



# The South African Military History Society

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## Die Suid-Afrikaanse Krygshistoriese Vereniging

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## NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2018

### **Curtain Raiser: Rupert Brooke, poetic icon of World War I by Marjorie Dean**

Returning to the podium once again to present another interesting lecture on a topic to mark the ending of the First World War, Marjorie Dean captivated the audience with this month's curtain raiser on "Rupert Brooke", much-loved poet of the early part of the war.

"Rupert" was a shorthand way in which the British Armed Forces described a very young, inexperienced, naïve and posh junior officer during WWI. There was no shortage of "Ruperts" wanting to enlist, who mostly came from middle and upper class families. They flocked to join up and were made junior officers and bore the brunt of the heaviest casualties, as they were made to lead from the front. Had these "Ruperts" not have been lost during the four-year conflict, they would have become leaders of the future, helping to take the British Empire further into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Only once the war had ended, was it realised how this future generation had to sacrifice their lives, and in order of not being forgotten, have had their stories of sacrifice retold many times through poets, writers and playwrights. This has been formed in to an artistic history of the Great War which continues to this day.

Rupert Brooke was one such "Rupert" who died early in the war and somehow came to personify the best of what had been lost - he was seen as an idealised version and became an icon of the "lost boy". He was a poet who captured in his work the lives of the young officers who signed up to fight and went on to die. One of his early poems "The Soldier" became one of the most known and loved poems of World War I. He was already an accomplished writer by the time he had enlisted and had an excellent grasp of the English language which ordinary people could relate to. Brooke epitomised what the pre-war generation had valued in a man. He was handsome, decent and educated. He was loved by many of his Edwardian peers and was the son of a housemaster at the famous Rugby school. He became a fellow at King's College in the prestigious University of Cambridge. Here he mingled easily and formed many friendships with those who became part of the "Golden Generation". His good looks won him many friends amongst the rich and powerful, not only in literature, but also society and politics, and he was irresistible to women. A complicated love life was followed by a nervous break-down in 1912. He recuperated by becoming a newspaper correspondent, travelling to the USA and South Pacific but kept abreast of the latest developments in Europe. He returned to England and enlisted just after war broke out. At age 27, and due to his political connections, he was accepted into Winston Churchill's Royal Naval Division.

As part of a hotchpotch group of men and officers, his first posting was to Antwerp to help relieve the Belgian Army, but seeing the huge numbers of casualties amongst the troops and civilians soon made him realise that this war was not at all as glamorous and exciting as he thought it would might be. He kept on writing poetry, which by now displayed a much darker tone. In 1915,

his division set sail to take part in the Gallipoli Campaign.

Brooke had always had frail health. He fell ill before the ship docked in Cairo, and, having well-connected friends such as Sir Ian Hamilton, was offered a desk job, which he refused. Brooke was soon sailing towards Greece, but became ill once again.

Admitted to a French hospital ship anchored off the island of Skyros, he died suddenly as a result of a mosquito bite on his lip that had turned septic and was hastily buried on the island by his friends and a group of Australian soldiers. His death brought him instant celebrity in the form of flowery tributes. He had become an icon for all the hundreds and thousands of men that were dying, forming an idealised memory to many families of their boy – a “Rupert” in real life.

He has a monument in Westminster Abbey alongside other World War 1 poets.

### **Main Lecture: The end(s) of the First World War in Africa by Dr. Anne Samson**

November’s main lecture by Dr. Anne Samson also had a strong WWI focus which revolved around the ending of the “War to end all Wars” – the Great War. In contrast to the War which ended in Europe at 11h00 on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1918, the war in Africa staggered to come to an end. Provision had been made for a cease-fire within a month, but because the powers in Europe were uncertain about where the forces in East Africa actually were, the final date had become unclear.

As it turned out, the first attempt to alert the Germans by the Allies to surrender, took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November after the final battle of Kasama. Five days later, the Germans accepted the fact that they had to lay down arms and the surrender was formally concluded on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, some 14 days after the cessation of hostilities in Europe. The Armistice took place in Abercorn, Northern Rhodesia (today, Mbala in Zambia).

The focus on the East African Campaign makes it easy to forget that other African regions were also caught up in the war. Togoland, Cameroon and German South West Africa brought their own challenges upon its inhabitants and overseers as they waited to determine the fate of the loser and its subordinate territories.

Not to be left out is Egypt which was a major centre during the war for troops fighting in Gallipoli, followed by the Suez Canal where ships were travelling up and down during the war. Here, Egypt had to contend with the Senussi, an ongoing struggle which would last until 1921. Four years had separated the first and last surrenders.

The Treaty of Versailles determined the final fate of the German Territories in Africa, but for some European colonies wanting to lay their hands on African territory, it became the final scramble for Africa. For Africa, it was the start of Africa’s struggle for independence. The impact of the war was felt on both an international and local level and some of its repercussions still resonate today.

Richard Schütte  
*Newsletter Scribe*

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### **Subscriptions for 2019**

Invoices will be sent out to existing members in January

Single subscription = R250

Family subscription = R270

A family being two people sharing a postal address

# FORTHCOMING LECTURES

CR = curtain raiser ML = main lecture

DDH = Darrell Dickon Hall Memorial lecture MS = member's slot

## Johannesburg:

Ditsong Museum next to Zoo at 8pm

### Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018

DVD [42 min]:                   **“Deterrence from the deep, the US Navy *Ohio* class ballistic missile submarines”**

**Year-end get together**

### Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019 NB THIRD THURSDAY of the month

CR: Hamish Paterson:   **“King's Mountain: 100 years before Majuba”**

ML: Errol Cunningham:   **“Brit, Boer and Spy: The British view of strategic risks, threats, espionage and sabotage in the Union of South Africa during WW2”**

## KZN in Durban:

### Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018

DDH Col. (ret) Steve Bekker   **“A Bit of This and a Bit of That”**

The talk will be followed by our Annual Year End **Cocktail Party** for members and invited guests.

### Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2019 NB THIRD THURSDAY of the month

DDH:                               **An excellent series of video clips showing the critical conditions in Britain before the outbreak of war in 1914**  
Facilitator Phil Everitt

ML: Robin Smith               **“Assassination of Arch Duke Ferdinand - lessons for the future?”**

## Cape Town:

**In recess**

**SAMHSEC:**

**Monday 10<sup>th</sup> December**

MS: Franco Cilliers

**“Bloemfontein night tank shoot.”**

CR Barbara Kinghorn

**“Face-Saving in 1918 – Anna Coleman Ladd’s  
Portrait-mask Studio in Paris.”**

ML: Mac Alexander

**“An American connection - Romance lost and won  
in southern Africa at the start and end of the First  
World War.”**

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***Season’s greetings***

***The Committee wishes members a joyous festive season,  
safe travelling and a happy, healthy and prosperous 2019***

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