

UCT IN UNIFORM

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Introduction

1979 saw the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of an educational establishment in the Cape which was to develop into the University of Cape Town. To mark this anniversary the authors have presented a short history of UCT in uniform, highlighting the multifarious contributions made by UCT students and staff. This documented history clearly indicates the valuable contribution that not only UCT but all South African universities and their members have made in the past and will be called to make in the future. Changes in national service policy particularly with regard to urban commandos have resulted in the replacement of the UCT Regiment by the Cape Garrison Artillery. However, the loss of the UCT Regiment itself, certainly does not point to the end of UCT's contribution to the defence of South Africa. For at this very moment, in diverse regiments throughout South Africa, members of the UCT community are making a valiant contribution in answering the call of their country.

World War I

Although the South African College had a cadet detachment it was not until the outbreak of World War I on 4 August 1914 that military matters were taken up more seriously. Professor Beattie, then head of the Physics Department, was extremely keen that staff and students should serve where possible. A cartoon in a College Magazine at the time depicts him in uniform with an enormous sword drilling his staff colleagues. Another cartoon shows General Botha thanking Professor Beattie (again in uniform) for his interest in the war. In 1918, as Sir Carruthers Beattie, he became first Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town.

The conquest of German South West Africa was South Africa's first task. Among those who served in this campaign was A. v.d.s. Centlivres who was a private in the Dukes' and who subsequently became Chief Justice of the Union succeeding General Smuts in 1950 as Chancellor of the University.

In April 1915 a list of staff, students and old boys appeared with 102 names of those on active service. This was a fine record for a College which had only 469 students, 100 of whom were women. After the South West African Campaign the University again answered the call when troops were needed in German East Africa.

South Africans served in the main theatre of war, in France and Flanders, in our own Forces or as members of British units. Some were seconded to the British Army and commissioned. Ross Spyker, who studied engineering, was wounded whilst serving in the South African Infantry Brigade at Ypres, and later seconded to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. His brother, Edward, also an officer, was blown up in the *Galway Castle* when she was torpedoed. In later years R. Spyker became Chief engineer of the South African Railways.

Dr G. W. Lewis, son of Professor Lewis, served as a naval surgeon and was lost in *HMS Queen Mary* at the battle of Jutland. His brother, Capt C. R. Lewis, MC, was killed while serving with the Royal Berkshire Regiment. Later another old boy, Capt S. H. Hugo, was killed while serving with the same regiment.

Second Lieutenant William Hamilton, a Lecturer in Philosophy and a poet was commissioned in the Machine-gun Company of the Coldstream Guards and was killed during an attack 'in face of appalling mud and fierce resistance, at Houlthurst Forest' on 12 October 1917.²

No less than 560 names of those who had served or were serving were published in November 1917. Of these 61 had been killed in action or died on service and 46 wounded. Among them were 2 Distinguished Service Orders, 10 Military Crosses, 1 Distinguished Conduct Medal and 3 mentions in dispatches. Articles began to appear in the College Magazine about life at the front and in the trenches — quite a contrast to the strict censorship of World War II.

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Maj A. M. Miller, DSO made at least two recruiting visits to the College and University in search of volunteers who would be trained as Royal Flying Corps pilots in England. His most famous recruit was Capt A. W. B. Proctor, VC, DSO, MC and Bar, DFC who ranks as South Africa's most decorated war hero. When he joined the Royal Flying Corps Capt Proctor was an engineering student. His Victoria Cross citation states that he had 'proved himself conqueror over fifty-four foes, destroying twenty-two enemy machines, sixteen enemy kite balloons and driving down sixteen enemy aircraft completely out of control.'³ Although he survived the war, he was killed in a tragic flying accident on 21 June 1921. There is a bronze plaque by Mrs Marion Walgate in memory of Proctor near the platform in Hiddingh Hall. World War I ended on 11 November 1918 and some of the veterans of the 'war to end war' came home to study at UCT.



Capt A. W. B. Proctor, VC, DSO, MC and Bar, DFC who ranks as South Africa's most decorated war hero.

World War II

By 1939 war clouds had begun to gather and on 3 September South Africa was once more at war. This time there was a difference, as war was becoming more scientific and the value of educated men was appreciated. Students were thus encouraged to remain at university and complete their courses before volunteering for service. Nevertheless by the end of the first term



Decorations of Capt A. W. B. Proctor.

of 1940 no fewer than 74 students had joined the forces and the 1st South African Division left the country to attack Italian held Abyssinia in July-November 1940.

University Unit

In January and February 1941 it was decided to form a University of Cape Town Training Corps. The training of ten students and twelve staff members commenced at Pollsmoor under command of Prof E. Emmet who held the rank of Major with Captain A. D. Knott-Craig as adjutant. In July that year a group of medical students went to the Training Depot at Sonderwater but judging by their comments in *Varsity* they did not find the hard army life to their taste. A training spell for Engineers that year fared better. Other members of the unit specialised in signalling, anti-aircraft artillery, field surveying, flying, commando fighting, and armoured fighting vehicle training. Women students also served in the unit as searchlight operators.⁴ General Smuts, who was the Chancellor of the University, inspected the University Unit on 10 September that year.

During its peak periods there were some 400 members of the unit on strength and by June 1944 some 350 former members had volunteered for full-time war service. However it was understandable that as the threat to South Africa receded, enthusiasm for service in the unit should do so too. In a letter to the Editor of the *Cape Times* which was published on 4 May 1944 'Ex Trg Corps' wrote that this decline had been experienced by other units as well.

Abyssinia, Egypt and the Western Desert

The Abyssinian Campaign was virtually over by June 1941 and South African troops went on to Egypt and the Western Desert, a barren stretch of country reaching beyond the Libyan border. Here they were to take part in the actions at Halfaya, Sollum, Bardia, Tobruk, Gazala finally ending their Desert service with the battle of Alamein in October 1942. Personnel in the SA Engineer Corps and SA Air Force continued to serve with the 8th Army final victory at Tunis in May 1943.

Medical graduates of UCT served in field ambulances, base hospitals and as regimental medical officers with the forward troops. Capt J. J. F. Russell, SAMC, a doctor, was killed in action on 2 December 1941 while serving with 15 Field Ambulance during the forgotten battle of Taib El

Essem, where Dan Pienaar's First Brigade fought off the panzers which nine days before had destroyed the Fifth Brigade at Sidi Rezeg. Fritz von Linsingen, then in his mature years, was killed in the fighting round Bardia. He had been a member of the SRC in the early 1920's. So the toll went on. J. P. Waugh, J. F. (Sam) Kirsten and Aubrey Hudson all gave their lives serving with the Second Division at Bardia.

One of the saddest incidents of World War II took place when Col Brian Shannon, MC, Maj O. M. Bell and Capt F. C. M. Voight, MC were killed in a minefield in April 1943 at Wadi Akarit while on reconnaissance ahead of the 8th Army.⁵

In earlier times many students and sportsmen had joined the Second Anti-Aircraft Regiment, known as the Second Ack Ack, which had done sterling work in Abyssinia and the Desert. Many of these men were taken prisoner at Tobruk in June 1942 to spend the following three years in prison camps in Italy and Germany.

Italy and the Middle East

After the fall of Tobruk renewed recruiting took place and a further 78 students left at the end of the first term in 1942. On 1 July 1942 a Combined Headquarters was established in the University's Orange Street Buildings. This included a Combined Operations Room which was the nerve centre of the Royal Navy and Union Defence Forces operations in the coastal area.⁶

In July 1943 the Italian Campaign commenced with the fall of Sicily and at the end of that year South African troops started to take their place in the invading Allied Army.

In the Middle East many UCT Engineers participated in building the strategic railway from Haifa to Beirut. Prof B. F. J. (now Sir Basil) Schonland, a young Royal Engineers Officer in World War I employed on sound ranging, became a Brigadier and worked on the perfection of the new invention of radar. Prof. B. L. Goodlet of the Electrical Engineering Department worked on the degaussing of ships to make them safe against magnetic mines. Engineer Commander Goodlet was later seconded to the Royal Navy in which his service was invaluable. Another scientist who made a vital contribution to the war effort was Group Capt (now Lord) Zuckerman who was created a Companion of the Bath and decorated with the American Medal of Freedom with Silver Palm.⁷

UCT engineers built coastal fortifications and defence installations on the home front. Col D. E. Paterson, OBE, MC, graduate in civil engineering, was responsible for the mammoth dry dock in Cape Town, which could easily accommodate the largest ship afloat.⁸

Meanwhile the Italian campaign claimed more men and a recruiting team visited the University in June 1944. It consisted of Col Lance Impey, MC (a medical officer) and Lt Col Fraser. Again many students left the university for what was to be the last leg of the war.

Shortly before the war in Italy ended, Lt Col A. S. Duncan, DSO, commanding officer of the First City/Cape Town Highlanders was killed in action at Monte Sole on 16 April 1945.⁹ The war in Europe ended a month later. In some cases the younger ex-students remained overseas where they furthered their studies with the aid of grants from the government. Many, however, came home to continue and complete their studies.

University Regiments and UCTR

There was little military activity at UCT during the next ten years. However, towards the end of the 1950's military units were linked to each of the big universities. The Universities of the Witwatersrand and Natal acquired artillery regiments, Stellenbosch and infantry regiment, while the University of Cape Town Regiment following the old Second Ack-Ack tradition consisted of a heavy anti-aircraft regiment formed from 4 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment's 51, 52 and 54 Batteries on 1 January 1960. The underlying idea of these university regiments was for students to do their military training in their own units. Training in turn would be organised so as not to interfere unduly with university work.

The regiment was mobilised during the State of Emergency of March/April 1960 and quickly adapted to the infantry role in which it was employed outside townships in the Cape Peninsula. In May that year a contingent represented the regiment at the Union Festival in Bloemfontein. The first commanding officer of UCTR was Cmdt C. D. Stark. He was followed by a senior lecturer in civil engineering at UCT, Cmdt D. C. Robertson, JCD, (1962 to 1967) and Cmdt J. K. van der Merwe. During the latter's command the regiment moved from Youngsfield to spacious new headquarters buildings at Wingfield.

Until 1967 the culminating point of the year's training programme was the three week camp which was usually held at Eerste River. Seaward gunnery practices were held at Strandfontein and in the deployment exercise the regiment moved to Fisantekraal. Despite the proximity of home and loved ones in the case of locally resident members of the unit, morale was high and leisure time entertainment sometimes included a Film Show on heart surgery by the Medical Officer Capt Chris Barnard of the Department of Surgery. Towards the end of camp there was often a medal parade, braai or a regimental dance in Jameson Hall.

The non-continuous training programme in the early 1960's included street lining for the Opening of Parliament, military lectures at UCT, the annual shoot at the Bellville Rifle Range and one battery represented the regiment at the Annual Gunners' Memorial Service held at the cenotaph in Adderley Street or after its re-dedication at the Gunners' Memorial in the Gardens. During the latter 1960's non-continuous training time was greatly reduced and 12 day camps for key personnel only were held from 1968.

The 3.7-inch heavy anti-aircraft gun was replaced by the 35 mm anti-aircraft gun and a conversion camp was held in December 1969. A second conversion camp was held at Wingfield from 5-25 October 1973.

On 21 February 1970, UCTR was privileged to provide a guard of honour for the State President, the Hon J. J. Fouché, at a ceremony on the Main Campus to mark the beginning of the new academic year.

The extension of Citizen Force service and consequent reduction in the number of discharges led to a very great increase in the number of men on strength and necessitated the establishment of a new regiment, 7th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, in July 1971 which was commanded by Capt A. H. Morris. Business commitments forced both Cmdt Van der Merwe and Cmdt F. T. Crosswell who succeeded him in 1972 to prematurely relinquish command of the regiment and the last commanding officer of UCTR was Cmdt W. Bannatyne, JCD, who had previously commanded the Cape Field Artillery and was appointed in 1973.

Although UCTR lacked the glamour of the old Cape Citizen Force regiments it had the good fortune to have ties with two very well-known South Africans. Maj the Hon P. V. G. van der Byl, MC, and cabinet minister from 1939-48, was the Honorary Colonel of UCTR. He accepted the appointment with enthusiasm and until his death in 1975 was the true father of the regiment. Prof Maj C. N. Barnard was UCTR's medical officer and continued to serve in this capacity until his world famous heart transplants and subsequent work pressure forced him to relinquish this post.



Maj the Hon P. V. G. van der Byl, MC and cabinet minister from 1939-48 was the Honorary Colonel of UCT.

Further changes in national service policy resulted in most university students being posted to urban commandos and it soon became clear that the regiment could no longer remain as it was then constituted.

It was thus decided to revive the name Cape Garrison Artillery which replaced the UCTR on 1 February 1974.

Conclusion

As was pointed out in the introduction, UCT's service to the defence of our country is a continuing and ongoing process. However, a plain block of suitable inscribed Table Mountain sandstone on UCT's Upper Campus bears testimony to the courage of those men and women of UCT who gave their lives for the cause of freedom in the last two wars.

Footnotes

1. Angus G. McKenzie *The Dukes*, Galvin and Sales, Cape Town, 1957, p 58.
2. Letter from Captain M. Hocker quoted in *University of Cape Town Quarterly*.
3. *London Gazette*, 30 November 1918.
4. *The Cape Times*, 22 November 1944.
5. *Roll of Honour 1939-45*, University of Cape Town, p 43.
6. L. C. F. Turner, H. R. Gordon-Cumming and J. E. Betzler: *War in the Southern Oceans 1939-45*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1961, p 153.
7. *Who's Who 1950*, Adam and Charles Black, London, p 3100.
8. *New Graving Dock*, Cape Town September 1945, brochure produced by the SA Railways and Harbours Administration.
9. *Roll of Honour 1939-1945* University of Cape Town, p 16.