

AIR, SEA AND LAND: The three branches of the SANDF march together to mark Armed Forces Day.



MARCHING ORDERS: Soldiers of the State President's Guard march in celebration of Armed Forces Day.



ARRIVAL: President Jacob Zuma arrives at the celebration to mark the 5th Armed Pictures: ELMOND JIYANE Forces Day.

COURAGE OF MEN OF SS MENDI HONOURED

CIC takes Armed Forces Day salute

Address by the President of the Republic of South Africa and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, PRESIDENT JACOB ZUMA, on the occasion of 5th Armed Forces Day held in Durban yesterday

MINISTER of Defence and Military Veterans Mapisa-Ngakula; Premier of KwaZulu-Natal Willies Mchunu; ministers; deputy ministers; MECs; present mayor of the eThekwini Municipality, councillor Zandile Gumede and all mayors and councillors present; the Chief of the SANDF; generals, admirals, officers, warrant officers, NCOs; members on parade; military veterans of World War II present here today; descendants of the Mendi; fellow South Africans; I greet you all on this important occasion, our country's Armed Forces Day.

our deepest condolences to the families of the three naval officers and three staff members of the Department of lives tragically late last week at the Naval Base Durban.

We received the news with occurring just as preparations were at an advanced stage to celebrate Armed Forces Day.

We are with the families at this difficult time. Their loss is our loss. Compatriots, today we celebrate the 5th Armed Forces Day.

Five years ago, we decided to use the 21st of February each year as Armed Forces Day to celebrate the contribution of the people's defence force to the consolidation of democracy and peace in our country.

We chose the date of the peace should be used to honour our men and women who what you came to do. are prepared to lay down their lives if need be, to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic, and its people, our soldiers.

This Armed Forces Day has a special meaning in our country, because we are marking the centenary of the sinking of the SS Mendi troopship.

On February 21, 1917, the SS Mendi ship was chartered by the British government as a troop carrier to serve in World War 1, carrying 823 members of the 5th Battalion.

They had completed 34 days of the voyage from Cape Town ery. to England, and were now on their way to France to the war, when the tragedy struck in the

English Channel. The SS Mendi was almost cut in half by a much bigger ship, the SS Darro, which was bound for Argentina. Six hundred and sixteen South

Africans died in the disaster, mostly black South Africans. Black people had volunteered to join World War I in

order to fight against fascism. They were ahead of their time. They were internationalists who loved peace and justice. They also joined the war believing that their con-

treatment back home after the

tribution would lead to better

time. They were not allowed to carry weapons and were to be utilised as labourers rather

They were also never decorated or awarded any medals at

That is the painful history we come from, a history of brutal and blatant racism and

is the tragedy second only in scale to the tragedy at Delville Wood in France the year patriots who died in the SS before in 1916, when 776 men of the South African Battalion died holding the wood over

We travelled to France last Let me begin by extending year to pay tribute to those are honoured and recognised in the South African monu-Public Works who lost their ment to the war in that country, on an equal footing with the white soldiers.

great shock and sadness, France honours all our sol-100 years later. We also salute South African people.

We remember the timeless words of Reverend Isaac Wauchope Dyobha, who said: "Be sinking of the SS Mendi, so quiet and calm, my country- appreciated. that the day on which so many men. What is happening now paid the supreme price for is what you came to do... you are going to die, but that is

the death drill.

my brothers... Swazis, Pondos, Basotho... so let us die like

"We are the sons of Africa. bodies."

In recognition of the tragedy, among the national

and their sacrifices throughout our lives and from generation to generation.

in memory of the selfless and brave soldiers of the Mendi, today we salute the men and women of the SANDF.

a different province each year.

Atteridgeville, Tshwane, in 2013, Bloemfontein in 2014, Potchefstroom in 2015, Port Elizabeth in 2016 and Durban

On this important day, as commander-in-chief, let me

than as fighting soldiers.

the end of the war.

colonialism. The sinking of the Mendi

who fell at Delville Wood and to ensure that black soldiers

The new monument in diers, black and white. Together today, we restore the dignity and humanity of the black soldiers who perished on that fateful day. We salute their courage, bravery and commitment. We salute their quest for a more equal and just world, for the better world we are still working to achieve the men of the Mendi because they promoted the unity of the

"Brothers, we are drilling

"I, a Xhosa, say you are

Raise your war-cries, brothers, for though they made us leave our assegais in the kraal, our voices are left with our

orders, the highest honour to be bestowed by South Africa is the Order of Mendi for brav-Through his award we will

continue to honour these men Compatriots and friends,

We take the Armed Forces Day parade and celebration to

The ceremony was held in

can National Defence Force. war by their colonial masters. inform the thousands of our doctors, nurses, engineers Unfortunately, their sacri-soldiers, on behalf of the and whatever they want to fice did not earn them any entire South African popula- be within the Armed Forces. respect from the rulers of the tion, that your work is highly Over the past three years the community development



the call to serve. We have full confidence in you. Armed Forces Day is an important feature of our national calendar. It provides an opportunity to promote better understanding of the SANDF and its role in the consolidation and defence of our democracy and our people.

Our soldiers get out of the barracks and showcase, to the people they are serving and protecting, the capability of the Defence Force and its state-of-the-art equipment.

We trust that all our people are now assured that the SANDF is combat ready! Many have enjoyed watching the various displays around eThekwini.

The people have been able to see what the various components of the SANDF do, from the navy, to the air force, army and military health services – and even our colourful ceremonial guard and our talented musical choirs and bands in the defence force.

Armed Forces Day also provides an opportunity for our youth to learn about careers

in the defence force. Military Through the Skills Development System, the SANDF has continued to recruit healthy and fit young people to join the South Afri-

They can be artisans,

RESPECT: President Zuma unveils the Stone of Remembrance for the fallen soldiers of the SS Mendi troopship that sank in the cold waters of the English Channel during World War I. SANDF has recruited over

Importantly, the SANDF Service Corps on behalf of the also supports other govern-Rural Development and Land ment departments in their Reform.

ranks of the defence force.

work. The SANDF has trained 6 000 students who are part 11 000 young people into the of the National Rural Youth

The SANDF, in partnership with North West Province, has launched a youth agriculture pilot project in the areas where the Defence Force has its footprint.

This is but one example of community upliftment projects that our armed forces are involved in.

On this important day we also acknowledge the contribution of the SANDF when there are disasters, be it floods or fires such as the fires that engulfed the Western Cape Province over a long period. As we speak, the SANDF has been involved in disaster

management in the wake of Cyclone Dineo. An Oryx Helicopter is on standby at Air Force Base Hoedspruit to cover both ity. Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces with some oper-

ational members deployed at

the Provincial Joint Centre in Mpumalanga. The situation is being monitored closely immediate reaction is appreciated in the case of Disaster

Management activities. When it comes to their core business, our soldiers continue to work tirelessly The leadership develop- to defend the borders of the

The SANDF continues to support and roll out the "Maritime Security Strategy" along the eastern seaboard, in the Mozambican channel, in order

The presence of our troops along the border also helps to curb crime. Members of the SANDF recover illegal weapons, stop illegal migrant crossings and have recovered stolen vehicles, stock and contraband goods and dagga among others.

The SANDF also plays a key role in our foreign policy, anchored on the promotion of peace and security in the continent in order to create conducive conditions for eco-

nomic development. The African Union has taken a decision that we must silence the guns in Africa by the year 2020. South Africa plays its role in the fulfilment

of this goal. We have deployed more than 3 000 members of the SANDF in the interest of contributing to peace and stabil-

acknowledge hard work of our troops in

the Democratic Republic of Together with our friends and allies they are standing

under the UN – Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) against armed rebels in the eastern In other parts of the DRC

simmer, they are responding

to ensure that peace is main-

tained so that people and citizens of that country can live in a safe and secure environ-

We will continue with our involvement in our mediation efforts, peacekeeping operations, and peace-making initiatives in Lesotho, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Mozambique, South Sudan, Somalia and

We have lost soldiers in some of the peacekeeping missions in the DRC, Central African Republic or the Sudan.

We will always remember

their selfless contribution to the quest for peace in our continent. Compatriots, every single member of

the defence force is an integral part of our nation. As a nation, we salute you all. We also salute the men who

lost their lives when the SS Mendi sank. May we continue drawing inspiration from their selfless commitment and Let me thank all who have contributed to the excellent

arrangements of Armed Forces Day and SS Mendi commemoration. We thank the South African Army in particular, which

is leading the celebrations this May we all continue to work hard and tirelessly to build a

united, peaceful, secure and prosperous South Africa. Happy Armed Forces Day – where tensions continue to to you all!

I thank you.

Op-ed Page 9