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# KHAKI-CLAD SPRINGBOKS

RUGBY MATCHES PLAYED BY THE  
6<sup>TH</sup> SOUTH AFRICAN ARMoured DIVISION 1943-46

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Gideon Nieman



SUN MEDIA

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Front cover photos of Jimmy Hearn's tour jersey (3) (Goodwin), UDF badge (Roos), 6th Division shoulder flash (own collection).

Photos in text used by courtesy of Ditsong National Museums of Military History

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# FOREWORD

THIS PROJECT STARTED IN 1989 when the SA Defence Force published a brochure to commemorate its contribution to South African rugby. It contained photos of various teams that played in Egypt and in concentration camps and of the 6<sup>th</sup> SA Armoured division's touring sides. The information on the matches and tour was skimpy and I wanted to know more.

About 3 years later I was working in Johannesburg and had the "normal" Monday rugby chat with colleagues over tea time when John van Vuuren mentioned that his dad played rugby in Italy during the war. The next day he brought me 3 postcard-sized photos of the match in Rapal against the NZ forces with compliments of his dad. I was hooked!

Whenever I had free time (from first a corporate job and then academia and the pressure of academic publishing) I would delve into newspaper archives and the *Springbok* to find more about rugby in war time (2<sup>nd</sup> World War) and especially the 6<sup>th</sup> Division tour.

In 2006, I also by chance met Bunny Matthysen who had kept a file with memorabilia on the tour as well as newspaper clippings. Through him I managed also to get interviews with Alex Fry and Cecil Moss. At that stage they and Bunny seemed to be the only surviving members of the touring side.

Retirement meant more time and I could pursue the research more diligently. A request in the *Cape Times* delivered dividends in that the families shared their memorabilia with me and let me scan photos and copy programmes and so on. Most invaluable were the diaries of Tips Muller and Ham Barry which helped with details of the tour in France, Germany and the return to Italy and finally to Egypt before being "demobilised" back to SA. The Ditsong: National Museum of Military History (NMMH) also helped in making 94 photos available to me on the tour and other 6<sup>th</sup> Division matches albeit that most photos lacked proper captions!

I decided to add the 6<sup>th</sup> Division's matches in Egypt during the 1943/4 season (the rugby season in the Middle East coincided with that in Europe namely that

it started in October and ended at the end of March the following year). This brought another problem. Whereas the South African newspapers reported on the 1945 tour matches in England, France and Germany, there was little or no reports on the 1943/4 matches except for the New Zealand match (of course!). In addition these reports were SAPA generated and as such reports in *The Star*, *Cape Times* and *Diamond Fields Advertiser* etc. were virtually the same. It was difficult to get the results. Again *the Springbok* proved invaluable but the real gem was *el Bullsheet* a daily news bulletin published by the 6<sup>th</sup> Division which I unearthed in SANDF archives.

A problem of the *Springbok* and *el Bullsheet* was that team lists would only give a rank (sometimes) and the surname. Even then Dummett would become Dummitt, Steyn would become Stein and Kingwill would become Kingwell and so on. Different spellings would be used in different documents. The lack of initials meant that I could not trace the players in the personnel records and hence the lack of details in the pen pictures at the end of this book. I have refrained from changing the spelling of surnames in the various reports referred to as the correct surname and spelling is set out in the pen pictures at the end of the book. Another problem was the lack of statistics for matches. Fortunately the use of various sources (*The Egyptian Gazette*, the *Springbok*, *el Bullsheet* and Ham Barry's diary) meant that the statistics of most matches are complete.

A project of this nature cannot be done without the help of many people. Family of the players, the public and rugby historians were generous in helping fill the gaps and providing me with scans of photos and documents. There are so many people to thank and therefore I decided to list them separately.

It was a fascinating journey. It was the arduous truck and train trips on the European tour that made me wonder if the modern player would've survived!

GIDEON NIEMAN  
Pretoria  
May 2017

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GIDEON NIEMAN  
May 2017

# THE SIXTH SA ARMoured DIVISION

### Introduction

THE PURPOSE OF THIS chapter is not to give a detailed military and historical account of the 6<sup>th</sup> SA Armoured Division at war. As the book's main purpose is to document the rugby played by the 6<sup>th</sup> Division in Egypt, Italy and in Europe from 1943 to 1946, it is meant to introduce the non-military reader to the formation of the unit and its campaigns in Egypt and the Mediterranean.

### Formation of the Division

The 6<sup>th</sup> SA Armoured Division was officially formed at Defence Headquarters on 1 February 1943 under command of Maj-Gen WHE (Evered) Poole with 11<sup>th</sup> SA Armoured Brigade and 12<sup>th</sup> SA Motorised Brigade and the necessary artillery, engineer, signals, medical and other units under command. It was based on a nucleus of men from the former SA 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division who had returned to South Africa after the second battle of El Alamein.<sup>1</sup>

Major-General W H Evered Poole, OB, CBE, DSO<sup>2</sup> received his schooling at St Andrews College, Grahamstown and Diocesan College, Rondebosch. He joined the permanent force in 1922 and quickly raced through the ranks. Later he became commanding officer of the SSB and was attached to the Brigade of Guards for four months in 1935 while attending a senior officers' course in England. His next senior appointment was Commandant of the Military College during 1938. In 1942 he was appointed as officer commanding 2<sup>nd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade. When the 6<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division was being formed he became its commander. On return to the Union in 1946 after the war, he was appointed Deputy Chief of the General Staff and was earmarked as successor to General Sir Pierre van Reyneveldt. This did not happen and he was instead sent to Berlin as head of the SA Military Mission. From 1948 to 1960 he



Maj-Gen Poole

rendered fine service to his country in the Diplomatic Field in important overseas appointments.<sup>3</sup>

It was reckoned that eight battalions were required for the division, and it was a declared intention that units which had not yet seen active service should be posted to the new division. Only seven such regiments existed, and as it was also hoped to provide an independent armoured car regiment, at least two more units had to be found.<sup>4</sup> It initially consisted of the 11<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade, the 12<sup>th</sup> SA Motorised Brigade and the Divisional Artillery.

The new formation's distinguishing flash was a gold triangle within a green triangle, and this appeared the first time in public when Gen. Poole presented wings at a passing-out parade of 23 Air school at Waterkloof on 19 February 1943.<sup>5</sup> Bourhill describes the flash as

<sup>1</sup> N Orpen, *Victory in Italy*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Born Caledon 8/10/1902 – Bellville, 09/03/1969.

<sup>3</sup> J A L Agar-Hamilton, *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, Vol 8, pp. 653-654.

<sup>4</sup> N Orpen, *Victory in Italy*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> N Orpen, *Victory in Italy*, p. 6.