MEDIA RELEASE

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SOUTH AFRICAN WAR DEAD HONOURED THROUGH NEW TECHNOLOGY

The vast contribution made by South African servicemen and women during the two world wars are revealed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission through its use of the latest mobile phone technology.

The initiative is part of a drive by the Commission to ensure that those who died, and in particular the lesser known contributions made by South Africans, is never forgotten.

During the two world wars, South Africans from all sections of society, made a vital contribution to allied victory. More than 21,000 of them died. The stories of some of these men and women will be told using the latest smartphone technology at the cemeteries and memorials around the globe where they are buried and commemorated. Two of the latest sites to benefit from this initiative are the Hollybrook Memorial in Southampton, UK and Delville Wood Cemetery in France.

Using new interactive panels – combined with a QR or Quick Response barcode – the Commission is able to reveal the stories of men like The Reverend Isaac Wauchope Dyobha and the tragic loss of the SS Mendi, on which 616 South Africans died. The Reverend Dyobha is reported to have calmed the men as the ship sank.

The SS Mendi left Cape Town on 25 January 1917, carrying the last contingent of the South African Native Labour Corps destined for France. In dense fog on the night of 21 February, the vessel was struck by another ship and sank within 25 minutes. Many of those who died on board the SS Mendi are commemorated by the Commission at the Southampton (Hollybrook) Memorial in the United Kingdom.

Delville Wood Cemetery, near the site of the South African National Memorial at Delville Wood in France, also features these new information panels.

The South African Infantry Brigade attacked Delville Wood in July 1916 as part of the Battle of the Somme. The brigade initially made strong gains before being checked by stiff German resistance. Surrounded on three sides and ordered to hold the wood ‘at all costs’, the South Africans fought without relief for six days. When they were finally relieved, their ammunition completely spent, only 755 men from a force of 3,153 were left standing.

These two locations are among 500 worldwide where the Commission is installing this new form of information panel. A further 16 panels are planned for cemeteries in South Africa and Namibia.

For more details contact:

Ends.
Notes for editors:

1. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (www.cwgc.org)
South Africa is one of six founding Commonwealth member countries of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The Commission maintains the graves of the 1.7 million Commonwealth servicemen and women who died during the two world wars. It also holds and updates an extensive and accessible records archive.

The Commission operates in over 23,000 locations in 153 countries across all continents except for Antarctica.

2014-2018: A series of high-profile worldwide events will take place to mark the centenary of the First World War, many of which will take place at Commission sites. The Commission will ensure that these sites are maintained at the highest standard and is installing information panels at over 500 sites to enhance the visitor experience. Smartphone users will also be able to access additional information, including the personal stories of some of those buried at the site.

The Commission provides teachers and youth workers with a comprehensive range of educational resources and support materials so that future generations remain engaged in the work of the Commission and continue to remember those who died in the two world wars.

2. The South African (Delville Wood) National Memorial and Delville Wood Cemetery
This Memorial is dedicated to all South Africans of all theatres of war. The Memorial is a flint and stone structure, with a shelter at each end and in the middle an arch, surmounted by figures of a horse and two men in bronze. It was opened in October 1926.

Delville Wood Cemetery was made after the Armistice, when graves were brought in from a few small cemeteries and isolated sites, and from the battlefields. Almost all of the burials date from July, August and September 1916. There are now over 5,500 burials and commemorations of the First World War in this cemetery. The cemetery was designed by Sir Herbert Baker

Use the following link to access the personal stories available at this location http://www.cwgc.org/microsites/delville-wood-cemetery.aspx

3. Southampton (Hollybrook) Cemetery
Southampton (Hollybrook) Cemetery contains 113 burials from the First World War and 186 burials from the Second World War. It also contains the Hollybrook Memorial which commemorates by name almost 1,900 servicemen and women of the Commonwealth land and air forces whose graves are not known, many of whom were lost in transports or other vessels torpedoed or mined in home waters. It also bears the names of those who were lost or buried at sea, or who died at home but whose bodies could not be recovered for burial.

Use the following link to access the personal stories available at this location http://www.cwgc.org/microsites/southampton-(hollybrook)-cemetery.aspx
4. Let us Die Like Brothers
‘Let us die like brothers’ is an educational CD-Rom from the Commission that tells the story of the SS Mendi, the men on board and their legacy. The resource is available to teachers with supporting lesson plans. To request a copy contact education@cwgc.org