

# WE, THE PURPLE

## Pretoria / Tshwane

during the Great War

1914—1918



**Education Resource**

This resource is best used with the *South Africa World War 1 Education Learning Resource* [SAWW1]. SAWW1 provides the national context for South Africa’s involvement in the First World War, while this resource considers the role that Pretoria and its inhabitants played in the same conflict. The national context for the section on Internment in Pretoria can be found in the *Interned Education Pack*, both available online at southafricaww1.com.

All the learning resources build on the Grade 8 CAPS requirements for the topic World War 1 (1914-1918). A quick glance at the requirements shows that their main focus is on Britain. We have broadened the coverage to be more South Africa specific. Although it is designed for use by learners in Grade 8, it can be easily adapted for older or younger learners/students.

The teaching materials explore a range of themes, including equality and diversity. Historically, different population groups and aspects (theatres) of war have been ignored in the South African World War 1 narrative. This resource aims to show the breadth and diversity of Tshwane’s involvement. In addition, some sources have been selected to stimulate and develop critical thinking skills, there being no right or wrong answer.

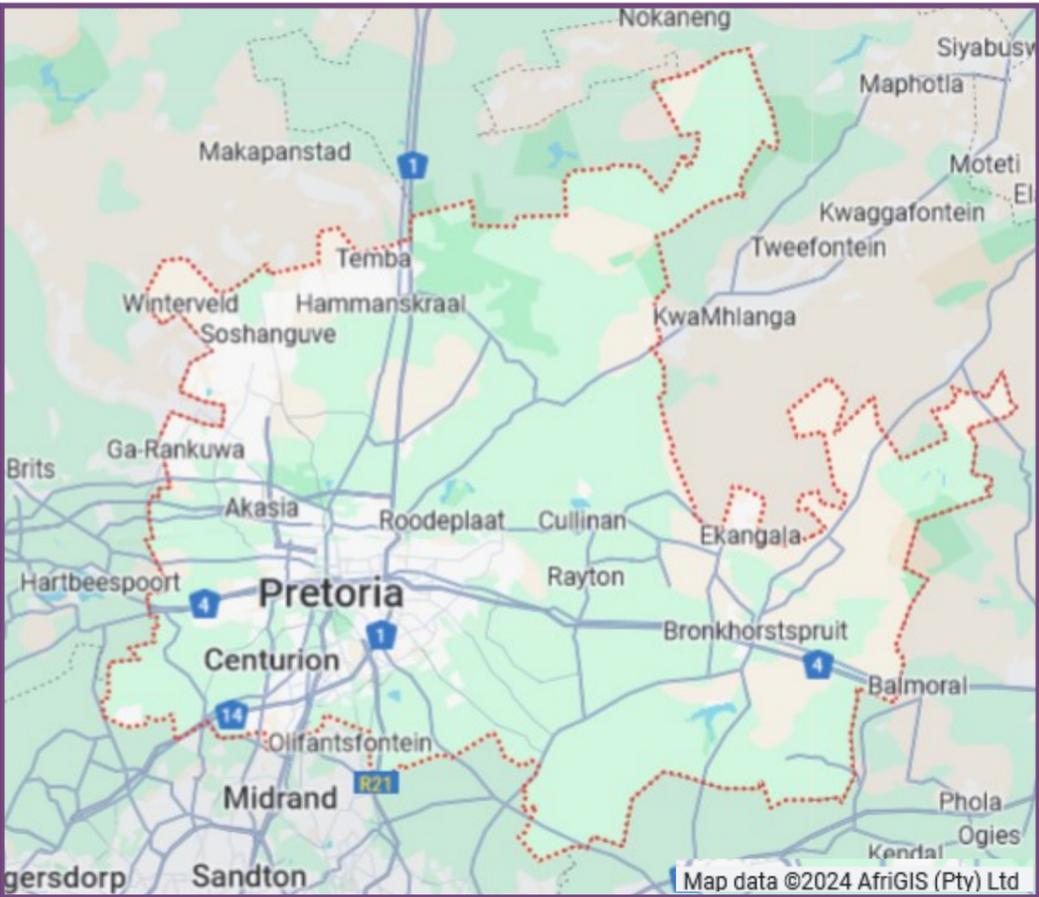
Through the activities young people will gain an insight into aspects of the First World War at global (empire), national (South Africa) and local (Tshwane Metropole) levels which continue to have relevance to the modern world. Although often regarded as an imperial war, something unconnected with Africa, the First World War of 1914—1918 was to have a major impact on the young Union of South Africa, including Tshwane, culturally, economically, and politically.

Themes touched on in this Learning Resource may prove distressing for some learners as they deal with discrimination, conflict and death.

The aim is to give learners an insight into people’s responses to a particularly challenging historical situation. Comparative material from the media today can be included at the teacher’s discretion to encourage learners to explore how the media react to perceived threats today. A list of further reading and links to support the project can be found on the inside back cover.

The resource is centred around two short films which can be watched with headsets in Virtual Reality, or on screen in 2D. They are available at <https://www.southafricaww1.com/virtualreality>. Pages 2 to 9 & 16 to 17 relate to the first film, pages 10 to 17 to the second film (‘Interned’). The yellow boxes summarise the spoken text in the film, the purple boxes give local information about Pretoria / Tshwane, and the blue boxes contain activities for learners.

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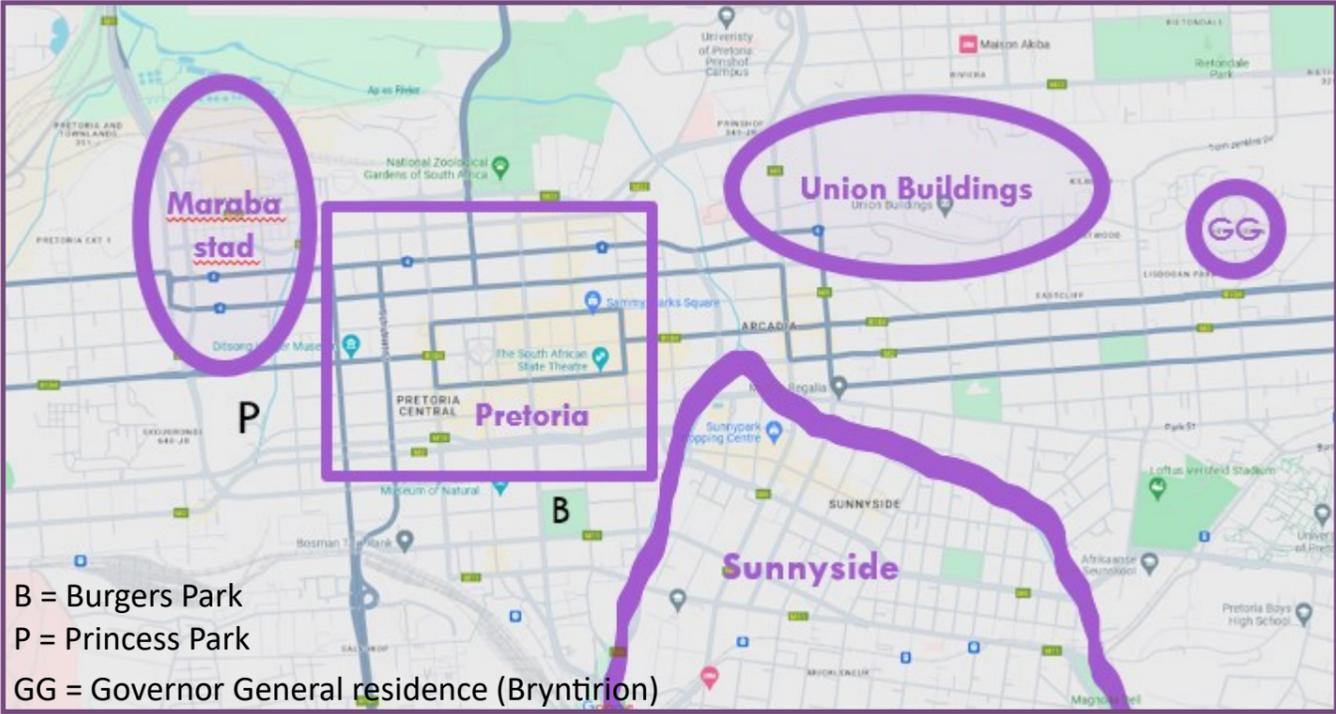
**Pretoria—then and now**

The above map shows the Tshwane metropolitan area in 2024. This is much bigger than the Pretoria municipal area in 1914 which effectively was the area around Church Square. The Union Buildings and residential Sunnyside were on the outskirts of town as was Marabastad. In 1914 any person who was not white was not allowed to remain in the Pretoria boundary after dark. Many lived in Marabastad. Places like Centurion, Atteridgeville and Mamelodi were not yet developed. It was all farmland.

Although there were some motorised cars, most people travelled by foot, horse or bicycle. There were also trams running in the Pretoria metropolitan area.

The jacaranda trees which today are prevalent in Pretoria were being systematically planted between 1905 and 1922.

The population of Pretoria in 1911/1921 census was 34,000 whites compared with 2,818,100 all populations groups in 2011. In 2011 there were 2,921,488 people on the census role for the greater Tshwane metropole area.



Cover image: Union Buildings, Delville Wood memorial and Nelson Mandela statue at Union Buildings, Thaba Tshwane Military college



### Enlist and Serve

As a British dominion, South Africa had no choice but to participate in the war. However, it could decide the extent to which it wanted to get involved. This was decided in Pretoria, the administrative capital of the young Union. The government's hesitancy in deciding what it would do, and letting the population know, resulted in panic and uncertainty.

#### Activity:

There were different reactions to the outbreak of war. How do you think you would have reacted? Discuss why in your group. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer.

Consider the various groups of people mentioned on these pages. Why do you think they behaved as they did?

Imagine you are a member of the town\* council in Pretoria during the years 1914-1918. What would you have suggested to address the inequalities and different attitudes towards the war? Present your views to the other members of the council.

\* Pretoria only became a city in 1932



As with the rest of the country, Tshwane was segregated, and while curfews had been in place for black South Africans in urban areas, the outbreak of war and the consequent introduction of martial law saw curfews and restrictions imposed on all population groups.

The image to the left is 'Cloak as a dagger' by Avitha Sooful, on display at the Javett-UP Art Centre in 2023. It is engraved with sections of the **1913 Land Act** which was the start of the formal split of areas between the different population groups. In particular, places like **Marabastad** were affected from 1917, Sol Plaatje talks of 37 families being forcibly removed under the 1913 Land Act in the Pretoria area. Another area affected by removals under the 1913 Land Act was Kilnerton where black farmers were forced to move despite the Methodist Church having allowed them to own land.

"World War I, South Africa: civilians have to hand over their weapons after the outbreak of the war in Europe."  
Photo: Wife of Pretoria resident on her way to deliver rifles to a collection point. Close to Church Square, August 1914.



**Martial law** was proclaimed on 12 October 1914 to reduce tensions and maintain order. The War Proclamation of 16 August 1914 required that any person not in the police or armed forces had to hand in their weapons or face punishment. No one could leave the municipal area without a pass and on arriving had to report to the authorities. Civilians could not enter the town after 10 p.m., and between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. had to be indoors. Unauthorised meetings were prohibited. Anyone using seditious language or spreading alarming reports was liable to punishment. For a while white South Africans were experiencing similar restrictions to their black counterparts, who had been subject to carry **passes** since 1797.

Pretoria was particularly under threat when the Boer, or white Afrikaner, **Rebellion** broke out against British rule. Many in the Union Defence Force (UDF) resigned their commissions to rebel. **Hammanskraal** became the focus of an encounter between rebel forces and the UDF when the rebels attacked the local police station to get arms. In the process, Native Administrator King was killed, much to the despair of the local chief who offered to effect revenge. Mrs King asked that he did not.



Around 400 rebels were imprisoned for their role in the uprising, 80 of them in Pretoria. Numerous others were pardoned. 6,000 Boer **women marched** from Church Square to the Union Buildings on 4 August 1915 to demand the release of the Boer rebels. This was happening around the same time that **Charlotte Maxeke** was protesting in Bloemfontein against black African women having to carry passes. By 1918 she had succeeded in her endeavours following a deputation to Prime Minister Louis Botha.

Forty-one years later, in Pretoria on 9 August 1956, an estimated 20,000 **women** of all population groups **marched** on the Union Buildings to protest against the increasing restrictions of Apartheid, when it was again determined that black South African women were to carry passes.



On 16 December 1914, **Jopie Fourie** was captured near **Hammanskraal**, the day he planned to march into Pretoria to liberate the Boers. He was taken to Pretoria where after a court martial he was executed at Pretoria Central Prison for treason a few days later. Jopie had failed to resign his commission in the Army. His brother, also due to be executed, was pardoned after he apologised. Jopie's body was later removed from the prison and buried in Church Street Cemetery, Pretoria.

#### Sources

Attwell, EM Thursley, *The fighting police of South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Natal Witness 1926  
Oost, Harm, *Wie is die Skuldigers?*, Johannesburg Afrikanse Pers Boekhandel  
Union of South Africa, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Native Pass Laws*, Cape Town: Government Printers 1920  
Woman on Church Square: Nélio Mendes II (Facebook)



### Economy

South Africa first went to war in German South-West Africa.

Thousands toiled in the mines, other industries and agriculture, to free spoils to pay for the war. In particular, South African gold was sent abroad to pay for the British empire's involvement in the war. While some industries boomed, others such as diamond mining and ostrich farming failed as there was no demand for luxuries. This resulted in men moving for work, such as those from the diamond mines going to the gold fields. By 1917, black and white workers are equally represented but wages are not. More women enter the workforce.

Pretoria's inhabitants **supported the war** in diverse ways, and the town saw a huge influx of people and increase in activity as the military machine demanded greater organisation. Kya Rosa (image right), which was then between Schoeman and Skinner Streets, became the office for War Recruitment.



**Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute** at Pretoria University provided great amounts of vaccines for horses participating in the war. It also helped farmers manage rinderpest outbreaks.



The **Premier Diamond Mine** in Cullinan just east of Pretoria was a strong supporter of the war. Forty-one of their men lost their lives in combat. Thomas Cullinan was to survey for water in the Namib desert before the South Africans launched the campaign on South West Africa, while his brother commanded Cullinan's Horse.



The **Pretoria Commando** (later Regiment) participated in suppressing the rebellion. After Parliament in Cape Town had sanctioned an attack on German South West Africa (Namibia), many from the Pretoria Commando volunteered to serve there too.

A horse being loaded onto a ship. A typical squadron would have say 200 men, 200 horses and 20 remounts. There were roughly three squadrons in a regiment. Thousands of oxen and donkeys were used for transporting food and equipment and also had to be moved to the fighting theatres.



### Activity:

Debate: Which group do you think is more important and why? Those supporting or those fighting?

Why do you think historians are struggling to work out how many men supported the Pretoria Commando?

Within the military units were *agterryers*, cooks and drivers, all making a vital contribution **supporting** those carrying weapons.

These men formed part of a specific commando or were recruited to the Military Labour Bureau (1914-1915), South African Native Labour Corps (1916-1919) or East African Native Labour Corps (1916-1918) for general service. Historians are still trying to work out how many *agterryers*, cooks and drivers were part of the Pretoria Commando.

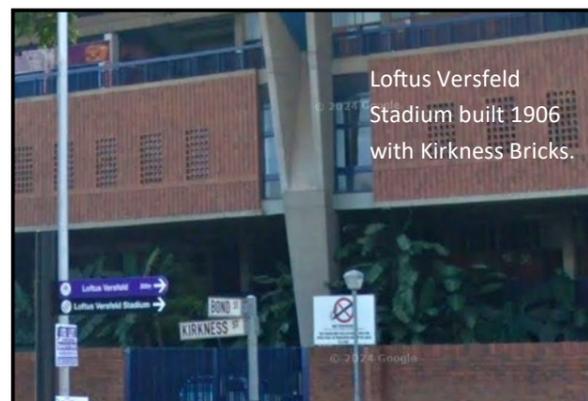
While only ten per cent of the South African **population saw war** service (the equivalent of one per cent of South Africa's population today), many others worked to support the economy and the war effort. In the South African Railways and Harbours workshops, factory workers adapted items to military use. This was the start of South Africa becoming a **manufacturing country**. Not long after the war, Yskor/Iskor started making iron and steel products. Kirkness Bricks, van Schaik's Booksellers, and 5 Roses Tea became household names.

**Sport** continued unabated during the war with rugby already a feature at Loftus Versfeld.

### Activity:

Research what sports were being played in Pretoria during the years 1914-1918. Why do you think sport played such an important role in society at that time?

How does it compare with sport today?



Loftus Versfeld Stadium built 1906 with Kirkness Bricks.

### Activity:

For more on Kirkness bricks see <https://safrechronicle.co.za/master-builder/>

How many buildings can you identify in Pretoria which are made of Kirkness bricks?



### Sources

Gutsche, Thelma, *There was a man: the life and times of Sir Arnold Theiler KCMG of Onderstepoort*, Cape Town: H Timmins 1979  
 South African Railways and Harbours Magazine  
 Anne Samson, Mining Magnates (2012 talk; Professor Deon Fourie, historian of the Pretoria Regiment)  
 Lincoln, John, Memories of war... Premier Mine and the village of Cullinan, *South African Military History Journal*, 14:1 (2007)  
 Minier image of statue on display at Voortrekker Monument 2023



### South Africa transformed

At home, the railroads, ports and harbours of South Africa manage the flow of men, money, supplies and munitions that travel the globe. The harbour and railway ports are hives of activity and many more are recruited to provide accommodation for the increased numbers passing through towns.

War is not won only by those who fight, but by the toil of those who provide safe passage, those who put food, guns and uniforms in the hands of those who fight.

The war affects everyone. At sea, the *SS Mendi* is sunk with the loss of over 600 lives when a friendly ship rammed it, and over 100 people were drowned when the *Galway Castle* was torpedoed.

All this labour is not recognised as military action; it is not counted in the official number of South African troops – yet all supported the British war effort.

Life essentially **continued as usual** for those left in South Africa. To appease an extreme white minority, government continued its 1913 Land Act policy. As a result, the **SANNC** which had supported the government's war effort in principle by not protesting, began to be more vocal against discrimination. Sefako Makgatho had been a teacher in Kilnerton before becoming President of the SANNC between 1917 and 1924.

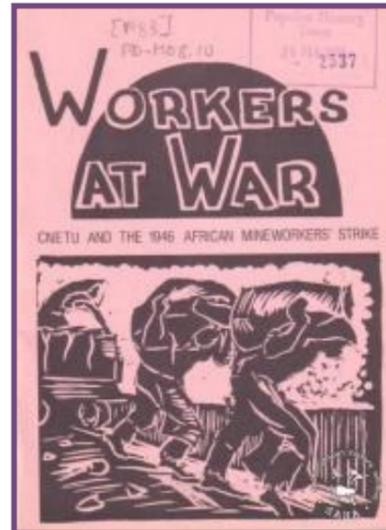
#### Activity:

Discussion: Why do you think life continued as usual for many in South Africa during the war years?

### Sources

[Sources: Willan, Brian, *The role of Solomon Plaatje (1876-1932) in South African Society*, London, SOAS: PhD 1979, online <https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/33784/1/11010557.pdf>;  
Oost, Harm, *Wie is die Skuldigers?*, Johannesburg Afrikanse Pers Boekhandel  
*Pretoriana* (<https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/59717>)  
[https://www.saha.org.za/workers/workers\\_at\\_war\\_cnetu\\_and\\_the\\_1946\\_african\\_mineworkers\\_strike\\_3.htm](https://www.saha.org.za/workers/workers_at_war_cnetu_and_the_1946_african_mineworkers_strike_3.htm)

**Newspapers** played an important part in communicating news and government policy to the masses. At a time when not everyone was literate, reading the news to a crowd became a social event in Pretoria.



#### Activity:

Discussion: The above booklet is from 1946. Why do you think workers strike? Are they effective? Why do you think there were no strikes in Pretoria during the war years when there were elsewhere in the Union?

While the rest of the Union saw numerous **strikes** throughout the war, 1916 being an exception with none, Pretoria had no recorded strikes until after the war.

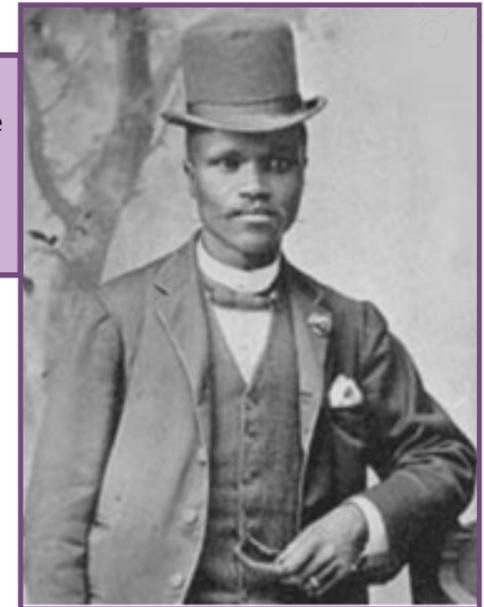
The **Pretoria News** was the most prominent paper, generally being the mouthpiece of government. Other papers came and went such as **Native Opinion**, started in Pretoria by Sefako Makgatho, Alfred Mangena and Allan Kirkland Soga. It was in circulation between 1912 and 1914. *Native Opinion* was replaced by **Abantu-Batho** in Johannesburg, with Pixley ka Isaka Seme as a voice piece for the South African Native Convention (SANNC), a forerunner of the ANC. Sol Plaatje, one of its co-founders, was nearly banned for writing anti-war comments. The white anti-war **War on War League** publication was banned. It was the only publication banned in South Africa during the war. *De Volksblad* became *De Volksstem* when the former was closed for publishing anti-government statements.

Xhosa poet Samuel Edward Krune **Mqhayi** was one of the contributors to *Abantu-Batho*. In the 1930s he wrote a poem honouring the men who drowned when the **SS Mendi** went down on 21 February 1917.

#### Activity:

Compile a newspaper article considering:

1. an aspect of the home front highlighting the contributions of those who supported the war effort.
2. the contribution of those who served behind the lines supporting the soldiers.



**Hospitals** played an important part in the war. Westkoppies Hospital which was a psychiatric hospital at the time was to provide the matron (ER Creagh) who set up the South African **Military Nursing Corps**. These nurses were to replace the Imperial nurses who had been at Roberts Heights and Wynberg. Roberts Heights military hospital was eventually to have 1,500 beds during the war. Later it became one of the biggest hospitals in South Africa. This is today in Thaba Tshwane.





**War**

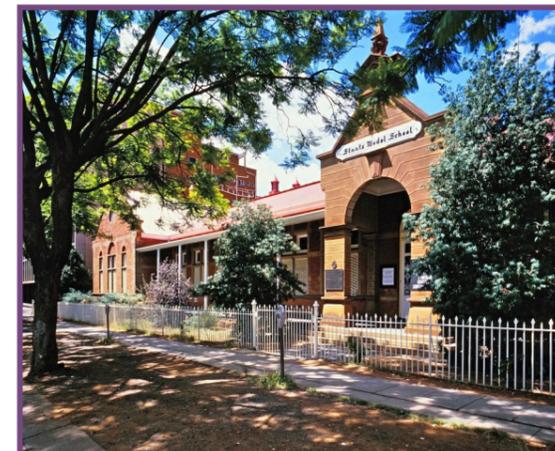
South Africa sent soldiers and labour units to the following theatres of war:  
 German South West Africa (1914—1915)  
 Europe / Western Front (1916—1918) including Egypt (1916)  
 German East Africa (1916—1918)  
 Mesopotamia / Palestine (1917—1918)



A World War 1 gun from the German cruiser *Königsberg* at the road entrance to the Union Buildings. The cruiser had been spotted by pilots flying a hydroplane from Durban, and South African hunter Philip Pretorius from Nylstroom (Modimolle), obtained valuable information for the attack

In total, 116 men from Tshwane **lost their lives** during the war. This included 28 men who died mainly from malaria and various lung disorders such as pneumonia, phthisis and TB, one from a mine explosion in East Africa, and three were at Roberts Heights hospital. One died of a fractured skull whilst at Roberts Heights, possibly from a horse kick as he worked for the South African Veterinary Corps (this seemed to be a common cause of death).

Seventeen from Hammanskraal lost their lives all from malaria, seven at Kilwa, one in 'East Africa', one at Kisiwani, Dar es Salaam and Hammanskraal, two at sea, three at Durban, one unknown. Most of the Hammanskraal deaths were between 21 March and 15 April, with the first on 23 February 1917 and the last on 2 October 1917. None were on the SS *Mendi* when it went down.



At end of the war, Pretoria was impacted by the **Spanish flu** which ran rampant through the country. On 8 October 1918, the flu was reported at Mayville Primary School, and by 11 October 84 pupils were absent. Between 2 and 25 November the school was turned into a hospital for those suffering from the virus, as was the *Staatsmodellskool* (Lilian Ngoyi and Nana Sita Streets). Prime Minister Louis Botha was one of the victims. He had recently returned from Europe where he and Jan Smuts had signed the Treaty of Versailles ending the war. Botha's state funeral, including a 17-gun salute, was held on 30 August 1919. He was laid to rest in the Heroes' Acre of the Church Street Cemetery.

**Delville Wood dead remembered**  
*P. News 17. 789.*  
 PHILLIP VOSLOO  
 Staff Reporter

ON Sunday, July 15 1916, more than 3 000 South Africans took to battle in Delville Wood.

Yesterday, 73 years later, more than 300 people attended a memorial service at the Scottish memorial in Burgers Park to salute the bravery of those soldiers killed, or wounded, in a little piece of France.

The total number of casualties sustained by the first South African Brigade which fought at Delville Wood came to 2 403 men. Only 766 of these died during the battle. The rest had been wounded and evacuated throughout the battle.

Of those listed as killed in action, 218 were never found.

In memory of the South African soldiers who gave their lives, wreaths were placed at the base of the statue of the soldier in the park by various organisations — including representatives from all arms of the South African Defence Force, the South African Police, the Pretoria Highlanders, the Moths, and the Sappers

Picture: WALTER PITSO

In memory: wreaths were placed at the Scottish memorial in Burgerspark yesterday during a memorial service for those soldiers who gave their lives at the battle of Delville Wood.

The South African Scottish Memorial in Burgers Park with inscription. The South African Scottish served in Europe from 1916



**Activity:**  
 In a small group, using the South Africa World War 1 story and the information in this pack, design a timeline poster to show where South Africans served during the First World War. Consider the pros and cons of serving in the different theatres for those serving as soldiers and those in support roles.

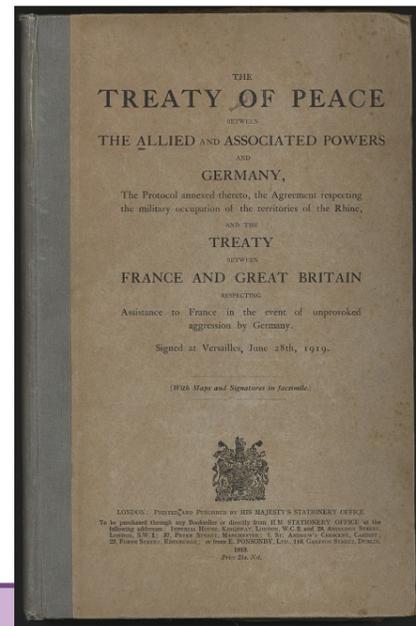
**Sources**

Commonwealth War Graves Commission, [www.cwgc.org.uk](http://www.cwgc.org.uk)  
 Pretoriana (<https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/59717>)  
 Scottish memorial Burgers Park by Reynard Loock, 2021 at [https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldg\\_images.php?bldgid=3833#367052](https://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/bldg_images.php?bldgid=3833#367052)  
 Delville Wood article—<https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/22151>



### After war and into dark times

1918, the guns fall silent. South Africa is on the winning side. But celebration quickly subsides, giving way to a slide, into dark times. Segregation becomes the norm. After a second world war, order in the country takes the form in 1948, of apartheid... Many South Africans had put their life on the line for Union and Empire, hoping that this would foster respect and equality for good. They were disappointed and for almost 50 years, the system persisted, and although Apartheid has now come to an end, inequalities remain. Today, the country is still at the dawn. Shafts of light pierce the dark, But shadows remain, the reality stark. Amongst turmoil, though must remain a place for peace.



The signing of the Treaty of Versailles saw four days of celebrations in Pretoria, incorporating all groups, albeit separately.

'On Saturday [2 August 1919], the first day of the Peace holidays, the coloured communities were regaled at the locations after a procession through the main thoroughfares headed by the native police band and ex-members of the Labour Corps from France, the Mayor [of Pretoria] subsequently hoisting the Union Jack to the accompaniment of vociferous cheering from the natives.'

Sunday, 8,000 attended a Thanksgiving service conducted by the Bishop of Pretoria, and war medals were handed out.

Monday, 4 August, Burgers Park, the Mayor awarded Municipal Medals to Pretorians who had been engaged in the war.

Tuesday: special celebrations aimed at the children were held at the Pretoria West racecourse.

On 8 August 1919, Generals Botha and Smuts arrived at Fountains in Pretoria from where, after being greeted by colleagues, close friends and family, they motored to town, escorted by a mounted commando and continuous cheering from civilians gathered on the streets and sidewalks. Their journey ended at the Union Buildings in the amphitheatre which was 'speedily filled to overflowing'. In the afternoon, a reception was held at Burgers Park where they set a handshaking record.



Pretoria appears to be the only municipality in the Union which issued a **Citizens Service Medal**: '[Each] Pretoria Soldier, Sailor, Airman and Nurse [was presented] with a medal of bronze or gunmetal of the regulation size, with a bar and colours of the Municipality attached; the medal being embossed on one side with the Pretoria Municipal Coat of Arms and on the reverse with the words in the English and Dutch Languages "Pretoria Citizens Service Medal. Great War 1914-1919".'

Read more at [https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/14682/006\\_p051-060.pdf](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/14682/006_p051-060.pdf)



### Activity:

Why do you think the peace celebrations were so drawn out?

Imagine yourself a member of the Pretoria town council, how would you plan the peace celebrations? Together with five to six others, come to an agreement about the event. How much do you think the event would cost? Is this something that should be considered when planning an event like this? Give your reasons.



Interned

Although the central South African internment camp was in Pietermaritzburg, Pretoria was also deeply affected by the **'enemy alien' question**: What shall we do with Germans living in South Africa? A Commissioner for Enemy Subjects was appointed and, from the capital Pretoria, coordinated internment and deportation operations across the Union.

A local **camp** was established in **Roberts Heights**. The site is today in **Thaba Tshwane**, just across the M7 motorway from the Voortrekker monument. Back then, it was a garrison town established by the British in 1905. It was then taken over by the South African Ministry of Defence after the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. In August 1914, when the war had just broken out, it was seen as an ideal place to contain 'enemy aliens' before a more permanent solution would be found. Germans from across the Union were transported here and experienced their first spell of internment in September and October 1914.

One internee was Fritz Schultze. Fifteen years earlier he had fought with the Boers during the South African War, where he lost a leg and was interned. He now found himself in British captivity for a second time. The photograph shows the internees queuing up for their food rations. Note the soldier on the right. On 25 October 1914, the 1,200 prisoners were marched to **Pretoria railway station** by soldiers with raised bayonets. From there they were transported to Pietermaritzburg.

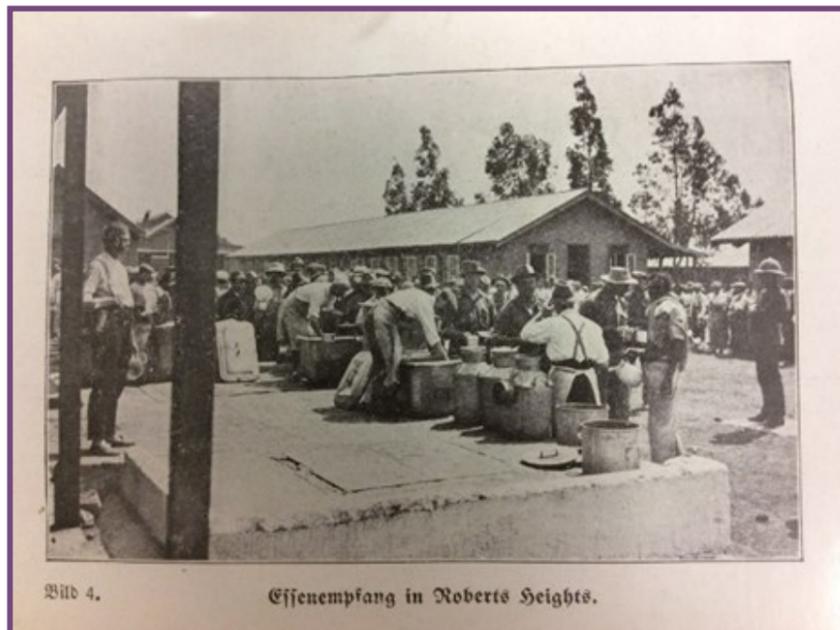


Bild 4.

Empfang in Roberts Heights.

Lunch at Roberts Heights

### Sources

Georg Wagener, *Bericht über meine Gefangenschaft in Süd-Afrika und England* (Berlin, 1916).  
Anon., *Südafrikas Deutsche in englischer Gewalt* (Dresden, 1916).



Hut

There was strong **hostility** against Germans in Pretoria, although no burning and looting of shops as in other South African cities. Public anger was directed against the alleged 'enemy in our midst'. The offices of *De Volksstem* were attacked, a newspaper that was accused of being pro-German.

600 staff of the **South African Railways** in Pretoria signed and submitted a petition: 'We, the undersigned, beg respectfully to call your attention to the large number of Germans and enemy subjects employed in these works, and we, as British subjects, recognise that their presence in these works is a menace to the interests of both the Administration and the British public at large. We respectfully ask that all Germans and enemy subjects now employed in these works be removed at once.' The Deputy Mayor organised a public **protest meeting in Pretoria** after the *Lusitania* sinking. Germans were accused of supporting their mother country.

Ernest Kohly, for example, was a local timber merchant who lived in **Arcadia**. His neighbour reported to the police that Kohly held a party where German patriotic tunes were sung.

### Activity:

Using the information on these pages, do you think the antagonism towards the Germans was justified? Explain your reasons in a letter to the local newspaper. Can people who live far away from their country be made responsible for its actions?

### Sources

Cape Times, 13 May 1915 (petition)  
The City Council of Pretoria [Pretoria], *Pretoria (1855-1955): History of the City of Pretoria published in the centenary year 1955*, Pretoria: Wallachs 1955 (Volksstem)  
NARSA PM JUS SAP30/436, 15 June 1917 (Kohly)

## S.A. RAILWAYS AND HARBOURS MAGAZINE.

Vol. 9.

JUNE, 1915.

No 6

### NOTES AND COMMENTS.

#### A Sensational Month.

Of the ten months which have elapsed since the outbreak of hostilities the one just ended has been the most sensational, and has had a sobering, saddening effect upon all civilised peoples. The tendency of war is to render even sensitive natures callous and indifferent to suffering, but even the most hardened have been appalled at the cold-blooded ruthlessness of Germany's newest methods—a combination of barbaric savagery with an almost devilish ingenuity in the application of the latest discoveries and inventions of science to the work of human destruction. To carry on war in the field on such lines is bad enough, but to wage it also against defenceless civilians, including women and children—these methods have indeed "staggered humanity." The sinking of the "Lusitania" and the resulting loss of nearly 1,500 lives have shocked two hemispheres, and horrible as the outrages in Belgium were, the "Lusitania" outrage will be likely to be longer remembered in the record of crimes against civilisation committed by the German rulers and approved by the German people. Regrettably, but quite naturally, these outrages have led to strong demonstrations against enemy subjects in many parts of the Empire, and there has been much destruc-

tion of property. Numbers of these enemy subjects have been treated by the authorities with the greatest leniency and consideration and many of them have grossly abused the liberty they have enjoyed; it was not surprising, therefore, that popular indignation against German inhumanities should express itself in something more emphatic than mere words, and that the enemy within our gates should suffer in property if not in person. Official censure has followed as a matter of course, but officialdom—at any rate so far as South Africa is concerned—seems always oblivious of the fact that prevention is better than cure. Had the King's proclamation regarding trading with enemy subjects been strictly and impartially enforced throughout the Union from the first, it is probable that hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of property destroyed during the past few weeks would have been intact to-day.

#### Naturalised Britons.

In times of national excitement there is frequently a tendency to temporarily forget national principles and obligations, and unless such a tendency is promptly checked great injustice may be done to individuals. The recent agitation against enemy subjects and the demand for their internment have,



Camp life

One of those interned in Pietermaritzburg was **Adolf Haiss from Pretoria**. He had come from Germany to South Africa in 1896 and opened a small restaurant in Pretoria, together with his wife Anna. They lived together in **Roseville** with their little daughter and Anna's mother. One morning at 8am a police constable knocked on their door and took Adolf away. He was not allowed to take anything and did not see his family for the next five years. In Fort Napier he was very bored, spending much of his time playing skittles and carving children's furniture.

Adolf's family fell on hard times. Anna had to sell their house in Roseville and close the restaurant. In order to survive, she was milking cows and threshing mielies for **farmers in the area**. After Adolf came back in 1919, the family would never recover and were not able to reopen their restaurant. They would spend the rest of their lives as poor subsistence farmers. Adolf's daughter would later remember that she missed her dad very much when he was interned, and that he was the most peace-loving man she knew.

**Activity:**

As the war dragged on, many women and children fell into destitution because the breadwinner of the family was gone. Some families were evicted from their homes and could not find anywhere to rent. In KZN, some women eventually lived on the beach.

## Discussion:

How do you think destitute women would have survived in Pretoria between 1914 and 1918?

Where can people go for help today?

**Sources**

Eckhardt von Fintel, *Fort Napier. Internment Camp for Germans during World War I*, unpublished compilation

**Protests / Riots**

The situation has now boiled over. It started when the Prime Minister, Louis Botha, visited the camp last month. Our representatives told him that our mood had risen to fever heat. They demanded that we should either be released or given more freedom. When there were no improvements after his visit, the riots started, just a couple of huts down from mine. Some inmates used paraffin to burn down several buildings. Some of the rioters pulled down a piece of barbed wire but did not manage to escape. Police and troops from Durban were brought in to suppress the riot. After all that excitement, we have realised that there is nothing we can do. It feels like we have all been forgotten. I hope that I hear from you soon and we will one day see each other again.

**Pretoria** and **Roberts Heights** received German **deportees** from across southern Africa. In September 1914 this included men from Lüderitzbucht in German Southwest Africa (today Namibia), after the town had surrendered to South African forces. It also included men, women and children from Belgian Congo, where Germans were treated badly due to German atrocities in Belgium.

After Roberts Heights camp was closed in May 1915, the next group was housed in makeshift accommodation in the **Princess Park** exhibition ground, three blocks west of **Church Square**. These were fifty-four women and eighty children from German East Africa who had been separated from their husbands, who were interned in Mombasa. One woman wrote that 'after all our troubles and experiences etc. the state of our nerves is fairly upset.'

The deportees were in very bad health. One of them was Marie Salis, who was pregnant with her second child when she **arrived in Pretoria**. Her husband was a missionary and interned in Cairo. In May 1917 the women and children were taken to a military station in Tempe near Bloemfontein. Marie Salis contracted tuberculosis and died shortly after giving birth to her child. Her husband Wilhelm hoped that 'we shall meet in a better land.'

**Activity:**

Consider the outcome of your discussion on workers striking and the riots against German businesses after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. How does the protest and riots by the internees compare?

Do you think there was another way to resolve the complaints by the different groups? Explain.

**Sources**

NARSSA/GG631/9/64/513, Correspondence Governor-General Pretoria, Commissioner for Enemy Subjects Pretoria, and High Commissioner Cairo, 10 and 13 October 1917.

NARSSA/CES126/ES70/2592/14, various files.



**Remembrance**

Where there is no more to say, sometimes silence must play its part.  
 From Cape Town's Signal Hill, we take our cue To stand in silence the world over, each to remember what they lost in war.  
 Two minutes silence is observed, a nation, for a moment, is allowed a chance to heal.  
 We cannot change the past, but we can remember together and shape the future – together.

What is striking about the history of Pretoria during the First World War are the silences. Considering the status of the town as a capital, very little was mentioned in the press of the time and in subsequent histories.

**Activity:**  
 Consider the following questions and give your opinion:  
 \* Did not speaking about the conflict help heal the wounds between neighbours, where one had been interned, another a rebel, one enlisted, while yet another helped keep the economy going?  
 \* How many were silent by choice?  
 \* How many were pressured to be silent?  
 'It is now up to us to recover our own history'. How do you think we do this?



In 1927, the **Delville Wood memorial** at the Union Buildings was unveiled. This is a replica of one that stands in France, with another in Cape Town's Company Gardens. Other memorials to those who lost their lives in the First World War can be found in various churches in the city.

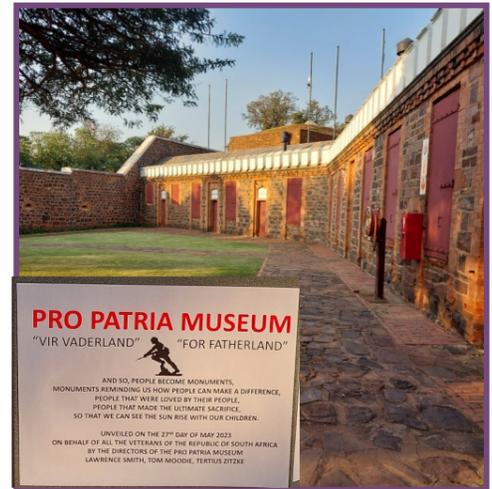
In Atteridgeville, Pitse and Tlou Streets, a **Mendi Memorial** was opened by Queen Elizabeth II on 24 March 1996. Its erection had been instigated by President Nelson Mandela who was born in the final year of the war, on 17 July 1918. [photo: SA Legion 2016]



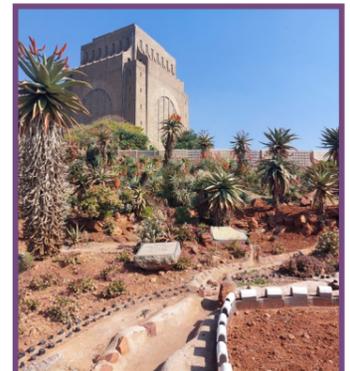
**Activity:**  
 Below are a selection of memorials in Pretoria, except for the Holocaust Memorial which is in Germany. There are others in the *South Africa World War 1 Education Pack*.  
 \* Write down when each was unveiled together with the reason for the moment.  
 In 2022, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission held a competition to design a new World War 1 memorial for Cape Town. The purpose is to remember those who previously have had no memorial to commemorate their death in the war. You can see the different designs, including the winning one at <https://cwgcmemorialcompetition.co.za/>  
 \* Are memorials the best way to remember the past? Remember that in recent years there have also been movements to pull down statues and other forms of remembrance.  
 \* What other ways are there to remember the past?  
 [hint, see *South Africa World War 1 Education Pack*; South Africa also has a strong oral history tradition [<https://ohasa.org.za/>].  
 \* Taking into account all that you have learnt about the First World War, and Pretoria/Tshwane's role in it, do you think a new memorial is needed? Prepare a presentation to put to the Tshwane Metropolitan Council explaining your views.



**Holocaust Memorial**  
 Berlin, Germany



**Freedom Park**



**Voortrekker Monument**

### Finally

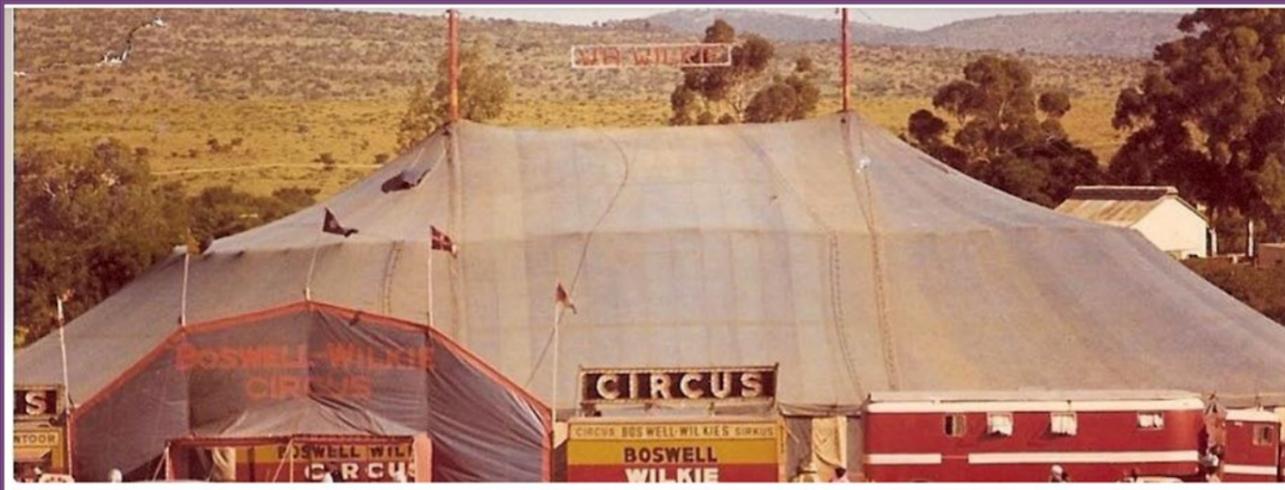
The war impacted South Africa and Pretoria in many ways as shown throughout this pack. To what extent do you think the story of the circus as told here reflects the experiences of Pretorians and more generally South Africans?

### NEWS SNIPPETS.

#### BOSTOCK'S IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Mr. E. H. Bostock's Royal Italian Circus is meeting with great success in South Africa, and after a fortnight's stay at Pretoria the famous circus is now located at Johannesburg for a month.

27/3/1915 *The World's Fair*



### Boswell Wilkie Circus

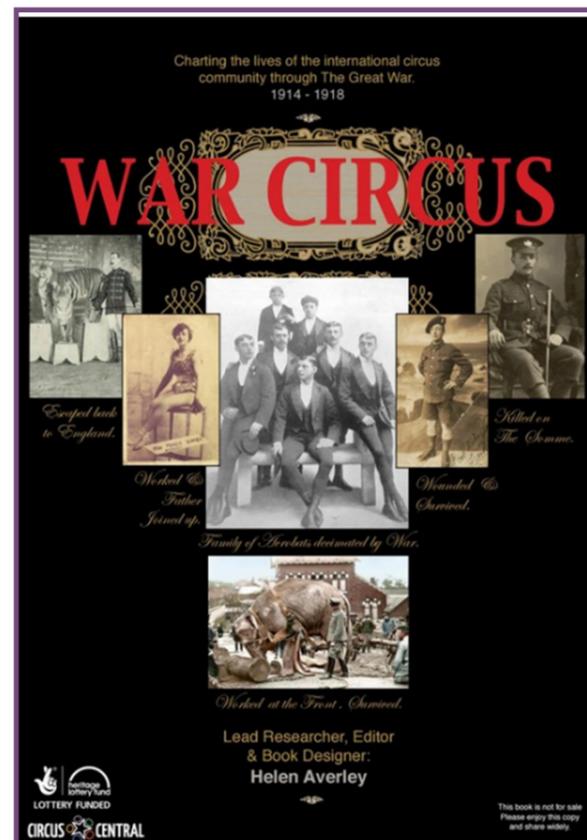
Public group · 2.6K members

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### Activity:

In 1915, EH Bostock's Royal Italian Circus was performing in Pretoria and touring the country. Meanwhile the South African Boswell Wilkie Circus performers were working for different companies. Claude Boswell had joined the British Army in Pietermaritzburg while Boswell's Circus Band had only been allowed to perform one show after war was declared and then the band members were interned because they were German. Boswell's Circus restarted in 1916 and continued performing until 2001.

- \* Using the information on the circus and elsewhere in this pack, consider how the war impacted on businesses.
- \* Why do you think people attended the circus during the war?
- \* Attendance at the circus, concerts and theatre fluctuated during the war. What do you think caused people to not attend a performance or event?
- \* Bostock's circus was from Italy. How do you think the war impacted on their performers?



This education resource, as well as the two Virtual Reality films and other resources, can be accessed at:

<https://www.southafricaww1.com/>



For further information on:

**South Africa in the Great War**, see the reading list at the end of South Africa World War 1 Education Pack [<https://www.southafricaww1.com/s/SAWW1-Education-Learning-Resource.pdf>].

**Internment in the Great War**, see the reading list at the end of the Internment Education Pack [<https://www.southafricaww1.com/s/Stobs-South-African-Education-Pack-1914-1919.pdf>] and the Internment Research Centre [<http://www.stobscamp.org/irc/>]

### Pretoria

*Pretoriana* available at <https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/59717>

### Acknowledgements

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# SOUTH AFRICA WORLD WAR ONE

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