



## **STEVE BIKO ARTILLERY REGIMENT (Formerly known as 18 LIGHT REGIMENT)**

(Source: The SA Gunner)

Many South African Artillery units are “old” units whose proud history can be traced to days before the Anglo Boer War .18 Light Regiment is one of the more “modern” artillery regiments that was created to cope with new warfare requirements.

The need for a light artillery regiment that could support paratroopers during air assault operations was identified in the early 1970`s. The Soltham M5 120mm mortar was chosen and several purchased in 1974. Staff tables were set up in June 1975, but the Regiment’s official birth date can be pinned down to January 1977.

The Regiment was, when formed as part of 1 SA Corps, with its Headquarters in the old OK Bazaars building, Randburg. The unit’s name, 18 Light Regiment, was allocated by the then Master Gunner, Lt Gen FEC van den Berg. The Regiment’s initial intake consisted of the Ops Savannah veterans of 141 Battery of 14 Field Regiment and 41 Battery of 4 Field Regiment.

None of the troops allocated to the unit was parachute trained. Cmdt G. C. Olivier from 7 Medium Regiment was appointed as the first OC on 15 November 1977. 1 SA Corps was disbanded in 1978 and the Regiment was transferred to 8 Armoured Division.

The first call up of the Regiment took place from 13 November to 8 December 1978 at the then Army Battle School at Lohathla. During 1979 WO2 Tinus Delport was transferred from 8 Armoured Division to the Regiment as the first RSM. On 25 May 1981 Col Jan Breytenbach, the OC of 44 Parachute Brigade, visited the unit. The future airborne strategy and role that the Regiment had to play was spelled out by him. The main objective of the Regiment was to support the newly formed 44 Parachute Brigade with artillery firepower during airborne operations.

In June 1982, the Regiment was incorporated into the newly formed 44 Parachute Brigade and was based at Murray Hill north of Pretoria. Attempts were made by the Brigade to change the Regiment’s name to 44 Light Regiment, but this idea did not meet with the approval of the then Chief of the Army.

As a Light Regiment, the unit was structured slightly differently from the other conventional medium artillery regiments. The Regiment consisted of a small RHQ element and 3 Batteries, namely 181, 182 and 183 Battery. Each battery consisted of two troops, each with four 120 mm mortars. Each detachment consisted of five Gunners.

To meet its airborne objective, the Regiment would only consist of Gunners that qualified as paratroopers. The existing officers and men took the new airborne roll of the Regiment as a challenge and in March 1982 the leader element was sent to 1 Parachute Regiment in Bloemfontein for parachute training. The Regiment’s traditional blue artillery berets were exchanged for the maroon paratroopers’ berets. New terminology and orders such as “Port and Starboard, Fit Chutes, Action Stations, Stand Up – Hook Up, Stand in the Door and DZ “, soon became part of the Gunners’ new language.

History was made at the General Piet Joubert Training Area in November 1982, when 181 Battery, as the first Airborne Battery, was deployed by parachute. The Battery jumped with its mortars, ammunition and equipment. This jump was followed up by Exercise Ubique. On 11 December 1984, the Regiment was able to deploy all 3 batteries in a single airborne drop. The Regiment was now moulded into a true airborne unit. The gunners with their mortars, equipment and first line ammunition were airdropped. Three C130's carried the mortars, equipment and ammunition. The gunners followed in three C160 troop carriers. A total of 200 men, NCO's and Officers took part in this drop. The jump was attended by various high ranking officers including Lt Gen F.E.C. van den Berg, the Master Gunner, Col A. Moore, the new OC of 44 Parachute Brigade and Col P.C. De Beer Venter, Director Artillery. During the same exercise the three batteries were also airlifted and deployed by helicopter.

The vision of the 1970's to have a Airborne Artillery Regiment was now a reality. 18 Light Regiment could now truly claim the title: "The only Airborne Artillery Regiment in Africa." The Regiment's light capability was further demonstrated when it participated in an amphibian exercise in July 1988. 181 Battery was landed by landing craft from SAS Tafelberg in Exercise Strandloper.

The Regiment was one of the first Citizen Force units to be deployed for internal unrest operations. During 1985, 181 Battery was deployed at Kirkwood in the Eastern Cape. The Battery did a lot of work to improve the conditions of the local Community and was awarded with the Chief of Army merit certificate for exceptional duty. Border patrol duties at Madimbo in the Soutpansberg Military Area followed for 181 Battery in September 1985.

During 1987 the whole Regiment was called up for the purpose of maintenance of law and order.

During Operation Hooper/Packer in March 1988, 182 Battery participated in the third attack on Quito Cuanavale in Southern Angola. As part of 82 Brigade, the battery was in direct support of 32 Battalion. During 1989, the Regiment assumed a completely new role. 183 Battery exchanged their maroon paratroopers' berets for the light blue berets of the UN peace keeping force. The battery formed part of the Joint Military Monitoring Group (J.M.M.C.) which had to oversee the withdrawal of the SADF from Namibia and the Cubans from Angola.

The last citizen force camp of 2 months duration was experienced by 182 Battery in 1989. The Battery was tasked with monitoring the border of South Africa with Botswana and Zimbabwe. The Battery was based at Almond base in the Weipe District. A very popular event on the Brigade calendar was the annual water jump. All paratroopers of the various units of 44 Parachute Brigade, could participate in this jump. It was usually held at Roodeplaat or Hartebeespoort dam. The jump was followed by a family fun day. 1991 was a year that saw many changes to the Regiment. 44 Parachute Brigade HQ moved to Bloemfontein. The Regiment moved from Murray Hill to the Paulshof Building in Pretoria. With the creation of the SANDF in 1994, it was decided to downscale 44 Parachute Brigade to 44 Parachute Regiment.

18 Light Regiment was transferred to the SA Army Artillery Formation in Pretoria. The Regiment is now located at Magazine Hill, with State Artillery Regiment as its neighbour. A unit flag was approved in July 1986 and a National Colour was presented to the unit in March 1993. The Regimental shoulder badge was designed by Lt G Gravette (Jnr). It consists of the 44 Parachute Brigade Griffon on a maroon background, with the Artillery flash above. This symbolises both the unique airborne and artillery characteristics of the regiment.

The regiment's name was changed to Steve Biko Artillery Regiment in 2019.

18 Light Regiment is currently equipped with the M5 120mm Light Mortar.