



March 2019

## The story of the 'Isie'



**Military slang**

# From the editor's desk

It's Friday, less than 24 hours before we have our monthly meeting. And I'm still putting the Halifax Herald together.

I've got such a lot of work at the moment that I don't know which way is up or down. Also this coming weekend is the "Last Night at the Proms". I am a member of the Cape Welsh Choir (typical of an Irishman) and will be singing on Saturday and Sunday night at the City Hall. FYI - John Verster and Tony Venn are also members of the choir.

Servaas and I were talking about bombers the other day (why, I have no idea). He said that a B52 bomber, the Enola Gay, dropped the first atomic bomb. I said no, he said yes. Just to let you know, I was right. The Boeing B-52 Stratofortress made its first flight on 15 April 1952 and went into service in February 1955. Ten years after World War II ended. The Enola Gay was a Boeing B-29 Superfortress.

Now, let me get some work done. Until next month. YUTTH.

Matt

## What's in this month's issue?

Okay, so there's not many articles in this month's issue. In fact there are only two.

And who do we have to thank? And no, it's not Boland Bank. It's you. Come on, I've been begging, pleading, crying for you guys to provide me with an article or two for three years now. I'm still waiting.

Anyway, enough of that. On page three we have an interesting article on Isie. Who or what was Isie? Read the article to find out.

On page eight is an article on slang expressions that we used to use in the SADF. There are also a number of expressions from other military forces around the world - mainly from the UK and the US.

Finally, on the back page is another old cartoon from Paratus magazine.

### FRONT COVER

I took this photograph during a demonstration prior to the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

Members of the Maritime Reaction Force board on of the frigates that had been taken over by pirates.

Their job was to capture the pirates, free the hostages, and secure the ship.

# Isie

*The story of a little wooden boat.*

By Servaas van Breda.

This is a story well worth telling as very little reference has been made of the ISIE.

The ESIE was just a boat, a wooden boat, but not just any ordinary boat. She was built specially to serve the artillerymen on Robben Island and, as the years rolled by, she became somewhat of an institution, transferred from one corps to another but always remaining synonymous with the Island.

She was named after a much loved woman, Mrs Sybella Margaretha, the wife of Gen Jan Smuts Prime Minister and Minister of Defence from 6 September 1939.

Known as "Isie" to her family and friends and "Ouma" to the many thou-

sands of men and women who served during WW2. This name was given to the African Service Medal which was fondly known as Ouma's Garter. The Isie was built in the yards of Louw and Halvorsen, boat builders whose yards were in a corner of Victoria basin.

She was wooden hulled as were all craft built in this yard. On 12 May 1941 ISIE was ready for trials. The ISIE was designed for passenger traffic and nothing else and could carry 45 passengers or 64 at a stretch but only in calm weather. She was well known to the many service personnel who journeyed back and forth between the Island and the mainland and she served the Island faithfully through the war



**ISIE:** Named after the wife of General Jan Smuts, she became synonymous with Robben Island

years and for many a day there after. From the outset all cargo traffic was carried by vessels operating under contract. Having to transport personnel from the Island was getting rather daunting as there at on one given time there were about 2,000 personnel. Another vessel was added namely the GOLD STAR, only operated for a short time and was transferred to Saldanha. So the ISIE was the only one to ferry troops and stores to the island. The ISIE was also utilised to conduct night patrols around the Island. Many stories can be told about the ISIE and the hundred voyages she made between the Island and Victoria Basin of the Cape Town harbour. She was part of Cape Town. Sometimes her engine had to be started by heating her single piston engine with an oil lamp. This is but one of the many stories her that are legion. Some being recounted time and time again by those women who served in the ASWAAS (Artillery Specials, Woman's Auxiliary Service, the SWANS (The Woman's Auxiliary Naval Services) and the girls of the SSS (Special Signals Service). Margaret Rae recalls '....those trips....'on the ESIE to Robben Island, some of which was quite hair-raising. She added though when it was stormy and the ferry did not run it was not fun being stuck on the Island. Another remembered going down to the docks after a day or two of leave on the mainland to board the ISIE: There was a terrible gale

blowing and the skipper refused to take us back to the Island, saying it was far to dangerous and he was not going to risk his life or ours. However, the six of us pleaded, humoured him, and almost begged on our knees to get us back, saying that 'Old Perkins' (Commanding the Sub Depot on the Island) would be furious if we did not get back. I might add that 'Old Perkins' was only about 33 but to us he was old!!! The outcome of our pleadings was that in the end this young South African Skipper of the ISIE brought out brought out a certain register and said, 'Sign your names, write down your next of kin and note, should you drown it is not my fault'. We were quite aware of the and quite happily our names to the book. Army men waiting to go back to the Island were absolutely forbidden to go on this trip-perhaps SWANS were expendable. Away we went, but after we gone through Cape Town's Harbour entrance that we realized what we were up against. We first seated ourselves comfortably in the cabin aft of the little vessel, but as time went on we were thrown from one bulkhead to the other, our belongings heaped on top of us. We became, one by one, so seasick that through sheer compulsion we gradually went on deck and held on to the mast whilst the little ship bravely rode the huge waves which rose and smashed themselves over us. The skipper kept coming out the bridge shouting at us to go down

again, but we were too ill to care. We were drenched completely, our winter uniforms sodden but we continued hanging on, our knuckles and hand frozen with pain. Darkness set in and the sea did not seem to care-it just went on lashing the ISIE. It was perfectly obvious to us that we were being blown out to sea past the Island. The trip lasted from 15:00 until 22:00 that night and they were welcomed by fires on the beach with blankets being warmed. The six drenched SWANS were taken to their quarters for hot baths, cocoa and brandy to bring them to a semblance of normality. Other

SWANS on another trip when the Cape rollers were at their worst, remembered the helmsman performing wonders in preventing the boat from pooped (seamanship term for the dangerous event of a big sea breaking over the stern (poop deck) while '....we sat mesmerised by the huge seas rising and bearing upon our small craft....'. Former SWAN Gloria Hutchinson joined us as a Technical Swan in November 1943 but was taken off the technical course at Saldanha and transferred from to the Communications Branch as Signal SDO. She was sent to the Signals Of-



**SOAKED TO THE SKIN:** A cartoon drawn by the well-known Cape Argus cartoonist, P M Jackson.

fice, about once a week with secret signals ‘... on that God awful tub (the ISIE) that made me seasick’. Gloria Hutchinson was also (also a MOTH) answered the sunset call, she moved to the SA Legions, Rosedale Service Centre and transferred to the Admiral Halifax Shellhole. She held the post of commander 1997-2001. She held the post of 1st Lieutenant when answering the sunset call. PO Flo Morton recalled years after the war: ‘Mostly it was a delightful trip on fine days that one did not get seasick. However, in the winter the voyage could be fearsome. When the North-westerly was tearing across the Bay, it seemed as though we were crossing under the water instead of on the surface, and the journey often took twice as long. The seas would break right over us and, as well as being rather scared we were drenched to the skin. I was one of those who could not go below to the shelter of the cabin without getting seasick, so it was to stay on deck, or else! The crew would issue us with “sou’westers” but the elastic chin stays were always perished, so we had to hold the brims together on either side of our chins in order to keep them on. The water poured down and every ten minutes or so on had to empty about a jug-full of water out of ones sleeve. On one occasion we arrived, half frozen and soaked, at Cape Town Docks and had to huddle around a watchman’s fire to keep us warm until a taxi arrived.

When I reached home my tie was so wet that I could not undo the not, and my mother had to cut the tie off before I could get out of my wet clothes’. And there was other excitement to. L/Swan Doreen Francis told the story of the day the ESIE broke down and a tug had to be summonsed to help. When the tug arrived alongside the Swans were told to jump from ISIE to the tug, both vessels ranging up and down in what she described as a rough sea. Two crewmen on the tug stood ready to catch the girls as they leaped across but after one look at the gap between them it did not seem like an action Doreen could undertake. She kept moving further and further back in the line, putting off the evil moment, but soon it was only her to make the jump. Everyone was urging her to do it. ‘I am a bad swimmer’, she said, but the Petty Officer her that swimming would not in any event help and that she must jump. Doreen froze. The two crewmen shouted ‘Jump, we’ll catch you. I took a deep breath and jumped so hard that I nearly landed on the far side of the tug. Every one cheered and clapped....’ But she was happy to be safely on the deck of the tug.’ On another spring day, with the off-duty Watch heading for the City and home, many carrying large bunches of arum lilies gathered on the Island (where they grew in abundance) the Isie was no sooner out of the little harbour than she was met by the full blast of a strong southeaster. Heavy waves

began to break over the vessel and one young lady had the distinct feeling that the sea was doing its best’...to wash and scour everyone overboard. We clung like leaches on to any part of the ISIE we could get hands, legs and teeth attached to’. Some were seasick the waves water could be felt pouring water. ‘...though my collar, down inside my clothes and over my body. I was completely soaked!’ And then the engine sputtered and with a big grunt, it died. Bobbing around the boat were bunches of arum lilies and for some minutes thoughts of a mass burial of an entire Watch, with floral tributes already provided through Alice Holgate’s mind. But ISIE soon got her breath back and delivered the Watch safely to the harbour. ‘Although the wind was still blowing it was a beautiful sunny day in Cape Town. We all

looked strange in the extreme bystanders as we filed ashore! We were SWANS who truly got our feathers wet...’ No Swan will ever forget the ISIE. The sea was much in the minds of the SWANS, not only watching over it day after day, recording the voice of the Asdic loops, but also travelling over it to and from Cape Town and the Island. The ISIE was taken over by the South African Marine Corps of Marines in 1953 she became part of a unit known as the Robben Island Ferry Service. When the Marines disbanded in 1955 she was handed back to the South African Navy and when the Navy moved off the Island in 1961 the ISIE was handed over to the Department of Prisons. After years of faithful service she was paid off in July 1978.



**LAUNCHED:** The Isie is launched from the Cape Town builder's yard of Louw and Halvorsen on 12 May 1941.

# Say What?

*Do you know your 'Audie Murphy' from your 'White Gold'? Take a look at some military slang from around the world.*

The military has always had its very own language, most of which would never be understood by civilians.

The old SADF had slang that consisted of English, Afrikaans and techno-speak. Some of it was clever, some of it funny, and some of it downright crude.

The SADF was not unique though. Most military organisations around the world have their own rich vocabulary of slang.

So let's take a quick look at some of the slang terms that we used to use. And maybe learn a few new ones from other forces.

- **Ali Baba** - Used during the Iraq war by both American and British troops, it was the name for insurgents, local thieves and looters.
- **Archie** - Used during World War I to describe anti-aircraft guns or anti-aircraft fire.
- **Army lawn dart** - (US Army) UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter. Named for its inability to stay in the air. Also Known as a "Crash Hawk".
- **Asino morto** - used by the Italian

Army. It means 'dead donkey' and is a term for canned ham.

- **Audie Murphy** - (SADF) Someone that took needless risks. The term originated with the Hollywood movie star Audie Murphy, a highly decorated WWII veteran who later became a movie star.
- **Bagger** - (Irish Army) Derogatory term referring to an Irish reservist Soldier, comparing him/her to a sandbag, i.e.; useless.
- **Battery Acid** - (SADF) Slang term given to concentrated cold drink that was mixed with water. In the US Army it was called 'bug juice'.
- **BIMBLE** - (British) Basic Infantry Manoeuvre But Lacking Enthusiasm.
- **Bleu** - (France) A recruit. Derived from the French term for barely-cooked steak, symbolizing a "raw" recruit.
- **BOHICA** - "Bend over, here it comes again." used when warily contemplating idiotic or malicious decisions by higher-ups.
- **Bokkop** - (SADF) Slang term for infantry soldier. It is derived from

the Afrikaans word 'Buck Head'. The emblem of the infantry was a Springbok's head.

- **Brake shoes** - (SADF) Slang term used to describe Provita Biscuits.
- **Bravo Zulu** - (Worldwide Navies) (BZ) Means 'Well Done'. Comes from the Allied Maritime Tactical and Maneuvering Book, conveyed by flag hoist or voice radio.
- **Bubblehead** - (US) Any person serving on a submarine or in the Submarine Service (a reference to decompression sickness).
- **Bungalow Bill** - (SADF) When troops lived in a bungalow or dormitory one of them would often be put in charge. Although this trooper usually had no rank he was known as the Bungalow Bill.
- **Charlie** - (U.S.) NATO phonetic alphabet for the letter C. During the Vietnam War was a general term for the Vietcong by shortening of "Victor Charlie."
- **Check six** - (U.S. Air Force) Term for "watch out behind you" or "watch your back", based on looking for enemy aircraft or missiles to the rear (6 o-clock position).
- **Chicken parade** - (SADF) Basically a clean up of an area, picking up papers, cigarette butts, and general refuse. In the navy this was known as 'skirmishing'. In this US military it is known as a police action.
- **Chocko** - (Australia) An Army Reservist. Pejorative term dating back to World War 2, used by Soldiers of the 2nd AIF to imply incompetence on the part of Reservists who in their view were 'Chocolate Soldiers', likely to melt at the first application of the 'heat of battle'.
- **Clutch plate** - (SADF) Slang term given to hamburger patties.
- **Clusterf\*\*k** - A disastrous situation that results from the cumulative errors of several people or groups. In semi-polite company this is referred to as a Charlie Foxtrot (from the NATO phonetic alphabet). Also used as a slang term to describe the area effect nature of artillery or cluster bombs.
- **COB** - (U.S. Navy) Chief of Boat. Senior enlisted man onboard a submarine, responsible for manning, training, order and discipline of the enlisted crew. This equates with the Command Master Chief (CMC) onboard a surface ship or shore unit. In this position, the man is often casually referred to passively and in-person as "COB".
- **Crap Hat** - (U.K.) SAS or Parachute Regiment describing other regiments in the British Army as less than elite, derived from the distinctive SAS and Parachute berets which are different in color to every other regiment.
- **Cuca shop** - (SADF) An illicit drinking house or shebeen com-

mon to Ovamboland in South West Africa. Often they were little more than a hut or corrugated iron shack. You could sometimes buy normal alcohol from a cuca shop, but most of the time it was home made beer that was made from Marula fruit. This home made beer was called Mahangu. Cuca shops were off limits to SADF troops, not that it ever stopped any of them.

- **Devil dodger** - (SADF) Slang term for padre.
- **Egyptian PT** - (U.K.) Sleeping, particularly during the day. Probably dates from World War II or before. The act of laying on your bed, with your arms crossed over your chest, just like an Egyptian mummy.
- **Elephant virgin** - (SADF) Slang term given to slices of polony.
- **Engine mountings** - (SADF) Slang term given to tinned braised Steak.
- **Extras** - Extra duties. A form of punishment.
- **Fig Jam** - “F\*\*\*k I’m Good, Just Ask Me” A nickname given to “that” Soldier who just thinks they know more than everyone.
- **Fish & Chips** - (UK) It most countries the term for urban warfare is FIBUA (Fighting In Built Up Areas). The British Army refers to it as ‘Fish & Chips’ (Fighting In Someone’s House, Causing Havoc In People’s Street).

- **FITFO** - (U.S.) “Figure it the f\*\*\*k out.”
- **Flossie** - (SADF) Slang term for the Hercules C-130 transport aircraft.
- **Fobbit** - (U.S.) Fairly new term used to describe Soldiers who do not go outside their Forward Operations Base (FOB) in Iraq, or a Soldier stationed in Iraq who has not seen combat. Derived from J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Hobbit*, a creature that didn’t like to leave the safety of their homes or “The Shire.”
- **Go kart** - (SADF) Slang term used for a twenty-man toilet. These were fibreglass toilet shells which were placed over a hole dug in the ground. They were mounted on wheels for easy movement.
- **Gone Elvis** - (U.S.) Missing in action.
- **Green Slime** - (U.K.) Intelligence Corps. Based on color of Beret combined with the Intelligence Corps’ sneaky and underhand warfare.
- **GTS** - (US Air Force) Google That Sh\*t. Used when asked a stupid or unknown answer to a question one could learn on their own by utilizing a popular search engine.
- **GV** - (SADF) A term used for someone who was very enthusiastic. It was short for the Afrikaans *Grens Vegter* or ‘border fighter’.
- **Gypo** - (SADF) Slang term for someone who was lazy. Also used

as a term for avoiding work.

- **HANO** - (U.S.) “High Altitude No Opening”, a parachute jump in which the parachute fails to open, Usually with fatal results. Play on “HAHO” and “HALO”.
- **Interflora** - (SADF) Derogatory term for a member of the Signals Corp. Their emblem of the winged figure of Mercury was also used by the national florists, Interflora.
- **Jollie patrollie** - (SADF) Used to denote any excursion or activity regarded as fun. Literal translation means ‘jolly patrol’.
- **Ivan** - (NATO countries) Generic term for Russians.
- **Maak dood** - (SADF) Term used to signify the end of a smoke break. Derived from the Afrikaans term ‘extinguish’ or ‘make dead’.
- **Mushroom** - (SADF) Used among the officers corps to denote a 2nd lieutenant. Like a mushroom they were kept in the dark and fed on sh\*t.
- **NAAFI** - (SADF) Slang expression used to denote a lack of motivation or interest. It stood for ‘No Ambition and F\*\*\*k-all Interest’.
- **Noddy Car** - (SADF) Slang expression for an Eland-60 armoured car.
- **Numpty** - (U.K., Canada) An individual who just doesn’t get it.
- **Olifant skilers** - (SADF) Slang term for Cornflakes (breakfast cereal). It is an Afrikaans expression

meaning ‘elephant dandruff’.

- **Ou man** - (SADF) Term used for a troop who only had a short time left of his national service. It is Afrikaans for ‘old man’.
- **O Dark Thirty** - (U.S.) Very early in the morning. Also known as O Dark Stupid and O Silly Hundred Hours.
- **Pille en brille** - (SADF) Slang expression for Com Ops.
- **Santa Maria** - (SADF) SADF issued underpants. Hardly every worn by the troops but rather used to polish floors or boots.
- **The States** - (SADF) A term used by those in the operational area to refer to South Africa. If someone was “going back to the States” they would be returning from South West Africa to South Africa. The term originated during Ops Savannah in 1975 when SA troops in Angola were trying to pass themselves off as American.
- **Suurstof dief** - (SADF) Derogatory term for those in non-combatant roles. Afrikaans expression meaning ‘oxygen thief’.
- **White gold** - (SADF) Slang expression for toilet paper.

Hope you remembered most of those, and learnt a few new ones.

# DOPPIE

DEUR  
JAN VREELAND

WAT HET JY TEEN  
'N BEKFLUITJIE OF  
IN KITAAR, DOPPIE?

