

PRESERVATION OF THE SUBMARINE SAS *ASSEGAAI* AS A MUSEUM OF TECHNOLOGY – A PROSPECTUS

On 23 November 2003, the last of the SA Navy's Daphne class submarines, *SAS Assegai* (ex-*Johanna van der Merwe*) was paid off for the last time and destined for disposal along with her two sisters. With the scrapping of our first submarine, *SAS Spear* (ex-*Maria van Riebeeck*) that same year, a number of naval enthusiasts, both serving and retired, however, felt that she should be preserved as a museum vessel and campaigned for her retention.



SAS Assegai's final alongside in 2003

As a result of their efforts, in 2005 the Naval Board approved her retention as the Navy's first museum vessel and an annex of the Naval Museum under the conditions that it be done at no direct costs to the SA National Defence Force and carried out by volunteers who would raise funds to place it ashore where it could be used as an educational tool to promote the sciences amongst the youth as well as function as a museum exhibit.

An *Assegai* Preservation Team consisting of volunteers under the auspices of the Naval Heritage Trust (NHT) was formed for this purpose. The Naval Heritage Trust is a registered Public Benefit Organization established in July 1994 with the primary objectives being to generate an awareness of the South African Navy and to educate the general South African public about our naval heritage, culture and traditions.

Planning and fund raising to move the vessel ashore at the Naval Museum commenced, a major engineering challenge and time consuming. Thus Navy Headquarters gave authority to the team of volunteers to temporarily open *Assegai* as a floating museum in the East Dockyard to stimulate fund raising and promote public interest.

Initially only open during the annual Naval Festival, this was fully achieved in late 2010 when she was placed alongside a pontoon on the outer wall of the Dockyard and accessible to visitors by boat and later, due to weather limitations, by a special bus service 363 days a year (closed on Good Friday and Christmas day). All this was achieved using only volunteers.



Then CNavy, V Adm J. Mudimu officially opens the *Assegaai* museum submarine in 2010

On 01 March 2011 the submarine museum was formally opened by Chief of the Navy, VAdm Mudimu and soon established itself as a museum of technology and thus an educational attraction with numerous schools, both local and from as far as Limpopo, the Eastern Cape, Namibia and the Northern Cape sending classes on a regular basis. No other single exhibit contains a greater variety of practical applications of technologies than a submarine. These range from basic mechanical and electrical systems to hydrodynamics, optics, sonars and many others.



However, in 2015 it became apparent that *Assegaai* needed hull maintenance and the boat was closed to visitors on 02 August 2015 for a planned docking for repainting and some re-plating of the outer hull. The Navy, however, then decided that they would take back the boat and carry out the necessary preservation.

By the time it was closed after four and a half years, the submarine had received over 56 000 visitors from 110 countries or dependencies, more than 16 000 of whom had commented positively in the visitors book. This was in spite of the difficulties in accessing the boat due to security restrictions.

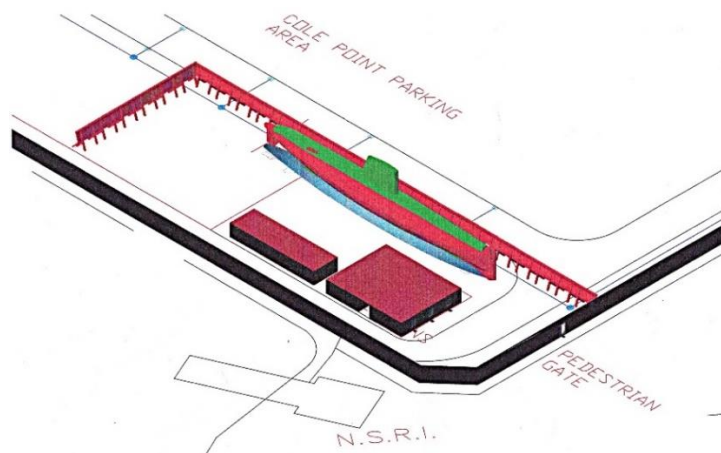
It should also be noted that 'Trip Advisor' rated the *Assegaai* Museum as a 4.5 out of 5 with 28 giving it 5 stars (excellent) and 18 giving 4 stars (very good). A 3 star (average) rating was based on security delays at the Dockyard gate while both 1 stars (terrible) merely stated that the museum was closed rather than assessing it.



There are some 124 preserved naval submarines in the world of which only six are in the southern hemisphere, *Assegaai* having been the only one in Africa.

Sadly, the Navy's declining budget meant that no further preservation could take place and in 2020 the Naval Heritage Trust (NHT) approached the Navy with a request to again assume responsibility for her preservation on behalf of the Naval Museum and prevent her disposal and scrapping. A proposal on the establishment of a permanent site and a plan for the restoration and relocation of the submarine adjacent to public access as well as a proposed agreement on the management of this new museum annex was submitted to the Navy.

On 11 May 2022 the Chief of the Navy formally signed the agreement for the NHT to again assume full responsibility for the restoration, preservation, management and operation of SAS *Assegaai* and its adjacent facilities at Cole Point on behalf of the SA Naval Museum.



To achieve this, the NHT needs to raise approximately R5 million for the restoration of the outer hull and preparations for mounting ashore, the laying of foundations for the permanent mounting ashore and the physical move of the 700 ton boat to its new position. Also included is the refurbishment of existing facilities including toilets, classroom and display rooms as well as direct but secure access for visitors. The plan is to establish the museum in stages as follows:

- a. The occupation of the museum site and laying of the foundation for mounting the boat is the first priority and was to be completed in 2023. The estimated cost was R470 000 but achieved in time at a cost of R234 285, largely due to the ingenuity and enthusiasm of the Project's naval architect. At the same time the submarine has been prepared for moving which was mainly achieved

through the kind assistance of Damen Shipyards. The Damen contribution is valued at R1.5 Million with project expenditure of R60 000 for material. This included the fitting of lifting frames as well as the permanent stands for mounting the boat – as shown below. The completed work was handed over to Chief of the Navy by Damen on 14 August and the cutting of two access points in the hull for visitors has commenced.



- b. Transferring the boat to its permanent site. We are awaiting a final quote from a lifting company to move the boat in July to our site. Estimated cost R1 7M.
- c. Once on site, the boat will have various services connected and prepared for display with the outside hull prepared. This will allow initial opening to visitors. Further restoration of the outer hull, tanks and casing can then commence using self-generated funding once operating fully.

The NHT is a registered with the Department of Social Development as a Non-Profit Organisation – Registration No 079-490 NPO. It has now raised just over R2M which covers design, construction and planning costs as well as the move to the site. The remaining funding to cover preparation of the site for visitors and restoration of the outer hull still needs to be sourced from grants, public sponsorship and donations. This is estimated to be R3M.

As the NHT is a purely volunteer organisation, the professional management and daily running of the museum annex will be carried out by the Simon's Town Amenities Development Company (STADCO) STADCO is a registered Section 21 non-profit company (NPC) formed by local community organisations in 2003 to manage local public amenities on behalf of the City of Cape Town and currently runs the town jetty and Jubilee Square. Details on STADCO are available on the website and a copy of the registration (2003/005546/08 dated 2003-02-20) can be provided on request.

Funding for the operating and through-life costs of the museum will be sourced from visitor donations, merchandising, functions aboard and possible filming rights. All income will be ring-fenced and controlled by a Submarine Museum Management Board appointed by the SA Navy and NHT.

The Submarine Museum, once open will operate on a daily basis, 363 days a year as in the past and there is little doubt that she will be of major benefit to the nation as a whole through her promotion of science and technology amongst the youth as well as promoting South African industry through the example of their innovative systems aboard. At the same time she will promote the image of the SA Navy as well as be a major tourist attraction throughout the year, including school groups.

Link to NHT *Assegaai* site: <https://navalheritagetrust.co.za/sas-assegaai/>

SPONSORSHIP AND DONATION DETAILS

It is hoped to obtain sponsorship from commercial or related organisations interested in the educational and tourist benefits afforded by this project and which may wish to support specific tasks such as the laying of the mounting foundation or the restoration of the outer hull which could facilitate visible public acknowledgement for the sponsor. Such sponsorships can also be in kind. A small percentage of each donation will be ring-fenced for subsidising indigent scholars from fee-free schools and institutions once the museum is operating.

At the same time, general donations will be acknowledged on a donation board to be displayed in the reception area and listing all sponsors and donors. Whilst all donations will be acknowledged, certain ones, depending on the amount donated, will receive special acknowledgement such as 'bunk ownership' with free family access to the museum.

All such individual donors will have a brass name plate attached to on one of the submarines 39 bunks, based on the following criteria:

- a. Forward Mess (Junior Ratings and Recces) – donations of R10 000/£500/\$550.
- b. Aft Mess (Senior Ratings) – donations in excess of R20 000/£1 000/\$1 100.
- c. Wardroom (Officers) – donations in excess of R30 000/£1 500/\$1 800.
- d. Captain's Bunk – donations in excess of R50 000/£2 500/\$3 000.

Corporate sponsors (in cash or kind) exceeding R100 000/£5 000/\$6 000 will be entitled to the use of the submarine and its adjoining facilities for the hosting of functions, preferably after hours (1700 – 0900) including 'submarine dinners' or 'sleep-overs'. They will also be entitled to use the submarine in advertising or publicity. ALL donors and sponsors will be acknowledged on the donation/sponsorship plaque at the museum.

Banking details for donations are as follows:

Account: The Naval Heritage Trust
Standard Bank
Universal Branch Code: 051001
Account No: 07 210 2276
Swift Code: SBZAZAJJ

All payment should be referenced as 'ASG + donor initial and name.' Notification of payment should be made by email to hellemannh@xsinet.co.za info angel45@iafrica.com and should indicate full name, amount and contact details to ensure correct acknowledgement. All donors and sponsors will be acknowledged on a Donor Board at the entrance to the museum.

ENQUIRIES

All enquiries, including possible sponsorship opportunities/details can be directed to assegaai@navalheritagetrust.co.za Attention: R Adm (JG) Arnè Söderlund, alternately on +27 21 786 3283 or +27 82 807 8073 (WhatsApp) or to angel45@iafrica.com .

02 May 2024