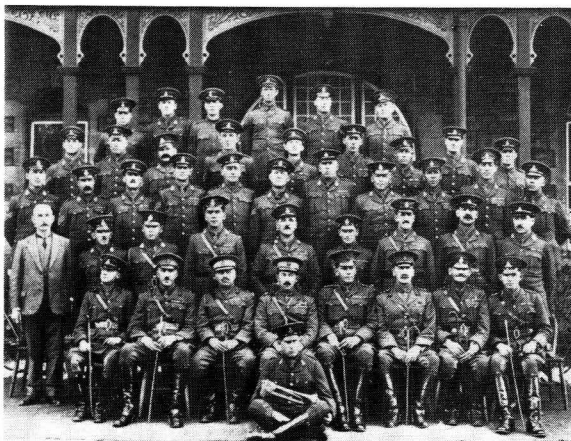


# THE TRAINING OF CANDIDATE OFFICERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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A thorough analysis of cadet courses in the years 1922 – 1950 is far beyond the scope of this study which should be regarded as speculative and suggestive.

From the early 1920's to the mid 1950's the South African Military College (the South African Military School unit 1924) was involved in the instruction of candidate officers. Yet the military schooling of cadets was not necessarily the primary function of the College. It was not a specialist military college or academy such as Sandhurst or Westpoint solely preoccupied with the education of young aspirant officers. The South African Military College catered for the land and Air Forces, tutoring Permanent Force as well as Citizen Force personnel, training members of the South African Instructional Corps and running staff courses for officers. The South African Military College had to operate on a somewhat restrictive budget.



The Staff of the South African Military School with Lieutenant-Colonel A.J. Taylor, CMG, DSO, MC (sitting fourth from the left) in July 1922.

The South African Military College does not compare favourably with military colleges of other dominions as regards size and equipment, but a high standard of efficiency is aimed at, and it keeps well abreast with the latest and most suitable developments in modern warfare.<sup>1</sup>

In a minute dated 25 July 1922, Major-general A.J.E. Brink, the Chief of General Staff, asked

Lieutenant-colonel Taylor, Commandant of the South African Military School, to draw up a detailed programme of training for a proposed Cadet Course to be held at the South African Military School to provide commissioned officers for the Permanent Field Force (Artillery and Riflemen).<sup>2</sup>



Major-General A.J.E. Brink.

In reply Taylor stressed that the experimental nature of such a course necessitated an *ad hoc* approach to the drafting of a syllabus. He maintained that the course should be broken up into four terms of approximately three months each, his object being

'... to make each term a progressive period,

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1. *The Nongqai*, vol 17, no 1, January 1926 (The South African Military School) p 56.  
2. CGS Box 231, File 31/0/2.

that is to say, the cadet will be taken by stages through the ranks from private soldier to commissioned officer.<sup>3</sup>

The course was to train the cadet as 'both gunner and mounted rifleman' but Taylor pointed out that twelve months was too short a period to accomplish anything more than laying 'a sound foundation' on which the cadet would have to build after joining his unit.<sup>4</sup>

The first Cadet Course to be held at the Military School commenced in 1922 with twelve cadets. Only three had completed their matriculation examination.

The instruction was utilitarian:

These young men have to assimilate a remarkable amount of knowledge. Every branch of military work is taught them thoroughly — Mounted Drill, Foot Drill, Riding School, Horsemanship, Rudimentary Veterinary knowledge, Artillery (in all its themes), Reconnaissance, Musketry, Lewis Gun, Duties of Regimental officers, Military law ... Permanent Force Regulations, Interior Economy, General training for War, etc, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Besides the actual instruction given the 1922 course established a number of precedents. For instance, cadets were permitted to eat in the officers' mess of the Military School — a sort of informal training in etiquette. The top cadet received a sword and cadets on passing out received seniority according to their place on the passing-out list. Successful candidate officers were appointed to commissioned rank as second-lieutenants. Appointment, however, was governed by existing vacancies.

A course for aspirant officers for the South African Air Force was on the stocks towards the end of 1922. Colonel Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, Director of Air Services, was actively involved in drawing up the programme of instruction. He envisaged six months training at the South African Military School which was to include courses in drill, regimental duties, physical training, military hygiene, military law and regulations, organizations and the functioning of other arms, map reading and field sketching, Vickers and Lewis Gun instruction, the morse code and military history.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, for a further six months, there would be instruction in the theory and practice of flying.

Taylor in turn, emphasized the need for airforce cadets to study tactics from the perspective of the

land forces and to receive artillery instruction.<sup>7</sup>



Sir Pierre van Ryneveld former Director of Air Services.

The experimental 1922-23 Course was not a success. In a memorandum written while the course was still in progress and which bears evidence of a thorough examination of cadet courses held at Sandhurst and military colleges in the Dominions, particularly the Royal Military College of Australia, Taylor suggested a number of improvements to the South African Military School's Cadet Course.<sup>8</sup> One of the more significant of these recommendations was the stipulation that every endeavour be made to select cadets from the universities of the Union and that the minimum educational qualification for future courses be a matriculation pass. Traditions and behavioural patterns shaped by the English public school system, to a considerable extent underpinned the concept of an officer class in the British military system. Taylor, probably aware of a need to adapt the British model to the pluralistic society of South

3. *Ibid*, Minute 89/7 to CGS.

4. *Ibid*.

5. *The Nongqai* Vol 14, no 5, May 1923, p 287 (South African Military Schools) p 287.

6. CGS Box 231, File 31/0/2. Minute DAS 147/16 from van Ryneveld to CGS and Commandant of the South African Military School dated 7 November 1922.

7. CGS Box 231, File 31/0/2. Minute 45/48 dated 21 November 1922 from Taylor to CGS.

8. CGS Box 232 File 31/0/16. Undated memorandum.

Africa, appears to have looked to what might be loosely defined as the white South African intelligentsia, to supply material for the creation of a distinctive officer class in South Africa. However, because of a lack of available evidence, one cannot say to what degree, if at all, Taylor contributed original thought to the problem of creating a South African educated officer class and to the examination of the future rôle of a professional officer in South Africa.

Taylor also recommended that the period of training should be at least two years and that future cadets should be given 'a sound commercial training'. He argued that from the point of view of the military, future officers of the Union Defence Force would require such a training. The primary reason for insisting on commercial instruction was that if a cadet was found unsuited to the military profession or lacked sufficient aptitude, he could be absorbed into the Public Service. He thought that there were too few cadets on the 1922 Course. Approximately forty cadets organized into a company — a Sandhurst practice — was more attractive. Surplus officer material could be absorbed by the Public Service.

Taylor also suggested that the scope of the Military School be extended

... to increase its activities and to assist in training a body of young men fitted in every way to undertake the future training of the Citizen Forces of the Union.<sup>9</sup>

Here we encounter a flaw in Taylor's thinking — a failure to define the function of a Permanent Force Officer. Was such an officer to be used as an instructor for Citizen Force elements or rather to constitute the nucleus of a small but highly trained professional army and air force? In fact, military policy makers in the inter-war years devoted little or no critical thought to *raison d'être* of a Citizen Force in South Africa.

The reaction to Taylor's recommendations was ambivalent. The idea of training forty cadets for two years was considered a sound one, 'if the practical difficulties could be overcome'.<sup>10</sup> Besides the problem of financing such a course it was pointed out that Taylor's scheme was more applicable to the Imperial Army, not the small Union Defence Force. Nonetheless, General Brink put forward a diluted version of Taylor's standpoint (in a minute to the Secretary of the Public Service Commission) which strongly influenced the planning of cadet courses throughout the inter-war

period.<sup>11</sup> Previously, Brink pointed out, it had been accepted practice to fill commissioned appointments by promotion from the ranks but in the 1920's it was 'essential that commissioned appointments be filled by well educated young men, who possess the additional military requirement'. Matriculation was to be the minimum educational qualification and university degrees would be advisable particularly for technical units such as the Garrison Artillery or Engineers. 30 Cadets per course as a reasonable number. Aspirant officers were to be given an education on the lines of that offered by Military Colleges in the British Commonwealth. The question of sending cadets en masse to qualify at Sandhurst had been investigated, but rejected on the grounds of expense and also because of South Africa's peculiar military requirements. However in the inter-war period the odd candidate does seem to have been sent to Britain to either the Royal Military College at Sandhurst or the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. The Royal Air Force College at Cranwell appears to have received a few cadets from the Union.

The successor to 1922 Course (for army cadets) commenced on 1 July 1924. On the same date the South African Military School adopted the mantle of a military college by being redesignated the South African Military College. The duration of instruction was eighteen months and the emphasis was on the moulding of a practical professional soldier. 'It can be readily imagined by the ordinary civilian,' wrote a contemporary observer in 1926, 'that training at such a College must necessarily be of a type altogether remote from that experienced in an ordinary College or University.' There was no explicit education in citizenship. In fact, besides Taylor's sometimes muddled thoughts regarding the kind of officer required by the Union Defence Force, there is little indication of any sustained creative thought being devoted to the rôle of a professional officer in a changing South African society. But then in the inter-war years, though the hey-day of colonialism in Africa was past, African political movements were largely of nuisance value. The permanence of white supremacy in Southern Africa received little critical scrutiny.

At the end of 1929 the Director of Air Services suggested that the eighteen month South African

9. *Ibid.*

10. CGS Box 232 file 31/0/16. Minute 1/16/51839 from AG to CGS.

11. CGS Box 232 file 31/0/16. Minute 54844/1 dated 30 October 1923 to the Secretary of the Public Service Commission.

Permanent Force Cadet Course and the twelve month South African Air Force Cadet Course be combined.<sup>12</sup> He advised the immediate amalgamation of two such courses then in progress, the Air Force Course 144 and the Permanent Force Course 145G scheduled to end on 30 June 1930 and 30 September 1930 respectively. The assurance that it was possible to teach almost anyone to fly was 'accepted as a cardinal premise in affecting the combination of the two courses'.<sup>13</sup> It was soon evident that it was *not* possible to teach every cadet (on the combined course) to fly and a more flexible approach was mooted. The new policy of having combined eighteen month courses was to be continued and every endeavour would be made to train Artillery-Air cadets. However, cadets unlikely to learn to fly were to be withdrawn from air instruction, but were to continue the course provided they were recommended by the Commandant of the Military College as likely to be efficient Staff Corps or Artillery officers.

There were a medley of reasons influencing the policy-makers. In the first place, much of the work was the same for both courses. Secondly, Union Defence Force, especially the Air Force, was going through a lean period. A career in the South African Air Force at the time had been labelled a dead-end profession. A combination of the courses would increase promotion possibilities and provide a more attractive course. Thirdly, by combining courses, costs could be kept down and more efficient equipment and training be provided. Finally, the numbers of flying officers in the Reserve would be boosted.

The outcome of the experimental 1930 Course seems to have been encouraging for in March 1931 an eighteen month course for Artillery and Air Cadets began at the Military College. This new course was accorded considerable publicity; it was described as a novel departure from the conventional cadet course offered in the British Commonwealth.<sup>14</sup> It is difficult on the basis of available evidence to assess the amount of constructive thought given to the planning of the new type of course. In format the revamped course was little more than a combination of the content of the separate courses for Air Force and Army officers held in the 1920's.<sup>15</sup> There appears to have been a vague commitment to the ideal of a versatile officer corps but the emphasis was still on training rather than *educating* candidate officers. Traditional assumptions were largely unchallenged. There is no indication, for example, that the possibility of blacks being trained as officers, was seriously debated.

In the inter-war period the very modest requirements of South Africa's fledgling navy did not justify the expense of establishing a special course in South Africa for midshipmen. It was more expedient to send the occasional naval cadet to Britain to be schooled under the auspices of the Admiralty at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich.

The South African Military College had strong ties with British military institutions and traditions. There was, for instance, a continual interchange of instructors between the two countries. The procedure and syllabus of South African cadet courses appear to have been modelled on the courses at Sandhurst and Cranwell. One gains the impression that the sphere of reference of South African military planners seldom ranged beyond the countries of the British Commonwealth. There were, of course, indigenous developments such as the amalgamation in 1930 of the separate courses for Army and Air Force cadets. However, such developments, as we have implied, were prompted by the exigencies of the time and involved a re-organization, pruning or elaboration rather than a radical evaluation of the instruction offered.

What was the standard of instruction offered to South African Military College cadets on the eve of the Second World War? In a report on his visit to the Dresden Military School, Colonel G.E. Brink, a former Commandant of the South African Military School, commented:

The standard aimed at is a detailed knowledge of Infantry Battalion tactics and a general knowledge of the tactical employment of a Regiment and co-operation of all Arms in a Division, *which is considerably more than we expect of our Cadets* (my emphasis)<sup>16</sup>...

Hitler's expansionist ambitions possibly had some effect on South African military planners for by 1939 the cadet course had been extended to two years.

During the Second World War, the formal training of Regular officers was suspended. Officers were, in a sense, mass-produced.

12. CGS Box 232 file 31/0/16. See memorandum dated 14 January 1930 on Officer Cadet Courses.

13. CGS Box 232 file 31/0/16. Minutes dated 28 March 1930 to CGS.

14. CGS Box 232 file 31/0/16.

15. The tempo of cadet training increased in the 1930s. See *Commando* vol 3, no 29, October, 1952, (Die ontwikkeling van die Suid-Afrikaanse Militêre Kollege) pp 41 – 42.

16. Brink papers, Box 63, file U, document 66.





General G.E. Brink former Commandant of the South African Military School.

Cadet courses were approximately four months long and of a specialised nature ie there was an Infantry Cadet Course, Artillery Cadet Course and so on. Matriculation qualifications were not rigidly insisted on and promotion from the ranks was also resorted to.

During the re-organization of the Union Defence Force in 1946 the problem of establishing an officer corps capable of forming and maintaining an efficient and sophisticated military force in a complex, polyvalent age, an age of ideologies, of the transistor and nuclear power, appears to have received some attention in high military places.

On 10 December 1946 a conference was held at the South African Military College to finalise the syllabus of the first post-war Permanent Force Cadet Course which was to commence on 1 April 1947. With the exception of J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton, Editor-in-Chief, Union War Histories, all representatives were officers.

The President of the conference, Colonel H.S. Celliers, Commandant of the South African Military College, enunciated, in his opening address, what amounted to the basic tenets of the philosophy

underlying the cadet training in the early post-war period. He declared that the 1947 Cadet Course would, to a certain extent, be a synthesis of similar courses held at Sandhurst and at Westpoint. In a number of ways the 1947 Course was a departure from any previous course for the training of Permanent Force officers. He felt that earlier courses had possibly been over-ambitious in that they had attempted to turn out officers fully qualified to command, for example, a platoon of Infantry or a flight of aircraft. (Celliers was presumably referring to the wartime cadet courses.)

The aim of the new course, Celliers continued, was rather to produce a good officer with a 'sound general knowledge of all arms and co-operation between them'.<sup>17</sup> The cadet would acquire a detailed understanding of any particular branch of the Service only *after* posting to that branch when commissioned.

The underlying aims of the syllabus were fivefold. Firstly, there was to be emphasis on character development and the inculcation of those traits most desirable in any officer. (There was no elaboration on the question — begging terms, 'character development' or 'desirable traits'). Secondly,

17. *Ibid.*

candidates were to be soundly grounded in the art of command and man-management. Thirdly, the interest of the cadet in his profession and the study thereof. Fourthly, understanding in the academic as well as the military spheres was to be increased. Finally, future officers were to be provided with a sound basic military training, to equip them for more advanced instruction in the various branches of their choice. There is nothing revelatory about the five-fold objectives : in fact, some of the aims seem rather trite.



Colonel H.S. Cilliers was officer commanding the South African Military College in 1946.

Among the points that were stressed at the conference was that academic instruction should reinforce practical military knowledge : theoretical and formal knowledge of academic subjects was not vital. However, it was important that co-operation between all arms be emphasized in military training. Also, English and Afrikaans were to be used as nearly as possible on a fifty-fifty basis.

The conference was reconvened on 1 March 1947 to discuss a final programme.

On 3 March a Board of Officers consisting of Major-General W.H.F. Poole (President), Brigadier J.T. Durrant, Brigadier S.J. Joubert, Colonel H.S. Cilliers and Dr S. Biesheuvel, the Director of the National Bureau for Personnel Research in an advisory capacity, assembled at the South African Military School to select candidates for the 1947 Cadet Course. Selection procedure differed little from the

inter-war years. All candidates were required to undergo intelligence and educational tests before appearing before the Board.

There were nine cadets on the 1947 Course (14G); six came from an urban and three came from a rural background. Four were Afrikaans speaking and five were English-speaking. Their ages were between seventeen and twenty-one. Some had done previous military service.<sup>18</sup> As far as can be assessed the political views of the candidates were conservative; there is no evidence of any serious consideration of the viability of a new social order in South Africa.<sup>19</sup>

From 1 April to 1 July 1947 the cadets received basic training which included footdrill, physical training and elementary musketry. During this period, students lived with privates in the barracks of the Permanent Force Training Centre. The goal was to give them first-hand knowledge and experience of the problems of the common soldier.

The cadets of Course 14G slept in the same quarters and received all their instruction as a single group. After the recruit phase they were posted to the South African Military College. After the first year of the course the candidates qualified as Senior Cadets and were given more freedom in order that they might become self reliant and accustomed to behaving as officers. Furthermore, it was argued, by relaxing discipline those potentially unsuited to become officers would have 'sufficient rope to hang themselves'.<sup>20</sup>

The academic instruction was divided into three parts. The social-humanistic portion contained as subjects English, Afrikaans, Introduction to the study of Native languages, Political History and Governments, Economics and International Regulations, Anthropology, Sociology and Man Management. There also appears to have been a small course on the theory of teaching.

The scientific-engineering part embraced Mathematics, Military Topography and Survey, Physics and Chemistry, Electricity and Mechanics.

The professional section included Military History and Geography, Military Engineering, Military

18. G.F. Jacobs: *Die invloed van militêre opleiding op die ontwikkeling van persoonlikheidstendense, houdinge en menings by rekrute aan die Suid-Afrikaanse Militêre Kollege* (unpublished MA thesis. University of Pretoria) pp 18 – 20.

19. *Ibid*, p 133 – 170.

20. See proceedings of conference at South African Military College on 10 December 1946.

Equipment, Military Hygiene and Military law. These subjects had, by and large, been dealt with in the pre-war courses.

The growing popularity of the behavioural sciences (psychology and sociology) in the post-war years, particularly in the United States of America, was reflected in the academic section of the course. But the medley of subjects to be taught in a relatively short space of time was surely not conducive to developing a sound theoretical understanding of the subjects.

General military training dealt with Drill and Ceremonial Work, Regimental Training, Battle Drill, Weapon Training, Artillery (all phases), Signals, Armour, Aviation, Physical Training and Equitation. Finally there was some specialized training in the arm to which the individual cadet was to be posted on graduation. It was intended that the cadets would acquire their wings on graduation but because of a heavy work programme there was insufficient time to teach them to fly.

The 1947 Course was not as innovative as Cilliers claimed. In fact, at times it is the continuity of tradition rather than the novelty of the course which strikes one. Key policy-makers were at one time or other cadets at the South African Military College and this fact surely conditioned their response to the problem of how to educate officers. A brief comparison between the 1939 and 1947 Courses is instructive. Probably the only substantial difference between the two courses was the introduction of academic subjects in 1947.<sup>21</sup> On Course 14G, the odd civilian lecturer was used, whereas for the earlier course instruction was solely by military personnel. 'The type of youth who is regarded as being likely to make an efficient officer,' it was stated on the application form for the 1939 Course, is one who is a good sportsman in every sense of the word, possesses personality and initiative, and is gifted with the quality of leadership'. In 1947 these same platitudes were repeated virtually *ad verbatim*. Neither course was designed to turn out dynamic thinkers eager to challenge hardened dogma and ill-founded assumptions both in the military sphere and in society. Both courses required similar educational and medical requirements and were of two years duration. Undoubtedly developments in tactics brought about by the Second World War had been embodied in the military training side of the 1947 Course, but the overall structure of general military training does not appear to have been extensively remodelled. In theory Course 14G was

a combination of the best features of Sandhurst and Westpoint, but British military traditions still predominated despite the fact that many of the textbooks used by the cadets were of American origin.

In February 1948, 40 cadets were chosen from 138 aspirant candidates for the 1948 Cadet Course commencing on 1 April.

The methods, content and nature of instruction was basically similar to that of the 1947 Course. Recruit training, however, was reduced to 2 months and made more intensive. Also, unlike the 1947 Course which had only 9 cadets, the 1948 intake, after moving to the South African Military College, was split into 3 groups, each group having its own particular group instruction. Furthermore, tuition in some of the academic subjects was undertaken by lecturers on the staff of the Pretoria Technical College.

There were 13 Afrikaans en 27 English-speaking cadets on the Course. The predominance of English-speaking cadets can to a certain extent be ascribed to a reluctance on the part of some Provincial Education Departments to allow recruiting officers to visit state schools. Private schools, the students of which were primarily English-speaking, appear to have had no objections.<sup>22</sup>

During 1948 the possibility of establishing a Military Academy at the South African Military College, of converting the normal 2 year cadet course into a longer degree course was being toyed with.

In April 1949 Captain G.F. Jacobs, a lecturer at the Military College, was appointed as co-ordinating officer in a move to promote the idea of a Faculty of Military Science at the Military College.

There had been an increasing interest in American military thought and institutions and a growing contact between United States and South African military authorities in the late 1940's. And the idea of a military academy undoubtedly owes something to the Westpoint example. This

21. During an interview with Brigadier V.R. Kruger and Colonel O.F. Wellington it was recorded that the atmosphere encountered by cadets during the 1920s and early 1930s appears to have been more spartan than that of the 1947 and 1948 post-war courses. Also the cadets on the post-war courses were called Mr by their instructors. It was stressed that they were gentlemen cadets.

22. G.F. Jacobs: *op cit*, pp 21 – 24.

is not to say that British military models were neglected. For instance, the syllabus of a BSc (Engineering) Course (for young officers) at the UK Military College of Science was scrutinised.

The Minister of Defence Advocate F.C. Erasmus, displayed great interest in the scheme for a military academy. In a memorandum from General Len Beyers, Chief of the General Staff, to Erasmus, the advantages of advanced academic instruction were laid out.<sup>23</sup> The raised status of future cadet courses would, it was agreed, expedite a drive to secure the best officer material. The regular officer would be on a par with professional men in civilian life. Also, scientific knowledge would enable the officer to operate complex weaponry and equipment. Furthermore, military instruction would be on the same level as that of modern Western countries. Finally, Beyers declared that a Faculty of Military Science could function as a research centre.

Academic learning was, as far as possible, to be of direct military application. Military training would be given along with academic instruction. Tutoring in academic subjects was to be given by lecturers appointed by the Department of Defence. These were expected to have undergone some degree of military training to function in a military atmosphere. The faculty was to be affiliated to the University of South Africa, to cater for approximately 30 cadets and expected to be operational in 1950 provided the necessary personnel could be found in time.

On 2 June 1949 a conference was held at the South African Military College to make recommendations on the training policy for an envisaged 4 year Cadet Course. Chairman was Colonel H.S. Cilliers. A number of principles were endorsed. The somewhat vague aim of the course was that all cadets be 'so trained that they would possess upon graduation, those qualities and attributes that are essential to their progressive and continued development throughout a life-time career as officers of the Permanent Force.'<sup>24</sup> Except in cases of candidates of obvious merit admission to the faculty was to be reserved for those between the ages of 17 and 19. Graduates were to fill vacancies in the Land or Air Force. The academic course was to provide a broad general education rather than a specialized one.

On the question of the length of the course unanimity was not reached.

In August 1949 the press was informed of plans

for the establishment of a Military academy at the South African Military College. *The Star* declared that the academy would be established

... on similar, though not identical lines to Sandhurst in England and West Point in the United States ... Although the general system of training will be much the same as at the big overseas military institutions, the South African military academy will be adapted to meet South African conditions.<sup>25</sup>

In a letter dated 10 October 1949<sup>26</sup> to Prof Rautenbach, Rector of the University of Pretoria, Cilliers (now a Brigadier and Director of Policy Co-ordination) argued that the South African Military College which drew cadets from all over South Africa and from both white groups, could not afford to be associated with a University of provincial rather than a national character. The implication was that the University of South Africa, as opposed to the University of Pretoria, was less affected by party politics. For Cilliers, one senses, a good officer was first and foremost a professional soldier and as far as possible politically neutral.

Early in January, 1950, in terms of R0 1564, a Board of Officers was 'appointed for the purposes of interviewing and selecting candidates for cadetships at the Military Academy, Voortrekkerhoogte, for the Course due to commence on 1 April 1950'. President was the Director-General of Land Forces and members were the Director-General of the Air Force, the Adjutant-General and the Director of Policy Co-ordination.<sup>27</sup>

In January serious doubts were entertained as to whether the 1950 Course could commence at the proposed time (1 April). In a telex from the Director of Policy Co-ordination to the Chief of the General Staff, the Director asked if the Minister of Defence had agreed to postpone the opening date of the Military Academy for one year. Alternatively:

If he has insisted that Cadet Course be proceeded with, whether he has agreed to two-year course instead of proposed four-year course for academy.<sup>28</sup>

An early ruling was requested. Erasmus' reply was prompt and unequivocal: the four-year course would be proceeded with.<sup>29</sup>

23. Memorandum 56/36 dated 22 March 1949.

24. CGS File 56/36.

25. *The Star* 18 August 1949.

26. CGS File 56/36.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*



The green light from Erasmus was by no means enthusiastically received in all quarters. In mid-February 1950 the Commandant of the Military College complained that

... unless conclusive instructions as to the exact duration, scope and content of the course are received and unless the requisite staff are immediately made available the success of the course will be seriously jeopardised.<sup>30</sup>

Lack of staff, the need for good facilities for practical instruction in physics and chemistry appear to have occasioned a reconsideration of an earlier reluctance on the part of South African Military College authorities to work in conjunction with the University of Pretoria. It was decided that normal university subjects were to be handled by the University of Pretoria's own lecturers.

Military Science subjects such as Military Geography, Military History and Military Law were to be handled, as far as possible by the South African Military College staff.

On 1 April 1950 the Military Academy, a branch of the Military College and affiliated to the University of Pretoria, began to function. A BA Mil and BSc Mil-degrees were to be presented at the end of a three year course to successful candidates.

The first degree course, Course 158G, starting on 1 April 1950, consisted of 30 cadets.<sup>31</sup> The cadets attended general academic classes as internal students of the University of Pretoria while military subjects were taught in lecture theatres at the Military College. The programme of the first batch of Academy-cadets was full, for they had to undergo military training simultaneously with their academic instruction. Of these first thirty cadets only six managed to graduate within three years. In 1951 it was decided to ease the pressure and future courses were to be four years in duration.

In 1952 the cadet degree course was brought more in line with the usual BA and BSc University courses, largely confining the Academy lecturers to instruction on a first-year level. The University of Pretoria considered that the final years of the B.Mil degrees should be handled by its own lecturers. Furthermore from 1952 onwards there appears to have been tension between the Academy lecturers and the military instruction personnel of other branches of the South African Military College. For these and other reasons the Academy lecturers agitated for an autonomous Military Academy, like Westpoint, free from pressures

exerted by the Military College and the University of Pretoria.

On 1 February 1956 the Military Academy, as a self-accounting unit, was opened at Saldana Bay in the Cape. An arrangement was made with the University of Stellenbosch to the effect that the University could provide first-year instruction while military lecturers would teach the final 2 years of a B.Mil degree.

Though a degree course for officers was in line with an increasing use of university graduates in Western Military forces, the rather hasty setting-up of the Military Academy in association with the University of Pretoria in 1950, does seem to have political overtones. Erasmus, the Minister of Defence, mistrusted the British influence in the Union Defence Force :

Dit (die idee van 'n Militêre Akademie) is ... bejeen as 'n instrument wat die destyds bestaande militêre bedeling moes verafrikaans en juis om die rede glad nie gewild by die destyds oorwegend Engels georiënteerde Unie Verdedigingsmag nie.<sup>32</sup>

The large percentage of English-speaking cadets on the 1948 Course had probably not gone unnoticed.

One must be wary of an uncritical acceptance of the superiority of a degree course for candidate officers. Though it is extremely difficult to compare the standard of instruction offered at the University of Pretoria in the early 1950's with that offered at other South African universities or those in the United Kingdom or the United States of America, the general atmosphere at the University was not conducive to liberal thought; Marxist thought was taboo.

The development of cadet courses in South Africa in the period 1922 – 1950, was evolutionary. The 1947 and 1948 Courses were, in a sense, transitional, straddling the utilitarian inter-war courses and the academic orientation of the Military Academy degree course. The scope of these two-year courses was perhaps too ambitious, but the cadets do appear to have received a sound practical training. These courses are not anachronistic in that their concern for versatility and practical experience

30. *Ibid.*

31. Information regarding the early days of the Military Academy was taken from C.M. Bakkes: *Die geskiedenis van die Militêre Akademie te Pretoria* (unpublished paper dated 28 August 1975).

32. C.M. Bakkes: *op cit*, p 1.

is a corrective in an age of specialisation : there is a danger that degree courses for officers can become divorced from the day-to-day realities of a modern defence force.

Though the planners of cadet courses were at times myopic, the South African Military College turned out officers like W.H.E. Poole (top cadet of the 1922 Course), who won fame as the commander of the 6 South African Armoured Division in Italy in 1944-45.

One cannot afford to be complacent about officer training in South Africa today. Problems confronting South Africa are more complex and bewildering than in the 1940's and before. More than ever there is a need for the South African Defence Force to emerge as a dynamic body, unshackled from prejudices and obsolete concepts, prepared for a wider sphere of influence than the maintenance of a *status quo*. And central to such an organization would be a free-thinking, elitist officer corps.



W.H.E. Poole — top cadet of the 1922 Course.