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Delville Wood and South African Great War Commemoration

IN May 1920, Jan Smuts, Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, and a pushy member of the inner circle of Lloyd George's Imperial War Cabinet, wrote to the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges. He expressed his regret at the loss of a large number of South African soldiers on the Somme and in Flanders, and expressed personal sympathy for the families of fallen men who felt that their remains should not be left on the Western Front, but shipped back to the Union to be buried and honoured in their home country. After all, the South African war contribution was uniquely deserving of national veneration: while Britain had ended up having to feed conscripts to its imperial war effort, its South African Dominion had supplied only willing volunteer patriots.

Turning to the Battle of the Somme, an artful Smuts reflected pride and gloom in about equal measure. Although his country's costly military sacrifice there had been in a good cause, the muddy outcome of the 1914–1918 war as a whole remained a matter of heavy regret. For, what the Great War had left were 'the ruins in which poor mankind is struggling today'. Still, so as not to leave Bridges wholly disheartened, Smuts shared some quiet optimism. This lay in the hope that South Africa's tough contribution to the recent Somme campaign would in time work to produce some 'spiritual regeneration' of European society, and that a proper memorial to Union losses in 1916 would soon be erected to commemorate Africa's magnificent 'European sacrifice' in a sacrificial battle for 'civilization' in the 'Old World'. Venerating the loyal wartime conduct of British Africa would be doing the right thing for the right reason. If the significance of this tangible legacy of the Great War were not to be taken seriously, concluded Smuts, 'the fate of the white race is going to be very dark'.¹ On that basis, Pretoria's disproportionately large share of its burden looked unlikely to be lessened.

It is fairly clear that for Jan Smuts and other members of South Africa's ruling political establishment, the galloping idea of establishing a National War Memorial on the Somme was meant to be more than just securing a public site of mourning to pay homage to the Union war dead. From its inception, it was envisaged as a spiky political commemoration of Dominion identity and achievement in war, a tracing in granite and marble of the colonial strengths of the South African character across French soil. Here, the Union could suddenly narrow the salt water frontier between Cape Town and Southampton.

1. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Bridges Papers, f. 132, J.C. Smuts to R.H. Bridges, 11 May 1920.

There was little need to search for an appropriate commemorative spot. The obvious symbolic point on the Somme battlefield had to be Delville Wood, a bushy patch of land to the north of the small town of Longueval which, in July 1916, had been a stiffly defended forested enclave on the German second line. Invoked as ‘the full epic’ of ‘tortured humanity’,² or the fabled ‘site of a South African epic’,³ the Delville Wood battle would go down in First World War history as a celebrated icon of colonial settler valour and sacrificial heroism under fire.

The emblematic case for a particular Delville Wood commemoration lay in the commitment of the 3rd South African Infantry Brigade to the Somme offensive. A component of the British Fifth Army, this was a skilled and experienced contingent of white volunteers, many of whom had already seen service in the 1914–15 German South West Africa campaign, or earlier in the 1899–1902 Anglo-Boer War. In the time between its disembarkation at Marseilles late in 1915 and its deployment in action during the second stage of the Somme offensive, men of the 3,000-strong Brigade had already minted a distinctly up-beat soldiering ethos, refracted through a vaulting ‘Springbok’ national identity. Portrayed in stylized imagery as bronzed and big-boned infantrymen bred on the veld, these volunteers were Africa’s European elect, its archetypal ‘colonial supermen’, to use Paddy Griffith’s memorable phrase.⁴ Lined up behind its laurelled Springbok emblem with its encircling Anglo-Dutch motto, ‘Union is Strength – Eendracht Maakt Macht’, the Pretoria expeditionary force was eulogized in the English South African press as the essence of a sharp-looking and superbly disciplined British Dominion Army.⁵

Its assertive identity was a strikingly idiosyncratic mix of burly physical elements and underlying values. At one level, a contagious kind of diaspora ‘Scottishness’ bound together Brigade Springboks, many of whom had been recruited through the flamboyantly Scottish infantry formations of the Union Defence Force, like the Transvaal Scottish, Cape Town Highlanders, and the Cape-based Duke of Edinburgh’s Rifles, as well as through the rolls of a network of Caledonian Societies. The force’s ‘military Scottishness’⁶ was cemented further by its operational attachment to General Henry Rawlinson’s 9th (Scottish) Division. Rawlinson, a veteran of the Anglo-Boer War, welcomed South African Scots empire patriots to a command under which the male

2. John Buchan, *The History of the South African Forces in France* (Edinburgh, 1920), p. 63.

3. John Keegan, *The First World War* (London, 1998), p. 319.

4. Paddy Griffith, *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London, 1996), pp. 59, 177.

5. *Cape Times*, 15 Aug. 1915; *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 Aug. 1915; *Natal Witness*, 26 Aug. 1915; *Pretoria Friend*, 19 Dec. 1915; *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 30 Dec. 1915.

6. As used by Jonathan Hyslop, ‘Cape Town Highlanders, Transvaal Scottish: Military “Scottishness” and Social Power in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century South Africa’, unpub. conference paper, The British World Conference, University of Cape Town, 9–11 Jan. 2002.

camaraderie of colonial 'Jocks' could blend with the old warrior guilds of the Royal Scots or the Argyls.

At another level, kilted Brigade infantry carried their own sense of what it meant to be, say, Transvaal Scottish. In this respect, a dash of fierce Africa was the glass of fashion. As Springboks trudged off for trench warfare training, the vocal imagery of 'Bonnie Highland' marching songs celebrated the imagined ties of affection and respect between Celtic colonists (and accompanying English and East European immigrants who also took to pipes and kilts) and subject African societies renowned for their military prowess. Thus, the coinage of 'Zulu Gaelic', 'Basuto Gaelic', and even Rhodesian 'Matabeleland Gaelic' underscored the colonial presence of South African combatants within an Old World 9th Scots Division.⁷

Equally pervasive were the customary trench chants, aimed at lifting the spirits of exhausted men. Steeped in the crude discourse of an imitative African tribalism, exhortations commonly took the shape of Zulu war cries or mock Zulu dances. For white infantrymen, this make-believe cultural affinity reinforced a potent martial message: the fighting spirit of the 3rd South African Infantry could match that of a nineteenth-century Shakan *impi* or war party.

In fact, so attractive was this hot-blooded narcotic that some white Springboks painlessly became black. In snatched recreation periods, infantrymen relished self-parody as *le Zulu Blanc*, blackening up with soot and making the most of burlesque opportunities 'to mess about and shout *Usuthu!*'.⁸ Playing at 'Zulus' undoubtedly provided fleeting moments of pantomime relief from the daily brutality and drudgery of service on the Western Front.⁹

The Somme Brigade was also tightly knit in two other notable ways. One of these was its localized recruiting grid in 1915, drawing officers and men from college schools, merchant houses, engineering works and mining company offices where they had frequently known one another in peacetime. These were reliable individuals, including a tough rump of 'Scottish-English' citizen volunteers who had already served together under arms in putting down late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rural African resistance and rebellion. A second element was its weighty, middle-class South African English or Scottish-English and loyalist Anglo-Afrikaner orientation; cross-fertilization fostered social closeness, and lubricated the spring of a common, pro-British patriotism.¹⁰

7. *Rondebosch Boys High School Magazine*, ix (1916), 41; *The Selbornian*, iii (1916), 19.

8. Nasson, 'A Springbok on the Somme: Joe Samuels, a South African Veteran of the Great War', *Oral History*, xxv (1997), 34.

9. Nasson, 'South Africans in Flanders: "le Zulu Blanc"', in *Passchendaele in Perspective: The Third Battle of Ypres*, ed. Peter Liddle (London, 1997), p. 293.

10. Ian Uys, *Rollcall: The Delville Wood Story* (Johannesburg, 1991), pp. 4–8; Buchan, *South African Forces*, pp. 14–18; Peter K. A. Digby, *Pyramids and Poppies: The 1st South African Infantry Brigade in Libya, France and Flanders 1915–1919* (Johannesburg, 1993), pp. 17–24.

What this all amounted to in 1916 was the formation of a colonial contingent with a peculiar national style of fabricated clan tartan. The Scottishness of Union infantry was in one part the florid creation of Scots migrants. In another, no less – possibly more – important part it was but the crust of a broader white South African assimilation. The 4th Battalion South African Scottish struck a chord which wailed in the breasts of a range of other white war volunteers, be they loyalist Afrikaners, or immigrant English, Irish or even Polish. And as wartime white politics hinged on the abrasive division between national Dominion loyalty and the surly anti-war dissent of Afrikaner nationalism,¹¹ the South African Brigade became a rock, proclaiming the sturdy war commitment of the country's non-Afrikaner whites, a minority of a minority.

By July 1916, Smuts's Springboks had acquired a sharp reputation for marksmanship among British 9th Division officers, and were being indulged by war correspondents who lapped up the spectacle of a white British fighting formation given to shouting fearsome Zulu or other tribal war cries at their German enemy, or to breaking into Dutch-Afrikaans ditties with threatening overtones, 'not sounding at all unlike Scotch, the more so coming from fellows in kilts'.¹² But the Delville Wood engagement was to be their first real military test in France. On 12 July, the Brigade's three forward Battalions were ordered by General William Furse of the 9th Division to 'capture and consolidate the outer edge of the whole of Delville Wood'.¹³ The assault on this German-held strongpoint was intended to produce penetration at any price. As relayed to the South African commander, General Henry Timson Lukin, its unequivocal objective was to seize this portion of German second line ground and to hold it 'at all costs'.¹⁴

Those costs were to be horrifically high. In a bloody five-day encounter with highly trained defending Bavarian forces from 15 to 20 July, Union infantry achieved great military distinction by taking and holding Delville Wood in one of the most savage and attritional engagements of the Somme campaign, a well-documented battle experience which need not detain us here.¹⁵ When the Brigade's

11. Nasson, 'Springboks ou Outruches: Les Réactions Sud-Africaines au Déclenchement de la Guerre de 1914', *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains*, clxxix (1995), 61–81; 'War Opinion in South Africa, 1914', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xxxii (1995), 33–52; 'A Great Divide: Popular Responses to the Great War in South Africa', *War and Society*, xii (1994), esp. 49–53.

12. South African Defence Force (SADF) Archives, Pretoria, DSD/WO1 Box 7, 1st SAI Brigade, vol. 3B, Brigade Major's correspondence files, 1916–1917, Capt. J. Campbell to Capt. E.V. Vivian, 2 July 1916.

13. G. Genis, 'Delville Wood: Eighty Years, July 1916–July 1996', *Militaria*, xxvi (1996), 8.

14. Uys, *Rollcall*, p. 43.

15. Narrative accounts include J. A. Lawson, *Memories of Delville Wood: South Africa's Greatest Battle* (Cape Town, 1918); E. Solomon, *Potchefstroom to Delville Wood* (Johannesburg, n.d.); Buchan, *Forces*, pp. 56–82; Uys, *Rollcall*, pp. 45–120; Genis, 'Delville Wood', 4–21; Digby, *Poppies*, pp. 121–48.

Battalions were finally relieved by 9th Scottish Division reinforcements, the force had been gutted of two-thirds of its strength: Lukin's contingent of around 3,150 men emerged from the Battle of Delville Wood having lost over 750 dead, and over 1,500 wounded, captured or missing.

The Brigade's powers of endurance personified an idealized image of gritty South African dependability whatever the odds. Survivors' accounts mostly presented a riveting depiction of crack Springbok heroism in which, however desperate their position, South Africans' discipline and combat readiness held fast. Enduring intense bombardment and repeated frontal assaults without respite, surviving remnants of the force continued to inflict losses on German regiments.¹⁶ 'Kilties' from the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, Orange Free State and the Transvaal were hailed not only for 'fighting like lions' and 'darting like jackals'. They were acclaimed in particular for dipping into a South African tradition of mobile bush warfare to emulate the unrelenting resistance of Boer republican *bittereinders* or die-hards in 1902, dogged warriors who ducked and weaved, stubbornly refusing to capitulate.¹⁷ In this popular portrayal, Christiaan de Wet, the 1899–1902 Boer general from the Orange Free State, found his empire *bittereinder* equivalent in the pugnacity of Private Andrew Hoatson. The Natal son of a Scottish missionary father, Hoatson stuck it out at his Lewis gun post despite being severely gassed, while the rest of his platoon perished.¹⁸ These personal trials of blood were soon well on their way to becoming a mythic code of selfless warrior sacrifice.

In France, as well as later in Flanders, roving South African infantry units drew breath periodically to mark their Delville Wood inheritance, a fertilizing battle honour imparting moral sustenance to soldiers whose fighting attributes as 'the suicide Springboks'¹⁹ had already 'become legendary'.²⁰ To this end, the presence within a reconstituted post-July 1916 Brigade of a peppering of decorated Delville Wood veterans clearly helped to keep up a resurrectionary legacy of the Somme battle through later service in theatres like Passchendaele. Inevitably, from this flowed gestures of a more poignant kind. For Brigade survivors, the shattered Wood signified a sacred place of homage to fallen comrades, as small clusters of July 1916 veterans began returning after the Battle of the Somme. In 1917, and again in 1918, parties assembled on the battleground for memorial services, and individuals tried to add dignity

16. SADF Archives, A. H. Betteridge, 'Combat in and over Delville Wood', unpub. MS (n.d.); Lawson, *Delville Wood*, p. 14; Digby, *Poppies*, pp. 139–48.

17. *South African News*, 28 Aug. 1916; *Cape Times*, 19 Aug. 1916; *Diocesan College Magazine*, xii (1917), 26.

18. *Zululand Times*, 10 Sept. 1916.

19. *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 Sept. 1918.

20. *Zululand Times*, 29 July 1917.

to the charred resting places of the dead by erecting rough wooden crosses and other makeshift markers.²¹

Nor did the luminous symbolic significance of Delville Wood escape the notice of South African officers attached to various British regiments. For the leading Smuts loyalist, Deneys Reitz, it formed a compelling spot during the years 1917–1919, a magnetic focus of repeated personal pilgrimage to express a mixture of bereavement and pride in national accomplishment.²² Another regular visitor, Lieutenant Arthur Ross, was not one for literary modesty. A second pilgrimage in March 1918 prompted him to pen, ‘Delville Wood is where our virtue was good/We from a land strong, brown and tan/Who are proudly South Affri-Can’.²³

Meanwhile, pro-war and pro-empire interests within the Union soon fastened on Delville Wood. As the high water mark of South African war participation, it was trumpeted as a ‘profound’ or ‘spiritual’ legacy of national achievement and sacrifice.²⁴ In major cities, July 1917 saw the beginnings of domestic Delville Day commemoration, encompassing memorial church services, rallies, street processions, bazaars and concerts, graced by an empire loyalist Anglo-Afrikaner elite which turned out to honour ‘those who fought and died in France for our liberation’, in the words of the *Zululand Times*.²⁵

For the more bulldog strain of politicians, civic notables and journalists, the defining significance of Delville Wood lay not so much in mourning losses, still less in querying the sacrificial use by British command of South African infantry as battering troops, but in commemorating national fighting spirit and a selfless and uncomplaining heroism. Moreover, for those attached to Jan Smuts and Louis Botha’s cause of constructing the new post-1910 Union of South Africa as a British Dominion based upon a unified white nationalism, the Somme carnage represented a rich historical transition. Shoulder to shoulder in battle, English and Afrikaner had finally found each other. However heavy the loss at Delville Wood, its ‘unifying blood sacrifice’ had helped to seal the shared European citizenship of previously fractured English and Afrikaner communities.²⁶

In this view, the immediate effect of Delville Wood was liberating, erasing the sour legacy of the Anglo-Boer War, dispelling the clouds left by the 1914–15 Afrikaner republican rebellion against Union war participation, and crowning the recent achievement of a unified white Dominion within the British Empire-Commonwealth. As the Mayor of

21. *Natal Witness*, 25 Aug. 1916; *South African News*, 5 Mar. 1917; *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 July 1918; *De Graaff-Reinetter*, 24 Aug. 1917.

22. Deneys Reitz, *Trekking On* (London, 1933), pp. 272–73.

23. *South African College Magazine*, xix (1918), 37.

24. *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 Sept. 1916.

25. *Zululand Times*, 29 July 1917.

26. *Cape Times*, 14 Oct. 1916.

Durban put it in 1917, the 'national growth' stimulated by 'a splendid stand' in wartime confirmed a bright future for the nation.²⁷ Being blooded in the Great War would insure it against the debilitating virus of a nationalist Afrikaner isolationism.

For a stridently patriotic press, 'here on the Somme battlefields, Briton and Boer had stood shoulder to shoulder after the Boer War, and these races had died together at Delville Wood'.²⁸ Acclaiming 'our sons who had died in France not as Dutchmen and English but as South Africans', the *Rand Daily Mail* declared them to have 'occupied the anvil of character' upon which they had forged a South African nation, just as the inspiration of Gallipoli and Vimy Ridge had helped to create an Australian and a Canadian nation.²⁹ As the dugouts on a Turkish peninsula had proudly taken root in the life of a Pacific Dominion, so the Delville Wood trenches of 'Buchanan Street', 'Bond Street' and 'Princes Street' had ploughed their strength into the national character of European Africa.

These assertions of a cohesive white national identity were, however, more than a little optimistic. Around two-thirds of the majority white Afrikaner population had always been vehemently opposed to a British imperialist war of which it felt no part, and Union Defence Force recruitment campaigns had little to show from this quarter.³⁰ In 1915, radical nationalist Afrikaners had heaped scorn upon mobilization of an overseas Expeditionary Force, with one prominent religious leader assuring followers that it was 'God's Will that the Boers should oppose Britain by helping Germany, rather than going to wage war on her behalf'.³¹ Inevitably, then, effusive assertions of equality of sacrifice at Delville Wood were laying it on a touch thicker than either blood or water. In reality, no more than about 12 per cent of the Springbok Brigade was of Afrikaner origin.³² And for that matter, almost half of its initial complement were 'Home-born' British emigrants rather than 'colonial-born' settlers.

Beyond this, more radical republicanism had nothing but contempt for the growth of Delville Wood sentiment after July 1916. While the mainstream English-language press voiced virtually no criticism of British High Command handling of the Battle of the Somme, nationalist publications like *De Burger* did not mince words in

27. *Natal Witness*, 21 Jan. 1917.

28. *Cape Argus*, 16 Aug. 1916; *South African News*, 28 Aug. 1916; *De Graaff-Reinetter*, 24 Aug. 1916; *Midland News*, 9 Sept. 1916.

29. *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 Sept. 1918.

30. N. G. Garson, 'South Africa and World War 1', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, viii (1979), 76; S. E. Katzenellenbogen, 'Southern Africa and the War of 1914-18', in *War and Society*, ed. M. R. D. Foot (London, 1973), p. 117; H. Giliomee, "'Wretched folk, ready for any mischief": The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939', *Historia*, xxxvii (2002), 621-22.

31. *De Volksblad*, 16 Apr. 1915.

32. Uys, *Rollcall*, p. 5; Digby, *Poppies*, p. 17.

attributing South Africa's casualty rate to the incompetence and callousness of Sir Douglas Haig and his generals. The notorious cruelties of the Anglo-Boer War had already demonstrated the heartless bungling of British commanders, declared *De Burger* in August 1916; for South Africans, it hardly seemed worth the price of an uncomfortable voyage to Southampton and Marseilles for a further lethal taste. 'South African lives were slaughtered for nothing', it concluded some weeks later, 'like rotten fruit thrown away by British shopkeepers'.³³ Even more disparagingly, for the ultra-republican *Afrikaansche Boerenvriend* lives would have been shed more meaningfully 'not in the far forests of France, but here at home, in the making of an independent Dutch Republic, free of the curse of Britain'.³⁴

Hostility to Delville Wood commemorative sentiment also came from a more internationalist and anti-militarist political current. Representing the Marxist wing of white labour socialists, the South African International Socialist League warned that the 'blind patriotism' of Delville Day Anniversary events would only strengthen the ruling class of the gold fields in 'keeping Smuts in government to kill even more men in France'.³⁵ The International League, an anti-war grouping which had split from the pro-war South African Labour Party, queried the suspect motives of local politicians and imperial officials 'whose hearts seem suddenly so bereaved by the slaughter of Delville Wood'. For this body of socialist revolutionaries, the ultimate beneficiary of the Delville Wood action had to be capitalism. For the patriotic excesses it had triggered could only sweeten the power 'of the capitalist barons of Paris, London and Johannesburg, and also naturally worldwide FREE TRADE, as the noble cause most worthy of their loss'.³⁶

To respectable pro-war opinion, aspersions on a hallowed Delville Wood story from the left and from Afrikaner nationalists were little short of treasonous. During the latter half of 1917 and through 1918, there was a chorus of demands for the banning of disaffected elements whose views 'polluted' or 'desecrated' the pristine moral memory of the Somme; as the *Cape Argus* declared in June 1918, falling in behind battle remembrance was 'a simple matter of citizenship',³⁷ with the *Natal Witness* defining it equally as 'the patriotic duty of all citizens'.³⁸ Any dishonouring of the Union's 'Jock' or 'Scotch' achievement was to forfeit the meaning of true citizenship.

Amidst all of this, there was another kind of intervention altogether. From the end of 1916, leading members of the mission-educated African social elite began to reproach authorities for hurtful racial discrimination

33. *De Burger*, 14 Sept. 1916.

34. *Afrikaansche Boerenvriend*, 3 Sept. 1916.

35. *International*, 22 June 1917.

36. *International*, 29 Jan. 1917.

37. *Cape Argus*, 21 June 1918.

38. *Natal Mercury*, 3 Feb. 1918.

in their overriding concentration on Delville Wood. Papers such as *Imvo Zabantsundu* and *Izwi la Kiti* offered eloquent and rueful observation that South Africa's 'glorious dead' seemed to be commemorated 'only by the white men of our Springbok Brigade',³⁹ whereas the loss of several hundred African lives at sea in the 1917 *Mendi* disaster, Labour Corps auxiliaries who had 'displayed bravery and loyalty no less infinite' was virtually ignored.⁴⁰ Of course, such pointed remarks counted little. Patriotic black South Africans may have had susceptibilities, but no citizenship entitlement from which to make a political fuss.

Meanwhile, for their part, beleaguered English anti-war radicals found it difficult to establish much of a voice outside of minority trade union bodies or political clubs in cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg. Indeed, in the wake of the war, criticism of Delville Day civic rallies and associated commemoration of the fallen grew increasingly mute, flickering occasionally in the patchy, anti-militarist sub-culture of those militant white workers who had turned their backs on a pro-empire and pro-war South African Labour Party.⁴¹

Almost simultaneously, the immediate post-1918 era laid the foundations for a Delville Wood monumental commemoration of South African war sacrifice. Unusually, the idea of some imposing national memorial emerged first as an individual rather than a public or state initiative. Its beavering proponent was Sir Percy FitzPatrick. One-time Jameson Raid plotter, FitzPatrick was a prominent industrialist and landowner, an influential figure in Johannesburg mining and financial circles, author of the acclaimed ripping yarn, *Jock of the Bushveld*, and a figure with a hundred and one ties of affection with Smuts and his advocacy of a trusty Dominion South Africanism.⁴²

Between 1914 and 1918, FitzPatrick had largely buried himself in the war effort. While too old himself to enlist for Expeditionary Force service, he gladly saw both sons go off to war—one, Nugent, was killed in France. FitzPatrick bore this bereavement stoically, drawing spiritualist consolation through psychic communication with his dead offspring.⁴³ Once the Battle of the Somme was underway, Percy FitzPatrick

39. *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 10 Aug. 1917; *Izwi la Kiti*, 29 July 1917.

40. This was a reference to the February 1917 sinking in the English Channel of the British troopship, *Mendi*, with the loss of over 600 African servicemen of the South African Native Labour Corps, a maritime disaster which received only fleeting official acknowledgement. See Brian Willan, 'The South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916–1918', *Journal of African History*, xix (1978), 61–86; Albert Grundlingh, *Fighting Their Own War: South African Blacks and the First World War* (Johannesburg, 1987), pp. 93–96, 139–41; Norman Clothier, *Black Valour: The South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916–1918 and The Sinking of the 'Mendi'* (Pietermaritzburg, 1987), esp. pp. 174–77.

41. *SA Railways and Harbours Magazine*, 1 (1920), 7–8.

42. From a slate of FitzPatrick hagiography, see, for example, J. P. R. Wallis, *Fitz: The Story of Sir Percy FitzPatrick* (London, 1955). *Interfering in Politics: A Biography of Sir Percy FitzPatrick*, ed. A. H. Duminy and W. Guest (Johannesburg, 1987), is more circumspect.

43. National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, FitzPatrick Papers, B/AVIII, 1070/138, FitzPatrick to Staff Officer, 3 Apr. 1918.

busied himself with mobilization efforts, all the while extending his role as patron and ally of wartime donor groups and voluntary associations, and pondering how to commemorate battle sacrifice in ways that would fully bind South Africans to an overseas war effort.⁴⁴

Accordingly, in July 1916 he was instrumental in establishing the nationwide daily ritual of a 'Noon Pause' as a unifying tribute to distant Allied sacrifice in France. At twelve o'clock each day, all activity was to cease for one minute of silent prayer for the war dead. This haunting ritual to bring together English and Afrikaner citizens in spontaneous shared remembrance captivated some more wide-eyed local observers. There were even suggestions that Fitzpatrick's Noon Pause could help to educate uninformed black inhabitants about the glory of white combat sacrifice for freedom and civilization. In one especially bizarre call, society mistresses were requested to encourage their domestic servants to cease scrubbing and polishing during The Pause, and Witwatersrand mineowners to stop African labourers hewing, for a fleeting underground moment of fictive bonding with overseers and managers.⁴⁵

FitzPatrick had both stamina and a long missionary reach. It was he who used the model of his South African Noon Pause to persuade the British Cabinet to adopt the convention of the Armistice Day Silence.⁴⁶ Imagining The Silence as a kind of spiritual transmission belt for holding the empire together behind memory of a war for civilization, 'Fitz' argued that the culture of every British possession could be fortified by its introduction.

Then, towards the end of 1919, he turned to the notion of creating a national war memorial, to be located in a major South African city like Johannesburg, Pretoria or Cape Town.⁴⁷ A driven man with deep pockets, FitzPatrick envisaged financing this monument personally as a donation to the country, an act of pride to be presented to the Union Government as a patriotic family gift. Not altogether surprisingly, he envisaged this emblem of remembrance as an aesthetic extension of himself, and as a repository of his family hope of symbolically bringing back its dead from the Western Front. Indeed, as a shrine it was to be a place of homage to Nugent FitzPatrick, his remote grave in France providing a motif for all fallen Springboks on European soil, 'the power of our heroic sacrifice carried within itself'.⁴⁸

As he pressed on with his pet project, Percy FitzPatrick discovered an astonishing thing. In December 1918, Colonel Geoffrey Herbert, a somewhat business-minded Staff Officer of the Union Defence Force, had inveigled a personal option to purchase the ruined Delville Wood site (now inscribed in soldiering memory as 'Devil's Wood', 'Nightmare

44. Wallis, *Percy FitzPatrick*, p. 209.

45. *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 25 July 1916.

46. Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919–1946* (Oxford, 1994), p. 9.

47. FitzPatrick Papers, B/AVIII, 1070/144, FitzPatrick to A. Balfour, 19 Nov. 1919.

48. FitzPatrick Papers, A/LC1, 1047/119, O. Beit to FitzPatrick, 12 Nov. 1919.

Wood' or 'Death's Wood') from its wealthy French landowner, Vicomte Dauger. Acting as a property agent was on the list of Herbert's coy extra-curricular activities, and he had in fact been trying to persuade his government to buy Delville Wood as a 'national treasure'. For the busy Colonel, its acquisition would fulfil the patriotic ideal of 'a Union Servant whose heart would rejoice', and also sweeten his bank balance through a backhanded seller's commission from Dauger.⁴⁹

Faced with this tangled state of affairs, 'Fitz' typically did not dawdle. He quietly closed a deal with Herbert for £1,000, and advised Pretoria that his Somme purchase would be donated as a gift to the Union. FitzPatrick further undertook to secure funding for a large monument to 'Springbok heroism on the fields of France', and began looking to the Imperial War Graves Commission.⁵⁰ France may not have been the location he had in mind, but it was the ideal of a national war memorial which came first. Jan Smuts, however, was not pleased by these developments. In February 1920, Herbert was disciplined for irregular conduct and ordered to break off the deal with FitzPatrick. Furious at having been fingered by a 'meddling busybody' in the office of the High Commissioner, a sulky Herbert withdrew 'to sit quiet and grind my teeth over the meanest action I have heard of for a long while'.⁵¹

The Prime Minister then advised parliament that Delville Wood would be acquired directly, as 'sacred' and 'imperishable' South African ground.⁵² At once Vicomte Dauger more than doubled his original price, adding on an extra £10,000 as compensation for 'war damage to the great heritage of France'⁵³. Here was an aristocrat who achieved a nice blend of idealism and greed. Having been elbowed aside, a furious 'Fitz' was mollified by Smuts, who offered him a leading spot in an official Delville Wood commemorative enterprise.

Already within the creeping shadow of organized Afrikaner nationalism, the Pretoria administration had good reason for not wanting to accept Delville Wood as a personal gift from so forceful a capitalist-imperialist personality. Politically, it was scarcely winning to be seen as the client of a figure inclined to tactlessness – in 1913 FitzPatrick had saddled up to take pot-shots at striking white miners, and in 1915 he had lambasted authorities for treating convicted Afrikaner rebels too leniently.⁵⁴ That aside, FitzPatrick's war memorial obsession was already becoming controversial. In the 1920 general election he came under attack from Afrikaner nationalists for 'exploiting' and 'cunningly' manipulating Delville Wood sentiment in order to develop a monument intended simply to honour his fallen son, or to celebrate a British

49. FitzPatrick Papers, DBA/VIII, 1030/122, Herbert to FitzPatrick, 20 Feb. 1920.

50. FitzPatrick Papers, 62/8, vol.1, FitzPatrick to Beit, 30 Jan. 1920.

51. FitzPatrick Papers, DBA/VIII, 1030/122, Herbert to FitzPatrick, 28 Feb. 1920.

52. *Union Government, House of Assembly Debates*, 18 Feb. 1920, col. 62.

53. *Cape Times*, 14 Mar. 1920.

54. *SA Railways and Harbours Magazine*, vii (1916), 33.

imperial war achievement.⁵⁵ 'This imperialist', grumbled the stern Nationalist, Tielman Roos, 'is not so much interested in planting trees in that terrible spot, as in putting down the roots of British grandeur, for which so many lives from here were quite uselessly sacrificed'.⁵⁶

Equally, Percy FitzPatrick's peerless connections to the Anglo-South African social nexus, his stepping stone financial links, and his organizational abilities, made him a prime asset to the Delville Wood initiative. Certainly, for admiring political associates such as Deneys Reitz and Lionel Phillips, he was the man best entrusted with the South African memorializing task.⁵⁷ High-minded in his brand of Dominion and Empire patriotism, and uncorrupted by the partisanship of stultifying party politics, 'Fitz's' passionate determination and purity of motive put him head and shoulders above other 'patriotic interests of more modest means', including 'girl guides and fire brigades' who were raising pennies for a national memorial.⁵⁸

Sure enough, Sir Percy FitzPatrick became chairman of a powerful Anglo-South African Delville Wood Memorial Committee in July 1921. Established primarily to secure subscription monies for a South African Memorial Fund, its London patrons included Lloyd George, Douglas Haig, The Prince of Wales, and a minor array of country house grandees. In addition to Henry Lukin, the South African Brigade Commander, Johannesburg furnished a clump of Witwatersrand mining capitalists for whom the Delville Wood venture presented a handy public opportunity. During the war, the German or German-Jewish taint of Randlords like Alfred Beit, Julius Wehrner and Henry Strakosch had raised some eyebrows over the reliability of their British commitment.⁵⁹ Now, an association with Delville Wood through public patronage provided an opportunity to re-confirm their claim upon a loyal 'English' South African identity.

At the Delville Wood Committee's first London meeting, the Prince of Wales thanked Smuts effusively (if not subtly) for his undertaking of a grand tribute to 'true' South African empire loyalists, 'the very best citizens of the old country'.⁶⁰ Assisted by an orbit of smaller memorial committees made up of imperial officials in South Africa, active groups of South African and Rhodesian War Widows, Caledonian Societies, budding church and other voluntary associations, mayors and various civic notables, the Delville Wood body soon raised over £50,000 from

55. *Union Government, House of Assembly Debates*, 3 Mar. 1920, col. 38.

56. *De Volksblad*, 12 Mar. 1920.

57. See, for example, Lionel Phillips, 'South Africa and the Empire Question', *United Empire: The Royal Colonial Institute Journal*, ix (1919), 518.

58. *Morning Post*, 8 Aug. 1922.

59. *SA Railways and Harbours Magazine*, viii (1917), 17.

60. *Morning Post*, 8 Aug. 1922.

public and private donations for a South African Memorial and Cemetery.⁶¹

Its design was put into the hands of a key figure in the South African Memorial Fund, the busy British architect, Herbert Baker, a man 'at his best on committees', in the wry judgement of David Cannadine.⁶² As the form of the Delville Wood project would be deeply influenced by his grandiose imperial fixations and architectural conceptions, his local political background and intellectual temperament may be briefly considered. Baker had enjoyed a cosy personal and professional association with Southern Africa's imperialist titan, Cecil Rhodes, under whose later nineteenth-century patronage he can be said to have established a high imperial style of architecture in British South Africa. His aesthetic philosophy was shot through with burly beliefs in an organic social imperialism, in which a European 'English-speaking' South African identity was the exact mirror of a British imperial identity. This vicarious bloodline contained the oxygen of a renewed classical civilization.

For Baker, the Somme battlefield had showed how well South Africa could discharge its imperial obligation by falling in behind 'the common calling of English-speaking races'.⁶³ Even more, the valour of its infantry had matched the ageless warrior ideals of Greece and Rome: classical Springboks emulated hoplites and legionnaires, Delville Wood was Marathon or Cannae. This Graeco-Roman glaze on the modern British Empire fitted perfectly Herbert Baker's vision of European South Africa as the spur of a Greek and Roman civilization in Africa, wreathed in the mythology of 'the vital spirit of the South Africa which is to be'. That realization, he stressed, was to be best conveyed through boldly Classicist architectural expression, 'precious records' becoming a visual charter of an Olympian 'South African character'.⁶⁴

By the time of the Great War, Baker had decided that among the most potent of these records were war memorials, 'destined to be the permanent spirit of South Africa, for centuries'.⁶⁵ Not surprisingly, he had himself already designed several prominent memorials to settlers who had lost their lives in local colonial wars. For instance, in 1897 he had been commissioned by Rhodes to construct a triumphalist Rhodesian Matabele War Memorial, which he decorated with allegorical battle friezes based on ancient Greek war art. Two years after the end of the Anglo-Boer War, Baker designed a ponderous South African War Monument to the Honoured Dead, taking the shape of a triumphal victory arch resting upon four pillars or cones, cast as 'the turning points

61. *African World*, 21 Dec. 1922.

62. David Cannadine, *The Pleasures of the Past* (Harmondsworth, 1997), p. 114.

63. FitzPatrick Papers, DBA/XI, 1073/790, Baker to J.S. Smith, 4 May 1922.

64. Sir Herbert Baker, *Architecture and Personalities* (London, 1944), p. 91.

65. Michael Keath, *Herbert Baker: Architecture and Idealism, 1892–1913: The South African Years* (Gibraltar, 1992), p. 173.

of imperial fulfilment', and the 'foundations of a harmonious European nation'.⁶⁶ In the fond gaze of his patron, Rhodes, this politically insistent piece of Edwardian baroque satisfyingly 'illustrated the Union of two equally pioneering races on the enduring foundation of South African Federation within the Empire'.⁶⁷

In a further 1911 South African War Memorial to the Rand Regiments, Baker once again utilized his preferred Graeco-Roman memorial form, fashioning a celebratory archway beneath a circular dome set upon chunky granite columns. A strong feature of all of these earlier Southern African monuments was their depiction of the conventional artefacts of war. Realistic bronze representations of cannon, gun carriages, rearing war horses, rifles and helmets were an essential part of the commemorative spectacle, rather than any figurative depictions of Peace.⁶⁸ Edwin Lutyens, Baker's more sensitive co-architect on the Imperial War Graves Commission, had good cause to once say despairingly of him that 'his artistic world is limited by the range of a pom-pom gun'.⁶⁹

Initially, like FitzPatrick, Baker had favoured locating a national war memorial within the Union. His ideal location was above the sweeping Union Buildings complex in Pretoria which he had designed for the post-1910 Botha-Smuts government. This political power-house was a fusion of two elevated corner blocks or towers, laced together by a deep, curving wall, in the outline of an amphitheatre. In form and scale, Baker's Pretoria commission embodied his consuming desire 'to affirm the permanent resting place where the symbolic union of civilising English and Dutch races would occur, under the benevolent gaze of the imperial spirit'. Combining the Union Buildings with an adjoining, raised War Memorial, would 'bring Acropolis next to the City of Athens', he assured Smuts. An allegorical monument would stimulate sacred awareness of the historical grandeur of the Union Buildings site, 'lifting up the eyes of the dead to the highveld of South Africa, drawing them ever closer to the epic moral progress of our pioneering races'.⁷⁰

At the centre of a Pretoria war memorial Baker pictured a replica Dutch colonial house as a tomb or mausoleum for the remains of a Springbok Unknown Soldier, to be brought back from Delville Wood.⁷¹ He was firmly opposed to South Africa following the symbolic practice adopted by Australia, New Zealand and Canada, which accepted the

66. 'Sir Herbert Baker: In Memoriam', *South African Architectural Record*, July 1946, 179.

67. D. E. Greig, *Herbert Baker in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1970), p. 184.

68. Keath, Baker, p. 74; Philip Longworth, *The Unending Vigil: A History of the C. W. G. C 1917-1984* (London, 1985), p. 102.

69. *The Letters of Sir Edwin Lutyens*, ed. C. Percy and J. Ridley (London, 1989), p. 123. For Lutyens's strikingly contrasting minimalist design approach to war memorials, see Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 102-108; Cannadine, *Pleasures*, pp. 116-119.

70. FitzPatrick Papers, 62-6/3, Baker to Smuts, 27 Apr. 1924.

71. FitzPatrick Papers, 62-8/1, Baker to E. Christian, 14 Oct. 1921.

unknown buried in Westminster Abbey as appropriate representation of the return of the Dominions' fallen.

In such views Percy FitzPatrick was not far behind Herbert Baker. Irritated by talk of a French memorial, he pushed for commemoration on home soil. 'Will there be nothing that a South African can see', he asked rhetorically, 'without that arduously long journey to England, and then again across to France?'⁷² Privately, Baker disliked the idea of France even more, but not because of its troublesome distance from the barracks of the Cape Town Highlanders and the Transvaal Scottish. When he learned from FitzPatrick that Delville Wood was to be the site of South Africa's 'only united memorial', he grumbled that it would be impossible to erect an essential 'Dutch House' for the display of impressive 'Springbok war relics'. It would all be spoiled by the philistine greed of roaming French peasants. 'Impossible by nature', Baker lamented, 'the French are already about to steal any wood and brass from our finished cemeteries'.⁷³

Smuts, too, favoured a South African installation, in a place which would resonate in the daily life of inhabitants. His personal inclination was the summit of Table Mountain in Cape Town, a blustery expanse where in July 1921 he unveiled a small cross to record the loss of Infantry Brigade members of the Mountain Club of South Africa who had fallen on the Somme. At this austere ceremonial pilgrimage, led by grieving mountain climbers and attended by several blinded and disabled Delville Wood veterans who had hauled themselves up a gorge, Smuts invoked the souls of the dead to lend an edge of sacrificial loss to a call about manifest destiny and common cause with the needs of European allies. Inhabiting a sacred site, they had come to rest 'now just beneath the heavenly sky, and looking across the continent to that great struggle for democracy and civilisation to the north'.⁷⁴ Robert Bridges would probably have nodded in understanding had he been present.

However, achieving consensus around the choice of a national war memorial site within the Union posed formidable political difficulties. On one hand, there were edgy rivalries between major cities, with local public servants vying to designate the most attractive town space. On another, provincial administrations were prickly about potential favouritism in the regional allocation of public works opportunities and contract payments. Furthermore, militant Afrikaner republicans in the northern provinces were likely to be hostile to any new commemoration of a British imperialist war.⁷⁵ A memorial might become a focus for protest. In this tricky climate, FitzPatrick and the South African coterie of his Delville Wood Committee were obliged to adjust their sights, and

72. FitzPatrick Papers, 62-8/2, Baker to Smuts, 9 Feb. 1922.

73. FitzPatrick Papers, 62-8/1, Baker to R. Feetham, 24 Oct. 1922.

74. *Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa*, xviii (1921), 41.

75. FitzPatrick Papers, 62-8/2, Baker to W. Dalrymple, 29 May 1923; *De Volksblad*, 9 July 1923.

plumped for a single national war memorial in northern France.⁷⁶ Thus did a centre of remembrance on the Somme become the solution to troublesome war sensitivities: north of Paris represented infinitely less contentious a setting than anywhere north of Cape Town. In practice, it was easier for the Union in the 1920s to sponsor an external commemorative expression than to bed its national Great War symbolism in home soil.

Collaborating closely with FitzPatrick, leading Delville Wood patrons and French and British suppliers, Baker constructed what amounted to a Somme version of his bloated Southern African colonial war memorials, a patriotic monument which drew heavily on the figurative expression of Anglo-Afrikaner racial unity embodied in his Union Buildings Classicism. In his words, 'a South African Memorial for the world and for the centuries',⁷⁷ the Delville monument was sited on a southwestern patch of land which in July 1916 had formed 'Buchanan Street', the first trench line of the South African Brigade. The columned corner buttresses on each flank summoned up the hereditary social grandeur of European colonization – Baker composed these as substantial replicas of Cape colonial summer houses built by the seventeenth-century Dutch East India Company governor, Simon van der Stel. A deep, semi-circular stone wall, his 'ramparts of civilization', linked Baker's two stately 'houses', redeeming symbols of an early colonial arcadia.⁷⁸

This imperial pastoral was coupled together by a soaring Roman triumphal arch, on top of which the architect anchored a commanding dome or 'temple'. Baker fashioned this structure as 'a little Rhodes memorial temple', and hoped that it would be recognized as such by those who had seen the Matabeleland and Rand Regiments monuments. Above the lines of former perimeter trenches and gun emplacements, and gazing down and across to the adjoining site of the Delville Wood Cemetery, it was meant to reflect the indissoluble connection between the 'pioneering spirit' of Rhodes and British imperialism, and 'the immortal sacrifice of those trenches'.⁷⁹

At its apex, the Delville Wood construction had a rearing bronze sculpture of two muscular warriors coaxing a foaming war horse into battle. Baker had at first toyed with placing a Springbok, the official Union military insignia, above a carved wreath, but subsequently decided that such routine figurative art would not be 'heroic enough'.⁸⁰ Instead, floating warrior figures, produced by the British artist, Alfred Turner, were chosen as a more strapping representation of 'the young manhood of the two races, joining hands over a war horse in the cause of

76. FitzPatrick Papers, 62–8/1, Baker to R. Feetham, 24 Oct. 1922.

77. Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, p. 90.

78. Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, p. 91.

79. FitzPatrick Papers, 62–8/1, Baker to Smuts, 18 Nov. 1923.

80. FitzPatrick Papers, 62–8/1, Baker to FitzPatrick, 2 Oct. 1923.

the Commonwealth'.⁸¹ For a heavy-handed Baker, they were also the visual embodiment of a slice of Victorian martial verse by Macaulay, a poem in which 'the Twin Great Brethren appeared from the skies to fight in the ranks of Rome'. Here, crafted as the twin gods, Castor and Pollux, they elevated the 'comradship in arms of the two South African Races, fighting Englishman and Dutchman, the final true brotherhood of Briton and Boer'. For Baker, Turner's work would help to answer one of his major – and repeated – concerns about Delville Wood, that it not be a vehicle to propagate an abstract or universal message of peace. What mattered was that South African visitors to their National Memorial be reminded 'of the military meaning of the battle'. That, he dramatized, was a miraculous and exclusive action on the Somme, 'that Dutch and English, such recent enemies, had joined a sacrificial fight for the British Commonwealth against a common foe'.⁸²

In his extensive writings on the Memorial, Herbert Baker mostly viewed his commission as that of finding the right battlefield form to commemorate a European South African nationhood. Its colonial corner houses, positioned for the summer sun, stood for 'the two races of South Africa, in heroic unity'. The memorial's arch opened upon the wide acres of Delville Wood, standing at the head of a thoroughfare to the cemetery. In a sense, the dead of its graves were even to be envied, sacrifice having placed them in 'a Hall of Fame of the Great of both Races in South Africa, finding Triumphal Ascendancy on the European Battlefield'. The 'little memorial' was Rhodes re-fortified, a civilizing spirit sanctified by warfare, and 'a great symbol of final Union'. Upholding the vigilance of 'an armed brotherhood', the thrusting horse and warriors evoked a masculine ideal of 'selfless heroism, the instinct of our European races'. And the monument wall or 'ramparts' was the impenetrable governing 'crust' or 'skin' of South African white 'racial unity' under arms.⁸³

Indubitably, the Delville Wood process was a brand of battle area commemoration which sought to affirm the idea of war as a baptismal code of national achievement. Unlike Lutyens, whose brooding Cenotaph and Thiepval archwork were bleak signposts of the tragedy of mass bereavement, the architect of the South African epic was not one to succumb to gaunt desolation in expressing the meaning of terrible loss, an angle of interpretative meaning for war memorials upon which Jay Winter in particular has been so eloquent.⁸⁴

Taking enormous care over gradients and contours, proportionality and logic, Baker laid out a Delville Wood Cemetery within the

81. Greig, *Baker*, p. 186.

82. Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, p. 90.

83. FitzPatrick Papers, 62–81, Baker to Smuts, 16 Nov. 1923.

84. Winter, *Memory*, esp. pp. 78–116; 'Forms of Kinship and Remembrance in the Aftermath of the Great War', in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 54–56.

boundaries of the original wooded enclave, harmonized with the southernmost edge of what had been the Buchanan Street defensive line. By the early 1920s, this field contained around 5,000 graves, some 150 of these corpses identifiable South African soldiers; several hundred more of the dead were unknown, buried under collapsed trenches and in shell holes, or as unretrievable dismembered fragments, littering the churned up soil of the devastated Wood. Satisfied that the Cemetery had been integrated 'in conformity with this monument as a whole', Baker then laid down a broad avenue running up from its graves to the Memorial.⁸⁵

Through its arch and around its thick bastion wall, what had once been the densely forested heartland of the Battle of Delville Wood could be observed, slashed bare by the artillery fire of 1916. In the 1920s it was still levelled, but for a solitary surviving hornbeam tree, targeted for preservation as a relic. Part of the commemorative project was eventually to restore the area's natural undergrowth and smothering forest vistas, in a monumental effort of resurrectionary landscaping of the shattered site. South African press coverage of the Somme campaign had resonated with contrasting images of Springboks excelling in an essentially great war upon a green and mossy European battlefield, or stuck in humdrum, dusty bush campaigning in East Africa.

With battle in northern France already inscribed as a pastoral motif, renewed arable cultivation of the Delville Wood patch would in time almost empty it of vestiges of the terrifying dominion of industrialized mass warfare. In its larger aspect, the finished Memorial would register both the essential role of sacrificial battle as the midwife of national unity, and the notion of heroic death in combat on a green field viewed as both foreign yet familiar to colonial men of European stock.

Through the bunched masculinity of a bronzed infantry brotherhood, stalwart guardians of their cause, the fire of Delville Wood had come to 'sacralize' a mythical patriotic unity.⁸⁶ For figures like Smuts, FitzPatrick, Baker and Reitz, men still emotionally immersed in a 1916 world of kindred gallantry between English and Afrikaner patriots, the qualities attributed to Delville Wood were of special moral sustenance. Created as a pre-eminent 'national institution',⁸⁷ it had become the Union's first effective battle honour, proudly commemorating the passing of the ultimate test of the Somme. The country had now been left in good stead, with the 'Springbok Spirit of the fallen'⁸⁸ galvanizing the living to be ever vigilant in defence of its creed of democracy and liberty for its enfranchised minority.

Having acquired a new historic frontier, Delville Wood's Pretoria landowner worked to tidy it up in sylvan style. Between late-1920 and

85. Keath, *Baker*, p. 75.

86. FitzPatrick Papers, 62–8/1, Baker to Smuts, 6 Nov. 1924.

87. *African World*, 20 Dec. 1924.

88. *De Zwartlander*, 14 Nov. 1924; *Natal Mercury*, 19 Nov. 1924.

1924, all rough wooden crosses, makeshift cairns and other small personal memorials to dead Infantry Brigade comrades and some German soldiers were stripped from the battlefield in great scouring sweeps, with several South African crosses shipped back to be installed in churches in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.⁸⁹ With the Bishop of Johannesburg being the brother of General Furse of the 9th Division, Anglicans were no less taken by Delville Wood crosses and their rituals of homage than were Presbyterians and Methodists.

At the same time, aided by Britain's Kew Gardens, cool climate plants were cultivated at South Africa's Kirstenbosch Botanical Research Station and transported to France to assist in restoring undergrowth and in thickening vegetation.⁹⁰ As ever, anything but unobtrusive, Baker was closely involved, composing a tasteful layout and fixing a novel arrangement with the Imperial War Graves Commission for 'a collection of living plants from Delville Wood' to be deposited in return in Kirstenbosch Gardens. Cultivation 'of the native flora of Delville Wood', he suggested, 'would appeal strongly to South African sentiment', sharpening awareness of what had been achieved in France.⁹¹ Some near corner of the Cape Province was now forever to be Longueval.

Moreover, in an energetic and lavish tree-planting scheme to re-stock the battle arena as a 'sacred wood' or 'cathedral of the forest' for fallen Springbok heroes, acorns were collected from oaks first grown in the southwestern Cape Colony by eighteenth-century French Huguenot colonists, and implanted on the Memorial grounds. In one treasured (and well-publicized) act, soaked in symbolism, scatterings of oak seed from the Franschoek or 'French Corner' district were collected from Afrikaner-owned grape farms called 'Verdun', 'La Motte', and 'Burgundy', and transferred to Picardy through Kew Gardens.⁹²

As all this suggests, horticultural renewal was a striking part of the Delville Wood story as historical allegory. In 1915 and 1916, one focus of Union war propaganda had been the portrayal of overseas combatants as plucky carriers of a European 'civilizing' mission. Having borne the burden of civilizing their portion of the African continent in the nineteenth century, South Africans were declared to be taking up arms to 'cleanse' or 'purify' France and Belgium of the pestilence of an

89. FitzPatrick Papers, 62/8, vol.1, Report of work carried out at Delville Wood from 20 April 1922 to 7 May 1923.

90. *Natal Witness*, 19 Jan. 1926. The literary scholar Peter Merrington has argued that a cult of indigenous horticulture became a distinctive Cape stamp of purity and survival in the early twentieth century: 'Heritage, Genealogy and the Inventing of Union, South Africa 1910', Centre for African Studies, unpub. seminar paper, University of Cape Town, May 1997. Equally, enhanced public botanic activity after 1918 may well be seen as a way of signifying healing and restoration after the destruction of total war.

91. *Journal of the Botanical Society of South Africa*, ix (1923), 4.

92. *Worcester Advertiser*, 27 Feb. 1923.

'uncivilized and brutish Prussian tribe'.⁹³ Now, conveying acorns, saplings and flower bulbs, the descendants of those northern European colonists who had ventured out to subdue and improve the lands of Southern Africa were sailing back.

With war work accomplished, a peacetime need was to cultivate and civilize a corner of a ravaged France. To complete the task, Baker also called for expenditure on animals. In 1924, he was scouting for a stock of 'wild fallow deer' to be driven into the wood, to roam its rides as recognizable 'cousins to the Springbok'.⁹⁴ He appears not to have had in mind that this woodland adornment was equally – at least in retrospect – a strange and ominous reminder of slaughter, the fate of game at the hands of hunters and their shooting parties on the Scottish moors and the Transvaal highveld. Once again, he was lavished with praise for his attention to Delville Wood 'character' by an appreciative South African English press. As a Durban paper announced, the fecund soil of the Cape had virtually become 'the soil of Picardy'; in war, and in peace, South Africa stood 'steadfastly alongside' its enduring ally, France, a country with a shared indebtedness to Britain.⁹⁵

Delville Wood construction took place in the early 1920s, a time of pressure from Dominion governments for their own national monuments, and the busiest period in the shaping of a landscape of remembrance on the Western Front.⁹⁶ Stone quarried by British and French contractors was shipped in, and masons, gardeners and casual labourers were engaged from the Imperial War Graves Commission and French forestry authorities. From beginning to end, Herbert Baker remained in commanding control, fussing over every detail, making extended visits and pushing the enterprise along. Construction turned out to be far less protracted than some members of his Delville Wood Committee had expected.

Nor was financing any more difficult. Almost £67,000 was collected through South African as well as British public donations and the disposal of £10,000 of Union government stock. This flush state of affairs was undoubtedly helped by close connections with several of the very richest Randlords who were embracing the Delville Wood cause, such as Beit, who personally gave several hundred pounds. The comfortable result by the end of 1922 was that the public subscription list could be closed. Thereafter, the position of the Memorial Fund remained buoyant; with all outlay on construction met, it was left with a

93. *The Selbornian*, v (1918), 34.

94. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Maidenhead (CWG), 1049/11/5, Box 1075, Baker to H. Goodland, 28 Sept. 1924.

95. *Natal Witness*, 5 Sept. 1916.

96. Michael Hefferman, 'For Ever England: The Western Front and the Politics of Remembrance in Britain', *Ecumene*, ii (1995), 306.

surplus of over £19,000 which was ploughed into an endowment fund for annual caretaking and maintenance costs.⁹⁷

The National War Memorial was unveiled in October 1926, its inaugural fanfare abroad accompanied by simultaneous services at home to launch miniature replicas of the Herbert Baker monument in front of the Union Buildings, in the Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens, and in the original Dutch East India Company Gardens, close to Parliament, in Cape Town. These ceremonies were attended by local civic dignitaries, French consular officials, British Army and Union Defence Force officers, and a trickle of Delville Wood veterans. Fairly muted in tone, these local flowerings of commemoration tended to turn less upon the inspiration of the nation at arms, and more upon the stark solemnity of loss and bereavement, and upon the notion of a citizenship duty of faithfulness to the memory of fallen comrades.⁹⁸

In contrast, the commemoration in France was both resplendent and more insistently patriotic in its language of remembrance. For the *Cape Times* and the *Pretoria Friend*, the assembly near Longueval was a tribute to the 'precious memory' of 'English-Dutch racial unity in war',⁹⁹ while the *Natal Witness* saw the National Memorial as an ode 'to the memory of the Fallen, drawn from the great white stocks that form the South African people of today'.¹⁰⁰ Naturally, not everyone was as ecstatic. The Imperial War Graves Commission itself was quietly unimpressed, murmuring to Herbert that the monument looked 'rather in the nature of a battle exploit Memorial'.¹⁰¹ Black South African political organizations and their small press expressed little if any Delville Wood allegiance, embittered that observance seemed to provide no honouring recognition of the deaths of African support troops on active service. For its part, disdainful Afrikaner nationalist opinion pronounced the Somme activity to be 'little more than indoctrination', a 'doubtful gesture', or 'nothing but a tragedy'.¹⁰²

Efforts were made to try to persuade Smuts's successor as Prime Minister after the 1924 election, the Nationalist leader, J. B. M. Hertzog, not to participate in the Delville Wood opening, nor for his coalitionist Nationalist and Labour Party Pact government to have any official association with FitzPatrick's war memorial committee. As *De Burger* approvingly reminded its readers, Hertzog had served the imperial war effort badly by remaining aloof. Therefore, as for the grievous South African losses in the Battle of Delville Wood, these were 'assuredly not General Hertzog's fault, nor was he responsible for so needless and

97. CWG, 1049/1, Pt. 2, Box 1074, Finance Adviser to Director of Works, 4 Nov. 1925; FitzPatrick Papers, DB/AYIII, 1070/247, H. B. George to FitzPatrick, 8 May 1926.

98. *SA Railways and Harbours Magazine*, xvii (1926), 481–82.

99. *Cape Times*, 28 Oct. 1926; *Pretoria Friend*, 3 Nov. 1926.

100. *Natal Witness*, 25 Sept. 1926.

101. CWG, 1049/1, Pt. 6, Box 1126, Secretary, IWGC, to Lieut.-Col. G. Herbert, 16 May 1926.

102. *De Zwartlander*, 14 Sept. 1926; *De Volksblad*, 25 Sept. 1926.

wasteful a war'.¹⁰³ That responsibility lay with the South African Party's pro-war Smuts and his culpable War Cabinet backing of Haig and the Western Front.

Hertzog, nonetheless, swallowed hard and acceded to the Delville Wood Committee's request that he represent the Union government at the Memorial opening. In a rounded view which was probably too round for the occasion, his party then announced that he would be attending 'Delville Bos' on behalf of 'the Hollandse-Afrikaner' nation, to honour 'the innocent Afrikaners who fell in the World War', an unwanted conflict which had been 'all a tragedy'. By implication, this would incorporate dead insurgents of the wartime Afrikaner Rebellion, those guilty of treason, into Union war remembrance. But Hertzog was not so heavy-handed and partisan as to be indifferent to the moment, arguing for the need to acknowledge a national South Africanism, in which 'there can be no room for division now when our own men entered and died in such bitter conflict'.¹⁰⁴

All the same, he remained studiously aloof towards the British war connection. Instead of lipping the customary patriotic language of South African imperial fulfilment, Hertzog stressed that the Somme ordeal had cemented a new 'abiding friendship' in its creation of 'permanent bonds' between South Africa and France. Indeed, the power of the present commemoration was that it was hailing South African fighting men who had 'fallen in defence of France', having 'stood firm in its hour of greatest need'.¹⁰⁵ The Prime Minister seemed more eager to court Foch and Clemenceau than Haig and Lloyd George.

It fell to reassuring figures like FitzPatrick, John Buchan (author of the 1920 *The South African Forces in France*),¹⁰⁶ and Lord Buxton, Governor-General of the Union, to polish the empire loyalist message. With 'the best citizen of the empire' simply 'the best South African', the Great War battlefield had become 'the hallowed ground of empire overseas', its blood 'that of nation and empire, as one'.¹⁰⁷ In his closing words, 'Fitz' told the assembly that the 'burial place of Delville Wood has become the altar of a nation', turning its distance and remoteness from South Africa into a distinctive virtue. As a great site of official war memory, it was all the better for being maintained 'a world away', its New World martial vigour preserved by its location 'in a distant land'. The stature of Delville Wood would be sustained most effectively through its distant symbolism, preserved for eternity against change or

103. *De Burger*, 15 Apr. 1926.

104. *De Burger*, 25 Oct. 1926.

105. *Cape Times*, 23 Oct. 1926.

106. See Nasson, 'John Buchan, the Great War and Springbok Achievement', *John Buchan Journal*, xxviii (2003), 14–24.

107. *Delville Wood Commemorative Brochure*, 16 Oct. 1926, xiii.

decay by the reality that 'not one in a thousand of our people will ever see this Memorial'.¹⁰⁸

Percy FitzPatrick was not the only one who ended up at ease with the development of an overseas monument. Ironically, Herbert Baker, of all single-minded people, had also swung round towards its advocacy. During 1923, he had already declared to Smuts 'that this Sanctuary of Our Dead in France, though perhaps to be little visited, may in future generations become an increasingly sacred place' because of the haunting purity of its leafy solitude, and transcendence over 'babble' and grubby political 'dunces'. The proud defence of 'freedom' for which it stood, might well in future 'influence Dominion people to intervene to prevent this ever being the test of civilised nations again'.¹⁰⁹

In its figurative trajectory, the Somme commemorative rituals now yoked together almost the entire constellation of South African Great War experience. Delville Wood served as the European rib-cage of all 1914–18 remembrance, including the unromantic colonial field campaigns of German South West Africa and German East Africa, which had missed out on the prestige associated with a crusading expedition to take on warfare in Europe. An embalming Memorial inscription recalled 'our Immortal Dead, Who at the Call of Duty made The Great Sacrifice, and lie Buried on the Battlefields of Africa, Asia and Europe'. At the opening, speeches by Sir Douglas Haig and Marechal Joffre harked back to the kinship and shared duty of South African, British and French troops, underlining the special self-sacrifice of South Africans in journeying to the Somme to give up their lives for a better world.

Over 150 wreaths were laid by representatives of a range of institutions representing the Union's social elite. These ranged from the bristling masculinity of the Zululand Sons of England Society and the British Empire Kaffrarian Service League, to a middle-class roll call of old girl veterans of female war services and war widows, such as the Transvaal Mothers of the Great War. Naturally enough, the tartan camaraderie of the Union's Caledonian Societies was equally conspicuous, as was the vocal presence of Presbyterian clergymen, a reflection of the energetic Scottish Protestant tradition which had nourished the many South African 'Jockies' who had perished in Delville Wood.¹¹⁰ Other acts of individual pilgrimage were undertaken by the wealthy, the well-born and the powerful; among those who stood or queued from the front were the industrialist, Abe Bailey, the Duke of Atholl, and the government administrator, Sir Frederick de Waal.

In a Memorial dedication which bobbed uneasily between traditional themes of heroism and nationalism and a liturgy of Christian meditation, there was a measure of dignified balancing to try to reconcile

108. FitzPatrick Papers, 62/8, vol.1, FitzPatrick to Col. Christian, 31 Oct. 1924.

109. FitzPatrick Papers, 62–8/1, Baker to Smuts, 16 Nov. 1923.

110. *African World Supplement, Delville Wood Special Souvenir Edition*, 16 Oct. 1926, xi

two church worlds. To this end, the concluding Anglo-Afrikaner Christian affirmation sought to smooth over prickly wartime tensions over loyalty and war commitment between English churches and Afrikaner Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dutch Reformed Church) clerics. The sceptical NGK compromised by softening its Biblical message about the horror and futility of the war, a catastrophe to be preached on through the Books of Ezekiel and Revelations; Anglicans and Presbyterians compromised by moderating idioms of the 'glorious dead' and their sacrifice for 'British Commonwealth' freedoms.¹¹¹ The gap was bridged by a shared thread of South Africanism, with the ordeal of the Somme having lifted the gaze of people towards the final attainment of a mature sense of nationhood. Thus, the Bishop of St Albans and *Dominee* Marthinus van der Merwe jointly consecrated Delville Wood as 'a sacred milestone in national history', sanctifying its soil as South African ground, a 'boundary beacon in the history of western civilization'.¹¹²

Tucked in right at the end of the October proceedings in France were three private gestures of homage, well down the roll call of national remembrance. Leo Weinthal, warm-hearted and liberal Jewish editor of the London *African World*, laid a wreath to 'All South African Natives Who Gave Their Lives in the Great War'. A shower of petals from the Natal Indian Congress commemorated men of the South African Indian Bearer Corps. Lastly, Major William Cunningham remembered the sacrifice in German East Africa and Palestine of Cape Coloured Corps volunteers, many of whom had fought with distinction against superior Turkish forces in the 1918 desert Battle of Square Hill, virtually forgotten outside of working class Coloured communities in Kimberley and Cape Town. If these tributary visits were not quite doing justice to the widespread Great War sense of equality of loss, they were a slight salve to the honour of second or third class service in the Union Defence Force. For *Abantu-Batho*, for example, it meant that 'the worthy contribution' of 'loyal Bantu subjects of the Crown was not being completely forgotten'.¹¹³

On the contrary, however, for this side of the Union war record the execution of the 1926 event was precisely about forgetting and exclusion. The attitude of the Memorial Committee to a 1923 approach by an ex-Labour Contingent Colonel that there be an inscription to *Mendi* victims was, as its secretary noted, 'stony'.¹¹⁴ Ever to the point, Frances Newton, Southern Rhodesia's High Commissioner in London, observed to FitzPatrick that although 'one had to have Labour

111. FitzPatrick Papers, 62/8, vol.1, Sec., Delville Wood Committee, to Sir E. Walton, 24 Apr. 1925.

112. *Delville Wood Commemorative Brochure*, 1926, xix.

113. *African World Supplement*, xi; *Abantu-Batho*, 1 Oct. 1926.

114. FitzPatrick Papers, DB/AXII, 1074/48, Sec., Delville Wood Committee, to Sir E. Walton, 17 Mar. 1924.

Battalions' and 'coloured troops', they could not 'expect in an affair like this to be recognised' as if they were 'our fighting men'.¹¹⁵

The message propagated by this imposing centrepiece of commemoration was indebtedness to the nation in arms, defined by the European exploits of white Springboks or *le Zulu blanc*. To be sure, then, the Somme monument and the annual Delville Days which pulsed around it, fittingly reflected the mood of a racially segregated colonial order. Delville Wood was also distinctive among most comparable national forms of Allied war remembrance in its heroic affirmation of arms. In its memorializing form and purpose there was little sense if any of prevailing mythic notions of equality of sacrifice, or of comprehension of the war's communal social loss, without discrimination of colour or class. The calculation of this National Memorial was that it should elicit 'historical' feeling about the character of South African arms and blood sacrifice.

In this respect, Delville Wood was the invention of the patriotic tradition of a non-republican Anglo-Afrikaner people, governing a white Dominion state taxed and not found wanting by war, and able in victory to commemorate the virtue of sacrificial valour. As a breathless correspondent to *The Star* exclaimed in December 1926, 'the magnificent inspiration of our Delville Wood heritage' would ensure 'an everlasting perpetuation of that Springbok spirit', perpetually at the ready 'whenever the call should come', for another 'march' upon 'the battlefields for civilisation, wherever in the world these may lie'.¹¹⁶

This was the political and civic setting in which local 'agents of remembrance'¹¹⁷ sought to build public war commemoration in their own image. In this, they were firmly in control. It is small wonder that through the later-1920s, 1930s and 1940s, Delville Day and Armistice Day commemoration at the Memorial and in the Union, including annual Western Front pilgrimages by ex-servicemen's associations, provided a patriotic touchstone for a pro-empire Anglophone elite. Its old breeding ground of collegiate schools, Caledonian Societies, Presbyterian benefit clubs and the like, continued to bear the imprint of a male volunteer service culture in which 'Springboks' clubbed together as 'Dukes' or 'Rhodesian Highlandry', in a mental universe governed by an antiquarian concern with British 'blood' kinship and identity.¹¹⁸

Embedded in it all was nothing like the wider collective ritual of nationhood through war associated with an Australian or New Zealand Anzac Day; what the Union had created was 'Delville Wood Day for white South Africans'. At the same time, in another world of war and

115. FitzPatrick Papers, DB/AXII, 1074/48, Sir F. Newton to FitzPatrick, 15 Apr. 1926.

116. *The Star*, 8 Dec. 1926.

117. As used by Jay Winter, 'Kinship and Remembrance', p. 59.

118. FitzPatrick Papers, DALC1, 1047/116, Sec., Sons of England Patriotic and Benevolent Society, to Smuts, 10 Apr. 1924; *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 3 Aug. 1936; *Diocesan College Magazine*, xxv (1927), 62.

remembrance, detached from the state, annual African commemoration became wreathed in the heritage and mythology of a February *Mendi* Day, a Delville Wood counterpart 'for the black people of South Africa',¹¹⁹ with its own iconography of marches, religious ceremonies, poetry, war dances, educational scholarships and veterans' *Mendi* Memorial Club activity coursing into rising African nationalist sentiment.

For its part, renovated by new warfare after 1939, the focus of Delville Wood through the Second World War was the retrieval of an ethical code of 'honour', 'indebtedness', and undiminished loyalty to 'fallen comrades'.¹²⁰ For the *Rand Daily Mail*, the Somme was inscribed, 'always with us ... a pasture of heroic khaki Springboks' acting as a moral compass for present action.¹²¹ This sombre reiteration of Great War memory aided in fortifying national and empire loyalism against a domestic enemy of pro-German Afrikaner republican subversives, and in egging on volunteer service in the Union Defence Force. Above all, it again reflected the idea of duty beyond national boundaries, rooted in the 1940 'Red Tab' and later 1943 service oaths, in which men committed their bodies for combat in Africa and further afield, and not just for home defence.¹²² To some wartime observers, this was the instinctive Delville Wood 'test' of service obligation, a commitment 'across land and seas' to a collective British Commonwealth effort.¹²³ Once again, it offered something which had not been lost, the image of a supreme Somme sacrifice by 'our loyal warband of Scottish gazelles'.¹²⁴ And, as Prime Minister once again, Smuts was there with his devotion to empire duty.

Of course, it is also a commonplace of the expanding cultural history of the Great War that its legacy of memorials and commemoration could not carry fixed or immutable meanings over time: memorialization of past warfare has always been subject to revision, by being re-composed.¹²⁵ For those linked to its primary legacy, Delville Wood remembrance was subject, inevitably, to new accretions and to the

119. Clothier, *Black Valour*, p. 175.

120. *Cape Times*, 16 July 1940; *The Star*, 5 Aug. 1941; *Pretoria Friend*, 10 Sept. 1943.

121. *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 Dec. 1939.

122. The 'Red Tab' was an orange shoulder flash on khaki issue. For the oath issue and Allied service, see Ian Phimister, 'South Africa', in *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War*, ed. I. C. B. Dear (Oxford, 1995), p. 1026; Nasson, 'South Africa', in *The Great World War 1914-45*, vol. 2, ed. Peter Liddle, John Bourne and Ian Whitehead (London, 2001), p. 246.

123. *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 Sept. 1940; *Zululand Times*, 2 Nov. 1940.

124. *Diocesan College Magazine*, xxxvii (1941), 17.

125. See, for example, Bob Bushaway, 'Name upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance', in *Myths of the English*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge, 1992), esp. pp. 143-61; Catherine Moriarty, 'Private Grief and Public Remembrance: British First World War Memorials', in *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Martin Evans and Ken Lunn (Oxford, 1997), pp. 125-42; K. S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne, 1998), pp. 75-122, 451-65; Gregory, *Silence of Memory*, esp. pp. 149-83, 212-27; Winter, *Sites of Memory*, esp. pp. 78-116; and, particularly for the present argument, George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York, 1990).

legitimizing imperatives of incoming political orders. Thus, the welling up of an Afrikaner nationalist movement between the First World War and the 1940s acquired a disruptively different roll-call of sacrifice and martyrdom. So, following the 1948 accession to power by the National Party, representing an anti-British imperialist tradition which had opposed participation in both World Wars, Delville Wood swiftly became converted to serve other visions of a national past. The new government installed a Voortrekker Cross of Sacrifice on the site, linking battle on the Somme to the nineteenth-century legacy of the Great Trek and Boer wars of colonization against African 'savages', or battles of European Christian civilization against African 'barbarism'.¹²⁶ Soon, there was more. In 1952, the Memorial was 're-dedicated' amidst a thicket of Cabinet Ministers, and a new World War Two Stone of Remembrance unveiled to the more recent fallen.¹²⁷

Addressing the pilgrimage party, Britain's Secretary of State for War praised the laying down of further 'visible evidence' of 'the ideals for which South African people of the Commonwealth' were 'prepared to sacrifice their lives'. H. T. Andrews, a Johannesburg figure who knew about the preservation of assets, pledged that his land 'would not fail' the 'gallantry and devotion' of those who had died for the 'maintenance and development of a united South Africa, in a spirit of peace and brotherly fellowship'.¹²⁸ At the same time, a funding application from the South African Legion to the Governor-General's National War Fund for a pilgrimage by grieving widows and parents, on the grounds that paying tribute to the dead would further healing and 'rehabilitation', was turned down as its motivation was 'sentimental' rather than 'practical'.¹²⁹

Through preservationist rituals of re-consecration, South Africa's post-1948 apartheid order sought not only to yoke the Union to the rhetoric of freedom, democracy, hope and civilization associated with the Allied cause in the World Wars. The resonance of Delville Wood in the social memory of white South Africa made it a useful political conduit, enabling a ruling Nationalist leadership to re-invent and memorialize what had, in effect, been their forgotten twentieth-century wars. Commencing in the early 1950s, acts of official homage on both South African and French soil to Union Defence Force sacrifice in two World Wars was one prominent way for some leading National Party figures to try to divorce themselves from their recent pro-Nazi Germany war record.

By adept appropriation of remembrance, a mixed past of opposition to war or even of being sympathetic to the enemy, could be sanitized. In

126. *Cape Times*, 3 Aug. 1950; *The Star*, 8 Aug. 1950.

127. *South Africa*, 2 Aug. 1950; *The Times*, 2 June 1952; *Die Kerkbode*, lxxi (1953), 291.

128. CWG, Add. 1/1/60, Box 1074, Delville Wood Cemetery, 1952.

129. University of Cape Town Archives, Molteno Papers, BC579, SAL/KAP 50/1496/2, Twelfth Annual Report, 30 June 1952.

a fairly vintage piece of historical irony, D. F. Malan, the first post-1948 Prime Minister, stopped at Delville Wood early in the 1950s, dedicating his trip to France as a tribute to the future of 'democracy', on a site hallowed by the Christian blood of South Africa's 'fallen heroes'.¹³⁰ Three decades earlier, as a minor Interior Ministry official, he had been reprimanded for 'discourtesy' in spurning a request for assistance from the Delville Wood Memorial Committee.¹³¹

Indeed, a mordant kind of historical irony seemed fated to remain embedded in the life history of the national memorial, never more so than in the post-Second World War period. This has resonated at different levels. Conservation of Delville Wood's green and silent acres remained both touchy and tactful, drawing on a kind of rustic pacifism. Yet it was always caught in the incidental shadow of the Great War. In the 1950s, a request from Longueval hunters for access to game was turned down by the Paris embassy, citing the risk of 'accidents or damage' from 'any shooting on the premises'.¹³² A decade later, a caretaker request to do away with 'the infestation of rabbits in Delville' by 'gassing' was judged 'too inhumane'.¹³³

It was the allusions surrounding the Delville Wood monument itself which grew increasingly ambiguous in public perception. In a particularly pronounced way it had grown as a palimpsest, exhibiting the death and victory of imperial Anglo-Afrikaners, the outpouring of its 1920s creators, and in later decades acquiring traces of a very different invention, as the ideologues of early apartheid stitched their version of Christian service and sacrifice into a national epic. Moreover, in another important respect, as the contemporary story of South Africa became the story of apartheid, it became more thorny to lay claim to the territory of European war sacrifice; gradually, Delville Wood became sullied by that history.

Its changing fortunes could already be seen by the early 1970s. Although Delville Wood was designated as the best location for a new nursery from which to service Commonwealth war graves, due to its 'excellent appearance' and the 'integrity of the site', advisers cautioned that use of a South African area would be 'politically sensitive'.¹³⁴ Losing historical ground and political grip through the 1970s and 1980s, increasingly resentful South African diplomats in France did not hide their disappointment on occasions such as Delville and Armistice Days. Instead of acknowledging the loyalty of a nation which identified fully with the West and had sacrificed in wars for its causes, in pushing South Africa out into the cold Western conduct had become shameful and

130. *Pretoria Friend*, 6 Aug. 1952.

131. FitzPatrick Papers, 62-8/2, W. Menzies to D.F. Malan, 16 Sept. 1923.

132. CWG, 1049/1, Pt. 5, Box 1124, J. Fourie to Brig. C.S. Vale, 10 Sept. 1958.

133. CWG, 1049/1, Pt. 6, Box 1126, Embassy Sec. to G. Webster, 16 Feb. 1969.

134. CWG, WG 1049/1, Pt. 8, Box 1127, Director-General (IWC, Northern Region), extract from notes on cemeteries and memorials visit, 24-28 Apr. 1971.

dishonourable. This attitude, as the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* quoted the Ambassador to France remarking plaintively on one such occasion, was both 'regrettable' and 'undeserving'.¹³⁵

Once again, the Delville Wood picture was refurbished, this time by a dramatic reinforcement of its message of national political conviction in war. In 1983, President P. W. Botha initiated a Delville Wood Commemorative Museum as a capital project to be completed for the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, thereby fertilizing 'South Africa's hallowed ground in a foreign land'.¹³⁶ Grafted on to Baker's Memorial and inaugurated in November 1986, the museum became housed within a large replica of Cape Town's seventeenth-century Dutch East India Company castle, Southern Africa's first permanent colonial fortification. With its pentagon shape also serving as the insignia of the Republic of South Africa Defence Force, it conflated a fortified European imperial past with a besieged apartheid present.

An ambitious museum circuit of documentary illustration and commemorative art bracketed remembrance of the Great War with imagery of the South African war effort in the Second World War, the Korean War, and in the Cold War. Its purpose, according to the official exhibition guide, was to depict 'the full story of South African participation in Wars of the Free World'.¹³⁷ Enlarging the frame of official memory through a new myth of national unity, the museum reflected 'South Africa's united resolve to fight, to sacrifice, and to die for civilised traditions of the Free World . . . regardless of colour or creed'.¹³⁸ In its illustrative composition, black servicemen in the World Wars were accorded recognition as camp followers of the Springboks of 1916, in saintly tribute to faithful duty as medical orderlies, stretcher-bearers, drivers, guards and in other auxiliary roles.

In the words of the penultimate President of the apartheid state, Delville Wood remembrance was not merely a reminder to Europeans of past South African sacrifice for 'our common cause of liberty and democracy'; it was also the mirror of an iron national character, vigilant in defence against any enemy threat to the 'civilized values' of South Africa's Western European heritage. Armed patriots would 'continue to fight' in order to 'uphold the values for which our brave men died here at Delville Wood'.¹³⁹ Past and present dissolved in this fabricated moment of historical meaning, as the fires of Soweto became the fires of Delville Wood, and the raiding parties sent against anti-apartheid guerrilla camps became the storming trench parties of the Somme. In a seamless horizon of war commemoration, South African sacrifice in the Battle of

135. *Sunday Times*, 12 Nov. 1988.

136. *Die Burger*, 26 Sept. 1983.

137. *Delville Wood Commemorative Museum* (1986), 3.

138. *South African Panorama*, ii (1986), 8; *The Delville Wood Memorial Book* (1991), 21.

139. *Rapport*, 12 Nov. 1986.

the Somme was turned into a parable of endurance 'of all times and all battlefields',¹⁴⁰ an eternal stand against aggression.

At the heart of P. W. Botha's Delville Wood pilgrimage of the 1980s lay a belief that through re-creation, there could be a way back into that Allied country of remembrance from which an Afrikaner Nationalist South Africa had been exiled. Of course, for South Africa it took the end of apartheid and a post-1994 return to the Commonwealth to see that full return. As for the Delville Wood site, there is a new national flag but no other rhetorical inventions to signal a post-apartheid history. Almost two decades ago, on seeing pictures of the 1980s monument project, one of the last remaining survivors of the Battle of Delville Wood was moved to observe that 'historical ironies are certainly abundant, and we should all do well to dwell upon them'.¹⁴¹ By and large, they continue to blanket this commemoration of the fallen.

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140. *Rapport*, 15 Nov. 1986.

141. *Sunday Times*, 28 Oct. 1986.