



the sandf

Department:
Defence
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Speech by Major Albert Pestana at SA Irish Centenary Dinner

Mr Mess,
Major General Andersen, Chief of the SANDF Reserves;
Lt Col Bennett, Officer Commanding SA Irish Regiment;
Officers;
MWO Moseki, RSM SA Irish Regiment;
Warrant Officers;
Non-Commissioned Officers;
Ladies & Gentlemen
All protocols observed.

It is an honour and privilege for me to be called upon to reply to the address of Lt Col Bennett on behalf of the guests at this very auspicious occasion.

I am indeed in the company of a venerated group of guests who are present here tonight to be part of the commemoration of such a significant milestone in the history of such a fine Regiment.

Thank you very much for the opportunity.

It is a hard task to follow on from the address by Lieutenant Colonel Bennett, so I will try my level best. In some ways I feel like an unknown rock band who have been asked to perform after having The Rolling Stones as an opening act.

When I was preparing for this last night, I could not decide whether I would be serious or humourous, or both. In the end I opted for the serious approach which I feel is commensurate with the occasion, so I beg your indulgence.

All of the guests here this evening would like to express our profound admiration and praise to the members of the SA Irish Regiment.

You are the essence of what makes the Regiment what it is today.

Your tenacity and unwavering service to your Country and your regiment is exemplary to all the future members of this Regiment.

You are the custodians of many fine traditions that have been passed down through the years from the ranks of your predecessors.

Always be mindful of these fine traditions but never cling on to them unnecessarily, as together you forge our way into the future, and as we transform our organisation into a uniquely South African organisation of which we can all be proud of.

I firmly believe that we are all on the brink of very exciting and challenging times, and I look forward to being there in support of the South African Irish Regiment as we move into the future.

With this in mind, allow me to quote from an address made by Right Honourable Kwame Nkrumah to the Ghanaian National Assembly in June 1965, which I hope will inspire you:

"Countrymen, the task ahead is great indeed, and heavy is the responsibility; and yet it is a noble and glorious challenge - a challenge which calls for the courage to dream, the courage to believe, the courage to dare, the courage to do, the courage to envision, the courage to fight, the courage to work, the courage to achieve - to achieve the highest excellencies and the fullest greatness of man. Dare we ask for more in life? "

This weekend we also commemorate the 73rd Anniversary of the Battle of Sidi Rezegh which took place in the Western Desert in North Africa, in what is now Libya, on the 23rd November 1941.

During this battle the men of the South African Irish, together with the 3rd Battalion Transvaal Scottish, Regiment Botha and supported by the 25 pounder guns of the Transvaal Horse Artillery, made up the core of the 5th South African Brigade under Brigadier Armstrong.

Together we fought the mighty onslaught of Rommel's Panzer Army, with our guns firing over open sights during the height of the battle.

The 5th South African Brigade was decimated at this battle, but not after inflicting the most serious casualties sustained during a single action on Rommel's army during the campaign in the Western Desert.

One of the THA's veterans of this battle, Gunner Murray Victor Wright was serving at the battle in 9th Battery in direct support of the SA Irish. He often recalled how brave the SA Irish were during the battle, but most of his praise came when all of his gun crew had been taken out and he needed replacements. He quickly press-ganged some of the withdrawing SA Irish members onto his gun and they continued to fire on the Panzers over open sights until they ran out of ammunition. "Thank God it was the Irish" he said "Otherwise I would have not been here today"

Oscar Wilde used to say that delivering a speech is very much like having an illicit affair, very easy to begin, but very difficult to end.

It only remains for me to propose a toast to the South African Irish Regiment, on behalf of all of the guests present here tonight.

So if I can ask all of the guests here this evening to please charge your glasses and to be upstanding:

*"May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again,
May God hold you
In the palm of his hand."*

Ladies & Gentlemen: The South African Irish Regiment.