The Springboks in East Africa

The role of SA Survey Company (SAEC) in the East African Campaign of World War II

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The East African war zone
• 1 Sept 1939: World War II began when Germany invaded Poland.

• South Africa as member of the British Commonwealth automatically also in a state of war with Germany.

• 10 June 1940: Italy entered War on side of Germany.

• Italian forces in Eritrea and Abyssinia necessitated the presence of South African troops in north-east Africa.

• North-east Africa was by 1940 **unmapped** except for an 1 : 400 000 Italian series of Abyssinia and Somaliland and some small-scale GSGS maps of Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda. It was left to SA to provide topo information and maps of the operational area for military purposes.
MAPPING POLICY – EAST AFRICA

• Existing 1 : 2 000 000 GSGS 2871 remains standard map of Africa. SA responsible for sheets south of latitude 4° North.

• Existing 1 : 1 000 000 GSGS 2465 of Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda to be extended to 8° North by the EASG.

• 1 : 500 000 series (2° x° 2° sheets) standard series for operational area. Based on surveys of accessible areas, reconnaissance reports and other available map material. Special areas to be photographed from the air.

• 1 : 250 000 series of developed areas to be undertaken by SA.

• 1 : 50 000 and 1 : 25 000 maps of selected areas to be produced by SA using rapid air surveys.
• As from July 1940 the **Survey Directorate EAF** was responsible for all surveying and mapping in East Africa.

• In Aug 1940 an **East African Survey Group (EASG)** was formed which consisted of the East African, the Southern Rhodesian, and the West African Units.

• **1 SA Survey Company (SAEC)** was not at any time included within the EASG, but worked as a parallel organisation, reporting directly to the Survey Directorate.

• **Three central offices** were established under control of the Survey Directorate:
  - the Central Trigonometrical Records (CTR)
  - the Central Photographic Records (CPR)
  - the Central Cartographic Records (CCR)
1 SA SURVEY COMPANY (SAEC)

- SA was ill prepared for war. Since 1912 when the UDF was established, SA was dependent on the British War Office for its intelligence.

- In Jan 1936 this situation changed when the Director of the civilian Trig Survey Office was appointed *ex-officio* Director of Military Survey.

- In April 1938 1 SA Survey Company was formed as an Active Citizen Force unit. Mobilisation took place in May 1940, and in July 1940 the Company left for Nairobi in East Africa.

- The unit consisted of 35 officers, approx 450 men and 142 vehicles and comprised of:
  - Field Sections
    - a Geodetic Section
  - a Map production Group
  - a Photo-Topo Group
  - a Map Reproduction Group
  - an Instrument Repair Section
Movement of forces

Northwards attack
- 2nd SA Infantry Brigade
- 5th SA Infantry Brigade
- 25th EA Brigade

Eastwards attack
- 1st SA Infantry Brigade
- East African troops
- British troops
- West African troops
- Rhodesian troops
The Field Sections had to extend the existing Kenya primary triangulation northwards into southern Abyssinia to be connected to the Uganda triangulation. They also had to establish a secondary triangulation to provide control points for military purposes.

Many points were inaccessible by vehicles due to dense bush or boulder-covered ground, whereas a lack of water and poor visibility due to mirages and glare also provided problems.
In June 1940 the task to photograph large areas of East Africa for mapping purposes was given to 60 Photographic Squadron of the SA Air Force which was attached to 1 SA Survey Company.

With only a few aircraft and limited resources they produced valuable photography on an ongoing basis.
The **Photo-Topo and Map Production** sections transferred the topo information from the aerial photographs to plane tables, and compiled and fairdrew the maps. They worked in shifts of 10 hours on and 20 hours off, and produced roughly 3.5 maps per day.

**Map Production** was centred in Nairobi throughout the campaign. On mobilisation, the Government Printer of SA became the UDF Director of Army Printing and Stationery Supplies (DAP & SS). In 1940 a Mobile Printing Company was moved to Nairobi and attached to 1 SA Survey Company.

The **printing work** was divided between the EASG and the 1 SA Survey Company, and although some sheets were compiled, drawn and printed by only one of these units, many were compiled and drawn by the one and printed by the other.
1 : 500 000 mapping by 1 SA Survey Company and the East African Survey Group, 1940-41
A section of the map sheet East Africa
1 : 500 000 NEGHELLI
Compiled from air photos taken in 1941.

Compiled from topo., and car and compass surveys made in 1941.

Compiled from 1:1,000,000 Italian series, Sheet Lago Margherita 1938, Gwynns map of Southern Abyssinia and various other information.

Air Photographs taken in 1941.

1:500,000 Southern Frontier of Abyssinia 1909.

1:1,000,000 Italian series, Sheet Lago Margherita 1938.

Miscellaneous sketch plans and communications intelligence.
1 : 250 000 mapping by 1 SA Survey Company and the East African Survey Group, 1940-41
The Africa 1 : 2 000 000 series produced and printed in South Africa
• In May 1941, 1 SA Survey Company was moved to Egypt to serve in the Western Desert.

• In Egypt, it was re-designated as 46 Survey Company, SAEC and assigned to the British 8th Army.

• In 1943, prior to the invasion of Italy, it was reassigned to the 5th US Army in Tripoli.

• Whilst serving in Italy, 46 Survey Company, SAEC was twice awarded the 5th Army plaque for excellence in discipline, performance and merit.
Thank you for your attention!