

HISTORY OF THE CAPE TOWN HIGHLANDERS

The Cape Town Highlanders (CTH) have served since before South Africa (as a union of disparate provinces) even existed. The Regiment – fondly known as ‘CTH’ - was founded in 1885 by a group of volunteer soldiers who felt that Cape Town should rightly have a Scottish regiment. The Regiment has waged both war and peace – arguably more so than most others in the South African National Defence Force – and has been awarded battle honours for battles in places as far afield as the Western Desert and northern Italy. Two of these – ‘Paliano 1944’ and ‘Alam el Halfa’ – are not held by any other South African unit.

In World War I, CTH helped to capture what was then South West Africa from the Germans. Thereafter, members of the Regiment formed the major part of a composite regiment – the 4th SA Infantry (SA Scottish) – that fought in most of the significant battles in Europe during the rest of the ‘War to end all wars’. At the Battle of Delville Wood (1916), despite being heavily outnumbered and suffering heavy losses, the battalion held off the German advance for five dreadful days.

In World War II, members of the Regiment were the first South African troops in Egypt, serving in the victorious Western Desert campaign against Rommel, right up to Rommel’s crushing defeat two years later. At the Battle of Alamein Box in late 1942, CTH was one of three South African regiments tasked with stopping Rommel’s advance in its tracks. Ever since, CTH has remembered their fallen heroes, and those of other South African regiments who gave their lives, at the annual El Alamein Memorial Service in Cape Town. Regimental records show that CTH has lost more than 220 officers and other ranks killed or believed to have been killed in the line of duty in service of South Africa.

During the South African Bush War, the unit was called to active service on several occasions during the 1975 incursion into Angola and during counter-insurgency operations in what is now Namibia. In more recent times, the unit was deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, performing peace-keeping operations.

The Regiment has also taken part in countless ceremonial parades over the years, with two particularly significant events standing out: CTH provided the Guard of Honour for HM King George VI and the Royal Family during their visit to South Africa in February 1947, and the Regiment provided the majority of the guard of honour when HM Queen Elizabeth II laid a wreath at the Commonwealth War Graves section of Woltemade Cemetery in 1994. On this occasion, the traditional lament ‘The Flowers of the Forest’ was played by the then CTH Pipe-Major Glen Gordon.

CTH boasts 22 battle honours, and cherishes an additional 15 battle honours awarded to the South African Scottish, the expeditionary unit formed when CTH ‘married up’ with the Transvaal Scottish during World War I, for service in North Africa and France/Flanders.

Bechuanaland 1896-97	South Africa 1899-1902	South West Africa 1915
Gazala	Alam Hamza	Best Post
Alamein Box	Alamein Defence	Alam el Halfa
Battle of El Alamein	Western Desert 1941-43	Cassino II
Paliano	Chiusi	Florence
Gothic Line	The Greve	Monte Stanco
Monte Pezza	Sole/Caprara	Po Valley
Italy 1944-45		

The 15 battle honours awarded to the South African Scottish are:

Egypt 1916	Menin Road	France and Flanders 1918
Somme 1916	Messines 1918	Le Transloy
Delville Wood	Hindenburg Line	Scarpe 1917
Arras 1917	Cambrai 1918	Kemmel
Ypres 1917	Pursuit to Mons	Lys

The following Colours have been awarded to CTH over the years:

1904: King's Colour (laid up 1961)
1910: Regimental Colour (laid up 1961)
1966: Regimental Colour (laid up 2003)
1986: National Colour (laid up 1994)
2003: Present Regimental Colour

Many units experience name changes through the years; so too, the CTH's name has been changed five times. Since 1885, when the unit was established as the Cape Town Highlanders, the unit's names changed as follows:

1906: The Duke of Connaught and Strathearn's Own Cape Town Highlanders
1913: The 6th Infantry (DC&SO CTH)
1926: The Duke of Connaught and Strathearn's Own Cape Town Highlanders
1947: The Queen's Own Cape Town Highlanders
1961: The Cape Town Highlanders

The Regiment's pipe band is known as 'the Drums and Pipes', as drummers joined the unit before pipers in the 1800s. The Regimental Drums and Pipes are a visible part of the life of the Mother City and have become well known on the international military tattoo circuit since 1998. To date, the Drums and Pipes have performed at the famed Edinburgh Military Tattoo on numerous occasions, as well as performing at the late Queen Mum's special 100th birthday celebration tattoo. The Drums and Pipes have also performed at similar events in Basel (Switzerland), Berlin (Germany) and Jinhae (Korea), as well as at the Cape Town Military Tattoo since 2003. They recently performed at Queen Elizabeth II's 90th birthday party at Windsor Castle. They also regularly perform at the opening of Parliament and participate in competitions and charities.

The Regiment wears the Clan Gordon tartan, a privilege granted by the Gordon Highlanders at the beginning of the 20th Century. The Regimental quick march is shared with the Gordons' regimental quickstep, "The Cock o' the North". The only Reserve unit located at the Castle of Good Hope in central Cape Town, the CTH has two mottos: the first, "Nemo Me Impune Lacessit" (No man challenges me with impunity), is shared with various Scottish Regiments; the second "Bydand" (Steadfast) is unique to the Gordon Highlanders and the Cape Town Highlanders. The men and women of the CTH actively keep the many inherited traditions of their fine regiment alive.