

CRY FOR HELP: THREE SEAMEN, THREE WORKERS DIE IN FREAK CIRCUMSTANCES

Marine dies a hero

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“He died as he lived: no holding back,” says the family and friends of Henro ter Borg.

Naval seaman Ter Borg (21) from Brackenfell died a hero on Friday when he, along with two fellow sailors, attempted to rescue three workmen overcome by methane gas in an underground pit in Durban.

He was always ready to lend a hand, no matter the consequences to himself. It was the essence of who he was – those who knew him, knew this about him.

It was also these qualities of selflessness and daring that earned him space in the elite unit of the South African Marine Corps.

At the time of his death, Ter Borg was undergoing training for this unit.

He was a fearless adventurer at heart.

“Since he was a little boy he always wanted to join the Defence Force – something that would allow him to live out his love for the daring and exert his boundless energy; stuff like hanging out of helicopters on ropes. That was Henro,” says a family member.

Ter Borg matriculated at Brackenfell High School in 2014, after which he took a gap year and then joined the South African Navy.

“All his friends and teachers will remember him as someone who would always be willing to help, no matter what. In fact, he went out of his way to help others. It was typical of Henro to run in where others wouldn’t dare,” says Stokkies Truter, a teacher at the school.

“He touched many lives.”

For Ter Borg’s family the reality has not set in yet.

“We keep on expecting him to walk through the door or ring us up. His death is not real to us,” says the family member.

Ter Borg was on a tour of duty in Durban for the 2017 Armed Forces Day celebrations when the incident that authorities describe as a freak accident, occurred.

“Three workers from the Department of Public Works were working on a sewerage valve when gas fumes leaked out and affected their breathing,” says national Defence Force chief, General Solly Shoke.

“They tried to escape the pit, but were overwhelmed by the toxic gases and passed out. One contractor ran for assistance and approached the Maritime Reaction Squadron bus passing nearby at that moment.

Ter Borg, along with seamen Amrithlall Ramdin (41) from naval base Durban, and Francois Mundell from SAS Makhanda (residing in George), immediately responded to the cries for help.

They descended down the pit.

“They unfortunately succumbed to the high levels of fumes in the pit,” Shoke says.

As more assistance arrived, other officers descended down the pit through a compressed air breathing apparatus to bring the six people to the top of the pit.

Resuscitation attempts failed and all three seamen and the three workmen were declared dead on the scene.

Shoke conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the grieving families of the seamen.

“These sailors who laid down their lives did so while on a noble duty to save the lives of fellow South Africans in distress. Their actions are commended.”

He said an investigation by Military Police into the exact circumstances surrounding the incident is underway.

Funeral arrangements will be announced this week.

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Henro ter Borg