

How it all began.



The event owes its beginnings to the vision of one man, World War I veteran Vic Clapham. Vic Clapham was born in London on 16 November 1886 and immigrated as a youth to the Cape Colony in South Africa, with his parents. At the outbreak of the South African War (Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902) he enrolled as an ambulance man into the Cradock Town Guard at the age of 13. He later moved to Natal and worked as

an engine driver with the South African Railways.

With the outbreak of the Great War 1914-1918, Vic Clapham signed up with the 8th South African Infantry, and fought and marched 1700 miles of the eastern savannahs of Africa in pursuit of Glen Paul Von Lettow-Vorbeck's Askari battalions.

The pain, agonies, death and hardships of his comrades which he witnessed during those awful days left a lasting impression, especially the camaraderie engendered among the men in overcoming these privations. Thus when peace was declared in 1918, Clapham felt that all those who had fallen in this catastrophic war should be remembered and honoured in a unique way, where an individual's physical frailties could be put to the test and overcome.

Clapham asked for permission to stage a 56 mile race between Pietermaritzburg and Durban under the name of the Comrades Marathon and for it to become a living memorial to the spirit of the soldiers of the Great War. This was strenuously resisted by the League of Comrades, but Clapham persisted. Applications in 1919 and 1920 were refused but in 1921 the League relented and gave permission.

The first Comrades Marathon took place on 24th May 1921, Empire Day, starting outside the City Hall in Pietermaritzburg with 34 runners. It has continued since then every year with the exception of the war years 1941-1945, with the direction alternating each year between Pietermaritzburg and Durban, the so called up & down runs.



Peter Proctor (Chairman CMA), bust of race founder Vic Clapham and Great grandson Antony Clapham

His great-granddad, Vic Clapham Senior initiated the first-ever Comrades Marathon in 1921, leaving behind a legacy like no other. Then, his granddad, Vic Clapham Junior founded the First Hillcrest Scouts. And now, the 33-year old Antony Clapham carries the baton for being the first of this generation of Clapham's to take on the iconic Comrades Marathon challenge.



Vic Clapham was educated at **Wynberg High School**, Cape Town. Eldest son of William Clapham of Cape Town.

Married, October 1912, at Ladysmith, Nellie E. Parks of Bulawayo. They had six sons.

He was a member of St. Johns' Ambulance Brigade.

Originator and Honorary Secretary of the Comrades Marathon.

Lived at 115 Greyling Street, Maritzburg.



Herbert Philip Masterton-Smith

Born 21st July 1911 in Bergville, Natal. Educated at Westcliffe Public School, Cape Town and **Wynberg Boys' High School**, Cape Town.

Second son of H. Masterton-Smith, late of the Natal Police, and Ursula Heyter.

Runner-up W.P. Amateur Boxing Championship, Lightweight, 1927. Winner W.P. Welterweight A.B. Championship, 1928.

Assistant Scoutmaster, 6th Pietermaritzburg Troop Boy Scouts (St. Saviours) 1930.

Runner-up Comrades Marathon, 1930; 7hrs 28 mins. 3 secs. Winner Comrades, 1931, 7 hrs. 16 mins. 30 secs. 6th in Comrades 1932. 10th in Comrades 1933.

Served with "C" Squadron, Natal Carbineers as a Trooper from 1930.

Recreation: Fishing and Boating, Riding, Tennis and all forms of outdoor sports. Hiking and Mountaineering. Served with the Support Company, 1st Royal Natal Carbineers, WWII. Sailed in S.S. *Devonshire* on 17 July 1940 for service in Kenya

Royal Natal Carbineers WW 2

Western Desert, 1941-1943

Following the fall of Italian East Africa in May 1941, the 1st South African Brigade was dispatched to North Africa to confront the joint Italian-German forces in the see-saw offensives across Egypt and Libya. The Carbineers earned numerous individual battle honours between June 1941 and January 1943 when it sailed home for a well-earned leave.

Gazala, battle of, fought from 26 May to 17 June 1942 when Rommel attacked the British and Commonwealth Eighth Army's Gazala Line west of his immediate objective, Tobruk. By doing so he pre-empted a British offensive to drive him out of Libya before the planned start of the North African campaign that November.

Though technically excellent, the line was based on the concept of static defence. The Eighth Army, then commanded by Lt-General Neil Ritchie, was grouped in defensive strong-points, or 'boxes', with its armour committed piecemeal to their defence. ULTRA intelligence revealed Rommel's intentions to attack, and when, but gave no indication of his plan to outflank the line by a hook round the most southerly strong-point, Bir Hakeim. This movement, combined with a frontal assault by Rommel's Italian troops in the north, achieved surprise and at first worked well. But Rommel's intelligence had underestimated British strength and Axis forces, troubled by the length of their supply lines and by the new Allied Grant tank, were brought to a halt on 29 May after some of the fiercest armoured battles of the Western Desert campaigns. Rommel then withdrew to an area which became known as the 'Cauldron' and Ritchie, thinking he was disengaging, failed to mount an effective counter-attack immediately. This allowed Rommel to reorganize his forces, re-establish his supply line, and send his 90th Light Division to overrun Bir Hakeim. Its fall on 10 June, after Rommel had defeated another attack on him in the Cauldron, turned encirclement into a strong salient deep in the British defences, and on the night of 12/13 June he forced the retreat from a defensive box (KNIGHTSBRIDGE) which made the Gazala Line no longer tenable and opened the way to Tobruk.

- **Gazala:** The Gazala Line, to the west of Tobruk, established in early 1942, was a series of connected strong-points intended to blunt a German thrust towards Egypt. Carbineers formed part of the garrison of this line from March to June 1942, when they were forced to retreat after a German breakthrough and the fall of Tobruk. The major highlight of the Gazala sojourn was the patrol on 5 June where Sergeant Quentin Smythe earned the Victoria Cross.

- **Point 204:** This little-known clash occurred in the Alem Hamza area of the Gazala Line on 5 June 1942. The single company involved suffered heavy casualties in a clash with Italian troops. Among the six killed was **H.P. Masterton-Smith**, the 1931 Comrades Marathon winner.



