

REGIMENT WESTELIKE PROVINCIE

(Source: Lt Col Pierce)



The regiment can trace its origins back to 1856, when volunteer units were raised from the country areas of the Cape Western Province, including Stellenbosch, Paarl, Malmesbury and Worcester. In 1894, these units were amalgamated into a single unit called the Western Rifles of the Cape. During the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), troops from a British background were sent to the front to fight on the British side under the regimental name Stellenbosch Mounted Infantry. After this war, the Stellenbosch Mounted Rifles and Western Rifles of the Cape were merged to form the Western Province Mounted Rifles, which comprised three infantry sub-units.

In the years between World War I and World War II, the regiment remained dormant, until it was reactivated on 1 April 1934 as a machine gun battalion with anti-tank and mortar platoons, as part of the rebuilding of the citizen force after the Great Depression. At the time, military service was voluntary. Lt Col JH Wicht was the first officer commanding of Regiment Westelike Provincie from 1934 to 1939. As the regiment regards itself as successor to the various small 19th century volunteer regiments in the Western Cape - a time when Dutch rather than Afrikaans was the prevailing language here - the Dutch spelling of "Provincie" with a 'c' is used instead of than "Provinsie" with an 's'.

The unit's badge consists of a wreath of leaves from the silverleaf tree, around a yellow kernel of the same tree, with the inscription R.W.P beneath it. Interestingly, the silvertree is indigenous to the Western Cape, like the regiment itself. There is no full stop after the P, due to an error in the original artwork for the unit's badge. This unusual feature remains part of the unit's history. Although the regiment was initially known as *Regiment Westelike Provincie*, this name changed several times over the years, i.e. to Regiment Onze Jan (in honour of 19th century Afrikaner political leader Jan Hofmeyr) in 1951, to Regiment Boland in 1960, to First Battalion Regiment Boland in 1970, and back to Regiment Westelike Provincie in 1974. It also regained its formal status as a traditional regiment, with its soldiers entitled to wear the original traditional uniform. During World War II, R.W.P were deployed as reinforcement for the Fifth Armoured Car Regiment. In 1943, members of the regiment were absorbed into the Royal Natal Carbineers and the Imperial Light Horse. They learned tank warfare, and served with distinction in Italy, under the banner of the Sixth South African Armoured Division, commanded by Maj Gen Poole, of Hermanus.

In 1946, just after WWII, R.W.P became an infantry battalion. On 31 March 1947, R.W.P received its colours from King George VI, who was visiting South Africa at the time, Hence R.W.P celebrates its birthday on or around 31 March every year. Lt Col Len Verwoerd (brother of Dr HF Verwoerd) was the OC at the time. On 17 September 1948, Field Marshall the Right Hon Jan Christian Smuts was appointed as the regiment's Colonel-in-Chief, remaining such until the date of his death on 11 September 1950. This was a great honour, as he is the only South African ever to serve in such capacity. Lt Col GW Krige MC, who was the OC of the regiment at the time, was instrumental in getting Gen Smuts, who was married to Issie Krige, to accept this appointment.

Every year in May, a remembrance service is held in the small town of Riebeeck West in the Western Cape, where Gen Smuts was born on 24 May 1870. On the Sunday closest to his date of birth, another annual memorial service is held at his farm Doornkloof in Irene, Pretoria. R.W.P organises the annual Riebeeck West service in conjunction with the M.O.T.H.(The Memorable Order of Tin Hats. In 1951, R.W.P became an armour regiment, with its members undergoing training at Oudtshoorn. In 1960, it became a motorised infantry battalion, but in the 1980s, it reverted to a mechanised (Ratel) infantry battalion.

In the 1970s, the regiment served in the Angolan War and on the border between Namibia (then South West Africa) and Angola; more specifically, between January and March 1976, the regiment was active across the border in Operation Savannah. In March 1977, en route to the operational area at the border, a terrible train accident at Keetmanshoop in southern Namibia resulted in the death of 5 soldiers and serious injuries to 71, who had to be evacuated to 2 Military Hospital in Wynberg, Cape Town. Every year, on the regiment's birthday, this tragic event is remembered at a memorial service. The remaining soldiers of the regiment completed their border duty at Eenhana base on the border between Namibia and Angola, testimony to their strength, discipline and courage. During the State of Emergency (1985 to 1990), its members were called up once more to ensure the internal security of the country.

On 23 April 1983, R.W.P received the Freedom of Entry into the City of Cape Town; it has also received Freedom of Entry into the towns of Bellville (3 November 1984), Parow (24 March 1990), Goodwood (24 March 1994) and Overstrand Municipality which consists of 16 small towns in 2006. In addition, R.W.P has also received official colours at various times in its history: in 1947 from King George VI as Regiment Westelike Provincie; in 1966 as Regiment Boland due to the name change; on the 1st of April 1987 from Minister of Defence, General M.A. Malan at a colorful ceremony on the Grand Parade in Cape Town, after the name reverted to R.W.P; and one more time, in 1990, when it was awarded national colours. Between 1968 and 1993, national military service had been compulsory; after 1994, it became voluntary once again, and R.W.P's status subsequently changed from a Citizen Force regiment to a SA Army Conventional Reserve Unit which focused on transformation and integration into the SANDF. Members were recruited from black and coloured communities and were given basic and leadership training. The transformation process followed the guidelines of the Minister of Defence. The unit is also participating in internal and external deployments since 2006 to date. In 2011 our members deployed with 9SAI Bn to the Sudan as part of OP CORDITE.

Since the end of apartheid, the regiment has undergone a transformation from being an "Afrikaans" unit to a unit representing all South Africans, regardless of race. The patriotism of this regiment, as well as its versatility and adaptability, and its willingness to act in the best interests of the country, is further underscored by its motto, "*Non Sibi Sed Patriae*", which means "Not for ourselves but for our country."