

Springbok

Journal of the South African Legion
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Members from the Pretoria branch that attended the Annual SS Mendi Memorial Service at the Mendi Memorial in Atteridgeville, Pretoria, on Sunday 2 March 2025.

INDEX	PAGE
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK	3
MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT	4
NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS	5
BRANCH NEWS	6
• CAPE TOWN	6
• DURBAN	6
• PORT ALFRED	10
• PRETORIA	10
COMMEMORATIONS	13
• Annual Sinking of the SAS President Kruger	13
• 125 th Service of the Battles of Rorke’s Drift and Isandlwana	13
• SS Mendi Memorial Service Durban	13
• SS Mendi Memorial Service Pretoria	13
• SS Mendi Memorial Service, Noordwijk	18
• Three Ships Memorial Service Port Elizabeth	20
• Annual Gunners Memorial Service Cape Town	20
• ‘Animals in War’	22
OTHER STORIES	24
• Update on the Submarine Museum	24
OBITUARIES	25

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



Once again, thank you to those branches that have contributed to this edition of *The Springbok*. It's wonderful to see that the South African Legion remains active in many cities and towns across the country.

It's hard to believe we've reached the end of the first quarter of 2025, with winter just around the corner. Looking back, the past three months have certainly been eventful, both internationally and here at home.

On the international stage, the newly inaugurated President of the United States has signed several executive orders that have surprised many nations and, no doubt, unsettled others. Only time will reveal their full impact and consequences. His efforts to broker an end to the war in Ukraine remain uncertain for now.

Closer to home, the news that the M23 rebel group and the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have signed a ceasefire agreement brings relief. This allows our forces, deployed as part of the SADC Force in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), to return home. The role of the SADC Force in eastern DRC has sparked much debate, and discussions on this topic are sure to continue.

Locally, the political landscape has also been lively. For the first time since 1994, the Minister of Finance was unable to deliver the annual budget as planned. As I write these notes, the budget's approval remains uncertain. What this means for the Government of National Unity (GNU) is unclear—once again, only time will tell. We must continue to pray for the GNU's stability and success.

NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT - YEAR-END EDITION



Dear Legionnaires,

As we conclude our financial year this March, I'd like to share the notable achievements we've accomplished despite the challenges we've faced. Our commitment to veteran welfare has remained strong during this period of transition.

I'm pleased to report that despite the relocation of our Head Office to Cape Town, our beneficiary payments continued without interruption. This achievement, managed by our dedicated staff member who adapted to changing responsibilities, demonstrates the commitment at the heart of our organisation's mission to support veterans in need.

The update to our operational structure has created new opportunities for improved efficiency. While our telephone numbers have changed with the move (email addresses remain unchanged), this refinement of communication channels aims to serve you better. The revised directories, though limited in circulation due to POPIA requirements, reflect our commitment to both compliance and service—your regional office can provide this information when needed.

Our volunteer-led management approach is showing promise, giving our regional committees greater decision-making authority as agreed upon during our September Congress. The Cape Town Congress was well-organised, with good hospitality that provided an appropriate environment for productive discussions.

The branch reports from Congress showed the resilience of our membership nationwide. While we face changes in our organisation with some adjustments in branch structures, this gives us an opportunity to consider renewal and growth.

The adjustment to membership fees, explained in this week's circular, is necessary for our future operations. This financial decision helps ensure we maintain the standards of service our veterans deserve. This is an opportune time to strengthen our ranks with new members. By welcoming fresh perspectives and talents, we can both secure our financial stability and improve our capacity to fulfil our mission. Training and succession planning will ensure our future leaders are developing appropriately. Each branch should review their structure and implement a plan to support sustainable growth.

I look forward to the year ahead as we continue our legacy of service.

Yours faithfully,

Mark Louw

National President

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

GENERAL SECRETARY



It is with great pride and joy that we celebrate the 104th birthday of the South African Legion. This milestone is not just a testament to the longevity of our organization, but also to the unwavering dedication, service, and sacrifice of our members over the past century.

Founded on **21 February 1921** by three prominent soldiers - **Field Marshal Earl Haig, General the Rt. Hon. J C Smuts, and General Sir H T Lukin** - the South African Legion began as the British Empire Service League (BESL) in Cape Town. Our mission was to provide care, employment, and housing for those who had served in World War I and faced incredible hardships upon returning to civilian life.

We would continue our work as many men and women would return after war, requiring much needed assistance. Wars would come and go, yet our mission would remain resolute and continue long after the guns fell silent.

BRANCH NEWS

CAPE TOWN

Nineties High Tea Party.

A very happy group of nonagenarians were honoured at a Nineties High Tea Party at Rosedale on Wednesday, 12 February. For once, Del Davies, who turns 90 in October and has organised and hosted this event annually for several years, was able to sit back and simply enjoy the occasion.

Rosedale Residents' Committee.

The Older Persons Act (Act No. 13 of 2006) requires all retirement facilities to have a committee that represents residents' needs through engagement with the facility's management. At Rosedale, a residents' committee has been in place since May 2017, making it timely to reconsider its structure and make any necessary adjustments. With this in mind, outgoing residents' committee chair Phyllis Webb and manager David Holmes invited residents to a meeting to share their views. A full house attended on Tuesday, 4 March, and as a result, a broader range of office-bearers was established to form the foundation of the soon-to-be-elected committee.

Birthdays and St Patrick's Day at Rosedale

It was a happy birthday, to be sure, for Abraham Ross and Iris Newton, who celebrated in true Irish style, toasting each other with green drinks in hand.

Honouring the Staff at Rosedale

The staff who work behind the scenes to provide Rosedale residents with fabulous food, glorious gardens, home-based care and so much more were recognised for their selfless duties on Friday 28 March after lunch. Manager David Holmes and Del Davies, events coordinator did the honours. Staff members included Peter Hendricks, Kenneth Fourie, Patricia Nokonwaba and Brian Barbier, with co-workers Patricia Mentashe, Monique Marang, Desiree Cornelius, Nastasha Goodman, Frances Prins Angelique Williams, Shauneez Mea, Mieska Moosa and Irene Ngobeni-Manjezi.

DURBAN

Dinner with the Consul General of India

The SA Legion, Durban Branch, had the honour of attending a dinner hosted by the Consul General of India, Dr Thelma David, in honour of the INS *Tushil*. It was a truly remarkable experience and a great privilege.

The evening brought together distinguished guests, including the Commodore and various officers from the INS *Tushil*; the Mayor of eThekweni Metro, Cyril Xaba; the High Commissioner of India, Mr Prabhat Kumar; and members of the SA Legion, Durban Branch.



Left: Residents from Rosedale enjoying their nineties teas.



Right and below are scenes from Rosedale Residents Committee meeting.





*Scenes from the birthday and St Patrick's Day celebrations
at Rosedale on 17 March 2025.*





Left: Staff of Rosedale with manager David Holmes (left) and Del Davies, events coordinator (seated). Back row: Peter Hendricks, Kenneth Fourie, Patricia Nokonwaba and Brian Barbier, with co-workers Patricia Mentashe, Monique Marang, Desiree Cornelius, Nastasha Goodman, Frances Prins Angelique Williams, Shauneez Mea, Mieska Moosa and Irene Ngobeni-Manjezi.

Right: Members of the SA Legion, Durban Branch with the Mayor of eThekwin Metro, Cyril Xaba; the High Commissioner of India, Mr Prabhat Kumar; and the Consul General of India Dr Thelma David



It was inspiring to witness the camaraderie and deep-rooted ties between the Indian and South African navies. The visit of the INS *Tushil* serves to strengthen cooperation and mutual understanding between the two nations. The conversations and shared experiences throughout the evening underscored the significance of these long-standing bonds, built on respect, collaboration, and a shared commitment to maritime security. Being part of such a prestigious gathering was a privilege, and the opportunity to engage with such remarkable individuals made it an unforgettable occasion.

Visit to the INS *Tushil* in Durban Harbour

Members of the South African Legion, Durban Branch, along with invited guests, had the honour of boarding the INS *Tushil*, where they were warmly welcomed and given a guided tour by the crew. This visit was a testament to the strong partnership between the Indian and South African navies, reinforcing cooperation and mutual understanding between the two nations.

Throughout the tour and discussions, the significance of these enduring bonds was evident—built on respect, collaboration, and a shared commitment to maritime security. The visit provided an invaluable opportunity to engage with the crew, gain insight into naval operations, and further strengthen diplomatic and military ties.

The Midmar Mile

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) once again demonstrated excellence at the annual Midmar Mile. Congratulations to Craig Rene Stanton and the SANDF team on another successful year at this prestigious event.

A special acknowledgment goes to David and Farrah for their outstanding achievements as the fastest male and female SANDF swimmers. Their dedication and performance earned them top honours, with trophies sponsored and presented by the South African Legion, Durban Branch. Well done to all participants for their commitment and sportsmanship—we look forward to another successful event next year.

PORT ALFRED

The Port Alfred Branch held its monthly meeting in February. 52 members attended the meeting, the most since the COVID-19 pandemic. (*By the Editor—Well done, Port Alfred.*)

PRETORIA

At the branch meeting of the Pretoria Branch on Saturday 15 February 2025 Legionnaire Marina Valentine was inducted as a member of the branch. The upcoming SS Mendi Memorial Service on Sunday 2 March was also discussed.



Members of the Durban Branch on a visit to the Indian Navy ship, INS Tushil, in the Durban Harbour.



Attendees at the recent meeting of the Port Alfred Branch of the Soth African Legion.



The involvement of the South African Legion during the Annual Midmar Mile swimming event. On the photo left the President of the Durban Branch, Lgr Pat Acutt is with David Frosh and on the photo below right Chairperson of the branch, Lgr Bryan Dore is with Farrah Vercuiel.



COMMEMORATIONS

SINKING OF THE SAS *PRESIDENT KRUGER* – MEMORIAL SERVICE AT ROSEDALE

The Rosedale gardens provided a fitting setting for the commemoration of the disaster that befell the SAS *President Kruger* in 1982.

This year, on 6 February, family members of the ship's 199-strong crew—16 of whom were lost at sea—gathered alongside four survivors, dignitaries, and Legion members to pay their respects. The memorial service was led by Commander Leon Steyn, curator of the SA Naval Museum, with prayer and scripture reading conducted by Chaplain (Ret) Vela Mabena of the SA Military Health Service.

The ceremony included the sounding of *The Last Post* and *Reveille*, the National Anthem, and a two-minute silence, followed by the laying of wreaths at the Wall of Remembrance. The Legion would be honoured to host this solemn occasion again next year.

125th COMMEMORATION OF THE BATTLE OF RORKE'S DRIFT AND ISANDLWANA

Members of the Durban Branch were honoured to attend the 125th Commemoration Service of the Battles of Rorke's Drift and Isandlwana, organised by the MOTH of Alan Wilson Shellhole. A heartfelt thank you to them for arranging this important event and ensuring the remembrance of these historic battles.

SS MENDI MEMORIAL SERVICE – DURBAN

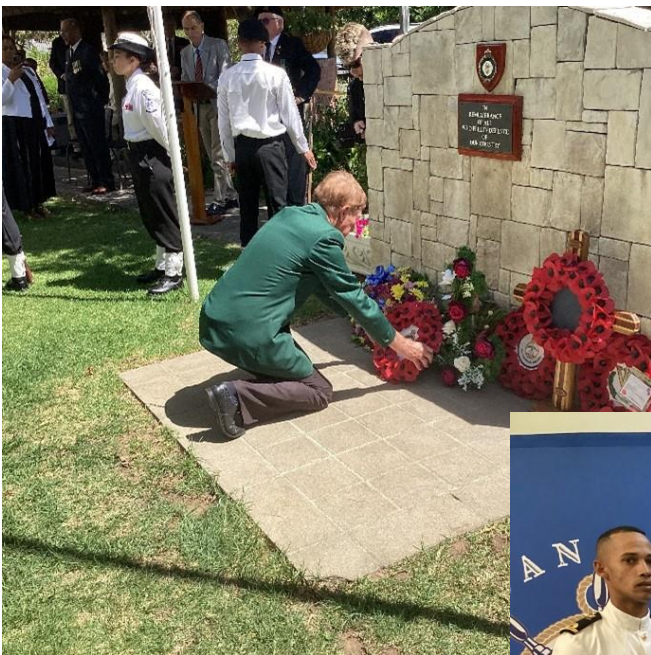
The South African Legion, Durban Branch, had the honour of hosting the annual SS Mendi Memorial Service, paying tribute to the brave souls who lost their lives in one of South Africa's greatest maritime tragedies. This solemn occasion serves as a reminder of their sacrifice and the unity they embodied.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the City of Durban and the Port Natal Maritime Museum for their unwavering support in ensuring this event was a fitting tribute. A special thank you to His Worship, the Mayor, Councillor Cyril Xaba, for his presence and support, and to the many military associations, dignitaries, and community organisations who stood with us on the day.

We also appreciate the participation of the Scouts and the District Grand Lodge of Freemasonry in KwaZulu-Natal for their commitment to preserving our heritage. Their collective support ensures that the legacy of the SS Mendi continues to be honoured and remembered.

SS MENDI MEMORIAL SERVICE – PRETORIA

Following months of planning and a rehearsal by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) on Friday, 28th February, the annual SS *Mendi* Memorial Service took place at the Mendi Memorial at the Ga-Mothakga Resort in Atteridgeville on Sunday, 2nd March 2025. The day dawned much like the day the SS *Mendi* sank on 21st February 1917, with an unusual fog over Pretoria.



Scenes from the Annual Sinking of the SAS President Kruger Memorial service held at Rosedale.





Members of the South African Legion who attended the 125th Commemoration Service of the Battles of Rorke's Drift and Isandlwana.



Scenes from the Annual SS Mendi Memorial Service held in Durban.





*Scenes from the Annual SS Mendi Memorial Service
held at the Mendi Memorial in Atteridgeville.*

Despite the conditions, the service was well attended. However, there were some challenges, as the chairs did not arrive. Fortunately, the resort, which belongs to the City of Tshwane, stepped in and provided chairs. Secondly, the public address system was also missing. A decision was taken to shorten the service, and all the chairs were brought out from under the tent roofs and placed around the Programme Director, Legionnaire Marina Valentine, who had a strong voice.

The SANDF Chaplain delivered a brief religious message, followed by the Last Post, a two-minute silence, and Reveille. The wreaths were then laid, with several military attachés taking part. The service concluded with the National Anthem and the withdrawal of the sentries and flag orderlies.

Some of the photos are courtesy of Jaco van As.

SS MENDI REMEMBERED IN NOORDWIJK, THE NETHERLANDS

On the morning of Wednesday, February 21 2025, the South African Ambassador to The Hague, H.E. Vusi Madonsela, the Deputy Mayor of Noordwijk, Alderman Theo Alkemade joined with diplomats representing several countries, the defence attachés of several more, and representatives of the South African Legion and other veterans, at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission section of the General Cemetery in Noordwijk in the Netherlands, to mark South African Armed Forces Day, and commemorate the 108th anniversary of the sinking of the *SS Mendi.**

The Revd Canon Michael Roden, Anglican Chaplain to The Hague, led the service with hymns and prayers. SA Ambassador Madonsela, Noordwijk's Alderman Theo Alkemade, and SA Legion Europe Chair, Lgr Andrew Bergman, all addressed the gathering. Noordwijk historian Mark Sijlmans, who has travelled to KZN in South Africa to meet with some descendants of the *SS Mendi* casualties who lie in his town's cemetery, appraised the gathering of the latest episodes in his extensive research into those fascinating individual histories he has managed to unearth, reminding us of the human side of South Africa's worst wartime maritime disaster.

The Dutch Armed Forces provided a Guard of Honour, a brass ensemble, and several pipers, to add colour to a dignified event. The pipers led a procession from the hall to the gravesides for the wreath-laying. The Act of Remembrance was recited by Lt Col P.P. Mtanase, South African Deputy Defence Attaché based in Brussels. Trumpeter, Cpl Maxine Willering-Tegelaers of the Dutch Armed Forces, sounded Last Post, which preceded a customary two minutes' silence. The Rouse was followed by the respective National Anthems of South Africa and the Netherlands.

Wreaths were laid by the SA Embassy, the Municipality of Noordwijk, dignitaries from organisations, diplomats and defence attachés of several countries, the SA Legion Europe Branch, as well as the Dutch veterans of Veteranen Noordwijk, with whom the SA Legion has built a warm fraternal bond over the years.

After the service, the South African Embassy hosted a light lunch with coffee. The local TV station interviewed SA Ambassador Madonsela at the event. For video footage, see:

<https://youtu.be/TtkrSZNQDeg?si=VSKHgGq8dWhl0lQR>



Scenes from the Annual SS Mendi Memorial Service held in the Noordwijk Cemetery, The Netherlands.



** On 21 February 1917, the SS Mendi, a troop ship out of Cape Town carrying 823 men of the 5th Battalion South African Native Labour Corps bound for Le Havre in France was rammed by the Daro in thick fog in the English Channel of the Isle of Wight.*

They were travelling to support the war effort, in particular Britain and her allies, who were running out of people and supplies.

The SS Mendi sank quickly with the loss of more than 600 South African servicemen. In 2012, February 21 was proclaimed as the day to observe Armed Forces Day annually.

Since 2014, an annual remembrance and wreath-laying service has been held at the gravesides of Privates Sitebe Molife, Natal Kazimula, Abram Leboche, Arosi Zenzile, and Sikaniso Mtolo, who lie buried in the picturesque seaside town of Noordwijk in the Netherlands. They all perished when the SS Mendi sank, and their bodies were washed-up on the (neutral) Dutch coast.

THREE SHIPS MEMORIAL SERVICE – PORT ELIZABETH

On 23/02/2025, the above event was held at St Luke's Anglican Church in Palmridge, Port Elizabeth. This year, the service took place at a different venue to encourage better interaction with the local community.

The service was opened by Lt Cdr C. Hearne, who provided a brief history of the three ships being commemorated: SS *Mendi* (sunk on 21/02/1917), HMSAS *Southern Floe* (sunk on 10/11/1941), and SAS *President Kruger* (sunk on 08/02/1982).

A Sea Cadet delivered a short message on behalf of the South African Sea Cadets Corps (SASCC), followed by a scripture reading. The main address was given by the SAL Padre, Rev. M. Barth, who directed his message towards the younger generation in attendance. A key part of his message was:

"Each of these ships was on a mission. A crisis occurred, and sailors lost their lives, but we must continue to focus on those who survived. How do you deal with your challenges? You must believe that God will see you through. Face your challenges—they shape your future. Press on and never give up."

The service continued with the reading of the Sea Cadet Vow, after which three Cadets lit candles—one for each ship—followed by the singing of various hymns and the National Anthem. A vote of thanks was delivered by Sub Lt Moodie, after which all departed in harmony.

Among those present, we were privileged to have one of the survivors of SAS *President Kruger*, WO1 Josef Tiffelin.

ANNUAL GUNNERS MEMORIAL SERVICE – CAPE TOWN

The Company's Garden, where memorials to the fallen are erected, is a fitting venue to stage a ceremony – as it indeed was on Sunday, 16th March, when the Gunners' Association held its Memorial Service at the Association's "Gun" to honour its serving men who died during WWII.

Attendees to the Annual Three Ships Memorial Service in Port Elizabeth.



Above and below: Scenes from the Annual Gunners Memorial Service held in Cape Town.



Attendees included councillors and members of veteran organisations. Padre Tony Bethke led the religious section, and the SA Army Band WC supplied the music, whilst troops from the Autshumato Anti-Aircraft and Nelson Mandela Artillery Regiments formed the ceremonial guard, sentries, and flag orderlies. The Nelson Mandela Artillery Regiment fired the salvos.

Guest speaker Exco Chairman Kevin Ashton was accompanied by a group of dignitaries, including the Department of Defence Inspector General Maj Gen W. Mazibuko, who is also the "General of the Gunners", Maj Gen Hlongwa, Brig Gen Mafune, GOC Air Defence Artillery Formation, Brig Gen Maso, GOC Arty Formation, and Brig Gen Pakade, GOC Armour Formation.

Table Mountain in the Company's Garden forms the magnificent backdrop to this moving commemoration of the soldiers who served as gunners during WWII. Twenty-eight wreaths were laid by the various organisations, including one by Deputy President Lt Col Ray Nessel on behalf of the SA Legion.

The Sea Cadets did a great job as wreath orderlies.

Photos courtesy of **Regine Lord**, Writer & Photographer, Cell: 084 446 2271
Email: regine.lord@gmail.com

INAUGURAL ANIMALS IN WAR PARADE

The inaugural *Animals in War Parade* took place at the Voortrekker Monument on Sunday, 30 March 2025. Following the placing of the standards and the announcements, Veteran Roche Vermaak welcomed everyone to this historic service. This remarkable monument to animals in war is the brainchild of Veteran Roche Vermaak.

The service began with a reading of the poem *Die Onvergeetlike Held* by Peet Vermaak, followed by a religious service. This was followed by the inauguration of the monument by Major General Lawrence Smith (SA Army, Retd), Chairperson of the Council of Military Veteran Organisations of South Africa (CMVO SA), assisted by Veteran Roche Vermaak and his dog. After this, various speakers shared their experiences as veterinarians who served in the South African Police (SAP), the South African Police Service (SAPS), the South African Defence Force (SADF), and later in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Some members of these services recounted stories of animals lost during the Rhodesian and Border Wars, whose names are inscribed on the panels of the monument.

This was followed by the Call to Remembrance, the sounding of the Last Post, two minutes of silence, and the *Réveille* by Warrant Officer Laura van Niekerk of the SAPS Band, who performed on horseback with her horse, Legacy. The Master of Ceremonies then read the poem *Prayer of a War Horse*. Following this, more than 50 wreaths were laid. The service concluded with the playing of the National Anthem.

It will henceforth be an annual event on the last Sunday of March.



Scenes from the Inaugural 'Animal in War' Parade held at the Voortrekker Monument.



OTHER STORIES

SUBMARINE MUSEUM UPDATE

The submarine museum is now two and a half months into the planned trial period and has become well established with respect to procedures and tours with very little work on the boat still outstanding. The main issue is the lack of forced ventilation but this is firmly in hand with a number of unobtrusive options being actively followed up.

Contrary to initial expectations the natural airflow through the boat has kept it relatively cool even during the warmest spells of summer. With two doors and the hatch in the fin open, the prevalent South Easter has done the rest.

We have still not started advertising publicly as we promised to invite all our major donors and bunk owners to the opening. We did have a proposed opening date from Naval HQ for 6 March but delays in confirmation left insufficient time for invitations and catering and thus a new date later in March or early April is awaited.

This delay has allowed us to spend more time on preparing for the opening, especially Harry Croome who has spent three weeks finishing the *Galatee* pressure ring which will be our 'donor wall' and now sports a three-coat scheme in four colours. Harry has now downed brushes and rollers and finally taken a break in the Cedarberg.

The entrance to the museum is now looking particularly attractive and clean as can be seen in the photo below.

Notwithstanding the lack of advertising, social media and the towering billboard effect of her big black hull has lured sufficient visitors to confirm our faith in being able to sustain her. As of Friday 28 February, some 6 808 visitors had passed through *Assegai*. Since we had only been open for 67 days that gives an overall average of 100 visitors a day!

As her initial break-even number used in the early business plan was 40 per day and souvenir sales were not factored in, our future seems secure – as long as we can find sufficient volunteer guides to meet the demand as the current few are wearing thin.

We are also beginning to attract our most important audience for visits – school groups. Amongst them was a group from Lawhill Maritime Centre sponsored by the General Botha Old Boys Association and accompanied by the Chairman Capt Tony Nicholas and Hugh James of the Cape Town Sailors Home which made a very generous donation to the Assegai Fund and acknowledged on our donor board. Clive Scholtz as a former chairman of the board of governors for Simon's Town School was the appropriate guide for the group.

OBITUARIES

BENONI

Lgr Jimmy Ross

SOUTH AFRICAN LEGION



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SOUTH AFRICAN LEGION STRUCTURE

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