

# Flags of the South African Department of Defence — 1994 and beyond

*Bruce Berry and Edward Watson*

## Abstract

The new democratic political dispensation in South Africa and adoption of a new national flag in April 1994 saw new flags being adopted by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). This paper looks at these new flags and the emergence of a new visual identity as a result of the subsequent transformation within the South African Department of Defence and the SANDF which recently saw the adoption of new emblems and additional new flags.

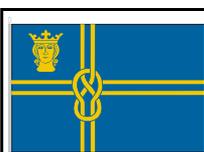
## Introduction

The evolution of the flags of the South African Defence Force and its branches from 1912 until 26 April 1994, the day before the new South African interim Constitution (Act 200 of 1993) came into force, is comprehensively dealt with in Professor H. H. Smith's *Flags of the Union Defence Forces and of the South African Defence Force, 1912 – 1993*, which was published as *SAVA Journal SJ* No. 2, 1993.<sup>1</sup> A summary of these changes which occurred up until the establishment of the new democratic political dispensation is shown in Table 1. The main focus of this paper is, however, the post-1994 changes to flags of the South African National Defence Force as no firm developments have taken place with respect to the visual identity of the other components within the Department of Defence.

## Castle of Good Hope outline (also known as the Cape Castle)

One of the most striking features of each of the five ensigns of the South African Defence Force (SADF), and its constituent arms of service, in use at the time of the first democratically elected government on 27 April 1994, was the incorporation into each design a device which is called the “ground plan of the Castle of Good Hope” (Fig. 1). This device also appears in some of the earlier designs of the Army and of the Air Force. The Castle of Good Hope outline was also used as standard insignia of the SADF until 26 April 2003 and its use on all the SADF flags was standardised in 1981.

The Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town is the oldest building in South Africa,



Jan Oskar Engene (ed.): *Proceedings of the XX International Congress of Vexillology, Stockholm, 27th July to 1st August 2003*, Bergen: Nordic Flag Society, 2004. ISBN 82-996983-1-6

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Table 1 South African Defence Force flags (1912 – 1993).

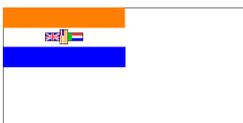
**South African Defence Force Ensign**

c. 1947 – 1979	
01 June 1981 – 26 April 1994	

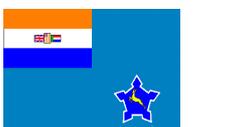
**South African Army Ensign**

1951 – 15 November 1966	
16 November 1966 – 15 February 1973	
16 February 1973 – 26 April 1994	

**South African Navy**

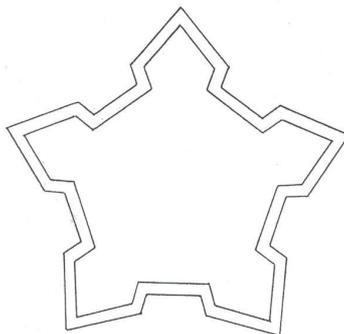
1922 – 30 August 1946	
01 September 1946 – 30 May 1951	
31 May 1951 – 24 March 1952 (never flown)	
25 March 1952 – 1959	
1959 – 30 May 1981	
31 May 1981 – 26 April 1994	

**South African Air Force**

c. 1920 – 02 December 1940	
03 December 1940 – 28 June 1951	
29 June 1951 – ? 1958	
1958 – 20 January 1967	
21 January 1967 – 25 March 1970 (never flown)	
26 March 1970 – 02 March 1981	
03 March 1981 – 26 February 1982	
27 February 1982 – 26 April 1994	

**South African Medical Services**

05 March 1981 – 26 April 1994	
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*Figure 1 Castle of Good Hope (Cape Castle) ground plan.*

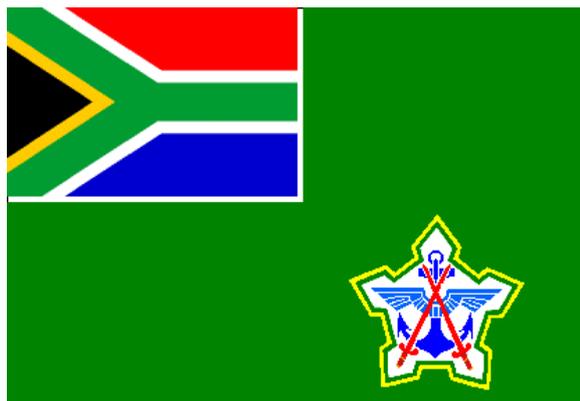
having being erected by the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to protect its settlement at the Cape of Good Hope. Construction began in 1665 and it was completed in 1679 and the most noticeable feature of the ground plan is the five bastions which were incorporated into its design. Since 1679 the Castle of Good Hope has been the seat of military administration of one kind or another and as such it was considered appropriate to be used as the device on the ensigns of the SADF and its constituent arms of service.<sup>2</sup>

### **Initial post-1994 changes to the South African National Defence Force flags**

On 27 April 1994 a new national flag was taken into use in South Africa. Since the national flag is depicted in the canton of the Defence Force flag and the ensigns of the South African Army, Air Force, Navy and Medical Services, it follows that the flags in question became obsolete with the adoption of the new flag.

The SADF also underwent a name change on 27 April 1994, becoming the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), which comprises not only the former SADF, but also the defence forces of the former “independent” Homelands and certain forces which had been part of the liberation struggle, most notably *Umkhonto weSizwe* (The armed wing of the African National Congress) and the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA), the military wing of the Pan Africanist Congress.

New flags for the SANDF and its constituent services were announced on 19 October 1994 and formally taken into use at a parade in Pietersburg on 11 November 1994. Apart from the replacement of the national flag in the canton, the new flags of the SANDF were identical to their immediate predecessors. This was despite a decision being taken that the Cape Castle outline as a rank insignia was dropped at this time and was replaced with a nine-pointed Star. In the case of the naval ensign however, the navy badge used between 1981 and 26 April 1996 was dropped from the lower fly. However, the navy badge continued to be used for other navy business such as on stationery etc. The new flags adopted by the SANDF were:



*Figure 2 Flag of the South African National Defence Force (1994 – 2003).*

### *South African National Defence Force*

The SANDF ensign approved by the Chief of the SANDF on 11 July 1994 was:

a rectangular beetle green (a misreading of the British Colour Council description “Green Beetle”) flag in the proportions of two to three; within the upper hoist quarter the national flag of the Republic of South Africa, with a white fimbriation; and in the lower fly quarter the emblem of the South African National Defence Force, to wit;

on a white ground plan of the Castle of Good Hope, a dark blue erect anchor surmounted by a horizontal pair of steel blue wings and overall, a pair of orange swords in saltire; the whole within a border, the inner half of which is dark green and the outer half gold (Fig. 2).

This ensign was carried for the first time at a Defence Force parade held in Pietersburg on 11 November 1994.<sup>3</sup>

### *South African Army*

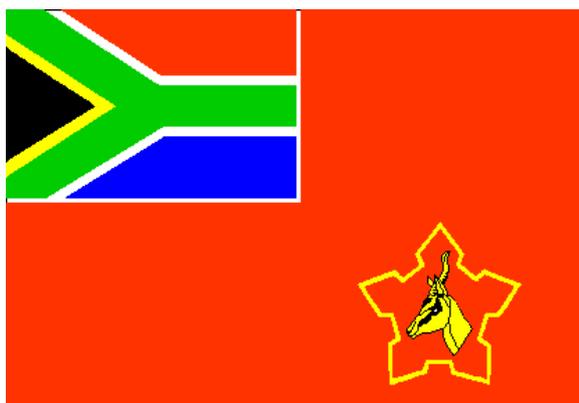
The design of the new South African Army flag approved by the Chief of the SANDF on 11 August 1994 was:

a rectangular chilli red flag in the proportions of two to three; within the upper hoist quarter the national flag of the Republic of South Africa, with a white fimbriation; and in the lower fly quarter the emblem of the South African Army, to wit;

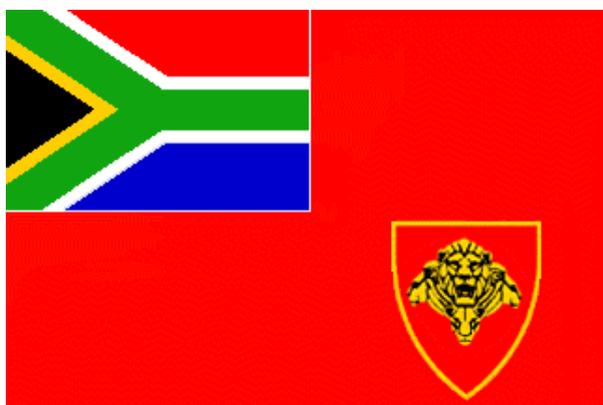
on an orange ground plan of the Castle of Good Hope, with a gold border, a gold springbok head couped at the neck (Fig. 3).

This ensign was carried for the first time at a Defence Force parade held in Pietersburg on 11 November 1994.<sup>4</sup>

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*Figure 3 South African Army flag (1994 – 2002).*



*Figure 4 South African Army flag (2002 – 2003).*



*Figure 5 Army Office flag (2002 –).*



*Figure 6 South African Air Force flag (1994 – 2003).*

There was a further change to the Army flag following the adoption of a new army badge and rank insignia in March 2000 which resulted in the Cape of Good Hope castle outline being dropped. The new emblem comprises three conjoined lions' heads above one lionesses head (the so-called "pride of lions") in gold in the centre of a red shield. This design was never registered with the heraldic authorities due to a perceived resemblance to the design used by India as a national emblem which is derived from the so-called Ashoka Pillar.

Consequent upon the adoption of the new army emblem, two new Army flags were introduced in April 2002. The new army emblem replaces the springbok and castle outline on the Army flag (Fig. 4). The lions represent cohesion and the ongoing transformation of the Army within the SANDF. A new Army Office flag (Fig. 5) has also been introduced. This flag has a red field with the emblem superimposed over a pair of crossed swords in the centre.<sup>5</sup>

#### *South African Air Force*

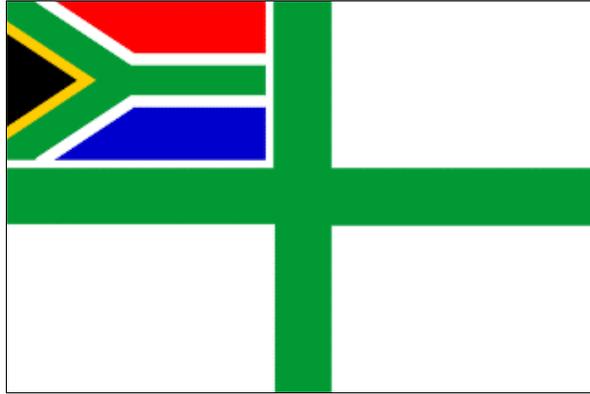
The design of the new South African Air Force flag approved by the Chief of the SANDF on 27 July 1994 was:

a rectangular steel blue flag in the proportions of two to three; within the upper hoist quarter the national flag of the Republic of South Africa, with a white fimbriation; and in the lower fly quarter the emblem of the South African Air Force, to wit;

on a dark blue ground plan of the Castle of Good Hope, of the same shade as the blue stripe in the National flag, with a white border, a gold representation of the South African Air Force eagle (Fig. 6).

This ensign was carried for the first time at a Defence Force parade held in Pietersburg on 11 November 1994.<sup>6</sup>

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*Figure 7 South African Naval ensign (1994 –).*

*South African Navy*

The design of the new South African naval ensign approved by the Chief of the SANDF on 29 September 1994 differs from its immediate predecessor in that the navy emblem no longer appears in the lower fly, namely:

a rectangular white flag in the proportions of two to three; with thereon a dark green cross; and having in the upper hoist canton the national flag of the Republic of South Africa, with a white fimbriation (Fig. 7).

This ensign was carried for the first time at a Defence Force parade held in Pietersburg on 11 November 1994 and hoisted on the Ensign Staff of naval vessels at noon on the same day. Between 27 April and noon on 11 November 1994, the South African National Flag served as a temporary ensign.<sup>7</sup>

*South African Medical Services*

The design of the new South African Medical Services flag approved by the Chief of the SANDF on 03 August 1994 was:

a rectangular ruby red flag in the proportions of two to three; within the upper hoist quarter the national flag of the Republic of South Africa, with a white fimbriation; and in the lower fly quarter the emblem of the South African Medical Services, to wit;

on a ruby ground plan of the Castle of Good Hope, with a gold border, a serpent coiled round an upright staff, both of gold (Fig. 8).

This ensign was carried for the first time at a Defence Force parade held in Pietersburg on 11 November 1994.<sup>8</sup>



*Figure 8 South African Medical Services flag (1994 – 2003).*

### **Further post-1994 changes to South African National Defence Force flags**

At a Retreat Ceremony held on Friday 25 April 2003, the old South Africa National Defence Force (SANDF) emblem, based on the Castle of Good Hope outline, was formally phased out. The new SANDF emblem and flags were presented at a parade presided over by the Chief of the South African National Defence Force, General Sphiwe Nyanda, on 29 April 2003 at Thaba Tshwane (formerly Voortrekkerhoogte) in Pretoria.

The change is another milestone in the transformation process within the SANDF and sees the replacement of the Cape Castle outline with a new emblem. The decision to drop the Castle outline was taken in April 2001, although as described above it had already been dropped from rank insignia as early as 1994.<sup>9</sup> The new SANDF emblem (Fig. 9) incorporates a nine-pointed “Star” representing the warm sun of Africa and the nine provinces of South Africa. The Star outline replaces the Castle outline and is also used in divisional emblems and flags to reflect a common corporate identity coupled with a unique device for each Division. The four Services retain their respective traditional colours. The emblem also reinforces the idea of military identity, authority and dignity.

The use of the green and gold are the traditional colours used to reflect the corporate identity of the Department of Defence. Green can also be seen as referring to the natural wealth of Africa while gold can be seen as a reference to the mineral wealth as well as nobility and purity.<sup>10</sup>

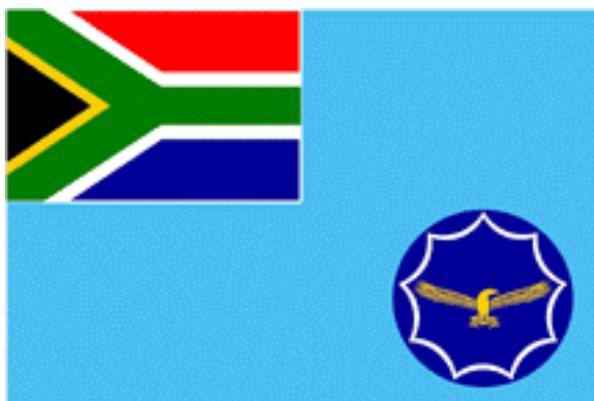
Apart from the replacement of new emblems, the new SANDF, Air Force, Army and Medical Services flags (Figs. 10–13) are identical to their immediate predecessors which have been in use since 11 November 1994 with the exception of the South African Army which adopted a new flag in 2002. The South Africa Naval ensign, which did not incorporate the emblem in its post-1994 design, remains unchanged (Fig. 7), although the navy has also adopted a new emblem replacing the Castle of Good Hope outline with that incorporating the nine-pointed star for use on stationery etc.



*Figure 9 New SANDF emblem.*



*Figure 10 New flag of the South African National Defence Force (2003 –).*



*Figure 11 New South African Air Force flag (2003 –).*



*Figure 12 New South African Army flag (2003 –).*



*Figure 13 New South African Military Health Services flag (2003 –).*



*Figure 14 Flag of Joint Operations Division (2003 –).*



*Figure 15 Flag of Joint Support Division (2003 –).*



*Figure 16 Flag of Defence Intelligence Division (2003 –).*

In addition to adopting new emblems on 29 April 2003, the SANDF also unveiled three new Divisional flags, namely those of Joint Operations, Joint Support and Defence Intelligence (Figs. 14–16). The new suite of South African defence force flags are:

#### *South African National Defence Force*

With the exception of the badge in the lower fly, this flag is almost identical in colour and design to its immediate predecessor, with the exception that for ease of manufacture and to promote standardization the green field is now “national flag green” instead of beetle green.

The new emblem of the SANDF (Fig. 9) comprises four spear heads/points and two crossed swords above two tusks in a nine-pointed star outline. The four spear heads are in Service Colours and allude to the four arms of Service within the SANDF (army, air force, navy and military health services) and the nine points of the star

represents the nine provinces of South Africa. The tusks are bound together by four elements representing the SANDF Divisions (namely Joint Operations, Joint Support, Defence Intelligence and Corporate Staff) while the swords emphasise the image of the military. This flag (Fig. 10) was officially taken into use at a Defence Force parade held at Thaba Tshwane on 29 April 2003.

#### *South African Air Force*

With the exception of the badge in the lower fly, this flag is identical in colour and design to its immediate predecessor (the sixth flag adopted by the South African Air Force).

The new badge of the air force revives the roundel as an aircraft marking after nearly 50 years and comprises a dark blue roundel in which is a white nine-pointed star. In the centre of the roundel is a yellow SAAF eagle, facing the fly with its wings outstretched. This is the only division to have the nine-pointed star in white rather than yellow. This flag (Fig. 11) was officially taken into use at a Defence Force parade held at Thaba Tshwane on 29 April 2003.

#### *South African Army*

With the exception of the badge in the lower fly, this flag is identical in colour and design to its immediate predecessor (the fifth adopted by the South African Army), which had only been in use between April 2002 and 25 April 2003.

The new badge of the army comprises the nine-pointed star outline in yellow and in the centre of which is army emblem of three conjoined lions' heads above one lionesses head, also in yellow. This flag (Fig. 12) was officially taken into use at a Defence Force parade held at Thaba Tshwane on 29 April 2003.

#### *South African Military Health Services (formerly South African Medical Services)*

With the exception of the badge in the lower fly, this flag is identical in colour and design to its immediate predecessor (the second adopted by the South African Medical Health Services).

The new badge of the Military Health Service is the nine-pointed star outline in yellow in the centre of which is a serpent coiled round an upright staff, also in yellow. This flag (Fig. 13) was officially taken into use at a Defence Force parade held at Thaba Tshwane on 29 April 2003.

#### *South African Navy*

As the naval ensign in use since 11 November 1994 did not contain any emblem in the fly, the design of the naval ensign is unaffected by the change in SANDF emblems. The design of the naval ensign remains unchanged (Fig. 7), having a green cross on a white field with the national flag in the canton, and is included here for the sake of

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completeness. However, the navy emblem has also dropped the Castle of Good Hope outline and now incorporates an anchor and the crest from the national coat-of-arms in the centre of the nine-pointed star outline.

### *Joint Operations Division*

The Joint Operations Division previously had a flag, but without the national flag in the canton. The new flag of Joint Operations has a “national flag green” field with the national flag, fimbriated in white in the canton, and the badge in the lower fly. The badge comprises four spear points, pointing to the cardinal compass points, containing the Service Colours within a yellow none-pointed star. This represents the mission of CJ Ops, which is to command troop deployments where ever this might be. The Southern Cross is indicative of the southern hemisphere where South Africa is situated. This flag (Fig. 14) was officially taken into use at a Defence Force parade held at Thaba Tshwane on 29 April 2003.

### *Joint Support Division*

The Joint Support Division is a senior division within the SANDF which previously did not have a flag and this anomaly has now been corrected. The new flag of Joint Support has a “national flag green” field with the national flag, fimbriated in white in the canton, and the badge in the lower fly. The badge comprises a yellow fluted pillar, symbolising support from a variety of disciplines, within a yellow nine-pointed star outline. This flag (Fig. 15) was officially taken into use at a Defence Force parade held at Thaba Tshwane on 29 April 2003.

### *Defence Intelligence Division*

The new flag of Defence Intelligence has a field of “national flag green” with the national flag, fimbriated in white in the canton, and the badge in the lower fly. The badge comprises a black and white globe within a yellow nine-pointed star outline. The badge of Defence Intelligence symbolises the global nature of their field of responsibility, with the colours indicating the need to separate fact from falsehood as well as to symbolise the role of the division of shedding light into darkness. This flag (Fig. 16) was officially taken into use at a Defence Force parade held at Thaba Tshwane on 29 April 2003.

### *Corporate Staff Division*

For the record, it is important to note that the Corporate Staff Division elected not to have a flag, thus making it the only Division within the SANDF not to have one. However, the Chief of Corporate Staff was careful to stress that his decision was not to be considered binding on his successors as certain of his sub-divisions felt that they had a need for a visual identity (including in some cases a flag).

## **Other components of the Department of Defence**

It is also important to note that the Secretariat for Defence — the “non-uniformed” component of the Department — also has a number of Divisions that are *de jure* the equal or even superior to the Divisions of the Defence Force. Some of these have indicated that they also require a visual identity without as yet indicating whether or not this should include flags. At another level, the President is the *de jure* Commander in Chief and protocol requires that, in certain circumstances (for example, when on board a ship of the South African Navy), the incumbent of that position must have a flag for display. The same applies to Cabinet Ministers. Draft designs for such flags have been prepared but no firm decisions have been made as yet as to which, if any, will be further developed or adopted.

## **Conclusion**

The change of the emblems and flags of the arms and divisions within the SANDF are a visible manifestation of the transformation currently underway within the Department of Defence and the Defence Force. Further evidence of the continuing evolution of the visual identity of South African defence structures is the redraft of the policy on Flags and Colours which is currently underway. Other issues receiving attention are the possible adoption of a Presidential Standard and flags for the Minister of Defence and Chief of Joint Operations, with a draft designs for these flags having already been prepared.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Smith, H. H., *Flags of the Union Defence Forces and of the South African Defence Force*, SAVA Journal SJ: 2/93, Pinegowrie, 1993

<sup>2</sup> Smith, H. H., *op cit*, 1993, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Brownell, F., *New Flags of the South African National Defence Force*, SAVA Newsletter SN: 11/94, Pinegowrie, December 1994, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Brownell, F., *op cit*, 1994, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Berry, B., *New Flags – South African Army*, SAVA Newsletter SN: 33/02, Pinegowrie, August 2002, pp. 2 – 3.

<sup>6</sup> Brownell, F., *op cit*, 1994, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Brownell, F., *op cit*, 1994, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Brownell, F., *op cit*, 1994, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Rear Admiral BW Visser (Chief of Logistics) to Heads of Department, Department of Defence, dated 04 April 2001 following discussion at the Military Council meeting 02/2001 of 06 March 2001.

<sup>10</sup> South African Department of Defence website, <<http://www.mil.za>>, *Implementation of new SANDF flags, emblem and medal series, 25-29 April 2003*.

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## **About the authors**



*Bruce Berry* was born and bred in Zimbabwe and watched with interest the vexillological changes which occurred in that country up to and immediately after independence. This interest developed into a substantial flag collection, as well preparing numerous papers and articles for vexillological publications and conferences. Bruce attended Rhodes University and the Universities of the Witwatersrand and South Africa culminating in a Master of Arts degree and a diploma in Project Management. He is a Unit Manager at the Development Bank of Southern Africa and lives in Johannesburg with his wife and two sons. He is a founder member of the Southern African Vexillological Association (SAVA) and has been Secretary/Treasurer since its inception.

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