

CITY OF JOHANNESBURG PAUSES ON REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY TO COMMEMORATE 99TH ANNIVERSARY OF ARMISTICE DAY

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The City of Johannesburg once again contributed to the commemoration of South African servicemen and women lost in two World Wars and subsequent conflicts. The National Civic Remembrance Sunday Service and Wreath Laying Ceremony took place at Johannesburg's Beyers Naudé Square based Cenotaph on 12 November 2017. The commemorative event was hosted by the South African Legion in collaboration with the Office of the Executive Mayor, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), Ditsong Museums of South Africa, and the South African National Military Veterans' Association (SANMVA). Members of the Reserve Force Council's Junior Officers' Association (RFCJOA) were on hand to assist the South African Legion in an organisational capacity with the processing of wreaths and the distribution of poppies and service programmes. 2016's theme of remembrance centred on the centenary commemoration of the Battle of Delville Wood, while Remembrance Sunday in 2017 honoured those lost in the troopship SS Mendi tragedy. Remembrance Sunday 2018 will remember the exploits of the Cape Corps at Square Hill in Palestine, and mark the 100 year anniversary of the end of the First World War.

March Past Salutes the Honoured Dead

The opening of the remembrance service was preceded by the hoisting and unfurling of the National Flag as those attending assembled, before the Marching Column passed before the old Johannesburg City Hall, with participants saluting the Cenotaph as they went passed. The Cenotaph on Beyers Naudé Square, was unveiled on 10 October 1926, simultaneously with the Delville Wood South African National Memorial in France, to commemorate South Africa's First World War dead. It bears a striking resemblance to the Cenotaph that was first erected in 1919 and then made a permanent structure on Whitehall in London, England.

The head of the marching column was led by the newly formed Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD) Band with JMPD personnel following behind. The column included personnel from St John's Ambulance, City of Johannesburg Emergency Management Services fire fighting personnel led by a red Scania 6x4 truck carrying the Bronto Skylift F37 HDT ladder platform, the South African Police Service (SAPS), as well as the Girl and Boy Scouts respectively. The SANDF Reserve Force Contribution to the march past was the Pipes and Drums of the South African Irish Regiment (SAIR) which was followed closely by members of various veterans' organisations, with the rear brought up by the JMPD Equestrian Unit's Mounted officers on their black Friesian horses.

The SANDF Regular Force contribution to commemorative proceedings came in the form of a military ceremonial company, sentries and flagman from 21 South African Infantry Battalion (21 SAI Bn) based in Doornkop.

City and Citizenry Unite in Remembering Sacrifice for Justice and Freedom

The Sunday 12 November observance was presided over by Mayor - Councillor Herman Mashaba, along with attendance by senior civil and military officials, diplomats and military attachés paying their respects. The order of the service saw a prayer and a sermon invoked by the Anglican Diocese of Johannesburg's Dean, the Very Reverend Xolani Dlwathi, and scripture read by the Speaker of the Council of the City of Johannesburg, Councillor Vasco da Gama.



The Johannesburg Cenotaph, with wreaths laid and 21 SAI Bn sentries posted.

Cenotaph – The Empty Tomb

The theme of this Remembrance Day service focused on the tragic loss of the 616 men of the South African Native Labour Corps (SANLC) with the sinking of the troopship SS Mendi one hundred years ago. The etymology of the Greek word Cenotaph – *Kenos*, meaning “empty”, and *taphos*, meaning “tomb” is most fitting for this Remembrance Day’s special focus on the centenary of the sinking of the troopship SS Mendi, in that cenotaphs are erected to commemorate those whose remains are interred elsewhere, lost or location unknown. Most of the 616 South Africans who perished when the Mendi went down have no known grave. The theme of prayer, scripture readings and benediction at the event centred not only on mourning the great loss to South Africa on 21 February 1917, but also revolved around what the sacrifice made by all South Africa's fighting sons and daughters stood for.

Those present joined in song, singing the SANDF Unity Hymn to the accompaniment of notes provided by the National Ceremonial Guard's Band, followed by observing the solemn conducting of the Last Post, two minutes' silence, and the Reveille. The tradition of marking two minutes' silence traces its origins to Cape Town during the First World War, with one minute dedicated to those who came home, and the other for those who did not. A South African, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick successfully petitioned King George V for this to be officially observed at all Armistice Day services.

South African Irish Regiment (SAIR) Pipe Major, WOII Craig Herwill played the Lament, alternating with the Ceremonial Guard Band while dignitaries and guests laid wreaths at the Cenotaph. The Chief of the South African Army Infantry Formation, Major General Rudzani Maphwanya laid a wreath on behalf of the Chief of the SANDF, while Brigadier General Debbie Molefe and Brigadier General Gerhard Kamffer did so with the former in her capacity as Director: Defence Reserves and the latter as Director: Army Reserves. A wreath was laid on behalf of the Reserve Force Council by Councillor - Brigadier General Kefilwe Mathibe (Ret).

Intervene and end all conflicts, protect us and protect our Nation

What started as a sunny afternoon turned towards the end of the service to peals of thunder and lightning. The storm broke with a considerable downpour over proceedings just as the National Anthem was played, with those assembled joining in for a most heartfelt rendition in response above the din. The first portion of the National Anthem’s second stanza in Sesotho, translated as ‘Intervene and end all conflicts, Protect us, protect our nation’ is most fitting when taking remembrance and commemoration into consideration.

Continuing to Remember

The City of Johannesburg and SANDF continue to honour those South Africans who paid the ultimate price in all wars, battles and armed struggles in pursuit of the values of freedom, democracy and peace which this country now holds so dear.

Great thanks must go to the collaboration between the City of Johannesburg, the SANDF, and the South African Legion’s Programme Director for the day – Legionnaire Godfrey Giles for a respectable commemorative service, on the eve of the one hundred year anniversary of the cessation of hostilities in the First World War, to be marked on 11 November 2018.

The SANLC SS Mendi casualty Reverend Isaac Dyobha’s words bring the war home - "I, a Xhosa, say you are all my brothers, Zulus, Swazis, Pondos, Basutos, we die like brothers. We are the sons of Africa."

Lest we forget.