

11 FIELD POSTAL UNIT

(Source: Col Muller, SSO Reserves, SA Signal Formation)

During 1963 eleven employees of the Dept. Post & Telecommunications (Dept. P&T) participated in a military exercise with the South African Defence Force (SADF) in the desert in South West Africa (SWA).

During this exercise they realised the necessity of an efficient field postal service for troops in uniform.

Subsequent to negotiations between the Dept. P & T and the SADF, a new military citizen force unit, 11 Field Postal Unit (11FPU) was established on 1 October 1964.

The Dept. P & T mandated 11 FPU Unit to receive, handle and deliver all mail for troops in uniform on its behalf.

The then Under-Secretary: Posts and later Deputy Postmaster General: Telecommunications, Mr Chris Gouws, was the first officer commanding of the Unit.

Initially 25 employees from the Dept. P & T volunteered to do military service in the interest of their colleagues who had been mobilised and deployed.

During 1966, all the members of the Unit were called up to participate in the Republic Festival. During this operation the Unit rendered a fully-fledged field postal service to the SADF and all troops participated for the first time. The same service was rendered at subsequent Republic Festivals.

Since then the Unit has participated in various domestic military exercises. More than 50 Field Post Offices (FPO's) had been deployed as extensions to the nearest civilian post office. The most important being field post offices at the SA Army Battle School, now SA Combat Training Centre, at Lohatla.

Due to circumstances on the SWA border and the deployment of South African troops on the border, an extensive investigation with regard to the distribution of mail in the operational area was undertaken during December 1975.

Grootfontein was identified as the main receiving and distribution centre. Following this, 14 members from 11 FPU were deployed at Grootfontein to establish an efficient mail distribution system for all troops deployed in the operational area.

FPO 2 became operational on January 2 1976.

Mail from family and friends at home was separated in civilian post offices from other mail and transported by rail via Upington and Windhoek to Grootfontein. From here it was transported by road, by air and by whatever other means possible to the field post offices in Oshakati, Rundu and Katima Mulilo.

On July 1, 1982, FPO 1 was established at Air Force Base, Waterkloof in a brand new functional building designed and erected by the Dept. P & T.

It was now possible to transport mail by air to FPO 2, Grootfontein, FPO 10, Oshakati, FPO 20 Rundu and FPO 70, Katima Mulilo. This was done by having a dedicated mail Hercules, C130 (Flossie) assigned for the transporting of mail to and from SWA. By doing this, the efficiency of the field postal service was dramatically improved as the delivery period of mail to and from the operational area was reduced to 2 days instead of 7 days.

11 FPU was the only citizen force Unit that was deployed in the operational area uninterrupted and continuously for a period of 14 years. During this period the Unit supported all operations of the SADF i.e. Modular, Hooper, Packer and Displace by detaching field postal sections to handle mail to units participating in these operations.

On September 15, 1986 FPO 117 was deployed at Messina in the Northern Transvaal to support troops deployed in the Soutpansberg Military Area.

In 1986 the Chief of the SADF, General Jannie Geldenhuys, honoured 11 FPU by presenting it with a citation for services rendered in the interest of the SADF and its members.

When the conflict on the Namibian (SWA) border came to an end in 1989, all Field Post Offices were de-commissioned. The unit still delivered internal services and participated in field exercises.

When the South African Government decided to support the United Nation's peace keeping initiatives in Central Africa, 11 Field Postal Unit was re-activated on 01/01/2000

Field Post Office 3 was deployed at Air Force Base Waterkloof. It is the heartbeat of the Unit's operations and is its main dispatching hub. FPO 3 renders a valuable service to the troops deployed in the Mission Areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR).

11 FPU is once again the only Reserve unit that has been deployed continuously since the first South African troops were deployed in Central Africa during 2001. All members called up for service at field post offices (FPO's) were or are still employees of South African Post Office (SAPO).

The Unit is dedicated to provide an effective field postal service to the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and its members, wherever they may be deployed, during operations and/or large-scale field exercises.

11 FPU plays a major role in supporting the SANDF. It is a specialist unit, not an extension or duplication of any service rendered by any other unit within the SANDF. As a leader in ensuring that communication channels between deployed soldiers abroad and their families are maintained, the Unit's activities are regulated and supported by SAPO whose slogan is "We deliver whatever it takes".

There are currently eight different FPO's in operation in Africa. They are:

- Field Post Office 3: Air Force Base, Waterkloof (Main Hub)
- FPO 31: Munigi Base, Goma (DRC)
- FPO 312: Goma (DRC)
- FPO 313: Likasi, Lumbumbashi (DRC)
- FPO 33: Kinshasa (DRC)
- FPO 34: El Fasher (Sudan)
- FPO 341: Mellit (Sudan)
- FPO 35: Bangui (CAR)

The Unit has made great progress over the past years; it has increased customer confidence and ensured overall customer satisfaction. The Unit has extended its range of services at FPO 3 which includes a fully operating SAPO counter (All Post Office transactions can be done there).

Without the dedicated support received from the GOCSA Army Signal Formation, Act Dir Reserves and SAPO top management, 11FPU would not have achieved the successes it has done to date. The Unit also salutes all its loyal members, who are committed to serving the Unit and SANDF to insure that 11FPU provides field postal services DoD where and when required.

11 Field Postal Unit's slogan: "we deliver come what may"

Officers Commanding to date.

Cmdt. Chris Gouws - 1 October 1964 - 31 December 1966

Cmdt. Corrie Coetzee - 1 January 1967 - 30 September 1970

Cmdt. Braam le Roux - 1 October 1970 - 31 January 1976

Cmdt. Chris Opperman - 1 February 1976 - 30 June 1981

Cmdt. Jopie van der Walt - 1 July 1981 - 31 July 1985

Lt Col Rudi van Heerden - 1 August 1985 - 31 December 1999

Lt Col Leon de Villiers - 1 April 2000 – Current

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