

FIVE S. AFRICANS MADE HISTORY

HOW SOUTHERN ISLANDS WERE ANNEXED

FIRST EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT

THE first eye-witness account of the occupation of Marion and Prince Edward Islands by South African forces was given to the Cape Times yesterday by a member of the landing party from H.M.S.A.S. Transvaal.

Four men under Lieut.-Commander J. Fairbairn, in command of Transvaal, formed the first landing party of the expedition to set foot on the islands. Before an audience of sea lions and penguins they formally planted a metal South African flag.

METAL FLAG USED

The eye-witness account of this historic event for South Africa was as follows:

"We left Cape Town hurriedly a few days before Christmas for an unknown destination.

"Most of the men on board believed that we were going south because of trouble between the whalers there but a few miles out to sea Commander Fairbairn mustered the men and broke the news that we were going to annex the two islands on behalf of the South African Government.

WAIT IN GALE

"We followed the coast to Cape St. Blaize and then set course for the islands, 1,000 miles away. As we approached the Roaring Forties the winds increased in violence and the temperature dropped. By the time we reached Marion Island at 2 a.m. on Christmas morning a full gale was blowing.

"At dawn we all peered in the direction of South Africa's latest acquisition and saw a volcanic island, about 12 miles long and seven miles wide.

"It rose steeply from the sea to a height of about 4,200 feet and the top half of it was covered in snow. The coastline was precipitous and forbidding.

"The gale forced us to cruise around until December 29, when in fair weather the motor-boat took the landing party ashore. We had to transfer to a dinghy when near the shore because the motor-boat could not make the passage through masses of kelp floating in the water.

FLAG CEREMONY

"The shoreline consisted of large boulders on which hundreds of sea-lions were basking, and they eyed us curiously as

returned to the ship, and the work of transferring the stores began.

PERPETUAL SNOW

"During our stay there I was able to see something of the island but exploration was out of the question. The top of the mountain is under perpetual snow and as this melts it fills the lower reaches with water which turns every inch of ground into the slush of guano and moss in which we landed.

"The vegetation is primitive—Marion is just a volcanic island rising sheer from the sea and covered in ferns and mosses and lichens. Here and there are patches of grass, but generally speaking a dry expanse is a rarity. The top of the island is usually hidden in cloud, and to complete the desolation the cold Roaring Forty gales come howling from the west to drive monstrous seas against the rock-bound coast.

"We saw it in summer, at its best—it must be a dreadful place in winter.

"One thing which interested me was the number of albatross nesting places which I found on the island. As a seaman I am used to seeing these birds 1,000 miles from the nearest land. I never expected to see their actual nesting grounds.

ON TO PRINCE EDWARD

"We left a permanent occupying force of 14 men, including the doctor, on Marion, and then sailed for Prince Edward Island. This is only 12 miles from Marion. It was annexed in the same manner.

"Prince Edward is a small volcanic island about 12 miles in circumference, with precipitous cliffs around it. It must be still semi-active because I could see