



THE SOUTH AFRICAN LEGION

NEWSLETTER OF THE PORT ELIZABETH BRANCH

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Branch news

Well there is no news from the Branch this month as your erstwhile Secretary was not at the last meeting. However it is believed that all is still well, and the Branch did actually manage to struggle on without him. A reminder to all SA Legion members. Do not forget the SA Legion braai at the Moth Memorial Centre at 57 King Edward Street, Newton Park on Saturday 5th April 2008. All attendees will receive a free boerawors roll, while braai packs and liquid stuff will be on sale. Come and meet others from your Branch and enjoy the fresh air and good comradeship.



Little known facts about WWII

Miscellaneous facts during 1941.

Zonderwater POW camp. In February 1941, Italian prisoners-of-war began arriving in South Africa where the Zonderwater Camp had been established in the Transvaal, twenty-three miles from Pretoria. These prisoners were captured during the Somaliland and Ethiopian campaigns. Thousands more were brought in from the campaigns in Egypt, Libya and Tripolitania during the years up till 1943. Around 9,000 of these prisoners were illiterate, and among the greatest and most lasting achievements at Zonderwater was that before the camp closed in February 1947, all had learned to read and write their mother tongue during their six years confinement. Some 5,000 learned a trade before returning home, and another 4,000 were allowed to work outside the camp on neighbouring farms. A symphony orchestra of 86 musicians was formed and a brass band of 65 instrumentalists was welded together from the prisoners. Fifteen schools were established teaching a variety of subjects.

At its peak, on December 31, 1941, there were 63,000 prisoners in the camp. A total of 233 prisoners died from illness and 76 lost their lives through accidents. What was done at Zonderwater represents a great achievement in the field of human relations in the treatment of prisoners-of-war. Their efforts were recognized by the post-war Italian Government when the Camp Commandant, Colonel Hendrik Prinsloo, and three of his officers were invested with the '**Order of the Star of Italy**'. Colonel Prinsloo was further recognized by the award of the '**Order of Good Merit**' by His Holiness, the Pope.

The last execution in the Tower of London

This historic event occurred on August 14, 1941. German spy, Josef Jakobs, was executed while seated tied to a chair, by an eight-man firing squad from the Scots Guards. The white lint target patch placed over the area of his heart bore five bullet holes from the eight shots fired. Jakobs had parachuted into

Britain on January 31, 1941, and broke his leg on landing. He lay all night in a field until his cries for help were heard next morning. He is buried in an unmarked grave in St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cemetery at Kinsal Green, London.

Fire brigade tragedy. April 20, 1941, was Hitler's birthday and the Luftwaffe celebrated the event by dropping 1,000 tons of bombs on London. Many schools in the city were standing empty, the children already evacuated to the country. The Old Palace School in St Leonard's Street, Poplar, was now sub-station 24U of the London Auxiliary Fire Service. The playground was ideal for training and the parking of fire appliances.

On the night of April 20, fire service crews were standing by in anticipation of a heavy raid on the Capital. At precisely 13:53, a land mine, dropped from a Luftwaffe bomber, scored a direct hit on the school. Thirty-two firemen and two fire women were killed. The bodies of the two firewomen, mother of three Winifred Peters, and twenty one year old Hilda Dupree, on duty in the watch room, were never found.

This was the largest loss of Fire Brigade personnel ever suffered in the history of the service in Britain.

Surprise! Surprise! Australia's '**invasion**' of Portuguese East Timor (now Timor Luru Sae) on December 16, 1941, was the first time in history that Australia violated another country's neutrality. Aussie troops (Sparrow Force) invaded Dutch West Timor and the 212nd Independent Company landed on the shore near Dili, the capital of Portuguese East Timor and so pre-empted a Japanese takeover. They proceeded immediately to surround the airport. Well armed, and expecting to do battle with the Portuguese military, they approached the administration building, guns at the ready.

Suddenly the main door opened and out stepped a civilian Portuguese official who tipped his hat and in perfect English said "**Good afternoon**". Dumbfounded, the troops stared at each other in disbelief. Not a shot had been fired. Unknown to Sparrow Force, the Australian and Portuguese governments had previously agreed to a peaceful '**invasion**' of the island to help protect the inhabitants from a possible Japanese invasion, which did in fact take place two months later, on February 20, 1942.

US pilots. Seven American volunteer pilots fought alongside the RAF pilots during the Battle of Britain. One, Pilot Officer William Fiske, died of wounds on August 17, 1940. (Could P/O Fiske have been the first American casualty of WWII?). Only one of the other six, Pilot Officer Haviland, survived the war. During the Battle of Britain, the German Luftwaffe lost 1,882 planes, and the RAF lost 1,265 planes. In all,

537 pilots were lost to Fighter Command, 718 pilots to Bomber Command and 280 pilots were lost to Coastal Command.

Eagle squadrons. Many American pilots served in the Royal Air Force and in order to circumvent the US Neutrality Act they assumed Canadian or South African nationality. They formed the Eagle Squadrons, approved by the British Air Ministry in September 1940, and operated within the RAF Fighter Command. The first Eagle Squadron was No 71 Squadron, formed with Hurricanes at RAF Station, Kirton-in-Lindsay, Lincolnshire. The ultimate total of US pilots thus serving numbered 243 with additional squadrons Nos 121 and 133 operating from Kirton-in-Lindsay and Coltishall respectively. After the US entry into the war the Eagle Squadrons were transferred into the US 8th Air Force.

Spitfire verses Hurricane. Contrary to popular belief, it was the Hurricane, not the Spitfire that saved Britain during the dark days of 1940. The turn-around time (re-arm, refuel etc) for the Spitfire was 26 minutes. That of the Hurricane, only 9 minutes from down to up again. During the Battle of Britain the time spent on the ground was crucial, and as one fitter / mechanic of No 145 Squadron quipped, **"If we had nothing but Spits we would have lost the fight in 1940."**

The Spitfire was an all-metal fighter, slightly faster, with a faster rate of climb and had a higher ceiling, while the Hurricane had a fabric covered fuselage, which was quicker to repair and withstood more punishment. With the for's and against's of both fighters they came out about even. The majority of German planes shot down during the four-month period were destroyed by Hurricanes. For much of the Battle of Britain, the Spitfires went after the German BF 109s at the higher altitudes, while the Hurricanes attacked the bomber formations flying at lower altitudes. This cost the enemy a total of 551 pilots killed or taken prisoner. During the war a total of 14,231 Hurricanes and 20,334 Spitfires were produced. The famous Rolls Royce **'Merlin'** engine evolved through 88 separate marks and was fitted in around 70,000 Allied aircraft during the six years of war.

In the hectic battles in the sky over southern England many pilots returned to base utterly exhausted and routinely fell asleep as they taxied their plane to a stop. Ground crews often had to help the sleeping pilot from the cockpit after he returned from combat.

Sponsored fighters. Private companies and individuals sponsored many Spitfires used in the Battle of Britain. Money raised in cities, towns, and villages was used to buy a Spitfire at a cost of £5,000 each.

They bore names such as Dogfighter, bought by a well known Kennel Club, Dorothy was bought by women whose name was Dorothy, Gingerbread by red-haired men and women, Unshackled by donations from POWs and so on.

The largest donation received came from Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, who donated £215,000 to purchase an entire squadron of 43 Spitfires.

Lucky hit. During the attack on Pearl Harbour, a Hawaiian DC-3 airliner, coming in to land, was hit by a Japanese tracer bullet and set on fire.

A minute later, the plane was hit by another bullet, which hit the valve of a fire extinguisher, thus putting out the fire!

POW escape attempt from Britain. During the war, no German prisoner of war escaped from Britain. Many believe that Franz von Werra was the most notable escapee, but von Werra made his escape in Canada, where he was sent as a POW. (In Canada there were twenty-one Prisoner-of-War camps set up during WWII).

The most audacious attempt was made by Lt Heinz Schnabel and Oblt Harry Wappler on November 24, 1941. The two Luftwaffe officers were prisoners in Camp No 15 near Penrith, Northumbria (formally the Shap Wells Hotel). Forging papers that identified them as two Dutch officers serving in the RAF, they made their way to the RAF airfield at Kingstown near Carlisle. Without difficulty they entered the station and with the help of a ground mechanic started the engine of a Miles Magister, of which there were fifty parked around the airfield. Taking off, they headed for the sea and Holland, a distance of some 365 miles. Over the North Sea they realized they could not make it (the maximum range of a Magister was 367 miles on full tanks). Rather reluctantly they decided to turn back and landed in a field about five miles north of Great Yarmouth. Back at Camp No 15 again, the two daring escapees were sentenced to 28 days solitary confinement.

Hunting request. After Pearl Harbour, the Department of Conservation in Nashville, Tennessee, handed in a request for six million licenses to hunt Japs at a fee of \$2 each. Back came a note **"Open season on Japs - no license required"**.

American servicemen in Britain. The Yanks were said to be **"overpaid, oversexed, overfed and over here"**. The Americans countered this by saying the Brits were **"underpaid, undersexed, underfed and under Eisenhower."** 🍌

Cuito Cuanavale, judge for yourself

Much has been in the news of late about the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. From these extracts taken from the Internet, why not judge for yourself.

The final phase of the campaign was centred on the city itself, as the South Africans continued pursuing their overall objective (Operation Packer) of driving FAPLA forces west of the Cuito River. The South Africans shelled FAPLA forces with artillery from the surrounding high grounds of the Chaminga Heights. South African and UNITA forces never captured the city of Cuito Cuanavale, but maintained that it was never their intention to do so.

South African and UNITA forces claimed to have inflicted enormous casualties on Cuban and FAPLA forces, and to have accomplished their objective of repulsing the offensive against UNITA havens in southeast Angola. Cuban and FAPLA forces, however, count the failure of the South Africans to capture the city, and the resilience of their troops under bombardment as a triumph. Regardless of which side was the victor, the battle marked a major turning point in the course of events in southern Africa. In 1988, following the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale and the Cuban bombing of the Calueque hydro-electric scheme, South Africa and Cuba agreed to the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Angola. In 1990, Namibia gained its independence from South Africa.

Aftermath. The SADF side claimed they inflicted severe casualties on the Cubans forcing them to the negotiation table, with the Cubans claiming they defeated the SADF to do the same. In fact much of the aftermath has been mired in propaganda. In *Black Africa*, particularly in southern Africa, the battle has attained legendary status. To that part of the world it is considered the debacle of apartheid. A rout of the South African armed forces that altered the balance of power in the region and heralded the demise of racist rule in South Africa. Thus, the battle is often referred to as the African Stalingrad of Apartheid. The decisive event that defeated Pretoria's objective of establishing regional hegemony, a strategy which was vital to defending and preserving apartheid, and directly led to the independence of Namibia and accelerated the dismantling of apartheid. In this point of view Cuba's contribution was crucial as it provided the essential reinforcements, material and planning.

On the SADF side the taking of Cuito Cuanavale was never intended, only operational control of the area by using the new long-range G-5 artillery. SADF and American observers claim that MIG air superiority meant very little because of poor Cuban pilot training, ineffective close air support techniques from high altitudes and the use of the FIM-92 Stinger anti-aircraft system forcing MIGs to fly higher.

The SADF used just over 3,000 soldiers with large support from UNITA. The SADF claimed a large number of Cuban casualties of 4,000 men, 100 armoured vehicles, 9 aircraft, as well as a heavy loss of armour (94 tanks) due to their use of obsolete T55 tanks and poorly trained crews against more modern SADF anti-tank weaponry and targeting devices. Subsequent comments made by Soviet advisers to the Cubans in Angola are pointed too, as supporting their version of the events. ***'The people's armed forces for the liberation of Angola have not been able either, even with the help of the Cubans, to decisively defeat the enemy and drive him out of the territory or the country. The result, frankly speaking, was an impasse.'***

The South African and American view is expressed by John Turner who claims that following their losses, the Cubans were convinced that further military confrontation with the SADF would not succeed. They therefore launched a propaganda and diplomatic

campaign to cover their setbacks and hide their losses.

Conversely, the Cuban version claiming defeat of South African forces was seen as a major development in the African anti-colonial struggle. The World, the foremost Black South African newspaper, declared, ***"Black Africa is riding the crest of a wave generated by the Cuban success in Angola. Black Africa is tasting the heady wine of the possibility of realizing the dream of total liberation"***.

Quotes. The people's armed forces for the liberation of Angola have not been able either, even with the help of the Cubans, to decisively defeat the enemy and drive him out of the territory or the country. The result, frankly speaking, was an impasse. **M Ponoromov, Krasnaya Zvezda Magazine; May, 20, 1988.**

If defeat for South Africa meant the loss of 31 men, three tanks, five armoured vehicles and three aircraft, then we'd lost. If victory for FAPLA and the Cubans meant the loss of 4,600 men, 94 tanks, 100 armoured vehicles, 9 aircraft and other Soviet equipment valued at more than a billion Rand, then they'd won. **Colonel Dean Ferreira, CDR SADF in Angola Paratus (SADF Magazine), March, 1989.**

The defeat of the apartheid army was an inspiration to the struggling people in South Africa! Without the defeat of Cuito Cuanavale our organizations would not have been unbanned! The defeat of the racist army at Cuito Cuanavale has made it possible for me to be here today! Cuito Cuanavale was a milestone in the history of the struggle for southern African liberation! **Nelson Mandela, July 1991.**

During the course of the fighting FAPLA suffered one of the worst defeats to befall an army since the WWII.

The SADF (Operation Modular) intervention began modestly, as UNITA attempted to stiffen its resistance to the invaders in Cuando Cubango, in August, and picked up through September as South African artillery repelled two attempts by FAPLA to cross the Lomba River. Finally, South African mechanized forces intervened to annihilate one of the FAPLA task forces in battles on 3-4 October. This defeat was followed by the FAPLA withdrawal toward Cuito Cuanavale, which was put under siege by UNITA and bombarded by South Africans (Operations Hooper and Packer). At the same time UNITA made considerable gains in the central plateau area and on the CFB, most of which were later regained by FAPLA at great cost. Frustrated in attempts to remedy the situation in the centre and east, FAPLA and the Cubans redeployed forces in south-western Angola to the Namibian border, where they sparred with the SADF until being decisively checked on 26-27 June at Techipa in Cunene province. Following this battle, the Cubans were convinced that further military confrontation with the SADF would not succeed, but launched a propaganda and diplomatic campaign to cover their setbacks and cover their losses. They also apparently decided to leave the MPLA to its fate, accepting shortly thereafter the linkage proposed by the US that led to Namibian

independence in return for Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. **John W Turner, Continent Ablaze; The Insurgency Wars in Africa, 1960 to the Present, 1998.**

At Cuito Cuanavale, the SADF were dealt a decisive defeat. As the South Africans withdrew, the Cubans, together with Angolan and SWAPO forces, advanced toward the Namibian border. **Isaac Saney, Morning Star, November 4, 2005.**

In early October the Soviet-FAPLA offensive was smashed at the Lomba River near Mavinga. It turned into a headlong retreat over the 120 miles back to the primary launching point at Cuito Cuanavale. In some of the bloodiest battles of the entire civil war, a combined force of some 8,000 UNITA fighters and 4,000 SADF troops destroyed one FAPLA brigade and mauled several others out of a total FAPLA force of some 18,000 engaged in the three-pronged offensive. Estimates of FAPLA losses ranged upward of 4,000 killed and wounded.

This offensive had been a Soviet conception from start to finish. Senior Soviet officers played a central role in its execution. Over a thousand Soviet advisers were assigned to Angola in 1987 to help with Moscow's largest logistical effort to date in Angola, roughly \$1.5 billion in military hardware was delivered that year. Huge quantities of Soviet equipment were destroyed or fell into UNITA and SADF hands when FAPLA broke into a disorganized retreat. The 1987 military campaign represented a stunning humiliation for the Soviet Union, its arms and its strategy. It would take FAPLA a year, or maybe two, to recover and regroup. Moreover the Angolan military disaster threatened to go from bad to worse. As of mid-November, the UNITA / SADF force had destroyed the Cuito Cuanavale airfield and pinned down thousands of FAPLA's best remaining units clinging onto the town's defensive perimeters. **Chester A Crocker. (US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs during the Reagan Administration. 🤖**

US Commissioned Officer insignias

The young 2nd Lieutenant approached the crusty old MSG and asked him about the origin of the commissioned officer insignias.

"Well, Lieutenant, it's history and tradition. First, we give you a gold bar representing that you're valuable but malleable. The silver bar of a 1st lieutenant represents value, but less malleable. When you make captain, you're twice as valuable so we give you two silver bars. As a colonel, you soar over military masses, hence the eagle. As a general, you're obviously a star. Does that answer your question?"

"Yes, Master Sergeant" replies the lieutenant, **"but what about majors and lieutenant colonels?"**

The Master Sergeant explains, **"Now that goes waaaaaay back in history, back to the Garden of Eden even. You see, we've always covered our pricks with leaves."** 🤖

One of God's helpers

During a college class a professor, professing that he was an atheist to the class that he was teaching told them that he was going to prove to them that there is no God.

He said, **"God, if you are real, I want you to knock me off of this platform. I'll give you 15 minutes!"**

Ten minutes went by. He kept taunting God, saying, **"Here I am God. I'm waiting!"**

It got down to the last couple of minutes and a young veteran service member just released from being on active duty and newly registered in the class walked up to the professor, and hit him full force in the face, which sent him tumbling from his platform.

The professor struggled up, obviously shaken, and yelled, **"What's the matter with you? Why did you do that?"**

The veteran replied, **"God was busy; so he sent me!"** 🤖

Modern military terms

Engage the enemy means **"to blow something up"**. Surgical strike means **"to blow up something small"**.

Decapitate means **"to blow up their leaders"**.

Collateral damage means **"to accidentally blow up something of theirs"**.

Friendly fire means **"to accidentally blow up something of ours"**.

Target of opportunity means **"to blow something up on a whim"**.

Kinetic targeting means **"to blow up something that's moving"**

Ordnance is **"something that that does the blowing up"**.

An asset is **"something that can be blown up"**

Embedded media means **"a report that's blown out of proportion"**. 🤖

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this newsletter reflect the personal views of the Editor and are not the official views of the Port Elizabeth Branch of the SA Legion.

Many of the articles published in this newsletter come direct off the Internet, or from other published articles in magazines, old newsletters, etc. Though often no direct acknowledgement is made to the authors, when it is known, readers must know that the editor readily acknowledges that others have written many of the articles, and all he has done is perhaps edit them to fit into available space. 🤖

Do not forget to come to the SA Legion braai! We want to see all forty odd PE Branch members there. We do not want to have to send out a Press Gang, as they tend to get a bit too aggressive. So turn up and enjoy the comradeship! 🤖

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