

Springbok

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SOME OF THE WREATHS LAID AT THE GRAVES OF THE SS MENDI CASUALTIES IN THE NOORDWIJK CEMETERY, THE NETHERLANDS DURING THE 106TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SINKING OF THE TROOPSHIP SS MENDI ON 21 FEBRUARY 1917.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



Let me begin by thanking all the readers for their compliments and comments on the December 2022 edition of Springbok. It is much appreciated. I would like to once again thank the branches for their support as without it the Springbok would not be as popular as it is. The contents of this edition once again confirm the support of the branches to the Springbok with a wide variety of stories and photos being submitted. Must however confess that with the abundance of stories and photos received for the December 2022 edition, some stories, unfortunately, had to stand over to this edition. My sincere apology.

Once again, this edition is filled with stories and photos reflecting the activities of the branches. This is extremely encouraging and ensures that the Legion lives up to its motto, Not for Ourselves, But for Others. We need to commend the Europe Branche under the leadership of Lgr Andrew Bergman for the very close relationship with the South African Embassy in the Netherlands. Well done, Andrew.

The link to the latest edition of the Springbok is also sent to the editor of the MILITARY DESPATCHES who includes a photo of the cover page and the link in every edition. It appeared on page 53 of the February edition.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In our experience, The SA Legion Rosebank has really lived up to their motto, "Not for ourselves, but for others".

My husband Abraham, who served in the SANDF for 39 years, joined The SA Legion, and the Rosedale Service Centre a few years back.

From then onwards, whenever we had to visit 2 Military Hospital, we would make a reservation to enjoy the occasional lunch in the exquisite dining hall, looking out on the lovely gardens.

The lunch they serve includes a hearty bowl of soup with bread, a truly well-balanced meal, and coffee. (On Wednesdays and Sundays, they also serve pudding. 🌸)

In 2121, we were honoured to become official members, at an evening event at Rosedale.

Yet, the real test for dedication By the institution came in October/November 2022, when I needed open thoracic surgery at Vincent Pallotti Hospital. Cardiac Surgeon Dr Loven Moodley had to remove a mass from my heart, and I ended up in ICU for ten days, plus four more days in a general ward.

Living in Strand, it would have been impossible for my elderly husband to visit me every day. The Legion Management, under the leadership of Mr Dave Holmes, stepped up to the plate and graciously arranged accommodation for Abraham while I was in Vincent Pallotti Hospital.

During this time, there was always a sympathetic ear and words of encouragement for Abraham.

After my discharge, we could rent the holiday flat for another month, so that I could be close to the cardio specialists. This has proved to be a godsend, because I was still on morphine, had to go back several times, and, one night, Abraham collapsed because of his diabetes.

I really have to thank everyone involved in bending over backwards to accommodate us in every way during this difficult time. Philippa had to jump through several hoops to fit us in between holiday makers who booked earlier. Lucille made sure our meal tickets were updated, and issued us with Poppy brooches to wear, so that we could feel part of the community.

Peter and his staff made sure we had the same nutritious meals as everyone else, and always enquired about my progress. The housekeeping personnel, especially Diseree, Fumdi and Hilda (not from 7de Laan!) always came around with a smile and genuine concern, when they fixed the room.

During this period Abraham could make use of the washing machine and tumble drier, and that alone cleared yet another obstacle people sometimes face when away from home.

In sum, the Legion is serious about putting its motto into practice when members face difficult times.

Elma Ross (D Ed)

BRANCH NEWS

ALEXANDRIA

The Alexandria Branch recently handed over a donation to the Diaz Home for retired in Alexandria. The ceremony took place at Diaz Home where Lgr Johann Smuts, Vice Chairman, of the branch handed over the donation.

CAPE TOWN

Rosedale.

Pierre Fourie. It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Pierre Fourie on Tuesday 13 December after a short illness. Pierre and his wife Ramona were very involved in the affairs of the Rosedale Service Centre (he served on its committee) and he was elected to the Branch Executive Committee in 2015 where he held the portfolio of PR and Fundraising before standing down at this year's AGM and will be greatly missed.



A photograph of a donation being handed over to the staff at the Diaz Home, Alexandria. On the left Stephen Fick (Diaz Home Board Member), Lgr Johann Smuts (Vice Chairman SAL Alexandria, Nadia Cannon(Diaz Home staff) and Tania Kahts (Diaz Home staff).



The late Lgr Pierre Fourie, Cape Town Branch, in the centre at one of the many functions at Rosedale.



Members of Cape Canopy that attended the unveiling of three plaques in the Clubhouse at Rosedale.

Master of Ceremonies for the evening Stick Leader Col. Fritz Wolfaardt and Col (Dr) Alan Nelson (Hon. President of the Cape Canopy of Paratroopers) did the honours and were warmly applauded by their colleagues and guests.



SAL Branch manager David Holmes chats to Steph Piek (background Theo Kleinhans).

Pierre's funeral was held on Monday 19 December and was well attended by the Branch Exco Committee, Rosedale residents and the Signals' Association, another veteran's organisation that Pierre had served for many years.

Our condolences to Ramona and the family. *(My apology for not including this in the December 2022 edition.)*

Cape Canopy. Cape Canopy of Paratroopers used the facilities at Rosedale to unveil 3 plaques (1 Para Battalion, 2 Para Battalion and 44 Brigade) in the clubhouse on Tuesday 7 February. Master of Ceremonies for the evening Stick Leader Col. Fritz Wolfaardt and Col (Dr) Alan Nelson (Hon. President of the Cape Canopy of Paratroopers) did the honours and were warmly applauded by their colleagues and guests.

Rosedale Service Centre. After lunch on Friday 24 February the staff at Rosedale were awarded with a gift envelope by way of acknowledging the outstanding service they deliver to the residents. The staff included Brian Barbier, Lionel Stuurman, Melanie Kumar, Phumlani Spaji, Lucky Matyumza, Nastasha Goodman, Francis Prins, chef Peter Herbert, Angerlique Williams, Fundi Msweli, Monique Marang, Irene Ngobeni-Manjezi and Mieska Moosa (absent on day off Nokonwabe Ntobongwana, Brunice Solomons, Hilda Louw and Desiree Cornelius)

DURBAN

Report on the 50th Midmar Mile: Sunday, 12 February 2023. At the request of the Durban Branch Chairman, Lgr Bryan Doré (who was indisposed in hospital), Lgrs Brad Fourie and Kassie Nel travelled to Howick to meet Colonel Craig Stanton (SANDF Senior Sports Officer and Manager of their Swimming Team), who had kindly secured us a spot to set up our gazebo, as well as to liaise directly with Admiral (Retd) Robert Higgs (ex-COS SA Navy and multiple 8-mile swimmer) to do the presentations. The fastest Defence Force Male Swimmer was Charles Beaurain (again!) who finished in 22 minutes. The fastest SANDF Female Swimmer was, for the second time, Charrisse van Jaarsveld at 31 minutes 59 seconds. Charrisse had to head back to Bloemfontein before the presentation, therefore Nico Frylinck accepted the award on her behalf.

Colonel Stanton kindly invited Lgrs Fourie and Nel to join them for a meal and beverages before leaving. Overall, it was a lovely day and beautiful environment. *(Note by the editor. Lgr Robert 'Rusty' Higgs is a member of the Pretoria Branch of the Legion).*

PIETERMARITZBURG

Remembrance Sunday London 2022. My son and I were up early and left for the Aldershot station with our wives. He was in his military uniform and I was in SA Legion uniform both wearing our medals. It was a bit intimidating, as we were not sure how the public would re-act to our dress. When we walked onto the station we were surprised by the number of men and women wearing uniform with medals. Everyone was talking and greeting each other. On arrival at Waterloo station, we were greeted by a lady, informing us that we could get a free ride to the parade area in any black London cab.

Judd Sullivan, Japie Gouws & Michael Roberts enjoying the refreshments after the unveiling of the plaques.



Lgr Lucille Byrnes is escorted by Lgr John Dorrington to the unveiling of the plaques.

Rosedale staff that were awarded with a gift envelope by way of acknowledging the outstanding service they deliver to the residents. From l to r: Brian Barbier, Lionel Stuurman, Melanie Kumar, Phumlani Spaji, Lucky Matyumza, Nastasha Goodman, Francis Prins, chef Peter Herbert, Angerlique Williams, Fundi Msweli, Monique Marang, Irene Ngobeni-Manjezi and Mieska Moosa.





Charles Beaurain (left) accepted the Fastest SADF Male Swimmer Award from Admiral Higgs during the 50th Midmar Mile swimming competition.

Admiral Higgs with Nico Frylinck (right), accepting the Fastest SADF Female Swimmer Award on behalf of Charrisse van Jaarsveld at the 50th Midmar Mile swimming competition.



The Legion representatives had access to a Food Court area allowing spectators to sit back relax and enjoy the 50th Midmar Mile swimming competition.

On arrival at the Horse Guards parade ground, we had to present our tickets to the guards and were then told where we could join the group that we would be marching with. We were with the SA Legions group number D33. Our group consisted of 34 men and 2 ladies and we were soon in conversation with a number of them. One chap spoke to me in Afrikaans for about 15 minutes. We were made to feel very welcome.

At about 10h20 we marched across the Horse Guards parade ground and into Whitehall Street. At the gate, we turned left and marched towards Nelson's column. Here we halted, did an about turn and waited for the parade to begin.

I must point out that we were so far from the cenotaph, that we could not see it, but there were large screens mounted on posts about every 200m up and down Whitehall street on which we could watch the whole parade. At 10h58, King Charles III marched to the front of the cenotaph and took up his position. (First time I have ever been on parade with a King!) At 11h00 Big Ben started playing its tune and just before it struck 11h00 a canon fired a single shot salute. The 2 minutes silence started. Considering that there were over a 1000 people on parade plus about 1000 or more spectators, there was absolute silence. There was not a cough, a sneeze or even a child crying, to be heard.

The 2 minute silence was introduced by Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, author of "Jock of the Bushveld" who proposed the idea to the governor of the Cape. The governor informed the King about the idea and it was adopted for all Remembrance parades. The first minute is dedicated to the men who did not return and the second for the wounded men who did return. Their arms and legs shattered, their eyes blinded and suffering from shellshock.

As the 2 minutes ended another salute was fired by the canon and a trumpeter sounded the "Last Post". The King then laid the first wreath, followed by the heads of the different departments of the defence force, the Prime Minister and many more dignitaries.

The Bishop of London said a prayer and we all sang the hymn "O God our help in ages past" accompanied by the Bands of the Guards Division. The Bishop then said a prayer and all present recited the Lord's Prayer. After the Blessing, the Rouse (Reveille) was sounded.

The King and all the dignitaries left the parade and then the different regiments and organizations marched past the cenotaph. As we passed it, the wreath bearer handed his wreath over to the boy scouts who were assisting to lay the wreaths out in neat rows. We saluted the Cenotaph. Further down we saluted a member of the Royal Family. We marched down to King Charles street then back to the Horse Guards parade where we saluted another member of the Royal Family.

After we had fallen out, we chatted with the members of our group. It was not easy as most of us were feeling rather emotional about the parade we had just had the privilege of taking part in. I will remember every step that I took on that 1.5km parade. Submitted by Lgr. Vincent Nixon.



Lgr Vincent Nixon, to the right of his son, Dave Nixon (in uniform) during 2022 Remembrance Day Service in London, United Kingdom.



A collage of photos of members of the Port Elizabeth Branch watching the 2022 Annual Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

PORT ELIZABETH

After the events of the Festive Season the Port Elizabeth Branch got back into the swing of things with a somewhat different event to our usual meetings, parades etc.

The branch ordered a copy of the DVD for the 2022 edition of the Edinboro Military Tattoo in November last year, it arrived in late December and we held a social evening to show the DVD on the "Big Screen" at our HQ, the Maritime Club, in Port Elizabeth. About 20 people attended and spent an enjoyable evening watching the show in all its splendid glory and munching on some delicious borewors rolls made by the ladies. We will now hire out the DVD to raise funds and allow others to see this spectacular show in the comfort of their own homes.

We continue with our ongoing social work, assisting needy Veterans where needed. - "Not for our selves but for others".

COMMEMORATIONS

SAMIVA SUNRISE MEMORIAL SERVICE

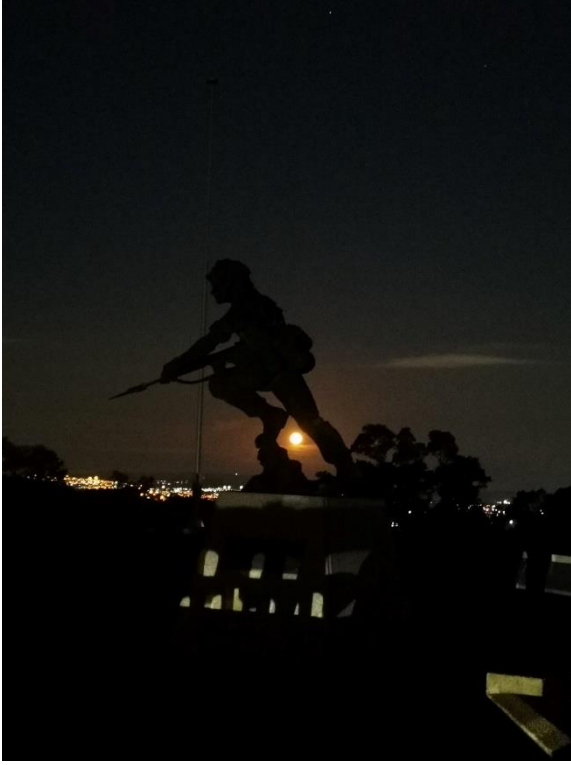
The South African Military Intelligence Veterans Association (SAMIVA) held its Annual Sunrise Memorial and Wreath Laying Service at the 'Troepie' memorial at Fort Klapperkop at 06:00 on Sunday 5 February 2023. In addition, the service commemorated International Intelligence Services Day. The service was very well attended by veteran organisations and members of the diplomatic corps. After the service guests enjoyed refreshments in the Fort Klapperkop lapa. Lgr Debra De Bilott laid a wreath on behalf of the South African Legion.

BORDER BOYS PARADE – CAPE TOWN

The 20th Annual Border Campaign Parade and Memorial Service took place at the Dawn Patrol Shellhole, Cape Town on Sunday 5 February 2023. The event was very well attended and the Legion standard was on parade.

SAS *PRESIDENT KRUGER* REMEMBRANCE PARADE – HERMANUS

SAS *President Kruger* Remembrance Parade - Hermanus 18th Feb 2023, - run by the TS Birkenhead Sea Cadets and their SA Navy oversight, in conjunction with the South African Navy Veterans Association, and the assistance of the South African Legion and the Memorable Order of Tin Hats - Seagull Shellhole, Hermanus. Parade was run by Lt Noel Dreyer with Cdr Glenn Von Zeil in attendance. Lt Dreyer was himself a survivor of the sinking of the PK and two other survivors of the sinking were also in attendance. Speeches included Noel Dreyer and Peter Dickens who addressed the cadets on behalf of the SA Legion and the MOTH. The religious services were handled by MOTH Seagull Shellhole's Padre - Craig Hounsom. Lgr Peter Dickens laid the wreath on behalf of the SA Legion and MOTH Stephan Loubser - Seagull Adj - laid the MOTH wreath.



Scenes from the SAMIVA Memorial Service.





Scenes from the Annual Border Boys Parade held in Cape Town.



Scenes from the sinking of the SAS President Kruger Remembrance Service held in Hermanus.



SAS PRESIDENT KRUGER (F150) SUNSET PARADE – PRETORIA

With storm clouds gathering, the threat of rain, and the noise of the spectators at the rugby game between the Blue Bulls and the Stormers not far away, survivors, former members of the Navy, and friends gathered at the main building of the Pretoria Boys High School late afternoon on Saturday, 18 February 2023, for the 41st Commemoration of the sinking of the SAS *President Kruger* (F150) on 18 February 1982.

The survivors in attendance were R Adm (JG) Dennis Forrest, Capt. (SAN) Graham Davies, Cdr Adeel Carelse, and CPO Derrick ‘Stompie’ Williams, all retired. Also in attendance was Mrs. Terblanche, widow of PO R. A. Ma Master.

Those that could muster, mustered as the ‘ship’s company’ in front of the main building. Following the parade activities, the guests were called to attention for the General Salute and the two minutes silence. After the welcome by CPO ‘Stompie’ Williams, Padre (MOTH) Sybrand Van Niekerk conducted the scripture reading and prayer. The latter started on a joyful note with those in attendance singing happy birthday to ‘Stompie’.

This was followed by the Call to Remembrance and the reading of the Roll of Honour by CPO Williams. MOTH Tim Lane then read the poem ‘In Water Deep’. Guests were then requested to place a flower at the ceremonial remembrance site.

Lgr’s André Le Grange and Charles Ross represented the Pretoria Branch of the South African Legion.

The parade concluded with a toast in remembrance of those who perished in the sinking of the SAS *President Kruger* on 18 February 1982.

The parade was hosted by CPO Derrick ‘Stompie’ Williams and CPO Johnny Demetroudes both retired. Tegan and Tyne Williams were the photographers.

THE ANNUAL SS MENDI MEMORIAL SERVICE IN DURBAN

On Sunday, 19 February 2023 the South Africa Legion Durban Branch, with the assistance of City Hall, hosted the Annual SS *Mendi* Memory Service at the SS Mendi Memorial at Durban Harbour.

The Service was opened by Branch Chairman, Lgr Bryan Doré who welcomed all dignitaries, veterans and visitors in attendance.

We thank Chaplain (Lgr) Thami Shange for the prayers and scripture reading on the day. After the Wreath Laying, esteemed guest Eric Apelgren (Municipal Head of International Relations and Governance) gave an Address on behalf of the Mayor of Durban, Cllr Mxolisi Kaunda.

Attendance included the Branch President, Lgr Pat Acutt, members of the South Africa Legion, Moths, SANDF, SA Indian Legion, SANDF, Irish & English Freemason Lodges, Land Scouts and general public.



Scenes from the sinking of the SAS President Kruger remembrance service held in Pretoria.





Left: Chairman of the Durban Branch, Lgr Bryan Doré addressing the guests at the SS Mendi parade in Durban.



Right: Wreath Orderly, Lgr (Mrs) Helen Lancaster at the SS Mendi parade in Durban.



Left: Chaplain (Lgr) Thami Shange, conducting the Religious Service at the SS Mendi parade in Durban.



Above: Members of the SA Indian Legion, Lt Madlala of the SANDF, Eric Apelgren and Lgr Pat Acutt at the SS Mendi parade in Durban.



Above: Eric Apelgren (Municipal Head of International Relations & Governance) giving his Address on behalf of the Durban Mayor at the SS Mendi parade in Durban.



Attendees at the SS Mendi parade in Durban.

On conclusion of the service, attendees were invited for delicious refreshments kindly provided by the Municipality at the nearby Maritime Museum.

NOTE: This memorial symbol was initiated by the Durban Branch some 6 years ago. The Defence Reserve Office KZN subsequently executed the project and, with input from the Museum Directorate and local historians, the Memorial Stone was prepared and placed historically appropriately. However, as it suffers apparent neglect, a new project is being initiated by Durban Branch to move it to a more secure and prominent location.

THE 106TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SINKING OF THE SS *MENDI* COMMEMORATED IN THE NETHERLANDS

NOORDWIJK, ZUID HOLLAND– To mark the occasion of South African Armed Forces Day, the fallen South African servicemen of the SS *Mendi* – at least five, and possibly six of whom lie buried in the [Commonwealth War Graves Commission \(CWGC\)](#) section of [Noordwijk General Cemetery](#) in the Netherlands – were fittingly commemorated during a dignified service and wreath-laying ceremony today, after a two-year hiatus due to Covid restrictions.

In the annals of South Africa's military history, 21 February 1917 is a dark day. It marks the sinking of the troopship SS *Mendi* after it collided with the SS *Daro* off the Isle of Wight, with the loss of 616 South African servicemen, 607 of them members of the South African Native Labour Corps: Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Swazi, and Tswana. They were ultimately bound for northern France, to join the allied war effort.

Today, the anniversary of the SS *Mendi* disaster is aptly the day on which South Africa remembers all her fallen soldiers and in particular the deadliest disaster in South African naval history. Across the country, parades and ceremonies will be held to commemorate those South Africans who paid the ultimate price in wars across the globe.

The event, co-hosted by the Municipality of Noordwijk, the South African Embassy in The Hague, and the office of the South African Defence Attaché in Brussels, was attended by several international ambassadors, diplomats, defence attachés including Australia, Canada, UK, USA, and Zambia, local dignitaries, and members of the South African community in the Netherlands.

At the service in the cemetery hall, Royal Netherlands Navy Chaplain, LTZ1* Hilbrand van Eeken, led guests in hymns and prayer. The Mayor on Noordwijk, Alderman Wendy Verkleij, delivered a welcoming address, at which she affirmed her town's commitment to preserving the memory of those Commonwealth and Allied servicemen, from both WWI and WWII, who lie buried in the CWGC section of the Cemetery, affirming that 21 February has become an entrenched annual event on Noordwijk's municipal calendar.

Local historian Mark Sijlmans, who has done extensive research and helped to identify exact positions of the Noordwijk SS *Mendi* graves, recounted his meeting with the descendants of some of the casualties when he travelled to South Africa, who had scant if any knowledge of the fate of their ancestor, apart from a vague notion that 'he died in the war'. He highlighted that the family have



Scenes from the 106th Commemoration of the sinking of the SS Mendi in Noordwijk, The Netherlands (1).





Scenes from the 106th Commemoration of the sinking of the SS Mendi in Noordwijk, The Netherlands (2).



expressed their keenness to travel to the Netherlands to perform the appropriate Zulu rituals to allow the spirit of their ancestor to return home.

In his address, the South African Ambassador to the Netherlands, Vusi Madonsela, pledged his intention to facilitate a visit by the family to the graves, and highlighted its importance to the surviving descendants. Last year, in lieu of an official ceremony, Ambassador Madonsela joined the South African Legion, to plant new rose bushes at the graves.

South African Legion (Europe Branch) Chair, Andrew Bergman, highlighted the inscription on the CWGC Cross of Sacrifice, 'Their Name Liveth For Evermore', and emphasised the importance of continuity in remembrance that it implies. He pointed out that in the two years marked by the Covid pandemic, the SA Legion, who initiated the Noodwijk 21 February remembrance in 2015, has continued to lay wreaths and perform low-key Acts of Remembrance at the SS *Mendi* graves, within the constraints of the prevailing restrictions.

He lauded the ongoing efforts of the Municipality of Noordwijk, as well as the local Veteranen Noordwijk, to perpetuate the memory of the servicemen buried in their cemetery, and their visible efforts to involve the town's young people: "It is immensely reassuring to see that a new generation is ready take up the torch of remembrance we carry today, and it's comforting to know that for the fallen, including Privates Leboche, Zendile, Molide, Kazimula, and Mtolo, for many years to come, at the going down of the sun, and in the morning, we will remember them," he said.

The service concluded with a reading by Netherlands-based South African filmmaker, Zeb Ngobese, of the poem in isiXhosa *Ukutshona Kukamendi (The Sinking of the Mendi)* by S.E.K. Mqhayi.

Guests then followed two bagpipers to the gravesides, where SA Defence Attaché R. Adm. Gogi recited the Act of Remembrance preceding the wreath laying, Last Post, two minutes' silence, Reveille, and the National Anthems of The Netherlands and South Africa.

Following the event at the cemetery, the South African Embassy hosted an informal lunch reception at Noordwijk's modern sports centre.

© Text: [South African Legion \(Europe\)](#)

Photography courtesy [John Hogg](#)

For local coverage (in Dutch), see:

<https://www.blikopnoordwijk.nl/item/17165-burgemeester-verkleij-legt-krans-bij-herdenking-gezonken-ss-mendi>

<https://www.bollenstreekomroep.nl/herdenking-scheepsramp-ss-mendi-1917-in-noordwijk/>

* Royal Netherlands Navy rank LTZ1 (*Luitenant-ter-zee der 1^e klasse*) is the equivalent of a Lieutenant Commander in Commonwealth Navy.

PVO – PRETORIA CANOPY REMEMBRANCE SERVICE

The PVO Pretoria Canopy held a Remembrance Day Service at the Paratrooper statue at the Voortrekker Monument on Sunday, 26 February 2023, at 08:00. The service was well attended, and



Lgr André La Grange laying a wreath on behalf of the Legion during the PVO Pretoria Canopy Remembrance Service.

several wreaths were laid. Lgr Andre La Grange represented the Pretoria Branch and carried the branch standard and laid a wreath on behalf of the Legion.

SS MENDI MEMORIAL SERVICE – ATTERIDGEVILLE

After the absence of several years the Annual SS *Mendi* Memorial Service took place at the SS *Mendi* Memorial in the Ga-Mothakga Resort in Atteridgeville west of Pretoria. The service was arranged by the Pretoria Branch of the Legion with the support of the South African National Defence Force, MOTH and the TS Springs. Lgr's Debra De Billot and Jaco Lötter laid wreaths on behalf of the South African Legion. Sadly, the memorial has been damaged. The City of Tshwane has undertaken to repair it.

SS MENDI MEMORIAL SERVICE – CAPE TOWN.

Lgr's Claudio Chistè and Peter Dickens attended the SS Mendi parade at the Mendi memorial on the grounds of the University of Cape Town on Sunday 26 February. Lgr Claudio Chistè laid the wreath for the SA Legion Western Cape and Lgr Peter Dickens laid the wreath for the SA Legion UK and EU. After the parade Lgr Chistè exchanged his Legion Centennial tie with Lgr Dickens as Lgr Dickens was pretty much down and out in hospital for the duration of the SA Legion's 2021 centenary, and for that gesture Lgr Dickens is most truly grateful.

OTHER STORIES

LIEUTENANT JIM BOOTH, NAVAL OFFICER WHO RECONNOITRED SWORD BEACH ON THE EVE OF D-DAY – OBITUARY

When the operation was delayed by bad weather, his midget submarine had to stay submerged on the seabed off Normandy

Lieutenant Jim Booth, who has died aged 101, was believed to be the last surviving member of the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties, a secret navy formed in the war to reconnoitre enemy beaches.

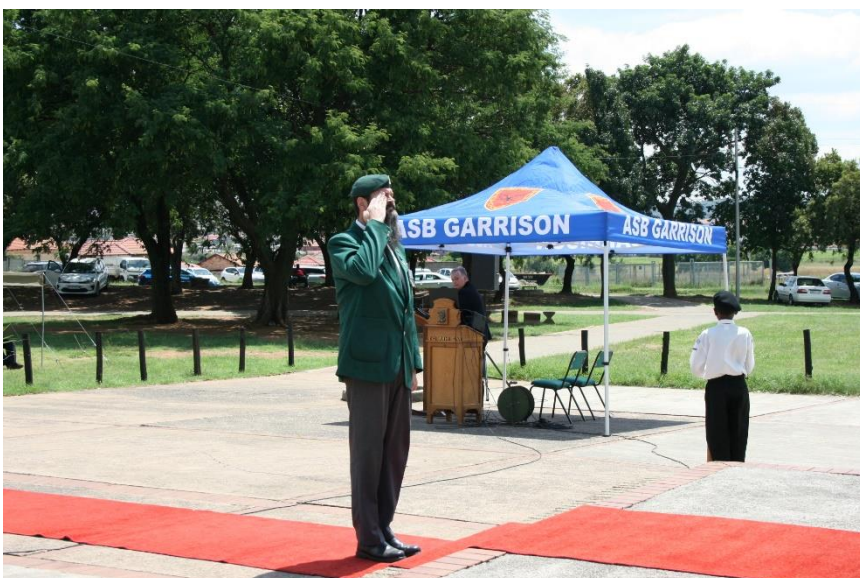
On Friday, June 2 1944, he embarked in the midget submarine X23 commanded by Lieutenant George Honour. Two days later, as part of Operation Gambit, X23 bottomed off the coast of Normandy. Through the periscope, Honour and his crew watched the Germans playing football on the sand, unaware of what awaited them over the horizon.

X23's crew of four was augmented by a two-man team from COPP No 9 commanded by Lieutenant LG Lyne. Their task was to mark the eastern end of Sword beach, using lights, flags and wireless. They had the honour, with X20, of being the first ships to arrive in the assault area, only to receive the coded message, "Trouble in Scarborough", telling them that Operation Neptune, the Allied landings in northern France, was delayed by 24 hours by bad weather.

X23 lay helpless on the bottom, fixed by her anchor to prevent her drifting from her carefully checked position; it was smelly and dirty, and they were sustained by tea and baked beans warmed over an electric ring in a pan they called the "gluepot", taking it in half-hour turns to warm up by lying in a sleeping bag over the submarine's batteries.



Scenes from the SS Mendi Memorial Service held in Atteridgeville, Pretoria (1).



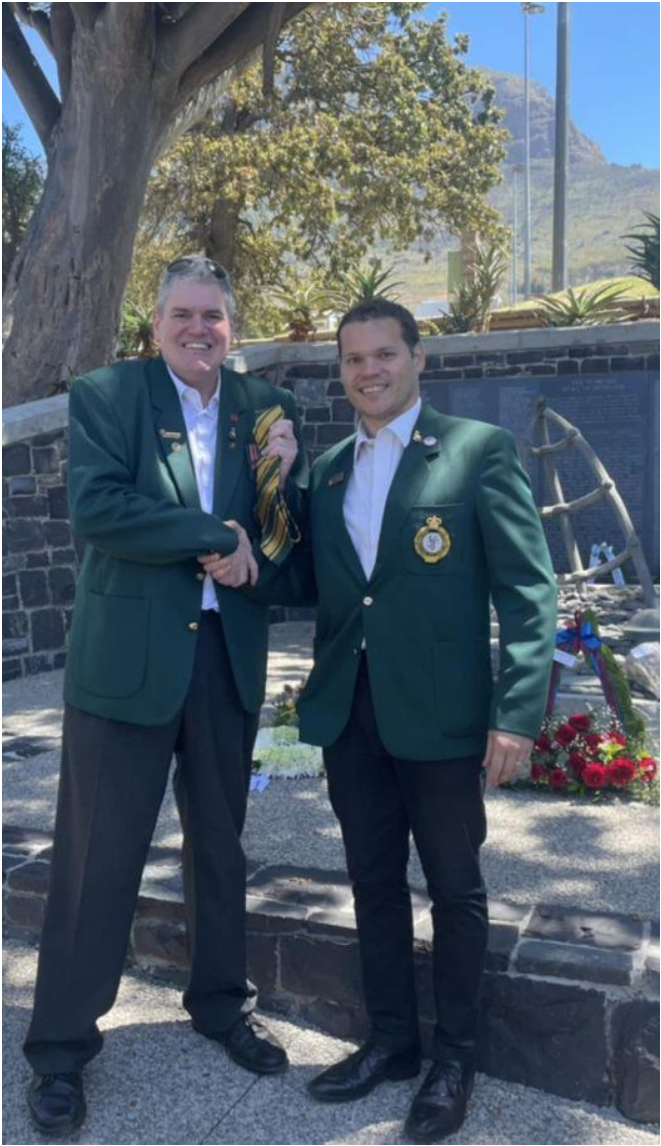


Scenes from the SS Mendi Memorial Service held in Atteridgeville, Pretoria (2).





Standards at the SS Mendi Memorial Service held in Atteridgeville.



Lgr's Dickens and Chistè exchanging ties after the SS Mendi Memorial Service in Cape Town.



The South African Navy contingent that attended the SS Mendi Memorial Service in Atteridgeville.

Although everyone was trained in each other's tasks, Booth's particular task was to row inshore and set up the inner end of a navigational transit, but the weather forced the cancellation of this part of the operation. Instead, at 0507 on the morning of June 6, after spending 64 of the last 76 hours submerged, X23 surfaced to hoist an 18ft telescopic mast to begin flashing a predawn light to seaward and broadcasting a wireless beacon tapped out in Morse for minesweepers escorting the landing forces approaching Sword and Juno beaches.

At dawn Booth was awed to see the seas covered by Allied craft, and watched in admiration as amphibious tanks swam ashore and troops waded up the beaches. Their job done, by midday on D-Day the crew of X23 and COPP9 were so exhausted that Booth, when ordered, could not lift the anchor: instead, he cut the cable.

Lyne and Booth spent the following night in the headquarters ship *Largs* before returning to Portsmouth in a destroyer. Lyne was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, while Booth was Mentioned in Despatches. Later he received the Croix de Guerre for "outstanding gallantry on D-Day".

Lord Mountbatten, who as Chief of Combined Operations and as Supreme Allied Commander in South East Asia had intimate knowledge of the work of COPP, wrote that "None of the great amphibious operations of the last war could have been carried out, with such efficiency and skill, without the vital information that COPPs provided".

James Charles Macauley Booth was born on July 9 1921 in London, where his father was a retired businessman. He was educated at Eton, where he was a "wetbob" and was awarded an organ scholarship. When war broke out he had just started his first term reading Medicine at Cambridge when he volunteered for service. His sister was a FANY (First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) who transferred to the SOE ; his uncle was Cecil Spring-Rice, who wrote the words of I Vow to Thee, My Country.

Booth's talent was spotted while under training at Skegness when a sailor was needed to play golf with a visiting admiral, and he volunteered. He served only five months on the lower deck in the minesweeper *Hussar*, service which was brought to an end when she was bombed on May 15 1940 off the Dutch coast; though severely damaged, she returned under her own way to harbour.

He served briefly in the new cruiser *Kenya* among many survivors of *Exeter* who had fought at the Battle of the River Plate. Sent to HMS *King Alfred* at Hove, after a five-week course he became a midshipman RNVR. He served in the coal-burning, anti-submarine trawlers *Turquoise* and *Pict* in the North Sea and of the west coast of Africa (1941-43), but became bored and volunteered for "anything more exciting".

Failed on medical grounds for human-torpedoes (his hearing had been damaged loading 4-inch guns *Kenya*), he joined COPP and practised underwater beach reconnaissance surveys during the winter of 1943-44 in Loch Striven.

After D-Day Booth prepared for operations in the Channel Islands, but was sent to Ceylon to train for the British landings in Burma and Malaya. Working behind enemy lines, Booth, who had been issued with a commando knife, eventually had to use it: his party was fired on by the Japanese army.



Booth volunteered for midget-submarine service in search of something 'more exciting' than life above the surface.



Jim Booth in 2019 aboard MS Boudicca on his way across the Channel to help celebrate the 75th anniversary of D-Day Credit: Paul Grove

He told an interviewer from the Imperial War Museum: “We now knew where their base was, so we sneaked up overnight and eliminated them. There were about ten of them. We weren’t really supposed to do that [aggressive operations] and our commanding officer didn’t put that in his report, but it was the right thing to do.”

In August 1945 Booth received his one and only injury when he broke his ankle during parachute training in northern India. He sheepishly admitted that a late night in the bar had addled his co-ordination. The next day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

Post-war, Booth accepted a permanent commission in the Navy and spent the next four years clearing German mines in the Aegean Sea and eastern Mediterranean and magnetic mines in the Thames estuary. However, he was invalided in 1949 after a routine x-ray showed a shadow on his chest.

Booth attended agricultural college and became a sheep farmer on Dartmoor for 30 years. He retired to Taunton, where he played the organ at several churches in the town and at Taunton School.

A lover of steam trains, he was a sprightly figure who in his nineties once cycled many miles to watch his grandson play cricket. At a celebration of the 70th anniversary of VJ-Day in 2015, in a marquee outside Westminster Abbey, the 94-year-old Booth danced with the Duchess of Cornwall.

Two years later he was attacked at home by a burglar and suffered multiple skull fractures. “Worse things happen at sea,” he commented. He was awarded the British Empire Medal in the following New Year’s Honours for service to the community.

In 1951 he married Berry Evans, a Wren whom he had met on a blind date while in Malta. She predeceased him, and he is survived by their four children.

Jim Booth, born July 9 1921, died December 18 2022

OBITUARIES

KIMBERLEY

Lgr Lgr John Sjoblom.

PIETERMARITZBURG

Lgr P Fourie.

Lgr Charlie Dickinson.

Lgr T Tearle.

SOUTH AFRICAN LEGION



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