

## THE SPRINGBOK SIXTH DIVISION

by *The Late Major Hertzog Biermann*

The Springbok Sixth Division was a mighty armoured force  
Of men whose ancestors made war in ships, on foot and horse  
They wrote a stirring chapter in Springbok Martial lore  
When they went to sunny Italy in Nineteen-Forty-Four.

They were in the Springbok First Team and their modest claim to fame  
Was their response to the clarion call : "Pay up and play the game!"  
Their duty they did nobly as their fathers did of old  
They proudly wore the Sixth Div flash of Springbok green and gold.



From grim Cassino's ruin to Salvaro's lofty head  
From May until December our men had fought and bled  
First dust, then rain and mud, then cold and slush and snow  
Then those long months in the Winter Line before they reached the Po

Behind them lay a storied trail from bleak Taranto's shore  
And all the way up Italy they learned new arts of war  
They drew first blood at Piglio and at Paliano  
They went through Rome in hot pursuit, their sights set on the Arno.

Civita Castellana was their next port of call  
The Springboks showed the enemy that they were on the ball  
On Lordly Mont' Sorrate they trained their guns and mortars  
But the bird had flown by the time they came to Kesselring's headquarters.

Through Vallerona and Viterbo to the stream with waters red  
The Sixth Division thundered on as the Allied host's spearhead  
The tankmen of the SSB made mincemeat of the foe  
In the first big battle fought on the field of Celeno.

In honour of the blooding of the Springbok armoured might  
The place was named PROTEA to commemorate the fight  
Then tanks and trucks and guns and jeeps churned up the powdered dust  
As General Poole directed the Sixth Div's northward thrust.

Bagnio Regio, Orvieto and Allerona fell  
Then came the rain and the mud they were bogged down for a while  
Cetona was the next town they captured in their stride  
But on Chiusi's terraced slopes our men were sorely tried.

The FC-CTH lost a company there  
But soon enough the foe was routed from his vineyard lair  
Here many centuries ago, a boastful tyrant strode-  
Lars Porsena of Clusium in the Horation ode!

"Oom Jannie" came to see his troops and brought a word of cheer  
"Press on," he said "to victory, forget the setback here"  
The Springboks got the message, their spirits full restored  
Their motto: "Pass the ammo and praise be to the Lord!"

The towns and cities tumbled like ninepins in a row  
Then came the Sixth Division to Castel di Brolio  
The home of famed Chianti wine bade them a welcome quaff  
Their thirst they quenched and on they went when they had enough.

At Radda some were lined up for inspection by King George  
His visit was a tribute and did bonds of friendship forge  
He reminded them that they were heirs of glorious Alamein  
And Sixth Division proudly proclaimed the mountains from the plain.

It was a new kind of war, up their among the peaks  
But the Springboks did in days what they feared would take them weeks  
Querciavella and Michele, Fili and Domini  
Were conquered as they raced to greet, the Rose of Italy.



When Strada lay behind them and they tackled  
Impruneta  
Poole said: "Next stop is Florence boys and we  
have to go to get there  
Before Field Marshall Freyberg and his Kiwis  
win the race  
To be the first in Florence, the home of art and  
grace."

It was on the Fourth of August in the first light  
of day  
That the ILH-and-Kimberley boys swept  
through in bold foray  
They reached the Arno River bank and follow-  
ing close behind  
Came tankmen, sappers, gunners by the  
townsfolk cheered and wined.

From the villas of the affluent and abodes of  
mean estate  
The liberated people flocked to the city's  
Roman Gate  
They came to cheer the victors with kiss and  
cup and bloom  
They recognised the auguries that spelt the  
foreman's doom.

The bridges over the river were blown in the dark of night  
Those who were there will not forget that grim and awesome sight  
While Paratroops Division with stubborn Prussian pride  
Gave battle from the North Bank to stem the thundering tide.

Fair Florence was divided between two sets of foes  
They shelled and mortared daily but seldom came to blows  
Until the Germans pulled out and fell back on the slopes  
Of the mighty Appenine barrier on which they set their hopes.

Then soon we first encountered a new and fearsome thing  
A nine-barrelled Nebelwerfer that a song of death did sing  
Some called it the "Five O'clock Whistle" which marked the break of day  
And others, "Moaning Minnie", as its bombs whined our way.

When the Springboks crossed the Arno and the mountains loomed ahead  
To Pistoia and to Prato the armoured pursuit sped  
Then followed gory clashes "midst verdant beech and pine  
Where the 16th SS cohorts stood in Hitler's Gothic Line.



On the highroad to Bologna the Springboks forged ahead  
Into the mountain fastness that formed the watershed  
They took Castiglione but they did not then know  
That it would take full seven months to break through to the Po.

The rain came down in torrents on the peaks and fissured vales  
The tanks and trucks were bogged down on a score of mud-filled trails  
Thenceforth the Sixth Div's battles on the roof of Italy  
Were fought by Biermann's Gunners and Palmers's Infantry.

It was a fearsome prospect that faced the 12th Brigade  
From peak to peak in front of them the message was relayed  
By the Reichsfuehrer Division, the SS corps d'elite  
"The elements are with us, we have the Springboks beat."

To the East of Mont'Visese, the ILH-KIM R  
Fought valiantly but vainly, to cross the mountain bar  
Then came the fateful order to Comrie's Carbineers  
To wrest the highest Apennine peak from the Panzer Grenadiers.

It was gallant Peter Francis who led his company  
Through swirling mist and lashing rain to gain the victory  
The company of Germans who lay in wait up there  
Could not believe that such a feat their enemy would dare.

The First Company of the First Battalion, Panzer Grenadiers  
Was routed in that dawn assault by the RN Carbineers.  
Many were killed and wounded and they captured a score and ten  
But not a single one was lost of the Carbineers bold men.

It was a different story on Stanco's shell-pocked slope  
Where the Carbineers were driven back by stormtroops crazed with dope  
They formed up at Grizzana and came in mess array  
It was a fearsome sight to see on that chill Autumn day.

The FC-CTH and the Wits and De la Rey  
Went through to take the mountain upon the following day  
The battleground was churned up by tons of Springbok Shells  
And the German troops retreated to more mountain peaks and fells.

Through the village of Grizzana where the walls were stained with blood  
The Carbineers marched onward up to their knees in mud  
They fought for Monte Pezza and wiped out Stanco's stain  
As the sun shone on the battle field after days of pouring rain.

Point 806 was taken by the Wits and De La Rey  
And the ILH-KIM R came through to bring the foe to bay  
On the last stretch of mountain mass crowned by Point 826  
Where the SS Div was flung from high across it's River Styx.

On the right flanks of the Springbok's against the foe arrayed  
Marched the gallant three battalions of the British Guards Brigade  
Scots, Grenadiers and Coldstreamers who wore the Sixth Div flash  
And Pretoria's Regiment of tanks shared in their famed dash.



The Carbineers relieved the Scots on Monte Termine  
While their brother regiment slay high above the Reno valley  
Durban's Royal Regiment with Vickers guns and mortars  
Dug themselves in with all of these in the role of close supporters.

The lot of the front-line soldier was not all shot and shell  
The enemy propaganda gave him some joy as well  
On the nightly radio broadcast came that well-loved refrain  
- Sung by Milan's "Three Doves of Peace" - of sweet Lili Marlene.

The first snow fell in Christmas week in Nineteen-Forty Four  
And the Springboks had to suit themselves - in white - to a brand new kind of war  
They patrolled the ice-bound no-man's land across its length and breadth  
Where the wintry air was laden with the sour-sweet stench of death.

Between the Sixth Div front line and the German rock-bound lair  
Lay a sinister stretch of no-man's land of human life stripped bare  
When farming folk were massacred by vengeful SS bands  
After Partisans revolted to free their mountain lands.

In many a lonely hamlet and farmsteads round about  
Lay bodies of those innocents who died in the fatal rout  
Old men, women and children slain by their brutal foe  
Before God's hand enveloped them in a shroud of driven snow.

The outpost at Point 512 was manned by Carbineers  
And many a story still is told when they talk of bygone years  
Of curious things that happened around that ghostly Shrine  
On the path to San Martino in the German Winter Line

Another RNC outpost was down below Salvaro  
Where the ground slopes gently down to the banks of the River Reno  
That was where Norman Clothier, the SA Legion's head  
Was succoured by "Koffie" Reznek when he was all but dead.

Before the winter ended the Sixth Div went to rest  
At Lucca whence they marched again when they were full refreshed  
Back up into the mountains on Route Six Two O  
When only Sole stood between them and the mighty River Po.

With Hitler on the run up North the peace was coming fast  
For Hitler's Army of the South the fatal die was cast  
They faced us in those mountains defiant to the last  
But the knell of doom was sounded when the guns began to blast.

Field Marshall Alexander arrayed the Allied host  
Of 28 Division spread abreast from coast to coast  
The British 8th, and the US 5th, were told to drive the foe  
From his eyrie in the mountains and down across the Po.

The line-up of the Allies was culled from far and wide  
There were Britons, Yanks, Canadians and Springboks in the side  
A Jap-American combat team and a Brigade of Jews  
Brazilians and Poles and folk of other hues.

A new Brigade - the 13th - came into being when  
The British Guards were sent off to parts beyond our ken  
In command was "Happy Jack" Bester, ex-Wits-De la Rey  
And he was told, when Sole fell, to Bologna lead the way.

So Sixth Div had an Armoured and two Infantry Brigades  
Artillery, Sappers, Signallers and troops of other grades

When the SAAF and the US Air Force came to bomb and strafe the foe  
As Mark Clark gave the order to break out to the Po.

In front lay Monte Sole with Caprara on the left.  
Beyond lay Mont' Abelle above the mountain cleft  
The Springbok Sixth Division was ready for the drive  
On the fifteenth day of April in Nineteen-Forty Five.

It was the last big battle for the South Africans to fight  
They had to climb those mountains in the middle of the night  
The FC-CTH and the Wits-De la Rey  
Had to be on top by sunrise on that stark, historic day.

Our bombers and fighters came to terrorise the foe  
The mountain were plastered by the gunners down below  
But at the zero hour the boys on foot stood still  
With bayoneted rifles to go in for the kill.

On the slopes below Caprara the Wits-De la Rey  
Were mortared on the start-line as they squared up for the day  
But led by dauntless Van der Riet they upward toiled that night  
To win a hard-fought battle before the day was light.

The final Charge on Sole was led by a brave young man  
A Rhodesian named Mollet who through a minefield ran  
With his FC-CTH platoon to rout the stubborn foe  
And his reward was a well-deserved DSO.

On the morrow of that triumph a tragedy befell  
When the Fates for Angus Duncan, tolled their fatal bell  
The Colonel went to visit his boys up in the line  
When upon the mountain pathway, he trod upon a mine.

The battle was'nt over before the sun went down  
It raged on unabated for Mont' Abelle's crown  
Uncounted deeds of valour were done by night and day  
Before the Sixth Division could secure the right of way.

The Carbineers were sent off with the Armour close at hand  
The Germans fled and left the line named Genghis Khan unmanned  
They broke through to Bologna with the Yanks in line abreast  
The Germans headed for the Po flushed from their Appenine nest.

The SSB and PAG went pounding after Fritz  
And up in front to lead them was the dauntless "Papa" Britz  
At Finale nell Emiglia the verdant plains of storied Lombardy  
A million men surrendered to Alexander's host  
And the thunder of guns was stilled from coast to coast.

It was a famous victory and soon the war was done  
And we could go back to our homes beneath the Southern sun  
It was a martial triumph that earned a laurel crown  
But not for Mussolini : they hanged him upside down.

In Berlin Hitler followed him and died a death of shame  
And neither left to history aught, but a dishonoured name  
On V-Day there in Europe it was great to be alive  
After our last big battle in Nineteen-Forty Five.

REMEMBER THE BOYS WHO DIDN'T MAKE IT  
REMEMBER AND GLAD THAT YOU'RE ALIVE  
BE GLAD THAT NOTHING HAD YOUR NAME ON IT  
BEFORE THE END OF NINETEEN-FORTY FIVE!