



Jimmy's Own

Official Newsletter of the Signals Association

Issue 29 - Special Edition



Foreword

By **Matt Tennyson**, editor of *Military Despatches* and a member of the South African Signals Association.

I am both honoured and delighted to write a short foreword to this Special Edition on Jimmy's Own.

My own association with the South African Signals Association goes back to 1 May 2016.

A friend of mine, and a fellow military veteran, had mentioned that the Signallers were holding some or other function, and that they were looking for someone to take photographs of the event.

He had given me the phone number of a certain Robbie Roberts and asked me to give him a call if I was willing to help out.

I called Robbie that evening and it was that start of not only a working relationship but also a friendship that I treasure.

The event in question was the Traditional Ceremony and Handing Over between the 3 Brigade Signal Company Reunion Association and the South African Signals Association.

3 Brigade Signal Company from Cape Town had served throughout World War II. After the war they decided to hold an annual reunion and the first of these was held on 27 May 1946.

They held their last reunion on 1 May 2016, a remarkable 70 years later. The last three surviving members

of the 3 Brigade Signal Company Reunion Association had decided to call it a day. They would be handing over to the South African Signals Association.

Not only did I get to photograph the event, I also shot some video and, along with Robbie, put together a short documentary of the event.

We produced a short booklet on the event and from this came the idea to do "Jimmy's Own", a quarterly online magazine and official newsletter of the Signals Association.

At 11:00 on 11 November 2016 we launched the SA Signals Association website. It has been my privilege to be involved with the design and upkeep of the website as well as with the layout and design of "Jimmy's Own".

In December 2022 I was made an official member of the SA Signals Association. It is something I am very proud about.

My own involvement with the South African Corps of Signals goes back to 1976 when, as a member of the Permanent Force, I did an Electronic Warfare course at the Army Gymnasium in Heidelberg.

May I congratulate the South African Corps of Signals on their Centenary and may they go from strength to strength.

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Signals Association supports the celebration of the Centenary of the South African Corps of Signals

Article by South African Signals Association President, Lt Col (Ret) William A. (Robbie) Roberts, SM, MMM, JCD

When I commenced writing this article during May 2023, it was not yet known as to whether, or not, the SA Army Signals Formation will be honouring and celebrating the centenary of the South African Corps of Signals (S.A.C.S.) which was established 100 years ago on 1 November 1923.

From where I sit in Cape Town, and being so close to 1st November 2023, I am oblivious to any major happening(s) at the behest of the SA Army Signals Formation in Wonderboom to honour and celebrate the centenary of the SA Corps of Signals (SACS).

Fortunately, there are a group of retired signallers, some of whom are members of our association and others from in and around Gauteng, who are doing praiseworthy work in arranging events and functions to commemorate this historic occasion. I wish Brig Gen (Ret) Ian Fordred and his fellow Jimmies all the very best in their efforts in this regard.

In Cape Town the

Association has arranged a combined Annual Association Birthday and Corps of Signals Centenary luncheon which will take place at the SA Legion's Rosedale Club on Saturday, 18



November 2023. The Guest speaker at this event will be Retired Alderman Ian Neilsen, former Deputy Executive Mayor of Cape Town who will be representing Alderman Geordin Hill-Lewis is the current Executive Mayor of the City of Cape Town.

The Cape Town head office of the Signals Association is also bringing out a special set of wine to commemorate the centenary of the Signals Corps. Pictures of the labels have been included on the back page of this special issue of our newsletter.

Whatever the Signals Formation contemplate doing does not distract us, the 'Signals Association', being the only military veteran organisation in South Africa, registered with the Council for Military Veteran Organisations (CMVO) and representing all former Signallers, to honour our commitment in recognition of this special occasion in the history of our beloved Signals Corps.

When I was officer commanding 71 Signal Unit (formerly 3 Signal Squadron), the unit hosted a large Open Day at Acacia Park, Goodwood on Saturday, 6 May 2000 to announce our intention to establish an association.

Maj Gen (Ret) Piet Verbeeck acted as our functionary. Little did we expect to last and grow ever popular at the time, but now, almost 23 years later, we find ourselves in the position to acknowledge the privilege to be able and honour the 100th birthday of our own S.A.C.S.

When I set out pen to paper, I was fortunate to have a copy of the 'famous' Black Book on the South African Corps of Signals, being the 4th publication of the Documentation Service of the old SADF.

The book was compiled by Maj F.J. Jacobs, Lt R.J. Bouch, Sophia du Preez and Richard Cornwell in 1974, with Maj Genl L.H. Groenewald, SM, and then Director General Management Systems having written the Foreword.

This publication was launched when the S.A.C.S celebrated its 50th anniversary and it outlines the development of the "important branch (Signals) of the military establishment, with particular mention being made of the Anglo-Boer War and the First World War, to show how the earlier signals service were incorporated in the military effort".

The second part of the book deals with the establishment of the S.A.C.S., a development anticipated in the First World War and describes the difficult progress through the twenties and the comprehensive reorganisation of the Union Defence Force in the second half of the thirties.

It also touches on the technological development that quickly rendered the 'most modern' electronic apparatus (at that time) obsolete. It also covers the development and erection of a South African Radar system on the eve of the Second World War and provides a good example of how the South Africans kept abreast of technical progress.

The outbreak of the Second World

War resulted in impressive expansion of the S.A.C.S. with its members drawn mostly from the Department of Posts and Telegraphs; with the book describing them having acquitted themselves exceptionally well of their tasks in the newly created brigade groups. The signallers' activities in WWII were so fully integrated in those of their brigade groups that it was difficult to isolate the role of the signal units.

The S.A.C.S. was established with effect from 1 November 1923 in terms of Government Notice 671 of 22 April 1924.

The planning and extent of the various units to make up the Corps was initiated in a letter by Col Edward Sturman, the then Postmaster-General, on 9 November 1923. Col Sturman's enthusiasm led him to conclude his letter with the following paragraph: "The mobilisation equipment tables are at present being carefully reviewed with the object of meeting the requirements of the Union, and these will be submitted to the Equipment Table Committee as early as possible".

Col Sturman's rank was adjusted to that of Lt Col which was considered high enough for peacetime purposes.

Chief of the General Staff on 20 November 1923 authorised the following Active Citizen Force (ACF) units:

- Corps HQ
- 3 Brigade Sections
- 3 Radio Telegraph Sections
- 1 Radio Section (SAAF)
- 1 Motor Air Line Section



• 2 Cable Sections

Since the foregoing, it appears there were lots of differences of opinion between the Postmaster-General as Director Signals, the Quartermaster-General and Chief of the General Staff regarding the composition of the Corps, its HQ and various ACF units.

A significantly important document was initiated on 1 April 1924 when the then Adjutant-General published his first Strength Tables, where after followed communications between the S.A.C.S. and Britain with the Colonel-Commandant of the Signals Training Centre in England writing to our Adjutant-General on 2 January 1925 expressing a desire for a possible "connection" with the S.A.C.S. as the Royal Corps of Signals did not have any such "connections" at the time.

The British Colonel-Commandant wrote to say that "the Royal Corps of Signals would be most grateful if you (S.A.) could ascertain and acquaint him as to whether a suggestion to form an alliance between the S.A.C.S. and the Royal Corps of Signals would meet your (our) own approval, and with that



WHERE IT ALL BEGAN: Maj General (Ret) Piet Verbeeck (left), Lt Col (Ret) Robbie Roberts officiating at the Open Day for Signallers in the Western Cape held at Acasia Park Military Base, Goodwood on 6 May 2000.

of the S.A.C.S.

Director Signals, Lt Col Sturman, welcomed the British proposal on condition it was based on an improvement of unit spirit ("Espirit de Regiment"). Our Adjutant-General's response to the Signal Training Centre in Sussex, England on 6 March 1925 was that the proposed "connection" would be welcomed. The British War office responded positively, suggesting the S.A.C.S. lodges an application with a recommendation by the South African Prime Minister.

The first "connection" in the history of the Signals Corps was finalised on 2 September 1926 with a written communiqué from Downing Street to the SA Governor-General stating:

"I have the honour to acknowledge

the receipt of your Excellency's despatch No 281 of 26 May and to request you to inform your Ministers that His Majesty the King has been graciously pleased to approve of the alliance of the South African Corps of Signals, Active Citizen Force of the Union of South Africa, to the Royal Corps of Signals".

Since then, the composition of the S.A.C.S. took various shapes and with the outbreak of WWII in 1939, the Corps consisted of the following three Divisional Signals Companies:

- 1 Divisional Signal Company (Durban)
- 2 Divisional Signal Company (Johannesburg)
- 3 Divisional Signal Company (Cape Town)

With a further 9 Brigade Signal

Companies being subsequently established with effect from 1 May 1946 in terms of Government Notice No 1540 dated 19 July 1946, and published in Government Gazette No 3681. Them being:

- 1 Brigade Signal Company Durban
- 2 Brigade Signal Company (Port Elizabeth)
- 3 Brigade Signal Company (Cape Town)
- 4 Brigade Signal Company (Bloemfontein)
- 5 Brigade Signal Company (Johannesburg)
- 6 Brigade Signal Company (Pretoria)
- 7 Brigade Signal Company (Durban)
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- 9 Brigade Signal Company (Cape Town)

In early 1939 there became a need for radio tracing and concerted efforts were initiated to develop an effective air defence capability. Such “project” was mainly developed by Scientists from various South African universities using South African designed radar sets and incorporated into the S.A.C.S., which became the forerunner to the Special Signals Service (SSS).

The first task of the SSS was the provision of personnel and equipment for duty in East Africa and later also in the Middle East, whilst the safeguarding of the South African coast line against enemy airplane and ships became an



IN THE ARMY: This is what a Postmaster General, Johan Hendrik de Villiers, looked like when still a Corporal doing basics at 3 Signal Squadron from 1949 until 1952.

increasing necessity.

In 1941 a SSS training school was established in Cape Town and something the Signals Association is proud of is that about twelve of the former operators of the SSS (then all of them deep into their 90's) attended our Open Day activities to which I alluded to on page five of this article. The role the coastal radar stations fulfilled during the War proved invaluable in the saving of many human lives.

Another aspect the Signals Association is proud of, is the fact that our as-

sociation's first Chairman, Johan Hendrik de Villiers, as a former member of Cape Town based 3 Signal Squadron and a Founder Member of our association, served as South Africa's last Postmaster-General before such title was changed because of government restructuring. See Johan's input in another article of this issue of “Jimmy's Own”.

After the first 50 years of the S.A.C.S. General Georg Meiring, (then Col as Director Signals), contributed fully on the S.A.C.S.'s Golden Jubilee:

He said it was appropriate that a commemorative publication should accompany the celebration of a notable event and that the S.A.C.S. was fortunate in being one of the few corps whose history was recorded in book form. Those responsible at Doc Services, he said, have successfully reconstructed the story of the S.A.C.S., with its essential although unobtrusive task and for this contribution to the S.A.C.S.'s Golden Jubilee celebration he expressed their gratitude.

WWII was followed by the lowest point in the development of the S.A.C.S. Many of the war veterans returned to civilian posts and those who remained in the SADF had to make do with obsolete wartime equipment. Awareness gradually arose of the need for a new beginning and equipment to meet the S.A.C.S.'s most urgent needs was acquired from the United Kingdom.

These conditions prevailed for a

long period, but slowly the RSA became self-sufficient in certain items, with the aid of the Armaments Board as the “Supplier and Agent” of the SADF.

The communications ability of the S.A.C.S. then vastly improved during later years with the demand for more rapid and reliable equipment still remaining. Such communications were essential for command and control and at the time of the Corps' Golden Jubilee, the S.A.C.S. had to overcome marked leeway with two communications modernisation projects being launched to bring the SA Army's static and mobile command and control communications up to date. Before long it was realised that the ordinary modernisation programme would not have the desired effect and therefore Project Ebbehout was extended in scope to provide for speech, telegraph, data and facsimile communication with the S.A.C.S. organising, implementing and managing the systems. For the mobile command and control system of the SA Army a similar project, Project Netor, was initiated.

New developments in telecommunications techniques demand that personnel be well versed in system theory and operation. A member of the S.A.C.S. had to be well trained in the general service and technical aspects of telecommunication.

General (then Col) Meiring saw that the SA Army's telecommunication requirements would expand to include high quality digital equipment as a ba-

sic telecommunications system. With the advent of extensive computerisation of various functions he foresaw that “true time” data communications would assume prime importance going forward.

General Meiring said at the time that Fifty years had passed and that he could only guess what the future held for the S.A.C.S. The image of Mercurius, with his foot upon the South Wind, represents the integrated nature of the S.A.C.S. with all members wearing exactly the same badge. All personnel serve only for one reason, and that is to “get the message through.

General Meiring said 50 years ago that the S.A.C.S. has a short though colourful history and before it lay the wide prospects offered by a real challenge to all its then present and future members. Despite the good prospects for the S.A.C.S. in particular and for the SA Army in general, there are difficult times ahead. We must not mislead ourselves by pretending that our country does not have problems, problems which are in a broad sense those of the SADF and therefore of the S.A.C.S. We stand amongst our people; may we be guided from above in true spirit of service and above all, let us be prepared for any circumstances which may arise. The corps, notwithstanding all its modern equipment, is only as good and effective as its members allow it to be.

As General Meiring said in his address after the first 50 years of the S.A.C.S., “we stand amongst our peo-



General Georg Meiring who extensively covered the first 50 years of the S.A.C.S.

ple; may we be guided from above in true spirit of service and above all, let us be prepared for any circumstances which may arise. The corps, notwithstanding all its modern equipment, is only as good and effective as its members allow it to be”.

General Meiring’s wish for the next 50 years certainly came true as the S.A.C.S. became even more sophisticated and effective in all spheres of communication in our country to the extent that our defence capabilities as far as communications systems and IT is concerned, can be regarded amongst the best in the world.

The quality of the Signaller Jimmies of the past 100 years laid the founda-



Brig Gen (Ret) Denis Jelliman

tion for the SANDF of to-day and beyond. May the Corps, or Formation as it is nowadays called, go from strength to strength.

We as Signaller Veterans pay tribute to our forbearers and salute them, one and all of whatever rank, creed or background.

Brig Gen (Ret) Denis Jelliman, an Honorary member of the Signals Association and previous Director : Reserves, upon being asked to comment on my draft article, said that during the second half of the S.A.C.S.’s centenary huge strides had taken place with new technology that would need to be covered if ever a follow-up “Black Book” was to be compiled.

General Jelliman said that the history, progress and development in Elec-

tronic Warfare (EW) was another important topic to be covered and pointed out the publication of a recent book by Generals Gerrit Murphy and Chris Labuschagne that covers the development of EW. He also reckons that a lot can be written on Project Ebbehout and Netor which, he says, is covered to an extent in the aforementioned book on EW.

Many new generation technology projects have been launched since the turn of the century of which project ‘Radiate’ needs mentioning as the introduction of the new family of digital radios and of which production has started.

General Jelliman is also of the opinion that a lot could be recorded on the development and support of the Reserve Force units including the Field Postal service and their contribution to the S.A.C.S. The field Postal service (11 Field Post Office) has been active since the early stages of the border war and the only unit in the SADF/SANDF that has provided the Defence Force with continuous operational support 24/7 up to the present deployments of the SANDF, truly a remarkable achievement.

Let’s hope that someone will find the time and energy to tackle another “Black Book” to cover the second 50 year span of the corps’ 100th year of existence.

Certa Cito veteran greetings.

Robbie Roberts
President: Signals Association

Brief overview of the South African Corps of Signals

Article by South African Signals Association Chairperson, Lt Col (Ret) William Geoffrey Laskey, MMM, JCD

The South African Corps of Signals will be 100 years old on 01 November 2023. This is a great achievement for the South African Corps of Signals who has provided a professional, specialist signal services for the South African Defence Force

throughout its existence. Since its inception, the composition of the S.A.C.S. took various shapes and with the outbreak of WWII in 1939, the Corps consisted of the following three Divisional Signals Companies:

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After WW2 the Citizen Force was a reserve component of the South African armed forces. In South Africa members of the SACS comprised of a Permanent Force element as well as Citizen Force members (Part-time forces). From 1952, all men of conscription age (16 years) were balloted, and the Citizen Force members initially consisted of conscripted members. From the introduction of the Defence Amendment Act of 1967 (Act no. 85 of 1967) until 1994, South Africa had a system of universal national service for white males which served in all the elements of the SANDF (Army, Air Force, Navy and Military Medical Services). These members were known as National Service men. At the

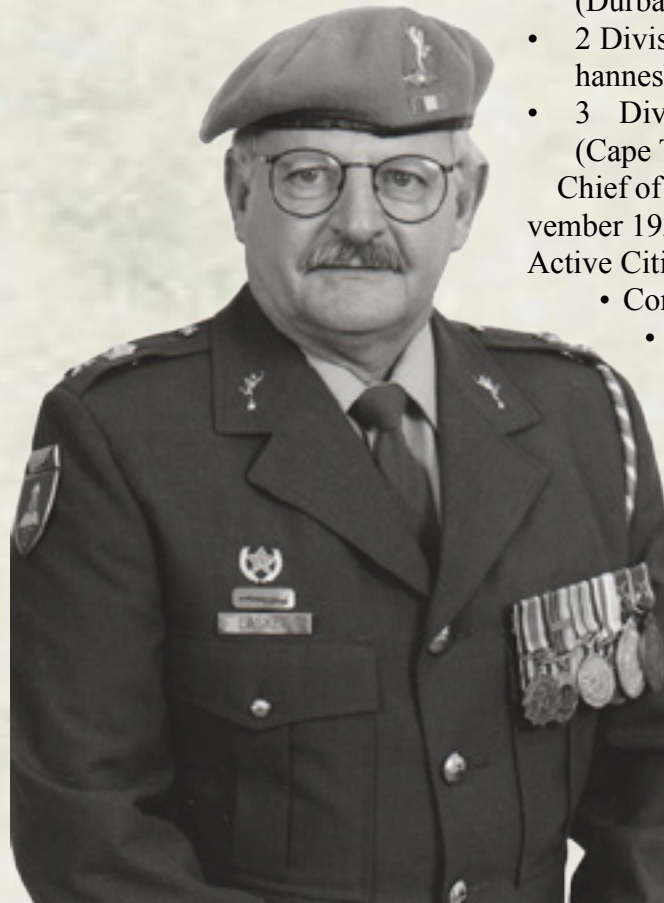
end of the South African border war in 1989 the need for part time forces reduced considerably, which led to the discontinuation of the National Service System eventually in 1994. However, since 2015 the SANDF Military Strategy and the Force Employment requirements identified the need for a greater participation by citizens in the military. These “rejuvenated” and updated part time forces are based throughout South Africa and dependent on volunteer members totally.

In the SANDF Permanent force and Part-time members served in the Corps of Signals and the South African Defence force with distinction in various peacetime and operational roles and remains an integrated and integral part of the South African Military forces.

With this special centenary edition of “Jimmy’s Own”, we as members of the Signals Association pay tribute to our forbearers and the culture, traditions, and camaraderie they established. We salute them, one and all of whatever rank, creed, or background. They deserve to be acknowledged and honoured for their outstanding services to their country and particularly the South African Corps of Signals over the 100 years of its existence.

Certa Cito Greetings,

Geoff Laskey
Chairperson Signals Association



Message from Johan de Villiers

First Chairman 02/12/2000 to 29/03/2005. Member of 3 Signal Squadron and South Africa's last Postmaster General.

I grew up in the Southern Cape and went to school in Napier until 1948. I joined the Department of Posts and Telecommunications (as it was then known) the following year as a junior clerical assistant.

Compulsory military training was enforced in those days and I joined 3 Signal Squadron at Youngsfield in 1949. It was proper for post office employees to join the Signals Corps since signalmen had to understand telecommunications and we also received training in Morse Code and wireless operating.

I served in 3 Signal Squadron until 1952 when I was transferred to Bloemfontein. I asked not to have to join 4 Brigade in Bloemfontein as I wanted to concentrate more on the advancement of my career.

I also then embarked on further studies and enrolled at UNISA where I attained the degrees BA and BCom Hons.

Part of our military training in Cape Town took place over weekends when we did among others, wireless operating. Since there were no immediate threats of war against our country at the time, we perhaps did not take our training too seriously. On one such occasion we decided to rather listen to the horse racing broadcast from Ke-



nilworth on our radios instead of the usual army stuff.

I noticed that Col Edward Sturman, Postmaster General in 1923, showed interest in Signals. None of my immediate predecessors, all of whom I knew personally, showed any interest. They were apparently more interested in assisting the Field Post Office in the Namibian War at the time.

My view as Postmaster General was different and apart from having been a member of 3 Brigade Signal Squadron, it was a great honour to be chosen the first chairman of the association. I wish the association the best for the future. May they go from strength to strength.

My wife Marié and I live in Cape Town. We are still fairly active and enjoy good health

Exclusive Invitation for South African Signals Corps Association Members

When our association hosted a large event at the Italian Club in Cape Town on 1 May 2016, Walter Volker presented our association with a full set of his Trilogy on the history of the South African Corps of Signals (S.A.C.S.). This set comprised three large volumes of the following books:

- Army Signals in South Africa (The story of the South African Corps of

Signals and its antecedents.

- None Charlie (Army Signals in the Field – The story of the men and women of the South African Corps of Signals and their equipment).
- Signal Units of the South African Corps of Signals and related services.

Walter's generous donation found pride of honour in the association's collection of memorabilia.

The least our association can do as some minor form of reciprocation is to publish the following letter / offer from Walter:

Exclusive Invitation for South African Signals Corps Association Members

Dear Esteemed Members and Veterans of the Signals Association of the SA Corps of Signals.

We are thrilled to extend an exclusive invitation to you for a unique opportunity. Given your distinguished service and association with the SACS, we believe this will be of special interest to you.

To join in the commemoration of the centenary celebrations of the SACS (1923 – 2023), G5 Books proudly presents the SACS Centenary Limited Edition Three Volume Box Set.

This collection is not only a testament to the rich history and achievements of the Corps, but also a reflection



THE AUTHOR: Walter Volker, a member of the Signals Association and author of the Trilogy of books on the history of the S.A.C.S.

tion of our collective journey.

For those keen on military history, this set provides insights into operational aspects, electronic warfare developments, and showcases the innovations and inventions pivotal to the SACS during South Africa's isolated years.

Key Highlights:

- The set is limited to just 100 copies.
- Each box set will be autographed by General Georg L. Meiring (former Chief of the SADF and SANDF), Geoff Laskey (Chairperson of the Signals Association), and Walter V. Volker (the author).
- The collection encompasses three titles delving deep into the heart of the SACS and its impact over the years.
- As an added incentive, we are offering a special discount exclusive to our members. The collection, originally priced at R2500, can be yours

for R1450 (excluding shipping).

This is more than just a set of books. It's a piece of history, a tribute, and a journey down memory lane. With delivery set for December, this would also make a perfect keepsake or gift.

Reserve your numbered copy today and be among the select few to own this collector's piece. For more information or to place your order you can log onto the G5 Books website (below) <https://g5books.com/products/pre-order-sacs-centenary-limited-edition-3-volume-box-set> or else email Jandre du Plessis at jandre@g5j.co.za

Thank you for your service, dedication, and the invaluable contributions you've made to the SACS. We hope this collection serves as a cherished reminder of our shared legacy.

Warm Regards,
Walter Volker



INVITATION

THE SIGNALS ASSOCIATION
GAUTENG BUNKER
CORDIALLY INVITES SIGNAL
AND COMMUNICATOR
VETERANS AND THEIR
SPOUSES TO ATTEND A FLAG
RAISING CEREMONY AND
PLAQUE UNVEILING TO
COMMEMORATE THE
CENTENARY OF THE SOUTH
AFRICAN CORPS OF SIGNALS



VENUE: GEMS VILLAGE, JAN SMUTS AVE, IRENE, PRETORIA.

DATE: SUNDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2023 AT 10H30 FOR 11H00.

DRESS: JACKET AND TIE OR ASSOCIATION DRESS WITH MEDALS.

MEAL AND REFRESHMENTS: A THREE COURSE LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED AND A CASH BAR WILL BE AVAILABLE.

COSTS: R250 PER HEAD.

BANK DETAILS: M. LOMBARD: ABSA BANK: SAVINGS ACCOUNT: ACCOUNT NO: 3802 0541 846.

BRANCH CODE: 632005: USE NAME AND SURNAME AS REFERENCE AND SEND PROOF OF PAYMENT TO attmauritzlombard@gmail.com

ENQUIRIES: MAURITZ LOMBARD: TEL: 0824457890 OR IAN FORDRED: TEL: 0833246655.

RSVP: PLEASE CONFIRM ATTENDANCE BY 10 NOVEMBER 2023 TO attmauritzlombard@gmail.com or ian@fordred.net



The South African Corps of Signals (SACS) will be celebrating its Centenary on 1 November 2023. This is a great achievement for the Corps which has provided a professional, specialist signals services for the South African Defence Forces throughout its existence.

Since its inception, members served in WW 2 (1939-1945) and the South African Border War (1966-1989) and in various peacetime and operational roles to date. They served the Corps of Signals and the South African Defence Force with distinction in various peacetime and operational roles and have always been and are still an integral part of the South African Military Forces.

The quality of the Signaller “Jimmy’s” of the past one hundred years laid the foundation for the SACS of today and beyond. May the Corps go from strength to strength.

This Centenary bottle of wine was the initiative of the SIGNALS ASSOCIATION. We as Signaller Veterans pay tribute to our forbearers and salute them, one and all of whatever rank, creed, or background. They deserve to be acknowledged and honoured for their outstanding services to our country and particularly the South African Corps of Signals over the 100 years.

