

Britains figures - Regiment Louw Wepener

Introduction

Among the Britains figures portraying the South African Army, one set has always puzzled me - the blue-grey uniformed figures of Set 1900: Regiment Louw Wepener. What was the background behind these uniforms?



Britains set 1900: Regiment Louw Wepener (with one rifleman missing).

The photo is from Vectis Auctions

The set of 8 figures - 1 officer and 7 riflemen - had only a short spell in the Britains catalogue - 1940-1941 (a period of eight months) and 1948-1949 - thus being relatively rare.

The following article is a result of my investigations into the background of the regiment and its blue-grey uniforms (in the Britains version however, more blue than blue-grey), perhaps best known, outside South Africa at least, due to the Britains figures and a couple of cigarette cards.

Regiment Louw Wepener



Regiment Louw Wepener.

Card No. 4 from
the Player's series
Military Uniforms
of the British Empire
Overseas, 1938.

On the back of the card the following information is found:

The Orange Free State, to which this regiment belongs, was one of the four-governing Colonies which maintained Volunteers and Militia before the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

Military re-organisation was then carried out by the Government in which General Louis Botha was Prime Minister and General Smuts the Minister of Defence. At the present time, the Defence Force of the Union is divided into five categories, particulars of which will be found on Card No. 3 [1](#)).

We show a Sergeant of the Regiment Louw Wepener; in the background may be seen the Provincial Legislative Chamber (formerly the Raadzaal), Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State.

A similar illustration of a sergeant from Regiment Louw Wepener is also found in the cigarette card series *South African Defence*, published by The United Tobacco Cos. (South) Ltd, circa 1938.



Regiment Louw Wepener.
Card No. 55 from
the cigarette card series
South African Defence,
published by
The United Tobacco
Cos. (South) Ltd, circa 1938.

This card forms the basis for an article found in the South African Military Society's Military History Journal, Volume 12, No. 2 (Source 2). The webmaster of the South African Military Society, Ms Joan Marsh, kindly made this article available online, thus presenting more information on Regiment Louw Wepener.

The following information is found in the series album (Source 7):

While khaki is widely used in the Defence Force, many of the units wear a uniform of the grey-green veld drab colour shown here.

This is particularly true of the 1934 expansion policy and the new commando uniform is of the same colour. The Regiment Louw Wepener, an Orange Free State unit with headquarters at Ladybrand and platoons stationed at Senekal, Ficksburg, Clocolan, Wepener, Bethulie and Zastron.

The regiment is named after a noted Boer leader, who led expeditions against the notorious native chief Moshesh. The colours of the regiment are black and gold and are shown in the flash at the side of the helmet.

Regimental history in brief



Regimental badge Regiment Louw Wepener [2](#)). From Source 3.

Regiment Louw Wepener

1934 On 1 April 1934 Regiment Louw Wepener was raised as one of six new Afrikaans speaking regiments [3](#)) in the Active Citizens Force, and based in Ladybrand [4](#)).

1940 Volunteers from Regiment Louw Wepener and Regiment De Wet were mobilized on 7 June 1940 and transferred to Regiment President Steyn, which served as a Machine Gun Battalion in the 1st South African Division in North Africa 1941-42.

1946 Regiment Louw Wepener was re-raised.

1960 The name Regiment Oos-Vrystaat (Regiment East Free State) was adopted.

1966 The original designation, Regiment Louw Wepener, was re-adopted in 1966.

1990s Absorbed, together with Regiment Dan Pienaar, into Regiment Bloemspruit.

The badge

The badge is composed of the following; the image of Thaba Bosiu (Mountain of the Night) [5](#)), forming the background; a Vickers machine gun superimposed on the mountain and name THABA BOSIGO. Below the name is an Nguni shield with two crossed assegais, above a scroll bearing the words REG - LOUW WEPENER - REG.

The reason for REG being used twice is probably that the regimental name then appears in both Afrikaans (Regiment Louw Wepener) and English (Louw Wepener Regiment), the two official languages in South Africa at the time.



Regiment Louw Wepener.

Card No. 42 from the cigarette card series
South African Defence,
published by The United Tobacco
Cos. (South) Ltd, circa 1938.

The following information is found in the series album (Source 7):

The Regiment Louw Wepener is another of the infantry battalions created under the scheme of Defence Force expansion. Regimental headquarters are situated at Ladybrand, in the eastern Orange Free State.

The badge of the regiment is an interesting one; the background of the badge represents Thaba Bosigo, a peculiarly shaped flat-topped mountain in the regimental area, which was once the fortified stronghold of the troublesome Basuto chief, Moshesh. This chief descended from his splendid natural stronghold at intervals, to raid the cattle of the Boers who were then establishing the Orange Free State, and he was a source of constant trouble until the Treaty of Thaba Bosigo was signed in 1866.

The machine-gun on the badge is, of course, an allusion to the armament of the unit.



Regimental flash

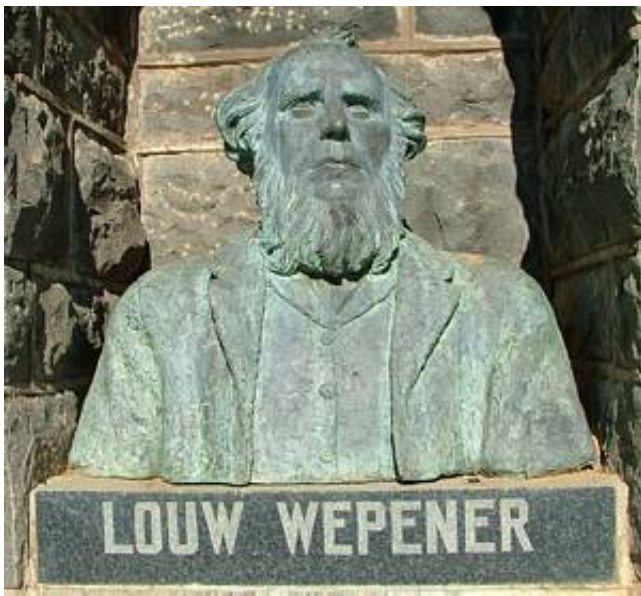
Regiment Louw Wepener.

Based on information
from Source 3.

The uniform

The uniform shown in the cigarette cards resembles the uniform of the Union Defence Forces, as described in the Dress Regulations of 1934. (Source 2)

It consisted of veld-green (*veld* is Afrikaans for field) jacket, shorts, puttees with yellow string, brown boots and polo helmet with the regimental badge in front and flashes on the side. Chevrons of Non-Commissioned Officers were yellow and sergeants carried orange sashes.



The Louw Wepener Monument.

Photo by Simon du Plooy (SA Genealogie).

Follow the above link to see further photos of the monument.

Commandant Louw Wepener

Commandant [6](#)) Lourens (Louw) Wepener (1812-1865) was an Orange Free State Boer hero, killed at Thaba Bosiu on 15 August 1865, during The 2nd Orange Free State-Basuto War (1864-1866) [7](#)).

The Thaba Bosiu (Mountain of the Night) was originally spelled Thaba Bosigo in Afrikaans, thus being used on the badge.

In 1967 a medal for bravery - the Louw Wepener Medal - was instituted; see Louw Wepener Medal (South African Military History Society).

The monument is found 6 kilometres north of Bethulie (SA Routes), where Louw Wepener's farm, Constantia, was situated.

Sources

1. Regiment Louw Wepener cigarette card by Allan Sinclair (South African Military History Society).
2. Email of 25 February 2005 from J.L. Keene, Director of the South African National Museum of Military History.
3. *The Armed Forces of South Africa, with an appendix on the commandos* by Major G. Tylden, City of Johannesburg Africana Museum, Frank Connock Publication No. 2, Johannesburg, 1954.
4. Badges of Citizen Force Units, Part 3 by S.C. Foote, Commando Magazine, January 1969 (The Booker Collection of military hat & collar badges).
5. Die Ontwikkeling van die Rangstruktuur van die Boercommandos, Deel 2: 1834-1902 by Lt-Kol. J. J. Retief (South African Military History Society).
6. Basutoland Roll of Honour by Major G. Tylden (South African Military History Society).
7. *South African Defence*, a series of 100 cigarette cards published by The United Tobacco Cos.(South) Ltd, circa 1938.

Per Finsted

Noter:

1) From Card No. 3: The Union of South Africa Defence Force is divided into (a) the Permanent Force, which is recruited on a voluntary basis; (b) the Coast Garrison Force, supplementing those positions of the Permanent Force detailed for this purpose; (c) the Active Citizen Force, which corresponds to the Territorial Army in Great Britain; (d) the Commandos, formed from members of the Defence Rifle Association; and (e) the Reserves. Enrolment into the Active Citizens Force is for a period of four years, and re-engagement for periods of one year is permitted.

2) The badge was worn until 1965, when a new badge was introduced. Information on the badges is found in Source 4.

3) The other five new Orange Free State regiments were: Regiment Botha, Regiment De Wet, Regiment De la Rey, Regiment President Steyn and Oranje Vrystaat Veld Artillerie (or Orange Free State Artillery). (Source 3)

4) See Ladybrand (SA Routes).

5) See Thaba Bosiu, Lesotho (Go2Africa).

6) The rank *Commandant* within the Boer Commandoes can be compared to that of a Lieutenant-Colonel.

7) See Basuto-Boer War 1865-1868 (Wars of the World) and Lesotho (Lesotho Government Online).