

FREE STATE ARTILLERY REGIMENT

(Source: Ladysmith Municipality Heritage Commemorative Brochure – 2 July 2011)

The 'Artillerie-corps van den Oranjevrijstaat' (Artillery Corps of the Orange Free State) was first organized in 1880 by Major Albrecht, who became its commanding officer. The unit was highly disciplined and well trained: Albrecht was a German who had fought in the Franco-Prussian War and he continued to command the Orange Free State's artillery until his capture at Paardeberg on the 27th February 1900.

During the Anglo-Boer War, the OFS's artillery was deployed in the Northern Cape and along the Natal border. Their baptism of fire came at the Battle of Rietfontein on the 24th October 1899 and during the Siege of Ladysmith the guns were divided amongst the various Commandos. During the battle of Spioenkop, one of the Free State Krupp guns was deployed between the Twin Peaks with the Deputy President of the ZAR, General Schalk Burger.

After the capture of Albrecht, the Corps was re-organised and as the war progressed to the guerilla phase, the OFS's artillery was used sporadically in the north-eastern Orange Free State under the command of Sergeant Muller.

In February 1902 most of the Corps's guns were captured and in effect it ceased to exist and in terms of the Treaty of Vereeniging the Burgher forces were obliged to lay down their arms, surrender their munitions and swear allegiance to King Edward VII as their Sovereign.

After Union in 1910, the Union Defence Force only came into being on the 1st July 1913. 10th Citizen Battery was established to be headquartered in Bloemfontein but due to economic reasons, it was formed and disestablished from the 30th June 1926. On that date, however, two new Citizen Force Batteries were established; they were the 4th and 5th Citizen Batteries Oranje Vrystaatse Veldartillerie (OVSVVA) and headquartered in Bloemfontein and Bethlehem. Their link to the Boer forces was rekindled in 1932 when OVSVVA fired a salute to Maj Albrecht at his funeral. They also formed a guard of honour for HRH Prince George when he visited Bloemfontein in 1934.

When WW2 broke out, insufficient personnel volunteered to enable either battery to be called up, so those who did were transferred to 4th Field Brigade.

After the war, the two Batteries were combined under the title 6th Field Regiment SAA (OVSVVA) and in 1960 another regiment was established (Regiment Universiteit Oranje-Vrystaat) but both were amalgamated under the title 6 Veldregiment (VSA). The title was changed yet again in 1960 when it became the Vrystaatse Staatsartillerie – a direct link to its pre Anglo-Boer War days. Its officers were unhappy with the name, so it was changed yet again on the 1st September 1966 to the Oranje-Vrystaatse Veldartillerie, but the hyphen was removed in March 1968.

The Regiment underwent several tours of operational service on the South West African / Namibian border and in January 2007 – after over 80 years of association with Bloemfontein – the HQ moved to Kroonstad. On the 19th August 2000, the regiment became affiliated with Q (Sanna's Post) Battery RHA.

The plethora of name changes dating to its inception has continued because the regiment is now known as the Free State Artillery Regiment (Vrystaatse Artillerie Regiment) and its standard ordnance is the magnificent South African made G5 Gun.