

Mendel Apter (1921 – 1975)

A man of great charisma,
generosity and ingenuity

Compiled from information sent by his son David,
including stories by his friend Hector Kleinot

by Geraldine Auerbach, London January 2020,
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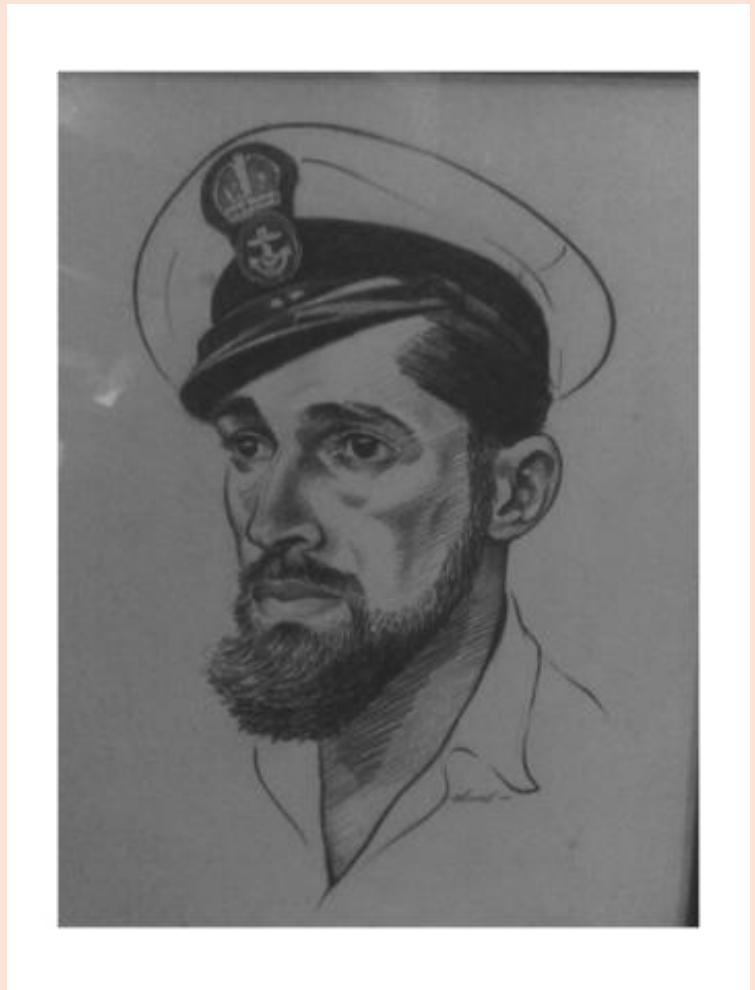
**Mendel (Emmanuel) Apter**, the second son (of the five children of Solomon and Tetcha Apter – Lionel, Mendel, Alec, Nina and Ethyl) was born in Kimberley in 1921.

When the Second World War broke out, Aged 19, partly against his parent's wishes, Mendel joined the Royal Navy in Simonstown and soon found himself in Portsmouth. (His brother Alec Joined the Air Force as a pilot and his brother Lionel became a medical officer in the army.

Mendel was assigned to crew on a frigate doing convoy escort through the Mediterranean to Malta. He was a man of great charisma, generosity and ingenuity.

Back in Kimberley having survived the siege of Malta and already proved his prowess at making money, trading in lemons, he and his younger brother Alec – who had joined the Air Force, joined his father's wholesale business S Apter & Co, in Southey Street.

Mendel married Winnie Wilson in June 1952. They built a beautiful house with swimming pool in Memorial Road. They had two sons, David a Geologist in South Africa, and Steven (deceased, served in the SA Airforce).





Pictured above at their wedding in June 1952 are brother-in-law Dr Hymie Tockar, married to Mendel's eldest sister Nina, Sophie Jacobson bridesmaid, Solomon (Zalman) Apter, Winnie and Mendel, Miriam and Dr Lionel Apter (eldest brother) and Owen Hendler (best man).



Left are Mendel and Winnie in their garden.

After Mendel's brother Alec died suddenly in 1968, the business S Apter and Co started by their father, Solomon, was sold, and Mendel and Winnie moved to first to Cape Town and then to Johannesburg. It was sadly not to be for very long. Mendel, always a heavy smoker, died of lung cancer aged just 54 in 1975.



This picture taken at their home in Senderwood, Johannesburg few months before his untimely death, we see from the left his brother-in-law Hymie Tockar, a friend Martin Bell, Mendel, behind him son Dave and Mendel's wife Winnie, and then his brother Lionel and his wife Miriam.

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## **Mendel Apter – Drambuie does not taste good a second time!**

This is a story written for the family by **Hector Kleinot** as a sort of eulogy to his special friend Mendel Apter shortly after he died.

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It was a Saturday after lunch, Kimberley 1969. The voice on the phone said, 'Hi Hector, you know we are leaving Kimberley in a couple of weeks and it's really urgent that we clean out the bar. Please come over and help me'. It was Mendel.

He had recently sold up his business and home. He was about to enter the world of corporate competition.



I had come to live in Kimberley some seven years previously with my young family because of consulting work offered by Mendel. He had then been chairman of 'Treasure Trove Investments', one of the minor stock exchange listed diamond 'public companies'. I had worked successfully for the company as consultant and over the years had profited immensely from Mendel's wisdom and tutelage in general business acumen. At the same time, we had become firm friends and confidants. I drove over to the house in Memorial Road, near the Monument to the honoured British dead in the Siege of Kimberley and Boer



War, where I found Mendel alone in the long bar. He was proud that his private bar was longer than the bar in the Grand Hotel downtown Kimberley. It was lined with inverted bottles, looking like a commercial bar. However here the measures were all 'free run' as Mendel was as LARGE a man as he was physically small. 'Now we have to clear out all the dregs', he informed me.

'There must be thirty different liqueurs each with less than an inch inside. You see I have not replenished a bottle for the last year since I knew we would be moving to Cape Town. I found this treasure in the back the drawer where the cocktail shakers live.' He held up a peculiarly shaped bottle.



'Come see', he said, 'Look, its shaped like a crown and its label is almost eaten off by fish moths' (Silverfish). We could see it was an unopened bottle of Port. There was a glass stopper with a cross on it tied with waxed string to the bottle rim. We removed the cork, which came away surprisingly clean. The stopper fitted perfectly. "We have to try this. You first", said Mendel offering me the bottle.

'At least let's get glasses,' I said fetching two Irish crystal goblets from the shelf. 'Smooth and more-ish' was the verdict.

The stopper was never used again. I intended to salvage the bottle, but somehow that never happened, due to a foggy day. The port flowed as we tried to establish its age. We deciphered from the remnants of the label that it was indeed Coronation Port to commemorate a coronation. But the question was- whose? In the end we decided it was either Edward VII in 1902 or George V in 1910. In any event the port was delicious and certainly was very smooth, having been in that bottle at least half a century.

Relatively sober at this stage, we attempted to clean up the rest of the bar. No way could we pour away the dregs of bottles, especially of old favourites like Benedictine and Drambuie. A sip here, a full glass there. Some discussion about how to tell the real colour of quality emeralds by the green Chartreuse comparison; and another dead soldier joined the pile on the floor.

If we killed thirty bottles that afternoon it is a conservative estimate. Say an inch in each bottle, shared by two. That is at least a bottle of rainbow mixed liqueurs each, on top of the port. I vaguely remember my wife Glenda fetching me home as I was very responsible and was feeling too unwell to drive myself. So, I had called her to collect me. I recall her annoyance and distaste as I lay on the new bathroom floor clutching the fashionable bidet to keep the room from capsizing in the heavy seas the cruise liner had encountered.

'We are due at the theatre in an hour', said Glenda 'Not tonight Josephine' quoth I. *Drambuie does not taste good the second time.*

Shortly after this, Mendel and his dear wife Winnie left Kimberley for Cape Town. Mendel took up a position as partner in a large import house, which promptly went bankrupt. They had cheated him and probably used his investment fruitlessly, trying to save their business. Mendel had been a very successful businessman in Kimberley but was no match for the big city sharks. He then finished his career as a buyer of groceries for South Africa's then biggest supermarket chain. He was based in Johannesburg and lived in an apartment near the Wanderers Club in Corlett Drive. Years later I rented an apartment in the same complex before finally pulling up stakes in South Africa.

Soon after the Apters moved to Johannesburg, Mendel was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. He was indeed a heavy smoker. He died aged middle fifties a few months later. I lost a dear friend, and his dear wife lost a loving husband. I remained friendly with Winnie and her sons. She remarried happily and lived another 20 years – a charming lady. I spent many a memorable evening in her home during the subsequent years.

I first met Mendel just after Glenda and I returned to SA from Ghana. I had come from my first consulting job in the Central African Republic, and I'd vowed never to work for a corporation as a lowly employee again. I set up a geological consulting office in

Johannesburg where we lived. I befriended another consulting geologist and his partner an option dealer called Nat Lowenstein and Benny Siddler. They put excess work my way – for which I was very grateful. At that time the vogue in prospecting was for diamonds, and I found myself often looking at prospects in the Kimberley district. One such job was for Treasure Trove diamonds, a listed public company – true it was a penny share but still had good prospects. I met the chairman Mendel Apter in his office in his wholesale warehouse around the corner from De Beers' Head Office. Somehow, we instantly clicked and after my first report Mendel offered me the position of consulting geologist to the company.

From that time until his sad demise some dozen years later, we remained firm friends and he



confided in me a lot, which I took as a great compliment. Through Winnie and Mendel we met and became friendly with many other people in Kimberley with whom we might otherwise never have associated. Of these I must mention the Toms family. Tremaine Toms was resident vet to the Oppenheimer stable, and manager of their Maritzfontein estate near Kimberley. Through the Toms family we became acquainted with the Oppenheims and several of their associates. Contacts made during this period of my life opened many doors

for me.

Pictured are Mr and Mrs Harry Oppenheimer and their wining horse Hengst

Mendel was a small man, but contrary to the norm countered small man syndrome with a largeness and generosity I have never encountered again. Thank you Mendel!





In this picture headed: **Cantor A Rudy & Choir of the Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation 1930-1932**, nine-year-old Mendel is seated on the right.

Back Row: Lionel Apter, S Klein, Abe Goldberg, I Levin, G Fine, M Lazarus, H Mehl

Front Row: Issie Goldberg (soloist), Harry Klein, M Want, Cantor the Rev A Rudy, N Brayton (Choirmaster) M Rudy, Mendel Apter Centre Front: Shim Maresky

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### **Mendel Apter, Kimberley Businessman**

Compiled, by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, January 2020  
From information sent by his son David, including stories by his friend Hector Kleinot,  
Updated April 2023.

Read the family story here: [Apter Family](#)

Read more about the Apter family business in the article [Jewish Wholesalers](#) of Kimberley

Read their army stories here [Kimberley Jews and the Second World War](#)

You can read of Mendel's escapades in the navy in the story [Fresh Lemons](#) by his friend Hector Kleinot, who revered Mendel as a great friend and mentor.

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