

# South African Coloured Corps

## Part 2

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With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the Nationalists had to relinquish power because of their opposition to participation on the side of the allied forces. The Coloureds were again mobilised under the Cape Corps. Thousands enlisted but the government was not prepared to arm them all; placed most in non-combat positions in the Essential Services Protection Corps at the Cape. However, many saw action in East and North Africa and were represented in famous battles like the Tobruk, El Alamein and the Battle of Square Hill where they emerged heroes. The Coloured people as part and parcel of the world's people waging a titanic battle against fascism, served with distinction. After the war, the Cape Corps, the pride of the Coloured community were demobilised. Their interests were thereafter to be looked after by the British Commonwealth Ex-Servicemen's League (BCESL).

### Nationalist Government

When the present government, the very disciples of Hitler, came to power in 1948 the military establishment was reorganised and defence became the exclusive responsibility of the whites. The government hounded the Coloured people and the meagre rights which they had were further eroded. In 1948 Coloured administration was decentralised with the passing of the Coloured Affairs Council Act. This council was the forerunner to the bogus institutions created later, the Coloured Affairs Department (CAD) and CRC. In terms of the Group Areas Act the Coloured people were evicted in 1966 from areas they had occupied for decades. The glaring injustice of this act was demonstrated when tens of thousands of Coloured people were evicted from District Six, once the traditional home of the Cape Coloured community, and dumped on the sand-dunes of the Cape Flats.

The demand by extreme racists for the political separation of the Cape Coloured community was met in 1956 with the passing of the Separate Representation of Voters Act and Coloured Persons Education Act of 1963. Far from lapsing into despair

and inactivity, the Coloured people resisted. The BCESL now played a political role as part of this resistance. Leading ex-servicemen registered their protest against the injustice meted out to their people and the BCESL was represented at Malmesbury Convention of 1961.

Despite relegating them to the status of second-class in the country which they and their ancestors helped to build, the Boers tried to impress upon them that they have nothing in common with other oppressed people. Allowed certain minimal privileges and concessions within the South African economy they were expected to believe that their salvation lies in accepting and defending the vacuum which the white supremacists created for them. This false belief coupled with the growing manpower shortage and the increasing strength of the national liberation movement led to the establishment of the South African Coloured Corps (SACC) in 1963.

## SACC

Initially they served in non-combat roles. Various schemes are used to recruit, giving the impression of voluntary enlisting. A SADF document revealed in February, 1980, that recruiting is not as successful as should be, publications are encouraged to run articles of such nature as to glamourise the life of African, Indian and Coloured servicemen. Recruits are thoroughly screened politically besides being vetted by psychologists and ethnologists to check their personalities and backgrounds.

The type of man needed is one with a low level of education who will be easily susceptible to brainwashing. The rural area with high unemployment rate and low level of political awareness presents fertile ground for such recruitment. Inducements like job advancement and 'social security' are used to attract recruits mostly from the North-West Cape, Kango and Namaqualand. To facilitate this, the training of Coloured Cadets Act was passed in 1967. The act makes provision for the compulsory training of unemployed men between the ages 18 and 24 for 'useful employment'. The Cadet Camp was strategically erected next to the SACC base. First and foremost it serves as a recruiting ground for the SACC, SAP and Prison Services. Circumstances force them to 'volunteer'; this can be borne out by the fact that the majority of the SACC are former Cadets. Secondly, it is intended for the creation of a stable and subservient labour force which can be used for scabbing in times of crisis. Recently the take-over

of the Cadet centre by the SADF was announced. (Sunday Times 17.2.80).

Restrictions on the advancement of the SACC were lifted in 1973. In 1974 it was reported that a total of 224 SACC soldiers completed training as 'anti-guerrilla' fighters. Some members were commissioned in 1975 and presently four hold the rank of major. There are seventeen Coloured officers serving in the Coloured component of the SADF with an Operations Infantry Battalion, Maintenance Battalion and Officer Training School, the first of its kind for black soldiers.

Since 1978 Coloured Infantry soldiers have been trained as paratroopers. In 1979 the strength of the SACC stood at 4,000 men. The navy has also been recruiting Coloured men since 1963, chiefly in service capacities and Coloureds serve in the South African Air Force (SAAF) in maintenance sections.

### **Attitude of The Community**

Since its establishment, the SACC has evoked increasing rejection from the Coloured community. The Coloured people as part of the oppressed are opposed to the regime, hence their interests cannot be served by defending the system. The SACC, an ally of the SADF against the national liberation movement, is therefore diametrically opposed to the interests of the Coloured people. The absolute hostility with which the Coloured people regard any participation or actions condoning the existence of the SACC can be vividly demonstrated by the case of Sonny Leon, Chairman of the Labour Party after he had visited the 'operational area' in the company of some parliamentarians. He was dismissed as Chairman and resigned from the party, his political career ruined and his credibility in the eyes of the people destroyed.

Various Coloured community leaders and Labour Party have persistently called for the closure of the Cadet Camp. They exposed the nature of the Camp and pointed out that the training is of a military nature with recruits who do not comply with the serious and prolonged punishment. Government plans to introduce cadet training in Coloured high schools was rejected by the Labour Party as well as the Cape Teachers' Professional Association (CPTA).

Individual members of the SACC are completely ostracised and alienated from the community. The base situated at Faure/Verete River is a few kilometres from the townships of the Cape Flats. It is no exaggeration that no known or uniformed member of the SACC can easily venture into any of these town-

ships without being subjected to insults and possible assault. This ostracisation is clearly seen if we look into their relations with the neighbouring communities as far as sport, a major activity in the SACC, is concerned.

The huge sports complex at the base has been turned into a white elephant. All major sports codes in the Western Cape's Coloured communities adhere to the non-racial principles of the South African Council on Sports (SACOS). The SACC because of its very nature is not acceptable in these leagues. Instead they are affiliated to the racial unions. In rugby, the major sport in that region, the SACC is openly working against the interests of the community. The rugby fields at the base are used by the racial South African Rugby Federation (SARF) to conduct secret trial matches and practices for selection against the touring sides. It is from amongst these ranks that Coloured players included in the recent Barbarian side that toured England came. Players from the non-racial South African Rugby Union (SARU) are enticed with money offers.

When the Coloured community of Bellville objected to the use of their tennis courts for an exhibition match featuring an Australian aboriginal, Yvonne Goolagong, and other white professionals, the match was played at the base after an urgent application to the Cape Town Supreme Court succeeded in favour of the Bellville Sport Board which controls the courts.

The strengthening of the SACC despite its rejection by the Coloured community should be seen as part of the enemy's reaction to the growing tide of revolution within the country and the rising actions of the masses under the guidance of the African National Congress and its allies. This makes it imperative that we should respond to these actions of the enemy. There is a need to do political work within the rural areas which are the prime target for recruitment and strengthening of such forces. Wide-spread propaganda about the SACC, its nature and social implications will serve to deter prospective recruits to a certain degree. The Bonteheuwels and Mannenberg of 1976 and the Elsie Rivers of 1980 have destroyed the myth that the Coloured people will side with the regime in times of crisis. As is well reflected in the Strategy and Tactics of the ANC, the Coloured people are an integral part of the liberation movement. The President of our people's organisation, Comrade Oliver Tambo, once said that:

"As our forces drive deeper into the south, we have no doubt that they will be joined not by some but by the whole African nation; by

the oppressed minorities, the Indian and Coloured people, and by an increasing number of White democrats".

It is a matter of proud record that among our first gallant fighters and martyrs of our revolution to engage the enemy forces of Smith and Vorster during the historic Wankie Campaigns was Basil February (Paul Petersen), a comrade from the Coloured community.

THE FREEDOM OF OUR PEOPLE IS INDIVISIBLE!

FORWARD TO A PEOPLE'S GOVERNMENT!

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# What I Did Was Right



This is an extract from the historic speech made by Comrade Bram Fischer to the racist Pretoria Supreme Court on 28th March, 1966, in defence of our freedom struggle to which he had devoted his life.