

SA political leaders honour black troops in France

Ministers TW Nxesi (Public Works) and Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula (Defence) laid wreaths in honour and memory of South African troops who died during the Great War in Arque-la-Bataille, France.

The Ministers took some time to honour mainly the black troops, who for many years have gone unrecognised for their participation in the 1st World War.

In Arque-la-Bataille lay 260 black troops who participated and perished in the Great War, while mainly white soldiers, were buried separately in Delville Wood.

During the memorial service, Minister Nxesi said: "History has been re-written, as until now, only white soldiers were recognised and celebrated. The black soldiers hardly received attention in the South African history, nor did they receive any medals for their participation in the war."

"The unfair omission that was in Delville Wood has been corrected and in the spirit of democracy, reconciliation, restitution and integration, the transformation of the National heritage was imperative, so as to ensure the re-writing of an objective, just and authentic South African military history,' he said.

He also emphasised the importance of the event and shared the history of the museum with the younger generation.

Minister Nxesi and Minister Nqakula are in France as part of the delegation accompanying President Jacob Zuma on an official state visit to France for the commemoration of 100 years of South Africa's participation in the Great War.

The South African National Memorial was inaugurated in 1926 at Delville Wood, Longueval village in France. The memorial is situated on the South African-owned 63 hectares of property that was acquired in 1920.

Delville Wood was chosen as a site to erect a National Memorial because it is in this area where the first South African infantry brigade engaged in one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War.