

A concise history of the South African Defence Force (1912–1987)

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INTRODUCTION

AS the SA Defence Force celebrates its 75th anniversary, it can look back with pride at a truly remarkable history. Established just two years after Union, the fledgling force was to be severely tested within the first two years of its existence to a degree perhaps unparalleled in the history of modern armies.

Just over a year after its formation, when it still existed more on paper than in fact, the Union Defence Force (UDF) was called upon to suppress a violent industrial strike on the Reef. Having passed its first test with flying colours, the UDF was confronted a few months later by the far more serious crises of internal rebellion and World War. Once again, however, the young organization proved equal to the occasion, and by the end of the Great War the UDF had developed into a battle-hardened, professional force respected the world over for its prowess, courage and endurance in the field.

The foundations which the UDF carved for itself in the trying circumstances of the Great War were to prove strong and resilient enough to withstand even the post-war cut-backs and austerity measures brought about by the depressed econ-

omic conditions of the time. The result was that when the Union was again called to arms in 1939, it was able to mobilize a vast and redoubtable fighting machine within a relatively short period of time. As in the Great War, the South African Forces quickly won the respect of friend and foe alike for their professionalism, dedication and powers of endurance. In proportion to its relatively small population and material resources, the Union's war effort was at least as great as that of any of the Allied powers.

With this proud tradition and record forged during two World Wars as its cornerstone, the modern South African Defence Force has developed and improved itself over the years to the point where it has no equal on the African continent in terms of quality.

Today, seventy-five years on, the SA Defence Force faces challenges at least as awesome and daunting as those faced by the UDF in earlier years. It has no less a task than ensuring the very survival of the Republic of South Africa at a time when the whole world seems bent on its destruction. Its proud history and record of past achievements, however, should leave no-one in doubt that the modern SA Defence Force will prove equal to the occasion in the best tradition of its forerunners.

THE BEGINNINGS: 1910–1914

Preparations for the establishment of a Union Defence Force and the Defence Act of 1912

Remarkable as it may seem in retrospect, the proclamation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 did not contain any provision for the defence of the new country with a population of 2 million Whites, 4 million Blacks, 500 000 Coloureds and 150 000 Indians. This was partly a result of the sensitivity and difficulties of creating a single Defence Force from the two entirely different military traditions of the Afrikaans and English-speaking South African, and partly owing to the fact that the Imperial Government in Britain retained overall responsibility for the defence of the Union.

Nevertheless, the first Union Government Notice, No 1 of 31 May 1910, provided for the creation of a portfolio of Defence, which office was assumed by one of the principal architects of the Union, Gen J.C. Smuts, who also held the portfolio's of the Interior and Mines. Ten days later Mr H.R.M. Bourne was appointed as Under Secretary for Defence to assist Gen Smuts.

For the first two years after Union, therefore, matters pertaining to defence were dealt with by a small section of the Department of the Interior on an ad-hoc basis in terms of existing colonial legislation, i.e. Acts, proclamations, government notices and regulations.

This unsatisfactory state of affairs led to a determined effort on the part of Minister Smuts to prepare legislation providing for the creation of a unified Defence Force in terms of a single, consolidated Defence Act. Capt J.J. Collyer, among others, was called upon to advise and assist in the task of preparing a Defence Act which would best cater to the peculiar needs of the new Union of South Africa.

By mid 1912 the preparatory work had been completed and consensus had been reached within the Cabinet on the proposed Defence Act.

The Act itself, No 13 of 1912, attracted nationwide interest and comment when it was first tabled, and was generally regarded to be the most important piece of legislation to come before parliament during that year. On the whole the Act was very favourably received, as it was deemed to have taken into consideration both the English and Afrikaans military traditions. Assent was given to the Act by the Governor General, the Rt Hon Viscount Gladstone on 13 June 1912, and on the following day (14 June) the Act was officially promulgated in the Government Gazette.

The philosophical basis of the Defence Act of 1912 rested on the principle of personal service, in the sense that the Defence of the Union was held to be the responsibility of *every individual citizen*.

The most important provisions of the Act were the following: Every European citizen was required between his seventeenth and sixtieth year to do personal military service for the defence of his country in any part of SA or outside the Union; every citizen was subject to the obligation to do military training over a period of four years between his seventeenth and twenty-fifth year in the Active Citizen Force or the Royal Navy Reserve. A certain percentage of citizens were to be called up for this training every year. The remainder were expected to become, in the same period of four years, members of Rifle Associations. Persons not of European descent were not in any way liable to render personal military service, although nothing prevented these groups from voluntarily engaging in the Defence Force.

Apart from the Active Citizen Force and the Rifle Associations, a Permanent Force was established, consisting of a headquarters, instructional and administrative staffs and five regiments of mounted riflemen supplied with artillery, who, apart from their military duties also had to do police service.

Provision was also made for a Coastal Defence Corps, various classes of reserves, an Air Corps and School Cadet Corps.

No provision was made at this stage for a Chief of the General Staff. Instead the three military executive commanders, namely the Cmdt-General of the Active Citizen Force, the Inspector-General of the Permanent Force and Commandant of the Cadet corps, were placed under the direct control of the Minister, who in turn was advised by a Defence Board consisting of four eminent ex-soldiers. Finally there was the Secretariat, which was the Civil Division under the Secretary for Defence, which was charged specifically with financial administration.

For training purposes, the Union was divided into 15 military districts.

The implementation of the Defence Act and the birth of the Union Defence Force

Although the Defence Act had been promulgated on 14 June, it was not until 1 July that a beginning was made with the actual implementation of its provisions. On 1 July the colonial military posts of the Cmdt-General Cape Defence Force, the

Commandant of the Militia (Natal) and Inspector of the Volunteers (Transvaal) were formally abolished and a HQ for the Union Defence Force was established in Pretoria. For this reason 1 July 1912 has come to be generally accepted as the birthdate of the Union Defence Force.

The new HQ of the UDF was divided into three distinct sections, namely:

- a. The Secretariat, a civilian branch responsible for the finances of the UDF, under the Under-Secretary for Defence
- b. The General Staff Section, responsible for all aspects of military organization
- c. The Administrative Section, responsible for provisions, transport etc.

On the same day that the HQ of the UDF was established in Pretoria, a group of 51 officers of the former British colonies and Boer republics was nominated to undergo a course to be held at the Presidency, Bloemfontein, under the auspices of the South African Military School, also established on 1 July 1912. (The South African Military School, the forerunner of the SA Military College, was subsequently moved to Tempe on 1 January 1914).

The group of 51 officers, which included such well-known names as J. Lewis, W.E.C. Tanner, E.T. Thackwray, P.V.G. van der Byl, A.H. Nussey, S.G. Maritz, A.J. Brink and J.C.G. Kemp, can really be regarded as the fathers of the Union Defence Force, as they were to fill most of the original HQ and District Staff Officer posts in the UDF.

On 1 April 1913 an important milestone was reached with the establishment of the Permanent Force (PF) in terms of Proclamation 219 of 13 December 1912 under the command of Brig-Gen H.T. Lukin. The PF consisted of five regiments of the *South African Mounted Riflemen (SAMR)* stationed on a decentralized basis at Kingwilliamstown, Pietermaritzburg, Dundee, Pretoria and Kimberley. In terms of the Defence Act a permanent battery of artillery was to be a component of each regiment. Nevertheless, the SAMR was in reality a military constabulary similar to the Cape Mounted Riflemen, tasked primarily with police work in their respective geographical areas. By May 1913 the total strength of the SAMR had grown to 103 officers, 348 NCO's and 1 565 riflemen, while the non-European section consisted of nearly 2 000 Black and Indian constables.

Another major organizational advance in the early history of the UDF occurred on 1 July 1913, when the Citizen Force (under Brig-Gen C.F.

Beyers), Coast Garrison and new Cadet organization were established. The authorized strength of the ACF and Coast Garrison Force was 25 155 and by 31 December actual strength stood at no less than 23 462. The initial strength of the Cadet organization was 11 318 with the amalgamation of all the pre-Union Cadet Corps.

The first day of July 1913 also marked the first moves towards the formation of the proposed Rifle Associations which were designed to fulfill the same role as the former Commando's and Rifle Associations of the Boer Republics and British Colonies. Experienced military personnel were appointed by General Beyers to the posts of Commandants of the new Rifle Associations, with the task of establishing and organizing the Rifle Associations in their respective districts. Provision was made for the issue of a Government rifle and bandolier along with a free issue of ammunition to the compulsory members of the Rifle Associations. Provision was also made for boys between 13 and 17 to become cadet members of the Rifle Associations in country districts.

The revamped Rifle Association scheme proved so popular that within a year more than 42 000 members had joined the Associations, including a large percentage of volunteers.

The Industrial Crisis of January 1914

The newly constituted UDF had barely had time to effectively organize itself when it was confronted by its first real test in the form of the Industrial disturbances of January 1914.

The disturbances, which began at the Dundee coalfields, quickly spread to the Rand, Cape Town and Durban, and when local police forces proved unable to deal with the situation in the face of the threatening violence, the Government decided to call out the PF and ACF units stationed on the Witwatersrand as well as certain Class B reservists. The rapid mobilization of the UDF forces in the Transvaal clearly unnerved even the more radical strike leaders, and by the middle of January law and order had been restored throughout the Union.

THE REBELLION AND WORLD WAR ONE

The Rebellion and the GSWA Campaign

Six months after its successful deployment against the strikers, the UDF was confronted by another,

far more serious crisis in the form of the outbreak of the Great War in August. The Union Government under Prime Minister Louis Botha immediately accepted responsibility for the entire defence of the Union, thus relieving the British garrison troops stationed in South Africa for service elsewhere.

The Union Government also undertook, at the request of the British Government, to seize control of German South West Africa (GSWA) so as to deny the Germans use of the territory's strategically important harbours and wireless stations.

To this end a UDF expeditionary force was despatched by sea to Luderitzbucht in September 1914, while another force under Brig-Gen H.T. Lukin landed at Port Nolloth. A third force, under Lt Col S.G. (Manie) Maritz was instructed to advance towards Keetmanshoop from its base at Upington.

On 26 September a small detachment from Lukin's force was overwhelmed by vastly superior German forces at Sandfontein. No sooner had news of the reverse reached the Union, when an even more serious disaster befell the Union and its armed forces. The prominent UDF commanders C.F. Beyers, S.G. Maritz and J.C.G. Kemp went into rebellion with several thousand followers in protest at the Government's decision to become involved in the War.

The rebellion not only delayed the planned invasion of GSWA, but also threatened the very existence of the fledging UDF.

As it proved, however, the UDF rose to the occasion magnificently. The vast majority of UDF members remained loyal to the Government, and within a few weeks over 30 000 men had been mobilized to suppress the rebellion. Gen Botha's decisive military action, combined with skilful and conciliatory negotiating methods, resulted in the collapse of the rebellion by the middle of December, although the last of Maritz and Kemp's forces only surrendered in February 1915.

The suppression of the rebellion enabled the UDF to proceed with its plans to capture SWA from Germany. On Christmas Day 1914, a large force under the command of Gen Botha landed at Walvis Bay, and in the New Year a two-pronged thrust was successfully initiated along the railway line from Swakopmund towards the crucial rail-head at Karibib as well as along the Swakop river. In the south, meanwhile, a three-pronged thrust against the vital rail junction at Keetmanshoop was launched by the central, southern and eastern

forces under Brig-Gen McKenzie, Lt Col van Deventer, and Lt Col Berrange respectively.

Karibib was captured by Botha's northern forces on 6 May. Windhoek, the capital, was occupied by UDF troops on 11 May, by which time the German resistance in the south had collapsed entirely.

After a period of regrouping and consolidation, Gen Botha broke the resistance of the remaining German forces in the north by means of a tactically brilliant and highly manouvable thrust along the railway line to Grootfontein and Tsumeb towards the end of June. On 9 July Dr Theodor Seitz, the German Governor, and Col V Franke, the military commander, capitulated at Khorab near the village of Atavi. Altogether 4 740 German troops surrendered with 37 guns.

The GSWA campaign can be said to have really marked the coming of age of the UDF. 67 000 troops had been mobilized during the campaign, and in rather less than six months the Union forces had compelled the surrender of a widely dispersed enemy force in a territory of some 322 000 sq miles with no assistance whatsoever from any of its allies – all this for the loss of only 266 casualties from all causes.

The East African Campaign

The conquest of GSWA released the bulk of the UDF forces for service elsewhere. The logical theatre of operations, where UDF forces were most needed, was East Africa, where the British forces had been too few to prevent the German Commander in Tanganyika, Paul von Lettow – Vorbeck, from invading the British colony of Kenya at the outset of hostilities.

The Union Government accordingly undertook to raise two infantry brigades, three mounted brigades, and a Cape Corps battalion together with artillery and supporting services for a campaign aimed at driving the Germans out of East Africa.

The UDF forces for East Africa had, however, to be raised on a volunteer basis as so-called Imperial Service units, as the 1912 Defence Act had stipulated that members of the UDF could only be compelled to render military service if it was in direct defence of the Union itself.

By December 1915 the first South African troops were en route to Kenya, and General J.C. Smuts was subsequently appointed Commander in Chief of the Imperial forces in East Africa, arriving in Mombasa on 19 February.

The campaign against von Lettow – Vorbeck's able and elusive forces proved long and arduous in a theatre of operations where sickness caused more casualties than enemy action. Gen Smuts' force, together with a force under Brig-Gen J.L. van Deventer, nevertheless succeeded in advancing southwards into Tanganyika, while a mostly British force under Gen Northey was positioned to cut off the German retreat east of Lake Nyasa. By January 1917, when Gen Smuts left for London to join the Imperial War Cabinet, the German forces were depleted but undefeated.

The campaign now entered a guerrilla phase, and some 12 000 UDF troops were repatriated to the Union, many of them physical wrecks from repeated attacks of malaria and dysentery. Gen van Deventer, however, remained in overall command of the Allied forces in East Africa until the German forces finally surrendered on 25 November 1918, by which time over 2 000 South Africans had died.

The Campaign in Flanders, Egypt and Palestine

At the conclusion of the GSWA campaign, the Union Government had agreed to raise an Infantry Brigade for service with the British forces in France. Four battalions of volunteers from the Cape, Natal and the OFS, from the Transvaal and Rhodesia, and from the SA Scottish regiments respectively were subsequently recruited to form 1 SA Infantry Brigade, 5 800 strong, under the command of Brig-Gen H.T. Lukin.

After an initial period of training in the Union, the Brigade arrived in Britain early in November 1915 to undergo further training before deployment to France. Almost immediately, however, 1 SA Brigade was diverted to Egypt, where a rising of the Sanussi, instigated and led by Turks, threatened the rear of the British forces defending the Suez Canal.

The South Africans landed at Alexandria early in January 1916 and on 25 February two South African battalions were engaged in a pitched battle at Agagia, SE of Sidi Barrani, which ended in a complete rout of the Turkish-Sanussi forces and the capture of the Turkish commander Gaofer Pasha.

The successful conclusion of the Egyptian campaign paved the way for 1 SA Brigade's deployment in France in April.

After an intense period of orientation and train-

ing with the famous Ninth (Scottish) Division to which it was attached, 1 SA Brigade was thrown at the beginning of July 1916 into the bloody battle of the Somme and in particular the fighting for Trones Wood, Bernafay Wood, Longueval and Delville Wood. In these battles which lasted from 5–20 July 1916 the SA Brigade was all but wiped out, emerging from the carnage with a strength of just 29 officers and 751 men from a total of nearly 4 000 who had entered the battle. Nevertheless, the incredible courage and endurance displayed by the South Africans during the battle of Delville Wood gained them a reputation which will not be quickly forgotten.

After being brought up to strength with much needed reinforcements from the Union, the SA Brigade in France was again committed to action in the area of Butte de Walencourt in October 1916. The following year the Brigade took part in the battles of Arras (April 1917) and the 3rd Battle of Ypres (September–October 1917), suffering heavy casualties on both occasions. In 1918 the Brigade was once again all but wiped out in the massive German summer offensive, but was later reformed in time to participate in the final Allied breakthrough in France which ended the war.

Altogether, the campaigns in France and Egypt claimed 4 454 South African lives and over 10 000 wounded.

South African troops also distinguished themselves in Palestine in the campaign by Gen Allenby against the Turks. Six siege batteries of South African heavy artillery were deployed in Palestine during the summer of 1916, together with a brigade of field artillery and a detachment of the Cape Corps.

The Role of SA Aviators in the Great War

Although military aviation was still in its infancy at the time that the UDF was formed, the Defence Act of 1912 had made provision for the establishment of a South African Aviation Corps, under the section of the Act relating to the ACF. Towards the end of 1912 the Commandant-General of the Citizen Force, Brig Gen C.F. Beyers, was sent to England and Europe by General Smuts to observe and report on the use of aircraft in military activities.

Gen Beyers was so impressed by what he saw, that when he returned to the Union, he strongly recommended the setting up of a school of aviation. The Government subsequently contracted Compton Paterson to provide flying training to a select group of 10 aviators at his flying school in

Kimberley in terms of a Government Gazette published on 10 May 1913.

In April 1914 six of the initial 10 pupils were appointed as probationary lieutenants in the South African Aviation Corps of the Active Citizen Force and were sent to England to undergo further training at the Central Flying School at Upavon. On the outbreak of war in August 1914 the six South Africans were granted permission to join the newly formed Royal Flying Corps, and the group was to participate in the first aerial reconnaissance and artillery – spotting missions over France during the closing months of 1914.

In January 1915 the South African pilots were recalled to the Union to help officially form the South African Aviation Corps (SAAC) for service in GSWA, and by May six Henri Farman planes were able to take to the air in support of General Botha's northern force. Within a very short space of time the infant SAAC pilots had proved their worth, flying regular reconnaissance patrols to keep Gen Botha constantly updated on the enemy's movements and dispositions. Gen Botha was so impressed that at the conclusion of the campaign he expressed his conviction that the use of aircraft had contributed notably towards the speedier termination of the campaign.

The SAAC was disbanded after the GSWA campaign, but the majority of its pilots volunteered for further service in England, where they were to form the nucleus of No 26 (South African) Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). After No 26 Squadron had been brought up to strength by further recruits from the Union, it was despatched to East Africa in December 1915 with BE 2E and Henri Farman aircraft to carry out reconnaissance, bombing and communication missions in support of Gen Smuts' forces. 26 Squadron performed admirably in extremely trying and difficult conditions until its eventual recall to England in June 1918. The following month the Squadron was disbanded.

Apart from the South Africans who served with No 26 Squadron, several hundred South Africans volunteered for service with other RFC squadrons during the course of the war, among the most famous of whom were Capt Alistair Miller, Andrew Weatherby Beauchamp-Proctor and Pierre van Ryneveld.

War-time administrative Changes in the UDF

Several important administrative changes occurred in the UDF during the course of the Great War as

a direct result of deficiencies in the command-and-control organization which had been exposed by the exigencies of the war situation.

When the Cmdt-Gen of the Active Citizen Force resigned his post in September 1914 he was not replaced, as Gen Smuts assumed direct responsibility for the CF in his capacity as Minister of Defence. On 2 August 1915 there was a further change in the organization of the high command. Brig Gen J.J. Collyer's post of Staff Officer, General Staff Duties was re-designated Chief Staff Officer, General Staff Duties and Adjutant General. The officer in charge of the Administrative section became Quartermaster-General on 14 March 1916 and the head of the Medical Services Section became Director of Medical Services. On 4 June 1917 the post of Chief Staff Officer General Staff Duties and Adjutant General was again altered, to become Chief of the General Staff/Adjutant General.

The functions of the Adjutant General were finally separated from those of the General Staff section on 28 May 1918, when an important reorganization of the command structure took place. Until this date all military policy had been directed by the Minister through his civilian Secretary of Defence. In May 1918 the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) assumed responsibility for the co-ordination of all military staff work at DHQ and for the communication of the Minister's orders to the UDF. Under the CGS were four sections: the General Staff section; Adjutant General; Medical Services and Quartermaster General.

Statistical Summary of South Africans who served in the Great War

A total of 254 666 South Africans of all races served in uniform during the First World War, comprising 146 897 Whites, 25 000 Coloureds and Indians and 82 769 Blacks. Of these 8 325 Whites, 893 Coloureds/Indians and 3 136 Blacks were killed in action or died on service.

THE INTERWAR YEARS, 1919–1939

Demobilization and Rationalization: 1918–1921

The conclusion of hostilities in November 1918 was followed by a period of intensive demobilization and rationalization in the UDF as the size of the UDF was trimmed from the inflated levels of the war to more or less its pre-war strength.

One of the first priorities in respect of Defence matters was the settling of the highly involved wartime accounts and debts existing between the governments of Great Britain and the Union.

An important part of the eventual settlement reached was a decision by the Imperial Government to terminate entirely its commitment to the defence of the Union and to hand over all the assets and facilities of the Imperial Garrison force in the Union to the UDF. The last British troops accordingly left the Union at the end of 1921, and all the grounds, buildings and contents etc belonging to the British War Department and Admiralty were handed over to the UDF.

For the rest, a policy of strict economy and retrenchment was followed by the UDF, with two military districts being amalgamated in three instances under one District Staff Officer.

Further economy was achieved by abolishing the post of Inspector General on 31 December 1921 when the Adjutant General took over the work of the section. The CGS had already assumed the functions of the Commandant of Cadets in 1919.

The Formation of the SA Air Force and SA Naval Service: 1920–1922

Despite the policy of strict economy and retrenchment which was applied with regard to the UDF during the immediate post-war years, two outstanding highlights of the period in question were the establishment of the SA Air Force in 1920, and the SA Naval Service in 1922.

The experience of the Great War had proved the indispensability and potential of air power in military conflict beyond doubt, and Gen Smuts, who had been instrumental in the formation of the RAF in the later stages of the war while serving on the Imperial War Cabinet, was determined that the UDF should have its own air arm after the war.

On 1 February 1920, accordingly, Sir Pierre van Ryneveld was appointed Director of Air Services (DAS) with instructions to establish an independent Air Force in the Union. Van Ryneveld's appointment as DAS has in fact come to be regarded as the official birthdate of the SA Air Force (SAAF), although it was not until 1 February 1923 that the SAAF was listed as one of the units of the reconstituted Permanent Force.

The establishment of the SAAF was greatly facilitated by the extremely generous decision by the

Imperial Government in 1919 to allocate some 100 aeroplanes from its war stocks, complete with spares and equipment, to the Union. The "Imperial Gift", as it became known, saw the transfer of 48 de Havilland DH 9's, 30 Avro 504 K's and 22 scout-type SE 5 aircraft, plus workshop machinery, spares, steel frameworks for 20 permanent hangers, wireless and photographic equipment, aviation fuel, oils, lubricants etc to the newly established SAAF.

In mid 1921 a site at Zwartkop (later Swartkop) 3 km east of Roberts Heights (later Voortrekkerhoogte) was chosen as the site for the SAAF's first airfield, and by the following year the SAAF had become fully operational with a flight of six aircraft operating from Zwartkop.

The year 1922 also saw the establishment of the Union's first independent Navy, officially termed the South African Naval Service (SANS).

In 1921 it had been agreed at the Imperial Conference held in London that the arrangement whereby the Union contributed an annual amount of 85 000 pounds towards the Royal Navy should lapse. Instead, the Union should form its own navy, based on the grant of a survey ship and two minesweepers by the Imperial Government to the Union.

The recruitment of the first personnel into the SANS was approved with effect 1 April 1922, with Cmdr N.H. Rankin appointed as the Commander of the new service, with his administrative HQ in Simonstown. At the same time the survey ship and two minesweepers, renamed the HMSAS Protea, HMSAS Sonneblom and HMSAS Immortelle, were officially commissioned into the SANS.

The proclamation establishing the SA Naval Service was signed in Cape Town by the Governor General on 1 July 1922, although it was not officially promulgated in the Government Gazette until 26 January 1923. Nevertheless, 1 April 1922 is generally recognized as the birthdate of the SANS, as it was on this date that the ships and personnel were officially commissioned into service.

A year after its establishment, the strength of the SANS stood at 13 officers and 110 O/R's, organized into three sections – General Duties, Minesweeping and Hydrographic Survey.

The Rand Strike of 1922 and Bondelswarts Rebellion

In February 1922 a strike by coalminers on the Rand degenerated into a series of violent clashes

between police and strikers, with the latter forming their own "commando's" in an attempt to overthrow the established order.

By the beginning of March it had become clear that the police had lost control, and the UDF PF was instructed to assume the law and order responsibilities of the police. At the same time 14 000 members of the ACF and certain A class reservists were called up, and martial law was declared in several Rand magisterial districts.

After a series of extremely violent clashes between the strikers and the UDF, during the course of which the assistance of the newly-formed SAAF was called upon to bombard the striker's positions in Benoni, Springs, Boksburg, Brakpan and Johannesburg, law and order was restored and the strike was called off (with effect midnight 17 March 1922). A total of 43 UDF and police force members were killed during the clashes, while the SAAF suffered 2 dead, 2 wounded and 2 aircraft damaged beyond repair.

The prompt UDF action during the Rand Strike proved that the Union's military forces were still more than capable of maintaining law and order despite the severe economies and cut-backs which had occurred during the immediate postwar years.

Just two months after the strike had ended, the operational services of the SAAF were again called upon – this time to help suppress an uprising by the Bondelswart Hottentots in SWA. The rebels eventually surrendered to the security forces on 2 June 1922, by which time the SAAF had flown 105 operational hours against the rebels without loss.

The Reorganizations of 1922 and 1926

Two major reorganizations of the UDF occurred in 1922 and 1926 as a direct result of the need to economise in view of the prevailing recessionary economic climate.

On 12 July 1922 the South African Defence Amendment Act (Act 22 of 1922) was promulgated, giving effect to an earlier decision to replace the system of 5 dispersed mounted constabulary units (SAMR) with a single regiment of Mounted Riflemen. The following units and corps were officially established in terms of the Amended Act: SA Staff Corps; SA Instructional Corps; SA Naval Service; SA Field Artillery; SA Permanent Garrison Artillery; SA Engineer Corps; SA Air Force; SA Service Corps; SA Medical Corps; SA Ordnance Corps; SA Veterinary Corps and SA Administrative, Pay and Clerical Corps.

Despite the establishment of the new Corps, the actual size of the UDF shrunk still further during this period as a result of pay cuts, resignations, retrenchments and discharges.

A further economy was achieved on 30 September 1922 following the retirement of the Secretary for Defence, Sir Roland Bourne. It was decided not to replace the Secretary, but rather to transfer his functions to the Chief of the General Staff.

In 1926 the necessity for still deeper cuts in expenditure on defence led to yet another reorganization of the UDF. The last remaining regiment of the SAMR was disbanded on 31 March and the number of military districts was reduced from 16 to 6 on 1 April. The Brigade HQ of the SA Field Artillery was also disbanded and sections of artillery distributed to various stations in the Union.

The drastic economy measures of 1922 and 1926 left the PF strength of the UDF at just 151 officers and 1 259 O/R's by 1927.

The Depression Years: 1929–1934

Difficult as the financial climate had been for the Union in the decade following the end of the Great War, the Great Depression placed even greater pressure on the Government budget, and the UDF was rather unwisely made the prime target of further economies and cuts.

With effect 31 December 1929 no less than 49 ACF units were disbanded, and between 1 July 1930 and 30 June 1934 continuous ACF training ceased altogether. The Defence Rifle Associations, meanwhile, did not escape the austerity measures. In 1931 alone 54 DRA's were disbanded, the amount of cartridges issued to DRA members halved, and the allowances paid to DRA commandants reduced.

In 1934, in perhaps the most drastic measure of all, the SA Naval Service was disbanded.

The abovementioned cuts and reductions in the UDF's budget apart, the period 1929–1935 also saw several important administrative changes.

In 1933 Maj Gen A.J. Brink was appointed to the new post of General Officer Commanding the UDF and Secretary for Defence. The vacant post of CGS was occupied by Brig Gen van Ryneveld, while the latter's old appointment as Director Air Services was abolished and replaced by a smaller Directorate of Civil Aviation. In another organizational development in 1933 the new Directorate of Technical Services was established, which relieved QMG of all responsibilities connected with

technical questions. In October the General Staff Section at DHQ passed under the control of the new Director of Military Operations and Training. There were thus now five major sections at DHQ under the overall control of the CGS: Director Military Operations and Training; Adjutant General; Quartermaster-General; Director Technical Services and Director Medical Services.

Another administrative change affecting the UDF to occur in 1933 was the redesignation of the six military districts to Commands.

Despite the generally pessimistic mood prevailing in the UDF during the Depression years, there were a few positive developments, not least of which was the occupation of the new military hospital at Voortrekkerhoogte in October 1930.

One of the more successful experiments in combatting the ravages of the Great Depression occurred in 1933 with the establishment of the Special Service Battalion (SSB) at Roberts Heights (Voortrekkerhoogte) on 1 May. The unit was established to provide employment and training for the many youths left destitute by the Depression. The SSB was to prove a great success and an invaluable source of trained personnel to the UDF (and other Government Departments) in subsequent years.

A Period of Growth: 1935–1938

During the course of 1934 the economy of the Union began demonstrating a sustained upward trend, to the extent that a significant increase in the Defence Budget was subsequently approved for the first time in many years. During the parliamentary debate on the Defence vote for 1934–1935, the Minister of Defence, the Hon O. Pirow, announced a five year expansion plan for the UDF aimed at increasing the strength of the PF and ACF to 56 000, with a further national reserve of 100 000 riflemen.

The increase in funds had a quite significant effect on the training facilities and efficiency of the Army and Air Force. In 1937 a new training scheme for pupil pilots was introduced which gave the development of the Air Force considerable impetus. The idea was to train a reserve of 1 000 pilots and 1 700 air mechanics. The overall size of the Air Force was also increased to 7 Squadrons, with new stations and bases being built at Waterkloof, Bloemfontein, Durban and Youngsfield. The Air Force expansion programme received a dramatic boost in 1938 when 200 Hartbees aircraft

were donated to the SAAF by the RAF for training purposes.

The organization of the Rifle Associations was also improved and they were placed under their own Commander in Chief who was directly responsible to the Minister for the training, organization and discipline of the Commando's.

The new post of Commander in Chief Burgher Commando's in fact replaced the old post of GOC UDF held by Maj Gen Andries Brink. Other administrative changes which occurred in 1937 included the establishment of a Directorate of Operations and Intelligence (DOI) under the CGS, the replacement of the Director Military Operations and Training by a Director of Army Training (DAT) and the redesignation of Director Technical Services to Director Air and Technical Services (DATS).

In 1938 the Minister of Defence announced plans for the further extension and improvement of the UDF, for which purpose a total of 5 million pounds spread over three years was to be made available.

Before these plans could be fully implemented, however, the Second World War broke out.

WORLD WAR TWO

Mobilization and Administrative Developments

At the outbreak of war in September 1939, the PF consisted of just 352 officers and 5 033 other ranks, while the ACF comprised 918 officers and 12 572 other ranks.

The first priority was thus to organize for a greatly expanded UDF which would be needed to sustain South Africa's war effort once the political decision to enter the war had been made.

On 22 September 1939, the ACF units were authorized to accept volunteers (in addition to those in the age group 17–21) for the duration of the war and each unit was required to undergo a months continuous training. On 16 February 1940, as a result of opposition from the section of the South African population not favouring participation in the war, the ACF was reorganized on a totally voluntary basis. Those who took the Africa oath were provided with a strip of orange which was worn at the outer aspect of the shoulder strap, indicating their willingness to serve anywhere in Africa.

Although hampered initially by a chronic shortage of equipment, the rate of recruitment into the reorganized ACF proceeded very satisfactorily, and within a short period three complete divisions had been established. These were the:

- a. First Division under Maj Gen G.E. Brink, comprising 1, 2 and 5 Brigades
- b. Second Division under Maj Gen I.P. de Villiers, comprising the 3, 4 and 6 Brigades
- c. Third Division, under Maj Gen M. Botha, comprising the reserve Brigades

The First Division was destined to serve in East and North Africa, the Second Division in North Africa, while the Third Division was stationed in the Union itself.

In the meantime, a host of other combat and support Corps' and units were formed, such as the SA Tank Corps, the SA Veterinary Corps, mounted units and the like.

The outbreak of war and the greatly increased size of the UDF not surprisingly provided the impetus for a whole series of structural alterations in the UDF's high command.

By November 1939 the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) headed a greatly expanded command structure. On the one hand he had the Director General Operations (DGO), responsible directly to him for all matters concerning operations, intelligence and coastal defence. On the other hand was the DCGS through whom the CGS controlled the various Directorates. These were: the DCGS section itself, responsible for all training, mobilization and signals; the Director General of Defence Rifle Associations; the Adjutant General and Director General of Reserves (AG and DGR) responsible for personnel, reserves, organization and discipline in the UDF; QMG, responsible for supplies, quarters, transport of stores, veterinary services, works and fortifications; Director General Technical Services, responsible for technical stores, artisan training and workshops; Director General Air Services (DGAS), in charge of all Air Force organization and training; and finally, the Director General Medical Services.

By 1942 some minor changes had been made to the above command structure, with AG and DGR becoming simply AG again, and DGAS becoming Director General Air Force (DGAF). By this time the Director General Defence Rifle Associations had ceased to occupy a place in the command structure.

The East African Campaign: June 1940–November 1941

The first major campaign in which South African troops became involved during the Second World War was in East Africa, where the Italians had overrun British Somaliland and advanced southwards into Kenya from their base in Abyssinia by mid 1940.

The UDF's First Division was accordingly despatched to East Africa during the latter half of 1940 to assist the hard-pressed British forces endeavouring to hold a 800 mile front against the advancing Italians.

1 SA Brigade under Brig D.H. Pienaar arrived in Kenya in June 1940, and by December the complete First Division had set up its HQ at Gilgil, NW of Nairobi. 1 SA Division, which fell under the overall command of Lt Gen Alan Cunningham (GOC East Africa Force), was allocated the Marsabit sector, consisting of some 250 miles of inhospitable terrain stretching from the Sudan border to the area of Moyale.

In January 1941, 1 SA Division (minus 1 SA Brigade attached to 12 (Afr) Division) was ordered to advance across the Chalbi desert to the Abyssinian frontier, with the object of outflanking the Italian positions on the Mega-Moyale escarpment.

The Division's advance met with immediate success, and on 18 February Mega was captured by 2 and 5 SA Brigades and 1 000 prisoners taken. 1 SA Division's successes prompted Gen Cunningham to deploy 2 SA Brigade into British Somaliland, while the Divisional HQ and 5 SA Brigade was despatched to Egypt by sea, arriving at Omuraja on 4 May 1941. 2 SA Brigade, for its part, proceeded to advance towards Abyssinia against relatively light opposition along the route Nanyuki, Nyeri, Garissa and Mogadishu before it too was ordered to Egypt towards the end of May.

1 SA Brigade, in the meantime, had been ordered, along with the rest of 12 (Afr) and 11 (Afr) Divisions, to advance to the Juba river and then to the port of Kismayu. So successful was the operation, which commenced in February 1941, that the attack soon developed by stages into a triumphant advance on Addis Ababa itself.

By 22 February enemy resistance along the Juba river front had collapsed entirely and thousands of prisoners were taken. Thereafter the combined British and South African forces broke through to Mogadishu and Harar, the latter being occupied on 26 March after major actions at Babile and Bisidimo. On 29 March 1 Transvaal Scottish pa-

trols, in the vanguard of the British/South African forces, entered Dire Dawa. Finally, on 5 April 1941 Addis Ababa, the capital of Abyssinia was captured.

After further operations in the vicinity of the capital and in Eritrea, in which 1 SA Brigade played a leading role, the enemy resistance was finally broken and on 19 May the Duke of Aosta, Viceroy of Italian East Africa, surrendered with 5 000 men, the remnant of the Italian army in Eritrea. Exhausted by its exertions in the rapid advance on Addis Ababa and subsequent operations in Eritrea, 1 SA Brigade was at this point rested prior to transfer to Egypt via the Eritrean port of Massawa.

Despite the fall of Addis Ababa and the surrender of the Viceroy, Italian forces in the lakes region south of the capital and in the Gondar regions refused to capitulate, and it was not until the end of November that the last Italian forces in East Africa finally surrendered after a protracted campaign in mountainous terrain and difficult weather. 1 Natal Mounted Rifles, 1 Field Force Battalion and various South African artillery, Light Tank and support units participated in these latter operations with rare distinction.

Total UDF (land) battle casualties during the East African campaign amounted to 270, of whom 73 were killed.

Although the UDF combat units had performed admirably throughout the arduous campaign, the role of the various UDF support units in contributing to the final victory should not be underestimated. Indeed, the chief problems of the East African campaign were more of an administrative, technical and logistic than purely military nature, and in this respect the sterling efforts of the UDF engineering, road construction, motor transport and medical support units in supporting the fighting units over vast distances in an inhospitable terrain and equally unpleasant climate deserve special mention.

The North African Campaign: June 1941–November 1942

By mid 1941, with the East African campaign to all intents and purposes at an end, the UDF transferred its attention to the North African theatre, where it was planned to deploy two full divisions in support of the British forces, who by this stage were being confronted by the menace of Rommel and his Afrika Korps army.

By the end of June 1941 1 SA Division, fresh

from the East African campaign, had been assembled at Mersa Matruh in Egypt, where it concentrated on improving the Matruh defences and on training in desert warfare tactics. 2 SA Division moved to Egypt directly from the Union, arriving towards the end of June. At the beginning of August the Division was deployed to El Alamein, where it also busied itself in constructing a defensive position and in desert training.

By November 1941, the British 8th Army, to which the two South African divisions were attached, felt strong enough to launch an offensive against the German forces in Libya with the object of relieving the beleaguered Tobruk garrison. 1 SA Division was entrusted with the task of advancing past Sidi Rezegh towards Tobruk in support of the British 7th Armoured division.

In the event, the South Africans were soon to discover that they faced a far more formidable and resolute enemy in the form of Rommel's Afrika Korps than they had experienced during the East African campaign. After initial successes the 8th Army attack broke down, and during fierce fighting on 22 and 23 November, the 5th SA Infantry Brigade was overrun and annihilated by Rommel's armour at Sidi Resegh. 1 SA Brigade, too, became involved in heavy fighting in the Sidi Resegh area during the period 28 November–1 December.

2 SA Division, in the meantime, had been attached to 13 Corps, and during December 1941 and January 1942 the Division's Brigades played a dominant role in the successful capture of Bardia, Sollum and Halfaia. The three battles cost the South Africans approximately 500 casualties, but they took 14 000 German and Italian prisoners.

The sustained pressure from the 8th Army eventually forced the enemy to fall back from their positions on the Gazala line and contact was re-established with Tobruk. Between January and March 1941 the two SA Divisions were employed in helping to strengthen the 8th Army's defensive positions in Libya against an expected German counter-offensive. 1 SA Division was allocated a front along the Gazala line, while at the end of March, 2 SA (less 3 SA Infantry Brigade) was moved to Tobruk to take over the fortress protecting the harbour town.

On 26 May, Rommel launched his long-awaited counter-offensive, and after decisively defeating the British tank forces in the area of Knightsbridge, El Aden and Bir Hacheim, Rommel's forces succeeded in driving the 8th Army into headlong retreat back towards the Egyptian frontier. 1 SA Division succeeded in reaching the Egypt-

tian frontier without serious casualties, but as a result of several tactical blunders on the part of the 8th Army commanders during continued heavy fighting in June, the fortress of Tobruk was cut off and isolated by Rommel's forces. On 21 June the Tobruk garrison under Maj Gen Klopper was forced to surrender when German assault forces broke through the fortress perimeters. Altogether 10 722 South Africans were taken prisoner, which meant in effect that 2 SA Division had ceased to exist.

Rommel wasted little time in capitalizing on his success at Tobruk, driving straight for Alexandria and capturing Mersa Matruh on 29 June. The 8th Army, however, made a successful stand around its defensive positions at El Alamein during July and August, with the South African Brigades of 1 Division performing particularly meritoriously.

By September Rommel's offensive had broken down completely owing to the exhaustion of his men and the lack of reinforcements, supplies and fuel. The lull in operations allowed the new 8th Army Commander, Gen Montgomery, sufficient time to plan and train for a major offensive, and at 2140 hours on the night of 23 October 1942, the final and decisive battle of El Alamein commenced with an artillery barrage on an unprecedented scale. South African artillery units alone fired 62 000 rounds of 25 pounder ammunition during the night.

The massive artillery barrage cleared the way for a decisive infantry and armoured assault on the German positions around El Alamein, with 1 SA Division one of four attacking divisions.

The 8th Army's El Alamein offensive succeeded beyond expectations, and by the beginning of November, Rommel's forces were in a headlong retreat from which they were never to recover. Tobruk was re-captured on 12 November, and by month end the German forces had been cleared from Libya.

With its services no longer required in North Africa, 1 SA Division was returned to the Union at the beginning of 1943.

The price of victory had been high, however. Total South African casualties in North Africa were 23 625, including 14 147 POW's and 2 104 soldiers killed in action.

The Campaign in Madagascar: June—November 1942

South African forces played a limited part in the British invasion of Madagascar in mid 1942, de-

signed to forestall the very considerable risk of a Japanese invasion.

7 SA Infantry Brigade under Brig G.T. Senescall landed at the naval base of Diego Suarez on the northern tip of the island on 25 June. The Brigade moved into camp at Sakaramy and prepared defensive positions.

In September the SA Brigade took part in a large-scale operation aimed at capturing the southern half of the island from its Vichy French occupants. Although little serious opposition were encountered, topographical and climatic conditions were arduous and malaria casualties high.

The Vichy Governor surrendered on 2 November 1942 and the SA troops returned to the Union on 7 December 1942 having sustained a total of 18 casualties during the campaign.

Italy and the 6th SA Armoured Division: April 1944—May 1945

The last major theatre of operations in which South Africans participated during the Second World War was the Allied campaign to reconquer Italy.

On 1 February 1943 the first-ever SA Armoured Division – the 6th SA Armoured Division – was formed in the Union under the command of Maj Gen W.H. Evered Poole. Although few people knew it at the time, the Division had been specifically formed to take part in the invasion of Italy which was being planned by the Allied High Command.

After a few weeks of intensive preparation at Zonderwater, the Division moved to Hay Paddock near Pietermaritzburg in early April to wait for a convoy north. On 18 and 19 April 1943, the Division set sail for Egypt, where it was to undergo training in preparation for the Italian campaign.

On arrival at Suez, the Division was transported to a camp which had been especially pitched at Khatatba, some 60 miles from Cairo. For the next twelve months 6 SA Armoured Division engaged in an exhaustive training programme designed to bring its various units to the peak of battle efficiency for the difficult task which lay ahead.

Finally, nearly a year after arriving in Egypt, the Division crossed to Italy in April 1944 and concentrated in the Altamura – Matera-Gravina area. The conditions facing the Division were very different from those which 1 and 2 SA Divisions had encountered in North Africa. It would have to

operate in mountainous country ideally suited to defensive warfare, and attack positions manned by a skilful and stubborn enemy. In summer, rain and mud, and in winter snow and intense cold would impede mobile warfare, while there was little scope for turning movements. This type of war would make heavy demands on all arms, but particularly the Engineers.

The Division remained in the Matera area until late May, when it was ordered forward to Caserta and from there to the battle area around Cassino.

The 6th SA Armoured Division in fact arrived at Cassino just too late to participate in one of the biggest and most decisive battles of the Italian campaign. Since January the US 5th and British 8th Armies had been trying in vain to capture the German positions around Monte Cassino, which were frustrating the Allied advance on Rome. Monte Cassino was an imposing peak of the southern Appenines, and it dominated access to the Liri Valley, which was the only viable route through the Appenines which the Allies could follow to Rome. As it happened, just as the 6th Armoured Division was being readied for action, the German positions at Cassino were overrun in a massive Allied offensive which had achieved all its objectives by 24 May.

The capture of Cassino opened the way to Rome for the Allies, and the entire 6 SA Armoured Division, with 11 Armoured Brigade leading the way, was ordered forward to assist in the capture of the city. After a rapid advance against relatively light opposition, the South Africans entered Rome on 6 June. The fall of Rome, however, did not by any means mean the end of the fighting in Italy. In fact the next two months were to see some of the sternest fighting of the campaign to date, as the Germans met an all-out Allied drive towards Florence with dogged resistance.

Cellano, en route to Florence, was captured on 10 June after a particularly fierce battle in which the 11 SA Armoured Brigade performed particularly heroically.

Eventually, after a long hard slog of eight weeks through Cellano, Orvieto, Chiuse, Sinalunga and finally along the Divisional "Green Route" through Radda, Mercatale, and across the Greve River, the 6th SA Armoured Division entered Florence on 4 August in the vanguard of the Allied advance.

The capture of Florence afforded the Division a well-earned rest lasting six weeks. The respite was used to good effect with the Division's equipment and vehicles being stripped and overhauled en

masse. In the meantime congratulatory messages were received from, among others, the C in C General Sir Harold Alexander and the Army Commander Lt Gen Sir Oliver Leese.

There remained much to be done, however. The Germans were still firmly entrenched along the Arno River and the formidable Gothic Line extending from the West Coast of Italy across to the Adriatic. 6 SA Armoured Division was given the task of pushing the Germans back on the Gothic Line behind Pistoia. For this part of the campaign, the Armoured units were used as mobile reserves reinforcing the SA Division's 12 Motor Brigade and 24 Guards Brigade. In fact often during the following months the armoured units were forced to adopt the role of "infanteers", as the German Gothic Line ran for much of its length along the northern Appenines range which was so mountainous as to be quite unsuitable for tank warfare. In addition, the onset of winter and the accompanying bad weather further restricted the use of tanks.

Nevertheless, despite these natural handicaps, the 6th SA Armoured Division acquitted itself admirably throughout the grim winter as the Allied forces relentlessly rolled back the Gothic Line along the Appenines. By the end of winter, the Allied forces stood poised to make the decisive break-through along the remainder of the Gothic Line which would lead to the capture of Bologna, the crossing of the Po and the eventual collapse of German resistance in NE Italy.

The breakthrough came in April 1945, when on the 14th and 15th the Allies launched a massive and decisive offensive against the German positions in the Mt Sole and Caprara areas. On 18 April the entire German front started collapsing. Only now, in the final weeks of the war, was 6 SA Armoured Division allowed to revert to its true armour role as the Allied forces exploited the German collapse and raced across NE Italy in the direction of Venice in pursuit of the fleeing Germans. By the beginning of May the German resistance in Italy had effectively ceased, and a last-minute dash by 6 SA Armoured Division to Milan in NE Italy proved unnecessary as on arrival on 2 May the South Africans were informed of the unconditional surrender of all German forces in Italy.

With the war in Europe officially over, the first units of the 6th Armoured Division began returning home towards the end of May.

Total UDF battle casualties in Italy amounted to 5 176 of whom 753 were killed.

The SAAF and SANF contribution in the Second World War

Although the vast majority of South Africans who participated in the Second World War served with the ground forces, the SA Air and Naval Forces made an extremely important contribution to the UDF's total war effort.

The advent of war in 1939 had caught the young SA Air Force unprepared for large-scale operational deployment despite the attempts which had been made in 1937 and 1938 to expand and modernize the Air Force. At the outbreak of war the SAAF's "front-line" operational aircraft consisted of 4 Hurricanes, 1 Blenheim and 1 Battle, while it also possessed 63 obsolete Hartbees biplanes and a few equally obsolete Tutors, Wapiti's, Harts, Hinds, Furies and Audaxes – a total of 104 serviceable aircraft.

With regard to personnel, the SAAF comprised a total full-time strength of 160 officers, 35 officer cadets and 1 400 other ranks.

The first priority was thus to train more personnel and acquire more aircraft. Within weeks of the outbreak of war, new flying schools were established at Pretoria, Germiston, Bloemfontein and Baragwanath, while a Training Command under Col W.T.B. Tasker was established to oversee the SAAF's overall training programme. The real breakthrough came in August 1940, however, with the establishment of the Joint Air Training Scheme (JATS) under which RAF, SAAF and other Allied air and ground crews were trained at 38 South African-based air schools. Under this scheme the SAAF began to burgeon and blossom, and by September 1941 the total number of military aircraft in the Union had increased to 1 709, while the personnel strength had leapt to 31 204, 956 of whom were pilots. The JATS was ultimately to pass out a total of 33 347 aircrew during its five year existence, of whom 12 221 were SAAF.

On the operational front, the SAAF provided a valuable protection service for Allied shipping along South Africa's coastlines from the very outset of the war. By the end of the war in August 1945, a total of some 15 000 coastal reconnaissance sorties had been flown by the SAAF along SA's coastlines.

It was in East Africa, however, that the SAAF's exploits began to hit the headlines in earnest. Equipped with a few squadrons of Gladiators, Hurricanes, Furies, Hartebeeste and JU86's, the SAAF took on an Italian air component comprising nearly 300 modern aircraft. By the end of the

campaign, nevertheless, the SAAF pilots had accounted for 71 Italian aircraft in the air and many more on the ground. In addition, they had destroyed innumerable railways, convoys and supply dumps in interdiction sorties in support of the ground forces. SAAF losses during the East African campaign were 79 pilots and aircrew killed and 5 missing.

In North Africa, the SAAF fighter, bomber and reconnaissance squadrons encountered a more tenacious and skilled opponent in the form of the Luftwaffe, while the climate and conditions were even worse than those they had experienced in East Africa. For all this, the SAAF squadrons played a major role in enabling the Allied "Desert Air Force" to attain total air superiority over Rommel's Air Force by the beginning of 1942.

The SAAF's single most memorable feat in North Africa was probably the "Boston shuttle service", during which 18 aircraft of 12 and 24 Squadrons showered hundreds of tons of bombs on the Afrika Korps as it relentlessly pushed the 8th Army back towards Egypt during the first half of 1942. It was largely due to these bombing raids – three a day for many weeks on end – that Rommel's advance finally ground to halt near Alamein in mid 1942. After the battle of Alamein, too, the SAAF's North African squadrons played a vital role in harassing the retreating German forces. Between April 1941 and May 1943, the SAAF, with a maximum of 11 squadrons operational, flew 33 991 sorties and destroyed 342 enemy aircraft.

By the time the Italian campaign had begun in earnest in early 1944, the SAAF had truly come of age. Indeed, it was the SAAF which played the dominant role in the Allied air operations over Italy as the Allies began to withdraw RAF aircrews for deployment in support of Operation Overlord. By this stage, indeed, the SAAF consisted of no fewer than 35 operational squadrons with 33 types of aircraft, operated and maintained by 45 000 men and women.

The SAAF's most noteworthy achievement in the air operations over Europe was the efforts of No 2 SAAF Wing, operating from Italy, to supply the Warsaw resistance movement in August and September 1944. Night after night the Liberators of 31 and 34 Squadron winged their way over 1 700 miles of some of the most heavily defended German occupied territory in Europe before streaking in over Warsaw at 200 ft to drop their supplies. The cost to the SAAF of the abortive "Warsaw Concerto" was tragically high in men and machines, but the daring and skill of the

pilots involved nevertheless earned the SAAF the lasting respect and admiration of the Polish resistance fighters.

By war end the SAAF had flown a total of 82 401 missions since the commencement of hostilities in East Africa. During the same period the SAAF lost 2 420 of its members killed or missing.

Like the SAAF, the South African Naval Forces were caught quite unprepared by the outbreak of war in September 1939. In fact, the Union did not possess a formal Navy at all in 1939, as it will be recalled that the South African Naval Service had been disbanded in 1934 owing to severe cutbacks in the Defence budget.

With a view to redressing the situation, the Seaward Defence Force (SDF) was established on 15 January 1940 with Rear-Admiral G.W. Hallifax, RN (Rtd) as Director. Hallifax was tragically killed shortly afterwards in an air crash, and was succeeded by Capt (later Commodore) James Dalgleish, OBE.

The first task facing the new force was to acquire ships and train men as rapidly as possible to enable it to carry out the defence commitments which had been allocated to it in respect of South African waters. These consisted of minesweeping and anti-submarine duties along the South African coastline, as well as the setting up of an Examination Service and Port War Signal Systems.

Recruits came forward readily during 1940, principally volunteers from the RNVR (SA) Division and civilian quarters. As the only ships that were available were trawlers and whalers, little time was lost in converting these at the various South African ports for war duties. Within months of the establishment of the SDF, some 14 vessels had been converted and readied for service.

The new force was soon called upon to carry out the arduous, difficult and dangerous task of clearing an enemy minefield laid along the main shipping route off Cape Agulhas. The operation began in May 1940, and continued at intervals for over 18 months. The Mine Clearance Flotilla also carried out operations with units of the RN from time to time in other areas such as Madagascar and the Indian Ocean.

The activities of the SDF were not only confined to South African waters. Late in 1940, in response to an urgent Admiralty request, four South African anti-submarine vessels left for the Mediterranean to join the British fleet in the area. The 22nd A/S Flotilla, as it were designated, arrived in Alexandria on 11 January 1941 and was

almost immediately put to work on protection work along the exposed sea-route to Tobruk.

Although inexperienced in the type of work required, the Flotilla's personnel tackled the task with energy and determination in the face of incessant air attack. On 11 February 1941, HMSAS Southern Floe was lost while on patrol after striking a mine, with only one survivor.

Despite the loss of a second ship, the minesweeper HMSAS Parktown in an action off Tobruk on 21 June 1942, the number of South African ships in the Mediterranean steadily increased from 1942 onwards, reaching a peak of 4 A/S vessels, 8 minesweepers and a salvage vessel (HMSAS Gamtoos).

On 1 August 1942 the Seaward Defence Force and the RNVR (SA Division) were amalgamated under the designation of the South African Naval Forces (SANF), and all officers and men of the latter body serving with the RN automatically became SANF seconded personnel.

In October 1942, the Germans launched widespread submarine attacks upon the shipping routes round the Cape. Thirteen merchant ships were sunk in the first four days of the offensive. The newly formed SANF was consequently called upon to provide a rescue service for the survivors of the torpedoed ships, without however relaxing the patrol vigils at the entrances to South African ports. Later, when the convoy system was introduced in 1943 between Durban and Cape Town, SANF A/S vessels were detached to take part in escort duties in company with RN auxiliary trawlers and corvettes.

In the Mediterranean, in the meanwhile, the SANF was to lose a further two vessels during the course of operations in 1944 and 1945. These were the minesweepers HMSAS Bever, which was sunk by a mine off Crete on 30 November 1944, and HMSAS Treern which hit a mine in the Aegean on 12 January 1945.

The SANF received a tremendous psychological and material boost during the closing stages of the war in the form of an Admiralty offer to supply it with three of the latest frigates. The first of these, HMSAS Good Hope, was commissioned in the UK on 9 November 1944 and the second (HMSAS Natal) on 1 March 1945. The third, HMSAS Transvaal, arrived in Cape Town on 28 July 1945. HMSAS Natal had the distinction of sinking a U-Boat in British waters on the 14th March while on trials – the only ship on record in the Allied navies to achieve this feat!

When the Second World War ended, the SANF had 1436 officers and 8896 O/R's on strength, including 2937 personnel who had been seconded to the RN. This was a far cry indeed from the 74 officers and 358 men with which the SDF had been founded in January 1940. The SANF's losses during the war totalled 338.

Statistical summary of South Africans who served in the Second World War

In all, 334324 full-time volunteers of all races served with the UDF during the Second World War. Of these, 211193 were Whites, 45892 were Coloureds and Indians, and 77239 blacks.

The total number of South Africans who lost their lives during the conflict was 12046.

POST WAR REORGANIZATION, 1946–1959

Demobilization and Reorganization: 1946–1956

As had been the case after the Great War, the UDF's immediate priority after the Second World War was to dismantle the enormous war machine which had been assembled during the war years. This involved in the first instance the demobilization of the thousands of full and part-time volunteers who had enlisted in the UDF, as well as the disbandment of the numerous volunteer units which had been specifically established for the duration of the war.

The Ministry of Defence and UDF High Command however, was careful not to repeat the mistake which had been made after the Great War of allowing the UDF to run down completely in terms of manpower and armaments.

Thus even after the demobilization process had been completed in 1946, it was decided to establish and maintain two complete Divisions in the UDF, namely 1 SA Infantry Division and 6 SA Armoured Division, consisting of 1, 2, 3, 12, and 13 (CF) Infantry Brigades and the (PF) 11 Armoured Brigade. The Divisions were formally established with effect 1 July 1948, but with the exception of 11 Brigade they were disbanded on 1 November 1949, chiefly as a result of difficulties in obtaining volunteer recruits to man the CF Brigades. 11 Armoured Brigade was itself disbanded on 1 October 1953.

The UDF's difficulties in obtaining sufficient

volunteers to fill the ranks of the ACF in the postwar period led to the decision to introduce the ballot system of conscription in 1953. The 1912 Defence Act had provided for a system of selection by ballot to compel citizens to undergo military training, but the system had never been implemented and until 1952 the ACF had been comprised entirely of volunteers. The new system was so designed that the percentage of citizens selected from each magisterial district throughout the Union would, as far as possible, be the same. It was also decided that the length of ACF training should be increased to three months continuous training during the first year and 21 days during each of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th years.

In 1953 a committee was set up under the chairmanship of Brig H.B. Klopper to consider the reallocation and distribution of ACF units in order to ensure their more even geographical and language distribution in relation to the manpower made available by the introduction of the ballot system. Based on their findings, the committee recommended that some English-speaking units be converted to Afrikaans medium units, while other regiments should be amalgamated or contracted. Despite representations made by some of the units affected, the reorganization went ahead with effect 1 January 1954.

In 1956 a further reorganization was made necessary by the considerable increase in the number of citizens balloted for training in some areas. The UDF was accordingly reorganized to consist of 32 Afrikaans medium units (including 6 field regiments, 2 medium regiments, 3 LAA regiments, 5 infantry regiments, 5 tank units and 4 armoured car units) and 20 English medium units (3 field regiments, 1 medium regiment, 1 AA regiment, 10 infantry regiments, 4 tank units and 1 armoured car unit). The changes were implemented with effect 22 September 1956.

On the level of command and control, the post of DCGS was transformed in 1948 into that of Director General Land Forces (DGLF), and in 1951 the Directors of Land, Air and Naval Forces were re-designated Army, Air and Naval and Marine Chiefs of Staff respectively.

In 1953 an Inspector General was introduced into the General Staff immediately below the CGS. Operations, training, mobilization, intelligence and general administration were the responsibilities of the three services' Chiefs of Staff, while the AG, QMG and Surgeon-General retained responsibility in their particular specialized fields.

In 1956 the post of CGS was redesignated Commandant General.

The decade after the Second World War saw several other important developments in the UDF worthy of mention. Among these were the redesignation of the SA Naval Forces to the SA Navy in January 1951, the establishment of the South African Marine Corps on 1 July 1951 and its later disestablishment on 1 October 1955, the establishment of Army, Air and Navy Gymnasiums between 1949 and 1951, and the establishment of the Military Academy on 1 April 1950.

In another significant development, the Commando's and Rifle Associations, which had previously been organized on a rather loose footing, were formally reorganized and established in 1949 as Rifle Commando's.

The Berlin Airlift and Korea

In terms of active participation in operations the decade after the Second World War was relatively quiet as far as the Army and Navy was concerned, but the SA Air Force distinguished itself in two major operational theatres during this period.

In 1948, against the background of increasingly strained East/West relationships, the Soviets cut the overland communications between West Berlin and its food supplies in West Germany in an attempt to force the Western powers out of West Berlin. As a result all supplies had to be airlifted into West Berlin – no mean feat as the daily requirements of the 2,5 million West Berliners was in the region of 1 250 tons of food and 3 500 tons coal per day.

In the event, the SAAF was called upon to contribute to the year long Anglo-American airlift to West Berlin by way of supplying 20 aircrews for the daily shuttle service.

The SAAF crews, after intensive training at the RAF's base at Bassingbourne, flew no less than 1 240 missions in RAF Dakota's out of the German city of Lübeck during the airlift. By 15 April 1949 when the blockade was lifted by the Soviets, the South Africans had airlifted 4 133 tons of supplies into West Berlin.

Just a year after the SAAF's notable contribution towards beating the blockade of West Berlin, the SAAF's services were once again called upon to assist the Western and UN Powers against Communist aggression.

This time the scene of operations was Korea, where Communist North Korea had invaded the

Republic of (South) Korea on 25 June 1950 in overwhelming force.

When the United Nations decided to intervene militarily at the US's request on the side of the South Koreans, the Union Government, as a founder member of the World body, wasted little time in offering the services of No 2 Squadron to the UN forces. The offer was gratefully accepted, and on 27 September 49 officers and 157 men of 2 Squadron, all volunteers, left for Johnson Air Base in Tokyo prior to deployment in Korea.

After a hasty conversation to the American F-51 Mustang, the "Flying Cheetahs" were deployed in November 1950 to K-24 airbase near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang as part of the USAF's 6002nd Tactical Support Wing.

The "Flying Cheetah" pilots were immediately employed in flying close-support missions for the advancing UN forces, but when the Red Chinese intervened in the conflict on a massive scale at the end of November, the UN forces were forced to retreat, and in early December the Squadron was necessarily evacuated further south to K-13 airfield near Suwon.

After yet another forced move south to K-10 airbase at Chinhae, where the Squadron came under the command of the USAF 18th Fighter Bomber wing, the South African aircrews got down to the arduous task of flying almost continuous close support missions against the advancing Chinese armies. Despite primitive conditions at K-10 and appalling weather, the pilots of No 2 Squadron succeeded in inflicting heavy losses on the enemy troops and transport.

By March 1951 the Chinese offensive had been halted, and Gen Stratemeyer, Commander of the Far Eastern Air Force, now ordered his subordinate air units to concentrate their efforts against the enemy's supply lines.

For the rest of the war, accordingly, most of 2 Squadron's efforts were directed at maintaining the interdiction campaign against the Communist's logistic system. This was no easy task, for targets were difficult to identify in a land of mountains, gorges, deep ravines and narrow valleys, mud flats and rice paddies. The problems were compounded by the inaccuracy of the available maps and the similarity of many place names. In addition, the enemy proved himself adept at camouflage and skilled in repair work.

Despite these handicaps, however, No 2 Squadron achieved a string of quite exceptional results during 1951 and 1952, operating first from K-10

and later K-13, K-46 and K-55 airfields. Unfortunately, however, the Squadron's intensive involvement in offensive sorties on a daily basis resulted in inevitable and relatively heavy casualties, chiefly owing to anti-aircraft fire.

Towards the end of 1952 the Squadron received the news that it was to convert to F-86F Sabre jets, and after several weeks of conversion flying at K-55 airbase, the South Africans began flying operational sorties in the new Sabres in February 1953.

The Squadron achieved immediate successes in the interdiction campaign against the North in their Sabres, but late in May the Communists launched a late offensive and the Squadron's role reverted once again to the flying of close-support missions.

The Communist offensive in fact proved to be a last – gasp effort, as the negotiations at Panmunjon were finally reaching agreement on the details of an armistice. On 23 July 1953 offensive operations against the North ceased, and four days later an Armistice was signed ending the War.

From November 1950 to July 1953, 2 Squadron's pilots had flown 12 405 sorties, 10 373 of them in Mustangs. Of the 95 Mustangs which saw service with the Squadron, 74 were lost in action or in accidents, which were numerous in the appalling flying conditions, and of the Sabres, 5 were lost. All told, 826 South Africans had seen service in Korea, and of these 34 pilots had been killed and 8 captured, and 2 ground crew had died. The Squadrons accomplishments, however, far outweighed these losses, for by July 1953 the unit could confirm the destruction of 18 tanks, 160 field guns, 120 anti-aircraft guns, 615 vehicles, 4 locomotives and 200 railway trucks, 46 rail and road bridges, 49 petrol and oil dumps, 243 other supply dumps and 3 021 buildings. The Squadron had also cut the enemy railway lines in 472 places.

Wide and valuable experience in operational flying had also been gained by many South African personnel, and in fact the Squadron continued operational training with the Sabres after hostilities had ended. It was only on 29 October 1953 that the last of the South Africans left Korea for home.

Consolidation: 1957–1959

The period 1957–1959 can be characterized as a time of consolidation for the Defence Force, during which the post-war process of reorganization and change was carried through to its logical conclusion.

The most significant event to occur during the period in question as far as the Defence Force was concerned was the passing of the Defence Act, No 44 of 1957. The Defence Act consolidated and improved the provisions of the 1912 Defence Act and its amendments of 1922 and 1932. Among its more important provisions were: the changing of the designation Union Defence Force to South African Defence Force (SADF); the re-designation of Active Citizen Force and South African Permanent Force to Citizen Force and Permanent Force respectively; the incorporation of the Commando's into the Defence Force and the exclusion of the reserves; the promulgation of emergency regulations; the establishment of South African Decorations; and the introduction of new uniforms and badges for the Army, Air Force and Navy.

The main thrust of the 1957 Defence Act was thus to legislate a series of changes which gave the Defence Force a more specifically South-African character than had hitherto been the case.

The year 1957 was also significant for another important event affecting the Defence Force, namely the official handing over of the British naval base at Simonstown to the Union of South Africa. On 2 April the base was handed over to the South African Navy in terms of an earlier agreement concluded between the South African Minister of Defence, Mr F.C. Erasmus, and the British Minister of Defence, the Rt Hon Selwyn Lloyd. The widely publicized ceremony was attended by, among others, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Earl of Selkirk.

The Simonstown Agreement gave the South African Navy total and permanent control of the naval base in exchange for certain privileges regarding the use of the base which were accorded the Royal Navy. The Agreement also made provision for the purchase from the UK of six (later reduced to four) Type 12 frigates, 10 coastal minesweepers and 4 seaward defence boats by the SA Navy.

The Simonstown Agreement initiated an era of unprecedented expansion and modernization in the SA Navy. Among the most important administrative changes which followed the Agreement was the move of the Naval Chief of Staff and Naval HQ from Simonstown to Pretoria.

For the rest, the years 1948 and 1959 proved relatively uneventful as far as the newly re-designated SADF was concerned. The most important feature of the period was a further re-structuring of the CF, involving a reduction in the overall number of units and certain changes in their role.

The first phase of the re-structuring, which had been planned in 1958, had been implemented by January 1959, and the second phase was due for completion by February the following year. The reorganization left the CF with 51 regiments and 2 sub-units. Of these, 22 regiments and 1 sub-unit were Afrikaans and 16 regiments and 1 sub-unit English medium, with the remaining units dual-medium.

MODERNIZATION AND EXPANSION: 1960–1970

In the 1960's South Africa was subjected to a process of increasing isolation from the international community. At the time when South Africa became a Republic in 1961 numerous African states were in the process of achieving independence, and these states began to call for an arms embargo against the new Republic. The threat of Communism and Communist inspired insurgency in Africa also appeared to be growing.

It was against this background of growing isolation and an increased external threat that a decision was made by the Government and SADF High Command to drastically increase the size, and improve the readiness and efficiency of the SADF.

On 8 December 1962 the Commandant-General (CG) approved in principle a programme for the expansion of the SA Army, and in 1964 a large number of additional CF units were established to ensure that sufficient units would be available in a support role in the event of mobilization. On 4 May 1965 CG approved in principle the establishment of 51 additional CF units in cadre form with effect 1 April 1965, and the conversion of 16 of these cadre units to functioning units in 1966.

Apart from increasing the size of the CF, steps were also taken to improve the combat readiness and efficiency of the SADF. In January 1962 a system of Full-time Force (FTF) units was introduced, whereby a certain number of units were selected from the various services and corps and placed on a more or less permanent standby footing in case of trouble. The FTF was an attempt to overcome the disadvantages of the CF with its long periods of inactivity and complicated and lengthy mobilization procedures. The FTF organization was disbanded at the end of 1967 on the eve of the introduction of the new National Service system.

By the early 1960's it had also become apparent to the SADF High Command that the entire

nature of warfare was changing, with a move away from conventional warfare to various forms of unconventional warfare and insurgency. The decision was taken, accordingly, to establish 6 Combat Groups with the specific task of executing unconventional warfare. The first four, namely 11–24 Combat Groups, were established on 1 January 1961, and these were followed by 15 and 16 Combat Groups on 1 April 1963. With the re-evaluation of the role of Commands, the Combat Groups were disbanded towards the end of the decade.

As far as conventional formations were concerned, 7 SA Division and 17–19 Brigades were established on 1 April 1965. Difficulties with manning levels saw the disestablishment of 7 SA Division on 1 November 1967 and its replacement by Army Task Force (HQ) and 16 Brigade.

The ambitious plans for the expansion of the CF ran into serious difficulties in the mid 1960's as a result of shortages of manpower. The ballot system had by this stage become an inappropriate means of providing the CF with manpower, being too rigid and too limited in its use of the available manpower resources.

In 1965, owing to the shortcomings of the ballot system, the Groenewoud Committee was set up to consider alternative forms of military service. It was felt that the ballot system was in a sense unfair as it was one of fortuitous discrimination. Practice had shown that except through mobilization it was not possible under the ballot system to build up the existing CF units to their full approved strength, still less was it possible to establish new units in proportion to peace time needs.

The recommendations of the Groenewoud Committee led to the introduction on 1 January 1968 of a new national service system whereby all medically fit male citizens were eligible for military service in the year in which they became 18. Service in the CF was increased from 4 years to 10 years and initial continuous training was extended from a maximum of 9 months to a maximum of 12 months.

The sweeping changes affecting the organization of the SADF during the period in question were accompanied by a major re-structuring of the SADF High Command.

In 1966 the General Staff was replaced by a Supreme Command based on the principle of corporate leadership and comprising the Commandant General, Commander Maritime Defence and Chief of the Navy, GOC Joint Combat Forces, Chief of Staff Army, and Chief of Staff Air Force.

At the same time it was decided to abolish the civilian post of Secretary for Defence. The Commandant General now assumed full responsibility as Departmental Head with the additional title of Secretary of Defence, and the Comptroller's section was established to take over much of the work of the Defence Secretariat.

The rapid expansion of the Defence Force made further organizational changes necessary by 1968. To the four members of the Supreme Command, under the Commandant General, was added a fifth, the Chief of the Defence Staff, to serve as chief of a co-ordinating staff group. In the supporting services Chief of Defence Force Administration replaced the Adjudant-General, Chief of Logistics Services took over from QMG and Technical Services, and a Director of Military Intelligence was appointed. In addition the titles of the services Chiefs of Staff were altered to Chief of the Army, Chief of the Navy and Chief of the Air Force. These posts of the Chiefs of the services were at the same time upgraded and they were provided with their own Chiefs of Staff for administrative purposes.

By 1970 further organizational changes had been made and the Chief of Defence Force Administration was added to the advisory body of the Supreme Command. His function was to deal with all high-level matters of personnel, general administration, efficiency studies and quartermaster's matters. Directly responsible to him were Director General Personnel, Director General Administration, Director General Management System and Quartermaster General.

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE: 1971–1975

By the early 1970's the isolation and external threat facing the RSA, which had first been perceived during the 1960's, had intensified and crystallized. By this stage the Republic's neighbouring states to the north were being subjected to a deliberate Communist-sponsored campaign of destabilization, while the first incidents of terror infiltration into SWA and the Republic of South Africa itself had begun to manifest themselves.

The increasing conventional and unconventional threat against the Republic forced further major reorganizations affecting the SADF.

With effect 1 September 1972 Army Task Force HQ was re-designated Headquarters 7 South African Infantry Division. Following an in-depth study of methods to promote the effective func-

tioning of the SA Army, it was decided in 1974 to organize the Army's conventional force into two divisions, 7 SA Infantry Division (71–73 Motorized Brigades) and 8 SA Armoured Division (81 Armoured Brigade, 82 Mechanized Brigade and 84 Motorized Brigade). The HQ's of the two divisions were established with effect 1 August 1974, and they form the basis of the organization of South Africa's conventional forces to this day.

Alongside their conventional role, meanwhile, the CF and commando's were re-organized to play a more effective part in counter-insurgency (COIN) operations. In 1975, following the re-evaluation of the role of commands which had taken place the previous decade, the planning and conduct of COIN operations was decentralized to the territorial commands. Each officer commanding a territorial command was given responsibility for measures to prevent insurgency as well as to conduct active COIN operations within his territorial boundaries. For this purpose the commando's in his area as well as a number of specially allocated CF units were placed under his direct command, thus forming an independent COIN force.

In an attempt to boost manpower levels, a system of voluntary extension of National Service was introduced in 1974.

On the level of the SADF's High Command, the Supreme Command was replaced in 1972 by a Defence Staff Council. Membership of this body comprised all the members of the now defunct Supreme Command with the addition of the Chief of Defence Force Administration.

By 1975 the posts of GOC Joint Combat Forces and Commander maritime Defence had been abolished, and their responsibilities taken over by the three Service chiefs. This removed an intermediate level of command and brought the fighting services under the direct command of the Chief of the SADF.

The responsibilities of Chief of Defence Force Administration, in the meantime, were divided between various staff divisions each with its own Chief of Staff.

By 1975 there were four of these Staff divisions, namely Personnel, Intelligence, Operations and Logistics.

In the event, the re-organization and modernization of the SADF which had taken place during the 1960's and early 1970 was soon put to the test. In 1973 the SADF had taken over responsibility for the defence of SWA from the police, and during the succeeding months the SA Army became

involved in combat operations (against SWAPO) for the first time since the Second World War.

In 1975 the operational efficiency and combat readiness of the SADF was tested to the full when the SADF was ordered to intervene in the Angolan Civil War on the side of the nationalist movements fighting the Communist-backed MPLA. The prime objective of the RSA's limited intervention in Angola was to prevent the Civil War from spilling over into SWA itself.

Despite massive deliveries of sophisticated weaponry by the Soviets to the MPLA and the direct intervention of several thousand Cuban troops, the SADF contingent in Angola – numbering no more than 2000 – acquitted itself exceptionally well, scoring several major victories over the numerically superior and often better equipped MPLA/Cubans.

THE CONTEMPORARY SA DEFENCE FORCE: 1976–1987

The arms boycott and the rearmament of the SADF: 1976–1987

Despite the impressive performance of the SADF against the Cubans and MPLA, the operations in Angola had exposed certain deficiencies in the South African weaponry and equipment, much of which was of Second World War vintage. This was especially true of the SADF's artillery, which had been badly outranged by the Cuban's Soviet-supplied artillery and rocket systems.

Part of the reason for the relative obsolescence of much of the SADF's weaponry at this time was the fact that the RSA had been subjected to an informal arms boycott by the great majority of countries in the international community since the early 1960's, including the UK which had first imposed an arms boycott on the Republic (in the 1960's) and then abrogated the Simonstown Agreement in the early 1970's.

The international arms boycott against the Republic acquired substantive form in November 1977, when the UN Security Council voted a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa.

The main effect of the SADF's experiences during the Angolan Civil War and the UN resolution of November 1977 was in fact to provide a dramatic boost to the Republic's own armaments industry.

The development of South Africa's own armaments industry had commenced in earnest as early

as the mid 1960's with the establishment of the Armaments Production Board, the forerunner of the Armaments Corporation of South Africa (Armcor). Armcor had concentrated initially on the production of small arms and a variety of ammunition, but by the late 1970's it had become clear that the Republic would have to strive for virtual self-sufficiency in the development and production of its own armaments if it was to continue to successfully defend itself.

The result of the above circumstances was a spectacular period of growth in South Africa's armaments industry, almost unparalleled in the history of armaments development. During the 10 years following the mandatory UN arms embargo, Armcor succeeded in supplying the SADF with a range of sophisticated weaponry across the board which was the equal of, and in many instances superior to, the best weaponry available anywhere in the world. Highlights especially deserving of mention include: the development of a range of Infantry Fighting vehicles/armoured personnel carriers (Ratel), the G5 and G6 155 mm artillery and 127 mm Valkiri rocket systems, and the SAMIL range of military transport vehicles for the army; the development of the Kukri heat seeking missile and Cheetah fighter aircraft for the Air Force and the design and development of a missile strike craft for the Navy.

Today, thanks to the remarkable achievements of the South African armaments industry in the decade since the imposition of the UN arms boycott, the SADF is one of the best equipped and most advanced fighting forces in the world. The future looks equally rosy, moreover, as the South African arms industry has now reached the stage where it is able to export its products, the proceeds of which will fund the necessary research and development effort for the next generation of weapons and equipment.

Operational highlights: 1976–1987

During the period immediately following the end of the Angolan Civil War, the SWAPO terrorist onslaught against SWA/Namibia intensified, and the SADF dedicated itself to defending the people of SWA from the intimidation and terrorist tactics of SWAPO.

At first the SADF was content with a passive defence of the territory, but beginning in 1978 the SADF changed to a more offensive strategy involving cross-border preemptive raids against SWAPO bases in Angola. This was done in the

realization that the only way to defeat SWAPO was to strike at the organization's rear bases, thus disrupting the terrorists' logistic communications and other facilities even before they entered SWA/Namibia.

The upshot of the change in strategy was a series of spectacularly successful attacks by highly mobile SADF Task Forces against SWAPO bases in Angola between 1978 and 1983. The most important operations were: REINDEER (May 1978), SCEPTIC (June 1980), PROTEA (August–September 1981), DAISY (October–November 1981) SUPER (March 1982) and ASKARI (December 1983). During operation PROTEA, the largest mechanized operation by the SADF since the Second World War, large quantities of sophisticated armaments were captured and destroyed and the enemy's entire logistic system in southern Angola destroyed.

The success of the SADF's offensive policy vis SWAPO forced the terrorist organization's main supporter, the MPLA regime in Luanda, to conclude a treaty with the RSA in 1984 involving a phased withdrawal of SADF troops from Angolan soil in exchange for an undertaking by the MPLA to cease actively supporting SWAPO. The MPLA Government later reneged on its promise, but by 1987 the SWA Territory Force and the SADF were unquestionably winning the war against the SWAPO insurgents, who were by this stage a spent force.

The period in question also saw an increase in the incidence of incursion into the Republic itself by ANC terrorists. The SADF was consequently forced to attack and bomb ANC bases and HQ's in Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe on several occasions between 1981 and 1987. Without exception, the SADF operations against the ANC targets achieved their objectives.

The operational experience gained by the SADF during its unconventional operations during the last decade has transformed it into one of the most effective and efficient counter-insurgency forces in the world today. At the same time, the conventional aspect of the SADF's combat readiness has by no means been neglected, and the SADF's conventional forces are today trained and equipped to repel any foreseeable conventional threat against the Republic.

Organizational Changes: 1975–1987

The constantly escalating threat, both external and internal, to the Republic's security during the last decade necessitated further organizational and

structural changes designed to improve the SADF's level of combat readiness and efficiency.

In view of the critical need for additional manpower in the SADF, the first continuous period of National Service was increased from 12 months to a period not exceeding 24 months in January 1978. The previous system of voluntary extension introduced in 1974, which had not been particularly successful, was phased out and the increased period of service applied retrospectively to the January and July 1977 intakes of National Servicemen. With effect from January 1983 the total service commitment period of CF personnel, subsequent to the completion of their National Service, was extended to 720 days over a period of 12 years.

With regard to the organizational structure of the SADF, the most significant changes to occur during the years 1976–1985 were the establishment of the fifth Staff Division, Chief of Staff Finance, in 1978 and the establishment of the South African Medical Services (SAMS) as the fourth arm of the services in July 1979. The first phase of a major organizational re-structuring of the SADF, following an intensive study into the structure of the SADF by a Commission under the chairmanship of Gen J.J. Geldenhuys during the early 1980's, was implemented in 1986 with the appointment of a Chief of Defence Force Staff, whose role, like his predecessor in the 1960's, was to co-ordinate the functions of the Staff Divisions and supporting services. A sixth Staff Division, viz Planning, was also created in 1986.

* Major W.A. Dorning, D Phil is attached to the SADF archives.

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