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In October, 1914, the South African Government decided to form a non-combatant force of African labourers, for service with Military Operations in the various theatres of war zones. These men were called upon to perform many and varied duties, principally the construction of military railways and roads, and as drivers and leaders of animal transport.

Although they ranked as non-combatants, and were, therefore, not armed, they not infrequently found themselves under fire, and suffered casualties. Furthermore, numbers died as a result of disease, and many lost their lives as a result of climatic conditions.

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Early in 1917 a troopship "H.M.T.MENDI" left Cape Town with about 800 members of the Native Labour Contingent on board, bound for France. In the English Channel, in the early morning of the 21st February, 1917, the "MENDI" was struck by another vessel, and was severely damaged, as a result of which 615 Africans were drowned. The whole African contingent displayed great courage, and this event prompted the idea of the "Mendi Memorial Service"!

Annual Memorial Service
This night that we should have to dwell
of our nation whose valour should be an inspiration to us a many an

~~It is not for us, however, to dwell on the horror and tragedy of this event.~~ We are concerned with the

present, and the future, and in order that the sacrifice made by those who lost their lives in the "MENDI" disaster should not be in vain, it is up to us to build a prosperous Nation, and be worthy of those men.

In the literal sense a seed of that disaster has borne fruit. Near the National Park, in Natal, there stands a kraal, and next to it, a beautiful shady tree. An African soldier, who had been in France previously saw in

that country some trees which he admired greatly, and managed to get a seed. This seed he carried with him as a most precious possession. That man was on the "MENDI" when disaster fell, but survived, with the seed. He returned to this country eventually, and planted the seed, and today there is the tree.

In the figurative sense the sacrifice of the "MENDI" victims has also borne fruit. Some years ago a committee was formed to establish a fund for scholarships called "The Mendi Memorial Scholarship Fund". The Fund is administered by the Union Department of Native Affairs, and is under the Chairmanship of the Native Commissioner, Johannesburg. It provides a limited number of scholarships for secondary education for Bantu children from Johannesburg.

The Fund is a worthy means of perpetuating the memory of the courage of the men of the "MENDI". It serves not only as a living memorial, but contributes in no small measure to meeting the needs of African children for

education beyond the primary stage. Secondary education is the responsibility of the Provincial Administration, but because of the great shortage of educational facilities, particularly for the African people, the City Council has endeavoured to make some contribution towards enabling promising African children to complete their education. At present the Council offers six Annual scholarships of £20: each to the children of Johannesburg residents for secondary education at Johannesburg schools, tenable for a period of four years. It also offers two medical scholarships, in respect of which £75: is provided for the first year at Fort Hare, and, subject to good behaviour, £225: each year thereafter for the completion of the medical course at the Witwatersrand University.

We cannot at this function forget that since the "MENDI" disaster there has been another War. Again the African people of South Africa served with the Armed Forces as drivers, ambulance men, hospital orderlies, cooks, etc.

1957

CITY OF
JOHANNESBURG



STAD
JOHANNESBURG

NON-EUROPEAN AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT
AFDELING NIE-BLANKE-SAKE

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JOHANNESBURG

80, ALBERT STREET,
ALBERTSTRAAT 80,
C/r ALBERT & DELVERS STREETS,
H/v ALBERT-EN DELVERSTRAT,
MARSHALLSTOWN,
JOHANNESBURG.

REF. NO.
VERWYS NO.

*Dear councillor Lewis
Herewith herewith
notes as requested.*

J. W. Steyn

21.2.57

MENDI MEMORIAL ANNIVERSARY SERVICE.

For some years it has been the custom for the Bantu people of Johannesburg to hold a service in commemoration of their people who lost their lives during the First World War.

In October, 1914, the South African Government decided to form a non-combatant force of ^{African} Native labourers for service with Military Operations in the various theatres of war in which the South African Forces were engaged in the war zones. These men were called upon to perform many and varied duties, principally the construction of military railways and roads and as drivers and leaders of animal transport.

Although they ranked as non-combatants and were, therefore, not armed they not infrequently found themselves under fire and suffered casualties. Furthermore, numbers died as a result of disease and many lost their lives as a result of climatic conditions.

Early in 1917 a troopship "H.M.T. MENDI" left Cape Town with about 800 members of the Native Labour Contingent on board bound for France. In the English Channel in the early morning of the 21st February, 1917, the "MENDI" was struck by another vessel and was severely damaged, as a result of which 615 Natives were drowned. The whole ^{African} Native contingent displayed great courage, and this event prompted the idea of the "Mendi Memorial Service".

It is not for us, however, to dwell on the horror and tragedy of this event. We are concerned with the present and the future and in order that the sacrifice made by those who lost their lives in the "MENDI" disaster should not be in vain, it is up to us to build a prosperous Nation and be worthy of those men.

In the literal sense a seed of that disaster has borne fruit. Near the National Park in Natal there stands a ~~Native~~ kraal and next to it is a beautiful shady tree. A ~~Native~~ ^{from Beaufort} who had been in France previously saw in that country some trees which he admired greatly and managed to get a seed. This seed he carried with him as a most precious possession. That man was on the "Mendi" when disaster fell but survived with his seed. He returned to this country eventually and planted the seed and today there is the tree.

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The Fund is a worthy means of perpetuating the memory of the courage of the men of the "MENDI". It serves not only as a living memorial but contributes in no small measure to meeting the needs of Native children for education beyond the primary stage. Secondary education is the responsibility of the Provincial Administration, but because of the great shortage of educational facilities, particularly for the Native people, the City Council has endeavoured to make some contribution towards enabling promising Native children to complete their education. At present the Council offers six Annual scholarships of £20 each to the children of Johannesburg residents for secondary education at Johannesburg schools, tenable for a period of four years. It also offers two medical scholarships, in respect of which £75 is provided for the first year at Fort Hare and, subject to good behaviour, £225 each year thereafter for the completion of the medical course at the

Witwatersrand University.

We cannot at this function forget that since the "Mendi" disaster there has been another War. Again the Native people of South Africa served with the Armed Forces as drivers, ambulance men, hospital orderlies, cooks, etc. Many of these soldiers also did not return to South Africa and are buried in East Africa and the Western Desert.

One of their number was awarded to D.C.M. for most heroic behaviour. In the thick of battle and severely wounded he continued through one day and most of the night going out under fire and carrying wounded men back. Even when ordered to stop and rest he refused and carried on.

He is but one of the many who performed great deeds of valour and sacrifice in this War.

Another Native soldier who was a prisoner in the hands of the Germans at Tobruk was engaged in loading petrol ships. This boy had been on the Mines and knew something about explosives. After a long period and with infinite patience, he collected small quantities of explosives and fuses. Eventually he was able to set a charge in a petrol ship and lay a long fuse which he was able to light at the end of his period of duty. It is said that he went back to Camp showing no emotion but quietly sat on a kopjie inside the wire where he could see the harbour. Sure enough the ship eventually blew up. It is doubtful if the Germans to this day know how it happened.

It is to be hoped that never again will people have to leave home and family to go to War. Peace is difficult enough. As a result of both Wars things are much harder now than they might have been. It is only by patience, co-operation and mutual trust that the peoples of this country, black and white, can together build a prosperous Nation.

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