

SOUTH AFRICAN
LEGION



1921 - 2011

and still going strong . . .

SITREP

SOUTH AFRICAN LEGION

CAPE TOWN BRANCH

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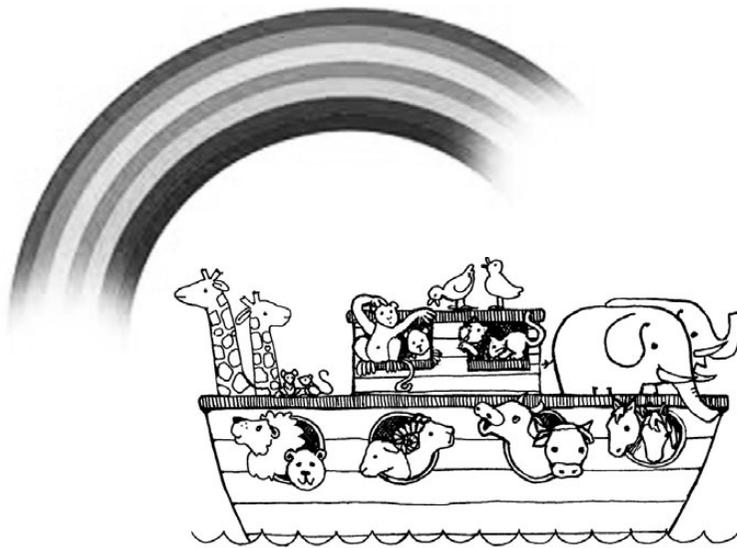
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FEBRUARY 2014



Noah's Ark:

Everything I need to know, I learned from Noah's Ark.

ONE: Don't miss the boat.

TWO: Remember that we are all in the same boat!

THREE: Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.

FOUR: Stay fit. When you are 60 years old, someone may ask you to do something really big.

FIVE: Don't listen to critics; just get on with the job that needs to be done.

SIX: Build your future on high ground.

SEVEN: For safety's sake, travel in pairs.

EIGHT: Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.

NINE: When you're stressed, float awhile.

TEN: Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.

ELEVEN: No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.

2013 POPPY DAY COLLECTON



With four collection tins still outstanding, we have closed off and are pleased to announce that R60,914.94 was banked. This is a new record – an increase of 19,6% on last year’s previous record.

	2012	2013
Donations - individuals	4,968.10	3,650.00
Donations – corporate	262.65	3,150.00
Collections at shopping centres	28,975.50	41,447.83
Collections at senior citizen’s residences	2,118.20	2,989.01
Collections via schools and churches	5,682.60	5,675.85
Collections via sport clubs, pubs	5,034.30	1,964.20
Collections via shellholes	535.50	923.20
Collections via SANDF units	1,165.95	313.85
Individual collectors	2,175.55	801.00
	<u>R50,918.35</u>	<u>R60,914.94</u>

A few points on the various sources of the funds.

1. Collections via shopping centres increased significantly and can be attributed to two reasons.
 - a. Shoprite Checkers gave us permission to collect inside their stores where the Centre Management had refused permission to collect at the Centre.
 - b. Twenty-three Rosedale residents answered the call to collect at various points which saw R5,928.88 being collected, an average of R257.00 per collector. I salute them.
2. Support from the SANDF was limited save for 71 Signals Regiment who manned various collection points and raised R2,760.45 whilst individual members of the CTR Dukes also manned collection points and collected at their Unit. This raised almost R1,000.00. A few members of the CTH Association also assisted at three collection points and there combined efforts raised approximately R1,100.00.

3. The annual Gunners collection point at Cavendish Square in which four of the 13 collectors were serving CFA members, raised R3,827.90.
4. For the first time, apart from individual Moth/SA Legion members assisting 1 Shellhole agreed to collect at their shellhole and this raised R923.20.

Exposure for the Legion increased where this year the Branch Secretary, Lgr Lionel Crook, addressed the Wynberg Boys High School staff, pupils and former pupils at their annual Founders Day Service, at Rondebosch Boys High School Memorial Service and at the Red Cross Children's Hospital's Memorial Service. In addition, Lgr John Gandy attended the Western Province Preparatory School's annual Memorial Service.

I extend my sincere thanks to Lgr John Gandy for convening the project for the second successive year and for all his hard work before the day and for again collecting the boxes from numerous collectors and places afterwards. In addition, my thanks to our Branch Secretary, Lgr Lionel Crook, for serving on the sub-committee, for all the correspondence before and after the event and to Lgr Graham Williams for serving on the sub-committee, canvassing for collectors and for assisting with the counting of the money. Our chief counters, Lgrs Norman Stockton and Glen Villett, who once again supervised, counted and recorded the contents of each tin, as well as collecting on the day, need a special thank you, as well as Lgr Marianne Minnaar who was always available to help wherever it was needed. Thank you to the band of Rosedale ladies who attached pins to the poppies.

Finally a special thank you to the convenors of the various collection points for manning and organising the volunteers, as well as all other individuals who held a collection tin on the day.

This year Poppy Day is planned for Saturday 8 November and I hope that with early planning we will reach our target of R75,000, or more.

Lgr Ian McKinney
Fundraising Portfolio
Cape Town Branch
SA Legion of Military Veterans

30 Jan 2014

For those who wonder, and for those who have asked, the funds collected on Poppy Day are placed in a welfare account and are there to assist members of the Legion who are in need. In very special circumstances assistance is also provided to non-members who through a local regiment for example, have close ties to the Legion. For instance : the Branch recently made a donation to the Cape Town Rifles (Dukes) who were raising funds to assist Rifleman Titus whose home in the Overberg district burned down in December last. He was a hero – he plunged into the flames twice to save his wife and one child - but he lost everyone and everything else. He went into hospital with 90 percent burns and subsequently succumbed himself, leaving only a very badly burnt wife who has now left hospital and with only one of three children left, is slowly recovering her life.



OPERATION UXOLO : CAPE FIELD ARTILLERY AT QUNU

The Salute Troop of Cape Field Artillery had the honour, together with a Troop from The Light Regiment, Potchefstroom, of firing two 21 gun salutes at the funeral of the late Nelson Mandela at Qunu in the Eastern Province on 15 December 2013.

Urgent orders were received by the commanding officer, Lt Col CA ‘Kees’ de Haan on Friday, 6 December 2013, and well tried and practiced procedures were immediately put in place. Troops were called up. Vehicles and ammunition had already been readied following a warning order in mid-year. Rounds had been in the unit’s magazine since then; but now vehicles were again checked and serviced and, meanwhile, a movement order was prepared and typed. Arrangements were made for accommodation at Fort iKapa (where the unit is headquartered), at Oudtshoorn and at Port Elizabeth. The headquarters at Fort iKapa was a bustle of ordered activity, while preparations were in progress for the journey to the Eastern Province.

A final order group was held at midday of Sunday, 8 December 2014, and at 02h20 on Monday, four gun tractors, guns and support vehicles under the command of Captain Leon Carstens, quietly departed, leaving the headquarters and swinging through the quiet suburb of Goodwood and, with the long journey before them the convoy moved to the N1 and thence the R62 en route to their first major stop at Oudtshoorn. There the vehicles were refuelled before the convoy moved via Long Kloof to Port Elizabeth where it remained overnight. The next morning

saw the convoy move via East London, before arriving at Qunu in the afternoon of Tuesday 10 December.

At Qunu Cape Field Artillery joined the military contingent that was already there. Personnel found the weather cold and *very* wet during the time that they were there but together with The Light Regiment, practice drills were held. And on 15 December, with all personnel in Dress No. 1, the two salutes were fired. The first was fired much as a Minute Gun, the 21 rounds were fired at one minute intervals as the cortège moved to the burial site and the second, a correctly fired 21 gun salute, as the remains of the first President of a Democratic South Africa was laid to rest.

After cleaning guns, rest and sleep was the order of the day. And then it was back to Cape Town by the same route, the convoy leaving Qunu at 03h00 on Monday, 16 December and arriving back at the Regiment's headquarters at 20h00 on Tuesday, 17 December 2013.

Major Dalene Coetzee, with assistance of six other members of the unit, including warrant officer Bill Hennings, manned a 24 hour operations room at the regiment's headquarters and every two hours were provided with progress reports. It was a rather an emotional moment when the Salute Troop returned and were safely back at Fort iKapa.

It was one of a few long journeys the regiment has made. The first was in 1974 when Major Ian McKinney, then second-in-command, took a convoy of eight tractors and guns with support vehicles from Cape Town to Potchefstroom, returning with the replacement guns that had been calibrated. Other similar journeys have been made. In 2012 the Salute Troop travelled to Grahamstown where it fired a 21 gun salute during a visit by President Zuma; and it went to the Eastern Cape once again in 2013 to fire a 21 gun salute when the Deputy President attended the Heritage Day celebrations.

A wife sends a text to her husband on a cold winter's morning . . .



CENTENARY OF THE OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR ONE

The start of World War 1 1914

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire, in Sarajevo in June 1914, triggered the bloodiest conflict in human history.



A British recruiting poster at the start of World War I featured the war minister, Lord Kitchener.

This was aimed at blocking any aggressive Russian move in the Balkans.

Another alliance, the Triple Entente, was made between Britain, France and Russia. It was not a military alliance, but its members had agreed to co-operate against any aggression from Germany.

Jealous of Britain's trade and colonies, Germany which already had the world's largest army, had begun to build up its navy. Kaiser Wilhelm II's ambition to acquire more colonies overseas and his aggressive foreign policy also worried other European countries.



Under Kaiser Wilhelm II (1890-1918), Germany embarked on a fleet to rival Britain's.

In the years leading up to 1914, Britain and Germany competed to build larger and better ships for their navies. The rivalry between European countries over trade, colonies and military power had also been growing and the European powers had grouped in defensive alliances.

Making alliances

The main alliance was the Triple Alliance, of Germany, Italy and Austria-Hungary. In this alliance, an attack on any one country would bring its allies to its defence.



World War I began after a Serb terrorist killed the heir to Austria-Hungary.

In 1914, Europe divided into two. Britain, France and Russia, known as the Allies, combined to fight the Central Powers, comprising Germany, Italy, Austro-Hungary and its allies. Fighting took place on the eastern and western fronts.



In 1914, Britain was the only country which did not have a huge reserve of trained men. Volunteers flocked to join up at army recruiting offices.

Belgium's defence and sent the 100,000 strong British Expeditionary Force to France to help slow the German advance at Mons and Charleroi.

However, in the face of a determined German advance, Joffre retreated until he was behind the Marne River. Here, the French forces halted the Germans on September 6. Both sides then took up defensive positions, and within three months, a line of trenches was dug from the Channel to the Swiss frontier.



Germany invades France

The British then acted upon the Treaty of London (1839), in which they had agreed to protect Belgian neutrality. It was on these grounds that Britain declared war on Germany on August 4. Britain went to

France. When the German army marched into neutral Belgium to attack the French from the north, they were faced with determined Belgian resistance. This slowed down their advance and allowed the French, under General Joffre, time to reorganize their forces.

Both sides raced to manufacture more and more weapons, such as poison gas. They thought that by using these weapons they would shorten the war. But it lasted for four years and was the bloodiest conflict in human history.

It has been estimated that the direct cost of the war was 40 billion Sterling pounds and the total number of men killed or wounded amounted to about 30 million.



Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary

How the war began

The war began when a Serb terrorist, Gavrilo Princip, shot dead the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. This led Austria to declare war on Serbia on July 28.

Russia's tsar, Nicholas II, mobilized his country's troops to defend Serbia from Austria. In return, Germany declared war on Russia on August 1. Russian armies were defeated by the Germans at Tannenberg and in the battle of the Masurian Lakes.

To the south, the Austro-Hungarian armies were defeated by the Russians in September.

A war on two fronts

Germany had always dreaded a war on two fronts, so it put the Schlieffen Plan into operation. Drawn up by General von Schlieffen, the plan aimed to defeat France in six weeks so that Germany could concentrate its forces against Russia.

The French army had the difficult task of defending hundreds of kilometres of frontier against the enemy.

In 1914, the German army was the largest and best trained in the world.

Britain had the smallest army in 1914, but it was made up of professionals.



Inspired by the call for volunteers to defend their countries in August 1914, millions of men of all ages, across Europe, joined up to fight the common enemy.

In August this year, one hundred years ago, war erupted in Europe – a war in which, when it ended, 37 million people had become casualties. It was a war that drew in all the great powers and assembled them in two opposing camps – the Triple Entente of the United Kingdom, France, and Imperial Russia, and the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Both would be joined by other nations, for instance Japan and the United States joined the Entente (Allies) and the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria joined the Central Powers. Ultimately, more than 70 million military personnel, including 60 million Europeans, were mobilised. It was the largest war in history.

The underlying cause was a resurgence of imperialism, but the ultimate cause was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, by a Yugoslav nationalist in Sarejevo on 20 June 1914.

Tempers ran high. The first shots were fired on 28 July by Austria-Hungary in preparation for the invasion of Serbia; Russia mobilised; Germany invaded neutral Belgium and Luxembourg before advancing into France; Britain declared war on

Germany. After Germany's march on Paris was halted the war in France became a stalemate. What became known as the Western Front became lines of trenches – on both sides – stretching from Belgium to Switzerland. It did not alter much until 1917.

It was on the Western Front that the 1st South African Brigade found itself in 1915.



General Botha

THE IMPERIAL SERVICE CONTINGENT
General Botha, the South African Premier, saw that the fortunes of the country were bound up with those of the British Commonwealth and he offered to assist the Imperial Government in Europe. South Africa's finances, depleted by the conquest of German South West Africa, could not undertake the logistics of the campaign in France. It was therefore arranged that volunteers would be equipped, as far as possible, from resources at hand, and be paid until the date of embarkation. They would thereafter be paid at

the same rate as British regular troops and have the same status as the new service battalions of the British Army.

An Infantry Brigade.

A Brigade of four regiments of infantry was raised and the battalions were constituted as follows:

1st S.A. Infantry – Cape of Good Hope Regiment.

2nd S.A. Infantry – Natal and Orange Free State Regiment.

3rd S.A. Infantry – Transvaal and Rhodesia Regiment.

4th S.A. Infantry – Recruited from the Scottish regiments then existing in the country and from Caledonian Societies.

A Regiment of Heavy Artillery

A regiment of heavy artillery of five batteries was raised from those who had fought in the heavy batteries in German South West Africa and from members



of the Cape Garrison Artillery and the Durban Garrison artillery.

The conditions of service were the same as those for the infantry battalions.

The batteries were representative of the four provinces.

* * *

Signal Company

A Signal Company was recruited. Picked men with a high standard of specialised knowledge, character, intelligence and military experience resulted in the assembly of 230 men by September 1915.

Medical Services

Apart from men who volunteered for regimental duties, One Field Ambulance Unit and a General Hospital Unit were formed for service in France.



Railway Companies and Trades Companies

Months after the units described above had left South Africa; two Railway Operating Companies were formed from volunteers.

In July 1917 a Miscellaneous Trades Company was formed for service in France.

Cape Auxiliary Horse Transport Companies

In February 1917 the War Office asked the South African Government if it could raise companies of drivers for the Army Service Corps in France. Eight companies of coloured drivers were raised with the recruiting centre being established at Kimberley. Artificers and drivers eventually numbered 3482. The first detachment arrived in France in May 1917. Others followed soon after.



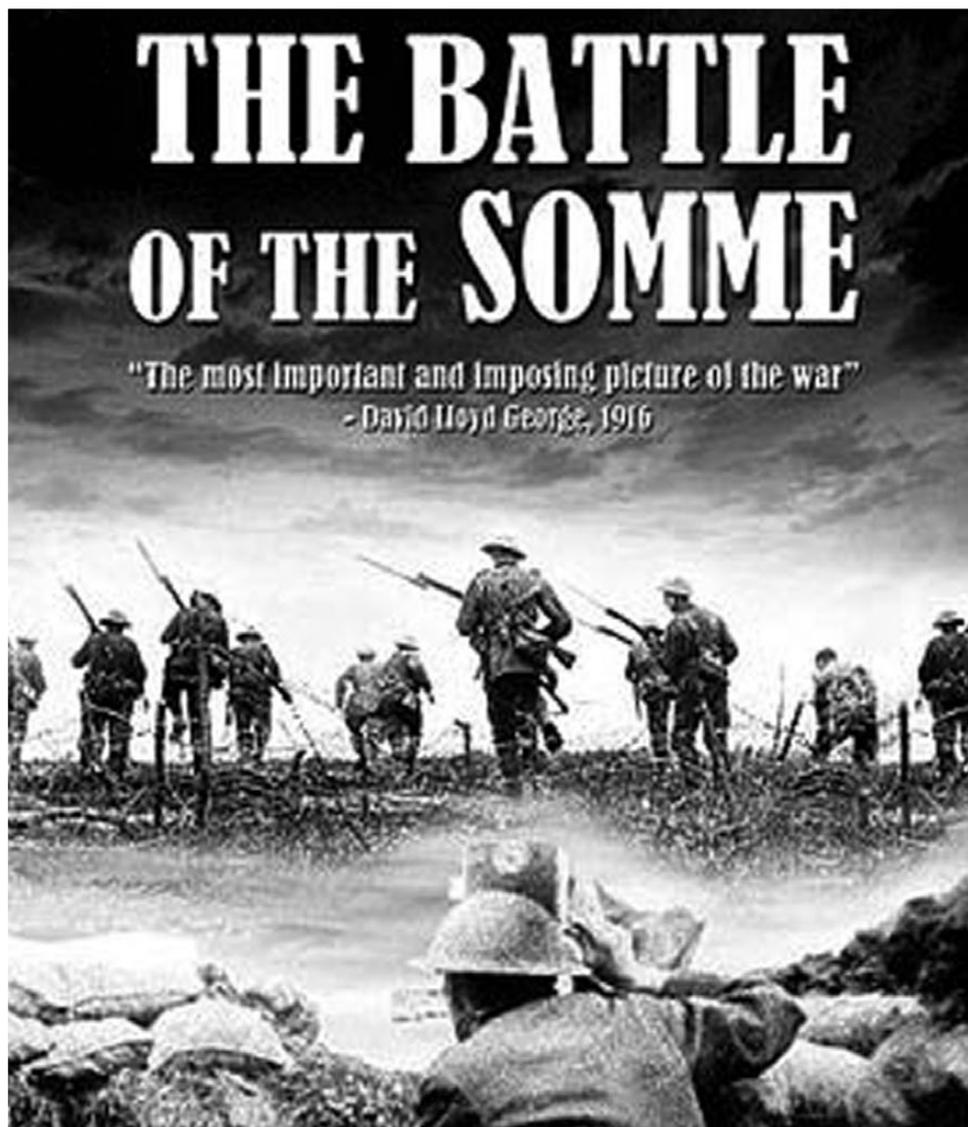
Brigadier General
Henry Timson Lukin

THE 1ST SOUTH AFRICAN INFANTRY BRIGADE

The Brigade, under command of Brigadier General Henry Timson Lukin, CMG, DSO, arrived in England in late October and underwent two months training. But then, on 7 December 1915 instead of France, the Brigade was sent to North Africa where the tribes of the Senussi were up in arms, stirred up by German and Turkish agents. The Brigade arrived in January and almost immediately moved into the battle area where the 5000 Senussi were causing mayhem.

The Brigade was involved in the Battle of Halazin and was in action again at Agagia, and in the march on Sollum.

On 25 March they began the return to Alexandria and moved from there to Marseilles in mid-April 1916.



Reaching Flanders it took its place as a Brigade of the 9th Division on 14 May 1916. And in Flanders it took part in the murderous Battle of the Somme, where Britain lost 60 000 officers and men as casualties, in one day.

During the first months the battle, which began on 1 July, the 9th Division was in reserve but ten days later the South Africans had been drawn in and were involved in the fight for Trônes Wood. It was taken, but could not be held. The 2nd S.A. Regiment had 200 casualties here.

An attack on the German Line by XIII Corps on 14 July was successful and all the objectives were taken but on the right flank – the most difficult of all, 9th Division had been ordered to take the village of Longueval. But it became obvious that the whole of Longueval could not be taken unless Delville Wood was also taken.

In desperate hand-to-hand fighting the Division's 26th Brigade (8th Black Watch, 10th Argyll & Sutherlands, 9th Seaforth and 5th Cameronian Highlanders) secured all except the northern section of the village. The 1st S.A. Regiment under Lt.Col. Dawson, was deployed with the Scottish Brigades. It returned to Lukin's command after the three other regiments of the Brigade began to move to the Wood. Lukin's brigade was ordered to take the Wood. On the cloudy morning of 15 July, as the sun rose, the sky lightened, and men noticed how small birds still sang in the ruins and larks rose from the battered ridges. The attack went in from the south-west and at first the advance moved swiftly, despite violent shelling. Lt.Col. Tanner of 2nd S.A. Regiment, who was in charge of the attack, was able to report that the 3rd Regiment held everything south of Princess Street. He then sent the 2nd Regiment to occupy the northern perimeter. It proved a heavy undertaking but they reached their objective.

No sooner had they done so when the whole Wood was violently shelled by enemy, with machine-gun and rifle fire from the strong German positions around the perimeter. At 2.40 pm. Tanner reported he had taken the whole Wood with the exception of strong points abutting on Longueval and the northern orchards.

The problem was to continue to hold it. Although it had originally been planned to thin out the troops in the Wood and leave it to be held by detachments on the perimeter, armed with machine-guns, the scale and fury of the German reaction made this impossible. The entire Brigade became involved in holding Delville Wood.

An advance by 27th Brigade to take the northern sector of the village and capture the orchard failed in the face of intense opposition. The situation was desperate. Longueval and Delville Wood had proved to be too strongly held. It was a vicious circle. Longueval could not be won and held without Delville; Delville could not be won and held without Longueval.

It was decided to make another assault on the north-west corner of the Wood.

The attack was made shortly before dawn on 17 July but it met with stubborn resistance, and the troops were forced to fall back to their original position. Further attempts to gain ground were made but by now the Germans had advanced into a section of the Wood. A counter-attack was launched and cleared the ground, but only at the cost of heavy casualties.

76th Brigade of 3rd Division was brought in, and succeeded in obtaining a foothold in the orchard and Thackeray of 3rd S.A. Regiment was ordered to link up with them. He directed a company of 1st S.A. Regiment to do so. That morning, the fourth day of the battle, was a crisis day for the defenders of the Wood. The arrival of the company of 1st S.A. Regiment on the outskirts of the Wood was the signal for an enemy bombardment of unprecedented fury. Every part of the area was searched and smothered by shells. The rate of fire was often as high as 400 shells a minute.

All through the morning the rapidly thinning handful of men held out. Their one relief was when the shelling ceased and enemy troops advanced upon them, for their accurate shooting took a heavy toll. By half-past two that afternoon the position had become desperate. Lt.Col. Dawson of 1st S.A. regiment, with only 150 men remaining, had just been withdrawn in a thinning out process of withdrawal, after having been continuously in action for four days. He was ordered to take them forward as reliefs. The men of the Brigade's Trench Mortar Battery – three officers and about eighty men – were brought from Montauban and placed at Dawson's disposal.

Dawson found Thackeray's 3rd S.A. Regiment in serious straits. In many parts of the Wood the garrison had been utterly destroyed and the few survivors had been forced back. Wounded filled the trenches. It was impossible to remove them since all of Thackeray's stretcher bearers were casualties and no men could be spared to take their place. The Trench Mortar Battery was sent to reinforce 3rd S.A. Regiment.

At 6pm that evening – 19 July – came the welcome news that the South Africans would be relieved. But it was a slow and intricate business. By midnight, however, portions of two companies of the 4th were withdrawn.

The enemy had brought up fresh troops and they made repeated attacks, three on the night of 18 July; in the last of them Thackeray's men were assaulted on all three sides. All through 19 July they held on, suffering incessant shelling and sniping, the latter now from close quarters. It was the same on 20 July, but at six o'clock that evening, troops of 76th Brigade (from 3rd Division), were able to take over what was left of Longueval and Delville Wood in the hands of 9th Division.

Thackeray marched out with two officers – both wounded – and 140 men, made up of details from all the regiments of the Brigade.

When Lukin received orders to take the Wood the Brigade strength was 121 officers and 3030 men. The total ultimately assembled was about 750.

The value of the Wood is proved by the fact that the enemy used his best troops against it – successively the 10th Bavarian Division, the 8th Division of their 4th (Magdeburg) Corps and the 5th of the 3rd Corps.

For six days and five nights the South Africans had held the Wood against the flower of the German Army and they did not give way to the challenge. John Buchan wrote: As a feat of human daring and fortitude the fight is worthy of remembrance by South Africa and Britain.

On 18 July, Thackeray – who had taken over command from Tanner when the latter was wounded – was holding the Wood with nine and a half companies, a strength of about 1500 men; two days later he had only 140. From this we may judge the fury of the conflict.

Delville Wood was not the end for the South African Brigade in Flanders. There was more to come.

(See the next SITREP)



A father walks into a restaurant with his young son. He gives the young boy three one Rand coins to play with to keep him occupied. Suddenly, the boy starts choking, going blue in the face. The father realizes the boy has swallowed the coins and starts slapping him on the back. The boy coughs up two of the coins, but keeps choking. Looking at his son, the father is panicking, shouting for help. A serious looking woman hears the commotion, gets up from her seat and makes her way, unhurried, across the restaurant. Reaching the boy, the woman carefully drops his pants; takes hold of the boy's testicles and starts to squeeze and twist, gently at first and then ever so firmly. After a few seconds the boy convulses violently and coughs up the last coin, which the woman deftly catches in her free hand. Releasing the boy's testicles, the woman hands the one Rand coin to the father and walks back to her seat without saying a word. As soon as he is sure that his son has suffered no ill effects, the father rushes over to the woman and starts thanking her saying "... I have never seen anybody do anything like that before, it was fantastic. Are you a doctor?" "No," she replied "... I work for the South African Revenue Service".



JOKE'S

* I passed a bakkie this afternoon and saw that it had a sticker on the back which read: 'I am a vet and I drive like an animal'. It then occurred to me that there must be quite a lot of gynaecologists on the road”.

* A woman has the last word in any argument. Anything a man says after that is the beginning of a new argument.

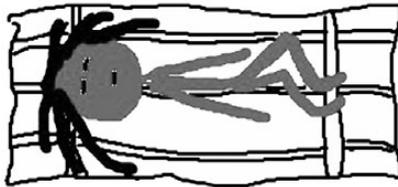
* A woman worries about the future until she gets a husband. A man never worries about the future until he gets a wife.

*A successful man is one who makes more money than his wife can spend. A successful woman is one who can find such a man.

* A woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he does not. A man marries a woman expecting that she will not change, but she does.

* Jannie se Mammie sê vir Jannie om sy Pa te bel en te vra hoe laat hy huis toe kom van gholf af. Jannie bel en sê vir sy Ma “... dat daar 'n vrou is wat sê dat hy nie nou kan praat nie!" Later kom Pappa by die huis en Mamma gee hom 'n vreeslike klap. Pappa is heel verbaas en vra “... wat de hel was dit nou voor?" Mamma sê toe vir Jannie om “... vir sy Pa presies te sê wat die vrou gesê het toe jy gebel het!" Jannie antwoord met "... the subscriber you have called is not available right now. Please try again later”.

This one may have appeared on our pages in the past:



A rather well built woman spent almost all of her vacation time sunbathing on the roof of her hotel. The first day that she sunbathed she wore a red bathing suit.

However, on the second day, she felt a little more adventurous. She slipped out of it in order to get an overall tan figuring that no one could see her way up there. She had hardly begun when she heard someone running up the stairs. She was lying on her stomach, so she just pulled a towel over her rear. "Excuse me, miss," said a flustered out of breath assistant manager of the hotel. "The Hilton does not mind you sunbathing on the roof, but we would very much appreciate you wearing a bathing suit as you did yesterday!" "What difference does it make", Joan asked rather calmly. "No one can see me up here on the roof and besides, I am covered with a towel." "With all due respect, not exactly ma'am," said the embarrassed manager. "You are lying on the dining room skylight."



Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind - George Orwell in 1984.

Common Sense in Managing a Country

Cicero in 55 BC is alleged to have stated:

"The budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed, lest Rome will become bankrupt. People must again learn to work instead of living on public assistance".



Governments have evidently learnt nothing over the past 2 069 years and the above applies particularly to local circumstances.

A Storm in the North Atlantic - February 1945

Submitted by J.W.H. Meiring



The ‘HMAMC *Canton*’, converted into an Armed Merchant Cruiser, was a new P & O liner of 25 000 tons, launched in 1938. She was transporting RAF and other personnel back to England from the Far East.

Our ship’s company was embarking in Cape Town to go and take delivery of the third frigate, the ‘HMSAS *Transvaal*’ that the Royal Navy was making available to the South African Naval Forces. We were to join our ship in Glasgow when she was ready. The “*Canton*” was short of crew to man their guns and they had asked our ship’s company for volunteers. About seven of us stepped forward. As my training had been in gunnery, I was allocated one of the portside Oerlikon cannons.

We were now included in the “*Canton*” crew, and therefore messed with them and had far superior quarters than being in one of the troop-decks below. Watch-keeping hours of 4 on and 8 off were instituted.

On leaving Gibraltar we picked up an escort of two destroyers. The February weather had now turned considerably colder and the sea became ‘choppy’ as the ships proceeded northwards into the teeth of a bitter wind.

Our ship was to dock in the Clyde Estuary, and in order to get there, we had been routed round Northern Ireland so as to minimise the “U” Boat threat. A short while after leaving Gibraltar, a gale began blowing. The glass dropped

suddenly, and mountainous seas began building up. Most of our contingent had experienced bad weather round South African shores, in particular round The Cape of Good Hope, but this was truly awesome. The long pitched seas were approaching from the Port Quarter which made the “Canton” pitch and roll in a most alarming combination. The howling wind whipped the tops off the rollers and for a fair height above the average surface of the sea there was a continuous and impenetrable layer of heavy wind-driven spray. The sound of the wind and the storm was unimaginable.

The sea towered above the decks in such a way that one would have thought it impossible for the ship to ride over them. However, at the last possible moment, with a shudder and a lurch, the heavy green seas were heaved off the bow over which they had broken, and we appeared to slide down the back of the wave into the trough, in readiness for the whole procedure to happen time and time again. Not much could be seen of the escorting destroyers, but every now and then, through the grey gloom, a glimpse would be caught of a mast-head, a funnel or perhaps a flashing Aldis lamp from the bridge, showing that in spite of the terrible weather, the eyes and ears of the Royal Navy had not relaxed their vigilance. Nobody, but watch-keepers and guns’ crews, was allowed on deck. Continuous sea spray had made everything very slippery, and there was a very real danger of going overboard. Lifelines had been rigged along decks where people had to pass. It was an ordeal to get to one’s post. One was safe once one had reached the Oerlikon gun pit however as one could brace oneself against the upturned rings round the gun. The storm started to abate after about eight hours, and by then we had turned south to starboard into the Irish Sea.

Finally, during the course of my last watch from midnight to four o’clock that morning, we said goodbye to the two escort destroyers, who left in a flurry of foaming bow waves and flashing signal lamps, we to proceed up the Clyde Estuary to Gourock, and they to carry on further south to their home port of Liverpool.



VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS

Our South African ‘part-time’ soldiers are Volunteers, many of them without civilian employment, except, to a large extent, for the leader element – officers, warrant officers and NCOs.

The regiments and other units in which they serve are today known as the Reserve Force. Prior to that it was unofficially known as the Part Time Force and before 1994 it was the Citizen Force. Before that, however, its title was Active Citizen Force. Whatever the title may be ...it is truly a Volunteer force *and* a citizen force, composed of citizens of our country.

It was once, many years ago, almost sneered at and those who joined the Active Citizen Force were thought of as men with nothing better to do than playing at being a soldiers. And in later years, when Citizen Force units training was stepped up and they were attending training camps every year, was derogatorily referred to – mostly by ill-informed Permanent soldiers - as Campers. But the Border War – as it is termed, changed all that and so has the Governments peace-keeping initiative in sub-Saharan Africa.

Cape Town based Citizen Force units were among the first to be mobilized in 1976 for Operation Savannah, crossing over into Angola in 1976 – Cape Field Artillery, Cape Town Highlanders, 3 Field Engineer Regiment and 71 Signals Unit. Joining Cape Field Artillery were two batteries and a troop of Transvaal Staatsartillerie, a battery of Regiment Oos Transvaal (anti-aircraft) and a battery of 2 Locating Regiment.

These regiments/units did subsequent tours of border duty and a number of part-time soldiers took part in the battles that took part in the fighting against FAPLA and the Cubans in the years leading up to 1990 when the thousands of Cubans eventually withdrew.

Our Volunteer army had its base in the volunteers of the Cape and Natal. The first unit in the Cape was formed in November 1855 and was known for a short while as the Cape Royal Rifles (the word Royal did not receive official sanction) – and which still exists today as the Cape Town Rifles (Dukes). It gave birth in 1857 to a unit of Foot Artillery, which later bore the proud name of Prince Alfred's Own Cape Field Artillery –today Cape Field Artillery.

The latter regiment had the honour of providing a Troop of four guns that travelled to Qunu in the Eastern Cape to fire 21 gun salutes during the funeral of our first democratic President, the late Nelson Mandela.

It is generally not known that the South African Volunteer system began before that of the Volunteers in Britain. True – there were Volunteers long before that at the Cape, but with danger past the system had come to an end.

WAR WITH FRANCE

War with France seemed inevitable in the mid-nineteenth century, however, as the nation's anger had been simmering for over a decade – ever since a remarkable letter had been leaked to *The Times*. (Yes, letters were leaked even in those days). A letter from the Duke of Wellington had written to General Burgoyne exposing the poor state of Britain's defences (sounds like 1939) and it argued how the threat had changed : steam was replacing sail, and a French navy powered by steam could quickly put an invading army ashore anywhere in Britain, Soon the idea of a Volunteer force- part-time Volunteer soldiers captured the nation's imagination.

In May 1859 the government agreed to this new military structure. It began with Artillery Volunteers for defence against naval attack but over time it expanded to units of Light Horse, Mounted Rifles, Engineers and Medical corps. By the early years of the twentieth century the Volunteers numbered over a quarter of a million men. It became the Territorial Force in 1908.



THE LOSS OF THE TROOPSHIP MENDI

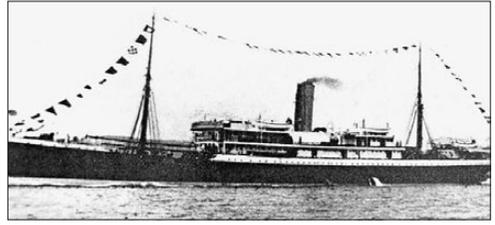
After their arrival in England in October 1915 the 1st South African Infantry Brigade were sent to North Africa on 7 December to deal with a problem there, but by May 1916 it was back in France, in positions at the Somme battlefield, The South African Field Artillery was in action in East Africa serving their guns while enduring the ravages of malaria, dysentery and short rations; and the five batteries of South African Heavy Artillery landed in France in April 1916.

Huge numbers of men were being lost daily in the fighting in the trenches of what was called the Western Front. But men were needed to keep the front lines supplied with ammunition, rations, medical supplies and all the other items required to wage war. Britain needed to call those men to the front lines to replace the heavy casualties being experienced.

In September 1916, Louis Botha the South African Prime Minister agreed to a request from the British Government to recruit 10 000 black troops to replace those troops presently working at the ports and supply dumps in France. Recruiting offices were opened in South Africa and the High Commission territories. Volunteers came forward quickly and received initial training at the Western Province Agricultural Societies show grounds at Rosebank, Cape Town, where the men were housed in tents. A memorial to commemorate them was discovered about five years ago in the grounds of what is now the University of Cape Town).

They were sent off to Europe in groups when training was completed. The 4 230 ton steamship *MENDI* – an Elder Dempster Line single screw vessel, (named after the Mendi tribe in Sierra Leone – a more usual port of call for the ship) carried the last of the 10 000 troops. It left Cape Town on 6 January 1917 in convoy with five troopships carrying Australians and escorted by the cruiser *EDINBURGH* – just before the German raider *WOLF* laid mines in Cape waters. For most of the men of the 5th SANLC Battalion on board it was probably their first view of the sea.

After a call at Plymouth, *MENDI* sailed steamed at reduced speed for Le Havre, her final destination, escorted by HMS *BRISK*. At about 04.55 on the foggy morning of 21 February, approximately eighteen kilometres from the Isle of Wight, the 11 484 ton. *DARRO* came out of the mist at full speed, and crashed into the two forward holds of *MENDI*. The holds had been converted to troop decks and the gash made by *DARRO* cut to a depth of 20 feet from deck to keel. Many men were killed immediately – others began to climb out to the main deck but one of the stairways had been damaged and not all men reached their allotted lifeboat stations. With water pouring into the ship a quick list to starboard soon developed and of the seven lifeboats only two were successfully launched and were able to reach *DARRO* with about one hundred survivors.



The Steamship *MENDI*



Cruiser *EDINBURGH*



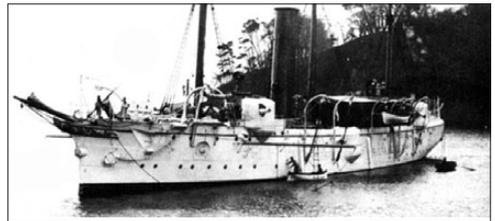
German Raider *WOLF*



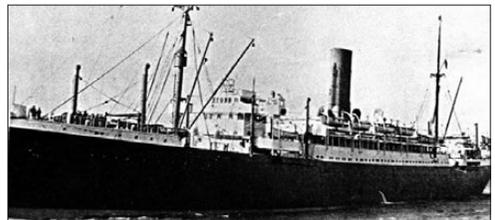
There are many stories of courage and self-sacrifice. It is told of Padre Isaac Wauchope Dyobha, that he cried out to the men on deck:

Be quiet and calm, my countrymen. What is happening now is what you came to do. . .

You are going to die, but that is what you came to do. Brothers, we are drilling the death drill. I a Zulu, say you are all my brothers . . . Swazis, Pondos, Basutos . . . so let us die



HMS *BRISK*



The *DARRO*

like brothers. We are the sons of Africa. Raise your war-cries, brothers, for though they made us leave our assegais in the kraal, our voices are left with our bodies.

And they stamped the death dance together.

* * *

It is a story that has been immortalized although can never be confirmed. It is, however, unlikely that South African oral tradition would have repeated an account that has no foundation whatsoever.

Twenty minutes after MENDI was hit, she sank, taking with her all those that were still on board. Of the many who jumped in the zero degree water most succumbed to the freezing temperature. HMS *BRISK* launched her lifeboats to try and rescue as many as possible but the life had been sapped from many of them by the icy water. The search went on through the darkness until it was light at 09h00. They landed 137 survivors and the bodies of twelve men.

Of 802 troops, 607 were lost; nine of their white officers and NCOs and 31 of the crew of 69 were also lost. The *MENDI* disaster was one of South Africa's worst tragedies of the First World War – surely none could claim to have killed so many so quickly. This incident prompted the Prime Minister, General Louis Botha, to move an unopposed Parliamentary motion of sympathy with the bereaved relatives of those who had died.

The names of all those who lost their lives in the tragic accident – one that should never have happened – are inscribed on the impressive Hollybrook Memorial near Southampton – 'For those with no known grave but the sea.' . And Queen Elizabeth unveiled a stone plaque at the Avalon Cemetery in Soweto on Thursday, 23 March 1995, to mark the opening of a Garden of Remembrance in honour of the victims lost in the sinking of the *MENDI*.

Altogether about 21 000 black South Africans – all of them volunteers – eventually served in France with the South African Native Labour Corps between 1916 and 1918. They formed part of the labour force that included French, British, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Egyptian and Canadians, as well as German prisoners of war. Most men worked in the harbours at Le Havre, Rouen and Dieppe, where they unloaded supply ships and loaded trains with supplies for the front lines; but by the time the SANLC was disbanded other tasks had been undertaken – they labored in quarries, laid and repaired roads and railway lines and cut vast quantities of timber. Their work was highly regarded and those employed at the harbours earned special praise. Three hundred and thirty-three gave their lives in France and most are buried at the British Military Cemetery at *Arques-la-Bataille*.

Most people walk in and out of your life, but FRIENDS leave footprints in your Heart.

The Webster dictionary defines Matelot as a sailor or seaman and states that the term originates from Middle French and Middle Dutch and literally means 'bed mate' (most interesting but we probably all knew that!).

However, the privately owned Aussie website - www.gunplot.net - 'OZ Navy online' provides the following fuller and more accurate definition of the term:

A Matelot isn't born – he is made of leftovers! God built the world and the animals and then recycled the gash¹ to create this dastardly weapon.

He took the leftover roar of the lion, the howl of the hyena, the clumsiness of the ox, the stubbornness of the mule, the slyness of the fox, the wildness of the bull and the pride of a peacock – then added the filthy evil mind of the devil to satisfy his weird sense of humour.

A Matelot evolved into a crude combination of John Dillinger, Errol Flynn, Beau Brummell and Valentino – a swashbuckling – beer-swilling – lovemaking – LIAR!

A Matelot likes girls, rum, beer, fights, runs ashore, pubs, jokes, long leave, his mates and his ticket. He hates officer's rounds, saluting middies, naval police, painting the side, jaunties, navy scran², his turn at the barrel and signing on.

A matelot comes in four colours: white, off-white, dirty, and filthy – all looking alike under a tan and a uniform.

He is brave drinking beer, abusive playing crib, brutal defending his pride and passionate making love.

He can start a brawl, create a disaster, offend the law, desert his ship and make you lose your money, your temper and your mind.

He can take your sister, your mother, your aunt, and when he's caught, get his captain to vouch for his integrity.

A Matelot is loved by all mothers, sisters, aunts and nieces; hated by all fathers, brothers, uncles and nephews.

He has a girl in every port and a port in every girl. He breaks more hearts, causes more fights and begets more bastards than any other man, yet when he is off to sea he is missed more than any other!

A Matelot is a mean, hard drinking, fast running, mealy mouthed son-of-a-bitch, but when you're in strife he is a strong shoulder to lean on, a pillar of wisdom and a defender of the faith and cause.

He fights for his mate and dies for his country, without question or hesitation.

Gash - Aussie slang for anything superfluous.

²Scran - Aussie slang for 'food'.

OLD AGE AND THE ONSET OF DEMENTIA



As you get older three things happen. The first is your memory goes, and I can't remember the other two.

As we get older many of us try to keep our minds active in an attempt to stave off dementia.

Well let's see if your mental aerobics is paying off.

Dementia Quiz . . . and don't peek at the answers!

FIRST QUESTION: You are a participant in a race. You overtake the second person. What position are you in?

ANSWER: If you answered that you are first, then you are absolutely wrong! If you overtake the second person and you take his place, you are in second place!

Not as sharp as you thought you were? Try to do better next time. Now answer the second question, but don't take as much time as

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**SECOND QUESTION:** if you overtake the last person, then you are.....?

**ANSWER:** If you answered that you are second to last, then you are..... wrong again. Tell me sunshine, how can you overtake the last person??

*You're not very good at this, are you?*

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THIRD QUESTION: Very tricky arithmetic! Note: this must be done in your head only. Do not use paper and pencil or a calculator. Try it.

Take 1000 and add 40 to it. Now add another 1000. Now add 30. Add another 1000. Now add 20. Now add another 1000. Now add 10. What is the total?

ANSWER: Did you get 5000?

The correct answer is actually 4100...

If you don't believe it, check it with a calculator! Today is definitely not your day, is it? Maybe you'll get the last question right.... Maybe....



FOURTH QUESTION: Mary's father has five daughters: 1. Nana, 2. Nene, 3. Nini, 4. Nono, and 5. ????. What is the name of the fifth daughter?

ANSWER: Did you answer Nunu? No! Of course it isn't Nunu you dumb fool. Her name is Mary! Read the question again!

Old age isn't looking too inviting for you is it? Ok, "village idiot" let's see if you can redeem yourself. Here's a bonus question.



BONUS QUESTION: A mute person goes into a shop and wants to buy a toothbrush. By imitating the action of brushing his teeth he successfully expresses himself to the shopkeeper and the purchase is done. Next, a blind man comes into the shop who wants to buy a pair of sunglasses; how does he indicate what he wants?

ANSWER: It's really very simple. He opens his mouth and asks for it!

*Does your employer actually pay you to think?? Highly doubtful!
Old age isn't looking too inviting for you is it?*



"I WOULD'VE RETIRED YEARS AGO BUT I FORGOT
WHERE I WORK."