

The Shamrock
SA Irish Regiment
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2013

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The Shamrock



The official newsletter of the SA Irish Regiment

2014: Our Centenary Year

By the Editor

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Years

1914 - 2014

Honorary Colonels

Col. (Mrs) Louis Botha (1914-1915)
Col. T.W. Cullinan (1945-1953)
Col. W.J. Busschau (1966-1976)
Col. C.A. Twomey, SM, JCD (1977-1978)
Col. B. Molefe (2009 - Present)

Commanding Officers

Lt-Col. F.H. Brennan, VD (1914-1915)
Lt-Col. J.A.M. Moreland, MC (1939-1940)
Lt-Col. D.I. Somerset, MC (1940)
Lt-Col. J.F.K. Dobbs, MC (1940-1942)
Lt-Col. C. McN. Cochran, DSO, MC (1942)
Lt-Col. F.H.G. Cochran, OBE, ED (1945-1951)
Lt-Col. J. Geber, DSO (1951-1956)
Cmdt. C.A. Twomey, SM, JCD (1956-1964)
Cmdt. G. van Kerckhoven, SM, JCD (1965-1969)
Cmdt. E.M. Kristal, JCD (1970-1972)
Maj. (T/Cmdt) C.I. Steyn (1972-1975)
Cmdt. S.W.J. Kotze (1975)
Cmdt. J.C. Bosch (1975-1980)
Cmdt. J.H. Swanepoel (1980-1982)
Cmdt. S.H. Moir (1982-1986)
Cmdt. A.J. Karcz (1986-1988)
Cmdt R. Joubert (1988-1991)
Lt Col. G. Rothschild (1991-1999)
Lt Col. J.P. Jonker (1998-2005)
Lt Col. T. Pounder (2005)
Lt Col. M.A. Bennett (2005-Present)

Regimental Sergeants Major

WO1. J. Murray, DCM (1914-1915)
WO1. R. Bowker (1939-1940)
WO1. E. Owen (1940)
WO1. A.H. Brehem (1940-1941)
WO1. C.E. Whillier MM, EM (1946-1955)
WO1. A. du Preez (1955-1960)
WO1. J. Bartman (1960-1961)
WO1. R. Parks (1961-1962)
WO1. P. Halroyd (1962-1964)
WO1. F. Ferreira (1964-1966)
WO1. J.L. Fitzhenry (1967-1977)
WO1. A.L. Day (1977- 1985)
WO1. R.L. Olsen, JCD (1985 - 2007)
MWO. G.S. Moseki (2007 - Present)

“Our Reserves are an integral part of the defence and provide the expansion capability in the case of an emergency or a state of national defence”.

Defence Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula.

From the Editor

From: The Editor

This year is a landmark in the history of the Regiment, since we will be celebrating our centenary year this year. Many activities are planned for our centenary celebration, culminating with the Sidi Rezegh parade at the end of 2014.

This year has already started off with a bang for our Training Wing, with the Regiment already committed to pre-deployment training.

Contributions towards "The Shamrock" can also be emailed to irish.regiment@gmail.com

Remember: Newsletters can be downloaded from the internet. Go to www.sairish.webs.com to download Regimental newsletters and copies of the latest SA Soldier magazines in PDF format. You can also listen to the Regimental march on our website. Our website is now cell phone friendly and you can now visit our website via your cellular phone.

You can also join our Facebook fan page or follow us on Twitter.

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From the OC's Desk

By: Lt Col. M.A. Bennett

As the South African Irish Regiment prepares for confirmed deployment, I have no doubt that those involved with bring honour to our country and to the SA Irish Regiment through their professional conduct.

Security regulations does not allow me to mention when and where you or even how many of our soldiers are going, but know that you are in our prayers for your safe return.

Know that you have a sacred mission. It is rare in history that soldiers are sent, not to conquer, but to bring peace, stability and prosperity to a war-torn land.

We must never lose sight that our calling as soldiers are dangerous. You must focus on your training so that if the unthinkable happens and you have to engage and armed and aggressive

foe, your actions will be both honourable and professional in the face of possible overwhelming odds.

I have the utmost confidence that my Regiment's die hard spirit and the fighting spirit of Sidi Rezegh will ensure that you will be properly prepared for any dangers that we might face on deployment.

Always remember your training and the fighting spirit of the "Fighting Irish".

- Faugh a Ballagh!
Lt Col. M.A. Bennett

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Regimental Events

By: The Editor

8 March - Leader-Group Table 1 Shoot

11 April - Combined Mess Formal Dinner

10 May - Leader-Group Table 2 Shoot

12 July - Leader-Group Adapted Table 2 Shoot

13 September - Leader-Group Table 3 Night Shoot

11 October - Freedom of the City of Barberton parade

1 November - Leader-Group Table 2 Proficiency Shoot

8 November - Freedom Regiments Parade

9 November - JHB Remembrance Parade – JHB Cenotaph

23 November - Sidi Rezegh Commemoration Parade

29 November - Regimental Association Ball

1 December 2014 - Regimental Birthday (100 Years)

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In memorium

By: The editor

It is with sorrow that I have to report the passing of one of our former Officers Commanding.

Col. E.M. Kristal, JCD passed away on Saturday 8 March 2014.

Col Kristal was Officer Commanding of the SA Irish from 1970 to 1972 before being promoted to higher HQ.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his family.

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Did you know?

By: The editor

The original (1914) motto of the regiment was "*Quis separabit?*" ("Who will separate us?"), but during World War II it changed to "*Faugh-a-Ballagh*" ("Clear the way"), which it has remained to the present day.

The first regimental march was "*The County Down Militia*" but was later changed to "Killaloe". You can now listen to the Regimental march on our website. www.sairish.webs.com

Our website is now cell phone friendly and you can now visit our website via your cellular phone.

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From the Pipes and Drums.

By: The Pipe Major

S A Irish Regiment Pipes & Drums 2013 Calendar of Events:

12 April – Lyttelton Manor Gathering – Pretoria

3 May – South Coast Highland Gathering – Amanzimtoti, Kwazulu Natal

17 & 18 May – Celtic Fest – Johannesburg

31 May – De La Salle Gathering – Johannesburg

14 June – Pretoria Boys Gathering – Pretoria

28 June – Gathering to be advised

12 July – St Benedict's Gathering – Johannesburg

26 July – Benoni Gathering (South African Championships) – Benoni

Date to be Advised - SA Irish Gathering and beating of retreat.

8 November – Freedom Regiments Parade

9 November – JHB Remembrance Parade – JHB Cenotaph

24 November – Sidi Rezegh Parade

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From the Reserve Force Council – A tribute to Nelson Mandela

By: *The Reserve Force Council*

As we all mourn the passing of one of the greatest citizens of South Africa and of the World, let us also celebrate what his life has meant to all of us.

Most people throughout the globe would all have wished to meet him and to know him. Some of us have been privileged to have done so and there is little doubt that each one of us treasures the memory of meeting him and what that meeting him meant to each of us.

Walking in his footsteps one day when I was accompanying him to a beautiful Victorian, but derelict, school where the company for which I worked had been asked to rebuild the school, I saw the unbelievable out-pouring of joy and adulation by hundreds of women and girls as Nelson Mandela walked up the path to the school hall. Once inside the ululating and singing reached a crescendo in what can only be described as a messianic experience. I watched entranced.

Later on when it was time to leave, and in aggravation of the anxieties of his staff who were trying to manage an impossible time table, Nelson Mandela walked to the line of policemen who had secured the venue, and shook each one by the hand and thanked each of them individually for looking after him. He was not in a hurry and was determined to show his appreciation.

On the flight back to Johannesburg, I had the opportunity to ask questions about some of the then-current political problems in Africa. His answers were all concise, uncomplicated and to the point. His grasp of the essential aspects of several conflicts and his insight into the leadership and human aspects to the peoples and of their leaders, made it easy to appreciate his statesmanship and why his opinions were sought after by many nations.

This record may be a personal one, but it exemplifies what Nelson Mandela stood for, what he meant to people and

what he was able to contribute to the world as a statesman.

Having lived through the nerve-racking and often fractious and dangerous political transition in South Africa, it is absolutely clear to me that Nelson Mandela's leadership of all South Africans was the anchor of a process which he drove with a determination that he had shown in public ever since his famous speech at his trial in 1964. Without his strength and wisdom the "revolution" would certainly have degenerated into a bloody and destructive one. We are forever thankful for what he did.

As we all look ahead we must remember what he stood for and that he led the reconciliation of the many different peoples of South Africa from a centuries-long history of discrimination and conflict through the first passages of a democratic, non-racial, non-discriminatory and expectantly peaceful society. As we live our daily lives we need to bear this in mind when the realities of our efforts seem to show the opposite side of this coin.

Like Nelson Mandela, we must not capitulate.

Lastly, his example is one which can be followed by the many leaders of countries in conflict today. If the many different peoples of South Africa were able to settle their differences, then all people can do so. In South Africa we were fortunate as the process was successful because of the leadership of a person of the calibre of Nelson Mandela.

Dr (Col) John Job
Chairman, Reserve Force Council
7 December 2013

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Regimental News – Military traditions of the SA Irish

Courtesy of the South African Military History Society - Military History Journal - Vol 6 No 1
The South African Irish Regiment: An Exemplar of the Military Traditions of the Irish in South Africa

Written by Cmdt O.E.F. Baker, DWD (circa 1970)

The following study has as its focus the South African Irish Regiment. Archival material relating to this unit is sadly lacking, in marked contrast to such units as the Light Horse Regiment, Rand Light Infantry and Transvaal Scottish. These units have longer and fuller histories than the South African Irish Regiment, but, the brief and truncated nature of the South African Irish Regiment's history certainly does not preclude an endeavour to produce a detailed study of its distinguished history. Indeed, the following article, it is hoped, will eventually form the basis of a monograph, dedicated to the Regiment's history. It is considered that it would be a distortion of historical perspective if the South African Irish Regiment were to be discussed an isolated context, without reference to a general overview of the impact, which has been very considerable, of the Irish tradition upon South African military history. Hence, in the interest of the preservation of historical continuity, the history of the South African Irish Regiment, which can be said to have commenced in 1914, is prefaced by a study of the interaction between the history of a number of Irish regiments, forming part of the British military tradition, in the South African context. This is followed by an examination of autonomous South African units which have been shaped by the Irish presence.

Irish Regiments in the British Army Serving in South Africa

All the regular units of Irish origin in the British Army have served for a period of time in South Africa. Other formations, such as Militia, Volunteers and Yeomanry have also seen service in South Africa either as units or as reinforcements for the regular forces, especially during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Although the first record of British Army units serving in South Africa cites the 78th Regiment of Foot (later 2 Bn Gordon Highlanders), who were landed at Simons Bay on 10 June 1795, the Irish were not far behind.(1) The 86th Regiment of Foot (later 2 Bn Royal Irish Rifles, to be reconstituted as the Royal Ulster Rifles, who were to be affiliated to the South African Irish Regiment after World War 2) arrived at the Cape on 22 September 1795, one week after the Dutch surrender. One authority states that: 'Until the 20th

February 1799 when it embarked for India, it is recorded that the appearance of the men was especially commented on. Well grown, well set up, and 1 300 strong, the regiment excited universal admiration and, its regimental records add, it was perhaps the finest body of men that ever came to this country.'(2) They carried out field and garrison duties and had as a companion Irish unit the 8th Dragoons (Kings Royal Irish Dragoons, later the 8th Kings Royal Irish Hussars). The unit also made a name for itself, to which the same authority bears witness 'Frequent reference has been made to the service rendered by this regiment in the disturbances at the Cape during 1796-1803. General Dundas repeatedly declared that without the Dragoons he could not have held the colony. These men had a thorough knowledge gained from experience of all the roads, mountain passes, fords through rivers as well as a knowledge of the dialects spoken in the country. Farmers trusted them to such a degree that they would leave their houses and cattle in their charge whilst they set out with their produce for Cape Town. These relay Dragoons protected their houses from run-away slaves and their cattle from beasts of prey.'(3)

At a later point in South African history the 27th Regiment of Foot (later 1 Bn Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers) were involved in the campaign on the Eastern Cape frontier in 1835. Subsequently, after the Battle of Congella (1842), the regiment served in the relieving force in Durban, where a detachment of the regiment, under Capt Charlton Smith, had been under siege for a month under extremely adverse conditions. He was rewarded by promotion and received a testimonial expressing 'appreciation of his indomitable bravery in maintaining his post at Port Natal.'(4)

Hence, the 27th Regiment laid the foundations of the British colony in Natal. Indeed, they provided its first Magistrate, Capt Durnford, and many years afterwards supplied the Governor, Col MacLean. In 1843 two companies of the 45th and one of the 27th Regiment of Foot pitched camp on Maritzburg Hill, naming the hill Fort Napier after Sir George Napier, the Governor of the Cape. At the beginning

of 1845 the detachment from the 27th rejoined the remainder of the regiment at Fort Peddie on the Eastern frontier of the Cape. A soldier of the 45th has supplied some interesting reminiscences of this time and mentions that the Grenadier Company of the 27th was 'the finest in the army, the tallest man being 'Long Hines' who stood 6 feet 8 inches, whilst the shortest was 6 foot.'

During the Zulu War of 1879 the 88th Regiment of Foot (Connaught Rangers) was involved, whilst the 94th Regiment of Foot (later 2 Bn Connaught Rangers) served in the First South African War of Independence of 1880-1881. Garrisoning four towns besieged by the Boers, the regiment also incurred many casualties in the course of the battle of Bronkhorstspuit. The 27th Regiment of Foot, discussed earlier, reappears during the Basuto War of the mid 1880s, together with the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons.

The roll of Irish regiments who participated in the South African War is almost a complete embodiment of the Irish contribution to the British military establishment. The following Irish units served:

- 1 Bn Connaught Rangers
- 1 and 2 Bns Royal Dublin Fusiliers
- 1 Bn Royal Irish Regiment
- 1 Bn Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers
- 1 and 2 Bns Royal Irish Fusiliers
- 2 Bn Royal Irish Rifles
- 1 and 2 Bns Leinster Regiment
- 1 Bn Royal Munster Fusiliers
- 8th (Kings Royal Irish) Hussars
- 6th Inniskilling Dragoons
- 5th (Royal Irish) Lancers
- 45th (R Irish Hunt) Imperial Yeomanry
- 46th (Ulster) Imperial Yeomanry Corps support units (Artillery, Engineers, Medical)

In 1900 Queen Victoria duly authorized the wearing of the shamrock on St Patrick's day, due to the tremendous public sentiment generated by the gallantry of the Irish troops in the war. However, a greater mark of appreciation of the bravery of Irish troops in South Africa was accorded

when, a short while later, the Queen also deemed it appropriate that an Irish regiment of Foot Guards be formed, to be designated the 'Irish Guards'. Elements of the Irish Guards were to participate in the latter phases of the Anglo-Boer War, as components of a composite Guards Mounted Infantry unit.(5)

Autonomous South African Units shaped by Irish Influences

The first South African unit with a truly Irish background was the Cape Town Irish Rifles, raised by Maj O'Reilly in 1885. In 1891 the unit was absorbed into the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Volunteer Rifles as 'H' (Irish) Company. Regrettably, there is very little information available concerning the Cape Town Irish Rifles specifically, but it is hoped that further research will produce additional information. The helmet plate of the regiment is a magnificent specimen and closely resembles that of the Connaught Rangers who were contemporary. The Cape Town Irish Rifles may be said to represent the first predecessor of the South African Irish Regiment, in so far as it was the first indigenous South African unit with a distinct ethnic Irish component.

During the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902, the second predecessor of The South African Irish Regiment was formed. Driscoll's Scouts was founded by Capt D.P. Driscoll, who had previously served in Burma during the earlier part of the Anglo-Boer War and who decided to come to South Africa with the specific intention of forming an Irish unit. This was motivated by the losses suffered by Irish units within the British Army during the early battles of the War. Eventually totalling a strength of just under 500 men of all ranks, it first served with the Colonial Division and was present at the siege of Wepener and operations around Lindley and Fouriesburg. In one particular action at Wepener, in which Driscoll's Scouts assisted the Cape Mounted Riflemen, the Scouts had an adventurous and hazardous ride across open ground from their bivouac, being exposed to the concentrated fire of two Maxim machine guns, a pom-pom, small arms fire and, at the end, to a barrage of shells from a field gun, during their

entire four kilometre ride. Their action helped to stabilize the British position(6). Later the Scouts formed part of 8 Division and were part of the force concentrated to oppose the incursions into the Cape Colony by the forces of Gen Smuts. Driscoll's Scouts also took part in the final operations directed against Gen de la Rey in the Western Transvaal.



Major D.P. Driscoll, DSO, commander of Driscoll's Scouts during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902.

Irishmen in the Service of the Boer Republics

Up to this point the Irish contribution to the British military effort in South Africa had been discussed, whether this contribution was in the form of Irish units forming part of the regular British military establishment or autonomous ('colonial') units, as in the case of Driscoll's Scouts. However, it should be remembered that the Irish military tradition with regard to the British was in the shape of a two-edged sword. Whereas many Irishmen served in units composed of their countrymen which were to found distinguished records in the annals of the British Army, others remained bitter opponents of the Protestant monarchy. This was particularly true of those Catholics who, during the course of the 18th century served as 'soldiers of fortune' (the 'wild geese'), and were particularly prominent in the 'Irish Brigade' of the French Army. This tradition of mercenary service in foreign armies, conjoined with opposition to Britain, reappeared in the Anglo-Boer War in the form of the Irish Brigade, which served with the forces of the Boer Republics. Divided into two sections of 100 men each, led by Cols Blake and Lynch, it comprised

mainly Irish Americans, whose motives varied widely.



Col. J.Y.F. Blake

They either loved fighting, hated the British, or had high hopes of future rewards from their employers (and frequently all these motives were present at once). In common with the other foreign corps serving with the Boers, the Irish Brigade adopted Boer tactics. Generally speaking, they were courageous but inferior to the Boers in skill, and more than on one occasion, (e.g., at Elandslaagte and Magersfontein) allowed themselves to be surrounded, captured or destroyed. Relations between the Irish Brigade and the Boers were often strained (as were relations between other foreign volunteers and the Boers). The former invariably expected more than they were either accorded or received(7). Blake's section distinguished itself at Pepworth, near Ladysmith, where it stood its ground under a hail of British shrapnel, dragging a great deal of ammunition up the hill. This unit was later engaged in the operations at Brandfort and in the surrounding regions. The Section under Col Lynch was also involved in the fighting around Ladysmith and was particularly acclaimed following its stand near Dundee in the general Boer withdrawal. Indeed, it was said to be the one Foreign Corps in the general confusion of the time that achieved some distinction. By resisting the British advance for over an hour it gained valuable time for the remainder of the force engaged. Towards the end of the War Lynch's section was in action in the Barberton and neighbouring regions.

The South African Irish Regiment

At the outbreak of World War 1 in August 1914 three officers met at the Irish Club in Johannesburg with a view to raising an Irish regiment from among the citizens of Johannesburg and its environs. They were Maj George Twomey, Capt J. Jeffreys, and a Capt MacDonald. Authority was granted by Defence Headquarters and Lt Col Brennan, VD (Volunteer Decoration), was appointed as Commanding Officer, with Maj Twomey as Recruiting Officer. Recruits were quickly found and the battalion formed up at Booyens Camp, Johannesburg, on 9 September 1914, its establishment consisting of six companies. The Honorary Colonel was Mrs Louis Botha, who was an Irish girl (formerly named Emmett), and the wife of the General.

According to Military Archives the date of the formation of the unit is 1 December 1914. This date, however, is disputed and it would appear that the claim to have been established on 9 September 1914 is recognized as valid. The South African Irish Regiment was a unit within 4 South African Infantry Brigade in Col Skinner's Northern Force and embarked from Cape Town on 21 December 1914. The Force landed at Walvis Bay on the morning of 25 December 1914, and was immediately in action. On 26 December 1914 outposts of the South African Irish came into contact, and conflict, with German patrols. Hence, the unit was in action three months after it was raised. On 11 February 1915 the Northern Force came under the command of Gen Louis Botha.



South African Irish Officers in Pretoria 1914. Lt.Col. F.H. Brennan seated in chair and Capt (later Major) G.Twomey standing right.

With the close of the SWA Campaign Active Citizen Force regiments were not permitted to proceed, as such, to other theatres of war. War service units were created for East Africa and Europe, and the South African Irish Regiment was formed, together with elements from other units, into the composite 9 South African Infantry ('Sportsmen's') Battalion. 9 Battalion campaigned in East Africa, where it earned the Honours 'Kilimanjaro' and 'East Africa 1916-17'. Maj Twomey became a double Company Commander with 9 Battalion. It is of interest to note that the appellation 'Sportsmen's Battalion' was largely due to the influence of Maj Twomey, who was extremely active in South African sport and prominent in the South African Amateur Boxing Association, the South African Athletics Association, and the South African Olympic Games Association. He also won the first road race between Johannesburg and Pretoria. Maj Twomey naturally attracted to the South African Irish many prominent sportsmen from Johannesburg and elsewhere. It is a matter of some pride to the Regiment that Maj Twomey's son, Cmtt C.A. Twomey, SM, JCD, commanded the unit for many years and later became its Honorary Colonel.

The dress for the South African Irish in 1914-15 shared the common features of the uniform of South African military forces, and as with many other units on active service the slouch hat or sun helmet was worn. However, a green shamrock cloth patch was worn on the left hand side of the hat or helmet. The badge was produced locally and worn on the cloth patch, and also as collar badges, this comprised a brass shamrock upon which was stamped 'S.A. IRISH'.

On Saturday, 29 January 1921, at Milner Park, Johannesburg, the South African Irish Regiment was presented with the King's Colour by Prince Arthur of Connaught, the (then) Governor-General of the Union of South Africa, in recognition of its service in German South West Africa. The Colour was hung in the old St Mary's Cathedral, Johannesburg, but was, most regrettably, lost when the Cathedral moved from what is now Darragh

House to its present site; and, despite the most intensive inquiries, cannot now be traced.

In 1939 the First South African Irish Regiment was reformed through the efforts of Maj Twomey, Capt Jeoffreys and Capt Cullinan (son of Sir Thomas Cullinan, of diamond fame). Cullinan was the Transport Officer in East Africa and later the Honorary Colonel of the Regiment. The unit was designated as the First South African Irish but, in fact, a Second Battalion was never formed, for men intended for this Second Battalion were drafted to the First. Thus, the usual designation was simply 'South African Irish'.

HQ, Support Company and 'A' Company were recruited in Central Johannesburg, 'B' Company on the East Rand and 'C' Company on the West Rand. A pipe band was formed, the pipes and music being obtained in Eire and the personnel wearing saffron kilts and green stockings. The regimental mascot was, predictably, an Irish terrier.

In November 1939 the Union Defence Forces had approved of the formation of the unit and two months later parades were held and details forwarded to the South African Military College at Roberts Heights concerning courses of instruction.

In April 1940 the regiment, under Lt Col J.A. Moreland, MC, trained at Premier Mine, being brigaded with the Imperial Light Horse and Pretoria Regiment. On 16 June the South African Irish was mobilized under the command of Lt Col D.I. Somerset, MC, and, together with 2 Botha Regiment and 3 Transvaal Scottish, formed 5 South African Infantry Brigade. In July the Brigade moved to Barberton for further training and, after being fully motorized, proceeded via Durban to Kilindini on the *Llanstephan Castle*. After concentrating at Gilgil in Kenya, the South African Irish took part in the invasion of Southern Abyssinia (1 February 1941) and distinguished itself at El Gumu, Hobok, and Banno early in February 1941. The regiment also participated in the capture of Mega (18 February 1941). Among the casualties resulting from this action was the Second-in-Command, Maj Ward Clare.

The South African Irish then returned with other units of 5 Brigade to Kenya and, embarking at Mombasa on 18 April, reached Suez on 1 May 1941. After some time at Amiryra the unit proceeded to Mersa Matruh on 23 May and remained in the vicinity until October. At the end of August a number of members of the unit were granted leave to South Africa, their places being filled by reinforcements from other units; e.g., 2 Witwatersrand Rifles. Morale at this time was excellent.

In November the long awaited invasion of Libya and the relief of Tobruk was scheduled. The South African Irish, with its sister units, the 2 Botha and 3 Transvaal Scottish, together with the Transvaal Horse Artillery, were enmeshed in the defeat at Sidi Rezegh on 23 November 1941, when the German panzers overwhelmed 5 Brigade and 'plunged straight into Egypt.' The casualties of the South African Irish were heavy, and included among its number the OC, Lt Col Dobbs; only 140 men escaped the disaster. Maj C. McN. Cochran, who succeeded Lt Col Dobbs, was wounded. Several members of the unit were drowned whilst en route to Italy by ship, as prisoners-of-war. Until the end of November the survivors served with New Zealand forces; after this date they rejoined the decimated Brigade at Mersa Matruh.

In February 1942 the South African Irish and 3 Transvaal Scottish ceased to exist as independent infantry units and the remnants were drafted either to the Regiment Botha or to the South African Artillery. As 11 Battery, 4 Field Regiment, South African Artillery, the Irish were once again in action at El Alamein, and fired their first shot in the engagement on 24 September 1942, at 22h00. In 1943 the unit returned to the Union of South Africa, to become 4/22 Field Regiment, South African Artillery. In this form it returned to North Africa as a component of 6 South African Armoured Division, later serving in Italy.

In recognition of its services during World War 2 the Battalion received the following battle honours:

EAST AFRICA 1940-1941
MEGA

WESTERN DESERT 1941-1943
SIDI REZEGH

These honours were not awarded immediately upon publication of the official order, as was the case with other infantry battalions, because, at the time of publication, the unit was an artillery regiment and, as such, did not carry any Honours. However, with its reconversion to an infantry unit it became entitled to Honours that had previously been earned by it and they are now incorporated in the colour of the Regiment presented to them by the State President in 1968. At the end of World War 2, in view of the resurrection of Active Citizen Force units, Col Cullinan requested that the Regiment be reformed as an infantry unit. As there was no intention at that time to establish additional Active Citizen Force infantry battalions, the request for the re-establishment of the South African Irish in the form of an infantry regiment was refused. Nevertheless, authority was granted for the formation of an artillery unit, to be designated 22 Field Regiment (South African Irish) South African Artillery. Such a unit was formed in June 1946 and operated until 31 December 1959 as an artillery regiment, its members (drawn from ballotees residing in Johannesburg) wearing the gunners's insignia. On 1 January 1960 the Regiment reverted to its original infantry role and regained its old title, 'The South African Irish Regiment.' In this form it was involved in controlling the disturbances of 1960-1961 in South Africa. The Freedom of the City has been conferred upon the South African Irish Regiment by both the Johannesburg and Barberton Municipalities, in the former case cementing the long and close ties between the city and the Regiment.

Traditions and Curios of the South African Irish Regiment

Upon the re-formation of the Regiment in 1939 a Pipe Band was raised, under Pipe Major Foster, remaining with the Regiment until 1949, after which it became the South African Irish Regimental Association Pipe Band. The Regimental march was 'The County Down Militia' but it has now been changed to 'Killaloe'. Upon its reconversion to an Infantry regiment the

only change in dress resulting was the return of the original cap badge, the crowned harp and motto, to all non-commissioned ranks. In 1961, following the institution of the Republic, the crown was removed from the badge. At a later date a new badge minus the crown was produced in Pretoria, to be worn by all non-commissioned ranks, officers continuing to wear the original badge, minus the crown, which was of silver. At this time the caubeen (a headdress exclusive to Irish regiments) was replaced by the green beret. Between the accession of Queen Elizabeth II (1952) and the institution of the Republic, the St Edward's Crown was worn by Majors and Warrant Officers on the shoulder straps and sleeves. Chrome South African infantry buttons continued to be worn, but with one unusual distinction. Cmdt Twomey decided that, in remembrance of the time when the Regiment was an Artillery unit, the top left hand cuff button on the khaki jacket should be a chrome South African Artillery button. As a further memento of the time when the Regiment was an Artillery unit, Sam Browne belts were not worn for walking out.(9)

The South African Irish Regiment was allied in 1940 to the London Irish Rifles, and after the war former prisoners-of-war met their comrades in London. In 1949 the affiliation between the two Regiments was announced.

The Regiment at present stands 16th in order of precedence amongst the infantry battalions of the Citizen Force. This precedence, however, may be elevated if a claim to an earlier date of establishment is officially recognized. The original motto of the Regiment in 1914 was that of the Royal Irish Rifles (later the Royal Ulster Rifles), 'QUIS SEPARABIT?' ('Who will separate us?'). During World War 2 it changed to 'FAUGH-A-BALLAGH' ('Clear the way'), which has remained to the present time. The motto echoes the history of the Royal Irish Fusiliers the First Battalion of which were known as the 'Faugh-a-Ballaghs', an honorary title conferred upon them during the Peninsular War (1809-1812). Indeed, until their amalgamation in the 1960s (with other regiments of the North Irish Brigade, the Royal Irish Rangers), they

were still commonly referred to as the 'Faughs'.

Conclusion

With some justification perhaps the South African Irish Regiment may be referred to as 'the elusive regiment' in two major respects. Firstly, one has its recurring characteristic of disbandment and re-establishment; its disappearance following the close of World War 1, and reformation in 1939. Secondly, one notes the chameleon-like character of the Regiment, changing from an infantry to an artillery unit, and then reconverting to an infantry unit once again. However, despite this constantly changing complexion (which now, one assumes, has ended, with the firm establishment of the Regiment as an infantry unit in 1960) the echoes of the Irish tradition in South African military history remain a consistent feature of the Regiment's history. Those echoes may be defined in terms of tenacity and daring, which nobody could deny to the South African Irish.

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News from the SANDF – New Chief for the SA Navy

Written by Kim Helfrich

When Vice Admiral Johannes Mudimu steps down as SA Navy chief on March 31 his deputy, current Rear Admiral Samuel Hlongwane, will become the country's most senior sailor.

This is one of four top naval appointments announced via a Navy Bulletin.

With only a week left in uniform before Flag Officer Fleet (FOF) Rear Admiral Philip Schoultz retires on 31 January, his farewell parade has now been changed to a handover of command.

The parade, in Simon's town, will see Rear Admiral (JG) Bravo Mhlana become a full rear admiral and the senior officer of the SA Navy fleet.

Current Chief Director: Maritime Strategy Rear Admiral Hanno Teuteberg will become Navy Deputy Chief on April 1. He has been managing

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maritime strategy for the seaborne arm of the SA National Defence Force (SANDF) from the Navy Office in Visagie Street, Pretoria, for just on a year.

Rear Admiral SL Pillay will take over from Teuteberg.

Fifty-two-year-old Hlongwane joined the military wing of the ANC in 1982 and was trained in Angola and the former USSR. Immediately prior to integration he was MK logistics chief in Tanzania.

Following integration he went the maritime route because of naval training done in Azerbaijan as an MK operative where he completed the naval ship command course in navigation. After a tour of duty on SAS Umgeni, Hlongwane re-mustered to intelligence, rising to the rank of captain and the position of SSO Operations Counter Intelligence.

A three year term of defence attaché to the DRC and the Republic of Congo followed before he came back to South Africa and was promoted to Rear Admiral (JG) and appointed Chief of Fleet Staff.

Adm. Mudimu is retiring and has been Navy Chief since March 2005.

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News from the SANDF – New Chief for Army Force Preparation

Written by Kim Helfrich

In March last year Nontobeko Mpaxa became the first woman to head up the SA Army’s Intelligence Formation. She has just been promoted to major general and becomes Chief Director: Force Preparation for the landward arm of the SA National Defence Force (SANDF).

Prior to her move to the Intelligence formation she was Commandant of the Army Combat Training Centre (CTC) at Lohathla in Northern Cape and prior to that she held the distinction of being the first woman to command an infantry battalion – 141 at Umtata in Eastern Cape. She was also the first woman to

head an army support base, at Port Elizabeth, where she held the rank of colonel.

While heading up the Intelligence Formation she completed her B Comm degree in Human Resources through Unisa.

A former MK member, Mpaxa integrated when the SANDF was established and completed training at the SA Army Women’s college in George. She has, to date, been the recipient of five medals and is also the holder of a Leadership Award, presented to her during her tenure at the Army Support Base in Port Elizabeth.

Her successor at the Intelligence Formation has not yet been announced.

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News from the SANDF – 50 Years of SAAF Reserves

Written by Kim Helfrich

The Reserve component of the SA Air Force (SAAF) last year marked its 50th anniversary and Colonel Sphiwe Hamilton, Air Force Reserve Council (AFRC) chairman, has called on young professionals to join so their knowledge and skills can be shared with the wider SA National Defence Force (SANDF).

His views are echoed by SAAF chief Lieutenant General Zakes Msimang who writes in the latest edition of Reserve Force Volunteer that the Reserves play a major role in the SAAF.

“They provide an expansion capability for major combat operations, peace support operations, medical evacuations and diplomatic and political missions among others.”

The three star general points out the physical, functional and developmental training provided to reserves and regulars is guided by the SANDF’s one force concept that is “continuously moulding us into one formidable organisation ready to fulfil its Constitutional mandate”.

Msimang told the publication he is “addressing the multiple and unforeseen challenges” that have seen the SAAF Reserve grounded for more than a year.

“I am confident the Reserve squadrons will soon take to the air again, especially now that the SANDF has border protection responsibilities.

“The SAAF is doing everything possible, within our limited resources, to achieve the important Ministerial priority - rejuvenation of the Reserves. Training and development of the Reserves in the SAAF is primarily aimed at this priority and Reserves are continuously being trained to build a force that is disciplined, capable and ready for deployment.”

Hamilton is encouraged by efforts to establish a national policy to serve as a guide for employers in contributing towards the Reserve Force.

He sees the AFRC as “well placed” to advise and assist CAF in all strategic and policy matters affecting SAAF Reserves.

Hamilton is looking forward to optimal utilisation of SAAF Reserves in areas such as border control on both land and at sea as well as in continental peacekeeping missions.

The SAAF Reserve goes back to September 1963 when approval was given to establish 12 Commando Squadrons across South Africa and the then South West Africa. According to Lieutenant Colonel BP Oberholzer, a member of the AFRC, the concept of part-time squadrons to support territorial forces, the now disbanded Commandos, had long been advocated by aircraft owners.

The Commando squadrons were under the control of the Army and operated separately from the SAAF’s Citizen Force squadrons. Squadron members flew civilian aircraft, either owned by themselves or hired from owners, to support the Commandos.

In May 1969, the Minister of Defence announced that the Commando Squadrons were to be placed under the control of Tactical Group and, later,

Light Aircraft Command, which was based at AFB Swartkop. The following year the squadrons were allocated to air force bases in their area of responsibility for administrative and operational control.

Of past work done by the SAAF Reserve Oberholzer said: "Typical tasks performed are VIP and IP transport, airborne command and control, Telstar, visual reconnaissance, routine communication flights and medical/casualty evacuation. The Reserve has also played a major role in supporting the police during crime prevention operations.

"From humble beginnings the Air Force Reserve squadrons have grown to an integral part of the SAAF and, by maintaining professional standards have become the most economic force multiplier, increasing the SAAF's air power excellence," he writes in the Reserve Force Volunteer.

In 1988 a 25th anniversary parade for the SAAF Reserves was held at AFB Swartkop with 12 squadrons, including one from the then SWA Territorial Force, taking part. Then SA Defence Force Chief General Jan Geldenhuys hailed the SAAF's volunteer airmen and women as "one of the cornerstone elements" of the airborne arm of service.

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News from the SANDF – Name changes still coming for the Army Reserve Force units.

Written by Kim Helfrich

Following what can at best be termed a lukewarm response to suggestions for new names for SA Army Reserve Force units, soldiers have again been asked to put their thinking caps on and come up with names reflecting the democracy South Africa is today.

Brigadier General Gerhard Kamffer, Director Army Reserves, said: "The ethnic composition of the SA Army Reserves in terms of Africans, Coloureds and Asians currently is 87%. To cater for this cultural composition,

new units will have to be raised and identity changes introduced. The changes have to reflect cultural identities, symbols and accoutrements to which members may feel greater affinity.

"However, indications are some African members are embracing the history and traditions of their current units even though many symbols reflect only part of South Africa's military history."

The Name Review Steering Committee appointed by SA Army Chief, Lieutenant General Vusi Masondo, has issued a new set of criteria for unit name changes.

These include that units must not be named after living people. When the name of a dead person is nominated he or she must have played a significant role in the country's military history. Names such as that of Doman, a Khoi-Khoi leader; Gonnema, leader of the Cochogue in the second Khoi-Khoi conflict in 1673; Xhosa chief Ngqika; Field Marshall Jan Smuts; Major General Dan Pienaar; Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and Chris Hani have been put forward as possibilities.

Where place names have changed since democracy, such as Transvaal and Natal, these should not be part of unit or regiment names. "The temptation to simply update a name to the new name should be avoided wherever possible and consideration given to a new and imaginative name," Kamffer told the Reserve Force Volunteer.

Ethnic and tribal names are a no-no. Scottish, Irish, Zulu and Xhosa are given as examples that should not be included in new unit name suggestions but the traditions associated with these could be maintained via regimental bands or ceremonial sub-units.

Importantly, there is no indication that colours and battle honours will disappear to be forgotten in musty storerooms. If a unit changes its name it has the right to retain its colour and battle honours.

While some Reserve Force soldiers have indicated they do not object to name changes, others feel it will take

away history and traditions from regiments, some of which have existed for more than 100 years.

Reserve Force members canvassed by defenceWeb last year had differing opinions on name changes.

"All the pros and cons will have to be properly weighed up before any regiment name is consigned to the history books," a Western Cape Reserve Force member said.

A Mpumalanga-based Reserve Force officer was more forthright saying name changes had been part and parcel of the South African landscape since 1994.

"So what? Are we going to let that kill us as Reserves or are we going to prove South Africa can still rely on her sons and daughters to serve our country?" he asked, and answered his own question positively saying: "I hope it's the latter".

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News from the SANDF – DOD priorities revealed.

Written by Guy Martin

Enhancing the Reserve force, building up the South African Army and strengthening peacekeeping capacity are some of the Department of Defence's main priorities, according to its annual report.

The report, for the 2012/13 financial year, said the enhancement of the South African National Defence Force's (SANDF's) Landward Defence Capabilities was "essential" in order for it to carry out all the missions required of it.

The report noted that the South African Army received no equipment from the Strategic Defence Procurement Package, like the other arms of service did, and is thus lacking technologically advanced equipment. Enhancement "is considered a priority", especially if the Army is to operate jointly with the Navy and Air Force.

The Shamrock

More money was allocated last year to the landward defence programme, due mainly to extra maintenance requirements for the SA Army’s ageing vehicles and the renewal of some equipment. The SA Army will further be enhanced in the coming years with the delivery of Badger armoured vehicles, which are being built by Denel Land Systems.

Enhancing the SANDF’s peacekeeping capability and deployability was another priority, as “the role of the SANDF in promoting peace and security in the region and on the African continent necessitates the enhancement of the SANDF’s peacekeeping capability that will include the SANDF’s Forward Deployment Capability.”

The Department of Defence report noted that the revitalisation and transformation of the reserves was an important on going task, as the Reserves are needed to fulfil various defence tasks in support of the regulars. “The Reserves were transformed to fulfil their primary role of providing the majority of the conventional landward capability of the SANDF, whilst at the same time supplementing the peace support missions conducted by the Regulars,” the report noted. Thousands of reserve forces personnel were used during the 2012/13 financial year to support everything from border safeguarding to peacekeeping deployments.

In its report, the Department of Defence stated that it was important to review the arrangement for the repair and maintenance of defence force facilities, with the aim of establishing an in-house DoD Works Capability. This would allow the SANDF to assume full responsibility in looking after its own facilities, following problems encountered with the National Department of Public Works (NDPW).

“The DOD has steadily progressed with the establishment of the Defence Works Formation which is currently functional and executing identified renovation projects for facilities occupied by the DOD in close co-operation with the NDPW,” the report said. “The creation of the Works capability has enabled the

DoD to assume selected custodian responsibilities from NDPW and in the process created job opportunities.”

Other priorities outlined in the annual report included job creation, the National Youth Service, enhancing maritime security (primarily through the South African Maritime Strategy) and restructuring and supporting the defence industry (through the Defence Review Committee).

A number of capacity constraints were identified by the DoD’s accounting officer that impacted on priorities, such as skills losses, which “continued throughout the period under review, resulting in some critical skills needing to be acquired from industry at exorbitant cost. Although new personnel were recruited and trained, it will take time for these members to gain the necessary experience.”

The skills shortage affected peace support missions, leading to the non-compliance with minimum standards of serviceability of major equipment. Consequently, the Department of Defence was not fully reimbursed by the United Nations for the use of its equipment.

As previously mentioned, the state of primary equipment, particularly within the Army, “continued to decline to unacceptable levels. Additional funding provided for maintenance and repair of the operational vehicle fleet has had some effect, but is not sufficient to address this concern adequately. The rejuvenation of these capabilities therefore remains one of the DOD’s top priorities.”

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News from the SANDF – University reserve parade in North West

Written by Kim Helfrich

On 21 January 2014, the Army Reserve become 104 candidate officers richer.

The new additions were all recruited as part of the SA National Defence Force (SANDF) Reserve Force University Reserve Training Programme (URTP)

in Gauteng and North West. They have successfully completed basic military training (BMT) and will embark on the next phase of training – officer formative – during university vacations this year.

Since its implementation just on three years ago, URTP has boosted Reserve Force junior officer levels by 153, all who will bring specialist skills as well as leadership qualities to the part-time component of the SANDF, said Colonel Monica Muller, SSO Reserve Force Projects.

All URTP volunteers are full-time under-graduates or post graduate students and on successful completion of officer formative training will start with functional and junior leader training, the final stage prior to unit postings.

During officer formative training the volunteers are taught the skills necessary for leadership, management and conduct becoming an officer.

Functional training is done on a service specific basis. In the case of the Army, the volunteers could find themselves in, among other formations, infantry, armour, engineers, air defence, artillery or signals depending on their specific fields of academic knowledge.

An indication of the Reserve force’s importance to the overall efficiency of the SANDF came from defence minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula. Speaking at last year Armed Forces Day parade in Pretoria she said: “Our Reserves are an integral part of the defence and provide the expansion capability in the case of an emergency or a state of national defence. Reserve force members, who have other life commitments outside the SANDF, continue to make a significant contribution to both internal and external operations of the SANDF”.

The parade will be at Regiment Mooiriver in Potchefstroom, North West, where the newest intake of URTP volunteers did their basic military training.

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News from the SANDF – Veterans’ benefits set out.

Courtesy of Defenceweb

A just released 22 page Government Gazette sets out how military veterans should go about submitting applications for benefits ranging from injury compensation through to counselling, job assistance, the use of public transport at subsidised rates, housing and healthcare.

The over-arching criteria is that veterans should not earn more than R125 000 a year, a monthly income of R10 416, to qualify for benefits such as housing, burial support to a total of R25 000, and subsidised transport.

On what the Department of Military Veterans (DMV) terms “employment placement” veterans wanting assistance to get work have to submit a CV to the department which will then “facilitate employment placement, subject to availability of opportunities”.

Veterans wanting this assistance will be helped by officials in the DMV’s skills development and empowerment unit, housed along with its other assistance units, registration and administration at 1052 Festival Street, Hatfield, Pretoria.

As far as entrepreneurship is concerned the just published regulations stipulate the Minister (Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula) “must establish a business vehicle through which opportunities can be pursued by the State on behalf of all military veterans”.

On making veterans’ business entities viable the DMV will assist with training on business information and statistics; planning, logistics and financial modelling; supply linkages to markets; provide information on funding options as well as capacity building, skills transfer, support and mentorship.

The subsidised public transport benefit is available to unemployed veterans who receive a State pension as well as those earning not more than R125 000 a year. On completion and approval of official documentation they will qualify

for a 100% subsidy when using public transport within the borders of South Africa.

The regulations also make provision for compensation for injury, trauma and disease, counselling and treatment for mental illness and post-traumatic stress disorder as well as general healthcare.

The DMV earlier this year relocated to Pretoria, from Denel’s Irene campus as part of its “drive to bring services closer to veterans”. The move to the Pretoria suburbs makes the DMV offices accessible via public transport with a Gautrain station nearby and the Tshwane Metro’s rapid bus transport system, currently under construction, also close.

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News from the SANDF – President awards medals on armed forces day.

Written by Guy Martin

Commander-in-Chief and President Jacob Zuma on Friday, 21 February, awarded medals to soldiers involved in the deadly Battle of Bangui in March last year as part of Armed Forces Day celebrations in Bloemfontein.

The day before, the three units involved in the battle in the Central African Republic were awarded Battle Honours. The members of 1 Parachute Battalion, 7 Medical Battalion and 5 Reconnaissance Regiment wore their new colours during the parade on Friday. Zuma said the awarding of Battle Honours was the first time such honours had been bestowed on the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in twenty years of democracy.

Referring to Operation Vimbizela, South Africa’s mission since 2007 in the Central African Republic (CAR), Zuma said it had seen “relative success. However, owing to further internal destabilisation of the region, SANDF members were unfortunately caught in the crossfire in the current civil conflict that continues to this day. After being ambushed in March 2013, our members had to defend themselves...our soldiers

accounted well for themselves.” In spite of being overwhelmed, they inflicted massive casualties, estimated at at least 700 rebel fighters, for the loss of 15 SANDF troops.

In recognition of their service, Zuma awarded a number of medals to those involved in the Battle of Bangui. 12 Silver Protea medals and three Bronze Leopard medals were handed to family members of 1 Parachute Battalion soldiers who died in the CAR. A single Silver Leopard, eight Bronze Leopard, two Golden Protea and one Silver Protea medals were also awarded to SANDF personnel while a civilian, S M Gates, was given a commendation for her activities.

Referring to the controversy of South Africa’s mission to the Central African Republic, originally to train, reintegrate and support the CAR’s military, Zuma said there were “mischievous attempts” by some South Africans to deny the honour in the deaths of those who fought Seleka rebels in Bangui. Zuma said the soldiers who fought in Bangui should return home in triumph, not shame. He said Armed Forces Day was there to stand behind South Africa’s military heroes and correct negativity surrounding them. “Through 2014 more parades will be held to honour the SANDF,” he said.

“It is our view that the true account of the battle of Bangui still needs to be documented, debated and be known to South Africans. We want to call on South Africans, to learn to celebrate and stand behind our heroes,” he said.

Zuma noted that Armed Forces Day “allows for reflection on the remarkable transformation to build a defence force we are all so proud of,” and “celebrate twenty years of freedom and twenty years of existence of the South African National Defence Force.” He said the old South African Defence Force (SADF) was known for aggression, terrorising the townships and slowing the march to freedom. Now the SANDF protects the population, conducts peacekeeping operations on the continent, builds infrastructure in rural areas and trains the youth.

“The transformation of the SANDF has been a truly inspiring journey,” Zuma said. For twenty years the SANDF has been the midwife to peace and freedom on the continent, with South Africa playing a leading role in post conflict reconstruction and support. “Over the last thirteen years South Africa has deployed forces to participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations,” notably in the DRC where the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) helped bring about the surrender of M23 rebels, the president said.

Zuma lauded the Navy’s role in protecting the country from sea invasion and allowing South Africa to continue to enjoy affordable fish; the SAAF’s role in sea and mountain rescues and the SANDF’s role in, fighting crime, disaster relief and humanitarian missions. “Our people are trusted to protect the borders of our land. Soldiers stay awake at night to ensure the people can sleep in peace,” he told soldiers and guests at AFB Bloemspruit in Bloemfontein.

On the question of military funding, Zuma only went as far as saying that the issue of budgets needs to be looked at. “Much consideration has gone to this,” he said, adding that the formal stages of cabinet approval should be finalised within the end of the current term of office.

Looking back over the past year, Zuma noted that the Defence Works Formation was established to improve the facilities at bases and that the SANDF had announced the establishment of the Education Trust for dependents of dead or injured personnel as well as disabled personnel. “The education fund will help dependents of those who have fallen...I will make a small contribution...a small token of R500 000 to the fund,” Zuma announced.

21 February’s Armed Forces Day celebrations included several flypasts, including by the Silver Falcons. Other aircraft that took part included six Gripen and a Hawk, two C-130s, a C-47TP, Caravans and Air Force helicopters (Rooivalk, Oryx and A109). After hundreds of troops marched up and down and saluted the Commander-

in-Chief, around 100 vehicles in a mechanised column drove past assembled guests and then through Bloemfontein. The convoy included active vehicles, from trucks to main battle tanks, as well as retired vehicles from the SA Armour Museum.

The first Armed Forces Day was held in Thaba Tshwane on December 16, 2010, disappearing from the national calendar for the next two years before coming back on February 21 last year. This year it was hosted by the Army and will be the South African Air Force’s responsibility next year.

February 21 is a date with enduring significance to the South African military fraternity as it marks the single biggest loss of life in the country’s naval history. The sinking of the SS Mendi with the loss of 616 lives in the English Channel en route to France in 1917 is regarded as one of South Africa’s worst military disasters.

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News from the SANDF – Battle honours for 3 SANDF units.

Written by Kim Helfrich

On 20 February was the first time in its almost 20 year existence that the SA National Defence Force (SANDF) bestowed battle honours.

SANDF Chief General Solly Shoke conferred this singular military honour on three units that took part in the ill-fated Battle for Bangui in the Central African Republic (CAR) last March. The final South African death toll was 15, with two soldiers succumbing to their wounds after being casevaced back to 1 Military Hospital in Thaba Tshwane.

1 Parachute Battalion, 5 Reconnaissance Regiment and 7 Medical Battalion will now on proudly carry recognition of their involvement in the CAR on unit and regimental flags.

All three units took part in 22 February’s Armed Forces Day parade at AFB Bloemspruit and this was the first

public display of the new additions to their colours.

The CAR tasking was only the second time in democratic South Africa’s history that a SANDF military force, and not a peacekeeping force, had seen combat in a foreign country. The first was in 1998 when about 600 South African soldiers and other defence elements moved into Lesotho to deal with a deteriorating security situation in the landlocked country. South Africa was supported by Botswana in that intervention force, approved by the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

In the CAR, as part of Operation Vimbezela, South Africa went it alone with soldiers already on the ground as part of a detachment to assist in training soldiers in the landlocked country bordered by Chad, Sudan, South Sudan and the DRC.

Speaking in Pretoria after the South Africans were evacuated from CAR, Shoke said the about 200 soldiers had taken on a far superior force, numbering 3 000 rebels, for between 13 and 18 hours. The combat abilities of the South Africans were such that rebels eventually surrendered under a white flag, Shoke told a media briefing.

SANDF Commander-in-Chief, President Jacob Zuma, also conferred medals for heroism on soldiers who survived the Battle for Bangui during the Armed Forces Day parade.

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International News - African standby force to be operational by 2015

Written by Kim Helfrich

African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui, has urged member states to ensure its African Standby Force (ASF) is fully operational by 2015.

He told the seventh meeting of the African Union (AU) specialised technical committee on defence, safety and security that the ASF was originally meant to be operational by 2010.

“Owing to delays, this deadline was pushed to 2015. It goes without saying that we simply cannot afford another postponement, otherwise the credibility of our collective undertaking will be eroded,” he said in Addis Ababa.

Chergui reinforced his plea by saying that in April last year a comprehensive assessment of the ASF, including its rapid deployment capability was recommended. This was followed in May by a decision, in principle, to immediately establish an African Capacity for Immediate Response to Crises (ACIRC) as a transitional arrangement ahead of the ASF becoming fully operational.

The decision, he said, was guided by the need to ensure Africa is in a better position to respond to peace and security challenges facing the continent.

“The situation in Mali, in particular, guided the AU Assembly in this decision. While the continent, in particular through ECOWAS and Chad, displayed a high level of solidarity and support to Mali, there is no doubt the AU response could have been more effective.

“As a result of our own constraints, we had to rely on the French Operation Serval to counter the offensive launched by the armed and terrorist groups in January last year. The Heads of State and Government, while appreciative of that support, felt and rightly so, that Africa, through its continental union and regional mechanisms, should have played the leadership role,” Chergui said.

To date 10 AU member states, including South Africa, have pledged support for ACIRC. They are Algeria, Angola, Chad, Liberia, Niger, Senegal, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

The AU Commissioner sees ACIRC as “expediting the realisation” of ASF’s rapid deployment capability. This, in turn, will take another step forward in October when the final field training exercise for the ASF Roadmap III, takes place in Lesotho. According to an AU Peace and Security statement the exercise is seen as an evaluation of the state of readiness toward full

operational capability of the ASF in two years’ time. A planning conference for the exercise was held in Gaborone, Botswana, in October.

General Sekouba Konate, AU high representative for operationalisation of the ASF, told the planning conference: “African leaders have made a landmark decision by opting to equip the AU with the ASF, in the light of the violent and resurgent conflicts that undermine development efforts and take a heavy toll in human lives”.

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International News - UAV's to counter poaching

Written by Oscar Nkala/Guy Martin

US company Airware has deployed an Aerial Ranger unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) to track down rhino poachers in Kenya’s Ol Pejeta conservancy – East Africa’s largest black rhino reserve – in an effort to showcase the potential of such aircraft.

Airware in December sent a three-person team to Kenya to carry out in-field tests of the Aerial Ranger to see how it could observe, track and protect wildlife.

Airware specialises in building UAV hardware, software and firmware. The company plans to launch its commercial UAV platform later this year and in anticipation of this, it wanted to educate people on the positive uses of UAVs, according to Airware founder and CEO Jonathan Downey.

As a result, Airware deployed the Aerial Ranger to Kenya to monitor for poachers, with Airware supplying the autopilot and control software. “The drone, equipped with Airware’s autopilot platform and control software, acts as both a deterrent and a surveillance tool, sending real-time digital video and thermal imaging feeds of animals – and poachers – to rangers on the ground using both fixed and gimbal-mounted cameras,” Airware said.

The company’s digital mapping interface has been designed for ease of use – users click a spot on the map to

either get the UAV to fly there or point its camera there. Another feature is an autoland instruction.

As it is able to capture real time video and thermal imaging data, the UAV can operate day and night. The footage captured by the UAV could be used to identify poachers and help convict them in court. In addition to combating poaching the UAVs have the potential to cost effectively count wildlife - the conservancy usually does its annual wildlife survey with a light aircraft. Thirteen hours of flight time are required at \$220 an hour, but a UAV could do this for a fraction of the cost, during the day and at night.

While at Ol Pejeta, Airware’s flight team tested multiple airframes including conventional fixed-wing and flying-wing. One aircraft for the programme was the UAS-USA Tempest, with an endurance of 90-120 minutes, a top speed of 100 km/h and a flight range of 75-125 km. The team demonstrated bungee and wheeled launches, as well as parachute and wheeled landings. They also flew beyond line of sight, testing both range of real-time digital video and contingency plans for loss of communications. In one instance when communications were lost, the UAV’s failsafe activated and it automatically returned to land.

“While the Aerial Ranger surpassed all expectations during its two-week African safari, there is still some way to go before it makes a regular appearance in the skies of Ol Pejeta,” the conservancy said. “Ol Pejeta and Airware are committed to making the Aerial Ranger effective and long lasting, a challenge easier said than done as many testing UAVs in the field have learnt. While the sensors are tweaked, the screws tightened and the wires adjusted, wildlife conservationists everywhere can prepare themselves for a revolution.”

The conservancy used crowdfunding website Indiegogo to successfully raise \$35 000 to buy the first UAV and animal tracking equipment. Ol Pejeta hopes to buy more UAVs to monitor wildlife and facilitate tourism and hopes to put its first UAV in the air by March or June.

“The commercial drone space is a major growth market with applications like precision agriculture, infrastructure inspection and search and rescue,” Downey pointed out. The company is hoping to be part of the drone revolution and use its software on commercial drones in the United States.

Meanwhile in South Africa, last year experiments using UAVs to monitor poachers and game were conducted in the Hluhluwe Imfolozi Park in KwaZulu-Natal. The park employed IT security company Shaya Technologies to assist it curb rhino poaching.

Two types of UAVs were used during the pilot project at Hluhluwe. The first, with a 3.5 m wingspan, was powered by a petrol motor, and could stay in the air for five to six hours. The UAVs in the second fleet were smaller, electric hex rotor copters. These were typically quick reaction aircraft, used to investigate suspicious activity.

During the month-long demonstration in the park in mid-2013, not a single rhino there was poached.

A separate initiative, by a group called Conservation Drones, is already utilising UAVs at as many as 20 sites around the world. One of its projects involves using UAVs to count orangutan nests in the jungles of Sumatra, Indonesia. Making use of high-definition cameras and GPS-mounted navigation software, UAVs are able to cover large territories in less time than ground-based crews.

Back in South Africa, at present a Denel Seeker II UAV is deployed to combat rhino poaching in the Kruger National Park, which lost 606 rhinos last year in comparison, Kenya lost 50 rhinos in 2013. The Seeker is flown regularly at night when it is more difficult to operate manned aircraft.

Jerker Ahlqvist, general manager of Saab Aeronautics South Africa, sees UAVs as enhancing the operational effectiveness of rangers and law enforcement agencies, including the SA National Defence Force (SANDF), when it comes to counter-poaching operations.

The company is promoting its Skeldar rotary wing UAV to fight poaching, saying the aircraft can be utilised for surveillance, reconnaissance, aerial photography and border patrol. One of the benefits of the rotary wing design is that it does not need a landing strip to land and take off from, making it useful for bush operations.

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News from the SANDF – SS Mendi remembered

Written by Chris Szabo

Members of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), veterans organisations and the public held memorial services for those lost on the ship SS Mendi in 1917, a tragic accident that gave rise to a famous act of heroism.

The South African Legion of Military Veterans (SA Legion) held no fewer than seven services in South Africa and Portsmouth in the UK. In Gauteng, the Soweto Branch, led by Chairperson Legionnaire Pauline Mohale Buyeye, held its service at the Avalon Cemetery outside Soweto, Johannesburg, on Saturday 22 February.

Speaking at the memorial at the Avalon Cemetery for the 616 members of the SA Native Labour Corps (SANLC) who drowned in the icy waters of the English Channel, the SA Legion’s Godfrey Giles told the audience: “It is one of the most important events of our history in South Africa. We are getting very close to the centenary of the Mendi and we need to do something very special for that.”

Nine of the 616 South African Native Labour Corps (SANLC) casualties are buried in the Milton Cemetery in Portsmouth, England. The graves include the names of, among others, Private Karel Kgoogong Letau and a Private called simply “Jonah” with the force number given as 10593. The graves are maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) which also maintains many grave sites in South and Southern Africa.

The Speaker of the Johannesburg City Council, Conny Bapela, who delivered the main address, said the City of Johannesburg wished to remember over 300 men from the area who lost their lives when the Mendi sank. She added: “Let us also think of many others who have served our country in the many wars and liberation struggles to ensure that we can live a better life in South Africa today”.

Bapela laid the first wreath at the memorial unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II in 1995. Other wreaths were laid by members of military veterans organisations including the SA Legion, the MOTHS and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

The Pretoria memorial service was held Sunday at the invitation of the Atteridgeville Branch of the SA Legion and the guests were welcomed by Branch Chairman Legionnaire Abel Sefolosha at the Mendi Memorial Statue in the Gamothakga Recreation Resort.

The SA Navy provided the sentries and the SA Military Medical Service provided the band, the bugler and the piper. Army Chaplain, the Reverend Colonel Kingsley Masemola, presented the Prayer and Sermon. Speaking of the crucial role of a chaplain, he described it as: “To nurture the living, care for the wounded and honour the dead.”

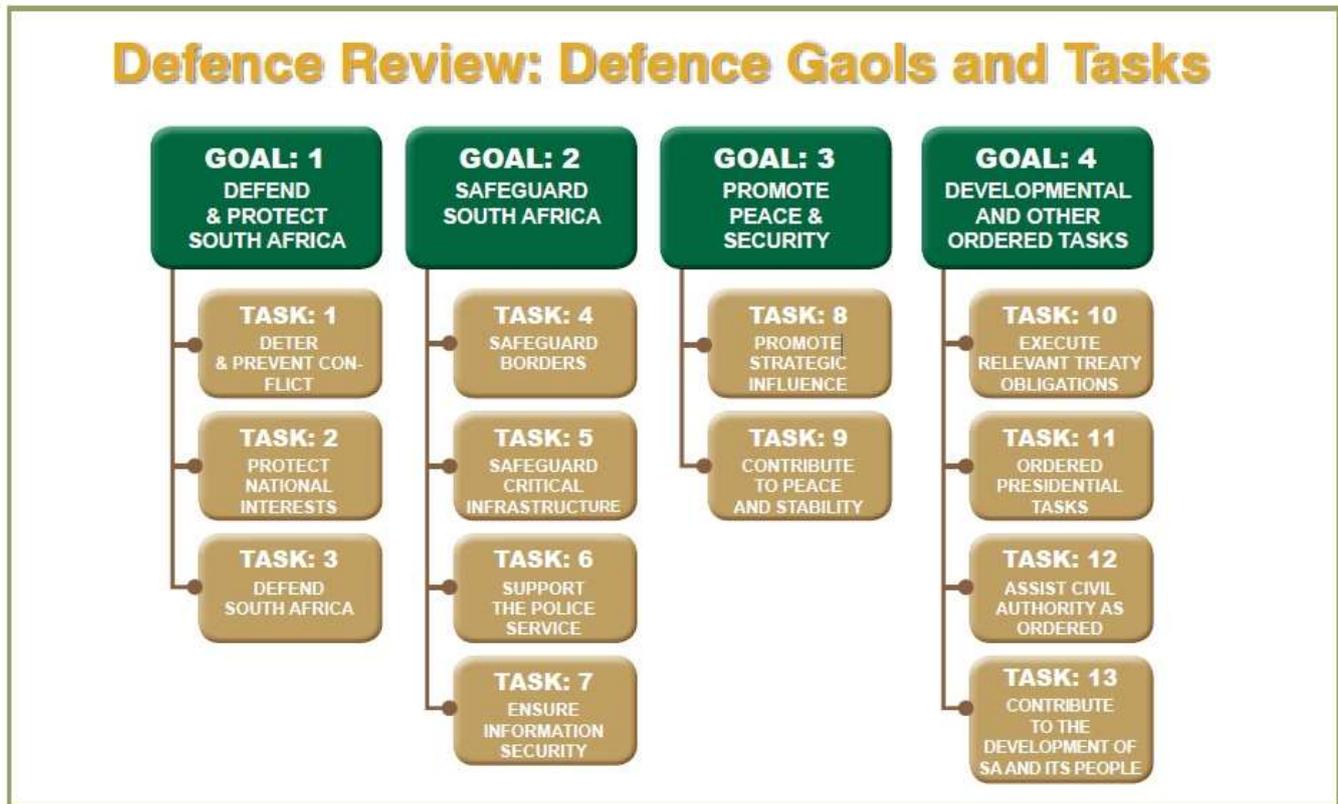
Chaplain Masemola said it was important to honour the memories of those who perished, to remember and never forget the pain and suffering of those who died as well as the grief of their families, and reflect on the real cost of being a soldier. He said: “At a memorial such as this we also celebrate the contribution of those members to the liberties and the freedoms that we all enjoy. We must be proud of their bravery and commitment.”

Among those who laid wreaths were King Makhasoke II of the Ndebele people, the Belgian Military Attache and general and flag officers of the SANDF as well as representatives of the military veterans organisations as well as ladies who laid a wreath on behalf of the SANLC.

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News from the SANDF – Goals and tasks of the SANDF

Courtesy of the Reserve Force Volunteer



From the Chaplain

Read Psalm 118

- ¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.
- ² Let Israel say:
“His love endures forever.”
- ³ Let the house of Aaron say:
“His love endures forever.”
- ⁴ Let those who fear the LORD say:
“His love endures forever.”
- ⁵ When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD;
he brought me into a spacious place.
- ⁶ The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?
- ⁷ The LORD is with me; he is my helper.
I look in triumph on my enemies.

- ⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans.
- ⁹ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.
- ¹⁰ All the nations surrounded me,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them down.
- ¹¹ They surrounded me on every side,
but in the name of the LORD I cut them down.
- ¹² They swarmed around me like bees,
but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns;
in the name of the LORD I cut them down.
- ¹³ I was pushed back and about to fall,
but the LORD helped me.
- ¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my defense^[a];
he has become my salvation.

- ¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory
resound in the tents of the righteous:
“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”
- ¹⁶ The LORD’s right hand is lifted high;
the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things!”
- ¹⁷ I will not die but live,
and will proclaim what the LORD has done.
- ¹⁸ The LORD has chastened me severely,
but he has not given me over to death.
- ¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.
- ²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.
- ²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

The Shamrock

- ²² The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
²³ the LORD has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes.
²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.
- ²⁵ LORD, save us!
LORD, grant us success!
- ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name
of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless
you.^[b]
- ²⁷ The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine on us.
With boughs in hand, join in the festal
procession
up^[c] to the horns of the altar.
- ²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise
you;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.
- ²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is
good;
his love endures forever.
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South African National Orders — The Mendi Decoration for Bravery

By the Editor

The Mendi Decoration for Bravery

The Decoration is awarded to South African citizens who have performed an extraordinary act of bravery that placed their lives in great danger, or who lost their own lives including in trying to save the life of another person, or by saving property, in or outside the Republic of South Africa.

Organisation

This Order can be awarded in three categories:

Category 1 = Gold

Category 2 = Silver

Category 3 = Bronze.

Symbolism/design elements

Central motif/symbolism

The shield, made from animal hide, particularly cattle, is processed and woven into an oval product of a very rigid surface and finished off with a

wooden handle. The knobkierrie and the spear complement the shield, which is given to visitors who come into our country from all over the world as a symbolic gesture of goodwill.

Elements

The shield

1. The SS Mendi - represents the courage of many black South African soldiers and their fellow white officers who drowned aboard the SS Mendi. The ship sank after being struck and almost cut in half by the SS Darro in the cold waters of the English Channel near the Isle of Wight on 21 February 1917. They were on their way to France to assist the British during the First World War.

2. The blue crane - the flight of the blue crane in the ocean skies above the SS Mendi symbolises the souls of the drowned brave soldiers. The blue crane's feathers were traditionally conferred to adorn brave warriors during colonial wars.

3. The green emerald - the core from which the three pointers emerge represents the way ahead in rendering assistance to those in need during natural disasters and other extreme difficulties that take place from time to time around the globe.

Neck badge

The holding shape

4. Lion - as a symbol of beauty, power and bravery, it is represented by its spoors around the edges of the holding shape. This indicates border patrols, within and beyond our country, by dedicated and brave South Africans. The three geographical pointers are represented by the integration of the flowers of the bitter aloe, an indigenous South African plant symbolic of resilience, survival and medicinal value.

5. Knobkierrie and spear - complement the shield as symbols of defence and honour.



Photos: SA Irish
Officers 1914 to 2014

