

# SS MENDI

## We Die Like Brothers Education Resource Pack

In February 1917, the First World War troopship Mendi sank after a collision in the English Channel. Almost 650 men, many of them black South Africans, perished in the freezing water. This is their story.

This pack compliments the teaching of history at Key Stage 3 (England) and Grades 7-9 (South Africa). It can be used to support a visit to Delville Wood Memorial in France, where the We Die Like Brothers exhibition about the Mendi was opened in summer 2015, or it can be used to explore the First World War in the classroom.

It includes:

Four posters introducing -

The First World War  
The South African Native Labour Corps  
The Loss of the Mendi  
The Aftermath and the Mendi's Legacy

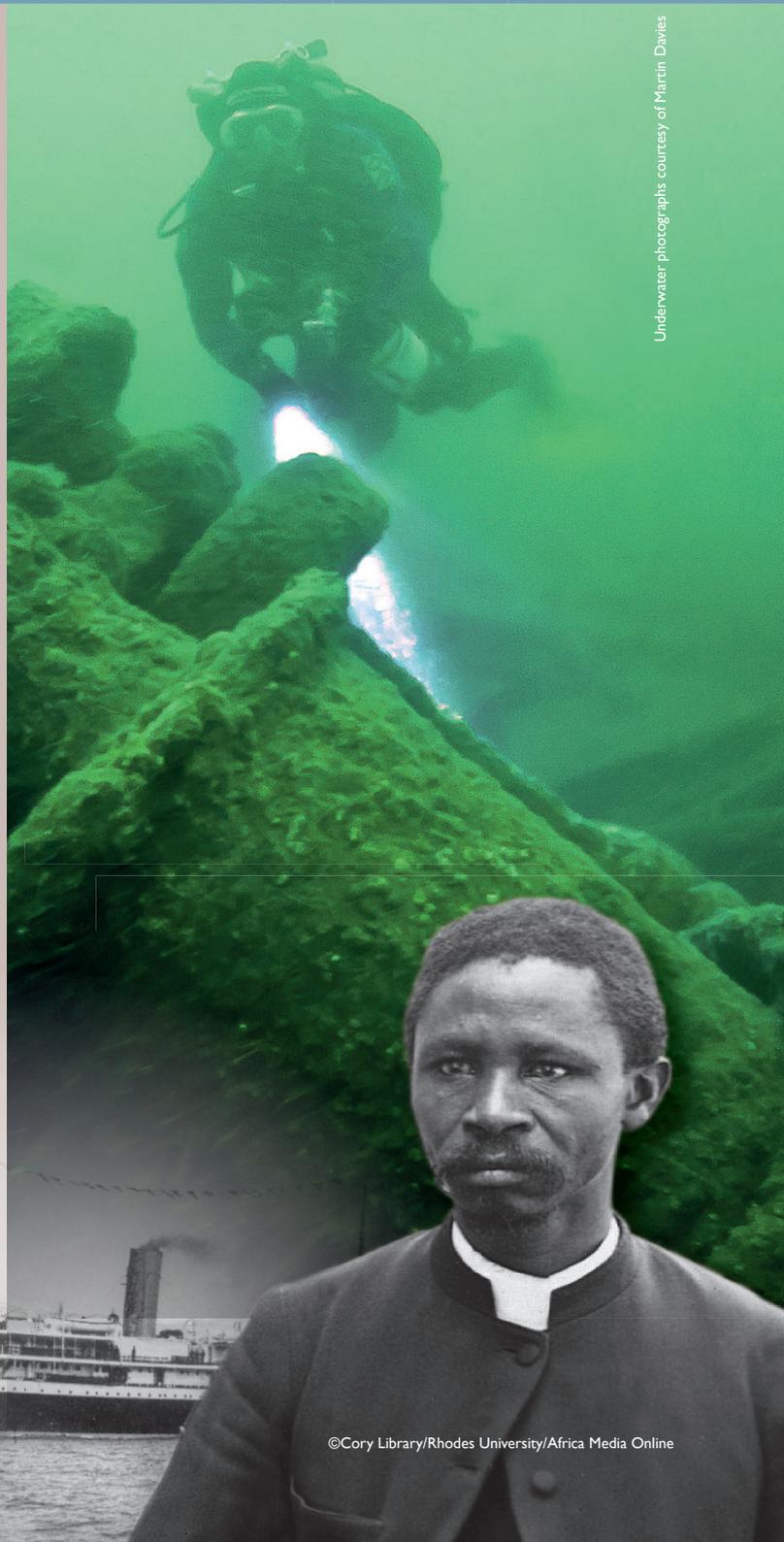
Activities to further explore the Mendi and its legacy -

1. Understanding Chronology
2. Understanding Significance
3. Exploring Inequality
4. The Death Dance
5. Making Links
6. In Memoriam
7. Exploring Archaeology
8. An International Story

Links to further sources of information

Glossary – words in green can be found in the glossary

Underwater photographs courtesy of Martin Davies



# Glossary

**Apartheid** – From 1948 until 1994 South Africa was divided by apartheid. Apartheid was a system of racial segregation, keeping blacks and whites apart.

**Artefact** – An object made, shaped or used by a person which can teach us about the past.

**Bridge** – The bridge is the room on a ship from where it is controlled. The Captain, or Officer on Watch mans the bridge.

**Chart-room** – The room on a ship where the charts, maps and instruments are kept.

**Chronology and chronological** – The order in which events occurred, beginning with the earliest and ending with the most recent. For example, the First World War comes before the Second World War when they are placed in chronological order.

**Geophysical survey** – Archaeologists use geophysical survey, or geophys, to create images of what is under the ground, or under the sea. There are lots of different techniques that can be used. At sea, a device towed behind a boat sends signals to the seabed, and into the seabed, and measures how long it takes for them to bounce back. Computer software then creates a picture of what is below the water.

**International significance** – Things that are important to people or affect people in more than one country.

**Keel** – The bottom of the ship.

**Local significance** – Things that are important to people or affect people in a small area, for example, within a town or village.

**National significance** – Things that are important to people or affect people across a country.

**Oral tradition** – These are the stories about the past that are passed from person to person that are not written down, or which are written down long after the events they describe.

**Port** – If you are stood on board a ship, facing towards the front (which is called the 'bow'), port is on your left.

**Porthole** – The name given to a window on a ship. They are often round and have thick glass.

**Primary source** – A document, picture or object that was created at the time of the period being studied. Letters written by the men on board the Mendi are primary sources for learning about the First World War, the geophysical survey image of the Mendi is a primary source for learning about how the ship looks today.

**'rang Full Speed Astern'** – This means that the ship was directed to go backwards at full speed, or to reverse.

**Starboard** - If you are stood on board a ship, facing towards the front (which is called the 'bow'), starboard is on your right.

**Triple Alliance** – An alliance between Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy formed in 1882.

**Triple Entente** – An alliance between Russia, France and the United Kingdom formed in 1907.

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# Links to other sources for investigating the Mendi

This Education Resource Pack is part of the web presence of the We Die Like Brothers exhibition, which opened at the South African National War Memorial's museum at Delville Wood on the Somme in France in July 2015.

[www.delvillewood.com](http://www.delvillewood.com)

Dr Shawn Sobers takes an innovative approach to the commemoration of the Mendi. His work can be found here :

<http://www.shawnsobers.com/african-kinship-systems-emotional-science-case-study-2-ss-mendi-tragedy/>

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission produced a learning DVD about the Mendi.

It can be ordered from:

<http://www.cwgc.org/learning-and-resources/primary.aspx>

The National Maritime Museum, the Imperial War Museum and The National Archives have documents and images on the Mendi. Use their catalogue search engines.

Wessex Archaeology has investigated the wreck. Our work can be found here:

<http://www.wessexarch.co.uk/projects/marine/eh/ssmendi/index.php>

There is a collection of artefacts recovered from the wreck of the Mendi at the Shipwreck Centre and Maritime Museum, Arreton, Isle of Wight.

Whilst Wessex Archaeology have checked the suitability of third party websites prior to the release of this document, we cannot guarantee that the links are still current, or hold the same content. Wessex Archaeology cannot take responsibility for third party websites.

This project has been funded by Historic England

<https://www.historicengland.org.uk/news-and-features/first-world-war-home-front/>



Historic England



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