



18 Reginald Harry Myburgh (Reg) Hands

Chiselled on the dome of the entrance hall to Rhodes House, 9 South Parks Road, Oxford are the names of those Rhodes Scholars who perished in World Wars I and II. RHM (Reg) Hands is among them.

Reg Hands was the eldest of the three talented Hands brothers, a well-known family of Cape Peninsula athletes in the late 19th and early 20th Century. The three Hands brothers had one sister Doris who married Dr E Atkinson, of Molteno. Their father Harry Hands (in later years, Sir Harry Hands) was born at King's Norton, Worcestershire, in 1860. He was educated at King Edward School, Birmingham, and represented his school in rugby and cricket. He came to South Africa in 1881, joined the Claremont Cricket Club in 1882 and was regarded as their best bowler for a period of ten years. For some 15 years, he also served as secretary of the Western Province Cricket Club. He began his career in the accounting office of the Cape Government Railways, but later practised as an accountant and auditor in partnership with C Oscar Shore. His career in service of his community began as councillor of the Claremont Municipality before he later became mayor of Claremont. In 1912/13 he became mayor of Cape Town and from 1915 to 1918, during the difficult war years, he again occupied the mayoral chair. In 1919 he received the KBE (Knight of the British Empire) and the Cross of Commander of the Order of Leopold II, which was conferred upon him by the King of Belgium. His wife Lady Aletta Catherine (the daughter of PA Myburgh of Elsenburg) was also active in all departments of war work and received the "la Medaille de la Reine Elisabeth" from the King of Belgium, and a silver medal from the Italian Red Cross Society. During the late 1910s and 1920s Sir and Lady Hands lived at "Talana", Claremont, Cape Town.

In passing, a few comments on the parallels in the lives of the three Hands brothers. Reg was born at Claremont, Cape Town on July 26, 1888. Philip Albert Myburgh (Pam), the middle brother, was born at Claremont on March 18, 1890 (on Pam Hands, see below) and Kenneth Charles Myburgh (Ken), the youngest of the triumvirate, was born in Stellenbosch on March 22, 1892. All three brothers were educated at the nursery of early Western Province sportsmen, the Diocesan College, Rondebosch. All three of them represented the cricket XI as well as the rugby XV. In addition, all three became Rhodes Scholars (Reg in 1907; Pam in 1908 and Ken in 1910) and all three won their rugby Blues while studying at Oxford. The three Hands brothers were, of course, the first, but not the only ODs to achieve this hat trick. Their feat was later emulated by the three Macdonald brothers, DA (Dugald), DSM (Donald) and CP (Coll), during the 1970s and 1980s when they also obtained their rugby Blues at Oxford. Finally, all three brothers served with distinction in World War I and all three were mentioned in dispatches. Reg and Pam served with the Heavy Artillery, and Ken served with the Royal Engineers in France. Reg also had a legal career. Pam initially followed in his elder brother's footsteps, but soon after he took his law degree he changed to accounting. The third brother Ken studied engineering and practised as a civil engineer before joining his father's firm of accountants in Cape Town. The name of the firm was Hands and Shore, and its offices were at 106 St George's Street, Cape Town.



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All three brothers represented Western Province in cricket (Reg from 1912 till 1914 in three Currie Cup games and two other first-class games, Pam from 1906 till 1927 in 13 Currie Cup games and 11 other first-class games, and Ken from 1921 till 1931 in 21 Currie Cup games and seven other first-class games). All three also represented South Africa in cricket (Reg in one test in 1913/14 against England; Pam played in seven official and two unofficial tests between 1913/14 and 1924; and Ken in one test in 1924/25 against SBJ Joel's English team). All three brothers were above-average rugby players. Reg was an England international, while both he and Pam played for the SA Army XV versus the New Zealand XV during World War I. Ken was selected to play rugby for the Free State, but was unable to attend the Currie Cup tournament of 1914.

Reg was killed in World War I in France on April 20, 1918, at the age of 29. Ken died in Paris, France on November 18, 1954, age 62, where he was visiting at the time. Pam died in Parys, in the Free State, on April 27, 1951, age 61. (The feat of the three Hands brothers' representing South Africa on the cricket field is equalled only by the three Tancred brothers: Augustus Bernard, Louis Joseph, and Vincent Maximillian. The three Tancreds represented South Africa from 1888/89 until 1919/20 in a total number of 17 tests. See AB Tancred, above.)



Captain Reg Hands, circa 1916

Reg Hands was at Bishops from 1899 to 1907. During that period he passed the School Higher, the Matriculation (first class, 1905) and the Intermediate (second class, 1906) examinations. At Bishops he played for the First XI in 1906 and 1907 and he also captained them in his last season there. He also played for the First XV, and represented Bishops in the Inter-Collegiate race in 1906. He won the Jamieson prize for the best all-round sportsman at the College in 1906. He was also a prominent member of the debating society.

In 1907, having been elected as Rhodes Scholar, he went to University College, Oxford to read law. Reg graduated with a BA (Honours in Law) (2nd class) in 1910. He won rugby Blues in 1908 and 1909. In 1908 the annual derby between Oxford and Cambridge ended in a draw, but the next year Oxford crashed their opponents 35-0. After completing his studies at Oxford he played rugby for Blackheath. While playing for the Blackheath Club he played seven matches for the Barbarians during the 1908 season. He was also selected to represent England as a forward in the last two rugby internationals of the 1909/10 European winter. He made his debut against France on March 3, 1910 at Parc des Princes, Paris. England won 11-3. His second test was against Scotland on March 19, 1910 at Inverleith. England won 14-5. Why he did not play for England again after that season remains a mystery since he was at his best after that. One of his contemporaries on the rugby field recalls that Reg Hands

"was a very fine player and readily adapted himself to any style ... the bigger the game, and the better the company, the better he played. He was quiet, unassuming, and modest, and would not willingly hurt a soul,

but all the same was very determined, and had views on most things above his age. As a Rugger player, a companion, and a man, he was the very best – a perfectly true sportsman, who would never take the slightest mean advantage in any game. Bluffing the referee or anything of that sort did not appeal to him, and he was a very great asset in every way to any touring side."

He passed the Bar finals with a second class in April 1911 and was called to the Middle Temple Bar, London. Reg Hands returned to South Africa during July 1911 and practised as advocate at the Cape Bar from 1911 to 1913. Owing to his early death at the age of 29, he never had the opportunity to establish himself at the Bar, and as a result very little is known about his legal career. However, it is known that in 1912 he practised at Charlton Chambers in Cape Town. Although in a letter written during September 1913 and addressed to the Warden at Rhodes House (Mr FJ Wylie) he complained that he was "sitting at the Bar in Cape Town and teaching [himself] the lessons of patience", things were not that bad. From Wylie's responding letter it appears that Reg was getting more work than most of his colleagues.

Before he went to England in 1907, Reg Hands played senior club rugby in the Western Province wearing the Bishops jumper. After his return to South Africa in 1910 he played rugby for Villagers until the outbreak of World War I. But he never played rugby for Western Province.

After his return from England, Reg Hands had a short but sensational cricket career for Western Province from 1912 to 1914. He was an exceedingly hard-hitting right-hand batsman and played with wonderful success for the Western Province. He played in five games for Province in which he scored 243 runs at an average of 40.50. During the 1912/13 season he had a batting average of 72, which was the pick of the Western Province batting averages for that season. In 1913/14 he played for Western Province, the Cape Colony, and in one test for South Africa, against the MCC team of JWHT Douglas. He scored nil and seven in his two test innings respectively.

During Reg's years at the Cape Bar from 1911 to 1913 he also played for the Bar's social cricket team, which included the very able likes of Murray Bisset, Beauclerk Upington, Justice Hopley, WH Mars, and AJ "Sport" Pienaar.

More than one hundred ODs died in World War I. Four of this unfortunate number were Rhodes Scholars. Reg Hands belongs to both groups. In fact he acted as honorary secretary to the College Council until he went to South West Africa with the Second Irish Light Horse during World War I (1915). He returned to take a commission in the South African Heavy Artillery. On August 28, 1915 he embarked from Cape Town on the *Kildonan Castle* for England. On February 15, 1917 Reg was promoted to the rank of captain, and for a time was acting major, until he was invalided to England from France with trench fever. On discharge from hospital he was put in charge of a depot at Devenport for a while. He then rejoined his battery in France in December 1917.

On January 10 of the following year Reg joined the 71st Siege Battery from England and on March 1 of the same year he was posted to the 73rd Siege Battery in France. By mid-April 1918 the 73rd Battery had emerged successfully from ten days of as strenuous fighting as they could possibly have experienced. They then returned to their fosse at La Bourse, in the neighbourhood of Bethune. The officers, including Captain Hands, were quartered in a



house in the village. At about 4:30 on Thursday April 18th, the Germans opened a strong bombardment on the battery, as well as the back areas, including La Bourse. The officers' quarters were hit between 5:30 and 5:45. Captain Hands and two other officers, Lieutenants Maasdorp and Brown were in bed in their pajamas in one room when a shell hit, bursting as it broke through the wall. Miraculously, only Lt Maasdorp was injured and his two comrades placed him on a stretcher and carried him to a dressing station nearby in the village. On reaching the dressing station, they all began vomiting. They then realised, for the first time, that their room had been hit by a gas shell. By that time Reg Hands' eyes had begun to swell and he was feeling the effects of the gas. (The severity of the mustard-gas shells was such that the four medical orderlies who attended to Reg Hands were so badly gassed by the gas exuding from his clothing, that they all had to be evacuated the following day.) He was taken to a hospital near Bruay, a few miles further, where they arrived at about 10:00. By that time he was quite blind and suffering some pain. Typical of his consideration for others, even under those circumstances he ordered his batman to bring him his writing-case and materials for him to finish some paperwork. He also remembered that he owed his batman some money for wages, and gave him a 50 franc note in settlement. He died of gas poisoning on Saturday April 20, 1918, and was buried in Flanders.

In a special meeting of the Cape Town City Council following his death notice, Reg Hands

THE LATE CAPT. REGINALD HANDS.

City Council's Resolution of Sympathy.

A special meeting of the City Council was held yesterday morning, mainly for the purpose of expressing sympathy with the Mayor and Mayoress at the death of their son.

The Deputy-Mayor (Mr. R. J. Verster), who presided, said: Since the last meeting of the Council news has been received of the death, whilst fighting for King and Empire in France, of a young and well-known citizen of Cape Town, Captain R. H. M. Hands, the eldest son of our esteemed Mayor, who succumbed to the effect of wounds and gas poisoning on Saturday, April 20. The news of Captain Hands' death has been received with universal expressions of sorrow and regret, for he enjoyed immense popularity, especially in sporting circles, where his demise will be particularly deplored.

was described by the deputy mayor of Cape Town, Mr RJ Verster, as a "gallant gentleman" and possessing "noble traits of character" which were "revealed in a gentle, sympathetic, unassuming and loveable disposition and genial though strong personality". At the time of his death his parents were mayor and mayoress of Cape Town. (His father was mayor from 1912 to 1913 and again from 1915 to 1918.) Nine days after Reg's death the City Council of Cape Town accepted the following motion:

"[T]he Council do record their profound regret at the lamentable decease of the late Captain RHM Hands, who died whilst fighting for King and Empire in France on April 20, 1918, and do tender their sincere sympathy with His Worship the Mayor and Mayoress and the members of the family of the deceased officer in their sad bereavement."

He is described as a cheery and energetic man who was bound to have made his mark and to have done honour to his profession and country had he lived longer. He kept his ties with Bishops and in his will he left £100 to the school for "General Knowledge of Current Events". The two Hands prizes are still awarded annually for essays "showing general knowledge of current events, social, political and sporting".

(See Anon 'Deaths' *Cape Times* Monday 29 April 1918 2; Anon 'Deaths' *Cape Argus* Friday 19 November 1954 10; Anon 'Died on visit to Paris' *Cape Argus* Friday 19 November 1954 4; Anon 'The Late Captain Hands' *Cape Argus* Monday 29 April 1918 7; Anon 'The Late Capt Reginald Hands' *Cape Times* Tuesday 30 April 1918 6; Colin Bryden (ed) *South African Cricket Annual* 1999 Vol 46 (1999) 157; Benjamin Bennett *This Was a Man* (1958) facing 33; Geoffrey A. Chettle *South African Cricket Annual* 1955 Vol 4 (1955) 182; Diocesan College 'OD Cards' - RHM Hands, and OD Magazine; Paul Dobson *Bishops Rugby: A History* (1990) 137, 210, and 239; Ken Donaldson (ed) *South African Who's Who (Social and Business)* 1931-1932 (1932) 130; DF du T. Malherbe *Family Register of the South African Nation* 3 ed (1966) 396; Robin Isherwood and Philip Bailey *Western Province Cricket: 1889/90 - 1995/96* (1996) 9 and 28; Peter le Mesurier *Bishops Prep: A History of the Diocesan College Preparatory School* (1994) 65; AC Parker *WP Cricket - 100 not out* (1990) 36, 197; AC Parker *WP Rugby Centenary 1883-1983* (1983) 303 and 320; Rhodes House Files sv RHM Hands; Rhodes Scholar Register sv 'Hands, Reginald Harry Myburgh'; EHD Sewell *Rugby Football International Rolls of Honour* (1919) 64-65; and *Sports and Sportsman* compiled and edited by the *Cape Times* (c1924) 314-315.)

