Second World War

Learning from the lessons of the First World War, when bands of friends and comrades stayed together to sometimes devastating effect, as happened to the South African forces at Delville Wood, the Ist and 2nd battalions were distributed between British regiments in the Middle East to even out the probability of major casualties in one group. They became involved in reconnaissance and sabotage against enemy lines, working with the early Special Air Service (SAS).

Col. Ken Harvey DSO, a former chairman of the National Trust for Zimbabwe, (NTZ), fought in the Western Deserts and Italy with the Seaforth Highlanders and SAS. Col. Ken Grainger of the Southern Rhodesia Reconnaissance Regiment, later a commander in the Rhodesian Army, was a major philanthropist to charities in Zimbabwe. Continuing his work, a donation from the Don Grainger Memorial Trust has enabled the NTZ to refurbish the Rhodes Museum, Nyanga, one of its properties. Another link of interest to locals, the Ist Battle of the Rhodesia African Rifles training in the NTZ, headquarters in Borrowdale Road, Harare, before being sent to the Far East.

A number of future Rhodesian government ministers flew in the Royal Air Force during the war: Wing Commander William Harper, a government minister from 1965–73; Wing Commander Hardwicke Holderness DSO, Southern Rhodesia MP 1954–8; and Flight Lieutenant Ian Smith, Prime Minister from 1965–79. Outside politics, another notable future Rhodesian was Group Captain Brian Paddington DSO, a contemporary of the British politician Aneurin Bevan, both of whom successfully escaped from Colditz.

The Rhodesian ships of the Royal Navy, HMS Moshone and HMS Mombasa both took part in the Norwegian Campaign (April to June 1940) which ended when that country fell to the German forces. The ships and their crew continued operations, eventually, experiencing mixed fortunes: on its return from participating in the sinking of the Bismarck, HMS Moshone was hit by an air attack on Trondheim in May 1941; of the ship’s entire crew, only five men were lost. HMS Mombasa was torpedoed in the Barents Sea in March 1942; of the entire crew, only two men were saved.

The 2nd Battalion RR was raised to resist the presence of German forces in East Africa and some incursions into Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). The German commander, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, and his officers made considerable use of trained askari (native troops), who were mobile and attuned to the environment. This could not be said of white troops, many of whom succumbed to tropical diseases and enfeeble. The 2nd Battalion withered due to these effects and cooped with uninspired and unimaginative leadership, this conflict dragged on until 1919.

At sea, the Imperial German light cruiser SMS Blücher, trapped by the Royal Navy cruisers, was scuttled in 1915 on the Bonamena River (Rufiji) Delta, then the German East Africa/Mozambique border.

The story of the South African experience in the war is depicted in ‘Stories from silence: finding South Africa’s servicemen’ by Andrew Piper, Manager, Online Projects, State Library of South Australia.

Stories from silence: finding South Australia’s servicemen

Andrew Piper, Manager, Online Projects, State Library of South Australia

Introduction

From 1916 until 1919, the South Australian Red Cross Information Bureau undertook research into 8,033 ex-servicemen from family and friends of Australian Imperial Force (AIF) personnel who fought in the First World War. The State Library of South Australia (SLSA) is developing a web resource that will enable researchers, family historians and institutions worldwide to interrogate, contribute to and harvest the content of those enquiries. It is anticipated that this resource will be available early in 2015.

What we have

SLSA’s holdings are unique in Australia. While the Australian War Memorial (AWM) holds copies of most of the Australian enquiry records from the London bureau and may include some South Australian information, SLSA’s collection includes the original documents from the South Australian Bureau, including the enquiry letter and often a response from the family. Its new web resource will enable searches to be conducted across a range of indexed metadata and the retrieval of newly digitised scans of the original packets and, for the first time, enable searches by enquirer’s name and other characteristics.

The resource will comprise three searchable elements, which represent phases of the project:

1. The entire content of packets in a digitised format, giving enquirers access to view and download copies of the original documents and the ability to search across a range of indexed metadata
2. A place for the public to contribute additional information. This may range from family photos of the soldiers to personal reminiscences or transcription of letters within the packets and tagging. This ability to engage with the public and offer opportunities to contribute more information is attractive to us at SLSA
3. Content from third-party sources, such as the National Archives of Australia (NAA), Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) and the National Library of Australia’s Trove, which directly relate to the soldiers.

This phase will link information from many different institutions across Australia and internationally, bringing everything together into one searchable web presence.
the soldier, such as personal information or a description. These words may be the only record of that person's experience of war. DIGITISING commenced in December 2012 and was completed in September 2013 using a Kodak 3400 document scanner and Kodak Capture Pro Software, which simultaneously create searchable PDF and TIFF formats for preservation and for the website. Just as the Bureau used a volunteer workforce, SLA continues the tradition by engaging volunteers to contribute to the rediscovery of these South Australian soldiers through indexing. A team of volunteers is extracting details from the records and entering data into a spreadsheet. The data will be added to the Library's catalogue and then exported to a purpose-built web resource during 2014. Considerable thought has been given as to what to index. While all the information is valuable and interesting, time constraints dictated what to record. For example, by removing any requirement to interpret the content, it will be easier for our volunteers to concentrate on indexing. This will be alleviated by providing the opportunity for visitors to transcribe and tag records with keywords. To give the resource validity and authority, the focus is on the people: the soldiers, eyewitnesses and enquirers. The following will allow connections with other resources: packet number; title on the packet; date range; soldier's name, service number, unit and NAA barcode; their date of death; eyewitness name and identifying details; locations associated with the soldier, including place of incident, hospitals, prisoner-of-war camps, burial, etc.; and the enquirer's name and address. In time we will validate the place names and provide geo codes for mapping purposes.

Conclusion

The centenary is an opportunity to offer something unique to world-wide commemorations and provide content for the public to learn from and reuse. It is also an opportunity to deliver the public's expectation to be involved, to add their knowledge to our collections and create new content. This will, in turn, enrich the value of our heritage resources. The recruitment of volunteers for data entry is a natural alignment for this project, neatly creating a full circle that commences with volunteers in 1915 and ends with volunteers in the twenty-first century.

For more information, visit our project page at: http://library.sl.aunz/centenaryynesrace.

References
5. 'Public librarybeard', The Register, 20 December 1919, p.16.

How the Forestry Commission came into being and its connection to the National Trust

Ray Hawes, Head of Forestry

The landscape of parts of northern France and western Belgium was devastated by the fighting and associated activities of the First World War. Although there were no land battles in the UK at this time, our landscape also changed significantly because of the war. The reason was trees — or rather the lack of them.

The land of the British Empire was required for the timber that was needed for ships, buildings, and for fuel to power industry. The demand was so great that virtually all the timber was exported. The supply of timber was so depleted that the British government initiated a reforestation program to replace the supply. This led to the establishment of the Forestry Commission in 1919.

The Forestry Commission was originally established to supply timber for the war effort. After the war, it was continued to ensure that the UK had a sustainable supply of timber for future needs.

The Commission has since played a vital role in the reforestation of the UK and has contributed to the environmental sustainability of the country.

Conclusion

The Forestry Commission has played a crucial role in the UK's timber supply and has contributed to the sustainability of the country. Its establishment was necessary to ensure that the UK had a sustainable supply of timber for future needs.