

HISTORY OF 71 SIGNAL UNIT

By: Lt Col Johan Johnson

When the South African Permanent Force was reorganized in 1922, no provision was made for an independent Corps of Signals. At that stage signaling had been the responsibility of the SA Engineering Corps, which only operated in the Cape Fortress – the chain of heavy batteries, which guarded the Cape Peninsula.

At about that time, however, emphasis was being placed on the need for a higher signals organisation and an independent signal service. No doubt this was influenced by the creation a year or two earlier of the Royal Corps of Signals in the British Army. Whatever the arguments in favour, they were successful, and the South African Corps of Signals was born on 25 April 1924, as a unit of the Active Citizen Force (ACF).

It was not until 1926/27 that the first establishment tables were produced, and the elementary organisation introduced at that time lasted until major changes were made in July 1938, when ACF Brigade Signal Companies were formed with the headquarters in the major cities. It was in this new form that the Signal Corps went to war 1940.

The Corps ended the war as a mature organisation with a wealth of experience behind it. To meet the requirements of the vastly expanded Permanent Force, various wartime units were maintained. Fortuitously, a considerable number of personnel who had served during the war elected to join the Permanent Force, so a body of trained personnel was available to man the units. Following the end of the Second World War in 1945, the South African Government decided to reorganize the Defence Force of the country to meet peacetime needs. In accordance with this decision, the Minister of Defence, Field Marshall Smuts, recommended that there was to be formed an organization which could rapidly mobilize two divisions – the First Division (Motorised) and the Sixth Division (Armoured).

Not long after Field Marshall Smuts' announcement, the Active Citizen Force was reactivated in 1946 on a basic war establishment and ten new signal squadrons were formed to cater for the two ACF Divisions eventually established in 1948. One of these squadrons was 3 Brigade Signal Squadron, SACS, established and designated with effect 1 May 1946, in terms of Government Notice 1540 dated 19 July 1946, and published in Government Gazette No 3681. The new unit was allotted to the Cape Command (previously Western Province Command) with its headquarters at the Castle in Cape Town. The unit is currently known as 71 Signal Unit.

Since then the unit has never neglected its duty to provide tactical communications and electrical power supply to the Formations to which it has been attached.

UNIT DESIGNATIONS

3 Brigade Signal Squadron, SACS	1 May 1946
3 Infantry Brigade Signal Squadron SACS	1 Jan 1954
2 Squadron, 1 Armoured Division Signal Regiment SACS	1 Jan 1956
3 Signal Squadron	31 Jan 1959
74 Signal Squadron	1 Sep 1971
71 Signal Unit	1 Aug 1975

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS

25 Apr 1924	SA Corps of Signal established.
1 May 1946	The unit is established.
1 Oct 1946	The Permanent Force SA Corps of Signals was born.
1947	The unit provided signalers for the Royal visit.
Feb 1948	Continuous training Camp held at Brooklyn Air Force Base (now Ysterplaat).
31 May 1951	The unit participated in the Union Day Parade at the Castle
1950 and 1951	Continuous Training Camp held at Oudtshoorn.
1955	Continuous Training Camp held in Oudtshoorn with a troop attached to the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles. (CTR).
Jul 1955	The unit detached signalers to 3 Field Squadron, SAEC.
Aug 1955	The unit detached signalers to Cape Town Rifles (CTH).
Aug 1956	Continuous Training Camp held at Oudtshoorn.
Aug 1957	Participated in Exercise Outenikwa held at Oudtshoorn.
Apr 1960	The unit provided signalers during the State of Emergency.
1963	Participated in Exercise Spitskop I held at Potchefstroom.
1964	Participated in Exercise Metlaka held at Bloekomboom, Voortrekkerhoogte.
	Participated in Exercise Spitskop II.
1969	Continuous Training Camp held at Wingfield and Darling.
1971	Continuous Training Camp held at Rashoop where the filming of 'Where the Lion feeds' was taking place. The OC and RSM were called to dispatch a lion after it had escaped from his cage and killed a sound recording engineer.
1972	Participated in Exercise Brolley Tree I.
1973	Participated in Exercise Brolley Tree III with 17 Brigade at Potchefstroom and Mosito in the Northern Cape.
1975	Continuous Training Camp held at Army Gymnasium, Heidelberg.
4 Jan – 18 Mar 1976	Participated in Operation Savannah.
Apr 1977	The unit detached signalers to RWP, R Bol and ROR.
Nov 1978	The unit detached signalers to Cape Field Artillery (CFA).
Jul/Aug 1979	Participated in Exercise Eagle Hill II.
Aug 1980	Participated in Exercise Ditsem III and underwent Border Service
Oct 1981	Participated in Exercise Aggressor III held at Army Battle School, Lohatla.
Aug 1983	Participated in Exercise Turning Wheel held at Army Battle School, Lohatla (Divisional Exercise).
Aug 1984	Participated in Exercise Thunder Chariot held at Army Battle School, Lohatla.
1985	Participated in Operation Xenon.
1986	Participated in Operation Xenon by supplying signalers to CFA at Port Elizabeth, CTH at Worcester, RWP at Marble Hall and CTR Nelspruit.
Apr 1987	Participated in the Side's 75 th Birthday Parade.
Aug/Sep 1987	Participate in Exercise Lighting held at Army Battle School, Lohatla.
Jan-Mar 1988	Participated in Operation Xenon by supplying signalers for duty at Witwatersrand Command.
Sep 1988	Participated in Operation Prone.
Aug/Sep 1989	Participated in Exercise Cobra held at Army Battle School, Lohatla.
Sep/Oct 1990	Participated in Exercise Excalibur held at Army Battle School, Lohatla.
Jul 1991	Corps Training held at Apostle Battery, Llandudno.

Jun 1992	Participated in Exercise Genesis.
Apr/May 1994	Participated in Operation Jumbo.
Oct 1995	Participated in Exercise Vindicator held at Army Battle School, Lohatla.
1 May 1996 to 5 May 1996	Celebrated 50 th Birthday with a reunion of Past and Present members held at the Naval Hall, SAS Wingfield, a medal Parade held in the Hangar of 9 SA Division HQ to conclude its 50 th birthday celebrations.
11 – 13 Oct 1996	Initiated and managed the 9 SA Division V & A Waterfront Open Day Project.
1997 – 1998	Initiated signals training courses for members of Conventional and Territorial Reserve Forces.
1 Apr 1999	Unit placed under command of the Signals Formation (CMIS Div) and relocated to share the HQ premises with Regiments Oranjerivier (ROR) and CTR.
2000	Continued training courses for other reserve force units.
2 Dec 2000	Founding meeting of Signal Association (WC) – currently the only active signals association in South Africa.
2001 – 2002	Continuation of training of own members as well as members from other Units culminating in the National communications field exercise EX QUO VADIS I.
2003	Members on detached duty to CMIS Y as part of the force expansion principle and continuation of training concluded by EX QUO VADIS II.
2004	Unit initiated local HF training exercise in mountains at Clanwilliam and established communication with stations in Worcester and Durban. Training for the year was concluded with EX QUO VADIS III.
31 May 2005 2005	Lt Col W.A. Roberts retired after a marathon of 10 years of service as OC. Training of own members continued on progressive basis. The first ever combined SANDF (Signals)/HAMNET (Amateur Radio emergency communications) HF exercise EX DOUBLE BARREL I was very successfully initiated by 71 Signal Unit and conducted among the mountain areas of Worcester, Rawsonville, Tulbagh, Ceres and De Doorns. EX DOUBLE BARREL II the combined SANDF (Signals)/HAMNET Ex expanded to a successful national HF exercise with stations spread over the entire country. Training was concluded with EX ADVENIMUS with 19 members from PE Res Force Office in attendance.
2006	60 th Anniversary Celebrations 12 to 14 May 2006 Formal Military Ball 12 May 2006 Commemorative Service 14 May 2006
2007	Unit training exercise in Worcester and Rawsonville area.
2008	Unit training exercise at Touwsriver trg area. The unit also participated in the SAPS Parow 40 th celebrations and Robertson Show.
2009	Unit training exercise mobile communication centres established at Stellenbosch and Gordons bay. Exercise with WSAR in du Toitskloof mountain area. Unit training exercise at Touwriver trg area. Recruitment drive at Robertson show.
2010	Distance training for R13 course members commenced. Unit members took part in exercise Revelation. Week-end trg ex and combined WSAR exercise in the Cederberg mountain areas. Attended the Robertson Show and Naval Festival.

2011	Participated in the Naval Show, Tulbagh Show and Mitchells Plain exhibition. Week-end training exercise and combined WSAR exercise in Ceres mountain areas.
2011	The Unit provided Signal support to Ex Boleng, the first combined Res Mechanised Exercise at Lohatla for many years. Four R13 dist training members completed their course with flying colours. Five members deployed with RWP on Ops Cordite.
2012	Exercise Tulbagh – conventional signal support exercise in the Ceres
2013	Karoo area. Moving into the new HQ and training facility.
5 May 2012	Official opening of the new HQ building by Brig Gen L.L. Eggers MMM, as part of 66 th Anniversary Celebrations.

The present leader group of 71 Signal Unit prides themselves in the knowledge that this unit is one of the oldest signal units still in existence in the country. We have a proud history and look forward to being of service for the next 66 years.

HONORARY COLONELS

Hon Col W.S. Pretorius	1 Jan 2000	1 May 2010
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COMMANDING OFFICERS

Maj J.W. Hawkes	1 Oct 1946	19 Feb 1948
Capt A.W.T. Prowse (Permanent Force – Acting)	Jun 1947	19 Feb 1948
Maj D.M.C.S. Johnson	20 Feb 1948	Feb 1953
Maj R.C. Clegg	Feb 1953	5 Nov 1954
Maj C.D. Holloway	6 Nov 1954	31 Aug 1960
Capt H. Lapedus	1 Jan 1963	13 Mar 1963
Maj A.M.L. Kriel	13 May 1963	31 Jul 1966
Maj P.L. du Preez	1 Aug 1966	30 Sep 1968
Capt A.F. Coleman	1 Oct 1968	31 Jul 1970
Maj G.A.R. Coomer	1 Sep 1970	20 Nov 1976
Maj J. Arendson	28 Feb 1977	31 Dec 1977
Cmdt J.K. Coates	1 Jan 1978	31 Mar 1985
Cmdt W.G. Laskey	1 Apr 1985	31 Mar 1989
Cmdt M. Goodleser	1 Apr 1989	31 Mar 1992
Cmdt I.S. Robertson	1 Apr 1992	31 May 1995
Lt Col W.A. Roberts	1 June 1995	31 May 2005
Lt Col J.J. Johnson	1 Aug 2005	Still serving

REGIMENTAL SERGEANT MAJORS

WO2 E.W.G. Butters		30 Jun 1957
WO2 W.F.G. Sass	1 Jul 1957	1961
WO2 L. Schou	1961	1967
WO2 B.J. Clarkson	1967	30 Sep 1975
WO1 J.D. Kruger	1 Oct 1975	31 Jul 1989
WO1 R.V. Taylor	1 Aug 1989	31 May 1993
WO1 C.J. Maree	1 Jun 1993	12 Jan 1997
WO1 L. Cornelissen	13 Jan 1997	31 May 1999
WO1 J.D. Kruger	1 Jun 1999	31 July 2005

SSgt P.J. Jordaan (Acting RSM)

26 Feb 07

Still serving

UNIT CHAPLAINS

Cpln (Rev.) R. Hills

1968

31 Jul 1989

Cpln (Dr.) J.J. Johnson

8 Aug 1989

31 Jul 2005

Cpln B.S. Mqobongo

2008

Still serving

MOTTO

(of the original SA Signal Corps)

CERTA CITO (Sure and Swift, Accuracy with Speed). (Pronounced "Kerta Kito")