

CAPE GARRISON ARTILLERY



(Source: Maj V. Archer)

The Cape Garrison Artillery (CGA) was raised on 6 August 1859 as the “Cape Volunteer Sappers and Miners” and is a very active Reserve Regiment within the Air Defence Artillery Formation (ADA Fmn).

In 1880 the Regiment served in the Transkei during the Tambookie campaign as the “Cape Town Volunteer Engineer Corps”.

In 1891 the Regiment was re-designated as the “Garrison Artillery and Engineer Volunteer Corps” with Major Vicomte de Montfort as the Officer Commanding (OC). During 1896 the Engineer Volunteer Corps was disbanded and the unit was re-designated as “Cape Garrison Artillery”.

In October 1899 the CGA was mobilised and served during the Anglo Boer War. One of its officers was captured by Gen C.R. de Wet and was prisoner of war with Sir Winston Churchill. Documents in the original hand writing of Gen de Wet describing this incident are on display in the Officers’ Mess of the Regiment at De Casteel.

It was during this period that Pieter David Graaff, (father of Sir de Villiers Graaff), was officer commanding of CGA. In 1904 the unit was presented with a Queen’s Colour (originally designated by the King in the previous year) by the administrator on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen at a parade in Cape Town.

On declaration of war in 1914, the Regiment was mobilised for service and during 1917 the unit manned Fort Wynyard which was utilized as a training depot during World War 1.

In 1934 the unit became part of a unique formation known as the “Coast Artillery Brigade” consisting of a combined Permanent Force and Active Citizen Force hybrid of Coast Artillery batteries and medium Artillery, Field Artillery and an armoured train.

Many years after the term of office of Pieter David Graaf as OC, the link with the Graaff family was re-established when Sir de Villiers Graaff, (his son) was appointed as the Honorary Colonel of CGA. Sir de Villiers Graaff was well known political figure of the 1960’s and 1970’s, and the leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

He also served in the Defence Force and was a South African prisoner of war for the major part of the Second World War. He was a well known local Western Cape farmer, farming on De Grendel just outside Cape Town City Centre. After Sir De Villiers Graaff was called to higher service, his son Sir David Graaff was appointed as the current honorary colonel. Sir David also now farms on De Grendel – converting it to a major and leading wine farm.

South Africa's first anti-aircraft battery was established in April 1939. War was declared in September 1939 and Cape Garrison Artillery officers were the first personnel to be mobilised.

After World War II, the Regiment formed part of 54 Composite Anti-Aircraft Troop, SAAF, established with effect from 1 August 1946. The troop became a battery from 1 July 1947 and was transferred to land forces as a unit of the SA Artillery and in February 1949 as 54th Anti-Aircraft Battery, South African Artillery.

In July 1951, together with all the other anti-aircraft and coastal artillery units, it was transferred to the South African Corps of Marines, but four years later when the SACM was disbanded, the unit reverted back under the command of the SA Artillery. Three coast regiments of Cape Garrison Artillery were transferred to the South African Navy as SAS Ubique, SAS Diaz and SAS Malagas, while the anti-aircraft regiments were transferred to the South African Artillery.

An independent unit known as the "Headquarters 4th Heavy AA Regiment" was established on 1 November 1956 and Cape Garrison Artillery was placed under its operational control, together with other independent batteries: 52 Radar battery, 53 and 54 Anti-Aircraft Batteries.

In 1957 the Queen's Colour of the Regiment was laid up in the city hall, Cape Town by SAS Ubique. The Colour was transferred to the Regiment's officers' mess at De Casteel in 2004.

In 1958 the naval coast artillery units disbanded and ceased to exist.

The sub-units never trained together resulting in stagnation. With the re-organisation of the Citizen Force in 1959/60 the headquarters and three independent anti-aircraft batteries (52, 53 and 54 AA Batteries) were combined into one regiment known as "University of Cape Town Regiment". The Regiment mobilised during the state of emergency during that period. It was equipped with 3.7 inch guns, one of which is still at display at the Regiment HQ. The organization consisted of three batteries of two troops each and a radar troop.

The head quarters was originally at Young's Field but transferred to Wingfield in 1969 and "7 Light Anti-Aircraft" was raised on 1 April 1969 from its mother unit, UCTR.

In 1974 the Regiment was re designated "Cape Garrison Artillery".

In 1982 the unit operated as an infantry battalion on the Northern Province and Namibian borders and was awarded National Colours during Exercise Genesis.

In 1992 the then OC, Lt Col Marius van der Westhuizen re-secured Fort Wynyard as an HQ and the unit was transferred from Wingfield back to its original home, Fort Wynyard, near the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront. The old fort is in an unique position to become a showcase artillery museum.

In 1994 during South Africa's first democratic elections the unit participated in Ops Jumbo. The Citizen Force became an all volunteer force.

The unit absorbed the volunteers of 7 Light-Anti aircraft when it closed in April 1997.

Struggling to exist, as many other units then did, a turnaround for the unit came in 2005 and it has now become a vibrant, energetic entity, operating as an apex training base for Air Defence Reserves, having recruited and taken over a large number of the former commando units namely Bidaauwberg and Two Oceans. The latter held an official handover of command to CGA during a ceremony at the Commando HQ. The Regiment's organisation is now based on that of a three-battery 35mm Regiment.

During 2005, Cape Garrison Artillery proudly established links with the historic Groote Kerk in Cape Town as the official regimental chapel of the unit.

The Right of Civic entry into the City of Cape Town was awarded to the Regiment in November 1980 and it received the Freedom of Belville in September 1989, and the right of the Freedom of Goodwood (from 7LAA).