

We Die Like Brothers

Understanding Chronology

This is a history learning resource for the teaching of the First World War at KS3 (England) or Grades 7-9 (South Africa).

It supports the English National Curriculum for KS3 History -Challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day - the First World War and the Peace Settlement. For pupils in Hampshire, it could also form part of a local history study.

It supports the South African National Curriculum Statement for Senior Grades 7-9 in Social Sciences 2.4.2, 2.4.3 and 2.4.4.

Activities within this pack could also form a stimulus for literacy, art and design.

Equipment:

Posters from the We Die Like Brothers resource pack.

Understanding Chronology sources from the We Die Like Brothers resource pack.

Workbooks and writing materials.

Words highlighted in **blue** can be found in the glossary at the back of the resource pack.

Understanding Chronology

Read the posters provided at the beginning of this pack and then carefully consider the sources that accompany this activity. Place them in **chronological** order to tell the story of the troopship Mendi.

Learning outcomes

Pupils will become familiar with the story of the Mendi and through that, the background context of the First World War.

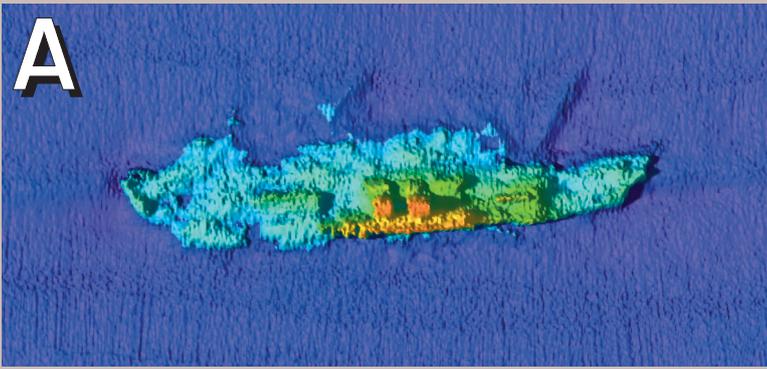
Pupils will reinforce their understanding of chronology.

Pupils will explore a range of historical sources and information from other sources, to build a bigger picture of a significant historical event.

Homework/Extension activities

Read the sources again. Identify which are **primary sources**.

SS MENDI

A

This is a **geophysical** survey image of what the wreck looked like in 2007 when the site was surveyed.

B

"...you can still clearly see the outline of the hull and the area where the Darro hit it, as well as the ship's engine and the huge boilers that supplied them with steam."

Extract from the 2007 geophysical survey report, produced by Wessex Archaeology.

C

1917-500-200. S. NO 57662 A

NATAL.
Act 49 of 1901.
Act 3 of 1904.

IDENTIFICATION PASS. (1/-)

Magisterial Division of RICHMOND

Registered Number 670 Date of Original Issue 30-8-1904

Name and Surname (isibongo) of Native to whom this Pass is granted
SIKANISO MTOLO

Name of Father NGENANGANI

Name of Kraal Head GANE

Name of Chief MATOPALA

* Place of Residence D. Lands (W. P. Payne)

PERSONAL DESCRIPTION:
Sex MALE Apparent Age 30 YRS. Height 5' 7"
Build MEDIUM Complexion DARK BROWN

Marks (if any) (Scar Newcastle) Pass Officer J. Astead
Date 16-10-1916

* Here state, in addition to the Locality, whether it is on Location, Mission Reserve, Crown, or Private Lands. In the case of Private Lands, the name of the Owner to be inserted.
Endorsement (if any) under Section 4 of Act No. 3, 1904:

Private Sikaniso Mtolo's Identification Pass. This pass was found with Private Mtolo's body which washed up on the coast of Zaandvoort, in Holland, on 29 April 1917.

Image courtesy of Noord-Hollands Archief

D

- The loss of life was caused by the collision, by the Mendi taking a heavy list to **starboard** and foundering so quickly, by the lack of assistance from the Darro after the collision, and the low temperature in the water.
- The loss of life at the moment of impact was due to the Darro striking the Mendi on the starboard side, in the vicinity of the fore troop deck, where a considerable number of the native labour battalion were quartered.

J. G. Hay Halkett, Judge, Board of Trade Inquiry. The formal investigation into the sinking took place between 24 July and 8 August 1917.

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E

"Instantly I could see from the fittings that it was a good quality merchant ship. I then found a little saucer with a crest, B&ASNC, British and African Steam Navigation Company."

Quote from Martin Woodward, diver, who identified the wreck in 1974.

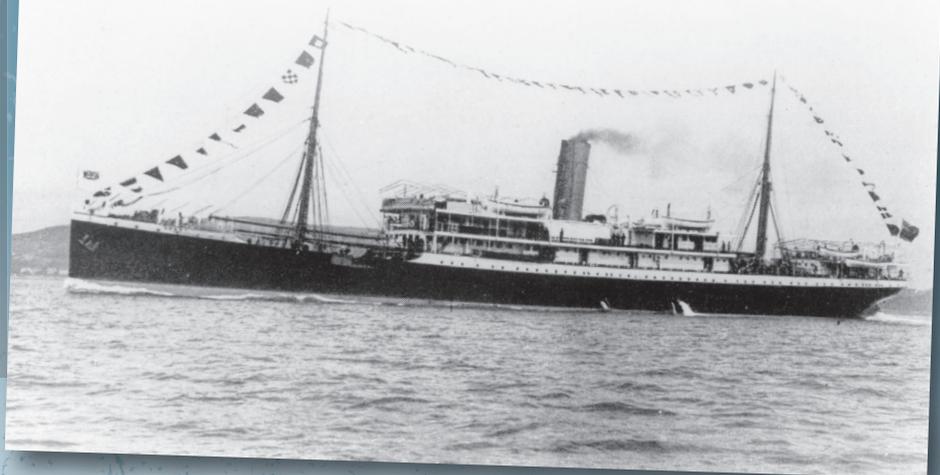
F

"...to pause and pay tribute to all members in uniform who have taken it upon themselves to serve the people of South Africa and defend the Constitution of the country with their lives".

President Jacob Zuma's words when announcing that February 21 would be South Africa's Armed Forces Day. This was first commemorated in South Africa in 1994.

G

The Mendi was built by Alexander Stephen & Sons Ltd, Glasgow, for British & African Steam Navigation Co Ltd. and registered in 1905 in Liverpool.



H

"There was great panic and confusion, and on the deck we were told to get onto lifeboats and leave the ship, as it was sinking. Below there was a sea of darkness, but the men plunged into the rough, cold water, singing, praying and crying".

Private Mathumetse, 16 years old

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"I am sure it was when the ship sank, that many men lost their lives, because as it sank it made a great hollow and many men were not far from it. So by the time the water covered that empty space many had gone down into it"

Private Jacob KoosMatli, C Company

J

"The Mendi is now a 'protected place' under the Protection of Military Remains Act. Although divers can still visit it, it is now an offence to damage it or remove artefacts from it."

Mark Dunkley,
Historic England, 2015.

Copy. Date... 21st February 1917. H.M.S. "BRISK" Message.

Receiving Ship	Transmitting Ship	Time of Dispatch or Receipt	T u n e.	Remarks.	Message.
All ships	S.S. Darro	5.0 am	C	En clair (F. method)	S.O.S. s.s. Darro in collision ten miles South of St. Catherine's. Is there any assistance required, can you proceed and at what speed?
S.S. Mendi	"	5.4 am	C	no answer	What is extent of damage?
s.s. Darro	"	5.35 am	C	En clair	Will find out.
Brisk	s.s. Darro	5.35 am	C	En clair	S.O.S. s.s. Darro sinking twelve South of St. Catherine's.
All ships	s.s. Darro	5.40 am	C	Vocabulary via Niton	0600. Convoy Mendi in collision, damage unknown.
C-in-C Plymouth	Brisk	5.42 am	Q	Vocabulary via Niton	0600. Mendi sunk picking up survivors. Darro reports sinking.
C-in-C Plymouth	Brisk	5.8 a.m.	Q	Vocabulary via Niton	6.19 am
C-in-C Plymouth	Brisk	5.25 am	C	En clair	Do you want any assistance? How are you getting on?
s.s. Darro	Darro	5.26 am	C	En clair	All O.K. so far.
s.s. Darro	Brisk	5.44 am	C	Commercial - made several times - no reply	Have you anything to communicate?
C-in-C Plymouth	Brisk	6.55 am	Q	Vocabulary via Niton	0645 Steamer Darro reports: all O.K. so far.
Brisk	Capt. D. II	7.3 am	Q	Commercial - several calls - no reply	0655 Indicate Mendi's position at time of sinking. Have you anything to communicate?
Capt. D. II	Brisk	7.35 am	Q	Vocabulary via Niton	0730 Reply 0655. 10 miles South of St. Catherine's. Captain of MENDI onboard.
Brisk	s.s. Darro	7.45 am	Q	En clair	O.K. here up to present.
s.s. Darro	Brisk	7.49 am	Q	En clair	What is the extent of damage?
Brisk	s.s. Darro	7.51 am	Q	En clair	Still waiting instructions from bridge.
Brisk	s.s. Darro	8.3 am	Q	General Service	I have sent to bridge for instructions.
Brisk	s.s. Darro	8.34 am	Q	General Service	DARRO collided with MENDI 8 miles South of St. Catherine's Point. Trying to make Southampton fog preventing progress.
s.s. Darro	Brisk	8.55 am	C	General Service	What is your magnetic surge and speed? When did you leave scene of collision?
Capt. D II	Brisk	9.15 am	C	Vocabulary	0800 To what port should BRISK proceed?
S.O. Portsmouth	Brisk	9.28 am	C	Vocabulary	0800 Have picked up DARRO escorting her to St. Helens at slow speed.
Brisk	s.s. Darro	10.12 am	Q	General Service.	North East dead slow just leaving scene defended port. After returning to base.
Brisk	Capt. D II	10.42 am	Q	Vocabulary	0810 Your 0810. To the most convenient defended port.
C-in-C Portsmouth	Brisk	10.58 am	Q	Vocabulary	1050 Am proceeding to St. Helena Roads with survivors of MENDI: Captain, 4 officers, 11 white ratings, 1 military officer, 3 sergeants, many coloured men saved.
C-in-C Portsmouth	Brisk	11.15 am	Q	Vocabulary	1100 Weather permitting expect arrive 12.45 pm. 70 natives saved, 10 dead on board.
S.O. Portsmouth	Brisk	11.40 am	Q	Vocabulary	1106 Report what base you are proceeding to utilise local patrol boats for landing survivors if possible.
Brisk	Capt. D II	12.5 pm	Q	Vocabulary	1200 Proceeding to St. Helena arrive at 1 p.m.

Log of radio messages sent and received by HMS Brisk which was in the vicinity of the Mendi when it sank.

L

Just a line while still waiting to leave to again wish you goodbye. When I got the chance yesterday after all the excitement I looked in your direction. Had rather a restless night so far. This is a fine boat and nicely fitted up, two in each cabin. Suppose shall get used to my new surroundings in a day or two. Ta ta fondest love, Bob

Letter dated 16th January 1917 from Sergeant MacTavish to his wife written on the day the ship departed from Table Bay, Cape Town.



HE whom this scroll commemorates was numbered among those who, at the call of King and Country, left all that was dear to them, endured hardness, faced danger, and finally passed out of the sight of men by the path of duty and self-sacrifice, giving up their own lives that others might live in freedom. Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten.

Colour/Serjt. Robert Alexander MacTavish
S. African N. Zab. Cont.

Scroll commemorating
Sergeant MacTavish

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