

# City man died during annexation

**JOHN YELD**

Environment & Science Writer

THE ANNEXATION of Marion and Prince Edward islands in 1948/9 has been hailed as a move of tactical genius in geopolitical terms, but it also came at a human cost.

And because the life lost during this expedition was the "wrong" colour of the time, there was little acknowledgement of the sacrifice made, save for a simple white cross that became weather-beaten over decades of exposure to Marion Island's extreme weather.

Now the life and death of Joseph Daniels, a coloured man from Constantia who was part of the first top-secret Operation Snoektown expedition during the annexation, is being honoured.

This will include an attempt to trace his family, the erection of a monument honouring his memory, and the creation of a new merit award bearing his name that will be bestowed on all members of construction teams who since 2003 helped to build the new base on Marion Island that is used by the South African National Antarctic Programme.

Last week the base was inaugurated by the Deputy Minister of Public Works, Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu.

She also unveiled a white cross, carefully constructed by artisans in her department to be as close a replica of the original as possible, at the site of Daniels's grave about a kilometre from the base, during a short

but moving ceremony.

Marine ornithologist and amateur historian John Cooper, a Marion Island veteran, has attempted to trace the history of Daniels, but with little success.

All that is known about him is that he was from Klaassenbosch – originally a wine farm – in Constantia, and that in January 1948 he was a crewman aboard the Guano Islands coaster Gamtoos, explains Cooper.

The Gamtoos had been chartered by the government to bring sections of dismantled huts to Marion Island.

These were to be erected as the first buildings on Marion Island for use as a meteorological station, just days after the annexation party aboard the navy frigate Transvaal had claimed Marion and Prince Edward islands as South African territory.

On January 29, 1948, the Gamtoos's motor boat towed a "flat boom" rowing boat loaded with sections of the hut and timber and cast it off close to the shore.

But the small craft's five-man crew, of whom Daniels was one, got into difficulties in the rising swell and it capsized, tossing the men into the icy water, which can be as cold as just 5°C.

Despite the heroic efforts of a medical orderly and a works inspector who swam out in a rescue effort – three crew of the boat were saved and one made it ashore himself – Daniels appeared lifeless when pulled ashore, and he could not be resuscitated.

"Soon after the Gamtoos had

left Marion, Joseph Daniels was buried on the island ... and a simple wooden cross was erected at the head of his grave and facing the sea," says Cooper.

"Since then, Joseph Daniels has rested quietly on the island, sometimes with wandering albatrosses breeding only a few metres from his grave."

Bogopane-Zulu said the department would profile Daniels's community in an attempt to trace his family.

"We will be trying to find his family or living next of kin, to come to some form of agreement to preserve his memory by constructing a mini monument.

"This will acknowledge his role and contribution, but also acknowledge that the construction industry is still one of those sectors where the educated and the uneducated continue to work side by side. That will just be the beginning," she said.

She also announced the creation of the Joseph Daniels merit award for members of the base construction teams.

"It will be important to honour and thank them for their bravery in the challenging weather conditions and working long hours to deliver this state-of-the-art facility, given its remoteness," she said.

"If Robben Island was the final birthplace in the history of freedom and democracy, then let Marion Island and (South Africa's other sub-Antarctic) islands be the birthplace of our new scientific frontiers," the deputy minister added.

john.yeld@inl.co.za



WE REMEMBER: André Share of the national Environmental Affairs Department, right, and other visitors to Marion Island during last week's ceremony to honour Joseph Daniels, the first of three South Africans who died while working at this remote sub-Antarctic territory. PICTURE: JOHN YELD

# Marion Island pioneer is honoured