

HISTORY OF THE WITWATERSRAND RIFLES

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The Regiment was originally formed as the Railway Pioneer Regiment in 1899 during the Anglo Boer War and drew its members from the mining community on the Reef. The founder was a Major Seymour, an American Mining engineer.

The Regiment was essentially an engineering unit which was utilised in the repairs to railway lines and bridges which had been destroyed or damaged by Boer forces.

In 1903 the RPR was disbanded and along with the Rand Rifles formed the nucleus of the Witwatersrand Rifles (WR) on 1st May 1903.

The Regiment relied on volunteers from the mining community spread across the Reef and had companies in each town at one stage. The Regiment was supported by many of the Randlords of the day and many famous names are linked to the history.

The Regiment produced excellent shotists, a tradition which continues until today. The WR also boasted a large and excellent military band which was amongst the finest at that time.

The Regiment was mobilised during the 1914-1918 war and supplied men to the 3rd SA Infantry, many of whom were killed at Delville Wood and in other battles on the Somme. The WR itself saw action in German SWA in 1915 and was rewarded with its first battle honour for this campaign.

Training continued during the years between the wars and the Regiment became affiliated to the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) and later adopted their uniform.

The Regiment mobilised at the outbreak of WW2 and was billeted at Barberton where it became a training and feeder unit for the North African campaign. After the success of the North African campaign the Regiment was finally mobilised for active service and sent to Egypt where the formation of the 6th SA Div took place and the WR was amalgamated with the De La Rey regiment and became known as the "Wits/De La Rey" (WR/DLR).

The WR/DLR acquitted themselves admirably during the Italian Campaign, winning a further 12 battle honours at famous battles such as Casino. Great leaders were produced in the likes of Brig "Happy Jack" Bester, Lt Gen "Boysie" Van Der Riet and Maj Gen "Bill" Barends and Brig Doug Campbell.

After the war the Regiment settled down to a rebuilding phase, hampered by the politics of the day. A pipe band had in the meantime been formed and training continued with members who had been balloted for training.

In the early 1960's conscription was introduced and the numbers began to grow, as did the training commitments.

By 1970 the Regiment had a compliment of well over a thousand members and in 1976 was mobilised for the SWA/Angola border war. Many mobilisations followed during that era mixed with duties in support of the SAP in the local townships. During these operations the Regiment received many accolades for its professionalism and exemplary discipline.

At the cessation of conscription in 1993 the Regiment began an active drive to recruit new members, lead by an enthusiastic volunteer leader group. This paid off and the WR continues to attract volunteers for regular part time training.

Over the past few years the Regiment has provided troops for internal operations in support of the SAPS and on the borders as well as for peacekeeping operations in the DRC and the Sudan.

The WRt continues to maintain its traditional Scottish Lowland uniforms and traditions as well as upholding very high standards of discipline and effectiveness in training and operations.

The Regiment has an active pipe band as well as one of the top shooting teams in the country and is ably supported by a Regimental Council and a very active Regimental Association and Ladies Committee.