



The South African Military History Society

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Krygshistoriese Vereniging

Founded 1966

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NEWSLETTER - MAY 2008

Before the AGM commenced, Flip Hoorweg announced the conferring of Honorary Life Membership on Prof C Johan Barnard in recognition of his manifold services to the Society during the course of many years. Prof Barnard was unable to attend and the certificate would be presented to him in Pretoria in due course by one of the committee members.

The 42nd Annual General Meeting was opened by the Chairman, Flip Hoorweg, who welcomed all present before declaring the meeting open, as a quorum of members was in attendance.

The usual format was followed and after acceptance of the 2006 minutes, Flip Hoorweg reported on the Society's activities in 2007. He also thanked the committee members for their support. Joan Marsh then gave the Treasurer's Report in conjunction with the Financial Report as audited by Gavin Moore and company. In summary the Society made a profit of R2 222 in 2007 and has healthy reserves. A total of 523 members was registered at the end of 2007; 147 of these in KwaZulu-Natal; 39 in Cape Town and 54 in SAMHSEC (Eastern Cape). There were 21 overseas members from 6 countries.

After all the reports were completed Colin Dean announced the prize winners for 2007, starting with the curtain raisers: third place was earned by David Williams for "Seven Famous Battles that shaped South Africa" and second was Roslyn Peter with *The Graf Spee*. The "George Barrell Memorial Prize" in the form of a certificate and a cheque for R100 was won by Ivor Little for his curtain raiser entitled: "The SAN boats - Eagle Oil at War". Since he was overseas the prize would be presented to him at a later date.

The "Dr Felix Machanik Memorial Prize" for 2007, in the form of a certificate plus R200, was awarded to Tim Waudby for his main lecture on "The Way Back - Burma 1943-45". Colin presented the certificate and prize money to Tim, to hearty applause. Second placed main lecture was Frank Diffenthal's "We were volunteers - Angola 1975" and third "The Planning of D-Day" by Martin Ayres.

Flip Hoorweg having completed his second year as Chairman, being about to stand down, asked for nominations for the position of Chairman. Bob Smith was nominated by Hamish Paterson and seconded by John Parkinson. There being no other nominations Bob was declared Chairman and duly took the Chair.

Bob called for nominations for the committee and David Scholtz proposed the re-election of the current

committee *en bloc*, which was seconded by Gavin Moore and accepted by the meeting. The committee for 2007/08 thus comprises: Colin Dean; Marjorie Dean; Flip Hoorweg, Ivor Little; Lyn Mantle; Joan Marsh; John Parkinson and Hamish Paterson.

Gavin Moore once again accepted the nomination as Honorary Auditor. Under general, Gavin raised the necessity of amending the Society's constitution to bring it in line with certain legislative changes to voluntary bodies especially as regards accounting practices. The meeting accepted his proposal to meet with the committee to advise them and obtain their agreement to the necessary changes. This business accomplished, Bob then closed the 42nd AGM of the Society, which had taken 29 minutes!

Anybody wanting a copy of the Financial Statements and/or the draft minutes of the meeting is welcome to contact Joan Marsh who will e-mail or post them as requested.

Following the affairs of the Annual General Meeting, Marjorie Dean, a long-standing member of the National Committee of the Society, addressed the meeting on the subject of "Battlefield Tours." Marjorie was very qualified to talk on this subject, having personally visited many historic battlefields in South Africa, Europe, the United Kingdom and North America. It is a subject that has always fired her enthusiasm and passion, which was very evident during the delivery of her lecture.

Battles may be over in a brief hour or two, or last for days, but battlefields are forever. Land that has been fought over in a great or small battle is changed forever. It becomes stained with blood and sacrifice, and therefore somehow set apart. The ancient Romans were great travellers and tourists, and we know the sites of ancient battlefields mainly because they wrote about it in letters and diaries. Battlefields have always attracted visitors, but it was not until the 19th century when technological advances enabled large numbers of people to visit the historic sites - just check it out on the Internet.

Visiting battlefields touches us in a number of ways. Enthusiasts can trace the development of tactics, see how great commanders plied their craft, and view the interplay between the ground and the events that unrolled across it. People visiting battlefields go, because by going there, they add to the chain of memory.

Not many would want to go and see the immediate aftermath of a battle, although there were and are those who do just that. There are those who, also since time immemorial, have tagged along to witness actual battles. It was once considered quite a special outing to go along if you knew a battle was about to take place, and watch ?from a (hopefully) safe distance, of course. Many of those indulging in this activity had no idea of what they were about to witness, and probably bolted after the first round of artillery was fired.

According to a recent article by Simon Calder in the London Independent, when conflict flares, sales of maps to the area increase. The buyers, however, appear to be people wanting to follow the course of the conflict, rather than would-be tourists. Mind you there are those who do want to visit, as tourists, countries around the world where serious fighting is currently going on. There is a name for this kind of tourism that seeks to be involved with death. It is called "thanatourism". At the first shots being fired, "thanatourists" are off to book a ticket to wherever the fighting is taking place.

An interesting example of tourism while the fighting is still going on, is that of the Nationalist government in Spain, which advertised battlefield tours in April 1938 - during the Spanish Civil War! It promised to take visitors, at a cost of £8 for a 9-day bus tour, and including first-class hotels, 'to the War Route of the North (San Sebastian, Bilbao, Santander, Gijon, Oviedo, and the Iron Ring).' 'See history in the making among Spanish

scenery of unsurpassed beauty', they offered. 'A War Route of the South' through Andalusia was added in September of the same year. Not insignificantly, they earned some 7 million pesetas for the depleted Spanish coffers.

As early as December 1914, just four months after the outbreak of the First World War, a magazine reported that civilian souvenir hunters (another very large category of battlefield tourists) were already active. Thomas Cook was forced to report the following year that, because of French hostility, it would not be running any more sightseeing expeditions to the battlefields 'until the war was over'! Tours began almost as soon as the guns stopped firing on 11 November 1918, despite the total destruction of the infrastructure of roads, railways, hotels and power and water supplies in the scarred landscape of the Western Front, still strewn with battlefield debris and even human remains. Cooks offered a luxury tour at thirty-five guineas, or an economy version at nine and a half guineas. The average wage in Britain - and that barely subsistence level - was only £3 a week. So these "thanatourists" must have been relatively wealthy.

Today battlefields see tourists lugging metal detectors and spades, out for personal gain or even profit, at the expense of wrecking a historic site. Sadly, in today's South Africa, looters, totally ignorant of history, are destroying valuable monuments on battlefields, just to sell as scrap metal.

Modern technology, through video, CD and tape recording, have now made it possible for the survivors to tell their stories, which are often very interesting to military historians. Many of us are fortunate enough to be able to view the History Channel on DSTV, where some truly excellent programmes revisit both ancient and more modern battles, giving us a far better idea than ever before, of what actually happened. Battlefields are thoroughly investigated from every angle, old weapons are fired, ground is carefully tested for geological factors, the weather is researched, troop numbers analysed and often some really interesting stuff is uncovered. Computers recreate the battles before our very eyes, but omit the gory details that might upset sensitive viewers! Nothing however, replaces the excitement of "walking the ground". One gains much more understanding of what actually happened, and why. Looking at the KZN battlefields on a bright sunny morning is one thing. Seeing them in the kind of torrential downpour that many of the battles took place in is something else.

WWI battlefields are lovingly cared for today and preserved with reverence for those who died. Nobody who has seen those cemeteries and the forests of white memorials, never mind the Menin Gate with its walls and walls covered with the names of those who died but have no known graves, can ever forget how many lives were sacrificed. The article written by the pupils from Waterkloof High School in Pretoria for our December 2007 journal illustrates just how strong an impression these almost century-old battlefields and memorials make on teenagers today. At least today those who die in battle are remembered by name in First World countries. The tragedy of wars in the Third World is that those who die are almost immediately forgotten, often not even properly buried or counted. Millions just "disappear".

How should you visit a battlefield? This depends upon personal circumstances and choice. But a good guide can hugely enrich the experience by filling in the details that make history come alive. We in South Africa are very fortunate to have some really excellent battlefield guides, many of them our members, not hugely expensive to use, and I would urge you to make use of their services.

Tourism experts point to Waterloo (1815) as the first battle site to become an international 'tourism mega-attraction.' Not only was Waterloo 'the first great battle to be witnessed and recorded by tourists,' but the location remained popular throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a place for visiting. Napoleon and Wellington became iconic figures. Within two days of the battle, the first coach of curious visitors had arrived from

Brussels. But very soon after, the area was changed for ever. Wellington, when he beheld Waterloo once more, two years later, exclaimed, 'They have altered my field of battle!'

Probably next most popular to visit are the extensive battlefields of World War I, especially those of the Somme. These are probably the most written about, filmed and best-known battlefields in the world, apart, perhaps from those of the American Civil War. The sheer scale of death in World War I touched almost everyone in Europe, and accounts for the vast numbers of people who visit battlefields such as Verdun and the Somme. These visits, originally mainly pilgrimages, were made possible by the huge development of railways, partly brought about by the war. Those first post-war pilgrims found battlefields and trenches still littered with bones. Souvenir hunters gathered everything from spent bullets and tunic buttons to bones and skulls, and in the summer of 1919, a magazine published a picture of people actually picnicking in the still uncleared battlefields. In places, there were as many as five unexploded shells per square metre and levelling operations unearthed "as much as 5,000 kilos of shrapnel and detonators per hectare, not counting the shells and larger pieces". The towns of Belgium and North-East France, were slowly being rebuilt, but the battlefield tourists could drink tea in the "Café des Allies", and purchase souvenirs, both genuine and junk. It took the development of national tourist agencies to make battlefield tourism a mass enterprise. More affluent visitors to First World War battle sites were aided by Michelin, the Touring Club de France, and, above all, the Office National du Tourisme (ONT). France needed money to repair its shattered infrastructure. Michelin put out a guidebook to French battlefields in 1917 to suggest to tourists with cars how they might view the battlefields to best replicate the authenticity of the trench experience. Soon after, tourist agencies began taking in the better-off in motor coaches, housing them in first-class hotels.

The success of battlefield tourism from the UK in the inter-war years was phenomenal. Some figures are worth mentioning. In 1930, 100,000 people signed the visitors' log at the Menin Gate of Ypres, Belgium, in just three months, and there were 150 places for those tourists to buy beer in the town.

The most visited World War 2 battlefields are in Normandy, where the invasion of Europe started. The coastline hosts countless reminders of that time. Best museum we visited was the humble museum in Bayeux, housed in old army huts and containing a huge collection of small items that were of great interest. It was also moving to see coach-loads of elderly men, mostly Canadians, who had come to have a final look at where they had fought so hard as youngsters 50 years before.

Many South Africans visited El Alamein on tours to mark the 50th anniversary of that battle, and found it a very emotional experience. The South African Memorial is a simple monolith with the following dedication: "South Africans outspanned and fought here during their trek from Italian Somaliland to Germany 1939-1945".

The Brits and Americans are very good at looking after battlefields, and they are still popular day visits. A top choice is Battle, on the South Coast of England, scene of the original '1066 and all that'. English Heritage has successfully solved the problem of how to present the site with imagination. An unobtrusive audio visual system guides you around the slopes with a succession of historical scenes. The viewer is taken to each part of the battlefield, and can observe the conflict from both sides.

Scotland, too has its great battlefields. Bannockburn, where Robert the Bruce famously beat the army of King Edward I of England and gained his country independence, now sits incongruously amid a suburban housing estate on the edge of the town of Stirling. Go further north, past Inverness to Culloden, and the battlefield is in open countryside, and barely changed, apart from the planting of a small forest. Heather grows among the pathetic small memorials, just simple stones really, where the clansmen lie buried where they fell. Being close to the coast, it is subject to mist, and this gives it an eerie, haunted feel, much remarked on by visitors. Ireland's most famous

Battlefield, at the Boyne, engenders much emotion among Irishmen; on a working visit there Marjorie found a quiet water meadow with gentle Kerrygold cows grazing.

In the USA the “War Between the States” is pretty much a tourist industry on its own; battlefields are well preserved, re-enactments frequent, and there is a fun side to battlefield tours. Eager guides take you around, and the best spots for photos are marked. Museums are excellent and well maintained, and maps and books will take you through exactly what happened. Most battlefields you visit in the USA are well preserved, even the less important ones. Further afield, the Asian country of Vietnam has built much of its modern tourism industry around the war that took place almost half a century ago. At Cu Chi visitors worm their way through a section of the 150 miles of tunnels dug by the Vietcong. Visitors are issued with a torch and invited to descend a narrow hole in the ground. The scramble through the tunnel seems to take an age, but in fact lasts only three minutes.

Sites of naval battles are a bit more difficult to find. However, the most famous of all, Trafalgar, can be viewed from the Cape that bears its name on the wild and windy west coast of Spain. The Falkland Islands, fairly inaccessible until after the 1982 Falklands War, now have regular flights and visits from cruise ships. All this, of course, has done wonders for the local economy.

Hard cash benefits make a difference in South Africa, too. This country is fortunate to have its share of great and easily visitable battlefields. Isandlwana and Rorke’s Drift; Majuba and Ulundi; Blood River and Magersfontein are just a few, and many of us have had the pleasure of visiting them. The Eastern Cape too, has fascinating tales to tell of the Frontier Wars. Most places are pretty well as they were at the time of the battles, which makes them particularly attractive to tourists.

Battlefield tourism is alive and well and bringing in bucks in South Africa. Signs directing tourists to the sites were up by the early 1960s, and then the hit movie, ‘Zulu’ revived people’s interest. Serious interest in the Anglo-Zulu War really began at the time of the centenary commemorations in May 1979. The late David Rattray travelled the world selling this area as a tourist attraction, and had great success until his untimely death last year. A visit to these battlefields with him was an unforgettable emotional and historic experience. David was unique.

Interest in the Anglo-Boer war started to really pick up around the centenary commemorations at the turn of the century. Battlefields in South Africa have been protected since the National Monuments Council was established and battlefields came under their wing. (However, the amount of protection offered has recently come into question after thefts and vandalism at battlefield sites.) Kimberley has its own ‘Battlefield Route’ for tourism, good signage and roads have been developed, and Magersfontein has an excellent visitor centre. Tourist literature in South Africa is now well presented and there is recognition in the community of the benefits battlefield tourism can bring to any area.

For anyone with the slightest interest in military history, battlefield visits are an essential part of the experience. Tourism is a way of bringing visitors, money and employment into areas which otherwise might have little to attract any of these. Tourism and history can work together to preserve places great and small that were, as we said in the beginning, ‘stained with blood and sacrifice, and therefore somehow set apart.’

Bob Smith
Acting Scribe

FORTHCOMING LECTURES

Johannesburg:

8th May

CR	Nick Cowley	Three Braggart Soldiers of the 19th Century
ML	Dr. Org de Bruyn	The story that coins tell

12th June

CR	Hamish Paterson	Ill-met: U boat vs aircraft
ML	Alan Mantle	Suez 1956 - The invasion & the aftermath

KZN in Durban:

8th May

DDH	Jesse Wesseloo	The Dutch-East India Company as a fighting force
MAIN	Bill Brady	Kenneth Campbell VC - The Natal Connection

12th June

DDH	Prof Mike Laing	Quiz evening
MAIN	Bill Bizley	The sinking of U-197 - a flashpoint in German/South African surveillance politics, 1942/1943

Cape Town:

Thursday 8th May 2008

The Action at Ebo - Operation Savannah 1975

Our speaker is Mr Stephan Fourie who will speak on the Battle of Ebo in Angola. This took place on 23 November 1975, during "Operation Savannah" and was a defeat for the hitherto victorious South Africans. It took place just prior to the victory at Bridge 14. Members will recall that Stephan spoke to us previously on the role and military successes of the various "combat groups" in the early stages of "Ops Savannah", as well as the crucial battle at Bridge 14. He participated in both the battles at Ebo and Bridge 14 and is therefore in a unique position to give an eye-witness account of events.

SAMHSEC in Port Elizabeth:

8th May

CR	Zane Palmer either	"Making of model cannons" or "Restoration of 7 pdr RMLs"
MAIN	Malcolm Kinghorn	Chris McCanlis, BCR Memorial Lecture: The Indian invasion of Goa

14th June (Grahamstown)

CR	Mary Knowling	Service in the SA coastal artillery in WW II.
MAIN	John Jackson	Greeks (or Romans) at War

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For Eastern Cape details contact Malcolm Kinghorn 041-373-4469

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E-mailing

Occasionally, book publishers and distributors send unsolicited material by e-mail to the Society office. Any member who is on e-mail and would like to receive a copy (unedited, simply "bounced" to your e-mail address) is to please send a blank e-mail with "books" in the subject line to scribe@samilitaryhistory.org to be added to the distribution list.

As a matter of interest 230 members receive their newsletters by e-mail and 250 by snail-mail (post) each month.

Rhodesian Light Infantry Regimental Association

Rhodesian Light Infantry Regimental Association has sent out an appeal for funds for the Troopie - the story of which is available by e-mail to interested members - please send a blank e-mail with "Troopie" in the subject line to scribe@samilitaryhistory.org - the article is several pages long and a copy will be posted on the web-site in due course.

East Rand Military History Society

Any members wanting copies of the newsletters from this affiliated society please drop a line to scribe@samilitaryhistory.org

Walking Tour - Johannesburg

A fascinating "Heritage" walking-tour has been arranged for **Saturday, 28 June, 2008**. Departing from the Sunnyside Park Hotel (safe parking) at 14h00, the tour will include some of Johannesburg's historic suburbs, tracking the exploits of the early residents of the Anglo Boer War, 1899 - 1902. The tour will be conducted by Dennis Adams, one of the co-authors of the book "Follow the Flags through Parktown," and will cost about R35-00 for the two and a half hour's tour. For those who want to participate, please indicate your name on the list provided by Bob Smith at the next Society meeting.

For more details, contact Bob Smith, Home; (011) 675 0836, Cell: 082 858 6616.