



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS
Republic of South Africa

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF
DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS MS NN MAPISA-NQAKULA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF THE
CENTENARY OF ARQUE LA BATAILLE, DIEPPE , FRANCE**

Programme Director

The Sub-Prefect of Dieppe, Ms M. Laquieze

The Mayor of Arques-la-Bataille, Mr G. Senecal

Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Chief of the South African National Defence Force

Ambassador R.S. Molekane

Generals, Admirals, Officers, Warrant Officers, Non Commissioned
Officers

Members on the Parade

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

I am saddened to announce the passing on of Lieutenant General Duma Dumisani Mdutyana the Chief of Joint Operation of the South African National Defence Force who passed away two days ago whilst we were preparing for this befitting occasion, after a short illness. He had extensive experience in peacekeeping operations where he served

in various capacities such as a General Officer Commanding of the South African Contingent in Burundi in 2003 and as Deputy Division Commander of the Eastern Division in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in the United Nations Mission (MONUC) from February 2005 to September 2007. He was promoted to the rank of Major General in February 2008 and posted as the Chief Advisor to the DRC, Chief of Defence Staff, until March 2009. From April 2009 until November 2010, he served as the Deputy Force Commander of the United Nations mission, UNAMID, in Sudan. From 1 December 2010, Major General Mduyana was appointed as General Officer Commanding Joint Operational Headquarters until 1 December 2011 when he was appointed as Chief Director Operations at Joint Operations Division. In 2015 he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General, as Chief of Joint Operations.

May I request that we bow our heads for a moment of silence in respect of General Mduyana and convey our sincerest condolences to his family, friends and relatives. May his soul rest in peace.

On behalf of our Commander-in-Chief, His Excellency, President Jacob Zuma, and each one of our dedicated men and women in uniform, I welcome you to this historic occasion, our country's commemoration of all South Africans who perished in France during the 1st World War and now lie buried here, so far away from their homeland in pursuit of world peace.

It is an honour for us that so many of you have taken the time out of your busy schedule, in order to be part of the memorial service which is held here, at Arques-la-Bataille each year with the full support of the people of Dieppe. This tradition must for part of the fabric of our Defence Force for years to come.

This occasion must become an important event our national calendar,

to be held annually coinciding with the commemoration of key historic events in the life of our defence force. It is an event that should give South Africans, the opportunity to interact with and celebrate our armed forces.

Such an event recognises both our history as well as the future of the Defence Force. It acknowledges that our country has come out of a history of divisions and conflict, and celebrates the progress we have made in forging unity and a common patriotism.

In memorialisation of our countrymen in this manner we have taken care to identify a historic moment, in the life of the armed forces that best represents the values of patriotism, comradeship, valour and common sacrifice. It is these values that identify our nation's ability to rise above our challenges of the past, to build a democratic and peaceful society based on the respect for human rights for all.

Throughout history, our forefathers fought various wars of resistance and wars of liberation in South Africa and in other countries, and endured hardship so that future generations can inherit a better country. They fought with pride, courage and dedication.

Each time we hold such a memorial service, we honour their memory and their contribution to the freedom of our nation and the world. Accordingly this morning we laid a wreath at this memorial site to commemorate their memories. This memorial service is the precursor of the Delville Wood memorial, at the village of Longueval which, will be presided over by our President, His Excellency Mr. JZ Zuma the President of France His Excellency Mr. Francois Hollande two days from today.

Ladies and Gentleman

Why Delville Wood? This is the question. On 18 July 1917, in the town

hall of Cape Town, a large crowd gathered to remember the sacrifices of the South African men in France. It was called Delville Wood Day. It was a tribute to the memory of the noble South Africans who made supreme sacrifice at Delville Wood under very difficult circumstances which won glory for the country. It was regarded as a great anniversary by the Cape Times newspaper.

It was not merely a small episode in the Great War, for South Africa, it was “first stiff fight” for Union Defence Forces under extreme conditions of modern warfare, as described by former Cape Prime Minister, John X Merriman. The South Africans demonstrated toughness and proved themselves equal to the dreadful task.

Delville Wood has a special place where South Africans stood with the rest of the Allies to stop German militarism, to be counted as part of the Allied crusades which stopped the world from falling under German dictatorship at the time. Hence this episode is marked every year to remember the soldiers who played their part in the great strife.

This episode of Delville Wood looms large in the South African military history. The new warfare had exposed South Africans to appalling casualties. Medical evacuation was under strain— motor vehicles, trains and large barges sailing on the Somme River were used. Many friends were lost.

The South African infantry and Artillery served in the horrible sector of the war on the Western Front. They were also served by the black units called the South African Labour Contingent. By September 1916, the offensive gradually slowed down. Despite the challenges, the South Africans, together with the Allied forces, were fighting on all fronts. At least they were doing something in the war. The news was broadcast by newspapers back in South Africa. The men acquitted their task bravely, of which they could be proud. They fought gallantly in a no-man’s-land - into the fire of enemy artillery and machine guns, in a life and death struggle to secure justice and peace for world.

Ninety thousand black and coloured South African were recruited in South Africa for the rear and support duties during the Great War. From those, more than 25 thousand volunteers served in France in the South African Native Labour Corps (SANLC) to provide that support and were engaged in offloading the millions of tons of munitions and supplies necessary for the continuing the War on the Western Front. Many were exposed to dismal scenes of the battlefield and lost their lives due to awful working conditions and unsanitary conditions and enemy fire.

The Total losses of the South African Native Labour Corps (SANLC) in Europe amounted to 1120 men, 260 of them rest here in Arque-la-Bataille Cemetary, near Dieppe, where the No 1 General Hospital was established. It is sad that none of these members did not receive medals, however we are proud that we are gathered here today to correct that history and we would like to thank the residents of Dieppe for their continued support and keeping the memory of these great men alive for this long period.

Ladies and Genetlemen

As we celebrate these brave South Africans and right the wrongs of the past, we should ensure that transformation of all remaining symbols of segregation is achieved. In our transformation process an area that has remained unchanged is the depiction of the role played by black South Africans in the World War I. Transformation of the South African National Memorial and Museum in Delville Wood, has been a critical point if we are to honour our forebears and let them rest in peace knowing that the worngs of the past have been correct and reflective of the true history of human kind. We cannot allow and perpetuate segregation even in death.

It is necessary to ensure that the historical role played by black South Africans in France is accorded the importance it deserves in the same spirit as that of white South Africans. As already mentioned more than 21000 black South Africans served in World War 1 (WW1) in France. They were enlisted as the South African Native Labour Contingent. However the South African Native Labour Contingent has received hardly any attention in South African histories.

They were not allowed to carry arms. Their duties were to work in the dockyards and at railheads, to dig behind the lines and manhandle supplies and munitions and tree felling. They were considered unfit to serve as combatants. One disqualification for combat troops was skin colour. The idea of using black troops to fight against white (enemy) troops was considered unwise and repugnant.

This unfair omission is most evident in the South African Museum in Delville Wood. The South African National Memorial was inaugurated in 1926 at Deville Wood, Longueval village in France. The memorial is on a 63 hectre piece of land which is a South African property, acquired in 1920 by the South African government. Delville Wood was chosen as a site to erect a National Memorial because it is at Delville Wood that the First South African Infantry Brigade got engaged in one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War. The Memorial commemorates South African soldiers who died in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. The representation of Africans during the war is very minimal and it distorts the important role they played in various theatres of war.

In the spirit of democracy, reconciliation, restitution and integration, the transformation of this National heritage is imperative, so as to ensure the rewriting of an objective, just and authentic South African Military history.

I am pleased that the exhumation of the first member of the SANLC to perish during WW1 and re-internment in the courtyard of the South African War Museum at Delville Wood was done and the Deputy President had the honour to be part of the re-internment last year.

The creation of a Garden of Remembrance dedicated to all South African soldiers (members of both the South African Infantry brigade and the South African Native Labour Corps) buried in various regions of France (Somme, Nord, Pas-de-Calais, Normandy Aisne, and many more) and a new memorial stone is erected to serve as a dedication to all South Africans that perished during WW1. Redoing the interior of the Delville Wood Commemorative museum so to ensure a just and fair representation of the role of all South African soldiers who died during the World Wars was completed.

The reinternment of Private Nyweba Beleza, to the museum which now proudly marks his final resting place, the first member of the South African Native Labour Corps to perish in the Great War. The re-internment has given further impetus in consolidating our diversity and it will also solidify our efforts to bring the various South African groupings together. It will further greatly assist in helping to remove the negative stigma attached to the Delville Wood Memorial that has been for a very long time seen as a dedication to a very small segment of the South African population.

I stand here proud that we have achieved what we set ourselves to achieve in correcting a very important part of our history as South Africans to be all inclusive.

I thank you

Issued by the Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans

Contact: Sonwabo Mbananga

Director of Communications

0820453963