

SAAFA Remembrance Day

Armistice, as related to warfare, is defined 'a mutually-agreed suspension of hostilities between two Powers engaged in warfare'. During World War One, it became apparent towards the end of 1918, that the state of the German Armed Forces, rendered futile any continuation of the terrible carnage which had characterised trench warfare in particular, and on 6 November 1918, a delegation, headed by the notorious Herr Erzberger, the German Secretary of State, left Berlin to seek terms for an Armistice.

The delegation was admitted through the French lines and arrived in France near La Capelle during the evening of 9 November 1918. The following day, they were transferred to a train and taken to the Forest of Compiègne, where the French Marshall Foch and the British Admiral, Sir Rosslyn Wemyss, awaited them in a saloon of another train, together with their respective Staff Officers.

After much protesting and attempts at evasion, the terms were accepted at 05h00 on Monday 11 November 1918. At the 11th hour, on the 11th day of the 11th month 1918, the Armistice was proclaimed. The welcome sound of the cease-fire echoed from the bugles of the Allied Forces from the front lines, to the French and Belgian coasts.

As 11'o clock struck, the streets of London filled as if by magic and when the bells pealed out their joyful message, all restraint was flung aside as people danced, sang and cried. The celebrations continued throughout the night, the rich joining hands with the poor, united in goodwill by the joyful news. There were many however that were saddened by the thought that their own loved ones would never return and thoughts turned to husbands, wives, sons, daughters and relatives who had made the supreme sacrifice for their country.

The scenes in London were repeated in South Africa, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in other parts of the Empire but were followed in a short time by services of thanksgiving in cathedrals and churches throughout the Empire that 51 months of slaughter and suffering had passed and that the 'war to end all wars' had come to an end.

It was agreed that 11 November should thereafter be celebrated as a Day of Remembrance in Great Britain, the Dominions and Colonies, in France and the USA. For many years in Great Britain, all traffic (except express trains) would halt from 11h00 until two minutes past and everyone observed two minutes silence to honour those who had sacrificed their lives. With the passing of time, new generations grow up and memories become blunted, so the practice was restricted to the Sunday nearest 11 November, which became known as Armistice Day.

After World War Two during 1946, Armistice Sunday became known as Remembrance Day that the older generations and some of the younger generations still observe. In spite of the advances of the age, wars in Korea, South Africa's Border War known as the Bush War and Wars of Liberation continue in Africa and international terrorism has started to take root in Europe and other parts of the world. Even though South Africa is involved with peacekeeping operations, South Africans continue to lose their lives and it is therefore very important that the new younger generations and we should not forget.