



# The South African Military History Society

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## Die Suid-Afrikaanse Krygshistoriese Vereniging

Founded 1966

P.O. Box 59227  
Kengray  
2100 South Africa

Tel (+27) 010-237-0676  
Fax (+27) 086-617-8002

Email: [scribe@samilitaryhistory.org](mailto:scribe@samilitaryhistory.org)  
Web: <http://samilitaryhistory.org>

## NEWSLETTER - MAY 2012

This year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 12 April, was attended by a large number of 70 members, which must be a record turn-out for such an occasion. There are many other local Societies which would dearly love to have that sort of number at their AGM.

The meeting followed the usual format. After the preliminaries, the outgoing Chairman, Ivor Little, presented his report and thanked each member of the Committee for their sterling support over the past year. The Society's membership as a whole is down slightly to 511 members, but the Gauteng branch is showing a steady growth and good attendance figures. The Branch has, in addition to its normal monthly lecture evenings, been very active in erecting and re-furbishing military memorials; answering historical queries; running tours and the publishing of our Journal.

The Secretary/Treasurer, Mrs Joan Marsh, followed on with the Financial Report and members were pleased to hear that the finances are healthy and that there would be no increase in subscription for the coming year.

The new Branch and National Chairman was then elected. This is Mrs. Marjorie Dean, a well-known long-serving committee member and a frequent speaker at Gauteng and other branches.

Colin Dean then came forward to announce the prize-winning speakers. After explaining the voting procedure, Colin announced that the winner of the "George Barrell Memorial Prize" for the best curtain-raiser lecture was Peter James Smith for his lecture "Professor Liebig's Miracle Invention or the 19th Century Military Food Revolution". Peter came forward and collected a framed certificate and a cash prize of R100.

The winner of the "Dr Felix Machanik Memorial Prize" for the best main lecture (a framed certificate and a cash prize of R200) was Tony van Ryneveld for his lecture "The Flight of Sir Pierre van Ryneveld and Quinton Brand in 1920". Unfortunately, Tony lives in Cape Town and thus was not able to accept his prize personally. The prize will be couriered down to him.

The formalities of the AGM thus concluded, Marjorie introduced the speaker for the evening. This was our well-known member and ex-committee member, John Murray, who has addressed the Gauteng Branch on several occasions in the past. His subject was "Operation Mincemeat - The Man Who Never Was". John

started off by reminding those old enough to remember of the 1956 award-winning film "The Man Who Never Was". Although based on fact, this film took a few liberties with the truth. John then proceeded to give the true story, as revealed by more recently opened archives regarding World War II.

In 1943, the war in North Africa was drawing to a close and the victorious allies were contemplating their next step, the invasion of Europe itself. With all of North Africa in their possession, the next logical step would be to attack the "soft under-belly of Europe" through the north coast of the Mediterranean. The obvious answer was the short hop across from Tunisia to Sicily, although this would be a move that the Axis powers would anticipate. Other possibilities were to strike through Greece into Yugoslavia or to land on Sardinia, as a stepping stone to Southern France. Each of these could be expected to be anticipated by the enemy. It was decided to launch an attack on Sicily, code-named "Operation Husky". The problem then arose as to how to deceive the Axis about the Allied intentions.

The problem was passed to the London Controlling Section, under Lt. Col. John H Bevan who, in turn, co-opted Lt. Col. Dudley Wrangle Clarke of "A Force" in Cairo. These two concocted an elaborate plan to convince the Axis that the Allies intended launching a two-pronged attack through Greece and Sardinia, simultaneously with a feint on Sicily to distract the Axis Forces there. Phantom armies and forces were moved around by wireless, to re-enforce their concept, and care was taken that these messages would be intercepted by the Germans in Italy. Hitler was informed and this information rang very true to him, as he feared a strike through the Balkans, while from Sardinia the Allies could land in Northern Italy or Southern France and cut off vast numbers of German troops. The next step was to re-enforce this false information and Bevan and one of his assistants, Cdr. Ian Fleming (the writer), came up with an ingenious plan, adopted from a crime novel written by Basil Thompson. A corpse, dressed as an airman, with despatches in his pockets, could be dropped on the coast, supposedly from a parachute that had failed.

John then went into great detail as to how this was done to deceive the Germans. The plan was refined so that the airman became a Royal Marine Officer, with a briefcase containing secret papers manacled to his wrist. His pockets contained up-to-date personal items and letters, and he appeared to be the survivor of a plane crash. A suitable body, in good condition and with the symptoms of drowning, was searched for and found. This was Glyndwr (pronounced Glendower) Michael, a homeless Welsh derelict, whose family connections had long since been broken.

Michael became Captain (Acting Major) William "Bill" Martin, with all of the fictitious ID documents, and a complete false biography which would bear checking by German Intelligence. Documents detailing the proposed fictitious landings were placed in his briefcase and Martin, as he was, was ready for action. He was carried down to Huelva, 50 miles north of Gibraltar, by the submarine HMS *Seraph*, and there slipped quietly over the side. The prevailing current carried him towards the shore and on the morning of 30 April 1943 he was found by a Spanish sardine fisherman. The authorities were notified and the body taken to Huelva. The British Consul was notified and the body claimed. However, in the interim, the pro-German Spanish authorities in Huelva secretly went through Martin's pockets and briefcase and passed the information therein on to the Germans. The British were duly grateful for the Spanish co-operation and Martin's body was buried ceremoniously in the local Huelva cemetery. The Germans were grateful also. The information confirmed Hitler's worst fears and moves were immediately set afoot to strengthen the garrisons in Greece and Southern France.

On 10 July 1943 the Allied invasion of Sicily took place, but true to plan, was at first mistakenly regarded by the Germans - whose unstrengthened forces were rapidly overwhelmed by the Allied Expeditionary Force

- as a feat. "Operation Mincemeat" had succeeded brilliantly and the man who never was had carried out his task to perfection. Years later, the true identity of "Major Martin" was revealed and the name of Glyndwr Michael added to Martin's tombstone in Huelva. The drifting Welsh derelict had, in death, done his country an immeasurable service.

At the conclusion of John's talk, Marjorie called upon Colin Dean to thank the speaker and then closed the meeting, after which the members present adjourned for the usual refreshments.

P.S. A member who was on the Pretoria tour on Saturday, 10 March, left his blue-and-white striped folding chair in the luggage compartment of the bus.

If anyone has found this chair, please phone Paul on 011-442-7354.

*Ivor Little,  
Scribe.*

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### **Financial report**

Any member wanting a copy of the 2011 financial report is welcome to contact [joan@trolleyScan.com](mailto:joan@trolleyScan.com) or at the letterhead address and she will send a copy to them.

# FORTHCOMING LECTURES

## Johannesburg:

**10<sup>th</sup> May**

Film - **The true story of Roger Bushell** - the S.A. born RAF squadron leader who masterminded the Great Escape of WW II

There will be no curtain raiser because of the running time of the film.

**14<sup>th</sup> June**

CR **Charles Ross**

**The work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission**

ML **Ken Gillings**

**The Art of War ; Lt.Col. J.N. Crealock's Anglo-Zulu War watercolours – then and now**

## KZN in Durban:

**10<sup>th</sup> May**

DDH **Jeremy Day**

**My experiences as a NSM Gunner in Op. Savannah, 1976.**

Main **Donald Davies**

**Tunnels from the Frontier Forts.**

**14th June**

DDH **Jean Beater**

**Heritage and Environmental Assessments**

Main **Prof Philip Everitt**

**Maj Gen Sir Charles Warren in Northern Natal**

## Cape Town:

**10<sup>th</sup> May**

**Prof Derrick Dickens**

**The SAAF's role in the Korean War**

## SAMHSEC:

**14th May 2012 at the EP Veteran Car Club in Port Elizabeth**

18h30 **World at war series episode**

**Home Fires: Britain (1940–1944)**

CR **Anne Irwin**

**Solferino**

ML **Franco Cilliers**

**The Battle of Jutland**

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### Contact details

**For Cape Town details contact Ray Hattingh 021-592-1279(am) ray@saarp.co.za**

**For Eastern Cape details contact Malcolm Kinghorn 041-373-4469 culturev@lantic.net**

**For KwaZulu-Natal details contact Ken Gillings 031-702-4828 ken.gillings@mweb.co.za**

**For Gauteng details contact Joan Marsh 010-237-0676 scribe@samilitaryhistory.org**