

## Nancy the WW1 Springbok Mascot

Nancy took the fancy of the South African soldiers of the Transvaal Scottish during World War One (WWI).

She was a springbok (Thompson's Gazelle), their mascot as well as the symbol portrayed on the badges that the soldiers wore with pride.

Nancy was given to the unit by the Mc Claren-Kennedy family who lived on the farm Vierfontein (4<sup>th</sup> fountain) in the Free State. Private Peterson, nicknamed 'buck major', was her keeper, trainer and protector and all the men loved her. Nancy was their pet diversion and reminder of 'home'. She moved with the columns and along the lines, announcing to all and sundry that the South African soldiers were there marching and fighting as 'Springboks', the nickname of all the South African soldiers.



When Mr. David Mc Claren-Kennedy presented Nancy to the Regiment, he attached a message written in Scottish-English that read:

Hey Jock, am sendin' ya ma 'Nancy'  
An' hope that she may tak' yer fancy!  
Ye're gaeing' faur across the seas;  
Sae mind puier 'Davit' if ye please –  
That's me  
David Mc Claren Kennedy.  
Vierfontein, OFS.  
20 August 1915.

The regimental poet, Sergeant Mc Vean, replied in South African-Scottish-English:



Right pleased I was tae get the beastie,  
And mony thanks is in my breastie,  
And Sir, I'll no neglect ma' duty,  
Tae praise her for her grace and beauty,  
Met e emblem o' this sunny land  
Fit pet tae grace our gallant band.  
You may be sure I'll no neglect her,  
Wi kindly care I'll aye respect her  
She'll be ma' first and constant care  
And dine upon the daintiest fare  
Wee bits o' grass and heaps o' stubble,  
Nae matter whether here or France  
We'll aye be prood o' bonny 'Nancy'.



Nancy's keeper was a bugler, No.186, Edmund Peterson of "D" Company South African Scottish. Being the official mascot, Edmund trained Nancy to move and trot on her dainty legs in tune to the sound of the bagpipes and the regimental band. Her fame spread quickly and when in December 1915 Her Majesty Queen Mary together with her son the future King George VI, inspected the South African Brigade, the Queen especially asked to see Nancy.

Nancy, like many other soldiers on strength, was also 'temped' and, while at the Mex Camp in Egypt, went AWOL (absent without leave). Her keeper, Pte. Petersen, was beside himself with worry, suspecting that Nancy could have been kidnapped to be served up as dinner for an Egyptian family. A house-to-house search was undertaken but eventually a 'patrol' of skirling bagpipes was sent out in different directions, even into the desert and amongst the dunes, in the hope that the sound of the bagpipes would 'call her back to base'. This plan worked like a charm. Nancy reappeared and moved nonchalantly back to camp, having then forsaken 'the call of the wild'. After this close shave, Nancy was kept under control secured by a stout leather dog collar joined to a rope leash until the end of the war in 1918.



When the South African Brigade moved to France, Nancy was fitted out with a warm 'coat' made from Transvaal Scottish tartan cloth to protect her from the severe, cold winter weather. The French powers-that-be found tame, smartly clad Nancy so adorable that they even had a postcard printed and circulated of her.

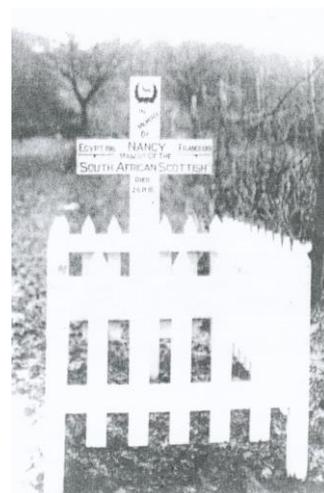


Nancy accompanied the Springbok soldiers everywhere, even surviving the horrors of the battle of Delville Wood. When the fighting was in the vicinity of the French town Armentieres, a shell exploded close to where Nancy had been tethered. In fright she had bolted and seriously damaged her left horn against a wall. The doctors were not prepared to risk resetting the horn so it eventually grew downwards at an angle. With her out-of-alignment left horn, Nancy then displayed a golden 'wound'-stripe on her tartan coat.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 1918, when the first Commemorative Drumhead Memorial Service was held by Father Hill in devastated Delville Wood, Nancy was present at what was to be her last ceremonial parade. Strutting on her dainty legs, she proudly led the four battalions of the South African Brigade to their positions. Nancy then positioned herself sedately next to her keeper, Pte. Edmund Peterson.

Nancy caught pneumonia during the severe winter of that year and, although cared for by Bugler Peterson and the medical personnel, died on 26 November 1918. Her death was announced in General Orders. All other parades were cancelled.

On 28 November 1918 Nancy was buried with the officers and men standing ankle deep in the mud with their heads bared, around the open grave in the war cemetery at Hermeton. Only a few of the original members of the regiment were still on active service, but those that were present were detailed to form the firing party over Nancy's grave. Nancy is the only animal in history to be accorded a full military funeral with honours and to be buried in an Allied war cemetery.



Wounded Lt. Colonel D.M. Macleod who stood by his men until after 11 November 1918 when the guns fell silent, wrote home about the demise of their beloved mascot Nancy as follows:

*We have had rather bad luck this week. Poor old Springbok, 'Nancy', the regimental mascot who served with us ever since the first, died but she saw us through until the armistice. She was suffering from the cold, and some infection of the neck, which she had last winter. We buried her in the village and we put up a cross with a French inscription so that the grave will always be left undisturbed. Before we buried her, we skinned her, and I have had the skin sent home to a very good taxidermist in bond Street, and I am having it stuffed and mounted.*

The stuffed and mounted 'Nancy' was dispatched back to South Africa and can be seen at the South African Military Museum in Johannesburg.

Nancy the springbok is not forgotten.



**SA troops (Springboks) headed by a substitute springbok mascot during the Victory Parade, London in July 1919; Nancy having died in November 1918.**



**Pte YE Slaney 4<sup>th</sup> SAI a survivor of The Battle of Delville Wood laying a wreath at the Cenotaph in Durban.**

*J. C. Abrahams (Tannie Mossie)*

