



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS
Republic of South Africa

To All News Editors

MEDIA STATEMENT: MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS, MS NN MAPISA-NQAKULA, MP COMMEMORATE 100 YEARS OF THE PARTICIPATION OF SOUTH AFRICA IN THE GREAT WARS (1ST WORLD WAR), AT ARQUE-LA-BATAILLE, DIEPPE, FRANCE, 8 JUNE 2016

The Minister of Defence and Military Veterans Ms NN Mapisa- Nqakula accompanied by the Deputy Minister of the Defence and Military Veterans Mr K Maphatsoe will be leading a military delegation to France for the commemoration of 100 years of South Africa's participation in the Great War where South African troops died and are buried in Arque-la-Bataille, near Dieppe and Delville Wood in Longueval. A memorial service will be held in Arque-la-Bataille in remembrance of all those South African, mainly black troops who for many years have gone unrecognised for their participation of the 1st World War and are buried here. This commemoration coincides with the State visit to France by President Zuma.

Accompanying President Zuma on the state visit, Mapisa-Nqakula will officiate at the memorial service to be held at Arque-la-Bataille where about 260 black South African soldiers who participated in the Great War perished and are laid to rest whilst others, mainly white South African soldiers are buried in Delville Wood. History will be re-written as until now only white soldiers buried in Delville Wood were the only ones who were recognised and celebrated. The black soldiers enlisted and formed the South African Native Labour Corps (SANLC). However the South African Native Labour Corps has hardly received any attention in South African histories nor did they receive any medals for their participation in the war.

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. As part of our efforts to correct our history the first member of the South African Native Labour Corps to perish in the Great War, Private Nyweba Beleza, has been re-interred to the museum which now proudly marks his final resting place,

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.

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