

The Oddest Weapons Ever Used

War is as old as human history. It has been fought so many times in so many ways that one might think that every strategy and weapon has been tried. Well, think again. The history of war, especially in the last century, is dotted with some of the oddest weapons imaginable. Read a sampling of the most ridiculous, outlandish, amateurish and even childish strategies and weapons ever employed.

ES LEBE DER FÜHRER!
ES LEBE DEUTSCHLAND.

Graffiti

One of the tactics used by both sides of the conflict during World War II was propaganda. Psychological operations were recognized as a critical factor in conducting a successful war. One of the popular tactics that the Allies turned against their Nazi enemies was graffiti.

Partisans were especially fond of leaving behind these messages. Spray-painting an anti-fascist slogan on a prominent wall or German vehicle involved relatively low risk to one's life and provided a wonderful opportunity to vent one's hatred of the Nazis while lifting the morale of the populace.

Allied espionage planners were quick to acknowledge the value of graffiti as a weapon of war. To assist the effort, they began smuggling large quantities of stencils into occupied territories. Unfortunately, the plans did not work as well as was hoped. It proved too easy to remove the graffiti.

However, English intelligence officials were not about to be stymied by such a minor setback. They invested a lot of effort and money into producing a new type of paint that was ammonia-based. The chemical would etch itself into glass surfaces and prove impossible to clean off. To fool the German guards, the paint was packaged in toothpaste tubes for smuggling over the border. As soon as it arrived, the indelible graffiti paint became a smashing hit among the resistance.

There was just one catch. One delivery of the graffiti paint was mistakenly shipped to the North African front. Allied troops stationed there had no knowledge of the covert operation and mistook the innocuous-looking tubes of toothpaste for the genuine product. The results of this blunder remained deeply etched in the memories—and teeth—of the hapless soldiers.

Itching

One of the greatest nightmares of Allied military leaders during World War II, certainly during the early years of the war, was the U-boat. The German



Nazi propaganda graffiti on a wall in occupied Netherlands.



US paratroopers dropping into France during Operation Dragoon, 15 August 1944.



French partisans arrested by militia members. Their fate was not pleasant.

submarines terrorized their shipping lanes. They succeeded in their furtive attacks on both military and merchant shipping with murderous efficiency. They remained hidden

beneath the waves and by the time a ship detected their presence it was usually too late.

Allied strategists were constantly looking for ways to take the battle to the U-boats rather than letting the battle come to them. Not always were the ideas they concocted very effective. In one desperate attempt they came up with a strategy that's a real head-scratcher. Chemists working for the British espionage department developed and mass-produced a powder that was a powerful skin irritant.

The powder was composed of tiny hairs that would trigger severe itching on contact with skin. England's Special Operations Executive (SOE) had the powder smuggled into Nazi-occupied territories in containers that were labeled as ordinary talcum powder. These were then distributed to partisans and resistance groups who made sure they were put to the greatest effect.

The resistance used their network of contacts to deliver the powder to laundromats and clothing factories that serviced German soldiers and sailors. There the offending powder was used to treat uniforms and other garments. Janitors working at the German U-boat bases also smuggled the powder in with them to sprinkle on the beds they were making and the private clothes they folded.

It is surprising how widespread this operation was. An SOE memo dated October 1943 proudly informed Prime Minister Winston Churchill that over 25,000 German sailors were exposed to the powder. Many of them had to be hospitalized for treatment. At least one case is known in which a U-boat was forced to return to port after the entire crew reported terrible itching. They were convinced that they were suffering from an outbreak of severe dermatitis.

In Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, SOE agents slipped the powder into envelopes that German servicemen mailed back home. Now the Nazi postal system was being used to advance the Allied effort and allow the folks back home to enjoy a taste of the war...



British chemists developed a powder that is an extreme skin irritant and creates a terrible itching sensation.



Illustration of a German U-boat.

Mosquitoes

During the course of World War II, both the Allies and their enemies invested tremendous effort developing unconventional weapons, most notably the atom bomb. Other efforts, however, did not work out exactly as hoped. One example was the Nazi plan to transform mosquitoes into a deadly biological weapon.

Discussion of this idea began in January 1942, one month after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and precipitated the entrance of the United States into the global conflict. Heinrich Himmler, the infamous director of the SS and chief architect of the Final Solution, ordered German scientists to create a special institution to study the possibility of employing insects to spread disease rapidly, which could potentially paralyze attacking forces in a very short time.

The program was meant to be a highly-classified military secret. The Germans