kaigun Kōkū-tai* (Japanese Imperial Navy Air Service) or the *Dainippon Teikoku Rikugun Kōkūbutai* (Japanese Imperial Army Air Service).

Their ranks would be the same as either the army or navy ranks.

That's our motto

Many military corps, regiments, and units will have official motto's. Some of them may have unofficial motto's that are associated with them. This month we give you a motto (in English) and you tell us who it's associated with.

Answers on page 65.

1. Through adversity to the stars.
2. Here we are.
3. Always faithful.
4. Service before self.
5. Fly-Fight-Win.
6. May the Lord of the Water be auspicious unto us.
7. This We'll Defend.
8. Honour and fatherland.
9. To Free the Oppressed.

FLYING HIGH: At least one of these motto's belongs to an air force.

AIRBORNE: Two of these motto's belong to paratroopers. But which two?

10. By sea, by land.
11. Always ready.
12. Through hardships to the stars.
13. All the way.
14. If you wish for peace, prepare for war.
15. Oorah!
16. By strength and guile.
17. We stand on guard for thee.
18. Swift and Sure.
19. My honour is loyalty.
20. Ready for anything.
21. The only easy day was yesterday.
22. Better to die than to be a coward.
23. On the sea we are glorious.
24. Everything for the Motherland.
25. March or die.

ALL AT SEA: At least one motto is that of a navy. But how many more are there?

SEA CADETS SHOW UCT STUDENTS HOW TO LEAD

By **Sinethemba Ncetani**, *UCT Geology student & Groote Schuur Residence 2018 Subwarden*

Annually student leaders from University of Cape Town Groote Schuur Residence and Mansions, with a few from other residences, participate in a practical leadership experience hosted by TS Woltemade Sea Cadets at Lakeside.

This opportunity also exposes future leaders in their fields to maritime youth development, the opportunities the Sea Cadets enjoy and the practical application of these skills for life and career.

The students' first task was to plan their journey to ensure that they arrived on time at Lakeside station to meet the Sea Cadet Instructors. With all the excitement and thrill of the unknown we missed our train by 10 minutes and had to wait for 45 minutes for the next one.

We learnt later that "Wakey Wakey" was an important "evolution" and that if a sailor missed the sailing of his ship he / she would be "charged".

On our arrival at the Lakeside station we were met by a disciplined Midshipman Ruben Pillay and a Senior Sea Cadet. It was evident by our long faces that we were embarrassed at being late (we had been warned not to be!) and initially there was some confusion in or "ranks" as we were unsure what would happen next.

We then relaxed and adopted our usual playful and jolly natures. The response from Mid Pillay was unexpected as he "took charge" naturally.

We realised very quickly that we had left our student lives behind and were now part of a "squad". I was left wondering what had I let myself in for as we proceeded to march to the Unit in a military fashion.

Before the "lunch pipe" was sounded the squad were exposed to several of the Letrobaun activities designed to test our ability to work as a team while practically solving a physical challenge. These activities tested our ability to assume a leadership position while learning how to draw the best from each member of the "squad".

After each "evolution" the team was debriefed so that we could improve our practical leadership and problem solving skills. The engineering students amongst the "squad" excelled as these exercises were exactly what their lecture hall lectures were all about.

As we had not accomplished the first Letrobaun exercise in the given time frame, we were forced to reflect on what we were doing wrong as a team. We knew we were "intelligent" enough.

We realised that we were used to working and completing tasks individually, without having to listen to other people's ideas. This became the barrier to our success as we wasted more time in trying to figure things out as individuals than as a team. The saying "failing to prepare is preparing to fail" became a reality to us because we failed to prepare as a team and the rest of the task became a lesson.

Having learnt this we chose one person from our group to lead us, we started listening to each other, gave each other opportunities and made sure that no one was left behind. With the great assistance of Midshipman Pillay our next task became a success and this left all of us happy and boosted the confidence we had in ourselves and in our team.

After some nourishing "victuals" at lunchtime we were issued with life jackets and boarded the Saldanha dinghies for some "pulling" instruction. For most of us this was the first taste we had had of boarding a boat and were now expected to "pull" it.

We each had to "man an oar" and learn the commands associated with pulling and once we had "shoved off" we were out there on the vlei leaving us once again to the Midshipman and Instructors mercy.

As we slowly found our own personal rhythm and listened to the commands of the "cox" the boat pulled more smoothly and we could chart a course using the rudder. We learnt that there can only be one leader calling the time and providing direction. We ended this adventure

PULL TOGETHER: Students take part in a "pulling" exercise on the vlei. From left to right: Mapulane Makhaba, Sohil Tulsi, Mid (SCC) Ruben Pillay, Khanyiso Manganye, and Sinawo Ndlombose

with the boats racing one another and only returned safely due to an increase in wind.

The things that we learnt from the experiences were:

- Be on time.
- Work within the time frame given.
- Poor planning results in poor execution.
- Order and a disciplined approach works better.
- The team work created as we learnt from our mistakes recognised the strengths and allowable weaknesses in the team.
- Importance of clear communication in explaining our thoughts to resolving the challenges as well as instructing others to carry this out practically.
- Not having access to cell phones resulted in a targeted focus, no distractions and side conversations – even during lunch break The courage and motivation needed to function as a team.
- The spirit of leadership and self-discipline.

The above were the sentiments that we as students all shared while taking time out to explore the Unit, the facilities, including a book and DVD library, boat shed, workshop and observing the Sea Cadets practice their silent precision drill.

We noted that all the adult Officers and Instructors, many ex Sea Cadets themselves, were volunteers who sacrifice their time to make a positive impact and a change in these young leaders lives.

The enthusiasm, positivity, respect, discipline and skill that these youth displayed reminded us as a slightly older generation that the values which the Sea Cadet corps instils is as much required today as when the Unit was founded in 1906.

The South African Sea Cadets organisation is one of youth organisations that provide our youth with positive alternative lifestyles away from gangs, alcohol, drugs, etc. Several students remarked that they wished that they had had such opportunities, experiences and more positive role models when growing up.

On the return train journey to our residence in Rondebosch we discussed how much better our nation would be if there were Units like TS Woltemade in each neighbourhood with adults who were prepared to teach the youth values, discipline, respect and teamwork.

"Bravo Zulu" (Well done in Naval language) to the Officer Commanding TS Woltemade, Lt Cdr (SCC) Paul Jacobs, in making the Unit and Instructors available to us for a very different leadership experience. A special thank you to Mid Ruben Pillay and his senior Sea Cadets for exposing us to practical situational leadership.

These are lessons that we will all take forward in building a better nation for the next generation.

FOOT NOTE

It was through this opportunity that SLt Masego Mosupye, UCT Chemical Engineering graduate and then Subwarden at Woolsack residence, witnessed what Sea Cadets did, and decided to join the SA Navy and became a Sea Cadet Instructor whilst awaiting her "call up" papers.

Today she works as the firs female Chemical Engineer for the Engineering Section maintaining the Fleet.

Perhaps there are others like her out there ?

The Plot(s) to kill Hitler

Even before the Nazis came to power in 1933 there were at least four attempts on Adolf Hitler's life. From the time Hitler came to power until he committed suicide on 30 April 1945, there were at least 28 assassination attempts on his life. We look at some of them.

There is no denying that Adolf Hitler was popular with a lot of people. Especially in Germany. After the debacle of World War I many regarded him as the saviour of Germany.

Yet when you become one of the most despised tyrants in human history, spread totalitarianism through Europe, orchestrate the invasion of numerous countries, commit countless war crimes, including the attempted genocide of the Jewish people, and basically start a world war, then you are going to lose popularity.

A lot of people wanted Hitler dead. And it wasn't only the Allies that organised secret plots to kill Hitler. Members of the German High Command wanted him dead as well.

Many hoped his death would bring about an end to the Second World War; others simply wanted to put an end to his atrocities.

As we will see in this article, there were as many reasons for killing Hitler as there were attempts made and methods used.

Yet, as people discovered, killing Hitler was not as easy as it sounded.

Adolf Hitler was a strong believer in *Vorsehung*, or "providence." The Führer felt that if anything was going to happen to him, such as assassination, there was nothing he could do about it. He had been selected by fate to achieve something great; he would not die, either by accident or assassination, until he had fulfilled that God-given mission. And for the better part of two decades, it appeared as if providence was on his side.

Even before the Nazis came to power in 1933 there were at least four attempts to kill Hitler. This included one where they tried to poison him at the Hotel Kaiserhof in 1930.

Once Hitler came to power there were many who conspired to kill or depose him. Most of the early attempts were divided between half-crazed lone gunmen and half-hearted former government officials.

The former tended to fail because they were disorganised, careless, and inept. The later failed because they were naively convinced that all they had to do was arrest Hitler and depose his government.

Here are just some of the attempts that failed.

Beppo Römer

Josef "Beppo" Römer was a veteran of World War I. He was a member of the *Freikorps Oberland*, one of the paramilitary organizations that sprang up around Germany as soldiers returned in defeat from World War I.

When he was kicked out of his own organisation in the mid-1920s he had a change of heart and converted to communism. He earned a law degree and started organising workers into labour unions.

He was appalled at Hitler's rise to power and, when the Nazis came to power in 1933, he conspired with a handful of other communists to kill the new Chancellor.

There plot never even got past the planning stages before they were arrested. Römer was lucky to escape execution and he was thrown into Dachau concentration camp.

After his release in 1939, Römer immediately got back to work organising plots to kill Hitler. He seemed oblivious to the fact that the Gestapo would be watching him like a hawk and in 1942 he was back in prison.

In September 1944, Römer was finally executed.

Helmut Hirsch

If anyone had a grievance it would have been Helmut Hirsch.

He was born in Stuttgart but was technically an American citizen, even though he had never even visited the United States.

Add to that the fact that he was Jewish and also had a doubtful legal status in Hitler's Germany and it's not difficult to see why he joined a Czechoslovakian anti-Nazi group.

The group was known as the Black Front. Unfortunately for Hirsch the group had been thoroughly penetrated by German intelligence.

In 1938, somebody in the group – possibly the Nazi agent who later gave evidence at Hirsch's trial – sent him across the German border with instructions to pick up a couple of bombs and kill Hitler. Instead, Hirsch was picked up at the border, interrogated by the Gestapo, and beheaded in 1939.

MINUTES TOO LATE: The aftermath of the bomb planted by Georg Elser at the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich. It missed killing Hitler by only 13 minutes.

Maurice Bavaud

To say that Maurice Bavaud was an odd man would be an understatement.

A devout Catholic, he travelled from Switzerland to Germany in 1938 with the intention of killing Hitler. His orders were given to him by a man that Bavaud believed - of all things - was the heir to the Romanov dynasty.

Bavaud's multiple attempts on Hitler's life could have come straight from the pages of a Monty Python script.

At the 1938 Nuremberg rally, Bavaud positioned himself on an overpass. When Hitler passed underneath him, Bavaud would take a .25 pistol from his pocket and shoot Hitler.

As Hitler approached, Bavaud reached for his gun, ready to take his shot. The problem is that the crowd all stood up in front of Bavaud and saluted their Führer, blocking his view. He lost sight of his target and the opportunity was lost.

Bavaud resorted to plan B. He had heard that Hitler would be relaxing in Berchtesgaden after the rally. He bought a train ticket for Berchtesgaden, only to discover on his arrival that Hitler was still in Munich.

Badaud bought another train ticket to Munich, only to learn when he got there that Hitler was now in Berchtesgaden.

The problem was that he had now run out of money. He was arrested at the train station for vagrancy.

The police found the gun, a forged letter of introduction, and another document that was addressed to Hitler himself.

He was handed over to the Gestapo, who could be very persuasive with their interrogation methods, and Bavaud soon confessed to everything. He was sent to the guillotine in 1941.

This, however, was not the end of the story. For some bizarre reason the German government put Bavaud on trial twice after his death. The first time in 1955 and a year later in 1956.

In his first retrial his death sentence was commuted to five years in prison, which would have been nice to year 14 years earlier. A year after that, Bavaud's conviction was overturned entirely and his family given a pension for his anti-Hitler activities.

Georg Elser

A mere 13 minutes is all that stood between success and failure for Georg Elser.

On 8 November 1939, Adolf Hitler would be giving his customary speech at the *Bürgerbräukeller* in Munich. This was to commemorate the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch.

Elser had spent two months planning and planting a bomb behind the speaker's podium. It was set to detonate while Hitler was making his speech.

Unknown to Elser, Hitler had initially cancelled his speech at the Bürgerbräukeller to devote his attention to planning the imminent war with France, but

changed his mind and attended after all.

The start time of the reunion was brought forward half an hour to 20h00. and Hitler cut his speech from the planned two hours to a one-hour duration.

The high-ranking Nazis who accompanied Adolf Hitler to the anniversary of the Beer Hall Putsch on 8 November 1939 were Joseph Goebbels, Reinhard Heydrich, Rudolf Hess, Robert Ley, Alfred Rosenberg, Julius Streicher, August Frank, Hermann Esser and Heinrich Himmler. Hitler was welcomed to the platform by Christian Weber.

Only 13 minutes after Hitler and his entourage had left, the bomb exploded.

The bomb brought down part of the ceiling and roof and caused the gallery and an external wall to collapse, leaving a mountain of rubble. About 120 people were still in the hall at the time. Seven were killed. Another sixty-three were injured, sixteen seriously, with one dying later.

Elser was arrested trying to cross the Swiss border. He had wires and bomb components in his pockets, photographs of the beer cellar, and diagrams of the explosive device he had built.

Elser was remanded to the Gestapo. According to a witness, non other than Heinrich Himmler himself took part in the beating Elser got. After several delays, Elser was sent to Dachau concentration camp.

He was executed on 9 April 1945, only days before the camp was liberated.

PEACE IN OUR TIME: Neville Chamberlain's agreement with Hitler over the Sudetenland was a spoke in the wheels of the generals plans to arrest Hitler.

Internal plots

All of the attempts we've looked at so far were made by civilians, most of them amateurs at the assassination game. The attempts were carried out with little or no outside help.

Starting in 1938, however, a series of increasingly desperate plots were hatched by members of the German military elite.

Following several scandals that discredited high-ranking German officers in 1938, Hitler took the opportunity to clean house. The German War Minister was fired for having married an ex-prostitute, and the Army Chief of Staff was cashiered for disloyalty. One field marshal was even court-martialed for suspected (later disproved) homosexuality.

Senior officers were outraged by Hitler's purges. Some of these officers got together and started plotting to remove Hitler.

The leader was Ludwig Beck, who had recently been fired as Chief of Staff. It was his task to coordinate efforts to dispose Hitler in the name of the German people.

While none of their efforts were successful, it wasn't for lack of trying. For almost seven years the conspirators cooked up one plot after another. And, like the good staff officers they were, they committed all of their plans to paper.

Again and again, bad luck dashed the plotters' hopes and let Hitler unwittingly stroll right past men who were ready to die for the chance to kill him.

Hitler's unwitting ally

With help from members of the *Abwehr* (German military intelligence), Beck made contact with British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and other members of the British government. He was looking for their support, but there is no evidence that they received any support whatsoever. This left the generals operating alone for the time being.

SAFELY HOME: Adolf Hitler arrives back in Berlin after visiting the Russian Front. A plot to blow up his aircraft was unsuccessful when the bombs failed to explode.

Czechoslovakia had been created in 1919. The new nation was created out of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire and it contained numerous nationalities, including 3,2 million Germans.

Most of the Germans lived in the region on the western border with Germany – the Sudetenland.

Hitler wanted the Sudetenland back as part of Germany. And he was quite prepared to send his army in to do the job.

The plan was for the generals to overthrow and arrest Hitler if he fomented crisis over the Sudetenland. The plans for the putsch were all but finalised when Hitler was assisted by an unwitting ally.

Chamberlain announced that he would meet with Hitler in Munich. Everybody knew right away this meant Hitler had won his gambit, which made arresting him impossible. The plan was shelved.

The Spirit of Zossen

The next attempt took shape while Hitler was planning the invasion of France.

The generals were all veterans of World War I and they remembered what had happened the last time Germany had gone to war against the French.

They were convinced that Hitler's plan would spell the doom of Germany. Their old plans were updated and they got ready to move.

One of the plotters, serving Chief of Staff Franz Halder, insisted on waiting for the outcome of one last meeting with Hitler, where the staff's objections would be formally presented. The meeting didn't go quite the way Halder expected.

Hitler flew into one of his trademark rages, ranting about how he knew all about the generals' disloyalty and promised to crush what he called "the spirit of Zossen" (Zossen was where the general staff were head quartered).

The tirade was probably nothing more than Hitler blowing off steam - something he did frequently. But Halder was convinced that the plot had been exposed. Once again the plans were shelved.

On 10 May 1940 the Germans invaded France. Six weeks later, on 25 June, it was all over. France had surrendered and in just 46 days the Germans had achieved what they couldn't do in four years from 1914 to 1918. The generals could hardly arrest Hitler now.

Operation Valkyrie

With the Germans achieving success after success, the generals were left with little to do but bide their time.

Then, after Germany had invaded Russia, their armies were bogged down outside Moscow in 1941. The time was right for another attempt to get rid of Hitler.

Henning von Tresckow, the commander of the Moscow military district, took charge of the plot and worked it up into a full-scale plan codenamed Operation Valkyrie.

The plotters made contact with both British and American intelligence and prepared for a

military occupation of Berlin. Most importantly, the plotters' resolve had hardened. This time it would not be enough to just arrest Hitler - he would have to die.

On March 13, 1943, shortly after the surrender at Stalingrad and just before the disaster at Kursk, Hitler arrived in Smolensk for consultations.

One of the plotters, Helmuth Stieff. gave one of Hitler's aides a case of brandy for the plane trip back. Two of the bottles inside were not filled with brandy, but rather with explosives prepared by British intelligence. They were set with a 30-minute timer.

It was the perfect plan. Except for one small flaw. Two hours after take off, Hitler's plane landed safely in Berlin. The bombs had both failed to detonate.

Another plotter hurried to switch the case with another case of real brandy. On investigation it was discovered that both of the bombs had been duds.

One week after the failed bomb plot, Hitler was scheduled to speak at an exhibition of war trophies in Berlin. A German colonel got there first with a bomb in his pocket. His plan was to set the bomb's 10-minute timer and stand next to Hitler until it went off.

At the last moment, the colonel was told Hitler would only be staying for around eight minutes. That was cutting it too close. The would-be bomber disabled the device and gave up.

A few months later, in November 1943, Hitler was scheduled to have a look at some winter uniforms the *Wehrmacht* had ordered.

One of those selected to model the uniforms was Axel von dem Bussche, a *Wehrmacht* colonel. He had once witnessed a mass shooting in the east and since then had no love for Hitler or the Nazis.

His plan was simple. He would carry a grenade in his pocket. Then, as Hitler approached him, he would pull the pin and tackle Hitler.

The plan would probably have worked. Yet, as had happened in the past, the plan was thwarted by the Allies.

An Allied bombing raid destroyed the train that was carrying the uniforms and the show was cancelled.

The 20 July plot

Operation Valkyrie's big plot finally came off on 20 July 1944.

The attempt to kill Hitler took place at *Wolfsschanze* (Wolf's Lair). It was Hitler's first Eastern Front military headquarters and was built for the start of Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.

Count Claus von Stauffenberg, a *Wehrmacht* colonel, would place a British-made suitcase bomb in Hitler's situation room. It would detonate while Hitler was attending a briefing.

What many people may not know was that there were three previous plots to kill Hitler at the Wolf's Lair.

In 1943 an unknown Pole tried to kill Hitler at the Wolf's Lair. Little information is available on this plot, but the attempt didn't even come close.

The attempt in November 1943 by Colonel Axel von dem Bussche would also have taken place at the Wolf's Lair.

When the demonstration of the new winter uniforms was finally set to go ahead at the Wolf's Lair, von dem Bussche was no longer available. He had been wounded in action earlier.

A young infantry officer, Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist-Schmenzin, was then designated to kill Hitler.

Kleist planned to set off explosives hidden in his briefcase. But like earlier attempts, the plan was not carried out, as Hitler kept putting off the scheduled uniform demonstration.

After the plot's failure, he managed to cover up his resistance activities and proceedings against him were dropped in December 1944 for want of evidence.

He was, thereby, spared a trial before the *Volksgerichtshof*, (People's Court) which would almost certainly have ended with a death sentence, as it did for many of his fellow plotters, including his own father. However, he was imprisoned at the Ravensbrück concentration camp, and subsequently sent to the front, where he remained until the war ended. He died in Munich on 8 March 2013 at the age of 80.

The attempt on 20 July 1944 came very close to succeeding. The location of the briefing had been unexpectedly changed from the subterranean *Führerbunker* to Albert Speer's wooden hut due to it being a hot summer's day.

AFTERMATH: Members of the German High Command survey the damage cause by the bomb on 20 July 1944. To the left are Martin Bormann and head of the *Luftwaffe* Hermann Göring.

Von Stauffenberg entered the briefing room carrying a briefcase containing two small bombs. He left the room to arm the first bomb with specially adapted pliers, a task made difficult because he had lost his right hand and had only three fingers on his left. A guard knocked and opened the door, urging him to hurry as the meeting was about to begin.

As a result, Stauffenberg was able to arm only one of the bombs. He left the second bomb with his aide-de-camp, Werner von Haeften, and returned to the briefing room, where he placed the briefcase under the conference table, as close as he could to Hitler. Some minutes later, he excused himself and left the room. After his exit, the briefcase was inadvertently moved behind a thick wooden table leg by Colonel Heinz Brandt. This action probably saved Hitler's life.

When the bomb went off the table shield Hitler from the main force of the explosion. The bomb wasn't designed with any shrapnel, so everybody who wasn't killed by the blast force alone was more-or-less okay and Hitler was only slightly wounded.

It eventually turned out that the conspiracy had been compromised by the SS, and Himmler himself knew the names of almost every plotter, thanks to an outrageous act of negligence on the part of American intelligence.

The plotters had been in regular contact with Allen Dulles, the Organisation of Strategic Services (OSS) station chief in Switzerland. Dulles would later go on to head the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The liaison, Hans Bernd Gisevius, visited Dulles and gave him a list of the conspirators. Gisevius hated von Stauffenberg for personal reasons, so he didn't include the man's name on the list. That's why, when Dulles transmitted the names over a compromised channel, the SS agents who intercepted the message were at a loss to know who the actual bomber was.

In the 24 hours following the bombing, the Gestapo effortlessly rounded up almost all of the conspirators who survived. Beck had committed suicide with a gunshot to the head on the night Valkyrie failed. Von Tresckow, at his post on the Eastern Front, got news of the failure over the radio, grabbed a grenade, walked out toward the Soviet lines, and blew himself away.

The SS reaction to the July 20 plot was as brutal as it was swift. Thousands of people, both real and alleged plotters, were rounded up and executed. Many were tortured for days before execution. Leading plotters were given a show trial and slowly hung from piano wire suspended on meat hooks.

Abwehr chief Wilhelm Canaris, who had been swept up in the July 20 backlash, was executed at Flossenbürg concentration camp on 9 April 1945. He was survived by a widow who spent the rest of her life collecting a pension from the CIA, hinting at the role American intelligence had played in these failed plots.

Four months after the last attempt on his life, Hitler moved into a bunker under the Chancellery building in Berlin. Five months after that, he took his own life with cyanide and a self-inflicted gunshot, finally achieving what so many other had failed to do.

Main Battle Tanks

This month we look at the Main Battle Tanks of ten countries.

Leonardo da Vinci is often credited with the invention of a war machine that looked like the first tank.

The tank was originally designed as a special weapon to solve an unusual tactical situation: the stalemate of the trenches on the Western Front.

The armoured tank was intended to be able to protect against bullets and shell splinters, and pass through barbed wire in a way infantry units could not hope to, thus allowing the stalemate to be broken.

The first offensive using tanks took place on 15 September 1916, during the Battle of the Somme. Forty-nine of the Mark I type were committed, of which 32 were mechanically fit to take part in the advance and achieved some small, local successes.

Though initially crude and unreliable, tanks eventually became a mainstay of ground armies. By World War II, tank design had advanced significantly, and tanks were used in quantity in all land theatres of the war. The Cold War saw the rise of modern tank doctrine and the rise of the general-purpose main battle tank. The tank still provides the backbone to land combat operations in the 21st century.

M1A2 Abrams - United States

Weight: 65 t.
Hull length: 7.93 m
Width: 3.66 m
Height: 2.44 m
Crew: Four (Commander/machine gunner, gunner, loader, driver)
Main Armament: 120 mm L/44 M256A1 smoothbore gun (42 rounds)
Secondary Armament: 1 x 12.7 mm M2HB heavy machine gun with 900 rounds
2 x 7.62 mm M240 machine guns with 10,400 rounds (1 pintle-mounted, 1 coaxial)
Engine: Honeywell AGT1500C multi-fuel turbine engine 1,500 shp (1,120 kW)
Range: 426 km
Road Speed: 67 km/h
Off-road Speed: 40 km/h

The M1 Abrams is an American third-generation main battle tank named for General Creighton Abrams. Highly mobile, designed for modern armoured ground warfare, the M1 is well armed and heavily armoured. Notable features include a powerful AGT1500 multifuel turbine engine, sophisticated composite armour, and separate ammunition storage in a blow-out compartment for crew safety. It is one of the heaviest main battle tanks in service.

The M1 Abrams entered U.S. service in 1980, ultimately replacing the M60 tank. The M1 is the main battle tank of the United States Army and Marine Corps, and is also used by the armies of Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Australia, and Iraq.

Type 99A - China

Weight: 58 t.
Hull length: 7 m
Width: 3.7 m
Height: 2.35 m
Crew: Three
Main Armament: 125 mm ZPT-98 smoothbore gun capable of firing ATGMs
Secondary Armament: Type 85 heavy machine gun
Type 59 7.62 mm coaxial machine gun
Engine: Diesel 1,500 hp (1,119 kW)
Range: 600 km
Road Speed: 80 km/h
Off-road Speed: 60 km/h

The Type 99 (Chinese: Jiǔjiǔshì) or ZTZ99 is a Chinese third generation main battle tank. The vehicle was a replacement for the aging Type 88 introduced in the late 1980s. The Type 99 MBT was China's first mass-produced third generation main battle tank.

The tank entered People's Liberation Army (PLA) service in 2001. The People's Liberation Army Ground Force (PLAGF) is the sole operator of the Type 99. Three main versions of the Type 99 have been deployed, the Type 98 prototype, Type 99 and the Type 99A.

T-14 Armata - Russia

The T-14 Armata is a 4th Generation Russian main battle tank based on the Armata Universal Combat Platform. It is the first series-produced next generation tank. The Russian Army planned to acquire 2,300 T-14s in the period 2015–2020 but production and fiscal shortfalls, pushed the date to 2025. The first batch of 100 tanks will be deployed to the Taman division, and it is expected to be completed by 2020; tanks will be transferred only after the completion of all state tests.

Featuring a number of innovative characteristics, the T-14 represents a new generation of Russian main battle tanks. The most significant novelty is an unmanned turret, with the crew of three seated in an armoured capsule in the front of the hull. The development of the tank took five years.

Weight: 48 t.
Hull length: 8.7 m
Width: 3.5 m
Height: 3.3 m
Crew: Three
Main Armament: 125 mm smoothbore 2A82-1M tank cannon with 45 rounds (32 of them in the autoloader)
Secondary Armament: 12.7 mm Kord machine gun (6P49), 7.62 mm PKTM machine gun (6P7K)
Engine: Diesel 1,500–2,000 hp
Range: 500 km
Road Speed: 80–90 km/h

Challenger 2 - Britain

Weight: 62.5 t.
Hull length: 8.3 m
Width: 3.5 m
Height: 2.49 m
Crew: Four (Commander, gunner, loader/operator, driver)
Main Armament: L30A1 120 mm rifled gun with 50 rounds
Secondary Armament: Coaxial 7.62 mm L94A1 chain gun EX-34 (chain gun), 7.62 mm L37A2 Commander's cupola machine gun
Engine: Perkins CV12-6A V12 diesel 26.1 litre 1,200 bhp (890 kW)
Range: 550 km
Road Speed: 59 km/h
Off-road Speed: 40 km/h

The FV4034 Challenger 2 is a British main battle tank (MBT) in service with the armies of the United Kingdom and Oman. It was designed and built by the British company Vickers Defence Systems (now known as BAE Systems Land & Armaments).

The tank entered service with the British Army in 1998, with the last delivered in 2002. It is expected to remain in service until 2035.

AMX Leclerc - France

Weight: 56.3 t.
Hull length: 9.87 m
Width: 3.60 m
Height: 2.53 m
Crew: Three (Commander, gunner, driver)
Main Armament: GIAT CN120-26/52 120mm tank gun
Secondary Armament: 12.7 mm coaxial M2HB machine gun (1,100 rounds)
7.62 mm machine gun (3,000 rounds)
Engine: V8X SACM (Wärtsilä) 8-cylinder diesel engine 1,100 kW (1,500 hp)
Range: 550 km
Road Speed: 72 km/h

The Char Leclerc is a main battle tank (MBT) built by GIAT, now Nexter of France. It was named in honour of General Philippe Leclerc de Hauteclocque, who led the French element of the drive towards Paris while in command of the Free French 2nd Armoured Division (2e DB) in World War II.

The Leclerc is in service with the French Army and the army of the United Arab Emirates. In production since 1991, the Leclerc entered French service in 1992, replacing the AMX 30 as the country's main armoured platform. The price in 2011 was €9.3 million, which made it the most expensive tank in history at the time.

Leopard 2 - Germany

Weight: 62.3 t.
Hull length: 9.97 m
Width: 3.75 m
Height: 3.0 m
Crew: Four
Main Armament: 1× 120 mm Rheinmetall L/55 smoothbore gun (42 rounds)
Secondary Armament: 2× 7.62 mm MG3A1 (4,750 rounds)
Engine: MTU MB 873 Ka-501 liquid-cooled V12 twin-turbo diesel engine (1,479 hp, 1,103 kW)
Range: 550 km
Road Speed: 68 km/h

The Leopard 2 is a main battle tank developed by Krauss-Maffei in the 1970s for the West German Army. The tank first entered service in 1979 and succeeded the earlier Leopard 1 as the main battle tank of the German Army.

The Leopard 2 was used in Kosovo with the German Army, and has seen action in Afghanistan with the Danish and Canadian contributions to the International Security Assistance Force, as well as also seeing action in Syria with the Turkish Armed Forces against ISIS and the YPG.

Merkava Mk4 - Israel

Weight: 65.5 t.
Hull length: 7.60 m
Width: 3.72 m
Height: 2.66 m
Crew: Four (Commander, gunner, loader, driver)
Main Armament: 120 mm MG253 smoothbore gun, capable of firing LAHAT ATGM
Secondary Armament: 1 × 12.7 mm MG
2 × 7.62 mm MG
1 × 60 mm internal mortar
Engine: 1,500 hp (1,119 kW) turbocharged diesel engine
Range: 500 km
Road Speed: 64 km/h
Off-road Speed: 55 km/h

The Merkava is a main battle tank used by the Israel Defence Forces. The tank began development in 1970,and entered official service in 1978. It was first used extensively in the 1982 Lebanon War.

Design criteria include rapid repair of battle damage, survivability, cost-effectiveness and off-road performance. The Merkava is protected by an Israeli-developed composite armour. Advanced models include modular armour design which enables ordnance crews to replace only the damaged part. Besides the crew, it can also carry six passengers.

Olifant 1A/1B - South Africa

The name is derived from the Afrikaans word for elephant. The layout of the Olifant mk1 was very similar to that of the South African Semel tank which was based on an upgraded conversion of the British Centurion tanks. The Olifant has been continually upgraded. The Mk1A entered full-scale production in 1983 and the first were in service by 1985. In the same year that the mk1A entered the production phase, development work was started on the mk1B, and these tanks were in production during the 1990s and are operational in the South African National Defence Force.

Weight: 56 t.
Hull length: 7.56 m
Width: 3.39 m
Height: 2.94 m
Crew: Four
Main Armament: 105mm GT3B semi-automatic quick firing gun
Secondary Armament: 2.7 mm AA machine gun
7.62 mm coaxial machine gun
Engine: Continental 29 litre turbo-charged air-cooled V12 diesel engine
Range: 500 km
Road Speed: 65 km/h

Arjun - India

Weight: 58.5 t.
Hull length: 10.638 m
Width: 3.864 m
Height: 2.32 metres m
Crew: Four (Commander, gunner, loader and driver)
Main Armament: 120 mm rifled gun
Secondary Armament: 1 × 7.62mm co-axial Browning MG
1 x 7.62mm turret Browning MG
Engine: Unknown
Range: Unknown
Road Speed: Unknown

The Arjun is a third generation main battle tank developed by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), for the Indian Army. The tank is named after Arjun, the main protagonist, an archer prince of the Indian epic Mahabharata.

The Arjun entered service with the Indian Army in 2004. The tanks were first inducted into the 43 Armoured Regiment, Indian Army Armoured Corps while the latest induction has been into the 75 Armoured Regiment on 12 March 2011.

Al-Zarrar - Pakistan

Weight:44 t.
Hull length: 9.50 m
Width: 3.30 m
Height: 2.50 m
Crew: Four
Main Armament: 125 mm smoothbore gun
Secondary Armament: 12.7 mm external anti-aircraft machine gun
7.62 mm coaxial machine gun
Engine: 1xKMDB 12 cylinder liquid cooled diesel 730 hp
Range: 450 km
Road Speed: 65 km/h

The Al-Zarrar is a second generation main battle tank (MBT), currently in the services of the Pakistan Army since 2004. The tank is named as Al-Zarrar, which means "main striker" in Arabic and Persian languages.

It is an upgrade of Pakistan's aging Chinese Type 59 tanks (a design that in turn was based on the Soviet T-54A from the mid 1950s), developed with Ukrainian assistance and manufactured by the Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT)

TESTED IN BATTLE: An SADF Olifant Mk1A passes a FAPLA M-46 130 mm field gun in Angola during operations in 1987/88. It was the first time that South African tanks had been used in battle since World War II.

Heinrich Himmler

One of Hitler's most loyal sycophants and the architect of the Holocaust, he ruthlessly despatched those that stood in his way as he rose to a position of power second only to that of his Fuhrer. Yet at the end he would spectacularly betray his master.

Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel and a leading member of the Nazi Party of Germany, Himmler was one of the most powerful men in Nazi Germany and one of the people most directly responsible for the Holocaust.

Heinrich Luitpold Himmler was born in Munich on 7 October 1900. He was the second of three sons born to Joseph Gebhard Himmler and Anna Maria Himmler.

His father, known as Gebhard, was a school teacher while his mother was a devout Roman Catholic.

He was named Heinrich after his godfather, Prince Heinrich of Bavaria, a member of the Bavarian royal family. The prince has been tutored by Gebhard.

While his family was not rich, they were well off and respected within the local community.

Himmler attended a grammar school in Landshut, where his father was the deputy headmaster. Himmler did well at school, although he struggled with sports and athletics.

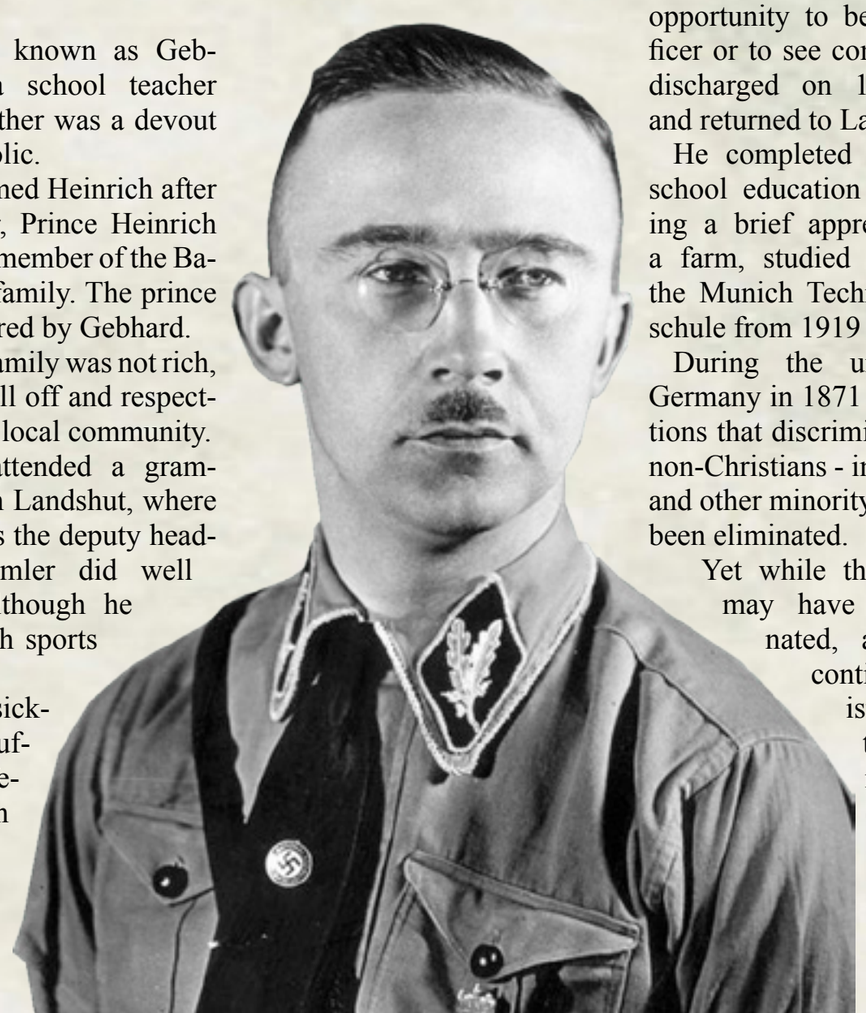
He was a sickly boy and suffered from lifelong stomach complaints and other ailments.

In his youth he trained with weights and exercised to become stronger.

From the age of ten he kept a diary and it shows that he took a keen interest in current events, duelling and the serious discussion of religion and sex.

Himmler the cadet

Himmler joined the Landshut Cadet Corps in 1915 and, through his father's connections with the royal family, was accepted as an officer candidate. He enlisted with the reserve battalion of the 11th Bavarian Regiment in December 1917.



Himmler was keen to see action. His elder brother, Gebhard, served on the western front. He was awarded the Iron Cross and later promoted to lieutenant.

While Himmler was still in training, the war ended in November 1918, denying him the opportunity to become an officer or to see combat. He was discharged on 18 December and returned to Landshut.

He completed his grammar school education and, following a brief apprenticeship on a farm, studied agronomy at the Munich Technische Hochschule from 1919 to 1922.

During the unification of Germany in 1871 many regulations that discriminated against non-Christians - including Jews and other minority groups - had been eliminated.

Yet while the regulations may have been eliminated, anti-Semitism continued to exist and in fact thrive in Germany and other parts of Europe.

By the time he went to university Himmler was anti-Semitic, but not exceptionally so. He remained a devout Catholic and spent most of his leisure time with members of his fencing fraternity.

During his second year at university, Himmler increased his attempts to pursue a military career. While he was not successful, he did extend his involvement in the paramilitary scene in Munich.

It was during this period that he first met Ernst Röhm. An early member of the Nazi Party and co-founder of the *Sturmabteilung* (Storm Battalion, SA), Röhm was a decorated combat veteran of World War I. This was something that Himmler admired.

At Röhm's suggestion, Himmler joined his anti-Semitic nationalist group, the *Bund Reichskriegsflagge* (Imperial War Flag Society).

His diary entries in 1922 show that Himmler was becoming more interested in the "Jewish question". His diary contained an increasing number of anti-Semitic remarks and recorded a number of discussions about Jews with his classmates.

His reading lists, as recorded in his diary, were dominated by anti-Semitic pamphlets, German myths, and occult tracts.

After the murder of Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau on 24 June, Himmler's political views veered towards the radical right, and he took part in demonstrations against the Treaty of Versailles. Hyperinflation was raging, and his parents could no longer afford to educate all three sons. Disappointed by his failure to make a career in the military and his parents' inability to finance his doctoral studies, he was forced to take a low-paying office job after obtaining his agricultural diploma. He remained in this position until September 1923.

Himmler the Nazi activist

In August 1923, with the Party number 14,303, Heinrich Himmler became a member of the Nazi Party.

As a member of Röhm's paramilitary unit, Himmler was involved in the unsuccessful Beer Hall Putsch.

He was questioned by the police about his role in the putsch, but was not charged because of insufficient evidence. However, he lost his job, was unable to find employment as an agronomist, and had to move in with his parents in Munich. Frustrated by these failures, he became ever more irritable, aggressive, and opinionated, alienating both friends and family members.

During the following year he abandoned Catholicism, instead focusing on the occult and in anti-Semitism. Germanic mythology, reinforced by occult ideas, became a religion for him.

Initially Himmler was not all that impressed with Hitler. Not was he swept up in the cult of Führer worship. He did, however, regard him as useful for the party.

Following the disarray of Hitler's arrest in the wake of the Beer Hall Putsch, Himmler took full advantage of the situation to consolidate and advance his own position in the party.

From mid-1924 he worked as a party secretary and propaganda assistant, travelling all over Bavaria and agitating on behalf of the party.

When the Nazi Party reformed under Hitler in 1925, Himmler was placed in charge of the party office in Lower Bavaria.

In 1925 Himmler joined the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) as an SS-Führer (SS-Leader); his SS number was 168. The SS, initially part of the much larger SA, was formed in 1923 for Hitler's personal protection, and was re-formed in 1925 as an elite unit of the SA.

Himmler's first leadership position in the SS was that of *SS-Gauführer* (district leader) in Lower Bavaria from 1926.

In September 1927, Himmler told Hitler of his vision to transform the SS into a loyal, powerful, racially pure elite unit. Convinced that Himmler was the man for the job, Hitler appointed him Deputy Reichsführer-SS, with the rank of *SS-Oberführer.*

Himmler met his future wife, Margarete Boden, in 1927. Seven years his senior, she was a nurse who shared his interest in herbal medicine and homoeopathy, and was part owner of a small private clinic. They were married in July 1928, and their only child, Gudrun, was born on 8 August 1929.

Himmler, Reichsführer-SS

Upon the resignation of SS commander Erhard Heiden in January 1929, Himmler assumed the position of Reichsführer-SS with Hitler's approval.

One of his first responsibili-

ties was to organise SS participants at the Nuremberg Rally that September.

Over the next year, Himmler grew the SS from a force of about 290 men to about 3,000. By 1930 Himmler had persuaded Hitler to run the SS as a separate organisation, although it was officially still subordinate to the SA.

In the 1932 election, the Nazis won 37.3 percent of the vote and Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany. After the Reichstag building was set on fire only a month after Hitler was sworn in, Hitler forced President Paul von Hindenburg to sign the Reichstag Fire Decree, which suspended basic rights and allowed detention without trial.

Von Hindenburg died on 2 August 1934, and Hitler became both head of state and head of government under the title *Führer und Reichskanzler* (leader and chancellor). The Nazi Party's rise to power provided Himmler and the SS an unfettered opportunity to thrive.

By 1933, the SS numbered 52,000 members. Strict membership requirements ensured that all members were of Hitler's Aryan *Herrenvolk* ("Aryan master race"). Applicants were vetted for Nordic qualities. Naturally no-one was brave enough, or stupid enough, to tell Himmler that, by his own standards, he did not meet the requirements.

In 1931 he appointed Reinhard Heydrich chief of the new Ic Service (intelligence service), which was renamed the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD: Security Service) in 1932.

MEET AND GREET: Adolf Hitler (left) shakes hands with Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer-SS.

That same year, Hitler promoted Himmler to the rank of SS-Obergruppenführer, equal in rank to the senior SA commanders.

Hermann Göring had created a Prussian secret police force, the *Geheime Staatspolizei* or Gestapo in 1933. Its main task was to counteract the power of the SA. Control of the Gestapo was handed over to Himmler on 20 April 1934.

On 21 June 1934 Hitler decided that Röhm and the SA leadership had to be eliminated. In what became known as "The Night of the Long Knives", Röhm and between 80 and 200 members of the SA leadership were killed between 30 June and 2 July 1934. With the SA thus neutralised, the SS became an independent organisation answerable only to Hitler on 20 July 1934.

Himmler, World War II

When Hitler and his army chiefs asked for a pretext for the invasion of Poland in 1939, Himmler, Heydrich, and Heinrich Müller masterminded and carried out a false flag project code-named Operation Himmler.

German soldiers dressed in Polish uniforms undertook border skirmishes which deceptively suggested Polish aggression against Germany. The incidents were then used in Nazi propaganda to justify the invasion of Poland, the opening event of World War II.

At the beginning of the war against Poland, Hitler authorised the killing of Polish civilians, including Jews and ethnic Poles. The *Einsatzgruppen* (SS Special Action Squads) had originally been formed by Heydrich to secure government papers and offices in areas taken over by Germany before World War II.

Authorised by Hitler and under the direction of Himmler and Heydrich, the Einsatzgruppen units - now repurposed as death squads - followed the Heer (army) into Poland, and by the end of 1939 they had murdered some 65,000 intellectuals and other civilians. Under Himmler's orders via

ROGUES GALLERY: Himmler, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, and other SS officials visiting Mauthausen concentration camp in 1941.

the RSHA, these squads were also tasked with rounding up Jews and others for placement in ghettos and concentration camps.

When the German invaded Russia in 1941, they were closely followed by the Einsatzgruppen who were tasked with rounding up and killing Jews and others deemed undesirable by the Nazi state.

In addition, 2.8 million Soviet prisoners of war died of starvation, mistreatment or executions in just eight months of 1941–42.

As many as 500,000 Soviet prisoners of war died or were executed in Nazi concentration camps over the course of the war; most of them were shot or gassed.

By early 1941, following Himmler's orders, ten concentration camps had been constructed in which inmates were subjected to forced labour. Jews from all over Germany and the occupied territories were deported to the camps or confined to ghettos.

As the Germans were pushed back from Moscow in December 1941, signalling that the expected quick defeat of the Soviet Union had failed to materialize, Hitler and other Nazi officials realised that mass deportations to the east would no longer be possible. As a result, instead of deportation, many Jews in Europe were destined for death.

Himmler and the Holocaust

After Germany had declared war on America in December 1941, Hitler finally resolved that the Jews of Europe were to be "exterminated."

Reinhard Heydrich arranged a meeting, held on 20 January 1942 at Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin. Attended by top Nazi officials, it was used to outline the plans for the "final solution to the Jewish question".

Heydrich detailed how those Jews able to work would be worked to death; those unable to work would be killed outright. Heydrich calculated the number of Jews to be killed at 11 million, and told the attendees that Hitler had placed Himmler in charge of the plan.

Himmler took over leadership of the RSHA and stepped up the pace of the killing of Jews in *Aktion Reinhard* (Operation Reinhard), named in Heydrich's honour. Heydrich had been assassinated in Prague in an operation carried out by members of Czechoslovakia's army-in-exile who had been trained by the British Special Operations Executive. He ordered the Aktion Reinhard camps,the first extermination camps, to be constructed at Bełżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka.

Himmler was a main architect of the Holocaust, using his deep belief in the racist Nazi ideology to justify the murder of millions of victims.

Himmler, the beginning of the end

On 20 July 1944, a group of German army officers led by Claus von Stauffenberg and including some of the highest-ranked members of the German armed forces attempted to assassinate Hitler, but failed to do so.

Though Himmler was embarrassed by his failure to uncover the plot, it led to an increase in his powers and authority.

He formed a special commission that arrested over 5,000 suspected and known opponents of the regime. Hitler ordered brutal reprisals that resulted in the execution of more than 4,900 people.

On 6 June 1944 the Western Allies launched Operation

Overlord, the amphibious invasion of northern France. In response Heeresgruppe Oberrhein (Army Group Upper Rhine) was formed to engage and stop the advancing Allies. In late 1944, Hitler appointed Himmler commander-in-chief of Army Group Upper Rhine.

On 26 September 1944 Hitler ordered Himmler to create special army units, the Volkssturm ("People's Storm" or "People's Army"). All males aged sixteen to sixty were eligible for conscription into this militia.

By October 1944, children as young as fourteen were being enlisted. Because of severe shortages in weapons and equipment and lack of training, members of the Volkssturm were poorly prepared for combat, and about 175,000 of them lost their lives in the final months of the war.

The *Heeresgruppe Weichsel* (Army Group Vistula) had been hastily formed to stop the Soviet Red Army's advance. On 25 January 1945, in spite of Himmler's lack of military experience, Hitler appointed him as commander.

In early 1945 Himmler could see that the writing was on the wall. The German war effort was on the verge of collapse and Himmler's relationship with Hitler had deteriorated. Himmler decided that it was time to negotiate an independent peace settlement.

His masseur, Felix Kersten, who had moved to Sweden, acted as an intermediary in negotiations with Count Folke Bernadotte, head of the Swedish Red Cross. Letters were exchanged between the two men, and direct meetings were arranged by Walter Schellenberg of the RSHA.

Himmler and Hitler met for the last time in Berlin on Hitler's birthday, 20 April 1945. Once again Himmler swore unswerving loyalty to Hitler.

At a military briefing on that day, Hitler stated that he would not leave Berlin, in spite of Soviet advances. Along with Göring, Himmler quickly left the city after the briefing.

On 23 April, Himmler met directly with Bernadotte at the Swedish consulate in Lübeck. Representing himself as the provisional leader of Germany, he claimed that Hitler would be dead within the next few days. Hoping that the British and Americans would fight the Soviets alongside what remained of the Wehrmacht, Himmler asked Bernadotte to inform General Dwight Eisenhower that Germany wished to surrender to the West. Bernadotte asked Himmler to put his proposal in writing, and Himmler obliged.

Meanwhile, Göring had sent a telegram, a few hours earlier, asking Hitler for permission to assume leadership of the Reich - an act that Hitler, under the prodding of Martin Bormann, interpreted as a demand to step down or face a coup.

On 27 April, Himmler's SS representative at Hitler's HQ in Berlin, Hermann Fegelein, was caught in civilian clothes preparing to desert; he was arrested and brought back to the *Führerbunker*.

On the evening of 28 April, the BBC broadcast a Reuters news report about Himmler's attempted negotiations with the western Allies.

NEAR THE END: By early 1945 Himmler realised that Germany had lost the war. This photo was taken about a month before Hitler committed suicide.

Hitler, who had long considered Himmler to be second only to Joseph Goebbels in loyalty (he called Himmler "the loyal Heinrich"), flew into a rage at this apparent betrayal. Hitler told those who were still with him in the bunker complex that Himmler's act was the worst treachery he had ever known and ordered his arrest. Fegelein was court-martialed and shot.

By this time, the Soviets had advanced to the Potsdamerplatz, only 300 metres from the Reich Chancellery, and were preparing to storm the Chancellery.

This report, combined with Himmler's treachery, prompted Hitler to write his last will and testament. In the testament, completed on 29 April - one day prior to his suicide - Hitler declared both Himmler and Göring to be traitors. He

THE END: Heinrich Himmler lies died after committing suicide with a potassium cyanide pill.

stripped Himmler of all of his party and state offices and expelled him from the Nazi Party.

Himmler, the end

Himmler came to the grim realisation that the Allies were not interested in negotiating with him. In fact he had been declared a war criminal.

Rejected by his former comrades and hunted by the Allies, Himmler decided that it was time to go into hiding. He had not really prepared for it, but he had equipped himself with a forged Wehrmacht paybook under the name of Sergeant Heinrich Hitzinger.

He shaved his moustache off, removed his glasses, and wore a patch over one eye. With a small band of companions, he headed south on 11 May to Friedrichskoog, without a final destination in mind. They continued on to Neuhaus, where the group split up.

On 21 May, Himmler and two aides were stopped and detained at a checkpoint set up by former Soviet POWs. Over the following two days, he was moved around to several camps and was brought to the British 31st Civilian Interrogation Camp near Lüneburg, on 23 May 1945.

Not suspecting for a minute who he had in his custody, the duty officer, Captain Thomas Selvester, began a routine interrogation of the prisoner.

For some reason Himmler admitted who he was. Perhaps he though he would receive preferential treatment. Captain Selvester had the prisoner searched before he was taken to the headquarters of the Second British Army in Lüneburg.

Medical officer Doctor Wells conducted a medical exam on Himmler. However, when the doctor tried to examine the inside of Himmler's mouth he was reluctant to open it. Himmler jerked his head away and then bit into a hidden potassium cyanide pill before collapsing to the ground.

Within 15 minutes Heinrich Luitpold Himmler, the man who had been responsible for millions of deaths, was dead. He was 44 years old.

Shortly afterward, Himmler's body was buried in an unmarked grave near Lüneburg. The grave's exact location remains unknown to this day.

SS Symbolism

Himmler was interested in mysticism and the occult from an early age and he viewed the SS as an "order" along the lines of the Teutonic Knights.

When members of the SS were sworn in, they had to take an oath. "I vow to you, Adolf Hitler, as Führer and chancellor of the German Reich, loyalty and bravery. I vow to you and to the leaders that you set for me, absolute allegiance until death. So help me God"

The *SS-Ehrenring* ("SS Honour Ring"), unofficially called *Totenkopfring* ("Death's Head Ring"), was an award of Heinrich Himmler's Schutzstaffel (SS). It was not a state decoration, but rather a personal gift bestowed by Himmler. The SS Honour Sword and SS Honour Dagger were similar awards.

Hunter Group

This year the Hunter Group, which later went on to become 2 Reconnaissance Commando, would have turned 50 years old. **Paul J. Els** *has written a book,* Saturday Soldiers- The Hunter Group. *This article was taken from the book.*

The idea of a special trained group of men was born as early as 1966, thanks to the clear thinking of a citizen force officer who, in 1965 was promoted to Officer Commanding South African Irish Regiment, Commandant Gil van Kerckhoven.

He was faced with the difficult task of motivating Junior Officers and NCOs with the challenging task of improving their level of training, over and above that of the accepted training methods (of the SADF at that time still using the training manuals from World War II and British doctrine).

Van Kerckhoven felt that the methods were out dated, especially if used against an enemy who specialise in guerrilla-type warfare. The emphasis in training and level of command in guerrilla warfare, compared to conventional warfare, lies with the individual soldier and the corporals who control the section.

The only way to achieve this was to start out by using volunteers and at the time would not to be easy; most members of the Citizen Force units were not that motivated. The only way for success was to recruit volunteers by offering high risk and dangerous aspects such as hand to hand combat, explosive booby traps, instinctive quick kill shooting, counter ambush patrols, and to provide encouragement to men who would be prepared to dedicate their spare time to do the training.

On 11 May 1968, a small group of people met at the Headquarters of the SAIR at the Doornkop Military Base, to discuss training. They were Commandant G. van Kerckhoven JCD, Officer Commanding the Regiment, Major E.M. Kristal the second in command, Lieutenant J.P. Ullmann, Warrant Officer 2 B.J. Wood, Private Ian Langley of the Johannesburg North Commando, and a civilian, Mr J. Grant-Grierson.

It was at this base where this group was formed and the training began.

To make the training more realistic, they were given lectures, presented by Lieutenant I. Mihailovich on all aspects of communism; Mihailovich is fondly remembered as the political commissar of the Hunter Group.

During June 1968 the first volunteers arrived and were trained under command of the SAIR, as assistant instructors. The venue for this training was Doornkop military base situated outside Johannesburg, near the Baragwaneth Airport. According to the training schedule the instructors had to attend three full Saturdays training per month and other recruits had to attend every second Saturday afternoon for eight consecutive Saturdays.

ORIGINAL: The original Hunter Group patch - a scorpion on a yellow background.

Many recruits came from well-known Citizen Force (CF) units, such as ¬the SAS Rand (CF Navy land-based at Wemmerpan), Imperial Light Horse (ILH - CF Armoured Cars based at Doornkop), The Transvaal Scottish, 6 Light Anti-Aircraft (CF attached to 72 Brigade), Rand Light infantry CF (RLI) and various commando units including West Park, East Park, Meyerton, Roodepoort, Wemmerpan, Atlas and Boksburg.

Wits Command used the Hunters as an Army public relations showpiece and instructed the group to do demonstrations and exhibitions at various functions and Army-day shows.

THE FIRST: One of the first photographs ever taken of any Hunter group members: Standing: left to right: Cpl Mouse Pockley, Cmdt Gil van Kerckhoven, Joe Grant-Grierson, and Sgt K. Lucy. Seated: S/Sgt Willy Ward, Capt Botten, Ian Langley, Cpl Marty Koekemoer and Sgt Bill du Toit (NN).

Amongst these were demonstrations of mock battles at the Old Milner Park show grounds at the Rand Easter Show and various agricultural shows in the Pretoria, Witwatersrand and Vereeniging area, where public and military interest soon proved fruitful, as there was a sudden influx of recruits.

The Hunters' activities were receiving more and more attention throughout South Africa and General Pop Fraser*, realising that the Hunters were doing a professional job on a part-time basis, arranged for Van Kerckhoven to visit the Portuguese Marine Commando in Luanda, Angola, who had was a typical Special Forces unit. Their selection process was very strict, using psychological factors to build the men up, into a high state of readiness.

During 1971, African Mirror (news filmmaker at the time) made another film of the Hunter training for screening in film theatres. The film was returned to the group and became the Hunter training-film, which was used extensively in future promotions for the group. General Moody screened it at Supreme HQ in Cape Town, which led to Fraser contacting General Fritz Loots, with the purpose of forming a specialised military unit.

The scorpion was chosen for its unobtrusive deadliness, being quietly and efficiently able to deal with prey much larger than itself. The name Hunter is an apt description of anti-guerrilla warfare, and the Group's motto - WE DARE - is self-explanatory.

To make the training more realistic, they were given lectures on all aspects of communism, presented by Lieutenant I. Mihailovich.

Throughout Hunter training the accent was always on leadership and realism.

Basic Hunter training would consist of the following:

- patrolling and patrol techniques
- immediate action drills (e.g.: actions in an ambush)
- individual action drills (individual activities when engaging the enemy: charge, fall, leopard-crawl, observe enemy, fire)
- house-clearing skills and neutralising booby traps
- unarmed combat and close-quarters combat
- abseiling from helicopters and buildings
- survival and tracking
- knife throwing and knife-fighting skills
- methods of silently neutralising an enemy centre
- demolitions, setting booby traps and improved ammunition
- river and obstacle crossing
- establishment of temporary bases with special emphasis on location and defence of bases
- weapons handling and marksmanship
- foreign weapons: firing and stripping of weapons
- first aid and self-aid.

During 1969 the first course to qualify members as assistant Hunter instructors, took place at the Doornkop Military Base.

As the training became more sophisticated, an instructional core was formed; where members then in turn would instruct new arrivals. Proper courses were organised in December 1968.

Training Programme

Saturday afternoon training sessions started during 1969. Instructors were under strict orders to train and lead by example and never to expect recruits to do something that they would not undertake themselves.

At the passing-out parade of the fourth course in June 1969, over 60 men, including a naval contingent from SAS Rand, became the first to wear the coveted and distinctive Scorpion badge (Yellow Back ground), signifying that they had completed volunteer Hunter training. The 240 hours of training every year was tough but stimulating, relentlessly demanding but rewarding and deeply satisfying.

The Hunter Group trained over 1 800 volunteers in part time training including Permanent Force officers and instructors. Its weapons handling concepts were incorporate into the quick kill manual produced at the Military College.

TASK FORCE: After returning from deployment to Rhodesia, members of the South African Police requested training from the Hunter Group.

DON'T MOVE: Two "prisoners' are searched. Part of a training exercise.

Amongst the group were members of the Parachute Battalion. Staff Sergeant Willie Ward, a very enthusiastic member of the Hunter Group and also a very keen skydiver, managed to convince Van Kerckhoven and Lieutenant van Wyk who was a member of the local Air Commandos and had his own aircraft, that all Hunter instructors should become parachute-qualified and to form a parachute club.

Training for the PT phase then commenced once a week on Thursday nights at the Wit Command Drill Hall. After six weeks of training, including PT, exit and landing drills, emergency procedures, parachute packing and some blood, sweat and tears, the great moment had arrived: the men were considered ready to jump.

A very nervous group of 27 men gathered early on Saturday morning, 3 March 1971, for their first jump.

All the men completed their eight-jumps over the next six weeks. Two months later a unique parade was held where Brigadier Meintjies OC Wit Command presented 29 wings, 27 to the jumpers and the instructor, one to the pilot and a special wing to van Kerckhoven for his guts.

A team of Hunter parachutists went to Germany to compete in a world parachute jump event. Although they did not win anything, they gained a vast amount of experience. The team comprised: Corporals B.G. Walls, R. Knoetzer, G.E. Williams and G. Nel.

Towards the end of 1971, van Kerckhoven was promoted to Colonel and transferred to 14 Brigade. The command of the Hunter training group was then given to newly promoted Major Sybie van der Spuy, with Captain Stan Botten as the 2IC and Training Officer, Captain Bach Winterbach as Adjutant and Sergeant Bill du Toit as the quartermaster.

A new chapter begins

A very interesting chapter in the history of the Hunter Group was when, one Saturday during 1971 while they were training at Doornkop, a group of policemen arrived and asked to see the OC.

It appeared that they had just returned from a tour of duty in UDI Rhodesia, where they had found themselves attacked several times by trained insurgents and felt that their training was inadequate for their task.

During the making of the film Shangani Patrol, the filmmakers arrived at the Hunter base, needing assistance with 'props' for 'training' sequences to be filmed. When the film was released on circuit the Hunters put on the static weapons displays at the première.

At the beginning of 1974 Brigadier G.W. Germishuizen was appointed as the OC of Wit Command. One of his first orders to Van der Spuy was to disband the Hunter Group because they could not operate on an unofficial basis in Wit Command.

WHO NEEDS A GUN: Members of the Hunter Group practice unarmed combat.

A historical meeting in May 1974 held at Witwatersrand Command was attended by Brigadier Germishuizen, the Director Infantry with some of his staff, and Major van der Spuy.

The formation of 2 Reconnaissance Commando a Citizen Force unit for Special Forces was formally tabled. A deciding factor in the discussion was the loss to the army of many members who had received special training from 1 Reconnaissance Commando.

You can order *Saturday Soldiers - The Hunter Group* from epos@groep7.co.za.

THE TRAINING NEVER STOPS: Members of the Hunter Group on a training exercise.

NEW IDENTITY: The first shoulder flash of 2 Reconnaissance Commando.

Operation Babylon

While most of the world condemned Israel's attack on the Iraqi nuclear facility at al-Tuwaitha , Operation Babylon actually did the world a huge favour.

Saddam Hussein had spent nearly two decades as a street fighter and assassin for the militant Ba'th Party in Iraq. When the party seized power in 1968, Hussein began his ascendency to the presidency.

In the late 1970s, it became clear to the international community that Iraq was attempting to acquire nuclear weapons through the guise of buying nuclear reactors for power generators.

Hussein, who was now president, was well known for his expansionist ambitions. He also bore an unyielding animosity towards Israel, which he referred to as "the Zionist entity".

If Israel had a supposed nuclear capacity, the Hussein was determined that Iraq would have one as well.

Hussein stepped up his efforts and used diplomatic and financial contacts he had made in France earlier in the decade.

In 1975 he completed a deal with France to sell Iraq the equipment necessary to construct a nuclear reactor at al-Tuwaitha, a research site located on banks of the Tigris River, a mere 20 kilometres from the centre of Baghdad.

The French also agreed to supply Iraq with 72 kilograms of enriched, weapons-grade uranium, which could easily be converted for use in an atomic bomb. Such a bomb, which experts calculated could be completed by the early 1980s, could easily kill at least 100,000 people if dropped on Tel Aviv, the capital of Israel.

The world reacted with alarm to news of the sale. The United States and Great Britain expressed measured diplomatic concern, and the United Nation's International Atomic Energy Agency increased monitoring efforts of Iraq's nuclear program. But it was little more than a slap on the wrist.

In the immediate wake of the 1973-74 oil embargo, the West was reluctant to alienate the Arab world. So it was left to Israel to take more direct action.

It was Israel's intelligence agency, the Mossad, that made the first move in 1979. They intercepted a shipment of nuclear cores from France to Iraq at La Seyne-sur-Mer.

The Mossad agents blew up the warehouse where the shipment was stored, severely damaging the cores.

Terrified of Hussein's reaction to the news, Iraqi officials accepted the damaged goods and kept their mouths shut.

Unfortunate incidents

Over the next 15 months a number of key nuclear scientists from Iraq and other Arab countries met a series of unfortunate accidents while visiting western Europe.

These accidents included hit-and-run automobile accidents, sudden fatal flu-like illnesses, and virulent food poisoning. And a few of them had their throat slit. Mossad were hard at work slowing down the pace of Iraq's nuclear program. Undeterred, Hussein continued to press forward.

"How could a people who only know how to ride camels produce an atomic bomb?" he scoffed when asked about his plans.

Meanwhile, he threatened to suspend payments - and much-needed oil shipments - to France unless the French fulfilled their original contract calling for delivery of 72 pounds of 93% enriched uranium. Naturally the French agreed to honour their terms.

Iraq's nuclear efforts suffered their next blow nine days after the start of the Iran-Iraq was on 30 September 1980. And it was Iran and not Israel that did the deed.

Iran sent two Phantom F-4-E jets to attack several Iraqi targets, among them the uncompleted nuclear reactors at al-Tuwaitha. The Phantoms fired two rockets. One did not explode, and the other hit the housing of one of the reactors, damaging

NUCLEAR AMBITIONS: Iraqi President Saddam Hussein wanted to develop a nuclear program, giving Iraq the ability to build an atomic bomb.

the dome and cooling system, but causing no significant destruction. Hundreds of French and Italian technicians and engineers working at the facility were evacuated, however, and work at al-Tuwaitha ground to a standstill.

Israel was rightly worried over the Iraqi nuclear threat and over the course of the following year Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin considered various options. These options included an attack on Iraq's nuclear reactors.

Such an attack, however, came with major concerns. These including the probable adverse reaction from the rest of the world, and concerns that even though Iraq was at war with Iran, they may still have attacked Israel. Another concern was the distance to the target. It was over 1770 kilometres to the target and back.

There was something else to consider - the reaction of Egypt. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat had brokered a peace treaty with Begin at Camp David in 1979. While an attack would not violate Israel's treaty with Egypt, which called for Israel to pull out of the Sinai in April 1982, Sadat's reaction was still unpredictable.

Operation Babylon

Begin had some hard decisions to make. He weighed the risks and came to the conclusion that a preemptive strike was worth any possible aftereffects. The though of Iraq having nuclear capabilities was just to dangerous to contemplate.

The Israelis felt that a quick, surgical air strike was the best option, and there were two things in their favour.

First of all Iraq was weakened by its ongoing ground war with Iran. The second consideration was even more important.

The reactor was not yet operational, so an attack would not result in any kind of nuclear fallout over Baghdad. This would have been a humanitarian and public-relations disaster.

By the end of March 1981, Mossad reported that foreign workers were returning to al-Tuwaitha, and that construction had resumed on the Osirak nuclear reactor. Begin and his advisors finalized plans for an air strike on the Iraqi facility in early May. It was codenamed Operation Babylon.

After a series of delays, Mossad reported that France had finally delivered all 72 kilograms of enriched uranium to Iraq. It was time for the Israelis to strike.

Just before sunset on Sunday 7 June 1981, Operation Babylon was launched. It had been carefully planned for a Sunday, on the assumption that the 100 to 150 foreign experts employed at the reactor would be absent on the Christian day of rest.

The raid was planned for late afternoon because it would give the Israeli Combat Search and Rescue Team, riding in CH-53 helicopters, all night to search for any downed pilots.

At 15h00 the CH-53s took up their position, hovering at only 30 metres just west of the Jordanian border. The CH-53 crews were not told what the mission was. Their instructions were that if a plane went down they had permission to violate any sovereign airspace to pick up the pilots.

At 16h00 eight of Israel's American-built F-16 fighters took off from Etzion airbase in the Sinai desert. They were carrying extra 1,400 litre fuel tanks

to increase their range.

Due to the distance to the target, weight was a serious consideration. The F-16s were stripped of two of their four air-to-air Sidewinder missiles. The jamming devices for protection against Iraqi MiGs and SAM-6 radars had also been removed.

Despite these attempts to reduce weight the F-16s took off at a weight that exceeded nearly twice the plane's design specifications.

Each F-16 was equipped with special racks that carried two 900 kilogram MK-84 'dumb' bombs. They were called 'dumb' bombs as opposed to 'smart' bombs because they had to be dropped directly on the target. They had no form of guidance system.

The F-16s were escorted by eight F-15 fighter interceptors. They would provide protection against Arab aircraft was well as jamming Iraqi radar over the target. Moreover they would act as communication relay stations to a Boeing 707 command post that would be orbiting over Israel.

The route to the target was anything but easy. They would have to fly over or circumvent seven separate Arab airfield.

There was a very real danger of interception from Jordanian F-5-Es and Iraqi Mirage-4000s, MIG-23, and MIG-25s. At al-Tuwaitha itself, the fighters would face anti-aircraft artillery batteries and SAM-6 missiles.

The route of the attack from take off in the Sinai was east across the Gulf of Acaba, then across the northern part of Saudi Arabia near the border of Jordan, where Israel believed it had discovered some radar blind spots. Additionally, the Israelis had intelligence that the Saudis would only have one of their American-supplied Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) intelligence aircraft in the air at the time of the attack and that it would be overlooking the Persian Gulf.

Radio communication, only to be made at five checkpoints, would be single words in English, the international language of aviation, so that if overheard the communication might be mistaken for a commercial flight.

The eight pilots were divided up into two teams. Each of them had been chosen for their experience in F-16s. Team one included Lt. Col. Zeev Raz, the wing commander, Amos Yadlin, Doobi Yaffi, and Hagai Katz. Team two, led by Lt. Col. Amir Nachumi, included Iftach Spector, Relik Shafir, and Ilan Ramon.

The formation flew low, about 30 metres, and fast, about 360 knots, to avoid detection. Once they were across Saudi Arabia they turned towards Baghdad.

Once they reached their target the attack was over in a matter of minutes. The F-16s swept across the sky in pairs, quickly climbing to 1,500 metres in four seconds, before diving and unleashing their bombs at the target. It was something that had practiced for months in the Sinai.

The first bombs hit the side of the reactor, opening holes for the second set of bombs, which found and destroyed the reactor inside. In all, 14 out of 16 bombs hit the reactor with pin-

EXECUTIVE DECISION: Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin gave the go ahead for Operation Babylon.

point precision.

A French worker who witnessed the Israeli attack called the accuracy of the Israeli bombing "stupefying." Eight workers, including one French technician, were killed in the bombing.

Within two minutes the attack, which had been timed for sunset, was over and Iraq's nuclear ambitions came to an abrupt halt.

The larger Tammuz I (or Osirak) reactor was destroyed. The smaller Tammuz II reactor's sensitive equipment and foundation were ruined.

As it transpired, Iraqi anti-aircraft unit personnel were eating when the attack occurred, which was another reason for the timing of the bombing, and had turned off their radars. It was something that the Israelis had expected.

As a result, there was a fatal delay in their reaction time, and no SAM-6s were fired at the Israeli planes. A number of Iraqi soldiers on the ground, how-

SURGICAL STRIKE: Israeli F-16 jets on patrol. It was planes similar to these that carried out Operation Babylon.

ever, were killed by errant antiaircraft fire. As predicted, the Saudi AWACS aircraft was facing the Persian Gulf and did not detect the Israeli aircraft.

The attack squadron landed safely back at Etzion at 19h00 without so much as a scratch, having faced no enemy aircraft on the return flight.

Sadly, in a cruel twist of fate, pilot Ilan Ramon, Israel's first astronaut, would die in the Columbia space shuttle accident in February 2003.

The world reacts

While the raid had been brilliantly executed, the rest of the world was not amused. The raid was universally condemned, including by the United States.

The Reagan administration, normally sympathetic to Israel, chose to condemn the attack through a speech by American UN ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick, who called the raid "shocking" and compared it to the recent Soviet incursion into Afghanistan.

France, who were naturally upset, declared the Israeli actions "unacceptable," and made a brief national hero out of an unfortunate French nuclear technician, Damen Chaussepied, who was killed while working in a lab next to the reactor at the time of the raid.

Great Britain denounced it as "a grave breach of international law." A New York Times editorial thundered: "Israel's sneak attack on a French-built nuclear reactor near Baghdad was an act of inexcusable and short-sighted aggression."

A United Nations Security Council resolution condemning Israel's raid passed unanimously. But despite loud denunciations inside the Arab world, Israel was never attacked in reprisal, and no UN sanctions were ever put in place against it (the result of a threatened American veto). As for the president, Ronald Reagan shrugged off the dramatic event with a characteristic shrug. "Boys will be boys," he said.

Saddam Hussein was besides himself and he played the victim to the hilt. He called on "all peace-loving nations of the world to help the Arabs in one way or another acquire atomic weapons" in order to offset Israel's obviously aggressive tendencies. At the same time, he sought to deflect blame for the attack away from his army's own less-than-stellar defensive performance at al-Tuwaitha by accusing the French of being complicit with Israel in the attack.

The Israelis stood firm against the adverse public opinion. It was not the first time that they had been condemned for defending themseles, nor would it be the last.

"Israel has nothing to apologize for," Begin told a news conference a few days after the raid.

Noting that Sadaam Hussein had frequently butchered his closest colleagues, to say nothing of his opponents, Begin warned that Iraq would have had "no hesitation in dropping three or four or five of those bombs on Israel."

Three weeks later, Begin's hard-line Likud Party was given a thumping endorsement at the polls, and a few months later the United States quietly resumed the sale of F-16s to Israel.

When American forces invaded Iraq in 1991 and 2003, they did not have to confront the fear of an Iraqi nuclear response. The audacious Israeli raid on al-Tuwaitha had seen to that.

With bold ambitions to expand his empire **Matt O' Brien** *sets out to conquer Europe, the Americas, and India. That's if he doesn't get lost at sea again.*

Empire: Total War is not a new game by any means. In fact it was released in 2009, making it nearly a decade old. But damn, it's still a good game.

It's a turn-based strategy and real-time tactics computer game that focuses on exploration, economics, politics, religion, the founding of colonies and, ultimately, conquest.

The game is set in the early modern period from 1700 until the end of the 18th century, allowing players to lead various nations and attempt to dominate Europe, the Middle East, India, North America and the Caribbean, along with the maritime trade theatres of the South American coast, Gulf of Guinea, Mozambique Channel and the East Indies.

As with previous Total War games, Empire: Total War consists of two separate areas of game play: a turn-based geopolitical campaign that allows the user to deploy complex strategies by moving armies and navies across the globe, conducting diplomacy, trade, espionage, and managing the internal politics of their nation, as well as a real-time battle mode that enables players to command military forces in battle both on land and at sea.

The game features about fifty 18th-century factions; however, only eleven of the most powerful and influential are playable. In western Europe, these are Great Britain, France, the United Dutch Provinces, Spain and Sweden, and in central and eastern Europe, Prussia, Austria, Russia and Poland–Lithuania. In the Balkans and Middle East, the Ottoman Empire is the principal faction, while the Maratha Confederacy and Mughal Empire are the major powers on the Indian subcontinent.

A story-driven campaign entitled "Road to Independence" is also included, allowing the player to guide the British colonisation of America in three structured chapters.

The first sees the player establish and develop the English colony of Jamestown, the second focuses on the British fighting both the French and their allied Native American nations in the French and Indian War, whilst the third has the player directing the American Continental Army against the British in the War of Independence.

This campaign is goal-oriented and strictly historical, and also functions as a tutorial for the game play, both military, economic and political. Completion of "Road to Independence" unlocks the newly formed United States to use in a shorter, later version of the full campaign.

The main campaign of Empire: Total War involves a player choosing a faction and moving to forge a global empire during the 18th century. Each faction controls various historical provinces, each with a regional capital, and a number of other settlements ranging from minor villages to prosperous sea ports (as long as they are coastal territories).

The player can recruit armies and navies to take and defend provinces by military means, or adopt diplomacy and politics to make advances in the game. In addition, players can use economics and religion to their advantage, as well as clandestine means such as espionage and assassination.

The campaign mode is turn-based, with each turn representing six months starting in summer or winter, allowing the player to attend to all needs of their faction before ending their turn and allowing the artificial intelligence to make all other factions' moves.

The second major area of game play is the battle system. Unlike the campaign game, here players control battles in real-time and battles can be fought both on land and sea.

In land engagements, players have an 18th-century army consisting of units such as cavalry, musketeers, riflemen and artillery. Each has its own intrinsic advantages, disadvantages, cost, and overall effectiveness. Players must use 18th-century tactics and formations to defeat their enemies. The battlefield terrain and the weather are also important.

Factions can lay siege to settlements, replacing open land battles with street fighting and close-quarter combat. Each unit has morale, which increases if the battle goes well, or decrease after heavy casualties, army losses, coming under artillery bombardment, or with the death of the general. Tactical situations such as attacking from a flank or the rear, or depriving a unit of allied reinforcements, also hit morale. When a unit's morale is sufficiently depleted, it will be routed and flee the battlefield.

Depending on whether morale is merely broken or entirely shattered, the player may be able to rally the unit and regroup. Victory is achieved by causing every enemy unit to rout, or be annihilated. In addition, sieges can be won if the attacker manages to take control of the settlement's central square for a set amount of time.

Besides the single player campaigns, you can also set up one-off battles. There is also a multi-player mode which lets you go up against real opponents.

The Empire Total War Collection (which is the one for R89.75) comes with some decent bonus content.

This includes elite units of the West, East, and Americas, Special Forces units, and an extra campaign.

The campaign is called The Warpath Campaign. Here you take control of the Native Americans and go up against the new colony.

Empire Total War is both enjoyable and addictive. It's not one of those games where you just build up a massive army and go out and destroy everything in your path.

You've got to look after your finances, keep your population happy, and keep industry running.

If you enjoy a challenge, then you're sure to enjoy this game.

Publisher - Sega

Genre - Simulation

Score - 8/10

Price - R89.75 (on Steam)

The Longest Day

Released in 1962 and shot entirely in black and white, The Longest Day is a war epic based on Cornelius Ryan's book of the same name.

It was produced by Darryl F. Zanuck and is about the D-Day landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944.

The film features a large ensemble cast including John Wayne, Kenneth More, Richard Todd, Robert Mitchum, Richard Burton, Steve Forrest, Sean Connery, Henry Fonda, Red Buttons, Peter Lawford, Eddie Albert, Jeffrey Hunter, Stuart Whitman, Tom Tryon, Rod Steiger, Leo Genn, Gert Fröbe, Irina Demick, Bourvil, Curt Jürgens, George Segal, Robert Wagner, Paul Anka and Arletty. Many of these actors played roles that were essentially cameo appearances.

In addition, several cast members – including Fonda, Genn, More, Steiger and Todd – saw action as servicemen during the war; Todd was among the first British officers to land in Normandy in Operation Overlord, and he participated in the assault on Pegasus Bridge.

The movie is filmed in the style of a docudrama. Beginning in the days leading up to D-Day, it concentrates on events on both sides of the channel, such as the Allies waiting for the break in the poor weather and anticipating the reaction of the Axis forces defending northern France.

The film pays particular attention to the decision by General Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of SHAEF, to go after reviewing the initial bad-weather reports as well as reports about the divisions within the German High Command as to where an invasion might happen or what the response to it should be.

Numerous scenes document the early hours of 6 June when Allied airborne troops were sent in to take key locations inland from the beaches. The French resistance is also shown reacting to the news that an invasion has started.

The Longest Day chronicles most of the important events surrounding D-Day, from the British glider missions to secure Pegasus Bridge, the counterattacks launched by American paratroopers scattered around Sainte-Mère-Église, the infiltration and sabotage work conducted by the French resistance and SOE agents to the response by the Wehrmacht to the invasion and the uncertainty of German commanders as to whether it was a feint in preparation for crossings at the Pas de Calais (see Operation Fortitude), where the senior German staff had always assumed it would be.

Set-piece scenes include the parachute drop into Sainte-Mère-Église, the advance inshore from the Normandy beaches, the U.S. Ranger Assault Group's assault on the Pointe du Hoc, the attack on Ouistreham by Free French Forces and the strafing of the beaches by two lone Luftwaffe pilots.

The film concludes with a montage showing various Allied units consolidating their beachheads before they advance inland to reach Germany by crossing France.

A colourised version of this film was released on VHS in 1994, the 50th anniversary of the invasion.

The movie won two Academy Awards and was nominated for three others.

Not as visually graphic as something like *Saving Private Ryan*, but still well worth watching.

Click on the box cover to watch a trailer of the film.

"Mad Mike" Hoare: The Legend

Colonel Mike Hoare led 300 'Wild Geese' across the Congo to crush a communist rebellion, rescue 2000 nuns and priests from barbarity, beat Che Guevara … and become a legend.

Of Irish blood, Mike was schooled in England and, during World War 2, was the 'best bloody soldier in the British Army'. He demobbed as major, qualified in London as a chartered accountant and emigrated to South Africa.

Going rogue, he started living dangerously to get more out of life, including trans-Africa motorbike trips, bluewater sailing, exploring remote areas, and leading safaris in the Kalahari Desert.

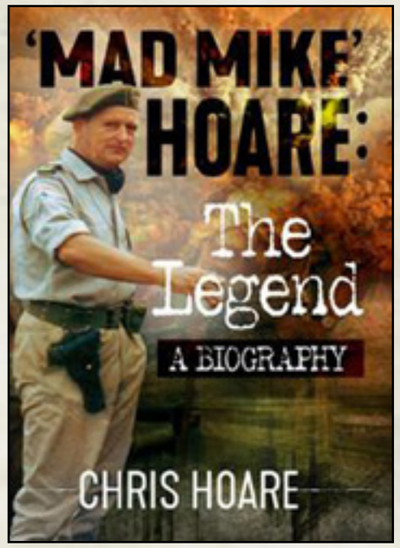
Here Mike got to know the CIA agent who was to change his life … and who was to stop Nelson Mandela.

Later Mike was technical advisor to the film The Wild Geese, which starred Richard Burton playing the Mike Hoare character.

In 1981 Mike led 50 'Frothblowers' in a bid to depose the socialist government of the Seychelles. Things went wrong and Mike was sentenced to ten years in jail for hijacking a Boeing 707.

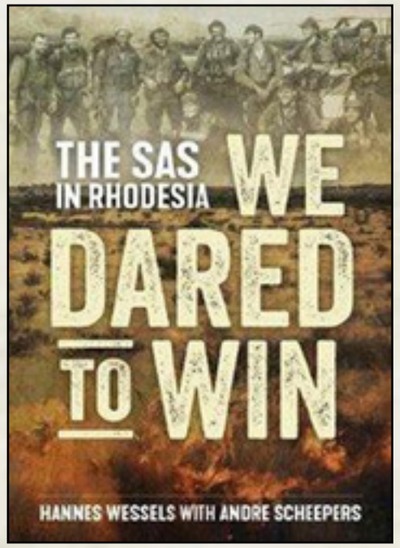
In this biography – rich in new material – Chris Hoare separates the man from the myth in a way only a son can, and concludes his 'mad dad' was an officer and a gentleman with a bit of pirate thrown in.

Available 16 July 2018.



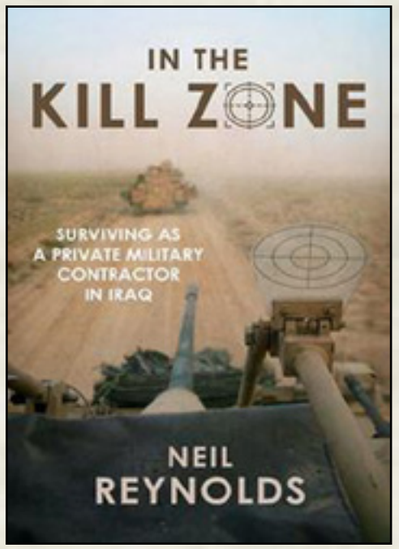
Softcover, 302 pages with photos. There will also be a limited hardcover edition, numbered and signed (God willing) by Mike Hoare and the author, his son, Chris.

Price: R350



We Dare to Win
R300

Against All Odds
R650



In The Kill Zone
R300

All books are available from Bush War Books

Nice to meet you

One things was certain for anyone that did national service - you would get to meet a lot of new and interesting people.

There is an old saying that there are only two things in life that are certain - you will die, and you will pay taxes.

Well if you were a white male in South Africa between 1968 and 1992 there was another thing that was certain - you would do national service.

For over two decades national service was a type of rite of passage for white South African males. Many people do not realise that the South African Defence Force was a citizen force. Only 10% of the SADF were permanent force. The remaining 90% was made up from national servicemen busy doing their initial conscription or ex-national servicemen (Citizen Force).

National service began in 1968 when it was decided that all white South African males would be required to do a period of compulsory military service. Note carefully the use of the word compulsory. It was not a request, it was an instruction and it was backed up by an act of parliament.

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

Thousands of young conscripts from around the country reported for national service twice a year. And they came from every walk of life.

Tim was 18 when he did his national service. He went on to become a corporal and took an intake for basic training.

"The intake that I was involved with was a real mix of people. There was a mix of both Afrikaans and English speakers, but there was also a fair share of those that came from Portuguese, Greek and Lebanese backgrounds.

"A wide range of religious denominations were also represented. Everything from Dutch Reformed to Catholic, Seventh Day Adventists to Pentecostal happy clappers.

"Some guys came from rich families, the type that had gone to expensive private schools. Others came from families that were really poor.

"Most of the recruits were 17 or 18 years old. Yet I had a guy in my squad that was much older. After school he had done a doctorate in economics and had also studied overseas for two years. So when he finally did his national service, he was 27 years old. He was like a grandfather when compared to the others in the squad."

Remember me?

More often than not you wouldn't know anyone in your intake. Yet sometimes you would recognise someone that had been at the same school as you.

Mike was 18 when he was called up, and he did bump into someone that had been at school with him.

"When I started high school we had this bloke in our class by the name of Guy. He was this skinny little kid that never stood up for himself. So naturally everyone bullied the crap out of him. I must confess that I was one of the worst culprits.

"From standard six to standard eight I made his life at school sheer hell. I would push him around, tease him, call him names and often slap him around just for the fun of it. His mom used to give him money every day to buy something from the tuck shop. I would make him buy me something with the money in return for me not beating him up.

"At the end of standard eight he left school to join the army and that was the last I saw of Guy. Until I was called up, that is.

"I did my national service at 5

ON PARADE: The parade ground was one place you would meet some interesting characters as well as hear some really good comments.

SAI in Ladysmith. Imagine my surprise and horror when I was put into a squad only to discover that Guy was my basic training corporal. And to make matters worse, Guy was no longer this skinny little kid.

"When Guy had joined the army he had started doing body building and power lifting. Two years later he was built like the proverbial brick outhouse. I was hoping that maybe he wouldn't remember me. Fat chance of that. He came straight up to me and stuck his face right up against mine.

"Hi Mike," he said with an evil smile. "Remember me?"

"That was 40 years ago and I can still remember how scared I felt. For three years I had bullied him and now the shoe was on the other foot.

"That first night in camp I seriously considered going AWOL, hitching home, and demanding that my parents send me overseas where the army couldn't get at me.

"The strange thing is that Guy turned out to be a hell of a decent person. He was tough on us, make no mistake about that. But he was tough on everyone, not just me. On my second day there he took me one side and spoke to me.

"Listen Mike," he told me, "at high school you were a real prick. But the past is the past and I have no hard feelings. So just keep your nose clean and you'll have no problems with me."

If I learnt one thing in the army it was that whatever you do in life will come back to you at some stage. If Guy had been vindictive he could have made my life a living hell.

All shapes and sizes

It was unlikely that you would know anyone in your squad and more often than not they were total strangers. Yet for at least the next nine weeks these would be the people that you would be spending every minute of your day and night with. It was also likely that the members of your squad would come from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Paul was a corporal with 3South African Infantry Battalion and he took an intake for basic training.

"I remember a song that my dad would sometimes sing. It was called 'Bless Them All' and one of the lines went 'the long and the short and the tall.'

"Well as a basic training instructor I saw the long and the short and the tall. I also saw the fat and the thin and the downright ugly.

"On one of the intakes we had a guy who was just over seven feet tall. And he was only 19. Not only was this guy tall, he was also huge. Most tall guys that I have seen are normally fairly thin. This guy was almost as wide as he was tall, and none of it was fat.

"He took a size 14 or 15 boot and we had to order footwear especially for him. His hands were massive. If he made a fist and held it in front of your face, it would cover your entire face. He was also exceptionally strong.

"Yet he was also soft-spoken and gentle. I never once saw him get angry or lose his temper. I think that he realised that with his strength and size he just couldn't afford to lose his rag.

"I also remember these two guys that were in another squad. One of them, and if I recall his name was Watson, was the fattest guy I have ever seen. If you had painted him blue he would have looked like a beach ball. I'm serious man, he was completely round. He weighed over 200 kilograms.

We couldn't find any uniforms to fit him and for the first

two weeks of basics he had to dress in his civvie clothes while they made some uniforms for him. There was another guy in the same squad who looked like a human skeleton. I once saw this movie about the concentration camps in World War Two and this guy looked exactly like that. This guy was just skin and bones. If he stood sideways and stuck out his tongue he looked like a zip.

"Our company sergeant major was a bit of a wag and he had this really dark sense of humour. He gave these two guys a hell of a time.

"You," he would say to the thin guy. "You look like you've been through a famine." Then he would point to Watson and say, "And you look like you caused it."

"I also remember this one chap named Mike. When I saw him getting off the train at the station I thought that someone's little brother had climbed on the train by mistake. He looked no older than twelve. He was a short little guy with a baby face and if you had dressed him in a primary school uniform no one would have given him a second glance. Our company sergeant major took one look at him and shook his head.

"Does your mother know where you are sonny?" the sergeant major asked. Yet this guy was 18 years old.

The best that I remember though was a guy who was given the nickname 'Beast'. Jeez but he was ugly. He was about five feet four, had a huge forehead that stuck out, a small flat nose, and he was almost completely covered in hair. Our sergeant major was beside himself when he saw 'Beast' for the first time.

"Corporal," he said to me, pointing at Beast, "has anyone heard that thing speak yet? Hell, I think we've discovered the missing link."

Yet Beast turned out to be quite an intelligent and likeable character. I definitely saw the long and the short and the tall during my national service."

Edukated

Most new recruits had finished matric or at least standard eight. Some of them even had degrees or diplomas. Yet there were also those that had a very rudimentary education.

Mark did his national service at 7 SAI and he remembers one of his fellow conscripts that found the process of writing home very traumatic.

"The guy that had the bed next to mine was from a farm in the middle of nowhere. If I recall his name Pieter and he was about 17 or 18.

"At least once a week we had to write a letter home and it was compulsory. I think the army wanted to reassure our parents that we were all having a wonderful time and enjoying our great big adventure.

"Pieter's problem was that he was totally illiterate, and I'm not having you on. He couldn't read or write a single word. The first time we had to write home, Pieter sat there with a pen in his hand and stared at the writing pad as if it were a snake. Eventually he turned to me with this sad smile on his face.

"Listen Mark," he said. "I don't write so good. Can you help me?"

"I felt so sorry for him. For the rest of basics I wrote his letters back home for him. He would sit and dictate to me, in Afrikaans, and I would write his letter.

"When he received mail, which was only one letter a week from his parents, I would read them out to him.

"The contents of the letters he received from his parents were filled with spelling errors and the handwriting was really terrible. I sometimes battled to read what they had written. I suspected that his parents weren't all that well educated.

"Talking about education, Pieter was always very evasive about where he had done his schooling. I don't think Pieter had ever been to school."

Wrong side of the tracks

Naturally you would get recruits that came from rather shady or dubious backgrounds.

Kevin was 18 when he did national service. He remembers one of the characters that was in his squad.

"Tyrone came from what in those days was regarded as a really rough area of Johannesburg. He was 20, a down and out thug, but also a really likeable bloke. He was so laid back and nothing seemed to ever faze him. He always spoke with this slow drawl.

"During basics he had at least 30 girls that used to write to him. Even our corporal was impressed.

"On our first weekend pass about seven of us that lived in Johannesburg decided that we were going to go to Hillbrow on

FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE: Conscripts came from very diverse backgrounds. You would often meet people that you would never have normally come into contact with.

the Saturday night. Tyrone was one of the group.

"We went to three different clubs that night, and we didn't pay to get into any of them. At two of the clubs we didn't even pay for our drinks. And it was all thanks to Tyrone.

"It's okay. They know me here," he would say.

"I don't know how many people came up specially to greet him that night. And they all addressed him as 'Mister'.

"I'll never forget this one time we went to SADFI. It was a kind of shop run by the SADF and was not far from our base in Pretoria. You could buy all sorts of stuff there.

"I wanted to buy a cassette tape. There were four tapes that I was keen on, but I could only afford one.

"The tapes were kept in a metal rack that was locked. When you wanted a tape an assistant would come and unlock the rack and take out the tape before locking it again.

"I finally selected the tape I wanted, after much deliberation, and the guy came and unlocked it for me. I paid for it and we left the shop.

"As we were walking back to camp, Tyrone reached into his pocket.

"Here we go my brother," he said, giving me the other three tapes that I had wanted.

"How there hell had he managed it? Listen, how did he get the tapes from a locked rack. And I was standing next to him the whole time. How did he do it?"

Dead shot

A day that most national servicemen will never forget was that first trip to the shooting range. For many it was the first time that they had ever fired a weapon. While it may have been an exciting experience for the new conscripts it was often a frightening experience for the instructors.

Peter was a national serviceman who became a basic training instructor at the Army Gymnasium. He clearly remembers an incident that caused much mirth amongst the instructors.

"I was always wary when we took the recruits to the shooting range for the first time. Most of these guys had never handled a firearm in their lives.

"Our shooting range allowed 30 people to shoot at a time. We would take the first 30 to the firing point and the remainder would sit some distance behind them. Some of them were also put to work in the pits so that they could raise and lower the targets.

"Safety was always of a high standard and we would have a range officer, a safety officer, and a pit officer. There were also enough instructors standing behind those on the firing line to ensure that none of the recruits did anything stupid like turn around with a loaded firearm.

"The first thing we would do was give each of those on the firing line five live rounds. These were fired into the stop wall, which was basically a sandbank behind the targets. This would allow them to get a feel for the weapon and it would also allow our weapons tiffie (armourer) to adjust the gas setting on their rifles if needed.

"Once this had been done they were given another five live rounds to fire into the stop wall. Then it was time for them to fire at a target for the first time. They were given ten live rounds and fired from the prone position. The targets were raised

and they could fire at their own pace.

"After everyone had finished firing we would do safety checks and then approach the targets to see how they had done. The weapons tiffie would come with and he would set the sights on their rifles. Normally the shots were spread all over the target.

"On more than one occasion I had guys who would not hit the target with a single round.

"I remember with the one group there was this guy from the farm who had buckteeth and the biggest ears I had ever seen. He looked like a car that had its doors open wide.

"After this group had fired their first ten rounds at the target, we went to check how they had done. This particular guy's target puzzled us no end.

"There were five shots dead in the centre of the target. They were so tightly grouped that you could have covered them with a One Rand coin. The other five rounds had missed the target entirely.

"The holes on the targets were covered and we went back to the firing point. They fired another ten rounds at the target.

"When we went to check the targets again, we found that the same thing had happened. This guy had five shots dead centre and five shots off the target. We couldn't figure it out. How was it possible for this guy to be so accurate with five shots and then miss completely with the other five?

"We then took him back to the firing point and gave him another ten rounds. This time he would be the only person firing and at least six instructors and the weapons tiffie were watching him like a hawk.

"As soon as he started to fire we saw what the problem was. The R1 rifle is a SLR or self-loading rifle. To operate it you place a loaded magazine into the weapon and pull back the cocking handle. When you release the cocking handle the breach block moves forward and scoops up a live round and chambers it. When you pull the trigger the round is fired. A gas-operated piston then pushes back the breach block. On its way backward, the breach block ejects the spend cartridge and on its return scoops up a fresh round. So you only have to cock the weapon once.

"This guy would cock the weapon, pull the trigger, and then cock the weapon again. This would then eject a live round. So when he loaded ten rounds into his magazine, he was actually only firing five of them. The other five were being ejected without being fired. There were live rounds mixed in with all his empty cartridge cases laying next to him.

"We all killed ourselves laughing and explained to him what he was doing. He was very confused by this. He told us that he had been shooting with his father's .303 rifle since the time he could walk. He was adamant that if you didn't cock the rifle it would not fire.

"We in turn tried to explain that his father's rifle was a bolt action rifle and that it had to be manually cocked each time you fired a round, but that the R1 was an automatic weapon that only needed to be cocked once. I'm not joking when I say that it took us months to get this into his head. He was the most deadly shot I have ever seen, but damn he was stupid."

Sense of humour

Troops would normally have little contact with officers. Yet during bungalow inspections or parade inspections, they would get to meet company commanders.

Bruce did his basic training at 3 South African Infantry Battalion. He still smiles when he recalls some of the comments passed by officers during parade inspections.

"Some of the officers actually came out with some sharp comments. These were some of the ones that I regard as my favourites.

"Troop, did you shave this morning?" the lieutenant asked.

"Yes sir!" replied the troop.

"Well next time I suggest you stand a little closer to your razor. Corporal take this man's name."

"Do you feel anything troop," asked a lieutenant, standing behind a guy.

"No lieutenant!" came the reply.

"Well you should," the lieutenant told him, "because I'm standing on your hair. Get it cut! Corporal take this man's name."

The best comment I heard was just after we had come back from our first weekend pass. It was on Monday morning parade and a couple of the guys had obviously had too much to drink during the weekend.

"There was the one guy in my squad who was suffering badly from the after effects of his weekend. He still reeked of alcohol and he was swaying gently backwards and forwards.

"The lieutenant walked straight past him, hardly giving him a glance. When the lieutenant had taken a few steps forward he said over his shoulder, "John Travolta if you want to carry on Staying Alive then you had better get over your Saturday Night Fever like Greased Lightning, otherwise you will become The One That I Want."

"He was making a reference to songs from the movies Saturday Night Fever and Grease. This was at a time when all those movies were fresh, so it was really funny and quite a few of us let out a laugh.

"Normally you would have been crapped out for laughing on parade. But I think he appreciated the fact that we had picked up on his joke.

"Thank you very much," he said. "I'll be appearing here all week."

THE SHOOTING RANGE: It was always interesting to watch the way different people handled firearms.

Souties vs Dutchmen

The vast majority of those called up for national service would be young men who had just completed high school. A very small percentage would be people who had first attended university and completed a degree while others were those who had managed to avoid national service for a year or two.

It is only logical that if you take a few thousand young men from a wide diversity of backgrounds and put them together in confined proximity there is going to be friction. This was often the case during basic training.

Friction could often be found at section level, platoon level, and company level. Inter-unit rivalry was also not uncommon. The main cause of friction at section level would be between English and Afrikaans speaking conscripts. Mike explains further.

"I was at 1 SAI in Bloemfontein and the guys in my section all shared a bungalow. About sixty percent were Afrikaans and the rest of us were English.

"This was always a huge cause of friction. A lot of the Afrikaans guys hated us because of the Boer War. Can you believe it? Look, I've got an Afrikaans surname but I grew up in an English-speaking household. I'm South African, just like any Afrikaner, but there was no ways you could explain this to them.

"They used to call us 'Souties' or 'Sout-piele'. What they meant was that we had one foot in South Africa, one foot in England, and our penis hung in the sea, hence the name 'Salt Prick'. On the other hand we used to call them Dutchmen, or Rock Spiders.

"There was many a harsh word exchanged between the English and Afrikaans guys in our section. Once or twice guys actually came to blows.

"Then there was friction on provincial lines. The Natal boys hated the guys from the Transvaal and the Free State, while everyone hated those from the Cape.

"While we used to fight and bicker amongst each other, we would all stick together if another platoon gave us hassles.

"There was also rivalry between the companies. I was in Bravo Company and we regarded ourselves as being the best company in the battalion. Of course the other companies felt the same way and this would

often lead to physical confrontation.

"We would sometimes raid another company at night after lights out. When raiding another company you would take your 'balsak' (kit bag) and put a pair of boots or your steel helmet inside it.

"Then you would put on your balaclava and a group would make their way in the darkness to another company line. You would then invade a bungalow, rushing in and hitting everyone while they lay sleeping. Then you got out as quickly as possible and ran for your own company lines before they could get their act together.

"Of course if they suspected that you were going to raid them, then they would be waiting and you would walk straight into an ambush. While this may sound like a lot of fun and little more than a prank, some guys were badly hurt. More than a few had to be treated in hospital for their injuries.

"Naturally it was against standing orders to raid each other but the corporals would just turn a blind eye. Hell, often they would encourage it."

Strange characters

With so many people being called up each year it was a foregone conclusion that they would include some 'characters'. Charles had three characters in his section during basics.

"Never before and never since have I met such characters as I did in the army. We had three rather strange chaps in our section during basics.

"One of them was an Afrikaans boy by the name of Jappie. Not the sharpest pencil in the box, but a hell of a nice youngster. The problem with Jappie is that he used to snore.

"Now look, quite a few of the chaps in my section would snore. Most people do. But when I say Jappie used to snore, I mean he was something else. It would actually wake you up. He used to snore so loud that he would even wake himself up. And the thing is that when you complained to him about how loud he snored, he wouldn't believe it.

"Paul was another lad with a bit of a problem. He used to sleep walk just about every night. And he used to do this strange thing. He would come up to your bed and shake you awake. Then he would just stand there and stare at you. It was eerie and it used to scare the daylights out of me. And the thing is that you couldn't wake him. We tried on more than one occasion without success.

"The strangest lad was Craig. Normally Craig was the most laid back and likeable chap in our section. Yet when it was full moon Craig used to wake up in the early hours of the morning, about 02h00, sit on his haunches on his bed, and howl like a wolf. And it wasn't a joke or anything.

"Apparently he suffered from a rare condition known as lycanthropy and they are affected by lunar cycles. I believe that this is where the legend of werewolves comes from. Hearing him howl like that was terrifying I can tell you."

Friends, or not

Some of those that did national service together remained friends afterwards. Harry, who was 18 at the time, made some really good friends.

"I made some damn good friends during basics and those friendships have lasted for more than 40 years.

"Four of us that did our basic together still see each other on a regular basis and at least once a month we have a braai. Hell, one of them has since become my brother-in-law after I married his sister. I met her when we had our visitor's day during basics.

"I went to all of their weddings and was best man at two of them. I've watched their kids and grand kids growing up and even my wife regards them as part of our family. Yet if it wasn't for national service I would most probably never had met any of them."

Yet others quickly lost contact with their fellow conscripts once they finished their national service. Steve did basics in 1976.

"When I left the army I never saw anyone that I did basic with ever again.

"Listen, we came from all over the country. So it's not surprising.

"To be honest, I can't even remember the names of most of the guys I was with. I remember two characters called Koos and Tony, and another guy who had the nickname 'Peanuts'. Other than that, I can't remember any of them."

So, how many interesting characters did you meet when you served in the military? Why not send us an e-mail and tell us about them.

Quiz Answers

So how did you do with this months quiz? Here are the answers.

1. Royal Air Force. Their actual motto is *Per ardua ad astra*.
2. Corpo de Fuzileiros Navais (Brazilian Marine Corps). Their motto is *Ad sumus*.
3. United States Marine Corps. Their motto is *Semper Fiedelis*.
4. Indian Army.
5. United States Air Force.
6. Indian Navy. Their motto is *Sham No Varunaḥ*.
7. United States Army.
8. Armée de Terre (French Army). Their motto is *Honneur et patrie*.
9. US Army Green Berets. Their motto is *De Oppresso Liber*.
10. British Royal Marines. There motto is *Per mare, per terram*.
11. United States Coast Guard. Their motto is *Semper Paratus*.
12. South African Air Force. Their motto is *Per aspera ad astra*.
13. US 82nd Airborne Division.
14. Royal Navy. Their motto is *Si vis pacem, para bellum*.
15. United States Marine Corps.
16. British Special Boat Service.
17. Canadian Army. Their motto is *Vigilamus pro te*.
18. Royal Corps of Signals. Their motto is *Certo Cito*. It is also the South African Corps of Signals motto,.
19. German SS. Their motto was *Meine Ehre heißt Treue.*
20. British Parachute Regiment. Their motto is *Utrinque paratus*.
21. US Navy Seals.
22. The Royal Gurkha Rifles. Their motto is *Kayar Hunu Bhanda Marnu Ramro*.
23. Indoensian Navy. Their motto is *Jalesveva Jayamahe*.
24. Spanish Military. Their motto is *Todo por la Patria*.
25. French Foreign Legion. An unofficial motto is *Marche ou crève*.

Useful links

Every month we will be featuring a few useful links to military websites, newsletters and online magazines. Stuff that we think our readers will appreciate.

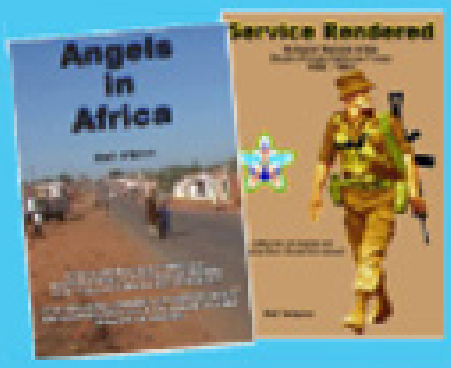
Here are two of our favourites. The first one is Nongqai, the unofficial police newsletter for veterans of the former South African Police Force and for those interested in Police History. The second is Jimmy's Own, the official newsletter of the South African Signals Association. Click on the magazine covers to go to the respective websites.

Hipe! media

E-mail
editor@hipe.co.za

Online Magazines
Flip book magazines with pages that can be turned.

E-books
Produced in any electronic format required.



2D & 3D Animation
Produced in any video format.

Video Production
Scripting, storyboard, filming and editing done to any video format required. We also do aerial and underwater video and stills.

Still Photography

If you're thinking digital media then think Hipe Media.