



Marshal Smuts Shellhole

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BULLSHEET

February 2011

Editorial

The year has started for most of us at a good pace and if it continues, promises to be an extremely busy and eventful one.

In January we were privileged to have the Moths Motor Cycle Association (MMA) visit us and we said farewell to Duncan and Gill McKenzie. Following on our Robben island guns article last month we conclude our Robben island history with a story of the ferry that transported many military personnel to and from the Island. Part 5 of our series "to live like a month" features Bert Johnson and in our history section we will start looking back at the South African roll during WWII. Ever heard of Red sock Friday, well if not read on and be informed.

Our Birthday celebrations plans are progressing well. We have also decided to have a planned social event at the Shellhole every month, starting this month on 19 February. This of course does not affect the ad hoc occasions or the Friday evening braais. To those still lucky enough to have a valentine "Happy Valentines day on the 14th.

Happenings at Marshal Smuts

VISIT BY THE MMA

On Sunday the 16th of January the MMA held their first meeting of the year at Marshal Smuts Shellhole. After going on a breakfast run from Cape Town via Pringle Bay and Botriver, the group of about thirty Bikers arrived at Marshal Smuts around 11:30. After a couple of cold beers and a meeting, the group was entertained to lunch. From a Marshal Smuts point of view, the bar takings were good and we also entertained some of our older members who cannot attend our evening meetings.

Thank you to Moth Fred Cheetham and the MMA members for a most memorable afternoon of true comradeship, mutual help and sound memory!



The group joined by two Marshal Smuts Bikers, Moths Alf Hilder and Adriaan van Zyl

<p><u>Shellhole Calendar</u></p> <p><u>18 Feb : Monthly Meeting 18:00</u></p> <p><u>19 Feb : Dinner Dance at Shellhole: 19:30</u></p>
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FAREWELL DUNCAN

Duncan and Gill MacKenzie have relocated to Edinburgh where they will be settling permanently. Duncan joined our Memorable Order on the 7th of November 1980 at the D Day Shellhole in Umtali Zimbabwe. He vividly recalls that his subscription fees for the first year amounted to the grand total of seven rand. During 1990 the Mackenzie's came to settle in the Helderberg Area after a stint of Colonial living in Natal. Duncan became a member of Marshal Smuts Shellhole during November 1990 and is our fourth longest serving member after Moths Malcolm Bouwer, Pierre Olivier and Frank Joubert. He served on the Shellhole Executive Committee for many years and was Old Bill when Marshal Smuts celebrated its 50th birthday. Like her husband Gill was also a staunch supporter of Marshal Smuts Shellhole, as well as being a Mothwa at Remembrance Shellhole. She served as Lady Billy at Remembrance on more than one occasion and their efforts and good work towards bettering our Shellhole will be missed. Duncan has committed himself to

stay on as a member of our Shellhole and we look forward to meet up with them during November, when they will come on their first visit to South Africa. At Marshal Smuts we wish them God speed and fair winds! Thank you for living like Moths!



Old Moth friends, Pierre Olivier, Duncan MacKenzie, Gill MacKenzie, Bob Fisher, (seated) Frank Joubert and Bert Johnson

SA NAVAL COLLEGE CHANGE OF COMMAND PARADE

Marshal Smuts Shellhole was invited to the Change of Command Parade at Naval College in Gordon;s bay on 28 January. Several of our members attended and in gale force winds witnessed Captain Kevin Ernest Packer accepting Command of the SA Naval College; after command was transferred to him by his predecessor, Captain Lungile Mpetsheni. Marshal Smuts Shellhole would like to thank Captain Lungile Mpetsheni for always extending a hand of friendship to our Shellhole and wish him, his wife Thandiswa and children a very successful time in Pretoria where he will work as SSO Navy Foreign Relations.

Captain Packer joined the SA Navy in January 1980. He obtained his BSc (Military Science) degree at the SA Military Academy Saldanha.

Between 1980 and 1998 he served at sea on the Type 12 Frigate SAS PRESIDENT PRETORIUS, SAS TAFELBERG, as Officer Commanding SAS FLEUR, the SAN's Torpedo Recovery Vessel, the Strike Craft SAS OSWALD PIROW and as Officer Commanding SAS PW BOTHA (now the SAS SHAKA). During this time he was also appointed as a Divisional Officer at the SA Naval College in 1992 and in 1994 he served as part of a three month attachment to the Argentinean Navy on board the icebreaker Ara Almirante Irizar.

On the 1st of January 2001 he was promoted to Captain and was appointed to Naval headquarters. Following his successful stint at Naval HQ, Captain Packer was appointed as Officer Commanding (designate) SAS Mendi and posted to Hamburg Germany during April 2004.

He assumed command of SAS Mendi in Kiel Germany on the 14th of June 2004. After a successful transit by the SAS Mendi to South Africa, Captain Packer co-ordinated the installation and integration of the frigate's combat suite effectors and sensors in Simon's Town. Command of the SAS Mendi was handed over on the 6th of December 2006 and thereafter he

served as Senior Staff Officer Operational Sea Training and Senior Officer Surface warfare at Fleet Command in Simon's Town. Under his command the SAN Task Group took part in the international Exercise Good Hope IV with the German Navy and Exercise IBSAMAR II with the Indian and Brazilian navies.

At Marshal Smuts we wish him God speed and fair winds!

To live like a MOTH – Part 5 – Bert Johnson



Bert Johnson was born on the 7th of March 1920 in Lancaster. "I grew up during the years of the Great Depression. The only job my father, a Great War Veteran could get was that of night watchman, whilst my mother worked as a chef at the Country Inn. In 1935 at the age of 15 I joined the Royal Air Force and was enlisted as an indentured apprentice for the next 12 years of my life. I did my training at Holton, but I soon found the RAF to have too much spit & polish and buttons & collars stuff. After completing my apprenticeship I was transferred to 61 Bomber Squadron in Lincolnshire. With the possibility of War becoming ever more real in Europe, the Royal Navy decided to enlarge the Fleet Air Arm and I immediately applied for a transfer. After my transfer was approved, I was appointed as a 4th Class Air Artificer and was posted for service on the HMS Birmingham. I knew nothing about the RN or ships and the RN knew nothing about Air Artificers; the problem was solved by posting me to serve with the Seamen Petty Officers. Quite soon I was to become an ammunition supplier as well!"

HMS Birmingham (C19) was a member of the first group of five ships of the "Town" class of light cruisers.

- 12 × BL 6 in Mark XXIII guns (4x3)
- 8 × QF 4 in Mark XVI guns (4x2)
- 8 × QF 2-pounder Mark VIII pom-pom guns (2x4)
- 8 × .5 in Vickers machine guns
- 6 × 21 in torpedo tubes (2x3)

Aircraft carried: 2 × Supermarine Walrus flying boats

Aviation facilities: 1 × catapult

She was built at Devonport Dockyard and launched on 1 September 1936. *Birmingham* initially joined the 5th Cruiser Squadron on the China Station in January 1938. On the outbreak of the Second World War she left for Malta for a refit before joining the Home Fleet in March-April 1940. As a unit of the 18th Cruiser Squadron she was initially used to patrol off the coast of Norway to prevent German fishing vessels operating in this area. In mid-April *Birmingham*, *HMS Manchester* and *HMS Cairo* escorted a troop convoy to Norway and in May, in company with *HMS Manchester* they evacuated 1500 troops from Åndalsnes.



HMS Birmingham

"We were docked at Scapa Flow when Gerry bombed us the first time. While the ship operated in Chinese waters she picked up millions of

Chinese cockroaches that were quite a menace to us. With Gerry now bombing us, all the guns on the ship opened fire simultaneously, with searchlights flashing all over the sky and thousands of cockroaches coming out of the woodwork, I received quite a baptism of fire! During the evacuation of the Army, Nobby Clarke a Veteran of the Battle of Jutland asked me to relieve him in the magazine so that he could go and have a smoke. As I was sealed in Gerry Aircraft started bombing us. Being sealed in the magazine meant that I was under the water line – I'll never forget the sound that those bombs made under the water and the fright I got when all our guns opened fire in the same direction, rolling the ship completely to one side!"

From January until April 1941 *Birmingham* escorted troop convoys to the Middle East, around the Cape of Good Hope. In May she returned to home waters and was involved in the hunt for the German battleship *Bismarck* and the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen*. *Birmingham* had already put to sea from Scapa Flow on a patrol of the Iceland-Faroes passage and did not end up engaging the German ships. *Birmingham* then escorted convoy *WS-9A* from the UK to South Africa arriving on 4 July 1941. Whilst in South African waters, she docked at the Selborne dry dock at Simon's town for a minor refit, where she was fitted with the Mk284 and 291 radars and several new AA weapons. *"While we were docked in South Africa, I met my future wife for the first time!"*



Walrus being catapulted

Bert's comment: *Lt Cdr Dicky Nathan used a chequered flag – timing had to be good – sink or fly the only options – the Walrus performed a slick landing flattening the water first – what a job to recover the bloody thing!*

On completion in February 1942, *Birmingham* was transferred to the Eastern Fleet, returning to South Africa in March. In June she was reassigned to operate in the Mediterranean as a member of the 4th Cruiser Squadron. She was part of the covering force for the double convoy operation codenamed Operations *"Harpoon"* and *"Vigorous"* from Gibraltar and Alexandria to supply the island of Malta. In March, she was attacked and damaged by 15 JU 87 and Italian Cant 1007 aircraft. Though they failed to hit *Birmingham* directly, she was damaged by several near misses. In September she returned to the Indian Ocean and

was involved in the British operation to occupy Madagascar, codenamed Operation "Stream". *Birmingham* escorted a convoy to Mahajanga on the West Coast of Madagascar where the 10th Infantry Brigade was landed under air cover provided by the carrier *HMS Illustrious*. "During this campaign I contracted Malaria and was hospitalised in Cape Town, giving me more time to spend with my future wife!"

From April until October 1943 she was again refitted in the UK. She returned to the Mediterranean and on 28 November was torpedoed by the German submarine *U-407* off the coast of Cyrenaica. Seriously damaged, she succeeded in returning to Alexandria where temporary repairs were carried out. In June 1944, she sailed for the U.S.A. where more permanent repairs were carried out. In November 1944, the repairs were completed and she returned to home waters to join the 10th Cruiser Squadron at Scapa Flow.

In May 1945, as the war drew to a close, a force consisting of *HMS Birmingham*, *HMS Dido* and several destroyers was tasked with occupying ports in the Baltic. The force passed through the German mine barrage off the Skagerrak, reaching Copenhagen on 9 May, taking control of the German cruisers *Prinz Eugen* and *Nürnberg* after their surrender. On 13 May *Birmingham* was relieved by *HMS Devonshire* and she returned to the UK. Bert Johnson received the Atlantic Star, Africa Star, Burma Star and France/Germany Star.

Bert Johnson was married to his South African wife, Frieda and decided to stay in South Africa. "After experiencing this country, who would want to go and live in England again?" He went to work for South African Airways as a so called *travelling spanner*, based in Cape Town. When he retired in 1980 he was the Head Technician at D.F. Malan Airport. Bert first became a member of our Memorable Order in 1947, but work commitments led him to broken service.

"It was only when I moved to Somerset West and met up with my old friend Frank Joubert that I became a MOTH again. This happened in October 1993 and I am glad that I did it. Nowadays Frank and I are both 91 year old Veterans. Frank can't see all that good anymore so I go and pick him up on Fridays for lunch and to help him with his cheques and that. I travel at about 45 km per hour and all the youngsters blow their horns at me; but that's ok, I'm on my way to go and fetch my friend, we'll have a couple of beers, lunch and enjoy ourselves. Frank Joubert, the best Aircraft Technician and friend I ever knew!" We salute you MOTH Bert Johnson!

Remembering the Second World War

To the memory of the men of the Hottentots-Holland Area

Who fell in the Second World War 1939 – 1945

R. Anderson, M.A. Aylmer, R. Braxton, L. Bell, I.G. Cohen, N.W.J. Coldrey, D. Cupido, D.A. Devenish, W. Earl, W. Emkhe, R. Field, A.E.R. Fry, Rev H.C.M. Grebe, P.H. Griffiths, S. le Roux, L. Manuel, E.C. Santer, L. Shields, L.W. Syme, E.P. Thomas, A. Williams and F.R. Williams

We will remember them



Farewell parade, 1st South African Infantry Brigade, Zonderwater 13 July 1940

"From personal experience I know what awaits you. I know what war means – seven years of my life have been spent in wars. They were amongst the hardest years of my life, but they were also full of the richest experiences that life can give. I would not exchange my war experiences of the Anglo-Boer War and the last Great War for all the gold on the Rand. You are going to face danger, hardship and sacrifice – perhaps death itself – in all its fierce forms. But through it all, you will gather that experience of life and enrichment of character which are more valuable than gold or precious stones."

Gen. Jan Smuts

The first two years of war - development of the Union Defence Forces

September 1939 to September 1941 - Andre Wessels

Due to an almost total inadequacy in preparations for war, in addition to shortages in weapons and other equipment, South Africa was unable to properly defend herself, let alone make a contribution to the Allied war effort, on the eve of the Second World War. Since 1934, when an elaborate five year expansion plan for the Union Defence Forces (UDF) had been announced, various efforts had been made to improve the UDF's state of preparedness. However, the consequences of the severe depression of 1929 to 1933 had cast blight on the UDF. For example, forty-nine Active Citizen Force units were disbanded, all three of the South African Naval Service's vessels were decommissioned, and the little money that was available was justly rather spent on non-military development.

Furthermore, some of the politicians did not realise how important the defence of the country was. Even Defence Headquarters had no properly conceived plan for the future defence of the country; the Union was located far away from the traditional European theatres of conflict and the presence of the Royal Navy at Simon's Town made many South Africans overcautious when it came to defence matters. Many of the schemes put on paper were overambitious and what was done was not always very practical.

However, most other Allied countries were also caught unprepared for war and the planning and reorganisation that had been done in South Africa, albeit on a small scale, did enable General J C Smuts, the new prime minister, to put the country on a war footing very quickly.

The building up of the S.A. Army and Air Force, September 1939 to September 1941

When South Africa declared war against Germany on 6 September 1939, there were apparently 352 officers and 5 033 other ranks in the UDF Permanent Force (PF) and 918 officers and 12 572 other ranks in the Active Citizen Force (ACF). The commando units had strength, on paper, of about 122 000, but only about 18 000 men were properly armed. Many of the latter, however, were not properly trained. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that not all PF, ACF or commando members were in favour of the Union's participation in the war.

Throughout most of the war, the UDF suffered a shortage of white manpower. A calculation of manpower available in October 1940 showed that, out of a white population of just over two million, there were about 251 519 men in the military age group, 18 to 44. In the same age group, there were about one million black South African men, plus coloureds and Indians, but on the eve of the war there were no '*non-whites*' in uniform. Because of political considerations, it would take some time before '*non-whites*' became involved in the Union's military war effort and then mostly only in a non-combatant capacity. This was in sharp contrast with the situation during the First World War, when '*non-whites*' were actively involved not only as auxiliary troops, but also as soldiers in German South West Africa (Namibia), German East Africa (Tanzania), Palestine and France.

Another problem facing the government was that the South African Defence Act (Act No 13 of 1912) was vague in its description of where members of the UDF could be deployed. The act was to a large extent drafted by Smuts, accepted by parliament on 13 June 1912, and led to the formation of the UDF on 1 July 1912. All white citizens between the ages of 17 and 60 (both inclusive) were liable to tender personal service in the defence of their country in times of war.

Smuts anticipated Italy's entry into the conflict, regarded Kenya and Uganda as South Africa's strategic boundaries and was determined to deploy UDF units '*up north*'. However, in the light of the prevailing tense political climate and because the act could be interpreted as not making provision for active service by UDF units beyond the Union's borders, Smuts announced that he would not press a single man to go beyond the country's geographic borders and would create a fighting force of volunteers.

These volunteers were accordingly required to sign a document known as the '*Africa Oath*', in which they declared that they would be prepared to fight anywhere in Africa. Members of the UDF who volunteered were distinguished from the others by orange-scarlet shoulder tabs on their uniforms, commonly referred to as '*red tabs*'. The wearing of these tabs caused a lot of resentment, by stigmatising both those who were prepared to fight and those who opposed active involvement (depending on one's political outlook) and was one way of exerting pressure on UDF members to volunteer for active service.

When war broke out, the South African Army had a total of 3 548 PF and 13 490 ACF members, with 609 PF members in the artillery and 1 722 PF members in the Special Service Battalion. The army inventory comprised only two obsolete medium tanks, two obsolete armoured cars and two armoured trains. There were sixteen artillery batteries, but only 87 serviceable mobile guns, plus 23 3-inch mortars. With only eight 3-inch 20cwt anti-aircraft guns in the country, air defence was at risk. Furthermore, ammunition was very scarce for all artillery. Only 28 941 rounds of artillery ammunition were available. By September 1941 this had all changed - the country's armaments industry supplying the UDF with a variety of weapons and

ammunition; other military material being acquired from abroad; and about 200 000 persons of all ranks, races and sexes serving in the army.

Notwithstanding all the efforts to modernise the South African Air Force (SAAF), when war broke out it only had 173 officers and 1 664 other ranks, one operational and two training squadrons, as well as five shadow squadrons that existed only on paper and 104 mostly obsolete aircraft. On 6 September 1939, the SAAF's front-line operational aircraft consisted of four Hurricanes MkI (a fifth having crashed the previous day), a twin-engined Blenheim bomber and a single-engined Fairey Battle bomber, while it also possessed 63 obsolete Hawker Hartbeeste, six obsolete Furies, three DH 66 Hercules, one Gloster AS 31 and a few equally obsolete Avro Tutors, Westland Wapitis, Hawker Harts, Envoys and Audaxes. There were also about 230 training aircraft in the country, many belonging to private plane clubs and many without spares.

By September 1941 all this had changed dramatically, with the burgeoning and blossoming SAAF having a personnel strength of 31 204, of whom 956 were pilots, 715 observers and air-gunners, 2 943 basic trainees and 4 321 members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force and the total number of military aircraft in the Union no fewer than 1 709, over and above the aircraft deployed in the different operational areas.

After two years of war, South Africa had also established itself as one of the important Allied air force personnel training centres. Right from the commencement of hostilities, the emphasis was placed on training, with the establishment of new flying schools and even the use of private aeroplanes for training purposes. Far away from enemy air force bases, South Africa's air space was ideally suited for training purposes. On 11 April 1940, Smuts announced that the British government had accepted his offer of facilities for training British airmen, a scheme with far-reaching consequences for both the RAF and SAAF. The Joint Air Training Scheme (JATS) virtually commenced its existence on 1 June 1940, when the Memorandum on the expansion of training facilities in South Africa was signed by Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, Chief of General Staff for the Union and Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham on behalf of the Air Ministry. The JATS in the Union was one of the great success stories of the country's participation in the Second World War and played a major role in the rapid development and the efficiency of the SAAF. Until 31 December 1945, the JATS passed out 33 347 aircrew at 57 flying schools and depots: 20 800 for the RAF (including about 15 000 pilots and navigators), 12 221 for the SAAF, and 326 for other Allied air forces. At one stage, at least 36 flying schools were in operation and several new airports and air-strips were built. (After the war, some of these were taken over by the SAAF, whilst others were put to civilian use). By the end of the war, more than 50 000 persons had served in the SAAF and it had in its service at one stage or other about 2 500 aircraft.

Seaward defence, September 1939 to September 1941

When war broke out, the Union - with a coastline of 4 828km to defend - had no naval vessels. The South African Naval Service still existed, but with only three officers and three ratings. The only real local naval activities were confined to the South African division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVRSA). In September 1939, the RNVRSA had at least 600 members and although they were not mobilised, the Smuts Government gave them permission to join the Royal Navy on a voluntary basis to help to defend South Africa's coasts. Members of the RNVRSA also manned port war signal stations and examination vessels.

As far as the Coast Artillery was concerned, there were a few 9, 2-inch and 6-inch guns at Cape Town, Simon's Town, East London and Durban, but the defences were not adequate. The government and UDF's first priority was to ensure the safety of the country, its inhabitants, its coastal waters as well as the strategically important Cape sea-route.

The SAAF took over all 29 South African Airways passenger aircraft (ironically all German-built aircraft): eighteen twin-engined Junkers JU-86Z-Is now used as maritime patrol aircraft and eleven three-engined Junkers JU-52I3Ms, used as transports. Of all the dominions, South Africa was the only one to suspend all civilian flights. In conjunction with the Royal Navy, the SAAF commenced patrolling the coasts, intercepting enemy merchant vessels trying to return to their home ports via the Cape sea-route, rescuing survivors of ships sunk by enemy submarines and attacking submarines whenever possible. In 1940, the JU-86s were replaced by British Anson patrol aircraft.

By the war's end, SAAF planes - in conjunction with British and Dutch aircraft stationed in South Africa - had intercepted seventeen enemy ships, helped in the rescue of 437 survivors of sunken ships and attacked 26 of the 36 enemy submarines that operated within 1 000 sea miles of South Africa's coasts (i.e., from the mouth of the Kunene River in the north of what is today Namibia, to Ponta do Ouro in the east, on the border with Mozambique). By August 1945, the SAAF had flown about 15 000 coastal patrol sorties.

The Second World War once again proved that the Cape of Good Hope provides a classic example of a focal area which demands a zone of control, all the more because naval operations in the two oceans meeting there always tended to crystallise around this point. In an effort to maintain control over this zone, the South African Naval and Air forces worked in close liaison with the Royal Navy, which used Simon's Town as an operational base.

The vulnerability of the Cape sea-route was illustrated by the cruise of the German pocket battleship Admiral Graf Spee that sailed unchallenged from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and back again, sinking nine Allied ships. This was the first enemy warship to visit the area. In the meantime, whalers and trawlers were converted into minesweepers and anti-submarine vessels and, by the end of 1939; fifteen vessels were in service, manned by volunteers from the RNVRSA. On 15 January 1940 the new Seaward Defence Force (SDF) was formally constituted, with as its first director, Rear-Admiral C W Halifax, a retired British officer who had settled in South Africa. One of the SDF's first tasks was to sweep the mines laid by the German armed merchant raider Atlantis, a mission which was completed successfully.

On 10 June 1940 - with western Europe shuddering from the German Blitzkrieg - Italy declared war against Britain and France and the next day South Africa declared war against Italy. Italy's entry into the conflict meant that the Mediterranean was, for all practical purposes, henceforth closed to Allied traffic. The strategic importance of the Cape sea-route increased and the war came to Africa. The Italian colonies of Libya, Somalia and Abyssinia were seen as potential springboards for attacks against bordering British and French colonies and the danger of attack came a little nearer to South Africa. What Smuts had foreseen, had happened and his government's hand was strengthened. However, while the Italian Navy was strong, nothing came of its potential threat to the Cape sea-route.

The SDF grew steadily and by August 1940 had 183 officers, 1 049 other ranks, twenty minesweepers and four anti-submarine vessels. At the request of the British Admiralty, the SDF sent four of its large anti-submarine whalers to the Mediterranean. They arrived at Alexandria on 11 January 1941 and were almost immediately put to work along the exposed sea-route to Tobruk. There, on 11 February 1941, the SDF suffered its first war loss when HMSAS Southern Floe sank after hitting a mine. Although the South African ships were scheduled to return home in May 1941, their time of service was renewed time and again.

Another nine South African ships were sent to the Mediterranean. Three were sunk after September 1941, but the South African ships and crews did excellent work. Two of the vessels sank an Italian submarine. A few of the ships only returned home in December 1945. By September 1941, the SDF comprised 216 officers, 1 427 other ratings, 35 minesweepers and fifteen anti-submarine vessels. By that time, the

German submarine offensive against shipping in the South African maritime theatre had not yet been launched, giving the SDF and SAAF time to improve their anti-submarine capability.

During the following four years, minesweeping continued with great success and several Vichy ships were intercepted. Coastal defences were improved and although a shot was never fired in anger from these defences, they could well have been a good deterrent. On 28 March 1941 Rear-Admiral Halifax was killed in a civilian air crash and was succeeded as director of the SDF by Commander (later Commodore) J Dalglish, OBE. On 1 August 1942, the SDF and RNVRSA amalgamated to form the new South African Naval Forces. By the end of the war, more than 10 000 people had served in the Union's naval forces and 89 vessels of various shapes and sizes had been in commission.

Following on last month's article on the guns at Robben Island this month we present:

"THE ISIE "

Isie was just a boat, a wooden boat...but not just any ordinary boat.

She was built specially to serve Robben Island and as the years rolled by, became somewhat of an institution, synonymous with the Island.

And she was named after a much loved woman, Mrs Sybella Margaretha Smuts, the wife of Gen Smuts, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence from 6 September 1939, known as *Isie* to her family and friends and '*Ouma*' to the many thousands of men and women who served during WWII. Her name was also given to the Africa Service Medal which was fondly known as "*Ouma's garter*."

The *Isie* was built in the yards of Louw and Halvorsen, boat-builders of Cape Town whose premises were in a corner of the Victoria Basin where the large retail store of Cape Union Mart, part of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront shopping development is today. She was wooden hulled as were all the craft built in that boat-yard. She did not, however, go down the ways as newly built craft usually did, but was built on the hard, probably due to lack of space and with some measure of urgency as part of a Government contract. She was launched by crane, the Cape Town harbour heavy lift floating crane depositing her gently into the calm waters of the Victoria Basin in October 1940.

Fitting –out took some time, possibly due to war-time shortage of various bits and pieces but *Isie* was declared ready for trials on 12 May 1941. Authority was given for the enrolment of Union Defence Force personnel as crew – all to be carried on the establishment of 5th Heavy Battery, South African Artillery, which was based on Robben Island. The crew was to consist of :

One Warrant Officer Class 1	'A' Class Artisan – as Skipper
One Staff Sergeant	'B' Class Artisan – Skipper's Mate
One Bombardier and two Gunners	Deck hands
One Staff Sergeant	'A' Class Artisan – Engineer
One Bombardier	Engineers Assistant

Isie could carry 45 passengers – 64 at a stretch in calm weather, and on a good day the 7.5 mile journey to the Island (or vice versa) could take about an hour. She was well-known to the many service personnel who journeyed back and forth between the Island and the mainland and she served the Island faithfully through the war years and for many a day thereafter.

In January 1942, the Deputy Chief of Staff, General Headquarters, Pretoria, ruled that the crew of both *Isie* and *Ionic* (the latter also served the Island but she remains unknown) and other similar craft '...shall be SDF (Seaward Defence Force) personnel, 'attached' to Artillery Units. The term 'attached', he said, was meant to convey that these vessels would perform a service for the units concerned. The Deputy Chief of Staff stated in his message to the Officer Commanding, Cape Peninsula Artillery Brigade, and the Director, Seaward Defence Force, whom he had addressed, that the questions of administration and operational control was to be settled by both addressees.

Sometimes the *Isie's* engine had to be started by heating her single piston engine with a blow-lamp. This is but one of many stories of her that are legion. Some have been recounted time and time again by those women who served in the ASWAAS (Artillery Specialists, Women's Auxiliary Army Service), the SWANS (Women's Auxiliary Naval Service) and the girls of the SSS, (Special Signals Service).

Margaret Rae of the SWANS remembers '*...those trips...*' on the *Isie* to Robben Island, some of which were quite hair-raising. When it was stormy and the ferry did not run it was not much fun being stuck on the Island, she said.

Another remembered going down to the docks after a day or two of leave on the mainland '*...to board the Isie.*' There was a terrible gale blowing and the skipper refused to take us back to the Island, saying it was far too dangerous and he was not going to risk his life or ours. However, the six of us pleaded, humoured him, and almost begged on our bended knees to get us back, saying that '*Old Perkins would be furious...*' if we did not get back. I might add, she wrote, that '*Old Perkins*' was only about 33 but to us he was old!!! The outcome of our pleadings was that in the end this young South African skipper of the *Isie* brought out a certain register and said, '*Sign your names, write down your next of kin and note, should you drown it is not my fault.*'

We were quite unaware of the danger and quite happily penned our names in the book. (Army men waiting to go back to the Island were absolutely forbidden to go on this trip- perhaps SWANS were expendable.)

Away we went, but only after we had gone through Cape Town's harbour entrance did we realize what were up against. We first seated ourselves comfortably in the cabin aft of the little vessel, but as time went on we were thrown from one bulkhead to another, our belongings heaped on top of us. We became, one by one, so seasick that through sheer compulsion we gradually went on deck and held on to the mast whilst this little ship bravely rode the huge waves which rose and smashed themselves over us. The skipper kept on coming out of the bridge shouting at us to go down again, but we were too ill to care. We were drenched completely, our winter uniforms sodden but we continued hanging on, our knuckles and hands frozen with pain. Darkness set in and the sea seemed not to care – it just went on lashing the *Isie*. It was perfectly obvious to us that we were off course and that we were being blown out to sea, past the Island.

Their trip lasted from 3.00pm until 10.00pm that night and they were welcomed by fires on the beach with blankets being warmed. The six drenched SWANS were taken to their quarters for hot baths, cocoa and brandy to bring them back to a semblance of normality.

Other SWANS on another trip when the Cape rollers were at their worst, remembered the helmsman performing wonders in preventing the boat from being '*pooped*' while...we sat mesmerized by the huge seas rising and bearing down upon our small craft,...' Former Swan Gloria Hutchinson joined as a Technical Swan in November 1943 but was taken off the technical course at Saldanha and transferred to the Communication Branch as Signal SDO. She was sent to the Signals Office, Robben Island about once a week with secret signals '*...on that God awful tub (Isie) that me seasick.*

When not on duty as a transport *Isie* was used as a patrol vessel, checking the Island's coasts for breaches of security.

Taken over by the South African Corps of Marines in 1951 and as part of the Corps she became part of a unit known as the Robben Island Ferry Service, S.A.C.M. After a minor refit she carried on her transport duties with her usual aplomb, waddling back and forth between the Island and Table Bay harbour where her usual berth was right opposite the yards in which she had been built.

But finally when the Marines were disbanded in 1955 she was handed to the SA Navy and when the Navy moved off the Island in 1962 *Isie* was handed over to the Department of Prisons. The Department spent roughly R75 000 on an extensive refit of the boat in order to qualify for a passenger certificate from the Department of Transport. Fully refurbished the old vessel was re-registered under the name : *Issie*, perhaps a sign-writers error when the name was added after repainting.

But after six months she was condemned – the hull had weakened, the wood was becoming soft and the hull was flexing too much, affecting the alignment of the engine and the shafts.

After giving wonderful service for many years, *Issie* (sic) *Isie* was 'pensioned off' and sold by the Department of Prisons in July 1978 to a Johannesburg businessman, Mr Des White for R15 000. She was replaced by a former Baltic pleasure cruiser, the *White Lady*, which had been bought by the Department of Prisons at a cost of R240 000. The *Isie*'s powerful diesel engines were removed prior to the sale and re-installed in the newer boat, which was renamed *Susan Kruger* after the wife of a former Minister of Justice, Mr. Jimmy Kruger.

Mr White spent some R38 000 on renovations and conversion of the *Isie* into a floating restaurant, after he had "positive indication" from the Milnerton Municipality to moor the boat in Rietvlei, an indication that was later turned down. He had originally applied to moor it in the Milnerton lagoon but the application had been refused because the owner had not complied with certain waste disposal requirements. Other sites from Amanzimtoti to Saldanha were investigated but it was the Strand Municipality that agreed to allow the boat to be 'parked' alongside their pier. It was found after investigation to be too shallow at low tide.

The somewhat expensive conversion was not a success and *Issie* sat on the wharf at the docks for two years, while rent was paid to the harbor authorities.

The unfortunate owner decided to auction the boat and a small group of interested spectators were present at the auction on the morning of 21 June 1980; the highest offer was R15 000 and he withdrew. But, he tried another auction on 24 April 1981, and was even less fortunate- he had an offer of R5 000.

Isie was not the only vessel to serve Robben Island, there were a number of small vessels employed to do so, the *Clara*, *Golden Star*, *Mae West* and others, including an occasional SAAF crash boat. In addition, based on Robben Island was the motor launch, *Ampere*. She was used to ferry pilots to and from the Island for the purpose of guiding ships through the degaussing range. The launch was manned by SDF personnel and was under the command of CPO AE McConnell.

Not much is known of the small vessels except *Clara*. *Clara* was requisitioned and commenced the war as the Examination ship in Table Bay but she was bought outright by the Defence Force in 1942 for the use of the Seaward Defence Force. She was later converted to carry water and stores to Robben Island and to Saldanha Bay, and did so for the remainder of the war.

Despite her 49 years she was sold as surplus to naval requirements in May 1946; but her days at sea ended when she was towed out to sea and on 27 July 1961 scuttled off the Island she had served.

The *Richard Bennett*, the oldest trawler to be requisitioned for naval service had also served as a naval vessel in World War One, the only one in the SDF to have done so, apart from the *Stork* – an examination vessel that served at East London and later Durban. (*Stork* had been built for the Union-Castle Line in 1905, and used as a tender for the mail vessels at East London.)

Richard Bennett was returned to her owners in May 1940 and resumed her peace-time occupation as a trawler. But as part of the general disposal of old vessels she was taken out of service in 1954 and on 26 October was towed out to sea to serve as a target for the three 9.2-inch guns of the De Waal Battery (previously Robben Island Battery). She seemed somehow forlorn as the tug GS Stephens ‘...left her wallowing in the strong south-west swell.’ She finally went to the bottom after 23 rounds had been fired at her.

Of the *Golden Star* and *Mae West* little or nothing is known. Of all the little ships that served Robben Island the *Isie* was by far the better known, she was even famous in her way.



The story behind **redsockfriday**.

But why red socks??

One of two young friends recalled his experience at an annual remembrance ceremony at his school; “Very somber occasions indeed – wreaths (of flowers) are lain by the veterans, lone bugler playing ‘the Last Post’ from an upstairs window, a bomber flies over the school during the moments of silence. And although the connection to those world events gets dimmer and dimmer as the years pass, the vets who arrived each year were the same and the faces became weirdly familiar. one in particular was the oldest of them all - he must have been 90 years plus, hobbling up to the epitaph, laying his wreath - every year (no doubt years before and years after...) the reason he was remembered was that he wore **red** socks; every single year.

His story is something remarkable, when we eventually found it out. This is it. He and two of his best friends were preparing to be sent north to fight in WW1. They agreed that whoever made it through the conflicts - alive - a sign should always be visible to remember his lost friends. They chose **red** socks, and the pact was - for every day thereafter, they’d wear **red** socks. This man celebrated all that he held dear every day of his life. It’s impossible to quantify – brotherhood/ friendship/ human connection, but this man had it in abundance.

Red**sock**friday means all of that. It takes a leaf out of that gentleman’s book, it means remembering your family, your friends, the life that you are afforded to live and the energy you carry with you knowing that others are remembering those same qualities in you!”

The two young friends knew straight away that **red** socks was what they were looking for and promised every Friday moving forward they would wear **red** socks remembering each other, their friendship, their passion for life and to follow their dreams.

Red**sock**friday has become an international social association of likeminded passionate, energetic and positive people like you and although a young organisation attracting people of all ages and persuasions.

Because the concept upon which redsockfriday was initiated started with a military veteran, the **SA Legion** of Military Veterans has decided to endorse this initiative in recognition of military veterans and currently is negotiating with the association to include the profile of a red poppy on the sock, probably the only logo besides that of redsockfriday to be displayed. But Redsockfriday is not only about military veterans, it is about all and any positive energetic person who wants to have a connection with other like-minded persons.



Enrol now. It is free and without any strings attached. This can be done on their website <http://www.redsockfriday.com> and order your socks. The socks cost R25.00 a pair and a portion of the cost goes to charity.

5th Letter from the Home Front

September 1979: The following members were duly appointed to the executive committee – Old Bill MOTH Danie Wiehan, Wee Bill MOTH Aubrey Noone, Adjutant MOTH Tubby Hobart, Pay Bill MOTH Malcolm Bouwer and Sgt-Major MOTH Harry Russell.

October 1979: MOTH Woods wanted to know if the executive committee were doing anything about the bar loss as stated by the previous Pay Bill at the A.G.M. and also who authorised the bar price increases when at a previous meeting it had been agreed not to increase them. Old Bill said that something had to be done about the loss and MOTH Woods should ask the Quarter Master about the price increase. MOTH Lloyd proposed that bar stock value, profit or loss be shown every month by the Pay Bill in his monthly report. The motion was seconded by MOTH Woods. MOTH Hobart wanted to know why it was suddenly desired, “surely if the previous executive had known anything about bar losses, they should have taken action?” The proposal was accepted. MOTH Lloyd then asked the Old Bill why he had said at the A.G.M. “the executive committee recommended the award of these Certificates of Comradeship to:” when he, MOTH’s Delgano and Watson were the rest of the executive and knew nothing about the recommendations. Old Bill replied that he could not ask MOTH Lloyd to recommend himself for an award and he had taken it upon himself to ask Dug Out to award the Certificates. MOTH Lloyd then replied that he did not want his award upon the word of one man. MOTH Calder and seconded by MOTH Hartman then proposed that the Shellhole confirm the Old Bill’s actions in this regard. In

opposition MOTH Watson then proposed a motion which was seconded by MOTH Delgano, that the Old Bill should be castigated for taking this action. The 2nd motion was defeated by 14 votes to 4.

November 1979: MOTH Paris explained the awarding of Certificates by Dug Out. There was a slight difference with MOTH Lloyd. MOTH Coyne proposed a vote of confidence in Old Bill Wiehan and the motion was seconded by MOTH Russell. MOTH Watson wanted to know why the bar was not open after the Armistice Day service and why he could not get a drink prior to the meeting. Old Bill replied that the remark was not considerate towards the Quarter Master, “he has to stay after all had finished their festivities and we should remember that he also has a home to go to.” The committee had asked the Quarter Master to not open the bar before the meeting.

January 1980: Old Bill spoke about the December open night and thanked the members of the Shellhole, Ladies Auxiliary and VIP’s for making it such a fine evening. MOTH Vigar asked if he could be supplied with a list of when the hall is engaged because no matter when he came to the hall it always seems to be dancing times. MOTH Richards enquired about the Governor Generals War Fund and whether MOTH’s have access to it. MOTH Paris replied that it was now a national fund and the Old Bill promised to obtain information about the fund from the SA Legion.

February 1980: Old Bill thanked the 4 out of 6 over 80 members for attending the meeting. MOTH Woods wanted to know why the ladies had to receive our donations at the door and why only the ladies benefitted from the open night and Dug Out meetings. MOTH Broderick replied that

door donations have been given to MOTHWA to provide snacks at our meetings and as the Ladies Auxiliary now provided these snacks, the contributions should go to them. Old Bill stated that the Ladies Auxiliary also provided the meals at the open night and Dug Out meeting. MOTH Woods then demanded that this decision be stated in the minutes. MOTH Barr then pointed out that there must be a proposer and seconder to make MOTH Woods' demand a ruling, and pointed out to the meeting that neither existed. MOTH Dockrall then spoke about the petty bickering at Shellhole meetings and asked for it to stop. He further stated, "let us remind ourselves of True Comradeship, one of the three ideals of our Order."

March 1980: Old Bill welcomed 5 out of 6 over 80 members to the meeting. He further said that the 6th member had left for Cape Town and that his actual whereabouts was unknown at present. A round of applause was given to the "Old Boys." MOTH Hartman noted that with the presence of Lady MOTH O'Laughlin at the meeting, 40 MOTH's attended this meeting to set a new record for attendance at Marshal Smuts's monthly meetings.

April 1980: Old Bill asked the Orderly Sergeant to request the presence of the Ladies Auxiliary. When the ladies joined a tribute was paid to our former Pay Bill MOTH Stan Watson, who has answered the Sunset Call. We will remember him! Old Bill then announced that at the last convention, one of our members, MOTH Bill Paris, was elected to be the Old Bill of the Order, the highest reward one can receive in Mothdom. A short tribute was paid to MOTH Paris and the members stood to give him a round of applause. A pennant from Cape Western Dug Out was presented to the Shellhole on this joyful occasion.

May 1980: Old Bill reminded the blokes that the SA Police Liquor Squad was on the alert and that the blokes should be careful to drink at the open door, or outside.

June 1980: Old Bill reminded the blokes not to salute the candle, but the vacant chair, which is the symbol of our remembrance to fallen comrades.

July 1980: The list of correspondence was read out. The reading matter put on the table consisted of: The National War Fund magazine and the General Smuts War Veterans Foundation Newsletter.

August 1980: MOTH Frank Joubert extended greetings from Remembrance Shellhole. MOTH Calder reported that Sir De Villiers Graaf has been appointed as Honouree Colonel to the Cape Town Highlanders and that as a MOTH he should be congratulated. Old Bill thanked all MOTH's who had attended the funeral of MOTH Maloney. MOTH Led Nicholls was presented quietly with his Life Membership Certificate.

Old Bill Report 1979/80:

Members (63)

Average meeting attendance (30)

Meetings: 3rd Monday at 20:00

? Member transferred in

? Member transferred out

? New recruits

Sunset Call: MOTH Stan Watson and MOTH Maloney

Yours under the Tin Hat

Danie Wiehan – Old Bill



Important FEBRUARY Dates

We remember first a few important matters that happened in the past:

Rifleman Leonard (Chunkie) Truter of 1 Parachute Battalion who was killed in action on the 15th of January 1981

Lance Corporal W.T. Steenkamp of 61 Mech Battalion Group who was killed in action during Operation Askari on the 4th of January 1984

Rifleman H.A. (Alie) Heyns of 61 Mech Battalion Group who was killed in action during Operation Askari on the 4th of January 1984

We will remember them

Korean War

On the 18th of January 1951, Chinese and North Korean forces recapture Seoul. On the 1st of February 1951, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 498 declares that China, along with North Korea, is an aggressor in the Korean War.

P1/35454 Lieutenant Gordon Derrick Doveton of the SAAF 2 Squadron who was killed in action on the 15th of February 1951 flying F-51 Mustang no 304.

At 13:00 on the 15th of February 1951, Lt Doveton and Lt McKellar took off from their airfield at K-10, Chinhae, to conduct an armed reconnaissance mission in the vicinity of Kaesong-Haeju-Sariwon. After attacking a few different targets, they found a camouflaged vehicle near Kaesong, which they attacked. On their fourth pass the vehicle caught fire. Despite this, Lt Doveton chose to make another attack, and Lt McKellar saw Lt Doveton's aircraft bounce off the side of a hill in a cloud of smoke, somersault and burst into flames. Lt G.D. Doveton was married to Helene Doveton, (born De Jongh) and his name is listed on the United Nations Pusan Memorial.

We will remember him

18 February - Events

1901: Winston Churchill makes his maiden speech in the House of Commons

1943: Joseph Goebbels delivers his Sportpalast speech

1965: The Gambia becomes independent from the United Kingdom

1979: Snow falls in the Sahara Desert in southern Algeria for the only time in recorded history.

2011: Marshal Smuts Shellhole monthly meeting at 18:00

Interesting reads on the Internet:

www.samilitaryhistory.org

www.ninefoxtrot.org

www.dod.mil.za

www.firstworldwar.com

19 February - Events

On this day in 1878, Thomas Edison patents the phonograph. This invention eventually allows us to present a **Dinner Dance at Marshal Smuts Shellhole**, starting at 19:30, on the 19th of February 2011. Tickets available at the bar and the cost will be to 25.00 ZAR per person

www.secondworldwar.com

www.61mech.org.za

<http://www.redsockfriday.com>

Contributions to gfj@sun.ac.za