The Union Defence Force Between the Two World Wars, 1919-1940

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Abstract

South Africa was ill prepared for the Second World War. Her war potential was limited and Hitler is reputed to have laughed when the South African declaration came on 6 September 1939. The Permanent and Active Citizen Forces were under strength: the first comprised only 350 officers and some five thousand men. There were a further 122 000 men in the Commandos, of whom only 18 000 were reasonably equipped, and, being rurally based and overwhelmingly Afrikaans, many of these men did not support the war effort. Furthermore, training and training facilities were inadequate, there was a shortage of uniforms and equipment and, like the rest of the British Commonwealth, much of the doctrine had not kept pace with technological developments. This predicament developed over the preceding twenty years.

The mechanisation of ground forces and the application of new technology for war contrasted sharply with developments in Europe. Although South Africa had the industrial capacity for the development of armour and mechanised forces, arguments based upon the nature of potential enemy forces, poor infrastructure and terrain inaccessibility combined with government policy and financial stringency resulted in nothing being done. Southern Africa, the focus of South African defence policy, was also thought to be unfavourable for mechanised warfare. Inadequate roads and multifarious geographic features concentrated energy on the development of the air arm for operations in Africa and a system of coastal defences to repel a sea assault, as well as a mix of British and Boer-type infantry supported by field artillery. As a result, an expeditionary force had to be prepared from scratch and the first South Africans to serve in the Second World War only left the country in July 1940. Yet the close relationship between the projected role of the Union Defence Force (UDF) and the low priority given to force maintenance and weapons acquisition has been perceived by few writers.

Keywords

The Union Defence Force; Two World Wars; Hitler; Afrikaans; UDF; with technological developments; a mix of British and Boer-type infantry

Full Text:

PDF

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5787/30-2-174

Refbacks

- There are currently no refbacks.

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ISSN 2224-0020 (online); ISSN 1022-8136 (print)

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Defense spending increased 40 fold between 1933 and 1940 and the focus of the second and third Five Year plans had been beefing up the arms industry and military infrastructure. Universal conscription was introduced in 1939. Much of this was done as Hitler rose and created his formidable military machine in Germany. But when German troops invaded Poland, the Soviet Union was ill prepared to fight a major war. Hitler thus prepared for war against the Soviet Union under a plan that he officially approved in December 1940. At this point, however, Stalin still apparently believed that the Soviet Union could avert war by appeasing Germany. To achieve this goal, regular shipments of Soviet materials to Germany continued, and the Soviet armed forces were kept at a low stage of readiness. The Union Defence Force (UDF) was the military force of the Union of South Africa from 1 July 1912, when the Defence Act (No 13 of 1912) took effect, two years after the creation of the Union of South Africa, until 1957 when it was reorganised and renamed the South African Defence Force. YouTube Encyclopedic. "The Union Defence Force between the Two World Wars, 1919-1940". Scientia Militaria. 30 (2). Intelligence Between The World Wars, 1919-1939. "A World Made Safe For Deaths of Democracy". — Referring to this period, in the final chapter title. The international outrage and Swiss diplomatic pressure forced the Nazi regime to release him, and he left Germany for exile. European newspapers reported on numerous spy incidents during this period. One of the more curious. No comprehensive intelligence history exists of the period between the world wars. Most coverage is by individual country or regime. Great Britain.