

15 MAINTENANCE UNIT

(Source: Kwa-Zulu Natal Military Tattoo Programme)



15 Maintenance Unit is South Africa's oldest logistic unit. Formed just weeks prior to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899, the unit was known as the Natal Volunteer Transport Corps. It was tasked with the transport and distribution of supplies in Ladysmith.

In the early years, there was a reliance on animal-drawn transport. During 1906 Zulu Rebellion, the Corps operated 450 wagons drawn by 12 000 oxen.

Renamed 2nd Mounted Brigade Train in 1913, the Unit saw action in World War 1 in both German South West Africa (1916 – 1918). The Great War also marked the transition to motorised transport.

In 1926, the unit moved from Pietermaritzburg to Durban. When World War 2 broke out in 1939, the unit undertook mammoth convoys through Kenya, Abyssinia and into the battlefields of Egypt. Thereafter, the unit was part of the triumphant advance through Italy.

Renamed 1 Supply and Transport Company in 1954, the unit finally became 15 Maintenance unit in 1971. In the 1970's and 1980's the unit saw service in South West Africa and Angola. In 1994 the unit was deployed in Natal to ensure that South Africa's first democratic election was free and fair.

The unit consists entirely of volunteer soldiers. Its members are currently on duty in Ladysmith and there are bases in Durban. Granted the honour of the Freedom of the City of Durban in 1974, 15 Maintenance Unit still encapsulates its Zulu motto, "Akulalwa" – those who never sleep