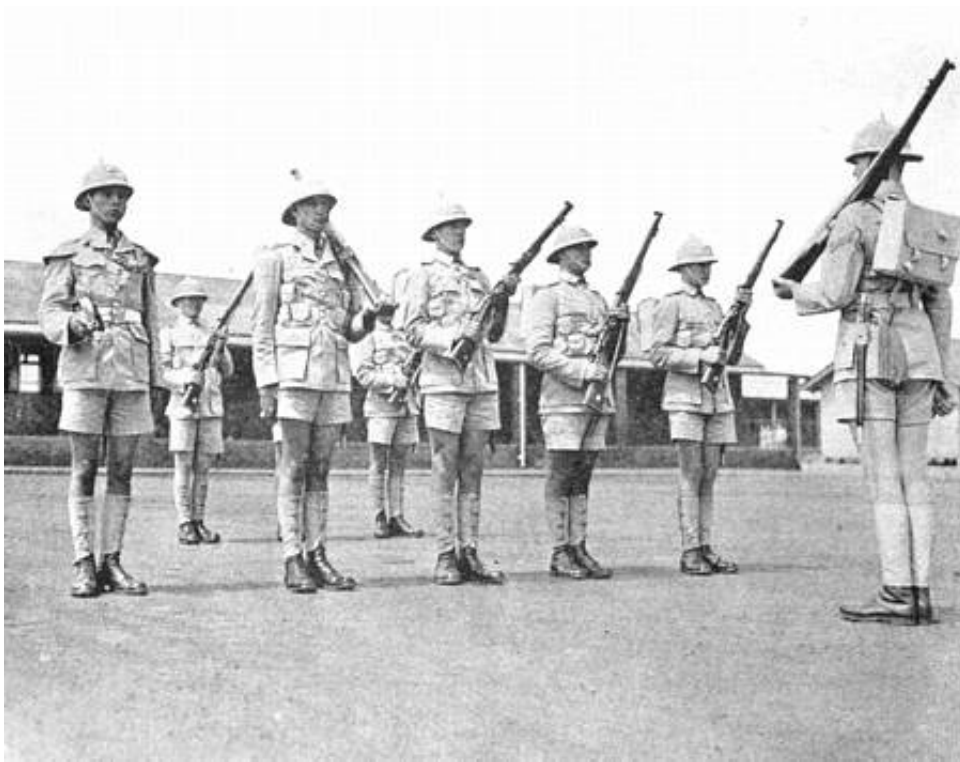


Britains figures - Union of South Africa Defence Force

Introduction

For a number of years I have been interested in Britains South African Army figures and more recently in the historical context of the figures. Although I do not have all the various types, this does not diminish the interest; it works more the other way round. And perhaps that is what collecting is all about - to have something, to know about other things, and then be on the lookout for something else ... Quite interesting, but often a bit frustrating!



*Guard mounting by the Union of South Africa Defence Force, c.1939.
From Source 1.*

Union of South Africa Defence Force

The camp may be the Roberts Heights Camp at Pretoria, the main training centre of the Permanent Force in the Union of South African Defence Force [1](#)), and home of the South African Army College [2](#)).

The guard shows the rather smart South African tropical helmet, which during the North African Campaign was much sought after by Germans as well as Allied soldiers. The shorts - rather short compared to e.g. British tropical uniforms - and the long leggings are also typical of the pre-war South African army uniforms.

The equipment is of the British Model 1908 webbing type, perhaps with a South African type of ammunition pouches.



Cape Town Highlanders.



Kimberley Regiment.



Witwatersrand Rifles.



Regiment Louw Wepener.

Cigarette cards Nos. 1-4 from the Player's series
Military Uniforms of the British Empire Overseas, 1938.

The uniforms displayed in the cigarette cards depict units which participated in the South African Contingent in the 1937 coronation of King George VI.

Durban Light Infantry



*Britains Set 1293 or 1294: Durban Light Infantry or
British Infantry in Tropical Dress.*

From Source 4.

The marching figures, in shorts, were introduced by Britains in the 1934 New Lines catalogue which contains the following sets:

1293: Durban Light Infantry

1294: British Infantry in Tropical Dress

Both sets consisted of 1 officer and 7 privates, all based on the same figure.

Compared to most other Britains figures, which are marching with the left foot forward, the figure with shorts is marching with the right foot forward.



The Wolseley Pattern tropical helmet [3](#)).

The head with the *Wolseley Pattern* tropical helmet is, in my opinion, among the best produced by Britains.



Britains Set 1293: Durban Light Infantry.
From Source 2.

Among experts, e.g. the authors of Sources 2 and 3, the prevailing theory is that figures from the Durban Light Infantry sets were produced in a dark khaki uniform whereas the British figures had a lighter shade of khaki uniform. However, it is difficult to be precise, since Britains used an often confusing number of khaki colours for their figures.

Sets 1293 and 1294 were produced from 1934 to 1941.

Union of South Africa Defence Force

In 1940 Britains supplied a further 3 sets of South African figures:

Set No.	Pre-war	Post-war
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Title

1900	Regiment Louw Wepener	1940-1941	1948-1949
1901	Cape Town Highlanders	1940-1941	1948-1959
1902	Union of South Africa Defence Force	1940-1941	--



Britains Set 1902: Union of South Africa Defence Force.
From Source 4.

Whereas the two first sets portray specific regiments, the third set could be almost any South African infantry regiment.

Each set consisted of 8 figures - 1 officer and 7 privates, and like the 1934-sets the same type of figure was used for both officer and men. The officer figure was painted with brown gloves and boots.

Although the shorts were cast somewhat longer than South African regulations and the helmet is of British pattern, and not the smaller South African type, the figures give a good representation of real life South African soldiers, e.g. the Kimberly or Witwatersrand Regiments shown in the Player's cigarette cards.



Britains Set 1902: Union of South Africa Defence Force.
From Source 2.

Regiment Louw Wepener



Britains Set 1900: Regiment Louw Wepener.
From Source 4.

The figures display the characteristic veld-green (veld is Afrikaans for field) uniform of the Regiment Louw Wepener, although rather more blue than the blue-grey displayed on contemporary British and South African cigarette cards.

For further information on Regiment Louw Wepener, refer to my article [Britains figures - Regiment Louw Wepener](#).



Britains Set 1901: Cape Town Highlanders.

Cape Town Highlanders

Britains produced most of their Highland figures in parade uniforms or early field uniforms. The two major exceptions are the Cape Town Highlanders shown here and Set 114: Cameron Highlanders, slope arms position, Active Service.



*Regimental badge of
the Regiment Louw Wepener.*



*Regimental badge of
the Cape Town Highlanders.*

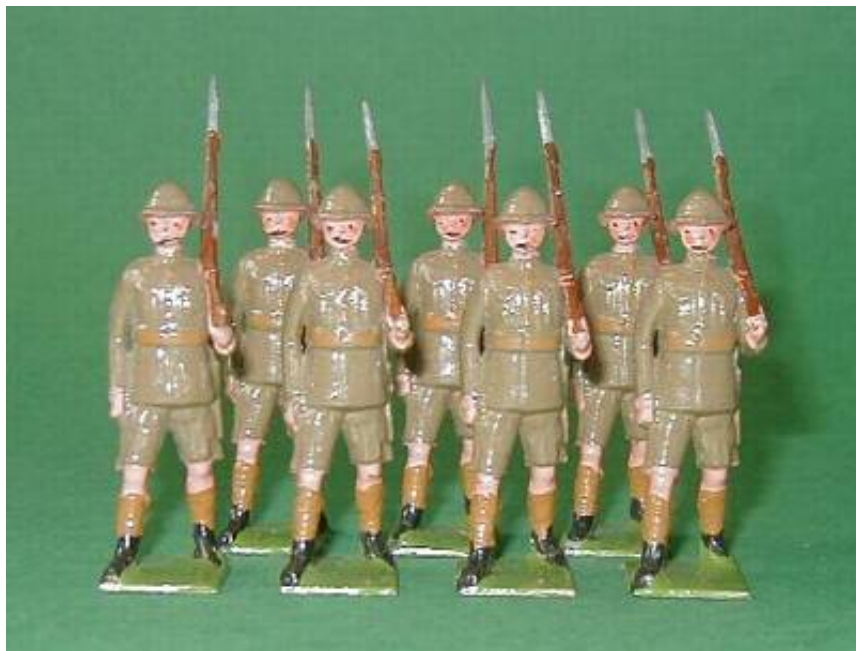
The Cameron Highlanders were based on the same figure as the Cape Town Highlanders, but carried rifles without bayonet. Apart from the obvious difference in the kilts, the Cameron Highlanders displayed white tropical helmets.

Illustrations from South African Military Units (John Dovey).

Kilder

1. *The Wonder Book of Soldiers* by Harry Golding (red.), Ward, Lock & Co., London, c.1940.
2. *The Great Book on Britains - 100 Years of Britains Toy Soldiers* by James Opie, New Cavendish Books, London 1993, ISBN 1-872727-32-8.
3. *Armies of the World, Britains Ltd. Lead Soldiers 1925 - 1941* by Joe Wallis, Privat udgivelse, 1993, ISBN 0-9605950-2-3.
4. *The Art of the Toy Soldier* by Henry I. Kurtz og Burt R. Ehrlich, Abbeville Press, New York 1987, ISBN 0-89659-746-6.
5. *Britains New Lines 1934*. Reprint.

Further photos



Britains Set 1293: Durban Light Infantry.

Based on the prevailing theory of the darker khaki uniforms, these figures could be from the *Durban Light Infantry*, but I am not 100% sure.

The officer figure is sadly missing, but when not displayed for photography an officer in a lighter shade of khaki normally leads the men.

In real life various shades of khaki would be absolutely correct, but in the world of collectors' matching uniforms often take the lead.



Britains Set 1294: British Infantry in Tropical Dress.

Further to the prevailing theory of shades of khaki these figures could be *British Infantry in Tropical Dress*.

The collector who sold me the figures had obtained two similar sets, including one in an original Set 1294 box. Consequently, I presume these figures really are *British Infantry in Tropical Dress*.

This obsession with shades of khaki may sound trivial, and one could use the figures according to preference, but in the world of collectors these often insignificant details tend to have large bearings, especially on the price of original old toy soldiers.

Per Finsted

Noter:

- 1) For further information of the South African Army, see *South African Army 1939-40* and *The South African Army on 3 September 1939 (Commonwealth Orders of Battle)* as well as *South African Formations of the Second World War (British & Commonwealth Orders of Battle)*.
- 2) See *The South African Army College (The South African Military History Society)*.
- 3) From *The Cut of Cloth* by D.S.V. Fosten, *Military Modelling*, April 1984.