



***A Brief
History of the
Rhodesia Army***

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RHODESIA ARMY

The Charter granted to the British South Africa Company in 1889 authorised it to raise a police force for the maintenance of law and order in its Territories. At first it was intended to make use of the Bechuanaland Border Police; however, in 1890, when the Pioneer Corps was being organised for the march into Mashonaland, the High Commissioner in Cape Town directed that the Corps should be accompanied by a military force to protect it and to keep open communications with the south. The same force would be able to preserve law and order and protect the pioneers when they dispersed after the occupation of the country.

Thus was formed the first of what has become the Rhodesia Army. Named the British South Africa Company's Police, it was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel E. G. Pennefather, who was seconded from the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons, then stationed in South Africa. Initially a detachment of 100 was enrolled, largely from the Bechuanaland Border Police, but the strength was subsequently increased for the march into Mashonaland to 500.

1892

Early in 1892 the British South Africa Company reduced their Police to 150 and renamed it the Mashonaland Mounted Police. It included about 40 men, who constituted a Town Police Force. To supplement the military police a volunteer force was raised in 1891; this, the Mashonaland Horse, consisted of 500 men, of whom 200 were mounted. The Matabele War was fought by Rhodesian volunteers with one Imperial unit, The Bechuanaland Border Police. The volunteers were the Salisbury Horse, Victoria Rangers and Raff's

Rangers, operating in two columns, the Salisbury Horse and Victoria Rangers operating together as one column and Raff's Rangers and the Bechuanaland Border Police together as the other for the advance on Lobengula's kraal, which was occupied on 4th November, 1893, but Lobengula had fled northwards.

1893

On 4th December, 1893, was fought the historic battle of Major Allan Wilson's patrol on the Shangani River, 100 miles north of Bulawayo. On that day in 1893 Major Allan Wilson and his gallant patrol of 33 officers and men fought the Matabele from sunrise to sunset, and died to the last man. The story of their defiant refusal to surrender, even when all hope of rescue was gone, is the most heroic page in the history of Rhodesia.

1894

At the end of this campaign it was necessary to reorganise the military forces to include Matabeleland, and the Matabeleland Mounted Police was formed for the purpose. There was one further change; the Salisbury Horse, Victoria Rangers and Raff's Rangers were disbanded, and in their place was raised the Rhodesia Horse, which drew members from both Matabeleland and Mashonaland.

1895

In December, 1895, a large proportion of the Police accompanied Dr. Jameson on his abortive raid into the Transvaal. When he surrendered at Doornkop these men were taken prisoner and subsequently sent to Britain and South Africa, leaving only about 40 men in the country.

1896

When the Matabele rebelled in 1896, the units of the Rhodesia Horse in Matabeleland were disbanded and reformed into the Bulawayo Field Force, and those in Mashonaland were formed into the Salisbury Field Force. During this campaign many additional volunteer forces were raised, and Trooper H. S. Henderson and Trooper F. W. Baster were awarded the Victoria Cross.

The Defence Force, in drawing upon all available manpower capable of bearing arms, created some anomalies; Sir Thomas Scanlen, former Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, well on in years, and the Vicomte E. de la Panouse, who had been A.D.C. to Marshall McMahon during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, were enrolled as privates.

1896/1897

In June of this year the rebellion spread to Mashonaland. Captain R. C. Nesbitt was awarded the Victoria Cross as an officer of the Mashonaland Mounted Police. The Matabele made peace with Rhodes in October 1896, but the Mashonaland campaign continued until the same month in 1897. However, late in 1896 the Mashonaland Mounted Police and the Matabeleland Mounted Police were reorganised and reinforced to become the British South Africa Police. Three divisions were formed, one in each of Mashonaland, Matabeleland and Bechuanaland. As the territory became more populated and settled, the strength of the British South Africa Police was reduced and in 1898 a new volunteer movement was created. This new force was named the Southern Rhodesia Volunteers and was organised into two parts, an Eastern Division with its headquarters in Salisbury and a Western Division based in Bulawayo.

1899

In the Boer War (1899-1902) the Southern Rhodesia Volunteers and the British South Africa Police served with a column which advanced from Bulawayo to help in the relief of Mafeking. Besieged by the Boers, Mafeking had one division of British South Africa Police in its defence at the time. Additionally the column included a new unit specially raised for the defence of the country. This was the Rhodesia Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel J. A. Spreckley, C.M.G., D.S.O. After the relief of Mafeking the Regiment took part in many operations in the western Transvaal until it was disbanded in the latter part of 1900.

1903

In 1903 the two divisions of the Southern Rhodesia Volunteers were amalgamated.

1904/1905

On 5th October, the King's Colours were presented to the British South Africa Police and to the Southern Rhodesia Volunteers at Mafeking by His Excellency the High Commissioner, Lord Milner, for their services rendered during the Boer War. In 1905 a Regimental Colour was presented to the Southern Rhodesia Volunteers by the people of Bulawayo.

1913/1914

On 27th March, 1913, Major General A. H. M. Edwards, C.B., M.V.O., was appointed Commandant General and Commissioner of Police to command both the permanent force (British South Africa Police) and the Volunteers (Southern Rhodesia Volunteers). This

was the organisation until the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

It was with a minor operation, of which little has been heard, that Rhodesia first entered World War I. This was in the Caprivi strip German South West Africa. Very soon after the declaration of war a small column of British South Africa Police, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel A. E. Capell, D.S.O., captured the German frontier post of Schuckmannsburg and with it a large quantity of stores, ammunition and mules. These supplies were later used against the Germans in East Africa.

To assist South African forces in their battle in German South West Africa, the 1st Rhodesia Regiment was formed on 13th October, 1914, from members of the Southern Rhodesia Volunteers and the general public. It was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel F. R. Burnside. The 1st Rhodesia Regiment landed in Walvis Bay on 25th December, 1914. It was temporarily attached to the 4th South African Brigade and subsequently to the 3rd South African Brigade for the advance on Nonidas and the protection of the construction of a railway line across the Namib Desert. Later the Regiment was attached to the 1st South African Brigade in an unsuccessful attempt to bring the enemy into action at Kalkfield.

1915

Thereafter it performed garrison duties at Otjiwarongo until the surrender of German South West Africa. The Regiment was disbanded on 31st July, 1915. However, during this time, the 2nd Rhodesia Regiment was raised on 21st October, 1914, for service in German East Africa Commanded by Colonel A. E.

Capell, D.S.O., it first went into action at Salaita Hill, near Taveta, in Kenya, where casualties were heavy. At this point may be recorded the death, with the Imperial Forces in German East Africa, of one of the most prominent of the Rhodesian pioneers, Captain F. C. Selous, D.S.O., at Beho Beho on 4th January, 1917.

At this time, after seventeen months of the war, there was approximately 64 per cent. of the country's available manpower serving in various theatres. Towards the end of the East African campaign the 2nd Rhodesia Regiment had to be disbanded on 12th October, 1917, because there was insufficient manpower available for reinforcements. Rhodesians thereafter served in the King's Royal Rifle Corps and other British Regiments.

Another force of Police, Southern Rhodesia Volunteers and ex-1st Rhodesia Regiment was raised in August, 1915, for service in the Northern Rhodesia side of German East Africa. Named after Lieutenant Colonel R. G. Murray, D.S.O., D.C.M., Murray's column continued operating until 1918.

1916

In 1916 it was decided to raise a Native regiment to serve in Rhodesia whilst other troops served abroad, and in May, 1916, the 1st Rhodesia Native Regiment was formed; it joined the 5th South African Infantry Brigade at Songa in November, 1916. This was followed by another battalion called The Matabeleland Native Regiment, which almost at once became the 2nd Rhodesian Native Regiment and saw service in German East Africa. At the end of the war both these units were amalgamated as the Rhodesia Native Regiment on 1st February, 1918. Their Battle Honour, later transferred to the 1st Battalion The Rhodesia African Rifles, was "East Africa 1916-1918".

The Rhodesia Regiments were given the following Battle Honours for their service: "Great War 1914-1918", "South West Africa 1914-1915", "Kilimanjaro, Beho Beho and East Africa 1915-1917".

1920

In 1920 it was decided to disband the units of the Southern Rhodesia Volunteers and to maintain Rifle Companies in the main towns in the Territory. This system did not meet with enthusiasm and in 1924 the Commandant General wrote in his Annual Report, quoting one of his District Officers:

1924

"I regret to report that the feeling of the country towards defence, particularly in the case of youths of 18 to 26 years of age, has not improved in any way. The apathy shown is criminal. The men who should be in training are doing nothing whatsoever, and I would most strongly urge compulsion in the matter of training. Until this is done, we will have merely the very old and the very young taking any sort of interest in the matter of defence of their country."

1926

In a Defence Act promulgated in 1926 provision was made for a Permanent Force and a Territorial Force.

The Permanent Force consisted of the British South Africa Police, with a headquarters instructional and administrative staff for the Defence Force consisting of six officers and twenty-one warrant officers and non-commissioned officers drawn from the Police. This headquarters unit was the beginning of the Permanent Staff Corps.

1927

The Act came into effect on 1st January, 1927, The Southern Rhodesia Volunteers were embodied in the Territorial Force on 1st April, 1927, and the new Territorial Force organisation were formed on 1st October, 1927, under the command of Colonel H. W. Watson, C.M.G., D.S.O.

The 1st Battalion, The Rhodesia Regiment was established in Salisbury and the 2nd Battalion, The Rhodesia Regiment was formed in Bulawayo. "B" Company of the 1st Battalion was formed in Umtali.

1928

Later "B" Company of the 2nd Battalion, The Rhodesia Regiment was formed in Gwelo.

1929

In the following year an endeavour was made to form an Aviation Unit of volunteers from Territorial Force officers. There were only six privately owned aircraft based in Southern Rhodesia at the time.

His Majesty, King George V, approved the transfer of the Colours of the 1st and 2nd Rhodesia Regiments of World War I, and their Great War Battle Honours, to the Regiments of today.

1930

In 1930 it was decided to include Specialist Companies of Engineers and Motor Transport in each Territorial Battalion.

Matters remained much the same for the next few years.

1935

In June, 1935, an aviation unit of volunteers was formed of six men for air training.

Internal security duties were carried out on the Copperbelt in Northern Rhodesia by Police and volunteers from the Forces. This was a time when the country was recovering from the slump and it was not until 1936 that any new weapons were purchased. It was in May that the formation of a Council for Defence was gazetted. The Budget allowed for the purchase of Bren guns to replace the Lewis gun.

1939

As a result of a report made in 1938, it was decided to reorganise the Forces so that the Defence Force should not only be prepared for internal security, but also take part in action overseas. Each Battalion of The Rhodesia Regiment was re-formed into two groups to be able to carry out their new roles. The Permanent Staff Corps was increased to 22 officers and 25 other ranks to assist in the specialist training necessary.

1940

Due to the increase in the size of the Defence Forces at the outbreak of the Second World War, it was decided in 1940 to separate the Military Forces from the Police, and introduce fulltime conscription. In May, under the powers of the National Service (Armed Forces Act, 1940, the 18-25 year old age group of men was called upon to register before the 10th of June. Within certain prescribed areas citizens who were not available for full-time service were liable to perform up to 300 hours part-time training in any twelve months.

The full-time units formed were:

The Southern Rhodesia Reconnaissance Unit.
The Light Battery
The Southern Rhodesia Medical Corps
Signal Company

As further forces were required overseas, the 1st Battalion The Rhodesia African Rifles and the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Services were raised. At this time some 990 of all ranks had been drafted overseas, being posted to various British Regiments in the Middle East.

In October, 1940, the Southern Rhodesia Reconnaissance Unit served under General A. G. Cunningham, D.S.O., M.C. as the only Rhodesian unit. Later, the Southern Rhodesia Medical Corps controlled No. 2 General Hospital in Nairobi and the Southern Rhodesia Survey Unit was ordered to map the Northern Frontier District.

1941

In 1941 the Southern Rhodesia Supply Corps was formed and on 16th July, 1941, the Coloured Motor Transport Depot was opened. The Women's Auxiliary Territorial Services was renamed the Southern Rhodesia Women's Auxiliary Volunteers.

A Leader Training School was formed in Gwelo and an Armoured Fighting Vehicle School was opened in Umtali.

The Southern Rhodesia Reconnaissance Unit expanded and became an Armoured Car Regiment.

The Light Battery was affiliated to the Royal Regiment of Artillery.

On 3rd July The Rhodesian African Rifles Depot was opened. A Rhodesian Air Askari Corps was formed for the maintenance and protection of aircraft.

The 3rd and 4th Battalions, The Rhodesia Regiment, having completed their training on 8th December, were disbanded to form Depot Companies for the 1st and 2nd Battalions, The Rhodesia Regiment.

Towards the end of the year, The Southern Rhodesia Military and Air Force Police was formed.

1942

In October, 1942, the Southern Rhodesia Women's Auxiliary Volunteers was again reformed into the Southern Rhodesian Women's Auxiliary Service, Women's Auxiliary Air Service and Women's Auxiliary Police Service.

A Southern Rhodesia Works Company of Engineers was formed.

The Southern Rhodesia Armoured Car Regiment went to South Africa, on its way to North Africa to join the 6th South African Armoured Division as a result of a decision that the Southern Rhodesia Forces would be linked with the South Africa Command.

1943

In 1943 the Rhodesian Coloured Motor Transport Depot was disbanded and the Rhodesian African Rifles left for Kenya where they remained for about nine months.

1944

In 1944 the Southern Rhodesia Electrical and Mechanical Engineers was formed, and the Rhodesian

African Rifles left Kenya in August for Ceylon en route to Burma.

At the time, the total numbers of personnel serving were:

Inside Rhodesia	.....	.....	.....	.....	4568
Outside Rhodesia	.....	.....	.....	.....	2313

1946

As the war neared its close, the Southern Rhodesia Works Company was disbanded and the 1st Battalion, The Rhodesian African Rifles, on its return in 1946, was reformed with added companies to serve the various airfields used by the Royal Air Force.

The year 1947 saw a great number of changes, the first of which was that the Southern Rhodesia Permanent Staff Corps was changed to The Southern Rhodesia Staff Corps.

The Defence Headquarters moved into the King George VI Barracks, where it remains to this day.

The Southern Rhodesia Women's Military and Air Services was approved, as a replacement of the previous women's units, on 2nd April, 1947.

It was because of wide and meritorious service and the fine reputation which The Rhodesia Regiments of the past had gained that His Majesty the King conferred the title Royal on the Rhodesia Regiment and also assumed the Colonelcy-in-Chief. The Regiment was also given the embracing Battle Honour "Second World War."

1947

The Southern Rhodesia Cadet Corps became affiliated to The Royal Rhodesia Regiment on 1st September, 1947, and a new unit of the Sea Cadets was

formed in Bulawayo, that in Salisbury having been formed earlier.

1948

In 1948 the Training Wing was reorganised and renamed the Southern Rhodesia Training School.

The GAZETTE showed that the following units were renamed and reorganised:

- Southern Rhodesia Armoured Car Regiment
- Southern Rhodesia Artillery
- Southern Rhodesia Engineers
- Southern Rhodesia Signal Corps
- 1st Battalion, The Royal Rhodesia Regiment
- 2nd Battalion, The Royal Rhodesia Regiment
- Southern Rhodesia Medical Corps

1951

A volunteer group was formed and trained for service with Commonwealth Troops in Malaya. This unit was called the Rhodesia Squadron Malayan Scouts and went to the Far East on 12th March, 1951. The Colours of the Southern Rhodesian Volunteers were laid up at a ceremony attended by His Excellency the Governor at St. John's Cathedral, Bulawayo, on 10th June 1951.

In October the Southern Rhodesia Corps of Military Police was raised within the Territorial Force.

1952

Another call on the Regular Forces saw three companies of The Rhodesian African Rifles sent for service in the Suez Canal Zone. They returned in 1952.

1953

During 1953 The Rhodesian African Rifles were presented with their Queen's and Regimental Colours by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. Later the Battle Honours of "Arakan Beaches", "Taun-

gup" and "Burma 1944-1945" were added to those received by the Rhodesia Native Regiment in World War I. On the formation of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland a large expansion programme was undertaken to incorporate the units of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland into a Federal Defence Force. A Central Africa Command was formed on 12th December, 1953, and from 1st January, 1954, all forces in the territories came under the control of the Federal Defence Department and the Central Africa Command. At the same time a period of 4½ months of National Service was agreed to by all territories.

Her Majesty The Queen was graciously pleased to approve the addition of the prefix "Royal" to the name of the Rhodesian Air Force on 15th October, 1954.

1955/1956

From this time on the policy was to replace British Army Officers of the two battalions of The Kings African Rifles and of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment with Federal Officers, and also to undertake the overseas commitments being carried out by those units. To this effect the 1st Battalion, The Rhodesian African Rifles prepared during 1955 to take over from the 1st Battalion, The Northern Rhodesia Regiment, who were serving in Malaya. The Battalion landed in Singapore in 1956.

During this year, the Royal Rhodesia Air Force was established as a separate service, apart from the Army, having its own Air Headquarters.

On 1st April, 1956, all specialist units such as the Engineers, Armoured Cars, Artillery and Signals were suspended for reorganisation. The Staff Corps at this time had a strength of 178 officers and 449 other ranks.

On the same date the 3rd Battalion, The Royal

Rhodesia Regiment was formed in Northern Rhodesia, with its Headquarters in Kitwe.

1957

The reorganisation of Corps and Services was completed in 1957 when the following units were formed:
Rhodesia and Nyasaland Corps of Engineers
Rhodesia and Nyasaland Corps of Signals
Rhodesia and Nyasaland Corps of Infantry (including all African Regular and Territorial Force Battalions, Training establishments and all other Infantry personnel)
Rhodesia and Nyasaland Army Services Corps
Rhodesia and Nyasaland Medical Corps
Rhodesia and Nyasaland Army Pay Corps
Rhodesia and Nyasaland Chaplains Department

1958

On 1st January, 1958, the Southern Rhodesia Women's Military and Air Service was disbanded.

The 1st Battalion, The Rhodesian African Rifles returned from Malaya.

1959

The expansion and training continued to such an extent that during 1959 the strength of the Regular Units of the Federal Army, including all ranks was 4,218 and the Territorial Force strength was 2,972.

1961

In 1961 three new units were formed.

The 1st Battalion, The Rhodesian Light Infantry
The Rhodesian Armoured Car Regiment (Selous Scouts)

"C" Squadron, Rhodesian Special Air Service Regiment.

The Rhodesia and Nyasaland Army Education Corps was formed on the 24th February.

1963

The Army as a whole continued its expansion and increased its efficiency until the break-up of the Federation in 1963.

The Rhodesian Armoured Car Regiment was disbanded on 14th December, 1963.

The Federal Army strength was 5,323 all ranks of the Regular Army, and 8,528 all ranks of the Territorial Force.

1964

On 1st January, 1964, on the break-up of the Federation, all the Units in Southern Rhodesia reverted to their old names, incorporating the name of the territory, and a great deal of reorganisation was necessary.

The 1st Battalion, The Rhodesian Light Infantry changed its role and was reorganised on commando lines.

1965

The Depot, The Rhodesia Army Services Corps was formed.

During 1965 The Rhodesian Light Infantry was presented with The Queen's and Regimental Colours by the then Governor, Sir Humphrey Gibbs, K.C.M.G., O.B.E.

1968

The Field Engineering and Trade School located with 1 Engineer Squadron was redesignated The School of Military Engineering.

The Cadet Corps was disbanded.