

THE HISTORY OF THE CAPE CORPS IN BRIEF

The Cape Corps is the traditional military home of the Coloured People of South Africa and their connection with the defence systems of South Africa dates back to the earliest period of the colonization of the country.

As early as 1661 Van Riebeeck used the Kaapmans, a native Hottentot tribe of the Cape, against the Gonnamans another tribe in the Cape.

By the year 1675 it became the custom of the Dutch to use these people in defence of the Colony and by the year 1700 there was no difference between the military obligations of the Dutch Colonists and the native inhabitants. In the year 1774 the coloured people, who was then already in existence were conscripted for Commando Service.

In 1781 the Dutch established the Corps of Pandours from freed slaves in the Stellenbosch, Drakenstein and Swellendam areas.

This Corps of Pandours, who was actually the forerunners of the Cape Corps was taken over by the British when they took over the Cape in 1795, and renamed the Corps the "Cape Corps" when the Cape was handed back to the Dutch in 1803, the Dutch increased the strength of the unit by 125 men.

With the final take over of the Cape in 1806 the Corps was again re-employed by the British and renamed the Cape Regiment.

During this period up to 1910 when the Union of South Africa was established the Unit was employed in nearly all the campaigns in which the Colony was involved.

In 1817 the Cape Regiment was disbanded and re-established as Infantry and Cavalry under the names of Cape Light Infantry Regiment and Cape Light Cavalry Regiment. Both Regiments were employed in the Defence of Grahamstown when it was attacked by 9 000 natives. The Regiments were strengthened with 215 men in 1819 and used as Patrols against the Kaffers.

In 1827 these Regiments were again disbanded and reformed into the Cape Regiment of Riflemen. They rendered distinguished service in the Kaffer wars of 1836 and in the relief of Port Natal.

The Corps took part in the Battle of Boomplaats in 1848 against the Free State. In 1850 the Corps was again used in the war of the Ax in Eastern Cape Province and also to suppress a rebellion of Coloureds against the state when they made common cause with the Blacks.

1870 saw the disbandment of the Regiment as a military unit but Coloured remained subject to military service and in the Basuto War of 1880 - 81 more Coloureds than Whites were called up.

Rhodes re-established the Cape Corps in 1896 for service in Mashonaland and Rhodesia.

Although no Coloured Regiment existed during the Anglo-Boer War in 1899 to 1902 Coloureds were nevertheless used by both sides as transport drivers and servants. The British however used large numbers for garrison duty in various places.

When the Union Defence Act of 1912 was passed in 1912 Coloureds were not specifically excluded from military service but when the Active Citizen Force was established they were cautiously excluded.

WORLD WAR 1 : 1914 - 1918

The Cape Corps was re-established in 1915 and more than 35 000 volunteered as imperial troops.

Initially most of them saw service in SWA in a non-combatant role. But for the East African Campaign a battalion of infantry later to be known as 1st Battalion Cape Corps was formed. These men were originally not only infantry men and Garrison troops but also saw service as Pioneers.

They did so well that a second Battalion was started. First Battalion with reinforcements from Second Battalion was transferred to Egypt and Palestine in 1918 and on the 19, 20 and 21 September covered themselves in glory at the Battle of Square Hill. During this battle all their officers were killed or wounded the men carried on under the leadership of their NCO and refused to withdraw in spite of their troops being slaughtered by the Turks until they were instructed to do so by Low Flying Aircraft.

A Battalion of dockworkers was sent to France where they rendered excellent service in the Harbours of France. They also served in the SA Field Artillery, Cape Auxiliary Horse Transport Companies and the Cape Coloured Harbour Corps.

At the end of the war they were awarded the following Battle Honours.

- Megiddo
- Nablus
- Palestine 1918
- Kilimandjaro
- Behobeho
- Neyangao
- East Africa 1916 - 17
- and a King's Colour

Second Battalion won the Battle Honour, East Africa 1917 - 1918

WORLD WAR II : 1939 - 1945

With the outbreak of World War II the Cape Corps was reestablished in 1940 and more than 45 000 men volunteered for service and although they were used as non-combatant troops they played an extensive role in the war effort.

In 1942 the Defence Force adopted what became known as the "Dilution Policy" which in effect meant that all non-combatant roles had to give to members of the Cape Corps, this resulted that all numbers on the Artillery were filled by men of Cape Corps. Thus artillery training for Coloureds was commenced.

Men of the Cape Corps rendered distinguished service with all South African Regiments including the Medical Corps, Engineering Corps, Artillery, SA Seaward defence, the South African Airforce.

They also saw service with the Union Defence Forces during the Madagascar campaign in 1942.

At the end of the African Campaign various MT Companies were formed for service in Palestine and the near East. Whilst the Cape Corps Aerodrome Defence Units stayed in Egypt to guard RAF Aerodromes when the war moved to Italy. A large number of men moved to Italy with the 6 SA Armoured Division.

Men of the Cape Corps won the following Medals and Awards :

Military Medals	:	9
British Empire Medals	:	4
Mentioned in Despatches	:	51
Kings Commendation Medals:		2
Commander in chief's Commendation	:	8

In 1947 the Cape Corps was established as a PF Unit but was disbanded in 1949.

Period 1963 - 1980

In 1962 the Government appointed a commission to investigate, report and recommend on the possible utilization of Coloureds in the Defence Force. As a result of their recommendation the Minister of Defence announced in Parliament that wef from 3 September 1963 the South African Coloured Corps be established as a Permanent Force Corps of the South African Defence Force.

The Unit was established at Eersterivier where it still is today with the task of training, instruktors, storemen/clerks, drivers, stretcher bearers, hygiene and medical personnel and musicians for service in the unit and posting to other SADF units.

The first badge of 29 recruits commenced their basic training on 3 Sep 1963 and qualified as instructors in July 1964. Most of these men have now reached Senior NCO's and WO ranks and some have been commissioned as officers. The present Cape Corps Band started their training in 1965 and since then have become the display window of the Corps all over the Republic.

In 1966 the SA Navy decided to employ Coloureds as serving seamen in the Navy. These men were recruited from the trained ranks of the SACC and posted to the Navy. The unit continued with the recruiting of Naval Personnel and their basic training until 1968 when these tasks were taken over by the Navy itself.

Amongst the members themselves and their community there was always the desire to have the Cape Corps re-instated under its traditional name. This became a reality when in 1972 the unit was renamed the "Cape Corps" and the base the Cape Corps Service Battalion at the same time the Corps was given back its traditional "Lady Hope" badge.

The Chief of the Defence Force announced on the same occasion that young Coloureds were to be enlisted in the Army on a voluntary basis for one year. This commenced in January 1973.

In August 1973 the first group of Candidate Officers started their officers training. They were commissioned as Lieutenants on 16 May 1975. They have now attained Major's ranks.

Also in February 1975 the Defence Act was amended to give members of the Cape Corps the same status as their White counter parts.

In January 1975 authority was given for SACC members to wear the same uniform as the rest of the SA Army. The first Chaplain to the Cape Corps was appointed in October 1976.

Infantry training was commenced in June 1976 and in August of that year the first company of Coloured Infantrymen left Cape Town for operational duty. The first group to do so in 53 years they returned to Cape Town to a Hero's welcome in November. During this period an officer and two NCO's were wounded in contact with the enemy.

Since 1976 the Cape Corps has been represented in ever increasing numbers in the Ops area until they reached Battalion strength 1979.

Meanwhile the unit was also busy recruiting and training men in the Maintenance Field and since 1973 the Maintenance and Transport Companies have rendered continuous operational duty.

In 1980 the one years voluntary service was increased to two years and the interest in military service is increasing steadily inspite of the fact that since 1979 no recruiting drives were physically undertaken.

Parity in service conditions and salaries was attained in 1980 except in three lowest ranks, ie Pte, L/Cpls and Cpls and in the case of officers from candidate officers to Lieutenants.

The unit commander had by the end under his command the training wing, a Battalion of Infantry and a maintenance unit. To relieve the area of command it was decided to split the unit into three each with its own Commanding Officer. Since January 1980, therefore the Cape Corps Service Battalion was disbanded and the Cape Corps School, 1 SACC Battalion and SACC Maintenance Unit was established.

To accommodate those trained men who left the unit after their period of voluntary service and who wishes to continue with military service. 30 Maintenance Unit was established as a Cape Corps Citizen Force Unit in 1977. Authority was also granted for Coloured men to join the Commando's and other CF Units.

In 1980 Cape Corp PF members were absorbed into their functional course of the South African Army and the Cape Corps ceased to exist as a PF course of the South African Defence Force.

At the disbandment of the Cape Corps Battalion on 31st December 1979, Cape Corp members have received the following medals and awards :

Southern Cross Medals	:	3
Pro Merito Medals	:	5
C SADF Commendations	:	16
Pro Patria Medals	:	1 125
Long Service Bronze	:	80
C Army Commendation	:	2 (Civilian Personnel)

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