

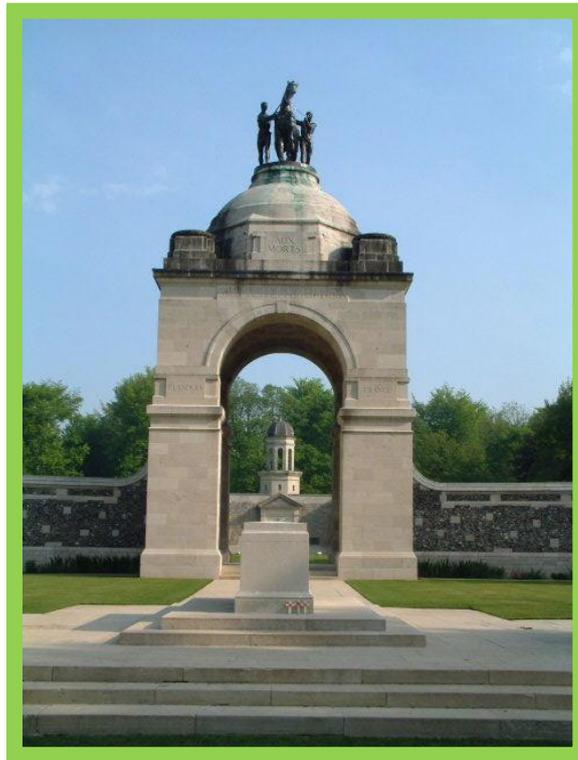


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Department:
Defence
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**ADDRESS AT DELVILLE WOOD BY MAJOR GENERAL ROY ANDERSEN, SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL DEFENCE FORCE,
ON 7 JULY 2013**



Not many places on earth have witnessed so terrible a testing of the human spirit under conditions so frightful over so long an unbroken period of time to which the young volunteer soldiers of South Africa were subjected upon this hallowed ground.

And doubly hallowed this ground is by virtue not only of the fact that over 600 of those young men who fought and died here, still lie unburied within the confines of this wood, now made lovely again by its regrown trees, but also because here stands the only national memorial to the 25 000 volunteers of all races who died whilst serving in the South African Forces during the two World wars, the Korean conflict, the Struggle for Freedom and more recent peace support missions.

They include the 381 buried at Arques-la-Bataille and the more than 600 young black soldier sons of South Africa who went down in the troopship "Mendi" in the English channel on their way to France on the early, ice-cold morning of 21 February 1917 and who, by the noble way they faced death in prayer and in song made of that disaster one of the most inspiring and shining examples of heroism in the annals of South African history.

Ninety seven years ago, in the third week of July 1916, the 1st South African Infantry Brigade comprising men drawn on a volunteer basis from many famous regiments but principally from the Transvaal Scottish, the Witwatersrand Rifles, the First City, the Kimberley Regiment, the Cape Town Highlanders, Durban Light Infantry, the Rand Light

Infantry and the Buffalo Volunteer Rifles – all under the command of Brigadier General HT Lukin, and supported by their own South African medical unit, found themselves here in this corner of France.

They had been together less than a year and came from offices, shops, factories, villages and farms of South Africa. Many of them had never been in action before. They had, however, volunteered as many South Africans had done before or have done since, to fight for their country and for the freedom of the world. The trail here had led them via England and fighting in Egypt to Flanders and France. On July 15th 1916 three battalions of this fine group of young men marched out of trenches near the ruined village of Montauban, two hours before dawn with orders to take and hold this wood, Delville Wood, at all costs.

By seven that morning they had established themselves in the wood and a pattern of attack, counter-attack, shelling and destruction developed. Fighting at times hand-to-hand the South Africans clung tenaciously to the wood. After an eight hour bombardment on the 18th July they were forced back into two pockets of resistance in the South-East and South-West corners of the wood. The following morning the men in the South-East corner ran out of ammunition and were overrun and captured. Those in the South-West corner fought on and their ordeal lasted six days and five nights.

Of the Brigade's 121 Officers and 3 032 men who entered the wood, 3 wounded officers and 140 men were relieved on the evening of the 20th. Two days later 5 officers and 750 men paraded before Brigadier General Lukin, who took the salute with bared head and with tears running down his cheeks.

Their fortitude and resolution set an example to the next generation of South Africans who fought in World War II.

In 1939 when the second World War broke out South Africa was one of the first countries to align itself on the side of the allies and by 1945, 334 378 South Africans of all races had participated in that war and 14 341 had made the supreme sacrifice. They too are remembered far away far from home.

In this year, 2013, 15 brave young South African Soldiers lost their lives in the Central African Republic. We remember their sacrifice and our thoughts are with their families.

These groups from World War I and II, and more recent conflicts are honoured by this memorial to all those who died for their country in action overseas.

The Museum behind us also portrays the courageous Struggle for Freedom in South Africa which culminated in the democratic elections and the end to apartheid in 1994. They paved the way for the freedom in South Africa.

This Delville Wood War Memorial which is so beautifully maintained by the CWGC and the people of Longueval is not only testimony to South Africa's proud military past, but it also carries a message for future generations. It is reminder of the military lessons learnt from previous wars that should never be forgotten, and should be taken to heart.

It tells us that peace only lasts until the next war, and that we should take the necessary steps to prepare ourselves to meet any threat at any given moment.

And so, I leave you with the message that those who made supreme sacrifice for liberty should not be forgotten.

Thank you to all for joining us today on this important occasion, as we build up to the centenary of the Battle of Delville Wood to be commemorated in July 2016.