

## TRANSVAAL HORSE ARTILLERY CELEBRATES 110<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY



The Transvaal Horse Artillery which celebrated its 110<sup>th</sup> Birthday on 17 March 2014 has a long and proud history of service to the people of the Republic of South Africa.

The long and hard fought war in South Africa, which culminated in the Treaty of Vereeniging, signed on 31 May 1902, and the withdrawal of the bulk of the British forces from the country led eventually to the establishment of volunteer corps in the new Crown Colony of the Transvaal. One of these units was the battery of artillery known as the Lys Volunteer Corps, named after its founder, Maj G. Lys. Established on 17 March 1904, the first volunteers were enrolled on 30 March 1904. Six months later the title of the battery was changed and became The Transvaal Horse Artillery Volunteers. In January 1907 it was renamed: The Transvaal Horse Artillery (THA).

A second battery was raised in 1905 and a section was later formed in Pretoria but only one battery was accepted into the Active Citizen Force when the latter was established with effect from 1 July 1913.

At the outbreak of war in August 1914, the THA volunteered to serve and were enlisted for active duty as the THA Battery (S.A.M.R.) and it was in this guise that one section of the battery fought its first war-time action at Sandfontein, in German South West Africa (GSWA), in September 1914. Unfortunately the small force which included the two guns had been led into a trap and were forced to surrender.

Reformed as a four-gun battery, the THA returned to GSWA by way of Walvis Bay in late February 1915 and joined Col Coen Brits' mobile column. The Gunners distinguished themselves at Riet, completely outshooting the six German guns in the foothills of the Langer Heinrich. Alongside the 1<sup>st</sup> Mounted Brigade, the THA took part in the remarkable desert march of 376 miles in 21 days from Usakos to Namutoni which outflanked the German defences, and brought about their eventual surrender. The last 200 miles had been covered in ten days and from Lemputz the battery had moved 52 miles in 52 hours, without water.

There was little training in the years after the war due to the economic situation but the battery was mobilised when martial law was declared in March 1922 as a result of an armed strike by miners. The 1930s saw an increase in the establishment of THA to a brigade of three batteries. Mobilised for war in 1939 the THA Brigade moved to Potchefstroom at the end of October where, on 1 February 1940, it became 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Brigade (T.H.A.).

The brigade left Potchefstroom for East Africa in September 1940 with 18-pdr MK II and MKIV guns but in January 1941 9<sup>th</sup> Field Battery were ordered to exchange their guns for the 4.5 inch howitzers of 11<sup>th</sup> Field Battery. The brigade fought with other South African Artillery units through the rigours of the East African campaign in support, of the 1<sup>st</sup> SA Division and the 12<sup>th</sup> African Division together with 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Field Brigades and 1<sup>st</sup> Field Battery (CFA).

Once the campaign was nearing its end, the South African artillery units moved to Egypt in August 1941. THA handed in their old guns and were issued with 25-pdrs, at the same time undergoing conversion training, to become 3 Field Regiment (V) South African Artillery (T.H.A.).

The regiment moved to Mersa Matruh and with the commencement of the Crusader offensive it went forward with 1<sup>st</sup> SA Division to become involved in what a brigadier later described as "...the bloodiest and most heroic encounter of the war", the Battle of Sidi Rezegh. It took place on 23 November 1942, Tottensondag to the Germans; the Sunday of the Dead was to live up to its name.

Attacked by the Afrika Korps, the gunners fought over open sights in rising smoke and dust. Casualties were heavy on both sides. The war diary of 22<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Brigade recorded that the South African gunners "had been magnificent", and a simple soldier said "... they gave it stick, they never faltered."

Remnants of the unit escaped the irresistible tide of German armour but by 1 December 1942 only 375 officers and men answered roll call at Mersa Matruh. A few more trickled in over the coming days. The regiment had managed to extract five of its 24 guns from the scene of battle and later recovered ten guns from the battlefield, seven of which were those of THA.

Reinforced and re-equipped but lacking adequate transport, 8<sup>th</sup> Field Battery moved to Gazala at the end of January 1942, followed by 7<sup>th</sup> Field Battery a month later. RHQ and 9<sup>th</sup> Field Battery remained at Matruh to calibrate guns and provide live shell shoots for courses, before moving to Tobruk at the end of April. They were joined by 8<sup>th</sup> Field Battery and most personnel were taken prisoner when Tobruk fell to the Afrika Korps on 21 June 1942. A party of 8<sup>th</sup> Field Battery managed to escape with the Reserve Company of the Coldstream Guards.

7<sup>th</sup> Field Battery attached to the 7<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, was badly hurt in the withdrawal from Gazala, the entire regiment reaching Alamein in a parlous state. Reinforced by officers and men from 5 Field Regiment, 7<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment (with the THA battery) fought at Alamein from July to the final battle in October.

The Transvaal Horse Artillery (V) was depleted at Tobruk, and was removed from the Order of Battle, together with 2 Field Regiment (NFA).

Transvaal Horse Artillery was represented during the Italian Campaign of 1944/45 by 7/64 Field Artillery (V), South African Artillery (T.H.A.) one of the three batteries combined with those of 22 Field Regiment to form 4/22 Field Regiment, equipped first with 105mm Priests and later 25-pdr Sextons.

The pre-war brigade was resuscitated on 1 January 1946 as 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Regiment (T.H.A.) and commenced annual peace-time training camps. Its next call to action was in January 1976 in support of 72 Motorised Brigade in Operation Budgie, following Operation Savannah. Recalling its war-time activities the batteries of

the regiment were, as in 1946, numbered 7, 8 and 9 and 8<sup>th</sup> battery was the first, during the Operation to be equipped with the 140mm gun (GV2) whilst the other three batteries were equipped with 25pdrs (GV1s). The fourth battery was (incorrectly) numbered 10<sup>th</sup> Battery.

Several tours of duty on the SWA/Namibian border were subsequently undertaken including Operation Protea where the THA was equipped with the GV4 155mm gun. On two occasions the THA was employed as infantrymen in Northern South West Africa and Angola. The regiment also served in COIN roles during the periods of unrest which preceded the change of government in 1994.

The Freedom of Johannesburg was awarded to the regiment in 1964 and in 1986 THA took part in a mechanized parade to celebrate the Centenary of the City of Johannesburg. Four years later Johannesburg Artillery Regiment (previously 2 Locating Regiment) and 7 Medium Regiment were amalgamated with THA, the latter retaining its traditional name.

The regiment celebrated its centenary in March 2004 with a well attended dinner at the Rand Club and by exercising its freedom of entry into the City of Johannesburg with both a mechanized and a marching column. In 2006 the THA was tasked with providing ceremonial gun salutes within the Gauteng province.

The regiment was affiliated with the Honourable Artillery Company on 13 August 1937. On the 11<sup>th</sup> June 2007 Regiment was privileged to share a Royal Salute alongside the HAC at the traditional saluting base, the Tower of London, in honour of the Official Birthday of the Duke of Edinburgh, Consort to Queen Elizabeth II. It was the first time that any Non-Commonwealth Troops have participated in such an event in the United Kingdom.



*THA visit to HAC*

In recent years the Regiment has been very active in Continuation Training activities which see the members reporting once a month to the School of Artillery in Klipdrift outside Potchefstroom, for training on the Prime Mission Equipment in groups and teams. This culminated in October 2013 when the THA provided the core personnel for a Medium Self Propelled Battery during Exercise Rhino which was held at Sheldon's Rest Military Base and on DirkieUys Range in Potchefstroom. The THA exercise alongside their regular counterparts from 4 Artillery Regiment and also with members of Natal Field Artillery.



*GV6 Guns*

On 16<sup>th</sup> December 2013 the THA had the honour of firing a 21 gun National Salute for the President at the Official Parade to Commemorate the Day of Reconciliation and also in honour of the late President Nelson Rohlala Mandela at the occasion of the unveiling of this statue at the Union Buildings.

Later in 2014 the Regiment will commemorate the Centenary of the Battle of Sandfontein which took place in Southern Namibia on the 26th September 1914.

The THA is under command of the SA Army Artillery Formation and the Regimental Headquarters is currently located at Mount Collins, Kelvin, Sandton.

The current ordnance of the THA is the GV6 155mm Self Propelled Gun/Howitzer.



*The GV1 guns of the THA firing a salvo at the 2014 National Gunners' Memorial Service*