

CAPE SAAACA



**SOUTHERN AFRICA MILITARIA
COLLECTORS' ASSOCIATION**

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SAMCA NEWSLETTER NO 2, FEBRUARY 2006

The speaker for the meeting of the evening of 26 January was John Mahncke, vice-chairman/scribe of the Cape Town Branch of the SA Military History Society. John's general historical interest covers the period of Imperial Germany, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. More specifically his areas of interest covers the subjects of First World War aviation, the Zeppelins, WWII subjects such as the battle for Stalingrad, German U-Boats, and the subject of the evening, *Legends and Tales of German U-Boats in SA Coastal Waters during WWII*.

John's talk dealt with a number of interesting and fascinating tales of U-Boat sightings and activities in SA coastal waters, which he has managed to collect over a number of years. As the space available does not allow for a lengthy description of each legend/tale, I will try and do it justice by at least listing a number of the stories covered.

U-Boats were active in SA coastal waters between 1942 and 1945, some say even from 1939. They were originally supplied by two supply ships, after these had been sunk, by German Type X (supply) U-Boats, known as "Milk Cows". U-Boats were also rounding the Cape of Good Hope on courier and supply missions to the Far East, transferring diplomats and diplomatic mail between the Axis partners, technology as well as scarce and strategic materiel, vital to the Axis war effort. The U-Boats sailed from Lorient in occupied France to Penang in Japanese occupied Indonesia, and *vice-versa*.

John's research originally started in the Breede River area after attending a wedding, where he became aware of the rich and fascinating U-Boat lore of the region.

Fresh water, fresh vegetables and diesel were always a problem for the U-Boats. After the "Milk Cows" had been sunk, the U-Boats had to fend for themselves. It has been stated that they carried everything with them, although the voyages lasted long periods. In most cases, U-Boat missions lasted over one hundred days, a few over two hundred days.

U-Boats mainly operated in the Atlantic against British and US convoys, but a few were sent to South Africa and Indian Ocean. Due to the fighting in the North Africa and the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal had been closed. Therefore all Allied shipping had to pass around Cape Point between the European and the Far East theatres of war. There were never more than 2-6 boats at our coast at any given period of time. Two "Wolfpacks" operated in SA coastal waters between 1942 and the end of 1943, known as

“Gruppe Eisbär” (1942) and “Gruppe Seehund” (1943). In addition U-Boats were also operational singly in SA coastal waters.

Due to the remoteness of the Union and the demands of the war effort up north, the SA coastline was not defended against attacks from the sea. Therefore the boats could (according to the legends) sail close to the coast and meet people, collect water from springs, buy provisions and make contact with the “Ossewa Brandwag”. There are stories of a U-Boat crew being entertained with a braai and soccer game at Renosterkop. Elsewhere people regularly left provisions for crews to collect.

Radar was only just being deployed, but once the stations were in operation, helping ships in distress or redirecting lost aircraft, U-boats had to keep a good distance, and the number of sightings along the coast decreased.

Well-known proof of the the U-Boats’ presence are the photographs taken by the commanding officer of U-172, *Kapitänleutnant* Emmerman, of Table Mountain and Sea Point on the night of 5/6 October, through the U-Boats’ periscope.

Stories include the following;

- Alhambra theatre (CapeTown) tickets found after the war in the personal belongings of U-Boat crew;
- U-Boat crew that landed at Bakoven, travelled by train to Rocklands cinema to learn English. Cinema tickets found afterwards;
- Reports of parties for crewmen in Camps Bay & playing table tennis in Clifton;
- U-Boat Captain who was given a car by friends in Kommetjie to travel to Cape Town and make his purchases at Stuttafords;
- False Bay fish market - bank notes used to pay for fish proved to be counterfeit;
- In Fish Hoek the Brindisi house was purported to be a spy nest;
- Able Seaman “Just Nuisance” apparently exposed U-Boat crewmen disguised as Royal Naval Military Policemen;
- Reminders that loose talk sank ships only added to the general paranoia and alleged sightings. The Radio Zeesen broadcasts were illegal to listen to, but the ban was widely disregarded. The messages about the names and sailing times of the Allied ships were amazingly accurate, and only added to the U-Boat and spy scare;
- A Hout Bay tramp was apparently a U-boat supply ship;
- The Swakopmund school dandy story. The flashing of a mirror seen in a school dormitory window proved not be be a spy signalling U-Boats lurking off-shore, but rather a vain schoolboy preening himself in front of a mirror in the window of his room;
- Rumours of tickets of the Hansa Hotel found in the pockets of dead sailors washed up after their U-Boat was sunk;
- Two U-Boats apparently regularly supplied in the Hammerkop area in the Southern Cape;
- A U-Boat captain exercises his crew on the beach at Cape St. Francis, and settles there after the war because he loved the area
- At Arniston the radar operator apparently heard U-boats surfacing and recharging their engines. These reports were not believed by the Reports Filter room in the Castle in Cape town, and not acted upon;
- In the Durban lots of activities were reported. At the height of the invasion of Madagascar, a Japanese plane was reported flying over Durban and along coast.
- A similar sighting was reported over Port Elizabeth of a Imperial Japanese Navy Type I-15 long-range submarine scoutplane Yokosuka E14Y “Glen” on 22 April 1942;
- The Arniston–Bredasdorp–Cape Agulhas triangle is a relatively sparsely settled area and abounds with stories and tales of U-boat sightings and landings;

- Farmer supplies provisions to U-Boats - the barn-door was apparently adorned with a huge swastika, which was used to signal visiting U-Boats whether it was safe to land or not;
- In Port St. John's the story is told of a seminarist in mufti making his purchases on the market for his U-Boat waiting off-shore;
- Reports of as many as six U-Boat wrecks along the coast have been collected. None of these could, however, be confirmed by the U-Boat archives in Cuxhaven;
- The Transkei and the Cape South Coast areas abound with stories of people supplying boats, such as the story of drum of Diesel fuel being stolen from a national road building camp between Karreedouw and Tsitsikamma forest;
- Rumours of U-Boat crew exchanges taking place along our shorelines (unproven);
- U-Boats coming into the Langebaan lagoon to collect water from Municipal Caravan Park;
- Finally the story of the last U-Boat to Japan to round the Cape apparently carried components of an atomic bomb manufactured by the Germans. After the surrender in 1945, the boat surrendered to US ships. Parts of the captured atomic bomb were rumoured to have been used in the atomic bombs dropped on Japan.

In the war-time paranoia, spies were seen everywhere and U-Boats sightings were plentiful. Paradoxically, these reports and rumours are amazingly similar to reports and sightings that emanated from the Caribbean and Southeastern seaboard of the United States that were experiencing a similar assault during the middle war-years.

Thank you, John, for a most informative and interesting talk.



The next meeting of SAMCA will be held on **Thursday, 23 February**, at 19:30 in the Cape Town Highlanders' lecture hall/E.M. & N.C.O.'s mess, behind the Castle. Directions will be provided on site. The speaker will be Commander "Mac" Bisset, well-known collector & expert on British Medals. The subject will be *British Campaign Medals of WWI & WWII*.

The subsequent meeting of SAMCA will be held on **Thursday, 23 March**, at 19:30 at the same venue. The CTH is hosting a guest speaker for the evening, on the subject of the SANDF's involvement in Zaire. The intention is to have a general meeting dealing with the Association's affairs, after which we will join the members of the CTH to listen to the talk.



FORTHCOMING TALKS:

- 23rd Mar: **The SANDF's Involvement in Zaire – an Eyewitness Report**
An illustrated talk by a guest speaker of the Cape Town Highlanders.
- 27th Apr: ***Firsthand Reflections of the Battle at Bridge 14, Angola, and the events that led to it***
An illustrated talk by Stephan Fourie (Chairman of CAPE SAAACA).
- 25th May: ***The 7,62x39mm AK47 Family: An Overview & Personal Notes***
An illustrated talk by Johan van den Berg.



PROVISIONAL TALKS FOR 2006 (SUBJECT TO CHANGE & IN RANDOM ORDER):

- ***Samurai Swords*** – Gary Morris/André Olivier
- ***Firsthand Reflections of the Battle at Bridge 14, Angola, and the events that led to it*** – Stephan Fourie
- ***The 7,62x39mm AK47 Family: An Overview & Personal Notes*** – Johan v d Berg
- ***Schutztruppe Edged Weapons & Medals*** – Andy Shoredits
- ***Boxer Rebellion Medals*** – Andy Shoredits

- **German Railway Guns - A Historical Perspective** – Johan van den Berg
- **The Tale of Two Skirmishes, 17th September, 1901 (Gen Louis Botha at Blood River Poort and Gen Jan Smuts at Elands River Poort)** - Johan van den Berg
- **German Political Daggers** – Andy Shoredits
- **German Fallschirmjäger in World War Two: A Historical Perspective** – Johan van den Berg



IMPORTANT!: We need:

- **proposals for lectures** and more importantly;
- **speakers**, especially on firearm/ammunition-related subjects! We do not want the subjects to become too one-sided and limited to only a small number of speakers – inbreeding never was a good thing - please help us to diversify and make your association an interesting and exciting one,
- **articles for the planned journal**, and
- **to know about fellow collectors or enthusiasts whom we could invite – please let us have their names and contact details ASAP.**

WE ARE DEPENDING ON YOUR PARTICIPATION AND ASSISTANCE!

See you at the forthcoming meetings – do not forget to diarise it!



PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE:

Until such time as a representative committee is elected, a provisional executive committee will oversee the affairs of SAMCA. The interim members are:

- **Andy Shoredits** (Secretary – Ph: 083-656-5936 & email: felsnest@global.co.za)
- **Johan van den Berg** (Scribe – Ph: 082-579-0386 & email: warbooks@mweb.co.za)
- **Stephan Fourie** (SAAACA/SAMCA Chairperson – email: stephan@sfa.co.za) (The SAAACA Chairman is (constitutionally) automatically Chairman of SAMCA & therefore not an interim appointment).

Best wishes

Johan van den Berg

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