

# ALTA PETE

AIR DEFENCE ARTILLERY: SOUTH AFRICA

1939 - 2016



LIONEL CROOK

# AIR DEFENCE ARTILLERY *in* SOUTH AFRICA



**ALTA PETE**

# A History of the South African Air Defence Artillery Corps



**Lionel Crook**

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## PREFACE

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

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

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

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



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

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

***Col (Ret) Lionel Athur Crook †***

***12 November 1930 - 04 November 2018***

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## CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

### **Volunteers and the Mountain**

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

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

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

### **Balloons in Bechuanaland**

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

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

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> Young's Field, p. 38.

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

### **Recommendation to Prime Minister**

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

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

### **South African Aviation Corps**

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

The first real attempt at Air Defence in Southern Africa took place in German South West Africa in 1914 when, at the request of Great Britain, South Africa's fledgling Defence Forces undertook the occupation of the German colony. Late in 1914, at Tschaukaib, a railway halt some 72 km inland from Luderitz Bucht, the 7th Citizen Battery (Natal Field Artillery) which, together with the Natal Carbineers and other units were part of Sir Duncan McKenzie's Central Force which had landed at Luderitz on 18 September, had to contend with a new and unexpected form of attack – from the air. The Germans had two fragile aircraft – an *Aviatik P14* and a *Roland Taube*, and they dropped 'bombs' – Artillery shells fitted with a long piece of cloth to stabilise its downward flight. With only a 130hp engine they were not powerful enough to take off with more than four of the 'home-made' bombs<sup>3</sup> so for safety usually carried only two.

### **First Casualty**

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> *Per Aspera Ad Astra*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Urgent Imperial Service*, p. 121.

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

<sup>5</sup> *The Kaffrarian Rifles 1876 – 1986*, p. 129

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

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

### **Skinny 'Liz'**

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> Unpublished *History of Natal Field Artillery*, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> *S.A. Railways and Harbours Magazine*, October 1914, p. 852.

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

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



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

*Figure 2: Skinny Liz*

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

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

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Photocopy of telegram in possession of author.

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

<sup>12</sup> *The Royal Artillery Commemoration Book*, p. 44.

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

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

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

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



Figure 3: Gransden Gun Fort Wynyard

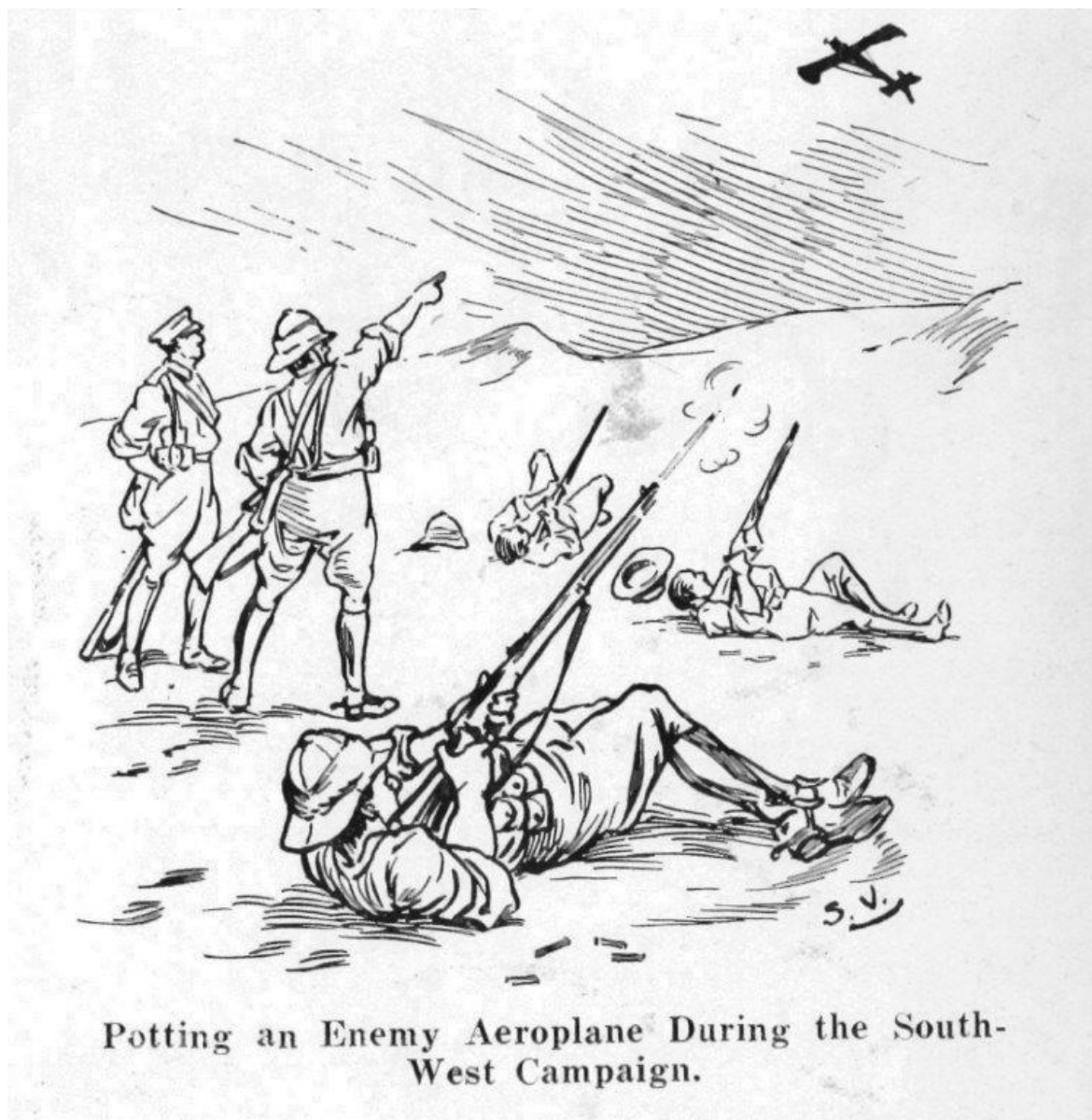
Nevertheless, after standing for many years outside the Officers' Club at Wynberg Military Base with the first 'Gransden' (or is it - Benson) gun, Skinny Liz was moved to a place of honour at the Anti-Aircraft Training Centre, Young's Field where it stood outside the administrative headquarters of Anti-Aircraft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

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

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

<sup>15</sup> *The History of the Transvaal Scottish 1902 – 1932*, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> SANDF Archives, Fort Record Book, Wynyard Battery.



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

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# THE WESTERN DESERT

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

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

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

### **Rommel to the Rescue**

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 38.

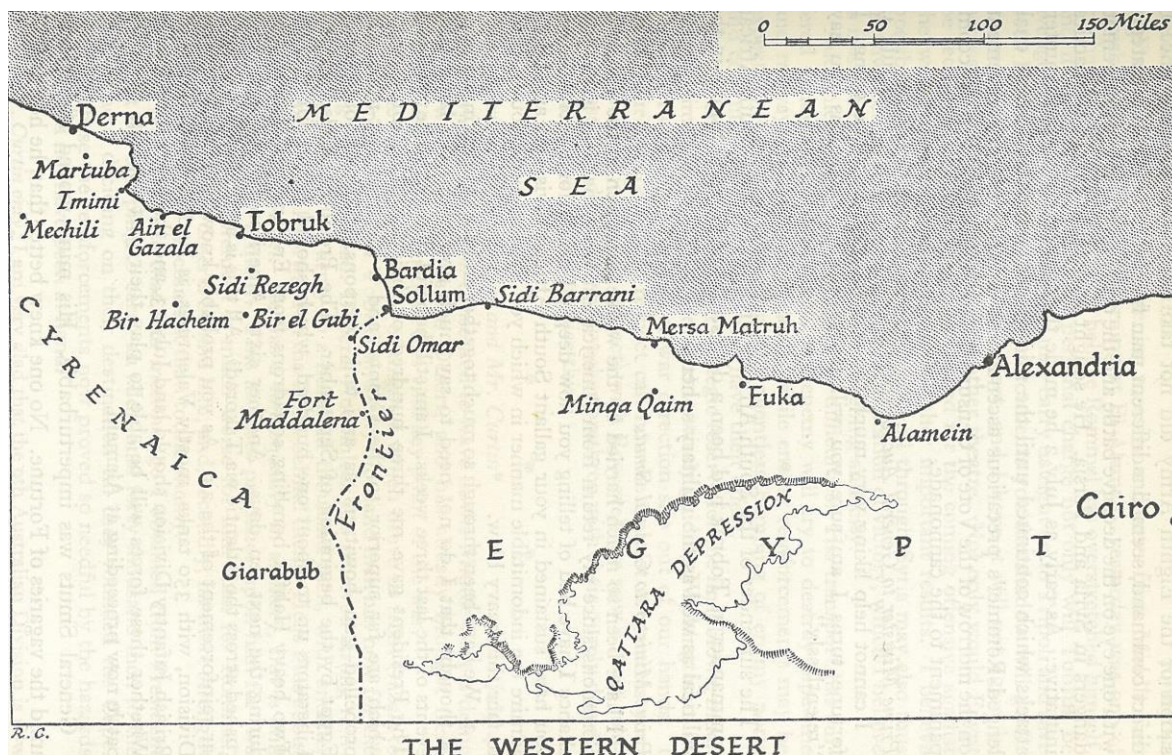


Figure 22: Map of the Western Desert

### 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade

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

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

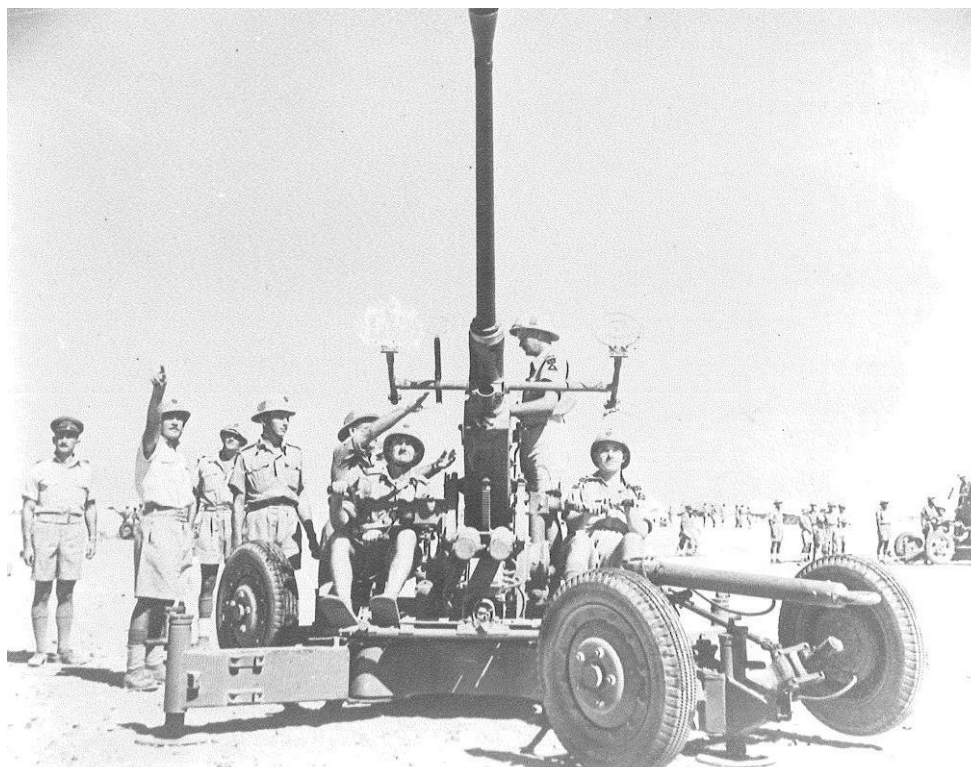
Meanwhile at Beni Yusef, to which 2 and 4 Sections of 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery had been moved, re-equipment went ahead; while at Port Said unloading of the Brigade's equipment continued. As transport came off the ship the vehicles were loaded with stores, except that the more delicate and important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

### Operation Order

The first operation order was received on 13 May 1941.

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

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



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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> SANDF Archives. War Diaries, Box 74, file A1.

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

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

Australian Anti-Aircraft Brigade Intelligence Summary No. 3 noted that in attacks on the Australian positions in Tobruk, their Anti-Aircraft guns and predictors had been singled out for attack. This was noted as a warning for the South African Anti-Aircraft gunners. The withdrawal of British and Australian troops from Crete began and between 27 and 30 May the Royal Navy lifted off 14 000 men; but it had a high percentage of losses, losing three cruisers and six destroyers in the process. For the Germans, who had dropped 8 500 men on Crete, 3 764 had been killed. For them it was a somewhat pyrrhic victory.<sup>4</sup>

There was no enemy air activity over Matruh in the first eight days of June, except for seven unidentified aircraft that over-flew the town on the eighth - the day that No 4 Section of 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery departed for Sidi Barrani on airfield defence, taking with them four 13.2 mm Breda heavy MGs, to join No. 4 Section. The section was attacked at 4.30 am the next morning and two bombs were dropped close to its position. The Bredas did not open fire; the aircraft were too high. But they had fortunately missed the most concentrated attack yet experienced at Matruh which took place later that morning, the enemy taking advantage of low-lying clouds. Sixty bombs were dropped by eight to ten aircraft in the attack which lasted 45 minutes. Damage was negligible. 1st Battery engaged with its 3-inch 20 cwt guns at intersections of searchlights and 893 rounds were fired. No aircraft were illuminated and none apparently damaged. There was no damage on the ground and no injuries. Seven Heikel III's again raided Matruh on 10 June, dropping 40 bombs which caused only slight damage. A small petrol point was ignited and a number of mines in the surrounding minefield exploded. 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery joined in the barrage and fired 174 rounds but no hits were observed. The aircraft were at about 13 000 feet. 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery did not open fire.<sup>5</sup> No. 1 Section was moved to a new position at Girawla airfield and at Sidi Barrani No. 4 Section was placed on stand-to from 5.15 am to 6.30 am and 8.00 pm to 9.30 pm daily, due to the expectation of air attacks.

Two days later an aircraft was engaged by barrage, and 74 rounds were fired without result. It was out of range of the searchlights and afterwards was 'presumed to be friendly although it gave the wrong A.R.S. and was flying in the wrong direction'. It was otherwise 'normal routine' that day at Abu Haggag, Sidi Barrani and Mersa; but in the evening a sing-song and band performance was held on the

<sup>3</sup> Notes provided by Major N. Garlick.

<sup>4</sup> Chronological Atlas, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box 374, file A3.

beach and, as the war diary records, 'Major General Brink took salute'.<sup>6</sup> Many of the attacks at Mersa Matruh took place early in the morning, and for the next two days hostile aircraft were overhead between 3.30 – 5.17 am. Bombs were dropped and aircraft were engaged at the intersection of searchlight beams. Similarly the next morning, when two aircraft attacked at a height of 8 200 feet and were engaged by barrage control. Twenty-three bombs were dropped and 542 rounds were fired. Aircraft were reported overhead at almost hourly intervals during the day, but the war diary did record, however, that two of them were RAF Wellingtons.

At midday a Hurricane coming in to land at Sidi Barrani, where No. 4 Section of 2nd Battery was on guard, was attacked by two ME109's and shot down. The airfield and surroundings were then strafed by the Messerschmitts. All guns opened fire and 'One plane staggers, apparently hit, both escape', recorded the day's diary.<sup>7</sup> The attacks at Matruh by bombers flying at heights up to 16 500 feet were continuous, but at Sidi Barrani ME 109's came in low to strafe the airfield. They also did so with British Hurricanes they must have captured in France. One such 'plane was hit and crashed. Further attacks took place in July and on the first day of that month one RA gun received a direct hit and was badly damaged; luckily there were no personnel casualties. That evening a lone enemy plane dropped a stick of fourteen bombs only sixty yards from 'Z' Troop's headquarters without causing damage to equipment. At Mersa Matruh Gunner N.D. Stathakis was killed by a bomb fragment. He was buried with due ceremony at 2.00 pm, the same day, at the Matruh Military cemetery. His grave is recorded as Row D Grave No. 1 Plot No 1. The next night following a raid in which a stick of fourteen bombs was dropped one enemy aircraft was illuminated by the searchlights and it attempted to dive down the line of light. Apparently blinded, the pilot got into a vertical dive and crashed into the sea. Believe it or not, the aircraft was credited to the searchlight.<sup>8</sup>

1st Anti-Aircraft Battery opened fire and expended 88 rounds during an attack on the night of 3 July when a stick of nine bombs were dropped. An aircraft was later heard flying off the coast after this engagement. Searchlights picked it up and it was seen to be gradually losing height. When at about 1 500 feet the aircraft nose-dived into the sea and exploded. Twenty minutes later the Battery fired 72 rounds at an aircraft later identified as friendly. It was a quiet day at Ras Hawalwa. The war diary contains a note to the effect that detachments on the 3.7-inch 20 cwt guns found them 'unsatisfactory' and possibly a little inaccurate. The problem was found to be in the Vickers predictor and an R.A. Staff Sergeant attached to the Battery traced the trouble to a faulty calculation in the manufacture of the predictor. An adjustment '... in the drum which recorded the wind allowance', was made and it seemed to solve the problem.

There were two raids the next day and to everyone's surprise the first one at 10.15 am was by Italian Savoia 79's; the second was by nine aircraft. No bombs were dropped on Matruh but a stick of bombs was dropped 15 miles due east. As was normal procedure, 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery fired seven rounds to indicate the target to own fighters. Enemy air activity continued on succeeding days this, but aircraft kept at a respectable height. During most of the raids Anti-Aircraft fire was directed either by barrage control or by firing on intersections of searchlight beams. Bombs were often dropped well away from points where the Anti-Aircraft guns were located, on one occasion an estimated 15 – 20 miles east of Matruh. No planes were brought down but many were diverted from their course.

On 6 July, 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade - which the war diary showed as 1 (S.A.) A.A. Brigade – was placed 'under command of BRA, 12th A.A. Brigade, R.A. vice B.A.A. 1st Australian A.A. Brigade.'<sup>9</sup> Bombing continued almost daily; thirty-seven bombs were dropped on Matruh between 3.39 am and 11.50 pm on 8 July; but new tactics were evident when an enemy aircraft glided in to 700 ft above Sidi Haneish railway station before 10.00 pm that night and dropped six incendiary and five small HE bombs, without causing damage or casualties. The AADC Matruh Fortress made an application that day for the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> SANDF Archives, War Diaries, Box 374, file A3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

credit of two enemy aircraft shot down by the heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery. When hostile aircraft entered the area at 4.45 am on 10 July the searchlights at Matruh were instructed 'not to engage but only by V.I.E. (Visual Indicator Equipment)'. The aircraft dropped their bombs three miles away. The next night one aircraft turned and dived with its engine off after all the others had withdrawn and machine-gunned Y2 searchlight position. Garawla landing strip was subject to a ten second attack and 40 incendiaries were dropped. In both instances there were no casualties or damage. From an attack made nine hours later – at 3.05 am – it appeared that the searchlights were targeted.

The fourteenth day of July was a red letter day – the first mail from home arrived.<sup>10</sup>

The persistence of high level attacks led to two sections of 3.7-inch guns being brought to the Matruh area. Early August saw a period of intensive air attacks with ten separate attempts to penetrate the air defences on the night of 5/6 August. Attacks continued through the month and Naval House was damaged by bombs in one attack at the end of August. Between 28 May and 12 October Matruh suffered 171 air raids, but after this date enemy aircraft became less active.

### **By Lighter to Tobruk**

Tobruk was under siege at this time and the Australian and British troops were kept supplied with everything they needed in order to continue holding the desert port, by ships of the Royal Navy and by lighters. During July 1st SA Division was instructed to provide Anti-Aircraft protection for the lighters that carried stores from Matruh to Tobruk. Each 'A' Lighter had a detachment of four gunners and two twin-Lewis guns. It was a run fraught with danger and four guns were lost by 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery before Western Desert Force (the forerunner of Eighth Army) ruled that the task was to be undertaken by the Infantry. On the evening of 28 July Anti-Aircraft LMG detachments from 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery provided protection aboard two lighters bound for Tobruk. They were heavily attacked by an estimated twenty JU 87's and fourteen ME 109's. A great number of bombs were dropped, one striking the bridge of one lighter which subsequently sank. Lance Bombardier Brand and two other gunners – one of which drowned when the lighter went down - made heroic efforts and were instrumental in saving the lives of eleven men who had been on the 'A' type lighter. One of the 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery's detachment was slightly wounded. The second lighter returned safely to Matruh on the morning of 30 July. That evening two more lighters left for the voyage to Tobruk, one with personnel from 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery and the other with a detachment from 1st Anti-Aircraft Battery, each providing Anti-Aircraft protection. A further lighter left on 4 August with machine-gunners from 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery and yet another two left on the night of 6 August – with 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery personnel manning LMGs on both.

The periodic journeys by sea between Matruh and Tobruk were hazardous. Two lighters with 2nd Anti-Aircraft Battery men on board left on the night of 10 August. Their journey was uneventful until the next afternoon when six JU 88s approached at low altitude. Two RAF fighters intervened and shot down two of the enemy aircraft, the rest making off in a hurry. Four more enemy aircraft appeared at a great height that evening but were again driven off by RAF fighters. The lighters reached Tobruk without further incident at 5.00 am on 12 August, but while moving into Tobruk harbour early that morning one of the craft struck a mine. It was lifted into the air and broke in two. The crew were thrown into the water, one gunner was slightly injured but all were able to swim the 250 yards to shore. The Anti-Aircraft personnel were 'a bit shaken' according to a Battery Commander and were evacuated the same night on a destroyer but as the vessel was leaving harbour it was attacked by enemy aircraft. The Luftwaffe 'planes were persistent in their attacks which lasted for four long hours.<sup>11</sup> A number of bombs were dropped while the destroyer was en route to Matruh, but the enemy aircraft failed to score a hit. On another lighter, Gunner W.H. Bailie was accidentally shot. Men from 5th SA Infantry Brigade, trained on Hotchkiss guns eventually provided lighter protection until, in October the Royal Navy took over this duty.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The Tide Turned at Alamein, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> War in the Desert, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

### 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment

Steps are being taken, announced the Adjutant General on 20 October 1941, to change the designation of 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade to read: 1st Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery. The AG was somewhat late in this announcement, and also a little incorrect as it had earlier been decided that numerical titles would be cardinal and not ordinal; so it was as 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment that it became a Regiment on 1 August 1941.<sup>13</sup> The newly titled unit was allotted to 1st South African Division and in the first week of September, Brigade Headquarters, 1st AA Battery and the Searchlight Battery, left Mersa Matruh and moved to Garawi Camp, close to the South African base at Helwan, for re-organisation moved on a new war establishment table (WET) and for re-equipping of 1 Anti-Aircraft Battery with 40 mm Bofors Anti-Aircraft guns drawn by Artillery quads – known to the Anti-Aircraft gunners as ‘Spiders’. They were followed at the end of the month by the two other Batteries.

On 12 October 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (under command of Major Lukas Meyer, with Captain Ross as his Battery Captain), now attached to 1st SA Infantry Brigade took over twelve 40 mm Bofors, four predictors with generators, and other equipment, from 100 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, RA., at Port Suez. And, on 15 October, 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (Major Bob Batho, with Captain Iain Campbell as Battery Captain) drew twelve 40 mm Bofors and four predictors with generators, from Ordnance Stores. 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (Major Neil Garlick and Captain Starke as Battery Captain) were similarly equipped from 21 October 1941. Training on the new Mk 1 guns proceeded simultaneously with the re-organisation of the Regiment as a light Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

There were about 45 vehicles per Battery and some were new. Battery Commanders and Battery Captains received Ford V8 staff cars built on the typical old pattern of a British country vehicle, i.e., station wagons, the bodies reinforced on the outside with wood frames. They were only two-wheel drive but had fat desert tyres, frequently punctured on the rough desert stones and, as Major Garlick described, each had a useful folding table and ‘a hole in the roof’ for a look-out. A pair of 4 metre long canvas/wood-slat sand mats, a ‘camel tank’, holding about eight gallons of water, and six jerricans of spare petrol were carried- and ‘all your worldly possessions’.<sup>14</sup> Major Garlick, who left these details mentioned that he also had a ‘stripped’ Lewis gun- i.e. one without the casing, which he used only once – against an ME 109 which was strafing the Battery position. Before all Battery vehicles had ‘acquired’ jerricans about mid-1942, petrol had been carried in 20 litre square tins which began to leak badly at the seams as a result of being shaken about in the vehicles. By mid-May 1942 American containers with screw tops arrived, but were discarded as soon as a vehicle crew obtained the German container.

Gun tractors were four-wheel drive Quads – the same as the field gunners used - and each detachment had a ‘follow vehicle’ as they were called. It was a 3-ton four wheel drive stores truck. The quad carried seven men, eight cases of ammunition (192 rounds) immediate use gun stores, and their personal belongings. The stores truck carried the rest of the detachment, balance of the gun stores, cooking utensils, reserve petrol and oil (enough for 300 miles was carried at all times – over and above full tanks), and water – usually 40 gallons. Between the two vehicles a total of 408 rounds HE and 48 rounds AP were carried. Vehicles had run-flat tyres to enable them to be driven in an emergency. New American 3-ton ‘lorries’ were issued. Cable-laying and other vehicles were old stub-nosed 15 cwt Canadian trucks, with the engine in the driving compartment. Five motor cycles were issued per Battery but were not well accepted and most of them were quickly returned to Mersa Matruh.

Most officers were young, with an average age of 25; Major Hugh McKenzie, who had been a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps in World War One was possibly considered at 48, a little too old for desert operations. He was returned to South Africa in October 1941, where he performed useful duties with 3 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and the SA Air Force searchlight units.

<sup>13</sup> SANDF Archives, Box 60/3, file 0149.

<sup>14</sup> Notes by Major N. Garlick.

A total of 373 Cape Corps personnel of the first draft from Robben Island were posted to the unit as gunners on 25 October and on 31 October<sup>15</sup>, and it was once again ready for operations. Within a few weeks a number of these men had been killed or captured at Sidi Rezegh. The balance of the draft was simply separated from their officers and marched into the Non-European Army Services camp where they felt lost among a crowd of others whom they regarded as total strangers. It caused anger and much dissatisfaction.

Regimental headquarters and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to the area of Potters Lynn on exercises with 1st SA Infantry Division.

### High Spirits

Before a final move into the desert was made some local leave was granted and many men of 1 and 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery – the only sub-units that had received pay - had ‘a last fling’ in Cairo, leaving Regimental headquarters and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft. High spirits resulted things becoming a little ‘hectic’; and one man was arrested by a military policeman. His friends tried to rescue him and tackled the policeman who immediately called for reinforcements. There was an ‘upset’ (as described by the war diary); and it was also said the battle was directed by an unnamed NCO from a house balcony above the bar while at the same time he had his arm round a girl’s waist. It resulted in about thirty five other ranks being incarcerated by the military police. Though they won the battle they themselves did not fare too well in subduing the high-spirited men.<sup>16</sup> Preparations were being made to move out of Helwan and Major Werner Meister was called to go into the heat, noise, filth and babble of Cairo, to bail them out. They were released somewhat reluctantly – on the promise that disciplinary action would be taken against them. It was understood by all ranks that the Cairo military police were not considered very friendly towards South African gunners after that incident.

It was just as well Regimental Headquarters and 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had not been paid. The battle could have been worse. With the Battery at this stage there were two gun Sergeants, former Permanent Force men, both large men, both bearing the names Petrus Johannes van der Merwe. It was a somewhat unusual situation – but easily solved: One became Sergeant Piet and the other Sergeant Johann.<sup>17</sup>

The Regiment was now ready for desert warfare.

**Operation Brevity** was launched by Western Desert Force at dawn on 15 May to clear Halfaya, push to Sollum and drive towards Bardia. It failed to achieve its objectives.

**Operation Battleaxe** began on 15 June in an effort to take both ends of Halfaya Pass, to attack Fort Capuzzo and another known defensive position at Hafid Ridge. But for the first time the Armour met the remarkable German 88 mm Flak gun as an Anti-Tank weapon. By the end of the first day of battle the British Armour had been reduced by 50 per cent. Although the 22nd Guards Brigade captured Fort Capuzzo and held it for two days against 15th Panzer Division, there was insufficient Armour to protect the surviving British and Indian Infantry, who had to withdraw or be captured. Battleaxe was a failure.

### Tobruk

By October 1941 Tobruk had been under siege for six months. Some 23 000 men held the port. Life was tough for the Australian and Indian infantrymen on the perimeter, but the gunners – especially those around the harbour were bombed and shelled almost daily. Ships that visited Tobruk took in stores and carried out men, and by this time nearly 40 000 in total had been evacuated and replaced by 30 000; while 30 000 tons of stores had been delivered. A whole flotilla of small craft – lighters, South African whalers and Italian schooners – were used. But it was at some cost. Thirty-four

<sup>15</sup> History of AA Organisation UDF 1940 1944, p69.

<sup>16</sup> Notes by Major N. Garlick.

<sup>17</sup> Notes by Major N. Garlick.

warships and merchantmen had been sunk and thirty-three damaged. Tobruk harbour was littered with wrecks. And, by October most Australian troops had been withdrawn on the insistence of the Australian Government. They were replaced by the British 70th Division and the 1st Polish Carpathian Brigade which were moved in during August/September.

## **2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment**

2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade arrived in Egypt from East Africa on 2 September under the command of Lieutenant Colonel C.T. Howie who, according to one of his junior officers, always looked the perfect Guardsman officer, a methodical officer, and fearless for his own safety.<sup>18</sup> He had superseded Lieutenant Colonel Kruger in East Africa. In the following weeks, Battery by Battery, a second South African light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was born. Re-designated in September 1941, 2nd Anti-Aircraft Brigade, South African Artillery was re-organised and on 1 August 1941 officially, it became: 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment (V), South African Artillery. Consequent upon the reorganisation the awkward situation regarding the coloured gunners left by 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment at Helwan was happily resolved. They were all taken on strength.

The Brigade first assembled during the period 3 to 15 September at Amariya, near Alexandria, sufficiently close for daily leave by small parties to that fascinating city; but only two weeks later the unit was again split. Conversion to 40 mm guns took place over several weeks due to immediate lack of equipment. The 6th Battery remained at Amariya, later to be moved to Helwan where it was re-equipped with 40 mm Bofors Mk II guns and predictors, while the rest of the Regiment moved west to Smugglers Cove near Mersa Matruh, on 22 September where it became involved in manoeuvres for the rest of the month. Troops in turn were attached to other units in training schemes and deployments in the Matruh area, admixed with operational duty in the harbour of Mersa Matruh, troops taking undertaking this task in turns. Two Troops of 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery went to Sofafi to provide Anti-Aircraft defence to a forward depot.

Matruh was a hot spot – it suffered 171 air raids between 28 May and 12 October, and a former Luftwaffe pilot in a book written in Germany in 1973, expressed admiration for ‘these gallant fellows who, using captured weapons withstood the might of the Luftwaffe’ and caused the German High Command to abandon their form of attack ‘which may have caused the change of events in the desert war.’ The number of attacks lessened after 12 October and this appears to corroborate with the statement by the German pilot.<sup>19</sup>

Conversion to 40 mm equipment took place over several weeks due to the immediate lack of Bofors guns. On 12 October the Brigade took on charge twelve 40 mm Bofors Mk II, four predictors, generators and other necessary equipment; and three days later 3rd Anti-Aircraft Battery (still using its old title) drew twelve Bofors, four predictors and other equipment. 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved from Amariya to Garawi Camp, Helwan to continue training and re-equipping with 40 mm Bofors and Predictors. 2nd Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was similarly equipped on 21 October. 7th Anti-Aircraft Battery, under Major Louis Wolf, arrived at Garawi Camp from Eritrea on 19 November and was almost immediately disbanded, ‘A’ Troop reverting to 4 Light AA Battery and ‘B’ Troop going back to 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. Training on the new equipment for all Batteries proceeded simultaneously with reorganisation as sub-units of a light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Re-organisation began with sections becoming ‘Troops’.

By October 1941, Western Desert Force had been re-designated XIII Corps, and by 21 October XXX Corps had been formed and began to function. It led to the creation of Eighth Army<sup>20</sup> from 2 September 1941.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Springbok, magazine of the SA Legion, January 1974.

<sup>20</sup> History of the Second World War – The Mediterranean and Middle East, Volume III, pp. 1.2.

Another 300 men left Robben Island to swell the numbers of Cape Corps men in 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in time for the battle of Bardia, which began on 31 December 1941. The 732 Cape Corps gunners who served in these two units saw real action against the *Luftwaffe* and these carefully selected men proved their ability and courage many times over during succeeding months in the Western Desert campaign,<sup>21</sup> not only in the capacities shown in official personnel tables but also as Lewis gunners, in Bofors detachments and even in manning captured 88mm Flak guns,<sup>22</sup> the 88 mm Anti-Aircraft guns that the Germans used so successfully as Anti-Tank guns.

In November, 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery (V), South African Artillery – as it had become – moved into the forward area, arriving at Matruh on 20 November 1941, and also deployed at Smugglers Cove. They were greeted by the heaviest air attack yet made and experienced by the Regiment. The enemy aircraft developed their attack at 6.30 pm and used flares to light up the target area. 4 and 5 LAA Batteries fired a barrage over the harbour with the 20 mm and 12.7 mm Breda weapons they had brought from East Africa. 'A' Troop of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was moved to Daba to take over from 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, where it was to protect a forward dump, while 'B' Troop of the same Battery occupied a defensive position at Similla railway station. 'C' Troop was at this time in the Matruh harbour area. On 21 November 'A' Troop, 6 Light Anti-Aircraft at Daba were in action against a Heinkel 111 which attempted a low level bombing run. Several hits were scored and the aircraft was driven off. Bombardier F.C. Scrimgeour was badly wounded in the attack and died on 2 December 1941.<sup>23</sup>

Once 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved into the desert, the opportunity was taken to transfer 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery back to Helwan for re-equipping on 40 mm Bofors and predictors. Training on this equipment began immediately it was issued. 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery remained in the Matruh area with their Bredas and LMGs, but they were relieved with occasional trips to the front with small parties which included AFV escorts for Brigadier W.H.E. Poole, commanding 2nd SA Infantry Brigade. On 5 December, Regimental Headquarters, accompanied by 5 and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries left Matruh for Sidi Omar, arriving there the next day to take up positions in the defensive 'Box'. One Troop of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery remained there only until the next morning before moving with the 2IC of the Regiment, Major N.C. Wessels, to provide Anti-Aircraft defence at the Gambut airfield. In consequence of the forthcoming move into the desert orders were received to return all predictors to Mesa Matruh 'for safe custody.'<sup>24</sup>

The first action of any note in the field was fought on 10 December 1941 - in a dust storm, with consequent poor visibility - against JU 88's flying fairly high. Two days later 'B' Troop – of the former 7th Anti-Aircraft Battery – joined 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery; and on the same day the balance of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, except for B Echelon, moved from Sidi Omar to Bir Hafid. 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved on 22 December from Gambut to Menastir. In consequence of the forthcoming move into the desert orders were received to return all Kerosen predictors to Mersa Matruh for safe custody.

### **A New GOC**

As a result of the two failed operations General Sir Archibald Wavell was replaced by General Sir Claude Auchinleck as GOC, Middle East Command, with the newly formed Eighth Army under the command of Lieutenant General Sir Alan Cunningham. The force at his disposal consisted of three Divisions of Infantry – the New Zealand, 4th Indian and 1st South African – a Guards Brigade, 7th Armoured Division, 4th Armoured Brigade and 1st Army Tank Brigade.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was attached to 1st SA Infantry Brigade, and within the formation the three Troops were posted to the three Batteries of 7 Field Regiment; 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was with Division troops, 'D' Troop with Division headquarters, 'E' Troop with Division 'Q' Services and 'F'

<sup>21</sup> *Militaria*, 24/2, 1994.

<sup>22</sup> *South Africa at War*, pp 122,123.

<sup>23</sup> In Memorium -Magazine of Rondeboschboys' High School, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> Notes by Major N. Garlick.

Troop with 7 Medium Battery, RA.; two guns were attached to each of the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, 1st Transvaal Scottish and Royal Natal Carbineers. 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was on a training exercise with 5th SA Infantry Brigade from 6 to 17 November 1941. Prior to the attack on Libya, with one Troop each was attached to 2nd Regiment Botha, 3rd Transvaal Scottish and 1st SA Irish. Twenty-five year-old Major. Garlick was for a short while, appointed acting commanding officer from 23 November 1941.



*Figure 24: A typical desert dust storm*

### **Advance into Libya**

In the Division's Anti-Aircraft Regiment, a fourth Battery was formed under Captain C.D. Stark – Battery Captain of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery - by withdrawing two guns from each of the three – normally - twelve-gun Batteries. It was given the special mission of guarding the advanced landing grounds which were to be used by fighter aircraft during the operation. The new Troops were designated 'X', 'Y' and 'Z'. The guns were in position by 17 November.

### **Operation Crusader**

Operation Crusader was launched on 18 November 1941; the newly formed Eighth Army, with two Corps – XIII and XXX Corps - crossed the frontier early that morning after two days of astonishing rain which had reduced large parts of the desert to bog. The operation was aimed at the relief of Tobruk, followed by the occupation of Cyrenica. XIII Corps drove north to isolate the garrisons between Sidi Omar and the coast, while the more mobile XXX Corps on their left drove north-west, first to Gabr Saleh and then to Bir el Gubi and Tobruk. The general role of the South African Division was to cover the west and south-western flanks of 7th Armoured Division. By evening advance forces had reached Sidi Rezeg; two South African Brigades were deployed south of Bir el Gubi, while New Zealand and Indian troops had blocked off access to the frontier positions.<sup>25</sup>

In the confusion of fighting in the hectic first ten days of 1st SA Division's participation in the general advance into Libya, some of the records of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment were lost. But, piecing together the statements of officers and men from the various Troops it became obvious that the Bofors gave valuable protection to divisional units against low-flying enemy aircraft. Several were

<sup>25</sup> Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 59.

claimed as shot down or damaged. The Bofors were also frequently engaged in an Anti-Tank role and claimed to have disabled or damaged a number of enemy tanks or armoured vehicles.

### **First Blood**

First blood for the Anti-Aircraft guns was drawn by 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery when six G 50 enemy 'planes appeared and ground strafed the Brigade area on 20 November 1941. 'C' Troop reacted immediately, scoring two hits and bringing one enemy plane down in flames. ME 109F's and ME 110'S launched another attack and this time 'E' Troop engaged. No hits were observed. The barrel of one gun was damaged by a premature detonation and Sergeant Potgieter's gun tractor suffered damage during the attack. Dive bombing attacks by fifteen dive bombers on the 'B' Echelon of 1st SA Infantry Brigade were made the next day. No specific Anti-Aircraft defence had been arranged for this area and much damage resulted from the attack, but one Stuka was hit by fire from the Bofors. Two of the fighter escort to the Stukas, when flying low on return to their base, were engaged by 'B' Troop's guns, and it resulted in one ME 109 and an ME 110 being destroyed. Five more dive bombers were destroyed when forty of these aircraft attacked Brigadier Armstrong's 5th Infantry Brigade in the early afternoon; and later another one was destroyed over his headquarters.

In an early attack on 22 November at Bir el Gubi Sergeant D.O. Williams' Bofors hit an unidentified aircraft which turned away in apparent difficulties.<sup>26</sup> And in mid-morning another dive-bombing attack was made on the Brigade's 'B' Echelon. The echelon still had no air defences. Fifteen JU 87's took part in this attack. They were protected by fighter escort and once more the echelon incurred damage. The attack was eventually broken up by the arrival of Allied fighters. As a result of these two attacks 'C' Troop was placed in support of 'B' Echelon at 5.30 pm that day. During a later night move on 22 November one of the 3-ton GS cargo vehicles carrying all 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery's spares, became detached and was not seen again. It was manned by one white and three coloured gunners and was presumed to have been captured by the enemy.

### **5th SA Infantry Brigade**

Rommel, still intent on upon his plans to break into Tobruk, refused to take into account reports of large British forces to his south. Then, in a world-wide news bulletin at 9.00 pm on 19 November, the British Broadcasting Corporation announced that a powerful Armour force was advancing victoriously towards Tobruk. The scales fell from Rommel's eyes; he turned his attention swiftly to destroying yet another British assault. He severely depleted the tank strength of 4th Armoured Brigade. Fifty tanks of the 7th Hussars barred his way, but not for long; all twenty Crusaders and all but ten of their thirty old cruiser tanks became scrap metal. By the evening of 22 November the weight of the German Armour had crushed the last resistance and Sidi Rezeg airfield was in their hands.<sup>27</sup> Rommel's prey was now the 5th SA Infantry Brigade, which stood in his path. With the Brigade was 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

Of the ten guns available to the Battery - two had been transferred to the 'new' 4th Battery nominated for airfield defence - three were allocated to the three Infantry Battalions, with one as token defence for Brigade headquarters. There was no enemy air activity except for daily reconnaissance flights at high altitude until 21 November, when 5th SA Infantry Brigade was attacked by a dozen JU 87's while it was on the move. Bombs were dropped on 'B' Echelon and the convoy was machine-gunned. All the Bofors opened fire and the enemy aircraft promptly broke off the attack. Hits were claimed but not confirmed. The Battery did not suffer casualties and there was no damage to equipment. That afternoon 'K' Troop shot down one enemy G50 aircraft. The next day was somewhat different. Some forty or fifty dive bombers attacked the Brigade while it was stationary, and later, another attack was made on the left flank of the Brigade group. The Bofors fired 'vigorously' and claimed five aircraft downed and hits registered on others. Two of the latter made off with smoke pouring from them. That Saturday afternoon the lone gun at Brigade headquarters shot down one ME 110. The pilot was made prisoner.

<sup>26</sup> Intelligence Summary dated 22.11.1941, with papers given to a author by Major Garlick.

<sup>27</sup> Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 59

### As a Staff Officer Records

A staff officer of 1st SA Infantry Division who was spending a few days with the Air Force seemed to have a sad knowledge of matters concerning Anti-Aircraft guns. Guns were probably guarding the landing ground from which South African aircraft were operating. He recorded an incident (no date is given) that seems to have occurred in the last weeks of 1941: '...an ME flew over and was chased by the fighters who failed to make contact. The ack ack who had fired a few rounds were inclined to claim something because someone had seen a half moon shaped object in the S.W. sky and thought it might be a parachute. The better opinion was that it was a half moon.' No one could surely have mistaken a moon for a parachute unless the gunners were trying to pull a 'fast one' on the fighter pilots.<sup>28</sup>

### Sunday of the Dead

The next day, Sunday, 23 November, was *Totensonntag* – The Day of the Dead - in Germany. The *Afrika Korps* fought another battle of annihilation that day - and this time its prey was the 5th South African Infantry Brigade, laagered just east of Bir el Gubi, near the white-painted tomb at Sidi Rezegh. The enemy maintained a very heavy Artillery fire throughout the morning before the Battery Captain, Captain Iain Campbell, reported that four German tanks had penetrated into 'B' Echelon's lines. A number of vehicles had promptly moved away towards Brigade headquarters. One tank came alongside one of the Battery vehicles and a member to the tank crew stood in the hatch and fired his revolver. The Bofors gunner shot the German and the tank moved away. The Brigade was still under Artillery fire but up to this stage 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had not suffered any losses in men or equipment. At about 2.30 pm Panzer Regiment 8 of 15th Panzer Division, and Panzer Regiment 5 of 21st Panzer Division, supported by Rifle Regiments 115 and 200 from 90th Light Division and 15th Panzer Division respectively, augmented by the lighter Armour of the Ariete Division, fell upon the South African Brigade from different directions, and what '...followed was one of the fiercest battles the *Afrika Korps* was ever to fight'.<sup>29</sup>

The Battery Commander at this time was at Brigade headquarters, collected his small party and in the general melee, with German tanks milling around, managed to slip away. The Bofors guns not immediately overrun fired in an Anti-Tank role. At the beginning of the day each gun had approximately 55 rounds of armour piecing and 300 rounds of HE. Owing to their high rate of fire there could not have been much unexpended ammunition to fall into enemy hands. It is not possible to know how many enemy tanks were damaged or destroyed by the Anti-Tank guns or the Bofors; but the only gun that emerged from that day's battle, claimed seven as its own.

Reports of the events of 23 November were collected at 'B' Echelon by Captain Iain Campbell, Battery Captain, for inclusion in the war diary, but when it was overrun these records were lost. The whole of 'B' Echelon became casualties and so did 'G' and 'H' Troops. The story of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery's fortunes on that day has been built up from the statements of survivors.

By dark it was all over. The Brigade had ceased to exist. To the Germans, who that day suffered equally as badly it was really was *Totensonntag*, the Sunday of the Dead. Rommel is reported to have admitted to a surviving member of the SA Irish that while their casualties were bad, his casualties were double those of 5th SA Infantry Brigade.<sup>30</sup>

### 'K' Troop

The Troop Commander, 'K' Troop, Lieutenant R.S. Quirk, was able to report on the Troop's actions in support of the SA Irish, which was on the left flank of the Brigade group that day. He confirmed that they were under intermittent gun and tank fire from 9.00 am, but was under the impression that the tank attacks on his front were being successfully held; the reason being that shelling ceased for up to half an hour at a time, only to be renewed from a different direction. About mid-day the support Company of the Irish moved to reinforce 2nd Regiment Botha and the Company Commander

<sup>28</sup> The Tide Turned at Alamein, p. 49.

<sup>29</sup> Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> Clear the Way, p. 288.

informed Lieutenant Quirk that a tank attack was likely to develop from the rear. The Anti-Tank guns moved into action positions and the Anti-Aircraft guns were re-positioned into line with them.

The Infantry moved towards a neighbouring ridge with their mortars and machine-guns with the intention of digging in against the threatened tank attack; but they had scarcely reached the ridge when the tanks broke through. The Bofors immediately opened fire. Lieutenant Quirk was then at the left hand gun with Sergeant McWilliams. The auto-loader had HE and these rounds were fired off; three rounds of AP followed but the gun then received a direct hit. The layer, Gunner L.F. Schroeder was blown off his seat, Sergeant McWilliams was severely wounded and Gunner Barnes was wounded in the feet. Gunner McIntyre took post in the layer's seat but quickly discovered that the gun could not be traversed. The detachment was ordered to take cover.

Lieutenant Quirk, assisted by Gunner Odgers, attempted to move Gunner Schoeder to a slit trench but the wounded man received another direct hit and he died soon after the slit trench was reached. Sergeant McWilliam was assisted to an ambulance, and an attempt was made to take the gun out of action. The damage to the gear, however, made this impossible. It was abandoned and the detachment was ordered to the tractor. The Troop Commander went to the next gun – under command of Sergeant Le Clus, which by this time had run short of AP and was firing bursts of HE at point blank range. Both Anti-Tank guns were out of action and the third Bofors, which had been engaging enemy tanks, had disappeared. A large number of tanks had by then passed through the Troop position and the Lieutenant considered it futile to continue the action with only one gun firing HE and he ordered a cease fire. Gunner Odgers later reported that he saw that the barrel of the third gun appeared to have been blown off and was under the impression that the detachment were trying to replace it with the spare when a second shell hit them and the whole gun and detachment were blown into the air.

The survivors of 'K' Troop joined up with a small party of other vehicles and at first light the next day reached the vicinity of Sidi Omar where they were able to contact 4th Indian Division. From there the remnants of 'K' Troop – one officer, 24 other ranks and 20 Cape Corps members – reached Madaleina.

Lieutenant Quirk reported:

*Throughout the action the conduct of the NCO's and men was magnificent. I would also like to mention Gunner Ramages (Cape Corps) who, throughout the engagement, without being ordered to do so, was engaged in clipping ammunition. Gunner Weedy assisted greatly after the gun was out of action in attending to the wounded and in applying field dressings. Both Sgt Le Clus and Bdr Wilmot were a fine example to their men by their calmness and quick grasp of the situation.<sup>31</sup>*

Sergeant Le Clus stated that when tanks appeared in their rear, moving in two directions, it was not known whether they were hostile. Ammunition was nevertheless prepared and when they were known to be German, fire was opened and at least seven tanks were stopped. Those hit by HE – after the AP had been expended – were seen to burst into flames.<sup>32</sup>

Major Bob Batho's 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery lost nine guns at Sidi Rezeg, two of which were known to have been destroyed and it is likely that several others were damaged before being overrun. The one gun that was saved was from the Troop under Lieutenant Quirk.<sup>33</sup> Two guns of the Troop of 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery on defence of a landing field close to the action, were saved and of that group, one officer 23 other ranks and three Cape Corps gunners survived. A number of men, including Major Batho, who was badly shaken, and two of the guns protecting 8 Field Battery (THA), and one

<sup>31</sup> History of AA Organisation UDF 1929-1944, p. 77.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>33</sup> Notes provided by Major N. Garlick.

gun of the Troop under Lieutenant Quirk managed to escape the debacle; a number of the Cape Corps men recently posted to the Battery were among those lost that day.

### Losses

All in all, as at 30 November 1941, it was reported that 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery had lost 209 all ranks, but this figure was later reduced slightly, when others reported. In addition to stragglers who managed to make their way back and later re-join their unit, several NCO's and men of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery who were taken prisoner, escaped from Bengazi, and others were released after the fall of Bardia. Lieutenants Frank Vlok, MC, Iain Campbell, Geoff Friedlinghuys and Mills Gibson were taken prisoner with others of the Battery and shipped off to camps in Italy. When Italy surrendered in 1943 the guards left the prison camps open and numbers of men made their escape before the Germans arrived to lock the gates, Frank Vlok managed to get over the mountains to Switzerland where he was forced to remain until the war ended. Lieutenant Vlok was officially notified of the award of the Military Cross on 1 March 1945.

All this while, other guns of the extra, '4th' Battery, had had an uneventful day, guarding landing grounds. It reported back to 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment on 23 November 1941 and was then disbanded, the guns and detachments returning to their own Batteries.



*Figure 25: A Bofors detachment of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment ready for action. It is winter in the desert and the men are wearing winter battle dress with leather jerkins for additional warmth*

### Clearing the Battlefield

Subsequent cleaning of the battlefield at Sidi Rezeg resulted in some equipment being salvaged, all in a damaged condition. It included one Bofors gun, three Bofors barrels and four gun tractors. Some forty German tanks remained on the field as evidence of the efficiency of the fire by the Anti-Tank and Bofors guns.

The three guns of 'E' Troop of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery remained in Libya under command of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, while the remnants of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery left with Rear RHQ and Rear Division HQ for Matruh. The marching out state of the Battery was two officers, 333 other ranks and eleven Cape Corps personnel. On 5 December reorganisation of the Battery commenced at Matruh but the Battery later moved to Smugglers Cove, where it received reinforcements of one officer, ten other ranks and 34 Cape Corps gunners from 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, and one officer,

nine other ranks and four Cape Corps men from 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. While the Battery underwent re-organisation, Major Bob Batho, then aged over 30 years was badly shaken. He was hospitalised with a recurrent stomach problem and later returned to South Africa. The 24-year old Captain Bruce Guilford replaced him as Battery Commander.

### **The Matruh Stakes**

XXX Corps had suffered losses but XIII Corps was still virtually unscathed and the New Zealanders were driving along the coast road towards Tobruk. Rommel, however, believed Eighth Army was in state of disorganisation and on 24 November, just before 11.00 am – while units of the Eighth Army were ‘basking pleasantly in the morning sun’<sup>34</sup> - he set off on a ‘Dash for the Wire’. Placing himself at the head of 21st and 15th Panzer Divisions, and collecting the Ariete Division *en route*, he led a 60 mile dash to the frontier, roaring through the British dumps, supply echelons, scattered Armour and Infantry units and field medical centres –creating some hilarious scenes that will live in legend. By nightfall he was in Egypt with the few panzers that had not broken down or run out of fuel.<sup>35</sup>

It was not easy at first, Brigadier Pienaar noted, to distinguish between the rush of fleeing transport which ‘swelled out liked a bow wave, in front of the enemy formations, and the pursuers coming on behind.’<sup>36</sup> For Advanced Division Headquarters, the quiet serenity of the day was soon disturbed by news of enemy tanks and motor transport bearing down upon the camping ground. Shells began to fall upon the vehicles. Armoured car patrols reported the advance of the enemy force on Division Headquarters and the GOC ordered it to withdraw towards the south-east. The CRA was instructed to hold the enemy with his Anti-Tank and Bofors guns. Notice to move was short and one officer who was ‘indulging in a wash’ had only time to fling sponge and basin into his vehicle and drive off, stark naked.<sup>37</sup>

Lieutenant General C.W.M. Norrie, Commander of XXX Corps, whose ‘imperturbable character’ was, in the opinion of many, one of the principle reasons why the German thrust achieved so little, included in his report : ‘*Brig Pienaar’s 1 S.A. Bde....never moved a foot....4 Armd Bde remained in the area allotted to them....the Spt Gp were also well placed.*’<sup>38</sup> And Major General George Brink in his operational report stated that as far as he could see: ‘*the only tps that were standing and fighting were two Troops of A/Tk guns and one tp of AA guns that had been attached to Adv Div HQ*’. These were ‘N’ Troop of 4 SA Anti-Tank Regiment and one, later two guns of ‘D’ Troop, 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.<sup>39</sup> The Bofors fought the enemy tanks and MT throughout the withdrawal.<sup>40</sup>

### **Bofors vs Panzers**

#### **08.00 am**

An Intelligence summary as at 24 November 1941 read: During “previous late afternoon & evening 5th Brigade badly wounded – disorderly withdrawal by survivors follows”.

#### **10.00 am**

‘D’ Troop fired 18 ineffective rounds at one ME 110 and four ME 109’s apparently on reconnaissance. Forty five minutes later German tanks supported by both ‘lorried and motor cycle troops broke through the 5th Brigade gap’ and advanced directly on the area occupied by Advance Headquarters, 1st SA Infantry Division. The headquarters was forced to make a hurried withdrawal.

#### **10.45 am**

One lone gun of ‘A’ Troop, 2 Light anti-Aircraft Battery – providing protection to Division Headquarters against air attack – was for several minutes forced into a rear-guard action against the panzers, which advanced slowly with a frontal formation of twenty tanks. Sergeant P.L. Byrne’s lone Bofors engaged them when they appeared over a ridge about 1 000 yards away. Shortly after the first

<sup>34</sup> The Sidi Rezegh Battles, pp. 289,291.

<sup>35</sup> Chronological Atlas of World War Two, p. 59

<sup>36</sup> The Sidi Rezegh Battles, p. 294.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 295,296.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 296n.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

rounds had been fired, two Anti-Tank guns arrived to support the Anti-Aircraft gun. Several rounds from the latter were dead on target. His ammunition clips had been loaded with mixed HE and AP. Two Anti-Tank guns arrived to support the Bofors gun. The tanks halted and opened fire with HE.

#### **11.00 am**

The situation was becoming impossible, particularly as the Anti-Tank guns had withdrawn several hundred yards. Lieutenant Upton who had remained with Sergeant Byrne's gun, ordered it to be taken out of action and withdraw about 500 yards. The tanks moved forward slowly and when about 600 yards away Sergeant Mason arrived with his Bofors. The two guns engaged the tanks from their wheels. The Anti-Tank guns had again moved and were firing 200 yards to the rear. The Bofors were described as 'putting up a magnificent effort.' Several tanks appeared to have been hit and in all probabilities badly damaged. One was seen to 'blow up' when hit by an anti-tank shell.

Many HE rounds ricocheted from the ground above the tanks and exploded in the air above the motorised troops behind the tanks. Casualties must have been caused. By now dust and gun-smoke resulted in poor visibility and accurate observation but the Intelligence Summary states that a number of tanks and other vehicles had 'actually stopped or been knocked out'. The slow stage by stage withdrawal continued and for 'several hours' the gun line was joined by additional Anti-Tank guns from 'N' Troop, 4 SA Anti-Tank Battery.<sup>41</sup>

#### **12.30 pm.**

The two Bofors under Sergeant Byrne and Mason were joined by two more Bofors under Lieutenant W.B. Cameron of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and a stand was made in front of Landing Ground No. 138. that were guarding Landing Ground 138, where a lone Lysander army co-operation aircraft was standing. The Panzers were beaten off and a pilot appeared and the aircraft took off and escaped destruction at the last minute.

One of Lieutenant Cameron's guns had a premature and the ammunition from this gun was passed to Sergeant Bryne who by now was short of ammunition. Lieutenant Upton moved off in an attempt to obtain more AP rounds. He met Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey who promised a supply...if possible and he immediately returned to the guns. By now the tanks appeared to have come to a halt and were possibly refuelling. It was noted that others from the rear were coming forward. Hits were claimed on six tanks by the three Bofors and Lieutenant Cameron claimed two destroyed.

About eight tanks attempted an encircling movement on the left flank and the Anti-Tank guns on that side moved further forward to engage. Lieutenant Cameron moved his guns to the north of the landing ground and Lieutenant Upton passed through the defence works to a position south west of the ground. Withdrawal continued in stages, the guns stopping and firing off their wheels ever 500 yards or so. Fire from the tanks was incessant and there were many close misses. The gunners had not suffered and casualties. '

#### **2.30 pm/3.00 pm**

Having expended all but a few rounds of HE it was decided to withdraw to a flank and attempt to get the guns out safely. But at 3.30 pm Lieutenant Upton joined a 7th Armoured Division Support column where he fortunately obtained a re-supply of petrol and ammunition. The column moved on for several miles and the Lieutenant lost contact with the guns. In attempting to find them his 15 cwt Morris was strafed by an ME109 and badly damaged. Late in the evening he was found by a Royal Hussars armoured car patrol.

N' Troop and the Bofors continued to fire on the panzers until sunset when the enemy tanks finally withdrew. It was estimated that at least six tanks had been hit and badly damaged or disabled and that damage and casualties inflicted on vehicles and troop to the rear of the tanks. Well over 300 rounds including 100 rounds of AP ammunition were fired by the two guns of 'D' Troop.

#### **That Night**

One of the two guns was lost to the enemy. Sergeants Byrne and Mason had joined up with other troops withdrawing to the frontier but during the night they ran into a German formation. In subsequent firing and confusion Lance Bombardier Reynolds was killed while at the wheel of the gun tractor. Sergeant Mason, complete with his gun and detachment managed to escape; so did Sergeant Byrne and Lance Bombardier A.W. Bassett. Gunners Schoeman, Sealy, Volschenk and I.V. Thomson

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<sup>41</sup> Uncle George, p. 228.

were taken prisoner.<sup>42</sup> 'Monty' Peterson and one other member of Sergeant Byrne's detachment were found six days later.

### **The Brigade**

On 23 November the Brigade's night move took it to a new defensive position, with the Bofors of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery sited for air defence but with a primary Anti-Tank role. The next day, however, Battery headquarters and 'B' Troop were re-positioned – though still in an Anti-Tank role, in support of 7 Field Battery, where 'A' Troop was already deployed. 'C' Troop – in support of 'B' Echelon – was withdrawn with the Echelon to El Cuesc. One gun of this Troop which endeavoured to join the main Brigade, lost direction and finally reached 1st SA Division Advanced Headquarters. While there enemy panzers broke through and in the ensuing confusion the Bofors party lost touch with the Division Headquarters, but eventually joined three other Bofors attached to XXX Corps Headquarters. It ultimately re-joined its own unit.

Because of the German move against 5th SA Infantry Brigade, 1st SA Infantry Brigade was forced to move back about five miles to ensure it would not be cut off.

### **Rommel at the Wire**

When Rommel and his group passed through the Wire he found he was isolated. He spent an anxious and cold night in Lieutenant General Crüwell's headquarter vehicle - a captured British Mammut, with ten other senior officers, before finding his way back through the frontier wire early the next morning.<sup>43</sup> They were quite undisturbed during the night – no British officer or NCO was going to face what they thought were peppery senior British officers sleeping peacefully inside the vehicle.

The New Zealanders had meanwhile linked up with the Tobruk garrison and turned to fight off a desperate onslaught as Rommel, realising his dash to the wire had been a mistake, threw everything he could in another attempt to take Tobruk. Twice the corridor was cut, but the New Zealanders fought like tigers to re-open it, beating off furious and desperate attempts by the panzers to reach Tobruk. Both sides were now suffering from the gruelling effects of the fighting in the past fortnight. The desert was littered with broken and abandoned vehicles which both sides were endeavouring to collect and repair, while supply columns were feverishly trying to build up supplies without which the battle could not continue.

For the remainder of November the battle raged around Tobruk, Rommel's forces were gradually being pressed back; he was running out of supplies; expenditure of fuel and ammunition was causing deep concern. At dawn on 4 December Eighth Army embarked on the second phase of its Crusader offensive, but 11th Indian Division failed to dislodge the enemy from Bir el Gubi. Meanwhile 1st SA Infantry Brigade – then protecting XXX Corps maintenance area – was ordered to send out small columns to harass the enemy in the El Adem - Acroma areas. The rest of the Brigade remained at Taieb el Esem, where it lay in the bitter cold. Two bombing raids on 4 December made it clear that only eight guns of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment was inadequate for protection of the maintenance area. Brigadier Pienaar 'grumbled bitterly' that the number of Bofors with his Brigade was 'quite inadequate'. And on 4 December he submitted a formal complaint, asking for permission to recall the guns he had been ordered to detach for protection of the Field Maintenance Centres.<sup>44</sup>

By the evening of 5 December a message informed Rommel that he could expect no replacements for the 142 panzers, 25 armoured cars, 83 guns or mortars he had lost; and even worse, for the sixteen commanding officers and 4 000 men now dead, seriously wounded or missing. It had also become obvious to him that the Eighth Army was about to launch another drive forward. Rommel gave orders for a withdrawal as far as Gazala, and then to the Gulf of Sirte. On 5 December his troops began to

<sup>42</sup> Intelligence Summary November 1941, provided by Major N. Garlick.

<sup>43</sup> The Sidi Rezegh Battles, p. 307.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 451.

disengage at Tobruk and commenced a withdrawal towards the west. Rommel halted his Army at El Agheila on 31 December 1941. It was in better shape than was expected.

### **The Wire**

Battery headquarters and Divisional Troops had meanwhile withdrawn without incident towards the Wire. 'F' Troop was still with 7 Medium Regiment, RA, and it successfully engaged six ME 110's and hit two; they crashed, but during the engagement Lance Bombardier Stroebel suffered a bullet wound in his right heel. Captain Starke was still with his two guns at Landing Ground 134.

Formations were 'still in general disorder' on 25 November; stragglers were returning to their units and began the next day to reform near the landing ground. One gun of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was missing and Lieutenants Friedlinghuys, Gordon and Upton went out in an attempt to locate it. By the end of the day the Battery was partially complete. In the next three days enemy aircraft twice overflew the Brigade and Sergeant Potgieter's detachment – more out of frustration than anything else - engaged on both occasions. He claimed one hit. Eighteen rounds were fired but the aircraft was apparently unharmed. Reconnaissance aircraft were again overhead early on 2 December and at 10.00 am, as expected, about thirteen JU 89's, with fighter escort arrived. One aircraft dived bombed but heavy Anti-Aircraft fire prevented the others from doing so. They contented themselves by dropping their bombing from on high. Due to lack of dispersion there was considerable damage.

### **1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment**

The rest of 'C' Troop had on 25 November, moved back through the frontier wire near Madaleina with the Brigade 'B' Echelon. 'A' and 'B' Troops remained with the Brigade but with very heavy tanks attacks launched that day the guns of the two Troops were deployed in an Anti-Tank role in support of 7 Field Regiment. They were not called upon to take action. That evening 1st SA Infantry Brigade withdrew some distance to re-organise, re-fuel and generally to replenish supplies; having done so the Brigade moved forward some five miles at noon on 26 November and occupied a new defensive position. With its 'B' Echelon now safely deployed behind the frontier wire. 'C' Troop re-joined 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery headquarters that day, in time to move north with the Brigade Group. While en route, the Group was subjected to an attack by 'friendly' Marylands which dropped bombs and pamphlets.

On the 29 November the two guns that had been detached to the 'new' 4 Anti-Aircraft Battery, returned to 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and the fourth Troop, titled 'Z' Troop was formed by taking one gun from each of the three Troops. The next day the Battery moved forward with the Brigade Group to Bir Sciascuif, 'A' Troop being in support of 1st Battalion, Royal Natal Carbineers; 'B' Troop with 1st Battalion, Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles; 'C' Troop with 1st Transvaal Scottish and 'Z' Troop with headquarters, 1st SA Infantry Brigade. On 1 December the Brigade Group withdrew to Taieeb El Esem. 'B' Troop and 1st DEOR, covered the withdrawal which was described as 'according to plan'.

On 3 December seventeen JU87's repeated the previous bombing run over the Brigade. The guns engaged and one aircraft was definitely hit. There were near misses on the guns of Sergeants Williams and Faber but their vehicles and equipment suffered damage. The guns fired well and the Battery was congratulated by the commanding officer of a Royal Artillery Regiment on their 'splendid performance'.

The *Luftwaffe* must have been desperate to stop or destroy the Brigade. Resulting from the appearance of a reconnaissance aircraft on 1 December, thirteen JU 87's had appeared; on 2 December – seventeen JU 87's at 4.30 pm, and on 3 December 30 plus Stuka's appeared out of the sun. Anti-Aircraft fire did not prevent the Stuka's from diving. The Anti-Aircraft guns appeared to be the target with Sergeant Faber's gun at the centre. He and his detachment were badly shaken but otherwise unharmed. Sergeant Viljoen's gun ran a close second, receiving several bombs in the close vicinity. The JU 87's were back early the next morning and bombs again fell in the vicinity of the Anti-Aircraft guns. But this time two aircraft paid the price; they were hit and later reported 'down'.

At 10.00 am another air attack developed, with 21 JU 87's dropping their bombs on the Brigade. Anti-Aircraft fire was described as 'bad'. The detachments were in fact badly shaken. But 5 December was a peaceful day and it did much to restore shattered nerves. Sergeant van Niekerk was transferred to the badly hit Troop that day. The usual ME 110 'recce plane' appeared at 8.00 am on 6 December but Sergeant Faber and Sergeant van Niekerk detachments 'made things hot' for the aircraft. Sunday, 7 December was really a day of rest – not one aircraft was to be seen. The following morning Lieutenant H.C. Haworth was ordered out with two guns (Sergeants Faber and van Niekerk) to accompany a patrol.

The Brigade was on the move forward when it was strafed at 8.00 am on 10 December by six ME 109F's. No damage was caused. Bombardier Seith did well in dropping his gun into action in record time. Sergeant Williams reported a definite hole seen in one aircraft. Just after midday one JU 88 was foolhardy enough to fly over at 4 000 feet Sergeant Viljoen obtained hits and it was last seen to be 'smoking'.

Lieutenant Haworth and two guns accompanied another patrol on 10 December. They were attacked twice en route by ME 109's. Hits were scored on one aircraft and it seemed to deter the others from further attack. They reached Sidi Rezegh that day where the Infantry took fourteen prisoners. They found a Bofors, apparently abandoned – with a round in the breech and a clip ready to be fired. It was recovered, cleaned and found fully serviceable and later returned to Base. Another Infantry patrol with the remaining guns of the Troop reached Bir Hakiem, returning two days later.

### **Sollum, Bardia and Halfaya**

By now Operation Crusader had pushed *Panzergruppe Afrika* well away from Egypt and the three enemy garrisons of the fishing village of Sollum, of the small port of Bardia, and Halfaya Pass, were isolated.

During most of December Advanced Headquarters of 1 LAA Regiment remained attached to XXX Corps Advanced Headquarters, but on 26 December, accompanied by two Troops of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, it also moved up to the forward area. 'C' Troop, 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved the next day to Menastir, to provide Anti-Aircraft protection to Field Artillery units engaged in the coming battle to subdue Bardia. Three days later 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery arrived at Sidi Omar accompanied by a signal section and a workshop section; but, leaving a rear Regimental headquarters and the Battery headquarters of both 4 and 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Batteries at Sidi Omar. An advance Regimental headquarters moved out to position itself on the Trig–Capuzzo road.

Elements of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment moved forward to occupy suitable positions close to Bardia from which they could provide Anti-Aircraft support. 'A' and 'C' Troops of 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery deployed inside the Bardia perimeter defences south of Bardia harbour, to provide protection to 1 Field Regiment (CFA); 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery HQ and B Echelon were at Menastir – the Battery's 'A' and 'C' Troops affording Anti-Aircraft cover for Artillery units, and 'B' Troop was deployed at Sidi Aziz landing ground, with 'C' Troop of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery. The other two Troops of the Battery – 'A' and 'B' Troops - were also engaged in providing cover for Field Artillery units. After much preparation and pre-bombardment, the attack on the sea port was launched on 31 December 1941, but in the absence of enemy air activity the Anti-Aircraft guns had nothing to do.

### **Christmas**

Captain Stark, Battery Captain, 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was sent to the rear area to obtain 'goodies' for Christmas. He left on 18 December and was welcomed back on Christmas Day with his vehicle well stocked with beer, whisky, canned fruit and 'other necessities' and with a huge amount of mail, both letters and parcel post. The Battery, the only one of the three, 'enjoyed the festivities and were reasonably well behaved.'<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Letter written to Captain H. McKenzie, 30.1.1942. It was never posted. With papers received from Major N. Garlick.

It was only after the garrison of Bardia had surrendered that, on 2 January 1942 a formation of JU 88's attacked the Bardia area. The guns south of the harbour engaged immediately and a hit was made on one aircraft which jettisoned its bombs and turned away with its starboard engine smoking. 'A' and 'C' Troops of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and all guns of 6 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery also went into action and direct hits on another JU 88 were scored. One enemy aircraft made a forced landing. The only casualty as a result of this raid was to Captain R.C.T. Curling, Battery Captain of 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, who was killed by a bomb. After Bardia was taken a stock of brand new rifles still wrapped and greased, was discovered in a warehouse, they were issued to the many Cape Corps personnel in the Regiment, whom the Regiment felt had every right to defend them-selves if it ever became necessary. The sub-units of the Regiment were re-positioned for the siege of Sollum and Halfaya which were still holding out.

On 3 January 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved to the area of Fort Capuzzo; 4 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved into Bardia, where two Troops were deployed to protect the harbour, while 'A' Troop moved to a position on the Sollum-Capuzzo road to afford Anti-Aircraft protection to the field and medium Batteries shelling Sollum and Halfaya. 'A' and 'B' Troops protected the Advance HQ of 2nd SA Infantry Division; and RHQ and Battery HQ's were moved to Bir Hafid. The Troops of 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery were positioned in the Halfaya area to also cover the Artillery Regiments. There was no enemy aerial activity. 'C' Troop 5 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery went into action when a Free French plane bombed it in error on 7 January. The fire drove the aircraft away. Sollum surrendered on 12 January but Halfaya, commanded by Major Wilhelm Bach, the German pastor whose leadership was largely responsible for its stubborn defence, only surrendered five days later.

### **Into Cyreneica**

*Panzergruppe Afrika* had withdrawn into Cyrenaica; 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery accompanied 1st SA Infantry Brigade who was protecting XXX Corps maintenance area at the same time sending out reconnaissance patrols and 'mosquito' columns to harass the enemy in the El Adem – Acroma area. The South African Brigade remained at Taieb El Essem. A Stuka dive bombing attack by thirty or more dive bombers on 4 December killed one officer and wounded four other ranks. Major Garlick visited Lieutenant Mosely's Troop that day and it was only half an hour after his arrival that Stukas appeared over the Brigade. The two officers felt they were the centre of attention while they lay huddled in a slit trench. Bombs dropped all round them – 'in a circle some 400 yards in diameter'.<sup>46</sup> Once the aircraft had departed they clambered out of the ground, to find themselves in a ring of burning vehicles. One had only just begun to burn – the flame was small – and they moved to extinguish the flames when some-one shouted: 'It's an ammo vehicle.' The two officers hastily withdrew. Seven other ranks were wounded in another attack two hours later. Shooting was good and prevented the Stuka's from coming below 3 000 feet.

It was clear that only eight guns of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment for protection, defence against the Luftwaffe was inadequate. 'B' and 'F' Troops of 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery at this stage were in support of the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, and moved with them to Bir Hakiem on 10 December. 'B' Troop was deployed at Bir el Gubi landing ground. At this stage 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was reorganised to include four Troops instead of three; the fourth Troop – known as 'Y' Troop - being made up by withdrawing one gun from each of the three 'normal' Troops. For some days the Battery was engaged in support of forward patrols but on 13 December 1941, all Troops were withdrawn from 1st SA Infantry Brigade which was ordered to move back to railhead.

1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, consisting of 'A', 'B', 'C' and 'Z' Troops was then deployed for the Anti-Aircraft defence of 1st SA Infantry Brigade area at Bir Sheferzen; but the next day orders arrived instructing the Brigade to once more move forward and deploy in the area of El Adem, preparatory to taking part in the advance into Cyrenaica. There was air activity overhead and 'B' and 'Z' Troops at Timini shot down a JU 88 B, which rather stupidly did a low level reconnaissance run right over them.

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<sup>46</sup> Report written by Major N.Garlick.

A second plane was damaged. Two days after this 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery was moved forward and 'D' Troop joined 1st SA Infantry Brigade about four miles west of Timini airfield. At the same time Battery headquarters, together with 'E' and 'Y' Troops, joined the Brigade 'B' Echelon.

On 22 December 1st SA Infantry Brigade received orders to return to Desert Railhead and then to Matruh. The Brigade spent Christmas just north of the Trigh el Abed and the next day moved along that road, halting at midday for lack of petrol. All available reserves of fuel was given to 7 Field Regiment which had been ordered to move to support 2nd SA Infantry Division in its assault on Bardia. The field Regiment moved East on 27 December followed by the Brigade which had unearthed a supply of Italian petrol in the Gubi area. The Brigade passed through the Frontier wire and again came under command of 1st SA Infantry Division.<sup>47</sup>

Two days before their first Christmas in the desert, the advanced headquarters of 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery left XXX Corps Headquarters and returned to Matruh and at about the same time a reorganised 'X' Troop of 3 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery moved forward from Matruh to defend the landing ground at Sidi Azeiz; and 'F' Troop, 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery returned to Matruh, moving later to a deployment position near the sea off the Smugglers Cove road. More South African Anti-Aircraft sub-units followed – with 2 Light Anti-Aircraft Battery headquarters, 'E' and 'Y' Troops moving into Smugglers Cove on 4 January. A Regimental Training Battery was established at Smugglers Cove on 13 January 1942. Its primary objective was to train Cape Corps personnel as reinforcements.<sup>48</sup> The officers established a comfortable Mess with a fireplace (coal fired), and a well for washing water – on the premises. Quite like home, it was stated, far superior to the Lido Hotel in Mersa Matruh. And in the area was a ramp for greasing vehicles. On 24 January they received orders to move.

### **Crusader Falters**

For an Army which had just advanced from Egypt to the Gulf of Sirte, Eighth Army was in considerable disarray. Supply lines, the bane of desert warfare, were stretched. Many of the troops were replacements for the Crusader casualties and the remainder were tired after the stresses of the advance. *Panzergruppe Afrika* was in far better condition, not only because its lines of communication were shorter but because it was being resupplied at an unusual rate – mostly because of the losses suffered by the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean. Of five capital ships only one was afloat; two cruisers had been sunk, and two badly damaged and one had been withdrawn by the Australian government for service nearer home, where the Japanese threat was increasing. *Panzergruppe Afrika* struck early on the morning of 21 January; two days later it smashed a British Armour Brigade, routed other troops and in the last days of January the scattered groups of XXX Corps withdrew to Gazala, in conditions of heavy rain and in appalling wind and sandstorms.

The Axis armies were instructed to go no further east than Maraua, on the orders of the Italian commander-in-chief, who insisted that forward positions should remain there. Rommel was told that only reconnaissance units could operate between Maraua and Gazala.

### **Light Aid Detachments**

In January 1942 it was decided to equip each Battery with a 3-ton four-wheel drive vehicle to replace the 15 cwt LAD vehicles then in use. They were incapable of towing a loaded three tonner or gun tractor. Nor could they carry sufficient spares to effect immediate repairs.

The LAD had from the beginning been equipped with basic tools but all LAD's eventually collected, salvaged or made the tools and parts not issued. These included battery chargers, anvils, small portable forges, bench drills, vices, work benches and steel stores lockers. Due to non-standardisation of springs, carburettors, distributors, petrol pumps, radiators, etc, numbers of these items had to be carried to keep transport serviceable. Many repairs, normally sent to Base Workshops, were carried out in the field.

<sup>47</sup> War in the Desert, pp. 72,73.

<sup>48</sup> Typed notes by Major N. Garlick., marked 79.

Their work was important, of a high order, not generally acknowledged, or appreciated.



*Figure 26: 3.7-inch Anti-Aircraft gun*

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

# A NEW CORPS

### Splitting the Corps

Colonel Chris Venter, Director Artillery, announced that Ministerial approval had been granted on 10 October 1984 for a split in the Artillery Corps; and from 1 November 1984 two new Corps would feature in the Army's precedence list – the South African Artillery and the South African Anti-Aircraft Artillery.<sup>1</sup>

During 1971 two separate Corps directors were appointed - and since then the Corps of South African Artillery had been divided into a Field Branch and an Anti-Aircraft Branch, with a Director for each branch. But it had long since become evident that a change was necessary due to differing technical aspects and weapons technology development, and because of the roles and functions each Branch filled within the SA Army. Ministerial authority was given on 10 October 1984 for:

- the titles of the two Corps
- establishment of an Anti-Aircraft Corps
- re-designation of certain units and
- appointment of two Corps Directors.<sup>2</sup>

In the statement made by Colonel Chris Venter it was clear there was a firm decision to maintain a close relationship; 'Future development will be such that each Corps can move in its own direction'.... 'the traditional ties between the two Corps should be maintained and strengthened', he said.<sup>3</sup> Colonel J.C. Pieterse who had been Director Artillery (Anti-Aircraft) until midnight on 31 October 1984, became in the next second, Director Anti-Aircraft. The Division of the Corps was a move welcomed by some but felt by many to be a detrimental move to the Corps of South African Artillery as a whole. Rumours abounded that the split was caused by a personal clash between the two directors.

### Re-designation

Another result of the Implementation Instruction was the re-designation of the Anti-Aircraft School. Artillery Air Defence School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was re-designated with effect from 1 November 1984; its new title from that date was: Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.<sup>4</sup> The combined unit consisted of three Wings; the Anti-Aircraft School itself, the Regimental Training Wing and the Support Wing (called HQ Unit), with the Regimental Training Wing being made up by 101, 102 and 103 Batteries. The unit was still responsible for training National Servicemen from recruit to operational standard. The first two Batteries trained on 35 mm Oerlikons and 103 Battery on 20 mm guns. Training on 23 mm Russian guns captured during operations in Angola was also conducted. The School was responsible for the training of all Anti-Aircraft personnel in specific technical musterings. Promotion courses were also presented to qualify Citizen Force officers and NCOs.

### Citizen Force Units

Headquarters of Cape Garrison Artillery was originally at Young's Field and on 19 November 1980, during the years it was there, the Right of Civic Entry into the City of Cape Town was awarded to the Regiment at a parade in the city, in company of five other units. The Freedom of Bellville was awarded

<sup>1</sup> Copy of Implementation Instruction 14/84 dd 1 November 1984, provide by office of Director Reserves.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> *Uniform*, 16.11.1984.

<sup>4</sup> Directive D/PLANS/502/2/1 seen by author.. (Archive, Box and file unknown.)

to the unit on 9 September 1989. Headquarters moved to an area near Acacia Park, Wingfield, but the then current commanding officer, Commandant Marius van der Westhuizen secured the use of Fort Wynyard at Mouille Point, as headquarters. The Regiment moved in November 1992 and there it remains. The new headquarters was 'officially' opened at a Gunners *Tiddler* on 8 October 1993. The Regiment has twice operated as an Infantry Battalion, once in the operational area and again on South Africa's northern border. In 1994 when South Africa's first democratic election was held it participated in Operation Jumbo to provide security. Although it absorbed the few volunteers of 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in 1997 when that unit was closed down, Cape Garrison Artillery struggled to survive, just as other units. The turnaround came in 2005 when it took members of Blaauwberg and Two Oceans Commandos under command. Although a three-Battery 35 mm Regiment, it was very much later rumoured as being considered the SA Army's operational URV (Unmanned reconnaissance vehicle) unit.

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment claimed ancestry from 1859 through its perceived association with Cape Garrison Artillery, from which it had emerged. It was pointed out to them in a lecture that age does *not* ensure efficiency and that hard work and dedication makes it so. Although a young Regiment it had a series of competent commanding officers and became a very efficient and impressive unit, especially so during the years 1980 - 1987. Members of the unit took part in *Operations Askari, Packer, Prone and Agro*.

The Regiment was awarded the Freedom of Goodwood on 31 March 1990 and was presented with a National Colour by the Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr. W.N. Breytenbach at Young's Field on 30 November 1993. The unit had a curious quiff in that it took a bugle - which otherwise reposed in the Officers' Mess - to training camp each year. It was included in the new 9 SA Division which evolved from 71 Motorised Brigade and was later one of a number of units that appeared at first to have been needlessly disbanded wef 1 April 1997. After the abandonment of National Service and the virtual disappearance of thousands of Citizen Force troops, the few volunteer personnel remaining on strength in 1997 elected to join the Cape Garrison Artillery. 7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment RSM MWO D.W. Danie Steyn MMM JCD, occupied the post from July 1989 - September 1997, and was then appointed as the RSM of CGA, when RSM WO1 B.M. Bruce Risien JCD (1992-1997) vacated his post, after the amalgamation, and was promoted to Captain. MWO Danie Steyn served as RSM of Cape Garrison Artillery from September 1997 to February 2014, and was the longest serving RSM in the SANDF Reserve Forces, with almost 25 years of service in the post.

#### **44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment**

While two Anti-Aircraft units had been disestablished, another was formed. 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was born on 1 January 1985. It was a specialised unit - intended to be parachute trained as the air defence component of 44 Parachute Brigade. It struggled to obtain recruits - trained gunners were instead incorrectly posted to the Battalions. But Colonel 'Mac' Alexander had other ideas. He approached 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and it resulted in the transfer of Captain Jean Roux to the Brigade on detached duty to command the parachute gunners. In his own words, not only did he: 'ramp up the Citizen Force component'<sup>5</sup> but he was also involved in the planning, direction and strategy covering their use. During this time - 1987-1988 - 14 Parachute Battalion was under command of Nikolaas van den Berg. He had an Anti-Aircraft Troop detached from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment under command. All personnel were parachute static-line trained and also trained on 40 mm Bofors, 23 mm twin barrel, 14.5 mm foreign Anti-Aircraft guns, and SAM 7.

During 1987 Captain Roux arranged a three-week course to convert volunteer Infantrymen from 2, 3 and 4 Parachute Battalions to Anti-Aircraft gunners, to 'start up' 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Only about twenty men were successfully converted that year to become NCOs and gunners. They formed the backbone of the unit. Others were trained but over the years there were never more than about 100 parachute trained men on strength and the unit was never able to call upon more than one trained

<sup>5</sup> Email from Captain J. Roux, 22 .10.2009.

'jumping-fit' Troop. This Troop with the National Service Troop of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment constituted a Battery. One other problem arose about this time. The Regiment was ordered to exchange their Artillery berets for Parachute Regiment berets. They refused; there was a temporary 'stand-off'; to their distress the Gunners lost the battle. Today they wear Oxford blue Artillery berets.

### **Opening of Parliament**

Troops of 101 Battery, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment were among those that lined Adderley Street at the ceremony surrounding the opening of Parliament in February 1985. Later that month there was ceremony of a different type when Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment took leave of Colonel J.M. (Jack) Slabber, practically the last of the war-time Gunners still on strength. A Guard was present at his funeral on 2 February. Colonel Slabber was one of those men not content to retire when leaving the School in September 1972. He had filled a post at Western Province Command, first as staff officer civil defence and later in the recruiting section. He served in the latter until forced to retire in October 1984 due to ill health.

### **Civil Unrest**

Simmering agitation broke out in July 1985 into serious unrest in the urban areas of the Cape Flats. Troops from Young's Field were hastily called out to assist the SA Police to cope with major disturbances and demonstrations. The young National Servicemen and their Permanent Force officers were faced with situations they had never before expected or experienced. The litter – broken traffic lights, smashed shop windows and general debris was more a reminder of the war in Angola than civilian disturbance in a supposedly civilised society. 101 Battery found itself in unfamiliar Buffels, dressed in riot gear, patrolling Gugulethu and the Lansdowne/Athlone areas on unrest control operations. There was not much rest from the continual patrols but they were relieved when the first Citizen Force and Commando units reported for duty. Thereafter the Young's Field men were sent to the Eastern Province and were on duty at Kirkwood and other areas. During unrest control operations in Kwazakele township Port Elizabeth, Corporal J. Schoeman of 5 SA Infantry Battalion became separated from his patrol and was brutally hacked to death. Members of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment provided a Guard of Honour at his funeral in Gansbaai.

The Staff of Western Province Command were hard pressed to cope with events, which seemed at times to run out of control as a result of the actions of political activists. Reports by both local and foreign journalists did nothing to help the situation. Both Brigadier Yvor de Bruyn and his SSO Operations were away on detached duty and a Commando officer, Colonel P. S. (Piet) Lotz occupied both posts in the first three months of the emergency which were the worst. Colonel Lionel Crook was called in to assist from 1 September with tactics and doctrine, while Colonel Johan Lourens divided his time between the Command operations room and command of Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment, until he was finally transferred to Western Province Command as SSO Operations. He nevertheless continued to officially hold the post of Commanding Officer, Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in addition to his duties at the Command until 31 December 1985. He was officially transferred to the Command from 1 January 1986.

Because Colonel Lourens had little time for his duties at Young's Field due to involvement in Operation Xenon (as the unrest situation was known) problems there were left to Commandant Jeff Ormond to handle. The latter had been at Young's Field since January 1970 when first posted there for nine months' national service training. This period had, much to his horror, as he later described it to the author, been extended to one year shortly after his arrival. Despite his initial reaction, he found he had a liking for military life and after passing out as a Junior Leader he signed a short service commission. During that year he joined the Permanent Force. Three years at the SA Army College – one in 1990 as a Staff course student and two on the Staff Duties Directing Staff led to his promotion to Commandant and appointment as Commanding Officer, 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in 1983.

Commandant Ormond was officially appointed to command Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and promoted to Colonel from 1 January 1986. His senior staff consisted of Commandant van Deventer at the School, Commandant N.G. (Neil) Muller commanding the Regiment and Commandant J. Del Monte at the Headquarters unit in charge of logistics and personnel. The RSM of

the combined unit was still WO1 C.J. van der Westhuizen, PMM, who would continue in that post until 17 January 1987, before a transfer to Headquarters, 71 Motorised Brigade – a Citizen Force conventional warfare Brigade - as Brigade Sergeant Major.

### **75th Anniversary Day**

The Sergeant Major was soon involved in supervising the Anti-Aircraft contingent for the biggest ceremonial parade in the Cape since the Republic Festival parade at Goodwood in 1966. During the morning the Anti-Aircraft gunners provided a Guard of Honour at the Founders Day ceremony held at the statue of Jan van Riebeeck on the Foreshore, Cape Town. Later a contingent attended the SADF 75th Anniversary Day parade at Three Anchor Bay. It was a beautiful, clear summer's day. Specially invited spectators were seated in a special pavilion, built almost on the sea-wall – leaving just enough space for the march past. On the dias, almost on the spot where once had stood the Three Anchor Bay Battery, were the State President, Mr. P.W. Botha, the Minister of Defence, the Mayor of Cape Town and Chiefs of Services of the SADF. The State President took the salute as thousands of spectators viewed the marching troops.

A group of military veterans led the parade and were followed by a Platoon dressed in uniforms worn by the Forces over the preceding 75 years. Next was an Army representative group with men from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the leading ranks, and following this group was a Colour Party with the Colours of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the place of honour on the left of the leading rank. A SAAF contingent and one from the SA Navy also formed part of the marching troops while a fleet of naval vessels sailed past Three Anchor Bay and aircraft flew overhead.

Nine days after this event, Colonel W. Mouton, who had been appointed Director Anti-Aircraft from 1 January 1985, was guest of honour at the Anti-Aircraft memorial service held at the newly instituted Memorial at Young's Field. On the following day he attended the Passing-Out parade of the February 1985 national service intake, when 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment's Colour was again on parade. To round off the next month the unit provided troops for the annual Gunners' Memorial Service in the Company's Gardens.

The Young's Field Gunners were among many thousands of rugby supporters who anxiously awaited the outcome of the Currie Cup match at Welkom in May, when Western Province played against Northern Free State. There was more interest from the Gunners than usual - Gunner Schalk Burger was the new Captain of the Western Province team. 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment headed for Devon in the Northern Transvaal in June, where it took part in Exercise Golden Eagle II.

### **Retirement**

A significant retirement took place during 1985 while officers and men based at Youngs' Field were engaged in containing civil unrest.

Perhaps the best-known senior officer of the 1980's-1990's retired as Chief of the SADF on 31 October 1985 after 32 years of distinguished service. At a parade held in his honour General C.L. (Constand) Viljoen, SSA, SD, SOE, SM, was presented with an address, handed to him by four members of Special Forces after they had abseiled 70 feet from a Puma helicopter.<sup>6</sup> The address, presented as a token of sincere appreciation and admiration, described the General as an inspiring leader - which without any doubt every member of the Defence Force would agree he was.

Forming the rear-guard of the parade was the only World War Two Artillery sub-sub unit remaining in the country - a Morris Quad gun tractor towing a Field Artillery limber and a 25 pounder Mk 2 gun-howitzer (the barrel without muzzle brake). He was given a final salute from the turret of the gun tractor by Major General F.E.C. van den Berg, as a farewell from the Corps in which General Viljoen had begun his military service.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Paratus*, November 1985, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

### The Independent Batteries and Troops

Delta Battery had operated in Angola many months before. But early in 1986, it became necessary to provide air defence for the mechanised Battalion groups specially formed to counter Cuban aggression in Southern Angola; in addition to 32 and 44 Battalions. Independent Anti-Aircraft sub-units were formed in that year. They were nearly all based at logistical or support areas. The sub-units were mostly equipped with Ystervark systems – the 20 mm GAI-GOC mobile gun – but captured ZU-23-2 twin 23 mm and 35 mm Oerlikons in a static role were also used, as were SAM-7s. Vehicles of opportunity (Buffels and Ratels) was used to serve as Troop fire control posts to transport the Tupperware radar.



*Figure 53: Example of Tupperware radar mounted on 81mm mortar Ratel vehicle*

Only one Battery seems to have been given a title. Foxtrot Battery (the name was given by the Battalion Commander) – in reality little more than a Troop – under command of Captain C.R. Lindsay from 11 January 1981, when it was detached from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and joined 61 Mechanised Battalion Group (previously known as Combat Group Juliet). The Battalion Commander named it as shown when it became an independent 'Battery' remembered only from 1 March 1986. It was commanded by Captains J.J. Visser; D. Bornman; J. Roux (in an acting capacity); A.J. Greef; H.J. Baird; A. Burger; Lieutenant P.S. Mokgosi and finally by Lieutenant D.R. Fortuin, before it returned to 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment in January 2001.

Foxtrot Battery made a name for itself by destroying three replica model aircraft – flown at a height and speed to simulate actual aircraft-when under training at Omuthiya in South West Africa. In 1982-84 with two Troops of 20 mm guns and a SAM 7 team Anti-Aircraft protection was provided for logistics bases during Operations *Daisy*, *Askari* and *Meebos*, and later during Operation *Modular*. Commanded by Captain J. Roux it was joined by the much-depleted Anti-Aircraft Troop from 62 Mechanised Battalion during Operation *Hooper*. Bombardier Hendriks unfortunately died in a bombing attack during this operation. During Operations *Hilti* and *Prone* in 1988 – the final operations of what has been termed the 'Bush War' - it provided air defence for elements of 10 Division. It later formed part of the Resolution 435/UNTAG forces, withdrawing afterwards to Walvis Bay and the Army Battle School. It was afterwards deployed as part of 61 Mechanised Brigade Group in Internal Stability Operations during the 1994 elections, and again in 1995, 1996 and 1998. The Battalion Group closed down in the year 2000.

Five Troops acted independently, but little is known of their activities, nor of their titles.

The second of the five Troops, commanded initially by Captain J.H. (Poena) van Heerden, was placed under command of 4 South African Infantry Battalion from 1 August 1986. The Battalion – as 62 Mechanised Battalion Group – took part in Operations *Modular* and *Hooper*. The Troop provided protection for the Group's logistics base. Malaria caused a drop in its strength and for a short while it was attached to Foxtrot Battery during Operation *Hooper*. It later rejoined 62 Mechanised Battalion Group and moved with the Group to Walvis Bay where it was demobilised in December 1989. It was commanded by Lieutenant J.H. van Heerden; Captain A. de Villiers; Captain J.H. van Heerden and Lieutenant J. Booysen respectively.

Poena Van Heerden, then a young Captain, wrote in the year 2017 of events in 1988 during the time he was in command of the Troop:

*I normally don't live in the past, but sometimes you have to share your story with others, not to bring back bad memories, but to honour those men (although they were only 18 – 19 years old), and who have earned my respect. This is not about who was right or who was wrong, or who has told the best 'war story'. This is only a small portion of what we went through on the 25 February 1988. I apologise to all the names I used without their consent, and I also apologise for the names I have not used. This is my story (I wrote this last year), dedicated to the people who lost their lives on the 25 February 1988.*

*"The attack on Tumpo 1 was done by 61 Mech. The Anti-Aircraft Troop of 62 Mech (or what was left of it) joined up with 61 Mech. Captain Jean Roux was the Troop Commander and I was the 2IC. During the attack, we were a tactical distance (taktiese sprong) behind the tanks and Infantry. We were quite widely spread due to the formation and the terrain, so one could not see all vehicles. We came under fire from enemy Artillery, which was quite accurate, and we even thought there might be an enemy fire controller on our side. It was as hot as hell with a lot of smoke, dust, noise and radio clutter around us. The call came through - Hendriks is weg'. At this stage own forces were moving back so I 'lost' it a bit (as only a young Captain would do), as he was supposed to be with his vehicle. After a few swear words and shouting, the reason for the call became obvious, and with me the closest to Hendrick's vehicle, I moved the 50 meters forward. Getting there, I saw him lying on his back with a SAM missile next to him. The question might be asked what Hendricks was doing outside his vehicle at that stage. Well, doing his job, and trying to engage the MiG's with a missile. He was very eager to bring down an enemy aircraft. Keeping in mind that we were still receiving incoming Artillery fire, there was no time to hang around there. I remember jumping from my own Ratel and with the help of the medic and the other guys, lifted his body onto my Ratel, placing it behind the turret. We left the missile where it lay, as we were unsure what shrapnel damage the missile had received, but did remove the trigger mechanism. I was not sure if it was the SAM 7/14/16 as we had all three types in our inventory. Looking at the earlier photos, but suspect it was a SAM 14. I think we wrapped his body in a groundsheet. He had a shrapnel wound to the back of his head. As he was the driver of his Ratel, I jumped into his Ratel and drove it a few 100 meters away from the incoming fire. There somebody took over his vehicle and I drove with his body to 'A' Echelon, Commandant Loubscher. I remember looking behind the turret at his body, not understanding the real impact of what had just happened. At 'A' Echelon we lowered his body from the vehicle, and someone placed it in a body bag. I think the guy that was standing next to him, who was not wounded but saw everything, was also casevaced. Driving back to the battle group was a very scary and a reluctant experience, as we all experienced the realities of death and war. I think it was quite natural for everyone to shed a tear that night. Thinking back to that day, even after 29 years (This year 30), I can still remember it as if it had only just happened.*

*The second incident I remember as well. Not sure if it was the same day, or a bit later. I was sitting in the turret of the Ratel and with binoculars, was watching the MiGs (as long as you could see them, you knew where they will bomb). We again received incoming Artillery or mortar fire, and somehow I jumped inside the Ratel, closing the hatch after me. A mortar round landed about 5 meters away from us, with a deafening explosion, lots of dust and smoke. The Ratel was a bit 'shaken'. There were guys in front of and on the other side of the Ratel. An Engineering 'troopie' (I remember he had white hair and looked like an unshaved poodle) was screaming 'die f\*kkers het my raakgeskiet'. Again, the medic loaded the guy on the Ratel and we had to get him to a medical post. We got stuck on sawn-off tree stumps, and with a push of another vehicle we were on our way with no idea where the Medical Post was. On the way there, a MiG bombed an ammunition truck full of mortar and other ammo, which was*

*exploding all over. Close to that was another Ratel which needed a jump start, so we had to make a stop there before the MiG's came back, and used the burning ammo truck as a reference point. We saved the other Ratel in quick time, and followed a general instruction back to the medical post. It was quite late in the afternoon when we dropped of the casevac at the medical post, using very little Portuguese to ask directions from UNITA. At the medical post we (or someone else) bumped into a lonely dead tree, which almost fell on our vehicle, luckily without any further 'death / injury by tree' incident.*

*The above happened 30 years ago, but I still relive it as if it has just happened. Tomorrow I will have a cold one on Bombardier Hendricks and celebrate the friendship of 'brothers in arms'.*

The third Troop – remembered only by its call sign (A63) - was formed in 1989 to protect Sector 10 headquarters at Oshikati, later being attached to 63 Mechanised Battalion Group. Commanded for a short while by Lieutenant H.J. Baird it took part in various operational deployments and also acted independently at the Ogongo and Okolonguo support bases. After this it took over the protection of Oshikati airstrip after the withdrawal of the 35 mm Oerlikons that had until then constituted the defence element. The Battalion – as 63 Mechanised Battalion Group – took part in Operations *Merlyn* and *Agree*. With the mechanised Battalion group the Troop withdrew from the Operational Area in 1990 to the Army Battle School to conform to United Nations Resolution 435 under command of Lieutenant B. Snyman.

From 1986 both 32 and 44 Battalions each had an attached Anti-Aircraft Troop. The Troop with 32 Battalion (The Buffalo Battalion – '*Os Terriveis*') was deployed from 1986 and commanded in turn by Major L. Scheepers, Lieutenant J. Roelofse and Captain A.B. Korf. It provided protection for the Battalion's base, but an Anti-Aircraft section formed part of Battle Group Bravo from December 1987 to February 1998. About 4 February, an air attack was made upon the Anti-Aircraft position, which protected the Tactical headquarters. One SA-7 missile was fired by the Anti-Aircraft gunners but it did not launch correctly; instead of climbing into the sky – it skimmed along the ground providing a perfect target indicator for the MiG's. It was withdrawn from the operational area after Easter 1989 and moved back to Young's Field. Lieutenant Naude commanded the Troop in the last few months.

It is recorded that three members of a detachment of National Servicement manning a 20 mm gun at the logistics base at Menongue apparently became bored and wandered over to inspect the wreckage of an MiG. There are two versions of what subsequently happened but it may have been booby trapped; and in an explosion two of the men were killed instantly. The third suffered serious and tragic injuries.

The last of the independent Troops was deployed at Swartbooisdrift under command of Major J. Roux. It was equipped with six Jakkals air transportable mini-jeps, each mounting twin Browning machine guns – apparently the brain child of Commandant Les Rudman, previously 44 Parachute Brigade's SO1 Ops. The Troop was also equipped with SAM 7's. It appears that the Troop was manned by personnel of 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment and was to have been dropped on Mocamedes with members of a reconnaissance Regiment acting as pathfinders. They were to receive and be trained by UNITA on Stinger ground-to-air missiles before the main force dropped. The operation never took place. Little is known of any further deployment.



*Figure 54: The independent Troop of 32 Battalion with part of the wreckage of a MiG that was shot down*

Despite hard training, interspersed with sport and week-end passes after the first weeks, not all was well at Young's Field. Two gunners - P.J. da Silva and M.R. Kruger - who could possibly not take the intensity of training - or perhaps had more personal reasons - attempted suicide in August 1987. The School also lost a gunner when G.M. Goldberg was killed on his motor cycle in a head-on collision in Kloof Nek Road on 18 September 1987.<sup>8</sup>

Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment presented its annual Junior Leader passing-out parade to the usual large number of invited guests and parents on 18 December 1987. Forty-six new 2nd Lieutenants and one hundred and eight new Bombardiers and Lance Bombardiers paraded before the military and civilian spectators. They were congratulated on their promotion by Chief of the Army, Lieutenant General A.J. (Kat) Liebenberg. The parade was as expected, immaculately performed. Tea and refreshments were afterwards available in the Pom-Pom Hall.

### **Battle**

To the north an offensive had in earlier months been launched by Cuban forces and FAPLA against UNITA and a stage was reached where it became necessary for South Africa to intervene to avoid the possibility of UNITA-held territory from being taken. South African and Namibian troops clashed head-on in battles with Russian and Cuban air and land forces in south-eastern Angola.

They had entered the battle once FAPLA had been badly beaten after launching an offensive to dislodge UNITA from its stronghold at Jamba. Tanks, sophisticated ground-to-air missiles, attack helicopters and MiG-23's had been used in their desperate bid to re-capture the Cuando-Cubango province in Southern Angola. It was in South Africa's interest to assist UNITA as MPLA control over the area would allow SWAPO to once more have easy access to cross into South West Africa.

<sup>8</sup> SANDF Archives, C Army, DLA Gp 47, Box 34.

In ensuing operations in the vicinity of Cuito Canavale where South African troops destroyed FAPLA 59 Brigade, a MiG 23 was shot down on 8 October near the Lomba River by an Ystervark mounted 20 mm gun. Further hits were obtained on other MiG's but the jubilant Anti-Aircraft Gunners could not claim any other major success. The enemy aircraft were more careful in future attacks and abandoned low-level runs. The success of the Gunners was tempered by the loss of one of their number, when Bombardier C. Hendriks died as a result of enemy Artillery bombardment.<sup>9</sup>

Two days later the *Cape Times* gave the names of five men who had died in actions against the Russian/Cuban force. In his announcement the night before, General Jan Geldenhuys also stated that sophisticated and advanced Russian electronic weaponry – not thought to have yet been seen by the West – had been captured. The booty included top-secret Artillery locating devices in addition to Anti-Aircraft weapons and other equipment. Defence advisers in the United States were reported to be 'delighted' with the South African success, particularly with the capture of the 'high-tech' weaponry. The capture of these weapons had stymied moves in the United States Congress to terminate US-South African military intelligence links, which, had it taken place, would not have allowed the United States to benefit from the Republic's battlefield booty.

### **Regiment Vaal Rivier and Flak Traps**

During February 1988 Regiment Vaal Rivier was tasked to provide a light Anti-Aircraft Battery at Rundu where it was to relieve 102 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment. The take-over was successfully completed and the relieving Battery followed a standard daily routine until 7 March. On that day, Brigadier Smit, commanding 7 SA Infantry Division, informed the Battery Commander, Captain F.P. Möller, that his Battery was to provide air defence support to 82 Mechanised Brigade during the forthcoming Operation *Packer*. Indents were immediately placed for gun tractors and other necessary vehicles and equipment. Two 35 mm guns, an FCU (fire control unit) and two generators were loaded on a C130 on 12 March and with 22 members of the Battery under Captain Gerrie Marais, were flown to Mavinga. Further loads followed, the last arriving during the night of 17 March.<sup>10</sup>

A road convoy led by WO2 G. Visser with all the remaining vehicles had meanwhile left Rundu very early in the morning of 14 March. It arrived at Mavinga on 18 March. The entire Battery then moved 80 km to the BAA. The Battery Commander was instructed to deploy two Troops independently in the region of the Chaminga and Hubi Rivers to act as Flak Traps (not a standard manner of employing 35 mm equipment) for enemy aircraft operating in the rear of own forces; to mislead the enemy and to keep aircraft away from the GV5 155 mm guns deployed in the area while it was busy engaging targets on D-Day. By '...0600, D-hour on D-day 23 March 1988,'<sup>11</sup> the guns of the two Troops – 'C' Troop under Captain Marais and 'E' Troop under Lieutenant W. Kruger – had been dug in and were ready. Anti-Aircraft fire was opened on a few occasions while mortar fire and smoke were used as dummy gun positions. It was reported through SAAF channels on one occasion that the tail of one aircraft had received damage. The entire Battery was ordered to withdraw to the concentration area on 24 April. From there it moved via Mavinga to Rundu, and was demobilised and at home early in May 1988.<sup>12</sup>

7 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment also supplied two Troops that were deployed during Operation *Packer*.

### **Air Defence Weaponry**

With the appointment of Colonel J.C. Pieterse as Director Projects a separate Projects Office was established to address Anti-Aircraft equipment requirements. This office, responsible for Anti-Aircraft projects had been developed over decades. The first large Anti-Aircraft projects were initiated in 1983 and 1984 under the director projects. Lieutenant Colonel B. Louw (responsible for towed systems) and Lieutenant Colonel Altus van Heerden (responsible for mechanised systems) took over as project officers from Lieutenant Colonel Brian Carpenter and Lieutenant Colonel Francois Cilliers respectively. Lieutenant Colonel Garry Francis (responsible for local warning radars) joined the team and was

<sup>9</sup> *Cape Times*, 14.11.1987.

<sup>10</sup> *Regiment Vaal Rivier, History and Reminiscences* 1960 to- 2008, pp 102-115.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

relieved by Major M.M. Mostert in 1999. Major J.S. Mbuli was appointed as project officer (responsible for mobile systems) in December 1999 and was promoted to programme officer in 2008. Lieutenant Colonel H.J. Baird (responsible for the Very Short Range Air Defence System and mechanised systems) was transferred to the GBADS project office in January 2002. Captain Lisa Cilliers served in the project office as equipment manager from September 2002 until October 2003. The project office structure was expanded and WO2 Alwin Samuels was appointed as equipment manager in 2004. WO1 T.C. Smart served as equipment manager from November 2011 until July 2017. Colonel A.J. Greeff served in the Project Office from January 2005 until December 2008 as programme officer. Lieutenant Colonel E. Mostert replaced Colonel H.J. Baird in February 2009 and served as project officer until the final closure of the project in 2015. Colonel G.A. Hayes was appointed as programme officer in 2010 and was replaced by Colonel L. Puckree in 2017. GBADS Project Office personnel were all on the structure of the Air Defence Artillery Formation and seconded to the Project Office to serve as project officers.

The campaigns in Angola in 1988 - Operations *Modular*, *Hooper* and *Packer* – all contributed to the realisation that the SADF lacked modern air defence weaponry; it was a real, immediate weakness in the weapon systems held by the SADF; and it was finally driven home for all to grasp – the Army's lack of modern air defence equipment. Although Cactus and 35mm Oerlikons were deployed they were both too fragile for operations in the Angolan bush.

Cactus had been deployed 27 km north-east of Cuito Canavale on 13 February but success was limited and they were moved back to Mavinga during the night of 26 February and flown out three days later. The 24-man detachment under Commandant Johan van Heerden had consisted of two Cactus launcher vehicles, six captured ZU-23-2 Anti-Aircraft guns and a close-in defence section with captured SA-7s – Strela man portable SAMs – troops of 32 Battalion provided protection and patrols in the deployment area. They were needed. The '...airman were rather noisy in deploying...' <sup>13</sup> and soon attracted the attention of the Angolan Air Force. On being redeployed during the night of 19 February they again made more noise than was healthy and were heard by FAPLA reconnaissance patrols. The detachment was moved back to avoid ground attack but the Cactus vehicles, quite unsuited to the terrain, were beginning to have severe problems. Their success had been limited. Only about seven missiles had been fired, one of which caused limited damage to a MiG.

The very basic *Ystervark*, – jokingly called a 'pea-shooter' – a single barrelled SPAA GAI- CO1 system 20 mm Anti-Aircraft gun, together with captured SA-7s and UNITA Stinger and SA-7 teams, shot down and damaged more Angolan aircraft than did their sophisticated counterparts. And, they did prevent the MiG's from coming in low and slow enough to be really effective. Jubilant Anti-Aircraft gunners had shot down an MiG 23 near the Lomba River on 8 October – hence the reason for the increased height of air attack. Other MiG's had been hit but not damaged enough to stop them returning to their base. These weapons could not, however, restore or maintain the mobility of the ground forces in the face of an enemy air presence... The twenty-year-old- Cactus, '...whose technology was archaic and whose transporters were much too dainty for bush warfare...' <sup>14</sup> and the 35 mm guns that were also deployed for short periods, were too fragile for such operations. Until the Army can obtain modern air defence equipment, it will remain entirely dependent on passive air defence measures and on the SA Air Force...' stated a well-known military personage in his book, *War in Angola*. <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *War in Angola*, p. 237.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.330.



Figure 55: From left to right: SA-7 missile with Gunner Ferreira, SA-14 missile with Gunner Lombard and SA-16 missile with Bombardier C. Hendriks, one week before his demise

A combined Cuban\FAPLA force launched an attack on Calueque, but were easily beaten off. This was followed by a deliberate well-planned bombing run by six MiG's on the Calueque Dam installation on 27 June 1988. A stray bomb – an 'over' – killed eleven young national servicemen when it landed some distance from its intended point of impact. Two 20 mm Anti-Aircraft guns deployed to protect the dam quickly swung into action and damaged two of the aircraft. Signals intercept revealed that one had crashed just north of Techipa, on its way back to its base.<sup>16</sup> It was completely unusual for the Anti-Aircraft Troop not to have early warning but at Calueque and Techipa there were no MAOTs on the ground. Early warning came by ordinary operational command channel – and the signal was received too late. The End Conscription Campaign, then well into its stride of condemning national service said in a statement: '...the deaths of these young conscripts is the price paid for the military aggression of the Nationalist Government.'<sup>17</sup>

During the Defence debate in the Houses of Parliament, Cape Town, it was noted that the Defence Force was once again entering a period of change and renewal. The debate centred on discussions of the SADF's actions in central Angola and the Minister stated that the SADF's image as an effective, motivated and formidable fighting force had once again been confirmed. 'Our men achieved feats that will be long talked about,' he said. Between 7 000 and 10 000 casualties had been inflicted on the forces opposing them, while enemy losses in weaponry ran to more than a million dollars.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *The Buffalo Soldiers*, p. 360.

<sup>17</sup> *Cape Times*, 4.11.1988.

<sup>18</sup> *Annual Defence Review*, p. 41.

### GV5 Anti-Aircraft

Shortly before the end of Operation *Hooper*, in early March 1988, the Field Gunners made preparation to shoot down enemy aircraft as this extract from the book: *First In, Last Out*, indicates:

*On 29 February Regimental Commander, Commandant van Eeden issued an instruction to his G5 Battery, headed 'AA use for 155mm HA rounds'. Strange as this may sound, it was to be an experiment in deflecting enemy aircraft from own forces whilst in contact. During the previous attack, the FAPLA Artillery had fired 972 rounds at own force and three direct hits caused two South African deaths and three vehicles burnt out.*

*The object of this experiment was to provide counter-bombardment as support to own forces that would be pinned down in the final battle while under threat of air attack.*

*The plan was to deploy two G5s in a roving position about 10 kilometres away from any other Battery. One gun would elevate to 1,316 mills (74°) and lay in a westerly direction – the expected direction of attack. The SAAF Mobile Air Operations Team would provide the approach height and direction, and the gun detachment would set the time fuse to burst at pre-set heights of between 15,000 and 25,000 feet above ground level. For safety, the predicted point of burst on the ground was to be sent through to HQ to keep own forces out of that area. The idea was that a 155mm round would burst in front of an approaching enemy aircraft and scare off the pilot.<sup>19</sup>*

There was no further mention of this rather radical use of a sophisticated 155 mm field gun in an Anti-Aircraft role.

### Training Continues

Meanwhile training of 'new' Anti-Aircraft gunners continued in the Western Cape – and it was not without incident.

In 1987 the Anti-Aircraft School was under command of Commandant N.G. Muller with the Junior Leader wing commander Major Altus van Heerden, who officially held the post of CIGAR (Chief Instructor Gunnery and Research). The Junior Leader Wing was taken to Rooiberg, near Van Wyksdorp, where they underwent Platoon weapon and section leading training. The final highlight of the training period was live night fire from defensive positions. For two days the troops dug trenches in misty rain conditions with little less than Infantry spades, set out firing lines and prepared defences. This was also the last year that the old green material webbing and steel helmet was used.

Major Van Heerden briefed everyone in the deployment area and stressed that the signal to start the fire plan would be the explosion of two claymore mines in front of the defence with white phosphorous grenades. He specifically cautioned all *not* to fire before the signal was given. The Major invited the dignitaries of the town to witness the finale from a nearby hill. At 'stand to' one could hear a pin drop - everyone watched the killing zone. After dark the bus with the dignitaries could be heard approaching the hill. The bus stopped on top of the hill and was received by the Major. As the driver switched off the engine a single tracer round was fired from the trenches in the centre of the killing zone. Seconds later the whole defence opened fire with everything they had. A signal to 'cease fire' was given by means of a red 1 000 ft flare. The bus with its load of dignitaries departed. The next morning the trenches were closed, area cleaned and the whole training wing gathered. Major van Heerden asked who had fired the first shot; but the culprit could not be identified. The whole Wing was punished, and they would not forget the punishment or the lesson; 'dash, down, crawl, observe and set sights', for eight kilometres back to the main gate of the training area.

In September 1988, personnel of 101 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment under command of Major Danie Hurter completed their practical training field phase at Papendorp with a live firing exercise over the sea in preparation for operational deployment. Lieutenant H.J. Baird also joined this training in preparation for operational deployment. The deployment area for the eighteen 20 mm *Ystervark* guns curved below the dunes in the bay, about 200 metres from the shore line. During one of the 'shooting

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<sup>19</sup> *First In, last Out*, pp. 338, 339.

runs' Bombardier Johan Small experienced a stoppage on his gun. Without performing the correctly required safety precautions on the weapon, he proceeded to investigate. In doing so he unlocked the barrel. With this action the breech block went into positive locking, releasing the firing pin. The round in the chamber fired. There was one bang and in full view of the whole Battery the Bombardier was flung off the vehicle and in an instant, found himself lying on the beach, five metres behind the *Ystervark* with the barrel in his hand. Fortunately no injuries were sustained, but his embarrassment served as a valuable lesson to all.



*Figure 56: The gun line of 101 Battery at Papendorp*

### **Parachute Gunners**

As part of a reaction force 44 Parachute Brigade was established in April 1978 and an Anti-Aircraft capability became necessary. 44 Anti-Aircraft Battery was therefore formed. It became a Regiment, appointed and designated as a unit of the Citizen Force in January 1985. The unit is in another sense unique. It went through the entire process of application for a Colour, design, approval and the whole administrative by various headquarters' that followed. But the Colour was never made. The unit decided that the guns were their Colours - despite being armed with foreign weapons.

Headquarters of the Regiment was at Murrayhill (Hammanskraal). The unit initially struggled to obtain any intake of National Servicemen and the first eighteen parachute qualified Anti-Aircraft gunners were appointed in September 1984. They were trained at Young's Field on SAM 7 missiles, the Russian 14.5 mm heavy machine-gun, and on .50 Browning's. The Russian gun had a collapsible carriage similar to the 20 mm Hispano Zuisa. Major J.P. (Paddy) Case was appointed from 1 April 1985 to command the unit, Major Case recalls that because of a lack of qualified parachute gunners they were integrated into 4 Parachute Battalion in a Company in which he became Company Commander. In 1988 an airborne attack on Naib (Mocamedes) was planned and was said to be the biggest airborne attack since Arnhem. The Anti-Aircraft gunners were to be dropped with the Pathfinders, collect Stinger missiles from UNITA and join the main force when the latter landed. The 'war' in Angola ended during the operational planning cycle.<sup>20</sup> Major Case resigned shortly afterwards and he was followed from January 1989 by Major J. Roux, who had previously served in 101 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

### **A New Intake at Young's Field**

Colonel Ormond (who had begun his military career at Young's Field as a national serviceman, the first to become commanding officer and thence Director Artillery Anti-Aircraft) was notified in December 1989 of his transfer to Army Headquarters from 1 January 1989 as SSO Anti-Aircraft Projects. He handed over command to his successor, Commandant S.K. Warren on 14 December, the day before the Junior Leader passing-out parade. Commandant Warren - who had at one time served in the

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Major Case, 18.5.2008.

Transkei Defence Force – was notified of his promotion to Colonel from 1 January 1989, as well as his appointment as Commanding Officer, Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment.

The Passing-Out Parade was held on 15 December against the picturesque backdrop of the Table Mountain, Vlakkenberg and Constantia mountains. And it had the Cape Doctor – the blustery south-east wind that could blow up to 70 km/h. It did that day. Lady guests abandoned their hats and the two bearers of the National flag and the Regimental Colour had a particularly hard time maintaining their stance during the parade. After the official inspection by the Minister of Defence, General M.A. de M. Malan, accompanied by Lieutenant General Liebenberg, Brigadier A. K. de Jager – Officer Commanding Western Province Command – Colonel J.A. Ormond and the parade commander, the troops marched past the Revue officer, his entourage and spectators in Review order. They did so much to the obvious annoyance of a Kiewiet family of two adult birds and two chicks who objected to the troops invading their turf. After registering their protest, they carried on with their insect collecting activities, leaning into the wind to maintain equilibrium.

After personally congratulating each one of the sixty-five new officers and forty-nine new Bombardiers, the Minister presented awards to winners of trophies. Eleven newly commissioned officers and thirty-eight Bombardiers were not present at the parade. They were in the operational area.

In his speech the Minister of Defence stated that Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was one of the best training establishments in the SADF and said that *Alta Pete – Aim High* – was a striking motto. He further mentioned that the Anti-Aircraft gunners were an integral part of South Africa's Air Defence System but the 'Ack-Ack' would have to face up to and meet even greater challenges in future as technology dictated changes in the patterns of warfare. Guests and parents afterward attended a sumptuous spread of refreshments in the Pom-Pom Hall where, at a given moment, parents proudly attached the insignia of their newly won ranks to their son's uniforms.

With the change in command the RSM stepped down on 31 December to allow the new RSM – D.T.W. Lennie to step into the most critical post in any unit. The 'RSM Handing Over and Taking-Over Parade' took place on 26 January 1989 and was followed by a farewell tea. Other changes that took place at the year-end included the promotion of Major P. du T. Walters to Commandant and his appointment as Officer Commanding, Anti-Aircraft School. He replaced Commandant N.G. Muller who had earlier left to attend Staff course. At the same time, Commandant C.R. (Carl) Lindsay took over the post of Headquarters Unit Commander from Commandant John Del Monte.

Sergeant Major Lennie was on hand to oversee the arrival of more than 800 of the 1989 intake of National Servicemen who reported at Young's Field on Wednesday, 1 February. They were greeted by none other than the Deputy Minister of Defence, Mr. Wynand Breytenbach, who announced that the SANDF were giving thought to reducing Citizen Force part-time service. Among the recruits were a number of top sportsmen, always welcome in any unit. 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment could boast of four young men who excelled at sport: Gunner K. Andrews, a Western Province rugby player; Gunners B. Cameron and P. Slater – placed first and second in the South African Windsurfing championships, and Gunner D. Rundel who represented Western Province at cricket.

Mr. Breytenbach told the bemused recruits – as most are on their first day in the Army – that the thought of a reduction in training had been the result of the recent lengthy negotiations and for Battalion groups in the operational area, as well as to 32 and 44 Battalions. Peace initiatives and Angola. But that despite such welcome news National Service would not be cut in the short term. A further welcoming address was delivered by the Officer Commanding, Western Province Command, Brigadier A.K. de Jager on 8 February. Their welcome, and after collecting kit and settling down in the bungalows built to house airmen of the two Air schools that had occupied Young's Field during the war years – was followed by an inter-bungalow touch-rugby competition. Basic training for the new gunners took place on the cement areas originally laid for Air School aircraft. Field training took place later at Koeberg, Gansekraal and Touws River.

The most unfortunate news ever received by the Anti-Aircraft gunners was recorded in the *Cape Times* of Wednesday, 1 February 1989. The Defence correspondent reported that Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was to be moved to another Base 'somewhere up country', possibly 'a more central location in the hinterland.' Kimberley was mentioned but the article stated that 'Military spokesmen would not comment on the move.' It was, however, confirmed later in the year that Kimberley was the destination and the move would take place in late 1989 or early 1990.

### **Fifty Years**

Completion of fifty years since the official establishment of the first Anti-Aircraft Battery in the Union Defence Force on 1 April 1939 gave Colonel Syd Warren the opportunity for celebration. Suitable arrangements were for this event to coincide with the end of basic training on 14 April 1989. A very impressive passing out parade was thus held two days after the annual Gunners' Memorial Service. The Revue officer was once again Major General Dunbar Moodie, SM, the oldest surviving commanding officer of the School, who in his speech reflected on the activities of the Anti-Aircraft gunners over the previous fifty years. The parade was followed by a buffet dinner provided by the prize-winning Young's Field chefs. The evening before a magnificently organised function had been held in the Pom-Pom Hall to celebrate the half century.

A large number of Permanent and Citizen Force officers were present as well as Warrant Officers and NCOs, and their wives. Practically a guest of honour in his own right was Lieutenant Colonel C.T. Howie, who commanded 1st Anti-Aircraft Brigade in East Africa; 1 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in North Africa; was captured at Tobruk; escaped from a POW camp and flew to safety in a German aircraft that he 'stole'. For the last few months of the war in Italy he was again in command of 1/12 Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment. Others included Major Neil Garlick – the first adjutant of a South African Anti-Aircraft unit – and later a Battery Commander and interim Regimental Commander.

Former commanding officers – Brigadier E.L. Bekker, and Colonels A. Moelich and J. du P. Lourens were present; and so were both Director, Anti-Aircraft and Assistant Director. Also there to hear the tributes paid to Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment by Brigadier A.K. De Jager, Officer Commanding Western Province Command, were four former RSM's: Warrant Officers I.J. Spangenberg; M. Schickerling; C. van der Westhuizen and M. Janse van Nieuwenhuizen. Significantly perhaps, that evening the Anti-Aircraft gunners were seen wearing their newly issued beret badges, both of which had received official approval on 10 November 1987.

### **A Chapter Closes**

While the Fifty-Year celebrations were taking place - another chapter in South Africa's military and political history was drawing to a close.

Years of negotiation over the future of South West Africa/Namibia had at last resulted in agreement on the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola in accordance with UN Resolution 435. South African security forces would withdraw from South West Africa, where 101 Battery of 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was providing air defence at Ondangwa and Oshikati.

There had been a permanent Anti-Aircraft presence in those two centres for approximately two years, Batteries relieving each other at intervals. 101 Battery under Major D.J.K. Hurter had left for the SAAF base at Ondangwa and the military headquarter town of Oshikati in mid-December to relieve Cape Garrison Artillery. The original members of the Battery had been replaced by gunners of the 1988 intake and the Battery Commander had been replaced by Major J.F. Conradie. This post was subsequently filled in turn by Major A.P. van Heerden, Major S.M. Schultz and Commandant J. Del Monte. Major Steven Schultz had followed in his father's footsteps by becoming an Anti-Aircraft Gunner. He unfortunately received a gunshot wound in his back on 26 April 1989 during a state of 'Readiness High' when diving at a gunner who had twice fired at him as a result of imagined grievance. He was evacuated to 1 Military Hospital, Pretoria, the next day.

When the final date of withdrawal reached the Anti-Aircraft gunners the Sector 12 headquarters was closed down and the Battery, then under command of Commandant Del Monte, the last 35mm

Battery Commander in the operational area - with WO2 A. Kruger as convoy 21C - departed from Ondangwa at 7.00 am on 18 May in a convoy of 53 vehicles en route to the military base at Grootfontein. Once there, the 109 officers and men of the Battery loaded their guns and vehicles onto rail transport and later flew 'home' to Young's Field. Lieutenant H.A. Smit and the gunners of the Ystervark Troop were left. They serviced their seven vehicles and headed for Walvis Bay.

The final Anti-Aircraft SITREP of Operation Agree, sent on 15 May 1989, heralded the end of the South African Anti-Aircraft presence in South West Africa/Namibia... except for the Ystervark Troop at Walvis Bay - still South African territory.

#### 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment

It was not until Exercise Vlakwater in September 1989 that a full Troop from 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment with two gun sections of Russian 14.5 ZPU Anti-Aircraft guns and one Jakkals airborne vehicle (described as a mini- jeep with four- wheel drive) with a double-barrelled 12.7 mm Anti-Aircraft machine-gun, was deployed by air. Browning machine-guns were also mounted on Jakkals vehicles. The gunners exited the C-130 using the 'nerve wracking tailgating'<sup>21</sup> method from the rear ramp, immediately after the equipment pallets had been drawn out. (The full name of the 14.4 mm KVP Russian gun, one of many captured in Angola is: *Krupnokabiliberniy Pulemyot Vladimirova*)

During *Exercise Pegasus* at the Army Battle School in 1992 - and by now under acting command of Captain G.B. Krenzer who had succeeded Major Paddy Case - fifty-one parachute-qualified air defence Gunners from 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment were dropped at approximately 11.30 pm on 14 July over the General De Wet Training Area. Unfortunately, due to a surface wind their landing was a little harder than usual. Two 24 ft gun pallets were released from a C-130 transport aircraft before the Gunners exited the aircraft by the tail-gate. Their task was to provide air defence for the ground troops who went into the attack at 7.00 am on 15 July. A single 'enemy' aircraft appeared but because of fire from their eight twin-barrelled 14.5 mm Anti-Aircraft guns and two shoulder-launched missiles, it was unable to launch an attack. Just after first light the next morning the ground forces were attacked by air (in the form of Skylift radio-controlled aircraft) and were repelled by the Anti-Aircraft gunners.



Figure 57: ZPU-2 14.5 mm Anti-Aircraft gun

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Two Anti-Aircraft Troops were an integral part of the support weapon structure of 1 Parachute Battalion Group – one from 10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment – both of which were used during the exercise. The exercise was the first in which Anti-Aircraft procedures, doctrine and tactical response were demonstrated since being included in the Battalion group.<sup>22</sup> The Regiment took part in 44 Parachute Brigade's 'water jumps' over the Roodpoort Dam each year from 1990 to 1996. By 1997 the strength of 44 Anti-Aircraft Regiment was five officers and 117 other ranks although not all were jump qualified. Volunteers did a water jump that year.

### **SAAF hands over Captured Guns**

At Hammanskraal 'under an unforgiving sun' Colonel J.J. van Heerden of Air Defence Artillery Group, SAAF, symbolically presented a number of Russian 2A14 23 mm (Sergei) ZU-23-2 twin-barrelled automatic Anti-Aircraft guns to the SA Army. In his address when handing them over Colonel van Heerden highlighted the fact that despite training manuals our troops had been able to use them against the enemy with devastating results. He said they had been found to have a '...highly destructive surface-to-surface ability...' and the weapon had proved itself the most feared weapon in the bush.' They were accepted by Colonel J.A. Ormond, Director Anti-Aircraft.<sup>23</sup> Thirty-six guns had been captured during operations in Angola and had been given to the Air Force to protect their Cactus ground-to-air low-level missile Batteries. They had been mounted by the Air Force on Samil 100 trucks. The ZU-23-2 was developed in the 1950's and in service from 1960 by many countries. It had a practical rate of fire of 1 400 rpm, and a cyclic rate of 2 000 rpm; an effective range of 2.5 km against low-flying targets and could hit armoured vehicles at 2 km. (Zenitnaya Ustanovka abbreviated as ZU).

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<sup>22</sup> Anti-Aircraft School/10 Anti-Aircraft Regiment Newsletter 02/92..

<sup>23</sup> *Paratus*, Vol 41, No. 3, March 1990, p.14.