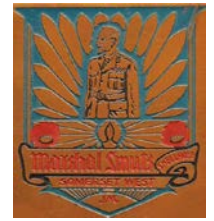




Marshal Smuts Shellhole

P.O.Box 246, Somerset West, 7129
Cnr. Drama & Swalle Streets, Somerset West, 7130



BULLSHEET

NOVEMBER 2011

Editorial

As mentioned in the previous editions, there will be no Remembrance Sunday commemoration at the Somerset West Town Hall this year. However I am sure we will see everyone at our own Sunset Parade on 11:11:11.

I would also like to remind all about "Red Sock Friday". Visit www.redsockfriday.com and order a pair at only R25.00 today. Part of the purchase price is also donated to charity

After a long break we introduce a new edition to our "To live like a MOTH" series. This month we focus on Mrs Rene van der Merwe and we have our final edition of "South Africa and the War against Japan."



<u>Shellhole Calendar</u>
Sunset Service at the Shellhole
– 11 November 18:00
Remembrance Parade Hermanus
– 13 November 10:30
Monthly Meeting
18 Nov @ 18:10
<u>Birthdays</u>
Tom Steenberg – 09 November
Gerda Olivier – 10 November
Brian Porter – 27 November

EXCO REPORT – OCTOBER 2011

Lease Agreements – as per the Standing Order Instructions and meeting resolution, new contracts for 2012 were signed by both tenants on the 7th of October

Garden Development and Johnny Farrell Memorial Gates – The tree stumps were removed and we are now awaiting the report from the appointed sub-committee at the November monthly meeting; meanwhile Pay Bill Van Zyl, handyman Neels and Grouser Truter cleaned and repainted the gates and we would like to thank them for a job well done

Security – We have all read in the previous Bullsheet about the break-in that occurred at the Shellhole. Security has been stepped up and hopefully the plans that we have put in place will have the desired effect

Recruiting - New recruits are attending and supporting the various Shellhole functions very well. GHQ1 forms have been completed and approved for 5 Recruits. At the November monthly meeting it is hoped to initiate two prospective members, Dirk Conradie and Rob Harding and at the January monthly meeting four prospective members, Dirk Kotzè, Stuart Smal, Jason Grobler and Joe van Niekerk.

To live like a Moth – Part 9 – Rene van der Merwe

Catherine A de Villiers was born on the 20th of November 1922. While doing research for this article, we came upon this detailed history of WAAF as published in the SA Military History Journal, and Rene agreed that she could not tell the story better herself.

Miss Egerton Bird relates her first conception of extensive flight training for women, which culminated in the South African Women's Aviation Association: "One day, not very long after I had taken my "A" licence, I went out early to the Rand Flying Club to fly. After a few cheery words to my instructor, I climbed into the cockpit of my machine and eventually taxied out on to the runway of the aerodrome and flew away into the blue. It was very beautiful and a thought came to me - I wished that more women could have the opportunity of seeing such beauty as this. As I banked to turn towards Germiston, I saw another plane piloted by a man, a pupil under the Government's scheme and another thought flashed across my mind: By Jove there is something very wrong here - I am flying at a cost of £3 per hour and this man is flying for NOTHING! Being completely overcome by this observation, I decided that something must be done to aid women, and in some way provide cheaper flying for them.

I flew, with wide-open throttle, to Germiston, circled round the aerodrome, made a terrific landing, and taxied back to the Rand Flying Club; jumped out of my machine, sought out my instructor and told him I was going to try and get cheaper flying for women. He gave me a look of

astonishment and then roared with laughter! When he had recovered from this he said, "*My dear Miss Bird, if you live to be 90, you will never start anything to reduce flying rates for women - and even if by a miracle you did, what on earth could they do? The air would then be as unsafe as the roads.*" I laughed and said, well you wait and see. I went off to find the secretary of the club, who was also very amused at this idea.

As the days went by, I got in touch with friends who were interested in flying and then, one day, when talking to Miss Joan Blake, we decided to get up a petition and send it to the Government to ask if something could be done about cheaper flying for women. This was done and a petition signed by 150 women interested in flying was sent to the Honourable Oswald Pirow, who was then Minister of Defence. He promised to give the matter consideration. The petition was duly acknowledged and the reply stated that, "*Perhaps after the first thousand men pupil pilots were trained then something might be done for women.*"

The training of a thousand pupil pilots would take approximately two years. This answer was most discouraging. So again I went forth and this time I got in touch with Miss Doreen Hooper, who was a flying instructress and a girl I was very proud to know. She had proved that women were capable of functions outside their traditional roles, and she promised to give us every atom of help she could. The response was immediate. A meeting of six women interested in the concept was called. The six

involved were: Miss Doreen Hooper, Miss Joan Blake, Miss Elaine Percival-Hart, Miss Sylvia Starfield, Mrs Toy Celliers and I. The meeting convened in Miss Hooper's flat. Over many cups of tea, and much discussion, we decided to form a committee, placing Miss Hooper in the chair. Joan Blake was made the treasurer and I the secretary, the remaining three being members of the committee.

We decided to ask Mrs Deneys Reitz, who was the Member of Parliament for Parktown, if she would take the chair at a meeting to be called later at the Wanderers' Club. Mrs Reitz consented and appeared very interested in the idea. We advertised this meeting in the press, expecting about 50 women to appear. In actual fact, when the meeting was held on the evening of 5 December 1938, we found the hall packed to overflowing; 110 women having enrolled for the evening. Everybody was most enthusiastic, and it was decided that we would call ourselves the South African Women's Aviation Association (SAWAA). Mrs Bertha Solomon, Member of Parliament for Hillbrow, was also at the meeting, and she and Mrs Reitz and the committee of six were thrilled with the support which the idea was obviously receiving.

Now we had to decide what to do with these 110 women. At last an opening was made when Mr Haswell, Secretary of the Rand Flying Club, who had been approached, gave us the idea of forming a unit of 32 women. He offered to have eight girls every weekend at the Rand Flying Club. He realized that these girls were all keen to do any work given to them, as long as they could learn about planes and flying. Soon

after this other Flying Clubs followed suit, and before six months had passed, the 110 members were split into units of 32, working during weekends learning how to handle aeroplanes and everything appertaining to aircraft. As the secretary of the SAWAA, I was receiving letters from all over the Union of South Africa asking for advice as to how to start women's aviation associations in their particular areas. At the end of one year, branches had been formed throughout the Union of South Africa, and the SAWAA possessed between 3000 and 4000 members. Each branch was collecting money to give bursaries to any of their members who showed an aptitude for flying."

The formal objects of the Women's Civil Air Guard (as the SAWAA became popularly known) were: To release men from civil aviation in time of National Emergency; Ferrying and transport work; Ambulance work; Flying mail and despatches and all normal civil aviation work; Charter work; urgent medical work, etc; Instructing and Technical work.

The rapidity with which the idea spread may be deduced from the fact that when, in February 1939, the women of the East Rand had formed their own branch of the SAWAA, in less than one week 100 women had joined in one town - Benoni. The first parade of a Flight of 32 members of the SAWAA was held at the Rand Flying Club, Germiston, on 6 March 1939. In the February of 1940 the SAWAA achieved another '*first*'. Six of its members flew over Johannesburg in formation flight. Marjorie was one of the pilots, and this was the first

time in the world that women had flown in formation flight.

The need for the SAWAA may be deduced from the fact that, in 1939, there were only 600 licensed civilian pilots in the Union, compared with approximately 30000 in England, France and Germany and 60000 in America.

The gathering of war clouds led to a certain change of emphasis in the functions of the SAWAA. The idea of cheaper flying for women was rather overshadowed by the new concept that its members could also be useful in the workshops as well as other work appertaining to aviation, and thereby release men for more important roles at the war front. Consequently, instruction in first aid, fire-fighting, alarms, clerical and administrative work was provided, in accordance with this new emphasis. Military drill was also taught - not without amusement in the opening stages, in which officers had to learn the necessary commands to relay to the novices.

When the Second World War broke out on 3 September 1939, the Association sent a telegram to General Smuts which stated: *"The Women's Aviation Association offers its services to the Government."* It was a few months before the offer was accepted. On 24 May 1940, at a parade of the SAWAA, a message was received from the Chief of Staff, General Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, which read, *"I and the Air Force need you, and need you badly."*

On 1 June 1940, Doreen Hooper was the first woman in South Africa to be called upon to volunteer for full time war service.

She was at that time 22 years of age, and entered the WAAFs with the rank of Major, being then known as Major Dunning. Marjorie Egerton Bird was the second woman to be called up ten days later, and then Miss E. Percival-Hart, both with the rank of Captain. Twenty-eight days later 100 girls from the SAWAA volunteered and were accommodated in military camps in Pretoria. Five months later there were 800 WAAFs proudly wearing the orange flash. The vital role which the SAWAA had played in providing an essential basis for the WAAF was recognized in the re-designation of the SAWAA. On 10 October 1939 Miss Bird announced that she had learnt from Col J. Holthouse, Director General of Air Services, that the Association was henceforth to be recognized as an air auxiliary unit of the South African Air Force, and that the official name of the Association would, therefore, be *"The South African Women's' Voluntary Auxiliary Air Unit of the South African Air Force."*

During the Second World War there were some 10000 WAAFs at one time. They performed in all some 75 different types of work. The military authorities called with increasing frequency on the services of the WAAFs and every one of them was determined that when the call came they would be fully trained and prepared. In December 1940 the first detachment of WAAFs were sent up North with Miss Muriel Horell in charge. They went to Mombasa in a troopship and from there by train to Nairobi, where a camp was established in a grey stone building rather like a castle. Soon this became too small to hold all the WAAF girls, and they moved to another camp of wooden huts. In September 1940 the WAAF

was sent to the Middle East, where their headquarters were in a hotel in Cairo.

The range of WAAF activities during World War II may be gauged from the following summary of the Service's functions: Artisans, Armament Instructors, Administrative and Camp Staff, Cooks and Caterers, Communication Pilots, Despatch Riders, Hygiene – Aerodromes, Intelligence, Link Trainer Instructors, Motor Transport, Meteorological Assistants and Observers, Photographers, Parachute Packers, P.T. Instructors, Shorthand Typists, Stores and Wireless Operators. By 1941 there were 36 'A' licence pilots in the WAAF.

In 1942 a major re-organization occurred within the WAAF. This re-organization consisted of the amalgamation of all administrative work with the SAAF administrative functions. The fundamental reason for this rationalization of functions was that the WAAF was maintaining a very large WAAF directorate, and most of the work was being duplicated by the SAAF sections. The merger with SAAF administrative duties was therefore dictated by the necessity of saving overlapping and duplicated staff. The directorate remained, but with only a few senior officers serving within it, their function being to direct the policy of the WAAF organization and to maintain a watch over the general welfare and well-being of all the WAAFs on full-time service.

There can be few service institutions which owe so much to the tenacity and enterprise - initially within a hostile environment - of a handful of individuals as the WAAF. When one considers that the South African Women's Aviation Association (or Women's

Civil Air Guard) held its inaugural meeting on 5 December 1938, and its first flight at the Rand Flying Club, Germiston, on 6 March 1939, and when one then considers the role and size of the WAAF during World War II, its development compares most favourably with that of the Royal Air Force (which, as an independent organization, pre-dated the SAWAA by some 21 years and which, moreover, had extremely influential personalities guiding its development, including Gen Smuts). Throughout the WAAF's development - from its origins in the SAWAA to demobilization in 1945 - certain personalities recur as dominating forces, moulding and directing its purpose; Maj Marjorie Egerton Bird, Lt Col Doreen Dunning (Hooper), Capt Sybil Starfield, Maj Elaine Percival-Hart, and others. Indeed, this powerful theme of continuity had its distinctly tragic overtones; in so far as Capt Starfield died in the service of women's aviation. It bears emphasis that the WAAF's role included duties which were far from sedentary; Rosamund Steenkamp was the first woman to pilot a jet aircraft and, indeed, was killed whilst on flying operations. In a major respect, the efforts of Maj Egerton Bird and her founder-colleagues of the WAAF (as it ultimately became) anticipate by some three decades the struggle for women's equality which has been such a prominent feature of contemporary social history.

Rene says that she joined the WAAF during 1940, did her training at Bloemfontein and was mostly stationed at Pretoria. She mainly worked as a Wireless Operator and did many flights as a Meteorological Assistant and Observer. "I even flew to Cairo and Alexandria on a couple of occasions, but

was never stationed up north. The up north bit I left to my future husband, John Loxton van der Merwe. John joined the SA Air Force during 1939 and was first trained as an aircraft technician. He qualified to become a pilot and flew during the War in the Desert and Italy. After the War he remained with the SAAF as a pilot and when War broke out in Korea, he was one of the first to volunteer. During 1952 he did a six month stint in Korea as a member of 2 SAAF Squadron. By the 24th of June 1952 he had completed 75 successful sorties and on the 25th of May 1952, was awarded the United

States of America Distinguished Flying Cross. He remained with the SAAF, mainly as an instructor and later in life became a logistics pilot. He flew transport aeroplanes to the SWA operational area and would always bolster that he had participated in three wars. After his retirement during 1982, we moved to Somerset West where we both became MOTHs. Rene recalls that the blokes at the Shellhole wanted her to do administrative work and therefore had no problem with bending the rules a little as to accommodate her!



Some call this Justice: as appeared in an American newspaper:



South Africa and the War against Japan 1941-1945 - Andre Wessels (part 7)

South African naval vessels in the Far East

Although several SANF vessels stayed in the Mediterranean until shortly before the end of 1945, the cessation of hostilities in Europe on VE Day, 8 May 1945, meant that, to all intents and purposes, the war was over for South Africa. However, steps had been taken to ensure that units of the SANF and SAAF would participate in the war against Japan, should that country not surrender in the near future. The boom defence vessel, HMSAS Barbrake, was the first South African naval ship to be attached to the Royal Navy East Indies Station. In November 1944, the Union government agreed to lend the Barbrake and her crew to the British Admiralty for service on the East Indies Station. Under the command of Lt F M Kamke, the Barbrake sailed from Simon's Town for Trincomalee on 3 February 1945 and arrived at its destination on 23 March. This ship was employed mainly in laying and lifting moorings off the coast of Ceylon and in the Bay of Bengal and, in April 1945, she played a prominent part in laying a submerged pipeline at Chittagong, in that part of India that today is Bangladesh. With Trincomalee, Ceylon (the present-day Sri Lanka), as her base, the Barbrake also visited Madras (India), Colombo (Ceylon) and Akyalo (Burma, the present-day Myanmar). On 20 July 1945, the Barbrake arrived at Rangoon in Burma. After removing parts of the Japanese boom defences there, as well as doing general work on buoys and moorings in the river channel, she sailed for South Africa at the beginning of December 1945. After an uneventful voyage, the Barbrake arrived back at Simon's Town on 12 January 1946.

With the struggle against Germany having ended in May 1945, the Allies concentrated all possible power against Japan. The SANF decided that all three of their 'Loch' Class frigates, which remained under the operational control of the Royal Navy, would be sent to the Far East. The HMSAS Natal and HMSAS Good Hope were tropicalized and certain other alterations were made to prepare them for service in the Far East. The sudden collapse of Japan, however, meant that only the Natal would serve in Eastern waters.

On 20 August 1945, after the nuclear bombs had been dropped on Japanese cities and after VJ Day, 15 August 1945, but before the signing of the formal surrender on 2 September, the HMSAS Natal left Durban. The ship arrived at Colombo in Ceylon on 1 September, having called at Diego Suarez along the way. Later that month, she escorted a convoy of 24 ships across the Bay of Bengal and through a cleared minefield in the Malacca Straits to Port Swettenham on the Malay Peninsula. She then escorted a small relief convoy to Singapore. Attached to the East Indies Escort Force, the Natal was given a number of assignments in and around Singapore and the Malacca Straits and participated in clearing-up operations in Burmese waters. Having taken part in the Allied occupation of Singapore and Malaya, the Natal was ordered to relieve the cruiser HMS Nigeria as guard ship off the strategic island of Sabang, at the north-western tip of the island Sumatra. On 23 October

1945, the Natal sailed for home via Singapore, Colombo and Port Louis (Mauritius). The vessel arrived back in Durban on 30 November 1945 and received a resounding welcome.

Two Royal Navy vessels that served in the Far East in the war against Japan were entirely manned by SANF personnel. The purpose-built *'King Salvor'* Class salvage ship; HMS Salvestor remained the property of the British Admiralty, but was placed under SANF control, being taken over by the SANF at Naples on 31 August 1944. After doing sterling work in the Mediterranean, the Salvestor sailed from Alexandria in Egypt for Durban on 24 March, where she arrived on 17 April. On 21 April, she left Durban and sailed via Port Louis and Colombo to Trincomalee, where she arrived on 12 May 1945 to join the British Eastern Fleet. The Salvestor would have sailed to Fremantle in Australia but, en route on 24 May, she received instructions to proceed instead to Onslow in north-western Australia, where she refuelled and then sailed to Darwin. Escorted by two Australian fleet minesweepers, the Salvestor and two tugs left Darwin on 19 June, with Admiralty Floating Dock No 18 in tow, the small convoy sailed via Torres Strait to Milne Bay New Guinea, arriving there on 8 July 1945.

On 8 August 1945, the Salvestor went to the assistance of a merchant ship that had encountered problems more than 200 km from Milne Bay and safely brought her into port on 11 August. Three days later, the Salvestor sailed for Manus Island, north of New Guinea, where she arrived on 19 August. On 30 August she left for Hong Kong, where she raised a Japanese tug and carried out a number of other salvage tasks, thereby rounding off the SANF's valuable contribution to wartime naval salvage. The SANF crew was gradually replaced by Royal Navy personnel, the ship was handed back to the Royal Navy early in 1946 and the South African crewmen returned to the Union by naval transport. For services rendered in the war against Japan, the Salvestor received the *'Pacific 1942-45'* battle honours, the only South African-manned naval vessel to be honoured in this way.

Because of a shortage of manpower in the Royal Navy, the SANF agreed to man HMS Teviot and HMS Swale, *'River'* Class anti-submarine frigates. After refitting, HMS Teviot was re-commissioned with an all-SANF crew at Cape Town on 10 June 1945. Although manned and operated by the SANF, however, the vessel remained the property of the British Admiralty. On 19 June 1945, she sailed from Durban for Colombo, where she arrived via Diego Suarez on 2 July. There she joined the East Indies Escort Command in Colombo and, after being painted in Pacific Ocean camouflage colours, immediately began a four-week work-up period. She was then employed as a link and mark ship on the aircraft route between Colombo and Rangoon. However, her active role did not last long, because, while sailing up the Irrawaddy River on the way to Rangoon, she struck an uncharted submerged wreck of a Japanese gunboat and suffered considerable underwater damage. The Teviot was patched up at Rangoon and repaired in a floating dry dock at Trincomalee and then returned to Durban, arriving on 21 December 1945. She was paid off on the same day. The war against Japan ended before Teviot's sister ship, HMS Swale, also with an all-SANF crew, could be sent to the East.

By the time atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945), a total of 16 630 officers and men of the SAAF had volunteered for service against Japan; 5 411 in the Army had done likewise; as well as 1 350 SANF personnel. Of these - not counting naval personnel seconded to the Royal Navy - only those members who served in the naval vessels that went to the East, '*saw action*' against Japan, a figure of not more than about 400 officers and men, including those who served on board the two Royal Navy vessels with all-SANF crews. As far as could be ascertained, no black, coloured or Indian South Africans were sent to the Far East.

A total of at least 334 324 South Africans (men and women) of all races served in uniform as full-time volunteers in the UDF during the Second World War, both at home and/or abroad. Only 0, 12% of these were sent on active service to the Eastern theatre and none of them saw action against the Japanese. On the other hand, more than 2 000 South Africans seconded to the Royal Navy saw action in the Far East. However, those thousands who manned South Africa's coastal and harbour defences, flew maritime reconnaissance sorties, and served on board the minesweepers and anti-submarine patrol craft in local waters, also guarded against potential Japanese attacks. From December 1941 onwards, local defences were geared to withstand the Japanese threat as much as the German and Italian threat. A total of 12 046 South Africans lost their lives during the war, including at least 75 in the war against Japan, albeit sometimes indirectly, as in the case of the Madagascar campaign.

When, on 2 September 1945, the Japanese envoys signed the Instrument of Surrender on board the battleship USS Missouri, South Africa was represented by Comdr A P Cartwright of the SANF, the senior South African officer on the staff of Admiral Chester Nimitz, the Allied commander-in-chief in the Pacific Ocean. Although South African naval vessels were sent to the Far East shortly before the cessation of hostilities, UDF units and personnel were never in direct armed confrontation with Japanese forces, while South Africans seconded to the Royal Navy did fight against the Japanese. No Japanese military personnel set foot on African soil, no South Africans were captured by the Japanese and UDF personnel were consequently spared the horrors of Japanese prisoner of war camps.

In relation to the role played by the Union in the overall Allied war effort during the Second World War, the country's direct contribution towards the struggle against Japan was not very extensive. However, during the dark days experienced by the Allies in the months following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, South African ports played an important role in keeping the Allies supplied in the East and this role continued until the cessation of hostilities. The Union's participation in the war against Japan led to the improvement of local defences as the country braced itself for a possible Japanese invasion. The war against Japan did not affect local politics or social matters in South Africa to any great extent, but it did contribute to the economic growth experienced during the war years.

For most of the nearly four years that the Allies fought against the Japanese, South Africa's direct military role was negligible. However, the country did play a vital role in keeping the Cape sea-route to the Far East open, conquering Madagascar, supplying ships on their way to the East with fuel and stores, repairing ships where necessary and exporting certain war items to the Allied forces in the Pacific region. South Africa participated in driving the Axis powers out of Africa and contributed towards the defeat of Italy (September 1943) and Germany (May 1945), so that gradually more and more other Allied forces could be freed for action against Japan, bringing that aspect of the Second World War to a close with the signing of Japan's unconditional surrender on Sunday, 2 September 1945.

Interesting reads on the Internet:

www.samilitaryhistory.org

www.dod.mil.za

www.firstworldwar.com

www.secondworldwar.com

www.raf.mod.uk

www.61mech.org.za

www.redsockfriday.com

www.30degreessouth.co.za

www.cwgc.org

www.ninefoxtrot.org

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