

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BUFFALO VOLUNTEER RIFLES ***(Source: Maj (Ret) A.J. Step)***

The Buffalo Volunteer Rifles is classified as a Motorised Infantry Battalion. All members are volunteers and the Regiment consists of a Battalion HQ and three rifle companies with members trained in the use of support weapons. The Buffalo Volunteer Rifles is an Army Conventional Reserve Force unit. The unit's main role is to ensure that it has Combat Ready trained members to be able to be deployed into destabilised areas as required or tasked by The Infantry Formation, especially in support of the country's endeavours. To be able to meet its obligations the Regiment, in conjunction with the Eastern Cape Nodal training point, ensures that training and retraining is top priority and regular courses are held throughout the year.

The original Regiment, The Kaffrarian Rifles was raised in 1883 from its parent unit namely the Buffalo Volunteer Rifle Corps formed in September 1876, due to the unsettled situation on the Eastern Frontier. The Corps was raised by Maj.Gen Sir E.Y. Brabant KCB CMG and last year as part of the 135th anniversary celebrations the Regiment deemed it appropriate to honour its founder. Almost to the year the Corps was mobilised to protect the farmers alongside the Kei river in expectation of an invasion from across the Kei during the 9th Frontier War of 1877-1878, now termed as the Wars of Land Dispossession.

On formation in 1883, the full-dress uniform of the Regiment was similar to that of the King Royal Rifle Corps a British regiment, now renamed The Rifles. All the characteristics such as the Maltese Cross and the black buttons with the bugle horn, insignia of all rifle regiments at that time were adopted. Badges at the centre having red felt mounted at the back. Even today those old traditions have survived. In 1927 the Regiment was affiliated to the King Royal Rifle Corps a liaison which the Regiment holds in high esteem. It is only fitting that the devices of the past even if changed in appearance are still worn to date. Such as the Maltese Cross, Badges matt black mounted on red felt and the black bugle horn buttons. The Regiment is classified as a traditional unit, officers and warrant officers still wear Sam Browne sword belts and carry swords during ceremonial events and parades. When members are dressed in combat uniform, the normal standard SANDF dress code is adhered to, except that the beret has normal regimental devices worn.

The Regiment previously had the honour of the late His Majesty King George VI to be followed on his death by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as The Colonel-in-Chief's of the Regiment but this honour fell away when South Africa became a Republic.

Over the years the Regiment has had a few minor name changes but the most significant took place in 1999 and in spirit of reconciliation The Regiment reverted back to its original title. It is most fitting and appropriate that the name can be identified with the beloved city namely, Buffalo City. At the same time the Regiment had the honour to have Col G. Nkwinti, Member of Parliament appointed as Honorary Colonel, a position that he still holds.

The Freedom of Entry into East London was bestowed on the Regiment in 1957. This civic honour was conferred on the Regiment on the 25th of May 1957 by the then serving Mayor, Councillor R. de Lange on behalf of the City Councillors of the City of East London, thereby allowing the Regiment the privilege of marching into the city "with drums beating, colours flying, and bayonets fixed". This right the Regiment exercises every five years.

The Regimental colours are Black, Red and Rifle Green, also a legacy from the past and examples can be seen on the stable belt.

The Regimental motto is NUNC ANIMIS which means "Now with Courage or Now without Fear".

Like most Regiments that are steeped in military history, it is inevitable that the call to defend the values that make up the fabric of nations, have resulted in members being called up in times of conflict and unfortunately many have made the supreme sacrifice for causes that they have believed in.

The Regiment has never been found wanting and has been involved in many areas of internal as well as external conflict. To name but a few:-

The newly formed Regiment the Kaffrarian Rifles (1883) was mobilised to serve in the Bechuanaland Campaign of 1897 and played an active role in quelling the rebellion and the capture of the rebel leaders.

The most notable early conflict was the Anglo-Boer War and the Regiment formed part of the Colonial Division and found itself serving under its original founder, who had now been promoted to Commander of the Colonial Division. The Regiment played a major role while on active service during the 2nd Boer War and it is well documented that they were involved in most of the major battles and remained in the field until the end of the war.

The Regiment was to serve in the defeat of the Germans in German South West Africa, now Namibia during the World War 1. On their return in 1915, many members joined the 1st South African Infantry Brigade and went on to fight in the trenches on the Western Front in Europe against the Germans. During the Battle of Delville Wood, against all odds the Brigade held the wood with most being killed or wounded, an epic battle that is still commemorated today.

When World War 2 broke out, the Regiment was again mobilised and soon found itself in North Africa fighting the German and Italian Forces. The first big test was the battle of Bardia in December 1941 which resulted in the defeat of the Axis forces. The German forces regrouped under Rommel and attacked Tobruk which was held by the Allied forces and the Regiment plus about 30 thousand troops ended up being captured and found themselves prisoners of war. Capt G.R. Norton of the Regiment while in action in Italy was awarded the Victoria Cross for extreme bravery. He was one of three South Africans to be awarded this coveted award during World War 2.

The Angola \ South West Africa conflict in the late 1970's and the Liberation Struggle resulted in the Regiment being utilized on a rotational call up system. Members spent three months doing Border Duty each year until a settlement was reached.

Today we are proud in having a completely integrated and representative Regiment. Members have been attached to the United Nations forces and have served in Peace Keeping Missions in Burundi and recently a Rifle company returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo after a six month spell of active duty.

BATTLE HONOURS

GAIKA GCALEKA 1878-79

BECHUANALAND 1897

SOUTH AFRICA 1899-1902

SOUTH WEST AFRICA 1914-15

WESTERN DESERT 1941-43

BARDIA

SWA/ANGOLA 1975-76

SWA/ANGOLA 1976-89

SWA/ZAMBIA 1979

NUNC ANIMIS