

## **Military Fakes You Won't Believe Fooled the World**

We've all met a liar -- the guy who claims he's been in a ton of street fights, or a secret agent. But nothing is worse than the fake war heroes -- dudes who want all of the glory and cool stories of people who served without the actual "risking their lives" part. It's not surprising that those ridiculous, compulsive liars exist. It's surprising that some of them managed to fool the world.

### **Overweight "Green Beret" Convinces Feds He Should Be in Charge of Disaster Recovery**

William James Clark liked to pretend to be a Green Beret. That doesn't mean he was good at it, mind you. In fact, we would have named Clark the worst impostor in the history of military fakers ... had his own government not believed him.

For instance, in 2010, an active-duty sergeant saw this whale of a man lumber by him in Army combat fatigues at a gun show. Of particular note were the special forces patch on his arm and his rank, which was captain. Also of note, he was claiming to be a member of the Army special forces group the Green Berets, yet he was wearing a black beret. Clark was hitting up an ATV representative for a special deal on a few for "his guys." To review, an overweight man in uniform indicating that he was an officer in the Green Berets was trying to convince someone to sell him ATVs for use in combat, all while wearing the wrong colored hat. He pretty much did stuff like this every day.

For instance, two years prior, Clark called up the Russian embassy to warn them that his unit was planning to assassinate Vladimir Putin. Because he's totally a Green Beret, you guys, and that's how they operate.

But it's all harmless fun, right? Just a random crazy guy who found a uniform ...

### Who Bought This?

On May 26, 2002, the captain of a tugboat lost control of the vessel and collided with the Interstate 40 bridge on the Arkansas River in Oklahoma. What followed was a scene of total chaos -- 14 people died in the disaster. Folks nearby and even the tugboat crew immediately began to render aid to those in the water. You know, like people are wont to do in an emergency. And then fake Green Beret Billy James Clark appeared on the scene.

Clark announced to approximately 20 local, state, and federal responding agencies on the scene that he was in charge. And they believed him. This included staff attached to organizations like the FBI, National Transportation Safety Board, and Army Corps of Engineers. For almost three days, Clark supervised rescue and recovery efforts, which for him meant things like going through the victims' personal effects, commandeering the use of a pickup truck from the local dealership (he told the owner that the National Guard had sent all their vehicles out of the country), and securing seven or eight rooms at a nearby hotel that only he'd use.

Oh, and it turned out that an actual Army officer died in the accident, so "Captain" Clark secured the soldier's briefcase, inside which he found a phone number for the man's widow. Naturally, he took it upon himself to give her the terrible news. You know, as a fellow officer.

Eventually he was called out by the mayor of a nearby small town, and of course Clark turned himself in and apologized for the ruckus caused by assuming command of a situation he was not remotely qualified to handle.

Oh, wait, no. He instead packed up his "borrowed" pickup and headed north to make a run for the border, which he successfully crossed, only to be caught days later and eventually sent to federal prison.

### **The Counter-Terrorism Instructor Who Knows Less About the Subject Than You**

If you spent time in a public school, there's a good chance you had at least one teacher who didn't have any idea what they were talking about (no matter how hard they work, it's rough when budget cuts force the gym teacher to muddle through a semester of botany). But if you're taking a class that deals with matters of life and death, you usually assume that you're listening to an expert. Which brings us to William "Bill" Hillar.

Hillar claimed to be a retired army colonel and (again) Green Beret, an expert with a Ph.D. who taught classes in counter-terrorism, human trafficking, and drug smuggling. He wasn't any of those things. You'd think he wouldn't get five minutes into his first lecture before somebody called him on his lies. You'd be wrong.

#### Who Bought This?

Hillar, who in his classes claimed that the Liam Neeson movie *Taken* was based on his life (he said his daughter died in the real incident), spent a decade spreading his "expertise" on the subject. From the late '90s, schools and employers lined up to throw money at Hillar to come give classes and workshops on the art of punching terrorists in the throat. And please keep in mind, he wasn't fooling a bunch of college freshmen with this stuff -- his students were mostly active-duty military or police types engaged in continuing education on topics like human trafficking, drug smuggling, and "tactical counter-terror." His students got a syllabus including such otherwise unobtainable information as articles in *The Atlantic*, *Charlie Wilson's War*, and Executive Order 12333.

The incredible thing is that it only took over 10 years of his "teaching" to finally get the attention of actual members of the special forces community. Then, in 2010, it was revealed that Hillar was never in the Army, had not graduated from college, and had never told a terrorist over the phone that he would find him and kill him.

## Stanley Clifford Weyman Pretends to Be With the Navy, Meets the President

This is the first entry in which we find out that wearing a military uniform is apparently universally accepted as a form of ID.

It was 1915, and a guy in a funny uniform claiming to be from the Romanian navy showed up where the flagship of the Atlantic fleet, USS Wyoming, was berthed. His name was Lieutenant Commander Ethan Allen Weinberg. That was not his real name, and he was not really a member of any navy. He was just a man who figured out that a fancy uniform gets you through the door anywhere.

### Who Bought This?

Being an apparent foreign officer from a friendly country, Weinberg was invited aboard for an inspection, which he gladly accepted. It went swimmingly, and afterward "Commander Weinberg" invited the officers to a dinner at the Astor Hotel the following day, which the captain proceeded to accept. The dinner was a grand affair, the Astor being one of the best hotels in New York, and everyone had a great time. Well, until a couple of cops showed up and arrested "Commander Weinberg," who was heard to remark that they should have waited until dessert.

Yeah, it turns out that this wasn't the first time he'd faked his way into free food. The guy was actually named Stanley Clifford Weyman, and he had played the VIP as early as 1910, when he was busted pretending to be the American consul to Morocco, dining at upscale New York restaurants and having the bill sent to the government.

But then, in 1921, he bluffed his way into meeting the president of the USA. In the White House.

To pull this off, Weyman put on a Navy uniform again and approached a princess from Afghanistan named Fatima. He told her he was from the State Department, and that he could get her a meeting with the president if she would pay him \$10,000. She did, and since that's like \$130,000 today, most men would have considered the con over and skipped town with the cash. But Stanley Clifford Weyman was not most men.

Instead, our impostor turned around and bluffed his way into actually getting her a meeting with President Warren G. Harding. How did he do that? Simple: by pretending to the Navy that he was in the State Department, and then pretending to the State Department that he was in the Navy. The guy was just so freaking convincing that nobody ever felt the need to verify what he was saying. Weyman used the \$10,000 to rent a private boxcar to get the princess from New York to Washington, D.C., and arrange expensive accommodations once there. In other words, he spent the money she gave him to help him better play the role of the big shot.

The meeting with Harding happened, under much press coverage, and only then did someone notice that this was the guy who was constantly getting arrested for pretending to be naval officers. So, he was arrested as a fake, again. And again. At least a dozen times he would get caught for various fraud schemes involving false identity, and who knows how many more he got away with. He really did just like screwing with people.

## Wilhelm Voigt Gets a Thrift Store Uniform, Overthrows a City

In the early 1900s, German ex-con Wilhelm Voigt was just out of jail after serving long sentences for theft and forgery. Homeless and without options, Voigt decided to do what any respectable German would do in his position: imitate a member of the military and take over the town.

Voigt bought items of clothing from the time period's equivalent of military surplus stores and assembled himself an officer's uniform. Luckily, he was already in possession of the most important part of this uniform: a giant manly looking mustache.

All right. Time to knock over the city.

### Who Bought This?

Voigt soon ran into a random group of soldiers and commanded them to follow him to the nearby town of Kopernick. There, with the soldiers as backup, Voigt took over the town hall, personally arrested the mayor, and commanded that the soldiers escort the mayor to a guardhouse in Berlin. Deciding that all of this looked completely legit, the soldiers obeyed.

They also helped Voigt collect the entirety of the town's cash, which he carried away in sacks. It was only after they showed up in Berlin with the mayor and everyone started asking, "Hey, where did that guy with the mustache go?" that the soldiers began to question the motives of the total stranger who had just disappeared with a bunch of money. We told you: a fancy-looking military uniform trumps any degree, job title, or letter of recommendation you could possibly get.

Fellow Germans held up the incident as an example of the blind obedience to military authority that existed in the country at the time. However, considering that it happened in 1906, we guess the lesson took a while to sink in.

## David Deng Raises a Private Army

So we've had a couple of guys on here pretending to be special forces -- if you're going to fake being in the military, why not go all the way? But there is always another liar willing to take things to the next level.

And so, David Deng bought himself a fancy uniform and pretended to be the commander of a special forces group and went about gathering recruits.

### Who Bought This?

Taking advantage of Chinese immigrants who'd recently arrived in Los Angeles, Deng "enlisted" over 100 people into the "U.S Army/Military Special Forces Reserve" by promising them that serving in his group would both help their chances of becoming U.S. citizens and also get them some totally hot women. Of course, for such services, Deng charged them hundreds of dollars, because obviously the power that comes from having a (albeit low-budget) version of Blackwater wasn't going to buy him a hot tub anytime soon.

To keep up the pretense, Deng converted an abandoned store and decorated it to resemble a training school. Here, each recruit took part in regular drills that Deng had gleaned details of from training manuals, and they were given both uniforms and ID cards, apparently bought from the world's most clueless army surplus store.

In the end, however, Deng's scheme failed because ... it was too good. The "soldiers" were so convinced that they were members of the U.S. military that, when the time came to renew their memberships, they turned up to actual military bases and tried to pay there. Presumably once the real soldiers had regained their composure after laughing their asses off, they contacted the FBI, and Deng was arrested for a crime that he totally committed.

### **Douglas R. Stringfellow Fakes Paralysis, Gets Elected to Congress**

Being a war hero has to be by far the biggest advantage a person can have when entering politics. No other group is as universally respected. So maybe it's no surprise that political candidates have been known to fudge the truth on the subject from time to time. They just tend to not take it as ridiculously far as Utah Representative Douglas Stringfellow.

It was 1952, the Cold War was heating up (cooling down?), and the nation was looking for strong leaders who had proven themselves in battle. In walked World War II hero Douglas R. Stringfellow, Silver Star winner.

According to him, as a member of the OSS (the forerunners of the CIA), Stringfellow was tasked with undertaking dangerous missions behind enemy lines, equipped with only his wits, a pretty lady on his arm, a gun in his holster, and probably some sort of tiny laser on his watch. He claimed that, during a "routine" mission to rescue renowned nuclear scientist Otto Hahn from the clutches of the Nazis, he was captured and imprisoned in Belsen. There, he was tortured endlessly, an experience that sadly left him a paraplegic.

Holy crap, who can dare challenge that story? This guy is so badass, he can probably kick your ass from his wheelchair!

Now, the thing is, the story wasn't complete bunk. Stringfellow had in fact served -- he was a private in the Air Force and not only saw action, but was in fact wounded by a mine. But the whole bit about the OSS, winning the Silver Star, and, incredibly, the part about being paralyzed from the waist down was a lie. The man could walk and was hoping that nobody would ever figure it out.

### **Who Bought This?**

Utah, apparently, because they voted him in. Stringfellow lasted for two years in power before his rivals discovered the truth and annihilated him. The Church of Latter-Day Saints, of which he was a member, ordered him to make a public confession. Stringfellow was replaced on his ticket just 16 days prior to the next election.

The sad thing is that just running on the truth probably would have been enough -- Stringfellow served honorably and was wounded in service to his country. Actually, the sadder thing was that the guy apparently had built his plan on simply never being seen walking again. Ever. For the rest of his life. Was he going to fake a miraculous recovery at some point?

We'll never know.