



The South African Military History Society

Die Suid-Afrikaanse Krygshistoriese Vereniging

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NEWSLETTER - JUNE 2017

The Chairman, Jan-Willem Hoorweg, opened the meeting and extended greetings to what seemed a larger-than-normal group of Visitors. A reminder was made of the up-coming Boer War Weekend at Kedar Historical Lodge near Rustenburg.

The Curtain Raiser speaker was **Colin Harris** who has previously presented Papers on a variety of subjects to the Society. His subject for the evening was; "**Striving for Recognition- the Confederacy's Dilemma.**"

By the summer of 1862, 14 months after the Civil War started, the Confederate States of America was not recognised as a legitimate nation. Attempts by diplomats, businessmen and sympathisers had failed to obtain any positive response by either Great Britain or France. The embargo on exports of Cotton and Tobacco had failed to get any positive response regarding recognition. The United States of America had branded the Confederacy as Rebels and as such had embarked on a policy of suppression of the rebellion by armed means. Encouraged by some successes in the many battles and skirmishes which had taken place, a belief started in which many Confederate leaders both Civil and Military, felt that a defeat of the Union Army in a major battle would get the world's attention and recognition might follow. In June 1862 a massive invasion was launched by the Federal Government to capture the Confederate Capital of Richmond, Va. Despite an overwhelming army which had been transported by sea to the area, a series of blunders led to defeat of Union General George McLellan's forces and the invasion was abandoned.

Abraham Lincoln's newly appointed General Pope had already initiated a new invasion down the main railway link which would be reinforced by the many thousands of McLellan's returning troops, but the Confederate General Robert E Lee was able to block the advance and in fact force Pope to retreat northwards.

Rebel leaders gained confidence from these Union setbacks and it was decided to take the battle to the Union. Lee used brilliant tactics to attack the main Union supply base at Manassas Junction and in a text-book battle defeated Pope's Army at the 2nd Battle of Manassas or Bull Run. Consolidating on this victory, Lee then took his Army northwards with the intention of isolating Washington DC from the rest of the Union.

It was not to be: The Confederate Army was brought into a fight which it did not seek at Sharpsburg in Maryland. Although Military honours were roughly even in this terrible confrontation which saw the greatest ever loss of American soldiers in one day, it was a political disaster. So ended the invasion and sorted the South's dilemma for all time. These two key battles were described in detail by Colin with the aid of maps showing the various elements of the invasions and the fights which ensued.

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Nick Cowley and his group of players and singers made a popular and welcome return to the Society to present “**Songs of World War 2**” having previously performed similar programs. With the audience in possession of song sheets, Nick introduced his performers and began by giving the historical background to the first number.

Now a Dame of the British Empire, at 100 years old, Vera Lyn’s young image on the screen set the tone for the evening.

Nick then sketched in the story behind Flanagan and Allen’s songs; “If a Grey-Haired Lady” and “Hang out the Washing on the Siegfried Line.”

The naughty connotation of the “Mademoiselle of Armentieres” of the 1st World War and the said Grey-Haired Lady had the audience chuckling.

A lightly sentimental note crept in as the audience joined in a pensive rendering of “The White Cliffs of Dover,” a song actually written by two Americans whose ornithological knowledge was a little weak. Blue birds only occur in America! The song however was inspirational in lifting spirits in England’s darkest hours.

Things jazzed up with the playing of “This is the Army, Mr. Jones” as the entry of America into the War was introduced. With the huge contribution of the US Army Airforce and the attendant losses the memory of the drama came with the rendition of “Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer”.

“Lili Marlene” the poignant song of both sides, but surely almost ‘owned’ by the Eighth Army, was explained in detail. Nick detailed the German and English soldiers’ versions and also of course that by Marlene Dietrich. Lady Astor, who had shot herself in the foot deriding the Eighth Army as ‘D-Day dodgers’ came in for a roasting in that Army’s version of the song..

Colonel Bogey, which must have as many sets of words, mainly rude, as any, was whistled enthusiastically if not so musically by the audience. Chuckles came as Nick referred to the descriptions of four Nazi leaders’ physical endowments a la Col. Bogey.

The contribution to the War made by the famous “Lady in White,” Perla Siedle Gibson, as she sang on Durban’s dockside to the many troopships which visited brought memories to many in the audience.

In a South African context how can any celebration of music and warfare not be held without “Sarie Marais?” Could the object of our boys who went “Up North” not have been the granddaughter of the Anglo-Boer War girl?

Colin Harris
Scribe

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Miscellany

Ian Uys mentions that research started 35 years ago by Julian Orford concerning **Raaff’s Rangers** is finally coming to fruition in an e-book of that name - details from Joan Marsh.

There is a very interesting monthly publication about ‘snippets of Karoo’ history by the name of **Rose’s Round-up**: - e-mail karootour@telkomsa.net for subscription details

Members wanting e-mails about **books** brought to the Society’s attention to be forwarded can send Joan an e-mail with the subject matter Book list

Members wanting e-mails about **lectures at the Smuts House Museum** in Irene, Centurion, can contact Friends@smutshouse.co.za to be added to their mailing list.

FORTHCOMING LECTURES

Johannesburg

Thursday 8th June

CR: Nicky von der Heyde: **The Turbulent Cape Frontier**

ML: Gil Jacobs: **The Hydrogen Bomb - Peace or Annihilation?**

Thursday 13th July

CR: David Katz: Ludwig Boell and the other Side of the Hill - The East African Campaign in the First World War from the German Perspective

ML: Prof. Ian van der Waag: **Reconsidering South Africa's military past**

KZN in Durban:

Thursday 8th June

DDH: Major Mark Levin **Reg Walker; Durban's first Olympic hero and WW1 veteran**

ML: Prof Donal McCracken **Ireland remembers and disremembers the Anglo Boer War**

Thursday 13th July

DDH: Duncan Drew Kohima/Imphal: **The Battle of the Tennis Court**

ML: Robin Tarr **D.Day – Normandy Revisited**

Cape Town:

Thursday, 13th June

Kevin Vos **Salute the Eagle: Reminiscences of a Parabat in Angola**

SAMHSEC in PE:

Monday 12th June

CR: Richard Tomlinson **Military Vehicles at Stars of Sandstone**

ML: Andre Crozier **The Battle of Gazala, June 1942**

A Field Trip to King William's Town, some of the 9th Frontier War sites of the Transkei area, and East London is planned for Friday 4th to Sunday 6th August. This promises to be a unique opportunity to visit these difficult-to-find Transkei sites. Details will follow.

**CR= curtain raiser; ML= main lecture; DDH = Darrell D Hall Memorial Lecture;
MS= member's slot**