

UNSOCIABLE DIPLOMATS AND MISNAMED WOMBATS More Funny Bloopers and Barbed Ripostes

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In a *Wall Street Journal* forum on terrorism, published on September 9, 2011, a former top government official wrote: “We went to war with Germany in 1941 not because it had attacked Pearl Harbor but because it was dangerous.” Does he really think Germany rather than Japan attacked Pearl Harbor? Or is it just a sloppily crafted sentence? Among the comments posted in response to the forum—167 in all—only one reader pointed out the mistake.

The following errors and anomalies are not quite as momentous, but you may find them amusing, as I did. As always, each is paired with an arch retort.

Associated Press, February 6, 2011:

“Two men have been arrested and charged in a shooting at an Ohio fraternity house that killed one student and injured 11 people at a party near Youngstown State University campus, police said Sunday.”

▶ **The house is pleading self-defense.**

The New York Times, Corrections, February 2, 2011:

“A television review on Tuesday about ‘Post Mortem,’ a documentary on PBS about lapses in the American system for investigating causes of death, misattributed a quotation from the film and rendered part of it incorrectly. The forensic pathologist Vincent Di Maio—not Marcella Fierro, the retired chief medical examiner of Virginia—said that the work done “varies from excellent to absolutely lousy.” He did not say “really, really lousy.”

▶ **Whew!**

cbsnewyork.com, January 15, 2011:

“In Times Square Saturday, four pairs of competitors are trying to break the Guinness World Record for a handshake from 2009, which is when two people shook for 15 hours and 30 minutes. . . . They have to meet all of the Guinness rules. These rules include using only one hand for the duration and, if they take a permitted bathroom break, continuing the handshake with a Guinness official observing.”

▶ **Good luck with that.**

The New York Times, June 10, 2011:

“[The one-woman play] also touches on Ms. Taylor’s struggle with weight and body image, and with anorexia. In an hourlong conversation, she talked about gaining and losing and gaining the same 50 pounds before realizing that she could do well as a plus-size model.”

▶ **Are you sure it wasn’t a *different* 50 pounds?**

Report, National Academy of Sciences, 2011:

“First, on average, men tend to show greater interest in sex and express a desire to engage in sex more frequently than women. . . .”

▶ **In other breaking news: Cats like milk.**

The New York Times, online, April 28, 2011:

“Just 24 hours before the event, Britain said Thursday that it had revoked the Syrian ambassador’s invitation to the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton. . . . In a radio interview on Thursday, Mr. Khiyami said that he found the British snub ‘a bit embarrassing’ but that he did not believe it jeopardized other aspects of Syria’s relationship with Britain. ‘I’m not a man who likes to attend events,’ he said.”

▶ **Isn’t that a handicap in the diplomatic corps?**

The Wall Street Journal, Corrections & Amplifications, July 12, 2011:

“The artist Clyfford Still painted the 15-foot [abstractionist] work ‘PH-1049’ in 1977. An article in Saturday’s Review section on a museum devoted to Mr. Still’s work incorrectly gave the painting’s title as ‘Untitled79lr.’”

▶ **Now it all makes sense.**

The New York Times, Corrections, January 9, 2011:

“An obituary last Sunday about the author Ruth Park misstated the name of the protagonist of a series of radio plays and books she wrote for children. He is the Muddle-Headed Wombat, not the Muddle-Headed Mongoose.”

▶ **Both are demanding an apology.**

For the fraternity house item, and riposte, my thanks to Richard Lederer.