

Photographic collection of Sergeant O.P. Perlstein, W.A.A.S.
courtesy of her sons, James Crook and Dr Alan Crook, Israel.

Imperial Military Hospital Baragwanath



Baragwanath Hospital, June 1942. South African Military Nursing Services (SAMNS) and Women's Auxiliary Army Services (WAAS) Barracks



Nurse Anders, Lt. Comm Enoch (patient), Matron Forbes, June 1942.



Col W.H Du Plessis, Matron Fick, Col L.I. Braun, July 1943.

Official Opening of Baragwanath Military Hospital 1942





Non-Commissioned Officers (N.C.Os) on Parade



Women's Auxiliary Army Services (W.A.A.S.) on Parade





Nurses on Parade



Inspecting the nurses.



Prime Minister Jan Smuts and Col. D.L. Ferguson, O.C.



Col. D.L. Ferguson (O.C.)



Prime Minister Jan Smuts and Matron



Prime Minister Jan Smuts addressing the gathering



Gladys..., Margaret Forbes, Marcus..., Col D.L. Ferguson (O.C.)

History of Baragwanath Military Hospital

In September 1940 the British government asked the South African government to provide health care facilities for Imperial troops of the Middle East Command. The South African government decided to build a hospital near Johannesburg, Transvaal as there was a university medical faculty, a nurses' training college, and facilities for rehabilitation. The site of the proposed hospital was to be on the farm Diepkloof, south-west of the centre of town which was situated at the 8th milestone on the road from Johannesburg to Potchefstroom. Nearby was the Baragwanath Aerodrome which was built after the First World War. During the Second World War it was used by both RAF and SAAF air crews under the Joint Air Training Scheme.

The initial estimate of the cost of erecting the hospital was £324,000, but it was then decided to make provision for 1,544 beds, instead of 1,200, because of the increase in hostilities in the Middle East. The layout of the hospital resembled a military camp with many huts containing the various wards. There were about 50 wards that could accommodate 40 beds each. The Johannesburg municipality provided electricity, water and drainage. Construction commenced on 3 November 1941 and the first patients were admitted on 28 May 1942. A section was reserved for the medical and surgical treatment of tuberculosis. There was also a workshop for occupational therapy. The final cost of the hospital was £328,000. Prime Minister Jan Smuts officially opened the hospital on 23 September 1942.

The first Officer Commanding Baragwanath was Lieutenant Colonel D.L. Ferguson. He was succeeded by Colonel L.I. Braun on 3 June 1943 and him by Colonel W.H. du Plessis in the same year. Initially most of the staff were Canadians, but they were gradually reduced and replaced by locals. Colonel Alley took over command of the hospital in 1944. In 1946 he was succeeded by Colonel D.C. Scott. As the war in the Far East expanded, so the number of soldiers contracting tuberculosis increased. By 1944 Baragwanath had predominantly become a hospital for the treatment and convalescence of tuberculosis. From 1945 onwards the hospital was known as "130 Military Hospital and Convalescent Depot, Baragwanath. The servicemen who died at the hospital were buried in the West Park Cemetery in Johannesburg. The military left on the 1 September 1947.

The Transvaal Provincial Administration paid the British government £1 million for the buildings, remaining equipment and stores. Dr J.D. Allen was the first civilian Superintendent of the hospital. The first Matron was Joan MacLarty. They started converting the facilities at Baragwanath to accommodate the non-European section of the Johannesburg General Hospital. Initially the hospital was called the NEH, but later the name Baragwanath was used again. The hospital move to Baragwanath occurred in May 1948. It became one of the biggest hospitals in the world and served the black population of Soweto. Today it is called Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital.

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