Fliegeroffizier (Flying Officer) Walther Meyer gracefully banked the Messerschmitt 109 and pointed its sharp nose south. The squadron of Heinkel 111s, each weighted down with 5000 kilos of hideous incendiary bombs, would now have to continue on the final leg to Coventry, without the comforting presence of the five fighter escorts. The 109s were handicapped by a limiting 560 kilometre range and having just passed over the landmark village of Chipping Norton, the pilots knew it was time to turn for home.

The Fliegstaffelfuhrer (Squadron Leader) insisted that returning Messerschmitt 109s spread out, as they winged their way home over the English Southern Counties and seek out targets of opportunity, including RAF bases, trains, military convoys, industrial plants and coastal shipping.

Having surprisingly encountered no opposition thus far from Spitfires or Hurricanes, Walther Meyer was conscious that his one 20 mm canon and two 7.9 mm machine guns remained fully loaded. He was also aware his Fliegstaffelfuhrer directed harsh words towards any 109 pilot who returned with unspent ammunition.

Accordingly, Meyer throttled back the big 1800 hp Daimler Benz 605D inline engine and descended to 600 metres. Avoiding the anti-aircraft defences surrounding the London area, he weaved his way east of Tunbridge Wells, hoping to spot a target prior to crossing the Kent coast near Dungeness.

And there it was! A bright orange Fordson tractor, standing out in clear contrast to the chocolate coloured ploughed field in which it was working.

Meyer kicked the rudder bar and pushed the control column forward, at the same time thrusting the throttle into the wide open position. The unfortunate tractor driver remained totally unaware of the death swooping down upon him. Assailed by a fusillade of white hot bullets and cannon shells, within seconds there remained only a pyre of the smouldering remains of the Fordson and its operator.

As he zoomed over an approaching high ground, Fliegeroffizier Walther Meyer could not believe his luck! Dead ahead was yet another orange Fordson. Within half a minute, a column of smoke marked another ‘win’ for the laughing Meyer as he urged his Messerschmitt 109 across The Channel in the direction of home. Not only two kills to his credit, but not a Spitfire or Hurricane in sight! And surely only the Brits would be stupid enough to have bright orange tractors in wartime!

The Fordson

Henry Ford introduced his Fordson Model F in 1917, designed by Bulgarian immigrant Eugene Farkas. Unlike nearly all other tractors of the era, the Model F was a frame-less unit construction. The engine block, gear box and rear differential were joined rigidly together, thus creating an immensely strong unit, which was not subjected to the torsional flexing of chassis type tractors.
It is sufficient to state that the 20 hp tractor performed ‘adequately.’ But there were two reasons why, by the mid 1920s, the Fordson F had achieved the title of the world’s top selling tractor. Firstly, it sold for around half the price of similarly powered tractors. Secondly, it was produced in such vast numbers that they were readily available in most farming areas around the world. By 1923 production topped 100,000 per annum. Indeed the British government placed an order for 6000 units and a further 26000 were exported to The Soviet Union.

In a surprise move, in 1928–29 production of Fordson tractors was transferred from the US to Cork in Ireland and then to Dagenham in England. The Model F was upgraded, but in actual fact little changed, to become the 24 hp Model N. The solemn grey colour was changed to a more attractive blue with either red or orange wheels.

By 1937 Fordson sales entered a period of decline. International Harvester, Massey Harris, Oliver and others were offering better and more modern tractors. A concerned Fordson marketing team decided that a lustrous new colour scheme would likely give a boost to sales. Bright orange was selected! It is doubtful if this resulted in increased sales, except to the British government, which in 1939 placed an order for 3000 of the orange tractors, in order to bolster the war time ‘Ploughing Up Campaign’. This was aimed at increasing farm output, necessary to counter the prevailing wartime food shortages.

By the following year, particularly in the south of England, the farming landscape was significantly embellished by hundreds of gaily coloured Fordson Model N tractors. This unfortunately coincided with the arrival of swastika emblazoned Luftwaffe Heinkels, Dorniers and Junkers and their marauding Messerschmitt escorts.

It became a regular occurrence for these innocuous and utterly defenceless tractors and their unsuspecting operators to be blown to smithereens by the German fighter aircraft. Accordingly, His Majesty’s War Office held a special meeting decreeing that henceforth, during the wartime emergency, all Fordson tractors would be painted a dull dark green in order they blend in with the rural landscape.

As a result, the mortality rate of British tractor drivers went into a steep decline.

World War I and Heinrich Lanz

The giant German tractor and farm machinery manufacturer Heinrich Lanz A.G., experienced its first association with military affairs during the latter years of World War I. This was the era in which Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin’s airships were converted into bomb carrying flying machines, capable of transporting to, and dropping bombs on any European capital city.

While historians generally refer to these airships as ‘Zeppelins’, it is often forgotten (or indeed unknown) that the Mannheim firms of Lanz and Schutte created a partnership to design and manufacture an alternative airship, which proved to be considerably technically more advanced than the Zeppelins.

Unlike the rigid canvass enshrouded metal outer frame of the Zeppelins, which encased the giant hydrogen gas bags, the Lanz-Schutte used an innovative design of laminated timber framework. The lighter material resulted in a much increased carrying capacity. Accordingly, the 143 metre long Lanz-Schutte had a gas capacity in excess of 26,000 cubic metres which enabled a lifting capacity of 8000 kilograms.

Three crew-carrying gondolas were strung below the cigar shaped frame, each supporting a Maybach 240 hp engine with a pusher propeller, providing a cruising speed of 90 km per hour at around 2500 metres.

World War II and Lanz Bulldogs

By the outbreak of World War II in 1939, Lanz Bulldog tractors were sales leaders in Germany and highly respected around the world (including Australia) for their simplicity of design and dependability. The single cylinder two-stroke engine...
featured only five moving parts and could be fuelled with low
grade and inexpensive naphtha or crude oil.

Owing to the low compression ratio of five to one, it was
necessary to pre-heat the hot bulb region of the combustion
chamber with a blow lamp, in order for the engine to commence
firing.

This perhaps tedious feature was to prove a godsend for the
Third Reich forces during the calamitous Eastern Front campaign,
which endured from June 1941 until May 1945, involving
central and northern Europe and in later stages the Balkans and
Germany.

Basically, when Hitler’s Luftwaffe failed to overwhelm Great
Britain during the Battle of Britain (and this when Britain stood
alone as America had not yet entered the conflict), he turned
his military might in the direction of Moscow, believing The
Soviet Union to be a soft target. In this he was to be proved
horrendously wrong!

The battles on The Eastern Front between the Allied forces
and the German war machine constituted the largest military
confrontations in history. An estimated 30 million lives were lost,
many of them civilians.

Appalling conditions were experienced during the long
winter months, with temperatures dropping to minus 50°C. In
addition to the legions of Wehrmacht (Germany army) personnel
who froze to death, many being equipped with only tropical
uniforms, machinery could also freeze solid.

For example, crews of the fearsome 62 tonne Tiger Panzers
(tanks), with their devastating 88 mm guns, were obliged to
keep the big 690 hp Maybach engines operating 24 hours a day,
or else they froze rock solid.

Similarly, owing to an acute petrol shortage, which
determined that petrol powered Wehrmacht trucks could not be
left idling during the night, the drivers were required to maintain
a smouldering charcoal fire positioned immediately below their
vehicle’s engine! On the spot execution was the penalty for
allowing the fire to go out or should the truck catch alight!

Lanz Bulldog tractors, which could always be started owing
to the blow lamp pre-heating arrangement, were perhaps the
only engines that did not succumb to the freezing conditions.
They were put to a multitude of tasks during the Eastern Front
campaign, and were credited with being responsible for the
Luftwaffe fighter aircraft being able to continue to operate from
their mid-winter Russian located air bases.

The aircraft (including twin engined Messerschmitt 110s,
Junker JU87 Stuka dive bombers, Focke-wulf 190 ground attack
fighters and the high wing Henschel Hs 126s,) were cosseted in
heated temporary canvas hangers when not operational. Lanz
Bulldogs were used to clear the snow on the take-off runways
and pull the aircraft from their hangers.

Although plagued with aviation fuel shortages and being
subjected to the daunting task of engaging with the much
superior Soviet Lavochkin, Yakovlev and Polikarpov fighters, the
German aircraft put up a strong resistance until being finally
virtually driven from the Soviet dominated skies.

The Lanz Bulldogs were largely destroyed by the advancing
Soviets or abandoned by the fuel starved retreating Wehrmacht.

The aircraft (including twin engined Messerschmitt 110s,
Junker JU87 Stuka dive bombers, Focke-wulf 190 ground attack
}

A Wehrmacht Panzer Tiger pictured in Russia, during the
Eastern Front campaign.

IAN’S CLASSIC TRACTOR QUIZ

The quiz is designed for those who have an interest in
tractor history. Some of the questions are dead easy, others are
stinkers! But remember it is only a frivolous fun thing, and you
are invited to give it your best shot.

Good luck – Ian M Johnston.

1. Which one of these single cylinder two-stroke tractor
ingines was NOT a semi diesel —
   Field Marshall, McDonald Imperial or KL Bulldog?
2. Australian made Jelbart tractors were manufactured at —
   Bendigo, Ballarat or Benalla?
3. The Canadian Cockshutt 90 was infact a rebadged —
   Allis Chalmers, Oliver or Case?
4. The 50 hp diesel powered Sift imported into Australia
   from Europe during the late 1940s and early 1950s was
   manufactured in —
   Italy, Germany or France?
5. The Ansaldo TF70 crawler tractor was powered by a four
cylinder diesel —
   Fiat, Landini or Alfa Romeo engine?
6. The 1913 three wheeled Case was the model —
   1020, 12-25 or 18-32?
7. Harry Ferguson attached a plough to which make of car to
test his revolutionary mounted implement theory —
   Rolls Royce, Ford Model T or Humber?
8. A four wheel drive industrial loader of the 1960s known as
   The Crab was manufactured by which Australian company —
   Conquip, Pacific Ace or Cranvel?
9. The GM 270D engine in the Chamberlain Super 90 was —
naturally aspirated, turbo charged or supercharged?
10. In 1929 the Oliver Corporation purchased which opposition
   tractor company —
    Minneapolis Moline, Hart Parr or Holt?

See answers on page 72.