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# Bilbo's Random Thought Collection

*Random observations and comments from the Fairfax County, Virginia, Curmudgeon-at-Large.*

Today's DUMBCON  
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About Me



BILBO

I'm a 61-year old father of three and grandfather of six with opinions on nearly everything. I believe in courtesy, common sense, and fair play. I love ballroom dancing, reading, gourmet cooking, and travel. While I'm opinionated, I'm not close-minded, and I welcome your constructive comments on my blog. My motto: "I have seen the truth, and it makes no sense."

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TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2011

## Thoughts on The Ides of March and Confusing Greek Letters

Yesterday, March 14th (3/14), we celebrated "Pi Day." Pi\*, of course, is the symbol for the ratio of a circle's diameter to its circumference, and figures prominently in many utterly incomprehensible mathematical equations which exist largely to confuse doomed students. It is a fact, although not generally known, that both modern mathematics and rowdy college fraternities would be impossible without Greek letters.

But that was yesterday.

Today, March 15, is the day we commonly know as the "*Ides of March*." The term *Ides* comes from the Roman calendar, which organized its months around three days which served as reference points for counting the other days. These were *Kalends* (the first day of the month, and also the word from which we derive our word *calendar*), *Nones* (the seventh day of March, May, July, and October; but the fifth day in the other months), and *Ides* (the date of the full moon - the 15th day in March, May, July, and October; and the 13th day in the other months). The other days of the month were identified by counting *backwards* from the Kalends, Nones, or the Ides. For example, March 3rd would be V Nones, or five days before the Nones (the Roman method of counting days was *inclusive*, meaning that the Nones would be counted as one of the five days).

Didja get that?

We all know the expression, "Beware the Ides of March!", immortalized by Shakespeare in his play *Julius Caesar* - it was the warning shouted at Caesar shortly before he was murdered in the Roman forum. My old high school friends who read this blog may remember a classic twist on this expression from many years ago - there was a popular Pittsburgh television news anchor in the 60's named Carl Ide, who had a notably large family. When he moved to a larger home, the Pittsburgh Press headlined the story, "*Beware the March of Ides!*"

Anyhow, it's no wonder that the Roman empire didn't last. Between the impossible complexities of Latin grammar (I took Latin for three years in high school, two of them trying to get out of Latin I) and trying to figure out what the date was, the poor Romans never could get their ... uh ... poop in one sock (I used the word *poop* in honor of [Chrissy](#), the reigning queen of funny poop stories).

And now you have the straight poop about the Ides of March. Ide write more, but now it's time to go to work.

Have a good day. More thoughts tomorrow.

Bilbo



\* Pi is itself under attack by mathematicians with nothing better to do who want to replace it with another Greek letter, Tau. You can read *that* perplexing story [here](#).

Posted by [Bilbo](#) at [4:51 AM](#)

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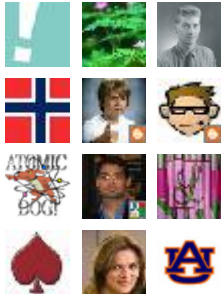
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7 comments:



**Gilahi said...**

Ide no idea.

[6:55 AM](#)



**Amanda said...**

I tried to read that paragraph about the Roman calendar a few times but its still confusing....

[6:57 AM](#)



**Raquel's World said...**

I'm with them. Huh?

[8:16 AM](#)



**John said...**

Leave it to the linguist to blog about Greek and Latin in the same post!

wv: charchip--n. the dark over cooked potato chips that sneak by QC. (my personal favorites)

[9:28 AM](#)

**allenwoodhaven said...**

At work last week I was talking about the Ides of March and no one knew what I meant. Then they insisted that it was the Eyes of March.

A quick google showed them the proper term but apparently it is commonly understood to be Eyes rather than Ides.

Perhaps it was my years of Latin (which makes perfect sense within it's own rules but very little otherwise) and loving Shakespeare, but I never had heard it expressed that way.

Thanks to you, I now know about the confusing Roman calendar. I'm so glad we don't use that anymore!

[7:14 PM](#)



**Mike said...**

I actually know more about the Roman calendar than that. But if I told you.....

[Transplanted Tennessean in Montana](#)

9:29 PM

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**[KathyA said...](#)**

Yes, Beward the Ides of March. -- Of course, though, we would choose this day to fly!!

Actually, the 15th of March would have been my dad's 37th b-day. What's bad for Caesar isn't necessarily bad for the rest of us!!

1:15 PM

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**Another Blogging  
Award!**



Yet Another Award!



And Another...



One More Award!



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The Scholastic  
Scribe



Our Award From  
Jersey Girl



# Ides of March

The **Ides of March** (Latin: *Idus Martii* or *Idus Martiae*) is the name of the 15th day of March in the Roman calendar.

## Etymology

The word Ides comes from the Latin word "idus", a word that was used widely in the Roman calendar indicating the approximate day that was the middle of the month. The term *ides* was used for the 15th day of the months of March, May, July, and October, and the 13th day of the other months.<sup>[1]</sup> The

Ides of March was a festive day dedicated to the god Mars and a military parade was usually held.



Vincenzo Camuccini, *Mort de César*, 1798

## Julius Caesar

In modern times, the term *Ides of March* is best known as the date on which Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. Caesar was stabbed (23 times) to death in the Roman Senate by a group of conspirators led by Marcus Junius Brutus and Gaius Cassius Longinus. The group included 60 other co-conspirators according to Plutarch. Another point which arises is Shakespeare's use of the Ides of March and (the lack of doubt in) Marcus Brutus' decision to assassinate Caesar to portray an atmosphere of madness, pleasure, and pandemonium. It is said that on ides of March the sea succumbs to chaos and the full moon brings high tides. All these points give the Ides of March a very mysterious quality.<sup>[2]</sup>

According to Plutarch, a seer had foreseen that Caesar would be harmed not later than the Ides of March; and on his way to the Theatre of Pompey (where he would be assassinated), Caesar met the seer and joked, "The ides of March have come", meaning to say that the prophecy had not been fulfilled, to which the seer replied "Aye, Caesar; but not gone."<sup>[2]</sup> This meeting is famously dramatised in William Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*, when Caesar is warned by the soothsayer to "beware the Ides of March."<sup>[3][4]</sup>

Furthermore, Suetonius writes that the haruspex Spurinna warns Caesar of his death which will come "not beyond the Ides of March" as he is crossing the river Rubicon.

## References

[1] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, ides

[2] Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, Caesar 63

[3] "William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act 1, Scene II" ([http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare/julius\\_caesar/3/](http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare/julius_caesar/3/)). *The Literature Network*. Jalic, Inc. 2010. . Retrieved 15 March 2010.

[4] "William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act 3, Scene I" ([http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare/julius\\_caesar/9/](http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare/julius_caesar/9/)). *The Literature Network*. Jalic, Inc. 2010. . Retrieved 15 March 2010.

## External links

- Plutarch, The Parallel Lives, The Life of Julius Caesar ([http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Caesar\\*.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Caesar*.html))
- Nicolaus of Damascus, Life of Augustus (translated by Clayton M. Hall) (<http://www.csun.edu/~hcfll004/nicolaus.html>)

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