

ALTA PETE

AIR DEFENCE ARTILLERY: SOUTH AFRICA

1939 – 2016



LIONEL CROOK

AIR DEFENCE ARTILLERY *in* SOUTH AFRICA



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A History of the South African Air Defence Artillery Corps



Lionel Crook

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PREFACE

During 2014 Maj Gen Roy Andersen, the then General of the Gunners, approached the South African Artillery and Air Defence Artillery Formations to enquire as to what he could do to further contribute towards the Formations? Colonel H.J. Baird expressed the need for capturing the Air Defence Artillery Corps history. Although individual Air Defence Artillery units have kept their own history and some have published their history, the Corps history had, to date, not been formally documented.

A constitution was adopted on 24 October 2014 to establish the Air Defence Artillery History Steering Group under the chairmanship of the General Officer Commanding Air Defence Artillery Formation and Maj Gen Roy Andersen provided guidance and assisted in soliciting the services of Col (Ret) Lionel Arthur Crook as the proposed author. Formal contracting of Lionel as author of the proposed book through a Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 05 September 2014 and four years later after intensive research and concerted efforts, the vision has been achieved.

This work strives to capture more than 100 years of South African Anti-Aircraft and Air Defence Artillery Corps history since its ancestral inception in 1914 and the establishment of the first Anti-Aircraft unit in 1939. Although this work represents a comprehensive effort, the history of the South African Air Defence Artillery Corps is still being carved today.

It is not feasible to capture all detail and the book thus only highlights important aspects, it strives to place events in historical context with situations of higher order structures or external environments that prevailed at the time. This glimpse into the proud history of the South African Air Defence Artillery Corps serves as a basis for lessons learned, further expansion and future additions in order to leave a legacy for the future generations of Air Defence Artillery Gunners. Air Defence Artillery Gunners can reminisce over their past contributions and the public can gain insight into a hard fought proud history.



Figure 1: Brig Gen J.S. Mbuli (GOC) signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Col (Ret) Lionel Athur Crook as author.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When asked to produce this history I accepted readily, but was later dismayed to discover the lack of references to Anti-Aircraft gunners in any published South African Regimental history; particularly those that fought in the Western Desert of North Africa. The air threat in that campaign was at its worst and Infantry, Field Artillery and other units of the two South African Infantry Divisions were almost totally dependant on the Bofors 40 mm guns of 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments for protection from the Luftwaffe. Reference to the Anti-Aircraft gunner in the Border Wars of the 1980's is just as meagre.

One almost received the impression in reading some books, that a war could only be fought by the Infantry – with little help from other arms.

But, reading the laconic entries in the War Diaries of the two units that represented the Anti-Aircraft effort as part of the South African Artillery in both East and North Africa, the true story of the bravery and dedication of the Anti-Aircraft gunner emerged and the tremendous effort they made in these campaigns is told. I hope this point is fully covered in the pages that follow and emerges sufficiently enough to inspire the Anti-Aircraft gunner of today.

Aircraft of World War One flew at about 100 mph at the beginning of the war but even with continued development of aircraft, speed was not much more than 200 mph by 1918. During the war of 1939-1945, aircraft could reach speeds of up to 450 mph. Today a maximum speed of 900 mph or more is attained. The reaction time of those who man guns with which to down aircraft is no longer measured as a minute or two - it is measured in a second or part thereof. The old early warning sound locator has long since disappeared and radar can now track an incoming aircraft from as much as 120 km away; and seconds are necessary to open fire with gun or missile.

It has also surprised me how reticent are those who served as Anti-Aircraft gunners. Appeals for stories and information have elicited little response. Fortunately there were those who did help: Major Generals H. Roux; Louis Coetzee; Colonels Jakes Jacobs and Major Horstmanshof and MWO E. Brits are among them; but Colonel Jacques Baird, formerly Chief of Staff at Air Defence Artillery Formation and still chairman of the History Committee, was a tower of strength in providing information and answers and in answering queries. There are others who have helped put these pages together who are not mentioned, to whom I am equally grateful. My long-standing relationship with Documentation Centre once again proved its worth and I am grateful for the assistance given me so readily by Ms Louise Jooste, Gerald Prinsloo and others on the staff of the Reading Room and Library. And grateful thanks go to Ms Claerwen Howie, daughter-in-law to the late Lieutenant Colonel Charles Howie whose flight to Italy, after his escape from a German prisoner-of-war camp, and after eluding the Gestapo in Hungary, has now - for perhaps the first time - been correctly recorded. Thanks and appreciation is also expressed towards Colonel H.J. Baird, Lieutenant Colonel A. de Villiers and Maj B. Risien who assisted in editing the book.

There are several sponsors who have connections to the Air Defence Artillery Corps and who more fully deserve a very special vote of thanks and appreciation for their support. They are:

Maj Gen Roy Andersen, then the General of the Gunners
 Mr Frikkie Naude of Intertechnic Contracting
 Mr Carl Kies of Reutech Radar Systems
 Mr Ricky Adair of THALES UK

The Air Defence Artillery Corps has had an unusual and eventful history beginning as it did in 1939 as a unit of the Coast Artillery Brigade but nevertheless in the Corps of South African Artillery. Anti-Aircraft units fell under command of the South African Air Force from January 1944, transferring in February 1949 back to the South African Artillery before a transfer to the South African Corps of Marines in July 1951. On 1 October 1955 the few Anti-Aircraft units then in existence were transferred back to the South African Artillery. They remained in that Corps for thirty three years before gaining independence as an entirely new Corps from 1 November 1984. It seemed to signal a rebirth for Anti-Aircraft gunners and they have not looked back since then.

***The author sadly passed away prior to publishing.
He will be sorely missed amidst the Guns, but will be fondly remembered for many
generations through his dedicated work on this book.***

Col (Ret) Lionel Athur Crook †

12 November 1930 - 04 November 2018

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Anti-Aircraft
AASO	Anti-Aircraft Staff Officer
AA&CD School	Anti-Aircraft and Coast Defence School
AADC	Anti-Aircraft Defence Commander
AADS	Anti-Aircraft Defence School
AAES	Anti-Aircraft Experimental Section
AASL	Anti-Aircraft Search Light/s
AATC	Anti-Aircraft Training Centre
ADA	Air Defence Artillery
ADAA	Assistant Director Anti-Aircraft
ADAS	Air Defence Artillery School
AFV	Armoured Fighting Vehicle
A.G.	Adjutant General
ALO	Air Liaison Officer
AP	Armour piercing
ARS	Aircraft Recognition Signal
ASP	Africa Service Personnel
ATD	Artillery Training Depot
BAE	BAE Systems Inc
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BLR	Beyond Local Repair
BMATT	British Military Advisory Training Team
BNAF	British North Africa Force
BRA	Brigadier Royal Artillery
CAB	Coast Artillery Brigade
CASL	Coast Artillery Searchlights
CGA	Cape Garrison Artillery
CGF	Coast Garrison Force
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
CIG	Chief Instructor Artillery
COIN	Counter Insurgency
CPAB	Cape Peninsula Artillery Brigade
Cwt	hundred weight
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DAA	Director Anti-Aircraft
DAAT	Director Anti-Aircraft Training
DAK	<i>Deutsche Afrika Korps</i>
DAW	Director Army Works
DCAD	Director Coastal Area Defence
DCC	Deputy Coastal Command
DCCW	Deputy Chief Coastal Works
DCS	Deputy Chief of Staff
DCGS	Deputy Chief of the General Staff
DDAF	Deputy Director Air Force
DDCA	Deputy Director Coast Artillery
DDCAF	Deputy Director Coastal Air Force
DECHIEF	Cable address of the CGS, Pretoria
DEL&T	Defence Electric Lights and Telephones
DEMS	Defensively Equipped Merchant Ship
DEOR	Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles
DFAAT	Director Field Army Artillery Training
DGAF	Director General Air Force
DGO	Director General Operations

DGTS	Director General Technical Services
DGWS	Director General War Supplies
DMO&T	Director Military Organisation and Training
DSDF	Director Seaward Defence Force (precursor of the SA Navy)
DTS	Director Technical Services
ECC	End Conscription Campaign
ETD	Education, Training and Development
FAPLA	<i>Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola</i> – The Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola, i.e. the armed wing of the MPLA.
FCU	Fire Control Unit
FNLA	<i>Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola</i> – Nation Front for the Liberation of Angola. Also ethnic based, founded 1962 among Bakongo people
GBADS	Ground Based Air Defence System
GDF	G-Gun, D-35mm calibre, F-Field mounting
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GS	General Service
HAZMAT	Hazardous material
HCD	High Density Current (pertaining to searchlights)
HE	High explosive
HMT	His Majesty's Transport (pertaining to a ship)
IFF	Identification, Friend or Foe
LOCATS	Low Cost Aerial Target System
LMG	Light Machine-gun
LML	Light Mobile Launcher
LPD	Links Pulse Doppler
LWS	Local Warning System
MECHADS	Mechanised Air Defence System
MEF	Middle East Force
MG	Machine-gun
MGRA	Major General Royal Artillery
MAOT	Mobile Air Operations Team
MP	Member of Parliament
MPLA	<i>Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola</i> – People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola. Founded 1956.
MSDS	Military Skills Development System
MWO	Master Warrant Officer
NAAFI	Navy Army Air Force Institute – a canteen organisation.
NEAS	Non-European Army Services
NFA	Natal Field Artillery
NMR/SAAF	Natal Mounted Rifles/SA Air Force Reconnaissance Regiment
NRSL	Non Recordable (or Reflective) Service Leave
Oppositely	The cable address of the South African High Commissioner in London
ORBAT	Order of Battle – now called a Troop List.
PLAN	Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia (the armed wing of Swapo)
PME	Prime Mission Equipment
PSAP	Public Service Act Personnel
QE	Quadrant Elevation
QF	Quick Fire
QMG	Quartermaster General
RADAR	Radio Detection and Ranging
RAF	Royal Air Force
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
RBHS	Rondebosch Boys' High School
RDF	Radio Direction Finding
RFC	Royal Flying Corps

RMT	Remote Missile Turret
RNAS	Royal Naval Air Service
RNVR	Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve
SAAF	South African Air Force
SACS	South African Corps of Signals
SAEC	South African Engineer Corp
SAMC	South African Medical Corps
SCWO	Senior Chief Warrant Officer
SHORADS	Short Range Air Defence System
SOAA	Staff Officer Anti-Aircraft
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPAAG	Self Propelled Anti-Aircraft Gun
SWAPO	South West Africa Peoples Organisation
TSC	Technical Service Corps
TE	Tangent Elevation
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UNITA	<i>União Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola</i> –National Union for the Total Independence of Angola. Established 1966 and based in Southern Angola. The Ovimbundu people formed its base
URTU	University Reserve Training Unit
(V)	Volunteer unit
VE Day	Victory in Europe Day
VJ Day	Victory in the Far East (against Japan) Day
VoC	<i>Vereenigde Oos-Indische Compagne</i>
VMSS	Voluntary Military Service System
VP	Vulnerable Point
VSHORAD	Very Short Range Air Defence
WAAF	Woman's Auxiliary Air Force
Warsup	The cable address of the UDF supply organisation in the United States
WET	War Establishment Table

GLOSSARY

Translations

<i>Afrika Korps</i>	Referred also as the DAK (Deutsche Africa Corps) the German Africa Corps; formed officially on 19 February 1941. It consisted of Panzerarmee Afrika (15th and 5th Light Divisions – the latter later renamed 21st Panzer Division - and 90th Light Division.
<i>Panzerarmee Afrika</i>	German/Italian Armoured Army in North Africa. Formed on 22 January 1942 and incorporated the DAK: 15th and 21st Panzer and 90th Light Divisions; Italian 10th Corps: Bologna and Brescia Divisions; 20th Corps: Arieta (armoured) and Trieste (motorised) Divisions and 21st Corps: Pavia, Trento and Sabratha Divisions.
<i>Gefechtstaffel</i>	Battle Staff
<i>Kiehl Battle Group</i>	Panzerarmee Afrika formed battle groups for special puposes and they were named after the officer in command of the group.
<i>Trommelfeuer</i>	A constant barrage of Artillery fire - literally: drum-fire.
Enemy Aircraft	<p><u>Junkers JU87</u> – <i>Sturzkampflugzeug</i> – commonly known as a Stuka. A low wing dive bomber and ground attack aircraft which made its debut in 1937 with the <i>Luffwaffe's</i> Condor Legion in the Spanish civil war. It lasted until 1945. The B1 variant had a propeller-driven siren mounted on the leading edge of the wings which became known to the troops as the Jerico Trumpet. Although it reduced the speed of the aircraft it was considered important as a psychological weapon to weaken enemy morale. When realised it did not weaken the resolve of the men in Eighth Army the 'trumpets' were removed.</p> <p><u>ME 109</u>: A single seater fighter, often described as the ME 109, (as done in this book) it is more correctly the Bf 109. It was produced by <i>Bayerische Flugzeugwerke</i>. More than 34 850 were eventually manufactured, the first in 1935 and the last, in a Spanish factory, in 1956, a total altogether of 34 652 aircraft. By a quirk of fate both the first and last had Rolls Royce engines. The 109 E was fitted with drop bombs. The Bf 109F outclassed the British Spitfire V. The 'G' version introduced in 1942 had improved engine performance. Flying this aircraft the highest scoring German ace in North Africa achieved 159 aerial victories.</p> <p><u>ME 110</u>: A two/four seated long range escort fighter, night fighter and attack bomber.</p> <p><u>Macchi C200</u>: Called Saetta (Lightning) it could only just exceed 300mph. It was totally outclassed by all Allied fighters.</p>

Anti-Aircraft Command, Royal Artillery

The organisation was based on that of three Corps. As at February 1941 there were five Divisions in 1st Anti-Aircraft Corps; four in 2nd Anti-Aircraft Corps and three in 3rd Anti-Aircraft Corps, Each Division included a number of Brigades and each Brigade included a number of heavy and light Anti-Aircraft and Searchlight Regiments, the entire organisation structured according to the importance of the defended area. London, for instance in February 1941 was

defended by 1st Anti-Aircraft Division with four Brigades, with a total of ten heavy, five light and four Searchlight Regiments.

Anti-Aircraft guns as Anti-Tank weapons

As noted in this history, specifically at Sidi Rezeg, the 40 mm Bofors fought the German Armour and one unit claimed a small number destroyed or damaged. One author (now deceased) – an Anti-Aircraft gunner himself – stated that no matter how well a Bofors was dug in, it still had one insurmountable handicap; it had to be loaded with clips of ammunition from above. They had to be inserted by the loading number standing on the gun platform and were thus completely unprotected against machine gun fire from advancing tanks before coming into effective range of the Bofors armour-piercing solid shot. No doubt the dust and smoke at Sidi Rezeg was a factor in favour of the Anti-Aircraft gunners, and particularly of the loading numbers.

Batman	An officer's servant. In the war of 1939-45 they were drawn from men of the NEAS. Officers during the war of 1939-45 – when they had a batman – received an extra one shilling a day (ten cents) 'servant's allowance'. The practice continued after the war – but without the servant's allowance – and in post-war years, cleaning of quarters, washing and ironing for those officers who lived in an Officers' Mess - including Citizen Force officers during continuous training - was undertaken by locally employed batmen. A small charge on Mess accounts was levied for this service.
Barracks	A building or group of buildings that housed soldiers.
Barrage Control	A curtain of fire through which enemy aircraft must pass to attack their target. It was fired against visual or unseen targets to provide deterrent fire over VPs when the conditions of attack prevented the use of any other system of fire control.
Battery Captain	The second-in-command of a field or an Anti-Aircraft Battery, whose task encompassed administration and welfare of the Battery, including supply of ammunition and rations, the latter usually delegated to the BSM and the QM respectively.
Bofors	The Bofors 40 mm Anti-Aircraft gun was produced by one of the oldest Arms manufacturing companies in the world which began by making cannon under the name <i>Finspång</i> . Many of the old cannon to be found in Cape Town, dating almost from the time of van Riebeeck were made by <i>Finspång</i> .
<i>Bosvark</i>	Literally – bush pig. Name given to the self propelled Anti-Aircraft system consisting of a 23mm ZSU-23-2 gun mounted on a 6x6 mine protected (KWE100) vehicle, with communications. Operated by a five-man detachment.
Cables	For many years the underwater cable system was the only means of sending a written message quickly to an address overseas and they were in use until the 1950's/60's until replaced by the telex system.
Desert Air Force	Incorrectly described in a number of works as the Desert Air Force it was in fact originally 204 Group, Royal Air Force, which on 9 October 1941 became Air Headquarters, Western Desert, hence Desert Air Force. The formation known officially as Desert Air Force was not established until May 1943. American air craft also operated in the Western Desert campaign and the United States Middle East Air Force was established on 28 June 1942.

<i>Eekhorning</i>	Literally – Squirrel. Name given to the self propelled Anti-Aircraft local warning radar for the 20mm and 23mm mobile systems. Consisted of an Tupperware radar, mast mounted on a 4x4 mine protected Rhino (Samil 20) vehicle, with communications. Operated by a three-man detachment.
Eighth Army	The British Army that fought in North Africa and later in Italy. It arose from the original ‘Middle East Force’ – later termed ‘Western Desert Force’ - based in Egypt. It was re-titled XIII Corps in January 1941. Following reinforcement by a second Corps (XVI) in September 1941 the two Corps became Eighth Army.
Fire Unit	A Fire Unit comprises a Fire Control Unit, Sensors and one or more Effectors (guns or missiles).
Gaggle	Normally used to describe a flock of geese or group of noisy people but in the war years it described a loose group of aircraft, more usually of the enemy. It is used in this book only to provide some indication of the typical language of the period.
Height-finder	An instrument used to determine the height at which an aircraft was flying. In 1938 it consisted of two instruments, one at each end of a surveyed base, operated by a detachment of four – a home station operator and a layer, and a distant station operator and layer, with telephone communication between them and the guns. It was superseded by the much more efficient Radar.
<i>Kameelperd</i>	Translated it means – giraffe. The name given to the air defence specialised Local Warning radar mounted on an 8x8 Eljaba vehicle, which included necessary Command and Control.
Kopje	A small Hill.
Key Men	Men whose occupations were declared totally essential to South Africa’s war effort – to keep engineering and ship repair services, power stations, the railways, water services, etc, in operation. They were not allowed to volunteer for permanent military service but were later permitted to volunteer for part-time units.
<i>Khamseen</i>	A dry, hot, southerly or south-easterly wind peculiar to the Western Desert of North Africa which generally arose about mid-March and blew at intervals over a period of approximately fifty days.
Lighter	A barge-like vessel built for carrying bulk cargo, usually open and used mostly for transferring cargo between ship and shore or in rivers, but in the context used in the Mediterranean, they were decked over and able to move on coastal voyages under their own power.
Mile	An measurement of length, originally a Roman unit of 1 000 double paces. As an English measurement it is 1 760 yards, or 1.609 km in length. One yard is equivalent to 0.9144 metres. (Each yard is of three feet, each of 12 inches). The Scottish mile and the Irish mile are different in length. The English measurement system was replaced in South Africa by the metric system of measurement authorised by an Act of Parliament in 1969. The entire conversion in all spheres of measurement was completed by 1973.

Mines Engineering Brigade

Formed in 1940, with volunteers from the various mines in the country. They were a valuable addition to South Africa's war effort. The MEB was disbanded wef 1 June 1948 per F.O. 4175, 19.10.1949.

Murder See under 'Stonk'.

National Volunteer Brigade

The Brigade was a direct successor to the Defence Training Organisation and the Police Reserve into which 'key' men were recruited. It became an ACF unit from 1 October 1940 and was initially formed to co-operate with the SA Police. Units in 1941 at the coast were transferred to the Coast Defence Corps and those inland were formed into a Brigade as 15 (NVB) Motorised Brigade Group (V) which, with the Mines Engineering Brigade, formed 4th SA Armoured Division to operate under Major General Brink's Inland Area Command.

Numbering System

In common with other writers, Eighth Army is described as now shown; Corps are always shown in Roman numerals (XVII) and lower formations - Divisions and Brigades - in ordinal numbers: first, second, third, etc – abbreviated to 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. Numbered units of the Union Defence Force (particularly Artillery units) were originally given ordinal numbers but were in early 1942 changed to a cardinal system (1, 2, 3, etc.)

Oath

(Referring to both Africa and General Service): A solemn, sworn promise to be loyal, naming God as one's witness.

Porté

A four-wheel drive vehicle onto which a gun was drawn, tied down and carried. They were originally designed to carry 13 or 18-pdr field guns but later also Anti-Tank guns. The latter when in action often fired from the porté.

Quadrant Elevation

The angle which the axis of the bore makes with the horizontal plane when the gun is laid. The process of laying a gun for elevation with reference to the horizontal plane is termed 'laying by quadrant elevation'. Quadrant elevation can be applied to a gun either by means of a clinometer or by an elevation indicator on which the range in yards corresponding to various angles of QE can be read.

Red Eye

Russian Rockets – which emitted a noticeable red glow when seen.

'Red Tab'

A strip of Red felt worn in a loop on epaulettes to indicate that the wearer had signed the Africa Service oath as a volunteer. Although a new oath - the General Service oath for service outside Africa was introduced in 1943, the red tab continued to be worn.

Revetment

A built up wall generally of sand-bags as protection around a gun position.

Section

Two guns, with their detachments, vehicles and stores. It was a subaltern's command.

Sable

Literally – Sable Antelope. The name given to the Starstreak missile system including Sensors, Effectors and Command and Control. Acronym for: Surface to Air Defence System that is Balanced, Lethal and Effective

<i>Thutlwa</i>	Name given to the upgraded <i>Kameelperd</i> specialised mobile air defence radar and communications system, but which also included secondary radar.
Stonk	One of two terms used by Gunners in World War II (the second is a 'murder'). A ' <u>Stonk</u> ' was a powerful weight of fire designed primarily to meet an attack by enemy Armour. It was a priority call for a Divisional fire mission at 'Fire by Order' on an area target, the guns firing on parallel lines. A ' <u>Murder</u> ' on the other hand was also a Divisional fire mission at 'fire by order' that called for a concentration of all available guns on a particular grid reference. If it was a known enemy gun position, it would have been obliterated from the weight of fire. The Stonk was a regular feature during live shell shoots in ACF Field Artillery training in the 1950's, as was a 'murder'.
Subaltern	A 2nd Lieutenant or Lieutenant. These junior officers stood to attention when spoken to by the RSM and in any reply called him 'Mister'. (See under Warrant Officer)
Tangent Elevation	The vertical angle which the axis of the bore makes when the gun is laid, with the line of sight. It differs from the angle of projection by jump and droop.
Terms Used	<u>Establish</u> : A unit is formally established by declaration in SANDF Orders or by Notice in a Government Gazette. The unit is immediately added to the Troop List. <u>Disestablish</u> : Is to terminate a Unit's existence completely. <u>Formed</u> : A unit may be established but not necessarily be formed, as in 7 Light Anti-Aircraft for instance. It was 'formed' some time after establishment when men were posted into it and an officer was appointed to command the unit. <u>Disband</u> : A unit may be disbanded and closed down thus suspending any further activity – prior to placing the unit into suspended animation or disestablishing it altogether. <u>Suspended Animation</u> : A unit placed in suspended animation remains on the Troop List but is totally inactive until it is again needed, at which time it is resuscitated. It solves the problem of requesting permission to open a new unit.
Tommy Gun	A nickname for an American weapon of .45 calibre – not quite a pistol and yet not a fully fledged machine-gun. Originally with a drum magazine but later versions could take the drum or a stick magazine which held 20 rounds. It was invented by John T. Thompson hence - Tommy gun. (Also known as the Thompson machine gun).
Trigonometrical	(adjective: a survey term) A branch of mathematics dealing with the relationship between the sides and angles of triangles and the relevant functions of any angles.
Troop	A sub-unit of a Battery, containing two or more sections.
Warrant Officer	Due to their status Warrant officers were always respectfully addressed as 'Mister'.
The Wire	The boundary between Egypt and Cyrenaica (now Libya) marked by a heavy fence and rolls of wire which, except for the first 150 miles, ran down the 25 degree longitude to meet with the Sudanese border.
Western Desert Force	See under Eighth Army.

Ystervark A mobile Anti-Aircraft system mounted on a Bulldog vehicle (often described as a Samil 20 Chassis), with mine-resistant hull and an armoured cab, armed with a single-barrelled GAI-COI 20 mm Anti-Aircraft gun. It was operated by a three man detachment and was created as a temporary solution until a more sophisticated, mobile system became available.

Enemy Weapons

M55 A Soviet triple-barrelled 30 mm Anti-Aircraft gun.

ZU-1 A Soviet 14.5 mm Anti-Aircraft gun.

ZU-23-2 A Soviet-made 23 mm light Anti-Aircraft gun with an operational range of 2 500 m. *Zenitnaya Ustanovka* – hence ZU.

Desert Places

Alam cairn or prominent rock

Bir underground water reservoir

Wadi gully or natural cutting – leading down to the coast

Naqb or Bab pass or cutting in the escarpment

Sanyet deep well

Sidi tomb

Qaret low hill or rise in the desert floor

Deir depression in the desert surface

Minqar promontory or cliff in the escarpment

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Volunteers and the Mountain

The present Cape Field Artillery, then known as Prince Alfred's Own Cape Volunteer Artillery, was apparently stirred at reports from overseas about war balloons. They engaged in an 'anti-war balloon' exercise in 1885. The *Cape Times* of Monday, 7 December 1885 reported:

Our Volunteers having become so efficient in Artillery practice that there is no fear of any enemy landing on our shores from vessels of war, they are now in training to prevent the progress of a war balloon over our city. In this respect our Volunteers are in advance of the armies of Europe for not even von Molke has given serious consideration to the war balloon of which a magnificent illustration has appeared in Harper's Weekly and which war vessel the imaginative ingenuity of America has launched over the world.

The article went on to say that Prince Alfred's Own Volunteer Artillery needed only ...*the right class of gun and to understand how to elevate...* to become proficient. Apparently the experiment of firing at a 'war balloon' was actually conducted at a target – a prominent rock on the mountain known as 'The Devil's Peak.' In the course of the shoot the bush and trees on the mountain were set alight, the fire burning for about two and a half hours before a fortunate shift in wind enabled the weary gunners to contain the flames – and to probably forget about any further anti-war balloon practice.

Balloons in Bechuanaland

A balloon was first used for observation in South Africa, near Mafeking, in 1884/85, when a Balloon Section, provided by the Royal Engineers was included in the Warren Expedition - officially known as the Bechuanaland Field Force - led by Major General Sir Charles Warren. Perhaps this had also inspired the Cape Town Volunteers. But *defence* against these 'flying objects' had its first shaky beginnings during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, when Paris was besieged. Leon Gambetta's balloons, first seen in Paris on 7 October 1870, were used during October and November to send mail out of the city - and they were occasionally used by intrepid men who wished to escape the siege – by drifting over the net cast around the city by the Prussians.¹ The armaments firm of Krupp, then already well-known, produced a light 1-inch 'Balloon Gun' mounted on a swivel, to shoot down the balloons. Until the siege ended, all balloon departures thereafter took place at night.

The Wright brothers began their experimentation in flight in 1896, just a year after the President of the Royal Society, William Thomson, Lord Kelvin had stated the 'Heavier-than-air machines are impossible.' Orville Wright's first flight took place on 17 December 1903.

By 1914, most European nations had some experience of employing balloons and airships for military and civilian purposes. Practical flight by winged aircraft had advanced to heights reaching a thousand feet or more, and trips had been made of up to two hundred miles. Germany had led the way with its Zeppelin airships, capable of carrying passengers and cargo on long distance flights.

Although John Weston built a 'heavier-than-air machine' at Brandfort in South Africa in 1907 which, after fitting an engine, was first flown in 1910, the first 'foreign' aeroplanes arrived in South Africa in 1911 when the London-based African Aviation Syndicate Ltd brought a French Bleriot and a biplane to

¹ Young's Field, p. 38.

the country, and in Cape Town gave demonstrations to admiring crowds, and probably to many military men.

Recommendation to Prime Minister

Major General Christiaan Beyers, head of the newly-born Union Defence Forces, was sent to Europe by the Prime Minister, General J.C. Smuts in the next year to observe military manoeuvres in France, Germany and England. In England, bearing in mind the Prime Minister's instructions, he visited the British Army's new aviation school on Salisbury Plain in order to obtain as much detail as he could, as a guide to establishing a similar school in South Africa. Beyers watched military manoeuvres in Germany; and in October 1912, went for a flight in one of the simple aircraft of the day – a Rumpler-Taube monoplane (becoming the first South African General to fly in an aeroplane); in England he watched field forces change direction after aircraft had dropped messages once the pilot had sought out and found the opposition forces.

He realised that the day of the horse as a scouting 'machine' was over and he reported to Smuts that aircraft would play an important part in future warfare, and should prove a great saving in horses and men.²

South African Aviation Corps

After initial training at a flying school established by Compton Paterson at Kimberley, one of the three partners in the now defunct Aviation Syndicate, six of the ten aspiring pilots who were felt proficient, were sent to England for further training with the Royal Flying Corps. Five were judged to be competent and they were recalled to South Africa in August 1914. Before leaving they were ordered to find suitable aircraft, technicians and spares, to assist in the take-over of German South West Africa. By May 1915 the South African Aviation Corps was operational and ready to begin reconnaissance work for General Botha. The campaign in German South West Africa ended on 9 July 1915.

The first real attempt at Air Defence in Southern Africa took place in German South West Africa in 1914 when, at the request of Great Britain, South Africa's fledgling Defence Forces undertook the occupation of the German colony. Late in 1914, at Tschaukaib, a railway halt some 72 km inland from Luderitz Bucht, the 7th Citizen Battery (Natal Field Artillery) which, together with the Natal Carbineers and other units were part of Sir Duncan McKenzie's Central Force which had landed at Luderitz on 18 September, had to contend with a new and unexpected form of attack – from the air. The Germans had two fragile aircraft – an *Aviatik P14* and a *Roland Taube*, and they dropped 'bombs' – Artillery shells fitted with a long piece of cloth to stabilise its downward flight. With only a 130hp engine they were not powerful enough to take off with more than four of the 'home-made' bombs³ so for safety usually carried only two.

First Casualty

To quote from the unpublished history of the Natal Field Artillery:

Early in the morning following the attack on Garub a German aircraft appeared over the camp at Tschaukaib and dropped two homemade bombs each consisting of a 4-inch HE shell with percussion fuze and a long cloth streamer to keep the nose pointing downwards. One of the bombs did no damage, but the other almost hit one of the guns of 12th Citizen Battery, killing one man and wounding several others.⁴

This was the first and most successful of a number of raids by this aircraft, although other casualties did occur from time to time. A man of the Pretoria Regiment was a later casualty – he died after being hit between the shoulder blades by shell splinters.⁵

² *Per Aspera Ad Astra*, p. 9.

³ *Urgent Imperial Service*, p. 121.

⁴ Unpublished *History of Natal Field Artillery*, p. 36. (The man who died was Corporal Keeping)

⁵ *The Kaffrarian Rifles 1876 – 1986*, p. 129

All flights were made in the early morning while the air was calm, it being impossible to fly these early, fragile, machines when the wind blew strongly. Camp routine therefore required the animals to be taken out before dawn and scattered across the desert until the wind rose and the danger of air attack was over for the day. There were no such things as Anti-Aircraft guns and the only effort at defence was to dig a circular trench into which to sink the trail of a 15-pounder gun to obtain high-angle all-round fire, by discharging time shrapnel more or less at random. The procedure offered a fair chance of success against the low speed and altitude attained in those early days of flying, and according to a German report a few bullet holes were found in the wings after one of its raids. This whole problem so worried Captain G.T. du Val, SAMR, Battery Commander, 7th Citizen Battery, that he made a special report to the Brigade Major:

My proposal is to keep the guns in their present position at the left of the four-inch guns during the day and night, with the exception that at 5 a.m. I propose to take out to another position which I have chosen and place them in gun emplacements which have already been prepared. This spot is 2400 yards north of the present camp. I will arrive there at 5.30 a.m. at latest and at 6.45 a.m. I shall return and place the guns at the emplacements where they now are. The advantages are that the new position will, in my opinion, afford better opportunities of shooting at aircraft and I shall have a field of fire of 270° without firing over camp. I shall also have the opportunity of manoeuvring the four guns together on my way in and out.⁶

Skinny 'Liz'

The field gunners could not then have known about Skinny 'Liz, or her sister gun, both designed to fire at high angle as an Anti-Aircraft gun does, neither of which in mid-December 1914, had arrived in German South West Africa. In Britain both 13-pdr and 18-pdr field guns were converted to fire at high angle; the 13-pdr was not that successful and the result was that the 18-pdr was re-lined to take a 13-pdr shell, which with the extra boost provided by the 18-pdr charge, gave the shell a higher ceiling. Was the example provided by these guns the reason for the conversion of a 15-pdr in South Africa?

The first of two such guns - both were QF BLC 15-pdr field guns - was provided with a special carriage to enable it to fire at high angle. The ordinary field carriage could not be elevated beyond sixteen degrees and this presented difficulties in manufacture; but they were overcome. A field carriage was successfully converted at the Army Ordnance Workshops, Fort Knokke, close to the present Woodstock suburban railway station in Cape Town. Armament artificers, working under the guidance of Captain C.L. Gransden, Inspector of Ordnance Machinery, South Africa, produced a workable Anti-Aircraft gun. After successful trials at Woodstock it '...was placed in service in the Cape District.'⁷ It could fire at an elevation of just over 60 degrees.

Apparently not entirely satisfied with the first gun, a second 15-pdr (described as a 12-pdr field gun - which was easily converted to fire a fifteen pound shell), designed on an improved plan by Lieutenant Benson, to give it an elevation of 71 degrees, was subsequently constructed in joint co-operation between the Salt River Railway Workshops and the Army Ordnance Workshops. Its sole purpose was that of shooting at aircraft. The new carriage was constructed of 1-inch (25mm) boiler plate steel and was so heavy that ten men were required to lift the trail. It was also provided with extra springs to absorb recoil. The gun alone weighed 9 cwt (457 kg) and normal recoil through the cradle in the field carriage was 3 ft 6-inches. (1.06 m). The gun was successfully tested in September, probably near Simon's Town, in the presence of General Sir James Wolfe Murray - General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, South Africa, Major General C.W. Thompson, CB, DSO, Officer Commanding Cape District, and a number of ladies and gentlemen, including Mrs Louise Botha, wife of the Prime Minister, and Lady Wolfe Murray. Six rounds of shrapnel, exploded alternately by time and percussion fuzes, were fired

⁶ Unpublished *History of Natal Field Artillery*, p. 56.

⁷ *S.A. Railways and Harbours Magazine*, October 1914, p. 852.

with satisfactory results. The ...bursts which took place at an altitude of some thousands of feet,⁸ were clearly seen. They produced '...a fine effect...'⁹ The gun was immediately placed in service.

The Fort Record book of Queen's Battery, Simon's Town, mentions that the gun was placed in rear of the 6-pdrs mounted on the Battery. It also records that it was shipped to GSWA in December 1914, probably after a telegram sent by Colonel Rose to 'Defence' via Port Nolloth Radio at 12.25 pm on 28 December, which confirmed that 'Major TRIPP will enquire Salt River re construction of Anti-Aircraft gun...'¹⁰ Commander Hay of the RNVR later stated it was ...mounted on the fore-castle of the ss Gaika, ready for use should an enemy aeroplane appear.¹¹ The gun was under the command of Lieutenant E.H. Tamplin, MC, RFA. The ship arrived at Walvis Bay on Christmas Day, 1914. *The Royal Artillery War Commemoration Book*¹² mentions that Skinny 'Liz was frequently used with considerable success against German aeroplanes, but this cannot be altogether correct, although it would have warned either of the two enemy aircraft in German South West Africa to keep away.



South Africa's first anti-aircraft gun the 15-pdr BLC known as "Skinny Liz" in her field mode in South West Africa in 1915. (SADF Archives)

Figure 2: Skinny Liz

No one is certain how, why or when the gun was dubbed 'Skinny Liz', but it seems there might be some connection with Colonel Skinner, Commander of 1st Infantry Brigade. The gun accompanied his 3rd Infantry Brigade in the advance on Garub, but its only recorded action appears in the report of the 2nd Battery, SA Mounted Rifles, which described an unsuccessful engagement with a troublesome *Taube* monoplane using a converted 15-pounder BLC gun. The report noted that one of the springs broke each time a round was fired. The aeroplane was never damaged but was forced to keep its distance. It seems hardly likely, therefore, that Skinny Liz was as successful as the Commemoration Book described. An old soldier, Gunner Peter Mathias, of Cape Garrison Artillery, was sent on detached duty as a member of the gun detachment. He remembered the gun as ...*a very antiquated contraption with a towering carriage on top*. He also told a reporter of *The Argus* in an interview in his 90th year, that Skinny Liz ...*was affectionately known as such by all who made acquaintance with her...* and he went on to say that the gun:

*was one helluva contraption that sent everybody running when she fired. You had to run like hell as you didn't know what the reaction was going to be when she fired.*¹³

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Photocopy of telegram in possession of author.

¹¹ *The History of the RNVR (South African Division)*, p.130.

¹² *The Royal Artillery Commemoration Book*, p. 44.

¹³ Letter from his son, Chris Mathias on 20.8.1985, enclosing cutting from *The Argus* of 7.10.1982.

Perhaps the best work done by the gun was at the battle of Trekkopjes on 26 April 1915 when it came into action as a field gun in the open. The section of heavy Artillery had been withdrawn a few days previously to take part in the advance on Karibib,¹⁴ leaving Skinny Liz as the only gun present. She took on the German guns single-handed, registering several direct hits. Owing to the construction of the carriage it was necessary for the layer to stand on two biscuit tins in order to lay the gun, which rendered him an even more likely target. Several enemy shells landed in the proximity but neither Skinny Liz nor the layer received injury. The Transvaal Scottish had a different view of this action and their historian noted that after the German force had been beaten off (after the fire fight) and could be seen forming up in the distance prior to retiring on Usakos. *It was then that 'Skinny Liz' under Lieutenant Tamplin fired her only two remaining shells, and the last two shots of the action, one going wide and the other appearing to burst right among the Germans.*¹⁵

Skinny Liz saw the whole campaign to its end, after being used in a field role at least that once. She was later gracefully retired. One of the Gransden guns was mounted at Wynyard Battery in November 1917 together with 'a Maxim on AA mtg.'¹⁶ They remained there until after the war although the Fort Record Book of Wynyard Battery states in the paragraph confirming that the Anti-Aircraft gun at Queen's Battery was sent to GSWA, that: another was designed by Lieutenant Benson in 1917 and also later put at Wynberg Officers Mess. The Fort Record Book of Wynyard Battery confirms that one of the two converted field guns, described as '15-pdr. BLC A/A gun' was placed in the Battery in November 1917 till after the war.

So there is some mystery behind South Africa's first two Anti-Aircraft guns. Only one is known by the name Skinny Liz, but to the casual observer - which one *is* which?



Figure 3: Gransden Gun Fort Wynyard

Nevertheless, after standing for many years outside the Officers' Club at Wynberg Military Base with the first 'Gransden' (or is it - Benson) gun, Skinny Liz was moved to a place of honour at the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, Young's Field where it stood outside the administrative headquarters of Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. When this unit moved to Kimberley in late 1990, the gun went there too. It stands there today at the Diskobolos base occupied by Air Defence Artillery School and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, the centre piece of a memorial to all Anti-Aircraft personnel who have made the supreme sacrifice, where an annual service of commemoration is held. The first converted Gransden gun stands proudly, outside the headquarters of Cape Garrison Artillery at Fort Wynyard. On display with it in the grounds of Fort Wynyard are other old Anti-Aircraft guns.

Both Skinny 'Liz and the Gransden gun were unique to South Africa.

¹⁴ *Union of South Africa and the Great War 1914 -18*, p. 44.

¹⁵ *The History of the Transvaal Scottish 1902 – 1932*, p. 90.

¹⁶ SANDF Archives, Fort Record Book, Wynyard Battery.

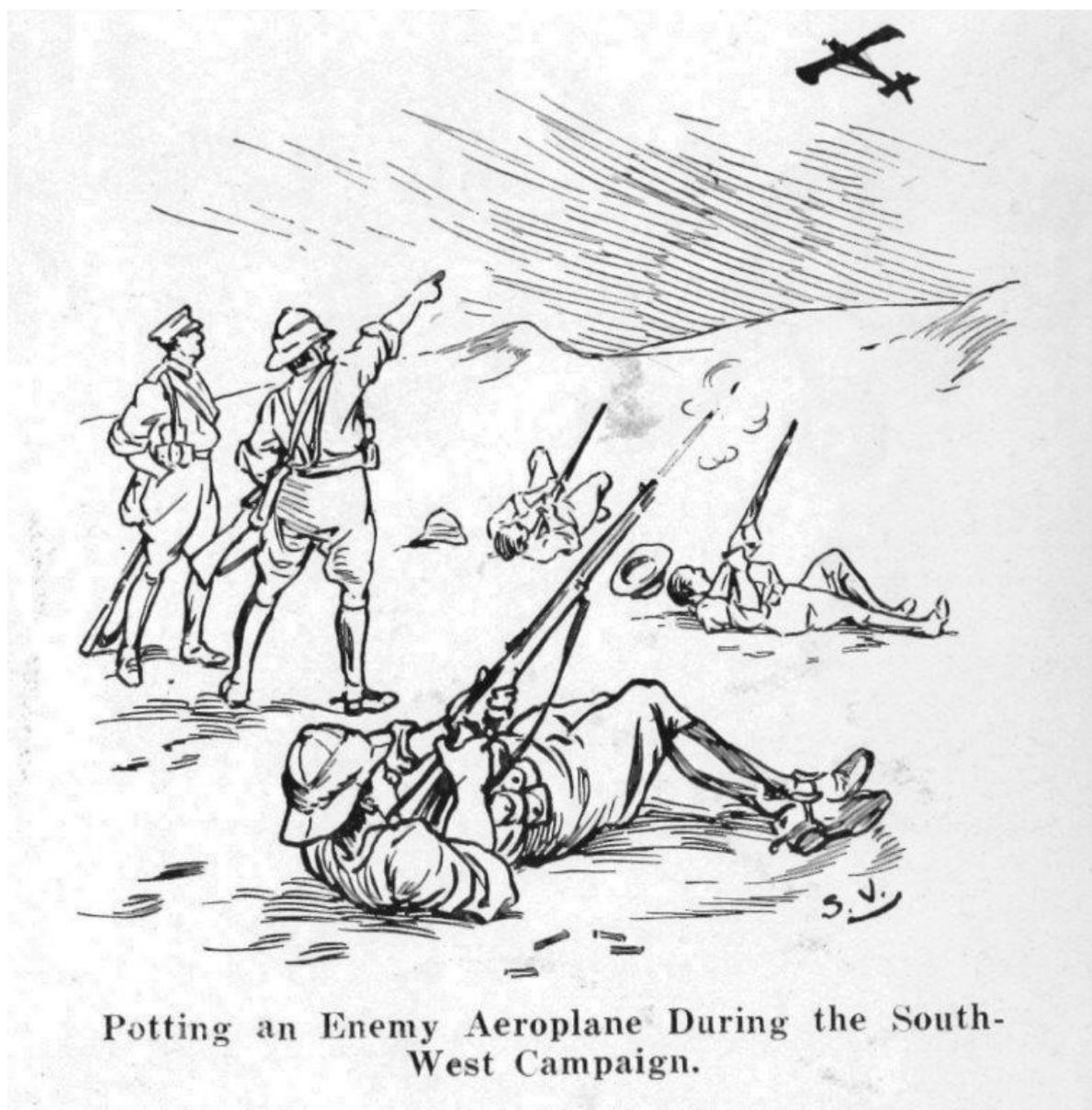


Figure 4: Potting an Enemy Aeroplane During the South-West Campaign

CHAPTER TWO

ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEVELOPMENT

The effort to employ guns for air defence was logical but not the result of forethought or pre-planning, rather a matter of hasty improvisation.¹

Royal Flying Corps

The British War Office was otherwise slow to recognise the potential of aircraft in warfare for observation over the battlefield, although the Royal Engineers had also provided balloons for this purpose in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War. But nevertheless, in 1910 it bought its first experimental winged aircraft, and in 1912 it formed the Royal Flying Corps as part of the Army, to train pilots and evaluate the use of the new air machines. Nothing was done about 'shooting at objects in the sky' until just before World War One, when aeroplanes first appeared over the battlefield and actually posed a potential threat. By then only a few experiments with howitzers had been conducted. No Anti-Aircraft organisation existed nor was there any alarm whatsoever about a possible air threat, either in the minds of those members in Parliament or in the public at large.

The beginnings of Air Defence Artillery can therefore be laid squarely on the start of World War One.

The Royal Navy

The Royal Navy, alarmed by the spectacle of aircraft flying with apparent ease at a thousand feet over their battle fleet in home waters, took a keener interest in this extraordinary development. The Admiralty also formed an air wing – the Royal Naval Air Service; but it went a step further – it investigated the provision of suitable, high-angle armament for its warships. This resulted by 1913 in the production of the naval 3-inch and 4-inch QF Anti-Aircraft guns. While there was no British Anti-Aircraft organisation, both the Germans and the French had recognised that the engagement of balloons and winged aircraft must be an accepted risk and had begun to design guns for this task.

Once war began the four British Squadrons of the Royal Flying Corps that existed went to France. It was realised that the Germans had Zeppelins capable of reaching and bombing targets in Britain and the Royal Navy, with the few guns available, thus became responsible for the air defence of London and key installations such as the Royal Arsenal, ordnance factories, ammunition dumps and oil installations. Winston Churchill as First Lord of the Admiralty formed an RNVR Anti-Aircraft Corps to handle the task.

Churchill tackled the London defences with his usual energy and was able to gather from various places a variety of weapons – which included the Vickers 1-pounder quick-firing pom-poms readily adapted to a variety of mountings. These all-purpose weapons, dating from the Anglo-Boer War, were fitted to pedestal high-angle mountings. The Admiralty could only provide very few 4-inch and 3-inch guns but were able to give twelve 60 cm hand-controlled searchlights, powered by acetylene gas. A search provided 12-pdr guns designed for use against torpedo boats, and Hotchkiss naval close-range 6-pdrs. They were all modified and deployed.

France

And to meet the new commitment in France the War Office by November 1914 raised Anti-Aircraft sections, each of two guns, as sub-units of the Royal Garrison Artillery, to meet the challenge of the aircraft which by then were active on both sides of the frontlines – the trenches that stretched from

¹ History of Royal Artillery - Anti-Aircraft Artillery. p.3.

Switzerland to Belgium. The sections were armed with the Vickers 1-pdr and probably to the surprise of both the pilot and the gun detachment this gun produced the first recorded Anti-Aircraft success of the war: on 23 September 1914, Lieutenant O.F.J. Hogg with No. 2 Anti-Aircraft Section in III Corps area, shot down a German aircraft, with the expenditure of 75 rounds, over open sights.

Adaption of Guns

The two fundamental problems of all wars in the 20th Century were: catching up with armament production – in these early years heavily dependent upon manual skills rather than mass production, and of finding manpower for the armed forces.²

In 1915 work began on adapting guns from other roles, i.e. from Field Artillery 18-pdr and 13-pdrs. The latter, seemingly the first to be used, needing revised recoil gear, a new mounting and sights for high – angle fire. It eventually emerged as the 13-pdr 6 cwt or more formally – 13pr QF Mark 3. Its performance was basically poor. The barrel of the 18-pdr was lined down from 3.3 inches to 3.0 inches, thus permitting the 13-pdr shell to be fired with a bigger charge without any stress problems. When other modifications were complete it became – with much improved performance – the 13-pdr 9 cwt. It was soon the standard Anti-Aircraft gun in France. One wonders whether these two guns provided the inspiration to convert 15-pdr guns at the Cape for Anti-Aircraft defence.

The 3-inch Gun

In order to tackle the speed and operational height of the Zeppelins and of likely future winged aircraft, only high performance guns were effective; they were the 3-inch 20 cwt, 4-inch and the 13-pdr 9 cwt. By February 1916 the Royal Navy had found that home Anti-Aircraft defence was a drain on its resources and Anti-Aircraft defence of Britain was passed to the Army. The Anti-Aircraft organisation was overhauled, modified and an enlarged weapon production – especially of the 3-inch 20 cwt gun – came into operation. Stemming from the Vickers' naval pattern of QF 3-inch, the War Office specification introduced differences in operation. The 3-inch 20 cwt was modified: semi-automatic operation of the breech mechanism was applied, in which recoil of run-out of the barrel on firing was used to open the breech, eject the empty cartridge case, and retain the breech open with the striker cocked. To achieve this, a sliding breech-block was employed. When the next round was loaded this released the block to close behind it and to fire the gun.³

The War Office pattern 3-inch 20 cwt gun was first designed to fire a 12½ lb shrapnel-filled shell at a muzzle velocity of 2 500 ft/sec. Early experience in action showed excessive barrel wear, loss of accuracy and instability of the shell in flight. In 1916 a new shell weighing 16 lbs was adopted and the muzzle velocity reduced to 2 000 ft/sec. The ceiling of the gun was 22 000 ft but effective ceiling was 16 000 ft. A rate of fire of 16-18 rounds per minute was achieved.

The Anti-Aircraft gunner in 1916 had to visually and clearly see and identify a target in the sky – often difficult in a hazy or cloudy sky or at other times when the light was poor – and engagements could not begin until detachments were also tracking the target. The GPO had to order deflection and opening range, giving a 'lead' to these values - time of drift and time of flight, and this put a premium on his skill, eyesight and practical experience. No tables existed for high-angle fire from which corrections of the moment could be deduced, and guns were not calibrated for changes due to barrel wear, corrections for wind speed and direction and all these, including fuze-length, had to be a matter of adjustment. It is therefore hardly surprising that hits were rare. In addition, near-miss shell-bursts were generally ineffective because of the unsuitability of shrapnel.

Instruments

But war breeds inventors. An Anti-Aircraft Experimental Section came into existence during 1916 and from their work a major advance was made when it was realised that if a target's height could be measured by some instrument and combined with the angle of elevation in a trigonometrical function, it would be possible to predict fuze-setting. Drawing on well-known mathematical principles, two

² Ibid., p. 5.

³ Ibid., p.12.

instruments were proposed. The first was cumbersome, it had open sights without magnification and required a base-line of at least 1 000 yards in length.

The second proposal was to employ a single-station optical instrument to calculate slant range and to obtain height by incorporating a small computing device which would resolve the relation of height to range and angle of elevation. The Height/Range Finder used two sets of lenses and prisms at either end of a short base-line, reflecting two images to a central point. By bringing them into alignment, through gearing, the parallax angle was adjusted and the movement, if measured, was proportional to the range.

Easily transported and set up, this instrument required a high degree of skill. But height-finders of this type became standard equipment for the next 25 years, through development and improvement in accuracy. The first model was the Barr and Stroud UB2. It could measure height up to 20 000ft. South Africa obtained the UB7 version in 1939.



Figure 5: Barr and Stroud UB2

From 1916 onwards new ideas and new techniques were constantly being produced and teams from London University enabled high-angle range tables to be published. Ballistics, meteorological and barrel-wear factors were computed; and an operational 'workshop' eventually produced an instrument known as the Height/Fuze Indicator. It enabled a GPO to order fuze-length from its relationship to height and angle of elevation as determined by the ballistics of the gun in use. Later improvements provided optical magnification of the target image and heights expressed in logarithmic values.

In 1916 there were so many Anti-Aircraft sections in France that they were grouped into Batteries – although in Britain itself they were still regarded as Companies of the Royal Garrison Artillery. Advances in Anti-Aircraft gunnery did no more than keep pace with the increased speed of the Zeppelin and the development of aircraft. By then the 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft gun had begun rolling off production lines.

Bombers, and the RAF

After the new German Gotha aircraft began bombing London the Government realised that it had to move to defend the city. A committee under the chairmanship of General Smuts was appointed to examine the functioning of the RNAS and the RFC and then to recommend what should be done about home defence. Smuts advised the creation of one unified Air Force under an Air Ministry – hence the creation of the Royal Air Force. And he made other significant recommendations; perhaps the most important point made was that all the air defence resources of the London region be controlled by one commander. The report was accepted. By this time – mid-1917 – the speed of aircraft had increased; the top speed of the Sopwith Camel F1 (which was manufactured at a cost of £837, or R1 674 if converted at the original two Rand to the pound sterling) had reached 126 mph.

Anti-Aircraft Sections

A typical Anti-Aircraft section of two guns in France in 1917 consisted of two officers and 41 other ranks. The number included ten instrument operators, three telephonist/linesmen, an Orders-board recorder, an air sentry/orderly, a cook and two drivers. Sections in the earlier years were given an area

in which to operate and left very much to themselves. They were nobody's baby. There was no such thing as an Artillery Commander of any kind. They were not included in fire plans or march-tables for movement and were seldom welcomed by their neighbours, as fire from their guns brought an unwelcome response. A general instruction to the sections was to get as far forward as they could. Communication was not good. On one particular evening – this is a true story - a section was visited by an Infantry Captain who told the Anti-Aircraft Lieutenant that the front line was to retire that night to 200 yards in front of where the section was then deployed and 'could he please have the use of your dug-out as Battalion headquarters.'⁴ From late in 1916 individual regions for Anti-Aircraft defence were defined, each known as an Anti-Aircraft Group under an Anti-Aircraft Defence Commander.⁵

Experimental work by the Anti-Aircraft Experimental Section continued in 1917 and it produced an instrument called the Wilson-Dalby, which employed tachymetric principles. It used generated voltages to represent rates of angular movement but employed separate sights and circuits for azimuth and elevation. It had no direct transmission to the guns. Instead the computed values were marked by hand on a board in the command post, super imposed on time rings. The GPO selected the appropriate deflection and ordered it by voice to the guns. By 1918 when the war ended the effectiveness of Anti-Aircraft fire had improved considerably: the totals of claimed kills by the guns were 95 in 1917 and 176 in 1918.

The Anti-Aircraft organisation had become an established part of the Army.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 8,9.

⁵ Ibid., p.12.

CHAPTER THREE

BETWEEN THE WARS

The 1920s and 30s

The Great War – the war of 1914/1918 – the war to end all wars, now known as World War One - was one which had been predominantly an Artillery battle; and it had become so because the war became a gigantic siege. The Infantry faced one another from trenches that stretched for hundreds of miles, from Switzerland to Belgium, with battles to gain but a few metres of ground. Although they were supported by hundreds of guns the Infantry nevertheless suffered very heavy casualties and the loss of countless lives, and many more wounded and missing. Men drowned in the shell craters or, wounded and unable to move, suffocated as they slid further into the mud into which the battlefields were churned by the guns of both sides. Huge numbers of men were therefore reported as missing.

The combatants ended the war well stocked with gunnery equipment, enough to last for years - although most Artillery men realised that much of it was obsolescent; most of the guns involved were designed well before the war. During the 1920s reaction against the carnage of 1914 – 1918 set in, and most military forces were reduced in men and equipment. Little attention was paid to Anti-Aircraft gunnery. Many 'experts' thought that the Anti-Aircraft guns of World War One were stop-gap weapons and that it was with aircraft that one fought enemy aircraft. By about 1923, most of the world's Anti-Aircraft defences had all but disappeared. The trickle of funds made available in France was used to build the Maginot Line, while in Britain emphasis was placed on coast defence weapons and equipment. The introduction of winged aircraft and the growth of air power in the Great War nevertheless matched the parallel development of guns to deal with aircraft. They ranged from the early improvised mountings of 1914 to the precursor in 1918 of the famous World War Two German *Flugzeugabwehrkanone Model 18*.

Technical Interest

To quote Ian Hogg:

There were apparently, two methods of approach to the problem of shooting down aircraft. One was to develop a medium or heavy calibre gun which fired a shell capable of downing any existing aircraft with a single shot. This, unfortunately demanded an extremely high degree of accuracy in aiming so as to fetch aircraft and shell together in the same place at the same time, and the technical problems involved in such accurate fire control were formidable. The other approach was to adopt a light fast-firing gun which could emit a stream of shells and fill the sky with metal, in the hope that one of the shells or some of the splinters might fall in the path of the aircraft and damage it. This light gun could then be directed upwards by eye and 'hose-piped' about until it achieved success.¹

Some progress in design was made, and in default of actual manufacture, techniques, communications, deployment, weight of shell, ranges of equipment, and the employment of field and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, all these factors and more, were examined in the years to follow. Anti-Aircraft Artillery became 'a field of great technical interest in the early 1930s,² and ideas began to bear fruit. What really caused difficulty, however, was aircraft design and performance. It did not change much in the twenties and early thirties but there was significant change in speed and performance after 1933/34. Gun designers worked hard to keep pace.

¹ *Artillery in Colour, 1920-1963*, p. 18.

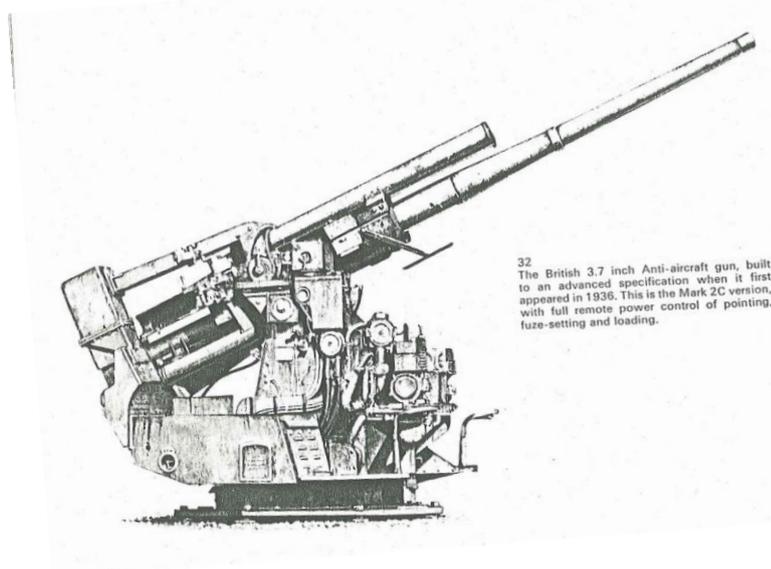
² *Ibid.*

The decade saw the introduction by the Swedish firm of *AB Bofors* of the famous 40 mm L/60 , developed in 1929 and which fired a 20 lb (9.1 kg) shell from four-round clips at the rate of 120 rounds per minute. The shell was fitted with a tracer unit which burned and emitted a red light which outlined the shell's flight through the air, thus giving the gun-layer a visual indication of his accuracy. The tracer lit a self-destruction charge which exploded the shell in the air, so that it did not come down to earth live and primed to explode on contact. In the absence of a suitable local weapon it was purchased by Britain and the first Swedish-built equipment began to be issued in 1938.

In the larger Anti-Aircraft gun field, stated Ian Hogg, 1933 was a significant year because it saw the introduction of a gun which became a legend in its own life-time: the German 88mm Flak 18. This gun had its beginnings in 1925 when the German Army came to the conclusion that 75 mm was not a large enough calibre and Krupp was asked to develop something more powerful. At that time the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty had left the German gun-making industry in something of a decline, and Krupp had sent some of their designers abroad to work with other companies. One such team had gone to AB Bofors in Sweden and, when not working for Bofors' benefit, they had designed an 88 mm gun firing a 20lb (9.1 kg) shell. In 1933 they returned to Germany with the drawings; prototypes were built and tested, the Army approved, and in 1933 it was put into production.³

It was the first model of the World War Two, well-known '88', and was introduced into service in 1933, in time to be tested during the Spanish Civil War by the Kondor Legion.

The second half of the thirties also witnessed the introduction of a British heavy Anti-Aircraft gun. Work had begun in 1917 on specifications for the design of a high performance Anti-Aircraft gun of 3.6-inch bore, to fire a 25 lb shell to a maximum height of 25 000 ft at a muzzle velocity of 2 000 ft/sec. Although the War Office gave a preliminary order for 100 guns this was reduced in September 1918 to five for testing and trials; but with the ending of the war the project was abandoned. One can see in the design, however, the forerunner of the excellent Vickers 3.7-inch gun of 1935. Specifications drawn up as far back as 1928 formed part of the desultory search for a new high performance gun; but new specifications issued in 1932 called for a muzzle velocity of 3 000 ft/sec, a shell weight of 28 lbs, a 'ceiling' of 35 000 ft and, for mobility, a road speed of 25 mph and a maximum weight of eight tons.⁴ With gun metallurgy and ballistics by this time much improved, this resulted by 1936 in the 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft gun. It was a very advanced design for its day. A drawing of the advanced Mk 2c version is shown below.



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The British 3.7 inch Anti-aircraft gun, built to an advanced specification when it first appeared in 1936. This is the Mark 2C version, with full remote power control of pointing, fuze-setting and loading.

Figure 6: 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft Gun

³ Ibid., pp. 18-19.

⁴ Ibid., p.50.

Training Lags Behind

While this unique gun had been designed and put into slow production in Britain, South Africa was many months away from obtaining gunnery equipment as protection from air attack. Anti-Aircraft training for rifle and light machine gun was being taught to personnel of the Coast Artillery Brigade in Cape Town, as evidenced by a War Office publication – Small Arms Training, Volume 1, Pamphlet No. 6, Anti-Aircraft 1937 – issued to ‘N. Orpen’, then a member of the Brigade.

The training pamphlet described the possibility of air attack on probably the most vulnerable target – that of a column of troops on the line of march. It described various possibilities at which an aircraft might attack – either by bomber ‘...from altitudes at which small arms fire is ineffective, i.e. over 2 000 feet, or by fighter and bomber aircraft flying low, when the main defence is small arms fire.’⁵ It went on to describe how an aircraft would seek to effect surprise’ – by making use of ‘...clouds, low hills, woods, etc., for concealment,’ or by attacking out of the sun. And it said, such attacks would be made at high speed, ‘probably between 200 to 300 m.p.h.’ Such speeds would be no surprise to South Africans, the Air Force consisted then of old aircraft where these speeds were normal but overseas, newly designed aircraft were greatly exceeding them.

Training, surprisingly, was by model aircraft, although only in silhouette – placed on a cord on a frame-like apparatus with weights at each end to move the silhouette at various speeds from one leg to another, while ‘fire’ was directed at it by a light projector attached to an LMG. Infantrymen were also taught to use LMGs without this apparatus, and there was definite fire discipline training against a ‘direct’ attacker and a ‘crossing’ aeroplane for both rifle and LMG.

⁵ Small Arms Training, Volume 1, Pamphlet No. 6, Anti-Aircraft 1937, p. 5..

CHAPTER FOUR

POLITICAL UNDERTONES

The First Five Year Plan

The fusion of the two political parties led by General Smuts and by General Hertzog in 1933 coincided with the end in South Africa of the world-wide economic crisis that began in 1929. The country had been saved the worst of the depression because of its gold.

Mr Oswald Pirow was appointed Minister of Defence in the new Pact Government's cabinet. One year later, in May 1934, during the debate in the House of Assembly on the 1934-35 defence budget, the new Minister announced his five year plan for the re-organisation of the Defence Forces, designed to improve the defence capability of the country. It had been drafted by the new CGS, Sir Pierre van Ryneveld to meet new challenges. Although it focussed on expanding the Army, most attention was given to the Air Force with no significant emphasis on coastal defence. The feeling existed that the occasional surface raider could be taken care of by mobile 6-inch guns and field Batteries, together with the old 9.2-inch Mk V guns in Table Bay and Simon's Bay. Reliance was placed on the Royal Navy for protection of the seas surrounding South Africa.

But Pirow was also Minister of Railways and Harbours and did little else but devote his attention to the protection of the new Table Bay harbour that was under construction, and of securing the heaviest coast guns available for this purpose. He was convinced that it had to be made battleship proof, despite the considered opinion of the Admiralty and the British War Office that an attack by a heavy cruiser was all that could be expected. He *wanted* it to be battleship proof, and to be defended by 15-inch guns.

In the years before the war of 1939 – 1945 there was no Anti-Aircraft organisation in the Union Defence Forces, but included in the initial five-year plan produced in 1934, were three Anti-Aircraft Batteries, with searchlight sections. One mobile Anti-Aircraft Battery and one mobile searchlight section were to be included in the authorised strength of the Artillery School at Roberts Heights and another was to be stationed in Durban. But in a letter of 10 September 1935, the CGS intimated that the Artillery posts for the Durban Anti-Aircraft and searchlight sections were to *...be held in hand and not to be filled at present*.¹

The CGS addressed 'the Hon The Minister' on 13 May 1936 and recommended that he give approval for the purchase of the equipment as debit to the Artillery and Machine-gun Replacement Fund, at an estimated cost of:

One Anti-Aircraft Battery	£15 000	(R30 000)
One Searchlight Section	£12 000 ²	(R24 000)

Authority was clearly refused.

Three months later, however, a secret document dated 13 August 1936, was produced; it concerned the *Erebus* (a Royal Naval 15-inch gunned monitor to be used as a floating fort in Table Bay) and it also covered Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Tank policy. In paragraph 3 of the document the CGS made this statement:

¹ SANDF Archives, DCS/CGS, Box 63, file G. 96/2.

² Ibid., file G.96/1.

*The three modern searchlight sections which are included in our old programme to be completed and equipped on a mobile basis, one of the Sections being established at the Artillery Training Depot, Roberts' Heights.*³ And paragraph 4 included:

*Of the three Anti-Aircraft Batteries (changed in someone's hand to 'Sections') included in the old scheme, one is to be established at the Artillery Training Depot, Roberts' Heights, and equipped and trained on a mobile basis. The formation of the other two is not to be proceeded with.*⁴

But on 29 August, the Adjutant General (A.G.) copied a communication from the CGS and addressed the Officer Commanding Roberts Heights and Transvaal Command – with DMO&T, QMG and DTS for information, to confirm that the Artillery Training Depot, Robert's Heights would '...now consist of the following units: '

- (i) Headquarters A.T.D.
- (ii) 3rd Heavy Battery – 6" Mrk. XIX.
- (iii) 1st Field Battery - 4.5" How.
- (iv) 2nd Field Battery - 18 pdr.
- (v) 1st Light Battery - 3.7" How.
- (vi) 2nd Light Battery - 2 pdr. Anti-Tank.
- (vii) No.1 Anti-Aircraft Section.
- (viii) No. 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Section.
- (ix) No. 2 Armoured Train.⁵

Establishment Tables for (ii, vii) and (viii) were enclosed with this Secret communication.

The earlier letter written by the CGS on 13 August 1936 (on the same date as the policy statement) had included the fact that the Depot *...will also train personnel in equitation and on armoured vehicles.*⁶

Despite the promise of a beginning to an Artillery air defence capability Colonel H.S. Wakefield, Adjutant General, writing to the same addressees on 3 September 1936, referred to his letter of 29th ultimo and stated that the 2nd Light Battery, No. 1 Anti-Aircraft Section and No. 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Section would not be formed '*...pending further instructions, as the equipment is not available and not likely to be available for some considerable time.*'⁷

The activities of the German pilots flying their Stuka's in the Spanish Civil war in 1937, the use of their new 88mm Flak gun, and the Munich Crisis of 1938, which could very easily have escalated into a state of war, must have confirmed to those at Defence Headquarters that they had been correct in considering that an air defence capability was necessary in a field Army. Others thought so too. *The Nongquai* of June 1937 contained a paragraph of interest to proponents of Air Defence. It read:

*Sgt Major W.R. Tacon, SAAF, is proceeding overseas on June 8 on a few months leave, and while there is taking a short course in Coastal Defence and Anti-Aircraft Instruments.*⁸

No action to obtain equipment was, however, taken. This is reflected in a communication dated 16 February 1938, when the CGS informed the A.G. and the Director of Training that there was *... no intention at present of forming the 1st and 2nd Anti-Aircraft Sections in the Coast Artillery Brigade, and there is no plan or provision to obtain the equipment,* despite the fact that the CGS had stated earlier that the Union Defence Forces will be based on an Infantry Brigade Group that would include, in its Artillery component, one Anti-Aircraft Battery with eight 3.7-inch guns and one searchlight section of six lights.⁹

³ Ibid., file G. 96/2.

⁴ Ibid., A.G.(1), Box106, File A.G.579.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *The Nongquai*, June 1937, p. 551.

⁹ Ultimo Ratio Regum, p. 150.

Another Five Year Plan

In 1936, in an upgrading of the first five year plan, *more* attention was paid to the coastal defences. South Africa stood at the intersection of the major sea routes and safeguarding of South Africa's ports, particularly Table Bay and Simon's Bay – the latter enjoying first priority in terms of the Smuts/Churchill Simon's Town agreement - had become necessary. It was envisaged that the fixed defences of Simon's Town, Cape Town and Durban would be armed with modern power-operated high-angle guns (as had been agreed by the Committee under Hankey in 1938) by the middle of 1938. The plans envisaged putting the coastal defences in order within four years.

Speaking in the House on 27 April 1936 on his five year plan - which was due for completion in 1941 - the Defence Minister outlined various aspects of South Africa's defence policy. He mentioned that coastal defence was still governed by the arrangements entered into by Committee of Imperial Defence in 1928. He said that a further extension of the programme was being considered for Cape Town. No mention was made of defence against air attack.

World Situation Deteriorates

The Prime Minister, General Hertzog had confirmed on 8 February 1935 that his Government was not prepared to participate in any scheme of Imperial Defence, and it was while the Italians were fomenting trouble to the north that Mr. Pirow on 15 June told General Andries Brink, Brigadier Generals J.S. Wylie and J.J. Collyer, and the Chief of the General Staff, at a Defence Committee meeting, that as far as South Africa was concerned invasion was extremely unlikely. He nevertheless felt it was not unlikely yet not impossible that Britain could become involved in a war with Japan or France. But, he continued, it was possible that 100 000 men *could* be landed by sea or come overland supported by 100 aircraft in an attack on South Africa.¹⁰ He did not elaborate on how he had reached this conclusion, or how South Africa would protect itself against such a large number of aircraft.

The possibility of an external threat became serious when Mussolini led Italy into a war of conquest against Abyssinia in 1935. Abyssinia was invaded by Italian forces on 3 October 1935 and by 5 May 1936, following much brutality, the capital Addis Ababa was in their hands. The country was annexed by Italy four days later. All Italian ports were closed to British shipping, and traffic was diverted from the Mediterranean to the Cape and Panama Canal routes. By this time Hitler had openly defied the treaty of Versailles and the restrictions it placed on weaponry and was re-arming and expanding Germany's armed forces. They had commissioned three 'pocket battleships', each with main armament of six 11-inch guns and each a potential sea-raider. Hitler at this time had his eye on South West Africa (formerly a German colony) and Tanganyika (now Tanzania), and also a former colony.

Germany entered the demilitarised Rhineland in March 1936, the Italian/Abyssinian war was on-going; Gen Franco began a military revolt in Spain and Britain could see the threat of war with Germany and Japan looming on the horizon. The Defence Requirement Committee in England recommended 'as most important' a substantial improvement in coastal defences at naval bases both at home and abroad. And the Chiefs of Staff warned the British Cabinet that war with Germany *...would be a disaster for which the Services with their existing commitments...are totally unprepared.*¹¹ At this time the Union Government had not yet given the General Staff any indication of what its Defence Policy was. Italy, now with air bases in Abyssinia, had the potential of bombing the Witwatersrand on a one-way flight.

Forced Changes

Mr Sydney Waterson, the young MP for South Peninsula, warned the Minister of Defence before he spoke in Parliament on 28 July 1938, during the Part Appropriation Debate on the state of the Union's defences. He created a furore in Government circles by drawing the attention of the House to the fact that the Minister of Defence had made two statements about defence, one in 1934 and another in

¹⁰ *South Africa at War*, p 7.

¹¹ *The Continental Commitment*, p103.

1936 but had given no information since then. Stressing the inadequacy of the Air Force, the Artillery and the antiquated defences of Simon's Town, he went on to ask rhetorically, whether there was a single modern Anti-Aircraft Battery in the country. Before he finished a worried and obviously shaken Minister of Defence sent him a note indicating he would make a full statement during the debate on the Defence Vote.¹² His speech was in fact a turning point in the struggle for finance for defence.

Six weeks later, on 7 September, when the House of Assembly resumed in Committee of Supply on 7 September, the Minister of Defence, Mr Oswald Pirow, stood up in the House and outlined his current, revised, Defence Policy, affirming the Government's decision to spend £6,000,000 on defence.¹³ He assured the country - just three weeks before the major international crisis over Czechoslovakia - that the General Staff had concluded South Africa would not have to make any major defence effort until six months after the outbreak of hostilities. Shortage of manpower, he said, would be counter-balanced by superior fighting qualities and equipment, and the use of automatic weapons. The automatic weapons were Lewis guns. There were 91 in the country against war requirements of 2 574. Five hundred had arrived by May 1938 but were incomplete. And none of the 27 Infantry Battalions had a single 3-inch mortar.

Re-organisation of the Defence Forces

The *Cape Times* of 8 September 1938, reported that Mr Pirow had stressed the fact that the Union's defence policy had to be based purely on local conditions and could not be guided by what was being done in that respect overseas. He assured the country, as reported by the Cape Town morning newspaper that:

We are not bound, directly or indirectly, to take part in any war, in Africa or elsewhere. We shall not take part in a war except when the true interest of South Africa make such participation inevitable. Even then the decision would rest with the people.

The Minister said that £1,000,000 would be for 'harbour defence' and £5,000,000 for weapons and equipment for the Defence Force. In addition to strengthening the (non-existent) defences of other harbours, he stated that it had been decided to make Table Bay 'battleship-proof. The defence scheme ...represented the very minimum compatible with national safety. He was again not completely honest. The *Cape Times* of Thursday, 8 September 1938, went on to report almost the entire content of Minister Pirow's speech under the sub-heading of 'Coastline Defence'. No mention of protection against air attack was included.

Within a few months Waterson was given a diplomatic post in London and was thus effectively removed from the political scene.¹⁴

Finances

Mr A.H. Broeksma, the Secretary for Defence placed a somewhat different view on the huge amount the Government had made available for defence. He said the amount of £1 million voted by Parliament was to be regarded as a contribution to the Aircraft and Artillery Replacement Fund for the financial year 1938-39. The balance of £5 million, he wrote, 'was only to be made apparent in the Estimates for 1939-40.¹⁵ No final orders were to be placed overseas until he received details and approved of the purchase.'¹⁶

Easy Days of Peace Training

In those easy, peaceful, days of 'peace training' - which every young man who unknowingly volunteered to give four years of his time undertook to do - included a period of continuous training of four weeks once per year for coastal gunners (three weeks for all other ACF units), was just that -

¹² Hansard, 28.7.1938, 298ff.

¹³ Cape Times, 6.9.1938,

¹⁴ Discussion Orpen/Waterson, Notes by N.N.D. Orpen 11.2.1964.

¹⁵ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 305.

¹⁶ Ibid.

peace training. There was no work on Saturdays and Sundays, and Wednesday afternoon was devoted to sport – if one felt so inclined. It was very easy to obtain deferment or cancellation of one's training commitment. For the officers there was a full social life. Promotion was made when one's ability and natural leadership skills were noted, and commanding officers of units, both in the coast units and ACF units, had the authority to promote whom they pleased in the ranks - gunner to Sergeant Major. The full responsibility for the efficiency of their unit rested on their shoulders alone.

Officers were produced from the ranks, or even from someone outside the unit who either volunteered to undergo training (without going through the Defence Headquarters' casual call-up process), or was approached by a commanding or other officer, to 'come and join us'. One's social background was quite important. In some units one had to have attended the right school.

There was a catch to the process. One had first to undergo a medical (it took less than half an hour); be taken on strength (i.e. be included in the next Part II Order - provided the medical result confirmed that one was healthy); and then serve for six months in the ranks. This was not onerous. It did not even necessitate appearing on any parade – dependent upon how strict was one's commanding officer. To obtain a commission, the final act was to be presented by the commanding officer to the Officer Commanding, Cape Command (for Cape Town units). After a brief interview, the latter would, if he approved, make a recommendation to Defence Headquarters. Every Coast Garrison Force and Active Citizen Force unit observed this process. And, unlike today with our modern technology, a written reply would generally be received within a month.

Neil Garlick was one of those gentlemen who volunteered for training. In his own words: 'I had to do an initial 'stint' at Wynberg Camp to learn how to do simple things, like wear a Sam Brown, a whistle lanyard on the right shoulder, etc. 'Smiler' Brereton Stiles (then 2 pips) – Permanent Force with 3rd Heavy Battery – was my instructor – also: 'How to drink beer.' In December 1938/January 1939 Neil Garlick was overseas and when he returned he discovered in his absence he had been posted to 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery.¹⁷

It was men like Neil Garlick and many others like him that, with limited training, would take South African units to fight the next war.

Threat of war

The actions of the new German leader, Adolf Hitler, led to a threat of war in Europe; the threat had slowly been gathering momentum over the two or three years prior to 1938. On 17 August German troops moved to the Czechoslovakian border and with war seemingly imminent, Permanent Force gunner officers and men were hurriedly moved from Roberts Heights to Cape Town that month to assist in manning the coastal defences. In Britain, Winston Churchill continued to stress the limitations of air power and the invincibility of the Royal Navy, while Hitler's plans for a Blitzkrieg to take over Czechoslovakia within four days from 1 October 1938 caused world-wide concern. European capitals prepared for war in the wake of a defiant speech by Hitler; it almost did lead to war. The Royal Navy was mobilised on 14 September and Czech troops were rushed to their borders. In London the War Council met; on 16 September Dr D.F. Malan appealed to Afrikaners throughout the Union to stand together to prevent South African participation in a European war...';¹⁸ the British Prime Minister flew to Munich in a last attempt to avoid war and on arrival back in Britain he triumphantly waved a piece of paper - Britain and France had agreed to the dismemberment of the Czech State provided Hitler did not invade the country and this act '...of political cynicism was greeted with great relief all over the world.'¹⁹

Fortunately, the Munich Agreement, signed between Germany, Britain, France and Italy on 29 September, averted the immediate threat of war in 1938. Violent anti-Nazi riots broke out in central

¹⁷ Written and typed notes provided by Major N. Garlick (Ret),.

¹⁸ *A Country at War*, p. xix.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

Johannesburg on 24 September when five men wearing black-shirt uniforms and swastikas collided with a cyclist. A crowd stormed the car. Johannesburg celebrated the Munich Agreement with a riot between pro and anti-Nazi factions, broken up only by the arrival of troops. But running battles between the factions broke out ‘...all along the Reef, in Benoni and Boksburg, Potchefstroom and Johannesburg, and continued well after the declaration of war the following year.’²⁰ In South Africa (and in Canada) the British Admiralty encountered difficulty in calling up reservists of the RNVR. The British Government knew that South Africa, and probably Canada, would not go to war over Czechoslovakia.

A number of officers, senior and junior NCOs and gunners of the Artillery School, and Limber Gunners of Natal Field Artillery, Pietermaritzburg; Transvaal Horse Artillery, Auckland Park, Johannesburg; Cape Field Artillery and 2de OVSVA were earmarked for Fortress Manning on the coast Batteries, should there be any recurrence of the emergency.²¹

The South African Governor General told the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Station, during the course of a conversation ‘...that he thought there would have been a revolution...’ if the Union Government decided to enter a war.²² The crisis over Czechoslovakia changed General Smut’s mind. He had initially supported the Prime Minister’s view that South Africa should adopt a stance of non-belligerence, but his thoughts firmed when Hitler later invaded the country.

Schemes of Development

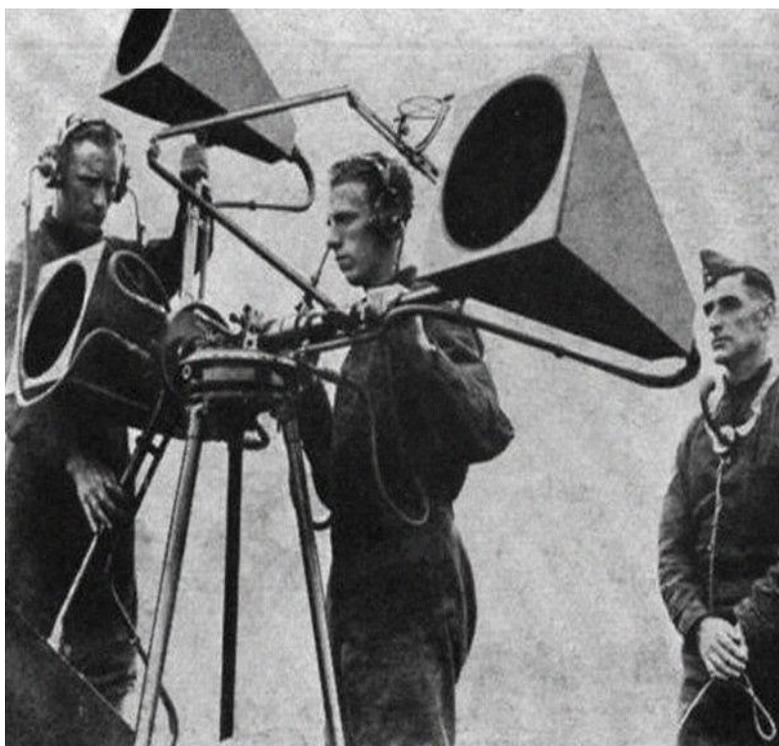


Figure 7: An early sound locator

In an approved ‘Scheme of Development’ produced in August but included with a letter dated 4 September 1939, the Director of Coast Artillery noted, among mention of other coastal defences, that twelve 3.7-inch guns and five AA searchlights would be available for the defence of Table Bay harbour, with four of these guns and four ‘SA Artillery searchlights’ for Simon’s Town Dockyard defence. Much of the equipment listed in the Scheme of Development did not materialise for many, many months. The first two 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft guns to arrive in the country were sent to Durban. They were there by 23 April 1942 – but without ammunition.²³

²⁰ *South Africa at War*, p.xxi.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²³ *Island at War*, p. 51.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE YEAR BEFORE THE WAR

The Coast Artillery Brigade, with its headquarters at the Castle, Cape Town, was established from 1 June 1934¹ and it was formed with the following units under command:

Headquarters, Coast Artillery Brigade - at the Castle.	
(With Engineer & Fortress Signal Sections provided by CGA)	
No. 1 Heavy Company	manning the coast guns at Cape Town.
No. 2 Heavy Company	manning the coast guns at Simon's Town.
1st Medium Battery	with four 60-pdr guns.
2nd Medium Battery	with four 6-inch howitzers.
Cape Field Artillery (Prince Alfred's Own)	with four 18-pdr field guns.
No. 1 Armoured Train	with an 18-pdr mounted on an open railway truck.

By April 1939, it included: the Erebus Heavy Battery (C.G.A.); 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery, (both in the Cape Command), 3rd Heavy Battery in Eastern Province Command and 4th Heavy Battery in Natal Command.

Apart from a decision made in the intervening years to form the Anti-Aircraft units in the Cape as part of the Coast Artillery Brigade instead of at Roberts Heights, events in Europe must have forced a change of mind. Rumours abounded, and a correspondent writing in the March 1939 edition of the South African Police and Union Defence Force inter-service journal, *The Nongqai*, stated that there were ...*rumours of an Anti-Aircraft Battery being opened up here soon. Nothing official is known yet, but the rumour is strong and who knows!*² On the eve of the coming war, the Anti-Aircraft capability of the Union of South Africa left much to be desired – a formal organisation was non-existent.

There were some, apart from any in the Defence Forces, who thought about danger from the air and the value of an Anti-Aircraft organisation.

William Saunders, who held the view that 'a country worth living in, was worth fighting for' and who had served with the Kimberley Regiment in 1899, wrote to the Minister of Defence on 7 October 1937 and suggested 'for early establishment', a section of an Anti-Aircraft Battery with searchlights - at Witbank. The town, he said, had a power station worth £2 million, and in addition, was an important railway junction. He stated in his letter that it should have the equipment and trained men to 'put up stern resistance' if attacked; and suggested that men from Roberts Heights could '...teach the young men here the business of Anti-Aircraft destruction'.³

William Saunders received a polite reply thanking him for his suggestion and telling him it was not proposed to form any new units.

The Legion of Frontiersmen was next in line. The Legion had been founded early in the 20th Century and they were featured in Cape Town Volunteer journals about 1904. They described themselves as 'non-political, non-racial, a body of loyal, reliable men of mature age and with experience from all

¹ Force Order 158.

² *The Nongqai*, March 1939, p.263.

³ SANDF Archives, A.G. 1, Box 114, file 648/1, Enc. A.

Branches of the Service.⁴ Their Transvaal Command chairman wrote to Colonel C.J. Venter, DFC, Officer Commanding Witwatersrand Command, and asked to be attached to the Union Defence Forces as a Legion of Frontiersmen. In his letter of 7 March 1938 the Area Commandant stated they would serve in any branch of the Service, preferably as an Anti-Aircraft unit. The letter was submitted to the Adjutant General who replied that he had noted their request, but stated that if and when Anti-Aircraft units were formed, they would form part of the Active Citizen Force.⁵

From Durban came a letter from G.W. Hammond, also a member of the Legion of Frontiersmen; he referred to 'these troublesome times' and felt that he and many other ex-soldiers should offer themselves to prepare for an emergency. He obviously passed his thoughts to the media. *The Star* published an article under the heading **Anti-Aircraft Defence**, announcing that *...official recognition of the Legion as a body to be used in Anti-Aircraft defence would be gazetted in not more than a month's time*. The paper said it provided for taking over the Legion as a military body and the Minister would shortly sign a paper to this effect. When questioned by Natal Command on the instructions of the Adjutant General, Hammond said he had been badly misquoted.⁶ The matter seems to have ended there.

Technical Ability

The coastal gunners of the Royal Garrison Artillery had prior to World War One become proficient at the calculation of gun data and the ability to hit a moving target, and it was reckoned the same proficiency was required of those who operated Anti-Aircraft guns. Hence the two forms of gunnery were allied. As in most gunnery, the application of Anti-Aircraft fire was both a science and an art and the nature of the target presented special problems. There was no benefit in being able to range onto a target - Anti-Aircraft gunnery involved some technical ability and this had an interesting effect on attitudes within the Royal Artillery in the inter-war years. The majority of officers and senior NCOs had been trained in the traditional methods of direct fire which was applied by ranging and then correcting the fall of shot by observation. This knowledge could not be applied for engaging fast-moving targets in space. For accurate, predicted, aimed, fire at a moving target in the air a number of variable factors had to be resolved into corrections. Deflections had to be calculated and ballistic adjustments made to secure a first-round hit, if possible. The state of wear of the guns and accurate calibration was essential. Few officers had studied the art of computation to enable them to achieve this, and only coastal gunners had the ability to do so.

The art of predicting fire against a constantly moving target was new. Early instruction in Anti-Aircraft gunnery may have been sketchy but there was nevertheless a strong antipathy to the limited knowledge of Anti-Aircraft fire control. Many Field Artillery officers, particularly senior officers, thought horsemanship far more important than technical gunnery and this attitude was to persist for many years. But there were a few who accepted the new methods – unlike the gunner officer who advised his son not to follow him into the Regiment since with the advent of mathematics to Field Artillery it was no longer a profession for gentlemen.

There is the well-known story of the old Battery Commander who distained as new-fangled nonsense 'meteor' (weather) telegrams, and decided the 'correction of the moment' for his Battery every morning after breakfast when smoking his first cigar of the day. Having watched the smoke curl up into the air of Flanders for some minutes he would send for his gun position officer and announce: 'The correction for today is left 10 minutes, add 150 yards!'⁷

But it was not so in the Coast Artillery, whose officers who found themselves in the Royal Garrison Artillery without any hope of a transfer to the Field Branch. They resigned themselves to learning all about gunnery. They learned from the Royal Navy to calibrate their guns, to make the technical

⁴ Ibid., Box 114, Enc. 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., file 648/2, Enc. 3.

⁷ *Gunners at War*, p.36

allowance for curvature of the earth, they learnt about charge temperature, and droop, and the effect of wind direction on the flight of a shell; and they slowly came to appreciate that prediction, calibration and correction of the moment and many other facets of technical gunnery could enable them to achieve every hope of a first round hit on an enemy ship with their coast guns. They took this knowledge with them to France and Flanders in 1915.

Thus it was, because of the technical ability of the coastal gunner, that Anti-Aircraft gunnery with its new technology, found a home in the Royal Garrison Artillery. The Royal Garrison Artillery had, prior to World War One, become proficient at calculation of gun data and the ability to hit a target, and it was reckoned the same proficiency was required of those who operated Anti-Aircraft guns. Hence the two forms of gunnery were allied. And when the Union Defence Forces eventually formed the first Anti-Aircraft Battery, it was natural that it became part of the Coast Artillery organisation in the Cape Peninsula, as a unit of the Coast Artillery Brigade, despite the decision in the mid-1930s to attach it to the Artillery School.

It was by 1938 known what the problems were of hitting an aircraft ‘...flying through the air at 200 m.p.h. at a height of 10,000 feet or more...’⁸ BSM A.E. Gard, RA, Instructor Gunnery at the Artillery School, Roberts Heights, included this in an article he wrote for *The Nongqai* entitled: *A Few Aspects of an Artilleryman’s Training*, in which he devoted half a page to the complex problems of Anti-Aircraft gunnery, emphasising that the keynote of all training was ‘team work’ and that in Anti-Aircraft Artillery this was essential, especially on instruments. He made a point too, of stating the men working on the Predictor and the Height finder – both requiring skill – must be kept together as a team.⁹ It was a matter of theory to officers and men of the South African Artillery as there was no Anti-Aircraft equipment in the country, and nor would there be for a few months.

A Floating Fort

On 23 March 1939, Pirow, with great fanfare, revealed that as from 1 September: *Cape Town, with Parliament and members in it, will enjoy the protection of the Monitor Erebus, which is armed with 15-inch guns*¹⁰ Placed at the disposal of the Union Government as part and parcel of the coastal defence organisation, he stated that the monitor *Erebus* was to be reconditioned by the SA Government at a cost of £100 000, and would act as a floating ‘fort’ in Table Bay and, with laughter from members, he said: *...as long as it held together*¹¹ He did not tell Parliament that he had requested the Admiralty to remove all the Anti-Aircraft guns (fourteen) then on the ship - except two of the 3.7-inch guns , before it sailed for South Africa. He did not intend that a crew be kept on board as he did not wish it to be known as a ship. The Minister went on to explain that his second five-year plan to boost the country’s defences, introduced in 1936, would be completed in 1941. These plans had hardly begun to materialise by the time war broke out in September 1939, as a result of problems with finances and a consequent delay in the implementation of planning proposals.

Mr Pirow stated that: *With the exception of Anti-Aircraft Artillery which was rather difficult to obtain at present... other arrangements for coastal defence were well in hand.* He said that coastal defence was being given priority over orders placed in Britain for defence equipment.¹² The Minister had never at any stage in the last few years mentioned that the Defence Force had in 1936 budgeted for a Battery of Anti-Aircraft guns at a cost of £15 000 (less than was paid for the same guns due to arrive in Cape Town in April 1939), or that he had placed an embargo on the original order;¹³ or, that two 9.2-inch guns delivered in 1937 had been lying on the quayside in Table Bay for two years while he had negotiated with the Admiralty to secure the *Erebus*.

⁸ *The Nongqai*, November 1938, p. 1132.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Hansard, Vol 33, 1939.

¹¹ *Cape Times*, 24.3.1939.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ SANDF Archives, CGS Gp 1, Box 63, file G 96/1.

Reporting on the Minister's speech in Parliament the previous day, the *Cape Times* quoted the remarks made about the Anti-Aircraft guns, and made other comment about the new five-year plan: *The programme further involved additional signal Companies, motor transports, chemical warfare defence unit, three A.C.F. Artillery Batteries, one Anti-Aircraft Battery, which was not very modern but would provide experience enabling Anti-Aircraft gunners to use any kind of Anti-Aircraft gun, an Anti-Aircraft searchlight section and....*¹⁴

Meanwhile, South Africa's first Anti-Aircraft guns were about to arrive.

3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft Gun

The 3-inch 20 cwt gun was accepted for service in March 1914 as the common Anti-Aircraft gun for both the Royal Navy and the British Army. And by the end of the Great War it had supplanted all other extemporised Anti-Aircraft guns. It was light, had a good rate of fire, rapid traverse and a good elevation. Designed for a static mounting it was later developed to a variety of mobile or towed platforms. As aircraft performance increased it could no longer meet requirements but was not actually declared obsolete until 1946. It is doubtful if any gun in British service has ever had so many different varieties of ammunition issued as this gun.¹⁵ Used throughout the First World War it was again used during World War Two. It had lasted so long because there were so many of them. Two hundred and seventy of these guns filled the gap in Britain's defences in 1940 until there were sufficient 3.7s.

The 3-inch was the first purpose-built gun for use with a Field Army. Its weight in action was 6 000 lbs and elevation limits were minus 10 to plus 90 degrees. The gun fired a shell of 16.5 lbs and with a muzzle velocity of 2 000 ft/sec had a maximum horizontal range of 12 400 yards, a maximum ceiling of 25 200ft and an effective ceiling of 15 700ft.¹⁶ A good detachment could achieve a rate of fire of 16-18 rounds per minute with the fixed ammunition – an essential feature of most Anti-Aircraft guns. Rear mounted trunnions reduced the clearance above ground – needed at high angles. The cradle carried an oil-filled buffer and spring-loaded recuperator. Two layers, operating hand wheels, traversed and elevated the gun through a full circle and up to 90 degrees elevation. The 3-inch 20 cwt gun was rugged, simple and reliable, instantly recognisable in action by the sharp, loud 'crack' from its short barrel.

The first Anti-Aircraft guns seen in South Africa were of this type; after arrival at Cape Town in April the new equipment was given maximum publicity and the guns were shown to the South African public on Union Day, 31 May 1939, when they formed part of a military parade in Adderley Street.¹⁷ The eight 3-inch 20-cwt guns were on mobile mountings, (they were reported as being 'barely mobile') and the six modern 60-inch HCD searchlights were originally stored in the gun park at the Castle, but the Coast Artillery Brigade advised the Cape Command on 30 June 1939 they were to be moved to the Brooklyn Aerodrome, probably so they would be convenient and in preparation for a forthcoming Anti-Aircraft course.

¹⁴ *Cape Times*, 24.3.1939, p.12.

¹⁵ *British and American Artillery of World War Two*, pp 104-106

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.104.

¹⁷ *The Nongqai*, October 1939, p.1059.

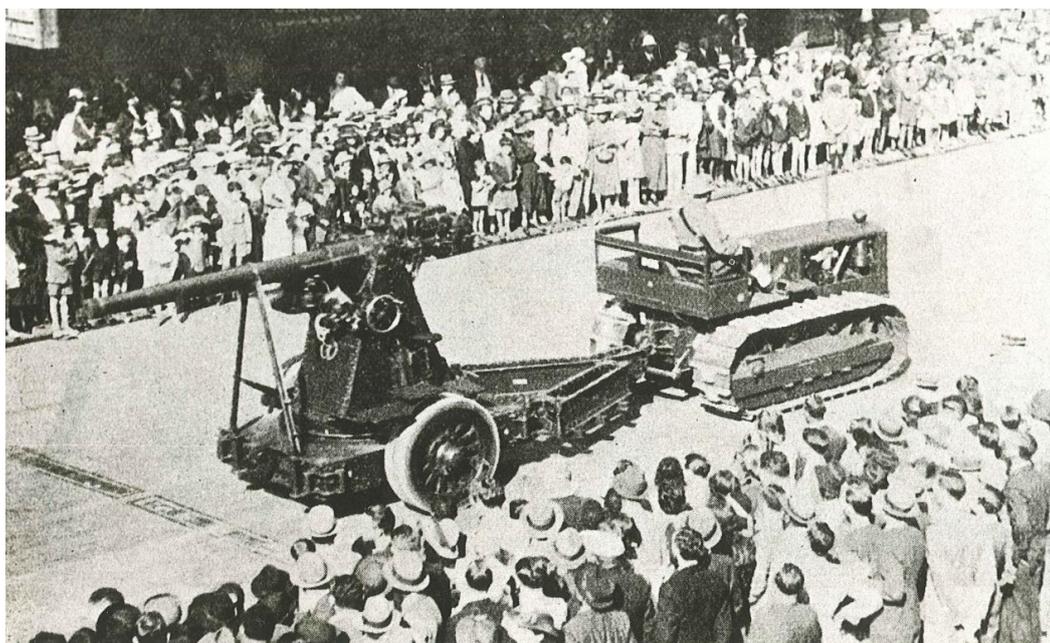


Figure 8: After the Union Day Parade at Green Point the guns were again shown to the public in Adderley Street, Cape Town

According to a letter addressed to the Quartermaster General on 3 August 1939 – the equipment was stored in a hangar and in a building recently purchased from the African Air Transport Coy. Ltd., at Brooklyn Aerodrome, (in 1926, a civilian airport on the outskirts of Cape Town and now Air Force Base Ysterplaait).¹⁸ All their accompanying stores, including identification telescopes, Anti-Aircraft; height finders, U.B.7, Anti-Aircraft, and sound locators were also stored there. The Officer Commanding Cape



Figure 9: Major L.J. Klootwyk

Command in his communication to the QMG stated that north side of the aerodrome abuts on the municipal Brooklyn residential district and it was considered an urgent necessity that the buildings on the aerodrome be protected by barbed wire fencing. He had obtained two quotations: one for barbed wire entanglements at £361 and another for a single upright fence with a sloping top bracket at £175. He considered the later suitable.

The First Anti-Aircraft Course

There was little delay in learning all there was to know about the new Anti-Aircraft equipment.

Apart from Major L. J. Klootwyk there was probably no-one else in the country with any real knowledge of the new guns. Len Klootwyk had attended a Long Gunnery Course (Field, Coast and Anti-Aircraft) in England from September 1937 to October 1938 and was course commander for a 41 day (working day) Anti-Aircraft course which was scheduled to take place at Brooklyn Aerodrome from 3 July to 16 September 1939.¹⁹ He was

assisted by Warrant Office Joubert and Sgt Poolman. Sgt Houston of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps was on hand to assist with the instruments.²⁰ The object was to urgently train Permanent Force instructors on the new Anti-Aircraft guns and associated equipment. Nine officers and 25 other ranks – all coastal Gunners – and according to *The Nongqai* of October 1939, it included ‘some of the old CAB men who were transferred back from *Voortrekkerhoogte*.²¹ Immediately before this a number of NCOs from coast Batteries, but including a few members of 1st Medium Battery, attended a preliminary twenty-day course of training on the Predictor, and as Height-Finder specialists. Major Jeffrey, Captain Meister and Lieutenant Garlick, also attended the lectures and gun and predictor drill, before going to their civilian occupations at 10.00 am daily.²²

¹⁸ *The Argus*, 24.2.1995.

¹⁹ SANDF Archives, CAB, Box 37.

²⁰ *The Nongqai*, October 1939, p. 1059.

²¹ *The Nongqai*, October 1939

²² Hand-written notes provided by the late Major N Garlick, in possession of the author, p. 3,

Apart from all nine available Coast Artillery officers attended the course. One officer - Captain and T/Major G.J. Prinsloo was present for a few days before reporting sick, Those that did included: Lieutenants L.W. May, G. Dunbar Moodie and N.G. (Nick) Wessels and the newly commissioned 2nd Lieutenants: I.S. (Bruce) Guilford, D. (Doug) Loftus, M.E. Anderson, G.A. De Kock, D.E. Peddle and C.D. Stark. Lieutenant Colonel Cilliers was also present when able to do so. Their withdrawal from normal duties to attend the course meant that the defences of the greatest naval base in the Southern Hemisphere was for a short while in July 1939 in the care of a handful of Lance Bombardiers and gunners under the command of an equally newly commissioned 2nd Lieutenant L.G.F. (Louis) Wolf. All the new officers had only been commissioned on 1 March 1939. Louis Wolf was about to be relieved by a Captain and temporary Major who would soon return from sick leave.

All nine officers passed with good marks – between 81.36 and 90.9 per cent - Lieutenant Graham Dunbar-Moodie being edged out of top spot by 2nd Lieutenant I.S. (Bruce) Guilford by a mere 0.4 per cent. Only sixteen other ranks passed the qualifying 60 per cent mark. Of the specialist course, six other ranks qualified as predictor specialists and six as height finders. Lieutenant Colonel Cilliers, Commander of the Coast Artillery Brigade, paid tribute to all those on the courses - on their adaptability, keenness and the general standard of intelligence of the members. Their previous training had been that of coastal gunners.²³

International developments cut the course by a week and it was hurriedly terminated on 30 August, the live shell practice being cancelled. Nine of the other rank participants failed to qualify and this was considered good as the nature of Anti-Aircraft gunnery involved infinitely more technical theory. The complicated problem of trying to hit an aircraft flying at 200 miles per hour was solved by the Predictor, ‘...a marvel of modern science and human ingenuity and skill ...*which works out continuously a most complicated trigonometrical and ballistical problem, and offers the answer as data for the guns*’.²⁴ The data was fed by ‘...electrical follow-the-pointer dials’²⁵ The complicated theory of the Predictor led one particular Sergeant Major to believe that if one ‘...*put the rate of pay in one side, the number of days in the month on the other side, and turned the hand-wheels proportional to his beer-drinking ability, it would solve his monthly pay budget!*’²⁶

In an approved Scheme of Development produced in August but included with a letter dated 4 September 1939, the Director of Coast Artillery noted, among mention of other coastal defences, that twelve 3.7-inch guns and five Anti-Aircraft searchlights would be available for the defence of Table Bay Harbour, with four similar guns and four searchlights for Simon’s Town dockyard defence. But from all accounts, the equipment had not yet been ordered.

An Anti-Aircraft Organisation

In April 1939 the Adjutant General wrote to a number of addressees and informed them that steps had been taken for the establishment of seven new units – including 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery which was intended should be established from 1 July 1939 subject to the passing of the estimates.²⁷ The estimates were approved. The 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery, South African Artillery, the first formal Anti-Aircraft unit to be formed, was ‘established and designated’ as a unit of the Active Citizen Force, backdated with effect from 1 April 1939.²⁸ In accordance with policy current at the time, the Battery was a ‘diluted’ unit, with a small number of Permanent NCOs, drawing its Active Citizen Force recruits from the University of Cape Town. Included in its establishment was a section of Anti-Aircraft searchlights.

²³ SANDF Archives, CAB, Box 37.

²⁴ *The Nongqai*, October 1939, p. 1059.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 60/1, file 93/1/A.

²⁸ G.N. No. 333, and G.N. No. 789, 9.6.1939

The first day of July was the first day of the Government's financial year and it was on that date each year that ACF recruits - who were always medically examined in January - began their four year stint of peace training. On 30 June annually those who had completed their four years 'peace training' were discharged. It was policy in those years – and until about 1953, that personnel of Citizen Force units had to be resident in the vicinity of their unit's headquarters. Most of the other ranks of 3rd Heavy Battery, who were engineering or medical students of the University of Cape Town, – those who remained on strength, quite suddenly found themselves in the new Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Major S.H. (Stan) Jeffrey, a Cape Town attorney, originally commissioned into Cape Garrison Artillery from the rank of gunner in July 1931, was first posted to 2nd Heavy Battery but, typical of the Coast Artillery Brigade, there were many inter-unit transfers. From 12 February 1936 he was promoted as Battery Commander, 2nd Medium Battery and when the headquarters of 2nd Medium Battery was transferred to the Artillery School in late 1936, he was transferred to the newly established 3rd Heavy Battery. The Heavy Battery was transferred to East London with effect from 1 October 1938²⁹ and after some time on the General List, Stan Jeffrey, then a substantive Captain, but with the temporary rank of Major, was appointed as Battery Commander 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery. He became a substantive Major from 12 August 1939, after being officially transferred to the new Anti-Aircraft Battery from 1 July.³⁰ With him went Captain G.W. Meister, who had previously commanded 1st Medium Battery and prior to that had reached the rank of Sergeant in Natal Field Artillery before being transferred to Cape Town. Two Lieutenants, N.M. (Neil) Garlick (of 3rd Heavy Battery), and C.D. Stark, a short service Permanent Force officer, were also moved to the new Anti-Aircraft Battery. The four officers occupied the posts of Battery Commander, Battery Captain and section officers respectively. About thirty Permanent Force NCOs and gunners formed part of the unit strength.³¹ The Battery offices were in the New Drill Hall in Tennant Street, Cape Town, a road now occupied by a bridge which spans the railway lines from Sir Lowry Road to the Foreshore area.

An Honorary Colonel to the Battery - Professor Theodore le Roux, MA., D. Litt. – was appointed with effect from 25 October 1939³² but no one, except possibly Major Jeffrey, seemed to know anything about the appointment, least of all the adjutant.



Figure 10: Officers and senior NCO's training on the new 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft guns at night in late 1939

²⁹ G.N. No.1756, 28.10.1938

³⁰ F.O. 2067.

³¹ Notes by the late Neil Garlick in possession of the author

³² G.N. No. 1915 1.12.1939.

CHAPTER SIX

WAR IS DECLARED

On 28 April 1939, shortly after South Africa's first true Anti-Aircraft guns (excluding Skinny Liz and her sister gun) – arrived at Cape Town, Hitler announced that all agreements with Poland were ended and that all he wanted from Britain was the return of Germany's colonies (including South West Africa). This time there was no mistaking his intentions. He had in the previous year taken personal command of German forces in the field and marched them into Austria and announced the *Anschluss* – the Union of Austria and Germany into a 'Greater German Reich'. In May he announced his 'irrevocable decision to destroy Czechoslovakia', and by October the *Sudentenland* (the western and most industrialised province of Czechoslovakia) was his. In March 1939 his troops drove out of the *Sudentenland* and occupied Prague and then the whole of Bohemia and Moravia. Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. Within days it became obvious that Poland was another target.¹ Throughout April and May, while Hitler and Mussolini announced a treaty which bound Italy and Germany in a 'Pact of Steel', there was a great deal of ambassadorial activity in Europe. It was to no avail.

Legacy of Colonial rule

The legacy of colonial rule in South Africa had resulted in the inheritance of many of Britain's socio-political and military structures. Britain and the Union of South Africa – together with Australia, Canada and New Zealand - shared the same Monarch as official head of state, and the Union Jack was still one of the country's national flags. At the end of cinema performances (bioscope as it was then called) the audience stood while God Save the King was played. The Union Defence Forces were to all intents, British – in uniforms, customs and language.

Many Afrikaans-speaking South Africans – including many in the Defence Forces, felt no strong bond with Britain; the Anglo-Boer War was still fresh in the memories of many, and those memories were nurtured by the extremists. The war which by now everyone believed would come, was a hotly debated issue; many hot-heads and adventurers were looking forward to it. The Prime Minister, General Hertzog, believed firmly that the Statute of Westminster signed in 1934, assured South Africa's autonomy and in 1938, he tied the Cabinet to a position of firm neutrality² should Britain enter a war with Germany. His argument was based on the question: 'Why should Britain, the only country to have attacked South Africa be supported in a war against Germany – a country that had shown only friendship?'³

After the Czechoslovakia 'incident', General Smuts had a change of heart; he believed that Nazi-Germany was a threat to world freedom and, consequently, to South Africa. He felt morally obliged to join Britain in stopping German aggression, but would not, prior to September 1939, interfere in Defence matters. He could not before then risk a break in the Cabinet.⁴ Smuts was deeply disturbed by the political divisions within the country and later, when as Prime Minister he delivered his 1939 end-of-the-year message he referred to excessive party politics as - *...South Africa's premier national industry. It is no longer an open or debatable question...instead of uniting round our leadership we do our best to break it down. 'People,'* he said, *'do not seem to have realised yet that the country is really at war.'*⁵

¹ *The Chronological Atlas of World War II*, p. 2.

² The Erebus Scheme, p 71.

³ *Ibid.*, p 79.

⁴ Interview Orpen/Watson, notes by Col NND Orpen, 11.2.1964.

⁵ *A Country at War*, p 53.

Hostilities begin

At dawn on 1 September 1939, *Wehrmacht* Divisions crossed the border into Poland supported by an Air Force of over 3 500 aircraft; and in South Africa mingled anxiety and excitement were hourly increased by uncertainty about the Government's attitude to the conflict in Europe. Outside the Drill Hall in Johannesburg a crowd gathered to wait for news. Parliament was fortuitously gathering in Cape Town to pass a Bill to prolong the life of the Senate. There was not a sign of the *Erebus* that had been promised would be available to protect Table Bay. At 10.00 am that Saturday, the first South African Governor General, the Hon. Sir Patrick Duncan, informally opened Parliament. The Senate Bill was quickly disposed of and the House adjourned until Monday 4 September.

In Britain at about midday on Sunday, 3 September 1939, thousands the world over listened to the words of the British Prime Minister:

I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room in No. 10 Downing Street. This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed to the German Government a Final Note stating that, unless we heard from them by 11 o'clock that they were prepared to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you that no such undertaking has been received, and consequently this country is at war with Germany.

France, New Zealand and Australia immediately associated themselves with Britain's declaration.

The South African Government was still bound by the 1921 Agreement to defend the Royal Naval Base at Simon's Town. In August, during the critical period that immediately preceded the outbreak of war on 3 September, 2nd Heavy Battery at Simon's Town was therefore placed in a state of readiness, as far as circumstances would permit. The normal peace time strength of the Battery was increased by the transfer of twenty men from the Special Service Brigade at *Voortrekkerhoogte*, bringing the strength up to four officers and 106 other ranks under the command of Captain (T/Major) G.J. Prinsloo.

Declaration of War

On that first Monday of the war in Europe, crowds milled about in Parliament Street. Only at 9.00 pm was a vote taken in the House of Assembly, and General Hertzog's motion for non-belligerence – he never mentioned neutrality – was defeated by 80 votes to 67. Next day he tendered his resignation. The Governor General decided to call upon Smuts to form a new Government. The House met and prorogued until 13 December, but that afternoon, 6 September 1939, South Africa declared war on Germany.⁶ It was said that when Hitler heard of the South African declaration of war against Germany, he laughed,⁷ knowing that the country had no armed force to speak of.

Gen Hertzog said on 6 September that General Smuts had debased the freedom of the nation and was *...a prostitution of the policy enunciated by the United Party so often and with such emphasis*.⁸ In terms of that policy the Cabinet had undertaken not to let South Africa take part in any European war unless the vital interests of South Africa were at stake.

When war was declared South Africa was *almost* totally unprepared. There were about 352 officers and 5 033 other ranks in the Permanent Force and 918 officers, many, no doubt, were administrative, technical and stores personnel. The Active Citizen Force of 13 490 all ranks was neither trained nor equipped for war. Not all in the armed forces were in favour of the Union's participation in the war. There was really nothing in the way of material of war to speak of; there was, for instance, only one day's ammunition for the 87 pieces of Field Artillery - all of World War One vintage - in the nation's armoury, a number of which were either obsolete or unserviceable. The Field Artillery could count on

⁶ *South Africa at War*, p 23.

⁷ *Hostilities Only*, p 1.

⁸ The Cape Argus, 6.9.1939.

only 65 guns for operations, compared with the 97 possessed by the Boer forces in 1899.⁹ There were two obsolete medium tanks, two obsolete armoured cars and only thirty-two 3-inch mortars instead of 548 that were required.

Other Infantry weapons were also in extremely short supply; there were no real naval vessels, although the SA Naval Service did exist - with three officers and three ratings on strength; and the Air Force was operating with a motley collection of aircraft. The coast Batteries, those that existed in Table Bay and Simon's Town, could not be fully manned, *and* there were only the eight Anti-Aircraft guns of World War One vintage in the country.

Mobilisation of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery

No steps had been taken by the Union Defence Forces for a general mobilisation, concentration of troops or post mobilisation training. But Lieutenant Colonel Harold Cilliers, Commander of the Coast Artillery Brigade, who, one writer has described as having an existence strangely apart from the rest of the Permanent Force *and* the Active Citizen Force, had warned the heavy Batteries of the possibility of war two weeks before the outbreak of hostilities. And he had made his own preparations, far removed from those of the CGS in Pretoria. A 'precautionary period' was declared on 27 August with a call for volunteers to come in immediately on an emergency basis once war was declared. Warning Order No. 1 was issued on 1 September with instructions to move from the Precautionary to the War Stage at any hour; Precautionary Manning Coast Defence Order No. 2 was issued on 3 September and all leave was cancelled. Telephones began ringing in homes all around the Cape Peninsula and soon, before the declaration of war by the South African Government, officers and men began reporting to the coast Batteries.¹⁰

Members of the 1st Medium Battery, 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery and Cape Garrison Artillery were among those called up, ostensibly for training – with no authority for pay on a full time basis. A few officers of some Infantry units were also called up for service.

Major Stan Jeffrey, Captain Meister and Lieutenant Neil Garlick of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery were among the officers unofficially mobilised and '*...employed whole-time in connection with the war and attached to the Permanent Force...*'¹¹ with effect from 4 September 1939, two days before South Africa declared war on Germany. They were provided with an office in the New Drill Hall. There was nothing Captain Meister, the Battery Captain, could do to organise anything at all, and so he went back to his duties in the Cape Provincial Education Department, temporarily as it turned out. On 5 September he walked over the Grand Parade to the Castle and found that there was still no official mobilisation policy insofar as 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery was concerned, in fact there was no policy for any ACF unit. He was, however, sent to Wynyard Battery where he found Major Jeffrey and a number of other officers who had been called up and were about to return to their civilian occupations. Meister was in Government service and could only obtain release from employment on production of an official instruction from the Union Defence Forces. It was some days after this that mobilisation of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery was ordered. By about 1 December, after an official letter from the Commanding Officer 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery, Captain Meister was back with his unit at the Rosebank show grounds, where the unit was in the throes of being formed. The Battery boasted an Honorary Colonel which no one appears to have known about; but Government Notice No. 1832 of 1 December 1939 recorded the appointment of Professor Theodore le Roux, MA, D Litt, as 'Honorary Colonel 1st A.A. Battery' with effect from 25 October 1939. When questioned about the appointment after the war it came as a surprise to a senior officer, who vowed he did not know nothing of the professor.

The attachment of ACF and CGF personnel to the Permanent Force did not last long. Proclamation No. 210, 1939, made it known that all who joined up for full-time service would serve in the ACF or the CGF. Government Notice No. 1936 of 1 December 1939 made it clear that Permanent Force personnel could be employed in the ACF with temporary rank, if they volunteered for full-time war service. They

⁹ *South Africa at War*, pp. 31,32.

¹⁰ From notes made by Colonel N.N.D. Orpen and now in possession of the author.

¹¹ SANDF Archives, Supplement to Force Orders, UDFO No..1, 9.2.1940

would be seconded to the ACF and would receive pay and allowances according to their substantive Permanent Force rank or ACF rank, whichever was the greater.

Weeks after the official declaration of war by South Africa, on 6 September 1939, 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery, South African Artillery, received orders to mobilise and to immediately increase strength to full war establishment of eleven officers and 299 other ranks. The first volunteer recruit, who arrived on 1 October dressed in a white pith helmet, was Ali Reece (nick-named Ali). He was aged about 32 years and was soon commissioned.¹² Other recruits followed in a slow trickle, later described by the adjutant, Lieutenant Garlick, as 'steady', and by December the number of volunteers had risen considerably. All were housed in barrack rooms on an upper floor above the Inner Square of the Castle.

Recruiting marches

Recruiting marches were held in the city in November, but in December the Cape Field Artillery began a successful recruiting campaign, assisted by The Wanderer – the daily columnist of *The Argus*, and droves of men volunteered for this old and well-known Cape Town unit. The barrack rooms were hardly adequate for both the Anti-Aircraft unit and the field gunners. It was therefore decided to quarter the Anti-Aircraft Battery and its Troop of searchlights at Bamboesvlei, Wynberg; but apart from the immediate provision of accommodation for the Battery, extensions were to be provided for the whole of 1st Ant-Aircraft Brigade when called up for full-time service. The estimate for accommodation, was based on an authorised total of 45 officers and 1 199 other ranks for an up-to-strength heavy Anti-Aircraft Brigade.

Accommodation at Bamboesvlei – later referred to as Ottery - proved insufficient. Accommodation was therefore hired from the Western Province Agricultural Society, and the Battery eventually moved out of the Castle into old buildings in the lower portion of the Society's show grounds at Rosebank. Today the area is occupied by the Rhodes Recreation Ground, the Middle Campus and residences of the University of Cape Town, and partly by Woolsack Drive. It is on the upper portion of this ground that an old and dilapidated memorial to those lost on the ss *Mendi* on 21 February 1917, was discovered in 2010. Neil Garlick was quartered in a bank and, as there was no transport, he and other officers used their own vehicles, paying for petrol themselves. As the days went on, more and more officers were recruited. Among them were Ian Campbell, Ross, R.A.S. Upton and F. Vlok. Lieutenant I.S. Guilford and D. H. Loftus, both Permanent Force officers, were posted to the unit in December. Doug Loftus did not remain an 'ack-ack' gunner longer than two months; he was a qualified pilot, as were all former Permanent Force cadets, and he transferred to the Air Force, where he later served in Italy as Colonel D.H. Loftus, DFC, DSO, and Wing Commander, 7 Wing, SAAF.

The Anti-Aircraft capability of the Defence Force was disturbing. A formal organisation was virtually non-existent. The only equipment in the country were the eight 3-inch 20 cwt guns of 1918 vintage – upgraded as far as was possible - that had arrived in April 1939, together with six searchlights. Training nevertheless began on the guns and technical equipment. Most of the Permanent Force men on strength of the Brigade volunteered to remain in an ACF capacity and were able to train the new recruits. Drawing on memory, Lieutenant – later Major Neil Garlick - remembered WO2 van Aswegan, Sergeant Nieuwoudt, Bombardier du Preez and Lance Bombardiers Swart and Erasmus, as instructors. There were about ten gunners. There was no drill book or any instructional manual for the searchlights – an entirely new piece of equipment insofar as the Defence Force was concerned - or the Lister generators. Fortunately, Sergeant Major Anderson, a British REME Sergeant Major who was on secondment to the Union Defence Force to assist in the electrical work involved in the emplacement of coast guns, was made available. He had to rely on his memory to provide instruction.¹³

The buildings on the show grounds housed the mobilisation depot for Anti-Aircraft personnel for a number of months. They were hired from the Western Province Agricultural Society for the princely

¹² Notes by the late Neil Garlick in possession of the author.

¹³ Ibid.

sum of £20 (R40) per month. While the Battery was there Professor Theodore le Roux, M.A., D. Litt., was appointed Honorary Colonel, back-dated to 25 October 1939.¹⁴

First Touch of War

While at the show grounds 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery had two brief periods of interest, other than training. In December, with coast Batteries keenly aware of a possible attack by the German pocket-battleship *Graf Spee*, then prowling the southern African coastal area and being sought by the SA Air Force - the German liner *Watussi*, endeavouring to slip back to Germany from Lourenco Marques, was sighted by an aircraft on patrol, 160 km south of Cape Point. She was forced to stop; passengers and crew entered the lifeboats and the ship was set on fire to prevent it falling into Allied hands. Survivors were landed at Simon's Town. Before going into internment, the passengers were accommodated in the old barracks at Wynberg camp – where they were guarded by the Anti-Aircraft gunners, whose rifles had no bayonets and not more than a couple of rounds of ammunition among them. In those early days of December, the Battery was also called upon to mount an Anti-Aircraft searchlight on the South Arm of Cape Town harbour to 'spot it if the German Pocket Battleship should send an M.T.B. to try and sink ships in Cape Town Docks.'¹⁵ Armament consisted of a railway-mounted 18-pdr field gun and an equally ancient searchlight, which had burned out and required repair. Those nominated for this task spent a very wet, cold night in the so-called 'Battery', close to the harbour entrance.

A Full Brigade

When, on 1 February 1940, the Coast Artillery Brigade was replaced by the Cape Peninsula Brigade which was to control only the Table Bay and Simon's Town Fire Commands, it also included the 1st Anti-Aircraft Training Brigade with 1st, 2nd and 3rd Anti-Aircraft Training Batteries.¹⁶ First Anti-Aircraft Battery was enlarged to a full Brigade of three Batteries,¹⁷ with an increased authorised strength and, from the same date 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade was established. They were both 'appointed and established' in terms of two separate Government Notices, one of which was dated 1 March and did not include either a Brigade Headquarters nor a Searchlight Battery; while the second Notice on 12 April,¹⁸ detailed the entire structure of each unit. They were both intended to be heavy Regiments and the war establishment of both 1st and 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigades provided for three eight-gun 3.7-inch Batteries and a full Battery of 18 searchlights, including attached personnel, but excluding a Workshop Troop, the total personnel being 54 officers and 1440 other ranks. In practice 3.7-inch guns would not be available for many months and 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade was soon placed instead on a light Brigade establishment.

Anti-Aircraft Guns

Britain's first priority was its own defence and factory capacity was severely stretched; but not only that - Britain needed the raw material with which to manufacture equipment and shipping resources were also stretched to breaking strain. There would very soon be a priority system in place for shipping war supplies. Britain had earlier made arrangements for the production of the 40 mm Bofors but it was not until 1941 that these guns began to come off the production line in any quantity. Although an order from South Africa for 24 mobile guns, 3.7-inch guns are said to have been placed immediately before war began, records indicate that the order was only placed in February 1940, when a comprehensive order for the supply of Air Defence equipment was placed through the office of the High Commissioner, London. The order included:

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 122 | 3.7-inch mobile Anti-Aircraft guns complete with spares, section stores for 60 sections, and Battery stores for fifteen Batteries. |
| 60 | Predictors |
| 60 | Height and Range Finders No. 3 (9 ft instruments) |
| 108 | Light Anti-Aircraft guns (40 mm Bofors) complete with spares, to equip five Batteries and the requisite number of Kerrison Predictors |

¹⁴ G.N. No. 1915, 1.12.1939

¹⁵ Notes by the late Neil Garlick, p. 5, in possession of the author

¹⁶ F.O. 168.

¹⁷ G.N. 333, 1.3.1940.

¹⁸ G.N. 569, 12.4.1940.

No equipment could be spared by Britain and for some time only a trickle could be released. Enquiries were therefore made for a supply from America.

The Coast Artillery Brigade was 'tapped' for recruits but when Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Jeffrey took command of the Brigade at the Rosebank Show grounds, personnel were slow in coming forward. Coast Battery Commanders did not encourage members to transfer, due to the inexpediency of depleting detachments on the guns. Stan Jeffrey, apart from being Brigade Commander, was also Battery Commander of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery. The 2nd Battery was commanded by Captain G.W. Meister and the third by Captain R. Batho, while Lieutenant Neil Garlick – the erstwhile adjutant – commanded the Searchlight Battery.¹⁹

The Agreement of Lease signed between the Public Works Department and the Agricultural Society specified that the buildings occupied by 1st AA Brigade would be vacated in time for them to be used for the annual Rosebank (Agricultural) Show. As time went by and there was no sign of the gunners moving out pressure was placed on Public Works, and the Society was almost threatening to sue the Government. The Show was the highlight of Cape Town's calendar – an extremely popular event which drew thousands of Capetonians and many visitors from country areas. The highlights of the show were the races in the huge arena when large farm carts drawn by spans of six mules competed against each other. Major Jeffrey was well aware of the popularity of the annual show. He hired transport and making arrangements for rations, tents and training personnel, and moved the entire Battery into camp at Klaas Jagers Berg, until the show was over.

Prospective Officers

'Peace Training' for Coast Garrison Force personnel (basically only the Cape Garrison Artillery) ceased from 18 January 1940 and according to typed notes kept by Major Neil Garlick, a course for prospective officers was held '...in and around the old wooden church at Wynberg Camp'.²⁰ The course ran from January to 27 April 1940, organised by the Anti-Aircraft Training Battery established with effect from 1 February 1940, and the course resulted in about forty men being commissioned as 2nd Lieutenants. Approximately twenty were posted to 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade and among them were Watson (no initial); Ian Logie; S. Quirk; B. Cameron; Sampson (killed at Gazala); C. Haworth and Gordon (both lost in a hospital ship sunk between Tobruk and Alexandria); G. Freilinghaus (POW); J. Freilinghaus (killed at Gazala); G. Mills (POW); J. Horne; J. Goulden (killed while with another unit); Forsyth and Whehelan.

Training

The first period of continuous training for the new Anti-Aircraft Battery therefore took place in the South Peninsula from 12 February to 6 March 1940. The guns were hauled at a snail's pace by D4 Caterpillar tractors over the long Main Road from Brooklyn Aerodrome through the Southern Suburbs, past Wynberg, Muizenberg and Simon's Town to the camp site in the Rooihooft area of the South Peninsula, overlooking Smitswinkels Bay. One of the lucky drivers was young Gunner P.L. (Blackie) Swart who many years later rose to the rank of Commandant at the Artillery Air Defence School, Young's Field.

A university student of those days, Lance Bombardier J.L. Seftel, clearly remembered the '...ancient sound-locating device which consisted of two pairs of sound boxes fitted to stethoscope-type ear pieces...' which were used to track enemy aircraft in order to direct searchlights on to the target. At the first shoot of the guns he operated the first analogue predictor, which in association with a range finder was used to track the target and direct the guns. At that training camp the target drogue was towed 'by an ancient and very slow Wapiti aircraft' and the students scored a direct hit, much to the amazement of all.²¹

¹⁹ SANDF Archives, Cape Field Artillery Gp 2, Box 33, Cape Command Order No. 6.

²⁰ Letter from Major General G. Dunber Moodie. 16.5.1988.

²¹ Letter from Mr. Seftel to the author in 1996.

A Volunteer Army

The Defence Act limited military service to Southern Africa but General Smuts stated in Parliament on 7 February 1940, that it was the Government's policy to extend operations to Kenya and Tanganyika ...using volunteers if necessary.²² He was convinced after Italy entered the conflict, that Kenya and Uganda were South Africa's strategic boundaries and that it would be necessary to deploy troops in that region. Because of the tense political situation and because the Act could be interpreted as not making provision for active service beyond the Union's borders, Smuts had announced he would create a fighting force of volunteers. The decision to rely on volunteers had an impact on existing ACF units and a few days after the 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade left Durban, the AG informed all Commands, Directors and Deputy Directors of Sections, the Officer Commanding the Seaward Defence Force, Commandant-in-Chief of the Burger Commandos and others *that a volunteer counterpart of each existing unit of the Coast Garrison Force and the Active Citizen Force had been established from 1 April 1940*. He furthermore confirmed that In order to distinguish such volunteer units from ordinary CGF and ACF units, the letter (V) 'will be added to the designation of each volunteer unit, e.g.:

1st Battalion (V), Imperial Light Horse.

No. 1 Supply Company (V), 'Q' Services Corps.

1st Field Battery (V), South African Artillery

The system whereby each existing ACF unit had a volunteer counter-part was known as 'double banking'. The A.G. confirmed that '...all volunteers would be transferred to the volunteer counterpart of the unit to which they presently belong; and that new units established since 1 April 1940 were established purely as volunteer units '...and have therefore no A.C.F. counter-parts.'

The 'Red Tab'

On 29 March 1940, men were invited to take a new oath whereby they undertook to serve anywhere in Africa for the duration of the war. From 1 April no one would be allowed to join the defence force for full-time service unless he attested on these terms. All those who signed the new oath were soon wearing the distinguishing sign of the Mobile Field Force, a strip of orange cloth on their shoulder straps, which became known as the Red Tab. Apart from their brown boots it acted as a distinguishing mark of all South African personnel, wherever they went. The wearing of the 'red tabs' caused a lot of resentment by stigmatising both those who were prepared to fight and those who, because of their political opinion, were opposed to active involvement.

The Field Force units being readied for battle lost 350 men overnight. The refusal of a number of personnel to sign the new oath did not help in recruiting for the new Anti-Aircraft units. Nor did it help in the Coast Artillery units, which in any event were thought quite unlikely to leave the shores of South Africa. Little did the officers and men know that the Coast Artillery would soon provide numbers of personnel for Anti-Aircraft units. In 2nd Heavy (coast) Battery only 64 per cent signed the oath. At Potchefstroom about 180 Permanent Force members refused to serve outside the Union and they were promptly drafted to the Coast Artillery, permitting the release of a similar number of men to the new Anti-Aircraft Brigade.

Once it was decided to send troops to East Africa and, because of the presence of the *Regia Aeronautica*, the Italian Air Force, - it became necessary to provide Anti-Aircraft protection for the port of Mombasa, the only port of entry on the Kenyan coast - where South African troops would disembark; but also for lines of communication, airfields, bases and troops in the field. The Italian Air Force was then quite capable of attacking these areas. The fact during the whole period that Mombasa was the base for operations in East Africa, Italian air operations against the port consisted of no more than isolated aerial reconnaissance, is a matter difficult to understand.

University students

Many of the personnel of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery were university students and there was an outcry when it became known that they had been called up for full-time service. Common sense prevailed and the Minister of Defence ruled that university students had first to complete their 'varsity' studies

²² Hansard, Vol 37, 7.2.1940, p.987.

before volunteering for full-time service. There were difficulties in obtaining enough recruits, they were slow in coming forward but entry of Italy into the war boosted recruiting. The establishment upon which the Brigade was based catered for three eight-gun 3.7-inch Batteries and a full Battery of 18 searchlights. It required a large establishment, as shown above; by 7 May the actual strength had reached only fourteen officers and 314 other ranks. A day later Cape Command produced a Part 1 Order which stated that the organisation and establishment of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade 'will for the present only entail the filling of such posts as are essential for the co-ordination of training and maintenance of records.' Presumably he was referring to the Brigade Headquarters only; the only other reference to the Brigade in the Order referred to 2nd and 3rd Anti-Aircraft Batteries.

A course to produce officers for 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade was being held in and around the old wooden church in Wynberg Camp. Chief Instructor Gunnery was Captain Graham Dunbar-Moodie and Lt I.S. (Bruce) Guilford was course commander,²³ and among members of the course (as remembered by the adjutant) were Jim Horne, 'Storky' Louw and Slabbert. Live shell practice was carried out from the Rooihogte area, south of Simon's Town between 9.00 am and 1.00 pm on 26 and 27 April 1939.²⁴ Officers to bring the Brigade up to full establishment were expected at the conclusion of this cadet course.: There is some doubt about 1st Anti-Aircraft Training Brigade vs 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade, and in the absence of any actual establishment table in the documents consulted, it can only be assumed that the two units were one and the same.

The 1st Brigade Moves

In the first few days in May Colonel Harold Cilliers and newly appointed Lieutenant Colonel Stan Jeffrey, flew to Pretoria and from there, Captain Meister received a telegram instructing him that 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade was to move to Potchefstroom on 11 May. Lieutenant L.W. (Lukas) Meyer, then adjutant of the Cape Peninsula Artillery Brigade, joined the Anti-Aircraft gunners at this time. Hurried departure arrangements led to the Brigade loading their 3-inch guns and associated equipment on trucks at the nearby Rosebank station rail siding - normally used only at show-time - and finally entraining on 13 May 1940. They left that morning for Potchefstroom. With Stan Jeffrey now promoted from the double posts of Battery Commander, 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery *and* Brigade Commander, were his new Battery Commanders and Battery Captains:

Captain (T/Major) G.W. Meister (Lieutenant I.S. Guilford as Battery Captain)	1st Anti-Aircraft Battery
Lieutenant T/Captain) L.W. (Lucas) Meyer (Lieutenant Stark as Battery Captain)	2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery
Captain P. Batho (Lieutenant N. Garlick as Battery Captain)	3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery
Lieutenant (T/Captain) H. McKenzie	1st Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battery.

All the appointments and temporary promotions shown above were made effective from 13 May 1940. The adjutant was Lieutenant B. Johnson. Lukas Meyer and Bruce Guilford were both Permanent Force officers. All the others, as well as Captain H. Mackenzie who was transferred from DELT Simon's Bay Fire Command, were ACF personnel.

At Potchefstroom

From Potchefstroom Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey flew up to Nairobi with Brigadier De Waal - then Director General Operations and South African Liaison Officer to British Middle East Command - to arrange for the reception, accommodation and deployment of the Brigade. Major Meister was left to form, equip and move the Brigade when ordered to do. Two Batteries were issued with single Lewis guns on tripod mountings.

When 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade left Cape Town for Potchefstroom it was badly under strength, with only 399 all ranks. Following arrival at Potchefstroom, 530 Field Artillery recruits were posted to the

²³ Notes by the late Neil Garlick in possession of the author.

²⁴ G.N. No. 638, 19.4.1940

Brigade from the field Brigades then under training. Cape Field Artillery lost an entire Battery and had to make it up with men from the Reservist Training Depot. The new intake had apparently not been a welcome addition and the Anti-Aircraft gunners felt that about 250 of them included discards, originally from the depot. It was a huge blow to the Field Army Artillery units. Two field Brigades and two other field Batteries – eight Batteries altogether - amounting to 17 per cent of the troops under training - were almost completely destroyed and rendered useless for some considerable time. Probably because of this, as Neil Garlick records: *The 1st AA Brigade was treated like Cinderella.*

A limited number of vehicles and water trailers were made available for the Brigade, as well as motor-cycles for the officers. Twenty-two year old Neil Garlick, now acting as adjutant, was ordered to acquire vehicles and to design and arrange to construct them to take the searchlights, and to fit out others as signal vehicles. He had no idea what a signal vehicle should look like, but was given one week to have all the vehicles ready. The searchlights, as he later recalled, were mounted on 'old 2nd hand Ford 6 wheeled chassis' which he described in his hand-written memoirs as 'much too heavy and clumsy'.²⁵ A Workshop Section under Lieutenant C. Stevens, with two machine shops (as described by Neil Garlick) and a Signals Section under Sergeant Seymour, of the Permanent Force – were attached.

The Brigade Departs

It can only be presumed that a Signal Corps communications system had not yet been fully established, as a telegram containing orders for Major Meister was received late in May, but in transmission through the Post Office it had been badly mutilated. In the form it reached him it contained no instructions regarding loading and departure details. Lieutenant Colonel Maurice de Villiers, Officer Commanding Troops, Potchefstroom, had just arrived from Pretoria where, that morning, he had been told about the move. He went to the Anti-Aircraft lines at about 4.00 pm to enquire from Major Meister how the move was progressing and to enquire whether there were any problems with loading equipment. It was the first Major Meister had heard of loading stores and equipment.

He was told that three special trains with special locomotives were waiting at the main Potchefstroom station – the only place where guns, vehicles, etc, could be loaded. The train alongside the platform (on the main line to Johannesburg) had to be shunted away each time a passenger or goods train passed through and, well - he had better get a move on.²⁶

With assistance arranged by Lieutenant Colonel de Villiers, Major Meister managed to complete loading of equipment. It was as well – the Quartermaster General, through whose department train schedules were arranged (and there were probably many), was threatening court-martial if there was any delay. The Brigade Headquarters, 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery and the Searchlight Battery, left Potchefstroom by train on 28 May. Embarkation orders were to be given to the acting commanding officer while *en route* to Durban, but when the train arrived at 5.30 am there was no one to meet it, and there were no orders. He therefore kept everyone on the train until the Guard told him that other trains were due and he was going to have the coaches shunted off the quay. By then Major Meister had discovered that Lieutenant Guilford and the advance party had already loaded the guns, vehicles and stores.

The Hell Ship

Officers and men detrained and embarked, including attached SAMC personnel and members of a reconnaissance unit. The whole embarkation was rather chaotic, in spite of every effort by the ESO (Embarkation Staff Officer) Colonel Agnew. There were no proper records of who was embarking and a number of men simply rolled up armed with route forms from various centres, and the next day – 24 May - they sailed from Durban in the 7 000 ton ss *Taklewa* with Major Meister as OC Troops. It was the first troopship to leave South Africa and the entire ship had to be officially signed for on behalf of the

²⁵ Notes by the late Major Neil Garlick, in possession of the author.

²⁶ From undated typed notes on discussions between Colonel Orpen/Lieutenant Colonel Meister, possibly prior to 1967.

Union Government. She was considered to be a 'hell ship' and was nicknamed *Altmark 2*, after the German supply ship carrying prisoners that had been recently captured by the Royal Navy in Norway. The heat in the men's quarters on the *Taklewa* was appalling. During the voyage the medical staff lectured the troops on East African diseases – tape worm, round worm, malaria, yellow fever, black water fever, jigga fleas (they crept under finger and toe nails), and VD.

During the voyage the officers managed to sort things out and account for everyone on board. Nominal rolls were prepared and by the time the ship sailed into the port of Mombasa on 1 June 1940, they were ready to be handed over to a South African staff officer who, with Brigadier De Waal and Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey – then the youngest officer of such rank in the Union Defence Forces- was waiting for them. Once the staff officer was satisfied with the nominal rolls the unit, they and all others, disembarked. Apparently an aircraft was on stand-by to fly the nominal rolls back to Pretoria.

The remainder of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade, equipped only with twin Lewis machine guns, glad to shake the dust of Potchefstroom off their feet on 28 May 1940, left for embarkation at Durban, hoping to collect another 100 recruits from the Coast Artillery at that port. They sailed for East Africa, and arrived there about four days after the first group. The entire Brigade at this stage had an active strength of 47 officers and 780 other ranks and based on the heavy Anti-Aircraft establishment, was still 500 under strength.

All the Anti-Aircraft equipment the Defence Force possessed – eight 3-inch 20 cwt guns of World War One vintage and six new searchlights had left the country with the Brigade. South Africa was left without any form of air defence, except Lewis guns and aged aircraft. The Brigade itself was thoroughly unprepared for active service. They had not been asked to volunteer for service outside South Africa; nor had they signed any oath to do so; their training was minimal, they had no tropical uniforms, and for several months no pay books, no Identity discs; and there were no revolvers for the officers. These did not appear for a number of weeks. Those who could do so had more comfortable uniforms made in Mombasa. Nor, it seems, had officers and men been given any of the necessary inoculations and vaccinations usually associated with travel to tropical climates. This was rectified fairly soon.

But above all – they were keen to perform the duties expected of them. Their *esprit de corps* was excellent.

A Training Brigade

In the meanwhile 1st Anti-Aircraft Training Brigade, with 1st, 2nd and 3rd Anti-Aircraft training Batteries had been established - on paper.²⁷ By this time the Coast Artillery Brigade had been replaced by the Cape Peninsula Artillery Brigade (CPAB) and it controlled all the heavy coast Batteries in Table Bay, Simon's Bay and Saldanha, which formed part of the Fire Commands in those areas. First Anti-Aircraft Training Brigade also fell under its command. The Officer Commanding the CPAB was also DDCA. The Training Brigade was responsible for a Coastal and Anti-Aircraft Student Officers Course held partly at Simon's Town from 7 March to 19 July 1940, attended by 50 students. Without available accommodation at Simon's Town during the initial few weeks, the students had to travel each day from Wynberg Camp, where they were accommodated during March and April in the Pupil Pilots Mess. Not all the students made the grade – one was discharged on 22 April, the report in his file stating, quite bluntly: 'not likely to become an efficient officer.'²⁸

Cape Field Artillery

In Cape Town before the war, the Cape Field Artillery consisted of only one Battery, and it was eventually ordered on 5 December to mobilise - well after the mobilisation dates of Natal Field Artillery and Transvaal Horse Artillery - and to recruit and attest personnel. A very successful recruiting campaign, aided by *The Cape Argus*, was held and a full Battery departed for Potchefstroom on 21

²⁷ SANDF Archives, F.O. 168

²⁸ Ibid., CAB Gp 2, Box 89, file A.Q./13/2.

December. Recruiting for this well-known Cape Town unit continued and a second Battery moved to Potchefstroom in mid-January, but only to undertake one month's 'peace training'. It then returned to the Cape. A second Battery for what had now become Cape Field Artillery Brigade was drawn from the Eastern Cape, and a third was raised from the Recruits Depot at Potchefstroom. Recruits were still, however, registering at the headquarters of CFA in Cape Town. With a full (second) Cape Town Battery, and an additional 75 attested full-time by 6 March for a third Battery, the Officer Commanding Cape Command reported to the AG that a third Battery could be formed with ease. He was told this would *not* happen.

On 7 May 1940 the following telex was received by Cape Command:

CD 175A ALL CFA PERSONNEL IN CAPE WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO AA BDES FORTHWITH STOP
AG IS ADVISING KRYG ACCORDINGLY STOP ALL ARTILLERY EQUIPMENT AT CAPE TOWN WILL
BE SENT TO POTCHEFSTROOM +++ ENDS

It was an interesting reply. The men of Cape Field Artillery (Prince Alfred's Own) had, totally unknown to them and prior to the telexed reply, been posted to 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Regiment with effect from 8 April 1940,²⁹ despite a Part 1 Order from Cape Command indicating that posts in both 5th and 6th Anti-Aircraft Batteries would be filled with men from Cape Garrison Artillery.

2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade Mobilises

A Warning Order to call up the men who had volunteered for 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade was issued on 24 May, but initially only 5th and 6th Batteries were included in this order. South Africa declared war on Italy on 11 June 1940, and on 19 June 1940, two Batteries of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, under the command of Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) D.C. (Dantjie) Kruger, a Permanent Force officer of the Coast Artillery, marched out of the Castle and down Castle Street to the railway station. The two Batteries- 6th Battery under Captain W.H. Morris, comprising men originally recruited for Cape Field Artillery, and 5th Battery under Captain N. Wessels, in which there were a number of men of Cape Garrison Artillery and the overflow from the Cape Field Artillery recruits - filed into the doorway that led directly to platform 21, from whence the daily mail train to Johannesburg departed.

It was not a smart parade, wrote former Gunner Herb McKenzie in 1996: *the majority had received no military training. The men did not have complete uniforms and such as they had were ill-fitting and obsolete. What they did have was enthusiasm, as did the citizens of Cape Town, who turned up in their hundreds to say 'tot siens' to the boys going 'Up North'*.³⁰

Their enthusiasm grew to a strong camaraderie, the sort that can only come about when adversity is shared. It lasted for many years after the war had almost been forgotten – as will be seen in much later pages.

The Brigade had no equipment whatsoever and they had not received any Anti-Aircraft training. On arrival at Potchefstroom fifty men of the two Batteries were given instruction on Lewis machine-guns of which only 36 were then available. These guns had an effective range of only 2 500 yards. After just over a month of enduring the cold of the Highveld, orders were received on 25 July to be ready to move north and to concentrate 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery, which had only been called up for full-time service on 10 July. Although 94 recruits assembled at Rosebank under the command of Captain H. Scholtz, shortage of tentage resulted in a temporary halt to any further move and it was not until 6 August that arrangements were made for the Battery to entrain for Premier Mine, from whence it joined the Brigade, just before departure for Durban. 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery was then approximately 250 under strength.

²⁹ Ibid., CFA Gp 1, Box 33.

³⁰ Birthday pamphlet produced by Herb McKenzie, SC, in 1996. In possession of the author.

One hundred additional Lewis machine guns were issued and on 29 August 1940, 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, South African Artillery, with an actual strength of 36 officers and 855 other ranks, armed with 136 Twin Lewis machine-guns, left the concentration area for Durban, to embark for active service.

Brown Paper

It is not known what other units occupied the Agricultural Society's Rosebank show grounds, but there is a sequel to the departure of the Anti-Aircraft units. The Cape Corps men on Robben Island were accommodated in tents near Cornelia Battery, as were all other troops on the Island.

In late May 1941, with winter approaching there was a serious outbreak of influenza among the Cape Corps men. Improved, warmer accommodation was sought for them. They *had* to be removed from the Island. The Chairman of the Western Province Agricultural Society was approached with a request to accommodate the coloured gunners at the Rosebank Show Grounds on a temporary basis, until such time as the Pollsmoor camp had been enlarged. The request was turned down flatly. The Society did not think it appropriate to allow the use of their property, which was in a white area, for housing coloured soldiers. Perhaps, just as important to the Society, another reason was that the troops that had previously occupied the Society's buildings had caused considerable damage. The Secretary reported, for instance, that holes had been founded in beaverboard partitions and they had been covered with brown paper and painted over. He had rendered an account to the Public Works Department for the damage which amounted to £13, (R26.00) but the account had been repudiated.³¹ He was not prepared to allow this to happen again.

University Training Corps

Possibly in reaction to the decision that university students had to complete their degree course before attempting to 'join up', a University Training Corps was established as a volunteer unit of the Active Citizen Force. Most had either an Artillery Troop or a Battery but Cape Town University boasted the only Anti-Aircraft Troop from 15 April 1942. It also had a field Engineer Troop, an Infantry Company and, later, a survey section. The strength at one stage was 389 volunteer students. The mathematics professor – Professor Young, commanded the unit. From some date – unfortunately unknown – a WAAF searchlight unit also formed part of the Training Corps in Cape Town. About forty girls received searchlight training and they manned searchlight stations in the Cape Peninsula over long week-ends and during holidays. They were trained by Lieutenant Summerly and Corporal Voges - both stationed at the Air Defence School – were the training officers.³²

³¹ Western Province Agricultural Society Minutes, 2.6.1941.

³² Letter from Mrs. Margaret Skead, 12.4.1988.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A TRAINING AREA

Coast Directorate

With war declared almost six months before, the enormous task of organising and preparing the Defence Forces for hostilities was beginning to bear fruit. Insofar as the Coast Artillery was concerned, a Coast Directorate was formed to exercise command over the Batteries and fixed defences. Because of the huge shortage of suitably qualified senior officers, it was commanded by no less than Lieutenant Colonel H.E. (Harry) Cilliers, a coastal gunner who had been appointed to command the Coast Artillery Brigade as a Major on 3 October 1937. He was appointed Deputy Director of Coast Artillery (DDCA) and he reported on 20 February 1940 that the Coast Artillery Directorate had been opened at Wynberg Camp. His duties in this post included maintaining close liaison with the Director of the Seaward Defence Force (DSDF) and the Deputy Director Coastal Air Force (DDCAF), and ensuring close co-operation with them on all matters relating to coast defence. The directorate was a sub-section of the Deputy Chief of the General Staff's Section at Defence Headquarters.

In order to cope with training requirements the Chief Instructor Gunnery (CIG), Coast Artillery Brigade and his entire staff were immediately transferred from the Brigade to the new Directorate. They became responsible for supervision all aspects of Coast Artillery training and for all Anti-Aircraft training, insofar as it could be done without guns. They scrutinised all training programmes produced by Battery Commanders and supervised practices. The armament officer of the Coast Artillery Brigade with members of his staff, were included in the transfer and they supervised all details and orders for the supply and upkeep of armaments, ammunition and stores to all units and fixed defences. Two officers from the Defence Electric Lights and Telegraph Section (DEL&T) were also transferred to the Directorate. They were technical officers and were responsible for all matters concerning communications and for defence electric lights, and more.

Although these arrangements should have made it possible for the Anti-Aircraft gunners to function separately it proved not to be the case. They continued to function in close co-operation with the Coast Artillery.

Suggested Separation

On 14 March 1940 the DGO suggested to the CGS the separation of Anti-Aircraft from Coast Artillery, and furthermore, suggested the formation of composite Brigades consisting of two Batteries of Anti-Tank and two Batteries of light Anti-Aircraft guns, separated from both the Coast and Field Artillery. He recommended obtaining two officer instructors be obtained from the British Army to assist in this organisation and he gave a number of reasons for his suggestions. These covered the differences between Mobile Field Force units and Coast Artillery; the requirement for older men in the latter; weapons, training and method of employment of Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Tank were very similar and *as currently contemplated*, they were both comparatively small units, about 400 strong. He concluded by stating that such a composite unit had been adopted in the British Army and also stated no officer in South Africa had had any experience in the employment of either Anti-Aircraft or Anti-Tank.¹ He was completely wrong about Anti-Aircraft strength.

The raising, training and administration of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade was under the control of Coast Artillery Directorate and its qualified instructors. But once 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade, and later the 2nd Brigade, departed for the Field Artillery training area at Potchefstroom they fell under command of Director of Field Army Artillery Training (DFAAT). The Artillery School did not have any Anti-Aircraft

¹ History of AA Organisation UDF 1939 - 1944

equipment for training, nor were its few instructors qualified in Anti-Aircraft gunnery. The transfer of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade to Potchefstroom was altogether a strange decision that should not have been repeated with 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade. Fortunately for the latter, it had on strength eleven officers who had received, and could impart training, and there were also a number of other ranks, previously coastal gunners who could also do so.

When 1st and later 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigades left Potchefstroom for active service, they came under the jurisdiction of Director General of Operations (DGO), later known as Director of Military Operations and Intelligence (DMO&I). The position was anomalous and following the moves of the two Anti-Aircraft Brigades it was soon realised that Potchefstroom was not an ideal site for Anti-Aircraft training.

The DGO gave a number of reasons for the stance he had adopted and among them were:

The specialists required for coast and for Anti-Aircraft were similar, older men should be used in Coast Artillery.

The organisation and administration of Mobile Field Force units differed from that of Coast Artillery.

Weapon training and method of employment of light Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Tank units were similar.

Both the light Anti-Aircraft Brigade and the Anti-Tank Brigade as currently contemplated were comparatively small units, each being about 400 strong.

These suggestions began a protracted correspondence, discussion and argument on the responsibility for training Anti-Aircraft units and on the site of an appropriate training area. The views of various interested parties and whose differences of opinion on the subject lasted until later in the year.

The DFAAT in a memorandum of 5 August addressed to the Deputy Chief of the General Staff (DCGS) summarised all the problems of training, accommodation (at the exclusion of field gunners), equipment and rations that the Artillery School had experienced with the two Anti-Aircraft Brigades that had passed through Potchefstroom. There cannot be any doubt that being ordered to give up so many of his field gunners to try and bring 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade up to strength still wrangled. Two field Brigades and two other Batteries had been almost totally destroyed. He asked four pertinent questions in the memorandum to the DCGS:

- Where were the remaining Anti-Aircraft units to be established
- How and where were they to be recruited
- How were they to be trained
- Where were the reserves to be located and trained

He pointed out that the raising, training and administration of the Anti-Aircraft Brigades had been the responsibility of DGO who had at his disposal in the garrison Artillery at least six officers and NCOs, including an IG, all of whom were able to give instruction in Anti-Aircraft gunnery. Only the Officer Commanding the Artillery School had any knowledge of Anti-Aircraft gunnery, and there was no equipment at the School that could be used in their training. The field gunners had improvised equipment to represent guns, but it was not possible to do so for the Anti-Aircraft gunners. It did not have any Anti-Aircraft equipment for training.

The training of Anti-Aircraft gunners was entirely different to that of a field gunner – there was very little in common and with the limited amount of time available it would be difficult to train a member of one branch while at the same time members of another branch were undergoing training. In addition, having already sent two Anti-Aircraft Brigades to East Africa it would be necessary to build up a reserve of 30 percent. This required:

	Officers	Other ranks
For the existing Brigades	24	663
Or, for Brigades for two Divisions	40	1063
Or for Brigades for a total MFF	86	2122

The Director of Works had reported to him that accommodation being erected at Potchefstroom would not be sufficient for all Field Artillery units and their reserves unless some units were moved to

other camps, possibly along the Ventersdorp Road. This would be a separate Artillery camp and would necessitate first providing a supply of water. In addition the range at Potchefstroom could not be used for firing Anti-Aircraft guns, at least 16 000 yards was required for this purpose.

He also gave other reasons why no further Anti-Aircraft Brigades should be formed and no training should take place at Potchefstroom. These included the lack of Anti-Aircraft equipment; the reasonable prospect of acquiring further Anti-Aircraft guns; a sufficient number of trained instructors; an extension of the camp to provide sufficient accommodation and a decision on who was to be responsible for Anti-Aircraft recruiting, training and organisation. And he made a number of recommendations regarding the division of authority between DGO and his Division. He argued that Anti-Aircraft could only be accommodated at the expense of Field Artillery but said that if he was instructed to be responsible for recruiting, training and administration of further Anti-Aircraft Brigades there would be no difficulty from his point of view but, he noted, that Anti-Aircraft instructors were at the same time Coast Artillery instructors. His arguments were cogent and sensible.

Argument from the DCA

On 16 August Lieutenant Colonel Cilliers, Deputy Director Coast Artillery, replied to the lengthy memorandum sent by DFAAT to DCGS. He pointed out that responsibility regarding Anti-Aircraft Artillery was originally vested in him as DDCA and that this responsibility had not been officially removed or amended in any way, but the two Brigades already formed had on mobilisation received instructions from various sources, which had led to the present serious confusion.

He reiterated that the general policy of grouping Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft organisation had been accepted some time before the outbreak of war on similar lines to those existing in Britain. The last few Imperial Gunnery Staff courses had been so arranged that students completed the Military College of Science portion at Woolwich and then went on to complete a Field Artillery or a Coast and Anti-Aircraft course. The best instructors on his staff, he stated, were those who had received training on these special lines. But, owing to previous experience in Coast Artillery and the greater scope this offered in the Union, they were far more highly qualified in Coast Artillery. If they were transferred to Anti-Aircraft Artillery only, they would constitute a serious loss to Coast Artillery.

He stated further that a number of men in the Coast Artillery had completed both Anti-Aircraft and Coast Artillery courses, and although a large number had been drafted into the two Brigades on service there were still a number in Coast Artillery who could, from time to time, be made available for instruction in Anti-Aircraft. It would, he repeated, be a serious loss to Coast Artillery were they to be transferred permanently. In conclusion he once more stated that the Coast Artillery organisation was fully conversant with all Anti-Aircraft matters and in a position to control such training, whereas the Field Army section could only do so if several experienced instructors were transferred to it.

Most of the argument had centred round the provision of qualified instructors, of whom there were a number in the Coast Artillery who had completed both coast and Anti-Aircraft courses. Apart from accommodation – there was not sufficient at Potchefstroom and nothing available at Cape Town, hence it would in any event have to be provided. The most important factor was the lack of an airfield at Potchefstroom; and fortunately, there were already airfields and aircraft at Cape Town. Surprisingly, the DDCA mentioned that pilotless aircraft formed an essential part of Anti-Aircraft training, ‘...especially in tactical shoots and this type of aircraft could not be carried out over land as the type of aircraft used could only take off and land on water and, if hit, would be a menace if flown over land areas.’² Lieutenant Colonel Cilliers went on to say it was fully appreciated that pilotless aircraft would not be available for a considerable time ‘...but if the War was lengthy, this form of AA practice was well within the bounds of possibility for the Union. It has undoubtedly proved to be the best form of training in Europe.’³

² History of AA Organisation UDF 1929- 1944, p. 11.

³ Ibid.

Practices were never attempted over land ranges as projectile fragments fell over an extremely wide area.⁴ 'Dud' rounds fired at 40 degrees elevation from a 3-inch gun travelled about 14 000 yards and 22 000 yards from a 3.7-inch gun. The 40 mm Bofors required a safety range of 13 000 yards. The Cape, (not in any way as built up as it is today), although not ideal in every way for Anti-Aircraft training, did possess the necessary training area as well as all important sea ranges for Anti-Aircraft practice.

It had by then been decided that Robben Island would make a good training and practice area. However, with the added necessity for space for manoeuvres it was suggested that an Anti-Aircraft Training Centre be established at Pollsmoor, the site of a disused international Grand Prix motor racing circuit. Anti-Aircraft equipment in the field, it was said, was not normally required to move far from roads and was primarily employed to cover movement through villages and defiles; and a survey of the nearby Cape Flats and areas such as Agter Paarl, etc., revealed that proper tactical training was possible in the Cape and was, in fact, far superior to the Potchefstroom Artillery range.

Amidst a number of arguments he put forward he suggested that the '...building up of the remaining AA Brigades...' could only take place when equipment became available. As this would be '...very limited...' only one Battery at a time could be trained and this could '...easily be arranged at Cape Town with a range established on Robben Island – which had already been identified as a very good practice area - or Melkbosch Strand, where the rainfall was only about 15 inches a year.'⁵ He stated that control of both coast and Anti-Aircraft should remain with DGO. He again suggested that together with the necessity of a nearby manoeuvre area, a training centre should be established at Pollsmoor.

Counter Argument

The DGO again produced a lengthy memorandum, also dated 16 August, in which he voiced the opinion that Anti-Aircraft should remain allied to coastal defence training. He confirmed his view that the duties of the two arms were identical, their work being largely static and he made the strange remark that the duties of the two were almost identical. 'AA Brigades,' he stated, 'were used chiefly for defence of bases and certain forward vulnerable areas, such as railheads and dumps – their work was largely static, as was the case with Coast Artillery.'⁶ He noted that the morale of the coast units would suffer if they were separated from the Anti-Aircraft Brigades. One of the inducements offered to officers and men to join the Coast Artillery was that they would also be trained in Anti-Aircraft gunnery and would have the opportunity of a tour of duty with the Anti-Aircraft Brigades.

On quite another matter Lieutenant Colonel Cilliers sent a telegram to 'DEOPS' asking if finality had been reached and he suggested that an indication regarding the responsibility for the Anti-Aircraft organisation could be included in the reply⁷ but the decision had been made. A letter addressed to him was already on its way.

A Decision

The DCS did not take long to dwell on the memorandum from DFAAT. On 17 August, before receiving Lieutenant Colonel Cillers' retort to the response from DGO; he stepped in and approved control of Anti-Aircraft organisation remaining with DDCA. Writing on 26 August to DGO, the A.G., QMG and DFAA, he reiterated that the Anti-Aircraft organisation was part of coast defence for organisation, administration and training and would remain unchanged.⁸ Training of Anti-Aircraft units was to take place in the Cape. He furthermore decided that the only way to join an Anti-Aircraft unit was by first joining the Coast Artillery – and they would be made to understand this - thus ensuring a continuous supply of trained coastal gunners. Personnel under the age of 35 years were also to receive instruction in Anti-Aircraft gunnery, after which they would be transferred into the Brigades in the field. And eleven days later, he informed the DDCA that the Anti-Aircraft organisation would remain part of the

⁴ Young's Field, p.23.

⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶ History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944, p. 12.

⁷ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp. 1, Box 12, file O(C.D.) 1\1, enc.44.

⁸ Ibid., enc. 63a.

Coast Defence Organisation ‘...for organisation, administration and training purposes...’, in other words policy as dictated pre-war by the CGS – that the Anti-Aircraft organisation was part of the coast defence for organisation, administration and training - remained unchanged. Dual control of Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Artillery would continue to be vested in one Directorate.⁹

It would remain so only for a further eight months.

Seven days after the DCS had made the decision on the responsibility for Anti-Aircraft training, the Assistant Director Coast Defence, Captain (T/Major) A.W. Stanford, who was based at Defence Headquarters, addressed the Deputy Director in Cape Town. He referred to the decision made by the DCS, stated that the question of maintaining an adequate personnel reserve was now of paramount importance; as was the question of establishing some central reservist depot to which the Anti-Aircraft LMG trained men from the coast Batteries could be sent to be equipped ‘before proceeding North.’ He considered it ‘undesirable’ for them to be sent to Potchefstroom and was investigating the possibility of a depot at Premier Mine, but also felt that Cape Town and Durban should not be forgotten. He seemed to be thinking away from the route that had already been decided, i.e. the Coast Artillery organisation in Cape Town, although he ended his communication by saying that he personally considered the best solution was to have ‘the men under our own command until they entrained or embarked.’ He asked the DDCA for his views to enable him to discuss them with DGO and DCGS at Defence Headquarters.

The DDCA, who had his own view on the subject, wrote to the two Brigades in East Africa on 30 August informing the commanding officers of the latest developments. Because, he wrote, a decision on the control of the Anti-Aircraft arm had taken so long – and only given a few days beforehand, the general administration of the Anti-Aircraft organisation had suffered considerably. He proposed to communicate with them monthly and give all possible information regarding recruits, equipment and other matters of interest. He mentioned the decision on recruiting via the Coast Artillery, the age factor and confirmed that the first draft for 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade - about 52 personnel ex Coast Artillery, would be assembled on 5 September 1940. (The draft of reinforcements left the same day). Thereafter, he said, personnel would be assembled at Rosebank in batches of 50 or 100 and sent forward. Equipment was still a matter of concern but every endeavour was being made to obtain some form of training equipment for recruit training before they were released to units.¹⁰

A further response to the discussions on a training area emerged when the DGO addressed DDC on 2 September 1940 and told him that it was the intention to establish a Reinforcement and Training Centre ‘up North’ to which reinforcements would be sent and to which the 10 per cent reserve ‘which accompanies units’ will be sent. Each Branch, he stated, is to have a training staff to deal with the twelve officers and 200 other ranks representing the 10 per cent reserve for the two Brigades in East Africa. DDCA was asked to place selected training staff on stand-by, ready to move at a moment’s notice.¹¹

A Training Depot on Robben Island

With dual control of Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, and with the early policy of finding reinforcements for Anti-Aircraft units in the field from the Coast Artillery still in place, it was inevitable that the policy on the use of NEAS men would change. General Smuts in February 1941 decided to make use of Cape Corps personnel in Anti-Aircraft units. With coastal instructors also instructing Anti-Aircraft recruits it was also decided that the training functions of the two arms should be combined in one training institution. Unfortunately, by November 1940, Pollsmoor had become an Infantry Training Depot and training had therefore to be concentrated at the coast depot on Robben Island.

⁹ History of AA OrganisationUDF 1929-1944, p. 13

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid..

The Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot (V) on the Island had been officially established with effect from 1 May 1941.¹² The establishment of the depot had been made even more necessary by the establishment of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment on 1 May, its title changed from 1 October 1941 to 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment.¹³ A second full-time Regiment – 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment (V), South African Artillery, was established with effect from 1 February 1942.¹⁴ These units, apart from duties within South Africa, were required personnel for 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments in the Middle East; and also as a basis for future the future SA Artillery Anti-Aircraft organisation, from which forward air defence units would be provided for the three Armour Divisions then being discussed. Not only that task: they had also to immediately provide key personnel and instructors for the SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft port defence Regiments that were about to be established.

The Searchlight Regiment

The proposed organisation of the Searchlight Regiment included a Regimental headquarters and four Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Batteries, numbered from one to four. It was formed at Pollsmoor with about 100 all ranks from the Coast Artillery and placed under command of Captain Mervyn Williams, a former Cape Garrison Artillery officer and Town Clerk of Cape Town, who was on loan from the Coast Artillery. From 1 May 1941, because 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment had assumed an operational role, the Searchlight Regiment began to function as a training depot for white personnel until such time as the future of the Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot on the Island was decided upon. Any surplus Anti-Aircraft personnel, including any arriving back from the Middle East, were posted to the Regiment but kept on a separate roll. They were ultimately destined for posting to 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment to bring it up to war establishment. The Searchlight Regiment became a unit of the SA Engineer Corps from 30 June as 1 (S.A.E.C.) Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment but from 22 August its title was altered to 8 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment, S.A.E.C.

On 14 October following a discussion between DAA and DFAE it was agreed to form 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battery, SAEC, at Cape Town for full-time searchlight duties, in order to provide a training nucleus for the whole Regiment, and to take on charge all searchlight equipment required for training. 2, 3 and 4 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Batteries were intended to be established at Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town respectively ready to take up Anti-Aircraft searchlight duties under SA Artillery instructors. The intention was that the the Engineer Corps would immediately form all four Batteries each with four 60-inch Sperry searchlights, 2 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battery was to be organised and ready to commence searchlight duties within three months – but this was not to be. Although a training nucleus was formed at Cape Town the SAEC personnel allocated for searchlight duties continued with more urgent engineering tasks at military installations in the Cape Peninsula. 4 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battery was based at Ndabeni Camp (also called Pinelands) and was engaged in construction work throughout the Cape Peninsula, including effecting improvements at the Batteries on the Atlantic coast more especially Wynyard Battery and Apostle Battery.

The Regiment was disestablished with effect from 1 January 1944

The CGS had for some time been under the impression that searchlights were a necessary adjunct to heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and earlier discussions on this subject led the War Office to inform the CGS in October 1942 that they were not normally used with heavy guns which used the GL method of fire control at night. Searchlights, the War Office stated, may be used with light guns for the defence of aerodromes or for protection of mine-laying from the air (an unlikely possibility for South African waters). It considered that twelve searchlights at most would be required but left it to the CGS to decide on the number he required.

Volunteers

By October 1942 there were 277 000 volunteers serving full-time and part-time in the Union Defence Forces, with the SA Air Force recruiting as many as both the Army and the SA Naval Forces combined.

¹² SANDF Archives, DCS CGS, Box 78.

¹³ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/3.

¹⁴ Ibid. DCS CGS, Box 78.

The two most important combatant arms – the Infantry and the Artillery were the most difficult to fill. In January 1941 Colonel Adler, the Director Field Army Artillery had reported manpower problems, with wastage through transfers and discharges exceeding the number recruits by about 300 in the previous six months.¹⁵ Efforts to induce men to join up included an article in a bulletin drawn up in these early days for issue to the daily newspapers. It painted a wonderful picture of Army life and stated, among other descriptive remarks that recruits required for coast and Anti-Aircraft Batteries would find conditions of service to be enjoyable:

*Recruits are required for coast and for Anti-Aircraft Batteries. The conditions of service are as good as any in the Union Defence Forces and the men lead a pleasant and healthy life....They are housed in comfortable buildings. Each gunner is provided with comfortable bed and mattress. The food, too, is excellent and complaints are seldom heard in a gunners mess....table linen, crockery and cutlery are of the best quality....recreation and sporting activities are well catered for and sport includes rugby and soccer in the winter, and cricket, tennis, baseball, golf and athletics in the summer. There is also the new Physical Training for gunners, which today is a very pleasant pastime....Gunners on the Coast Artillery and the Anti-Aircraft lead a very pleasant and healthy life.*¹⁶

...as good as any in the Union Defence Forcesand they could themselves decide whether they wish to join the Coast Artillery or the Anti-Aircraft. The bulletin also stated: Men up to the age of 49, who are medically fit are accepted for the Coast Artillery. Men over 35 years of age must be pronounced in the "A" class by the doctors before they will be signed on for Anti-Aircraft. On joining up, privates receive 3s 6d (35 cents) per day and in the case of married men an allowance of 4s 6d per day, (45 cents) plus 1s (10 cents) per day for each child up to a maximum of six children. Chances of promotion were good and specialists - those qualifying as gun layers, telephonists, or range takers – may receive an increment of 4d (4½ cents) per day after the half-yearly examinations.

The inducement to 'join-up' which must have produced gales of laughter among those who were housed in tents and who queued in long lines at meal times, was hopefully further enhanced by another paragraph which read:

While serving in the Batteries the men do not live under canvas but are housed in comfortable wood and iron buildings. Each gunner is also provided with a comfortable bed and mattress. The food, too, is excellent and complaints are seldom heard in a gunner mess. All the mess appointments and facilities are provided out of Regimental funds and the table linen, crockery and cutlery are of the best quality. Each mess is provided with a radio and a small library.

The article did not, however, neglect to speak of the hard training and arduous duties but stated:

Regular gun drill...builds up body strength, teaches menrtal alertness...and: Among the gunners are some of the finest physical specimens in the Army and this is borne out by the fact that at military athletic meetings it is generally the Artillery team which wins the tug-o'-war'

Those who were serving on Robben Island must have had a good few laughs on seeing this in print. On Robben Island everyone was living in tents – all the personnel of the Training and Reserve Depot. There was no group distinction – even the officers' mess was in a double marquee tent. The almost constant wind blew under the flaps of the tents and life was uncomfortable. By August, with attestations at about one hundred a week, the tents in use were becoming unserviceable and were moreover, not of the quality to be able to stand up to weather conditions there. But slowly the old and ruined buildings were being renovated and by September 1941 construction of bungalows for the coloured gunners had begun. There was still no air defence equipment on the Island; it was a similar

¹⁵ SANDF Archives, CGS Gp 2, Box 209.

¹⁶ Ibid., UWH Civil, Box 296, file B142.

situation elsewhere in South Africa. By November part of the enlarged Pollsmoor camp was able to accommodate white Anti-Aircraft gunners where they underwent training by 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

The Regiment had been born as '3rd Light A. A. Regiment (V) S.A.A.' on 1 May 1941, according to a secret document reference A.G. (3) 154/51/4/67 addressed to DCAA; OC: Cape Command, and Heads of Sections on 29 May 1941.¹⁷ It was organised as a Regiment on full-time service;¹⁸ but it was soon realised that 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments had been established in the Western Desert - so 'steps are being taken' stated the AG on 20 October 1941, to change the title to 3rd Anti-Aircraft Regiment from 1 October 1941.¹⁹ On 15 May 1942 the AG addressed a circular to DCAA, GOC Cape Command and heads of sections informing them that the '...organisation of 3 A.A. Regiment will read as follows:

H.Q. 3 A.A. REGT.

7 A.A. BTY.

8 LT. A.A. BTY.

9 LT. A.A. BTY.'²⁰

As though to emphasise this the AG again addressed a similar letter to the same addressees on 8 June 1942.²¹



Figure 11: A Royal Artillery 3.7-inch Battery in training

¹⁷ Ibid., DCS CGS Box 78, Vol. IV, File O (M) 17, enc. 85.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., enc.128.

²⁰ Ibid., UWH Admin files, Box 4.

²¹ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/3, file 0149, enc. 80.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TRAINING DEPOT

A Proposed School

By mid-1940, with both 1st and 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigades *en route* to East Africa and with the closure of the Training Brigade as a result of their departure, it was fully realised that an effort had to be made to secure adequate equipment for the formation of a school for Anti-Aircraft training. It was on this subject that DGO wrote to DCGS on 3 September 1940 and recommended that a fully equipped school be established to train officers and men for the Anti-Aircraft Brigades still to be formed. The proposed school would also train recruits as reinforcements for existing Brigades in the field, and train young officers and men for duty in the Coast Artillery. It was proposed that at least two student officer courses be held each year, two gunnery courses and two courses to produce instructors, as well as a continuous training programme for training recruits, be instituted.

Training in Anti-Aircraft gunnery at the proposed school was to include predictors, height finders, sound locators, Anti-Aircraft LMGs, searchlights and generators. Artificers were also to be trained in the care and maintenance of equipment. For this purpose the minimum necessary equipment for the school was considered to be:

- One complete AA Battery of eight 3.7-inch or 3-inch 20 cwt guns with semi-automatic breech mechanism, and with all necessary instruments.
- One complete searchlight section of six lights and six sound locators, paraboloid type, hand controlled.
- One complete section of four 40 mm AA guns with all necessary instruments.
- Six twin Lewis guns complete with six AA twin mountings.
- 52 miles of field telephone wire, two cable layers and 12 field telephones.
- Two wireless vans.

This information was cabled to the High Commissioner, London, for onward transmission to the War Office who, it was hoped, would approve and release the equipment. In the event the War Office were understandably unable to do so. The equipment was never forthcoming and by mid-1942 there were still no modern Anti-Aircraft guns in South Africa,. The decision to combine coast and Anti-Aircraft training arrangements had, however, been made: so the training of Anti-Aircraft personnel on Robben Island, especially men of the Cape Corps, on equipment located there for operational purposes, continued.

Dunkirk

Within the first few months Britain was in crisis. The British Expeditionary Force in France had to be evacuated, *Operation Dynamo* was set in motion on 26 May 1940 and in a miraculous nine days 338 226 British and French troops were lifted off the beaches of Dunkirk (the British had hoped to save only 50 000). But the BEF were forced to leave all heavy weapons and equipment behind. Two British Divisions and 120 000 men on lines of communication were also lost. France fell to the Germans and hostilities eventually ceased on 25 June 1940. In June with an air battle expected, a 'stock take' of Anti-Aircraft equipment revealed the gun strength in Britain to be 1 280 heavy (3.7-inch and 4.5-inch) guns and 517 light guns – a mixture of 2-pdr, 3-inch and 40 mm. This may sound reasonable, but compare the figures with the gun strength actually planned i.e.: 3 744 heavy, 4 410 light and 8 000 rocket projectors.¹ There was obviously little hope of early delivery of the equipment ordered by South Africa.

¹ The Journal of the Royal Artillery, *Gunners in the Battle of Britain*, p. 14.

Invasion of Britain

After his successful invasion of France Hitler ordered Operation Sealion – a seaborne landing in Britain; but Goering's Luftflotte 2 and 3 had first to destroy the Royal Air force with help from Luftflotte V in Denmark. August 6 was the opening day of the much vaunted *Adler Tag* – Eagle Day air offensive; Goering had over 3 000 aircraft and was confident that his Air Force would cripple the RAF in four days and wipe it out entirely in four weeks. The war to subdue the British in preparation for a cross-channel invasion began with German aircraft attacking Britain in July. Before 10 August they had lost 217 aircraft to 96 RAF fighters. Airfields and RDF (later called Radar) towers in southern Britain were the first to be hit. Some RDF towers were damaged, one important one was badly hurt – but all were back in operation with 24 hours. They were never touched again – the Germans did not know what they were or how much they would assist in the course of the air battle that followed. On the night of 24/25 August faulty navigation led to bombs being dropped on London. Churchill felt that retaliation was justified and for several of the following nights RAF bombers dropped bombs on Berlin. Hitler was furious that they could penetrate so far into his Reich. He ordered the Luftwaffe to change targets.²

The Blitz

The Blitz began when about 300 bombers of Goering's Luftwaffe, escorted by about 600 fighters, bombed London on the afternoon of 7 September 1940, causing huge fires which acted as beacons for the waves of aircraft that followed. Londoners eventually called it 'the Blitz'. On 9 September, a German pilot, Peter Stahl, in a JU 88, as part of II Gruppe, Kampfgeschwader 30, in an assembly of 200 bombers, recorded in his diary:

*Very soon we have reached the outer AA Belt of the capital. The Brits are shooting unpleasantly well, and the formation becomes restless.*³

Mass formations of enemy aircraft flew over and bombed targets in Southern England and Wales and on 12 September when the Luftwaffe arrived overhead they were greeted by strong Anti-Aircraft fire from newly arrived guns. The cross-channel invasion was eventually abandoned, but the Blitz would continue for some time to come. With London specially targeted, small scale and some larger but persistent and wide spread air raids continued over Britain until January 1944. And it was only a few months after that when the destructive, day and night, flying bomb attacks began. The first V2 Rocket attack on London was made on 13 September 1944.

The Royal Artillery had a huge Anti-Aircraft organisation in Britain, organised in three Anti-Aircraft Corps – two of five Divisions each, and one of two Divisions, each from seven to thirteen Brigades strong, with up to five Regiments in each Brigade. They were spread over Britain, protecting vulnerable areas, one Division of four Brigades with a total of seventeen Regiments and four Searchlight Regiments between them, protected London only.⁴

There was little hope of obtaining the Anti-Aircraft equipment that had been ordered in February 1940. The expected air war on Britain began shortly after the order had been placed and Britain needed every gun she could produce.

A Training Regiment

Until it left for the north the 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade had acted in a training capacity, and in the early weeks of 1940, an Officers' Training Battery had existed – officially from 1 February 1940. About fifteen officers from the Cadet Training Battery at Potchefstroom transferred to the Anti-Aircraft officers training Battery – possibly because they did not like being forced to ride horses – as was expected of field gunner cadets. But, resulting from the decision to concentrate Anti-Aircraft training in the Cape Peninsula instead of Potchefstroom, the Coast Artillery Directorate became fully responsible for Anti-Aircraft training from 1 May 1941.

² Chronological Atlas, pp. 22, 24, 26.

³ Militaria, 20/4, 1990, p. 15.

⁴ The heavy Anti-Aircraft strength of the RA at 30 September 1939 was 1083 Officers and 35 257 other ranks.

With dual control of Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, and with the early policy of finding reinforcements for Anti-Aircraft units in the field from the Coast Artillery, it was inevitable – with Coast Instructors Gunnery also training Anti-Aircraft recruits - that the training functions of the two arms should be combined in the training institution already in existence on Robben Island.

Promotion

Colonel H.T. Newman, Royal Marines, writing as Director Military Operations and Training (DMO&T) addressed the AG on 31 October 1940 and pointed out that he had earlier recommended the upgrading of the appointment of Lieutenant Colonel Cilliers from DDCA to DCAA (Director Coast and Anti-Aircraft) with the rank of Colonel, to cover the Anti-Aircraft organisation which was included in his duties. The letter on file has the words 'dealing with this matter' scribbled alongside the text. It was dealt with. Harry Cilliers was promoted to the temporary rank of Colonel from 1 October 1940 as Director Coast Artillery. The post was later also described as 'Colonel Coast Artillery'. It would be four months before the post that Colonel Harry Cilliers occupied before the Directorate was re-designated to include the words 'Anti-Aircraft'. A favourable reply to the request passed to London for Anti-Aircraft equipment, was at that stage still awaited.

Equipment for Training

On 3 August 1940, with equipment obviously desperately required for training recruits before they were sent to either 1st or 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, the DGO asked the CGS to investigate the possibility of a loan from the War Office of eight 'obsolete 3" 20cwt AA, four old type height finders and predictors' for training purposes.⁵ The reply from the War Office, some six weeks later, indicated there was no obsolete equipment available since everything they had was in service. A loan was impossible.⁶ The DGTS was not to be dissuaded so easily. He asked on 31 October 1940 what the situation was regarding delivery of the 3.7-inch guns ordered per indent 430.⁷ He was told in a cable from 'Oppositely' to 'Dechief' (i.e., from the office of the High Commissioner in London to the CGS in Pretoria) that the supply was 'very 'doubtful for a considerable time.' This answer was softened by the fact that the War Office would be prepared to re-consider the request at the end of another six months.

Once again, in January 1941, another attempt was made – this time by DMO & I who asked if the War Office could make available four unserviceable 3.7-inch or 3-inch guns for training. With Britain's Anti-Aircraft system in action each day the War Office cannot be blamed if it appeared to be a little exasperated by the continuing requests. It replied via Oppositely on 31 January 1941, regretting that there were no unserviceable guns as 'all are returned immediately to Ordnance for repair and reissue earliest'. Operational equipment, the reply stated, 'is actually being used in training establishments which would have to be replaced with unserviceable guns were any available.' Oppositely repeated an earlier statement about light Anti-Aircraft guns, which it was said, would become available sooner than heavy guns. It was suggested that the Union Defence Forces convert some heavy Batteries to a light establishment.⁸

But Technical Services could or would not understand the supply problem and made another attempt to obtain equipment, pointing out that there had been a revival of recruiting for Anti-Aircraft units and it was 'imperative that some form of equipment' be made available for training. 'Have you any Bredas which could be released for this purpose', he asked the CGS in March. And he suggested that two would be helpful, but more would be welcome.⁹

The Military Liaison Officer in London was in regular contact with the War Office and there was no doubt in his reply sent on 14 March which repeated that 'no useful forecast of delivery of AA

⁵ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 10, file 3/8/, enc. 4.

⁶ Ibid., enc. 12.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., enc. 20.

⁹ Ibid., enc. 27.

equipment can be given. Guns were in considerable demand'. Oppositely and the staff of South African House should know. London was being bombed daily. South Africa House was luckily not among the large number of buildings in London either damaged or destroyed.

Not to be outdone the DGAF asked in May if there were any Bredas for aerodrome defence – the need is great - his memorandum to the CGS stated. The War Office in June apparently asked how many Bofors would be required for training and the CGS cabled a reply on 26 June that twelve Bofors were required for training centres at Cape Town and Pretoria.¹⁰ A strange answer when the only Anti-Aircraft training centre was at Cape Town, partly on Robben Island and partly at Pollsmoor. So desperate was the training requirement that enquiries were made of the War Supplies Office in America, and an order was eventually placed for 100 heavy Anti-Aircraft guns and one hundred light guns as well as searchlights.

The 3-inch 20 cwt Guns

By July 1941 South Africa's eight 3-inch 20 cwt guns of World War One vintage were in the Middle East and in action against the *Luftwaffe*. Defence Headquarters was asked if they could be retained and on 3 September 1941 the DCS confirmed that 'Mideast' could retain the guns 'subject to a financial adjustment.'¹¹ Britain, however, agreed in lieu of the eight guns, to send to the Union for training purposes, 'four partially worn-out guns and two sets of fire control instruments from 1 SA Heavy AA Regt' (not its correct title as the latter was re-designated a 'Light' Regiment from 1 August 1942. Agreement was reached and the equipment arrived in South Africa aboard the ship *Fishpool*, at end September 1941.

Searchlights

It was not only guns that were required for Anti-Aircraft defence, but also searchlights. The Coast Artillery organisation also needed searchlights. The standard equipment in service in 1939 was the Searchlight Projector 90cm, otherwise titled 'Lamp, Searchlight HCD 90-cm'. By mid-December 1940, 24 projectors (mobile lights) without generators or Ford trucks had arrived from Britain and were stored at 'T' Stores, Young's Field, near Cape Town. The balance of the order which amounted to 132 searchlights was awaited. Damage to factories in Britain and shipping difficulties and the urgency of orders for British Service requirements seriously delayed the delivery of the South African indents. Seven generator sets had been shipped at the end of November 1940 with 22 sets on demand to be shipped '...in a few weeks time.'¹² Because of the uncertainty of delivery from Britain it was decided in late January 1941 to place orders for one hundred searchlights in America.

'Warsup' in New York was approached about the possibility of supplying one hundred searchlights. The War Supplies representative in New York replied that General Electric could provide U.S. 1941 Army Type 60-inch searchlights with cable at a cost of \$12 780 each and U.S. 1941 Army type petrol engine-driven power plants at \$3 100. Sperry sound locators were available at a cost of \$5 500. Delivery of five to ten units could be made in November 1941, fifteen units in December and the balance in January 1942. The Director General of War Supplies cabled back to confirm an order. But on 7 January 1941 the Chief Buyer, Director General War Supplies wrote to the CGS and told him that Sperry had quoted practically the same price and could begin delivery in July 1941, and probably complete the order by the end of the year – provided an order was placed by 15 January 1941. This was accepted and the General Electric order cancelled. 'Warsup', New York confirmed the cancellation was not a problem. A large number of American Sperry lights were eventually in service in South Africa during 1941/45.

Orders for one hundred of each of heavy and light Anti-Aircraft guns from American suppliers were also cancelled in July 1941.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid., enc. 40.

¹¹ Ibid., enc. 63.

¹² Ibid. file 8/10 V.I.

¹³ SANDF Archives, CGS W3ar, Box 19, file CGS3/8, Vol. 1. Enc. 21.

A New Directorate

Following the decision by the DCS in August 1940 to continue with the early policy of dual control of coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery to remain vested in one directorate, a new Directorate of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Training was established with effect from 1 October 1940.¹⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Harry Cilliers who was appointed Director, was given temporary promotion to Colonel from 12 December.

Scraping the Barrel

In early August the DGO indicated that 400 recruits were required for Coast Artillery,¹⁵ as soon as possible and a monthly progress report to the CGS by DMO&I of 22 November 1940, he mentioned that an Anti-Aircraft and Coast Artillery recruiting drive had been most satisfactory, 'resulting in 246 recruits being obtained – 157 for Anti-Aircraft and 89 for the Coast Artillery.'¹⁶ But by March 1941, the Union Defence Force was scraping the barrel for recruits and regulations had already been gazetted for the control of industrial manpower; there was rationing of certain foodstuffs and petrol, but there was no serious awareness that South Africa was engaged in a war. No amount of encouragement, or exhortation, could produce non-existent volunteers. The constant struggle for recruits did not bode well for the future – there were already signs – worsening as the months wore on – that the Union Defence Forces would suffer a manpower problem.

The political situation in the country, with many opposed to the war, prohibited full use of available white manpower and in early 1941 the initial burst of enthusiasm throughout South Africa to 'join up', had slowed down considerably. Coloured organisations had clamoured to be allowed to play their part in the war effort and the Cape Corps was established on 8 May 1940 with the initial aim of providing 'Mechanical Transport Companies'. Four Road Motor Transport Companies, Cape Corps were formed and went overland to East Africa where they did splendid work in keeping the fighting troops supplied. They did 150 miles per day on average, two days out of three, loading on the third day, seven days a week.¹⁷ They did their own repairs en route.

General Smuts during February 1941 decided to alleviate the manpower problem by making the fullest of Cape Corps personnel in the coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery organisation. With this policy of diluting units an order of priority for the intake of NEAS personnel was given as:

- SA Air Force and SA Engineer Corps
- SA Artillery
- 'T' Services artisans

Much later, Cape Corps Battalions were formed and underwent full training in all Infantry weapons.

Loss of Director

Forty year old Colonel Harry Cilliers, who had been appointed to the post of Director Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Training, did not live to see either the Coast or the Anti-Aircraft organisation grow during the months to come. He and those travelling with him were unfortunately killed in an air crash on 28 March 1941 while returning from an inspection at Walvis Bay. Others in the aircraft were the Director of Seaward Defence Force, Rear Admiral G.W. Halifax and Lieutenant Colonel G.P. Shearer, Royal Engineers. The aircraft, flying in thick mist, struck a hillside at Baboon Point, near Elands Bay, 74 km from Saldanha. The post held by the late Harry Cilliers was occupied from 29 March by Lieutenant Colonel A.H.K. Jopp, DSO, previously, Commanding Officer, Cape Peninsula Artillery Brigade (until 8 February 1940 it had been the Coast Artillery Brigade). He was given temporary promotion to Colonel and took over the functions of both DCA and DAAT.

¹⁴ Force Order 2595, 1941

¹⁵ CAB Gp1 Box 12, file O (C.D.) 1/1.

¹⁶ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp 2 Box 27, file(C.D.3/1) Progress report, enc.17

¹⁷ East African and Abyssinian Campaigns, p. 237.

Combined Training

As a result of combining the training functions of the two arms in one training institution, the Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot (V) was officially established on the Island with effect from 1 May 1941. The first Part 2 Order – No.1.1941 – taking a number of volunteers on strength was issued on 24 June 1941. The Depot functioned as an autonomous unit under command of Major E.C. Chisholm with a small staff of officers. In later years as a Lieutenant Colonel, he commanded 4 Coast Regiment.

1st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was established at Cape Town with effect from 1 May 1941,¹⁸ and was formed from within the Coast Artillery organisation. Its title was altered to 3rd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), once it was realised that 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments had been established in North Africa.¹⁹ From 1 October 1941 the title of the Regiment became 3rd Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V).²⁰ The new Regiment functioned in a training role at Pollsmoor, where both coast and elementary Anti-Aircraft training for white personnel was undertaken, while Cape Corps men were under training on Robben Island. Once the four 3-inch 20 cwt guns from the Middle East had arrived in Cape Town, 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was also given an operational role, with detachments of two 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft guns at Paarden Island and another two at Fort Wynyard. Records show that by the end of April two 40 mm Bofors had been placed on charge of the Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot and it was these guns that were manned by a third detachment at Cape Town docks.²¹

Dilution Policy

Resulting from General Smuts' decision on dilution the Deputy Director of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery was instructed to accept Cape Corps men for training as coastal gunners but he and his senior Staff Officer, Major Len Klootwyk – so legend has it – took one look at the first draft of men from the Cape Corps depot at Kimberley, and refused to accept them.²² Not legend as thought by a former coastal gunner – but fact, and as a result of the incident the DDCA wrote to DGO on 7 September and asked him to task recruiting officers to take special care in the selection of recruits for Coast Artillery 'in order to avoid their rejection as unsuitable as recently occurred with the men sent from Johannesburg.'²³ He indicated that dismissing men as unsuitable caused privation and must be avoided if at all possible.

The DGO concurred with these sentiments and recommended the use of private vehicles by the recruiting officers. He also stated that the Anti-Aircraft Brigades were 'considerably understrength' and that at least 1 000 recruits were needed and 'must be found in the shortest possible time'.

Colonel Jopp sent for 2nd Lieutenant H.E.P. Watermeyer (after the war: the Hon Mr. Justice Watermeyer) and gave him the task of finding suitable recruits to be trained as coastal gunners, to enable white coastal gunners to be posted to 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, which, although operational was still in the process of being brought up to authorised strength.

Recruiting

The coast and Anti-Aircraft organisation launched its own recruiting campaign from 1 May 1941, and it resulted in 113 white men and 215 Cape Corps personnel attesting for full-time service. These figures were broken down for the information of the CGS into groups of under and over 35 years of age. The over 35s numbered 58 white and 10 coloured men. The reason for this lay behind the decision by the CGS that men under the age of 35 should be transferred to Anti-Aircraft units in the field and all those over 35 would be retained in Coast Artillery. The younger men, after initial Coast Artillery training would become reinforcements for the Anti-Aircraft branch.

With Lieutenant Gilchrist and one other officer, and working in close co-operation with the Recruiting Officer at the New Drill Hall, Tennant Street, Cape Town, the three officers visited country towns

¹⁸ SANDF Archives, DCS CGS, Box78.

¹⁹ Ibid., UWH Admin files, Box 4.

²⁰ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/3, file 0149, enc. 30.

²¹ History of AA Organisation 1939 -1945, p24.

²² South Africa at War, p107.

²³ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp1, Box 12, file O(C.D.) 1/1, enc.49.

arranging for potential recruits to come in to Cape Town. The Watermeyer recruiting team went further afield, even to Beaconsfield itself (a separate mining camp in its early diamond-mining days but now a part of the city of Kimberley), to select more recruits, until it came to the attention of Colonel Hoy, Officer Commanding Non-European Army Services, who ordered recruiting to stop. The reason for this peremptory instruction was not known but it certainly displeased Colonel Jopp. The ruling made by Colonel Hoy, had resulted from his contention that he had been given a charter by General Smuts to recruit a Cape Corps, and he was now witnessing the first attempt to break up *his* Corps. When the Field Branch Artillery at the same time began recruiting Zulus for a field Regiment and commenced training them at Eshowe it resulted in some friction and he complained officially and *insisted* that the 'non-white' men be recruited through *his* organisation only.

For several months there was a certain amount of confusion regarding the organisation of diluted units. At Staff Conference No 21 on 8 October 1941, the A.G. mentioned that he was having trouble with Col Hoy on the loss of identity of the Cape Corps. Col Hoy's contention was that he had been given a charter by the Prime Minister which gave a definite undertaking that all 'Cape Coloureds' recruited by him would be members of the Cape Corps. He accused Defence Headquarters with breaking up the organisation of his unit and doing away with *esprit de corps*. This argument appears to have been waived aside in the discussion that followed and the result was that members of the Cape Corps used in the dilution of 'white' units would welcome the idea of calling themselves members of the SA Artillery, SA Engineer Corps and the SA Air Force.

At the following Staff Conference held on 15 October 1941, the CGS intimated that he had discussed this with the Minister of Defence who had ruled that they should definitely be incorporated. Coloured personnel transferred to the SA Air Force, Engineers and Artillery should become members of those units and wear the appropriate badges.²⁴ It never happened; but after the conclusion of hostilities the A.G. laid down policy by stating in a document of 30 June 1945 that '...all Non-Europeans attached to diluted units within the Union shall preserve their identity by continuing to wear their distinctive badges and buttons.'²⁵

Lieutenant Watermeyer personally selected the best of ever-increasing numbers reporting for attestation, as future coastal gunners. Once they had passed medical examination, these men, who were the pick of the coloured community still out of uniform, were sent to Robben Island and began elementary training in foot drill. In September 1941, just when work began on the construction of permanent bungalows for the coloured gunners, 400 were earmarked for transfer to the Anti-Aircraft Regiments in Egypt.

Cape Corps Gunners

It was realised that the Depot was a temporary expediency and although efforts had earlier been made to secure adequate equipment for the formation of a separate Anti-Aircraft School, there was as yet no move in this direction. The training of Cape Corps men as future Anti-Aircraft gunners, one of the original functions of the depot, continued on Robben Island. Although dual control of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery remained under one Directorate, and with the early policy of finding reinforcements for field Army Anti-Aircraft units from the Coast Artillery still in place, it was inevitable that policy on the use of NEAS personnel would change, as it would in due course.

Another Recruiting Drive

In July 1941 Colonel Jopp, anxious about recruiting, telexed Pretoria, stating: '...cannot let grass grow under my feet in obtaining recruits before others get them.' He obtained permission for an extensive tour of the southern and eastern Cape – the anticipated mileage was 3 250 miles - from 1 August to 25 September to try and recruit 2 500 Coloured men for the Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery. Permission was given for another recruiting tour to obtain '...as early as possible...' the balance of requirements, viz approximately 1 900 'non-white' personnel for Coast and Anti-Aircraft. Authority

²⁴ Ibid. Page 89

²⁵ Ibid.

was granted in writing on 11 August 1941,²⁶ but Lieutenant Guicherit and a Sergeant had already left Robben Island for the second tour of the Western Province which was undertaken from 11 August to 10 September.²⁷ Towards the end of July/September the Director of Recruiting, Brig Werdmuller, had to forbid recruiting for the Cape Corps or the Indian and Malay Corps in numerous country areas stretching from Paarl, Stellenbosch and Somerset West through to Worcester, Tulbagh and Bredasdorp, where farmers had become restive at the loss of labour. This 'no-go zone' was much later extended to even more magisterial districts for the same reason.

Basic Training

On Robben Island the men received a very thorough basic training with officers under whom they would eventually serve. They were inspired by a keenness which showed itself in September 1941 when the first draft of so-called gunners, who had never handled a rifle or yet seen a Bofors Anti-Aircraft gun, were ferried across to the mainland to entrain for Durban to take ship for the Middle East. Accompanying them were three officers and half a dozen white NCOs under Captain (T/Major) N.N.D. Orpen, all routed to 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in Egypt. The main speculation in Cape Town with the Officer Commanding was whether the draft would even get as far as Durban with the full 400 men. Yet, when the first roll call was taken aboard ship after a hurried embarkation, it was found that he had not 400, but 401.

The Japanese Threat

At this time events occurred in the Pacific that altered all planning. With Britain standing alone against Germany, a new threat had developed in the East, and a new phase in the war was about to begin.

Manpower

By January 1942 the manpower shortage was so acute that the CGS expressed the view that it should seldom be necessary to discharge anyone as medically unfit due to the new medical categories being applied. Men were therefore to be retained on service up to the limit of their capacity to serve. The Union Defence Forces had long before this begun to feel the pinch as far as recruits were concerned. More men were joining the Air Force than those going to the Army and Seaward Defence Force combined. The recruiting situation was slowly worsening and causing concern and efforts had to be made to provide additional manpower. The Coast Artillery was an obvious place to look to for recruits. While absolutely necessary for the purpose of defending the harbours that were so vital to the war effort, it nevertheless tied men up permanently.

Women at War

Women were being increasingly employed. The Woman's Auxiliary Defence Corps had been established by Proclamation 287, 1939 dated 17 November 1939; and steps were taken on 18 May 1940 in terms of Emergency Regulation 30 of the National Emergency Regulations to establish the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) and the Woman's Auxiliary Army Services (WAAS) on a volunteer part-time basis, as a preliminary step towards permanent establishment. A few days later, - on 22 May 1940 - the AG wrote to confirm their status as full-time volunteers. There were soon numbers of women in uniform, and already beginning to make a marked difference to the war effort by releasing men for other tasks.

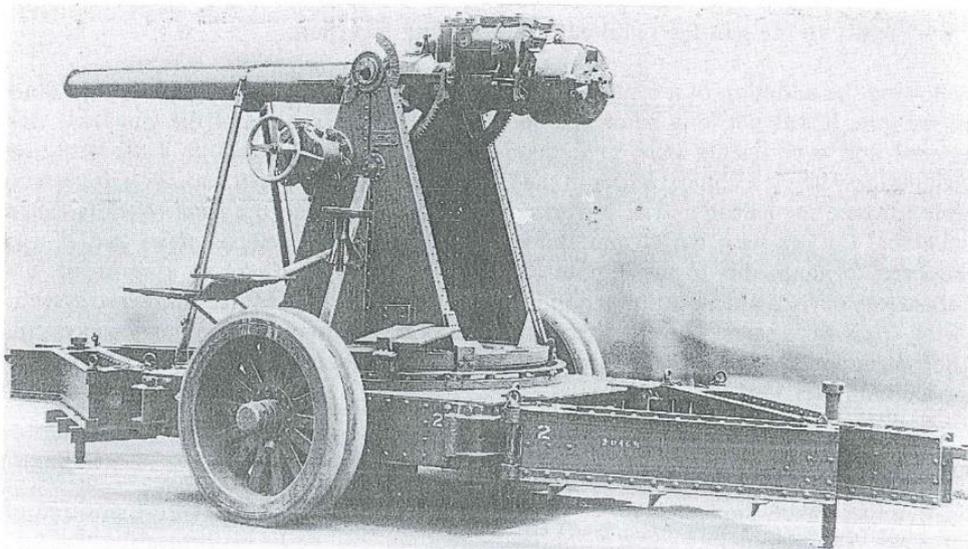
By July 1940 the first women had been sent to East African headquarters as typists - and by September 1942, 7 000 women had attested in the WAAF. They operated searchlights and other instruments of the Air Force Anti-Aircraft units that were later formed. Proclamation 215, 1942 in Government Gazette Extraordinary 3091 declared that it would be lawful to employ women of the WADC in duties other than non-combatant duties. Members of the Woman's Auxiliary Army Service (WAAS) were first recruited on 7 June 1940. They provided personnel for all the duties that could release men for more active roles in the war effort. From June 1941 selected women 'without encumbrances' were trained to operate Coast Artillery instruments. Over 400 women - who became

²⁶ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp 2, Box 123, file C.D. 21/3

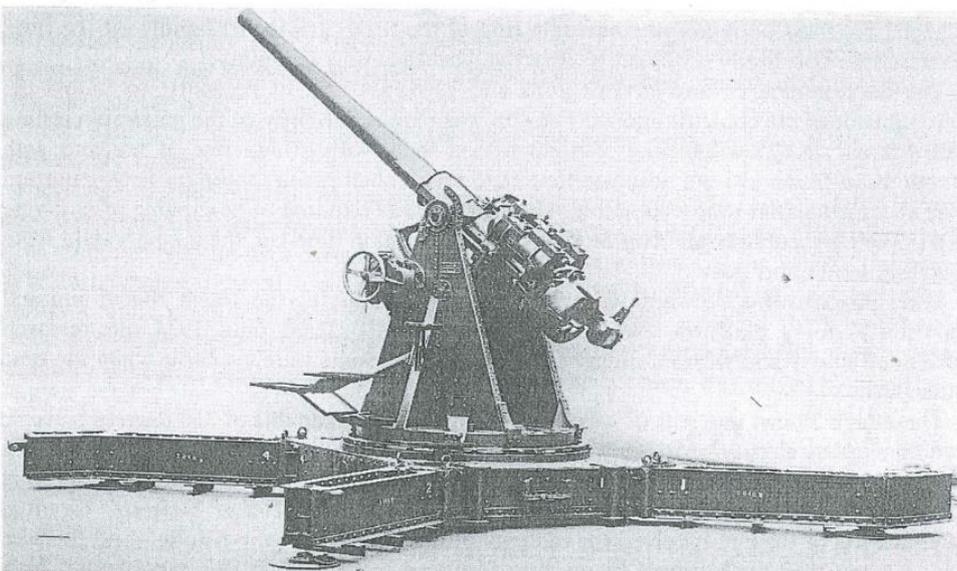
²⁷ Ibid., file C.D. 21/2.

known as the ASWAAS, Artillery Specialists Women's Auxiliary Army Service – eventually manned all the Coast Artillery instruments, allowing many men to be released for front line units.²⁸

Key men, those who kept the wheels of industry turning were not permitted to volunteer for full-time service, but in May it was decided to allow key men to be recruited into the part-time National Volunteer Brigade, formed on 1 October 1940. This remained a police and not a military reserve for the time being, despite the time and energy which the CGS and his staff devoted to it.



3-inch 20 cwt anti-aircraft gun on semi-mobile mounting ready to move, 1920



3-inch 20 cwt anti-aircraft gun on semi-mobile mounting in action, 1920

Figure 12: 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft Gun

²⁸ Island at War, pp. 154, 155.

CHAPTER NINE

1st ANTI-AIRCRAFT BRIGADE: EAST AFRICA

Arrival of the Air Defence Gunners

On 1 June the first elements of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade – Brigade headquarters, 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery under Major G.W. Meister, and the Searchlight Battery, arrived at Mombasa, the first combatant unit of the South African Army to serve outside South Africa in World War Two. The Brigade organisation was based on that of a heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and it was still considerably under strength; but as it had only one section of six searchlights, instead of a complete Battery of eighteen lights, there was in effect a saving of some 225 personnel. Shortages were later made up by two drafts, one of 62 men in September and another of 114 in December 1940.

Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey, who had flown to East Africa ahead of his unit, had arranged to take over the Tudor Hotel as headquarters of the Brigade. The building, after the war called Tudor House, occupied a beautiful position facing Port Tudor Reach, three miles from Kilindini or Mombasa. The staff settled in, just a week before Italy declared war and long before any other South African ground forces reached Kenya. The Brigade workshop detachment was also located at the hotel. Lieutenant Stevens and his thirty men had a mobile light unit and a smattering of various tools, but there was only one man on his staff who was capable of effecting repairs to predictors, height finders and other technical equipment. The entire South African Anti-Aircraft organisation in East Africa depended on his skill.

Deployment

Major G.W. Meister, commanding 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery was instructed to occupy positions, to enable it to defend the age-old coral island from attack by air and in a general scheme of defence against air attack, decided upon in conjunction with the SA Air Force, sections of two guns each were deployed at as follows:

- No. 1 Section at Nyali Bridge,
- No. 2 Section at Makupa Road,
- No.3 Section at Port Reitz airfield,
- No. 4 Section at the golf course.

The first, second and fourth sections each had two 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft guns, but No. 3 Section also had Lewis guns.

The remainder of the Anti-Aircraft Brigade arrived at Mombasa on 8 June, and South Africa was further represented by No. 1 Light Tank Company and 4th Field Brigade, when these units also disembarked that day. The air defence position at Mombasa was relieved when 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade arrived and allowed the use of 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery at Mombasa.

After the arrival of the remainder of the Brigade, positions for 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery were arranged in the Mombasa area and, by 20 June, permanent gun positions were occupied by the Battery at:

- Magidi House, Shell House, Pratt House, Shell airfield - No. 1 Section,
- Makupa Bridge, Devil's Island, Cattle Sheds (two posts), Water works - No. 2 Section,
- Port Reitz airfield and old quarantine station - No. 3 Section, and with No. 4 Section at Port Reitz airfield.

By 24 June 1940, 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery positions were organised in four sections comprising 27 posts. Ammunitions drums were loaded with three rounds of tracer to one round of ball. Each gun was supplied with five drums. 1st Searchlight Battery had detachments positioned on the island near the Kenya and Uganda Railway restaurant, at the Old airfield and at Makupa Bridge. The general defence

plan was for fighters to take off immediately on receipt of a warning of the approach of enemy aircraft, and to gain a height of not less than 16 000 ft. Until a signal arrived from Air Force headquarters, enemy aircraft were to be engaged by the ground defences at all altitudes, but after receipt of the signal, guns were to confine themselves to ranges up to 15 000 ft only.

Searchlights were widely dispersed, each light being up to two to three km from its neighbour and it was possibly for this reason that Lieutenant Garlick was transferred from 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery to the Searchlight Battery to help lessen the pressure of control from the shoulders of Captain H. Mackenzie. Initially there was no radar and an elementary warning system was put in place – a ‘coast-watcher’ at Malindi, north of Mombasa and another at Tiwi in the south. Communication was by hand-cranked telephones. At each post a ‘...local inhabitant would call ‘Bwana’ if he saw an aeroplane or a ship – and Bwana would immediately telephone Fortress Headquarters in Mombasa.’¹

The position at Mombasa was relieved when 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade arrived; it allowed 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery to be temporarily attached to 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade at Mombasa for the foreseeable future.



Figure 13: A sound locator somewhere in Kenya photographed at night. Bureau of Information – official photograph

At this stage it was estimated that Italy had some 250 000 troops in East Africa (against 350 – 360 000 stated by the Italians), but moreover, it had approximately 325 aircraft. The possibility existed that an overland invasion or a major raid on the Transvaal via Portuguese territory became a possibility that the South African General Staff had to consider.

¹ Notes by Major N. Garlick.

At 4.45 pm on 10 June 1940, the British Ambassador in Rome was informed by Count Ciano, Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs that at one minute past midnight Italy would be at war with Great Britain. The next day South Africa officially declared war on Italy; and in Mombasa the pilots of No.1 Fighter Squadron, SAAF, with its four Hurricanes, and the personnel who manned the Hartebeests of No. 11 Bomber Squadron waited, just as the Anti-Aircraft gunners were doing, for the arrival of the first aircraft of the *Regia Aeronautica* to attack Mombasa.

Malaria

Malaria and VD was a problem. The strength of the Brigade at 3 July was 49 officers and 734 other ranks, with 53 non-effectives in hospital and one in detention. Six days later the number had risen to one officer and 74 other ranks. A peak was reached for July when there was one officer and 85 other ranks in hospital. Gunner P Barnard died on 12 July after being hospitalised. Everyone had been issued with mosquito nets, mosquito cream and quinine on the day of arrival and quarters were sprayed twice daily. These measures, together with lectures by medical officers, assisted in abating the incidence of malaria but casualties from this cause nevertheless remained high. Neil Garlick recorded in his notes that 'Our first real casualty was struck on the head by a falling coconut and became a mental case.'²

Malaria cases continued to surface and a high peak of illness was reached when two officers and 92 other ranks were in hospital. The arrival of 35 men as reinforcements from the 2nd AA Brigade was therefore timely. They were posted to 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery. A drop to the more usual figure of about 69 was registered by the month end.

Radar

Radar – then known as RDF (Radio direction Finding), developed at the Bernard Price Institute, Pretoria, using parts purchased from radio shops in Johannesburg, and built using an amateur radio handbook for guidance, arrived in East Africa. It was the first set made and had been tested at Avoca, Durban. Designated JB 1, it arrived in July 1940. The set was installed on a hill – named South Africa Hill, at Mambui, north of Malindi and about 160 km north of Mombasa. By 1 August 1940, it was in operation and able to give early warning of aircraft moving south towards Mombasa. It was thought that any attack would take place at dawn or dusk so the set operated for fourteen hours in each twenty-four. It was the first radar set designed and built by a South African team and there was a constant stream of technical calls to keep it on the air. They operated near the Italian frontier and the section – 'No. 1 Section, SSS, whose official war establishment was one officer, one Staff Sergeant, two corporals, four privates, no bicycles, no motor cycles, no motor cars, three light trucks, one pistol and seven rifles.'³

They were supported by a section of Lewis gunners to provide Anti-Aircraft cover. Malaria was endemic and the gunners did not escape it. They all got it, in spite of the rules that mosquito nets were to be worn over helmets, with long trousers and gaiters- an extremely hot form of dress in an extremely hot place. The SSS team escaped it. They lived in a mosquito-proof bungalow with a local thatched roof and a calico ceiling to exclude snakes. Water was to be boiled but mosquito larvae was often found swimming in it. The Anti-Aircraft officer who was also responsible for water treatment had his own ideas; he drank half a bottle of gin with the water each day, and remained in excellent health. The food was bad; the cook's qualification was that he was unfit for gun duty.'⁴

The Radar set was the forerunner of other South African built sets, including one of a different design for use by 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade at Mombasa. It aroused considerable interest in Royal Air Force circles in the Middle East; but when an RAF officer was sent to Mombasa to decide on the siting of a station he was totally unaware that a South African set was already operating. Such was the secrecy

² Notes by Major Neil Garlick

³ South African Radar in World War II, p. 25.

⁴ Ibid.

on both sides that he was not allowed to tell the local commanders why he was there. Communication was therefore somewhat difficult. The Anti-Aircraft Brigade Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Stan Jeffrey, finally told Squadron Leader Atherton that if, by any chance, he was thinking of putting a radar station there, he ought to know that there was already one in operation. The Squadron Leader was astounded. The RAF installed their station two years later, by which time the air threat had probably evaporated.⁵

In the last days of August 1940, the first South African troops began to move forward from training areas to the frontier districts.

Searchlight practices at Mombasa were held regularly, and twice a day Batteries routinely stood to. On 1 September when Major Harry Scholtz and his 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade arrived, it took over four LMG defence posts – at Linkoni Wireless Station, Hotel Triangles in Mombasa, Flora Point and at Linkoni. And on 17 September it took over two more of the LMG defences, at Magadi House and Shimanzi. A new LMG post was established at Palalaiso. The 4th Battery held these posts until 23 October when it re-joined its own Brigade.

Air raids on Mombasa were surprisingly infrequent. An air-raid alarm for one of these raids was sounded on the morning of 20 September when an unknown aircraft was sighted south-west of Kilifi. All gun sections took post but half an hour later the all-clear was sounded. Six days later the searchlight section moved from Port Tudor to a site behind the Palace Hotel in Kilindini Road, Mombasa and from there, on the last day of the month, one searchlight detachment co-operated with the coast defences in a practice shoot. One gunner has written in his memoirs that he and others learned later that ‘...the Italians thought Mombasa was peppered with heavy A.A. guns because from the air the wells that were pumped by having a blindfolded ox walking round and round at the end of a 12 ft pole looked like gun pits in photographs !’⁶

Possible Attack

There were worries about Italian intentions and in a personal and secret cable sent to Mr Sydney Waterson, High Commissioner for South Africa in London, by the CGS, Lieutenant General Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, the latter stated that there had been unofficial talks with senior UDF officers who had indicated that intelligence reports indicated the Italians were concentrating in Italian Somaliland and were a serious threat to Mombasa. South African Troops, he said, had nothing to hold off an attack which would be done by tanks and armoured vehicles. If Mombasa falls, he continued, it would have disastrous effect on all Southern Africa and endanger all communications. He asked if 42 Anti-Tank guns 2-pdr complete with spares and associated stores for seven Batteries, with 80 000 rounds of ammunition and 500 Anti-Tank rifles be sent at once ‘the Union Forces are confident such a possible attack will be defeated’. He ended: Strongly suggest you should bring this matter at once before the Prime Minister. ‘Immediate action should be taken otherwise it will be too late.’⁷

It was a worry. The Italian strength was over 291 000, and increasing daily (when operations began they had a numerical superiority of ten to one), with 39 light tanks and 126 armoured cars and over 800 guns, including Anti-Aircraft guns. The Duke of Aosta, Commander-in-Chief of Italian forces in East Africa, also had ample stocks of rations and supplies of petrol, oil and lubricants, but much of his transport was worn out after five years of use.⁸

There is no record of a reply and one is left to wonder whether the CGS was aware of the real picture of events in East Africa and whether he knew the South African troops had already moved to forward positions.

⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶ Story written by former Gunner Ron Myburgh, accompanied by letter dated 9,9,2008

⁷ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 10, file 3/9 Vol. 1, enc. 21.

⁸ The East African and Abyssinian Campaigns, pp. 18, 19.

Mombasa was thinly protected – with only 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade and its eight 3-inch 20 cwt guns, and a number of twin Lewis guns which had a limited range.

Range Practice

In October all ranks attended range practice with rifle and LMGs, but the month was relatively uneventful until the 24 day, when the approach of two enemy aircraft was reported by Malindi. The aircraft did not reach Mombasa and, from a height of 15 000 feet, dropped fifteen bombs at Malindi instead, twelve of which fell into the sea. The remainder caused very slight damage to the airfield. Again, on the afternoon of 28 October three hostile long-range bombers approached Mombasa from the sea at a height of 20 000 feet but withdrew northwards without pressing an attack. Fighters sent up to intercept them failed to contact. The Anti-Aircraft Batteries had practised gun drill diligently during the months of operational inactivity and in the afternoon of 28 October live shell 'station practice' at targets seawards was fired by the 3-inch guns. One suspects that this was undertaken to 'let off steam' after the frustration of seeing the enemy overhead.

December was another uneventful month of routine and training, with not even an alarm to relieve the monotony. Sickness continued to be a drain on the strength of the Brigade, with between 50 and 70 in hospital throughout the month. The actual strength of the Brigade (four Batteries – including 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery, and a searchlight section) was 56 officers and 882 other ranks against an establishment of 65 officers and 1576 other ranks. Based on the establishment of four Batteries the Brigade was understrength at this stage by nine officers and 694 other ranks; and even on the three Battery establishment, 419 other ranks were required to bring it up to full strength, despite the arrival in September of a draft of 62 men. The situation was further relieved when the second draft of 114 arrived during December 1940.



Figure 14: Mombasa - A detachment of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery loading their 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft gun

Advance Headquarters

On 13 December Major General George Brink opened his advance headquarters at Marsabit and thereafter reconnoitred a possible line of advance into Abyssinia. Three days later 1st SA Infantry Brigade went into action at El Wak. The East African campaign that would be fought by the 1st SA Division over the next few months, had begun.

The 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade was still protecting the vital port of Mombasa but on 9 January 1941 a warning order instructed 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery to stand by for a move. Two days after receipt of the order a small party from the Battery left for Nairobi to take over a number of vehicles. On the day that followed Battery headquarters and three sections left Mombasa by rail for Nairobi and Nakuru. All posts previously manned by 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade at Nakuru and Nanyuki were taken over by 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery, which was subsequently reinforced by a section supplied by 3rd AA Battery. On 9 February orders for the augmented Battery to take more advanced positions were received. Battery headquarters and No. 2 Section moved to the airfield at Garissa where 12 SAAF Bomber Squadron was situated; No. 1 Section went to the airfield at Hussein with 11 Bomber Squadron; No. 3 Section was posted at Kolbio and No. 4 Section was attached to 12th African Division at Aligabi.

No. 4 Section had in fact been attached from 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery and had since been manning their Lewis guns at Archer's Post. It moved on 10 February from Ali Gabi to Belles Gugani and then to Afmadu, where, on 10 February, the section had the distinction of being the first section to actually fire on an enemy aircraft. The Italians came in at about 4 000 feet in the small hours of the morning and dropped sticks of bombs on the airfield, without doing any material damage. A ground mist obscured the vision of the gunners, but the bombers were in any case out of range of the twin-Lewis guns. But two hours later a multi-engine bomber, a Savoia 79, ventured down to an altitude of 700 feet and was met with the concentrated fire of five twin-Lewis guns. Direct hits were seen to be scored on the plane which, having jettisoned its bomb load, flew off in a hurry, but was nevertheless brought down and credited to 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery – the first 'kill' made by the Battery. Next day three of the twin-Lewis LMGs were moved forward to Gobwen airfield near Kismayu.

1st Anti-Aircraft Battery moves

Meanwhile, at Mombasa, preparations were underway for the movement of two sections of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery. They embarked on HMT *Dumra* and the ship sailed on 15 February, anchored the next night at Lamu, and arrived at Kismayu on 19 February. A few days later new gun positions for 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery were reconnoitred by Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey, who was appointed to command the fixed defences of Kismayu and Mogadishu. The take-over of former Italian coast defence guns became part of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade's responsibility, salvage parties from 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery began sorting out and servicing this equipment. By 26 February one gun on the island at Kismayu was in service and being manned by a detachment of former coastal gunners serving in the Battery.

Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey, luckily with experience gained in the pre-war Coast Artillery Brigade, was appointed to command the fixed defences of Kismayu and Mogadishu. He left for the latter harbour the same day to conduct a survey of the Anti-Aircraft and coast defences there. His unit - the light Anti-Aircraft component of 1st South African Division (V) as envisaged in proposals made in 1939 - was being scattered far and wide. It made administration difficult.

At Mombasa the headquarters of 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery and two sections were warned to be ready to move by road to Kismayu. The convoy left on 27 February 1941, and it was followed by Brigade headquarters on 2 March. On arrival in Somaliland 1, 2, 3 and 4 Sections were deployed for the protection of the harbour at Merca, the satellite airfield at Gobwen, the harbour at Kismayu and the landing ground at Vittoria d'Africa. An officer and 27 men of 3 Anti-Aircraft Battery were organised as No. 5 Section to take charge of Anti-Aircraft equipment captured on Kismayu Island and to make it serviceable, so as to create a four gun mobile Anti-Aircraft section. This section fell under 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery for administration and discipline. Lieutenant Rees of 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery was detached to act as Battery Commander, Coast Defence Battery, Kismayu Island. He had under his command a detachment from 1 Anti-Aircraft Battery. Lieutenant Upton and some men from the Searchlight Battery were shipped to British Somaliland with twin-Lewis guns but saw no action.

The remainder of 3 Anti-Aircraft Battery – one officer and 27 other ranks - thus remained at Kismayu with 1 Anti-Aircraft Battery, while the Battery Headquarters and a section of 3 Anti-Aircraft Battery were stationed at Merca, and sections of 2 Anti-Aircraft Battery at Mogadishu. The Searchlight Battery had remained at Mombasa but in early March was warned to be ready to move to the Middle East. The move did not take place for another month.

On 11 March No. 2 Section, 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to Daghabur and was attached to the SAAF's 41 Army Co-operation Squadron. The section provided nine twin Lewis LMGs for the defence of the airfield. No sooner had the section arrived than three Savoia bombers flew over but dropped their bombs about two miles away. The aircraft were in any event, well out of range. But later that day two CR 42 Fiats came down to 2 000 feet to machine-gun the airfield. The twin-Lewis guns opened fire and registered hits. Both aircraft were subsequently shot down by fighters. The section was moved to Giggaga airfield and on several occasions enemy aircraft provided activity for the Air Force but were never within range of the guns. On 23 March, however, four Fiats came down to 600 feet to machine gun aircraft on the ground. The MGs opened with such accurate fire that the Italian 'planes made off. One appeared to be badly damaged and an unconfirmed report stated that it had crashed in the mountains. Three days later the section received orders to return to Mogadishu, together with No. 4 Section which had been stationed at Gorrarei since mid-March.

Meanwhile two sections of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery moved from Mombasa by sea with Brigadier Buchanan's 2nd SA Infantry Brigade to Berbera, arriving there on 22 March. The derricks of the ship were not powerful enough to off-load the 3-inch Anti-Aircraft guns and tractors and, on 27 March gun detachments re-embarked and the ship sailed to Aden. The heavy equipment was transhipped to another vessel with heavier derricks and it sailed to Berbera where the guns and tractors were landed. From 2nd Battery, F Troop under Lieutenant Moseley was possibly the most advance unit. On being withdrawn they returned with a white goat which the unit took with it to Libya.

By the end of March the curtain was beginning to ring down on 1st SA Division's activities in East Africa and units of the Division began moving off to the Middle East, the first overland convoy leaving on 5 April. At midnight on 6 April command of 1st SA Division area passed to 12th African Division and under command of the latter there were a number of South African units, including a section of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery at Yavillo. The 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery under Major Harry Scholtz which had been in southern Abyssinia was at Nanyuki and had a section of 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery attached. In view of the impending move of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade to the Middle East, Major Len Klootwyk assumed duty as Commander, Coast Defences, thus relieving Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey of this additional responsibility.

But there was a problem with the shipment of the two sections of 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft guns that had accompanied the Brigade. They had been loaded from quayside cranes but the condition of the jetty and the fact that the ship's derricks were not strong enough to unload them, prohibited unloading. So the gunner personnel of 2nd and 4th Sections re-embarked and the ship sailed to Aden. They arrived at Aden on 5 April and the personnel were quartered in the 'Royal Artillery Singapore' lines. Their equipment, when landing was completed on 8 April, was placed in the care of the 15th Hong Kong and Singapore Battery. The next day an advance party of the two sections took over the equipment of the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery that was apparently aboard the *ss Amin* – three 3-inch 20 cwt guns on naval mountings and a section of 40 mm Bofors. The ship sailed for Berbera the next day. Eight other ranks were left at Aden to guard the Battery equipment, the remainder of 2nd and 4th Sections sailing for Berbera on the *SS Ayamonte*. They arrived the next day, finalised the take-over of the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery equipment and were able to greet men from No. 5 Section who were guarding 664 Italian POWs.

Meanwhile at Kismayu a decision to load three 3-ton and six 1-ton lorries as deck cargo aboard the *SS Tayari* was abandoned and the lighter *Sigi*, which had a 10-ton crane was brought alongside and the vehicles were then transhipped to the larger *Tayari*, which sailed for Mombasa on 8 April.

1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade Prepares to Move

In preparation for the move to Egypt with other 1st Division units, Brigade headquarters, 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade and 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery, on 1 April at Mogadishu, prepared to leave for Kismayu. They arrived two days later to join 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery, less 2nd and 4th Anti-Aircraft Sections.

Loading of approximately 14 000 rounds of Italian ammunition and 6 000 rounds for the 3-inch guns progressed slowly because of the rise and fall of the tide. The ebb tide necessitated the use of a winch. Loading of ammunition continued day and night until 1.00pm on 15 April. The 3-inch guns of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery were brought to the jetty with tractors and skidding and all guns were loaded by 9.00pm. Loading parties were changed every four hours and as soon as a lighter was loaded it was moved out to the ship in the roadstead, a mile distant from the jetty. Loading continued the next day with the workshop vehicles loaded with stores, two cars, one 3-ton generator lorry, the LAD vehicle, a water tanker and two 1-ton trucks as well as two tractors that had been in the workshop, all loaded onto lighters.⁹

At 6.00 pm on 16 April an advance party moved out to the *SS Dumra* to supervise the handling of rations, predictors and height finders. Loading went on through the night until departure on 19 April. At 8.30 am that day Brigade Headquarters, No. 1 and 3 Sections of 1st Battery, the complete 2nd and 3rd Batteries left Kismayu for Mombasa, where the Searchlight Battery had been preparing their equipment and stores for departure.

Meanwhile, having taken over the accommodation of the Hong Kong and Singapore Battery on 13 April, normal routine was being observed by 2nd and 4th Sections of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery. No. 2 Section took over the 3-inch guns and No. 4 the Bofors positions. HMT *Nieuw Zeeland* arrived at Mombasa at 10.00 am and tied up alongside the *Dumra*. All personnel moved over to the incoming vessel and were allotted sleeping quarters. At 11.00 am the weary task of transshipping equipment, guns and stores began.¹⁰

At Berbera, movement orders were given to Nos. 2 and 4 Sections to move with their guns and those of the Honk Kong and Singapore Battery. They sailed from Berbera in the evening of 20 April for Aden, arriving there the next day and began transshipping guns and equipment to the *SS Gararagan*. Work was complete by 8.00 pm. The guns previously left at Aden were already on board. The personnel of the two sections embarked on the *SS Varsoba* in the morning of 23 April and the ship sailed for Suez in the early afternoon. No docking facilities were available when the ship arrived five days later and it remained in the roadstead until the following day. Officers and men disembarked and were transported to *Beni Yusef* camp, approximately 15 miles from Cairo, arriving there at midnight on 29 April. The next day the sections began re-equipping and this continued for the next few days.

HMT *Nieuw Zeeland* left Mombasa on 21 April in convoy with HMS *Ceres*, HMT *Dunera*, HMT *Johan de Witt* and the ships *City of Athens* and *Landaff Castle*. The officers and men of the Anti-Aircraft Brigade enjoyed very good accommodation - most of the Brigade were accommodated in cabins; and the meals supplied were described as excellent. The convoy arrived at Port Said at 8.30 on 1 May, entered the Suez Canal at daybreak the next day and by 3.00 pm the *Nieuw Zeeland* was alongside at Suez. A train was brought to the quay and it departed for Amariya. They arrived at Amariya at 3.00 am and everyone was grateful to the Australians to be provided with hot food and later, with transport to take them to their camp site. They slept in the open until morning when tents arrived and they could set up camp.¹¹

An unloading party was left behind. Gunner F.W. Baum unfortunately died of malaria in the early hours of 3 May and was buried later that morning. Guns, vehicles and equipment were unloaded into lighters and moved further down the harbour to a military jetty. As vehicles came off the ship they were loaded with stores but Predictors and Height finders with other essential equipment of 1st Anti-

⁹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box 374, file ME 65.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Aircraft Battery were loaded on special vehicles. Unloading was complete by 6.30 pm on the fourth day after arrival. The first convoys left Suez on 9 May but were held up en route by air raid damage. By 12 May all vehicles and stores were at Amariya and had been distributed to Batteries and sections. In all the loading, unloading and transhipment only two bearing dials were found badly damaged – a tribute to the care that had been taken by the men of the Brigade. They were fortunately replaced by the Ordnance Depot. All the Italian guns captured at Kismayu were handed to the same depot.¹²

Motto

Inscribed on the pedestals of their 3-inch 20 cwt guns were the words:

Quod Surgit Cadero Debet

(What rises must fall)

For his service in East Africa, Lieutenant Colonel Stan Jeffrey was awarded the Order of the British Empire (Military Division) on 30 December 1941.

¹² Ibid.

CHAPTER TEN

2nd ANTI-AIRCRAFT BRIGADE: EAST AFRICA

2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade

The 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, South African Artillery with 4th, 5th and 6th Anti-Aircraft Batteries, South African Artillery, was also established with effect from 1 February 1940, the same date as 1st AA Brigade - but as a part-time light Anti-Aircraft Brigade of the Active Citizen Force. Both units were included in the Government Notice of 12 April 1940.¹ It was not immediately mobilised but preparations for mobilisation on a full-time basis began with initial authority given for a nucleus RHQ and 5th and 6th Batteries to be formed. A warning order instructing that arrangements be made for the call up on full-time service of part-time personnel recruited until then was issued on 24 May 1940. Recruiting for the second Brigade began almost immediately. There was a rush of recruits with young – and not so young – wishing to join up. The Brigade ‘...drew recruits like a magnet draws iron filings...’ stated H.S. McKenzie, SC, in an article written in December 1996.² They wanted to be where the action was’, he said, ‘as it was generally accepted that this unit would leave on active service as soon as it became physically possible.’³

The second-in-command of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade, Major D.C. (Daantjie) Kruger, was transferred to the Brigade and appointed commanding officer. The newly appointed commanding officer was told that his 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery was to be formed from ‘D’ Battery - the Cape Town Battery of Cape Field Artillery (Prince Alfred’s Own), which was an ACF Battery under Captain W.H. (Bill) Morris, undergoing non-continuous training on a normal part-time basis.

The 4th Battery was composed of university students, also undergoing normal ACF training, but when mobilisation threatened and, after hasty and urgent representations were made to the Minister of Defence, the notice of mobilisation was withdrawn. Thereafter an instruction was issued that students were not to be called up for any unit, until they had completed their studies. The 5th Battery was formed from excess Cape Field Artillery personnel of ‘D’ Battery, and its overflow of recruits, and with a number coming from those volunteers of Cape Garrison Artillery who did not wish to remain in the coast Batteries. Newly recruited volunteers were also taken on strength of 5th Battery.

Lieutenant Louis Wolf who was commissioned on 1 March 1939 was posted as adjutant to 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade after the previous officer in this post – Lieutenant Alex de Kock - had been killed in a motor accident.⁴ Louis Wolf had originally been posted to 1st Heavy Battery, Table Bay, with others of his cadet course, thence to 2nd Heavy Battery, Simon’s Town, on 1 July 1939. All other coastal officers were at the time attending an Anti-Aircraft course at Brooklyn. He was sent to Walvis Bay early in September 1939 with the 60-pdr medium Artillery guns emplaced there in a coast defence role. Before June he was transferred back to Cape Town to 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade. Major N.G. (Nick) Wessels and Major W.H. (Bill) Morris, the latter of Cape Field Artillery, were Battery Commanders of 5th and 6th Batteries respectively.

Advance party

An advance party was nominated and warned on 3 June to be ready to depart for Potchefstroom. The party - twenty-one members of Cape Field Artillery (Prince Alfred’s Own) - duly left for Potchefstroom

¹ G.N. No. 569, 12.4.1940

² *Military History Journal*, Vol 10, No. 4, December 1996, p. 152.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Notes made by Colonel N.N.D. Orpen, in file Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, held by Author.

on the daily mail train on 6 June. Their continuous training camp in the heat of summer had not prepared them for the winter cold of 'Potch'. Clad in ACF uniform of bush jacket and shorts, with pith helmet, boots, anklets and puttees, with neither greatcoat, pullover or jersey, they arrived at a deserted Potchefstroom station at 3.00am. Eventually collected by a duty NCO and transported to the camp, they were dumped, after a freezing 15 minute ride, on a stretch of bare veld between the lines of two Field Artillery units. At 06h00, shivering with cold, they were given hot coffee by a friendly cook who had noticed their plight. Completely unaware that they were now Anti-Aircraft gunners, they were put to work pitching tents and generally organising a camp site. The men were shattered to be told a day or two before the arrival of the main body of the Brigade on 19 June that they had been re-mustered as Anti-Aircraft gunners, as the embryo of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade. The Battery was, at the insistence of its members initially and unofficially known as 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery (Cape Field Artillery). Denis Oakley had tried to join the RNVR but did not succeed and instead joined the Active Citizen Force Battery of Cape Field Artillery (Prince Alfred's Own. He had turned nineteen years of age in February, been issued with CFA red and yellow helmet flahes and in his words '....had mucked about with Artillery instruments - directors and rangefinders – on some evenings and Saturday afternoons, and didn't learn very much'. He was one of those totally surprised when mobilised to discover that his Field Artillery Battery had unexpectedly been converted to an Anti-Aircraft Brigade

Ninety per cent of the Brigade was drawn from Cape Town.

What a tally!

This was the headline to *Tavern of the Seas*, the daily column written by Henry Hope in *The Argus* of 23 September 1970. He was recording the first team rugby match in June 1940, when the Villagers team lost to Stellenbosch by 72 points to nil - the worst battering in Villagers history. But, what a wonderful excuse the team had! 'Almost to a man, the first team had enlisted a few days previously, and, the outfit they joined was soon nicknamed the Sportsman's Regiment.'⁵

The roll call of names was headed was headed by '...the greatest Villagers Captain and, perhaps the greatest Springbok rugby Captain of all time.'⁶ Henry Hope was writing to advertise the first reunion of members of the 'Second Ack Ack Regiment', into which the Villagers Rugby Club's first team had enlisted, as did other well-known sportsmen. The list of sporting greats was impressive and he mentioned the names of Benny Osler; Dendy Lawton; John Apsey; Geoff Gray; Frank Mellish; Dick Came; Tony Dumas; Geoff and Freddy Rowlands; Boon Wallace, later Preident of the SA Cricket Council; Charlie Savage and 'Olly' Olsen – both top boxers; hockey stars like Geoff Reid, Tommy Blomkamp; Les Manning; Cyril Whiting and Ken Nattle. Eric Emke and Clive Luyt were included. Names not mentioned were: Peter Jaffer who played cricket and soccer for Western Province – and was one of the first professional soccer players in England (thought to be for Liverpool); and Frank Tindale and Cecil Tyler who both plyed cricket for the Cape Town Cricket Club.

Apart from Sportsmen, there were others whose names later became well known - Martin Theron and Harold Berman (Judges of the Supreme Court); Dave McKenzie (Dean of the Medical Faculty at UCT); Neil Orpen, the military historian; Ken Taylor, the horse racing commentator; the Rev. Jerry McMorrow, chaplain to Owen Cardinal McCann; Harry de Stadler, Mayor of Fish Hoek, and Sakkie Katzenellbogen and Gordon Wilson, both also town mayors. Others joined the Regiment later: Mike Stott, Springbok angler; Ronnie Jackson (shooting) and 'Cocky' Hammond (badminton). There were many others, and men too numerous to mention in professional and business circles. So well represented were all sports that the Regimental rugby team was never beaten and the boxing squad won a tournament in Asmara against the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders by 12½ bouts to 1½.⁷

⁵ The Argus, 23.9.1970.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ 60 YEARS ON – a pamphlet by Herb McKenzie advertising a luncheon on 21 June.

A 'Sportsman's' Regiment', indeed.

The Brigade was mobilised and, led by Major Kruger (promoted to Lieutenant Colonel from 27 June 1940)⁸ and Captain (T/Major) Graham Dunbar Moodie, two Batteries marched out of the Castle on 17 June 1940, moving to the Castle street entrance to the railway station. They sweated in their newly issued greatcoats. They *had* to wear them - it was the only way to carry them. They wore every thing else that had been issued to them. It was not a smart parade. The majority had received no military training; they did not have complete uniforms and such as they had were ill-fitting and obsolete. The men entrained for Potchefstroom and arrived there two days later in freezing weather. It was so cold that Benny Osler, one of the few eager young men who needed dentures, woke one morning '...to find his snappers frozen solid in the mug of water beside his camp bed.'⁹ 'Potch' - as it is most often referred to - (and Zonderwater for the 4th Battery) would be remembered for rifle and marching drill, Army 'bull' in general, and cold showers, long meal queues, ten to a bell tent, week-end leave to Johannesburg, German measles, influenza, cookhouse fatigue, weekly inspections and the many other irritating things that happen in a military camp.¹⁰



Figure 15: 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade marching out of the Castle

At 'Potch' fifty members of the two Batteries received some training with Lewis Guns (they had an effective range of only 2 500 yards), of which only 36 were available. They learned how to cure the 21 'stoppages' for which the Lewis gun was prone. Only the Officer Commanding the Artillery School had any recent knowledge of Anti-Aircraft training. He was quite capable of supervising the training of personnel but needed a trained staff –and there were none. No Permanent Force or Active Citizen Force officer had had any training in Anti-Aircraft gunnery and only eleven officers in 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade could handle such training. They were all members of the Brigade and under orders to leave with their unit.

⁸ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp. 1, Box 12, file O (C.D.) 1/1. Enc. 5.

⁹ The Argus, 23.9.1970

¹⁰ Military History Journal, Vol. 10, No. 4, December 1996.

Training of the Lewis gunners was no doubt based on the information given in the 'Vertaling van SMALL ARMS TRAINING Volume 1, Pamphlet No. 6 – LUGAFWEER 1938', produced by the General Staff, Defence Headquarters. It described on pages 12 onwards at what point of an aircraft a rifleman should aim his rifle in order to bring down an aircraft. Light machine-gun fire against dive bombers and against 'crossing' aeroplanes was also covered. Another, amended issue of the same pamphlet, the original of which had in fact been written in 1937, was dated 16 August 1940. The information varied very little from the earlier, 1938 edition. It was way out of date.

After the loss of the university students undergoing their 'peace training', arrangements had been made for 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery, to continue recruiting from volunteers. A number of 'varsity students did, however, 'join up' after the university authorities agreed to grant credit for a full years work if they passed their mid-year examinations. One such recruit was Ron Myburgh, who was in his third year of an Engineering course to qualify for a B.Sc degree. He tried to join the Air Force but was told there was such a 'shortage of both planes and instructors he would have to wait until at least the end of the year and so should return to U.C.T.'¹¹ 'We were told', he wrote, 'that in view of the damage caused by Germany's dive-bombers in this modern war, Anti-Aircraft was becoming vital.' He learned that recruiting '...for the last Battery of the second A. A. Brigade was being formed for East Africa so about 100 of us from U.C.T., including many R.B.H.S Old Boy's joined the 4th Battery'.¹²

It was to be called up on full-time service on 10 July 1940. Although about 94 recruits assembled at Rosebank, shortage of tentage at Potchefstroom resulted in a temporary delay in the formation of the Battery. Some training was given by Coast Artillery instructors. On 25 July orders were received to hold the entire Brigade ready to move North and to concentrate the 4th Battery (which was 240 under strength) as well. Ron Myburgh and his friends joined up on 29 July and were at Rosebank until 6 August when the Battery, under command of Captain H. Scholtz, entrained for Premier Mine. It was still approximately 250 other ranks under strength.

An additional 100 Lewis guns were issued – giving the Brigade 136 instead of the establishment of 224. On 21 August 1940 two 'Movement Control' officers – one each at Potchefstroom and Sonderwater – reported to the commanding officer, 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade and the Battery Commander, 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery respectively to check their administration records and equipment issue sheets before departure.¹³ Five days later, on 26 August 1940, RHQ and all three Batteries, with a total strength of 36 officers and 855 other ranks - the Batteries armed with their twin Lewis machine guns – and with only six weeks of training, left the concentration areas for Durban to embark for active service in East Africa. The Brigade sailed on the *Llangibby Castle*, hastily converted into a troop carrier, in a convoy which included the well-known passenger ships - *Franconia* and *Empress of Britain*. *Llangibby Castle* had engine trouble and could not keep up with the convoy so the 4-inch gun at the stern became an important piece of hardware. Gunner Ron Myburgh, on duty at the gun during a heavy storm, suffered from violent seasickness, as perhaps others did. They were perhaps pleased to step ashore at Mombasa after arrival on 8 September as a unit of 1st South African Infantry Division (V).

Dress and Flashes

The Union Defence Force had by now adopted, as uniform for bush warfare - the khaki bush-shirt, with khaki drill slacks, canvas anklets and boots. Full webbing was worn in the field – more often than not discarded by gunners, Armour, Engineers, and other technical personnel. The regulation headgear was the light polo-type helmet. All ranks of the 1st SA Infantry Division (V) wore a diamond-shaped shoulder flash, gold in the upper half and green in the lower.

The Division's shoulder flash had been decided very much earlier at Defence Headquarters in Pretoria. Perhaps a few days after the Division was formally established, a member of the Adjutant General's

¹¹ Letter from Ron Myburgh to the author dated 9.9.2008.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp. 1, Box 12.

staff had shown Colonel S.J. Joubert, senior staff officer of the Division, a chart with designs of flashes for every unit in the new Division. The Colonel looked at it and, on the spur of the moment, drew on a piece of paper a square, a circle and a rectangle. He drew a line through each shape and wrote 'gold' in the upper and 'green' in the lower segment of each. But with another thought he turned the square around, the corner of the design pointing down. The shapes were submitted to Brigadier General Brink, approved by him and accepted by Defence Headquarters. They became the flashes of 1st, 2nd and 3rd SA Divisions.¹⁴

East Africa

The Brigade had been established as a 'light' Anti-Aircraft unit – as opposed to 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade whose establishment was that of a 'heavy' Brigade and had left the Union with two Batteries each of 36 Lewis guns and one Battery with only 23 guns. But eight captured 20 mm Breda's had been sent from the Middle East for use by the Brigade. During the campaign captured 12.7 mm Breda's were also put to use. To provide mobility, 3-ton trucks were converted to carry the Breda's. Some of the vehicles also mounted twin Lewis machine-guns, and were designed in part by the Line of Communication Base Workshops to an original drawing produced by Sergeant McLean, an artificer with 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, and with suggestions by officers of the Brigade. Complete drawings were produced by the workshops and from these the Kenya and Uganda Railways and Harbours Workshops converted a large number of vehicles for both Anti-Aircraft Brigades.

4th Battery Detached

The 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery was almost immediately on arrival detached to serve under 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade. One of its sections was posted to a sandbagged position on top of the Rex Hotel with its twin Lewis gun. The detachment slept in a hotel bedroom and dined in the dining room but this idyllic existence lasted only three weeks, before they were moved to a position on the south side of the harbour entrance. There they had to excavate three gun pits in solid coral for a triangle of harbour defence guns. They slept in palm-leaf huts and had their own local cook, so found life quite pleasant. There was a small beach nearby and they were able to borrow a canoe and paddle out over the coral reefs at the harbour entrance.¹⁵ Other sections were not so lucky.

Meanwhile Brigade headquarters, 5th and 6th Anti-Aircraft Batteries proceeded to Kabete, near Nairobi. On 18 September 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery was ordered to move to Nanyuki and it took over the Anti-Aircraft defences there two days later. One section was later detached and moved 70 miles north to Archer's Post to provide Anti-Aircraft protection to 12th Bomber Squadron, SAAF. The balance of the Battery remained at Kabete until 12 October when one section, of two officers and 67 other ranks, with nine twin Lewis guns, was transferred to Garissa on the Tana River, to provide protection for the pontoon bridge over which troops and stores were being moved, and where 12th African Division then had its headquarters. It was there, on the morning of 19 October, that the first section of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade - No. 1 Section of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery – was the first to see action, against three Caproni bombers that attempted to attack the bridge. It was claimed that one had been hit and badly crippled; but it fell easy prey to a SAAF fighter. Intelligence reports credited the SAAF with this aircraft. The Brigade was later deployed at a number of points in a defensive role over an area of about 600 miles (965 km) – making administration extremely difficult. A section of 5th AA Battery was moved to Nakuru to protect the airfield and nine days later one section of 4th AA Battery arrived to join 5th AA Battery at Kabete.

A New Commander

The enormous strain in having to build up the defences of Kenya from virtually nothing, had left its mark on Lieutenant General D.P. Dickinson, DSO, OBE, MC, Inspector-General of East Africa Force, who had arrived at Nairobi on 22 August 1939. Failing health had made his relief imperative. The veil of secrecy over the movements of General Smuts was lifted a little on 29 October when he stepped out of his Lodestar aircraft at Nairobi air station, where a Guard of Honour provided by 2nd Anti-Aircraft

¹⁴ East African and Abyssinian Campaigns, p. 50.

¹⁵ Letter from Ron Myburgh to the author, dated 9.9.2008.

Brigade was drawn up to welcome him. He was followed out of the aircraft by the new General Officer Commanding East Africa Force, Lieutenant General Alan Cunningham. His arrival began a change in better relations between British officers and the South Africans.

The day after General Smuts' arrival the section of 5th Battery at Garissa moved to Nanyuki; two sections of 6th Battery were at the same time to move forward to Habaswein, but heavy rain forced a cancellation. On the same day another section of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery was moved from Kabete to Nairobi to protect the Kenya and Uganda Railways workshops. Another section took over the defence of Nairobi aerodrome. Sections 'B' and 'D' of 6th Battery moved from Nanyuki with a small headquarters' staff on 29 November and arrived at Wajir three days later; on arrival 'B' Section was attached to 24 Gold Coast Brigade and 'D' Section to 1st SA Infantry Brigade.

El Wak

Training and successful exercises over a two-day period were carried out, mostly at night, in the 110 km area between Wajir and Habaswein, in preparation for the attack on El Wak, the first action to be undertaken by South African troops.

For the El Wak action itself, 'B' Section was split into two sub-sections – one went to Dick Force (24 Gold Coast Brigade) and the other to Pinforce (1st SA Brigade), both acted as protection to convoys on forward and return journeys. The Dickforce section under Lieutenant Peters left Arbo on the morning of 14 December and arrived at the landing ground, seven miles south of British El Wak at midnight on 15/16 December. Posts were immediately established for the defence of Brigade headquarters and the vehicle park. Only a few minutes after settling in they came under rifle fire and grenade attack. No casualties were suffered. Two hours later another attack developed but owing to the disposition of own troops the sections could not reply. In both these night attacks the Anti-Aircraft gunners remained extremely composed.

Early next morning a Caproni 133 – 'old C.A. 133 coffins', as described by a young Italian Lieutenant-Observer of the *Regia Aeronautica*¹⁶ - dropped eight bombs close to one of the Anti-Aircraft detachments and also machine-gunned it from a low altitude. The Anti-Aircraft posts opened fire and hits were believed to have been scored, a belief shared by Brigadier C.E.M. Richards, DSO, MC, Commander of 24 Gold Coast Brigade. He was standing in the vicinity of one of the posts and saw several bursts hit the aircraft. The Gold Coast Regiment reported they saw the aircraft come down but owing to the density of the bush, it could not be confirmed. 'D' Section at this time was providing protection to Brigade headquarters.

The villages of British El Wak and Italian El Wak were separated by a line of razed bush known as 'the boundary cut', and the post guarding them were only 2 000 yards apart. The raid on Italian El Wak was entrusted to Major General Godwin-Austen's 12th African Division, and it was led by 1st SA Brigade.¹⁷ The attack went in on 16 December and was unchallenged. By nightfall El Wak had fallen. The SA Air Force had played a major supporting role. The Anti-Aircraft gunners had had little to do but watch and wait, but at 4.30 the next morning a Caproni 133 was heard high above El Wak. The gunners waited as it approached but it was shot down by Major Durant's flight of Hartbeests. The gunners of 'B' Section moved back to Wajir, arriving there on 19 December, having expended 850 rounds in the El Wak action.

The moral effect of the success at El Wak was out of proportion to its value as a military operation.

The other section with Pinforce was also in action on 17 December, firing at a Caproni which dived over the debussing area at El Wak and dropped five bombs about 100 yards away from one of the Anti-Aircraft posts. Two of the posts opened fire and several hits were recorded. The other posts were ordered to withhold their fire due to the proximity of three pursuing SAAF Hartbeest fighters.

¹⁶ A Gathering of Eagles, pp. 103,104.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

This section fired 340 rounds before its return to Wajir on 19 December. Both sections left Wajir and arrived back at Nanyuki on 20 December 1940^{nb}

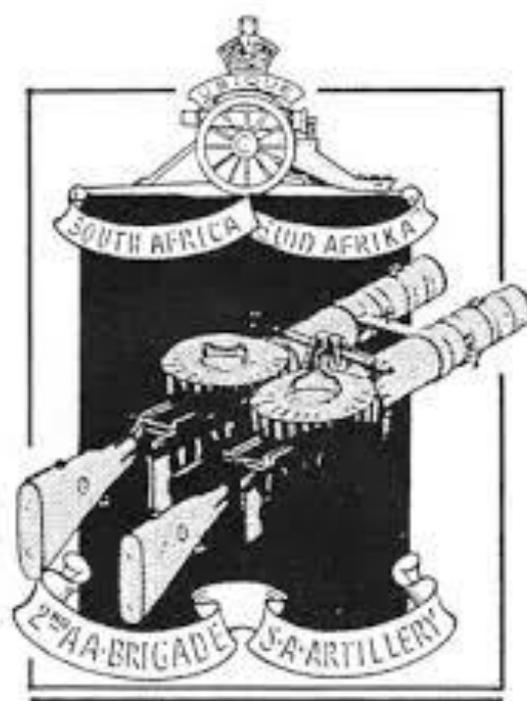
Commanding Officer

Batteries and sections were spread so far apart that large numbers of men had last seen their commanding officer in Mombasa. Word arrived that Lieutenant Colonel Kruger had returned to the Union on 16 December and that Major Nick Wessels was acting as Brigade Commander. He continued to do so until the arrival of T/Major and A/Lieutenant Colonel C.T. (Charles) Howie in January 1941. The new commanding officer, appointed to command from 1 February 1941, had like many others at this time, begun his military career as a part-time soldier in the Coast Artillery Brigade. As a Captain he had been second-in-command of the Brigade. He began his full-time war service on 5 September 1939 and was awarded promotion to T/Major from 1 December 1939 when posted as Battery Commander Lion Battery on Signal Hill, Cape Town, and also Fire Commander, Table Bay defences.

In December 1940, 1st SA Division under the command of Major General George Brink – known to all his troops as ‘Uncle George’ – should have had a light Anti-Aircraft Brigade for its own protection, but it was left with one section, when ‘D’ Section, a little less than a week after arrival at Wajir, was attached to Divisional Troops.

Preparations for Action

There are two rainy seasons in large parts of Kenya and, with the lack of properly constructed roads operations were large determined by the weather. From October to December the ‘Short Rains’ could be expected, while the ‘Long Rains’ fell during March – May in most areas. In the coastal belt the south-east monsoon brought very heavy rain in April and May, but light occasional rain continued up to October, followed by the Short Rains. From December to March comparatively dry weather could be expected – a factor in any planning of operations.¹⁸



*Christmas card of the 2nd AA Brigade, 1940.
(SA Naval Museum, Simon's Town)*

Figure 16: Christmas card of the 2nd AA Brigade

¹⁸ The East African and Abyssinian Campaigns, p. 58, 59.

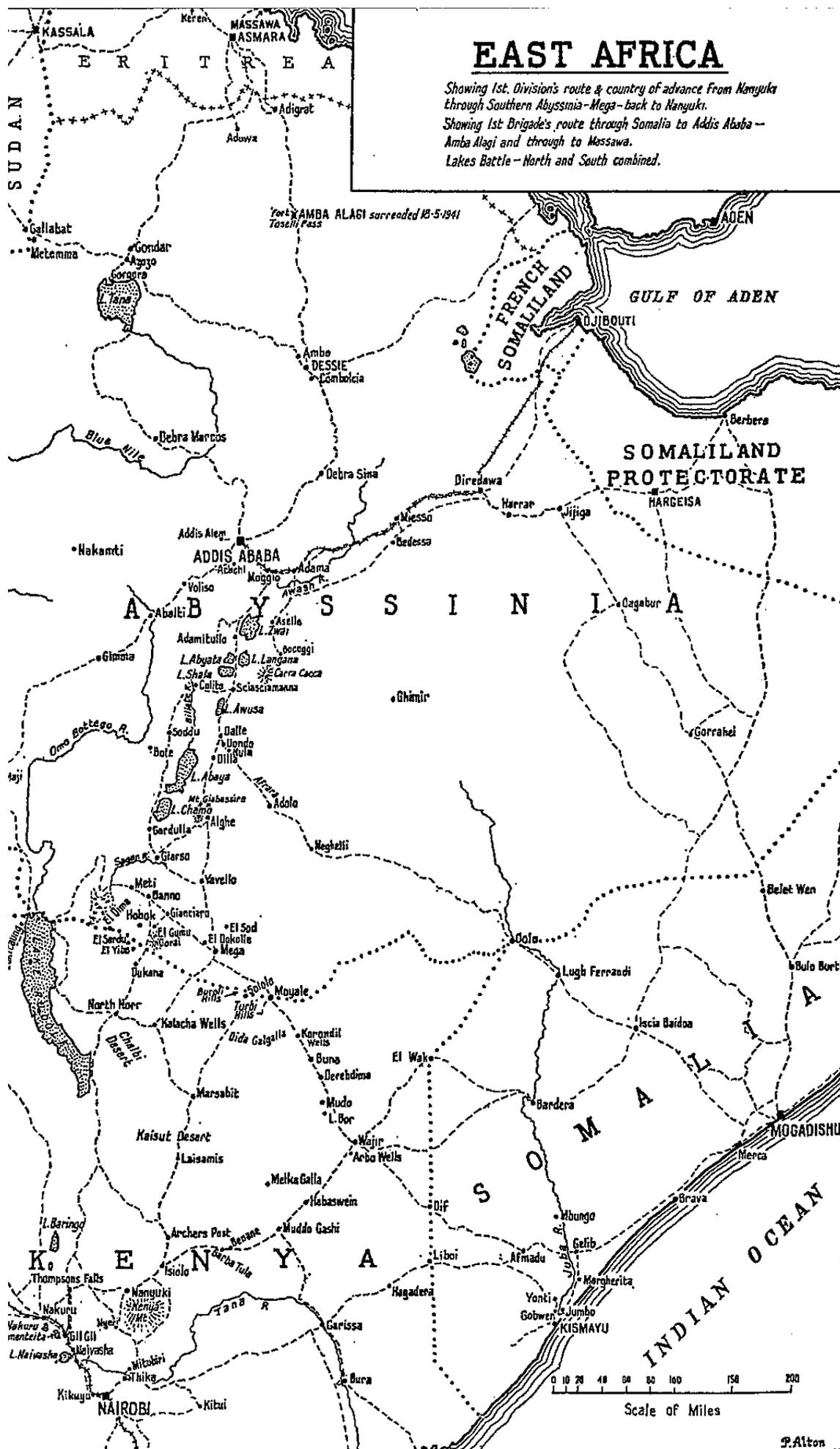


Figure 17: Map of East Africa

Battle-front Training Complete

With battle-front training behind them the men of 1st SA Infantry Brigade moved into front line positions in the Northern Frontier District of Kenya, in readiness for the advance into Abyssinia.

January was a month of movement and redistribution of sections of the Brigade in preparation for the commencement of the campaign against the Italian armies. Beginning on 7 January, Section 1 of 4th Battery departed from Kabete to join 1 SA Division at Marsabit, a huge extinct volcano about 4 miles in diameter where the SA Air Force had established an airfield. There was a huge forest and many wild animals. Hyenas investigated the Anti-Aircraft gun pits during dawn 'stand-to'.¹⁹ A strong defence and supply point was established in the volcano area. South African Engineers in four weeks drilled and developed water supplies, increasing the supply from 5 000 gallons to over 52 000 gallons per day. Marsabit lay on the edge of two deserts; one, the soda-sand desert of the Chalbi, stretching in an unbroken area to the oases of North Horr and Dukana; and the other, the grim lava desert, the *Dida Galofalla* (the Desert of the Night), running 160 km north from Marsabit to the Huri Hills, Gara Torbi and the Moyalo escarpment. It was a harsh stretch of country that separated Kenya from the Southern Abyssinia border. The Chalbi was so hot that one could fry an egg at midday on the purple lava rocks; all else to see were thorn trees and up to 30 'dust devils' at a time, twirling away across the landscape be disappearing.²⁰

'A' and 'C' Sections, 6th Battery left Nanyuki to join 12th African Division at Garissa. The next move was made on 13 January – when the headquarters and Section 2 of 4th Battery left Kabete and Eastleigh aerodrome respectively, to also join 1st SA Division at Marsabit, while Sections 2 and 4 of 5th Battery left the highlights of Nairobi airfield and the railway area behind them, to join 11th African Division at Bura. They were replaced on 14 January by Battery headquarters and 'D' Section of 6th Battery which had moved from Nanyuki. A day later, Section 1 of 5th Battery left Nakuru airfield to join 1st SA Division at Marsabit. On that day Section 3 was transferred from Nanyuki airfield to join 1st SA Infantry Brigade at Wajir; and headquarters and Section of 6th Battery left Nanyuki to take over air defence duties at Nairobi airfield and the railway area, which lay fairly close by.

More moves were made on 17 January – but although it might seem that a staff officer had probably waited for the dust to first settle before another redistribution of tasks, all the moves were made to put sections in readiness for the coming offensive against the Italians. 'B' Section of 6th Battery departed from Archer's Post and travelled to Nairobi as the air defence for Eastleigh airfield. In the apparent confusion of moves, the headquarters of 5th Battery, moved on 18 January from Nairobi to Bura, to join 11th African Division, and two days later the headquarters of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade moved from Kabete to Nanyuki.

And, on 23 January, one sub-section of 4th Battery was transferred from Marsabit to join 'A' Flight, 40 Squadron, SAAF, at Kalin, in the Lokitaung area, northwest of Lake Rudolph, where they were attached to 25th East African Infantry Brigade. The sub-units of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade were now distributed over an arc of 600 miles, with Brigade headquarters situated in the centre, some 200 miles behind.

1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade re-entered the picture when its 2nd AA Battery, with one section of 3rd Battery, took over the air defences in the Nankuru, Nanyuki and Archer's Post areas.

Preparations for Action

January was a month of movement and redistribution of sections of the Brigade. Beginning on 7 January Section 1 of 4th Battery departed from Kabete to join 1st SA Division at Marsabit. 'A' and 'C' Sections, 6th Battery left Nanyuki to join 12th African Division at Garissa. The next move was made on 13 January – the headquarters and Section 2 of 4th Battery left Kabete and Eastleigh aerodrome respectively to also join 1st SA Division at Marsabit, while Sections 2 and 4 of 5th Battery left the highlights of Nairobi airfield and the railway area behind them to join 11th African Division at Bura.

¹⁹ Letter from Ron Myburgh to the author dated 9.9.2008

²⁰ Ibid.

They were replaced on 14 January by Battery headquarters and 'D' Section of 6th Battery which had moved from Nanyuki. A day later, Section 1 of 5th Battery left Nakuru airfield to join 1st SA Division at Marsabit. On that day Section 3 was transferred from Nanyuki airfield to join 1st SA Infantry Brigade at Wajir.

The Offensive begins

General Brink's masterly campaign in the subjugation of Southern Abyssinia with a 640 mile outflanking move from Marsabit by 2nd and 5th SA Infantry Brigade Groups, north through Dukana, crossing the border in the late afternoon of 31 January; moving across the Chalbi Desert in temperatures of up to 50 degrees celcius, thence moving through Hobok to Mega, proved decisive.

That Bomb

One section of 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery was posted close to a makeshift landing strip at Gancharo from which 40 Squadron aircraft carried out reconnaissance over Mega and the surroundings. One gun position was at the end of the runway and one day after a Hawker Hartbees took off one of the bomb-racks broke and a 120 lb bomb dropped to the ground about 30 yards from the gun position. The detachment dropped almost as fast as the bomb. A runner was sent to the Squadron headquarters which sent a truck to collect the offending bomb. The gun detachment was then told it was safe; it had to be dropped from several hundred feet for a small vanned fan to act and unscrew and actuate the detonator.

Mega

Dominating the defences of southern Abyssinia was the fortress of Mega which lay on a high mountain plateau. It was manned by resolute Black-shirt troops and picked Battalions of Colonial Infantry. Before 2nd SA Infantry Brigade troops moved to El Sod *en route* to its move southwards for the attack, 'C' Company of 2nd Field Force Battalion was left in place on the Yavello road, north of Mega to warn of enemy reinforcements and to prevent any withdrawal from Mega. One Platoon under Lieutenant Vernon Kay faced up the road towards Yavello – with sections on either side, a second one astride the road faced towards Mega. A third Platoon was in reserve. At 3.30 am vehicles were heard coming south towards Kay's Platoon. He was awakened as the first of two 10-ton supply vehicles was stopped by a round from the Platoon Anti-Tank rifle, towards which Kay moved. He received a hit in the jaw from return fire and, badly injured was taken to Platoon headquarters.

Lieutenant Brall, commanding the Battalion's Anti-Aircraft Platoon was left to guard the wounded subaltern. Lieutenant Geoffrey Johnson with his section of 4th Anti- Aircraft Battery – the Anti-Aircraft Batteries task had become temporarily redundant – was allowed to form a No. 17 Platoon from all the odd personnel he could gather in 2nd Field Force Battalion, was also instructed to guard the wounded subaltern. He was ordered not to fight, but to leave a man with Kay, withdraw the Platoon and re-join the Brigade. On receiving these unusual instructions he saluted and was heard to mutter that he had no intention of allowing Kay to fall into the hands of the enemy. With that he disposed his men around the tent sheltering the wounded fellow-officer. He posted two men on nearby heights as look-outs and watched the rest of the Brigade move off on their approach march for the attack on Mega.

All hell broke loose at daybreak when the Italians launched a counter-attack, accompanied by light tanks - *carrì veloci* – little 3 ton L3-40s. 'C' Company was badly mauled and in some disarray, was forced to withdraw. Lieutenant Kay, almost forgotten, was placed in an armoured car that withdrew eastwards to El Sod, which 2nd SA Infantry Brigade had reached during the night of 14/15 February. Weak from pain and loss of blood but still conscious, he was given into the care of 12th Field Ambulance main dressing station.

After fighting in temperatures of up to 110 degrees F (about 43 degrees celcius) the attack on Mega came as a shock to South African troops. Leaving all their kit, including great coats and blankets behind, they moved towards the heights on which the fort at Mega stood. Shortly after noon, the sun disappeared behind black clouds. As the troops were scaling the heights rain fell; temperatures dropped rapidly and, without adequate protection from the cold, the men suffered terribly. A

number from exposure. On the third day, mortars were man-handled up a 3 000 foot precipice and the fortress was subjected to fire. Artillery had been man-handled forward and the enemy's main defences were shelled. With bayonets fixed, 3rd Transvaal Scottish moved forward but at about 5 O'clock - through a rift in the mist - a white flag was seen flying over the fort. Mega had surrendered – it had been taken after a hard fight.

4th Anti-Aircraft Battery

Operations in southern Abyssinia continued until the two South African Brigades were withdrawn. By then the gateway to Southern Abyssinia had been unlocked and General Cunningham wished to concentrate 1st SA Infantry Division in Italian Somaliland. The 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery and one section of 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery which had been operating with 1st SA Infantry Division were placed under command of 12th African Division, commanded by Major General A.R. Godwin Austen, OBE, MC. The Anti-Aircraft gunners had not had any opportunity of action against enemy aircraft but personnel had assisted in mounting patrols and provided men as infantrymen for defence of headquarter areas. Battery Headquarters was at Nanyuki and one section was at Yavello airfield where the hangars and many Italian aircraft had been destroyed. The same sections of 4th Battery were guarding what they termed their old friends of 40 Army Co-operation Squadron. The rains had begun and when the gunners could not get a truck through to the ration point, they cadged from the Air Force- usually obtaining the luxury of fresh vegetables. Two sections of the Battery were at Mega; three sections at Kalam; and one section of 5th Battery was also at Yavello airfield.

From Yavello, 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery provided an escort for five heavy vehicles driven by Cape Corps drivers that were carrying bombs to Neghelli for the Air Force. Despite the road being bad they managed to get through in one day and, after unloading the transport vehicles moved off southwards to Kenya. On the journey back to Yavello, at the crossing of the River Dawa, the gunners came under rifle fire from the surrounding bush. Several bursts from the twin Lewis guns soon stopped that – but one of the two vehicles received an unlucky hit in the radiator. It had to be towed for the last 50 miles back to Yavello. They had been amused at the large number of monkeys at the Dawa River Bridge but they had obviously been replaced by Banda. Further on they saw lion at the roadside and stopped to try and shoot one. This very nearly led to tragedy. When 'Stoops' van Niekerk aimed, he had not noticed Sergeant Minnaar approaching. The bullet whistled past the Sergeants ear – the lions escaped but 'Stoops' didn't.



Figure 18: A mobile twin Lewis Anti-Aircraft machine-gun section of 2 Anti-Aircraft Regiment on stand-by, with John Apsey, Springbok rugby player in the center. The machine gun is mounted on the vehicle. The picture was taken somewhere in East Africa

Northwards

Now attached to 11th Africa Division, portion of 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery moved north with the Northern Rhodesia Regiment, a Battery of Transvaal Horse Artillery and an Armour car Squadron. There were minor actions at Green Hill, Chinchilla, Aghe and, Ciossa and finally Garbasieri. They were now at an altitude of 7 000 ft, in rainy weather, in the mountains, forests and terrible roads. But there they took delivery of their new 'mosquito' trucks, specially built on 1-ton chassis' for their twin Lewis guns – a lot easier and faster than their old 3-tonners. And, here, as Bombardier Ron Myburgh has written: 'Typical of the Army it was decided that as the *Regia Aeronautica* no longer existed in Southern Abyssinia we would now return to Nanyuki to refit.'

Breda-mounted vehicles arrive

The 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade was classed as a 'light' unit; unlike 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade which had been established as a 'heavy' Anti-Aircraft unit and, as such, occupied many static positions in East Africa. When the 2nd Brigade left the Union two Batteries were equipped with 36 twin Lewis machine guns each, and the third Battery had 23 of these weapons. It was, however, issued with eight Italian Breda 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns sent from the Middle East but to provide mobility, 3-ton trucks were converted to carry the Breda's. Some of the vehicles also mounted twin Lewis machine-guns, and were designed in part by the Line of Communication Base Workshops to an original design by Sergeant McLean, an artificer with 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, in conjunction with officers of the Brigade. Complete drawings were produced by the workshops and from these the Kenya and Uganda Railways and Harbours Workshops converted a large number of vehicles for both Anti-Aircraft Brigades.

During the campaign the unit also acquired a number of captured weapons - Italian 20 mm and 12.7 mm Bredas, and, in addition to their twin-Lewis machine guns, was equipped with a number of 'mosquito' trucks, vehicles specially designed and fitted to carry twin Lewis machine-guns as mobile Anti-Aircraft equipment. They fought many actions with this equipment against the Caproni and Savoia bombers and CR 42 Fiat fighters of the Italian Air Force.

Almost in preparation for the advance into Italian Somaliland, vehicles converted to carry 20 mm Breda Anti-Aircraft guns began arriving from the Nairobi railway workshops for the sections of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade. On 1 February 1941, nine converted one-ton vehicles, each mounting a Breda arrived for 'A' Section of 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery; and six days later, Lieutenant Peters left Nairobi with two similarly equipped trucks and was routed to headquarters of 11th African Division. More Breda mounted vehicles were on their way on 10 February, D Section of 6th Battery, left Nairobi with nine such vehicles to also join 11th African Division, which by then had begun the advance into Italian Somaliland and was at Bura, where the Nigerians were waiting to cross the border at Colbio. Some of these vehicles later saw action in the Western Desert.

Out of Touch

So out of touch with reality regarding the situation in East Africa was the South African Chief of the General Staff that he sent a personal cable to Lieutenant General Cunningham on 8 February 1941, which read:

In the absence of AA guns and with dwindling Italian Air Force, it appears to me that personnel of your two Anti-Aircraft Brigades are wasted. If you are receiving 4.5-inch Hows and 18 pounders from Mid-East would it not be better to convert these AA personnel for your Field Artillery Regiments.

It was a rather astounding statement at a time when the Italian Air Force had not yet been finally defeated and Anti-Aircraft units – though unknown to them – were going to be at their busiest. General van Ryneveld went on to state:

When Abyssinia is over and Kenya forces move to Mid-East our organisation can always be re-cast to meet new requirements.²¹

²¹ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 10 files 3/8, enc. 21.

It was obvious that General Cunningham did not agree. He politely ignored the suggestion and almost, but not quite, replied to the message, asking instead for permission to divert the SA Air Force JU52 'mail plane', then at Nairobi to Khartoum to collect and bring back four Breda Anti-Aircraft guns 'urgently required for operations'. There were, he said, only four Bredas presently with the force and he had no other aircraft available to undertake this chore.²²

Advance into Italian Somaliland

Headquarters 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade joined Advance Force headquarters at Garissa on 8 February 1941, and was concerned with maintaining contacts for BRA with the sections of 5th and 6th Batteries until 28 February, after the advance into Italian Somaliland by East African Force began on D1 Day - 11 February 1941. No. 3 Section of 5th Battery was in action in the early morning of 12 February against three Caproni bombers who dropped flares and bombed the tail of a road convoy. One aircraft was hit and was reported to have crashed in the bush a few miles away. That day more converted Breda-mounted trucks arrived with Lieutenant Stephens, RA, attached to 6th Battery, when he reported to 12th African Division with two Breda-mounted vehicles. On 23 February, the day before Jilib fell, nine more converted mobile Anti-Aircraft vehicles passed through Afmadu on their way to Section 2 of 5th Battery, and the next day, Lieutenant Davies, RA, attached to 6th Battery passed through the town with two similar vehicles.

The 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery and Section 1 of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery were still with 1st SA Division on the southern fringes of Abyssinia.

The Juba

The 22nd East African Brigade moved from Garissa and were able to take Afmadu without encountering any opposition. Bullo Erillo was taken by the Gold Coast Brigade on 12 February; and the satellite landing ground near Gobwen was protected by detachments of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery. The Anti-Aircraft gunners also covered the debussing area and the Field Artillery gun positions, both vital areas for the coming attack on Gobwen. The South Africans captured Gobwen two days later. Kismayu was taken on 14 February when 5th King's African Rifles supported by South African armoured cars drove unopposed into the town. The Juba Line, based on the Juba River, was held in strength by the Italians but the attack by 1st SA Infantry Brigade and the Gold Coast Brigade proved to be the most decisive action of the whole campaign by East Africa Force. The enemy had grouped the greater portion of his forces in Italian Somaliland on the Juba Line in the belief that the advance of East Africa Force could be held there. First probing of the Italian defences proved that a frontal attack would be costly. A column, which included Brigadier Pienaar's battle headquarters and a great deal of Artillery, including a section of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery, probed upstream, and found a crossing place near Yonte. A Company of the Transvaal Scottish and a Company of the Royal Natal Carbineers crossed by inflatable boat during the night of 17/18 February against light opposition. The Italians counter-attacked at midnight but the South Africans held their ground and practically decimated the attacking force.

A pontoon bridge was hastily erected and the River Juba was crossed in a successful operation. The 2nd East African Brigade had an easier crossing further north in the forested area at Mbungo. These crossings proved to be the end of Italian resistance, which melted away. Jilib was occupied on 22 February and its fall marked a definite stage in the campaign. General Cunningham realised his Army could reach Harar, a thousand miles (1 600 km) away if he followed up quickly against the demoralised enemy. After a 440 km dash between 6.00 am on 23 February and 5.00 pm on 25 February, the Nigerian Brigade entered Mogadishu. Huge quantities of petrol, weapons and stores were found in the coastal town. There were rations enough to feed 10 000 men for six months.

Spring Blades

The roads, such as they were, were not in good condition and many vehicles barely made Mogadishu. Fifty-seven vehicles were immobilised in the town with broken springs. But among other equipment

²² Ibid.

discovered the 107th Road Motor Transport Company of the SA Indian and Malay Corps found a large supply of spring blades. The discovery of the blades, and the petrol, proved to be treasure chests

Pursuit to the North

After the fall of Jelib a relentless pursuit of the enemy began; a pursuit that for speed and distance has been unequalled in the history of warfare.

With a pause of only three days, thanks to the stocks of petrol discovered at Mogadishu, and the use of Merca as a port, Major General H. de R. Wetherall, DSO, MC, General Officer Commanding, 11th African Division, ordered his troops on 1 March to strike north from Mogadishu. The Italians had completed a 200 mile stretch of 30 foot wide all-weather tarmac-surfaced road – the Strada Imperiale – from Mogadishu to Ferfer, at which point the tarmac ended. And, when the good road ended, the 23rd Nigerian Brigade's pursuit of the enemy continued, across the white sandy Ogaden Desert, a grim, almost featureless country with sparse bush and nomadic tribesmen. It was able to reach Buloberti, the day after departure. The oasis of Belet Uen, 209 miles from Mogadishu, was reached on 3 March. They halted there to let supplies catch up with them. On 6 March No. 4 Section of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery moved with Headquarters, 11th African Division, for Belet Uen and they were joined there the next day by No. 2 Section of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery. The two sections provided Anti-Aircraft protection for the Division's vehicle park.

Lieutenant Louis Wolf, serving with 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery which was operating with the Nigerians, described the few days at Belet Uen as 'a nightmare of heat, sand storms and patrols across appalling country which caused many broken springs.' This was at a time when the column put on a spurt over the worst stretch of 'road', before reaching Jijigga. Nevertheless a small group of vehicles including armoured cars, 5th Field Battery, Natal Field Artillery, a Troop of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery and a Company of Infantry were rushed forward to secure landing grounds and reconnoiter water supplies. They were ordered not to move beyond Sassabanel before 9 March as the main body would not be able to leave Belet Uen before then.

Led by the Nigerian Brigade, the Division headed for Jijigga and the Marda Pass on 13 March; and No. 4 Anti-Aircraft Section moved with the column. There were no mountain barriers (such as the 2nd and 5th SA Infantry Brigades had encountered in the south and which had blocked further quick forward movement from the mountain fortress of Mega), and soon they debouched onto the Jijigga plains. Meanwhile 3 Section of 5th Battery had left Mogadishu with Advance Force Headquarters, which was also headed for Jijigga. They were followed on 19 March by 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade Headquarters.

Lieutenant J.A.S. Hopkins, commanding the advance guard, sent it on, past Sassbanett and it reached Dagabur, south of Jijigga, almost on the tail of the fleeing Italians and 100 miles (160 km) ahead of the rest of the Brigade. Misfortune struck the Anti-Aircraft gunners when one of their 3-tonners carrying petrol caught fire and blew up, causing very serious burns to Gunner I.H. Allister and Gunner Bisset. Both men were put in an ambulance provided by 5th Field Battery, NFA, and they were rushed some 30 miles forward to Dagabur. From there they were flown back to Mogadishu for medical attention. Unfortunately, Gunner Allister died of his injuries on 19 March.

Dagabur

At Dagabur on 12 March, 'B' Detachment's Breda, attached to 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery, was in action against a Savoia 79. Hits were registered and the aircraft jettisoned its bombs and flew away with one engine out of action. Later the same morning another Savoia 79 appeared and the detachment again registered hits, forcing the aircraft to make off without dropping bombs. A day later the Bredas were attacked by two Fiat CR 42s. But they were being pursued by SAAF fighters and the guns could not return fire from the unwelcome visitors. After moving up from the south with their Bredas, 'A' and 'B' Detachments of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade arrived at Jijigga and were deployed at the airfield from which SA Air Force reconnaissance and fighter aircraft, and 11 and 12 Bomber Squadrons were already operating. The airfield came in for attention by Italian aircraft on several occasions – but on each occasion they were beaten off by the Anti-Aircraft gunners.

The 23rd Nigerian Brigade arrived at Jijigga on 18 March and No. 2 Section of 5th Battery provided protection for the Brigade's vehicle park. The section engaged two Savoias on 26 March and later in the morning it fired at four Fiat CR 42s. No. 3 Section was close by and it came into action at Jijigga on 27 March when the Regia Aeronautica returned to Jijigga in force. Six Fiat fighters came in very low out of the morning sun and dived on the airfield in groups of three. In the first attack one JU 52, a Valencia and a Hartbeest were set on fire, and two of the JU 52s damaged in the previous attack were again shot up. All guns of the section opened fire and numerous hits were recorded. Many hits were registered by the Anti-Aircraft gunners. One Fiat CR 42 was shot down by No. 3 Section, 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery, probably with 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery contributing to the success, which earned for Lieutenant Mike Stott a bottle of whisky from a delighted Brigadier Blaker, RA. Two of the Fiats were shot down by Hurricanes that arrived from the satellite landing ground.

The Marda Pass

On 22 March Brigadier Pienaar and his reconnaissance party '...sweeping over the hills and round a wide, descending loop of dusty road, reached the fertile plain of Jijigga, some 5 000 feet above sea level, in time to be given an outline of the situation and to watch the Nigerians put in their attack on the Marda Pass'

1st Nigerian Regiment was to capture the two heights known as Marda's Breasts, and Camel Saddle Hill to the right of the road. The road through the pass ran between Marda's Behind and Telephone Spur. To the left of Telephone Spur was Observation Hill, the Ledge, and Saddle Hill. They were all heavily defended. These positions overlooked the plain across which the attack would have to take place. The Nigerians would be supported by three field Batteries of South African Artillery. Twin Lewis guns of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery were placed on the flanks and rear of the field Batteries to protect them from low-flying aircraft attack.

After intensive shelling of enemy Artillery and machine gun positions during the morning of 21 March, the Nigerians began their attack about midday. By 4.30 pm they were on Marda's Right Breast. Unexpected tough opposition denied them the second objective but, at about 3.00 am a patrol found the pass unoccupied. The enemy had withdrawn from all the heights. The cost to the SA Artillery was five casualties, including two officers killed. The Nigerians had 39 casualties including five killed.

No. 4 Section, 5th Battery, which had arrived during the night of 18 March together with Battery headquarters, was deployed on the slopes of Marda Pass to cover the vehicle park of 2nd Nigerian Regiment.

A section of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery was quickly sited to cover the Nigerian columns that were moving through the pass and, within a half hour of being deployed the section was attacked by two Savoia 79s, flying at 4 000 feet. Once fired at, the aircraft did not press home the attack but dropped their bombs and flew off. Ninety-six rounds were expended by the mobile twin Lewis guns. The next day 'E' Detachment was again attacked, this time by two Savoia's and one Fiat CR 42. Two sticks of bombs were dropped. They were ineffectual; but the Fiat tried to machine-gun the road and was driven off by the Bredas.

Anti-Aircraft Gunners are Busy

Three roads led from the pass to Harar – the second city of Abyssinia – and they joined at the Babile Gap, 30 miles to the west of Marda Pass. The period between 23 and 29 March was a busy one for the Anti-Aircraft gunners. At the Gap, detachments of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery went into action on four occasions against enemy aircraft and drove them off. On 23 March 'C' Detachment Breda, while in bivouac between Marda and Babile Pass, engaged four Fiat CR 42s which attacked the area. The aircraft were persuaded to depart, after 36 rounds had been fired at them. But the next day the Italians were back. No. 4 Section, 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery was in action after two Savoias and one Fiat CR 42 flew in to the attack. Two sticks of bombs were dropped. The posts opened fire but there was no verification of any hits on the enemy aircraft.

By the evening of 25 March, when Nigerian troops had reached a position overlooking the Bidisimo River they were held up by heavy fire from the opposite bank; a heavy Artillery duel took place and the Anti-Aircraft gunners fired at two Savoia 79 aircraft at about 4 000 feet both when coming in to bomb transport on the road to Babile. Hits were scored on the Savoia's as portions of fabric were seen to have been shot off. Three Fiat CR 42s proved a nuisance. They attacked and machine-gunned 'C' Detachment while it was in a bivouac area near the Babile Pass. They were driven off by fire from 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery guns at the top of Babile Pass.²³ Hits were registered on one Fiat. In the two engagements 200 rounds were fired.

The Italian Air Force was showing it still had some teeth, and the following day - 26 March – was a busy one for the Anti-Aircraft gunners, though perhaps not quite as busy as they would be once they reached North Africa.

No. 4 Section of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery was in action against two Savoias but no hits were registered. In the same action 'E' Detachment Breda registered hits and later this detachment was in action against four Fiats CR 42s without any success. No. 2 Section was next in action when two Savoia bombers appeared. The section claimed hits; and it later fired at four Fiat CR 42s which attempted to machine-gun the area. The gunners registered hits on one or other of the aircraft. In an attempted attack on a convoy 'C' Detachment with its Breda engaged three Savoia 79s and three Fiat CR 42s. 228 rounds were fired and one aircraft was believed to have been hit. The Italians must have been desperate as later the same day, between the Marda Pass and Harar, three Fiats attacked a convoy but they were, however, driven off with the expenditure of only 48 rounds. The value of the mobile Anti-Aircraft guns was well illustrated.

Harar Occupied

Harar, declared an open city, was occupied on 25 March when 1st Nigerian Regiment entered the town at 6.00 pm. From Mogadishu to Harar, 11th African Division, under the command of Brigadier G.R. Smallwood, had covered 1 054 miles at an average of 35 miles per day, the last 65 against strong opposition in only three and a half days. They had captured 19 000 Italian troops, bringing the total of killed, wounded or deserters up to an estimated 50 000. They had led the advance until the occupation of Harar.

From here, on 27 March 1941, 1st South African Infantry Brigade Group took over the lead.

Keren falls

On that day, Keren, the key position in Eritrea, fell to 4th and 5th Indian Divisions '... after holding out for fifty-four days in the bitterest and most decisive battle of the East African campaign.'²⁴ Casualties on both sides were high. The Divisions involved at Keren had received magnificent support from 121st, 122nd, 124th and 125th Road Motor Transport Companies, Cape Corps, (later designated A, B, D and E Companies) who literally drove 150 miles a day, two days out of three, loading stores on the third day, seven days a week, to keep the Divisions supplied with everything from rations to ammunition. And when their vehicles broke down they did their own repairs. Lieutenant General W. Platt of Sudan Forces commended them highly.

2nd SA Infantry Brigade

2nd SA Infantry Brigade mobile column under Lieutenant Colonel H.P. van Noorden which left Nanyuki on 15 March with 642 vehicles and 1 600 men, reached Mogadishu on 22 March and was ordered to move up to reinforce 1st SA Infantry Brigade Group. With petrol provided for their almost empty tanks, the force – (Mob col) – moved five days later for Marda Pass and Harar. The 1st SA Brigade Group and 11th African Division were almost at the gates of Addis Ababa; but away to the east the rest of 2nd SA Brigade's Infantry – (Bucforce) sailed from Mombasa on 16 March. Six days later they

²³ A Gathering of Eagles, p. 197.

²⁴ The East African and Abyssinian Campaigns, p. 237.

began the laborious process of discharging equipment onto the badly damaged wharves at Berbera. Brigadier Buchanan soon had patrols out in all directions in British Somaliland.

On to Diredawa

From Harar, the road plunged 4 000 feet down the Hubeta Pass into the Great Rift Valley, in a ten mile defile of twisting road which had been demolished every few miles. In the last serpentine descent the Italians had decided to fight a delaying action, but at daybreak the next morning it was discovered they had gone. Patrols continued down the pass and found some enormous demolitions. At one point the mountainside had been blasted and the road cut. One crater was 70 yards across. An estimate of seven days to repair but it was completed in 36 hours of non-stop work by a combined force of Engineers and infantrymen.

After negotiating the Hubeta Pass and its demolitions, Diredawa - on the railway line from Jibuti to Addis Ababa - was occupied on Saturday 29 March, after an agitated Assistant Governor appealed to the Transvaal Scottish to *please* enter the town before nightfall as his citizens were being menaced by armed deserters. With the fall of Diredawa the last outlet to the sea was blocked. Moving on the two routes to the capital city, the Awash River defences were forced and, meanwhile aircraft of the SAAF and the RAF destroyed thirty Italian aircraft at the Addis Ababa airfield.

All the way back to Mogadishu and to Berbera via the Marda Pass work to improve the lines of communication was proceeding. Although there was little enemy air activity Anti-Aircraft detachments from 5th and 6th Anti-Aircraft Brigades were strung out along the road from Jijigga to Miesso - which the South Africans had reached - on the alert for air attacks. And, as it happened, there were still Italian aircraft flying. Just after midday on 27 March three Fiats approached Jijigga, as three SA Air Force JU 52s carrying personnel from Advanced Force and Air Force headquarters were coming in to land. Their bombing was effective; all three of the JU 52s were so badly holed they were rendered unserviceable. One of the other nine aircraft on the ground was also badly damaged. The Fiats were untouched by fire from the Anti-Aircraft guns.

The Middle East

In North Africa, Italian forces which had moved across the Libyan frontier towards Egypt but were driven back past Benghazi with spectacular success, by Western Desert Force under the command of Lieutenant General R.N. O'Connor, during December 1940 and January 1941.

It was a worrying time for General Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief, Western Desert Force (it became XIII Corps on 1 January 1941 and renamed Eighth Army on 2 September 1941) in North Africa. His Middle East command area now included Greece which was invaded by the Germans because of poor showing by the Italians. Problems in Syria and Iraq were also causing concern. By 2 May the German Army had taken Greece. British troops withdrawn from operations in the Western Desert and sent to assist the Greek Army had been evacuated to Crete, but on 20 May German paratroopers landed on the island, forcing the British to once again evacuate at great loss in men and ships.

Deutsche Afrika Korps,

A decision by the Führer to support the Italians in North Africa led to the creation of the *Deutsche Afrika Korps*, command of which was given to Lieutenant General Erwin Rommel. The newly constituted force landed in Libya in February 1941. The seasoned British troops and equipment transferred to Greece had badly weakened the British forces in North Africa and Rommel's advance, which they were unable to stem, led, according to Rommel - to 'a somewhat precipitated retreat'²⁵ It also led to disaster - with the capture of Generals Neame and O'Connor on 7 April, the latter had shown himself to be one of the most capable generals in the British Army. By 11 April the *Deutsche Afrika Korps* had cut off 35 700 men, including 14 270 men of 9th Australian Division which were bottled up in Tobruk. The next day Rommel's troops were close to the Egyptian frontier.

²⁵ War in the Desert, p. 5.

South African Division in Egypt

Churchill had for some while been impatient to see the South Africans sent from Kenya to North Africa and a plan to move 1st SA Infantry Division to Egypt had been on the cards since February 1941. General Cunningham moved 21st East African Brigade to the Maga-Moyale sector to allow 2nd SA Infantry Brigade to withdraw to Marsabit and 5th SA Infantry Brigade to Wajir, to which Divisional Headquarters was also eventually ordered. By March General Sir Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, was anxious that his forces in North Africa be bolstered by the 1st South African Infantry Division. In early April, he therefore ordered Major General George Brink to move his headquarters to the Middle East so that it could prepare for the arrival of troops. At midnight on 6 April 1941 command of units of 1st SA Division passed to 12th African Division – under whose command there were already a number of South African units, including 1st SA Infantry Brigade Group. On 21 April Major General Brink's headquarters, Divisional troops and 5th SA Infantry Brigade sailed from Mombasa for the Middle East.

5th Anti-Aircraft Battery, was then at Yavello in southern Abyssinia. And, at this time, 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery under Major Harry Scholtz, with a section of 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery attached, was at Nanyuki and had been operating in southern Abyssinia, with some of its sections in the south west of the country. It had not had any opportunity of action against aircraft and was assisting in patrols in an Infantry capacity,

Addis Ababa

Ten miles outside the capital an Italian envoy escorted by motor cycle police, complete with white flag, waited to surrender the city. Major General H.E. de R. Wetherall, DSO, MC, commanding 11th African Division decided that the official entry would be made on 6 April and that a representative force of South Africans, Nigerians and King's African Rifles – men of the three Brigades who had led the way from Mogadishu – would have the honour of liberating the first capital city to be freed from Axis domination. The Italians begged, to no avail, that entry be made earlier. The formal entry took place as arranged. Major General Wetherall's small retinue as he drove into the city to accept surrender included Brigadier Dan Pienaar of 1st SA Infantry Brigade and Brigadier C.C. Fowkes of 22nd East African Brigade (later Major General and GOC 12th African Division).

Combolcia Pass

After the occupation of the capital, Brigadier Pienaar's troops went towards the Omo River area to begin planning for operations against Jimma, but he was recalled and the Brigade was ordered north to Dessie where there was a considerable Italian force. Lieutenant General Platt's British and Indian Divisions were closing in on Amba Alagi from the north and the South Africans were needed to act as the southern arm of the pincer.

Only one minor demolition had held up their advance on the *Strada Vittoria*, which climbed out of the warm valleys and wound up into the mountains and over the Combolcia Pass. On 13 April the Brigade reached the Mussolini Tunnel. They were surprised to find that it was not damaged. But, about 2 km beyond the tunnel, they came across a spectacular demolition, the first of a series. It was another four days before contact with the enemy was established. The battle for Combolcia Pass lasted five days. It was fought in steep, mountainous country at an altitude of 9 000 feet in rain and bitter cold against tougher opposition than the Brigade had met before then. On the Dessie road, 'C' Detachment's Bredas were in action against one Savoia and two Fiats which attacked the column as it wound its way along the winding mountain road, focusing their attention mainly on the easily recognized Column Headquarters and on the Field Artillery. Many troops found shelter in the tunnel. Enemy positions were strong, well sited and in depth. Their Artillery was accurate and persistent and their fire made the road impassable; but they were eventually silenced by the equally dogged, persistent and accurate shooting of South African gunners who won the day, in what was almost a five day gun battle.

On 15 April the Brigade began the descent to the lush tropical bush of the Great Rift Valley before once more climbing into the mountains. Enemy forces in the Dessie area numbered over 10 000 men of which 6 000 were Italian, with 52 guns. The South African infantrymen inched forward, the men almost worn-out in the wet, cold rarified air – until within reach of the enemy, entrenched on the

heights. Men of the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, 1st Royal Natal Carbineers and 1st Transvaal Scottish had won Hill 1 and Hill 2 and now they crept forward through the mist of a cold morning and, by midday Hill 3, the last of the three such objectives, was taken and held, despite a counter-attack with a loss of up to 500 of the enemy killed, against ten South Africans. Combolcia was entered on 26 April without opposition.

The airfield at Combolcia was found to be littered with the wreckage of Italian aircraft - ten Fiats, six Savoias and three Capronis, bringing the total of confirmed enemy air losses in six weeks to thirty-five fighters and fifty-six bombers. The Italians had flown their last four aircraft – two Fiats and two Savoias – from the town, only a matter of hours before it fell to 1st SA Infantry Brigade.²⁶

The Brigade pressed on towards Dessie which was held by some 5 000 troops and 3 000 local Infantry and, while the Infantry deployed ahead, the 60-pdrs began to fire on Dessie from the Combolcia airfield at a range of 10 000 yards. The engagement continued until about 3.00 pm when a car flying a white flag emerged. After a brief discussion with the Brigade Commander the emissary accepted terms of surrender and the first troops entered the town at dusk, in time to prevent wholesale slaughter of the Italian population.

The battle by 1st SA Infantry Brigade for the Combolcia-Dessie area was the last lone battle by the 1st SA Infantry Brigade.

Amba Alagi

They moved, however, to support the British attack on the Duke of Aosta's last stronghold. Towering 10 000 feet, the peak of Amba Alagi – described as an inland Rock of Gibraltar - was the centre of a jumbled mass of mountains, a natural fortress; the Italian Engineers had honey-combed it with caves and the gullies with gun emplacements and machine-gun nests.

Dozens and dozens of Italian vehicles had been abandoned on the road to this vast mountain fortress. Slowly, remorselessly the pincer closed, valley after valley, peak after peak the attack was pressed home – South Africans from the south and the Indian Division from the north. The South Africans, who had fought for months in bush and desert in temperatures rarely below 38 degrees centigrade, climbed into the mountains ten to fifteen thousand feet above sea level, and fought with determination in biting winds, rain and sleet, drawing the noose ever closer. Fifteen days after the Indians began their attack and five days after 1st SA Infantry Brigade had stormed the southern defences the Duke of Aosta, with ever-increasing casualties, sued for an armistice. The final surrender took place on 19 May 1941, when the Italian generals and senior staff officers led a column of about 5 000 dejected troops past an immaculate Guard of Honour found by the Transvaal Scottish. The day after the formal surrender, No. 2 Section of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery was shot up by SA Air Force Fairy Battles. Two gunners were slightly wounded by bomb splinters and it was fortunate that there were no serious injuries.

The Brigades Departs

On 22 May Brigadier Pienaar's rear headquarters and service units began to move from the area of the mountain fortress and by 25 May the last elements of 1st SA Infantry Brigade had left Amba Alagi for Massawa. After a brief rest, the main body of the Brigade sailed for the Middle East on 12 June.

The 5th SA Infantry Brigade had sailed from Mombasa much earlier and had been at Mersa Matruh since 23 May – the day that General Smuts had been promoted to Field Marshall in the British Army. The 2nd South African Infantry Brigade sailed from Berbera on 3 June and reported to Headquarters, 1st SA Infantry Division at Amariya. Brigadier Buchanan handed over command to Brigadier W.H.E. Poole and moved to Helwan to organise a base and training wing for the Middle East.

²⁶ The East African and Abyssinian Campaigns, pp. 270,271.

Remaining Operations

There were still operations to conduct - Amba Alagi was not the finale in East Africa. An Italian force at Gondar still held out and some specialised South African units were still required – units such as No. 1 SA Light Tank Company, 7th Field Brigade, 1st Field Battery (CFA) and 7th Field Battery (THA); and various detachments of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade – the last acting as infantrymen and in Anti-Tank roles. They were attached to 11th African Division which had been directed to take the town of Jimma, south-west of Addis Ababa. The town was eventually occupied on 21 June by 22nd East African Brigade Group, which included 'A' Troop, 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery. Four Generals and eight Brigade Commanders were among the 12 000 Italian and 3 000 local troops captured at Jimma.

The 6th Anti-Aircraft Battery and 'C' Troop of 5th Anti-Aircraft Battery were then with the 23rd Nigerian Brigade which transferred its main thrust onto the Ababa-Lechemti road, and on the morning of 15 June made short work of the Italian rear guard at *Orde Mule*, or 'Massacre Hill'. There were many casualties.

The Anti-Aircraft Gunners Assemble

From 25 April the skies had been clear of enemy aircraft and any Anti-Aircraft gun in action since then had been acting as an Anti-Tank weapon. Owing to pending Regimentation, the Battery Commander of 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery was recalled to Addis Ababa where the Brigade headquarters was situated. He arrived from Neghelli on 2 June, after taking eight days to complete the 300 mile journey. Next day the BRA signalled all sections of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade to assemble at Addis Ababa. This was the first time during the entire campaign that the Brigade headquarters had made contact with more than three sections at one time. The Brigade then had fourteen Breda 20 mm guns and more were expected after the fall of Jimma, the intention being to arm sections with at least two Bredas each.

During the first few days of June 4th Anti-Aircraft Battery was on leave in Kenya. This became possible because of the absence of enemy aircraft in southern Abyssinia. The Battery assembled its sections and left Nanyuki on 16 June in a hurry, but once in Southern Abyssinia were slowed by the weather and the bad condition of the roads in the areas of black 'cotton' soil, as it was called. The Engineers laid 'corduroy' over many of the worst sections – thousands of saplings laid across the track and pegged down at the sides with transverse saplings. But in one day the whole convoy of 75 trucks moved less than half a mile – and that with the aid of a bulldozer! They passed Afrar and Dalle, climbing all the way to an altitude of 9 000 ft and passed the airstrip at Shashanmanna where the Italians had 'erected vertically the wing of one of our Fairy Battle light bombers they had shot down. It was placed at the head of the three graves of the aircrew. Their names were inscribed on the wing.'²⁷ It took ten long days to reach Adama and from there 60 miles by tarred road to Addis Ababa on 3 July. Some days barely five miles were covered on the heavy mud-covered roads but, despite the appalling conditions, only two out of seventy-five vehicles were lost *en route*. Despite the rush to move the Battery it remained at Addis Ababa for two months where they enjoyed living in barracks with electric light and running, hot water.

5th Anti-Aircraft Battery during June had one Troop at Addis Ababa landing ground as Anti-Aircraft defence and the other two Troops were with 22nd East African and 23rd Nigerian Brigades respectively, and in both Troops - because there were no longer any enemy aircraft to worry about, the 20 mm Bredas were used as Anti-Tank guns. The Troops had made many moves, often in heavy rain. 'A' Troop was present at the capture of Jimma and was shelled on a number of occasions. Six Bredas captured at Jimma were handed to them.

6th Anti-Aircraft Brigade also co-operated with the 22nd and 23rd Nigerian Brigades in an Anti-Tank role. One Troop underwent heavy shelling at Abalti and the other – 'C' Troop - with the Nigerian Brigade operating in the Lechempiti area was also subject to shelling by the enemy while it was acting

²⁷ Notes provided by Major N. Garlick.

as Infantry on the banks of the Omo River. Roads in the area were much better and movement less difficult.

It was not until late in June 1941 that 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade as a full unit re-assembled in Addis Ababa. Most of the sub-units reached Addis Ababa via Italian Somaliland, the Ogaden and Harrar, but the 4th Battery and one section of the 6th had advanced along almost impassable roads from the south via Neghelli and the Lakes area. Before their arrival at the capital, sections had seen action at many places: at Archers Post, Nanyuki, Kabete, El Wak, Garissa and Wajir; they covered the capture of Kismayu and the crossing of the Juba River, the move north through Italian Somaliland; saw action at Garsi Gerbi, Dagabur, Marda Pass, Babile Pass, Jiggiga, Dessie Road, and Amba Alagi. There were late involvements at Jimma, the Omo crossing, Abalti and Lechempiti and elsewhere.

The Anti-Aircraft gunners left the capital by road on 22 and 23 July for Asmara, which was at an altitude of 6 000 ft. The heat and humidity at the port of Massawa was exceptional and troops were always driven down from Asmara to the port in the evening to immediately embark and sail. Thus the main body of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade embarked on the 6 000 ton SS *Cairo City* at Massawa in late August and after five days on the over-crowded vessel, everyone perspiring perpetually, enduring salt water showers and poor food, this slow vessel eventually arrived at Port Tewfik, Egypt, on 2 September 1941 – all except one Anti-Aircraft Battery – the 7th – it remained behind.

Field Gunners Depart

South African field gunners were in action until 23 June but by 20 July all South African Artillery units in East Africa Force were concentrated at Addis Ababa, before departure for the Middle East.

7th Anti-Aircraft Battery

The newly created 7th Anti-Aircraft Battery, under the command of Captain L.G.F. (Louis) Wolf, was formed at a late stage during the campaign in East Africa and placed under East Africa Command. There was little in the way of action but after helping to convoy 1st Medium Brigade - which had handed over its 60-pounders to 51st Gold Coast Light Brigade - to Massawa, it established its own headquarters halfway between Dessie and Amba Alagi where it was soon joined by four SA Air Force Squadrons, all of 2 Wing: No. 3 Squadron with its Hurricanes and Gladiators; No. 4 Army Co-operation Squadron; No. 15 with Fairy Battles and No. 16 with its JU 86s. The Anti-Aircraft Battery virtually took command of the Alomata area.

At the beginning of October a composite Troop of Bredas and twin-Lewis guns under Lieutenant Potts left for Wolchehit and there, to their surprise, found that Colonel Conelle, with almost three thousand troops, had surrendered to 25th East African Brigade on 27 September. Shortly afterwards, *en route* back to their base at Alomata, via Dabat, the Anti-Aircraft gunners were almost dumbfounded when they had to come into action against one of the last two aircraft in Abyssinia – a CR 42 and a CR 32 – that were still flying. With a fairly substantial hole in it the biplane got away, only to later to be shot down on 24 October by the SA Air Force. The second aircraft, after strafing columns on the road to Gondar on 26 November, returned to its base where it was destroyed by the Italians.

On 11 November the Battery left Massawa to re-join its Brigade – by then converted to a Regiment - in the Middle East; and on arrival it was disbanded and its personnel distributed between 4th and 6th Batteries.

Resistance Ends

By 12 July all enemy resistance in the vast territory for which East Africa Force was responsible, had ceased. Only 11th and 12th African Divisions, with a few essential South African units, were left to complete the destruction of the remaining Italian resistance. Their forces in the district of Gondar, west of Amba Alagi, eventually surrendered on 11 November 1941 to 12th African Division, which was by then led by Major General C.C. Fowkes.

World War

During two or three days at the beginning of December 1941, a little less than a month after Gondar fell, six gigantic operations were successfully launched by the Japanese in an area stretching a quarter of the way round the world. History had seen nothing to compare with it. The vast, co-ordinated operation turned the war from a European into a world conflict. On 7 December that day Japan struck Pearl Harbour and crippled most of the American Pacific fleet. America was in the war. They also struck at four other strategic points – Hong Kong, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, and the Malay States and Singapore; but it was Pearl Harbour that hurt most.

Remembering East Africa

‘Men remembered the campaign in East Africa not only for the very limited periods of action, but also for the dreary months of being bumped about in the back of a 3-ton truck, for the dust, and at other times the soaking tropical rains or the intense cold of the mountains; for the limited supply of the brack water; the basic diet of bully beef, biscuits, jam and sometimes melted butter; for the quinine and mosquito cream; for the primitive natives who would provide more eggs for a penny than for a shilling; for shooting small game for the pot, for the short periods of leave in Mogadishu, Addis Ababa and Asmara, for the seemingly endless number of Italian prisoners of war and for the hockey against the Indians in Addis Ababa and boxing against the British at Asmara. By the end of the campaign, sections and even individual gun teams learned to become self-sufficient – most men knew how to repair a vehicle, many had ‘won’ a personal revolver, and all had learned how to cook.’²⁸

²⁸ Military History Journal, p. 152.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AIR DEFENCE EQUIPMENT

The background to the whole story of the build-up of an Air Defence Artillery capability in South Africa rested on the supply of guns and ancillary equipment. It was a major part of the equipment necessary for warfare and it had received scant attention in the pre-war years. The CGS – an airman himself – had been more concerned with training and building up a credible Air Force. The Navy, such as it was, received no more than the flicker of an eyelid – the Royal Navy was, after all, in control of the seas – so it was thought. Britain, South Africa's supplier of military hardware, stores and equipment was in early 1940 under tremendous pressure to prepare her own forces for an expected onslaught.

While 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments were engaged in the Western Desert of North Africa there was a great deal of activity in South Africa insofar as Air Defence Artillery was concerned, but everything was dependent of the supply of equipment from Britain.

And it was not only South Africa that required supplies from Britain. Her forces in the East – at Hong Kong and Singapore were awaiting equipment, as were Australia and New Zealand. Canada decided not to wait – it obtained licences and began manufacturing her own supplies.

Prior to the war of 1939-1940 the Union Defence Forces are said to have ordered 24 mobile Anti-Aircraft guns for the defence of the harbours. Twelve were intended for Table Bay, eight for Simon's Town and four for Durban. Perhaps it was now felt that more guns were required; the Deputy Chief of Staff asked the South African High Commissioner in London in a cable of 24 July 1941 to recommend the scale of guns necessary for the port defences.¹ Not one gun of the original order had arrived by the time war was declared.² It is in fact not certain whether the equipment was actually ordered and perhaps it was planned to order it as no trace of an order has been found. The correspondence is strange, when one considers that a comprehensive order for Anti-Aircraft equipment had been sent to London in February 1940, as shown below. In a letter dated 19 August 1939 from the DCA – Colonel De Waal – addressed to the CGS covering the subject of coast guns the final paragraph suggests that orders be placed for 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft ammunition on the scale of 24 C.D. guns at 500 rounds each' and '32 remaining guns at 250 rds. each', i.e. a total of 20 000 rounds.³

A number of coast defence programmes, re-modified programmes, revisions and summaries of approved schemes, etc. were prepared for the Minister by the CGS's section in the months immediately before the war, and for a couple of months into the war. Each was a little different but none made mention of Anti-Aircraft defence needs. In an 'Extension of the Coast Defence Programme of 16 August 1939, however, the Director of Coast Defence (DCA) requested the CGS to confirm the Minister's instruction that orders could be placed for 3.7-inch ammunition on the scale of:

24 C.C. guns at 500 rounds each	£12 000
32 remaining guns at 250 rounds each	£8 000

The handwritten word, 'confirmed' and signed A.H. Broeksma (Secretary for Defence) was placed on the document.

And in February 1940 a comprehensive order for the supply of equipment was passed to the War Office via the office of the High Commissioner in London. The order included:

¹ SANDF Archives, CGS WAR, Box 39, file 3250, vol. VI. Enc. 79.

² Ibid., file C.G.S 8/11.

³ Ibid., enc. not numbered.

- 122 3.7-inch mobile AA guns with spares, section stores for 60 sections, and Battery stores for 15 Batteries.
- 60 Predictors
- 60 Height Range Finders No. 3 (9ft instruments)
- 108 Light AA 2-pdr guns, complete with spares and section stores to equip five Batteries and the requisite number of Kerrison predictors.

The situation in Britain was precarious and for some time no Anti-Aircraft equipment could be spared. And when eventually some could be released it was a mere trickle. Enquiries were therefore made for a supply from America. Heavy Anti-Aircraft guns, enough for one Regiment, and light Anti-Aircraft guns to equip two Regiments were ordered, but later cancelled, although an order for Sperry searchlights was confirmed.

By March 1940 the situation regarding indents for equipment had become a little clearer. All demands were submitted through the office of DGO but some had been held up pending receipt of further information required by the War Office from the CGS. 'Everything', a cable from the South African High Commissioner stated, 'is being done by WO to satisfy our demands but as you are aware many of the items for coast defences cannot be supplied until late one nine one four.' With the losses sustained in France, Britain needed every gun she could produce There was obviously little hope of early delivery of the equipment ordered by South Africa, or any of the other Dominions. Canada could not wait and began producing 40 mm Bofors for which she already shared the licence with Britain.

It was suggested that one of the sources of the problems at Defence Headquarters, insofar as indents and orders was concerned, were the frequent changes of Staff in DGO and QMG. And, in addition, the highly technical nature of the demands they had to deal with, and possibly many that they did not fully comprehend. Shipping war equipment to British bases round the world was to some extent hazardous and the War Office had warned the CGS that guns sent to be re-lined could very easily not arrive.

Searchlights

The approved scheme for Coast Artillery Searchlights (CASL) included four HCD lights listed for Robben Island. By mid-December 1940 24 projectors (mobile lights) without generators or Ford trucks had arrived from Britain and were stored at 'T' Stores, Young's Field, Cape Town. The balance of the order which amounted to 132 searchlights was awaited. Damage to factories in Britain and shipping difficulties and the urgency of orders for British Service requirements seriously delayed the delivery of South African indents. Seven generator sets had been shipped at the end of November 1940 with 22 sets on demand to be shipped '...in a few week's time.'⁴ 'Delivery of switchboards suspended owing enemy action...no reliable forecast...' of delivery, a cable of 7 March 1941 stated.⁵

The Director General Technical Services addressed a 'very urgent' letter to Director Military Operations on 12 January 1941- with a copy to DGWS for information - inviting their attention to the fact that one heavy Anti-Aircraft Brigade of 24 guns had an establishment of 18 searchlights and that the Defence Force had one Battery of heavy Anti-Aircraft guns in service equipped with six searchlights; furthermore 24 mobile searchlights but without Ford trucks or generators, 'recently arrived from England', were being held in 'T' Stores, Cape Town.⁶ He suggested that there was an excess of searchlights, enough in fact to equip an additional 32 heavy guns and that the acquisition of a further 100 searchlights from America '...would not appear to be justified at this juncture in view of the fact that the delivery of guns is remote.'⁷ DGTS ended by suggesting the wording of a cable to Warsup, New York, to cancel negotiations for the delivery of one hundred searchlights that had been ordered. He asked, if, DMO&I agreed with this proposal, to obtain the approval of the CGS.

⁴ Ibid. file 8/10, Vol.1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., enc. 15

⁷ Ibid., file C.G.S. 8/10, Vol. 1.

Colonel H.T. Newman Royal Marines, who had been DDCA in the DCS Section at Defence Headquarters but now signed as DMO&I, asked the CGS on a copy of the letter if he agreed with the proposed cable. The CGS was quite emphatic in his reaction: 'Certainly not', he wrote, 'Searchlights are a vital factor in Air Force night operations and we stick to our original requirements for searchlights.' The DGTS asked DMO in a note pencilled on the letter, if he agreed. Delivery of the letter was 'overlooked' and not forwarded to the Director until 12h41 that day. The reaction was swift and forceful. 'Tell DGTS', he scribbled across the side, 'he has no business to communicate with Director General War Supplies (DGWS or his representative - Warsup) in military policy which is a matter of settlement by the CGS.' A few days later a letter from the office of the CGS drew the attention of the DGTS '...to the fact that it is not within your province to communicate with the Directorate of War Supplies on matters of military policy.' There were apparently many of these internecine squabbles in Defence Headquarters where many of the staff were working under pressure and many sections, it seems, did not know in what direction regarding military equipment others were engaged.

Meanwhile in December 1940 a cable had arrived from Mombasa in which it was asked whether personnel and searchlights to complete the establishment of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade were being sent. It was important to complete the programme of air defence in East Africa. The answer given a day later indicated that 70 more Anti-Aircraft recruits would be available at the end of December and when the balance of the order for searchlights arrived, their training could commence. All would '...go forward six weeks later with equipment.'⁸

DGTS did not take the rebuke lying down. The Brigadier wrote direct to the CGS on 21 January and, while accepting the remarks addressed to him, noted that DGWS was pressing for an urgent decision in the matter of the searchlights. He pointed out that DGWS had communicated with CGS two weeks earlier and had not had a reply and he had therefore passed a copy of his letter to DMO&I merely to indicate that attention was being given to the searchlight question.

He then went on to say that there was an order from England:

Indent 431	46 searchlights
Indent 553	<u>86</u> searchlights
	<u>132</u>

Both orders were for complete lights (sound locators, etc.) mounted on Ford chassis. Twenty-four mobile lights complete, but without Ford trucks or generator sets had arrived in Cape Town. No shipping papers had been received, nor was it known whether further deliveries could be expected. He asked therefore if he could '...be favoured with your decision...' about these indents –were they to stand, in view of the order now placed in America for 100 searchlights and equipment.⁹

Because of the uncertainty it was decided in late January 1941 to place orders for one hundred searchlights in America. In the original approved scheme the four searchlights listed for Robben Island were apparently allocated to Cornelia Battery but a record of 26 March 1941 covering an order to *Oppositely*, London, for generators lists four 2 degree lights for the Island. However, records show that on 10 November 1944 there were four 3 degree lights that were at that time unmanned.¹⁰

The standard equipment in service in 1939 was the Searchlight Projector 90cm, otherwise titled 'Lamp, Searchlight HCD 90-cm'. A large number of American Sperry lights were in service in South Africa during 1940/45 due to the difficulty of supply from Britain.

Searchlights depend for their source of illumination upon an electric current arcing across a small gap between carbon electrodes in the lamp. Direct current is used. As the lamp burns a crater is formed at the end of the positive carbon rod where the arc strikes. The crater is filled with incandescent gases

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp 1, Box 15, file D.C.A.2, Vol.VI

which burn with an intense white flame and this light source is pointed at a parabolic mirror which reflect the light rays outward. The rods were automatically fed slowly forward as they burned away in order to maintain the gap. They could theoretically, burn for about three hours before needing replacement

The Blitz continued for some months and suppliers in Britain were therefore working under great difficulties; for some time no Anti-Aircraft equipment could be supplied at all. Even when some could be released it was a mere trickle. Orders had also been placed for 132 searchlights, complete – with sound locators, mounted on a Ford chassis. The Technical Services Directorate, however, sent a 'Very Urgent' communication to DGMO&I on 12 January stressing that there was at present an excess of searchlights, 'sufficient to equip an additional 38 heavy A.A. guns...' ¹¹ and that the acquisition of a further 100 searchlights did not appear to be justified in view of the fact that the delivery of guns was remote. Twenty-four mobile lights were reported on 21 January 1941 to have been received, but without Ford trucks or generator sets. They were held in 'T' Stores, Cape Town. Because of the difficulty of supply, an order had been placed in America for 100 searchlights. ¹² A telegram from DETECH, the office of the Director General of Technical Services (DGTS) to the CGS confirmed that an order for 100 searchlights costing £675 000 had already been placed before the Authorities Committee but that the latter were unable to give covering financial authority. ¹³ The telegram stated that the requisition should be submitted to Treasury for approval and that they would ask whether this request had the approval of the War Committee.

The CGS was quick off the mark. He replied three days later to confirm that at Meeting No. 13 of the War Supplies Committee held on 11 September 1940 the chairman, Colonel Reitz, confirmed that a definite order should be placed by Director General War Supplies (DGWS) for 100 Anti-Tank guns, 100 3.7-inch AA guns, 100 Bofors and 100 searchlights. And, he stated he had given this information to the Financial Authorities Committee the day before and had been rebuffed. He asked the DGTS, Brigadier Trollip, to submit the application to the Treasury. He also asked the DGTS to confirm the total on order and the number already received as he was not clear on the current position. He acknowledged that 194 had already been ordered and presumed the 100 now on order from America was intended to replace part of the order placed in Britain.

Suggested Cancellation

Meanwhile, the War Office entered the picture and in a cable via the High Commissioner it was suggested that all indents for searchlights be cancelled and that a new demand for 75 only, be submitted. It also pointed out that only serviceable but second-hand Sound Locators Mk III were available and it would be advantageous to order Locators, Sound, Mk IX and Projectors A.A. 90 cm Mk V – also only available second hand. A new demand for 76 searchlights and associated equipment would, the cable stated, automatically exclude the 21 lights already delivered.

By the following month (March) the situation regarding indents for equipment had become a little clearer. All demands were submitted through the office of DGO but some had been held up pending receipt of further information required by the War Office from the CGS. 'Everything', a cable from the South African High Commissioner stated, 'is being done by WO to satisfy our demands but as you are aware many of the items for coast defences cannot be supplied until late one nine four one.' There was no problem apparently with supplies from America. In early April 1941 the British Purchasing Commission in New York had discovered and told Warsup that 239 60-inch searchlights, 196 power plants and 177 sound locators were available ex a cancelled French contract. The New York contact code-named 'Swingler' asked whether there was any interest over and above the 100 Sperry lights already ordered.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., CGS WAR, BOX 39, file 8/10, vol. 1.

¹³ Ibid., enc. 22.

On 9 April 1941 a list of weapon requirements sent by indent to Oppositely from Dechief included:

	A (for training)	B (for home defence)
3.7-inch AA :	2	24
40 mm AA :	3	48
Predictors :	1	12
Height finders :	1	12
AA searchlights :	2	96
Sound locators :	2	96
Directors No. 12:	1	6

'B' was said to be the bare minimum, without reserves, for home defence, which included coast defence and 3rd (Reserve) Division. These weapons, Dechief stated, were considered vitally necessary 'in case we have trouble within or outside the Union.'¹⁴

It was suggested that one of the sources of the problems at Defence Headquarters, insofar as indents and orders was concerned, were the frequent changes of Staff in DGO and QMG. And, in addition, the highly technical nature of the demands they had to deal with, and possibly many that they did not fully comprehend. Shipping war equipment to British bases round the world was to some extent hazardous and the War Office had warned the CGS that the situation was difficult due to damage to factories as a result of air raids, and delivery due to loss of shipping from submarine activity.

By mid-1941 there were still no modern Anti-Aircraft guns in South Africa.



Figure 19: Anti-Aircraft searchlights

¹⁴ Ibid., Box 7, file 3247, Vol. 2.

Estimates

In July the War Office was tasked to prepare an estimate of Anti-Aircraft requirements up to the end of 1942. A request was therefore passed on 5 July to H.T. Newman, RM, now holding Brigadiers rank and based at South Africa House, London. He cabled Pretoria for the information, using a specific format. The reply cabled ten days later in cable H.03178, stated that the number of units serving outside the Union as at 30 April 1942 was one 24 gun 3.7-inch mobile Regiment and two light Anti-Aircraft 48 gun Regiments. The light units were 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments, then fighting in the Western Desert but the heavy unit strains the imagination a little – and was possibly meant to be 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Durban. The reply to (b) - Units formed or forming in the Union for service outside the country - was given as one heavy Regiment of twenty-four 3.7-inch guns and one light Regiment of 40 guns. No answer was given to 'Formed or forming in the Union for home defence' but on 25 July Dechief cabled London and pointed out that certain Anti-Aircraft equipment had been ordered before the war for defence of harbours and he listed them as Table Bay eight; Simon's Bay, eight and Durban, four – total twenty-four. As, the cable continued, 'our harbours are of special interest to the Imperial authorities we request a recommendation from the Ports Defence Committee as to the scale of AA defence now necessary.'

Towards the end of August the CGS asked if a reply could be expedited.

The reply by the CGS in July was in fact considered by the Ports Defence Committee at their next monthly meeting on 16 September and in early October the Director of Anti-Aircraft and Coast Defence at the War Office informed Brig Newman, Military Liaison officer at South Africa House, London, in War Office Minute 091/3294 (AA4), that the Ports Defence Committee 'was of the opinion' that the scale of equipment should be:

Table Bay	16 HAA and 12 LAA
Simon's Bay	12 HAA and 12 LAA
Durban	16 HAA and 12 LAA

There was no mention of Port Elizabeth, East London, Walvis Bay or Saldanha and this was conveyed to the CGS by cable three days later. Two days after receipt of the information the CGS asked what number of Anti-Aircraft searchlights, if any, were recommended for the three ports and: whether it is considered no Anti-Aircraft defence was necessary for Port Elizabeth, East London, Walvis Bay and Saldanha Bay. He was later told that searchlights were not normally used with heavy Anti-Aircraft guns, which used the G.L. method of fire control at night; and secondly, that searchlights may be used with light Anti-Aircraft guns for defence of airfields or for protection against minelaying from the air. (for which there was little likelihood on the South African coast.) The reply indicated that twelve searchlights at most would be required for this purpose but that local conditions must decide. So Dechief made a further enquiry as 'it would appear that the two S/L Regts which we have on our programme for service in the field with our two projected hvy AA regts would now fall away.'¹⁵ 'If on the other hand light AA regts require S/Ls pse ascertain from War Office what number of lights should be provided for each light AA regt, in which we would propose to convert our S/L regts for service with light AA regts.'¹⁶ As South Africa already had two light Anti-Aircraft Regiments in North Africa it seems ridiculous that the CGS had to make such an enquiry. Aircraft were reaching speeds that were too fast for a searchlight to pick it up and follow to enable Bofors guns to open fire.

The War Office suggested in reply – one Searchlight Regiment for home defence on a 'pool' basis and the rest should be raised as light Anti-Aircraft Regiments. Their Minute 079/4943 (AA4) of 9 November 1941 to the MLO at South Africa House, suggested that any small requirement they (South Africa) might need in the field could almost certainly be found from resources already in the UK.'

¹⁵ SANDF Archives, Archives Bundle B (Vol. 2 List III MA62/1.

¹⁶ Ibid., cable H.O. 7846 dd 27.10.1941

The Military representative at South Africa House in a further cable again mentioned that the ‘...ports mentioned (Port Elizabeth, East London, Walvis Bay and Saldanha) had not been considered¹⁷ by the Ports Defence Committee and that the High Commissioner had asked for a further recommendation. It led to a letter being addressed by the Secretary (presumably of the High Commissioner) on 17 October 1941, to the Secretary to the Admiralty. In it he stated that he had been directed ‘...to request the views of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the following points concerning the defence of certain ports in the Union of South Africa.’

The letter listed the ‘history’ of orders placed for Anti-Aircraft equipment, beginning with the pre-war order for 24 3.7-inch mobile guns. He stated that the Union Authorities had in July of 1941 asked whether ‘as our harbours’ were of special interest to the Imperial Authorities any increase in the original scale of Anti-Aircraft equipment was recommended. The Ports Defence Committee had answered on 5 October and confirmed that AA defences should be increased to a total of 44 heavy and 36 light guns, distributed at Table Bay, Simon’s Town and Durban. The Union Defence Force Authorities ‘now enquire’, he said, whether it is considered that no Anti-Aircraft defence is necessary at Port Elizabeth, East London, Walvis Bay and Saldanha.

It was realised the Secretary stated that Port Elizabeth and East London ‘...may not be of major importance to Commonwealth lines of communication, in which case the Union Defence Authorities will presumably base their defence requirements on the value of their importance to communications within the Union.’ But, he pointed out, Walvis Bay and Saldanha were both being provided with 6-inch coast defence guns at the request of the Admiralty although these ports were not of major importance to the Commonwealth lines of communication they had a value to communications within the Union. Of Walvis Bay and Saldanha he said that these ports were not of vital importance to internal communications but they were being provided with 6-inch coast guns for seaward defence at the request of the Admiralty. He ended by ‘throwing the ball into the Admiralty’s lap’, asking on what scale, ‘in their Lordship’s opinion’ Anti-Aircraft defences should be provided for the ports in question, to enable a forecast to be made of the total Anti-Aircraft equipment required.

A lengthy four-page cyphered cable was sent to the High Commissioner, London, from the office of the CGS on 7 January 1942. It began:

With Japan in the war and the added importance of our ports especially Cape Town and Durban on the Line of Communication to the Mid-East and the Far East will you please ask the Ports Defence Committee for advice on the adequacy or otherwise of Defence provision for our ports...’

The cable listed the entire spectrum of existing defences at some length, from Walvis Bay on the Atlantic coast to Mombasa on the Indian Ocean coast. They were shown in the cable as ‘A’, with the (then present) approved policy, which was referred to under ‘B’, for each of the ports. These defences covered aircraft available – serviceable and unserviceable, coast guns – of all the various types, Anti-Aircraft guns – both 3.7-inch and Bofors, RDF sets - both locally made and imported, searchlights – both, coast and Anti-Aircraft, minesweeping and anti-submarine vessels. It is interesting that it listed air cover at both Lourenco Marques and Beira, as well as the more distant ports of Mombasa, Dar-es-Salaam and Kismayu in East Africa.

		Available	Authorised
Cape Town	3.7-inch	2	16
	40mm	0	12
	AAS/L	0	12
Simon’s Town	3.7-inch	0	12
	40mm	0	12
	AAS/L	0	12

¹⁷ Ibid.

		Available	Authorised
Durban	3.7-inch	0	16
	40mm	0	12
	AAS/L	0	12
Port Elizabeth	3.7-inch	0	12
	40mm	0	12
	AAS/L	0	12
East London	3.7-inch	0	12
	40mm	0	12
	AAS/L	0	12
Achilles Reserve			
	3.7-inch	0	12
	40mm	0	12
	AAS/L	0	12

It appears from this cable that there were two 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns at Cape Town with sixteen as policy; at Simon's Town nil and twelve; Durban nil and twelve; Port Elizabeth nil and twelve. East London, Walvis Bay and Saldanha were each shown to be nil on both counts, but paragraph 10. Achilles (Reserve) showed a figure of twelve 3.7-inch guns as approved policy. It was much the same for 40mm Bofors guns: Cape Town, Simon's Town Durban, Port Elizabeth and Achilles (Reserve) all shown as nil and twelve, and none at the remaining ports. It did not include four 40 mm Bofors 'borrowed' from the Admiralty who had agreed to their removal from the DEMS service 'for temporary loan' at Durban. The loan was made subject to the guns being allocated on the basis of two to the dock gates and two to the oil installations.¹⁸

Japanese sea power

Japanese had announced in December 1941 that the United States Pacific Fleet had suffered '...an annihilating blow...'¹⁹ The British battleships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* had been sunk; Hong Kong capitulated on Christmas Day; Singapore surrendered at 7.50 pm on 15 February (the greatest ever surrender of British troops); the Allies evacuated Sumatra two days later; the Australian port of Darwin was subject to an air attack on 19 February and in the Battle of the Java Sea the Dutch Admiral Doorman lost half his force and went down with his flagship, *De Ruyter*. The battle ended Allied sea-power in the east.

The Japanese went on the rampage in the Bay of Bengal and took their first stride into the Indian Ocean, sinking over 100 000 tons of shipping in four days; and they sank the heavy cruisers HMS *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire*, later sinking the carrier *Hermes* with all her aircraft still on board. Admiral Nagumo had mastery of the seas from Hawai to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). These events added a new dimension to the war and the beginning of a possible threat; South Africa's government had to face the possibility of a future attack and possible invasion.

Towards the end of February 1942 the War Cabinet's Sub-Committee on Defence Arrangements for the Indian Ocean re-assessed defence arrangements at Indian Ocean ports. Insofar as South African ports were concerned the committee envisaged the possibility of brief bombardments of the ports by 14-inch gunned battleships, and operations by torpedo and mine-laying craft as well as attacks by up to 200 carrier-borne aircraft and an Infantry landing in Brigade group strength. Defence of the coast ports, the Committee stated, would demand powerful Coast Artillery, torpedo bombers and fighter planes as well as 208 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns and a similar number of 40mm Bofors guns and, in addition, radar coverage of the whole coastline.

¹⁸ Ibid., CGS War Box 10, file 4091, vol. 2, enc. 4.

¹⁹ War in the Southern Oceans, p. 108.

There was apparent confusion over the order for searchlights and Brigadier de Waal on 26 February 1942 requested the cancellation of all existing indents for searchlights; a new demand was submitted for:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Lamps, searchlights H.C.D. 90 | 52 |
| 2. Locators, sound Mk 1X | 52 |
| 3. Projectors A.A. 90cm Mk V | 52 |
| 4. Lorries, complete with generators | 62 |

He confirmed that it was not necessary to cancel the ten lorries already on contract as these could be used for spares and to replace casualties and, secondly, he would be quite happy to accept serviceable second-hand projectors.²⁰ In April there was still confusion over the number of lorries and searchlights required and seemingly the order was settled at 76 of each.²¹

On 26 February 1942 the South African High Commissioner in London cabled the CGS to inform him that the Cabinet Ad Hoc committee were making a recommendation to the British Chiefs of Staff concerning the delivery of coast and Anti-Aircraft equipment to South Africa. Insofar as Anti-Aircraft equipment was concerned the cable gave Anti-Aircraft increases as *'four heavy and eight light Cape Town. Eight heavy four light Saldanha Bay. Four heavy eight light Durban. Eight heavy twelve light East London.'* Five days later, on 3 March 1942, the High Commissioner referred to the personal message he had sent to the DCS on 26 February and informed Dechief that the Chiefs of Staff had approved the recommendations of the ad hoc committee. 'Since,' his cable stated:

been informed War Office recommending immediate release 32 heavy static and 36 light AA equipment. This being considered by Chiefs of Staff and most likely to be approved and shipped this month.

The High Commissioner asked whether the CGS anticipated difficulty in providing and training personnel, and suggested it may be possible to arrange help from the War Office, either from convoys or from personnel in transit camps. He ended:

*I have not discussed this with W.O. but would do so if you wished.*²²

In a cable dated 11 March 1942, the Chiefs of Staff confirmed approval for the release of 32 static 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns and 36 40mm Bofors.²³ The first 3.7-inch guns arrived in March 1942. By 23 April 1942 the total Anti-Aircraft equipment available for distribution in the Union was:

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 2 | - | 3.7-inch AA guns. |
| 4 | - | 3-inch 20 cwt AA guns |
| 4 | - | 40mm Bofors |
| 57 | - | Sperry AA Searchlights, complete with 86 AA lorries. |
| 21 | - | British AA Searchlights, complete with lorries, including three extra vehicles. |

This equipment was distributed at coastal ports as follows:

Table Bay	Four 3-inch 20 cwt guns, two 40 mm Bofors and twelve Sperry AA Searchlights.
Simon's Bay	Twelve Sperry AA Searchlights.
Port Elizabeth	Twelve Sperry AA Searchlights.
East London	Three Sperry and nine British AA Searchlights.
Durban	Two 3.7-inch guns, two 40 mm Bofors and twelve Sperry AA Searchlights. ²⁴
Reserve Unit, Cape Town	Two Sperry AA Searchlights.
AA Training Centre Robben Island	Two 40 mm Bofors.

²⁰ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 39, file 8/10, Vol, 1.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., file 8/8.

²³ Ibid, Box 10, file 4091, enc. 5.

²⁴ *History of AA Organisation, UDF 1939 -1944*, p.1.

Three Sperry AA Searchlights were allocated to the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence and one Sperry and three British AA Searchlights were held in storage. Also held in store were the extra 86 Sperry and one British searchlight vehicles. Two Sperry and three British searchlights were on loan to the Coast Artillery.

There were 1 000 rounds of ammunition for each 3-inch gun but there was no ammunition for the 3.7-inch guns. The ammunition was on order and cables had been sent to London asking for delivery to be expedited, but London replied on 17 March confirming that '*32 000 rounds AA ammo 3.7-inch will be issued to match 32 equipments now in course of issue.*' Four days later, however, the DCS asked for an immediate shipment of 2 000 rounds for the two 3.7-inch guns 'already here'.²⁵

It is interesting that at this time, when two 6-inch coast guns were being considered for the Durban defences, that the War Office asked whether or not they should be replaced by two dual role 5.25-inch CA/AA guns or by two 6-inch on 45 degree mountings.²⁶ It was not the last time that the subject of the CA/AA guns arose; two were later ordered. The order was, however, cancelled and after the war a committee was formed to decide whether to again place an order for these guns. The 5.25-inch twin weighed 76 ton; with a muzzle velocity of 2 800 fps it fired an 80 lb projectile to a height of 43 000 ft. But it was an extremely expensive piece of equipment and required heavy concrete work on which to place the almost formidable mountings. It was decided not to ask for these overly expensive pieces of equipment. They would, in any event, not be available in quantity before the end of the war.

There seems to have been complete confusion or misunderstanding between the various departments at Defence Headquarters about orders for military equipment. In March 1942 an order for twenty-four 3.7-inch mobile Anti-Aircraft guns complete, and thirty-two 40 mm Bofors complete was sent to London, as an addition to a previous order sent on 10 December 1941. The cable including this data indicated that an indent number would be sent by the DGTS 'as soon as financial authority (had been) obtained'.²⁷ DGTS on the other hand informed the CGS on 25 March that purchases from overseas were recorded on the following indents:

40 mm guns:	Indent 639 - 108 guns	£107 000.
	Indent 1015 - 4 guns	(no cost noted)
3.7-inch guns	Indent 430 - 54 guns	£869 000
	Indent 639 - 122 guns	£1 668 000

Oppositely in London must have also by now been a little confused. Brigadier Newman, Royal Marines – previously DDAA in Pretoria) now in the hot seat in the Office of the High Commissioner, replied and suggested that a completely new indent 'for total requirements' be submitted'.²⁸ And so a new and revised order went to London. It called for 204 3.7-inch guns, and 276 40 mm Bofors guns.²⁹ Cables went back and forth in April 1942 - Oppositely asking for clarification of the situation regarding outstanding indents which it said must be cancelled. And towards the end of May 1942 when the War Office assessed the number of guns necessary for the defence of South African ports as 108 heavy AA guns and 112 light AA guns, a reply from the CGS indicated the numbers to be 204 heavy guns and 278 light guns.

A Further Assessment

In April 1942 with the Japanese on the rampage in the Indian Ocean, possibly in desperation, the Admiralty was approached for assistance with Anti-Aircraft guns and on 20 May it indicated it could not allocate more than twenty Oerlikons from the May production. It hoped, however, to allocate thirty per month from June onwards, to reach the total of 104 required. By the end of May when the

²⁵ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 10, file 4091, enc. 8.

²⁶ Ibid., enc. 6.

²⁷ Ibid., enc 9a.

²⁸ Ibid., enc.13.

²⁹ Ibid., enc. 14.

Japanese were about to launch a June offensive at sea, the position had improved – a little. Twenty 3.7-inch guns had arrived and been distributed and so had about 40 Bofors.

In replying to London – who had obviously been asked by the War Office for details, Dechief cabled London on 7 June, giving the distribution of Anti-Aircraft guns and searchlights at that date. It showed the number of 3.7-inch guns as:

Durban - two mobile and six static and Cape Town - six static. Simon's Town still had four old 3-inch 20 cwt guns.

It was much better picture with the 40 mm Bofors guns, with forty received and distributed to coastal ports. Guns had begun to arrive with some semblance of regularity and, by 20 June distribution was:

Station	3.7-inch Static	3.7-inch Mobile	3-inch Mobile	40mm Bofors	90cm HCD British	120cm Sperry American
Cape Town	12	-	-	12	-	12
Durban	12	2	-	12	-	12
Simon's Town	-	-	4	6	-	12
Port Elizabeth	4	-	-	6	-	12
East London	-	-	-	4	9	3
AATC	4	-	-	-	-	8
On loan to coast	-	-	-	-	8	- ³⁰

At this stage London was asked to confirm urgently whether all further 3.7-inch guns would be mobile as this would affect an order for tractors, which had to be placed with Washington. A reply indicated there was no objection to the request for mobile equipment but it would affect the order, as releases would necessarily have to be made over longer period. The cable, dated 2 July 1942, gave the information that eight guns had been released 'yesterday'.

By the end of May 1942, the Anti-Aircraft equipment position had improved considerably and when Major General Loch, CB, MC, the War Office Adviser on Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, visited South Africa in June and carried out an inspection of all coast and Anti-Aircraft defences, Anti-Aircraft equipment had been distributed as shown below:

Station	3.7-inch Mobile	3.7-inch Static	3-inch Mobile	40mm Bofors	90cm HCD British	120cm Sperry American
Cape Town	-	6	-	14	-	12
Durban	2	6	-	12	-	12
Simon's Town	-	-	4	6	-	12
Port Elizabeth	-	4	-	6	-	12
East London	-	-	-	6	9	3
Saldanha Bay	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reserve (with DAAT & DCAC)	-	-	-	14	10*	8
On loan CASL	-	-	-	-	5	-
Total	2	16	4	56	24*	59

There were no GL Sets and no SLC Sets and the three 90cm HCD British searchlights were without power plants. And there was still no ammunition for any of the guns.

Manufacture and delivery of equipment was at the mercy of the activities of the *Luftwaffe* and of the rate of loss of shipping due to submarine activity and it was noted that delivery of Predictors, height finders and ID telescopes for 3.7-inch Batteries was based on one set for four guns. The War Office

³⁰ Ibid., Box 10,

was informed on 25 June that South Africa was forced to deploy both two and four-gun sections and therefore submitted a request for one set per two guns. But Dechief, the CGS, was advised on 3 July that production for the next six months only allowed one set per four guns. This was accepted but Dechief nevertheless asked for an additional six each of the height finders and ID telescopes.

Six days later the CGS cabled 'Oppositely' (the High Commissioner – through whom all these cable were routed) and gave amended AA requirements, i.e.: a total of 188 3.7-inch guns with 316 spare barrels and 94 each of the range finders, Predictors No. 1, range and height finders and ID telescopes. In addition he asked for 404 40mm equipments and 2020 spare barrels, plus 236 Kerrison predictors, No. 3, and six Stiff-key, stick-laying equipment. This was acknowledged but the War Office nevertheless reduced the number of spare barrels they could supply.

More equipment arrived and made it possible for a redistribution as is shown below:

	<u>3.7-inch</u>	<u>40mm</u>	<u>AA SLs</u>
Table Bay	12	12	12
Simon's Bay	4	6	12
Port Elizabeth	4	6	12
East London	4	6	12
<u>Durban</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>60</u>

The U-Boats

U-Boats had been operating in the seas off the West African coast after moving away from the Americas where there had been increased anti-submarine activity. But, resulting from the increased U-boat activity off the African coast, the Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic, moved his headquarters from Freetown to Simon's Town in 1942 to enable him and his staff to more directly control the naval activity against the U-boat menace. He saw Saldanha as an alternative convoy assembly point and as a result he made representations to strengthen coast and Anti-Aircraft defences there. The Admiralty agreed with his point of view and, furthermore, agreed to send two 6-inch naval guns, eight 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns and four Bofors for employment at that port.

The Germans had developed an improved U-Boat with an increased range and *Gruppe Eisbär* was sent by *Bevelshaber der Unterseebooten* to operate in Cape waters and disrupt the supply chain to the east. Four of the new improved U-boats with a U-tanker were sent south towards the end of 1942. A fifth U-boat joined the group a little later. They arrived in Cape waters in October and by mid-October fourteen ships had been sunk, many within sight of Table Mountain, some were possibly carrying war material destined for South Africa. One U-boat was found and sunk during the time they were in South African waters.

Ammunition

With a semblance of regular delivery of guns the next problem was spare ammunition. DGTS on 16 July requested permission from the CGS to make application for AA ammunition additional to that already on order. He asked for:

49 000 rounds HE for the 3.7-inch guns, and
11 400 rounds shrapnel; and
174 400 rounds HE for the Bofors

No AP for the 3.7s or the Bofors was requested, nor were any SAP with tracer for the latter.³¹ He indicated that the additional order would cost £3 492 120. Application for financial authority was passed to the CGS, Secretary for Defence, and the Authorities Committee on 7 September. In his memorandum – a repeat of earlier one to which he had not had a reply – DGTS said quantities were

³¹ Ibid., CGS War, Box 10, enc. 25.

based on revised estimates for the 188 3.7-inch and 404 Bofors guns on order 'which were being obtained for AA defence within the Union.'³²

In an extract from 'Report by Combined Services Committee on Natal Coastline as regards Landings', dated 1 August 1942, the committee noted that '...much equipment on demand from the UK has not been delivered...' It pointed out that Anti-Aircraft defence of the (coast) Battery positions is essential. Owing to the smallness of the target, it said, the chief danger to gun sites is from dive bombing and low level attacks and, therefore 'Light A.A. defence is the first requirement.'³³ It noted that four Oerlikon guns on loan from the Royal Navy had been set up in the gun area on the initiative of the Fire Commander. The committee recommended that this 'unofficial arrangement be regularised'. It also pointed out that there were then only four pairs of twin-Lewis guns to protect six Batteries. Members considered that these should be increased to twelve, i.e. two pairs per Battery; and that when heavy Anti-Aircraft guns become available they should be sited primarily for the protection of targets more vulnerable to high level bombing; i.e. oil tanks, docks, etc. The committee pointed out that guns and approach roads should be camouflaged immediately, as they were extremely conspicuous from the air. Other matters on which it reported included: radar coverage and an improvement in beach protection. It considered the latter to be a serious gap.

As a result of the report camouflage was greatly improved and dummy gun positions were constructed. The dummy positions had not been completed when a reply was given the authors of the report. It noted that the four Oerlikon guns 'are now permanently acquired. No further issue of Twin Lewis has yet been granted.' It added that it was understood there were '...tentative plans for siting several LAA guns on the Bluff...' and that these will be used essentially in the protection of the oil sites and other vital areas. Four 3.7-inch guns had already been sited on the Bluff and these, it was said, will provide protection against high and low level attack. They would only be used to defend the Batteries in the unlikely event of direct attack on the guns. Had they known about this policy the gunners would have received some comfort from the report.³⁴

The distribution of Anti-Aircraft guns as at 6 June 1942, given in a cable to London, was:

1. 3.7" mobile Durban – 3
2. 3.7" static Cape Town 6 & Durban 6
3. 3" 20 cwt Simon's Town 4
4. 40 mm CT – 12, Dbn -12, STown- 6. PE – 6, EL -4

By August 1942, however, more Anti-Aircraft equipment had begun to arrive in South Africa. In his 'Progress Report on the AA Defences at Coastal Areas', which covered the situation as at 9 August, DCS reported that of the thirty-two 3.7-inch guns authorised, Table Bay had six sections of heavy guns. There were two sections each of four 3.7-inch Mk II guns for which the instruments were being installed – these would be in action in seven days, he said, and two sections each of two 3.7-inch Mk II guns that were in action in temporary positions. In addition two sections each of two 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft guns were also in action at temporary positions and awaiting movement to Simon's Bay. The full authorised number of thirty-two 40 mm Bofors had been received. Nine were in action and three employed for training. Work was in progress on communications, gun operations rooms and the construction of emplacements, magazines and administrative buildings. The report covered similar data for all other ports.

³² Ibid., enc. 27.

³³ Ibid., CAB Gp.1, Box 52, file CCA/61.

³⁴ Ibid.

A final programme of equipment for the ports based on the estimated arrival by mid-August 1942 of additional Anti-Aircraft guns and associated equipment is reflected below:

PORT	3.7-inch guns	40 mm Bofors	AASLs
Table Bay	32	20	12
Simon's Bay	12	12	12
Port Elizabeth	12	12	12
East London	8	12	12
Durban	32	20	12
Saldanha	8	4	12
Total	104	80	60

By 7 September a memorandum compiled by DAA on the Air Defence organisation of the country showed an even rosier picture of the availability of equipment. It indicated that both Table Bay and Durban each had 32 Bofors instead of only 20. There was, however, a reserve of twelve 3.7-inch guns, twelve Bofors and twelve searchlights, making a total in the country of 116 3.7-inch guns, 116 Bofors and 72 searchlights. By the time that the Japanese threat was at its height, a respectable, if not strong, system of coast Anti-Aircraft defence had been built up. Anti-Aircraft guns continued to arrive until August 1943, with fifty-eight 3.7s included in that month's DGTS report. A day earlier than the memorandum, financial authority was given for the construction of thirty-two 3.7-inch AA emplacements, but this was subsequently cancelled and 'allowed for on a larger A.A. vote.'

Also in September, on instructions from DCS, the Technical Services Directorate applied to the CGS, Secretary for Defence and the Authorities Committee for expenditure authority for:

188 Spare barrels for 3.7-inch guns	£51 700
114 complete 40 mm equipments)	
1730 spare barrels for above)	£80 600
6 Stiff key stick laying equipment) ³⁵	

By end September 1942 the increase in arrival of Anti-Aircraft equipment had turned the country into a slightly more respectable force. Despite some guns being lost at sea while en route to South Africa through enemy action, there was a total of 104 3.7-inch and 104 40 mm guns in the country.

A 'most urgent' cable on 22 November 1942 asked for 52 GL Mk II (Canadian) equipment, which stated was '...required immediately...' together with six Stiff-key Mk V equipment for training.

Over the months before October numbers of cables passed between *Oppositely* (the office of the South African High Commissioner in London) and *Dechief* - the office of the CGS in Pretoria, on the scale of Anti-Aircraft equipment necessary at South African ports as part of the coast defence system. On 3 October 1941 the Director of Anti-Aircraft and Coast Defence at the War Office wrote to the Military Liaison Officer at South Africa House, London, and advised him that the Ports Defence Committee had, after consideration decided the scale of Anti-Aircraft defence at South African ports should be:

	Heavy Anti-Aircraft guns	Light Anti-Aircraft guns
Table Bay	16	12
Simon's Bay	12	12
Durban	16	12

The question of the provision of Anti-Aircraft equipment and of training became one of some urgency and after the South African Defence authorities queried the reason for excluding Port Elizabeth, East London, Walvis Bay and Saldanha it was found the Ports Defence Committee had not even considered these ports.

³⁵ Ibid., enc. 28.

Telegrams passed between DCAA and Dechief about the requirements for searchlights and the air defence of those ports not included in the War Office's original decision on the scale of air defence. Correspondence eventually landed on the desk of The Secretary to the Admiralty at the request of the High Commissioner who asked for the views of the Lords High Commissioners of the Admiralty. The Secretary outlined the background to the current state of affairs, commencing with the order for 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns placed by the Union Defence Force before the commencement of the war, i.e.:

Table Bay	12 guns
Simon's Bay	8 guns
Durban	4 guns

No trace has been found of such an order and in any event it conflicts with the order placed in February 1940.

He asked, following the decision of the Ports Defence Committee, whether the Admiralty considered it necessary, on what scale (in their Lordship's opinion...) Anti-Aircraft defences should be provided for Port Elizabeth, East London, Saldanha and Walvis Bay. He did, beforehand, point out that Port Elizabeth and East London were not of major importance to Commonwealth Lines of Communication but on the other hand Walvis Bay and Saldanha were being provided with 6-inch guns for seaward defence at the request of the Admiralty. This was being done even though these two ports were not of vital importance to the internal communications of the Union.

In April 1943, with a new provision policy in place, the office of the CGS informed the Under-Secretary for War in London that the 'the Union's requirements for 40 mm A.A. equipments have been reduced to a total of 346 with 1 750 spare barrels and 236 predictors. He asked for amendments to be made to three Demand documents and at the same time stated that the quantity of Stiffkey Stick Mk V equipments be reduced from 162 to 126. A total of 366 'equipments' had already been released, 'i.e. 20 in excess of the new requirements figure' and he went on to state that as eight had been lost at sea, the net excess was twelve. He therefore requested that the 54 'equipments' released ex North America in February be reduced by twelve.³⁶

One can only assume that the Defence authorities knew what they were doing and were keeping a tight and accurate control of orders for guns and all other items, as trying to make sense of it all these years later with correspondence in numerous files is akin to walking a wobbly tightrope across a minefield.

Apparently in reply to a request from London, the DCS on 5 February 1943 cabled that the distribution of Anti-Aircraft equipment and searchlights as at 20 January was as follows:

Firstly. Three point seven inch Mobile. East London 4, Durban 8, Training 2.

Secondly. Three point seven inch static. Cape Town 14, Simon's Town 4, Port Elizabeth 4, Durban 12, Training 2. Latter also used operationally at Cape Town.

Thirdly. Three inch 20 cwt Simon's Town 4.

Fourthly. Forty mm Bofors earmarked for emergency at Saldanha but temporarily on training of One Field Army Battery 4, Cape Town 24, Simon's Town 8, Port Elizabeth 9, East London 6, Durban 24, Training 16, Reserve 1 undergoing repair.

Fifthly. Ninety cm AA Searchlights training 9 - on temporary loan to Coast Searchlights fifteen.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., UWH CIVIL, Box 78, Artillery LMAB No. 100/CC.

³⁷ Ibid., CGS War Box 39, enc. 53

By this time the Japanese threat was not as serious as it had been. In the Battle of the Coral Sea on 7 and 8 May 1942 between American and Japanese fleets, each lost one carrier sunk and one damaged. The Battle of Midway in the first few days of June left the Japanese with the smoking hulls of four carriers. Although not realised at the time it was one of the truly decisive of battles at sea. The Japanese Army continued their operations elsewhere – in Papua, New Guinea and Guadal canal.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE GUNS

‘The application of Anti-Aircraft fire is both a science and an art.’

The 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft Gun

As has been seen Britain, after World War One, made a slow start to replace the 3-inch 20 cwt gun that she had, had at the end of hostilities in 1918. Five hundred or so were kept but all other guns used against aircraft were scrapped. There had been complaints in France during 1915-1916 that a gun with a higher performance than the 3-inch 20 cwt was required. In 1917 the experimental Branch of the Ministry of Munitions began work on a new design. First drafts were delayed while possible conversion of the naval 4-inch to a mobile model was investigated. This was abandoned and the new design re-activated in 1918. The specification drawn up was for a QF Anti-Aircraft gun of 3.6-inch bore, to fire a 25 pound shell to a maximum height of 25 000 feet at a muzzle velocity of 2 000 ft/sec. The prototype was a long-barrelled gun with a semi-automatic breech mechanism and fitted with ‘rocking-bar’ sights. The mounting was new: a towed, tracked chassis of low profile, carrying the detachment in action. A preliminary order for one hundred was given in September 1918, but then reduced to five for testing and trials. With the end of the war the project was abandoned.

Although suggestions for a number of other Anti-Aircraft gun designs were made during the 1920s a Royal Artillery Committee in 1928 suggested that a 3.7-inch (94mm) gun firing a 25 lb shell to a height of 28 000ft would be effective. After theoretical calculations had been made a General Service Specification was issued in 1933. It called for a 3.7-inch gun weighing eight tons, capable of being put into action in fifteen minutes and of being towed at 25 mph. Designs were suggested in 1934 by Woolwich Arsenal and Vickers-Armstrong; the Vickers-Armstrong design was accepted and their pilot model passed proof trials in April 1936. Production was authorised in April 1937. The first guns were delivered in January 1938. It was the year of the Munich Crisis and the effort to produce sufficient guns to defend Britain before the onset of the war that was inevitable, used much of the country’s finance and manufacturing capacity. Production continued from 1938 until 1945, reaching its peak in March 1942 with a delivery rate of 228 guns per month.

When first produced, the 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft gun had a number of disadvantages; firstly, even with the best trained detachments it was slow in coming into action. This was mainly due to the very heavy platform, jack-arms and pads. It required luck and skill to have the davit holes to be completely in line to insert the securing pins.

There was a story told of the early days of the war when an RAF pilot flying a patrol off the North Foreland of Kent was fired on by the Anti-Aircraft defences. It ceased after he radioed a complaint, but on landing he was immediately called to the telephone in the Ops room. The voice at the other end of the line was that of the Anti-Aircraft Commander. ‘I am really am most frightfully sorry’, he said in typical English fashion. ‘But please tell me, were we anywhere near hitting you?’

The gun was a very advanced weapon for its time but the carriage was particularly complicated. It carried no optical sights and was intended to be operated by data transmission from fire control instruments displayed on dials, much as in Coast Artillery counter bombardment guns. All the gun-layer had to do was to operate his controls and move the gun until pointers on the dials actuated by the gun’s movement coincided with pointers set by the fire control instruments. The gun fired a 28 lb (12.7 kg) shell at a maximum rate of about 19 rpm (auto-loading) at 3 425 ft/sec (792 m/sec) to a maximum height of 59 300ft - the height it could reach against the pull of gravity - assuming the gun was at its maximum elevation of 80 degrees. The effective ceiling with Predictor No. 10 and Fuze Time

No. 208 was 45 000 ft. On exploding the time-fuzed shell hurled out hundreds of red-hot splinters that were lethal against any aircraft within about 45 feet.

An automatic fuze-setter (MFS No. 11) and an automatic loader were introduced during the war. These not only eliminated variations in time taken in loading and fuze-setting but it enabled the gun to follow predictor data more closely, increased the rate of fire and providing improved accuracy. The gun was designed as mobile equipment but the carriage was complicated and a simple static mounting was later produced. Modifications were continually introduced.

The War Office, looking ahead in 1941, demanded a fresh design of gun, asking for a ceiling of 50 000 feet, a time of flight to that height of 30 seconds and the ability to fire three rounds and have a fourth loaded in 20 seconds. With this came a new system of rifling. Known as 'RD' (Research Department) Rifling it was designed by Colonel Probert of that Department and it worked in conjunction with a specially-designed shell. The rifling commenced at zero depth, and the lands assumed their full height at just over four inches from the commencement of rifling. Towards the muzzle the groove depth gradually reduced until at 11 inches from the muzzle, the bottom of the grooves had come up to meet the top of the lands and the gun was a smoothbore. The shell was fitted with a high-efficiency driving band, and twin centring bands at the shoulder. These had the effect of dividing the torsional stress of spinning more evenly along the length of the shell, and centring the projectile more perfectly on the axis of the gun barrel. As the rifling grooves decreased, the copper of the driving band and centring band was squeezed into cannelures in the shell body. On leaving the muzzle, these copper bands, which normally protruded into the airstream and degraded the shell's flight, were smoothed flush with the shell wall to permit an unbroken air flow over the shell, which helped to sustain velocity. The RD Rifling was highly successful. The gun was introduced in 1943 as the Mark 6. It performed so well it remained in service for the remainder of heavy Anti-Aircraft's gunnery days.¹

The gun was originally manually operated. However accurate was the future position data that was passed from the predictor, its application to the gun was made by fallible human operators turning hand wheels to follow their pointers. By 1944, however, after some years of development, a Remote Power Control (RPC) gear was introduced which eliminated manual laying. Equipment so modified were known as the Mark IIC. The modification also included as fully automatic fuze setting and loading gear. This resulted in the whole service of the gun being carried out mechanically and with a constant and predictable drill time. When this system was combined, as it was, with centrimetric auto-follow radar and an electronic predictor, the fully automatic chain from radar to gun had been established. The final refinement was the introduction of the proximity or VT fuze, which eliminated the errors in fuze estimation and fuze working which were unavoidable with pre-set clockwork fuzes.

The RPC gear was not introduced without some troubles on the way. It was demonstrated to a distinguished audience at a gun position near Bexley, England in 1943, the spectators clustered round the predictor in the command post. The great moment came and the gear was engaged; all four guns traversed and depressed themselves majestically until all were laid accurately on the predictor – and the audience. This display and the highly successful RD rifling in 1943 ensured that the Mk 6 gun remained in service until declared obsolete in 1959. It was a very successful design. It was considered by at least one Royal Artillery senior officer to be the Rolls Royce of guns and fitted with the No. 11 fuse setter it had an unrivalled rate of fire. German prisoners-of-war called it the 'electric gun'.

It is interesting to view statistics. To summarise the performance of the heavy Anti-Aircraft guns in Britain during World War 2:

Daylight during the Battle for Britain in 1940:

Firing visual against bomber formations at medium altitude with visual acquisition and tracking and with mechanical predictor and optical height finder:
Rounds fired per aircraft destroyed.....350-500

¹ British and American Artillery of World War 2, pp. 108,109.

Day and night 1944 firing unseen against V1 rockets

With RPC and automatic loading and fuze setting, and centimetric auto follow radar.....600-800

Day and night 1944 firing unseen – as above, but with VT fuzes.....100-150²

One writer has noted that the average number of rounds fired to bring down a V1 missile in 1944 was about 150, an 82 per cent success rate; a far cry from the 18 500 rounds-per-bird of the 1940 Blitz when radar was in its infancy and powder-filled fuzes were standard.³

An experiment at shooting the 3.7 in the ground role was conducted at Trawsfynydd in the UK during 1941 after some quick work in producing a range table. After it was all over and the gun returned from whence it had come, nothing further was ‘...heard from Western Command or anyone else...’.⁴ Some Battery Commanders at different times used their guns in a temporary ground role but the practice was frowned upon. By the time of Alamein there were nearly one thousand of these guns in the Middle East, and many never fired a round in anger. Yet not one was released to the Eighth Army.⁵

The 3.7 was nevertheless used in a ground role in Italy by the South African Artillery. Care had to be taken with crest clearance, in view of its high muzzle velocity and, in the ground role, its low trajectory and range. It proved to be a good third Battery for 7/23 Medium Regiment, SA Artillery. It was not the first time this gun had been used in a ground role. It was equal to, if not superior to the German 88 mm Flak gun, used to great effect by the Germans in an Anti-Tank role. This was proved in June 1942 when four 3.7s of 282 Battery, 88 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA, knocked down their gun-pit walls and depressed to zero, to engage and delay Rommel’s *panzers* that were moving towards Tobruk harbour. They were so successful they had to be wiped out in an Infantry attack.

One ‘88’ Flak in the eastern sector of Tobruk on 20 June, manned by a medley of men under Sgt Mellish of 2 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, South African Artillery, kept German *Panzers* at bay for a short while until they were overwhelmed by weight of numbers.

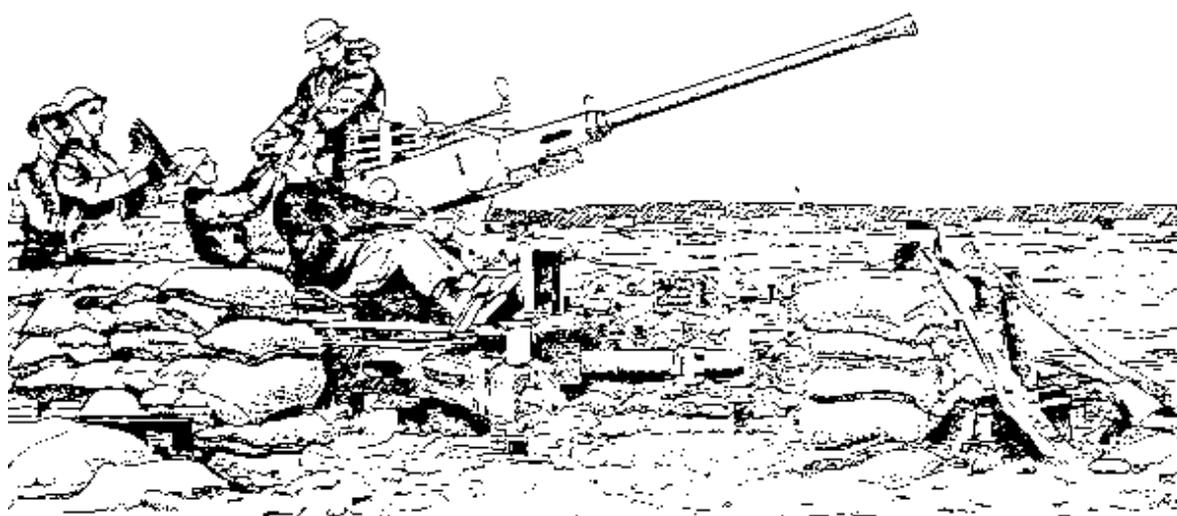


Figure 20: 40mm L/60 automatic light Anti-Aircraft gun

² With acknowledgement to pp. 18/19 of a copy of *Gunner* for which no reference is available

³ *British and American Artillery of World War 2*, pp. 108,109.

⁴ *Gunner*, June 1984, p.14.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The 40 mm Bofors

The 40mm L/60 automatic light Anti-Aircraft gun (although AB Bofors have made scores of different guns, the 40 mm is always referred to as 'The Bofors Gun') is one of the most successful and famous guns ever built. It was designed and developed by the Swedish company, *Aktiebolaget Bofors* in 1929, re-designed and developed before being placed on the international market in 1931. One hundred 40 mm Bofors and 500 000 rounds of ammunition were purchased by Britain in 1937 in order to give the necessary low-level protection to the Army. The Swedish built equipment began to be issued in 1938.⁶ A further quantity of these guns was purchased from Poland (the Poles had taken out a licence to produce the gun in 1935) and this was followed by a licence to manufacture them in Britain. It also enabled Canada to produce the gun. Arrangements were made to manufacture the gun but factory capacity in Britain was at a premium and it was not until 1941 that guns began to come off the production line in quantity. A special predictor, the Kerrison (or No. 3 predictor) was developed, the auto-loader was simplified, the sights underwent several changes and towards the end of the war of 1939-45 remote power control was perfected. Although designed to be lowered to the ground for emplacement, it was quite possible to fire it from its wheels, and on the move the gun-layer often rode on the gun so as to open fire with the least delay. The gun was recoil operated and had a vertical sliding breech-bloc. An 'auto-loader' unit behind the breech accepted rounds in chargers of four and fed them down into line with the breech, whence they were rammed by a spring rammer. The fired cases were ejected straight back and then deflected down a guide chute to be thrown clear at the front of the mounting. Barrel springs compensated the barrel weight, and the whole mounting revolved on a ball-race on the carriage, which had four outriggers and two axles.

In a two page report apparently sent to someone at Defence headquarters and now on file in the military archives, the author described a possible amendment to the manufacture of the 40 mm Bofors. He suggested he said, after much thinking, substituting only two small coil springs for lighter ones of the same size. He intimated that it did away with the whole feeder system and 'a thousand machine operations' in the manufacturing process. He had also found '*a host of other ways of simplifying the manufacture which can be incorporated in a new design.*' The report was dated 27 October 1940. There was no name or signature and it was not addressed to anyone in particular; but someone had written in red: 'Col HJ Johnson whom I previous wrote to DGWS about. No Action'. An unknown initial was appended.

Almost four and a half months later the same gentleman again sent an unaddressed report to 'someone' at Defence Headquarters. In this report (more of a friendly letter) he said he had perfected the spring feed device, and trials at Tenby, South Wales, lasted three days against towed and aerial targets, '*at one time we had 21 shell-bursts in the air round a target doing 200 mph. Representatives of the War Office and Ministry of Supply and Commandant of the School of Gunnery were present. We had 100 per cent success.*

*Winston Churchill ordered a 50 per cent increase in production but the Ministry said it couldn't be done unless the modifications were adopted at once. Wheels began to move. How soon could guns be produced by the Royal Ordnance Factory, Churchill asked. He was told only when someone in authority said, Go. He ordered a go ahead at once. One hundred and twenty three parts have been eliminated and the gun is now being spoken of as the Johnson gun, but officially the Bofors Mk 2. There will probably be a saving of £500 000 on orders now on hand.'*⁷

A wide variety of sights were employed at different times from the first widely-used 'Polish Course and Speed Sight' – difficult to manufacture and demanded a high state of proficiency – to the Forward Area Sight which replaced it in 1940. In 1943, the foresights were replaced by cartwheel sights with three rings for aim-off at target speeds of 100, 200 and 300 mph. In 1944 one of the very many involved variants (including naval and self-propelled variants) was the introduction of the 'Stiff key Stick' or 'Sight, Correctional M4'. The sight was evolved at a light Anti-Aircraft training camp at

⁶ *The Guns* : 1939-45, p. 85.

⁷ SANDF Archives, CGS, Box 10, file CGS 3/8, Vol.1, enc. 30.

Stokey on the Norfolk coast of Britain – hence, by some curious interpretation - Stiffkey.⁸ The L/60 Bofors, with a rate of fire of 120 rpm, fired a standard HE shell weighing 2 lb.⁹ With an MV of 2 700 ft/sec the *maximum* attainable ceiling was about 12 500 feet although the *effective* ceiling was 5 000 feet. The maximum horizontal range was 10 800 yds. The L/70 version, introduced in the 1950s, fired a slightly heavier shell, had a higher muzzle velocity, double the rate of fire and an *effective* ceiling of 11 500 ft. It had a power unit to provide electro-hydraulic elevating and traversing of the gun.¹⁰

There were about eighteen variants of the gun – from Mk I to Mk 12/I; Auto-loaders Type A to Type E; Mountings Mk 1 to Mk 10; seven different platforms and six changes in carriage. There was also a self-propelled version: the ‘Carrier, Morris 40mm AA Mk I’ (a 3-ton Morris-Commercial truck chassis with the Mk 5 mounting secured to the cargo bed) and a Bofors mounted as ‘Crusader II AA Tank Mk I.’ The Bofors variants almost equalled those of the 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft gun, but were nowhere near to the 215 different combinations of charge and shell for the latter gun.¹¹

Both the 3.7-inch and the Bofors were included in South Africa’s armoury in the immediate post war years.



Figure 21: 40mm Bofors gun towed

⁸ *British and American Artillery of World War Two*, pp.97-100.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Twentieth-Century Artillery*, pp. 109,110.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.106.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE WESTERN DESERT

When 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade arrived in Egypt in May 1941, it was under-strength and required three officers and 468 other ranks to take it up to full establishment. A new war establishment table for a heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, on a diluted basis, was then being prepared in the Union and it included 39 officers, 577 white and 517 Cape Corps personnel. The actual number of white personnel on this basis was in excess of requirements. Defence Headquarters promised to send the required number of Cape Corps men as soon as possible.

The Brigade had been sent to East Africa in April 1940 as a heavy Anti-Aircraft Brigade based on three Batteries each of eight 3.7-inch guns and one Searchlight Battery of eighteen lights – although it had fought in East Africa with only one heavy Battery and six lights. In highlighting the temporary equipment with which the Brigade had fought the East African campaign, Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey raised the question of the issue of equipment and stated it was now felt the unit should be properly equipped. The request did not receive the attention the unit commander had hoped for.

It was a crucial period in the war for possession of North Africa. The Italian Tenth Army had been destroyed in an operation led by Major General O'Connor, which had begun as a raid to push the Italians back from their comfortable series of camps in the Sidi Barrani area, across the frontier wire and back into Libya. Operation Compass was so successful that it ended in early February 1941 when the remnants of ten whole Italian Divisions surrendered to less than one Infantry Division, two Batteries of Artillery and an understrength Armour Squadron of Western Desert Force.¹ But by then the tanks of 7th Armoured Division were in a deplorable state and, for urgent maintenance reasons, the whole Division was transferred back to the Delta. They were replaced by the newly arrived 2nd Armoured Brigade. Troops had also been withdrawn to assist the Greek Army, which had bested the Italian forces that on 28 October 1940 had attempted to invade Greece. Hitler sent in XXX Corps of the German Twelfth Army and by 21 April the Greek Army had been overcome. British units sent from North Africa to assist were hastily evacuated to Crete, where, despite a good beginning, they were eventually overwhelmed by German paratroopers, who dropped on the island at dawn on 20 May.

Rommel to the Rescue

Generalleutenant Erwin Rommel was sent to rescue the situation in North Africa and he wasted no time, making his move on 31 March. By 4 April Benghazi was in his hands, Derna fell to his 5th Light Division (later named 21st Panzer Division) and on 11 April he was knocking on the door of Tobruk, then held by an Australian Brigade – a haven into which the retreating and disordered British forces congregated. In the shambles of the retreat General O'Connor was taken prisoner.

Rommel attacked Tobruk on 12 April but ran into a barrage of heavy and concentrated Artillery fire that it persuaded him to bide his time until he had more forces at his disposal. Tobruk was strategically dominant throughout the North African campaign, both as a supply port and as a block on the routes east and west across the desert. He moved on to Bardia and Sollum and reached there the same day. He was inside the frontier wire of Egypt by May.

¹ Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 38.

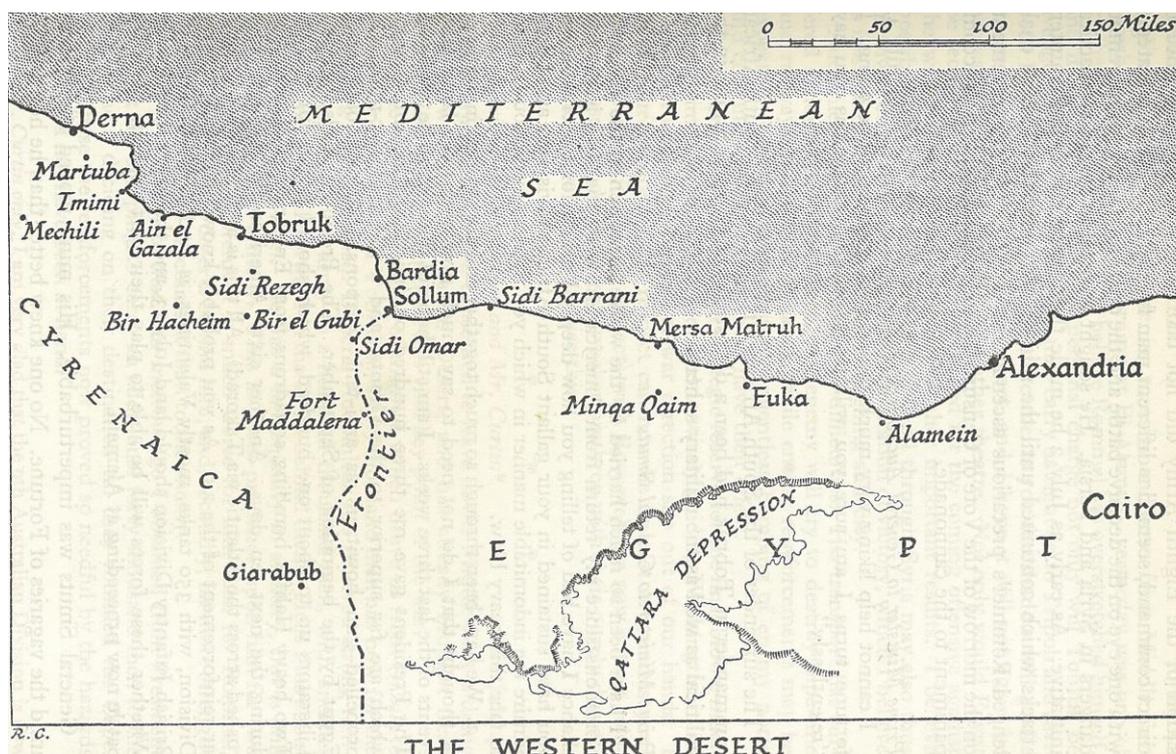


Figure 22: Map of the Western Desert

1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade

At 3.00 am on 4 May the main body of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade reached Amariya, some 15 miles south-west of Alexandria, where hot food was provided by an Australian unit who also supplied vehicles for their move to the camp. Everyone slept in the open. Tents were provided in the morning. That day Major General G.E. Brink opened the headquarters of 1st SA Infantry Division (V) at Amariya. The Division's emblem, painted on all vehicles was the Blue Wildebeest – an antelope noted for its speed and tenacity. Vehicles were generally covered in dust and Division's sign could not usually be seen.

Four days earlier General Erwin Rommel had launched yet another attack on Tobruk; but the Australians then in full possession of the sea port had counter-attacked and by 4 May the *Afrika Korps* had been repulsed, although they retained the high ground at Medauar on the Tobruk perimeter.

Meanwhile at Beni Yusef, to which 2 and 4 Sections of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery had been moved, re-equipment went ahead; while at Port Said unloading of the Brigade's equipment continued. As transport came off the ship the vehicles were loaded with stores, except that the more delicate and important items – including predictors and height finders - were loaded into special vehicles. Unloading was completed by 6.30 pm on 7 May and in the early morning of 9 May two convoys left the port. Only an hour into their journey they were halted for a short while, because of air raid damage. The move of guns, stores and equipment – including those at Beni Yusef - and their redistribution to Batteries and sections continued over for the next two days. Only two bearing dials were found badly damaged but they were fortunately replaced by the Ordnance Depot.

Operation Order

The first operation order was received on 13 May 1941.

1st Anti-Aircraft Battery's stores and guns were loaded onto a train and the Battery, with No. 4 Section of 2nd Battery, left for the port of Mersa Matruh on 13 May, where Major G.W. Meister was appointed AADC, Mersa Matruh. He took command of the Gun Operations Room and assumed command of all Anti-Aircraft defences in the immediate area. 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery were meanwhile checking equipment and awaiting orders, while 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery cleaned equipment. All the 76 mm Italian guns captured at Kismayu were handed to Ordnance Stores. A

number of junior officers and NCO's were sent to the Anti-Aircraft School to qualify as Bofors Instructors. Training of all Anti-Aircraft instructors for the two South African Anti-Aircraft units in the Middle East was undertaken at this school. It was a Royal Artillery institution and was based at Haifa. After arrival from East Africa both 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments sent between 30 and 40 junior officers and senior NCOs to the School on courses for conversion to 40 mm Bofors Anti-Aircraft guns.

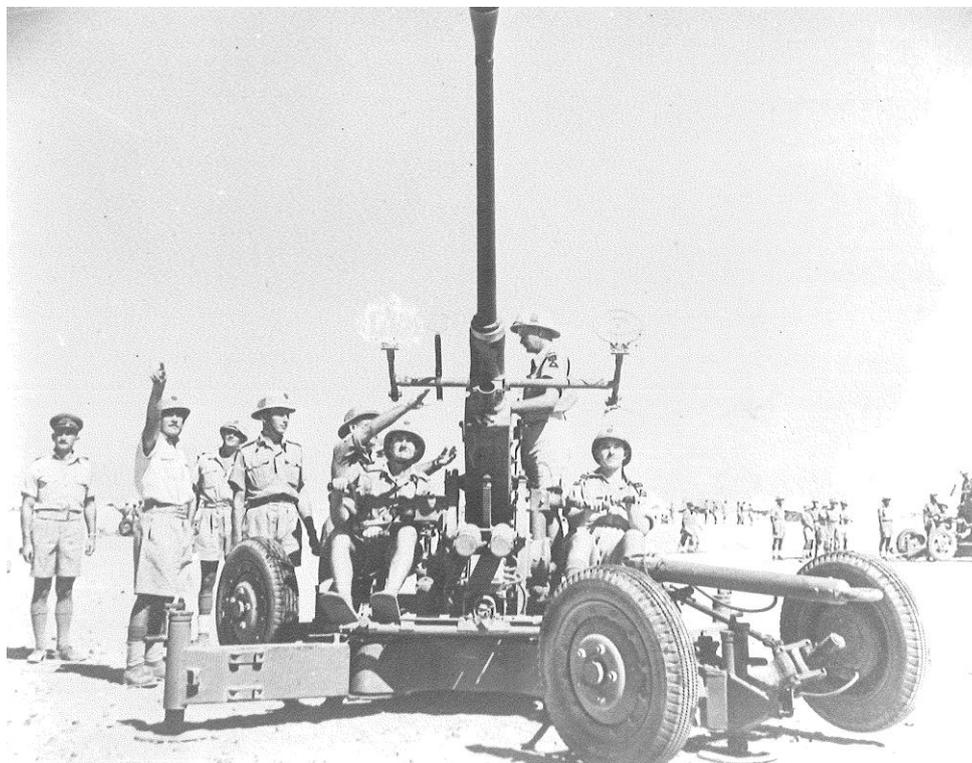


Figure 23: A sub-section in training on their newly issued Bofors'

On 15 May Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey moved his headquarters, together with the Signal and Workshop Troops, to Qasaba, south-east of Mersa Matruh; the Searchlight Battery joined 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery at Matruh, all gun and searchlight personnel being accommodated in the Lido Hotel. It was to be no sinecure - nothing like East Africa had been. Sixteen bombs were dropped around the railway station on the first night they were there. The railway line was damaged; and there was more bombing a night later. By 16 May, No. 1 and 3 Sections took over the positions from 25th Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA, and the next day No. 1 Section of 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery was manning nine twin-Lewis gun posts at Fuka landing ground. Possibly not quite ready to identify German aircraft, one flew over Mersa Matruh on 16 May and was considered friendly – until it dropped its bombs. A number of other aircraft overflew the town but none were identified.²

For the balance of the month there was little air activity, apart from obvious reconnaissance flights at high altitude, and the passage overhead of groups of enemy aircraft – twenty-seven in one group were counted on 18 May. That day another post was established by No. 1 Section of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery at Fuka satellite landing ground where they also manned nine twin-Lewis guns. Visibility that day was poor, with low-lying heavy clouds but an estimated ten enemy aircraft were heard overhead and bombs were heard to drop some distance away. The balance of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery – two sections - arrived on 18 May. A section with nine LMGs was posted to Bagush satellite landing ground on 18 May and four twin and twelve single MGs was sent to Sidi Haneish railway station five days later. Continued air activity hastened their preparations for action.

² SANDF Archives. War Diaries, Box 74, file A1.

Four days later No. 3 Section of 3rd Battery manned four twin and twelve single Lewis LMGs at Sidi Haneish. A sandstorm interrupted activity over the next two days. Faulty recognition led to a Heikel III flying undisturbed overhead at Matruh on 26 May. On that day No. 4 Section of 3rd Battery was disbanded and personnel were transferred to the remaining three sections. Aircraft recognition was still a problem and remained so for almost the entire desert campaign. No training in the recognition 'of our own or the enemy aircraft was ever given', noted Major Garlick, many years later.³ Nor did they receive any training on identifying 'own' and 'enemy' tanks and vehicles. At about 11 pm on 28 May sound locators picked up an aircraft approaching from the east. There was no recognition signal and the guns opened fire – 49 rounds being expended before Jumbo (an identification system) identified the aircraft as friendly.

Lieutenant Colonel Jeffery was appointed Commander, Heavy Anti-Aircraft Defences, Bagush Area, from 1 June and the Gun Operations Room was transferred to Maaten Bagush, coming into full operation that day. He was responsible for all Anti-Aircraft defences over the whole area Fuka to Garawla and was in direct communication with the guns at seven gun sites in an area spread over 47 miles. Guns included four sections each of two 3.7-inch guns from 25 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, Hong Kong and Singapore Regiment, RA, two sections each of each of two 3.7-inch guns and one section of 3-inch 20 cwt semi-mobile guns of 23 Heavy Battery, also of the Hong Kong and Singapore Regiment, the 3-inch 20 cwt guns of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery, the Italian Bredas captured in East Africa, and twin-Lewis machine-guns.

Australian Anti-Aircraft Brigade Intelligence Summary No. 3 noted that in attacks on the Australian positions in Tobruk, their Anti-Aircraft guns and predictors had been singled out for attack. This was noted as a warning for the South African Anti-Aircraft gunners. The withdrawal of British and Australian troops from Crete began and between 27 and 30 May the Royal Navy lifted off 14 000 men; but it had a high percentage of losses, losing three cruisers and six destroyers in the process. For the Germans, who had dropped 8 500 men on Crete, 3 764 had been killed. For them it was a somewhat pyrrhic victory.⁴

There was no enemy air activity over Matruh in the first eight days of June, except for seven unidentified aircraft that over-flew the town on the eighth - the day that No 4 Section of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery departed for Sidi Barrani on airfield defence, taking with them four 13.2 mm Breda heavy MGs, to join No. 4 Section. The section was attacked at 4.30 am the next morning and two bombs were dropped close to its position. The Bredas did not open fire; the aircraft were too high. But they had fortunately missed the most concentrated attack yet experienced at Matruh which took place later that morning, the enemy taking advantage of low-lying clouds. Sixty bombs were dropped by eight to ten aircraft in the attack which lasted 45 minutes. Damage was negligible. 1st Battery engaged with its 3-inch 20 cwt guns at intersections of searchlights and 893 rounds were fired. No aircraft were illuminated and none apparently damaged. There was no damage on the ground and no injuries. Seven Heikel III's again raided Matruh on 10 June, dropping 40 bombs which caused only slight damage. A small petrol point was ignited and a number of mines in the surrounding minefield exploded. 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery joined in the barrage and fired 174 rounds but no hits were observed. The aircraft were at about 13 000 feet. 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery did not open fire.⁵ No. 1 Section was moved to a new position at Girawla airfield and at Sidi Barrani No. 4 Section was placed on stand-to from 5.15 am to 6.30 am and 8.00 pm to 9.30 pm daily, due to the expectation of air attacks.

Two days later an aircraft was engaged by barrage, and 74 rounds were fired without result. It was out of range of the searchlights and afterwards was 'presumed to be friendly although it gave the wrong A.R.S. and was flying in the wrong direction'. It was otherwise 'normal routine' that day at Abu Haggag, Sidi Barrani and Mersa; but in the evening a sing-song and band performance was held on the

³ Notes provided by Major N. Garlick.

⁴ Chronological Atlas, p. 45.

⁵ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box 374, file A3.

beach and, as the war diary records, 'Major General Brink took salute'.⁶ Many of the attacks at Mersa Matruh took place early in the morning, and for the next two days hostile aircraft were overhead between 3.30 – 5.17 am. Bombs were dropped and aircraft were engaged at the intersection of searchlight beams. Similarly the next morning, when two aircraft attacked at a height of 8 200 feet and were engaged by barrage control. Twenty-three bombs were dropped and 542 rounds were fired. Aircraft were reported overhead at almost hourly intervals during the day, but the war diary did record, however, that two of them were RAF Wellingtons.

At midday a Hurricane coming in to land at Sidi Barrani, where No. 4 Section of 2nd Battery was on guard, was attacked by two ME109's and shot down. The airfield and surroundings were then strafed by the Messerschmitts. All guns opened fire and 'One plane staggers, apparently hit, both escape', recorded the day's diary.⁷ The attacks at Matruh by bombers flying at heights up to 16 500 feet were continuous, but at Sidi Barrani ME 109's came in low to strafe the airfield. They also did so with British Hurricanes they must have captured in France. One such 'plane was hit and crashed. Further attacks took place in July and on the first day of that month one RA gun received a direct hit and was badly damaged; luckily there were no personnel casualties. That evening a lone enemy plane dropped a stick of fourteen bombs only sixty yards from 'Z' Troop's headquarters without causing damage to equipment. At Mersa Matruh Gunner N.D. Stathakis was killed by a bomb fragment. He was buried with due ceremony at 2.00 pm, the same day, at the Matruh Military cemetery. His grave is recorded as Row D Grave No. 1 Plot No 1. The next night following a raid in which a stick of fourteen bombs was dropped one enemy aircraft was illuminated by the searchlights and it attempted to dive down the line of light. Apparently blinded, the pilot got into a vertical dive and crashed into the sea. Believe it or not, the aircraft was credited to the searchlight.⁸

1st Anti-Aircraft Battery opened fire and expended 88 rounds during an attack on the night of 3 July when a stick of nine bombs were dropped. An aircraft was later heard flying off the coast after this engagement. Searchlights picked it up and it was seen to be gradually losing height. When at about 1 500 feet the aircraft nose-dived into the sea and exploded. Twenty minutes later the Battery fired 72 rounds at an aircraft later identified as friendly. It was a quiet day at Ras Hawalwa. The war diary contains a note to the effect that detachments on the 3.7-inch 20 cwt guns found them 'unsatisfactory' and possibly a little inaccurate. The problem was found to be in the Vickers predictor and an R.A. Staff Sergeant attached to the Battery traced the trouble to a faulty calculation in the manufacture of the predictor. An adjustment '... in the drum which recorded the wind allowance', was made and it seemed to solve the problem.

There were two raids the next day and to everyone's surprise the first one at 10.15 am was by Italian Savoia 79's; the second was by nine aircraft. No bombs were dropped on Matruh but a stick of bombs was dropped 15 miles due east. As was normal procedure, 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery fired seven rounds to indicate the target to own fighters. Enemy air activity continued on succeeding days this, but aircraft kept at a respectable height. During most of the raids Anti-Aircraft fire was directed either by barrage control or by firing on intersections of searchlight beams. Bombs were often dropped well away from points where the Anti-Aircraft guns were located, on one occasion an estimated 15 – 20 miles east of Matruh. No planes were brought down but many were diverted from their course.

On 6 July, 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade - which the war diary showed as 1 (S.A.) A.A. Brigade – was placed 'under command of BRA, 12th A.A. Brigade, R.A. vice B.A.A. 1st Australian A.A. Brigade.'⁹ Bombing continued almost daily; thirty-seven bombs were dropped on Matruh between 3.39 am and 11.50 pm on 8 July; but new tactics were evident when an enemy aircraft glided in to 700 ft above Sidi Haneish railway station before 10.00 pm that night and dropped six incendiary and five small HE bombs, without causing damage or casualties. The AADC Matruh Fortress made an application that day for the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box 374, file A3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

credit of two enemy aircraft shot down by the heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. When hostile aircraft entered the area at 4.45 am on 10 July the searchlights at Matruh were instructed 'not to engage but only by V.I.E. (Visual Indicator Equipment)'. The aircraft dropped their bombs three miles away. The next night one aircraft turned and dived with its engine off after all the others had withdrawn and machine-gunned Y2 searchlight position. Garawla landing strip was subject to a ten second attack and 40 incendiaries were dropped. In both instances there were no casualties or damage. From an attack made nine hours later – at 3.05 am – it appeared that the searchlights were targeted.

The fourteenth day of July was a red letter day – the first mail from home arrived.¹⁰

The persistence of high level attacks led to two sections of 3.7-inch guns being brought to the Matruh area. Early August saw a period of intensive air attacks with ten separate attempts to penetrate the air defences on the night of 5/6 August. Attacks continued through the month and Naval House was damaged by bombs in one attack at the end of August. Between 28 May and 12 October Matruh suffered 171 air raids, but after this date enemy aircraft became less active.

By Lighter to Tobruk

Tobruk was under siege at this time and the Australian and British troops were kept supplied with everything they needed in order to continue holding the desert port, by ships of the Royal Navy and by lighters. During July 1st SA Division was instructed to provide Anti-Aircraft protection for the lighters that carried stores from Matruh to Tobruk. Each 'A' Lighter had a detachment of four gunners and two twin-Lewis guns. It was a run fraught with danger and four guns were lost by 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery before Western Desert Force (the forerunner of Eighth Army) ruled that the task was to be undertaken by the Infantry. On the evening of 28 July Anti-Aircraft LMG detachments from 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery provided protection aboard two lighters bound for Tobruk. They were heavily attacked by an estimated twenty JU 87's and fourteen ME 109's. A great number of bombs were dropped, one striking the bridge of one lighter which subsequently sank. Lance Bombardier Brand and two other gunners – one of which drowned when the lighter went down - made heroic efforts and were instrumental in saving the lives of eleven men who had been on the 'A' type lighter. One of the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery's detachment was slightly wounded. The second lighter returned safely to Matruh on the morning of 30 July. That evening two more lighters left for the voyage to Tobruk, one with personnel from 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery and the other with a detachment from 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery, each providing Anti-Aircraft protection. A further lighter left on 4 August with machine-gunners from 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery and yet another two left on the night of 6 August – with 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery personnel manning LMGs on both.

The periodic journeys by sea between Matruh and Tobruk were hazardous. Two lighters with 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery men on board left on the night of 10 August. Their journey was uneventful until the next afternoon when six JU 88s approached at low altitude. Two RAF fighters intervened and shot down two of the enemy aircraft, the rest making off in a hurry. Four more enemy aircraft appeared at a great height that evening but were again driven off by RAF fighters. The lighters reached Tobruk without further incident at 5.00 am on 12 August, but while moving into Tobruk harbour early that morning one of the craft struck a mine. It was lifted into the air and broke in two. The crew were thrown into the water, one gunner was slightly injured but all were able to swim the 250 yards to shore. The Anti-Aircraft personnel were 'a bit shaken' according to a Battery Commander and were evacuated the same night on a destroyer but as the vessel was leaving harbour it was attacked by enemy aircraft. The Luftwaffe 'planes were persistent in their attacks which lasted for four long hours.¹¹ A number of bombs were dropped while the destroyer was en route to Matruh, but the enemy aircraft failed to score a hit. On another lighter, Gunner W.H. Bailie was accidentally shot. Men from 5th SA Infantry Brigade, trained on Hotchkiss guns eventually provided lighter protection until, in October the Royal Navy took over this duty.¹²

¹⁰ The Tide Turned at Alamein, p. 12.

¹¹ War in the Desert, p. 26.

¹² Ibid.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Steps are being taken, announced the Adjutant General on 20 October 1941, to change the designation of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade to read: 1st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery. The AG was somewhat late in this announcement, and also a little incorrect as it had earlier been decided that numerical titles would be cardinal and not ordinal; so it was as 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment that it became a Regiment on 1 August 1941.¹³ The newly titled unit was allotted to 1st South African Division and in the first week of September, Brigade Headquarters, 1st AA Battery and the Searchlight Battery, left Mersa Matruh and moved to Garawi Camp, close to the South African base at Helwan, for re-organisation moved on a new war establishment table (WET) and for re-equipping of 1 Anti-Aircraft Battery with 40 mm Bofors Anti-Aircraft guns drawn by Artillery quads – known to the Anti-Aircraft gunners as ‘Spiders’. They were followed at the end of the month by the two other Batteries.

On 12 October 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (under command of Major Lukas Meyer, with Captain Ross as his Battery Captain), now attached to 1st SA Infantry Brigade took over twelve 40 mm Bofors, four predictors with generators, and other equipment, from 100 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA., at Port Suez. And, on 15 October, 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (Major Bob Batho, with Captain Iain Campbell as Battery Captain) drew twelve 40 mm Bofors and four predictors with generators, from Ordnance Stores. 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (Major Neil Garlick and Captain Starke as Battery Captain) were similarly equipped from 21 October 1941. Training on the new Mk 1 guns proceeded simultaneously with the re-organisation of the Regiment as a light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

There were about 45 vehicles per Battery and some were new. Battery Commanders and Battery Captains received Ford V8 staff cars built on the typical old pattern of a British country vehicle, i.e., station wagons, the bodies reinforced on the outside with wood frames. They were only two-wheel drive but had fat desert tyres, frequently punctured on the rough desert stones and, as Major Garlick described, each had a useful folding table and ‘a hole in the roof’ for a look-out. A pair of 4 metre long canvas/wood-slat sand mats, a ‘camel tank’, holding about eight gallons of water, and six jerricans of spare petrol were carried- and ‘all your worldly possessions’.¹⁴ Major Garlick, who left these details mentioned that he also had a ‘stripped’ Lewis gun- i.e. one without the casing, which he used only once – against an ME 109 which was strafing the Battery position. Before all Battery vehicles had ‘acquired’ jerricans about mid-1942, petrol had been carried in 20 litre square tins which began to leak badly at the seams as a result of being shaken about in the vehicles. By mid-May 1942 American containers with screw tops arrived, but were discarded as soon as a vehicle crew obtained the German container.

Gun tractors were four-wheel drive Quads – the same as the field gunners used - and each detachment had a ‘follow vehicle’ as they were called. It was a 3-ton four wheel drive stores truck. The quad carried seven men, eight cases of ammunition (192 rounds) immediate use gun stores, and their personal belongings. The stores truck carried the rest of the detachment, balance of the gun stores, cooking utensils, reserve petrol and oil (enough for 300 miles was carried at all times – over and above full tanks), and water – usually 40 gallons. Between the two vehicles a total of 408 rounds HE and 48 rounds AP were carried. Vehicles had run-flat tyres to enable them to be driven in an emergency. New American 3-ton ‘lorries’ were issued. Cable-laying and other vehicles were old stub-nosed 15 cwt Canadian trucks, with the engine in the driving compartment. Five motor cycles were issued per Battery but were not well accepted and most of them were quickly returned to Mersa Matruh.

Most officers were young, with an average age of 25; Major Hugh McKenzie, who had been a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps in World War One was possibly considered at 48, a little too old for desert operations. He was returned to South Africa in October 1941, where he performed useful duties with 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and the SA Air Force searchlight units.

¹³ SANDF Archives, Box 60/3, file 0149.

¹⁴ Notes by Major N. Garlick.

A total of 373 Cape Corps personnel of the first draft from Robben Island were posted to the unit as gunners on 25 October and on 31 October¹⁵, and it was once again ready for operations. Within a few weeks a number of these men had been killed or captured at Sidi Rezegh. The balance of the draft was simply separated from their officers and marched into the Non-European Army Services camp where they felt lost among a crowd of others whom they regarded as total strangers. It caused anger and much dissatisfaction.

Regimental headquarters and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to the area of Potters Lynn on exercises with 1st SA Infantry Division.

High Spirits

Before a final move into the desert was made some local leave was granted and many men of 1 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery – the only sub-units that had received pay - had ‘a last fling’ in Cairo, leaving Regimental headquarters and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft. High spirits resulted things becoming a little ‘hectic’; and one man was arrested by a military policeman. His friends tried to rescue him and tackled the policeman who immediately called for reinforcements. There was an ‘upset’ (as described by the war diary); and it was also said the battle was directed by an unnamed NCO from a house balcony above the bar while at the same time he had his arm round a girl’s waist. It resulted in about thirty five other ranks being incarcerated by the military police. Though they won the battle they themselves did not fare too well in subduing the high-spirited men.¹⁶ Preparations were being made to move out of Helwan and Major Werner Meister was called to go into the heat, noise, filth and babble of Cairo, to bail them out. They were released somewhat reluctantly – on the promise that disciplinary action would be taken against them. It was understood by all ranks that the Cairo military police were not considered very friendly towards South African gunners after that incident.

It was just as well Regimental Headquarters and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had not been paid. The battle could have been worse. With the Battery at this stage there were two gun Sergeants, former Permanent Force men, both large men, both bearing the names Petrus Johannes van der Merwe. It was a somewhat unusual situation – but easily solved: One became Sergeant Piet and the other Sergeant Johann.¹⁷

The Regiment was now ready for desert warfare.

Operation Brevity was launched by Western Desert Force at dawn on 15 May to clear Halfaya, push to Sollum and drive towards Bardia. It failed to achieve its objectives.

Operation Battleaxe began on 15 June in an effort to take both ends of Halfaya Pass, to attack Fort Capuzzo and another known defensive position at Hafid Ridge. But for the first time the Armour met the remarkable German 88 mm Flak gun as an Anti-Tank weapon. By the end of the first day of battle the British Armour had been reduced by 50 per cent. Although the 22nd Guards Brigade captured Fort Capuzzo and held it for two days against 15th Panzer Division, there was insufficient Armour to protect the surviving British and Indian Infantry, who had to withdraw or be captured. Battleaxe was a failure.

Tobruk

By October 1941 Tobruk had been under siege for six months. Some 23 000 men held the port. Life was tough for the Australian and Indian infantrymen on the perimeter, but the gunners – especially those around the harbour were bombed and shelled almost daily. Ships that visited Tobruk took in stores and carried out men, and by this time nearly 40 000 in total had been evacuated and replaced by 30 000; while 30 000 tons of stores had been delivered. A whole flotilla of small craft – lighters, South African whalers and Italian schooners – were used. But it was at some cost. Thirty-four

¹⁵ History of AA Organisation UDF 1940 1944, p69.

¹⁶ Notes by Major N. Garlick.

¹⁷ Notes by Major N. Garlick.

warships and merchantmen had been sunk and thirty-three damaged. Tobruk harbour was littered with wrecks. And, by October most Australian troops had been withdrawn on the insistence of the Australian Government. They were replaced by the British 70th Division and the 1st Polish Carpathian Brigade which were moved in during August/September.

2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade arrived in Egypt from East Africa on 2 September under the command of Lieutenant Colonel C.T. Howie who, according to one of his junior officers, always looked the perfect Guardsman officer, a methodical officer, and fearless for his own safety.¹⁸ He had superseded Lieutenant Colonel Kruger in East Africa. In the following weeks, Battery by Battery, a second South African light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was born. Re-designated in September 1941, 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, South African Artillery was re-organised and on 1 August 1941 officially, it became: 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery. Consequent upon the reorganisation the awkward situation regarding the coloured gunners left by 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Helwan was happily resolved. They were all taken on strength.

The Brigade first assembled during the period 3 to 15 September at Amariya, near Alexandria, sufficiently close for daily leave by small parties to that fascinating city; but only two weeks later the unit was again split. Conversion to 40 mm guns took place over several weeks due to immediate lack of equipment. The 6th Battery remained at Amariya, later to be moved to Helwan where it was re-equipped with 40 mm Bofors Mk II guns and predictors, while the rest of the Regiment moved west to Smugglers Cove near Mersa Matruh, on 22 September where it became involved in manoeuvres for the rest of the month. Troops in turn were attached to other units in training schemes and deployments in the Matruh area, admixed with operational duty in the harbour of Mersa Matruh, troops taking undertaking this task in turns. Two Troops of 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery went to Sofafi to provide Anti-Aircraft defence to a forward depot.

Matruh was a hot spot – it suffered 171 air raids between 28 May and 12 October, and a former Luftwaffe pilot in a book written in Germany in 1973, expressed admiration for ‘these gallant fellows who, using captured weapons withstood the might of the Luftwaffe’ and caused the German High Command to abandon their form of attack ‘which may have caused the change of events in the desert war.’ The number of attacks lessened after 12 October and this appears to corroborate with the statement by the German pilot.¹⁹

Conversion to 40 mm equipment took place over several weeks due to the immediate lack of Bofors guns. On 12 October the Brigade took on charge twelve 40 mm Bofors Mk II, four predictors, generators and other necessary equipment; and three days later 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery (still using its old title) drew twelve Bofors, four predictors and other equipment. 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved from Amariya to Garawi Camp, Helwan to continue training and re-equipping with 40 mm Bofors and Predictors. 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was similarly equipped on 21 October. 7th Anti-Aircraft Battery, under Major Louis Wolf, arrived at Garawi Camp from Eritrea on 19 November and was almost immediately disbanded, ‘A’ Troop reverting to 4 Light AA Battery and ‘B’ Troop going back to 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. Training on the new equipment for all Batteries proceeded simultaneously with reorganisation as sub-units of a light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Re-organisation began with sections becoming ‘Troops’.

By October 1941, Western Desert Force had been re-designated XIII Corps, and by 21 October XXX Corps had been formed and began to function. It led to the creation of Eighth Army²⁰ from 2 September 1941.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Springbok, magazine of the SA Legion, January 1974.

²⁰ History of the Second World War – The Mediterranean and Middle East, Volume III, pp. 1.2.

Another 300 men left Robben Island to swell the numbers of Cape Corps men in 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in time for the battle of Bardia, which began on 31 December 1941. The 732 Cape Corps gunners who served in these two units saw real action against the *Luftwaffe* and these carefully selected men proved their ability and courage many times over during succeeding months in the Western Desert campaign,²¹ not only in the capacities shown in official personnel tables but also as Lewis gunners, in Bofors detachments and even in manning captured 88mm Flak guns,²² the 88 mm Anti-Aircraft guns that the Germans used so successfully as Anti-Tank guns.

In November, 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), South African Artillery – as it had become – moved into the forward area, arriving at Matruh on 20 November 1941, and also deployed at Smugglers Cove. They were greeted by the heaviest air attack yet made and experienced by the Regiment. The enemy aircraft developed their attack at 6.30 pm and used flares to light up the target area. 4 and 5 LAA Batteries fired a barrage over the harbour with the 20 mm and 12.7 mm Breda weapons they had brought from East Africa. 'A' Troop of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was moved to Daba to take over from 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, where it was to protect a forward dump, while 'B' Troop of the same Battery occupied a defensive position at Similla railway station. 'C' Troop was at this time in the Matruh harbour area. On 21 November 'A' Troop, 6 Light Anti-Aircraft at Daba were in action against a Heinkel 111 which attempted a low level bombing run. Several hits were scored and the aircraft was driven off. Bombardier F.C. Scrimgeour was badly wounded in the attack and died on 2 December 1941.²³

Once 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved into the desert, the opportunity was taken to transfer 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery back to Helwan for re-equipping on 40 mm Bofors and predictors. Training on this equipment began immediately it was issued. 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery remained in the Matruh area with their Bredas and LMGs, but they were relieved with occasional trips to the front with small parties which included AFV escorts for Brigadier W.H.E. Poole, commanding 2nd SA Infantry Brigade. On 5 December, Regimental Headquarters, accompanied by 5 and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries left Matruh for Sidi Omar, arriving there the next day to take up positions in the defensive 'Box'. One Troop of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery remained there only until the next morning before moving with the 2IC of the Regiment, Major N.C. Wessels, to provide Anti-Aircraft defence at the Gambut airfield. In consequence of the forthcoming move into the desert orders were received to return all predictors to Mesa Matruh 'for safe custody.'²⁴

The first action of any note in the field was fought on 10 December 1941 - in a dust storm, with consequent poor visibility - against JU 88's flying fairly high. Two days later 'B' Troop – of the former 7th Anti-Aircraft Battery – joined 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery; and on the same day the balance of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, except for B Echelon, moved from Sidi Omar to Bir Hafid. 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved on 22 December from Gambut to Menastir. In consequence of the forthcoming move into the desert orders were received to return all Kerosen predictors to Mersa Matruh for safe custody.

A New GOC

As a result of the two failed operations General Sir Archibald Wavell was replaced by General Sir Claude Auchinleck as GOC, Middle East Command, with the newly formed Eighth Army under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Alan Cunningham. The force at his disposal consisted of three Divisions of Infantry – the New Zealand, 4th Indian and 1st South African – a Guards Brigade, 7th Armoured Division, 4th Armoured Brigade and 1st Army Tank Brigade.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was attached to 1st SA Infantry Brigade, and within the formation the three Troops were posted to the three Batteries of 7 Field Regiment; 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was with Division troops, 'D' Troop with Division headquarters, 'E' Troop with Division 'Q' Services and 'F'

²¹ *Militaria*, 24/2, 1994.

²² *South Africa at War*, pp 122,123.

²³ In Memorium -Magazine of Rondeboschboys' High School, p. 51.

²⁴ Notes by Major N. Garlick.

Troop with 7 Medium Battery, RA.; two guns were attached to each of the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, 1st Transvaal Scottish and Royal Natal Carbineers. 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was on a training exercise with 5th SA Infantry Brigade from 6 to 17 November 1941. Prior to the attack on Libya, with one Troop each was attached to 2nd Regiment Botha, 3rd Transvaal Scottish and 1st SA Irish. Twenty-five year-old Major. Garlick was for a short while, appointed acting commanding officer from 23 November 1941.



Figure 24: A typical desert dust storm

Advance into Libya

In the Division's Anti-Aircraft Regiment, a fourth Battery was formed under Captain C.D. Stark – Battery Captain of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery - by withdrawing two guns from each of the three – normally - twelve-gun Batteries. It was given the special mission of guarding the advanced landing grounds which were to be used by fighter aircraft during the operation. The new Troops were designated 'X', 'Y' and 'Z'. The guns were in position by 17 November.

Operation Crusader

Operation Crusader was launched on 18 November 1941; the newly formed Eighth Army, with two Corps – XIII and XXX Corps - crossed the frontier early that morning after two days of astonishing rain which had reduced large parts of the desert to bog. The operation was aimed at the relief of Tobruk, followed by the occupation of Cyrenica. XIII Corps drove north to isolate the garrisons between Sidi Omar and the coast, while the more mobile XXX Corps on their left drove north-west, first to Gabr Saleh and then to Bir el Gubi and Tobruk. The general role of the South African Division was to cover the west and south-western flanks of 7th Armoured Division. By evening advance forces had reached Sidi Rezeg; two South African Brigades were deployed south of Bir el Gubi, while New Zealand and Indian troops had blocked off access to the frontier positions.²⁵

In the confusion of fighting in the hectic first ten days of 1st SA Division's participation in the general advance into Libya, some of the records of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment were lost. But, piecing together the statements of officers and men from the various Troops it became obvious that the Bofors gave valuable protection to divisional units against low-flying enemy aircraft. Several were

²⁵ Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 59.

claimed as shot down or damaged. The Bofors were also frequently engaged in an Anti-Tank role and claimed to have disabled or damaged a number of enemy tanks or armoured vehicles.

First Blood

First blood for the Anti-Aircraft guns was drawn by 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery when six G 50 enemy 'planes appeared and ground strafed the Brigade area on 20 November 1941. 'C' Troop reacted immediately, scoring two hits and bringing one enemy plane down in flames. ME 109F's and ME 110S launched another attack and this time 'E' Troop engaged. No hits were observed. The barrel of one gun was damaged by a premature detonation and Sergeant Potgieter's gun tractor suffered damage during the attack. Dive bombing attacks by fifteen dive bombers on the 'B' Echelon of 1st SA Infantry Brigade were made the next day. No specific Anti-Aircraft defence had been arranged for this area and much damage resulted from the attack, but one Stuka was hit by fire from the Bofors. Two of the fighter escort to the Stukas, when flying low on return to their base, were engaged by 'B' Troop's guns, and it resulted in one ME 109 and an ME 110 being destroyed. Five more dive bombers were destroyed when forty of these aircraft attacked Brigadier Armstrong's 5th Infantry Brigade in the early afternoon; and later another one was destroyed over his headquarters.

In an early attack on 22 November at Bir el Gubi Sergeant D.O. Williams' Bofors hit an unidentified aircraft which turned away in apparent difficulties.²⁶ And in mid-morning another dive-bombing attack was made on the Brigade's 'B' Echelon. The echelon still had no air defences. Fifteen JU 87's took part in this attack. They were protected by fighter escort and once more the echelon incurred damage. The attack was eventually broken up by the arrival of Allied fighters. As a result of these two attacks 'C' Troop was placed in support of 'B' Echelon at 5.30 pm that day. During a later night move on 22 November one of the 3-ton GS cargo vehicles carrying all 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery's spares, became detached and was not seen again. It was manned by one white and three coloured gunners and was presumed to have been captured by the enemy.

5th SA Infantry Brigade

Rommel, still intent on upon his plans to break into Tobruk, refused to take into account reports of large British forces to his south. Then, in a world-wide news bulletin at 9.00 pm on 19 November, the British Broadcasting Corporation announced that a powerful Armour force was advancing victoriously towards Tobruk. The scales fell from Rommel's eyes; he turned his attention swiftly to destroying yet another British assault. He severely depleted the tank strength of 4th Armoured Brigade. Fifty tanks of the 7th Hussars barred his way, but not for long; all twenty Crusaders and all but ten of their thirty old cruiser tanks became scrap metal. By the evening of 22 November the weight of the German Armour had crushed the last resistance and Sidi Rezeg airfield was in their hands.²⁷ Rommel's prey was now the 5th SA Infantry Brigade, which stood in his path. With the Brigade was 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Of the ten guns available to the Battery - two had been transferred to the 'new' 4th Battery nominated for airfield defence - three were allocated to the three Infantry Battalions, with one as token defence for Brigade headquarters. There was no enemy air activity except for daily reconnaissance flights at high altitude until 21 November, when 5th SA Infantry Brigade was attacked by a dozen JU 87's while it was on the move. Bombs were dropped on 'B' Echelon and the convoy was machine-gunned. All the Bofors opened fire and the enemy aircraft promptly broke off the attack. Hits were claimed but not confirmed. The Battery did not suffer casualties and there was no damage to equipment. That afternoon 'K' Troop shot down one enemy G50 aircraft. The next day was somewhat different. Some forty or fifty dive bombers attacked the Brigade while it was stationary, and later, another attack was made on the left flank of the Brigade group. The Bofors fired 'vigorously' and claimed five aircraft downed and hits registered on others. Two of the latter made off with smoke pouring from them. That Saturday afternoon the lone gun at Brigade headquarters shot down one ME 110. The pilot was made prisoner.

²⁶ Intelligence Summary dated 22.11.1941, with papers given to a author by Major Garlick.

²⁷ Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 59

As a Staff Officer Records

A staff officer of 1st SA Infantry Division who was spending a few days with the Air Force seemed to have a sad knowledge of matters concerning Anti-Aircraft guns. Guns were probably guarding the landing ground from which South African aircraft were operating. He recorded an incident (no date is given) that seems to have occurred in the last weeks of 1941: '...an ME flew over and was chased by the fighters who failed to make contact. The ack ack who had fired a few rounds were inclined to claim something because someone had seen a half moon shaped object in the S.W. sky and thought it might be a parachute. The better opinion was that it was a half moon.' No one could surely have mistaken a moon for a parachute unless the gunners were trying to pull a 'fast one' on the fighter pilots.²⁸

Sunday of the Dead

The next day, Sunday, 23 November, was *Totensonntag* – The Day of the Dead - in Germany. The *Afrika Korps* fought another battle of annihilation that day - and this time its prey was the 5th South African Infantry Brigade, laagered just east of Bir el Gubi, near the white-painted tomb at Sidi Rezegh. The enemy maintained a very heavy Artillery fire throughout the morning before the Battery Captain, Captain Iain Campbell, reported that four German tanks had penetrated into 'B' Echelon's lines. A number of vehicles had promptly moved away towards Brigade headquarters. One tank came alongside one of the Battery vehicles and a member to the tank crew stood in the hatch and fired his revolver. The Bofors gunner shot the German and the tank moved away. The Brigade was still under Artillery fire but up to this stage 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had not suffered any losses in men or equipment. At about 2.30 pm Panzer Regiment 8 of 15th Panzer Division, and Panzer Regiment 5 of 21st Panzer Division, supported by Rifle Regiments 115 and 200 from 90th Light Division and 15th Panzer Division respectively, augmented by the lighter Armour of the Ariete Division, fell upon the South African Brigade from different directions, and what '...followed was one of the fiercest battles the *Afrika Korps* was ever to fight'.²⁹

The Battery Commander at this time was at Brigade headquarters, collected his small party and in the general melee, with German tanks milling around, managed to slip away. The Bofors guns not immediately overrun fired in an Anti-Tank role. At the beginning of the day each gun had approximately 55 rounds of armour piecing and 300 rounds of HE. Owing to their high rate of fire there could not have been much unexpended ammunition to fall into enemy hands. It is not possible to know how many enemy tanks were damaged or destroyed by the Anti-Tank guns or the Bofors; but the only gun that emerged from that day's battle, claimed seven as its own.

Reports of the events of 23 November were collected at 'B' Echelon by Captain Iain Campbell, Battery Captain, for inclusion in the war diary, but when it was overrun these records were lost. The whole of 'B' Echelon became casualties and so did 'G' and 'H' Troops. The story of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery's fortunes on that day has been built up from the statements of survivors.

By dark it was all over. The Brigade had ceased to exist. To the Germans, who that day suffered equally as badly it was really was *Totensonntag*, the Sunday of the Dead. Rommel is reported to have admitted to a surviving member of the SA Irish that while their casualties were bad, his casualties were double those of 5th SA Infantry Brigade.³⁰

'K' Troop

The Troop Commander, 'K' Troop, Lieutenant R.S. Quirk, was able to report on the Troop's actions in support of the SA Irish, which was on the left flank of the Brigade group that day. He confirmed that they were under intermittent gun and tank fire from 9.00 am, but was under the impression that the tank attacks on his front were being successfully held; the reason being that shelling ceased for up to half an hour at a time, only to be renewed from a different direction. About mid-day the support Company of the Irish moved to reinforce 2nd Regiment Botha and the Company Commander

²⁸ The Tide Turned at Alamein, p. 49.

²⁹ Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 59.

³⁰ Clear the Way, p. 288.

informed Lieutenant Quirk that a tank attack was likely to develop from the rear. The Anti-Tank guns moved into action positions and the Anti-Aircraft guns were re-positioned into line with them.

The Infantry moved towards a neighbouring ridge with their mortars and machine-guns with the intention of digging in against the threatened tank attack; but they had scarcely reached the ridge when the tanks broke through. The Bofors immediately opened fire. Lieutenant Quirk was then at the left hand gun with Sergeant McWilliams. The auto-loader had HE and these rounds were fired off; three rounds of AP followed but the gun then received a direct hit. The layer, Gunner L.F. Schroeder was blown off his seat, Sergeant McWilliams was severely wounded and Gunner Barnes was wounded in the feet. Gunner McIntyre took post in the layer's seat but quickly discovered that the gun could not be traversed. The detachment was ordered to take cover.

Lieutenant Quirk, assisted by Gunner Odgers, attempted to move Gunner Schoeder to a slit trench but the wounded man received another direct hit and he died soon after the slit trench was reached. Sergeant McWilliam was assisted to an ambulance, and an attempt was made to take the gun out of action. The damage to the gear, however, made this impossible. It was abandoned and the detachment was ordered to the tractor. The Troop Commander went to the next gun – under command of Sergeant Le Clus, which by this time had run short of AP and was firing bursts of HE at point blank range. Both Anti-Tank guns were out of action and the third Bofors, which had been engaging enemy tanks, had disappeared. A large number of tanks had by then passed through the Troop position and the Lieutenant considered it futile to continue the action with only one gun firing HE and he ordered a cease fire. Gunner Odgers later reported that he saw that the barrel of the third gun appeared to have been blown off and was under the impression that the detachment were trying to replace it with the spare when a second shell hit them and the whole gun and detachment were blown into the air.

The survivors of 'K' Troop joined up with a small party of other vehicles and at first light the next day reached the vicinity of Sidi Omar where they were able to contact 4th Indian Division. From there the remnants of 'K' Troop – one officer, 24 other ranks and 20 Cape Corps members – reached Madaleina.

Lieutenant Quirk reported:

Throughout the action the conduct of the NCO's and men was magnificent. I would also like to mention Gunner Ramages (Cape Corps) who, throughout the engagement, without being ordered to do so, was engaged in clipping ammunition. Gunner Weedy assisted greatly after the gun was out of action in attending to the wounded and in applying field dressings. Both Sgt Le Clus and Bdr Wilmot were a fine example to their men by their calmness and quick grasp of the situation.³¹

Sergeant Le Clus stated that when tanks appeared in their rear, moving in two directions, it was not known whether they were hostile. Ammunition was nevertheless prepared and when they were known to be German, fire was opened and at least seven tanks were stopped. Those hit by HE – after the AP had been expended – were seen to burst into flames.³²

Major Bob Batho's 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery lost nine guns at Sidi Rezeg, two of which were known to have been destroyed and it is likely that several others were damaged before being overrun. The one gun that was saved was from the Troop under Lieutenant Quirk.³³ Two guns of the Troop of 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery on defence of a landing field close to the action, were saved and of that group, one officer 23 other ranks and three Cape Corps gunners survived. A number of men, including Major Batho, who was badly shaken, and two of the guns protecting 8 Field Battery (THA), and one

³¹ History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944, p. 77.

³² Ibid.,

³³ Notes provided by Major N. Garlick.

gun of the Troop under Lieutenant Quirk managed to escape the debacle; a number of the Cape Corps men recently posted to the Battery were among those lost that day.

Losses

All in all, as at 30 November 1941, it was reported that 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had lost 209 all ranks, but this figure was later reduced slightly, when others reported. In addition to stragglers who managed to make their way back and later re-join their unit, several NCO's and men of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery who were taken prisoner, escaped from Bengazi, and others were released after the fall of Bardia. Lieutenants Frank Vlok, MC, Iain Campbell, Geoff Friedlinghuys and Mills Gibson were taken prisoner with others of the Battery and shipped off to camps in Italy. When Italy surrendered in 1943 the guards left the prison camps open and numbers of men made their escape before the Germans arrived to lock the gates, Frank Vlok managed to get over the mountains to Switzerland where he was forced to remain until the war ended. Lieutenant Vlok was officially notified of the award of the Military Cross on 1 March 1945.

All this while, other guns of the extra, '4th' Battery, had had an uneventful day, guarding landing grounds. It reported back to 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment on 23 November 1941 and was then disbanded, the guns and detachments returning to their own Batteries.



Figure 25: A Bofors detachment of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment ready for action. It is winter in the desert and the men are wearing winter battle dress with leather jerkins for additional warmth

Clearing the Battlefield

Subsequent cleaning of the battlefield at Sidi Rezeg resulted in some equipment being salvaged, all in a damaged condition. It included one Bofors gun, three Bofors barrels and four gun tractors. Some forty German tanks remained on the field as evidence of the efficiency of the fire by the Anti-Tank and Bofors guns.

The three guns of 'E' Troop of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery remained in Libya under command of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, while the remnants of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery left with Rear RHQ and Rear Division HQ for Matruh. The marching out state of the Battery was two officers, 333 other ranks and eleven Cape Corps personnel. On 5 December reorganisation of the Battery commenced at Matruh but the Battery later moved to Smugglers Cove, where it received reinforcements of one officer, ten other ranks and 34 Cape Corps gunners from 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, and one officer,

nine other ranks and four Cape Corps men from 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. While the Battery underwent re-organisation, Major Bob Batho, then aged over 30 years was badly shaken. He was hospitalised with a recurrent stomach problem and later returned to South Africa. The 24-year old Captain Bruce Guilford replaced him as Battery Commander.

The Matruh Stakes

XXX Corps had suffered losses but XIII Corps was still virtually unscathed and the New Zealanders were driving along the coast road towards Tobruk. Rommel, however, believed Eighth Army was in state of disorganisation and on 24 November, just before 11.00 am – while units of the Eighth Army were ‘basking pleasantly in the morning sun’³⁴ - he set off on a ‘Dash for the Wire’. Placing himself at the head of 21st and 15th Panzer Divisions, and collecting the Ariete Division *en route*, he led a 60 mile dash to the frontier, roaring through the British dumps, supply echelons, scattered Armour and Infantry units and field medical centres –creating some hilarious scenes that will live in legend. By nightfall he was in Egypt with the few panzers that had not broken down or run out of fuel.³⁵

It was not easy at first, Brigadier Pienaar noted, to distinguish between the rush of fleeing transport which ‘swelled out liked a bow wave, in front of the enemy formations, and the pursuers coming on behind.’³⁶ For Advanced Division Headquarters, the quiet serenity of the day was soon disturbed by news of enemy tanks and motor transport bearing down upon the camping ground. Shells began to fall upon the vehicles. Armoured car patrols reported the advance of the enemy force on Division Headquarters and the GOC ordered it to withdraw towards the south-east. The CRA was instructed to hold the enemy with his Anti-Tank and Bofors guns. Notice to move was short and one officer who was ‘indulging in a wash’ had only time to fling sponge and basin into his vehicle and drive off, stark naked.³⁷

Lieutenant General C.W.M. Norrie, Commander of XXX Corps, whose ‘imperturbable character’ was, in the opinion of many, one of the principle reasons why the German thrust achieved so little, included in his report : ‘*Brig Pienaar’s 1 S.A. Bde....never moved a foot....4 Armd Bde remained in the area allotted to them....the Spt Gp were also well placed.*’³⁸ And Major General George Brink in his operational report stated that as far as he could see: ‘*the only tps that were standing and fighting were two Troops of A/Tk guns and one tp of AA guns that had been attached to Adv Div HQ*’. These were ‘N’ Troop of 4 SA Anti-Tank Regiment and one, later two guns of ‘D’ Troop, 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.³⁹ The Bofors fought the enemy tanks and MT throughout the withdrawal.⁴⁰

Bofors vs Panzers

08.00 am

An Intelligence summary as at 24 November 1941 read: During “previous late afternoon & evening 5th Brigade badly wounded – disorderly withdrawal by survivors follows”.

10.00 am

‘D’ Troop fired 18 ineffective rounds at one ME 110 and four ME 109’s apparently on reconnaissance. Forty five minutes later German tanks supported by both ‘lorried and motor cycle troops broke through the 5th Brigade gap’ and advanced directly on the area occupied by Advance Headquarters, 1st SA Infantry Division. The headquarters was forced to make a hurried withdrawal.

10.45 am

One lone gun of ‘A’ Troop, 2 Light anti-Aircraft Battery – providing protection to Division Headquarters against air attack – was for several minutes forced into a rear-guard action against the panzers, which advanced slowly with a frontal formation of twenty tanks. Sergeant P.L. Byrne’s lone Bofors engaged them when they appeared over a ridge about 1 000 yards away. Shortly after the first

³⁴ The Sidi Rezegh Battles, pp. 289,291.

³⁵ Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 59

³⁶ The Sidi Rezegh Battles, p. 294.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 295.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 295,296.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 296n.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 296.

rounds had been fired, two Anti-Tank guns arrived to support the Anti-Aircraft gun. Several rounds from the latter were dead on target. His ammunition clips had been loaded with mixed HE and AP. Two Anti-Tank guns arrived to support the Bofors gun. The tanks halted and opened fire with HE.

11.00 am

The situation was becoming impossible, particularly as the Anti-Tank guns had withdrawn several hundred yards. Lieutenant Upton who had remained with Sergeant Byrne's gun, ordered it to be taken out of action and withdraw about 500 yards. The tanks moved forward slowly and when about 600 yards away Sergeant Mason arrived with his Bofors. The two guns engaged the tanks from their wheels. The Anti-Tank guns had again moved and were firing 200 yards to the rear. The Bofors were described as 'putting up a magnificent effort.' Several tanks appeared to have been hit and in all probabilities badly damaged. One was seen to 'blow up' when hit by an anti-tank shell.

Many HE rounds ricocheted from the ground above the tanks and exploded in the air above the motorised troops behind the tanks. Casualties must have been caused. By now dust and gun-smoke resulted in poor visibility and accurate observation but the Intelligence Summary states that a number of tanks and other vehicles had 'actually stopped or been knocked out'. The slow stage by stage withdrawal continued and for 'several hours' the gun line was joined by additional Anti-Tank guns from 'N' Troop, 4 SA Anti-Tank Battery.⁴¹

12.30 pm.

The two Bofors under Sergeant Byrne and Mason were joined by two more Bofors under Lieutenant W.B. Cameron of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and a stand was made in front of Landing Ground No. 138. that were guarding Landing Ground 138, where a lone Lysander army co-operation aircraft was standing. The Panzers were beaten off and a pilot appeared and the aircraft took off and escaped destruction at the last minute.

One of Lieutenant Cameron's guns had a premature and the ammunition from this gun was passed to Sergeant Bryne who by now was short of ammunition. Lieutenant Upton moved off in an attempt to obtain more AP rounds. He met Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey who promised a supply...if possible and he immediately returned to the guns. By now the tanks appeared to have come to a halt and were possibly refuelling. It was noted that others from the rear were coming forward. Hits were claimed on six tanks by the three Bofors and Lieutenant Cameron claimed two destroyed.

About eight tanks attempted an encircling movement on the left flank and the Anti-Tank guns on that side moved further forward to engage. Lieutenant Cameron moved his guns to the north of the landing ground and Lieutenant Upton passed through the defence works to a position south west of the ground. Withdrawal continued in stages, the guns stopping and firing off their wheels ever 500 yards or so. Fire from the tanks was incessant and there were many close misses. The gunners had not suffered and casualties. '

2.30 pm/3.00 pm

Having expended all but a few rounds of HE it was decided to withdraw to a flank and attempt to get the guns out safely. But at 3.30 pm Lieutenant Upton joined a 7th Armoured Division Support column where he fortunately obtained a re-supply of petrol and ammunition. The column moved on for several miles and the Lieutenant lost contact with the guns. In attempting to find them his 15 cwt Morris was strafed by an ME109 and badly damaged. Late in the evening he was found by a Royal Hussars armoured car patrol.

N' Troop and the Bofors continued to fire on the panzers until sunset when the enemy tanks finally withdrew. It was estimated that at least six tanks had been hit and badly damaged or disabled and that damage and casualties inflicted on vehicles and troop to the rear of the tanks. Well over 300 rounds including 100 rounds of AP ammunition were fired by the two guns of 'D' Troop.

That Night

One of the two guns was lost to the enemy. Sergeants Byrne and Mason had joined up with other troops withdrawing to the frontier but during the night they ran into a German formation. In subsequent firing and confusion Lance Bombardier Reynolds was killed while at the wheel of the gun tractor. Sergeant Mason, complete with his gun and detachment managed to escape; so did Sergeant Byrne and Lance Bombardier A.W. Bassett. Gunners Schoeman, Sealy, Volschenk and I.V. Thomson

⁴¹ Uncle George, p. 228.

were taken prisoner.⁴² 'Monty' Peterson and one other member of Sergeant Byrne's detachment were found six days later.

The Brigade

On 23 November the Brigade's night move took it to a new defensive position, with the Bofors of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery sited for air defence but with a primary Anti-Tank role. The next day, however, Battery headquarters and 'B' Troop were re-positioned – though still in an Anti-Tank role, in support of 7 Field Battery, where 'A' Troop was already deployed. 'C' Troop – in support of 'B' Echelon – was withdrawn with the Echelon to El Cuesc. One gun of this Troop which endeavoured to join the main Brigade, lost direction and finally reached 1st SA Division Advanced Headquarters. While there enemy panzers broke through and in the ensuing confusion the Bofors party lost touch with the Division Headquarters, but eventually joined three other Bofors attached to XXX Corps Headquarters. It ultimately re-joined its own unit.

Because of the German move against 5th SA Infantry Brigade, 1st SA Infantry Brigade was forced to move back about five miles to ensure it would not be cut off.

Rommel at the Wire

When Rommel and his group passed through the Wire he found he was isolated. He spent an anxious and cold night in Lieutenant General Crüwell's headquarter vehicle - a captured British Mammut, with ten other senior officers, before finding his way back through the frontier wire early the next morning.⁴³ They were quite undisturbed during the night – no British officer or NCO was going to face what they thought were peppery senior British officers sleeping peacefully inside the vehicle.

The New Zealanders had meanwhile linked up with the Tobruk garrison and turned to fight off a desperate onslaught as Rommel, realising his dash to the wire had been a mistake, threw everything he could in another attempt to take Tobruk. Twice the corridor was cut, but the New Zealanders fought like tigers to re-open it, beating off furious and desperate attempts by the panzers to reach Tobruk. Both sides were now suffering from the gruelling effects of the fighting in the past fortnight. The desert was littered with broken and abandoned vehicles which both sides were endeavouring to collect and repair, while supply columns were feverishly trying to build up supplies without which the battle could not continue.

For the remainder of November the battle raged around Tobruk, Rommel's forces were gradually being pressed back; he was running out of supplies; expenditure of fuel and ammunition was causing deep concern. At dawn on 4 December Eighth Army embarked on the second phase of its Crusader offensive, but 11th Indian Division failed to dislodge the enemy from Bir el Gubi. Meanwhile 1st SA Infantry Brigade – then protecting XXX Corps maintenance area – was ordered to send out small columns to harass the enemy in the El Adem - Acroma areas. The rest of the Brigade remained at Taieb el Esem, where it lay in the bitter cold. Two bombing raids on 4 December made it clear that only eight guns of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was inadequate for protection of the maintenance area. Brigadier Pienaar 'grumbled bitterly' that the number of Bofors with his Brigade was 'quite inadequate'. And on 4 December he submitted a formal complaint, asking for permission to recall the guns he had been ordered to detach for protection of the Field Maintenance Centres.⁴⁴

By the evening of 5 December a message informed Rommel that he could expect no replacements for the 142 panzers, 25 armoured cars, 83 guns or mortars he had lost; and even worse, for the sixteen commanding officers and 4 000 men now dead, seriously wounded or missing. It had also become obvious to him that the Eighth Army was about to launch another drive forward. Rommel gave orders for a withdrawal as far as Gazala, and then to the Gulf of Sirte. On 5 December his troops began to

⁴² Intelligence Summary November 1941, provided by Major N. Garlick.

⁴³ The Sidi Rezegh Battles, p. 307.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 451.

disengage at Tobruk and commenced a withdrawal towards the west. Rommel halted his Army at El Agheila on 31 December 1941. It was in better shape than was expected.

The Wire

Battery headquarters and Divisional Troops had meanwhile withdrawn without incident towards the Wire. 'F' Troop was still with 7 Medium Regiment, RA, and it successfully engaged six ME 110's and hit two; they crashed, but during the engagement Lance Bombardier Stroebel suffered a bullet wound in his right heel. Captain Starke was still with his two guns at Landing Ground 134.

Formations were 'still in general disorder' on 25 November; stragglers were returning to their units and began the next day to reform near the landing ground. One gun of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was missing and Lieutenants Friedlinghuys, Gordon and Upton went out in an attempt to locate it. By the end of the day the Battery was partially complete. In the next three days enemy aircraft twice overflew the Brigade and Sergeant Potgieter's detachment – more out of frustration than anything else - engaged on both occasions. He claimed one hit. Eighteen rounds were fired but the aircraft was apparently unharmed. Reconnaissance aircraft were again overhead early on 2 December and at 10.00 am, as expected, about thirteen JU 89's, with fighter escort arrived. One aircraft dived bombed but heavy Anti-Aircraft fire prevented the others from doing so. They contented themselves by dropping their bombing from on high. Due to lack of dispersion there was considerable damage.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

The rest of 'C' Troop had on 25 November, moved back through the frontier wire near Madaleina with the Brigade 'B' Echelon. 'A' and 'B' Troops remained with the Brigade but with very heavy tanks attacks launched that day the guns of the two Troops were deployed in an Anti-Tank role in support of 7 Field Regiment. They were not called upon to take action. That evening 1st SA Infantry Brigade withdrew some distance to re-organise, re-fuel and generally to replenish supplies; having done so the Brigade moved forward some five miles at noon on 26 November and occupied a new defensive position. With its 'B' Echelon now safely deployed behind the frontier wire. 'C' Troop re-joined 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery headquarters that day, in time to move north with the Brigade Group. While en route, the Group was subjected to an attack by 'friendly' Marylands which dropped bombs and pamphlets.

On the 29 November the two guns that had been detached to the 'new' 4 Anti-Aircraft Battery, returned to 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and the fourth Troop, titled 'Z' Troop was formed by taking one gun from each of the three Troops. The next day the Battery moved forward with the Brigade Group to Bir Sciascuif, 'A' Troop being in support of 1st Battalion, Royal Natal Carbineers; 'B' Troop with 1st Battalion, Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles; 'C' Troop with 1st Transvaal Scottish and 'Z' Troop with headquarters, 1st SA Infantry Brigade. On 1 December the Brigade Group withdrew to Taieeb El Esem. 'B' Troop and 1st DEOR, covered the withdrawal which was described as 'according to plan'.

On 3 December seventeen JU87's repeated the previous bombing run over the Brigade. The guns engaged and one aircraft was definitely hit. There were near misses on the guns of Sergeants Williams and Faber but their vehicles and equipment suffered damage. The guns fired well and the Battery was congratulated by the commanding officer of a Royal Artillery Regiment on their 'splendid performance'.

The *Luftwaffe* must have been desperate to stop or destroy the Brigade. Resulting from the appearance of a reconnaissance aircraft on 1 December, thirteen JU 87's had appeared; on 2 December – seventeen JU 87's at 4.30 pm, and on 3 December 30 plus Stuka's appeared out of the sun. Anti-Aircraft fire did not prevent the Stuka's from diving. The Anti-Aircraft guns appeared to be the target with Sergeant Faber's gun at the centre. He and his detachment were badly shaken but otherwise unharmed. Sergeant Viljoen's gun ran a close second, receiving several bombs in the close vicinity. The JU 87's were back early the next morning and bombs again fell in the vicinity of the Anti-Aircraft guns. But this time two aircraft paid the price; they were hit and later reported 'down'.

At 10.00 am another air attack developed, with 21 JU 87's dropping their bombs on the Brigade. Anti-Aircraft fire was described as 'bad'. The detachments were in fact badly shaken. But 5 December was a peaceful day and it did much to restore shattered nerves. Sergeant van Niekerk was transferred to the badly hit Troop that day. The usual ME 110 'recce plane' appeared at 8.00 am on 6 December but Sergeant Faber and Sergeant van Niekerk detachments 'made things hot' for the aircraft. Sunday, 7 December was really a day of rest – not one aircraft was to be seen. The following morning Lieutenant H.C. Haworth was ordered out with two guns (Sergeants Faber and van Niekerk) to accompany a patrol.

The Brigade was on the move forward when it was strafed at 8.00 am on 10 December by six ME 109F's. No damage was caused. Bombardier Seith did well in dropping his gun into action in record time. Sergeant Williams reported a definite hole seen in one aircraft. Just after midday one JU 88 was foolhardy enough to fly over at 4 000 feet Sergeant Viljoen obtained hits and it was last seen to be 'smoking'.

Lieutenant Haworth and two guns accompanied another patrol on 10 December. They were attacked twice en route by ME 109's. Hits were scored on one aircraft and it seemed to deter the others from further attack. They reached Sidi Rezegh that day where the Infantry took fourteen prisoners. They found a Bofors, apparently abandoned – with a round in the breech and a clip ready to be fired. It was recovered, cleaned and found fully serviceable and later returned to Base. Another Infantry patrol with the remaining guns of the Troop reached Bir Hakiem, returning two days later.

Sollum, Bardia and Halfaya

By now Operation Crusader had pushed *Panzergruppe Afrika* well away from Egypt and the three enemy garrisons of the fishing village of Sollum, of the small port of Bardia, and Halfaya Pass, were isolated.

During most of December Advanced Headquarters of 1 LAA Regiment remained attached to XXX Corps Advanced Headquarters, but on 26 December, accompanied by two Troops of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, it also moved up to the forward area. 'C' Troop, 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved the next day to Menastir, to provide Anti-Aircraft protection to Field Artillery units engaged in the coming battle to subdue Bardia. Three days later 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery arrived at Sidi Omar accompanied by a signal section and a workshop section; but, leaving a rear Regimental headquarters and the Battery headquarters of both 4 and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries at Sidi Omar. An advance Regimental headquarters moved out to position itself on the Trig–Capuzzo road.

Elements of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment moved forward to occupy suitable positions close to Bardia from which they could provide Anti-Aircraft support. 'A' and 'C' Troops of 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery deployed inside the Bardia perimeter defences south of Bardia harbour, to provide protection to 1 Field Regiment (CFA); 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery HQ and B Echelon were at Menastir – the Battery's 'A' and 'C' Troops affording Anti-Aircraft cover for Artillery units, and 'B' Troop was deployed at Sidi Aziz landing ground, with 'C' Troop of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. The other two Troops of the Battery – 'A' and 'B' Troops - were also engaged in providing cover for Field Artillery units. After much preparation and pre-bombardment, the attack on the sea port was launched on 31 December 1941, but in the absence of enemy air activity the Anti-Aircraft guns had nothing to do.

Christmas

Captain Stark, Battery Captain, 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was sent to the rear area to obtain 'goodies' for Christmas. He left on 18 December and was welcomed back on Christmas Day with his vehicle well stocked with beer, whisky, canned fruit and 'other necessities' and with a huge amount of mail, both letters and parcel post. The Battery, the only one of the three, 'enjoyed the festivities and were reasonably well behaved.'⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Letter written to Captain H. McKenzie, 30.1.1942. It was never posted. With papers received from Major N. Garlick.

It was only after the garrison of Bardia had surrendered that, on 2 January 1942 a formation of JU 88's attacked the Bardia area. The guns south of the harbour engaged immediately and a hit was made on one aircraft which jettisoned its bombs and turned away with its starboard engine smoking. 'A' and 'C' Troops of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and all guns of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery also went into action and direct hits on another JU 88 were scored. One enemy aircraft made a forced landing. The only casualty as a result of this raid was to Captain R.C.T. Curling, Battery Captain of 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, who was killed by a bomb. After Bardia was taken a stock of brand new rifles still wrapped and greased, was discovered in a warehouse, they were issued to the many Cape Corps personnel in the Regiment, whom the Regiment felt had every right to defend them-selves if it ever became necessary. The sub-units of the Regiment were re-positioned for the siege of Sollum and Halfaya which were still holding out.

On 3 January 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to the area of Fort Capuzzo; 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved into Bardia, where two Troops were deployed to protect the harbour, while 'A' Troop moved to a position on the Sollum-Capuzzo road to afford Anti-Aircraft protection to the field and medium Batteries shelling Sollum and Halfaya. 'A' and 'B' Troops protected the Advance HQ of 2nd SA Infantry Division; and RHQ and Battery HQ's were moved to Bir Hafid. The Troops of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were positioned in the Halfaya area to also cover the Artillery Regiments. There was no enemy aerial activity. 'C' Troop 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery went into action when a Free French plane bombed it in error on 7 January. The fire drove the aircraft away. Sollum surrendered on 12 January but Halfaya, commanded by Major Wilhelm Bach, the German pastor whose leadership was largely responsible for its stubborn defence, only surrendered five days later.

Into Cyreneica

Panzergruppe Afrika had withdrawn into Cyrenaica; 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery accompanied 1st SA Infantry Brigade who was protecting XXX Corps maintenance area at the same time sending out reconnaissance patrols and 'mosquito' columns to harass the enemy in the El Adem – Acroma area. The South African Brigade remained at Taieb El Essem. A Stuka dive bombing attack by thirty or more dive bombers on 4 December killed one officer and wounded four other ranks. Major Garlick visited Lieutenant Mosely's Troop that day and it was only half an hour after his arrival that Stukas appeared over the Brigade. The two officers felt they were the centre of attention while they lay huddled in a slit trench. Bombs dropped all round them – 'in a circle some 400 yards in diameter'.⁴⁶ Once the aircraft had departed they clambered out of the ground, to find themselves in a ring of burning vehicles. One had only just begun to burn – the flame was small – and they moved to extinguish the flames when some-one shouted: 'It's an ammo vehicle.' The two officers hastily withdrew. Seven other ranks were wounded in another attack two hours later. Shooting was good and prevented the Stuka's from coming below 3 000 feet.

It was clear that only eight guns of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment for protection, defence against the Luftwaffe was inadequate. 'B' and 'F' Troops of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery at this stage were in support of the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, and moved with them to Bir Hakiem on 10 December. 'B' Troop was deployed at Bir el Gubi landing ground. At this stage 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was reorganised to include four Troops instead of three; the fourth Troop – known as 'Y' Troop - being made up by withdrawing one gun from each of the three 'normal' Troops. For some days the Battery was engaged in support of forward patrols but on 13 December 1941, all Troops were withdrawn from 1st SA Infantry Brigade which was ordered to move back to railhead.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, consisting of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'Z' Troops was then deployed for the Anti-Aircraft defence of 1st SA Infantry Brigade area at Bir Sheferzen; but the next day orders arrived instructing the Brigade to once more move forward and deploy in the area of El Adem, preparatory to taking part in the advance into Cyrenaica. There was air activity overhead and 'B' and 'Z' Troops at Timini shot down a JU 88 B, which rather stupidly did a low level reconnaissance run right over them.

⁴⁶ Report written by Major N.Garlick.

A second plane was damaged. Two days after this 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was moved forward and 'D' Troop joined 1st SA Infantry Brigade about four miles west of Timini airfield. At the same time Battery headquarters, together with 'E' and 'Y' Troops, joined the Brigade 'B' Echelon.

On 22 December 1st SA Infantry Brigade received orders to return to Desert Railhead and then to Matruh. The Brigade spent Christmas just north of the Trigh el Abed and the next day moved along that road, halting at midday for lack of petrol. All available reserves of fuel was given to 7 Field Regiment which had been ordered to move to support 2nd SA Infantry Division in its assault on Bardia. The field Regiment moved East on 27 December followed by the Brigade which had unearthed a supply of Italian petrol in the Gubi area. The Brigade passed through the Frontier wire and again came under command of 1st SA Infantry Division.⁴⁷

Two days before their first Christmas in the desert, the advanced headquarters of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery left XXX Corps Headquarters and returned to Matruh and at about the same time a reorganised 'X' Troop of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved forward from Matruh to defend the landing ground at Sidi Azeiz; and 'F' Troop, 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery returned to Matruh, moving later to a deployment position near the sea off the Smugglers Cove road. More South African Anti-Aircraft sub-units followed – with 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery headquarters, 'E' and 'Y' Troops moving into Smugglers Cove on 4 January. A Regimental Training Battery was established at Smugglers Cove on 13 January 1942. Its primary objective was to train Cape Corps personnel as reinforcements.⁴⁸ The officers established a comfortable Mess with a fireplace (coal fired), and a well for washing water – on the premises. Quite like home, it was stated, far superior to the Lido Hotel in Mersa Matruh. And in the area was a ramp for greasing vehicles. On 24 January they received orders to move.

Crusader Falters

For an Army which had just advanced from Egypt to the Gulf of Sirte, Eighth Army was in considerable disarray. Supply lines, the bane of desert warfare, were stretched. Many of the troops were replacements for the Crusader casualties and the remainder were tired after the stresses of the advance. *Panzergruppe Afrika* was in far better condition, not only because its lines of communication were shorter but because it was being resupplied at an unusual rate – mostly because of the losses suffered by the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean. Of five capital ships only one was afloat; two cruisers had been sunk, and two badly damaged and one had been withdrawn by the Australian government for service nearer home, where the Japanese threat was increasing. *Panzergruppe Afrika* struck early on the morning of 21 January; two days later it smashed a British Armour Brigade, routed other troops and in the last days of January the scattered groups of XXX Corps withdrew to Gazala, in conditions of heavy rain and in appalling wind and sandstorms.

The Axis armies were instructed to go no further east than Maraua, on the orders of the Italian commander-in-chief, who insisted that forward positions should remain there. Rommel was told that only reconnaissance units could operate between Maraua and Gazala.

Light Aid Detachments

In January 1942 it was decided to equip each Battery with a 3-ton four-wheel drive vehicle to replace the 15 cwt LAD vehicles then in use. They were incapable of towing a loaded three tonner or gun tractor. Nor could they carry sufficient spares to effect immediate repairs.

The LAD had from the beginning been equipped with basic tools but all LAD's eventually collected, salvaged or made the tools and parts not issued. These included battery chargers, anvils, small portable forges, bench drills, vices, work benches and steel stores lockers. Due to non-standardisation of springs, carburettors, distributors, petrol pumps, radiators, etc, numbers of these items had to be carried to keep transport serviceable. Many repairs, normally sent to Base Workshops, were carried out in the field.

⁴⁷ War in the Desert, pp. 72,73.

⁴⁸ Typed notes by Major N. Garlick., marked 79.

Their work was important, of a high order, not generally acknowledged, or appreciated.



Figure 26: 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft gun

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE GAZALA LINE

Very little air activity was experienced in the last days of January, but from 5 February enemy aircraft were seen, and felt, more often. That evening three JU 88's flew southwards over 1st SA Brigade area at about 5 000 feet towards the Free French area. 'C' Troop located there claimed one as a 'kill'. In mid-morning, three days later, six JU 87 B's, with fighter escort, dive-bombed 1st SA Infantry Brigade from a height of 8 000 feet. The Anti-Aircraft guns succeeded in turning the first attack away from the position held by the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, damaging one aircraft in the process. The attack then centered on the Brigade headquarter area and 'A' Troop of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery caused the aircraft to crash into the sea. Only a few small bombs were dropped. One aircraft - variously described as a 110, an ME 109 and a Hurricane - was shot down in aerial combat and it too, crashed into the sea.

Continuous fighter sweeps took place that day and in the early afternoon an ME 109, engaged in reconnaissance, was damaged. Two hours later seven JU 87 B's dive bombed the Transvaal Scottish positions. One ME 109 F was shot down in flames and one JU 87 B was damaged, believed destroyed. This was followed by yet another dive bombing attack, this time by ten JU 87 B's in the general area of 1st SA Infantry Brigade. Although the Anti-Aircraft guns replied 'vigorously' there were no visible results.

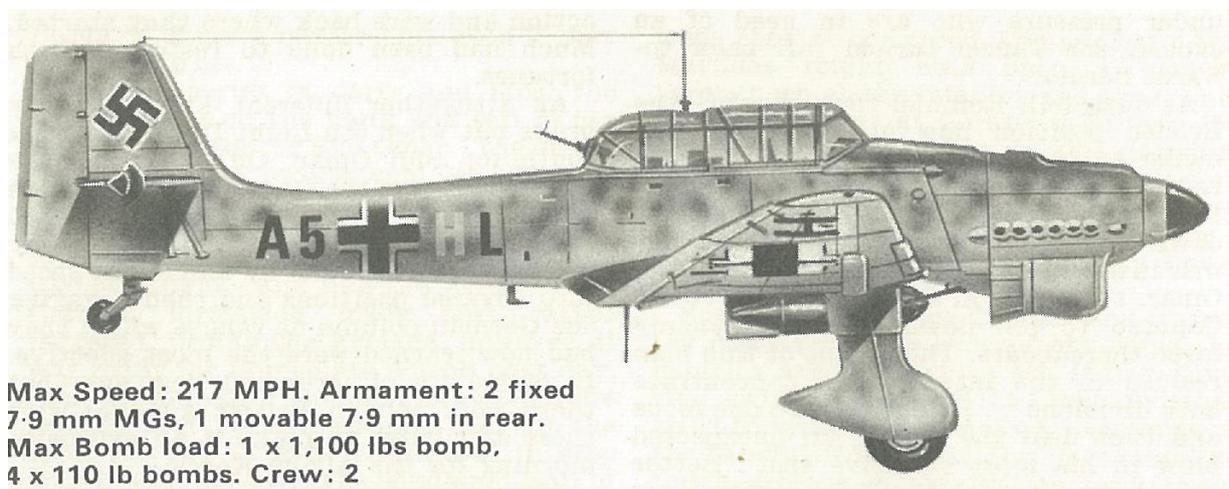


Figure 27: Stuka dive bomber

There were more attacks during the next day. A number of JU 87 B's attacked the Free French sector and one was damaged. At about the same time a JU 88 made a bold attack on the headquarters of 1st SA Division. It was hit by the guns of 'H' Troop. Allied fighters finished it off and it fell in flames near the headquarters. An hour later ten JU 87 B's dive bombed the area held by the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles. One was shot down in flames by 'E' Troop, 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. As the rest of the aircraft turned away 'A' and 'C' Troops engaged them and a further aircraft bit the dust. Three other were damaged, one so badly that it was believed unable to reach its base. The troops watched the aircraft shot down in flames.

It was like a slow- motion picture. It started as a small orange glow, then developed into a huge sheet of flame and smoke. As it went down headlong, two white objects appeared, and

*the crew floated to earth. The aircraft hit the ground, accompanied by a roar of cheers from the troops.'*¹

Mixed Patrols

Patrols were sent out each night and one managed to penetrate an Italian encampment and discovered several officers in their violet-coloured pyjamas. Unfortunately they resisted capture and all were shot in their attempts to escape. Delay fuzes were left on an ammunition dump and the patrol retired some distance to watch the fun. When it exploded the Italian troops rushed out and began firing in all directions.² In addition to the daily and nightly Infantry patrols into 'no man's land' patrols in strength were sent out. In one of these, 'Z' Troop of 1 LAA Battery under Lieutenant J.S. Hallack, accompanied a mixed patrol with 1st Battalion Transvaal Scottish on 7 February to Wadi Fregh, some miles forward of the Gazala positions. The patrol was attacked by a low flying ME 109F but unfortunately the Bofors could not retaliate for fear of hitting vehicles in the column. Several JU 87B's returning from attacks on the Gazala positions were, however, engaged by the Troop.

Two days later another mixed patrol led by 'A' Company, 1st Transvaal Scottish, with a field Battery of 25-pdrs from 3 Field Regiment, a Troop of Anti-Tank guns, a Troop of 6-inch howitzers, several 'recce' cars and 'Z' Troop, moved out to Wadi Belfaris. The patrol was attacked by twelve 87 B's. The Anti-Aircraft guns engaged and three planes fled the scene; the remainder being chased away by fire from the Bofors. They did not drop their bombs until they were over the coast road. Towards sunset the patrol reported that the enemy had vacated the wadi and vehicles all returned safely to their positions in the Line.³ In one of these patrols Gunner J.J. Geldenhuys was wounded by grenade splinters.

On one occasion two guns under Lieutenant Jack Windridge were sent to protect a forward outpost. One gun was sited behind a small ridge and to everyone's surprise they heard a clanking sound. It was an Italian tank and it came up the other side of the ridge; when it came into view its occupants probably as surprised as the gunners were. The Bofors could not depress sufficiently to open fire at the tank, and nor could the tank depress its gun sufficiently. It reversed and left in a hurry, leaving Lieutenant Windridge and his men just a little shaken.⁴

The Luftwaffe

During the period 4 to 9 February the Anti-Aircraft gunners of 1 and 2 LAA Batteries had accounted for four enemy aircraft destroyed and eight damaged.

While *Panzergruppe Afrika* enjoyed some relief from front line action, the *Luftwaffe*, and to a lesser extent the *Regia Aeronautica*, continued their daily flights over the Gazala Line. On 8 February 6 LAA Battery, with two of its guns out of action, joined the Polish Brigade.⁵ There was considerable reconnaissance activity over the South African sector throughout the day on 10 February – and especially over the adjacent area occupied by the Polish Brigade. Just before noon, 1st SA Brigade and Polish Brigade areas were dive bombed by twenty Stukas, escorted by six ME 109's. The direction of approach indicated the enemy knew the locality of Anti-Aircraft concentrations. They nevertheless met a weight of fire from the Troops of 1 and 2 and of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA. Despite the heavy fire, only one JU 87 was damaged. Half an hour after this, a lone ME 109 strafed the Division headquarters with one long burst of machine-gun fire. In the afternoon another attack was made, this one by twelve Stukas escorted by four ME 109's. The enemy approached at 10 000 feet, well out of range; but their identification of targets was poor. Their bombs were dropped on derelict enemy transport.

¹ The Tide Turned at Alamein, p. 94.

² Ibid., p. 39.

³ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box 374, file A12. Hand written report by Lieutenant Hallack.

⁴ Ibid., Notes by Battery Commander.

⁵ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, WD 374, A12.

Continuous Reconnaissance

Continuous reconnaissance flights were observed, a variety of aircraft being used, mostly by ME 109's. They flew over every hour with what seemed clockwork precision. There were fairly regular dive bombing attacks, generally with fighter escort and when within range they were all engaged. A new tactic was for one plane to fly over the Division's area, followed by a dive bombing attack. This was the tactic used on 13 February when seven or eight Stukas with a heavy fighter escort flew over 1st SA Brigade's area. The Anti-Aircraft guns engaged and hits were observed on three planes, one of which caught fire and crashed. The other two flew out to sea, one obviously out of control. It was reported to have crashed into the sea. A few minutes later six ME 109's came in to ground strafe from a low height and one of these planes was destroyed, crashing two miles away. And at midday the next day, a formation of nine Stukas passed high over Division Headquarters, returning ten minutes later in the same formation. The gunners took a chance and engaged, although the aircraft were at extreme range. One was unlucky; it was hit in the 'belly' and was crippled, crashing in front of the Polish Brigade – after having been re-engaged by the guns of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. It was in one of these attacks that Bombardier H.A. Sarembok was mortally wounded.

Co-ordination of Fire

It was realised that some improvement should be made to the deployment areas of the Anti-Aircraft guns in the Division. One Troop of 3 LAA Battery was with XXX Corps Headquarters and the other two Troops were at Matruh. These Troops became available later and the Anti-Aircraft guns then available to the Division, including those of the Polish Brigade, were:

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery	four Troops each of twelve guns
2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery	four Troops each of twelve guns
3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery	four Troops each of twelve guns
6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA.	four Troops each of eleven guns
i.e. a total of:	Sixteen Troops consisting of forty-seven guns

Despite their successes, the deployment of the guns was not providing the best results. No formulated Anti-Aircraft plan existed and Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey submitted a report on 12 February together with a layout to improve the position, and with details of proposed co-ordination in command, with centralised communications to cover all the Anti-Aircraft resources within the Division. These were accepted and on 17 February 1942 an operation instruction was issued, detailing the layout of the new scheme. 1, 2 and 6 LAA Batteries were allocated ten Troop positions; 'F' Troop, 2 LAA Battery was placed in support of 1st Battalion Natal Mounted Rifles at Strongpoint Bir Berrahal, while 'H' Troop was re-located and deployed for the defence of Headquarters, 1st SA Infantry Division. A location statement was given CRA, 1st SA Infantry Division on 21 February 1942.⁶

In the course of a Special Order of the Day, thanking all those of the Division for their excellent work, Major General Brink included: *Our Anti-Aircraft defence has been well organised and is now so admirably sited that the enemy's Air Force is treating the Div Area with great respect.* He added his appreciation and thanks to all ranks in the Brigade Group for the undoubted spirit and keenness shown by them

On 21 February the main party of 3rd SA Infantry Brigade began to move up to Gazala. 'When we stopped for the night', wrote one officer,

When we stopped for the night the routine never changed. A slit trench was scratched, a bed-roll undone, coffee and bully beef stew brewed; a couple of whiskies, a chat and a heavy sleep under the stars. Before first light, we moved off in a hurry to avoid being caught unawares by enemy aircraft, and there followed the intolerable boredom of travelling in convoy at ten or fifteen miles in the hour. It was a continuous dust storm; trucks boiled, tempers deteriorated, until finally the peace, calm and relaxation of an evening meal ended another day in the desert.⁷

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Tide Turned at Alamein, p. 85.

Three days later 3rd SA Infantry Brigade reached Gazala, bringing with them the balance of 3 LAA Battery, with its four officers and 116 other ranks, of which 47 were Cape Corps, and six Bofors and two LMG's. The Polish Brigade moved south and the newly arrived Anti-Aircraft guns were deployed in accordance with Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey's defence plan. The new Anti-Aircraft defence layout seemed to keep enemy aircraft out of range of the guns but they nevertheless persisted in frequent reconnaissance raids; whenever these came in low the guns engaged. On 20 February, for instance, an ME 109 that came lower than usual was hit in the tail and the next day a similar machine was shot down. On 22 February another ME 109 was damaged by gun fire. At noon a formation of Stukas dropped bombs over Advanced Division Headquarters, while shortly afterwards a dog fight took place at 500 feet over the Troop positions of 3 LAA Battery when two ME 109's passed overhead on the tail of a Tomahawk. The Anti-Aircraft guns opened up, hitting one of the ME 109's on its tail; the second one broke away. This action saved the Tomahawk.

'A' Troop, 1 LAA Battery went forward with a fighting patrol in advance of the patrol line, three days after the Tomahawk incident, but the patrol returned with nothing to report. Enemy planes flew overhead at a height beyond the effective ceiling of the Bofors and were not therefore engaged. Hits were, however, observed on several ME109's engaged on reconnaissance and two were heavily hit over the Polish lines, one of which crashed. The pilot was taken prisoner. Two other planes were badly damaged and were believed to have come down. The Poles were overjoyed to have a prisoner. They had a deep hatred for the Germans and were reported to have mounted a 25-pdr to fire at high-angle as an Anti-Aircraft gun. The chances of a hit were one in a million but as the Poles said '...if she hit – poof! What a mess!'⁸ One of the 2nd SA Infantry Brigade officers who had lived with the Poles for a few days told Lieutenant Bernstein:

*during an air raid when a terrific ack ack barrage was being put up a Polish officer had fired his revolver at a low flying Messerschmidt which crashed in flames a few hundred yards away. The Poles were enthusiastic and insisted he had brought down the plane and almost decorated him.'*⁹

A New Commanding Officer

The Japanese threat was causing concern about air defence at South African coastal ports and in view of proposed Anti-Aircraft developments in South Africa, Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey, OBE, was recalled to South Africa to become Director Anti-Aircraft Training (later Director Anti-Aircraft. He was said to be a very efficient officer, technically very alert but not popular and not too well-liked by the rank and file. Stan Jeffrey left in mid-March to take some leave before taking up his new post which became effective from 1 April 1942.¹⁰ He took over the duties of DAAT in Cape Town on 7 April 1942.¹¹ Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) G.W. Meister – described as a slow, methodical officer, a late riser in the day, who disliked cold weather - assumed command of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and Major Lukas Meyer filled the post of second-in-command, with Captain C.D. Stark becoming Battery Commander of 1 Anti-Aircraft Battery. Sometime before this Captain Neil Garlick – aged 24 years – became a temporary Major as Battery Commander of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

At about this time 'G' Troop of 3 LAA Battery while out on an extensive patrol, engaged three ME 109's which attacked the column from a height of 2 00 feet. One aircraft was damaged and the others were driven off.

During one air attack on the Gazala Line Lieutenant Basil Cameron had a lucky escape when a bomb burst about 10 yards from him. He had dropped 'between the gun girders' on the opposite side to the bomb and received a small splinter in his backside. A wag said that it was the problem of having a big bottom. Others in the vicinity were not so lucky. The Padre excelled himself during the same attack; he shocked the Regiment when he swore lustily at his car going up in smoke.¹²

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁰ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp. 2, Box 52, file CA54/DCA, enc. 4.

¹¹ Ibid., enc. 6.

¹² Notes provided by Major N. Garlick.

Brigades Re-positioned

Brigades were re-positioned. When re-organisation of the Gazala Line was taking place, planning included moving 2 LAA Battery with the French Brigade to Bir Hakiem. From 6 to 12 February the Battery provided Anti-Aircraft protection for the French 75 mm guns. Major Garlick became friendly with a handful of French naval officers, who still wore their white naval caps, and he and Captain Dick Upton, the Battery Captain were one day invited to dinner, expecting 'French wonders in the culinary art'. Shortly after their arrival, at about 5.00 pm, all hell was let loose. 'Ve joost test ze gons', the French said, as every gun in their Brigade had, fired into the air. Somewhat taken aback by this noisy show they afterwards sat down to the expected meal, a hoped for change from bully beef stew. All the two officers received was pea soup – five courses of it!¹³

A few days later the Battery Commander, accompanied by Lieutenant Ian Logie and his batman, drove south, outside the FDL's, to reconnoitre the ground at Bir Haliem, returning by the same route without a shot being fired at them. When the Line was eventually settled, (it was in fact a long and deep belt of wire and minefields interspersed with a number of fortified localities known as 'Boxes', generally held by a Brigade. 1st SA Infantry Division, by now commanded by the newly appointed Major General Dan Pienaar (Major General Brink had been invalided back to South Africa), held the northern sector of the line –known as 'The Bastion'.

South of them lay the British 50th Division - with its three Brigades - the 151st, 69th and 150th – from north to south in that order, reaching a little beyond Sidi Muftah. Running from there fifteen to twenty miles further south to Bir Hakiem, now held by the Free French Brigade, was an extensive 'mine marsh'. It was a series of much overrated, extensive and deep mine fields, not adequately covered by any military force.¹⁴ Major General Pienaar had objected to his Division being scattered – one Brigade was ordered to the Indian Division and another to the New Zealanders, and so the Anti-Aircraft gunners remained with the Division. 'My Division will fight under my command or not at all', Major General Pienaar told Richie bluntly, (whom he later accused of murdering the Eighth Army in the Cauldron) when the latter proposed splitting up the Division.¹⁵

6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery

On 21 March 1942, 6 LAA Battery was placed under command of 1st SA Infantry Division and it moved forward, arriving there the next day and relieving 6 LAA Battery, R.A., in the 2nd SA Infantry Brigade sector. It was organised into four three-gun Troops, as had earlier been ordered. All guns within range opened fire that day when two ME 109's came down to 3 000 feet and dropped a few bombs on one of the AA gun positions. One was hit and was reported to have crashed. A formation of JU 87's flying low over the sea, escorted by fifteen ME 109's, passed by; two of the Stukas appeared to be damaged and one of these crashed into the sea. The very next day a gaggle of ME 109 F's passed over 1st SA Division's 'B' Echelon area at a height of 100-150 feet while pursuing Boston Havoc bombers and Kittyhawks. The twin Lewis guns manned by the coloured gunners of 'D' Troop, 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery opened fire and caused an ME 109 F to crash.

It was apparent that the enemy had learnt to give 1 SA Division area a wide berth, unless engaged in that specific area. Up to this stage, enemy aircraft intent on targets behind the divisional lines would fly directly overhead, but from now on they flew over the sea, finding this detour healthier than the sustained fire from the Bofors guns. These tactics, and also the height at which they flew when overhead, kept the 'score' of the Anti-Aircraft guns to a minimum, but the gunners were watchful, and flared into action when an enemy ventured within range. On the evening of 2 April, for instance, a flight of JU 88's passed by out of range but when their escorts dropped down to 2 500 feet they were engaged. Two hits were observed on the leading aircraft which commenced smoking and losing height rapidly.

¹³ Notes provided by Major N. Garlick.

¹⁴ Crisis in the Desert, p. 6.

¹⁵ Uncle George, p. 267.

Due to a realignment of Brigade areas it became necessary to re-position the Anti-Aircraft Troops. 'D' Troop of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved from its gun position at the Division's 'Q' Services deployment area and it was replaced by 'X' Troop of 3 LAA Battery. All moves by all Troops to their new positions were made over three days at 8.00 pm on 1, 2 and 3 April.¹⁶ It was mentioned in a detailed Activity Report of 7 April covering the first five days of the month; Lieutenant Colonel Meister stated that several Mk II platforms 'broke down' during the moves. He included a note confirming the destruction of one enemy aircraft; and a week later, in the next weekly report, he noted that enemy air activity had consisted mostly of minor 'recce' flights, but that nevertheless his guns had probably destroyed one and damaged nine enemy aircraft. An appendix to the war diary for that week recorded that Major Lukas Meyer had been sent on a course at the AA & CD School, Haifa, and that due to casualties the number of white reinforcements required had risen from 107 in the previous week to 113 while the number of Cape Corps reinforcements required had dropped by the two men returning to duty after suffering wounds.¹⁷

'G' Troop of 3 LAA Battery, while on an extensive patrol on 4 April, engaged three ME 109F's. One aircraft was damaged and the other two driven off before they could develop their attacks. Over 1st SA Infantry Division area enemy aircraft continued to take evasive action but on 7 April, one ME 109 F was hit by a Troop of Bofors deployed on the coastal sector. That day two hits were scored on one of two ME 109's, in the southern sector of the Division's front and, in subsequent reconnaissance flights by ME 109 F's, two further hits were recorded. Of fourteen enemy air patrols on 8 April, only three came below 7 000 feet. One of these was hit at 5 000 feet by three different Troops. It was badly damaged and when last seen was losing height rapidly; it was written off as probably destroyed. The next day eleven fighter patrols flew over 1st SA Division area at various times but only on one occasion did any aircraft come within range of the light Anti-Aircraft guns. This was an ME 110 which passed over at 6 000 feet, escorted by two ME 109 F's. When the guns fired the fighters took evasive action and climbed to 8 000 feet but the slower ME 110 was hit and damaged.

The last Stuka attack on 1st SA Division was recorded on 9 March and with the exception of the ground strafing attack by fighters on 14 March the area had been left severely alone except for high level reconnaissance flights. On 11 April, however, the long immunity enjoyed by the Division was broken when ten JU 87's, escorted by four or five ME 109 F's, bombed the 2nd SA Brigade area from a height of 5 000 feet. At least four Stukas were heavily damaged by the Bofors. None was actually seen to crash but pieces were seen falling from one of the stricken planes. One Anti-Aircraft gun had thirteen craters within 100 yards and another, seven craters within 150 yards. Damage to personnel and equipment was fortunately light.

Misfire

During this action Sergeant Lubbe, who had recently been awarded the Military Medal, experienced a misfire on his gun. He ordered his detachment to take cover and removed the offending round. While engaged in this task he was wounded in the buttock but ignoring the pain he continued with the task at hand. Only after it was complete did he report his injury. A Lance Bombardier of another detachment was also slightly wounded by a splinter and several vehicles suffered minor damage. During the short period of the engagement 2 192 rounds of 40 mm HE was fired, as well as 2 140 rounds of small arms fire.

There was an unfortunate accident on 13 February after a Stuka engagement. A gun at 'D' Troop was depressed ready for cleaning. Two men inserted the ram rod into the front of the barrel when No. 4 touched the Breech lever that must have re-cocked the firing pin. There was probably – unknown to anyone – a misfire round in the breech. Whether the ram rod reached the round, or the firing pin engaged it, no one will ever know. Both Lance Bombardier A. Hammond and Gunner D.S Meyer in

¹⁶ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A14, Ops Instruction No. 7/42

¹⁷ Ibid.,

front of the muzzle were 'blown to pieces'.¹⁸ Their remains were buried in the 1st SA Infantry Division cemetery at Ain el Gazala.

Only about two weeks after this incident – at 9.30 pm during the night of 28 April, Lieutenants A Mc. Gordon and H.E. Haworth were involved in an accident on the escarpment while negotiating the narrow Serpentine pass. Both had to be transferred to hospital in Tobruk. Both were later evacuated in a hospital ship which was sunk a little while after departure from the harbour.

Reduced Air Activity

There was a period of reduced air activity over the Division's area and because 6 LAA Battery returned to 2nd SA Division on 23 April, and the loss of support from 57 LAA Battery, RA, - which had covered the southern area - new gun positions were once again reorganised, resulting in a reshuffle of Troops. The Anti-Aircraft Troops of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment were now spread over a larger area, twice the former size it had earlier protected. Their principal task was the protection of the Division's most valuable assets – the Field Artillery Batteries and the attached medium guns in the southern portion of the Northern Sector. With the thinning-out, an adequate and co-ordinated defence was no longer possible. The Troops deployed at 'Q Services and Acroma Keep were moved back to the forward area on 19 April.¹⁹ The only incident of note in this period was an attempt by an ME 109 F to dive on an Anti-Aircraft gun pit. The detachment held firm and claimed a hit on the underside of the fuselage. The aircraft took avoiding action without pressing home the attack.

With the reduced activity men had a little more time to relax and chat and it was during this time that Major Garlick learned the extraordinary story of one man in his Battery – his quartermaster Sergeant, Staff Sergeant Nieuwoudt, described as a small weather beaten man. He and a few off duty personnel at 'B' Echelon were enjoying their one beer a week and he said he enjoyed the desert. When asked why, he said it reminded him of his youth and when pressed, told how his father had insisted his education must be completed in the Kalahari. He was given a knife sent out at the age of fifteen with a Bushman and told not to come back for six months; the Bushman was to teach him how to survive. He taught him where to dig for water; to plant and grow desert melons and how to bury them for future water; to eat insects, how to make a fire, snare animals and eat certain plants. He returned home after eight months, fully 'educated', thinner, but healthy.²⁰

April Report

In his monthly report on 1 May Lieutenant Colonel Meister stated firmly that a Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in support of a Division should be increased in firepower from 36 to 54 guns. The suggestion did not include the provision of trained bodies to man the extra guns. He went on to report that while the Quad gun tractor was capable for its task, it did not provide sufficient loading space. Damage to guns in the month under review had been minor and repairs in most cases had been undertaken by the Rear Workshop Troop. He also reported that owing to dusty conditions barrel wear was heavy, some guns only firing 700 rounds before being condemned by QME.²¹ By now it was almost mid-summer and May was the *khamseen* season, the winds caused severe dust storms. Sometimes it blew in the morning and blew itself out by the afternoon. On other occasions it blew through the night. It was dusty and uncomfortable; and the temperature during the day could reach 110 degrees Fahrenheit (44 centigrade) in the shade.

In another and later report typed on 26 May he enlarged on his comments concerning the problem of dust:

- Bombs and the blast of guns caused a terrific amount of dust.
- Guns dug in cause dust to rise up to a radius of 40 feet from gun platforms and where possible it is advisable to build up a revetment.

¹⁸ Notes by Battery Commander – Major N. Garlick.

¹⁹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A14. (Report of 1 May 1942.)

²⁰ Notes by Major N. Garlick.

²¹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A14.

- The dust penetrates all 'crevices' on the gun and causes breakdowns and stoppages. It impedes engagement and prevents a change-over to new targets.
- Each gun had two spare barrels, sufficient in cool weather but on a hot day barrels did not cool off quickly enough causing their wooden stands to become scorched.
- Wear on the rammer levers (claws) was excessive and many times the levers do not open automatically when the gun is unloaded. So far this had not impeded the automatic firing of guns.
- One control plunger and one extractor spindle had broken during engagements.
- Rammer springs and striker springs had to be replaced on several occasions. The single striker spring is not strong enough and is the cause of misfires but this defect can be overcome by the addition of washers when a double spring is not available.

He also stressed the necessity of providing protective gun shields for mobile warfare. He also drew attention to the fact that ammunition was being received in a dirty condition, and that quick succession of raids did not leave much time for cleaning it. Finally, he pointed out that mildew on the cartons containing rounds indicated they were subject to damp before delivery.²²

A Quiet Opening to May

For the Anti-Aircraft gunners, May opened quietly and only high level reconnaissance flights were noted. The enemy was obviously collecting information on the Gazala defences and it was suggested that a heavy Battery be brought into the forward area to take on the 'recce' flights and deny collection of information. Nothing came of this suggestion. It was not until 13 May, after days of daily recce flights, that in an apparent show of bravado, a lone Macchi 200 flew over at 3 000 feet, drawing the attention of 'G' and 'X' Troops, the former scoring a hit. The aircraft disappeared, losing height. And a forward area patrol on its way back to base at that time reported it had passed over them at a very low altitude.²³ Increased ground and air activity from that day onwards made it clear that the enemy intended carrying out an offensive at an early date. On 16 May about 45 aircraft, mostly ME 109 F's passed over the Divisional area, which was probably under close observation. The next day after the 'Macchi' incident, one of four ME 109's that roared over the northern sector, was hit by the very experienced Anti-Aircraft gunners; the other aircraft turned away.

The Waiting Game

From the beginning of February the rechristened *Panzerarmee Afrika*, bided its time, building up supplies while enjoying the luxuries left behind by the British – among them 7 000 000 cigarettes and several lorry-loads of rum. On both sides, a period of consolidation, refitting and consolidation took place, each sending out daily probing patrols. The Eighth Army Commander meanwhile built up the Gazala Line and established a number of strongpoints behind it. Both armies watched each other. Both readied themselves for an offensive. But Hitler later realised that if the Persian oilfields could be taken, Britain could be knocked out of the war, and a drive across the Nile and through Palestine could join a powerful Spring Offensive on the Russian front. Two plans were hatched: Operation Herkules to subdue Malta – a thorn in the supply route across the Mediterranean – and Operation Aida – the drive to the Nile.

On 13 May representatives of all units in the two South African Divisions gathered at Gambut to hear General J.C. Smuts announce that both 1st and 2nd Division would shortly be withdrawn to the Delta for re-equipping and training as Armour Divisions. On Tuesday, 26 May General Theron flew from Cairo to discuss re-organisation with Generals Pienaar and Klopper and it was agreed that conversion should be done one Division at a time. General Klopper conceded that 1st SA Infantry Division should have priority, and it was decided that the first course should begin on 8 June, in less than a fortnight's time.²⁴ But as Major General Brink recorded many years later: 'God and Rommel decided otherwise.'²⁵

²² Ibid., File A 15.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ War in the Desert, p. 219.

²⁵ Uncle George, p.

Almost from the day of that meeting, enemy air operations showed increasing signs of an offensive. More reconnaissance flights and more bombing runs were noted and observed. El Adem landing ground came in for attention and 4 LAA Battery engaged a number of aircraft during the time it was providing Anti-Aircraft protection. The enthusiastic reaction of the coloured gunners manning the Battery's machine-guns was in particular, a pleasant surprise to those whose aircraft they were guarding.²⁶

Between 17 and 23 May there were always enemy aircraft to be seen in the sky above the South African Division, more often than not in groups of from fourteen to twenty-four and mostly out of range of the guns. Only on three occasions did they come low enough to engage. No hits were reported. The gunners had two quiet days on 24 and 25 May when no aircraft were to be seen.

There were other diversions. Concentrated Anti-Aircraft and small arms fire in late May forced a bomber – a Savoia 81 – which circled the 3rd SA Infantry Brigade area and flew lower and lower, to make a perfect landing near the minefield fence in front of the 1st Royal Durban Light Infantry. It was riddled with bullet holes and an Anti-Aircraft shell appeared to have made a direct hit. Anti-Aircraft fire was in fact poor as layers were given too great lead for the slow speed at which the aircraft was flying. Seven men, unharmed by the concentrated fire, quickly scrambled out; they were all wearing Italian Air Force uniforms; a Colonel, a Lieutenant Colonel; a Major; two Lieutenants, and a be-whiskered Sergeant in overalls, were all taken into captivity. A junior NCO with the group had a gunshot wound in the hand. The pilot had lost his way.²⁷ The aircraft was searched and yielded up a number of important documents.

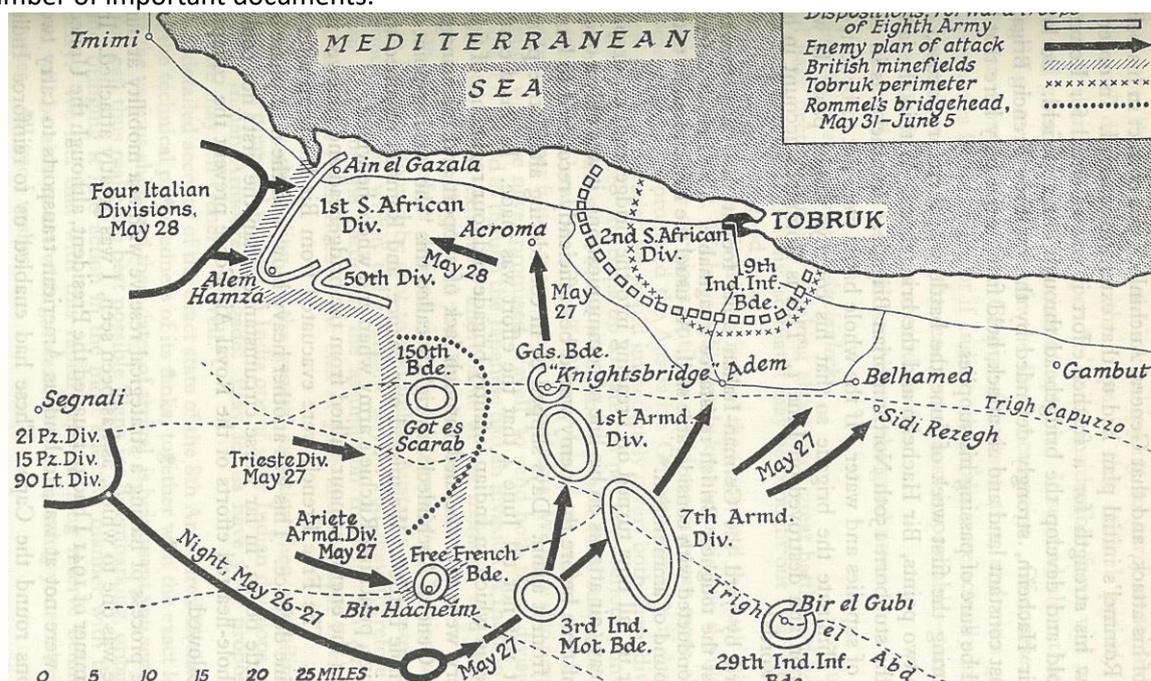


Figure 28: Rommel's plan for May 27-28

String of Strongpoints

Covering the lines of communication from the new railhead dump at Belhamed, and from Tobruk itself to 1st SA Division, ran a string of strongpoints westward to 69th Infantry Brigade's 'Box' – Point 187, Best Post and William's Post, backed by Acroma Keep and Commonwealth Keep. There were roving columns behind this line – Stopcol, an entirely 2nd SA Division force, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel 'Og' Sherwel, which on 13 June, lay on the escarpment – and Seacol on the coastal plain. Included among other units in Stopcol was 'C' Troop of 4 LAA Battery, and Lieutenant Pott's Troop from 5 LAA Battery. Major Harry Scholtz of 4 LAA Battery was there – with his tent. It stood out prominently, planted as usual as 'Stuka Bait', 'so as to give his Bofors gunners plenty to do'.²⁸

²⁶ War in the Desert, p. 129.

²⁷ The Fighting 3rd, pp. 162-164.

²⁸ War in the Desert, p. 268.

Panzerarmee Strikes First

Now a Colonel-General, Rommel and his newly titled and expanded *Panzerarmee Afrika*, struck first. While Italian units struck the Gazala line on the morning of 26 May, Rommel's original *Afrika Korps* made a bold and predictable outflanking move, swinging around the Free French at Bir Hakiem, pushing aside 7 Motor Brigade stationed south-west of Bir Hakiem and surprising the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade, striking into the heart of the Eighth Army's defences, held by 2nd, 4th and 22nd Armoured Brigades, 32 Army Tank Brigade, 201st Guards and 29th Indian Brigades. After the Stuka attack on 2nd SA Infantry Brigade on 11 April there had not been any heavy enemy air attacks on the 1st SA Infantry Division sector of the Gazala Line – until 26 May – the day *Panzerarmee Afrika* launched its attack on the Line.

On that day there were fourteen heavy Stuka raids within five and a half hours. Seven of the attacks were made on the area defended by 'K' Troop, 3 Anti-Aircraft Battery, and it was supported in the 'run-up' to these attacks by 'G' Troop of 3 Anti-Aircraft Battery and 'Y' Troop of 2 Anti-Aircraft Battery. The log for that day indicated that 101 enemy aircraft overflew and attacked the Northern Sector held by 3rd SA Infantry Brigade - of which five were destroyed; and about 180 attacked the Southern Sector (1st SA Infantry Brigade). Many of these aircraft were not engaged due to the height at which they flew (up to 15 000 feet) but several hits were scored on about five aircraft. Just after 6.00 pm two Stukas were destroyed for the expenditure of 236 rounds. Due to the close proximity to the Northern Sector the record for this sector was also applicable to the Central Sector where 'D', 'E' and 'F' Troops were able to engage in twelve of thirteen raids. Due to the sustained attacks on the 'K' Troop area the detachment was replaced by that of 'G' Troop after sunset. The total for all three sectors was seven JU 87 B destroyed; ten probable's – one departed in flames - and thirty damaged. One Macchi 200 was also damaged. The unit used 6 274 rounds in these actions.²⁹

It was a good introduction for Lieutenant G.W. Loffhagen who was taken on strength on 25 May ex the E4 list. It eased the shortage of officers but little, the unit was still five officers short of establishment. Major Meyer had returned from Haifa on 1 May and Lieutenant K.E. (Keith) Gow had joined as reinforcement while Lieutenants H.C. Haworth and R. McL. Gordon had both been admitted to hospital and J.S. Mallack was transferred to UDF Admin HQ as Assistant Staff Officer Artillery. Lieutenant and Temp Captain J.H. Wicht was attached to 1 Anti-Aircraft Battery for a short period during the month for training and instruction.³⁰ In other ranks 137 white and 18 coloured gunners were required to fill the establishment table, while 29 white and 43 coloured other ranks were needed as reinforcements for the attached sub-units.³¹

For the period 27 to 30 May 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment destroyed six enemy aircraft, seven were probably destroyed and nineteen were damaged. And on 31 May eighteen enemy aircraft formations were noted but much of their activity was concentrated on the area to the rear of the Gazala Line. Nevertheless, the gunners continued to be successful and on 4 June it was reported they had damaged ten aircraft on 31 May and four on 1 June. The May report showed a total of thirteen aircraft destroyed with seventeen probably destroyed, and sixty-three damaged. Three men were wounded on 31 May.

The Free French

The enemy thrust south of the minefields had unexpectedly met the Free French Brigade at Bir Hakiem and, even more unexpectedly, so fierce a resistance to their immediate attack that it consumed forces that Rommel could have used elsewhere. In an epic stand, the French Brigade, that included troops other than French, held out against repeated ground and air attacks for fifteen days. There were 1 300 air attacks in seven days. On 10 June it was attacked by twenty Stukas and 40 JU 87's escorted by 50 ME 109's, during which 130 tons of bombs were dropped on the French.³² Then, with ammunition and

²⁹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A15.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² History of the Second World War – The Mediterranean and Middle East, Volume III, p. 236.

all water exhausted, and down to emergency rations, they broke out through the encircling enemy on 10 June, led by Brigadier General M.P. Koenig's vehicle, driven by blonde, 25 year old, Susan Travers, the only woman to have been involved in the battles of the Western Desert. Two thousand seven hundred men, including 200 wounded of the original 3 600, escaped with her before *Panzerarmee Afrika*, warned by their Intercept Service, sealed the narrow lane that had enabled supplies to reach the French. She was awarded the *Croix de Guerre* and the *Ordre du Corps d'Arme* for her part in the escape. (Susan Travers joined the French Foreign Legion officially in 1945, without revealing her sex, the only woman at that stage to have done so. She died at the age of 92 in 2003.)³³

Stuka Attacks

It was a different picture for 1st SA Infantry Division on 26 May, when violent action took place with no fewer than fourteen Stuka raids over its area in only five hours. The brunt of the defensive work fell on the shoulders of 'K' Troop, 3 LAA Battery. It was supported during the run-up of the bombers by 'G' Troop of the same Battery, and 'Y' Troop of 2 LAA Battery. After a succession of fighters had been over on patrol during the morning, twelve JU 87B's opened the dive bombing offensive just after 3.00 pm. Waves of these aircraft, in rapid succession, kept coming in, and a total of 6 274 rounds of 40 mm ammunition were fired by those troops able to engage. Their fire resulted in the certain destruction of seven JU 87B's and the probable destruction of ten more, all of which departed from the scene in flames. In addition, 30 JU 87 B's and one Macchi 200 were damaged. In the tenth Stuka raid of the day there was a spontaneous cheer from the men being bombed when one Stuka was hit by Anti-Aircraft fire and failed to pull out of its dive, crashing into the area held by 'B' Company, Royal Durban Light Infantry. The day ended with a Stuka being shot down and, as it crashed and burst into flames in the lines of the Natal Mounted Rifles, the men cheered lustily, throwing their tin hats into the air.³⁴

The task of the AA guns in defence against the dive bombing attacks was difficult because they were spread over an area of fifteen miles to protect the field and medium Artillery Battery gun positions. The Stuka raids, made in rapid succession at first, were gradually made at greater intervals. The first raids were directed at 5 Field Regiment in the forward area of the northern sector, where the enemy's Artillery had done little damage. The third and fourth raids were directed at a few Bofors positions, but failed to cause any problem. It was at this stage that Allied fighters appeared for the first time, but after several losses, they were not seen again.

'K' Troop

The Stukas in their usual fashion peeled off and dived one after the other, to 4 000 feet in the first few raids, but they came lower in the fourth and fifth attacks; thereafter their dives became increasingly shallow. The fifth raid was again directed on 'K' Troop and this time a detachment of one of the guns sustained casualties. It seemed that the *Luftwaffe* considered 'K' Troop an important target. The next day it was again a target for some of their attacks; but 67 Medium Regiment, RA., was also subject to the attention of the Stukas.

Casualties were negligible in comparison with the number of bombs dropped. All the Bofors guns were protected by revetments, but this unfortunately did not protect one detachment when, in the fifth raid of the day, a bomb fell on the revetment, wounding four men, all of whom returned to duty after their wounds had been attended to. Three other men had to be evacuated from the scene; one was fatally wounded and a second dangerously. The gun itself was hit on the buffer cylinder but continued in action and was repaired next day. In the southern sector one gunner was wounded. Transport vehicles had been dug in and only suffered minor, superficial damage.

Tank Battles

Furious tank battles took place behind the Gazala line and almost immediately south of Tobruk, in the area that became known as 'the Cauldron', the advantage swinging to and fro. An intense battle

³³ London Weely Telegraph, 31.12.2003.

³⁴ The Fighting 3rd, p. 115.

developed between El Adem and Knightsbridge; one by one the defensive 'Boxes', built up to avoid such a catastrophe, fell to the immense weight of the German Armour; El Adem, stubbornly defended by 29th Indian Infantry Brigade fell; Knightsbridge was abandoned by the Guards Brigade, and shortly afterwards they escaped from Rigel Ridge, where 6 Field Battery of 2 Field Regiment fought until it was overrun. Separate engagements were taking place in all directions', wrote one man, 'and many tanks were involved.'³⁵ The Cauldron - coupled with it was the *Khamseen* season - as one history has described:

It was an incredible and unforgettable sight; tanks manoeuvring with engines roaring, their squeaking clanking tracks throwing up a skirt of dust around them, the crashes of their guns adding to the tremendous din of battle. The British Crusader, Valentine and Matilda tanks were no match the German Mark II and IV Panzers, and the few Grant tanks were nothing more than an invitation to the enemy. The desert was littered with knocked Matildas, Valentines and a few Honeys – burnt out steel coffins for their crews.³⁶

The Regiment was heavily engaged in the actions at the defensive outposts and at one stage sub-units of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery fought unequal rear guard actions against German tanks. It ultimately led to disaster for the British Armour when on 12 June, the battle was decided in favour of *Panzerarmee*. The Axis by-pass road was cut, most of the defensive posts and 'Boxes' had been taken; and the Gazala garrison was now forced to retreat along the Via Balbia through Tobruk.

After a week of aggressive disintegration of the British Armour in the Cauldron, Rommel was ready, the one desire dominant in his mind – to take Tobruk

While *Panzerarmee Afrika* was engaged in their battles with the British Armour behind the Gazala Line, intensive air patrols were carried out by the enemy over the 1st SA Infantry and 50th British Division areas. They were quite obviously looking to see what their reaction would be, especially at the dangerous point where Rommel's fuel supplies were running low and ammunition, in some units, almost exhausted; before Group Crüwell broke through the main Gazala minefields and were able to establish a re-supply route.

Enemy aircraft did not have it entirely their own way. A 'Hunting Troop' proved successful when moved to an area where enemy aircraft least expected to be met with ground fire. Enemy aircraft paid the price. On 27 May one Macchi 200 was probably destroyed and three others severely damaged. A day later an ME 109 and a Fiat CR 42 were destroyed, one Fiat probably destroyed and a Fiat and two ME 109's damaged; and on 29 and 30 May two Italian aircraft were destroyed, two JU 88's probably destroyed and a mixed bag of eleven *Luftwaffe and Regia Aeronautica* aircraft damaged. The tally credited to 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the last five days of the month was six aircraft destroyed, seven probably destroyed and nineteen damaged.

During these last five days of May there were no dive bombing attacks on the ground occupied by 1st SA Division; the enemy was devoting his entire attention to the battles raging in the Cauldron. Only those flying back to their airfields passed over the Division's area, which was in effect, the main thoroughfare for attacking and the return of aircraft engaged in the fight for Eighth Army's defensive posts, including the important one of Knightsbridge. But the men on the Bofors were ever vigilant and were in action whenever an aircraft came within range. There were casualties: Sergeant Viljoen, Lance Bombardier Pirie, Gunner C.F. Martin and Gunner van Rooyen, Cape Corps, were wounded. And in another attack Gunner Newman was slightly wounded but remained on duty.

On 31 May 1942, because of the threat by enemy columns in the area and the difficulties of maintaining supplies, restrictions were placed on the expenditure of ammunition. This did not stop the Anti-Aircraft gunners, who damaged three JU 87's and one CR 42 on 1 June. Two days later, of 44 enemy air formations which overflew the northern sector, six came within range and were engaged;

³⁵ Letter to Signaller James Timoney in possession of Author.

³⁶ The Kaffrian Rifles 1876-1986, p. 220.

and over the southern sector of 1st SA Infantry Division, of 60 formations, ten were engaged. A total of 2 212 rounds were fired resulting in the destruction of one JU 87 B; four others, one JU 88 and two ME 110's were damaged. Many other hits were recorded and several neat formations of Stukas were broken up. The Anti-Aircraft defences were a little stronger in the northern sector and this enabled 'D' Troop of 4 LAA Battery, 2 LAA Regiment to accompany a mobile column from 2nd SA Infantry Division on 2 June.

Italian aircraft dropped pamphlets over the 1st SA Division area calling on the South Africans to surrender. The strongly worded paper – in support of the friendly Boers - ended with the words: 'Stop shedding your blood for the English tyrants.' Enemy air activity remained on a considerable scale, although the number of formations that came within range was less than previously. There was consequently less action for the gunners and a reduced expenditure of rounds but strangely, the number of successes was higher.

At approximately 8.25 pm on 4 June a formation of 22 JU 88's with fighter escort approached from the east. When the Bofors opened fire the leading aircraft fired a red, a green and a yellow Verrey light. The signal was repeated by other aircraft and the formation immediately split up. 'D' Troop engaged with aircraft almost immediately overhead and scored hits on two JU 88's. The tail of one was completely shot away by Sergeant Mason's gun. It crashed a little south of 'D' Troop. The second JU 88 was hit close to the engine and was last seen on fire and moving west. It was not seen to crash but was believed destroyed. 'E' Troop claimed three hits on another aircraft – on right wing and fuselage – and a further hit on the right engine of another one. It was thought that it may have been the same aircraft claimed to have been hit by 'D' Troop.

'F' Troop claimed four hits on one of the above aircraft but could not verify whether they or 'Y' Troop actually scored the hits; but 'Y' Troop were able to claim four hits on one JU 88, setting it on fire. This was verified by personnel of the Medium Artillery Battery in the area and also by Battery Headquarters. The aircraft was losing height when last seen. The score for the day was one aircraft destroyed, two believed destroyed and two damaged.³⁷

As a result of earlier attacks that day the full count for 4 June was three JU 88's and one ME 109 F destroyed; two other JU 88's probably destroyed; and five JU 88'S and one ME 109 F damaged. One of the JU 88's was heavily damaged and the aircraft broke up in mid-air. The crew bailed out and one was captured by 'C' Troop, 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and a second by the Cape Town Highlanders. The third member was unfortunate, his parachute did not open. Many other aircraft this day were hit by 40 mm shells and by small arms fire.

There was a reduction in air activity the next day. Only six, of some 46 enemy air formations, came anywhere within range of the Bofors. One unlucky pilot brought his Messerschmitt 109 F down low and was hit in the wing, and another that also passed over 'C' Troop at low altitude on a ground strafing run, crashed after receiving two hits – with only two rounds fired!

Heavy dust storms on 2 June and 5 June preceded unfavourable weather on 6 June - in fact, a heavy thunderstorm followed by a cloud-burst - was probably the cause of comparatively few fighter and reconnaissance patrols. There were no bombers at all; but of the former group one Macchi 202 was destroyed and three Macchi's and two ME 110's were damaged – for a total of 900 rounds in ammunition expenditure. The next day was like a holiday – no aircraft were seen over the northern sector and in the southern sector the gunners fired only 40 rounds at an ME 109 F, which flew over the area en route to its own lines. It was already smoking when seen and after two hits the smoke was seen to increase and the aircraft 'made off at great speed'.

Low Level Strafing

It was noted that a feature of enemy tactics at this time was low level ground strafing; but the fighters frequently came in too low for the Bofors to safely engage them. It was a great relief to the Anti-

³⁷ Report by Major N. Garlick, 4.6.1942.

Aircraft gunners and in fact to all the ground troops of 1st SA Infantry Division in these early days of June, without the usual attention of enemy air. There was no engagement in the northern sector on 8 June and only four enemy aircraft overflew the southern sector. Flying at between 4000 and 5000 feet, they were nevertheless engaged. Two attempted to take evasive action by coming down low; three hits were registered on one of them. Only 179 rounds in total were fired by all the Anti-Aircraft guns the next day. It was quiet. 10 June would have been the same but for a surprise attack on 1st SA Infantry Division Headquarters when two ME 109F's dived out of the sun and dropped bombs from only 500 feet. The Anti-Aircraft gunners were taken completely by surprise but managed to get off only six ineffectual rounds. Considering the congestion in the area, damage was minor- only two personnel were slightly wounded but possibly more seriously, two vehicles were burnt out.

'D' Troop and the mobile column left the southern sector on 11 June but their departure was not felt as up to 14 June there was little occasion for the Anti-Aircraft gunners to go into action. Operation Herkules, the subjugation of Malta was now occupying the attention of the *Luftwaffe*.

The Cauldron Battles

2nd SA Division Anti-Aircraft Troops were heavily engaged in actions at the outposts before being withdrawn into Tobruk. At one stage sub units of 2 LAA Battery fought unequal rear guard actions against German Armour. The Cauldron battles eventually led to disaster for the British Armour when, on 12 June, the fight went in favour of *Panzerarmee*. In the furious battle between El Adem and Knightsbridge the generally accepted information was that 7th Armoured Division had lost 100 tanks.³⁸ Knightsbridge was evacuated during the hours of darkness with the loss of one 6-pounder, one Bren carrier and one 7-pound tin of Cooper's Oxford Marmalade, which a Guards officer, described by his colleagues as 'temporarily unbalanced in the excitement of his departure' had considered unessential and drained out upon the sand'.³⁹ On that day the fate of 50th British and 1st SA Divisions hung in the balance; and of the enemy forces that night: 'leaguers of weary men were scattered aimlessly over the desert, asking only sleep and silence'.⁴⁰ By midday on 13 June British tank losses had risen considerably. The 29th Indian Brigade at El Adem was withdrawn during the night of 16/17 June with the permission of General Ritchie. The next day, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles noticed an unusual stillness there. Belhamed, the other covering position, was also abandoned the same day. Major General Kloppe only learnt of these withdrawals on 18 June.

After a week of aggressive disintegration of the British Armour in the Cauldron, Rommel was ready 'with the desire dominant in his mind' – to take Tobruk. On 17 June he drew up the order for Operation Theseus – the capture of Tobruk. He hoped that with Tobruk taken he would be given permission to proceed with Aida – the drive to the Delta.

It had not been a happy holiday in the Gazala Line. There had been air raids almost every day; up to 64 enemy aircraft overhead at different times during one day. The ground was hard but with much difficulty tents and bivvies were dug in to a depth of about two feet to provide some protection from shell splinters. When time allowed vehicles were dug in nose first to protect the radiators and engines.

There was never any fresh food – meat, fish or vegetables. It was bully beef and dog biscuits - large square hard biscuits, potatoes, rice, powdered eggs, tinned milk, tea and coffee. Officers and men countered themselves lucky if they received one beer a week; but at least each were given a tot of brandy each evening. Water was poor – brack and bitter – just drinkable. Each man was rationed to six litres per day; and this served for washing, drinking, making tea or coffee, cooking and to fill vehicle radiators. Everyone tried to carry water sufficient to last ten days. Gazala was approximately 28 miles from Tobruk.

And the flies, the flies; flies in their thousands.

³⁸ War in the Desert, p. 264.

³⁹ Crisis in the Desert, p. 71

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FREEBORN

'Freeborn', a code that would be given only if it became necessary to withdraw from the Gazala Line, had been in existence from 10 May. After *Panzerarmee Afrika* had swung around the position at Bir Hakiem, Major General Dan Pienaar had, however, become anxious about the fighting in the Cauldron, more especially with the presence of two Armour Divisions of the DAK now in the rear of the line. He was not going to wait for the code word. He called his Brigade Commanders together and set out plans he had made in case it became necessary to withdraw. His plans included placing the Anti-Aircraft Batteries of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment under command of Brigades. Original orders for Freeborn instructed 50th Division to break out westwards at 6.00 pm while the South Africans held the Line until first light next day. But Major General Pienaar objected strongly and XXX Corps amended its orders at this late stage, giving the South African Division until 7.00 am on 15 June to be clear of Tobruk. Both Divisions were to withdraw to the frontier along the Via Balbia – otherwise known as 'Messerschmidt Alley'. 'German fighters had a nasty habit of shooting up any vehicles that moved along the road in daylight hours', wrote Major Garlick in notes to the author.

The order to withdraw from the Line was received at 8.30 am on 14 June and the transfer of Anti-Aircraft units to under command of Brigades took effect from 9.00 am, as under:

- 1 LAA Battery - less 'Z' Troop at Eluet el Tamar - under 1st SA Infantry Brigade.
- 2 LAA Battery - less one Troop at William's Post - under 2nd SA Infantry Brigade.
- 3 LAA Battery - less two Troops - under 3rd SA Infantry Brigade. Its 'H' Troop was with 1st SA Division Headquarters and 'X' Troop was placed under command of Regiment Botha .

Two rear guard 'Boxes', manned by composite groups, were established by the Division at Eluet el Tamar – renamed Best Post, and on the nameless hillock labelled Point B154, renamed Williams Post.

The string of strong points included one manned by 69th Infantry Brigade at Point 187. They were backed by Acroma Keep, Point 208 and Commonwealth Keep. Best Post included 'Z' Troop from 1 LAA Battery, and two Troops of Bofors under Lieutenant van Rooyen were included in the composite group at William's Post. The Division was, as far as possible, already prepared for the move. Fortunately, there was much less of a problem from the air – the *Luftwaffe* was busy trying to subdue Malta. Bofors guns were also busy elsewhere. The guns of 4 LAA Battery's 'A' Troop (under Lieutenants M Syfret and GR Findlay) were providing protection for a Troop of 25-pdrs and Anti-Tank guns of 2nd SA Infantry Division's 'Tonycol', about three miles south of Acroma. They added to the score by shooting down two of four R42's attacking 1st Armoured Division.¹

The Axis by-pass road round the south of Tobruk had already been cut; many of the defensive posts and 'Boxes' had been taken or were under threat; the Gazala garrison was now forced to retreat along the Via Balbia - the metalled road that ran along the coastal plain through Tobruk - and on to the frontier Wire. Three passes down the coastal escarpment were used for the withdrawal; Serpentine Pass (furthest west, very steep and narrow) Bill's Pass, and Agheila Pass nearer to Tobruk (also known as Agheila West or Fig Tree Pass). The first was allocated to 2nd SA Infantry Brigade, the second to the 3rd Brigade and the third to 1st SA Brigade. The Serpentine Pass and El Agheila Pass were eight miles apart. It was mid-summer, which meant dusk at 9.15 pm and dawn at 5.15 am – eight hours to move a Brigade 30 miles in the pitch dark was a tall order indeed.

¹ War in the Desert, p. 251.

Movement of the Divisions

The Brigades kept up the pretence of still being active – (the field gunners continued firing to use up ammunition) - and all formations were scheduled to move independently. All non-essential personnel and vehicles began to move at 9.30 am and Main Divisional Headquarters left at 11.00 am, all fortunately covered by the same dust storm hiding the break-out preparations of 50th Division. The allocated route took the headquarters down Agheila Pass. In the evening fifteen JU87 B's, with fighter escort approached the Agheila Pass at a height of 10 000 feet and circled around before dive-bombing the pass at 6 000 feet. All six guns opened fire but with no apparent result due to the height of the attackers.

Tactical Headquarters remained in position until 3.00 pm and it arrived at 2nd SA Infantry Division Headquarters at 8.30 pm on 14 June. The two generals exchanged greetings and, no doubt, news, ideas and advice. Major General Pienaar left with a parting shot for his friend 'Kloppie', giving him 'the prophetic opinion, couched in homely terms: that his Division would be wiped out if he remained in Tobruk'.²

50th British Division

50th British Division, masked by a dust storm, made preparations for a break-out and, in a remarkable move, the bulk of the Division – of which 150th Brigade was short of rations, water and ammunition - moving in in two main groups and with great vigour, smashed gaps through the Italian lines and broke out westwards.³ The Division was supported by 6th SA Armoured Car Regiment, which was split between the two groups. The Division then moved southwards, before doubling back well south of Bir Hakiem, heading east across the desert towards the frontier. 'It lost nothing by its success, but evaded exhausted foes....'⁴ The third Battalion of 151st Brigade – the 9th Durham Light Infantry – delegated as the last to leave the defence line - found the Italian opposition so thoroughly awakened that their commander, Lieutenant Colonel J.E.S. Percy decided to turn back and follow the trail of the South Africans.

Division Headquarters leaves the Pass

Progress of the column from the bottom of the Pass was slow due to heavy congestion on all roads. That afternoon the headquarters column was attacked nine times by Macchi 202's, ME 109's and 110's, CR 42's and Stukas, strafing, bombing and dive-bombing. 'H' Troop shot down five enemy aircraft with another two probably destroyed.⁵

A large number of the 'Q' vehicles were driven by black drivers who moved their vehicles up to 500 yards from the route whenever there was an air attack, even when it was remote from the columns area. It took time to get them back into the convoy. All three Brigades had sent their 'soft' vehicles well ahead and these vehicles – and other convoys – constantly overtook the Division's Headquarters' column and sought to pass without regard for dispersion or road discipline. Another cause of confusion was that many drivers were more intent on watching out for enemy planes than for ordinary hazards of the road and this led to unnecessary collisions. Owing to these factors the headquarters of the Division took five hours to cover the short distance from the El Agheila water point to the Acroma by-pass. It was considered afterwards that had drivers been instructed to continue on the route at all costs, and had the road been protected by Anti-Aircraft guns, progress would have been quicker.

'H' Troop only had two guns capable of action, a third requiring workshop attention. No enemy aircraft intervened until about 3.00 pm when the Anti-Aircraft guns had reached the junction of the El Agheila Pass and the main Tobruk road. Four Macchi 202's came down to ground strafe the road. The

² Ibid., p. 287.

³ Ibid., p. 276.

⁴ Africa Corps, p. 81.

⁵ War in the Desert, p. 273

two available guns quickly dropped into action and one of the Macchi's was hit and turned away in flames, crashing at the foot of the Gazala Pass. The pilot bailed out and was made prisoner.⁶

Enemy air tactics

Enemy air tactics appeared to change somewhat and they now ground strafed the sides of the road, rather than the road itself, seemingly to cause personnel casualties, rather than destroy vehicles. In the afternoon five ME 109F's, following the method of attack, came in to drop bombs on the roadside and then machine-gunned the same ground. The two Bofors went into action and shot down one of them, which nose-dived into side of the road. Shortly after this six CR42's appeared from over the sea and bombed the coastal track; three of this group then attacked the main road with their cannon. One turned its attention to a Bofors position but the gunners shot it down. One gunner was slightly wounded when the CR 42 crashed only 150 yards from the muzzle of the gun. During this action another gun was reported out of action. Fifteen minutes later the remaining gun opened fire on six ME 109's that appeared on the scene and, and, while not scoring a hit, it drove the enemy aircraft away. The Troop Commander had meanwhile succeeded in restoring the second gun to serviceable condition by using parts from the one that was unserviceable.

The enemy aircraft were not going to give up that easily. The attack was followed by a 'hit-and-run' raid by three ME110's. They dropped a number of small bombs at the roadside. One of them was hit by the Anti-Aircraft gunners and was probably destroyed as it was last seen losing height and only ten feet above the sea. There was little breathing space before the next attack at 5.50 pm when five CR42's resumed the attack on the convoy. One was hit and disappeared in the direction of the sea, smoking heavily. It was also probably destroyed. Only ten minutes after this, two ME 109's appeared and ground strafed the convoy. Both aircraft were engaged and one crashed about 100 yards from the gun that had hit it. At 7.30 pm nine Macchi202's came down to ground strafe the sides of the road. One of these was sent down by Anti-Aircraft fire, to crash nearby. Perhaps they had had enough. It was the last air attack of the day.

'H' Troop realised that their guns were more than a match for low-flying aircraft engaged on ground strafing missions. The two effective guns of the Troop had destroyed five aircraft, probably destroyed two others and damaged three, all within the space of five hours – for the expenditure of 673 rounds of ammunition. It was a very creditable performance.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment's tally for the first half of June 1942, was sixteen enemy aircraft destroyed, four possible destroyed and 29 damaged, for a total expenditure of 7 33 rounds of HE ammunition.

The Fortunes of the Batteries

All 'B' Echelons were on the move by noon, their transport concealed to some extent by the dust storm that helped 50th Division. Each Brigade Headquarters' moved at 4.00 pm and thinning out of the forward localities began towards evening. The war diaries record that main bodies of 1st and 2nd SA Infantry Brigades withdrew from the positions at Gazala in the late afternoon, 3rd SA Brigade, in closer contact with the enemy and handicapped by lack of transport began to thin out at 9.25pm. Second line ammunition had been dumped in the Gazala Line before 26 May, but the Regiment was able to lift every round surplus to first line.

1st SA Infantry Brigade

'A' and 'C' Troops of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were deployed along the route to El Agheila Pass to provide Anti-Aircraft protection for the various elements of the Brigade during the period of withdrawal.

With only two serviceable Bofors, 'B' Troop moved with 7 Field Regiment, but was never called into action. 'Z' Troop of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was at this time with a mobile column at Eluet el Tamar (Best Post). When the Division's rear guard commander ordered the 'Box' to be evacuated, it moved out during the night and joined the Battery, which moved on uneventfully with the Brigade

⁶ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A12.

and followed the Division Headquarters down Agheila Pass. Fifteen JU 87B'S, with fighter cover, approached and dive-bombed the column. All six guns opened fire but the aircraft were too high for the fire to be effective.⁷ Only one bomb did any damage. That damage was severe.

The history of the Transvaal Scottish recalls the move down the Agheila Pass:

Only a single line of trucks can descend the winding pass, and there is already a jam at the top. The mass of vehicles is like a herd at a kraal gate Two Bofors protect the pass, one at the top and one at the bottom. Gunners are stripped to the waist; the muzzles circle all the time. There is no question of these gunners leaving before the last truck is down...and the stukas must come. Some of the Battalion are down the pass, others still jammed at the top... The Stukas scream down on the pass....into the path of the Bofors fire, up and off. The gun at the foot follows their flight through the murk of explosive smoke. The gun at the top ceases to chatter: dead men hang over it and lie among torn sandbags.⁸

The Bofors position was hit when a 500 lb bomb fell only ten yards away from the gun. Anti-personnel bombs were also dropped close to the gun and Lieutenant Peter Sampson and eight other ranks were killed. Two 3-ton vehicles were set on fire and destroyed. By the time Major Garlick reached the site the identity discs of all the detachment had been removed. There was nothing further he could do so he and his vehicles moved on. The gun was so severely damaged that it could not be raised off the ground, nor could any useful parts be removed. It was later completely destroyed by SAEC personnel attached to the Brigade.⁹ The top of the pass was very congested and it was fortunate there were no further air attacks on 1st SA Infantry Brigade that evening. 'Z' Troop evacuated Eluet el Tamar during the night and before the Brigade passed through 'D' Gap in the Wire on 15 June it had re-joined the column. The Brigade arrived at the Kennels the next without further incident.¹⁰

But on this day, and the next, when 'X' and 'K' Troops shot down an Italian G 50, an ME 109 and a CR 42, and with the result of 'H' Troops shooting, the Bofors probably did better than the fighters could have done, and at a lower cost.¹¹

With no more than Acroma Keep, the 36 remaining tanks of 32nd Army Tank Brigade and Stopcol to stem the further advance of the *Afrika Korps* on the Via Balbia, the Brigade passed through Tobruk without interference and thence to 'D' Gap in the Wire of the Egyptian- Libyan border. It arrived at The Kennels at Hamra on 16 June.

2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery

The second of the Batteries was less fortunate. The main body of 2nd SA Infantry Brigade lost its way during the night of 14/15 June and did not clear Bill's Pass until 5.40 am the next morning. Stragglers from other units joined the Brigade column. 'D' Troop was detailed to provide Anti-Aircraft protection to the Brigade rear guard; 'E' Troop was at Williams Post and only 'F' and 'Y' Troops were with the Brigade's main column. At 12.00 noon on 14 June, before the withdrawal began a single JU 88 approached the Brigade sector at 3000 feet and was immediately engaged. Two hits were observed and the aircraft turned away before it reached the gun positions. The Brigade commenced its move at 3.30 pm and an hour later several JU 87 B's were engaged by the guns while on the march. One hit was recorded.

Best Post was heavily attacked by enemy Infantry on 14 June and they were engaged by every weapon in the Box, including fire from the Bofors Troop. That evening Brigadier CL de Wet du Toit, commanding the Division's rear guard, ordered Williams Post and Best Post to be evacuated.¹² Vehicles collected the Williams Post garrison about 9.30 pm and by 2.45 am the whole of the Best

⁷ Ibid., file A16.

⁸ The Saga of the Transvaal Scottish, p. 487.

⁹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A16.

¹⁰ Ibid., Report 25.7.1942.

¹¹ War in the Desert, p. 273.

¹² Ibid.

Post garrison had been withdrawn. E' Troop re-joined the Battery the next day. These 'Boxes' and those of 2nd SA Infantry Division at Point 187, supported by Commonwealth Keep, Stopcol, Tonycol – guarding the flank of the withdrawal at Point 201, east of Acroma from early on 14 June¹³ – and others, had gained valuable time for 1st SA Infantry Division to escape the net Rommel was hoping to throw around it. He had noted the heavy traffic on the Via Balbia and issued the most urgent orders to the *Afrika Korps* to descend the escarpment¹⁴ but his Troops were far too tired to respond. The main body of the Brigade moved through Tobruk and on to the Wire, without further incident. The little force at Commonwealth Keep, almost surrounded, eventually made a hurried 'getaway', threading its way down the escarpment, past sleeping Germans.¹⁵ As General von Mellenthin confirmed: *'The fact is that the Afrika Korps had reached the end of its tether....; it was impossible to rouse the men.'* 'And so the escape of the South Africans went unhindered.'¹⁶

The rear guard began its withdrawal at 1.30 am on 15 June as ordered, and reached the top of Bill's Pass at 5.45 am. It had been instructed to blow the Pass after the last vehicles were down; but it was delayed by the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel Percy's, Durham Light Infantry which had not managed to break out with the rest of the 50th British Division. The rear guard waited, the British troops negotiated the pass, and at midnight they blew the road.

3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery

3rd SA Infantry Brigade fired its last Field Artillery rounds in the Gazala battle on some enemy patrols at about 11.00 pm. A few minutes before 1.00 pm one JU 88 approached the 3rd Brigade area at a height of 2000 feet and was engaged by both 'G' and 'K' Troops. No hits were recorded and there was no further enemy air interference. The Brigade reached the Serpentine Pass at midnight. There were about 200 vehicles, loaded with tired, silent and disappointed men, waiting to go down. Progress was very slow and military police – who necessarily had to wait for the last vehicle to reach the road – guided each vehicle round the sharp turns. The Brigade had some difficulty negotiating the Pass¹⁷ but it reached the bottom at 3.00 am and then had a clear run to the Mrassas minefield. It concentrated beyond the minefield at 7.00 am and then commenced the slow crawl towards 'D' Gap at Tobruk, outside of which was solid mass of transport of all sorts – nose-to-tail and ten or twelve abreast. They painfully edged their way through the narrow gap in single file through the darkness at snail's pace. This, the greatest target for bombers, stretched for several miles.¹⁸

At about 7.30 am about 30 Stukas arrived and dropped their bombs, mercifully causing no damage. They were the first of four air attacks by enemy aircraft and although there were no casualties to personnel, many trucks were damaged. One G 50 was hit at about 9.00 am and it crashed nearby. Apart from these attacks, while other enemy aircraft were frequently overhead, Allied fighters thankfully prevented any major attack. By 11.00 am the first vehicle of the Brigade succeeded in getting into Tobruk, and an hour later the Battalions were moving through the fortress, they were on their way to the Wire by 2.00 pm. The last vehicle was clear of the Fortress by 4.00 pm on 15 June.¹⁹ A little earlier near the El Adem by pass four hits were made on one of two ME 109 F's. It crashed in flames. The pilot bailed out and was captured by the crew of an armoured car. No one would accept responsibility for the prisoner and he was handed to 'G' Troop, the Troop Commander was obliged to retain the prisoner until 18 June when the Brigade arrived at the Kennels. A bivouac area near Gambut was reached about 10.00 pm and everyone fell asleep where they were. Some had been sixty hours without sleep, Next day they moved on towards the frontier wire; where 'D' Gap was clouded with dust as vehicles streamed through. Everyone and everything was covered in dust.

¹³ Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁴ Panzer Battles 1939-1945 p.108.

¹⁵ Crisis in the Desert, p. 93

¹⁶ Afrika Korps, p. 79, 81.

¹⁷ The Tide Turned at Alamein, p. 100.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁹ War in the Desert, p. 273.

Regiment Botha was situated in the Bight of Gazala Gulf and 'X' Troop was placed under command of the Regiment at 9.00 am of 14 June. At 7.00 am on 15 June 2nd Regiment Botha and 'X' Troop began its withdrawal from its position. One and a half hours after this the column was attacked by two ME 109 F's. The Anti-Aircraft gunners destroyed one of the aircraft. Another hour and a half passed before six CR42's appeared and dive-bombed the column. One aircraft was destroyed. The word must have been passed around not to touch the South Africans – they were not molested again. Regiment Botha and its accompanying gunners passed through the rearguard, moved through Tobruk and after crossing the frontier at 'D' Gap, 'X' Troop rejoined 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Touch and Go

It was touch and go whether the 1st SA Division would get clear. Rommel had issued orders to block the Via Balbia but his Troops, after three weeks of almost continuous action were exhausted and too tired to respond. The three Troops of Bofors with Stopcol – 'B' and 'C' Troops of 4 LAA Battery and Lieutenant Reg Potts' Troop from 5 LAA Battery - were ordered into Tobruk and they were fed through the mass of vehicles at 'D' Gap. South African 'Boxes' at William's Post, Best Post, and Point 187, supported by Commonwealth Keep, Stopcol and other units had allowed the Division to escape. All had got away except the remnants of a small rear guard party on the Via Balbia near the Mrassas water point, some of whom had rushed a small element of German troops and got away with it. The little force at Commonwealth Keep, almost surrounded, eventually made their way past sleeping German troops, down the escarpment and into Tobruk, after the other posts had been vacated, with Lieutenant Geoffrey (Johnnie) Johnson's Troop of Bofors from 4 LAA Battery already at the Acroma Gap, to ensure their safety from air attack.²⁰

With no more than the 36 remaining tanks of 32nd Army Tank Brigade, and Stopcol – acting like a rock - to stem the *Afrika Korps'* advance to the Via Balbia during the night of 14-15 June, 1st SA Infantry Division passed through Tobruk. Its last units were clear of the fortress by 4.00 pm on 15 June.²¹ The two Divisions - 1st SA Infantry Division and 50th British Division were by that evening making their way, unmolested, to the Frontier.

The Rearguards

Much delayed by the arrival of transport from 50th Division, the 1st Brigade rearguard nevertheless blew Agheila Pass at about 9.00 am on 15 June. It moved towards Tobruk, making a detour towards the sea to avoid the Germans and with only slight casualties, the Brigade was through the Mrassas minefield by approximately 1.50 pm.

The rear guards of 2nd and 3rd SA Infantry Brigades were less fortunate. They were in increasing danger as the *Afrika Korps* awoke – to a new day and an infuriated Commander-in-Chief.²²

The 3rd Brigade Rear Guard allowed the 2nd Regiment Botha through and then waited at the bottom of the Pass for two hours for orders. An element of German troops from Rifle Regiment 115 supported by a captured 25-pdr and about six Mk III tanks had meanwhile been successful in cutting the road ahead of them. The rear guard eventually caught up with 2nd Brigade rear guard where there was the utmost confusion. At 1.30 pm the rear guard was shelled by guns from the escarpment and 'D' Troop received shell fire. Lieutenant John Friedlinghaus was severely wounded in his back and was placed in an ambulance, but later that day succumbed from his injuries. Lieutenant Gow took command of the Troop. The Durham Light Infantry of 50th British Division 'had no intention of giving up so near to Tobruk and a semblance of safety'.²³ They attacked the small German force; they and the enemy infantrymen were almost wiped out. A 2-pdr Anti-Tank gun destroyed three Panzers, with two more being destroyed by 7 Field Battery. Lieutenant Colonel Percy's Battalion – which included Bofors guns, Bren carriers and troop carriers - and 7 Field Battery headquarters and its 'B' Troop and

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 273-275.

²¹ Ibid., p.275.

²² Year of Alamein, p. 87.

²³ Ibid., p. 88.

three other 25-pdrs, then broke through about 3.00 pm and pushed on to Tobruk, entering the Fortress with 28 German prisoners.²⁴

But the gap was quickly reinforced by the Germans. The now demoralised remnants formed a defensive 'Box' near the sea and an attempt was made to pass the enemy position by moving north along the track that ran close to the coast. At 3.00 pm the column was brought to a halt by enemy tanks across the line of withdrawal. The leading elements of the rear guard were being subjected to Artillery and small arms fire and the Troop Commander, who moved forward to the head of the column, found that no further movement seemed possible. He returned and reported to the rear guard commander who then went forward to make his own assessment.

Lieutenant Gow brought his Bofors into action in a defensive position about 300 yards from the sea alongside a Troop of 25-pdrs under command of Captain C.E.G. (Smiler) Brereton Stiles. Late in the evening the field guns were moved onto the beach, leaving the three Bofors exposed; but the Anti-Aircraft Troop Commander thereupon pulled his guns back in conformity with the field guns as it was considered that the site offered the best chance of a last stand. Lieutenant Gow, who managed to escape, reported:

The gunners of this A.A. Troop are to be complimented on their behaviour during this period when those around them had lost all control, they were standing by to man their guns.

Lieutenant Loffhagen, Assistant Troop Commander, 'E' Troop, discovered he could go no further after reaching the gap at the Mrassas water point. It was under heavy shell fire. He found a way through the mine field, then returned and gave instructions to the gun detachments to follow him if he succeeded in getting through with his 15 cwt truck. He made it successfully and the Anti-Aircraft tractors and guns and an attendant 3-tonner followed, unharmed. A further ten 3-ton trucks of the Cape Town Highlanders also followed and thus escaped capture.²⁵

The Battery Commander of the field Troop with the rear guard, in a full story of the day's incident written in his notebook while in POW camp, was scathing of the ineptitude of the rear guard commander in not taking the party through with the Durhams. There was no attempt. The remnants of the rear guard were overwhelmed. The Anti-Aircraft Troop lost all its guns, vehicles and equipment and only a few of the personnel managed to escape the net thrown around the rear party.

Ordered to the Kennels

1st SA Infantry Division and 50th British Division meanwhile made their way to the frontier, a good 75 miles from the battle area, with the South African Division ordered to the Kennels at El Hamra. The Division, more than any other Eighth Army formation, was comparatively fresh, the great bulk of its units not having been involved in the fierce fighting behind the Gazala Line. It arrived there in good order on 17 June and took over the southern sector of the Kennels 'Box' – a fortress about twelve miles square. It was a huge supply dump, well stocked with rations, water, munitions and spares, with a smattering of defences no one had ever taken seriously. It lay ten miles from the frontier and 250 miles from the coast in an area of barren desert with not even a stunted shrub to relieve its bareness. For the first time in four days men were able wash, shave and enjoy a reasonable meal. One wonders why it was there.

On arrival at the Kennels, 1st SA Infantry Division received orders to form two 'mobile striking elements' (50th Division was to act similarly) from 1st and 3rd Brigades to harass the enemy forces investing Tobruk. 2nd SA Infantry Brigade was given the responsibility for protection of the three minor passes on the escarpment – Lovers Lane, The Pub and The Cradle. The mobile striking elements

²⁴ War in the Desert, p. 276.

²⁵ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374 File A16 report of 25 July.

were to include a third of an Infantry Battalion, twelve Anti-Tank guns and an Anti-Aircraft Troop as well as Engineer and medical support. 2nd SA Infantry Brigade had been sent on another task after passing through 'D' Gap in the wire. The situation had, however, taken a decided turn for the worst and Army ruled instead that the Division was to remain at Hamra. But the same day XXX Corps ordered Major General Pienaar to provide a Company of Infantry and a Troop of Anti-Aircraft for Landing Ground 79 and to arrange Infantry protection and necessary Anti-Aircraft Artillery and traffic control at Gaps H and K; and to also hold the Kennels 'Box'. Various orders also included an order to protect the Field Maintenance Centre. There was a difference of opinion on the impossible tasks the Division had been ordered to undertake, which would have reduced it to little more than a shell. Losses in the three weeks before 19 June had been the equivalent of a Brigade strength and some echo of Major General Pienaar's explosive comments must have reached Army Headquarters.

To Alamein

Because of the speed at which *Panzerarmee* was moving in the afternoon of 21 June XIII Corps ordered 1st SA Infantry Division to destroy all dumps of stores, to evacuate the Kennels and move to Alamein.²⁶ Once more, Major General Pienaar had read the signs correctly. He had held an order group a few hours before to discuss and plan for a move.²⁷ The Division's AA and QMG, Lieutenant Colonel E. O'C. Maggs, lifted as much as possible from the enormous dumps of stores, and they were then thrown open to the troops. The hours that followed were lunatic. Every unit was involved in the destruction – of everything it could not carry.²⁸ Vehicles were filled – with as much as they could hold – of the good things that make life bearable, not forgetting essentials such as petrol, oil, water and ammunition. (officers of one field Regiment had a champagne party one evening on their journey to Alamein.)

At 8.00 pm 3rd SA Infantry Brigade and its Anti-Aircraft Troop began the 220 mile journey - a long, slow trek across the trackless desert, parts of it over flinty sharp, edged stones – to Alamein. 1st Brigade followed the next day. Major General Pienaar with a small 'Tac HQ' remained behind until they had left. 2nd Brigade, with its headquarters at Halfway House, remained in place, guarding the three passes (Lovers Lane, The Pub and The Cradle) on the Haggard el Aqaba escarpment. Of its nine guns, those of 'E' Troop had been withdrawn for landing ground defence where 208 Air Co-operation Squadron, RAF, was based. The remaining guns were split, with two to each pass. Strong objections to splitting the Troops into less than three guns had simply been overruled. It was fortunate that no enemy aircraft had appeared.

On the afternoon of 23 June the Battery received orders to blow the demolition charges in the ammunition, petrol and supply dumps, in the water works and in the passes, and to fall back to Alamein. Proceedings were, however, halted when 'a conscientious bloke from Army' arrived to inspect the one of the water reservoirs.' After he had satisfied himself that it was in good condition and had departed 'happily on his way' the demolitions were blown by the South African Engineers.²⁹

Tyres and springs and steering suffered (one field Regiment arrived at Alamein needing 100 sets of springs) and some vehicles, unable to be repaired had to be destroyed. Every evening vehicles as ordered, were turned to face west, to alert any enemy reconnaissance aircraft that might happen to see them, that it was a Division moving up to the front. On 22 June they learned of the fall of Tobruk. They could not believe it; it was impossible they thought.

The Division was eventually re-united on arrival at El Alamein on 25 June. The Gazala Gallop was over. They were told there would be no further withdrawal.³⁰

²⁶ Crisis in the Desert, p. 234.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ War in the Desert, p. 239.

²⁹ Crisis in the Desert, pp. 234,235.

³⁰ The Tide Turned at Alamein, p. 106.

Note : British sense of humour is much in evidence in the names given to desert places, not only the Kennels (one wonders who and why it was given this name), there was Playground, and Halfway House; The Stables and Conference Cairn could be found behind the frontier wire; and the three passes down the escarpment of Haggard el Aqaba, south-east of Sollum, named Lovers Lane, the Pub and The Cradle. There were also London place names such as King's Cross, Charing Cross, and Knightsbridge, Commonwealth Keep and the Pink Palace in or near Tobruk; and and Smuggler's Cove near Matruh. Operations later launched, were named: Daffodil, Hyacinth, Snowdrop and Tulip.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TOBRUK

The South Africans came into Tobruk as tenants in a strange house, and moreover, a house that had fallen somewhat into disrepair.¹

Behind the Gazala Line

Besides holding Tobruk – described by the New Zealanders as the ‘most sordid of desert places’,² 2nd SA Infantry Division was responsible for a number of posts and small columns which were established behind the Gazala Line. The focus of strategic interest was the 30 miles section of the Via Balbia which linked the Gazala positions to Tobruk. Stopcol and Seacol were two mobile columns that formed part of these defences, while Tonycol guarded the eastern flank. Seacol operated below the escarpment and Stopcol above it. The Division was also ordered to establish the post at Commonwealth Keep at Point 209. Most posts included Anti-Aircraft guns.

When Lieutenant General Ritchie spoke about the ‘Tobruk garrison’ perhaps he did not realise, or appreciate, that the only troops of what could in any sense be implied as the garrison of Tobruk, included the anti-aircraft gunners of 4th Field Brigade, RA, protecting the harbour with their eighteen heavy Anti-Aircraft guns and a few Bofors,³ as part of the permanent defence of the port; the newly arrived 11th Indian Infantry Brigade – guarding 13 miles of perimeter; and those members of 4th and 6th SA Infantry Brigades and 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA, - not actually fighting in Columns and ‘Boxes’ outside Tobruk.⁴ There was no minefield in front of the Indian Brigade and of the few mines that were there, were Egyptian and mostly defective.

On 24 March ‘C’ Troop, 4 LAA Battery, fell under command of 4th SA Infantry Brigade and moved into the Tobruk area during a severe dust storm. The next day ‘A’ Troop of the same Battery was moved back from Gazala to El Adem to protect an ammunition dump. Regimental headquarters moved into Tobruk two days afterwards and on the same day, the headquarter group of 4 LAA Battery also moved to El Adem. Meanwhile 5 LAA Battery, based in the area of Sollum, apart from providing three detachments for railway train defence duties, was putting in useful training on Bofors guns under the instruction of 6 LAA Battery, R.A. They reciprocated by instructing the Royal Artillery gunners on the 20 mm Bredas.

2 LAA Battery on 1 April was widely spread and apart from those now in Tobruk, detachments of other Batteries were deployed as follows :

4 LAA Battery	: Headquarters	at El Adem landing ground
	: ‘A’ Troop	on the escarpment at El Adem
	: ‘B’ Troop,	at Hagfet Sciaaban
	: ‘C’ Troop	in Tobruk

5 LAA Battery : Battery headquarters and three Troops at Sollum, but with three detachments on train protection duties.

¹ Infantry Brigadier, p. 15.

² Ibid.

³ Crisis in the Desert, p. 135.

⁴ War in the Desert, p.282.

6 LAA Battery : Headquarters	in the Gazala area
'A' Troop	in the Acroma 'box'
'B' Troop	with 1 LAA Regiment at Gazala
'C' Troop	at Ain el Gazala
'D' Troop	with 1 SA Division supply headquarters.

4 LAA Battery was instructed to re-organise as four Troops each of three guns, and on 2 April 'D' Troop was formed at El Adem. Similar action was taken by 5 LAA Battery at Sollum. The gunners of this Battery were now *au fait* with the 40 mm Bofors and had taken over the guns from the Royal Artillery Battery with which they had been training. The Battery left Sollum on 5 April for Acroma, arriving three days later. In the meanwhile the sub-units of 2 LAA Regiment in the area behind the Gazala were almost constantly in action, and the guns at El Adem were called upon several times to defend the landing ground against enemy attack. One such attack took place on 13 April when five ME 109F's came in at various heights to dive bomb and ground strafe. One definite hit was scored by 'A' Troop. Two further attacks took place later the same day. In one of the attacks 'B' Troop engaged three ME 109 F's without visible effect and in the second of the later attacks both 'A' and 'D' Troops fought four ME 109F's. One of the aircraft was hit by 'A' Troop.

There was also action at Acroma; two ME 109's being engaged on different occasions during the day.

Owing to reduced air activity 6 LAA Battery received orders on 19 April to move back from Gazala, and on the same day the headquarters of 4 LAA Battery and its 'A' and 'D' Troops moved from El Adem into Tobruk. It had not really had sufficient time to settle into new positions when, two days later, new orders were given to the Regiment: it was required to provide Anti-Aircraft defence for Acroma 'Box', Agheila water point, Mrassa water point and the strongpoint at Acroma Keep. And, in addition the Regiment was required to provide Anti-Aircraft defence for three mobile columns, two of which were under command of 4th and 6th SA Infantry Brigades and the third in the forward area under command of a tank formation.

In accordance with these instructions 'D' Troop of 4 LAA Battery, moved into Tobruk, 'C' Troop took over duties at Acroma Keep and 'A' Troop went to Acroma 'Box', while 'B' Troop also moved to the Acroma area. 5 LAA Battery headquarters were moved to the edge of the escarpment, fifteen miles west of Tobruk, where one Troop was allotted road patrol duties; the other three Troops linked up in the AA defences of the Acroma area with 4 LAA Battery. 6 LAA Battery withdrew a Troop from the Gazala line to look after the defence of the vital Marassa water point.

Several actions were fought by the Bofors guns from these positions in the course of the next few days, mostly against ME 110's at extreme range. All Troops were in action during April and heavily involved in both Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Tank roles. Two enemy aircraft were shot down during this period and four probably destroyed, with nine others damaged. Tobruk was bombed regularly, but, as these raids took place at night from a high altitude, there was little that the light Anti-Aircraft guns could do. Regimental headquarters received a scare one night when bombs fell on the escarpment close by. Two bombing attacks by large formations of Stukas were made during the month and several of them were brought down by the guns and also by RAF fighters who were still at that stage able to operate over Tobruk from airfields nearby.

General de Villiers Recalled

Because of the continuing Japanese threat in the Indian Ocean, GOC, 2nd SA Infantry Division, Major General IP de Villiers – who had opened his headquarters in Tobruk on Friday, 27 March 1942 - was recalled urgently to South Africa, to take command of the newly established Coastal Area Command. He left Tobruk on 14 May after a farewell party, taking with him several senior members of his Staff. Brigadier HB Klopper, who had been appointed to command 3rd SA Infantry Brigade two days before the fall of Halfaya, was transferred from 3rd SA Brigade to assume command from 16 May – without any proper handing-over procedures taking place in the fortress. Brigadier RJ Palmer – the senior of the Brigade Commanders, had been passed over for command of the Division as Eighth Army had demanded that a regular officer should take command. Palmer instead took command of 3rd SA

Infantry Brigade, which was now permanently lost to 2nd SA Infantry Division. Now a T/Major General, Klopper found himself commanding a Division which had just been stripped of its most experience Brigade, and with an inexperienced Staff amongst whom there was a serious conflict of personalities. The senior Staff officer would not, for instance speak to the CRA on the Staff. The Division was thousands of men under-strength and units were operating either well beyond the perimeter of the fortress or being called upon to provide mobile columns. Artillery units came into Tobruk and left, and it was never clear what would be available for defence⁵ until almost the last couple of days. No concerted plans for co-ordinated defence could be made or put into operation. The Eighth Army Commander had in May assured the commander-in-chief Middle East, Lieutenant General Sir Claude Auchinleck, that he did not feel there was any real danger of the Troops in Tobruk from being 'bottled-up'⁶ and Klopper understood that Tobruk was to be a pivot for a line of defence through El Adem and El Gubi.

The two South African Divisions were by then buzzing with the news that they were shortly to be withdrawn to the Delta for re-equipping and training as Armour Divisions. But, as General Brink later recorded: 'God and Rommel willed otherwise'.⁷

The War Diaries which covered the activities of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment for May and June 1942 were lost in the fall of Tobruk, but there can be no doubt that the whole Regiment was very actively involved during that period.

Lieutenant EW Layland, although captured with the rest of the Regiment, managed to escape, and from him it was learned that in May there was increased air activity over all areas and all Troops were engaged daily. A number of aircraft were shot down by the guns of the Regiment, besides others probably damaged. Headquarters, 6 LAA Battery, were moved back from the Gazala line in early May to a position near the Gazala Road, close to El Agheila, and 5 LAA Battery was attached to a mobile striking force known as Stopcol. 6 LAA Battery – except for the Troop at the water point - remained where they were. Although 4 LAA Battery was initially moved into Tobruk, it was shortly afterwards moved out to join a mobile column. Both it and 5 LAA Battery were almost continually in action while operating with mobile columns in the Acroma-Knightsbridge area. Both Batteries suffered casualties

When Rommel and his *Panzerarmee* launched the attack on the Gazala Line, the Regiment became heavily involved in both an Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Tank role. Troops fought many an encounter outside the Tobruk perimeter, particularly in the Acroma - Knightsbridge area. A dust storm in the afternoon of 27 May brought some respite; and in the night of 14 June the Bofors were sent back into Tobruk. They threaded their way in through the minefields at 'D' Gap in the Tobruk perimeter. Lieutenant Neil Orpen recalls that it was too dark to see the trip wires on either side of the dusty track and Cedras, his driver, sat on the bonnet of their one-tonner, directing him with hand signals.

4 and 5 LAA Batteries were again withdrawn into Tobruk, 4 LAA Battery being deployed in the western sector with 6th SA Infantry Brigade, and 5 LAA Battery with 4th SA Infantry Brigade north of the Pilastrano Ridge. Eventually the whole Regiment gathered inside the perimeter of Tobruk fortress, the last to move into the perimeter was 6 LAA Battery. It had been covering the withdrawal from Gazala along the coast road and had sustained a number of casualties during this phase. But to their credit, they succeeded in bring down a number of enemy planes. They were deployed near the landing grounds. Regimental headquarters was also moved to a new position closer to Divisional headquarters at the caves in the Solaro Escarpment. The Batteries were all thinly spread out.

By 14 June the Battle of Gazala had been irretrievably lost and withdrawal of the two Divisions in the Line was inevitable.

⁵ Crisis in the Desert, p. 135.

⁶ War in the Desert, p. 195.

⁷ Ibid., p. 196.

General Ritchie Confers

Lieutenant General NM Ritchie flew in to Tobruk on 16 June in a light German aircraft – a captured *Fiesler Storch*, the Anti-Aircraft units having been prudently warned beforehand. Before his arrival, however, a telephone message was received at Regimental headquarters from Captain Mike Stott (many years after the war a Springbok angler) reporting that his guns had unfortunately opened fire on a *Fiesler Storch* and it had been ‘shot out of the sky’. When the message was handed to Lieutenant Colonel Howie, his eyes went blank. He picked up his cap and without a word, left the headquarters and walked out into the desert. After some minutes he returned and instructed his signals officer, Lieutenant IF ‘Frans’ Nel – (who in 1990 became Honorary Colonel of Prince Alfred’s Guard) to summon Captain Stott to report forthwith. The Captain arrived and the signals officer decided that he should remove himself from the headquarters, but ‘After a while’ he wrote in later years. ‘I thought that whatever had to be done must by now have been done.’, so he turned back to the headquarters tent. As he approached he was astonished to hear gusts of laughter from his Regimental Commander and others, who were enjoying listening to Mike Stott reciting Eskimo Nel. Only then did he realise that the story of destroying the aircraft had been a huge joke played on the commanding officer.⁸ It says much for the character of the commanding officer to have taken it as such.

The Generals

During Ritchie’s visit Major General Klopper, easily the most junior Divisional Commander in Eighth Army, was given his final directive. The conference with Generals Gott and Klopper struck an optimistic note. He was told to be prepared to hold Tobruk in case of investment, but was assured that El Adem to the south and Belhamed – a huge stores dump to the east of Tobruk - would stand firm. He was warned to pay particular attention to the western face of the perimeter. Tobruk, he said, was to be a pivot for a line Tobruk – El Adem- Bir el Gubi. While General Ritchie was confident that Tobruk would not be invested, Lieutenant General W.H.E. Gott, Commander of XIII Corps, made no secret of his belief that investment was inevitable. He was impressed by General Klopper’s handling of the columns during the Gazala operations: the garrison made a good impression: supplies were adequate. Everything he felt unnecessary for a siege was sent out – a great deal of motor transport filled with all sorts of non-combatant and technical people who would not be of any use; including the very experienced 2nd Royal Horse Artillery attached to the Guards Brigade; eighteen heavy Anti-Aircraft guns and a number of tanks, including Grants.

That evening General Gott and his XIII Corps Headquarters trundled off along the Gambut Road towards Alamein, leaving behind him a mixed garrison of 33 000 men in what he considered ‘a nice tidy show’. Tobruk was left in charge of a General of only one month’s standing, and with fortress defences in poor condition. Tank ditches had caved in or were half filled with sand: large amounts of barbed wire had been lifted for use elsewhere⁹ and 19 000 mines had been lifted by the New Zealanders for use at El Adem - the ‘very good box’ they had built over a period of six weeks -with full permission and knowledge of Eighth Army – as recorded by General Kippenberger in his book *Infantry Brigadier*¹⁰ – with major elements of his troops manning points, columns and ‘Boxes’ outside Tobruk, he had not been able to organise a cohesive defence. The history of *The Desert Rats* also confirms that the defences had fallen into neglect...’and the troops within, newly arrived they were from an arduous battle, had no time to organise a proper defence.’¹¹ The Report of the Court of Enquiry into the loss of Tobruk states that: ...it is questionable whether even the most experienced commander could have grappled with the problem in the time available.’¹²

German troops occupied Gambut airfield at about midnight on 17-18 June.’ On 17 June, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles, from their positions at Medawar, observed that in the El Adem area there was ‘an unusual stillness.’¹³ El Adem was evacuated in the face of overwhelming pressure in the early during

⁸ Quote from a pamphlet produced for a Light Anti-Aircraft reunion.

⁹ History of the Second World War – The Mediterranean and Middle East – Volume III, p. 261.

¹⁰ *Infantry Brigadier*, p. 261.

¹¹ *Crisis in the Desert*, p. 116.

¹² SANDF Archives, Report of the Court of Enquiry into the Loss of Tobruk, p. 18.

¹³ *The Umvoti Mounted Rifles 1864-1975*, p. 186.

the small hours of 17 June, and 20th Indian Infantry Brigade was ordered to withdraw from Belhamed during the night 17/18 June.¹⁴ Tobruk was now in the front line. It had been left stranded. The featureless plains with small escarpments running through it; with ground rising 500 feet within the defences; an area of nearly 135 square miles within a perimeter of 33 miles – this was Tobruk – the ‘most miserable and sordid of desert places’¹⁵ and it was to be held by two understrength Brigades and two battle-weary British and Indian Battalions, with under-gunned tanks and no air support. Major General FW von Mellenthin years later remarked that with the evacuation of El Adem ‘...the defence of Tobruk ceased to be a serious operation of war.’

Deployment areas

On 20 June the dispositions of the Anti-Aircraft units in Tobruk were:

Heavy Anti-Aircraft:

‘A’ and ‘B’ Sections of 277 Battery, 68 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (3.7-inch guns) sited in an Anti-Tank role north of the NAAFI which was at grid 41324312.

Another Troop, of 282 Battery, 88 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (3.7-inch guns), apparently in the angle of the El Adem-Bardia roads.

2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment:

Regimental Headquarters: in the neighbourhood of the NAAFI.

4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery: under Major Harry Scholtz protected the Western Sector.

5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery: under Major Louis Wolf, with Captain Mike Stott as his Battery Captain, was responsible for the central sector of the Fortress.

6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery: under Major NC ‘Nick’ Wessels looked after the Eastern Sector. His

Troops were disposed as follows:

J Troop – covering 12\25 Field Battery, R.A., south of King’s Cross on the edge of the escarpment north the Bardia Road.

K Troop – covering 31/58 Field Battery, R.A., in the angle of the El Adem-Bardia Road, just inside the inner minefield.

L Troop – On the east side of the wadi where a Battery of medium guns were deployed, near Battery headquarters.

M Troop – covering 287 Field Battery, R.A., south of King’s Cross and east of the El Adem Road.¹⁶

The 2 Field Battery (CFA), also in this area, had not been given any air defence protection. The nearest Bofors Troop was well away behind them, protecting the Batteries of 25 Field Regiment, RA. Both Troops of the South African Battery were close to the perimeter and their only defence against air attack was either to take cover or to use machine-guns or small arms fire. But according to the report submitted by the Battery Commander after his release from a POW camp, one enemy aircraft was shot down by small arms fire and crashed some distance away to the south.¹⁷

At the far end of the quadrant, away to the south-west of King’s Cross and just off the El Adem road itself there were two of the most formidable Anti-Tank weapons in the Fortress. Completely ignored in official accounts of the battle, they were two 88 mm German Flak guns under Major Jon Hoets, the second-in-command of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and a former CGA coastal gunner. It was manned by a mixed detachment of white and coloured gunners, cooks and drivers with Sergeant George McGregor and Sergeant Sheldon in command of the guns. They had no transport or gun tractors of any sort. They stood in the path of the German and Italian panzers which had swung behind the perimeter defences. When tanks approached their position they fought until one received a direct hit. The first shot from the second 88 went wild but the next three rounds knocked out three tanks before it was also damaged and the position overrun. Both Sergeants were killed; other members were wounded, but one who survived to become a POW was Gunner Francis Mellish who had played rugby for Western Province in 1939 and was to again represent the Province in the 1946 and 1947 seasons.

¹⁴ Crisis in the Desert, p.p. 255-258.

¹⁵ Infantry Brigadier, p. 115.

¹⁶ SANDF Archives, UWH Civil, Box 366, Artillery Narrative Tobruk.

¹⁷ Ibid., Report submitted by Major Morris after release from POW camp.

Battle for Tobruk

The Anti-Aircraft guns had been very active during the cauldron battles where they were regularly in action; but never more so than in the morning of 20 June when the attack on Tobruk was launched, with a huge air strike from the nearby airfields. Rommel threw his forces into the attack at first light that morning, only moments before the OP of Troop, 2 Field Battery, CFA, was about to go through the wire with a fighting patrol. At first he could not believe his eyes but quickly recovered to bring down fire on the advancing enemy Infantry, transport and tanks – the first rounds in the one day battle. The lull was soon dispelled as an intense Artillery bombardment of the perimeter defences, was followed by heavy and continuous Stuka strikes in the same area. It seemed that every aircraft of the *Luftwaffe* was bombing or strafing the defenders. The Germans had complete control of the air and there appeared to be several hundred Stukas that flew in a shuttle from the nearby captured airfields at El Adem, Gambut and Gazala, continually plastering objectives in Tobruk. Nearly 400 tons of bombs were estimated to have been dropped on Tobruk that day.¹⁸ The Anti-Aircraft units in Tobruk – 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and elements of 277 and 288 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries, R.A. - struck grimly to their task, securing many hits.

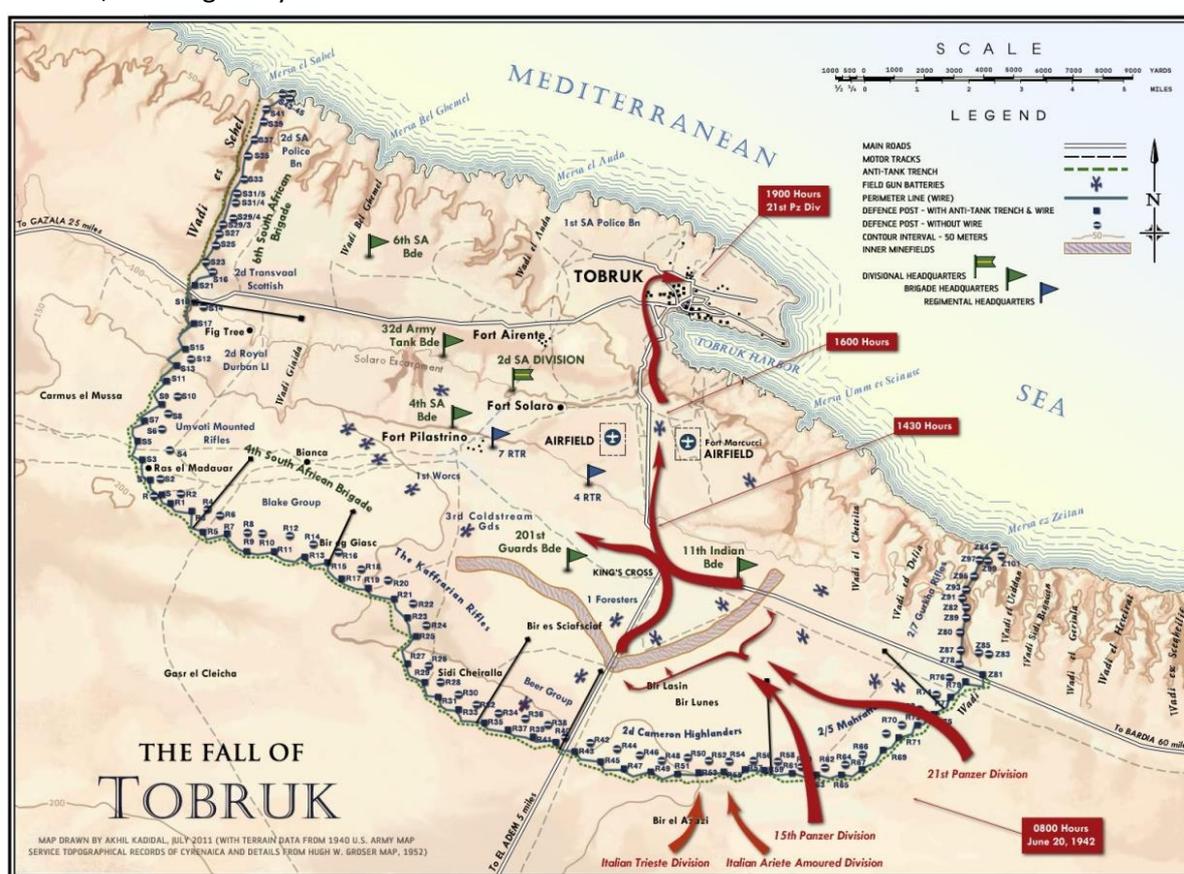


Figure 29: Map of Tobruk

A breach made in the defences of the eastern sector was exploited by 21st Panzer Division, which crashed through the position held by the Mahrattas and spear-headed the attack into the interior of the fortress, its aim to reach the harbour. It was quickly followed by 15th Panzer and 90th Light Division.

In the face of these overwhelming attacks the Troop of 287 Field Battery, RA was destroyed by German tanks while trying to extricate itself, and the attached Troops of Anti-Aircraft guns of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were destroyed with the field guns they were trying to protect from air attack. Lieutenant Mark Newton-Thompson was mortally wounded while trying to get one of his Bofors away. The gunners of 'M' Battery lay concealed in the depression in which their guns were sited and were not taken prisoner until the late afternoon by German Infantry returning from the west. Major

¹⁸ Crisis in the Desert, p. 232.

Wessels' Battery headquarters was overrun shortly after 1.00 pm and it apparently came as a surprise to him; all he had heard from Division headquarters – at 12 noon – was '12 German tanks had got into the perimeter but the situation was in hand'.¹⁹ Regimental Headquarters only just managed to move out ahead of the German tanks. It withdrew to a position close to Fortress headquarters below Pilastrano in the western sector. 'K' Troop of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was surprised about 1.30 pm to find the enemy close at hand; they were taken prisoner by enemy Infantry and the Troop at King's Cross 'was overrun after using its Bofors against the enemy tanks. This was an enterprise of considerable difficulty and, perhaps one could say, foolish bravery:

The 40 mm Bofors, with a projectile about the same as a 2-pdr Anti-Tank gun, suffered from one insurmountable handicap when in use against tanks – it was loaded from above with clips of ammunition which can only be inserted by a member of the gun detachment standing up on the gun platform, which is itself above ground level. No matter how well the gun may be dug in, loading numbers and to a lesser extent the gun layers, are thus completely exposed and unprotected from machine-gun fire from advancing tanks – before they came into range, Though a very effective weapon against armoured cars, the Bofors was never a serious threat to the German Mk III and Mk IV tanks, except perhaps under the most favourable of conditions.

This statement by a former Anti-Aircraft gunner officer was not quite correct – a number of enemy tanks had fallen victim to the fire of the Bofors. The frontal armour of the panzers could not be penetrated by the 40 mm shell but if hit on the side the tanks could and did suffer damage, as seen particularly at Sidi Rezeg.

Despite the loss of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery it nevertheless claimed, in post-war debriefing, to have shot down six enemy aircraft.²⁰

By the afternoon the eastern sector of the garrison was practically over-run, except for the 2nd Battalion, Cameron Highlanders, who held out for a whole day, 24 hours longer than the Fortress itself, only agreeing to surrender after demanding they be conceded the honours of war – they marched out as a Battalion, led by their pipers; and the Gurkhas who at 10.00 am on 21 June asked for Artillery support, (Lieutenant 'Turkey' Whyte, the FOO of 2 Field Battery was still with them) not realising the guns were in enemy hands. The Italian X Corps spent several days rounding up the Gurkhas from the wadis into which they disappeared.

Ammunition

The field Regiments had not been allowed to stockpile ammunition (the medium Batteries had an allowance of five rounds per day), the senior officer responsible for ammunition relying on old orders issued by XIII Corps. And when one Battery sent a truck to collect additional supplies the driver was told that ammunition would only be issued on requisition provided by 'Q', at Fortress Headquarters, and he actually demanded such an authority on the evening of 20 June when German tanks were visible from the ammunition dump.

The Base Supply Depot at the cross-roads near the ruined Fort Airenti remained intact for a while; a story current in prison camps holding South African troops, told 'how a senior RASC* officer explained, that as any professional soldier would know, stores and equipment must not be destroyed without proper authority.'

(* Known to British soldiers as 'Rob all starving comrades')

Luckily for 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, the Battery headquarters had managed to stop a 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery 3-tonner, fully laden with Bofors ammunition, after it had come into Tobruk with elements of 1st SA Infantry Division when it withdrew through Tobruk. A Staff officer remembered it and the ammunition was soon distributed. It proved very useful.

¹⁹ SANDF Archives, UWH Civil, Box 139, enc. 5206.

²⁰ Ibid., file Post-war debriefing.

The 3.7's

South of the escarpment on the Solaro Plain close to the old and ruined Fort Solaro and near the NAAFI, there was now nothing to stop the German tanks reaching the town and the harbour - except for four of the eighteen 3.7-inch guns of 277 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, 68 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA. They had been given to the CRA, Colonel H. McA. Richards, 2nd SA Infantry Division, by Brigadier Stebbings, Commander of the Anti-Aircraft Brigade in Tobruk, to site in an Anti-Tank role. They were dug in close to the old ruined Fort Solaro to the north of the NAAFI.

The gunners knocked down their gun pit walls and depressed to zero to engage the Armour. Bill Bowes, years later a Yorkshire and England cricketer, served in 68 HAA Regiment. The following is an extract from a letter he wrote in late 1984, in which he recalls that his Battery took delivery of:

...open sights...either late on the night Tobruk fell, or very early in the morning of the day, and after half an hour's practice around 6 o'clock we were using them in earnest. It is incredible to recall that the first ranging shot of a German tank on the horizon landed full in one of our gun pits, put the gun out of action and killed a couple of the crew. We had been instructed not to open fire under 1 000 yards, but the Jerries did not come so close and we had to open up at a longer distance.²¹

The German panzers were approaching the harbour when they met the determined Anti-Aircraft gun detachment, their 3.7-inch guns firing in direct action at the tanks. They held up the advance for half an hour and knocked out four enemy tanks, (as recorded by the German author, Heckmann) – another record said six – at very close range.²² Rommel had been near the Wadi el Chteita, directing fire on ships and harbour installations, but now he came up with the tanks. The Anti-Aircraft gun detachments set to work with enthusiasm and efficiency to offer a magnificent resistance that earned the admiration of Rommel himself, who described their stand as one of 'extraordinary stubbornness'. The range was short enough for them to wreck two tanks and damage three more. Rommel sent an *oberleutnant* to demand the surrender of the position but the guns replied with 'hellish fire' and blew the turret clean off another tank.²³ In the end the position was taken by a storming party led by Rommel's own driver. They stole up under cover and rushed the emplacements amid a shower of hand grenades.

The Caves are Gutted

The caves in the Solaro Escarpment occupied by Headquarters, 2nd SA Infantry Division – with German panzers about a thousand yards away - were vacated after destruction of the contents, and most of the headquarters staff moved to an area in the Western Sector. The CRA, Colonel H McA Richards, and the CRE, Lieutenant Colonel RD Henderson, followed the General when he finally left at about 6.30 pm, after he had attempted again and again to contact Eighth Army. Dusk was falling. While *en route* to 6th Infantry Brigade they passed a field Battery whose senior officer exclaimed, 'Good God, are you leaving too? Isn't anyone going to stay and fight?'

A Diary

Sergeant Ralph Warrilow, of 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery - a pre-war gunner of Cape Field Artillery – recorded in a diary he kept all through his days as a prisoner of war, that his gun and others of his Troop, had been busy all day. 'Enemy aircraft appeared just after breakfast', he wrote, 'The Troop engaged 'and his gun claimed a hit. There were several more attacks during the day but towards sunset 27 Stukas approached the Troop's position. Six veered off to attack another target but nine attacked Battery headquarters. The Troop opened fire on them but instead became the target for the twelve Stukas that remained. They came down with that unmistakable screaming noise peculiar to the Stuka. No one was hurt but to everyone's distress the kitchen truck was destroyed. Anti-Aircraft actions in the Western Desert were vastly different from what one writer thought was the 'rather

²¹ From p.14 of a copy of the Royal Artillery magazine, *Gunner*, produced about October/December 1984.

²² Routledge writing in *Gunner*, August 1984, and also reported by Lt Col Sherwell, UWH Civil., Box 139, ref 5265.

²³ SANDF Archives, UWH Civil, Box 139, ref. 5263. Report by Major Robbertze after release as POW.

primitive variety' encountered in East Africa and he thought that 'being on the receiving end of a Stuka dive-bombing attack ...was an experience not easily forgotten.'

Orders to move were received and the Troop packed up; the guns were placed in Anti-Tank positions. It was discovered a short while later they were no longer needed in that capacity (possibly when the German tanks had veered off to Tobruk town and harbour); so they were re-deployed in their old gun pits at Fig Tree where 'they found what seemed to be the whole of 2nd Div.'²⁴

A little earlier, when the Panzers were approaching the harbour area, Lieutenant Colonel Howie (who had by this time learned he had been mentioned in dispatches for gallantry and distinguished service over the period November 1941 to April 1942) returned from 2nd SA Division headquarters with instructions to destroy all RHQ vehicles. The Division HQ had also burnt surplus vehicles before evacuating their area and moving to the new location in the west. Howie soon announced that 'It is all over' and that personnel were free to attempt to escape Tobruk if they wished. He was able to contact 2nd SA Division Headquarters later that night in its new location in the sector held by 6th SA Infantry Brigade. 4 and 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries were instructed to take up Anti-Tank defensive positions. Casualties had been light; Lieutenant Mark Newton-Thompson of 6 LAA Battery was the only officer who had died to this stage.

As dusk fell and in the gloom of the desert evening, two of the three 25-pdr guns of 'D' Troop, 1 Field Regiment (CFA), that had escaped the onslaught in the east, had a brief exchange of fire against German panzers; but after that all remained quiet in the western sector during the night. The gunners dug most of the night, ready for a fight in the morning. Nightfall found the remnants of the badly hurt 2 Anti-Aircraft Regiment concentrated near Fig Tree. Major Nick Wessels' Battery had been overrun; Major Louis Wolf had lost five guns; and there was now no contact with Lieutenant Colonel Howie. No one could reach the commanding officer and, 'imperturbable as ever', Major Harry Scholtz of 4 LAA Battery, with all his guns intact, took over.

The arrival of the Fortress Commander at 6th SA Infantry Brigade' headquarters at dusk came as a surprise and shortly afterwards he issued a warning order for a mass breakout at 10.00 pm that night. It was generally accepted that Eighth Army was on its way to assist the garrison in a fighting breakout. A little after receiving the order, Brigadier Alec Hayton of 4th SA Infantry Brigade held a meeting with his Battalion Commanders at the headquarters of the 2nd Royal Durban Light Infantry at Fig Tree. Major Harry Scholtz, described as 'a spirited veteran of the 1st World War' was present and he was clamouring for a task.²⁵ Brigadier Hayton was not in favour of the break-out – his Brigade had only thirteen vehicles. (The three Anti-Aircraft Batteries in Tobruk were still using most of the vehicles with which they had left Durban in 1940) The meeting agreed to the creation of a western 'box', from which they 'could fight it out'. Men dug furiously to improve the defences. The Brigadier, accompanied by his Intelligence and his signals officers, left to see General Klopper. There was no sleep that night. Unknown to the South Africans the Royal Army Service Corps had three Companies with, between them, 700 vehicles south of Tobruk harbour. The CRA discovered this when he was already in a prison camp in Europe.

Major General Klopper, who had been given the assurance that Tobruk would be well supported, was finally able to contact Eighth Army by signal at 2.00 am. Communication was not good, signals went back and forth, but much later in the early morning he received a polite message from General Ritchie,²⁶ who after all promises, had obviously abandoned Tobruk. The message left a bitter taste in the mouth of the signaller who took it down. The Commander of the Division had meanwhile made some decision to fight it out. Lieutenant Colonel Howie spotted Major General Klopper just before dawn and was clearly told, as Brigadier Hayton had been : Fight, but don't take too many casualties.

²⁴ From the diary of Sgt Ralph Wrangmore, lent to the author during the time this chapter was written.

²⁵ The Durban Light Infantry, p. 193.

²⁶ Crisis in the Desert, p. 214.

But at about 6.30 am, after fruitless messages between Division headquarters and Eighth Army, and an anxious, soul-searching night, Major General Klopper bowed to the obvious – Tobruk could not expect any help. It was clear that the fortress had been written off. To prevent, as he later recorded, another Delville Wood, he sent an emissary to offer surrender. The news spread quickly. There was an air of disbelief in the fortress; one man, hearing the shout of ‘They’ve surrendered’ and assuming the Germans had surrendered, asked with incredulity ‘But why? We haven’t beaten them yet!’

Sullenly at dawn they obeyed Major General Klopper’s order to surrender. In prison camps for many months afterwards they were bitterly resentful and ashamed. The fortress that had held out for nine months in 1941 had been taken for a day. Inevitably they would be blamed. Inevitably they blamed Maj. Gen. Klopper.²⁷

The Australians in the prison camps did not let them forget it. The two remaining Anti-Aircraft Batteries destroyed their guns and personnel dispersed in a vain attempt to escape.

Ralph Wrankmore continued:²⁸

‘About 3 am and have already commenced digging a gunpit. Finished about 7.30 am. I leave for previous position to collect some stores. On way back find road blocked by staff car. Infantry guard occupants with fixed bayonets. On enquiry find that occupants are suspected German spies. I peer into the car & discover them to be our Colonel and other R.H.Q. officers. I identify them and they are released. A little further on I find many trucks burning and Mr. Abbott’s Troop destroying their guns. (All junior subalterns– and the RSM – were in those days known and addressed as Mister) Report this to Mr. Syfret (his Troop Commander). He goes to make enquiries. Returns and instructs us to destroy our guns and vehicles. We destroy our equipment & then start discussing the position. We are all flabbergasted and extremely miserable. As I was about to set fire to our truck a Jerry turned up to take us prisoner. I set alight to the truck and ducked for it. Got into a crowd and mixed with them. Mr. Syfret set alight to a truck and returned to crowd without being noticed. Told to move east and.....’

Just before 9.45 am Rommel, the ‘Desert Fox’, of whom the British Prime Minister, Churchill said, (his) ‘ardour and daring inflicted grievous disaster upon us’, met the Fortress Commander on the Via Balbia, six km out of Tobruk, against the background of the great black clouds of smoke from the burning fuel dumps, vehicles and stores. His fury at the loss of fuel and supplies could not have been more evident. He attacked the Fortress Commander about the destruction of the supplies he had hoped for – all through the medium of his interpreter Lieutenant H. Schafer, who had been educated at Rondebosch Boys High School, Cape Town. Unknown to Schafer, one man of 2 Anti-Aircraft Regiment not captured when Tobruk fell was another Rondebosch Boys’ High School, Gunner A.K. MacKenzie, who must have attended the school with him. MacKenzie was one of a handful in hospital at Helwan.²⁹

In Major Harry Scholtz’ Battery – Lieutenants Geoff Gray, Geoffrey (Johnny) Johnson; Neil Orpen; Miles Syfret; G.R. Findlay and Abbot (initials unknown) went into the ‘bag’. 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery officers included Major Louis Wolf; Captain Mike Stott and Lieutenant Reg Potts. When 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had been overrun in the Eastern sector, Lieutenant Mark Newton-Thompson had been mortally wounded. Major Nick Wessels and the rest of his officers also became POWs. War diaries were lost and so too were names of most officers. Those in 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were known only via Lieutenant Orpen – a later historian.

It was the end for 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Two years and four days after marching out of the Castle to entrain at platform 23 on Cape Town station, for departure to Potchefstroom, they were assembled and marched into holding camps. The Regiment was ‘in the bag’ – prisoners-of-war - and apart from a few that managed to escape, they remained in captivity for the rest of the war. Less than twelve members of the unit, who were either on leave or attending courses, evaded this disaster and were transferred to 1 Light Anti-Aircraft

²⁷ Saga of the Transvaal Scottish, p. 521.

²⁸ Sergeant Ralph Wrankmore’s diary.

²⁹ A pamphlet titled *In Proud Remembrance*, p. 42.

Regiment. The Cape Corps members of the Regiment, as well as many other NEAS men on duty at the port, suffered at Tobruk, probably more so than the white personnel. Over 3 000 went into captivity when the Tobruk fortress was taken by the *Afrika Korps* on 21 June 1942. They were the best of the NEAS and all were reported to have been badly treated – kicked and beaten by both German and Italians. They were forced to work and fed only a packet of British biscuits per day, with little water given to them, according to a few that managed to escape.

Up to the time of the capture of Tobruk the Regiment had shot down some 48 enemy aircraft and inflicted more or less severe damage on about 100 others. Shortly before Tobruk fell Major General Klopper congratulated Lieutenant Colonel Howie on the efficient work of the Regiment during the three-week battle in the Gazala-Tobruk area.

To Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, it was ‘a shattering and grievous loss’. To General J.C. Smuts, the South African Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, it was equally so – but for a different reason. A total of 10 722 South Africans were taken prisoner - 560 officers, 8 400 other ranks, 380 men of the Cape Corps, 113 of the Indian and Malay Corps and 1 264 black volunteers of the Native Military Corps. About 85 South Africans were killed in action in those anxious last days. With the losses sustained much earlier at Sidi Rezeg, South Africa had lost up to 12 000 ‘A’ category men –manpower it could ill afford to lose.

2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery was officially disestablished on 6 September 1942 and removed from the ORBAT. It no longer existed – only the memories remained.

But it is wrong to think that the story of the Regiment ended with the fall of Tobruk.

H.S. (Herb) McKenzie, SC, a member of the Regiment in later years wrote:

In POW camps in North Africa, Italy and Germany, Ack-Ack men played their part in camp organisation and entertainment which was so necessary for the maintenance of morale. Many escaped, particularly after the capitulation of Italy, and some assisted partisan groups. Some were recaptured and some succeeded in reaching Allied lines. Ack-Ack men tended to stick together and help one another, whether in the dysentery-ridden starvation camps in North Africa, the coal mines and sugar factories of Silesia or on the final long march across Germany ahead of the advancing Russian armies.

Many had left the the Regiment before Tobruk – some owing to wounds and illness and some to go on promotion courses. Many of these men served with distinction in other units until the end of the war, although they served in many different units, nearly all of them tended to regard the 2nd Ack-Ack as their unit.

And, it was said, they always will. ‘I know that, I still do’, wrote one in April 1990.³⁰ During 1946 the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Regiment Association was formed. Apart from organising functions that were at times attended by former 2nd Ack-Ack men from all over the country, the association succeeded in raising enough money to endow a bed at the Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital ‘In memory of Fallen Comrades’. Years later these indomitable men and the ‘Anxious Annies’ – the women who waited for them to return and who did a wonderful job in many ways in the years before they returned from POW camps - were still meeting regularly. They were initially hosted as former prisoners-of-war by the Red Cross, and after meeting a number of former Anti-Aircraft gunners there it led to a group under the chairmanship of former Gunner Herb McKenzie, State Counsel, to search for others and to a second and larger reunion at Young’s Field on 17 June 1985. At Young’s Field they witnessed an extremely well-performed Retreat Ceremony given by the National Service Troops of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, at which the salute was taken by a former Battery Commander, Major (Ret)

³⁰ Home Front, April 1990, magazine of the MOTH ex-service organisation.

Nick Wessels. Their host was the Officer Commanding, Western Province Command, Brigadier Y. de Bruyn.

Thereafter they met regularly, on several occasions at the Anti-Aircraft School, Young's Field. They celebrated the 50th Anniversary of their departure from Cape Town, on 17 June 1990. Shortly before this a number had attended a party at Red Cross House, Wynberg where a book titled *Inside Story* written by Ike Rosmarin (one of the former gunners and a prisoner of war) and edited by Brian Lello, war-time correspondent and journalist, was launched.³¹ The book tells the story of the years of internment and hardship and it contains a full list of those of those who went into captivity. By then their numbers were dwindling; all were well over 80 years old; their last function – with about fifteen immensely proud men - took place in the afternoon of Wednesday, 18 June 2003 at a retirement village at Rondebosch. It is only fitting that that they are remembered at the entrance to the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, Cape Town, where the name 'Anxious Annies' appears next to that of the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Regimental Association.

Long after the war, on 19 December 1946 to be more specific, notification of the the award of the Military Cross to Majors L.G.F. Wolf and N.G. Wessels of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was made. Major Wessels had on 15 December 1942 received a Mention in Despatches. The Military Medal was on 19 December 1946 awarded to Gunners M.A. Boehmke and J.E. Olsen, both of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Herb McKenzie's lasting impressions of the war were the endless movement; the dust storms and the flies, the digging of gunpits and slit trenches in the hard desert dround, cooking and 'brewing up' on petrol fires, regular rations of bread and fresh meat, occasional distributions of 'glort bags', issues of brandy and Naffi treats, Cairo leave, training on new guns and the nightly guard duties. All this and the being on the receiving end of Stuka dive bombing was not easily forgotten.

³¹ Constantia Bulletin 21.6.1990.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE 'BOX'

Mersa Matruh

Lieutenant General Neil Ritchie, Commander of Eighth Army decided firstly to occupy a 'holding' at Sollum; but events overtook him and led him to make a stand at Matruh, where '...the whole plan of defence was obscure.'¹ Rommel moved quickly, leaving Tobruk only two days after it had fallen. *Panzerarmee Afrika*, urged on by Rommel, and with only 44 tanks in running condition, crossed the frontier and on 25 June they were in contact with XIII Corps south of Matruh. The 90th Light Division cut the road fifteen miles east of Matruh. Other units followed up quickly and surrounded the area. On the evening of that day the Army Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, General Sir Claude Auckinleck, flew to Eighth Army headquarters, at Bagush and relieved General Ritchie of his command. 'The Auk', as he was known, assumed personal command of Eighth Army. There would be no more indecision. The Army would fight as a concentrated force and Matruh would not be defended. Instead it was to be withdrawn to Alamein to cover the coast road to Alexandria and the desert route to Cairo.

XIII Corps led by an overstrained and tired Lieutenant General W.H.E. Gott, began an un-coordinated withdrawal, 'with no compelling reason to do so'.² Rommel by-passed Matruh and X Corps, inside the Matruh perimeter was surrounded, but broke out in disorganised formations. Both it and XIII Corps swept back to Alamein. It was described as 'unpleasant', with many casualties in the three Batteries of 5 SA Anti-Tank Regiment. 8 Anti-Tank Battery arrived at Alamein with only 57 men of the 185 on strength. The break-out of the New Zealand Division was on an epic scale. The 4th New Zealand Brigade cleared a lane by the bayonet and almost annihilated a Battalion of German Rifle Regiment 104 in hand-to-hand fighting. A second Brigade, with all its transport, drove through the lane; but 5th Brigade had lost its transport early in the afternoon. Packing men onto gun tractors, anti-tank portés, and on guns and every available vehicle they could find, they made a daring break-out, followed by the 4th Brigade.³ 2 SA Anti-Tank Regiment withdrew from Matruh but suffered in the process.

After Matruh, apart from several minor rearguard actions, there was nothing to stop *Panzerarmee Afrika* in its quest to complete Operation Aida and reach the Nile Delta. While Rommel's forces continued their advance towards Cairo, some of the Eighth Army then withdrawing to Alamein, were running parallel to *Panzerarmee Afrika*, some even behind. On 28 June the Italian dictator, Mussolini, flew to Derna, with a white charger following in a transport aircraft, ready to make a triumphal entry into Cairo on his white horse.⁴ That evening, with the DAK only fifty miles away, the first of continuous bombing raids on the Alamein positions began - and the Anti-Aircraft gunners were once again facing serious air attacks.

1st SA Infantry Division

At Alamein on the evening of 25 June the 1st SA Division was once more re-united. On arrival that day the Division was placed under command of XXX Corps and the Corps Commander, Lieutenant General C.W.M. Norrie, decided that the whole of the Division would occupy the El Alamein 'defended locality'. The expression 'Box' was *verboten*. Instructions were issued at 9.00 pm on 26 June for the three Brigades to move into their positions in the defined area.⁵ The Alamein 'Box' - as it remains

¹ Infantry Brigadier, p. 127

² War in the Desert, p. 338.

³ Crisis in the Desert, p.258.

⁴ Ibid., p. 239 and War in the Desert, p. 243

⁵ War in the Desert, pp. 236, 237.

known – was occupied only four days before the arrival of the enemy advanced forces on 30 June 1942. Men dug furiously, clearing out the silted fortifications they had dug after arrival in Egypt, adding wire and laying mines to their front. Further west at Deir el Shein, near the end of the Ruweisat Ridge, stood the 18th Indian Infantry Brigade, newly arrived from Iraq and also digging hastily; and nine miles south was 6th New Zealand Brigade. Neither Brigade at that stage had any Artillery support.

New Dispositions

On 28 June, after a discussion between General Sir Claude Auckinleck and Major General Dan Pienaar, 1st and 2nd SA Infantry Brigades were instructed to form mobile battle groups outside the Alamein Box. 2nd SA Infantry Brigade Battle Group, under Brigadier C.L. De W. du Toit, moved to an area two miles south-west of the perimeter and about a mile west of Alam el Onsol; and 1st Brigade - with 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery – only with eleven guns in action - deployed four miles south of the El Alamein Box and just north of Ruweisat Ridge. A Battery from 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was with each of the three battle groups. Three guns from 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were out of action and required workshop attention. Two were soon repaired and returned by Advance Division Workshop, but one gun was moved to Rear Division Workshop and then transferred to Base Ordnance Depot as BLR, reducing the Battery to ten guns. This number was further reduced by deploying three guns (X Troop) to protect Main Headquarters, 1st SA Infantry Division.

The Anti-Aircraft Gunners

On 1 July 1942, the rear headquarters of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was at South African Base, Helwan; the Advance Headquarters, with Lieutenant Colonel Meister and a staff of a batman-driver and two signalers, was at Main Headquarters, 1st SA Infantry Division. 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery with nine guns was under command of 1st SA Infantry Brigade in the Central Sector (one gun was temporarily with 2 LAA Battery); 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery with nine guns was in the Southern Sector and under command of 2nd SA Infantry Brigade, and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery with nine guns was under command of 3rd SA Infantry Brigade in the Alamein Box. The Battery also had three guns covering the Division headquarters, but the main task of the Anti-Aircraft guns was protection of the field guns.⁶ The medium Regiment under command was protected by light Anti-Aircraft guns provided by the Royal Artillery.

Allied air superiority ensured that engagement of hostile aircraft was comparatively limited. Bombing raids on 1st SA Infantry Division were mild in comparison to those of other sectors; but ME 109 F's continued to engage Allied aircraft over the sector held by the South Africans. On a number of occasions low-flying Hurricanes, Tomahawks and Kittyhawks were saved from the faster Messerschmitts by the guns of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.⁷ The light Anti-Aircraft Battery with 2nd SA Infantry Brigade recorded that twelve Stukas bombed their area, completely destroying one gun killing Bombardier P.J. Collins and Lance Bombardier T.Y. Graham. Sergeant D.W. Denton and Private M.E. Shaw – the latter a 'gun tiffie' - died of wounds – the Sergeant that day and Shaw two days later. Gunners Hansen, Harms, Mulligan and Tucker suffered from shock. One Stuka was shot down and the gunners of 1st SA Infantry Brigade also brought down another. The pilot bailed out and was taken prisoner. 1 Squadron, SAAF, also intercepted the Stukas and it is recorded that all fifteen Stukas, in three groups each of five aircraft, may therefore have been shot down.⁸

Personnel

The white other rank establishment on the Anti-Aircraft Regiment was depleted to almost a bare minimum, due to the number of casualties. Those killed in action or wounded had been the result mostly of shell fire - Men remaining on the guns were beginning to feel the strain; they had been in continuous action for nine months – 1st SA Infantry Brigade longer than any other in Eighth Army. Complaints of eye strain showed a rapid increase and the loss of a large number of well-trained layers. Continual eye strain and lack of leave all resulted in a loss of efficiency. Officers came and went.

⁶ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Boz WD 374, file A17.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ War in the Desert, p. 359.

Lieutenant G.J. Louw was admitted to hospital on 29 June and on 3 July five officers - Lieutenants P.A. Tilbury, J.K. van P. Klerck and (Sir) L.L. Richardson, and 2nd Lieutenant G.J. Rackstraw - were taken on strength as reinforcements. The fifth one was Lieutenant A.R.G. McLeod who replaced the signals officer, Lieutenant F.C.S. Bell.⁹ A strength return of 4 July indicated that 182 white and 93 coloured reinforcements were necessary; the total included a shortage of sixteen Sergeants and fourteen Bombardiers. The number rose to 202 white and 127 coloured gunners by 18 July.

Another group of officers was taken on strength on 7 July. Lieutenant D.E.R. Ayres and S.W.A. Tacon were posted to Regimental Headquarters and so did C.R. Ferguson –as Regimental Subaltern; while Lieutenant I.G. Pierce was transferred to the Regiment direct from the Anti-Aircraft School, Cape Town. On 12 July Lieutenant C.D. de B. Forsyth was sent to SA Base for return to the Union. The transport officer of 3 LAA Battery, Lieutenant J.H.H. Horns was wounded the next day. Seven days later Lieutenant F. Heymann arrived from the reinforcement pool and so did Lieutenant C.J. Louw who returned 'ex hospital' where he had been since the end of June.

The 'Box'

The 3rd SA Infantry Brigade Group, reinforced by a Company from 2nd Regiment Botha, one from the Natal Mounted Rifles, and 'A' Company of the Cape Town Highlanders, assumed complete responsibility for the Alamein Box from 28 June. Brigadier R.J. Palmer's 3rd South African Infantry Brigade - with a total of only about one thousand infantrymen in his three Battalions - held a line some seven miles long. A number of the previously prepared defensive positions in the southern and eastern sectors of the perimeter were unmanned due to a lack of troops. All 'soft' vehicles and men not required for fighting were sent to the rear. The southern flank was 'covered' by 22nd Armoured Brigade and 1st and 2nd SA Infantry Brigades which lay to the south, more or less between the 'Box' and 18th Indian Brigade at Deir el Shein.¹⁰ Meanwhile elements of Eighth Army streamed through the gap in the Alamein defences; vehicles were nose-to-tail, both on the Via Balbia and on the dirt road alongside the railway line.¹¹

At 11.30 am on 29 June, Brigade informed the Rand Light Infantry, which occupied a post astride the railway line and the Via Balbia, that the enemy was only 12 miles away and the minefield gap had to be closed immediately; but with the stream of traffic passing through it was impossible. Three and a half hours later traffic was still as solid as ever. A detachment of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry were the last through the gap before it was closed in the early morning of 30 June.¹²

Rommel, anxious to reach the Delta, and despite the fact that his troops were tired, did not hesitate to move his *Panzerarmee* forward from Matruh, On 30 June his advance forces were seen approaching Alamein and were within 4 000 yards of the 'Box', when the guns of 1 Field Regiment (CFA) under Lieutenant Colonel John Gordon Gray, opened fire, to signal the start of the first Battle of Alamein. Two attempts to move forward were stopped. The Germans had no idea that the South Africans were occupying the Box. They believed that the British X Corps with 10th Indian and 50th British Divisions, both badly bruised, were holding both it and a position to the south at Deir el Abyd. And they believed the southern sector of the so-called line was held by XIII Corps with 1st Armoured and the New Zealand and 5th Indian Divisions. By nightfall on 30 June it was obvious that an attack was about to take place.¹³

The First Day of July

A major attack was launched the next morning by 90th Light Division, with Ariete Armoured and Trieste Motorised Divisions in support. At 3.20 am 90th Light Division moved forward and collided with the Alamein defences. They had veered too far north in their night march instead of swinging south of the 'Box' to cut the coast road to the east of it, as they had done at Tobruk and Matruh. They were

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 244,345.

¹¹ Rand Light Infantry, p. 176.

¹² Ibid., p. 177.

¹³ War in the Desert, p. 350.

halted by heavy fire which drove them to take cover when only 2 000 yards from the positions held by the Imperial Light Horse. They moved further south but by 7.30 am were pinned down in front of Rand Light Infantry. Well after midday 90th Light resumed their advance but were halted by extremely heavy Artillery fire. They could not make any progress. They were forced to take cover. The 'Box' was already proving a harder nut to crack than the tired German troops had expected. Later that day, the British Armour, which had stayed placid up till then, crept cautiously along Ruweisat Ridge, towards Deir el Shein and drove 15th Panzer before it.

South of 90th Light, the *Afrika Korps* blundered into the hastily prepared 'Box' at Deir el Shein and to their dismay they were held up for the rest of the day. The 18th Indian Infantry Brigade had the grim privilege of being the last Indian Brigade to succumb to a German assault, but at Deir el Shein with 23 guns hastily allocated to it from three different Regiments, the formation held up the German tanks decisively for eight hours of bitter fighting, and reduced the *Afrika Korps* from 55 to 37 tanks. However, by 7.00 pm the position held by the Indian Brigade was overrun and 2 000 men were taken prisoner. Twenty-three guns were either destroyed or taken intact. But the timetable of the *Korps* had been thrown completely out of kilter. By that evening any hope that Rommel may have had of bursting past Alamein, had vanished.¹⁴ His timetable had been thrown completely out of gear.

'The stand of the Indian Brigade was almost the last in the old style, while simultaneously to the north the South Africans made the first in the new.'¹⁵

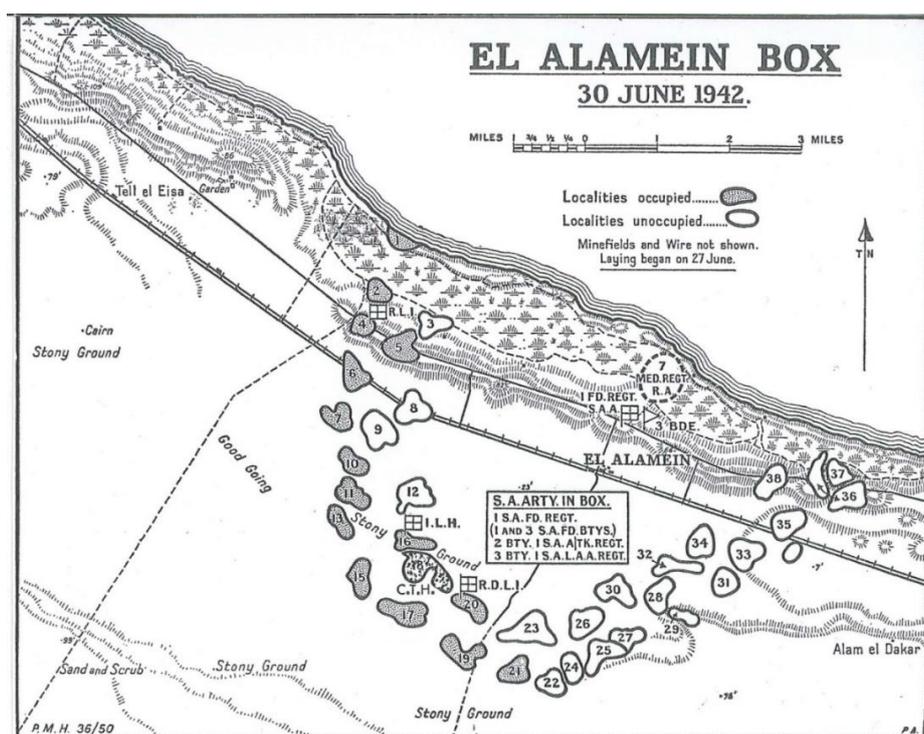


Figure 30: The Alamein Box, which included 3 Anti-Aircraft Battery of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in its defences

Trommelfeuer

After they moved southward, towards the positions held by the Rand Light Infantry, the 90th Light ran into a *Trommelfeuer*. The tremendous and co-ordinated cannonade that stopped the 90th Light Division was a converging fire from the three Regiments of the South African Artillery and the senior desert medium Regiment.¹⁶ It was the first co-ordinated cannonade of the desert campaign. The War Diary of 90th Light records: 'a panic breaks out in the Division....'.¹⁷ Supply columns and even parts of fighting units withdrew but they were stopped by the energetic action of senior officers. The Division

¹⁴ Afrika Korps, p. 95.

¹⁵ Gunners at War, p. 185.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ War in the Desert, p. 352.

dug in. It shook even the men old enough to remember the barrages of World War One. In his effort to reach the coast Rommel drew upon additional troops - he brought in his own *Gefechtstaffel* and the *Kiehl* Battle Group and at 4.00 pm the attack was renewed. Another attempt was made to break through and reach the coast. But once again coordinated, heavy, fire pinned them down. It included 'tracer from Anti-Aircraft guns which whizzed through our forces'.¹⁸ When the Artillery fire slackened Rommel ordered his personal *Gefechtstaffel* to disengage and the *Kampfstaffel* (*Kiehl* Battle Group) was left to hold the ground.

The 1 300 men of 90th Light were not allowed any rest. Rommel was determined to break through and he instructed them to fight their way to the coast by moonlight; they were ordered once more into the attack. They were again stopped by murderous machine-gun and Artillery fire. Bombing by the Desert Air Force was added to their ordeal. Rommel called off the attempt and shortly after 8.00 pm attacks on the Alamein 'Box' ceased; but he ordered the panzer Divisions to thrust north-east next morning to cut the coast road near El Qassaba el Sharqiya and then take the 'Box' by storm. Beginning at 6.00 am on 2 July, another attempt to advance round the perimeter was broken up. It was another busy day for the field gunners and every attempt to attack was thwarted by intense Artillery concentrations and machine-gun fire. Stukas dive-bombed the southern perimeter and at mid-morning another attack was driven off.

General Auckinleck was determined to retain an initiative and planned to attack. During the afternoon of 2 July it became clear that a major German attack would take place that afternoon and that 2nd SA Infantry Brigade was the target. A planned British operation began almost simultaneously with that of the enemy. Shelling by the enemy Artillery increased and the Brigade Commander and his Brigade Major were wounded. The field Regiment bore the brunt of the fire and there were severe casualties, every officer was wounded and the Regiment reported gun barrels badly worn. With assistance from the guns of 1st Armoured Brigade, a two-Company attack supported by German mortars and 88 mm and 105 mm guns was nevertheless beaten off.

1st SA Infantry Brigade

The Brigade, situated three miles in advance of the others was in danger of being outflanked, encircled and destroyed and Major General Pienaar's requests to withdraw to a position further back were refused. But he went 'through the back door' to Army Headquarters. He was politely refused permission. General Norrie was later authorised by the Army Commander to substitute 'Ackcol' from 50th Division for 1st SA Infantry Brigade. The latter withdrew without waiting for the substitute, leaving the box empty and occupied a position on the rear flank of 2nd SA Infantry Brigade Group. Forward elements of 90th Light Division moved in and when Ackcol arrived they had to drive the Germans out.¹⁹

Major General Pienaar's reputation with Eighth Army was not enhanced. The General was visiting the area when the British relieving column arrived and he watched the newcomers run into very heavy fire. He had misgivings about his own part in the verbal exchanges of the night; but half an hour later Ackcol was forced to withdraw slightly to the rear of 2nd SA Infantry Brigade Group. He felt justified. Rommel decided on one more attempt to break through.

The Northern Sector

In the north, enemy Infantry advanced against the Royal Durban Light Infantry in some force about 10.30 am on 3 July. They were engaged by the field guns, but by 2.00 pm when they were closer, both the Durban based Battalion and the Imperial Light Horse opened fire with mortars and machine-guns. The enemy infantrymen managed to get within 500 yards of RDLI by 3.30 pm but suffered heavy casualties. By 5.00 pm they were withdrawing towards their transport. It was evident that evening that Rommel's troops were too exhausted for further prolonged effort. Over an hour later fourteen Stukas and fifteen ME'S approached the 3rd Brigade area. In one of the most successful air battles of the desert war, Hurricanes of 1 Squadron, SAAF appeared and in full view of the RDLI, claimed thirteen of the Stukas. 274 Squadron went for the *Messerschmitts*.

¹⁸ Durban Light Infantry, Vol. II, p. 241, and War in the Desert, p. 353.

¹⁹ War in the Desert, pp. 356,357.

The Monthly Anti-Aircraft Report

Apart from weekly returns of officers, other ranks and attached troops, the Regimental headquarters also submitted reports on Anti-Aircraft action. It showed that no Anti-Aircraft guns were used during the mobile operations that had taken place during the month of July but also noted that the Alamein 'Box' had received much more attention than did other sectors. Groups of up to twenty aircraft at a time bombed the northern sector of the 'Box', and on one day, a total of 62 enemy aircraft were overhead, most of them in five different groups. Aircraft flew over the sector at various heights – from 8000 feet to 500 feet, but at 9.45 am on 5 July, two ME 110's took the gunners by surprise when they zoomed over at what was described as 'zero feet'. On the day before this seven JU 87 B's had approached from the east, also at fairly low altitude. One was hit before the action was broken off by the appearance of Allied fighters.²⁰

On 7, 8 and 9 July the Anti-Aircraft gunners had nothing to report but 10 and 11 July were heavy days for them, 1 351 rounds being fired in twelve different engagements, the most successful being on the evening of 11 July when a JU 88 was destroyed and two others in a formation of twelve were hit. And on 15 July an enemy aircraft that had been hit was seen burning as it left the area. Thirty-four aircraft were overhead on 17 July. Although the Bofors fired at them, there were no hits. The commanding officer, doubtful that he might be, recorded in a rare bit of humour, that from 18 to 24 July German pilots must have been 'on holiday'; three ME 109 F's spoilt the day on 22 July when they roared over the 3rd SA Infantry Brigade area at 2 500 feet. Rounds fired at them had no effect. There was a dog fight over the sector in mid-morning two days later and when the enemy aircraft were clear of Allied planes, they were engaged. 102 rounds were fired that day. There were no hits and no damage. The Anti-Aircraft gunners fired 4 670 rounds during the month for one aircraft claimed as destroyed, another heavily damaged and hits on fourteen others.

The Central Sector

South of the 'Box', the Central Sector – which became the Southern Sector on 3 July when 1st SA Infantry Brigade (which was further south) withdrew - took a hammering after two quiet days when 40 JU 87 B's in three groups bombed 2nd SA Infantry Brigade on 3 July. One gun of 'F' Troop was hit by a 500 lb bomb and three of the detachment died. Bombardier P.J. Collins and Lance Bombardier J.Y. Graham were both killed. Sergeant D.W. Denton subsequently died of wounds and Gunners Tucker, Harms, Mulligan and Hansen were unhurt but badly shaken. They were slightly wounded by splinters and by the anti-personnel bombs that were dropped. Gunner M.E. Shaw was badly wounded and died two days later. The gun was destroyed beyond recovery. In another detachment, Gunner H.E. Hurzuk was also a casualty that day, while in other attacks in those early days of July Corporal Jandrell was wounded in the back; and Gunner M.T. Kirsten received slight wounds but was able to remain on duty after treatment.

Several aircraft were hit and three of the JU87 B's were seen to crash. Hurricanes of 1 Squadron, SAAF, appeared and shot down fourteen of the enemy as they tried desperately to leave the scene of their attack. The Anti-Aircraft gunners with 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were also in action against a group of twelve Stukas which bombed 2nd SA Infantry Brigade area. One of their Bofors was destroyed and three gunners were killed; but the guns extracted vengeance by shooting down one Stuka. The pilot was taken prisoner. The next day was worse: at noon a formation of Boston bombers dropped their bombs on 2nd SA Infantry Brigade, doing as the war diary records, 'great damage'; two Battery vehicles were badly damaged.²¹ The days of 11 and 17 July again saw dive-bombing attacks but otherwise the balance of the month was quiet, with dust storms and heat being experienced. 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery reported on 23 July 30 that JU 87 B's had flown overhead on course to the north-west after bombing 5th Indian Division. Fire was opened against them and one aircraft was hit twice; another was seen to crash. And the Battery reported that on 17 July four hits were made on sixteen JU 88's that dived to 4 000 feet before releasing bombs. Over 3 000 rounds were fired by the Battery during July, with two aircraft destroyed and eight damaged.

²⁰ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A17.

²¹ Ibid.

July opened quietly for 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. On 3 July the Battery accompanied the Field Artillery at 4.35 am when the latter 'withdrew E.N.E. and by 0800 occupied new position east-north-east of 2nd SA Infantry Brigade.'²² At 6.30 pm that day enemy aircraft dive-bombed 2nd SA Infantry Brigade sector and then passed over 1st SA Infantry Brigade sector. All guns engaged and six hits were recorded. One JU 87 B crashed and the pilot captured by the Transvaal Scottish. Another crashed further south. Once again Allied fighters appeared and shot down a number of the enemy planes. One gun hit previously by a bomb splinter was declared out of action on 7 July as the result of a split breech casing. It was 'evacuated' to the rear workshop and was declared BLR. JU88's returning from an attack on Alamein station on 11 July received attention. One received a direct hit from the Bofors and the port wing burst into flame. It crashed.

The balance of the month was quiet. Only 32 rounds were fired on 23 July at three ME 109 F's attacking an RAF Hurricane.

Mid July - Last Direct Attack

There was intense shelling by the enemy all day on 12 July. Wireless (radio) interception on 13 July indicated that 5th Panzer Regiment would attack the El Alamein positions that afternoon.²³ Shortly after midday thirteen Stukas and JU 88's bombed the 3rd SA Infantry Brigade area and intense shelling by the entire *Panzerarmee* followed. By 1.40 pm the enemy, with about 400 Infantry and 24 tanks, aided by smoke, advanced against the Alamein 'Box'; and shortly after 2.00 pm they were within a thousand yards of the wire in front of the Cape Town Highlanders (under command of 3rd SA Infantry Brigade from 9 July). At the same time some 800 German troops moved forward to assault the most northerly posts manned by the Royal Durban Light Infantry.

Both groups were heavily shelled and neither was able to penetrate the minefield. Successive attacks on the localities held by the RDLI – the second about 4.00 pm – reached within 300 yards of Locality 15. Continuous fire from South African and Australian guns held them off. In spite of further attacks to penetrate the 'Box' – with heavy supporting Artillery fire, and a bombing attack at 7.45 pm by fifteen JU88's – they were denied success. But it had been necessary to call in reinforcements – a Company from Regiment Botha, another from the Cape Town Highlanders, and a Vickers machine-gun Company from Regiment President Steyn, as well as two Troops of 79th Anti-Tank Regiment, RA.

Nevertheless the German troops again attacked and again reached within 300 yards of the wire. By 9.35 pm some infantrymen and tanks had reached the outer wire. Field and medium guns subjected them to a murderous fire. Blackened, ear-drums bleeding, soaked in sweat, caked in dust and hardly human in appearance, the gunners fought on until about 10.30 pm when the enemy troops began to withdraw. One Cape Town Highlanders Vickers gun fired no fewer than 25 000 rounds during the action.²⁴ Stuka dive bombers again attacked the Box a day after.

The field gunners in the 'Box' – 1 Field Regiment (C.F.A.) South African Artillery – had suffered heavily. Seven guns were out of action and five gunners had been killed, two died of wounds and nine wounded. Six were suffering from shell shock. One Battery of the Regiment fired well over 9 000 rounds that day. The gunners were, dirty, grimy and exhausted. Cooks, clerks and drivers had been used to fill gun detachments and one had consisted only of officers.

George Cross Medal

The balance of the month was relatively quiet. On 10 July 'Z' Troop moved to 3rd SA Infantry Brigade sector; it returned three day later, but two days after that it moved back to the 'Box' to again join 3rd SA Infantry Brigade. Stukas attacked the Box on 16 July, looking for the guns. As a result of aerial reconnaissance followed by bombing and enemy counter-Battery fire, the deployment areas of the three South African Field Artillery Regiments were moved frequently. Each time they were re-

²² Ibid.

²³ War in the Desert, p. 371.

²⁴ The Cape Town Highlanders 1885-1970, p. 170.

deployed the Anti-Aircraft gunners followed suit. Although, Lieutenant Colonel Meister noted in his monthly report; the Anti-Aircraft guns were under command of Brigades, 'the latter had little control over AA'²⁵ there was often no escape from damage or casualties. On 16 July a bomb fell close to the gun tractor which hauled Sergeant Bell's Bofors. It was set alight but the Sergeant did not hesitate, despite the vehicle carrying 40 mm Bofors and small arms ammunition, a quantity of petrol, Mills bombs and grenades, he leapt towards the tractor, calling his detachment to assist. One tin of petrol caught alight and he succeeded in throwing it off the vehicle; a Mills bomb exploded but did no damage.

Sergeant Bell and his detachment were able to save the vehicle and most of the load. His devotion to duty, courage and leadership earned him the George Cross, respect from his detachment and the officers of the Battery. Many days later Major General Pienaar sent for him. His Battery Commander - Major Guilford – personally escorted the Sergeant to the General's dugout where at a small parade in the desert, he was presented with the ribbon of the George Cross. He received the medal itself on return to South Africa.²⁶

Sergeant Bell's award was not the only award received by 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment personnel. Lieutenant Quirk had earlier been awarded the Military Cross and four men the Military Medal. In addition 43 members of the Regiment were mentioned in despatches, one of them being a Cape Corps gunner.

As a result of the air attacks 1st SA Infantry Brigade moved three miles west to a new position on 19 July and the next day 'Z' Troop re-joined its parent Battery. For the rest of the month only 32 rounds were fired by the Anti-Aircraft gunners when three ME 109F's on 23 July, attacked RAF Hurricanes. In the face of this fire the enemy gave up the chase. It showed – as the gunners already knew – 'that Anti-Aircraft fire could achieve failure of an enemy's intention, without necessarily shooting down a single aircraft. If, because of Anti-Aircraft fire, an attack fails to destroy its objective, or subsequent attacks are diminished in size, accuracy or frequency, then it showed effectiveness, even though it could not be quantified.'²⁷

Typed on 19 August 1942, the monthly return listed two guns destroyed, one officer and eighteen other ranks killed and eight vehicles and their loads destroyed. The number of wounded, it stated, was relatively low. The report of enemy aircraft destroyed or damaged was an impressive document. It listed the combined results of all three Batteries in the order: Time; Date; Type of aircraft; Course; Height; Destroyed; Probable; Damaged; Ammunition expenditure.

The totals for the month were five destroyed; one probably destroyed and nineteen damaged, for an expenditure of 6 489 rounds. Most of the action had taken place in the late afternoon and evening. One CR 42, listed as destroyed, was *not* claimed by the Regiment. It had been shot down in the northern sector (held by 3rd SA Infantry) by small arms fire, when it had flown over the southern part of the sector at an altitude of only 500 feet.²⁸ The tally was quite different to the June figures of sixteen, four and 29 respectively.²⁹ The report ended with: 'Brigades have taken interest in LAA guns and the results have been satisfactory. Even more satisfactory results will be obtained when the number of guns per bty is increased to 18.'³⁰

The Cost

²⁵ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A17.

²⁶ The Cape Argus, 24.12.1988.

²⁷ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A17.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., file A16

³⁰ Ibid.

July 1942 cost the South African Division 527 casualties, much less than the 1997 for June. The strength of the 1st South African Division was down to 15 630,³¹ of which 4 729 were black and coloured soldiers – theoretically, non-combatant. Forward effective strength therefore stood at 13 007 all ranks. All South African front line units were understrength-some by as much as two-thirds. The Artillery, both field and Anti-Aircraft was no exception. On 4 July 182 white and 93 Cape Corps reinforcements were necessary to increase the authorised strength of 1 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. By 18 July this had risen to 202 white and 127 Cape Corps other ranks. Attached troops were likewise understrength, the workshop and medical sub-units requiring 31 white and 40 NEAS members between them.

The Australians Arrive

By August the Alamein line had settled down to one of thrust and counter-thrust, nightly patrols by the Infantry – one penetrated 1 200 yards into the enemy front lines – with the initiative still, however, held by Rommel. Attacks by the DAK continued at intervals, and ‘the Auk’, determined to allow the enemy no rest, also undertook aggressive action. The Australians arrived from Syria and on 2 August re-organisation took place, with 9th Australian Division taking over responsibility for three miles of the front line on the north-west perimeter of the Alamein ‘Box’. They were soon accompanying patrols to familiarise themselves with the desert. 3rd SA Infantry Brigade remained responsible for the perimeter south of the inter-divisional boundary. 1st and 2nd SA Infantry Brigades remained in their existing positions but regrouped into normal Brigades, with all units reverting to their parent formations. Rand Light Infantry, which had been withdrawn for rest and recuperation, moved back into the Alamein perimeter on 4 and 5 August, taking over the positions held by Imperial Light Horse and Royal Durban Light Infantry. The latter went into reserve and an armoured Brigade moved into the Box as a counter-attack force. On 10 August the Australians were ordered to take the high ground at Tel el Eisa.

The Australian 4th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was deployed in close proximity to the South African 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. It helped to provide an Anti-Aircraft umbrella from the coast to the southern point of the area occupied by 1st SA Infantry Division. Although attached to Brigades, operational command and control of the Anti-Aircraft guns remained with the CRA, Lieutenant Colonel F (Freddy) Theron - who had succeeded Lieutenant Colonel de Wet du Toit in that post.

Air Cover

By this time Allied air cover was a marked improvement on the past and enemy air raids were generally on a much reduced scale. Most enemy aircraft seen were usually ME 109 F’s, either on reconnaissance or in pursuit of Allied fighters. The only success the Anti-Aircraft gunners could claim was damage to two aircraft – an ME 109 F and a Macchi 202 in the southern and northern sectors respectively.

Churchill’s Impatience

Apart from fresh troops, new equipment began to arrive for Eighth Army. Despite the continued aggressive action taken by General Auckinleck, the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill’s growing impatience with what he described as ‘the inexplicable inertia of Middle East Command’,³² had become uncontrollable. He could not understand why Lieutenant General Auckinleck could not launch a full-scale offensive against the DAK. He arrived in Cairo on 3 August with General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to meet Field Marshall Smuts, General Sir Archibald Wavell and Mr. Richard Casey, the Minister of State in Cairo. Discussions eventually led to ‘the Auk’ and three other generals being relieved of their commands and, following the death of General Gott (Churchill’s first choice) in an air strike, the appointment of Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery as Commander, Eighth Army. General the Hon. Sir Harold Alexander was appointed Commander-in Chief Middle East Command.

³¹ War In the Desert, p. 388.

³² Ibid., p. 387.

General Bernard Montgomery was reportedly a bit of an eccentric with an almost fanatical zeal for intense training, stern discipline and physical fitness. 'Monty' as he became known, arrived in Cairo on 12 August. He arrived at Eighth Army Headquarters two days before the appointed date and summarily took command. He immediately made it clear there would be no withdrawal. Orders reaching 1st SA Infantry Division confirmed that existing defended localities were to be held at all costs.

August was a relatively quiet month for the Anti-Aircraft gunners. The monthly report, produced on 9 September, reflects only three enemy aircraft destroyed and four damaged in six recorded actions. About 2 500 rounds were fired, most of them on the last day of the month when a Macchi 202 was damaged and a CR 42 destroyed. It brought the Regiment's totals to 80 enemy aircraft destroyed; 33 possibly destroyed and 175 damaged.³³ There had been some minor engagements on the first day of the month – without result; and 'E' and 'Y' Troops were regularly in action against 109 F's between 8 and 11 August, without being able to make any claims of success. But on 13 August there was a noticeable increase in enemy air activity, mostly out of range of the Anti-Aircraft guns 'E' and 'Y' Troops were again in action two days later. Dust storms hindered enemy reconnaissance flights – they were now flying on clear days, at 6 000 to 8 000 feet and the guns could not reach them. On 25 August, however, an ME 109 F was engaged at 3 000 feet and the war diary recorded '...very close misses.'³⁴ Dust storms and intense heat was experienced during the remaining days of the month.

Personnel

On 3 August a welcome 72-hour leave scheme was introduced and each day five details were allowed to visit Alexandria. The first group left for the delights of Alexandria on 8 August under the watchful eye of Lieutenant van Rensburg. The scheme changed later when, each day, two men went to Alexandria and three to Cairo. From 11 August a new six-day scheme came into operation; and three days later Lieutenant Sir Leslie Richardson and Sergeant van Niekerk were sent to the Royal Artillery Anti-Aircraft School at Haifa to attend courses.

Four days before they left it was announced that the Distinguished Conduct Medal had been awarded to Sergeants R.N. Collins and van der Linde and to Gunner A. Schippers.

There was apparently very little punishment meted out in the Regiment (unless it was not recorded in the war diary), but a Bombardier was court martialled on 3 August and 'reduced to the ranks', while Gunner K Woolf was later sent to Detention Barracks at Helwan. Lieutenant Keith Gow, with Sergeant Lubbe and detachment - a total of fourteen altogether, were temporarily attached to 'F' Troop and four days after they arrived Sergeant Fahrens' gun in 'F' Troop was connected by telephone to Tactical Headquarters, 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery to make it possible to report aircraft over the sector. An interesting experiment took place at 11.00 pm on 11 August, when 40 rounds of a new flashless ammunition was fired from Sergeant Lubbe's gun, to compare it against the normal rounds usually fired. It was recorded as a 'highly satisfactory test'.³⁵

The Officers

The officer strength was shown in a weekly report as 27, against an authorised number of 31, with six reinforcements required; nevertheless two officers were shown as surplus to requirements. And the two were second Lieutenants – there were no authorised posts for such rank. Battery Commanders were unchanged: Lieutenant (T/Captain) C.D. Stark, Lieutenant (T/ Major) N.M. Garlick and Lieutenant (T/ Major) I.S. Guilford, commanding 1st, 2nd and 3rd Batteries respectively. The other rank establishment required 211 white and 120 Cape Corps men to take the unit up to strength. Officers went and came back from courses at Haifa. Captain R.F. Ross, and Lieutenants W.D.E. Cameron, A.P. Mosely, R.S. Quirk and J.R. Windridge who had left the Regiment on 28 July for the 'AA and CD School' re-joined on 15 August. Lieutenant P.M. Francis was posted inwards ex the SAA General List and Ferguson returned on 20 August. A few days before this the signals officer was replaced and the

³³ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A18.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

Regimental headquarters welcomed Lieutenant G.K. Starkey. Finally, Lieutenant J.H.N. Horne, transport officer of 3 LAA Battery returned from hospital. He was promptly sent on course. Gun detachments at Alamein consisted of twelve men – a Sergeant, a Bombardier, Lance Bombardier, five white gunners and four coloured gunners. A full detachment was kept on the Bofors 24 hours a day.

Panzerarmee Afrika

Opposite Eighth Army, changes were made in the composition of the enemy troops holding the forward positions. But their supply situation was unsatisfactory and was, in fact, deteriorating due to Allied naval and air action. Health and hygiene was not one of the strong points of *Panzerarmee Afrika* and the health of the troops was showing signs of becoming a concern. A large proportion of the officers and men had been in action for more than two years and the pace at which Rommel had driven them was beginning to tell.³⁶ Exhaustion and sickness was taking its toll. He was aware of the steadily deteriorating situation of his own forces and the increasing strength of Eighth Army. His intelligence service told him that a convoy was expected at Suez with troops and more than 100 000 tons of supplies whereas supplies for his own Army were hardly enough to sustain it, let alone build up reserves for battle.

His fighting strength was not much more than twice the strength of the South African Division. By early August 85 per cent of his serviceable vehicles were of either British or American origin – and there were no spare parts. Numbers of tanks and guns were awaiting shipment to North Africa, but ships to get them across the Mediterranean safely, was a major problem. He had much earlier come face to face with one of the immutable laws of warfare – that long lines of communication and supply would bedevil his Army.

Time was running out for him. It was now or never; and with promises of an air lift of 500 tons per day, and the use of Italian submarines and warships as transport, Rommel was determined on one last gamble. He made up his mind for one last attempt to reach Cairo and decided to repeat the plan which had been so successful at Tobruk and Matruh – a rapid thrust during the night round Eighth Army's southern flank north of Mount Himeimat. He had one advantage. However hungry, thirsty, dirty or tired his men were, their spirits were high, and confidence in their leader was equally so.

His operation order was issued on 22 August 1942.

³⁶ El Alamein, p. 43.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LAST THROW OF THE DICE

The Last Attempt

There were, by now, obvious signs that Rommel was contemplating another offensive and Lieutenant General Montgomery reasoned that Rommel would attack during the coming full moon. Alam Halfa, a long rise in the desert floor, 200 feet at its highest point, which lay in rear of Lieutenant General WHC Ramsden's XXX Corps (9th Australian, 1st South African and 9th Indian Divisions) had formed part of General Auckinleck's plan to forestall any attack by Rommel. General Montgomery accepted the plan and amended it. He had more troops and armament available. He deployed the newly arrived 44th Division on the ridge. Four hundred tanks behind a screen of Anti-Tank guns were deployed between the western end of the ridge and the New Zealand positions. Rommel could only attack via the south and a plan to foil him was hatched. A false map, showing the condition of tracks, areas of soft sand unusable by vehicle and the minefields in XIII Corps sector, was placed in the wreck of an armoured car in such a manner that did not arouse suspicion about its authenticity. A German patrol found it, and 'they fell for it and tended it with loving care'.¹

Considerable enemy movement southwards was reported on 27 August by armoured car patrols. Rommel's plan was to launch head-on decoy attacks on the South African and Australian positions by two Italian Corps, reinforced by German elements at 2.00 am on 30 August to distract attention away from the south where his armoured forces would advance eastwards through the gap just north of Mount Himeimat, and up to 30 miles beyond the start line by dawn. In ignorance of this plan 1st SA Infantry Division launched a planned raid against the Trento Division that night and had the best of the encounter, and an unsuccessful raid on the Australians by the German 164th (Lungershausen) Division, completely upset the move in the north.²

The attack in the south began in the night of 31 August 1942.

Alam el Halfa

The moon, five days past full, was due to rise twenty minutes before midnight. Two hours before this the main assault began, and the combined German/Italian armoured column moving with 15th and 21st Panzer in the lead, reached the first British minefields. They had expected a clear drive through with only a short halt to pick up a few scattered mines. By daybreak Rommel realised it was not going well. The Armour came up against unmarked minefields and areas of soft sand which slowed them down. They had covered ten miles instead of thirty. They took heavy casualties from the guns of 7th Motor and 4th Light Armoured Brigades that had been well placed to protect the flanks. The Desert Air Force (by this time augmented by seven American Squadrons) bombed them by the light of flares. All hope of surprise had been lost. Rommel had planned that before dawn 15th and 21st Panzer would be facing north towards Alam el Halfa, behind Eighth Army's positions which would be surrounded and cut off from supply.³ Bombing began again at daylight; soft sand slowed them down. General Georg von Bismarck was killed just after 4.00 am and General Nehring Commander of the *Afrika Korps* and other officers were wounded in an air attack. Rommel ordered the attack to continue towards the north-west. The *Afrika Korps* was directed towards Point 132, the summit of Alam El Halfa ridge; and with the Italian XX Motorised Corp to their left, 15th and 21st Panzer were accompanied by the Littoria Armoured Division. Saved from air attack by a sand storm, the soft sand had increased fuel

¹ The History of World War II, p. 287.

² El Alamein, pp. 50-53.

³ Ibid, p. 47.

consumption and it became necessary to refuel. With this completed, and with ammunition replenished, the attack recommenced at midday, instead of six hours earlier as intended. They were moving onto the ground selected for their defeat.

Montgomery quickly reinforced Alam el Halfa with a Brigade drawn from 1st SA Infantry Division. 2nd SA Infantry Brigade moved on 1 September from the Alamein Line to 'Locality D' at Grid 446894, where it lay - nominated as a mobile Striking Force. Battery Headquarters, 2 LAA Battery - with 'E' and 'Y' Troops, moved with the Brigade and arrived in the area designated at 4.00 am on 1 September. 'F' Troop was detached from the Battery and placed under command of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery to occupy the position vacated by 'E' Troop. 'A' and 'C' Troops of 274 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Northumberland Hussars) were attached and from 2.00 pm on 2 September also fell under command of Major Neil Garlick. All guns were dug in by 4.00 pm. Shortly thereafter, 274 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment's 'C' Troop moved to Locality 'C' to provide protection for 20 Field Battery of 7 Field Regiment, South African Artillery. On 4 September the Brigade Group also moved to Locality 'C' at El Mayid - the end of Ruwiesat Ridge - two miles behind 1st SA Infantry Division's sector, where it remained in reserve until 17 September 1942.

Meanwhile the German Armour had run into 22nd Armoured Brigade, south of Alam el Halfa Ridge and was thrown back with heavy casualties. They appeared reluctant to resume their attacks and reports at first light on 3 September indicated the panzers had withdrawn from contact. The ever cautious Army Commander perhaps did not realise he had lost an opportunity for a speedy and devastating counter strike.⁴ He made no move. Bombed by the Air Force and hammered by 7th Armoured Division, the exhausted enemy forces finally withdrew on 7 September. General Montgomery called off the battle, leaving the German forces behind the minefield they had penetrated the week before and in possession of the western portion of the original British minefields and the twin peaks of Mount Himeimat. He was content to leave them there. Their position gave good observation over Eighth Army's southern front and would in the days to come provide the DAK with bogus information

The six guns of the Royal Artillery Battery ceased to be attached at 6.45 pm on 8 September. The Battery returned to its parent Regiment.

The Anti-Aircraft Batteries

The Anti-Aircraft Batteries that had remained in the Alamein defences continued to be alert and, between them, only 3300 rounds were fired during the month of September, without any success; this, despite almost daily visits by enemy aircraft, mostly ME 109 F's and mostly beyond reach of the Bofors. Many were as high as 13 000 feet. On four days that month, only about 34 rounds were fired. Of the more than 65 enemy aircraft seen overhead at different times, only a few dropped below 6 000 feet. Three ME 109F's and one Macchi 202 were damaged in the first eight days of the month. One ME 109F which was hit was seen to crash into the sea.

Days went by without any action, other than to watch an ME 109F circling overhead on 11 September. Hits on two other aircraft were recorded in the latter half of the month. The Anti-Aircraft gunners were almost taken by surprise on 8 September by a daring Messerschmitt pilot who flew his aircraft westwards over the southern sector at a height of only 100 feet, too low - as the War Diary recorded - for effective engagement.....and it probably happened too quickly for the gunners to react. One JU 87B of a formation of twelve jettisoned its bombs over the southern sector in the area of 7 Field Regiment after dropping down to 3000 feet; and another did the same, but unluckily for the pilot the aircraft was hit. It was seen losing height and 22 Australian Battalion confirmed it had crashed in the enemy's FDL's. Eight hits on other aircraft of the formation were claimed.⁵

⁴ War in the Desert, p. 403.

⁵ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 357, file A1, appendix B.

All was quiet on the Division's front for some days but on 26 September a Stuka raid on 1st SA Infantry Brigade left four other ranks of 7 Field Regiment wounded and one 25-pdr out of action. Gun tractors were damaged. Three such raids were deliberately directed at the Artillery. In one raid three Stukas remained in rear of the formation and then attacked the Anti-Aircraft guns when they opened fire. No damage was done as the guns of the Troop were dug in and protected by a sandbag revetment. To relieve their boredom 2 Anti-Aircraft Battery arranged some 'entertainment', 'Y' Troop giving demonstrations of gun drill to Companies of Cape Town Highlanders; 'E' Troop doing likewise for Frontier Force Battalion. Just over 40 rounds were expended in total during these demonstrations. In turn the gunners were given lectures on mortars and other Infantry weapons followed by practices at a small arms range.

In his Monthly Report Lieutenant Colonel Meister noted that the Battery had tested firing at a ground targets, using fuze 250, the self-destroying charge being closed off from the tracer igniter. In order to test range and trajectory one gun fired a few rounds at a ground target at 9 000 yards range. The gun was laid using a bearing arc and a clinometer. The ranging rounds were observed well plus of the target. By reducing the calculated range by one ninth caused the rounds to fall on the target with very little dispersal of the fall of shot. It was concluded that the employment of indirect laying did not appear to have value unless more accurate tables were made available; furthermore the experiment was thought to be of great value in preparation of barrage tables, specially so when the new 12-second tracer came into use.⁶

In another aspect of the same report the commanding officer recorded that the springs in the ammunition chargers had weakened because of continuous use. Weak springs in one charger had caused a stoppage in action on one occasion. The problem had not been noted before that and was fortunately one capable of easy repair.

The Troublesome ME 109's

Following 62 rounds fired at an ME 109F on 19 September, Battery headquarters and the two Troops – 'E' and 'Y' – moved from El Mayid the next day to the new Brigade area. Guns were 'roughly positioned' according to the War Diary, but guns and vehicles were dug in on 19 September. The next day was observed as a day of rest. Training began on 21 September. Stukas, escorted by ME 109's attacked 1st SA Infantry Brigade area on 22 September. 'E' Troop intervened, firing only 24 rounds before the enemy aircraft decided it had become too hot for them; they flew away. Gun drill, lectures on equipment – and on general subjects – were given. What the gun detachments thought of this after a year of almost continuous action would have been interesting to record. Soccer was played with great enthusiasm in the late afternoons. There were no further calls on the guns.

⁶ Ibid., Box WD 374, file A18, Appx H to report of 8 October 1942

CHAPTER NINETEEN

PREPARATION FOR BATTLE

Training

No sooner was the Alam el Halfa situation restored to normality than Lieutenant General Montgomery continued methodically with preparations for a Reserve Corps, the replacement of senior officers incompatible with his own ideas, and with training. The 1st SA Infantry Division began intensive re-organisation and training, and one by one the Infantry Brigades moved out of the line to a training area. 2nd SA Infantry Brigade, held in reserve from 18 to 30 September approximately two miles east of the centre of the divisional sector, moved to a training area at Alam el Onsol. It ended training with a night exercise, before reverting to under command of 1st SA Infantry Division. The two Anti-Aircraft Troops with the Brigade – ‘E’ and ‘Y’ Troops - had seen very little action in the past month due to a great deal of activity by the RAF and South African Air Forces. ‘E’ Troop had engaged an enemy aircraft on 2 September without result and three days later had watched an ME 109F circling high overhead. 2nd SA Infantry Brigade relieved 3 SA Infantry Brigade which moved back to an area north of Alam el Onsol. After a few days’ rest, training and toughening-up, with compass marches by night began on 9 October. Full-dress rehearsals were held before the Brigade moved back to Alamein at 6.00 pm on Wednesday, 21 October to begin their preparations for the big attack.¹

There were added reasons for re-training the desert Army. A new approach was necessary; for the first time there was no open flank, no wide-open space for the Armour to operate. By September 1942 the defences of both armies extended from the shore of the Mediterranean Sea down to the Qattara Depression, south of Mount Himeimat. And every day the defences were thickened. An attack would demand a 1918 style of attack with massive Artillery bombardment, followed by a direct Infantry assault, supported by the guns. Win or lose – the mathematics would be based on the cold, grim facts of attrition.² ‘This battle will involve hard and longed fighting’, said Lieutenant General Montgomery. ‘The Infantry must be prepared to fight and to kill, and continue doing so over a long period...’, ‘It will be a killing match’, he said.³ And he demanded that all formations and units were properly trained for the task they would undertake.

Field Gunners at Full Strength

The three Field Artillery Regiments of the Division were each refitted at Helwan and for the first time 1st SA Infantry Division found itself with three fully equipped and manned field Regiments.⁴ To fill its ranks 4 Field Regiment had taken a number of coloured soldiers of the Cape Corps and trained them as gunners. Many men of the disbanded SA Irish filled posts in the Artillery and other were transferred to fill gaps in Infantry units.

Little or nothing has been done about reinforcements for the lone Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the Division. But five officers were newly posted to the Regiment on 21 September. Apart from Captain J.H. Wicht – well known in the Coast Artillery after the war, the rest were 2nd Lieutenants and as such were considered surplus to establishment. They were; 2nd Lieutenants H.F. Hand, S.J.L. Lubbe, C.H. Swanson and E.K. Taylor. Lieutenant Horne had arrived back from course the day before and on 24 September Lieutenant P.M. Francis was admitted to hospital. Local leave was still being allowed and on that day Captain R.A.C. Upton and 2nd Lieutenant G Loffhagen made their way to the delights of

¹ The Durban Light Infantry, Vol.II, 1934-1960, pp. 276-277.

² The Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p 82.

³ Ibid.

⁴ War in the Desert, p. 407.



*Figure 31: A 40 mm Bofors of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the Alamein Box, ready for action against German aircraft.
A drawing by Gordon Taylor*

Cairo. Two days after their return Captain Upton was admitted to hospital. While the two officers were away Lieutenant M.M.R. van Rooyen covered Upton's post at Battery headquarters and Lieutenant D.F. Mosely stood in for Loffhagen.

Quiet Days

Many days in September had been quiet with little or no enemy air activity and the war diary of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was exceedingly repetitive. The war diary recorded the fact that Lieutenant Louw had been discharged from hospital and was back on strength from 2 September, and that there had been one casualty in 'G' Troop as a result 'of SA fire'. The words 'as per activity report' were entered almost daily. For 14 September it noted, however, that one gun from 'H' Troop was sent to 'Div Wksp' and on the next day – that an aircraft had bombed '1 Bde area and afterwards bombed near 3 Bde'.⁵ Action livened up, and on 18 September one hit on an ME 109 F by 'G' Troop was recorded, with the same Troop in action on the 20th day' recording one possible hit. Four days later, this troublesome Troop was dive-bombed by nine JU 87B's. The Troop hit back. Four hits were observed and one aircraft was seen smoking. Bombing and strafing by the enemy continued during the last four days of the month and a number of reconnaissance flights were noted; all were out of range. Eight JU 87's bombed the area south of the Brigade on the last day but were not engaged

Preparations for Battle

Apart from training and toughening up, compass-marching by night and rehearsing the actual part each man would play in the coming battle, there were other signs of preparation. Slit trenches were dug well forward for the infantrymen who would occupy them from the night of 22/23 to the night of 23/24 October. They were left unused. Hundreds of dummy guns, vehicles, tanks and dumps were positioned early in September. Gun -pits and places for tanks were dug under camouflage cover made to represent vehicles. Six hundred tons of supplies, 8 000 tons of petrol, oil and lubricants were stockpiled near Alamein station and suitably hidden. Care was taken to obliterate tell-tale tracks. The 10th Armoured Division moved quite openly to the south, where dummy guns and vehicles were placed. And a pipe-line which ran towards the southern part of the Line from a real water point was constructed at a rate which gave observers an indication that it would not be completed until mid-November. A trench was dug during each day and covered up at night and the pipe which lay along the trench was moved forward to be 'placed' in the next section that was dug. But one pipeline was

⁵ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A19.

laid with great secrecy – the main water line from Alexandria to Alamein. It was replaced by one with a larger bore; and a new water point was concealed at El Imayed station. Fortunately for the South Africans the Division had on 19 October entered a period of four quiet days when there had been no enemy activity; the Division had been untroubled in its final preparations for battle.

Another Front

While South African troops were engaged in preparations for what would be the greatest battle of the war thus far, their country had been under possible threat from the Japanese whose Army and Navy had rampaged through the Pacific and the Far East. They had struck Pearl Harbour in a surprise attack, and practically destroyed the American Pacific fleet; taken the Philippine Islands and crushed Hong Kong; and inflicted the heaviest defeat on British forces in history by capturing Singapore on 1 February 1942, where 80 000 men went into captivity. They had advanced into the Indian Ocean and their submarines were operating off the coast of East and Southern Africa. The possible loss of Madagascar, still loyal to Vichy France raised fears and worried both Churchill and General Smuts. An enemy force using it as a base could control the vital sea route to India and the Middle East. Force 121 arrived off the coast on 5 May and within three hours most of 29th Infantry Brigade and all of No. 5 Commando were ashore. After two days they had taken the north of the island. French resistance was at an end. A British battleship in Diego Bay was damaged by a Japanese miniature submarine. Capture of Diego Suarez had not removed all danger of Japanese occupation of the rest of the large island of Madagascar. The 7th South African Infantry Brigade landed in August and with 22nd East African and 29th Infantry Brigades, the occupation of the entire island was completed by end September.⁶

Air Activity

Enemy air activity in the Western Desert increased during October but the enemy had little success and very little effect on preparations by the ground forces. Allied aircraft had full control of the air. In a report of 13 October Lieutenant Colonel Meister gave brief particulars of air activity over the South African Division area since 1 October. There was really little to report other than the number and type of enemy aircraft seen by the Batteries. Some were too high some up to 18 000 feet, and many others from 2 000 to 9 000 feet were engaged, without result. On 2 October, 'A' and 'Z' Troops of 1 LAA Battery 39 were withdrawn from 1st SA Division area and moved to Landing Ground 39. While in a rendezvous at Burg el Arab prior to occupation of their new position, four ME 109F's dive-bombed a neighbouring landing ground. The guns engaged, firing 486 rounds, forcing the enemy aircraft to make 'off at top speed'.⁷ Numbers of aircraft were engaged during the month by the Anti-Aircraft gunners, but one, without any action taken against it, crash-landed near 'DIV MAIN H.Q.' at 2.00 pm on 6 October.⁸ The sum total for the first nine days of the month was one ME 109F damaged. The honour was taken by 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

In another report covering the period up to 19 October, eleven 'fighter sweeps' were noted over a two day period. Dust storms over the two days following gave the gunners a respite but two ME 109F's appeared on 18 October. Seven rounds were fired without any likelihood of a hit at the height of the fast-moving Messerschmitts. Nine JU 87's, with fighter escort appeared at mid-morning the next day and the aircraft dived on the FDL's of the southern sector. They appeared to have overshot their mark and no bombs were dropped but they fell prey to the guns. Three aircraft were hit, two of which were soon burning furiously and losing height as they departed, escorted closely - as the Activity Report stated - 'by the fighters'.

The last Activity Report, typed on 9 November covered the period 20 to 31 October. It was recorded specifically that there was a huge and indiscriminate use of small arms fire against aircraft that appeared over Eighth Army space. Described in the report as 'millions of rounds of S.A. amn.', it even

⁶ The Chronological Atlas of World War II, pp. 72, 81.

⁷ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box 375, file A19, Appx B.

⁸ Ibid.

brought down or damaged 'some of our own fighters'.⁹ Also recorded was an aircraft that passed over the FDLs at 2 000 feet and was left untouched. It appeared to be a Spitfire but seemed hostile and, according to Lieutenant Colonel Meister's report of 9 November, may have been a Reggiane 2001. A neighbouring formation fired on the strange aircraft. It was not seen again.

The Rose Garden

On 10 October Lieutenant General Montgomery released his plan for the attack; and he did so in stages, from Brigade Commanders downward in rank, and finally to junior officers and men on 21 October. His planning had been thorough, down to the last detail. In the South African Division preparations for the operation began in earnest when Major General Pienaar met his Brigade Commanders, Brigade Majors and commanding officers of Divisional Troop units on 14 October. All present viewed a sand model of the South African sector of attack. All leave was quietly stopped from 21 October. On the day before all Battalion officers visited the closely guarded 'Rose Garden' – a huge sand model covering the entire area of the forthcoming operation. It showed accurately all enemy positions, strong points, gun and minefields. Two main minefields extended along the front, each some hundreds of yards deep. They were referred to by the Germans as 'The Devil's Garden's'. At 8.00 am that day in 1st SA Infantry Division, details of the operation - the plan for the attack – was disclosed to all ranks.

Paragraph 15 (h) of 1st SA Infantry Division's operation order, headed 'Lt AA' showed in brief the specific tasks facing 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. It read:¹⁰

1 Lt AA Regt will give protection to 1 SA Div Arty and 69 Med Regt RA.

(i) One tp will be under comd Div Res Gp.

(ii) One tp will be ready to move out at first light D+1 to give added protection to Div Res Gp.

(iii) One tp will be at call CCRA to protect any area that becomes congested.

There was no further mention of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Previous orders to provide protection to the field and medium Regiments remained in place. Apart from the Bofors there were 84 field guns in support of 1st SA Infantry Division's attack, including those from three Royal Artillery troops, and a Battery of eight guns supplied by 69 Medium Regiment, RA. They were programmed to fire 62 500 rounds that night.

A nominal roll was prepared by 1 LAA Regiment as at 22 October 1942 and it revealed the other rank strength of the Regiment as:

	White	Cape Corps
Posted strength	: 302	179
Authorised	: 543	311

The Field Return of other ranks on the same date showed:

	White other ranks	Cape Corps
Posted strength:	302	179
Authorised	543	311
Reinforcements required	241	133

Of concern were the shortages in the medical section attached to the Regiment on the eve of battle. Their requirement was for four white and 40 coloured assistants.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Operation Order in possession of the Author.

On the eve of battle the Field Return of officers of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment showed the following:

Captain	T Lt Col	G.W. Meister	Commanding Officer
Lieutenant	T/Major	L.W. Meyer	2nd in Command
2nd Lieutenant	T/Lieutenant	J.D. Watson	Adjutant
"	"	R.S. Quirk	Quartermaster
"	"	R.E. Whelehan	Regimental Orderly Officer
Lieutenant	T/Major	C.D. Stark	BC 1 LAA Battery
2nd Lieutenant	T/Lieutenant	I.R. Logie	Acting Battery Captain
"	"	C.R. Ferguson	Troop Officer
"	"	K.E. Gow	"
"	"	J.E. van P. Klerck	"
"	"	I.G. Pierce	"
"	2nd Lieutenant	H.F. Hands	"
"	"	S.J.L. Lubbe	"
"	"	O.H. Swanson	"
Lieutenant	T/Major	N. M. Garlick	BC 2 LAA Battery
2nd Lieutenant	T/Captain	R.A.S. Upton	Battery Captain
"	T/Lieutenant	A.F. Mosley	Troop Officer
"	"	Sir L.L. Richardson	"
"	"	M.M.B. van Rooyen	"
"	2nd Lieutenant	C.W. Loffhagen	"
"	"	C.J. Rackstraw	"
Lieutenant	T/Major	I.S. Guilford	BC 3 LAA Battery
"	T/Captain	J.H. Wicht	Battery Captain
2nd Lieutenant	T/Lieutenant	D.E.R. Ayres	Troop Officer
"	"	J.H.N. Horne	"
"	"	G.J. Louw	"
"	"	C.F. Penberthy	"
"	"	S.W.A. Tacon •	"
"	"	J.R. Windridge	"
"	2nd Lieutenant	E.K. Taylor	"
Attached ex SACS	2nd Lieutenant	T.B. Starkey	Signals Officer

- The same man who is described in an earlier chapter, when as a SAAF Staff Sergeant in 1938/9, he visited England 'regarding Anti-Aircraft'.

Prior to Battle.

In accordance with Operation Order No. 5 issued by Headquarters SA Artillery – and previous verbal instructions – sites for battle positions were reconnoitred and prepared by 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and, where necessary, gun pits were dug and immediately camouflaged. From 20 to 23 the new positions 'were occupied by a process of gradual infiltration'.¹¹ All moves were co-ordinated with those of other units. 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to its new deployment area in small groups from 19 October so that no alarm was caused. On arrival the guns and vehicles and their tracks were immediately camouflaged. Five hundred rounds per gun were dumped in the battle positions prior to D-Day.

'X' Troop, with 1st SA Infantry Division main Headquarters on the coast was re-deployed and moved with the Divisional Tactical headquarters to a new area; and on the same day, 'B' and 'Z' Troops were relieved of the duties as protection at Landing Ground 39 and re-joined 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. This enabled 'G' and 'Y' Troops to return to command of their respective Batteries. 'Y' Troop re-joined

¹¹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, file A 19.

2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery in the Reserve Brigade and 'G' Troop moved to battle positions in square 883298 to provide protection the Troops of 98 Field Regiment in that area.

An inconclusive engagement with six plus ME 109F's by the guns of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery took place on 22 October, although one hit was recorded for 110 rounds expended. There were no other engagements in these last three days before D Day.

Two additional Bofors were taken on charge by 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery the same day, bringing them up to the full complement of twelve guns. But at 6.00 pm the Battery moved, with portion of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, to battle positions where they were to protect the Field Artillery Batteries. The move was completed by 9.00 pm. The remainder of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to their battle positions at 6.00 pm the next day. They were dug in by 10.00 pm. The Troops provided protection for the Royal Artillery medium Regiment and Divisional Tactical headquarters. Each gun had a supply of 200 rounds HE on the ground and 400 rounds HE and 48 rounds AP in first line transport, held in the wagon lines in the old positions. Both Batteries covered an area of 5 000 by 3 000 metres in which were sited seven field Batteries and one Troop, and an entire medium Regiment. During the evening of 22 October the Artillery and Infantry moved to to their gunpits and slit trenches where they would remain hidden until nightfall the next day.

Likewise the Infantry and Armour had prepared battle positions in advance. For the Infantry it was not an easy day on 23 October. They had occupied their slit trenches during the night of 22 October to remain hidden there until nightfall the next day.

Both sides shelled each other occasionally during the day of 23 October, thus providing an air of normality. 'X' Troop suffered casualties during the morning. One gunner was killed and another was seriously wounded by an enemy shell which landed close to a gun. No one else suffered wounds, and no damage was caused. At 9.30 pm 'C' Troop moved away with a Special Brigade Group to occupy their battle position just before dawn on the 23rd.

During October 1942 Major Stark modified a small quantity of Mk 1 ammunition with 250 fuzes, so that the shell burst on percussion only. This was done by unscrewing the fuze, removing the charge from within the shell and inserting a small metal plate to cover the tracer detonator, then replacing both charge and fuze. The metal plate prevented the shell from being destroyed after it had been in flight for several seconds. A Bofors of the Battery was fitted with an Italian dial sight, its position (at Alamein) surveyed in and fire orders were given by a Field Artillery roving OP. Enemy targets were engaged very successfully at approximately 8 000 yards and shooting was reported to be extremely accurate, although observation was at the time difficult. No further experiments could be carried out due to a shortage of Mk 1 ammunition with 250 fuzes.

By October 1942 Western Desert Air Force operating with aircraft of the Royal Air Force and the South African Air Force – the two oldest Air Forces in the world, had been augmented by seven American Squadrons, four of Mitchell medium bombers and three of Warhawk fighters.

CHAPTER TWENTY

ALAMEIN – THE BATTLE

‘The Infantry must be prepared to fight and to kill, and to continue doing so over a long period.’

Lieutenant General B.L. Montgomery, ‘G.O.C.-in-C.’ Eighth Army, issued his personal message to all troops on 23 October which ended with the exhortation:

5- Therefore let every officer and man enter the battle with a stout heart, and with the determination to do his duty so long as he has breath in his body.

AND LET NO MAN SURRENDER SO LONG AS HE IS UNWOUNDED AND CAN FIGHT

By that day most men were in their battle positions and probably did not see the message.

The long burning day of 23 October dragged on until the sun dropped below the horizon. Then it was dark. There was a strange hush over the desert; infantrymen got up from the cramped slit trenches in which they had lain all day and then, in 3rd SA Infantry Brigade area, the solemn notes of *Abide with Me*, played on a trumpet by Sergeant John Summers sounded clearly over the desert.¹ Men stood to attention until the last note was heard. Hot food was brought forward. The field, medium and Anti-Aircraft gunners removed the camouflage from their guns and prepared the ammunition which over the last few days had been stockpiled close to each gun platform. Watches were checked, the gunners counting the minutes and seconds more precisely than anyone else. The infantrymen of 9th Australian Division in the north; 51st Highland Division to their south and the New Zealand Division between the Highlanders and the South Africans, readied themselves for Zero Hour.

In the south XIII Corps began a programmed neutralisation shoot at 9.25 pm with 135 field guns. In the north the guns of XXX Corps opened fire with 456 field and medium guns at 9.40 pm, striking known enemy guns positions. Counter-Battery fire stopped at 9.55 pm. The gunners laid their guns on the first of a number of new targets in accordance with the gun programmes given them, and they waited. For five minutes there was a breathless silence and bright moonlight over the desert, with very little reaction from the enemy. By then the Infantry were on the start line. In the sky two searchlight beams pointed long still fingers into the sky. Five minutes passed and then the ‘...two beams swung inwards, intersected and stopped.* It was zero hour - 10.00 pm – the guns again opened up with a cloud-burst of fire - 882 guns firing on enemy forward defended localities. The whole front reverberated with a thunder ‘such as man would never forget’.² The intense bombardment lit up the sky and shook even the men who were expecting it.

Operation Lightfoot

The Infantry began to move forward to the urgent drumming of the guns; the leading Companies advanced close behind the fall of shot, which soon obscured everything with dust and smoke. The objective for the South Africans was a mile and a half ahead. The crump of shells, and the tracer fired at intervals by the light Anti-Aircraft guns on fixed lines on the divisional boundary, helped the infantrymen keep direction.³

*The story of the two beams of light has been taken from the book ‘*Australia in the War of 1939-45, Vol. III*’ by Barton Maugham; but the War Diary of ‘HQ SA Arty, 1st SA DIV.’. notes that ‘Three vertical searchlight beacons established in XXX Corps would be exposed vertically for five minutes every quarter hour from 2000h D Day onward. From 2200 to 2205 they

¹ War in the Desert, p. 421 and The Fight 3rd, p. 326.

² El Alamein, p. 119.

³ Ibid., p. 104.

will form a cone over the forward battle area.' Another Australian book: *'Khaki and Green – With the Australian Army at Home and Overseas'*, contains a picture of a single beam with the caption: 'When this beam was shown over the Egyptian desert on the night of 23/24 Oct 1942, Hell broke loose as the great Allied drive began'.

The Australians and the 51st Highland Division had the task of forcing a northern corridor through the minefields north of Miteiriya Ridge to enable 1st Armoured Division to break out westwards; the New Zealanders and South Africans who were together to open a southern corridor, drove southwest onto the ridge itself, while 4th Indian Division put in a powerful raid onto the western end of Ruweisat Ridge. In the South African sector, from a start line of about 4 800 yards in length 3rd SA Infantry Brigade (Brigadier R.J. Palmer) attacked on the left half of the Division's area of responsibility; 2nd SA Infantry Brigade (Brigadier W.H.E. Poole) attacked on the right half. They overcame the most advanced outposts with little difficulty but had a hard fight before 'A' Company, Cape Town Highlanders of 2nd SA Infantry Brigade, reached and established itself on the objective – the Sanyet el Miteiriya Ridge.

By 8.00 am on 24 October 'B' and 'C' Companies had joined them. A New Zealand Battalion lay on their right. The Cape Town Battalion had suffered 40 casualties. The Natal Mounted Rifles to their left, went into battle with 30 officers and 317 other ranks - against their strength on mobilisation of 983, and had taken their portion of the objective by dawn, with 105 casualties. Ninety five Cape Corps drivers moved behind the assault troops to cope with prisoners. On their left, the Field Force Battalion had faced a strongly defended locality, identified from air photographs as a dump. It was only overcome in desperate close quarter fighting. They suffered heavily in this one night, losing 189 casualties, including 41 killed, eight of which were officers; only 50 men were left effective. The Field Force Battalion particularly noted the unflinching selflessness of the black stretcher bearers throughout the action. One Lukas Majozi, wounded in four places, refused medical attention and continued carrying out wounded until he collapsed from loss of blood.⁴

Miteiriya Ridge

In 3rd SA Infantry Brigade the Rand Light Infantry fought its 'way bloodily forward from the start line'⁵ and on reaching the first objective were by-passed by the Royal Durban Light Infantry, who cleaned up pockets of the enemy left behind by the first Battalion. After hard fighting, enfiladed by machine-guns firing on fixed lines, the men of 'C' Company with bayonets fixed and singing the lusty, gutsy Zulu song: '*Ye-ye-ye-li mama, jioleli mama*', reached the objective and making sure they were firmly on the ridge of the final objective, 'C' Company of Royal Durban Light Infantry fired Eighth Army's first success signal.⁶ They were followed by the Natal Mounted Rifles who fired their yellow signal rocket four minutes later.⁷ After gaining the objective everyone dug in. Casualties were heavy; Royal Durban Light Infantry lost seven killed and 42 wounded. The Rand Light Infantry lost 35 killed and 89 wounded. It was a shadow of its former self, needing reinforcements of 9 officers and 396 other ranks. The Imperial Light Horse, however, conducted a model attack. But they had wandered slightly off course, had met little opposition, and reached the objective with nine casualties, including one officer killed.

The Infantry dug in. The field gunners had given full support to the Infantry in the grim battle to secure the ridge, but with the casualties they had taken they were in no position to exploit south as planned. All units were loud in their praise of the magnificent support they had received from the black, coloured and Indian soldiers in carrying ammunition, signal cables and escorting prisoners of war, and the total and unflinching selflessness of the stretcher bearers. Black stretcher-bearer Private Amiel Moage received the Military Medal for his 'calm courage and devotion to his task.' His medal was well-earned. Many more did what he had done.

⁴ War in the Desert, p. 421.

⁵ Ibid., p. 424.

⁶ The Durban Light Infantry, Vol.II, 1935-1960, pp. 213,214.

⁷ Ibid.

By 8.00 am on 24 October all Divisions were reported on their objectives but, however, not one lane of the two planned lanes had been cleared sufficiently to enable the armour to break through. When 10 Armoured Division tanks reached the ridge, heavy Anti-Tank fire denied them any further progress.

The Australian operation had gone almost to plan and they had reached their objective on time at 2.45 am after stiff fighting in the latter stages. The Highland Division had gone into the attack with bayonets fixed and to the skirl of their pipes. They had had a particularly tough task and only a handful of men of the 7th Black Watch had managed to fight their way to make contact with the New Zealanders over the crest of the ridge. The latter, between the Highland Division and the South Africans also met strong opposition, but were established west of the ridge by 4.30 am.

The Anti-Aircraft Gunners

There was no action in the South African sector on 24 October and no major engagement on 25 October. The two South African Brigades were that night left in comparative peace; but the Anti-Aircraft gunners were active.

During the night of 24/25 October single enemy aircraft overflew the battle field, dropping bombs singly or in sticks. A few vehicles were hit which was not surprising considering the number in the area. It was the first time aircraft had been seen at night at heights up to 6 000 feet. There was, however, a bright moon and a thin layer of cloud, forcing the aircraft to fly under the cloud and were thus silhouetted against the clouds. Own aircraft were also active and as it was not possible to identify them the guns of 1 Anti-Aircraft Regiment did not engage. Others did, and small arms fired indiscriminately, which resulted in a Corps instruction not to engage aircraft at night unless they could positively be identified as hostile. It was noted that night that the enemy had obviously increased his Anti-Aircraft defences in the forward areas and that large numbers of Breda 20 mm, and 20 and 88 mm Flak guns engaged Allied aircraft. The enemy was also using six Bofors. In the heavy barrages thrown up by the enemy it was interesting to note, stated Lieutenant Colonel Meister in his report, that the Bofors guns had a steady trajectory whereas fire from the lighter guns 'had a rapid loss of M.V. and tended to snake after reaching 200 feet'.⁸ The superiority of the Bofors was a source of tremendous pride to the gunners of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The guns of 2 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries protecting the field and medium Artillery were interspersed, so they fought jointly, and when a lone JU 88, fitted with a siren, appeared over their area at 6.45 am on 25 October, it received a huge shock. Although it was at extreme range all the guns engaged and it took 'violent evasive action', but managed to drop its bombs, setting one vehicle alight, before disappearing. Eight ME 109F's bombed 1st SA Infantry Brigade sector and were engaged by the guns at 5.15 pm, without result. An hour later the guns of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery also had a disappointing result when engaging three ME 109 F's at 7 000 feet. Only 35 minutes later 30 JU 87B's which approached the perimeter of 1st SA Brigade area overshot their mark and dropped bombs on their own troops. Panic flares of all colours were fired by the enemy.

The aircraft continued further north, dropping the remainder of their bombs on the sector held by the Royal Natal Carbineers. The Anti-Aircraft guns in the area engaged. Other enemy aircraft that had completed a bombing run further south also approached the area under protection of 2 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries at about 7.00 pm. A few were within range and although visibility was poor, owing to the fading light and the smoke of bursting shells over the battlefield, they were engaged. Two were hit several times and were last seen losing height and 'burning fiercely'.⁹ A third JU 87B also received hits; it turned west and crashed in enemy lines. Rounds expended by the Regiment that day amounted to 1 209. The latest *Messerschmitt* - the *bf* 109 G - was seen over the battlefield that day.

⁸ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 374, Regimental Commanders monthly report, 9.11.1942.

⁹ History of AA Organisation 1929-1944, p. 115.

The guns of 69 Medium Regiment moved to new positions during the forenoon of 25 October and were accompanied by the Bofors of 'H' and 'K' Troops of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery; and during the night of 25/26 October the Anti-Aircraft guns of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to new deployment areas with their Brigade's field guns.

Momentum Slows

Rommel, who had been in Germany on sick leave, returned and resumed command of *Panzerarmee* late in the evening of 25 October. Further north the Australians were engaged in heavy fighting. On 26 October both the New Zealand and South African Divisions pushed their FDLs a further 1 000 yards forward, but as hard-pressed as the Germans and Italians were, the momentum of Eighth Army's attack was slowing down; the effort to break through to the open desert had failed. The enemy still ringed the break-in area with a strong Anti-Tank screen.

With 6140 killed, wounded and missing since the night of 23 until dawn on 26 October, Lieutenant General Montgomery felt that a note of caution was necessary. The battle was now at a crucial stage; he spent the day of 26 October 'in detailed consideration of the situation.'¹⁰

Intense Fire

A number of engagements were fought by the Anti-Aircraft gunners on 26 October, beginning with four lucky hits secured during the run-up of a formation of 30 JU 87 B's which approached at 10 000 feet and bombed 1st SA Infantry Brigade area. All three Batteries poured intense fire into the air and one ME 109 F was destroyed before Allied fighters appeared on the scene. Due to the intensity of the Anti-Aircraft fire Allied fighters had to break off their approach. Orders not to fire on bombers when own aircraft were present were soon received from Corps - the fighters were more effective in dealing with the enemy bombers. The Anti-Aircraft gunners were busy a number of other times during the day, firing at groups of ME 109F's. Against 1 305 rounds fired that day only 517 rounds were fired the next day. Most of the aircraft seen were fighters and fighter-bombers, the latter releasing their bombs well outside the reach of the Bofors.

Regrouping

Well aware that neither the New Zealanders nor the South Africans had any reinforcements, Montgomery decided to switch the direction of his 'crumbling action' - a steady, consistent pressure on the opposing forces. He regrouped his Army and during the evening of 26 October the 2nd New Zealand Division was taken out of the line and placed in reserve. He moved the 1st SA Infantry Division sideways into the New Zealand area and brought in the 4th Indian Division to their left. It was not an easy move at night, but with the help of New Zealand transport it went well. Next, he moved the 51st Highland Division which took over the sector held by 20th Australian Brigade. 1st SA Infantry Brigade replaced the 2nd Brigade on 28 October and the latter went into reserve.

When 1st SA Infantry Brigade moved to its new position 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery also moved. Next afternoon they had the satisfaction of obtaining hits on a group of four ME 109 F's that dived from 10 000 to 6 000 feet to drop bombs on an Advanced Dressing Station. Numbers of enemy aircraft were seen over the battlefield, singly or in small groups - except on 27 October when a group of 31 JU 87B's bombed to the west of the South African Division's area. Many were out of range but the Bofors were nevertheless able to claim a few hits.

A New Plan

On 27 October General Montgomery developed his plan for breaking out in the Northern sector.¹¹ The entire South African Division moved forward on 28 October and took over positions in the front line from 51st Highland Division. 2 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries were also re-deployed. During the day 1 LAA Battery fired on three separate occasions at groups of ME 109's engaged in dive-bombing

¹⁰ El Alamein to the River Sangro, p. 19.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 21.

attacks. No hits were scored. One tractor was damaged by splinters and one GS vehicle badly damaged by flames. 3 LAA Battery hit one of four ME 109F's engaged in a similar task.

1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries scored hits on a formation of 30 JU 87 B's which approached at 10 000 ft the next morning and then dived to 5 000 feet to bomb the area. One aircraft was destroyed and two others departed from the scene, smoking heavily. 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had four other engagements during the day, without results; but 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was more successful. It claimed another hit on one of two 109F's flying dangerously at only 4 000 feet. 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, which took part in the first of the Stuka raids, had three other engagements with groups of *Messerschmitts* during the day, but without any result. The three Batteries fired just over 930 rounds that day.

9th Australian Division was ordered to attack northward on the night of 28/29 October to destroy the enemy in the coastal salient, while XXX Corps was launched along the coastal road and railway route to fight its way westward to reach the Rahman Track and get behind the enemy salient. XIII Corps in the south was ordered to go on the defensive but every effort was to be made to keep the enemy on tenterhooks. The New Zealand Division was chosen as the spearhead of a future drive to the west.¹² The conduct of the ever cautious Army Commander was causing concern in London and Winston Churchill felt he had done nothing for the past three days – but he was assured by General Sir Alan Brooke, supported by Field Marshall J.C. Smuts, who explained the military implications of the desert war.

The Australians crossed the road and reached the sea. Rommel reacted to the threat in the north by moving 90th Light to face the Australians on 29 October. *Panzerarmee* had insufficient fuel to return to mobile warfare. By now it was short of supplies and unable to move troops rapidly from one sector to another. Hopes of receiving fresh supplies in time to stave off disaster were rapidly fading.¹³ At 11.30 am on 29 October the 'shattering news reached their HQ that the tanker *Luisiana*, with 1 489 tons of petrol, had been sunk. The Axis tanks and vehicles, almost without fuel, lay in the desert, waiting to be annihilated'.¹⁴ Still no attack was launched by Eighth Army.

Early morning seemed the time for mass attacks by enemy aircraft. At 9.45 am on 30 October a formation of eighteen JU 87 B's appeared overhead at their favoured height of 10 000 feet; but they dropped quickly to 4 000 feet, releasing their bombs west of the Qattarra Track. Once more the arrival of Allied fighters caused the Anti-Aircraft gunners to cease fire, but not before they claimed hits, two by 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and one by 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. One Stuka failed to come out of its dive and crashed. Later in the day two Troops of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were deployed further forward. Their only engagement was against two ME 109F's at 7 000 feet - without result.

Once more, on 31 October 1942, a formation of 24 JU 87B's with fighter escort approached the area held by the South Africans. The guns of all three Batteries turned upon them and during the run-up before bombs were released, one aircraft was hit. Allied fighters appeared and destroyed several Stukas. All guns were again in action in the evening when eighteen JU 87 B's made a direct approach from the west, diving from 9 000 to 4 000 feet to release their bombs. Several hits were claimed. One Stuka began smoking heavily and lost height rapidly. It was written off and probably destroyed. The gunners had fired 1551 rounds during these engagements.

In the North

General Montgomery realised that a resumption of the Australian attack would ensure that 90th Light remained in that area; and also that the main force of an amended westward drive would hit the Italians. He modified his break-out plan slightly and spent the morning of 30 October writing the directive for Supercharge. Stage management problems, as he termed them, led him to postpone it for

¹² Ibid.

¹³ War in the Desert, p. 439.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 442.

24 hours but to extend the depth of penetration to 6 000 yards under a very strong Artillery barrage. The remains of the Panzer Grenadier Regiment meanwhile fought their way out of the salient created by the Australian attacks. The thrust to the north by the Australians began again on the night of 30/31 October. South African field guns supported the Australian attack, firing incessantly that night.¹⁵

By dawn on 31 October, a spearhead of 30 tanks was on the coastal road and thrusting into the Axis second line. General Ritter von Thoma sent in additional troops and although they suffered heavy casualties, General Montgomery was once again robbed of complete success. No major assault was launched to force a breakthrough. Two more ships bringing supplies to the beleaguered DAK were sunk.

Supercharge

There was little Anti-Aircraft activity on 1 November; 1 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries were not in action at all on 1 November, nor was the next day more notable; a total of five ineffective actions were fought against ME 109F's.

Supercharge began at 1.05 am on 2 November on a front of 4 000 yards. The enemy suffered a heavy seven-hour Artillery bombardment and bombing attack. 1st SA Infantry Brigade was ordered to prepare for a mobile role and it moved to a new position on 2 November. 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, still protecting 7 Field Regiment, moved with the Brigade and was re-deployed. The Battery was not called upon to take any action against enemy aircraft; but 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had two ineffective actions against formations of ME 109F's, firing only 52 rounds in all. As the battle moved further westwards the light Anti-Aircraft guns had less and less to do. But the next day 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery scored a hit on one of two ME 109F's in pursuit of a Kittihawk. The enemy planes had already opened fire when the Anti-Aircraft caused them to abandon the chase. The two other Batteries also intervened when Allied aircraft were being chased. As the battle moved further westwards the light Anti-Aircraft guns had less and less to do. 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery fired only 54 rounds in two brief engagements with the ubiquitous ME 109F's. No hits were scored in either case.

As the battle moved further westwards the South African light Anti-Aircraft guns had less and less to do.

The armoured cars of the Royal Dragoons managed to penetrate the enemy lines south of Tel et Aqqaqir as dawn was breaking on 2 November and reached the open desert to raid deep in rear of the enemy. The cars of the South African 4/6 Armoured Car Regiment eventually made it through during the night of 3/4 November, passing through a mass of enemy transport while men stared at them in amazement. By 6.30 am the South African armoured cars were also in the open desert. It was not long before 3 SA Armoured Car Regiment was also able to begin harassing the enemy in his rear.

The attack by the New Zealand Division with two British Infantry Brigades under command, opened a gap which enabled 9th Armoured Brigade to pass through; but although it suffered 75 per cent casualties, the Brigade held the bridgehead. There were indications on 3 November that the enemy was about to withdraw. 1st Armoured Division became involved in the north; a further move by the South Africans was made to fit in with an attack by 51st Highland Division. Both it and 4th Indian Divisions launched a hastily mounted attack to break through southern sector of the enemy's Anti-Tank screen. That night the men had dug in once more. The main assault was launched at 5.45 am, with Artillery roaring through the hours of darkness. But as day broke, a strange hush descended over the South African sector. Men peered westwards with tired eyes and were astonished to note that the enemy had gone. The Armour Divisions and the New Zealanders were set in motion. They broke out into open desert. Soon the whole area of the front was a mass of armoured cars, tanks and guns moving forward.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 450.

In the Battle of Alamein Eighth Army had won a decisive victory.¹⁶ But victory had not been bought lightly. Casualties during the twelve day battle amounted to 13 360 – about 2350 killed, 8950 wounded and 2 260 missing. Six per cent of the total was South African.

XIII Corps, which included the South African units, was assigned the task of clearing up the battle field.

1 SA Infantry Division (V) was ordered to withdraw from their final positions at Alamein. The battle of Alamein so far as 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery was concerned was over and the Regiment became engaged with other units in battle. 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was, however, ordered on 6 November to move to Burg el Arab to provide Anti-Aircraft protection to railway sidings and dumps; But on 13 November 1942, Regimental Headquarters, with 1 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries, moved from Alamein to the South African base camp at Quassassin. They were followed the next day by 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. Handing back of equipment began; local leave was granted and the first parties left on 17 November.

Homeward Bound

Withdrawal of 1st SA Infantry Division from El Alamein marked the end of their fighting in the desert. Planning for two Armour Divisions had long been delayed by unforeseen events. There was as yet no clear decision how units were going to fit in with the training of the two Armour Divisions that had been envisaged. It was already clear that Major General Pienaar and Brigadier Poole were to be in command of the two Divisions. And planning included leaving 1st and 2nd Infantry Brigades in Egypt as 1st SA Armoured Division and transferring 3rd SA Infantry Brigade to the Union, convert it to Armour, and return it to the Western Desert as 6th SA Armoured Division (V). It was finally thought preferable in view of the situation in the desert to return all three Brigades and 4/6 Armoured Car Regiment to South Africa. Field Marshall Smuts addressed a general parade of 1st South African Infantry Division at Quassassin on 22 November and was cheered when he announced the possibility of home leave. Advance parties began leaving by 1 December. Major General 'Dan' Pienaar, with other officers and some senior NCOs, left by air on 17 December for the long flight back to the Union; but at dawn, two days later, the aircraft crashed after take-off from Kisumu and all on board were killed. It was a stunning blow to the Division.

Final orders were received to move to the Union and on 1 December 1942, 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, with a strength of 33 officers and 361 other ranks, entrained for Suez where the Regiment went aboard HMT *Highland Monarch* on 11 December. Everyone on board caught their first glimpse of home when the ship arrived off the entrance to Durban harbour on 31 December. Crowds watched as the troops marched through the city to an official welcome at Albert Park. When all the arrival procedures were over the Regiment entrained for Hay Paddock camp, Pietermaritzburg, on 2 January 1943. All ranks were granted leave on 4 January and re-assembled at Hay Paddock on 9 February. The strength of the Regiment at this stage was 31 officers and 354 other ranks. From the date of their arrival at Durban, the Field Allowance for officers ceased to be paid.

Memories

Memories of the desert – well: Anti-Aircraft actions in the desert were vastly different to those of East Africa and being on the receiving end of a Stuka attack was an experience never to be forgotten. The screaming of its 'Jerico Trumpet' as it dived would last in the minds of some for a lifetime. Other lasting impressions of those months of war were the endless movement, the dust storms and the flies, the digging of gun pits and slit-trenches in the hard desert ground, cooking and 'brewing-up' on petrol fires, regular rations of bread and fresh meat, occasional distributions of 'glory bags', issues of brandy, and NAAFI treats, Cairo leave, training on new guns and the nightly guard duties, but above all – the flies, the ever-lasting flies.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., and El Alamein to the River Sangro, pp. 23,24.

¹⁷ Article by Herb McKenzie, who served in 2 Light AntiAircraft Regiment. From a post-war re-union booklet.

Statistics

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment had ventured into battle in the Western Desert in November 1941 with 37 officers, 648 white other ranks and 245 coloured other ranks. There were eight men in each gun detachment of which four were coloured gunners. In some cases when still equipped with Lewis guns these men acted independently. Six men were kept within a few yards of the gun day and night.

The Regiment had by November 1942 suffered the following casualties:

	Officers	White other ranks	Coloured gunners
Killed, death presumed or died of wounds:	4	43	20
Wounded and evacuated:	1	54	19
Prisoner of war:	<u>7</u>	<u>143</u>	<u>61</u>
	12	240	100

Those who were wounded but remained on duty are excluded from these figures. Those who were evacuated for normal health reasons are also not included.

By 31 October 1942 it had been in action for eleven months and its tally of damage to enemy aircraft was:

Shot down and confirmed destroyed:	86
Probably destroyed – unconfirmed:	38
Damaged:	<u>198</u>
Total:	322

And in addition:

Tanks destroyed or damaged:	25
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The Regiment kept 36 guns in action during the whole period, except for one month in December 1941 when the loss of nine guns at Sidi Rezegh had not yet been replaced.

Rounds fired in twelve months: 105 000 (roughly an average of 1 000 rounds per aircraft destroyed between 1 February and 4 November 1942.

Losses in vehicles: 65 vehicles were lost or destroyed, 55 due to enemy action – the others by mechanical failure. Fifteen were issued to replace losses and about 35 salvaged by the Regiment. One was a Lancia 5 tonner.

Honours and Awards.

Military Cross:	Two - Lieutenants F. Vlok and R.S. Quirk
George Medal:	One – Sergeant R. Bell
Military Medals:	Four –
Mentions in Despatches:	Forty-three (including one Cape Corps gunner)

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SCHOOL OF AIR DEFENCE

Japan's entry into the war in December 1941 had significant effects on the Union Defence Forces and on the defence of coastal ports, which were of strategic importance on the Imperial supply route to India and the Middle East. It was imperative that they be given additional protection. In early 1942 a decision was made to expand the Anti-Aircraft organisation, but because of the increasing difficulty of drawing recruits for Army units and the large number of men being recruited for the SA Air Force, it was decided to create SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft units to man equipment that would eventually be installed at each port.

Appointment of a Director Anti-Aircraft

It had long been appreciated that the combination of coast and Anti-Aircraft in one training institution could not continue and, by December 1941, the time had come to make a change. In early 1942 the depot for white recruits was moved from Robben Island to the mainland, due to the availability of accommodation at Pollsmoor. South African Artillery units had a serious problem in obtaining recruits, but men were flocking to the SA Air Force; it was by that time realised that the Air Force could be made responsible for coastal air defence. It had the manpower. On 18 February 1942 it was decided that control of Anti-Aircraft defences at defended ports – including control of all guns and searchlights - was to be made the responsibility of the SA Air Force.

It was also realised that the coast and Anti-Aircraft directorate could not continue to be responsible for the vastly increased responsibilities - a separate air defence organisation was necessary and a separate Directorate of Anti-Aircraft Artillery would be necessary. It only needed a decision on who to appoint as Director Anti-Aircraft Training (DAAT) in order to guide and command the process.

From 1 March 1942, in preparation for the appointment of two Directors - the Directorate of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery (DCAA) – (with offices in Geneva House, Parliament Street, Cape Town), was split in two as shown below, each to be headed by their own director, and both as sub-sections under the Deputy Chief of the General Staff (DCS). The result was:

Directorate of Coast Artillery (DCA), and a
Directorate of Anti-Aircraft Training (DAAT)

Lieutenant Colonel S.H. Jeffery, an attorney in civilian life, commissioned into the Coast Artillery organisation, and who had been awarded the OBE for his work in East Africa, was the obvious choice. He was then in command of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Gazala in North Africa; he was well educated and had the necessary experience and knowledge. He was appointed Director Anti-Aircraft Training (DAAT) with effect from 1 April 1942, but with effect from the date of assumption of duty in South Africa. He was recalled and left for South Africa in mid-March in order to have some leave before assuming duty. Although the new directorate was created on 1 March, both coast and Anti-Aircraft continued to operate as one unit under T/Colonel A.H.K. Jopp, DSO, originally Battery Commander of 4th Heavy Battery, Durban, and latterly, Officer Commanding the Cape Peninsula Artillery Brigade - had succeeded Colonel H.E. Cilliers after the latter was killed in an air crash. He exercised the functions of both directorates as a temporary measure until Lieutenant Colonel Jeffery arrived to take over the duties assigned to him. On his arrival 7 April, Colonel Keith Jopp was relieved of further responsibility for Anti-Aircraft recruiting, training and operations.

Searchlight Regiment

Authority for the 'organisation' of 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment as a volunteer unit of the South African Artillery, with effect from 1 February 1942, was given on 4 February 1942.¹ The composition of the Regiment: a headquarters and 1, 2, 3 and 4 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Batteries, was given only on 13 February 1942.² Each Battery consisted of four sections lettered from 'A' to 'D'. Its strength at the time was, however, only about 100 all ranks. By the time Stan Jeffrey arrived the recently established Regiment was also encamped at Pollsmoor - the former national motor racing circuit and now a well-known prison, and was under the command of Captain Mervyn Williams, who was on loan from CASL. He had originally been commissioned into Cape Garrison Artillery and at the time he was called up for military service was Town Clerk of Cape Town. He had served with Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey in the Coast Artillery prior to 1939. Captain Williams was replaced as commanding officer by Captain M.S.B. Varrie from 4 May 1942.

Within a day or so of his arrival the energetic new Director Anti-Aircraft Training, Lieutenant Colonel Stan Jeffrey, again raised the old question of an Anti-Aircraft School and began to plan and campaign actively for the establishment of a School. As instructed he also commenced planning for a general re-organisation of all matters concerning Anti-Aircraft units, including those for the SA Air Force coast Anti-Aircraft Regiments, which he had been told were to be established at coastal ports. While helping to organise the SAAF Regiments he was probably more concerned about the establishment of an Anti-Aircraft School; and probably becoming a little frustrated about the delay in Pretoria in approving the ideas he had.

Original Proposals

It was initially proposed that the Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot (V) be retained on Robben Island as a training centre for higher training of both SA Air Force and SA Artillery School trainees, preparatory to the formation of a School for that purpose. It was recommended that two 3.7-inch, two 40 mm Bofors and two Anti-Aircraft searchlights be made available for both training and as operational equipment. It was furthermore suggested that when the School was formed the depot be moved to a more accessible location on the mainland. Pollsmoor was thought to be available and it was noted that part-time units could more easily undergo training there.

It was at first proposed that the school be sited on Robben Island and that the depot be moved to a more accessible location on the mainland, such as Pollsmoor, where the training of part-time units would also be undertaken. Another proposal considered that the Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot be retained on Robben Island as a training centre for higher training of both SA Air Force and SA Artillery personnel, preparatory to the formation of a school for that purpose. It was recommended that two 3.7-inch AA guns, two 40mm Bofors and two Anti-Aircraft searchlights be made available for the dual purpose of training and in an operational capacity.

Air Force Coast Anti-Aircraft Organisation

Of foremost importance was assistance towards the new SAAF Anti-Aircraft organisation about which he had been briefed. On 16 April, only nine days after his arrival, the DAAT, in consultation with DGAF, prepared a memorandum on the re-organisation of the entire Anti-Aircraft organisation, based on the SA Air Force manning coastal air defences. The SA Artillery Air Defence organisation at that stage consisted of:

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment:

RHQ and 1, 2 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries: in the Middle East. As at 20 March 1942 it was under-strength in officers and considerably under strength in other ranks. It had to be maintained from existing personnel resources in the Union.

¹ SANDF Archives, DCS CGS, Box78, file O (M) 17, Vol.IV, enc. 89.

² Ibid., enc. 92.

2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment:

RHQ and 4, 5 and 6 Light AA Batteries: also in the Middle East. The unit was up to strength in other ranks but needed officer reinforcements.

3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment:

It was a composite Regiment within the Union, partly equipped and trained and consisted of 30 officers and 600 white other ranks. A further nineteen recently commissioned officers awaited postings.

The Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot:

Then on Robben Island; it consisted of a small staff of officers and approximately 400 Cape Corps men. The Director Coast Artillery, However, regarded these men as Coast Artillery reinforcements and not Anti-Aircraft.

Both the latter were required to provide reinforcement of personnel for the two Regiments in the Middle East and to provide a basis for the future South African Artillery Anti-Aircraft programme. The DAAT had to bear in mind that talks were ongoing about the establishment of three Armour Divisions and also the necessity of units, either full-time or part-time for internal defence against possible aggression by Japan. Additionally, the two units – the training centre and 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment - had to provide key personnel and instructors for the SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft programme. It was a tall order.

Anti-Aircraft Equipment

The situation regarding Anti-Aircraft equipment at this stage was far from good. Guns available in South Africa on 23 April 1942 were positioned as shown below:

- Two 3.7-inch guns - at Durban, and without ammunition.
- Two 40 mm Bofors – at Durban, also without ammunition.
- Four 3-inch 20 cwt guns at Cape Town – with 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment - on operational duty.
- Two 40 mm Bofors – at Cape Town on Robben Island.

One thousand rounds were held for each of the 3-inch 20 cwt guns but none for the others. Ammunition was on order and cables had been sent asking for the order to be expedited. Delivery was at the mercy of the U-Boats.

There were also fifty-seven Sperry (American) searchlights complete with eighty-six extra Sperry vehicles, and twenty-one British searchlights complete, with three extra vehicles. As shown below, they were distributed among the five major ports.

DAAT's Section and Staff

The DAAT's staff component was finally approved by Deputy Chief of Staff on 4 May 1942 and it included:

The DAAT	-	Colonel or Lieutenant Colonel
DDAAT (G)	-	Lieutenant Colonel or Major
DDAAT (P)	-	Major
Staff Officers (G)	-	Three Captains or Lieutenants
Staff Officer (P)	-	Captain or Lieutenant
Armament Officer	-	Captain
Transport Officer	-	Lieutenant

The duties of Director of Anti-Aircraft Training were defined as:

- The provision, control and issue of all Anti-Aircraft equipment, spares and associated stores. Such equipment included searchlights, fire control instruments, tractors, searchlight carriers and other technical vehicles.
- Liaison with the Director of Transport regarding the control of issue of transport to all Anti-Aircraft units.

- General organisation of Anti-Aircraft units of all types and services.
- Supervision of training and development of methods of fire control and technique of employment.
- Control of the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence (SAAD) as a DHQ organisation and the organisation of training centres and depots.
- Liaison with the Director of Signals with the organisation of technical maintenance of the instructional branch of SSS for GL and SLC equipments.

The duties of all other members of the DAAT staff were also clearly defined.

Future Policy

The intention regarding future policy was defined as:

- The DAAT would be responsible for forming and maintaining all Divisional Anti-Aircraft units as well as all part-time units.
- The DGAF would be responsible for providing personnel and for organisation and training of all units allocated to Air Defence groups in South Africa.
- The DAAT would control the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, where the main task would be to train specialists and instructors for all Anti-Aircraft units, and to inspect and report on any Anti-Aircraft unit as required.

The DGAF was ordered forthwith to make arrangements to provide personnel for training on searchlight equipment and on certain gun equipment at various ports. During the transition period DGAF and DAAT were instructed to co-operate to ensure that all available equipment was manned and ready for immediate action, irrespective of ultimate responsibility.

Provisional Organisation

By 6 May 1942, the DAAT, acting on the knowledge that the SAAF coast Anti-Aircraft units would soon be approved –back-dated to 1 May 1942 - drew up a schedule provisionally allotting equipment to enable the SAAF to organise the six Anti-Aircraft Regiments, each with a heavy Battery, a light Battery and a Searchlight Battery, i.e:

Table Bay: Six two-gun sections with twelve 3.7-inch guns
 Two light gun Troops with twelve 40mm Bofors
 Two searchlight sections with twelve AA searchlights

Simon's Bay Two two-gun sections with four 3.7-inch guns
 One light gun Troop with six 40mm Bofors
 Two searchlight sections with twelve AA searchlights

Port Elizabeth Two two-gun sections with four 3.7-inch guns
 One light gun Troop with six 40mm Bofors
 Two searchlight sections with twelve AA searchlights

East London Two two-gun sections with four 3.7-inch guns
 One light gun Troop with six 40mm Bofors
 Two searchlight sections with twelve AA searchlights

Durban: Six two-gun sections with twelve 3.7-inch guns
 Two light gun Troops with twelve 40mm Bofors
 Two searchlight sections with twelve AA searchlights

There were not enough guns in South Africa to satisfy even a portion of the requirements for Cape Town, but each port was well-equipped with searchlights. While the formation of the coastal Anti-Aircraft Regiments was taking place, steps had to be taken urgently to provide an Anti-Aircraft

presence in Durban, the port that was most in danger. It was left to 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment to fill that gap.

The Regiments established from 1 May 1942 – for the defence of the ports indicated, were:

21 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF.	Saldanha Bay (the Regiment was never formed)
22 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF.	Table Bay/Cape Town
23 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF.	Simon's Bay/Simon's Town
24 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF.	East London
25 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF.	Port Elizabeth
26 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF.	Durban

On 26 May, almost three weeks later, the DAAT in a minute to DCS and DGAF, outlined the broad basis of the scheme for Anti-Aircraft defences for the coastal areas of the Union. It was to be in two phases:

Firstly, an immediate programme based on the availability of equipment, personnel and accommodation facilities. The period intended to be covered by this phase was three months from 15 May 1942.

Secondly, a final programme of completion of the defence organisation as an extension of the immediate programme.

Available Equipment

Equipment available was then allocated as follows:

Cape Town	four 3-inch AA guns and 12 Sperry AA searchlights
Durban	two 3.7-inch AA guns and 12 Sperry AA searchlights
Simon's Town	six British AA searchlights and six Sperry AA searchlights
East London	nine British AA searchlights
Port Elizabeth	twelve Sperry AA searchlights
Reserve at Cape Town	two Sperry AA searchlights
AA Training Centre	two 40mm Bofors guns

The DGTS was instructed to make arrangements with DGAF personally, for the immediate distribution of this equipment to the different centres and for the temporary loan of maintenance and assembly personnel.

DGAF was also instructed to arrange directly with DAAT for the temporary loan of instructors until sufficient SAAF personnel were trained as instructors. DGAF was finally ordered to organise the Anti-Aircraft defences and available air Squadrons (fighter, coastal reconnaissance, bomber and torpedo Squadrons or flights) as were available, into composite Air Defence Groups as directed by the General Staff.

Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot

Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey knew the Cape Peninsula well and with some information at his disposal soon discovered a site close to Young's Field aerodrome that could be made available for the School. Known as Ottery Camp, it was a former forestry camp and the camp buildings were sited at the northern end of a plantation known as the Rifle Range, first opened in 1897 and declared a Forest Reserve in 1901.³ The Defence Department had acquired the camp from the Department of Agriculture and Forestry prior to March 1939. The camp had reasonably favourable facilities and there was space for expansion. He arranged for the Anti-Aircraft Regiment to move in and begin functioning as a School.

³ *Young's Field*, p. 1.

A Change of Policy

With the arrival from the Middle East of four 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft guns in October 1941, operational tasks in Cape Town had been given to 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The balance of the Regiment continued its training function. But 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment (V), South African Artillery, established on a full-time basis from 1 February 1942, and with several experienced former coastal gunners in its ranks, functioned from 1 May 1942 as the Depot for white personnel. The headquarters of both units were at Pollsmoor. There was a small detachment of searchlights at Durban under command of Captain Hugh McKenzie.

At the same time it was proposed that 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment be immediately equipped on a skeleton war establishment of only fifteen officers and 210 white other ranks and 150 men of the Cape Corps. It could then be deployed to Durban - the port most in danger from the Japanese move into the Indian Ocean, with a proposal of four 3.7-inch and eight 40 mm Bofors guns. Furthermore, it was recommended that ten officers and 100 other ranks be retained to meet the demands for reinforcements. The Anti-Aircraft reinforcements, pending their posting to the Middle East, were employed at either the Training Centre, with 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, or as a posting to the SAAF as instructors.

3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment moved to Durban with 8 and 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries and took on charge the two 3.7-inch guns that were already there, but without ammunition. The Regiment or the Batteries at Durban were not anywhere near full strength. Whatever remained of the Regiment was left behind at Pollsmoor, without any equipment whatsoever.

The Searchlight Regiment took over as a depot and the training role. It continued with training until the future of the Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot was decided upon. The Regiment was at this stage under command of Captain Mervyn Williams – on loan from Coast Artillery searchlights (CASL). Before he was called up for full-time service he had been Town Clerk, City of Cape Town. The balance of SA Artillery resources – approximately twenty-five officers and 290 other ranks - could be immediately transferred to SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft units to provide trained key personnel in the coast air defence groups then in the process of being formed. Allocations within the coast Anti-Aircraft units were proposed and plotted, and it showed that when the six proposed units were at full strength, the number of personnel required would be:

- SAAF Officers: 226
- SAAF other ranks: 1987
- WAAF: 1854
- NEAS: 1554

It was also recommended that recruiting for SA Artillery Anti-Aircraft units be reinstated on the understanding that recruits were to be posted to Field Army Anti-Aircraft units. There was ample evidence at this stage that recruiting in the past for both coast and Anti-Aircraft, as policy had decreed had been a deterrent to those volunteers who wanted to serve in the field.

Almost within days the function of the Depot on Robben Island was altered. The Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot had originally been formed to provide Cape Corps personnel for Coast Artillery and for Anti-Aircraft units in the field; but policy changed due to a decision that Cape Corps men were not to be posted to units in battle, but were to instead increase the proportion of Cape Corps gun numbers in Coast Artillery and thus release white males for front line service. The demand for coloured reinforcements in the Western Desert of North Africa was mainly for drivers, who were supplied by the Cape Corps Driving School in Kimberley. On strength at that time were approximately 400 men of the Cape Corps who Director Coast Artillery regarded as Coast Artillery reinforcements rather than Anti-Aircraft gunners.

There was an almost continuous drain on manpower from the coast Batteries - the number of new field and Anti-Aircraft units being established was given as the reason, with white gunners being replaced by Cape Corps personnel under white Sergeants on the 6-inch guns, and as ammunition

numbers on the more complicated and heavier 9.2-inch guns. Men who operated the instruments for the Batteries, in the plotting rooms and FOPs were also slowly being replaced by the women of the ASWAAS – Artillery Specialists, Woman’s Auxiliary Army Services, the Artillery girls, as they were known. The first of them, trained at Scala Battery, Simon’s Town, had first taken over these duties on Robben Island in January 1941.⁴

Decision to disband Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot

It was finally appreciated that combined coast and Anti-Aircraft training could not continue. By the end of May the DAAT had decided to abandon Robben Island as a site for the Depot and the proposed School of Anti-Aircraft Defence. The deciding factors were the lack of on-the-spot air co-operation and insufficient accommodation facilities, quite apart from the major problem of transport between the Island and the mainland, often interrupted by the weather. With Robben Island abandoned as a site for the proposed School and depot, and to begin with the arrangements the new DAAT wished to put in place, the Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot (V) was re-designated with effect from 15 April and it became instead the ‘Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Training Depot (V), South African Artillery’.⁵ The process of planning for the allocation of instructors and other personnel and of posting them either to the coast or Anti-Aircraft organisation took place. The ‘new’ training depot would last as such for only 15 days before it was disbanded on 30 April.⁶ Clearing up and dismantling it administratively took a little while and the last Part 2 Order, No. 57/42 was issued by Captain M.S.B. Varrie on 26 June 1942.

Parting of the coast and Anti-Aircraft organisations had begun.

There were a number of reasons for withdrawing from the Island and for selecting Cape Town as the venue for training and equipping of both SA Artillery and SA Engineer Corps Field Army Anti-Aircraft units, and in addition, those of the SA Air Force:

- All equipment, spares, stores and ammunition arrived from overseas by sea, was off-loaded, moved to, checked and issued by SSO, ‘T’ Stores Depot, Young’s Field.
- It was desirable that units being equipped be adjacent to the place of issue.
- The units would be trained in conjunction with, and under the supervision of the School.
- The Anti-Aircraft Depot was adjacent. To eliminate unnecessary transportation and movement, all recruits and reinforcements could be posted through the Depot.
- Air co-operation – essential for Anti-Aircraft training was available close by. The selection of any other venue might necessitate a special ‘sleeve-towing’ flight of aircraft.
- The prohibited area of Eerste River bombing range on the coast of False Bay was available for live firing practice over the sea.
- Training equipment on issue to the Anti-Aircraft Depot and School would be available for operations in an emergency.

While administrative arrangements to establish the School were in hand and with the knowledge that it would soon be approved Stan Jeffrey quickly moved 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment to the forestry camp at the Rifle Range to act as a depot and prepare accommodation for 180 staff members including sixteen WAAS and twenty Cape Corps personnel. He made other adjustments and minor alterations to posts that he knew would be authorised prior to actual authority being received. It was the basis of a School. Approval for opening the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence at Ottery was given on 28 May 1942, but Colonel Stan Jeffrey had ‘jumped the gun’; the School was in a way, already functioning.⁷ To replace the training institution on the Island, three new units were established, designated and back-dated with effect from 1 May 1942. They were:

⁴ *Island at War*, pp. 155, 156.

⁵ SANDF Archives, CGS War Gp 2, Box 60/3, file 0149.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Young’s Field*, p. 18.

Coast Artillery School and Depot (V),
 School of Anti-Aircraft Defence (V)
 Anti-Aircraft Depot (V) CAB Gp 1 Box 5, file DCA 1/10.

Personnel of the disbanded depot were absorbed from 1 May (a move that was also back-dated) into the Coast Artillery School and Depot (V), the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence (V), and the Anti-Aircraft Depot (V). The Coast Artillery School and Depot remained on Robben Island as one unit. The two Anti-Aircraft training institutions, designed to cater for the training of both SA Artillery as well as SA Air Force air defence personnel, technically moved to the mainland – (they were already there) - once the authority was received late in May.

In his letter of 16 June authorising the establishment of these units the A.G. noted that a war establishment table (WET) - now called a Personnel Table - for each unit would soon be available and be issued to all concerned. By the end of May the decision had already been made officially, to abandon Robben Island as a site for the Depot and the proposed School of Anti-Aircraft Defence.⁸ With the knowledge that it would soon be approved, he had not waited for the official letter of approval. As a basis for the School and Depot; Stan Jeffrey had earlier arranged to move the understrength 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment – under command of Captain M.S.B. Varrie from 4 May 1942 - from Pollsmoor to the forestry camp at Ottery as the basis of a depot. He made other adjustments and minor alterations to authorised posts prior to authority being received, to permit the immediate functioning of the School. They were of necessity urgent, 180 staff members, including sixteen WAAF and twenty Cape Corps, and were expected to arrive by 15 June 1942. In addition, 120 students were anticipated to be on course from time to time. The School opened at the Rifle Range on 28 May 1942.

The Searchlight Regiment

As a result of the earlier exchange of cables with the War Office on the subject of Searchlight Regiments, it had been decided that only one SA Artillery Searchlight Regiment was necessary – all others would be SA Air Force coast units. The 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment suffered particularly, men wanted to be in a unit that would see action and word was spread that the Searchlight Regiment was 'home' based – it was not going anywhere. Once the School opened and was 'up and running' and, because the Artillery in general was plagued with recruiting problems (it continued to do so until the end of the war) a solution was found by transferring the Regiment to the SA Engineer Corps, and from 30 June 1942 it became 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment (V), S.A.E.C.⁹ But only a few weeks later it again suffered a re-designation to become instead 8 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment (V), S.A.E.C., probably as a result of the disciplined numbering exercise of Artillery units described later.

The School

The School and the Depot were organised as separate self-accounting units for the simple reason that the School functioned as training facility for both SA Artillery and SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft units, whereas the depot did not. Accommodation in the depot at Ottery was designed for 86 officers 267 other ranks, 41 WAAS and 90 Cape Corps, including Anti-Aircraft Depot staff, and officers and men, which left three hutments and a proposed recreation hall as lecture rooms and gun rooms for instructional purposes.¹⁰

The staff of the School consisted of eleven officers, thirty-seven other ranks, sixteen WAAF and twenty men of the Cape Corps. Capacity for students was 60 officers, 60 other ranks and 20 WAAS. Including staff of the Anti-Aircraft Depot and officers and men in the depot, accommodation was therefore available for 86 officers and 267 other ranks, 41 WAAF and 90 Cape Corps. It left three hutments and a proposed recreation hall available as lecture rooms and gun rooms for indoor instruction. The School

⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

⁹ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 60/3, file 0149, enc. 37

¹⁰ *Young's Field*, p. 41.

was established with some urgency and it was quickly apparent that accommodation was not in any way sufficient for future growth.

By the end of May it was apparent that accommodation would become 'tight'. It became necessary to enlarge the Ottery Camp and in mid-1942, a request was submitted for the expansion of the camp for the purpose of accommodating a Training Regiment, including an attached but understrength Searchlight Battery for training the proposed 8 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment. Approval was given on 8 June to increase the accommodation at Ottery Camp to house 500 all ranks; and on 24 August it was reported that on completion of new construction, the camp would be able to house the following units:

• The School – including course students and NEAS	180
• The Depot - including staff and NEAS	255
• Technical staff of 'T' Services Corps	<u>75</u>
	<u>515</u>

But, owing to the necessity of accommodating SAAF and SAEC personnel in addition to SAA, the request was increased on 6 October to cover hutted accommodation for 132 officers, 272 NCOs and cadet officers, 860 white other ranks and 670 Cape Corps personnel.¹¹ Tentage was also required for an increase of 25 per cent to accommodate those who from time to time would be required to be at Ottery on a temporary basis. The DAAT pointed out that the Training Regiment would be required to form, train and equip all Field Army Anti-Aircraft units, both SAA and SAEC, and in addition the reserve SAAF Anti-Aircraft units.

Further increased accommodation was requested in October 1942 but delays in approval caused an acute situation by November 1942, when some 1200 personnel were squeezed into accommodation designed for only 500.

School Responsibilities

The School which was a DHQ training institution under the control of DAA,¹² had a permanent staff of eleven officers, 37 other ranks, sixteen WAAS and 90 NEAS. It was responsible for providing advanced training of officers and other ranks in Anti-Aircraft employment and gunnery, advance courses for operators fire control – in conjunction with Special Signals Service; guns and barrage controllers, searchlight instructors and other Anti-Aircraft specialists; qualifying courses under the technical supervision of DDTS (CD) for Anti-Aircraft artisans – gun, instrument and searchlight artificers for SAA units, SAEC artisans for SAEC units and SAAF artisans. These men were trained in the maintenance and repair of Anti-Aircraft equipment at the Technical Training Section of the School. Training within a unit was a Regimental responsibility but DAA was nevertheless responsible for training methods and programmes. Special courses were given for the training of Gun Operations Room staff. He was held responsible for every imaginable facet of the Anti-Aircraft organisation and operation, including the technical development of Anti-Aircraft systems, layouts within fortresses, development of heavy and light Anti-Aircraft gun sites, searchlights, communications, liaison with Director Signals, and Director Works in respect of works and installations for magazines, gun emplacements and gun operation rooms. All publications, training précis and information on Anti-Aircraft employment, were under his control, as well as issues of these papers by the School to approved scales.

Upgrading of Knowledge

One of the posts on the DAA's establishment was held by 35 year old T/ Lieutenant (A/Captain) R.H. Maskew as SO (G). He had earlier been sent north and given clear instructions to gather knowledge on Anti-Aircraft operations. He was '*...instructed with the specialised duty of calculation of Gunnery data, technical aspects of equipment and layouts, development of Gun Operations Rooms, Barrages and other Fire Control systems and calculation of Fire Concentrations. In addition for collaboration from the Gunnery aspect with S.S.S. Branch of S.A.C.S., in Radio Controlled Fire Systems.*'

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., CGS Gp 2, Box 691, file G1208/12.

Notice was given by the DCS to comb-out all those who could be spared for duties in Regiments being prepared for duty in the North Africa. In response to this Colonel Jeffrey replied that Captain Masken in October 1942 had recently returned from the Middle East where he was specially despatched to gain knowledge of the forementioned subjects. There was no officer available in the Anti-Aircraft organisation over the age of 35 years as qualified and competent to be exempted as he was. The DAA requested he be exempted from the provisions of the instruction given by the AG.¹³

Air co-operation became ever more important as training developed. At this time sleeve-towing targets were being provided by aircraft of 65 Air Armament School, Young's Field and also the Royal Naval Fleet Air Arm stationed at Wingfield; but no formal arrangements existed.

Numerous courses were held at Ottery. In a photograph of the 7th Anti-Aircraft Gunnery Course held over the period June/ July 1942, which showed Major Bob Batho as Commandant, were two IGs – Assistant Instructors Gunnery – Sergeants G.A. Ruthven and W.A. Hyman, both later to be warrant officers in the post-war Anti-Aircraft School at Young's Field. Sergeant A.E. le Barrow was another AIG at that time. He appears among Permanent Force personnel in a photograph of personnel on the staff of the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre in September 1949 – with the rank of Captain. By the time the 12th Anti-Aircraft Gunnery Course was held in August/September 1942 for non-commissioned officers, non-other than PL (Blackie) Swart was among the course member. Gunners P.J.J van Niekerk and F.C. de Beer, members of the first ever Anti-Aircraft course were NCOs, and all became warrant officers by 1943. Three IG's not included in the photograph were: Lieutenant M McQueen, E.K. Taylor and W.S. Davidson.

Major Batho was appointed Commandant of the new Anti-Aircraft Training Centre in addition to his post as Officer Commanding the School. An order dated 18 December 1942, indicated that all units in course of formation training and equipping at Ottery would fall under command of Anti-Aircraft Training Centre for discipline, camp administration and 'any other such purposes as may be necessary.' He furthermore instructed that 2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery would cease to fall under command of 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and would instead transfer to under command Anti-Aircraft Training Centre for all purposes.

Bob Batho, originally a member of Cape Garrison Artillery – he had been promoted to Lieutenant in the Unit on 2 July 1925 – had previously served as Battery Commander of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. He had been almost captured with members of his Battery at Sidi Rezegh. Fortunate to escape with a number of his men, he was returned to South Africa and later posted as acting 2IC, 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment, from which he was transferred to the post of Commandant, School of Anti-Aircraft Defence as its first Commanding officer.

2nd Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery formed the basis within the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence (SAAD) of what became known as the Training Regiment, the task of training being one undertaken until that time by 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Field training of Field Army Anti-Aircraft units was conducted under Training-Regiment arrangements at Ottery where units, once formed and basically trained, were placed under command of the Training Regiment for approximately three months intensive training in mobile warfare. It was intended that once this phase was complete they would be ready to enter the field. The Training-Regiment was devised on the output of one completely trained and equipped Anti-Aircraft Battery – either heavy or light – every two months. The first three Batteries were, on this basis, due to commence training during October 1942.

With two Regiments under training by October instead of the three Batteries expected, the Anti-Aircraft Depot became in fact a larger organisation than the School. The Director Anti-Aircraft felt, therefore, that it was essential to have a more senior officer in command of the Depot. He proposed that Major Batho – only a temporary Major – be transferred as Commander, Anti-Aircraft Depot, to replace T/Captain E. Buckley, the latter, who was acting Commander of the Depot, to instead become Quartermaster.

¹³ SANDF Archives, personal file, Lt Col Jeffrey, enc. 89.

It was furthermore proposed that T/Captain J.E. Dixon-Seager, who had received promotion to that rank on 1 January 1942, and who occupied the post of Staff Officer (G) on the staff of Director Anti-Aircraft, be promoted to acting Major and appointed Commandant, School of Anti-Aircraft Defence from 1 October 1942.¹⁴ Approval for these appointments was effective from 1 October 1942.

These requests were approved by the Deputy Chief of Staff on 3 December 1942, after the officers concerned had occupied the posts for over two months.

Three Armoured Divisions

The CGS was determined to form three Armour Divisions, each requiring a light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. By this time 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment had been lost at Tobruk and in July authority was received to form 5 and 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments. This was soon followed within days by authority for 18 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, established from 12 July 1942. It was followed by 13 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments, which were, however, shown only on a provisional Order of Battle – the heavy unit as part of GHQ Troops and the light unit as Field Army Artillery. The light unit was eventually established as a three-Battery part-time Regiment.

An instruction to complete the establishment of 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and to ensure that 5 and 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments were fully formed, trained and equipped at Cape Town as soon as possible, was given to DAAT. This resulted in a request for a further expansion of the camp, to make it capable of accommodating a Training Regiment, including an Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battery. This would involve space for a further forty officers, 700 white other ranks and 400 Cape Corps. General Headquarters was told that the Training Regiment would be employed as a base for the training, equipping of all future Field Army Anti-Aircraft units – both SA Artillery and SA Engineer Corps – and also for the reserve SA Air Force unit. It was also necessary to maintain one under-strength searchlight training Battery attached to the training Regiment for the proposed 8 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment. It was pointed out that that the training Regiment would be employed to form, train and equip all Field Army Anti-Aircraft Regiments, both SA Artillery and SA Engineer Corps, including the SA Air Force coast Anti-Aircraft Regiments.¹⁵

Coastal Command

The School fell under a new Command when Coastal Area Headquarters (V) was established at Cape Town from 1 July 1942 with Major General I.P. de Villiers at its head. He became responsible for all areas within 50 miles (80km) of the coastline.

The balance of the country resorted under Inland Command which was headquartered within Voortrekkerhoogte and Transvaal Command. It was under command of Major General George Brink, (Uncle George) who had reluctantly returned to South Africa after being incapacitated after a bad fall at Gazala in March 1942.¹⁶

Note the difference in appointments: Dixon-Seager - as Commandant of School of Anti-Aircraft Defence.
Batho - as Commander of the Anti-Aircraft Depot.

Existing Resources

The situation regarding equipment was still not good and, of the total Anti-Aircraft equipment available in South Africa by 23 April - as allocated and shown in the following table - the new school was given the two 40mm Bofors Anti-Aircraft guns that had been on Robben Island.

Cape Town	: four 3-inch AA guns and 12 Sperry AA searchlights.
Durban	: two 3.7-inch AA guns (still without ammunition) ¹⁷ ,
	: two 40 mm guns and 12 Sperry AA searchlights.

¹⁴ SANDF Archives, Personal file, Major Bob Batho, encs. 47, 48.

¹⁵ *History of AA Organisation 1929-1944*, p. 26

¹⁶ *Uncle George*, p. 264.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Simon's Town	: six British AA searchlights and six Sperry searchlights.
East London	: nine British AA searchlights.
Port Elizabeth	: twelve Sperry AA searchlights
Reserve unit Cape Town	: two Sperry AA searchlights.

Go Boldly to Dilution

Staff Conference No. 58 was held on 28 October 1942.¹⁸ During the conference the CGS, in a reply to GOC Inland Area, confirmed that two Battalions of the originally proposed Cape Corps Brigade would be raised and that one would be employed on Robben Island. Six Battalions, possibly seven, would be employed guarding POWs and Internment Camps. The two to be raised would be motorised Battalions trained with and attached to 8th and 9th Armoured Brigade Groups. There were, he said, no restrictions on arming them¹⁹ and they would be trained in the use of all weapons and armed for combatant purposes.²⁰ There would be no further recruits from this source for the Air Defence Artillery units.

Re-organisation

After the Battle of Alamein units of the 1st South African Infantry Division (V) were withdrawn from the pursuit of the fleeing Axis Army and spent some time on battlefield clearance before returning to South Africa for well-earned leave and re-organisation. In the meanwhile a decision that the SA Armoured Corps would be established from 1 January 1942, and that it would include all first-line full-time Motorised Battalions and Tank Corps units, was taken at a 'Manpower' Conference held in the office of the Chief of the General Staff on 9 November 1942.²¹

By October 1942 there were 277,000 full-time and part-time volunteers serving in the Union Defence Forces with the SA Air Force recruiting as many as both the Army and the SA Naval Forces combined. The two most important combatant arms – the Artillery and Infantry – were the most difficult to fill. As far back as January 1941 Colonel 'Fritz' Adler, Director Field Army Artillery (it included Anti-Aircraft Regiments), reported manpower problems, with 'wastage', through transfers and discharges of personnel, exceeding the number of recruits by about 300 in the previous six months.²² The Anti-Aircraft organisation was experiencing the same problems, in fact the two most important Corps - Artillery and Infantry – were the most difficult to recruit up to strength. Efforts to induce men to join up included an article released to the media which painted a wonderful picture of Army life. Among other descriptive remarks it stated:

Recruits are required for coastal and for Anti-Aircraft Batteries. The conditions of service are as good as any in the Union Defence Forces and the men lead a pleasant and healthy life....They are housed in comfortable buildings. Each gunner is provided with comfortable bed and mattress. The food, too, is excellent and complaints are seldom heard in a gunners mess....table linen, crockery and cutlery are of the best quality....recreation and sporting activities are well catered for and sport includes rugby and soccer in the winter, and cricket, tennis, baseball, golf and athletics in the summer. There is also the new Physical Training for gunners, which today is a very pleasant pastime....Gunners on the Coast Artillery and the Anti-Aircraft lead a very pleasant and healthy life.²³

The article did not, however, neglect to speak of the hard training and arduous duties but said regular gun drill...*builds up body strength, teaches mental alertness...* and said: *Among the gunners are some of the finest physical specimens in the Army and this is borne out by the fact that at military athletic meetings it is invariably the Artillery team which wins the tug-o'-war.*

¹⁸ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 129, file 32/1, Vol II..

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ SANDF Archives, DCS/CGS, Box 119, file O (M) 71/13/1.

²² Ibid., GCS War Gp 2, Box 209.

²³ Ibid., UWH CIVIL, Box 296, file 42.

Manpower Conference

By 9 November 1942, when the CGS held a senior staff man-power conference in his office, the situation in the Indian Ocean and Pacific had eased insofar as South Africa was concerned. A number of matters were agreed. Among decisions directly affecting the School were:

- Corps training centres were to be established, each with a school and a depot.
- 'A' category men were to be withdrawn from coast Anti-Aircraft units in due course and posted to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. The A.G. was instructed that SAAF coast Anti-Aircraft was placed on first priority for 'B' Category men.²⁴

The CGS stated that postings to and from Training Centres would be under the control of DHQ (DCS Section), with the reservation that postings and appointments to and from training staffs will be done in consultation with Inland Area H.Q.' The Training Centres would otherwise be under General Officer Commanding, Inland Area for training, discipline and administration.

It was agreed the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre would remain in the Coastal Area Command. The DAA was inevitably involved in the decisions that were made, particularly where it concerned the SA Air Force coast Anti-Aircraft units for which among other matters, part-time WAAF were to be recruited. WAAS were to be recruited for Coast Artillery. In addition it was decided that Coast Artillery officers who were 'A' medical category were to be transferred to Field Army Artillery units as soon as they could be replaced by 'B' category personnel. SAAF 'A' category also to be withdrawn from coast Anti-Aircraft units and transferred to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment which would include an SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft Battery. This unit was destined to be posted to 6th SA Armoured Division (V).

Urgency

There was an urgent necessity for this organisation to be put in place as soon as possible, as four days prior to the conference the Adjutant General had authorised the establishment of three armoured car units, a motorised Battalion, a Field Artillery Regiment, an Anti-Tank and an Anti-Aircraft Battery, as well as an Engineer unit. All were to be on a part-time basis – but nevertheless to be formed and undergo training.

Director Anti-Aircraft – the title DAAT had by then been altered – in an instruction of 27 November 1942 authorised the formation of a unit to be known as Anti-Aircraft Training Centre (V). It would co-ordinate all training and recruiting arrangements. The first Part 1 Order No. 1/42 was issued on 18 December 1942. The position regarding air defence training became clear. The AG in an instruction dated 9 February 1943 confirmed that Ottery Camp had become the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, consisting of a Headquarters, an Anti-Aircraft Depot and the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence, all reorganised and re-designated from 9 November 1942.²⁵

Anti-Aircraft Training Centre

When T/Major Dixon-Seager was posted to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment command of the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre was given to Major Bob Batho and on the same date A/Major P. Guicherit was posted as Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft Depot. The depot, responsible for training, included three IG's on it's staff: Lieutenants M. McQueen, E.K. Taylor and W.S. Davidson. It was divided into three sections to function respectively for recruits and reservists of SA Artillery, SA Air Force and SA Engineer Corps Anti-Aircraft units. In addition all units in the course of formation, training and equipping at Ottery were placed under command of Headquarters, AATC for discipline and camp administration. The units immediately affected were:

Headquarters 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAA. (partially formed)
7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAA. (partially formed)

²⁴ Ibid., DCS/CGS, Box 119, file O(M) 71/13/1, enc.65.

²⁵ Ibid., DCS CGS, Box 119, file O (M) 71/13.1, enc. 65.

- 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAA.
- 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAA. (partially formed)
- 13 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAEC.
- 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAEC.

Re-organisation

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment appeared on an Order of Battle but there is no record of it being formed. It was apparently decided a little before this time that some discipline should be applied to the system of numbering SA Artillery Regiments. There was little that could be done about 1 Field Regiment, 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and 1 Anti-Tank Regiment – they were all in action in the Western Desert; 1 Medium Regiment and 1 Armoured Train were seemingly ignored but 7 Field Regiment – also in the desert – stood in the way of the proposed 7 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 5 Field Regiment had suffered very badly in the withdrawal from Gazala and had been disestablished, so 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment virtually took its place. There was already an 8 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment and , 9, 10 and 11 Anti-Tank Regiments – so 12 was the next available number, hence, in all probability 12 took the place of the proposed 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. This was reflected in a Most Secret ‘New Artillery Order of Battle’ of 27 November 1942, listing all the Artillery units then in existence, as shown below:

- 1 Field Regiment (CFA)
- 1 Anti-Tank Regiment
- 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- 1 Medium Regiment, S.A.E.C.
- 1 Armoured Train
- 2 (Vacant)...(2 Field Regiment (NFA) - lost at Tobruk)
(2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment – lost at Tobruk)
- 3 (Vacant)..(3 Field Regiment (THA) - lost at Tobruk)
- 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- 4 Field Regiment (including one Battery SA Irish)
- 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment S.A.E.C.
- 6 Field Regiment
- 7 Field Regiment
- 8 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment
- 9 Anti-Tank Regiment
- 10 Anti-Tank Regiment (Part-time) – to be formed
- 11 Anti-Tank Regiment (including one Battery Railways and Harbours)
- 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (including one Battery SAAF)
- 13 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Part-time) – to be formed
- 15 – 20 (Vacant)
- 21 Field Regiment
- 22 Field Regiment
- 23 Field Regiment S.A.A. (M.E.B.)
- 24 Medium Regiment S.A.E.C. – to be formed
- 25 Medium Regiment (Part-time) – to be formed
- 26 Field Regiment S.A.E.C.
- 27 – 31 (Vacant)
- 32 (N.V.B.) Field Regiment (including 91 (Rand UTC) Field Battery)
- 33 (M.E.B.) Field Regiment
- 34 Field Regiment (Part-time) – to be formed
- 35 Anti-Tank Regiment (Part-time), with:
 - 32 (NVB) A/Tk and
 - 33(MEB) A/Tk Btys - already formed
- 36 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Part-time) – to be formed
- 37 (N.R.V.) Field Regiment – to be formed
- 38 (N.R.V.) Field Regiment – to be formed
- 39 (N.R.V.) Field Regiment – to be formed

40 (N.R.V.) Anti-Tank Regiment – to be formed
 42 – 49 (Vacant)
 50 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF
 51 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF
 52 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF
 53 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF
 54 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF
 54 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF
 55 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF
 56 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF (Reserve unit) - to be formed)
 57 (Vacant) – reserved for SAAF

INDEPENDENT BATTERIES

92 (Rhodes UTC) Field Battery
 Consisting of: HQ 92 (UTC) Field Battery
 'C' (Rhodes UTC) Troop
 'D' (OVS UOK) Troop
 93 (O.V.S. U.O.K.) Field Battery – to be formed

COAST ARTILLERY

1 Heavy Battery (Cape Town)
 2 Heavy Battery (Simon's Town)
 3 Heavy Battery (East London)
 4 Heavy Battery (Durban)
 5 Heavy Battery (Robben Island)
 6 Heavy Battery (Port Elizabeth)
 7 Heavy Battery (Walvis Bay)
 8 Heavy Battery (Saldanha Bay)
 10 Reserve Heavy Battery (Durban)

By 10 June 1943 the Artillery Order of Battle had been altered. Nine units, of which two became medium Regiments between June and November, had been or were about to be disbanded, including three that had not appeared on the previous list. But seven new units – 15 and 16 Field Regiments, 17 Anti-Tank Regiment and 18 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment had been established as well as 42, 43 and 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments. The last three would in January 1944 become SA Air Force units and eventually end as SAAF Infantry Regiments. There were also two new independent Field Batteries listed, one of which was yet to be formed.

Delays in building work

Delays in commencing the building work found an acute situation at Ottery in November 1942, when some 1 200 personnel were squeezed into accommodation designed for 500. In answer to questions raised by the Authorities Committee it was pointed out that the following units were permanently housed at Ottery:

- The Anti-Aircraft Depot, which acted as a base for all Anti-Aircraft units of the Union Defence Forces (including SA Air Force, SA Engineer Corps and SA Artillery and the units in the Middle East). The average strength of the Depot for units already formed alone, would be 50 officers, 800 other ranks and 360 Cape Corps, on a basis of ten per cent only of units then in the Union, and would include reserves, reinforcements and recruits ex-North and men awaiting medical examination and discharge, etc. These figures did not provide for units still to be formed or units in the Middle East.
- The School of Anti-Aircraft Defence which, with staff and students, had an average strength of 60 officers and 120 other ranks.

- All Anti-Aircraft units which could be formed, were trained and equipped at the Ottery camp, as was the case of Field Artillery at Potchefstroom. This was a continuous process although the number of units could not be exactly estimated at any one time. For this reason provision of tentage expansion had been made. Units already at Ottery were 5 and 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments and 8 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment, and 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was shortly to arrive. There was also the Regiment destined for Saldanha Bay and the reserve SA Air Force Regiment to be considered, in addition to part-time units on continuous training and all other units on the provisional order of battle.

Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey appeared before the Authorities Committee on 19 November 1942 to further explain the situation. The required extensions to Ottery Camp were approved.

Radar Training

In September 1942 Arthur Davey was a gunner in 24 Composite Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, at Port Elizabeth. He and another airman/gunner were sent to the Anti-Aircraft School at The Rifle Range, to undergo an unspecified course. On arrival they were required to sign an oath of secrecy; and they discovered they were to attend the first radar operator's course held at the School. He wrote that a peculiar feature of the course was that the course commander – a young Lieutenant – had the duty of forming up course members in the morning and marching them off '...to a remote place of instruction', following which he would disappear and sit on a log some distance away. He had not been administered the 'secret oath'.²⁶ They were instead instructed by Sergeant 'Skaap' van der Merwe and Sergeant 'Mama' Els, together with a chirpy Technical Services Corporal. Other than the latter, all the NCOs were SA Artillery personnel. On occasions they were supervised by Staff Sergeant Jones, who Davy said was 'a man of awe-inspiring size and presence – with a gleam in his eye.'²⁷ Course members had to memorise operational sequences on the instruments – a GL No. 1 M2 *, which consisted of a generator, transmitter and receiver. There were no printed instructions and no notes were permitted.

At the end of the two-month course they were sent off to the 3.7-inch gun site on Green Point Common to practice their skills and train a new batch of operators. Towards the close of 1942 the small group, some of which had served in 2 and 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiments - were assigned to further operator/training duties. He went to Durban and was placed under command of the Special Signals Service detachment for radar activities but under the local Anti-Aircraft Battery Commander for rations and accommodation. Arthur Davey felt aggrieved when in 1944, by which time he was a Corporal - he was back at the School, this time as he said: 'running round a 40 mm Bofors once more.'²⁸

The Comb-out of Coast Officers

By 1943 the South African Artillery was struggling to attract recruits to make up the losses incurred in North Africa and Coast Artillery personnel were encouraged to transfer to the field Army Artillery. Twelve Coast Artillery officers, including one Major and two Captains, were posted to the Field Artillery and reported to the Field Army Artillery Depot on 24 July 1943, while eight Field Artillery officers were sent to the Coast Artillery Training Depot '...with a view to being absorbed into Coast Artillery.'²⁹ In the months to come altogether sixty one coastal officers underwent conversion courses at the School to fit them for Field Artillery duties, the intention being that they would be absorbed into 6th SA Infantry Division Artillery units on completion of the course. Thirteen failed to qualify and five did not complete courses due to illness. Fifty nine new officers, including the failures arrived in the Middle East.

Six months later, on 14 May 1943, instructions were issued for the Anti-Aircraft Depot to function as a recruit, reservist, reinforcement and transit base for all Anti-Aircraft personnel. These functions were

²⁶ Letter from Arthur Davey to the author, dated 8.10.1993.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ SANDF Archives, Field Artillery Gp. 1, Box 19.

undertaken by three separate wings – SA Artillery Wing, SA Air Force Wing and NEAS Wing. A proposed fourth wing for SA Engineer Anti-Aircraft personnel was considered but the idea was abandoned as it was considered the SA Artillery Wing could quite easily handle the additional SAEC administration.

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Believe it or not: deflection, or clay pigeon shooting, for air gunners was introduced at 66 Air School, Young's Field, in 1943. The object was to teach air gunners how and where to aim in order to hit a moving target. 'The knowledge gained will be of the greatest value later when it comes to handling machine-guns in the air. There is, of course, only one place to aim at, that is where the target will be when the bullet arrives.' so stated a precis for clay pigeon instructors.³⁰ Once shotguns had been acquired and the necessary equipment – clay pigeon traps, springs and skeet range – training began.

The first course for Clay Pigeon Instructors' was held at Young's Field 12 to 19 April 1943. A Second course was held at the beginning of July and it included two aspirant instructors from the Air Defence School. Shortly after this course arrangements were made with the Director Anti-Aircraft to make certain skeet ranges available to Anti-Aircraft Bofors gun detachments.³¹ The sixth and final course was held from 3 to 16 January 1945.³² Evidence was presented that deflection shooting helped to increase hits on drogues by as much as 100 per cent. It must be presumed that the benefit to Anti-Aircraft gunners was equal to this.

³⁰ *Militaria* 2/3, 1995, p. 104.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.105.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 107

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

COASTAL AIR DEFENCE

Early Preparation

Over the months before October numbers of cables passed between *Oppositely* (the office of the South African High Commissioner in London) and Dechief - the office of the CGS in Pretoria, on the scale of Anti-Aircraft equipment necessary at South African ports as part of the coastal defence system. On 3 October 1941 the Director of Anti-Aircraft and Coast Defence at the War Office wrote to the Military Liaison Officer at South Africa House, London, and advised him that that the Ports Defence Committee had, after consideration decided the scale of Anti-Aircraft defence at South African ports should be:

	Heavy Anti-Aircraft guns	Light Anti-Aircraft guns
Table Bay	16	12
Simon's Bay	12	12
Durban	16	12

The question of the provision of Anti-Aircraft equipment and of training became one of some urgency and after the South African Defence authorities queried the reason for excluding Port Elizabeth, East London, Walvis Bay and Saldanha it was found that the Ports Defence Committee had not even considered these ports.

Telegrams passed between DCAA and Dechief about the requirements for searchlights and the air defence of those ports not included in the War Office's original decision on the scale of air defence. Correspondence eventually landed on the desk of The Secretary to the Admiralty at the request of the High Commissioner who asked for the views of the Lords High Commissioners of the Admiralty. The Secretary outlined the background to the current state of affairs, commencing with the order for 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns placed by the Union Defence Force before the commencement of the war, i.e:

Table Bay	12 guns
Simon's Bay	8 guns
Durban	4 guns

He asked, following the decision of the Ports Defence Committee, whether the Admiralty considered it necessary, on what scale (in their Lordship's opinion) Anti-Aircraft defences should be provided for Port Elizabeth, East London, Saldanha and Walvis Bay. He did, beforehand, point out that Port Elizabeth and East London were not of major importance to Commonwealth Lines of Communication but on the other hand Walvis Bay and Saldanha were being provided with 6-inch guns for seaward defence at the request of the Admiralty. This was being done even though these two ports were not of vital importance to internal communication.

Anti-Aircraft searchlights were to be employed mainly as aircraft fighting lights and layouts were to be determined accordingly. At the same time these lights would be required to function in conjunction with the guns and were to be included in the Anti-Aircraft defence plan. As the whole allotment of Anti-Aircraft searchlights was already in the Union, arrangements had been made for them to be available to the appropriate units and the allocation of personnel and accommodation was requested under the immediate programme. For the local protection of searchlight detachments, within or adjacent to vital localities, it was proposed that arrangements would have to be made by DAW and DF and CW for the construction of emplacements.

Heavy Anti-Aircraft guns (3.7-inch) were to be allotted on the basis of the minimum possible number of two-gun sections to four-gun sections to give all-round protection of a two-gun concentration over vital localities. By the expansion of two-gun sections to four-gun sections, and the siting of certain intermediate sections, this skeleton form of protection would be built up to the requisite gun concentration on the full allotment. The immediate programme contemplated only static sites, as the initial order for the provision of guns had already been determined as being static equipment.

Japan's entry into the war posed a dramatic threat to South Africa, with the possibility of submarine attacks on Allied shipping around the South African coast and later, even the possibility of direct attack. Although well away from the main operational areas, South Africa could not rely on much support should the Japanese decide to launch an all-out offensive in the Indian Ocean. Its Army and Navy were formidable – with some 1.4 million men in the Army. But it was the Japanese Navy that posed the biggest threat. It consisted of some 325 000 personnel manning ten battleships, eight aircraft carriers, eighteen heavy cruisers, twenty light cruisers, 108 destroyers and 60 submarines - of which there were several large T-Class boats that could carry a midget submarine and/or a floatplane. There were also several minor vessels and many auxiliaries.¹

Their operations were spread over Malaysia and Indonesia and their forces were overrunning one area after another. The Union Government had to face the serious possibility of a future attack and even possible invasion, with the disturbing acceptance that the coast Batteries were nowhere near strong enough to act as a deterrent and would not be able to offer much in the way of resistance. Lack of adequate air defences made the ports even more vulnerable. Nor was the Seaward Defence Force in a position to offer resistance. The minesweepers and the anti-submarine vessels of the SDF – all converted trawlers and whalers - each mounting a 12-pdr gun on the bow, could not even take on a destroyer, let alone anything bigger. And although the Union's only safeguard was still thought to be the Royal Navy, and the ability of its more powerful allies to maintain their presence in the Indian Ocean; it could no longer be accepted that they would be able to control those seas. All that South Africa could muster were those men and women serving in an administrative capacity and the number of under-trained personnel in the part-time units serving in the Union. Most of South Africa's fighting forces, both Army and Air Force, were engaged in the Western Desert of North Africa.

Strenuous efforts

1942 was to be a year of crisis for the Allies, and in the Union Defence Forces there was a particular flurry of activity during the year. Possible dangers to South African ports were varied in their scope. Strenuous efforts were made in the next few months to improve the defence structures in the Union and Defence Headquarters called for special vigilance regarding internal security and against possible attacks from the sea.

On 5 January 1942, with Japan in the war and the added importance of South African ports on the line of communication to the Middle East, the office of the CGS at the request of the War Office, sent a lengthy four page cable to the High Commissioner in London listing the entire spectrum of defences at ports from Walvis Bay to Mombasa. It included aircraft available – serviceable and unserviceable, and those due for overhaul, coast guns – of all the various types, Anti-Aircraft guns both heavy and light, minesweeping and anti-submarine ships, and radar – both locally made and imported.

It included an allocation of Anti-Aircraft equipment to coastal ports in an immediate programme, once guns became available:

	Authorised/Available 3.7-inch		Authorised/Available 40mm		Authorised/Available Searchlights	
Cape Town	12	2	12	Nil	12	Nil
Simon's Bay	12	Nil	12	Nil	12	Nil
Durban	16	Nil	12	Nil	12	Nil

¹ *Jane's Fighting Ships*, pp. 280-326.

Port Elizabeth	12	Nil	12	Nil	12	Nil
East London	12	Nil	12	Nil	12	Nil
Achilles Reserve	12	Nil	12	Nil	12	Nil

South Africa's harbours were, without doubt, of vital importance to the war effort, principally the anchorages in Table Bay, and at Durban. The latter had the only graving dock able to take a large liner or battleship. Both anchorages, and those at other ports, were eventually protected by under-sea electrically charged indicator loops – specially made cable laid on the sea bed, able to detect a ship's magnetic field and provide a signal as it crossed the loop - which could be read at a shore station. The first – the Table Bay 'Loop' - was only placed in commission in November 1942.²

The Japanese threat and the number of carriers it had, made adequate protection a necessity, especially of providing Anti-Aircraft defences for these and the other of the Union's principal ports. The decision was made early in 1942 to immediately expand the Anti-Aircraft organisation by creating additional Regiments to undertake this duty. But the South African Artillery, both field and Anti-Aircraft were suffering from a dearth of recruits. The political divisions in the country did not help nor did the complacent attitude of the general public. An *Avenge Tobruk* display, before the 1942 Durban July races began, caused Brigadier Werdmuller, Director of Recruiting to comment - after noting the well-dressed and seemingly affluent crowds enjoying the annual race-day – that they did not seem to appreciate the fact that South Africa was engaged in an all-out war.

A New Assessment

Assessment of defences at various ports in the Indian Ocean area was upgraded by the War Office in January 1942. It was hoped, however, to provide additional equipment, both coast and Anti-Aircraft, especially for Durban - now at the greatest risk of attack - towards the end of 1942.

Assessment of Attack

The War Office had begun to upgrade AMTB equipments at various ports in the Indian ocean and on 10 January a suggested scale of AMTB equipment was provided by the Admiralty, but the cable, from the Dominions Office and addressed to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, stated that one QF 6-pdr Twin would possibly be made available for Durban towards the end of 1942. Production rate, the cable read, was presently slow and a number of equipments '...shortly due for delivery are already allocated to Singapore and other operational ports...' on a priority basis which the War Office '...do not feel justified in disturbing in present circumstances.' Not long afterwards – on 15 February - Singapore fell to the Japanese – the greatest defeat in the history of the British Army. Darwin in Australia was bombed for the first time on 19 February, causing much damage and killing numbers of inhabitants.

On 26 February 1942 the South African High Commissioner in London cabled the DGS to inform him that the Cabinet Ad Hoc committee were making a recommendation to the British Chiefs of Staff concerning the delivery of coast and Anti-Aircraft equipment to South Africa. 'Insofar as AA equipment was concerned,' the cable stated, 'A.A. increases four heavy and eight light Cape Town. Eight heavy four light Saldanha Bay. Four heavy eight light Durban. Eight heavy twelve light East London.' Five days later, on 3 March 1942, the High Commissioner referred to the personal message he had sent to the DCS on 26 February and informed DECHIEF that the Chiefs of Staff had approved the recommendations of the ad hoc committee. 'Since,' his cable stated, 'been informed War Office recommending release 32 heavy and 36 light AA equipment. This being considered by Chiefs of Staff and most likely to be approved and shipped this month.'³ The High Commissioner asked whether the the CGS anticipated difficulty in providing training personnel, and suggested it may be possible to arrange help from the War Office, either from convoys or from personnel in transit camps. He ended: 'I have not discussed this with W.O. but would do so if you wished.'

² *Island at War*, p. 203.

³ SANDF Archives, CGS WAR, BOX 39, file 8/8.

The SA Air Force

To allay fears of lack of harbour protection, and because the SA Air Force was drawing more recruits than all the other Corps combined, it was agreed that the Air Force should be responsible for the air defence of South Africa's harbours. It was decided on 18 February 1942, that SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft units would be created to man equipment at all the principal ports of the Union, with future control of coastal Anti-Aircraft would be in the hands of Director General Air Force (DGAF). Brigadier Newman, the Royal Marine officer who had previously served in South Africa in an official capacity, was by then in London. He informed Dechief that the War Office *had* agreed to release thirty-two 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns and thirty-six Bofors for this purpose.⁴

Virtually the same information was addressed to Dechief, Cape Town by Oppositely in a cypher telegram on 26 February 1942. But what it said, however, was that '...for your advance information a Cabinet Ad Hoc committee was to make a recommendation to the Chiefs of Staff.' This was a little different to the information cabled by Brig Newman. Five days after Oppositely's message another cipher telegram arrived on the desk of the CGS and it stated that the Chiefs of Staff had approved the recommendations of the Ad Hoc committee. It also revealed that the War Office was recommending the release of '32 heavy Anti-Aircraft and 36 light Anti-Aircraft equipments.' This was now being considered by the Chiefs of Staff. It was good news.⁵

A Risk of War

The loss of Sumatra in mid-February and the Battle of the Java Sea in the latter half of the month - which ended Allied sea power in the East Indies caused a reassessment of coastal defence arrangements. A War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Ad Hoc Committee in London met again on 23 February and felt, insofar as South Africa was concerned, that the Japanese were unlikely to consider the prizes to be gained were sufficient to justify '*tip and run raids*' involving the landing of troops or even escorted carrier-borne attacks. But the risks of attacks on shipping or bombardment of land targets by single raiders or warships was a risk of war which must be accepted, they said.⁶

Events in the Indian Ocean added a new dimension to the war and the beginning of a possible threat to the Union. Due to the worsening situation in the East, the Chiefs of Staff were soon to change their minds.

Towards the end of February 1942 the War Office Cabinet's Sub-Committee on Defence for the Indian Ocean, reassessed defence arrangements at Indian Ocean ports. They envisaged the possibility of brief bombardments of South African ports by 14-inch gunned battleships and operations by torpedo and mine-laying craft, as well as attacks by up to 200 carrier-based aircraft, and an Infantry landing in Brigade-group strength. Defence of the ports, the assessment stated, would demand powerful Coast Artillery, torpedo bombers and fighters as well as 208 3.7-inch and a similar number of 40 mm Bofors Anti-Aircraft guns, and in addition, radar coverage of the entire coastline. But when the facts were made known, planning showed only sixteen 3.7-inch guns at Cape Town and at Durban and twelve each for the lesser ports, and a reserve unit with the same number of guns: twelve Bofors and twelve searchlights were planned for allocation to each port - a total of eighty 3.7-inch guns and sixty Bofors. The *real* state of affairs showed that there were:

Four 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft guns at Cape Town.
Two 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns at Durban, and
Two Bofors at the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre.

Much to the relief of everyone, a cable was received from London on 11 March confirming that the War Office had finally agreed that 32 static 3.7-inch guns and 36 40 mm Bofors equipments would be

⁴ Ibid., CGS War, Box 39.

⁵ Ibid., CGS War, Box 39, file 8/8.

⁶ Ibid.

released to South Africa.⁷ A cable of 1 April made amendments to the Chief of Staffs' paper covering the scale of Anti-Aircraft defences at South African coastal ports, including Saldanha.

Revision of Attack

A cable from London on 24 March provided another scale of attack adopted by the Chiefs of Staff. It indicated little more than tip and run raids by cruisers with 12-inch or lesser guns and smaller vessels; about 30 T.S.R. aircraft from an aircraft carrier and small landing forces for smash and burn raids. They also assessed attacks by submarine, minelayers, ship-borne MTBs, midget submarines and human torpedoes.

In April 1942 a Japanese fleet of five carriers, four battleships, four cruisers and eight destroyers entered the Indian Ocean. The British bases of Colombo and Tricomolee were damaged in raids between 5 and 9 April and several merchant ships were sunk. The cruisers HMS *Cornwall* and *Devonshire* and the aircraft carrier *Hermes* and an escorting destroyer were sunk at sea by Japanese aircraft.⁸ The move of the Japanese into the Indian Ocean was an obvious worry for the War Office. Supply convoys to the Middle East and India could be endangered; and the scale of attack on South African shores was under constant scrutiny and review. This provided an additional measure of urgency to the arrangements taking place in South Africa. Reviews and assessments constantly changed in the month's ahead.

A Further Assessment

In April the Chiefs of Staff approved amendments to defence plans in the light of the situation in the East. Firstly, a brief bombardment by 14-inch battleship and smaller vessels and attack by torpedo and mine-laying craft; secondly air attack by 150 to 200 aircraft carried in three or four aircraft carriers; thirdly a military force of about one Brigade group equipped to seize and hold a lightly defended base or to smash and burn the facilities. The cable of 1 April from London went on to make amendments to the Chiefs of Staff paper which covered the scale of Anti-Aircraft defence at coastal ports, including Saldanha.

By 19 April a cabled message from the Admiralty to the C-in-C, South Atlantic stated that a '...most recent assessment of the scale of attack on South Africa (will be) limited to submarines and armed merchant cruisers so that aircraft attack is limited to a problematical single aircraft probably on reconnaissance which might be carried by an A.M.C. or Japanese U-boat.' The message went on to say that there was in all probability not a single hostile aircraft now within several thousand miles of South Africa.⁹

Air Defence

Planning for air defence requirements provided for only sixteen 3.7-inch guns at Cape Town and Durban and twelve each at the lesser ports, with a reserve unit with the same number of guns as those for the lesser ports, i.e: Port Elizabeth, East London and Walvis Bay. Twelve Bofors and twelve searchlights were to be allocated to each port. Planning had therefore encompassed a total of eighty 3.7s and sixty Bofors. There were, however, four 3-inch 20 cwt Anti-Aircraft guns of World War One vintage in the country, both at Cape Town, and two 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft guns and two 40 mm Bofors at Durban. In addition two 40 mm Bofors had been issued to the Anti-Aircraft Training Depot for training purposes.

Gun Sites and Accommodation

Planning went ahead and it was decided that heavy Anti-Aircraft guns (3.7-inch) were to be allotted on the basis of the minimum possible number of two-gun sections to four-gun sections to give all-round protection of a two-gun concentration over vital localities. By the expansion of two-gun sections to four-gun sections, and the siting of certain intermediate sections, this skeleton form of protection

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *The Chronological Atlas of World War Two*, p.71.

⁹ Photocopies of documents from SANDF Archives, no archive reference

would be built up to the requisite gun concentration on the full allotment. Presumably in consultation with DGAF the DCS had initially ruled that all guns and searchlights should be mobile, but on 12 March the CGS had learned that the War Office had allocated static 3.7s for delivery to South Africa. Thus immediate programme necessitated construction of permanent sites.

Demands on DAW for the immediate construction of accommodation and emplacements were already in hand, based on some sites being static. In order to speed up work and conserve material, which was beginning to be in short supply, a modified form of static gun emplacement had been discussed and agreed with Director Fortifications and Coastal Works.

It was recommended the light Anti-Aircraft guns should be allotted on a skeleton basis. As no WAAF personnel were included in the establishment table for light guns, these sites were to be the last to be considered for accommodation, except for the provision of essential hygiene and cooking facilities. Whenever possible, light Anti-Aircraft personnel were to be accommodated in tents and requests for permanent hutments made later. Emplacements were to be constructed under unit arrangements and sandbags would be required.

Recommendation for the allotment of guns would be made to conform to the availability of equipment and the training of personnel. Construction of accommodation and emplacements and requests for communications would have to be synchronised in order to avoid any delay. Bearing in mind the possible threat from the Japanese it was determined that the order of priority in all matters was:

Durban
Cape Town and Simon's Town
Port Elizabeth
East London
Saldanha Bay

Control of all Anti-Aircraft guns and searchlights at defended ports by the SA Air Force made it necessary to provide Anti-Aircraft Regiments to man the equipment and it was anticipated that six Regiments would soon be established. It was furthermore appreciated that the combination of coast and Anti-Aircraft training could not continue and that a separate Directorate of Anti-Aircraft Artillery should be created. Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey, commanding 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the Western Desert, was nominated as DAAT. From 1 March 1942, therefore, the Directorate of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery was split into two separate directorates, so that easier control of the growing Anti-Aircraft organisation could be established.

Air Force Coast Anti-Aircraft Organisation

On 16 April, only nine days after his arrival from North Africa, the energetic newly appointed DAAT, in consultation with DGAF prepared a memorandum, on the re-organisation of the entire Anti-Aircraft organisation, based on the information given him that the SA Air Force would man coastal air defences.

It was also decided that equipment, once fully available was to be allocated to ports as shown below:

Saldanha	8 x 3.7-inch Heavy AA guns 4 x 40mm Bofors
Table Bay	32 x 3.7-inch heavy AA guns 32 x 40mm guns 12 AA Sperry Searchlights
Simon's Bay	12 X 3.7-inch guns 12 x 40mm Bofors 12 x AA Sperry
Port Elizabeth	12 X 3.7-inch 12 x 40mm 12 x Sperry AA Searchlights
East London	8 x 3.7-inch

	12 x 40mm
	12 x AA Sperry Searchlights
Durban	32 X 3.7-inch
	32 X 40mm
	12 x AA Searchlights
Reserve Unit	12 X 3.7-inch
	12 X 40mm
	12 x AA Searchlights ¹⁰

Neither the Reserve unit nor the unit proposed for Saldanha Bay were ever formed. Saldanha was not considered to be of any great importance – it did not have the infrastructure as did Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban and it had no direct road or railway communication links to the hinterland. Later, when it was decided that, because of German U-Boat activity in the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean, Saldanha would make a useful convoy forming-up point, coast guns were emplaced to guard the entrance channel and, for a limited period Anti-Aircraft protection was provided. There had originally been no thought of any Anti-Aircraft protection for Port Elizabeth and East London.

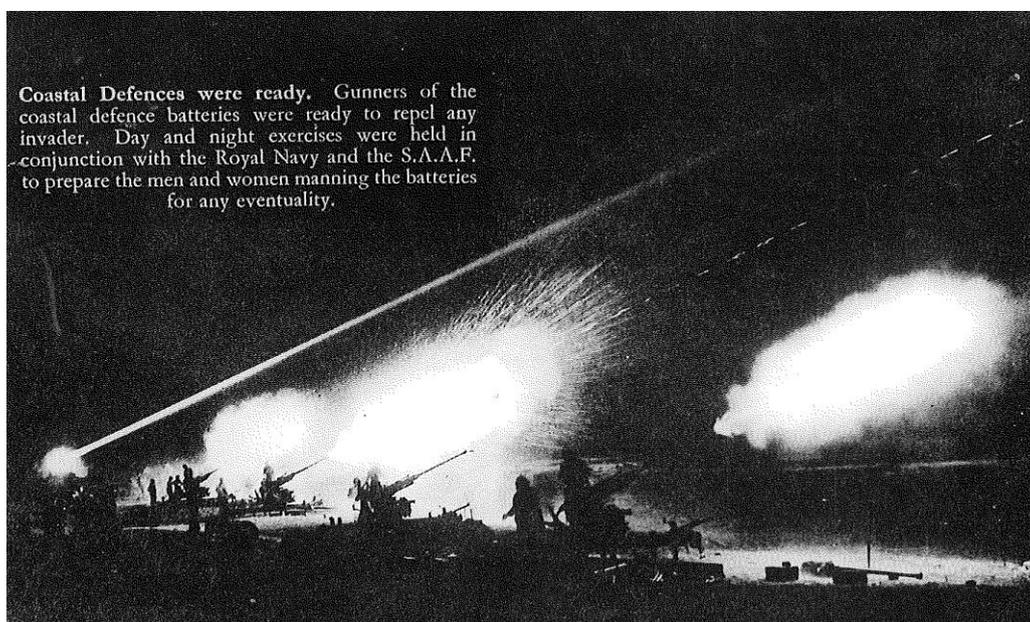


Figure 32: Coastal Anti-Aircraft defences

By 23 April 1942 the total Anti-Aircraft equipment available for distribution in the Union was:

Two 3.7-inch guns.
 Four 3-inch 20 cwt guns
 Four 40 mm Bofors
 57 Sperry Anti-Aircraft searchlights, complete with 86 lorries.
 21 British Anti-Aircraft searchlights complete with lorries, and three extra vehicles.

This equipment was distributed at coastal ports as follows:

Table Bay	Four 3-inch 20 cwt guns, two 40 mm Bofors and twelve Sperry Anti-Aircraft searchlights.
Simon's Bay	Twelve Sperry Anti-Aircraft searchlights.
Port Elizabeth	Twelve Sperry Anti-Aircraft searchlights.
East London	Three Sperry and nine British Anti-Aircraft searchlights.
Durban	Two 3.7-inch guns, two 40 mm Bofors, and twelve Sperry Anti-Aircraft searchlights. ¹¹

¹⁰ SANDF Archives, CGS Gp 2, Box 691, file G1208/12

Reserve Unit, Cape Town: Two Sperry Anti-Aircraft searchlights.
Anti-Aircraft Training Centre Robben Island: Two 40 mm Bofors.

There were 1 000 rounds of ammunition for each 3-inch gun but there was no ammunition for the 3.7-inch guns. The ammunition was on order and cables had been sent to London asking for delivery to be expedited.

Three Sperry Anti-Aircraft searchlights were allocated to the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence and one Sperry and three British Anti-Aircraft searchlights were held in storage. Also held in store were the extra 86 Sperry and one British searchlight vehicles. Two Sperry and three British searchlights were on loan to the Coast Artillery.

As a result of the increased U-boat activity on the South African coast the Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic, moved his headquarters from Freetown to Simon's Town in 1942 to enable he and his staff to more directly control the naval activity against the U-boat menace. He saw Saldanha as an alternative convoy assembly point and as a result he made representations to strengthen coast and Anti-Aircraft defences there. The Admiralty agreed with his point of view and furthermore agreed to send two 6-inch naval guns, eight 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns and four Bofors to that port.

Immediate action

It was recommended that immediate action be taken:

- to appoint SA Artillery officers on transfer to the SAAF as Commanders of the proposed Anti-Aircraft Regiments in order to initiate - under the control of DCAD and technical direction of DAAT, the necessary preliminary work in connection with organisation, layout, communications, sites, accommodation, training and administration of the new Regiments.
- Transfer officers and other ranks from 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment (after its reduction to skeleton establishment) to the SAAF Regiments to temporarily fill necessary posts.
- Post all SAAF, WAAS and NEAS personnel available from recruiting or other sources to the Regiments for basic training under Regimental arrangements followed by technical training on the equipment they would man.

Accommodation and Searchlights

The requirement for accommodation had by this time become clearly defined, as the equipment released by the War Office by this time were static equipment, which implied fixed emplacements. It had until then been contemplated that emplacements would almost entirely be constructed by the units holding the guns. Light guns and searchlights remained mobile in all cases.

Because of accommodation difficulties at Cape Town and because of space being available at Port Elizabeth, it was decided to train a large number of WAAF searchlight operators in that coastal city. It was agreed that instructional staff would consist of previously trained SAAF NCOs. Four of the five officers allocated to the training section were also SAAF personnel. DCAD on 2 June recommended that searchlight training should be undertaken entirely by the SAAF and that searchlight training (except for special training at Ottery) take place at a Searchlight School, permanently located at Port Elizabeth. Major Hugh McKenzie was transferred from Durban to Port Elizabeth to take temporary command. The section was not there for long. By August 1942 accommodation had become available for WAAF personnel at various other centres and it allowed the young ladies to be trained on site at unit level.

All this would be dependent upon the availability of accommodation and priority in this respect was decided as:

¹¹ *History of AA Organisation, UDF 1939 -1944*, p.1.

- WAAF Searchlights
- Heavy gun sections
- Light gun detachments

Priority in construction of hutments was given as Durban, Cape Town Simon's Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Saldanha Bay – in that order. As already indicated personnel would of necessity be accommodated in tents until hutments could be provided.

Finally, it was decided that a Staff Officer, Anti-Aircraft, should be appointed on the Staff of DCAD for close liaison with the SAAF.

Existing resources were still not good and, of the total Anti-Aircraft equipment available in South Africa by 23 April 1942, equipment was allocated as under:

Cape Town	four 3-inch AA guns and 12 Sperry AA searchlights
Durban	two 3.7-inch AA guns and 12 Sperry AA searchlights
Simon's Town	six British AA searchlights and six Sperry AA searchlights
East London	nine British AA searchlights
Port Elizabeth	twelve Sperry AA searchlights
Reserve at Cape Town	two Sperry AA searchlights
AA Training Centre	two 40 mm Bofors guns

The DGTS was instructed to arrange direct with DGAF for the immediate distribution of this equipment to the different centres and for the temporary loan of maintenance and assembly personnel.

DGAF was instructed to arrange direct with DAAT for the temporary loan of instructors until sufficient SAAF personnel were trained as instructors. DGAF was finally ordered to organise the Anti-Aircraft defences and available air Squadrons (fighter, coastal reconnaissance, bomber and torpedo Squadrons or flights) as were available, into composite Air Defence Groups as directed by the General Staff.

SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft Regiments

Six SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft Regiments numbered from 21 to 26 were established with effect from 1 May 1942; and on 2 May the undermentioned acting Regimental Commanders were reported to have been appointed:

- Captain N.M. Munnik at Cape Town: with five officers and 60 other ranks.
- Captain W.M. McKeag at Simon's Town: with five officers and 50 other ranks.
- Captain J.S. Jamieson at Port Elizabeth: with six officers and 40 other ranks.
- Captain H.M. Williams at East London: with six officers and 40 other ranks.

The SA Air Force Regiments were:

- Saldanha Bay 21 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- Cape Town 22 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- Simon's Bay 23 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- Port Elizabeth 24 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- East London 25 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- Durban 26 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

The Regiment allocated to Saldanha was never formed. This organisation would require:

- 226 officers
- 1 987 white other ranks
- 1854 WAAF and
- 1554 NEAS personnel.

Proposed establishments of each Regiment included a 'Q' and 'T' maintenance Section, a workshop and a Transport Section. The heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries were to have SAA gun numbers, Regiment Woman's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) instrument personnel, telephonists and clerks, and NEAS personnel would provide 30 per cent of gun detachments, and drivers and those for general duties. The breakdown for light Regiment was much the same except that the SAAF would man the guns with 25 per cent of the detachment being provided by the NEAS, but they would also control the instruments. Personnel for the searchlight Batteries were expected to be almost wholly from the WAAF, except for certain artisan duties for which the SAAF would be responsible, and with NEAS men as drivers, etc.

On 6 May the DAAT drew up a schedule provisionally allotting equipment to the SAAF to enable it to organise temporarily six Anti-Aircraft Regiments numbered from 21 to 26. Each would consist of a heavy Battery (3.7-inch guns), a light Battery (40mm Bofors) and a Searchlight Battery, almost none of which, except searchlights, was available. All that was actually available at that stage were the four 3-inch 20 cwt guns that had arrived from the Middle East in September 1941, and were in operational use by 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. They were vouchered off to 22 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, six days later. Until the latter unit had sufficient trained personnel to man these Anti-Aircraft guns, and the twelve Sperry searchlights that it had, trained men from 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment did so. The commanding officer of 22 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, however, assumed responsibility for operational control and administration of the personnel.

Major Hugh McKenzie, was transferred from Port Elizabeth and appointed acting Commander of 26 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, at Durban. And pending the arrival there of 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SA Artillery, he functioned as AADC. He later had under his operational command three officers and 60 SA Artillery personnel of 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Six officers and 60 other ranks were in addition, transferred from SA Artillery to form the nucleus of the SAAF Regiment at Durban. Furthermore, another 30 SAAF personnel already trained on searchlights were also made available, to be posted to 26 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, once it became operational.

From the same date Air Defence Groups under Fortress Commanders, were established at each coastal port, in order to control both air Squadrons and Anti-Aircraft defences. Lieutenant Colonel Durrant had, however, arrived in Durban on 27 March 1942 as Fortress Commander to organise the air defences. There was no blackout in Durban and no bay that could be used as an anchorage, as in Cape Town. Ships at anchor outside the port were outlined against the blaze of lights from the city. There was some anxiety not to disturb the public; but there was some urgency and arrangements to impose a blackout were eventually made, much to the annoyance of the inhabitants of Durban.

Holding the Fort

In August and September 1941, while 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was 'holding the fort' in South Africa, 1st and 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigades arrived in Egypt and underwent conversion to become light Anti-Aircraft Regiments.

In South Africa, 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was established with effect from 1 May 1941,¹² and formed from within the Coast Artillery organisation. In October, once it was realised that the two Regiments in North Africa had been established, the title of the new Regiment was changed to 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The new Regiment, with a Regimental headquarters, 7, 8 and 9 Anti-Aircraft Batteries was commanded by Major F.W. Mellish, MC, previously Commander of 2nd Heavy Battery, Simon's Town. Famous as a rugby player, he had won the Military Cross in France as a Lieutenant in the SA Heavy Artillery. Twelve other officers, 30 NCOs and 484 gunners were also transferred from Batteries of the Cape Peninsula Artillery Brigade (which had replaced the Coast Artillery Brigade on 8 February 1940) and from 3rd, 4th and 6th Heavy Batteries at East London, Durban and Port Elizabeth respectively. The Regiment was brought up to strength by 1 February 1942 and on 16 April it had a posted strength of 30 officers and 600 other ranks. A further nineteen recently commissioned officers awaited postings.

¹² SANDF Archives, DCS CGS, Box78.

It was proposed that it be moved to Durban, but before any move was made the Regiment was placed on a skeleton war footing with a strength of fifteen officers and 210 other ranks – one hundred all ranks per Battery in two Batteries, and ten in the headquarters. Apart from twelve officers and 120 other ranks that it lost - all of whom were posted to the Middle East as reinforcements – the balance were used as a basis for the newly established SAAF coast Anti-Aircraft units.

On 12 May 1942, the four 3-inch 20 cwt guns and two Bofors held by the Regiment were vouchered off to 22 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, in the person of T/Captain Norman Munnik. Until the new unit commander had sufficient trained personnel to man these equipments and the twelve Sperry searchlights allocated to Table Bay, an attachment of trained SA Artillery personnel from 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment was made. Captain Munnik nevertheless assumed responsibility for operations and administration of the attached personnel. Regimental headquarters of 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, with 8 and 9 Anti-Aircraft Batteries, both partly trained, thereafter moved to Durban - the port most urgently requiring protection - to man the equipment already there, pending the formation of the SAAF Regiment destined to take over the air defence commitment at that port. It took over two 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns and two 40 mm Bofors. There was no ammunition for either the heavy guns or the Bofors. On arrival in Durban the Regiment came under command of the SA Air Force.

A New Assessment

Assessment of defences at various ports in the Indian Ocean area was upgraded by the War Office in January 1942. It was hoped, however, to provide additional equipment, both coast and Anti-Aircraft, especially for Durban - now at the greatest risk of attack - towards the end of 1942.

Air Defence

Planning for air defence requirements provided for only sixteen 3.7-inch guns at Cape Town and Durban and twelve each at the lesser ports, with a reserve unit with the same number of guns as those for the lesser ports, ie : Port Elizabeth, East London and Walvis Bay. Twelve Bofors and twelve searchlights were to be allocated to each port. Planning had therefore encompassed a total of eighty 3.7s and sixty Bofors. There were, however, four 3-inch 20cwt Anti-Aircraft guns of World War One vintage in the country, both at Cape Town, and two 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft guns at Durban and two 40mm Bofors.

Existing Resources

The situation regarding Anti-Aircraft equipment was still not good and, of the total Anti-Aircraft equipment available in South Africa by 23 April - as allocated and shown in the following table - the new school was given the two 40mm Bofors AA guns that had been on Robben Island.

Cape Town	: four 3-inch Anti-Aircraft guns and 12 Sperry searchlights.
Durban	: two 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns (without ammunition) ¹³ , : two 40 mm guns and 12 Sperry searchlights.
Simon's Town	: six British searchlights and six Sperry searchlights.
East London	: nine British searchlights.
Port Elizabeth	: twelve Sperry searchlights
Reserve unit Cape Town	: two Sperry searchlights.

The War Office re-assessed the number of Anti-Aircraft guns necessary for the defence of South African ports. The Director of Anti-Aircraft and Coast Defence writing from the War Office, London, to the High Commissioner for South Africa on 22 May 1942, stated that the Sub-Committee on Defensive Arrangements in the Indian Ocean area had assessed the defences required at various South African ports as 108 heavy Anti-Aircraft guns and 112 light Anti-Aircraft guns, he requested the Commissioner to ask what equipment in addition to these guns, were required.¹⁴ The information was passed to

¹³ *History of AA Organisation UDF 1939-1944*

¹⁴ SANDF Archives, UWH, Box 78.

Pretoria and on 19 June the CGS gave the total requirements as 204 heavy Anti-Aircraft guns (i.e. an additional 96) and 278 light Anti-Aircraft guns (an additional 166) were necessary.¹⁵

The SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft Regiments

Meanwhile the six new South African Air Force Anti-Aircraft Regiments were still in the process of being formed. Known as Coast Defence Composite units, each consisted of a heavy Battery (3.7-inch guns), a light Battery (40mm Bofors) and a Searchlight Battery. It was intended that the heavy guns would be manned by SA Artillery personnel; the light guns by the SA Air Force, and the searchlights by the WAAF - except for certain artisan duties and general duty posts. The WAAF would also supply instrument personnel, telephonists and clerks; and in the light Batteries provide telephonists and clerks. Cape Corps men were to provide 30 per cent of heavy gun detachments as well as drivers, and fill all possible general duty posts; they were to form a quarter of gun detachments in the light Batteries, and also serve as drivers, batmen and orderlies '...in what must have been the most extraordinary "mix" in any unit of the Union Defence Forces.'¹⁶

A Heavy Regiment

From June 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was classed as a heavy Regiment and became an Army HQ unit. Orders were given in May for the urgent formation of 26 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF; 26 Anti-Aircraft Regiment SAAF, was not on the priority list for formation and the Anti-Aircraft guns at Durban continued to be manned by 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, although on paper 7, 8 and 9 Batteries had been allocated to 7th, 8th and 9th Armoured Brigades. Once the SA Air Force unit had been formed at Durban, 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment would be available for movement to Saldanha Bay.

By the end of May when the Japanese were about to open a June offensive in the Indian Ocean and could possibly disrupt convoys to India and the Middle East, the supply of Anti-Aircraft guns had improved considerably. But the number of properly trained personnel was poor – 173 of the 424 details required from the SA Air Force and only 172 WAAF. When Major General Loch, CB, MC, the War Office Adviser on Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, visited South Africa in June and carried out an inspection of all coast and Anti-Aircraft defences, equipment had been distributed as shown below:

Station	3.7-inch Mobile	3.7-inch Static	3-inch Mobile	40mm Bofors	90cm HCD British	120cm Sperry American
Cape Town	-	6	-	14	-	12
Durban	2	6	-	12	-	12
Simon's Town	-	-	4	6	-	12
Port Elizabeth	-	4	-	6	-	12
East London	-	-	-	6	9	3
Saldanha Bay	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reserve (with DAAT & DCAC)	-	-	-	14	10*	8
On loan CASL	-	-	-	-	5	-
Total	2	16	4	56	24*	59

There were no GL Sets and no SLC Sets and the three 90cm HCD British searchlights were without power plants.

Manufacture and delivery of equipment was at the mercy of the activities of the Luftwaffe and of the rate of loss of shipping due to submarine activity and it was noted that delivery of Predictors, height finders and ID telescopes for 3.7-inch Batteries was based on one set for four guns. The War Office was informed on 25 June that South Africa was forced to deploy both two and four-gun sections and therefore submitted a request for one set per two guns. But the CGS, was advised on 3 July that

¹⁵ Ibid..

¹⁶ *South Africa at War*, p. 186.

production for the next six months only allowed one set per four guns. This was accepted but he nevertheless asked for an additional six each of the height finders and ID telescopes.

Six days later the CGS cabled Oppositely (the High Commissioner – through whom all these cable were routed) and gave amended Anti-Aircraft requirements, ie : a total of 188 3.7-inch guns with 316 spare barrels and 94 each of the range finders, Predictors No. 1, range and height finders and ID telescopes. In addition he asked for 404 40 mm equipments and 2020 spare barrels, plus 236 Kerrison predictors, No. 3, and six Stiff-key stick-laying equipments. This was acknowledged but the War Office nevertheless reduced the number of spare barrels they could supply.

More equipment arrived and made it possible for redistribution as is shown below:

	<u>3.7-inch</u>	<u>40mm</u>	<u>AA SLs</u>
Table Bay	12	12	12
Simon's Bay	4	6	12
Port Elizabeth	4	6	12
East London	4	6	12
<u>Durban</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>
<u>Total</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>60</u>

Improvement in delivery of guns

Durban by then had two mobile and six static 3.7-inch guns and a Battery of 40 mm Bofors, Cape Town had six static heavy guns and fourteen light guns while Simon's Town had received the four 3-inch 20 cwt guns, and in addition, six Bofors. There were six static 3.7-inch and six 40 mm Bofors guns at Port Elizabeth and East London had six Bofors. Fourteen Bofors were held in Reserve. Although the position regarding Anti-Aircraft guns had improved, the number of properly trained personnel was poor – 173 of the 424 details required from the SA Air Force and only 172 WAAF; so it was not clear how the guns would be effectively manned, especially as considerable practical experience in Anti-Aircraft gunnery was a necessity.

Strange aircraft over Durban

Ships were sunk about 600 km east-north-east of Durban by raider-cum-supply ships accompanying the Japanese 8th Submarine Squadron; the submarines having moved into the Mozambique Channel. At Durban, where any threat from the Japanese would be the greatest, '...the Air Force – rather forgetful of the fact that they themselves had taken over responsibility for Anti-Aircraft defence – were upset when at 5.15 a.m. on 30 May 1942, according to Durban Fortress Air Defences, a mysterious and unidentified aircraft was reported over the brightly-lit city by the Fire Commander (a gunner officer) on The Bluff, 'without a single searchlight or Anti-Aircraft gun going into action.'¹⁷ There were only two the 3.7-inch guns (and without ammunition they could in any event not engage) and (by then) twelve Bofors, at Durban and without a searchlight identifying a target they could not in any event have gone into action.

Again on 5 June sound locators of 26 Anti-Aircraft Regiment picked up an aircraft over Durban. Searchlights failed to reveal anything and 'in a display of nonchalance'¹⁸ it apparently took the Anti-Aircraft gunners 25 minutes to report the unidentified aircraft to Fortress Air Defence. The mysterious aircraft disappeared out to sea a half hour later but it was fifteen minutes before it vanished that the SA Police also reported the aircraft.¹⁹

The very next day, voicing concern over Japanese aggression, Vice Admiral Tate, Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, pointed out that certain ports were vital to the war effort. He named these as Cape Town, Simon's Town and Durban. Durban, he considered especially vulnerable and important because

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 179.

¹⁹ Ibid.

of its graving dock and he suggested that balloons be provided for protection against air attack. He asked, if the United Kingdom authorities agreed to his recommendations, whether the Union Defence Forces could man and operate a balloon system.²⁰ With the ever-present and possibly increasing danger in the Indian Ocean area, a blackout was enforced on 9 June and made permanent on 16 June, on the insistence of the Navy. Further alarms were caused by the suspected presence of enemy aircraft on 18 June, and again on 22 June, at a time when news of the German onslaught on Tobruk, was awaited.

It was not only Durban that was overflowed by what was thought to be a Japanese aircraft. An unidentified aircraft was reported over Port Elizabeth on the night of 9 December. Radar did not pick it up. And in Cape Town an ASWAAS girl based on Robben Island reported an unidentified aircraft just before midnight on 23 November 1942. It caused the only general air raid alarm to be sounded in Cape Town during the war; but 'Joan' (surname unknown), who had reported the aircraft, was disbelieved, although a sound locator at Camps Bay, the coast Battery at the docks, and Lion Battery on Signal Hill also reported it. The ASWAAS girls were told *never* again to make such a report without first waking the duty officer for corroboration.²¹ One can imagine waking him after the first bombs had been dropped!

Gun Sites and Accommodation

A general plan for the selection and acquisition of sites, and construction of accommodation and emplacements, had already been formulated with Lieutenant Colonel Makepeace, Director AW. In brief this plan envisaged the selection of the sites for the heavy Anti-Aircraft, light Anti-Aircraft and searchlights by the DAAT, in company with a member of the staff of DCAD, while a representative of the Secretary for Defence attended to the legal aspect of the acquisition of the sites, once selected, a representative of DCCW reported on the engineering aspect, a representative of DAW prepared details of accommodation, etc., to be provided, and a representative of Director of Signals considered the question of communication.

The allocation in the immediate programme was:

	3.7inch guns	40mm guns	AASL
Table Bay	12	12	12
Simon's Bay	4	6	12
Port Elizabeth	4	6	12
East London	4	6	12
Durban	12	12	12 ²²

Anti-Aircraft searchlights were to be employed mainly as aircraft fighting lights and layouts were to be determined accordingly. At the same time these lights would be required to function in conjunction with the guns and were to be included in the Anti-Aircraft defence plan. As the whole allotment of Anti-Aircraft searchlights was already in the Union, arrangements had been made for them to be available to the appropriate units and the allocation of personnel and accommodation was requested under the immediate programme. For the local protection of searchlight detachments, within or adjacent to vital localities, it was proposed that arrangements would have to be made by DAW and DF and CW for the construction of emplacements.

Heavy Anti-Aircraft guns were to be allotted on the basis of the minimum possible number of two-gun sections to four-gun sections to give all-round protection of a two-gun concentration over vital localities. By the expansion of two-gun sections to four-gun sections, and the siting of certain intermediate sections, this skeleton form of protection would be built up to the requisite gun

²⁰ SANDF Archives, UWH, Box 78.

²¹ *Island at War*, p. 160.

²² SANDF Archives, CGS Gp2, Box 691, file G1208/12.

concentration on the full allotment. The immediate programme contemplated all static sites, as the initial order for the provision of guns had already been determined as being static equipment.

Demands on DAW for the immediate construction of accommodation and emplacements were already in hand, based on sites being static. In order to speed up work and conserve material, which was beginning to be in short supply, a modified form of static gun emplacement had been discussed and agreed with Director Fortifications and Coastal Works.

It was recommended the light Anti-Aircraft guns should be allotted on a skeleton basis. As no WAAF personnel were included in the establishment table for light guns, these sites were to be the last to be considered for accommodation, except for the provision of essential hygiene and cooking facilities. Whenever possible, light AA personnel were to be accommodated in tents and requests for permanent hutments made later. Emplacements were to be constructed under unit arrangements and sandbags would be required.

The necessity for hutted accommodation became clear when it was realised that the heavy guns released by the War Office were static equipment, which implied static emplacements. Light guns and searchlights remained as mobile equipment. Two-gun sections were first organised but as more guns arrived they were converted to four-gun sections.

Madagascar

There were important problems concerning the country in the early months of 1942. German raiders were still operating off the coast and so were submarines. Mines were laid at the entrance to the swept channel into Table Bay and in April on the Agulhas Bank. The threat of Japanese aggression, the poor recruitment of manpower for the personnel-starved Union Defence Forces, particularly the Artillery and Infantry and with the exception of the Air Force, was a deep and abiding concern to General Smuts, the CGS and his staff. So too, was the lack of any significant fighting force in South Africa.

The Japanese naval raid into the Indian Ocean in April 1942 and the possibility of Japanese occupation of Madagascar, still loyal to Vichy France, was a haunting fear to both Winston Churchill and General Smuts. They had reasoned that if the Japanese arrived there the Vichy French would probably offer no more resistance than they did in Indo-China. A Japanese air or naval base, with submarines or warships on Madagascar would threaten or even paralyse the Allied supply line to the Middle East. The British Prime Minister especially was alarmed about the threat to the convoy routes to the Middle East and India while General Smuts looked upon Madagascar as the key to the safety of South Africa and the Indian Ocean.²³

Operation Ironclad was launched and Force 12 (No. 5 Commando, 29th Brigade and 17th Brigade) arrived off the island on the morning of 5 May 1942. The first troops landed at 4.30 am and it was not long before Diego Suarez was in their hands. There was one 'hiccup' An unknown aircraft flew over the harbour on 29 May and the following evening HMS *Ramillies* and a tanker nearby were hit by torpedoes, damaging the battleship (which was able to reach Durban for repairs, escorted but under her own steam) and sinking the tanker. A midget submarine launched from a Japanese submarine was responsible. The midget stranded, the crew were discovered and were shot by a British patrol.

A further operation took place when South African troops of 7th SA Infantry Brigade landed on the island and in co-operation with the British troops secured the whole island to prevent any other port being used by an enemy.

Coastal Command

The South African military command structure was spread over the entire country, and in May, with the defence of South Africa foremost in his mind, although the Japanese threat to South Africa had

²³ *The Hinge of Fate*, pp. 189,190.

declined since the Battle of the Coral Sea in early May - when both Japanese and American fleets had each lost two carriers. The Battle of Midway in the first four days of June – although not realised at the time – was one of the decisive sea battles of history. The American Pacific fleet delivered a huge blow to the Japanese Navy; in five violent minutes half of Japan's carrier force was eliminated. Though not immediately realised, the immediate pressure on South Africa was relieved.

General Smuts nevertheless decided that it was prudent to establish a headquarters directly responsible for the coast and its defences. On 1 July 1942, South Africa was divided into an Inland Area Command and a Coastal Area Command. Major General I.P. de Villiers was recalled from his command of 2nd SA Infantry Division in the Middle East to assume command of the latter. Headquarters, Coastal Area Command was established at Cape Town and all areas within 50 miles (80 km) of the entire coastline became his area of responsibility. The signals network was reorganised to provide communications between the SAAF Headquarters Control Station at Waterkloof and Commander, Coastal Air Defences at Cape Town as well as direct lines to the Commanders, Fortress Air Defence at Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban. East London was added to the Fortress headquarters circuit. On 13 July, local air defences at each port were placed under a Commander, Fortress Air Defences.

In an extract from 'Report by Combined Services Committee on Natal Coastline as regards Landings', dated 1 August 1942, the committee noted that '...much equipment on demand from the UK has not been delivered...' It pointed out that AA defence of the (coast) Battery positions is essential. Owing to the smallness of the target, it said, the chief danger to gun sites is from dive bombing and low level attacks and, therefore 'Light A.A. defence is the first requirement.'²⁴ It noted that four Oerlikon guns on loan from the Royal Navy had been set up in the gun area on the initiative of the Fire Commander. The committee recommended that this 'unofficial arrangement be regularised'. It also pointed out that there were then only four pairs of twin-Lewis guns to protect six Batteries. Members considered that these should be increased to twelve, i.e. two pairs per Battery; and that when heavy AA guns become available they should be sited primarily for the protection of targets more vulnerable to high level bombing; i.e. oil tanks, docks, etc. The committee pointed out that guns and approach roads should be camouflaged immediately as they were extremely conspicuous from the air. Other matters on which it reported included: radar coverage and an improvement in beach protection. It considered the latter to be a serious gap.

As a result of the report, camouflage was greatly improved and dummy gun positions were constructed. The dummy positions had not been completed when a reply was given the authors of the report. It noted that the four Oerlikon guns "are now permanently acquired. No further issue of Twin Lewis has yet been granted. It added that it was understood there were '...tentative plans for siting several LAA guns on the Bluff...' and that these will be used essentially in the protection of the oil sites and other vital areas. Four 3.7-inch guns had already been sited on the Bluff and these, it was said, will provide protection against high and low level attack. They would only be used to defend the Batteries in the unlikely event of direct attack on the guns. Had they known about this policy the gunners would have received some comfort from the report.'²⁵

Improved Arrival of Anti-Aircraft Equipment

By August 1942 Anti-Aircraft equipment had begun to arrive in South Africa with some regularity. In his Progress Report on the Anti-Aircraft Defences in Coastal Areas, which covered the situation as at 9 August, DCS reported that of the thirty-two 3.7-inch guns authorised, Table Bay had six sections of heavy guns. There were two sections each of four 3.7-inch Mk II guns for which the instruments were being installed – these would be in action in seven days, he noted, and two sections each of two 3.7-inch Mk II guns that were in action in temporary positions. In addition two sections each of two 3-inch 20cwt Anti-Aircraft guns were also in action at temporary positions and awaiting movement to Simon's Bay. The full authorised number of thirty-two 40 mm Bofors had been received. Nine were in action and three employed for training. Work was in progress on communications, gun operations

²⁴ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp 1, Box 52, file CCA/61.

²⁵ Ibid.

rooms and the construction of emplacements, magazines and administrative buildings. The Report covered similar data for all other ports.

A final programme of equipment for the ports based on the estimated arrival by mid-August 1942 of additional AA guns and associated equipment is reflected below:

PORT	3.7-inch guns	40mm Bofors	AASLs
Table Bay	32	20	12
Simon's Bay	12	12	12
Port Elizabeth	12	12	12
East London	8	12	12
Durban	32	20	12
Saldanha	8	4	12
Total	104	80	60

Coast Defence and U-Boats

While Directors Coast Artillery and that of Anti-Aircraft were concerned about the delivery of equipment (the first 9.2-inch gun had become operational in February 1941, and the delivery of heavy Anti-Aircraft guns had begun) *Gruppe Esibär* (Wolfpack Polar Bear) had been sent by *Bevelshaber der Unterseeboote* in August to operate in Cape waters. In October four of the new improved U-boats with an increased range, and a U-tanker were in Cape waters. By mid-October fourteen ships had been sunk, many within sight of Table Mountain, some at least, carrying war material and stores for South Africa. Altogether 28 U-boats operated in South African waters during the war years 1942 -1944. German raiders – armed merchant ships were also active round the coasts in 1941 – 1943.

New Designations

From 4 September the designations of the six SA Air Force coast Anti-Aircraft Regiments were changed and they were instead numbered from 50 to 56, to avoid confusion with similarly numbered existing Squadrons of the Air Force. With the improved arrival of guns, Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey, now Director Anti-Aircraft, was able to produce a memorandum on 7 September 1942, showing an even rosier picture of the Air Defence organisation. It was sent to the War Office at their request and gave details of the the final Anti-Aircraft organisation earmarked for harbour protection. . It indicated that both Table Bay and Durban each had 32 Bofors instead of only 20. There was, however, a reserve of twelve 3.7-inch guns, twelve Bofors and twelve searchlights, making a total in the country of 116 3.7-inch guns, 116 Bofors and 72 searchlights.

A day earlier than the memorandum, financial authority was given for the construction of thirty-two 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft emplacements, but this was subsequently cancelled and 'allowed for on a larger A.A. vote.'

On 9 September 1942 he signed a letter on behalf of the Deputy Chief of Staff, detailing the organisation. It confirmed the allocation of guns as:

PORT	<u>3.7-inch guns</u>	<u>40mm Bofors</u>	<u>AASLs</u>
Table Bay	32	32	12
Simon's Bay	12	12	12
Port Elizabeth	12	12	12
East London	8	12	12
Durban	32	32	12
Saldanha	8	4	-
Total	116	116	72²⁶

Although the Saldanha unit was included it was never formed. Figures released on 10 September showed that the total strength of the six Regiments was 1 749 SAAF and WAAF – an average of 291

²⁶ *History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944*, p.42.

men and women in each unit – less than one fifth of the establishment of the first Anti-Aircraft unit to leave Cape Town in May 1940.

Searchlights

The WAAF and the WAAS were established on 1 May 1940 and the first WAAF unit left for East Africa in December 1940. By September 1942, 7 000 women had attested in the WAAF.²⁷ They were employed as artisans, meteorological personnel, photographers, draughtsmen, armament instructors, link trainer instructors, in clerical posts and as cipher clerks and decoders. *The Star* of 23 April 1942 contained an article headed-lined:

UNION'S GIRL SOLDIERS: NEW UNITS IN TRAINING: ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENCES and it began:

Girls of the South African Women's Auxiliary Air Force are to go into the Union's frontline defences in Anti-Aircraft and searchlight units. The first batch to volunteer are now undergoing training at a coastal city' They were found by 'an official correspondent' to be hard at work mastering the art of searchlight detection and the intricacies of instruments that supply vital information to Anti-Aircraft gunners....

The long article recorded that they were being trained as soldiers and would live on the job: *next to the searchlights and instruments they will operate if the enemy attempts an invasion of these shores.* It went on to describe '*... a woman Ack-ack gunner instructor in the W.A.A.F. from a Cape Town ack-ack Battery...*'²⁸

By July the Air Force was clamouring for women to 'join up' to operate their searchlights and to use the sound locators and other instruments at the SA Air Force coast Anti-Aircraft Batteries. The Johannesburg newspaper - *The Star* of 7 July 1942 - carried an article in its pages headed:

WOMEN NEEDED FOR AIR DEFENCES. It announced that:

*A big recruiting drive had been launched to strengthen AA units of the SAAF and SAA, and that more women were urgently needed to operate searchlights and delicate instruments with the AA guns. The article stated that 'batches of girls have already been trained for searchlight crews and to manipulate predictors and height-finders.'*²⁹

The article went on to remark that knowledge of mathematics was not essential but that 'the S.A.A.F wanted recruits of reasonable intelligence who have nimble fingers'.³⁰

Other articles in similar vein appeared in *The Star* on 8 July 1943, and on 12 June 1944. Other newspapers followed suit, the Rand Daily Mail of 12 June calling for woman volunteers for the ASWAAS (Coast Artillery), the Special Signals Service and the Women's Army Military Police Corps.

Searchlight School

Because of accommodation problems at the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence and with suitable space available at Port Elizabeth, it was decided that a large number of WAAF personnel could be trained on searchlight duties at that port. It was determined that the instructors would be trained SAAF NCOs and furthermore, four of the five officers eventually posted there were from the Air Force.

Searchlights depended for their source of illumination upon an electric current arcing across a small gap between carbon electrodes in the lamp. Direct current was used. As the lamp burnt a crater was formed at the end of the positive carbon rod where the arc struck. The crater was filled with incandescent gases which burnt with an intense white flame and this light source was pointed at a parabolic mirror which reflected the light rays outward. The rods were automatically fed slowly forward as they burned away in order to maintain the gap. They could theoretically, burn for about three hours before needing replacement. Thorough training was therefore required.

²⁷ SANDF Archives, Narep Unfo. 16.

²⁸ *The Star*, 23.4.1942.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.7.1942.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

On 2 June DCAD recommended that searchlight training – except for special courses at the School should be undertaken entirely by the SA Air Force and that a Searchlight School should be permanently located at Port Elizabeth. Major H. McKenzie, originally with 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade and in command of the Brigade's searchlights, and now at Durban with 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, was transferred to the SAAF and placed temporarily in command of the Searchlight Training School which consisted of trained SAA officers and NCOs. The need for the School fell away in August 1942 when accommodation for WAAF ladies became available at other centres to which they could be posted directly to units for training under unit arrangements.

Another matter which concerned the DCS – quite apart from the fact that gun emplacements were not yet ready was the lack of accommodation. This situation was reported to QMG but DAA reported that even when these problems were remedied WAAF personnel could not operate searchlights unless armed guards were provided, or the women themselves given small arms training. As four hundred women were then available for duty in Anti-Aircraft units on searchlights or instruments and that a further 1 050 were being sought by DCS, an urgent decision was requested on arming them.



Figure 33: Women undergoing searchlight training at Bamboesvlei, Wynberg

On 16 November it was decided that members of the WAAF and WAAS on outlying duty may be armed with pistols. The weapons were to be a unit and *not* a personal issue and not to be carried beyond the boundaries of the post.³¹ The total number of searchlight posts which WAAF personnel were required to operate was sixty – twelve each at Table Bay, Simon's Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban. Normal arms for these posts were three rifles and one LMG. It was suggested that in addition to the three revolvers provided for the WAAF, in lieu of rifles they should also be allocated an LMG.

³¹ The History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944, p. 38.

Manpower Conference

On 9 November 1942, at the man-power conference in the office of the CGS, a number of matters were decided (Anti-Aircraft considerations formed a large portion of the conference) and those of immediate relevance to Coastal Area Command were:

- Anti-Aircraft establishments were to be cut down to the lowest possible limits, although layout and general organisation was to continue on the full authorised programme.
- Recruiting was to be restricted to equipment on hand, plus 20 percent reserves to meet short notice expansion.
- Part-time WAAF and WAAS were to be recruited for coast Anti-Aircraft and Coast Artillery respectively. Coast Defence Corps personnel were to be used on coast Anti-Aircraft in order to release A1 medical category men. 'A' category men were to be withdrawn in due course and posted to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. The A.G. was instructed that SAAF coast Anti-Aircraft was placed on first priority for 'B' Category men.
- SAAF 'A' category personnel were to be withdrawn from coastal Anti-Aircraft in due course and posted to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The AG was to ensure that SAAF coast Anti-Aircraft were placed on first priority to receive 'B' category personnel.
- Black personnel of 21 Field Regiment were to be transferred to coastal Anti-Aircraft and employed in the Durban Fortress.³²

The ground defences were slowly and continually improving. By 7 December, 51 Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Cape Town had twelve 3.7-inch guns and seventeen Bofors. And, significantly, because of the shortage of recruits, 127 black former field gunners from Piet Retief reported for duty with the Regiment as gunners. Others went to 52 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in Simon's Town. But all coast anti-aircraft units continued to remain understrength. As of 2 January 1943, the authorised establishment of the five SAAF coast Anti-Aircraft Regiments was 252 officers, 28 WAAF officers, 3048 white other ranks, 1 959 WAAF other ranks and 2 635 men of the NMC. They were under-strength by 119 officers, 24 WAAF officers, 1129 other ranks, 1 552 WAAF ladies and 1414 NMC. It was reported that the NMC gunners at Simon's Town were not happy there as they did not like the weather, it was cold they grumbled.

The reduction in the coastal Anti-Aircraft establishment allowed GOC, Coastal Area, on 11 February 1943 to withdraw 50 officers and 500 white other ranks from the Coast Artillery Batteries and post them to 6th SA Armoured Division. They were replaced with men of the Cape Corps. DCS had by then asked AG to post 250 Cape Corps personnel to the Coast Artillery Training Centre for training on the coast guns.

Radar

In Britain, by 1936, a radio detection system was proved and in 1937 the process of reporting data to the Royal Air Force had been perfected. RDF towers for this purpose were placed on the southern coast of England and fighter Squadrons could be alerted of impending attacks.

Early in 1939 when it was clear that war with Germany was imminent the British Government decided that it should share radio detection secrets with the Dominions. Shortly after obtaining data on the new detection system (later known as Radar) Dr. Schonland of the Bernard Price Institute (BPI) began work on a South African radar set. It was a top secret operation and, with components commonly used by radio amateurs and repairmen, and with the aid of a Radio Amateurs Handbook, construction of the first set began in October 1939. Two months later the team had an experimental RDF apparatus. It was named JB - after Johannesburg; but after modification, another set - JB1 was tested at Avoca, Durban. It detected shipping extremely well. From then on development forged ahead. A top secret unit known as the Special Signals Service (SSS) was created within the Corps of Signals. It operated at first in East Africa before embarking on large scale development in South Africa. From 100 miles north

³² SANDF Archives, DCS CGS, Box 119, file O (M) 71/13/1

of Mombasa, it provided Mombasa and 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade with early warning of Italian air attacks on the port.³³ No attacks were, however, ever made.

The main operational thrust of the SSS in South Africa throughout the war was the direct surveillance of coastal waters in support of coastal defence and shipping. Radar coverage of the Cape Peninsula by 10 February 1942 was provided by two JB sets – one on Signal Hill and one at Cape Point. Durban had two sets – one at Avoca, close to the FOP and one at Island View FOP. But additional installations were being installed or were ‘contemplated’. By the end of the year another twenty-five would be commissioned at various points on the coast.

To increase the efficiency of wide-ranging coastal reconnaissance far out to sea, radar was fitted to aircraft of SA Air Force coast reconnaissance Squadrons. Radar to direct the fire of the coast guns was not developed in South Africa; the sets came from overseas and some were received and installed only after the end of the war. But there were other pieces of apparatus with which the SSS were involved in a small way. By 1944 radar was available for Anti-Aircraft guns.

Gun-laying equipment (GL Mk II) was attached to the 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft Battery on Green Point Common, Cape Town. Housed in two caravans and operated by six men under Captain Browne of the SSS headquarters in Hope Street who was the GL expert. The dishes rotated electrically, in synchrony, not by hand as had the first radar antennae situated on Signal Hill in May 1941, and it located the target, to the astonishment of the gunners. The equipment transferred the range and bearing directly to the guns. But it only went on the air when there was an alert. Soon afterwards SLC (searchlight control) sets arrived and their accuracy, as one SSS operator testified, ‘...was absolutely uncanny.’³⁴ ‘The antennae were mounted on the searchlights themselves, and the second we had the target centred on our screens, the signal to switch on was given. On would come the lights and without fail the aircraft would appear in the beam. And, as Paul Goldschmidt later wrote ‘I can still hear Sergeant Major Louw of the SA Artillery, the first time he saw this happening, shouting out – *Man, daar’s hy poep in die bleddy middel!*’³⁵

Radar operated proximity fuzes (VT fuze) - consisting of an extraordinarily compact assembly of miniaturised radar components, with its antenna, were fitted inside the fuze body of a 3.7-inch AA shell - were first issued in June 1944. VT fuzes were later made available for Field Artillery use.

South Africa in 1944 was becoming more and more remote from the war. It was then being fought in Northern Italy; Allied forces had landed on the coast of Normandy and were moving towards the Rhine, and the Americans in the Pacific were edging ever closer, island by island, to the Japanese homeland. In Italy they had lost 15 716 men in killed, wounded or sick since early September; their operations in the Pacific were just as costly.

Coastal Area Defences Close Down

Coastal Area Command was disestablished with effect from 1 November 1944.

Numbers of officers and men had been drawn from the coast Batteries and posted to units of the 6th SA Armoured Division where the cry was for more men on the ground. They were replaced by the ever enthusiastic men of the Cape Corps. Personnel of coast Anti-Aircraft units had already been reduced to the lowest possible limits; there was no further danger to the coastal ports and all the coast Batteries were closed down and placed in Care and Maintenance from 1 January 1944. Similarly, men in the four port defence Anti-Aircraft units were withdrawn and – except for maintenance personnel – were transferred to operational units. The changed war picture no longer made it necessary to keep them in operation and they were disbanded from 1 January 1944.

³³ *South African Radar in World War II*, p.143.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Numbers 51, 53, 54 and 55 Anti-Aircraft Regiments, SAAF, established specifically for the defence of Simon's Town, Table Bay, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban were all authorised for disestablishment on 1 January 1944. So too were 3 Heavy and 18 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments. The changed war situation no longer made it necessary for the special coastal defences to operate. But on 8 January after the SA Air Force had taken control of all Anti-Aircraft units, Director General of the Air Force instructed they would as a temporary measure continue to function as before. Defence Headquarters continued to be responsible for technical development and the siting of defence works and Fortress Commanders retained operational control of all Anti-Aircraft Artillery in his area. This situation continued until 2 March. On that day DGAF authorised their disbandment effective from 1 January 1944.³⁶

By 12 February 1944 the full-time units in the Anti-Aircraft organisation were totally disbanded but part-time training continued. At Simon's Town a number of very competent men were employed by the Royal Navy in the dockyard itself, and the Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic was asked to make them available to man the coast Batteries in an emergency. By 25 March the Coast Defence Corps units which had been doing specialised training on Anti-Aircraft and coast guns had reverted to their former role as motorised Infantry, or had transferred to the part-time coast garrison Artillery Batteries. The SA Naval Forces detachments in the Cape Fortress reverted to normal naval training and the university Anti-Aircraft Troop was disestablished. Only nominal periods of training were undertaken.

On 30 November 1944 the headquarters of Coastal Area Command was disestablished and closed down. Fortress Commanders were finding it increasingly difficult to retain the interests of men in Coast Defence Corps units and employers justifiably felt that their staffs could be better engaged than what they perceived as aimless military parades and exercises. Field Marshall Smuts himself had implied as long ago as May 1943 that the primary value of any of the part-time organisations and units was to maintain morale and discipline in South Africa itself. The part-time units had served their purpose.

The war had not yet ended in the Far East but the Defence Force began to dismantle the extensive network of Anti-Aircraft sites that had been built up in the ports, in addition to radar stations and other facilities. In Cape Town and immediate surroundings alone, thirty-one Anti-Aircraft sites were ordered, on 28 August 1945, to be cleared and all buildings removed. There were still guns at site No, C.H.31 (Leary's Farm) and site C.H.46 (Heatherton) and they were instructed to be removed. Fourteen 'Ack-Ack sites' (as described in a letter from Cape Command to the QMG) were still occupied at end August 1945. Most were at Table Bay harbour of but two were at Simon's Town. A motor transport section occupied space at the Yacht Club and one by Cape Corps members of 2 Heavy Battery. The rest were being used as storage by SA Naval Forces.

1945

In an extract from a War Cabinet Defence of Bases Committee paper which covered a : 'Review of Fixed Coast Defences at Defended Ports at Home and Abroad - and of Anti-Aircraft Defences at Ports Abroad' showed the position world-wide as at 1 February, 1945. it included South African ports as under:

	HAA Guns	LAA Guns
Durban	20	24
Cape Town	14	32
Simon's Town	8	8
Port Elizabeth	4	12
East London	4	12
Saldanha Bay	8	10

A note to this table indicated that all the above were on a care and maintenance basis. The whole machinery of war in South Africa was clearly running down.

³⁶ SANDF Archives, Field Artillery Gp. 1, Box ...file FAOA , vol. 26.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

NEW UNITS

Much had happened since the two Anti-Aircraft Brigades left Durban in May and August 1940, respectively.

The Armoured Divisions

Discussions on the conversion of the two Divisions in the desert into Armour Divisions took place in the first few months of 1942, while one Division was in the Gazala Line and the other in Tobruk - long before the battle of Alamein. After he had visited the Middle East in July 1942, the CGS had clung to the idea of having two Armour Divisions. He had drafted an ORBAT for the 1st and 2nd South African Armoured Divisions, each of which quite obviously included Anti-Aircraft units. Major General Pienaar and Brigadier W.H.E. Poole were nominated as Commanders of the two Armour Divisions. (An Infantry Division required 24 108 officers and men against an Armour Division strength of 14 195). The Union Defence Force had decided on forming three Armour Divisions, one to be maintained in the Union as a feeder for the other two. But the loss of the 5th SA Infantry Brigade at Sidi Rezegh had dented this plan and the loss of the 2nd Division at Tobruk was a further severe blow.

The CGS nevertheless clung to the idea of operations with two Armour Divisions. When 1st SA Infantry Division pulled out of the Line after Alamein the CGS still considered it possible to convert the Infantry Divisions to Armour Divisions and planned to send them back to the Western Desert for further operations in North Africa. The plan included incorporation of a motorised Brigade supplied by the British Army, Middle East, in each Division; but as a result of Eighth Army's successes it was appreciated that by the time the two Divisions were ready for action, the German forces would have been cleared out of Africa. The British and American planners were already looking at Italy. South Africa had lost the equivalent of a whole Division in the Middle East and training staff in the Union amounted to more than those on strength at the time there were two Infantry Divisions in the field. Relying purely on volunteers, South Africa's Army, Navy and Air Force had suffered 23 625 casualties since January 1941; 2 104 men had been killed in battle, 3 928 wounded and 14 247 had fallen into enemy hands.¹

The Middle East crisis and the possibility of a Japanese attack on South Africa overlapped. 1942 was thus a year of crisis for the Allies and the Union Defence Forces. In South Africa there was a particular flurry of activity during the year with the likelihood of danger to its ports. Strenuous efforts were made that year to improve the defence structures in the Union and a number of units and formations – both full-time and part-time – sprang to life to constitute Brigades and Divisions on paper. Defence Headquarters called for special vigilance regarding internal security and against possible attack from the sea.

The Anti-Aircraft Gunners Arrive Home

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, which had a tally of 323 enemy aircraft destroyed, probably destroyed or damaged, embarked on HMT *Highland Monarch* at Suez on 11 December 1942 and arrived at Durban on 31 December. There was an official welcome home at Albert Park, before moving off to Hay Paddock Camp, Pietermaritzburg. Officers and man were granted leave from 4 January.

Officers and men of the Regiment found many changes since they had left as 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade. The threat from the Japanese had been at its greatest in the latter half of 1942 and, in

¹ *War in the Desert*, p. 476.

addition, the desire of the CGS to raise two Armour Divisions was a driving force behind the increase in the number of Anti-Aircraft Regiments. Some were formed as full-time units and others on a part-time basis; some as part of defences prepared to counter possible Japanese aggression. They found a well organised Anti-Aircraft school and a depot – quite apart from the coast Anti-Aircraft Artillery organisation – under a Director, Anti-Aircraft Training.

Rationing

There was rationing – not as severe as in Britain - but it was something that South Africans were certainly not originally used to. Petrol was rationed and coupons were issued to allow a vehicle 400 miles of travel a month. No petrol was available at week-ends. Meat was rationed, so was butter, and white bread was replaced with brown, although those who illegally sifted their brown flour could make their own white bread. There was a shortage of tea, hats and paper, among other items. Postage stamps had shrunk to half their size.² There was a shortage of glass and in 1943 one hotel in Durban was forced to serve beer (when available) in champagne glasses. Other bars were serving it in jam tins, or inviting customers to drink it from the bottle.³

Huge amounts of foodstuffs were supplied to the large convoys that passed through Cape Town and Durban. Convoys of up to fifty ships at a time each with war supplies and with thousands of troops on board, anchored in Table Bay (ninety-nine ships assembled in Table Bay on one occasion but the largest had 34 ships in dock and 69 in the roadstead)⁴ and to a lesser extent at Durban where the largest convoy was 21 ships on 16 March 1941, to replenish fuel and stores.⁵

And South Africa was manufacturing bombs, shells and other munitions of war. The country was making 3.7-inch howitzers – most being exported to India – as well as 2-pdr Anti-Tank guns, and had even had a serious look at making 25-pdr field guns. Armoured cars and 3-ton trucks were rolling off assembly lines.

Worst of all, there was a shortage of beer and whisky.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

After 'ex North' leave, officers and men of the Regiment re-assembled at Hay Paddock camp, Pietermaritzburg about 9 February. Some officers and senior NCOs were transferred to 'stiffen' units then being formed and the remainder departed from the camp in mid-March under command of Major N. Garlick (who remained in command until end September 1943) and moved to Ottery Camp, Cape Town. Strength at this stage was twenty officers and 276 other ranks. A detachment of seven officers and 90 men were left behind at Durban to assist 55 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, to man the equipment there. The Regiment arrived at the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre on 17 March. Lieutenant Colonel Meister handed over to Major Neil Garlick and the latter continued to command the Regiment until its return to the Middle East. Re-organisation and training commenced with a view to an early return to North Africa and the desert. It had been made plain by General Smuts that South African troops would take part in the liberation of Italy and all ranks were approached to consider signing the General Service oath. By the beginning of May effective strength had been reduced, a total of four officers and 77 men from 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries had declined to sign the oath. Everyone in 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery signed the new oath.

University Training Corps

When 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade had been mobilised in 1941 and, following the decision made at that time to exclude Active Citizen Force members who were university students from any future mobilisation, it was possibly decided at that stage to establish a University Training Corps (V). The establishment of various part-time units at the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University,

² *A Country at War*, p. 203.

³ *Sunday Times*, 14.2.1943.

⁴ *We Fought the Miles*, p. 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Rhodes University and the University of the Witwatersrand, followed. The University of Cape Town Training Corps (V), established on 12 November 1940, was the only one with an Anti-Aircraft component. It also had a field Engineer Troop, an Infantry Company and later, a survey section. The mathematics professor - Professor Young – commanded the training corps at the university.

There was at first never more than an Anti-Aircraft Troop at the university which, when established on 15 April 1942, was titled: Troop Headquarters Light A.A. (V) S.A.G.A.⁶ 'A' Troop and 'B' Troop were formed as instructed by the Adjutant General, from 15 April 1942. Personnel, he stated, will be drawn from the existing members of the Training Corps at the university and and no capitation grant or clerical allowance would be payable.

In an instruction from the AG on 1 July 1942 granted authority for the replacement of the Troop at the university by 10 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, South African Artillery (CTUTC), with an establishment date of 1 May 1942. 10 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery with a Troop Headquarters and 'A' and 'B' Troops Light Anti-Aircraft (V), S.A.G.A.⁷ There is a difference of opinion on the title of the unit. Although a part-time unit, it was included in the provisional organisation of the Field Army organisation. Training as a Battery actually commenced on 21 March 1942, with full-time training personnel attached. Despite a later allocation of eighteen 40 mm Bofors, an initial shortage of equipment was a hindrance to progress. The Battery became a sub-unit of 36 (NVB) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment about June 1943 when on the instructions of DCS it replaced 20 (NVB) Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.⁸ The Battery was eventually disbanded on 1 January 1944 – personnel were absorbed by the CTUTC and it was disestablished on 31 December 1946.⁹

Doctor N.R. Fraser of Wellington, New Zealand, provided the author with several amusing stories of his time as a medical student doing part-time training and duty on 40 mm Bofors with 10 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. He was a loader one day when loading and aiming exercises were being practised. Shells were about to be passed up to him when the Sergeant, realising that Gunner Fraser was a beginner, ordered a dummy shell to be given him first. Fraser placed it in the magazine but he neglected to press the stop. The shell fell all the way down and landed on its nose on the concrete floor. The gun detachment fell silent, expecting to be blown to bits, until one quipped: 'If that had been live, we would have been angels in the Milky Way.' It was a salutary lesson.¹⁰

On 14 July 1942 preliminary arrangements were made for the formation of a part-time searchlight unit at the University of Cape Town to be designated 27 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battery, S.A.A.F. Personnel were provided by young women of the Woman's Volunteer Air Force who were students at the university. The girls had actually commenced training at week-ends from 24 March. Their instructors were Lieutenant Summerly and Corporal Voges, both stationed at the Anti-Aircraft Defence School. The girls 'manned' searchlights at various sites in the Cape Peninsula.¹¹ The troops were absorbed by 22 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. The Training Corps (and all other University training Corps¹) was disestablished on 1 December 1944.

Other part-time units followed the university Battery.

And other Batteries

A second Battery - 11 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery - was established as a part-time unit on 1 May 1942¹² although authority for its formation was only given by the AG on 11 July 1942. The AG stated it 'will

⁶ SANDF Archives, DCS CGS, Box 78, file O (M) 17, vol. IV.

⁷ Ibid., UWH Admin files, Box 4.

⁸ Ibid., CGS War Box 60/3.

⁹ Ibid., A.G.(3) 154, Box 157 file 154/51, Vol 11. Enc. 226/c. Cape Comd, Box 5, file C (G)18/6/18.

¹⁰ Letter from Dr.N.R Fraser 24.9.1988..

¹¹ Letter from Ms. Margaret Skead 12.4.1988.

¹² SANDF Archives, CAB Gp 2, Box 67.

comprise ordinary part-time personnel recruited in the ordinary way in Cape Town and environs'.¹³ It included a SA Naval Forces Reserve Troop for the defence of Young's Field airfield. The authorised strength was 96 all ranks with Lieutenant F.M. Russouw as acting commanding officer from 23 February. The Battery manned sites at the Yacht Club and near the new foreshore works. Headquarters was at the Castle. It was disbanded and disestablished from 5 June 1943; personnel were absorbed by the SA Coast Defence Corps.

Members of the Seaward Defence Force Reserve in 1942 underwent gun drill on Bofors on Saturday afternoons. Instruction was given by 'Army instructors' described by Seaman Ken Button as 'real bastards.' It was decided that the reservists would make an excellent Anti-Aircraft unit. He continued:

There followed intensive instruction in Bofors gun-drill, carried out on Saturday afternoons by Army instructors described as 'real bastards'!

The guns were usually towed onto the Unities parade by Bedford trucks and, as training progressed, the teams found they were able to unhook, drop the wheels and level the guns in seconds rather than minutes.

Button also discovered that during stand-easy periods the seemingly formidable drill Sergeants turned out to be the nicest of men! He reveals the little known fact that, over week-ends at least, the air defence of Cape Town was in the hands of SDF reservists.

The need for some sort of air defence was considered imperative in view of the rapid Japanese advance – and of course, Cape Town was a very important port and convoy assembly centre.

Gun emplacements and Batteries were scattered at strategic points across the city. On the mountain side opposite Unities there was a Battery of 3.7 high-angle Anti-Aircraft guns. They in turn were protected a little further inland by Bofors.

Other Batteries were located on the Foreshore (then a wide-open barren space; at the Castle; on top of the 14-story Colosseum Building (which housed the 700 seat Colosseum Cinema); another within a stones throw of the Gallows Hill traffic department; and one near the present syncro-lift in the docks – seven in all.¹⁴

There were many more Anti-Aircraft gun positions in the Cape Peninsula than Seaman Button realised, most of them not permanently occupied and not all protecting the city itself.

18 (M.E.B.) Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, South African Artillery was established on 1 August 1942 as a voluntary part-time unit of Divisional Troops in Inland Area Command, personnel being provided by Mines Engineering Brigade. In a re-organisation of the Mines Engineering Brigade it became part of 16th (M.E.B.) Armoured Car Brigade Group (V). Personnel were provided by 64 Mines Company. Training began immediately it was formed. It was part of a projected 36 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and was intended it would have a sister Battery in the National Volunteer Brigade Group. Neither the Regiment nor the second Battery, were ever formed. The first Battery, 18 (M.E.B.) Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was provided with 40 mm Bofors guns and placed under command of a Major Greaves. It eventually became a very efficient Bofors Battery and later became a sub-unit of 36 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

At Simon's Town certain dockyard personnel carried against SA Garrison Artillery establishment were manning naval Anti-Aircraft equipment. About mid-July it was proposed they be absorbed into the Anti-Aircraft establishment and formed into 27 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF, to operate as a sub-unit of 23 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. This re-adjustment took place later – the Admiralty, in the person of Captain, Dockyard, objecting to the time given by his artisans to Anti-Aircraft training and the consequent loss of time on ship repair work.

4, 5 and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries had been lost at Tobruk in June 1942 and under a month later - on 11 July 1942 - the AG granted authority for the formation of 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A.A. on a full-time basis from 30 June. It was placed under command of 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment from

¹³ Ibid., DCS CGS, Box 78, (O) M 17, Vol. IV enc. 153.

¹⁴ Copey's Castle, pp. 75,76.

that date.¹⁵ 8 and 9 Batteries were an integral part of the heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment; 10 and 11 Anti-Aircraft Batteries had already been established so the next in line, the part-time 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, (S.A.E.C), was established from 25 June.¹⁶ 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A.A. was formed at Ottery from 1 December as a sub-unit of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), S.A.A. but was re-designated from 12 December to become 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), S.A.E.C. (M.E.B.). It kept a war diary for only a brief four months before disappearing from ORBAT. 15 (Rhodesian) Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was shown in a 'New Artillery Order of Battle' dated 10 June 1942, as a unit 'to be formed'. It does not appear to have ever been more than an idea.

Regiments

The full-time 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment, South African Artillery, established as a full-time unit on 1 February 1942¹⁷ was re-designated 1 (S.A.E.C.) Searchlight Regiment, from 30 June 1942, after the formation of the Anti-Aircraft Defence School. The letters S.A.E.C. were from 28 August placed after the word 'Regiment'. It was formed with only one Battery with only a training nucleus as a unit with dual employment. Most members were engaged in engineering tasks at the coast Batteries in the Cape Peninsula. As a result very little searchlight training was ever done. Until the CGS realised that a Searchlight Regiment was not a necessity, the Regiment continued to exist, but before it disappeared from ORBAT there was one Battery at Pinelands, Cape Town, commanded in turn by Major L.W.B. Procter and Captain E.F. Mockford and another in the Cape Town area in early 1943 under Captain G. Poole, before it too became superfluous. Another Engineer-trained 'Battery' was at the Clairwood Race Course, Durban, without searchlights (there were already quite enough SAAF lights at Durban). One of the Batteries was to have been in Pretoria until it was decided to augment 8 Field Company, SAEC, in the event of invasion, it was commanded by Major T. Gillespie.¹⁸

Order of Battle

On 21 August 1942 a 'Tentative Provisional Future Order of Battle' was produced by the Deputy Chief of Staff after a conference three days earlier with DSD (O), DDMO, DFAE, and DDSD (Arty). It gave the names of the units to be included in 1st and 2nd Armoured Divisions; the Mobile Field Force (no longer to be titled 3rd S.A. Armoured Division); Headquarter Troop; 4 Armoured Car Division and similarly, 5 Armoured Car Division.¹⁹

The Anti-Aircraft component of the proposed organisation was:

- 1st SA Armoured Division: 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (S.A.E.C.) – 'to be formed'
- 2nd SA Armoured Division: 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment – Lt Col Meister
- Mobile Field Force: (No longer called 3 SA Armoured Division but based on an Armour Division organisation)
4 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- HQ Troops 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
6 Light Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment (S.A.E.C.) - to be formed.
- 4 Armoured Car Division 11 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (to be formed)
- 5 Armoured Car Division 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (to be formed)

3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery

The mainstay of air defence in South Africa during 1941 and the early months of 1942 was 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. It had been formed at Pollsmoor on 1 May 1941 as 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment²⁰ but quickly changed to 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment when it was found that 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft

¹⁵ SANDF Archives, CAB Gp 2, Box 67.

¹⁶ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/3, file 0149, enc 37.

¹⁷ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/3, file 0149.

¹⁸ *Salute the Sapper*, vol. 2, p. 382.

¹⁹ SANDF Archives, Fd Arty Gp 1, Box I, file FAO, enc. 2.

²⁰ Ibid., DCS-CGS, Box 78.

Regiments had been formed in the Middle East. The title again changed from 1 October 1941 to 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment;²¹

The Regiment was formed from within the Coast Artillery and its organisation, given in a letter from DCAA of 14 May 1942, was 7 Anti-Aircraft Battery and 8 and 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries. Only the last two Batteries were formed. Major Mellish, MC, was transferred from 2 Heavy (coast) Battery as commanding officer, and twelve officers under were transferred into the Regiment from various Coast Artillery Batteries, together with the following other ranks:

	NCOs	Gunners
From: Cape Peninsula Artillery Brigade	76	280
3rd Heavy Battery, East London	14	58
4th Heavy Battery, Durban	22	80
6th Heavy Battery, Port Elizabeth	<u>18</u>	<u>66</u>
	<u>130</u>	<u>424</u>

Half of the above number assembled at Pollsmoor on 25 November 1941, and the unit was brought up to war establishment on 1 February, when another thirteen officers and the remainder of the personnel from coast Batteries arrived.

The Regiment as a Training School

The Regiment operated at first as a training 'school' and two training courses were in progress under the general direction of Major Mellish, MC. The first was an Anti-Aircraft course with four officers and 29 other ranks and the second an Anti-Aircraft searchlight course attended by six officers and 24 other ranks.²² Training was taken over by 1 Searchlight Regiment from 1 May 1942. Both units were required to provide personnel for 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments in the Middle East; and also to provide a basis for the future Anti-Aircraft organisation of the three Armour Divisions then being discussed. They had also to immediately provide key personnel and instructors for the SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft port defence units then under discussion.²³ Four 3-inch 20 cwt guns had by this time been received from the Middle East and 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment then became an operational unit – limited though it was; two guns were emplaced at Fort Wynyard and two at Paarden Island while two 40 mm Bofors protected Cape Town harbour.

In early 1942 when it became necessary for some form of air defence in Durban, the most threatened of the ports on the South African coast - and until the SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft Regiments were able to do so - 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was required to fill that task. Its equipment in the Cape was taken on charge by 22 Anti-Aircraft Regiment SAAF. With understrength detachments of 8 and 9 Anti-Aircraft Batteries, 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment moved to Durban where they manned two 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns - which were without ammunition (there was none in the country), and two 40 mm Bofors, equally without ammunition. There were, however, searchlights. The remainder of the Regiment (RHQ and some details) was at Pollsmoor without any equipment whatsoever. On 16 April the strength of the unit had been 30 officers and 600 other ranks. Nineteen other ranks were also on strength awaiting postings elsewhere.

Orders given in May 1942 called for the urgent formation of 26 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF and it was established with effect from 1 May under the command of Major Hugh McKenzie, who had previously served in the Western Desert with 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Six officers (including the Major) and 60 other ranks were transferred from the South African Artillery to form the nucleus of the new Air Force Regiment. Thirty SAAF personnel, trained on searchlights, were later posted to the unit. In fact, practically the only equipment the unit held at that time was twelve searchlights. 26 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery was not on the priority list for formation and the 3.7-inch and Bofors guns at Durban continued to be manned by the detachment of 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, until relieved by the still to be formed 26 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. On 7 June orders were given to re-constitute 8 and 9

²¹ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/3.

²² *History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944*, p. 24.

²³ SANDF Archives, DCS-CGS, Box 78.

Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries as independent Batteries. Planning had allocated 7, 8 and 9 Anti-Aircraft Batteries to 7th, 8th and 9th Armoured Brigades.

With 26 Light Anti-Aircraft, SAAF eventually in place, 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was transferred back to the Cape. At Ottery, it was again re-designated as a 'heavy' Regiment from 30 June 1942 to become 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, as a unit of GHQ Troops. Only on 11 July 1942 was an instruction received which gave authority to form 7 and 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries from 25 June 1942. It also confirmed that 8 and 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries were withdrawn from 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, and from 30 June would be 'un-Brigaded units'.²⁴

On that day 8 and 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries, still without predictors, were transferred from the Regiment to become independent field Army units. Their personnel strength was expanded and the formation of 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery began. 1, 2 and 7 Anti-Aircraft Batteries and Headquarters 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment (SAEC) were allocated to 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment from that date. It was apparent that the instruction had omitted to inform all concerned that the Regiment was at the same time re-designated. Although re-constituted only eleven days earlier, with effect 30 June 1942, a further instruction from the AG noted the re-designation of the Regiment:

'3 A. A. Regt. (V) S.A.A.
is reconstituted to read as follows
REGT. H.Q.
1 HY. A. A. BTY. S.A.A.
2 HY. A. A. BTY. S.A.A.
7 HY. A. A. BTY. S.A.A.'²⁵

It was only in August that official correspondence referred to it as 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Once again, while at Pollsmoor the Regiment was 're-constituted', with effect from 18 September 1942, and was placed on a two-Battery basis. By this time 1 Heavy AA Battery was equipped with eight 3.7-inch guns; 2 and 7 Anti-Aircraft Batteries were each still awaiting the issue of four heavy guns.

Arrival of the DAAT

All the above had taken place before the arrival of the newly appointed DAAT – soon to be titled Director Anti-Aircraft; and although the School was operating changes took place from 9 November 1942 with the establishment of a Training Centre, in which the School and the Depot were sub-units. The AG in an instruction dated 9 February 1943, confirmed that the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence and the Anti-Aircraft Depot had been re-organised and re-designated with effect from 9 November 1942 under a new Anti-Aircraft Training Centre.²⁶ The Director Anti-Aircraft – the title Director Anti-Aircraft Training had been superceded – had already issued an instruction – on 27 November 1942 – authorising the formation of a unit to be known as Anti-Aircraft Training Center (V) in order to co-ordinate all training and recruiting arrangements AATC Part 1 Order 1/42 of 18.12.1942.

Major R.G. (Bob) Batho was appointed Commandant of both the Training Centre and the School. The order dated 18 December 1942 stated that the School and the Depot and all units in course of formation, training and equipping at Ottery would fall under the Training Centre for discipline, camp administration 'and such other purposes as may be necessary.' Major Batho's order further stated instructed that 2 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery would cease to fall under command of 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and would instead come under command Anti-Aircraft Training Centre for all purposes.

Bob Batho, originally a coastal gunner, had been commissioned into Cape Garrison Artillery in 1923 and promoted to Lieutenant on 2 July 1935. He had served as Battery Commander, 3 Anti-Aircraft Battery in the Western Desert, avoiding capture with some of his men at Sidi Rezegh in November

²⁴ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/3, file 0149.

²⁵ Ibid., DCS-CGS, Box 78, file O (M) 17, Vol. 1V, enc. 165.

²⁶ Ibid., Box 119, file O (M) 71/13/1.

1941. He was posted as second-in-command 1 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment before being transferred on 1 August 1942 as Commandant, School of Anti-Aircraft Defence.

The Training Regiment

2 Heavy Battery formed the basis within the Training Centre of was known as the Training Regiment, a task undertaken until that time by 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Field training of Field Army Anti-Aircraft units was thereafter conducted under Training Regiment arrangements at Ottery where new units, once formed and given basic training were placed under command of the Training Regiment to undergo approximately three months intensive training in mobile operations. This portion of the training organisation was still in its infancy and subject to the availability of equipment. It was intended that Field Army units be completely equipped and ready to enter the field as soon as this training was completed. Training was based on the output of one completely trained and equipped Battery – either heavy or light – every two months. The first three Batteries to undergo this ‘course’ were due to commence training during October 1942.

With two Regiments under training by October – instead of the three Batteries expected, the Anti-Aircraft Depot had become a bigger organisation than the School and Director Anti-Aircraft (as the post had become) felt that it was essential to have a senior officer in command at the Depot. He therefore proposed that Major Batho be transferred as Commandant Anti-Aircraft Depot to replace Captain E. Buckley.

Note: The word ‘Commandant’ refers to Major Batho as commanding the School, not to the rank of Commandant which in the 1960’s replaced the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. The word ‘Commander’ was in the 1940’s used for the Officer Commanding the Depot.

The latter, who was acting Commandant of the depot would become its QM instead. It was furthermore proposed that T/Captain J.E. Dixon-Seager, who had been promoted to that rank on 1 January 1942 and who occupied the post of Staff Officer (G) on the staff of DAA, be appointed Commandant, School of Anti-Aircraft Defence from 1 October as acting Major. These requests were approved by the Deputy Chief of Staff on 3 December 1942, after the officers concerned had occupied the posts for over two months. Major Dixon-Seager would not hold that post for long before being posted elsewhere.

Air Co-operation

Air Co-operation became ever more important as training developed. By this time sleeve-towing targets were provided by aircraft of 65 Air Armament School. Young’s Field and the Royal Navy’s Fleet Air arm base at Wingfield. It depended on aircraft being available – no permanent arrangements existed.²⁷ The school and the depot were busy and without any thought to the distant future, the basis of the post-war Anti-Aircraft organisation was being laid. In the 7th Anti-Aircraft Gunnery course held over the period June July 1942 under Major Batho were two Assistant Instructors Gunnery (AIG’s) – Sergeants G.A. Ruthven and W.A. Hyman – both to become Warrant Officers in the post-war Anti-Aircraft School at Young’s Field. Sergeant A.E. Le Barrow was another AIG at this time and he appears with the rank of Captain in a photograph of Permanent Force personnel at the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre in September 1949. When the 12th Anti-Aircraft Gunnery course was held in August/September 1943, none other than Sergeant P.L. (Blackie) Swart²⁸ was a member of the course. (Blackie) Swart, together with Gunners P.J.J. van Niekerk and F.C. de Beer - members of the first Anti-Aircraft course held in South Africa –had by 1943 all become Warrant Officers and AIG’s.

Captain R. Sive was Chief Instructor Gunnery in those hectic days, serving as such under Major Batho and Major Dixon-Seager, both in turn Commandants (officers commanding) the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence. In early March Captain Sive was posted as a Troop Commander, 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The camp at Ottery was efficiently run under the watchful eye of WO1 W. van

²⁷ *Young’s Field*, p. 56.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Aswegan, the first recorded RSM. He was appointed in June 1943 and served as such until July 1946.²⁹

Other Duties

The accommodation problem at Ottery had obviously improved to the extent that twenty members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force were able to attend the 17th Anti-Aircraft Gunnery course (Searchlights) in September/ October 1942.

Not only now undertaking searchlight training the school had been tasked with other responsibilities. It now undertook the technical training of 'T' Services artisans for SA Artillery, SA Engineer Corps and SA Air Force units, covering maintenance and repair of Anti-Aircraft equipment. A Technical Training Section (Artisans) had been included in the establishment of the School but the necessary technical instruction was provided by Deputy Director Technical Services (Coast Defence). Operators Fire Control were also trained at the School by arrangement with Special Signals Service. Special courses were also presented for Gun Operations Room staff.

All higher training of officers, instructors and specialists was undertaken by the School. Considerable progress had been made and despite the strain placed upon it by the growth of the Anti-Aircraft organisation. But the need for better qualified and more experienced resulted in a request to the War Office via the South African embassy in London for assistance in this regard. The 31st Anti-Aircraft Course (Armament Artificers commenced in November 1942 and lasted until end February 1943. It was attended by thirty-eight SAEC and SAAF NCO's. As the course drew to a close HMS *Antenor* slipped out of a British port, bound for South Africa. On board was a group of about twenty Royal Artillery officers (Instructors Gunnery) and Warrant Officers (Assistant Instructors Gunnery) under the command of Major Norman Chivers. Known collectively as a Military Mission, they were all specialists – all instructors in all aspects of: Anti-Aircraft guns (light and heavy) and gunnery, searchlights and radar.³⁰

Royal Artillery Assistance

Calling at Freetown en route, HMS *Antenor* – a former Blue Funnel Line passenger ship of 11 174 tons, built in 1925 but converted to troop carrying in late 1942 – by-passed the Cape and made her next call at Durban, where the Mission disembarked and reported to the Transit Camp on Greyville Racecourse,. From there members were depoloyed: Captain Minter and WO2 John Marshall remained in Durban to assist in training 26 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. They were accommodated in the lines of the Regiment's headquarters on Greyville Racecourse.

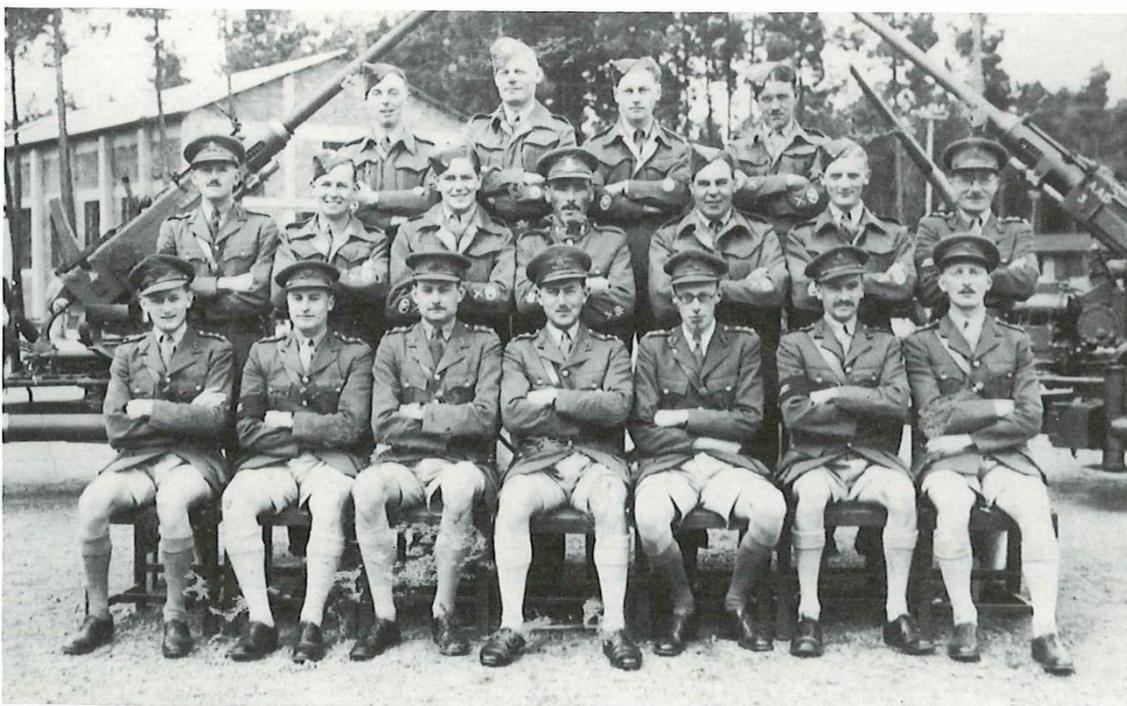
Two members – and officer and a warrant officer - were allocated to 25 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, at East London and similiary, another two remaind at Port Elizabeth with 24 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. The balance of the mission moved directly to the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre in Ottery, where the six members left at Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth joined them in May 1943. Shortly after this the combined group presented a four month long course of training on the Bofors 40 mm and mobile 3.7-inch guns, together with their associated predictors, range finders, etc. Gun drill was given on the large parade ground at Ottery and practice firing took place at Strandfontein.

The Royal Artillery instructors performed a valuable service. Warrant Officers and NCO's were released to 1 and 12 Light Ant-Aircraft Regiments, both eventually combined as 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment as divisional troops, 6th SA Armoured Division (V).

Members of the Mission returned to Britain about March 1944 in the *Nieuwe Amsterdam*; but not before Warrant Officers John Marshall and Freddy Colclough had assisted with training 57 Anti-Aircraft Battery, 51 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, at Simon's Town. At a party held on conclusion of the training programme the two warrant officers were each presented with a brass plaque, cast by

²⁹ *Young's Field*, p. 58.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.



*Figure 34: Royal Artillery 'Instructors Gunnery' at School of Anti-Aircraft Defence, Ottery, March 1944.
 Front Row: Unknown, Capt. R. Mintner, unknown, Capt. N.H.W. Chivers, Capt. Harding, Capt.B.J. Drake, Unknown.
 Middle Row: Capt. R.A.W. Savage, WO2 H.F. Smith, WO2 J. Marshall, WO1 G. Bland, WO2 E. Hardcastle, WO2 F. Colclough, Capt. P.W. Mathews.
 Back Row: WO2 F. Ellis, F. Bedford, J. Banaves and E. Hammersley.*

the Royal Naval Dockyard workshops. The plaques consisted of a Springbok with wings, surrounded by a laurel wreath surmounted by a crown. Below was a scroll containing the words: 'Beer is Best'. Among the group of Royal Artillery specialists was WO1 George Bland. He joined the British Army at the age of 14 years as a Boy Soldier (an actual rank in those days and had become a Staff Sergeant by the time war was declared. He had enjoyed his stay in South Africa and after the cessation of hostilities in 1945 returned to the country and joined the Permanent Force, finally retiring as a WO 1 in the late 1960's.

5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), (S.A.E.C.)

The establishment of new Anti-Aircraft Regiments began with authority for the first – 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery – granted by the AG in a letter of 28 August 1942, with effect from 1 July 1942 as a unit of 16 th (M.E.B.) Armoured Car Brigade - in Inland Area Command.³¹ The instruction was addressed to GOC's of both Inland and Coastal Command, of 3 Armoured Division, 5 LAA (sic), and Commanders Fortress Commands, OC's Commands and OC's Troops. The Regiment was intended for allotment to 'X' Armoured Division, with an RHQ and three Batteries - 59 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), SAEC – established as an independent Battery on 11 July 1942 and the newly independent 8 and 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries (V), SAA. It was not formed at this stage. The AG stated that this authority was effective from 1 July and that the part-time 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery – already established – would now form part of the new full-time unit as a full-time sub-unit. The Sapper organistaion had more volunteers than it could use and the SAEC had already taken over 8 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment. DCS in a letter dated 28 August indicated that the title of the newly established Regiment was to be 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), (S.A.E.C.); it was to be 'organised' by 11 July 1942 and had to be given priority for 'Q' and 'T' stores and also for vehicles.³²

The programme covered the establishment of 13 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery at Ottery Camp on 31 October 1942, with men being transferred from the Engineering Training Centre. It did not include Cape Corps drivers who would follow a month later. All men accepted for training after 13 Light Anti-

³¹ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 60/3.

³² Ibid., DCS CGS, Box 78, file O (M) 17, vol. V, enc. 50.

Aircraft Battery was 'completed' were to be held for 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and sent to Port Elizabeth. 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was to be formed after completing the intake for the Battery destined for Port Elizabeth. It was expected this phase would be complete by 30 November and that 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery would be at full strength by the end of January 1943. As an interim measure, pending the formation of the Regimental headquarters 13 and 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries were placed under command of Battery headquarters 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), South African Artillery. On 3 February an instruction was, however, given to form Regimental headquarters, 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), SAEC, immediately and to take 13 and 14 Batteries under command. 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), SAA was formed at Ottery on 1 December 1942. The headquarters was in fact established from 14 January 1943. It was ordered to complete training by March. All unit personnel, less 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, were thereafter moved to the Engineer Training Centre, Zonderwater.

The Regiment was reconstituted from 11 June with 12, 13 and 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries.³³ 13 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was formed at Ottery on 31 October 1942 from men transferred from the Engineer Training Centre 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, established at Ottery on 1 December 1942, was re-designated 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V). S.A.E.C. (M.E.B.)³⁴ from 12 December 1942. It was formed three days later. As an interim measure, and, pending the formation of Regimental headquarters, 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, 12 and 14 Batteries were placed under command of headquarters, 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The entire exercise appeared to have been a waste of time and effort - the Regiment was seemingly disbanded on 28 February 1943.³⁵ But it was not so. By 8 February 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was included as a unit of 14 Armoured Brigade Group in Field Force (South).³⁶

From 1 March it became instead 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), S.A.E.C., with 12, 13 and 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries.³⁷ This 'new' Regiment was ordered to be hurriedly formed at Cape Town from 1 July 1943 on a full-time basis, Personnel - less 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery which was at Port Elizabeth under command of 53 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. SAAF - were moved via Ottery to the Engineer Training Centre, Zonderwater, under command of Major E.W.N. Driver. It was shown in the Mobile Field Force Order of Battle drawn up on 31 December 1942. 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery kept a war diary for only three months, mostly in training, before it disappeared from ORBAT. By 8 February 1943 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), S.A.E.C., shown as a unit of 14 Armoured Brigade Group (South).³⁸ It was eventually disestablished with effect from 31 January 1946.³⁹

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), S.A.A.

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was included in an Order of Battle which appeared in mid-1942.⁴⁰ A notation indicated that it had to be formed, trained and equipped at Cape Town as early as possible. Although AG gave authority for the establishment of the units there is, however, no record of its establishment, and in fact no further mention of it, probably because of the numbering exercise which included *all* Artillery units - as noted in an earlier chapter.

18 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), S.A.A.

Authority was granted on 15 July 1943 for the establishment of 18 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V) from 12 July 1942, as a volunteer part-time unit of Divisional Troops in Inland Area Command. It was intended to be a unit of 16th (M.E.B.) Armoured Car Brigade Group (V) in a re-organisation of the Mines Engineering Brigade. The composition of the Regiment included 21, 22 and 23 Light Anti-Aircraft

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/3, AG Circular 28.8.1942.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., Fd Arty, Box 1.

³⁷ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/3.

³⁸ Ibid., Fd Arty, Box 1.

³⁹ Ibid., CGS War Box 60/3.

⁴⁰ *The History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944*, 52.

Batteries, but only a headquarters and one fully equipped Battery were formed immediately.⁴¹ Personnel were to be supplied by 64 Mines Company. The Regiment was intended to be a reinforcement unit for Regiments in the Middle East and was formed in Ottery on 5 February 1943. The CGS ordered it to be moved to Potchefstroom to be posted with 16 Field Regiment and 17 Anti-Tank Regiment (each of them them of only one Battery) and with a medium Battery, to form a composite Regiment for inclusion in 1st Armoured Brigade Group. The 22 and 23 Batteries were ordered not to be formed. The new unit was formed on 3 August from surplus personnel of 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment when the latter was reconstituted on a one-Battery basis. Major Pienaar was appointed second-in-command and also Battery Commander. It was moved to Potchefstroom and thence on 26 September to Barberton on 26 September where 21 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was attached to 15 Field Regiment of 1st Armoured Brigade Group. When 18 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment returned to Ottery, 'A' Troop of 21 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery remained behind and was trained as an Anti-Tank Troop. The Regiment was disbanded and disestablished 1 January 1944 and personnel were posted to the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, which became responsible for the 'final winding up' of the unit. The adjutant, Captain Horne, was moved to 16 Anti-Aircraft Equipment Depot at Ottery, pending a move to Young's Field when storage space became available.

14 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

14 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), S.A.E.C. was another unit that existed only for a short while. It had been included in the provisional organisation of Field Army Anti-Aircraft units as at 7 September 1942 as part of GHQ Troops. It was only established some time after the end of September and was formed as a part-time unit with a headquarters, 21, 22, and 23 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries. The unit lasted only until disbandment and disestablishment on 15 May 1943.

13 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment

13 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment was included in the same provisional organisation. Nominated, as either an SAA or an SAEC unit and as part of Line of Communication Troops, it was later scheduled to be formed as GHQ Troops from 9 September 1942, with 3, 4 and 5 Heavy Batteries; each Battery with eight 3.7-inch guns. It does not, however, appear to have been established.

On 3 September 1942 the 'authorities were still considering five Divisions - including three Armour Divisions. They were listed as: '... 'X' Armd. Div.; Armd. Div. M.E.; M.F.F.; 4 Armd C. Div. and 5 Armd. C. Div.'⁴²

Re-designation of Units

It must have been at about this time (and here we can only surmise) that discussions took place about a possible confusion in unit titles as a result of numbering. Director Staff Duties on 23 September 1942 recommended the re-designation of all Field Army Artillery units. He produced a document, signed by Brigadier P. de Waal, the Deputy Chief of Staff, in which *all* Artillery units were listed. The Anti-Aircraft units were shown as:

Field Army Light Anti-Aircraft Units.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA. (1, 2 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries)	Full-time	With 1 SA Division
5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAEC. (Written in ink: 12, 13 and 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries training at Ottery)	Full-time - Formed for 'X' Armd Div.	
12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA. Armd Div is incorporated) (7 – Replaced in ink by 59 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF. 8 and 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries, SAA.)	Full-time - Formed for MFF (in which 3	

⁴¹ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 60/3.

⁴² SANDF Archives, Field Arty, Gp 1, enc . 8.

14 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA/SAEC. (four Batteries (14 to 17) not yet formed - formation not authorised.)	Full-time - Allocated as GHQ Troops but
36 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA (MEB and/or NVB) (18 (MEB) Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAA.) (19 and 20 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries, SAA.)	Part-time - To be formed for 4 Armd. Car Div. Part-time: to be formed for 5 Armd Car Div.
41 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA. (10 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (CTUTC)) (11 ⁺ and 21 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries, SAA.	Part-time + includes SANF Res. Tp.
22 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAA. ⁺	Full-time - To be formed for special course.
3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA. (1, 3 and 7 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries, SAA.)	Full-time - Formed as GHQ Troops
13 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA or SAEC (3, 4 and 5 Heavy Ant-Aircraft Batteries, SAA or SAEC.)	Full-time -To be formed as GHQ Troops

There were many ink notes on the document, indicating changes to sub-unit numbering; to Batteries not yet formed or, in a couple of instances it indicated where the headquarters and or sub-units were situated. For instance RHQ of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was shown at Cape Town, the senior Battery at Port Elizabeth and 13 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery at Ottery.

A third page showed the SA Air Force coast units – 50 to 56 Anti-Aircraft Regiments – and 8 Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment, SAEC, with its four Batteries numbered one to four. It was described as ‘formed as GHQ Troops (dual employment).’

12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Authority for the establishment of Headquarters, 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V) as a full-time volunteer unit of the Active Citizen Force was granted by the AG on 18 September 1942.⁴³ It took effect from 8 September. The instruction from the AG stated: ‘...this H.Q. will with the 7, 8 and 9 Btys already established constitute the Regt.’⁴⁴ and that it ‘...will be organised on a full-time basis w.e.f. 8 Sept. 42.’⁴⁵

The headquarters of the Regiment was established at Ottery and instead took under command from that date the ‘already constituted’ 7, 8 and 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries of 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Although an instruction to re-designate the Regiment as 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF was given by DCS on 18 November 1942, this was quite obviously not immediately carried out. SAAF Headquarters, Middle East, were, however, informed that as from 25 February 1943, 56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF, had been established as an independent unit and was attached to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. And, furthermore, it would proceed on active service with its new parent as part of 6th SA Armoured Division. This departure from normal offered an outlet for SAAF personnel in coast Anti-Aircraft units who wished to escape from the boredom of inaction where they had the remote chance of firing at an enemy. In an attempt to smooth out any difficulties arising from differences in Army and Air Force procedures, a SAAF liaison officer was attached to the Regiment.

By this time 6th SA Armoured Division was being readied for an eventual move to the Middle East and preparations were being made to bring units up to strength. A number of officers from 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment were transferred to the Regiment on 10 February, including T/Captain J.M. Slabber, who was appointed to the post of Battery Captain under Captain Dixon-Seagar.

⁴³ SANDF Archives, CAB,Gp 2, Box 67.

⁴⁴ Ibid., DCS-CGS Gp 2, Box 691, file 1208/11.

⁴⁵ Ibid., DCS-CGS Box 78, vol. V, file O (M) 17, enc. 50.

The Air Force was still drawing more recruits than both the Artillery and Infantry Corps' combined; and it was decided to continue the success of the coast Anti-Aircraft units in the field Army. And so, on 18 November 1942, the DCS instructed the AG to re-designate 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA, as 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. The DCS had furthermore indicated that A1 medical category personnel released by coast Anti-Aircraft units were to be transferred to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and SAA personnel so released were to be returned to the Anti-Aircraft Depot.⁴⁶ While 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was being prepared for service, it had taken under command the '...already constituted' former 7, 8 and 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries of 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and was by this time at Premier Mine, ready for the introduction of personnel from 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The instruction to rename the unit was obviously not immediately carried out but the Regiment *was* reconstituted from 24 February 1943 with a headquarters, 7 and 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries and 56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF. 9 LAA Battery remained an independent unit.

SAAF Headquarters, Middle East, were, however, informed that as from 25 February 1943, 56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF, had been established as an independent unit and was attached to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. And, furthermore, it would proceed on active service with its new parent as part of 6th SA Armoured Division. This departure from normal offered an outlet for SAAF personnel in coast Anti-Aircraft units who wished to escape from the boredom of inaction where they had the remote chance of firing at an enemy. Only those who agreed to take the General Oath and who had an A1 medical status were transferred. In an attempt to smooth out any difficulties arising from differences in Army and Air Force procedures, a SAAF liaison officer was attached to the Regiment. It was hoped that all SA Artillery personnel would later be transferred to the SA Air Force. Command was given to Lieutenant Colonel Meister.

A recruiting team – known as a Mosquito Column – with three Bofors guns - was at the time visiting cities and towns in the country in an endeavor to obtain recruits. Arrangements were made for the column to abandon the tour and for the Anti-Aircraft component to report direct to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Premier Mine by 15 February 1943.⁴⁷

Major Dixon-Seagar served as Commandant of the School of Anti-Aircraft Defence only until 10 February 1943, from which date he was transferred to 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and appointed Battery Commander, dropping from the exalted rank of acting Major to become again a temporary Captain, with a resultant drop in pay.⁴⁸ Acting and temporary ranks were often coupled during the 1939/45 war, Temporary rank carried pay of rank while acting rank did not. It was, according to an authority a way used by the CGS to keep Defence Force costs contained. There were many officers holding temporary rank, and even both temporary and acting rank. An example is that of T/Captain and A/Major Guicherit who eventually received promotion to war substantive Captain, which meant he could revert to the substantive rank of Captain at the end of the war. The Regiment *was* again reconstituted from 24 February 1943 with Regimental Headquarters, 7 and 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries, SAA and 56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF, the latter established on 24 February 1942. 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery remained un-allotted.

Anti-Aircraft Training Centre

All the foregoing Anti-Aircraft units and sub-units had begun their training at the Anti-Aircraft training Centre, Ottery. Major R.G. (Bob) Batho was appointed Commandant of the Training Centre in addition to being Commandant of the School from 9 November 1942. The School of Anti-Aircraft Defence had been re-organised from that date.⁴⁹ But, very strangely, in confirmation of the decisions taken at the Manpower meeting on 9 November 1942, the AG in an instruction dated only on 9 February 1943

⁴⁶ Ibid., DCS-CGS Box 119, file O (M) 71/13/1, enc. 71.

⁴⁷ Ibid., DCS CGS, Box 119, file O (M) 71/13/1, enc. 85.

⁴⁸ SANDF Archives, personal file. Major Dixon-Seagar.

⁴⁹ Ibid., DCS CGS, Box 60/3, file 0149.

confirmed that the School and Depot had been re-organised and re-designated, effective from 9 November 1942.

42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, South African Artillery

This Regiment was formed on 15 May 1943⁵⁰ by converting the two-Battery 21 Field Regiment to an Anti-Aircraft role. 61 Field Battery became 124 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and 62 Field Battery, 125 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. A new 126 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was established.⁵¹ Major G.J. Prinsloo, then commanding 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Saldanha, was appointed Regimental Commander with effect from 7 May 1943. During the balance of the month men arrived from 1, 4 and 7 Field Regiments, SAA, 1 Anti-Tank Regiment and 1 Medium Regiment, these Regiments being 'combed out' for Africa Service personnel. Organisation was complete by 1 June 1943. Soon afterwards Major Prinsloo became ill and Major L.W. (Lukas) Meyer was appointed in his stead. He was relieved on 1 September by Lieutenant Colonel Rory Murray, DSO. Organisation was complete by 1 June 1943. It had been planned that the unit would move to Ottery for training but this was cancelled and it was instead earmarked for special operational duties in the Mediterranean theatre. Orders were issued for all personnel to proceed on embarkation leave and to assemble at Hay Paddock, Pietermaritzburg by 18 June 1943.

Heavy Regiment again 'reconstituted'

Once again 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment was 'reconstituted' - this time on a two-Battery basis from 18 September 1942 while it was at Ottery. By this time 1 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery had eight 3.7-inch guns; 2 and 7 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries were still to be equipped, each with four 3.7's. Additional personnel were posted to the Regiment to allow of the formation of 7 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery from 20 October 1943. It was placed under command of Major G.J. Prinsloo, who had been on the DAA staff. The Regiment was allocated temporarily to Coastal Command and was transferred to Saldanha on 18 September 1944, to form part of the port defences. The port by that time had four fixed coast Batteries, consisting of two with 6-inch coast guns and two with 12 pounder guns, all emplaced to guard the entrance to the lagoon. Saldanha was to be used as a convoy forming up point due to congestion at Table Bay. Major Prinsloo also undertook the duties of AADC at Saldanha. Major R.F. Ross took command from 1 April 1943.

The withdrawal of 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery from 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment was made up by posting 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery to the Regiment. An order for the temporary detachment of 3 Anti-Aircraft Battery from its parent unit was given on 6 May 1943 and it was placed under command of 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment from 12 May 1943, for operational duty at Saldanha. It manned ten 40 mm Bofors. Air defence duties at Saldanha lasted only about eleven months before the heavy Regiment was in July 1944 transferred to the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre. It was given orders to remain there indefinitely under training, but on stand-by to return to Saldanha Bay. 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery returned to its parent unit on 4 July.

Instead, leaving 8 Heavy Battery at Ottery, 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment was transferred to Premier Mine in February 1944 where transfer of personnel to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment took place. While at Premier Mine 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment fell under command of 6th SA Armoured Division.

The break-up of 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment was about to begin.

Director Anti-Aircraft ordered the transfer of battle age personnel from 3 Heavy to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and those exceeding battle age – or otherwise not required – to be transferred to posts or duties in 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. All A1 medical category personnel from SAAF coast Anti-Aircraft units were transferred to the Regiment and all S.A.A. personnel so released were returned to the Anti-Aircraft Depot. Personnel of 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment '... exceeding battle

⁵⁰ Ibid., Box 119.

⁵¹ Ibid., Fd Arty, Box 1, file FAO vol. 2, enc.68.

age were also transferred to equivalent posts or duties' in 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The two-Battery Light Regiment was reinforced at Premier Mine to full war establishment plus twenty per cent reserve. There was a stern note in the Order from the Anti-Aircraft Directorate; it stated '... all moves will be reflected in unit orders. Nominal rolls will likewise reflect posts of officers, age and medical category.'⁵²

Transfer of Officers

A number of officers were transferred from 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment with effect from 10 February 1943. They were:

T/Major H.A. Middlemost as second-in-command; T/Lieutenant and A/Captain J. Maxwell-Davis as Adjutant and T/2nd Lieutenant W.A.R. Ballantyne as Quatermaster and T/Captain D.M. Sinclair as Battery Commander, 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

T/Captain J.E. Dixon-Seager was transferred from the School as Battery Commander, 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Other officers transferred from the heavy Regiment were:

T/Captains – J.M. Slabber, J.S. Heydenrych and H.A. Smith.

T/Lieutenants – G.L. Boreland, S.I. Roibes, L.M. Manning, P.C. McCullagh, B. (Barry) Risien, N.D.N. Fairbairn, S.H.W.J. Barde, E.J.R. Dyke-Pointer and W.S.F. du Plessis.

T/2nd/Lieutenants - P.J. Attfield, S. McLaverty, J. Lane, L.M. Walker and G.D. Daly

The following were transferred as part of the twenty per cent reserve: T/Lieutenant R.D. James, and T/2nd/Lieutenants R.F. Paine, W.P. Douglas, B.E.R. Jones, Z. Zion, M.P. Grobberlaar and H.A. Turnbull.

In addition to the above transfers five officers – including T/Captain R.F. Ross - were posted *from* 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment to the Anti-Aircraft Depot; one to the School as an officer instructor and one to DCS (DAA) as Staff Officer (Training).

Within a couple of days another list appeared; it altered the postings of 22 of those transferred into 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Nominal rolls in some detail were required and the instruction from Director Anti-Aircraft was to ensure they were absolutely correct. It must have taken some time to make certain they were. The DAA also made it quite clear that those going to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment were to do so with 'clothing, accoutrements, respirators and steel helmets' only. All other equipment was to be withdrawn and retained in the unit stores of 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment.⁵³ On completion of the re-organisation of 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Premier Mine, the remainder 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment was taken off strength 6th SA Armoured Division and moved back to the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, Ottery.

On 3 August 1943 the Regiment was reduced to one Battery, after surplus personnel were transferred to the newly formed 18 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment languished at Ottery until it was disestablished with effect from 1 January 1944⁵⁴ and personnel were taken on strength at Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, where Major R.F. Ross, commanding officer from 1 April 1943 was later responsible '...for the final winding up.' of his unit and 18 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. After a chequered career the Regiment was finally disbanded administratively on 1 April 1944.⁵⁵ Major Ross, by then with War substantive rank, was released from service on 7 May 1945 for return to his pre-war occupation in the Justice Department.

The Department had appealed for his release due to shortage of senior staff. They were told that if he resigned from Public Service he would be liable to recall to the Department of Defence. His service was typical of many others. WS/Major Ross had served in a number of posts. Attesting for service on 17 January 1940, he served as QM in 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Brigade and Regiment, January 1940 – August 1942) and as Battery Commander of 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. He had also served in 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, (September 1942- March 1943); 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, (March 1943-January 1944); SAAF (Army Units) Depot to November 1944 and thence 42 Light Anti-Aircraft – later Infantry Regiment, until May 1945. After three years as a T/Captain his pay had been increased by

⁵² Ibid., DCS CGS Box 119, file O (M) 71/13/1.

⁵³ Ibid., enc. 85.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Fd Arty, Box 1, file FAO, enc. 91 and 111.

⁵⁵ *The History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944*, p. 19.

two shillings and six pence (25 cents) per month and he gained and at different times lost his servants allowance of one shilling per day due to transfers to other units.

A New Oath

By January 1943, with South African units of 1st SA Infantry Division arriving back home it was also clear that Middle East Headquarters was not enthusiastic about the formation of two South African Armour Divisions. Despite warnings, General Smuts nevertheless considered that two Armour Divisions could be kept up to strength and it was decided by 26 January to continue with the programme. It was seemingly a matter of prestige that South Africa could do so. It became clear, however, that the manpower situation would not allow the formation of two full Armour Divisions, nor could South Africa maintain two Divisions on a volunteer basis. But it was nevertheless decided to continue on these lines, but with only two Brigades in each Division. The previous idea of having two Armour Brigade groups with a Cape Corps motor Battalion in each Division had been abandoned. Even then it is doubtful, without full-time Rhodesian troops, whether South Africa, in March 1943, could have maintained even one Division. A third Brigade – a motorised Brigade - would be supplied by Britain.

It was envisaged that South African forces would operate in Europe (and later in the Far East) and three days after Eighth Army entered Tripoli on 23 January 1943 a motion for voluntary service anywhere in the world was introduced in the South African Parliament. Response to the appeal for volunteers was far from satisfactory. Many men refused to take the new oath and it became abundantly clear from the manpower situation that South Africa would definitely *not* be able to maintain two Divisions on a voluntary basis. In one Cape Town Infantry unit only 52 percent of the men had signed the new oath by the time it reassembled after 'Ex North' leave'. The rest - the Africa Service Personnel – were resented and referred to contemptuously as 'ASP's' by those who had agreed to continue pursuing the enemy wherever he might be.

6th SA Armoured Division

The realities of the situation came into play; there was just not enough manpower. This problem, combined with the political division in the country had already had serious consequences, made worse by the cavalier attitude of a large section of the population who did not appear to believe that South Africa was involved in a total war. These problems put paid to the two Divisions and by mid-February it was finally realised that they were but a pipe dream. Meanwhile, at a conference at Defence Headquarters, Pretoria, on 1 February 1943, the 6th South African Armoured Division (V) (one of the two Divisions) was officially formed. It was never to serve in Africa but destined to serve outside the continent. Command was given to Major General W.H.E. Poole. The Division consisted of: 11th SA Armoured Brigade (Brigadier J.P.A. Furstenburg) and 12th SA Motorised Brigade (Brigadier R.J. Palmer), and the necessary Artillery, Engineer, signals, medical and other units under command.

Internal safety and the perceived threat from the Japanese had also to be taken into account. The organisation of the Division and a decision on the Artillery protection element of Inland Command was probably decided at the same conference. Two Anti-Aircraft units were included in Field Force South and 14 Armoured Brigade Group, with 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, S.A.E.C. was among the Artillery units. A second component of the Field Force was 1 Armoured Brigade Group, with two field and an Anti-Tank Regiment and 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. This organisation was shown in a list dated 8 February 1942 and classified as 'Most Secret'. The Artillery component of the Division was listed in the same document.⁵⁶

Through out the weeks that followed the main pre-occupation of Defence Headquarters was to provide the new Division with the necessary manpower. The establishment of an Armour Division required less manpower than an Infantry Division and a considerable amount of reorganisation at Zonderwater was therefore necessary. It was the declared intention that those units that had not had the opportunity of seeing active service should be included in the 6th SA Armoured Division

⁵⁶ SANDF Archives, Fd Arty, Box 1, file DSD 2000/17/00

Divisional troops therefore included 6, 22 and 23 Field Regiments and 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Acting Lieutenant Colonel and T/Colonel J. N. (Nick) Bierman, (later acting Brigadier), was appointed Commander Divisional Artillery – more commonly known as the C.R.A. – from the British designation, Commander Royal Artillery. He also had an Artillery Headquarters, 6th SA Armoured Division (V), South African Artillery. Volunteers from 1st SA Infantry Division, then resting and undergoing light training in the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga) after its return from North Africa, were drafted into the Artillery units of the 6th Armoured Division. The immediate response was enough to bring the Artillery units of the 6th South African Armoured Division more or less up to strength. All the Artillery Regiments would later be ‘married’ with those from 1st SA Infantry Division to bring them up to full strength and to create reserves.

Addressing members of Parliament on home defence, the CGS explained that the Defence programme had by force of circumstances been amended and only one Armour Division would be formed. One full-time Armour Brigade group at home was the minimum needed to keep the Armour Division up to strength.

36 (N.V.B.) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery

Although included in a provisional organisation of Field Army Anti-Aircraft units as at 7 September 1942, the AG on 1 February 1943 confirmed the establishment of 36 (N.V.B.) Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment on a part-time basis from 26 November 1942 as a unit of 4th Armoured Car Division (V). The AG stated that members of the Regiment would fall under the conditions of service for the NVB and MEB. The sub-units were 18 (M.E.B.) Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (already formed), and 19 and 20 (N.V.B.) Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries respectively.⁵⁷ 20 (N.V.B.) Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was disestablished from 20 June 1943 and replaced on paper by 10 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), CTUTC. Only 18 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery became a reality.

An Airborne Unit

The idea of a parachute Regiment appears to have been born in 1942 and Captain D McCome studied the subject in Britain that year. He arrived in the Middle East on 6 August 1943 to investigate training equipment for an airborne Company as part of a SA Air Force (Airborne) Regiment already established in South Africa. The Armoured and Airborne Regiment SAAF was established in May 1943 and on 22 June the CGS informed Major General Frank Theron, General Officer Administration, Union Defence Forces, Middle East, that if a proposal to form a parachute unit within the Army failed, then the possibility of forming a Company within the SA Air Force would be investigated. It would require five officers and 131 other ranks and a 25 per cent reserve. Two officers and seventeen other ranks were recruited from 9th Battalion, 1st Reserve Brigade in the Middle East but shortly before end November the whole idea was dropped. Men who had already begun training in South Africa were routed to the Middle East as reinforcements for 6th SA Armoured Division.⁵⁸ The Division's reconnaissance Regiment was restructured on 22 January 1944 to provide it with a long-felt need for an Infantry component. Men released from 51, 52, 53, 54 and 55 Anti-Aircraft Regiments, SAAF, and the former airborne trainees were posted to it. It became: Natal Mounted Rifles/SA Air Force Regiment.

The End in Africa

By this time the war in North Africa was nearing its end.

On 8 November 1942 a 100 000 strong Anglo-American force had landed at two places on the North African shores, between Safi to the west of Casablanca and Algiers, 800 miles to the east.⁵⁹ From Alamein the *Afrika Korps* Divisions were in full flight, streaming to the west. Rommel conducted a masterly retreat and when at the end of November the Eighth Army arrived at Agedabia they faced a well-planned defence line, running south from El Agheila, round the bend of the Gulf of Sirte. They

⁵⁷ Ibid., DCS CGS, Box 119, file O(M)71/13/1, enc..84.

⁵⁸ *Eagles Victorious*, pp. 204, 205.

⁵⁹ *Chronological Atlas of World War Two*, p. 86.

were supported to the end by the little ships of the SA Naval Forces, the SA Air Force, and to a large extent by South African Engineers.

The fighting in the next few months was unspectacular and bitter, the *Afrika Korps* pressed by both the British Eighth Army from the east and the British First Army and the American 7th Army under General Patton, from the west. But on 6 May General Alexander, the overall commander, unleashed a massive attack. From dawn on 7 May the advance moved at a faster rate and that afternoon the first armoured cars rolled into Tunis. On 12 May General von Arnim surrendered. The war in North Africa was over. The British Chiefs of Staff had long before this stated that before the proposed South African Armour Divisions were ready for operations, the Axis forces would have been cleared out of Africa. It had already become clear that the two Armour Divisions envisaged by the CGS would not be needed nor could they operate as garrison troops.

Only on 13 May 1943, the day after the German surrender in North Africa, did the 6th South African Armoured Division begin training in Egypt. The planners were already preparing for the invasion of Italy.

Sicily

While the Division was in training in the desert, Allied forces moved across the Mediterranean. Germany was to be struck from the underbelly. Preceded by massive air strikes and by paratroopers the British Eighth Army and the American Seventh Army landed on the island of Sicily on 10 July in the first sea landing operation of the war. Two thousand ships and landing craft, carrying 160 000 men, 14 000 vehicles, 600 tanks and 1 800 guns in what was until then the biggest amphibious operation in history.⁶⁰ Weather conditions nearly caused havoc but as quickly as it rose the weather abated. The British assault waves landed without opposition but the American craft further west came under heavy fire. It was soon silenced by escorting warships. After weeks of fighting against strong opposition the Germans began evacuating Sicily on 12 August. General Patton was determined to beat the British and the end came in Sicily on 17 August when he drove into Messina. The first senior British officer to arrive on the scene shook Patton's hand and said: 'It was a jolly good race. I congratulate you'.⁶¹ Montgomery himself was not quite so effusive.

A story is told of a debriefing after Sicily had been taken, as was Lieutenant General Montgomery's custom. His staff and other senior officers attended. At the end when 'Any questions' was asked a seeming very brave and immaculately dressed G3 at the back of the audience said, 'Yes', and then asked 'Was the Almighty under command or in support of?'

More Volunteers

Instructions were given by the CGS at a manpower conference on 9 November 1942 to revise coastal Anti-Aircraft establishment tables to cut them down to the lowest possible limits. Layout and general organisation was to continue on the full authorised coastal programme but recruiting was to be restricted to man equipment then available, plus twenty per cent reserves to meet short notice expansion. Full-time WAAF and WAAS were to be recruited for both coast Anti-Aircraft units and the fixed Coast Artillery Batteries. The DGS was instructed with DCA about the use of Second Line Coast Defence Corps personnel on the Anti-Aircraft guns to complete manning of equipment and to release A1 category SAAF personnel for transfer to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The AG was instructed to ensure that SAAF coast Anti-Aircraft became top priority for 'B' Category men. The CGS also instructed that Native Military Corps personnel in 21 Field Regiment were to be transferred to coast Anti-Aircraft and be employed in the Durban area.

The experiment of training Zulus as gun numbers at the NEAS School at Rietfontein, and later at a depot established at Eshowe in October 1941, where 21 Field Regiment had been formed specially for the purpose, did not prove to be an outstanding success. 432 untrained and 400 partly trained gunners were therefore transferred to the SAAF coast Anti-Aircraft Batteries in November 1943 for

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.104

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 106.

employment in the Durban Fortress in November 1943. Personnel of the coast and Anti-Aircraft Batteries were being combed to produce men for the 6th SA Armoured Division and 127 black gunners from Natal reported for duty with 52 Anti-Aircraft Battery at Simon's Town, others going to 51 Anti-Aircraft Battery at Cape Town. All races were being openly and actively deployed in accordance with the agreed policy of dilution.

The Manpower Situation

Mention has already been made of the manpower problem. In 1943 manpower continued to be an enormous problem. Volunteers were not coming forward in sufficient quantities and the GOC 6th SA Armoured Division found it necessary to take unusual steps to keep his Infantry Battalions at a semblance of fighting strength.

The threat of attacks against the Union had long disappeared and it was no longer necessary to maintain Coast Artillery Batteries at full war establishment – white gunners had in any event already been replaced by coloured gunners and the men who manned and operated the various instruments had been replaced by the young ladies of the ASWAAS – Artillery Specialist woman's Army Auxiliary Service. Orders were given for manning of coast guns on a reduced basis from 1 November 1943. The Batteries were gradually closed down and placed in Care and Maintenance, with only one gun in each Battery manned on a reduced basis after all, there was still a war situation. Reduction in coast defence manning resulted in further personnel being posted to 6th SA Armoured Division. Part-time personnel and older white NCOs and gunners and the ever enthusiastic Cape Corps men were kept active to continue manning the few remaining guns that remained in action - particularly on the Examination Batteries at each port. These were kept in action until the Japanese surrender.

Similarly, there was no further need to continue full manning of the Anti-Aircraft guns at coastal ports. Volunteers from the five SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft Regiments were posted to the Armoured and Airborne Regiment.

Closure of Coast Anti-Aircraft organisation

The disbandment of 51, 52, 53, 54 and 55 Anti-Aircraft Regiments, SAAF, (as well as 3 and 18 Anti-Aircraft Regiments) was authorised by the AG with effect from 1 January 1944;⁶² But Director General Air Force had taken responsibility for all Anti-Aircraft Regiments from 1 January 1944. He instructed they would, as a temporary measure, continue to function until he had an opportunity to examine the personnel situation.

On 2 March, however, DGAF authorised their disbandment from 1 January 1944. The units were transferred to under command as shown hereunder, pending complete administrative close-down:

51 and 52 Anti-Aircraft Regiments	Anti-Aircraft Training Centre.
3 Heavy and 19 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments	Anti-Aircraft Training Centre.
53 Anti-Aircraft Regiment	Air Force Station, Driftsands, Port Elizabeth.
54 Anti-Aircraft Regiment	No. 7 Motor Boat Section.
55 Anti-Aircraft Regiment	Air Force Station, Durban.

SA Air Force Regiment (Armoured and Airborne)

The SA Air Force Regiment (Armoured and Airborne) was established on 1 August 1943⁶³ A Paratroop Company was to be formed at 75 Air School Lyttleton. The parachutists underwent some hard training but the battle for manpower won in November. Meanwhile volunteers from 51, 52, 53, 54, and 55 Anti-Aircraft Regiments, SAAF were transferred to the Regiment and it was despatched to the Middle East. On arrival at the 6th SA Armoured Division base at Helwan on 22 January they were posted to and amalgamated with the Natal Mounted Rifles, with some going to the Reserve Group. The Natal Mounted Rifles (V) news-sheet titled '*Rough but Ready*', News sheet No. 13 dated 12 February 1944

⁶² SANDF Archives, Fd Arty, Box 12, file FA 34, Vol. 1.

⁶³ Email from SAAF Museum, Ysterplaat, 24.3.2016

(published by the blokes for the blokes) included the statement: ‘We celebrate our “Lucky Number” edition by recording the Unit’s official change of name to N.M.R./S.A.A.F.’⁶⁴

The unit was styled ‘Natal Mounted Rifles/SA Air Force Regiment and it trained as an armoured reconnaissance unit and operated in this role in Italy until the winter of 1944. There were several personnel moves – 24 officers and 40 other ranks being routed to the Reserve Squadron and 21 other ranks were sent to the SA Air Force Depot.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

With the establishment of Coastal Area Command, 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment became a unit of Force Troops, Field Force (South). On 25 May 1943, 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries were merged and one officer and 89 men were transferred to 42 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, reinforced by men left behind at Durban, was detailed for coast Anti-Aircraft operational duty duties at Saldanha. On 6 May 1943, 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was detached to under 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Saldanha. An advance party left the training centre on 17 May and the main body departed eight days later. The balance of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was ordered to re-organise on a two Battery basis for temporary detachment to coast Anti-Aircraft, pending being equipped for a mobile role in the field. But further varied instructions regarding its organisation were received and eventually the unit was again ordered to return to Egypt.

On 26 May, 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment began to reorganise as a three-Battery unit, each Battery on a two-Troop basis until sufficient personnel could be found for the third Troop. With postings inward and outward, the total strength of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment changed and as at 31 May 1943 there were 34 officers, 300 white other ranks and 90 Cape Corps personnel on actual strength, the latter all posted from 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. During June reorganisation continued, especially in segregating those now serving under the General Service and Africa Service oaths. By 30 June the position was:

	Officers	Other ranks	Cape Corps
General Service:	28	273	2
Africa Service	-	25	87

It seemed there was always re-organisation; posted strength was eventually made up with more personnel from 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and re-organisation was complete by beginning July 1943. On 2 July 1943, instructions were given for 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment to consist of ten officers and 200 other ranks (South African Artillery) and three officers and 130 other ranks (SA Air Force) to assemble at Hay Paddock Camp, Pietermaritzburg, not later than 28 July, ready for movement overseas. 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery returned to Ottery on 4 July after handing over equipment to 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Saldanha. Due to an excess of officers, seven were transferred to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Personnel were sent on embarkation leave and re-assembled at Hay Paddock, Pietermaritzburg, on 28 July, ready for embarkation for the Middle East, where it would ‘marry’ with 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The ‘Forties’

When 14 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, was disestablished with effect from 15 May 1943, approval was given in the same instruction ‘for the constitution and formation’ of 43 and 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments.⁶⁵

41 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, South African Artillery

41 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was included in the provisional organisation of Field Army Artillery units as at 7 September 1942 as a full-time unit. It was to be allocated to a Division but was later formed as a part-time unit of the SAEC.

⁶⁴ *The Official Natal Mounted Rifles History*, pp. 277.

⁶⁵ SANDF Archives, DCS CGS Box 119, file O(M) 71/13/1 enc. 109.

42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, South African Artillery

42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was established from 15 May 1943 by converting the two-Battery 21 Field Regiment to an Anti-Aircraft unit.⁶⁶ 61 Field Battery became 124 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and 62 Field Battery, 125 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. 1 Mountain Pack Battery, part of 21 Field Regiment, was disbanded. A new 126 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was established from 15 May.⁶⁷ Major G.J. Prinsloo, previously on DAA staff and then Commander of 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and AADC, Saldanha Bay, was appointed Regimental Commander with effect from 7 May 1943. Soon afterwards, however, he became ill and Major Lukas Meyer was appointed in his stead, until relieved by Lieutenant Colonel Rory Murray, DSO.

Instructions were given to Artillery Training Centre, Potchefstroom, to arrange for medical examination of men forthwith – in respect of the former field gunners – and send those with category A1 and B1 reports on ten days embarkation leave. They were to report at Hay Paddock Camp, Pietermaritzburg, not later than 12 June 1943. Similar instructions were given by the DAA to OC AATC in respect of the sixteen officers and 201 other ranks at Ottery. DAA ended his instruction by stating he expected the number of personnel from Ottery to rise to 33 officers and to 220 other ranks due to other men being made available.

The unit was instructed by DCS to be held in readiness ‘... to move to Mideast by rail and sea after 15 Jun. 43.’⁶⁸ The Regiment eventually sailed from Durban in HMT *Simbajak* on 25 June and disembarked at Port Tewfik on 10 July.

43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery

43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery was also established from 15 May 1943 as a full-time unit, with a headquarters and 127, 128, and 129 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries. On 26 May the DAA Instructed that it be formed at AATC immediately with T/Captain Dashwood-Fowler as second-in-command. He was also to act as commanding officer from 15 May until the post was filled.⁶⁹ Amended instructions were given that it was to be formed at Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, Ottery between 9 and 20 June. The first group of men were allocated to the new unit on 1 June. The Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, was asked to ensure that all SA Artillery ASP personnel of A1 and B1 medical category ‘...who can be temporarily spared.’ by 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and Anti-Aircraft Training Centre were to be transferred to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment ‘...and if necessary replaced by appropriate lower medical category’ other ranks. GOC Inland Area was requested to provide 469 personnel, with the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre ‘immediately’ providing 45 officers and 216 other ranks.

T/Captain Dashwood-Fowler was replaced as unit commander when Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) FW (Frank) Mellish, MC, of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, arrived to take command. The unit was held in ‘...immediate readiness to move to Mid-East by rail and sea after 15 Jun 43.’ Personnel were granted embarkation leave from 28 June with orders to re-assemble at Hay Paddock on 10 July.

The unit began assembling at Hay Paddock. Pietermaritzburg, on 8 July 1943 and by 14 July Major Mellish had 529 effective personnel on strength and was able to begin organising them into sub-units. Artillery personnel were grouped into 127 Battery, SAAF personnel into 128 Battery and 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, and SAAC Battle School personnel into 129 Battery and RHQ. Large batches of SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft personnel were drafted in to the unit between 12 July and 27 August. Some 2 000 men were taken on strength and off strength, many in absentia, which complicated administration extensively. Many had to be posted AWOL and subsequently as deserters. Numbers were taken on strength and ‘...no sooner settled in when they were posted to some other ASP unit,

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., enc. 112.

⁶⁹ Ibid., enc.110.

and the procedure had to be reversed.⁷⁰ 'Applications for release received from the men and from parents were myriad, dissatisfaction was rife, and desertions, A.W.O.L., etc were plentiful.'⁷¹ By the end of the month the strength of the unit was 37 officers and 956 other ranks but there were 123 non-effective, including 86 AWOL and 26 in sick-bay or hospital.

44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V). South African Artillery was also established on 15 May 1943. It was described as an 'ACF Volunteer (Part Time) unit'⁷² and was only formed on 20 September 1943 when 25 officers and 56 other ranks were taken on strength. It was placed under command of Major W.H. Morris, formerly Officer Commanding 51 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. The Regiment had an organisation consisting of RHQ and 130, 131 and 132 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries (V), S.A.A. On 1 July 1943 the AG decided to disband the unit. This decision was later obviously reversed although a letter from the AG dated 9 July confirmed that it *had* been 'disbanded'.

The Regiment was ordered to report to Hay Paddock, Pietermaritzburg, on 4 October 1943, and 25 officers and 56 other ranks reported and were allocated to Batteries.

The SAAF pool of 619 Africa Service personnel – the result of reducing personnel in the coast Anti-Aircraft Batteries - was allocated to the unit as well as 455 Cape Corps personnel. Movement orders for an advance party of 250 were received on 15 October and 131 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery under Major C.V. Tiran was nominated for this task. The move was cancelled the next day. Three Bofors guns were made available on 16 October for training and were used by Batteries in rotation. On 25 October the two Batteries not on gun drill undertook a 14 mile route march and the third Battery did so the next day. All ranks stood the march well, not a single man dropping out. By 31 October the strength was 42 officers, 107 General Service and 694 Africa Service other ranks, with an attachment of 7 officers, 7 other ranks and 572 Cape Corps personnel. Except for the officers and senior NCOs, the Regiment was almost wholly composed of Africa Service minors (under the age of 21) who had been withdrawn from SAAF Technical Training Schools. No one knew who was to provide training facilities or equipment, where it was to be employed, or who would control it. It was not until the close of December that the unit reached the Middle East.

School Boys

Due, no doubt to the chronic recruiting situation, the Defence Department looked with favour on senior school boys, hoping to them with the idea of 'joining –up' once their schooling was complete. One chronicler recorded: School cadets in Cape Town when World War 2 was 'at its most savage height were issued with some lovely toys.' Wynberg Boys' High School each Thursday trained a portion of their cadet detachment on 25-pdr field guns. Christian Brothers College, Green Point, had a senior Platoon who did a course in Coast Artillery and who were 'whisked off each week to see, clean, polish, fondle and even to fire' the 12-pdrs at Fort Wynyard. Another Platoon was trained on light Anti-Aircraft guns. Training staff of Cape Command arranged for a drogue to be flown over Green Point on 18 September 1943, the day of the Detachment's annual inspection. The school-boy squad shot it to tatters, to the delight of hundreds of spectators.⁷³

Changes at the Training Centre

There were changes made within the training centre, the School and the Depot at the end of 1943. Major Batho who had been posted as Commandant of the Depot at Ottery in October 1942 was transferred on 21 June 1943 as Officer Commanding Anti-Aircraft Training Centre. Captain C.I. Peters became the new Commander of the Depot. He was later 'cross posted from Cdr AA Depot' to 'on strength AA Depot' and Captain (A/Major) P. Guicherit was 'cross posted from BC LT AA Regt. SAA, to Cmdtr AA Depot, AATC.' Both transfers became effective from 6 December 1943. Major Paul Guicherit was now second-in-command of the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre. On transfer to the SA Air Force from

⁷⁰ Ibid, War Diaries (SAAF), Box 104.

⁷¹ Ibid., Appendix G.

⁷² Ibid., DCS CGS, Box 119, file O (M) 71/13/1, enc. 109.

⁷³ *Young's Field*, p.60.

1 January 1944 his post became known as Officer Commanding, and not Commander, Anti-Aircraft Depot.

Portrait

Major Guicherit had reached his new posting via Battery Commander, 1st Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Battery, 1st Anti-Aircraft Searchlight Regiment in May 1942; thence in August 1942 on the staff of Director, Anti-Aircraft until end September 1943 – where he served as staff officer (operations and organisation) and deputy to the Director, until his appointment as Battery Commander, 18 light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. He had also served during 1940 and 1941 with 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and in 1st and 10th Heavy Batteries, Coast Artillery, as Gunnery Operations Officer, adjutant and fire commander; and also at one time as recruiting officer for both white and coloured personnel. Paul Guicherit was well educated and well connected socially and in business. He had attested for military service on 1 February 1940 with the rank of 2nd Lieutenant. His previous service had been that of a private in Cape Town Highlanders, undergoing four years 'peace training' from 1921 to 1925. As Officer Commanding of the Depot - and second-in-command of the Training Centre – he was also unit security officer and president of the Officers' Mess Committee at Ottery Camp.

Manpower

By the end of 1943 there was a very real shortage of manpower and it posed immense problems for General (no longer Defence) Headquarters. At a Staff Conference on 1 December the CGS outlined the manpower needs of 6th SA Armoured Division, GHQ, Lines of Communication troops and the SA Air Force and stated the only way to solve the problem was to comb out home establishments ruthlessly. One of the units he proposed to close down was the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre. By this time, because the threat of enemy action had evaporated entirely, it had been decided that Anti-Aircraft port defence units could be closed down. The four existing units were thus disestablished, so too were 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and 18 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, all with effect from 1 January 1944. The Anti-Aircraft Training Centre continued its training function; Anti-Aircraft gunners would continue to be needed for SA Air Force units in the field.

Training and Equipment

1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment continued with manoeuvres and exercises in the desert continued during November and December 1943 and the first half of January 1944. A move to a new camp at Helwan was made from mid - January and a few days after arrival the reserve personnel were taken off strength and posted to Reserve Battery (V), 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, a sub-unit of 6th SA Armoured Division Reserve Artillery Regiment (V), South African Artillery, established from 1 December 1943 and formed on 20 January 1944.⁷⁴

Transfers

All officers of the Training Centre, the School and the Depot – including five officers of 16 Anti-Aircraft Depot which had been established on 8 January 1944 and formed at Ottery Camp on 17 January under the command of Captain J.H.N. Horne as second-in-command – were all transferred to the Air Force from 1 January 1944. Major (T/Lieutenant Colonel) Bruce Guilford had been included in the original request for the transfer of officers to the SA Air Force but it had been at first refused. He was, however, seconded to the Air Services Directorate at GHQ from 1 January 1944.

The transfer of officers was authorised by the AG on 7 March 1944; but a full list of names was only provided on 10 May. They were taken off strength Anti-Aircraft Training Centre (V) SAA and immediately posted to 'Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, SAAF' clearly indicating that it had become an Air Force responsibility. There was some confusion, the AG in a circular dated 1 January 1944 informed all addressees that the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre was to be converted into an Anti-Aircraft Depot and

⁷⁴ SANDF Archives, UDF, Box 123, file UDF/826/2/2/1.

come under control of DGAF that day. Later orders indicate that no change in the designation or organisation of the Training Centre was made except for the addition of the letters 'SAAF'.

Major Bob Batho served the Training Centre until September 1945. He was posted to the Demobilisation Corps Dispersal Depot, Westlake - where the original training of Anti-Aircraft gunners was once held (now Pollsmoor Prison) – on 17 September 1945 and so ended his term as Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre (V), SAAF. He was released from service the next day to return to civilian life.

16 Anti-Aircraft Depot

16 Anti-Aircraft Equipment Depot was established at Young's Field from 17 January 1944 and in an instruction given by DGAF in a letter of 27 January 1944 it became a repository for all Anti-Aircraft equipment. By 15 July 1944 all Anti-Aircraft and searchlight equipment had been transferred to the Depot, which by then was at Young's Field.

The Air Force takes Command

It was eventually agreed that 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was to become entirely SAAF as soon as the proportion of SAAF personnel reached 60 per cent through normal reinforcement. Finally, because of the recruitment problems the Field Artillery was experiencing - as opposed to the numbers joining the Air Force - it was agreed by 22 December 1943 that the whole Anti-Aircraft organisation was to be taken over by Director General Air Force (DGAF). From 1 January 1944, the SAAF was to take command of all Anti-Aircraft units, and control all Anti-Aircraft matters, including personnel and equipment. Existing Regiments - 1/12, 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments - were to remain light Anti-Aircraft and all Africa Service personnel were to be transferred to the SAAF. Those who decided to remain in the South African Artillery and took the General Service Oath by 1 February 1944 would be transferred to the Field Artillery of 6th SA Armoured Division. The three Regiments were to be maintained 'up north', with the last two being fed by 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, while 42 and 43 acted as a pool for 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. It was shortly after decided that 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, formed only in September, instead be disbanded.



Figure 35: Officers, Warrant Officers and senior NCOs of the School of Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Ottery, 1944/5. Lieutenant Colonel Guilford is seated in the centre

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

BACK TO THE MIDDLE EAST

6th SA Armoured Division

The establishment of an Armour Division differed to that of an Infantry Division. It required less manpower. The detailed organisation of the Division was decided at a conference at Defence Headquarters on 1 February 1943. It was agreed that those units that had not had the opportunity of seeing action were to be included in the 6th SA Armoured Division; 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was included in the new Division. A considerable amount of reorganisation had to be undertaken at Zonderwater. About the time the 6th Division was established, Colonel W.H. Hingeston, later Senior Air Officer Administration on the staff of the General Officer Administration, UDF, Cairo, proposed that an aerodrome defence unit be created to guard units in the field. The scheme was thought to be impracticable in view of the shortage of manpower at a time when, theoretically at least, only white South Africans were permitted to bear firearms.

But, SAAF Headquarters, Middle East, was informed that 56 Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF, had been established on 25 February 1943 as an independent unit and was attached to 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery. Furthermore, it would proceed on active service with its new parent as part of the 6th SA Armoured Division. An attempt to smooth out difficulties arising from the differences in Army and Air Force procedures was made by the attachment of a SAAF officer to the light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. An NCO looked after SAAF matters at B Echelon. This was the extent of inner-service support when the '6th Div' – as it was popularly called – began arriving in Italy.¹

Volunteers from 1st SA Infantry Division, then resting and undergoing light training in the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga) after its return from North Africa, were drafted into the Artillery units of the 6th Armoured Division. The immediate response was enough to bring the Artillery units of the 6th South African Armoured Division more or less up to strength. The Artillery units of the Division moved from Balloon Siding, Zonderwater, in two groups in the first week of April 1943, to the grassy slopes of Hay Paddock Camp, Pietermaritzburg. They sailed from Durban on 18 and 19 April for Suez.

The '6th Div' began arriving in the desert less than a fortnight before fighting ended in Tunisia on 13 May 1943. It was very much under strength. Training equipment was collected at Tel-el-Kebir before moving to their desert training area – El Khatatba, a desolate spot in the desert east of Wadi Natrun and not far from the Rosetta Nile. The Division was destined to face almost a year of training in the Western Desert before it reached Italy to commence operations.

12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery

12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA, under command of Lieutenant Colonel G.W. Meister and consisting of 7 and 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries, SAA, and 56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF, left with the main body of the Division on 19 April and arrived at Port Tewfik on 30 April 1943. It reached Khataba on 2 May and a week later Regimental training commenced. Equipment was drawn at the end of May.

Free use was made of special Anti-Aircraft courses at the Royal Artillery School at Haifa, groups of officers and NCOs attending in rotation. The authorised strength of the Regiment was 42 officers, 520 other ranks and 224 coloured and black South Africans; but the actual strength at this stage was 54

¹ *Eagles Victorious*, p. 204.

officers, 611 other ranks and 271 members of the Cape Corps. The excess was carried against a permissible 25 per cent reserve. By 9 August 1943, the Regiment had received thirty 40 mm Bofors guns and training had advanced to a stage where live shell practices were held. During August it was also agreed that 56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery would remain part of the SAAF for personnel administration, but would fall under the headquarters of 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment for operations, training, discipline, accommodation, rations and equipment. Field experience showed this to be impractical and the Battery soon became an integral part of the Regiment. The DGAF accepted this situation and left the whole matter to the Army, although in theory the anomalous situation continued. It was eventually agreed that 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was to become SAAF as soon as the proportion of SAAF personnel reached 60 per cent through normal reinforcement.

The Regiment moved to Amiriya after mid-August, the balance of its allotment of Bofors guns were issued on 8 September and the next day the Regiment was placed on operational duty. Advance Regimental Headquarters, 8 and 56 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries moved to the Suez Canal area and 7 Anti-Aircraft Battery to the Abbassia /Heliopolis area.

Recruitment Problems

Recruiting in South Africa was down to rock bottom and even the CGS had to admit this regrettable fact. The Artillery units of the Division were all understrength. In order to fill the vacant posts and to create a sufficiently large reserve in Egypt it was decided to employ those officers and men of the now understrength units of 1st SA Infantry Division that had already seen action in the earlier battles in the Western Desert. Those who agreed to sign the General Service oath and volunteered to serve outside Africa were sent back to the Middle East to reinforce the Artillery units then with the 6th Division. The same applied to the Anti-Aircraft Regiments.

A Depleted Regiment

The much depleted 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment assembled at Hay Paddock Camp, Pietermaritzburg, on 28 July 1943, to await embarkation for the Middle East. The Regiment was aware of what was to happen to it as authority for the amalgamation of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in Egypt was given on 12 August 1943.² Reinforced by SA Air Force personnel and under command of Major N.M. Garlick, it sailed for Egypt on 14 September 1943.³ The Regiment was 'married', as it was termed, to become instead 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery. It took place officially on 2 October 1943, the day of arrival at El Khatatba.⁴ Major Neil Garlick handed over command of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment to Lieutenant Colonel G.W. Meister, who had commanded 1 Light AA Regiment in the final months of fighting in Cyrenica and Egypt. He remained in command of the combined Regiment until 31 December 1944. The amalgamated unit included 56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF, which had been joined by 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAA, to become 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, SAAF. The combined Regiment, organised on the basis of 54 guns, was well up to authorised strength, plus 20 per cent reserves.

The 'marriages' that took place in October altered the officer position in the Field Artillery units entirely, and instead of having a shortage of officers the Commander of 6th SA Armoured Division (V) and the Adjutant General were faced with a huge surplus of Artillery officers, not even including the recent transfer of coastal officers. To solve the problem each Regiment was allowed to carry a 50 per cent reserve.⁵ There were also senior NCO's and gunners in excess and in October Staff Sergeant R.D. Howard was transferred from 1/6 Field Regiment (PAOCFA) to the Reserve and Training Depot for onward posting to 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Similarly, seven Sergeants were transferred from 4/22 Field Regiment and four Sergeants from 7/23 Medium Regiment.⁶

² SANDF Archives, Fd Arty Gp. 1, Box 1.

³ Ibid., file FAO, vol. VII, enc. 121.

⁴ Ibid., enc. 84.

⁵ Ibid., Box 19, file FAO, Vol 5.

⁶ Ibid., UDF, Box 123, file UDF 826/2/1.

The merger of the Field Artillery Regiments entailed a certain amount of difficulty with regard to officer appointments, but this was overcome by co-operation with the Royal Artillery, to which a number of officers were transferred. There was far less of a problem insofar as the Anti-Aircraft gunners were concerned. The combined Anti-Aircraft Regiment was well up to authorised strength, plus reserves. The Royal Artillery needed officers and the transfer of officers to Royal Artillery field (and a few to Anti-Aircraft units) was arranged. Seventy-nine South African officers transferred to the Royal Marines, including Lieutenants R.S. Bate and J. Mc. P.F. Girdwood. Lieutenant Bate served in 41 Commando in North-West Europe and died on 16 February while a prisoner-of-war. Lieutenant Girdwood served afloat in the Battle of the Atlantic and the North West European war zone.

Major M.E. (Mike) Andersom voluntarily relinquished his rank in August and served as a Captain in the elite Special Boat Service of 1st Special Air Services Regiment. He took part in amphibious operations in the Aegean, Crete and Greece and was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry on 13 July 1944. It was probably in these days that he became handy and extremely accurate with a handgun.

Strength on arrival of 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the desert had been 54 officers, 611 other ranks and 271 Cape Corps personnel in July 1943, against an authorised strength of 42 officers, 520 other ranks and 224 Cape Corps. Its strength in officers as at 2 October was 49, including eight in reserve, but seven days later, *after* the amalgamation it had risen to 68 officers. Major Lukas Meyer was second-in-command. The merged Batteries were:

1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), SAA	Major H. A. Middlemost
2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), SAA	Major J. C. G. McIntosh.
3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), SAAF	Major N. E. Munnik.

Re-designation of the Batteries took place in the first days of the month, each sub-unit being told of its new title (as shown above) which would be used as such administratively but operationally they would be known as 1, 2 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries. 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery received this information on 4 October at Heliopolis, 2/8 at Ismailia on 8 October and 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries at Gebel Myriam. They were all recovering from a severe storm that struck on 1 October and had damaged tents and personal belongings and badly damaged dummy gun sites. The same day 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had received a signal reporting an Egyptian soldier, armed with a rifle and 36 rounds, had gone amok after killing an officer. Guards were doubled with orders: 'shoot to kill', as recorded in that day's war diary.

There continued to be 'ins' and 'outs' of personnel. On 4 October Lieutenant L.A.D. Walsh and eighteen other ranks reported to 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery as part of the Battery reserve, and three days later Captain R.S. Quirk, MC and Captain G.P. Penberthy reported in as Troop Commanders of 'G' and 'J' Troops respectively. An additional four officers – including Major R.S. Upton – and 84 other ranks were posted to 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery on 7 October.

By 9 October there were changes in postings. Major N.M. Garlick took over as second-in-command, the desert-experienced Captain J. D. Watson took over from T/Captain I. Maxwell-Davis as adjutant and T/Captain and A/Major J.C.G. McIntosh was replaced by Major Jamieson. The Field Return of that date recorded 934 other ranks and 160 Cape Corps, against a new establishment table of 45 officers, 733 other ranks and 98 Cape Corps. There was a surplus of 251 white other ranks and 63 coloured gunners. The surplus dropped by about 235 once postings had been completed.

Lieutenant Colonel Meister signed his first Part One Order on 24 October 1943. It was almost of unbelievable length – twenty pages, detailing every conceivable situation from: Censorship, postal address, traffic accident report, passwords, beer allocation (one bottle per man per week – but subject to fluctuation) NAAFI trading hours, promotions, discipline, graves (photographs), air mail letter cards, washing of clothing, blood donors, specific gravity of electrolyte, return of engine

assemblies, malaria, out of bounds (Cafes and hotels), maintenance of vehicles, maintenance of BESA machine guns to use of, industrial grease, etc, etc,⁷

Training had by then already commenced. 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA was about to complete its training under 1 Anti-Aircraft Brigade at Kilo 5 on the road Cairo – Suez; 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, less one Battery were to be deployed with:

RHQ at Ferry Post 74018771.

HQ 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery – as above – with 18 guns on Ismailia/Kantara stretch.

HQ 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery at Monument 74018712 with 18 guns on Deversoir stretch at Gebel Maryam.

These operational postings lasted only until 17 October. 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA, was re-deployed and again came under command of the Officer Commanding 80 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment who was AADC, Central Canal Zone. All Fighting Books; Operation Instructions; Brigade Administrative Instructions; all communications, complete; all telephones, complete; were handed to the incoming unit as per instructions, to ensure that the aircraft warning system remained operational. All welfare stores and amenities, radio sets and sports gear was also handed over. The Royal Artillery Brigade loaned the South African 'some vehicles – to be returned after move' to enable Regimental Headquarters and the two Batteries to move by road under orders of 78 Anti-Aircraft Brigade to Khatatba to again fall under command of CRA, 6th SA Armoured Division.⁸

The Regiment had been deployed before being fully equipped and by end October it was still in that situation. The LAD Troop had not received its vehicles and tools and no signal equipment had been made available. A shortage of vehicles placed a heavy strain on the few already on charge to the Regiment.⁹ Leave was granted and seven of the number of Jewish other ranks left for Palestine (sic) for six days leave. In 2/8 Battery 71 other ranks went on leave from 26 October and, strangely, the Battery diary in recording this also noted: 'Officers away "on duty".'

1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

The Regiment, less one Battery, was soon involved in training at Khatatba, for which a warning order was issued by 12th SA Motorised Brigade on 30 October. It took place from 2 to 16 November, followed quickly by another training exercise - Exercise Durban - from 23 November to 7 December. At the time of the first exercise the Regiment had sent 66 NCO's from Bombardier upwards - from the former 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and by then spread among the three Batteries - on refresher courses in light Anti-Aircraft duties and in 'Infantry wing training'.¹⁰ This training was held at a camp organised by 1 Anti-Aircraft Brigade, RA, and later at No. 4 Practice Camp. It took place over the period 1 to 16 November 1943.

Another warning order was received on 22 December for further divisional exercises; and on 28 December Exercise Zonderwater began. It involved 11th SA Armoured Brigade. The same day the headquarters of 6th SA Armoured Division Reserve Group was formed under command of Colonel P.H. Grobbelaar.

The 6th SA Armoured Division Reserve Group Headquarters (V) was established from 1 December 1943¹¹ and under its command fell the School (V) and the Artillery and Armoured Corps Depot. Despite the continued cry of a shortage of all ranks held personnel excess to establishment of divisional units. Later, on transfer to Italy, it had Batteries covering field, medium, Anti-Tank and Anti-Aircraft personnel undergoing instruction, conversion to new equipment or as reservists for units undergoing operations.

⁷ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 373.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., Monthly Progress Report for period ending 30 October 1944.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, UDF, Box 123, file 826/2/1, 4.11.1943

The New Year, 1944, began with the arrival from GHQ, Middle East of general instructions for Exercise Tussle – a III Corps project and the most ambitious training effort so far. In ‘Tussle’, the Division ‘fought’ 10th British Armoured Division. Other units included 1st and 4th Egyptian Brigades, 2nd Belgian Brigade and 11th Indian Infantry Brigade. The object was to exercise all headquarters down to Squadron and Company level in command and control in procedures reminiscent of desert warfare. Manoeuvres lasted from 12 to 21 January in bitterly cold weather with an Armour battle in swirling dust. Cynics in the Division labelled it the first battle honour.

1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF

An official instruction dated 18 February 1944 was received informing the Regimental Commander the title of 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment had been changed with effect from 1 January 1944. It was now known as 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), SA Air Force. It was transferred to the South African Air Force from that date.

6th SA Armoured Division moved into a new camp at Helwan on 21/23 January where a Divisional Birthday parade was held on 1 February – each unit providing a detachment. Sir Bernard Paget, the new Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, took the salute. It was clear that the already cosmopolitan Eighth Army did not want the South Africans to add to its troubles. Italy was in any event not ‘Armour’ friendly country. Men were impatient and were eager for action. The Division had had one abortive order in mid-November 1943, to move to Palestine – but this time advance parties left four days after the news arrived on 3 March 1944. The convoy moved through the Sinai Desert to an assembly area near Gaza.

The third major assault on Cassino was still waiting suitable weather for its opening when on 9 March Major General Poole and two of his staff left for Italy. They had ring-side seats at the opening of the battle on 15 March. On 23 March the third battle to take Cassino and break through the German Gustav Line was called off. Cassino barred the way to the Liri Valley – the only possible route for an advance on Rome.

By March 1944, 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, had been fully equipped with the new American towed Bofors Mk I guns fitted with shields and with Stiffkey stick control and ‘eye shooting’ sights, as opposed to forward area sights. Neil Garlick records that the Stiffkey sights ‘...were a 500 per cent improvement on the old Ring sight.’¹² Eighteen British manufactured 40 mm Bofors on SP mountings were issued for training purposes. Regimental exercises continued at Helwan and the first warning of an impending move ‘overseas’ was given on 18 March 1944. The unit was in ‘Practice Camp’ at El Rebeiqi from 19 March to 1 April under the direction of ‘Major F.J. Walker, RA, Instructor Gunnery, A.A. Practice Camp’. He did not give the Regiment a favourable report but the monthly report of the commanding officer described it as ‘reasonable’.

Eighteen British self-propelled 40 mm Bofors were received at the Practice Camp to replace eighteen towed guns. It allowed one Troop in each Battery to be equipped with SP guns. The SP had the disadvantage that space was cramped and could not accommodate kit, rations and cooking utensils, etc. Each SP therefore had an accompanying 15 cwt vehicle which carried all the sub-sections ‘clutter’. Lieutenant Colonel Howie described the SP as a ‘four wheel drive Morris chassis. He noted that it should have towed an 8 cwt trailer, thus saving POL and space.’ The towed 40 mm Bofors Mk I equipment was of American manufacture. Satisfactory full charge practice shoots were carried out. Training in the desert continued until the end of March 1944.

To Italy

Meanwhile the advance parties returned to Helwan after orders on 12 March to join Eighth Army had been received. They arrived back to find other Advance Parties had left for Italy.

¹² Notes supplied by Major N. Garlick, p. 44.

Between 14 and 16 April the main body of the Division embarked in the greatest secrecy at Alexandria and Port Said. Red tabs, divisional flashes and even cap and beret badges were removed; but not their brown boots. The South Africans were easily recognised.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

MORE SAAF ANTI-AIRCRAFT UNITS

Additional

Meanwhile the additional South African Anti-Aircraft units - 42, 43 and 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments - intended eventually to be South African Air Force units - had begun arriving in the Middle East.

Visit by the DAA

There were many problems of control of the new SAAF units and SAOA was still faced with difficulties over 102 Cape Corps Battalion (SAAF), which had been formed from the 500 Cape Corps men of ground detachments left behind by Squadrons moving to Italy.¹ Lieutenant Colonel S.H. Jeffrey and Major I. Maisels arrived in Cairo on 20 January 1944 to help sort out matters regarding the Anti-Aircraft units; but events by this time had taken another turn. The Imperial authorities needed a security Battalion and instructions were received that 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was to be converted to Infantry. It had been intended that the DGAF would form one garrison Battalion from surplus Anti-Aircraft personnel and anyone that he could 'comb-out' from other units.

By the end of January the SAAF Regiment was amalgamated with the Natal Mounted Rifles to form the NMR/SAAF as a reconnaissance Regiment. The unit settled down under Lieutenant Colonel R.D. Jenkins, and in a short time no one ever alluded to the SAAF component except in the most formal documents. Surplus personnel were absorbed into other SAAF units, and it was hoped to second some to the RAF. In 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, the general feeling was summed up by Major Norman Munnik, an experienced gunner who was commanding 3/56 Anti-Aircraft Battery: 'What the devil does it matter what cap badges we wear', he remarked, 'Let's get on with fighting the war!'² None the less, transfer to the Air Force caused much 'heartburn', as Major Garlick described it. Most of the officers and men were members of the SA Artillery and even a number of the SAAF contingent had originally been part of the Gunner fraternity. It pleased the Gunners immensely when it was later ruled that they could continue wearing their Gunner badges.³

During February 1944 firm decisions from Pretoria at last enabled the SAOA to begin sorting out the jumbled pieces of the Anti-Aircraft puzzle. Both 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments ceased to be a general reinforcement pool for the 6th SA Armoured Division but the SAAF were to provide reinforcements and otherwise maintain 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and also its portion of NMR/SAAF. In effect, the SAAF would bolster the land forces and⁴ 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment became 44 Infantry Battalion from 10 February 1944. Special staff was added to SAOA's Headquarters to cope with these units, duplicating arrangements of long standing within the Army itself.

42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment under command of Major Lukas Meyer arrived in the Middle East on 10 July 1943 as an Africa Service unit, without any Anti-Aircraft training and with morale at an extremely low ebb. Lieutenant Colonel R.H.E. (Rory) Murray, DSO, arrived by air to take command from 1 September 1943, while Major Meyer assumed the post of training officer to both 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments.

¹ *Eagles Victorious*, p. 99.

² *South Africa at War*, p. 206.

³ Notes supplied by Major .N. Garlick, p. 43.

⁴ *South Africa at War*, p. 206.

A first batch of 41 men were sent on a signals course in July and 48 men who had taken the new GS oath left on 21 July as reinforcements for 6th SA Armoured Division. Fifteen more followed six days later. Soon after arrival at Helwan 41 men were sent on a signals course and on 24 July the first of many parties of officers and men left for Haifa to attend Anti-Aircraft courses. The first period of training within the unit began two days later. Initial difficulties were experienced owing to lack of equipment and of trained IG's and AIG's but by the end of the month six Bofors had arrived and a further eleven were expected. Strength of the unit at end July was 46 officers and 587 other ranks. On 2 August, 294 Cape Corps men were taken on strength from 6th SA Armoured Division. Sixteen guns arrived in the two days that followed and at the end of the month another 36 guns arrived. Many were in bad condition.

A large group of 118 white gunners and eight Cape Corps men under an officer left on 3 September to attend a layers course and in succeeding days guns and detachments went to Maadi for air co-operation training. This was followed by an Anti-Aircraft practice camp at El Deir. The standard of training showed an immediate improvement as a result of live shell practice. The unit was ready for operational duty on the Nile defences. During the first three days of October advance parties of the Regiment left El Deir for Qassassin and Suez, the main bodies following shortly after. The Regiment, by now under command of 78 Anti-Aircraft Brigade, RA, was transferred to under command 106 Anti-Aircraft Brigade, RA, for operations in the Suez area. 125 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was deployed along the Canal from Kantara to Ismailia. From 1 November 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment fell under command of the Commanding Officer, 74 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA, who was AADC, Suez. Training continued.

Up to 31 December 1943, a total of three Warrant officers, 63 NCO's and 105 gunners and 22 minors, had taken the GS oath. Of these 102 were transferred to 6th SA Armoured Division, leaving 91 GS volunteers on strength. With fresh arrivals from South Africa the strength of the unit by this date was 51 officers, 776 white and 229 coloured other ranks.

To the Air Force

The Regiment continued manning gun sites on the Suez Canal until 26 January when a warning order for a move to Qassassin was received. Lieutenant Colonel Stan Jeffrey arrived that day and the commanding officer learned that the unit had been transferred to the SA Air Force with effect from 1 January 1944. Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey conferred with unit commanders and senior officers and they were informed it had been decided to convert the unit from Africa Service to General Service, manned by GS personnel. The Cape Corps establishment was to be reduced to Invasion Establishment (Cape Corps personnel were to be reduced to minimum) and, Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey indicated, surplus coloured personnel, together with other Cape Corps men from 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and 6th SA Armoured Division, might become a Cape Corps Anti-Aircraft unit under white officers and senior NCO's.

The policy of the CGS and the DGAF, he said, covered the fact that those taking the GS oath as from 1 January 1944 would remain with 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, provided they intimated their willingness to transfer to the SA Air Force. The only commitment to the 6th SA Armoured Division was to supply 250 reinforcements to the Field Artillery, twenty from the unit in addition to those already earmarked, and 140 from South Africa. From this date, he explained, the obligation to provide reinforcements to the Field Artillery units - which badly needed reinforcements - ceased entirely. But, he also noted, an obligation existed which called for 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments to supply reinforcements should 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment suffer casualties.

Shortly after the meeting - on 31 January - an advance party left Suez for Qassassin and three days later 125 and 126 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries left for Tahag for training. Regimental Headquarters joined them the next day and 124 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery followed on 17 February.

A further conference with Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey took place at Tahag on 10 February, when many doubtful matters were cleared. One point made was that only GS personnel would in future be

posted as reinforcements from South Africa. Many matters, however, remained unresolved at the end of March 1944 and it was becoming clear, as Headquarters, Twelfth (British) Army – now responsible for the Middle East - also felt - that 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments could not both be maintained on a General Service basis. A final decision for the possible conversion of both 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments to GS was promised by 1 April 1944.

Change of Command

Lieutenant Colonel Murray left for South Africa on 16 March and Major C.J.E. Leyer took command temporarily, until the arrival of Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) I.S. Guilford on 26 April. The new commanding officer had begun his service as an Anti-Aircraft gunner with 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade in 1939, serving subsequently as adjutant and then Battery Commander with 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA. After duty as Commandant of the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, he had been sent back to Cairo as Staff Officer, Anti-Aircraft, before appointment as commanding officer of 42 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. Following his new appointment, Major G. Dashwood-Fowler became SOAA and later Staff Officer SAAF Army Units on Brigadier Hingston's staff.

Attempts were made to increase the number of General Service personnel in 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments so that the units would be eligible for service outside Africa. In 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment it was hoped that all ranks of the SA Artillery would soon be in the SAAF, which had by then created a special Army Unit Depot to control movement of men to and from these units – thus duplicating such arrangement of long standing within the Army itself.

42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments ceased to be a general reinforcement pool for 6th SA Armoured Division, although the SAAF would maintain 1/12 LAA Regiment and its portion of the NMR/SAAF.

It was intimated on 2 April that 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was to become an African Service unit and that all GS personnel required by 43 LAA Regiment were to be transferred to that unit. Up to this date 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment had provided 138 GS personnel to 6th SA Armoured Division and in addition there were 266 'converts' in the Regiment. Many felt this should have been taken into consideration, but almost two weeks later SAAF Administrative Headquarters, UDF, MEF, confirmed the position and ordered the necessary transfers of GS personnel from 42 to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, forthwith.

When he took command on 26 April 1944 Bruce Guilford found that reports of a very dispirited Regiment with no esprit de corps and with morale at rock bottom, was quite correct. The officers, all trained field gunners, themselves disappointed at their summary transfer to Anti-Aircraft, were hard put to successfully cope with the dispirited and refractory personnel assigned to them. It had been hoped that the Regiment would soon have a full GS complement and disappointment was accentuated by the transfer of many GS personnel to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and the reversion of 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment to an ASP unit. By instituting an energetic training programme Bruce Guilford staved off the possibility of the Regiment being converted to an Infantry security Battalion and of moulding disappointed officers and disgruntled men into an efficient operational Regiment.

The Regiment moved to Camp 'L', Helwan on 3 May for two months intensive training as an ASP light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Training commenced within a few days of arrival. Re-organisation and re-equipping also took place during this time. Five officers and 83 other ranks were transferred into the unit from SAAF (Army Unit) Depot on 8 May. Cape Corps personnel left to join 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment during 15-17 May and surplus Cape Corps men were posted to the NEAS Depot.

Note: There was in those days, and for a number of years after the war, much hilarity in officers' messes during the evenings after formal mess dinners when spirits became high. Various 'games' were played and one such form of entertainment was 'bok-bok'. There was an unfortunate accident one night while playing this robust and popular game; it resulted in Major Lukas Meyer having a leg amputated. Bok-bok was banned thereafter, but many years later, with other 'games', it was still a part of an evening's raucous entertainment. Major Neil Garlick became second-in-command as a result of the game.

With two thirds of the Regiment now Africa Service personnel, with the possibility confronting them that, should they not be considered efficient as an Anti-Aircraft unit, they would be relegated to security duties as an Infantry Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Guilford addressed all his officers on 19 May and told them that the unit had been given two months to become an efficient ASP Anti-Aircraft unit. He requested their co-operation in this difficult and necessary task. Prior to this many officers and GS NCO's had been ready to take any opportunity for secondment or transfer. The Regiment took part in the Empire Day celebration at the Alamein Club, Cairo, on 24 May, and also in the Union Day parade at Helwan Base on 31 May 1944. On this day thirteen Sergeants and 42 Bombardiers – all GS men – arrived from South Africa, and on the same day 71 other ranks left on posting to the SAAF (Army Unit) Depot for further transfer to 44 SAAF Infantry Battalion.

On 1 June, 66 other ranks gathered from disbanded Artillery units in South Africa, arrived at Helwan to join 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. They were placed on a light Anti-Aircraft course, held concurrently with the main training at the Anti-Aircraft School at Helwan. Seven days later, a representative Battery took part in a march past at Kasr-el-Nil Barracks, Cairo, on the occasion of HM the King's Birthday. They acquitted themselves well – a reflection of the restoration of morale. Four men signed the GS oath during this week, the first men to do so for some time. It was felt that more would do so if it were not for the fact that it meant transfer away from the unit and friends to either 1/12 or 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments.

Stiffkey stick control

Two days after the march past, Major Schofield arrived with a team of instructors to teach and train the Regiment in the operation of the new M1 Bofors guns and in the new method of 'eye shooting' and Stiffkey stick control, as opposed to the old forward area sights. The Regiment now had priority for re-equipping with guns and vehicles. One of the main difficulties in training had been the lack of detachment commanders. Regimental courses for officers and Regimental instructors, under the eagle eye of AIG's, was immediately instituted, in order to allow promotions to be made from the ranks of GS personnel. In mid-June the old guns were returned to Base Ordnance Depot in exchange for new M1 Bofors and unserviceable vehicles were also replaced. Training on the new weapons began on 19 June. The training programme included courses which all officers were required to attend. Motor transport courses were also held. The promise of an operational role gave impetus to enthusiasm; and the value of the training was enhanced by daily air co-operation from the RAF.

Before going on to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Director Anti-Aircraft, Colonel Jeffrey, visited the Regiment and in the course of a meeting gave the impression that the unit would be brought up to full strength with GS personnel, from Bombardier upwards, by reinforcement from South Africa. Following his visit the commanding officer went to Headquarters Twelfth Army to try and discover what was intended of the Regiment in future. All he was able to ascertain was that reorientation of Anti-Aircraft units was the subject of a conference at a higher headquarters. In the meanwhile, training at Helwan ended on 6 July with an inspection by General Sir Bernard Paget, Commander-in-Chief Middle East. He was accompanied by Major General Maxwell, MGRA, and Brigadier Hier, BRA, who had both watched the progress of the Regiment during its training. In an address to officers and NCO's they were told the unit would soon have a definite job of guarding either a port or the Suez Canal. Lieutenant Colonel Guilford had by his energetic direction in training had staved off a possibility of the unit becoming an Infantry security Battalion.

An advance party left the same day for the Practice Camp at El Deir. They were followed by the main body two days later. Practice shooting at El Deir continued until end July. Two Royal Artillery IG's, Major Schofield and Captain Worth - confirmed on 29 July that the standard the unit had reached had made it quite capable of being deployed in an operational role. Lieutenant Colonel Guilford left the same day for Ferry Post, Ismailia, to make arrangements to take over from 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, which was about to be transferred to Italy. On 30 July Regimental Headquarters, 125 and 126 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries moved by road to positions on the Suez Canal and the next day 125 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to Alexandria. Regimental Headquarters was sited at Ismailia and the Battery areas were:

125 Battery: Port Said to Kantara

126 Battery: Ismailia to Kantara

Lieutenant Colonel Guilford was appointed AADC, Central Canal Zone from 1 August 1944.

During August the unit busied itself preparing headquarters' and gun sites and in liaison with local authorities in their areas, The Gun Operations Room was organised at Ismailia, under control of AADC, Central Canal Zone, functioning under a gun control office and a searchlight officer from units operating in the area. 124 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had hardly shaken down into its position was in action during the night of 4 August, firing 786 rounds at an enemy aircraft engaged in photo reconnaissance. The engagement was regarded as very successful by all observers and was an immediate boost to morale. The Brigade Commander, 18 Anti-Aircraft Brigade, under whose command 124 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery fell, visited Battery Headquarters and one of the gun sites to commend the Battery on its first action.

Eight days later an advance party of the Sudan Artillery, Sudan Defence Force, arrived at 126 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery headquarters and by 14 August it had taken over from the South African unit. 126 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to Amariya where it also came under command of 18 Anti-Aircraft Brigade, RA. It began mobile and other training, to be able to relieve the two other Batteries of the Regiment on a rotation basis. Another enemy aircraft, also determined to be on photo reconnaissance flew over Alexandria in the early hours of 17 August and was engaged by all guns of 124 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery; 1 024 rounds of tracer No, 14 were fired. By this time, with new guns and improved ammunition, a height of 11 500 feet could be reached.

The German Army in Italy was being pushed beyond Florence and the problem of internal security, in the event of a collapse by Germany was beginning to occupy the minds of planners. An instruction from Brigade about this time called for the formation of Infantry Companies equipped to deal with riot and insurrection among the local population. Arrangement were made for 124 and 126 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries to each have available the equivalent of a fully equipped rifle Company and for Regimental Headquarters - by then situated in Alexandria, to provide a smaller force. 124 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was, for instance, issued with sufficient .45 ammunition to allow each troop to have 2 100 rounds, with 1 200 rounds issued to Regimental headquarters.

125 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery settled down to mobile training and practice shoots in October before relieving 124 LAA Battery in Alexandria. 126 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was by then in Port Said, also guarding the northern sector of the Suez Canal and was under command of 820 Anti-Aircraft Defence Headquarters, RA. The guns also had a seaward defence role. When the MGRA, Major General Percival, and the Commander 820 Anti-Aircraft Defence Headquarters, RA, visited sites of 'H' Troop, 126 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, they watched while one gun fired at a tar barrel in the water. They were not too successful; but another gun scored a direct hit with its first round, to the General's expressed satisfaction.

Lieutenant Colonel Guilford received an abrupt recall to South Africa on 7 October to take over the post of Director Anti-Aircraft from Colonel Jeffrey, who had reached retirement age and was about to return to civilian life. 125 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery about this time was chosen to guard Cairo West airfield and the Mena area during a visit by the Rt Hon. Winston Churchill. In typical fashion the Battery later received a message from the War Office with compliments from the Prime Minister and his congratulations on the efficiency with which their duty had been carried out.

Because enemy air action over Egypt was no longer a threat, a lower scale of ammunition became applicable for the Battery at Alexandria. On 23 October 1944 all Anti-Aircraft defences at the port were ordered to stand down during the hours of darkness. This signalled the end of an active threat to the old city and it meant that the gunner role of the Regiment was drawing to a close.

By 16 January 1945, now under the command of Major Lever, 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF moved to Helwan where it was converted on 16 January to become 42 Infantry Battalion, SAAF.

43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

The next unit to arrive in the Middle East was 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. It had begun assembling at Pietermaritzburg on 8 July 1943 and the main body arrived at Suez on 12 September under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Frank Mellish. By this time Frank Mellish was already a very popular commanding officer; strict but fair, his officers and men would do anything for him. His Regiment had 30 officers and 336 other ranks on strength. Reinforcements of thirteen officers and 336 other ranks followed at the end of the first week in November. Finally, a rear party of 34 officers and 276 other ranks arrived on 17 December 1943. Of this group fourteen officers and 175 other ranks were posted to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The possibility of making it a single, completely General Service unit was being explored. It was, in fact, to be allotted to the forces in Italy on condition that it would be used to guard airfields used by the SAAF – a stipulation, it has been said, with the decline of the *Luftwaffe*, had become increasingly unrealistic.

The main body reached Helwan on 13 September with 30 officers and 552 other ranks. Two weeks after arrival twelve Bofors and predictors were issued and active training began; and two months afterwards reinforcements of thirteen officers and 336 other ranks arrived.

On 23 October the unit moved from Helwan to the Royal Artillery base at Almaza for two weeks of intensive training under 2 Depot Regiment, RA. A two week programme of Battery training then commenced. This was followed by live shell shoots at ground targets. On 15 November the Regiment moved to the Anti-Aircraft practice camp at El Deir where live shell shoots at sleeve targets were carried out. By 4 December 1943, 127 and 128 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries had completed their training and prepared to move to the Suez Canal zone to assume operational duties. It took over from 16 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA., and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA., two days later.

Morale was high. 128 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was deployed in the Kantara area, taking over Battery headquarters and twelve gun sites from 45 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA, and six sites from 46 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA. The same day Regimental headquarters and 127 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery arrived at Port Said and took over twelve gun sites from 45 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA, and six sites from 46 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA. Regimental headquarters relieved the headquarters of 16 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA. In mid-December 129 LAA Battery was transferred to a new deployment area on the Central Canal Zone, which stretched from Kantara to Ismailia. Regimental Headquarters moved to Ferry Point to take over from 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA. It was here that Lieutenant Colonel Mellish became AADC Central Canal Zone.

Meanwhile 129 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery completed its course of intensive training at El Deir. Sub-calibre shoots were carried out with fair results and 40 mm anti-tank shoots were satisfactory. Everyone also did a short small arms course, training and firing Brens, Tommy guns and rifles. General progress was good and the interest shown by all ranks was much improved. Morale and discipline of the Battery was reported to be high.

A 'rear party' of 34 officers and 276 other ranks arrived on 17 December 1943. Of this latter group fourteen officers and 175 other ranks were posted to 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The unit was transferred to the SAAF and its designation was altered from 1 January 1944 to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF.

Strength of the Regiment at 31 December 1943 was 60 officers, 879 other ranks and eleven members of the Cape Corps. Up to this time it had been used, incidental to its operational role, as a reinforcement pool for 6th SA Armoured Division. Men taking the GS oath having the choice of which unit to which they wished to be posted. With the new SAAF control, this policy was questioned. Of the SA Artillery ASP men in 42, 43 and 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments during January 126 took the GS oath. Of these 57 were posted to SA Artillery units and the balance to other units in the Division. In early February the CGS decided that 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments would cease to be a general reinforcement pool and that the Air Force would only maintain 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft

Regiment and the SAAF portion of NMR/SAAF Regiment. In effect, the SA Air Force would bolster the Land Forces. The decision led to the establishment of the SAAF (Army Units) Depot. On 31 March Major R.F. Ross arrived to take command of the SAAF (Army Unit) Depot.

While these administrative matters were being sorted out 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment continued training while performing its operational role in the Suez zone. Decisions reached included arrangements to enable minors to take the GS oath and it resulted in the GS personnel strength reaching over 400 other ranks. The policy was to convert both 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments to GS units and this resulted in surplus ASP men from both units being transferred to SAAF (Army units) Depot, Helwan. The GS strength of 42 LAA Regiment was then about 250.

Due to the failure of the two units to convert enough men to General Service, and owing to lack of reserves in South Africa, the GOC Twelfth Army felt that only 43 LAA Regiment should be placed on a GS basis. It was suggested that GS personnel from 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment be transferred to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, thus making 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment a wholly ASP unit. In early April 1944, the CGS instructed that all SA Artillery members of SAAF Army units were to be compulsorily transferred to the SAAF. Inter-unit transfers took place during the month in conformity with this instruction, AS personnel going to 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and GS personnel to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The moves were completed by 29 September and it resulted in the latter Regiment attaining a full GS strength - but without any reserves.

A number of AS personnel and minors were retained to permit the unit to continue its operational duties in the Suez area. 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was about to move to the Artillery School, Helwan and before it left, arrangements were made to transfer Cape Corps GS men to bring the Cape Corps section of 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment up to strength.

Lieutenant Colonel Mellish left Egypt early in May 1944 to undergo a six week tactical course in Italy. At the same time certain officers - who had been engaged mainly on administrative tasks - were earmarked to attend a Troop Commander's course at Haifa. The Batteries deployed in the Suez area were relieved of their operational duties in turn, and ordered to attend Practice Camp for training in a mobile role. The Regiment was steadily being re-equipped with new vehicles and guns. On 7 June SOAA discussed with Headquarters Twelfth Army the probability of 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment being able to move to Italy, as 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment would soon be competent enough to take over operational duties in Egypt.

The original plan was for 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment to relieve a Royal Artillery unit that was to be converted to Infantry. It was about this time the GOC 6th SA Armoured Division made 'overtures' for 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment to be converted for use as another Infantry Battalion for the Division. The overture was in fact a direct request from 6th SA Armoured Division to Eighth Army Headquarters for onward transmission to Mideast Command. The GOC of the Division was hoping thereby to provide his command with another Infantry unit. His request was refused. The GS strength of the unit at 1 July 1944 was: 58 officers, 692 white other ranks and 171 Cape Corps other ranks.

On 14 July a warning order for movement overseas was received, personnel to be called forward at 24 hours notice with effect from 10 August. Lieutenant Colonel Mellish returned from Italy on 22 July after completing a Brigade Commanders Course (all arms) at Benevento. He had been attached to 6th SA Armoured Division until his return. He immediately left for No. 1 Practice Camp where 129 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were undergoing training. On 1 August Regimental Headquarters and 127 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved by road from Ferry Point to Port Said. They were joined by 128 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and two days later 129 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved by train from Amiriya. The Regiment embarked on 5 August, the main body at Port Said and portion of 129 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery at Alexandria. They were en route to Italy.

The CGS instructed that all SA Artillery and Technical Service Corps men attached to SAAF units were to be transferred to the SAAF, except those TSC personnel attached to 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in 6th SA Armoured Division. Corps of Signals personnel attached to 42 and 43 Light Anti-

Aircraft Regiments also became SAAF, and personnel 'swaps' between these two units brought the latter up to strength with General Service men, but without reserves. It was not long before Major General Poole cast covetous eyes on this Regiment as a possible source of Infantry reinforcements for his Division with whom both 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and NMR/SAAF moved forward on 26 May 1944 for the advance on Rome.⁵

42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

The first batch of officers and men who took the GS oath transferred to 6th SA Armoured Division in July. On 2 August 294 Cape Corps personnel were posted to the unit. Sixteen Bofors arrived about 2/3 August and a further 36 at the end of the month, many in bad condition. Training proceeded at Helwan and Haifa, Palestine, and the unit eventually began operational duty on the Nile defences. But due to operations in Italy where little or no enemy was experienced, re-organisation of Anti-Aircraft defences in the Eastern Mediterranean sector made the employment of Headquarters, Anti-Aircraft Brigade; 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA., and 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA, no longer necessary. By now under command of Major Lever, the Regiment was withdrawn from duty on the canal and concentrated AT Camp 11, leaving 'I' Troop of 126 Light Ant-Aircraft Battery under Captain L. Roibes deployed in the Port Said area to guard the static guns emplaced there. Operation sites and guns were also under guard at Alexandria.

The adjutant had quite obviously, a good sense of humour. It showed in the war diaries, one of which began:

The Regiment is concentrated at Camp 11 and in the absence of any operational duty is getting over the Christmas and New Year celebration. This is in many cases a painful and gloomy process. The weather has been biting cold with almost continuous rain and a driving wind which has been apt to collapse tents on the apprehensive heads of their occupants.

The 'admin position' was quiet and officers and men took the opportunity of taking leave. But on 8 January 1945 instructions to dismantle all equipment on all sites was received, pending a move.

On 10 January T/Captain A.A. Purcell and T/Lieutenants J. Nofel, M.G.B. Openheimer, D.R. McAllister and P.J. Coetzee were posted to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and they departed for Almaza en route to Italy. Two others were already on course in Italy were also posted to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and three – T/Captain J.G. Visser, T/Lieutenants J. Goldberg and H. Friedman - were held back to accompany a draft of GS details going to 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The transfer of all these officers and other ranks was in response to a call for reinforcements. All those transferred were under the age of 25 years; all were recorded as '...extremely pleased to get away.' The adjutant also recorded in the war diary:

'...and those super-annuated old gentlemen who could not qualify watched them go with a certain amount of envy and regret, not to say a gnashing of teeth! It is difficult to persuade young officers who feel themselves physically and mentally at their zenith, that they are too old to practice a trade for which, by all the canons of their training and experience they are never better endowed. The "make way for youth" policy is not, in fact, popular among the officers.

Major General P.W. Perceval wrote to Major Lever when unit was at Camp 11 to thank him for the service of the Regiment. I am sorry, he said, your Regiment has not seen more action'. And he went on to say:

You should remember that by merely being deployed in defence of the vital ports of the Middle East and of the Suez Canal you have provided an invaluable insurance against enemy attack.'

On 22 January the Regiment moved to the South African Base, Helwan. It had been transferred to SA Air Force wef 1 January 1944 and on 23 January was redesignated: 42 Infantry Battalion, S.A.A.F. to

⁵ *Victory in Italy*, p. 207.

consist of a Battalion headquarters and five Companies.⁶ (One historical return gives a date of 16 January.) Between 23 and 25 January workshop and signal equipment; guns and associated stores were 'handed over' over the next day – 24 January – and 'For the last time as a gunner Regiment' the acting Officer Commanding, Major C.J.N. Lever, ED, addressed a full Regimental parade Captains Mclvor, Staff Officer Army Units, and Lieutenant Dunkley. Officer in Charge, Records, were present. The next day the last batch of guns left for 5 Base Ordnance Depot; transport was re-organised and all GTV's, jeeps and motor cycles were taken away.

44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Yet another light Anti-Aircraft Regiment arrived towards the end of December 1943. With 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment under Major W.H. Morris, the confused situation that existed was further confounded. The unit had only been formed in September 1943 and apart from officers and senior NCOs, it consisted almost entirely of Africa Service minors withdrawn from technical training in the Air Force. No one knew who was to provide training facilities or equipment, where the unit was to be employed, or under whose command it would fall. And, following its arrival, the news reached the Middle East that the four remaining SAAF coast units were to be disbanded and that as from 1 January 1944, the SA Air Force was to control all matters relating to Anti-Aircraft – including personnel and equipment. On 1 January 1944 it was transferred to the SAAF with a resultant change in designation to 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. Although it was at one stage decided it would act as a feeder for 42 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments, it was later apparently decided to disband it.⁷ This did not, however, take place.

Most of the other ranks were only 18 to 19 years old and SAAF Administrative Headquarters felt that the role for which the unit had been raised – as an Infantry Battalion for garrison duties in North Africa – was barely suitable. It was by then in camp at Helwan and in a state of flux, awaiting a decision about its fate. Some squad and gun drill was done and, in order to keep up morale the young men were encouraged to take part in sport. The unit was ordered on 8 January 1944 to move to Qassassin and an advance party left the next day. Camp was pitched and the main body arrived on 12 January.

The Regiment was without arms or equipment except for two sub-machine guns and two rifles – as protection against armed robbers – and one three-ton truck. More sub-machine guns and rifles were received on 21 January, as well as four more motor vehicles and two motor cycles. It was already common knowledge that the unit would probably become an Infantry Battalion for garrison and security duties in North Africa and many of the officers took steps to secure secondment to the Imperial Forces. Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey and Major Maisels visited the unit and their unease was allayed to a certain extent; their unease was further satisfied when Major General F. Theron visited the unit on 26 January and informed Major Morris that a recommendation had been passed to the CGS to retain the unit as a light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Despite this, 44 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was converted to an Infantry Battalion from 10 February 1944, as 44 Infantry Battalion, SAAF. At this stage the strength was 23 officers, 76 GS other ranks, 42 minors still awaiting parent's consent, and 496 other rank Africa Service personnel. The door was left open for officers and GS personnel to be posted in future to Anti-Aircraft units. The unit was organised with a headquarters of four officers and 60 other ranks; 'A' Company with five officers and 137 other ranks; 'B' Company, five officers and 144 other ranks; 'C' Company, five officers and other ranks and 'D' Company with four officers and 136 other ranks. The Battalion formed up as such on a morning parade for the first time on 21 February. Infantry training commenced that day.

But within a week, concentrated training of the Infantry Battalion was interrupted by the need to fulfil urgent guard and security patrol duties at Tel-el-Kebir. Five officers and 285 other ranks were detailed for this temporary emergency duty. Detachments were soon in action against armed raiders. Six were arrested on the last day of the month and one was shot when caught in the act of stealing. A

⁶ SANDF Archives, War Diaries (SAAF), Box 108, file B1.

⁷ *Eagles Victorious*, p. 99.

Palestinian unit arrived the the same day and a portion of the guard duties were handed over to it on 3 March. The newly arrived unit was not able to take over all the posts as had been intended. In order to cope with the situation the South African Battalion was re-organised: 'A' and 'B' Compnies were amalgamated and so were 'C' and 'D'. It allowed training to continue when one amalgamated Company was off guard duties.

Brigadier W.H. Hingeston (SAOA) and Major Dashwood-Fowler (SOAA) visited the unit in early March to discuss matters concerning personnel, administration and equipment. Because of the young age of most other ranks it was felt that care should be taken in drafting in older AS personnel. The young men had begun to enjoy an esprit de corps they were building and it was feared that the wrong type of more mature AS personnel might upset the balance that was being created. One good thing resulted from the visit. The unit had suffered severely from shortage of transport since its arrival in Egypt; more vehicles were later issued. Musketry practice began just before mid-March and by 22 March it was considered sufficiently trained to undertake the role of a security Battalion. Meanwhile at Tel el Kebir the guards had fired at and killed isolated raiders.

All training was suspended from 1 April. In addition to their duties at Tel el Kebir, the unit was asked to furnish guards to prevent pilfering from tents in six camps at Qassassin. This absorbed the whole unit. Five days afterwards a warning order was received, placing the unit on 24 hours notice to move with effect from 21 April, and two days after that the unit was relieved of all guard duties. A movement order arrived on 24 April and the Battalion moved to the transit camp, Amiriya. It boarded MT *Tegelberg* six days later, sailed from Alexandria, called at Naples to disembark an American unit, and arrived at Algiers on 7 May.

44 Infantry Battalion, SAAF, completed training and became available for security purposes. The unit eventually moved from Tunis to Algiers. It was learned on 4 April that Lieutenant Colonel J.C. Ferguson would be posted to the Middle East to command 44 Infantry Battalion, SAAF, which sailed at the end of the month for Algiers with 605 all ranks on strength for regular guard duties and the prevention of theft by Arab pilferers. The Battalion took over duties from the 800-strong 30 Battalion, DCLI, on 10 May 1944, guarding the harbour, its entrance gate and Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) and Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC) dumps. Miscreants were very active, but paid dearly for their greed on more than one subsequent occasion. On 14 May 1945 the sentry on duty at an Algiers dock gate confiscated a 15 lbs bag of sugar from an Arab who was attempting to smuggle it out of the area. The Arab attacked the sentry with a knife but he managed to kick it out of the Arab's hand and subdue him. About six gendames were standing at the barrier fence but not one made a move to assist. The matter was reported to the Military Police and to Headquarters, British Troops North Africa (BTNA) with a view to investigating non-co-operation.

Three day after the Battalion provided a Colour Party for a BTNA ceremonial parade conducted by the French authorities. Lieutenant Colonel Ferguson arrived and took command on 11 May and Major Morris was posted as second-in-command.⁸ Six days after the arrival of the commanding officer the MV *Gripsholm* arrived at Algiers with a large party of repatriated South African POW's. They were met and suitably entertained by Lieutenant Colonel Ferguson and his officers. A group of 102 other ranks and three officers arrived as reinforcements in mid-June and a further 74 men were promised by Colonel Jeffrey when he arrived on 2 July to discuss matters pertaining to the Regiment.

Apart from regular guard duties, and the prevention of theft by Arab pilferers, they were also called upon for other duties including the provision of guards of honour, escorting military prisoners and POWs. The nature of these duties resulted in the unit being spread over an area of 150 square miles, with patrols over 110 miles of road. It was not all work and no play. Cricket, tennis and hockey were played. Most cricket games were inner-unit, either officers vs NCO's or one officers team, for instance Captain Steyn's XI against Lieutebanat Pelteret's XI. In one such game the sides scored 261 for 7 declared with Pelter's XI scoring 219 for 6 when stumps were drawn.

⁸ SANDF Archives, War Diaries (SAAF), Box WD 110, file B1.

There was a big call on NCO's for command purposes; the unit commander had a problem – he was short of one Warrant Officer and 85 NCO's. SAAF Headquarters were approached and asked to provide additional NCO's and for men for a fifth Company as well as permission to carry twenty officers over establishment. The climate was warm, with the promise of further heat to come. Men on duty had to stand for several hours at a stretch in the sun and a request was made for helmets, polo. These were later received and issued for head protection.

While administrative matters were being discussed with the DAA over the few days he was there, the four Companies (now fully up to strength and with the nucleus of a fifth) in their isolated areas were dealing with pilferers. Shooting often took place and on occasion an Arab was killed. Several arrests were made but full co-operation with the French gendarmerie was not always available. On 8 July a raid was organised on an Arab village by a Platoon of 'B' Company and a fair quantity of pilfered goods was recovered.

Education of the young men received due attention. Steps were taken to encourage them to study and the Education Officer of 28 Squadron, SAAF, delivered a number of lectures on various subjects. Advantage was also taken of the presence in Algiers of an Imperial Mobile Lecture Team. It was suggested that a full-time Education Officer be posted to the Battalion. Despite the terrific heat, health remained good. Petty crime in the unit, mostly of a minor military nature, was very low. By August 1944 pilfering and theft by the local population had been much reduced – largely due to the vigilance of the Battalion. Their morale was good and there was a marked increase in the number who signed the GS oath.

Daily and weekly incident reports were submitted and the Battalion received high praise from Imperial commanders for its anti-pilfering duties. By January 1945 it had accounted for 27 fatalities among the gangs of thieves. Its smartness, discipline and standard of administration were well deserved. By June 1945 repatriation had begun and the Battalion was ordered to route all 'A' Group personnel to SAAF Army Unit depot, Almaza 'B' Group it was said could also be released. There were not many of either. But a number of officers were in both groups. WS/Major C.D. Stark T/Captain C.J. Louw – both 'A' Group, and four 'B' Group officers - T/Lieutenant Colonel W.H. Morris, T/Majors A.J. du Plessis and J.D. Pretorius and WS/Lieutenant W.P. Chesters were retained for operational reasons - either by the commanding officer or at their own request.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

ACROSS THE MEDITERANEAN

Italy

Allied forces landing in Italy took place in September – Eighth Army on the toe of Italy at 4.30 am on 3 September and the American Fifth Army (British X Corps and American VI Corps) south of Naples. They began the hard slog northwards against a determined foe towards the Gustav Line, where Cassino proved to be the linchpin.

Gustav Line

Eight Divisions of the American Fifth Army had advanced from the toe of Italy to Cassino, the last seven miles at a cost of 16 000 battle casualties and 50 000 non-battle casualties, caused by appalling weather, inferior equipment and the strain of mountain warfare. This exhausted Army was now facing the Gustav Line. Rome was the great prize for which the Allies were aiming and the battle for Cassino became the battle for Rome. The battle was said to have begun on the night of 17 January 1944 when British troops crossed the Garigliano River and attempted to establish a protective left flank for a thrust across the Rapido River. It was to have penetrated the heart of the Cassino defences and to have paved the way for an attack by the already tired United States 36th (Texas) Division three nights later. Three attacks failed and there were hundreds of casualties. Two American Divisions were broken in two and a half weeks of fighting in the first attack.

Eighth Army was moving up the east side of Italy but the Supreme Commander, General Alexander, ordered a regrouping once it became clear how formidable the Cassino defences were. The fourth attack was to be launched at a time and in a manner of General Alexander's own choosing. The Adriatic front was left to a holding force and most of Eighth Army was quietly moved to the west to reinforce the Americans. Both armies would attack on a twenty mile front between Cassino and the sea. Regrouping took two months under cover of a massive deception plan which left the German s completely unaware of what was happening.

South African Forces move to Italy

On 1 April 1944 Major H. A. Middlemost, Captains M.S.F. du Plessis and R.D. James with Lieutenants R.S. Adams, A. Alexander, R.C.V. Engenes, H.A. Turnbull, G.L. Borland and 90 other ranks, all of 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, returned from No. 4 Anti-Aircraft Practice Camp. The Battery Commander had been warned of a move and the Battery spent the next five days refitting and preparing for departure. By 2 April in the meanwhile, other personnel had returned from the small arms range. The officers were not 'let off the hook' and, divided into four syndicates, attended Exercise Cobble for the full day on 6 April. Before moving from Helwan orders were given for red tabs, all Corps signs and Divisional flashes to be removed. American cigarettes were issued and these were to be smoked instead of South African ones (the favourites in those days were Springbok and Gold Leaf – both unfiltered).¹ The instructions did little to conceal the identity of the troops. All ranks wore brown boots – the only Allied troops to do so and even the little street urchins knew that. Each man was also warned to be in possession of his pay book, identity discs, first aid dressing, mosquito cream and tablets, respirator and steel helmet.

A Battery advance vehicle party of 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery with twelve guns and tractors departed on 7 April and a second vehicle party of six self-propelled guns, four jeeps, a water tanker and three GS vehicles departed on 8 April. Both vehicle parties, with advance parties of the other

¹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD262, CMF 49, file A1.

Batteries, joined a 'vehicle party' under Major Garlick, with one other officer and 94 other ranks, which left Helwan for Alexandria - their port of embarkation.² Guns and vehicles were scheduled to be the first to depart for Italy. When loading commenced the heavy Jumbo derrick frayed. A new cable had to be fitted to be able safely to lift the 35 ton Sherman tanks carrying the 40 mm Bofors. But then a pintel broke at the base of the derrick's swivel. This took over seven days to repair. By this time the ship was partially loaded and it was impossible to unload. So the group waited.

At midnight on 12 April the main body of 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery under Major J.S. Jamieson left Helwan and at midnight marched to the station where they entrained at 3.45 am for Port Said, later embarking on MS *Sobieski*. With him were Captains J.E. Dixon-Seager, J.S. Heydenrych, H.A. Smith and B. (Barry) Risien, and Lieutenants G.W. Lofthagen, A.K. McGlashan, R.E.J. Dyke-Pointer, O.M. Swanson, S. McLaverty, G.J. Rackstraw (the latter, with Sergeant E.B. Roselt both later to be awarded the American Bronze Star) and 107 other ranks. Comparatively high seas during the voyage to Italy resulted in 35 per cent of the men suffering from sea-sickness which, however, did nothing to reduce their high morale. Those who did not suffer manned the Anti-Aircraft guns on the vessel; no aircraft were, however, seen during the voyage.

Two days later the main body of the Regiment - Regimental Headquarters, with 1/7 and 3/5 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries, left Helwan and also marched to the Helwan (cement siding) railway station where they entrained for Port Said and embarked on 15 April. 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was commanded by Major N.M. (Norman) Munnik - who had requested to be reduced in rank from Lieutenant Colonel in order to serve overseas. Serving under him were: Captains R. Sive, R.S. Quirk, H.E.P. Watermeyer and G.P. Penberthy, and Lieutenants C.G. du Bois, D.J. McQuirk, E.S. Gearing, F.C. Allan, B.E. Oscroft and D.A.V. Fisher. Lieutenant S. Hodgson was orderly officer. All these officers - as in Regimental headquarters and the two other Batteries - held temporary rank.

Marching out State

The marching out state dated 14 April showed: 30 officers, four warrant officers, eight Staff Sergeants, 43 Sergeants, 46 Bombardiers, 350 gunners and 65 Cape Corps personnel. It was signed by Captain J.D. Watson, still holding the post of adjutant, as he had been with 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the Western Desert.³

All parties embarked on HMT *Alcantara* and towards evening on 15 April the ship joined a convoy which sailed the same day. In contrast to those sailing in the same convoy on the *Sobieski* emergency stations sounded just after 4.00 pm on 18 April, as a result of sighting an unidentified aircraft. It did nothing to affect the high morale. The convoy arrived at the port of Taranto on 20 April; 2/8 Battery under Major Jamieson had manned the Anti-Aircraft guns on the ship in which they had sailed, had already disembarked and transported to Camp 65. The balance of the Regiment were disembarked into lighters and taken to the quayside from which they marched to a staging camp six miles from the harbour area. From there they left the next day for Camp 65.

The ship carrying the guns and vehicles docked at Bari - a black, dirty mess of a harbour where a German bomb had hit an ammunition ship some six months before. The first of the vehicle party arrived on 23 April; 2/8 LAA Battery received a warning order on 26 April to move on 1 May with 12th Motorised Infantry Brigade; the CRA addressed all officers (the war diary of 3/56 LAA Battery recorded this event⁴ - RHQ did not apparently feel it was worth recording) - but on 27 April a more important event was noted: 'at 15.20 Heavy rains commenced to fall and camp soon became a morass of black turf mud.'⁵ By 30 April most of the Regiment's transport had arrived at Camp 65, except for 28 vehicles still to come.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Officers and men of the 6th South African Armoured Division (V) landed at Taranto in Italy on 20 April 1944. Many troops after spending one night at a transit camp, moved to Camp 65, between the small towns of Altamura and Gravina di Puglia. The Division had taken over the camp which had once housed thousands of South Africans captured in Tobruk and elsewhere. The local children could sing *Sarie Marais* to prove it. Soon the entire divisional Artillery was housed in the camp, including 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, and the Natal Mounted Rifles/SA Air Force Regiment.⁶ The barracks were large and airy but a little cold for the winter months. It was a landmark day for the SA Air Force. For the first time, members of the SAAF on foreign soil faced the enemy on the ground instead of in the air. But it was a day which marked another step along the long road littered with anomalies and problems, exemplified in the NMR/SAAF – an armoured reconnaissance Regiment – and 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. Both were part of the Division under Major General W.H.E. Poole.

The 6th SA Armoured Division was a very well organised Division. Each vehicle of every unit carried signage, to indicate the unit to which it belonged, the sub-unit and the vehicle occupant i.e. the letter Z was the vehicle of the Regimental Commander. Every gunner vehicle, front and rear, carried a red and blue coloured plate with the Regiment's code number. For 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment the number was 73. All headquarter vehicles were marked by a diamond plate on each side and sub-unit vehicles by triangle, square or circle according to sub-unit seniority. Roads on the divisional route were well marked with sign posting and unit locations were marked similarly. In the maze of roads in Italy and with thousands of vehicles using the roads, route marking was an absolute necessity.

⁶ *From Portfire to Basebleed* – unpublished History of Cape Field Artillery.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

OPERATIONS IN ITALY

The arrival of 6th SA Armoured Division in Italy on 20 April 1944 was a landmark day for the SA Air Force. For the first time, members of the Air Force on foreign soil faced an enemy on the ground instead of in the air. The day marked another step along the long road littered with anomalies and problems, exemplified in the Natal Mounted Rifles/SA Air Force Regiment – an armoured reconnaissance Regiment – and in 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. Both were part of the Division under Major General W.H.E. Poole, which had joined Eighth Army in Italy.

With Eighth Army

Again under command of Eighth Army, 6th SA Armoured Division's first order group in Italy took place on 21 April. 12th Motorised Brigade, with 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery under command, was instructed to move to the Isernia area where the Brigade would ostensibly undergo training in mountainous country. But it was almost immediately giving alternate orders to move to the Cassino area in preparation for the relief of 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade in the line opposite Cassino. The Brigade was placed under command of 2nd New Zealand Division in British X Corps, in readiness for action at Cassino, in time for the fourth and final battle to take the heights and force a way through the German defences.

Major General Poole informed Brigadier Palmer that 12th SA Motorised Brigade Group – with 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery under command – was to relieve 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade 'man for man on the ground' during the night of 5/6 May. Reconnaissance parties left Gravina on 23 April, the main body leaving on 1 May. The first troops began to arrive at Acquafondata two days later; they received a hot meal before setting off on foot down the Inferno Track to 'A' Echelon under cover of darkness. They lay up there till the following night before setting out towards the Rapido River to take over from the Canadians.

The 25-pdrs of 3/17 Field Battery were hauled up the atrocious road to Acquafondata with the help of two bulldozers and they took over from a Canadian Battery on 2 May. The Regimental headquarters with 1/16 and 14/18 Field Batteries arrived the next morning to complete the take-over from 17 Field Regiment, RCA. The Bofors of 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, commanded by Major J.C.G. McIntosh, were placed under command of 1/6 Field Regiment (V), P.A.O.C.F.A., and took over from 41 Canadian Light Anti-Aircraft Battery on 4 May and passed to under command of 2nd New Zealand Division, but attached to 14 New Zealand Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment from 5 May 1944.¹ They deployed in the area to protect the field guns from air attack, 'D' Troop covering 1/16 Field Battery, 'E' Troop providing cover for 3/17 Field Battery and 'F' Troop with 14/18 Field Battery.² During their first night in this position they would be kept awake by Polish Anti-Aircraft guns being used as Field Artillery. The main bodies of the Infantry Battalions arrived on 3 May. They relieved the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade. Their role was a holding one but it was by no means inactive.

On 5 May 1944, Headquarters, Allied Armies in Italy, issued Operation Order No. 1 with the plan for the fourth and last battle of Cassino.

Battle of Cassino

At 11.00 pm on 11 May 1944 the Battle of Cassino began on a fourteen mile front with an immense contribution from the Gunners, when more than a thousand guns of all types and sizes were used to

¹ *Victory in Italy*, pp. 25, 26.

² SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD262, CMF 49, file A2.

pound the German defences. The town and the monastery were held by the 1st Parachute Division, reported to be the best troops in the German Army. They held these positions in the face of losses which would have broken the spirit of a normal Division.³ The Eighth Army attacked on the Rapido – Cassino sector with 2nd Polish Corps (3rd Carpathian and 5th Kresova Division) and XIII Corps (4th British Division, 8th Indian Division, 78th Division and 12th SA Infantry Brigade of 6th Armoured Division). The Canadian Corps was in reserve and X Corps in support on the right flank. After seven days of extremely bitter fighting – of the Alamein dog-fight type, almost hand-to-hand – Cassino and the monastery feature were taken on Ascension Day – 18 May – by the Poles, who suffered very heavy casualties in doing so (281 officers and 3 502 other ranks – of whom one third were killed and only 102 missing).⁴ At 10.30 am the red and white standard with the white eagle of Poland fluttered over the ruins to announce their victory.

124 Artillery Regiments of all types contributed to the battle. Anti-Aircraft units in the rear areas were not involved. There were a total of 1 554 guns: 1 152 field guns; 270 medium; 100 heavy; 4 super heavy, and 28 heavy Anti-Aircraft guns in a ground role. Ammunition expenditure was huge:

25-pdr.	1 220 000 rounds.
105 mm and 75 mm	99 800 rounds.
Medium and heavy	279 900 rounds. ⁵

Although the heavy Artillery included four United States Field Artillery Battalions (less one Battery) it did not include any other guns of the American Fifth Army. The enemy reply was insignificant but forty airbursts over the deployment area of 'F' Troop, 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery fortunately did no harm.

The defeated 10th and 14th German Armies retreated in disorder to the north of Rome and narrowly escaped destruction when the Allied force that had in January landed on the coast at Salerno, broke out of the perimeter and threatened them. The battle only ended on 4 June when the American Fifth Army ignored Army boundaries and entered Rome.

Anti-Aircraft Action

Two *Focke-Wulf* 190's put in a harmless appearance during the evening of 12 May. They were the first enemy aircraft the South African Anti-Aircraft gunners had seen since Alamein. Bombs were dropped in the vicinity of 'D' and 'F' Anti-Aircraft Troops on 13 May but the German aircraft were above the clouds and could not be engaged. No damage was caused and there were no casualties.⁶ Towards evening of that day an ME 109 E ventured over the same area and one gun of 'D' Troop fired a few rounds at the fleeting target. The War Diary recorded it as a 'hot reception'. A single aircraft dropped bombs close to the field Batteries. It did no damage. Another flew over the area held by Wits/De la Rey the next day and an ME 109 E which ventured over the general area was fired on by New Zealand guns, with a few rounds from 'D' Troop, 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. There were no hits.

To the veteran gunners of the light Anti-Aircraft Battery, a number of whom had fought right through the desert campaign under Lieutenant Colonel Meister it was an unusual experience to see enemy aircraft and not to be dive-bombed or ground- strafed by the enemy. Aircraft of the *Luftwaffe* appeared during the night of 15 May and bombed Brigade Headquarters. It was ineffectual. Both 1/6 and 3/17 Field Batteries were shelled the same night but suffered no damage. The shelling did not come close to the Anti-Aircraft Battery.⁷

The first major engagement by the Anti-Aircraft gunners of 2/8 Battery took place on the morning of 19 May, when about fifteen to eighteen *Focke-Wulf* 190's and Messerschmitt 109 E's flew over the

³ *Gunner*, April 1969. Reprinted in *Gunpit News*, vol. 13, No. 2, June 1969.

⁴ *Cassino*, p. 254.

⁵ *Gunner*, April 1969. Reprinted in *Gunpit News*, vol. 13, No. 2, June 1969.

⁶ *Victory in Italy*, p.38.

⁷ *Ibid.*

area at 6 000 feet. All guns engaged and about 280 rounds were expended. No hits were claimed but the War Diary recorded that one aircraft lost height rapidly and crashed near Cassino.

Meanwhile, back in the divisional area at Altimura, the BSM of 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery raised the alarm on 15 May when, un-noticed, he discovered the GOC of the Division walking around the gun park and obviously looking carefully at all the equipment. There was no thought of asking Major General Poole what he was looking for, or looking at. The mixture of artillerymen and Air Force personnel Battery had settled down well and the first issue of the Battery newspaper – *Pelican News* – had made its appearance. It contained news taken from BBC broadcasts as well as Battery news of a social and personal nature. The Battery moved from Camp 65 to Airoca on 20 May but at 1.00 pm the next day the Regimental workshop truck caught fire while moving through the narrow country roads. It held up the whole convoy. It was only an hour later that a diversion was found and the remainder of the convoy was led through; it was past 8.00 pm when the last vehicle arrived at the staging area, where vehicles were out under a canopy of trees.

At 3.00 pm on 23 May the headquarters of 1/6 Field Regiment received a warning order of their relief by a New Zealand Regiment. It meant their Anti-Aircraft Battery would also be relieved.

Regimental Headquarters and remaining two Batteries of the Regiment, with the main body of 6th SA Armoured Division, practised convoy drill and march discipline, before moving on 22 May to a pleasant staging area at Airoca, near St Agatha de Goti. The war diary recorded that Troops were doing their own cooking. Orders were received by 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery to re-join the Regiment in that area. Discipline was tight and at Regimental Headquarters, Field Returns dated 6 and 13 May recording a General court martial, for which Lance Bombardier C.H.J. van Vuuren and Gunner H.E.G. Barr were attached from 7/23 Medium Regiment as witnesses, were submitted to Division.

The Regiment finally assembled in the wide valley east of Caserta, between St Agatha and the hamlet of Lematole, south east of Cassino; where 24th Guards Brigade was formally attached to the Division, to begin a happy and long-lasting friendship with due respect on both sides.

Two Batteries were placed under command of Brigades from 28 May as under:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery | ‘A’ Troop: 11th SA Armoured Brigade
‘B’ Troop; 2/22 Field Regiment
Battery Headquarters and ‘C’ Troop: Divisional troops ‘B’ Echelon. |
| 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery | Battery Headquarters and ‘D’ Troop: Divisional troops ‘B’ Echelon.
‘E’ Troop: 12 SA Motorised Brigade
‘F’ Troop: 1/6 Field Regiment |

Battery headquarters and ‘G’ and ‘H’ Troops, 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had, however, moved away with the Guards Brigade the day before. ‘J’ Troop remained and was placed under command 7/23 Medium Regiment, SAA.⁸

Allied air superiority, once irreversibly established in the Italian skies ended much hope of action by 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. On only three occasions in June were the guns in action. Twenty – nine rounds were fired at an HE 111 which dropped bombs from a low altitude in the early hours of 8 June. The following night, two lone JU 88’s overflew the divisional area and dropped bombs. All together 127 rounds were expended in the three attacks, without result.

By 1 June Regimental headquarters was at Pontecorvo, moving as usual with 6th SA Armoured Division Artillery Headquarters, and located in the general area of the Division’s Main Headquarters. The Division was following the route Pontecorvo to Rome.

⁸ SANDF Archives, War Diaries. WD 626, file A2..

The Race for Rome

General Alexander shifted the inter-Army boundary north and left Route 6 to 5th United States Army. The enlarged Division came under command of 1st Canadian Corps (1st Canadian Infantry and 5th Canadian Armoured Divisions) which had broken through the Cassino Gap. After a short stay under the shadow of the ruined monastery on Cassino Hill, the Division followed the Canadians up Club Route through the Liri Valley.

The Canadian Corps was to move up to the Army boundary and prepare to pass 6th SA Armoured Division through in pursuit through Rome. The '6th Div' raced through the Cassino gap and up the Liri Valley, but roads north were crammed with American and French traffic. The move of 11th SA Armoured Brigade on 31 May was described as 'a frightful nightmare'.

Because it was necessary to secure the route northwards to the small walled town of Castelnuovo di Porto where Highways 3 and 4 almost converged 28 km north of Rome, a 'flying column', named 'Bridgecol', drawn from 12th Motorised Brigade, was sent forward at 1.30 am. It included 'C' Company Wits Rifles/de la Rey, 'C' Squadron Natal Mounted Rifles/SAAF, a self-propelled Troop of light Anti-Aircraft guns from the Brigade's attached Battery, and an Engineer detachment. Bridgecol was to secure the Castel Giubbileo Bridge.⁹ Near the outskirts of Rome the road was hopelessly jammed with French and American vehicles. They eventually approached the bridge in the early morning with American infantrymen almost dead on their feet from weariness. General Mark Clark appeared and demanded to know of the South Africans: 'What the hell are you doing here?' Upon being told By Major J.J.C. Hamman – the column commander, that they had orders to capture the bridge the General brusquely informed him that he could tell *his* General – the Eighth Army Commander – that the American Fifth Army neither desired nor required the assistance of the Eighth Army and/or the South Africans to take the bridge. He more or less said 'Get the hell out of it – your tanks are cluttering up the place.' Before Major Hamman could reply '...there was a thundering explosion.' The bridge had been blown.¹⁰ An enemy aircraft appeared over the congested traffic and dropped anti-personnel bombs, causing casualties in 23 Field Regiment, RA.

The Guards eventually arrived to continue their advance over the bridge. But because it had been destroyed the Brigade moved onto high ground next to the French, overlooking the river. Meanwhile the rest of the Division was struggling along the congested route. Progress was slow. The Divisional column was halted by an American General and even when Major General Poole appeared his argument was of no avail.¹¹ The Division had to pull off the road while negotiations took place for the use of a route through the outskirts of Rome. A representative of XIII Corps sent to request permission for passage over one of the city's bridges was ordered at pistol point by an American military policeman to proceed no further. When the XIII Corps representative protested the MP became increasingly menacing.

Rome

General Clarke's eyes were on Rome. Everything was done to ensure the American Fifth Army would be the victors in the race for the city. Its Commander, at 46 years of age, the youngest Lieutenant General in the history of the United States Army was violently suspicious that General Alexander's plans represented nothing more than a scheme to deprive his Army of the glory of capturing Rome. It was a curious notion as the inter-Corps boundary had been laid down before the battle began and Rome was included in Fifth Army's 'territory'. 'Conceit was wrapped around him almost like a halo' one of his subordinates wrote.¹² His conceit and personal ambition allowed a powerful German force to escape a trap laid for it.¹³

A guard of honour was organised to accompany General Clark in his entry into Rome but he abandoned it and raced ahead with a group of media representatives. He was photographed in various

⁹ *Victory in Italy*, p. 52.

¹⁰ *NMR/SAAF*, p. 282.

¹¹ *Victory in Italy*, p. 52.

¹² *Rome Fell Today* p. 131.

¹³ *Chronological Atlas of World War Two*, p.126

poses at the Victor Emmanuel monument and, to the embarrassment of the large press entourage that accompanied him, in his 'victory speech' he completely omitted to mention the Eighth Army and all other units that had spilled so much blood on the way to *his* day of triumph. Although the fall of Rome was heartening news, General Alexander received a directive indicating that three United States Divisions and all the French troops were going to be withdrawn.

The South African Division finally entered Rome on 6 June and '...raced thro' Rome under a hail of flowers and a ring of overjoyed and excited people...'¹⁴

Disintegration

The Divisional Commander was seeking men to add some weight to his depleted Infantry Battalions and on 2 June a proposal to re-role 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment as an Infantry Battalion was made. The units of the Division were experiencing lack of personnel and with Allied domination of the skies it came as no surprise when, on 14 June 1944, the Regiment was ordered to reduce to 36 guns. From an establishment of 54 guns – consisting of eighteen SP and 36 towed Bofors – the reduction was achieved by disbanding 'C', 'D' and 'G' Troops. It left each Battery with two Troops, one SP Troop and one towed.¹⁵

Due to the disbandment of three Troops the Regiment had an immediate surplus of 225 all ranks. Four officers – Captain Heydenrych and Lieutenants Loffhagen, Boland and Greg Daly (the latter had been an Instructor at the School) and twelve other ranks were detached for traffic control duties under command of the Assistant Provost Marshall, and another party of an officer (Captain James) and 51 other ranks fell under the same command as a Divisional prisoner of war guard.¹⁶

But it was before this that disintegration of the light Anti-Aircraft Regiment had begun. The entire Regimental workshop Troop was withdrawn on 2 June and placed under command of the Divisional Mechanical Engineer. The workshop, with two Divisional workshops, was organised into an Advance Workshop Depot for quick repair service for the entire Division. In addition the attached SACS Signal Troop was also seriously depleted during the second half of June, both in equipment and personnel.¹⁷

Instructions were given on 19 June for the Anti-Aircraft gunners to commence Infantry training forthwith, with the idea that the Regiment could be used in an Infantry role until it became necessary to again employ it as an Anti-Aircraft unit. The proposal was received by all ranks with some indifference.

Air Gunners

The DGAF asked on 7 June whether he could recruit general service personnel from 43 and 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments – which were SAAF and presumably his responsibility in any event – to make good the shortage of air gunners in active Squadrons.¹⁸ But the CGS refused to allow this on the grounds that that it would be unwise to divert reinforcements for 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, to aircrew. Except for a few isolated bombing raids which caused no appreciable damage, there had been little enemy air activity and no action by 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Natal Mounted Rifles/SA Air Force Reconnaissance Regiment

When the Division reached Viterbo on 11 June it was decided to reduce the number of vehicles in the forward area. The virtually unemployed 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was withdrawn from operations and concentrated some four miles to the south. Before the idea of converting the Anti-Aircraft gunners into infantrymen could be implemented, instructions were received to transfer three officers and 105 other ranks to Natal Mounted Rifles/SA Air Force Reconnaissance Regiment as an Infantry component. There had long been a pressing need for this. Instead of posting members of the disbanded Troops the Regimental Commander asked for volunteers. Many answered the call. A

¹⁴ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, 1/6 Field Regiment.

¹⁵ Ibid., Box WD 626, file A3.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *The History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944*, p. 123.

¹⁸ *Victory in Italy*, p. 306.

number of adjustments had therefore to be made and it meant that the unit lost some of its best men. The group was taken on strength of NMR/SAAF on 22 June¹⁹ and five became casualties before Florence was reached.²⁰

The party met the reconnaissance Regiment's need for Infantry under its own control, to counter the efforts of well-camouflaged German tank-hunting parties and Anti-Tank posts lying in ambush for Armour on reconnaissance. Serious delays in the advance would be avoided.

At first the new gunner/infantrymen travelled off the roads by jeep, well ahead of the tanks, and were able to warn of enemy presence. They were, however, too exposed to shrapnel and small arms fire. The use of jeeps was discontinued after a few weeks and they were given tanks with the turret removed. They apparently did excellent work and contributed immeasurably to the success of NMR/SAAF in its role as a reconnaissance Regiment.²¹

One incident bears telling. The NMR/SAAF tanks were moving fairly rapidly in the final advance on Florence when Lieutenant Stan Hodgson – one of the three Gunner officers in the advance - reported he had reached the village of Necchi. Maps were still being consulted when the Lieutenant reported he had reached another village also called Necchi. It was only then that someone realised that the signs Stan had seen were advertising a famous make of sewing machine.²²

First City/Cape Town Highlanders

By 20 June the South Africans had advanced 100 miles from Rome; the next 100 miles would take six weeks.²³ Orders were received on 22 June for 130 volunteers from the Reserve Battery to form a Company for attachment to First City/Cape Town Highlanders. This finally put the lid on any further thought of converting the Anti-Aircraft Regiment into an Infantry Battalion. Orders to that effect were cancelled. An Anti-Aircraft gunner, Lieutenant Boland, but by then a Captain and acting Major, won the Military Cross during the time he spent with the Highland Battalion.

During June the Regiment was 'requested' to supply AWD with medical and hygiene orderlies, storemen and artisans. The request could not be granted, stated Lieutenant Colonel Meister in his monthly report 'as a further depletion of personnel' would, it was considered, end in disaster for the unit.²⁴ Apart from these worries the Regimental Commander was evidently not a happy man. His Regiment had been fully equipped with No, 19 and No, 22 radios sets when, south of Cassino, it had set out for the front lines. Withdrawal of signals personnel, with their radio sets and other equipment had already resulted 'in very poor communications.'²⁵ Sets left behind – No. 22 sets – were not proving of much use. The problem was solved a short while afterwards by placing the whole unit on one frequency.

North of Rome.

In the drive north from Rome and with the moon at the full, the Luftwaffe began occasional hit-and-run night attacks - 'nuisance raids' they were called. The divisional light Anti-Aircraft gun detachments enjoyed opportunities of firing at enemy aircraft in actions that were brief and must have seemed to them to be tame. The commanding officer and those who with him had served in the Western Desert had endured some of the heaviest dive-bombing and strafing attacks of the war when the Germans had enjoyed air superiority over the desert in 1941-42. The tables were now completely turned. Once Allied air superiority in the Italian skies was irreversibly established, the need for Anti-Aircraft Artillery almost became unnecessary in Italy and the Middle East.

¹⁹ *The Official Natal Mounted Rifles History*, p. 287.

²⁰ *Come Back to Portofino*, p. 294.

²¹ *The Official Natal Mounted Rifles History*, p. 287

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *With the 6th Div.*

²⁴ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, WD 626, file A4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

The Anti-Aircraft gunners moved on 23 June from Virterbo to a concentration area near Fabro. By this time the South Africans were moving slowly but surely forward in the face of stiff opposition. They were approaching a line where enemy aircraft, stationed north of the River Po, were within striking distance. Orders were received next day for their re-employment in an Anti-Aircraft role. From their position in the rear, where re-organisation as Infantry had cast a shadow over the South African Anti-Aircraft gunners, 'B' Troop with six SP guns was sent forward to provide air protection to 76 Medium Regiment, RA; 'E' Troop, similarly equipped, was sent to 1/6 Field Regiment (PAOCFA) and 'H' Troop, also with six 40 mm SP guns went to 7/23 Medium Regiment. Each had the additional function of providing local protection for these units against snipers and enemy infiltration.²⁶ The remainder of the Regiment carried on with Infantry training, moving on 28 June from Fabro along the division axis to a position one mile south of Chiusi.

In the first two days of July 1944, the three remaining Troops were also detailed to provide Anti-Aircraft protection. 'A' Troop was detailed to provide protection to 24th Guards Brigade vehicle concentration areas; 'F' Troop was ordered to picket the largest vehicle concentration areas on the divisional axis.²⁷ One section of 'J' Troop was given a similar role. The guns on road protection moved in bounds on the Divisional axis. The other section was placed in support of an ammunition supply point in the Division Headquarters harbour area.

During the night of 15/16 July 12th SA Infantry Brigade was relieved by the British 28th Infantry Brigade 'There was much clamour in the dark and there were casualties from enemy shellfire'.²⁸ One of the casualties in the early hours of 16 July was No. 3 gun of the attached 'E' Troop, 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, which was hit by a stray enemy shell. One gunner was killed and another wounded. The gun carriage was damaged beyond local repair and, although the gun itself was not touched, the whole SP Mounting had to be evacuated to the rear workshops. A gun from 'F' Troop – which was equipped with towed equipment - was sent to take its place.²⁹

The role of the Troops was changed on 20 July. 'E' Troop – on road protection – 'swopped' with 'F' Troop and 'H' Troop swopped places with 'J' Troop, giving the road protection guns a change of duty, protecting Artillery deployment areas instead of traffic on the roads. It also released the SP guns which became available in case there was a need to use them against ground targets.

Royal Visit

His Majesty King George VI arrived in Italy during July while heavy fighting was taking place in the battle to gain control of the last few miles leading to Florence. It was his second tour of the Mediterranean Theatre. His Dakota landed at a SAAF landing ground five miles behind the front lines. He visited South African units north of Panzano on 26 July, passing through the village of Radda – which had been taken only a few days before – where he visited the Anti-Aircraft gunners.³⁰ He left later that day in an Auster of 655 Air OP Squadron, RA. Anti-Aircraft protection for the King's visit was provided by nine guns 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.³¹

Mistaken Identity

Air attacks such as had been experienced in North Africa had become a dim and distant memory. The Italian skies were dominated by the Desert Air Force (still titled as such) and the number of enemy aircraft over the 6th SA Armoured Division front never exceeded ten on any one night. There had never been any worthwhile target presented to the Anti-Aircraft guns attached to the field Regiments. But considerable problems had arisen during July as the result of bombing attacks by clearly marked Allied Spitfires. Some casualties had been caused and there was resentment among the men of the Division because the Anti-Aircraft gunners did not engage the offending aircraft. Some units submitted

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., Monthly Report, 4.8.1944.

²⁸ *With the 6th Div*, p.136.

²⁹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, WD 626, file A5.

³⁰ *With the 6th Div.*, p. 149

³¹ *The History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944*, p. 127.

reports that the aircraft were ME 109E's while others confirmed they were indeed Spitfires bearing no markings and obviously flown by German pilots.

Allied aircraft had succeeded in keeping enemy aircraft out of the skies during the day and many nights went by without air attack. When the enemy did attack it was by night, switching off their engines and gliding down to release anti-personnel and butterfly bombs. Because of the unsettling nature of the dissent and rumours in the Division and because bombing in the vicinity had just taken place, 'A' and 'H' Troops on the night of 31 July/1 August engaged an aircraft which was silhouetted against the moon and identified as a JU 88. In doing so they broke standing orders forbidding the engagement of aircraft unless clearly identified. The aircraft fired the correct recognition signal and the guns ceased fire immediately. At this time 'A' Troop was attached to the Guards Brigade and 'H' Troop was responsible for protection of 7/23 Medium Regiment.³²

The first few nights of July – during the period of a full moon – witnessed more of the nuisance raids by enemy aircraft. Only two of these raids were in 6th SA Armoured Division area at Chiusi, causing slight damage to a Provost Traffic Control post. 'H' and 'J' Troops engaged on both occasions, without result. Requests had been made by now for the use of the 40 mm Bofors against ground targets but because of the 'close' nature of the country it had not been possible to use them.

Fortunately the Regimental workshop team was transferred back to the Regiment in mid-July. They were able to overhaul the lubrication systems of the jacks on the SP mountings. It was timely as the defects might have become more serious if not detected. During the second half of July the workshops recovered two damaged guns. One was repaired and the other sent back to the divisional workshop. Five other guns were overhauled and 38 vehicles were repaired. The work these men did was always appreciated.

The Race to Florence

The axis of advance was via Chiusi, Acqua Viva, Toritta, Sinalunga to Castel Nuovo and Castel Di Brolio. Radda was reached on 21 July and Panzano which was taken after strong opposition. It was thence via Impruneta and Galluzzo where the New Zealand and South African axes converged onto Route 2.

On the left of the South Africans, the New Zealanders had advanced to within 8 km of Florence but were forced back in a determined counter-attack. They soon broke the deadlock. In a series of small actions the South Africans won priority on the last stretch of road to Florence and a patrol of seven infantrymen from 'A' Company, Wits/de la Rey under Lieutenant J. Anderson entered the city on 4 August 1944 and reached the Ponte Vecchio in the heart of Florence.³³ Eighth Army had wanted to occupy Florence as soon as possible; it was a most important communications centre and the best possible springboard for an attack on the Gothic Line to the north of it. The South African Division won the race to Florence.

The Mountains

During the last days of the advance to Florence men of the '6th Div' could see beyond the River Arno - which ran through the city - the grim and menacing line of mountains rising to a height of nearly seven thousand feet on which – unknown to them - the German Todt Labour Organisation, with conscripted labour and a technical Brigade, created a barrier ten miles wide, stretching from the west to the east coast of Italy. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, a former Bavarian Artillery officer who had transferred to the Luftwaffe in 1933 and was now German Army Group Commander in Italy, had promised Hitler that he would halt the Allied advance in the Apennines.

It seemed that Kesselring *might* be able to halt the advance. Hopes of continuing their pursuit of the enemy were frustrated by the arrival of eight reinforcing Divisions for Field Marshall Kesselring, while twenty-five per cent of General Alexander's forces - three American and four French including the crack French mountain warfare troops, were withdrawn to form the invasion force for Operation Dragoon (previously named 'Anvil'), the strategically useless attack on the south of France. The

³² *The History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944*, p.126.

³³ *Victory in Italy*, p. 163.

Seventh Army would land on the French Riviera on 15 August. The offensive in Italy lost its impetus and 'So faded the last hope of a spectacular development of the campaign...'³⁴ The Commander-in-Chief Allied Armies in Italy now had at his disposal a much depleted force. With the South Africans about to enter Florence, the 25 000 man strong Brazilian 1st Division, Brazilian Expeditionary Force, began arriving in early August 1944 to reinforce the American Fifth Army, which had been reduced to one Armour and four Infantry Divisions.

Re-Organisation

By the time the '6th Div' reached Florence, there were virtually no enemy aircraft at which to open fire. The unprotected Bofors gun detachments were at a disadvantage should they ever have been attacked by ground forces. The guns were completely ineffective against the heavier German tanks now in use and the detachments could have been picked out by machine-gun fire.

Many of the Anti-Aircraft Regiments in Italy were being reorganised so they could be more profitably used. It seemed that all units of the Allied armies were suffering from manpower problems. Both in the British and American Army, whole Anti-Aircraft Regiments were being converted to Infantry. Infantry units were at such a premium that 74 British Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, organised as an Infantry Battalion and with the mortar Platoon of ILH/KIMR attached was placed under command of 6th SA Armoured Division. The Division's own light Anti-Aircraft Regiment - 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, could find no useful employment other than help the Infantry units. It never shot down any enemy aircraft, although sections were in action on a few occasions. With so little enemy air activity, it was surprising that the CRA should have under him a complete Regiment equipped with Bofors guns which had virtually no aircraft on which to fire. The guns could not be used in a ground role as they were completely ineffective against the heavily armoured *Panzers*.

War Diaries

War Diaries are generally dull but important notes about operational matters, useful for further study in many ways, and useful to the military historian; but diaries occasionally contain remarks of incidents that colour and give life to the story of a Regiment. So it is that Captain Watson, the long-serving adjutant recorded that four Lieutenants - A.L. McCluskie; Cc. Cowell; W.P. Douglas and S.D. Bernstein - were taken on strength during the week ending 5 August. Eleven details (per the War Diary) are noted on 11 August as reporting back to 3/56 LAA Battery from detachment on provost duty; and on 30 August six men were transferred to NMR/SAAF. Lieutenant A.K. McGlashan of 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and his Cape Corps batman were detached to the CRA for duty. They re-joined their Battery on 12 September, but no sooner had they done so when they were transferred to 1/7 LAA Battery.³⁵

Advanced UDF Admin HQ

Advanced UDF Administrative Headquarters (Land Forces) opened in Rome on 18 July under Brigadier John Daniel but he came face to face with the UDF's perennial problem – shortage of manpower.³⁶ Early in August 1944, XIII Corps passed on a request from 6th SA Armoured Division asking Eighth Army Headquarters to apply to Allied Armies in Italy for permission to convert 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, to Infantry, so as to supply the Division with another Infantry Battalion. But General Alexander's Headquarters refused the request on the grounds that the Regiment had been allotted to CMF only on condition that it was to guard airfields in Italy used by the SA Air Force. It was a stipulation increasingly unrealistic because of the decline of the Luftwaffe. A renewed request drew from Allied Headquarters a promise to reconsider the matter.

43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Frank Mellish – now a Lieutenant Colonel – returned from Italy to be told by Colonel Jeffrey that a warning order had been received for his Regiment to proceed to Italy as an Anti-Aircraft unit and representation had been made for its conversion to Infantry. Headquarters, Allied Armies in Italy (AAI)

³⁴ *Memoirs, General Alexander*, p. 135.

³⁵ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, WD 626, file A5.

³⁶ *Victory in Italy*, p. 180.

had, however, not agreed to this request. The Regiment handed over its Anti-Aircraft commitment to 42 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA, and left for a staging area.³⁷ Page 180 of the book *Victory in Italy*, intimates that the Regiment would probably be converted to Infantry on arrival in Italy.

The Regiment reached Taranto on 11 August with instructions from AAI to take over from 12 Anti-Aircraft Brigade, RA. But on 19 August a further message was received which placed 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment under command of 6th SA Armoured Division. Eight days later the GOC, 6th SA Armoured Division, informed Lieutenant Colonel Mellish that his Regiment was to be converted to Infantry. It was ordered to hold itself in readiness on 48 hours' notice to move to the Division's Reserve Group at Piedmonts d'Alife for conversion to an Infantry Battalion. When personnel were told they would become infantrymen, the information was quite favourably received. Lieutenant Colonel Mellish left for Naples on 25 August to visit Brigadier J.B. Kriegler at 6th SA Armoured Division Reserve Headquarters. On arrival he was instructed to re-organise his unit as a standard motorised Infantry Battalion with surplus specialists, such as signallers, to be trained as riflemen. Five per cent reserve was to be carried in the Support Company only. By the end of the month Frank Mellish had submitted to Brigadier Hingeston – as DGOA (Air) – his recommendations for appointments in a motorised Battalion.

His Regiment became the first Africa Service unit to convert to General Service and the first Artillery unit to be reorganised completely as an Infantry Battalion. It was a perfect example of the strange lengths to which the Union Defence Forces had had to go to keep its Division up to fighting strength; for this was a gunner unit, forming part of the Air Force but being converted to Infantry,' The recommendations included:

Battalion Headquarters	Lieutenant Colonel F.W. Mellish, MC.
	Major J.E. Sacks 2IC
	Captain D McKenzie Adjutant
Headquarter Company	Captain P.M. Francis
	Captain J.E.M. Joly QM
	Captain S. Kuper Transport
'A' Company	A/ Major G.L. Boland
'B' Company	Captain A.K. Mosely
'C' Company	Major I.G. Pierce
'D' Company	Captain I.G. Logie
Support Company	A/Lieutenant R.A.S. Upton

An advance party left for 6th SA Armoured Division Reserve camp on 30 August. While a tented camp was being prepared for the unit on the banks of the Voltuno River, Lieutenant Colonel Mellish went forward to be interviewed by Major General Poole. He was given a memorandum outlining the policy to be followed in the preparation of 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment for 'front line' duty. As all men were well grounded in basic training, Infantry training was to be confined to section leading, patrolling, digging and field works, route marching, shooting and co-operation with Armour. Platoon and Company training were to have special emphasis on attack, by both day and night. Battalion training was not to be undertaken without orders from the GOC. Training was to be complete by 15 November, with priority for the rifle Companies.

In order that six days of training of eight hours daily be completed each week, all leave was forbidden. Full use was made of appropriate courses for officers and other ranks both in British Schools and in the Reserve Group of the Division. Four officers and three NCO's were ordered to be attached to each Infantry Battalion of 12th SA Motorised Brigade for periods of three weeks at a time.

The main body of the Regiment arrived at the new camp on 11 September 1944 and were accommodated in bivouac tents. Personnel were immediately allocated to Companies and by 14

³⁷ Ibid., p. 181.

September training commenced. It had exactly two months to prepare for its new role. Twelve officers and 24 other ranks left next day for attachment to units and a number of officers and men were sent on specialised courses. On 20 and 21 September a total of two officers and 219 other ranks arrived as reinforcements. These two parties were somewhat of an embarrassment. They included a large group of senior NCOs' untrained in Infantry and unabsorbable under the proposed WET. Many men were over age for combat and others had medical conditions which precluded them from being used in active service. Lieutenant Colonel Mellish found himself in the same situation he had faced at Hay Paddock before departure from South Africa. He was, however, able to form a fifth Company without dislocating the training of other Companies. It was seen as a reserve Company.

Training continued and was conducted in atrocious weather. Everyone experienced great discomfort; but it was remarkable that they tackled the training under these difficult conditions with great enthusiasm. Instead of eight hours per day personnel kept at it for up to twelve hours at a stretch with little time for recreation of any sort. The weather continued to be unfavourable but there was no let up in training. By 2 October it became obvious that unless time was devoted to digging drainage and laying essential roads, the camp would become untenable. About 300 men were diverted to this necessary work for two days. After the first two weeks Bridadier Kriegler reported to GOC, 6th SA Armoured Division and commented on the extremely high morale and keenness of personnel who cheerfully carried on training despite the weather.

A special course for rifle Company officers ended on 5 October and on 13 October the group attached to 12th SA Motorised Brigade returned, less one Sergeant who had been killed and three NCO's who had been wounded. Lieutenant L.L. Fourie was killed in action while attached to the Division and two Sergeants were wounded. There were six grenade casualties during the course of training. In the last ten days of October two rifle Companies devoted themselves to co-operation with Armour and in village fighting, the other two practiced Platoon attacks, consolidation, and river crossings. There were four more casualties in the last week of the month; three due to hand grenades and one from rifle fire.

The second party to be attached to Infantry Battalions returned. It had suffered seven casualties resulting from heavy fighting in the Appenine mountains - two had been killed and five wounded. One NCO was reported missing. There was a requirement for a Platoon to form part of a SAAF Company to be included in Wits/de la Rey Battalion and as 'C' Company was at that stage the most advance in training, a Platoon under Lieutenant G.P. Whitelaw was allocated. It was given a good send-off by the rest of the Regiment.

During the first two weeks of November rifle Companies engaged in Platoon and Company schemes, including night exercises. Support Company completed its training and it ended with an exercise incorporating the Platoons of all Companies; live ammunition being used. The war diary recorded: 'The Instructors expressed great satisfaction at the spirit, enthusiasm and unbounded energy evinced by the men at all times.'³⁸

Regiment Headquarters opened in Santa Barbara where the unit was accommodated in double story flats – without provision for kitchens, latrines or messes; and there was some hesitation about the future of the Regiment. Morale remained high. By foraging for material, the unit built structures more or less weatherproof. Kitchens messes, offices, stores and Regimental canteens – both wet and dry soon appeared.

*'From a poor beginning the unit developed into an efficient and happy unit and took its conversion from Artillery to Infantry with magnificent spirit. The only regret is that the the only unit to convert from ASO to GS did not have the opportunity to prove itself as a unit.'*³⁹

³⁸ SANDF Archives, War Diaries (SAAF), Box 104.

³⁹ Ibid.

By this time Lt Col Meister's reduced 36-gun Regiment was responsible for air protection over the whole area occupied by the Division, with special emphasis for protecting the gunner Regiments. A Troop of Bofors was attached to and placed under command of each of the three gunner field and medium Regiments.

Rest, Recreation and Refit

The Division moved back to the area Castelnuovo - Berardenga, north-east of Sienna, for rest and refit. Early August was warm and sunny and units of the '6th Div' enjoyed perfect weather during a brief respite from the front lines, camped near the barely damaged old world city of Sienna. Vehicles and weapons were all given a much-needed overhaul but the rest period could in no way increase available reserves of men.

*'Quality had been born of the voluntary principle on which the South African Army was based, but quantity remained as elusive in 1944 as it had been since the war began.'*⁴⁰ On 8 August Regimental Headquarters, 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment moved to the rest area, Batteries and Troops linking up on the march. The wise Battery Commander of 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had sent Captain R. Sive ahead to select a good spot for his Battery. For once the whole Regiment was concentrated.

A Regimental parade was addressed by Brigadier J.H. Bierman on 9 August; arrangements were made for the overhaul of guns and equipment, and from 11 August each day, batches of twenty men at a time were granted leave to visit Sienna. A Rest Camp near Rome was also available to South African troops. During the rest period eleven men of 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery reported back from their detachment to the Provost unit and by mid-August the TSC instrument artificers, earlier withdrawn, were returned to 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. It once more seemed to be coming together; but not for long. From 16 to 28 August 'A', 'E' and 'H' Troops provided Anti-Aircraft protection near Sienna during the visit of the British Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. Winston Churchill.

Attempts had been made during the rest period to ensure that all equipment was in absolutely good condition but in his next Activity Report – that of 10 September 1944, Lieutenant Colonel Meister noted that modifications to joystick control on the 40 mm Bofors SP equipment had not begun as instructed. Although ordered some time before there had proved to be a shortage of packing material. Other guns, he said, had thankfully been overhauled due to the return to the unit of its LAD artisans.

From the rest area eleven men surplus to establishment of 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment were transferred to the Reserve Battery; and eleven men reported back to 2/8 from their detachment to the Provost Company. At 5.30 am on 24 August, 'F' Troop rejoined 1/6 Field Regiment; 'J' Troop moved off with 7/23 Medium Regiment at 1.06 am the next day, and the rest period ended officially at 2.39 am when Regimental Headquarters and the balance of the Regiment moved off to a position north-east of Certaldo, arriving there at 5.45 am the same morning. At Certaldo 1/7 LAA Battery was ordered to report to Headquarters, 6th SA Armoured Division, at grid Q 5754 – three miles east of Castel Fiorentino where the Guards Brigade had concentrated to its north. They were there for a short while to protect Imperial Light Horse/ Kimberley Regiment (then in Division reserve) which had been given the unusual task of guarding art treasures in six castles in the Castel Fiorintino area.⁴¹

The next day the Regiment moved further east to deploy in an area north of Prato. 'A', 'E' and 'H' Troops rejoined the Regiment on 29 August and were given the task of protecting divisional 'B' Echelon areas between Certaldo and Castel Fiorentino. 'B' Troop joined 166 Field Regiment, RA, on 26 August.

⁴⁰ *Victory in Italy*, p. 171.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

Fifth US Army

With Florence captured the campaign in Central Italy had come to an end. Regrouping of Eighth Army was necessary for the attack on the Gothic Line. General Alexander secretly transferred the main weight of Eighth Army back to the east coast and, once the enemy had weakened his centre to meet this threat, the American Fifth Army would attack on the axis Florence – Bologna. The Divisions of XIII Corps – 6th SA Armoured, 1st British and 8th Indian Divisions – were placed under command Fifth United States Army.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

WINTER AND THE MOUNTAINS

The axis of advance during the month was Empoli via Florence to Lamporechio – Prato – St Lucia – Fabro- Montepiano. At the beginning of the month, during a period of full moon, the enemy made a few night raids with single aircraft. A few casualties were sustained by Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment in Empoli. The Anti-Aircraft guns could not engage. 'A' and 'E' Troops provided bridge protection over the River Arno. Within a week of the two Troops being deployed, both bridges were washed away due to heavy rains. 'E' Troop was therefore moved to Route 66 for road protection south of Bottegone and also given the additional task of Air OP protection. 'A' Troop remained at Empoli to protect the Bailey bridges erected by the SAEC over the River Arno. The remaining Troops moved with the formations they supported.

Enemy aircraft - such as there were - did not present worthwhile targets and the Bofors remained largely idle. It was as well that this was so, as Regimental communications were poor owing to frequent changes in the attached SACS personnel. The Signals Troop was below strength and of poor quality. Wastage (a curious term) of personnel within the Regiment due to casualties proved exceptionally low and there were actually men in the reserve Battery that had not yet seen the front lines. Another call came for infantrymen and the Regiment agreed to transfer a further 47 other ranks to the Infantry Battalions. There was no need for reinforcements.

An ambulance was attached to the Regiment from Army pool during September. A comedian might have asked whether it was in return for those transferred to Infantry. In addition, a dental section which served all Artillery units and Division Headquarters, attached itself, for convenience, to 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The Regiment enjoyed wonderful medical and dental arrangements thereafter.

Winter was, however, slowly approaching; temperatures slowly dropped and towards the end of September winter rains began. At times visibility was down to only a few hundred yards. During the latter half of the month, winter battle dress was once more issued to personnel. In the bitter cold of October with many of the loftier peaks already blanketed with snow, miscalculation in higher ordnance planning unfortunately left many men without winter battledress.

Headquarters of 'F' Troop and its guns moved forward with 1/6 Field Regiment on 3 September but only four of its guns dropped into action when they arrived in the new deployment area at 3.00 am. Two guns had 'been bogged by rain'¹ and only arrived at 11.00 am. The guns were sited individually and far apart and personnel suffered during the wet weather. Just under two weeks later the Troop moved again but it came under fairly heavy shell fire in the new position. It was again shelled during the night of 18 September, and F3 gun came in for more heavy shelling the next afternoon. It was an uncomfortable position. F1, 2 and 4 were shelled again on 20 September, but there were no casualties. It did not stop maintenance; F4 was sent to the workshop team at Regimental headquarters that day for inspection and overhaul. When it returned four days later another gun and its 'follow vehicle' were sent to the LAD.

B' Troop reported a strafing attack by two unidentified aircraft between 11.00 pm and 3.00 am during the night of 3-4 September. Captain D.M. Sinclair, Troop Commander, 'A' Troop was seriously injured on 2 September when the jeep he was driving struck a double Teller mine. He was evacuated to

¹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, WD 626, file A6.

hospital where his right arm was amputated. On 7 September A6 gun and tractor became marooned in the River Arno when the detachment was crossing over a ford. The problem arose: 'owing to a sudden rise in water level'.² Equipment remained there until recovered and delivered to the Regimental workshop two days later. Just two or three days after the River Arno incident three men of 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were wounded by splinters when an enemy shell exploded nearby. They were evacuated to 75 Advanced Dressing Station for treatment. One man was able to return to duty almost immediately. And on that day Major C.D. Starke, Battery Commander of the Reserve Battery exchanged posts with Major Middlemost of 1/7 LAA Battery.

There were other casualties. Blackout restrictions were in place and the Battery Don R OF 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery collided with a truck in the dark of night on 10 September. He was taken to the casualty clearing station. After attention he returned to duty; but two days later was evacuated to the CCS for observation. The BSM of 2/8 LAA Battery was not so lucky; he was killed in a motor cycle accident about the same date.

Captain M.S.F. du Plessis was evacuated to Number 8 Casualty Clearing Station later in the month but was able to return to duty three days later.

In his report of 10 September 1944 Lieutenant Colonel Meister noted that modifications to joystick control on the 40 mm Bofor SP mountings guns had not begun (presumably ordered some time before) due to shortage of packing material. Other guns had thankfully been overhauled due to the return to the unit of its LAD artisans. He also reported that Cape Corps personnel were becoming a problem; they already spoke Italian more fluently than most other men in the Regiment and, as a result they were able to obtain liquor more readily. No disciplinary action had been necessary except in a few cases of drunkenness.

There was no enemy air activity during the first three weeks of September and in the closing days only isolated aircraft appeared at night, dropped a few bombs – which caused negligible casualties or damage – and quickly flew off. No Anti-Aircraft engagements took place. This quiet spell was used to good advantage; men were granted 48 hours leave to visit Sienna. Leave parties carried haversack rations but later a camp was established on the banks of the River Tiber with an officer, a Staff Sergeant and six cooks in charge. In Sienna a rest room and wine canteen which also served lunch, were established under Artillery Group control.³ It proved popular.

A few days later the Regiment welcomed 38 other ranks who arrived to replace those men who had volunteered to transfer to Infantry unit and had been taken off strength on 26 September. In 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery one other rank was injured and sent to hospital as result of a petrol fire. The workshop was probably a scene of activity - the Battery was also sending its SP guns for overhaul. It had an unusual task in the last four days of the month. 'E' Troop supplied a working party – the detachments of numbers 2 and 5 guns⁴ – to assist 8 Field Squadron, SAEC, and its bulldozer, to prepare a landing strip at Santa Lucia, north of Prato, for the new air OP Squadron formed within the Division.

Meanwhile the two Troops of 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, leaving the Battery headquarters at Cambiano, moved with 24th Guards Brigade from Cerreto Guido through Vinci, Olmi, Montecatini and Pistoia, ending on the last day of the month with 'B' section of 'J' Troop at Montepiano, and 'A' Section near Castiglione. 'H' Troop was deployed near Signa dei Pepoli – a winter resort in peacetime. 'J' Troop also came under heavy shellfire, resulting in the death of Sergeant T.P. Brian. Gunner Turner suffered wounds in the attack but was able to remain on duty.

Snow

By 1 October there was already snow on the higher peaks of the Appenine Mountains, the first that many of the South Africans had seen. By 8 October the Division's line of advance and only supply route

² Ibid., file A6.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

was covered by well selected, strongly fortified enemy positions on the heights of Monte Stanco, Monte Salvaro.

A number of men were in and out of hospital during October, probably as a result of the change in the weather and the poor conditions under which everyone was forced to live. Many men in the Division were without winter battledress due to a serious miscalculation when it was first ordered.

It was not apparently possible to arrange billets for each gun detachment as the guns had to be kept away from obstructions and the men had to live close to their guns. The bivouac shelters issued on the scale of one to every two men were inadequate for the weather being experienced. They were not water proof. The commanding officer stressed the necessity of improved shelters due to the wet and colder weather. He had much earlier submitted a request for sixty 180 lb tents and now sent another more urgent request to Division. Fifteen tents were received during November but personnel had begun to look after themselves, building various types of improvised shelters. Fortunately there was a good supply of wood for fuel in the abandoned enemy dugouts.

Additional Duties

Additional duties came the way of 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in October. The roads were sodden, with squelching mud. The 40 mm Bofors SP guns were too heavy to operate off the narrow roads and often became detached and detachments were left to fend for themselves when they had to make way for more urgent traffic. The SP guns proved to have no advantage over towed equipment.

It was becoming more difficult to supply ammunition, rations, and other necessities to the forward troops on the slopes of Monte Stanco. Lieutenant E.G. Gearing and seven other ranks with seven jeeps formed a jeep train for 12th SA Motorised Infantry Brigade, ferrying supplies to the forward troops. They often had to use chains on the tyres to overcome the mud. In addition one jeep and driver performed ambulance duty in the forward areas. Daily fatigues of twenty other ranks loaded and unloaded Bailey bridging at the CRE's dump and towards the end of the month an officer and twenty men were sent to assist the SAEC in bridge and road construction. Four officers – who were on strength but were in fact an addition to establishment – were on traffic control duties; two others (also surplus to the war establishment table) were detached as Liaison officers at Division Headquarters, and another was acting as commander of the POW guard.⁵ The Anti-Aircraft gunners were also called upon after 1 November to help 12 Field Squadron, SAEC, to maintain roads to Monte Acuto and Grizzano.

Major C.D. Stark returned to the Reserve Group and Major Middlemost resumed command of 1/7 LAA Battery from 17 October. Ten days earlier, Lieutenant H. Fraser – who had only recently joined the Royal Natal Carbineers for Infantry training – was killed after taking over a Platoon - in a valiant attempt to stop a German counter attack on the lower slopes of Monte Stanco.⁶ The fight for control of the mountain against German counter attacks, was bitter; It took place in severe cold and rain which turned mountain tracks into strips of glutinous mud, but with heavy support from the Artillery, Stanco, and Point 602 to the east of it, was finally wrested from the Germans by 13 October. To the east of Stanco the Guards occupied Grizzano station down in the Setta Valley.

The usual number of harassing raids took place at night in the last days of October and first days of November. 'Without early warning and IFF, instrument engagement at night is not possible,' stated Lieutenant Colonel Meister in his monthly report. Within Division, no damage or casualties were reported. The type of bomb the Germans dropped on these quick flights was chiefly AP, in most cases holding approximately 200 'butterfly bombs. The Regiment's war diary was brief: 'No Action. No Casualties. No Damage'.⁷

⁵ Ibid., file A7.

⁶ *Victory in Italy*, p. 222.

⁷ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 626, file A8.

43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Meanwhile on 11 September, 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment had arrived at its new camp on the banks of the Voltuno River, where everyone was accommodated in bivouac tents. Personnel were sorted into Companies and by 14 September training began. It had exactly two months to prepare for its new role. Most men were well grounded in basic training so Infantry training consisted of section leading, patrols, digging and field works, route marching, shooting and co-operation with Armour. Platoon and Company training had special emphasis on attack, both day and night. So that six days of eight hours per day could be completed each week, all leave was forbidden. Full use was, however, made of appropriate courses in British Schools and in the Division's Reserve Group, for both officers and NCO's. Four officers and three NCO's were attached to each Infantry Battalion of 12th Motorised Brigade for periods of three weeks at a time. The groups each left the day training began.

On 20/21 September two groups, totalling two officers and 219 other ranks arrived as reinforcements. They were somewhat of an embarrassment; there were a large number of NCO's, untrained in Infantry who could not be absorbed under the proposed establishment table (WET), and many whose age and medical condition precluded them from being employed in active operations. Lieutenant Colonel Mellish who had been admitted to hospital on 16 September with malaria, returned ten days later to find that it was difficult to secure adequate tentage or stores, as there was no authorised WET for the unit. Everyone pitched in and by foraging and scrounging material, and by a process of improvisation – without help from Division - the Regiment erected structures more or less weatherproof - a transport workshop, signals workshop, Regimental canteens - both wet and dry, offices, stores and Company messes and kitchens. The weather was slowly worsening but training continued in spite of great discomfort suffered by all ranks. They were enthusiastic and actually kept at training for up to twelve hours a day, with little opportunity for recreation. By 2 October it became obvious that unless time was devoted to digging storm water drains and laying essential roads, the camp would become untenable. Three hundred men were diverted to this necessary work for two days.

After the first two weeks of training the Regiment was visited by Brigadier Kriegler who commented in a report to GOC, 6th SA Armoured Division, on the extremely high morale and keenness of the men, who cheerfully carried on despite the adverse weather conditions. He noted that a fifth Company had been formed from the new arrivals without dislocating the training of other Companies. A special course for rifle Company officers was concluded on 5 October and eight days later the group of officers and NCO's attached to the motorised Brigade returned, less one Sergeant who had been killed in action and three NCO's who had been wounded. Lieutenant L.L. Fourie was killed in action on 18 October, and two Sergeants had been wounded while attached to 6th SA Armoured Division. There were also casualties during training – six other ranks had been wounded during practice with grenades.

Instructions were received on 25 October to post a full rifle Platoon to Wits/ de la Rey to form part of an SAAF Company eventually to be included in that Battalion. 'C' Company was the most advanced in its training and a Platoon under Lieutenant G.P. Whitelaw was despatched. It was given a rousing send off by the rest of the Regiment. For the week ending 29 October 1944, two rifle Companies devoted themselves to co-operation with Armour and village fighting, the other two doing Platoon attacks, consolidation and river crossing. There were four more training casualties during this period – three to hand grenades and the other to rifle fire.

A second party of twelve officers and 24 NCO's had been attached to Infantry Battalions and had been involved in heavy fighting in the Appenine mountains, overlooking Bologna. They had suffered seven casualties- two killed and five wounded, while one NCO was reported missing.

Employment of the Regiment was not settled until November 1944, when it was decided to attach Companies to Battalions of 12th SA Motorised Infantry Brigade. Furthermore, they were not to lose their identity as SAAF units. One Company each was posted to Witwatersrand Rifles/de la Rey; to First City/Cape Town Highlanders, Royal Natal Carbineers and Royal Durban Light Infantry. The remainder

of 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was posted supernumerary to the Reserve Motor Battalion of these units. 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was disestablished with effect 14 December 1944.⁸

Winter

The 2nd United States Corps had suffered over 18 000 casualties in its drive to reach Bologna and was withdrawn for rest and refitting. Winter had arrived and fighting became static. 12th SA Motorised Brigade, was then at Lower Veggio and, with 6th SA Armoured Division passing to under command of IV United States Corps, the winter period was used to the utmost for rotating Companies, for rest and for checking equipment and vehicles. Each South African Battalion was to absorb personnel from 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The winter months became a gunner's war and Frank Mellish was disappointed to find there was no vacancy for another gunner officer of his rank and experience. But it was agreed that the detachments of his Regiment were to retain their identity as Companies of 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. This stipulation was part of a strange – and short lived – effort to perpetuate the anomaly of having the unit as purportedly part of the SA Artillery. But at last, on 11 February 1945, the anomalous position of SAAF men serving in non-SAAF units of 6th SA Armoured Division was resolved. Former members of 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment were officially transferred to the Army units in which they were serving.

Desperately short of white volunteers in December 1944, the Army was nevertheless discharging perfectly fit and trained Cape Corps and black men, although 101, 102 and 103 Cape Corps Battalions were committed in the Middle East, and 104 Cape Corps Battalion had recently left for that area.

By the end of 1944, 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment had disappeared completely into the ranks of the Division's various Infantry Battalions, one Company of the 43rd going as an integral part to each of the already combined Battalions – the Witwatersrand Rifles/De la Rey, the First City/Cape Town Highlanders, and the Royal Natal Carbineers and Durban Light Infantry. Those superfluous to establishment were posted to the Reserve Motor Battalion.⁹ It was confirmed, however, they would retain their identity as Companies of the light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. In the First City/Cape Town Highlanders the newly arrived gunners replaced 'D' Company entirely. It was commanded by Major Gerry Boland, with Captain Tommy Martin as his second in command and Lieutenant Peter Solomon as one of the Platoon officers. Major Boland won the Military Cross during his time as an infanteer.¹⁰ 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was disestablished with effect from 14 December 1944.

A composite force known as 'Hingeforce' protected the Division's right flank, between the Guards and a United States Armour Division. Commanded by Lieutenant Colonel A. Johnstone of the Pretoria Regiment (Princess Alice's Own) it included a Battery of 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, a Squadron of the NMR/ SAAF and 'C' Squadron, 81 United States Reconnaissance Squadron. The steep mountainside was uninhabited but men were accommodated in bombed buildings and in ingeniously constructed dugouts complete with wood paneling and walls of ammunition boxes. Some even had built-in stoves made from biscuit and petrol tins.¹¹

The Armoured units.

In the mountains of Italy the 6th SA Armoured Division found itself in a role hardly less appropriate for armoured warfare in open country – for which it had been trained in Egypt. Their primary roles were severely limited in the mountains. So gunners became muleteers, tank crews dismounted and fought as Infantry, as did the Anti-Aircraft gunners, and the Infantry themselves became adept at moving through deep snowdrifts and across treacherous slopes while wearing white camouflage suits and

⁸ *Victory in Italy*, p. 257.

⁹ *The First City/Cape Town Highlanders in Italy*, p. 30.

¹⁰ *The Cape Town Highlanders 1885-1970*, p. 285

¹¹ *Come Back to Portofino*, p. 327.

hoods. Sledges were used to move supplies and evacuate the wounded.¹² No man could be expected to do this, day after day. Thus, Combat Command Charlie was born.

Combat Command 'C'

Combat Command 'C' was an improvised force which included an Infantry Company from each of the armoured units of 11th SA Armoured Brigade - Prince Alfred's Guard, Special Service Brigade and Natal Mounted Rifles, as well as 1/11 Anti-Tank Regiment.

Regimental Headquarters, 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment at the beginning of November was at Castiglione. 'A' and 'H' Troops were taken out of action on 31 October and their guns were parked in a central area near the headquarters and left with a small maintenance party. The Anti-Aircraft gunners were organised as 'D' Company, Combat Command 'C',¹³ in short, the CCC Battalion, as the Americans called it.

'D' Company (later Squadron), was deployed with the Combat Command, to provide protection to the left flank of the Division and at the same time allowed Infantry units to be withdrawn for rest and recuperation. It had relieved Witwatersrand Rifles/De La Rey on 16 October. The men who had been in the line needed not only rest from pure fatigue, the result of living as they were, and of continual expectation of attack, but also urgently required a bath, a change from wet clothing and warm food.

'D' Squadron, CCC Battalion was based at Collina, with No. 1 Platoon under Captain McGlashan, No. 2 commanded by Lieutenant McCluskie and No. 3 under Lieutenant Douglas. Once communications had been established the Platoons began patrols. Major Garlick, Staff Sergeant Maritz and Sergeant Slabber accompanied men of the Special Service Brigade on patrol in their area to get the 'feel' of the ground. The CCC was bombed occasionally – with no casualties ensuing – but one strike caused disaster to the line communications. Captain Watermeyer took a patrol of five men to find the breaks and repair them to restore line communication with the outpost at Cariola.

When the 'Bridge Builders' from 'B' Troop completed their task and returned to their Troop on 12 December, no doubt hoping for a rest from their labours they were probably disappointed. The next day they were ordered to form a reserve Platoon for 'D' Company, CCC. As part of the composite Combat Command Charlie, the Anti-Aircraft gunners joined this 'dismounted' formation at the same time as Pretoria Regiment (Princess Alice's Own) and men of Durban Light Infantry.

In the winter line the Infantry Company drawn from 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, held a section of the divisional front on Monte Stanco. On 7 December the commanding officer noted in his monthly Activity Report that '...the AA Infantry Company had on 18 November completed one month in the front lines.'¹⁴ He suggested it should '...now be relieved.' He later made another attempt to have them relieved. They remained there, however, for two more months. Parties did all manner of work in the forward areas. They suffered with the infantrymen the rigours and hardship of winter warfare in the front lines in the mountains; consistently bad weather, with boots and clothing soaked through for days on end, and often without any hot food or drink for long periods. Supply by jeep train was replaced with ammunition and rations being supplied by mule 'trains'.

Bofors Squadron

Lieutenant Gearing and his jeep train drivers reported back to 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and he was warmly received. He stepped into the shoes of Captain R Sive, who left for Rome ten days later for an interview with the Allied Civil Affairs Board.

On the first day of November in 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery Lieutenant W.P. Douglas with his batman and seven other ranks were withdrawn from 'F' Troop to join the 'Bofors Squadron for 'Infantry duties'. (The War Diary does not explain further.) One SP gun was, however, moved away and

¹² *Victory in Italy*, p. 257.

¹³ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 626, file A8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

deployed at Monzumo, for engagement at ground targets. This was probably the Infantry duty mentioned and it entailed only one gun being used. Conditions were not pleasant. Rain was heavy – in fact, described as severe – and the SP equipment had to be man-handled into position on a mat of shell cases laid in the mud.

The 'Bofors Squadron' fired at two land targets early on 4 November – 76 rounds at one target and 44 at the second. Of the total of 120 rounds expended, 30 rounds were used for ranging - the rest of the rounds were direct hits. The gun was withdrawn at 6.30 pm and it returned to 'E' Troop. It was the only opportunity the Regiment had had to shoot at ground targets and the gun had virtually been put through a test. Four days later No. 2 gun of 'F' Troop was heavily shelled. There were no casualties but the gun was damaged and had to be sent back for repair.¹⁵

Two days after the shelling an Italian civilian suspected of spying was arrested by 'E' Troop's No. 2 gun detachment. He was handed over to the MP's. Enemy aircraft still appeared occasionally and the gunners reacted when they could. Bombs straddled No 4 gun of the same Troop that evening; and the next day an unidentified aircraft dive-bombed the area in which No. 3 gun of 'F' Troop was deployed. Fifty rounds were fired at these fleeting targets. Four guns of the Troop hit back but despite firing 64 rounds there were no hits; and fortunately no casualties.

There were days of good weather in mid-November and enemy aircraft were surprisingly active at this time. But they usually flew at the turn of light, morning and evening. Flights were made by single JU 87's such as happened on 25 November when a JU 87 ground strafed the guns. No bombs were dropped; no hits were recorded and, once again, there was no damage and no casualties. To the gunners these attacks seemed purposeless. There was no opportunity for the guns of 'J' Troop to fire even one round. Although ammunition expenditure had been restricted to fifteen rounds per gun per day, 250 rounds first line ammunition was dumped after 12 November. The field gunners began a programme of harassing fire on Monte Sole. Preparations for taking Monte Sole began on Saturday, 30 November 1944, with preliminary operations to secure a start line.

Two days earlier an ME 109 G had the audacity to fly over the astonished gunners of 'J' Troop's area. It was a relatively quick visit but the gunners were wide awake, J1 and J6 guns fired 18 and 8 rounds respectively, but the pilot was in luck, they were not able to claim any hits.

A Gunner's War

Throughout the winter months, from November 1944 to February 1945, the Division engaged in static warfare in the Appenine Mountains. It was mainly a gunner's war, with Infantry patrols continuously probing the enemy defences.

Further up the route to Bologna the twin peaks of Caprara and Sole blocked the way, dominating the two road approaches to the city. The Germans were determined it should remain so. These mountains dominated the two road approaches to Bologna. Preparations for taking Monte Sole began on Saturday, 30 November 1944, with preliminary operations to secure a start line.

The immediate battle area was drained of civilians and assumed a deserted, silent state. The big advantage was that a large number of farm houses and other buildings became available for forward posts and headquarters', and to accommodate men occupying the area. Winter was hard and cruel and the houses were welcome. Artificial moonlight was supplied for almost three weeks by 360 (American) Searchlight Battery, which came under command of 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment from 4 December. 'Moonlight' was supplied by shining the searchlights on the clouds, thus reflecting it on the snow-covered ground, allowing Infantry patrols to see their way more clearly. Sometime after the American Battery was withdrawn at end December, patrols in the winter snow were assisted in navigation by the newly formed 535 Searchlight Battery (V), South African Artillery. The 'Battery' apparently consisted of only one Troop of searchlights which also provided 'reflected lighting' by

¹⁵ Ibid.

shining the searchlight beams off the clouds. It was a little known unit, and was included in a 6th SA Armoured Division Order of Battle dated 3 April 1944 and also in Orders issued by the Division in April 1945.

No Enemy Aircraft

The Anti-Aircraft gunners of 'F' Troop, 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), SAA, had been left without much to do. From the time the '6th Div' had reached Florence, there had virtually been no enemy aircraft on which to open fire. The Bofors remained idle, moving when necessary with Regimental headquarters, 1/6 Field Regiment. They were idle for the simple reason that the Luftwaffe declined to present themselves as targets. And suddenly they did; they caused a stir when three enemy aircraft overflew the Regiment towards dusk on Saturday, 9 December 1944. Unfortunately they were too high and the guns did not fire. An abbreviated history of the Anti-Aircraft Regiment states: 'It was just as well this was so, for the Regimental communications were poor owing to frequent changes in the SACS personnel'. The signals Troop was below strength and of poor quality; communications were difficult, and as a result of a poor report by the commanding officer¹⁶ the Signals Officer was removed and replaced by Lieutenant S.W. Greve. The ten SACS personnel on strength were detached to the Armour Division's signal Squadron, and eventually moved to the Artillery Signal Squadron – presumably at Divisional Headquarters.¹⁷

The unprotected Bofors gun detachments were at a disadvantage should they ever have been attacked by ground forces. The guns were completely ineffective against the new German tanks and the detachments could also have been picked out by machine-gun fire. And, owing to the high gun power of the 6th SA Armoured Division and the availability of 105 mm gunned tanks to supplement the field and medium guns, the light Anti-Aircraft guns had for a long while been denied the opportunity of engaging ground targets, except for that one opportunity in November.

But the time had come; the long-awaited opportunity of firing their Anti-Aircraft guns in a ground role had arrived.

Land Targets

On 1 December No. 1 Section, 'E' Troop, 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was given the task and was ordered to report to the Guards Brigade '... as support Artillery in a ground role.'¹⁸ That day Major James, Captain Quirk, MC, and Lieutenant McFall made a reconnaissance and pinpointed three gun platforms for ground shooting onto the slopes of Monte Sole. This was a long-awaited opportunity to use a complete section instead of only one Anti-Aircraft gun.

No. 3 gun fired 122 rounds at specified targets and that afternoon the usual suspect Italian civilians appeared. Three men were arrested at 'E' Troop's tactical headquarters and handed over to the Field Security Service. The next day No. 3 gun fired 151 rounds, and during the rest of the month whenever there was thick mist the guns fired towards Mont Sole. The auto-loader on one gun caused a stoppage and a replacement was borrowed from 'H' Troop.

'E' Troop Tactical Headquarters was heavily shelled, 22 rounds landing in the vicinity. There was more shelling on 10 December, with three direct hits on the building housing the Troop headquarters. Communications were cut. A 'Shellrep' was immediately sent to the Guards Brigade and a 'Div Stonk' was laid on the enemy guns concerned.¹⁹ The Troop was commended by the Guards Brigade on the 'prompt and efficient manner in which the shell reps were reported' But it was the Gunners that were first hit.

¹⁶ *The History of AA Organisation UDF 1939-1944*, p. 128

¹⁷ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 626, file A9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Careful note was made during firing and it was recorded on 13 December that approximately ten per cent of rounds burst above the target, the remainder bursting on impact. Whatever the Guards thought of the Anti-Aircraft gunners, the Natal Mounted Rifles/SA Air Force Regiment thought differently. They approached the Battery Commander on 13 December and asked him to remove the guns, stating that the flashless cordite gave off a great deal of smoke which might attract enemy shelling - with consequent damage to some of their tanks in the same area. Early that afternoon there was a direct hit on 'E' Troop Tactical Headquarters, wounding one other rank and four Italian civilians. Communications were again cut. Ten minutes later another round hit the house in which No. 2 Detachment lived. One shell burst inside a room where two motor cycles were stored. Both were destroyed. No. 1 Section, 'E' Troop was shelled on five occasions that day. There were no casualties.

Firing on ground targets continued through the rest of the month. The enemy reacted by subjecting the offending guns to counter bombardment fire. There were no fortunately casualties whatsoever. Four barrels in all 'were bulged' due to prematures in the bore; replacements were borrowed from 'F' Troop; ground fire continued. One SP Bofors was rendered US due to a mechanical jam within the breech casing; the equipment was BLR'd and sent to the rear workshops.²⁰ Tactical Headquarters was mortared at half-hourly intervals during 18 December. Shellreps were again sent to Guards Brigade and within ten minutes the divisional Artillery again delivered a 'stunk' on the enemy guns. They ceased fire. Four barrels had to be borrowed from 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery three days later. Mist began to come only at long intervals and on 30 December the Commander, Guards Brigade, intimated at an order group that 'E' Troop's usefulness might be at an end in view of the clear weather being experienced.

Before their immediate task ceased at end December, the guns had fired 5 190 rounds at land targets.

Lieutenant Colonel Meister - and Christmas

Lieutenant Colonel Werner Meister was admitted to hospital via 8 Casualty Clearing Station with a chest complaint on 13 December. Snow fell that day and the weather turned much colder. It snowed again on 21 December and early on Saturday, 23 December there were heavy falls of snow which continued all day transforming the countryside into a winter wonderland, but making it impossible to move except by jeep, and then only on some roads, and only if tyres were equipped with chains. Christmas came, and with it a visit from Lieutenant Colonel 'Pop' Fraser of 1/6 Field Regiment and his Regimental chaplain, Captain A. Paterson. They visited all sub-units including the 'B' Echelon and the Anti-Aircraft Troop. 'Q' personnel excelled themselves. There was a pleasant change from daily rations, with hot soup, spaghetti, roast pork and turkey, a good variety of vegetables, and Christmas pudding and jelly – topped off with two free bottles of beer per man.

His Last Report

Unknown to Lieutenant Colonel Meister, his December Activity Report would be the last he would write. It was typed and signed by an unknown hand on 5 January, after he had been evacuated. His report remarked that instead of seven or more raids a day as experienced in the Western Desert only seven raids had been experienced in December 1944. And, it must have been in his mind, although he did not commit it to writing, not by ten to twenty aircraft at a time; the seven raids had been by single aircraft and were, as mentioned in an earlier report, only of nuisance value. Only one JU 87 had been engaged and at most 70 rounds had been fired at it. Each of the offending aircraft dropped either two to four bombs or pamphlets, or otherwise engaged in hit and run strafing. It was questionable, stated Lieutenant Colonel Meister, whether any flight had a definite target.²¹

Lieutenant Colonel Meister returned to the unit five days before 25 December, but was diagnosed with pneumonia and was evacuated to South Africa the day after Christmas. Major Neil Garlick took command of the Regiment.

²⁰ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD626, file A9. (Activity Report, 5.1.1945)

²¹ Ibid., file A9.

The Riveggio Bridge

A report and a letter of appreciation was received by Major Garlick from Major A.H. Rocyn-Jones of 8 Field Squadron, SAEC. It was a sincere 'thank you' for the assistance given by Lieutenant A. Alexander and twenty men of 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery in helping to build a bridge over the river at Riveggio. 'A' Troop Commander had been ordered on 9 September to reconnoiter a position from which the guns could protect a bridge under construction. The site was under enemy observation. The Engineers began their work before end October but had been chased off the site by enemy air action. Another attempt was made on 13 November but this time, enemy shelling forced the SAEC to withdraw. An alternate site 200 metres away was chosen, but it could only be approached at night. The bridge was nevertheless put in hand and completed by 8 December. It consisted of continuous spans on two panel piers and was the longest yet built by the SAEC in Italy. In appreciation of the 'services rendered by Lieutenant Alexander and his men the bridge was named 'A. A. Bridge'. The War Diary of 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery noted it was '...320 ft in length over the River Sambro at GR 766244 and now named ACK ACK Bridge.'²²

Meanwhile, in South Africa

The task of many units in South Africa changed. Once the Japanese were no longer a threat and with South Africa becoming more remote from the area of conflict in Europe units began to be disbanded. Coast Artillery Batteries had been closed down and placed on care and maintenance. Similarly, personnel in the four port defence Anti-Aircraft units were withdrawn and –except for maintenance personnel – were transferred to operational units. The AG on 1 January 1944 instructed that the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre (V), (S.A.A.F.) at Ottery, was to be converted into a Depot²³ and be placed under the control of DGAF from that date. At the same time it was, on the instructions of DGAF, ordered to be converted into a Depot,²⁴ and its functions and responsibilities were: to act as a reception, reservist and training depot for SAAF Anti-Aircraft units and possibly also for SAAF Army Units. He also authorised the disbandment of six Anti-Aircraft, two field Army and four coast Anti-Aircraft units.

But, in a four page Preliminary Directive – Serial No. S, 197 of 8 January 1944 – issued after Director General of Air Force took command, he stated:

The control of all matters relating to the A.A. Organisation, including equipment and personnel, was brought under my jurisdiction w.e.f. 1.1.44.

The authority given him on 29 December by Director Staff Duties, gave him the responsibility for:

- *Guarding and maintaining fixed A.A. equipment in Fortresses;*
- *Guarding and maintaining balance of A.A. equipment in controlled or detached depots;*
- *Taking over from D.G.T.S. all technical stores and equipment peculiar to A.A. and accounting therefore;*
- *Taking over and maintaining the Ack-Ack Training Centre at Ottery.*²⁵

It was a comprehensive document, and it covered the transfer of Field Army Anti-Aircraft units to the SA Air Force – either immediately or in the normal process of reinforcement. To cover this situation and ensure the maximum facility for reinforcement, he announced that authority had been given for the disbandment of the following units from 1 January 1944:

3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA,
18 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAA, and
51, 53, 54, and 55 Anti-Aircraft Regiments, SAAF.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., CGS War, Box 60/2.

²⁴ Ibid., DCS CGS, Box 119, file O (M) 17/13/

²⁵ Ibid., enc. 151.

He added, pending further instructions, 'these units will continue as a temporary measure to function as heretofore.'²⁶ ('complete disbandment' was only authorised by the AG in early March 1944.)²⁷ The establishment of 56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, the subsequent transfer of units to the SA Air Force and the disestablishment of the coastal units provided an outlet for SA Air Force Anti-Aircraft personnel in coastal Anti-Aircraft units who wished to escape from the boredom of inaction and who had not the remotest chance of seeing action.

Detailed instructions covered equipment (it became a 31 Group Headquarters responsibility); the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre; transfer of personnel to the Air Force; and the transfer of a minimum of 250 SA Artillery GS personnel of 'A' or 'B' medical category – '... inferior in rank to T/Sgt, are to be posted to 6 Div. Fd. Arty. Reserve.'²⁸ Cape Corps personnel presently at Ottery were to be retained for future Anti-Aircraft requirements while NMC personnel were to be re-absorbed into other SA Air Force units. DGAF also applied for the transfer of Colonel Stan Jeffrey to the SA Air Force from 1 January and, although initially approved, the instruction was later cancelled and he was instead seconded to the Air Directorate. Similarly, Lieutenant Colonel Guilford's transfer was not approved and he was also seconded to the Air Services Directorate.²⁹ DGAF on 2 March 1944, when finally authorising the disbandment of the units shown above, also requested AOC No. 31 Group Headquarters to submit a draft establishment for No. 16 Anti-Aircraft Equipment Depot.

In a later instruction DGAF announced the establishment of No. 16 Air Depot and again confirmed the dis-establishment of the six Anti-Aircraft Regiments announced earlier. On their abandonment the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre became responsible for holding on charge all buildings at Ottery Camp and the Anti-Aircraft equipment storage building at Saldanha Bay, and also responsible for '*pay, messing, sport and recreation, transport and medical facilities for No. 16 A.A. Equipment Depot*'.³⁰

No. 16 Anti-Aircraft Equipment Depot, (S.A.A.F.) was established wef 8 January 1944, and formed at Ottery Camp, Wynberg, Cape, on 17 January³¹ under the command of Captain J.H.N. Horne and under control of the AOC, 31 Group HQ. It was established to undertake the functions of a Central Stores Depot for all Anti-Aircraft equipment and stores. It was instructed to receive, store and/or take on charge and maintain all Anti-Aircraft equipment at Ottery, Young's Field, Green Point Common and elsewhere in Cape Town, Saldanha, Durban and Driftsands, Port Elizabeth. It was also responsible for maintaining static equipment at Cape Town and Simon's Town. It was, however, released from some of these duties to some extent by an order for Air Force Stations Driftsands and Durban to be responsible for maintenance of equipment in their area.

There was an immense amount of clearing up to do – buildings, sites and material surplus to Defence requirements. In Cape Town alone there were thirty Anti-Aircraft sites to be demolished and /or cleared – at places such as Noordhoek, Kommetjie, Constantia, Zeekoevlei, Milnerton, Ysterplaat, Red Hill, Seaforth - and from places that can only be found only as street names - in the vast suburbs of Greater Cape Town of today. And one gun had to be removed from the top of the Colosseum building in the middle of the city.

January in Italy was cold

Winter, and the immediate lack of suitable, warm, accommodation caused problems and war diaries for December and January contain records of a number of officers and men who were admitted to hospital. Heavy snowfalls were experienced in January. So cold had it become by the end of the first week in January that weapons were liable to freeze up. Rain fell on 28 January and the snow began to thaw. Surprisingly, the *Luftwaffe* made a number of appearances in the early days of the month.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., Fd Arty Gp 1, file FAO, Vol. 2, enc. 111.

²⁸ Ibid., DCS CGS, Box 119, file O(M) 71/13/1, enc. 151.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., Fd Arty, Box 1, file FAO Vol II, enc 103.

Air Defence Role

'B' Troop, with 166 (Newfoundland) Field Regiment, RA, fired 207 rounds at a JU 87 on 3 January and claimed a number of hits. The Battery's war diary states that 'it appeared crippled' and a report from the field Regiment stated that the aircraft was believed to have crashed.³² For its temerity in firing at the JU 87, the area came under fire from the enemy, 'B' Troop headquarters at Ponte Lucattelo was shelled on 17 January 'by guns of heavy calibre'.³³ Shelling of the Troop area took place on 20 and 21 January, at 9.30 am on 27 January (50 rounds) and again just after 2.00 pm when fifteen rounds fell in their area. There were no casualties to men or equipment. One man at least was probably glad to be out of any further shelling. He was sent back to South Africa the next day on compassionate leave.

Other Troops were also in action – but not under shell fire. 'F' Troop numbers 1 and 2 guns engaged two separate JU 87B's which flew over their area after 5.00 pm on 3 January. Accurate fire from number 2 gun forced one aircraft to pull out of its dive over Lagaro and 'take wildly evasive action'.³⁴ The guns between them fired only seventeen rounds. Meanwhile 'F' Troop numbers 5 and 6 detachments engaged two JU88's – also flying individually – that overflew their area after bombing American positions in the vicinity. They fired 28 and 18 rounds respectively, number 5 guns swinging onto number 6's target when their own was out of range. The detachment of Number 5 gun claimed a hit and this was substantiated by an OP who saw an aircraft that appeared damaged and was losing height.

'E' Troop No. 2 Section was also in action on 3 January, numbers 4, 5 and 6 guns firing about 56 rounds between them at a JU 88 which made an appearance at 5.20 pm. Their diary records: 'AA splinters and unexploded Bofors rounds fell around Bty Tac HQ.'³⁵ Ten minutes after the earlier action, three JU 87's flew over 'E' Troop No. 1 Section area 'but did not commit any hostile act.' – a strange remark to record in a war diary. But the Section was still in its ground role positions, hidden behind buildings and probably not noticed by the enemy pilots.

The appearances of German aircraft on 3 January 1945 were the last that 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft would see of the *Luftwaffe* for a couple of months.

A Continued Ground Role

Number 1 Section of 'E' Troop was retained in its ground role. It moved to Monzuno and the first five rounds were fired during the night of 4 January 1945. No explanation was given.

By noon the next day all three guns were ready for action. Snow fell throughout the day but No. 3 gun was able to open fire at 11.55 am, and 49 rounds were fired during the snowstorm on a previously registered grid reference. The Battery's war diary records: 'There were no prematures but after the 49 rounds the spindle of the cylinder release column stuck and the gun had to be stripped.'³⁶ During the morning of 6 January No. 1 gun fired 153 rounds, again during a snow storm. Although there were once more no prematures, the slides on the breech casing broke and the gun had to be returned to workshops for examination. It was BLR'd and a replacement gun was borrowed from 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. It arrived at 12.30 pm that day. Firing on ground targets continued during the next two days. There were several prematures in the 91 rounds fired – thought to be due to the intense cold. There was another stoppage on one SP gun – this time due to the taper pin falling out of the crank shaft. It was quickly and easily rectified.

At 5.00 pm on 8 January No. 2 gun moved to a new position in front of the houses used as cover and as billets, but it became bogged in a cesspool and had to be left there until the following night. No. 3 gun which had followed it was in danger of being snowed in but was fortunately towed out by an American M10 tracked SP Anti-Tank gun. No. 2 gun was extricated and re-sited at 9.00 pm on 9

³² Ibid., War Diaries, Box WD 626, file A10.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

January. All was quiet for the next three days and the only comment in the war diary was the departure of Lieutenant O.H.S. Swanson and his batman, who were detached for duty with 'D' Squadron, Combat Command 'C'. Nos. 2 and 3 guns were active on 13 January, firing 131 and 90 rounds respectively. No. 2 gun was in action the next day and fired 414 rounds onto the higher enemy-occupied slopes of the mountains. It was a day of rest and maintenance for the detachments the next day, but on 16 January harassing fire was again directed on German positions, Nos. 1 and 3 guns firing 217 rounds between them. 'The guns normally fired single shots at 30 rounds per minute and twelve second tracer ammunition was used. Laying guns on target took time due to 'lack of accurate dials and field clinometers.'³⁷

The Battery tactical headquarters decided it was time to move to another empty house, and it did so on 17 January. Unfortunately an American mine-laying team arrived and drew enemy fire. The 'E' Troop section suffered the effects of the rounds which all fell in their area. Fortunately there were no casualties and nor any damage. Hostile fire ceased as soon as the Americans moved away. The guns were hidden behind houses in the area and when ordered to fire they were brought round to the side of their house and took up position on marks made by the base-plates of the jack cones. When fire ended fresh snow had to be thrown over the blast area in front of the gun; it became blackened by the blast from the gun and was a pointer for enemy air observation of the area.

The weather on 19 January 1945 was curious. The Section awoke to strong winds, thunder and lightning; but by 1.00 pm the storm had passed and a thick mist descended over the section, providing excellent cover. A gun was quickly readied for action but the mist lifted and disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared. The gun was returned to cover, but at 3.00 pm 'the fog re-descended' – in the words of the war diary – and the gun was again brought into action. It fired 49 rounds of harassing fire on two points, with another 200 rounds directed later at Point 502.³⁸

Two quiet days followed. At Battery headquarters area Major Jamieson fell heavily on icy ground under the snow on 22 January. He injured himself and was admitted to No. 8 Casualty Clearing Station. He was followed by Captain Quirk who became a victim of illness. There was little to record for the balance of the month. 'E' Troop No. 1 gun fired the final harassing rounds on 26 January. Total expenditure had been 1 545 rounds. Next day orders to 'pull out' were received and the Section arrived back in the Castiglione area on 29 January 1945.

Before his heavy fall, Major Jamieson filed a report on the ground shooting.

The task given to No. 1 Section, he said, was a simple one of deception, firing tracer towards the centre of the Monte Sole – Ignano Ridge, halfway between the peak and the river at the bottom. It was to have a double effect – the tracer would be taken as axis lines for an attack and secondly it would lure the enemy into believing the area was a likely forming-up point. The actual attack would be on the left of the ridge. The attack was, however, postponed.

Because of the misty weather all shooting had, per force, to be indirect. Ranges were 4 000 to 5 600 yards. Bearing and angle of sight were obtained from a map, TE from range tables and the guns were then laid by means of compass and QE scales. The 40 mm Bofors – one of which had the oil-motor removed and 11-inch discs fitted to the splined oil motor drive shaft with a pointer attached to the mounting. These discs were marked in degrees and five minutes, one complete turn on the elevating handle equaling 4°, and on the traversing handle 6° 20'.

By means of clinometer (or more roughly with the QE scale) the gun was laid at zero and the zero on the disc coincided with the pointer. To obtain bearing, the gun was laid by compass on a bearing roughly in the centre of the target area and the bearing scale set at zero. Switches could then be ordered left or right of zero-lines.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., Battery Commander's monthly report, 19.1.1945.

Model Aircraft

But 1/7 and 2/8 LAA Batteries needed live firing training to keep them 'up to scratch'. About the time 3.56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery began its ground target training, Major Garlick visited a British Anti-Aircraft Regiment to see if he could have the use of an aircraft and drogue. They could unfortunately not assist him and referred him to an American unit deployed ten to fifteen miles to the south. On arrival he found the Americans using their range – firing at radio-controlled model aircraft he described as half-sized – the first the Major had ever seen. The Americans generously offered the use of half the range.

The Guards are Withdrawn

On 18 February 1945, 24th Guards Brigade was withdrawn from under command of 6th SA Armoured Division and relieved by 135th United States Regimental Combat Team from 34th US Infantry Division. The Guards were transferred back to Eighth Army and with them went 166 (Newfoundland) Field Regiment, RA. It was a day of mixed feelings as the Division parted company with these elite British professional troops. The South Africans and the Guards had enjoyed more than nine months of close comradeship on the battlefield. The latter had developed a special alliance with the Pretoria Regiment.⁴⁰ The Guards Chapel at their London barracks had received a direct hit during bombing by the *Luftwaffe* and every man in the Division contributed towards a restoration fund for rebuilding their place of worship, 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment contributing £315, 19, 6d to the total.⁴¹

The newly formed 13th SA Motorised Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (later Brigadier) J.B. Bester, DSO, until then Officer Commanding Witwatersrand Rifles/De La Rey, formally came under command of the Division from 6.00 am on 13 January 1945, although it would not be in the line until the spring offensive in mid-April.⁴² Its Order of Battle as at 18h00 on 8 February 1945⁴³ included: Engineer and signal Squadrons, a workshop, Field Artillery, field ambulance, a postal unit, a mobile bath unit and a paymasters office - there is no record of an Anti-Aircraft unit with the new Brigade.

Rest & Recuperation at Lucca

Combat Commands 'A' and 'B' of 1st US Armoured Division relieved the South African Brigade from its Apennine mountain positions, 'D' Squadron withdrawing from Collinan after on 3 February after being relieved by 91 Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. The American Squadron came under command of 6th SA Armoured Division from 1 February 1945. Four officers and 100 other ranks under Captain H.A. Smith were detached to 12th SA Motorised Brigade 'for special digging duties, apparently preparation of Infantry positions. They returned on 12 February after being away for eight days.'⁴⁴

Once relief in the line had been completed, the Division withdrew on 23 February 1945. It moved back to the area of Lucca for rest, re-organisation and recreation. 'B' Echelon, 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and the remaining Troops of 2/8 and 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries arrived at Lucca on 24 February, completing the move of the Division. All the Batteries were inspected by their commanding officer three days later. Units expected to be out of the front lines for about six weeks and they settled down to rest, recuperate and reorganise, with the emphasis from Division on 'welfare of troops' as the first consideration.⁴⁵ Sport was organised; leave parties went to Rome, Florence, Prato and elsewhere. There was, however, the possibility of an operation lurking in the background.

A New Commanding Officer

A new commanding officer joined the Regiment on the day it moved to Lucca. During home leave in South Africa, Lieutenant Colonel Howie was appointed to command 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

⁴⁰ *Victory in Italy*, p. 260

⁴¹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 626, file A7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Box WD 611, file A1.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Box WD 611, Order of Battle, copy No. 7

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, WD 626, file A11.

at the headquarters and at the two Batteries, with eight held by the heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. The workshops received a heavy breakdown vehicle. One wonders what they had done without such a vehicle before this time.

A Back-up Force

While in the Rest area the Division remained operationally committed to back the American 92nd Division in the event of another attack. Operation Order 1/45 had been issued on 1 December as it was thought possible that the German troops opposite the coastal sector and the Sergio Valley might lead to other 'spoiling attacks' being launched during March or April to dislocate any preparations for a spring 1945 offensive by the Allies.

Unplanned Withdrawal

On 26 December German and Italian Fascist forces had launched a surprise attack astride the Serchio River on 5th US Army's left flank, where the newly arrived and untried 92nd US (Negro) Division fell back hastily in considerable confusion and disarray, taking their Armour, but in their haste leaving an American Artillery Battalion and the Royal Artillery heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment to face the attack. The panic, unplanned withdrawal, placed the big United States base at Leghorn in some danger. Fortunately General Mark Clark had just reinforced the Division with 336 Regimental Combat Team and two Brigades of 8th Indian Division. Patrols from a Brigade of 8th Indian Division made contact with the enemy at 10 pm on 27 December and next day the Germans began to withdraw. Major Neil Garlick '...had dined in the American HQ mess only 1 or 2 nights previous...'⁵²

Rhine was the code that would set 6th SA Armoured Division in motion to take up defensive positions in the rear of 92nd United States Infantry Division. The Division was to occupy the 'Blue Line' on the code *Avon*, which would include a time for occupation of a second 'emergency' line. 12th SA Motorised Brigade was tasked to hold the defended area and 'restore ground gained by the enemy'.⁵³ 1/6 Field and 7/23 Medium Regiments were in support and the commanding officer, 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, was made responsible for co-ordinating air defences within the Brigade area. *Cowboy*, the code for the operation, was a short while later found to be compromised and a signal signed by Major Jan Burger amended the code to *Tweed*.

The Heavy Gunners

A mixed group of men from 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, S.A.A, had fought German tanks in Tobruk in June 1942, with a captured German Flak '88'; and until they were overpowered a Troop of Royal artillerymen with their 3.7-inch guns had fought the Panzers trying to reach Tobruk harbour. Such use of heavy Anti-Aircraft guns was originally not approved by higher command and it probably stems from the earlier days of the war when Britain, short of these guns, was threatened by the *Luftwaffe*. Times had, however, changed.

Lieutenant Colonel Meister had suggested in his October monthly report, dated 9 November 1944, that one Battery be converted to 3.7-inch guns. He again made this suggestion in the next month's report and did so again the following month. But in the latter he went a little further, pointing out the usefulness and immense morale value a heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery would have.

The CRA's staff obviously agreed with the original suggestion and on 5 February 1945, Regimental headquarters received an instruction nominating 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery to undergo instruction on heavy Anti-Aircraft equipment, for instruction in ground shooting procedures. Two days later five officers – Major N. Munnik, Captains J.S. Heydenrych and G.P. Penberthy, and Lieutenants F.G. Allin and E.G. Gearing and 39 other ranks left Castiglione for Via Reggio, on attachment to 76 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RA.⁵⁴ Lieutenant Bernstein and 44 other ranks had been detached on 5

⁵² Notes from Major N. Garlick, p. 50.

⁵³ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 626, file A11.

⁵⁴ Ibid.,

February for the purpose of digging 'fortifications' in the Largaro area. With thirteen men, the Lieutenant had returned to the Battery on 6 February and was placed in command of 'J' Troop.

On 26 February a second group, consisting of Lieutenants R.S. Adams, W.P. Douglas, S.D. Bernstein and twenty other ranks, arrived at the heavy Regiment to attend a conversion course. Both groups returned to 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Lucca during the first three days of March. Yet another group of men from 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery left the rest area on 12 March for training with the Royal Artillery Regiment.⁵⁵

A number of the officers of 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and many of the other ranks were originally coastal gunners who had served on the South African Anti-Aircraft port defences, so some were familiar with the heavy Anti-Aircraft equipment. In Major Norman Munnik they had a Battery Commander who had joined the Coast Artillery well before the war and had taken command of 51 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF, when it was formed, originally as 22nd Anti-Aircraft Regiment in May 1942. The officers and men now learned how to handle 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns in a ground role. It was a belated imitation of the German 88mm Flak gun, so successfully used in an Anti-Tank role in the Western Desert.

Indirect Laying

In preparation for indirect laying all ACR equipment (oil motors, electric generators and switches) were removed from all 40 mm guns and the eighteen SP guns of 'A' and 'E' Troops were equipped with bearing and elevation dials for indirect laying. The workshop also had to give their attention to vehicle repairs and another set of dials were later fitted to the guns of 'B' Troop.⁵⁶ This must have given the gunners something to think about.

Vada

There was a surprise for the Anti-Aircraft gunners. Orders were given to 2/8 LAA Battery for ground shooting practice.

Captain Quirk, MC, and two other ranks left the Rest area at 9.00 am on 16 March as an advance party for the United States Army Anti-Aircraft ground shooting range at Camponnoli. The remainder of 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery – excluding one man who returned to South Africa on 180 days 'Agricultural leave'⁵⁷ - followed them in mid-afternoon. Men from 'F' Troop also participated in the practices, using 'E' Troops guns. Ground shooting exercises began early on 17 March and continued until the Battery departed for the coast at Vada in mid-afternoon on 19 March.

At Vada, 17 miles south of Leghorn, there was at first 'silent practice', followed by shooting at a towed flag from sub-calibre mountings on four of the SP guns. The mountings had been manufactured by both Divisional and Regimental workshops to enable a Bren LMG to be attached to the Bofors barrel. The Americans were firing .50 Brownings, single shot. Also firing single shot, the South African gunners claimed the first two hits. Major Garlick recorded that it proved easy to tell which weapon had scored – Browning or Bren – by the size of the bullet hole. Later that day 50 rounds were fired at full charge at a half-submerged wreck lying about 1 800 yards off-shore.

The firing points were shared with American Light Anti-Aircraft detachments using quadruple .50 calibre Brownings on electrically operated mountings, mounted on 'White' half-track armoured vehicles. It was anticipated that the Bofors SP vehicles might have difficulty on the soft sand at the beach but they proved as mobile as the half-tracks. Practice laying and firing was carried out using both, Sights Correctional Mk V (Stiffkey sticks) and normal ring sights; using the Bren gun sub-calibre mountings.

⁵⁵ Ibid., file A12

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., file A11.

In the afternoon of 18 March, 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery with its twelve SP guns arrived at Vada for the practices. The diary records nothing more than its arrival.

Two hundred full charge rounds were fired by 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery at a flag towed behind an aircraft on 20 March. Hits were recorded. This was followed by another silent practice. Lieutenant O.H. Swanson missed this bit of fun – he had departed that morning for a Divisional sporting fixture in Rome. He returned to the Battery four days later, missing small arms and Piat practices and the first sub-calibre shoot at an 'O Q Target' – a model radio controlled aircraft with a wing span of about six feet. The Americans must have been a bit 'miffed'. The South African gunners shot them both down – one with a round in the petrol tank and the second by a hit in the radio controls. All together there were eleven hits on the two targets.

Over 1 200 rounds were fired the over the next day and the following morning. But in the afternoon of 24 March two new 'O Q Targets' were flown over the range. Neither was shot down although sixteen hits were recorded on the first and two on the second. The latter was only in the air for about eight minutes, before being landed with engine trouble. Tommy gun and rifle practice took place in the later part of the afternoon before the Battery departed for Lucca.

The commanding officer considered that the standard of firing and laying was very good and above expectations, (in fact he recorded it as of a high standard) after a year with virtually no practice or action. His monthly report also covered the training of the heavy Battery in a field role which he thought to have been rushed, due to lack of all equipment and personnel. Officers and men of 5th United States Army stationed at Vada were extremely helpful, special mention being made of Lieutenant Colonel McGoldrick of 5th Army HQ and Lieutenat McClarity at the firing point.

The Rest Period Ends

Believe it or not, a team consisting of Captain T.H. Larkin and Sergeants G Rideout and C. Biddington, all of the SA Air Force, arrived at the Rest area on 31 March to audit pay sheets. The well-earned six weeks rest period was rudely interrupted that day, two weeks early, not only by the audit team but by the departure of the Division to the front lines. 'A' and 'B' Troops, 1/7 Light Ant Aircraft Battery moved out early in the day under command of 7/23 Medium Regiment. The Division as a whole moved later in the morning to relieve 1st US Armoured Division in the Monte Sole sector. Relief was complete by 5 April and the South African Division's motorised Brigade, with three Battalions up, found itself holding a 5 500 m front on the foothills of three towering features – Monte Sole, Monte Abelle and Monte Caprara.⁵⁸

The 3.7's

The Regiment had already provided a number of men for the Infantry and for many other tasks and now, for a short while, it had a 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. Its new guns would only be used in a ground Artillery role. Once completely trained and still under Major Norman Munnik and with Captain Jack Watermeyer as his Battery Captain, 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery joined 7/23 Medium Regiment, the Division's medium Regiment.

On 20 March the Battery Commander, 3/56 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery (as it had become) - Major Norman Munnik, and Captains J Watermeyer and Ballantyne, Lieutenant Gearing and 43 other ranks, went to 557 Base Ordnance Depot, Naples, to collect eight American Mack tractors, three 3-tonners and five 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft guns. Six days later, another, smaller party left for Rome to collect three more of the heavy guns from another wing of 557 Depot. On that day Lieutenant R. Landrish, RA, joined the Battery on attachment from 76 HAA Regiment, RA. By this time Lieutenant P. Grobbelaar and an additional 41 other ranks had been taken on strength of 3/56 LAA Battery, to make up the numbers required, resulting from a specially modified, War Establishment Table (WET) received shortly before.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *With the 6th Div*, p. 171.

⁵⁹ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD626, file A12.

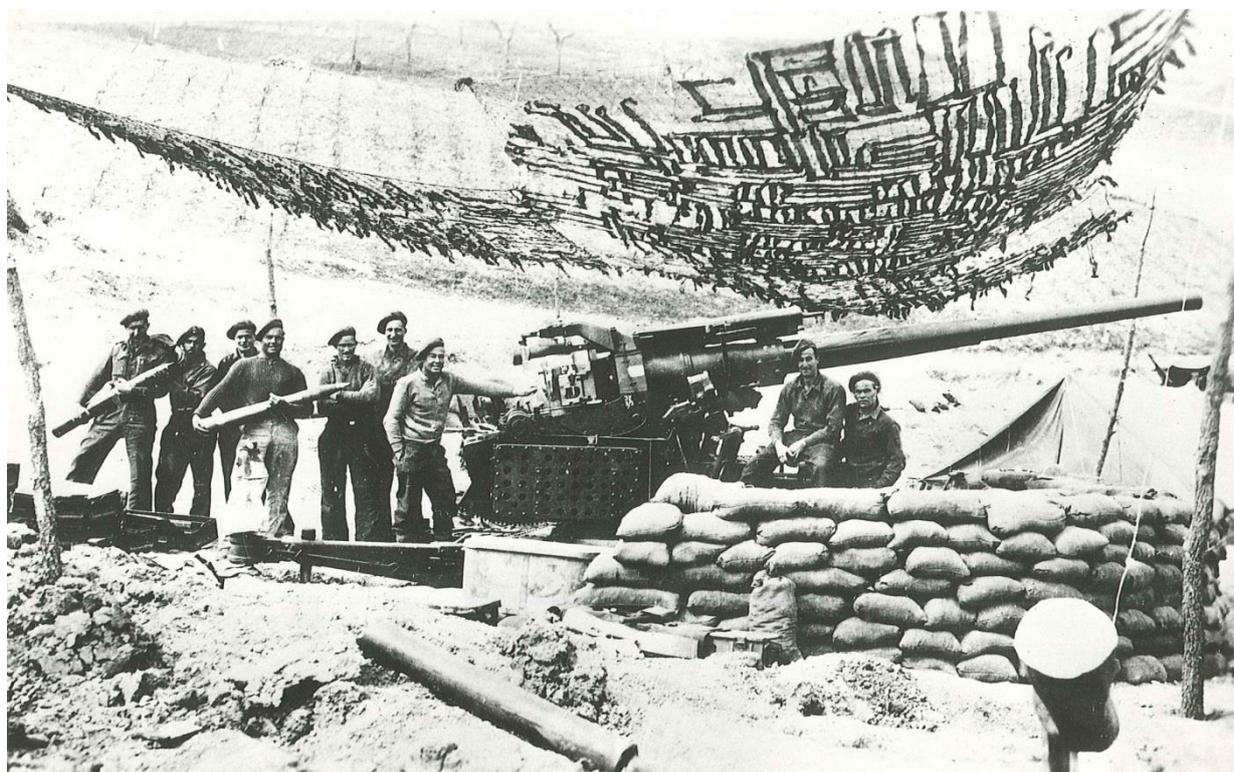


Figure 36: A 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft gun of Captain Norman Munnik's 3/56 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery in a ground role at S Benedetto. Picture courtesy of the late Jack Watermeyer

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

SPRING OFFENSIVE

Calibration

Lieutenant R. Bernstein collected 800 rounds of 3.7-inch ammunition from 55 'Q' Company on 29 March. While the Battery was preparing for their first calibration shoot - which was to be held on 3 and 4 April - Brigadier Bierman and Lieutenant Colonel Howie paid a visit. During the course of conversation the Brigadier informed Major Norman Munnik that his Battery was to be placed under command of 7/23 Medium Regiment and that the Anti-Aircraft guns had to be in the line and in action by 8 April. Modifications of sight brackets, clinometer brackets, dial and breech sights on three guns were completed by the Regimental workshops before the practice firing took place. It would appear that the modifications were only made to the three guns collected from Rome.

On 2 April guns and 'necessary' personnel moved to the Ponsacca area, to a live-firing range twenty miles south-east of Pisa, where the calibration shoot took place. The first shoot began early the next day, their first shell going right through the ground floor of a house, while the family lay huddled and terrified on the first floor. The house, like others in the area were, was presumed to be unoccupied. The shell was recovered and presented to the Battery. Firing firstly at 9 000 yards followed by shoots at 12 000 yards. Shooting continued the next day until practice shoots were completed by 3.00 pm. Despite the short period of training all ranks had received the shooting was considered to be good. Thought to be sufficiently trained for the task before them the Battery left the area at 5.00 pm and returned to Battery headquarters at Lucca.

Captains Barry Risien and Penberthy left on 6 April to 'recce' a gun area and after consultation with the second-in-command of 7/23 Medium Regiment an area north of Monte Acuto was selected. Two days later the Battery - by now known as 3/56 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery - moved out of the Lucca area at 8.00 am. It staged at Prato until 8.00 pm but was then badly delayed by the movement of Armour and only reached the deployment area at 4.00 am. Due to the nature of the carriage of the 3.7-inch gun it took a little while longer than usual to bring the guns into action on the uneven ground, but they were nevertheless in action by 8.00 am on 9 April, one day later than scheduled. The sighting equipment necessitated considerably more paper calculations than customary before the guns could be laid and fired.¹ The converted 3/56 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery fired its first rounds in an operational ground role on 9 April 1945.² The first rounds were fired later that morning, with Captain Penberthy as OP. Ranging with fuzes set at 'safe' the heavy Anti-Aircraft gunners afterwards set the time fuzes to obtain an air burst effect on the enemy positions.

'J' Troop moved to a new position some 2 000 yards to the rear flank of 'H' Troop and one can only guess the reason why - there is no record.³

The Battery had been trained and equipped in about eight weeks; the guns only issued nineteen days before the Battery went into action. Training was considered by the Regimental Commander to have been too rushed and this became obvious when '...several small points had to be "brushed up" after the Battery had actually gone into action.' The presence of Captain Larkin, RA, was probably welcome in this situation.⁴

¹ Ibid., file A13.

² *Victory in Italy*, p. 274.

³ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 626, file A13

⁴ Ibid.

Monte Sole

With the passing of winter, the air was still invigoratingly fresh and once more vehicles could travel along the mountain tracks without becoming bogged down in mud and slush. Bold and complicated plans were made for the coming offensive – to try and encircle enemy forces south of the River Po. The 6th SA Armoured Division was to play a prominent role – to take Monte Sole. American troops would attack on the far left flank on 12 April to draw the enemy away from the mountain. Bad weather postponed plans for the attack, which was delayed by two days.

Final Attack

On 11 April Lieutenant Colonel Howie held an Order Group during which he outlined the planning for D-Day in preparation for which 3/56 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery had already joined 7/23 Medium Regiment, S.A.A. The 'heavies' had since 9 April, been busy firing airbursts over enemy held positions. The attack on Monte Sole, for which 6th SA Armoured Division was responsible, was to be preceded by an aerial 'bombardment' from 12.30 pm, with H-Hour to commence at 10.30 pm. An Artillery barrage would be fired before the Infantry went in.

Captain J.E. Dixon Seager was appointed acting Battery Commander 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery on 7 April but two days later he and Lieutenant R. Dyke-Poynter departed for Florence on six days leave. One wonders whether or not they were warned about the order group held two days later. It was possibly attended by Captain J.S. Heydenrych who had been posted as Battery Captain on the same day as the acting Battery Commander.

Fire Plans

Various fire plans were hatched for the field gunners as part of a huge deception programme which was in operation before D-Day. Firing was carried out daily at various times, as part of complete, short and intense Artillery preparation. The fire plans were planned to simulate attacks at various points across the Divisional front, with an Infantry raid staged in conjunction with one of the programmes to increase deception and test the enemy defences. Fire plan *Salmon* (night of 7/8 April) was followed by *Jellyfish* (night of 8/9 April), thence *Porpoise* (night of 9/10 April) and *Dolphin* (10/11 April). *Dolphin* called for 3/56 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery to fire five rounds airburst per minute from H+5 to H+11. They were followed by *Crayfish* (11/12 April) and *Frog* (12/13 April). '*Frog*' was fired by all guns, including Anti-Tank and the guns of 3/56 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. Ammunition was confined to ten rounds per gun, except for 1/6 and 4/22 Field Regiments, S.A.A., each of which had an allocation of twenty rounds per gun. The fire plan stated that the method of fire was 'murder'. An earlier fire plan - '*Minerva*' - was cancelled and a DF plan came into effect from 6.00 pm on 6 April, which included 'murders' and 'stonks'.

Over on the east, Eighth Army began an attack on 10 April, preceded by support from one thousand bombers and 500 fighters. Good progress was being made. Bad weather delayed the American offensive which was to have begun on 12 April. It lifted two days later, and allowed the 1st US Armoured Division to launch its attack on the German mountain positions.

Attack on the Mountains

After all the months of winter, with continuous patrols being sent out to seek the enemy's positions and obtain prisoners from which to extract information, the front in the South African sector came alive with the massive attack on the heights of Monte Sole and Monte Caprara on 15 April 1945.

Just after midday men watched in awe as the first of 570 aircraft, in flights of eighteen,⁵ passed over the South African sector and began bombing communications and reserve positions in the rear of the Monte Sole- Caprara defences.⁶ When the bombers had finished fighter-bombers appeared and flew over continuously from 4.30 to 7.45 pm; perfect visibility simplifying the task of their pilots in bombing and strafing attacks on German positions. They raked the slopes with cannon and machine gun fire

⁵ Ibid..

⁶ *Victory in Italy*, p. 277

and, with the addition of almost 200 napalm bombs, it combined to set the heights alight;⁷ it seemed that nothing on Monte Sole could survive.

Sponge

When the Air Force had completed their task, fire plan *Sponge* began. All the guns of 6th SA Armoured Division and Battalions of 11th United States Corps Artillery, including one of their 8-inch guns, began the fire plan, designed to last four and a half hours; 218 guns began an almost continuous rain of fire on a confined area. The guns of 7/23 Medium Regiment and the 3.7-inch guns of 3/56 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery were superimposed on those of the field Regiments in the immense fire plan that supported the attack. Units were also allotted, on command, to fire on a number of Uniform targets, if necessary.

The Infantry assault began at 10.30 pm with First City/Cape Town Highlanders - supported by 'A' Squadron Prince Alfred's Guard - directed on Monte Sole and Monte Abelle, and Witwatersrand Rifles/De La Rey on their left, directed on Monte Caprara and Monte Castellino. 'C' Company, First City/Cape Town Highlanders, pushed ahead, throwing Cordex across minefields to clear a path, and to avoid allowing the enemy breathing space to reorganise ahead of them. A small party of five under a second Lieutenant from the leading Platoon of 'C' Company, dashed through the last minefield and with the loss of one man, reached the summit of Monte Sole just before 1.00 am. The rest of the Company followed and almost at the same time 'D' Company under the former Anti-Aircraft officer – Major G.J. Boland - was also on the summit. Fighting was extremely tough, and a number of counter-attacks on all the positions taken by all South African units were beaten off; but the assault led to the collapse of the enemy front although at heavy cost to the South African Infantry Battalions. Complete withdrawal from the Appenine mountain chain by the enemy began late on 17 April. The South African Division was quickly re-organised for pursuit.

Pursuit

After the rest period at Lucca the guns of 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment were allotted for the protection of the four Artillery Regiment: 'A' Troop with 7/23 Medium Regiment; 'B' Troop with 15 Field Regiment; 'E' Troop with 4/22 Field Regiment and 'F' Troop with 1/6 Field Regiment. But this arrangement led to an uneven distribution of the light Anti-Aircraft defences over the Divisional area. Policy changed as from 18 April and the four Troops were deployed on orders from Regimental headquarters, to give area coverage to the Division. Particular attention was given to river crossings, important road junctions and areas where vehicles were concentrated. It proved most satisfactory and no difficulties were encountered in road movement, each Troop leap-frogging as and when it became necessary. 'B' Echelon was, of necessity, kept busy with re-supply.

During the general advance from the area of Monte Sole to the River Po there was very little enemy air activity, only on two nights of bright moonlight did any enemy aircraft make an appearance. The night of 22-23 April witnessed the heaviest air attack experienced in the preceding twelve months. Aircraft attempted to harass the area and the axis of advance, using five or more types of aircraft. Casualties in the South African Divisional area amounted to four killed and twenty wounded. A JU 87B, one of those doing strafing and bombing runs between 100 and 2 000 feet was successfully engaged and destroyed by the Anti-Aircraft guns of 'B' Troop. 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. It was the first occasion guns of the Regiment had 'successfully engaged an aircraft at midnight by moonlight and the second-in command noted '...all credit must go to very fine laying'.⁸

The Heavies

Line communications at 3/56 Heavy Ant-Aircraft Battery were damaged by mortar rounds on 15 April; and on the same day two more subalterns arrived to spend a short while with the 'heavies', Lieutenant Harvey reporting to 'H' Troop and Lieutenant McFall to 'J' Troop. After firing a number of rounds during the day the Battery was confident it could operate in a counter bombardment role. In the next

⁷ *Gunners of the Cape*, p. 257.

⁸ SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 626, file A13 and Major Garlick's report of 8.5. 1945

two days, Lieutenant R. Langish, RA, returned to his unit after three weeks of secondment, leaving many new friends behind; and Captain Risien was withdrawn from the OP at first light. It had been decided no further observation would be needed.

New gun areas were occupied almost daily from that day: to positions south of Montorio, thence south of San Giovanni and by 22 April at Bolognina, where the Battery was '...employed in many Murder Tasks on en tpt and tps in vicinity of Finale and Nell Amelia.'⁹ During an action on 22 April, Gunner S. Hansford of 3/56 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery received burns as the result of a 'blow-back' on No. 2 gun due to faulty ammunition. The Regimental war diary described it as '...injured due to this unfortunate mishap'. It seems to have been treated quite casually as there is no record of his transfer to a casualty clearing station. The next day the Battery moved to a position south of Finale at Nell Amelia where 'H' Troop took two prisoners. Deployment of the guns was delayed by enemy sniper fire. Another move was made the next day. The reconnaissance party collected two more prisoners south of Felonica. Positions were selected 6 000 yards north-west of Bondero and at 3.30 pm the 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns fired their first rounds across the River Po. The shoot was witnessed by the Commanding Officer, 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Finale

The enemy was withdrawing across the bridge at Finale and on its approach the Royal Durban Light Infantry came under fire from tanks and 20 mm guns. The enemy counter-attacked at 1.30 am and were successfully repulsed but two tanks of Prince Alfred's Guard were knocked out by bazooka fire. Fighting died down as the night wore on. During that night a Stuka was shot down over Camposanto by two Bofors of 'B' Troop, 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. The Troop, then protecting 1/6 Field Battery, 1 Field Regiment, PAOCFA, had pulled into a camp area late that night and had no thought of going into action. The officers were possibly welcoming Lieutenants Harvey, Payne and McFall who had arrived on being posted to the Battery from the Reserve Group.

But they decided to deploy when an enemy aircraft came over to strafe. A second aircraft appeared at about 1.00 am was not so lucky. It was shot down. A third aircraft made three strafing runs at the guns but it, too, was hit and crashed about 150 yards from the one gun, its crew lying amid the wreckage. One of the two airmen had stopped a Bofors shell with his head. In the early hours of the same night a single enemy aircraft flew over the sector held by the Witwatersrand Rifless/De la Rey at Camposanto and dropped SD2 'Butterfly' anti-personnel bombs. Several men were killed and or wounded.¹⁰

Eric Axelson, an observer with Division noted details of the third incident in his journal on 23 April 1945:

Heard that the aircraft shot down in the night was only a couple of hundred yards away, so walked along to see it. We passed a Bofors of B Tp 1.12 LAA. The crew were busy cleaning their gun. They said it was they who had shot down the aircraft. Madden photographed them. The remains of the Stuka were about 150 yards from the gun. The remains covered a wide area, and the wreckage was almost completely burnt out. Lying about were the remains of the crew of two. One body was very burnt, but otherwise almost undamaged. The other man had stopped a Bofors shell in his head. A petrol tank has escaped the fire, and a Div man was standing guard over it, so that the petrol could be preserved for analysis.

*Back at the PW cage saw the Capt who was B Troop cmd. He said two guns were responsible for the bag. The Troop pulled in to the area late last night, and dispersed. There was no intention of going into action. The first enemy a/c came over, strafing and when it returned, they decided to place their guns in action. It was about 01:00 that they shot down the Stuka. It came very low and ten shells hit it. Another a/c saw it shot down, and out for revenge, bravely made three strafing runs at the guns. From then on the Div axis was left alone,...*¹¹

⁹ Ibid., Box WD 626, file A13.

¹⁰ *Come Back to Portofino*, p.391.

¹¹ *A Year in Italy*, pp. 206, 207.

Withdrawn from Operations

The entire Regiment, including the heavy Battery, was withdrawn to a concentration area near Poggio Rusco on 26 April and saw no further action. It took two more POW's that day. The heavy Battery had seen more action than the light Batteries and had fired a total of 1 634 rounds during the time it was with the medium Artillery Regiment.

By this time the Division had moved through the immense scrapyard of enemy equipment on the south bank of the River Po and had crossed the river. At fifteen minutes past midnight Regimental headquarters and the three Batteries with Headquarters, South African Artillery, also moved across the river to a concentration area near Legnano. The whole group moved again at 5.00 pm, arriving at a position north-east of Monagnano, on 30 April.

War Diaries are either a source of frustration, leaving the reader with barely any knowledge of the activities of the unit or sub-unit, or they are a pleasure to consult. The diaries of Regimental headquarters, 1/7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery – and to some extent that of 3/56 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery – are examples of the former. The diary of 2/8 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was quite different. The following is a quote from their diary:

For the last six days Germans have really been on the run, destroyed and abandoned equipment lay everywhere, especially south of the Po. The number of horses and cattle roaming the fields or lying dead on both sides of the road indicate that the Germans used them as his chief method of transportation. In most instances the animals seem to have been well looked after, and it is obvious also from examination of his MT, that maintenance is first class. Morale of the Battery during the chase has been very high – the moves have been well co-ordinated and the efficiency of the drivers is reflected in the fact in all the moves between 20th and 30th, much of it at night or in rain, not more than three vehicles were either lost or damaged.

During the advance a number of enemy vehicles were salvaged and put to use by the Anti-Aircraft gunners.

Surrender

Despite delicate and secret negotiations for surrender, with opposition from certain high ranking German officers, the news of Hitler's death released them from their oath of allegiance and enabled them to face reality with a clear conscience. Organised enemy resistance collapsed on 30 April except north-west of Milan where two German Divisions were still holding out. 6th SA Armoured Division was ordered to move to the Milan area and Operation Instruction 15/45 was issued on 1 May 1945 to cover the move. 1/12 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was ordered to remain in its present position and take command of the prisoner-of-war cage at grid 5266 which until then had been guarded by 4/13 Frontier Force Rifles.

On completion of evacuation of POW's the Anti-Aircraft gunners were instructed '...to move to 6 SA Armd Div Res Gp through 5th Army HQ (Br increment) Verona.'¹² But at 6.00 pm on 2 May, with effect from noon that day the news of the unconditional surrender of all German Forces in Italy was announced. The war in Italy was over. The Instrument of Surrender of the German Armies in Italy was signed at Caserta on behalf of the Allies on Sunday, 29 April 1946, by Lieutenant General W.D. Morgan, CB, DSO, MC (late RA). Reaction in South Africa to the news of surrender was estatic. Large crowds gathered in towns and cities to celebrate the victory.

Resistance ended in Germany with its unconditional surrender on 7 May and a surrender document was signed in a school-house at Rheims by General Jodl, German Chief of Staff, with a little known German General as witness. The Russians had a different idea of the date of surrender and it resulted

¹² SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box WD 626, file A13.

in considerable confusion. The Russian dictator, Stalin, refused to recognise the surrender document and insisted it be signed in Berlin – the final place for Allied triumph. Shortly before midnight on 8 May a second and final unconditional surrender was signed in Berlin by Field Marshall Kietel, the German Chief of the Combined General Staff, and Marshall Zhulov, for the Supreme High Command of the Red Army. Britain celebrated peace on 8 May and Russia did so on 9 May.¹³ The Springboks had endured a particularly savage and gruelling campaign in Italy. Reaction in South Africa to the news of surrender was ecstatic. In cities, towns and villages in South Africa large crowds gathered to celebrate VE Day - Victory in Europe.

World War 2 came to an official end in Europe. But a new bi-polar global political system emerged from the ashes of war – dominated by two super powers – the United States of America and the Soviet Union. It would bedevil world politics for many years to come.

Some good arose from the conflict. On 7 May Field Marshall Jan Smuts drafted the Covenant of the United Nations, and later submitted a suggested preamble to a new world charter. It became the Declaration of Human Rights – a beacon of hope for political prisoners throughout the world.

Those left behind

At a divisional parade near Brugheira on 4 May 1945, General Poole reminded his troops that it was exactly one year since the Division first went into action north of Cassino. On 14 May the whole South African Division was concentrated for a great victory parade in the famous motor racing track at Monza. The South Africans had endured a particularly savage and gruelling campaign in Italy and Major General Poole - who was presented with the American Legion of Honour by General Mark Clark, commanding The United States 15th Army Group¹⁴ - in a written address to the officers and men of 6th SA Armoured Division asked everyone to remember those who had been unable to be with the Division that day.

Since the commencement of operations in Italy South African casualties had amounted to:

	Officers	Other Ranks	Cape Corps	Total
Killed in Action	56	635	20	711
Wounded	199	2 390	86	2 675
Missing in action	8	157	7	172 ¹⁵

All those killed lie in well-tended cemeteries in various locations in Italy, many of them in the cemetery at Castiglione. An epitaph was written to those whose remains are buried there:

*South Africa, be these your own remembered sons;
From the Heart's South where the wide Zambezi runs
To the mantled Mother Cape, these were once yours;
So let them sleep, but know that as you pause,
In this quiet earth lie all the pasts you gave,
And here your freedom lives in the silent grave;
And when men ask who held the line this day
You may proudly say, 'These were They'.*

Four days after the last impressive parade of the Division at Monza the first parties of men for demobilisation were beginning to move on the long journey home. The Chief of the General Staff, Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, issued instructions for the immediate revision of existing military censorship

¹³ *Militaria* 25/2, 1995, pp. 80, 81.

¹⁴ *Victory in Italy*, p. 309.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 307-310..

directives. Future 'censorship will be confined to such matters as effect the security of operations during the second phase of the war', he said. It referred to the continuing war against Japan.

Clearing of Sites

The war in Europe was over but it had not ended in the Far East. Nevertheless the Defence Force began to dismantle the extensive network of Anti-Aircraft sites that had been built up in South African coastal ports. In addition to radar sites and other associated facilities in the Cape Town area and surroundings; thirty-one sites were ordered on 28 August 1945 to be cleared and all buildings removed. There were still guns at site No. C.H.31 (Leary's Farm) and site No. C.H.46 (Heatherton); their removal was ordered. But another fourteen 'ack-ack' sites (as described by Cape Command in a letter to QMG in late August) were still occupied. Most surrounded the harbours in Table Bay and Simon's Bay and not all by Anti-Aircraft – a motor transport section occupied one at the Yacht Club; one was occupied by Cape Corps members of 2 Heavy Battery and one was being used as storage by the SA Naval Forces.

War ends in the Pacific

War continued in the Pacific theatre. American marines edged ever closer to the Japanese homeland and were finally in a position to launch an attack on the Japanese mainland. But it was recognised that casualties would be extremely high. The United States Marines had already lost hundreds of men in the Pacific campaign. America resorted to bombing – with a difference. The first ever atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 and a second one on Nagasaki three days later. Both cities were almost completely obliterated. The world was stunned. Japan was devastated. Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender of Japan on 14 August 1945, and Japanese envoys signed the Instrument of Surrender aboard the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on 2 September.

The war had ended 'but the world was not immediately bathed in a peaceful glow'; naval and military activity did not stop.

As already discussed in Chapter 28, 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment disappeared into the ranks of the three Infantry Battalions of 12th SA Infantry Brigade and was, according to its war diary, disestablished with effect from 14 December 1945. Those men supernumerary to establishment were posted to the Reserve Motor Battalion of each of the three Infantry Battalions. It had been confirmed at the time that each of the three former Anti-Aircraft 'Companies' would retain their identity as Companies of 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. This did not last for long; the Regiment was disbanded on 1 February 1945.

43 Infantry Battalion (V), S.A.A.F.

Before the war came to its eventual end 43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment came to life again – in a different form. It was resuscitated with effect from 18 April 1945 as 43 Infantry Battalion (V), S.A.A.F. The unit was 'reformed at Helwan Base under command of 'O.C. UDF Base and Admin Command for all matters of Int, Admin, Trg and Op purposes.'¹⁶ T/Major D.G. Watcham was appointed second-in-command and acting Battalion Commander. Major O. Francis, commanding the advance party, arrived at Almaza that day with two other ranks. He had authority to proceed with initial preparations for accommodating and equipping the Battalion.

The SA Air Force base at Almaza was considered unsuitable for training and Helwan was instead selected. Major Watcham, Major Francis, Captain Sherratt – who had arrived ex 44 Infantry Battalion, SAAF on 20 April – and three newly arrived Lieutenants – D.D. Fyfe, A.W. Hemp and Hodgson – and the two other ranks, moved to Helwan in one Morris light utility vehicle. Major Maskew arrived two days later ex 6th SA Armoured Division Reserve Group and was immediately posted as adjutant. His duties could not have been too onerous – strength was only seven officers and two other ranks.¹⁷

¹⁶ SANDF Archives, War Diaries (SAAF), Box 43, file B2

¹⁷ Ibid.

In the first eight days of May another officer and 67 other ranks arrived; they were routed from SAAF (Army Units) Depot and from 42 Infantry Battalion, SAAF. Transport – fourteen 15 cwt vehicles, six 3-tonners and six motor cycles were drawn from 515 Vehicle Company a day after the unit received a visit by Major Dashwood- Fowler, Staff Officer (Army Units), Advance SAAF HQ, MEF. Officers and other ranks celebrated VE Day on 9 May. 'Free issue of beer and food made to other ranks through messes from a grant made by Camp Cmdt as the unit has no Regt fund', was recorded in the war diary. One can only presume that 'food' referred to additional, special, rations.

Strength was gradually increasing – Lieutenants J.P. Sulin and I. Zondag and 15 other ranks arrived on 10 May; with another 50 other ranks two days later. After their arrival the unit was organised into a Headquarter Company – with three officers and 31 other ranks; and 'A' Company with four officers and 95 other ranks. Another 25 other ranks arrived on 19 May 1945. Most of the men were artisans and had had little or no basic training. Basic Infantry training therefore began on 21 May. Five days later SAAF (Army units) Order No. 4 dated 21 May was received. It informed the commanding officer, pending the disestablishment of the unit, that certain vehicles were to be returned to the vehicle depot - at a date to be advised.

By 1 June the strength was ten officers and 161 other ranks and vehicles were returned between 3 and 11 June. Meanwhile Lieutenant Colonel Davies of SAAF Administrative Headquarters MEF, interviewed all other ranks with a view to absorbing them elsewhere in the SA Air Force via SAAF Base Depot. MEF. Seventy-four accepted immediately and were transferred the next day. Others reached the same decision over the next day or two. More moves took place four days later, Lieutenants Fyvie, Hemp, Sulin and Zondag going to 42 Infantry Battalion and 79 other ranks to the SAAF Army Units Base Depot. All arms, equipment, accommodation and stores, etc were returned to sources of origin. Clearances were received from the camp hygiene section and 'all authorities in camp notified of disestablishment. The Rear Party of eight officers were '...accommodated at 2nd Echelon UDF MEF.'¹⁸ They retained one Morris for their use. By 19 June the rear party completed its work and left Helwan Camp. The vehicle was returned. Major D.G. Watcham, Captain R.H. Maskew, Lieutenant S Hodgson and the one of the seven remaining other ranks were transferred to 42 Infantry Battalion, while Major P.M. Francis and the balance of the other ranks (two in absentia) moved to the SAAF (Army Unit) Base Depot.

The war diary of this short-lived unit ends appropriately with the following:

-----FINIS-----

43 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
Disbanded w.e.f. 1 February 1945
w.e.f. 18 April 1945 new designation
43 Infantry Battalion
Disbanded 1 July 1945¹⁹

A Combined Battalion

One former light Anti-Aircraft Regiment – masquerading as an Infantry Battalion had closed down – but there were two more such units in the Middle East.

A signal was received in Algiers on 29 June and it read: '44 Inf Bn SAAF due to be placed in suspended animation on release early release groups.' During July all 'C' Group personnel were routed to Almaza. Bearing in mind that the Battalion was an Africa Service Personnel unit – for service *only* in Africa – 44 Infantry Battalion, after being relieved by the Green Howards (a British Battalion) embarked aboard the MV *Argentina* and sailed for Italy. They arrived at Taranto at 7.00 pm on 21 July. No transport was provided and personnel marched seven and a half miles to a transit camp. A meal was ready for them

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

but no other steps to receive the Battalion had been made. The war diary is silent on what happened next. After nine days in Italy the Battalion embarked on HMT *Dunnottar* Castle. It arrived at Alexandria on 3 August 1945 where amalgamation with 42 Infantry Battalion, SAAF, took place.

42 and 44 Infantry Battalions, S.A.A.F. amalgamated as 42/44 Infantry Battalions, S.A.A.F. with effect 6 August 1945 and with Lieutenant Colonel W.H. Morris as commanding officer. The second-in-command was WS/Major C.D. Stark,²⁰ both officers were originally from Cape Town. Operational duties began almost immediately, as the war diary describes:

'A' Company	Ships guards.
'B' and 'D' Companies	Ship security guards.
'C' Company	POW escort duties, guarding ordnance stores, currency shipments, No. 3 British General Hospital and Burg-el-Arab and Mex staging areas.
'D' Company	Dock gate guards.

It was not an easy task for any of the Companies; they had to be wide awake. More than fifty ships in all were guarded by 'B' and 'D' Companies. With ammunition and petrol carrying vessels, the guards were not permitted to wear boots, carry arms or smoking materials. Insofar as the supply ships were concerned the war diary records: '...to which the evilly inclined local Egyptians, conscious of the fantastic prices paid on the black market, devote all the cunning they have accumulated during the thousands of years of their civilisation.'²¹ A case of tea could be sold for £150 and large bribes were paid to the guard who shut his eyes as a case was dropped overboard to be quickly picked up others in small boats. The men who had gained such a good reputation in the Algiers area did not waver from their duty but it was noted that 11 Battalion Reserve Brigade had provided guards for nearly eighteen months before '42/44' takeover. It was also known- and recorded – by the scribe: 'ASP spirit – had been without a cause for so long that they have lost any enthusiasm or ideals which may have once moved them. They had a lack of spirit and were negative.'²²

It was not all work and no play – or learning. Courses in English, Afrikaans, arithmetic and elementary geometry were held – with a promise of other and wider fields to come. Sports and recreational facilities were available at the Alexandria Sporting Club, and the Battalion's 'A'cricket team was unbeaten in a number of matches. Two officers and a Corporal were included in an Alexandria team which competed against a Cairo team. Employment opportunities were offered during a visit on 7 August 1945 by Major A.H. Betteridge, representing the General Manager, SAR & H. One hundred and forty-five applied immediately, and many others subsequently.

One task was enjoyed and very popular among GS men; that of escort to people being repatriated. In May a small party of GS men left en route to Greece as escort to a group of Greeks. Another group left on 2 May, with a parting shot from the GS Section 'who feel a certain irritation at being tied to Africa by the perverse view of the ASP'.²³

All good things come to an end.

The last war diary to be submitted by 42/44 Infantry Battalion (V), S.A.A.F. was dated 20 December 1945.

The war-time Anti-Aircraft organisation finally disappeared when the last war-time Anti-Aircraft unit closed down with the disestablishment of 1/12 Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V) on 3 January 1946.²⁴

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Military Information Bureau letter to author, reference AMI/MIB/(Arg)/514/3/4/dd 1.10.1955.



*Figure 37: A group of Anti-Aircraft officers on board ship en route back to South Africa. 1942
A number of names are unknown. Those in the front row include Lieutenant Daly, Ken Taylor and Rackstraw.
Behind them are: unknown, Guilford, Meyer, Meister, Starke, Wicht, Upton and Logie.*

CHAPTER THIRTY

TASK COMPLETE

Homeward Bound

'The task of the 6th SA Armoured Division has been completed' said a statement issued on 3 May 1945.¹ Allied plans for garrisoning Europe and for securing lines of communication did not require the presence of an Armour Division; it was agreed that repatriation of the Division would relieve pressure on resources in feeding and relief of the local population. A repatriation scheme for the South African forces had been announced some months before and a schedule of groups based on each individual's length of service, no matter in what unit he presently served appeared in a special supplement to *The Springbok* on 5 May 1945. Groups were lettered A to M – 'A' Group a covering attestation during September 1939 to 30 April 1940, 'B' Group from 1 May 1940 to 30 June 1940...and so on. Group 'M' covered those who had attested from 1 January 1945 and onwards. The first priority was repatriation of those men who had been prisoners-of-war. Twelve SA Air Force Squadrons and some forty other units were to remain in the Middle East Theatre during the second phase of war operations, and all these Squadrons and units were to be staffed in due course by men who had applied for extended service.²

'I am most proud of my Country', stated General Smuts in a message to South Africa when he described the victory in Italy as '...more colossal than we ever dreamed of and towards which South Africa has according to her strength contributed an unstinted measure.' The report in the *Cape Times* ended by stating: 'Scores of thousands have to be brought back and there is a grave shortage of transport'.³

By then men were, however, beginning to return home. South African prisoners-of-war were the first to be repatriated, and the first twenty-one men arrived at 'Zwartkop aerodrome' on Monday, 7 May 1945 in one of three aircraft expected that day, stated the *Cape Times Victory Edition* of Tuesday, 8 May 1945. They were the first of the released prisoners to be repatriated in the new shuttle service between Britain and South Africa. 'Five aircraft were expected on Tuesday and from Wednesday two aircraft will arrive daily, each with 21 men.'⁴ The Chief of the General Staff, Sir Pierre van Ryneveld on Monday, 7 May issued instructions for the immediate revision of existing censorship directives. 'Future censorship will be confined to such matters as effect the security of operations during the second phase of the war', he stated.⁵

Repatriation

Repatriation of troops from the Middle East theatre began with groups of men leaving according to the date they joined up. Lettered according to the alphabet, 'A' Group consisted of those who had first joined up for full-time service. It was a long process to go 'home'. In the absence of ships, men were flown to South Africa in flights of up to eight aircraft or more at a time. The journey took almost four days. Those who have in the past done the six-hour Dakota shuttle flight between Cape Town and Waterkloof will know what four days meant to those travelling in one of these flights.⁶ Five Sunderland flying boats of 35 Aquadron, SAAF, were later also used but many more men were able to travel by sea

¹ Special Supplement to *The Springbok*, 5.5.1945.

² Ibid.

³ *Cape Times Victory Edition*, Tuesday, 8 May 1945.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Notes supplied by Major N. Garlick, p. 52.

when at last shipping was made available. By the time their task was complete, the Sunderlands, built at the unbelievable cost of only £203.15/- had carried 1 786 troops and 655 tons of equipment.

Lodestars were originally used but from June, men were transported to South Africa by Dakotas, supplemented later by Venturas, Junkers and by Valencia's. Eventually, forty flights per week brought men back home.⁷

Most of 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment were in groups 'A' to 'F'. The Regiment's second-in-command, who had been among the first three to be called up for full-time service, was in the first group but being young and unmarried he decided to stay on. In August 1945, however, he felt it time to go. So he and others were sent by train from Northern Italy to Taranto – by sea to Alexandria – train to Helwan Base – and they stepped straight into the famous Helwan Riot. Shipping was scarce, aircraft could carry only a certain number at a time and the root cause of the infamous riot was preference being given to Permanent Force base personnel.

The Helwan Base Commander, a Colonel, had put men whose surnames began with 'A' into 'A' bungalows; 'B' into 'B' bungalows and so on; no officer or NCO had any control of their own men. Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Guilford arrived and diplomatically quietened the ring-leaders and the next day the camp was re-organised into groups of Regiments and units that fell under their own officers and NCOs.

Air Training School, Young's Field

In December 1939 General Smuts had offered facilities in South Africa for the establishment of schools to train both RAF and SAAF air crew.⁸ Acceptance of this offer was announced on 11 April 1940. The result – the vast Joint Air Training Scheme - otherwise called 'Empire Training Scheme' - which provided trained air crew, began with an initial agreement signed on 1 June 1940 (termed *Memorandum on the Expansion of Training Facilities in South Africa*) followed by a final agreement - *The Joint Air Training Scheme in South Africa, Memorandum of Agreement* - signed on 23 June 1941.⁹ (A total of over 33 000 air crew were eventually trained under this scheme). The Cape Air Training School formed in April 1938 was already in existence. It became the Armament and Air Observers School in September 1939, the Air Armament School in April 1940 and from 11 November 1940 became 65 Air School. Planning, siting and earthworks completed, building the Schools - with all necessary infrastructure of electrics water, plumbing and drainage - was an enormous task; and 65 Air School was only able to commence training on 30 April 1941. 66 Air School (Navigation and Bombing Training) also operated from Young's Field on the same date.

After thousands of air crew had received training at Air Schools all over the country, followed by their posting to Squadrons, the Joint Air Training Scheme began to wind down in late 1944. By mid-August 1945 all training had ceased. 66 Air School was disbanded on 1 April 1945,¹⁰ 65 Air School remaining at Young's Field until final disbandment on 10 September 1945,¹¹ The camp and its facilities, including hangars, became available for use by the post-war Anti-Aircraft organisation. It also became a civilian/military airfield; but of more importance in 1945 – it became available for storage of Anti-Aircraft equipment and, although not immediately, for use as an Anti-Aircraft training organisation.

16 Air Depot

The transfer of Anti-Aircraft guns and equipment from coast Batteries for storage at the Depot had already begun. Once 65 Air School were able to hand over hangars No. 22 and 23 in March 1945, the depot began moving equipment and stores to the more suitable storage facilities. After the final closure of the Air School, 16 Anti-Aircraft Depot was able by 5 June 1945, to complete its move from Ottery. With men continually being discharged from full-time service it eventually began to suffer from

⁷ Typed undated short history of the SAAF, p. 19.

⁸ *Yellow Wings*, p. 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11 and 70.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69,70.

a shortage of personnel, particularly of artisans. Shortly after the transfer of all Anti-Aircraft units had been transferred to Land Forces the Depot was absorbed by 92 Technical Stores Depot. Not all Anti-Aircraft guns were taken into storage at the Depot. For some reason the four 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns that had been deployed on Robben Island were left there – two to remain in action and two placed in long-term preservation. The Island later received another 3.7-inch and two Bofors – ex stores. By 1955 when the SA Navy took over the Island there were in addition, two 12-pdr HA/LA guns at Cornelia Battery.¹²

The Post War Army

Planning for the post-war Army began some time before the termination of hostilities in Italy and in June 1945, when the policy was decided, the task of re-organisation was a daunting one. It was based partially on the fact that the Union Government had agreed to assist Britain post-war by providing a Division, should any problem arise in the Middle East. Defence Headquarters not only gave thought to the demobilisation process but also to the welfare of those being demobilised. Many would have no jobs to go back to. The Interim Post-War organisation of the UDF covered in Routine Order R.O.1216 (which was itself an extract from R.O. Issue No. 251 dated 11 October 1945) confirmed the Government's decision on a post-war Defence policy to cover the period until 31 March 1947. The Government anticipated that, before the expiry of this period, '...world security and other aspects of the problem of Union Defence will have become sufficiently clarified ...' to enable it to decide on its ultimate long range policy. A substantial full-time Army, Air Force and Navy - based on manpower of one third Permanent Force and one third Active Citizen Force - was contemplated and a broad outline was given in the Routine Order. Two ACF Infantry Divisions, each with Brigades, training establishments - one of which was an Artillery training establishment – supporting and medical services and a Junior Cape Corps Battalion were listed; but there was no mention whatsoever of an Anti-Aircraft organisation.

Military Commands

Commands dropped their war-time status and they once again became Permanent Force Commands, Cape Fortress HQ (V), for instance becoming Cape Command HQ (V) from 12 July 1945.¹³ Officers commanding Commands were informed that ACF Infantry Battalions and ten Artillery units were being formed 'forthwith' in each of the seven commands and they would operate on approved war establishments.¹⁴ The eight coast units were again established from 1 January 1946 and the Coast Artillery Brigade was also established as a unit of the Permanent Force from 31 December of the same year. All pre-war Infantry Battalions were resuscitated and, with a few new ones – a total of 28 - became units of the newly established SA Armoured Corps,¹⁵ one of four new Corps established from 3 October 1946 by the same Proclamation. The others were the SA Engineer Corps, Chaplains and Signals Corps'.¹⁶ Ten Artillery Regiments were included. Everything was falling into place and running smoothly, as a Defence Force should.

Anti-Aircraft Training Centre

The Training Centre vacated the buildings at Ottery Camp in March 1945 and moved into the quarters previously occupied by 65 and 66 Air Schools at Young's Field. No. 16 Air Depot personnel also moved over but a number from both units remained at Ottery until July 1945 by which time the latter camp had been cleared of all personnel, equipment and stores. After the war had ended and demobilisation was well on its way the Training Centre went into virtual hibernation from September 1945, following the departure of T/Major Bob Batho who was transferred to the Dispersal Camp, Pollsmoor, and discharged from service in September 1946 for return to civilian life.

Officers and men of the Permanent Force with substantive rank prior to joining up for full-time service were discharged from the Active Citizen Force and posted back to their original units, which in many

¹² *Island at War*, p. 280

¹³ Government Notice No. 947, 3.5.1946

¹⁴ SANDF Archives, A.G. Gp. 1, Box 417.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Proclamation 204,1946.

cases meant the coast Batteries. They all reverted to the rank they had held before the war ‘...from the date of their release as a volunteer member of the Union Defence Forces and to have reverted to substantive rank on the fixed establishment of SAPF’, according to Proclamation 205 1944. A good example was Captain Reg Presmeg who was known to the author. He had qualified on a cadet course at Potchefstroom, and served from 1944 with a Royal Artillery Regiment and enjoyed all the privileges of that rank – and who reverted to his substantive Permanent Force rank of Staff Sergeant to become a Training NCO with 1st Medium Regiment at Cape Town in 1946/47. Major Louis Wolf, a war substantive Major thus retained his rank; he had returned from three years of incarceration as a prisoner of war, and was posted to 6th Coast Battery at Port Elizabeth.

WS/Lieutenant Colonel Stan Jeffrey, OBE, ED S.C. (V) – on the Staff of the Air Directorate, Defence Headquarters, was given a route form to report at the Showgrounds Pretoria, for indefinite release from service - but not before 31 October. He was finally released with effect 22 November 1944. T/Lieutenant Colonel Guilford assumed duty as DAA on the Staff of DGAF that day.



*Figure 38: Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Guilford with officers, warrant officers and NCOs of the School. mid-1945
The RSM, WO1 G.Bland is on the front right.*

Stan Jeffrey practiced as an attorney but later became Managing Director of SWA Fish Industries Ltd; from 1957 he was chairman of Instrument Manufacturing Corporation, which in collaboration with the CSIR perfected and manufactured the tellerometer. In 1964 his company was bought out by Plessey Overseas Ltd. In that year he won the prestigious Gordon Burn Wood Trophy for sailing and again in 1967 for a round-the-world voyage in his 59 ft ketch, Corsar II.

Bruce Guilford had been promoted T/Lieutenant Colonel on 26 April 1944 after the successful completion of a Staff Duties course in February 1944. In North Africa he had given a clear indication of his leadership qualities. He was subsequently appointed as DAA from 22 November 1944 to 1 August 1946. During this time he successfully completed a Long Gunnery Staff Course in England from December 1945 to 26 June 1946, beginning the course as a Lieutenant Colonel and on its conclusion, reverting to the substantive rank of Major, to which he had been promoted on 1 May 1946,¹⁷ on his return to South Africa. It would have been embarrassing to make this known in the middle of a Royal Artillery course and hopefully the drop in rank not revealed, until after his departure.

¹⁷ SANDF Archives, Personal file, Major General Guilford.

On return to South Africa and after a stint of three months as Details Commander- the post of DAA had been dispensed with - and a spell with Headquarters 31 Maintenance Group, Major Bruce Guilford - at the age of 26 years, was posted the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre from 18 November 1946 as commanding officer. His RSM – appointed in July 1946 – was WO1 F.C. de Beer, who as a Gunner, had also attended the first Anti-Aircraft course at Brooklyn Air Station in mid-1939. The Training Centre was resuscitated on 19 November 1946 with his appointment. Permanent Force personnel returning to South Africa who had served in Anti-Aircraft units were billeted at Young's Field; but the instructional staff of officers and other ranks at Young's Field were few and far between. Major L.G.F. Wolf joined the Depot as acting commanding officer for a short while from 19 December 1947, on return from a Long Gunnery course in the United Kingdom. Among the officers he found Lieutenant J.M. Slabber who had transferred to the Permanent Force from Cape Field Artillery on 20 November 1946 with seniority from 1 May 1946.¹⁸ Once the war ended he was transferred to the General List as a war substantive Captain; joining the Cape Town Field Artillery Regiment as a substantive Captain on 1 May 1946. According to policy, Lieutenant Slabber dropped rank to join the Permanent Force. He was, in November 1948, one of only twelve officers and 36 other ranks at the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre.¹⁹

Only eight days before Major Guilford assumed command, well over 500 ex-servicemen and women met at the Cape Town City Hall to air their grievances on the question of housing. During what became a lively meeting, demands were made that Young's Field be used to house homeless ex-servicemen and their families – instead of the Parliamentary staff that were occupying the former Air Force bungalows. Mr. Eric Louw, MP, who asked to address the meeting had to retire under a barrage of boo's before he could complete his speech on the subject.

Within days of Major Guilford's arrival at Young's Field an unsuccessful attempt was made to transfer the Anti-Aircraft Training centre to Simon's Town. Buildings within the perimeter of Queen's Battery, Simon's Town - from the time it closed down on 21 December 1943 as part of the fixed defences - were used by the Royal Navy for accommodation of naval ratings. From correspondence that passed between the Officer Commanding, Cape Command, and the Quartermaster General earlier in the year, the latter impressed upon Cape Command that the Battery – no longer required for coast defence purposes – should be used to accommodate the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, once the buildings were vacated in November. The tie between coast and Anti-Aircraft still existed in the minds of some. Major Guilford was instructed to visit the Battery and make a recommendation. He reported adversely.

The Post War Defence Force

The first priority was to return the Union Defence Forces to a peace-time footing. There were an enormous number of war-time volunteer units to be disestablished, with all the necessary closing down administrative 'bumph' that goes with such procedures, including accounting for discrepancies and return of stores and equipment. Units that had amalgamated had to be separated and those placed in suspended animation in 1939 had to be resuscitated. Unit commanders and men had to receive thanks.

When men were demobilised each received a carefully worded printed letter thanking them for their services and, in particular, officers commanding units received a similar letter signed by General Smuts stating his appreciation for the services of he and his Regiment. Unfortunately, such a letter addressed to the Officer Commanding 10 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), S.A.A. was sent to Headquarters, Witwatersrand Command, for onward transmission to the unit. It was returned 'for disposal'. A letter reference W.143/1 of 30 January 1947, signed by a Captain on behalf of the Brigadier commanding the Command stated: *'Although the formation of this unit was authorised there is no record at the Headquarters to show that it was actually established.'*

¹⁸ Ibid., Force Order 4060.

¹⁹ Ibid., Cape Garrison Artillery Unit History file.

In addition, a complete re-organisation of the Active Citizen Force and resuscitation of pre-war units was taking place. New units were created. The process included the recruiting into the new and the resuscitated units, of officers and NCO's who had seen six years of war. Officers Commanding Commands were instructed to find officers of suitably qualified rank to command them. The general response to resuscitate the peacetime ACF was disappointing – hardly surprising after six years of war; men were war-weary and wanted to get back to re-building their lives. Some well-known units had the support of their communities and made good progress, others did not. But one Cape Town unit was reported on 2 November 1945 – just eight days before SA Airways' first international flight took off from Palmietfontein airport, Johannesburg, for the 50 hour flight to Southampton²⁰ – to be already staffed by thirteen officers and eight NCO's. Approval of their postings was given by Defence Headquarters on 4 November 1945 - unbelievably quickly – by which time one gunner had also joined the unit. They had all joined a non-existent Regiment –ACF units were only resuscitated in May 1946 – with effect from 1 January 1946.²¹

The Gunners' Association was in existence by this time; it had been founded on 2 July 1943 and it was ready to support those who needed help. On 24 December 1947 it was registered under the umbrella of the Welfare Act. Subscriptions were 2/6d (25 cents) per annum.

In mid-1946 DCS wrote to the AG stating: 'as it is desired that A.C.F. Trg on a modified scale should commence on 1 July 1947, will you kindly arrange for the annual posting of citizens to the reformed A.C.F. units'.²² The war establishment of ACF units was altered to peace establishment for the training year 1946/47, which began on 1 July annually, the commencement date of the budget year. The first post-war registration of citizens for Peace Training took place in 1946; only enough citizens to fill posts, and a small reserve, received notices to report for medical examination in January 1947. It was not until July 1947 following the approval of Parliamentary budget estimates, that the first intake of recruits took place.

In Cape Town almost a full page article in *The Cape Argus* of 19 October 1946²³ gave a brief summary, accompanied by photographs, of the officers who had volunteered to command post-war Active Citizen Force units in the Cape. One was Lieutenant Colonel N.M. (Norman) Munnik. He had been appointed to command 1st Medium Regiment, S.A.H.A., South African Artillery. Norman Munnik volunteered in 1937 to join the Coast Artillery Brigade and was posted to 2nd Heavy Battery at Simon's Town. He had, by the time war was declared, become a full Lieutenant and, as a T/Captain, he spent a six months commanding the coast Battery at Walvis Bay. From 18 August 1941 he was posted to Lion Battery, Signal Hill, Cape Town, but remained there for only fifteen days before being transferred to Docks Battery, on the Elbow at the entrance to the new basin of Table Bay harbour. On 1 February he was transferred and became an Anti-Aircraft gunner in 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment only remaining there for a short while before finding himself transferred as commanding officer of 51 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, SAAF. Like many of his contemporaries he wished for action and in 1943 he exchanged his post as acting Major and T/Lieutenant Colonel and Regimental Commander, to that of a Battery Commander and went North with 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, attached to the 6th SA Armoured Division (V). His Battery suffered a few changes during the Italian Campaign – from Infantry, doing road patrols, etc, during the winter of 1944, to a conversion from Bofors to a Battery of 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns in a ground-firing role as the third Battery of 7/23 Medium Regiment. He gave the impression he had enjoyed his war.

The re-organisation of South African Artillery units was to prove no less involved than any other Corps.

²⁰ *The Cape Argus*, 23.8.1995

²¹ SANDF Archives, Fd Arty, Box 60, file FA 2873 vol.1, enc. 85

²² *Ibid.*,

²³ *The Cape Argus*, Saturday, 19.10.1946.

Men in Air Force Blue

Before the end of the war the entire Anti-Aircraft organisation was under control of the South African Air Force and it was decided to retain this state of affairs in the post-war Union Defence Force. The amalgamation of 1 and 12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments was dissolved and they were both disestablished with effect from 1 January 1946.²⁴ 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), had in fact been disestablished with effect 6 September 1942, together with 2nd SA Infantry Division and 2 Field Regiment.²⁵

The DGAF proposed to 're-activate' the war-time Anti-Aircraft units, and, as many of the former composite coastal Anti-Aircraft Regiments as possible, all of which had been raised during the war years as volunteer units in terms of special legislation. They could not be re-activated. A Staff officer, instructed by DGAF to investigate and make recommendations suggested using the same war-time numbering system for the new units. New units would be established under the authority of the existing Defence Act. With, possibly, inclusion in the two Divisions then only existing on paper, or perhaps with the protection of the Witwatersrand in mind, (the reasons have been lost in the mists of history), two light Anti-Aircraft Regiments were to be created. It proved impracticable to re-create the coastal Regiments and alternative suggestions for two Anti-Aircraft Troops and two Batteries to be established at coastal ports were submitted to DGAF. Acting on the authority of A.G./213/2/46 of 5 September, he approved their establishment the next day, with effect from 1 August 1946.²⁶

The new 53rd Composite Anti-Aircraft Troop was based in Port Elizabeth and allotted to Eastern Province and Border Command; 54th Composite Anti-Aircraft Troop, was based in East London and they each had an authorised establishment of nine officers and 135 other ranks.²⁷ 51st Composite Anti-Aircraft Battery was headquartered in Cape Town and 55th Composite Anti-Aircraft Battery was established in Durban. Their establishment was twelve officers and 214 other ranks. All bore the post-nominal title: S.A.A.F. (A.C.F.) and before there was any attempt at training of these units they were all re-designated from 1 January 1947, when the word 'Composite' was dropped from their titles. At the same time the two Troops were upgraded as Batteries.²⁸

In addition to the Troops and Batteries - two Regiments - 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments, S.A.A.F. (A.C.F.) were 'appointed and designated' from 1 August 1946, each with 33 officers and 493 other ranks. They, too, were re-designated from 1 January 1947 when the descriptive word 'Light' was removed from their titles; they became instead: 1 and 2 Anti-Aircraft Regiments, SAAF. The first was headquartered at Vereeniging and the second at Benoni. All these units – Troops, Batteries and Regiments, were completely newly 'appointed and established' and had no connection whatsoever with any previously existing and similarly numbered or titled unit. It had originally been decided to equip the composite Regiments with both Bofors and 3.7-inch guns but there was a limitation on the issue of available ready-use equipment. In the case of 51 Anti-Aircraft Battery only two 40 mm Bofors were issued in October 1947 and these remained on charge until 1950 when they were replaced by eight 3.7-inch guns.

Active Citizen Force Units

Training officers were posted to the new units. The Commander of 1st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was fortunate in having Captain F.T. Cromhout to handle administration and training from 1 April 1947; Captain H.S. Bosman from Anti-Aircraft Training Centre was attached to 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment as 'Admin and Training officer' from 24 March 1947.

A shortage of facilities and personnel severely inhibited training programmes – by November 1948 there were only 12 officers and 38 other ranks on strength at the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre.²⁹ It was

²⁴ C SADF Military Info Bureau letter AMI/MIB/(ARG)/514/3/1/10/55 of 1.10.1955.

²⁵ Circular from AG of same date in author's possession. File not recorded

²⁶ SANDF Archives, R.O. 1527, 18.1.1950

²⁷ Ibid., AG(3), Box 154, file 51, vol. 1, enc 248,

²⁸ Ibid, vol. 2, enc. 228.

²⁹ DGL Gp. Box 119, file O (M) 106/9/1, enc. 17.

only in March/April 1948 that training at Young's Field was able to commence, when 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment attended its first continuous training camp. Lieutenant Colonel Lukas Meyer commanded the Regiment and he was fortunate in having a number of former war-time officers with him – Major N.V. Hayward as second-in-command, Major Anthony Glenton Davies and Captains B. (Barry) Risien and H.A. Smith and Lieutenant G.J. Rackstraw. Two other officers who had been commissioned in the SA Air Force – Lieutenants R Attwell and B. Meyer were also on strength. Other ranks were quartered in the Young's Field camp, but there was no accommodation for the officers. They had to travel daily between the Garrison Officers' Mess at Wynberg and the Young's Field Camp. There was plenty of time, plenty of transport and petrol.

Elections

For some weeks in the first half of 1948 South Africa was in the grip of election fever. It became apparent on election-day that the United Party under General Smuts was doomed. Headlines on 28 May told the story of the National Party victory. The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill solemnly announced:

...a great world statesman has fallen and his country will undergo a period of anxiety and perhaps temporary eclipse....His name, and that of Louis Botha, will ever be respected, not only in Great Britain, but through all the free nations of the world.

General Smuts had spoken before the election of the National Party's 'crazy concept of apartheid' which was clearly defined by the new Prime Minister after he had taken office. Many opposition party members looked upon the Army, particularly, as an extension of the British Army. No one at the time appreciated what his defeat would mean for the future of the Union Defence Forces. But many felt that the Active Citizen Force, which had been represented in all theatres of war during 1939-45, could possibly undergo some transformation when it was learned that Advocate F.C. Erasmus – totally lacking any practical military experience - became Minister of Defence. He almost immediately began a process of transformation to give it '*...n beslister Suid-Afrikaanse karakter.*'³⁰

Changes Began

Changes began just 43 days after the 1948 election; and there would be many more in the next few years. In December 1948 Mr. Erasmus appointed a two-man committee headed by Professor A.N. Pelzer, Head of the Department of History at the University of Pretoria, to investigate the defence systems of the former Boer Republics and the Colonies (their organisation, military ranks, customs, Colours, flags, badges, traditions, uniforms and weapons). The Pelzer Committee submitted a report to the Minister at the end of March 1949. The Minister was determined to rid the Defence Forces of all British influence and introduce a South African culture with, as a beginning, the traditional ranks of Commandant-General, Commandant and Veldkornet.³¹ It was not all done immediately but Lieutenant Colonels very soon became Commandants. Many more changes would take place in the next few years.

For reasons that would boost his constituency of Saldanha the new Minister of Defence, Advocate Erasmus, appointed after the National Party won the election of 1948, wanted to move the Anti-Aircraft gunners out of Young's Field, seemingly to enhance his own constituency.

Proposed move

The Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, still under command of Major I.S. (Bruce) Guilford, became almost a political football in 1949. In that year the suggestion was made that the Training Centre be moved to Saldanha. Once this was brought to his attention he inspected the Saldanha area and provided a report based on the full requirements of the training centre. His report made it clear that there were not sufficient buildings in the area to provide enough married quarters for Permanent staff, nor, based on the current policy of accommodating one ACF Battery at a time, for those ACF units arriving for their annual continuous training. He admitted that an overflow could be accommodated on a temporary basis in the 8th Heavy Battery camp. Other than using existing hospital buildings to meet all

³⁰ *Militaria* 26/2 1996, p. 114.

³¹ *Militaria*.26 (2) 1966

requirements his report concluded that a fairly extensive building programme would have to be undertaken. Cape Command squashed this idea and after consulting with QMG, confirmed on 6 June 1949 that the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre would remain at Young's Field, where most of the Anti-Aircraft guns and other equipment in the country were being held in storage by 16 Anti-Aircraft Equipment Depot.³²

Solutions to Problems

In November 1948 a crucial meeting under the chairmanship of the QMG - Brigadier P. de Waal - took place in his office in Pretoria. It concerned the future of the Anti-Aircraft organisation, then under the firm direction of DGAF. Those at the meeting included the Directors General of the Land, Air and Naval Forces as well as Major Guilford and they met to decide whether Anti-Aircraft Artillery should remain under control of the Air Force or be transferred to Land Forces. It was not the first time nor would it be the last that this question was asked. It was recognised that ground-based guns should be integrated with the defence schemes presented by the Air Force; but it was very clear that Anti-Aircraft guns were required for the protection of the Army in the field. In the end a sensible compromise was reached; the decision was to transfer the entire Anti-Aircraft organisation from the SA Air Force to Director General Land Forces, although it was also agreed that operational control of units required for static defence should remain with DGAF.³³

The Air Force was quite probably relieved and could concentrate on its core business of flying. It could distance itself from Anti-Aircraft gunnery which in peace-time was quite different to having SA Air Force units in action and under command of another headquarters. In 1948, 1 and 2 Anti-Aircraft Regiments and 51, 53, 54 and 55 Anti-Aircraft Batteries with all their niggling personnel problems were still units of the SA Air Force; but this changed in early 1949. It was later seen as a traumatic year for the Union Defence Forces. During the year a number of changes were made to long established patterns.

All Anti-Aircraft units, including No. 16 Anti-Aircraft Equipment Depot, including the Radar Maintenance Section - were transferred to under command Director General Land Forces from 1 February 1949,³⁴ dropping the letters S.A.A.F. from their titles, and adding 'S. A. A.' instead. Government Gazette No. 1931 listed the Anti-Aircraft units as 'Appointed and established as units of the A.C.F....' and this statement was later followed by an Army Routine order. Routine Orders giving effect to the change, were a little delayed – the transfer was only noted on 18 January 1950 in Routine Order No. 1572, as an extract from the earlier Government Gazette. Notice R.O. 1572 confirmed that the SAAF Anti-Aircraft units were 'appointed and established as units of the Active Citizen Force with effect from 1st February 1949.' However, R.O. 1509 published on page 2 of the same Routine Order notified that they '...have been transferred to Land Forces...' from 1 February 1949. A little over two years later the Anti-Aircraft units would all be transferred to yet another Corps. Long before then the Equipment Depot had been absorbed by 82 Technical Stores Depot, the Radar Section going to 67 Base Workshop.

When Major Guilford's term of office as Officer Commanding the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre ended on 18 July 1949 he was appointed GSO2 Coast and Anti-Aircraft on the staff of DGAF. He was followed by Lieutenant Colonel D.C. (Daantjie) Kruger; (the rank was replaced by that of 'Commandant' in September 1950.³⁵ He had commanded 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade in East Africa but had now been transferred from the Coast Artillery Brigade Headquarters, disestablished from the same date. Before this time both Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Artillery were experiencing personnel problems.

Coast Garrison Force Goes/ Citizen Force Arises

The Coast Garrison Force was abolished with effect from 28 June 1949 in terms of Section 40 of the Defence Amendment Act, 1949 (Act 43 Of 1949) and personnel became members of the Active Citizen

³² SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 119.

³³ Ibid., DGL Gp, Box 119, file O (M) 1069/1, enc.17.

³⁴ Government Gazette No. 1931, 16.9.1949.

³⁵ Government Notice No.2093, 25.8.1950.

Force. The latter force itself underwent a change of title shortly afterwards. On 1 November 1949 it became simply, the 'Citizen Force'. And Colonel Maurice de Villiers was told in conversation with Brigadier du Toit, Director General Land Forces, that the Coast Artillery Brigade - originally established in 1934, closed down in 1940 and re-established on 31 December 1946 - was to be disestablished. Other changes were in the air. The disbandment of the Coast Artillery Brigade went ahead against strong objections from Maurice de Villiers.

School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery

Shortage of facilities and personnel adversely effected training of the newly established Active Citizen Force units. Transfer of control from DGAF to DGLF did not solve the problems being experienced as a result of the shortage of officers and other personnel. A solution was found by amalgamating and pooling training facilities to encompass both branches of Artillery. It resulted in the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre and the Coast Artillery Training Centre being re-designated as Coast and Anti-Aircraft Training Centre. The 'new' unit was designated and appointed from 1 November 1949.³⁶ It eased the shortages both had felt and presented no practical difficulties. Both coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery had enjoyed very close links in the past and many coastal officers and NCO's had served in Anti-Aircraft units.

The new unit – the School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery – fell under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Kruger. It was a Permanent Force unit and it had a headquarters at Young's Field, a Coastal Wing on Robben Island and an Anti-Aircraft Wing at Young's Field. The Young's Field headquarters was established in a building which later became Maritime Headquarters. After all moves had been made and the headquarters had settled down, the first Part 2 Order – No, 1/49 - was issued on 15 December 1950.

Western Cape Infantry units received training at Young's Field by Cape Command Training Depot staff under Major S.B. Hobson and later, Major P. Jacobs, both commanding the Depot in turn from September 1946. School cadets also received voluntary two-week training at Young's Field during school holidays. But the Depot closed down in December 1949 to make way for the Anti-Aircraft gunners. Citizen units in the Cape Command thereafter attended training camps at the re-opened former Air Training Scheme camp at Oudtshoorn. The first unit to occupy the bungalows set in the sea of red dust in the the heat of summer at Oudtshoorn camp was Regiment Suid Westelike Distrikte. It was followed in February 1949 by 1st Medium Regiment, S.A.H.A. from Cape Town.

The post-war Active Citizen Force structure of five Infantry Brigades and two Divisions – 1st SA Infantry and 6th SA Armoured Division, each with a Headquarters, SA Artillery – was broken up and disestablished from 1 November. Government Notice No. 2504 of 25 November 1949 announced the 'disbandment' of Headquarters' 1, 2 3, 12, and 13 Infantry Brigades and Headquarters', S.A.A., 1st S.A. Infantry and 6th S.A. Armoured Divisions.

In the meanwhile the administration of several Citizen Force units at the New Drill Hall, Cape Town, was stifled by lack of space. The two Artillery units moved out of offices in the Drill Hall: Cape Field Artillery going to Hangar T5 at Young's Field on 1 November 1949, followed by 1st Medium Regiment, S.A.H.A., the medium Regiment taking over the hangar between T5 and Ottery Road.

A Duel-purpose Gun

A re-examination of the need for a dual purpose Coast Artillery/Anti-Aircraft gun took place in late 1949.

The 5.25-inch CA/AA gun was designed for naval use in 1935 and was in service by 1940. Britain had decided by that time it would no longer produce the 6-inch coast gun and opted for the dual purpose 5.25-inch CA/AA gun for Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft purposes. Production of the Mk II version to suit Land Service conditions began. The Royal Artillery acquired three guns in early 1943 for use in the

³⁶ Ibid, No. 1931, 18.9.1949.

air defence of London. Only one Battery of the CA/AA gun had been installed in Britain by October 1944; due to war-time labour restrictions only 184 had been produced by the time the war ended in 1945.

As an Anti-Aircraft weapon it had an effective height of 36 000 feet (11 000m). The subject of these guns first arose in 1942 when knowledge of them became known by the learned gentlemen at Defence Headquarters, Pretoria. In December 1942 a decision was made to purchase two guns for emplacement at either Queen's or Noah's Ark Battery, Simon's Town in order to improve the capabilities and range of the coast guns on site. But it had been found that the cost of the works necessary to install the gun, together with the cost of the gun, mounting and technical calculators, was prohibitive. The order was cancelled³⁷ and six additional 6-inch guns on 45 degree mountings were ordered instead.³⁸

It was possibly thought that a gun capable of being available both as a coast weapon as well as Anti-Aircraft could solve the problem of waiting for the 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns to arrive for the SA Air Force coast units. But in mid-May in answer to a query, DCS was informed by cable that emplacements for the 5.25-inch CA/AA gun bore no relation to emplacements for 6-inch coast guns and that longer range 6-inch guns on 45 degree mountings would be available long before the 5.25-inch CA/AA gun. The Union Defence Forces in 1944 considered the possibility of placing three of these guns at Cornelia Battery, Robben Island. But the threat of war was receding and the costs were a factor to be seriously considered. They were:

One gun mounting and installation	£14 000	
One emplacement	£11 000	Total £25 000
Plotting Room	£76 000	

By 28 February 1945 the cost of a 5.25-inch CA/AA equipment complete with gun angle computer had risen to £19 853. A fire direction table would add another £18 000.

Coast and Anti-Aircraft - Never far apart

The question of installing 5.25-inch equipment again arose in 1949, Brigadier H.B. Klopper, Director General Land Forces, during a visit to Cape Command in January 1951 instructed the Officer Commanding, Cape Command, to convene a meeting to discuss matters concerning the air defence of coastal ports. Accordingly, notice of a conference to be held at the Castle on Saturday, 10 February was sent on 2 February to various bodies representative of the the School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, and the SA Navy.

On Saturday, 10 February 1951 the conference was held at the Castle in the office of Colonel L. du Toit. Those present were: Commandants D.C. Kruger and L. Klootwyk, Majors M.E. Fourie, L. Wolf, MC, M.E. Anderson, MC, and F. van Niekerk, and Captain F.C.B. du Preez – all of the SA Artillery; Lieutenant Commander J. Rice represented the SA Naval Forces and Major P.F. van der Hoven acted as secretary.

The object of the meeting was to discuss the coast and Anti-Aircraft defence of Cape Town and Simon's Town; the allocation of Anti-Aircraft in priorities along the coast; whether long-range guns were obsolete or not, and whether the expenditure on four 5.25-inch QF CA/AA guns was warranted. Other considerations were the operational control of dual role equipments, co-ordination of various services, operational responsibilities and operational control of coast defence forces as had been decided in principle and approved in July 1950. And finally, the purchase of 5.25-inch guns, the retention of 9.2-inch coast guns, and the allocation of Anti-Aircraft along the coast.

The chairman noted that no indication could be given by either the General Staff or himself on the type of sea or air attack that could be expected; but he listed the priorities for Anti-Aircraft protection,

³⁷ SANDF Archives, CGS War, Box 39, file 8/8, vol. IV.

³⁸ Ibid., file Guns & Amm.

commencing with Durban and followed by Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Simon's Town, East London, Saldanha and Walfish Bay (sic). It was a short meeting and was, in fact, a meeting to call a meeting. Sub-committees were formed to meet under Commandant Kruger to decide on the Anti-Aircraft defence of ports, the retention of 9.2-inch guns, the purchase of 5.25-inch equipments, and the use of 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft guns as a dual purpose coast and Anti-Aircraft weapon.

Three sub-committees were formed –the first under Commandant G.D. Moodie to discuss the new CA/AA gun; the second under Major Louis Wolf – to discuss the retention of the 9.2-inch guns; and the third under Commandant Len Klootwyk to discuss the use of 3.7-inch guns as a dual purpose weapon. The committee was also to discuss the operational control of Coast Defence Forces as decided by a board of officers in July 1950 and accepted in principle by Captain C.F.B. Du Preez. An outline of possible naval attacks and static or fixed requirements to combat this potential attack, was to be discussed by Lieutenant Commander J. Rice, SANF.

They met at Young's Field on 12 February 1951 and the results were interesting: the purchase of the 5.2-inch gun was not recommended; it was agreed the long range 9.2-inch coast gun be kept in service; and it was agreed that the siting of 3.7-inch guns constituted a serious problem and would reduce the efficiency of the gun in an Anti-Aircraft role. The sub-committee pointed out that only 113 such guns were available - with 77 mobile guns, leaving only 36 static available for port defence. They considered that the minimum number of 36 guns should be available for the Anti-Aircraft protection of Table Bay harbour. The crunch came with the last item. The committee decided it was NOT competent as an Artillery group to draw up a scheme for the control of all services in the form of a Maritime Control Headquarters. It was suggested that an inter-service committee be established to do so. Recommendations were later submitted to General Headquarters.

Planning to form a new Corps to take coast and Anti-Aircraft under its wing was already in place.

In March 1950, during the time the committees were discussing the future of the heavy Anti-Aircraft guns an information letter reached the Coast and Anti-Aircraft Directorate. It covered the Portobel Anti-Aircraft Trainer (Ground to Air) – otherwise described AS'Apparatus Dome Training No. 4, Mk. 1. It was an early attempt to provide training in gunnery by using a 35 mm cine projector to throw picture of an attacking aircraft on the white rubberised interior of the inflatable fabric dome which housed the equipment which resembled an operational version of a 40 mm Bofors. The Portobel, 30 feet in diameter and 20 feet in height, was kept fully inflated by an air blower. The file was signed off by 'CA&AA' on 22 May found its way without comment to the Archives.



Figure 39: At Strandfontein

Left to right : Lieutenant Colonels D.C. Kruger, Lukas Meyer and Major L.G.F. Wolf, MC. Shorts, shirt and Sam Browne were worn in the field, with shoes in place of boots.

New Policy

Brigadier HB Klopper, Director-General of Land Forces referred in February 1951 addressed the CGS and in a detailed memorandum on the position that then pertained to coast and Anti-Aircraft policy, he made a number of recommendations regarding future policy.

He referred to the recent offer of 5.25-inch CA/AA guns and the fact that the offer had been declined. He had given instructions, he said, that all Permanent Force Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft commanders reconnoitre their own areas and provide recommendations for the installation of 3.7-inch static Anti-Aircraft guns in, as far as possible, a dual purpose role. He further recommended that a start be made on planning a Mobile Coast Artillery unit equipped with mobile 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft equipment. A requirement for radar equipment to implement the introduction of the guns in a dual role, he said, would be submitted for the 1952/53 estimates.

He did *not* recommend the removal of any fortress installations as they then existed and recommended for the approval of the CGS as policy for the immediate future:

- Retention of all Coast Artillery installations.
- Introduction of 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft guns in a static dual purpose role.
- Planning and establishment of a mobile 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft gun unit in a mobile dual purpose role.
- Planning of harbour control by SA Naval Forces in co-operation with coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery commanders.
- The planning of operational headquarters in the different Coastal Command areas.

He stated further that he had visited the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic with the Director General of Naval Forces (on the instructions of the CGS) and the latter had begun planning ‘...his side of control.’³⁹ He said further that all Permanent Force Coast and Anti-Aircraft senior officers had been briefed to produce appreciations on the matter.

Change in Command

‘Cmndt D.C. Kruger, S.A.A. (Coast, P.F.)’ - his full title as shown in the transfer list of the monthly Defence Force magazine ‘Commando’ - did not remain long at Young’s Field. Soon after the Permanent Force Anti-Aircraft men took the shield for gaining first prize at the Easter week-end Bisley held at the Woltemade Rifle Range, attended by more than 300 shottists, he was taken ‘...off strength Young’s Field at 23h59 7.May.1951’, and transferred to Pretoria from 8 May 1950, as Staff Officer, Rifle Commandos and Cadets, DGLF Section at GHQ. It was a challenging post – about 150 Rifle Commandos had been established in mid-December 1948 and, between then and March 1950 about 20 Field Cornets were re-designated as Rifle Commandos.⁴⁰ They were soon unfortunately to be known as ‘Skieties’. The fact that he had been a Lieutenant Colonel on transfer was ignored. The rank had only been noted in Government Notice No. 2566 of 5 October 1951, although Government Notice No. 2093 of 25 August 1950 had instructed that Commandant was to be substituted for Lieutenant Colonel wherever it appeared in Permanent Force Regulations..

Commandant Daantjie Kruger was replaced by another coastal gunner - Commandant Graham Dunbar Moodie, SA Staff Corps and doyen of the coastal gunners. He was at the time in command of 4 Coast Regiment, Durban, but acting as Officer Commanding Eastern Province and Border Command, as had done so since 2 April 1951. He was required to continue there until the return to duty of Colonel W.T.B. Tasker, CBE, on 31 July 1951 before being able to take command at Young’s Field.

Anti-Aircraft Training

Training of Anti-Aircraft Gunners involved more than just going into a camp, doing some revision training and finally hearing the blast of the guns as firing took place. All arrangements were made well

³⁹ Ibid., KG Gp. 5, Box 243, file KG/GPO/5/2/4.

⁴⁰ Government Notice No. 1110, 19.5.1950.

in advance and included placing official notices in the Government Gazette, such as that included in Government Notice No. 1991 of 3 August 1951, which read:

Notified that firing practice seawards will be carried out on 24th and 27th August in the vicinity of Strandfontein in the District of Wynberg over the sea area in triangular form enclosed by the imaginary lines joining the following points:

Longitude 34° 15' Latitude 19° 29'

Longitude 34° 15' Latitude 18° 49'

Longitude 34° 10' Latitude 18° 49'

The public are warned that it will be dangerous to enter the sea area so enclosed.

And woe betide any fisherman who did not know his longitudes and latitudes.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

The MARINES and YOUNG'S FIELD

The Citizen Force Units

The Air Defence of South Africa was virtually in the hands of the the Citizen Force. Apart from the instructors and staff of the Anti-Aircraft Wing at Young's Field, there *was* no permanent Anti-Aircraft structure. And by 1950, while the input of recruits into the Anti-Aircraft units presented a satisfactory picture in respect of other ranks, the actual state of affairs regarding officers was poor. The picture in February 1950 showed:

	Actual strength		Authorised Strength	
	Officers	Other Ranks	Officers	Other Ranks
1 Anti-Aircraft Regiment	11	434	32	486
2 Anti-Aircraft Regiment	10	400	32	486
51 Anti-Aircraft Battery	4	180	11	210
53 Anti-Aircraft Battery	5	95	8	130
54 Anti-Aircraft Battery	Nil	Nil	8	130
55 Anti-Aircraft Battery	2	112	11	210

It was not until the Ballot System of recruitment was introduced in 1953 that anything close to full establishment was reached by the Citizen Force units. The nineteen-fifties were in many respects an unsettling period for the Anti-Aircraft organisation. In 1951, when a major re-organisation of the Corps of Artillery took place, *all* Anti-Aircraft and Coast Artillery Regiments were transferred to a new Corps.¹ When finally Commandant Moodie was released and able to take up his new appointment and duties at Young's Field, he was no longer a Gunner – but instead a Marine! From 1 July 1951 all coast and Anti-Aircraft units, including the School, ceased to belong to Land Forces (South African Artillery) and from that date they all fell under command of the SA Corps of Marines.

The South African Corps of Marines was established with effect from 1 July 1951, under Proclamation No. 209, 1951, as a unit of the South African Permanent Force. At the same time and on the same date the title SA Naval Forces was altered to become the South African Navy.

The SA Corps of Marines assumed responsibility for the four Citizen Force independent Batteries and the two Anti-Aircraft Regiments as well as all Coast Artillery Batteries and fixed defences. The Citizen Force coast and Anti-Aircraft units were formally transferred to the newly formed Corps from 1 July 1951.² The Anti-Aircraft units were not shown under their correct SA Artillery titles but indicated for example, as: '1 L.A.A. Regiment, S.A.C.M'.³ It was not until 1954 that another Government Notice was issued to provide the correct title of each unit.⁴ It was, seemingly, very much an afterthought and the original error may have come to light while Staff were examining the implications of closing down the Marines.

Always careful to make certain the name of the Corps was used correctly (as in the above heading), the new Corps took over all the Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Artillery Regiments from the South African Artillery, and in addition, Radar units from the South African Corps of Signals. On transfer the role of the Anti-Aircraft Batteries was changed and they became 'Heavy' Batteries. Once final transfers

¹ SANDF Archives, UDFO 37.51.

² Ibid., AG (3) Gp, Box 227, file AG (3) 1906/10, vol. 2, enc. 13.

³ Government Notice No. 1490, 4.7.1952.

⁴ Ibid., No. 72, 22.1.1954.

had been made the entire establishment of the SA Corps of Marines was listed in an annexure to a Union Defence Force Order in 1952. Apart from the coast Batteries and Radar units, it included:

School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, S.A. Marines
 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, S.A. Marines.
 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, S.A. Marines.
 51 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A. Marines
 53 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A. Marines
 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A. Marines
 55 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A. Marines

A firm distinction was drawn between the heavy and the light Anti-Aircraft units, and represented a move away from composite Regiments; the 'coast' Batteries becoming known as heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries. They would be trained and equipped on 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft guns; the two Regiments changing to operate with 40 mm Bofors and identified as 'Light Regiments'.

Earlier in the year Commodore Commanding Coastal Command informed all Marine units that '...the abbreviation S.A.C.M. will NOT be used under any circumstances.' He instructed units that the only abbreviation that would be recognized was S.A. Marines, but that the full title was to be used in Unit orders, i.e: S.A. Corps of Marines. This may have resulted from a mild reprimand as a result of a letter he sent to Commanding Officers of SA Marines units three weeks earlier which was addressed, for example, to 3 Coast Regiment S.A.C.M. It is after all, such little things that go to build and maintain the *esprit de corps* of any military unit.

Permanent Force officers transferred from SA Artillery (Anti-Aircraft branch) to the SA Corps of Marines effective from 1 January included Major L.G.F. Wolf, MC; Captains H.S. Boman, C.J. Louw, F.T. Cromhout, D.G. Steenkamp, J.M. Slabber, G.P. Penberthy, J.P. Stals, A.E. le Barrow; Lieutenants G.W. Lofthagen and R.R. Ransome, and Second Lieutenants B.O. Loxton and S.A. Peddie.

At the same time a number of coastal officers were transferred to the new Corps. They were Commandant P.F. van der Hoven, Majors I.S. Guilford, N.G. Wessels, M.E. Anderson, MC; D.E. Peddle, J.H. Wicht and E.L. Breeton-Stiles. Included in this group was Captain C.F.B. du Preez who received promotion to the substantive rank of Major from 22 January 1952; J.J. (Boots) Botha – who had been a commissioned field gunner with 1 Field Regiment (C.F.A.) in North Africa, and latter qualified as a pilot – and R.A. Edwards. The latter had joined Cape Field Artillery as an Active Citizen Force member of 'D' Battery and had been transferred with his Battery to 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade in 1940. He was in 1955 - on the disestablishment of the SACM -, transferred to the SA Navy, where he remained until his retirement in September 1982 as Chief of the Navy. Major Fred van Niekerk – originally commissioned into the SA Air Force - also found his way into the SA Corps of Marines on 1 January 1951.⁵

The Anti-Aircraft Wing of the School continued to be based at Young's Field and there was no change in its training or administrative functions. Citizen Force Anti-Aircraft units continued to be trained on the fields at Young's Field, overlooked by the magnificent south-facing view of Table Mountain. It is there that the silver tree grows...and nowhere else.

Transfers

It became obvious that the new Corps was to be fully integrated insofar as coast and Anti-Aircraft units were concerned and the officers felt this to be the case more than anyone else, even before the official list of transfers from Artillery to Marines was produced. Captain H.S. Bosman, SAA (AA) was posted to 1 Coast Regiment as acting commanding officer for the period 15 November 1951 to 12 January 1952,⁶ and towards the end of January Major C.F.B. du Preez was appointed to command 1 Coast Regiment. Captain Penberthy, an Anti-Aircraft gunner and Adjutant at the School was

⁵ *Young's Field*, pp. 30, 32.

⁶ *Ibid.*

transferred to HQ Coastal Command, Cape Town, as Assistant Staff Officer; his place as Adjutant was taken by Captain Le Barrow who had by then completed a period as Adjutant, 2 Coast Regiment. Captain J.P. Stals was fortunate to be transferred within the Anti-Aircraft ranks – from Officer Instructor, 1 Anti-Aircraft Regiment to Troop Commander, Anti-Aircraft Troop, School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Young's Field. Lieutenant R.R. Ransome, SAA (AA) was moved from Port Elizabeth, where he had been Officer Instructor, 53 Anti-Aircraft Battery – to be Instructor Gunnery, Young's Field. Finally, 2nd Lieutenant S.A. Peddie was posted to Vereeniging to replace Captain Stals as Officer Instructor at 1 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

No further transfers took place until later in the year when Lieutenant Lofthagen was moved from Headquarters, Cape Command to Port Elizabeth as Adjutant, 6 Coast Regiment; with Major Fred van Niekerk becoming acting commanding officer, 2 Coast Regiment, Simon's Town.

It was a new experience for many Anti-Aircraft gunners to occupy posts at Coast Artillery Regiments.

Uniforms

It was not only their discipline and drill that had the Marines stand out from other units of the Defence Forces - it was their uniform; described as a striking dark blue uniform with a dark orange strip about 3 cm wide on the outer side of each trouser leg. Permanent Force all ranks and Citizen Force officers and Warrant Officers wore this as No. 1 dress. But those in the Citizen Force from Staff Sergeant down, continued to wear khaki drill. The ceremonial dress was bush jacket with shirt and tie, shorts, boots, anklets and hose tops. By this time polo helmets had been replaced with caps, GS. Away with polo helmets and in with ear protection – in April 1952 the Surgeon General confirmed what everyone already knew; that the noise of certain weapons firing '... could cause considerable damage to unprotected ears'.⁷ Light and heavy Anti-Aircraft guns were included as a group in a list of four groups of weapons that could contribute to the problem. The ideal protection, stated the Surgeon General, was to indent for a supply of cotton wool and '...place a piece of clean, dry cotton wool, large enough to block the entrance to the ear passage and small enough to be comfortable,' in the ear.

Van Riebeeck Festival

A huge festival to celebrate the tercentenary of Jan van Riebeeck's arrival in Table Bay was held from 1 February to 6 April 1952 and personnel of the SA Corps of Marines – including Anti-Aircraft gunners – from various units, staged an excellent Retreat Ceremony in the huge temporary arena erected on the almost totally undeveloped Foreshore. During the Festival the Anti-Aircraft gunners gave a weapons demonstration, with a live shoot over Table Bay – the first and last time this has been done in time of peace. It was also the Anti-Aircraft gunners, together with their fellow coastal gunners who lit up Table Mountain each night during the Festival. Fifty English searchlights – each of 200 million candlepower, and twenty Sperry (American) lights each of 800 million candlepower (a total of 22 billion candlepower) were used to illuminate The Devil's Peak, Table Mountain and Lion's Head.⁸ It was the biggest single object ever illuminated in the world and was planned by Dr. H.D. Einhorn, lecturer in Physics, University of Cape Town, in co-operation with Major du Preez, then commanding 1 Coast Regiment, Cape Town. He also controlled the operation.

Transfers and Postings

Commando of June 1952 announced the names of a number of Warrant Officers who had been granted commissions as Lieutenants on six months probation from 1 May 1952, in the Technical and Administrative Branch; they were Warrant Officers 1: P.L. de B. Swart and P. van der Merwe and Warrant Officers 2: M.G. Jacobs and M.J.C. van der Linde. They were all Anti-Aircraft personnel. A number of NCO's were promoted shortly after the Festival there were five who would rise to prominence in the future – Staff Sergeant I.J. Spangenberg who became Warrant Officer 2, and Sergeants J.C.D. Augustyn and W.E. Nel who became Staff Sergeants. Bombardiers E.A. Baker and M.J. Schickerling were each awarded three stripes.⁹

⁷ SANDF Archives, CFA Gp 1, Box 27, file CFA/A/18/5.

⁸ *Young's Field*, p. 32.

⁹ *Commando*, June 1952.

Annual continuous training of Citizen Force units at Young's Field continued, with recruits reporting for six weeks and trained men (those who had completed six weeks the previous year) joining the recruits for the last three weeks. Each man, whose name was drawn from the thousands that had registered for peace training, was expected to do four periods of training before being posted to the Reserve from which at any time in the future he could be called up for service. From the age of 60 (changed later to 65) he was free; he would be posted to the National Reserve from which he could only be again called up in a truly crucial emergency. It was something that never entered anyone's mind. Once peace training was complete and all kit handed back to stores, the Army was generally forgotten.

For the Permanent Force it was business as usual.

Major L.G.F. (Louis) Wolf, MC, acted as commanding officer at the School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery for a month from mid-December 1952 while Commandant Dunbar Moodie was on leave. Several more transfers were ably handled by the well experienced acting commanding officer. Lieutenant Stuart Peddie, Instructor Gunnery, was transferred to 8 Coast Regiment, Saldanha, as Adjutant and Captain Cromhout moved from Durban to Young's Field as Troop Commander. He was replaced as Adjutant at 4 Coast Regiment, Durban, by Captain Penberthy. Captain Louw, also Instructor Gunnery at the School had thereafter to travel daily to Table Bay harbour to fill Penberthy's post of Staff Officer, Coastal Command. He did not have to do so for long; Headquarters, Coastal Command moved from the old Naval headquarters, HMSAS *Bonaventure*, opposite 'E' berth, Table Bay harbour, to Young's Field on Friday, 20 March 1953. It was all part of the normal process in the life of a Permanent Force officer. The number of Permanent Force officers in the Corps received a boost in the early months of 1954 when Commando of April that year announced the appointment to commissioned rank of Cadet M.A. Malan as Lieutenant on six months proof; and of Cadets N.H. Trott, J.J. Steenkamp and W.H. du Plessis, who were commissioned as 2nd Lieutenants. *Bonaventure* was disestablished from 1 March 1958.¹⁰

A column by *Grobmac*, included in each issue of *Commando*, writing in the February 1954 issue of the high degree of devotion, adaptability and readiness to adapt to change, also noted that the ...' most threatening attacks are not to be anticipated from the sea but from the air.' He noted there were changes in the air. The Americans he said were testing a new and completely automatic Anti-Aircraft gun called 'Skysweeper', which included an on-carriage, integrated fire control system, consisting of gun-laying radar, computer and associated fire control equipment. It was a 75 mm gun, automatically loading and firing HE proximity shells at 45 rounds per minute, and could locate and track aircraft flying at 700 mph up to 24 km away. For the South African air defence, such systems could only be dreamt of.

Inspector General's Report

A lengthy report produced by the Inspector General of the SADF on 18 October 1954, was submitted to the CGS. It covered a visit to the Cape Area by a small committee who were to investigate Permanent Force establishments and review Coast Defence Policy. The thrust of the report covered 2 Group SA Air Force, Coastal Command Headquarters and the SA Corps of Marines, but it was based mostly on the latter. The Inspector General saw the need for a reorganisation of the Coastal Command HQ where he found a duplication of functions at Headquarters Naval and Marine Chief of Staff.. The present function was the control of Naval, Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft responsibilities and in view of the duplication of functions it was essentially heavy in establishment. The Inspector General thought it essential, because of the decreased usefulness of Coast Artillery, to reconsider the Naval and Marine 'set-up as at present constituted...'.¹¹ His immediate problem centered round the Coastal Command HQ which he felt should continue, but be reorganised. The organisation of the SA Corps of Marines was obviously his main point of examination. He acknowledged that with its distinctive uniform and a character of its own it had become a separate Corps with considerable public appeal.

¹⁰ SANDF Archives, UDFO 49/58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, KG Gp. 5, Box 243, file KG/GPO/5/2/4.

He noted that a large portion of the Corps was of a land defence character; the role of its radar was entirely of a seaward defence nature, and that the modern trend was for anti-submarine patrol vessels and maritime air forces, to take over the Coast Artillery role. The Technical requirements for the maintenance of Coast Artillery equipment had demanded separate workshops and stores and in view of the obsolescence of Coast Artillery this portion of the organisation was out of proportion to the technical requirements of the rest of the Defence Force. And, with the obsolescence of Coast Artillery as a seaward defence weapon, the large manpower allocation to that branch of the Union Defence Forces was in proportion, also far larger than manpower distributed to the UDF as a whole.¹² He went on to record that the only Coast Artillery equipment still considered essential at all times is that employed in the examination Batteries and lighter harbour defence installations. As these were similar to naval armaments the maintenance could best be undertaken by the SA Navy. As a result he felt that the more highly trained personnel of the 'Coast Artillery Section' of the SA Corps of Marines 'would have to be directed into a more useful channel.'¹³

'No provision', he wrote, 'is made for Permanent Force LAA and HAA Tps. This amenity is served by a group of instructors and a Permanent Force nucleus which could serve as a demonstration and experimental section that does NOT exist.' Insofar as Robben Island was concerned he viewed it as an ideal gunnery school and it could bring about a considerable saving if it were converted to a naval gunnery training establishment.

Reporting specifically on the Marines the Inspector General felt it necessary to consider the continued existence of the Corps, based on its functions which were clearly Army and Navy responsibilities and the fact that its training was largely common to the Land Forces. But, he was careful to state, 'the Corps had been accepted and known as a Section of the UDF with considerable public appeal and its disbandment will probably meet with considerable disapproval. It was therefore perhaps necessary to clear it of all tasks that were clearly the functions of the other three services...'¹⁴ and re-organise it on the same lines as a Marine Corps of other nations, eg Commando troops, beach landing troops, parachute units, mobile harbour defence units and sabotage and long distance reconnaissance units.

Considering the latter statement, he said further, the limited manpower of the country demanded serious consideration before any new type of fighting units were contemplated; and that 'Our Home and overseas commitments in time of war are such that one cannot see any economic use for the units mentioned above'.¹⁵ He stated that the policy of '...our Home defensive organisation...' is clearly a defensive one and the type of units he had mentioned were essentially offensive action units. When the present Corps of Marines is stripped of the components '...common to one or other of the other three Services, very little will be left in that Corps.'¹⁶

In his recommendations the Inspector General recommended that the SA Corps of Marines be dissolved and that units, installations and personnel be incorporated into the Army and Navy as follows:

The Anti-Aircraft Artillery School and units - transfer to the SA Army.

The Marine Gunnery School on Robben Island - to become the Naval Gunnery School.

(This, he said, would effect a big saving as the Navy is in the process of organising a Naval Gunnery School at Saldanha.)

All Radar Companies - to the Navy.

Examination Batteries and Harbour Defence organisation - to become Naval units and,

Citizen Force Coast Artillery personnel - to be re-organised into Harbour Defence Units to carry out security and gunnery tasks.'¹⁷

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The Inspector General touched on the employment of Permanent Force personnel in either the SA Army or Navy, most, he said, being Army trained but with younger officers who could be '...converted to Naval use...', being given the option of a transfer. And he recommended that one Heavy Anti-Aircraft and one Light Anti-Aircraft demonstration and experimental Troop be established in addition to the instructors then on strength of the Anti-Aircraft School. He made no recommendations about '...the degree of maintenance of major CD armaments...' as he considered it to be the responsibility of the General Staff to decide on it's '...limited future employment or total abolition.'¹⁸

Repeating himself and with the acknowledgement of the stature that the Marines had in less than a handful of years reached, the Inspector General again stated that 'If the recommendations are accepted severe criticism will be directed at the UDF by the public for having established a Corps with an altered uniform and public appeal and so soon disbanding it.'¹⁹ He recommended that the present Marine uniform be incorporated in the Army as an optional walking out and evening dress.

An undated paper written apparently about April 1954, and seemingly as a draft document stated : '...in consequence of a re-appreciation of the role of Coast Artillery in the light of changing conditions of warfare, and in view of the prevailing manpower difficulties, Coast Artillery Policy has been changed and it has decided to disband the SA Corps of Marines. Existing units, installations and personnel would be absorbed into the Land and Naval arms of the Defence Force.'²⁰ It was furthermore stated that the integration process would be gradual; the combined headquarters now being established at Young's Field will continue to function; the Navy will assume responsibility for all harbour defences and heavy coastal equipment will be placed on a care and maintenance basis. The Army will assume responsibility for light Anti-Aircraft units and 'for the present will maintain a mobile heavy AA Regiment.'²¹ It was further decided that 55 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery - recently moved from Durban to Potchefstroom - would be disbanded and the personnel retrained and converted, to become a light Anti-Aircraft Battery. It would serve as the second Battery of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery at Upington were also to be retrained as light Anti-Aircraft gunners, and they would become the third Battery.

Altered and enlarged upon, it was eventually submitted to the CGS. Permanent Force Coast and Anti-Aircraft senior officers had been briefed to produce appreciations on the matter; but the fate of the SA Corps of Marines was sealed. The Anti-Aircraft gunners would soon find themselves with a new master.

One Hundred Years - and Union Day

Young's Field witnessed another but much larger event some months earlier when Advocate C.R. Swart, Minister of Justice, inspected about 2 000 troops from 1 and 2 Coast Regiments, 51 and 53 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries and all Permanent and Citizen Force personnel in Cape Command and Coastal Command (SA Corps of Marines and SA Navy) on Union Day, 31 May 1955. As the troops marched past the saluting base – a helicopter, three Sunderland flying boats – which continued on direct to Durban – two Dakotas, three Devons and nine Venturas flew overhead. Forty-five other aircraft scheduled to take part in the fly-past were grounded because of the cloud cover.

Following the decision made by the CGS Headquarters, Naval Chief of Staff, Pretoria, (a change in the title from Naval and Marine Chief of Staff was made in January) issued an instruction giving details of the 'Interim Peace Distribution of Coast Artillery Equipment'²² As approved by the CGS. It included certain equipment for long term or partial preservation and those to remain in action. Four 3.7-inch guns had been emplaced on Robben Island in 1943/4 and they were listed as:

Two 3.7-inch AA guns in action

Two 3.7-inch AA guns in long term preservation.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ SANDF Archives, KG Gp.5, Box 243, file KG/GPO/5/2/4.

²² Ibid., K.L.A. Artillery School, Box 7, file R.I. (Ops) 657G, vol. 2.

The instruction also listed two Anti-Aircraft guns at Cornelia Battery – a 6-inch coast Battery on the western side of the Island - with 'one 3.7-inch mobile AA gun and two 40 mm Bofors'. Both were shown as 'ex stores'. It was apparently noted that a 12 –pdr LA/HA gun would later be replaced with a 3.7-inch static.²³

End of an Era and Re-organisation

The long-standing - one could say traditional - bond between coast and Anti-Aircraft gunnery finally ended towards end of 1955. In an all too short career in the SADF the SA Corps of Marines distinguished itself for its discipline, efficiency and ceremonial. A final 'stand-down' parade was held in full ceremonial No. 1 Marine dress at Young's Field on 27 September 1955. The proud, disciplined SA Corps of Marines was disestablished with effect from 1 October 1955, and from that date all Citizen Force Anti-Aircraft units were transferred back to Land Forces – SA Artillery. One Anti-Aircraft unit of today wears a blue lanyard to – mistakenly – recall the time it was a unit of the SACM.²⁴ Their continuous training would henceforth be supervised by the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre which replaced the Anti-Aircraft Wing of the School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, which officially disbanded from 1 October 1955.²⁵ Permanent Force coast Regiments were disbanded and Citizen Force Coast Artillery and radar units were transferred to the SA Navy as shore establishments. They did not last long. The SA Navy divested themselves of the former Citizen Force units in January 1958.²⁶

Opportunity was taken by the Army Chief of Staff to reorganise the Anti-Aircraft branch of the South African Artillery. Language policy had meanwhile changed and many units of the Citizen Force had been nominated as either English or Afrikaans-speaking – to the extent that units so nominated would use only that language as its medium of training and correspondence. There were other units classed as bilingual, they were instructed to use English one month and Afrikaans the next, as the Permanent Force were required to do.

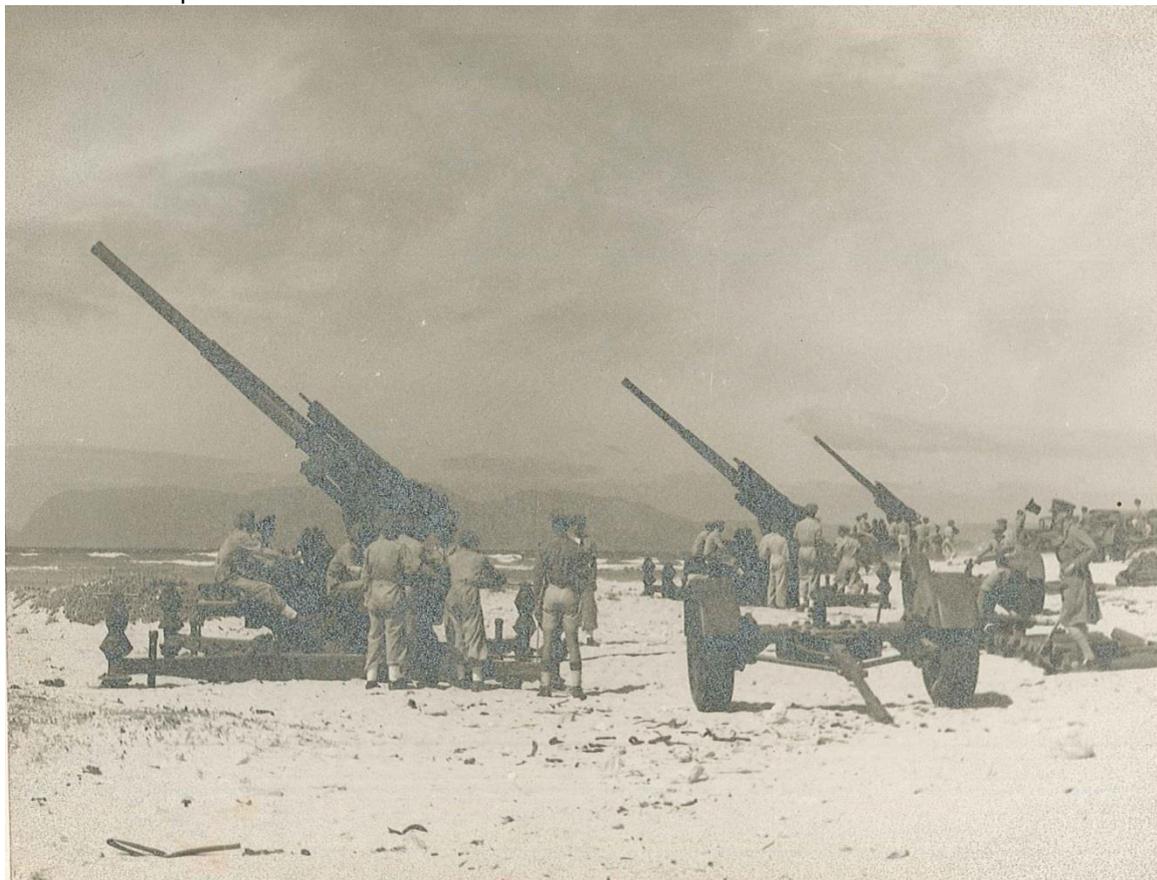


Figure 40: Heavy gun practice on the beach at Strandfontein in the 1950's

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Annexure A to UDFO 38/56 and Kommando, October 1955, p. 28.

²⁵ SANDF Archives, KG Gp.5, Box 243, file KG/GPO/5/2/4 and UDFO 37/56.

²⁶ UDFO 155/58

Re-organisation - Again

Included among other inter-unit transfer of officers was Captain Jack Slabber. He had in June 1955 been moved to 1 Coast Regiment as acting commanding officer; but he returned to Young's Field as an IG in October 1955, just in time to become part of the break-up of the SA Corps of Marines and consequent re-organisation.

The re-organisation included the School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery which was a Permanent Force establishment. It was disestablished with effect from 1 October 1955 and replaced from the same date by the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre²⁷ under the command of Commandant G.D. Moodie. In actual fact there was no change to the Anti-Aircraft wing of the former school at Young's Field and it could be considered as having been re-designated to maintain precedence and seniority. Warrant Officer 1 C. van Opperman, who had been appointed RSM of the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre in November 1948, ended his service as RSM of the Anti-Aircraft Wing on the dissolution of the SACM. His post was taken by Warrant Officer 1 F.C. de Beer from whom he had originally taken over. Sergeant Major de Beer later became RSM at Western Province Command.

Re-organisation led once more to the transfer of officers, some – including M.E. (Andy) Anderson, MC, and R.A. Edwards (much later Chief of the Navy) - selecting the SA Navy for the balance of their military careers. Andy Anderson was highly regarded as an expert with the 4.5-inch Colt and was also a talented pianist and, an heraldic artist, who in the years to come designed many of the SA Navy's ship's crests. In August 1943 he had voluntarily relinquished the rank of Major to join the Special Boat Squadron of the Royal Marine Commando's and had been involved in many amphibious and parachute operations in the Aegean Islands, Crete and Greece, distinguishing himself, leading to the award of the Military Cross.

Others officers, among whom were seven former or future commanding officers: Commandant G.D. Moodie, Major L.G.F. Wolf, MC, Captains J.M. Slabber, Lieutenants E.L. Bekker and A. Moelich and 2nd Lieutenant N.H. Trott, were transferred to the General Duties Branch, SA Army, SAA (AA) and remained Anti-Aircraft Gunners. Lieutenant P.L. de B. Swart, also a future commanding officer, was initially transferred to the Technical and Administrative Branch and Commandant Bruce Guilford was transferred from the SA Staff Corps (Marine) to the SA Staff Corps (Army). It was not until 1 November 1956 that the re-organisation was finally complete.

The 'new' Permanent Force unit was to be responsible for training all Permanent and Citizen Force Anti-Aircraft personnel. Prior to the change it was proposed it would consist of a School with 46 all ranks and a Training Regiment of fifteen officers and 214 other ranks. This proposal was not put into effect but Signal Corps personnel were transferred from 67 Base Workshop for Radar maintenance, as a distinct Wing. The School eventually consisted of four Wings, i.e.:

- Heavy Anti-Aircraft Wing
- Light Anti-Aircraft Wing
- Radar Wing
- Basic Training Wing

Citizen Force

As part of the re-organisation, Defence Headquarters decided that two new units would be established, both on an entirely new basis. The first was Headquarters, 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, appointed and established as an Afrikaans medium unit from 1 October 1955, with headquarters at Potchefstroom.²⁸ The headquarters was commanded by Commandant N.J. Oosthuizen. One Battery was to be at Bellville, Cape, a second Battery at Potchefstroom and a third Battery at Upington. It was further decided that 55 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery - recently moved from Durban to Potchefstroom - would be disbanded and the personnel retrained and converted to become a light Anti-Aircraft

²⁷ UDFO 37/56

²⁸ Schedule A to UDFO 38/56, 24.2.1956.

Battery. It would serve as the second Battery of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery at Upington were also to be retrained as light Anti-Aircraft to become the third Battery. The first training camp was held at Young's Field in August 1957 and it ended with a Retreat Ceremony on 23 August.

The second unit – Headquarters 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment²⁹ - was to be based at Young's Field, and would also have independent Batteries that would fall under command for training only. It was to be an English medium unit. The independent 51, 53 and 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries were nominated as independent sub-units. The Battery headquarters of 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery would be moved to Young's Field, Cape Town

With the loss of the SA Corps of Marines Radar Companies it was necessary to form a Radar Battery to be used in conjunction with the 3.7-inch guns of 51, 53 and 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries. 52 Anti-Aircraft Radar Battery was thus established from 1 October 1955³⁰ and placed under command of Captain M.W. Treloar, previously Commander of 52 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, and 61 Radar Company, SACM. 55 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery was dis-established on the same date.³¹ There were naturally a number of inter-unit transfers and this included the Coast Artillery Brigade Band which was still in existence. It was placed under command of 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Captain M.W. Treloar was initially appointed to also act as commanding officer 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. He was relieved by Captain C.D. Stark - formerly Battery Commander 51 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, as the first permanent appointee to this post in April 1957. Permission to transfer from the coast Regiments to the latter Regiment was refused but Captain J.A. Cheminai managed to do so and became adjutant of the Heavy Regiment, serving in this post until 1 January 1960, when the next re-organisation took place. The headquarters occupied a building at Young's Field in what was later the transport park.

The formation and establishment of the two new headquarters' and of 52 Anti-Aircraft Radar Battery, became effective from 1 October 1955. Authority was included in UDFO 38/56.

Commandant Moodie hardly had time to warm his seat as commanding officer, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre when he was called upon in December 1955 to also act as commanding officer, Cape Command during the absence on leave of Colonel P.S. de Lange, MC. But back in his own office at Young's Field in January he was able to welcome Captain 'Blackie' Swart as his new quartermaster. The latter replaced Captain J.A. Cronje who was transferred to 1 SSB Training Regiment, Bloemfontein. Lieutenant J.M. Coetzee was transferred inwards from 82 'T' Stores Depot as Assistant QM and Paymaster.

The Display Team

It was not all square-bashing and gun drill at the Young's Field training centre. The Anti-Aircraft gunners also had a motorcycle display team, managed by Staff Sergeant Augustyn – the transport stalwart of later years. The team Captain was Major Louis Wolf with WO1 Jooste as his Vice Captain. When the new showground of the Western Province Agricultural Society opened at Goodwood in 1956, one of the highlights of the arena events was the Young's Field Daredevil's motorcycle display team, with a display of formation and trick riding which both surprised and delighted the huge crowd. A photograph shows those on one motorcycle as Jack Verburg, Gerrie Coon (ranks unknown), and Sergeant de Villiers and below them: Lance Bombardiers Bennet and Justus, Major Louis Wolf, WO1 Pretoius, Staff Sergeant Jooste and Sergeants van der Westhuizen and de Witt. Only the legs of three individuals could be seen. Another of their show-stoppers was a member sitting facing the back while driving forward!

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ UDFO 37/56.

³¹ UDFO 217/56.

Until 1956 Regiments of the Citizen Force attending annual 'peace training' were virtually on their own, practicing advance to contact, defence or orderly withdrawals over the last couple of training days, according, one thought, to the type of prolonged warfare reminiscent of 1939-1945 that would again in the future be fought, and, according to the whim of 'someone' at Defence Headquarters. Minor exercises were at times held when an Infantry unit was scheduled for training at the same time. But it changed in April/May 1956. Exercise Oranje was the largest ever held in the country. And it was designed to test the organisational strength of the SA Army and supporting services, and also tactical doctrine in the face of atomic warfare. It was a huge effort to apply theories then current in Western World military circles. Among the Artillery units involved were 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments and 51 and 53 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Batteries, fully supported in training by instructional staff from Anti-Aircraft Training Centre.

Three months after returning from the cold of De Brug, outside Bloemfontein, a Permanent Force group of Anti-Aircraft personnel under command of Major Louis Wolf was despatched to the Southern Transvaal to assist in controlling a serious outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the Vereeniging - Heidelberg area. To counter the outbreak a special SADF unit – Foot and Mouth Disease Cordon – was created with effect from 1 February 1956.³² The gunners and others involved probably operated as part thereof. Major Wolf and his men spent weeks in the area and helped transform a chaotic situation into one of orderly management, finally returning to Young's Field in February 1958.

A visit to Young's Field in May 1958 by the Army Chief of Staff – Major General P.H. Grobbelaar, DSO, and the Chief Commandant, Citizen Force – Colonel G.N. Nauhaus, OBE, provided officers commanding Citizen Force units with the opportunity of meeting senior officers. It was a rare event; they seldom, if ever, met anyone other than a training officer of Major's rank.

Special events always trigger memories. As part of their one hundred year celebrations, Cape Field Artillery went to camp at Young's Field over the week-end of 16/17 October 1957. Apart from other facets of the birthday activities which included a church service at the Castle and a concert the evening before, a medal parade was held on Saturday afternoon when the first awards of John Chard Decorations were presented. In the next year April was a month to be remembered. The Anti-Aircraft Training Centre moved into its newly built headquarter building overlooking the grassed runways - and beyond, to the view of the Constantiaberg and Table Mountain. The move provided the RSM, WO 1 F.C. De Beer, with the opportunity of becoming a landscape designer when he laid out the gardens in front of the building.

All recruits joining the Permanent Force – except those going to the Medical Corps and the Mobile Watch, still underwent three months basic training at Young's Field. Basic and advanced training was also given to young officers entering the Anti-Aircraft branch of the SA Artillery. Those who obtained a B. Mil degree at Saldanha, and completed a Young Officers course at the SA Military College (later the SA Army College), underwent a heavy Anti-Aircraft and a light Anti-Aircraft instructors course. Lieutenant K Pickersgill was one. He was transferred with Sergeants J.A. van Staden and M.J. Schickerling to the Army Gymnasium for duty at the Gymnasium's Anti-Aircraft Troop.³³

Ceremonial

Ceremonial came next; men of Anti-Aircraft Training Centre provided the Gate Guard when Parliament re-opened on 4 July after the mid-year break. And six months later – on 23 January, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre provided the step-lining troops – two officers, a warrant officer and twenty-two other ranks at the entrance to Parliament. In February 1959 a Guard of Honour composed of men from Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, the SA Air Force and the SA Navy - commanded by Major Louis Wolf, MC, was present at the State Funeral in Stellenbosch of the late Dr. D.F. Donges, a former Prime Minister. At the entrance to the church, bayonets flickering in the sunlight, they gave a National Salute as the cortège departed.

³² UDFO 82/56.

³³ *Young's Field*, p. 36.

In 1959, HMS *Afrikander*, the Royal Navy's headquarters in South Africa was established at Young's Field for easier co-operation with Coastal Command Headquarters. The Cape Aero Club began using Young's Field earlier in the year, sharing the grassed landing field with 7 Squadron, SA Air Force – a Citizen Force Squadron equipped with Harvards. The Harvards seemed to dominate the skies over the Cape Peninsula at week-ends with their own peculiar brand of engine noise, once described as an irritating buzz-saw drone. Little did any of the pilots, including those of Owenair, a private charter company established in mid-1949 by three ex-Air Force officers, realise how much they contributed to the practical training of the Anti-Aircraft gunners.

Op Sheep

Drought in the Northern Cape caused another crisis in the farming world; and in June 1959, 1 Mobile Watch was ordered to move sheep from the drought-stricken area of Kenhardt, Pofadder and Kakamas to better grazing in Namaqualand. The Anti-Aircraft Training Centre was ordered to assist. By the time Operation Kenhardt – better known as Op Sheep – ended on 10 July, when the last load of sheep was delivered to better grazing in Springbok, Spektakelberg, Bitterfontein, Loeriesfontein and as far afield as Carnarvon - 26 223 sheep had been moved.³⁴ The farmers were grateful. Among those who were involved in this exercise was the RSM. WO1 De Beer presented each of his twin daughters with a karakul lamb on his return home.

Hardly had Operation Kenhardt come to an end when Operation Winklak began. 1 Mobile Watch bore the brunt this time, assisted by Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, 1 SA Infantry Training Battalion and various other smaller units. They endured untold hardship and discomfort in day temperatures ranging from 35 to 38 degrees Celsius, carting water to all the farms affected by the drought as they fought to save nearly 60 000 sheep and 5 000 head of cattle from dying of thirst. The Gordonia district had last had rain three years before.³⁵ In both operations military transport suffered badly and it took time before many vehicles were replaced.

A combined passing out parade of Permanent Force and Citizen Force Ballotees at Young's Field was the last major event of 1959. It was held in a strong south-easterly wind and commenced with a prayer by the much-loved Major (Ds) M.de V. (Doempie) Cloete, who was remembered by many men from their days in Italian and German prisoner-of-war camps. He was a rare individual. Cape Command was re-designated in October³⁶ to become Western Province Command; and at the conclusion of the parade Colonel G.N. Nauhaus, Officer Commanding the Command, presented prizes. The Captain of the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre shooting team, Field Cornet E.L. Bekker, accepted the 'First SA Infantry Brigade Football Trophy 1917' won by the team against stiff opposition. Other Anti-Aircraft gunners in the team were Chief Sergeants W.J. Nell and J.H. Verburg, Bombardier W.H. Lategan and Signaller D.A. Swanepoel.

There had been promotions and transfers in the last two years. Two future commanding officers – Lieutenants Trott and Moelich were promoted to Captain in January 1958; Captain and T/ Major P.P.J. Grobler was awarded substantive promotion from December. A year later, Candidate Officer J. de S. Hendrikz was appointed on six months probation and would become a future Battery Commander. Also announced in December were the promotions of Sergeants G.J.H. van Staden, M.J. Schickerling, E.W. Baker and J.C. Roelofse. Each became Chief Sergeants.

The rank they attained was an indication how far the Minister of Defence had gone in his quest to rid the Defence Force of its British connotation and give it a South African character. He had, in fact begun in June 1949, by discussing the subject of uniforms with the CGS but due to budget constraints – and the fact that the material had to be ordered from Britain, the new two-tone step-out dress to replace the old *barathea* uniforms only became compulsory for Permanent Force officers from 31 March 1952.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ SADFO 121/50

In the course of the next months it became available for others, including Citizen Force officers. The Red Tab was ordered to be removed from 1 December 1949 but some leniency was accorded to Citizen Force units; units were 'invited' to remove them. Some did so immediately others retained them until finally ordered to take them off. There were 'ceremonial' burials of the Red Tab and this caused angry reaction from higher authority.

A new series of medals was introduced from 6 April 1952 – the 300th anniversary of van Riebeeck's arrival in Table Bay; and instructions were issued on language use in the Permanent Force – with language tests beginning in 1957. Language use was later extended to the Citizen Force. Planning to produce a Military dictionary began in August/September 1948 and this huge task finally drew to a close in 1956, almost in time to be put into use at the Military Academy, established as a unit of the SA Permanent Force on 1 February 1956.³⁷

During these years new badges of rank were introduced - compulsory from 1 April 1952;³⁸ and during the year a new Defence Act (Act No. 44 of 1957) was promulgated. It consolidated all previous Acts – those of 1912, 1922 and 1932 - and withdrew out-dated terms such as Mounted Infantry, etc. It changed the name of the Union Defence Forces to South African Defence Force; South African Permanent Force to 'Permanent Force' and Active Citizen Force to 'Citizen Force'. Commandos and Rifle Associations which had become Rifle Commandos in 1949 were now officially Commandos and also officially included in the SA Defence Force.³⁹ There were more changes: the use of the word 'Garrison' wherever it appeared in any military name or term, was banned in 1959⁴⁰ (Garrison Hill in Voortrekkerhoogte became General Kemp Hill); and in January 1960 a further change in the new rank structure became applicable with effect from 5 December 1959.⁴¹ Use of the word 'Sir', was discontinued in October 1962.⁴² But within days of his announcement of new ranks Mr. Erasmus was appointed Minister of Justice. Morale in the Defence Force was by now at an all time low; but soon after the appointment of Mr. J.J. Fouche as Minister of Defence, and on the recommendation of the CGS (then a combat General), the new minister reversed the entire rank structure, except that of Commandant. This was retained in the Army but Commandants in the Navy again became Commanders and so did the rank 'Cornet' in the Army and Air Force revert to 'Captain'. Naval 'Cornets' again became Lieutenants.⁴³ And Chief Sergeants G.J.H. van Staden, M.J. Schickerling, E.W. Baker and J.C. Roelofse each became Staff Sergeants.

One young officer – a field cornet - who arrived at Young's Field in early 1962 from the Military Academy with a B.Mil under his belt, was almost immediately placed on a heavy Anti-Aircraft course, where he was chased back and forth by the experienced (but crazy, so he thought) Sergeant Huyshamen. The young man cannot remember how many times the detachment had to bring the 10 ton gun into action and take it out of action. At the end of the course there was live shell practice at Strandfontein. With everything – the weather and all the safety instructions complied with, and the Dakota with the sleeve target following on tow behind it, firing could at last begin.

The detachment numbers changed after a few rounds and the new Field Cornet became responsible in his own words: *'...wat die snellermeganisme moet aktiveer. Dit gaan voor die wind. Een patroon na die ander word teen rekord tempo afgevuur na die gesleepte teiken!! Dit het taamluk 'n rukkie geneem voordat iemand agter gekom het dat daar geen lugbars in die omgewing van die teiken plaasvind nie, maar dat daar wel baie ver op die horizon op die wateroperflakte ontploffings plaasvind.'*

WO1 G. Bland – always referred to with great respect as Mr. Bland – (an old and traditional title used when addressing Sergeant Majors) - drew attention to the problem to none other than Major Jack

³⁷ SADFO 82/56.

³⁸ UDFO 110/53

³⁹ *Commando*, September 1957, p. 14.

⁴⁰ SADFO 13/59

⁴¹ SAFO 21/60

⁴² SADFO 121/62

⁴³ *Militaria*, Vol. 26 (2) 1966, pp. 113-127.

Slabbert. The young officer, who had fired one round after the other with great pride and enthusiasm, was removed from the gun. He was told in no uncertain terms that he had neglected to go through the eight checks before commencing fire. One of them was to see that the fuze was set at 'time'; all rounds had instead been set at percussion. On the spot Field Cornet Roux was given what he thought was an absurd instruction to write out the list of checks 300 times so that he did not forget them. For a newly graduated officer it was humiliating; but he survived and never ever forgot the lesson.⁴⁴

While still a relatively junior officer there was another incident that Hennie Roux would remember forever. Two Anti-Aircraft officers were tried for a serious offence and cashiered, possibly one of the last times this happened in the Defence Force. The ritual took place in the Castle. Troops were drawn up in a hollow square, everyone in dress No. 1. The two guilty men were marched into the middle of the square. After the findings of the military court and the punishment had been read out to them they were systematically stripped of their badges of rank and other items of their uniform by a fellow officer – Major Sandy Hendriks - and thrown on the ground. Their caps, rank badges, buttons and belts were then tramped upon. When clad only in basic dress they were marched to a police vehicle - a Black Maria as they were known, and driven away to jail. This procedure was used by many other military forces to instill discipline, as a warning to those who might consider straying from the straight and narrow and must have had a strong psychological impact on the two guilty men. But it has long since disappeared as a punishment factor.

In later years Major General H. Roux – as he was then – sat on the court martial of a Colonel who had abused his authority in a disgraceful and scandalous manner, and was sorry that cashiering had been removed as a means of punishment. It would, he felt, have been appropriate.

⁴⁴ Email from Major General (Ret) H. Roux, 20.6.2014

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

RE-ORGANISATION

Stagnation

Units of the Citizen Force still provided the only ground-based Air Defence units in the country. They consisted of:

- 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
- Headquarters 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment - and independent sub-units.
- Headquarters 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment – and independent sub-units

The light Regiments trained on 40 mm Bofors and the heavy units on the aging 3.7-inch guns

Unfortunately the 1955/56 re-organisation was not an entirely satisfactory one insofar as the heavy Regiments were concerned. Both were really Regiments in name only. Each sub-unit functioned with its own headquarters and published its own orders. They underwent continuous training under command of the Regimental headquarters, but not always so. There was a year or two when a Battery was not included in continuous training. In Cape Town, much of the administration of Headquarters 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment and 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (nominally under Headquarters 3 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment) was undertaken by the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre. All correspondence and orders were signed by Major Stark of Headquarters, 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, including those of the Bellville-based Battery, whose Commander, Captain P.J. de Vos, was resident in Pretoria.

The continued independence led to the stagnation of the weaker units. No officers were ever appointed to 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery and Captain (now Major) Treloar was the only officer in 52 Anti-Aircraft Radar Battery. In contrast to the light Anti-Aircraft Batteries the heavy Batteries ended the decade considerably under strength, as shown below in the table of actual numbers for the Cape Town based unit:

Unit	Officers	Other ranks	Total
4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment	3	14	17
51 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery	3	86	89
52 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Radar Battery	1	67	68
53 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery	3	88	91
54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery	0	81	81

A Changing World

The world was changing and with it the rise of nationalism, dissent and insurrection.

In November 1954, Algerians had risen up against their French rulers. Actions against the government rose from about 200 a month later to over 2 620 in March 1956, by which time the original force of paratroopers sent to Algeria had been increased to 120 000 French troops. By January 1957 the number had increased to 308 000 soldiers. Military successes did not, however, produce political success. In the face of increasing terrorism, and after thousands had been displaced or fled the country, Charles De Gaulle – elected President in December 1958, disillusioned by France's defeat in Vietnam and who believed the conflict could be won, realised it was not producing political success. The conflict, never called a war by the French Government, ended in March 1962, after months of negotiation.

Britain had similar problems in Malaya where a guerrilla war was fought in the jungles by a Commonwealth force (British, Australian, New Zealand and Rhodesian troops) against the Malayan

National Liberation Army (MNLA) – the military wing of the Malayan communist party. It began in 1948 and ended with the defeat of the MNLA in 1960. The insurgency was renewed in 1967 and although Commonwealth troops had largely withdrawn from Malaya by then, the attempt to take the country failed. The Federation of Malaya was reconstituted as Malaysia in 1963. War broke out between Nigeria and Biafra in 1967 and there were problems in many other African countries.

It was these and other guerrilla ‘wars’ that made planners at Defence Headquarters come to the conclusion that the entire nature of warfare was changing. The large conventional formations of 1939-1945 and the deployments that had been regularly and rigidly practiced by Citizen Force units in their continuous training camps could not fight a guerrilla war; it was not possible...and it was too expensive. It was realised that the Defence Force would more likely be forced to fight in Africa. Small bodies of troops able to make hard-hitting lightning strikes began to be envisaged, with the emphasis being placed on mobility. Thus was mobile warfare slowly born, revised and at long last perfected. Planners came to the conclusion that the Defence Force was unbalanced – there were not enough Infantry units.

There was a second consideration – that of changing population patterns. The pattern of fixed recruiting areas meant that some units could no longer be supported with recruits from those areas. In 1958 the Afrikaans/English-speaking ratio of 65-35 and a rough parity in the number of Afrikaans-English-medium units, had changed and this was an additional reason for the disbandment of some Artillery units (in areas of insufficient ballot support) and the re-designation and change in language medium of others.

A final problem was the growing university student population. Students could only attend continuous training during university holidays. The School of Artillery at Potchefstroom and the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre had to therefore hold continuous training camps for university students at the beginning/end of each year. Citizen Force Field Artillery units with numbers of students on strength were the most affected, being forced to divide training administration, and all that it entailed, into two periods each year. It was decided to establish Citizen Force units at universities – the students represented a valuable leader group.

An event that astonished the world took place on 4 October 1957 – Russia launched Sputnik – a satellite that circled the earth. A new age had dawned.

Re-organisation was necessary, advance planning began, and what was described as Stage 2 of re-organisation took place in 1960. Defence Force Order 100/60 in January 1960 listed a large number of changes in Citizen Force units – some being disbanded, others re-designated and a few new units were established. It was at this time that ‘Decimal Dan’ the Rands & Cents Man, was explaining to the public the forthcoming switch-over from pounds, shillings and pence to the new Rand currency.

Due to the technical nature of gunnery, Artillery Regiments were chosen to be University Regiments, and it was decided they should be bilingual in language useage. University Artillery Regiments were thus established at Bloemfontein, Potchefstroom and Pretoria, with an Infantry unit: Regiment Universiteit Stellenbosch in the Western Cape.

In the Transvaal, the Transvaal Horse Artillery became the Witwatersrand University Regiment and in Durban the Natal Field Artillery became the University Regiment.¹ It was surprising that the Cape Town field Regiment was not treated similarly – but there was possibly a reason for this. It is suspected that the Minister had decided to rid the *very* English-speaking unit of its title of Prince Alfred’s Own. Against stiff resistance it was re-designated Regiment Tygerberg but the Minister gave way to an impassioned stand by the commanding officer by allowing the post nominal use of the letters (CFA) in the Regiment’s title.

¹ SADFO 100/60.

The illogical existence of an Anti-Aircraft headquarters and totally separate and independent sub-units could not continue. 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment underwent transformation. It and the independent Batteries - 51 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, 52 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Radar Battery and 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, were chosen to be welded together to be the University Regiment at Cape Town. They became the University of Cape Town Regiment, which was established and designated with effect from 1 January 1960.² It included a headquarters and three Batteries. Each Battery consisted of a radar Troop and two gun Troops. The Regiment was placed under command of Commandant C.D. Stark, JCD, and was to be trained on the 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft gun. As at January 1960 the Headquarters consisted of three officers and about fourteen other ranks. Serving members of the Batteries were transferred to UCTR from 1 February 1960.

Other changes in the SA Artillery (Anti-Aircraft Branch) included the disestablishment of 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments with effect from 1 March 1960. They were effectively deleted from the ORBAT. Headquarters, 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and its component sub-units – 7, 8 and 9 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries - were also disestablished from the same date, as well as the Port Elizabeth based 53 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. The ailing Anti-Aircraft Artillery Band was also disestablished. Formerly the Coast Artillery Band, CGA, it had been transferred to under command of Headquarters, 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment on the dissolution of the SA Corps of Marines and had since been in a state of decline.³

There was one other change: Regiment Vaal Rivier was established as an Afrikaans-medium light Anti-Aircraft Regiment with effect from 1 January 1960 to replace the three disbanded light Regiments. Its headquarters were to be in Vereeniging, once the 'home' of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. It was to be equipped with 40 mm Bofors. The new Regiment was commanded by Commandant L. Poorter.

There were now only two Anti-Aircraft Regiments – one heavy and one light - responsible for the air defence of the entire country. But one Regiment was already at work. Students of Cape Town University began training on the 3.7-inch guns before going back to their university lecture rooms in March. Their training was overseen by Major C.J. Louw, Battery Commander of the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre heavy Battery. On his staff was Captain S.A. Peddie, Officer Instructor Electronics, and Staff Sergeant W.J. Nell, Gunnery Instructor – glad to have shed the mantle of Chief Sergeant.

National Emergency

The personnel of 1 and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments were transferred to Regiment Vaal Rivier and the new unit almost immediately reported for continuous training at Young's Field. Commandant Laurie Poorter commanded the new unit and he was to remain there until 1964. Not satisfied with inaction he later joined the Reserve Air Wing.

There was, however, an indication of trouble brewing, and on the evening of 26 March 1960, almost two months after British Prime Minister, Harold MacMillan delivered his famous 'Winds of Change' speech, Permanent members of Anti-Aircraft Training Centre – and other units in Western Province Command were placed on stand-by. They were instructed to go home, collect necessary kit and return to their units. The following morning one Infantry Company was formed at Young's Field. Hardly had this been done, vehicles checked and allocated, when at 13:05 the alarm sounded – more than 30 000 black people from Langa and Guguletu led by a UCT student – Philip Kgosana - were marching towards the city in protest against the Pass laws. Personnel at Young's Field left in a convoy of Saracens, Ferrets, armoured cars and Ford 3-tonners, where they remained on stand-by at the Castle. Two groups were stationed outside the Houses of Parliament - Captain Loffhagen in command of a Saracen and three armoured cars, and Captain M. Malan commanding a dismounted Platoon. The group that marched on the city were both quiet and peaceful – totally remarkable after the tragic events at Sharpville only a few days before - and after a brief meeting with the Station Commander of the SA Police, during which their speaker accepted his promises of support, they departed quietly to their

² SADFO 100.60.

³ Ibid.

homes. The armoured cars and other vehicles returned to Young's Field late in the afternoon. Following a briefing by Major Wolf at 22:00 and a few hours sleep, they cordoned part of Langa the next day, until relieved by the Cape Town Rifles (Dukes) that evening.

A State of Emergency was declared on 30 March 1960 by Proclamation 86 of 30 March and Cape Town Citizen Force units were that day called up for service which lasted about until 4 May. Regiment Vaal Rivier, with only half of their continuous training complete, were used to cordon part of Langa until relieved by Cape Field Artillery. Anti-Aircraft Training Centre staff and those of other units operated as far afield as Stellenbosch and Caledon, within the parameters of instructions issued by the Officer Commanding Western Province Command, Colonel P.J. Jacobs, SM. They planned, co-ordinated and executed many of the major and minor operations carried out during the period of civil unrest. Discomfort was the order of the day. Captain Norman Trott, Sergeant W.J. Botha and Sergeants J. Jooste and P.M. Brand amongst others, remembered for many years the cold wind-swept nights spent on duty on the Cape Flats in the initial stages of the operation. Nor will a certain Citizen Force Infantry unit forget Colonel Jacobs shouting instructions by bull-horn as he hovered overhead in a helicopter, while they tried to establish a cordon in the thick bush.

Undergoing continuous training at Young's Field at this time was Regiment Vaal Rivier, commanded by Commandant Laurie Poorter. It was fortunate they were immediately available and went into cordon around Langa. A small control point under Commandant Poorter was established at the Vanguard Drive entrance and once Cape Field Artillery had been mobilised and reported for duty their 'Q' (Imhoff) Battery commanded by Major W. Bannatyne took over that portion of the cordon. A Battery of Regiment Vaal Rivier under Major Crous cordoned the south-eastern side of the township and it was relieved by 'P' (Amsterdam) Battery under Captain Crook. On 4 May, with the emergency over the Citizen Force was released and placed instead '...on indefinite leave without pay.'⁴

The newly instituted Trans-Karoo express made its first run between Cape Town and Pretoria in June 1960 and on the surface South Africa was at peace once again. At a parade on Saturday, 20 August 1960, Colonel Jacobs presented Union Medals for Long Service. Among those who received this award were Staff Sergeants W.J. Nell and J.C.P. Augustyn of the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre. Details of the parade were carried in the August Issue of the Defence Force magazine, *Commando*. Included in its Promotions and Transfers column was the announcement that Captain G.W. Lofthagen, S.A.A. (A.A.) had been appointed Assistant Disciplinary Officer at Western Province Command – over and above his normal duties at Young's Field with effect 1 July 1960. He was at this stage responsible for the initial training of all Permanent Force and Security Battalion recruits, a post he held for four years until transferring to the SA Navy in 1962, to take command of the Dockyard Police. When he finally retired fifteen years later he held the rank of Captain, SA Navy.

Change in Command

Decimal currency was introduced in South Africa on 14 February 1961. Just over two weeks before this event - on 1 January 1961, Commandant G. Dunbar Moodie, who had commanded the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre from August 1951, received promotion to Colonel. He was also appointed to act as Officer Commanding Western Province Command – in addition to his appointment at Young's Field. But he held the post at Command only until August before posting to the Commandant General's Section as a member of the Disposal Board to which he had, in fact, been appointed from 1 January. There were a number of other transfers and appointments in the Anti-Aircraft community at this time: Major Fred van Niekerk, GSO2 (AA) at Defence Headquarters vacated the post and it was filled by Captain J.M. Slabber, who was transferred from the Training Centre. They were promoted to Commandant and Major respectively. Major P.P.J. Grobler also became a Commandant from 1 January 1961; and finally Captain Peddie was sent to London as Assistant Liaison Officer after serving as GSO 3 (AA) in Pretoria.

⁴ WP Command Part 1 Order 15/60 in Authors personal file.

Weapons

A specially invited group, including the Minister of Defence - Mr. J.J. Fouche, already known as *Oom Jim* - who had already breathed new life in the Defence Force and given its morale a huge boost, was present with Commandant General P.H. Grobbelaar, SSO, DSO, other senior officers and members of Parliament on 17 March 1961 to witness an Anti-Aircraft demonstration at Strandfontein, on the shores of False Bay.

Heavy guns – the 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft gun of World War Two – fired at a drogue towed by Dazzle Dak – a specially painted Dakota; after this exercise the lighter 40 mm Bofors (used since 1941) went into action and fired at the same target. Then there was the *piece de resistance* – the newly purchased Bofors L/70 – seen in action for the first time. The audience was suitably impressed. Demonstration of the L/70 came as a climax to Course TDK 138 which had been held at 67 General Workshop for armament artificers on the new equipment. The 40 mm Bofors L/70 was an improvement on the earlier L/60; the main difference between the two versions was in the barrel - 70 calibres long instead of 60 – and in the mechanism, modified in order to double the rate of fire. It was chambered for a new round of ammunition with a bigger cartridge case and more powerful propelling charge. Shells and fuses had also been improved but as in the older model - the gun was still fed by four-round clips. It carried a power unit to provide electro-hydraulic elevation and traverse and was controlled by a joystick control column. There was provision for handwheel operation in case of power failure.

Only three months earlier the new Belgian FN 7.62 mm automatic rifle was taken into service. It replaced the old Lee Enfield .303. Suddenly, a new rifle drill had to be learned. In December 1960 and in January 1961, courses were held at the SA Military College, Voortrekkerhoogte. They were attended by Instructors from all training institutions around the country, including Anti-Aircraft Training Centre. A licence was acquired and manufacture of the new rifle commenced in South Africa, with the first Light Automatic Rifle Mk R1 presented to the Prime Minister on 23 September 1964.⁵

Major C.J. Louw, then Chief Instructor Gunnery at Young's Field, was transferred early in 1961 to Defence Headquarters as GSO2 Planning, Operations and Training. In July a new commanding officer arrived to fill the post vacated by Colonel Moodie. Commandant M.E. (Paddy) Fourie was an Armoured Corps officer who in June 1952 had been transferred to Windhoek as Officer Commanding, South West Africa with the rank of Major and temporary Commandant. He had received substantive promotion eighteen months later. He witnessed the re-birth of the war-time concept of a training Regiment – this time as a Battery - on 1 January 1962. Paddy Fourie remained with the Anti-Aircraft gunners only for a short while, before being transferred else where.

New Guns

Withdrawal of the heavy Anti-Aircraft guns was already being discussed. But, following a conference at Young's Field on 12 September 1952 and receipt of instructions from Defence Headquarters, Pretoria, seven days later, four 3.7-inch heavy guns were deployed in sections of two at Noah's Ark Battery and Scala Battery, Simon's Town. They were placed on level ground near No. 2 coast gun in each instance, so coast gun detachments could man them. Each section was equipped with its own command post, a height and range finder, and other necessary stores. It was not considered a perfect solution but the best that could be arranged in the circumstances.⁶

In 1953, the Royal Artillery realised that conventional projectiles would no longer be effective against the speed of aircraft coming into service. Disbandment of Anti-Aircraft units began; Anti-Aircraft Command was disbanded in August 1955. Coast Artillery began to disband at the same time and it saw the introduction of guided weapons in 1957. Guided Missile Regiments were equipped with the Corporal - a surface-to-surface weapon and Thunderbird – a surface-to-air missile was introduced into the Air Defence Regiments.

⁵ *Commando*, November 1964, p. 13.

⁶ SANDF Archives, Vloot Gp. 9, Box 100, file N.M.2911/2G.

It was appreciated by South African Anti-Aircraft gunners in the late 1950's that they could no longer continue to rely on the guns with which World War Two had been fought; and a decision was made that a replacement for the 40 mm Bofors must be found. A committee of three was appointed to investigate the guns and missile systems then available.⁷ The members: Commandant F van Niekerk, who had shortly before vacated the post of GSO 2 (AA); Major L.G.F. Wolf, MC, second-in-command at Young's Field; and Captain S.A. (Stuart) Peddie who had recently transferred to London. The committee visited a number of weapon suppliers in Europe. It soon became obvious to them that of the guided missiles available, they were only alternatives to the 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft gun and that there was nothing readily available in a low-level missile capability.

Possibilities in the field of guns, was narrowed down by the van Niekerk committee to the Swedish 40 mm Bofors L/70, and the four-barrelled 30 mm Hispano Suiza. The former was a current gun with nothing to carry it into the future. Their first port of call had been Switzerland and it was fortunate that the Swiss Army were carrying out trials on Anti-Aircraft equipment when the team arrived. They were allowed to watch the trials of various guns and they were particularly interested in two – the Hispano Suiza 30 mm, and an Oerlikon 35 mm gun. The latter, originally developed in 1960, was their obvious choice, despite seeing other guns during the rest of their tour. An order was placed for 169 Mk 1 guns and 75 Superfledermaus Fire Control Units. '...the 35 mm gun system has been a South African success story', wrote Fabian Ochsner – Vice President Marketing and Portfolio Management, Rheinmetall Air Defence, Zurich, in the *South African Army Journal* of 2014.

The original fire unit consisted of a Superfledermaus Fire Control Unit and two twin 35 mm Mk 1 guns Oerlikon GDF-002 and was brought into service in 1963. An initial conversion course at Young's Field attended by Commandant Wolf – now Commanding Officer, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre; Majors Bekker, Slabber and Cromhout and ten Warrant Officers and NCO's, was given by Herr Meier, Baumann, Wolsenberg and Flaubacher – representatives of the suppliers.



Figure 41: Superfledermaus Fire Control Unit (Radar) (copyright picture Rheinmetall Air Defence AG)

Isolation

In the 1960's South Africa was subject to a process of increasing isolation from the international community, with calls for an arms embargo against the Republic which had been declared on 31 May 1961. An Emergency had been declared about that time and troops had been put on stand-by but had not been used. A crusade for isolation and overthrow of the South African government had begun in the United Nations. Various countries introduced boycotts against South Africa and these efforts were augmented by the efforts of anti-South African organisations. These moves would gradually increase as the years went by.

⁷ Interview with Brigadier F. van Niekerk many years ago.

The threat of a communist inspired insurgency in Africa also posed a danger and led to a decision to increase the size and improve the readiness of the SADF. An expansion of the Army was approved in December 1962, but it was realised that one of the problems in the Citizen Force was that once called up, there would be a lengthy mobilisation time and possibly re-training before being ready for operations. Increased training was a necessity but in the interim, until they were available and reliable - a Full-time Force (FTF) was introduced. It included a certain number of units selected from various services and Corps that were placed on a more or less permanent stand-by to contain any problem that might arise. It was an attempt to overcome the disadvantages of Citizen Force units, with their long periods of inactivity and lengthy mobilisation.⁸

An increase in the initial training period of Citizen Force recruits from three months to nine months - with allowance for men to undergo another three months - came into effect on 1 January 1962. Planning had obviously begun long before this. It was realised there was no Anti-Aircraft unit available for training and retaining an Anti-Aircraft capability in the FTF. The wartime concept of a training Regiment was therefore introduced when authority was given for the birth of 10 Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A.A. (A.A.). It was officially established on 1 January 1962,⁹ after publication in SA Defence Force Orders on 28 November 1961, and was nominated as a unit of the FTF. Major D.G. Steenkamp was transferred from Western Province Command as Battery Commander. The establishment of the new unit brought with it other changes. In January Major Jack Slabber was moved from GSO2 (AA) at Directorate Artillery, Pretoria, to CIG at Anti-Aircraft Training Centre.

Commandant L.G.F. Wolf, MC, whose service since 1939 included both coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, and who had completed a Long Gunnery Staff course in England during 1948, was appointed Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre from 1 January 1962.¹⁰ The appointment of the new commanding officer and his CIG coincided with the increase in the initial training of Citizen Force recruits under the Ballot System from three months to nine months and with the nomination of Full-Time Force (FTF) units. It gave time for preparation before 10 Anti-Aircraft Battery received its first intake in April 1962. The organisation of the Battery included a heavy and a light Anti-Aircraft Troop although it was listed, together with University of Cape Town Regiment in a Defence Force Order issued in January 1963, as a Heavy Battery.¹¹ Apart from 10 Anti-Aircraft Battery and the University of Cape Town Regiment, the only other Anti-Aircraft unit was still Regiment Vaal Rivier, stationed at Vereeniging. But this was to change.

The Transport NCO

As Transport NCO, Staff Sergeant Augustyn ruled and protected his transport park and vehicles with a rod of iron. He was the enemy of all inexperienced young officers; but he was also the hero of the commanding officer with whom he seemed to have a direct line. When vehicles came back from an exercise one could be sure that if there was any damage - even minute damage, even an indicator light that no longer worked - the commanding officer would know about it. *Dan is die kansse baie goed dat jy moet hakkies klap oor jou onbesonnenheid*, wrote Major General Roux many years later. So, one could understand Staff Sergeant Augustyn's distress and the commanding officer's anger in August 1964, when four of his vehicles were 'badly damaged'.

What was just another Saturday training day for Cape Field Artillery turned out to be the most publicised story of the month in the local media. With permission of Cape Command, eight light Anti-Aircraft gun tractors were borrowed for deployment training purposes from Anti-Aircraft Defence Centre/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. They were Canadian stub-nosed Fords which had the engine in the driver's compartment, between the driver and the passenger seat. The Regiment's reconnaissance group had left to 'recce' gun positions when the eight vehicles of the gun group, towing 25 pounder

⁸ *Young's Field*, p. 40.

⁹ SADFO 181/61.

¹⁰ SANDF Archives, Personal file Brigadier L.G.F. Wolf.

¹¹ SANDFO 11/63.

guns, left the old Sir Lowry Road Market for the deployment area at De Grendel on the slopes of the Tygerberg Hills.

Unfortunately after leaving the old Sir Lowry Road Market and when moving along New Market Street a civilian vehicle inserted itself rather hurriedly into the middle of the convoy to avoid oncoming traffic. The driver of the tractor behind it was forced to brake hurriedly to avoid hitting the civilian vehicle; but the brakes were not strong enough to slow the forward motion of the heavy field gun. The result was not so much an accident but a magnificent pile up of the four vehicles of one Troop as they and their guns, one after the other, ran into each other. It was only the fourth tractor that did not have the barrel of a two and a half ton gun piercing the windscreen. It was fortunate there was only one very minor casualty.

Operation Dikmelk

Exit from the British Commonwealth in 1960 implied that South Africa would in future have to rely on its resources for its defence needs. In addition to growing world pressure, turmoil leading to destabilisation and chaos in the newly independent states to the north had to be taken into account. There had been a wake-up call in the late 1960's when intelligence revealed the possibility that an international hostile force with the support of 'certain great powers' would attempt to wrest control of Walvis Bay from South African control.¹² It led to the reinstatement of a Coast Artillery Battery of two 6-inch guns at Walvis Bay. Work was, however, only complete by about mid-July 1963. It was an early wakeup call.

Throughout the 1960's South Africa was engaged in a threat analysis of possible sea/air landings by a United Nations sponsored force. The formation of the Organisation of African Unity '...raised the temperature around the South West Africa issue.' As 1967 drew to a close it seemed that some action against South Africa's mandate might definitely be taken.

In 1967 it was whispered that an air assault would be made on an airport in South West Africa. The information came from the CIA via the South African Embassy in Washington and it was enough (stated an author) to place the SADF in a state of paranoia. Landings were apparently to be made on certain airfields in the territory. Whatever was imagined was about to happen. The initial report was received on 5 December, and by 7 December an operation to mobilise a preventive force was underway in the highest degree of secrecy. D-Day was presumed to be 10 December – Human Rights Day. Codenamed *Dikmelk*, three SA Air Force Squadrons were ordered for deployment, and a Company of paratroopers and four Infantry Companies were immediately deployed to Grootfontein, Mpacha, Rundu, Ondangwa, Tsumeb and J.G. Strydom airport, Windhoek. Other Infantry units – including twelve Citizen Force Companies - were placed on stand-by. The SA Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) was warned to deploy four 35 mm Anti-Aircraft guns and Super Fledermaus fire control systems. Another eighteen 40 mm Bofors were placed on stand-by. They were initially without detachments. During the operation the first operational deployment of the newest fighting vehicle on strength – the Vehicle Type A – soon to be given the name, Eland, drawn from 'D' Squadron, 2 SA Infantry Battalion, Walvis Bay, took place.

By 23 December it was clear that nothing was to happen and the force was stood down. There is no indication that Anti-Aircraft guns were actually deployed. Harsh words were afterwards exchanged between the SADF and the editor of *Beeld* – an Afrikaans daily paper. Two Beeld journalists were members of Regiment Noord Transvaal - deployed during Operation Dikmelk at Hot Dog (JG Strydom airport, Windhoek). No one was aware of the two men and there was no instruction on what could or could not be written. It led to a potentially embarrassing situation for the SADF.¹³

Despite the background of a possible threat, the 50th Birthday of the Defence Force was celebrated on 16 June 1962 with a huge display at Young's Field, which included an Anti-Aircraft display by the Anti-

¹² Ibid., KG Gp 5, Box 502, file G/GPT/2/3 (Walvis).

¹³ From the draft of a book by H Short.

Aircraft Training Centre. Six months after the Republic Festival Captains Bekker, Moelich and Trott were all promoted to the ranks of Major, all effective from 1 January 1963.

Additional Air Defence

But it was probably realised, despite the lack of an air threat that the two existing Citizen Force Anti-Aircraft units should be augmented and, with additional recruits now being trained it became possible to establish another unit. Regiment Oos-Transvaal, to be headquartered at Brakpan, was established on 1 October 1964¹⁴ and nominated as an Afrikaans-medium unit; but it was only formed in February 1965 with Commandant I.H. (Hennie) Crous, JCD, as commanding officer. He had been a member of the post-war 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, one of the Anti-Aircraft Regiments transferred to the SA Corps of Marines. After the SA Corps of Marines had been disbanded in 1955 and before 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment disappeared in March 1960, he transferred to the newly established Regiment Vaal Rivier which had an establishment of 42 officers and 712 other ranks. He served as a Battery Commander until he resigned and was transferred to the National Reserve. Hennie Crous was called up from the Reserve to establish the new Regiment. He had an immediate problem and it proved to be a feature of the Regiment's first three years - the absolute lack of administrative facilities available to the unit. Commandant Hennie Crous was obliged to make his home available as the unit's HQ until suitable office space was found in the Magistrates Court complex, Brakpan, in 1968. In these early years his wife acted as Administrative Clerk.¹⁵

The first 30 men were only taken on strength on 29 September 1966 and the first training camp was held in the following year. The Regiment was soon to be known as 'Die Rotte' (the Rats) - from ROT - the official abbreviation of their title. Units in other armies - particularly in the British Army - have over a large number of years been identified by a nickname, often generally used for that particular unit, but this is not usually so in the SA Army. Members of the Regiment were proud of their nickname and when a beret badge was designed for the Regiment it included a Rat. Similarly, a rat is included on the buckle of the unit's stable belts. Most military people talk of the 'Rotte' and not R.O.T. or Regiment Oos Transvaal.¹⁶

When the new Regiment was established it was decided to convert Regiment Vaal Rivier from a Bofors Regiment to one equipped with both Oelikons and Bofors. The Anti-Aircraft Training Centre was of the opinion that this would cause chaos and consequently Army Chief of Staff reversed the decision. Regiment Vaal Rivier was to remain equipped with Bofors and the newly established Regiment Oos-Transvaal was to be equipped from the outset with Oelikons. In December, however, Army Headquarters changed the decision and stated that from 1 December 1964 both Regiments were to be combined Bofors/Oerlikon Regiments, each consisting of:

A Bofors Regimental headquarters
Two 40mm Bofors Batteries
One 35 mm Oerlikon Battery
Attached Signals and LWT Troops.¹⁷

Problems

10 Anti-Aircraft Battery had originally been established as an independent self-accounting unit, but circumstances made it necessary for Army Chief of Staff to place it under command of Anti-Aircraft Training Centre from 28 January 1964. Major Steenkamp relinquished command of the Battery from 31 July and was transferred to the Reserves, and Commandant Wolf was authorised to appoint a suitable officer as Battery Commander in his place. This presented the Commandant with a problem. The Full-Time Force unit had been left, on Major Steenkamp's departure, with nothing in the way of officers except a handful of subalterns.

¹⁴ SADFO 104/64

¹⁵ Information from MWO E. Brits and Major L. Rossouw.

¹⁶ Extract from 2014 History Return. Regiment Oos Transvaal.

¹⁷ SANDF Archives, H Leer Gp 4, Box 11, file G/SD3.

Majors Bekker and Moelich were on a Staff Course at the SA Military College (later SA Army College) and Commandant Wolf therefore appealed to Army Chief of Staff in late July for their re-posting to Young's Field on completion of the course. He made the point that it would be a complete waste of eleven years experience, which included an overseas posting on an Anti-Aircraft course, if Major Bekker were to be posted elsewhere. He asked for Major Moelich to be re-posted to Young's Field to replace Major Steenkamp as Battery Commander. Louis Wolf had heard through the 'grapevine' – the 'old boys' net – that Captain Kleingeld – who was adjutant and paymaster, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, was required by his Corps to transfer to the Services School as an instructor. He asked Army Chief of Staff for permission to retain him at Young's Field, or to have an immediate replacement for the young officer. He motivated his request by pointing out that he, as Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, had had to act as Commander of the Centre on his appointment, but also as adjutant for fourteen months thereafter. It was clear from the tone of his letter that he did not care to do so again.

Commandant Wolf, was a gruff, stern, no-nonsense officer – a terrifying sight to young and very 'green' ACF subalterns when he seemingly barked an order at them; but he had a pithy sense of humour, dry and to the point. He ended his appeal to Army Chief of Staff by suggesting that an attempt be made to find three or four short-service officers for the Battery – 'preferably officers with some degree of Anti-Aircraft experience' in order to solve the shortage of officers in 10 Anti-Aircraft Battery. Army Headquarters agreed to the suggestions.

A New RSM

Following the transfer of Warrant Officer 1 de Beer to Western Province Command at the end of February 1966, Warrant Officer I.J. Spangenberg was appointed RSM, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre. In contrast to his predecessor, the newly appointed incumbent - although now senior warrant officer at the Training Centre - had spent most of his career as a coastal gunner. He had joined the Coast Artillery Brigade before the war and in 1939 was sent with 40 other ranks to England for training as part of the abortive HMS *Erebus* scheme (with its 15-inch guns it was to be used as a floating Battery in Table Bay). He served at Simon's Town (on two different postings); Robben Island; Walvis Bay where he had to train Owambos as coastal gunners. They knew no English or Afrikaans - all instruction went through two interpreters They were replaced by Cape Corps gunners. Then in 1946 it was back to Robben Island once more, but this time as an instructor. Segeant Spangenberg completed a course as quartermaster in the years after closure of Coast Artillery units in January 1944, but in typical Army fashion was posted to Robben Island in 1946 as an instructor on the staff of the Coast Artillery Brigade - serving under Major Anderson, MC. When the SA Corps of Marines was formed in 1951 he was still on the Island but when the Marines were disbanded in 1955, he decided against transfer to the SA Navy. So he became an anti-aircraft gunner instead, but was posted as Command Sergeant Major, Oudtshoorn – before a hasty recall to Young's Field three years later to coincide with the commencement of National Service training.



Figure 42: Live shell practice shoot: 35 mm Oelikon: Strandfontein beach

New Formations

Headquarters, 7 Infantry Division and three Brigades - Headquarters, 17, 18 and 19 Brigades - were established from 1 December 1964,¹⁸ providing an indication that additional light Anti-Aircraft units would be required for deployment in the field. There were other reasons.

A committee was established in terms of an Army Chief of Staff convening order in the latter half of April 1965 to consider and report on a number of matters concerning Anti-Aircraft defence. Chaired by Major A.R. Gotze, SAAF, it assembled at Army Headquarters on 3 May of that year. The chairman was replaced nine days later by Major de Vries, SAAF. After deliberation of items listed by Army Chief of Staff, supplemented by the Commandant General's observations and instructions, a 60 page report was compiled. It covered sixteen sections ranging among other items - from the determination of the air threat; limitations of the Air Defence System; determination of VPs and VAs and the principles applying to the allocation of light Anti-Aircraft guns in order to provide a Class 1 or Class 2 defence; allocation of guns; personnel requirements for the recommended number of units; acquisition of additional equipment; command and control and the air defence of harbours. The latter subject appears to have been submitted in a 'Terry-Lloyd' report under cover of a letter from Naval Chief of Staff.

The committee noted that equipment then available consisted of:

- 35 mm twin Oerlikon equipped with Super-Fledermous fire control unit on the scale of one unit per two equipment 36
- Bofors 40/L70 equipped with on-mounting power control and reflector sight 4
- Bofors 40/L60 equipped with Galileo power control and reflector sight 120
- Bofors 40/L60 – hand operated 136

It recommended the allocation of these guns to VPs /VAs, with a ten per cent reserve, excepting that;

- There would not be a reserve of 35 mm Oerlikons.
- Reinforcement Unit and Battle School - Bofors 40/L60 (Galileo) 3
- - Bofors 40/L60 (hand operated) 3
- Anti-Aircraft Training Centre - Bofors 40/L60 (Galileo) 9
- - Bofors 40/L60 (hand operated) 12
- And, strangely: Bofors 40/L70 ...for training only 4

A table reflected the total number of VPs under priority one to four with the number of Regiments required for each class of defence:

	Vulnerable Points	Class One defence	Class Two defence	Minimum defence
Priority One	22	10	6	5
Priority Two	6	3	2	2
Priority Three	11	8	4	6
Priority Four	30	14	5	2
Total	69	35	17	15

The report must have raised some concern at Defence Headquarters.

A Separate Committee

A separate committee under the chairmanship of Colonel I.S. Guilford, SM, SA St C; with Commandant L.G.F. Wolf, MC, , SAA (AA), Major W.J. Matthews, SM, SAAC, and Major P.J. de Vries, SAAF, as members with Major Norman Trott, SAA (AA) as secretary - was appointed on 23 April 1965 to consider the possible threat to VPs and the operational importance of the latter. It also assembled on

¹⁸ SADFO 1/65.

3 May. Their appreciation was based on DMI's appreciation of the potential air threat against the RSA and SWA from 1965 to 1970. It was, inter alia, submitted that no African State would by 1970 constitute an air threat except to provide airfields to support land operations against South Africa. The greatest danger it reported would result from an unfavourable decision of the World Court in the SWA case, resulting in a United Nations (UN) decision to intervene militarily. Unconventional attacks by light aircraft from within neighbouring States could not be excluded but not considered a major danger. Where UN action was concerned a carrier-borne strike was a low level possibility. It had, however, been shown that Western Powers would only provide support if there was a danger of strategical areas falling into communist hands or, as visualised, that South Africa was not able to maintain law and order; or had resorted to methods to restore law and order which provoked serious military intervention from other sources and became a threat to world peace. An operational airfield in the Caprivi Strip was suggested to increase fighter cover.

A comprehensive report was submitted in June 1965.¹⁹ and was obviously taken seriously.

Additional Air Defence units

The establishment of Regiment Oos-Transvaal was thus followed in the next year by the English-medium 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment which was established from 1 April 1965.²⁰ It was formed at the headquarters of Regiment Oos-Transvaal on 15 May 1966 when excess personnel were transferred from the latter unit. Commandant Crous of Regiment Oos Transvaal suggested that Commandant R.H. Inggs, JCD, be transferred from National Reserve to take command of the newly established unit. 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment also had an initial problem – no official, government-supplied headquarters. Commandant Dick Inggs' home in Selcourt, Springs, was his headquarters and his wife was the first Administrative Clerk. The HQ later moved to an office at the Magistrates Court, Springs and after a short while to Nonqgai Building in the same town.²¹

Events in Africa, north of South Africa's borders, were escalating. Rhodesia formally cut its links with Britain and unilaterally declared it self independent. It signalled the beginning of a long, secret, silent, unglamorous war – an ideological confrontation – in which South Africa to some extent became involved.

Place of Worship

A genius for improvisation, seemingly inherent in all military personnel but particularly in Gunners, was demonstrated when St. Martins-in-the-Camp opened for worship at the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, Young's Field early in 1966. Volunteers worked hard to convert and transform an old and semi-redundant building into a place of worship, worthy of its holy purpose. Furnishings and ornaments had all been acquired through normal Defence Force channels, but the Altar and Rails had been made by Anti-Aircraft Training Centre personnel. Flanking the Altar were the flags of the SA Army and the Corps of Artillery.²²

Worship was again in mind on 1 May 1966 when troops from Cape Field Artillery, Anti-Aircraft Defence School, University of Cape Town Regiment, 1 Locating Battery, 3 Field Squadron and 3 Signal Squadron paraded at the Cenotaph, Adderley Street, for the annual Gunners' Memorial service. A 25 pounder field gun was placed at each corner of the war memorial. The parade, and the last time it would be held there, was under command of Commandant Z. Nel. Almost three months later all these units would again be in Adderley Street – providing street-lining troops for the opening of Parliament on 29 July; and again two years afterwards, on 14 January 1968, for the state funeral of Dr. T.E. Dönges, Acting State President.

¹⁹ SANDF Archives, HS Ops, Gp. 1, Box 36.

²⁰ SADFO 148/65.

²¹ Info supplied by WO1 (now MWO) E. Brits.

²² *Commando*, April 1966, p. 39.

Anti-Aircraft Training Centre

During the preceding year, in a change not foreseen by the architects of the original Defence Act 1912 (Act No. 13 of 1912) the Minister of Defence invoked the powers granted him by the Defence Act, 1957 (Act 44 of 1957), and established the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, and a number of other Permanent Force units, as a unit for both Permanent Force and Citizen Force with effect from 1 September 1967.²³ Technically, there were thus two units known as Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, but this anomaly was corrected by a further notice when the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre was disestablished as a unit of the Permanent Force.²⁴

A Citizen Force Headquarters

There were a few – less than a handful – of Reserve Force Regiments that owned their own headquarters building. They were fortunate; others were shunted from one building to another at the whim of the Defence Force and they lost their ‘homes’ on which very often they have spent much time, effort and bluntly – their own money - in creating. It created a situation which was not conducive to the feeling of ‘belonging’. As already seen least two Anti-Aircraft unit commanders have initially had to use their own homes as a headquarters.

University of Cape Town Regiment was allocated four small rooms in a small building on the Ottery Road side of Young’s Field camp, some distance from the main gate in Wetton Road. Their ‘Q’ stores were in yet another small building. Of the four rooms, one served as the office of the commanding officer, one as an Orderly room, one was allocated to the officers and the fourth to the RSM and NCO’s. The building was in a top security area and it meant that members had to be issued with special passes to attend parades, and for those – the commanding officer, adjutant and RSM – who were called upon to do normal day-to-day administration at night - in the case of most if not all Reserve Force units.

There were occasional misunderstandings with various guard commanders, making access to the headquarters difficult. And worse still – the guard dogs occasionally escaped their handlers and menaced members when they attended Tuesday night parades. Lieutenant Bisset, who was later adjutant, drove to parades on a Velosolex. One night after he had entered the camp he was chased by a guard dog. He accelerated but to no avail. There was not enough power to escape. The dog caught up and bit him on the ankle. The result was that efforts to obtain improved accommodation intensified and the Regiment was able, in 1968, to move into a spacious and far more suitable building near Acasia Park, Wingfield.

Republic Day parade

Troops and equipment from Young’s Field formed part of the Artillery contingent at the huge Republic Day parade held at the foot of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria at the end of May 1966. Artillery equipment of every nature – both Field and Anti-Aircraft Branch - held by the Defence Force was included in the contingent. The public saw the Oerlikon Anti-Aircraft guns and their associated Fledermaus radar system for the first time. They had never before been seen outside the Training Centre. The Anti-Aircraft group in the Artillery contingent of the mechanised parade also include the well-known 40 mm Bofors it was a spectacular parade, seen by an estimated 750 000 spectators. Hundreds of troops were involved. What made it so special for the Citizen Force was that the large Artillery contingent was commanded and led by a Citizen Force officer - Commandant Zirk Nel of Cape Field Artillery. Marching columns followed and at 11:28 – on schedule – a fly-past of aircraft of the SA Air Force began. At noon, a 21-gun salute was fired above the strains of the National Anthem, played by the massed bands.²⁵

Two months afterwards, on 1 July, Commandant Wolf received promotion to Colonel and at the end of August he was transferred to Army Headquarters as SSO Planning. He was not the last Gunner to

²³ SADFO 97/67.

²⁴ SADFO 16/68.

²⁵ *Commando*, July 1966, pp.5 and 7.

hold this post.

An Officer Commanding

The post of Officer Commanding Anti-Aircraft Training Centre fell on the shoulders of Major P.L. de B. Swart. He took command in an acting capacity from 1 September 1966 and was promoted to Commandant later in the year, backdated to 1 July 1966. He was unfortunately involved in a serious motor accident in July of the next year and was admitted to hospital on 8 July. As he was expected to remain indisposed for up to six months, Major Bekker, the senior of the five Majors on strength of Anti-Aircraft Training Centre at the time, was appointed acting commanding officer from 11 July 1967 with the rank of temporary Commandant.²⁶ It had by then been decided to replace Anti-Aircraft Training Centre with a School and a training Regiment, much on the same lines as had existed in 1943. By October Director Artillery (AA) decided that the personnel problems resulting from Commandants Swart's serious injuries could be resolved by appointing him to command 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment (the new training Regiment) with Major Moelich as his deputy. The latter would act as commanding officer until Commandant Swart was fit for duty. Major Bekker would later command the new Artillery Air Defence School. These suggestions were approved. Major Bekker's promotion to substantive Commandant was made effective from 1 December 1967.

Other officers were promoted from about the same time – Major S.A. Peddie went to Natal as GSO1 with the rank of Commandant and a future Director Artillery (AA), Captain J.C. Pieterse was promoted to Major. Despite the arrangements confirmed by Chief of the Army (titles of Service Chiefs of Staff had recently been altered) in respect of Commandants Bekker and Swart, 'Blackie' Swart was able to return to duty earlier than expected and a priority signal was sent from the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre in mid-November informing Chief of the Army that Commandant Bekker would relinquish the appointment of Officer Commanding with effect from 1 December. Commandant P.L. de B. Swart assumed duty as Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft Training Centre the same day.

Almost unnoticed had been the acquisition during the past year of Hispano Suiza 20 mm QF guns for use by the light Anti-Aircraft Regiments to replace the aging Bofors. Although a towed gun some were later mounted on vehicles and first used in this role for the junior Leader course in 1985.



Figure 43: Examples of 20mm QF gun mounted on Mercedes trucks

Increased Initial Training

When the Active Citizen Force (as it was then known) began 'Peace Training' from 1947, a ballot system to provide recruits was in operation. It was a very simple system; if 5 000 recruits were required to feed units, a greater number of names were drawn and those men were told to report for medical examination. It was very easy to obtain exemption. Those eventually placed in units – mostly

²⁶ SANDF Archives, personal file Brigadier E.L. Bekker.

of their choice – served an initial recruit training period of six weeks followed immediately by a further three weeks, when they were joined by the recruits of the previous year – known as ‘trained’ men.

But with a growing external threat to South Africa a greater training period was necessary to provide an improved deterrent. The ballot system was tightened up considerably. Service of nine months was brought into effect from 1 February 1962. It allowed those who wished to do so to serve for a further three months to avoid non-continuous training at unit level over the next four years. The system had serious shortcomings; it was too rigid and too limited in its use of the available manpower resources, although Citizen Force units provided with recruits were in many cases able to accomplish more in non-continuous training.

A table of authorised strengths for Citizen Force units to be used for information and planning purposes was produced by Army Headquarters, Pretoria, on 24 March 1965, effective from 1 January of the same year. It was not broken down per unit but rather to use a much later SANDF expression - it showed ‘type’ units. So, two light Anti-Aircraft Regiments were shown as being allocated 68 officers and 1 358 other ranks, while one Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment was allocated 33 officers and 540 other ranks.²⁷

Light Anti-Aircraft Requirements

In view of a possibility of a threat arising, Army Chief of Staff instituted a committee to investigate and provide advice on the light Anti-Aircraft requirements necessary for operational protection of vulnerable points in South Africa. The committee of four members: Commandant L.G.F. Wolf, MC (SAA [AA]); Majors W.J. Mathews (SAAC) and P.J. de Vries (SAAF), was chaired by Colonel Bruce Guilford, SM. He was instructed that the investigation was a matter of urgency and all aspects were to be investigated. The committee met at Army headquarters on Monday, 3 May 1965, with Major Norman Trott as secretary.

Its report was all embracing, covering a determination of the air threat; limitations of air defence systems and justification for continued employment of light Anti-Aircraft guns; limitations of Radar early warning; the ideal air defence system for conventional attack; determination of vulnerable points and areas, and more – all contained in 15 different sections of the committee’s report. In respect of Anti-Aircraft requirements it was determined that a Class 1 attack on the 69 vulnerable points identified, would require 35 light Regiments; the minimum requirement being fifteen Regiments. The total personnel required to man 35 Regiments was determined at 32 125 all ranks, including artisans and almost 2 600 SACC personnel. There were at this time only two Anti-Aircraft Regiments in the country.

The air threat was seen as minimum unless the United Nations intervened militarily, with a ‘slight possibility’ that United States aircraft carriers would be provided in support of such a move *if* the World Court decision went against South Africa and was opposed. There could be unconventional attacks by light aircraft from bases in neighbouring countries. Only the UAR had an Air Force capable of an attack but the situation in the Middle East made this improbable, otherwise no African country would be capable of providing an Air Force able to launch an attack before 1970.

Air defence of harbours was investigated by the ‘Terry-Lloyd’ committee which stated that a proposed allocation of one 54 gun Regiment for each of the six main harbours was necessary. This suggestion was made with a ‘very broad brush’. It seems that there was a suggestion at this time to purchase sixteen French 100 mm Anti-Aircraft guns. The main committee stated they would only provide token defence, and then only against aircraft flying below 20 000 feet, and would not be able to engage an aircraft flying at that height at 500 mph before the line of bomb release. The advantage of the 100 mm guns over the 3.7-inch gun in the SADF armoury was that they had a higher rate of fire and VT fuzes were available. The sixteen guns on offer would only be available, installed and operational by 1970 at the earliest.

²⁷ From the Archives of Cape Field Artillery. G/SD/3/2.

The committee felt that Bloodhound or Masurca surface-to-air guided missiles to provide air defence for Cape Town and Durban could, if procurable, be finalised by 1970 and that the cost would be within the R23,000,000 needed to acquire the French guns. It also suggested that the modernisation of the 52 remaining 3.7-inch guns by the addition of the No. 11 fuze setter and the acquisition of new radar and fire control equipment would be far more economical as an interim measure and provide more effective defence than the sixteen French guns.²⁸

There is no record of the immediate decision made by the General Staff.

Groenwoud Committee

Yet another committee was set up in 1965.

The Groenwoud Committee was tasked to investigate and consider alternative forms of military service. Its recommendations led to the introduction in 1968 of a new national service system whereby all medically fit white male citizens would be eligible for military service in the year they turned 18. The National Service system had been under discussion in Parliament, and particularly in the news media, for months; and preparations for the reception of the increased numbers of young men who would have to present themselves for military service had been under way for some while.

The much publicised National Service system was introduced from 1 January 1968. Overnight, compulsory military service of one year replaced the ballot system of nine months. One of the results of the introduction of National Service was that the Full-time Force was no longer necessary. 10 Anti-Aircraft Battery was affected by revised arrangements necessary to cope with the influx in numbers of young men reporting for service.²⁹

Four Corps: SA Armoured Corps; SA Engineer Corps; SA Corps of Chaplains and SA Corps of Signals -all established on 20 August 1946 - and the SA Medical Corps established in 1923 – were disestablished as units of the Permanent Force from...1 September 1967, they were each re-established from the same date to serve as units of both the Permanent Force and the Citizen Force. The Anti-Aircraft Training Centre also underwent this metamorphosis on 1 September 1967.³⁰

Anti-Aircraft Organisation

Changes to the Anti-Aircraft organisation envisaged earlier came into effect in February 1968. An increase in the training and overall control of Anti-Aircraft gunnery became necessary and from 1 February 1968 changes were made at Young's Field. The Anti-Aircraft Training Centre was disestablished and simply disappeared and in its place two new units arose from its ashes - Anti-Aircraft Defence School and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, both established on 1 February 1968 as units of the Permanent Force.³¹ Commandant E.L. (Eddie) Bekker took command of the School from 1 February and Commandant Swart assumed command of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment the same day. Once again the value of continuation in precedence was broken, but history will record that the new School was a continuation of the Training Centre and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was a logical continuation of 10 Anti-Aircraft Battery. Commandant Bekker was not only the commanding officer – he also acted for some while as Adjutant, Pay Officer, Registry Clerk and general factotum – until matters gradually settled down to a more organised basis.

Officers were posted from Anti-Aircraft Training Centre and under Commandant Eddie Bekker there were: Major J.de S. Hendrikz as Chief Instructor Courses Wing; Captain P.O. du Preez – Instructor Gunnery Heavy Anti-Aircraft and Captain A.C. Fuchs - Instructor Gunnery Light Anti-Aircraft. Field Cornet H.G. Barnard was adjutant and three other Field Cornets were on strength as Instructors – R.T.

²⁸ SANDF Archives, HS Ops Gp 1, Box 36.

²⁹ *Commando*, December 1967, p. 37.

³⁰ SADFO 97/67.

³¹ SADFO 16/68.

(Reg) Deyzel, D.J. Verwey and H.A. Kotze.

Those senior officers posted to 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment under Commandant 'Blackie' Swart included Major A. Moelich as second-in-command; Major J.C. Pieterse- GSO2 Training; Major A.A. Walton – Quartermaster and three Battery Commanders: Major A.L. Conradie – 40 mm Battery; Captain M.C. van den Berg – 3.7-inch Battery and Major H. Roux – 35 mm Battery

As the senior unit the commanding officer, Artillery Air Defence School assumed the duties of Director Artillery (Anti-Aircraft). The School became responsible for the formulation of Anti-Aircraft doctrine, the preparation of all Anti-Aircraft training handbooks, precis, drill books, all Permanent Force and Citizen Force courses and the training of national service Junior Leaders and Instructors. 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was tasked with the training of all other national servicemen and annual continuous training periods of the Citizen Force Anti-Aircraft units.

At about this time a number of Warrant Officers were promoted to Class 1; they included WO2 Barry Ruthven (known as 'Tant Shoes'), Barnard, Nell, Bothma and Augustyn.

Problems

Almost from the outset it was found not possible to run both the School and the Regiment completely separately, owing to an acute shortage of personnel. The first months of their existence was marked by one crisis after another, owing particularly to a shortage of personnel, with the result that the Regiment could scarcely cope with the national service intake. It became progressively impossible for either unit to operate effectively as independent self-accounting entities. Consequently, in addition to its training function, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was tasked with the administration of Air Defence School³² and 4 Radar Maintenance Unit. The latter was soon to be titled: 4 Radar Maintenance Squadron. It had been established at Young's Field on 1 October 1963.

One of the causes of the problems being experienced was the February 1968 intake which at 675 men was 400 more than normally reported for duty. It was decided, despite the shortage of instructors and administrative officers and NCO's, to bite the bullet and carry on as best each unit could, putting the two units to a proper test before making any approach to Army Headquarters. There was no light at the end of the tunnel; in fact matters worsened. Major Hendrikz and Captain Fuchs resigned from the staff of the School and five officers of the Regiment decided enough was enough, and left. The temporary posting of training staff to Exercise Sibasa in the Northern Transvaal in August 1968 did nothing to help; and three months later Major Moelich was posted to SA Cape Corps Training Centre, Eerste Rivier.

Fortunately, Commandant J.N. Slabber returned about end March 1969 from a four-year tour of duty on the Staff of the Military Attaché in London. He was appointed second-in-command to Colonel Bekker, who had been promoted to that rank from 1 November 1968. Other promotions from the same date included Captains M.C. van den Berg – who had completed his B Mil degree as a candidate officer at the end of 1962 – and P.O. (Phil) du Preez, who both became Majors; and Lieutenants Barnard, Verwey and Deyzel promoted to the rank of Captain.

The situation in which the two units now found themselves could not continue. In July representations were made to Chief of the Army; he was asked to consider a combination of the two units, and was also asked to consider appointing additional officers to posts in the proposed combined unit. As a result Chief of the Army agreed to the formal, but temporary amalgamation, of the two units from 1 November 1969. This provided a partial solution to the problem. Commandant Moelich was shortly afterwards transferred back to the combined unit, now operating as Anti-Aircraft Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. It was an unwieldy title but it preserved the two titles and provided a measure of continuity in the event it later became possible to separate at a later date.

³² SANDF Archives, history file, AADS/10 AA Regiment.

Colonel Bekker was transferred at short notice on special duties from close of duty on 14 September 1969 and was held while on this duty as SSO (Documentation) on the staff of Director Military Intelligence. Commandant Slabber was promoted the following day to the temporary rank of Colonel and appointed acting Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Commandant Moelich became his second-in-command. Jack Slabber was later confirmed in the appointment and, in addition, appointed Director Artillery (Anti-Aircraft).

The officer postings looked bleak. The quartermaster, Major Walton had retired to pension on 30 September 1969; but some good news was received about this time. Four officers were to be transferred from the Field Branch and four directly from the Military College. They were:

From Field Branch:

Captain S.J.P. du Plessis

Captain L.P. Coetzee

Captain J.A. Swartz

Lieutenant D. Keller

From Military College:

Lieutenant D.M. Bossenger

2nd Lieutenant W.J. Mouton

2nd Lieutenant H.J.H. van der Hoven

2nd Lieutenant A.S.J. Kleinhans

They had all to attend an Anti-Aircraft orientation course before being usefully employed at Young's Field. The course began in early January 1970. Major Walton's replacement – the new quartermaster – resigned at the year-end, but the Major was persuaded to return to his former post. He re-entered service under Article 10 on 28 January 1970.

Other Changes

Changes continued to come to the Defence Force. The new international ABCA alphabet had been introduced into use in the Defence Force from 1 January 1967 by Army Training Instruction No. 22/66 of 8 November 1966 to replace two earlier versions: 'A' became Alpha, replacing Apple, etc. It had come about to standardise speech between aircraft and control towers where, until the introduction of ABCA, different versions of the same letter of the alphabet had caused misunderstanding and almost chaos in the air.

On 30 November 1959 the Minister of Defence announced a forthcoming change in the rank structure and in 1964 a new olive-brown battle dress was introduced.³³ It replaced the thicker, warmer but 'scratchy' British battledress worn by South Africans as winter dress since 1941/42, and as winter dress after the war. And now, a long-awaited announcement was made covering the new nutria field dress that had been subject to frequent rumours. The evolution of the dress and associated personal equipment was fully discussed in a five page article in *Commando* of May 1969.³⁴

Appolo Eleven had landed on the moon, but down on earth and specifically at Young's Field the 1960's had also proved to be interesting years. What would the 1970's bring?



Figure 44: Superfledermaus Fire Control Unit (Radar) in stowed position

³³ *Commando*, August 1964, p.65.

³⁴ *Commando*, May 1969, pp. 29.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

ARMS EMBARGO

One event which profoundly affected the Anti-Aircraft gunners at Young's Field was the closure of the airfield for SA Air Force and civil aircraft. It was fifty years since it had been opened as Cape Town's first aerodrome. The two civilian flying entities – Owenair and the Cape Aero Club, were asked to move out, despite SA Air Force efforts to keep them there – Owenair serviced 7 Squadron's Dakotas. But 7 Squadron, after many years at Young's Field moved to Ysterplaat.

Farewell to the Heavies

Two more Anti-Aircraft Regiments were established in 1969. 7 and 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments were both established with effect from 1 April¹ and they were both nominated to be Afrikaans-medium units.

By this time the 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft guns were obsolescent and outdated. Not only were aircraft flying higher and faster but the guns were not able to react quickly enough. Spares had become a problem. A decision was made to withdraw them from service. They were subsequently phased out and by 1971 had been completely withdrawn from service.

The SADF faced a predicament – how to replace the 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft guns. An offer to sell sixteen 100 mm Anti-Aircraft guns to South Africa had been made by France – at a cost of R23,000,000, but this offer was not pursued. The decision to withdraw the 3.7's from service was not taken lightly. It meant there were no guns left in use effective at targets flying above 10 000 feet – the maximum effective ceiling of the lighter guns in use. It placed an inordinate amount of pressure on the SA Air Force's fighter Squadrons to counter medium/high level air threats. The withdrawal of the heavy guns was nevertheless justified by Chief of Defence Staff on the grounds that the guns were rapidly becoming unserviceable due to age and lack of spare parts. The replacement cost of a heavy gun would be prohibitive. A Regiment of heavy guns was sufficient to protect only one vulnerable point and it was unrealistic to expect one heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment to protect all the vulnerable points in the country. For the heavy guns to be effective more Regiments would have to be introduced so they could be used en masse, as had happened in Britain in World War 2. Lastly, the 3.7-inch system was not effective against aircraft flying at supersonic speed; nor effective at heights above 23 000 feet and under 2 000 feet.²

Their withdrawal saw the end of an era in the brief history of Anti-Aircraft Artillery in South Africa; but it coincided with the beginning of an entirely new chapter – that of ground to air missiles – the introduction of the first Cactus missile Batteries.

Missiles

The establishment of a mobile air defence radar defence system by the SA Air Force led to the creation of a permanent network to protect the industrial and administrative centre of the country. It began in 1962 and it was natural that once an aggressor had been detected by the radar chain, a system more sophisticated than the anti-aircraft guns of the SA Army would be needed. There were in any event, not enough guns to defend SA Air Force fighter bases - let alone anything else.

Following months of technical investigation, discussion and negotiation Bloodhound missiles were ordered, but the Labour Government of Britain placed a ban on the sale of the missiles. South Africa

¹ SADFO 53/69.

² SANDF Archives, HVS Gp, file HVS 20/2/2/2, vol. 1, enc.13.

turned to France. A development contract was signed in July 1964 for a ground-to-air missile and the first firing took place in 1967. The result was Cactus (known in France as 'Crotale'), a fully automatic all-weather low-level surface-to-air missile (SAM), one of the first of its type to enter service. It was described in a Western Province Tattoo brochure as 'the most formidable system of its kind in the world. 'Those who wished to be an operator', the brochure continued, were invited by Major P.O. du Preez to 'get in on the ground floor and join the Ack-Ack now!'³

Prior to the arrival of Cactus the Anti-Aircraft organisation was once again involved in the crucial issue of their control, either by the Army or the Air Force. It was recognised that the missile system would be best employed for the defence of static points that were vulnerable to attack – more especially airfields. With these facilities wiped out the country would be almost defenceless. Cactus would be required to operate in conjunction with the fighter interceptor system and its fixed ground radar capability, and it seemed logical that Cactus should fall under the operational control of the Air Force, even though they could be said to fulfil a traditional Anti-Aircraft role. This was discounted by the fact that the missile system had a minimum range limitation of 1.5 km before it could lock-on to a target. The missiles would therefore need the protection of normal Anti-Aircraft equipment; the only guns available were Batteries of 40 mm Bofors.

To achieve finality of argument, a commission of enquiry was appointed within the SADF in 1970. Its mandate was:

...to examine the whole question of whether the Air Defence Artillery, including Cactus, should be integrated either partly or as a whole into the organisation of the SA Army or the the SA Air Force.

The first Cactus Battery was expected in April 1971 and the commission worked with a sense of urgency; four courses of action were considered:

1. To transfer all weapons to the Air Force.
2. To divide Anti-Aircraft resources – giving all guns to the Army and missiles, including missiles acquired in the future – to the Air Force.
3. To retain all Anti-Aircraft weapons (including Cactus), personnel and units in the Army.
4. To divide Anti-Aircraft resources between the Army and the Air Force – with weapons (guns and missiles) intended for the Task Force to the Army – and guns and missiles allocated for defence of static vulnerable points, to the Air Force.

After careful consideration of these four courses of action, it was decided that the SA Air Force was to control the Cactus missile system, together with the 40 mm Batteries for their protection. The remaining Anti-Aircraft units were to stay under Army control.⁴ In 1973, however, the Bofors and equipment allocated to the Air Force reverted to Army control.

Before the delivery of Cactus, Colonel Eddie Bekker, Majors Hennie Roux and Philip du Preez and two Warrant Officers – WO1 J.H. Verburg and WO1 E.A.Baker – with Captains C.R. Labuschagne and S.F. Cloete of the SA Corps of Signals, spent about fourteen months in France during 1970/71 to become fully *au fait* with the Crotale system. It was during this period that the decision in favour of the SA Air Force was taken. As a result, on their arrival back in South Africa, the whole team was seconded to the Air Force. Attached to Maritime Command until December of that year, they were transferred to the SA Air Force Air Defence School, Pretoria, where they were responsible for placing the equipment in service, training Air Force personnel in its use, and evolving and documenting battle handling procedures.

³ Tattoo Programme in possession of author.

⁴ SANDF Archives, HVS Gp, file HVS 207/2/2/2, Vol. 1.

The Cactus system – launcher vehicles, missiles, and radar acquisition vehicles - began arriving on time and the first Cactus Battery - as well as the 35 mm Oerlikon system - were seen at the huge Republic Day 10th Anniversary military parade at Goodwood, Cape Town on 31 May 1971. Other Artillery equipment was included in the Artillery contingent, which was led by Commandant W. Bannatyne of Cape Field Artillery. A huge crowd lined the route from Wingfield, well past the Goodwood Showgrounds.



Figure 45: Cactus missile firing

From 1971 onwards a total of eight acquisition units and sixteen firing units were delivered to the SA Air Force. They were controlled by Air Defence Artillery Group (SAAF) and were operated by 250 Air Defence Unit - established on 1 June 1974,⁵ as a unit of Strike Command. It operated initially from Waterkloof and later moved to Pienaarsrivier. The White Paper on Defence and Armaments Production, 1973, laid before Parliament by the Minister of Defence, confirmed that the commissioning of the Cactus system was taking place as planned. The White Paper covered the entire state of the Defence Force in all its aspects, but no mention was made of Artillery weapons, apart from the following statement:

Where it is at all feasible to modernise and improve weapons, this is done and their early replacement is not contemplated. Certain obsolete armaments do not fall within this category and must still be replaced.⁶

In 1974 a number of the Short, Tigercat close range air defence missiles, were acquired by the SA Air Force. Named Hilda in SA Air Force service they were also operated by 250 Air Defence Artillery Unit SAAF, until withdrawn from service in 1993 when the Unit was disbanded. By this time not only Cactus and Hilda were in operation with 250 Air Defence Unit but also at different times: the Russian 23 mm ZU-23-2, Bofors 40 mm and 20 mm TCM 20 Anti-Aircraft guns and the SA-9 Gaskin surface to air missile.⁷

⁵ Paratus, March 1991, pp. 50, 51.

⁶ White Paper on Defence and Armaments Production 1973, para. 25, p. 8..

⁷ SA Air Force Museum, Waterkloof, Fax MUS/R/517/1/3 dated 21 August 2008.

The Bofors 40 mm Anti-Aircraft gun had in fact been retired from service during 1972 but it continued to be used in training until 1976. A number of these guns were sent to the Border region in the 1980's and mounted on water towers for use as 'heavy machine guns'.

Senior Citizen Force Posts

During the Parliamentary session earlier in the year the Minister of Defence, Mr. P.W. Botha announced that Citizen Force officers would in future be promoted to more senior posts. Several posts were created with effect for 27 October 1971 and it was from this date that the Anti-Aircraft organisation acquired its first Deputy Director (Anti-Aircraft). A former commanding officer of Regiment Vaal Rivier, Commandant J.L. Lubbe, JCD, was appointed to this prestigious post with the rank of Colonel. He served in this capacity until end November 1974.⁸

7 and 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments

Although 7 and 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiments were established with effect from 1 April 1969,⁹ a delay in commencement of their existence, 'on the ground' was necessary. Due to the increase in the period of national service from four to ten years and the resultant increased intake into Citizen Force units, it became possible to form the previously designated units. 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, was formed and begun operating when supernumerary personnel from Regiment Vaal Rivier - mainly from its 'P' Battery - were transferred to the new unit from 1 September 1969. 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was re-designated from 1 July 1973 to become Regiment Overvaal. The Headquarters of the Regiment was at Vereeniging Military Base, and the first commanding officer was Commandant R.D.J. Coetzee, who had in fact been appointed from 1 October 1969. His RSM was WO1 C.S. Feldtmann, MMM. Their first task was to oversee the administrative process of taking on strength all those transferred to the unit. He was followed in command by Commandant L. (Laurie) Human, JCD, who took office on 1 July 1973. By the beginning of 1975 it had been organised as three Batteries each of twelve radar-controlled 35 mm guns.

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was only formed and drew its first breath on 1 August 1971, when excess personnel of the University of Cape Town Regiment (a heavy Anti-Aircraft unit) were transferred to the new unit and taken on strength. It soon shed its Afrikaans identity and became generally known as 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. It was placed under command of Major A.H. Morris - (previously adjutant and later second-in-command of University of Cape Town Regiment) - and his headquarters was initially in the same building as theirs. It later moved to Wingfield, Cape Town, where it occupied the upper portion of the the old Cape Town Airport Control Tower.¹⁰

The Major's first priority was to arrange for retraining of personnel on light Anti-Aircraft guns and equipment. By the beginning of 1975 the unit was organised as a three Battery Regiment 40 mm 18-gun unit. This young unit quickly became a very efficient Regiment. Phasing out of the Bofors guns had by this time, however, become a priority and the unit was soon to be equipped with 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns.

The new Light Anti-Aircraft Gun

At Young's Field in 1970, crates marked 'Engine Parts' had arrived from Switzerland and occupied part of the floor in the hangar allotted to 101 Battery. The 'engine parts' - a new gun for air defence - were assembled in great secrecy behind locked doors by the RSM, WO1 Pretorius, assisted by Gunner Ray Theron. Originally manufactured in Italy as the 20 mm Hispano Suiza HS820, Oerlikon had purchased the company in the late 1960's and a total of 150 guns were delivered in batches between 1970 and 1972. Project leader for the purchase of the guns was Colonel Jan Pretorius who was already familiar with Intertechnic which had supplied the 35 mm Oelikon then in service. The company trained the first instructors - WO1 Pretorius and WO Tinie Schickerling - on the new guns.

⁸ *Young's Field*, p.32.

⁹ SADFO 53.69.

¹⁰ SANDF Archives, History file, 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and as known to author.

Without a nominated towing vehicle the new light guns were originally towed by V6 Land Rovers and later by larger Bedfords. In July 1978 the gun tractors used by Cape Field Artillery – 911 Mercedes Benz vehicles - were withdrawn from that unit and transferred to 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment for use with the 20mm Oerlikon's.

Withdrawal from Service

During continuous training from 20 November to 12 December 1971 the Citizen Force 'heavy' Regiment underwent conversion to light Anti-Aircraft guns. By that time *all* 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft guns had been withdrawn from service and the university Regiment trained instead on 35 mm GDF-002 Oerlikons. By this time, however, the 'heavy' Anti-Aircraft Regiment had undergone another change of title; previously University of Cape Town Regiment, it chose to be renamed Cape Garrison Artillery in 1974, the new title becoming effective from 1 February 1974.¹¹

Cape Garrison Artillery had originally been listed as a unit of the SA Air Force, thence from 1949 as South African Artillery followed in 1951 as a unit of the South African Corps of Marines, before returning in 1955 to the South African Artillery. It had begun life as an Anti-Aircraft Troop of the SA Air Force (which had assumed command of all air defence units from 1 January 1944 and continued in command after the war). The Troop became an independent Battery which, for training purposes, fell under command of Headquarters, 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment – a headquarters formed specifically for this purpose. In 1960 the Headquarters and four independent Batteries were disestablished and replaced by the University of Cape Town Regiment.¹²

Two other important Anti-Aircraft units were also established. Although 1 Control and Reporting Unit (CF) had existed much earlier (it had been disestablished with effect from 1 January 1963¹³ the two new but similar units appeared on the ORBAT in 1969. The new units - 1 Anti-Aircraft Control and Report Troop and 2 Anti-Aircraft Control and Report Troop were both established as bilingual units of the Citizen Force¹⁴ on 1 April 1969. They were only formed in April 1970 when their first intake was taken on strength. Their task was to provide Anti-Aircraft controllers and staff for the Anti-Aircraft Control Centre, which in turn supplied Anti-Aircraft Regiments with 'filtered information', early warning and fire control orders. South African Defence Force Order 29/74 included one Permanent Force and six Citizen Force Anti-Aircraft Regiments and two Control and Report Troops as units of the SA Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) organisation.

1 Anti-Aircraft Control and Report Troop was, however, effectively disestablished when it amalgamated with 2 Anti-Aircraft Control and Report Troop from 1 August 1975, to form 2 Anti-Aircraft Control and Report Unit. The unit, which was headquartered at Vereeniging, continued to be commanded by Commandant G.C. Ternent of 2 Anti-Aircraft Control and Report Troop. On his retirement he was followed in command by Major M.H. Human, who was appointed from 16 August 1977. The unit was disbanded on 1 January 1979.

Training Period

Until 1972 a three-year cycle of continuous training had been in existence – with one 26-day period of continuous training followed by two periods of twelve days each. But to increase the preparedness of the Citizen Force the three-year cycle (which only lasted three years) was changed to a two-year cycle from 1972. At the same time the continuous training period of 26 days was altered to 21 days every third year, with twelve days in the intervening years, mainly to allow officers and NCO's to qualify themselves for their appointments and next higher rank. The twelve-day training period in July 1968 took the form of an All Arms radio exercise – Exercise Jukskei II. It was held at the SA Army College. Officers from Company/Battery Commanders upward attended.

¹¹ Wonderboom Part One Order No. 3/74, 11.4.

¹² SADFO 100/60

¹³ SADFO 74/63)

¹⁴ SADFO 53/69

1973 was an interesting year. It began on 15 January with the first coloured youths reporting for voluntary military service. In July 1973 the title of the Commandant General in the person of Admiral H.H. Bierman, SSA, OBE, became instead – Chief of the SA Defence Force. There were a series of retirements of Anti-Aircraft Gunners in the first half of the 1970's, one from his Staff.

Retirements

Major General G. Dunbar Moodie, SM, Chief of Army Staff, retired early in 1972 after a long career which began on 1 March 1934 when he attested as a Permanent Force cadet. Originally posted to Technical Services in Pretoria in charge of motor transport, he was soon transferred to Cape Town where, in the course of his technical duties, he discovered an interest in the coast guns of the fixed defences. He had unfortunately not done too well in the air section of his cadet course and could not be given a transfer to the general duties branch; but after harassing the authorities he was allowed to return to Pretoria to again attempt to obtain his wings. This time he passed, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 1 January 1937 and transferred at his request to the Coast Artillery Brigade. The rest, as he said, is history; but he later transferred to the General Duties Branch, SA Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) as an instructor. Among the many appointments he held was that of Officer Commanding Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery Training Centre in June 1956 and Officer Commanding Anti-Aircraft Training Centre in 1961.

A farewell function was hosted by 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment on 21 January 1972. The day began with a luncheon at the Wynberg Officers' Club – attended by the Commandant General (soon to be titled Chief of the SADF), Admiral H.H. Biermann' SSA, OBE; Brig M.A. de M. Malan, SM, Officer Commanding Western Province Command; and Brigadier C.J. Louw, SM. In the afternoon guests attended an impeccably performed Retreat Ceremony at Young's Field. It was followed by a sundowner party, attended by about 400 guests and members of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The commanding officer of the Regiment, Colonel J.M. Slabber, formally bid farewell to the General.¹⁵ Major General Moodie celebrated his 102nd birthday on 3 January 2014. He was one of those who had attended the first ever Anti-Aircraft course held in South Africa, although he was afterwards heavily involved in Coast Artillery – and only later with Anti-Aircraft training. Major General Graham Dunbar Moodie died at his home in Swellendam in January 2014. He had often joked that he had spent more years on pension than he had done in service.

Jack Slabber himself said good-bye to the Anti-Aircraft gunners when he retired in mid-year. He returned from leave to attend a farewell party given in his honour, before his actual retirement from service on 30 September 1972. In December the previous year a new petrol filling point, for which pumps and other equipment had been donated by an oil company, was competed under the supervision of WO2 C.J. Bond. It enabled several vehicles to be filled at the same time and had been officially opened by Colonel Slabber.

He was followed as acting commanding officer by Commandant N.H. (Norman) Trott who was transferred from Western Province Command. It was an uneasy settling-in period for Norman Trott; the next senior officer in his new unit was Commandant 'Blackie' Swart who held the same rank and who had been a Gunner for a very long time. 'Blackie' Swart was then serving – officially – as AQ SO1 – but unofficially as GSO1, supervising the training of the national service intake, until he went on leave prior to retirement after 38 years in the SADF. He had joined the SSB in 1935 and during his long career had served as a field gunner, in medium, Anti-Aircraft and as a gunner in a Coast Artillery Regiment. He had attended the first ever Anti-Aircraft course in 1939 and had ended the war as a Warrant Officer. Commissioning as an officer followed a Long Gunnery course in England in 1948-49, after which he served at Natal and Western Province Commands, before returning to Young's Field as Quartermaster and later, as Battery Commander, 10 Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Commandant Swart had seen Young's Field develop from a stretch of ground overgrown with trees and bush to become the modern, clean and tidy military base that it was – and he had sweated blood

¹⁵ *Paratus*, Vol 23, No. 8, August 1972, pp. 39, 60.

to help in this process. When the Air Force had taken over what was little more than a landing strip in 1937 – the grass over a large part of the area was, in his own words – ‘chest high’. He and others were detailed by the Air Force Station Commander to cut the grass. Seemingly this was his worst nightmare. He remembered not only the grass, but the snakes. There were snakes everywhere. Snakes in the cutters of the mower drawn behind the tractor; a mess of grass and chopped up snake that had had to be cleaned out now and again so the cutters could work properly. When recalling this time of his service he told the author many years previously that he dreamed of snakes each night.¹⁶

The situation apropos the two Commandants was resolved when Norman Trott was given temporary promotion to Colonel from 1 October 1972, the day following Colonel Jack Slabber’s formal retirement. There were other promotions and senior appointments at this time: Colonel Eddie Bekker, who held the rank of temporary Brigadier and had earlier been appointed Director Artillery (Anti-Aircraft), was promoted to substantive rank. Other former commanding officers who were promoted from the same date were Major General I.S. Guilford, SM, who became Deputy Chief of Defence Staff, and Brigadier L.G.F. Wolf, MC, who became Director Operations to the Chief of Staff (Operations) at Army Headquarters.

In the following year Major H. Roux, then Battery Commander at 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, was transferred in January 1973 to Southern Cape Command as GSO 1 (Planning and Operations) with the rank of Commandant. He was to return to Cape Town in 1975 as Officer Commanding Anti-Aircraft Defence School.

Western Province Command’s Army Day was held at Young’s Field on 6 October and the Anti-Aircraft gunners gave a demonstration of their weapons systems in a mock attack on the Base during the afternoon. In the evening the Gunners once again demonstrated their versatility, with an impeccably performed Retreat Ceremony. There was a festive air about the day’s events and a pancake-making record was claimed by Sergeant Major ‘Tienie’ Schickerling. Using a battery of nineteen double-plate gas stoves he made – from 8:00 to 19:46 - a total of 2 260 pancakes, representing eighteen pancakes every four minutes and forty-eight seconds. It was, altogether, a good day.

And Another Retirement

Another Anti-Aircraft Gunner to retire in the first half of the 1970’s was Major General I.S. (Bruce) Guilford. Schooled at Bishops, Cape Town, he began his military career in the Coast Artillery after completing a two-year Cadet Course, before being commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1939. Shortly after arrival in Cape Town he found himself on the very first and only Anti-Aircraft course held at Brooklyn aerodrome. First on the course, it was not long before he was transferred to 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade. He served with the Brigade in East Africa and in Egypt where it was converted to become 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Lieutenant Guilford contrived to extricate himself and fifty men of his Troop from the disaster at Sidi Rezeg in November 1941, to help reform the Troop and take it back to fight another day.

When the war ended Bruce, at the age of 26, was a Lieutenant Colonel and he became Director Anti-Aircraft. Subsequent post-war appointments included those of GSO2 Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery; as an Officer Commanding in the SA Corps of Marines; SA Military attaché in Canada and Officer Commanding, Natal Command. Bruce Guilford retired in 1974 while serving as Deputy Chief of Defence Staff. He was a member of The Gunners’ Association, of which he became the Western Province Branch Chairman. Because of his profound interest in the plight of military veterans he also joined the SA Legion in 1976, and was elected Chairman of the Cape Town Branch in 1980. He remained in that office until 1985 before becoming National President in 1986, serving as such until his untimely death in 1988. He was a true gentleman. It was said of him that:

*He lived for his fellow-man and cared for his fellow-man right to the end – and that, I believe, is how we will remember him.*¹⁷

¹⁶ Blackie Swart told this story to the author many years ago.

¹⁷ Written by ‘Scribe’ in *Sitrep*, Journal of the SA Legion, Cape Town.

The General had been the Honorary Colonel of 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment from 3 April 1982 until 30 June 1986. Six senior Warrant Officers of the Regiment were pall bearers at his semi-military funeral. The coffin bearing his remains was carried to Maitland crematorium on a 25-pounder gun towed by a Bedford gun tractor provided by Cape Field Artillery, where the Warrant Officers slow-marched the coffin draped with the South African flag to the crematorium chapel. The late Major General had requested as a last wish that members of 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment drink a toast of Port to him. This ceremony took place at the unit headquarters at Wingfield.

With his death the Corps lost an enthusiastic Anti-Aircraft gunner. Many had regarded him as 'the Grand Old Man of South African Anti-Aircraft Gunners.

1973 was an interesting year. It began with the first coloured men enrolling for voluntary national military service on 15 January; the title of the Commandant General - Admiral H.H. Bierman, SSA, SD, OBE, - was changed to Chief of the SADF in July and Lieutenant General M.A.de M. Malan, SSA, SM, was appointed Chief of the Army from 1 July. In October war broke out in the Middle East when Egypt and Syria attacked Israel; and the SADF was soon put to the test over the fight against SWAPO. Gunners in South Africa had their own problems, far removed from these events.

Artillery Directorate

Similar to the field gunners, the Officer Commanding the School of Anti-Aircraft acted as a Director, Anti-Aircraft. Corps Directors were officially created in 1972 and included on Chief of the Army's Staff. Brigadier C.L. Viljoen was appointed Director Artillery but the Directorate was never established as such. During July and the first two weeks of August Colonel F.E.C. van den Berg acted in his stead. He discussed with Brigadier Viljoen the question of a properly managed directorate and later provided motivation for the posts of SO1 (Training), SO2 (Personnel), SO2 (Equipment) and SO2 (Research) for both Field Branch and Anti-Aircraft Branch. The posts were eventually approved and accommodation was secured in the Lower East Wing of the addition to Army Headquarters, the Staff of each branch of the directorate sharing one floor. The SO2 (Research) in each case was accommodated elsewhere. SO2 (Research) - known to field gunners as TIGAR - Technical Instructor Gunnery and Research, was known to Anti-Aircraft gunners as CIGAR – Chief Instructor Gunnery and Research. The latter was based at Young's Field and TIGAR at Potchefstroom.

Colonel Frans van den Berg was promoted Brigadier from 14 August 1973 as Director Artillery (Field) with Brigadier E.L. Bekker as Director Artillery (Anti-Aircraft). They were the first and last two officially-appointed Directors to hold the rank of Brigadier.

Directors Artillery Anti-Aircraft were charged with managing Corps policy, philosophy and strategy – including Corps doctrine. They were responsible for career management of Anti-Aircraft personnel and served to advise Chief of the Army on matters concerning Anti-Aircraft. The Director had no command function over Anti-Aircraft units but managed the establishment of units and their disestablishment. These functions were later passed to SA Army Air Defence Artillery Formation.

To stimulate interest in the activities of the Citizen Force and to assist units in their expansion and with force preparation, Assistant Directors were approved for each Corps. The assistant directors were officers of the Citizen Force and were given the rank of Colonel. A former Commander of Regiment Vaal Rivier, Commandant J.L. Lubbe, JCD, was appointed Assistant Director Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) and promoted Colonel from 27 October 1971. He was followed from 1 January 1994 by the newly appointed Colonel L. Human, JCD, former Commander of Regiment Overvaal.

Dazzle Dak

Described as the 'world's gaudiest aircraft – a dazzling confection of black and yellow stripes...' Dazzle Dak had been towing targets for the Anti-Aircraft gunners for more than twenty years. Lieutenants Gavin Whitfield and Nick Duff brought Dazzle Dak - Dakota No.6877 - down to earth early in 1974 from

its last target towing task.¹⁸ At Ysterplaat it shed its coat of eye-catching colours and underwent a change and a major refit, emerging as a sober, camouflaged aircraft of 25 Squadron based at Ysterplaat. Dazzle Dak entered service in 1960 as a target-towing aircraft with the striking new look to make her easily seen and avoid unfortunate hits by the Anti-Aircraft during their live firing practices at Strandfontein. After nearly a quarter of a century on the job, with characteristic Dakota reliability, a new generation of Anti-Aircraft weapons guided by radar, made her bright colours obsolete.

Air Defence: The SAAF View

An interesting Defence Force Order was issued by Chief of the SADF in 1974.¹⁹ It stated:

This Order is promulgated as the Code for Air Defence Artillery and with effect from 1 January 1975 it replaces all previous orders and instructions which are applicable to the administration of Air Defence Artillery in the SA Air Force.

Air Defence Artillery forms the collective name for all Air Defence Ground-to-Air weapons, whether it be guns or missiles. To prevent confusion the words Anti-Aircraft will no longer be used.

The Order spelt out the role of Air Defence Artillery personnel for the SA Air Force; the control of the Air Defence Artillery structure in terms of policy and procedures, and administration of Air Defence Artillery personnel as individuals; recruiting and training; promotion, classification of individuals from Air Defence Artillery operators to Master Operators and Instructors. An appendix to the Order gave much more detail and information on requirements to be noted in recruits (*an alert, efficient person with a well-developed sense of responsibility and the ability to remain calm under severe emergency conditions*). It was very much the same as required of gunners in the Anti-Aircraft units, but which had never been spelt out.

Regimental Band

Many years before – in 1922 - a band was formed by the South African Railways and Harbour Brigade. When the Brigade was disestablished on 31 December 1928 the band continued as a civilian band, subsidised by the Railway administration for which it performed a few times each year. After lengthy negotiations with Defence Headquarters (each approach by letter took about three months for reply) the band was finally accepted as an Active Citizen Force unit from 1 April 1939. The Defence Force paid the Railways £150 for the band instruments. The Railways and Harbours Brigade was reformed in early 1940 and wanted their band to be returned to them; but it was refused. It remained a unit of the Coast Artillery Brigade throughout the war and in 1946 fell under command of 1/5 Heavy Battery, thence 1 Heavy Coast Regiment, and finally under the Coast and Anti-Aircraft School. It was seen by the coastal gunners as an Anti-Aircraft band. Its final resting place, before disestablishment on 1 January 1960,²⁰ was Headquarters, 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment. It had been in a state of decline between 1955 and 1959.

But another Anti-Aircraft band made an appearance fourteen years later when, with official approval, a Regimental band was established at Young's Field by 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment on 8 May 1974. It consisted of approximately 25 National Service bandsmen led by bandmaster Staff Sergeant Buys. He had been transferred to 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment from the SA Navy band in which he had held the rank of Petty Officer.

The band was in existence until the late 1980s but little is known about it, other than the fact that the Quartermaster, Major Sydney Burger, who had been responsible for starting the band, appears to have been appointed Director of Music. The troops – those not bandsmen - called it 'Trot's Trot' after the Officer Commanding Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Colonel Norman Trott. How the unofficial name originated is anyone's guess. Even officers serving at the time do not remember

¹⁸ SA Digest, Week Ended 22 June 1994.

¹⁹ SADFO 68/74

²⁰ SADFO 100/60.

much about the band. The band was used at many of Western Province Command functions as well as the ceremonial parades for which Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment were responsible. It took part in the ceremony associated with the inauguration of the third State President on 19 April 1975. It was at about this time that *Alta Pete* was adopted as the official march of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The band was disbanded in the late 1980s.

Organisation

The Anti-Aircraft organisation had stabilised in the first years of the 1970's and had achieved a degree of independence within the Army, similar to that enjoyed by the Field Artillery. As early as September 1970 Colonel J.N. Slabber was appointed Director Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) directly responsible to Chief of the Army.²¹ The organisation of the Anti-Aircraft Branch had begun to look more effective. The units in existence at the beginning of 1975 were:

Cape Garrison Artillery -with headquarters at:	Cape Town
Regiment Overvaal	Vereeniging
Regiment Vaal Rivier	Vereeniging
6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment	Springs
Regiment Oos-Transvaal	Brakpan
7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment	Cape Town

The first four each had three 12-gun Batteries of 35 mm guns; Regiment Oos-Transvaal was a six-Battery unit with eighteen 20 mm Hispano Suiza guns per Battery and 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was still nominated to have three eighteen gun Batteries of 40 mm Bofors, although the Bofors were declared obsolescent. Their replacement was seen as a priority for the second half of the decade.

By 1974 many units boasted a representative shoulder badge. In mid-year a drawing of the proposed shoulder badge of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was received by the unit for final approval. The design was that of a stylised silver leaf on a red (upper half) and light blue (lower half) background, described in heraldic terms:

Per fess, Gules and Azure, a leaf of a silver tree erect, Argent

The silver tree, one of Cape Town's most loved and beautiful trees grows only on the eastern slopes of Table Mountain and the Vlakkenberg towards which the Young's Field camp faced, and was specially chosen for the shoulder badge for this unique reason.

October 1974 saw WO1 W.J. (Bill) Nel being transferred to the Castle as Command Sergeant Major. He had served as RSM only since January after taking over from WO1 Spangenberg. Bill Nel was succeeded by WO1 E.A. Baker, a long-time resident of Young's Field whose experience extended back to the early nineteen fifties when Anti-Aircraft gunners were Marines. A change was also made in the Directorate with Brigadier Bekker moving to a post in the SA Embassy in France. He terminated his appointment as Director Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) on 11 November 1974. Major J.C. Pieterse, who had earlier resigned from the SA Army in 1969 had returned and was appointed acting Corps Director on 12 November, serving in this capacity until January 1976.

Anti-Aircraft School/10 AA Regiment was called upon to supply troops for the ceremonial inauguration of the third State President, Mr. Nicolaas Diederichs, which took place in Cape Town on 19 April 1975. It was Colonel Norman Trott's last ceremonial parade; he was transferred to the Army Directing Staff at the SA Defence College in May 1975. Commandant A. Moelich was appointed acting Officer Commanding in his place. The unit was awarded the Freedom of Wolseley in May in recognition of the assistance it had provided during the disastrous earthquake some years before. In October, Anti-Aircraft School/10 AA Regiment visited the town to exercise their right to march through its streets 'with drums beating, Colours uncased and bayonets fixed.' No doubt some of the gunners on that

²¹ *Ultima Ratio Regum*, p. 262.

parade were among those whose tents were torn down in the strong north-westerly wind that tore through the camp at Young's Field during the night of 7 July 1975. Eight tents of the forty-one housing the new intake of two hundred fresh young gunners suffered damage. The men involved battled to repitch their tents but eventually gave up and crawled into whatever dry place they could find.²²

²² *The Argus*, 7.7.1975.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE ANGOLAN EPISODE

The first television broadcast was made in South Africa on 5 January 1975, but on the other side of the world - the Vietnam War which began in 1954 ended in 1976 - had been part of the daily show on television. This war had cost the United States more than 58 000 dead. Back in Africa, in 1975, another was about to begin. It would not be on the same scale but the high cost of the Vietnam War would nevertheless be in the minds of senior officers at Defence Headquarters in the years to come.

Winds of Change

The South West Africa People's Organisation launched a bush war in 1966 from bases in Angola and later, Zambia. For the first two years the South African Police were responsible for countering the threat; but in 1968 the SA Army became involved. From 1 April 1973 - in the face of growing insurgency, the SADF took over the complete task of countering SWAPO. In a surprise *coup d'état* in Lisbon on 25 April 1974 Portugal decreed independence for Angola, and the three Angolan movements agreed to arrange elections by October. Russia knew that the Marxist-orientated MPLA would be decisively beaten and they had no intention of allowing this to happen, nor would South Africa allow the Calueque water scheme to be harmed.

On 3 February 1976 the shrewd and far-seeing Sir Harold MacMillan made his famous 'Winds of Change' speech to members of the South African Parliament, angering the South African Prime Minister.¹ Not even MacMillan could have foreseen that in March 1977 the President of the USSR would stand on the Zambesi River Bridge at the Victoria Falls and there promise to overthrow the governments of Rhodesia and South Africa.

The Winds of Change grew into a hurricane. Angola was the turning point and South Africa's military involvement began during the chaos of the hurried withdrawal of the Portuguese. SWAPO took advantage of the resulting confusion.

Preparatory Moves

Water was a scarce commodity in the northern region of South West Africa and the motive for the first incursion into Angola in August 1975 was to safeguard the now threatened Ruacana-Calueque scheme that supplied water to the inhabitants of Ovamboland on the southern side of the border. South African military intervention in Angola resulted from the hasty Portuguese withdrawal. It left a vacuum and allowed direct Soviet support for the Marxist MPLA which gained power. In an attempt to avoid a Marxist take-over and a possible direct Soviet threat to South West Africa, South Africa supported UNITA, operating in Southern Angola and the FNLA based in the north. Neither of these organisations was capable of any successful military action and UNITA had neither trained leaders nor specialists. In September 1975, nineteen SADF officers and men volunteered to act as mercenaries and assist in training the poorly trained and equipped UNITA troops, who were led by Dr. Jonas Savimbi. They were provided with green uniforms. Later in September it became necessary to begin providing logistic support to enable UNITA to launch operations against the MPLA, now being supported by Cuban forces. The first action against a well prepared and heavily defended Norton de Matos did not succeed. The enemy was aware of the planned attack well before it took place.

By this time it became apparent that Russia was pouring equipment into Angola worth millions of Rands, including MiG fighters, to establish a client state in Africa. The first of thousands of Cuban

¹ *The Army Quarterly and Defence Journal*, July 1977, p. 355.

troops had arrived. It was now clear that an escalation of South Africa's military involvement in support of UNITA was necessary in order to avoid a Marxist take-over of the country and possible guerrilla warfare on its borders. To spearhead this intervention two columns, code-named Task Force Zulu and Battle Group Alpha were formed; Zulu to attack on a South Eastern Front and Foxbat in the central area. Zulu was placed under command of Colonel J.S. van Heerden while Commandant D. (Delville) Linford commanded Alpha. Its personnel consisted of Angolan Bushmen (*fletchas*). Another Battle Group, named Bravo and consisting of FNLA personnel – was commanded by Commandant J. (Jan) Breytenbach while Battle Group Foxbat under Commandant Eddie Webb with the Unita personnel trained by the initial group of nineteen 'mercenaries', and SADF support elements.

Operation Savannah

Unknown to South Africans, two fast-moving SA Army columns entered Angola on 14 October 1975 and pushed into the country. Several skirmishes took place, but Sa da Bandeira was captured within ten days. From there they moved to the strategic city of Mocamedes with its harbour – the most important in Southern Angola – and captured it by 28 October. Resistance was limited. On 25 October Foxbat moved to an assembly area near Silvo Porto. There was much stiffer enemy activity and apart from some success the advance in a westerly direction was slow. It was soon evident that the fast moving Task Force Zulu moving north and Battle Group Foxbat moving west could meet in the vicinity of Benguela/Lobito. It was decided that Zulu would fight through to Lobito and Foxbat would serve as a cut-off force for enemy forces that might flee ahead of the advancing Zulu. Skirmishes took place on a wide front. Battle Group Alpha moved to Nova Redondo to protect the left flank of Foxbat.

At this stage the newly established 101 Task Force Headquarters based at Rundu (it later moved to Grootfontein), took over command of Operation Savannah. It ordered Zulu to move to Cela, where the equally newly established 2 Military Area was situated. Zulu arrived on 22 November.

The war had escalated and additional battle group became necessary. The forces involved were spread over the vast area of 2 Military Area as shown hereunder:

- Battle Group Alpha at Nova Redondo.
- Battle Group Beaver at Lobito to cover Alpha's rear.
- Task Force Zulu –consisting of Battle Groups Bravo and Foxbat -on the central front north of Cela.
- Battle Group X-Ray mobile in the direction of Luso and Texeira de Sousa.
- Battle Group Orange mobile in the direction of Mussende and Malanje.

It was decided that Zulu would fight through to Lobito and elements of the Task Force were soon overlooking Luanda the capital of Angola when - sponsored by America's Central Intelligence Agency - South Africa's incursion became a major political issue

By his time intelligence revealed the build-up of an enemy air capability, with reports from various quarters, including America, of Russian MiG's undergoing test flights.² Neither side had used aircraft. But the SADF had made preparations to do so. It would be the first time in many years that South African aircraft might experience aerial combat. Protection on the ground was, however, necessary. It was time to bring in the Anti-Aircraft gunners to join the new combat groups then being formed.

Anti-Aircraft defence

It was necessary to ensure the main base at Grootfontein and combat group administrative bases were protected from air attack. 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was quietly mobilised in late October 1975 practically stripped of equipment and amid frantic activity, with only sketchy intelligence and no idea what their task would be, the only Battery of 35 mm Oerlikons then available, and a Battery of 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns, together with two spares, was secretly loaded onto railway trucks at Wetton station in the dark of night of 4/5 November 1975 and well-covered with tarpaulins. It was a very 'hush-hush' operation and not even the Battery Commander of the Battery nominated to operate the

² Ibid.

equipment knew the reason for the urgency. Despite the secrecy the authorities had not reckoned with the curiosity of a Citizen Force Warrant Officer.

The RSM of Cape Field Artillery, Gavin Cowan, was a Railways Water Inspector. He had completed an inspection of the facilities at Wetton and, when returning to his transport, was walking down the line of rail where a number of loaded goods trucks were standing. There were not usually so many goods wagons at Wetton and certainly not with such strangely shaped covers. He wondered why, and out of curiosity stopped to check the waybill attached in its appropriate place on one wagon. To his surprise it was labelled: loaded Youngsfield – destination Grootfontein. The next few wagons carried similar waybills. After a good look at the tarpaulins he realised from the shape and the way the cover was arranged, they could only conceal guns.

It was thought the Anti-Aircraft guns were to be deployed at Grootfontein in defence of the base then under construction as well as the all important airfields.

On the next Monday at his Regimental headquarters he reported to his commanding officer. The latter had been unable for some time to speak to any of his well-known colleagues at the School of Artillery or at the two training Regiments; the RSM's information clicked. An exercise to repeat a previously drawn-up and practised mobilisation exercise was put in place immediately; without anyone knowing the real reason why. The SA Police were extremely helpful; the quartermaster could only wonder what had happened when a patrol van screeched to a halt in front of his house and it was demanded of him to get to his headquarters immediately.

The train carrying the guns departed from Wetton station in the very early hours of 5 November 1975. It was given priority and it sped down the suburban line to Salt River junction where it waited for the rest of the night before pulling out of the station yards for the next stage of the five-day journey. Personnel of 102 Battery travelled with the equipment. With the Battery Commander, Major L.P. Coetzee, were his Battery Captain and second-in-command - Captain J.J. (Jackie) Snyman - and Lieutenants P.J. (Piet) van Zyl, P.H. (Herman) du Plessis and J.A. (Jeff) Ormond commanding 'A', 'B' and 'C' Troops respectively, and his Battery Sergeant Major, WO2 L.C. (Wally) Venter. Despite the rush to get organised the train arrived at de Aar (a major rail junction) where, it seemed, it again waited for hours before moving on. Out of pure boredom in the intervening period, personnel occupied themselves by throwing stones at the railway lines.

The Battery eventually arrived at Grootfontein to discover they would be called upon to deploy in the operational area, more specially to guard the airfields and airstrips that were available for South African use. Orders were given, green uniforms were issued, and the towing vehicles brought from Young's Field exchanged for Unimogs. The Battery Commander was instructed to depart from Grootfontein when ordered and to cross the border with each 20 mm gun loaded onto a Unimog and hidden under the vehicle's tarpaulin to maintain movement of the guns a secret.

The 35 mm Battery

The 35 mm Battery was left at Grootfontein to be available for any eventuality. In the meanwhile WO2 Hoffman and a few gunners were to remain behind to protect and maintain the equipment. The Battery Commander decided to ask for volunteers for this task, feeling that many would use every possible excuse to remain behind. The opposite was true. He had a problem in getting enough to agree to this – the call of adventure lying ahead was far too strong! With those remaining at the base was a small group from 4 Electronic Workshop under WO2 T.F. Steyn. One member – Sergeant J.M. Squire – a Radar qualified technician, refused to remain there and used every trick in the book to join the 20 mm Battery. As the conflict developed the 35 mm guns were deployed at Rundu to defend the airfield. They were manned by 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment's 101 Battery.

Although each side in the conflict had an air capability neither had been used, but the SADF had made preparations for such eventuality. It would be the first time in more than thirty years that South African Anti-Aircraft guns would be deployed in war-like operations. By this time intelligence revealed

the build-up of an enemy air capability, with reports from various quarters, including America, of Russian MiG's undergoing test flights.³

Missile Deployment

On 4 December the Minister of Defence decided that Grootfontein should become a safely guarded base. Orders were given for the deployment of air defence radar and missiles at the base; and four days later equipment was en route to 'Grooties', as it was later more popularly known, with some fire units being flown in. Earthworks were ready by 16 December, and Commandant G.H.J.S. van Rooyen was able to deploy Cactus fire units and test his missiles. A mobile radar section was deployed near Gaikos, 35 km north-east of Grootfontein. It was ready and working by 19 December. Seventy-six all ranks manned this station.⁴ At Grootfontein ninety-one all ranks manned radar, locating sections and missile launchers.

Battle Group Orange

Elements to form Battle Group X-Ray II arrived at Grootfontein on 21 November 1975; and with other elements, including Captain P.R.B. du Plessis of 14 Field Regiment with his Troop of 140 mm guns, joined the Group that day. While 102 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was still at Grootfontein orders were given to the Battery Commander to detach only four 20 mm guns to Battle Group X-Ray II as six guns were considered excessive. Four guns under command of Lieutenant J. 'Dillie' Malherbe – a national service officer, accompanied by the experienced WO2 C.J.H. Basson, therefore left the Battery and joined the battle group. The command element came from the Orange Free State and on 29 November Major General A. van Deventer at Rundu changed the name from X-Ray II to Battle Group Orange. The Group was initially formed to serve as a reserve force.

Major Coetzee's 102 Battery with its 20 mm guns was destined to be attached to Task Force Zulu to protect 2 Military Headquarters and the main airfield at Cela. The group left Grootfontein by road, departing at 8.00 pm on Sunday, 1 December. A second convoy of 178 vehicles, including three Anti-Aircraft Troops (less four guns detached to Battle Group Orange) left Grootfontein at 10.00 pm that Sunday, arriving at Pereira da Eça (now Ongiva) as the sun rose.

The next stop was Silva Porto (Bie) where the four guns commanded by Lieutenant Dillie Malherbe were left behind.

Move to Cela (code named Texas)

The convoy moved on and reached Sà da Bandeira (Lubango) after nightfall on 4 December, continuing to Nova Lisboa (Huambo) on 4 December; here the Battery was again denuded of guns. It had meanwhile been decided to strengthen Battle Group Alpha on the Novo Redondo front where Commandant Linford was in command. Battle Group Alpha blocked the southbound route to Lobito and to put a stop to enemy reconnaissance flights over the area occupied by the Task Force - and to avoid a future air strike on their positions – Anti-Aircraft guns were required. The Battery Commander was instructed to detach four guns to join Battle Group Alpha at Nova Redondo. Major Coetzee asked for a volunteer for this task and Lieutenant P.H. du Plessis answered the call. He and members of the leader group who were under training at the School were seconded by the Anti-Aircraft School to 102 Battery for Operation Savannah. He decided his decision would keep the rest of the Battery more intact. On 6 December 'B' Troop began its journey to Novo Redondo.⁵

Major Coetzee and the rest of the personnel and guns moved to Cela where they were now to be deployed. On arrival at Cela where the headquarters of 2 Military Area was situated the guns were quickly deployed - a Troop of six 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns at the Cela landing strip and another Troop to provide protection for the headquarters. Contrary to doctrine the 20 mm Battery was sub-divided (referred to as 'penny packets') and this made the effective deployment of the Battery fire control

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Angola, Operasie Savannah 1975-1976*, p.173.

⁵ Ibid., p. 248.

post functionally impossible. This absence of gun control was detrimental to the safety of own aircraft.

Despite direct communication between the headquarters of 2 Military Area and the Anti-Aircraft component in order to report the movement of aircraft, there were several cases where warning was not given. 'Hold Fire' was generally in force - a state when guns were only permitted to engage an aerial target in self-defence - but in practise there was *no* effective air defence control. It resulted in the tragic shooting down on 4 January 1976 of a SA Air Force Puma helicopter. This incident, it was later said, had a profound effect on the future Anti-Aircraft policy. Details of this incident are included in a later page.

The gunners were used to deploying their 20 mm guns on the ground during exercises in the Western Cape, but operations in Angola were more fluid. Not only fluidity, but the load bed of their Unimogs was higher off the ground because of the vehicle's high ground clearance and therefore gave better visual possibilities. There was often more movement, so once the guns were on the Unimogs they generally remained there.

Christmas 1975 gave an opportunity to visit the Anti-Aircraft personnel at Novo Redondo and Captain Snyman hopped on a SAAF DC3 flight to the town. Arriving there he was amazed to find – despite the war – that there was still a resident operating a rather large warehouse with stocks of frozen fish. He and others had a thoroughly good Christmas lunch. He left for return to Cela with 85 kg of sole and some seven bags of prawns – bought for the equivalent of R25.00!

During their time at Cela continuous dry rations caused a strong desire by the young, healthy South Africans for a change in diet; it was decided at one stage to send out a party to look for meat in the form of a sheep. The livestock in the area was abandoned by the farmers that fled the war. The war, however, made them so wild that they fled into the mountainous areas and even setting up a hunting party could not ensure any fresh meat! At one stage a captured Russian rocket launcher was inspected and when a young gentleman, less known for his intellect, was asked if he knew what USSR was that was printed on the launcher, he responded angrily after a brief pause – of course United States of America!

To Novo Redondo

Lieutenant Herman Du Plessis and his 'B' Troop had a Total Oil Company road map to guide them in finding the way there. The route was not a problem; but his small convoy was without any protection whatsoever. The problem was the unknown, and the fact of being alone in this strange, silent land. Just before reaching Nova Redondo on 10 December he wisely stopped the convoy at a bridge and deployed the guns in a ground defence role and went alone into the town to look for the headquarters of the Task Force.

After many questions, and communication in sign language, he found himself before a 'mansion'. In the next moment a dark brown, sun-burnt figure appeared. It was wearing a strange camouflage uniform with the sleeves cut off - and it was wielding a Kalshnikov rifle. Then and there the Lieutenant thought – this is a Cuban and I am now a POW. But great was his surprise – and relief – when the figure said: *Ek is die bevelvoerder, Linford*. Almost the first guideline Lieutenant Du Plessis received was: *Skiet enige iets wat vlieg*. But in the weeks they spent at the small seaport of Novo Redondo (Ngunza) there was hardly anything to disturb their daily routine, although they did take action against one enemy aircraft that ventured into the area. They also fired mistakenly against at a friendly aircraft. To relieve boredom the Troop Commander attempted to produce a mobile Anti-Aircraft gun by placing a 20 mm gun on a Unimog and holding it steady with bags of sand.

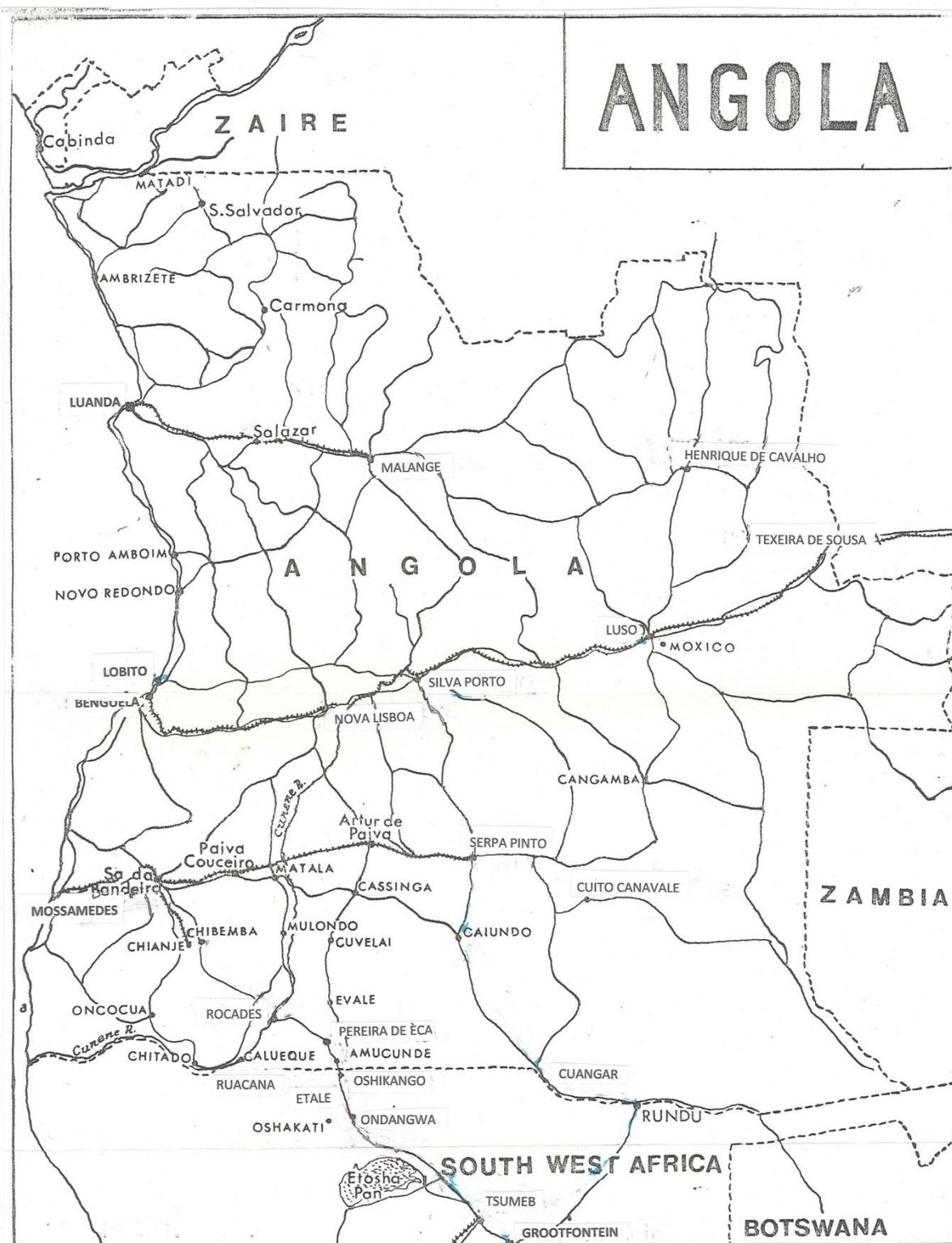


Figure 46: Map of Angola

Inactivity

The same inactivity was experienced by the Battery headquarters and both 'A' and 'C' Troops at Cela – the headquarters of the South African troops in Angola. Deployed to protect the headquarters and the airfield, they did engage in a few minor skirmishes but were in general a group of very frustrated gunners. Enemy aircraft appeared to by-pass Cela to its East rather than face the guns so it was decided to lay a 'flak trap' in an attempt to bag a victim. Lieutenant Piet van Zyl and his guns moved away from Cela with a special protection element (in effect a small combat team) and deployed to await the enemy aircraft. It was to no avail as Lieutenant van Zyl in 2017 described in an e mail to the author in 2017:

Flak Trap

During our brief stay in Cela it was reported that a light aircraft was doing regular reconnaissance in an area roughly 60 km north-east of the town. A small Anti-Aircraft contingent was hurriedly put together and briefed. The mission was singular and unambiguous: lay an ambush for the pesky reconnaissance aircraft and shoot it down. 'If it flies, shoot it down, then return to Cela' was really the essence of the task at hand.

Equipped with a single HF radio, a dog-eared Michelin road map with virtually no detail to speak of, rations for a week and a Unita guide who spoke only the most rudimentary English we set off in a general north-east direction. Leading the small convoy was an asthmatic Mercedes truck with about 20 Unita soldiers on the back, followed by my long wheelbase Land Rover, which was essentially the command vehicle, and two vehicles each towing a 20 mm AA gun.

We spent the first night in what seemed to be an endless effort to recover vehicles stuck in the mud while traversing a marshy floodplain. The Unita guide insisted that it was only a few hundred meters across but that was clearly not the case. The Mercedes truck was in no way capable of driving through the deep mud and sloshing water. It simply churned up the mess in front of the rest of the convoy into an impossible obstacle course.

When dawn came a bunch of thoroughly wet and muddy soldiers, blistered and bruised, briefly paused for breakfast along the two-track spoor that was supposed to be the road. We had no doubt the guide was as lost as we were, but he remained confident and we proceeded. At least we had cleared the swamp and the road seemed to improve somewhat and in daylight we could at least watch our guide getting lost, my driver reminded me. It seemed fair comment.

Late that afternoon we drove into a tiny village which our guide promptly declared to be the place we were heading for. A beautiful church complex sat impossibly out of place on the outskirts of this little hamlet which has a single muddy dirt road winding through the dozen or so huts and makeshift shelters. People seemed unperturbed by our presence and after our guide had a few words with one of the elders he found on the church grounds, we drove to a small clearing a few hundred yards north of the town.

It was not a bad site for an Anti-Aircraft ambush. The ground sloped gently downwards to the north for a few hundred metres before it started to rise again at a small drift where the track crossed a stream. The northern horizon was slightly above us and about a kilometre away. This is the direction from which we expected the enemy aircraft and I was satisfied that we had clear and unobstructed firing arcs.

We tried repeatedly to establish communications with Cela but the air was silent. HF radios, we were to find out, are fickle and different frequencies were required for different times of the day. We had a single frequency assigned for the day and another for the night, but none seemed to work.

By nightfall the guns were in place with camouflage netting draped over them, the troops were briefed, the guns cleaned and ready, ammunition checked and firing arcs allocated and marked out. Before dusk my Troop Sergeant and I walked away a few hundred yards and surveyed our ambush. We were satisfied that the trap was well laid and nearly impossible to see from a distance.

It was about 10 o'clock the next morning when we heard the sound of an approaching aircraft. The guns were quickly manned - without any apparent panic. To my surprise the troops seemed composed and ready for action in a business-like manner. Sixteen pairs of eyes eagerly scanned the horizon. Today was the day when all our training would come together; this is after all what we were here for.

Then, unmistakably, the sound of helicopter blades! The Troop Sergeant first spotted the dark body as it approached at what seemed like an impossibly low altitude, barely clearing the trees as it followed the contours of the ground below. Another few seconds and it would be comfortably in the range of the 20 mm guns. Everyone was waiting for my command to engage.

Yet, something about the situation made me hesitate. Firstly, we were deployed to ambush a fixed wing aircraft which most reports stated was a small twin-engined aircraft. What was approaching us was clearly a helicopter, not a twin fixed wing. Secondly, without radio communications with Cela there was not even the most basic command-and-control link in place which could alert us to own aircraft movements. I immediately realised I would have to wait for it to get a lot closer before giving the command to fire. This was not training; this was real; we had real guns; and we had real ammunition.

At about 800 meters the helicopter suddenly banked sharply left and sped off over the treetops in an easterly direction. The entire contingent looked in total disappointment at me. I thought I could see the reproach in their eyes for letting such an easy target get away. This was their first real operational quarry and the Troop Commander had just squandered it. Could it be that he did not quite have the nerve it takes to be an operational commander?

And then, distantly, but quite unmistakably, we heard sound of helicopter again; returning from a north-easterly direction. To be sure there was no misunderstanding this time round, the Troop Sergeant said in my ear so loudly that neither I nor the waiting gunners could miss it: 'This chopper was not going to get away'.

Always having had the desire to become a pilot but still serving as an Anti-Aircraft Troop Commander while waiting for news about my application for pilot training, I took a slightly keener interest in aircraft than the average gunner. My aircraft recognitions skills were therefore arguably slightly better than those of anyone around me at our little Anti-Aircraft ambush. As the helicopter approached I began to make out the basic shape of an Alouette III in the dark green camouflage of the SAAF.

The guns were silently tracking the approaching shape, gunners visibly growing tenser as they waited for the command to open fire. And then, in the characteristic attitude change of a helicopter reducing speed in preparation for a landing, the Alo slowed down and directly approached our position; nose slightly high, tail dragging close to the tall grass. She came into a hover just 50 meters in front of the waiting guns, apparently completely oblivious to the fortune a little indecision had earlier bought her.

At this short distance it was clear now to everyone that this was indeed a friendly aircraft. The guns were lowered and made safe. Not a single word was spoken. Eighteen year old National Servicemen with the wisdom of tall men, a strange maturity gathered in just a few short weeks across the Angolan border, went quietly about caring for their guns. The disaster that was avoided a mere ten minutes before, seemed to have aged them in a peculiar way. Perhaps it was just my imagination.

After greeting the pilot and his passengers we learnt that they were sent to come and look for us since Cela could not establish any radio contact with us. Walking back from the aircraft that was now squatting amongst the tall grass on the slope in front of us, I pointed out the 20 mm guns to the pilot and told him how close we came to shooting them down. His face turned several shades of white and red and gave an appraisal of the dangerous lack of command and control in the colourful vernacular used by infuriated aviators across the world.

They brought us new radios with, most importantly, a new HF frequency table to be used. We promptly set up successful communications with Cela and explained the incident which could have had extremely tragic consequences. So, in response, an immediate order for 'Wapens Vas' was issued and we were told not to fire at any aircraft whatsoever until we first received clearance from Cela.

We spent four more days waiting for the real target to turn up, but nothing except the breeze moved in the beautiful rustic countryside of western Angola. In the end we returned to Cela with uplifted spirits as a result of our rather unusual excursion and deeply thankful that a major tragedy was avoided.

At Cela

During the deployment at Cela, Commandant Chris Serfontein - an Infantry Battalion Commander, was flown in and once on the ground he became a regular 'foot' soldier - without transport! The

gunners lent him a Land Rover on a permanent basis to provide mobility. By Christmas 1975 part of the Battery was still at Novo Redondo.

Despite direct communication between the headquarters of 2 Military Area and the Anti-Aircraft component in order to report the movement of aircraft, there were several cases where warning was not given. 'Hold Fire' was generally in force - a state when guns were only permitted to engage an aerial target in self-defence - but in practise there was *no* effective air defence control. It resulted in the tragic shooting down on 4 January of a SAAF Puma helicopter by one of the guns under command of 2nd Lieutenant Malherbe, killing all on board with the exception of Commandant Visser of the SA Air Force who was nevertheless severely injured. The pilot of the Puma had only a few days before enjoyed the fish brought back from Novo Redondo. Those that died included the newly appointed task force Commander, Brigadier J.D. Potgieter. This incident, it was later said, had a profound effect on the future Anti-Aircraft policy.

Maps

During operations in Angola none of the usual gridded maps similar to those the Gunners used in planning or executing road movement during deployment exercises in the Western Cape were available. All they could rely on were Michelin and other road maps. 46 Survey Squadron, tasked with producing military gridded maps worked day and night for 24 days to produce them. The tragedy is that they never reached those who needed them. Very few reached the front but a huge number were very much later found in unmarked packages in a store at Grootfontein after the Citizen Force units had arrived, by an officer who knew certain necessary equipment had been received. He demanded and received entry to the store to find it. The maps had been copied from a Portuguese map and lines shown as a road could either be a good road or just an overgrown track through the bush.

Battle Group Alpha

A number of enemy air reconnaissance flights had by then been made over the area held by Battle Group Alpha but in the weeks that followed the arrival of the guns on 10 December, only one enemy aircraft was engaged, without success, and one 'friendly' aircraft was almost downed by the guns.⁶ This happened early one day when Lieutenant Du Plessis' Troop became aware of an aircraft approaching. At that stage 'weapons free' was still in force as per original guidelines. The Lieutenant saw a light aircraft approaching at low level and gave the command 'Fire'. One gun was within range but it picked up a snag with the camouflage net and failed to engage the aircraft. The aircraft landed at the airstrip a few hundred meters from the Lieutenant's position.

Still convinced it was enemy, he jumped into his Land Rover and rushed to the airstrip. He, his driver and signaller hid behind a low wall and trained their R1 rifles on the aircraft. Many years later he said: *'What happened next screwed me over. Emerging from the 'plane were three men dressed in browns, (SA Army field uniform) without rank insignia. I approached them on foot with rifle still at the ready. Still visibly shaken, I introduced myself as the AA commander and told them how close they were to being shot down. The unexpected response was: O! Ek is Majoor Kriel. Waar is Kommandant Lindford?'*

After that incident it was *'wapens staan vas'*.

At about this time in an ambitious plan by Commandant Linford to capture the bridge over the River Queue, he equipped a fishing boat with an 82 mm gun and a 20 mm Anti-Aircraft gun. It could also hold 30 men. Other boats were available and Colonel Delville Linford referred to them jokingly as 'his own Navy'. The plan required the co-operation of SAS President Steyn, then patrolling off the coast. The request to the Navy was not approved.⁷ There was also a shortage of ammunition so the plan was quietly, and knowing Delville Linford, reluctantly, dropped.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Silva Porto

Four guns of the Troop under command of Lieutenant Dillie Malherbe – who was accompanied by the experienced WO2 C.J.H. Basson - were actively deployed at Silva Porto (now Bie) while Battle Group Orange re-organised. Over the three days after arrival vehicles, equipment and ammunition were checked. Rations and water were loaded and Battle Group Orange departed from Silva Porto, leaving two guns of the Troop to guard the airfield. These guns would see more action than the rest of the Battery.



Figure 47: Top: "Kalahari" Wessels' Lieutenant J. Ormond and Major L Coetzee studying a Michelin road map.
Bottom: WO2 'Koos' Truter; Lieutenant J. Ormond; WO2 L.C. 'Wally' Venter and 'Kalahari' Wessels

A new reserve force –Battle Group Beaver - replaced Battle Group Orange, so named because most personnel were from the Orange Free State.⁸ Battle Group Orange moved north on 8 December via Andulo and Calucingo to Mussende. North of Mussende the Combat Group was involved in a sharp fight with elements of FAPLA, which hastily withdrew. During the subsequent advance a light aircraft flew overhead and was immediately engaged by the two Anti-Aircraft guns. Blown bridges blocked the advance but cover was provided for Engineers attempting to bridge the gap in the partially destroyed bridge over the Pombuige River. Every available weapon was deployed as far forward as possible, including the 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns. The enemy was engaged during the early evening of 17 December but drew heavy fire in return. The gunners learned to dig foxholes – quickly. Return fire the next morning was so accurate it became obvious that it was being directed from a helicopter seen by the South Africans. It was later hit by the 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns and disappeared over the hills,

⁸ Ibid., p. 159.

trailing black smoke. A reconnaissance aircraft flew overhead a little later but the gunners were unable to register any hits. By 27 December the combat group was 5 km south of Mussende.

The on-going problem of command and control surfaced when a cargo aircraft flew over the deployment area of Battle Group Orange and could not be identified as friend or foe. It was not engaged despite urgent radio requests to determine its nature. The answer was only received after the aircraft had safely left the danger zone. It was also realised to have been 'unfriendly' when, some while later, renewed and vigorous fire from the enemy indicated they had been re-supplied.

Former Bombardier J.J.A. Groenwald wrote of an incident that took place about this time:

Late November 1975, between 23:00 and 00:00, we departed from Grootfontein after spending the day preparing our equipment, loading it and 'hooking it up'. We drove through the night until the next day, without stopping once, as far as I can recall. I had no idea in which direction we travelled or in which group we were, although the name Zulu sticks in my memory. As a result of it being a very long convoy of vehicles, we followed each other basically blindly.

If I recall correctly, there were only four 20 mm guns in the group when we left, but later when it came to Battle Group Orange, there were only two 20 mm AA guns. (There is a difference in the number of guns reported.) I remember well that we withdrew from the battle front, which we usually did in order to be safe during the night. There were two vehicles towing 20 mm guns. The Unimog in front of me drove through a bomb crater resulting in the towed 20 mm gun flying through the air and after turning 180 degrees in mid-air, landed on its barrel, wheels in the air. The energy of the fall, however, sent the gun back into the air and again it landed on its wheels. We did not stop, as the driver of the Unimog did not even realise that the gun had done a somersault in the air, fortunately landing on its wheels again. We could, however, report it to Sergeant Major Basson and the next day we dismantled the gun to check every part carefully. I was surprised that the barrel did not show any visible 'bend' or damage, as the gun went quite high into the air before descending and falling directly on its barrel. It appeared that the gun came down on the 'muzzle brake', which is mounted at the front of the barrel. The proboscis breaker was slightly dented. There was also a small crack in the body of the gun and no further visible damage. The gun was tested and shot accurately without any failure. That does not mean that the gun would be safe for use in the future. Maybe this gun is still in use somewhere, who knows?

Protection for the Medium Guns

Lieutenant Malherbe and Sergeant Major Basson decided that we had to deploy right in front of the 5.5 inch howitzers, possibly rather the Sergeant Major's idea. Although there was nothing wrong with the decision, we were so close to the field guns' position one did get the taste of blood in one's mouth when they fired, mainly as a result of the shockwave. None of us knew any better and accepted the situation as such. We were also quickly targeted by the Red Eyes, as the field guns were the actual target. Fortunately no one in our group was hit, although the bombardment lasted for days. I cannot recall where this deployment was but we deployed in this manner several times. We did not receive much information and just did what we were told.

New AA position – The Swamp

I assume that the Sergeant Major realised that it was not such a great idea to be so close to the 5.5 field guns and he decided to change our positions. He hooked a 20 mm gun to his Land Rover and decided where he wanted to position the gun. The problem was that there was a terrible swamp area through which he had to pass to reach his chosen position. I believe he was the driver of the Land Rover and very quickly sank into the swampy quagmire, gun and all. He sent his driver, Gunner Grunwald to come and fetch me as I apparently would have been able to tow him and his gun to where he wanted it positioned. I went in a Unimog and upon arrival, saw that there was trouble. I told the Sergeant Major that it would not be possible for me to take him to his envisioned gun position, as the swamp was too vast and soft. He became agitated and we exchanged some harsh words. I will not repeat what I said, but the end result was that I deflated the wheels of the Unimog, entered the swamp to first hook up the Land Rover and gun and then see what would happen. I must add that Sergeant Major Basson did not use any foul language, but that I was the one who lost it a little bit. As soon as I started into the

swamp, my Unimog also became stuck. I believe at that stage the Sergeant Major realised this would not be child's play.

I went to fetch a six-wheel Magirus, which we anchored on a tree, as the footing was so wet that the Magirus could not remain in one position. We used the winch of the Magirus and the engine power of the Unimog to get the latter out of the swamp. So, anchored to the Magirus, I first rescued the gun and then the Land Rover from the swamp by means of using the Unimog's winch. We were very lucky, as the whole time we struggled, which took quite a while; we were not targeted by enemy fire. We were sitting ducks but it was done and dusted and we focussed on what lied ahead.

Another new AA position – The Hill

After the episode in the swamp, the Sergeant Major decided that we had to position one of our guns on the highest hill in the area. I managed to get the gun fairly close to the summit, but the last part of the summit to the top of the hill had to be done manually by physically pushing and pulling the gun. The gun was deployed and the Sergeant Major and Bombardier Whitey van Vuuren stayed with the gun and manned the radio. I and some other troops went downhill to dig trenches along the front and one side of the hill.

After the whole of the morning had been quiet, we suddenly heard the droning of a helicopter. We immediately knew it was an enemy aircraft as it came directly from an area from which the enemy had been firing at us from time to time. The people in the helicopter had no idea that we were positioned on the hill and approached us directly. As I understood from Whitey, the Sergeant Major manned the gun and started firing at the aircraft when it was about 200 to 300 metres from our position. The helicopter was so close to us that we would have been able to hit it with a R1 shot, but for some or other reason, nobody fired a shot. The aircraft must have been slightly damaged by the rounds, as I saw some smoke billowing from it as it turned and flew away. The ammunition was however depleted after the first burst and we could not fire anymore. We reloaded but realised soon that our position had been compromised and we were deployed far ahead of the 5.5 field guns. This made us an ideal target for the Red Eyes. (Multiple Rocket System)

The Red Eyes

Not long after the incident, the Red Eyes started firing at us and it became clear that we were the target. Everybody went down the hill to the trenches. However, we realised that not much proper planning went into the location of the trenches and that it would not provide any significant protection. We radioed for cover from the 5.5 field guns, but we were told that ammunition was scarce and that we had to take cover as best we can and wait for darkness. The gun and Unimog remained at the top of the hill. We eventually found meagre cover below somewhat of an overhang where we spent the day with little food and water. The Red Eyes fired at our position with intermittent intervals, but most of the detonations took place in soft ground or mud and did not make much of an impression. Fortunately none of the missiles hit the hill or close to our hiding place in the rocky area. Although there was nothing wrong with the distance of the Red Eyes, fortunately their direction was a bit off. The 5.5 field guns did fire some shots, but it was clear that they were in need of ammunition to provide proper fire support. As usual, the firing stopped when lunchtime arrived, but that is another story and we did not want to take any chances of trying to remove the gun from its position on the hill during broad daylight, as we would have had to use all the manpower and the risk would have been too high if we were spotted and the Red Eyes resumed firing.

Eventually, darkness fell and we could barely see, but did hook the gun with great speed. I descended the hill with the gun in tow without using any lights, and it was a very dark evening. We realised something had changed, as we had to drive back quite a distance. This was in fact the start of the withdrawal, but we would only realise that at a later stage. While I was driving, barely able to see the road, something told me to stop. When I stopped, the vehicle stood at the edge of a river bank, with quite a lengthy decline to the water level. We could not believe our eyes, as I missed the temporary bridge and actually stopped right beside it on my way to the river's edge. Everyone was relieved and after we crossed the bridge, we joined the group later. Everyone was extremely tired but we realised that where we were, was not safe and we had to take turns to stand guard. There I again came to the conclusion that we could not really identify the enemy and that they most possibly moved through our

position during the night. A sign of 'two fingers ahead', U for UNITA, was the signal and anyone could present it. The next morning the group was attacked with an attack launched on a 90mm Eland armoured car from a tree where we stayed overnight, most likely using an RPG. The Eland's machine gun was hit and the Captain suffered head wounds from shrapnel, but he was okay to relay the story. I understood that the Eland's 90mm 'removed' the obstacle and we could move ahead.

Food, Beer and Cigarettes very scarce

On some days we did not receive 'ratpacks' and had to be careful with the available food stock. This was also the case with beer and cigarettes. Sergeant Major traded some mealie meal for something from his food stock and somewhere he also found some meat at one time. But first the story about the meat: We were very happy about the goat meat, as we were hungry. We immediately started cooking the meat, but barely started when we were instructed to move forward. The fights were progressing well. The half cooked meat was packed up to the following position. To shorten a long story, we were only to eat the meat three days later due to all the redeploying and the speed with which the fights were moving forward. The meat was only cooked a little bit at a time, and ended up being very tough, but nonetheless tasted like the best chop in South Africa.

We filled up on coffee and it was an ongoing competition to see who could make the best cooking stove from a cold drink or beer can, which would use the least fuel. We could boil water with a quarter of a small fuel block.

Beer was so scarce that it is not worth talking about. We did sometimes, amongst ourselves, exchange beer for condensed milk, as your body craved some energy sustenance.

At the time, almost everybody smoked and the Sergeant Major was a 'senior smoker'. He brought along enough packets of 30 cigarettes from home. We could not afford to take cigarettes along and had to wait for the hand-outs. When things got tough, the Sergeant Major handed out two cigarettes to all those who smoked on a daily basis and everybody appreciated it.

This ends my memories of Sergeant Major Chris Basson; now deceased, of whom Major Coetzee had the utmost respect.

Tragic loss of a SA Air Force Puma

On an earlier page mention is made of the tragic loss of a SA Air Force Puma helicopter on 4 January 1976. The incident is covered by the following, compiled and written by Major General (Ret) L.P. Coetzee.

Background

The shooting down of Aérospatiale SA 330C Puma Helicopter, Serial No. 122 just East of Mussende next to the road to Malange in Angola was never officially reported in any official media to my knowledge. Over a period of time, stories and tales, however started to emerge with the coming of social media (from about 2014/2015) surrounding this very tragic accident. To my knowledge, there was also never an attempt to write a chronology that led to this incident (apart from the Board of Inquiry that is not available). I think it will be fair to say that everybody involved and also the higher echelons were so in shock with what happened, that a psychological block developed. As I heard, the Board of Inquiry came to the finding that nobody could be held responsible and because of the Secret classification of Operation Savannah the accident was probably "filed". As the reader reads on, you will gather it was an accident just waiting to happen. I am not going to touch on the reasoning behind any strategic or political decisions at the time that also directly and indirectly played a role, but will deal only with the tactical aspects at ground level.

Operation Savannah was a secret operation right from the start. To create a picture of a foreign force assisting UNITA, the SA forces were issued with green uniforms and some foreign equipment to help create this picture. We were also allowed to grow beards and any identification of SA manufacturing on items was to be removed. In the fluid situation that reigned, doctrine on the deployment of AA guns was impossible to follow, which had a negative effect on planning, available equipment and logistics. In the case of the 20 mm AA Battery, the guns were deployed in smaller "packets" from Novo Redondo in the West to Battle Group Orange in the East. This in itself seriously hampered the effective fire control of the guns.

There was no tactical radar coverage over the theatre of operations, no early warning radar equipment accompanied the Battery and no effective and dedicated communication could be established for fire control purposes. As a result of the concern for the safety of own aircraft, it was endeavoured to make ad hoc arrangements for gun control via radio communication between aircraft and the HQ in the area where guns were deployed. This relied on the pilot and HQ to ensure that the warning of arrival is in time communicated to the guns, which seldom happened and therefore the safety of any aircraft could not be guaranteed. To further assist in own aircraft identification, the official instruction was that all aircraft operating in the operational area would be painted at the time in the specific camouflage of sandy yellow and green.

Prelude to the Incident

Late December 1975, the order was given for the South African forces to start with a systematic withdrawal. The withdrawal of forces from Cela where the main HQ of 2 Military Area was located started early on 4 January 1976. The next (temporary) position for 2 MA HQ would be Silva Porto. The radio station of Texas closed down and command and control was transferred to the mobile HQ with call sign Texas1. On this fateful day early in the morning the newly appointed OC of 2 Military Area, Brig JD Potgieter, two pilots, Captains Immelman and de Wit and flight engineer Sergeant Kellet left from Rundu in Puma Helicopter, Serial No. 122 en route to Cela to pick up one passenger, the Air Liaison Officer Cmdt M. Verster. From Cela they departed on a command visit to certain of the forward combat HQs of Battle Group Orange. The helicopter was painted dull green and not the sandy yellow and green camouflage pattern as was the rule. Another distinct difference was that the two large air intakes for the engines were not covered with cowls and showed two large round holes when looking from the front. There are conflicting reports from combat troops on the ground why the accident happened. Some reported that they were not notified of the impending visit and then there are some reports that indicated that they were, but that they later got the message that the visit was cancelled. Unfortunately, for reasons unknown, the helicopter arrived unannounced at the forward line of own troops of Battle Group Orange near Mussende.

Give or take some basic points of difference, the following is a report from one eye witness on social media that summarises what transpired on the ground:

As I recall that day we were to expect a visit from the Puma early in the morning and Savimbi was supposed to meet them. A few days earlier some of Orange's guys were hassled by a blue Allo helicopter which they shot down (near Cariango) and also got strafed by Migs. The guys were thus a bit nervous about any aircraft. The weather that morning was bad with drizzle and low cloud and we were informed that the visit was not to take place and all aircraft must be seen as hostile. At about 10h30 we heard the Puma coming down the road from the north, where the Cubans were, flying very low below the mist following the road. Most of our vehicles were in the bush on the right of the road (if you were facing south) and the three 20mm ack-ack guns were in an open field on the left of the road. The pilot saw the ack-ack guns on the left and made a very hard left turn past the guns (with the typical very prominent rotor slap I recall) and came in from the west (direction towards the road from the bottom of the field) by now almost at a hover. At this time there was frantic radio contact with Nova Lisboa HQ to try to ID the chopper and contact the chopper itself (which had no markings at all and was painted in typical Savannah drab) only to be told that they were not aware of any air traffic in our sector and also no comms with the Puma either. The Puma had two .50 Brownings sticking out of the door and the Commandant (referring to the passenger) was hanging out of the door waving at the guns; the Puma was facing the bottom most gun head on, now hovering to land and then the pilot must have decided to land up on the road, dropped the Puma's nose at the guns and I heard over the radio "looi die bus!"....(the rest of the detail is left out as it will not add value to the history of this book. The only survivor of this tragic accident was Cmdt Martin Verster with 70% burns)

Another comment on social media from an AA gunner (since deceased) reads as follows:

I'm absolutely amazed that this terrible accident did not happen more often. As I recall we were never given advance warning of friendly aircraft flying overhead. Either they had no confidence in our ability to shoot straight or they didn't even know of our existence. There were a number of instances when rightly or wrongly, we decided that aircraft were friendly at the last moment and declined to engage.

Major Knoppies Coetzer, SAAF, also wrote about Air Operations during Operation Savannah:

During Operation Savannah Air Operations, there was never any formal tasking and debriefing for aircraft and aircrew held. No mission files, in which all the briefings and debriefings had to be filed, were kept. That is why there is so little information available on the Air Operations during Operation Savannah.

While I was responsible for the air supply of the C130s and C160s, I was informed that the Commander on the ground at Cela (or Silva Port and later also Villa Luso), did not need the supplies which had been delivered. They then handed me a handwritten letter from the Army Commander, which I subsequently handed to the Army Log Officers. They, in turn, did not believe us and showed the signals in which the senior Army Log Officer had set out his requirements. It was therefore evident that there was a complete lack of communication between everybody. The fact that supplying took place eventually was thanks to the people on the ground that used their common sense.

The Puma helicopter which was shot down by own forces, was an excellent example of the widespread lack of communication which was the order of the day. The Puma, with amongst others Brig Potgieter and his Air Liaison Officer, Commandant Martin Verster on board, flew out from Rundu to visit Army elements at the different battle fronts and to co-ordinate orders. As the Operations Officer at Rundu, not even I was aware of the mission, and the units to be visited were equally unaware as they had not been informed.

The poor troop which manned the Anti-Aircraft gun, therefore also did not know it was an own forces Puma coming in for a landing. He assumed that it was an enemy aircraft as the same deployment had been under threat from enemy helicopters a few days earlier.

Nobody has blamed anybody for this incident, yet it still remains a tragic one. After the incident, measures aimed at proper control of Anti-Aircraft guns and reporting of aircraft were implemented.

This was the reason why I joined Brig Ben De Wet Roos as Air Liaison Officer in Silva Porto in January 1976. Amongst others, we also made use of Sa Da Bandeira as base.

The following was written by former Bombardier J.J.A Groenewald from the AA element at the scene:

Preparing for a visit from the Officer Commanding to Battle Group Orange

On the morning of 4 January 1976, we were informed that we were to receive a visit from a high ranking officer and that we had to make sure the landing zone was safe for the visit. The visit would take place with a helicopter. At the stage, I was not aware of the exact date as we lost track of time during the operation. We also did not have watches, calendars, pens or paper with us.

At the time, we had all become a little edgy as many things had started going wrong with the withdrawal. We were fired upon, people were killed and caught and there was a general feeling of insecurity as we were not kept up to date with what was happening.

We deployed a 20mm AA gun together with a 90mm Eland armoured car and two machine gun groups. If I remember correctly, and I am using the top of the page as North, the Eland was positioned to the east and the two machine gun groups on either side of the Eland. We were position south of the Eland with our position facing in a north-westerly direction. The Unimog carrying the ammunition was placed at the west, some way behind the gun. I realise that the real direction would differ from my sketch, but I have used the paper's north to explain the positions as I cannot recall the correct directions. But the different placements are correct and should just be adjusted if the real directions become known.

At our position, the weather was not too bad, but was apparently very bad in the area from which the helicopter would approach. The visit was therefore postponed and we were informed via radio. I cannot recall clearly, but believe the visit was postponed twice.

We therefore started conversing with the other parties deployed because we were not expecting anybody. While we were chatting, we heard the droning of a helicopter and everybody scrambled for their positions. No1 was far away and Whitey was the closest to the gun, which he immediately manned. Whitey was supposed to be manning the radio. I was closest to the radio and grabbed it to start enquiring as to the aircraft. The other two gunners were further away and sought cover at the Unimog, filled with 20mm ammunition – not a good idea at the time. However, everyone got a fright and the adrenaline was pumping.

It can rightly be questioned what a driving & maintenance Bombardier was doing manning the radio. Firstly, I was the closest, excluding Whitey, secondly, I had been trained in radio procedures, which of course flew out the window at that point in time, and thirdly, when I was in Grootfontein, I was given a short course on the 20 mm gun with the focus on loading ammunition and calibrating. Lastly, but possibly most importantly, there might have been a higher hand which did not want to leave such a position in the hands of ordinary gunners, at least the two people involved were supposed to have leadership potential and were hopefully psychologically stronger.

While I was talking to Lieutenant Malherbe on the radio, the adrenalin kept pumping and I asked him if he knew what was going on. He also had no idea. The helicopter made a wide circle over our position and I tried my best to see any recognisable identification marks on the aircraft. I conveyed that I did not see anything, also not any of the camouflage which was supposed to have been used on the aircraft. The enemy helicopter Sergeant Major Basson shot at (noted earlier in document) also did not have any markings or camouflage and at that moment, there was no difference in my mind, the colour was the same, the drab olive green the same as our vehicles and equipment. I did not want to believe that it was an enemy helicopter and again repeated over the radio that I could not recognise any markings. It was then said that if we cannot recognise it, we had to fire at the aircraft. At that stage, the helicopter approached us from a north-westerly direction and came in low. Something however did not feel right and I did not give the command to fire. However, the next moment, the helicopter dropped its nose as if it was going into an attacking position and I shouted at Whitey "looi hom" and not "looi die bus" as had been previously written. I shouted very loudly as the noise was overwhelming - so loudly that the gunners deployed 30 metres away could hear, notwithstanding the noise.

The helicopter stood no chance and exploded in the air, very close to the ground. With the explosion, one person was flung out of the helicopter. On fire, he came running towards us. There was a lot of confusion because the ammunition and flares in the helicopter started exploding and we were of the opinion that we were being fired upon. Projectiles were flying everywhere but nobody was hit. That no one shot at the person on fire in all the confusion was a miracle.

The helicopter fell close to the position of the gun and the heat was so intense that we had to fall back to wait for the ammunition to explode, and the heat to subside. Nobody else in the helicopter survived. After communicating with the person who had suffered burn wounds, we realised that we had shot down our own helicopter. The injured person was in a lot of pain, but what I will always remember, is the manner in which he communicated with the medics despite his unbearable pain. I cannot describe what he said, but the manner in which he spoke conveyed that of a gentleman. Even when he was shot up with morphine, he was still in a lot of pain. He was later flown out with a Cessna and that story is well known.

The total disbelief was terrible and we did not discuss the incident amongst ourselves. We started to gather the remains, even the smallest pieces we could find. The smell of burnt human flesh and bones was overpowering. I still get the same feeling when I smell bones burning. This will probably never go away.

During the investigation, an Air Force officer questioned us individually. All that stayed with me was that he tried to convince Whitey and myself that Browns (our standard dress) and Greens (the dress we wore in Angola) was also camouflage dress and thus the helicopter had been camouflaged. Maybe he was right, but in the context we experienced it, it was definitely not camouflage.

As a group, we never again discussed the incident and were never sent for counselling. I left the group shortly thereafter and went back to SA as I had to enrol at Tukkies, if I remember correctly, on 6 February 1976. I never again had any contact with anyone who was in the group.

That is my story as I remember it.

D.M. Bossenger who as a Captain was a member of the official Board of Inquiry wrote the following:

I was a member of the Board of Inquiry which was convened by the SAAF. The members were from the section that investigated any flying accidents, I can't remember the name. They supplied the secretary and president of the board. From the Army side were Col Minnaar (a legal officer) and myself as the SO2 AA in Army HQ. The Dir AA was not on the Board but accompanied us so that he could see where the command and control failure lay. The Board of Inquiry was classified SECRET and should be in the archives but in those of the SAAF and not Army. It was definitely not filed and forgotten. I am not going to go into a whole litany of detail but suffice to say that what is written hereunder is as close to actual happenings as damn it to swearing. The questioning by the SAAF member as to what was understood

by the term camouflage was because the SAAF considered that Puma paint to be a type of camouflage and was not intended to catch anybody out. Two or even more understandings of camouflage existed and one encompassed disruptive patterning. The communications were a disaster and nobody on the ground was aware of the visit by the helicopter. Headquarters were being moved and a general state of non-communication existed. I am convinced that if the Puma had come into land only once it would never have been shot at. We on the Board of Inquiry only found out what actually happened once we returned to the RSA and were finally able to speak to Cmdt Verster, the ALO who had been sitting with headphone and mike on and was able to talk to the pilot etc. "They had circled the area and saw what the pilots had thought was a landing spot. As they settled in to land one of the oleo struts failed to lock and they had two greens and a red on the panel. They decided to recircle and do a second approach. As they started the recircle the nose was put down and power increased. (This was seen from the gun position that the helicopter was going to attack them with guns or rockets as it was pointing directly at them and the order to open fire was given). The tragic consequences followed. The finding of the Board of Inquiry was that nobody could be held culpable for the incident as there were too many factors that came together to cause the perfect storm.

Political Pressure

Political activity and pressure on the South African Government began to play a major part in events. CIA support was withdrawn (Clarke Amendment) after the presence of South African troops was revealed by a journalist when a South African column was in position to overlook the capital city of Luanda. South Africa's government realised that although it could take and hold Angola, world opinion would become a major political issue. Although it was acknowledged that the combat groups now overlooking Lobito could take the city, it was decided that they should be withdrawn. The first withdrawal orders reached the South African battle groups on 2 January 1976.⁹ Task Force Zulu's southward movement commenced in the next two days, but fresh orders delayed the withdrawal. Monday, 5 January found the headquarters of the Task Force 18 km south of Cela and a few kilometres north of Bridge 25 over the Queve River. To secure the route south the bridge was protected for two weeks by four 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns and a number of armoured cars.¹⁰ The advance party was already at Sà da Bandeira.

Meanwhile a decision had been made to commence the final withdrawal from the interior of Angola on 21 January. Troops were needed to cover the withdrawal. Citizen Force units of 71 Motorised Brigade were mobilised a few days before Christmas and would by then be deployed in southern Angola. By 10 January they were at the mobilisation centre at De Brug, near Bloemfontein, where they were kitted out, underwent medical inspection, signed wills and were able to take out insurance, etc.. 72 Motorised Brigade was later also mobilised and so too were Regiment Oos Transvaal and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Regiment Vaal Rivier followed fifteen days later. The Brigade spent some time in training before departure for Grootfontein.

Seiljag

'Seiljag' was the codeword authorising withdrawal. Colonel C.J. Swart, then commanding the Task Force, was informed on 17 January that Zulu would be relieved on the central front by Citizen Force units on 21 January 1976, after which his force could continue the withdrawal. It was given on 20 January. Major Louis Coetzee was convoy commander for the southward movement of 2 Military Area Headquarters, its personnel and equipment, and all support elements including his own Battery. Movement southwards, to the next temporary base at Silvo Porto, commenced in the dark hours of 21 January, as planned. En route south after a stop to rest drivers and check vehicles, Major Coetzee realised he had left something of importance at the last resting place. Accompanied by his driver he returned to retrieve the item but on the way back to rejoin the convoy they suddenly found themselves in an ambush. With foot on the accelerator they sped unharmed through what turned out to be a UNITA ambush. Speed and poor shooting had helped.

⁹ Extract from diary of Cmdt - now Lt Gen (Ret) - C.P. van der Westhuizen per e mail to author, 3.10.2007.

¹⁰ *Angola, Operasie Savannah 1975-1976*, p. 271.

Lieutenant Jeff Ormond's 'C' Troop formed part of the advance element. The weather had cleared; his Troop Sergeant Major was driving the Land Rover and the Lieutenant was sitting back, contentedly munching pro-vita biscuits; he was relaxed; all was well with the world. The Lieutenant was a non-smoker, but Cuban cigars had been one of the perks of war and he decided it was time to try one. It was the first and last time he ever attempted to smoke!

The headquarters of the South African forces reformed at Silvo Porto and here the Anti-Aircraft Battery continued to provide protection for the headquarters and the vital airfield. The gunners bivouacked in a church. With a beautiful clear stream nearby, they were able to have a much needed wash. Nearby logistics teams supplied much needed items and the troops had an enjoyable break.

'C' Troop was flagged-away from the rest of the convoy on arrival at Silva Porto to an area near some buildings and were soon bogged down in muddy ground – on their own – with nowhere to go and without any instructions. The Lieutenant alighted from his vehicle, stepping into ankle-deep mud, before making his way through the mud to a lighted and very noisy room in one of the buildings where he found the headquarters element his Troop had 'protected'. The headquarters of the South African forces reformed at Serpa Pinto (Bie) and here the Anti-Aircraft gunners continued to provide protection for the headquarters and the vital airfield.

2nd Lieutenant Malherbe's plucky four-gun 'Troop' was held back at Calucinga until 21 January with Battle Group Orange, after Orange had left Massango in pouring rain on 5 January. They moved south via Caiundo and Savati to Grootfontein. The Anti-Aircraft gunners at Novo Redondo pulled out of their positions at 9.00 am on 21 January and moved with Battle Group Alpha– which joined forces with Battle Group Beaver and moved via Sà da Bandeira, Pereira de Eça and Ondangwa to Grootfontein.

By 3 pm on 22 January Task Force Zulu was at Pereira de Eça (Ongiva) where weapons and equipment were handed to the relieving units.

Guns and equipment were finally handed over to Regiment Oos Transvaal in mid-February.

Meanwhile the 35 mm guns at Grootfontein had been taken over and manned by 101 Battery under Major Willem Mouton. They were later deployed at Rundu to protect the headquarters of 101 Task Force, 1 Military Area and the landing ground of 1 Sub-area. They were eventually handed over to a Battery of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The latter, under command of Commandant Inggs, was mobilised in December 1975. 61 Battery was deployed at Rundu under Major C.P. Doyle, 62 Battery at Ruacana under Major J. Griffen. Major D. Roxburgh and his 63 Battery remained at Grootfontein.

Their future

Major Louis Coetzee and Lieutenants P.J. (Piet) van Zyl, P.H. (Herman) du Plessis and J.A. (Jeff) Ormond commanding 'A', 'B' and 'C' Troops all ended their careers in the SANDF as senior officers; Major Coetzee as a Major General; while Lieutenant Ormond became Director Anti-Aircraft before retiring as Brigadier General. Herman du Plessis achieved the rank of Colonel and Lieutenant P. van Zyl achieved his life's ambition. On their way back from Angola to Young's Field he learned that his application for transfer to the SA Air Force had been approved. A Selection Board was followed by a pupil pilot's course and the award of Wings in 1977. He flew fighters for about fifteen years before becoming a flight instructor at Central Flying Aschool Dunnottar. He retired as a Brigadier General.

Citizen Force Mobilised

Citizen Force units, mostly from 71 Motorised Brigade, Cape Town, had been hastily mobilised in December 1975, two days before Christmas, to cover the withdrawal; nor forget the fact that Western Province Command closed down for the Christmas holidays, leaving the units 'in the air' without backup or support. The local Anti-Aircraft Regiment was not included in the call-out.

They were moved by train about 7 January to De Brug, near Bloemfontein. None of the Regiments concerned will ever forget the flurry of medical inspections, issue of Wills; issue of complete kit (such as they had never seen before). Nor would they forget the slow train journey northwards through

South West Africa; nor the deep mud of the transit camp at Grootfontein (originally known as *Otjivandatjongue* – the edge of the hills where the leopard committed its crimes).¹¹ They staged there until they moved forward in open trucks in extremely heavy rain to Ondangwa; and then the take-over of guns and transport at Pereira de Eça before moving into positions to cover the troops moving back from the interior of Angola.

Included in the call-up in January 1976 was 'R' Battery of Regiment Oos Transvaal under Major F.W. Peters. It served until 2 April and it was followed in the operational area by 'P' Battery under Major G.P. Slabbert. A Troop of Regiment Oos Transvaal joined Combat Group Juliet at Serpa Pinto on 25 January and another Troop joined Combat Group Hotel on 1 February 1976

Once the final withdrawal of Task Force Zulu commenced, Citizen Force units operating as Combat Group Hotel and led by Commandant O'Brien of the Cape Town Highlanders, were moved forward from Rocades to Cahama, from which the road from the north could be seen. Combat Group Golf guarded the area west of the Cunene River. Making his presence felt was Major Stan Harrison, an experienced officer who had fought in the Western Desert and Italy in 1942/45. At Cahama he had a trailer chock-a-block full of beer (with Castle beer bottle tops) bought from a Portuguese gentleman fleeing south and had no complaints or problems - except one – the Anti-Aircraft Troop (from Rocades) was deployed on the reverse slope behind his 25-pdrs, but it had challenges with logistical sustainment support. Major Harrison – a legend among troops in the area – assisted the Anti-Aircraft from from his own resources. He had also ordered the Anti-Aircraft gunners to dig in.

An unseen problem arose later when the entire group at Cahama was ordered to move west to Otjinchau, the southbound route expected to be taken by the opposition. At the order group, at question time, the Anti-Aircraft Troop Commander asked how he was to move 80 000 rounds of ammunition. This placed emphasis on one of the characteristics of Anti-Aircraft gun systems as being heavily dependent on logistical support. The Field Artillery commander was to provide assistance.

Back at Ondangwa it was discovered that a Battery of Regiment Oos Transvaal had been moved from Grootfontein to Ruacana. It was commanded by Major F.W. Peters, an elusive officer who appeared to be his own master, often disappearing to Rundu by courtesy of the SA Air Force. The Battery was placed under command of Cape Field Artillery. Frustration grew as the commanding officer endeavoured to find the Major. Eventually he was traced and ordered to report to the Operations cell at Ondangwa; but seemingly only minutes before he completed the long trip from Ruacana, orders were given to the Field Artillery commander to move from Ondangwa and deploy the Regimental headquarters and a Battery at Ruacana, where 'P' Battery of Regiment Oos Transvaal was protecting the airfield. His Battery was placed on two hours stand-by to re-deploy. Major Peters received this information on his arrival without any reaction whatsoever.

Over the years during continuous training, Citizen Force commanding officers had learned – often the hard way – to co-operate with Infantry and Armour in the very few combined exercises that had been held, but had never received any training or instruction in operations with Anti-Aircraft units. Major Peters intimated that he knew what was required of him but nevertheless Officer Commanding, Cape Field Artillery immediately signalled the Anti-Aircraft School at Young's Field and asked for relevant training pamphlets in order to obtain some background on deployment of Anti-Aircraft guns, battle handling procedures, etc. To his utter astonishment, a day after arrival at Ruacana; with his headquarters operating as a Brigade headquarters (it did so for three days with a very much reduced staff of only three – two officers and a Sergeant signaller) – and his own headquarters was established with an equally small number and operating as it should, he found Major Peters' airfield defence plan. It had just been left there without explanation.

He immediately left to investigate the strange plan and arrived at the airfield to find all the vehicles dug-in to the top of their canvas hoods. He realised this after he noted a Staff Sergeant practically

¹¹ *Lords of the Lost Frontier*, p. 94.

crawling out of a bush, next to which a vehicle had been dug in. The guns were well hidden and nowhere to be seen. The adjutant, almost totally unclad, eventually appeared out of the thick bush that surrounded the airfield. He gave the news that the Major had again gone to Rundu. Instructions were left for the latter to report on his return. Major Peters was perhaps an unlucky officer. Shortly before he returned, an order arrived instructing his Battery to immediately move to another deployment area. Headquarters, 7 SA Division, which had taken control of the military area, had to be told it was impossible - but that it would move as soon as it became possible. The divisional Commander, the strict no-nonsense Brigadier Paul Roos, was not in the least impressed.

Mayor of Pereira de Eça

Commandant Moelich, who had until 31 December 1975, commanded Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, was transferred to take part in Operation Savannah. He was appointed to assist in the movement and care of several thousand refugees pouring south to escape the fighting. He took over from Commandant D.S. du Toit at Sà da Bandeira, moving late in January 1976 to Pereira da Eça (Ongiva). At one stage he was practically mayor of the battle-scared town of Perera de Eça and was found behind the former mayor's desk in the town hall when Commandant Crook passed through the town en route north.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

YOUNG'S FIELD

Commandant Moelich was replaced at Young's Field by Colonel H. (Hennie) Roux who was appointed Officer Commanding Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment with effect from 1 January 1976. He had been GSO1 Operational Planning at Southern Cape Command. He was also appointed Corps Director over and above his normal tasks. The following month saw the end of involvement by Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in Operation Savannah. With this the School was given breathing space to rethink doctrine and tactics as a result of Operation Savannah, before being plunged into training of the first group of National Servicemen who reported in January 1977 for twenty-four months service.

The appointment of the new commanding officer was made at a fortuitous time as much had to be done to overcome the command and control problems that had been experienced between the SA Air Force and the Anti-Aircraft gunners in Operation Savannah. He was the instigator of a scientific approach to Anti-Aircraft problems and engagement procedures and such other matters that had until then been based on data supplied by manufacturers. This data was thoroughly investigated and updated. Participative management systems were also introduced by Colonel Roux and drill books updated to a high standard. A hard task master – he always required things to be done yesterday – he instructed Commandant Deyzel, who had become Chief Instructor Gunnery and Research – to produce an Anti-Aircraft battle handling book, based on lessons learned. He and Andre Kotze were given little rest before it was completed and accepted by Army Headquarters. The book was approved by Brigadier Minnaar Fourie, then Director Training at Army Headquarters with the terse comment: *'If you wrote it, who the hell am I to argue'*.

Colonel Roux, with motivation and assistance from his wife – who designed the Regimental Colour later presented to 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment - did much to improve the facilities available at Young's Field; and he learned a lot about the intrigues of man management. But his main aim was to improve the operational capacity of the troops under command. With all this he found that while all parents of 'troopies' were interested in their son's welfare and many a pleasure to deal with, some were an absolute nightmare.

A Mother not Easily Forgotten

During the time Colonel Roux commanded Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment he learned things about National Servicemen that were 'not in the book'. There were about one thousand 'troopies' at Young's Field during his term of command. Training, as it was elsewhere, was rigorous and most parents – many of whom enquired about their sons – were satisfied with their progress and treatment. But he particularly remembered one mother who practically demanded to see him. Her son, who was married, had been punished for some reason and had landed in hospital with a minor problem after undergoing 'exercise' on a light Anti-Aircraft gun. The mother made the appointment almost immediately after the incident. She and her husband entered the Colonel's office – the married daughter-in-law sat outside – and the lady quickly went into the attack over the treatment *her* son had received.

She demanded that her son's Battery Commander – Major Henri van der Hoven – be punished. It was refused; the Colonel felt it was his responsibility. Her anger intensified; she threatened to report him to the Minister of Defence and to Chief of the SADF. After several minutes of this tirade the Colonel excused himself and left the office to give her time to cool off. When he returned, and after endeavouring diplomatically to return to a normal discussion, he unfortunately mentioned that he was sorry she had adopted the aggressive attitude as most parents could not express enough appreciation for the manner in which their sons were being treated. It was like a red rag to a bull. She became furious and attempted to strike the Colonel with her handbag, but was eventually persuaded to leave the office, sweeping her husband (he had sat quietly by and not uttered a word) and her daughter-in-law with her as she left. Her married, lazy and disobedient son – the cause of the incident - was not aware of what had taken place.

Troops, as Colonel Roux recalled, '... *kan baie stout wees. En 'n duisend troep kan baie, baie stout wees!* There was a problem at one time during his term as commanding officer at Young's Field that a telephone booth was being used as a toilet. The Regimental Commander warned the troops on morning parade that it was an absolutely unacceptable practice and was to cease. There would otherwise be unpleasant consequences.

At the following morning's parade it was reported that the telephone box had again been violated. The RSM – WO1 Baker - was there and then ordered to use one entire training period for punishment drill. The RSM appreciated that signallers, cooks and drivers were also not angels and usually had good reasons not to be on parade in the mornings and ordered them to appear. It was felt to be a sight to be seen- and heard - as about 2 000 boots hit the ground, moving on the parade ground at double march. Clearly visible were the cooks with their unusual white headgear.

The inappropriate use of the telephone box was promptly abandoned - it remained in an hygienic state thereafter.¹

Major Henri van der Hoven was a wily young man who had received a BSc after two years at the Military Academy. His service included a stint as aide-de-camp to the Minister of Defence, a Staff Duties course and a posting as 2IC at Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment before resigning to become a successful businessman in the ferrochrome industry.

From Young's Field Colonel Roux was transferred in October 1977 to Western Province Command as SSO Operations and Commandant R.T. Deyzel took command of Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in an acting capacity that was to endure until 31 January 1979. Colonel Roux was later promoted and by late 1990 was Inspector General with the rank of Major General.

Arm Scor

Despite an impressive performance of the SADF against Cuban and FNLA forces in Angola, Operation Savannah had exposed certain deficiencies in South African weaponry. The obsolescence of its Artillery, which had been badly outranged by enemy guns was a special concern. The country had been subjected to an informal arms boycott since the early 1960's. The boycott acquired substantial form on 4 November 1977 when the United Nations voted a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. Experience during the Angolan civil war and in addition, the United Nations resolution, provided a dramatic boost to the country's own armaments industry.

Arm Scor owes its existence to the UN-inspired arms embargo, with impetus given by the equipment problems experienced during Operation Savannah. The Armaments Production Board, established in the mid-1960's had concentrated initially on the production of small arms – it acquired a licence to produce the R1 (the South African equivalent of the Belgian FN rifle) – and it also produced a variety of ammunition. But by the late 1970's it became clear that South Africa would have to rely on its own

¹ Notes from Major General (Ret) H Roux, undated

resources to provide self-sufficiency in the development and production of its own armament if it was to successfully defend itself. For this reason a more effective organisation was required and a decision led to the amalgamation of the Armaments Production Board and Armaments Development and Manufacturing Corporation in 1977 as the Armaments Corporation of South Africa (Armscor). Armscor succeeded in supplying the SADF with a range of sophisticated weaponry, the equal of and in many instances superior to the best available anywhere in the world.

Formations

It was also fortunate that much thought had been given not only to armament production but also to more distinctly orientated command and control structures. In August 1974, as result of a report by the Roos Committee, the foundation was laid for a new conventional force known as Headquarters, 1 South African Corps, with two Divisions - 7 South African Infantry Division and 8 South African Armoured Division. Each Division was further broken down to 71, 72 and 73 Motorised Infantry Brigades and in the Armoured Division, to 81 Armoured, 82 Mechanised and 84 Motorised Brigades. Each Citizen Force unit was encouraged to attain 'battle-ready' status. 71 Motorised Infantry Brigade attended a continuous training camp at De Brug, Bloemfontein, in 1975 with its attached Artillery unit undergoing training at Potchefstroom where it was the first and apparently only unit to attain a battle ready report. The new system was an eye-opener and welcomed by all units who now felt they 'belonged'. This was especially so in the Cape Town Brigade. It was a great pity that the Brigade structure was abandoned in the early 1990s.

Army Battle School

Operation Savannah had featured deployment on a 'battle group' basis and although it had been 'ad hoc' it afforded practical demonstration of the 'combat team' and 'combat group' exercises that had exercised the minds of planners in earlier years and had been tried at training units. Savannah provided a viewpoint from which to assess the shortcomings of this form of warfare, upon which senior officers could now speak with some authority. The thought process that followed and the need for a more extensive all-arms training area would quickly result in the establishment of the Army Battle School at Lohatla in the Northern Cape. The first tent was erected on 18 January 1978, on the site selected for the headquarters complex. This day marks the official birthday.

Various Training Wings were established. An Artillery Training Wing was commanded by Commandant F.M. (Felix) Hurter, and in its early days at that time covered both field, Anti-Aircraft and, for a short while, Engineer training; but on 3 July it was split into two branches to accommodate the diversity in training. The commander of the newly established Anti-Aircraft Branch was Lieutenant Colonel A.W.R. Visser, with WO1 van der Westhuizen as the Branch Sergeant Major.

It was a mammoth task to prepare the Battle School for its task but the first training exercises began in 1978 with at least one Artillery unit having undergone training during the early months. Shortages of equipment bedeviled its training. 81 Armoured Brigade was the first formation to taste the rigours of the Battle School range. Exercise Maramanie 1 took place in October the same year with Brigadier F.E.C. van den Berg as Brigade Commander. With the Armour Brigade was a Battery of 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, commanded by Major Hulme Moolman. He had as BSM WO 2 Jannie Smith and one of the TSM's was WO2 D.W. Steyn.

Anti-Aircraft training at the Battle School was conducted initially by the Citizen Force Training Wing of Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, then commanded by Commandant J. Swart. His second-in-command was Major Henri van der Hoven and his BSM was WO1 'Lofty' Simpson, with WO2 J. Bond as BQSM (T) and WO2 W. Gibbons holding the post of BQSM. Instructors in the training wing were: WO2 van der Poll, WO2 Truter, Signal WO WO2 Jansen and Sergeants D.T.W. Lennie and J. Kraft. Transport was the responsibility of BQSM (T) WO2 J. Bond and Lance Bombardiers E.R. Brits and D.R. Bromfield. Thirty gunners were assigned to this team. They loaded the three trains with the required logistic equipment and prime mission equipment (PME) to sustain a full 20 mm Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the field. It included:

PME 56 x 20 mm QF Anti-Aircraft Guns; Mercedes Benz 911 gun tractors; LPD 20 Radars; Radios; Bedford trucks GS; Water Bunkers ; Water Trailers; Logistic and PC Bedford's; Willy's Jeeps; R1 Rifles; Pistols; Heavy Barrel Machine guns; Gas Bottles; Sleeping bags; Uniforms (in the event of necessary exchange); 250 Man Cookers; Tents complete; Beds; 6 ft cupboards and Bucket Showers for the Officers and Training Team); 15 kVA generators for electrical supply and pantry trucks.

Three Trains and one road convoy transported the equipment to and from Lohatla.

Two 35 mm Anti-Aircraft guns (No. 165 and 166) were also taken to the Battle School for the first live fire demonstration for members of Parliament. Both guns unfortunately suffered stoppages.

Training of the Armoured Brigade was not without incident. Personnel on the range on 25 October were struck by a severe hail storm that caused some damage. One young man remembered Exercise Maramnie 1 because he celebrated his 22nd birthday on 26 October. He had been deployed and had missed two pay days at Young's Field – pay in those days was in the form of cash - and if it was not for the R20 that his mother had included with her letter received on 25 October his birthday on 26 October would have been a very dry celebration.



Figure 48: LPD 20 Search radar

Exercise Kwiksilver

Prior to the exercise at the Army Battle School involving 81 Amoured Brigade, 72 Motorised Brigade was exercised at Schmidtsdrift, near Kimberley. Exercise Kwiksilver was the largest to have taken place in South Africa at that time and much of the equipment used came from Pretoria. It was said, that with the regulation gaps between vehicles, the last one left Pretoria as the first arrived at Potchefstroom en route to Kimberley. Many vehicles were not in good condition. One driver of Transvaal Horse Artillery felt his vehicle give a lurch and then witnessed a complete wheel rolling down the road ahead of him. It was only the weight of the 140 mm gun he was towing that kept his vehicle from falling to the right.

The Anti-Aircraft Training Wing element consisted of the same members that later participated in Exercise Maramani 1 that year. The same equipment was transported by rail and road to Kimberly. All equipment was off-loaded and loaded at Beaconsfield station. It was the first exercise that Mercedes

Benz 911 gun tractors were in use. On delivery by rail they had only registered the kilometers between Wetton Station to Young's Field and back to Wetton for unloading at Beaconsfield. Fifty-six 20 mm guns were allotted to Regiment Oos Transvaal which supplied three complete Batteries of three Troops per Battery of six guns per Troop during Kwiksilver and one Support Battery. Two guns were held in reserve. Major Stoffel Prinsloo led the unit – the unit commander being unavailable at the time – and Major J. Hersselman acted as second-in-command. WO2 C. du Plessis was RSM.

Regiment Oos Transvaal experienced a number of unusual incidents during the exercise. The most notable and remembered was 'the eye'.

Major Jurg Nel a Battery Commander 'Q' Battery, Regiment Oos Transvaal arrived late for an Order Group one evening. Leaving his vehicle with his driver he ran through a short patch of bush in his haste to get there. He ran, however, into a 'hak and steek' thorn tree and, in disentangling himself, a thorn removed his left eye from its socket. He arrived at the meeting with his eye resting on his cheek. The Brigade Commander was not impressed with the disturbance the Major caused. After orders had been given the Regimental doctor returned the eye to its socket, without anaesthetic. He felt the Major's consumption of brandy was adequate comfort. Major Nel was later awarded a certificate by Major van der Hoven to commemorate the event and it is today displayed in the Apex Museum. The Major said afterwards he could not understand why the Brigade Commander was disgruntled and had asked - because of his late arrival - if he was seeking attention in disrupting his order group, while *he* the apparent offender, was covered in blood and very concerned about his eye then resting on his cheek.

The radiator stabilising bars on one Mercedes broke and were pushed into the radiator. While trying to repair the damage Sergeant D Muller's index finger was pushed into the radiator. After some difficulty he managed to extract his finger, only to find he had lost all movement in the affected digit. He would, forever, have a pointed finger when holding a whiskey glass!

Apart from the fact that the largest bar facilities yet seen in the field were provided at Exercise Kwiksilver, there were two other minor incidents worth a mention. Both concerned the instructional staff.

Staff Sergeant Prins of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment had for an unknown reason emptied the cordite of a thunder flash into his shirt pocket during a training session. At a break he lit a cigarette and a spark fell into his pocket - the cordite caught fire and he received serious burns to his face and chest. And in the second - unusual and strange accident - Commandant 'Blackie' Swart received a serious burn wound on his head when hit during an order group by a tin of condensed milk! The tin had been cooking on top of a gas lamp and it reached a stage where it virtually exploded. Hot condensed milk flew through the air and landed on his head creating forever – a bald spot.

With a realisation of changes to come, black soldiers became part of the Permanent Force on 1 January 1974 with the establishment of a Training Centre at Baviaanspoort. It moved to Lenz in December 1975 and was renamed 21 Battalion. This designation was chosen as its date of establishment fell on the 21st Birthday of the Infantry Corps. It began operational duty in March 1978. Men were eligible to attend all courses at Corps Schools and could be promoted up to commissioned rank if found suitable. The first black officers attended Exercise Kwiksilver at Schmidtsdrift in 1978.²

National Service received a boost when several thousand immigrants living in the country as permanent residents on permits issued before 19 April 1978, became South African citizens by naturalisation on 11 October in terms of new legislation. They became obliged to register for National Service.³

The School was responsible for training of selected national servicemen in order to produce leader

² *Defence Review* 1979, p. 299.

³ *Paratus*, August 198, p. 50.

group personnel – Subalterns and NCOs - from the ranks of national servicemen who reported for training; the Regiment undertook all other training. These were the normal activities of the Anti-Aircraft Corps at the Young's Field base. But one course was unusual. It was arranged to qualify Permanent Force personnel on the Ordnance QF 20 mm Anti-Aircraft gun and was held over the period from 2 to 20 September 1985. There was on the face of it, nothing unusual - except the participants. The eleven who attended each received a pass distinction; the course average was 91.89 per cent. What was more remarkable they were not Anti-Aircraft gunners – they were all members of 5 Reconnaissance Regiment. Perhaps it was the fact that they had been trained to handle so many different weapons that handling the 20 mm gun was easy to them. Their reactions were excellent and at a live shell shoot conducted on 17 and 18 September the accuracy of the eleven was extremely good.⁴

At the end of November the Junior Leader Passing-Out parade was held at Young's Field. The salute given by the newly commissioned 2nd Lieutenants and newly promoted NCOs was taken by Brigadier W. Kritzinger, Director Training. He presented prizes, and with him at the prize-bedecked table near the podium was the Chairman of The Gunners' Association, Western Province Branch, a senior serving Citizen Force Officer. His task was to hand to the Brigadier the two prizes to be presented by the Association for the best Junior Officer and the best NCO on their course. The prizes consisted of a sword and a pace stick respectively. Prizes had been awarded annually since 1979 when the idea of an award had been the brainchild of the then chairman of the Association.

Cross border operations

Following South Africa's withdrawal from Angola, Swapo established itself in the south of the country and began a campaign against South West Africa and the SADF. To safeguard the country, its inhabitants and the water scheme, numerous cross-border actions were taken against SWAPO. In May 1978 two large bases were attacked and destroyed. Follow-up operations included Sceptic in 1980 and Protea in the following year. Operation Protea was by far the largest at that time. In the two months of the operation SWAPO's logistics was destroyed and large quantities of sophisticated equipment was seized or destroyed. Overwhelming proof of direct Russian involvement was found. Four Russians – including two Colonels – were killed and a Russian Warrant Officer was captured. Truckloads of documents were removed and about 4 000 tons of weapons, worth about R200 million – enough to equip a small Army - were brought back. Included were some of the latest Yugoslavian 20 mm triple-barrelled Anti-Aircraft guns.⁵

Anti-Aircraft Parachute Gunners

Among the many weapons captured were SAM 7 shoulder-launched missiles and these, it was realised, were the the perfect weapon for the Anti-Aircraft parachute gunners. Thoughts in this direction had first materialised in the late 1970s/early 1980s when it was realised the aircraft flown by the opposition were more modern than those of the SA Air Force. Their pilots also appeared reasonably well trained. It was Soviet doctrine that their aircraft always flew within their own radar coverage. The MPLA were gradually extending radar cover southwards and own airborne forces had to be dropped behind the MPLA front line. They had to be given air defence cover. The idea at that time therefore was to deploy the Anti-Aircraft gunners at short notice, wherever required and this required a change in doctrine

The task of conversion was given to 103 Battery, then commanded by Major Joh Del Monte. With him were Lieutenant Daan Morkel as second-in-command and Warrant Officer Frans Huysamen as BSM. Proposed equipment included a prototype of a smaller and amphibious version of the ubiquitous jeep with a mounted .50 Browning machine gun and also a shoulder launched missile. The 'jeep', which later evolved into the 'Jakkals' was to be dropped from an aircraft while the shoulder launched missile would be flown in with the troops. In the planning stages it was decided that only part of the Battery would be trained in the air support role with the other half in the normal fighting role.

⁴ SANDF Archives, C Army, DLA Gp 47, Box 34.

⁵ *Paratus*, October 1981, pp. 69 to 71.

Major Del Monte attended a course to identify what problems would be experienced in dropping vehicles safely, but more especially the delivery of the SAM-7. This piece of equipment had a solid rocket motor and the fear of using these captured weapons was that if they had not been handled properly by their previous owners the motor could have been subject to cracks. This would have resulted in different pieces of the motor burning at different tempos and pressures with explosive results and obvious danger to the user.

In 1980 there was a concerted attempt to send officers and NCOs on a parachute course, to enable them to help train troops. It was not successful; only Sergeant M. Marais passed the course. Another attempt was made in 1981 and on this occasion one officer and a handful of gunners were successful. Major Del Monte was transferred to the Anti-Aircraft Directorate in 1980 where he and Captain Willem Klopper were Project Officers under the Director, Colonel Jan Pieterse. By this time Captain Daan Morkel commanded 103 Battery with Captain Carl Lindsay as second-in-command. Warrant Officer remained BSM until later replaced by Sergeant Major Human.

103 Battery provided 61 Mechanised Battalion with Anti-Aircraft cover in 1981, but the only weapons available for the Troop were the 20 mm towed Oerlikons. For various reasons this was not a success and it was soon decided to provide improved mobility by mounting the guns on vehicles. The first prototype mobile QF 20 mm was mounted on a Mercedes Benz Unimog. The gun exceeded its axle weight and did not prove suitable for deployment. Major Del Monte and Staff Sergeant Koos Erasmus collected a vehicle and gun at the CSIR, Pretoria and as it was a secret project drove it to Young's Field over one night. It was apparently not a pleasant trip as the vehicle was unbalanced and drifted all over the road. The 20 mm guns were ultimately placed on *Moffels* – modified flat bed Buffels. This process was almost a nightmare. Sandbags, for protection against mines had first to be placed on the vehicle floor and each gun, less its undercarriage, was mounted on top of the bags. They were then tied down with heavy wire – commonly called *bloudraad* – so that the gun remained firmly in place and could not fall off. One problem that had to be overcome was the fact that if the barrel traversed it had the potential of hitting the driver's head. This challenge was alleviated by a makeshift metal cage over the driver's compartment that prevented the barrel of the gun from traversing below the driver's cab. The *Ystervark* was later specially built for carrying the gun.

Captain C. Lindsay commanded the Troop of twelve guns and he had Sergeant M. Marais to assist him. Two *Moffels* – which provided no protection for the gun detachments – and one mine resistant *Buffel* which carried the detachments of the guns, worked as individual groups. The groups were spread through 61 Mechanised's convoy.

Another attempt was made in 1982 to qualify gunners in the parabat role and after intense training 76 men were identified and selected to attend a course at 1 Parachute Regiment. Captain Morkel and twelve gunners passed the course. They afterwards received training by another entity on the SAM 7's. It was the first fully trained, operational team of 103 Battery that could be presented. There was talk that this group would be attached to 44 Parachute Brigade but by 1983 no move in this direction had taken place. Nor by this time had any specialised vehicles been provided to enable the Anti-Aircraft gunners to act in their role as parachute gunners.⁶

A New Commander

Commandant Reg Deyzel had been acting as commanding officer from October 1977. He was promoted to Colonel on 1 February 1979 and appointed Officer Commanding Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and, at the same time appointed to the acting post of Director, SA Artillery (Anti-Aircraft). Prior to this appointment he had commanded 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Originally a National Serviceman – he had been called up in January 1961 – he had elected to join the Permanent Force, becoming a student at the Military Academy for two years from January 1962. He served thereafter as an officer instructor at Young's Field and later at the SA Army College.

⁶ From an article written by Daan Morkel



Figure 49: The highly regarded 35 mm Oerlikon has been the primary Anti-Aircraft gun for some while. This photograph of gun practice at Strandfontein was taken by Lieutenant Dave Bossenger in July 1970. WO11 'Tienie' Schickerling is holding the safety flag at the rear and the No. One is Bombardier John Laubscher.

Right of Civic Entry

Six units assembled on the Grand Parade, Cape Town on 19 November 1980 to receive the Right of Civic Entry into the City of Cape Town. With Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment were Cape Garrison Artillery, 1 SA Cape Corps Battalion, 35 and 27 Squadrons, SAAF, and the Lion's Head Commando. The first phase of the ceremony took place at a special meeting of the City Council in the Great Hall of the old City Hall where a resolution conferring freedom of entry was formally proposed and unanimously approved. Many dignitaries attended the meeting after which the mayor, Alderman Louis Kreiner, the deputy mayor and the town clerk led guests across Darling Street to the Grand Parade. The Mayoral party inspected the troops on parade and the returned to the dias where the mayor presented each commanding officer with a casket, each containing an illuminated scroll officially conferring on the unit the right to march through the city with bayonets fixed and drums beating. Colonel Deyzel received the casket on behalf of Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The units immediately exercised their newly conferred Freedom of Entry by marching through the streets, passing in review before the Mayor and all the dignitaries who stood behind him on the City Hall portico. The 'eyes right' by 1 200 Gunners, infantrymen and airmen was the climax of a ceremony that had taken place only twice before in the long history of the city, once known as de Kaapse Vlek – the Cape village. Two flights of aircraft – three Shackletons of 35 Squadron and eleven Albatrosses of 27 Squadron – roared overhead as the units passed the Mayor. The bands of the Cape Corps, the SA Air Force and 10 Anti-Aircraft Bands were also on the parade.

During his term of office Colonel Deyzel saw the transfer of his RSM, WO1 E.A. Baker to Western Province Command, where he took over as Command Sergeant Major from WO 1 Bill Nell. The new RSM AT Young's Field was WO1 J.J. Schickerling. The last ceremonial parade WO1 Baker was to supervise was the military involvement of the funeral of the West German Ambassador. The Guard provided by 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment slow marched from the Lutheran Church, Strand Street to the Castle, followed by a Cape Field Artillery gun carriage, while the SA Navy fired a salute of nineteen guns from Lion Battery, Signal Hill. Two months later the the Young's Field Gunners supplied the official pall bearers for the military funerals of Rifleman F. Loubser at Paarl and Rifleman P. Warrener at Stellenbosch. Both had died in a skirmish with SWAPO in the operational area. These funerals was performed by Lt B. Louw and WO1 Laubscher.

Regimental Colour

The second parade took place only fifteen days after the first when the State President, Mr. Marais Viljoen, presented 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment with a Regimental Colour in the presence of General C.L. Viljoen, Chief of the SADF; Lieutenant General J.J. Geldenhuys, Chief of the Army, and Brigadier S.J. van der Spuy, Officer Commanding Western Province Command. The presentation was made on what was the only grass parade ground in the Defence Force. It was a beautiful day as only the Cape can provide, with only a hint of a south-easterly wind. Several former commanding officers, including Major General G. Dunbar Moodie, Brigadier H. Roux and Brigadier Norman Trott attended the presentation. In a message to the unit the Chief of the Army said it was always a pleasure to see a unit reach a new milestone in its history and he emphasised that the presentation of a Colour was an important stage in building traditions and morale. 'It instills pride', he said, 'it gives you something to fight for, it binds you with dedication and loyalty to your unit, and is another reminder of the immense task entrusted to the Army'. He hoped, he said further, that the award of a Colour would assist in projecting an even greater image of the SADF in the Western Cape and elsewhere, a task at which he thought Anti-Aircraft gunners were already experts. 101 Battery was not present on the parade; it was already serving with distinction on the border.

The decision to have a Regimental Colour had been made seven years earlier by Colonel Trott. Despite the fact that it was not traditional for a Gunner Regiment to have a Colour in the form of a flag or banner, Colonel Deyzel, anxious to promote esprit de corps, had helped to see this idea realised. The Colour, valued at R2 000 in 1981, was designed by Mrs. Hannalie Roux and made by the nuns of the Dominican School for the Deaf in Witteboom, Cape. The great earthquake of 1969 took place when Reg Deyzel was serving as second-in-command to Captain P.O. du Preez; and during his term of office as both acting and commanding officer border duty in the Infantry role feature took place; as well as mounting of 40 mm and 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns on water towers in a measure to counter mortar attacks. A number of activities at Young's Field were instituted by Reg Deyzel: Monthly retreat ceremonies at which prominent persons were invited to officiate; getting the Skylift system off the ground and introducing cheaper 'home-made' versions; greater participation in parades, ceremony and meetings of The Gunners' Association.

It was Colonel Deyzel's last parade at Young's Field. He was transferred to Eastern Province Command as SSO Operations at the end of the year. His appointment as Acting Director had ended earlier with the appointment of Commandant J.C. Pieterse from 1 January 1980 with the temporary rank of Colonel. The new incumbent of this post had previously served as acting director from November 1974 to January 1976. He had in fact resigned from the Permanent Force in 1969 but had rejoined almost immediately. It was the first direct appointment as Director since the appointment of Brigadier Bekker in 1973.

Change of Command

Reg Deyzel was replaced from 1 January 1981 by Colonel L.P. (Louis) Coetzee who had also received a B Mil degree from the Military Academy, Saldanha. He had originally undergone basic training at the Air Force Gymnasium and had also served in both 4 and 14 Field Regiments at Potchefstroom and Bethlehem, before a transfer to the Anti-Aircraft branch. Before his appointment as Commanding Officer, Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, he had spent four years as Instructor and Chief Instructor, Staff Duties at the SA Army College, Voortrekkerhoogte (now Thaba Tshwane)

Colonel Coetzee had a good team. His senior officers were Commandant J.J. du P. Lourens of Anti-Aircraft School, Commandant J.S. Ormond – 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and Commandant A.F. Reiner of the Support Wing which supplied administrative and logistical services. The Colonel was ably supported until his transfer in January 1982 by his RSM, WO1 M.J. Schickerling.

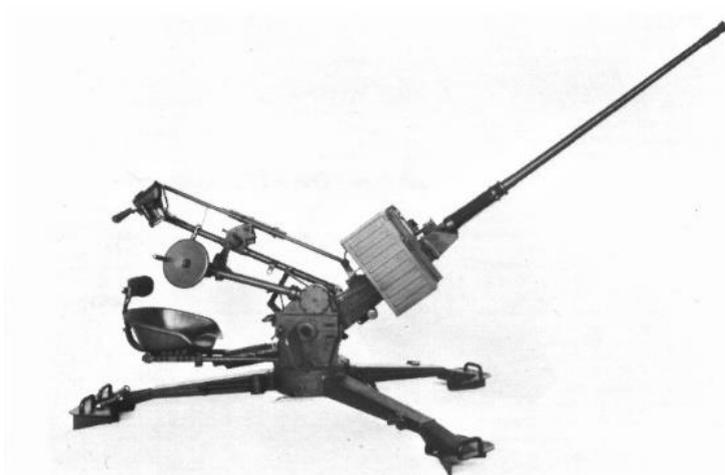


Figure 50: The 20 mm GAI-C01 Anti-Aircraft Gun

Sergeants' Mess

The Mess used by Warrant Officers and senior NCOs was in past years generally referred to by most units as the Sergeants' Mess, or the NCOs Mess. Anti-Aircraft Gunners had not for many years had a Mess they could call their own; not since the move from Ottery in 1946. They had had to make use of the Cape Command Training Depot Mess. In 1959, however, Warrant Officers and senior NCOs were given the use of the the former Officers' Mess, but in the early 1970s the kitchen equipment was finally declared unserviceable. The building was closed down.

From 1974 members of the former Mess had their meals in the National Servicemen's Club and the former SA Marines old building was used as a lounge and bar. The former Pupils Pilots Mess was earmarked for rebuilding and modernisation and it was finally completed and officially opened on 2 October 1981 by Major General I.S. Guilford, SM, first commanding officer of the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre after the 1939-1945 war.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

NEW CHALLENGES

Counter-insurgency

National servicemen posted to Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, underwent not only training in Anti-Aircraft gunnery but also in counter insurgency (COIN) Infantry training to prepare them for possible use as Infantry. Commandant Reg Deyzel motivated a request to Army Headquarters to undertake such duty but was refused. Chief of the Army agreed, however, provided an independent evaluation proved that the gunners were capable of such a task they would be used. Major Dave Bossenger and his Battery accepted the challenge and a great deal of hard work went into preparation for evaluation.

The January 1978 intake had been posted to 102 Battery and personnel had undergone normal basic training and air defence training in the various Anti-Aircraft musterings before switching to training in the COIN role. Platoon weapons, section leading, sub-unit battle handling and operational tasks were taught by 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. According to Army Headquarters the evaluation achieved by the Battery was the second highest of all national service sub-units in 1978. They were beaten to first place by 1 Parachute Battalion. With COIN training complete the Battery was divided into an enlarged modular Company with six instead of five rifle Platoons as well as its full headquarters element and 81 mm mortar, MMG and assault Engineer elements. Their planned border deployment at the end of 1978 was cancelled with much dissatisfaction voiced by members of the Battery who walked off the base to draw attention to their complaints. A Board of Enquiry was quickly assembled. Both the Board and Lieutenant General C.L. Viljoen, Chief of the Army – the latter in a personal visit to Commandant Deyzel - exonerated the acting commanding officer from blame. The Battery was later re-scheduled for the border when six individual Platoons underwent duty in Sectors 10, 20 and 30. Included among them was 'Grootvoet', a gunner who wore size 14 boots.

There was an modular Company consisting of 5 Platoons/Troops of Anti-Aircraft soldiers deployed on the border at Rundu in 1978. Herman du Plessis was the Battery Commander. Lt Brian Carpenter was one of the Troop Commanders. Sgt B. Louw was the transport NCO. The Battery Sergeant Major and Sergeant quarter master was ousted back to South Africa. Sgt B. Louw received his "Pro Merito" medal for acting in the posts of Battery Sergeant Major, Sergeant quarter master and transport NCO during this deployment. They were later relieved by Citizen force members.

Delta Battery

After three months they returned to Young's Field and following a short break departed as a complete sub-unit, for deployment at the beginning of July 1979. The sub-unit was originally destined to be Delta Company of 52 Battalion, but Lieutenant General Constand Viljoen, then Chief of the Army, informed Colonel Reg Deyzel, Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, it was his wish that the Battery retained its Artillery nomenclature. Unfortunately no one saw fit to inform the Battalion Commander, Commandant Chris (Swart Hand) Serfontein. This resulted in an interesting exchange of signals between the Battalion and the Battery Commander, with the former having finally to agree to the Gunner title of Delta Battery. Five Platoons (known as Troops) were stationed at Oshikati as the town's protection element while one Troop was detached to the Battalion Headquarters at Ogongo for operations under the Battalion Commander. One of the Platoons at Oshikati was on permanent standby as the Battalion operational reserve.

In addition to normal protection duties the first three months was spent in transforming their base, and in this respect the BSM, WO1 D.J.V. Bester, performed sterling work in converting a rundown facility into a base with hot and cold running water, showers and a wood-panelled mess hall for the

National Servicemen. He also re-organised the trenches and bunkers to make them safe against anything short of a direct Artillery bombardment. He was later replaced by WO 1 'Kooos' Truter. It was during the base reconstruction phase that the decision was made to protect some of the airfields and bases with 20 mm and 40 mm AA guns mounted atop towers. Test towers were erected at Oshikati and Air Force Base Ondangwa and the guns were mounted with help from the SA Air Force. They were successfully test-fired both in the day and at night. The Battery was initially commanded by Major Dave Bossenger and from September 1979 by Captain John Del Monte. It operated in the COIN role from July until December 1979 when it was replaced by a Battery from 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

Operations

Proposals for a demilitarised zone along the Angola/South West African border were finalised in March 1980 but a deadlock occurred after South Africa's insistence that SWAPO withdraw to north of the zone.

Early in 1981, 102 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment provided invaluable help to the townsfolk of Laingsburg when it was badly hurt by enormous floods. Extremely heavy rain in this Karoo area sent brown torrents of watery death sweeping down the normally understated river which ran through the town, carrying a number of people away with it. Help was provided by putting up tents for emergency shelter, providing drinking water and many other tasks.

Continued incursions by SWAPO terrorists led to the launch of Operation Sceptic in June 1981 – a lightning attack on a known base. The Young's Field gunners provided Anti-Aircraft support. Cross-border operations continued and developed into an extended operation as more and more caches of arms and ammunition were discovered. The sharp increase in skirmishes with PLAN led to Operations Carnation and Protea in July and August, the last named being the biggest mechanised operation ever undertaken by the SA Army. During these operations South African forces clashed for the first time with mechanised elements of SWAPO; and it also saw the first clashes with Angolan forces (FAPLA). Several Russian officers were killed and a Russian Warrant Officer was captured. Hundreds of PLAN and SWAPO casualties resulted and, during Protea, approximately four thousand tons of equipment, including several tanks and armoured cars and about 200 vehicles were captured.

The haul included a large quantity of Soviet Bloc Anti-Aircraft guns – Russian ZU-23-1 23 mm double barrel – a widely used and popular gun in their armoury; Yugoslavian 20 mm M55 A2 triple barrelled gun which had been designed by the famous Spanish arms manufacturer, Hispano Suiza in the early 1950's, and the 14.5 mm ZPU1 single and double barrel guns. The latter was also a Russian manufactured weapon, light and mobile, virtually stoppage-free and very easy to hide.

Enough Anti-Aircraft guns had been captured to equip three fully operational Batteries. It was ironic that during August while 101 Battery was providing Anti-Aircraft protection for the runway at Ondangwa and while their 20 mm guns were also deployed at Pereira da Eca (Ongiva), 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment gave a public demonstration of the captured Soviet Bloc weapons. An expert on foreign weapons, Staff Sergeant Johan Kraft, later noted that '... one of the drawbacks on the captured weapons '...was the poor quality of the sights.' He developed an improved gunsight for the 14.5 mm gun. The captured weapons were fully evaluated by 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and they entered service with the SADF; a formal course being held in 1982, complete with manuals written by the School. Their acquisition saved the taxpayer millions of Rand. Eventually Denel PMP also developed South African ammunition for the 23mm. Col B. Louw noted the interesting findings whilst testing the development of the 23mm ammunition and its effectiveness versus that of the 35mm ammunition. The 35mm ammunition was very sensitive and exploded directly with impact whilst the 23mm foreign ammunition was less sensitive and only exploded after it had penetrated through the second skin of aircraft.



Figure 51: 23mm ZSU-23-2 gun

During the same year an advanced and successful course on the technical aspects of the 35 mm Oerlikon was presented by the manufacturer's representatives.

Operation Daisy – resulting from information gathered two months before - followed in November. Contact was not made with FAPLA ground forces but MiG-21 fighters challenged the SA Air Force during which one was shot down.

Honours and Colours

By 1980 the Anti-Aircraft gunners – a relatively small Corps compared to others - had won a number of honours. The unit had already received the Freedom of Entry into the town of Wolseley in 1975. Although a combined unit, each, in fact, had its own shoulder badge and at a parade held at Young's Field on 4 December 1980, the State President, Mr. Marais Viljoen, presented 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment with a Regimental Colour. Depicted on the light blue background (the field) of the Colour was the unit shoulder badge - the silver tree leaf within a shield and the motto 'Alta Pete' surrounded by an open wreath of blossoms of the silver tree.¹ The Colour was rewarded on 24 November 1980 but received on parade on 4 December 1980.

Earthquake

A disastrous earthquake hit the Western Cape on 29 September 1969. It was centred near the town of Tulbagh where a great deal of damage was caused, particularly to the old, picturesque houses which made the town so attractive and gave it its character. Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment rendered a great deal of assistance, helping to clear the rubble and assisting inhabitants to resume a normal life. Long after this assistance had been given, on 21 October 1983, Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment* received the Freedom of Entry into Tulbagh. The Regiment's Colour party marched proudly past the saluting base that day, followed by four Samil tractors towing 35 mm Anti-Aircraft guns. The Mayor, Councillor O.H. Jones took the salute and standing on the podium with him were Brigadier S.J. van der Spuy, Officer Commanding Western Province Command, and Colonel L.P. Coetzee, who commanded the combined Anti-Aircraft unit.

- The illuminated scroll was inscribed with the name of "Anti-Aircraft Defence School"

The combined unit had used the Command training area near Touws River for field training and members of the unit had become frequent visitors to the town and obviously had had a welcome impact on its revenue. As a result the town council was only too pleased to honour Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment with the Freedom of Touws River. A special parade was held on 10 October 1987 and there was excitement in the town that day. The Minister of Transport, the Hon. Mr. Myburgh Streicher was guest of honour but the talking point in this normally quiet Karoo town was the *Ystervark*, a special mine-protected variant of the Samil 20, carrying a 20 mm Anti-Aircraft gun, officially unveiled to the public that day. The *Ystervark* had first been used in training with the 1985 Junior Leaders course at Tooth Rock.

A National Colour was presented to Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment by the State

¹ *South African Military Colours*, Part III, p. 785.

President, Mr. P.W. Botha, at a parade in front of the City Hall, Darling Street, Cape Town, on 1 July 1989. And, later in the year, the combined unit was presented with the Caltex Floating Trophy for Environmental Conservation by the Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr. Wynand Breytenbach.²

Skylift

A Skylift Section (Aerial Target) was established at the Army Battle School to accommodate the various exercises and courses held there. When first asked to provide a demonstration of their target aircraft Skylift team member Gunner Mark Burgess decided something different had to be demonstrated. The team put their heads together and produced a model parachutist, complete with main and emergency parachutes. The demonstration went ahead and much to the astonishment of the spectators, the parachutist was released by the Delta Target and gently floated down to earth before them. When practical exercises on a Brigade scale were conducted the Anti-Aircraft Training Branch was entrusted with air defence training and safety.

The Skylift Section had come into being at Young's Field when two model aircraft enthusiasts had suggested model aircraft as targets to replace Dazzle Dak. The team was in the news when the *Natal Witness* reported on the enthusiastic response from spectators when the Skylift's 250 mph Delta winged target was displayed at the Maritzburg Model Aircraft Circus in late July 1982.

Gunners David Trump, Rudi Venter, Gary Schneider and Martin Brandon-Kirby composed the Skylift team in 1982. They in turn were a section of the Regimental Training Wing, known as the 'Target Aircraft Section'. They produced two types of model aircraft – the 'Target Stick' made from corrugated cardboard and expanded polystyrene foam, and a more sophisticated 'Target Delta', made of fibreglass and polystyrene. Both were radio controlled. The Target Stick, powered by a 10 cc engine, had a relatively low speed and was not too stable but the Target Delta had a speed in excess of 200 km/h. It had a fuel capacity of one litre which enabled it to remain airborne for about 20 minutes. Approximately 1.3 metres in length with a wingspan of 1.7 metres, it could still fly with as many as five bullet holes in it.

When Skylift was first formed about eight years previously, ordinary balsa models were made and used as targets; but hours were spent in trying to repair the model aircraft – or what was left of them. Out of these problems, came the thought of using solid polystyrene wings on a body of corrugated cardboard and wood. The section had not looked back since then. The team was featured on the January 1985 cover of *Paratus*, the Defence Force monthly magazine. It covered in its pages the story of the Skylift team and its aircraft.

The ending of National Service – and the consequent loss of expertise and enthusiasm, combined with the increased technology available to Air Defence led - at the time the 35 mm Mk V guns were upgraded - to LOCAT, a new aerial target system. It is described in a later page.

Red Cross POW Party

The Young's Field Gunners – well used to being called upon to provide ceremonial support on all types of occasions and to act as hosts for various functions and organisations – for the first time ever played host to a former Prisoner-of-war get together. It was hosted by the Red Cross, the organisation that kept many POWs alive and well with the monthly food parcels sent to prison camps. It was the basis of an idea that drew officers and men of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment together in the years afterwards. A Retreat Ceremony was held following the gathering and the salute was taken by that distinguished former POW, Sir de Villiers Graaff, a former machine-gunner of Die Middelandse Regiment, who had been captured at Tobruk. (Many years after the war the Regiment was re-named Regiment Groot Karoo)

² *Paratus*, February 1991, p. 11

Gunners' Association Trophy

The Gunners' Association Trophy was the brainchild of retired Brigadier Paul Roos, then chairman of The Gunners' Association, Western Province Branch. Brigadier Roos had previously arranged for a scale model – in full detail – of a 5.5-inch (140 mm) medium gun – later coded GV2 – to be made and presented to the School of Artillery, Potchefstroom. He felt strongly, and his committee agreed with him, that a similar presentation be made to the Anti-Aircraft gunners for a Citizen Force inter-unit competition. With Director, Anti-Aircraft readily agreeing, rules for an annual competition were quickly produced. A detailed model of a 40 mm Bofors L60 was made at the request of Brigadier H. Roos by a Warrant Officer of the reconnaissance Regiment at Donkergat. When completed it was presented to Colonel Pieterse, Director Anti-Aircraft. The first competition, in 1981, was won by Regiment Overvaal. The story is more fully covered in an annexure to this book.

Facilities for National Servicemen

It had been recognised as far back as 1973 that a multi-purpose recreation centre to cater for the off-duty hours of National Servicemen was a necessity, and to enable them to entertain their families and friends over week-ends. But it was not until 1978 that Colonel Reg Deyzel initiated steps to fund such a project. Various fund-raising projects, including an ox-braai and a film première took place and R13 000 was raised. But due to the long delay in obtaining authority for the project and the tremendous rise in building costs, the cost of the proposed new building in 1982 was R200,000.

By then command of the combined unit had passed to Colonel Louis Coetzee.

Thoughts were given to the conversion of one of the hangars on the Base but the high cost involved excluded Government involvement. A decision was made to use the Pom-Pom Hall, then occupied by 103 Battery headquarters, and convert it for use as a recreational space, with a dry canteen, bar, TV area and snooker room. An outdoor braai area for use by troops and their families over week-ends was included in the plans drawn up by Andre Penz – an architect serving with Regiment Overvaal. Much of the cost of the project was raised at a golf day held under the patronage of General C.A. (Pop) Fraser, SSA, SM, the retired head of Combined Operations, SADF and former Consul General to Tehran. Various programme items were included for leading businessmen and industrialists were among the guests who sponsored the project. They and senior SADF representatives met in the hangar that was to be converted and given the opportunity of meeting senior Defence Force representatives under informal conditions but of also examining a scale model of the proposed project. After an address of welcome by Colonel Coetzee they were taken to Swartklip to witness a demonstration and shoot with both SADF and captured Anti-Aircraft equipment. The shoot formed part of the advanced Anti-Aircraft phase of the 1981 intake. The weather was not pleasant; a wind of near gale force swept Swartklip but the Anti-Aircraft gunners demonstrated their ability by twice hitting a drogue towed by Dazzle Dak. Guests thereafter attended a magnificent luncheon in the new Warrant Officers' and NCO'S Club before departure to the Royal Cape Golf Club.

The year ended well for Anti-Aircraft gunners. A local timber firm announced that instead of presenting customers with a Christmas gift they would donate the same amount to the National Service Battery then spending the 1982 Festive Season in the operational area. The gesture was gratefully acknowledged by Colonel Coetzee. The announcement was made shortly after Western Province Command had for the second year running won the SA National Army Games, with Artillery Air Defence School winning the Prestige Competition and the tug-of-war; and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment winning the potted sports section of the games. The games had been introduced by Lieutenant General Geldenhuys in 1981 and won by Western Province Command the honours won by Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. 1983 saw the same results.

The Three Wings

1983 proved to be a busy year. It began with the unit still divided into three Wings – the Artillery Air Defence School itself commanded by Commandant J.J. du P. Lourens; 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment as the Regimental Training Wing under Commandant J.A. Ormond, and the Support Wing (Called HQ Unit) under Commandant A.F. Reiner. Each Wing had a wing Sergeant Major – WO1 J.H.A. Truter, WO1 M.J.M. Janse van Nieuwenhuizen and WO1 D.R. van der Merwe respectively. The RSM was WO1 C.J.

van der Westhuizen. He had been a soldier since March 1954, when he had joined the SA Corps of Marines and had been an instructor on Anti-Aircraft equipment during much of his career, until his appointment as RSM in January 1982.

Under these internal arrangements the Artillery Air Defence School retained its previous responsibilities – those of Junior Leader training, Permanent Force and Citizen Force courses, and Anti-Aircraft doctrine, research and development. Junior Leaders had just returned to Young's Field from the operational area after completing a phase of their training there. The Regimental Training Wing which consisted of 101, 102 and 103 Batteries was, as before, responsible for the training of national servicemen from recruit to operational standard. 101 and 102 Batteries trained on 35 mm equipment and 103 Battery on 20 mm guns. The standard of training was high. In September 1983 one Battery shot down every target presented to it. Even the 20 mm Battery shot down six targets on one exercise, completely destroying three of them.

In mid-February an advanced gunnery demonstration was given at Swartklip on the False Bay coast for senior SADF officers and representatives of Armscor. Both South African and captured foreign weapons were demonstrated and it gave the Skylift team the opportunity of proving the worth of their model aircraft. It is suspected the demonstration also gave the opportunity of showing that the Corps was in the market for new equipment. There was a huge shift in world military circles towards missiles. South Africa had no choice but to go with the guns it had because of the Arms Embargo. But the effect of Anti-Aircraft guns during the recent Falklands War vindicated the stance of the South African Anti-Aircraft organisation. The Argentinian gunners had forced many NATO chiefs to reconsider the Anti-Aircraft gun and it had reappeared in a few armies as a complimentary weapon to that of missiles.

Memorial Service

For many years a Cinderella organisation run virtually by one man – former Gunner Wally Wallem – The Gunners' Association had blossomed with the appointment of Major General Guilford as chairman, followed later by Brigadier H. (Paul) Roos. All five Gunner units in Cape Town – Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Cape Field Artillery, Cape Garrison Artillery and 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and the Observation Regiment at Stellenbosch – had regularly supported the Association. The annual Gunners' Memorial Service was held at 'The Gun', in the Company's Gardens in April each year but because Citizen Force troops could no longer - for reasons of economy at the time, be used on such parades, Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment stepped in and supplied troops, as they did on 17 April 1983. Exactly one week later the combined unit attended the annual Western Province Command combined church service at the Oval, Wynberg Military Base.

On Friday, 4 June Brigadier S.J. van der Spuy presented medals to a number of officer and NCO's, including Colonel L.P. Coetzee, Commandant J.A. Ormond, Majors M.L. Rousseau and S.K. Warren, Lieutenants A.P. van Heerden and D.R. van der Merwe and Warrant Officers F.A. Huysamen and I.G. Theron.

Anti-Aircraft equipment was on display at the Rand Show a little earlier in the year and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment supplied twenty 'insurgents' for Exercise Blits 1 in Bushmanland – the Northern Cape. Two teams of 'terrorists' infiltrated the exercise area from across the Orange River, one from the North-West and the other from the North-East – their objective was the farming area near the town of Springbok. The Gunners proved they were not an easy foe to destroy and gave the Citizen Force and Commando soldiers of Western Province Command some anxious moments before the exercise ended.

The 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment driver's team won the Command Driver of the Year Competition in August and two months later Commandant Lourens was elected Chairman of the Western Province Command Rugby Club. He had an intense interest in rugby and his appointment was well deserved. The combined Anti-Aircraft unit did well in the military rugby competition matches. They had well-known provincial players, Calla Scholtz and *Koeloe* Ferreira of Western Province in the team. The unit

even had the Cape Parachute champion – Gunner O. Conradie – in their midst, not as a rugby player, however.

A Shoulder Badge

In the last month of 1983 Chief of the Army signed an Art Card giving final approval to the proposed Artillery Air Defence School shoulder badge. The art card, part of the formal process in obtaining authority via the Army's Logistics Division for badges, buttons, Colours, etc. had first been signed by Staff Officer Heraldry on 9 August 1983; thence by the unit commander; the Corps Commander (presumably Director Anti-Aircraft; by the State Herald and penultimately by the Quartermaster General, the latter responsible for production and costs. The badge represented an aircraft in red on a light-blue background with the old Anti-Aircraft gun-sight super-imposed in white circles. A wavy line in the solid middle of the three rings symbolised radar and electronic equipment.

Reality

From demonstration to reality - 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was involved in Operation Askari, a cross-border operation which took place over December 1983/January 1984. The Regiment suffered its first loss when Sergeant H.A. Oosthuysen, Troop Sergeant Major of the missile teams, was killed in an action against terrorists on a Sunday in December. A second death occurred after the operation when guns were being cleaned; Gunner G. Kruger was accidentally killed.

Change of Command

While a Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was on duty in the operational area Colonel Coetzee was transferred to a senior post at Western Province Command from 1 January 1984. His place as Commanding Officer, Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was filled by Commandant J.J. Du P. Lourens who was promoted Colonel from 1 January. Commandant J.A. Ormond became second-in-command at Youngs' Field while Commandant Syd Warren commanded the School. The Regimental Training Wing, consisting of 101, 102 and 103 Batteries – in actual fact 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment – fell under command of Commandant Koos van Deventer.

From the outset, Colonel Lourens was determined to ensure the unit maintained and improved upon its already high standards. He issued a list of ten priority targets that were to be achieved. One of the targets was the collection of funds for the erection of a memorial to those members of the unit that had paid the supreme sacrifice in operations. A braai was held after the Passing Out parade in April and the profit went towards the R5 000 needed for the project. Other fund raising activities followed.

Another promotion took place on 1 January 1984 when Commandant L. Human, former commanding officer Regiment Overvaal who had occupied a post at Headquarters, 8 Armoured Division, was transferred to the Corps Directorate as Assistant Director, Artillery (Anti-Aircraft). It was one of only a handful of posts at Army Headquarters occupied by Citizen Force officers.

Thunder Chariot

During 1984 the biggest exercise yet held by the SA Defence Force was held at the Army Battle School. Named Exercise Thunder Chariot, it was based on an attack by 7 Infantry Division with both 71 Motorised Brigade and 82 Armoured Brigade taking part. Radio Moscow broadcast a message covering the 'war games' and stated that war materials supplied by the United States and other members of the aggressive NATO lands would be used by the South Africans. *Ystervark* mobile Anti-Aircraft guns were used for the first time during the exercise and were said to have arrived '...straight from the factory'. They were manned by Regiment Oos Transvaal.³ 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment also attended this major exercise to which a number of spectators, including wives of senior Citizen Force officers had been invited to watch the final 'battle'.

Mobile Anti-Aircraft guns have an interesting background story. A number of 3-inch 20 cwt guns developed for use in France during World War One were mounted on lorries. South African use of

³ *Regiment Oos Transvaal history*, undated.

vehicle-mounted Anti-Aircraft guns began in East Africa in 1940 when 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, with the assistance of the Kenya Railways Workshops, mounted captured Italian Bredas on their Ford trucks.

A second Battery of Regiment Oos Transvaal that served during Operation Savannah managed to obtain a Unimog that was thought to have been declared unserviceable. It was, in fact, serviceable but had been allocated as an escort vehicle and was under utilised – not unserviceable. Under the supervision of Captain G. Swan and Staff Sergeant H.J. Moolman (Jr), a detachment commander, the vehicle was stripped of its cab and canopy and a 20 mm Anti-Aircraft gun was mounted on the steel load box above the chassis. It was secured with a towing cable and its 'feet' were embedded on sandbags to give it purchase and stability.

The cab and canopy and associated bits and pieces were not wasted; they were used as spare parts to repair other vehicles. This gun was the second to have been 'constructed' during the operation as a mobile gun and may have given thought - so those concerned believed - to the eventual production of *Ystervark*.

No photographs of the vehicle exist. For security reasons during Savannah cameras were not permitted to be taken into the operation. In fact, South Africans were not supposed to be in Angola at all. Such was the secrecy that when Regiment Oos Transvaal mobilised at De Brug all their kit was confiscated and sealed in each member's balsak, which was returned to the unit headquarters. Members were given a complete issue of new kit before leaving the mobilisation area for the operational area. Men collected all sorts of things during their service. Bows and arrows, AK 47's – one unit even had a goat; but security was extremely strict. Customs and Excise were present at the departure point and duty was paid on wines and spirits (much cheaper than in South Africa) purchased at Grootfontein; those returning from the operation area were searched by military police and any non-issued item had to be abandoned.

When the 20 mm gun became obsolescent in Anti-Aircraft service, most were disposed of and transferred to the SA Navy, but a few were retained for eventual use by air defence units as museum pieces.



Figure 52: The Ystervark with 20 mm gun

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

A NEW CORPS

Splitting the Corps

Colonel Chris Venter, Director Artillery, announced that Ministerial approval had been granted on 10 October 1984 for a split in the Artillery Corps; and from 1 November 1984 two new Corps would feature in the Army's precedence list – the South African Artillery and the South African Anti-Aircraft Artillery.¹

During 1971 two separate Corps directors were appointed - and since then the Corps of South African Artillery had been divided into a Field Branch and an Anti-Aircraft Branch, with a Director for each branch. But it had long since become evident that a change was necessary due to differing technical aspects and weapons technology development, and because of the roles and functions each Branch filled within the SA Army. Ministerial authority was given on 10 October 1984 for:

- the titles of the two Corps
- establishment of an Anti-Aircraft Corps
- re-designation of certain units and
- appointment of two Corps Directors.²

In the statement made by Colonel Chris Venter it was clear there was a firm decision to maintain a close relationship; 'Future development will be such that each Corps can move in its own direction'.... 'the traditional ties between the two Corps should be maintained and strengthened', he said.³ Colonel J.C. Pieterse who had been Director Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) until midnight on 31 October 1984, became in the next second, Director Anti-Aircraft. The Division of the Corps was a move welcomed by some but felt by many to be a detrimental move to the Corps of South African Artillery as a whole. Rumours abounded that the split was caused by a personal clash between the two directors.

Re-designation

Another result of the Implementation Instruction was the re-designation of the Anti-Aircraft School. Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was re-designated with effect from 1 November 1984; its new title from that date was: Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.⁴ The combined unit consisted of three Wings; the Anti-Aircraft School itself, the Regimental Training Wing and the Support Wing (called HQ Unit), with the Regimental Training Wing being made up by 101, 102 and 103 Batteries. The unit was still responsible for training National Servicemen from recruit to operational standard. The first two Batteries trained on 35 mm Oerlikons and 103 Battery on 20 mm guns. Training on 23 mm Russian guns captured during operations in Angola was also conducted. The School was responsible for the training of all Anti-Aircraft personnel in specific technical musterings. Promotion courses were also presented to qualify Citizen Force officers and NCOs.

Citizen Force Units

Headquarters of Cape Garrison Artillery was originally at Young's Field and on 19 November 1980, during the years it was there, the Right of Civic Entry into the City of Cape Town was awarded to the Regiment at a parade in the city, in company of five other units. The Freedom of Bellville was awarded

¹ Copy of Implementation Instruction 14/84 dd 1 November 1984, provide by office of Director Reserves.

² Ibid.

³ *Uniform*, 16.11.1984.

⁴ Directive D/PLANS/502/2/1 seen by author.. (Archive, Box and file unknown.)

to the unit on 9 September 1989. Headquarters moved to an area near Acacia Park, Wingfield, but the then current commanding officer, Commandant Marius van der Westhuizen secured the use of Fort Wynyard at Mouille Point, as headquarters. The Regiment moved in November 1992 and there it remains. The new headquarters was 'officially' opened at a Gunners *Tiddler* on 8 October 1993. The Regiment has twice operated as an Infantry Battalion, once in the operational area and again on South Africa's northern border. In 1994 when South Africa's first democratic election was held it participated in Operation Jumbo to provide security. Although it absorbed the few volunteers of 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in 1997 when that unit was closed down, Cape Garrison Artillery struggled to survive, just as other units. The turnaround came in 2005 when it took members of Blaauwberg and Two Oceans Commandos under command. Although a three-Battery 35 mm Regiment, it was very much later rumoured as being considered the SA Army's operational URV (Unmanned reconnaissance vehicle) unit.

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment claimed ancestry from 1859 through its perceived association with Cape Garrison Artillery, from which it had emerged. It was pointed out to them in a lecture that age does *not* ensure efficiency and that hard work and dedication makes it so. Although a young Regiment it had a series of competent commanding officers and became a very efficient and impressive unit, especially so during the years 1980 - 1987. Members of the unit took part in *Operations Askari, Packer, Prone and Agro*.

The Regiment was awarded the Freedom of Goodwood on 31 March 1990 and was presented with a National Colour by the Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr. W.N. Breytenbach at Young's Field on 30 November 1993. The unit had a curious quiff in that it took a bugle - which otherwise reposed in the Officers' Mess - to training camp each year. It was included in the new 9 SA Division which evolved from 71 Motorised Brigade and was later one of a number of units that appeared at first to have been needlessly disbanded wef 1 April 1997. After the abandonment of National Service and the virtual disappearance of thousands of Citizen Force troops, the few volunteer personnel remaining on strength in 1997 elected to join the Cape Garrison Artillery. 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment RSM MWO D.W. Danie Steyn MMM JCD, occupied the post from July 1989 - September 1997, and was then appointed as the RSM of CGA, when RSM WO1 B.M. Bruce Risien JCD (1992-1997) vacated his post, after the amalgamation, and was promoted to Captain. MWO Danie Steyn served as RSM of Cape Garrison Artillery from September 1997 to February 2014, and was the longest serving RSM in the SANDF Reserve Forces, with almost 25 years of service in the post.

44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

While two Anti-Aircraft units had been disestablished, another was formed. 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was born on 1 January 1985. It was a specialised unit - intended to be parachute trained as the air defence component of 44 Parachute Brigade. It struggled to obtain recruits - trained gunners were instead incorrectly posted to the Battalions. But Colonel 'Mac' Alexander had other ideas. He approached 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and it resulted in the transfer of Captain Jean Roux to the Brigade on detached duty to command the parachute gunners. In his own words, not only did he: 'ramp up the Citizen Force component'⁵ but he was also involved in the planning, direction and strategy covering their use. During this time - 1987-1988 - 14 Parachute Battalion was under command of Nikolaas van den Berg. He had an Anti-Aircraft Troop detached from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment under command. All personnel were parachute static-line trained and also trained on 40 mm Bofors, 23 mm twin barrel, 14.5 mm foreign Anti-Aircraft guns, and SAM 7.

During 1987 Captain Roux arranged a three-week course to convert volunteer Infantrymen from 2, 3 and 4 Parachute Battalions to Anti-Aircraft gunners, to 'start up' 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Only about twenty men were successfully converted that year to become NCOs and gunners. They formed the backbone of the unit. Others were trained but over the years there were never more than about 100 parachute trained men on strength and the unit was never able to call upon more than one trained

⁵ Email from Captain J. Roux, 22 .10.2009.

'jumping-fit' Troop. This Troop with the National Service Troop of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment constituted a Battery. One other problem arose about this time. The Regiment was ordered to exchange their Artillery berets for Parachute Regiment berets. They refused; there was a temporary 'stand-off'; to their distress the Gunners lost the battle. Today they wear Oxford blue Artillery berets.

Opening of Parliament

Troops of 101 Battery, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment were among those that lined Adderley Street at the ceremony surrounding the opening of Parliament in February 1985. Later that month there was ceremony of a different type when Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment took leave of Colonel J.M. (Jack) Slabber, practically the last of the war-time Gunners still on strength. A Guard was present at his funeral on 2 February. Colonel Slabber was one of those men not content to retire when leaving the School in September 1972. He had filled a post at Western Province Command, first as staff officer civil defence and later in the recruiting section. He served in the latter until forced to retire in October 1984 due to ill health.

Civil Unrest

Simmering agitation broke out in July 1985 into serious unrest in the urban areas of the Cape Flats. Troops from Young's Field were hastily called out to assist the SA Police to cope with major disturbances and demonstrations. The young National Servicemen and their Permanent Force officers were faced with situations they had never before expected or experienced. The litter – broken traffic lights, smashed shop windows and general debris was more a reminder of the war in Angola than civilian disturbance in a supposedly civilised society. 101 Battery found itself in unfamiliar Buffels, dressed in riot gear, patrolling Gugulethu and the Lansdowne/Athlone areas on unrest control operations. There was not much rest from the continual patrols but they were relieved when the first Citizen Force and Commando units reported for duty. Thereafter the Young's Field men were sent to the Eastern Province and were on duty at Kirkwood and other areas. During unrest control operations in Kwazekle township Port Elizabeth, Corporal J. Schoeman of 5 SA Infantry Battalion became separated from his patrol and was brutally hacked to death. Members of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment provided a Guard of Honour at his funeral in Gansbaai.

The Staff of Western Province Command were hard pressed to cope with events, which seemed at times to run out of control as a result of the actions of political activists. Reports by both local and foreign journalists did nothing to help the situation. Both Brigadier Yvor de Bruyn and his SSO Operations were away on detached duty and a Commando officer, Colonel P. S. (Piet) Lotz occupied both posts in the first three months of the emergency which were the worst. Colonel Lionel Crook was called in to assist from 1 September with tactics and doctrine, while Colonel Johan Lourens divided his time between the Command operations room and command of Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, until he was finally transferred to Western Province Command as SSO Operations. He nevertheless continued to officially hold the post of Commanding Officer, Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in addition to his duties at the Command until 31 December 1985. He was officially transferred to the Command from 1 January 1986.

Because Colonel Lourens had little time for his duties at Young's Field due to involvement in Operation Xenon (as the unrest situation was known) problems there were left to Commandant Jeff Ormond to handle. The latter had been at Young's Field since January 1970 when first posted there for nine months' national service training. This period had, much to his horror, as he later described it to the author, been extended to one year shortly after his arrival. Despite his initial reaction, he found he had a liking for military life and after passing out as a Junior Leader he signed a short service commission. During that year he joined the Permanent Force. Three years at the SA Army College – one in 1990 as a Staff course student and two on the Staff Duties Directing Staff led to his promotion to Commandant and appointment as Commanding Officer, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in 1983.

Commandant Ormond was officially appointed to command Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and promoted to Colonel from 1 January 1986. His senior staff consisted of Commandant van Deventer at the School, Commandant N.G. (Neil) Muller commanding the Regiment and Commandant J. Del Monte at the Headquarters unit in charge of logistics and personnel. The RSM of

the combined unit was still WO1 C.J. van der Westhuizen, PMM, who would continue in that post until 17 January 1987, before a transfer to Headquarters, 71 Motorised Brigade – a Citizen Force conventional warfare Brigade - as Brigade Sergeant Major.

75th Anniversary Day

The Sergeant Major was soon involved in supervising the Anti-Aircraft contingent for the biggest ceremonial parade in the Cape since the Republic Festival parade at Goodwood in 1966. During the morning the Anti-Aircraft gunners provided a Guard of Honour at the Founders Day ceremony held at the statue of Jan van Riebeeck on the Foreshore, Cape Town. Later a contingent attended the SADF 75th Anniversary Day parade at Three Anchor Bay. It was a beautiful, clear summer's day. Specially invited spectators were seated in a special pavilion, built almost on the sea-wall – leaving just enough space for the march past. On the dias, almost on the spot where once had stood the Three Anchor Bay Battery, were the State President, Mr. P.W. Botha, the Minister of Defence, the Mayor of Cape Town and Chiefs of Services of the SADF. The State President took the salute as thousands of spectators viewed the marching troops.

A group of military veterans led the parade and were followed by a Platoon dressed in uniforms worn by the Forces over the preceding 75 years. Next was an Army representative group with men from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the leading ranks, and following this group was a Colour Party with the Colours of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the place of honour on the left of the leading rank. A SAAF contingent and one from the SA Navy also formed part of the marching troops while a fleet of naval vessels sailed past Three Anchor Bay and aircraft flew overhead.

Nine days after this event, Colonel W. Mouton, who had been appointed Director Anti-Aircraft from 1 January 1985, was guest of honour at the Anti-Aircraft memorial service held at the newly instituted Memorial at Young's Field. On the following day he attended the Passing-Out parade of the February 1985 national service intake, when 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment's Colour was again on parade. To round off the next month the unit provided troops for the annual Gunners' Memorial Service in the Company's Gardens.

The Young's Field Gunners were among many thousands of rugby supporters who anxiously awaited the outcome of the Currie Cup match at Welkom in May, when Western Province played against Northern Free State. There was more interest from the Gunners than usual - Gunner Schalk Burger was the new Captain of the Western Province team. 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment headed for Devon in the Northern Transvaal in June, where it took part in Exercise Golden Eagle II.

Retirement

A significant retirement took place during 1985 while officers and men based at Youngs' Field were engaged in containing civil unrest.

Perhaps the best-known senior officer of the 1980's-1990's retired as Chief of the SADF on 31 October 1985 after 32 years of distinguished service. At a parade held in his honour General C.L. (Constand) Viljoen, SSA, SD, SOE, SM, was presented with an address, handed to him by four members of Special Forces after they had abseiled 70 feet from a Puma helicopter.⁶ The address, presented as a token of sincere appreciation and admiration, described the General as an inspiring leader - which without any doubt every member of the Defence Force would agree he was.

Forming the rear-guard of the parade was the only World War Two Artillery sub-sub unit remaining in the country - a Morris Quad gun tractor towing a Field Artillery limber and a 25 pounder Mk 2 gun-howitzer (the barrel without muzzle brake). He was given a final salute from the turret of the gun tractor by Major General F.E.C. van den Berg, as a farewell from the Corps in which General Viljoen had begun his military service.⁷

⁶ *Paratus*, November 1985, p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*

The Independent Batteries and Troops

Delta Battery had operated in Angola many months before. But early in 1986, it became necessary to provide air defence for the mechanised Battalion groups specially formed to counter Cuban aggression in Southern Angola; in addition to 32 and 44 Battalions. Independent Anti-Aircraft sub-units were formed in that year. They were nearly all based at logistical or support areas. The sub-units were mostly equipped with Ystervark systems – the 20 mm GAI-GOC mobile gun – but captured ZU-23-2 twin 23 mm and 35 mm Oerlikons in a static role were also used, as were SAM-7s. Vehicles of opportunity (Buffels and Ratels) was used to serve as Troop fire control posts to transport the Tupperware radar.



Figure 53: Example of Tupperware radar mounted on 81mm mortar Ratel vehicle

Only one Battery seems to have been given a title. Foxtrot Battery (the name was given by the Battalion Commander) – in reality little more than a Troop – under command of Captain C.R. Lindsay from 11 January 1981, when it was detached from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and joined 61 Mechanised Battalion Group (previously known as Combat Group Juliet). The Battalion Commander named it as shown when it became an independent 'Battery' remembered only from 1 March 1986. It was commanded by Captains J.J. Visser; D. Bornman; J. Roux (in an acting capacity); A.J. Greef; H.J. Baird; A. Burger; Lieutenant P.S. Mokgosi and finally by Lieutenant D.R. Fortuin, before it returned to 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in January 2001.

Foxtrot Battery made a name for itself by destroying three replica model aircraft – flown at a height and speed to simulate actual aircraft-when under training at Omuthiya in South West Africa. In 1982-84 with two Troops of 20 mm guns and a SAM 7 team Anti-Aircraft protection was provided for logistics bases during Operations *Daisy*, *Askari* and *Meebos*, and later during Operation *Modular*. Commanded by Captain J. Roux it was joined by the much-depleted Anti-Aircraft Troop from 62 Mechanised Battalion during Operation *Hooper*. Bombardier Hendriks unfortunately died in a bombing attack during this operation. During Operations *Hilti* and *Prone* in 1988 – the final operations of what has been termed the 'Bush War' - it provided air defence for elements of 10 Division. It later formed part of the Resolution 435/UNTAG forces, withdrawing afterwards to Walvis Bay and the Army Battle School. It was afterwards deployed as part of 61 Mechanised Brigade Group in Internal Stability Operations during the 1994 elections, and again in 1995, 1996 and 1998. The Battalion Group closed down in the year 2000.

Five Troops acted independently, but little is known of their activities, nor of their titles.

The second of the five Troops, commanded initially by Captain J.H. (Poena) van Heerden, was placed under command of 4 South African Infantry Battalion from 1 August 1986. The Battalion – as 62 Mechanised Battalion Group – took part in Operations *Modular* and *Hooper*. The Troop provided protection for the Group's logistics base. Malaria caused a drop in its strength and for a short while it was attached to Foxtrot Battery during Operation *Hooper*. It later rejoined 62 Mechanised Battalion Group and moved with the Group to Walvis Bay where it was demobilised in December 1989. It was commanded by Lieutenant J.H. van Heerden; Captain A. de Villiers; Captain J.H. van Heerden and Lieutenant J. Booysen respectively.

Poena Van Heerden, then a young Captain, wrote in the year 2017 of events in 1988 during the time he was in command of the Troop:

I normally don't live in the past, but sometimes you have to share your story with others, not to bring back bad memories, but to honour those men (although they were only 18 – 19 years old), and who have earned my respect. This is not about who was right or who was wrong, or who has told the best 'war story'. This is only a small portion of what we went through on the 25 February 1988. I apologise to all the names I used without their consent, and I also apologise for the names I have not used. This is my story (I wrote this last year), dedicated to the people who lost their lives on the 25 February 1988.

"The attack on Tumpo 1 was done by 61 Mech. The Anti-Aircraft Troop of 62 Mech (or what was left of it) joined up with 61 Mech. Captain Jean Roux was the Troop Commander and I was the 2IC. During the attack, we were a tactical distance (taktiese sprong) behind the tanks and Infantry. We were quite widely spread due to the formation and the terrain, so one could not see all vehicles. We came under fire from enemy Artillery, which was quite accurate, and we even thought there might be an enemy fire controller on our side. It was as hot as hell with a lot of smoke, dust, noise and radio clutter around us. The call came through - Hendriks is weg'. At this stage own forces were moving back so I 'lost' it a bit (as only a young Captain would do), as he was supposed to be with his vehicle. After a few swear words and shouting, the reason for the call became obvious, and with me the closest to Hendrick's vehicle, I moved the 50 meters forward. Getting there, I saw him lying on his back with a SAM missile next to him. The question might be asked what Hendricks was doing outside his vehicle at that stage. Well, doing his job, and trying to engage the MiG's with a missile. He was very eager to bring down an enemy aircraft. Keeping in mind that we were still receiving incoming Artillery fire, there was no time to hang around there. I remember jumping from my own Ratel and with the help of the medic and the other guys, lifted his body onto my Ratel, placing it behind the turret. We left the missile where it lay, as we were unsure what shrapnel damage the missile had received, but did remove the trigger mechanism. I was not sure if it was the SAM 7/14/16 as we had all three types in our inventory. Looking at the earlier photos, but suspect it was a SAM 14. I think we wrapped his body in a groundsheet. He had a shrapnel wound to the back of his head. As he was the driver of his Ratel, I jumped into his Ratel and drove it a few 100 meters away from the incoming fire. There somebody took over his vehicle and I drove with his body to 'A' Echelon, Commandant Loubser. I remember looking behind the turret at his body, not understanding the real impact of what had just happened. At 'A' Echelon we lowered his body from the vehicle, and someone placed it in a body bag. I think the guy that was standing next to him, who was not wounded but saw everything, was also casevaced. Driving back to the battle group was a very scary and a reluctant experience, as we all experienced the realities of death and war. I think it was quite natural for everyone to shed a tear that night. Thinking back to that day, even after 29 years (This year 30), I can still remember it as if it had only just happened.

*The second incident I remember as well. Not sure if it was the same day, or a bit later. I was sitting in the turret of the Ratel and with binoculars, was watching the MiGs (as long as you could see them, you knew where they will bomb). We again received incoming Artillery or mortar fire, and somehow I jumped inside the Ratel, closing the hatch after me. A mortar round landed about 5 meters away from us, with a deafening explosion, lots of dust and smoke. The Ratel was a bit 'shaken'. There were guys in front of and on the other side of the Ratel. An Engineering 'troopie' (I remember he had white hair and looked like an unshaved poodle) was screaming 'die f*kkers het my raakgeskiet'. Again, the medic loaded the guy on the Ratel and we had to get him to a medical post. We got stuck on sawn-off tree stumps, and with a push of another vehicle we were on our way with no idea where the Medical Post was. On the way there, a MiG bombed an ammunition truck full of mortar and other ammo, which was*

exploding all over. Close to that was another Ratel which needed a jump start, so we had to make a stop there before the MiG's came back, and used the burning ammo truck as a reference point. We saved the other Ratel in quick time, and followed a general instruction back to the medical post. It was quite late in the afternoon when we dropped of the casevac at the medical post, using very little Portuguese to ask directions from UNITA. At the medical post we (or someone else) bumped into a lonely dead tree, which almost fell on our vehicle, luckily without any further 'death / injury by tree' incident.

The above happened 30 years ago, but I still relive it as if it has just happened. Tomorrow I will have a cold one on Bombardier Hendricks and celebrate the friendship of 'brothers in arms'.

The third Troop – remembered only by its call sign (A63) - was formed in 1989 to protect Sector 10 headquarters at Oshikati, later being attached to 63 Mechanised Battalion Group. Commanded for a short while by Lieutenant H.J. Baird it took part in various operational deployments and also acted independently at the Ogongo and Okolonguo support bases. After this it took over the protection of Oshikati airstrip after the withdrawal of the 35 mm Oerlikons that had until then constituted the defence element. The Battalion – as 63 Mechanised Battalion Group – took part in Operations *Merlyn* and *Agree*. With the mechanised Battalion group the Troop withdrew from the Operational Area in 1990 to the Army Battle School to conform to United Nations Resolution 435 under command of Lieutenant B. Snyman.

From 1986 both 32 and 44 Battalions each had an attached Anti-Aircraft Troop. The Troop with 32 Battalion (The Buffalo Battalion – '*Os Terriveis*') was deployed from 1986 and commanded in turn by Major L. Scheepers, Lieutenant J. Roelofse and Captain A.B. Korf. It provided protection for the Battalion's base, but an Anti-Aircraft section formed part of Battle Group Bravo from December 1987 to February 1988. About 4 February, an air attack was made upon the Anti-Aircraft position, which protected the Tactical headquarters. One SA-7 missile was fired by the Anti-Aircraft gunners but it did not launch correctly; instead of climbing into the sky – it skimmed along the ground providing a perfect target indicator for the MiG's. It was withdrawn from the operational area after Easter 1988 and moved back to Young's Field. Lieutenant Naude commanded the Troop in the last few months.

It is recorded that three members of a detachment of National Servicement manning a 20 mm gun at the logistics base at Menongue apparently became bored and wandered over to inspect the wreckage of an MiG. There are two versions of what subsequently happened but it may have been booby trapped; and in an explosion two of the men were killed instantly. The third suffered serious and tragic injuries.

The last of the independent Troops was deployed at Swartbooisdrift under command of Major J. Roux. It was equipped with six Jakkals air transportable mini-jeps, each mounting twin Browning machine guns – apparently the brain child of Commandant Les Rudman, previously 44 Parachute Brigade's SO1 Ops. The Troop was also equipped with SAM 7's. It appears that the Troop was manned by personnel of 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and was to have been dropped on Mocamedes with members of a reconnaissance Regiment acting as pathfinders. They were to receive and be trained by UNITA on Stinger ground-to-air missiles before the main force dropped. The operation never took place. Little is known of any further deployment.



Figure 54: The independent Troop of 32 Battalion with part of the wreckage of a MiG that was shot down

Despite hard training, interspersed with sport and week-end passes after the first weeks, not all was well at Young's Field. Two gunners - P.J. da Silva and M.R. Kruger - who could possibly not take the intensity of training - or perhaps had more personal reasons - attempted suicide in August 1987. The School also lost a gunner when G.M. Goldberg was killed on his motor cycle in a head-on collision in Kloof Nek Road on 18 September 1987.⁸

Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment presented its annual Junior Leader passing-out parade to the usual large number of invited guests and parents on 18 December 1987. Forty-six new 2nd Lieutenants and one hundred and eight new Bombardiers and Lance Bombardiers paraded before the military and civilian spectators. They were congratulated on their promotion by Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General A.J. (Kat) Liebenberg. The parade was as expected, immaculately performed. Tea and refreshments were afterwards available in the Pom-Pom Hall.

Battle

To the north an offensive had in earlier months been launched by Cuban forces and FAPLA against UNITA and a stage was reached where it became necessary for South Africa to intervene to avoid the possibility of UNITA-held territory from being taken. South African and Namibian troops clashed head-on in battles with Russian and Cuban air and land forces in south-eastern Angola.

They had entered the battle once FAPLA had been badly beaten after launching an offensive to dislodge UNITA from its stronghold at Jamba. Tanks, sophisticated ground-to-air missiles, attack helicopters and MiG-23's had been used in their desperate bid to re-capture the Cuando-Cubango province in Southern Angola. It was in South Africa's interest to assist UNITA as MPLA control over the area would allow SWAPO to once more have easy access to cross into South West Africa.

⁸ SANDF Archives, C Army, DLA Gp 47, Box 34.

In ensuing operations in the vicinity of Cuito Canavale where South African troops destroyed FAPLA 59 Brigade, a MiG 23 was shot down on 8 October near the Lomba River by an Ystervark mounted 20 mm gun. Further hits were obtained on other MiG's but the jubilant Anti-Aircraft Gunners could not claim any other major success. The enemy aircraft were more careful in future attacks and abandoned low-level runs. The success of the Gunners was tempered by the loss of one of their number, when Bombardier C. Hendriks died as a result of enemy Artillery bombardment.⁹

Two days later the *Cape Times* gave the names of five men who had died in actions against the Russian/Cuban force. In his announcement the night before, General Jan Geldenhuys also stated that sophisticated and advanced Russian electronic weaponry – not thought to have yet been seen by the West – had been captured. The booty included top-secret Artillery locating devices in addition to Anti-Aircraft weapons and other equipment. Defence advisers in the United States were reported to be 'delighted' with the South African success, particularly with the capture of the 'high-tech' weaponry. The capture of these weapons had stymied moves in the United States Congress to terminate US-South African military intelligence links, which, had it taken place, would not have allowed the United States to benefit from the Republic's battlefield booty.

Regiment Vaal Rivier and Flak Traps

During February 1988 Regiment Vaal Rivier was tasked to provide a light Anti-Aircraft Battery at Rundu where it was to relieve 102 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The take-over was successfully completed and the relieving Battery followed a standard daily routine until 7 March. On that day, Brigadier Smit, commanding 7 SA Infantry Division, informed the Battery Commander, Captain F.P. Möller, that his Battery was to provide air defence support to 82 Mechanised Brigade during the forthcoming Operation *Packer*. Indents were immediately placed for gun tractors and other necessary vehicles and equipment. Two 35 mm guns, an FCU (fire control unit) and two generators were loaded on a C130 on 12 March and with 22 members of the Battery under Captain Gerrie Marais, were flown to Mavinga. Further loads followed, the last arriving during the night of 17 March.¹⁰

A road convoy led by WO2 G. Visser with all the remaining vehicles had meanwhile left Rundu very early in the morning of 14 March. It arrived at Mavinga on 18 March. The entire Battery then moved 80 km to the BAA. The Battery Commander was instructed to deploy two Troops independently in the region of the Chaminga and Hubi Rivers to act as Flak Traps (not a standard manner of employing 35 mm equipment) for enemy aircraft operating in the rear of own forces; to mislead the enemy and to keep aircraft away from the GV5 155 mm guns deployed in the area while it was busy engaging targets on D-Day. By '...0600, D-hour on D-day 23 March 1988,'¹¹ the guns of the two Troops – 'C' Troop under Captain Marais and 'E' Troop under Lieutenant W. Kruger – had been dug in and were ready. Anti-Aircraft fire was opened on a few occasions while mortar fire and smoke were used as dummy gun positions. It was reported through SAAF channels on one occasion that the tail of one aircraft had received damage. The entire Battery was ordered to withdraw to the concentration area on 24 April. From there it moved via Mavinga to Rundu, and was demobilised and at home early in May 1988.¹²

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment also supplied two Troops that were deployed during Operation *Packer*.

Air Defence Weaponry

With the appointment of Colonel J.C. Pieterse as Director Projects a separate Projects Office was established to address Anti-Aircraft equipment requirements. This office, responsible for Anti-Aircraft projects had been developed over decades. The first large Anti-Aircraft projects were initiated in 1983 and 1984 under the director projects. Lieutenant Colonel B. Louw (responsible for towed systems) and Lieutenant Colonel Altus van Heerden (responsible for mechanised systems) took over as project officers from Lieutenant Colonel Brian Carpenter and Lieutenant Colonel Francois Cilliers respectively. Lieutenant Colonel Garry Francis (responsible for local warning radars) joined the team and was

⁹ *Cape Times*, 14.11.1987.

¹⁰ *Regiment Vaal Rivier, History and Reminiscences 1960 to- 2008*, pp 102-115.

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² *Ibid*

relieved by Major M.M. Mostert in 1999. Major J.S. Mbuli was appointed as project officer (responsible for mobile systems) in December 1999 and was promoted to programme officer in 2008. Lieutenant Colonel H.J. Baird (responsible for the Very Short Range Air Defence System and mechanised systems) was transferred to the GBADS project office in January 2002. Captain Lisa Cilliers served in the project office as equipment manager from September 2002 until October 2003. The project office structure was expanded and WO2 Alwin Samuels was appointed as equipment manager in 2004. WO1 T.C. Smart served as equipment manager from November 2011 until July 2017. Colonel A.J. Greeff served in the Project Office from January 2005 until December 2008 as programme officer. Lieutenant Colonel E. Mostert replaced Colonel H.J. Baird in February 2009 and served as project officer until the final closure of the project in 2015. Colonel G.A. Hayes was appointed as programme officer in 2010 and was replaced by Colonel L. Puckree in 2017. GBADS Project Office personnel were all on the structure of the Air Defence Artillery Formation and seconded to the Project Office to serve as project officers.

The campaigns in Angola in 1988 - Operations *Modular*, *Hooper* and *Packer* – all contributed to the realisation that the SADF lacked modern air defence weaponry; it was a real, immediate weakness in the weapon systems held by the SADF; and it was finally driven home for all to grasp – the Army's lack of modern air defence equipment. Although Cactus and 35mm Oerlikons were deployed they were both too fragile for operations in the Angolan bush.

Cactus had been deployed 27 km north-east of Cuito Canavale on 13 February but success was limited and they were moved back to Mavinga during the night of 26 February and flown out three days later. The 24-man detachment under Commandant Johan van Heerden had consisted of two Cactus launcher vehicles, six captured ZU-23-2 Anti-Aircraft guns and a close-in defence section with captured SA-7s – Strela man portable SAMs – troops of 32 Battalion provided protection and patrols in the deployment area. They were needed. The '...airman were rather noisy in deploying...' ¹³ and soon attracted the attention of the Angolan Air Force. On being redeployed during the night of 19 February they again made more noise than was healthy and were heard by FAPLA reconnaissance patrols. The detachment was moved back to avoid ground attack but the Cactus vehicles, quite unsuited to the terrain, were beginning to have severe problems. Their success had been limited. Only about seven missiles had been fired, one of which caused limited damage to a MiG.

The very basic *Ystervark*, – jokingly called a 'pea-shooter' – a single barrelled SPAA GAI- CO1 system 20 mm Anti-Aircraft gun, together with captured SA-7s and UNITA Stinger and SA-7 teams, shot down and damaged more Angolan aircraft than did their sophisticated counterparts. And, they did prevent the MiG's from coming in low and slow enough to be really effective. Jubilant Anti-Aircraft gunners had shot down an MiG 23 near the Lomba River on 8 October – hence the reason for the increased height of air attack. Other MiG's had been hit but not damaged enough to stop them returning to their base. These weapons could not, however, restore or maintain the mobility of the ground forces in the face of an enemy air presence... The twenty-year-old- Cactus, '...whose technology was archaic and whose transporters were much too dainty for bush warfare...' ¹⁴ and the 35 mm guns that were also deployed for short periods, were too fragile for such operations. Until the Army can obtain modern air defence equipment, it will remain entirely dependent on passive air defence measures and on the SA Air Force....' stated a well-known military personage in his book, *War in Angola*. ¹⁵

¹³ *War in Angola*, p. 237.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.330.



Figure 55: From left to right: SA-7 missile with Gunner Ferreira, SA-14 missile with Gunner Lombard and SA-16 missile with Bombardier C. Hendriks, one week before his demise

A combined Cuban\FAPLA force launched an attack on Calueque, but were easily beaten off. This was followed by a deliberate well-planned bombing run by six MIG's on the Calueque Dam installation on 27 June 1988. A stray bomb – an 'over' – killed eleven young national servicemen when it landed some distance from its intended point of impact. Two 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns deployed to protect the dam quickly swung into action and damaged two of the aircraft. Signals intercept revealed that one had crashed just north of Techipa, on its way back to its base.¹⁶ It was completely unusual for the Anti-Aircraft Troop not to have early warning but at Calueque and Techipa there were no MAOTs on the ground. Early warning came by ordinary operational command channel – and the signal was received too late. The End Conscription Campaign, then well into its stride of condemning national service said in a statement: '...the deaths of these young conscripts is the price paid for the military aggression of the Nationalist Government.'¹⁷

During the Defence debate in the Houses of Parliament, Cape Town, it was noted that the Defence Force was once again entering a period of change and renewal. The debate centred on discussions of the SADF's actions in central Angola and the Minister stated that the SADF's image as an effective, motivated and formidable fighting force had once again been confirmed. 'Our men achieved feats that will be long talked about,' he said. Between 7 000 and 10 000 casualties had been inflicted on the forces opposing then, while enemy losses in weaponry ran to more than a million dollars.¹⁸

¹⁶ *The Buffalo Soldiers*, p. 360.

¹⁷ *Cape Times*, 4.11.1988.

¹⁸ *Annual Defence Review*, p. 41.

GV5 Anti-Aircraft

Shortly before the end of Operation *Hooper*, in early March 1988, the Field Gunners made preparation to shoot down enemy aircraft as this extract from the book: *First In, Last Out*, indicates:

On 29 February Regimental Commander, Commandant van Eeden issued an instruction to his G5 Battery, headed 'AA use for 155mm HA rounds'. Strange as this may sound, it was to be an experiment in deflecting enemy aircraft from own forces whilst in contact. During the previous attack, the FAPLA Artillery had fired 972 rounds at own force and three direct hits caused two South African deaths and three vehicles burnt out.

The object of this experiment was to provide counter-bombardment as support to own forces that would be pinned down in the final battle while under threat of air attack.

The plan was to deploy two G5s in a roving position about 10 kilometres away from any other Battery. One gun would elevate to 1,316 mills (74⁰) and lay in a westerly direction – the expected direction of attack. The SAAF Mobile Air Operations Team would provide the approach height and direction, and the gun detachment would set the time fuse to burst at pre-set heights of between 15,000 and 25,000 feet above ground level. For safety, the predicted point of burst on the ground was to be sent through to HQ to keep own forces out of that area. The idea was that a 155mm round would burst in front of an approaching enemy aircraft and scare off the pilot.¹⁹

There was no further mention of this rather radical use of a sophisticated 155 mm field gun in an Anti-Aircraft role.

Training Continues

Meanwhile training of 'new' Anti-Aircraft gunners continued in the Western Cape – and it was not without incident.

In 1987 the Anti-Aircraft School was under command of Commandant N.G. Muller with the Junior Leader wing commander Major Altus van Heerden, who officially held the post of CIGAR (Chief Instructor Gunnery and Research). The Junior Leader Wing was taken to Rooiberg, near Van Wyksdorp, where they underwent Platoon weapon and section leading training. The final highlight of the training period was live night fire from defensive positions. For two days the troops dug trenches in misty rain conditions with little less than Infantry spades, set out firing lines and prepared defences. This was also the last year that the old green material webbing and steel helmet was used.

Major Van Heerden briefed everyone in the deployment area and stressed that the signal to start the fire plan would be the explosion of two claymore mines in front of the defence with white phosphorous grenades. He specifically cautioned all *not* to fire before the signal was given. The Major invited the dignitaries of the town to witness the finale from a nearby hill. At 'stand to' one could hear a pin drop - everyone watched the killing zone. After dark the bus with the dignitaries could be heard approaching the hill. The bus stopped on top of the hill and was received by the Major. As the driver switched off the engine a single tracer round was fired from the trenches in the centre of the killing zone. Seconds later the whole defence opened fire with everything they had. A signal to 'cease fire' was given by means of a red 1 000 ft flare. The bus with its load of dignitaries departed. The next morning the trenches were closed, area cleaned and the whole training wing gathered. Major van Heerden asked who had fired the first shot; but the culprit could not be identified. The whole Wing was punished, and they would not forget the punishment or the lesson; 'dash, down, crawl, observe and set sights', for eight kilometres back to the main gate of the training area.

In September 1988, personnel of 101 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment under command of Major Danie Hurter completed their practical training field phase at Papendorp with a live firing exercise over the sea in preparation for operational deployment. Lieutenant H.J. Baird also joined this training in preparation for operational deployment. The deployment area for the eighteen 20 mm *Ystervark* guns curved below the dunes in the bay, about 200 metres from the shore line. During one of the 'shooting

¹⁹ *First In, last Out*, pp. 338, 339.

runs' Bombardier Johan Small experienced a stoppage on his gun. Without performing the correctly required safety precautions on the weapon, he proceeded to investigate. In doing so he unlocked the barrel. With this action the breech block went into positive locking, releasing the firing pin. The round in the chamber fired. There was one bang and in full view of the whole Battery the Bombardier was flung off the vehicle and in an instant, found himself lying on the beach, five metres behind the *Ystervark* with the barrel in his hand. Fortunately no injuries were sustained, but his embarrassment served as a valuable lesson to all.



Figure 56: The gun line of 101 Battery at Papendorp

Parachute Gunners

As part of a reaction force 44 Parachute Brigade was established in April 1978 and an Anti-Aircraft capability became necessary. 44 Anti-Aircraft Battery was therefore formed. It became a Regiment, appointed and designated as a unit of the Citizen Force in January 1985. The unit is in another sense unique. It went through the entire process of application for a Colour, design, approval and the whole administrative by various headquarters' that followed. But the Colour was never made. The unit decided that the guns were their Colours - despite being armed with foreign weapons.

Headquarters of the Regiment was at Murrayhill (Hammanskraal). The unit initially struggled to obtain any intake of National Servicemen and the first eighteen parachute qualified Anti-Aircraft gunners were appointed in September 1984. They were trained at Young's Field on SAM 7 missiles, the Russian 14.5 mm heavy machine-gun, and on .50 Browning's. The Russian gun had a collapsible carriage similar to the 20 mm Hispano Zuisa. Major J.P. (Paddy) Case was appointed from 1 April 1985 to command the unit, Major Case recalls that because of a lack of qualified parachute gunners they were integrated into 4 Parachute Battalion in a Company in which he became Company Commander. In 1988 an airborne attack on Naib (Mocamedes) was planned and was said to be the biggest airborne attack since Arnhem. The Anti-Aircraft gunners were to be dropped with the Pathfinders, collect Stinger missiles from UNITA and join the main force when the latter landed. The 'war' in Angola ended during the operational planning cycle.²⁰ Major Case resigned shortly afterwards and he was followed from January 1989 by Major J. Roux, who had previously served in 101 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

A New Intake at Young's Field

Colonel Ormond (who had begun his military career at Young's Field as a national serviceman, the first to become commanding officer and thence Director Artillery Anti-Aircraft) was notified in December 1989 of his transfer to Army Headquarters from 1 January 1989 as SSO Anti-Aircraft Projects. He handed over command to his successor, Commandant S.K. Warren on 14 December, the day before the Junior Leader passing-out parade. Commandant Warren - who had at one time served in the

²⁰ Letter from Major Case, 18.5.2008.

Transkei Defence Force – was notified of his promotion to Colonel from 1 January 1989, as well as his appointment as Commanding Officer, Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The Passing-Out Parade was held on 15 December against the picturesque backdrop of the Table Mountain, Vlakkenberg and Constantia mountains. And it had the Cape Doctor – the blustery south-east wind that could blow up to 70 km/h. It did that day. Lady guests abandoned their hats and the two bearers of the National flag and the Regimental Colour had a particularly hard time maintaining their stance during the parade. After the official inspection by the Minister of Defence, General M.A. de M. Malan, accompanied by Lieutenant General Liebenberg, Brigadier A. K. de Jager – Officer Commanding Western Province Command – Colonel J.A. Ormond and the parade commander, the troops marched past the Revue officer, his entourage and spectators in Review order. They did so much to the obvious annoyance of a Kiewiet family of two adult birds and two chicks who objected to the troops invading their turf. After registering their protest, they carried on with their insect collecting activities, leaning into the wind to maintain equilibrium.

After personally congratulating each one of the sixty-five new officers and forty-nine new Bombardiers, the Minister presented awards to winners of trophies. Eleven newly commissioned officers and thirty-eight Bombardiers were not present at the parade. They were in the operational area.

In his speech the Minister of Defence stated that Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was one of the best training establishments in the SADF and said that *Alta Pete – Aim High* – was a striking motto. He further mentioned that the Anti-Aircraft gunners were an integral part of South Africa's Air Defence System but the 'Ack-Ack' would have to face up to and meet even greater challenges in future as technology dictated changes in the patterns of warfare. Guests and parents afterward attended a sumptuous spread of refreshments in the Pom-Pom Hall where, at a given moment, parents proudly attached the insignia of their newly won ranks to their son's uniforms.

With the change in command the RSM stepped down on 31 December to allow the new RSM – D.T.W. Lennie to step into the most critical post in any unit. The 'RSM Handing Over and Taking-Over Parade' took place on 26 January 1989 and was followed by a farewell tea. Other changes that took place at the year-end included the promotion of Major P. du T. Walters to Commandant and his appointment as Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft School. He replaced Commandant N.G. Muller who had earlier left to attend Staff course. At the same time, Commandant C.R. (Carl) Lindsay took over the post of Headquarters Unit Commander from Commandant John Del Monte.

Sergeant Major Lennie was on hand to oversee the arrival of more than 800 of the 1989 intake of National Servicemen who reported at Young's Field on Wednesday, 1 February. They were greeted by none other than the Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr. Wynand Breytenbach, who announced that the SANDF were giving thought to reducing Citizen Force part-time service. Among the recruits were a number of top sportsmen, always welcome in any unit. 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment could boast of four young men who excelled at sport: Gunner K. Andrews, a Western Province rugby player; Gunners B. Cameron and P. Slater – placed first and second in the South African Windsurfing championships, and Gunner D. Rundlel who represented Western Province at cricket.

Mr. Breytenbach told the bemused recruits – as most are on their first day in the Army – that the thought of a reduction in training had been the result of the recent lengthy negotiations and for Battalion groups in the operational area, as well as to 32 and 44 Battalions. Peace initiatives and Angola. But that despite such welcome news National Service would not be cut in the short term. A further welcoming address was delivered by the Officer Commanding, Western Province Command, Brigadier A.K. de Jager on 8 February. Their welcome, and after collecting kit and settling down in the bungalows built to house airmen of the two Air schools that had occupied Young's Field during the war years – was followed by an inter-bungalow touch-rugby competition. Basic training for the new gunners took place on the cement areas originally laid for Air School aircraft. Field training took place later at Koeberg, Gansekraal and Touws River.

The most unfortunate news ever received by the Anti-Aircraft gunners was recorded in the *Cape Times* of Wednesday, 1 February 1989. The Defence correspondent reported that Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was to be moved to another Base 'somewhere up country', possibly 'a more central location in the hinterland.' Kimberley was mentioned but the article stated that 'Military spokesmen would not comment on the move.' It was, however, confirmed later in the year that Kimberley was the destination and the move would take place in late 1989 or early 1990.

Fifty Years

Completion of fifty years since the official establishment of the first Anti-Aircraft Battery in the Union Defence Force on 1 April 1939 gave Colonel Syd Warren the opportunity for celebration. Suitable arrangements were for this event to coincide with the end of basic training on 14 April 1989. A very impressive passing out parade was thus held two days after the annual Gunners' Memorial Service. The Revue officer was once again Major General Dunbar Moodie, SM, the oldest surviving commanding officer of the School, who in his speech reflected on the activities of the Anti-Aircraft gunners over the previous fifty years. The parade was followed by a buffet dinner provided by the prize-winning Young's Field chefs. The evening before a magnificently organised function had been held in the Pom-Pom Hall to celebrate the half century.

A large number of Permanent and Citizen Force officers were present as well as Warrant Officers and NCOs, and their wives. Practically a guest of honour in his own right was Lieutenant Colonel C.T. Howie, who commanded 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade in East Africa; 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in North Africa; was captured at Tobruk; escaped from a POW camp and flew to safety in a German aircraft that he 'stole'. For the last few months of the war in Italy he was again in command of 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Others Included Major Neil Garlick – the first adjutant of a South African Anti-Aircraft unit – and later a Battery Commander and interim Regimental Commander.

Former commanding officers – Brigadier E.L. Bekker, and Colonels A. Moelich and J. du P. Lourens were present; and so were both Director, Anti-Aircraft and Assistant Director. Also there to hear the tributes paid to Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment by Brigadier A.K. De Jager, Officer Commanding Western Province Command, were four former RSM's: Warrant Officers I.J. Spangenberg; M. Schickerling; C. van der Westhuizen and M. Janse van Nieuwenhuizen. Significantly perhaps, that evening the Anti-Aircraft gunners were seen wearing their newly issued beret badges, both of which had received official approval on 10 November 1987.

A Chapter Closes

While the Fifty-Year celebrations were taking place - another chapter in South Africa's military and political history was drawing to a close.

Years of negotiation over the future of South West Africa/Namibia had at last resulted in agreement on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola in accordance with UN Resolution 435. South African security forces would withdraw from South West Africa, where 101 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was providing air defence at Ondangwa and Oshikati.

There had been a permanent Anti-Aircraft presence in those two centres for approximately two years, Batteries relieving each other at intervals. 101 Battery under Major D.J.K. Hurter had left for the SAAF base at Ondangwa and the military headquarter town of Oshikati in mid-December to relieve Cape Garrison Artillery. The original members of the Battery had been replaced by gunners of the 1988 intake and the Battery Commander had been replaced by Major J.F. Conradie. This post was subsequently filled in turn by Major A.P. van Heerden, Major S.M. Schultz and Commandant J. Del Monte. Major Steven Schultz had followed in his father's footsteps by becoming an Anti-Aircraft Gunner. He unfortunately received a gunshot wound in his back on 26 April 1989 during a state of 'Readiness High' when diving at a gunner who had twice fired at him as a result of imagined grievance. He was evacuated to 1 Military Hospital, Pretoria, the next day.

When the final date of withdrawal reached the Anti-Aircraft gunners the Sector 12 headquarters was closed down and the Battery, then under command of Commandant Del Monte, the last 35mm

Battery Commander in the operational area - with WO2 A. Kruger as convoy 21C - departed from Ondangwa at 7.00 am on 18 May in a convoy of 53 vehicles en route to the military base at Grootfontein. Once there, the 109 officers and men of the Battery loaded their guns and vehicles onto rail transport and later flew 'home' to Young's Field. Lieutenant H.A. Smit and the gunners of the Ystervark Troop were left. They serviced their seven vehicles and headed for Walvis Bay.

The final Anti-Aircraft SITREP of Operation Agree, sent on 15 May 1989, heralded the end of the South African Anti-Aircraft presence in South West Africa/Namibia... except for the Ystervark Troop at Walvis Bay - still South African territory.

44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

It was not until Exercise Vlakwater in September 1989 that a full Troop from 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment with two gun sections of Russian 14.5 ZPU Anti-Aircraft guns and one Jakkals airborne vehicle (described as a mini- jeep with four- wheel drive) with a double-barrelled 12.7 mm Anti-Aircraft machine-gun, was deployed by air. Browning machine-guns were also mounted on Jakkals vehicles. The gunners exited the C-130 using the 'nerve wracking tailgating'²¹ method from the rear ramp, immediately after the equipment pallets had been drawn out. (The full name of the 14.4 mm KVP Russian gun, one of many captured in Angola is: *Krupnokabiliberniy Pulemyot Vladimirova*)

During *Exercise Pegasus* at the Army Battle School in 1992 - and by now under acting command of Captain G.B. Krenzer who had succeeded Major Paddy Case - fifty-one parachute-qualified air defence Gunners from 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment were dropped at approximately 11.30 pm on 14 July over the General De Wet Training Area. Unfortunately, due to a surface wind their landing was a little harder than usual. Two 24 ft gun pallets were released from a C-130 transport aircraft before the Gunners exited the aircraft by the tail-gate. Their task was to provide air defence for the ground troops who went into the attack at 7.00 am on 15 July. A single 'enemy' aircraft appeared but because of fire from their eight twin-barrelled 14.5 mm Anti-Aircraft guns and two shoulder-launched missiles, it was unable to launch an attack. Just after first light the next morning the ground forces were attacked by air (in the form of Skylift radio-controlled aircraft) and were repelled by the Anti-Aircraft gunners.



Figure 57: ZPU-2 14.5 mm Anti-Aircraft gun

²¹ Ibid.

Two Anti-Aircraft Troops were an integral part of the support weapon structure of 1 Parachute Battalion Group – one from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment – both of which were used during the exercise. The exercise was the first in which Anti-Aircraft procedures, doctrine and tactical response were demonstrated since being included in the Battalion group.²² The Regiment took part in 44 Parachute Brigade's 'water jumps' over the Roodpoort Dam each year from 1990 to 1996. By 1997 the strength of 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was five officers and 117 other ranks although not all were jump qualified. Volunteers did a water jump that year.

SAAF hands over Captured Guns

At Hammanskraal 'under an unforgiving sun' Colonel J.J. van Heerden of Air Defence Artillery Group, SAAF, symbolically presented a number of Russian 2A14 23 mm (Sergei) ZU-23-2 twin-barrelled automatic Anti-Aircraft guns to the SA Army. In his address when handing them over Colonel van Heerden highlighted the fact that despite training manuals our troops had been able to use them against the enemy with devastating results. He said they had been found to have a '...highly destructive surface-to-surface ability...' and the weapon had proved itself the most feared weapon in the bush.' They were accepted by Colonel J.A. Ormond, Director Anti-Aircraft.²³ Thirty-six guns had been captured during operations in Angola and had been given to the Air Force to protect their Cactus ground-to-air low-level missile Batteries. They had been mounted by the Air Force on Samil 100 trucks. The ZU-23-2 was developed in the 1950's and in service from 1960 by many countries. It had a practical rate of fire of 1 400 rpm, and a cyclic rate of 2 000 rpm; an effective range of 2.5 km against low-flying targets and could hit armoured vehicles at 2 km. (Zenitnaya Ustanovka abbreviated as ZU).

²² Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment Newsletter 02/92..

²³ *Paratus*, Vol 41, No. 3, March 1990, p.14.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

GOOD-BYE CAPE TOWN

Perhaps the most unfortunate news the Anti-Aircraft gunners had ever received was recorded in the Cape Times of Wednesday, 1 February 1989, perhaps the reason for the Deputy Minister's visit to Young's Field the same day. Cape Town was without doubt the home of the Anti-Aircraft gunner, much as Potchefstroom was for the field gunners. But with both the School and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment based at Young's Field it had become increasingly evident that the Anti-Aircraft gunners – both School and Regiment - lost valuable experience by not being able to more easily participate in exercises at the Army Battle School with other defence force units. Cape Town, while at a convenient distance from Pretoria, could no longer ignore the problems associated with operating in the midst of an ever-increasingly built-up city. The surrounding areas had, since 1939, grown to the extent that Anti-Aircraft training in the area had become almost impossible.

There was no adequate safety area except over the sea. The entire Western Cape had become more and more built up and by the 1980's there was little or no room for manoeuvre or to practice battle techniques. It had been decided therefore to transfer both units to Kimberley, where ample accommodation was said to be available and which was relatively close to the Battle School at Lohatla. Ample space was available for field exercises and live shell practice and, where formation training could be undertaken. The move was scheduled to take place either at the year-end, or in early 1990.

A last shoot took place at Swartklip on 22 March when 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment provided senior Defence Force officers with a demonstration of their gunnery. Their guns targeted a remotely-controlled model aircraft produced by the enthusiasts of the Skylift team. Now publicly recognised and in action that day was *Ystervark* – the mobile 20 mm gun system. The *Eekhoring* was developed as Troop fire control post for the 20mm mobile gun systems with a upgraded Tupperware radar as local warning sensor.



Figure 58: *Eekhoring* mobile local warning radar

Many families had spent years finding a niche for themselves in the local community and it was no wonder that the decision to move to Kimberley was met with a degree of reluctance. There was much

sole-searching by those who had for years been part of the Anti-Aircraft staff at Young's Field; some resigned instead of moving, but at the end of 1990 after a little more than 61 years of association with Cape Town, the Anti-Aircraft gunners moved to a new permanent base in Kimberley. Colonel Syd Warren saw it as a challenge. Almost the entire unit, with its personnel, stores and equipment made a smoothly executed move to the northern Cape town of Kimberley. It was originally named New Rush, but renamed Kimberley in 1873 in honour of the Earl of Kimberley, British Secretary of State for the Colonies. Famous for diamonds and its Big Hole, Kimberley is situated almost in the exact centre of South Africa.

It was not, altogether, a smoothly executed move. There are always little things that escape the planners or happen unexpectedly. Unfortunately, one of the 20 mm gun barrels had not been locked in the 'down' position and, when the first train rolled forward out of Wetton station the barrel elevated and caught in the railway high voltage overhead cable. The gun was ripped from its mounting and thrown onto the truck behind it, where it landed on top of other guns.

And all was not in place in Kimberley to receive the Anti-Aircraft gunners. There were not enough married quarters and some families had to stay at the Horse Shoe Motel for some months waiting for their accommodation to be built, Equipment hangars were not large enough – there was just not sufficient area – to store all the Prime Mission equipment. One group did not immediately suffer such problem. When the main body moved to Kimberley the Junior Leader branch remained at Young's Field in order to complete the training schedule set for the future 2nd Lieutenants and NCO's. The group, under command of Major A. de Villiers, supported by Captain H.J. Baird also acted as a rear party. Parade – the last to be held at Young's Field – took place on 22 February 1991. The Revue Officer was Brigadier D.P. Lambrecht who was welcomed by Colonel Warren. A number of trophies were awarded including those provided by The Gunners' Association – a pair of binoculars to 2nd Lieutenant R. Bent - the best candidate officer and a pace stick for Bombardier G.A. Hill – the winning NCO. The Gunners' Association prizes then had been a sword and a pace stick but had changed to a pair of binoculars and a compass when swords and pace sticks became unavailable in 1990. This large group joined the main body at Kimberley in the weeks after the parade.

Headquarters began operating in Kimberley from December 1990. It was a great loss to Cape Town, where the School had been situated since 1939, and from whence most of the World War Two Anti-Aircraft gunners were recruited. A farewell parade was held on the Grand Parade, Cape Town, on 28 November and a symbolic Flag, with the unit emblems of both the Anti-Aircraft School and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment as well as the Anti-Aircraft motto – '*Alta Pete*' (*Aim High*) was handed by the Officer Commanding, Western Province Command to the Acting Officer Commanding, Northern Cape Command to symbolise the official handing over of the unit from one Command to another. From the start the unit joined in with activities in Kimberley and at the 1991 Kimberley Show it won the prize for the most outstanding exhibit. Paratus described it as '*n Indrukwekkende uitstalling van meer as 4 000 vk meter van lugafweerkanonne, radars, memorabilia en opleidingshulpmiddels...*' It was said to be the focus point of the whole show and as newcomers to Kimberley Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment had surely made themselves known to the citizens of Kimberley.

Mechanised Anti-Aircraft Gun

A project to produce self-propelled mechanised equipment for the air defence gunners came to an end in 1990, when Project Strelitzia was terminated towards the end of the year due to the huge cost factor. (The cost of one such mechanised system with all its sub-systems was equivalent to a Squadron of tanks). Additionally, the 'Bush War' had come to an end and there was no further need for such mechanised equipment.

Major Altus van Heerden was Project Officer for Strelitzia with Mr. J. Knoetze as Armscor programme manager. The SPAAG (Self Propelled Anti-Aircraft Gun) system was made up of various technology building blocks, later integrated in other systems. It was based on a Rooikat 8 x 8 armoured platform but was also tested on a Russian T72 platform. The turret, manufactured by Lyttelton Engineering Works, was larger than the Rooikat 76 mm turret and the vehicle had to be enlarged to fit the newly designed Anti-Aircraft turret. This increased the overall length of the SPAAG vehicle by about 24

cm. Radar was the Hexagon radar supplied by ESD South - now known as Reutech Radar Systems. This radar later became the building block for the *Kameelperd/Thutlwa* radar. Sighting was by means of a stabilised electro-optical system developed by Denel and later used as the building block for the Rooivalk sight system; it included a high-resolution TV daylight as the main sensor but it also had an infrared thermal camera for use at night, with auto tracking system and laser range finder.

The ZA-35 mm gun was developed by Denel and was later used in the SA-35 mm DPG gun fitted to the SA Navy corvettes. The gun, which was double-barrelled, had very few moving parts and was extremely accurate. Major Jacques Baird, Warrant Officer Gert Kotze and Staff Sergeant Burger completed the first and only course on the system early in 1990 at KENTRON in Pretoria. The course ended with a demonstration to a high-level delegation, including Lieutenant General G.L. (Georg) Meiring.¹ Although the sub-systems (Vehicle, Gun, Radar and sights) were performing well individually, there were still some minor problems to be solved. Colonel Baird recalls: 'When we designated the gun with the radar data during the demonstration the barrels faced 180 degrees in the opposite direction. This was attributed to demonstration gremlins!' As one of the first and only instructors to be trained on this system he assisted in writing the drill book. The cost of one SPAAG then and even today compares to the cost of one Squadron of tanks. The end of the Bush War made the powers-to-be query the requirement for such a mechanised system at the enormous associated cost involved. The project was terminated by the end of 1990.

Re-union

Two years and four days after the officers and men of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade marched out of the Castle en route to Potchefstroom...and eventually to East Africa, North African and capture as POWs. Many of them met once again. 1990 signalled the 50th anniversary of the establishment of what they affectionately knew as '2nd Ack-Ack'. Their numbers were slowly dropping but they continued to meet fairly regularly; they welcomed each other, they talked, they enjoyed each other's company...and they quietly remembered '*Potch and Zonderwater for cold showers, meal queues, ten to a bell-tent, German measles, influenza, cook-house fatigue, weekly inspections...and whatever else happens in a military camp*'.² They had developed a great spirit of comradeship in the years they had fought together and had spent almost three years as POW's – a spirit which lasted fifty years, and would last another few - before the last twelve members of the Regiment – then in their late eighties, called it a day.

A History

Young's Field – a history of the School of Anti-Aircraft Artillery - was written as a dare by a Citizen Force Field Artillery officer who jokingly took Colonel Ormond to task for 'allowing' a poorly written and totally incorrect history of the Young's Field gunners to circulate in his Lines'. The Colonel responded with: 'Write a better one'. The gauntlet had been thrown.

After many hours of investigation and research Young's Field was completed and printed with the kind assistance of Reutech. But Colonel Ormond had by then moved on to another appointment. It was left to Colonel S.K. (Syd) Warren to thank the author and finally, to hand a copy of the history – the first published history covering the Anti-Aircraft gunners – to Lieutenant General G.L. Meiring, Chief of the Army. On 4 October 1991 Colonel Warren presented him a copy of Young's Field – The History of the Anti-Aircraft School – and thanked him for assistance given to the Corps. He also thanked Mr. Frikkie Naude for help and support from Intertechnic.³

During Exercise Golden Eagle towards the end of 1991, a new mobile Anti-Aircraft Battery fire control post was fully evaluated. Results were good. In 1992 a group was sent to the manufacturers in the Cape for full training on the *Kameelperd* Radar system.

¹ *Paratus*, December 1991, p. 41.

² *Springbok*, May/June 1990, p.9.

³ *Paratus*, November 1991, p. 27.

At 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

The January intake of National Servicemen allotted to Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was posted to 101 Battery and by the time the unit's Newsletter 02/92 appeared the Battery had enjoyed a very busy and successful training period. Corps training was followed by training at Army Battle School where they were included in Exercise Sweepstag. The intake for 102 Battery, who reported in between 6 and 10 July, was relatively small. The recruits underwent basic training and an average pass rate of 62 per cent was achieved. Five recruits did not pass the course. They all attended a field training phase at Barky-West with small-arms range practice, field craft, map reading and other basic procedures. Back in Kimberley a very successful presentation parade and parent's day with a spit-braai and dance, was held on 28 and 29 August and was attended by family members. Arena displays, sub-unit exhibits were to be seen and the second day ended with a very smart drill display. With basic training at an end, the week-end over, 34 candidates attended a selection board for possible inclusion in a junior leader's course. All succeeded on being chosen.

New Junior Leaders

On 3 July, after intensive training, which included Infantry training and a parachute course, the first seven black junior leaders received promotion. One was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant, the others being promoted to Bombardiers. 2nd Lieutenant T.M. Mohoase and Bombardiers F.L. Isaac; K.A. Modise; J.A. Thulo; A.L. Fothoane; J.M. Lebetsa and M.G. Setlolela had six months before been 'recruits', not posted to any Corps, and had undergone basic Infantry training. Once completed, they underwent and passed the three-day paratrooper '*vasbyt kursus*'; this was followed by the full paratrooper static-line course, after which they were given a choice of Corps. They made the wise choice of the Anti-Aircraft Corps. It was not the end, however, as they were subjected to MPI and psychological testing by the SA Military Health Services to ensure they had the aptitude to qualify as junior leaders. Then it was off to Anti-Aircraft School for junior leader training. Small-arms training was undertaken at 44 Parachute Brigade by Anti-Aircraft School instructors.

Meanwhile a number of other junior leaders – eighteen officers and 44 Bombardiers - had become Anti-Aircraft qualified and had assumed their new responsibilities. Major General P.M. Lombard Chief of Army Staff Planning and the newly appointed General of the Gunners was the functionary at their passing-out parade.

Change of Command

Regiment Vaal Rivier won the 1991 Bofors Trophy competition. The trophy was presented at a function at Vereeniging, Major Gerhard Stapelberg accepting the trophy from the local chairman of The Gunners' Association, Brigadier 'Fido' Smit. In his acceptance speech, Major Stapelberg said it was an honour to be awarded the trophy which reflected the loyalty, positive attitude, discipline and teamwork of the Regiment.⁴ The Regiment suffered a change in command when Commandant W. (Wolf) Wassermeier, after a total of 23 years Citizen Force service handed over to Commandant W.G. (Gerhard) Stapelberg on Saturday, 23 May 1992. The parade was inspected by Brigadier H.B. Smit, a former GOC, 7 SA Infantry Division. Both Commandants had given years of service to the Anti-Aircraft Corps. Wolf Wassermeier had served as an Anti-Aircraft Gunner since entering National Service at Young's Field on 2 July 1964; he had been appointed to the rank of assistant Field Cornet (a 2nd Lieutenant) at the conclusion of leader group training but on being posted to a Citizen Force unit (Regiment Vaal Rivier) he dropped rank to that of gunner. That was how the system worked, but Citizen Force commanding officers looked at the files of new intake and those who had held rank were quickly promoted. Wolf Wassermeier was very soon a Sergeant and was again commissioned in February 1972. He was appointed Honorary Colonel of the unit in July 1993.

Gerhard Stapelberg's service followed a slightly different path. He reported for National Service in February 1969 and was transferred to Regiment Vaal Rivier in 1970 as a Regimental signaller. He rose from the rank of gunner to Warrant Officer class 2, before being commissioned in 1981. As commanding officer one of his first tasks was to attend the Corps Symposium held at the National

⁴ *Vaal Stér*, 16.10. 1992.

Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, on 6 and 7 August 1992. The symposium was marked particularly by presentations of various Anti-Aircraft subjects by senior experts in their field. The reason behind this approach was to voice and bear in mind the future development of Anti-Aircraft.

It was fifty years since the Battle of Alamein; and the Corps took opportunity of the Symposium to present to the Director of the National War Museum, the original fire plan and deployment trace of the South African Anti-Aircraft guns as at 23 October 1942 - the day the Battle began. It was accepted by Major General (Ret) Phil Pretorius. Shortly after the symposium Commandant Carl Lindsay, Warrant Officer Erasmus and a small team moved to Pretoria to set up and man an Anti-Aircraft exhibit at the annual show. Other highlights during 1992 included:

- The evaluation under the direction of Commandant Louw and Major Francis of a new fire unit, with road tests and live fire at Jakkalsfontein. Tests and evaluation was undertaken by personnel of Aerotech (WNNR) and Sinotech. Cape Garrison Artillery supplied eight gunners to support the tests. This 35 mm gun fire unit development included a towed single barrel ZA gun developed under Project Strelitzia, and Search Radar based on the Hexagon radar supplied by ESD South (now Reutech Radar Systems) and the *Fynkyk* tracking radar developed by the CSIR. It was a technology development and never reached production.
- The arrival of the first Troop of GA-6 mobile 23 mm Anti-Aircraft guns, on which training began in September.
- The announcement of the final development of SPAAG 35 – a locally developed mechanised 35 mm Anti-Aircraft gun, which had received the ARMSCOR Chairman's award for the best developed system. The system was not in production but was a source of encouragement for all Anti-Aircraft gunners. The chairman of Armscor, Mr. Johann van Vuuren, announced it was available for the international market. A Self Propelled Anti-Aircraft Missile (SPAAM) system variant, using the same building blocks than the SPAAG were also developed but suffered the same fate.



Figure 59: Self Propelled Anti-Aircraft Gun and Missile development (SPAAG & SPAAM)

A New RSM

Warrant Officer J.N.P. Laubscher, on whose shoulders much had fallen in the move from Cape Town to Kimberley, ended his term of office as RSM of Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in October 1992. His dynamic leadership style had played an enormous amount in the establishment of the unit in the society of Kimberley. After 27 years with the Corps he was leaving to become RSM of Group 29, Ellisras. At an afternoon tea attended by members of both Messes, he handed the reins of office to the newly appointed RSM – Warrant Officer 1 I.G. Theron.⁵

Command of the combined unit also changed in 1992, when the reins of Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment were handed by Colonel Sydney Warren to Commandant Neil Muller on 17 December 1992. The latter, a golfer with an eleven handicap, - had completed his Staff course in 1989.

⁵ *Ubique*, No. 4 February 1993.

He received promotion to Colonel from 1 January 1993. The handing over ceremony was in some way historic as Sidney Warren who had assumed command of the combined unit at Young's Field on 17 December 1988, was for the first time part of a similar ceremony at Kimberley. It was he who had planned and overseen the move of the Anti-Aircraft training unit from Cape Town to its new base in the Northern Cape. In his farewell speech he passed on to officers and men his thoughts on self-esteem and responsibility. Colonel Warren was transferred from 1 January 1993, to Pretoria as SSO Contingency Planning at Chief of the SADF Operations Section.

On 2 July 1993, the official introduction of the SA Army's new camouflage uniform was announced; and the following day it displayed for the first time at the SADF parade held in Kimberley. The parade was held to celebrate the 81st Birthday of the SA Defence Force.⁶

An Air Defence Master Gunner

Major General (later Lieutenant General) F.E.C. (Frans) van den Berg, SD, SM, MMM, was appointed Master Gunner of the Corps of South African Artillery from 22 March 1982. The appointment was made as a result of the Director Artillery suggesting that a more senior appointment would be better able to assist the Corps at a higher level in the military hierarchy. It was later realised that all the officers, Warrant officers and senior NCOs who had attended and passed the rigorous Long Gunnery courses had all been classed as Master Gunners. His title was therefore changed to that of General of the Artillery. He was followed by on 1 June 1992 by Major General Paul Lombard, SM, MMM. Both were Field Gunners.

During the term of office of the first Master Gunner the Corps was split into an Field Artillery Corps and an Anti-Aircraft Corps. The May 1993 issue of *Ubique* – the newsletter of The Gunners' Association - made it clear that Major General Lombard was General of the SA Artillery *and* the SA Anti-Aircraft Corps' and the 'dismemberment' of the original Corps did not therefore raise a problem in 1993 when Major General PO du Preez, SD, - an Anti-Aircraft Gunner - was appointed General of the Artillery on 3 March of that year. At the lunch following the Gunners' Memorial service in Potchefstroom in 1993 the new General of the Artillery, as it was then, was presented with his symbol of command – a Shooting Stick - by the senior officer present, Colonel Groenewald, the Honorary Colonel of Transvaal Staatsartillerie. This was first presented to Lieutenant General van den Berg by Citizen Force units and is handed down to each new General of the Gunners. It is now in a showcase at Field Artillery Formation headquarters.

The title of the incumbent was altered from General of the Artillery to General of the Gunners from 2 July 1993 as this was felt more appropriate for one who was virtually the senior gunner of both the South African Artillery and the Anti-Aircraft Corps.

Although the avuncular, modest Frans van den Berg was known to artillerymen as the 'Gunners' Godfather' he fought for the gunner fraternity from behind the scenes; Philip du Preez, from 1 June 1995 a Lieutenant General, on the other hand thoroughly enjoyed his stint in this prestigious position and was seen more often by all units, and on all occasions. He was only too happy to adopt the traditions of the units, both Field and Anti-Aircraft, that he served and was perhaps the first to acknowledge and use the only band in the Corps – the pipes and drums of Cape Field Artillery. At his farewell function (he retired on 25 June 1998) he initiated the toast of a tot of whisky which he and the pipe Major each drank before throwing their glasses into the fireplace behind them. This act is carried on today by following Generals of the Gunners at important Gunner functions.

Tension

The year 1993 was one of tension, with an ever-increasing tide of violence which reached a new low with senseless, sickening attacks on children and passing motorists.⁷ Automatic gunfire shattered the peaceful service when men wielding automatic firearms and hand grenades burst into a church in a

⁶ *Paratus*, Vol. 44, No. 8, August 1993.

⁷ *Springbok*, May/June 1990, p.9.

Cape Town suburb during the Sunday evening service on 25 July 1993. Known as the St. James Church massacre, it left eleven dead and 58 injured.⁸ It was not the only incident to take place – but perhaps the most horrific. One newspaper recorded the possibility of people taking the law into their own hands. Earlier in the year - in March, President De Klerk ‘came clean’ by announcing that South Africa’s nuclear weapons programme - long suspected by the United States – had ended and that six deadly nuclear devices, kept secret for years, had been dismantled. Development had begun in 1974. It had been the best kept secret for twenty years; not even all the Cabinet knew of it.

All this while negotiations regarding South Africa’s future had been taking place. There were many questions – many answers – much discussion and hard bargaining. The military were concerned and among questions asked during the negotiations were: how does the SADF fit into a new political dispensation? Will the military chiefs accept such a new dispensation? Can the SADF and *Umkhonto we Sizwe* be merged? What is the future of conscription? What is the future of the traditional Citizen Force Regiments - they had always supplied much of the Army’s combat capability?

A little more than four months after the announcement of the issue of new camouflage uniforms, at thirteen minutes after midnight on Thursday, 18 November 1993 a fourteen-chapter Interim Constitution was finally approved after two hard-fought years of political bargaining, paving the way for a new – non-racial, democratic - South Africa.⁹

Colours: Regiment Vaal Rivier

During Commandant W. Wassermeier’s term as commanding officer of Regiment Vaal Rivier (August 1982 – May 1992) it was decided that the Regiment should make application to possess a Regimental Colour. About the same time the chaplain, ds G.J. van Rensburg, was asked to draw up a history of the Regiment to give credence to the application to be awarded a Colour. The chaplain was an enthusiastic and trained gunner, having reached the rank of Sergeant before his calling to the church. He undertook the task with enthusiasm.

At a Colours parade on 1 November 1992, National Colours were presented to fourteen units by General Georg Meiring – including Regiment Vaal Rivier.

With authority for a Regimental Colour obtained, it was designed and approved. The cost was generously donated by Commandant Wassermeier and it was ordered from overseas. It duly arrived but was discovered that it had been made with the wrong colours. It was hastily returned to Britain. The Battery Commander of ‘R’ Battery had suggested earlier that the State President be asked to present the Colour and when it was sent back to Britain the detailed protocol necessary in inviting the State President, with help of the member of Parliament for Vereeniging, Mr. Tom Gunning, was far advanced. By that time Commandant Wassemeier had transferred to 7 Infantry Division and shortly afterwards accepted the position of Honorary Colonel to the Regiment. There must have been many anxious thoughts; but fortunately the Colour, now correct in all aspects, arrived in South Africa one week before the parade was due to take place. The Regimental Colour with the Regimental shoulder flash and motto as the central device was presented by the then State President F.W. de Klerk at Vereeniging on 24 June 1994. Present were General Kat Liebenberg, Chief of the SADF; Lieutenant General Georg Meiring, Chief of the Army; and Commander, 7 SA Division, Brigadier Roland de Vries. It was only a day or two before Lieutenant Colonel Wassemeier became Honorary Colonel to the Regiment.

Democracy

A new era in the history of South Africa began on Sunday, 11 February 1990, when, after 27 years of imprisonment, Nelson Mandela walked out of Victor Verster Prison, Paarl, as a free man. In the weeks and months that followed meetings and negotiations eventually led to the acceptance of a new

⁸ *The Argus*, 24 July 1994

⁹ *The Argus*, 18.11.1993.

constitution for the country and the appointment of Mr. Nelson Mandela as the South Africa's first President in a country in which all races could exercise a vote.¹⁰

27 April 1994 – the day that marked the commencement of the Government of National Unity also marked the establishment of the SA National Defence Force and the integration of non-statutory forces. Turning a well-oiled war machine into a democratic institution was not easy. General Georg Meiring who was guiding the process had by 1996 succeeded '...beyond its wildest expectations, albeit there having been some problems along the way.'¹¹ Fruits were beginning to become apparent and with a rationalisation programme ahead, it was expected to result in a 70 000-strong Defence Force of manageable proportions. A British BMATT team was in the country assisting with selection and training criteria, to adjudicate in the selection process and finally to monitor the training. Lieutenant Colonel H.R. Lawford, RA, was responsible for integration of NSF members into the SA Artillery – both field and Anti-Aircraft. Neutrality, firmness and transparency were the tools of his team's trade. Bridging training followed the selection process '...to orientate the former NSF soldier away from a guerrilla background to the training norms of a conventional Army'.¹²

'On successful completion of general bridging training, the individual will then attend general bridging training at a Corps school, where he will receive very intensive training covering all the courses a regular member would have to receive in order gain a particular rank.' Lieutenant Colonel Lawford noted that '... the two Artillery Corps both conduct much more formalised courses than are seen in the Royal Artillery. Progress through the ranks is very much restricted by course attendance.' His service in the BMATT team fortunately took place over the period of the Rugby World Cup.

Subsequent training of non-statutory force personnel was undertaken by 103 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. By 1997 the first female gunners were under training at the School as Junior Leaders - for eventual promotion as air defence Officers and NCOs.

In 1994 the 20 mm Anti-Aircraft gun was phased out¹³ and was replaced by the 23 mm *Bosvark* system. The 20mm weapons were transferred to the SA Navy and to Special Forces according to their requirements. Vehicles were disposed of via Armscor.

Momentous events took place in South Africa in 1994, very few of which could have been foreseen in the 1960's and it took a little while for matters to change and to finally settle down to an even routine. Changes continued through the rest of the 90's, some of them bewildering.

Good-bye, Dune 7

There was, for instance, to be no more tobogganing down Dune 7 at Walvis bay. The South African Government ended 84 years of control of Walvis Bay when the enclave and twelve off-shore islands were officially handed over to the Namibian Government on Tuesday, 1 March 1994. It was an amicable end to a Territorial dispute which had begun in 1878 when it was first occupied for the Cape Colony by the explorer W.C. Palgrave. In 1885 following Germany's claim to the rest of the country, the Cape Colony annexed the bay and the area surrounding it. The boundary of the enclave was defined by King Alphonso of Spain in 1912.¹⁴

On the stroke of midnight of April 1994 the SA Defence Force became the SA National Defence Force and Commandants became Lieutenant Colonels. National Service was abandoned and the Citizen Force - which had been plagued for a few years by various groups agitating to end conscription, particularly the End Conscription Campaign - and which had suffered the problem of many men failing to report for training, simply became a limp rag as men 'disappeared'.

¹⁰ *From Port Fire to Base Bleed: Final typed history of Cape Field Artillery, Chapter 49, p. 20.*

¹¹ *The Argus, 10.5.1996.*

¹² *Gunner, Magazine of the Royal Artillery Association, pp.7, 8. (Edition unfortunately not recorded)*

¹³ *History of Regiment Vaal Rivier, p. 60.*

¹⁴ *Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa, p. 628.*

Almost the last call on the National Servicemen still available on duty were when the first democratic elections took place in 1994. Extensive disruption had been expected. But after the abandonment of National Service and the virtual disappearance of thousands of troops, Citizen Force units were left with few personnel - only true volunteers remaining faithful to their units. A schedule produced by 9 SA Division, based in Cape Town, showed only 29 on strength in Cape Garrison Artillery and 58 in 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Cape Town's premier Field Artillery unit showed a strength of six (which from personal knowledge of the author was totally incorrect.) One old traditional Southern Cape unit – Regiment Suid-Westelike Distrikte - was left with only its commanding officer and RSM. The End Conscription Campaign had achieved the object for which it had fought long and hard, reducing the most efficient Defence Force on the continent of Africa to less than a shadow – a whisper - of its former self. Equipment was a real problem. As the Minister of Defence described it in Parliament: 'We are already in injury time. Shortly after 2005 it will be the end of injury time, and then the final whistle will blow.'

While South Africa had its problems – so did the United Nations and the United States, with the latter preparing to send 3 000 ground troops into Kuwait as tensions escalated over the weapons inspection impasse with Iraq. There was suspicion that Iraq's arsenal included large stocks of chemical weapons. While President Clinton staid there was still a chance of a peaceful end to the situation, he repeated his threat of military action.¹⁵

The Anti-Aircraft gunners had been based at Kimberley for four years when Nelson Mandela was released from prison and when the first democratic elections were held, resulting in the establishment of the South Africa National Defence Force. It incorporated everyone within its ranks – members of the SADF, those from the TBVC states and from the non-statutory forces. Recommendations by the management consultants that prepared the scenario that today exists led ultimately to the two Divisions and the Brigades being swept aside. In their place arose the Type Formation – where, for instance all Infantry units would resort under one headquarters known as SA Army Infantry Formation. And, similarly, an Air Defence Artillery Formation, an Artillery Formation, etc. It led for a while to slightly confusing situation while Formations sorted themselves out and while Part-time Force units (unofficially no longer Citizen Force) became used to a new system of command. There was no longer a traditional Army structure of Divisions, Brigades and Regiments in that order but instead - a Level of Command; Level 4 being the units and Level 3 being the intermediate structures between the units and the next higher level. Level 2 included the Ministry of Defence staff divisions and Level 1 included the Secretary for Defence and the Chief of the SANDF.¹⁶

A high-powered Transformation Design Workshop was established to integrate and to transform theory into practice. Service in the Part-Time component became voluntary and on Thursday morning 1998 Gauteng Command received 328 volunteers as intake for the Voluntary Military Service System introduced at the beginning of 1994. The VMSS was seen as the main source of recruitment for conventional units and personnel for the 'Part-Time Component'.¹⁷

The new dispensation led to many things new, particularly to white male South Africans; it led to gender equality in the armed forces. It was a new challenge and armies do not give up when there is a challenge ahead of them. One of the first challenges given to the Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was the training of former non-statutory personnel.

This took place at 103 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment between 1994 and 1999. Most of the trainees were women and about 600 from various Corps of the SA Army underwent training. During this time – in 1997 - the first female gunners underwent junior leader Anti-Aircraft training and four candidate officers and eleven NCO's emerged from the course. They were trained as Bosvark 23 mm Troop second-in-command, detachment commanders and observation post officers and NCO's. In

¹⁵ *The Cape Argus*, 18.2.1998.

¹⁶ *Salut*, Vol. 5, No. 3, March 1998, p. 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

1999 the first female Voluntary (Initial) Military Service personnel were trained as gun operators and drivers at the Anti-Aircraft School.

Anti-Aircraft Symposium

The annual Gunners' Memorial Service at The Gun in the Company's Gardens, Cape Town, was held on Sunday, 2 April 1995 - a little earlier in the year than usual, to enable those attending the Anti-Aircraft Symposium to attend. The symposium, attended by Director Anti-Aircraft, commanding officer Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and all Regimental Commanders, took place in the week preceding the memorial service.¹⁸ The three-day symposium ended on Friday afternoon and everyone attended a change of command parade when Lieutenant Colonel Marius van der Westhuizen handed over command of Cape Garrison Artillery to Lieutenant Colonel C.W. du Plessis. The week-end had a full schedule: it began on Saturday with a medal parade when 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment's newly appointed Honorary Colonel, Mr. W Pretorius, performed his first official task, that of presenting medals to members of the unit. Present was Colonel Jeff Ormond, Director Anti-Aircraft. A formal dinner at which all those who attended the symposium were present, took place that night. Lieutenant Colonel 'Stoffie' Stofberg gave a delightful speech, thanking them for their loyalty and devotion.¹⁹

Visit to Royal Artillery

Lieutenant General Philip du Preez, SD, SM, MMM, paid a visit to Woolwich, London, in company with the South African representative of the Royal Artillery Association, Lieutenant Colonel J.R. McGregor in September 1996. They attended a presentation on 'The Royal Artillery Today' and afterwards lunched at the Woolwich Officers' Mess, before visiting the famous silver collection, the largest in the British Army, and the Library which is considered to hold the largest collection of books on Gunnery and related subjects anywhere in the world. They also visited the Rotunda Museum where guns of every description from all over the world are on display. A book, a commemorative copy of the Regimental Heritage, was presented to Lieutenant General du Preez by the Master Gunner St James's Park, General Sir Martin Farndale KCB.²⁰

Earlier in the year the High Commissioner for South Africa, Mr. Mendie Msimang, visited Woolwich to formally present the Royal Artillery with a 6-inch 26 cwt howitzer, the main medium gun of World War 1. The howitzer had been used by British and South African Gunners in France in World War 1 and again in East Africa, the Western Desert and Italy during World War 2. Although over 3 000 had been produced during the years of 1915/1919 the Royal Artillery did not have a copy in their museum and were very pleased to receive the generous gift.²¹

Exercise Vindicator was held at the Army Battle School in October with 32 men from Cape Garrison Artillery led by Candidate Officer Thys Jansen van Nieuwenhuizen, a former RSM of Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Young's Field. The Regiment was able to field two detachments for the 35 mm Anti-Aircraft guns. The Gunners' Association magazine *Ubique* carried this story and also announced that Gunner J. van Rooi '...shot down an aerial target with his 35 mm.' He must have been a very proud man.²² Reserve Force units were regularly involved in exercises in company with Regular soldiers, receiving practical field phase training.

In 1995 a document was released by the UK's Public Record Office which describes a contingency plan for the invasion of Rhodesia following the declaration of UDI. The planners strongly advised the government against military intervention, pointing out that there was no direct access by sea and that the risk of failure was high, as '... the invasion of a country with Rhodesia's military capability under these conditions would be without precedent. Any assault would need to be air-based and troops

¹⁸ *Ubique*, No. 11, October 1995, p. 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁰ *Ubique*, Issue 13 April 1996, p. 6.

²¹ *Gunner*, November 1995, p. 2.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

would have to be flown in, following a pre-emptive strike against Rhodesian Air Force airfields'. It was envisaged that five Brigades would be required, which was beyond the capability of Britain, as the maximum force that could be introduced and maintained would be two Brigades. The assembly of this force with all its equipment in Africa would take two and a half months and its introduction from there into Rhodesia would take another month.

The Americans had offered the use of C130 transport aircraft to assist and the initial assault would have used paratroopers. Despite planned pre-emptive strikes, it could not be guaranteed that all the Rhodesian Hunters and Vampires would be taken out, thereby posing a significant threat to transport aircraft. The planners were also wary of Rhodesian manpower, estimating that Rhodesia could field eleven major Army units within a matter of days. The planners concluded that '... there was no reasonable chance of success against an opposition, fighting stubbornly on its own ground, assisted by small bands of guerrillas and perhaps white police'. Fortunately, and despite the enthusiasm for war by the British Labour Party headed by Mr Harold Wilson, the invasion never took place.

Posting Changes

The first day of 1996 began with changes in the Anti-Aircraft Directorate and at the School. Colonel Jeff Ormond who had served as Director Anti-Aircraft since 8 January 1990, was appointed Military Attaché in Maputo and Colonel N.G. (Neil) Muller, until then commanding officer Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, became Commanding Officer Group 22 at Kimberley. Lieutenant Colonel P. du T. Walters, MMM, filled the appointment of Director Anti-Aircraft with the rank of Colonel from 1 January 1996 and the newly promoted Colonel C.R. Lindsay, MMM, replaced Neil Muller at Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

April 1996 heralded the second year of existence of the SANDF and it was celebrated on 27 April at NASREC, Johannesburg, with an impressive display of South Africa's military might. President Mandela was guest of Honour and in his address he urged people to volunteer for part-time service. He ensured the SANDF of his continued support, describing it as a '...priceless national asset.' During the ceremony the new nine-point Star badge of rank insignia was handed by the President to General Georg Meiring. The symbolic SANDF flag transfer took place, Natal Command passing it to Witwatersrand Command to signify the next such parade would be the responsibility of the latter command. The new constitution of the Republic of South Africa was adopted by the Constitutional Assembly on 8 May 1996. It dealt with a number of provisions dealing directly with the SANDF.

By the time the Constitution was signed the SA Army was readying itself for peace-keeping 'duties' south of the equator. It was a virtual certainty for the new-look SANDF, and its role in United Nations-brokered operations was spelt out by Major General S.E. du Toit when he addressed a workshop on 'training for peace'.²³

Alliance with the Royal Artillery

The South African Artillery *per se*, and not individual units as many Regimental histories tend to suggest, was affiliated to the Royal Artillery as recorded in General Order No. 58 of 1919. This formal relationship did not at first include any Anti-Aircraft unit – there were none in 1919, and it unfortunately ended in when South Africa declared itself a Republic on 31 May 1961. Co-operation, however, continued and with South Africa back in the British Commonwealth an initial approach was made in 1995 to revive the formal relationship. Frank Louw, Chairman of The Gunners' Association visited London early in 1996 to discuss details of the forthcoming event. The Alliance, as it came to be called was formally revived in 1996 through the efforts of the energetic General of the Gunners, Lieutenant General Philip du Preez - an Air Defence Gunner, when an illuminated scroll recording the Alliance was signed at a ceremony held on the Front Parade, Woolwich, London, on 5 June 1996, on behalf of the Royal Regiment of Artillery by General Sir Martin Farndale KCB, Master Gunner St. Jame's Park and Lieutenant General Philip du Preez, SD, SM, MMM, General of the Gunners, South Africa.

²³ *The Cape Argus*, 10.5.1996.

On parade at the ceremony, in addition to the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery and the Royal Artillery Band, were detachments of Royal Artillery Batteries with South African Honour titles: Q (Sannah's Post) Battery; 14 (Cole's Kop) Battery and 159 (Colenso) Battery.

At a formal luncheon following the parade gifts were exchanged. Lieutenant General du Preez presented a magnificent silver centre-piece of the Ras Gun to the Royal Artillery and in turn received a framed painting of a Royal Artillery field Battery being brought into action in 1850. It was agreed that greetings would be exchanged on 1 June annually.

General Sir Martin Farndale visited South Africa later in the year, attended The Gunners' Association National Congress in Kimberley; visited the National War Museum in Johannesburg and attended a formal Alliance dinner at the SA Army College on 23 September. During the formalities preceding the parade a second scroll was signed to symbolise the new Alliance.

Reserve Force Problems

During the past couple of years the Defence budget had declined by 50 per cent and the 1996 budget included a further decline of ten per cent to R10.2 Billion – R 942 million less than 1995. Six years prior to this the cost of Defence was 4.4 per cent of GDP and it was now only two per cent. Defence equipment was aging but it became necessary to retain and use it longer than its economic life. Minister Joe Modise told Parliament that his budget, which was 1.6 per cent of gross Domestic Product, placed South Africa in the lowest bracket of national defence investment in the world and he was unable to sustain a defence programme within the existing budget.²⁴ He added that there was no provision for capital equipment.²⁵ Many South Africans would not have given much attention to these statements; nor to the news a few days earlier, announcing that the first 'black gold' had been pumped from the Oribi oilfield off Mossel Bay on Monday, 12 May 1997. Officials said they hoped to pump 20 000 barrels of crude a day.²⁶

Units of the Citizen Force had suffered badly at the continual harassment – aimed primarily at the system of National Service – by the End Conscription Campaign. Call-ups for operations, both external and internal, were more and more often poorly supported for other reasons – disruption of employment; of family matters, conceived wastage of time and so forth. And by 1996, after the declaration of the new democratic society in 1994, some units found themselves with few members and some without troops. The end came for Regiment Overvaal at a training camp in 1996. 46 Brigade held a 36-day training camp at Lohathla with attached Anti-Aircraft personnel. Eight members of Regiment Overvaal and twelve from Regiment Vaal Rivier presented themselves for training. It was their swansong. Several units were able to provide security support for the first democratic elections, but after that only the most enthusiastic of the volunteers remained. The Commando system was, however, still in force. To make it worse it seemed apparent to Citizen Force units – by now being referred to as the Part Time Force – that were being ignored by the Full Time or Regular Force (no longer Permanent Force) who were battling to integrate non-statutory forces into the Regular structure and who seemingly were basically looking after their own interests.

The SANDF was also under pressure to reduce its footprint and cut costs. Funding was severely reduced and the flow of recruits to units came to an abrupt end. In a general re-organisation of the Troop List in an effort to contain the SA Army's expenses within budget, there were casualties in both Full Time and Part Time Force units. In the Anti-Aircraft Corps, 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and Regiment Overvaal, both established from 1 April 1969,²⁷ were summarily disestablished from 1 April 1997. The last four years of administrative work by certain members of both units, under difficult circumstances, had been undertaken with very, very limited recompence. And there was no thanks for what they had done.

²⁴ *Cape Times*, 22.5.1997.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.5.1997

²⁶ *The Cape Argus*, 13.5.1997.

²⁷ SADFO 53/69.

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment had been formed in mid-year by the transfer of a huge overflow from Cape Garrison Artillery. Initially under command of Captain A.H. Morris, a former adjutant of Cape Garrison Artillery (he was later promoted Commandant), he was followed by Commandant C.A.C. (Charles) Withington (1978 – 1986), Major T.J. Selfe (1986 – 1987) and Lieutenant Colonel J.W. Gafney (1987 – 1993). It quickly proved to be an efficient unit but while under command of Lieutenant Colonel A.J. Stofberg it suffered the fate of many other Citizen Force units when it was closed down in 1997 during a re-evaluation of the SA Army's commitments. It had provided troops during the Turnhalle elections; provided air cover at the Chaminga Gorge near Cuito Canavale in Angola and in many other minor operations and Exercises.

Commandant Withington was in the wine trade with the result that the unit became the first to produce its own port under licence from the Wine and Spirits Board. The Regimental Old Port was served at Mess dinners. The Regiment wore a blue lanyard on the right shoulder, recalling its days as a unit of the SA Corps of Marines; and it had a ceremonial bugle. Held in a glass cabinet in the Officers Mess, it accompanied any Battery when operationally deployed.

The unit had undergone its first training camp at Young's Field in November/December 1971 and thereafter annually at Darling/Saldanha (where members of the unit were used as support cast in a film titled *Seuns van die Wolke*), at Wingfield and at the Army Battle School. Operation *Askari* in Sector 10 of the Border was a break from Battle School training and so too were Operations *Donderslag*, *Lightning*, *Packer* in 1988 (72 Battery provided air cover at the Chaminga Gorge near Cuito Canavale) during Operations *Prone* and *Agro*. These were interspersed with service during riot control operations in the mid-1980s.

Regiment Overvaal

Regiment Overvaal had begun life as 8 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in 1969 under the command of Commandant R.D.J. Coetzee. He was followed by Commandants L. Human (1973-1983), P.J. Viljoen (1983-1988) and P.J. Roetz (1988-1991). The title of the unit changed on 27 April 1973. The unit trained as a 35 mm Regiment and underwent operational tasking during Operation *Savannah* in 1976, in Sector 10 in 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983 and 1984. It also undertook duty on the South African border (Operation *Pebble*) in 1984, 1985 and 1985; sentry duty at Wallmansthal in 1987 and back to the South African border in 1988 during Operation *Hilti*. Operation *Eardrum*, a riot control operation took place in the Pietermaritzburg area while four years later Operation *Jambu* took place in the area of Eshowe, Natal.

During the term of office of Lieutenant Colonel J.C. Zeelie (1991-1997) the unit was closed down – as a brief history described: 'ROV closed its doors for the last time.' It is always a sad occasion when this happens, particularly to Reserve Force units where among those serving were volunteers. In this Regiment, like others that were disestablished, officers and men had given their service to the country willingly; had endured hard training; discomfort in the field; often eating and sleeping when one could; leaving wives and partners alone at home while under continuous training in exercises or operations but generally enjoying what they were doing. Men like these sometimes transferred to another unit (not always a successful step – there is nothing like the camaraderie in one's own unit) and often met in informal associations before eventually drifting apart.

Regiment Overvaal had undergone operational service as shown above, and also riot control; it had lost a member on 12 January 1988 when Gunner K.A. Robberts died in an Army vehicle accident while on convoy duty.

It was for some while not clear whether the units affected had been officially disestablished or not, as the decision to disband them had apparently been made by Army Headquarters at the stroke of a pen. It was, and remains, the prerogative of the Minister of Defence, acting on behalf of the President, to establish or disestablish units. Cape Garrison Artillery absorbed a few volunteer personnel from 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in April 1997 and similarly, volunteer members of

Regiment Overvaal transferred to Regiment Vaal Rivier. All the Reserve Force Regiments undertook tasks other than Anti-Aircraft duties in the years that followed. Names that will appear in unit histories when written will include border duties in Operations *Pebble*, *Eardrum*, *Jambu* and others that are better known.

Trauma

Some units were able to recover from the trauma of the late 1990's, others did not. Unit morale was at an all-time low. Without recruits' units struggled to perform any duty assigned to them. World leaders flocked to the country to make their voices heard in the new South African Parliament and the Cape Town Field Artillery unit was hard-put to find men to man its guns for the many salutes fired at Cape Town International Airport. On some occasions instead of a detachment of six there were only three per gun. Bandsmen and men on Reserve were several times asked to become gun numbers for a day. Units tried to do their own recruiting but often met considerable opposition; they were, with some apparent reluctance by Army headquarters, only allowed to recruit men who were already trained. When the Commando system was dissolved enlightened unit commanders realised there was an opportunity to recover and persuaded men and women to transfer; but this was also not without its administrative problems and objections from Pretoria. Cape Garrison Artillery for instance took members of Two Oceans and Blaauwberg Commandos; and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment recruited former commando personnel from the Sebokeng area, finding that many had only completed three weeks of basic training.

It was altogether a very frustrating period for all part-time force units. The buzz-words 'One Force Concept' was bandied about; some believed it, many did not. The attitude is exemplified by the following recorded remark made by a Regular Force officer:

The One Force Concept does exist, only where there is common ground for it to do so.

Funding remained limited for some while but internal training nevertheless once again became possible and by the beginning of the new century Reserve Force units (as they had by then become known) were beginning to recover from the trauma of the earlier years.

Kimberley

The Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment had always been a well organised, disciplined unit and being in Kimberly made no difference to its ethos. From the beginning the unit joined in the activities in Kimberley and in the year after arrival there, won the overall prize for the most outstanding exhibit at the Kimberley Show. In October 1997, the unit won the Bridging Trophy, one that is awarded by the Warrant Officer of the SA Army to the unit he considers performed best during the year in the categories of discipline, training, logistics, *esprit de corps* and personnel management. In the year thereafter, the unit was awarded the Grand Prix trophy as the best unit in Northern Cape Command.

The Defence Force was also then being transformed; BMATT (South Africa) had arrived to assist solely in the largest, and arguably the most important transition ever seen in Africa. Such a team would normally have assisted in training. It just so happened that the two-year posting of the British team coincided with the rugby world cup. BMATT would strike a problem, with more than 43 000 claiming to have members of the ANC and PAC. They later acknowledged there were problems in the '...validation of reporting integrates'.²⁸

As part of the transformation process (*Marching into the Future*, General Georg Meiring called it) the Anti-Aircraft Directorate was dissolved and replaced from 1 April 1996 by an Air Defence Artillery Formation. Instructions were given that the Formation had to be operational by 1 April 1997. Colonel P. du T. Walters, the Director, Anti-Aircraft until 31 March 1999, continued in command until Brigadier General S. Marumo was appointed as General Officer Commanding from 1 April 1999. The formation

²⁸ *Weekend Argus*, 19/20. 9.1997

headquarters, with an enlarged staff, later moved from their offices in the 'temporary' building, which had been the home of the Directorate for a number of years, to a newly refurbished building on the slopes of Weskop, behind Army headquarters.

The 'marriage' between the Anti-Aircraft School and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, which had taken place on 1 November 1969, was officially terminated on 31 March 1999. The title of the School underwent a change and it became the Air Defence Artillery School, effective from 1 June 1999, with Colonel C.R. (Carl) Lindsay, MMM, in command. The previous functions of the School continued, but included training of all air defence gunners in specific musterings and course qualification for promotion purposes, in specific technical musterings - without the burden of administering the training Regiment.

The Air Defence Artillery School operated as an accounting unit under General Support Base, Kimberley. However, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment became self-accounting from 1 April 1999, in respect of financial, logistic and command affiliations and delegations. It became totally responsible for the force training of combat-ready forces and for operational deployment in support of the SA Army.

A Gunners' Dinner

The General of the Gunners held his annual Dinner in the Paratus Mess, SA Army College on Saturday, 19 April 1997. There were some official guests but officers of '... the South Africa Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Corps, serving or retired, members of The Gunners' Association and Honorary Limber Gunners...' were welcome and in fact encouraged to attend. It was apparently expected that the Formal Guest Evening would be over-subscribed and if so attendance, it was said, would be determined by ballot. With the cost of entertainment at that time those wishing to attend were required to pay a seemingly large sum of R50 for their seat at table. All arrangements were made by the office of Director Anti-Aircraft.²⁹

Down-Scaling and Representivity

In an attempt to facilitate down-scaling and allow for greater representation at command level the SANDF in late 1996 initiated a retrenchment programme. It was at the same time hoping to cut down on staff requirements by unifying the command structures of the four services, to dramatically cut salary costs and free up funds for capital purchases. Some of the most senior Generals were among 4 000 to take the package in the early months of 1997.³⁰ Facts and figures on Voluntary Severance Packages (VSP's) were announced during the next September. From those that had applied a number were not approved but 8 264 officers and NCO's nevertheless left the SA Army. It represented a huge loss of expertise.

Part-Time Gunners

Earlier, in March 1996, speaking at a SA Army seminar, Mr. Warren Clewlow, Executive Chairman of the Barlow Group, stated that 'Our military leaders have distinguished themselves in many fields. What they are now called upon to do is to put on a marketer's hat and present the part-time service system with conviction and factual accuracy. If the cap fits the business community will buy it'³¹ It was said during the seminar that the cost of Defence is one of the major items in the South African budget and argued that a volunteer system was a means of disguising the true cost of maintaining the SANDF by passing the costs on to the private sector. Suggestions were made about the allocation of budgetary costs to services such as the Police to combat the high cost of crime; Customs and Excise - border patrols, Inland Revenue and so on. But the crucial question - most central to the theme of the seminar: 'Is there really a need for a part-time force. Is the national security situation such that the permanent forces in conjunction with the military voluntary Short-Term Service forces are unable to cope?'³² Military leaders were told to put forward a compelling case to answer these key questions.

²⁹ Notice from Director Anti-Aircraft, and Invitation held by author.

³⁰ *Cape Times*, 31.12.1996

³¹ *Salut*, Vol. 3, No. 6, June 1996, p. 28.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Integration

There was much discussion on integration during these years but talk about integration meant very little to Citizen Force units (by now known as the Part-Time Force). They were still ignored; no recruits reached them and no monies were allocated for recruiting; it was only by their own means – by word of mouth – that coloured and black members were recruited. Despite this there was much said and noted about the lack of transformation in the Part-time force. There was also at this time a great deal of concern in regard to the future of the Part-Time Force, many members voicing the opinion that the Permanent Force was looking after itself, without thought to the Regiments that had provided South Africa's fighting troops since before Colonial times. With this in mind a Part-Time Force Council was formed to represent the Citizen Force units and ensure their survival as fighting units of the Defence Force. In the interim, trained officers and NCOs willing to join Regiments failed to receive support; lengthy delays in approval from Defence Headquarters lead to most losing interest and disappearing.

A policy, demanding new measures to ensure the availability of required numbers and quality of part-time volunteers in line with political, strategic and economic reasons required a new vision and approach. One of the measures was the institution of Project Shield – a two-pronged approach to promote the new Voluntary Part-Time Military Service System. A second was the inauguration of the National Defence Liaison Council – a high-powered body of businessmen to help promote voluntary military service. Mr. Warren Clelow was elected chairman at the first meeting on 18 November 1997.

Lieutenant General Reg Otto, Chief of the SA Army, was present at the meeting. He addressed the matter with: 'The question is not whether the Part-time Force should be an integral part of the SA Army? The question is: Are we committed enough to make the system work?' The paper he presented contained interesting statements, from which it was obvious that the Defence Force needed the Part-Time component. He stated, for instance: 'The major slice of the operational human resource on which the SA Army, is dependant, must be sourced from the part-time component...', which he said, '...must produce trained, disciplined, committed and up-to-strength structures.'³³ 'The option was a more expensive, balanced, full-time component which is for the foreseeable future, not an option at all.'³⁴ Otherwise it was conscription, which was also not an option.

Peace Keeping

South African troops, for the first time, took part in a peace-keeping exercise, Exercise Blue Hungwe, at a training area in Zimbabwe in early April 1997, in company with soldiers from other southern African states. Meanwhile to the north – in Central Africa – there was chaos, with wholesale slaughter in the Congo. Congo's government, backing down that it had nothing to do with the alleged massacre of Rwandan refugees, acknowledged in June that 'some may have been killed in crossfire.'³⁵ In Angola UNITA was facing obliteration as a fighting force³⁶ and Sierra Leone's government had been toppled in an army-led coup on 25 May.

By the end of 1997 transformation in Defence reached a new milestone when the Council on Defence gave unanimous 'in principle' approval to a new three-tiered structure for the Department that had been proposed by the Re-engineering Design Workshop. The Minister stressed that in order that the Department of Defence lived within its budget, implementation of the new structure would have to be done as speedily as possible. The three tiers were:

1. The Ministry of Defence - MoD
2. Intermediate Structures- formations between the MOD and units
 - Task Forces as force employment structures
 - Type formations – grouping of similar units as force providing structures.

³³ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *The Cape Argus*, 6.6.1997.

³⁶ Ibid., 13.6.1997

- Support formations – providing support to all units in all Arms of Service
3. Unit Structures – Combat and support units.
 - MoD satellite offices
 - Bases at unit level
 - Service centres – such as Chief Paymaster, etc.

Details, it was said, had still to be addressed but some elements of the DoD were implemented sooner than others. It was envisaged that these would function from 1 April 1998 or shortly thereafter. The structure would minimise duplication and would operate within the proposed budget of Rbn 9.578.³⁷ Attached to the Bulletin was a list of seven ‘traditional’ units which, according to NDFO, were due to be removed from the Force List. It did nothing to improve matters as far as the Part-Time Force Council was concerned. The Council acted vigorously. On these matters, it was in fact reported in *The Argus* on 12 June 1998 that the Deputy Minister of Defence had said: ‘The part-time forces of the SA National Defence Force are on the brink of collapse due to erratic recruitment and lack of money’. He went on to say that the Government will continue to rule out conscription in favour of a voluntary system and ‘...could not allow PTF units to simply fade away.’ But he also warned that the part-time force had to change in keeping with the transformation of the SANDF...’.

In the Middle East tension was escalating over the weapons inspection impasse with Iraq and the United States planned in February to send 3 000 ground troops to bolster the defence of Kuwait. A week later President Clinton felt there was still a chance of a peaceful end to the confrontation with Iraq but nevertheless repeated his threat of military action.³⁸

A Year of Changes

The daily newspaper Rapport on 22 March 1998 headlined one news page: ‘SA se eens magtige ystervuis le verlaam.’ The Minister of Defence under a secondary heading: *Keer verval nou – of dit is klaarpraat*, warned that the SA Army would ‘...binne ses jaar in duie stort.’ unless action was taken immediately to save the situation.³⁹ 1998 was in a year during which the Defence Force experienced many changes. The Anti-Aircraft Corps was experiencing change and modernisation; the 1997 Annual Report of the Department of Defence confirmed that six 35 mm Anti-Aircraft guns were upgraded to Mk V status at a cost of RM24 and had been received from the upgrading facility at Western Province Command Signal Unit.⁴⁰

Uniforms

The issue surrounding uniforms had begun much earlier, largely because of the cost involved and because most National Servicemen were housed in bases well away from their homes. They would very seldom be called upon to wear what was known as ‘step-out dress’, the smart two-tone uniform was from 1985 no longer issued to the thousands of young men who reported for service. Economics and common sense had prevailed; nutria uniform was worn at all times. Ceremonial dictated something different and shoulder badges were added to the uniform. Stable belts made their appearance in August 1984, that of the Anti-Aircraft gunners woven in the distinctive colours of guardsman red and light blue, separated by a thin white stripe. The original shoulder badge authorised in 1973 was worn by 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and a new badge for the School was approved on 5 December 1983.

Although Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment operated as a single unit the original arrangement to combine them had been regarded as a temporary one. It was still looked upon in this light and it was therefore a sensible arrangement to have separate badges, should they at any future stage be ‘divorced’ and operate as two units. The Regimental Colours presented by the State President in December 1980, which carried the silver leaf emblem, were those of the Regiment and similarly the

³⁷ DoD Bulletin No. 82/97, FOD No. 555282.

³⁸ *Business Day*, 10.2.1998 and *The Cape Argus* 18.2.1998.

³⁹ *Rapport*, 22.3.1998.

⁴⁰ *Department of Defence Annual Report 1997*, p. 100.

National Colours presented by the State President in July 1989 were considered those of the Regiment.

Now, four years after the new democratic constitution had been signed, Lieutenant General Reg Otto, Chief of the SA Army presented the SANDF's new camouflage uniform to Chief of the SANDF, General Georg Meiring, on 29 January 1998. The new dress replaced the nutria uniform and formed part of Project Abunt (Soldier 2000) to provide better protection in all conditions for the soldier at work and in battle. It did not replace the current Kalahari Sand office dress.⁴¹ A new rank structure for General and Flag officers was implemented from 1 April 1998 as a result 'of confusion with regard to the rank insignia and rank nomenclature of SANDF General/Flag officers and Brigadiers/Commodores, especially when interacting with other Defence Forces.'⁴²

Rank

Brigadiers became Brigadiers General and Commodores became Vice Admirals (Junior Grade) from 1 April 1998; General Georg Meiring requested early retirement and in June was replaced as Chief of the SANDF by Lieutenant General Siphwe Nyanda, MMM, from 1 June 1998. Lieutenant General P.O. du Preez, SD, SM, MMM, retired in mid-1998 and his farewell parade was held at the SA Army College, Voortrekkerhoogte, on Thursday Afternoon, 25 June 1998.

The SANDF was 'slashing South Africa's Infantry capabilities in a huge cost-cutting and rationalisation process.' according to *The Argus*, and closure of units 'will be followed by changes to be made late this year to the Reserve Force component of the SANDF.'⁴³ In mid-May 1998 a moratorium was apparently placed on the closure of any more part-time force units, although no statement as such was given in writing. By August 1998 the Regular Battalions, which once numbered 21 were reduced to only nine.

The title 'Part-Time Component' was accepted by the DCC during 1995 but the title never gained popular acceptance and, following research, it was found that 'Reserve Force' was the most commonly used and understood term. DSC approved the change in terminology on 14 January 1999 and on 2 February the Minister gave his approval. At the same time the Minister also approved the following nomenclature - Army Reserve consisting of:

Army Conventional Reserve
Army Territorial Reserve – consisting of the Commandos.

The changes were announced in DoD Bulletin No. 19/99 of 4 March and repeated by *The Cape Argus* on Tuesday, 11 May 1999. With the signing into legislation of the Defence Act, (Act No. 42 of 2002) the Citizen Force officially became the Reserve Force. The SA Army also became an official legal force by Section 12 (1) (a) of the Act.⁴⁴ It had never enjoyed complete legal status and had become known as the SA Army purely by use of the title. •The *Cape Argus* of 11 May 1999 announced that the SANDF had fallen into step with international trends by naming its part time forces as it had done.

The Formations

Chief Directorate Army Force Structure issued Implementation Instruction 15/99 on 13 September 1999 in which it noted that the SA Army Air Defence Artillery Formation had been established on 1 April 1999 after migration from the former Directorate of Air Defence. The Formation HQ was given the mission of implementing Air Defence Artillery according to guidelines with the aim of enabling the Regular Force structure to attain functional status by 1 January 2000 and operational status by April 2000. The Reserve Force units were not covered in this instruction; only the following elements were included:

SA Army Air Defence Artillery Formation Headquarters
School of Air Defence Artillery

⁴¹ *Salut*, Vol. 5, No. 3, March 1998, p. 64.

⁴² *SAMIC News*, Vol .4, No. 1, April 1998, p. 4.

⁴³ Undated newspaper cutting.

⁴⁴ Government Gazette No. 24576, 20.2.2003.

10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment – of which it was noted: organisationally the third ordnance Squadron is under command of HQ 61 Mechanised Battalion Group at SA Army Battle School.⁴⁵ (Note that this ordnance squadron referred to was Foxtrot Battery)

Marriage Terminated

The marriage between the School and the Regiment, which had taken place thirty years before - on 1 November 1969 - was terminated on 31 March 1999, and, from 1 April 1999. At the same time the title of the School underwent a change and it became the Air Defence Artillery School, with Colonel C.R. (Carl) Lindsay still in command. The Air Defence Artillery School operated as an accounting unit under General Support Base, Kimberley and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment became a self-accounting entity. Lieutenant Colonel H.J. Baird became the first Officer Commanding of the newly 'divorced' Regiment.

During the 1980s/early 1990s the SADF was subject to political harassment by resistance groups. The most important war resistance group of the 1980s was, the End Conscription Campaign (ECC), formed in 1984. Inspiration for the organisation came from the 1983 Black Sash conference, which made a call to end compulsory military service. The ECC initially drew its support from members of English-speaking universities and churches and was gaining considerable influence until it was restricted in August 1988 in terms of emergency regulations. It had considerable influence on the attitude of young men towards military service, running numerous campaigns from the time it came into existence. A 'Stop the Call-up Peace Festival' was organised in 1985, a 'Troops out of the Townships' campaign in September 1985 and the 'Working for a Just Peace' campaign in April 1986. Posters produced by the ECC read 'Free us from the Call-Up' and showed a symbolic breaking of a chain. A call to soldiers was made with one poster suggesting 'Defy Apartheid Call-ups. Resist the War against the people!'

Commanding officers of Citizen Force Regiments, Battalions and units were by 1990 finding it increasingly difficult in the face of the onslaught from the anti-war movements to provide enough troops to fulfil operational commitments. This placed a heavy burden on those men who were willing to be called upon for service. There were various reasons why some national servicemen and those in the Citizen Force objected or failed to report for service and, although some reasons were the same as other objectors round the world, South Africans had their own peculiar set of circumstances and reaction to those circumstances. Many men did not regard National or Citizen Force Service as a positive experience and felt it to be a waste of their time and detrimental to their career prospects, while others were more concerned about the security of their wives or families at home. Others feared the possibility of confronting death or injury, hardship or psychological stress but strangely these factors never arose openly or were expressed by anyone in the Regiments, in any of the periods of border duty or, latterly, duty in the townships. Religious, moral, political and ethical reasons were sometimes given by objectors and when Citizen Force units were deployed in the townships, the cry by the war resistance groups was that the troops were waging war against the country's own people. This was patently untrue as the units were more often than not welcomed by the inhabitants.

But by the late 1980s increasing numbers of men were applying for exemption or failing to report for service. After Namibia's Independence in 1989 the initial period of military service had been reduced and the SADF had generally become more relaxed about the prosecution of objectors and those who did not report for service.

Units of the Citizen Force had suffered badly at the continual harassment – aimed primarily at the system of National Service – by the End Conscription Campaign. It was a narrow and not major cause of the problem. Communities, employers, families and members of units were becoming weary of the demands made upon them. Call-ups for operations, both external and internal, were more and more often poorly supported and by 1996, after the Declaration of the new Democratic society in 1994 some units found themselves with few members and sometimes without any without troops at all.

⁴⁵ Facsimile from ADA Formation, 19.4.2000.

Several units were able to provide security support for the first democratic elections, but after that only the most enthusiastic of the volunteers remained.

Publicity

It is not often that articles covering the Anti-Aircraft organisation are featured in the media but *Salut* of September 1999 carried two full pages on the Air Defence Artillery Corps. Headed: '*Aiming High – they are on time, on target*'. It gave an historical synopsis of the Corps and details of the organisation of both the School and the Regiment. Colonel Carl Lindsay conceded that while the Regiment consisted of about 690 men and women and was about 87 per cent staffed, representivity at the top level was lacking. There were, however, at Battery Commander level a number of Majors and Captains. He noted that the '*...situation will improve over time as experience is gained*'. He also mentioned that the Corps included Reserve Force units and that seven Reserve gunners were attending a course at the School at that time. '*They were limited in the time they are able to give, but modular and distance training was being looked at in order to solve this problem*', the Colonel said.

He concentrated on weaponry and stated that the SANDF's Anti-Aircraft guns were about the best in the world; '*But we need tracking and acquisition radar to allow the guns to work at their full potential.*'⁴⁶ New equipment was needed as '*...some guns were close to their limit...*' and Colonel Lindsay added that the Corps would like to move to the Manpads (Man Portable Air Defence System) environment – shoulder launched and medium distance surface-to-air-missiles, coupled to a potent fire control unit.

Initial Military Service

The first female Initial Military Service (formerly known as Voluntary Military Service) personnel received Anti-Aircraft training in August 1999 as gun operators and drivers. During initial training simulators were used extensively. Before being presented with live targets gunners underwent a certain number of hours and passed a number of tests on the simulators. The Regiment had four gunner work-stations, each a replica of the gunners' cabin of the 35 mm Mk 5 gun. Control is from a central control station. On completion of simulator exercises results are accumulated and filed on individual personal files for later reference. Staff Sergeant 'Koos' Pieters explained to the representative of *Salut* that everything can be done on the simulators that takes place physically in actual warfare. An aircraft attack from as far away as 2.5 km can be simulated and engaged and likewise, attacks by helicopters and tanks; the aim is to engage successfully before weapons are released. Having mastered the simulators Gunners are then trained on the LOCATS (Low Cost Aerial Target System). LOCATS simulates the behaviour of modern attack aircraft. This also gives a print-out of performance. The most challenging is the high-speed target which is towed a number of kilometres behind a Lear Jet at night. It has a turbine which causes a light at the front of the target to illuminate. The gunners only see the light as a blip in the sky.⁴⁷

Air Defence Symposium

The second SA Air Defence Systems Symposium was held in Pretoria from 25 to 27 August 1999. Some foreign guests were present as guest speakers or participants. The symposium provided those who attended with information on how to best use '*joint air defence in small defence forces*'. It also assisted in broadening thoughts towards combined air defence in regional peace support operations. The Deputy Minister of Defence was a guest speaker, she spoke in the South African context and stated that the recent Defence Review made provision for a core force structure and was based on a 'no-threat' scenario. It recognised that the force must be capable of rapid expansion should any perceived threat change. The 'core-force' was largely in response to South Africa's improved external security environment and to the budget cuts implemented in the Defence Force since the early 1990's. The cuts had been prompted by the Governments' explicit commitment to funding socio-economic policies and its attempts to replace items which had become obsolescent or beyond economical repair. Most of the SANDF's major equipment will be replaced through government-to-government

⁴⁶ *Salut*, Vol. 6, No.9, September, 1999, pp. 40.41..

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

package deals over a period of time but, she said, Air Defence Systems do not form part of these packages. It was therefore essential that ways are found to provide effective air defence using existing equipment.

Lieutenant General Deon Ferreira made a positive address in which he emphasised that the elements of early warning, command and control and surface-based air defence needed to be addressed with immediate effect. Within the concept of joint air defence the element of surface based air defence is paramount, it provided the SANDF with protection from enemy air and missile attacks and with the Air Force allowed a commander to fully synchronise manoeuvre and firepower.⁴⁸

Combat readiness

The Regiment - of which Lieutenant Colonel H.J. (Jacques) Baird had taken command from 1 January 1999 - continued to operate as 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, with Warrant Officer Class One P. Olivier as his RSM. It became totally responsible for the force training of Anti-Aircraft combat-ready forces and for operational deployment in support of the SA Army. And since then the Regiment has been involved in several deployments and exercises. From January 1999, different Batteries have been deployed at Macadamia in Mpumalanga, the Lesotho border and KwaZulu Natal. In between deployment this busy Regiment had calls made upon it by General Support Base, Kimberley, for participation in ceremonial parades. The Regiment did not fail to report combat-ready for any tasking.

Alkantpan

From January 1999 the Regiment was involved in several deployments and exercises and one was Exercise Wake Up. This well recorded and unique exercise took place during September 1999 at the Armscor test range at Alkantpan, situated about 40 km from Copperton in the Northern Cape. Alkantpan in those days allowed deployment exercises without constant interference from the 'outside world'. There was virtually no cell phone reception and the range was large enough to accommodate the whole Regiment with extended distance for live fire. Traditionally this exercise was held to confirm combat readiness on unit level before the Regiment joined Brigade level exercises. The advance team consisting of the Regiment Support Battery forming the 'B' Echelon, deployed first and established the base area. It was followed by the main force - the combat Batteries and Regimental headquarters, forming 'F' and 'A' Echelons. The Admin Troop remained in the unit lines at Kimberley to act as rear link and to ensure that daily administration of the unit continued. All operational personnel were deployed, from the Officer Commanding, chaplain social worker down to the chef, drivers and necessary clerks.

With the arrival of the Regiment HQ around the camp fire the first evening whilst enjoying a 'snoek braai' – the chef was instructed not to cut up all the fish and deep fry it - the Officer Commanding – Lieutenant Colonel H.J. Baird, was briefed by Major W. Rosenstraght, the Regiment Support Battery Commander on the current status of base establishment. Major Rosenstraght remembers the Regimental Commander's reaction when told that one of the diesel bunker vehicles had rolled on the main gravel road inside the range at a sharp turn, infamous to the Air Defence Gunners. This sharp turn was just as renowned amongst them as the sharp turn nicknamed '*bokkies draai*' at Combat Training Centre Lohatla, was to the rest of the SA Army operational forces. It had claimed numerous victims through the years. The Regimental Commander had reacted by calmly leaning back on his folding field chair and only uttering one word: '*interessant*'. No personnel were injured as the driver reportedly jumped out before the vehicle rolled, but the cargo tank however had ruptured. The Battery personnel with WO1 P. Olivier, the RSM, spent the rest of that afternoon attempting to save as much of the 10000 litres of diesel as possible, using fire buckets and any hollow implement they could lay their hands on. They managed to avoid a HAZMAT disaster but the fuel had unfortunately been contaminated. The net result of this accident was that the concept of the exercise had to be changed by grounding any movement of the mechanised Battery for a week.

⁴⁸ *Salut*, Vol. 6, No. 10, October 1999.

For the first week, the Batteries underwent own sub-unit training and then married up with the Regimental headquarters to deploy in all round defence of a single critical point. The combat Batteries were deployed with the 35 mm Mk V guns forming an inner circle two to four kilometres from the critical point and the 23 mm guns forming the outer circle of defence between six to eight kilometres from the defended asset. The Regimental Support Battery and wagon lines deployed outside the defended area - there was simply not enough space within the defence layout. It was provided with one 23 mm Troop as additional defence. The Regimental headquarters deployed on top of the only hill on the range at '*Klein Strandberg*' in order to have total view and oversight of the deployment. The Regiment was visited by Brigadier General J. Jooste, Director Army Acquisition. While briefing the General he asked how Air Defence Artillery could manage to fund such a large exercise. It was explained to him that the rations and fuel were provided by the centralised Revolving Credit Account (RCA), ammunition and spares were drawn from stock reserves whilst other small expenditures such as stationary, gas, batteries, etc, were funded from the unit decentralised budget. The General complimented the unit on its combat readiness and specifically congratulated the Gunners on the serviceability and neatness of the vehicles and prime mission equipment.

Training carried out ensured that sub units were ready for integration. It included ordering 'cease fire' just after 'stand to' after last light; night movement; and re-deployments to be ready for action before first light in the mornings to perform 'stand to' drills.

The Adjutant, Lieutenant Lisa Kitching, reminded the Regimental Commander at some stage during the exercise that there were several female soldiers in the field and they required to shower more frequently than men. His response was to hand her a map to plot her position, and then instructed her to take the command Ratel, collect all the female soldiers, take them to the Regiment Support Battery for a shower and return before last light. There are virtually no reference points in Altkanpan to use for navigation, so they became lost. The ladies had their own story to tell when they eventually returned long after last light; needless to say they did shower but returned with their faces full of dust once more.

Lieutenant Colonel Baird and his RSM were constantly on the move to oversee training. Their vehicle was a Land Rover 110 and was fitted with special off-road tyres, a 24 v power supply to a radio rack that could listen in on any frequency of the Regiment and had a roof rack with spotlights. In the rainy season it was quickly learned where Altkanpan received its name. It is a dry dusty place of about 40 square kilometres of flat Karoo bushes, not higher than a Land Rover tyre. But when a thunder-shower passes over, the powdered dust on the roads becomes a muddy slush, surrounded by water at the road sides. The Land Rover was unable to follow in the tracks of the heavy vehicles and the only method of moving forward was to travel from one Karoo bush patch to the next. Driving through any pan of water was a certain recipe for getting stuck and instantly rendered the low headlights worthless. During one particularly bad thunderstorm the only vehicle in the Regiment able to move was the Land Rover. All the heavy operational vehicles were stuck, their axles deep in the mud. This included the Withings recovery vehicle. It was later recovered by a SAMIL 100 gun tractor operated by one of the older, more experienced gunners, much to the embarrassment and dismay of the recovery personnel.

During this watery episode, the Land Rover 110 was used in every role possible - from ration and water delivery to ambulance. When the roads were dry, however, that turbo diesel was not short of horses (power)! The principal driver is today still fondly referred to as Jody*. It can be said that, either the Altkanpan Springbuck are somewhat lethargic (never seen that in the Karoo), or the Defender driver broke a record one day by overtaking a springbuck in full flight on the centre of the 'middle mannetjie' whilst the vehicle stayed solidly in the '*tweespoor*' road.

During one of the night re-deployments the Regiment Commander and his RSM were secretly waiting at the future position of one of the 35 mm gun Fire Units to witness and record the deployment by focussing a video recorder through the night vision equipment. The deployment took place with a prohibition on the use of artificial light on a pitch-black night in total 'blackout' conditions. The Fire Unit reached its dispersal point it was met by its guides who were to walk the guns to their

deployment positions. The Fire Unit had, however, decided that the guides would sit on the vehicles; and from that moment chaos ensued. At about 02h00 in the morning after filming the Fire Unit driving in circles for what seemed hours, showing no regard to track plans or of keeping noise levels down, the Regimental Commander had seen enough. He stopped all movement and confronted the Fire Unit Commander who confessed his ignorance, confirming that the positions had been marked during daylight reconnaissance with black refuse bags; at night they could not be seen so they were unable to find them!

What made this exercise unique was the fact that it had been decided to perform live operational firing from the night deployment positions. The Regiment had in the past performed straight-line live shell range firing, including overhead fire (firing over other equipment). This was the first time that the whole unit would, simultaneously, be firing in all directions (360 degrees) including overhead fire from their tactical deployment positions. Safety planning was ensured during a two-day session undertaken by Lieutenant Colonel Baird and Major T.M. Mohoase, acting second-in-command, who had been detached from Air Defence Artillery School for the exercise. The Global Positioning System (GPS) position of each equipment piece was plotted on a map in the HQ and the safety templates of each weapon carefully applied in order to determine the main firing arcs, laser and taboo sectors as well as minimum and maximum elevation angles of each weapon.

The safety overlay on the map was very complex and resembled something like the original fire plan from the Battle of Alamein. During the safety planning it was realised that some of the Observation Posts (OPs) positions were not safe as the inert rounds would be falling on the ground at the range that they were deployed. The OPs had to re-deploy to safe ground and their areas of responsibility replaced with radar OPs. It took another two days to 'bundu bash' to every weapon, physically confirming its safety settings on the ground and to issue the live firing orders. The circumference of the inner circle guns stretched for 25 kilometres and that of the outer circle guns 50 kilometres. During the 'bundu bashing' all the RSM could utter as co-driver was one of three words 'hole!', 'hill!' or 'rock' as the terrain was negotiated. With safety confirmed, the unit was set for the operational live fire exercise totalling 26 guns and 9 radars including alternative positions planned for each equipment piece.

During this time the unit also received a visit by a group of young software engineers from the CSIR under the guidance of Mr. R. Oosthuizen, who was system engineer on the GBADS acquisition programme. The purpose of their visit was to familiarise themselves with the physical environment that the Gunners operated in as well as the equipment they deployed. It provided background information to their efforts in building software modelling and simulation models. The CSIR visit group was positioned at the 35 mm gun Fire Unit closest to the Regimental Headquarters. The Low-Cost Aerial Target System (LOCATS) provided by IST (Pty) Ltd was used as the target. It had the ability to launch unobserved from outside the defence and fly on a pre-programmed flight path to ensure that it would enter each weapon's main arc. The flight path was designed to test all the doctrinal aspects of fire control ranging from early warning, local warning, aircraft recognition, OP warnings, grouping colours, and target selection rules and procedures when a threat circles the defence up to and including engagement orders.

LOCAT flights stretched over a distance of 40 kilometres with a holding time over the defended area of about 45 minutes per flight. As more than one Battery was deployed around the same defended area one of the fire control posts was designated as the Regiment fire control post. The only thing for the Regiment Officer Commanding to do was to coordinate the simulated events and as Chief Safety Officer ensure that the range was closed and safety requirements met before issuing the command 'safe to fire'. The Fire Control Officer (FCO) took over the fight as would be done operationally and all engagements were performed in accordance with fire control doctrine. The live operational firing continued for two days, exercising practising the simulation of friendly aircraft, unexpected attacks at first light, attacks directly from the sun, last light attacks and different attack profiles with or without warning. The highlight of the exercise for the visitors was the spectacular destruction of LOCATS by the 35mm Mk V gun Fire Unit where the CSIR group was then situated.

The CSIR group was so impressed that they invited the Regiment headquarters leader group to join them for supper at 'The Herberg', the only guest house in Copperton. After weapons were declared safe and the day's action completed the leader group spruced themselves and all thirteen squeezed themselves into the commanding officer's vehicle. As the notorious and now well-known Land Rover moved off the rear door swung open, the adjutant fell out and landed on her rear end in the middle of the dirt road. Fortunately Lieutenant Lisa Kitching was uninjured and was able to laugh at the incident. The rest of the journey was without mishap. Upon arrival at The Herberg in high spirits, the group were provided with a welcome drink in the bar where they noticed that the LOCAT kill for the day was already on display, hanging from the ceiling. It had been donated to the owner by IST (Pty) Ltd. One of the female CSIR software engineers voiced her discomfort, stating that the male soldiers looked very hungry judging from the glances they gave in her direction.

Supper was enjoyed and many toasts instituted on the success of the exercise while some of the fairer gender slipped away to catch a quick hot shower organised with the owner. In the early hours of the morning the thirteen were back in the Land Rover and made their way back to camp, while singing Gunner songs. The following morning there was a crackle on the radio in the operations room, it was the range officer of Alkantpan who asked if there was any knowledge of a LOCAT donated to The Herberg. It seemed to have gone missing. Claiming no knowledge, the Regimental Commander stepped outside the headquarters only to be greeted by a Land Rover with a LOCAT wing sticking out from both rear-side windows. Surely there could not have been space for a LOCAT *and* thirteen people in the back of the vehicle! It could not be figured out, by the now sober individuals, how to remove the plane from the vehicle without breaking it further! Maintenance times were allocated to clean the guns and "Cease Fire" was ordered.

In preparation for the mechanised Battery Return to Unit (RTU), fuel replenishment was rationed to facilitate further training of the mobile Battery and its safe passage to Lohathla. To make certain the convoy made the 250 km trip without running out of fuel, careful calculations were made and since Army fuel gauges are unreliable and the fuel bunker's meter was unserviceable, the calculated fuel level of each vehicle was determined with a broom stick. If there was any uncertainty, the vehicle got less fuel than planned as the natural bias of the 'dispensing officer' was toward the mobile capability. Thanks to meticulous planning and much good luck, the remaining vehicles of the Regiment made it to their destination with fuel to spare – even if being towed due to mechanical issues. From the assembly area, the Regiment performed tactical movement to the Combat Training Centre at Lohatla to link up with the Brigade, re-deploying in exercise SWEEPSLAG.

There were some fundamental observations made during the debrief of exercise WAKE UP. Tactical command was still based on a paper system in an ever-increasing digital world. The Corps did not possess an Air Defence Control System that could handle the magnitude of a Regiment deployment around one defended asset and the system used was still voice based with 'eyeball mark one' identification that could not satisfy the weapon reaction time required. There was still a gap in the defence namely the absence of missiles. Although the Corps had SOPs and doctrine addressing shooting range safety there was nothing that addressed the application of safety during operational deployments. In light of the non-acceptance of collateral damage by the international arena and the fact that the local population in the battlefield were not the enemy, bush war operational safety where a certain percentage of collateral damage could be tolerated was no longer acceptable in built up areas. These aspects were all to be addressed by future projects in years to follow.

Notes:

*Jody David Scheckter (born 29 January 1950) is a South African former auto racing driver. He was the 1979 Formula One World Drivers' Champion

•Services were designated and appointed from a particular date by Proclamation given the Head of State, or from an amended date by Government Notice as in the case of the SA Air Force. There is no record of any Proclamation covering the SA Army. Seniority of the latter has been earned purely by its use as a Force in useage of terminology.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

THE GBADS YEARS

Thirty members of 14 (Cole's Kop) Battery, Royal Artillery, visited Cape Town between 20 and 23 January 2000, after the group had been to Colesberg where a commemorative ceremony was arranged as part of the Anglo-Boer War centenary celebrations. The Battery in 1900 had dragged two Armstrong QF 15 pounder guns up the steep 800 m Colesberg Kopje, to the surprise of the opposing forces. It had taken practically all night to get the guns and ammunition up the height. On the same date in the year 2000 - on 11 January – four members of the Battery – Lieutenant Diamond, Warrant Officers Mellor and Marshall, and Sergeant Kenyon climbed the mountain, ahead of the rest of the Battery taking sixteen and a half minutes to do so. Not to be outdone Lieutenant Colonel Theuns Stander of Regiment Oos Transvaal did the climb in just over one minute less.¹ The Battery Commander, Major Paul la Fontaine Belcourt, and his BSM were later photographed with Lieutenant Diamond and Sergeant Kenyon holding the Battery flag.

A 'field' formal dinner was held in the local school hostel that evening and was attended by Major General Chris van Zyl, General of the Gunners, and the Honoray Colonel of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Jeremy Webb. On 12 January a formal affiliation, between 14 (Cole's Kop) Battery and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, took place in a televised ceremony on Museum Square, Colesberg. Lieutenant Colonel Colin Doyle, Commanding Officer, 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, and Major Paul la Fontaine Belcourt, Battery Commander, 14 (Cole's Kop) Battery, Royal Artillery, each signed scrolls to commemorate the event. Both read out their respective scrolls prior to the ceremony of affiliation. The ceremony ended when Lieutenant Colonel John McGregor (Ret) – Royal Artillery representative in South Africa - presented the Mayor, Councillor Ngantweni with the 14 (Cole's Kop) Battery flag. It was a successful two days.

The Battery afterwards joined the Trans Karoo train which made a special stop at Colesberg to allow them to board the train, and again, by prior arrangement it stopped at Tulbagh – apparently the first time in 25 years - where the group left the train to spend a week at Lieutenant Colonel John McGregor's farm. They played cricket against a local team – and won, and helped to save three farms from a distrous veld fire. The locals showed their appreciation by taking the entire visiting group to the pub.²

14 (Cole's Kop) Battery was at that time a Rapier ground-to-air missile Battery, based at Woolwich, London. The most remarkable thing about the Battery is its flag. It has a yellow field and on it is featured an emblematic Springbok, prancing over a representation of Cole's Kop.

The Macadamia Triangle

In early 2000 102 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was deployed on Border Protection duties on the eastern border of Mpumalanga about 5 km north of the place where the borders of South Africa, Mocambique and Swaziland meet. The events described below took place in this area. The following has been written by Colonel Jacques Baird – then a Lieutenant Colonel, commanding 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment who, with his RSM at the time, were both personally involved:

I am neither superstitious person nor a believer in the supernatural, however, if there had not been witnesses to this tale, it would have been discarded as a tall story.

¹ *Colesberg Advertiser*, 21.1.2000.

² *Journal of 16 Regiment, RA*, pp. 24, 25.

On 26 March 2000 Gunner J.O. Sehemo was killed in a Samil 20 accident at Macadamia when the vehicle he was driving rolled during an Op INTEXO deployment. After his funeral, I decided to perform a staff visit to the deployed Battery although deployed forces were not under operational command of the unit.

On 12 April 2000, the RSM (WO1 P. Olivier) and I (Lt Col H.J. Baird) as Unit OC set off from Kimberley in a Land Rover 110 to perform a staff visit at Macadamia where 102 Battery was deployed on border protection duty. We slept over at Marloth Park the night of 12 April 2000. That night I had dream, which I normally don't remember, a night-mare in fact! I was flying in a "Bosbok" (Aermacchi AM.3C) aircraft with a young Air Force pilot over the "Soutpansberg" (for those knowing the vivo gap a familiar sight) when the earth dropped underneath us and suddenly the pilot said "hold on we are going down"! As the plane nose-dived and the G forces increased I just couldn't get my seatbelt fastened, waking up with a sweat in the middle of the night. The next morning at breakfast I shared my dream with the RSM and my folks. I stated to them categorically that if the base has scheduled a reconnaissance flight today (as they normally did) I will not be flying. They all grinned, shrugged it off and we made our way to the base.

Arriving at the base at approximately 08:00 we were greeted by the admin officer informing us that the Battery Commander (Captain R. Botes), BSM (Staff Sergeant W.O. Grobbelaar) and Air Force Intelligence Sergeant (Lindy) were on a reconnaissance flight with a Cessna 185 from 44 Squadron and should be back in about an hour. A bit annoyed, because they were aware of our visit, I proceeded to perform base inspection of the living quarters, transport and mess facility. We proceeded to the headquarters building and ended up sitting in the Ops room awaiting their return. We were informed of all their successes ranging from confiscating contraband and illegal goods on the daily train crossing the border to record numbers of illegal immigrant arrests by traveling in civilian clothing in unmarked Land Cruisers reading the markings along the sugar plantations to pick them up until the vehicle was full before revealing the R4s. The Gunners were achieving successes only managed in 6 months by other deployments and all in the area had a respect for the blue berets as they were referred to by the locals. Suddenly there was a crackle over the radio, a message, from one of the observation towers (Substation 7) along the fence of the Mozambique border that an aircraft went down near to their position. This was confirmed moments later when a person from the Mobile Air Operation Team (MAOT) ran into the Ops room informing us the Cessna 185 that our personnel were in, had gone down and communication was lost. Details were sketchy and the only indication that we had was the position of the observation tower.

"Let's go" I exclaimed and jumped in the Land Rover making best speed towards the direction of the observation tower. The gravel twin trail road along the Mozambique border followed the parallel ridges along the border and was very treacherous as it snaked through steep contours, creeks and hills. The RSM will attest to this day that at some stages the Land Rover was only travelling on two wheels. We were counting off the numbers painted on the observation towers as we made our way towards Substation 7 that reported the incident. Upon reaching Substation 7, what must have felt like an eternity, but was probably +/- 15 minutes later we still could not see any sign of the plane. The observation tower personnel pointed out to us that we were looking in the wrong direction and that the plane went down on the Mozambique side of the fence approximately one kilometre inside Mozambique. Some of the Gunners from Substation 7 had crawled through the fence and were waving at us from the crash site. They were the first on the scene and had provided water to the injured. We spotted the wreckage and crawled through the fence making our way through the veld to reach the crash site.

On reaching the wreckage we immediately went into assessment mode, hoping to find someone alive. Approaching from the left front hand side of what was left of the plane we could see two occupants. The pilot situated left front who was killed on engine impact, and left rear was a motionless female (the intelligence Sergeant) with severe head injuries. When we moved around to the right-hand side of the aircraft, fearing the worst, we found Capt Botes and Staff Sergeant Grobbelaar lying outside. Both the gunners were alive and had managed to free themselves and crawled out of the wreckage. Complaining of severe pain Capt Botes had broken his left upper leg and Staff Sergeant Grobbelaar his

left lower leg (both tibia and fibula). Staff Sergeant Grobbelaar also complained of stomach pain and it was later determined that his intestines had ruptured from the impact. He said he had tried to get Lindy - (the intelligence Sergeant) from the wreckage by pulling her hand but she had too much pain and had forgotten that she still had her seatbelt on. Whilst trying to get out of the wreckage being afraid that the aircraft would burst into flames as aviation fuel spewed out everywhere and onto his back, Staff Sergeant Grobbelaar knew that Andy (the pilot) has passed on and that there was nothing that he could do for him. He also said that while they were still awaiting rescue he shouted at Lindy to stop screaming, relax and that help was on its way. She then relaxed and became quiet. We did not dare move the Intelligence Sergeant as she was breathing but not responding with a severely swollen head and blood coming out of her nose, ears and eyes. The Staff Sergeant recalled that when he reached the outside he searched for his cell phone (to make contact) and pistol but everything was ripped from his body with the impact. Whilst still lying outside the wreckage he asked Capt Botes if they were "having a dream because it felt so unreal". The gunners were crying, cracking small jokes, expressing relief, gratitude and the seriousness of the situation simultaneously. I can remember Staff Sergeant Grobbelaar requesting a lighter to light up a cigarette. I refused explaining that there was a lot of aviation fuel around, judging from the colour patterns in the marshy water they were situated in. I was later informed that the members also suffered terrible burns to their skin because of coming into contact with the aviation fuel.

I enquired from the two talking members what had happened, and they explained that there were some illegal immigrants attempting to cross the border, and they had flown twice over them before "they got the message and turned around". They were making a final turn when the pilot just said, "we are going down" and the next moment they hit the ground. Within ten minutes of us reaching the scene an Oryx helicopter approached and landed with medics. The medics immediately performed their assessment and started giving assistance where they could. The pilot informed us that they had been busy with flood relief operations in Mozambique when they were re-routed to the incident. We had to assist to hold the injured down in order to splint their broken limbs and to load them and the deceased by stretcher into the Oryx. I remember the RSM had some harsh words with the stubborn Mozambique police to ensure the release of the body. The Oryx took off for 1 Military hospital and I phoned the Air Defence Artillery Formation headquarters and informed Colonel Lindsay of the situation, so he could await their arrival at 1 Military hospital.

Another Oryx arrived for the recovery operation. Upon analysing the situation, the pilot, 2Lt A.P. Leith (Andy), did a sterling effort in attempting an emergency landing. He selected the only "open" area with no trees, the tyre tracks in the grass started more than 300m back from the crash site before the left front wheel hit an ant's nest and broke off the left landing gear. The aircraft proceeded to slide along the ground with various pieces breaking off along the way, the engine now taking the full impact pushed through into the cockpit. The only recognisable portion of the aircraft was the role cage in which the occupants were situated. We were crawling back through the fence to the South African side when the Mozambique military forces arrived to enquire what happened. This was when we noticed the exact position the accident happened. Directly across from this incident approximately one kilometre on the South African side towered the long pipes of the Samora Machel airplane crash site memorial. The Air Force completed the investigation and later lifted the wreckage back to South Africa.

We proceeded back to Macadamia base where I called all personnel together to inform them of the situation and to appoint the 2IC (Captain L. Puckree) in command of the Battery for the remainder of the deployment.³

Infanteer in Command

As there were seemingly no suitably qualified Anti-Aircraft officers immediately available to command the School, in a break with long established practice, Colonel L. Dumakude - an Infanteer - was appointed to follow Colonel Carl Lindsay in command of the School from 1 March 2000.

³ Draft by Colonel H.J. Baird, reviewed and inputs provided by MWO P. Olivier and WO2 W.O. Grobbelaar and edited by Lt Col A. de Villiers

The third South African Joint Air Defence Symposium was held at the CSIR Conference Centre over the period 17 to 19 September 2000. Organised by the SANDF in co-operation with Armscor it allowed the Air Defence fraternity to gather and exchange information and ideas. A display of equipment was available and included the Kameelperd air defence radar and the Cactus missile system, the latter with the shoulder badge of 120 Squadron, SA Air Force, prominently displayed.⁴

GBADS

In 2002, with the withdrawal from service of the Hispano Suiza 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns and the life expectancy of the captured Russian 23 mm guns, the Anti-Aircraft Corps began looking with some hope, at a complete update in armament, i.e: missiles. There had been thoughts of this long before 2002 and it had been voiced in the White Paper on Defence 1996, when it stated:

The present SA Army air defence capability consists of a variety of towed and vehicle-mounted gun and associated radars. This is inadequate, however, some systems are obsolete and need to be supplemented and extended by new systems to fulfil the concept of layered air defence. The optional requirement thus includes guns, man portable missiles, short range missiles and search and fire control radar.

In Britain a unique entry into the world of air defence had been made in 1996 when the Starstreak High Velocity Missile (HVM) – a shoulder-launched Anti-Aircraft missile made its appearance. It flew at Mach 3+ and used laser guidance to home in on fast-flying aircraft, pop-up helicopters or UAVs, then used a system of three individually dart-like projectiles and warheads to shred any target they hit. Starstreak HVM's combination of speed, guidance and kill method was a significant advance over other missile systems in operation by America, France and Russia.

Modelling and Simulation (M&S) was an important facet of the decision to accept the missile. The need for decision support on the Ground Based Air Defence System (GBADS) acquisition programme offered an opportunity to establish an indigenous M&S acquisition decision support (MSADS) capability in CSIR (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research). The Modelling and Simulation Phase under the auspices of contracted acquisition support was concluded and excellent results were achieved. Once established it was used in 2002 during the tender process of the project and assisted in the decision to place the contract before the end of that year. As part of the first phase of the GBADS programme a number of Starstreak missiles was procured.

To provide this support a virtual GBADS demonstrator (VGD) was developed. Over the three year period of development it went through three major iterations – almost one per year – culminating in VGD 3.1 With real-time processing environment analysis tools, and 2D and 3D visualisation it can be used to simulate not only GBADS, but can be extended and applied to more air defence analysis experiments. All this has been done with a strong sense of South African issues, realities and limitations such as financial and human resources.

During the production phase of the real GBADS, tactical doctrine was performed, concurrently. It was a first for South Africa and in fact, for the world. Tactical doctrine would normally be developed after system hand-over.⁵ The project obtained special authority and funding to assist the Air Defence Artillery formation in providing draft doctrine for the new missile system. The Doctrine Development Task Group under the guidance of the project officer Lieutenant Colonel H.J. Baird, the Armscor program manager and system engineer Mr R. Oosthuisen compiled this draft doctrine. The Doctrine Development Task Group initiative was transferred to the Air Defence Artillery formation in 2010 for the total revision and modernisation of the Air Defence Artillery doctrine.

The SANDF three-phase GBADS was first announced in September 2002 when it was announced that Denel Kentron had been selected as the prime contractor for the GBADS Local Warning Segment

⁴ SA Soldier, November 2001 p.12.

⁵ Courtesy of Defence Peace Safety and Security Impact Report 2005.

(LWS). Kentron's team included African Defence Systems, part of Thales France; BAE Systems; Reutech Radar Systems; and Thales Air Defence. Armscor – the South African Procurement Agency – awarded Denel an initial R800 million contract to provide the first system elements in November 2002. LWS was the primary element of Phase 1 which would run from 2002 to 2008 and would provide a fully integrated air defence capability. The LWS was described as an 'embryo air defence capability round which the entire GBADS will be established in an incremental manner'.

Kentron's Sable LWS package included a Battery of eight Thales Starstreak HVM Light Mobile Launchers (LML) supported by two Thales Nederland PAGE 20 km-range low-probability-of-intercept J-band radars as short-range local warning sensors. The LML's were due for delivery in 2004. They were fitted with Kentron thermal imagers for night operations. Daylight cueing is effected with the aid of an OPO (optical 'puter on-er', or target pointer) based on a pedestal-mounted laser range-finder. PAGE low probability of intercept radars serve as short range local warning sensors and at Battery level the LML's are supported by the Kameelperd mobile fire control post which gives a 65 km detection range against a 2m² target.



Figure 60: OPO

Despite a serious delay of some three years in delivery, with a major deviation from planned cash flow, Air Defence of the SA Army in the field received a major boost when the newly purchased ground-to-air missile system was commissioned. In late 2011 the contractual and delivery requirements between the SA Army and Denel Integrated System Solutions were being finalised.



Figure 61: PAGE man portable radar

Upgrade

Plans for phases 2 and 3 (years 7-12 and 13-20) of the extended GBADS programmed included upgrading of a Battery of Oerlikon twin-35 mm GDF gun mounts which have a 4 km engagement range. These were to be fitted for firing Advanced Hit Efficiency and Destruction (AHEAD) programmable fragmenting ammunition and would be supported by new or upgraded fire-control units to give them all-weather capability. For the latter Thales Nederland planned to offer its Flycatcher Mk 2 Short-Range Air-Defence System (SHORADS) surveillance, coordination and fire-control system. Also planned to be procured was SHORADS missile launchers with a 15-20 km range, possibly using the same FCU as the gun systems, and two MECADS Batteries, equipped with self-propelled VSHORADS and SHORADS missiles. It was anticipated that both MECADS Batteries would be

missile and gun-based. The Thales plans never materialised as the upgrade with AHEAD and Fire Control Systems were contracted to Rheinmetall with Skyshield Fire Control Systems.

Forty-eight of the 169 Oerlikon GDF-001 (Mk 1) 35 mm guns purchased in 1963 were upgraded to Mark V status in 1990 and in the same year the Superfledermaus fire control units were phased out. Italian LPD radars remained as local sensors. Included in the upgrade was the Xaba sight to the Gun King sight. In the absence of fire control radar the Gunners had to laser the target to obtain range data for the gun computer to determine the predicted aiming point. This configuration of Mark V system did not have an all-weather or night fighting capability.

The system was further upgraded by German defence company Rheinmetall AG, represented in South Africa by Rheinmetall Denel Munitions, with State-owned Denel as 49 per cent shareholder. The local contractor for the upgrade was Intertechnic (Pty) Ltd; well known to air defence gunners, the company has given a great deal of support to the Corps over a number of years. The upgrade included the supply of Oerlikon Skyshield fire control units, replacing the phased out Superfledermaus. A number of guns were retro-fitted with upgrade kits to be able to fire Rheinmetall's state-of-the-art airburst ammunition. The system included logistics and training services and was scheduled for completion by 2017. By 2017, GDF-007 guns and AHEAD airburst ammunition was a standard for South Africa's Anti-Aircraft guns.

Air Defence Strategy

A lengthy 29 page document produced by Air Defence Artillery Formation in November 2002 outlined various aspects of air defence philosophy and strategy, including the framework within which air defence would be required to exist and provide protection. Factors included: development strategy, human resources, preparedness, employment and Force Support. Air Defence capability in landward defence, apart from formulating doctrine, providing policy guidance and controlling strategy and planning, monitoring and controlling funding, the capability was seen as including mobile air defence, mechanised air defence and air mobile defence as sub-capabilities.

Strategic objectives were seen as Support to the People; Promotion of Regional Security and Defence against Aggression. Various strategies were discussed in the paper: employment in the battle area; force design; core growth; preparedness approach; GBADS procurement, etc, ending with human resource matters and logistics. In one of the final paragraphs in Human Resources it is of interest that the author of the document stated:

It is of interest that the SANDF will consist of a relatively small Regular Force and sufficiently large Reserve Force. The main reason for proclaiming the One Force concept is to have a sufficiently large defence capability at a much more affordable cost. To date nothing has materialised. Differing view points exist within the DoD as to the role of the Reserve Force. There are no clear guidelines regarding the nature, scope and depth of integration required between Regular and the Reserve Force.

In addition, from commencement of the transformation process the DoD had by April 2001 reduced its full time component by 22 per cent. Mechanisms used to reduce personnel consist mainly of natural attrition, the Voluntary Severance Package initiative, the Selective Non-Renewal of Short Term Contracts and the Employer Initiated Retrenchment initiative. Most of these mechanisms were voluntary and individuals could choose whether and when to separate. These procedures provided only a partial solution. The high national unemployment rate prevents a substantial reduction in personnel. Members who function as breadwinners and who have extended families to support and who do not possess scarce expertise, are most vulnerable to separation. For this reason they went on to say, a system was needed to facilitate empowerment and alternative job placement.

Due to the uncertainty of the final force design and establishment table a defined HR composition to work towards a steady end-state could not at that time be defined but it was considered that to provide an integrated force preparation system a move towards education, training and development of allocated Regular Force and Reserve Force units was a necessity.

With acceptance given to the new Defence Act, 2002, (Act 42 of 2002) by the President on 12 February 2003, the title of *The South African Army* was used officially for the first time in an Act of Parliament.⁶ Usage of the term 'Permanent Force' changed and arising from Section 11 (a) of the Act, it became the Regular Force. In Section 11 (b) 'Citizen Force' officially changed to Reserve Force. Until the above date both names had been in regular use for some time, ever since the Minister of Defence, Mr. Joe Modise announced that the '...South African National Defence Force had fallen in step with international trends by re-naming its part-time forces, in particular the commandos. They would now, he said, be known overall as the Reserve Force. The Army Reserve, it was stated, would now consist of the Army Conventional Reserve and the Army Territorial Reserve.'⁷

South Africa had just over 3 000 men and women deployed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, (DRC), Burundi and between Ethiopia and Eritrea, with a further ten in June 2004 preparing for a monitoring mission in Sudan. Two South African soldiers were killed with the UN mission in the DRC and eleven injured in an ambush on Sunday, 6 June 2004. And Minister of Defence, Mr. Mosiuoa Lekota was concerned that inadequate funding meant Army prime mission equipment was not being renewed, Army facilities were rundown and these factors '...had an adverse effect on morale'.⁸ The Minister wanted at least R4 billion a year more for defence and for more weapons – to compensate for the unforeseen burden of South Africa's expanding peace keeping commitments. He said it had not been foreseen by defence planners in the May 1996 White Paper, how popular South Africans would become in the dangerous task as peace keepers. Minister Lekota said that the Defence Force had regularly been '...compelled to halt a number of programmes – sometimes for six months, sometimes for nine months' and budget casualties included pilot training, combat exercises and maintenance. South Africa could not go on a large-scale buying spree similar to the controversial multibillion-rand arms deal and must embark on a systematic and steady acquisition of more arms over a period of time. It would be wise to do so because of South Africa's peacekeeping obligations, the Minister stated.⁹

A Last Gathering

Minister Lekota's appeal was made in the same week that one of the last gatherings of members of the Sportmans Regiment' -2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment – took place. Their annual reunion was held at Woodside Village - a retirement village in Rondebosch, Cape, and it was attended by about thirty men – all over eighty years of age and some over ninety. Gilbert Whiteing and Les Ayris, both over ninety years, raised a glass to old times and so did Dick Came and Keith Muggleston. Simmy Lewis, Dennis Long and Bob Tiffin caught up with the latest news while sportsmen Arthur Gardiner, Gordon le Brun, Francis (Frank) Mellish and Clive Luyt were also present.¹⁰

They had fought together for over a year before spending almost three years as prisoners of war, resulting from the fall of Tobruk in June 1942.

Cape Garrison Artillery

It was 2004 and Conventional Reserve Force units were still not receiving any intake of recruits. Their strengths were reducing as men lost interest in the 'will' of the Defence Force. Many units consequently suffered from a lack of personnel. Cape Garrison Artillery decided to embark on a recruitment drive in the townships of the Western Cape. More than 100 applications were received but as a matriculation certificate was necessary only five candidates were accepted. All five were female. They underwent 'formative' training each Tuesday evening and were taught military etiquette, compliments and saluting, foot drill, history of the Regiment and of the SANDF and other related subjects by Sergeant Bobby Smith. This phase ended and from each weekend in July 2004 they began basic training in company with recruits of the Cape Town Highlanders. Training ended with a ten day camp.

⁶ Section 12. (1) (a) of Act 42 of 2002

⁷ Cape Argus, Tuesday, 11 May 1999.

⁸ *Sunday Times*, 13.6.2004.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *The Tatler*, 24.6.2004

For various reasons the Commando system was being closed down about this time; Reserve Force conventional units looked to commando members to fill posts. Cape Garrison Artillery made a successful approach to members of Blaauwberg Commando at the time it was closing down. An integration parade was held on Saturday, 10 September 2005 when 96 members of the Commando were 'taken on board'. The unit subsequently obtained further recruits from Two Oceans Commando which had been based at Diep Rivier, a suburb on the route to Muizenberg. A Selection Board on 30 August 2005 confirmed the selection of Major V. Archer as commanding officer of Cape Garrison Artillery for an initial probation period of one year with effect from 1 August 2005. The same Board confirmed Captain D.H. Horstmanshof's appointment to command Regiment Oos Transvaal, effective from 12 September 2005.¹¹

The original Cape Garrison Artillery had been presented with a King's Colour on Sunday, 12 February 1905, by the Administrator, Major General. E. Smith-Brooke, on behalf of King Edward VII. After the unit had been transferred to the SA Navy as SAS *Ubique* in 1955, the Colour was ceremoniously and permanently laid up in the old City Hall by SAS *Ubique* for safe keeping. The ceremony took place on 17 February 1957. It was done with in accordance with tradition and SANDF Regulations. It was removed in 2004 with the permission of the City Council, but seemingly unknown by Director Logistics, and transferred to the unit headquarters. The unit received a National Colour on 30 September 1990 when undergoing training at the Army Battle School. This Colour was laid up in April 1994 in accordance with an instruction to all units by Chief of the SADF.

Overview

The financial year 2005-06 was a trying but successful year for the Corps. Many small victories were fought and won. Conventional capability of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was tested at an exercise at the SA Army Combat Training Centre and, jointly with the SA Air Force and SA Navy, in Exercises Seboka, Golden Eagle and Seadog respectively. It proved, unfortunately, that the conventional capability of the Corps was not up to the required or expected standard. All aspects of training therefore underwent scrutiny and revision, followed by the immediate implementation of necessary changes.



Figure 62: Bosvark Anti-Aircraft System

There were also severe challenges in the base at Kimberley because of insufficient accommodation. Command and control suffered as leader group personnel- specially NCOs - had to share bungalows with troops and other infrastructure personnel. In some cases candidate officers had also to share bungalows with NCOs and troops. The standard of Mess equipment was poor, electrical wiring was considered life-threatening and in general, facilities needed urgent attention.

The School nevertheless produced formal training of a high standard and presented thirty-three courses during the year under review. Support was also given to SA Army by presenting courses common to all Corps, for those whose courses were outstanding. And Reserve Force personnel were

¹¹ Facsimile message from Colonel Doyle, ADA Formation, 23.9.2005.

also being accepted on courses while leader group members attended continuation training at both the School and the Regiment.

In his annual report for the year 2005/2006 the GOC emphasised the the Air Defence Artillery Formation in the forthcoming financial year would have to focus on the Operational Test and Evaluation and the commissioning of the GBADS SABLE system. He also noted that the SA Army would be without a mechanised air defence capability in the future.

At the 2006 congress of The Gunners' Association, the air defence representative reported that the 23 mm gun system was being withdrawn from service and the 35 mm Oerlikon guns were in the process of being upgraded, a project that would continue until 2020. He also reported that 101, 102 and 103 Batteries were being trained on the 35 mm guns and that 104 (Parachute) Battery would be trained on the Starstreak. The missile was here, he said, but the system was not complete. It weighed 20 kilos, was shoulder- launched and three missiles could also be mounted on a tripod, which required a right-handed operator of a certain height of who also had perfect eye sight.



Figure 63: Starstreak shoulder-launched firing

External Deployments

It was not all fun and games – with sports days and gun pushes – nor with exercises at the Combat Training Centre in the daily round of events involving Regular Force air defence gunners. They were also involved in external deployments.

10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment had by this time deployed two Batteries at Pondrft on the South African/Zimbabwe border from whence patrols were carried out. At an earlier date Batteries had been deployed on the border with Lesotho and in KwaZulu Natal.

External deployment had in 2004 included three Batteries in Burundi. 102 Battery was the first. Commanded by Major L. Puckree, it arrived in Burundi in July 2004, commencing deployment training as a static guard force structure element. Within three weeks, however, the post conflict training programme became part of the VIP Protection Force Structure element, titled VIPs/Static Guard Force Structure Element. Major Puckree later in the deployment took over as commander of this the Force Structure Element.

102 Battery was relieved after six months by Major S.G. Hlongwa and his 101 Battery. 103 Battery provided the final relief. The Battery, under command of Major D.R. Fortuin, relieved 101 Battery as static guard in September 2004. During the latter deployment Bombardier Tamakwe shot and killed Gunner Hendricks who had reported the Bombardier as absent from his call sign at roll call on that specific day. Bombardier Tamakwe was court-marshalled and sentenced to jail. After 18 months of external deployment, ending in March 2005, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment returned to its normal training schedule.

It was not the first taste of external deployment for 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Some members of the unit had been attached to a previous rotation of a VIP protection element. During a routine, fast-roping water exercise at Lake Tanganyika. Four men – Gunners P.Mello, N.P. Potsane, K.A. Huma and T.S. Mbele were lost. They drowned when the helicopter that was to lift them out hovered overhead, but had a problem with its recovery cable. The downwash from the helicopter's blades literally pushed the men under the water.

Thutlwa

Reutech Radar Systems opened its doors in Stellenbosch on 2 February 1987 as ESD South. It was a division of ESD in Midrand and its first project was Hexagon, a small L-band surveillance radar with a solid state amplifier. It was intended for the *Rooikat* vehicle being developed under Project Strelitzia as the mechanised Anti-Aircraft platform. The project went through the stage of an engineering development model and by the end of 1989 it had passed acceptance tests and early in 1990 was taken to Kentron for evaluation. By this time military expenditure had been scaled down and as has already been mentioned, the Strelitzia project was terminated.

A small radar was, however, required for the *Buffel* Infantry vehicle and Hexagon went through changes in Projects Contain I and Contain II. The latter called for medium range search radar housed in an armoured container with a mass of ten tonnes carried by a twenty ton truck; and so the L-Band *Kameelperd* radar was born. Four production baseline systems were built. These have been continuously improved and are in service as a Battery Fire Control Post in the Ground Based Air Defence System (GBADS).

The four battlefield radar systems ordered in 1996 under Project Bioskoop were eventually delivered in 2006. By 2006, therefore, despite the withdrawal of *Bosvark*, the Anti-Aircraft Artillery Corps was able to operate with the new equipment.

The radar systems - renamed *Thutlwa*, the Xhosa name for giraffe – is described as a highly-mobile solid state L-band 2D surveillance radar designed to provide local warning to air defence equipment in the field. It is a fully autonomous system with a self-contained power plant packed on a Spanish-designed *Kynos Aljaba* eight by eight all-terrain vehicle, named Cavallo (*Skimmel*) in SANDF parlance. The system is capable of being fully operational within ten minutes of arrival on a deployment site. The radar is on a mast which is raised to a height of twelve metres. The system also provides a combined air picture derived from primary radar and IFF (identification friend or foe) as well as a command and control system for effective air defence control. The high mobility of *Thutlwa* coupled with the battlefield-specific local warning sensor design, makes the system a pivotal element of the South African Army's Ground Based Air Defence System. It is able to track 100 targets simultaneously up to a 360 degree range from 120 km.

Also to be carried on a SHE Cavallo truck platform and presently being developed for the Corps is a land version of the *Umkhonto* short-range surface-to-air missile system. It is in use as by the navies of South Africa and Finland.



Figure 64: Thutlwa mobile Anti-Aircraft Radar

Anti-Aircraft Equipment

Thirty-six ZU-23-2 twin 23 mm Anti-Aircraft guns captured in Angola during the 'Border Wars' of the 1980's were mounted on Samil 100 trucks to be used in a mobile role. Known as *Bosvark*, the system began to show wear and tear and in 1996 the guns were refurbished by a Polish company. The vehicle platform was also upgraded, with each receiving a generator to supply power to the radio batteries. This part of the refurbishment was undertaken in 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment's lines in Kimberley by teams consisting of personnel from Armscor, a Polish contractor and SANDF personnel from the Technical Services Corps.

But it became necessary in 2005 to discontinue and withdraw the temporary *Bosvark* system. The main reason for withdrawing the system was due to the escalation in maintenance and operating cost that could not be afforded by the Army. The process of discontinuing and withdrawing the *Bosvark* from service came into effect from 1 April 2006; and without a mechanised capability it forced Air Defence Artillery Formation to focus on the mobile 35 mm Mk V guns. It put 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment under pressure in its support for the SA Army's primary role. The gun was, however, to be re-commissioned in 2014. Submission was made in on 08 Aug 2011 by the Air Defence Artillery Formation to the Army to dispose of the 23mm *Bosvark* system. The submission was met with strong resistance based on the renowned fire power of the weapon and the concern that mechanised doctrine knowledge would decline. Various options were investigated for the re-purposing of the system ranging from converting the guns to fit on land cruisers creating "Technical's" (neologism for a light improvised fighting vehicle) to the Infantry bidding to obtain the weapons as fire support weapons within Battalion structures. The requirement meanwhile arose in Africa peace missions to provide training on 23mm guns. Direction was given on 25 June 2014 by the Army that the system is to be retained and re-commissioned as an training capability in order to retain mechanised doctrine knowledge and qualified instructors. The re-commissioning had to be performed as and when funding would become available. Training courses were re activated at Air Defence Artillery School on the towed version of the 23mm Gun in 2015 and live firings with the weapons were performed in 2016.

Brigadier General Stephen Marumo, GOC SA Army Air Defence Artillery Formation attended the Joint Air Defence Symposium held at the CSIR International Conference Centre, Pretoria, at the end of May 2007. Altogether 24 papers were presented over the two days, some by representatives of various countries - Germany, Brazil, Great Britain, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden and Zimbabwe. There was a good balance between Defence, Institutes and Industry. The timing was good as South Africa was in the preparation stage for the 2010 Soccer World Cup; the SANDF was questioned how it would be involved and be able to monitor situations that might pose a serious threat.¹²

¹² SA Soldier, Vol.14, No.7, July 2007, p. 28.



Figure 65: The Bosvark Anti-Aircraft system

2006/2007 Annual Report

The 2006/2007 Annual Report of the Department of Defence in the Landward Defence Programme Outputs for the Finance Year stated that although Air Defence Artillery Formation Headquarters achieved 100 per cent in all internal evaluations during the financial year, the Air Defence Artillery School was not able to achieve its objectives due to a shortage of funds and a delay in the commissioning of the Ground Based Air Defence System Phase 1. The report went on to state, insofar as 'One Air Defence Artillery Regiment was concerned:

'The role of the Composite Air Defence Artillery capability had been changed to that of a Mobile Air Defence Artillery capability, as the SA Army has no mechanised Air Defence Artillery equipment. The Mechanised Capability will be reinstated with Phase 4 of the Ground Based Air Defence System. The requirements were 70% achieved owing to a lack of prime mission equipment. The Regiment was internally deployed in borderline control operations on the Zimbabwean and Botswana borders.'

It is interesting that 'three Reserve Force structure elements' were targeted as sources of manpower as leader group for 'Air Defence Artillery mechanised capability', although under the heading 'Achievement', the report confirmed that the existing capability was decommissioned as a result of the Air Defence Artillery's equipment being phased out. It went on to state, however, that this '...capability must be reinstated by means of the Ground Based Air Defence System Phase 4.'

The report obviously referred to the *Bosvark* system, which had been withdrawn from service. The report covering the Reserves was positive and confirmed that the target of one Air Defence Artillery Battery was 80 per cent achieved. It confirmed further that the Battery was manned but lack of prime mission equipment and B-vehicles remained a challenge. While conversion training was on-going the '... MSDS does not provide sufficient numbers to fully capacitate the Reserves.'

Amid hard training, sport also had its place. On 14 September 2007 the SA Army held its annual Recreation Day at the SA Army College. Teams of fifteen members each competed in two rounds in fourteen different activities. Those who were not in any team played soccer, volley ball and other games. The 'Best Spirit of the Day' accolade was won by SA Army Air Defence Artillery Formation.¹³

¹³ SA Soldier, Vol. 11, No. 11, November 2007, p. 8.

Exercise Seboka

Exercise Seboka was held at the Combat Training Centre in October 2007. As was usual before any planned exercise, revision training by individual units took place from 2 October, culminating with the actual exercise from 13 to 17 October. The January 2007 MSDS intake completed their theoretical training at Air Defence Artillery School before moving to 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment for practical training. Fully trained and qualified theoretically as 35 mm Mk 5 operators, the MSDS members first undertook live firing on the Aasvoëlkop range at the Combat Training Centre on 12 October 2007, prior to Exercise Seboka. It was in accordance with their course programme.

All safety measures had been observed and Gun Safety Officers were present. Eight 35 mm Mk V twin-barrelled Anti-Aircraft guns, all completely serviced and fully operational, were in place. Despite fully comprehensive training no account could be taken of the reactions of the individual operators, all of whom had a competitive spirit to do well.

The trained gun detachments waited for the order to open fire.

As instructed the Gunner on Gun number 124 fired a short burst. The rounds were on target. A second burst of 20-30 rounds was fired, but characteristically, smoke and fumes were generated and only the left-hand barrel fired. The Gunner, now excited, lost sight of the target and the gun began drifting to the left due to a stoppage in the right-hand barrel. The Gun Safety Officer tried to stop the heavy gun from moving and although unsuccessful managed to flick the safety lever to the safe position. The damage had, however, already been done. Personnel had dived to safety but a number did not move quickly enough. When the gun exhausted its 250-round auto-loader magazine, Staff Sergeant John Bezuidenhout, Bombardier I. Malaza and six gunners were dead; fifteen were injured, three seriously. Reaction from medical staff was excellent. A stand-by SAAF helicopter arrived quickly and one of the injured was flown to hospital in Bloemfontein but died en route.

A full investigation and inspection later found a broken spring pin on the switching mechanism.¹⁴ This had been compounded by non-release of the trigger mechanism. An open day was held on 19 October with spectators seated on Aasvoëlkop. It began with a minute of silence in honour of those who died in this tragic and unfortunate training accident. They were given a dignified farewell by the Minister of Defence, Mr. Mosiuoa Lekota, at a memorial service held in the Alexanderfontein Church, Kimberley, on 24 October 2007.¹⁵

It was the worst disaster to have happened in training from the time the Combat Training Centre had opened as the Army Battle School in 1978. It was equally a huge blow to the Air Defence Artillery Corps. Restrictions placed on the use of the 35 mm Oerlikons implied that until a full investigation was complete and corrective actions implemented the Corps had no available weapons with which to defend the Army in the field.

¹⁴ *Defence Web article*, 12, May 2011, 14:34.

¹⁵ *SA Soldier*, Vol. 11, No. 11, November 2007, p. 8.



Figure 66: The memorial shown above was erected at 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in honour and dedicated to the memory of those who died in the tragic accident at the Combat Training Centre on 12 October 2007. The Regiment holds a memorial service annually on that date to commemorate the event.

Starstreak Arrives

In 2005 Air Defence Artillery received its first batch of Starstreak HMV (High Velocity Missile), a manportable short-range shoulder-launched air defence system, manufactured by Thales Air Defence (formerly Short Missile Systems) in Belfast. The missile is designed to counter various threats, from very high performance low-flying aircraft, to fast pop-up strikes by helicopter. After launch the missile accelerates to approximately Mach 3.5, making it the fastest short-range surface-to-air missile in the world. When within range of a target it releases three laser beam-riding sub-munitions, increasing the likelihood of a successful hit. Starstreak cannot be jammed or suppressed by radar/radio, chaff or flares counter measures neither with anti-radiation missiles as its high speed reduces the time for effective use by any potential countermeasure.

A disadvantage of the system is the necessity of a direct hit. Smoke on the battlefield can obscure a target from an operator whose training level is thus critical. He has to track the target exactly. One hundred and seventy-eight upgraded Mk 2 missiles and eight LML launchers were initially ordered.

Starstreak underwent technical examination, tests and trials, user-manual evaluation and production, accompanied by operator training. And now, on 31 October 2007, after four years, Lieutenant Colonel Jacques Baird - the project officer for Starstreak - which forms part of the SABLE system procured for the Ground Based Air Defence System, witnessed the first shoot of the missile. It took place at the Overberg Test Range near Bredasdorp in the Western Cape. The primary aim of the field trials was to declare the first eight operators ready for operational deployment and prepare them for the final operational test and evaluation of the total SABLE system in 2009.¹⁶

¹⁶ SA Soldier, January 2008, p.25.

The new Starstreak thermal imager that provides a full 24-hour air defence capability was introduced for the first time. Thales was enthusiastic and published a media information bulletin which in its heading proclaimed that there was no '*...hiding from Starstreak day or night.*'¹⁷ The success of the camp was underlined by an unprecedented number of target 'kills' which led the Chief of Staff, Air Defence Artillery Formation to confirm his delight at the performance of the Starstreak system and the operators. He added that at one stage he thought they would run out of targets before the end of the camp.

Brigadier General Jabu Mbuli, GOC Air Defence Artillery Formation was clearly pleased and had this to say:

If this camp has proved anything it is that Starstreak can defeat a wide variety of air targets, both the traditional and the emerging small low infra-red signature threats. We spent quite some time evaluating various missile systems as our Ground Based Air Defence (GBAD) solution and what we have witnessed at this exercise clearly demonstrated that we made the right choice.

And David Beatty Managing Director of Thales, Belfast noted that once again Starstreak had demonstrated its unique capability.

LOCATS - Low Cost Aerial Target System - was used to supply targets during the trials. The system is far more sophisticated than the original Skylift model aircraft built by the enthusiastic National Servicemen in the 1970s and 1980s. Supplied by IST Dynamics, deployment time for the system is 39 to 45 minutes; It is launched by rail from a specialist vehicle; can fly from 120 kph up to 300 kph and is very manoeuvrable. It has an endurance time of 30 minutes. The 'targets' are recoverable by parachute.



Figure 67: LOCATS - Low Cost Aerial Target System

During the 2007/2008 financial year the GOC was absent for a few months on a detached task and Colonel C.R. Lindsay acted as GOC in addition to his normal tasks. The annual report submitted to CD SA Army Corps Services in March 2007 was not much different to the previous year's report. Decommissioning and disposal of the 23 mm Bosvark system continued; the first phase of the long, careful process of commissioning the GBADS SABLE system continued. All this against the severe challenges at Kimberley insofar as accommodation was concerned. The report quoted this and the state of Mess and kitchen equipment and other facilities as having reached a critical stage. It was nevertheless planned to fire the first missile during Exercise Seboka later in the year. In addition, Project Protector - the first step in the procurement of fire control Skyshield radars for the 35 mm Anti-Aircraft guns, together with AHEAD ammunition and the upgrade of the guns to Mk 7 - also continued, but completion of this phase was expected to be ready for final operational tests and evaluation only during the financial year 2018/2019.

Formal training of a high standard was given at the School and excellent results were obtained, with a pass rate of 94 per cent. The School also launched the first of four GBADS courses. Twenty-eight Gunners attended the four courses and were exposed to the missile launchers. They achieved a 100 per cent pass rate.

¹⁷ Thales Information Bulletin, published 20.11.2007

10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, as part of the SA Army conventional landward capability, attended Exercise Seboka and Exercise Young Eagle and its performance was a vast improvement on the exercises of the previous year. Despite financial constraints there were a number of successes during the twelve months covered by the report. It was also noted that Reserve Force personnel were becoming more involved in Force Training and sending more personnel to attend courses. They also received 'distance training' i.e. correspondence courses. The growth path of the Anti-Aircraft Reserve Force units was being formalised and achievable intermediate targets had been set.

Defence Budget 2009/10

The Defence Budget Vote for the financial year 2009/10 was presented to the National Assembly by the new Minister of Defence, Ms. Lindiwe Sisulu on 3 July 2009. A comparison of the last twenty-three annual Votes showed a significant drop from 15.5 per cent as a percentage of Government expenditure in 1989 (or 4.6 per cent of GDP); to 7.9 per cent in 1994 (2.2 per cent of GDP) and a further drop to 3 per cent of Government expenditure in 2011. The last figure represented 1.10 per cent of GDP.¹⁸ For the Department of Defence and Military Veterans – as it had become – the budget represented a challenge; made more so as a result peace-keeping of commitments in other parts of Africa, north of South Africa's borders.

A Special Year

2009 was nevertheless a special year for the air defence community in the sense that it was the seventieth year since Anti-Aircraft guns had arrived in Cape Town and an Anti-Aircraft Battery had in the same year been permanently established. It cannot be forgotten, however, that two field guns had very much earlier – in 1914 - been converted to fire at high angle, to emulate Anti-Aircraft weaponry used in Europe during 1914-1918.

In May 2010 an unusual request was approved by Air Defence Artillery Formation when authority was given to the commanding officer, Regiment Oos Transvaal, on 16 May 2010 to call up members of the two other units housed at Apex Military Base. By mutual agreement the three units were technically sharing duties in running the base and its facilities. In terms of existing policy and procedures members units could only be called up by an appointed commanding officer, but Regiment Vaal Rivier and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, were both at that time without an appointed commander...and so it was that for a short while Major Horstmanshoff found himself commanding three Regiments and in a situation to manage the utilisation of members for the benefit of the base and Air Defence Artillery Formation.

Soccer World Cup

It is a large jump from a Gun Push to a Soccer World Cup, one of the biggest sporting fixtures in the world. Operation Kgwele covered the SANDF support for the hosting of the 2010 World Cup in which air defence units were involved, together with many other units, more particularly at or near the venues where matches took place. Reserve Force units were involved to a limited extent; Troops from Apex Base for instance being involved at two stadiums in Johannesburg and one each at Pretoria, Rustenburg, Polokwane and Nelspruit. Cape Garrison Artillery was involved in the protection of Green Point Stadium, Cape Town. The *Thutlwa* radar was deployed at strategic points to provide the air picture over stadium areas.

The Gun Push

It is little known that for a number of reasons Reserve Force units need an income from which to pay for items not covered by official accounting regulations. Most units, if not all, have an official Regimental fund. Morale was often at stake. In years gone by members attending continuous training 'voluntarily' contributed one day's pay to the Regimental Fund, and monies were also sourced from any outsider who could be influenced to donate to the fund. The 'Gun Push' was the idea of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and was launched on 6 June 2001 as an event to raise funds to sponsor

¹⁸ SA Soldier, Vol. 16, No. 8, August 2002.

members for a visit to the United Kingdom later during the year to meet their affiliated Royal Artillery Battery.

The route began from the front of the Johannesburg City Hall and ended near the Eastgate Shopping Centre. It was conducted with 23 mm guns and only four units participated: Air Defence Artillery School, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Regiment Oos Transvaal and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The Regiment Oos Transvaal team consisted of the oldest members in the competition; WO2 D.H. Horstmanshof at 47 years was the front red flag bearer and the oldest member. Second to him was Lieutenant Colonel T.J. Stander, aged 45. Due to the age factor the team ended last. Cape Garrison Artillery and Regiment Vaal Rivier were trained on 35 mm guns and not therefore invited to participate in this 'light' gun event. It was a great success and the 'gun-push' was considered to be a good morale booster for the Corps. It thereafter became an annual event in the Air Defence Artillery Formation's Annual Week of Excellence.¹⁹

The Gun-Push as an annual event was hosted in Kimberley, either by Air Defence Artillery School or 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, from 2002 until 2009. For the three years following the first initiative Regiment Oos Transvaal made use of mercenaries in the form of hired members from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. They managed to obtain a first place for the Reserves in 2003 and the overall first place in 2004. 6 Light Anti-Aircraft who obtained the overall last place in 2004 objected to the fact that Regiment Oos Transvaal made use of hired troops and GOC, Air Defence Artillery Formation ruled that no unit would in future make use of 'hired' troops. During 2005, the 'Rotte' took third place overall and gained first place for the Reserves, using its own troops, aged from young to middle-aged. It was the first year that Cape Garrison Artillery participated.

It was realised that Reserve Force troops are mostly unemployed and due to pay restrictions could not be called up for practice. In addition, the age factor was playing a role. Reserve Force members were ageing. Effort being made by the Defence Force to provide units with recruits or trained men were not bearing fruits, and units were allowed only to recruit personnel with previous military service. Reserve Force units would never be able to compete successfully against young gunners from Air Defence Artillery School and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment to obtain overall first place. A new trophy was therefore introduced by the Regimental Sergeant Major of Regiment Oos Transvaal, WO1 E.R. Brits during 2006 as an incentive for the Reserve units. Only Reserve units gaining first place in the Gun Push qualified for the trophy.

And so it was that Capetonians watched with mixed emotions on their faces on Wednesday, 22 September 2010, as teams of air defence gunners from Air Defence Artillery Formation - 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Airborne), Cape Garrison Artillery, Regiment Oos Transvaal and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment - departed at intervals from the Grand Parade, to each push a 23 mm Anti-Aircraft gun along a predetermined route of approximately 7.5 km through the streets of the city. It was the annual 'Air Defence Artillery Formation Gun Push', held in Cape Town for the second year in succession, and was the result of untiring effort by MWO Danie Steyn, RSM of Cape Garrison Artillery, as project manager and co-ordinator.

Trained by 68-year-old Captain Thys van Nieuwenhuizen who ran with the team, the main and the Reserve Force Trophy of the 2010 event were won by Cape Garrison Artillery and, with three teams participating the unit also took third place. The Regular gunners also had three teams: Air Defence Artillery Formation Headquarters Mixed team; Air Defence Artillery School and 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment 'A' team. The latter came second.²⁰ Brigadier General Jabu Mbuli presented Gun Push Medals to all participants, including co-ordinators, time-keepers and referees from Cape Garrison Artillery.²¹

¹⁹ Email from Major D. Horstmanshof, 30.1.2014.

²⁰ *Reserve Force Volunteer*, Summer 2011, pp 53, 54.

²¹ *Ibid.*

The annual Gun Push was again held in Cape Town on 28 May 2011, and was hosted by SA Army Air Defence Artillery Formation in co-operation with the City of Cape Town. It took place in ideal weather, cool and with a hint of rain. A short shower mid-morning did nothing to dampen the spirits of the thirteen teams – including a team from an Armour Corps unit (Regiment Oranje Rivier) based in Cape Town, and an Infantry Battalion (5 SA Infantry Battalion from Ladysmith). The teams set off from the front of the City Hall, Darling Street, on the 7.2 km course on the sound of the Noon Gun, which resounds precisely at noon each day. The old cannon – a Blomfield 24 pounder - is fired electronically from Lion Battery above the city, by signal direct from the Observatory.

With barrels of the 23 mm Anti-Aircraft guns facing towards the rear, each sporting a pennant indicating unit insignia, teams of twelve – with four members on each gun at all times pushed their way along the course through the streets of the city, Air Defence Artillery School was first to complete the 7.2 km course, taking 57 minutes and a few seconds to do so. Cape Garrison Artillery, with 59 minutes on the clock, followed closely behind. Prize-giving was held on the Grand Parade, opposite the City Hall. Brigadier General Jabulani Mbuli officiated, with General of the Gunners, Major General Roy Andersen also present.

The 2010 Africa Aerospace and Defence Expo was held at Air Force Base Ysterplaat, Cape Town, from 21 to 25 September. Air Defence Artillery Formation displayed the *Thutlwa* field radar system, a 35 mm Mk V Anti-Aircraft gun and an LPD20 Radar.



Figure 68: Twin Oerlikon 35 mm MK7 Anti-Aircraft gun in action with Skyshield radar

An Annual Memorial Service

On Sunday, 18 April 2010, serving and retired Gunners of the South African Artillery and the South African Air Defence Artillery joined at the Gunners' Memorial, Potchefstroom, to honour those that had given their lives, in the service of the Gun. A number of dignitaries were present. The memorial site had undergone tremendous transformation in the past two or three years from, as was described: '...the former pale and bleak looking monument...' to one that was '...well-maintained and professional...'. It had included the extension of paving for VIP guests; planting and layout of gardens; a new podium; and planting of sixteen poplar trees to replace those that had died.

The Air Defence Artillery Formation Events calendar for the second half of 2009 did not include any special event to cover its date of birth, but it was surely mentioned during the Gauteng Tiddler at Apex

Base on 26 June; possibly at the Air Defence Artillery Formation and at the Cape Garrison Artillery formal dinner at Kelvin Grove, Newlands, Cape Town, on Friday, 7 August. Cape Garrison Artillery, the Reserve Force Regiment, celebrated the day they were first established in 1946 as an Anti-Aircraft Troop of the South African Air Force sixty-three years before. The events of the week-end included a finger luncheon at the Civic Centre the next day, after the unit had that morning exercised their Right to the Freedom of Entry of Cape Town. The week-end ended with a church service at the Groote Kerk, Adderley Street.

Other air defence events during the year included the GBADS Classic Golf Day which the Corps hosted in September at Kimberley. The Golf Day was taken over by Air Defence Artillery Formation and held as an annual event from 2000 after the closure of Northern Cape Command. It had been the Command's annual fund-raising day. Until 2010 the Golf Day was held at the Kimberley Golf Course but in 2011 it took place at the Magersfontein Memorial Golf Course, reverting in subsequent years to the original venue. The purpose of the golf day was to raise funds to not only support golfers in the Corps but also to donate and assist those in Kimberley deserving of assistance, particularly charities. Commerce and Industry with ties to air defence are invited to include teams in the GBADS Classic. Serving soldiers were also welcomed. In the early years the format was a day/night event of nine holes played during daylight hours and nine holes played at night. Day/night golf remains and is played on Wednesday evening as a prelude to GBADS Classic on Thursday. Overall winners have included Reutech Radar Systems, Valu Data, Armscor, The Gunners' Association and Team Thales. With the advent of the Local Warning Segment of the SABLE System, Thales Air Defence introduced the Starstreak Cup and Salvagers in 2003 and these prizes have been won by Pretoria Metal Press, Reutech, Armscor, Denel, Rheinmetall and Team Thales.²²

The annual Joint Air Defence Symposium took place in mid-October and a Starstreak visitor's day was hosted at the Overberg Test Range, Bredasdorp. It included the final round of Starstreak firings to declare eight operators ready for operational deployment as part of the final operational test and evaluation of the total SABLE system. South African Army Command Council members were invited to witness the firing. The final major event of the year was the Air Defence Artillery Formation Week of Excellence which began on 30 November. It included a Medal Parade, Memorial Service, the annual Gun Run, Kimberley Tiddler and ended with a church service.

Loss of Honorary Colonel

Regiment Oos Transvaal said *Hamba Kahle* to their Honorary Colonel, Eric Holdtman, who passed away on 31 August 2010 after a long illness. He had been appointed an honorary member of the Regiment in 1980 and appointed Honorary Colonel in January 2001. He was an enthusiastic supporter of the Regiment and had lengthy service on the Brakpan City Council as a council member and as deputy Mayor and Mayor eight times. He had also been deeply involved in community service, particularly with the elderly and had gained the respect of all who knew him.

Exercise Young Eagle

The parachute-trained Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment took part in Exercise Young Eagle conducted by 43 Brigade at the General de Wet Training area at De Brug, near Bloemfontein. The exercise – a force preparation and combat-ready exercise – was held over the period 12 to 24 February 2011. It took place not only at De Brug but also at the SA Army Combat Training Centre, Lohathla and was aimed at training and exercising the SA Army's airborne and air assault capability. South African parachute trained gunners from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment were involved. But spectators, including a number of high ranking officers watched in horror as 25 year old Gunner Jabulani (David) Masanga plunged to his death on 22 February 2011, in a tragic parachute accident when his parachute failed to open during the jump.²³ He was laid to rest with full military honours in the Nigel Cemetery on 5 March, his coffin draped with the National Flag, an honour to those who die in service of the country. His name was added to the roll of Gunners at the Gunners' Memorial, Potchefstroom.

²² E Mail from ADA Formation, 25.1.2017.

²³ *SA Soldier*, Vol. 18, No. 3, March 2011.

The 2011 Gun Run –an invitation received after the event states it was a Gun Push – was held in Cape Town in May. It started as a social event with a cocktail function in the Mayors Parlour, City Hall, on Saturday morning, 28 May. Chief of the SANDF Reserves, Major General Roy Andersen, CEO's of selected businesses, Consuls General and other senior officials in attendance. The Gun Run was held over a 7.2 km course at 12.00 noon the next day. Prize giving took place at the City Hall. And at 6.00 pm another function was given by the co-hosts – the City of Cape Town. Air Defence Artillery School were the winners, with Cape Garrison Artillery winning the Reserve Force Trophy.

Thutlwa used Operationally

Thutlwa was first used operationally in a peace-keeping role during the 2010 World Cup as part of the security system to ensure the safety of the stadiums; and a second time during an air border safeguard operation early in 2011. The mobile Battery fire control post and early warning radar made its international debut early in July 2011 when one was flown to Juba, the new capital of Sudan, to support independence celebrations. It was, in fact, deployed at Juba airport – the new capital – to provide radar coverage for the airfield and also necessary air space control in support of the SA Air Force air traffic controllers in their task of air space management during Sudan's independence celebrations. It was taken more than 500 km by road to Pretoria and loaded into an Ilyushin IL-76 cargo aircraft for the 5000 km trip to Juba.²⁴



Figure 69: Thutlwa finally loaded and ready to go.

²⁴ DefenceWeb 8 and 21.7.2011. and E mail from ADA Formation, 28.12.2016



Figure 70: Thutwa deployed at Juba airport. – A Special Forces team provided security for the equipment.

Apex Military Base

The mine compound for workers on the Apex coal mine was closed down in 1947 after the mine had produced high grade coal for many years. The compound became the property of the Brakpan Municipality and was later leased to the two military units headquartered in the Brakpan municipal area - Brakpan Commando and Regiment Oos Transvaal - at R1.00 per annum on a 99-year lease agreement. The commando took occupation during 1978 and the Anti-Aircraft unit followed in 1979. It was not a happy relationship, discipline in the opposite camp was not as it should be and eventually a fence was erected by the Anti-Aircraft gunners to separate the two units, in an attempt to avoid the unpleasant incidents that arose from time to time.

The Commando system was gradually dissolved and Brakpan Commando was closed down. It vacated the premises in November 2005. Regiment Oos Transvaal in 2006 became the sole occupants. Other Regiments followed; 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment moved in during 2008 and Regiment Vaal Rivier followed at a later date. The latter unit was after some while transferred to Kimberley. A great deal of time and effort was given by members of Regiment Oos Transvaal to make the accommodation habitable and useable as a military headquarters. Working with 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and with financial assistance from the local city council, the former mine compound was converted into a well-built ten-roomed Regimental headquarters. It was officially opened by Lieutenant General Geldenhuys in 1977.²⁵

The Base, and in particular 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, welcomed a new commanding officer with the appointment of Lieutenant Colonel Deon Bornman on 1 March 2012. The unit had been without a commander since the transfer of Lieutenant Colonel Coningsby to the Air Defence Artillery Formation staff. Lieutenant Colonel Deon Bornman had been a member of the Regular Force until 1995 and was self-employed in the security industry. He was one of three new air defence commanding officers – all former Regular Force officers - appointed about this time. Lieutenant Colonel Bob Visser took command of Cape Garrison Artillery on 20 February and Lieutenant Colonel G. Pieters assumed command of Regiment Vaal Rivier from 4 June 2013.

²⁵ Written with assistance provided by Major D.H. Horstmanshof.

Apex is now a recognised Military Base; a Centre of Excellence for Air Defence in Gauteng and a back-up venue for Air Defence Artillery Formation Headquarters. It has its own museum which underwent an upgrade and re-opened on 10 January 2013 - two days before a medal parade was held at the Base. But it had taken a lot of hard work, teamwork and excellent leadership to reach this stage. It was therefore a proud moment for Lieutenant Colonel Deon Bornman, who had only been in command for eight months and had been instrumental in ensuring that Apex had reached this stage – when the Base was awarded the Bofors Trophy for 2012. He was supported by a good management team – Major Horstmanshof, Commander of Regiment Oos Transvaal, by Major Kapsosideris, his second-in-command and his RSM, Errol Brits. WO1 Makhubu, RSM of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment played a large part, and help was given freely by other officers, warrant officers and NCOs.

Brigadier General S.J. Mbuli made the award during the Air Defence Artillery Formation's Excellence Week towards the end of December. He also presented certificates of Excellence to members of the Corps who had excelled over and above their normal duties and often at the own expense and time for the benefit of the Air Defence Artillery Corps. Those concerned were: Warrant Officer 2 Wayne Partridge; Staff Sergeant Alex Mokhethi; Sergeant Kevin Fenton; Corporal Motobake Mofekeng, Gunner John Msango; Mr. Edward Shokane and the dedicated PSAP at Apex Base: Mrs. Joey Buitendag.

An Historical Meeting

It is not every day that guests such as those shown below, some still serving but others who served between the early 1950's and 2013, could be seen attending a medal parade at Apex Base on 12 January 2013:



Figure 71: From left to right: Lieutenant Colonel Dave Roxburgh (Ret); Major Dirk Horstmanshof (ROT); Lieutenant Colonel Deon Bornman (6 LAA); Colonel Steve Coningsby (SSO Res.ADA Fmn); Colonel Jacques Baird (CoS ADA Fmn); Colonel (Ret) Lawrie Poorter; Lieutenant Colonel (Ret) Gert Lindque; Major (Ret) Louw Rossouw and Lieutenant Colonel Saadjie Zelie (SO1 Res ETD at ADA Fmn)

The Double Barrel

The lively Apex Base and the World Soccer event spawned a newsletter.

It began as *The Brakpan Gunner* – described as *A Newsletter for Apex Military Base Gunners* -and the first one was written by Kevin Fenton while on duty in the Operations Room at Apex Military Base during Operation Kgwele. By chance the second edition reached Colonel Crook who was collecting air

defence information and he recognised it could prove useful as source material. He suggested it be given a volume and edition reference and it thereafter underwent transformation to become much better known – and more widely distributed - as *The Double Barrel*. The scribe decided on the new name *The Double Barrel* as he felt it aptly described the double barrel Anti-Aircraft gun which is unique to the Air Defence Artillery.

Sergeant Fenton's original intention was to produce an internal newsletter with a newspaper 'feel' about it for the members on the base but later changed the format to its current form, including a change from landscape to portrait. *The Double Barrel* is conceived, researched, written, typed and edited by him in his private capacity and is published roughly once a quarter. It is primarily an online publication formatted into a PDF file and a draft copy is sent to Errol Brits for edit, prior to final print. This partnership, as Sergeant Fenton described, '... has proved its worth over the years, as Errol advises me on the correctness of various issues that I have written including correcting the ranks of senior officers. He generally ensures that *The Double Barrel* is military correct.'

About 1 450 copies are distributed. Although basically a Unit newsletter it is well recognised. The fact that it is available on The Gunners' Association website has made the effort of producing the newsletter all the more worthwhile.

Exhibitions and Shooting

Since the departure of Regiment Vaal Rivier to a new headquarters at Kimberley, Apex Military Base at Brakpan – also known as 'Brits se plaas' - housed only 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and Regiment Oos Transvaal. It was an efficiently organised and well run base under WO1 Errol Brits whose mantra for those who reported, was: 'You will deliver or you will go home.' In 2012 Regiment Oos Transvaal provided personnel to man the Air Defence exhibit at the Rand Show. Credit was given to the unit's RSM, MWO Errol Brits and the two gun detachments that were on duty during the show which lasted from 6 to 15 April 2012 and was visited by the Hon. Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Ms. Lindiwe Sisulu.

The *Rotte*, as they are nicknamed, entered a team of eight in the SA Army's annual Combat Rifle Shooting completion held in Bloemfontein from 5 to 10 March 2012. Two members were experienced shottists and six were still learning 'the trade'. It was the first time in three years that one of the units at Apex Military Base had entered a team. Competition among the 34 Reserve units taking part was tough and the *Rotte* found the experience invaluable. Vrystaat Artillerie Regiment were winners of the two major trophies and a Reserve Force team won the overall completion against a team from the Regular Force and seven international teams. Regiment Oos Transvaal is a proud unit and has in the course of time developed 'games' which after many years have become traditional; such as 'Muffin Man' for newly promoted Officers, Warrant Officers and NCO's; egg-eating (a raw egg with his favourite drink for someone just promoted), Kotte-Rot, and Five Past Nine rum time – the latter a tot of Red Heart rum poured into a 20 mm 'doppie' (a brass cartridge case) and consumed neat at the end of the working day 'admin' evening.

Durban Tattoo

For reasons known only to Durban Tattoo organisers, the Air Defence Reserves were invited almost at the last minute to participate in their tattoo. There had been no forward planning and bus tickets and transport were out of the question. RSM Errol Brits was tasked to take command and senior members at Apex Military Base were tasked to arrange transport to Durban and secure accommodation in the holiday city. All this took place during school holiday time. The RSM was also tasked to arrange the Gun Run at the tattoo

As one of the seniors said: ‘...being in the reserves and having become accustomed to problem solving...’. It was much, but not quite, like the famous words of a British Territorial soldier written in the 1950s when British Territorial soldiers in the post-war years were feeling grossly neglected:

*We, the willing, led by the unknowing
are doing the impossible for the ungrateful.
We have done it for so long
With so little
That we are now qualified
To do anything, with nothing.*

WO1 Wayne Partridge was asked to make a plan. No sooner said than done! Within 24 hours Apex Base was the proud owner of a 50 seater bus. The bus had not been used for three years and was about to be auctioned. It was overhauled, serviced and cleaned in record time, and transported 42 members of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment; Regiment Oos Transvaal; Regiment Vaal Rivier and Cape Garrison Artillery to Durban to undertake a Gun Push.

The stadium was found to be a little restricted and it was decided to instead do a relay with each team consisting of four members. The Gun Run – as advertised- proved popular. In the final race ‘...the dreams of glory that Regiment Oos Transvaal had were shattered when Regiment Vaal Rivier beat them by mere metres into second place.’²⁶

Medal Parade and Social Events

It is not every day that Apex Base hosts a medal parade with the number of honoured guests that attended on 12 January 2013. A photograph taken that day includes Lieutenant Colonels Dave Roxburgh and Saadjie Zeelie; Colonels Steve Coningsby, Jacques Baird and Lawrie Poorter, as well as Major Louw Rossouw. They represented a number of current and former Anti-Aircraft units. Two had latter joined the Reserve Air Wing. Lieutenant Colonel Deon Bornman was included in the group.²⁷ More than seventy medals, GOC Merit Certificates, and PSAP and Long Service Certificates, were presented to members of the Base by Colonel H.J. Baird, Chief of Staff, Air Defence Artillery, who represented Brigadier General Mbuli.

Apex Base has subsequently been host to the ADA Capability Board meeting normally held in Kimberley. It was decided that quarterly meetings would be hosted not only by 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment but also by Cape Garrison Artillery and by Apex Base. The latter had a particularly busy social year in 2013.

Chief Warrant Officer D.D. van der Merwe, Support Formation Sergeant Major was honoured with Life Membership of the Base. And Apex Base was later privileged to host the Chief Army Sergeant Major Meeting of 2013. It was hoped those who attended would see how well the Base was run and create a positive image for Air Defence Reserve units. The next event was ‘Ack Ack Veterans Day’, held on 25 May. The response to invitations was described as ‘fantastic’. Anti-Aircraft Gunners who underwent training ‘...even before 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was born and Table Mountain was a kopje...’ attended the day’s events. Brigadier General S.J. Mbuli, Colonel H.J. Baird and two present and past Formation Sergeant Majors – MWO P. Olivier and CWO D. Lennie, respectively – were also present.

The next event was a formal dinner for all the staff at the Base; all ranks - Colonels to Gunner attended. Full formal procedure was followed. Private L.M.N. Selaka was Mess President and Gunner Kau was Mr. Vice. Everyone on the Base was given a lecture beforehand on the customs and traditions of formal dinners and especially of the etiquette that went with it. Guest of Honour was Sergeant Major of the Army, SCWO Charles Laubscher, who had much earlier suggested to all units that the custom of formal dinners not be forgotten.

²⁶ *The Double Barrel*. Vol. 2, Issue 3, May/July 2012

²⁶ Email from WO 1 Errol Brits, 16.1.2013

²⁷ *The Double Barrel*, Vol. 3, No. 1, February 2013.

Another '*esprit de corps*' evening was held during the year. Organised by RSM E. Brits of Regiment Oos Transvaal it began with a full explanation of the history and traditions of both Regiments occupying the base. Major (Ret) Louw Rossouw was on hand to explain and teach members the 'Muffin Man' song, used to great effect when a newly commissioned officer first enters the Mess; RSM Brits and WO1 J.Harmzen explained the duties of an NCO (and what was expected of them)'. The tradition of eating a raw egg by newly promoted NCO's (and its symbolic nature) was explained and put into immediate practice – there were several newly-promoted Gunners present. And finally Major Horstmanshof explained the significance of his Regiment's 'Rum Time'.

The late Nelson Mandela's birthday was not forgotten. In a well organised exercise a total of 13 680 meals were measured and packed by the Springcare Centre based at Trinity Methodist Church in Springs, supported by members of Apex Base. Each meal consisted of four basic dehydrated foods – rice, vegetables, soya and a vitamin supplement - which when added with water becomes a wholesome meal. Six meals went into each parcel. Over two thousand were purchased for distribution by members of the base.²⁸

Despite these activities training was not forgotten by Lieutenant Colonel Bornman, two training exercises were held during the year: Exercise Blue Ray - an Anti-Aircraft training exercise for an 'opfor' attack; and Exercise Vuka that was held at a Bush Camp. It consisted of map reading and orientation assisted by compass – as opposed to the modern 'lazy technique' of GPS. Not only did Apex Base have its own bus, but by this time had also had a fire tender. It had been acquired some time ago by Warrant Officer Partridge and had been completely renovated and was fully functional. It was available to assist the local community and farmers in the vicinity. The Base was often used as a transit camp by Headquarters, 46 SA Brigade and by the Air Defence Artillery Formation. For this reason, in a project motivated by RSM Brits, rebuilding to provide VIP guest quarters was being undertaken as the year drew to a close.

6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment received the Freedom of the City of Johannesburg on 31 October 2002 and in company with eleven other Reserve Force units on Saturday, 9 November 2013 and it exercised its Right to the Freedom of Entry into the City. Units do so in accordance with the traditional phrase: 'with fixed bayonets, drums beating and flags flying'. This was, however, amended by Councillor W. van der Schyf in his speech when he authorised the twelve units '...to march through the streets of Johannesburg with your colours flying and bands playing'.²⁹

Included among the units that were involved in Exercise Seboka in 2014 - an annual exercise at the Combat Training Centre in the Northern Cape - was an air mobile Anti-Aircraft Battery supplied by 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Also present were members of 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, commanded from 17 January 2014 by Lieutenant Colonel A. de Villiers. He was assisted in running the Regiment from May by newly promoted MWO J. Claassen.

Defence Costs

In 1880 men who volunteered to fight in the Transkei campaign were paid what was then a good sum of 5/- (50 cents) per day. Citizen Force recruits in 1950 were paid 5/- per day and if one held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, it was £3.30. (R6.30). By 1973 the daily rate of pay had risen to R1.16 for a gunner, to R6.96 for a Commandant. On 1 January 1994 pay had risen to R33.35 for a Commandant. The Minister of Defence on 18 May 1984 announced a 12 per cent pay increase for Citizen Force and Commando personnel, retrospective to 1 January 1984. New pay scales were introduced from 1 July 1996; a gunner receiving R47.05 per day and a unit commander at the top of the range received R149.43. By January 2014 it had again increased to a scale the Reserve Force had never dreamed of before then. The cost of Defence had increased consequentially - and was continuing to do so.

²⁸ Ibid., Vol. 3, No. 4, p.1.

²⁹ *Reserve Force Volunteer*, Summer 2014, p. 64.

Upgrade for South Africa's Air Defence System

It was determined that an upgrade for South Africa's Air Defence System was necessary and in early 2014 a contract was signed with German defence company Rheinmetall AG, to cover modernisation of South Africa's then current equipment. It included logistics and training services, with the complete package scheduled for completion by 2017. The company was represented in South Africa by Rheinmetall Denel Munitions.

Among others, the contract included the supply of Oerlikon Skyshield fire control systems to the SA National Defence Force (SANDF). These, the German company said, would substantially improve the performance and accuracy of the twin-gun systems currently used by the SA Army's Air Defence Artillery Formation. A number of guns would be retrofitted with upgrade kits to accommodate Rheinmetall's state-of-the-art AHEAD airburst ammunition. An AHEAD shell consists of 152 tungsten spin-stabilised sub-projectiles, which, when released form a cone-shaped cloud, is placed so that the target, whether aircraft, missile or bomb, flies into it and is destroyed. The shell detonates by means of an electronic timer which is programmed as it leaves the barrel by an electromagnetic inductor in the gun muzzle of the Mark VII guns.



Figure 72: Skyshield Radar

The new Skyshield technology would enable the SANDF to protect sensitive government installations in the country as well as other critical and civilian assets from a wide array of aerial threats, including asymmetric terrorist-type attacks. Because Skyshield air defence systems can be easily transported and they can basically be deployed anywhere depending on the evolving threat situation, according to a statement issued by the contractors. The value of the contract was not disclosed. South Africa is no stranger to Oerlikon, having acquired and used the former Oerlikon Contraves since the 1960s for air defence purposes.

The SA Army currently operates twin 35 mm air defence guns acquired from Rheinmetall ancestor company Oerlikon, according to Engineering News.

Rheinmetall specialises in short range air defence systems, including fire control technology, Anti-Aircraft guns, integrated guided missile launchers and AHEAD airburst ammunition. One key weakness of the Mk V gun was the lack of Small Target Capacity a solution to this was an upgrade to the Mk VII, which included the fitting of a specific measuring and programming base and its associated AHEAD computer. The gun will thereafter be able to fire both existing and AHEAD ammunition.³⁰

Starstreak

On Wednesday, 15 October 2014 Lieutenant General Vusi Masondo, Chief of the SA Army, officially took the Starstreak Ground Based Air Defence missile system into the landward forces inventory. The handover took place at Discobolos, Kimberley, headquarters of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The system which first arrived in South Africa in 2004 underwent extensive modifications and enhancement at Denel Land Systems to adapt it to African conditions and the specification requirements of the Air Defence Artillery Formation. Testing had taken place at AFB Zwartkop, Denel's Overberg Test Range as well as the Air Defence Test Range at Riemvasmaak in the Northern Cape.³¹

³⁰ SA Army Journal 2014, p. 34.

³¹ Defence Web, 16.10.2014.

A Birthday

Regiment Oos Transvaal was formally established with effect 1 October 1964³² and its fiftieth birthday was proudly celebrated by the commanding officer, Major Dirk Horstmanshof, JCD, his officers - Major Ari Kapsosideris and Lieutenant Ronnie Phahlamohlaka, the RSM, MWO Errol Brits, Warrant Officers, NCOs and gunners. To quote from the Double Barrel of October.November 2014:

Congratulations are extended to all those members of ROT from yesteryear, whose contribution to the building of this unit will forever be remembered, because without them the unit known as ROT would not have the values, pride and esprit de corps that exists today',

On Saturday, 8 November, 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment participated in the annual Freedom of the City of Johannesburg parade. They were unfortunately not able to display their Colour due to another commitment. 6 Light AntiAircraft Regiment was established on 1 April 1965 in terms of SADFO 148/65 and it would celebrate fifty years of service in the coming year.

Social Events

The life of a Regiment, particularly a Reserve Force, is not all '...foot and squad drill, gun drill, maintenance of stores, etc.' Social events play a large part in building a Regiment as a team, of instilling esprit de Corps and morale. Good Regiments have a mixture of these events during a year and in 2014 Apex Base had its share: It hosted a South African Legion breakfast and medal parade in March (medals were presented to former National Servicemen/Citizen Force members - for whom the South African Legion had applied for and received medals on behalf of the recipients, and at a parade in May 22 serving members received such honours. In June Mrs. Dick Inggs presented her late husband's sword to Lieutenant Colonel Deon Bornman and it now holds pride of place in the Base Museum.

An Anti-Aircraft Old Boy's Day took place in October and it was followed by the annual Freedom of Entry into the City of Johannesburg parade in November. Earlier in the year a record number of Gunners – both former and serving – attended the annual memorial service at Potchefstroom. They were addressed by Lieutenant General Philip du Preez, SD, SM, MMM, National President of The Gunners' Association. Major General Les Rudman, Deputy Chief of the Army, represented Chief of the SANDF, Lieutenant General V.R. Masondo and Major General Roy Andersen, General of the Gunners, were both present on this solemn occasion. So too were Brigadier General J. Mbuli, GOC Air Defence Artillery Formation; Lieutenant Colonel Deon Bornman of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and Major Dirk Horstmanshof of Regiment Oos Transvaal. Two new branches of The Gunners' Association were presented at the service: by Major (Ret) Louw Rossouw – a former second-in-command of Regiment Oos Transvaal and now Vice Chairman of the new East Rand Branch; and the Honorary Colonel of Regiment Vaal Rivier – Lieutenant Colonel Wassemeier of the Vereeniging Branch, the latter established in 2014.

Medal Parade

Almost the last function of the year took place at Kimberly on 3 November 2014 when the annual Air Defence Artillery Formation medal parade, church service and awards evening was held. During the evening Brigadier General Mbuli presented the the Bofors Trophy to Regiment Vaal Rivier medals were also presented to those who had earned them. Gunner Dominic Hoole, National Chairman of The Gunners' Association presented prizes to the best young officer and best NCO of a recently completed course.

Retirement arrived in 2014 for Lieutenant Colonel Pierre de Monfort, who bade farewell to the SA Army during the latter part of the year. He was remembered by many, particularly by those under whom he was many years before, a tough, disciplined Bombardier instructor at Young's Field.

³² SADFO 104/64

Armed Forces Day 2015

2015 was a busy year for the SANDF with Armed Forces day taking place at Potchefstroom. Over 1 200 troops and their vehicles were on show at the local Trim Park before the main parade through the town. A wide range of specialised military vehicles, were seen by the public.

Rand Easter Show

The Rand Easter Show was conceded to be more spectacular in 2015 when compared to those of earlier years. It provided a platform to interact with the public and was a natural choice for an outreach programme. The huge SANDF display included air defence weaponry – a *Thutlwa*; 35 mm Mk V gun; Starstreak; LPD 20 and the LOCAT system. Members of Apex Military Base were busy preparing prime mission equipment for display at the show. Gunners from Regiment Oos Transvaal and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, provided manpower for the Air Defence portion of the SANDF exhibition to assist the Regular Force who were manning the display and in answering questions from the public. Apex Base members participated in a daily Gun Run in the main arena, teams competing against each other by running with a 23 mm gun, much to the delight of the large crowd. Apex men were also responsible for the Air Defence static display at The Gunners' Memorial, Potchestroom in April and at the Military Fair held at the Vortrekker Monument on 1 May 2015.

The hard-working 'tiffies' from the Apex Base participated in the annual *Just Wheels* exhibition which raised funds for the special needs Muriel Brand School in Brakpan. Children at the School all have severe disabilities. The project formed part of RSM Brits' vision to give back to the local community. *Just Wheels* is a vintage motor vehicle club and vehicles are mostly Ford V8's, Chevy, Dodge and Chrylers. It is the biggest fund raising event on the East Rand and about 800 vehicles are usually on display to anything from 6 000 to 8 000 visitors. Up to R240, 000.00 is raised. This annual Community Out Reach Project was until recently driven by WO2 W.A. Partridge; vehicle and equipment was taken and displayed at the School to support *Just Wheels* – and to advertise the Reserve Force Anti-Aircraft unit. But participation by Regiment Oos Transvaal sadly ended from 2016 due to lack of operating funding.

Changes in Command

On 1 October 2009 the GOC, Air Defence Artillery Formation, Brigadier General Stephan Marumo was transferred to the post of GOC, SA Army Support Formation with promotion to Major General.³³ His previous post – that of GOC, Air Defence Artillery Formation – was taken over from 1 October by Brigadier General J.S. Mbuli. Brigadier General Mbuli attended the Executive National Strategic Program over the period January 2012 to October 2012 and during these months Colonel H.J. Baird acted as GOC.

Brigadier General Mbuli received promotion to Major General from 1 January 2015 and was posted as Chief Director, Defence Acquisition Management at Defence Headquarters.³⁴

Colonel G.S. Hlongwa, commanding the Air Defence Artillery School was appointed to command Air Defence Artillery Formation with the rank of Brigadier General from 1 January 2015.³⁵ The General had joined the SANDF in 1994 with the rank of Lieutenant but had specialised in air defence during his period in exile. By 1996 he had passed all the courses necessary for promotion and was appointed an instructor at 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, before further promotion to Troop Commander and later, Battery Commander. In 2005 he was appointed to command 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. With his promotion to Brigadier General the post of Officer Commanding Air Defence Artillery School was handed to Colonel Leon Puckree who had joined Air Defence Artillery Corps as a volunteer in 1995.

³³ ADA FMN/513/6 dd 8/7/2009.

³⁴ E mail from Col H.J. Baird 18.5.2017.

³⁵ *Double Barrel*, Vol. 4, 6 December 2014.

Two Change of Command revue parades were therefore held at Kimberley on 18 and 19 March 2015 with three hundred Gunners on each parade, represented all units in the Corps. Brigadier General S. Hlongwa handed over command of Air Defence Artillery School to Colonel Leon Puckree on 18 March; and the next day Major General J. Mbuli officially handed over command of Air Defence Artillery Formation to Brigadier General Hlongwa. The Colours of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and Regiment Vaal Rivier were on parade, each with their own Colour Party. Lieutenant Colonel Marius van Wyk was parade commander for both parades.

On 19 March during a function after the second parade the General of the Gunners, Major General R.C. Andersen presented the General of the Gunners' Commendation Certificate to four Gunners who had distinguished themselves by rendering exceptional service to the Air Defence Artillery Corps. They were Major General S. Marumo; Major General J.S. Mbuli; CWO D.T.W. Lennie and WO1 E. Brits.

Gunners' Memorial Service

The annual Gunners' Memorial Service was held at Potchefstroom on Sunday, 12 April 2015. The memorial – a simple needle of granite embossed with the Artillery flash and surmounted by a grenade - stands on a site which in 1940/early 1945 was opposite the main gate at the south-western corner of the Artillery training base. It was used by every Field Gunner that moved in or out of the camp. Construction of the memorial was one of the earliest projects of The Gunners' Association. It was designed by Mr. Gordon Leith – a former Gunner, and constructed by Canata and Sons of Johannesburg. Finally on 10 May 1952 at the first memorial service, it was officially declared open by General 'Matie' C.L. de Wet du Toit, DSO, Chief of Staff, SA Army and himself a Gunner, on 10 May 1952, as the official memorial to Gunners who had given their lives in service of the country. The memorial was consecrated by Canon Harvey, formerly chaplain to Transvaal Horse Artillery during the years of war. Sentries were provided by 7 Medium Regiment (3 T.S.)

At the 47th annual Memorial Service, held in April 1998, the memorial was re-dedicated – to all Gunners, when a plaque was unveiled covering the deceased of both statutory and non-statutory forces. The memorial site has in the years 2000 to 2015 under the direction of the Gunners Memorial Trust, gradually been refurbished and improved. It is today an impressive area. The memorial was originally flanked by two QF 13-pounder field guns – (one of which was recovered from Ojikoto Lake, close to Tsumeb, Namibia, in 1915) – and a QF 18-pounder. The memorial is, in addition, now flanked with a 40 mm Bofors Anti-Aircraft gun and a 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft gun, as well as a Sexton self-propelled field gun - all guns that were used by the South African Artillery in 1939-1945, until replaced some years after the war. At the service a 35 mm Anti-Aircraft gun was deployed and manned by a detachment consisting of men from Regiment Oos Transvaal and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The Bofors now at the memorial had arrived at Potchefstroom by way of Regiment Vaal Rivier and Apex Base. With the closure of Regiment Vaal Rivier at Vereeniging their assets were transferred to Apex Base and the Bofors had had pride of place as a gate guard. On instructions from Brigadier General Mbuli it was given a 'face-lift' by the resident 'tiffie' – WO2 Partridge - and his assistant, Staff Sergeant Cill Partridge of Regiment Oos Transvaal. It was transferred to Potchefstroom by Lieutenant Colonel Tiaan Steyn and the Officer Commanding 102 Workshops, Lieutenant Colonel Koetaan. Once there it was placed in position at the Memorial where it serves as a reminder - with the 3.7-inch heavy Anti-Aircraft gun – of the officers and men of Anti-Aircraft units who gave their lives during the years of war.

These words, taken from *The Double Barrel*³⁶ – the newsletter of Apex Military Base – provide a good description of what the memorial really means to Gunners:

Potchefstroom in April is not only about remembering those that have passed, but it is also an opportunity to remind those Gunners, both serving and retired, that there is still a great need

³⁶ *Double Barrel*, Vol. 5, No. 3, May 2015.

to pass on the values and pride of being a Gunner. This unique fraternity has a duty to ensure that the ethos of a Gunner lives on in the next generation of Gunners. The traditions and Esprit de Corps of the various Artillery Regiments must be preserved in order for our troops to understand what it means to be a Gunner and the pride one has, when donning a blue beret.

The annual memorial service is an opportunity for all Gunners to engage with one another. Old friends are encountered again and new friendships are made. It is truly a fantastic day to not only honour the fallen, but to honour those that are still serving and those that served in the past.

It was the last memorial service that Major General Roy Andersen would attend as General of the Gunners. He retired from this prestigious position - which he had filled with great dedication – as from 12 May 2015. This long-serving gunner who began his military service in January 1966 will be sure to attend the service in future years. He had agreed to a request by Chief of the SANDF to serve as Director SANDF Reserves for a further year. Another retirement was announced about the same time when CWO D.T.W Lennie decided that enough was enough and the time had come to take off his uniform and don 'civvies'. He had begun his military career at Young's Field in 1973, serving in numerous posts before ending his long career as Sergeant Major of Training Formation.³⁷

Air Defence Capability.

In the month following the 2015 Memorial Service Lieutenant General Vusimuzi Masondo, Chief of the Army, told journalists at a media breakfast on 11 June 2015:

The Air Defence Artillery Formation took delivery of the Starstreak Very Short Range Air Defence Missile System from our Defence Industry late last year to complement the 23 mm and 35 mm Anti-Aircraft guns, providing the SA Army with a highly effective air defence capability to be deployed as a defensive asset for the SA Army's critical installations.

This Corps, he said further, will also take delivery of an upgraded Battery fire control post, known as the *Thutlwa*, that will provide air defence with radar coverage over a radius of 120 km.

Denel ISM told Defence Web that it is also busy with various activities relating to the next phase of the GBADS programme. The system study for the integration of the Mobile Air Defence System (MobADS) was contracted to Denel ISM with the main purpose of delivering an Allocated Baseline (ABL), Denel ISM. Provision will also be made for integration of the Denel Dynamics Umkhonto Short Range Air Defence (SHORAD) missile system to the GBADS. Additional improvements to the GBADS include the integration of radar systems and the upgrade of communications, particularly integrating the new generation locally supplied radios.

Regarding GBADS, as prime contractor, Denel ISM is supporting phase one of the project, with a support contract running from October 2015 to March 2018 covering programme management, systems engineering and system support activities, according to Dr Dawie Roos, Executive Manager at Denel ISM. The first phase of the GBADS included the Starstreak Very Short Range Air Defence (VSHORAD) missile officially introduced into service in October 2014. The latter has a range of six kilometres and can be fired from a multiple round launcher or shoulder-launched unit.

Battlefields Festival

The South African War of 1899 to 1900 has had far reaching effects on various aspects of our country's history. One, noticeably, is the fact that KwaZulu Natal has the highest concentration of battle sites in South Africa. The 118-day siege of Ladysmith was a turning point in the war and made Ladysmith a household name in Britain. With nearly 500 000 British troops involved or in action during the war- it had an equally dramatic impact on British military history. There are countless stories of heroism,

³⁷ Ibid., Vol.5, No. 3, May 2015

tragedy and suffering, not only for the South African citizens involved (black, white and Indian) but also for those British families who lost husbands and son killed in action. Many procedures and drills forced upon Royal Artillery field gunners during the Anglo-Boer War stood them in good stead when the Great War (later known as World War 1) broke out in 1914.

During the Anglo-Boer War (1899- 1900) heavy guns were mounted on the hills surrounding Ladysmith. The Swartkop Extreme Challenge began in 2003 as a private tourism event based on the fourteen guns mounted on Swartkop for the Battle of Vaalkrans, which took place from 4 to 6 February 1900. But during 2004 Ladysmith Tourism (Emnambithi/Ladysmith Municipality) expanded the event and it became the Ladysmith Siege Weekend. The challenge was also moved to Wagon Hill in Ladysmith for easier access. The 2005 Siege Weekend saw the Freedom of Ladysmith bestowed upon the Irish Guards and during the 2006 Weekend this honour was bestowed upon the Harrismith Commando. Both units return every year to exercise their freedom. Other units that have recently received the freedom of the town are invited to exercise their right of entry during the annual festival.

The 2007 Siege Weekend had been the most successful event to date. Visitor numbers quadrupled, and the media coverage included South Africa and British television and radio broadcasts.

The event was thereafter named the Battlefields Festival. Emnambithi/Ladysmith Municipality hosted the inaugural festival in 2010, and has done so each year since then. Battlefields Festival integrates the unique diversity of sounds and sights that make Ladysmith unique and the programme includes: Community Gun Run, International Gun Pull, Oral History Workshop, Literary Festival, Arts Festival, Fine Arts Evening, Sounds of Music and visits to nature festivities and battle sites. Other events that take place during the week, i.e.: Freedom of Entry Parade and Battlefields Tours. The 5th Annual Battlefields Festival organised by the Emnambithi/Ladysmith Municipality took place at Ladysmith, KwaZulu/Natal in June 2015.

Gun Pull at Ladysmith

In 2010, with Wagon Hill in mind, Air Defence Artillery School, then under command of Colonel S.G. Hlongwa, decided on an International Gun Pull competition. The Gun Pull event was aimed also at exposing disadvantaged population groups to the heritage of the area. Invitations were sent by the Colonel to various units requesting them to participate in the 'Gun Pull' competition at Ladysmith. There were not many replies, due no doubt to the time factor but eventually members of Air Defence Artillery School, 5 SA Infantry Battalion, the Lesotho Defence Force and a British Army team were on hand at the start line in 2011. Teams of 23 each, with fifteen pulling a gun and eight pushing the wheels – and helping also to balance it - were ready to take a 23 mm Anti-Aircraft gun up Wagon Hill. The Lesotho team came first in 8.53 minutes, the British Army team came second in 19.01 minutes and 5 SA Infantry Battalion were close behind in 19.37 minutes. Each team fired a blank round on reaching the finish line.

Gun Run at Ladysmith

Military support in 2011 also included a Gun Run and this took place in June during the week of the festival. It was hosted by the Emnambithi/Ladysmith Municipality, in conjunction with the Department of Sport and Recreation and the South African National Defence Force, co-hosted the inaugural Gun Run that took place in the main streets of Ladysmith in June 2011. Air Defence Artillery School supported the competition by providing ten 23 mm guns. From 2012 onwards 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment sent teams to join the Gun Run, which has always been won by the Anti-Aircraft gunners.

Exercise Young Eagle

10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was again involved in Exercise Young Eagle in 2015 when the SANDF tested its airborne and landward capability at the SA Army Combat Training Centre, Lohathla and at De Brug, Bloemfontein.

A Birthday Celebration

MWO Errol Brits was transferred from his post as RSM of Regiment Oos Transvaal to occupy the post of Air Defence Artillery Formation Reserve Warrant Officer, from 1 September 2015. He had at that stage been a member of his unit for 37 years. No one was appointed in his stead.

The age-old Ceremony of Beating Retreat has evolved over more than the past 300 years. It was first performed in 1690 and was initiated by order from King James VII of Scotland. On the day after the formal transfer of MWO Brits to the Air Defence Artillery Formation, the Corps celebrated the 70th Anniversary of the arrival of the first Anti-Aircraft guns in South Africa in a Retreat parade on 2 September 2016 when the SA Army band, Kroonstad, Beat Retreat on the parade ground of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Thereafter four air defence Batteries marched past the review officer, Brigadier General S.G. Hlongwa, GOC, Air Defence Artillery Formation, who took the salute. The four Batteries were accompanied by a seventy vehicle mechanised column. The parade was attended by a number of dignitaries and included, among the senior Generals and Colonels present, were the Mayor of Kimberley and the Sergeant Major of the Army. Regiment Oos Transvaal and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, both with fifty years of proud service, formed part of the parade.

In addition to the guests mentioned were ten members of 14 (Cole's Kop) Battery, Royal Artillery under the command of Major Charles May who were on a visit to South Africa. Their visit was part of an exercise by the Royal Artillery, soon to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Royal Regiment. It was doing so by an exercise to circumnavigate the world as part of the celebrations. A number of Artillery units took part in the various stages of the exercise. For their part in honouring the occasion, 14 (Cole's Kop) Battery chose to cycle from Cape Town to Kimberley and back to Colesberg. At Colesberg they scaled the Kopje and afterwards held a memorial service to remember those that lost their lives in service of the Battery during the Anglo-Boer War.

The annual GBADS Classic Golf Day was held after guests had had refreshments in the Air Defence Artillery School Recreation area. Those taking part in the night golf event were invited to change into their golfing kit in offices of Air Defence Artillery School.

One major event was missing in 2015 - the SA Joint Air Defence Symposium (SAJADS).

SAJADS

René Oosthuizen of Monze Consultants who was contracted as the GBADS System engineer by Defence Technology, a business unit of the CSIR, described events concerning the history of SAJADS:

The 1st South African Air Defence Symposium (SAADS) was held in 1997 at Gerotek, Pretoria West on 21-22 August 1997. The initiative arose from the huge expenditure on defence programmes (the so-called Package Deals) during the 1990's, as well as the tide swells of a pending Ground Based Air Defence (GBAD) tsunami which would dominate the Joint Defence landscape at the turn of the century. The need sprung from coordinating amongst capital acquisition programmes and ensuring functional Inter-operability, appropriate technology, and domestic industry participation. Not surprisingly, the latter drove the objective of the 1st symposium, which was: to provide an integrated solution for the South African Army's air defence requirements, with optimal involvement of local and international industries.

The 2nd symposium, by then alluding to Joint Air Defence as the theme but still known as SAADS, took place at the In Touch conference facility in Hatfield, Pretoria during the period 25-27 August 1999. The symposium escalated to a 3-day event and 205 delegates on the back of substantial international participation. At that time the GBADS Request for Information (RFI) saw the light of day. The theme of the symposium, 'Effective Joint Air Defence in Small Defence Forces', led the way to adopting the word 'Joint' in the symposium name from 2001 onwards.

The 3rd symposium, henceforth known as SAJADS, took place at the CSIR ICC during the period 17-19 September 2001. The conference theme was 'Air Defence – A Systems Approach' and attendance grew to circa 250. From this year onwards, the SAJADS took place at the CSIR, ICC. SAJADS was

institutionalised as a premier SANDF international event, hosted under the auspices of Chief Joint Operations; and was organised by a committee comprising the SANDF Services (chairing on a rotating basis) and Armscor with Industry support and sponsorship.

SAJADS grew from strength-to-strength throughout the first decade of the 21st century, and with the exception of 2005, the biennial event took place every uneven year until 2013. Typically attracting 350 delegates, these (mostly) 3-day events attracted top class national and international papers. It provided and established a platform where members of the Joint Air Defence (JAD) fraternity - the very fabric of an effective, sustainable SANDF JAD capability, had an opportunity to interact and share information critical to the maintenance and rejuvenation of the capability and associated knowledge base. SAJADS events provide an international forum to which Air Defence practitioners in the SANDF can aspire to participate. To this end a process has been put in place whereby presenters honing their knowledge and presentation skills at SA Army Air Defence Artillery Formation 'in - house' symposia and Joint Air Defence Services Symposia (JADSS) have an opportunity to present and participate in SAJADS.

Sadly, SAJADS 2015 did not take place, and it is at present unclear when the next event will be hosted. The demise of SAJADS is likely to have a negative impact on the sustainability of a SANDF JAD capability.

The Approach of 2016

It was announced shortly before Christmas 2014 that Colonel G.S. Hlongwa had been promoted to Brigadier General, with effect from 1 January 2015, in the post of GOC, SA Army Air Defence Artillery Formation. His predecessor, Brigadier General J.S. Mbuli, left Air Defence on promotion to Major General, as Chief Director, Defence Acquisition Management. Brigadier General J.S. Mbuli joined Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1981 and his association with air defence had begun in 1982 when he was selected to specialise in Anti-Aircraft guns and missiles. Later, as a Platoon Commander at Pango Camp north of Angola he was responsible for Anti-Aircraft deployment around the camp. Integrated into the SANDF in July 1995 with the rank of Captain he underwent bridging training at Tempe, Bloemfontein, and was subsequently employed as second-in-command of 103 Battery, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Kimberley. A spell as Communications Officer was followed by a transfer to Air Defence Artillery Formation as Project Officer and Force Structure Officer, thence in 2008 to an appointment as SSO GBADS. He was appointed General Officer Commanding Air Defence Artillery Formation on 1 October 2009.

Another Contract

As this is written, Denel Integrated Systems and Maritime (Denel ISM) are working on various contracts to upgrade and improve the Ground Based Air Defence System (GBADS). It is also presently providing the Gun Fire Control Posts (Gun FCP) as part of the Skyshield gun fire control system upgrade. RAD supplies the fire control computers and sensors while Denel ISM is responsible for the next level integration which includes a new generation command and control capability.

The SA Army currently operates 35 mm Mk 5 Oerlikon Contraves air defence gun systems acquired from Rheinmetall Air Defence (RAD) AG's ancestor company. Phase two of the GBADS programme will add new generation Gun Fire Control Systems, namely the Skyshield system from RAD as well as upgrading the current Mk 5 guns to the new 35 mm Mk 7 air defence gun system configuration, which provides for AHEAD ammunition capability.



Figure 73: Starstreak at the Rand Show 2016

Week of Excellence

In his report to the Board of Trustees of The Gunners' Association, Brigadier General Hlongwa noted that the relocation of the Air Defence Artillery School to Camden during 2016 was still on schedule; that 103 Battery was deployed to the Lesotho border in September 2015; and the acquisition of a new Fire Control system and upgrade to the 35 mm guns was progressing on schedule.

He reported that Air Defence Artillery Formation was moving from strength to strength and that the annual Week of Excellence was scheduled for 30 November to 4 December 2015. A Gun Run competition would take place on 30 November; a medal parade and Tea in the morning of 1 December, with the Air Defence Artillery Award Ceremony in the afternoon. As usual The Gunners' Association presentation to the best junior officer and NCO would form part. The second day of December was to be a sports day and on third December the GOC's session with senior air defence officers and all those from Staff Sergeant up.

A Time to Go

There is always in life a time to begin and a time to go; and in Regiment Oos Transvaal Major Dirk Horstmanshof – probably the only officer to command three Regiment at the same time -had retired in 2015, the RSM, Errol Brits had moved on to Air Defence Artillery Formation and now it was the turn of the civilian clerk - in today's vernacular - the PSAP. 'Tant' (Aunt) Joey - Mrs. Joey Buitendag, had been the civilian clerk at Nigel Commando and when the commando was closed down, she joined Regiment Oos Transvaal. And now, after ten years with the Regiment, during which she had become a friend to all ranks, it was time for her to retire. She would be long remembered for her kindness and generosity by everyone on the base. At a function to bid her farewell a gift was presented to her by the new commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Nyolo Ntsieng and, similarly, by Lieutenant Colonel Deon Bornman of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.



Figure 74: Major (Ret) Dirk Horstmanshof, 'Tant' Joey and MWO Errol Brits at the farewell function



Figure 75: Lieutenant Colonel Ntsieng presents Mrs. Joey Buitendag with a farewell gift

Fire Damage

Tragedy struck Apex Base during the early hours of Wednesday 26 October 2016 when fire broke out and ravaged the Combined Club. It caused untold damage to the bar area – where it was mainly confined to – the conference room and the club entrance. Due to the quick thinking of the Guard Commander, Sergeant Ronnie Mtshali, who rallied troops on the base into action, the fire was to some extent contained. Before the flames could be doused, however, the bar area had been destroyed. The domain of the loyal barman Eddie Shukwane had gone and many items of memorabilia in the room were lost. There was extensive smoke and water damage to the rest of the building.

A Freedom Parade

10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was awarded the the Freedom of Kimberley at a parade in the city on 23 November 2016. Under command of Lieutenant Colonel M.P. Maine, the first female Officer Commanding, were a Company each from 101, 103 and 104 Batteries; while 102 Battery was also represented on parade as Mechanised columns. A Colour Party carried the Regiment's Colours. The parade in front of the City Hall did not follow the usual format and after a prestige drill demonstration the SA Army Band, Kroonstad, trooped the Colour. It was followed by a choir performance after which the Regiment marched on. The Mayor was received, the Code of Conduct was read and the inspection then took place. After the Mayor's address and presentation of the Scroll the Colours were uncased and the Regiment marched past the Mayor, who took the Salute. A number of dignitaries were on the podium with him. It was a successful parade.

Skinny Liz'

When Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment moved to Kimberley 'Skinny Liz' went with the unit. It was placed in a position of honour entering the unit where it was unveiled on 4 December 1992. It is a silent guard for the units and it is here that a memorial service is held each year to remember those who gave their lives to the Corps in execution of their duties. It covers all who have died in operations since December 1963, and those who lost their lives in training. Those who died during the war years of 1939-1945 are included in a printed National Roll and shown only as members of the South African Artillery.



Figure 76: 'Skinny Liz'

Air Defence Artillery Formation celebrated the Week of Excellence from 5 to 9 December 2016 and on 6 December the annual Air Defence memorial service was held. It was attended by many Anti-Aircraft gunners who arrived from the length and breadth of the country. Wreaths were laid by Brigadier General S.G. Hlongwa, GOC Air Defence Artillery Formation, and by Gunner Dominic Hoole, National Chairman of The Gunners' Association. Captain Z Plaaitjies commanded the parade and WO2 E.L. Hammer was parade Warrant Officer. Tea was afterwards enjoyed in the School's Recreation Area.

The annual Gun Run was held the next day. It had grown in popularity and was sponsored by Capitec Bank, African Bank, The Old Mutual, Flamingo Casino, Intertechnic and Reutech Solutions. Nineteen teams entered the Run but eight of them were not Air Defence. The course was 8.1 km and the winning team - Air Defence Artillery School male team - completed it in 101.5 minutes. They were followed by 44 Parachute Regiment and a SA Police Service team. Two teams which recorded times of 54 and 55 minutes were disqualified. Only three Reserve Force teams entered. They were 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Regiment Oos Transvaal and 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.



Figure 77: Dignitaries at the Memorial Service, Kimberley, on 6 December 2016

In early 2017 Colonel Jaques Baird was transferred to Defence Matériel Division, Defence Headquarters, as Senior Staff Officer Defence Acquisition and System Engineering Management. He was replaced as Chief of Staff Air Defence Artillery, by the very able and respected, Colonel Patrick Mokgosi.

Colonel Baird, who served as Chief of Staff for seven years, is a legend among the Air Defence Artillery fraternity as recounted by the many officers, Warrant Officers, NCO's and gunners in the Corps who had the privilege of serving under his command at Formation headquarters, at the Air Defence Artillery School, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, the Combat Training Centre and while he was engaged in the GBADS projects. He will be sorely missed.



Figure 78: Colonel Jacques Baird

The Gold Cup

Reserve Force units have participated in the annual Gold Cup shoot for many years but it is noted that Lieutenant Danny Belcher of Regiment Oos Transvaal won the Best Marksman and became Overall Champion in the 1994 competition. Financial constraints prohibit the amount of time that can be spent on training but individuals such as Major du Preez of Regiment Vaal Rivier and Captain L Carstens of Cape Garrison Artillery did their best to establish Regimental teams, combined Reserve Force Air Defence teams have been entered since 2010. A composite Air Defence Reserves team was entered in the Gold Cup shooting competition in 2017 and came 16th of the 37 teams in the competition.

The competition began in 1910 when the first competition was won by the Village Deep Gold Mine. Gold mine teams won the trophy in the next two years and it was not until 1929 (there were no competitions during 1912 – 1928) that it was won by 3rd Infantry (Prince Alfred's Guard). It has been won 21 times by Natal Carbineers but the first Gunner Regiment to win the trophy was Vrystaat Artillerie Regiment in 2011. It did so again the next year. The trophy is actually solid gold – and not gold-plated – and was originally presented to the Coast Garrison and Active Citizen Force Volunteer Corps by Mr. J.B. Robinson of the Robinson Gold Mine, Randontein, 1902, to encourage service rifle shooting. After passing through several trusts the trophy is now owned by the SA Army Reserve Force Trust.



Figure 79: The Air Defence Reserves Gold Cup shooting team: 2017

Standing: L / R : Gunner M.J. Peu (6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment); Major Du Preez (Regiment Vaal Rivier - Team Manager); Gunner A.T. Sogcwayi, Sergeants. K.J. Fenton and J.R. Zwane (Regiment Oos Transvaal); Bombardier Botes (Cape Garrison Artillery)
Front Row : Gunner T.J.J. Motsei (44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment); Bombardier A.Q. Botes, and Gunner M.L. Lubambo (Cape Garrison Artillery)

Esprit de Corps

The first Esprit de Corps evening of the year, was held at Apex Military Base. With the encouragement of the Officer Commanding, Regiment Oos Transvaal, Lieutenant Colonel Martin Ntsieng who values the unit's traditions, and with the support of the Office Commanding 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Deon Bornman, a great evening of tradition, laughter and camaraderie was had by all who attended. They were honored to have the recently retired, former Sergeant Major of the Army SCWO (Ret) Charles Laubsher, and the former Air Defence Artillery Formation Sergeant Major, CWO (Ret) Dougige Lennie and the current Air Defence Artillery Formation Sergeant Major - CWO P. Olivier attend the function. Other invited guests included Lieutenant Colonel Hand, Lieutenant Valentine and WO 2 Bosman from 6 Medical Battalion, MWO Errol Brits, (ADA Reserve Force Sergeant Major) and MWO Johan Claassen (RSM 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment), Major (Ret) Dirk Horstmanshof, Major (Ret) Lou Roussouw, Major (Ret) Johan Herselman, and their ex PSAP now retired, 'Tannie' Joey were in attendance. They were also blessed to have a delegation from the Church of IAG Home of Judah based

in Tsakane, attend the evening, as did Rob Beech, the Wee Bill from the East Rand District of the M.O.T.H .



Figure 80: At the esprit de Corps evening: Lieutenant Colonels D. Bornman and N. Ntsieng flanking CWO (Ret) D. Lennie

Not to be outdone Cape Garrison Artillery in May 2017 resurrected its journal – the *Smoking Gun*, Issue 1 of 2017 produced by the editor ‘Gilly-bean’ was full of news and in full colour. It was a very well executed production. The third edition (received via MWO Errol Brits) surpassed the first in its content and presentation. It covered the units’ range practice; and the M.O.T.H. Motor Cycle Association together with members of Hells Angels visit to Fort Wynyard (headquarters of CGA) for their annual Poppy Day event. The event not only commemorates the fallen but also raises funds for charity. The following day Lieutenant Colonel Visser attended the main Poppy Day Remembrance service at the War Memorial in Adderley Street, Cape Town.



Figure 81: Lieutenant Colonel J.J. Visser laying a wreath at the Poppy Day Remembrance service at the War Memorial in Adderley Street, Cape Town.

The Cape Garrison Artillery Pipe Band featured, with attendance at the Mega Agri Show at Bredasdorp on 16 September; the annual Military Dinner at Kelvin Grove Club, Newlands, Cape Town, on 11 October; and later at Bok Radio’s Wes-Kaap Bokkie Toekenning. Also recorded was the visit to Fort Wynyard of two American Coast Artillery specialists, led by Captain C. Dooner and Commander ‘Mac’ Bisset, both retired members of the SA Navy. Unfortunately a few errors crept into an article on the Cape Garrison Artillery’s participation in the Anglo-Boer War. One had been repeated in several books since 1902.



Figure 82: Visitors standing next to the 'piece', (commonly known as the barrel) of a 9.2-inch coast gun at Fort Wynyard

Operation Corona

A Reserve Force contingent was deployed with 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment during Operation Corona - an operation to protect South Africa's internal borders. During the operation, in Pongola, Northern Kwa – Zulu Natal, Gunner (*Small Dog*) Katileho Andrew Rantjanyana, a member of Regiment Oos Transvaal lost his life in an accident while travelling in a water bunker. A member of 1 Special Service Battalion also died in the accident. Gunner Rantjanyana was a hard working, enthusiastic and popular member of the Light Workshop Troop at Apex Military Base and is Regiment Oos Transvaal's first recorded fatal causality while undergoing operational duty in the 53 year history of the Regiment. A memorial service, with his family, friends and colleagues in attendance, was conducted at Apex Military Base, on 23 March 2017 and he was buried with full Military Honours, on 1 April in Vanderbijlpark close to his family home in Sebokeng, Gauteng.

A New General of the Gunners

Major General J.S. Mbuli, former GOC SA Army Air Defence Artillery Formation was appointed General of the Gunners from 10 February 2017 to replace Major General R.C. Andersen who had earlier retired from that post.

The official hand –over of 'duties' from the outgoing General of the Gunners to the incoming General of the Gunners, and the ceremonial exchange of official tokens took place in the Cape Field Artillery Gun Park, Fort iKapa, during the morning of Saturday, 27 May 2017, when Major General Andersen handed the tokens of command to Major General Mbuli. Field Artillery and Anti-Aircraft equipment was on display in front of the Gun Park and contributed to the exceptionally well conducted ceremony. It was followed by a function for ex-service air defence members.

Jabulani Sydney Mbuli was born in Springs in 1963 and after completing his schooling joined *Umkhonto we Sizwe* in 1981, beginning his military career as a section commander during basic training in Angola. In the year that followed he was selected to specialise on Anti-Aircraft missiles and guns, after which he joined MK combatants in Malanjo Province, then the Eastern Front, facing UNITA, then attempting to close MK supply routes. He was appointed a section commander in the reconnaissance Platoon and was involved in skirmishes with UNITA. He was then transferred as a Platoon Commander to a camp in northern Angola, responsible for Anti-Aircraft protection. Transfer to a second camp followed and not long after that he was appointed Task Force Commander and deputy to the Chief of Staff. Selected for Special Force training and after completion he was deployed in South Africa as an operative but was also posted variously in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mocambique, Swaziland and Botswana.

Back in Zambia he furthered his education and obtained a number of diplomas in accounting, business studies and computer programming, etc. He returned to South Africa in July 1995 and joined the SANDF with the rank of Captain. After Bridging Training at Tempe he joined Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment as second-in-command of 103 Battery, thereafter becoming Communications Officer. In 1999 he was transferred to the Air Defence Artillery Formation and seconded to the Project Office as a project officer. In 2008 he was appointed SSO GBADS (Senior Staff Officer Ground Base Air Defence Systems). Before his appointment in October 2009 to command Air Defence Artillery Formation he completed all his Corps courses, a Senior Management Programme and a Logistics course.

He was promoted to the rank of Major General as Chief Director, Defence Acquisition Management on 1 January 2015 and was appointed Chief of Logistics, SANDF, from 1 July 2017 with the rank of Lieutenant General. On 01 March 2018 Major General Stephan Marumo had been appointed Chief Director, Defence Acquisition Management.



Figure 83: The scene at Fort iKapa on Saturday, 27 May 2017

ANNEXURE A

ROLL OF HONOUR

1 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Lieutenant

A.J. Frielinghaus	15 June 1942
R.M. Gordon	5 October 1942
H.C. Haworth	5 October 1942

Sergeant

T.C. Brain	30 October 1944
J.P. Cowley	15 June 1942
D.W. Denten	7 March 1942
A.F. Randall	15 August 1942
F.C. Scrimgeour	12 February 1941

Bombardier

N.R. Bayley	23 October 1942
P.J. Collins	7 March 1942
D.H. St F. Friday	12 March 1941
N.I. Lazarus	14 June 1942
H.A. Sarembock	12 February 1941
W.H. Townsend	27 January 1943

Lance Bombardier

J.R.E. Cuenod	24 November 1941
R.L. Grace	24 May 1944
J.Y. Graham	7 March 1942
A. Hammond	13 February 1942
W.F. Kriger	14 June 1942

Gunner

J.F. Badenhorst	23 November 1941
W. Bailie	14 August 1941
J. Barendze	30 December 1941
P. Barnard	7 December 1940
F.W. Baum	5 February 1941
J.A. Beneke	23 November 1941
G.C.M. Beste	4 February 1943
J. Bouwer	13 July 1942
E.E.C. Gray	23 November 1941
P.H. Groenewald	12 February 1941
N.E. Hards	12 September 1941
J.H. Harms	29 November 1942
S.J. Hendriksz	30 September 1942
L. Kaplan	25 February 1941
V. Kitly	29 November 1942
G.N. Maidman	15 June 1942
C.F. Martin	6 January 1942
D.S. Meyer	13 February 1942
W.D. Minnie	12 February 1941
H.C.N. Nicholson	29 July 1941

A.E. Saunders	24 November 1941
L.F. Schroeder	23 November 1941
N.D. Stathakis	7 January 1941
A.F. Thorn	12 March 1941
M.C. van Reenen	23 November 1941
A.J. van Rensburg	14 June 1942
F.A.N. Visser	23 November 1941
W.L. Walsh	14 June 1943

2 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Sergeant

P.J. Bosman	11 April 1941
G.M. Lawton	20 June 1942

Lance Bombardier

C. Buxton-Forman	29 November 1942
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Gunner

P. Benjamin	17 December 1942
T.L. Biccard	11 October 1942
A.G. Marquard	20 June 1942
V.J. Melville	31 October 1941
J. Mouat-Biggs	28 February 1945
A.E. Remnant	22 August 1941
R.K. Serrurier	28 July 1942

8 ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Gunner

J.O. Shelver	20 December 1943
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12 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Bombardier

R.K. Lombard	16 July 1944
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Gunner

A.K. McKenzie	7 November 1945
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43 ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Lieutenant

L. L. Fourie	20 October 1944
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Sergeant

B.H.C. Irwin	13 October 1944
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Gunner

C.J. Gilpin	1 October 1945
D.B. Roberts	12 October 1943

POST WAR

REGIMENT OOS TRANSVAAL

Gunner

L.E. Parsons	23 March 1965
K.A. Rantjanyana	19 March 2017

6 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRFAT REGIMENT

Second Lieutenant

J.L. Buys 26 January 1980

Gunner

J.J. Hills 26 January 1980

10 ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Lieutenant

T.E. Seithati 22 February 2013

Staff Sergeant

J.V. Bezuidenhout 12 October 2007

Sergeant

H.A. Oosthuyse 18 December 1983

Bombardier

C. Hendriks 25 February 1988

K..L. Malaza 12 October 2007

Lance Bombardiers

T.S. Mbele 11 October 2002

P. Mello 11 October 2002

Gunners

P. du Toit 8 February 1979

I.W. Ferreira 26 September 1988

C. Heathcote 7 May 1985

E.M. Hendricks 11 November 2004

K.A. Huma 11 October 2002

Z.N. Khumalo 22 February 2013

G. Kruger 15 January 1984

J.D. Masango 21 February 2011

B.P. Mkhize 14 October 1997

D.A. Morae 31 March 2011

E.T. Mthimunye 12 October 2007

R.M. Mtileni 12 October 2007

M.A. Mulovhedzi 27 January 2000

S.V. Nhlabathi 12 October 2007

T.J. Nkwana 12 October 2007

S.V.S. Nyembe 12 October 2007

R.E. Ortman 7 February 1979

N.P. Potsane 11 October 2002

J.H. Rochholz 2 March 1990

B.R. Seipato 12 October 2007

J.O. Sehemo 26 March 2000

R.C. Siphuma 12 October 2007

J. Terblanche 1 March 1990

J.P. van der Merwe 20 July 1988

W.A. Wienand 12 April 1978

NON STATUTORY FORCES

UMKHONTO WE SIZWE

Gunner

O.W. Lukhele	28 March 1988
D.M. Nkabinde	28 March 1988
S. Nkosi	28 March 1988
M. Velaphi	28 March 1988

A unit of 9 uMkhonto we Sizwe members infiltrated South Africa via Zimbabwe. On 28 March 1988, the unit was on a small island in the Mutale River near Tshikondeni mine. Local residents spotted their tracks near the river and called the security forces. A battle lasting several hours ensued, including helicopter gunship support. Gunners Nkabinde, Lukhele, Nkosi and Velaphi were shot dead as well as a Venda Defence Force member.

ANNEXURE B**DIRECTORS ANTI-AIRCRAFT****DIRECTOR COAST ARTILLERY AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY TRAINING**

Colonel H.E. Ciliers	1 March 1941
Colonel A.H.K. Jopp, DSO.	29 March 1941

DEPUTY DIRECTOR ANTI-AIRCRAFT TRAINING

Lieutenant Colonel S.A Jeffrey, OBE. 7 April 1941

DIRECTOR ANTI-AIRCRAFT

Colonel S.A. Jeffrey, OBE.	31 October 1942
Lieutenant Colonel I.S. Guilford	22 November 1944

DIRECTOR ARTILLERY (ANTI-AIRCRAFT)

Major J.C. Pieterse	12 November 1974	1 January 1976
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CORPS DIRECTOR

Major L.G.F. Wolf	1 September 1969
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DIRECTOR ARTILLERY (ANTI-AIRCRAFT)

Commandant E.L. Bekker	1 November 1968
Colonel J.M. Slabber	1 November 1969
Brigadier E.L. Bekker	7 February 1972
Commandant N. Trott (Deputy Director)	14 September 1972
Major J.C. Pieterse (acting)	12 November 1974
Colonel H. Roux	1 January 1976
Colonel R.T. Deyzel (acting)	1 February 1979
Colonel J.C. Pieterse	1 January 1980
Colonel J.C. Pieterse	1 January 1981

DIRECTOR ANTI-AIRCRAFT

Colonel J.C. Pieterse	1 November 1984
Colonel W. Mouton	1 February 1985
Colonel J.A. Ormond	8 January 1990
Colonel P. du T. Walters, MMM.	1 January 1996

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ARTILLERY (ANTI-AIRCRAFT) CITIZEN FORCE

Colonel J.L. Lubbe, JCD.	27 October 1971 – 30 November 1974
Colonel L. Human, JCD.	1 January 1984 - to date unknown.

SOUTH AFRICAN ARMY AIR DEFENCE ARTILLERY FORMATION

The Formation was created with effect from 1 April 1999 and it took command of the existing Air Defence Artillery School, depots and units from that date for all purposes except that of operations. The previous director was placed in command until a General Officer Commanding was appointed. An implementation instruction instructed that the new formation was to attain functional status by 1 January 2000 and operational status by 1 April 2000.

Officer Commanding:

Colonel P. Du T. Walters, MMM	1 April 1999
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General Officers Commanding:

Brigadier General S. Marumo	1 April 2000
Brigadier General J.S.Mbuli	1 October 2009
Colonel H.J. Baird acting GOC:	February 2012 to October 2012
Brigadier General S.G. Hlongwa	1 January 2015

ANNEXURE C

AIR DEFENCE TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEPOT (V)

Captain M.S.B. Varrie.	4 May 1942	20 August 1942
Captain E. Buckley (Acting)	21 August 1942	30 September 1942
Major R.G. Batho	1 October 1942	21 June 1943
Captain C.I. Peters	22 June 1943	5 December 1943
Major P. Guicherit	6 December 1943	14 June 1944

ANTI - AIRCRAFT TRAINING CENTRE. (V)

Major R.G. Batho	9 November 1942	to date unknown
Major R.G. Batho	21 June 1943	31 December 1943

ANTI-AIRCRAFT TRAINING CENTRE (V) (S.A.A.F.)

Major R.G. Batho	1 January 1944	16 September 1945
Major I.S. Guilford, SAAF.	18 November 1946	31 January 1949.

ANTI - AIRCRAFT TRAINING CENTRE, SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY

Major I.S. Guilford	1 February 1949	18 July 1949
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SCHOOL OF COAST AND ANTI - AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY

Lt Col (later Cmdt.) D.C. Kruger	1 November 1949	7 May 1951.
Cmdt G. Dunbar Moodie	12 June 1951	30 June 1951.

THE SCHOOL OF COAST AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY, S.A.C.M

Cmdt G. Dunbar Moodie	1 July 1951	1 October 1955
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ANTI - AIRCRAFT TRAINING CENTRE

Cmdt G. Dunbar Moodie	1 October 1955	31 December 1960.
Col G. Dunbar Moodie (also OC WP Cmdt.)	1 January 1961	20 July 1961.
Cmdt M.E. Fourie	21 July 1961	31 December 1961
Cmdt L.G.F. Wolf, MC.	1 January 1962	30 June 1966.
Col L.G.F. Wolf, MC	1 July 1966	31 August 1966.
Cmdt P.L. de B. Swart	1 September 1966	10 July 1967.
T//Cmdt E.L. Bekker (Acting)	11 July 1967	1 December 1967.
Cmdt P.L. de B. Swart	1 December 1967	31 January 1968.

ARTILLERY AIR DEFENCE SCHOOL

Col E.L. Bekker	1 February 1968	14 September 1969.
Col J.M. Slabber	15 September 1969	31 October 1969

ARTILLERY AIR DEFENCE SCHOOL / 10 ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Col J.M. Slabber	1 November 1969	30 September 1972
Col N.H. Trott	1 October 1972	11 May 1975
Cmdt A. Moelich	12 May 1975	31 December 1975
Col H. Roux	1 January 1976	14 October 1977
Cmdt R.T. Deyzel (acting)	15 October 1977	31 January 1979
Col R.T. Deyzel	1 February 1979	31 December 1980
Col L.P. Coetzee	1 January 1981	31 December 1983
Col J.J. du P Lourens	1 January 1984	31 October 1984

ANTI-AIRCRAFT SCHOOL/10 ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Col J.J. du P Lourens	1 November 1984	1 December 1985.
Col J.A. Ormond	1 January 1986	31 December 1988.
Col S.K. Warren	1 January 1989	31 December 1992
Col N. Muller	1 January 1993	31 December 1995.
Col C.R. Lindsay, MMM.	1 January 1996	31 March 1999

ANTI-AIRCRAFT SCHOOL

Col C.R. Lindsay, MMM.	1 April 1999	31 May 1999
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AIR DEFENCE ARTILLERY SCHOOL

Col C.R. Lindsay, MMM.	1 June 1999	28 February 2001
Col L. Dumakude	1 March 2001	14 October 2005 (died in Service)
Lt Col W. Rosenstracht (acting)	15 October 2005	31 March 2006
Lt Col T.M. Mohoase (acting)	1 April 2006	31 October 2006
Col L. G. Kekana	1 November 2006	31 December 2009
Lt Col S.G. Hlongwa	1 January 2009	31 December 2014
Col L.A. Puckree	1 January 2015	31 January 2017
Col L.A. Mafune	1 February 2017	

10 ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY

Maj D.G. Steenkamp	2 January 1962	31 July 1964.
Maj P.L. de B Swart	1 August 1964	10 July 1967.
Maj A. Moelich	1 August 1967	31 January 1968.

(Expanded to Regimental status wef 1 February 1968)

10 ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Officer Commanding: (as an independent unit)

Lt Col H.J. Baird	1 January 1999	31 December 2001
Lt Col O. Dube	1 June 2002	23 January 2005
Lt Col S.G. Hlongwa	24 January 2005	31 December 2009
Lt Col J. Pule	1 January 2010	31 December 2013
Lt Col M. Maine (Acting)	1 January 2014	31 May 2014
Lt Col M. Maine	1 June 2014	1 May 2017
Lt Col M. Van Wyk	2 May 2017	

ANNEXURE D**AIR DEFENCE REGIMENTS**

This list does not include independent Batteries of the SA Artillery or S.A.E.C.
nor any Anti-Aircraft sub-units or units of the SA Air Force or SA Corps of Marines.

1940 – 1945**SEARCHLIGHT REGIMENTS**

- 1 ANTI-AIRCRAFT SEARCHLIGHT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 1 ANTI-AIRCRAFT SEARCHLIGHT REGIMENT (V), S.A.E.C.
- 8 ANTI-AIRCRAFT SEARCHLIGHT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY

BRIGADES AND REGIMENTS

- 1st ANTI-AIRCRAFT BRIGADE (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 1 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 1/12 ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 2nd ANTI-AIRCRAFT BRIGADE (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 2 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 3 ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 3 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 3 HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 5 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 5 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), S.A.E.C.
- 7 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 12 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 13 HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 14 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), S.A.E.C.
- 18 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 36 (N.V.B.) LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 41 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 42 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 43 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY
- 44 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT (V), SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY

FROM 1946**1st ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT, SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY**

Lt Col R.H.B. Wilson

2nd ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT, SOUTH AFRICAN ARTILLERY

Lt Col L.W. Meyer	22 March 1947
Lt Col N.V. Hayward	1 July 1950
Cmdt H.A. Smith	June 1952
Cmdt L Poorter	1958

1 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT, S.A.A.

Maj (T/Cmdt) R.W. Green
Cmdt J.S. Perkins From 1959

2 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT, S.A.A.**HEADQUARTERS, 3 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT, S.A.A.**

Cmdt N.J. Oosthuizen

HEADQUARTERS, 4 HEAVY ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT, S.A.A.

Captain M.W. Treloar	1 October 1955	28 April 1957.
Cmdt C.D. Starke, JCD	29 April 1957	31 December 1959.

FROM 1960**6 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT.*****Honorary Colonel:***

Mr. T. Webb	1 August 1999	31 October 2010
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Officer Commanding:

Cmdt R.H. Inggs	1965	1976
Cmdt N.J. Irish	1976	1979
Cmdt J.M. van der Walt	1979	1985
Cmdt D. Roxburgh	1986	1995
Lt Col C.P. Doyle	1995	16 November 2001
Lt Col S.W. Coningsby	17 November 2001	31 August 2009
Lt W. Louw (Acting)	1 September 2009	31 December 2009
Maj D.H. Horstmanshof (Acting)	1 January 2010	31 January 2012
Lt Col D. Borman	1 February 2012	

7 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT***Honorary Colonel:***

Cmdt D.C. Robertson, JCD.	1 September 1978	13 June 1981
Maj Gen. I.S. Guilford, SM.	3 April 1982	15 June 1988
Mr. W. Pretorius	1995	1 April 1997

Officer Commanding:

Cmdt A.H. Morris	1 August 1971	31 July 1978.
Cmdt C.A.C. Withington	1 August 1978	4 April 1986
Cmdt J. Selfe	5 April 1986	31 August 1987
Cmdt J.W. Gafney	1 November 1987	
Lt Col A.J. Stofberg	1993	1 April 1997

8 LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

(Redesignated Regiment Overvaal)

44 ANTI-AIRCRAFT REGIMENT

Maj J.P. Case	1 April 1985	December 1988
Maj J. Roux	January 1989	
Capt G.B. Krenzer		to 1992.
Lt Col A. de Villiers	1 April 2014	

CAPE GARRISON ARTILLERY***Honorary Colonel:***

Major the Hon. P. van der Byl, MC.	1 February 1967	1975
Sir De Villiers Graaff, Bart.	4 August 1980	4 October 1999
Sir David Graaff, Bart.	26 January 2001	24 January 2014

Officer Commanding:

Cmdt W. Bannatyne, JCD.	1 February 1974	March 1975
Maj M.J. Denoon-Stevens	April 1975	April 1976
Cmdt O.G. Sieberhagen, JCD.	8 April 1976	August 1986
Cmdt J.L. de V Pfister	August 1986	September 1989

Cmdt M. van der Westhuizen	September 1989	March 1995
Lt Col C.W. du Plessis, JCD.	March 1995	31 July 2005
T/Maj V. Archer	1 August 2005	20 February 2012
Lt Col J.J. Visser	20 February 2012	24 February 2018
Maj M.A. Goetham	24 February 2018	

REGIMENT OOS TRANSVAAL

Honorary Colonel:

Mr. J. Holtmann	1 January 2001	31 August 2010
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Officer Commanding:

Cmdt J.H. Crous	1 October 1964	20 July 1972
Cmdt M.A. Nel	21 July 1972	31 October 1978
Cmdt G.P.J. Prinsloo	1 November 1978	30 September 1989
Lt Col G. Lindeque	1 October 1989	30 April 1993
Lt Col A.M. Amooore	1 May 1993	31 August 1994
Lt Col T.J. Stander	1 September 1994	11 September 2005
Capt (T/Maj.) D.H. Hortsmanshof	12 September 2005	26 November 2015
Lt Col N.M. Ntsieng	27 November 2015	

REGIMENT OVERVAAL

Cmdt R.D.J Coetzee	1 October 1969	30 June 1973
Maj Grotius	1 July 1973	20 October 1973
Cmdt L. Human. JCD.	23 October 1973	30 January 1983
Cmdt P.J. Viljoen	1 February 1983	31 March 1998
Cmdt P.J. Roetz	30 April 1998	30 November 1991
Lt Col J.C. Zelie	1 Jan 1991	4 April 1997

REGIMENT VAAL RIVIER

Honorary Colonel:

Lt Col W. Wassermeier	1 July 1993	
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Officer Commanding:

Cmdt L.F. Poorter	1960	1964
Cmdt J.L. Lubbe	1964	1971
Cmdt P.C. Langenhoven	1972	1976
Cmdt J.P.G. Engelbrecht	1977	1982
Cmdt W. Wassemeier	1992	1992
Lt Col W.G. Stapelberg	1992	
Maj D.H. Horstmanshof	Took responsibility for RVR from 2010 till Oct 2012	
Lt Col P. Jansen van Rensburg	18 October 2012	31 May 2013
Lt Col G. Pieters	1 June 2013	19 October 2015
Lt Col D. Fortuin	20 October 2015	28 February 2017
Maj F. du Preez (Acting)	15 March 2017	03 January 2018
Maj F. du Preez	4 January 2018	

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN REGIMENT

Honorary Colonel:

Major the Hon. P.V.G. van der Byl, MC.	1 January 1967	31 January 1974
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Officer Commanding:

Cmdt C.D. Starke, JCD.	1 January 1960	28 February 1962.
Cmdt D.C. Robertson, JCD.	1 March 1962	28 February 1967.
Cmdt J.K. van der Merwe, JCD.	1 March 1967	5 March 1971.
Capt F.T. Crosswell.	6 March 1971	30 April 1973.
Cmdt W. Bannatyne, JCD.	1 May 1973	31 January 1974.

ANNEXURE E

BOFORS TROPHY

The Bofors Trophy was produced by the Western Province Branch of the Gunners' Association at the instigation of the then chairman, Brigadier (Ret) H. (Paul) Roos. He had earlier arranged for a model 5.5-inch medium gun to be made in the workshops at Simon's Town Dockyard. It was made to absolute perfect scale, and to perfection itself. The hand wheels could turn; it could elevate, etc. The model was presented to the School of Artillery, Potchefstroom, for their officers' mess.

There were at the time five Anti-Aircraft Regiments stationed in Cape Town and they all supported the Association in one way or another. Brigadier Roos felt that Anti-Aircraft units should not be ignored. They should also have a trophy, but for competition among Citizen Force units....and so the Bofors Trophy came into being. It was made by Warrant Officer 2 van Jaarsveld of 4 Reconnaissance Regiment stationed at Donkergat and was made to absolute scale. The model was presented to Colonel J. Pieterse, Director Anti-Aircraft in 1980/81 for annual competition, the crux being the state of battle readiness reached during annual continuous training.

Regiments attended continuous training annually at that time but within three or four years there was a hiccup in the annual training schedule and the trophy 'disappeared' for a while. It was, however, found at Cape Garrison Artillery – the last winners - and reinstated as an annual competition trophy. But due to changes in training schedules and operational readiness, new rules became applicable. By 1997 it had again 'disappeared', generally believed to have been handed to Air Defence Artillery Formation by the last winner- Regiment Overvaal – which was disestablished in 1997. To replace the Bofors Trophy in order to reward the unit for good work the Volkskas Bank Trophy (with inscription: *For the Best Financially Controlled Unit*), was awarded to Regiment Oos Transvaal - which two days later received a reprimand for heavy overspending on its budget.

These years were a low period in Reserve Force history. There was an acute shortage of personnel; limited budgets; no recruits were forthcoming; and there was seemingly a complete lack of interest in the Reserves. Some units were down to absolute minimum strength; an Infantry unit in the Southern Cape was recorded with a strength of two – the commanding officer and the RSM.

In 2003 units began to receive budgets that allowed them to operate more effectively. It was known that a trophy *had* existed, and after much investigation it was eventually found in a storeroom by WO1 Mike Messias. With encouragement from Colonel Colin Doyle, SSO Reserves at Air Defence Artillery Formation it was in 2005 again re-instituted for competition among Reserve Force units, but under completely different rules. The benefit of the trophy, besides the fitness of teams, has been teamwork, endurance and camaraderie – besides esprit de corps.

The winners have been:

1981	Regiment Overvaal
1982	Regiment Vaal Rivier
1983	7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
1984	Cape Garrison Artillery
1985)
1986) No competitions -
1987) held in safe-keeping by Cape Garrison Artillery
1988)
1989)
1990	Cape Garrison Artillery
1991	Regiment Vaal Rivier

1992	Regiment Oos Transvaal
1993	Regiment Vaal Rivier
1994	Regiment Vaal Rivier
1995	Regiment Overvaal
1996	6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
1997)
1998)
1999) Probably transferred to Air Defence Artillery Formation by
2000) Regiment Overvaal when it was disbanded in 1997
2001)
2002)
2003)
2004	ROT wins the Volkskas Bank trophy because the Bofors trophy was in storage
2005	6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2006	Cape Garrison Artillery
2007	Cape Garrison Artillery
2008	Cape Garrison Artillery
2009	Regiment Oos Transvaal
2010	Cape Garrison Artillery
2011	Cape Garrison Artillery
2012	Apex Base (Regiment Oos Transvaal & 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment)
2013	Cape Garrison Artillery
2014	Regiment Vaal Rivier
2015	Cape Garrison Artillery
2016	44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment



Figure 84: Bofors Trophy

ANNEXURE F

AIR DEFENCE ARTILLERY FORMATION 'GUN RUN'

The 'Gun Push' was the idea of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and was launched on 6 June 2001 as an event to raise funds to sponsor members for a tour to the United Kingdom later during the year. The Gun Push became an annual event in the Air Defence Artillery Formation calendar. It was acknowledged that the fitness level of personnel from the Regular units at Kimberley exceeded that of the Reserve Force Regiments; and from 2006 a new trophy was presented by MWO Errol Brits for competition by Reserve Force units only. The GOC Air Defence Artillery Formation in 2016 ruled that there would in future be competition for only one trophy. The reserve Force trophy was laid to rest in the Apex Military Base museum.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Winner</u>
2001	Johannesburg	104 Battery, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2002	Kimberley	10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2003	Kimberley	10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2004	Kimberley	10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2005	Kimberley	Regiment Oos-Transvaal
2006	Kimberley	'A' Team, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2007	Kimberley	10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2008	Kimberley	4 Artillery Regiment
2009	Kimberley	10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2010	Cape Town	Cape Garrison Artillery
2011	Cape Town	Air Defence Artillery School
2012	Kimberley	10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2013	Kimberley	4 Artillery Regiment
2014	Kimberley	10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2015	Kimberley	10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
2016	Kimberley	Air Defence Artillery School (Male team)

The Reserve Force trophy was won in the few years of its existence by:

2006	Regiment Oos Transvaal
2007	Cape Garrison Artillery
2008	Apex Military Base
2009	Apex Military Base
2010	Cape Garrison Artillery
2011	Cape Garrison Artillery
2012	Regiment Vaal Rivier
2013	Regiment Vaal Rivier
2014	Regiment Vaal Rivier
2015	Regiment Oos Transvaal
2016	44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

ANNEXURE G

BADGES, COLOURS, etc.

Note: All National Colours shown below were laid up permanently in April 1994

South African Army Air Defence Artillery Formation

Established: 1 April 1999

Shoulder Badge: Crossed swords on a background of red (upper half) and blue (lower half) with a Gunner grenade set above two swords at the mid-point of the two colours

Heralic Description: Per fess gules and azure over all two swords in satire argent hilted and pommelled or, surmounted by a grenade with seven flames issuant also argent

UNIT TILES AND CHANGES IN TITLE**Air Defence Artillery School**

Established: 1 May 1941 as Anti-Aircraft Training and Reserve Depot (V).

Redesignated: 15 April 1942 – Coast Artillery and Anti-Aircraft Training Depot (V).

Redesignated: 1 May 1942 – School of Anti-Aircraft Defence (V) Centre

Redesignated: 9 November 1942 – Anti-Aircraft Training Centre (including a School and Depot)

Redesignated: 1 January 1944 – Coast and Anti-Aircraft Training Centre (V), S.A.A.F.

Redesignated: 1 February 1949 – Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, South African Artillery.

Redesignated: 1 November 1949 – The School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, S.A.A.

Redesignated: 1 July 1951 – The School of Coast and Anti-Aircraft Artillery, S.A.C.M.

Redesignated: 1 October 1955 – Anti-Aircraft Training Centre

Redesignated: 1 February 1968 – Artillery Air Defence School

Redesignated: 1 November 1969 – Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Redesignated: 1 April 1984 – Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Redesignated: 1 April 1999 – Anti-Aircraft School (Retained its name with split of units)

Redesignated: 1 June 1999 – Air Defence Artillery School

Motto:

Shoulder badge: Azure, an Mig 21 displayed erect gules, fimbriated argent, over all a radar screen, also argent, in centre a hurt charged with an impulse argent.

Heraldic description: In blou, 'n regopgeplaasde rooi Mig 21 in boansig, silwer gefimbrieer, daaroorheen 'n radarskerm, ook silwer, in die middle daarvan 'n blou skyf belaa met met 'n silwer impuls.

6 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Established:	1 April 1965 (SADFO 148/65)
Affiliations:	14 (Cole's Kop Battery) RA. – January 2000
Motto:	Ubique (Everywhere) We aim higher...which appears to be an unofficial motto
Shoulder badge:	On a shield divided into guardsman red in the top (chief) part and light blue in the bottom part, is an arect whie drawn cross bow.
Heraldic description:	Azure a chief gules over all a cross bow.
Colours:	National: 31 August 1992. Regimental: nil
Freedom of Entry:	Johannesburg – 9 November 2002.

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Established:	1 April 1969 (SADFO 53/69)
Diestablished:	1 April 1997
Affiliations	Nil
Motto:	Ubique (Everywhere)
Shoulder badge:	a mailed fist on a red background below a blue panel with seven small saw-like points.
Heraldic description:	<i>Gules, a mailed fist argent. A chief pily counterpily throughout of seven Azure or'</i>
Colours:	National: 30 November 1993
Right of Civic Entry:	Goodwood - 31 March 1990

10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Established:	1 January 1962 as 10 Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A.A (A.A.)
Redesignated:	1 February 1968 – 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
Redesignated:	1 November 1969 – Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
Redesignated:	1 April 1984 – Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment
Redesignated:	1 April 1999 - 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment (Reverted to its original title)
Affiliations	Nil
Motto:	<i>Alta Pete – Aim High</i> (more correctly: Seek lofty things)
Shoulder badge:	A stylised silver leaf on a red and light blue background.
Heraldic description:	<i>Per fess, Gules and Azure, a leaf of a silver tree erect, Argent</i>
Colours:	National: 1 July 1989. Regimental: 24 November 1980.
Right of Civic Entry:	Wolseley – 1975 Cape Town – 19 October 1980 Tulbagh – 21 October 1983 Kimberley - 23 October 2016
Regimental March:	<i>Lugafweermars</i>

44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment



Established:	1 January 1985 as a component of 44 Parachute Brigade
Affiliations:	Nil
Motto:	None
Shoulder badge:	The stylised head of a eagle
Heraldic description:	Murrey, an eagle's head erased sable, beaked or, langued gules, fimbriated or, in chief a pheon erect, also or. In maroen, 'n afgerugte swart arendkop, goud gebek, rooi getong en goud geimfimbrieër, in die skildhoof vergesel van 'n regopgeplaaste goue pylpunt.
Colours:	Regimental Colour approved but neither made nor presented.
Right of Civic Entry:	Nil

Cape Garrison Artillery



Established:	1 August 1946 as 54th Composite Anti-Aircraft Troop, S.A.A.F. (A.C.F.)
Redesignated:	1 December 1947 - 54th Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A.A.F.
Redesignated:	1 February 1949 – 54 Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A.A.
Redesignated:	1 July 1951 – 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A.C. M.
Redesignated:	1 October 1955 - 54 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery, S.A.A.
Absorbed :	1 January 1960 - University of Cape Town Regiment.
Redesignated:	1 February 1974 - Cape Garrison Artillery
Affiliations:	Nil
Motto:	Quo fas et gloria ducunt (Where right and glory lead)
Shoulder badge:	A three-turreted castle on a Guardsman red and Sky blue background.
Heraldic description:	Per pale gules and azure, over all a castle triple towered or. Gedeel van rooi en blou, oor alles heen 'n kasteel met drie toring van goud.
Colours:	National: 30 September 1990 Regimental Colour: Nil
Right of Civic Entry:	Cape Town - 19 November 1980. Belville – 9 September 1989.

Regiment Overvaal



Established:	as 8 Ligte Lugafweer Regiment - 1 April 1969
	Redesignated: Regiment Overvaal - 1 July 1973
Disestablished:	1 April 1997
Affiliations:	Nil
Motto:	<i>Ensa et Aratro</i> – Serving in War And Peace
Shoulder badge:	On a light blue background, a white plate with a red broad engraved arrow head facing upward.

Heraldic description: *'n Rooi pyl binne 'n wit sirkel teen 'n blou agtergrond Azure. (On a plate, a pheon erect, Gules.)*

Colours: National - 15 September 1990.
Regimental - 15 September 1990

Right of Civic Entry: Freedom of Vereeniging awarded on 16 September 1986.

.....
Regiment Vaal Rivier



Established: 1 January 1960

Affiliations: Nil

Motto: *At Infinitum – Forever*

Shoulder badge: In the top part (chief) of the shield a red zig-zag bar on a light blue background, divided with a thin yellow line from two smaller shields halved with a yellow pointed bar.

Heraldic description: *Azure, a pile reversed embowed throughout, Or, on a chief Azure, filleted Or, a bar dancetty Gules*

Colours: National – 31 October 1992
Regimental - 24 July 1993

Right of Civic Entry: Vereeniging – 27 April 1993.
Vanderbijlpark – 31 October 1970

.....
Regiment Oos-Transvaal



Established: 1 October 1964

Affiliations: NIL

Motto: *Genumus Nunguam Decessi (said to mean: Gunners never Die)*

Shoulder badge: A yellow arrow with red flamed shaft upward on a light blue chevron dividing the red background of the shield.

Heraldic description: *Gules a pile reversed azure charged with an arrow erect or, the shaft enflamed gules.*

In rooi 'n blou punt belaaï met 'n regopgeplaaste pyl van goud met skag rooi gevlam.

Colours: Nil

Right of Civic Entry: Brakpan – 14 April 198

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COLOURS : REGIMENTAL**10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment****Regiment Vaal Rivier****44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment**

ANNEXURE H

AIR DEFENCE ARTILLERY CORPS TRADITIONS

Gunners are particularly fortunate in enjoying an almost worldwide tradition of service to the Gun that welds them into a unique body of men and women – proud to be GUNNERS, and part of the Gunner Fraternity. In the accepted sense, the forerunners of the Gunners today were not soldiers at all. For well over a century, by reason of origin and characteristics, the Artillery developed as something of a distinct entity, almost a separate force, and hence Gunners have been regarded, even in this day and age, as somewhat different from the ordinary soldier. Rightly so, for they serve the GUN, and other equipment that provides firepower above and beyond the capacity of all other weapons, in all weathers, twenty four hours per day if necessary, to dominate a battlefield such as no other weapon can do.

The Gunners who fought at Crecy on 26 August 1346 (the first fully recorded use of guns – then called Bombards) are the same stamp of men as those South African Gunners who fought and died in Flanders in 1916-18, in East Africa and Palestine in 1917-18, in East Africa, North Africa and Italy during 1940-45 and in Angola in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The French King, Louis XV, gave the proud title of “*Ultima Ratio Regis*” (the Last Argument of a King), an inscription borne on his orders on all French guns. And Joseph Stalin of the USSR referred to his guns as *The Gods of War*.

Nicolô Fontana -1499-1537, nicknamed ‘Tartaglia’ (the stutterer) was the first person to apply mathematics to the solution of Artillery problems. His book ‘*Nova Scientia*’ was translated into English by Cyprian Luther who included additions and an appendix:

To show unto the Reader, the Properties, Office and Dutie of a Gunner.

He also stated that a Gunner:

Should be skilful in Arithmeticke and Geometrie, and:

A gunner ought to be sober, wakeful, lusty, patient, prudent and quick spirited man, he ought also to have good eyesight, good judgement and perfect knowledge to select a convenient place in the day of service to plant his ordnance where he/she may do most hurte unto the enemies and be least annoyed by them and where his ordnance may not be surprised by the enemy.

A gunner ought also to procure with all his power the friendship and love of every person, and to be careful for his own safety, and for the preservation of all those that shall be about him.

Also he ought to be no surfeited, nor a great or sluggish sleeper, but he/she must govern himself/herself in all times as wise, modest, sober, honest and skilful man/woman ought to do, that through want or understanding he/she may never lose his/her credit, nor a universal victory which oftentimes by the means of good well managing their pieces is gotten.

Also every gunner to know that it is a wholesome thing for him/her to drink and eat a little mead before he doth discharge any piece of Artillery, because the fumes of saltpetre and brimstone will otherwise be hurtful to his brain, so it is very unwholesome for him to shoot in any pieces of ordnance while his stomach is full.

Right of the Line

Many Gunner traditions dated back hundreds of years and so it is with the seniority of 'Right of the Line'. In days gone by infantry battalions formed up for battle with the senior battalion on the right. They had more claim to the support of the Artillery.

The excellent work achieved by the Gunner in the war between the French and the English in 1742 – 1748 led to his acceptance as part of the large brotherhood of the army; a more material gesture being the granting of the privilege in 1756 of taking that ancient post of honour – the right of the line on all parades. This tradition has survived to the present day in most armies of the British Commonwealth.

The First Permanent Gunners

The first permanent force of gunners, a master gunner and 12 paid gunners was appointed at the Tower of London in the 1400s. It was their duty to look after the equipment and to train certain partly paid civilians in the art of gunnery. The traditions that Gunners hold dear began to form from this early date and have spread to many countries throughout the world. When required for service the necessary guns and men were organised as a trayne, with all their support wagons carrying ammunition, stores and rations.

Colours

The traditional colours of the Artillery are red and blue. The significance of this choice is not known but the earliest record of their use by Gunners is recorded in the inventory for the clothing of a 'trayne' dated 1662. And in 1669 in Flanders gunners were dressed in crimson coats faced with blue, wearing (in reverse order of prominence) the colours that have been retained until today.

The Air Defence Artillery has coupled symbolic meaning to their colours: Light Blue of the Sky, the Red the Ground and White is the divide between Sky and Ground. We take the Battle from the Ground to the Sky.

Corps Pledge

To obey and apply the South African National Defence Force Code of Conduct and to uphold the customs and traditions of the Air Defence Artillery gunner.

Corps Code

- A **Always Neat**
- L. **Loyal and never complains.**
- T. **Takes security and loose talk seriously.**
- A. **An asset to the Corps.**

- P. **Proud of equipment.**
- E. **Energetic.**
- T. **Tough and fit.**
- E. **Enthusiastic in executing commands.**

Air Defence Artillery Song

A Gunner's heart beats strong and true,
 His courage never fails
 I'll solemnly promise all of you in victory and defeat
 When cordite smoke drifts in the sky and shells trace paths of light
 We'll stand united to the man and never shirk the fight

I'll sing their praise, I'll cheer their men
 For there's one corps you cannot beat
 Or who dares to cross you when
 The cry resounds:
 "ALTA PETE"

And when the solemn moment comes
 Break out the red and blue.
 When every gunner runs to serve
 His unit and his land.

With every shot his courage grows.
 So every man will say:
 "From now until eternity
 The ACK-ACK saved the day."

I'll sing their praise, I'll cheer their men
 For there's one corps you cannot beat
 Or who dares to cross you when
 The cry resounds
 "ALTA PETE"

Pride in the Gun

Gunners take great pride in themselves, their drill and their guns and this was so even in the 1500's when the popularity of the Artilleryman with members of the other arms was small indeed. The infantrymen was of the opinion that the gunner was conceited and gave himself airs, those of a superior person moving in higher spheres. At the time gunners had an evil reputation all over Europe for profane swearing, a failing attributed to his commerce with 'infernal substances', but the real reason was probably due to the fact that being less perfectly organised he was less amenable to discipline. Nevertheless, Gunners took great pride in themselves and their guns. There was, for instance (as there is today) a definite drill laid down for working the guns in action, with thirteen words of command for the wielding of ladle and sponge.

The Colour

Guns are the Colours of the Artillery and this is generally accepted world-wide; but two South African Air Defence Artillery units each have a Banner (otherwise called a Colour). Those that do not have one continue to honour the Gun as their Colour. On a parade it is saluted as is a Colour (Banner).

Detachment

The men who man a gun are often called a 'gun crew' or even 'team'. A crew is a ship's company and a team is a set of animals harnessed together. The original company of Artillery was not a company at all but a pool of trained 'gunners'. When required for any service, be it in a fortress, field army or fixed coast battery, NCOs and men were detached from the company, hence the correct Artillery term is 'detachment'.

A gun detachment consisted of three men – the gunner, his mate (mattross) and an odd-job man who gave general assistance; and the number of little refinements in their drill showed that artillerymen took great pride in themselves. Thus withdrawal of the least quantity of powder with the ladle after loading was esteemed a *'foul fault for a gunner to commit'* while the spilling of even a few grains on the ground was severely reprobated *'it being a thing uncomely for a gunnery to trample powder under his feet'*. Lastly, every gunner was exhorted to *'set forth himself with as comely a posture and grace as he can; for agility and comely carriage in handling the ladle and sponge doth give great content to standers by'*.

The last and greatest honour that could be accorded an Artilleryman was to be buried 'over the metal', on a gun carriage.

Bombardier

The rank Bombardier is purely a gunner rank and was created in 1686. Holders of this rank worked directly under the fire workers (fire masters assistants) in specialised duty with mortars. The word Corporal was an Artillery rank until 1920, coming below Sergeant and above Bombardier (the rank of Mattross was abolished in 1783). The rank of Lance Bombardier also came into use with the disappearance of the Corporal as an Artillery rank.

Pace Stick

Much as the rifle evolved from early guns so did the pace stick (so loved by the Infantry) evolve from an instrument used by the Artillery to measure the correct spacing between guns in the strict line of deployment of guns for battle. It was possibly in use for this purpose only during the early days of the Boer War before it was realised that lining up guns in the open made them beautiful targets for the Boer gunners.

Lanyards on the Right Shoulder

'Why do Gunners wear lanyards on the right shoulder and not on the left?'

Gunners and the cavalry were the first to wear lanyards on the left shoulder, with jack-knife on the end and housed in the top shoulder pocket. The blade was used to cut horses loose and a spike on the knife was for removing stones from horse's hooves. Recruits unskilled in rifle drill were apt, when ordering arms from slope, to disarrange the lanyard as the rifle passed down the left shoulder. It also shifted the bandolier. In 1924 the lanyard and bandolier were transferred to the right shoulder, and on the right it has since remained; but bandoliers had to be altered by the saddler if so to be worn. This change was not adopted.

Tiddler

South African gunner officers began the practice in 1972 of gathering socially once a month and this soon became referred to as a *Tiddler*, the code name for a Quick Fire Plan. This is now accepted as part of South African Gunner tradition. Air Defence Artillery Officers adapted the term for a live firing run to replace the Tiddler with a 'Shooting Run' when only Air Defence Artillery Officers gather socially.

Artillery Flash

The well-known zigzag flash of the Gunner symbolises thunder and lightning, emanating as a result of the noise and flash of a gun, but also having a bearing on the story of St Barbara, the patron saint of all artillerymen. Although apparently removed from the Church Calendar in 1969 for lack of proper evidence of sainthood, she nevertheless remains the Patron Saint of artillerymen and her feast day occurs annually on 4 December. The flash appear on the Air Defence Artillery Corps flag.

Saint Barbara Patron Saint of the Artillery

Saint Barbara was the daughter of Dioscuros, a very wealthy heathen of Nicomedia. He built a tower in which he kept the young and beautiful Barbara jealously secluded so that no man should behold her beauty. In her enforced solitude she gave herself to prayer and study. Many princes asked for her hand in marriage but she refused them all. After refusing her father's choice he went down into the town to see the work on which his men were busy, and he thereafter left for a lengthy visit to another country. Barbara descended from the tower to see the bath-house he was constructing. She noted that it had only two windows. So she commanded the workmen to make a third window and she

defaced the idols her father worshipped, placing the sign of the cross on them. When her father at last returned he was enraged to find the three windows, which Barbara informed him represented the Holy Trinity.

He dragged her before the Prefect of the Province and denounced her. She was beaten until her body was all bloody and was then thrown into prison. Led later through the streets she was again beaten and brought before a judge who ordered her to be beheaded. Her enraged father, merciless to the last, took her up a mountain and slew her with his sword. As Dioscurus descended a fearful tempest arose with thunder and lightning, and fire fell upon the cruel man and consumed him utterly so that nothing of his body but only ashes remained. Saint Barbara is invoked against fire, thunder and lightning, accidents arising from explosion by gunpowder and against death by Artillery. Whatever you do, avoid expressing any opinion of Saint Barbara during a thunderstorm!

Her saint day is celebrated with much ceremony in Germany, France and Switzerland, in the Ukraine and Palestine and possibly many other countries. The French set aside a whole week for festivities and at Basel in Switzerland after a day of celebration and gun drill by the National Artillery Association of Basel City, founded in 1834, members fire 23 rounds from a 75 mm field gun of 1905 vintage at 18h15, where-after they drink to the health of Saint Barbara. In the Ukraine potato dumplings are boiled in oil on her feast day and the Palestinian Christians go further and prepare a sticky pudding called Barbara.

South African Gunners had no tradition of celebrating Saint Barbara's feast day but about 1982 Colonel Lionel Crook, then chairman of The Gunners' Association, Western Province Branch, felt that the Saint Day was rather a good reason to have a party. And so the Branch has held a function on the Friday nearest to 4 December every year since then. Despite opposition from one well-known gunner the practice soon spread to other branches and to Gunner units.

AIR DEFENCE ARTILLERY CUSTOMS

Six Wheels or More

Whenever a vehicle with six wheels or more enters the unit lines, the co-driver must determine speed by walking in front of the vehicle and assist the driver with direction when reversing.

St Barbara's Day and Skinny Liz

In 1992 Air Defence Artillery Warrant Officers decided to commemorate St Barbara's Day on the first Monday after 4 December each year. The Commemorative Parade is held at 'Skinny Liz', the Air Defence Artillery Memorial at Kimberley, at a specific time that day. 'Only Red Heart Rum and Ras/Spar berry may be consumed from 18:00 onwards at the bar.

Seven chairs are placed in front of the gun with the person who has attended the most parades seated on the right, with other members in attendance seated to his left in the seniority according to years of previous attendance. Those who do not have a place to sit stand behind the seats. If a member who has a seat misses two years in a row, he relinquishes his chair to a junior. Eight jugs, manufactured from Bofor rounds are placed next to the gun. The eight jugs are for the gun and they are placed in a half moon. The senior RSM is responsible to place jugs and pour the 'Harry's' at 18:30 with the other members already in position. The 'Harry' is a mixture of Red Heart Rum and Ras/Spar berry.

Members are requested to stand whereby the senior sitting member will accompany the pourer and assist him to pour the 'Harry' down the barrel of Skinny Liz. The members who were seated will now pick up their jugs in seniority. Absent member's jugs are divided amongst the other seated members and any ex-servicemen present.

The members then drink the remaining 'Harry' and return to the bar. The senior RSM is responsible for the removal of the jugs. No smoking, swearing, or other misbehaviour is allowed in the vicinity of Skinny Liz.

INITIATION

Gunners'

After a recruit's first live firing exercise, he/she must drink multiple drinks poured into a spent cartridge of the weapon that he/she fired, to be recognised as an Anti-Aircraft Gunner. Starstreak Missile Gunners use the back plate of the Fired missile as a cup since 2006.

Officers'

The initiation of promoted Candidate Officers takes place at the Officers/Combined Club. A mentor (father/mother) is appointed to each CO before the event. The Creed of the Candidate Officers is read and he/she is ordained with the sword as in the days of the Knights by the King, in this case his/her mentor.

NCO's:

The initiation of a promoted NCO takes place in the Combined Bar where he/she reads the Creed of the Non Commissioned Officer and is poured a drink containing all drinks existing in the bar into the shell of a 40 mm Bofors Gun. These are hooked onto the loading plate of a Bofors, fitted against the wall with a handle. He situates his feet on the marked area and drinks until the last drops of the drink drips on his head. During initiation of Lance Bombardiers a mentor is appointed in the form of a senior NCO or a Warrant Officer (Father) to guide the member during his career as a NCO.

CEREMONIES

Toast

Drinking of Air Defence Artillery Colours (Sambuca or coloured cool drink for the non-alcoholic)

Red:	To the Guns.
Blue:	To the Corps.
White:	To members deceased.

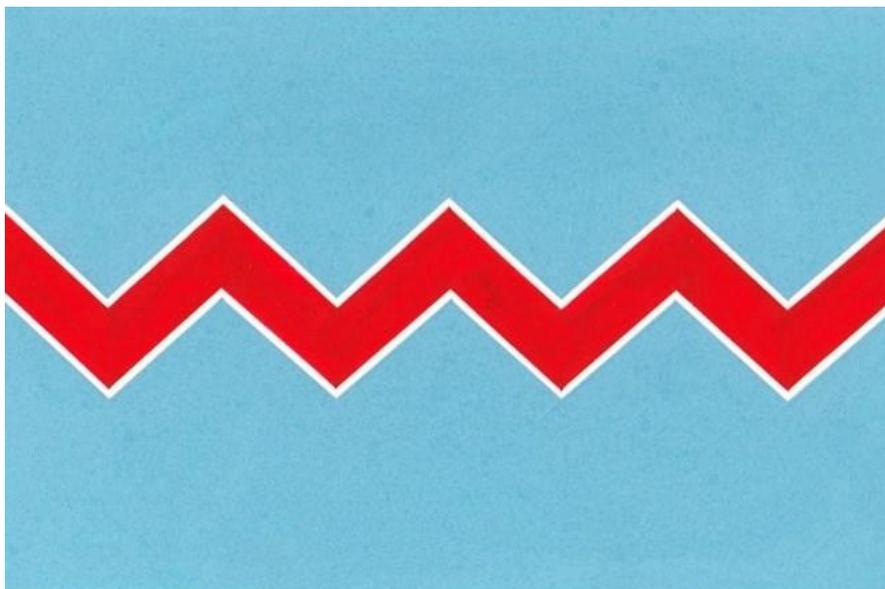


Figure 85: The South African Air Defence Artillery Corps flag

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