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**LT- GEN GEO. E. BRINK CB CBE DSO**



**1889 - 1971**

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TRIBUTE

to

Lieutenant-General George Edwin Brink, Companion (Military Division) of the Order of the Bath, Additional Commander of the Military Division of the Order of the British Empire; Member of the Distinguished Service Order, Croix de Guerre (avec palmes); Grand Officer of the Order of Oranje Nassau (with swords); Knight of Grace of the Order of St. John, on the occasion of the official naming of The Geo. E. Brink Hall and the opening of The Geo. E. Brink Exhibition at the S.A. National War Museum by the Hon. Minister of National Education and of Social Welfare and Pensions on 29 September, 1973.

Born at

Jagersfontein, 27 September 1889;

Died at

Port Shepstone, 30 April 1971.

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## Introduction

by

Colonel G.R. Duxbury

Director, S.A. National War Museum

On 19 February 1973 the Trustees of the South African National War Museum unanimously decided that they should honour the name and memory of Lieutenant-General Geo. E. Brink, CB, CBE, DSO, who served on the Board of Trustees, as Ministerial Representative of the Department of National Education, from 25 October 1946 to 31 October 1969 - the last twelve years as Chairman. The Minister of National Education (now, also of Social Welfare and Pensions), Senator the Hon. J.P. van der Spuy, was approached and asked to approve the naming of one of the Museum's two halls after him in recognition of his outstanding services to the Museum during his period of office as a Trustee. To this the Minister gladly agreed and expressed his personal pleasure at being asked to name the hall and open the Geo. E. Brink Exhibition at an official ceremony at the Museum on Saturday, 29 September 1973.

The pages that follow record some of the achievements of this distinguished South African General. His achievements in the military field are well known to most servicemen and to nearly all ex-servicemen and women. As the story of his life unfolds it will be seen that he had many interests and that the Museum was the most important of these during his last twenty-five years.

After he was elected Chairman on 28 October 1957, I had the pleasure of seeing him almost daily, as he lived only a few hundred paces away from the Museum. During our very close association I came to know a great deal about him and understand the special qualities which had inspired the name of 'Uncle George'. He was the quintessence of kindness and his generosity knew no bounds. Lest any reader should think that this sobriquet signified a lack of respect or discipline, I can assure him that nothing could be farther from the truth. Not only did it testify to the affection in which he was held by all who served under him, but I have heard him so addressed by his fellow General Officers. Never could the oft-heard description, 'an officer and a gentleman' be more fittingly applied than in the case of Lt-Gen Brink.

I think I can claim to have come closer to knowing him than probably anyone except his immediate family. He was a big man in every sense of the word - in his prime he stood 6'-4" in his socks - but his bigness went far beyond the mere physical. His heart was big and he was more forgiving and forbearing than anyone I have ever met. His severest critics were often at a loss to understand his turning the other cheek in the face of a verbal onslaught or adverse letter to the Press. His replies were always truthful and to the point and invariably took the wind out of the sails of all but the most obstinate and ill-mannered. His ability to react without rancour was inspired by an absolute sense of duty. His personal discomfiture was always of minor importance.

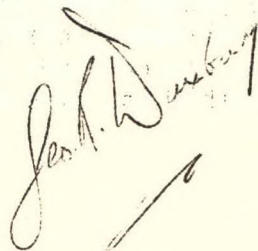
In reading his letters and his writing on many subjects, one cannot fail to be impressed by the nobility of his character - he stands out as a man of great moral and physical courage, a fine leader of men, who thought big and who was always quick in his grasp of a difficult situation.

He was born into a chivalrous age but, even if judged by the high standards of a dying generation, he was well above average and stood out among his fellow men as a beacon of light on a dark sea.

The Museum is indeed deeply in his debt. His enthusiasm knew no bounds and he never considered his time his own but something to be bestowed where it was most needed. His guidance and help, when the Museum was passing through a difficult stage, was largely responsible for lifting my morale from the depths to which it often sank and, in so doing, helped place the Museum in its present position, high on the list of South Africa's most active and popular institutions. As its Director I personally benefited by his wisdom and willingness to help and for this I shall always be grateful.

The name George Edwin Brink deserves to live on. It is, therefore, fitting that a hall at the Museum be named to perpetuate for this and future generations of South Africans his memory and his great contribution to this Museum.

JOHANNESBURG  
27 September 1973.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Geo. E. Brink", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right below the name.

## ANCESTRY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

On both his father's and his mother's side, George Edwin Brink could claim that he was descended from the root-stock of the early Cape settlers. His South African progenitor, Andries Brink, hailed from the Netherlands, and was referred to as a 'burger of Stellenbosch' in the marriage register which records that he married Sophia Grove on 13 July 1738. As far as can be ascertained, Sophia's father, Andreas Grové, arrived at the Cape in about 1719.

Sophia and Andries Brink had four children and George Edwin Brink was descended from the second child, Jan Godlieb, who was born in 1741. George Edwin's father, Johan Godlieb Brink, was born on 3 February 1857.

His mother, Elizabeth Magaritha Magdalena Hartogh, was descended from Abraham Hartogh who arrived in South Africa in 1683. Both the Brinks and the Hartoghs appear to have been early settlers in the Orange Free State, and indeed the ground, on which Fauresmith was laid out, was transferred to the Dutch Reformed Church by his maternal great-grandfather in 1859. In about 1870, diamonds were discovered at Jagersfontein, seven miles from Fauresmith, but it was not until 1878 that the diamond-field was systematically worked. The government appointed officials to supervise the mine workings and established a committee of management for the new township.

Mr Johan Godlieb Brink became the secretary of the Board of Management of Jagersfontein where George Edwin Brink was born on 27 September 1889.

In his unpublished 'Reminiscences of G.E.B.' the General has left us a fascinating picture of the early days of Jagersfontein. His father must have been a great raconteur and the son equally enthusiastic concerning the details of life in the town. Indeed his father seems to have instilled in the General a high regard for attention to detail at an early age. This is one of the characteristics which spring to mind when one examines the mass of records deposited by the General, not only with his family and the Museum, but also in the South African Defence Force Archives and the O.F.S. Archives.

Of his childhood under the guidance of loving and devoted parents, the General retained vivid and happy memories. One of the stories he delighted to tell concerned a family visit to Cape Town. One night his father woke him and carried him outside to watch the pipe band of the Cape Town Highlanders

march past in all their kilted finery. The sight made a great impression on the seven year-old boy who remembered the incident all his life. In later life he often said that it gave rise to the first stirrings of his desire to become a soldier. At all events he always had a 'soft spot' for the Cape Town Highlanders.

#### EDUCATION AND EARLY CAREER

He received his early education at the local government school until it closed on 27 March 1900 when the British occupied Jagersfontein.

At the outbreak of the South African War in October 1899, Mr J.G. Brink was Landdrost of Jagersfontein. As he was medically unfit for military service he was ordered by the Free State Government to remain at his post. For the duration of the war the Brink family of father, mother, two sons and two daughters were to find conditions very different from their previous life of security and comfort. Before Jagersfontein was captured by the British, young George Brink came into contact with two men who made a lasting impression on him. One was General Piet Cronjé and the other Battery Sergeant-Major (as he then was) van Deventer with whom, in later years, he was to serve in several capacities.

Through a misunderstanding Mr J.G. Brink, lost his official position and was arrested and sent to Bloemfontein by the British on Christmas Eve, 1900. Mrs Brink, who had had a very harrowing few months in Jagersfontein, was ordered to move to Bloemfontein with her children. She found Bloemfontein a very inhospitable place, brightened only by her husband's release from prison. He eventually obtained employment at the Bloemfontein Refugee Camp and later, in May 1901, was appointed superintendent of the Vredefort Road Refugee Camp.

While the family lived in Bloemfontein, George Edwin Brink attended Grey College where he made a friend of Colin Steyn, the son of President M.T. Steyn. In their spare time, the two boys helped Miss Emily Hobhouse to prepare parcels for women and children in the refugee camps and for the needy in Bloemfontein.

The family moved to Vredefort Camp and the 'Reminiscences' tell of sickness and the privations which all had to endure. A school of sorts was established in the Camp and, to his surprise, the young boy found himself teaching, while he furthered his own education at the same time.



Perhaps the most memorable event of this period was the surrender of the Burgers at Vredefort Road Station on 5 October 1902. Let the manuscript tell the story:

'Surrender of Burgers at Vredefort Road Station (now Greenlands) on 5 October 1902.

'This was the first Surrender of Arms in the Orange River Colony (now Orange Free State). Two Commandos laid down arms, those of Commandant C.A. van Niekerk (later Senator and President of the Senate), Onder Rhenoster Rivier Commando, and Commandant van der Merwe of the Parys Commando. I can't recall Commandant van Niekerk but well remember Commandant van der Merwe, a handsome youngish man with a golden coloured beard.

'General C.R. de Wet was present at the Surrender with Major-General E. Locke Elliot. General de Wet addressed his men before they laid down their arms. General de Wet's Commandos were ordered to surrender at various central points in the O.R.C. where he and General Elliott were present and General de Wet invariably addressed his men.

'Then General Christiaan de Wet, who was our greatest Boer Hero in O.F.S., came to the Camp with a few members of his staff. They brought a number of horses and mules. A tent was pitched for him next to ours and he and one of his Adjutants, Bert Nussey, had their meals with us. Little did I know that I was to serve on the staff of Brigadier-General A.H.M. Nussey as Brigade Major of the 1st S.A. Mounted Brigade in East Africa during the 1914-1918 campaign.'

The manuscript goes on to tell how, led by young Brink, several of the boys in the camp looked after General de Wet's horses but for their pains nearly received, 'n goeie lesing met die sambok' - the latter was the General's famous sjambok. At this time, too, the young boys were enthralled by stories of battle, adventure and hardship told to them nightly around the camp-fire by the General and his Staff. All this, without doubt, contributed to George Brink's decision to become a soldier.

After the South African War the family moved to Bloemfontein, and George finished his schooling at Grey College which he left on 22 June 1908.

His first employment was in the administration of the Orange River Colony; initially in the Department of Education and later as Confidential Clerk to the Commissioner

of Police. He resigned in March 1910 to join the staff of the Voorspoed Diamond Mining Company in the Kroonstad District. He served in various capacities in the secretarial branch and even as head of the fingerprint section where he gained useful experience. The mine eventually closed down and, after short periods with a mining magnate and an insurance company, he accepted the position as temporary clerk in the Department of Defence, in No. 3 Military District (East London). On 1 June 1914, he was appointed district staff clerk to No. 15 Military District at De Aar under Colonel Ben Bower.

## ARMY CAREER

### World War I: German S.W. Africa (1914-1915).

Almost immediately after the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914, the Union Government offered its services to the British Government. After the South African War a garrison had been stationed here but had been gradually reduced as the internal political situation stabilized. With the formation of the Union Defence Force, the complete withdrawal of Imperial troops was only a matter of time. Britain also anticipated that, when the newly-formed Union Defence Force was adequately trained, the necessity for a garrison would fall away.

South Africa's offer was accepted by the British Government on 6 August and, by 10 August, the Union Government had agreed to dispatch a military expedition against the enemy forces in South West Africa.

The political climate was not, however, as stable as many people thought. Indeed it could not be so. Many of the burghers of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic had not forgotten their all too recent loss of freedom at the hands of Great Britain. To some, therefore - about 11 000 in all - the entry of Great Britain into a World War seemed to present an opportunity to regain complete independence, and they rose in rebellion.

George Edwin Brink, now on the staff of Colonel Bower, was present at the action at Rooidam in September 1914 and, in the following month, was commissioned and attached to Southern Force Headquarters at Upington. Shortly thereafter he was appointed a staff captain to Southern Force and later, served in the same capacity on 10th Mounted Brigade Staff. It was at this time that he served on the staff of Col J.L. (later Lieut-General Sir Jacobus) van Deventer.

In 1915, 10th Mounted Brigade moved from Upington to Steinkopf, preparatory to operating with Southern Force under General Smuts in the invasion of German South West Africa. This force captured Keetmanshoop.

For his services in the Campaign Captain Geo. E. Brink was mentioned in despatches by the Commander-in-Chief, General Louis Botha, and awarded the French Croix de Guerre (avec palmes).

On the completion of the South West Africa Campaign, he served for a short time on the staff of Brig-Gen Sir Charles Crewe, Director of War Recruiting.

#### World War I: German East Africa (1916-1918).

On 12 April 1916, Capt Geo. E. Brink was appointed to the staff of 1st Mounted Brigade under Brig-Gen Manie Botha who had succeeded Brig-Gen J.L. van Deventer when the latter was promoted to command 2nd S.A. Division. In his capacity first as Brigade Staff Captain and, from 9 August 1916, as Brigade Major of the 1st Mounted Brigade, Maj Brink took part in General Smuts's East Africa Campaign to capture the German railway system. Having accomplished this the Brigade proceeded to Kissaki and Iringu.

At the end of 1916 he returned to the Union with the Brigade and was put on sick leave following severe attacks of malaria.

Lieut-General Hoskins succeeded General Smuts as Commander-in-Chief and in turn Lieut-General J.L. van Deventer succeeded General Hoskins.

On 19 May 1917, Major G.E. Brink was appointed a special service officer on the staff of General van Deventer. In this capacity, he acted as liaison between the General and his senior staff and commanders - indeed on many occasions General Brink told his friends that one of General van Deventer's persistent orders to him was - 'op pas dat hulle my nie sal ver-neuk nie'.

He served with General van Deventer throughout the remainder of the campaign in German East Africa and subsequently in Portuguese East Africa and Northern Rhodesia.

Maj Brink was awarded the Distinguished Service Order in 1918 for his work in East Africa and he was mentioned in

despatches by both General Smuts and General van Deventer for 'gallant and distinguished conduct in the field'. In September 1918, he was recalled to assume duty on the staff of the Adjutant General, Defence Headquarters, Pretoria. His special task was to prepare the machinery for the demobilization of the Union Defence Forces.

On 1 October 1918, 'The Friend', Bloemfontein, announced 'the engagement of Major Geo. E. Brink, DSO, of General van Deventer's staff, to Miss Lilian Alice de Villiers of the Normal and Polytechnic College, Bloemfontein. Major Brink has just returned to the Union after three years service in East Africa, first with the 1st Mounted Brigade and later on General Sir Jacobus van Deventer's staff. He has been recalled to assume duty on the staff of the Adjutant-General, Defence Headquarters. He is at present on a short visit to Bloemfontein'. Miss de Villiers's parents, Mr and Mrs J.D. de Villiers, lived in Paarl and she had been educated at St. Cyprian's School, Cape Town, and in Canada.

After the cessation of hostilities on 11 November 1918, officers of the Permanent Force were, in the main, reduced in rank and so, again in 'The Friend' on 15 August 1919, there appeared a report on the wedding in the Presbyterian Church, Bloemfontein, 'of Captain Brink, Deputy Assistant, Adjutant-General, to Miss L.A. de Villiers'. The report, of course, gives all the details of the bridal retinue.

Throughout the rest of his life, the General's home life provided him with the sheet-anchor which all men require and the haven where he could relax. Three daughters were born of the marriage.

#### CAMBERLEY STAFF COLLEGE

Shortly after his marriage Capt Brink was nominated to attend a course at the Staff College, Camberley, England. In after years the General stressed the tremendous value the course had been to him. The Chief Instructor was Brigadier (later Field Marshal Sir John) Dill and many officers who had done well in World War I attended the course. Among them were some who became famous, notably Field Marshal Earl Montgomery of Alamein, General Sir Richard O'Connor, General Sir Bernard Paget and Maj-Gen Sir D.F. Dickinson with whom Geo. Brink was again to have contact during the East African Campaign in World War II.

## MILITARY COLLEGE AND RAND REVOLT, 1922

On his return from England Captain Brink was appointed Adjutant and Officer Instructor, Administration, at the S.A. Military College, Roberts Heights (now Voortrekkerhoogte). There followed a period of close on thirteen years during which he served at the College in almost every capacity. Shortly after Capt Brink's appointment to the Military College the Rand Revolt broke out.

The revolt does not seem to have been directly fomented by any political party, although events in Russia were having repercussions, and there was a Communist party legally operating in South Africa. However, they had little sympathy with the strikers whose main demand was the entrenchment of the labour colour-bar on the mines.

On Wednesday, 8 March 1922 the prolonged industrial unrest on the Rand culminated in clashes between strikers and non-whites. The following day, the Governor-General called out certain Active Citizen Force units and on 10 March, 'Black Friday', more ACF units and 26 Burgher commandos were called out.

On Saturday, 11 March, the Chief of the General Staff sent for Lt-Gen Sir Jacobus van Deventer and made him Officer Commanding No. 3 (East Rand) Area with orders to smash the Revolt in that area. It is interesting to note that General van Deventer's Operation Order No. 1, dated 'Boksburg, 11th March, 1922' was signed 'Geo. E. Brink, Captain, General Staff Officer'. The instruction, 'to clear up the situation, and, if possible, suppress all further hostile efforts on the part of citizens who have taken up arms against the State', was categorical.

The East Rand - Boksburg, Benoni, Brakpan, was gradually brought under control. General Coen Brits with his burgher commandos, lent his assistance and soon the fighting on the East Rand was over.

Captain Brink after he had compiled Lt-Gen Sir Jacobus van Deventer's Report on his actions returned to duty at the Military College.

It was as Chief Instructor, Tactics, that he made his most important contribution at the College. He held this post for nine years and played a great part in the organisation and training of officers and non-commissioned officers not only for the Permanent Force but for the Active Citizen Force, Commandos and the Cadet Organization. Capt Brink received his majority in 1931.

In 1932 he was appointed, with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, to the command of the Military College, in succession to Col Sir H.A. (Pierre) van Ryneveld, KBE, DSO, MC.

In addition to these duties, Lt-Col Brink, on 1 May 1933 was appointed Officer Commanding Troops at Roberts Heights and, on the same date, he became the founder Commanding Officer of the Special Service Battalion (SSB/SDB).

### THE SPECIAL SERVICE BATTALION

Space does not permit giving a detailed account of the formation of the SSB or of the invaluable role which Lt-Col Brink, in his capacity as Commandant of Military College, played in the formation of the Unit.

The reasons for the establishment of the SSB are still debated but it is true that its origin had its roots in the widespread unemployment which resulted from the catastrophic, world-wide economic depression of the early thirties. In South Africa the 'Poor White Problem' had long been a thorn in the side of the Government, but now unemployment escalated alarmingly and reached country-wide proportions. A force such as the SSB seemed to offer some solution in that it would absorb hundreds of school-leaving youths faced with little prospect of finding any type of employment.

The matter is summed up by Col Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, at that stage Director of Air Services and Chairman of the Permanent Force Cadet Selection Board, in the concluding paragraph of his letter of 17 March 1933, to the Chief of the General Staff, Maj-Gen A.J.E. Brink, DTD, DSO:

'With our knowledge of military life and the value of its discipline, we could not help but discuss and picture the strong, healthy and vigorous citizens these same apathetic youths could be turned into, if on leaving school without any prospect of employment, they could be attached to a military unit where they could be kept fit and active until they could be drafted into suitable works and services'.

The Chief of the General Staff immediately saw the tremendous possibilities of the scheme and lost no time in placing the matter before the Minister of Defence, the Hon. Oswald Pirow. The Minister gave instructions that further details of a comprehensive scheme should be prepared and laid before him. By 11 April the Chief of the General Staff and his co-workers had completed the scheme. By 25 April the

Commissioner of the S.A. Police and the Head of the Prison Services had agreed that the proposed Battalion would be used as a source of recruiting for their services. For the first time, on 26 April 1933, the name of the Battalion - 'Special Service Battalion'(S.S.B.), 'Spesiale Diensbataljon'(SDB) - was used. The officers were appointed and Lt-Col G.E. Brink, DSO, S.A. Staff Corps was nominated first Commanding Officer with effect from 1 May 1933, the birthday of the Regiment.

Throughout the remainder of his life Lt-Gen Brink spoke in glowing terms of this regiment - he was proud to have been associated with it and was delighted to learn from time to time of the success achieved by many of its earliest members either within the Permanent Force or, more especially, when they left to take up jobs in the business world - the purpose for which the Regiment had been formed.

#### THE CASTLE, CAPE TOWN

By December 1933 changes were needed in the Defence Department. Lt-Col Brink was promoted Colonel and transferred to Cape Command, regarded as a most important post.

Colonel Brink during his career had not only made a deep study of the arts of war but in addition had read history widely and deeply - especially that of his own country.

At the outset of his command at Good Hope Castle Colonel Brink, therefore, set about continuing the task of restoring the Castle which was declared an historical monument.

In addition Simonstown was the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief, Royal Navy, Africa Station, and this fact allowed not only for normal liaison but also for the establishment of good relationships. The friendship which Colonel Brink and Vice Admiral E.R.G.R. Evans cultivated was of great value both to the Royal Navy and the Armed Forces of the Union.

#### VISIT TO EUROPE

In February 1937 Col Geo. E. Brink was sent to Europe by the Minister of Defence, the Hon. Oswald Pirrow, to study the organization, equipment and training methods of the British and Continental armies. During visits of varying lengths to Germany, Italy, France, Denmark - where he made a special study of physical training - and Great Britain, he was

given every assistance to follow up his investigations, especially in the field of training and in inspecting formations and units. In France and Germany he was fortunate in being invited to attend manoeuvres.

He was present at the Coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth in Westminster Abbey, London on 12 May 1937, having been chosen by the Earl Marshal to act as a Gold Staff Officer. He thus qualified for the Coronation Medal.

## TRAINING

As mentioned earlier, in 1933, South Africa was in the throes of an economic depression. In the interests of the country, Generals Hertzog and Smuts sank their differences and formed a coalition. With the exchequer at its nadir, little money was available for defence purposes but the Minister of Defence was determined to make improvements. Until 1935, when Mussolini embarked on his schemes to build an African Empire and Hitler turned an interested eye in the direction of South West Africa and Tanganyika, there was no potential threat.

With a possible enemy now uncomfortably close, the General Staff exerted all their pressure on the Government which eventually formulated its Defence Policy: 'The organization, equipment and training of the Union Defence Force is to be based on meeting an enemy on African soil in bush warfare'. On this directive the Staff was obliged to proceed, although many senior officers, who had visited the Continent, were convinced that Germany and Italy were making preparations for large-scale war.

Training and planning proceeded, the aim being to put two divisions in the field. For this exercise, the manpower was available but stores and equipment were woefully lacking.

Col Brink, on his return from his European tour, was appointed Director of Army Organization and Training for the Union Defence Force on 1 November 1937. On 15 June 1938, he was made Deputy Chief of Staff with the rank of Brigadier-General.

In accordance with suggestions made by Brigadier-General Brink, the field organization of the UDF was to be based on the brigade group which was to be made capable of



functioning independently, to obviate the delay in summoning supporting units which could be located far back in the divisional column. This was one of the organizational weaknesses Gen Brink had noted, as a young staff officer, in the German East Africa Campaign in 1916.

After his appointment as Director of Army Organization and Training, Col Brink lost no time in planning a series of tactical exercises and manoeuvres which were held at the end of 1937 and again in 1938 and 1939, within the limits of the Defence Policy. Notwithstanding this limitation, the exercises produced valuable lessons which led to improvements in several important directions. Firstly, it became apparent that mechanization was imperative, and that an armoured car, designed for use under South African conditions, was a paramount need. At that time South Africa had two obsolete armoured cars and two medium tanks of similar vintage. Enquiries overseas revealed that no armoured cars were available, and so the South African-built model was evolved. It went into production early in 1940, and by the time manufacture was stopped in April 1944, a total of 5 770 cars had been produced.

Another important fact to emerge was that the army was in need of troop carriers, porté vehicles for artillery pieces and several other specialist vehicles. These, too, were manufactured in vast quantities and made possible the high degree of mobility without which the 1st S.A. Division could not have achieved its success in Abyssinia.

The tremendous responsibility resting on Brigadier-General Brink's shoulders when South Africa declared war on Germany on 6 September 1939 can well be imagined. It was his responsibility to create the vast training schemes and establishments to cater for the large numbers of recruits who were flocking to join the forces. The Military College set-up had also to be enlarged to provide for the training of officers and non-commissioned officers required both for instructional purposes and for active service.

The first regiment called out on fulltime service was in camp by 26 October 1939 and others followed as circumstances permitted.

#### FORMATION OF 1ST S.A. BRIGADE

The formation of the 1st S.A. Brigade was approved on 13 May 1940 and it was mobilized by 20 May. War with

Italy was declared by South Africa on 11 June 1940. Shortly thereafter at a Conference with General Smuts, General Brink suggested the despatch to East Africa of a brigade group representative of the whole country. Training, which had been proceeding on a battalion basis, prior to call-up, was intensified and on 2 July 1940 the advance party flew to Nairobi and on 17 July the Brigade sailed from Durban.

#### FORMATION OF 1 S.A. DIVISION

By 13 August 1940 the formation of 1 S.A. Division was announced. The Division was to comprise the 1st S.A. Brigade Group which was already in Kenya, and the 2nd and 5th S.A. Brigade Groups. Divisional Headquarters and ancillary troops were appointed to complete the divisional establishment.

On the formation of the Division, Brigadier-General Brink was appointed to command, but it was not until 20 October that he was promoted Major-General and was released from his many other commitments to join and organize his Division. The General was confronted immediately with many administrative problems and he was especially concerned over the fragmentation of the Division. Actually the 1st S.A. Infantry Brigade Group had been split in September 1940, before the Divisional Commander arrived. This came as a shock but was accepted as one of the exigencies of war. In fact the three South African Brigade Groups were never to go into action or be moved by the Divisional Commander in Abyssinia or East Africa at the same time.

#### 1 S.A. DIVISION IN EAST AFRICA - 1940

On 16 November Headquarters of 1 S.A. Division opened at Gilgil and on the same day 2nd S.A. Infantry Brigade Group with two of its infantry battalions, arrived at Mombasa. To dash General Brink's hopes of a unified command, General Cunningham, who had succeeded General Dickinson as General Officer Commanding East African Troops, was of the opinion that he should be free to move South African formations and units as the situation demanded.

On 1 December General Brink assumed command of the Marsabit Area which consisted of the Northern Frontier Districts of Kenya. General Brink's command comprising 2nd and 5th S.A. Infantry Brigade Groups, was augmented by the attachment of 25th East African Brigade and about 2 000 East African and Abyssinian irregulars. The front to be defended was

approximately 640km in length. Divisional Advanced Headquarters was opened at Marsabit. Reconnaissance on a large scale was undertaken. Unfortunately whilst on reconnaissance, General Brink injured his back and had to be flown back to Nairobi for observation and treatment.

On 30 January 1941, however, Maj-Gen Brink issued the Operation Order which marked the real beginning of offensive operations against the Italian Forces from Kenya. In fact the operation was to be the first fully successful campaign waged by the Allies in World War II. The intention of the operation, as outlined by General Cunningham, was to invade Southern Abyssinia, clear the escarpment as far east as Moyale, foster rebellion among the Abyssinians and, by so doing, contain about seven Italian Divisions. This would facilitate the crossing of the Juba River and the advance up the east coast.

In brief the plan necessitated an outflanking movement of about 400 miles, across the Chalbi Desert west of Marsabit, then north through Kukana and Hobok to Mega Fort. Mega was the centre of the southern defences of Abyssinia and its loss made Moyale untenable by the Italians.

Crossing the Abyssinian border on 31 January 1941, the two South African Brigades made tremendous progress, capturing El Gumu on 1 February and Hobok on 2 February. It was not until 18 February that Mega surrendered to 3rd Battalion of the Transvaal Scottish after a fierce struggle.

On 27 February, Maj-Gen Brink was ordered to fly first to Mogadishu to confer with General Cunningham and thereafter to Nairobi to discuss plans with General Smuts and General van Ryneveld.

On 6 March Maj-Gen Brink was given a warning order that his division would be redistributed along the Ferfer-Mogadishu area and that 1st S.A. Infantry Brigade Group would come under the Division's Command. This move was cancelled the next day. 1st S.A. Infantry Brigade Group was placed under command of 11th African Division. 2nd S.A. Infantry Brigade was to occupy Berbera. Divisional Headquarters and 5th Brigade moved back to Nanyuki on 17 March. Within the week this Group was to proceed to the Middle East. Once again administrative problems, this time regarding home leave, cropped up and Maj-Gen Brink requested permission to discuss the future of his division in South Africa.

Lt-Gen Sir Alan Cunningham recommended that Maj-Gen Brink be appointed a member of the Military Division of the Order of the Bath (CB). In his report on the East African and Abyssinian Campaigns, to the Commander-in-Chief Middle East, Lt-Gen Cunningham recorded: 'I wish to place on record my appreciation of the sound judgement and determination in the face of great difficulties of terrain shown by Major-General G.E. Brink, CB, DSO, Commander 1st S.A. Division in bringing these operations to a successful conclusion'.

Early in April, Maj-Gen Brink was ordered to prepare for the departure to the Middle East of his Divisional Headquarters and later 5th S.A. Infantry Brigade Group, when shipping was available.

General Cunningham had hoped personally to visit Maj-Gen Brink at his Headquarters before the Division's departure from his Command. This proved impossible but General Cunningham in his usual courteous manner sent the following message to the Divisional Commander:

'It is to my regret impossible to fly to see you. Wish express before you leave my great appreciation whole-hearted and efficient support given me by you and your staff. Operations fully carried out by you in Mega area without doubt played major part hastening present collapse Italians. I part from you and your magnificent officers and men with greatest regret. Thank you all for grand work and wish good in future. I would be glad if you would communicate appropriate passage of message to men and remainder Division when they join you again'.

Those who had the privilege of knowing General Cunningham will confirm that this most sincere and warm-hearted tribute was sent because he was convinced of the truth of his statements.

On 8 April, Maj-Gen Brink returned to the Union by air and on 21 April, 1941 his Headquarters, Staff 1 S.A. Divisional Troops and 5th S.A. Infantry Brigade Group sailed from Mombasa for the Middle East.

The Conference in South Africa, attended by the Commanders of the two S.A. Divisions in the field and the Heads of Sections at Defence Headquarters under the Chief of the General Staff, appears to have been rather frustrating. The only bright spot, as far as Maj-Gen Brink was concerned

was that he had apparently got the message across that the only way to overcome the shortage of manpower in the Defence Force was to dilute the units with Non-European personnel. He had advocated this step from the beginning of hostilities and had frequently reiterated his belief that this was one way of overcoming the inevitable shortage. It was not, however, until 11 June 1941 that the Deputy Adjutant-General, Middle East H.Q. announced that all Union Defence Force Units were being diluted with Non-Europeans as drivers, stretcher bearers, batmen, etc. Units composed entirely of Non-Europeans, except for officers and senior non-commissioned officers, were also being formed.

On the question of home leave and certain other issues the Chief of the General Staff over-ruled Maj-Gen Brink.

#### WESTERN DESERT - APRIL 1941 - MARCH 1942

Maj-Gen Brink arrived in Cairo on 25 April 1941 and immediately set about meeting the Commander-in-Chief Middle East Forces, General Wavell and the other commanders with whom he was to serve.

It was appreciated by all that the situation in Greece was most critical and that it was little better in North Africa where Rommel, in a lightning strike, had won back most of Libya. It was for this reason that 1 S.A. Division was urgently needed in Egypt.

On 3 May, 1st S.A. Divisional Headquarters, Divisional Troops and 5th S.A. Infantry Brigade arrived at Suez and by 4 May Divisional Headquarters was operative at Amariya. Although the South Africans were keen to go into battle right away, they were held back by Maj-Gen Brink who had quickly realized the need for training in desert warfare and for acclimitization to conditions very different from those prevailing in East Africa. He also remembered the lessons he had learned on his 1937 tour, especially that the German Army was trained to exploit any weaknesses in their enemy, and he did not wish to put his troops into a position where lack of training would be apparent to the enemy.

On arrival, 1 S.A. Division had been made responsible for preparing a defence line to block the approach to the Nile Delta and the Suez Canal in case Rommel made a lightning drive across the Western Desert. Australian field-gunners and British anti-tank Batteries, in addition to a New Zealand

training battalion, were placed under Maj-Gen Brink's command. Soon his responsibilities were increased to include the protection of Wadi Natrun and certain aerodromes in the Amariya area.

In between digging defence positions, training continued. Maj-Gen Brink, however, was most unhappy that his Division was again to be divided by the despatch of 5th S.A. Brigade to Mersa Matruh. When the matter was submitted to the Commander-in-Chief, General Wavell ruled that the whole of 1st S.A. Division should move and re-group at Mersa Matruh, leaving the organization of the Delta Defence to 2nd S.A. Division which was expected to arrive shortly.

By 4 July 1941, the three Brigades, forming 1 S.A. Division, were together for the first and last time. The next day Gen Sir Claude Auchinleck succeeded Gen Wavell as Commander-in-Chief Middle East Forces. Almost immediately he brought up the question of reducing both S.A. Divisions to two brigades and using the third for reinforcements. Field Marshal Smuts, however, was reluctant to agree until at least one of the S.A. Divisions could be converted into an armoured formation.

The Divisional Commander was still hampered by shortages of manpower and equipment which, in turn, adversely affected training, already constantly interrupted by digging operations and frequent air raids. Between 28 May and 12 October 1941 there were 171 air raids on Mersa Matruh.

By the end of October 1941, Lt-Gen Norrie of XXX Corps proposed a corps exercise, but Maj-Gen Brink did not consider that his Brigades were sufficiently advanced in their training to participate, and he said so. He said he would require 21 days to prepare for the forthcoming Crusader Operation. As this was scheduled for 15 November, the Corps Commander suggested that 1st S.A. Division be left out of battle. At length a compromise was reached and D-Day for Crusader was fixed for 18 November. Maj-Gen Brink said he would have his Division on the startline on that date. As the authors of 'Sidi Rezeg Battles' wrote 'No other course was open to a soldier'.

The details of the battles of Sidi Rezeg are complicated. 2nd S.A. Infantry Brigade was left to garrison Mersa Matruh, 1st and 5th S.A. Infantry Brigades were under Maj-Gen Brink's command in XXX Corps.

Leaving the Divisional Assembly area, by 20 November, 1st S.A. Infantry Brigade was leaguered south of, and masking, El Gubi. 5th S.A. Infantry Brigade was on its way to Sidi Rezeg. Next day its advance was slowed down and it was placed under direct command of Maj-Gen Gott of 7th Armoured Division in XXX Corps. It was decided that 5th S.A. Infantry Brigade Group should dig in on the southern escarpment outside Sidi Rezeg. There was delay in executing the latter order. No night movement was made and at 09.30 hrs. on 21 November, the Brigade was halted in the vicinity of Hagfet el Hareiba where it spent the day with General Gott. During 22 November the Brigade moved up to Point 178 on the southern escarpment but in doing so the 3rd Transvaal Scottish was badly mauled. At 13.15 hrs. XXX Corps ordered Maj-Gen Brink to assemble his whole Division at Sidi Rezeg. The fact that this did not happen on the night of 22/23 November reduced considerably the chances of survival of 5th S.A. Infantry Brigade.

The events and result of the Battle on 23 November are well known. The 5th S.A. Infantry Brigade was attacked almost continuously by tanks and infantry. Fifty-two enemy tanks were destroyed before the Gunners ran out of ammunition and the Brigade ceased to exist.

The loss of the Brigade was most serious, not only for the Allied cause but for South Africa. The part it had played had considerable effect upon the subsequent course of the operation, to such an extent that Sir Basil Liddell Hart wrote, 'the crippling cost of this German tactical success was strategically more damaging to the enemy than anything else in Crusader'.

Meanwhile 1st Brigade disengaged itself from the enemy at Bir el Gubi but was unable to help 5th Brigade. 1st Brigade withdrew to Taieb el Essem and consolidated there on 24 November. Next day enemy tanks and artillery made three heavy attacks on the 1st Brigade but these were beaten off with great loss. With the arrival of British armour, the Brigade held out until nightfall and then withdrew.

At this stage, due to the failure to hold Sidi Rezeg, General Cunningham wished to abandon the offensive and regroup on the Egyptian frontier. General Auchinleck overruled him and replaced him by General Ritchie.

However, the Allied Forces were compelled to withdraw and on 20 December, 1st S.A. Infantry Brigade returned to Egypt. 2 S.A. Infantry Brigade was attached to 2nd S.A. Division.

On 27 January the 1st S.A. Infantry Brigade with Divisional Headquarters was ordered to El Adem area and again came under command of XXX Corps. On 29 January Maj-Gen Brink was ordered to report to XIII Corps. This in fact meant that the Divisional Commander was merely acting as a link between XIII Corps and 1 S.A. Infantry Brigade, who were now under XIII Corps.

However, Maj-Gen Brink's orders were to prepare defensive lines for two brigade groups west of the Gazala inlet and on 1 February, 1942 for an infantry divisional lay-back position from Acroma to an escarpment about 5 miles south of El Adem. 2nd S.A. Infantry Brigade Group again came under his command, and on 15 February was ordered to hold the Gazala Coastal Section. It was at Gazala that Maj-Gen Brink again injured his back and was invalided home on 10 March 1942.

The injury to Maj-Gen Brink's back took longer to mend than he had hoped. It was not until early June 1942 that it was decided that he would not return to the Middle East. On 16 June 1942 the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East wrote to him as follows:

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS,  
MIDDLE EAST FORCE

16th June 1942.

DO/PSC/21

My dear Brink

Thank you for your letter of the 8th June.

I too am sorry that you will not return North, but I hope you will find your new job interesting, and I wish you every success in it.

There is much hard fighting going on in the desert at the moment, and there is more still to come. As you will have heard, the two South African Divisions are doing just as well as I knew they would, and casualties have not been heavy.

I have not forgotten our talk about the future of Southern Africa, and I hope it will not be long before we have another one.



The very best of luck to you. You are greatly missed, certainly by me, and by many others as well, I am sure.

Yours

Sgd. C. Auchinleck.

Major General G.F. Brink, CB, DSO,  
Defence Headquarters,  
PRETORIA

Earlier on, General Cunningham as Eighth Army Commander had written to Maj-Gen Brink a personal message at the time of the disaster of Sidi Rezeg -

'I want to say how sorry I am about the 5th South African Brigade. I have heard many stories first hand of the gallantry shown by them and the magnificent manner in which they fought. Their doings will make a page of history - I am sure the battle will prove a keystone of our success to come...'

In the light of the happenings in June 1942, at Tobruk, it is significant to note that in his appreciation of the situation made in 1942 Maj-Gen Brink was fully convinced that Tobruk could not withstand a second siege. Indeed, he considered that if he as commander of 1st S.A. Division was called upon to defend Tobruk, he would find it impossible to do so without sacrificing his division. In September 1965 Lt-Gen Brink made the following statement to Lt-Col H. Klein when 'Springboks in Armour' was being written:

'I can say quite definitely that, when the possibility of a withdrawal from the Gazala Line was discussed during February 1942, Lt-Gen Ritchie told me in the presence of Lt-General Gott that in such an eventuality Tobruk would not be held as the Royal Navy had indicated that it could not be supported administratively and the Royal Air Force had indicated that it would not be able to give the invested forces air support.

'I raised the matter of the reoccupation of Tobruk at the time of the discussion, and told both Ritchie and Gott that in the event of a decision being taken to hold Tobruk I hoped my division (1st S.A. Division) would not be detailed for the task as it was my confirmed opinion that it would not be possible to hold the Fortress successfully, particularly if it had to be done at short notice. I told both the Generals

that I had made a reconnaissance of the defences on my way forward to the Gazala Line early in February, and had found them to be in a very bad state. I also informed them that my division had removed about three-quarters of a million land-mines - with Eighth Army approval - from the Tobruk perimeter and laid them in front of the Gazala defensive line. During this talk I had with Ritchie and Gott I made it quite clear to them that, should I be ordered to occupy Tobruk, I would lodge a protest as I was not prepared to sacrifice my division. General Ritchie then said that it had been decided at top level that Tobruk would not be held, but that in the event of a withdrawal I would have to detail a strong rear-guard to carry out demolitions in the Trobruk area and that this party would probably have to be sacrificed. I conceded that such a duty would, as a matter of course, be the duty of the 1st S.A. Division.

'When I handed over the division to Brigadier Pienaar prior to my departure for medical treatment in Cairo, I gave him the gist of my conversation with Ritchie and Gott, and asked him not to allow himself to be trapped in Tobruk. I warned him that he would lose the division and South Africa would blame him. He assured me that he would heed my warning.

'When I returned to the Union for medical treatment I told General Smuts that I feared that, notwithstanding assurances to the contrary, Tobruk would be held in the event of a withdrawal from the Gazala Line. I told him what my fears were; also that I had told Ritchie and Gott that I would lodge a strong protest if I were ordered to hold Tobruk.

'The 1st S.A. Division was able to get away (from Gazala) because it had the transport. I consistently refused to allow Corps and Army to take away any of my divisional transport.'

In bringing this section of the Tribute to a close, it is fitting to remember the important part played throughout by Colonel S.J. Joubert, DSO, as General Staff Officer (GSO I) to Maj-Gen Brink throughout his service in the field. As with most good staff officers, few references to his work are to be found in the history books. It is certain, however, that he rose to every challenge, and carried out his orders with unobtrusive efficiency. Worn out by his labours and dejected at the departure of his General, he too returned to the Union in March 1942.

## SOUTH AFRICA AND THE WAR WITH JAPAN

The entry of Japan into the war in December 1941, brought the threat of attack closer and caused the authorities to view the defence of the Union itself as a matter of urgency.

### INLAND AREA AND COASTAL AREA COMMAND

In June 1942 it was decided to reorganize the forces in the Union into Inland Area (comprising Northern, Central and Witwatersrand commands, with Headquarters in Johannesburg) and Coastal Area (comprising the Fortress Commands of Cape, Outeniqua, Port Elizabeth and East London, with Headquarters at Cape Town). Maj-Gen Brink was appointed General Officer Commanding, Inland Area and Maj-Gen I.P. de Villiers General Officer Commanding, Coastal Area. Full use was made of part-time units, and a Mobile Field Force with Headquarters at Ermelo was organized. No air or land attack was attempted by the Japanese but German submarines sank 9 merchant ships in two days in Cape waters, and many more off the South African coast.

The two commands were constituted on 1 July 1942 and closed down in June 1943.

During this period Maj-Gen Brink travelled extensively throughout his area supervising training and general reorganization. Lt-Col G.K. Roodt, who had served as one of the founder officers in the Special Service Battalion under Maj-Gen Brink, was appointed G1 to Inland Area Command. He had joined 1st S.A. Division in December 1940 in East Africa as Armoured Fighting Vehicle Staff Officer, and in the Western Desert had commanded the 3rd and 7th S.A. Recce Battalions at various times. When Maj-Gen Brink was appointed Director-General of Demobilization, Lt-Col Roodt was transferred to the Directorate.

From July to September 1943, Maj-Gen Brink was Chairman of a Committee of Inquiry to report on the advisability of establishing a Nautical College. The Committee's terms of reference were wide and they recommended the creation of a post-war South African Naval Force and Naval College.

### DEMOBILISATION

In 1943, the Government resolved that the problems of demobilisation and re-absorption of ex-volunteers into civilian

life should be examined.

Accordingly on 20 August 1943, the Ministry of Welfare and Demobilisation was formed with the Hon. H.G. Lawrence, MP, as the responsible Minister. On 1 October, 1943, Maj-Gen Brink was appointed Director-General of Demobilisation. On 26 September 1946 he retired from the Permanent Force and was placed on the Reserve of Officers (General Staff) with the rank of Lieutenant-General with effect from 27 September 1946, but his services were retained as Director of Demobilisation until 31 March 1948.

In opening the South African Legion Congress in 1966 Lt-Gen Brink gave the following figures of the number of South Africans who enlisted in World War II:

European Males on full time service	202 500
European Males on part-time service	55 600
European Females	24 800
Cape Coloured	46 900
Native Military Corps	76 500
	<hr/>
	406 300
	<hr/>

It will be remembered that towards the end of World War I, Capt Brink, as he then was, was recalled to duty at Defence Headquarters, Pretoria and there posted to the section charged with preparing the demobilisation scheme. At that time it was estimated that approximately 36 000 white and 25 000 non-white troops had to be demobilised.

Having been so intimately connected with the World War I Scheme, Maj-Gen Brink's appointment as Director-General of Demobilisation in World War II was particularly appropriate.

The Directorate, apart from employing a military staff of over 2 000 men and women to do the essential processing work, functioned principally through a network of 325 Discharged Soldiers and Demobilisation Committees throughout the Union. These committees in turn had a membership of over 6 000 men and women, and Maj-Gen Brink not only visited each and every committee but became personally known to the members.

It is impossible even to outline the numerous matters dealt with by the Directorate but the contents of the statement which Lt-Gen Brink made on his relinquishing his appointment as Director-General should be recalled:

'I claim that South Africa's Demobilisation Plan

compares more than favourably with that of any other country. It is a plan dictated by courage and vision, by sympathy and encouragement for the ex-volunteer and by the firm determination of the Country's leaders that this time there will be no forgotten men. The very corner-stone of the Plan is an undertaking to the soldier that South Africa alone has made - that no man or woman will be discharged until he or she has a suitable job to go to, or other suitable provision (e.g. training for employment) has been made, or he or she can be re-instated in pre-enlistment employment.

'Every facet of our national life has been touched in some way by the Plan. The Directorate of Demobilisation has constantly consulted industry, trade and commerce. It has co-operated closely with other Government Departments. It has dealt with every subject which has any bearing on the re-instatement of ex-volunteers - from University training to helping a man to get a drivers' licence.

'The "Field Force" of the Directorate, and natural channel for applications by ex-volunteers for demobilisation benefits, is the Discharged Soldiers and Demobilisation Committee organisation (in which is included the Dispersal Depot Committee) which has done outstanding work since it was formed. Demobilisation Committees have had hundreds of thousands of interviews with ex-volunteers, only a proportion represented applications for financial assistance. Ex-volunteers have contacted these Committees about employment, marital troubles, training at Universities and Technical Colleges, apprenticeships, employer-employee relations, farming, sheltered employment, housing and accommodation, post-nuptial contracts - in fact everything affecting their reabsorption into the civilian life of the country.'

The statement also contains a summary of the Directorate's achievements and of the expenditure involved in connection with the Demobilisation Plan, up to March, 1948. The particulars contained in this summary are given in the following paragraphs:

- (a) 218 334 Volunteers had been discharged. Of these 72 666 were discharged prior to the Directorate assuming charge of the Dispersal Organisation.
- (b) The Directorate reviewed the records of 22 393 ex-volunteers who had been discharged without benefits, and in 11 012 cases reversed the previous decisions and awarded discharges with benefits.

- (c) 155 300 volunteers were placed in employment through the machinery created by the Directorate assisted by the Department of Labour.
- (d) 217 538 applications for financial assistance by ex-volunteers - for the purpose of ensuring their re-instatement in civilian life - were approved.
- (e) Grants totalling £10 988 099 and loans totalling £10 367 115, making a grand total of £21 355 214 were made under the Financial Assistance Scheme.
- (f) Prior to the date on which the Directorate's Financial Assistance scheme came into operation, grants amounting to £790 389 had been paid to ex-volunteers by the Department of Social Welfare.
- (g) £366 303 in respect of loans under the Special Furniture Scheme was paid.
- (h) The overall grand total of grants and loans made under the Financial Assistance Scheme was, therefore, £22 511 906.
- (i) £4 930 000 was paid in respect of Civilian Clothing and Cash Allowance.
- (j) War Gratuities paid amounted to £14 380 000.
- (k) £94 415 was expended on the training of ex-volunteers under the provisions of Section 12 of the War Pensions Act, 1948, and £99 969 under the Alternate Training Scheme.
- (l) Sheltered employment projects for physically and mentally disabled ex-volunteers were subsidised to the extent of £839 410.
- (m) Temporary subsistence allowances paid to ex-volunteers awaiting sheltered employment amounted to £8 370.
- (n) The Government Village Housing Scheme for the temporary accommodation of ex-volunteers and their families amounted to £945 932.
- (o) Erection of additional accommodation at Universities Training Centres and Sheltered Employment Projects involved expenditure by the Department of Public Works totalling £436 419.
- (p) If the sum of £6 000 000, being the estimate of the cost of retaining ex-volunteers on paid military strength, pending their re-instatement in civilian

life, together with £10 620 463, paid by the Pensions Department in respect of military pensions and awards, is taken into account and added to the grand total of 44 million pounds referred to in the preceding sub-paragraphs, the overall grand total of the various benefits paid under the Demobilisation Plan and the cost of re-instating the ex-volunteers into civilian life amounted to nearly £61 000 000 by the end of March, 1948.'

Many tributes were paid to Lt-Gen Brink both in Parliament and throughout the country. The responsible Minister, the Hon. Harry Lawrence, sent him a congratulatory telegram in addition to his parliamentary tribute when the Director-General's Report was tabled. But the tribute which the Director-General most valued was the letter addressed to him by Field Marshal Smuts.

'I have read with deep interest and much satisfaction your report on the Demobilisation Scheme. The report reflects great credit on the manner you and your demobilisation organisation have carried out the task entrusted to them - one of the most responsible entrusted to a Governmental organisation. Considering that the Committees consisted of ex-volunteers and gentlemen who gave their services voluntarily and gratuitously after the war as they had given them during the war, they are entitled to the thanks of the Government and the Country; and I wish you to convey to them the Government's high sense of the public service they have rendered and of the Government's deep gratitude for it.

'More especially do I wish to express to you the Government's appreciation of your fine services as the head of this great organisation as well as that of the able Staff Officers who assisted you in your heavy duties.'

#### POST WAR PERIOD

To an extent this heading is a misnomer, because, for Lt-Gen Brink, the war went on after 1945. He did not relinquish the Directorate-Generalship of Demobilisation until 1948 & until 1951 he was fully occupied with the manifold problems of the Immigrants Selection Board. Throughout his life Lt-Gen Brink made a point of undertaking only commitments to which he could devote the necessary time and attention.

Through the knowledge of the serving soldier he acquired in two World Wars and the period between them, and especially the vast experience he gained during his work on the Directorate of Demobilisation, Lt-Gen Brink was in a unique position to appreciate the problems of ex-servicemen and women.

As circumstances permitted, he took an increasingly active part in the welfare of serving soldiers and particularly the ex-servicemen and women with whom he had been intimately connected.

In two of these projects, namely the Council of Corps, Regimental and Kindred Associations and the British Forces Committee of the War Graves Board, he worked closely with his old colleague and friend, Maj-Gen H.S. Wakefield CB,OBE.

In general, however, Lt-Gen Brink was ever ready to assist any individual or organisation which enlisted his help. As we shall see, he spoke on countless occasions throughout South Africa for Gunners, Sappers, MOTHS and other ex-service organisations not mentioned in this Tribute.

#### COUNCIL OF CORPS, REGIMENTAL AND KINDRED ASSOCIATIONS

This Association was founded in 1947 by Maj-Gen H.S. Wakefield, CB,OBE. The primary object of the Council was to serve the needs of Active Citizen Force Regimental Associations in their approach to the Government on matters of mutual interest. Maj-Gen Wakefield hoped to enlist the support of the South African Legion (as it is now called) and the Memorable Order of Tin Hats (MOTHS) which were and are the two principal organisations dealing with the welfare and interests of ex-servicemen. For their own internal reasons both these organisations declined the General's invitation. It became apparent that, because of the divergence of their interests in many cases, the Corps and Regimental Associations wished to retain complete and separate identity to enable them to approach the Government on their own account. Some of the Associations did not consider that they required a 'go between', however representative that body might be. Nevertheless the Council continued to function in a desultory fashion. At the end of January 1958 Lt-Gen Brink succeeded Maj-Gen Wakefield as Chairman of the Council. He accepted the fact that there was a difference of opinion on the question of whether the Council was fulfilling the objects for which it was formed.



At the same time two other matters of importance had called for co-operative ex-service organisational effort. These were:

- (a) The Prime Minister had closed down the Union War Histories Section of his office on 30 June 1961. Some effort was required to ensure the completion of the histories of South Africa's role in World War II.
- (b) The question of the care and maintenance of War Graves in South Africa prior to 1914 was again being brought to the public's notice.

#### SOUTH AFRICAN EX-SERVICES NATIONAL COUNCIL

Mr D. Macpherson, the National President of the S.A. Legion at the time, suggested the formation of the South African Ex-Services National Council and, on 11 November 1961 Lt-Gen Brink was appointed Chairman of the Council - a position he held until his death. In addition to the questions mentioned above, the Council supported the holding of annual Commemoration Services. It also attempted to co-ordinate assistance to individual ex-Servicemen and their dependants.

#### SOUTH AFRICAN LEGION

Lt-Gen Brink regarded the South African Legion as probably the most influential mouthpiece of all ex-service organisations. He served on the Committee of the Johannesburg Branch of the Legion and was asked to open the Legion's Annual Congress on two occasions, in 1949 and 1966. The outstanding addresses, which he delivered, are preserved in the Legion's records.

#### INTEREST IN HISTORY

From the beginning of his career, Lt-Gen Brink set out to acquire a deep and intimate knowledge of South African history with which the saga of his own family was interwoven.

In the latter case we have the General's manuscript covering the first part of his 'Reminiscences', some seventy typed pages, which deal with his family's background and his own boyhood and early manhood up to his appointment as District Staff Clerk in the Department of Defence at the Headquarters of

No. 15 Military District, Graaff Reinet during May 1914.

In the concluding paragraph the General wrote, 'The next phase of this story will deal with the Rebellion and my part in it and in the S.W.A. Campaign'. Unfortunately this was not to be.

On November 7, 1943, Field Marshal Smuts decided to establish the UDF Historical Advisory Committee. This Committee became directly responsible to the Prime Minister and formed part of the Union War Histories Section of the Prime Minister's office. Three volumes were eventually published: 'Crisis in the Desert', 'The Sidi Rezeg Battles, 1941' and 'War in the Southern Oceans, 1939-1945'. Four more books were planned, but in July 1959 the Committee's activities came to an end and on 30 June 1961 the Union War Histories Section was closed down.

We have already noted the action the General took through the Council of Corps, Regimental and Kindred Organisations in regard to this matter but what must be stressed is the praise and gratitude which all South Africans owe him for the un-flagging interest and zeal with which he pursued the matter of the completion of the Histories. The numerous interviews he had with the late Dr. Verwoerd and the Department of Defence and of Education, Arts and Science (now the Department of National Education), bear testimony to his persistence. The project was greatly advanced by the co-operation of Gen R.C. Hiemstra, SSA, when Commandant-General, and the grants given by the Human Sciences Research Council.

In order to provide the authorities with an organisation to control and direct the writing of the outstanding histories, Lt-Gen Brink formed the War Histories Advisory Committee which functions under the aegis of the S.A. Ex-Services National Council.

Aware that Government grants were inadequate to cover all the expenses involved in producing the Histories, Gen Brink enlisted the help first of Maj D.H. Ollemans and then of Mr C.G. Kerr, Sir Keith Acutt and Col A.S. Hall, JCD, in launching fund-raising appeals to which he himself gave unstintingly of his time. It is no exaggeration to say that it was his presence and personality which opened the purses of the industrialists and mining magnates.

Regarding the role played by South Africa in World War II, he placed all his knowledge of events and his

considerable volume of records at the disposal of the authors chosen to complete the histories. In particular Cmdt Neil Orpen has acknowledged his special indebtedness to Lt-Gen Brink for his unfailing encouragement and assistance. The fact is that, if it had not been for Lt-Gen Brink, the three books that have appeared and the three still to be published would probably not have seen the light of day.

In addition Lt-Gen Brink had long been concerned about the lack of an adequate history of the formation and exploits of South African Non-European Troops. One of the tasks he set himself during his retirement, was to remedy the omission, but he was not spared to fulfil it.

Whenever he addressed Regimental and Corps Associations, the General continually impressed upon these organisations the importance of ensuring that the history of the units was correctly written up. Throughout his career he had insisted on sub-formations under his command maintaining most accurate records, such as complete war diaries, strength returns and the other forms required by higher echelons.

The regimental associations have to a certain extent performed their task. A typical example is the S.A. Tank Corps which, spurred to literary effort by Lt-Gen Brink, appointed Lt-Col Harry Klein to write its history which appeared under the title 'Springboks in Armour'. It was with pleasure that he wrote in the Foreword: -

'As one who had a part in the birth, organization and training of the South African Tank Corps and subsequently had several of the Units in my command in East Africa, Abyssinia and North Africa I shall always look back with pride and affection on the achievements of that grand body of men who made up the personnel of that splendid Corps'.

ONS IS!

#### INTEREST IN WAR GRAVES

After World War II, the condition of both Boer and British War Cemeteries had deteriorated to such an extent that a campaign was started to form a statutory body to remedy the state of affairs. The graves concerned were those of persons who were killed or died in Battle in South Africa prior to 1914.

The graves of soldiers who died or were killed during World War I and II were and are more than adequately cared for by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which functions in South Africa through a local committee.

In 1951 the South African Legion established liaison with all existing voluntary organisations interested in the care and maintenance of South African War graves. In 1952 the Minister of Interior met a deputation from the Legion and in July 1954 a committee was appointed to advise the Minister on the care and maintenance of war graves. In due course Maj-Gen H.S. Wakefield became a member of this committee but due to ill-health he resigned in 1957.

Lt-Gen Brink attended his first meeting of the British Forces Committee of the South African War Graves Board on 14 October 1958. He was unanimously elected Chairman on 20 February 1962 retiring during the period 1 April 1969 to 31 March 1970. The time and energy devoted by Lt-Gen Brink, not only to attending meetings and proceeding on tours of inspection, cannot be measured.

In his address at the unveiling and dedication of the British War Memorial in the Garden of Remembrance at Mooi River on 26 February, 1966 Lt-Gen Brink said:

#### 'THE TASK

To enable you to appreciate the task facing the War Graves Board let me tell you that

there are approximately	26 000
British War Graves in South Africa	
of pre-1914 origin made up as follows	

Prior to 1899 (Boer War)	4 040
S.A. War (1899-1902)	21 942
Subsequent Rebellions	21

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26 003

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Burger Graves 1899-1902	6 189
Concentration Camp Graves approx.	26 000

These graves are scattered throughout the country in approximately 400 cemeteries of varying sizes.

The majority of these cemeteries are small groups of isolated graves in outlying areas rendering care and maintenance

more than a problem. The sudden death of Major Edmeades in July 1968 threw an additional burden on the General and the weight of this undoubtedly contributed to his decision to retire to the South Coast of Natal. Before doing so, however, with the help of Maj F.G. Fraser Pool, the General completed schedules of war grave projects which had already been dealt with and those still to be dealt with as at 31 December 1968.

#### OTHER INTERESTS

In addition to his major interests, Lt-Gen Brink constantly responded to calls by many para-military organisations to assist them in their various projects. During 1947 he served as National Chairman of a National Navy Week Appeal which collected R400 000, R120 000 of which was set aside for the establishment of a Sailors' Home in the United Kingdom as a token of appreciation of the services of the British Mercantile Marine during World War II.

During his period of office as National President of the National War Memorial Health Foundation from 1948 to 1951, Lt-Gen Brink was largely instrumental in placing the Foundation in a position where it could fulfil the purposes for which it was founded. In particular he showed great interest in the construction of the African Community Centre at Soweto, one of the Foundation's projects.

His work in and for the Most Venerable Order of St. John of Jerusalem must also be mentioned. In 1936 he was made an Officer of the Order and in 1943 he was promoted to the grade of Knight of Grace.

Lt-Gen Brink took a great interest in the development of West Park Commando of which he was made an Honorary Member.

#### S.A. NATIONAL WAR MUSEUM

From the date of his appointment as a Trustee on 25 October 1946 until he died, the South African National War Museum was the paramount interest of Lt-Gen Brink. He was elected Chairman on 28 October 1957 and remained so until he retired on 31 October 1969. Throughout this period he assisted in building up the Museum to ensure that it would be a worthy record of South Africa's military history.

When he launched the Trustees' appeal for R1 100 000 for the erection of a new permanent building he said,

'The Museum has become the storehouse of many of the Nation's precious war records as well as a memorial to the efforts and sacrifices made by the men and women of South Africa in times of war and strife'.

The Appeal through his guidance and drive was a great success but unfortunately it has not been possible to date to achieve his ambition of seeing the erection of a Museum structure worthy of housing the historical items and records it holds in trust.

#### 80TH BIRTHDAY PRESENTATION AND RETIREMENT

When it became clear that Lt-Gen Brink was slowly ridding himself of his many offices, his friends sought to show their appreciation of the tremendous service that he had rendered his country. This they did by giving him a farewell presentation. Ex-servicemen and women of all ranks throughout South Africa as well as a number of other countries and mining and industrial magnates all joined in paying honour to this great South African.

For many personal reasons and because he wished to do some writing on his own account, Uncle George decided that he should retire to St. Michaels-on-Sea.

He left Johannesburg at the end of October 1969 and true to his word, as soon as he had settled in his new home he continued helping the War Histories Advisory Committee to correct the manuscripts of 'War in the Desert'. This book was to be published shortly after his death.

The other history projects were not neglected and one can see from the copy of a letter sent to the Director, S.A. National War Museum, that he was anxious to fulfil the task which he had set himself:

P.O. Box 101,  
St. Michaels-on-Sea.

My dear George,

I am making an effort to write up the contribution made by our non-European Army Services (N.E.A.S.); also our war effort on the home front (we served as the workshop for the Mid East.)

Could you please ask the Librarian to endeavour to find out what books there are on the N.E.A.S. You have the record in your office of what was achieved on the home front.

Would you be good enough to let me have copies of the books in existence. I'll make every effort to return them within one month.

I'll be much obliged to you.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sgd. Geo. E. Brink.

These tasks were destined not to be completed. After a brief illness Lieutenant-General George Edwin Brink, CB, CBE, DSO died in the Hospital at Port Shepstone, Natal on 30 April 1971 -

'Ex-servicemen lost a true friend and South Africa, a most distinguished son'.

## HONOURS AND AWARDS

Lt-Gen Brink was the recipient of the following honours and awards:-

1. The Most Honourable Order of the Bath, Companion (Military Division) (C.B.)
2. The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, Commander, (Military Division) (C.B.E.)
3. Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.)
4. Order of St. John Of Jerusalem (Knight of Grace and Commander).
5. 1914-15 Star.
6. British War Medal, 1914-1920.
7. Allied Victory Medal, 1914-1918 (with Oak Leaf)
8. 1939-45 Star.
9. Africa Star.
10. War Medal, 1939-45 (with Oak Leaf).
11. Africa Service Medal.
12. King George V's Silver Jubilee, 1935.
13. King George VI's Coronation, 1937
14. Croix de Guerre (France), with Palm.
15. Order of Oranje-Nassau Grand Officer (with swords) (Netherlands)

In addition he was mentioned in despatches on the following occasions:-

The War of 1914-1918:

- (i) 22nd November 1916 - by Lt-Gen the Hon. J.C. Smuts.
- (ii) 13th March 1918 - by Lt-Gen Sir J.L. van Deventer, KCB.
- (iii) 5th April 1918 - by Gen the Rt. Hon. Louis Botha.

The War of 1939-1945:

- (i) 20th July 1944 - 'by the King's Order'.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO AUTHORS OF BOOKS CONSULTED

Unpublished:

Lt-Gen G.E. Brink -  
'Reminiscences of G.E.B.'

Published:

Agar Hamilton, J.A.I. and Turner, L.C.F.-  
'The Sidi Rezeg Battles, 1941'.

Collyer, Maj-Gen J.J., CB, CMG, DSO. -  
(i) The Campaign in German South West Africa,  
1914-15.  
(ii) With Smuts in German East Africa.

Hurd, Norman - 1922, The Revolt on the Rand.

Klein, Lt-Col H. -  
(i) Springboks in Armour.  
(ii) Springbok Record.

Orpen, Cmdt N.D. JCD -  
(i) East African and Abyssinian Campaigns.  
(ii) War in the Desert.

Official History -  
The Union of South Africa and the Great War 1914-18.

Otto, Cmdt W. - SDB/SSB (1933-1973)

Brochure issued by the Central Documentation Services, SADF  
for 'Lt-Gen Brink, Exhibition, 1971'.

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