

1 MEDICAL BATTALION GROUP

(Source: Ladysmith Municipality Heritage Commemorative Brochure – 2 July 2011)

1 Medical Battalion Group was originally known as the Natal Volunteer Medical Corps, which was formed in 1899 from unit staff detachments (or ambulance sections) that had been in existence since 1895. The first commanding officer was Lt Col James Hyslop, DSO VD, who became Medical Superintendent of the Natal Government Asylum in Pietermaritzburg. He served until 1914.

When the Anglo-Boer War began, the Regiment's strength was 14 officers, 46 other ranks and 18 nurses and they served with distinction throughout the 118 day Siege of Ladysmith.

During the 1906 Poll Tax ('Bhambatha') Rebellion the unit's personnel were deployed in various theaters. It became necessary to increase the strength of the corps, so later in the campaign the stretcher bearers were supplied by the Natal Indian community, led by Mohandas Gandhi (later the Mahatma). Once again, they were scattered about the Colony on detached duty.

In 1913, they became known as 2nd Field Ambulance SAMC and served with the Medical Corps during the German-South-West African Campaign. The name was changed once again in 1935, this time to 1 Field Ambulance. One of the original Medical officers was Dr Archibald McKenzie of Durban (one of the sons of Brig Gen Sir Duncan McKenzie, the Commandant of Militia during the Rebellion). They were of Scottish descent and when Dr McKenzie became the regiment's honorary colonel, the McKenzie tartan was adopted and is worn as a flash behind the badge.

During WW2, all the South African Medical personnel were pooled into newly formed regiments that included 17 Field Ambulance which was commanded by Lt Col J. Struan Alexander, formerly of 1 Field Ambulance. 17 Field Ambulance was captured at the fall of Tobruk in 1943. After the War, 1 Field Ambulance was re-established and 17 Field Ambulance was reformed in 1976. In 1981, both these Regiments were combined into 1 Medical Battalion Group which is the only South African Military Health Service Reserve Force Unit in KwaZulu-Natal. Its ranks have been filled by many prominent medical practitioners, specialists and surgeons.

1 Medical Battalion Group has a highly successful Pipe Band, which also wears the McKenzie tartan for its kilt. The band has taken part in many national and international military tattoos and competitions.

The motto of 1 Medical Battalion Group is "Non Nobis Solum" ('Not for Ourselves Alone') and this is very appropriate with regard to the dedicated soldiers who have served and continue to serve in the Regiment.