Incredible and Crazy Stories from History

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Terrifying Historic Villains

From Adolf Hitler to Charles Manson, there is no shortage of frightening figures in our history books. However, not all of these awful people receive so much attention. In fact, many of them are barely remembered.

Pietro Caruso
When fascist Italy aligned itself with the Nazis, few embraced the alliance more than Pietro Caruso. He was the police chief of Rome and responsible for upholding law and order. However, he ended up doing the exact opposite. Caruso was a loyal bloodhound of Mussolini. Together with Herbert Kappler, the Gestapo commander of Rome, he participated in many horrors and gleefully pursued Mussolini's enemies. His greatest atrocity was the mass execution of Fosse Andeatine in 1944: In just one day, he gathered over 300 people in front of Nazi rifles. Caruso was especially famous for his sadism—a notable achievement during a time when bloodthirsty Nazis freely roamed the country. After the war, Caruso was put on trial for his crimes. He was found guilty and sentenced to death by firing squad. But he almost didn't make it to his own execution: The furious Romans stormed his guard before the shooting and attempted to drown him in the Tiber River.

Hiroko Nagata
Western people often think of Japan as a restrained, misogynistic culture with little room for extremists—let alone female extremists. While this may be true to a certain extent, Hiroko Nagata managed to break the mold way back in 1972. Unfortunately, she broke it by forming a terrorist faction and killing a bunch of people. Nagata was the leader of United Red Army, a militant leftist group that wanted a Communist revolution in Japan. Her group was notorious for its extreme brutality, and before long, she got in trouble for conspiring to kill two people who tried to leave the group. But mere conspiring wasn't enough for her. In a single year, she led a number of horrifyingly violent group killings. The 12 victims were brutally beaten, tortured, and stabbed. These people weren't even her enemies—they were fellow members of her faction that she said weren't "revolutionary enough." She was eventually arrested in an incident that involved hostages and the deaths of two police officers and one civilian. In the end, she died a lonely death, perishing on death row after a brain tumor operation and a long illness. She was 65.

Goran Jelisic
When a person is commonly known as "Serb Adolf," you know he's probably not a particularly nice person. Goran Jelisic certainly lived up to his nickname. Originally a humble farm machinery mechanic, Jelisic's talent for murder and cruelty became apparent during the Bosnian War. Fighting for the Bosnian Serb forces, who were responsible for 90 percent of the war crimes during the conflict, Jelisic rose in the ranks until he was placed in charge of a detention camp. His camp held hundreds of Muslims and Croats, who were all tortured, murdered (often by Jelisic himself), and buried in hidden graves during the Serbs' ethnic cleansing campaign in 1992. Jelisic, who was only 23 at the time of his crimes, was arrested in 1998. He pleaded guilty to charges of war crimes and

crimes against humanity. However, he was acquitted on the charges of genocide because the prosecution could not prove them conclusively. He was sentenced to 40 years in prison and is currently serving his sentence in Italy.

Kenji Doihara

Kenji Doihara was a Japanese general during World War II. He was in charge of operations during the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, which earned him the nickname "Lawrence of Manchuria" (a reference to Lawrence of Arabia). But this was merely because he was able to dress and act like Chinese natives—not because he was heroic. Unlike his movie counterpart, Doihara wasn't out to help people. He was in it for personal gain and didn't care how many people he hurt to get there. Despite his high rank, Doihara was a rampant opium user and a thoroughly corrupt soul. He was heavily involved in Japan's conquest of massive areas of China, which broke traditional Chinese societal structures and plunged the country in deep confusion. Doihara seized the opportunity to become the mastermind behind all Manchurian crime. He controlled the drug trade and was the kingpin behind almost every criminal faction. Luckily, his near-total control of the underworld didn't last. After numerous terrifying deeds, he was caught, prosecuted for a long list of war crimes, and hanged in December 1948.

Laszlo Baky

Laszlo Baky had two passions: politics and violence. His brutal, counterrevolutionary work in Hungary earned him a high-ranking place in the Gendarmerie (a military faction acting as a police force). Baky became a prominent figure in the Hungarian Nazi party and eventually rose to the rank of state secretary. In 1944, Nazi Germany invaded Hungary, and Baky was the happiest man on earth. Teaming up with SS leader Adolf Eichmann and a fellow Hungarian Nazi named Andor Jaross, Baky became responsible for gathering Hungary's Jews and sending them to concentration camps. Baky loved his job and was horrifyingly good at it. In a terrifying display of efficient logistics, Baky and his companions shipped hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews to their deaths. Luckily, Baky was removed from power before the end of 1944. He fled the country but was caught a year later and sentenced to hang.

Pedro the Cruel

Tall, muscular, and well educated, Pedro of Castile seemed like the perfect king for Castile (a part of Spain). However, he soon proved the opposite. A petty and angry man with little talent as a leader, Pedro reacted to most situations with violence. He was an immoral and unfaithful husband and thought little of killing his wives and lovers if they became a burden. Pedro was originally a decent ruler, but the combination of bad political decisions, a controlling mother, and a close call with the Black Death changed him. Pedro started to brutally murder anyone and everyone in Castile he perceived as a threat. A series of awful deaths followed, and it seemed that no one in Castile was safe from Pedro's cruel madness. Ironically, he was kind of right about his paranoia: In the end, he was assassinated by his own brother.

Ion Antonescu
Ion Victor Antonescu was one of the lesser-known despots of World War II. He was a career officer who seized power in Romania by forcing the king into exile. Antonescu symphathized with the Nazis in their mission to ”purge” the world. Antonescu was a cruel man who had no problem with killing hundreds of thousands of people in vain. During his rule, 300,000 Jews and up to 100,000 members of other ”impure” ethnicities were murdered. His powerful army also provided more military support to the Nazis than all other Axis powers combined. Because he wished to keep Romania strong, he allowed most Jews within his ”Old Romania” borders to live and continue working. He even refused Hitler’s requests to deport them to Nazi death camps. Still, a death toll of up to 400,000 people and a close alliance with Hitler were more than enough to earn him a death sentence when the war was over.

Ieng SaryIeng
Sary was a rather strange villain. By his own admission, he only ever killed one person (who he seemed to think doesn’t count). He consistently claimed to be a nice, innocent man. As the foreign minister of Cambodia, he was the smiling face of their government. He used his charisma and diplomatic skills to negotiate support for his government and direct hatred toward Cambodia’s enemy, Vietnam. However, behind his flawless facade he hides unspeakable deeds. In reality, Ieng Sary was Brother No. 3 in the dreaded Khmer Rouge. He was close friends with their leader, Pol Pot, and was well aware of (and actively participating in) their terrifying, genocidal rule. Ieng Sary’s task was to mask the horrors of the Khmer Rouge and gather support from their only ally, China. Sary’s propaganda was a lethal weapon in itself; he presented Pol Pot’s Cambodia as a utopia of pure Communism—where all possessions, family, and religion were truly and successfully thrown away. With such talk, he lured thousands of Cambodian students and intellectuals back to their home country. As soon as they arrived, they were thrown in jail as spies, tortured, and killed. Ieng Sary was too slick and well-connected to suffer the fate of many other historical monsters. When the Khmer Rouge fell to Vietnam in 1979, he escaped to Thailand, where the Chinese embassy provided him with new clothes and a ticket to Beijing. There, he kept the Khmer Rouge movement going for two more decades, using his contacts to get filthy rich in the process. Although he was finally arrested in 2007, he was able to stall the process until his death in 2013.

Bleda The Hun
Attila the Hun was the ruler and creator of the Hunnic Empire. His sheer, over-the-top supervillain antics earned him the nickname “Scourge of God.” Bleda the Hun was Attila’s meaner big brother. For years, Attila and Bleda ruled the Huns as equals. They fought wars, razed their enemies, and conquered everyone else’s lands together. Attila, the guy who’s now remembered as a fearsome, powerful, warrior king, was actually the small, brainy kid brother of the duumvirate. Bleda was the physically imposing barbarian chieftain type. Bleda was not only an imposing figure and a dangerous conqueror, but a true supervillain in all senses of the word: He even got himself a Moorish dwarf that he kept around as a cruel combination of “pet,” jester, and (during battles) an Austin Powers–style, armor-clad Mini-Me. The reason Bleda isn’t better known is that he was unlucky enough

to cross the only person more dangerous than himself: Attila. The younger Hun started getting fed up with Bleda, particularly with his dwarf fixations. The brothers' relationship spiraled into a power struggle. Soon enough, Bleda mysteriously perished in either a genuine hunting accident or—more likely—an "accident" orchestrated by his brother.

Lavrentiy Beria

Lavrentiy Beria was, on the surface, the silver-tongued lackey of Joseph Stalin. However, his meek appearance was deceiving: Beria was one of the few men who could frighten even Stalin. During the 1920s and 1930s, Beria rose through the Communist ranks like a rocket. He specialized in the intelligence and counterintelligence operations of Cheka (the secret police) and its many successors, ultimately becoming the leader of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). According to legend, he personally strangled the man who held the job before him. Beria was a skilled political player. What's more, he was a remorseless killer who didn't hesitate to terminate anyone in his way. As head of NKVD, he would do anything to get a confession. Wherever he went, people went missing. Beria personally oversaw many of Stalin's political purges and used this as an opportunity to satisfy his desire for mass murder. The infamous Gulag work camps all operated under his supervision. And then there was his main job: Beria's NKVD charged and convicted hundreds of thousands of Russians for high treason, often under false or absurd accusations. Beria also created an effective worldwide spy system and dabbled in assassinations. By February 1941, Beria became the deputy prime minister. Along with his other duties, he oversaw strategic raw materials production for the war effort, naturally using the people he sent to the Gulag camps as slave labour. If he wasn't despicable enough already, Beria was also a sexual deviant of the highest order. He routinely raped and abused women who had often been taken from the street for that purpose. Those who resisted were murdered. His depravity was well known, and Stalin himself was said to be terrified when he heard his daughter was alone with Beria.

Fascinating Facts About Knights

From the Knights of the Round Table to *Game of Thrones*, our culture has no shortage of stories about knights, so it's strange how little we really know about them. We know they wore armor and fought in wars and tournaments . . . but what else did they do? What were their lives like?

The Arbalest Knights

The Arbalest Knights were the supreme force on the battlefield for centuries and it was starting to look as if no one could ever replace them. Ironically, their end was brought about by a very simple invention called the arbalest. The arbalest, invented in the 12th century, was a kind of super crossbow. It was made of steel, so it could endure much higher tension than ordinary bows and produce greater force. An arbalest was accurate up to 300 meters (984 feet), relatively quick to reload, and easy to operate. Its bolts could pierce armor. Suddenly, the mighty knight with all his combat skills, fancy armor, and a lifetime of training was nothing more than an easy target for a guy who had been learning to shoot for a couple of weeks. A skilled arbalestier could drop two knights a minute, yet stay safely out of reach. Although knights called arbalests unchivalrous, it was clear that their time as the alpha males of the battlefield was over, especially since gunpowder weapons were invented soon afterwards.

Spiral Staircases

Many medieval castles featured cleverly designed spiral staircases between the floors. They were usually located next to the castle wall (in a tower, the staircase usually ran along the outer wall and the rooms were constructed in the space in the middle). They might seem like a clever way to save space, but actually spiral staircases were invented for warfare. If an enemy army invaded the castle, their knights had an extremely difficult time walking up the narrow, curving staircase while fighting. The design also gave the defenders a bonus advantage. Medieval spiral staircases were designed so that they wound clockwise going up. That meant the invading knights had to advance with their left side to the front, which was a serious problem because pretty much all knights wielded their swords with their right hands.

Money Matters

Being a knight was extremely expensive. The armor, the weapons, the horse, and the servants all cost an obscene amount of money, on top of normal living expenses. Still, as skillful horseback fighters, knights were a vital part of any army, so the ruler had to provide them with the means to support themselves. The solution to this problem was knight-service, a system in which the ruler gave his knights a plot of land—and, in effect, the people living on said land—in a pact called a knight's fee or "fief." The knight was a tenant of the lord, with rights to rule over his fiefdom as he saw fit. In exchange, the lord could summon the knight and his men to fight in his army.

Virtues Of Chivalry

Chivalry was an overall system of proper knightly conduct. Its borders were loosely defined and often extended beyond the battlefield and into everyday behavior. The codes of conduct and etiquette were extremely strict, but their essence could be condensed into the vows a knight made during his dubbing ceremony. A knight should never traffic with traitors. He should never give evil counsel to a lady (regardless of her marital status) and should always treat her with respect and defend her against any danger. What's more, he must take part in fasts and abstinences, attend daily Mass and make offerings to the Church. The last of those vows was obviously inserted into the ceremony by the Church themselves. When they started preaching for the First Crusade in the 11th Century, they devised a cunning plan to get knights on board with their mission. The Church introduced its own code of chivalry, a code of conduct all knights were to follow. Unsurprisingly, it revolved largely around doing what the Church said and upholding Christianity. Although chivalrous behavior was common at social events, not many knights kept to chivalrous ideals when they entered battle. Instead, most opted to butcher and pillage as much as they wanted. They were soldiers and practical men, after all—they weren't going to risk getting killed because their opponent might be less chivalrous than them.

The Origins Of Knighthood

Knights were always associated with horses—their armored warhorses, known as destriers, were massive and trained for battle. Because of that, it's believed that the concept of knighthood comes from ancient horse troops. Knights are though to have originated way back in the heyday of the Roman Empire. The ancient Romans had an elite equestrian order known as the Ordo Equestris. Although the Ordo Equestris can't be conclusively linked to knights, scholars note that they shared many similarities with knights of the Middle Ages—they were lesser nobility who fought on horseback and commanded considerable respect. When Charlemagne, Emperor of the Franks in the ninth century, combined a similar mounted nobleman class with the concept of feudalism, knighthood was born.

Armour

No knight would dream of entering the battlefield without his suit of armor. The armour had to be tailor-made (since the garments were made of metal and other inflexible materials, it was essential that they fit as well as possible). It got sturdier and sturdier over time—originally knights' armor was a collection of padded garments and chainmail. As technology progressed, plate armour and finally full plate armour (the full knights' armour seen in most movies) entered the knight's wardrobe. Full plate armour was complex and weighed around 50 pounds. It could deflect blows from most medieval weapons. The quality and impressiveness of the armour was not only a life-saver but also a status symbol—the better the armor was, the more important the knight was thought to be.

Jousting And Hastilude

Jousting wasn't just something knights did in between wars. In fact, when jousting developed into the sports-like event popular culture depicts it as, there

weren't many wars to fight. Jousting began as an exercise in medieval combat tactics. However, when the crusades ended and knights had no more wars to fight, jousting quickly became a hastilude, the medieval name for a combat-themed sport. Popular hastilude events included the *pas d'armes* (passage of arms), in which a knight had to fight his way through a group of challengers, and melee, in which a group of knights were divided into two teams that fought each other on foot. Surprisingly, jousting was seldom the main event—usually the melee was the center of attention.

Training

A knight's training was an arduous process that began at the age of seven and lasted for 14 years. The future knight would first serve as a page. At that point he was just a servant boy who had to run errands and serve his lord. Although most of his training was in the form of different games and sports, they were extremely serious games. Instead of toys and action figures, the medieval page played with two-handed maces and practiced horsemanship. At the age of 14, the page graduated to become a squire. Each squire usually served a specific knight, acting as a butler of sorts and helping to dress the knight and maintain his armor and weapons. A squire was seen as a man who was capable of fighting on the battlefield. As such, his training became more and more dangerous. Injuries were commonplace, and traditional knightly skills such as jousting and quarterstaff-fighting became part of the training regime. At 21, the squire was finally knighted. The knighting process was called dubbing, and it was originally very simple—the nobleman performing the ceremony would just slap the squire on the neck with an open hand and say a few quick words.

The Crusades

The crusades, Church-orchestrated war campaigns to conquer the Holy Land and seize it from the Muslims, were for centuries the main stage for knights to show their prowess. Many people think there were just a couple of crusades, but in reality there were quite a lot more. The crusades were a near-constant religious war that raged for almost 200 years. There were eight major crusades (or nine, if you include the unfortunate Peasants' Crusade led by Peter the Hermit and Walter the Penniless) and many more minor crusades in between. Unfortunately for the knights, the crusades were ultimately a failure and resulted in the Holy Land falling into Saracen hands. Still, that didn't stop a succession of Popes from ordering further crusades against multiple enemies (mostly their political enemies from Europe) for centuries to come.

Modern Knights

Since 1560, knighthood has essentially ceased to exist as a military honor. There are still a few hereditary "true" knights around today, but most new knighthoods are bestowed because of the contributions their recipients have made to society in one way or another. Although there are still many chivalric orders, most that were created after the Middle Ages were specifically designed as means to decorate deserving individuals. For instance, the knighthoods given to famous people such as Sir Elton John, Dame Judi Dench, and Sir Paul McCartney are purely honorific and do not require them to saddle up and charge the enemy.

Did You Know?

The shortest war in history was fought between Zanzibar and England in 1896. The war lasted only 38 minutes before Zanzibar surrendered.

The longest reigning monarch in history was Pepi II, who ruled Egypt for 90 years, 2566 to 2476 BC.

Many men who acted as guards along the Great Wall of China in the Middle Ages spent their whole lives there. They were born there, raised there, they married there, died there, and were even buried within the wall.

Ancient Romans at one time used human urine as an ingredient in their toothpaste.

The first bomb dropped on Germany in World War II, killed the only elephant in the Berlin Zoo.

In Ancient Greece, if a woman watched even one Olympic event, she was executed.

Attila the Hun bled to death from a nosebleed on his wedding night.

In ancient Rome, it was considered a sign of leadership to be born with a crooked nose.

The flu killed over 20 million people in Spain from 1918 to 1919.

Julius Caesar wore a laurel wreath to cover the onset of baldness.

Roman Emperor Caligula was so upset by the death of his sister Drusila that he imposed a year of mourning. During this time, everyone in the empire was forbidden to dine with his family, laugh or take a bath. The penalty for transgression was death.

When Albert Einstein died, his last words died with him. The nurse close to him did not understand German.

People have been wearing glasses for about 700 years.

Coffee is the second largest item of international commerce in the world. The largest is petrol.

In 200 BC, when the Greek city of Sparta was at the height of its power there were 20 slaves for every citizen. Great news if you were free, not such good news for the slaves.

Ancient Egyptians used slabs of stones as pillows.

In Ancient Egypt, cats were considered sacred. When a family pet cat died, the entire family would shave off their eyebrows and remain in mourning until they had grown back.

Peter the Great executed his wife's lover, and forced her to keep her lover's head in a jar of alcohol in her bedroom.

Abraham Lincoln was shot with a Derringer.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, there was a tax put on men's beards.

February 1865 is the only month in recorded history not to have a full moon.

Marie Currie, who twice won the Nobel Prize, and discovered radium, was not allowed to become a member of the prestigious French Academy because she was a woman.

Christmas didn’t become a national holiday in the USA until 1890.

Atilla the Hun is thought to have been a dwarf.

One of Queen Victoria's wedding gifts was a 3 metre diameter, half tonne cheese.

Silly facts

Wearing headphones for just an hour will increase the bacteria in your ear by 700 times.

The original basket in basketball, as invented by James Naismith in 1891, was a peach basket.

Like fingerprints, everyone's tongue print is different.

The world's population grows by 100 million each year.

Dentists have recommended that a toothbrush be kept at least 6 feet away from a toilet to avoid airborne particles resulting from the flush.

In most American states, a wedding ring is exempt by law from inclusion among the assets in a bankruptcy estate. This means that a wedding ring cannot be seized by creditors, no matter how much the bankrupt person owes.

The hair of an adult man or woman can stretch 25 percent of its length without breaking.

Ninety percent of New York City cabbies are recently arrived immigrants.

By law, information collected in a U.S. census must remain confidential for 72 years.

You are more likely to get attacked by a cow than a shark.

The Main Library at Indiana University sinks over an inch every year because when it was built, engineers failed to take into account the weight of all the books that would occupy the building.

Anti-modem laws restrict Internet access in the country of Burma. Illegal possession of a modem can lead to a prison term.

It would take a car traveling at 100 mph nearly 30 million years to reach our nearest star.

Our eyes are always the same size from birth, but our nose and ears never stop growing.

China uses 45 billion chopsticks per year, using 25 million trees to make them.

The Hoover Dam was built to last 2,000 years. The concrete in it will not even be fully cured for another 500 years.

Alfred Hitchcock didn't have a belly button. It was eliminated when he was sewn up after surgery.

Jack Nicholson holds the record for most individual Golden Globe wins, which is six.

Approximately sixty circus performers have been shot from cannons. At last report, thirty-one of these have been killed.

The longest interval between an original film and its sequel is forty-six years – between The Wizard of Oz and Return to Oz.

The launching mechanism of a carrier ship that helps planes to take off, could throw a pickup truck over a mile.

The average person is half an inch taller upon rising in the morning.

Watermelons are a popular gift to bring to a host in China or Japan.

If you put a raisin in a glass of champagne, it will keep floating to the top and sinking to the bottom.

Every time Beethoven sat down to write music, he poured ice water over his head.

Humans are the only mammals that use a smile as an emotional response.

The Japanese word "Arigato" meaning thank you is derived from the Portugese word "Obrigado". Portugal once had a thriving trade with Japan.

It's against the law to catch fish with your bare hands in Kansas.

Tipping at a restaurant in Iceland is considered an insult.

Astronauts are not allowed to eat beans before they go into space because passing wind in a space suit damages them.

Most cows give more milk when they listen to music.

To burn off one plain M&M, you need to walk the full length of a football field.

Celery has negative calories. It takes more calories to eat a piece of celery than the celery has in it to begin with.

During one seven year period, Thomas Edison obtained approximately three hundred patents. In is whole life he obtained over one thousand patents.

Everyone drinks coffee to perk themselves up, but in fact an apple can perk one up more than a cup of coffee can.

There are only four words in the English language which end in "dous": tremendous, horrendous, stupendous, and hazardous.

The sun's total lifetime as a star capable of maintaining a life-bearing Earth is about 11 billion years. Nearly half that time has passed.

A clam can switch its gender from male to female,and it will take place few times throughout its life.

On a Canadian two dollar bill, the flag flying over the Parliament building is an American flag.

A study at Harvard has shown that eating chocolate can actually help you live longer.

A rose picked during afternoon can survive longer than a rose picked in the morning.

In an average lifetime the average American receives 31 prank phone calls.

If you yelled for 8 years, 7 months and 6 days you would have produced enough sound energy to heat one cup of coffee.

Crocodiles and alligators are surprisingly fast on land. Although they are rapid, they are not agile. So, if being chased by one, run in a zigzag line to lose him or her.

More calories are wasted by sleeping than sitting and watching TV.

The Earth experiences 50,000 Earth quakes per year and is hit by Lightning 100 times a second.

"Go." is the shortest complete sentence in the English language.

In the United States, a pound of potato chips costs two hundred times more than a pound of potatoes.

Table tennis balls have been known to travel off the paddle at speeds up to 160 km/h.

Some Amazing Facts

The country with the highest consumption of candy at 29.5 pounds annually per person is Denmark.

85,000,000 tons of paper are used in the United States each year.

Hydra - an aquatic creature is the only living creature that never die. It regenerates, replacing its cells with fresh ones.

A Baboon called "Jackie" became a private in the South African army in World War I.

Coca-Cola was originally green because of fresh cocoa leaves.

The Nobel Peace prize was first awarded in 1901 to Jean Henry Dunant, who was the founder of the Swiss Red Cross.

A bibliophile is a collector of rare books. A bibliopole is a seller of rare books.

Babies are born without knee caps. They don't appear until the child reaches 2-6 years of age.

During World War II, the Japanese used shark liver oil in the engines of their fighter planes.

A diamond will not dissolve in acid. The only thing that can destroy it is intense heat.

Leaving the water running while brushing your teeth can waste four gallons of water in a minute.

There are over one hundred billion galaxies with each galaxy having billions of stars.

A father sea catfish keeps the eggs of his young in his mouth until they are ready to hatch. He will not eat until his young are born, which may take several weeks.

Beetles taste like apples, wasps like pine nuts, and worms like fried bacon.

The more a person struggles to get out of quicksand the faster they will sink. Staying still, and being calm will actually make the body float in the quicksand because the body is less dense than the quicksand is.

The average lead pencil will draw a line 35 miles long or write approximately 50,000 English words.

A humming bird flaps its wings up to 90 times in one second or over 5000 times a minute.

"Almost" is the longest word in the English language with all the letters in alphabetical order.

Women are twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression than men in the United States.

If the population of China walked past you in single file, the line would never end because of the rate of reproduction.

A mosquito will become restless and start flying around if there is an increase of carbon dioxide in the surrounding air.

Walmart-mart sells more apparel a year than all the other competing department stores combined.

A dog can hear sounds that are 100 times fainter than the faintest sounds that a person can hear. If a person can just hear a noise that is coming from 10 feet away, a dog could hear that same noise from 100 feet away.

A person uses approximately fifty-seven sheets of toilet paper each day.

Victoria's Secret model Karolina Kurkova doesn't have a belly button. A belly button is always photo shopped into her bikini shots.

The best time for a person to buy shoes is in the afternoon. This is because the foot tends to swell a bit around this time.

A polar bears skin is black. Its fur is actually clear, but like snow it appears white.

Internet Addiction will be classified as a real psychological disorder in 2013.

Before air conditioning was invented, white cotton slipcovers were put on furniture to keep the air cool.

Each nostril of a human being registers smells in a different way. Smells that are made from the right nostril are more pleasant than the left. However, smells can be detected more accurately when made by the left nostril.

A quarter of raw potato placed in each shoe at night will keep the leather soft and the shoes smelling fresh and clean.

The reason why hair turns gray as we age is because the pigment cells in the hair follicle start to die, which is responsible for producing "melanin" which gives the hair colour.

The largest employer in the world is the Indian railway system in India, employing over 1.6 million people.

About 10,000,000 people have the same birthday as you.

The Great Pyramids used to be as white as snow because they were encased in a bright limestone that has worn off over the years.

The average distance between the stars in the sky is 20 million miles.

Abraham Lincoln had to go across the street to the War Department to get news from the battlefield because there was no telegraph in the White House.

If you are struck by lightning, your skin will be heated to 28,000 degrees Centigrade, hotter than the surface of the Sun.

Basketball was invented in 1891 by James Naismith. He set out to invent a game to occupy students between the football and baseball seasons.

Funny Animal Facts

Reindeer eat moss because it contains a chemical that stops their body from freezing.

A giraffe can clean its ears with its 21-inch tongue.

It is possible to lead a cow upstairs but not downstairs.

Camels can survive in the desert without drinking for almost 3 months.

Cows kill more people than Sharks. About 10 humans are killed by Sharks every year but nearly 100 people die each year from being stepped on by cows.

A cockroach will live nine days without its head, before it starves to death.

The praying mantis is the only insect that can turn its head 360 degrees.

Bulls are colorblind, therefore will usually charge at a matador's waving cape no matter what color it is - be it red or neon yellow.

The strongest animal in the world is the rhinoceros beetle. It can lift 850 times its own weight.

Crocodiles swallow stones to help them dive deeper.

Other than humans, black lemurs are the only primates that have blue eyes.

The Chameleon can focus its eyes separately to watch two objects at once.

A crocodile's tongue is attached to the roof of its mouth and he cannot move it.

Many snakes never stop growing. That's one reason they must shed their skin.

99% of all animal species that ever lived on Earth are now extinct.

Goldfish lose their color if they are kept in dim light or are placed in a body of running water, such as a stream.

Armadillos, opossums and sloths spend up to 80 percent of their lives sleeping.

Owls swallow their prey hole because they have no teeth. After 12 hours they cough up the feathers, bones, and fur in a shape of a football pellet.

A species of earthworm in Australia grows up to 10 feet in length.

If the Sun Bear is grabbed or bitten around its head, it can turn round inside the wrinkly skin on its head and bite the predator.

The giraffe has no vocal cords and communicates by vibrating the air around it's neck.

It is estimated that millions of trees in the world are accidentally planted by squirrels who bury nuts and then forget where they hid them.

Chained dogs are 3 times more likely to bite than unchained dogs.

The elephant's memory is legendary, in fact, they have a special ceremony for the return of a long lost member of the herd.

It is the female lion who does more than 90 percent of the hunting, while the male is afraid to risk his life, or simply prefers to rest.

The world's smallest mammal is the bumblebee bat of Thailand, weighing less than a penny.

Goat’s eyes have rectangular pupils, which allow them to watch over their broad, flat grazing area for predators.

An octopus can change its shape and color to blend in with its surroundings.

A flamingo can only eat when it's head is upside down.

When a giraffe's baby is born it falls from a height of six feet, normally without being hurt.

The blue whale is the largest of all whales and is also considered the largest animal to have ever existed in the world.

A woodpecker can peck up to 20 times in a second.

Moose have terrible vision, so much so that they'll mate with small vehicles.

Humpback whales create the loudest sound of any living creature.

An electric eel can produce a shock of up to 650 volts, which it uses to defend itself from predators or for hunting its prey.

The venom of a poison arrow frog can kill approximately 2,200 people.

To escape the grip of a crocodile's jaw, push your thumb into its eyeballs-it will let you go instantly.

Normally, a dolphin consumes food equivalent to one-third of its weight, every day.

A tarantula spider can survive for more than two years without food.

Fish communicate with each other by rasping their teeth to make sounds in their throat, or by using their swim bladder to create sounds.

Funny Facts About Humans

People are more likely to tilt their heads to the right when kissing instead of the left.

The human body weighs 40 times more than the brain.

You could remove a large part of your internal organs and survive.

The majority of American models are skinnier than 98% of American women.

The average person who stops smoking requires one hour less sleep a night.

A baby is born every seven seconds.

The Dutch people are known to be the tallest people in Europe.

People have the tendency to chew the food on the side that they most often use their hand.

The most common time for a wake-up call is 7 AM.

The human heart creates enough pressure while pumping to squirt blood 30 feet.

The typical person goes to the bathroom 6 times a day.

The three things pregnant women dream most of during their first trimester are frogs, worms and potted plants.

About 32 million bacteria call every inch of your skin home.

After spending hours working at a computer display, look at a blank piece of white paper. It will probably appear pink.

The fastest growing nail is on the middle finger. And the nail on the middle finger of your dominant hand will grow the fastest of all. Why is not entirely known, but nail growth is related to the length of the finger, with the longest fingers growing nails the fastest and shortest the slowest.

Human hair and fingernails continue to grow after death.

On average, people spend more than five years of their lives dreaming.

An average human drinks about 16,000 gallons of water in a lifetime.

The surface area of a human lung is equal to a tennis court.

The average adult falls asleep seven minutes after turning out the light.

Nearly all boys grow at least as tall as their mothers.

The average human will eat one pound of insects in their lifetime.

It takes about 60 seconds for one blood cell to travel a full circuit of your body.

The average American spends six months at red lights throughout his or her life.

Nerve impulses to and from the brain travel as fast as 170 miles per hour.

More than 2,500 left handed people are killed every year from using right handed products.

Humans are the only animals to sleep on their backs.

Sir Winston Churchill smoked an estimated 300,000 cigars in his lifetime.

Every time you lick a stamp you consume one tenth of a calorie.

Human stomachs produce a new layer of mucus every 2 weeks to stop it digesting itself.

Your left lung is smaller than your right lung to make room for your heart.

No pain in the brain! Do you know our brain does not feel pain. Even though brain processes pain signals, the brain itself actually does not feel pain.

The feet account for one quarter of all the human body's bones.

A cough releases an explosive charge of air that moves at speeds up to 60 mph.

An adult human body contains approximately 100 trillion cells.

It takes twice as long to lose new muscle if you stop working out than it did to gain it.

An average person has over 1,460 dreams a year!

An average human scalp has 100,000 hairs.

A human head remains conscious for about 15 to 20 seconds after it is been decapitated.

We are about 1 cm taller in the morning than in the evening.

Thomas Edison, light bulb inventor, was afraid of the dark.

Birth control pills designed for humans will also work for a gorilla.

People are much more likely to report being in "flow" on the job than during leisure.

Most people shed between 50 to 100 hairs every day.

A man named Charles Osborne had the hiccups for 69 years.

Funny Random Facts

You burn 26 calories in a one minute kiss.

The longest time a person has been in a coma is 37 years.

The Pentagon has twice as many restrooms as necessary. When it was built, segregation was still in place in Virginia, so separate restrooms for blacks and whites were required by law.

Hitler was claustrophobic. They had to install a mirror in an elevator just to keep him from being scared.

President Kennedy was the fastest random speaker in the world with upwards of 350 words per minute.

The largest known kidney stone weighed 1.36 kilograms.

In 1977 a 13 year old boy had a tooth growing out of his foot.

The chances of you dying on the way to get your lottery tickets is greater than your chances of winning.

In the early days of the telephone, operators would pick up a call and use the phrase, "Well, are you there?". It wasn't until 1895 that someone suggested answering the phone with the phrase "number please?"

Statistically you are more likely to be killed by a champagne cork than by a poisonous spider.

The fingerprints of koala bears are virtually indistinguishable from those of humans, so much so that they could be confused at a crime scene.

Grapes explode when you put them in the microwave.

Apples are more effective at keeping people awake in the morning than caffeine.

There are two credit cards for every person in the United States.

A raisin dropped in a glass of fresh champagne will bounce up and down continually from the bottom of the glass to the top.

The average bra size today is 36C whereas 10 years ago it was a 34B.

Chocolate kills dogs! True, chocolate affects a dog's heart and nervous system. A few ounces are enough to kill a small sized dog.

About two hundred babies are born worldwide every minute.

The first person selected as the Time Magazine Man of the Year was Charles Lindbergh in 1927.

The longest recorded flight of a chicken is thirteen seconds.

Einstein couldn't speak fluently when he was nine. His parents thought he might be retarded.

Ten percent of the Russian government's income comes from the sale of vodka.

Dogs have four toes on their hind feet, and five on their front feet.

There are twice as many kangaroos in Australia as there are people. The kangaroo population is estimated at about 40 million.

The average American family views television six hours each day.

Mario from super Mario Brothers for the NES was originally known as Jumpman from the 1981 arcade game Donkey Kong.

A car that shifts manually gets 2 miles more per gallon of gas than a car with automatic shift.

The moon is moving away at a tiny, although measurable distance from the earth every year. Do the math and you will clearly see that 85 million years ago it was orbiting the earth at a distance of about 35 feet from the earth's surface. This would explain the death of the dinosaurs.

Every citizen of Kentucky is required by law to take a bath at least once a year.

Word "Goodbye" came from "God bye" which came from "God be with you."

By raising your legs slowly and lying on your back, you can't sink in quicksand.

In the United States there is one birth every 8 seconds and one death every 14 seconds.

If you have three quarters, four dimes, and four pennies, you have $1.19. You also have the largest amount of money in coins without being able to make change for a dollar.

A person swallows approx. 295 while eating dinner.

A crocodile always grows new teeth to replace the old teeth.

Funny Weird Facts

The cigarette lighter was invented before the match.

A normal person will die from total lack of sleep sooner than from starvation. Death will occur about 10 days without sleep, while starvation takes a Few weeks.

Ostriches are often not taken seriously. They can run faster than horses, and the males can roar like lions.

Studies show that if a cat falls off the seventh floor of a building, it has about thirty percent less chance of surviving than a cat that falls off the twentieth floor. It supposedly takes about eight floors for the cat to realise what is occurring, relax and correct itself.

Sharks and rays are the only animals known to man that don't get cancer. Scientists believe this has something to do with the fact that they don't have bones, but cartilage.

If you put two straws in your mouth, one inside a drink and one outside it, you won't be able to drink through either straw.

Barbie's full name is Barbara Millicent Roberts.

Gopher snakes in Arizona are not poisonous, but when frightened they may hiss and shake their tails like rattlesnakes.

No piece of paper can be folded in half more than 7 times.

One in three dog owners say they have talked to their pets on the phone.

You are about 1 centimeter taller in the morning than in the evening!

You can tell the sex of a horse by its teeth. Most males have 40, females have 36.

Ninety percent of New York City cabbies are recently arrived immigrants.

In ancient Egypt priests plucked every hair from their bodies, including their eyebrows and eyelashes.

It is not possible to tickle yourself. This is because when you attempt to tickle yourself you are totally aware of the exact time and manner in which the tickling will occur, unlike when someone else tickles you.

23% of all photocopier faults world-wide are caused by people sitting on them and photocopying their butts.

Donald Duck comics were banned from Finland because he doesn't wear any pants.

It's physically impossible for you to lick your elbow.

The flea can jump 350 times its body length. It's like a human jumping the length of a football field.

In 10 minutes, a hurricane releases more energy than all of the world's nuclear weapons combined.

Because metal was scarce, the Oscars given out during World War II were made of wood.

The tooth is the only part of the human body that can’t repair itself.

Most dust particles in your house are made from dead skin.

Your ears secrete more earwax when you are afraid than when you aren't.

Chewing gum while peeling onions will keep you from crying.

Michael Jordan makes more money from Nike annually than all of the Nike factory workers in Malaysia combined.

If you farted consistently for 6 years and 9 months, enough gas is produced to create the energy of an atomic bomb.

The human body is estimated to have 60,000 miles of blood vessels.

You're born with 300 bones, but by the time you become an adult, you only have 206.

Your body has enough iron in it to make a nail 3 inches long.

Historic Facts

Saint Simeon Stylites was a monk who gained fame in the 5th century for spending 37 years standing on a small platform on top of a tall pillar in Syria. He did it for ascetic reasons and his example was followed in later years by other well known stylite saints. His story is quite amazing and you can read more about it here.

In the First Dynasty of ancient Egypt, hoards of staff and family members were walled up with the body of the dead king. The humans and animals buried with the king were expected to help him in the afterlife.

In 1927 Otto Rohwedder invented sliced bread. He made the first machine to slice and wrap bread and won a patent for the process. After only six years from invention, more sliced bread was sold than unsliced.

In 1911, pigtails were banned in China because they were seen as a link with its feudal past.

To save the effort of sailing boats upstream, Mesopotamian traders built collapsable boats which they would sail downstream with a donkey on board. At the other end of their journey they would sell the frame and when they finished trading, they would use the donkey to return home.

In ancient Rome the punishment for killing one's father was to be drowned in a sack along with a viper, a dog, and a rooster. The reason behind this? I have no idea.

Alexander the Great invented a spying technique still used today: he had his soldiers write letters home, which he then intercepted and read to discover who was against him.

In Gubbio, Northern Italy, a race has been run every year since the 12th century – and the outcome is rigged. Villagers carry three statues in the race, Saints Ubaldo (for whom the race was started), Anthony and George. Every year Saint Ubaldo comes first, Saint George second, and Saint Anthony last.

When anaesthetic was used for the first time in childbirth in 1847, the mother was so amazed and relieved at how painless the birth was that she named her child Anaesthesia.

The last time a cavalry charge was used in war was in the Second World War. A mongolian cavalry division charged against a German infantry division – the result? Not one German was killed and 2,000 of the cavalry were.

The grid layout used in many cities around the world is not a new invention – it first appeared in the city of Mohenjo Daro, in India, 4,500 years ago. The houses

to the side of the streets had bare walls facing the street to keep out the sun and dust from carts.

The first policewoman was Alice Stebbins Wells who joined the LAPD in 1910. Because she was the first (and only) policewoman, she designed her own police uniform. Four years later, Britain had their first woman policeman.

In the 1700s in Paris, women wore hats with lightning rods attached when venturing outdoors during bad weather. Bad idea.

In circa 3100–3050 BC Egypt was ruled by its very first Pharaoh – King Menes. It was said that he was the first human ruler – inheriting the throne from the god Horus.

Gorgias of Epirus (3rd century BC), a Greek sophist, was born in his dead mother's coffin! Pallbearers heard him crying out as they carried his mother's coffin to the grave.

Ye Olde Englande

The famous Battle of Hastings did not take place in Hastings! It was actually waged at Senlac Hill – which is about 6 miles (10km) north-west of Hastings. "The battle at Senlac Hill" certainly doesn't have the same ring to it as "The Battle of Hastings"!

One of the earliest versions of the London Bridge was destroyed in 1014 when the Saxons rowed up the Thames, tied ropes to it, and pulled it down! This helped regain London for the Anglo-Saxon king against the Danes. It is possible that this event may have been the inspiration for the nursery rhyme "London Bridge is falling down".

Berengaria of Navarre was the Queen of England by her marriage to King Richard The Lionheart. Little is known of her life – but what is known is that she is the only Queen of England never to step foot in England! The entire time that she was married to Richard, she lived in Europe. In fact, Richard himself only spent about 6 months in England as he was so busy traveling on crusader business.

In 1086, 10% of the population recorded in the Domesday Book (a large census) were slaves. In some areas, there were as many as 20%.

England used to be the native home of Brown Bears, but they became extinct around the 11th century. In latter parts of the Middle Ages, the bears were imported into England for sport.

It was not uncommon in England during the medieval period, for animals to be put on trial for crimes. Animals could be sentenced to death if found guilty of their crimes.

The Middle English term "pygg" referred to a type of clay. In the middle ages, people would often keep coins in jars or pots made of pygg – these were called "pygg jars". By the 18th century, with the evolution of language, these came to be known as a "pig bank" or "piggy bank".

Contrary to popular belief, medieval English people bathed quite regularly in public baths designed for that purpose. This was due to the belief that "cleanliness is next to Godliness". Public baths were eventually opposed by the Protestants in the 16th century because of prostitution being common there.

Most common folk had to produce their own food. For this reason rye and barley bread was common amongst the poor who could not afford the large quantities of manure needed to grow wheat for white bread.

Trial by ordeal was common in England in the middle ages. In this trial, the accused would be subjected to a very painful task (such as being burnt by a hot iron) – if they survived the trial, or their wounds healed quickly, they would be found not guilty as it was believed that God had performed a miracle to help the

accused. The Catholic Church forbade participation in these trials and demanded the use of compurgation instead. Compurgation was the taking of an oath of innocence by the accused which 12 peers must believe.

One bizarre recipe for a medicine to protect against the plague involved drinking ale that has had crushed roasted egg shells, leaves and petals of marigold flowers, and treacle added to it. Needless to say this was not particularly effective.

The Barber's pole symbolizes blood and bandages, as most barbers also performed the roles of surgeons and dentists in their towns. Bandages stained with blood would be washed and hung from a pole outside the barber's shop – these would then twist in the wind to form the spiral pattern we are all familiar with today. Macabre but true.

Prior to the introduction of surnames in England in 1066, everyone born had just one name. When surnames were introduced they would often include a nickname – such as Robert Red (symbolic of his hair color). If Robert went bald over time, his name could change to "Robert Ball" (ball meaning bald in Middle English). In time, the system evolved to a point where people would take the same name as their father – giving us the modern surname system.

Contrary to popular belief, gargoyles were not added to Churches and buildings to ward off evil spirits – they were drain pipes! True gargoyles project out of a wall (decorative monsters are not gargoyles) and rain water flows out their mouths away from the building, rather than down the side of the building causing damage. Their true purpose can be seen quite clearly in the photograph above of St Mary's Church in Adderbury. Gargoyles can be found all over Great Britain and are visible on virtually every Church built there during the middle ages.

Nazi Secret Weapons

During the World War II, the Nazis experimented with a number of new weapon designs. Many of them, like the V-1 and V-2 rockets, the U-boat, or the Panzer tank, saw extensive action. However, there were some that never really caught on, either because of impracticality or a lack of time. That doesn't make them any less awesome.

Heinkel 162
Designed and launched in three months during 1944, the He 162 was chosen as a winner of the Volksjäger ("People's Fighter") aircraft design competition, which the Nazis set up to find defensive aircraft that could be mass-produced, using little strategic resources. The 162 was also designed to be flown by novice or untrained pilots, since the aces of the German air force kept dying and it took too long to train new pilots. Ironically, it actually proved terribly complicated to fly, making it more or less useless for the Hitler Youth, who were set to be the pilots. The wings were made mostly of wood, with only a metal fuselage. Even though the first prototype broke its wing during a test flight, the He 162 went into production, and about 116 of the planes were completed. Very few were flown successfully.

Panzer VIII Maus
The Panzer VIII Maus was a super-heavy tank that remains the largest fully enclosed armored fighting vehicle ever built. Designed by Dr. Ferdinand Porsche, the Panzer VIII was 50 percent longer than the next largest German tank and was over three times as heavy. Due to the fact that bridges weren't able to support the weight, the Panzer VIII was designed with a series of components that would allow it to travel underwater to a depth of over 13 meters (45 ft). Due to the impracticalities of building such a massive machine, the Germans never put them into action, and they may have been designed to be as much a psychological weapon as a literal one. Incomplete tanks were captured by British and Soviet forces.

Junkers Ju 322 Mammut
While searching for a suitable replacement material for their cargo planes, the Nazis decided on wood and contracted the Junkers aircraft company to make a prototype for them. Designed as a glider, the Ju 322 Mammut ("Mammoth") resembled one giant wing and had a wingspan of over 60 meters (200 ft). The first test flight was in April 1941, but the plane proved extremely unstable and took nearly two weeks to be towed back to the airfield. In addition, the glider couldn't hold as much weight as originally thought—during one of the tests, a Panzer III fell right through the bottom of the cargo hold. The program was canceled a month later, and the prototypes were chopped up and used as fuel.

Rocket U-Boat
Determined to attack American soil, the Nazis formulated a number of crazy schemes, none of which ever came to fruition. One of the wackiest was the Rocket U-boat—basically a submarine with rocket launchers strapped to it. U-511 was the first to be fitted with rockets, but they were poorly guided and made

it much harder to navigate underwater. The plan was shuttered until 1943, when the V-2 rocket was developed. Unfortunately, the rocket was too big to fit onto a submarine. Instead, three of them were designed to be towed by a Type XXI U-boat to their destination, and then remotely launched from inside the sub. However, neither the launchers nor the Type XXI U-boats were completed before the end of the war.

Fieseler Fi 103R

Renowned SS officer Otto Skorzeny, after becoming interested in why so many V-1 rockets crashed just after take-off, designed a piloted version to fix the problem. Codenamed "Reichenberg," it was supposed to allow the pilot to parachute out at the last minute, although tests showed the canopy had trouble opening with such intense wind resistance (several pilots were killed in these tests). Nevertheless, nearly 100 men volunteered for the program and were unofficially known as "Self-Sacrifice Men," due to the suicidal nature of the "plane." Even though about 70 were produced, they never saw any action during the war—mainly because the Nazis decided it wasn't part of the "German warrior tradition."

Fliegerfaust

A late entry into the war, the Fliegerfaust ("pilot fist") wasn't developed until 1944. Also known as the Luftfaust (air fist), it was a portable ground-to-air rocket launcher, designed to be held and fired by a soldier. Due to a small firing range of only 460 meters (1,500 ft), it was only useful against planes that came relatively close to the ground. More than 10,000 of them were ordered for production, but they were apparently not widely deployed, as only 80 of them were found in late April 1945. In photos taken in Berlin after the Allies arrived, examples of the weapon can be seen lying in the rubble.

Zeppelin Rammer

Proposed in November 1944, the Zeppelin Rammer was an airplane designed to be towed by another plane into range of Allied bombers before being released. Once it had been let go, the pilot would ignite a rocket engine and fly toward the enemy planes, firing rockets on its first pass. On its second time through, the pilot would ram the Allied bomber directly, using its reinforced wings to try and bring down the plane. Afterward, having burned up all the fuel, the plane would glide to a suitable landing site so it could be refueled and sent up again. However, no prototypes were ever constructed—because the factory was destroyed by Allied bombers.

Taifun

The Taifun ("typhoon") was a rocket created by Klaus Heinrich Scheufelen in 1944 and was seen as a solution to the Allied bombers that had been devastating Germany (Scheufelen had previously been working with radio-controlled rockets). They were unguided rockets that would be launched in groups by soldiers at passing planes. They were relatively cheap and were seen as cost-effective, since the Allied bombers were increasingly large and made easier targets. The Taifun used a special contact fuse to explode, which also included a timer in case the rocket missed the plane. In the end, over two million of them

were ordered, yet only 600 were produced, and they never saw any action anyway.

Krummlauf
Developed in two different versions for infantry and tanks, the Krummlauf was a rifle attachment that allowed the user to fire in a number of different directions. Coming in 30°, 45°, or 90° angles, it was designated for production in 1944, with 10,000 being ordered. (The tank version wasn't finished until 1945 and very few were ever made.) For infantry, it was designed to allow them to fire around corners, with a special mirrored sight to aid them. When used by tank operators, it was simply stuck through a hole in the top and fired, to dissuade the enemy from sneaking up to the side of the tank and setting explosive charges.

The Sun Gun
The idea for the "Sun Gun" originated with famed rocket scientist Hermann Oberth in 1923. A giant mirror, more than 1.5 kilometers (about one mile) wide, would be sent into geosynchronous orbit above the Earth. The Nazis were serious about this plan, hoping it would be able to boil the seas and burn cities to the ground. No official construction details were ever released and the plan was estimated to need nearly 15 years to complete, with a cost of over three million marks. However, it is unlikely the weapon would have worked anyway, because light can't be brought to a sharp focus with a mirror unless the source is already focused. Oberth wrote that he came up with the idea after schoolchildren would use little hand mirrors to annoy him with light when he was a teacher.

Historic Oddities

Before the Boston Tea Party, the British actually lowered tea taxes, not raised them.

England's King George I was actually German.

Abel Tasman "discovered" Tasmania, New Zealand and Fiji, on his first voyage, but managed to completely miss mainland Australia!

Ethnic Irishman Bernardo O'Higgins was the first president of the Republic of Chile.

Thomas Jefferson and John Adams both died on the same day – the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Declaration of Independence.2

When the American Civil War started, Confederate Robert E. Lee owned no slaves. Union general U.S. Grant did.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, Tsar Nicholas II and George V were all grandchildren of Queen Victoria.

Karl Marx was once a correspondent for the New York Daily Tribune.

Josef Stalin once studied to be a priest.

Henry Kissinger and Yassir Arafat won the Nobel Peace Prize. Gandhi never did.

The Constitution of the Confederate States of America banned the slave trade.

The Finnish capital of Helsinki was founded by a Swedish king in 1550.

The "D" in D-Day stands for "Day" – "Day-Day"

There was a New Australia in Paraguay in the 1890s.

A New Orleans man hired a pirate to rescue Napoleon from his prison on St. Helena.

Like Dracula (Vlad Tepes), there really was a King Macbeth. He ruled Scotland from 1040 to 1057.

In 1839, the U.S. and Canada fought the bloodless "War of Pork and Beans".

Despite the reputation, Mussolini never made the trains run on time.

The world powers officially outlawed war under the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact.

Olympic Facts

No one actually knows what the origins were of the very first games. One myth suggests that Heracles (the divine son of the god Zeus) ran a race in Olympia and decreed that it be repeated every four years.

The Olympic Games were one of two central rituals in Ancient Greece. The other was the Eleusinian Mysteries – initiation ceremonies for people joining the cult of Demeter and Persephone.

The Statue of Zeus – the father of the Gods and one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World, was housed in a temple at Olympia – the site of the Ancient Olympics.

An Olympiad (a period of 4 years which refers to the time between two games) was used as a measure of years by the Ancient Greeks in much the same way as we now use AD and BC. This idea was devised by the historian Ephorus. Previously, every Greek state used its own different method of time measurement which led to a great deal of confusion.

The only event at the first Olympics was the Stadion race – a race of around 190 meters (measured after the feet of Zeus). The race was named after the building in which the race took place (the source of the English word "stadium". The Stadion race is pictured above.

Unlike the modern starting position, racers (of whom 20 would take place) started in a fully erect standing position with their arms stretched in front of them. If there was a tie, the race would be re-run.

The winner of the first recorded Olympic Games (the first gold medalist in a sense) was Coroebus of Elis – a baker from Eleia (the region in which Olympia was found). He won in 776 BC. Instead of winning a gold medal – as is now the norm – he received an olive branch – more a symbol than a prize. The town still exists today with around 150 citizens.

It is believed that the Greek tradition of athletic nudity started at the games in 720 BC, and it was most likely introduced by the Spartans or Megarian Orsippus. It is from this practice that we have our word "gymnasium" – derived from the Greek word "gymnos" meaning "naked". Competing naked was meant as a tribute to the gods and to encourage aesthetic appreciation of the male body.

While the competitors were naked during the games, it is possible that some wore a kynodesme: a thin leather strip tied tightly around the part of the foreskin that extended beyond the glans (to prevent the glans from showing). It was then tied around the waist to expose the scrotum, or to the base of the penis making it appear to curl upwards. Not all athletes wore the kynodesme. Pictured above is an athlete wearing the kynodesme – the picture is attributed to Triptolemos (480 BC).

During the games, all of Greece was under a truce (ekecheiria) – there could be no use of capital punishment, and no wars or battles. This was in order to ensure the safety of competitors and spectators on the way to Olympia. While this was generally adhered to, at least one account exists of a possible breach by the Spartan army, which resulted in a large fine and a ban from attending the games that year.

The Olympic Games were part of 4 games – held in order so that there would be one set of games each year. The other three were the Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian Games, but the Olympic games were the most important.

Although the first games were "international" in a sense (in that all Greek City States were allowed to enter), only men who spoke Greek could compete. Eventually members of the Greek colonies were also able to enter.

The last running race added to the Ancient Games (after the addition of two longer distance races) was the hoplitodromos – in which competitors would run 400 or 800 yards in full armor with shields and a helmet or greaves (leg armor). This was introduced in 520 BC. Runners would often trip over each other or stumble on shields dropped by other competitors. In the image above we see athletes competing in the hoplitodromos – in far more an orderly fashion than was likely.

In its heyday, the games lasted 5 days. The first three were for the sporting events, with the other two days being used for rituals and celebration. On the final day, all participants attended a feast in which 100 oxen (killed on the first day as a sacrifice to Zeus) were eaten. Certainly very different from the secular opening ceremony we will see this week, or, in fact, all olympic opening ceremonies from modern times.

As part of the move to making Christianity the official religion, the ancient Olympic Games were finally suppressed by either Theodosius I in AD 393 or his grandson Theodosius II in AD 435. They would not return until 1896. They were held in Athens, Greece.

Weird Stories About Famous People

History rocks, but your poor history teachers didn't have time to cover all the fun little bits. Whether these bits were sad, hilarious, or heartwarming, we think it's a shame you missed out. And we're righting that wrong.

Charles Dickens
Charles Dickens was probably the most famous writer of the Victorian era, and anything that resembles his work has now been granted the honorable title "Dickensian". Although his stories usually have happy endings, his own story most certainly did not start happily. Dickens' early life was spent mostly in debtor's prison because his poor dad couldn't pay off his debts so the whole family had to join him in the slammer, a fairly typical practice in Victorian England. He eventually worked in a factory to help pay off the debts, and the terrible working conditions were a major inspiration to his writing. As an adult, he appeared to be a more lighthearted, often pulling practical jokes. He had a fake bookcase with books that were hilariously titled, including Noah's Arkitechture and a nine-volume set entitled Cat's Lives.

Albert Einstein
Albert Einstein is the archetypal kooky scientist who was clearly more than a little bit off and yet was brilliant as brilliant could be. Einstein, although a seemingly friendly, intelligent guy had quite a few skeletons in the closet. In 1901, Einstein and his first girlfriend, Mileva Maric, were on holiday in Italy. It ended when Mileva found herself with child and Einstein found himself with no money to support her and the new baby. The child, Lieserl, was born in 1902 and disappeared from Einstein's letters to Mileva around 1903. It's unknown what happened to the child, but she probably died of scarlet fever. Later in life, Einstein left Mileva in 1912 (and divorced her in 1919) and married his cousin Elsa Lowenthal soon after. In the latter marriage, Einstein had numerous affairs during the marriage and well after Elsa's death in 1936. Genius? Yes. Playboy? Definitely.

Robert Louis Stevenson
You probably know Robert Louis Stevenson as the author of the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. What you probably don't know is that he wrote the novel on cocaine and then gave it to his wife for review. After his wife stated that the book was an allegory, and that he should write it as such, Stevenson burned it so that he could force himself to write it according to his wife's feedback. Speaking of his wife, Fanny Osbourne met Robert Louis Stevenson while she was in Paris– they fell in love, and she became his muse. When Fanny had to return home to America, Stevenson saved up for three years to see her again so that they could be together. That's one determined man.

Abraham Lincoln
Famous for his mighty beard, Abraham Lincoln was a curious figure. Though he wasn't actually born in a log cabin, he did have a relatively hard childhood. Hard labor was part of the daily regime in the frontier where Lincoln grew up, and, at

the age of nine, he lost his mother to milk sickness. As President, he would grow to be history's tallest President of the United States, standing proud at 6'4". Even after he died, his story didn't quite end. In 1876, a group of counterfeiters wanted to hold Lincoln's body for ransom, at the hefty fee of $200,000 in gold and the release of one of their accomplices. They were caught and sentenced to a year in jail.

Napoleon Bonaparte

Napoleon is famous for being short; a megalomaniac with a complex that was named after him; and for trying to take over Europe. But, actually he wasn't that short, he was 5'7", which was normal for the average Frenchman in his time. His childhood was a pitiful one—his father died of stomach cancer and left his family penniless due to his gambling. He was often made fun of in school for his studiousness and thick Corsican accent, but nobody could have predicted Napoleon's rise to power.

Theodore Roosevelt

The USA claims to be a 'class-less society', but nothing could be further from the truth. Theodore Roosevelt's story is one of privilege, big personalities, and bigger sticks. Teddy Roosevelt was born to the wealthy upper class Roosevelt family in New York City and was known to be sickly, asthmatic, and (very) hyper child. He also took up boxing at a young age to combat his weak constitution. Roosevelt had an injury to the left eye caused by boxing while in office. He took many trips to Africa and South America where he hunted and studied numerous exotic species. His best story, perhaps, concerns a speech in Milwaukee in 1912. During the speech, an assassin tried to kill Roosevelt with a gun, but the bullet was slowed down by his folded speech and eyeglass case. Roosevelt promptly told the crowd he'd just been shot, continued giving his speech, and then headed over to the hospital to get it removed. Well played, Mr. Roosevelt, well played.

Peter the Great

If this were a list about strange monarchs, Peter the Great would top the list. Peter the Great was the Czar of Russia in the 18th century. Seeing how backwards Russia was, he decided to tour Western Europe in order to find ways to modernize his country. Peter took the guise of an average merchant to avoid being discovered and came back to Russia with many ways to improve the empire. He set up new schools, created the mighty port of St. Petersburg, and ordered all Russian men to shave their beards or pay a tax. Yes, you read that right. Russians grow such poor beards that they had to pay to keep them. He also had a museum of oddities ranging from deformed animal fetuses to animal parts to dispel superstition in his country. Now that's scientific curiosity.

Charlie Chaplin

Sir Charles "Charlie" Chaplin is perhaps best known for his comedic films of the Roaring Twenties, and he certainly has tales to tell. Chaplin's parents weren't exactly role models–his mother had two illegitimate children from affairs and his father left the family when he was young. His mother eventually died of liver issues after becoming psychotic due to syphilis and malnutrition. His adult life was no less fascinating–Chaplin was once forced to pay child support for a child

that wasn't even his. When a young woman claimed that her child was Chaplin's, blood testing determined that the child was not Chaplin's, but the judge refused to have the test admitted into court, so he made Chaplin pay a substantial sum. Even after death, his story didn't quite end. In 1977, Chaplin's body was stolen for ransom, but it was recovered about two months later.

Sir Richard Francis Burton

Spy, explorer, soldier–so many words to describe Sir Richard Burton, but his stories were perhaps the most amazing. In 1853, Burton convinced the Royal Geographic Society to give him a leave of absence from the army to travel to Mecca and disguise himself as a Muslim–even getting circumcised to keep up the illusion–to make it there. While exploring in Africa, he was impaled by a javelin in a foray with a group of Somali warriors, yet escaped alive. He spoke over 30 different languages and dialects and was a diplomat later in life. It seems likely Sir Richard took plenty of tales to the grave.

Weapons

Culverin

Culverins were medieval guns. These were often used by horsemen in a medieval kind of drive-by shooting. The hand culverin were made of a simple smoothbore tube, closed at one end except for a small hole designed to fire the gunpowder. The tube was held in place by a wooden piece which could be held under the arm. The tube was loaded with gunpowder and lead bullets. The culverin was fired by inserting a lighted cord into the hole. In the image above, the hand culverin is between two small canons. These hand culverins soon evolved into heavier portable culverins, around 40kg in weight, which required a swivel for support and aiming. Such culverins were further equipped with back-loading sabots to facilitate reloading, and were often used on ships – a precursor to the modern canon.

Caltrop

A caltrop is a weapon made up of two (or more) sharp nails or spines arranged so that one of them always points upward from a stable base (for example, a tetrahedron). Caltrops serve to slow down the advance of horses, war elephants, and human troops. It was said to be particularly effective against the soft feet of camels. In modern times Caltrops have been used at times during labor strikes and other disputes. Such devices were used by some to destroy the tires of management and replacement workers. Because of the prevalence of caltrops during the Caterpillar strike of the mid-1990s, the state of Illinois passed a law making the possession of such devices a misdemeanor. Iron caltrops were used as early as 331 BC at Gaugamela according to Quintus Curtius. They were known to the Romans as tribulus or sometimes as Murex ferreus, meaning 'jagged iron'. The Roman writer Vegetius said:

The Roman soldiers rendered [the armed chariots] useless chiefly by the following contrivance: at the instant the engagement began, they strewed the field of battle with caltrops, and the horses that drew the chariots, running full speed on them, were infallibly destroyed.

Punji sticks and caltrops were used in the Vietnam War, sometimes with poison or manure on the points.

Boiling Oil

Back in the day, you had to scale the walls of a city or castle before you could rape and pillage. This led someone to the brilliant idea that you could pour boiling oil on top of the people trying to climb in. Oil was not difficult to come by as the women would all donate their cooking oil (a small price to pay to keep their privates private). If the town ran out of oil, they would use boiling water, or other easily obtainable things like sand. Castles were often built with special holes in the sides to make it easier to pour this blistering liquid on unsuspecting climbers. They were so effective that they were called murder-holes. These holes were also useful for firing arrows at attackers or throwing rocks. Similar holes, called machicolations, were often located in the curtain walls of castles and city

walls. The parapet would project over corbels so that holes would be located over the exterior face of the wall, and arrows could be shot at, rocks dropped on, or boiling water poured over, any attackers near the wall. Various sources claim that molten lead was also used as a weapon in this way, but there is no historical evidence to support that view.

Arbalest

We all know that crossbows are badass – but what about the arbalest? The Arbalest was a larger version of the crossbow and it had a steel prod ("bow"). Since an arbalest was much larger than earlier crossbows, and because of the greater tensile strength of steel, it had a greater force. The strongest windlass-pulled arbalests could have up to 22 kN (5000 lbf) strength and be accurate up to 500m. A skilled arbalestier (arblaster) could shoot two bolts per minute. Arbalests were sometimes considered inhumane or unfair weapons, since an inexperienced crossbowman could use one to kill a knight who had a lifetime of training. The use of crossbows in European warfare dates back to Roman times and is again evident from the battle of Hastings until about 1500 AD. They almost completely superseded hand bows in many European armies in the twelfth century for a number of reasons. Although a longbow had greater range, could achieve comparable accuracy and faster shooting rate than an average crossbow, crossbows could release more kinetic energy and be used effectively after a week of training, while a comparable single-shot skill with a longbow could take years of practice. Crossbows were eventually replaced in warfare by gunpowder weapons, although early guns had slower rates of fire and much worse accuracy than contemporary crossbows. This weapon was so badass, that Pope Innocent II (pictured to the left) banned them at the second Lateran Council in 1139:

We prohibit under anathema that murderous art of crossbowmen and archers, which is hateful to God, to be employed against Christians and Catholics from now on.

Today the crossbow often has a complicated legal status due to the possibility of lethal use and its similarities with both firearms.

Hunga Munga

The Hunga Munga is an iron fighting tool named by the African tribes south of Lake Tchad; also called "danisco" by the Marghi, "goleyo" by the Musgu, and "njiga" by the Bagirmi. It is handheld weapon and has a metal pointed blade with a curved back section and separate spike near the handle. The weapon can be used in hand to hand combat (Melee) although it is normally thrown with a spinning action. These African iron weapons are thrown with a rotatory motion (similar to an Australian boomerang), and cause deep wounds with their projecting blades. They come in many shapes and sizes and they were (and are) used across Africa from the Upper Nile on the east through Central Africa by Lake Tchad to the Africans of the Gaboon in West Africa. In parts of Central Africa, these weapons are shaped like a bird's head. This weapon is used in the Role-Playing game Mage The Ascension by the Euthanatos characters for their magical rituals. Buffy (from Buffy the Vampire Slayer) used one of these from time to time to battle demons that enslave their victims and force them to give

up their identities. The hunga munga was used in the opening credits of the show.

Morning Star
The Morning Star (also sometimes called the goedendag or Holy Water sprinkler) is a term used for a variety of club-like weapons with one or more sharp spikes sticking out of it. It would normally have one big spike poking out of the top with a bunch of smaller ones around the sides. These are often thought of as peasant weapons, but there were also very high quality ones made for the rich. These weapons were most effective when you hit someone on the head with them. The Holy Water sprinkler, was a morning star popular with the English army from the sixteenth century and made in series by professional smiths. Some of them were over 6 foot long! This was the favored weapon of King John of Bohemia who was blind – he would just sit on his horse and swing the thing until he hit someone (preferably one of the bad guys). In the game Mortal Kombat Deception, the character Havik weilds a morning star in his form of armed combat. The Morning Star is considered to be a Holy Weapon in Dungeons and Dragons. Of course, when not engaged in battle, this was a useful tool for keeping thine wyfe and kids in line, or as a backscratcher.

Dead Bodies
One of the upsides to siege warfare in the middle ages was the huge number of dead bodies from people who had died of plague or other mysterious illnesses. A very handy use for these bodies was biological warfare! Most towns would barricade themselves behind huge walls that could not be breached by the enemy – but they often relied on outside sources of fresh water. This is where the bodies come in. You could dump a few bodies in the rivers leading in to the town and all you had to do was wait! A perfect opportunity to sit back and watch some jousting. After a while, the plague would infect the town and you have a great victory! Obviously you can't rape and pillage too soon, but at least you didn't lose any men (except maybe the poor guys that had to carry the bodies to the river). In the image to the left, we see Jane Godbotherer being treated for the plague. She will eventually end up being used as a biological weapon. Plague infection in a human occurs when a person is bitten by a flea that has been infected by biting a rodent that itself has been infected by the bite of a flea carrying the disease. This type of warfare was used before the advent of catapults which were more much more effective at infecting towns with disease.

Trebuchet / Catapult
With the advent of the trebuchet (a very high powered catapult) came the realization that plagued bodies were no longer needed to slowly kill people in a fortified town or castle – you could simply catapult a rotting or diseased animal over the ramparts – or for truly fast results, you could fling over a few beehives. Dead horses were a popular weapon in this form of biological warfare, though anything filled with disease would do the trick. The counterweight trebuchet appeared in both Christian and Muslim lands around the Mediterranean in the twelfth century. It could fling three-hundred-pound (140 kg) projectiles at high speeds into enemy fortifications. Trebuchets were invented in China in about the 4th century BC, came to Europe in the 6th century AD, and did not become

obsolete until the 16th century, well after the introduction of gunpowder. Trebuchets were far more accurate than other medieval catapults. The trebuchet could launch projectiles a distance of over half a mile (over 750 m).

Greek Fire

Picture, if you will, a slow day on the seas. The water is calm, the sky is blue, when suddenly, from out of nowhere, it starts raining fire! You discover that you have just been engaged by a Greek warship and they have flame-throwers! Yes – that's right, the Greeks used flame-throwers in their naval battles from around 670 AD. So what do you do when you are being fired on by flame-throwers? According to one witness:

"Every time they hurl the fire at us, we go down on our elbows and knees, and beseech Our Lord to save us from this danger." In other words, not much! The recipe for Greek fire was a closely guarded secret – even now no one really knows what it was made of. Modern scientists have ventured a few guesses: petroleum, niter, sulfur; or naphtha, quicklime, sulfur; or phosphorus and saltpeter. Regardless of the recipe, the stuff was heated in a cauldron on the ship and squirted out a giant syringe at the enemy. But… the Chinese beat them to it. In the 3rd century BC, a flammable liquid substance was found in the Gao Nu County, located in the northeast portion of what is now the Shaanxi Province. This "flammable liquid" (called Meng Huo You) was probably petroleum that had seeped through the ground and was floating above the local waters. Ever the ingenious people, the Chinese put it to good use in destroying towns built with timber. In 900 AD, the Chinese also invented the Pen Huo Qi – a piston based naphtha flamethrower. The double-piston pump flamethrower was carefully documented and illustrated in the Chinese military manual known as the Wujing Zongyao. It was, of course, used in siege warfare.

Scythed Chariot

I am sure most will agree that it doesn't get more badass than this. A scythed chariot was a war chariot with one or more blades mounted on both ends of the axle. The scythed chariot was pulled by a team of four horses and manned by a crew of up to three men, one driver and two warriors. Theoretically the scythed chariot would plow through infantry lines, cutting combatants in half or at least opening gaps in the line which could be exploited. It was difficult to get horses to charge into the tight phalanx formation of the Greek/Macedonian hoplites (infantry). The scythed chariot avoided this inherent problem for cavalry, by the scythe cutting into the formation, even when the horses avoided the men. The blades extended horizontally for a meter on the sides of the chariot. Xenophon, an eyewitness, describing the scythed chariots at the battle of Cunaxa says, "These had thin scythes extending at an angle from the axle and also under the driver's seat, turned towards the ground". A scythed chariot can be seen in the chariot race of the movie Ben Hur, operated by Messala (here called a "Greek chariot" or a "beaked chariot."). Scythed chariots are seen in the first Colosseum scene in the movie Gladiator. In the film Alexander by Oliver Stone, scythed chariots are shown charging into Macedonian phalanx during the beginning of Battle of Gaugamela scene. This article is licensed under the GFDL because it contains quotations from the Wikipedia articles: Crossbow, Caltrop, Trebuchet, Scythed Chariot

Murderous Gangs From History

Everyone's heard of gangs like the Triads, Yakuza, the Mexican cartels, or the Bloods and the Crips. Some people call such groups of young, violent men a symbol of social decay as the modern world of video games, violent movies, and music eats away at our values—but we've had gangs like this for a long time. Gangs like . . .

Les Apaches

Les Apaches were a French street gang that operated in turn-of-the-century Paris before the advent of World War I. They were called Apaches because they were so ferocious during attacks that a policeman, upon hearing of their crimes, exclaimed that they were as vicious as Apache warriors. They were stylishly dressed, looking like old-timey French hipsters with fancy, striped shirts and berets, creating their own distinct style that would catch on and end up becoming popular in Bohemian circles. But they weren't just fashion victims—they could actually fight. They practiced their own down-and-dirty martial art called "savate." This was a fighting style that relied upon kicks and open-handed punches. A group of Apaches would mug Parisian gentlemen with a combination of savate and great numbers creating such a fear in Paris that the upper classes also picked up on it to protect themselves from constant Apache attacks. But it's not like the Apaches needed martial arts to protect themselves: they had a very specialized weapon that would make James Bond jealous. The Apache pistol also functioned as a knife and folded into a pair of brass knuckles. As you can see, the Apaches didn't just believe in overkill. They believed in over-overkill.

The Forty Elephants Gang

What distinguishes the Forty Elephants gang from the other gangs on our list is that it was entirely female. Before feminism existed, these gals took advantage of the patronizing sexism of the age that meant women were afforded extreme levels of privacy while shopping. It only took a few of these ladies working together to practically strip a store clean of clothing, jewelry, and other loot during a shoplifting spree. The gang operated from some point after the late 1700s right up until the 1950s, mostly targeting areas around London. The most impressive thing about this gang is that men had a completely subservient role within their hierarchy. Their leader was a woman called Maggie Hill who was as deadly as she was pretty—she wore diamond-studded rings like brass knuckles in case things got messy and she had to start swinging her fists.

The Know-Nothings (aka The Bloody Tubs)

The Know-Nothings were a group of toughs from Civil War-era Baltimore who fought for something more terrifying than drugs or territory: politics. Working on behalf of nativists (politicians opposed to immigrants), they intimidated people into voting for the candidates they endorsed. The Know-Nothings got their name from the politicians they supported, who always exclaimed "I know nothing!" when quizzed about the gang. They would block voting booths, stab voters with awls, beat people up, and dunk them into vats full of blood (which earned them their other name "The Bloody Tubs"). They even rounded up voters

and kept them in dank basements until they voted the way the Know-Nothings told them to. One of the voters unfortunate enough to receive this treatment was Edgar Allen Poe, who turned ill a few days later and died. They also fought with volunteer firefighters for control of fire hydrants during fires, causing bloody riots while houses burned to the ground. All in all, a nasty bunch.

Kabukimono

The Kabukimono ("crazy ones") are what became of lordless samurai who formed into drunken gangs of what can only be described as feudal Japanese glam rockers. They were mostly heavily armed, disenchanted teenagers who wore women's clothes and makeup and had their own slang and long hair—sometimes styled ridiculously. Just imagine roving gangs of them, trained to kill, armed with the sharpest swords ever invented—if you have pee in your pants, you're getting the picture. Although they looked ridiculous, they were actually deadly—drunkenly dueling in the streets with their swords, committing petty crimes, and generally not caring about anything, having now become wandering gangs of hooligans. Their motto was "I have lived too long!" which paints a pretty clear picture of how much fear the Kabukimono had of the rule of law: zero. Also, there's a theory floating around that they may have eventually became the yakuza, although modern yakuza don't really like to equate themselves with the sort of guys who might go to a My Chemical Romance concert (we're too afraid of the yakuza to press the issue).

The Vorovsky Mir

The Vorovsky Mir ("thieves in law") were formed in the gulags of Soviet Russia as collections of thieves, bandits, and murderers who banded together for mutual protection. They had little love for the short-sighted and brutal regime that created them, and in a kind of wacky echo of the Communist ideal, they created their own criminal code that they each vowed to uphold. If members broke this code, they were put on trial by the gang. The Vorovsky Mir identified each other with elaborate tattoos, a tradition that still exists today in Russian organized crime (as in the film Eastern Promises). Because it was hard to get certain luxury items before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Vorovsky Mir thrived on smuggling, bringing in clothes and food to Russia. They were so successful that they've survived to the present day—in a fashion—eventually evolving into the Russian mafia.

Mohocks

Like Les Apaches, this London-based gang from the 18th century also modeled themselves after a Native American tribe and are the sort of gang you only expect to find in movies and nightmares. After a delegation of Native Americans arrived in London to visit the Queen, they created such a stir that a youth gang was formed in their honor who called themselves "mohocks." They assaulted people at night, slashing and disfiguring their faces, cutting their noses off with knives, beating people up, and even stuffing women into barrels and rolling them down hills. This was all the more shocking to 18th-century London when rumors that the Mohocks were upper-class youth started going around. This caused moral panic among the lower classes (which mistrusted the gentrified rich folks of London) and plain old fear among the higher classes. And it's not surprising

people were scared. The Mohocks had a habit of getting drunk and creating huge riots. They would attack pedestrians willy-nilly, disfiguring their faces for no real reason, *Clockwork Orange*-style, gouging out people's eyes and stabbing them with swords.

The Five Points Gang

The Five Points gang was a pre-Prohibition Italian-American New York gang, operating from the mid-19th to the early 20th century from the Five Points district of Manhattan. Al Capone was a member at one point before he went on to bigger and more horrible things. In fact, he received the facial scar, which gave him the nickname "Scarface" during a bar fight while serving in the Five Points gang. And although it was the Mafia who would later go on to popularize the image of the Italian gangster in an expensive designer suit, it was the Five Points gang that was the first to require that all members dressed sharply. They rose to prominence as the worst gang in New York, and possibly the whole of America, with even the Mafia poaching members from them.

Thuggee

The Thuggee of 1800s India were a gang of killers, robbers, and assassins who were as deadly and shadowy as ninjas. They left such an impact with their activities that the word "thug" literally derives from them, and they operated with such brutality that they put the Mafia to shame with a Guinness World Record for highest gang death toll (yes there is a record for that, apparently). Every member gave the appearance of being a law-abiding citizen, even telling their wives that they were traveling trades people in order to explain their various murderous commutes. Admittance into the gang was hereditary. So, if your father was a Thuggee, you had to join the family business: murder. The Thuggee chose their victims almost at random, following certain signs that they believed were left by Kali, the goddess of death. They would then befriend the victim and travel with them until the time was right. One of them would say the code words "Bring the tobacco" and the Thuggee would strangle their victim to death and rob them.

Live Oak Boys

The Live Oak Boys were a New Orleans group of nasties from the mid-19th century that managed to terrify a city that was already terrified enough. Around this time, cops would only travel in large groups—and even then only during the day and armed to the teeth. And it's little wonder why. The Live Oak Boys carried the oak clubs they were named after, which they used to spread pandemonium by attacking local bars and saloons and smashing them to pieces. If the proprietor was smart, he would disappear when he saw them coming; if he wasn't smart he would likely soon be dead. The Live Oak Boys would usually do this because a rival proprietor had paid them to put a competitor out of business. Of course, sometimes they did it just because they were bored. The leader of the gang was a man named Red Bill Wilson, whose beard was so manly that it was able hold a hidden knife in case of emergencies. We like to imagine that if he and the Forty Elephants leader met up, they'd instantly start dating.

Victorian Death

Strange Deaths

While people did die from much the same ailments as we do today such as heart failure, strokes and pneumonia, there were just as many deaths caused under bizarre circumstances which serves as a looking glass of the times: Ever hear of death by corset? Well, according to the Dundee Courier of October 22, 1844, one Jane Goodwin, twenty-two, was sitting in church when she was suddenly taken ill and was carried out of the church to the sexton's house. Unfortunately before her friends got to her however, she was already dead. Her cause of death?—her corset was too tightly laced. In a time when dentures were made from the teeth of the recently deceased, it's rather ironic when one considers the death of Mr. Edwin Clayton who died after swallowing his false teeth. As was written in the June 8th 1904 edition of the Yorkshire Evening Post,

"Mr. Clayton was suffocated at Endon, between Leek and Stoke, through swallowing his false teeth. A doctor said he found the top plate of Clayton's false teeth wedged behind the claque of his throat, which would cause him to attempt to vomit, but he would not be able to do so, the fluid would enter the lungs, and he would be suffocated. A verdict of 'Accidental Death' was returned."

Sadly, children were not exempt from death under bizarre circumstances. On December 2, 1873 a child named Mullins was fatally mauled by a pig. As was described in the Yorkshire Post,
"Its throat and chest were so lacerated that it died in a short time. The pig dragged the child out of the house by the throat into the street. This is the second fatal accident of the kind at Galway within a month."

Other ways people died that were indicative of the times was scarlet fever, typhoid, cholera and for women, death by burns which was caused by a combination of open hearth cooking and the use of highly flammable fabrics in their clothes.

Superstitions

From weddings to illnesses, people in the Victorian age had many superstitions regarding everyday life. But no life occurrence was the subject of more superstitions than death. Though no one really knows how or why the Victorians came up with these superstitions, many of them are quite malevolent and ominous in nature. Here's a small sample:
It is bad luck to meet a funeral procession head on. If you see one approaching, turn around. If this is unavoidable, hold on to a button until the funeral cortege passes.
Stop the clock in a death room or you will have bad luck.
If you hear a clap of thunder following a burial it indicates that the soul of the departed has reached heaven.

If you don't hold your breath while going by a graveyard you will not be buried.
If the deceased has lived a good life, flowers would bloom on his grave; but if he has been evil, only weeds would grow.
If you smell roses when no one is around, someone is going to die.
If you see yourself in a dream, your death will follow.
If a sparrow lands on a piano, someone in the home will die.
If a picture falls off a wall, there will be a death of someone you know.
A single snowdrop growing in the garden foretells death.

Mementos

So attached were survivors to the memory of the deceased, that families would obsessively collect any reminder of the deceased that could be had. Such items as lockets, brooches, rings and even locks of hair were known to be coveted. And in an era when photography was still in its infancy, families were also known to take pictures of the deceased mere days after they passed. Called *memento mori*, which translates to "remember your mortality," these photos showed the deceased in settings that displayed their personalities. If for example, the person was a carpenter, they would be photographed in a woodshed, if they were a priest, they would be photographed in church. And yes, if the deceased was an infant, the child would be posed with other family members. And in order to ensure that the deceased looked as natural as possible in these photos, the photographer would either prop the deceased eyes open or paint pupils on to the photographic print. Sometimes even a rosy tint would be added to their cheeks. An even more macabre memento was in the sad case of a deceased infant, the family would often keep the dead body until it mummified, then dress the baby's body and display it as an *objet d'art*!

Funeral Etiquette

For the Victorians, life was all about proper etiquette, and nowhere was this more evident than at funerals. Unlike current times where anyone can attend a funeral service, in the Victorian age, a person must first wait to receive their formal written invitation. (It was not proper however, to send invitations to a funeral of a person who died from a contagious disease. In this case, there would just be a simple notice of death posted in the local paper with the simple phrase "funeral private" and all would be understood.) Funeral guests were then expected to arrive precisely an hour before the service was to begin. Upon entering the funeral parlor or house of the deceased, men were expected to remove their hats and not "replace them again while in the house." Loud talking and laughter were also strictly forbidden and "interviews with the family at the time should not be expected."

In the home or funeral parlor, the remains of the deceased were to be placed in such a way so that "when the discourse is finished, if the corpse is exposed to view, the assembled guests may see the same by passing in single file past the coffin, going from foot to head, up one aisle and down another." On the way to the burial, there were exactly six pall bearers who walked in threes, "on each side of the hearse, or in a carriage immediately before, while the near relatives directly follow the hearse succeeded by those more distantly connected." Ladies however, were firmly denied the privilege of following the remains to the grave

by strict social etiquette. At the end of the service, the master of ceremonies preceded the mourners to the carriages and assisted the ladies to their places. If the physician of the deceased happened to be in attendance, he was placed in the carriage immediately following the near relatives of the deceased.

Mourning Periods

Mourning Periods Were Strictly Regulated thanks to Queen Victoria who turned mourning into an art form unto itself, mourning the dead in the Victorian age became a very strict and formal occasion with a great many rules and regulations.

When a person initially died, so began the mourning process. Curtains were immediately drawn, clocks were stopped at the time of death and mirrors were covered because of the superstition that the spirit of the deceased could become trapped in the reflective glass. Mourning periods were divided into two time frames: deep mourning and half mourning. A widow was expected to mourn her husband for at least two years during which time she was expected to wear black at all times with her only social agenda being at church.

Parents who lost a child were in deep mourning for nine months and half mourning for three months. Children who lost their parents mourned for the same amount of time. The death of a sibling required three months of deep mourning and three months of half mourning. In-laws, aunts, uncles, cousins and other relatives all had mourning periods that ranged from six weeks to six months. As you can probably guess, it would not be unusual for a person to be in mourning sometimes for the better part of a year.

Mourning Attire

Due to the strict adherence to mourning attire, it was quite easy to recognize not only who was in mourning but also for how long. And of course women were the main attractions of this particular fashion show. During the first six months of mourning, the widow was expected to wear a full length dress made entirely of black crepe with white crepe collars and cuffs. On her head she would wear a crepe bonnet with a long crepe veil and a widows cap also of white crepe with black kid gloves on her hands. All kinds of black fur and seal-skin were also worn during this time.

After six months, the crepe material was removed and after three months the widows cap was removed. Now the widow could wear a dress made of silk garbardine, plain black grosgrain or crepe trimmed cashmere with jet trimmings. She could also exchange the heavy crepe veil for a lighter one. As for the use of crepe in mourning veils, doctors were very much opposed to its usage. Many doctors felt that when worn over the face for an extended period of time, the black dye from the crepe material “sheds its pernicious dye into the sensitive nostrils, producing catarrhal disease as well as blindness and cataract of the eye.

It is a thousand pities that fashion dictates the crape veil, but so it is. It is the very banner of woe, and no one has the courage to go without it. We can only suggest to mourners wearing it that they should pin a small veil of black tulle over the

eyes and nose, and throw back the heavy crape as often as possible, for health's sake." And while women were slaves to their mourning attire, men however, had it relatively easy. They simply wore their usual dark suits with black gloves and black cravats.

Churchyards

At a time when there was little to no standards for sanitation, the burial of the deceased occurred in churchyards many of which in were in the middle of small towns. Over time the churchyards became so overflowing with dead bodies that the surrounding neighborhoods became decidedly unhealthy. The bodies were usually buried in shallow pits beneath the floorboards of chapels and schools. And while churchyards may seem to contain only a small number of gravestones, that was actually however, quite misleading. For example, a churchyard that was only 200 square feet (18.6 square meters) in length would in actuality contain sixty or seventy thousand bodies. By the 1830s however, things changed when barrister, George Frederick Carden decided to create a commercial cemetery much like Paris's Pere Lachaise, an exquisite park-like cemetery. And so it was in 1831 when fifty-five acres of land in London's Kensal Green was purchased and thus was borne London's first great cemetery.

Dressing the Dead

While the fashion code for mourners was quite detailed and extreme, the rules were quite the opposite for dressing the deceased. The remains of a man were usually "clad in his habit as he lived." A woman's remains however, were usually dressed in a white robe and cap while children were dressed in white cashmere robes. As for the casket, it was usually made of hardwood or cast iron especially if the deceased died from a highly contagious disease such as diphtheria or cholera. Typically, the coffin itself would remain plain on the outside save for a swath of black cloth while the inside was usually satin lined. Another addition to the coffin's interior was usually a bell of some sort. Due to the contagious nature of diseases like small pox, cholera and diphtheria as well as the misdiagnosis of comas for death, unfortunately many people were actually buried alive in the Victorian age. Therefore, as a means of forestalling a not quite dead person's burial, the installation of bells in coffins became de rigeuer.

Queen Victoria

Queen Victoria started it all, she was a popular and powerful queen but nowhere was Victoria's influence felt more deeply than when she mourned the death of her beloved husband Prince Albert. After Albert's sudden passing from typhoid fever in November 1861, Victoria became deeply depressed and soon turned mourning him into her chief concern for the rest of her days. Shortly after Albert died, Victoria instructed her servants to maintain the Prince's rooms exactly as he had them when he was alive. They were also instructed to bring hot water to his dressing room for his morning shave just as they always did and to dress in black for the first three years after his death. Victoria however, continued wearing black for the rest of her life. Victoria continued mourning Albert by having statues made of him, displaying his mementoes around the royal palaces and staying secluded in Windsor Castle for many years after his death. After several years of this, the public became quite concerned about her sanity yet so

powerful was her popularity and influence that soon the British public took on her extreme form of bereavement and thus the Victorian way of mourning was borne.

Death Nightclubs

Nightclubs Existed to Celebrate Death. While the majority of the above entries showed how the Victorians planned for and feared their mortality, in Victorian Paris there were several night clubs that actually celebrated death. In the neighborhood of Montmartre, one could ponder their mortality in the aptly named *Cabaret du Néant* (The Cabaret of Nothingness). At this gothic nightspot, visitors were served by monks and funeral attendees who offered drinks named after diseases which were imbibed on top of coffins and caskets. At *Cabaret de l'Enfer* (The Cabaret of the Inferno), patrons would be greeted by a chorus of voices shouting "enter and be damned, the Evil One awaits you!" At this satanically themed nightclub, a half dozen devil musicians, both male and female, would be suspended in a caldron over a fire, playing selections from Faust as red imps stood with hot irons ready to prod those musicians who dared miss a beat. Throughout the room, other red imps would serve beverages or do somersaults as crevices in the walls would suddenly spew thick smoke and emit odors of volcanoes while flames would suddenly burst from clefts in the rocks. And of course, what would Hell be without Heaven so right next to The Cabaret of the Inferno stood the *Cabaret du Ciel* (The Cabaret of the Sky). At this heavenly themed bar, patrons were greeted by Dante and Father Time, served drinks by attractive ladies dressed as angels and were entertained by St. Peter himself.

Top 10 Worst Military Decisions In History

The effective prosecution of any war requires a load of decisions at all junctures. Many times, commanders will blunder through misinformation, faulty intelligence, or a misreading of the tactical or strategic situation. We, safely ensconced here in the future can play Monday morning quarterback with the decision of the past often without acknowledging the fact that the commanders in question lack our brilliant hindsight; however, some decisions are simple unconscionable. One has to think that someone, somewhere had to look at this choice and say "God, this is stupid!" This list represents, in chronological order, ten of what I consider to be the dumbest decisions anyone ever made. Each of these decisions either resulted in tremendously unnecessary loss of men and materiel or it resulted in the ultimate loss or needless prolonging of the war in which it took place.

Invading Russia. Napoleon Bonaparte (June 1812)
The only motivation I can fathom behind this idiotic blunder by a military genius is sheer boredom. To this point in his military career, Napoleon has known nothing but victory after victory. He's conquered pretty much all of Europe that refused to ally with him and suddenly he was sitting around with the largest army ever gathered in Europe up until then with nothing to do. So Napoleon looks west, to Mother Russia. We all know how it turned out but you have to think someone in that huge army knew it was a bad idea. In any event, he didn't say anything and the rest is history. Napoleon invaded Russia with three quarters of a million men and didn't fight much of a battle. The Russian retreated into the vastness of their country and burned everything in their wake. Result? Napoleon gets to Moscow only to find smoking ruins. Dejected at not getting to move his toy soldiers around on his big map, he turns the Grand Armee around and begins for home. But then the real trouble began. Constant harassment by tiny, mobile Russian units. Constant hunger because the supply lines are cut in more places than Danish lace and, worst of all, winter sets in and the soldiers start freezing to death in droves. Three quarters of a million went in, but less than one in three would made it out.

The Alamo. Gen. Santa Anna (February 1836)
Someone has remarked that the Alamo seems to show up on nearly every military list. Well, it's a great story. Not the least great part about it was it was so totally unnecessary. All the Alamo consisted of was a tiny adobe walled mission in the middle of a prairie. Basically, Santa Anna, aka Napoleon of the West, decided the tiny garrison in the tiny fort had to be taught a lesson about Mexican politics by his great big army. One just has to think that someone, some hard campaigning Sergeant in the Mexican force had to look around at the wide open prairie on both sides of the Alamo and think to himself, "Why don't we just go around? We can even shoot at them as we go by, but let's get to the rebel capital and put down the rebellion."

Instead, mainly as a result of Santa Anna's pride, the main Mexican army spends days and days held up attacking this insignificant little outpost. This needless

delay gives the Texas government time to get organized, gives people time to flee, and gives the main Texan army time to get reinforced and into better position. The end result was the Battle of San Jacinto where old Santa Anna got caught napping – literally – and the Republic of Texas was born.

Add Lard to Rifles. Some British Bureaucrat (May 1857)

This one will be a little obscure to some, but in the grand scheme of things, it was a world-changing event. The cartridge in question was for the new Pattern 3 Enfield rifle that was to be issued to all the Empire's troops and replace the older, less efficient models. On the surface this doesn't seem like a big deal and to us, it probably wouldn't be. However, in 1857, cartridges weren't brass, they were paper, and to load them, one had to first BITE the end off the cartridge and pour the contained powder down the barrel of the muzzle loaded weapon. Again, no big deal, until one realizes one singularly important fact. The lubricating lard smeared on the cartridges was made from animal fat. This fat could be obtained from either pigs or cows. In and of itself, that doesn't present a problem until one realizes that the vast majority of foreign troops in the British Empire were either Muslim or Hindu, especially in India. Now, pigs are unclean to Muslims and cows are sacred to the Hindus so the thought of putting a cartridge with lard into their mouths was anathema to both parties. It didn't help matters much that the political climate in India was becoming a powder keg, but the lard cartridges proved the final straw – the match that blew the keg, so to speak.

What resulted is known to history as the Sepoy Rebellion or the Sepoy Mutiny. Basically, without going into the very involved, tense and delicate political situation, the Sepoys or Indian soldiers, refused to touch the cartridges which constitutes mutiny. When the first few were seen being punished by the British colonial overlords, the rest rose up and began a bloody rebellion that lasted 13 months and saw tremendous bloodshed and cruelty on both sides. The British severity in putting down the revolt – many leaders were tied to the mouths of cannon and blasted to bloody vapor — remained in the minds of the Indian people through the rest of the 19th century and through two world wars in the 20th. In many ways, the Indian Independence Movement lead by Gandhi can trace its roots to this one monumentally boneheaded decision.

Losing Your Battle Plans. Unknown CSA Officer (September 1862)

During the American Civil War, one of the qualities that made General Robert E. Lee of the Confederacy so effective was the mysteriousness with which he moved and operated. His troops seemed to appear, fight, and melt away with uncanny speed. Now in reality, this was nothing more supernatural than very detailed and well-executed battle plans. Imagine what the Union generals could have done if they had only possessed a copy of one of Lee's battle plans. In a wildly providential moment, that is exactly what happened on the eve of the Battle of Sharpsburg in September of 1862. Union General George McClellan's 90,000-man Army of the Potomac was moving to intercept Lee, and occupied a campsite the Confederates had vacated just a few days before. While setting up their tent, two Union soldiers discovered a copy of Lee's detailed battle plans wrapped around three cigars. The order indicated that Lee had divided his army and dispersed

portions, intending to bring battle near Antietam Creek. Everything was there in writing. It was a colossal blunder by some Confederate officer.

The outcome would have been even more disastrous for the Confederates had not McClellan waited about 18 hours before deciding to take advantage of this intelligence and reposition his forces. As it was, the Battle of Sharpsburg (or Antietam) would be the single bloodiest day of combat in American history with 23,000 killed and countless wounded before the sun set. All that saved Lee was McClellan's indecision. Still, the battle sapped numbers of soldiers that the Confederacy could ill afford to lose. More importantly, though, was the fact that England had been teetering on the fence of coming into the war to aid their cotton supplying Confederates, but with the outcome of Antietam, they decided to sit back for a little while longer, thus robbing the Confederacy of help it desperately needed. A different choice of wrapping paper could have made all the difference in the world to the history of North America.

Not Following the Enemy. Gen. George Meade (July 1863)

It sometimes looks like Lee did have some sort of guardian angel; either that or the Northern generals before Grant were all monumentally stupid. The former is more romantic, but the latter is easier to prove. In any event, Meade's decision to let Lee slip back to Virginia is another example of Lee's luck and an opposing general's horrendous decision making ability. The Army of Northern Virginia was done. Three days at Gettysburg had reduced the proud rebels to a shell of their former strength. Devil's Den, Little Round Top, the Peach Orchard, and, at the last, Pickett's Charge up Cemetery Ridge had produced the High Water Mark of the Confederacy. With all his reserves spent, Lee was gathering his badly mauled forces and trying mightily to make it back to the relative safety of Ol' Virginy. In his way was the rain swollen Potomac River.

On his flanks were the persistent if largely ineffectual Union cavalry pickets. The roads were a quagmire of mud. In all, the stage was set for the final crushing blow to be delivered by the Army of the Potomac, which had several reserves that had seen little if any fighting. They would sweep down on the defeated boys in grey like an avenging blue tide. The Army of Northern Virginia would be crushed and the Civil War would be all but over. All that remained was for General Meade to give the order to attack. Well, the order never came. For reasons that, to this day, are unclear Meade was reluctant to follow Lee. Instead, he gathered his forces in strength and waited. No one is quite sure what he was waiting for, but when President Lincoln found out that Meade had literally allowed the end of the war to slip through his hands, Honest Abe was incensed. It was largely Meade's indecision that resulted in General Grant being called east from Vicksburg and placed in command of the Army of the Potomac. Had Meade attacked the defeated rebels at that opportune moment, the Civil War probably would not have drug on in a morass of attrition for nearly two more years. Countless lives, Union and Confederate alike, could have been spared and the Reconstruction Period would likely have looked much different.

Ignoring the Gatling. George A. Custer (June 1876)
It is generally held to be a good idea among most military men that, when the latest and greatest weapons are available, they should be used. The newly patented Gatling Gun was the earliest machine gun and had completed its trials. Custer had two to four of the guns and abundant ammunition available when he set out to uproot a "small Indian village" on the bank of the Little Bighorn River. Custer's reasoning behind not using them was that the Gatling guns would impede his march and hamper his mobility. More importantly, he also is said to have believed that the use of so devastating a weapon would "cause him to lose face with the Indians." Considering reports of Custer's vanity, this is not hard to believe.

These problems do not change the fact that the Gatling guns would have been a decided equalizer in the face of what turned out to be overwhelming Indian superiority, and that elsewhere in the Indian wars, the Indians often reacted to new army weapons by breaking off the fight. Instead, Custer led more than 250 doomed men of the famous 7th Cavalry into the Montana hill country. If he had taken the then greatly improved machine guns with him the outcome of the much-discussed Last Stand would surely have been very different. What could have been going through Custer's mind as he stood, the breeze whipping his famous golden hair behind him, his loyal men dead all about him, and several hundred Sioux warriors galloping towards him intent on making him a human pincushion? Could it possibly have been, "I really could use those Gatling guns right about now."

Invade Gallipoli. Winston Churchill (April 1915)
By the start of 1915, the Great War had ground to a halt. The trench lines stretched from Belgium through Italy and neither side was making progress. The war had devolved into mad suicide rushes across no man's land into the teeth of the new Maxim guns. Predictably, casualties were mounting daily and the war that "will be over by Christmas" seemed to have no end in sight. To make matters worse, Russia was getting their mess kits handed to them all up and down the Eastern Front and the tsardom was beginning to look shaky. The German navy had cut all the usual supply lines to accessible ports and any port safe from the German fleet was either icebound or entirely too far away to be of any practical use. Something had to be done and quickly.

Enter Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill. Now Churchill is well know for his personal bravery as well as his usually keen mind. He is also known for being a fan of a good stiff drink and apparently, he'd had several when he thought of this plan. Churchill proposed that a third front be opened up in the western Mediterranean. Specifically, he planned an attack on the Ottoman Empire held Dardanelles. The attack on what he termed the "soft underbelly of the Central Powers" would open up a warm water resupply depot for Russia and effectively turn the flank of the vast trench network. It was a great idea in theory and on paper. The Gallipoli Campaign took place at Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey from 25 April 1915 to 9 January 1916. The intent was for a joint amphibian attack by British Empire and French forces up the peninsula to capture the Ottoman

capital of Istanbul. To put it mildly, the attempt failed miserably with heavy casualties on both sides.

The whole operation was botched from the beginning. The planned invasion was tipped off to the Turks who reinforced the peninsula with heavy guns and additional troops. Once the invasion began, it quickly stalled on the beachhead, thwarted by the Turkish occupation of the high ground. To make a very detailed and long story short, the allied forces, the bulk of which were Australians and New Zealanders (who ultimately had the highest number of dead per capita of all nations in the war), were essentially trapped on the beaches in the open for months. No real progress was ever made inland despite several dogged attempts all around the peninsula. Promised naval artillery support was cut short as soon as the Admiralty found out – by the sinking of two battleships – that German U-boats were in the waters.

The whole event was an unmitigated disaster. Conditions were unreal. In the summer, the heat was atrocious, which in conjunction with bad sanitation, led to so many flies that eating became extremely difficult. Corpses, left in the open, became bloated and stank. The precarious Allied bases were poorly situated and caused supply and shelter problems. A dysentery epidemic spread through the Allied trenches. Autumn and winter brought relief from the heat, but also led to gales, flooding and frostbite. In the end, Churchill was sacked as Lord of the Admiralty, several generals saw their careers ended but most of all; tens of thousands of men on both sides were killed for absolutely no gain whatsoever. To this day, Gallipoli is remembered as ANZAC Day in Australia and New Zealand in honor of all the brave ANZACs who gave their lives for a stupid decision.

Soviet Invasion. Adolf Hitler, (September 1941)
Honestly? See item 10. Replace “Napoleon” with “Hitler”, “Russia” with “Soviet Union”, and “Le Grand Armee” with “Wermacht” and you have the gist of the story. Operation Barbarossa was, without a doubt, the worst case of someone who failed to learn from history being doomed to repeat it. Adolf Hitler proved that it’s not only teenagers who think, “It can’t happen to me.”

Micromanaging the War. Lyndon B. Johnson (August 1964)
Wars are best run by the professionals. Lyndon B. Johnson was President, but he was not a professional soldier by any means during the Vietnam War. That did not stop him from blowing what was a small insurgency with American “advisors” into an all out “police action” that would claim the lives of nearly 60,000 American soldiers, sailors, and airmen before it ended two Presidents later.

Johnson expanded American involvement on the ground in Vietnam as soon as he took office after JFK’s assassination. Unfortunately for the troops, LBJ watched opinion polls and it is hard to fight a war if you watch opinion polls. Basically, field commanders couldn’t attack certain high value targets without Johnson’s say-so and, given the distances and the time it would take to brief the President on each given situation, the men were fighting one step behind at all times. He also took fire from the press who said he was too cozy with the defense

businessmen and the war was justification for increased defense spending to make these businesses rich. That speculation, like Johnson's supposed involvement in JFK's assassination, is better left to the conspiracy theorists. What is a fact, however, is LBJ's insistence on being a hands-on Commander-in-Chief seriously handicapped American efforts in the jungles of Vietnam. Ultimately, his decision to try running a war based on opinion polls proved his undoing and he dropped out of the 1968 Presidential elections.

Invading Afghanistan. Yuri Andropov (December 1979)

For centuries, countries outside of Afghanistan – from the Indian Mughals, to the British Empire, to the Islamic fundamentalists – have tried to impose their will upon the Afghan people. As a result, the Afghans are a hardy bunch and they can fight like devils. The are experts at guerilla warfare and it is always a safe bet to assume that whoever is invading them has enemies all to willing to supply the natives with effective weaponry. That is over 1200 years of history totally lost on the Soviets in 1979 when they sent in a massive number of troops to prop up the unpopular communist government in Kabul.

What followed was a ten year blood bath of death among the rocks. For years, Soviet Hind helicopters would hunt in the valleys for any of the Afghan fighters. Upon finding them, the guerillas would be mown down by cannon fire from the craft they called "The Crocodile". Then the CIA saw a chance to return the favor the Soviets had played on the United States during its involvement in Vietnam and began supplying the Afghan fighters with Stinger surface to air missiles. So much for Soviet air superiority. Stingers shot down 333 Soviet helicopters in the course of the ten year war. The saddest part is the Soviets had just witnessed the USA's horrific ten year quagmire in Vietnam, but, like other groups in history, they figured it couldn't happen to them. They were wrong. The Soviets lost 15,000 men and billions of rubles worth of equipment to Afghanistan and they got nothing in return. For the Afghans, the country was left devastated and ripe for a group called the Taliban to take over.

Ten Scariest Witches Of World Mythology

Witches and witchcraft have captivated the minds of everyone: from angry villagers wondering why the women of the town were gaining a sense of independence to the average Joe wondering whether that herbal tea last night was a potion or just really bad tea. Witches have been seen as objects of wisdom and evil in folklore for many generations.

10 Kikimora
The kikimora, whose name is extremely fun to pronounce, is a household spirit who must—above all—be respected. She is the female equivalent and wife to the domovoi, or male household spirit, and her presence is always made known by wet footprints. So what makes the kikimora a witch you don't want to cross? Well, she's somewhat harmless, but if she is disrespected, she will whistle, break dishes, and throw things around. Unless you like all of your things broken, you'd best stay on her good side.

9 Circe
A famous character in Homer's Odyssey, Circe was a witch who lived on an island called Aeaea. She took up a rather peculiar hobby—she would turn passing sailors into wolves and lions and all sorts of animals after drugging them. Hey, some people collect stamps, others like turning men into animals. Who are we to judge? When Odysseus visited Aeaea, Circe turned his men into swine, but Odysseus was given a magical plant by the gods that prevented Circe from morphing him. After making Circe swear not to betray him, Odysseus and his men lived under Circe's protection for a year before attempting to sail back to Ithaca.

8 Morgan Le Fay
Most people are vaguely familiar with the legend of King Arthur and his companion the wizard Merlin, but few of us remember a character by the name of Morgan Le Fay. In the myths, she works tirelessly with her magic to bring down the good Queen Guinevere, who banished her from the court when she was younger. She tries to betray Guinevere's lover, Sir Lancelot, and foil the quests of King Arthur's knights. The ultimate fate of Morgan is unknown, but she does eventually reconcile with King Arthur and brings him to Avalon after his final battle.

7 The Witch of Endor
The Witch of Endor wasn't necessarily malevolent, but the fate she spoke of was not one to be ignored. As the story goes, King Saul went to the Witch of Endor for answers about how to defeat the Philistines. The Witch then summoned the ghost of the prophet Samuel—who didn't tell him how to defeat the Philistines—but prophesied that he would be defeated and join his three sons in the afterlife. Saul, who is wounded the next day in the battle, kills himself out of fear. And while the Witch didn't technically make Saul kill himself, she was certainly an accessory.

6 Jenny Greenteeth
Depending on where in England you're from, you may know this cruel hag as Ginny, Jinny, Jeannie, or Wicked Jenny. Jenny Greenteeth was a hag who would intentionally drown the young and the old for the sheer fun of it. In some legends, she devours the children and elderly. In others, she's just a sadist who enjoys the pain her victims go through. She's frequently described as having a green complexion and razor-sharp teeth. As with many creepy characters from folklore, she was probably used to scare children into behaving and staying close to the water's edge when taking an afternoon swim. But the main moral to this story is this: stay away from green river hags.

5 Chedipe
Ah, the Chedipe. What art thou: a witch, a vampire, what? Either way, she's no pretty dame in the moonlight. The Chedipe is a woman has died during childbirth or committed suicide and is to the Indian equivalent of the succubus. She rides on a tiger in the moonlight, and when she enters a home, not a soul will wake or notice her. She then sucks the life out of each man through the toes—yes, the toes—and leaves without a trace.

4 The Weird Sisters
Shakespeare's Macbeth is one of the Bard's defining plays, with brilliant characters galore and a story rife with magic, betrayal, and fear. But the very first characters in the story are the ones that set everything in motion—the Weird Sisters. And yes, they are more than a little weird, but in this case "weird" means "fate," so they are the Sisters of Fate. They act as agents of destruction and not only send Macbeth into a spiral of corruption and paranoia, they send all of Scotland to war just to take one man out of power. Now that's evil.

3 The Bell Witch
The Bell Witch is the most famous witch in American folklore, and her story is the kind that you'd tell around a campfire. The Bell Witch was supposedly a poltergeist that appeared in the home of John Bell, Sr. in 1817. The Bell Witch would attack members of the household and frequently swear at the family, and she eventually poisoned John Bell, Sr. by leaving a bottle of poison in the guise of medicine. Remind us to burn some sage tonight.

2 Hecate
Hecate was the Greek goddess of witchcraft. She was also the goddess of witches, sorcery, poisonous plants, and a host of other witchy attributes. Hecate was the daughter of the titan Perses, and she is still worshipped by some Greek polytheists today. It is said that the very concept of a jinx came from her, and shrines to her were raised to prevent the wrath of evil demons and spirits in the Greek mythos. One of her names—Chthonia—means "of the underworld." So what makes her so fearsome? Well, she's the goddess of witchcraft. If she existed, she probably wouldn't take too kindly to Europe's (or Salem, Massachusetts's) ancient habit of hating and burning/killing "witches" (who were likely just the unfortunate innocent). The fact that we've turned witches from fearsome wise-women who could inflict pain and healing into beautiful, televised women who use magic to cheat on their exams would probably irk her slightly.

1 The Graeae/Morai

So what witches do we conclude our list with? Why the very spinners of fate, of course. The Graeae and the Morai are two separate trios of witches who understand the whims of fate, but since they are often lumped together we'll mention them both. The Morai spun the loom of fate, and everyone's fate was tied to their loom, even those of non-mortals. The Graeae, on the other hand, were three malevolent sisters—kin to the Gorgons (Medusa and her two lesser-known sisters). The Graeae were not the friendliest bunch, but they did share an eye, which they passed between themselves. The Graeae also had knowledge of the unknown and of fate, but they did not control it. So which is worse—sisters to Medusa or those who could snip your string of life? We'd steer clear of both of them if we were you, dear reader.

The Maya

The Maya is a Mesoamerican civilization, noted for the only known fully developed written language of the pre-Columbian Americas, as well as its art, architecture, and mathematical and astronomical systems. Many misconceptions about the Mayans exist, and this list should put an end to at least one or two of them. In addition, it will introduce you to facts that you never knew about this great ancient civilization.

Continuing Culture
There are numerous Mayans still living in their home regions. In fact, there are over seven million Mayans living in their home regions, many of whom have managed to maintain substantial remnants of their ancient cultural heritage. Some are quite integrated into the modern cultures of the nations in which they reside, while others continue a more traditional culturally distinct life, often speaking one of the Mayan languages as a primary language. The largest populations of contemporary Maya inhabit the Mexican states of Yucatán, Campeche, Quintana Roo, Tabasco, and Chiapas, and in the Central American countries of Belize, Guatemala, and the western portions of Honduras and El Salvador. Just as a point of interest, it is very possible that the word "shark" comes to us from the Mayan languages, as does the word "cocoa". To say "thank you" in Yucatec Maya, you say "Jach Dyos b'o'otik."

Mayan Childhood
The Mayans "enhanced" the beauty of their children. The Maya desired some unnatural physical characteristics for their children. For instance, at a very young age boards were pressed on babies' foreheads to create a flattened surface. This process was widespread among the upper class. Another practice was to cross babies' eyes. To do this, objects were dangled in front of a newborn's eyes, until the newborn's eyes were completely and permanently crossed. Another interesting fact about Mayan children is that most were named according to the day they were born. Every day of the year had a specific name for both boys and girls and parents were expected to follow that practice.

Excellent Doctors
The Mayans had many excellent medical practices. Health and medicine among the ancient Maya was a complex blend of mind, body, religion, ritual, and science. Important to all, medicine was practiced only by a select few who were given an excellent education. These men, called shamans, act as a medium between the physical world and spirit world. They practice sorcery for the purpose of healing, foresight, and control over natural events. Since medicine was so closely related to religion and sorcery, it was essential that Maya shamans had vast medical knowledge and skill. It is known that the Maya sutured wounds with human hair, reduced fractures, and were even skilled dental surgeons, making prostheses from jade and turquoise and filling teeth with iron pyrite.

Blood Sacrifice
Some Mayans still practice blood sacrifice. It is a rather well known fact that the Mayans practiced human sacrifice for religious and medical reasons – but what most people don't know is that many Mayans still practice blood sacrifice. But don't get too excited – chicken blood has now replaced human blood. Today the Maya keep many of the ritualistic traditions of their ancestors. Elements of prayer, offerings, blood sacrifice (replacing human blood with that of sacrificed chickens), burning of copal incense, dancing, feasting, and ritual drinking continue in traditional ceremonies.

Painkillers
The Mayans used painkillers The Mayan peoples regularly used hallucinogenic drugs (taken from the natural world) in their religious rituals, but they also used them in day to day life as painkillers. Flora such as peyote, the morning glory, certain mushrooms, tobacco, and plants used to make alcoholic substances, were commonly used. In addition, as depicted in Maya pottery and carvings, ritual enemas were used for a more rapid absorption and effect of the substance. Above is a statue of a Mayan enjoying their enema.

Ball Courts
The Mayans built ball courts so they could play games. The Mesoamerican ballgame was a sport with ritual associations played for over 3000 years by the pre-Columbian peoples of Mesoamerica. The sport had different versions in different places during the millennia, and a modern version of the game, ulama, is still played in a few places by the local indigenous population. Ballcourts were public spaces used for a variety of elite cultural events and ritual activities like musical performances and festivals, and of course, the ballgame. Enclosed on two sides by stepped ramps that led to ceremonial platforms or small temples, the ball court itself was of a capital "I" shape and could be found in all but the smallest of Maya cities. In Classic Maya, the ballgame was called pitz, and the action of play was ti pitziil. The game was played with a ball roughly the size of a volleyball but made from rubber and heavier. Decapitation is particularly associated with the ballgame – severed heads are featured in much Late Classic ballgame art. There has even been speculation that the heads and skulls were used as balls.

Saunas
The Mayans used saunas. An important purification element to the ancient Maya was the sweat bath, or zumpul-ché. Similar to a modern day sauna, sweat baths were constructed of stone walls and ceilings, with a small opening in the top of the ceiling. Water poured onto the hot rocks in the room created steam, offering a setting in which to sweat out impurities. Sweat baths were used for a range of conditions and situations. New mothers who had recently conceived a child would seek revitalization in them, while individuals who were sick could find healing power in sweating. Maya kings made a habit out of visiting the sweat baths as well because it left them feeling refreshed and, as they believed, cleaner.

The Last Maya State

The last Maya state existed until 1697The island city of Tayasal was the last independent Mayan kingdom and some Spanish priests peacefully visited and preached to the last Itza king, Canek, as late as 1696. The Itza kingdom finally submitted to Spanish rule on March 13, 1697, to a force led by Martín de Ursua, governor of Yucatán. The famous archeological site and home to the beautiful monuments we are all familiar with was in Chichen Itza, located in this last independent region. Interestingly, much of the land under the monuments is privately owned by one family, whilst the government owns and administers the monuments themselves.

Life Goes On

The Fact: The Mayan Calendar does not predict the end of the world in 2012First of all, the Mayans don't have a calendar they have calendars which often interlocked. The calendar that has given rise to the myth of the end of the world is the Mayan long count calendar. According to Mayan Mythology, we are living in the fourth world or "creation" so to speak. The last creation ended on 12.19.19.17.19 of the long count calendar. That sequence will occur again on December 20, 2012. According to the Mayans this is a time of great celebration for having reached the end of a creation cycle. It does not mean the end of the world but the beginning of a new "age". Does the world end every December 31st? No – we go on to a new year. This is the same as the Mayan creation periods. In fact, the Mayans make many references to dates that fall beyond 2012. The idea of 2012 being the end of the world was actually first suggested by New Age religionist José Argüelles in his 1987 book The Mayan Factor: Path Beyond Technology.

Ancient Mystery

No one really knows what caused the collapse of the Mayan culture. For reasons that are still debated, the Maya centers of the southern lowlands went into decline during the 8th and 9th centuries and were abandoned shortly thereafter. This decline was coupled with a cessation of monumental inscriptions and large-scale architectural construction. Non-ecological theories of Maya decline are divided into several subcategories, such as overpopulation, foreign invasion, peasant revolt, and the collapse of key trade routes. Ecological hypotheses include environmental disaster, epidemic disease, and climate change. There is evidence that the Maya population exceeded carrying capacity of the environment including exhaustion of agricultural potential and over-hunting of megafauna. Some scholars have recently theorized that an intense 200 year drought led to the collapse of Maya civilization.

Weird Sex Items You Could Buy In Old Tokyo

In 1621, a brothel keeper wrote a petition to Tokugawa Ieyasu, the shogun and ruler of Japan. He made an argument that it would be good for everyone if a "courtesan quarter"—a red-light district—were set up in Edo (the city which later became Tokyo). The shogun agreed, and unsurprisingly, the brothel keeper was appointed the master of the new pleasure quarter.Yoshiwara, meaning "field of reeds" because it was basically built on a drained swamp, was completed in 1626. From the moment the gates opened for business, until the district was closed by the government in 1959, Yoshiwara remained a legendary porno version of Disney World for wealthy and lusty adult gentlemen with an itch to be scratched. But for the women who worked there, it was a prison from which they couldn't escape.Without further beating around the bush—ahem, my apologies—here are ten weird sex things that one could purchase from shops in and around Yoshiwara and elsewhere in the city, if one were so inclined.

Shunga
Let's begin with actual pornography. Shunga, or "spring pictures", are color woodblock prints depicting erotic acts, and could be purchased directly from the printer. Shunga also acted as instructive illustrations for new wives, and were carried as lucky charms by samurai going into battle. Though banned, shunga remained hugely popular. If you know anything about Japanese anime, you've likely come across the term hentai, a genre of sexually explicit animation. Does the word "tentacles" bring some unusual images to mind? All that tentacle probing probably found inspiration in The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife, a shunga by Hokusai featuring an attractive lady and a couple of amorous octopuses.

Erotic Novels, Songs, and Poetry
Downright salty stuff can be found in the erotic novels, songs, and poetry of Japan. As might be expected from a culture that places emphasis on beauty, lovely metaphors abound for lady parts (the forty-eight folds), gentleman's parts (pine mushroom), and various sexual acts (washing burdock in the sea, the moment of clouds and rain). A patron of Yoshiwara could hire an entertainer – like a male version of a geisha – to play music, sing bawdy songs, and tell humorous or dirty jokes and stories to get him in the mood while he waited for the courtesan to arrive. Or he could purchase an erotic novel to share with his mistress to titillate her. Note: high class courtesans weren't hired; they had to be wooed via gifts and romantic gestures. An uncreative gentleman might purchase beautifully written love letters to impress her.

Joss Sticks
Time was important in Yoshiwara. A courtesan had only so long each day to devote to her clients. Her schedule had to be managed carefully, which is where joss sticks or incense sticks came in. Lacking mechanical clocks, the next best thing was a stick or coil of incense that burned for a specific number of minutes. When the incense burned down to the last little bit, the gentleman had to go. Note: expensive perfume incense, used more to scent the clothing and hair than a

room, was considered a very generous gift to give a courtesan. Most of the ladies sold such presents since the price they received was far more useful.

Yamato Yam (Yamaimo)
A long, thick, somewhat bumpy vegetable, the wild mountain yam was sold to housewives to prepare for their family's dinner. But it had another use: it would also be sold, at request, to gentlemen visiting Yoshiwara. While in "cheap hells"—low class brothels—a patron would take his pleasure and depart, in the higher class establishments, a man was expected to satisfy the courtesan as well as himself. Not doing so was uncouth. However, on those occasions when his ardor proved unable or inadequate, the yamaimo was conveniently at hand. Like many species of yam, the yamaimo is brittle, with a tendency to snap at inconvenient times – and in inconvenient places – if plied too vigorously. Other materials used as sex aides of this type included cow horns, water buffalo horns, tortoiseshell, papier mâché, ivory, and bone. Speaking of bone …

Powdered Monk's Bone
Most likely a powdered animal bone or horn, it was marketed as the bone of a human. Specifically, it was represented as the "penis bone" of a legendary, well-endowed monk. Humans don't actually have a penis bone – but when did that ever stop an entrepreneur out to bilk his customers of their money? Gentlemen purchased a vial of powdered bone, mixed it in sake (rice beer), and swallowed the potion as an aphrodisiac – no doubt hoping some of the monk's epic awesomeness might rub off on him. Note: other potency enhancers included freshly-slaughtered snapping-turtle's blood, elephant urine, and tobacco, nicknamed "courtesan grass." I'll leave you to figure out why.

Konnyaku
Another root vegetable, konnyaku was sold to gentlemen who were either too broke to afford a visit to a brothel, or not in the mood for the elaborate courtship required to persuade a high ranking courtesan to yield. How did it work? After cooking, it resembled a very firm sort of jelly. A slab was then rolled in a piece of cloth to form a tube and heated in warm water. I'll leave further details to your imagination. In addition, a gentleman tuckered out from lovemaking might use a piece of slippery konnyaku jelly to stimulate the lady's delicate parts … or at least fool her into thinking he was doing something else entirely.

Higo-zuiki
A long, flat strip was peeled from the taro's stem—like removing an apple's peel in one piece. The resulting ribbon was wrapped around a gentleman's peerless part in overlapping layers and tied off. Ribbed for her pleasure, as it were. Note: the device was sometimes likened to a tapeworm in some poems for its tendency to unravel while in use. For the ladies, konnyaku cut into a string could be wrapped around the finger in similar fashion for similar purpose.

Fingers and Hair From Corpses
This one's more for the ladies who lived and worked in Yoshiwara. The highest love token that could be given by a lady to her gentleman lover was a lock of hair, a fingernail, or an amputated pinkie finger. That's right, you heard me. Self

mutilation equaled utter devotion. Needless to say, since a courtesan might have many lovers she was stringing along, she couldn't give away her hair or chop off digits left and right. A solution came in the form of the priests who handled dead bodies at temples around Yoshiwara. Some of them removed the fingernails, pinkie fingers, and hair from dead women and sold them to Yoshiwara courtesans, who were guaranteed a very nice present when they showed their lover a bandaged hand sprinkled with chicken's blood, a few tears, and a pinkie in a box. Note: traditionally, the amputation was done by setting a razor edge down on the finger, and striking the back very firmly with the wooden block used as a pillow. Yikes!

Likeness-picture
Unlike shunga, a "likeness-picture" wasn't necessarily erotic. These were color woodblock prints of actors (many were female impersonators) or courtesans in their most fabulous finery, occasionally with their naughty parts exposed. Kind of like Playboy or Playgirl, as both men and women purchased these pictures, and not just to admire their chosen crush at arm's length. These likeness-pictures found use as fantasy material, but might also play a more direct role in bringing a male owner pleasure, which brings me to …

Azumagata
A "wife-shape" or "Edo shape." An historic version of a modern kokeshi doll. Look it up. An azumagata was made of a likeness-picture attached to a "body" created from rolled up clothing and a bag filled with warm, mashed yams or the multi-purpose konnyaku jelly, which seems like the Swiss Army knife of sex in Japan. The resulting wife-shape was taken to bed by a gentleman with romance on his mind. Use your imagination, if you dare.Yoshiwara was just one of the pleasure districts in Edo. Another was Yoshichô, the home of male prostitutes. While some may wonder at the mind blowing weirdness of a few of the items on this list, one thing is clear—the average Edoite (person who lived in Edo) really knew how to party like a boss … provided that boss was a pervy yam fancier, that is.

Blunders of Ancient Science

This list is our first prize winner for the site launch competition. Congratulations to the author, Tristan Bradshaw. One of the most tempting mistakes in studying history is to judge the past by modern standards. Nowhere is this more easily seen than in the contributions of ancient science. When we laugh at geocentric cosmology, or the theory of four elements, we fail to realize that, while the theories were certainly wrong, they still advanced scientific knowledge. This list explores 10 such contributions.

Ptolemy
Ptolemy (born A.D. 90), was an astronomer whose model of the universe became the standard geocentric theory, until Copernicus. Ptolemy's writings proved influential in early astronomy, and he was revered throughout the Middle Ages in Europe and Arabia. He also provided the most authoritative compilation of constellations in antiquity. Although he helped to discredit Aristarchos' heliocentric universe (more on that later), and ensured the geocentric model would be universally accepted for the next 1,000 years, Ptolemy did much to raise the standard of astronomy. Ptolemy did this by highlighting the disjunction between mathematical models and actual, observed patterns in the stars. Because planets actually follow ellipses (a fact not proven until Kepler), ancient astronomers relied on epicycles (circles within circles within circles) to explain the motion of the planets. Epicycles can be quite accurate, but they are never perfect. Ptolemy's work on astronomy did much to highlight the problems of epicycles, ensuring that later astronomers continued to search for better explanations.

Euclid
Euclid (born c. 330 B.C.), is most famous for his contributions to geometry, but he also wrote treatises on astronomy and optics. Euclid's treatment of optics reflects his love of geometry. Euclid argued that vision occurs when rays emit from the eye to form a cone. From there, Euclid proceeds geometrically. Everything the rays touch is seen. If one reduces vision to a geometric exercise, Euclid's treatment of optics is profound. Issues such as medium, light and whether there was a physical connection between the eye and the viewed object were passed over. Nevertheless, Euclid's treatment of the subject would be influential until the age of Ptolemy.

Galen
Galen, born in A.D. 129 in Asia Minor, was the second most revered physician in antiquity, after Hippocrates. He served as the court physician for three Roman emperors and was one of the most prolific writers in the ancient world. His contributions to medicine, anatomy and physiology are numerous and profound. Not unlike the fictional Gregory House, Galen was known for being more interested in understanding the cause of a disease than the comfort of his patients, whom he tended to treat as specimens. The contribution to science that puts Galen on this list is not for any particular discovery or theory, but the absolute rigor and high standard he applied to developing medical knowledge. Human dissection was outlawed in Rome, so Galen used pigs and monkeys to

understand anatomy. His careful and meticulous dissections revealed many anatomical features that had been missed by others, such as his discovery that arteries contain blood. His theories of human physiology and disease were based directly on this research, leading to conclusions difficult for critics to dispute. Unfortunately, Galen's careful research led him to conclude that excess blood was frequently the cause of diseases and he helped to popularize bloodletting, a traditional medical practice in the Eastern Mediterranean, that had never gained popularity in Italy. Modern medicine has shown that, except in a small number of situations, bloodletting is useless and actually harmful, but Galen's authority and defense of the practice ensured bloodletting would become an accepted procedure until the 19th century. His careful work, while wrong in its conclusions, raised the standard of medical theory immeasurably.

Herophilos and Erasistratos

Herophilos was born in 335 B.C. — almost 500 years before Galen — in Asia Minor. He founded a school in Alexandria, Egypt, where he entered the service of the Ptolemaic dynasty. With Ptolemaic patronage, Herophilos and his students were permitted to violate the sanctity of the dead and dissect humans. Throughout antiquity, Mediterranean cultures maintained a strong taboo against cutting or dissecting the dead. Herophilos and his students were the first-known Greeks to violate this taboo in order to study anatomy. They may have even dissected condemned prisoners while they were still alive (which is known as vivisection).Herophilos' findings did much to advance knowledge of human anatomy. Much of the terminology he coined is still used in modern medicine. His student, Erasistratos, built on Herophilos' findings and argued that "pneuma" ran through arteries and nerves. Pneuma ("breath" in Greek) was a substance imagined to be the life force that enables much of the body to run. Erasistratos hypothesized that pneuma was pulled from the air via the lungs and sent through the arteries. It finally arrived at the brain, which refined the pneuma and sent it through nerves to control the body and feel sensations.

Empedocles

Empedocles (born c. 490 B.C.), was among the last of the Presocratics, philosophers before Socrates who wrote in verse. It was Empedocles who first hypothesized the classic four elements: fire, earth, water and air. Empedocles argued that all material is a mix of these four elements. Wood, for example, is made primarily of fire and earth. Burning wood separates the fire, leaving only earth (ash) behind. His notion that all physical material can be broken down into just mixtures of earth, water, air and fire seems hopelessly naive, but the idea had a profound impact on the physical sciences.

Empedocles' true contribution to science, however, was not what he was arguing for, but, rather, what he was arguing against. Empedocles was attacking the philosophies of Heraclitos and Parmenides. Heraclitus argued that reality is perpetually changing, and that material must come into and out of existence for change to exist. Parmenides argued that all change is an illusion, including time and movement (his student, Zeno, illustrated this with several famous paradoxes). Empedocles' theory of four elements was his attempt to show that material, in its elemental form, cannot be destroyed or created. Change is a result

of things being mixed together or separated. Empedocles' ideas anticipated the first law of thermodynamics by more than 2,000 years, and his notion that material is comprised of indivisible elements has proven invaluable to the physical sciences.

Hippocrates

Hippocrates (born c. 460 B.C.), is perhaps most famous for the oath that bears his name. It is difficult to separate what Hippocrates believed versus what his students believed. Since many of the texts that he supposedly wrote differ greatly in style and date of composition, none can be definitively identified as coming from him directly. Hippocrates developed the theory of four humors, which was the mainstream theory of human physiology, until it was disproved and displaced by modern medicine in the 19th century.

The theory of four humors states that the body's principle fluids are blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. Disease arises from a disproportion of these four fluids, or humors. Treatment required restoring the balance, usually through a change in diet or exercise. Hippocrates' theory of humors has been thoroughly debunked, but Hippocrates contributed to science by convincing other physicians that disease has a natural cause and is not a punishment from the Gods. By arguing for disease as an imbalance in bodily fluids, Hippocrates helped separate medicine from folk remedies. He did not change the practice of medicine universally. Folk medicine and sacrifices to Asclepius and Apollo never died out. However, he and his followers helped elevate the practice to a legitimate science.

Aristotle

Aristotle (born 384 B.C.), was a Macedonian student in Plato's school in Athens. Aristotle is, of course, famous as one of the most important philosophers in history. What is often forgotten, is that Aristotle had a passion for marine biology. He wrote several treatises on the biological sciences, and many observations he made while dissecting marine animals were not confirmed until the 19th century. While his observations on anatomy were mostly accurate, his conclusions on physiology and theory could be quite wrong. An example is that he argued that all animals are in a hierarchy of complexity based on the degree of body heat. Humans were at the top and insects and worms were at the bottom. Aristotle also argued that the function of lungs and gills were to cool down the bodies of animals. Before Aristotle, philosophers regarded the study of physics and astronomy as their highest calling. Aristotle argued that the biological sciences were worth studying because of the amount of information in them. This information was much more readily available than in astronomy or physics. Aristotle's prestige helped to elevate the biological sciences within philosophy and he paved the way for further developments.

Aristarchos and Cleanthes the Stoic

Aristarchos (born 310 B.C.), was a Greek astronomer from the island of Samos. He is known for being the first astronomer to suggest a heliocentric view of the universe. Aristarchos made careful measurements of the relative angles of the Moon and Sun. Given the level of technology available to him, it is not surprising

that his measurements were off. Based on his measurements, he concluded that the diameter of the Sun is seven times the diameter of the Earth, and is 18-20 times farther from the Earth than the Moon. In fact, it is more than 400 times farther away, and 109 times the diameter of the Earth.

Aristarchos' suggestion that the Earth orbits the Sun was immediately rejected in antiquity. Among his detractors was Cleanthes of Assos, one of the great luminaries of early Stoic philosophy. Cleanthes stated that Aristarchos should be charged with impiety for putting the Earth in motion. The greatest reason for the rejection of Aristarchos' model was stellar parallax. If the Earth orbited the Sun, rather than remain still, then the angle of stars should change in relation to the Earth throughout the year, since the Earth's vantage point is constantly changing. Aristarchos responded that stars are too far away for parallax to be measurable (which is true), but without proof to back this claim, it sounded more like a rationalization than a theory. Aristarchos' theory was ultimately correct, but Aristarchos was not able to meet the burden of proof. So his theory was reasonably rejected, thus anticipating Marcello Truzzi's famous quote, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof."

Pythagoras

Pythagoras (born c. 570 B.C.), is most famous for the theorem he reputedly discovered. Pythagoras was among the earliest of the Presocratic philosophers, and his influence was widely felt in later philosophy. Pythagoras was fascinated by the patterns numbers make, and he built his philosophy around numbers, though he left no writings behind. He also founded one of the earliest secret societies, which endeared him to conspiracy theorists the world over. He was the first to argue that mathematics can be found in nature, but he did not stop there. Later philosophers say he did not merely believe that nature is mathematical, but that reality itself is math. He famously stated that "all is number," perhaps believing that reality is something akin to the Matrix. Pythagoras' belief that numbers are reality doesn't really add up, but he did contribute to science by showing that the universe can be captured through mathematics. Without the addition of mathematics, the study of science would never have escaped the purely theoretical. Philosophy seeks to answer questions through the application of logic, and there is nothing more logical than numbers. Later philosophers, building on Pythagoras, relied more and more heavily on mathematics to explain the world.

Thales

It should not be surprising that Thales (born c. 624 B.C.) is listed as number one. He is universally recognized as beginning Western philosophy by arguing that nature can be explained without invoking the Gods, and one's explanation of how nature works must be defensible. His writings, if he wrote at all, have not survived, and we must rely on the questionable assertions of later philosophers to deduce what he believed. Thales appears to have argued that the ultimate element is water, from which everything else is made. He may also have believed that the earth was flat and floated on water. Regardless of the specifics, he and his followers emphasized explanations of the universe that did not involve appeals to the supernatural. Each new theory his school developed was

subjected to critical analysis and refined, creating a tradition of critical thinking and debate that led directly to Western philosophy.

Amazing Female Pirates

It may be hard to believe, but having a magnificent beard isn't a requirement for being a pirate. Some pirates broke the macho-male stereotype altogether. Whether they took on Rome or the Royal Navy, these female pirates were among the baddest of the bad.

Sayyida al Hurra
Born around 1485, Sayyida al Hurra was the daughter of a prominent Muslim family based in the Kingdom of Granada. Forced to flee their home in 1492 after the reconquista by Christian Spain, Sayyida and her family settled in Chaouen, Morocco. After the death of her businessman husband in 1515, Sayyida became governor of Tetouan. It was through this position that she met and married the King of Morocco, Ahmed al-Wattasi. Though she was richer than she could ever have imagined, her anger toward the Christians who had forced her from her home continued to drive her. Having made contact with Barbarossa of Algiers, she turned to piracy. While seizing Christian ships maintained her dream of one day returning home, it also proved profitable, with Sayyida soon becoming a queen with power over the Mediterranean Sea in the eyes of Christians. Sayyida eventually became the main negotiator with the Spanish and Portuguese governments when they sought to free captives held by pirates. In 1542, she was overthrown by her son-in-law. Her fate is unknown.

Pirate Queen Teuta Of Illyria
Few men had big enough guts to take on the might of Rome. It took a pirate queen such as Teuta of Illyria to take the Romans down a few notches. After the death of her husband, the King of Ardiaei, Teuta inherited the Ardiaean Kingdom in 231 B.C. In an attempt to address the aggressiveness of neighboring states, Teuta supported the pirate population of her kingdom. With the support of a pirate queen, Illyrians captured the cities of Dyrrachium and Phoenice. Extending their reach, her pirates attacked merchant vessels of Rome and Greece. Two ambassadors sent to Teuta by Rome were captured by her pirates, with one killed and the other put in captivity. In 229 B.C., Rome was forced to declare war on Illyria and the pirate queen. A force of 20,000 troops and a Roman fleet of 200 ships forced Teuta to surrender in 227 B.C. While her reign continued, the Romans forbade Teuta to sail a ship ever again.

Anne Bonny
Anne Bonny, or Anney as she was known, was an Irish pirate born sometime between 1697 and 1700. After her family moved to the New World, Anne's mother died, and her father accumulated a small fortune in the merchant trade. After stabbing a servant girl with a table knife and marrying a small-time pirate, James Bonny, Anne was disowned by her father. She moved to New Providence in the Bahamas, where she met Jack Rackham, captain of the pirate ship Revenge, and became his mistress. After Anne divorced James and married Jack, the two stole the Revenge and took to the sea. An effective fighter, Anne helped to raise a new crew and capture many ships, some of which were transporting tea. A threat to tea supplies was no joke to the English, and the Governor of Jamaica commissioned Captain Jonathan Barnet to deal with Bonny and Rackham. While

most of the crew was too drunk to fight, Bonny held off the troops for some time. Eventually, the ship was captured and Rackham was executed. Bonny disappeared—her father may have paid a ransom.

Jeanne de Clisson

Born Jeanne-Louise de Belleville in 1300, Jeanne was the descendent of a British family and lived in Brittany. In 1330, Jeanne married Olivier III de Clisson. A wealthy nobleman, Olivier was obliged to defend Brittany from English claimants. After failing to defend Vannes, he defected to the English. Captured in 1343, Olivier was taken to Paris and executed under orders from King Philip VI. Jeanne, overcome with anger, swore vengeance on the king. She sold her lands and her body to rich noblemen and bought three warships. The ships were painted black and their sails dyed red, and the "Black Fleet" took to the seas and hunted down ships belonging to King Philip VI. Clisson butchered the crew of the ships she captured, leaving only a few sailors alive to tell the King that the Lioness of Brittany had struck again. Even after Philip's death in 1350, she continued to lay waste to French ships, until 1356 when she retired to England—the only place where people liked the French just about as much as she did.

Ching Shih

Ching Shih, born in 1775, was a pirate who terrorized the China Sea in the 19th century. Although not much is known about her birth, she was a prostitute who worked in the city of Canton. Captured by pirates in 1801, she married Zheng Yi, their captain. Zheng formed a coalition of pirate fleets in China, known as the Red Flag Fleet. After the death of Zheng Yi in 1807, Ching took command of the fleet. The fleet of over 300 junks and 40,000 men scared even the British admiralty after they learned that Ching had nailed an enemy to the deck and then beaten him senseless. The Chinese navy lost 63 ships to the pirate fleet, forcing the government to offer the pirates amnesty in 1810, which they accepted.

Anne Dieu-Le-Veut

Born around 1650, Anne was a criminal deported from France to Tortuga sometime between 1665 and 1675. While in Tortuga, Anne married the buccaneer Pierre Length. In 1683, Pierre was killed by fellow buccaneer Laurens de Graaf during a bar fight. Anne challenged Laurens to a duel, he drawing a sword and she a gun. Laurens, refusing to fight a woman but, impressed by Anne's feisty side, proposed to her. Anne, apparently forgetting she'd just tried to kill the man, accepted. Together they sailed the seas as pirates, seizing ships and even raiding Jamaica in 1693. In 1694, a British raid of Tortuga resulted in the capture of Anne and her two daughters. Treated with respect, they were reunited with Laurens in 1698. Their fate is unknown.

Grace O'Malley

Grace O'Malley was born in Ireland around 1530, when Henry VIII was Lord of Ireland. Grace's father was chieftain of the seafaring O'Maille Clan, who were left to their own devices by the English. After her husband, Donal of the Battle, was killed and his castle captured, Grace raised an army and recaptured it. After marrying a second man, Iron Richard, Grace divorced within a year and seized Rockfleet Castle. It was some time during her two marriages that Grace took over

her father's role of collecting taxes from fishermen in their territory. Grace became a little more hands-on with "tax collection," targeting ships to demand cash or cargo for safe passage. Refusal was met with violence and murder. Grace also attacked the fortresses of Scottish and Irish noblemen. Some say that Grace even kidnapped the children of Anglo-Irish nobility.

Lady Elizabeth Killigrew

Elizabeth, born on an unknown date sometime before 1525, became Lady Killigrew when she married Sir John Killigrew of Arwenack, Cornwall. In the 1540s, when Pendennis Castle was built by King Henry VIII on Sir John's land, the Killigrews gained control of shipping in the area. They used this position to prey on the cargo of ships that entered the area under their control, fortifying Arwenack House as their stronghold. Elizabeth buried the treasure in her garden, and when John died in 1567, she took full command of their pirates. In 1581, Elizabeth learned that a Spanish ship, the Mafrie of San Sebastian, had taken shelter in Falmouth Harbor. she organized and led an attack on the ship, seizing both the vessel and its cargo. After she was caught, Elizabeth was granted a pardon by Queen Elizabeth in 1582.

Christina Anna Skytte

Born in 1643, Christina was the child of Baron Jacob Skytte of Duderhof, Sweden. Her brother, Baron Gustav Skytte, apparently not happy with his already insane wealth, led a secret double life as a pirate from 1657 onward, plundering ships in the Baltic Sea. Along with her fiance, Gustaf Drake, Christina became a partner in the "business." After having one of her fellow conspirators killed for trying to withdraw, Christina showed that she was no passive partner. In 1663, she was present when they attacked a Dutch merchant ship, killing the crew and stealing its cargo. This attack led to Gustaf's capture and execution, and Christina was forced to flee.

Jacquotte Delahaye

Born in Haiti to a Haitian mother and a French father, Jacquotte had a tough childhood. Her mother died giving birth to her brother, who suffered from mild brain damage. Although not much is known about her background, her father was killed, leaving Jacquotte with little money to look after herself and her brother. Jacquotte, a redheaded beauty, was forced to turn to piracy in the Caribbean to care for her brother. Active in the 1660s, she faked her own death to escape the government hunt for her. After living for many years as a man, she returned to piracy and became known as "Back from the Dead Red." Jacquotte is thought to have sailed alongside Anne Dieu-Le-Vuet.

The Longest Sieges In History

Sieges are devastating, both to the population of the besieged fortress and the attacking forces. Disease, hunger, and death were ripe among both forces. Because of this, the attacking force tried to make it as quick as possible, and most sieges lasted a year at the longest . . . but some sieges lasted decades.

Siege Of Candia: 21 Years
The Siege of Candia (now called Heraklion) in Crete was easily the longest siege in recorded history, lasting 21 years. In other words those born in the first few years of the siege were old enough to fight in its final battles. In 1644, after the Knights Hospitaller attacked an Ottoman convoy, the Turks responded by sending 60,000 men to assault Candia, which was controlled by the Knights' allies in Venice. The siege began in 1648. Attempts to lift the siege in 1666 and 1669 both failed. However, the Ottoman efforts to breach the walls also failed. There were no further attempts to lift the siege and Captain General Morosini of Candia was left with only 3,600 fit men. In 1668, he accepted honorable surrender terms, which allowed Christians to safely leave the city.

Fall Of Philadelphia: 12 Years
There are few sources on the fall of Philadelphia. No, not that one. We're talking about a city in Turkey now known as Alasehir. What we do know is that the city resisted a far superior Ottoman force from 1378 to 1390. The disastrous Byzantine Civil War of 1373 forced Manuel II Emperor of Byzantium to ask the Ottoman sultan for aid. The sultan's price was Philadelphia, a neutral city under the control of the Knights Hospitaller. The people of Philadelphia apparently didn't like this idea much and resisted the Ottoman troops, who were forced to lay siege to the city. In 1390, after all other cities of Asia Minor had surrendered to the Ottomans, Philadelphia was still holding out. The Turks were eventually forced to ask for help. After summoning the two leaders of the Byzantine Civil War to the blockade, Sultan Bayezid was finally able to enter the city in 1390, after a 12-year siege, Which we're sure was just as embarrassing for the Ottomans as it was for the Byzantines.

Siege Of Ishiyama Honganji: 10 Years
The cathedral fort of Ishiyama Honganji in Osaka, Japan came under attack by Oda Nobunaga in 1570. The extensive defensive network meant that the fortress held out against ferocious siege for a rather impressive 10 years. In August 1570, the attacking force of 30,000 men built a series of their own fortresses around Ishiyama Honganji. A month later, several of these were destroyed during a surprise attack by the 15,000-strong defending forces. Attempts to starve the fortress failed, as it was supplied from the sea by enemies of Nobunaga. In August 1567, an attempt by 3,000 men to attack the fortress failed—by this point the defenders had erected 51 outposts around the main fortress, easily defending it. In 1578, a fleet was finally able to cut supply lines to the castle. By 1580, the defenders had run out of food and ammunition and were forced to surrender.

Siege Of Thessalonica: 8 years

Not wanting to be outdone by warring Japanese factions, the Ottomans once again make it onto the list. In 1422, the Ottoman sultan sought to punish the Byzantines for trying to incite rebellion. The target was Thessalonica in central Macedonia. The Byzantines handed the city to Venice to oversee the defense. They must have done something right, because it would hold out for eight years. The siege started with a naval blockade, which caused starvation within the city. Thessalonica finally fell in 1430, when the Venetians, not realizing how expensive the defense would be, were unable to raise more than a few thousand defenders when the city came under attack by a massive Ottoman army. Nearly 10,000 citizens were taken as slaves.

Siege Of Drepana: 8 Years

Drepana was a Carthaginian naval fortress that came under attack by the Romans in 249 B.C. Besieged by both land and sea, it was able to hold out against the not-so-mighty Rome until 241 B.C., and the defending forces were even able to destroy an entire Roman fleet. In all, 120 Carthaginian ships sank or captured 93 Roman ships, which had been sent to blockade the port—at the cost of none of their own. This allowed Carthage to resupply Drepana from sea, while it was still being besieged by land. By 241 B.C., the Romans had rebuilt their devastated fleet, intercepting and destroying the main Carthaginian fleet. This led to the end of the First Punic War and the Siege of Drepana.

Siege Of Solovetsky Monastery: 8 Years

The Solovetsky Monastery Uprising was the rebellion of around 800 monks in an awesomely fortified monastery. The monks were members of a sect called the Old Believers, which was formed to protest against church reforms that furthered feudal oppression and monastic serfdom regulations. These men of the cloth embarrassed the Russian tsar by keeping his men at bay from 1668 to 1676. The monks had popular support, with many peasants from local villages and even Russian soldiers smuggling food and supplies past the blockade. By 1674, over 1,000 Russian soldiers and large numbers of artillery had joined the siege, while the monks had constructed a number of new fortifications. In 1676, a monk betrayed the monastery, showing the Russians a window, which they could use to enter and massacre the population. Only 60 defenders survived the assault. The Russians discovered sufficient food in the kitchen for the siege to have gone on for many more years.

Siege Of Tripoli: 7 Years

The siege of Tripoli took place in 1102, lasting seven years until 1109. It was an attempt by Raymond IV, the Count of Toulouse, to secure the Holy Land during the First Crusade.Knowing his 300 men were not enough to take the city, Raymond constructed the Citadel of Raymond de Saint-Gilles in an attempt to block access to Tripoli by land. Tripoli's ruler, Fakhr al-Mulk, attacked the citadel in September 1104, burning down an entire wing, killing many Franks, and injuring Raymond to the point that he would die five months later. On his deathbed, Raymond and Fakhr came to an agreement—not one that stopped the siege, because that would be far too wise, but one that stopped attacks on the fortress in return for the opening of trade routes with Tripoli. By 1108, bringing

food into the city was still hard, many citizens were fleeing, and nobles of Tripoli had sold out vital information about city defenses to the Crusaders (before being executed by the same Crusaders for their efforts). In 1109, with the city still holding, the Crusader King of Jerusalem himself arrived with reinforcements, who eventually took the city.

Siege Of Harlech Castle: 7 Years

By 1461, after the crushing defeat at the Battle of Towton, the Wars of the Roses were, for the interim, effectively over. The Lancastrian faction fled to Scotland and Wales with the House of York quickly chasing after them. The Lancastrian Queen Margaret of Anjou fled to Harlech castle because of its strong natural defenses. After the coronation of Edward IV, attempts were made to hunt down the last Lancastrians, with various attempts to starve Harlech failing due to the proximity of the castle to the sea. By 1464, all other Lancastrian holdings had fallen and Harlech stood strong as their last remaining stronghold. It held out for four further years against multiple attempts to seize it. The Lancastrians were even able to conduct raids and receive French reinforcements. Finally, in 1468, Edward IV was forced to organize an army of 10,000 men to seize the castle, which was being held by around 50 men. He succeeded—through negotiation.

Battle Of Xiangyang: 6 Years

In 1267, the Mongol ruler Kublai Khan ordered his commander Aju to attack the city of Xiangyang. The reason for the attack? They were Mongols, they didn't need a reason! The 8,000 troops garrisoned in the city were up against 100,000 Mongols and 5,000 ships. The besieging forces constructed a series of forts to blockade the city, and to act as a base for the 100 trebuchets they had brought with them. The defenders, expecting this, reinforced the wall and made netting covers that absorbed the force of the rocks. From 1267 to 1271, attempts to relieve the city of 200,000 were forced back by Mongol cavalry, leaving the besieged force on its own. In 1272, a force of 3,000 men managed to break through the blockade and supply the city, though there was no way back and the others believed that they had also been lost. The downfall of this impenetrable city came from a single test shot fired by a counterweight trebuchet to try and punch some kind of hole in the wall. The test shot happened to hit a stone bridge, destroying it, and causing the citizens to try and open the gate and flee. Seeing this panic, Aju slaughtered the population of a neighboring city to terrorize the population further, forcing the defenders to surrender.

Great Siege Of Gibraltar: 3 Years, 7 Months

The Siege of Gibraltar was an unsuccessful attempt by the Spanish and French to seize the fortress during the American War of Independence. Not only is this siege notable for being the longest that the British Armed Forces have participated in, but it's a decisive British victory despite the odds. By the winter of 1779, the British garrison was low on supplies, meaning that naval relief needed to be sent. After capturing a Spanish convoy and then further proving that he deserved his rank by defeating a Spanish fleet, Admiral George Rodney was able to resupply the garrison by avoiding the Spanish blockade with 129 ships full of supplies. These same ships were again able to dodge the Spanish on the way out, evacuating the civilian population of Gibraltar. On September 13,

1782, 10 French and Spanish floating batteries with 138 heavy guns (as well as 86 land guns, 78 other ships, 35,000 troops, and 30,000 sailors) assaulted the city. The 7,500 British met the floating batteries with hot shots, causing three to blow into mushroom clouds and forcing the enemy to cease the assault. To add insult to injury, a further 65 ships made it past the blockade the next month. In February 1783, the Spanish and French forces retired and Gibraltar was held.

Forgotten Ancient Civilizations

The typical history textbook has a lot of ground to cover and only so many pages to devote to anything before Jesus. For most of us, that means ancient history is a three-card trick—Egypt, Rome, and Greece. Which is why it's easy to get the impression that, outside of those three, our map of the ancient world is mostly just blank space. But actually nothing could be further from the truth. Plenty of vibrant and fascinating cultures existed outside that narrow focus. Let's fill in the blanks.

Aksum
The kingdom Aksum (or Axum) has been the subject of countless legends. Whether as the home of the mythical Prester John, the lost kingdom of the Queen of Sheba, or the final resting place of the Ark of the Covenant, Aksum has long been at the forefront of Western imaginations. The Ethiopian kingdom of reality, not myth, was an international trading power. Thanks to access to both the Nile and Red Sea trading routes, Aksumite commerce thrived, and by the beginning of the common era, most Ethiopian peoples were under Aksumite rule. Aksum's power and prosperity allowed it to expand into Arabia. In the third century A.D., a Persian philosopher wrote that Aksum was one of the world's four greatest kingdoms, alongside Rome, China, and Persia. Aksum adopted Christianity not long after the Roman Empire did and continued to thrive through the early Middle Ages.

If not for the rise and expansion of Islam, Aksum might have continued to dominate East Africa. After the Arab conquest of the Red Sea coastline, Aksum lost its primary trade advantage over its neighbors. Of course, Aksum had only itself to blame. Just a few decades earlier, an Aksumite king had given asylum to early followers of Muhammad, thus ensuring the expansion of the religion which was to unmake the Aksumite empire.

Kush
Known in ancient Egyptian sources for its abundance of gold and other valuable natural resources, Kush was conquered and exploited by its northern neighbor for nearly half a millennium (circa 1500–1000 B.C.). But Kush's origins extend far deeper into the past—ceramic artifacts dated to 8000 B.C. have been discovered in the region of its capital city, Kerma, and as early as 2400 B.C., Kush boasted a highly stratified and complex urban society supported by large-scale agriculture.

In the ninth century B.C., instability in Egypt allowed the Kushites to regain their independence. And, in one of history's greatest reversals of fortune, Kush conquered Egypt in 750 B.C. For the next century, a series of Kushite pharaohs ruled a territory that far outstripped their Egyptian predecessors. It was the Kushite rulers who revived the building of pyramids and promoted their construction across the Sudan. They were eventually ousted from Egypt by an Assyrian invasion, ending centuries of Egyptian and Kushite cultural exchange. The Kushites fled south and reestablished themselves at Meroe on the southeast

bank of the Nile. At Meroe, the Kushites broke away from Egyptian influence and developed their own form of writing, now called Meroitic. The script remains a mystery and still has not been deciphered, obscuring much of Kush's history. The last king of Kush died in A.D. 300, though his kingdom's decline and the exact reasons for its demise remain a mystery.8YamThe Kingdom of Yam certainly existed as a trading partner and possible rival of Old Kingdom Egypt, yet its precise location has proven nearly as elusive as that of the mythical Atlantis. Based on the funerary inscriptions of the Egyptian explorer Harkhuf, it seems Yam was a land of "incense, ebony, leopard skins, elephant tusks, and boomerangs." Despite Harkhuf's claims of journeys overland exceeding seven months, Egyptologists have long placed the land of boomerangs just a few hundred miles from the Nile.

The conventional wisdom was that there was no way ancient Egyptians could have crossed the inhospitable expanse of Saharan Desert. There was also some question of just what they would have found on the other side of the Sahara. But it seems we underestimated ancient Egyptian traders, because hieroglyphs recently discovered over 700 kilometers (430 miles) southwest of the Nile confirm the existence of trade between Yam and Egypt and point to Yam's location in the northern highlands of Chad. Exactly how the Egyptians crossed hundreds of miles of desert prior to the introduction of the wheel and with only donkeys for pack animals remains perplexing. But, at the very least, their destination is no longer shrouded in doubt.

The Xiongnu Empire

The Xiongnu Empire was a confederacy of nomadic peoples which dominated the north of China from the third century B.C. until the first century B.C. Imagine Genghis Khan's Mongol army, but a millennium earlier . . . and with chariots. A number of theories exist to explain the Xiongnu's origins, and at one time some scholars argued that the Xiongnu may have been the ancestors of the Huns. Unfortunately, the Xiongnu left few records of their own behind. What we do know is that Xiongnu raids on China were so devastating that the Qin emperor ordered the earliest construction work on the Great Wall. Nearly half a century later, the Xiongnu's persistent raiding and demands for tribute forced the Chinese, this time under the Han dynasty, to refortify and expand the Great Wall even further. In 166 B.C., over 100,000 Xiongnu horsemen made it to within 160 kilometers (100 mi) of the Chinese capital before finally being repulsed. It took a combination of internal discord, succession disputes, and conflict with other nomadic groups to weaken the Xiongnu enough for the Chinese to finally assert some semblance of control over their northern neighbors. Still, the Xiongnu were the first, and the longest lasting, of the nomadic Asian steppe empires.

Greco-Bactria

Too often, in recounting the life and conquests of Alexander the Great, we fail to remember the men who followed him into battle. Alexander's fate is well documented, but what of the men who bled for the young general's conquests? When Alexander died unexpectedly, the Macedonians didn't just head home. Instead, their generals fought one another for supremacy before carving up the empire among those left standing. Seleucus I Nicator made out pretty well, taking

for himself pretty much everything from the Mediterranean in the west to what is now Pakistan in the east. However even the Seleucid empire is fairly well known compared to the splinter state of Greco-Bactria. In the third century B.C., the province of Bactria (in what is now Afghanistan and Tajikistan) became so powerful that it declared independence. Sources describe a wealthy land "of a thousand cities," and the large amount of surviving coinage attests to an unbroken succession of Greek kings spanning centuries.

Greco-Bactria's location made it a center of fusion for a litany of cultures: Persians, Indians, Scythians and a number of nomadic groups all contributed to the development of a wholly unique kingdom. Of course, Greco-Bactria's location and wealth also attracted unwanted attention and, by the early second century B.C., pressure from nomads to their north had forced the Greeks south into India. At Alexandria on the Oxus, or Ai Khanoum as it is known now, fascinating evidence for this radical combination of Greek and Eastern culture was unearthed, before fighting during the Soviet-Afghan War destroyed the site in 1978. During the period of excavation, Indian coins, Iranian altars, and Buddhist statuary were found among the ruins of this decidedly Greek city, which was complete with Corinthian columns, a gymnasium, an amphitheater, and a temple combining Greek and Zoroastrian elements.

Yuezhi

The Yuezhi are notable for having seemingly fought everybody. Just imagine the Yuezhi as the Forrest Gump of ancient history, because for several centuries they appeared in the background of an improbable number of significant events across Eurasia. The Yuezhi originated as a confederation of several nomadic tribes on the steppes north of China. Yuezhi traders ranged over great distances to exchange jade, silk, and horses. Their flourishing trade brought them into direct conflict with the Xiongnu, who eventually forced them out of the Chinese trading game. The Yuezhi then headed west, where they encountered and defeated the Greco-Bactrians—forcing them to regroup in India. The Yuezhi's migration to Bactria also displaced a people called the Saka, who responded by overrunning portions of the Parthian Empire. Tribes of Scythians and Saka eventually established themselves all over Afghanistan. By the first and second centuries A.D., the Yuezhi were fighting those same Scythians in addition to the occasional war in Pakistan and Han China. During this period, the Yuezhi tribes consolidated and established a sedentary, agricultural economy. This "Kushan" empire survived for three centuries, until forces from Persia, Pakistan, and India all reconquered their old territories.

The Mitanni Kingdom

The Mitanni state existed from about 1500 B.C. until the 1200s B.C. and consisted of what is now Syria and northern Iraq. Chances are you've heard of at least one Mitannian, as there is evidence to suggest that Egypt's famous queen Nefertiti was born a princess in the Mesopotamian state. Nefertiti was likely married to the Pharaoh as part of an effort to improve relations between the two kingdoms. The Mitannians are believed to have been Indo-Aryan in origin and their culture demonstrates the extent to which ancient Indian influence penetrated early Middle Eastern civilization. Mitannians espoused Hindu beliefs like karma,

reincarnation, and cremation, beliefs that make the link between Mittani and Egypt all the more intriguing. Nefertiti and her husband, Amenhotep IV, were at the center of a short-lived religious revolution in Egypt, although we can only guess how much of that might be related to her foreign background. But Nefertiti is known to have been highly influential and was often depicted in situations, like smiting an enemy, that were typically reserved for the Pharaoh. While much of the above remains speculative, scholars are hopeful that upcoming excavations will uncover the Mitannian capital of Washukanni and reveal more about the ancient kingdom.

Tuwana

Kingdoms don't come much more lost or forgotten than Tuwana. When the Hittite Empire (the alpha dog of Bronze Age Anatolia) fell, Tuwana was one of a handful of city-states which helped fill the power vacuum in what is now Turkey. During the ninth and eighth centuries B.C., Tuwana rose to prominence under a series of kings, of which only a few are known from inscriptions. Tuwana leveraged its position between the Phrygian and Assyrian empires to facilitate trade throughout Anatolia. As a result it amassed significant wealth. In addition to its strong trading economy, Tuwana seems to have possessed great cultural riches. The kingdom used a hieroglyphic language called Luwian, but later adopted the alphabetical Phoenician script. It turns out this could have been pretty important, since Tuwana's position as a link between east and west put the forgotten kingdom into contact with elements of ancient Greek culture. It's possible that one result of all the linguistic interaction in Tuwana may been the origin of the Greek alphabet. Not too bad for a kingdom you've never heard of.

It seems Tuwana's central location and the disunity of the Anatolian city-states made the kingdom ripe for the taking in the early 700s B.C. As the Assyrian Empire expanded westward, it rolled up each of the post-Hittite city-states along its way until to controlling most of the Middle East. If that all sounds rather speculative, it's because up until 2012, all that was known about Tuwana was based on a handful of inscriptions and a few mentions in some Assyrian documents. The recent discovery of a massive city believed to be the base of Tuwana's power is changing all that. With such a large and well-preserved find, archaeologists have begun piecing together the story of a powerful and wealthy kingdom, which controlled trade through the Cilician Gates for several centuries. And considering that the Cilician pass was like a highly compressed Silk Road, Tuwana's archaeological potential is tremendous.

Mauryan Empire

Chandragupta Maurya was essentially India's Alexander the Great. So it's only fitting that the two men supposedly met. Chandragupta sought Macedonian aid in his bid for control of the subcontinent, but Alexander's troops were too busy with a mutiny. Undaunted, Chandragupta united the bulk of India under his rule and defeated all comers on the subcontinent. He did all this by age 20. After Alexander's death, it was the Mauryan Empire, which prevented his successors from expanding any farther into India. Chandragupta personally defeated several Macedonian generals in battle, after which the Macedonians preferred accord rather than risk another open war. Unlike Alexander, Chandragupta left behind a

carefully planned bureaucracy and government to ensure the duration of his legacy. And it might have survived longer if not for a coup in 185 B.C. that left India divided, weak, and open to invasion from the Greeks just to its north.

Indo-Greeks

There's a reason you can't talk about the ancient world without bringing up the Greeks—those Hellenes were everywhere. As mentioned before, external pressures doomed the Greco-Bactrians, but the Indo-Greek kingdom carried the torch for Hellenistic culture for another two centuries in northwest India. The most famous of the Indo-Greek kings, Menander, supposedly converted to Buddhism after a lengthy debate with the philosopher Nagasena, who recorded the conversation in "The Questions of King Menander." Greek influence can be seen clearly in the fusion of artistic styles. While surviving statuary is scarce, some finds show Buddhist monks and devotees sculpted in a definitively Greek style, complete with Greek tunics. Based on some Indo-Greek coinage made using a metallurgic process unique to China, it is believed there existed extensive trade between the two states. The accounts of the Chinese explorer, Zhang Qian, attest to this trade as early as the end of the second century B.C. The Indo-Greek kingdom's downfall seems to have been the combination of Yuezhi encroachment from the north and native Indian expansion from the south.

Insane Military Tactics That Actually Worked

While some military tactics are set in stone, a mixture of desperation and quick thinking have led to some tactics which simply make their creator look like a lunatic. Some of these tactics seem like they'd be instant death sentences to their side, but they actually did just the opposite.

The Cat Army
Animals have been used throughout the history of human warfare, usually as things that are as simple to light on fire as humans but much easier to talk into it. But rarely do we see animals being used as elegantly as Cambyses II of Persia used cats. He was fighting the Egyptians in the battle of Pelusium in 525 B.C. and as we all know, the cat held a high place in Egyptian society as sacred creatures and the Achaemenid Empire sought to use this to their advantage in the invasion of Egypt. Cambyses ordered his men to paint felines on their shields, and he brought hundreds of actual cats into his front lines. The plan worked: The Egyptian archers refused to fire on his felines, fearing that they would injure the animals—a crime punishable by death. Instead they retreated, and most were massacred by the pursuing Persians. This ultimately led to the capture of the pharaoh.

The Spartan Sikhs
When you think of the Sikhs (provided you know what Sikhs are), you wouldn't normally think of violence . . . unless you looked into one of the few battles the Sikhs actually fought—in which 48 soldiers held off 100,000 men. The Sikhs had been fleeing the Mughal Empire for days after taking Anandpur Sahib. After seeking shelter in a mud fort, they were awoken by the Mughal forces, who had surrounded them. For most, this would mean surrendering before the horde had the chance to knock on the front gate. But for the Sikhs, it meant leading a defense against a vastly superior enemy long enough for their Guru to escape. Somehow, the 48 men defended the fort through the night, distracting the enemy, killing 3,000 of them, and ensuring the survival of their religion.

The Siege Within
A Siege After a Gallic revolt at Alesia in 52 B.C., Julius Caesar marched 60,000 legionnaires to the town and laid siege to the 80,000-strong Gallic force. When word reached Caesar that a relief force of 120,000 was marching towards his forces, instead of retreating, he ordered his men to build a second set of walls around the first. For the next few weeks, while outnumbered four to one, Caesar led both a siege of Alesia and the defense of his own fortifications. On October 2, he personally led a devastating cavalry charge against an attacking force of 60,000 men with 6,000 of his own, forcing both the relief force and those in Alessia to surrender.

Hammers v U-Boats
German U-boats played a major role in disrupting British, American, and French supplies during the First World War. Single German U-boat captains such as Kretschmer were responsible for the sinking of 200,000 tons of shipping alone.

These glorified tin cans were starving out Europe one merchant ship at a time, replacing Christmas turkeys with Christmas potatoes. With no submarines of their own and no real countermeasures, one might expect some strange solutions. But nothing was nearly as insane as the British solution—a hammer and bag. Convoys would send a blacksmith and a few gunners out on a small raft in the dead of night. Once the team spotted a U-boat periscope, they would approach it in silence and either secure the bag around it or smash it with their hammer, blinding the captain and forcing them to surface. The method was surprisingly effective, with 16 U-boats being hammered.

Inferior Technology

Bringing a knife to a gunfight is ill-advised, and the same goes for spears and arrows, as many a nation learned when Europeans decided to go "exploring." So it seemed odd that, during World War II, the Russians chose to use biplanes on the Eastern Front when the Luftwaffe had much more advanced tech. The Polikarpov Po-2 biplanes were entrusted to the Night Witches—a brigade of women bombers. At first, they were given the inferior technology because they were women. They soon proved themselves, with many flying over 1,000 missions by the end of the war. There was one secret to their success: The speedy German Me-109s were unable to decelerate and hit the slow moving Po-2 planes without stalling. Though they could only carry two bombs each, their wooden frames made them undetectable to radar, and they remained some of the only Soviet aircraft to be able to survive the skies during the German occupation. And they were flown by schoolgirls with around four hours of training.

The Christian Burial

The tale of the Trojan Horse was designed in part to alert city guards to the danger of warmongers bearing gifts—or in this case, Vikings bearing coffins. Hastein, a Viking leader, was looking to sack Rome in A.D. 860 in an attempt to prove himself. Knowing that Vikings were far better at pillaging villages than cities, he came up with a plan to bypass the city walls: Pretend to be a dead Norseman seeking burial in the city. Hastein played dead in his coffin and his raiding force just walked through the front gate. Although his plan was met with great success, he later learned that he had mistaken the city of Luna for the city of Rome and pillaged the wrong city.

Flaming Camels

Patience is one thing, but setting fire to your camels—your only means of escape—is quite another. That didn't stop Timur, descendant of Genghis Khan, from doing so during his capture of Delhi. When faced by the Sultan and his 120 war elephants in 1398, Timur ordered his terrified, fleeing men to dismount and load their camels with as much hay as possible. As soon as the elephants started their charge, Timur's force set their mounts on fire and prodded them toward the enemy. Strangely not a monumental mistake, the sight of the burning camels was enough to spook the elephants and send them back into the Indian frontline. The Indian army was trampled by their own elephants, which were equipped with chain mail and poisoned tusks, allowing Timur an easy victory. He was also

able to replace his camels with 120 elephants, which he used later in his invasion of India.

The Enemy Of My Enemy

May 5, 1945 saw one of the strangest battles of World War II. Only three days before the official surrender of Germany, Major Josef Gangl and his nine men surrendered Castle Itter and its French prisoners to 14 US soldiers. When the Americans arrived to evacuate the prisoners and their former captors, they were engaged by elements of the 17th SS Grenadier Division who had been sent to execute the prisoners. Gangl, realizing that the prison would be overrun before help arrived, offered his assistance to the Americans. Throughout the morning, German and American soldiers fought side by side in the only recorded case of this happening in the war. After some time, an American relief force arrived and routed the SS, but not before Gangl was killed by a sniper. It should be noted that giving automatic weapons to prisoners of war is only advisable in extreme situations.

Ice

If there's one thing history has taught us, it's that if you invade Russia during the winter, you're going to have a bad time. The Teutonic Knights weren't immune to this rule. The Crusaders were far more equipped than the Russians, with full plate mail and armored horses. The Russians would have been easily beaten in a straight fight, so they retreated over the frozen Lake Peipus and then turned around to face them, hoping the lake would slow the enemy down. The over-eager knights followed them, not realizing that the ice would be unable to hold their armored weight. According to reports, the Crusader ranks were in chaos, slipping and breaking through the ice while fighting the armored Russian infantry. Eventual archer bombardment led to a full retreat of the Teutonic Knights.

Amazing Female Spies Who Brought Down The Nazis

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. The Germans would have done well to take note of William Congreve's writings during World War II. While the efforts of men in war have been well highlighted, we often forget that women played just as large a role in ensuring victory. Some piloted planes, others worked hard in factories, and a very special few joined the Allied secret service. The following ten women risked their own lives to scout enemy positions, bomb railroads, and ensure that the Third Reich met its match.

Andree Borrel
Andree was contributing to the war effort even before becoming a spy. This French national and her friend were responsible for an underground railway into Spain, which they used to evacuate downed Allied airmen from occupied France. When the network was betrayed in 1940, she fled to Portugal and eventually joined SOE in 1942. She was one of the first female agents to parachute into France along with Lise de Baissac on September 24, 1942. After joining the resistance in Paris, she became second in command of the local network by March 1943. Responsible for attacking a power station and other infrastructure, she and three key members were arrested. After proving too tough to crack through interrogation, she was taken to a concentration camp where she was given a lethal injection. Andree regained consciousness after the injection. Fighting the doctors for her life, she was eventually overpowered and cremated while alive.

Nancy Wake
Born on August 30, 1912, in Wellington, New Zealand, Nancy worked as a journalist in pre-war Nazi Germany. After marrying a French industrialist, she joined the French Resistance in occupied France and helped British airmen escape capture. In December 1940, after being betrayed, Wake was captured. After convincing her guards that she wasn't the woman they were looking for, she traveled to Britain and joined the Special Operations Executive (SOE). This was where she learned that her husband had been shot by Gestapo agents—which turned out to be a bad move on their part when Nancy came back with a vengeance. She was dropped back into France in 1944 to coordinate Resistance attacks with the planned D-Day landings. This time she led an armed raid against Gestapo headquarters and German gun factories. After getting separated from her radio operator during a German counter-attack, she walked 200 kilometers (124 miles) and biked a 100 more kilometers (62 miles) to contact another operator. One of her resistance members said, "She is the most feminine woman I know, until the fighting starts. Then she is like five men." Nancy died in 2011, at the age of 98.

Violette Reine
A French national, Violette moved to London before the start of the war. It was here that she met, fell in love with, married, and had a child with Etienne Szabo, a French Foreign Legion Officer serving with Free French forces. After Szabo was killed in 1942, Violette joined SOE to avenge his death (a common theme that

might suggest making enemies of women was the downfall of Nazi Germany). Replacing Philippe Liewer, an agent who had been uncovered and was hiding in Paris, she helped to completely restructure and reorder the shattered resistance movement in Normandy in June 1943. She also led sabotage missions against roads and railways as well as spotted potential bombing targets for the British. After briefly returning to Britain, she went on a second mission into France in which her car was ambushed. After holding off German troops with 64 rounds of ammunition so that her colleague could escape, she was captured and deported to Saarbrucken along with two other female agents and 37 male prisoners. During the transit, she used the cover of an Allied air raid to gather water for the imprisoned men in her final valorous act before she was executed on January 27, 1945.

Cecile Pearl Witherington

Cecile, a Brit born in France, joined SOE on June 8, 1943, after fleeing France. When she dropped into France on September 22, 1943, she started as a courier. The Germans, not taking kindly to even the prettiest of girls smuggling illegal weapons and intel, made even this low-level job incredibly dangerous. When her superior was arrested, Cecile took over his duties. As leader of the Wrestler resistance network, she fielded over 1,500 fighters who played key roles in the Normandy landings. They were so effective that the Germans placed a 1,000,000 franc bounty on her head. In one instance, a force of 2,000 German soldiers were sent to attack her and her men in a battle which lasted 14 hours. The battle saw the death of 86 Germans and 24 of her freedom fighters. In all, 1,000 German soldiers were killed under her command, and railways connecting South and North France were disrupted over 800 times. In the final days of the occupation, she presided over the surrender of 18,000 Germans.

Virginia Hall

Virginia may be the most impressive of the women on this list. While they all kicked Hitler's butt, Hall did it with only one real foot—the other was a prosthesis, and a terrible prosthesis given the time. No stranger to danger, she served as an ambulance driver during the invasion of France, which we're sure was an incredibly difficult task with the lack of automatic transmissions and even harder still with the clutch. Before even becoming an agent, she organized the resistance, helped downed pilots, and carried out raids in 1941 under the guise of an American reporter. The Germans declared the "Limping Lady" one of the most dangerous Allied spies in 1942, and with her very unique limp, she was forced out of France. The American equivalent of SOE recruited Virginia in 1944 and sent her into France via parachute in 1944, with her prosthesis in her backpack. From her landing onward, she disguised herself as a farmhand and trained French resistance troops, organized sabotages, and helped with the resistance role in D-Day.

Odette Hallowes "Who you know is everything" or "Who you claim to know is everything" should be the lesson that you take away from the adventures of Odette Hallowes. After accidentally enrolling into the SOE by sending a postcard offering to help with the war effort to the wrong government office, Odette was dropped into France in 1942. Meeting up with her supervisor Peter Churchill (no

relation to Winston), Odette acted as an assistant and courier. After their operation was infiltrated, the two were arrested and tortured in Paris. What they did then most likely spared them their lives. They claimed that Peter was the nephew of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and that Odette was his wife. The two were still sent to a concentration camp in June 1943, but no death date was officially listed. In fact, the camp commandant, Fritz Suhren, even brought Odette with him when he surrendered. He had hoped that her connections would spare him from being labeled a war criminal. Odette later testified against him, and he was hanged in 1950.

Diana Rowden

At the outbreak of the war, Diana Rowden, a French journalist, joined the French Red Cross. After fleeing France in the summer of 1941, she joined the SOE in March 1943. Flown to a location northeast of Angers, she joined the "Acrobat" resistance network in June 1943. Diana played a major role in delivering messages to other agents of the underground in Marseille, Lyon, and Paris under the noses of the Germans. She was also pivotal in the planning and execution of an attack on the Peugeot factory at Sochaux, which disrupted tank and plane manufacturing in the area. In November 1943, her network was betrayed, and Rowden was arrested. She was sent alongside fellow agents Leigh, Borrel, and Olschanezky to her death at the Natzwiler-Struthof concentration camp.

Vera Leigh

Leigh joined the French resistance after the fall of Paris, helping Allied servicemen trapped behind enemy lines. Thinking that she could be of more use, Vera fled to England in 1942 and was directly recruited by the SOE despite being 40 at the time (considered a little old for an agent). Known as a crack shot by her colleagues, she arrived near Tours in May 1943. Tasked with forming an entirely new network of resistance, Leigh, by chance, met her sister's husband who ran a safe house for Allied airmen. She took further risk to herself by also becoming involved in this operation. On the October 30, Leigh was arrested before she could fully finish her work creating the "Inventor" resistance group. Leigh was deported alongside other agents to Natzwiler-Struthof concentration camp where she was killed.

Krystyna Skarbek

Kyrstyna was a Polish spy who inspired the character played by Eva Green in Casino Royale, and she has our thanks for that rather drop-dead gorgeous inspiration. She also has our thanks for the pivotal role she played in occupied Poland and France. After joining the Secret Intelligence Service in 1939, she convinced a Polish Olympic skier, Jan Marusarz, to escort her from Hungary across the Tatra Mountains, which had temperatures of -30 degrees Celsius (-20 F) at the time, and into Poland. While in Poland, she made first contact with many agents and resistance groups, which would prove invaluable to the British. Furthermore, she smuggled Polish airmen to neutral Yugoslavia so that they could help the war effort. When she was captured in 1941, she pretended to cough up blood by biting her tongue, telling them that she has tuberculosis. Scars on her lungs from her job at an auto shop (emissions were pretty awful back then) confirmed the lie when German doctors took X-rays. After buying her

story, they let her go and Skarbek fled to England. She was later sent to Southern France by SOE in 1944. During her time there, she successfully scaled a 610-meter (2,000 ft) cliff to reach the Col de Larche fort, convincing the garrison of 200 fellow Poles to surrender. She was stabbed to death on June 15, 1952, before she saw her country freed.

Lise de Baissac

After fleeing Paris in 1940, Lise de Baissac found herself in London and applied to join SOE as soon as they accepted females. Along with Andree on September 24, 1942, she was one of the first female agents to parachute into France. Lise, posing as a poor widow, was tasked with setting up a network in the city, as well as transporting arms from the UK to French resistance members. She, of course, chose to be subtle, moving into an apartment near the Gestapo HQ and becoming acquainted with the chief, Herr Grabowski. She also used the guise of an amateur archaeologist to gather geographical information for landings. On her second mission, she returned to France on April 10, 1944 to work for another network. After D-Day, she played a role gathering information on troop movement, renting a room in a house occupied by the local commander of German forces. Lise died at age 98 in 2004.

Crazy Things Done By Philosophers

When we think "philosopher," a certain image comes to mind—most often a wise, calm person, who is knowledgeable and mature. You wouldn't necessarily imagine someone being cheeky with the people about to kill them or urinating on random bystanders. Nevertheless, those were some of philosophy's greatest minds, and some did even crazier things.

Descartes Slept In Ovens
Rene Descartes's "I think, therefore I am" is possibly the most quoted idea in all of philosophy. His ideas are said to be the grounding for most Western philosophy, and he may have come up with many of those ideas in an oven. Exactly when and where is up for debate, but according to Descartes himself, it did happen. It wasn't an oven as you might imagine, but a stone room where a fire always burned. Temperatures were raised when it was needed for cooking, but it was kept relatively low during other times of the day. They certainly weren't designed for people, but that didn't stop Descartes from sleeping in one and having dreams that he eventually turned into the grounding of his life's work.

Chicken Or Man?
Diogenes was from ancient Greece and known for his controversial stunts. For example, he once plucked a chicken and hand-delivered it to Plato's philosophy school. But it wasn't on an insane whim—he had a point to make. When Plato publicly defined man as "a featherless biped," Diogenes disagreed, believing man was more complex. To argue his point, he obtained a chicken, plucked it, and presented it to Plato's academy as a man. Annoyed, but not to be outdone, Plato added "with broad flat nails" to his definition.

Public Masturbation
Diogenes famously lived in a small barrel in public, so where did he go when he needed privacy? Apparently he didn't need privacy at all. He is said to have frequently masturbated in his barrel, well within the visibility of passersby. When those who were offended confronted him, he simply said that he wished it was "as easy to relieve hunger by rubbing an empty stomach." In further attempts of challenging society's understanding of why we feel shame, he's also believed to have urinated on people who annoyed him and defecated in public theaters. It turns out that ancient Greece drew a thin line between "great philosopher" and "offensive bum."

The Government Owes Socrates
Socrates was known as the "gadfly of Athens" because he was said to have annoyed Athenians (just as a gadfly annoys a horse) with his constant questioning of the societal norms they took for granted. His questioning, which was considered "corrupting the young" annoyed Athenians so much that it eventually lead to Socrates being put on trial and sentenced to death. According to Plato's Apology, Socrates was asked what he deemed an acceptable punishment for his actions. His response? Among other things, he should receive

"free maintenance by the state." In modern terms, Socrates claimed the government should give him food and wages because he believed his questioning was a service to them. Unsurprisingly, his rebellious attitude didn't get him out of the death penalty.

Bestiality: Not So Bad?

Peter Singer is an Australian philosopher who specializes in morals and is known predominantly for his ability to propose ideas that result in widespread protests. One of those ideas was that bestiality isn't all that bad. On a live Australian television show, Peter stated that he opposed any act in which an animal is harmed, but that there can be situations where both parties are pleased. He then gave an example: that a woman receiving oral sex from a dog might not be so horrible. The psychologists and politicians on the panel with him did not agree.

Nietzsche Hugged A Horse And Collapsed

Although many of his ideas aren't well known, the Nietzsche's name is definitely recognizable. Many know he was a philosopher of sorts, but not many know the details of his life. On January 3, 1889, Nietzsche left the place he was staying and saw a horse being whipped by a cabman. He reportedly ran to protect the horse, threw his arms around its neck, and began to cry. He then collapsed in the street. Believe it or not, his life went downhill from there.

Sartre Hid From A Nobel Prize

Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre was an existentialist and political philosopher in the '60s and '70s. Some of his work was so good that he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1964. The only problem was that he didn't want it. He claimed that winning the award would associate him with the Nobel committee forever. The press was very interested in someone turning down a Nobel Prize, but their attempts to contact Sartre went unanswered. Sartre hid in his sister-in-law's apartment until they all went away.

Alexinus's Failed School

Alexinus was an ancient Greek philosopher you've probably never heard of—and for good reason. Alexinus thought he was good enough to start his own philosophy school, and he moved all the way from Elis to Olympia to do so. When asked why he made the move, he said it was because he wanted the school to be called the "Olympian," and that wouldn't make sense in Elis. Unfortunately, the school was not prepared, ran out of provisions quickly after students arrived, and wasn't cleaned. The students decided the place was dirty and left, leaving Alexinus with one servant.

Demonax Starved Himself

Despite having the most evil name of all time, Demonax was a popular philosopher and celebrity figure. One thing that earned him that admiration was his love of solving disputes. According to a biography of his life, "he was fond of playing peace-maker between brothers at variance, or presiding over the restoration of marital harmony." So not only was he willing to use his ideals to solve the problems of squabbling couples, he did it for free because he enjoyed it.

When he got so old that he thought he couldn't take care of himself, he just stopped eating until he died. He was nearly 100 at the time.

An Expert On Children Abandoned His Own

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a Genevan philosopher known for his thinking on politics and sociology. Early in his life, Rousseau fathered five children and abandoned all of them to a home. He did this because abandoning children and sexual boasting was in fashion among his social circles, and men who had abandoned the most children were highly applauded. Such despicable behavior isn't quite what one would expect from a theorist on education and child-rearing, but that didn't stop Rousseau from becoming one. His past didn't escape the eye of rival philosophers—such as Voltaire—and he was severely criticized for being a hypocrite.

Notorious Witches And Warlocks

Many individuals have risen to notable power and fame thanks to their supposed knowledge of magic and the arcane arts. Some of them became rich and famous because of their talent, others suffered violent deaths. The people on this list came from all social classes and every period of history. Their temperaments ranged from friendly to terrifying. Yet they all had one thing in common—the world remembers them as witches and warlocks.

Moll Dyer
Moll Dyer was a 17th-century woman who lived in St. Mary's County, Maryland. Many things about her are shrouded in mystery, but she was know to be a strange woman. An herbal healer and outcast who survived mostly through the generosity of others, she was eventually accused of witchcraft and burned out of her hut during a freezing-cold night. She fled into the woods and was not seen for several days . . . until a local boy found her body. Moll Dyer was frozen to a large rock, in a kneeling position, with one hand raised to curse the men who had attacked her. Her knees had left permanent impressions on the stone. The villagers quickly found out they had been harassing the wrong woman (or, since they had accused her of witchcraft, the right woman). Moll Dyer's curse fell upon the area for centuries, causing cold winters and epidemics. Her ghost, often accompanied by various strange spectral animals, has been seen many times and is still said to haunt the area. Her eerie reputation eventually served as inspiration for the movie The Blair Witch Project. Although Moll Dyer is an influential folk figure in American witchcraft, reliable historical evidence of her existence is scarce.

Laurie Cabot
Laurie Cabot has been one of the instrumental forces in popularizing witchcraft in the United States. A California girl with a storied history as a dancer, her keen interest in the magical arts led her to New England. After years of studying the craft, she set up shop in Salem, Massachusetts, a historical epicenter of witch hunts. Initially she was wary of declaring herself as a witch. But when her familiar—a black cat—was stuck up a tree for days and the fire brigade refused to rescue it, she was forced to say she needed the cat in her rituals. The year was 1970 and the word "witch" still carried weight in Salem. The cat was immediately rescued by extremely meek and polite firemen. Now officially out of the broom closet, Cabot became a national celebrity. She set up a coven and a witchcraft shop, both of which were instant hits. The shop, which has since moved online, became a tourist destination. Cabot rapidly became one of the most high-profile witches in the world. Even the local government got in on the action—the governor of Massachusetts, Michael Dukakis, declared her the official "Witch of Salem" thanks to her influence and good work in the community. Cabot maintains that any curse by a witch will come back to haunt her and never performs evil magic. According to her, witchcraft is magic, astrology, and environmentalism combined in a scientific manner. She is the author of many books and a major influence on the Wiccan religion, which partially formed around her beliefs and approach to witchcraft. Although she is

hailed as the High Priestess of Wicca, she says she does not actually practice the religion . . . because she was already doing it long before Gerald Gardner introduced Wicca to the world.

George Pickingill

George Pickingill sounds as though he walked straight out of a horror story. A tall, frightening 19th-century man with a hostile demeanor and long, sharp fingernails, he was a famous cunning man—a practitioner of folk magic. Old George, as he was commonly known, was a farm worker who claimed to be a hereditary witch. According to him, his magical ancestry could be traced all the way back to the 11th century and the witch Julia Pickingill, who was a sort of magical assistant to a local lord. Pickingill was a vile, unlikeable man who often terrorized the other villagers for money and beer. However, he was respected as well as feared. He was said to be a skilled healer and occasionally settled disputes between villagers. In occult circles, Pickingill was a superstar—essentially the Aleister Crowley of his time. He was recognized as an acolyte of an ancient horned god, a frequent ally of Satanists, and the foremost authority on magical arts. As such, his counsel was widely sought by other witches. However, this authority was somewhat spoiled by the fact that Pickingill was a bit of a bigot (he would only endorse a coven if its members could prove they were of pure witch lineage) and something of a sexist (all the work in his covens was done by women, who also had to submit to some fairly unsavory practices).

Angela de la Barthe

Angela de la Barthe was a noblewoman and a notorious witch who lived in the 13th century. She was burned at the stake for a number of atrocious deeds she'd committed, according to the Inquisition. Her many crimes included, but were not limited to, nightly sexual relations with an incubus, giving birth to a wolf-snake demon that was blamed for the disappearances of children in the area, and generally being an unpleasant person. In reality, of course, Angela was nothing but an eccentric or perhaps mentally ill woman whose only crime was supporting Gnostic Christianism, a religious sect frowned upon by the Catholic Church. Her uncommon behavior led to accusations of witchcraft, which in turn led to a horrifying death. In those times, such a fate was all too common.

Abramelin The Mage

The true identity of the 15th-century man known as Abramelin the Mage has been lost to history. However, his legacy lives on in the form of thousands of followers and imitators. Abramelin was a powerful warlock described by Abraham of Würzburg, a magical scholar who convinced Abramelin to teach him his secrets. Abraham produced painstaking manuscripts of Abramelin's magical system, which was a complex process of commanding good and evil spirits to do his bidding. The system was based on magical symbols that could only activated at certain times and using certain rituals. In 1900, the manuscript was printed as a book called The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin. It was an instant hit in the occult community, and acted as a direct influence on many notorious practitioners, including big-name players such as Aleister Crowley.

Alice Kyteler

For a long time, Ireland was more relaxed about witchcraft than mainland Europe. However, witch hunts eventually arrived there, too. One of the first and most notorious victims of these changing attitudes was Dame Alice Kyteler, a wealthy moneylender whose husbands had a nasty habit of dying and leaving everything to her. When husband number four started to feel sickly and his fingernails began to drop off, his children smelled a rat—especially when they found out he was just about to sign a will that would leave everything to Kyteler. In 1324, church officials put Dame Alice on trial for heading a secret society of heretical sorcerers. She was not only the first witch to be accused on Irish soil, but also the first who had been directly accused of relations with an incubus. Authorities attempted to charge and imprison her multiple times. However, Dame Alice had many allies and always managed to escape. Kyteler eventually disappeared, leaving her servant and her son to be charged in her stead. She is said to have fled to England, where she lived in luxury for the rest of her days. Whether she actually dabbled in the dark arts or not, she is remembered to this day as the first witch in Ireland.

Tamsin Blight

A famous figure in 19th-century Cornwall, England, Tamsin Blight was an esteemed healer and hedge witch. Hedge witches were named for the hedges that surrounded villages, which acted as a symbol for the boundary between this world and others. Blight was said to be especially good at removing spells and curses, and also a crafty healer. She could enter a trance-like state and tell the future. However, she had an arsenal of bad juju too, and her reputation was somewhat tarnished by her husband, a fellow magician called James Thomas. Although a respected conjurer, Thomas was a drunken bully and widely disliked for his antics. Tamsin eventually parted ways with him, but they got back together toward the end of her life. Tamsin Blight's curses were effective, in practice because of her reputation and the esteem in which she was held. Once she cursed a cobbler who wouldn't mend her shoes—she hadn't been paying her bills—and said he'd soon be out of a job. When word got out, no one did business with the man anymore, and he was eventually forced to leave the area.

Eliphas Levi

Alphonse Louis Constant was known better under the name Eliphas Levi Zahed, which he claimed was his birth name translated into Hebrew. He was the man largely responsible for the mystical arts as they are known today. During the 19th century, Eliphas Levi distilled a number of belief systems—from Christianity and Judaism to fringe beliefs such as Tarot and the writings of historical alchemists—into a strange hybrid that became known as "Occultism." A trained theologist who almost became a priest, Levi was always more of a scholar than a practicing magician. Still, he was extremely charismatic and had vast knowledge in many areas of magic. He authored many books of ritual magic. Levi was particularly known for his work with Baphomet, the gargoyle-like entity allegedly worshipped by Knights Templar. He considered this figure a representation of "the absolute." He drew the famous picture of Baphomet as a winged, goat-headed female figure—often the first picture anyone thinks of when the occult is mentioned.

Raymond Buckland

Raymond Buckland, "The Father of American Wicca," was deeply impressed by modern Gardnerian Wicca. He took Gerald Gardner's teachings to the New World and eventually refined them into his own variation called Seax-Wicca. A veteran of witchcraft, Buckland has been involved in covens since the '60s, usually as a leader. He is a Wiccan priest and a revered expert in all things neo-pagan. Until his retirement from active witchcraft in 1992, he spent decades as the most recognizable spokesman and the foremost expert of the craft. These days, he lives in rural Ohio, where he writes books about magic and continues to practice a solitary version of the craft.

Agnes Waterhouse

Agnes Waterhouse, commonly known as Mother Waterhouse, was one of the most famous witches England has ever known. The crimes she was accused of were pretty heinous—Mother Waterhouse and two other witches stood trial for dallying with the devil, cursing people, and even causing bodily harm and multiple deaths through their black magic. The strange thing about the case was that the Church had nothing to do with accusing Agnes. She was the first English witch sentenced to death by a secular court. In her testimony, Agnes freely admitted to practicing the dark arts and devil worship. She owned a cat she called Satan, which she claimed to have sent to kill her enemies' livestock and, on occasion, the enemies themselves. She was unrepentant, stating that Satan had told her she would die by hanging or burning and there was not a lot she could do about it. Mother Waterhouse was indeed sentenced to hang for her crimes, despite the fact that the two other witches facing similar charges were let off lightly (one was found not guilty, the other sentenced to a year in prison—although later charges led to her death). Her Satanic bravado didn't last for long after sentencing. On her way to the gallows, Waterhouse made one last confession—she had once failed to kill a man because his strong belief in God had prevented Satan from touching him. She went to her death praying for God's forgiveness.

Incredible Cases Of Jewish Resistance During World War II

Though most Western depictions of World War II focus on soldiers rescuing helpless victims from German oppression, the truth is very different. The human species doesn't take kindly to genocide or oppression, and the Jews are no exception.

The Treblinka Rebellion 1943

About 800,000 to one million people were murdered at Treblinka Death Camp from July 23, 1942 to October 19, 1943 in Eastern Poland; ninety percent of all prisoners were murdered within two hours of arrival. The bodies were then taken by Sonderkommandos to the open cremation pit on a hilltop. The pit had iron rails laced in layers within it like grillwork, on which the bodies were incinerated. Jews were periodically forced to enter the pit and sift through the ashes for any bones that needed to be ground. The SS had been of the opinion that the Jews would be too underfed and overworked to cause a serious problem. They were wrong. On August 2, 1943, the prisoners fought back. About half of the 1,500 inmates allowed to live in the camp invaded the camp armory after three Jews walked up to the two guards at the rear door and stabbed them with their own knives before they could sound an alarm, whereupon the Jews stole small arms from the armory and opened fire on the SS guards throughout Camp II. The prisoners seized kerosene stores and set fire to every building while the guards and watchtowers began shooting back. The Jews broke into Camp I and armed some of its inmates, and then about 600 men and women broke through the outer perimeter and ran for their lives into the woods. All but about 40 of these were recaptured within a week and executed. Those 40 survived the war.

The Lenin Ghetto Assault 1942

During the Holocaust, the average population density inside the ghettos across Europe was about seven people to a single room, and up to 30 percent of a city's residents crammed into three percent of its area. The rest of a city was given over to Nazi party members, German troops, and the few gentile civilians deemed non-threatening. These were the living conditions of the Lenin Ghetto, near Pinsk, in Brest Province in southern Belarus. There were a few thousand Jews in the ghetto until August 14, 1942, when the SS entered and murdered almost every single human being, including infants. Thirty people were spared to work in the ghetto as tailors and woodwrights, and they were guarded by an SS garrison of 100, plus 30 Aryan Belarusian policemen who also hated the Jews. On 12 September 1942, the town was assaulted from the northeast by about 150 partisan soldiers, including the famous Bielski brothers, who killed thirty SS officers, soldiers, and police. They then broke through the wall, evacuated the 30 Jews remaining, and burned the ghetto to the ground before retreating into the surrounding woodland.

Zdzieciol Ghetto Partisans 1942-44

Today, Zdzieciol is called Dzyatlava, just over the Polish border in Belarus. It was a small town of about 6,000 during WWII. The Nazis occupied it on June 30, 1941, and established the ghetto on February 22 of the next year. On July 23,

1941, all of the most respected, well-educated citizens of the town were assembled in the main square and were arrested without being charged with any crimes. The SS Einsatzkommandos took them away in trucks and told the citizens watching that they would be put to work in labor camps. Instead, they were all shot in a forest a few miles outside of town. Once the ghetto was set up, eight people were forced to share living space in a single room without furniture except for collapsible cots. Anyone found smuggling food in from the city was immediately shot. Alter Dvoretsky, a local lawyer, organized a resistance group of about 60 people, who acquired guns and ammunition, and prepared to arm the ghetto residents in the event that it would be liquidated. These Partisan rebels cooperated with the Soviet Red Army in ambushing German patrols and stealing all weapon and food supplies from two dozen supply depots. The SS decided that this activity was a result of ghetto residents escaping: They liquidated the ghetto on April 30, 1942, and again on August 6. In the first incident, 1,200 of the most able-bodied Jews were marched out of the city and shot, then thrown into mass graves. The second incident resulted in 2,000 to 3,000 being shot, but the Partisans were able to fight on and remain hidden in the forests for the rest of the war.

Czestochowa Ghetto Uprising 1943

Czestochowa is a fairly large city in southern Poland and was one of the first cities to fall to the Germans after the Polish Army was defeated. Germany annexed it on September 3, 1939, two days after beginning WWII. The next day, the Wehrmacht, not the Waffen SS, committed one of their very few war crimes when they fired on unarmed civilians in two separate areas of the city, killing almost 600 men, women, and children. Soldiers who were involved have stated that this was not done because the victims were Jewish, but because the 42nd and 97th Wehrmacht Regiments were nervous and inexperienced. Many of the victims were non-Jewish. On April 9, 1941, the ghetto was completed and 95 percent of the city's Jews were forced in—about 45,000 total. The SS had taken over control of the city. On June 26, 1943, in the face of weekly deportations to Treblinka death camp and a supposed imminent liquidation, the 5,000 or so Jews inside the ghetto staged an urban firefight primarily along Nadrzeczna Street, where they took cover in makeshift bunkers and street-level basements. They were very poorly armed, with only one gun for every four people, and a few hundred Molotov cocktails, but those who weren't armed at the outset hoped that they could strip weapons from dead Germans. They did so, and lasted an amazing five days, but the SS had no real difficulty in quelling them. Their leader, Mordechai Zylberberg, shot himself just before the SS stormed into his bunker. Around 1,500 Jews died fighting, 500 were executed immediately afterward (many of them by flamethrowers), and some 3,800 to 4,000 who had been unable to arm themselves were captured and shipped to various labor camps.

The Sobibor Uprising 1943

Sobibor was one of the first death camps set up with the determined and large-scale purpose of murdering almost every Jew who was sent to it. The Nazis made the mistake of transporting hundreds of Soviet POWs to the camp for labor. Those who were Jewish were executed, but few precautions were taken because according to Nazi ideology the Soviets were subhuman and incapable of fighting

back. However, these POWs were experienced, battle-hardened soldiers—and one of them, Alexander Pechersky, could not bring himself to tolerate this wholesale slaughter. He was Jewish but fortunate not to look so, and after one month of incarceration in the camp he joined a covert resistance effort led by Leon Feldhendler with the goal of a successful escape. Two months later, the Sobibor prisoners sprang their plan. Pechersky and Feldhendler were among the very few prisoners involved in the uprising who had any experience killing other people. They lured guards and SS officers around the rear of one of the barracks or into a machine shop and stabbed, garrotted, or bludgeoned them to death. Each dead guard offered a uniform and weapons to another prisoner. They intended to kill every single guard and officer in the camp and then simply walk out through the main gate, but an errant guard spotted them and sounded the alarm. Half the prisoners made it out of the camp and into the woods, where more died by stepping on landmines. Some 50 managed to evade recapture by hiding in barns, haystacks, drain-pipes, and farmhouses. The local non-Jewish Poles risked their own lives by stowing them away in crawlspaces.

The Bielski Partisans 1942-45

Now famous via the 2009 film Defiance, the Bielski Partisans were led by four Jewish brothers: Alexander, Tuvia, Asael, and Aron Bielski. They organized a resistance group of 17 total after the liquidation of the Stankiewicz Ghetto in modern-day Belarus. In August 1941, the Bielskis' parents, sisters, and the rest of their entire family were murdered. The brothers escaped into the thick forests nearby. The SS continued separating people from their families, causing survivors to flee into the woods, where they found the Bielskis, who welcomed all Jewish refugees. They even began making night-time forays into towns and farms for food and ambushing German patrols for arms. Their membership swelled to 1,236 by the war's end. Their mission of upsetting the Nazi war effort as much as they could succeeded well enough that by 1943, the SS placed a 100,000 Reichsmark bounty of Tuvia Bielski's head. By late 1943, the Soviets had reached the area and the partisans joined them. They claimed to have killed 381 Nazis or Wehrmacht soldiers by 1944.4 The Syrets Concentration Camp Revolt 1943.

The Nazis installed a camp in Syrets, the western suburb of Kiev, in June 1942. It was one of the first built so far east of Germany or Poland, and its purpose was to force its Jewish prisoners to clean up all evidence of the Babi Yar massacre. There were about 3,000 Jewish prisoners in the camp at any time, and they were forced to bury or burn the naked bodies of their own family members in large pits. Fifteen people starved to death per day—25,000 died in the camp by the time the Nazis dismantled it over a year later. The ashes of the massacre victims were scattered on fallow fields across the area, and the prisoners were forced to live in shallow dugouts without beds. Anyone who refused to carry out the grave detail was immediately murdered by gunshot or mobile gas truck. Commandant Otto Radomski even had some prisoners skinned in front of the other Jews to terrify them. This continued until September 29, 1943, when the 326 prisoners managed to pick the locks of their chains with keys they had scavenged from the dead. The prisoners were so ill-treated that they were suffering from scabies and aggressive necrosis all over their bodies, but still found the strength to wrestle

their SS guards to the ground and stab them to death, gouge their eyes out, and strangle them with their bare-hands. Fifteen Jews escaped into the woods and survived to testify against Paul Blobel, the perpetrator of the Babi Yar massacre. The rest were executed.

The Auschwitz Sonderkommando Revolt 1944

Auschwitz was the largest and most infamous of the Nazis' concentration camps. It became operational on May 20, 1940 and remained so until January 27, 1945, when the Soviets liberated it. Over one million people were murdered in the three camps, about 90 percent of them Jewish. "Sonderkommando" was a special unite comprised of Jewish prisoners selected at random upon arrival at the camp. They were tasked with policing the corpses, clothing, and valuables to and from the gas chambers and crematoria, and though their job was horrible, they were rewarded with more food and better working conditions. On the morning of October 7, the Sonderkommandos suddenly attacked every single SS guard in and around the gas chambers and crematoria. There were two gas chambers and four crematoria, about 275 meters (300 yds) apart at the north end of Camp II. The Sonderkommandos totaled 451, vastly outnumbering the SS—but the SS were much better armed. However, these well-fed rebels proved very formidable adversaries and quickly killed several dozen guards with axes and knives, shoved two of them alive into the ovens, then stripped them of their weapons and opened fire on all SS personnel responding to the commotion. Over 70 Nazis were killed. Then the Jews flung the gunpowder satchel into an oven and blew up Crematorium IV. About one dozen men escaped the camp but were recaptured. All remaining Sonderkommandos, whether they had a part to play in the revolt or not, were executed.

The Bialystok Ghetto Uprising 1943

Bialystok is the largest city in northeastern Poland, not far from the Belarusian border, and the ghetto contained about 50,000 Jews from late July 1941 until the final liquidation and their deportations to concentration and death camps. When taking over the city one month earlier, the Nazis locked close to 1,000 Jews in the Great Synagogue and burned it down. Himmler visited two days later and gave his approval of the SS actions. The 50,000 ghetto Jews lived in cramped squalor, as was the case in all the ghettos. Every few weeks, a detachment of several thousand Nazis entered the ghetto to round up thousands of Jews to be sent to their deaths. Rumors could not help but be spread, and by the time rail cars reached their destinations, the passengers were screaming in terror and banging on the walls to try to escape.

By August 1943, the Jews of the Anti-Fascist Military Organization had worked up the courage to fight back, though they were only equipped with a single MG 34 machine gun and a single belt of 500 rounds of ammunition, 100 pistols, most of them Walther police pistols, and 25 Mauser rifles. They supplemented this meager arsenal with Molotov cocktails of gasoline, diesel, and kerosene, and about 100 glass bottles of hydrochloric, sulfuric, and nitric acids. They had set up command bunkers in the sewers and Moskowicz and Tenenbaum emptied their pistols at the surrounding SS until they turned their final bullets on themselves. The remaining 10,000 Jews in the ghetto were immediately shipped to Majdanek,

Treblinka, and Auschwitz. Some 1,200 children eventually arrived at Auschwitz for the gas chambers or Josef Mengele's experiments.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising 1943

This should not be confused with the Warsaw Uprising, which was a city-wide battle between the Nazis and the Polish Home Army. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising took place from April 19 to May 16, 1943, over a year before the Warsaw Uprising. The ghetto was established between October and November 1940, and from then until May 16, 1943, around 300,000 Jews were killed in various deportations, liquidations, and the final destruction. Life in the ghetto was deplorable. The Nazis allowed the Jews only 184 calories of food each per day, and they had to supplement this by stealing from outside the walls whenever possible. The Nazis entered the ghetto in January of 1943 for a deportation and shot 600 Jews dead more or less at random. Some of the women were dragged into the trucks and raped before being taken to trains that would ship them to their deaths.

The Nazis withdrew with 5,000 fresh prisoners for the death camps and waited under order from Heinrich Himmler until the Passover Week in April before they reentered for another deportation. Himmler appears to have chosen this date purely for the sake of offending their religion. About 4,000 Nazis began house-to-house searches only to walk face-first into multiple ambushes. Firefights erupted all over the city and the Nazis found themselves surrounded on many streets and without initial tank support. They quickly retreated and regrouped with tanks, heavy machine guns, demolition, and flamethrowers, with which they initiated building-by-building assaults, murders, and arson. The Nazis claimed 17 of their own were killed, while they executed 13,000 Jewish civilians. The fighting only lasted for about 10 days, after which the Nazis, ordered by Hitler himself, utterly obliterated the entire ghetto. Almost every single building was razed to the ground, and 56,000 Jews were shipped to death camps. The few who survived the war claimed that they knew they had no hope of defeating the Nazis, and were simply hoping to die on their own terms.

Amazing Forgotten Explorers

Sometimes it's not enough to be the first, to go the farthest, or even to chart the uncharted. Historical memory can be a fickle mistress, which is why we've decided to right historical injustice and celebrate the oft-overlooked pioneers of exploration.

Alexander Gordon Laing 1793–1826
For late 18th– and early 19th–century Europeans, Timbuktu was the El Dorado of Africa. But there's a reason the word "Timbuktu" is still synonymous with remote isolation, because even if Alexander Laing could have accessed Google Maps it wouldn't have done him any good. With only a vague idea of where he was heading, the British army officer and his tiny retinue left Tripoli in July 1825. Laing's local guide promised the plucky Scotsman the journey would take only a few weeks, but the caravan spent 13 months wandering the desert, avoiding warring nomads, and fighting its own war with thirst and hunger. The worst of Laing's ordeal came 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) and nearly a year into his journey, when his guide betrayed him to bandits. Laing survived and recounted the event like a minor inconvenience akin to burnt chips in a letter to his father-in-law. After detailing multiple cuts and fractures all over his face, head, and neck, he concludes: "I am nevertheless, as already I have said, doing well." Laing stumbled into Timbuktu a couple months afterward. He and his journal disappeared, but his subsequent murder was confirmed in 1828 by the second European explorer to reach the city.

Auguste Piccard 1884–1962
The Swiss scientist began his career as a physicist working with Albert Einstein and may have looked more science-y than any other man in history. But the two brilliant scientists' paths diverged as Piccard became fascinated with the study of cosmic rays. Of course, the Earth's atmosphere interfered with Piccard's study of said rays. His solution? Leave the atmosphere. To accomplish this and further his research, Piccard built a balloon complete with an attached pressurized chamber. And over the course of more than two-dozen balloon flights, Piccard reached altitudes ranging from 15,000 to 23,000 meters (50,000 to 75,000 ft)—higher than any man before him.

Zhang Qian 200–114 B.C.
In the second century B.C., the Chinese weren't too sure of what lay west of them. So the Han government commissioned its envoy, Zhang Qian, to locate Central Asian kingdoms and open up new markets for Chinese exports.Qian made it as far as Bactria (Afghanistan) where he encountered the remnants of a fascinating culture that had been forced south into India by nomads. The Greco-Bactrians were Hellenic colonists who settled in the area following Alexander the Great's conquests. They brought grapevine cultivation, European horses, and traditionally proficient artists to the area—which Qian reported to the Han court. But Qian wasn't done yet. Despite the occasional kidnappings by Xiognu nomads, Qian continued to crisscross the Central Asian steppe and frequently saw

Chinese goods, like silk, command outrageous prices. Qian forged trade agreements with countless peoples as he traveled. And within about a decade of Qian's death, Chinese traders were regularly traveling between the continents to exchange goods along routes similar to Qian's. Those routes formed one of history's greatest networks of commercial exchange, the Silk Road.

Pytheas 4th Century B.C.

A Greek sailor, Pytheas, discovered—at least from a Mediterranean perspective—the British Isles. Pytheas circumnavigated Britain at a time when most Greco-Roman minds imagined little existed beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar) other than an endless ocean.Before Pytheas could even begin his exploration in earnest, the Greek geographer had to navigate the Carthaginian blockade at modern-day Gibraltar. Apparently, Pytheas managed to avoid Carthage's warships and sight Britain, Scotland, and Ireland.But the most incredible part of Pytheas' expedition came when he found a land he called Thule. Lying one week's sail north of Britain, Thule, as described by Pytheas, was a place where oceans "congealed" and days lasted only a few hours. While his findings sounded laughable to ancient scholars, Pytheas' voyage probably traced part of Norway's Atlantic coast and likely took the Greek ship into the Arctic circle (the "congealing oceans" obviously being ice), making Pytheas history's first polar explorer.

Even More Auguste Piccard 1884–1962

Auguste Piccard was no one-hit wonder, hence his place here twice. We just couldn't keep him off the list with all the records he's broken. Being the first man to enter the stratosphere was only the beginning for him. After World War II ended and funding to match his ambition became available, Piccard pursued his next dream—deep-sea exploration. Piccard invented a steel-hulled submersible he dubbed a "bathyscaphe." Piccard's third bathyscaphe, The Trieste, resembled his high-altitude balloon design in reverse. The Trieste's cabin was built to withstand pressures exceeding 16,000 lbs per square inch—more than enough to flatten the average submarine. With US backing, Piccard's son, Jacques and Don Walsh, a US naval officer, piloted The Trieste to the deepest point on the Earth's surface, the floor of the Mariana Trench. This achievement was not duplicated for half of a century.

Ibn Battuta 1304–1368

Ibn Battuta, a son of middle-class Moroccan parents, was all set to become a lawyer and lead a traditional life. Then a pilgrimage to Mecca intervened. Once Battuta got there though, he pulled a Forrest Gump and kept running—or in this case, riding his horse. After reaching Mecca, Battuta continued on to Persia and then back to Baghdad. Ibn Battuta then determined that he would go as far as possible as often as possible while "never traveling the same route twice." For the next three decades, Ibn Battuta kept to his motto almost continuously and covered 120,000 kilometers (75,000 mi), a feat unequaled for centuries. Actually tracing all of the traveller's routes means grabbing a map of Europe, Africa, and Asia, then marking it with enough ragged pen lines to begin rendering it incomprehensible. For most of his travels, Battuta traveled within the Muslim world. His insider status allowed him privileged access to and observation of the

customs of far-flung peoples, which he recounted (not always entirely accurately) in The Travels of Ibn Battuta.

Hanno The Navigator 6th Century B.C.
To be fair, Hanno has not been completely forgotten; the Carthaginian sea-captain and original "Navigator" is the titular inspiration for a 2008 song. Long before Pytheas journeyed through the Pillars of Hercules and north, Hanno made his way south along the West African coast. Whereas several explorers are notable for their solo efforts, Hanno amazes with the incredible scale of his undertaking. Hanno's fleet consisted of 60 ships and 30,000 men and women. Hanno wasn't merely exploring; he was colonizing. And to that end he was successful: the Carthaginians established several lasting towns and trading posts. Unfortunately, dwindling provisions forced Hanno to abandon his attempt at circumnavigating Africa. However, Hanno's account did leave scholars with several intriguing references to African geography and animals, like the following:
"Most of them were women with hairy bodies, whom our interpreters called 'gorillas' . . . we could not catch any males: they all escaped . . . However, we caught three women, who refused to follow those who carried them off, biting and clawing them. So we killed and flayed them and brought their skins back to Carthage."

So, Jane Goodall wouldn't be proud, but the earliest probable reference to the large primates? Maybe add "The Zoologist" to Hanno's honorifics.

Harkhuf Approx. 2280 B.C.
Over 4,000 years before Stanley presumed anyone to be Livingstone, the Egyptian courtier Harkhuf was busy exploring the vast interior of Africa. During the 23rd century B.C., Harkhuf led four expeditions into lands far removed from the Nile riverbank. It's believed that Harkhuf carried Egyptian influence as far as the Kingdom of Yam (possibly modern-day Chad) and Sudan. The journey to the former would have taken the explorer through hundreds of miles of unforgiving desert (on foot), and perhaps even farther, as Harkhuf's tomb inscription notes as a point of pride that the trek took only "seven months." Harkhuf's funerary inscription also suggests the Egyptian explorer encountered a pygmy tribe in his travels. That same inscription makes Harkhuf the first explorer (of the imperial variety) in all of recorded history. Not the first explorer to "cross" or "circumnavigate" or "discover"—the first explorer of written record. Ever.

Juan Sebastian Elcano 1476–1526
Trivia fans and Listverse readers probably know Magellan was killed well before he could complete the first circumnavigation of the world. Far fewer know the lengths his successor went to in finishing the last 16 months (or nearly half) of the voyage. Sure, Juan Sebastian Elcano was a mutineer, but to be fair, after almost a year of searching, Magellan's expedition still hadn't found its way around South America, and the Spice Islands could never have seemed farther away. Considering only 18 of Magellan's 240 men actually made it back to Spain, maybe Juan Sebastian had reason to be worried. By the time Elcano assumed command following Magellan's death in the Battle of Mactan, only half the crew remained. And since Magellan had renounced his Portuguese citizenship to sail

for the Spanish, Elcano and his ship, Victoria, were considered pirates within Portuguese waters—which was pretty much the entire Indian Ocean. Preferring starvation to probable execution, Elcano crossed the Indian Ocean without putting into port. Thanks to this feat of seamanship and Elcano's grim determination to avoid capture, one-third of his crew completed the circumnavigation, returning to Spain in truly ghastly shape—but alive nonetheless.

James Holman 1786–1857

When Holman died in 1857, he was perhaps the most well-travelled man the world had ever seen, having logged some 400,000 kilometers (250,000 mi) in his lifetime. Holman hadn't planned on being a professional globetrotter and author; he originally aspired to be a British naval captain, but a sudden illness at age 25 robbed him of his sight. Undaunted, Holman spent the entirety of his life seeking out new experiences in exotic lands. "The Blind Traveler," as he became known, bucked cultural conventions, rejected travel companions, and refused to be treated as an invalid. Holman first crisscrossed Europe then attempted a mostly overland circumnavigation of the world—an attempt cut short when Russian authorities suspected him of actually being sighted and spying for Great Britain. Unfortunately, little documentation exists of Holman's actual routes over the next two decades, when he did the bulk of his traveling across Eurasia and Africa. Even so, plenty of evidence remains of the man's adventures, like his ascent of Mount Vesuvius while it was erupting or his hunt of a mad elephant in Ceylon. Sadly, Holman's writing and travel were victims of the era's prejudice. The 19th-century public refused to believe a blind man could observe the world around him with such insight and depth. And with the exception of leading minds like Charles Darwin and (later) Sir Richard Burton, Holman's accomplishments were roundly ignored.

African-American Heroes Of The Civil War

While most African-American soldiers drafted into the Union Army were discriminated against and confined to colored units, they still played a major role in bringing about a Union victory. Below are 10 African-American heroes of the Civil War.

Andre CaillouxAndre
Cailloux was born a slave in 1825 but was freed in 1846. He quickly became a leader within the free Afro-French community of New Orleans. In September 1862, Cailloux joined the Union's 1st Louisiana Native Guard, being made captain of Company E. His company was considered one of the best-drilled in the regiment.On May 27, 1863, General Banks led a poorly planned attack on heavily defended Confederate positions at Port Hudson. Cailloux's company spearheaded the assault and were ordered on a suicidal charge against enemy sharpshooters. Despite suffering heavy losses, Cailloux inspired his men to persevere, and even led further charges, during which his arm was blown off by cannon fire. Despite now only having one arm, he continued to lead the charge until he was killed by an artillery shell. His heroism quickly became the stuff of legend, with his funeral attended by thousands and his efforts inspiring many African-Americans to enlist.

Robert Smalls
Born into slavery, Robert Smalls worked as a pilot in the harbor at Charleston. When the Civil War broke out, Robert was assigned to steer the CSS Planter, an armed Confederate military transport. First, he stole the boat while the Planter's officers were ashore sleeping. Disguising himself as the captain and giving the correct secret signals, he successfully sailed the Planter past five Confederate forts that guarded the port. He then surrendered the ship, as well as a codebook, to the Union vessels that were forming a blockade. The Union commander at Port Royal, rightly impressed, sent Smalls to see President Lincoln, who he persuaded to allow African-Americans into the Union Army. Smalls was also given command of his old vessel, now in the Union's service, making him the first black naval captain of the war. He deactivated mines that he had helped to plant as a slave and assisted in the destruction of railroad bridges. To top it off, he later became a congressman.

William A. Jackson
Despite being a slave when the Civil War broke out, William Jackson was in a position of power, which he fully exploited. As a slave in the home of Confederate president Jefferson Davis, William was perfectly placed to become a spy for the Union. The loud-mouthed Davis saw Jackson as a piece of furniture rather than a possible enemy agent. As his coachman, Jackson risked his own life to listen in to conversations between the President and important members of the army. When Jackson fled across enemy lines in late 1861, he gave the Union valuable information about supply routes, military strategy, and Confederate supply shortages.

William H. Carney
Escaping slavery as a child through the Underground Railroad, William Carney joined the Union army at the first opportunity. During the Battle of Fort Wagner his regiment spearheaded a charge across a beach into withering enemy fire. When the color sergeant dropped, Carney picked up the flag and moved to the front of the charge. After the Union took the walls, Carney found himself alone and was shot twice. Forced to leave the wounded, he joined up with an advancing regiment where he was hit a third time. After being escorted to a field hospital, Carney passed off the flag to another member of the 54th. It was then that it became apparent that William Carney had been holding the flag the entire time, not letting it touch the ground once. For his heroism, he became the first African-American to earn the Medal of Honor.

Aaron Anderson
Another African-American Medal of Honor winner was Aaron Anderson. After joining the navy in 1863 at the age of 53, Anderson became a poster boy for the US Navy due to his heroic actions. In 1865, Anderson was an oarsman on a small boat equipped with a howitzer to attack Confederate forces in Mattox Creek, Virginia. After finding three abandoned enemy ships, the howitzer crew were preparing to destroy them when they came under fire from 400 Confederate soldiers on the shore. The barrage of bullets was so deadly that it destroyed most of the oars and the only musket on board, and heavily damaged the boat. Anderson and the few remaining men with oars managed to maneuver to safety under intense fire, ensuring that only one man was injured. For his insanely brave actions, Anderson got a spelling mistake on his Medal of Honor, which was awarded to "Aaron Sanderson."

Powhatan Beaty
Born into slavery, Powhatan Beaty had become a free man and moved to Cincinnati by April 1861. After a devastating Confederate victory at the Battle of Richmond, an attack on the city was feared and all men living nearby, including Beaty, were drafted to build defenses. For the next 15 days, the unarmed unit, many of whom were black men, voluntarily constructed defenses far in advance of Union lines. In 1863, Beaty enlisted, joining Ohio's first black combat unit. Promoted to sergeant within two days, he soon commanded 47 men. By the Battle of Chaffin's Farm on September 29, 1864, Beaty was a first sergeant. As part of an attack, which was eventually called into retreat, Beaty ran into intense enemy fire to retrieve a flag which had been dropped 550 meters (1,800 ft) away. Despite the suicide charge, Beaty was the highest-ranking soldier that survived from his company. He instantly took charge of the men, leading a second charge, which successfully drove the Confederates back. Beaty was awarded a Medal of Honor on April 8, 1865.

Alexander Thomas Augusta
Alexander Augusta wasn't a hero for facing down the barrel of a musket, but for the determination that he showed in the face of oppression as a surgeon in the Union army. Born to free parents in 1825, he enrolled as a medical student in 1850. In 1861, he enrolled, becoming the first African-American physician out of the eight that would sign up for duty. He rose to the rank of major, making him

the highest ranking African-American at the time. Despite saving lives, Alexander was attacked by mobs in both Baltimore and Washington. Two Union assistant surgeons also complained to President Lincoln about having to report to an African-American, forcing Augusta to be transferred to Washington. Despite the prejudice he faced, Alexander continued to serve as a surgeon until the end of the war, using his position to fight for black rights, especially the right to ride streetcars.

Miles James

Miles James, born in 1829, joined the army in September 1864. As a corporal in Company B of the 36th Colored Regiment, James served at the Battle of Chaffin's Farm on September 30, 1864.During the battle, Miles was hit by a shot, which mutilated his arm. Despite being urged to retreat and told that he needed immediate amputation, Miles proceeded to lead his men, firing and reloading his pistol with a single arm. All within 30 meters (less than 100 feet) of the enemy line. James was later honorably dismissed from the service after the battle for his new disability.

James Daniel Gardner

Gardner, a private in Company I of the 36th Colored Regiment, also served at the Battle of Chaffin's Farm. While his company was charging Confederate positions, Gardner saw a Confederate officer rallying his men on the parapet. Spotting his chance, Gardner charged ahead of his unit. He succeeded in shooting the officer, but failed to kill him. So he just kept on charging until he was close enough to pierce him with his bayonet. The day after, Gardner was promoted to sergeant, and he was even given a Medal of Honor for his actions.

John Lawson

Born June 16, 1837, John Lawson is a perfect example of how some people can shrug off pain to achieve amazing things. After enlisting in the navy in December 1863, John was assigned to the USS Hartford as a member of the ammunition party which supplied the deck guns. During the Battle of Mobile Bay, on August 5, 1864, the Hartford was badly damaged by a Confederate shell. The entire ammunition crew was killed, except for Lawson who was thrown against the side of the ship, badly injuring his leg. Despite being urged to go below deck for medical treatment, "upon regaining his composure" Lawson continued to supply the gunners by himself. This was previously a six-man job and Lawson now had only one good leg. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism.

Little-Known Battles That Changed The World

If you're here for any reason, it's to learn about all the things they should have taught you in school. If you missed these stories in history class, we'd like to fix that, because we would be living in a completely different world without these ten battles.

The Battle Of Tours, 732

In the sixth century, the Muslim armies were on a roll, toppling local superpowers and claiming huge swaths of land. In the early sixth century, Berbers from Libya sailed up into Spain and started claiming land for the Ummayad Dynasty. The armies didn't stop, taking most of southern Spain and then moving further and further up into France. This was the most serious attempt by the Muslims to take Western Europe, and considering Western Europe was in a thing we like to call the Dark Ages, they would have succeeded. That is, if it wasn't for Charles Martel. Martel led his armies to meet the Muslims a few times and didn't get off to a very good start, suffering several defeats. However, the Muslims got lazy, abandoned their posts, and started looting and pillaging local villages. Martel staged a last attempt at Tours and turned the Muslims back into southern Spain. Had he been defeated, there was no other army to check the Ummayads as they entered into Western Europe.

The Battle Of Tsushima, 1905

Believe it or not, Japan and Russia fought a crazy war before World War I over power in the region. The Russo-Japanese war would eventually end in a Japanese victory and turn them into a key power player that would come into play during World War II. Way back before all that, however, it was the Battle of Tsushima that decided who would win the war. The Russians wanted control of Manchuria, and so did the Japanese. The two armies met at Tsushima. The sea battle was the first time electronic communication was used in battle and resulted in an almost complete destruction of the Russian Navy as well as Japanese control over Manchuria.

The Battle Of The Metaurus, 207 B.C.

The Punic Wars were a series of wars between the world's greatest superpowers of the era, Rome and Carthage. It would be like if China and the US went three rounds in the nuclear octagon. There were three wars, and Rome won each war (but only barely). The Battle of Metaurus was the "little" battle of the Second Punic Wars. Hannibal's brother, Hasdrubal, faced off against the Roman consul, Nero. Hasdrubal was bringing reinforcements so large that, had he met up with Hannibal, Rome would certainly have fallen. But Hasdrubal lost the battle, and Nero famously had him beheaded and his head thrown into Hannibal's camp. The Romans would later defeat Hannibal and today we care about the Romans, not the Carthaginians.

The Battle Of Blenheim, 1704

Louis XIV wanted something, and he wanted it bad—he wanted regional peace. The problem was that in order to achieve peace, he needed to knock out the

Hapsburg capital. So he arranged a massive army and moved in on the superpower. The Austrians, worried of losing, allied themselves with England, Rome, and Prussia into one massive "Great Alliance." The armies met at the town of Blenheim, where the English began a siege. The French were able to hold off many repeated attempts to enter the city, the English finally broke through. The French suffered huge losses and their "invincible" reputation was destroyed. Furthermore, they were never able to conquer all of Europe.

The Battle Of Hastings, 1066

For a long time in the eighth and ninth centuries, England was playing the isolationist. Stuck on their island with no other major territories, they sat back and watched as the rest of Europe scratched itself to pieces—until the Normans decided they didn't like England hiding in the corner like that. They pushed to invade England with a large army, and at the battle of Hastings, they succeeded. The victory placed a foreign ruler on the English throne for the first time ever, opening England to influence from many other countries. For example, the win would integrate many French words into English, dramatically changing the language. It was the last time an army would successfully invade England.

The Battle Of Lechfeld, 955

In the eighth century, the Hungarian Empire was on the rise and wanted more and more land. After establishing themselves in the east, they made a move for Western Europe. The only people that stood by them were the newly formed German nation, which was fighting as one army for the first time. At the Battle of Lechfeld, the Germans fought off the invasion and successfully defeated the Hungarian invaders, keeping them from moving into Western Europe and effectively destroying any chance that the Hungarian Empire had of becoming a regional power player. It was also the first time the knights of a cavalry would win an important battle, setting the precedent for the rest of Western Europe to use cavalry instead of archers.

The Battle Of Emmaus, 166 B.C.

The Battle of Emmaus occurred when Jewish forces were battling for control of Jerusalem. This time, it was the Greeks trying to invade Jerusalem. The Jewish forces tricked the invaders into thinking they had fled to the mountains. In reality, the Jewish forces were lying in wait for the Greeks to leave their camp, and when they did, the Judean soldiers ransacked their base camp. When the Greeks returned, all of their supplies and weapons were taken. This victory by the Jews ensured peace for Jerusalem and kept foreign invaders off their soil.

The Battle Of Pultowa, 1709

In the 16th century, Sweden and Russia were fighting over who would become the next great regional power player. At the time, it was Sweden, which controlled most of northern Europe and was seeking to expand into Russia. Unfortunately, these people didn't have the benefit of hindsight and had no idea that you never invade Russia in the winter. The Swedes swept mightily into Russia but it didn't take long for the Russians to get serious and bring their A-game to Poltova (also called "Pultowa"). The battle was quite bloody as both sides suffered massive losses. However, after the dust settled, the Russians were

the clear victors and the Swedes were on the retreat. The loss actually led to the Swedes losing their seat of power and Russia taking it over.

The Battle Of Valmy, 1782

After the French Revolution, there were a number of revolutionary battles over French territory. Prussia brazenly attempted to conquer a weakened France, but they were met by the ragtag French forces at Valmy. Despite just coming out of a revolution with an unstable government structure and being outnumbered and outgunned, they defeated their opponents and forced the Prussians into a retreat. Because the country had just bounced back from a revolution, the army was made up of volunteers. Many see it as the first victory by an army inspired by liberty. The victory made the world take this new France seriously.

The Battle Of Yarmuk, 636

Remember how we said that the Muslim armies were steamrolling the Middle East, taking land and overturning superpowers? Well, none of that would have been possible had they lost at Yarmuk. Yarmuk is a small town outside the Sea of Galilee between Syria and Palestine. At the time, the Arabs controlled the East, while the Byzantine Emperor had control over the Levant including Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Outnumbered 10:1, but with the tactical genius of the Muslim leader Khalid bin Waleed, they retreated to the fields outside the city and waited for the Byzantines to approach them. Although they were calling the massive Byzantine army out into the open, Waleed was able to outsmart the Byzantines and destroy his opponents. The attack left the entire area, including the emperor's stronghold in Antioch, open to Arab attack. In the ensuing months, the Arabs took all of the Middle East and crippled the Byzantine Empire.

Absurdly Outnumbered Underdogs Who Won

The idea of a plucky underdog fighting his way to victory is common in stories, but that's not how war really works. In the real world, whenever a bunch of plucky heroes try to make up for a lack of numbers and equipment with sheer heart, they tend to get brutally ripped apart by the guys who remembered to bring tanks and guns and a whole bunch of well-trained friends. And that's how it always happens—except in these instances.

The Germans v Tannenberg 1914

To kick off World War I, Germany rolled the dice and sent its whole army to the Western Front to attack the crap out of the French. Not a bad idea since the Germans assumed they could knock the French out in a few weeks and then head back east and face the real threat, Russia. Germany assumed it would take at least a few months for Russia to mobilize its endless supply of soldiers/cannon fodder and march on Berlin. Eight days later, 400,000 Russian soldiers marched into North Germany. The only thing guarding Germany's back door to Berlin was its 8th Army, which consisted of less than 200,000 men. Things went from, "Uh oh," to "Oh god, no," in a hurry for the Germans when the Russian army forced 80,000 German soldiers to retreat. Thankfully for Germany, the Russian force was split into two armies separated by hundreds of miles. More importantly, Russia sent all of its recon planes to the western front. In a pattern consistent with Russian history, the Russian Army began groping about the North German forest with almost no idea of where the enemy lay. Instead of retreating farther, the Germans left a dummy force in the north and the bulk of their forces surprised the southern half of their enemy, which was spread out in a disorganized line 60 miles long (remember the groping?). German machine guns appeared out of nowhere and did terrible things for Russian morale: some 200,000 Russians fell into a panic. The Germans annihilated the southern half of the Russian force and evened the odds, setting the stage for the grueling stalemate to come.

Byzantines vs. Vandals At Tricamarum 533

Here's all you need to know: the Vandals, a tribe of Germans who did some serious migrating, ruled a valuable chunk of North Africa from their base at Carthage (today, Tunis). The Eastern Roman Empire (also known as the Byzantines) ruled a valuable chunk of Eurasia from their capital, Constantinople (today, Istanbul) located in what is now Turkey. Simple, right? The Byzantines wanted to restore the glory of the Roman Empire, and in 533 that meant owning the port at Carthage. As an added incentive to attack, the Vandals were the wrong kind of Christian. The Byzantines, ever stingy, sent just 15,000 soldiers with the general Belisarius to attack Carthage and reconquer North Africa. Belisarius had no problem taking Carthage since the Vandals weren't home, but boy, were those Germans pissed when they returned from their raiding. Forty-five thousand Vandals assembled near Carthage. Due to the dwindling loyalty of his mostly mercenary army, Belisarius abandoned Carthage and attacked the Vandal camp. The Vandal lines dwarfed the Byzantines, and things were shaping up for a legendary cavalry battle. What a letdown! After the first Byzantine

charge, the Vandals learned the hard way that a general who leads from the front is highly susceptible to stabbings. The general-less Vandals dispersed after suffering just 800 casualties, while their king ditched North Africa and handed over the kingdom to the Byzantines and their fun-sized army.

Swedes v Russians at Narva 1700

You may have heard of a city called St. Petersburg. It's apparently a big deal in Russia. What you may not know is that until 1703, the land St. Petersburg occupies actually belonged to the Swedish Empire. Peter the Great, the Russian Czar, was desperate to gain access to the Baltic Sea. The Swedes possessed little to no desire to give up their highly profitable sea ports—a conflict of interests if we ever heard one. Russia, never a stranger to delicate political negotiations, decided to solve this particular problem with cannons. Lots of cannons. So, in 1700, Peter the Great and his army of 35,000 troops surrounded the Swedish coastal fortress of Narva. Narva, being the gateway to the Gulf of Finland, was quite the prize (just trust us on that one). Peter had no trouble encircling the city with his massive army and was content to lob cannonballs at Narva's inhabitants until everyone inside starved or surrendered. It was a brilliant plan, but Swedish Emperor Charles arrived with all of 8,000 troops (well-trained, but still, not very many).

Despite being outnumbered four to one with the Russian army entrenched around the city, Charles chose to attack. Before the Swedes could throw themselves against the Russians, a blizzard swept in and prevented both forces from maneuvering. Sometime in the afternoon, the wind shifted and drove the snow directly into the Russian lines, obscuring their vision. Charles ingeniously recognized the advantage of attacking an enemy who is essentially blind and quickly woke his men up. Thanks to the near white-out conditions, Charles' 8,000 troops marched on the Russians completely undetected. By the time the Russian soldiers realized what was happening, they were full of Swedish bayonets. The Swedes killed, wounded, or captured the entire Russian army at Narva. Charles' only mistake? Mercy. He allowed his 20,000 Russian prisoners to take the march of shame back to Russia, and three years later, Peter the Great returned with those men, conquered Sweden's Baltic provinces, founded St. Petersburg on those very lands, and entered Russia into the Baltic Sea trade—which powered the nation's future military expansions.

The Great Siege of Malta 1565

The Knights Hospitaller shared a lot in common with the Templars, but instead of giving up on the Crusades and being wiped out by a French King in 1312, the Hospitallers moved from island to island in the Mediterranean and continued fighting whatever Muslims they could find well into the 17th century. The nearest Muslims to the Knights' base on Malta were the Ottoman Turks. The Ottomans, back then, controlled just about everything along the Mediterranean Sea except Italy, France, and Spain—none of which stopped the Knights from attacking every Ottoman ship possible. So, the Ottomans sent an armada and nearly 50,000 men to take the fortress on Malta and kill the few thousand knights and civilians inside. Big mistake for the Ottomans. Here's a lesson from history: never besiege a city ruled by a man named Jean who loads his cannons

with his prisoners' heads. Chief Knight Jean Valette didn't even blink when the Ottomans overran Malta's outer fortifications and killed 1,500 Maltese. For weeks, the Ottomans rained thousands of cannonballs on Valette and his defenders. When the main walls were finally breached, Ottoman soldiers poured into the fort, expecting little resistance. Instead, the Ottomans found Valette and a few hundred of the best knights in the history of sword swinging. They were a little rusty, maybe, but more than capable of slicing their way through a few thousand Turks in the narrow breach. After four months, the Ottomans still couldn't take Malta and lost 10,000 of their comrades. When a relief force of 8,000 Christian corsairs arrived off the coast of Malta, the Ottomans finally had an excuse to retreat and leave those crazed Knights to their Hospitalling. And those Maltese hospitals were full, because the defenders suffered close to 100 percent casualties.

Klushino 1610

Poland wasn't always just a place waiting to be invaded. In the early 17th century, the Polish Commonwealth decided to do a little conquering and land-grabbing of its own. And who better to grab land from than the conveniently civil-war-wracked Russia? Despite having lots of land, the Russians refused to share, and allied with the Swedes to save beautifully named cities like Smolensk—which the Polish were in the process of besieging. Before the 30,000-strong Swedish/Russian contingent could play Prince Charming to Smolensk's damsel in distress, 5,500 Polish cavalry stood in their way. The Russians weren't quite sure how big the Polish force was, because it was nighttime when Polish scouts stumbled into the Russian/Swedish camp like drunks on horseback looking for the bathroom in a dark bar.

Since these were chivalrous days, each army took time to prepare its forces for a dawn battle. The Russians built a palisade, while the Polish cavalry presumably spent all night sharpening their swords. The battle that ensued tested two very different tactics: the Russian cavalry favored prancing right up to the Polish lines, firing their pistols, and riding to the back of their formation to reload while the next rank of cavalry fired, a strategy called "caracole." It sounds brilliant, except guns in 1610 were wildly inaccurate, assuming they fired at all. The Poles' strategy can be best summarized as "charging at everything, hacking people with swords, and stabbing everything all the time, always." After routing the Russians with their pathetic "guns," the Poles turned their charging, hacking, and stabbing on the Russian/Swedish infantry, most of whom were mercenaries and not feeling quite up to the "hacking." To stop the slaughter, the Swedes and Russians surrendered in their own camp. The Poles got their land and helped briefly popularize the phrase "never bring a gun to a sword fight."

The Battle Of Watling Street 61

Odds 10:1In 61 A.D., the recently conquered Britons united under Queen Boudicca and decided to overthrow their new Roman overlords. The Roman governor Gaius Paulinus couldn't afford to wait for things like reinforcements or an actual army to arrive from Rome. So Paulinus made a like a good Roman and did the best with what he had. The best Paulinus had? Two legions, amounting to just 10,000 men. Paulinus knew the Britons outnumbered him, and used their

overconfidence to draw them into battle on a narrow field flanked by dense forest. The overconfident Britons ignored the fact their enemy was positioned at the base of a literal funnel, and brought their families along in an enormous wagon train that they left just behind their lines. Paulinus' legions weren't exactly thrilled at facing a force of 80,000 screaming warriors. But the Romans' funnel-like position prevented the Britons from overrunning the Roman shield line. Most of the massive Briton force had to wait in line to close with the Roman ranks. And while they waited to get in melee range, the Romans' rear ranks poured javelins into the mass of lightly armored Britons. Paulinus subbed out his front line like a hockey coach, so the few Britons who actually got close enough to engage always faced fresh legionnaires. The Britons tried to retreat, only to be trapped by their own wagon train. The Romans methodically closed in like a slow-moving pointy metal wave and killed everything they could stab.

Tigranocerta 69 B.C.

Odds 10:1Estimates vary, but it's probably a safe bet that the Roman general, Lucullus, had more than 10,000 troops in this battle and the Armenian King, Tigranes, had fewer than the 300,000 troops ascribed to him by ancient writers. Even so, it seems Lucullus invaded Armenia with an underwhelming force. Fortune and glory were on Lucullus' mind—that, and something about punishing Armenia for offering asylum to Rome's enemies, but mainly glory. The Armenians were still building the city of Tigranocerta when Lucullus rolled in with a few legions and surrounded the city. Tigranes came shortly after to save his city, and after sending Lucullus some serious trash-talk, showed up behind the Roman army with cavalry, archers, and heavily armored infantry totaling 100,000 or more. Since most of his numerically superior forces were lightly trained peasants unused to military service, Tigranes relied primarily on his heavy infantry. Neither numbers nor heavily armored infantry holding a superior (hill) position fazed Lucullus. Instead, the general waded across the river separating the two armies, forgot caution, and led his small force uphill and directly against Tigranes' strongest point. Tigranes' elite infantry broke under Lucullus' concentrated force while the rest of the Armenian force made for the nearest exit, which turned out to be slaughter via Roman sword. Never tell a Roman he doesn't have enough soldiers.

The British Win India At Plassey 1757

Plassey is a testament to both British resolve. The Bengali king, Siraj ud-Dauah, probably should have guessed something was up when his 40,000 troops backed by French artillery failed to intimidate the tiny expeditionary force of 2,500 British and Indian soldiers arrayed against him. Not long after the two sides started bombarding each other, a torrential downpour interrupted the action. Only the British moved quickly enough to cover their artillery and gunpowder. Once the storm passed, Siraj's army charged, assuming the British weapons had been soaked as well. The storm of musket fire and cannonballs leveled the attackers, helping convince Siraj and his few loyal guards that this was not their day. When his generals advised retreat and withdrew along with thousands of troops, the king really got the picture. Turns out the British weren't sweating at all, because Clive of India, bought the Bengali army's paymaster, Mir Jafar in advance. With control of his enemy's purse strings, Lord Clive knew Plassey was

his. The old king beat a hasty retreat and the British crowned the perfectly agreeable Mir Jafar. And thus, nothing but happiness, equality, and the British, ruled India for centuries to come.

100 Aussies Hang Tough At Long Tan 1966

Imagine Black Hawk Down, but in a Vietnamese rubber forest. And instead of 123 US soldiers, 108 Australian soldiers were surrounded by over 2,000 Vietcong. After the Australian base at Nui Dat came under heavy Vietcong mortar fire, several companies headed out to search for their attackers' location. The last to patrol, D Company, didn't find the mortar squad; they found an entire VC regiment with one objective: convince the Aussies to go home. The Vietcong poured heavy machine gun fire into the rubber trees that D Company was moving through. Monsoon rains limited visibility, as D Company struggled to assume something resembling a defensive position. In the process, one Aussie platoon stumbled onto the flank of a Vietcong assault force, which soon became a "retreat force" when the Australians opened fire. The next hours were spent in shallow foxholes, exchanging machine gun fire with a massive enemy often out of sight. D Company was down to its last 100 rounds, when an RAAF helicopter finally broke orders and flew through the rain and machine gun fire to deliver ammunition. The Vietcong assaulted the defenders in waves, until reinforcements arrived forcing the Vietcong to abandon the siege. Hundreds of Vietcong lay dead on the battlefield. The Australians suffered 17 dead and 19 more wounded, which gives you a really good idea of why the Vietcong really wanted to get rid of the Australians.

The Battle Of Muret 1213

Remember that bit about "the wrong kind of Christian?" That's how we ended up with French knights crusading against their French and Spanish neighbors who worshiped God improperly. A combined force of Aragonese and heretical Christians (over 30,000 troops strong) thought they had those uppity Crusaders trapped in the town of Muret. The 900 French knights and 700 infantry within Muret had a plan, though. The French knights, led by Simon Montfort, waited for the attackers to breach the main city gate. As the Aragonese troops rushed into the town, Montfort's knights left via a side entrance, feigning a cowardly retreat. Using the terrain as cover, Montfort led his cavalry behind the distracted besiegers and charged into the siege army's flank, cutting down the king of Aragon immediately. With their king dead, the bulk of the Aragonese fell into disarray. Remember—just moments earlier, they thought the battle was won. Montfort's tiny band of knights ran down the Aragonese by the thousands, as the heretics went from besiegers to spear fodder in a matter of moments. Montfort and his 900 knights inflicted almost 20,000 casualties during the Aragonese attempts at retreat.

Teenage Military Leaders

As a boy, I remember lying on the floor playing with my plastic army men, leading them to victory after victory. My younger self always wanted to be a military hero, and I think most children have a similar desire. While my need for military conquest naturally faded as I grew older and more mature, there are examples throughout history where the very young were able to turn that desire into reality. This list looks at ten figures in history who began leading armies before their 20th birthday.

Michael Asen II of Bulgaria
While many of these leaders were successful, Michael Asen II is one who was too young and inexperienced to have any success. He came to the throne at only seven years of age following the death of his father, Constantine Tikh, in battle. Being so young, the majority of the ruling was done by his mother, Maria Kantakouzene, who was the daughter of the Byzantine emperor, Michael VIII. At this time, the throne was fighting rebels all vying for a claim to the throne. Being the king, Michael Asen II took his father's place at the head of the military and, though he did very little actual leading, was on the battlefield on several occasions in full battle armament made especially for the young boy. In 1279, when he was only nine years old, the Byzantine emperor decided to place a more suitable leader on the throne. The Byzantine army easily took the capital, and Michael Asen II and his mother were sent into exile. Although he would attempt to return to Bulgaria with an army later in life, he would be unable to assert himself as the true king and his attempted takeover eventually failed. The date of his death is unknown.

Gregorio del Pilar
This one is a bit of a stretch, since he did not technically lead until his early 20s, but his career and fame would make it a shame to leave him off this list. Since he lived much later than most entries on this list, it was much more difficult for young soldiers to find themselves in positions of military leadership. Gregorio was born in 1875, the fifth of six children. His military career began immediately following college at the age of 20 with the start of the Philippine Revolution. Joining the revolutionaries against the Spanish, his actions and bravery in battle brought him to the rank of lieutenant only a few months after joining the service. A year later, now a captain at the age of only 21, he proposed an attack on a Spanish garrison at Paombong that was an overwhelming victory, leading to his promotion to Lieutenant Colonel. He was exiled to Hong Kong following a truce agreement between the rebels and Spanish the same year. Only two years later, with the Spanish forces weakened due to the Spanish-American War, Gregorio and others would return to the Philippians to finish what they had begun. In June of 1898, he accepted the surrender of the Spanish in the town of Bulacan and was promoted to general at only 23 years old. This earned him the nickname "boy general" and he was widely respected by his men. He later found success fighting the Americans in the Philippine-American War until he died fighting at the age of 24. He is considered a hero in the Philippines, with several statues and monuments dedicated to him.

Okita Soji
While not a military leader in the strictest sense of the word, he was a leading member of a special police force during the late shogunate period in Japan. Okita was a samurai who began training in swordsmanship around the age of nine. When he was only 12, he was defeating kenjutsu (swordsmanship) teachers in rival schools and attained the Menkyo Kaiden scroll labeling him as a master of his style at age 18. He was the head teacher at a dojo for the next year before becoming a founding member of the Shinsengumi, becoming their first unit captain at the age of 19.While noted for his kindness off the battlefield, he was ruthless on it. During the famous Ikedaya Affair, he held a group of rebels on the second floor of a Kyoto hotel by himself. Eventually, the Shinsengumi would become more involved with the shogunate military, and Okita would assist in several battles. Like many other non-royal leaders on this list, he would die very young, although not in battle. He fell seriously ill in 1867 and died (probably of tuberculosis) in July of 1868 at the approximate age of 24. He is considered one of only 13 Kensei, or "sword saints", and is one of the greatest swordsmen in the history of Japan.

Henry IV of France
Henry IV was the first monarch of the Bourbon branch of the Capetian dynasty of France. He baptized Catholic but would convert to Protestantism in the bloody French Wars of Religion. As a teenager, Henry joined and lead the Huguenot forces during this time period. He was known as a striking and brave leader for such a young age, and led several charges into battle himself. At the age of 19, he was nearly killed in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, but was only spared when he promised to convert to Catholicism. He was held captive by the Catholic forces for the next 4 years, before escaping in 1576 and rejoining the Protestant forces. In 1587, at the age of 24, he defeated a royalist army at the Battle of Coutras, which would lead to his ultimate rise to the throne. He was crowned king of France in 1589 and was adored by the people, known as a man of kindness, compassion, and good humor, but was assassinated by a Catholic fanatic in 1610.

Wladyslaw III of Poland
Wladyslaw is another king who succeeded to the throne at a very young age, being only 10 years old. With such a young king in power, many others saw an opportunity to take the throne for themselves, and thus his early reign was more of an internal struggle between the royal family and nobles. At the age of 17, when the kingship in the neighboring Kingdom of Hungary was being debated, Waldyslaw led armies with several other nations under the blessing of Pope Eugene IV against Hungary's regent Elizabeth of Luxembourg. Following her defeat, he accepted the crown of the Kingdom of Hungary at the age of 19.The threat of the Ottoman Empire was growing around this time and, with promised backing of Venetian and papal fleets, Waldyslaw turned his recently victorious forces to a holy war against the Turks. However he was betrayed by the Venetian fleets, which helped sail the Turkish forces from Asia to Europe. His army of 20,000 crusaders was caught by surprise when they met an army of 60,000 Turks in the Battle of Varna. Believing the only way for victory was to attack the

very person of the sultan Murad II, he personally led the charge of his best cavalry into the heart of the battlefield. While his enemies noted his bravery, it would not be enough to win him the day.He was overcome by the sultan's janissaries and killed, his head cut off and raised on a pike for the rest of his army to see, causing them to flee the battlefield. Neither his body nor armor was ever recovered.

Augustus (Octavian) Caesar

Augustus was born in 63 B.C. as the son of Gaius Octavius. In his early teens, he was sent to Apollonia, a city in modern-day Albania. He was only 18 years old when news of Julius Caesar's assassination reached him. Ignoring counsel to seek refuge with troops in Macedonia, he returned to Italia and learned Caesar had left him two-thirds of his estate and, having no living legitimate children, had named him both his son and heir. Set on following in his adopted father's footsteps, he began to gather support of those loyal to Caesar by emphasizing his status as the rightful heir to Caesar.On May 6, 44 B.C., 18-year-old Augustus led an army of more than 3,000 veteran troops into Rome, meeting with little resistance since many were sympathetic to his cause. He succeeded in driving Caesar's assassins, who were under a truce with the current consul Mark Antony, out of the city. With the Senate opinion of Antony shifting from friend to foe, Augustus began to build his military forces, even winning over two of Antony's legions with the promise of higher wages. After Antony fled Rome, Augustus was inducted to the Senate at the tender age of 19 and granted imperium, which made his command of his army legal. They sent him along with two other consuls to defeat Mark Antony, and they did so at the battles of Forum Gallorum and Mutina, forcing Antony to retreat, although the two consuls were killed in the process. This left 19-year-old Octavious in sole command of what remained of eight Roman legions. However, he was recalled to Rome, and his remaining troops were given to another commander. He would see more successful military exploits later in life, and eventually become the first emperor of the Roman Empire. He died in 14 A.D. at the age of 75.

Scipio Africanus

Scipio was a general during the Second Punic War and is most famous for being the commander of the Roman forces that defeated Hannibal at the Battle of Zama, though he was in his mid-30s at the time. His father, Publius Cornelius Scipio, was also a Roman general. While exactly when he began training for military service is unknown, he was believed to be present on battlefields with his father at around 16 years of age. He became on of his father's commanders by age 18, leading soldiers through several campaigns and gained a certain amount of fame at the Battle of Ticinus in 218 B.C., when he led a suicidal charge against enemy forces that had completely surrounded his father. The Greek historian Polybius noted his exceptional bravery and reckless daring in battle at such a young age. Even so, his father's army never had much luck on the battlefield and saw several disastrous defeats. These early losses would play a grand role in his development as a leader. Once he was promoted to general and given an army of his own at the age of 25, he would never again know the sting of defeat. Following his defeat of Hannibal, the Roman people wanted him to become their dictator, though he wanted no part in Roman politics and refused the offer. He

continued to lead victorious armies until his retirement in 187 B.C. He died four years later at the age of 53 and is still widely considered to be one of the greatest generals in world history.

Muhammad bin Qasim

Muhammad bin Qasim was a general who fought for the Umayyad Caliphate, the second of the four major Islamic caliphates following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. He was a member of the Thaqeef tribe, learning the art of leadership and warfare from his uncle, who was the Umayyad governor at the time. After proving himself on the battlefield at a very young age, he was given command of an army at the age of only 17. It was with this army that he began his conquest of the Singh and Punjab regions along the Indus River in modern-day Pakistan. His campaign was the third such attempt to conquer the region, the first two having been colossal failures. Where others had failed however, Qasim had remarkable success. He rode with his army, taking city after city. Word of his victories earned him many allies, and his army of 6,000 quickly swelled to around 25,000. He was noted as a ruthless military leader, even at such a young age.

His military strategy was outlined by his own word as being one that would "kill anyone belonging to the combatants while imprisoning their remaining family, but showing mercy to those who yielded and refused to fight, granting them safety."His success is widely contributed to the discipline of his troops and his usage of superior military equipment such as siege engines and the Mongolian bow. Following his conquest, he set up a successful administration in the region. Qasim's policies met with little resistance from locals as they allowed the observance of local religious customs in exchange for acceptance of Muslim rule. He was preparing his army for another conquest when there was a change in Umayyad leadership. The new leader recalled the generals and appointed a new governor who held a grudge against Qasim and had him arrested. There are several accounts of how he died: one says he was wrapped and stitched in oxen hides and carried through the desert, where he suffocated, while another states he was tortured to death. Historians agree he was no older than 20 at the time.

St. Joan of Arc

While lacking some of the military prowess that other entries on this list have, Joan has to be so high on this list because she was a teenage girl leading armies in a time when females simply did not fight on the battlefield. Joan was born in the small French village of Domremy in 1412. The house she was born in still stands and is now a museum. When she was 12 years old, she claimed to have a vision of saints Michael, Catherine, and Margaret who told her to drive the English out of France.At 16, she gained the audience of the royal French court and made a remarkable prediction about a military reversal that would occur near Orleans. Impressed, King Charles VII granted her request to travel with the army and dress as a knight. In order to test the validity of her claim that her mission was of a divine nature, she was sent to attempt to raise the siege at the city of Orleans. She arrived in April 1429 at the age of 17.

Historians continue to debate whether or not she actually led armies or was simply a presence there to raise troop morale, but she was no stranger to the battlefield and was noted as showing no fear. On May 7, she ignored a decision to wait for reinforcement and lead a charge against the main English stronghold called Les Tourelles. Though wounded in the neck by an arrow, she returned to lead the final charge herself and was regarded as the heroine of the battle. With the victory, Joan was seen as a hero. She petitioned for and received co-command of the French army and began attacking and recapturing several small French towns and key bridges. She was present at the battle of Patay, in which the English suffered a humiliating defeat. She also played a key role in the French assault on Paris, where she continued to lead troops despite a crossbow bolt to the leg. She aided in the capture of several other cities over the next year, while seeing her fair share of losses as well. Now 18 years old, she traveled to Compiegne in May of 1430 to help defend the city against a combined English and Burgundian siege. Outnumbered during a skirmish, she ordered a retreat and assumed the place of honor as the last to leave the battlefield. However, she was surrounded and captured by the Burgundians.She attempted escape several times, but was eventually sold to the English, who accused and convicted her of heresy. Sentenced to be burned at the stake at only 19, eyewitnesses reported she showed no fear at her execution. The executioner, Geoffroy Therage, stated that he "greatly feared to be damned." On May 16, 1920 she was canonized as a saint in the Catholic Church by Pope Benedict XV, and has since become one of the most popular saints.

Alexander the Great

This entry should come as a surprise to no one. Alexander was born in 356 B.C. as the son of the Macedonian king, Philip II. When he was 13 years old, he was sent to Mieza to be tutored by Aristotle, with classmates such as Ptolemy, Hephaistion, and Cassander. When he was 16, he returned to Macedon to rule as regent while his father waged war against Byzantium. It was during this time that Alexander saw his first military action by leading a small force against the Thracian Maedi, who saw the opportunity to revolt. The Maedi greatly underestimated the prince and were driven from their territory. This would be the first of many victories for Alexander. When he was 17, his father placed his son at the head of a small army, sending him to suppress revolts in southern Thrace, which he did with relative ease. Philip's army joined his the following year and together they took the city of Elatea. Next came the allied cities of Athens and Thebes, who met Philip and Alexander in the Battle of Chaeronea where the Macedonians used a faked retreat to win the day. With this victory, all the Greek city-states (except Sparta) surrendered, and Philip formed them into the Hellenic Alliance.

Two years later, Philip was assassinated by the captain of his personal guard. The nobles and army both backed Alexander as the rightful king at the age of only 20. He began his reign quite ruthlessly, eliminating potential rivals to his throne. When news of Philip's death reached the Greek city-states, they quickly rose up in revolt. Alexander took only 3,000 of the Macedonian cavalry to put them down. By age 21, he was preparing for his first campaign. A whole list could be dedicated to his military genius. He twice was outnumbered by at least 2:1

against the mighty Persian Empire and emerged victorious (Battles of Issus and Gaugamela), although he was in his mid-20s at this point. By the time of his death at age 32, he had conquered most of the ancient world. He is regarded by many today as the greatest military commander of all time.

Ancient Timekeeping Devices

In modern times, we take our ability to know the exact time for granted; it's on our walls, phones, computers, stoves, Blu-ray players, etc. Even analog clocks seem like ancient technology. But keeping track of time is something that mankind has struggled with for many thousands of years. This list will provide insight into the creativity and ingenuity of our ancestors as they tried to solve this age-old problem.

Rolling Ball Clocks
The rolling ball clock was invented by 17th century French engineer Nicolas Grollier. This clock kept time using rolling balls on a zigzag track. The path took anywhere from 15 seconds to a full minute for the ball to complete. Once it reached its destination, it tripped a mechanism that both moved hands of the clock forward and reversed the tilt to return the ball to its original position. However, the clock's main flaw was the cleanliness of the track. When dust accumulated, it slowed the ball down, which resulted in very unreliable timekeeping.

Candle Clocks
Candle clocks take advantage of a simple concept: the slow and consistent nature of a burning wax candle. By utilizing this process, our ancestors were able to keep steady track of the time. The clocks were created by engraving the length of the candle with evenly spaced markings. Each marking represented a single unit of time (such as one hour), and as the wax burned down, each hour would melt away. In order to determine how much time had passed since lighting the candle, you just checked the highest remaining marking. Candle clocks could also function as alarm clocks. To use them this way, they inserted a heavy nail into the wax at the desired time mark. When the wax melted that far down, the nail would clatter into a metal tray below. Candle clocks have been referenced as early as A.D. 520 in China, but it remains unknown who first employed the technique or where it originated.

Water Clocks
The water clock is the oldest (and possibly simplest) known timekeeping device, dating back to 16th century B.C. Babylon. These clocks used the steady flow of water to keep track of time. A large bowl or container would be filled with water and allowed to slowly drain from a spout on the bottom. The inside of the bowl was marked with the times, and you could determine how much time had passed by the water level in the bowl. You could also place a second bowl beneath the spout and measure the amount of water that accumulated. However, the design had one major issue: the water flowed more slowly as the bowl emptied. This was the result of a decrease in pressure as the weight of the water in the bowl decreased. Toward the end, the water barely trickled and no longer kept accurate time.

Incense Clocks
Originating in 6th century China, the incense clock took advantage of both the slow-burning nature of incense and the pleasant aromas it produced. First, they would select a stick of incense based upon the length of time that needed measuring. Short sticks were used for short periods and long, spiraled sticks were used for days. Incense clocks were often very ornate and designed with an eye toward aesthetics. They were often displayed in decorative, handcrafted trays. Strings could be tied to the stick so the string would burn through and release a gong when the desired time arrived. The most unique feature of the incense clock was its use of smell. The sticks could be layered with different fragrances so that each hour brought a new scent with it.

The Elephant Clock
The elephant clock was truly a masterpiece of mechanical engineering. Invented in medieval times by the brilliant Al-Jazari, this clock was a beautiful culmination of many different ideas. The design was structured around a hollow elephant statue. Various components of the clock were not only placed on top of the elephant, but housed within it as well. A giant ladle floating in a water reservoir was hidden in the elephant's head. This ladle took 30 minutes to fill and served as the timing mechanism. When the ladle was full, it would sink. This, in turn, made a ball drop into the mouth of a serpent on top of the elephant. The serpent swung down, pulling strings that caused the elephant rider to pound a drum and signal the hour. Then, the serpent tipped back to its original position and the cycle repeated.

The Merkhet
The ancient Egyptians have no shortage of impressive inventions credited to their civilization, and the merkhet is no exception. This "instrument of knowing," as it roughly translates, was the world's first astronomical tool. Traditionally, the Sun was the main way ancient people kept track of time. But the merkhet allowed the ancient Egyptians to keep time at night—with only the stars as their guide. The device consisted of a string with a weight attached to one end, enabling a straight line to be measured. When two merkhets were aligned with the North Star, they formed a celestial meridian in the sky. The time could then be determined by counting how many stars crossed this line.

Automaton Clocks
An automaton clock is a timekeeping device that uses animated figures to mark the passing of the hours. The most familiar example is the cuckoo clock. While a cuckoo clock is simple, automaton clocks are often extraordinarily elaborate—consisting of dozens of figures that perform very involved routines. Automaton clocks date back to the first century B.C., and are still being produced to this day. One of the most famous is Munich's Glockenspiel in the town square of Marienplatz, which consists of no less than 43 bells. During various points throughout the day, a team of 32 full-scale automaton figures dance and act out scenes from Munich's history. Each 15-minute show concludes with a gold bird singing atop the magnificent structure.

Obelisks
These tall rectangular structures, known as obelisks to the ancient Egyptians, took advantage of the shadow-creating effect of the Sun. The obelisks were pointed, and as the Sun moved across the sky, they cast a large shadow upon the ground. The path of the shadow could be mapped out with intervals that represented the hours of the day. The Egyptians constructed these monuments with great care, often adorning them with elaborate hieroglyphics. Their location was chosen to ensure that the angle of the shadow was accurate. In addition, markings on ancient obelisks indicate that the Egyptians made careful note of the Winter and Summer solstice.

Mercury Clocks
Water clocks in the ancient world had one major flaw: the water running through the clock was subjected to variations in temperature. It would freeze in the winter and evaporate in the summer. Zhang Sixun, an engineer during China's Song Dynasty, solved this important dilemma. He was the first to use liquid mercury as the driving force in his clocks. Mercury stays in liquid form at temperatures as low as -39 degrees Celsius (-38.2 Fahrenheit). Because of this, Sixun's devices did not freeze in the winter. Mercury also did not facilitate the rusting of mechanical parts like water did. As a result, Zhang's ingenious mercury clock could function smoothly throughout the year.

Astronomical Clocks
In addition to telling the time of day or night, an astronomical clock also keeps track of celestial information. For example, an astronomical clock might display a rotating map of the stars or show the phases of the moon. The most famous water-driven astronomical clock was designed by our old friend Al-Jazari in 1206. This device was one of the first programmable computers; it allowed the operator to reprogram the duration of each day to account for seasonal changes. The machine stood over three meters (9.8 feet) high and utilized many different functions. It tracked the orbits of the sun and moon, indicated the current zodiac sign, and featured a moving crescent moon that opened the doors for the figures to exit. To keep the mood festive, Al-Jazari even included animated figures that played music throughout the day.

Astonishing Shipwreck Treasures

According to UNESCO, there are as many as three million shipwrecks scattered across the world's seabed. Under international maritime and salvage law, military wrecks normally remain under the jurisdiction of their governments, while almost anything goes in international waters. To excavate the ocean's wrecks would take more than 400 years, and its treasures could be worth hundreds of billions of dollars. It should come as no surprise that, aside from being attractive to underwater archaeologists, these wrecks are also of major interest to treasure hunters and salvage operations as they can potentially generate millions of dollars–given the right wrecks are discovered.

The Salcombe Wreck
Between 1200 and 900 B.C., a ship floundered off the coast of Devon in England. At the time of its sinking, Babylon was still flourishing, the Hanging Gardens hadn't been built yet, and it would be centuries before the birth of Buddha. Its discovery was announced in 2010. Amateur archaeologists and divers have so far uncovered 300 artefacts that weigh over 185 lbs combined, including copper and tin ingots (used to make bronze), weapons, and several pieces of jewelry. Though it may not be the largest treasure ever discovered, it is significant both because of its age and because the artifacts have proven that a definite trade network existed between Britain and Europe during the Bronze Age. Academics from Oxford University are investigating the finds to try and locate its exact origins, but unfortunately, none of the ship's parts are still intact.

The Belitung Shipwreck $80 million
The Belitung shipwreck was the first Arabian ship to be discovered and excavated. Found by fishermen just off the coast of Indonesia in 1998, it has yielded the richest and largest assortment of early ninth century Tang Dynasty gold and ceramic artifacts ever found–bowls, spice jars, inkwells, funeral urns, crystals, and gilt-silver boxes. Some of the more significant items included pearls from the Gulf, rubies and sapphires, a gold cup (the largest ever found), and a silver flask. After its excavation, the cargo was purchased by the Singaporean Government, which has loaned it indefinitely to the Singapore Tourism Board.

The Ship of Gold $100–150 million
The S.S. Central America sank during a hurricane in September 1857 carrying 15 tons of gold. Its sinking greatly added to the "Panic of 1857" in the United States which in turn led to the first worldwide economic crisis. After its discovery in 1987 and the subsequent excavation, 39 insurance companies claimed they had a right to the gold and artifacts recovered because of damages paid by them in the 19th century. Legal battles ensued which ultimately saw the discovery team ending up with 92 percent of the gold. One of the gold bars discovered became a very important piece of currency after selling for $8 million–a worldwide record at the time.

The Antikythera Treasures $120–160 million

In the year 1900, divers discovered an ancient shipwreck just off the island of Antikythera. The Archaeological Service of Greece launched an expedition shortly thereafter in what was the world's first major underwater archaeological expedition. Another expedition in 1976 recovered the most significant part of the cargo. The recovered Antikythera mechanism (believed to be the world's oldest analog computer) has received so much media coverage over the years that many are not aware of the ships' other treasures. The massive haul of artefacts from the famous wreck also included coins and jewelry, glassware, pottery, wonderful statues, and even copper couch beds. One of the remarkably well-preserved statues was a classical bronze statue sculpted sometime from 340 to 330 B.C. named Statue of a Youth. The entire collection of artifacts recovered is on display at the National Archaeological Museum in Greece until August 2013.

Treasure of the S.S. Republic $120 – 180 million

The S.S. Republic was lost during a hurricane in 1865 off the coast of Georgia carrying coins worth an estimated $400, 00. The wreck was finally discovered by Odyssey (a well-known deep sea exploration and salvage company) after being submerged for more than 230 years. To date, more than 51,000 US gold and silver coins have been recovered from the site along with almost 14,000 artefacts which includes thousands of bottles, glasses, and stoneware containers. Soon after the first excavation, a lawsuit was filed by a man claiming Odyssey used his information to locate the wreck. In 2004 a federal judge ruled in favor of Odyssey, awarding them full ownership of the cargo.

The Diamond Shipwreck

Geologists working for De Beers (the world's biggest undersea diamond miners) were stunned when they discovered a shipwreck buried in the beach. After uncovering several ingots, the mining operation was stopped and archaeologists were called in. In what some have called "the find of a lifetime", they uncovered not only the oldest shipwreck ever to be found off Africa's coast but also more than 22 tons of ingots, 6 cannons, swords, thousands of gold coins traced back to King João III, and more than 50 elephant tusks. After some investigation it was ascertained that the ship was the Bom Jesus, a Portuguese ship, which sailed in 1533 and disappeared off the coast of West Africa.

The British Treasury Ship $200 million

The S.S. Gairsoppa sunk in 1941 after being torpedoed by a German U-boat. The ship carried a total cargo of silver, approximately 7 million ounces, worth £600,000 at the time. In 2010, Odyssey Marine Exploration won the exclusive salvage contract for its cargo after the UK Government Department of Transport put out a tender. Under the terms of the contract, Odyssey carries all the risks involved but retains 80 percent of the pieces salvaged. A year later, the wreck was discovered in the North Atlantic, approximately 4.6 kilometers (2.8 miles) below the surface. Odyssey recovered 48 tons of silver (43 percent of the lost treasure) but had to stop the project due the weather conditions. The complete weight of the haul makes it the largest known metal cargo that has ever been recovered from the sea. The excavation will resume when the rough weather season passes.

The Whydah Gally $400 million

The Whydah is significant as it is the only pirate ship that has ever been found. Even more significant is the fact that the Whydah was the flagship of "Black Sam" Bellamy, a famous pirate captain. Discovered by Barry Clifford in 1984 after many years of searching, its treasures are still being recovered to this day. More than 200,000 artefacts including cannons, coins, gold jewelry, and the ship's bell have been brought to the surface. Since 2007, a selection of he Whydah's artifacts has been on show in a travelling exhibition sponsored by The National Geographic Society. Aptly named "Real Pirates", the exhibit is incredibly popular.

The Atocha Motherlode $450 million

The Nuestra Señora de Atocha was carrying jewelry and jewels, indigo, silver, gold, and copper when it sank off the Florida Keys in 1622. The treasure on this legendary ship was so vast, that it took two months to painstakingly record and load it before the ship could depart along with the rest of the Spanish fleet. Although the Spanish tried to locate the wreck, it was never found. In July 1985, after scouring the seabed for almost 17 years, Mel Fisher discovered the Atocha and her fortune. To this day, the wreckage site is still being explored and excavated as the sterncastle, the most valuable part of the ship, has yet to be found.

The Black Swan Project $500 million

In 2007, Odyssey Marine Exploration flew 17 tons of coins from Gibraltar to an undisclosed address in the US. Their newly discovered shipwreck was located in a lane where many Colonial-era ships floundered and they were uncertain as to nationality, size, and age. Due to the uncertainty and other security concerns they did not release the wreck site, nationality, date, or type of the coins. The treasure haul was the largest to date throughout the world. Experts called the find "unprecedented" and without comparison. It wasn't long before the Spanish Government filed a claim against the cargo, claiming that it came from the Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes, a Spanish frigate that was sunk by the British in 1804. In 2008 a US federal court ordered Odyssey to disclose the location of the wreck site. The location appeared to rule out Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes, but after 5 years of litigation, the courts ruled in favor of Spain and the treasure was flown back.

Strange Forms Of Ancient Currency

In modern times we take coins and paper money for granted. In the ancient world, however, people assigned monetary value to a wide variety of objects. While most wouldn't be practical today, they still serve as a reminder of these ancient cultures and their richly diverse customs.

Edible Currency
Salt has long been used as a form of currency throughout the world. The word "salary" is actually derived from The Latin word "salarium", which was the Roman word for "money used to buy salt." In fact, salt was the primary currency in East Africa throughout the Middle Ages. Another form of edible currency was Parmigiano cheese. At one point this beloved cheese was actually accepted as bank collateral in Italy. In Central America, the cocoa bean was the food-currency of choice. In Central Asia, they used tea bricks. These bricks were actually preferred in Mongolia because they could be brewed or even eaten as a source of nourishment.

Katanga Crosses
This X-shaped trinket is known as a Katanga Cross. It originated in the mining region of Katanga in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These crosses were the region's primary form of currency and likely the most widely known form of ancient African currency. The crosses were cast from copper and weighed anywhere from 1 to 2.5 pounds. Often seen as symbols of great wealth, the crosses were used in all forms of barter and trade. It was even common for a person to be buried with their crosses. Since they were made from copper and quite large, the crosses could also be melted and remolded as tools if needed. Value-wise, one cross could fetch you approximately 22 pounds of flour.

Squirrel Pelts
Unfortunately for squirrels, Russians had taken a liking to trading squirrel pelts during the Middle Ages. And the Russians, not a group to waste anything, used the claws and snouts for pocket change. This odd form of currency may have accidentally benefitted the Russians in a non-economic way as well. During medieval times, Europe was ravaged by the infamous Black Plague, but Russia wasn't hit nearly as hard. Since the plague was most often carried by rodents, murdering a bunch of rodents and using their pelts as currency likely reduced the number of plague carriers. Modern day Finland actually recognizes squirrel pelts as a currency, and values them at 3 cents each.

Potato Mashers
Bafia potato mashers were a form of ancient currency in the region where the Republic of Cameroon is today. This strange currency was highly regarded and used in the most important trades in the ancient Bafian culture. The use of the potato mashers also suggests that the Bafians had some very interesting views on gender. For example, wives could be bought and sold for a set price–in this instance, thirty potato mashers.

Lobi Snakes
The Lobi were the ancient inhabitants of Ghana. They lived as farmers and spent most of their time in the fields, where they encountered a variety of snakes. To protect themselves, they forged iron snakes that were either worn on their person or placed on personal altars, just like garlic for scaring off vampires. They were such a focal point of the Lobi culture that the iron snakes were often used in trading and bartering. The bodies of the snakes were often depicted with curves to create the effect of movement as if the snakes were slithering through grass.

Kissi Pennies
Until recently, the "kissi pennies" were used as a form of currency in many parts of Western Africa. These long strips of iron were modeled by blacksmiths into a distinct "T" shape. On one end there was an "ear", which resembled the shape of a spade or hoe. On the other end was a "foot". The typical kissi penny was over a foot in length and, if broken, could not be used again without an elaborate ceremony involving a witchdoctor. Due to the low value of individual pieces, they were usually bundled in groups of about 20. At one time, a bag of oranges or bananas cost only one or two kissi pennies. But prices inflated as the pennies were phased out of use. During this time, the cost of a cow rose to over 100 bundles, while a kissi bride would cost you about 200.

Rings And Jewelry
For the most part, the economy in ancient Egypt was tightly controlled and organized. But until the late period in Egyptian history, they did not use traditional coin currency. Instead, they employed a more informal type of bartering system consisting of rings and other various types of jewelry. It is believed that the Biblical reference to money in Deuteronomy 14:25 is a reference to the ancient Egyptian ring bartering system.

Potlatch
A "Potlatch" was an extravagant celebration in the ancient world where people would exchange almost anything in the spirit of gift giving. Such ceremonies took place all over the world, but were a mainstay among Native Americans. For example, whales' teeth were a common item used in the Fijian islands, while feathers were a staple of the Native American Potlatch. These lavish events often accompanied other important occurrences, such as a birth or marriage. Often times, the initially light-spirited occasion would escalate into a competition of wealth and vanity, with each person trying to outdo the next with a more impressive gift. The largest potlatch took place when the queen of Sheba gifted King Solomon 120 talents of gold and the largest quantity of spices ever exchanged at the time. Potlatches were ultimately outlawed in the North America at the end of the 19th century.

Knives
Large bronze blades were early forms of coins and where very common throughout ancient China. Approximately 2,500 years ago, a Chinese prince allowed his troops to use their knives as payment for goods when money was scarce. After the troops began bartering with local villagers, the concept caught

on and soon became a standard form of currency. They were most widely used in China during the Zhou Dynasty (between 600 and 200 BC), and were often were fitted with ring shapes at one end so that the knives could be carried conveniently on belts and straps.

Rai Stones

The largest form of currency in the ancient world was known as the “Rai Stone”. These gargantuan stones, pictured above, were carved from a single piece of limestone. They each had a signature hole in the middle, measured up to 12 feet across, and weighed over 8 tons. Each Rai stone a story of its own that determined its value. Since the creation of each was such a massive undertaking, the difficulty experienced along the way would increase the value of the stone. The villagers risked their lives canoeing to a neighboring island where limestone could be found. Then the disks had to be carved and painstakingly carried back to the village (again, via canoe). One of the canoes sank once, and the stone that was lost was still a part of the economy. They just recognized the stone as being out in the ocean and “ownership” of it changed. None of the stones ever actually moved since they were so heavy. They just acquired a new owner and remained in the same location. If a villager died in the process of carving or transporting the stone, which was not uncommon, its value increased. Because of the significant amount of time and effort put in to each stone, transfers from one villager to the next could only be done following an elaborate ceremony.

Nazi Spies and Their Espionage Plots In America

The USA was slow in joining the fight against the Nazi hollocaust, due to the large number of US sympathizers who supported the Nazis. The Germans however didn't want to take any chances and even before U.S. involvement in World War Two, Nazi strategists—including Abwehr, the German intelligence agency—began inserting operatives into American cities or turning German-American citizens to the Nazi cause. The practice continued throughout the war. While there were some notable successes, especially prior to American involvement in the war, there were also some spectacular failures. Here are ten German spies and their plots, which occurred on U.S. soil during the 1930s and 1940s.

The Long Island Landing
In June 1942, German submarine U-202 carried a small group of would-be saboteurs to a position off the coast of Long Island, New York. The four spies, led by George John Dasch, were expected to perform acts of violence including blowing up bridges, railways, and factories in New York City and the East Coast over a planned two-year period. Dasch and his men comprised half of the assignment known as "Operation Pastorius" (see below), Hitler's pet project which his intelligence advisors told him didn't have a chance of success. The chosen men were inexperienced, and had very little training in intelligence operations.The mission didn't get off to a great start. The U-boat became stuck on a sandbar off Amagansett. Heavy swells made getting to shore in an inflatable raft an extremely hair-raising prospect. The men barely had enough time to bury their supplies—explosives, blasting caps, and timers—and strip out of their uniforms, when a Coast Guard patrolman, John Cullen, almost literally stumbled over them. A nervous Dasch lost his cool, threatened Cullen, and forced a significant cash bribe on him to keep his mouth shut.

Cullen did no such thing. He reported the suspicious incident. A little digging on the beach turned up four crates of explosives and equipment, German uniforms, and the stubs of German cigarettes. The FBI was brought into the case, and a search of Amagansett and Long Island began, but Dasch and his group had already made their way to New York City. While the other three Nazi spies hid out in a hotel, Dasch went to Washington, DC, where he turned himself in and rolled over on his fellow saboteurs. He got a sentence of thirty years in prison, instead of being executed like six other members of the ill-fated Operation Pastorius. He received clemency in 1948, and was deported to West Germany.

Operation Magpie
In November 1944, two German agents were landed in America—not to commit sabotage this time, but to gather intelligence on U.S. military ships, aircraft, and weapons. If possible, they were also to cause delays in America's development of the atomic bomb. The spies were Erich Gimpel, a native of Germany and former Abwehr courier who spoke English, and William Colepaugh, an American of German descent, a Nazi sympathizer, and a shady character who had little experience of spy craft. German submarine U-1230 dropped Colepaugh and Gimpel ashore near Bar Harbor, close by Hancock Point, Maine. Their clothes

weren't suited for the cold New England weather and the falling snow, but they managed to walk from the beach on back roads carrying their expensive new luggage full of fake IDs, guns, cameras, cash, and diamonds to a railway station, where they took a train to Boston and then to New York City.

Once in NYC, rather than getting down to the business of spying and surreptitious activities, the unstable and alcoholic Colepaugh began a spree of drinking, partying, and womanizing, much to Gimpel's vocal disgust. In one month, Colepaugh ran through $1,500 of the money they'd been given for operating expenses. Shortly before Christmas, Colepaugh abandoned Gimpel and absconded with the rest of the money—more than $40,000—and a female companion of dubious repute, ending up at an expensive hotel. After a final drunken binge over the holiday, Colepaugh turned himself in to the FBI on December 29. Neither he nor Gimpel had done any actual spying during their brief time in NYC. Colepaugh told authorities everything he knew, including where to find Gimpel. Despite his cooperation with the American government, Colepaugh was tried in a closed military tribunal with Gimpel. Both men were sentenced to death, but the end of the war delayed the executions and the sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. Gimpel was released in 1955 and returned to West Germany to write his memoirs, while Colepaugh was granted parole in 1960, and settled down to a quiet life in Pennsylvania.

Waldemar Othmer

Born in Germany, Maximilian Gerhard Waldemar Othmer came to the U.S. in 1919. The affable, likable man became a naturalized citizen by 1935, married an American woman, and settled down with his family and a temporary job as a vacuum cleaner salesman. Despite the fact that he made frequent trips to Germany, no one guessed that Othmer was a sleeper agent for Abwehr. He became involved with the pro-Nazi German-American Bund, eventually becoming the leader of the Trenton, New Jersey, branch while working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. After establishing himself as a hard-working, average guy, he got a job at Camp Pendleton (Norfolk, Virginia) military base, on the orders of German intelligence. In this position, he was able to send information to his handlers in Germany about British and American military vessels, convoys, and merchant ships in the port as well as Allied ship movements.

In 1942, he was transferred by the Army to Knoxville, Tennessee. An ongoing FBI investigation into Othmer, due to his open Nazi sympathies, proved inconclusive. By 1944, a new FBI investigation turned up some crucial facts—including Othmer's unusual request to a New Jersey dentist for Pyramidon, a common European painkiller used by Abwehr agents as an ingredient in invisible ink. He was brought in by the FBI's Knoxville division for questioning, and immediately confessed to being a Nazi espionage agent. He'd been sending information written in code in invisible ink to his handlers, but he denied sending any letters after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Othmer refused to name other agents, but he did turn over a microfilm containing a code he used when communicating with Abwehr, which was linked to other espionage cases. He was tried as a spy, convicted, and sentenced to twenty years in prison.

Guenther Rumrich's Passport Ploy
Born in Chicago, Illinois to an Austro-Hungarian father and raised in Germany, Guenther Gustav Rumrich returned to America in 1929 and served in the U.S. Army's Medical Corps in Panama until his desertion in 1936. He became suspected in 1938 of possible spy activities because of Mrs. Jessie Jordan in Dundee, Scotland. She was a woman under surveillance by Britain's intelligence agency, MI-5, who believed her to be an operative working for the Germans by acting as a mail drop, passing letters to and from a Nazi spy ring in New York City. Mrs. Jordan's communications with "Mr. Crown" were intercepted by MI-5. As it turned out, Crown was Rumrich's code name, and the letters were orders and instructions from his Abwehr handlers. The head of MI-5 turned the information over to the FBI.

Rumrich was put under federal surveillance, and a trap was set—but he didn't fall for it. Instead, in February 1938, he called the Passport Office in NYC. Masquerading as the U.S. Undersecretary of State, he requested thirty-five blank passports be sent to his address. The suspicious clerk he spoke to over the phone reported the incident to the authorities. Rumrich was arrested in what became America's first major prewar espionage case. Rumrich supplied information about his fellow agents, who were also arrested. At their trials, he acted as a witness for the prosecution. For his cooperation, he was given a light sentence of two years in prison. Unfortunately, more important Nazi spies escaped the FBI's net, and the case was not considered to be a complete success. The New York spy ring case pointed out America's vulnerability to foreign espionage efforts, and prompted government action.The Rumrich case was fictionalized in the 1939 film, Confessions of a Nazi Spy.

Lilly Stein
Born in Vienna, Austria, to wealthy and respectable parents in 1914, Lilly Stein's early activities included exhibition ice skating and tennis. However, her contacts with Viennese café society, separation from her family, and possibly her affair with an American career diplomat and U.S. State Department official, Ogden H. Hammond, Jr., led the willowy and buxom brunette socialite to be recruited by Abwehr as an intelligent agent. In 1939, Lilly was sent to New York City, where she opened a dress shop with new friends. She recruited agents for Abwehr and acted as a forwarding address, successfully moving letters containing orders or sensitive stolen information to and from Germany for fellow spies. Her affair with Hammond continued, though she later claimed that their relationship was "purely platonic."

According to the FBI, Lilly was a cautious spy; she put nothing in writing and carried nothing incriminating on her person except the occasional microfilm. The dress shop venture soon failed, however, and the pay from her Nazi handlers was usually late, often leaving her scrambling to pay the rent. To make ends meet, she worked as an artist's model. It wasn't long before her constant complaints and demands for money tested Abwehr's patience to the limit—eventually forcing them to cut her loose from their operations. Lilly was rounded up in June, 1941, as part of the infamous Duquesne spy ring (see #1). Despite her assertion that she was forced into the espionage business because she wasn't

purely Aryan—and therefore faced being put in a forced labor camp, deported, or worse when the Nazis took Austria if she refused to cooperate—she received a ten year prison sentence.

The Norden Bombsight Blueprints

Although he moved to New York City in 1927 at the age of twenty-five and worked towards naturalization for years, Hermann W. Lang always remained loyal to the country of his birth: Germany. That loyalty would lead him to acquire valuable intelligence for the Nazi spy agency, Abwehr, after he was recruited during a visit home in 1938.A draftsman by trade, Lang worked in a factory for the Carl L. Norden Corp., which manufactured top secret U.S. military and defense equipment and materials. One of their most guarded projects was an improved bombsight for the Navy and Air Force—considered so vital to U.S. interests that the fact of its existence was kept under lock and key. Not even America's closest allies, including Britain, were given access to the Norden bombsight, since the government wished to maintain the country's neutrality at the beginning of war in Europe. As a factory inspector, Lang had access to the bombsight's blueprints.

Company policy forbade anyone from taking the blueprints out of the office, but he managed to sneak a set home and make a copy, which was later smuggled to Germany in an umbrella carried by another agent on a passenger cruise liner. Lang continued to work at his job and send other details via a German network until he was arrested as part of the Duquesne spy ring operation. He pleaded guilty, and received a sentence of twenty years in prison. During the trial and its aftermath, prosecutors and government spokesmen assured the public that the Norden bombsight hadn't been entirely betrayed to the Germans and the secret remained safe. They claimed no one person at the factory had access to the full plans. However, it's been noted the bombsight used by the Luftwaffe after 1938 bore a resemblance to the one stolen by Lang.

The Ponte Vedra Foursome

In Adolph Hitler's planned Operation Pastorius, two groups of >Nazi saboteurs were landed on American shores in June 1942.Like their counterparts, the mission of the Ponte Vedra foursome was simple: commit acts of sabotage and terrorism such as blowing up railways, locks, and canals; plant suitcase bombs in Jewish owned shops; and destroy New York City's water system. The Florida group was led by John Edward Kerling, a German who had lived in America for years before returning to his homeland. These men didn't have much training in spy craft, apart from some basic knowledge on how to set explosives. Regardless, they carried a fortune in cash and crates of equipment, which they buried in the sand on the beach where they came ashore. They took a bus to downtown Jacksonville and then traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio, without incident, where they waited as instructed to rendezvous with the Long Island team headed by George Dasch. Unknown to Kerling, Dasch had blundered, causing his team to be arrested by the FBI, and he told the federal authorities everything he knew, including the when and where of his scheduled meeting with Kerling's sabotage team. Kerling and his three men were arrested, tried before a military tribunal,

and executed by electric chair in August 1942, along with two from Dasch's group.

Dr. Ignatz Griebl, Spymaster

After serving with the German Army in WWI, Dr. Griebl—an obstetrician and surgeon—immigrated to the United States in 1925 and, after becoming a citizen, resided in New York City in Manhattan's Yorkville district. Here, he became a community leader and a member of the U.S. Army Reserve. However, the apparently respectable doctor harbored a dark secret: he'd worked as an Nazi undercover agent since 1934. By means of his diligent work, social contacts, and loyalty to the Nazi cause, Griebl gained the trust of Abwehr to such an extent that he became the primary coordinator and head of a widespread spy ring operating across the country. Information flowed from German intelligence agents in other cities like Boston, Norfolk, and Baltimore, directly into Griebl's hands. He also sought out engineers with German-American backgrounds, and recruited them as moles to betray secret technical military and defense plans. Since no single federal agency in the U.S. had charge of investigating subversive acts, he was able to run his operation for years with virtual impunity, undetected. For his dedication, he received generous payments and an honorary commission as a captain in the Luftwaffe. In 1938, one of his New York spies, Guenther Rumrich, was arrested by the FBI—and during his confession, he gave up Griebl's game. In turn, after he was brought in for questioning, Griebl betrayed everyone in his network, naming names and offering details so readily that the FBI chose to release him, assuming he'd show up for the federal grand jury hearing. He didn't. The doctor wasted no time boarding a ship to Hamburg and escaping the United States. He eventually settled in Vienna, where he re-opened his medical practice, and did no further spying for Nazi Germany. As an interesting sidenote, Griebl was the only person to hold simultaneous commissions in both the U.S. and German military services.

Gustav Guellich

An often-depressed, unmarried loner who seemed a bit of a harmless kook according to his co-workers, Guellich was actually a Nazi agent working for Ignatz Griebl's spy network, and stealing America's secrets through his job in a New Jersey shipyard. The German born Guellich came to America in 1932, and was recruited by Griebl in 1935 due to his work as a metallurgist at the Federal Shipbuilding Co. in Kearney, NJ. Because of his position in the laboratory, Guellich had access to secret and restricted projects developed for the U.S. Navy, including guns and shells, destroyer blueprints, and samples of cables used on ships. The material was sent to Griebl, who forwarded it to Germany. It wasn't long before Guellich's diligence earned him a top spot in the Nazi spy network. A report crossed Guellich's desk detailing work by Robert H. Goddard, a pioneering rocket-propelled missile researcher. He sent a copy to Griebl. Berlin received the report with great interest, and ordered Guellich to obtain more information. He traveled to Goddard's laboratory in Roswell, New Mexico to observe a test launch of the Nell missile. Guellich's continued ferreting-out of secrets assisted German scientists in developing their own rockets. Guellich was betrayed by Griebl following the latter's arrest by the FBI. Like the other spies in the New York ring, he received a light sentence despite his espionage.

William Sebold and the Duquesne Spy Ring

Admittedly, this one's claim to a place on this list is a little tenuous—but given its relation to many of the spies mentioned already, it seems fitting to include the matter here. South African Frederick "Fritz" Duquesne's hatred of Britain, which had its origin in the Boer Wars, caused him to become a turncoat and spy for the Germans in WWI. He saw no reason to switch his loyalties when he moved to New York City and became a naturalized U.S. citizen. He eventually volunteered as a spy for Abwehr. Working at 120 Wall Street, Duquesne set up an extensive professional espionage network, collecting information from Nazi agents and moles at strategic locations in the United States. Unknown to Duquesne, the Gestapo and Abwehr attempted to recruit another potential spy, William Sebold—a native German who had become a naturalized U.S. citizen—during his visit home in 1939. His family still lived in Germany. Afraid they might face reprisals if he refused outright, Sebold agreed to be a Nazi spy, but as soon as possible, he quietly went to the U.S. Consulate in Cologne and offered his services to America as a double-agent.

After returning to the U.S. in 1940, Sebold assisted the FBI in setting up a surveillance operation against Duquesne's spy network. With his cooperation, federal agents were also able to use his assigned codes to send disinformation by shortwave radio to Abwehr. In December 1941, just six days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the FBI began arresting members of the Duquesne spy ring, including Fritz Duquesne himself—reaching a total of thirty-three spies in all. The operation was the largest round up of foreign intelligence agents in America. Some pleaded guilty, others went to trial—and all were convicted. William Sebold, however, disappeared—and his fate remains uncertain. Some believe that he was given a new identity to protect him from Nazi revenge. The 1945 film, The House on 92nd Street, is a fictionalized account of William Sebold and the Duquesne spy ring.

Mysterious Prehistoric Sites In the British Isles

Dotting the British Isles, scores of amazing prehistoric sites can still be found. In many cases, these are even older than the great pyramids of Egypt—and although archeologists have theories about who built them and what their purposes were, very little is known for sure. Whoever is responsible for these sites appears to have had sophisticated astronomical knowledge and construction techniques. One thing is certain: these sites have sparked imaginations and inspired debate for centuries, and will continue to do so indefinitely.

Loughcrew
The Loughcrew Cairns in Ireland are a series of tombs dating to 3200 B.C. Also known as the Hills of the Witch, the thirty-plus cairns and mounds feature some outstanding Neolithic art, and display a solid knowledge of astronomy. Debate rages as to what the art means or signifies. The passages of the main cairns are aligned so that the sun will illuminate the back walls on significant days. The main passage of Cairn T is built so that the light of the rising sun on the spring equinox is narrowed into a thin shaft, illuminating the art within. Cairn S is aligned to the cross quarter days, and it is believed that Cairn V (of which there is very little remaining) indicated the winter solstice.

Old Keig
Old Keig is a stone circle in England. Not much remains of the original stones, but what does remain hints that this must have been a magnificent sight indeed. The recumbent stone of Old Keig is 4.9 meters long, and weighs as much as fifty tons. The type of rock used for this stone is not local—meaning that this huge chunk of rock was transported up a steady slope from a site several miles to the southeast. Like most stone circles, Old Keig is astronomically aligned: the recumbent stone is situated so that the midwinter sun sets directly above it if viewed from the centre of the circle. During the major standstill (which occurs every 18.6 years), the midsummer full moon sets over the left side of the recumbent, and at the minor standstill the midsummer full moon sets over the right side of the recumbent.

Callanish Stones
Another majestic stone circle is located near the village of Callanish, in the Outer Hebrides. It is believed that the stones were erected around 2600–2900 B.C. One theory has it that the Callanish stones may have helped their architects form a calendar system, based on the position of the moon. A stone avenue, which leads out of the circle, points toward the setting midsummer full moon. These days, we barely even watch the sunrise anymore—who can imagine what was going through the minds of these ancient builders when they saw the sun go down each night?

Skara Brae
Skara Brae is a stone Neolithic settlement on the island of Mainland in the Orkneys. It was inhabited from roughly 3150 to 2500 B.C. It is the most intact

Neolithic settlement in Europe, gaining it UNESCO World Heritage Site status and the nickname of "Scottish Pompeii". The settlement is remarkably advanced for its age, with a sophisticated drainage system connecting to primitive toilets in each dwelling. Many intriguing artefacts were discovered at Skara Brae, including unusual carved stone balls.

The Ring of Brodgar
Located on the same island as Skara Brae, the Ring of Brodgar is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Most henges do not contain stone circles, making this a rather unusual site. It is the third largest stone circle in the UK. The interior of the circle has never been excavated by archeologists, and no scientific dating has been done, so it's difficult to accurately assess the age of the site—but it is generally believed to date from approximately 2500 B.C. Alexander Thom has proposed that the Neolithic builders of Brodgar and other sites used a common unit of measurement which he calls the "megalithic yard"; the diameter of the inner banks of Brodgar, Newgrange, and Avebury are all exactly 175 megalithic yards. This theory remains highly contested, however, as a common unit of measurement would suggest a sophisticated transfer of information not expected from Megalithic builders.

Avebury
Avebury contains the largest stone circle in England, and was constructed around 2600 B.C. The entire site consists of a henge, a large circle of stones, and two smaller circles within the larger circle. Archeologists disagree on the original purpose of Avebury: some suggest that it was a key element in religious rituals, while others highlight its potential function as an astronomical calendar system.

Newgrange
Newgrange is a mound constructed around 3200 B.C., in Ireland, and it is part of the Brú na Bóinne UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is a circular mound with a stone passageway leading to chambers inside. Ringed by kerbstones engraved with artwork, Newgrange is certainly an impressive sight. The main passage is aligned so that the rising sun of the winter solstice floods the interior with light, which enters through an opening above the doorway. Once again, archeologists do not completely understand the original purpose of Newgrange, but most agree that it was probably used in religious rituals.

Lios Na Grainsi
Lios Na Grainsi (or Fort of the Grange) is the largest stone circle in Ireland. The circle is aligned with the rising sun of the summer solstice; the sun shines down directly into the centre of the circle. The largest stone weighs more than forty tons. Locals apparently refuse to approach the site after sunset, since they believe that the circle returns to the Fey at this time.

Bryn Celli Ddu
Bryn Celli Ddu is located on the Welsh island of Anglesey. It was originally a henge and stone circle site in the Neolithic age, but sometime during the Bronze Age a mound was constructed on top of the henge. The site is aligned to the

summer solstice, and it has been argued that year-round alignments would have allowed Bryn Celli Ddu to be used as an agricultural calendar.

Stonehenge

In a choice between cliche and outrage, we went with the former. But despite the fact that everybody has heard of Stonehenge, it's worth reminding you with the help of the picture above just how incredible this site really is. The most famous stone circle in the world, Stonehenge was constructed in phases between 1500 and 3000 B.C. Of course, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is unclear why, or even how the huge stones were erected as they were—creating an enduring mystery that has captivated people for centuries.In a not entirely unrelated side-note, some believe that the well-known rhyme, "eeny, meeny, miny, mo" may have its origins as an ancient counting system, possibly used by the same people who built Stonehenge. In the English seaside town of Yarmouth, for example, oral tradition has it that numbers once began with the slightly similar "ina, mina, tethera, methera". Other small shreds of evidence support the idea, and although there's no way of being sure, it's an interesting possibility to dwell on.

Wars Fought In The USA

Battles, rebellions, skirmishes, disputes, and tiffs have occurred in America right up to the 20th century. Here are 10 historic conflicts that took place within the land borders of the United States of America and didn't happen during the Revolutionary or Civil Wars. For the purposes of this list, we've also excluded the American-Indian Wars.

Texas Archive War
The Lone Star State suffered a few growing pains in its earlier days, not helped by the near constant threat of invasion from neighboring Mexico. In 1842, the capital of the Republic of Texas was Austin. After receiving a demand for surrender from a Mexican general backed by an army, Texas president Sam Houston and the state Congress decided Austin might be in danger and ordered the seat of government—and its accompanying archive of official public documents and records—moved to the city of Houston. The citizens of Austin weren't pleased. Fearing the president's namesake city would become the new state capital, they formed a vigilante committee and swore armed resistance. The first attempt failed when the man appointed by the president to accompany the archive on its move was refused horses and wagons by the angry residents. The second attempt ended in humiliation when contemptuous citizens flouted the president's authority, shaved the manes and tails of his messengers' horses, and refused to let the men carry out their duty. At the end of 1842, a frustrated President Houston was forced to send a company of thirty Texas Rangers, with orders not to provoke bloodshed, to take the government archive from Austin.

The Rangers entered the town on the morning of December 29th and began quietly loading the archive into wagons, unnoticed by the citizens—except one. Upon witnessing the soldiers' activities, Angelina Belle Peyton Eberly, who ran the local boarding house, hurried to a six-pound cannon kept loaded with grape shot in case of Indian attack, and set off the charge (fortunately, no one was injured). By the time the vigilante committee members assembled, the Rangers raced out of town, taking the precious archive with them. Undaunted, the leader of the vigilantes, Captain Mark Lewis, commandeered a cannon from the nearby arsenal and took off after the Rangers with a couple of dozen furious citizens right behind him. They caught up to the company of Rangers the next day at Kenny Fort and at cannon-point, forced them to hand over the archive, which was returned to Austin.At that point, President Sam Houston gave up, the government archive remained in Austin, and the Archive War ended with only a few shots fired and no one hurt.

Red River Bridge War
Not to be confused with the Red River War in 1874 (U.S. Army v Southern Plains Indians). The Red River Bridge War in 1931 began with, unsurprisingly, a bridge spanning the Red River between Denison, Texas and Durant, Oklahoma. This was a free bridge built jointly by Texas and Oklahoma, much to the annoyance of a nearby older toll bridge also spanning the Red River, now made redundant. In July 1931, the toll bridge company filed for and received a court ordered

injunction against the Texas Highway Commission, citing an alleged, unfulfilled agreement to purchase the toll bridge and pay out the company's contract. The injunction prevented the bridge's opening. Governor Sterling ordered barricades erected on the Texas side. However, neither the injunction nor telegrams from Sterling prevented Oklahoma Governor Murray from issuing an executive order to open the new free bridge by asserting his state's claim to ownership of the land on both sides of the river. He sent workers to destroy the Texas barricades, causing Sterling to respond by sending a couple of Texas Rangers to rebuild the barricades.

The situation continued to escalate when Murray ordered crews to block the Oklahoma side of the toll bridge, and traffic flow across the Red River came to a halt. Finally, the Texas legislature granted the toll bridge company the right to sue the state, the injunction was withdrawn, and the free bridge opened. But that isn't the end of the story. The toll bridge company went to federal court to prevent Murray from continuing to block their bridge. The Oklahoma governor's response? Declare martial law and post a National Guard Unit at the sites of both bridges on both sides, prompting Texans to fear an invasion. Murray led guardsmen across the toll bridge while brandishing an antique revolver, and ordered the toll-booth torn down and burned. The two Texas Rangers inside fled. In August, the guardsmen were withdrawn and the Red River Bridge War ended.

Toledo War

A dispute took place over a piece of land called the "Toledo Strip"—where the city of Toledo, Ohio would later be located—which in 1835, gave U.S. President Andrew Jackson a headache by touching off the border skirmish called the Toledo War. The situation was a tad complicated and boils down to: the original surveyors of the land in question made a mistake and assigned it to Ohio when that state's border was created. In 1835, another survey corrected the error and set the land within the border of Michigan (not yet a state but a territory). However, this property became hotly contested because of its location at the mouth of the Maumee River. Canals were planned to connect to the Mississippi River, then a vital commercial artery. A city in that location had great potential for wealth. Hating the prospect of losing a future major trade center, the Ohio legislature called for another survey. This time, the borders were adjusted to no one's satisfaction.

Matters boiled up again when Michigan applied to the US government to become a state. Ohio Congressmen managed to block the application and wouldn't budge unless Michigan agreed to revert back to the old boundary line and give up the Toledo Strip. Adding insult to injury, Ohio governor Lucas refused to negotiate, created a county from the disputed land (named after himself), and appointed a judge and sheriff. Michigan governor Stevens promptly mobilized troops and marched to Ohio.During the brief Toledo War, both states were involved more in bluffing and posturing than actual fighting. The Michigan militia arrested a few Ohio surveyors and officials they caught on the border. They also passed a slightly larger military budget than Ohio in a blatant "mine's bigger than yours" display. Ohio sent militia to guard their interests, though the only casualty was a Michigan sheriff stabbed to death by an Ohio man in a bar brawl, and the only

shots fired were over the heads of the "enemy."In 1836, President Jackson ended the Toledo War by proposing to give the Toledo Strip to Ohio and assign a nice chunk of resource rich land to Michigan in compensation. If Michigan rejected the compromise, he would refuse to sign the bill giving the territory its coveted statehood. Needless to say, Michigan took the deal.

Dorr Rebellion

In 1841 in the smallest U.S. state, Rhode Island, one man and his supporters instituted insurrection against what they considered unfair voting practices and the disenfranchisement of many of the states' residents. Their cause became known as the Dorr Rebellion. Immigration caused an increase in Rhode Island's population as well as a workforce for the burgeoning Industrial Revolution. Due to the original charter, only property owners had the right to vote, and at the time, more than half the state's male residents didn't qualify. Previous attempts to change the qualification through official government channels failed. Finally in 1841, Thomas Dorr and like-minded citizens decided if state legislators couldn't be bothered, they'd hold a People's Convention and effect change themselves.

The Dorrites drafted and ratified a People's Constitution, which reformed the voting qualifications, giving all white male residents the franchise. They also "elected" Dorr as governor. Dorr and his supporters were opposed by state legislators including the officially elected Governor King, who used intimidation and force against the popular rebellion. Backed by many militia members, Dorr attempted to lead an attack on the arsenal in Provincetown in 1842, but the attack failed. He and his followers retreated to regroup, only to find their retreat cut off by government forces. The rebellion fell apart and Dorr fled the state. On his later return to Rhode Island, he was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to life in solitary confinement at hard labor, but he was pardoned and released in 1845.The Rhode Island legislature did eventually reform the state Constitution, giving the vote to white male residents who owned property or could pay a $1 poll tax.

Walton War

As a consequence of the Yazoo Land Fraud Scandal of 1795, in 1802 Congress passed a rather vaguely worded law granting certain tracts of land to Georgia which appeared to include the "Orphan Strip"—a small, isolated, and unwanted region surrounded by North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Nobody wanted to govern the wilderness, yet this troublesome bit of real estate would spark a conflict ending in tragedy. The area had a checkered history. First inhabited by the Cherokee, the Orphan Strip was claimed by South Carolina, who later ceded it to the US government, who in turn passed it back to the Cherokee. The Cherokee still didn't want it, so tribal leaders handed it over to Washington D.C. a second time. The Orphan Strip became public domain. Despite its isolation and popularity with outlaws and fugitives, some settlers from North and South Carolina decided to make the region their home.

The trouble began in 1803, when Georgia annexed the Orphan Strip and named it Walton County. The state of North Carolina didn't care, but the 800 some-odd settlers did. Their land grants had been issued by North Carolina and in some

cases, South Carolina, so they refused to pay taxes to Georgia in 1804. Walton County tax officials responded by ramping up the pressure with intimidation and attempts to dispossess. Tensions peaked when a Georgian official, Sam McAdams, killed North Carolina constable, John Hafner.Governor Turner of North Carolina sent his state's militia marching into Walton County to arrest the men responsible for Hafner's murder. Ten Walton officials were captured and sent to North Carolina for trial. They escaped jail and went on the lam. Disputes between North Carolina and Georgia over the land continued. Finally in 1811, a new survey put Walton County within North Carolina's border, and Georgia accepted the findings … until 1971, when a state commission reported Georgia still had a legal claim to the region. The governor of North Carolina called out the militia to defend the border. Fortunately, both sides kept their heads this time and the matter was resolved peacefully.

Aroostook War

Also known as the "Lumberjack War" or the "Pork and Beans War," the Aroostook War was a border dispute between Maine and Canada (and the US and Great Britain) in 1838. While no one died, the conflict did mange to achieve its own theme song. At the time of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War, the border between what would become Maine and New Brunswick, Canada (British territory) was vaguely set at the St. John's River. Since the region on both sides of the boundary line was covered in timber, Acadian loggers and trappers quickly settled there, ignoring the border. When Maine applied for statehood in 1820, legislators were surprised to find French-Canadian settlers on their side of the river. They gave land grants in the nearby Aroostook River valley to Americans, who soon began disputing with their Acadian neighbours.

King William I of the Netherlands was asked to arbitrate, but Maine rejected his compromise in 1831. The conflict heated up in 1837 when officials from Maine and New Brunswick began making arrests for trespassing in the Aroostook area. Canada accused Maine of timber theft and feared an invasion. The arrival of British forces from Quebec triggered Maine legislators to send a force of 200 militiamen to oppose them. The US Congress dispatched 10,000 volunteer troops to enforce peace while negotiations with Britain's representative went on—and if hostilities broke out, to defend the border by force. To everyone's relief, no fighting occurred and no one was killed—though folklore speaks of a Canadian pig or possibly a wandering cow shot by mistake. In March 1839, a settlement was finally reached, though a final decision on the border between Maine and Canada wouldn't be achieved until 1842.

Battle of Athens, Tennessee

Following World War II in 1946, violence erupted when returning American soldiers discovered their Tennessee county had been taken over by political corruption. Their plan to take it back involved bullets—lots of bullets—and dynamite. Why Athens in McMinn County, Tennessee became a battleground was due to Paul Cantrell, a Democrat running for sheriff in the 1936 election. He won over his Republican opponent, although the victory was tainted by rumors of fraud. Cantrell was a corrupt sheriff—for example, since state law allowed his

office to collect fees for each person booked, jailed, and released, deputies boarded buses passing through the city and arrested passengers on bogus charges of drunkenness, forcing them to pay fines. Prostitution, gambling, and kickbacks from illegal drinking establishments were commonplace.

The tide began to turn in 1945 when GIs returning to Athens were subjected to arrest on the flimsiest excuses and heavily fined. When the fed up soldiers attempted to support their choice for sheriff against Pat Mansfield (by then, Cantrell had been elected to the state Senate and backed Mansfield's bid), matters boiled over into direct conflict on Election Day 1946. Mansfield hired several hundred armed "deputies" to patrol the voting precincts in Athens—and no doubt to assist in the typical ballot stuffing and voter intimidation. The volatile situation escalated when Walter Ellis, an ex-GI and volunteer poll watcher, was arrested by Mansfield's deputies and held without charge. A black resident, Tom Gillespie, was refused the right to vote, beaten, and shot. More GIs were arrested and threatened with violence. By the end of the day, the former soldiers had enough. They broke into the town armory for weapons and besieged the jail, where Mansfield and his deputies had taken the ballet boxes. Battle continued sporadically throughout the night, resulting in wounded on both sides. When the GIs ran out of bullets around dawn, they began throwing dynamite. The deputies inside the jail surrendered. The highly publicized Battle of Athens not only ousted corruption from one county in Tennessee, the lesson learned would ultimately lead to great reforms in Southern politics.

Honey War

A border dispute in 1839 between Missouri and Iowa culminated in the Honey War—a bloodless if slightly rowdy conflict whose mark can still be seen in the landscape today. The border between Iowa and Missouri had originally been drawn in 1816 by J.C. Sullivan, a surveyor, creating the "Sullivan Line." However, less than a decade later, the exact whereabouts of the boundary line were in question. The matter didn't cause trouble until 1838, when Missouri legislators ordered a new survey done. The result, adopted by the Missouri government, shifted the border north into Iowa. Settlers in the annexed area considered themselves Iowans, so were understandably disconcerted when Missouri officials attempted to collect taxes from them. Their refusal caused several valuable bee trees—a source of honey—to be cut down and taken as partial payment, a definite crime in the citizen's eyes.

Next time, the tax agents threatened, they'd come in force. Incensed Iowans chased them away and contacted Iowa Governor Lucas.Expecting a fight, Missouri mustered a militia force of 600 men, who marched to the disputed area. Iowa lacked a militia, but eventually close to 1,200 volunteers armed with pitchforks showed up to defend their state's honor … and were too late to do anything except stand around since the Missourians had already got tired of waiting and gone home. Missouri Governor Boggs and Governor Lucas quarreled over where the true border lay. In the end, the U.S. Marshals intervened to keep the peace. At last in 1849-1850, the US Supreme Court decided to retain the old official Sullivan Line between Iowa and Missouri. Large, cast iron pillars were

driven into the ground every ten miles to the Des Moines River to mark the boundary. A few survive today.

Whiskey Rebellion

No one likes to pay taxes, and early Americans hated the idea with a passion. So when US Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton persuaded Congress to impose a tax on distilled spirits in 1791, he found himself with a rebellion on his hands. The new federal government needed revenue, not only to run the country, but to pay off debts incurred during the Revolutionary War. Since a national income tax wasn't yet in the cards, Hamilton felt it necessary to levy taxes on goods including a very unpopular "whiskey" tax which frontier farmers in western Pennsylvania felt was unfair. Many of these small-scale farmers grew rye and corn. Distilling the grain into whiskey allowed indefinite storage and gave them a more reliable source of income than shipping the harvest east. The farmers expressed their displeasure by refusing to pay the tax.

Whilst US President George Washington sought a peaceful solution and Hamilton urged military force, the farmers continued to ramp up the hostilities in the Whiskey Rebellion. In 1794, a group of 400 rebels marched on Pittsburgh and burned the home of John Neville, a tax collection supervisor. Washington was left with no choice. Concerned the rebellion might spread to other states and end in the destruction of the federal government, he mustered a sizable militia. Under the command of Hamilton and Henry Lee, governor of Virginia, 13,000 troops marched into western Pennsylvania to put down the rebels. When Hamilton and Lee's militia reached Pittsburgh, the rebels fled and the Whiskey Rebellion ended. About 150 men suspected of being involved were arrested, but freed for lack of evidence. Two were tried, convicted of treason, and pardoned by Washington. In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson, who had never agreed with the tax, repealed it.

Buchanan's Blunder

In 1857-58, the so-called "Mormon problem" caused the conflict known as the Utah War or Buchanan's Blunder, much to the eventual embarrassment of the US President. The Church of Latter-Day Saints faced a great deal of persecution in the United States. Members were eventually forced to head west to establish a sanctuary in Utah. About 55,000 Mormons occupied the Salt Lake City, and Brigham Young acted as territorial governor. Against federal law, Young governed the territory as a theocracy, allowing church doctrine to take precedence over civil matters. In the years since the Mormons had settled in the Great Salt Lake Valley, tensions between the church and the US government continued to rise over such issues as polygamy. Matters came to a head when hostilities against three federal judges by members of the church caused them to flee Utah, claiming they'd barely escaped with their lives (an exaggeration).

To deal with the problem, President James Buchanan appointed a new territorial governor and sent him to Utah accompanied by 2,500 U.S. Army troops. The commander of the expedition was given strict instructions not to attack citizens except in self-defence. Unfortunately, no one thought to inform the Mormons. In response to what they believed was an invasion, Utah mustered the militia and

began collecting firearms, ammunition, and food stores. Citizen drills were established. A reconnaissance unit sent to infiltrate the US Army camp brought back renewed fears of mass hangings and abuse of Mormon women. The severely outmanned and under supplied Utah government declared martial law and prepared for the worst. Young told militia commanders to avoid bloodshed if possible. In the meantime, the advance force of 1,250 US Army troops were harassed by the Utah militia and mounted scouts, who did not return fire even when shot at. Their orders were not to engage, but hinder and delay. Despite the reluctance to strike first, injuries and fatalities happened on both sides. Eventually, winter set in, bringing the "war" to a halt. By spring 1858, Buchanan's requests for further funding for the "Utah Expedition" were ignored by Congress. Mormon sympathies and the slavery debate made the action in Utah unimportant and unpopular. The Army was recalled. For the Mormons, life returned to normal. And while Buchanan's Blunder had the unintended effect of generating sympathy for the Mormons, it also ended Young's control over the Utah territory.

Strange Civil War Weapons

The American Civil War (1861-1865) occurred during an age of Industrial Revolution, when some of history's wackiest inventions were made. It's no surprise creative geniuses of the day tried to come up with outside-the-box methods of killing the enemy. All of the 10 strange weapons on this list were available to US and/or Confederate soldiers.

Winans Steam Gun
Allegedly capable of flinging 300 rounds of ammunition per minute from its steam powered revolving drum for 100 yards, this centrifugal gun came into prominence during the 1861 Baltimore Riots. Although erroneously linked to industrialist Ross Winans, the 5-ton gun was actually invented and built by Charles S. Dickenson, who had brought his working model to Baltimore, Maryland to give a demonstration to the City Council. When violence and riots broke out in Baltimore between secessionists and the US government, and the city feared invasion by federal forces, the gun was commandeered by the police. After the crisis ended, Dickenson tried to smuggle the gun out of Baltimore, but it was captured by federal troops and eventually ended up displayed as a war prize in Massachusetts.

Harmonica Pistol
An attempt to create a multi-shot pistol by adding a horizontal magazine—some variations held up to 10 percussion cap or pinfire cartridges—the harmonica gun was probably invented and certainly patented by a Frenchman, J. Jarre of Paris, between 1859-1862. No musical instruments were involved. The name came from the shape of the magazine, and the weapon was also called the "slide gun." An early manufacturer in the US was Jonathan Browning, father of firearms designer John Moses Browning. While looking like the sort of weapon a steampunk James Bond might carry, the harmonica gun proved too impractical for wide adoption. The user had to manually adjust the sliding magazine to center each cartridge under the hammer for every shot. Like VHS v Betamax, the much easier and faster shooting revolver finally won the day. The mechanism wasn't limited to pistols—famed Texas Senator Sam Houston owned a percussion rifle (by Henry Gross) using a harmonica slide, which is on display at the National Museum of American History.

Coffee Mill Gun
Many people have heard of the Gatling gun. The "devil's coffee mill," "coffee grinder" gun, "army in a box" or Agar gun was a similar hand-cranked machine gun firing .58 caliber cartridges at 120 rounds per minute. Having seen a demonstration in 1861, President Abraham Lincoln is said to have been quite enamored with the weapon. The US War Department ultimately acquired a total of 60 coffee mill guns. However, field commanders thought they wasted too much precious ammunition. The single barrel became quickly overheated during use, and the hopper-fed cartridges often jammed, making the guns impractical. Due to these problems, the guns saw little action during the war. A few were deployed to guard potentially vulnerable targets like bridges.

Double-Barrel Cannon
By joining two separate cannon barrels, the 1862 designer of this oddity, now a landmark in Athens, Georgia, believed the 6-pounder weapon capable of firing a devastating round of chain-shot—two cannonballs connected by a length of chain. The idea was both barrels would fire simultaneously, sending the chain-shot hurtling among enemy combatants. Unfortunately, the first field test of the prototype proved a disaster. The barrels did not fire at exactly the same time, causing the chain-shot to fly wildly off target or the chain to break. Regardless, the gun was kept by the city to use as a defensive weapon during the war, though it never saw action. The American Guns team recreated the double-barrel cannon on this episode. The idea certainly wasn't new—in the 17th century English Civil War, a double-barrel cannon named Elizabeth-Henry belonged to the Earl of Northhampton's regiment.

Pike
Dating from antiquity, the pike is a two-handed infantry weapon consisting of a wooden shaft about 6-10 feet in length tipped with a sharp steel point. In an age of gunpowder and projectile weapons, one might assume the pike was obsolete. However, due to the Confederacy's difficulty manufacturing or importing guns, cheaper and easier to make pikes were sometimes distributed to soldiers. Most were the standard model, but a few had specialized blades. In 1862, Georgia Governor Joe Brown ordered 10,000 pikes to arm local troops—some topped with three blades in a cloverleaf pattern and others with a retractable spring-loaded blade. The South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Military Museum has an example of a "Joe Brown's pike." You can view the video above. Needless to say, soldiers didn't exactly embrace the pike, not when they were facing US troops armed with rifles.

Armoured Railroad Car
To defend railway bridges against Confederate attacks and saboteurs, the US government ordered experimental armoured railroad cars (also called "ironclads" or an "ironclad battery"): baggage cars or boxcars fitted with thick iron sheets on the top and sides, and hooked to the front and behind a locomotive. Portholes in the sides and front/rear of the car allowed the fifty armed men inside to return fire, or aim a small cannon or pivot gun at the enemy. At least a few different models were made, including a variation consisting of a flat car with an iron shell built over it. In 1864, a lucky Confederate cannon shot destroyed an armoured railroad car. Another was struck by a shell in 1865, causing injuries to the men inside. Some were captured by Confederate troops.

Coal Torpedo
In the 19th century, a "torpedo" meant any kind of bomb, so the "coal torpedo" designed by Thomas Courtenay in 1864 was exactly as advertised—a gunpowder bomb disguised by genuine pieces of anthracite coal and deployed as a weapon of sabotage by the Confederacy's Secret Service Corps against steam powered Union vessels. The bombs were loaded or smuggled into coal supplies in ships. When workers stoked the furnace, the bombs exploded. Two ships are known to have been damaged by coal torpedo detonations. Another sabotage attempt was made against the Springfield Armory by putting a timing fuse on a coal torpedo,

but the bomb was discovered in time. Broader use of the coal torpedo came about after the war, when ship owners committed insurance fraud by blowing up their own vessels. A variation of the coal torpedo loaded with plastic explosives was employed in WWII.

Short's Greek Fire

Greek fire, the legendary weapon of the ancient world, was revived during the Civil War. For example, the failed Confederate sabotage plot to burn New York City with incendiary devices failed in part because most of the conspirators were unfamiliar with the Greek fire-fueled fuses. At the start of the war, Levi Short, a Philadelphia inventor, approached President Abraham Lincoln and demonstrated his new device: a rocket using his patented "solidified Greek fire." While Lincoln wasn't very impressed by Short's demonstration, US Rear Admiral David Porter ordered 10 gross for his Mississippi River ships to try out in action against Vicksburg. The rockets performed as advertised—parts of the city went up in flames, but the fires didn't last long—the chemicals burned about 7 minutes—not enough to do much damage. Porter deemed the invention "a humbug."

Porter Turret Rifle

Or the "many-chambered-cylinder firearm"—an unsuccessful 1850s attempt by T.P. Porter to upgrade the single-shot gun. The turret rifle's concept seems feasible: rounds of .48 caliber ammunition were placed in a wheel-shaped 9-round magazine, and as each shot was fired, the wheel rotated to place the next round into position. Unfortunately, in practice that meant for every bullet aimed forward toward the enemy, another bullet was aimed backward at the shooter. This made users nervous and the weapon didn't quite catch on in the general population, but personal weapons like these were carried by Civil War soldiers. Another variation sported a magazine holding 30 balls, gunpowder, and percussion caps. Rotating the turret loaded each chamber, ready for firing. Of course, a misfire or stray spark would make the whole magazine explode in the shooter's hand.

USS Alligator

In 1862, the US Navy launched its first submarine, the 47-foot long USS Alligator. Designed by French inventor Brutus de Villeroi, whose own government declined to build his marvelous machine, the Alligator was called a "submersible warship" and employed some cutting edge technology for its time, including an air purifying system and a lockout chamber allowing a diver to be deployed outside the submerged vessel. The US government kept the project top secret, intending to use it against Confederate ironclads. Alligator's first mission on the Appomattox River was a failure as the water wasn't deep enough. The sub was taken to the Navy Yard in Washington to be outfitted with a screw propeller. As Alligator was being towed to its next assignment (Charleston, South Carolina) when a huge storm forced the tow ship to cut the rope. Alligator sank to the bottom of the Graveyard of Ships off Cape Hatteras.

People Who Sold Out Their Own Kind

Traitors, hypocrites, cowards, liars… there are about a trillion different words for people who sell out their own kind, but there's one we can all agree on: assholes. Here are ten men who betrayed their own communities, big time:

Anthony Johnson
Johnson was an American plantation-owner who almost single-handedly introduced the evil of slavery to the US State of Virginia. Oh, and he was black! Not only was Johnson African through-and-through, he was an ex-slave himself. In 1621 he'd been snatched by slave traders and wound up working as an 'indentured servant' in Virginia. Now, while 'indentured servants' were basically slaves there was one important difference: when their contract expired or was bought out, they were free. That means all the beatings, forced labour and general awfulness had an end in sight—and owners were legally bound to honor it. Thanks to this system, Johnson was able to buy his freedom and eventually set up his own plantation. So when one of his 'servants' came to the end of his contract, Johnson let him go, right? Nope. He took the man to court and sued for his right to own him for life. The court agreed and, hey presto, suddenly slavery was de-facto legal in Virginia. Six years later, it was on the books and a whole depressing chapter of American history was ushered in—all thanks to one man who'd apparently never heard of 'solidarity'.

Jim West
As a member of the US House of Representatives, Jim West developed a track record for anti-homosexuality. What sort of track record? Well, he was a vocal supporter of a bill that would've banned gay people from working in schools, day care centers and State agencies; along with another one that would've made giving out pamphlets on HIV-protection illegal. West also signed a bill intended to criminalize teenagers who had sex or even touched each other. And he did all this while acting like the biggest man-whore in gay-history. In 2004, West was discovered to have a profile on the dating website Gay.com. When a newspaper splashed with the story, young boys began coming forward saying he'd seduced them—often in his office, on government time. West's career quickly exploded in his homophobic face, but only after he'd spent 20 years making life a living hell for other LGBT people.

Eleke Scherwitz
Scherwitz has the dubious distinction of being the only Jewish officer in the SS. Yes, that SS: the Nazi death machine that rounded up and murdered millions of Jews in one of the worst genocides in history. Now, Scherwtiz's story is nowhere as clear-cut as most on here. For one thing, when the Allies arrived, he claimed to be a concentration camp victim and spent the next three years helping the Allies round up escaped Nazis. It was only when he was spotted by a former inmate of the work camp he ran that he was put on trial for war crimes. But there's now some doubt over his role as a Nazi stooge. While it's undeniable he helped the SS commit atrocities, some argue he also saved thousands of Jews—a sort of undercover Oscar Schindler. So where does the truth lie? Was he a moral man

forced to make immoral choices; or a traitor who lied and killed to save his own skin? We'll probably never know.

Maurice Papon
Many French politicians turned traitor under Nazi occupation, but none got away with it for as long as Maurice Papon. Where others went into hiding or were put on trial, he clawed his way up the ladder of the post-war government—eventually being awarded the Legion d'honneur. It wasn't until 1981 that evidence of his collaboration emerged: his signature was uncovered on a set of papers ordering the deportation of over 1,600 French Jews to Drancy internment camp; a pit stop for those destined to be exterminated. For nearly twenty years the legal system dragged its heels, until Papon was finally put on trial in 1997 and convicted the following year. Because life is terminally unfair, he only served 4 years of his sentence before being released on humanitarian grounds—whereupon he promptly refused to die for another five years, and spent the remainder of his life loudly protesting his innocence and generally being an unrepentant idiot.

William Joyce
Speaking of unrepentant people, they don't come much more unrepentant than William Joyce. Born in America to an Irish father, Joyce's act of betrayal was to broadcast propaganda for the Nazis during World War II. Despite being a naturalized British citizen, Joyce was responsible for Germany's most-successful attempt to destroy the country's morale during the blitz. As Lord Haw Haw he'd come onto the radio and mouth-off about anything that came into his head—so long as it made the Allies look doomed. At the height of his fame, up to 18 million people would tune in to hear how the Britain was allegedly being steamrollered by the Nazis, creating a climate of uncertainty that could have led to surrender. When he was finally captured in Berlin, Joyce showed no hint of remorse. He eventually died as he had lived: a committed Nazi.

Omar Hammami
Hammami's betrayal of his people may not be the worst on this list, but it's certainly the funniest. An American citizen, Hammami radicalized himself and vanished off to Somalia to help the cause of global jihad. And by 'help' I mean 'release hilariously bad rap songs'. That's right: rap songs. In an attempt to corrupt other Americans into joining his one-man mission to destroy popular music, Hammami began recording songs about how terrorist-life totes beats thug-life y'all. If it weren't for his involvement with several fatal attacks on UN troops over the years, it would be tempting to feel sorry for his poor, deluded man. As it is, Hammami's devotion to jihad has led to the deaths of innocent people and contributed to the on-going conflict in Somalia. But, on a humorous note, that hasn't stopped other jihadists from claiming he doesn't even write his own lyrics. In other words, not only is he a terrorist, but he's a talentless one to boot.

Imran Firasat
While Hammami was making his transition from Christian to Muslim, Imran Firasat was going in the opposite direction. Originally from Pakistan, Firasat fled

to Spain after converting to Christianity and receiving death threats from neighbors. Understandably, this left him with a deep antipathy towards his former countrymen. Less-understandably, it also left him unable to grasp the concept of hypocrisy. One of Firasat's first acts as a Spanish citizen was to organize a petition to ban the Koran. Since that would effectively outlaw an entire religion, the government naturally declined. Not one to be put off by things like 'common sense', Firasat instead turned his energies to producing a bargain bucket knock-off of 'Innocence of Muslims'. When someone pointed out that producing a racist film might possibly constitute a hate crime, Firasat declared his right to free speech was being violated. A man who tried to ban a whole religion complained when the authorities tried to criticize his home movies! There's a name for that sort of behaviour …

Fikret Abdic

You've probably heard of the Bosnian Genocide. Briefly: during the catastrophic meltdown of the former-Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the Serbian Army decided to wipe out as many Bosnian Muslims as possible. Into this madness stepped power-hungry tycoon and ethnic Bosnian-Muslim Fikret Abdic, who decided it was the perfect time to realize his childhood dream of being king of the playground. While death, destruction and misery swirled around him, Abdic grabbed a handful of followers and annexed a small chunk of land to start his own republic. Known as the Autonomous Province of Western Bosnia, Abdic's imaginary state instantly allied itself with the same Serb Army currently engaged in a massacre of his people. Because there's no point selling out if you don't go all the way, he responded by setting up local concentration camps, where Bosnian-Muslims were tortured, sexually assaulted and murdered. Eventually, the Bosnian army wiped out his non-state, but not before Abdic escaped to Croatia. He wasn't arrested until 2002, whereupon he was convicted of the deaths of 121 civilians. Because war criminals can apparently get time off for good behavior, he was released in 2012 and is now free.

Magnificent But Little-Known Structures

Human civilization has created and built many amazing structures, and these monumental legacies left by our ancestors fill all man with pride. Unfortunately, only a few of these amazing structures are world-renowned or even recognized. Most have heard of some of the greatest monuments in the world, such as the Parthenon, the Colosseum and the Pyramids of Giza, but this list is an ambitious attempt to highlight some of the lesser known historical structures that many people may not be aware of. Not all of these structures can be dated back to the ancient world, but they are some of the most amazing creations of our ancestors, despite the lack of popularity on a global scale.

Incallajta

Bolivia might not be well known for its rich history and treasures, but it is indeed a nation bursting with Inca history. One of the least known, but most astounding Inca sites is Incallajta, just a few hours east of Cochabamba. This fortress community lies at the mouth of a scenic valley. Before the Spanish conquest, the Incas had expanded into the Cochabamba valley because of its rich agricultural potential. They built complex systems of roads and fortresses, and Incallajta was a strategic effort to further Inca expansion toward the Amazon. This fortress was built originally by Inca Tupac Yupanqui around 1465 to repel invaders from the lower tropical regions. This remote fortress has not been well preserved, and has only recently come under the protection of the Bolivian government, through the University of San Simon in Cochabamba.

Temple of Hercules Victor

The Temple of Hercules Victor is an ancient edifice in the Forum Boarium in Rome, and it's a round temple in classic Greek peripteral design. It dates back to the 2nd century and it consists of a cella within a concentric ring of twenty Corinthian columns. The columns supported the ancient architrave (upper section joining the columns) and the roof. Unfortunately, both of these have disappeared, but the cella wall and 19 of the 20 original columns still remain to this day. The specific structure has a very significant historical importance, since it's the earliest surviving marble building in all Rome. There are no accurate sources so we can't be absolutely certain who dedicated this temple and what it was called originally, but it is believed to be connected with the legend of Herakles and Cacus, which is the main reason it is known today as the Temple of Hercules Victor.

Temples of Mỹ Sơn

The Temples of Mỹ Sơn, in Vietnam is one of the most amazing groups of ancient structures, but unfortunately it is largely unknown to the masses, especially in the Western world. At one time it consisted of more than 70 temples and it's one of the most important temple complexes of Buddhism. Dating as far back as the 4th century, Mỹ Sơn was an important center of knowledge, spiritualism, and politics for the Champa culture. In a lush green valley in central Vietnam under the imposing glare of Cat's Tooth Mountain rests one of the most important archaeological sites of the ancient kingdom of Champa, which controlled what is

now contemporary Vietnam until the 13th century.In 1937, French scholars began to restore the temples at Mỹ Sơn. Unfortunately many historical buildings were destroyed during the Vietnam War when American aircraft were bombing the region. The surrounding area is to this day highly dangerous for tourists and visitors through the presence of unexploded land mines.

Temple of Poseidon at Sounion

The sanctuary of Poseidon at Sounion is one of the most important sanctuaries in the world, yet very few outside Greece know about it. Sporadic, finds point to the conclusion that the site was inhabited in the prehistoric period but there is no evidence of religious practice at such an early date. The sanctuary of Sounion is first mentioned in the Odyssey as the place where Menelaos stopped during his return from Troy to bury his helmsman, Phrontes Onetorides. The finds of the 7th century B.C. are numerous and prove the existence of an organized cult on two points of the promontory at the southern edge where the temenos of Poseidon was situated. Today the temple of Poseidon at Sounion is a lesser known cultural spot, but ironically a better known romantic spot for young couples that want to enjoy the amazing view and full moon of August.

Chogha Zanbil

Chogha Zanbil is an enormous ziggurat located in Iran and is one of the most impressive monuments of modern Khuzestan. It was built about 1250 B.C. by King Untash-Napirisha to honor the great god Inshushinak. The site is more than three-thousand years old, and is in remarkably good condition. It is also one of the only ziggurats built outside of Mesopotamia. Ziggurats were not used in the same way as most Western Temples—they weren't meant for priests to reside or perform rituals in. Instead, a ziggurat was viewed as a resting place for the Gods. By building a ziggurat near a major city, the rulers could ensure that the gods stayed near and protected the people. In 1979, Chogha Zanbil became the first Iranian site ever (at that time) to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Jetavanarama Dagoba

The Jetavanarama Dagoba, which was the pet project of King Mahasena, is the largest building at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. Originally it was no less than 122 meters high, making it—at the time—the third tallest structure on earth after the pyramids at Dharshur and Giza in Egypt. The Jetavana Dagoba must have dominated the ancient city, just as it dominates the ruins today, even though its height has diminished to about 75 meters. But whereas for centuries its dome was encrusted with vegetation and its spire broken, it is now being restored with the support of UNESCO. If somehow Jetavanarama Dagoba looks familiar to you, it's probably because you remember it being the beautiful backdrop of Duran Duran's classic music video "Save A Prayer."

Ruins of Nalanda

Nalanda was a Buddhist university established in A.D. 450, and was the longest running university in Indian history. Among its many notable guests were Buddha and Mahavira, and at its zenith it accommodated over 10,000 students and over 2,000 faculties. This place saw the rise and fall of many empires and

emperors who contributed to the development of the University. However, it was destroyed by Turkish Muslim invaders in 1193, when the students and teachers were massacred and the massive university library was burnt down. Nowadays, all that remains are extensive ruins that are spread over an area of 14 hectares, reminding the visitors of the greatness of a glorious past.

Vézelay Abbey

The Benedictine abbey church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine at Vézelay in Burgundy is one of the most important surviving monuments of architecture and sculpture of the Romanesque period. It was a pilgrimage church, allegedly holding the relics of St. Mary Magdalen to whom it is dedicated. The early twelfth-century building is notable for its groin-vaulted nave and narthex, and for its remarkable sculpture on portals and capitals. The choir dates from the end of the twelfth century and is an important witness to the adoption of the Gothic style in Burgundy. The sculpture on the outer facade was largely destroyed during the French Revolution, but fragments of it still survive in the cloister.

Temple of Hephaestus (Theseion)

The Temple of Hephaestus was built in 450 B.C. and was dedicated to the god of fire, Hephaestos. The temple is located in Thission, one of the most touristic and trendy areas of Athens today, which attracts over 10 million visitors a year. Theseion is described by UNESCO as one of the best preserved ancient temples in the world, which really makes you wonder how it still remains widely unknown outside Greece, mainly because of the lack of promotion and motivation from the Greek authorities.Made from marble, the temple stands tall and grandiose. It was built on the top of a small hill with 34 columns and the Doric style temple is a must-see monument when you are touring around the Ancient Agora of Athens. This area was the hub of commercial, political and social activity during the Golden Century of Pericles, creating a meeting place for the Ancient Athenian citizens.

Meteora

The amazing thing that makes Meteora so special is the monasteries on the top of the rock towers. In a region of almost inaccessible sandstone peaks, the area of Meteora was originally settled by monks who lived in caves within the rocks during the 11th Century. It is (fairly so) considered a unique achievement of magnificent architecture and human creativity; on the one hand the wonder of nature with huge inaccessible cliffs and on the other hand the miracle of the man who managed to tame nature and build in such impossible-to-reach places. The buildings of the monasteries began in the 14th century and up to the 16th century there were 24 monasteries operating. The monasteries were not only religious centers but academic and artistic as well; they attracted not only the deeply religious, but philosophers, poets, painters and the deep thinkers of Greece during the Byzantine Empire's reign. During the Ottoman occupation, it was the monasteries that kept alive Greek culture and traditions in the area. It is believed that if it was not for the monasteries, Hellenic culture and religion would have disappeared and modern Greece would be just a reflection of the Ottoman Empire, with very little knowledge of its roots and history. Today only six of the monasteries are active.

More Extremely Bizarre Phobias

We probably all suffer from a minor phobia or two, but some people's lives are virtually debilitated by their fears. This list looks at ten more of the most unusual phobias that afflict people in modern days. If you suffer from any of these phobias, be sure to tell us about it in the comments. For those interested, here is the previous list of bizarre phobias.

Agyrophobia Fear of Crossing the Street
Agyrophobics have a fear of crossing streets, highways and other thoroughfares, or a fear of thoroughfares themselves. This, of course, makes it very difficult to live comfortably in a city. The word comes from the Greek gyrus, which means turning or whirling as the phobic avoids the whirl of traffic. The phobia covers several categories, wherein sufferers may fear wide roads specifically down to suburban single lane streets, and can also include fearing jaywalking or crossing anywhere on a street, even a designated intersection. This phobia is considered independent from the fear of cars.

Mageirocophobia Fear of Cooking
The bizarre fear of cooking is called mageirocophobia, which comes from the Greek word mageirokos, which means a person skilled in cooking. This disorder can be debilitating and potentially lead to unhealthy eating if one lives alone. Sufferers of mageirokos can feel extremely intimidated by people with skills in cooking, and this intimidation and feeling of inadequacy is probably the root cause of the disorder for many.

Pediophobia Fear of Dolls
Pediophobia is the irrational fear of dolls. Not just scary dolls – ALL dolls. Strictly speaking, the fear is a horror of a "false representation of sentient beings" so it also usually includes robots and mannequins, which can make it decidedly difficult to go shopping. This phobia should not be confused with pedophobia or pediaphobia, which is the fear of children. Sigmund Freud believed the disorder may spring from a fear of the doll coming to life and roboticist Masahiro Mori expanded on that theory by stating that the more human-like something becomes, the more repellent its non-human aspects appear.

Deipnophobia Fear of Dinner Conversation
Now admittedly some dinner conversations can be very awkward, but some people are so terrified of the idea of speaking to another person over dinner that they avoid dining out situations. In times gone by there were strict rules of etiquette that helped a person to deal with these situations – but they are (sadly) mostly forgotten. In today's society in which rules and formality are out the window, it is possible that the more controlled nature of a dinner party may lie partly behind this phobia.

Eisoptrophobia Fear of Mirrors
Eisoptrophobia is a fear of mirrors in the broad sense, or more specifically the fear of being put into contact with the spiritual world through a mirror. Sufferers

experience undue anxiety even though they realize their fear is irrational. Because their fear often is grounded in superstitions, they may worry that breaking a mirror will bring bad luck or that looking into a mirror will put them in contact with a supernatural world inside the glass. After writing this list I realized that I suffer from a minor form of this disorder in that I don't like to look into a mirror in the evening when I am alone for fear of seeing someone (or something) behind me.

Demonophobia Fear of Demons

Demonophobia is an abnormal and persistent fear of evil supernatural beings in persons who believe such beings exist and roam freely to cause harm. Those who suffer from this phobia realize their fear is excessive or irrational. Nevertheless, they become unduly anxious when discussing demons, when venturing alone into woods or a dark house, or when watching films about demonic possession and exorcism.

Pentheraphobia Fear of Mother-in-Law

Of all the phobias on this list, pentheraphobia is probably the most common. It is, as stated above, the fear of one's mother-in-law. I am sure that most married people have, at one time or another, suffered from this terrible fear. This fear is one that is so common in Western society that it frequently appears in movies and other forms of entertainment. Of the many available therapies for this illness of the mind, divorce seems to be the most popular. A related phobia to pentheraphobia is novercaphobia which is a fear of your stepmother – the most famous sufferer of which is Cinderella.

Arachibutyrophobia Fear of Peanut Butter Sticking to the Roof of your Mouth

I must say that finding information on this disorder is extremely difficult – which does make me wonder if it is perhaps the figment of an over-active imagination, but it is definitely bizarre and fairly well known so it seems to deserve a place here. This disorder seems to be a fear that is quite easily worked around: don't buy peanut butter. However, for a child who is forced to eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every day, one can see how it might cause severe trauma in later life. Here is the testimony of one alleged sufferer: "Whenever I'm around peanut butter I start to sweat excessively and my body starts convulsing. The roof of my mouth becomes coarse and itchy. I can't live with this fear anymore. My thirst for peanut butter must be quenched without me going into a full blown panic attack."

Cathisophobia Fear of Sitting

Cathisophobia (sometimes spelled with a 'k') is a terror of sitting down. This disorder can be sparked off by a particularly nasty case of hemorrhoids but in some serious cases it can be due to physical abuse relating to sitting on sharp or painful objects. Sometimes, the sitting fear is due to some punishment in the school days, or it may be an indication of some other phobia like sitting in front of elite and influential people. Cathisophobia is characterized by sweating, heavy or short breathe, and anxiety.

Automatonophobia Fear of a Ventriloquist's Dummy

I think we can all see the merit in this disorder – the very act of ventriloquism seems particularly nasty to me. It involves a man with his hand up a dolls butt which he then proceeds to talk to. Sufferers of automatonophobia need not seek treatment – it is a perfectly valid reaction to a perfectly revolting concept. I think that is enough said on this topic.