

FLYING SPIRIT



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The Official National Newsletter of the SAAF Association

NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

2015 was a tumultuous year in many ways, especially with regards to the national economic and political environments. In the military veterans environment it would appear as if the national body is still heavily biased towards those veteran organisations that have the necessary political alignment. Considering this situation, it needs to be asked how best the interests of the South African Air Force Association can be served in the coming year.

Several years ago the branches were asked whether the founding objectives of SAAFA were still valid and appropriate in these times. The response from the branches was extremely positive and it was agreed that the guiding apolitical principles of this seventy year old veteran organisation were sound and honourable. It would therefore stand to reason that SAAFA should maintain its approach and continue to act in the best interests of its members. At this stage it is still not clear whether SAAFA should continue to interact with the national body via the Council of Military Veteran Organisations or to conduct its business directly with the Department of Military Veterans.

While the SAAF is going through a tough time, its men and women continues to conduct effective operational duties inside and outside our borders. For this, the rank and file deserves our continued support, in the same way that we received such generous support from the older generation of SAAFA members when we were in service of the SAAF. The current more hands-on approach to the maintenance of the SAAF Memorial is bearing fruit and it will shortly be back in a condition that we can be proud of. We can seriously consider extending our support to memorials located at other SAAF bases and thereby demonstrate our commitment to honour the fallen to those SAAF members that are further removed from the main memorial.

In these difficult financial times it is obvious that those less fortunate will be hard pressed to make ends meet. Although the number of those receiving support from the branches is relatively small, a greater effort is required to raise funds needed to provide the support. It is pleasing to see that the concept of stronger branches supporting smaller branches, which was proposed some time ago, is taking place. This, with the annual support from the national executive illustrates that the decentralised model of benevolence has evolved into a more balanced composite model.

Although 2016 is likely to require more innovation and determination, it is clear that SAAFA is healthy and well positioned to take on the challenges of the coming years. I would like to thank the national executive and the branches for the support in the past year and trust that

we will tackle the coming year with the same spirit. I am looking forward to seeing the many delegates at the 71st Congress in May.

A B17 RETURNS FROM THE PAST¹

The wreck of a World War Two B-17 Flying Fortress has been discovered on the bottom of the sea off the Norfolk coast of England. Two divers discovered the remains, and since the discovery they have been back to investigate further. On dry land, meanwhile, the divers have been researching how the B-17 came to be at there.

From their discovery and investigation, Paul Hennessey and Mandy Frary believe that because the B-17's pilot and co-pilot acted with such bravery when the plane got into trouble, they saved nine of the aircraft's ten crewmen. They also may have saved the lives of civilians on the ground who could have been injured if the plane crashed on land instead of into the sea. The only person who died in the crash was the pilot, Captain Derrol Rogers.

Hennessey and Frary set about finding the wreck after retrieving coordinates from a fisherman who had spotted the wreck a few years ago. The wreck is sitting on the seabed around 20 metres below the water's surface. Previously it was thought to be a jet that crashed during the 1960s, but now the divers have confirmed that it is a World War Two B-17.

Fishermen have also provided information about the engines of a B-17 that were recovered in the nearby area during the 1970s. The engines are assumed to have been separated from the wings in the crash landing. The diving team have taken extensive underwater photographs of the site and were able to clarify the B-17's location and identify its serial number as 42-29752. It was based out of RAF Snetterton Heath.

The Story of the Crash

This is quite incredible, and probably a reflection of many stories from World War II that have been left untold:

On May 13, 1943, Capt. Rogers and his crew prepared for their first mission at the start of their combat tour.



B-17 Flying Fortress 42-29752 with its right horizontal stabiliser missing

They were to attack the Luftwaffe airfield at St Omer, France – but things went wrong straight away as the 22 aircraft taxied for take-off.

Two planes veered off the runway and the lead aircraft had to abort over Spalding because of an oxygen leak in the ball turret. The rest followed their leader back to base – except for B-17 42-29752.²

Pilot, Capt. Rogers, had been on a roll of bad luck. Two days earlier his original aircraft, "Miss Poisonality", had damaged a wing in a collision with a contractor's truck on the airfield and was being repaired.

¹ Recognition to: American Air Museum (www.americanairmuseum.com) which is owned by the Board of Trustees of the Imperial War Museums ("IWM").

² Its fate is recorded in the book "Snetterton Falcons", written by Geoff Ward, from Diss, and Robert Doherty, a veteran of the 96th.

Lt Joe Hudson, who was the navigator on board 42-29752, later wrote of the tragedy: “We had been warned about the possibility of being attacked while we were taking off or landing. Consequently, our machine guns were charged. When Capt. Rogers banked the ship, the right waist gun discharged about 50 rounds, severing the right horizontal stabiliser. By great flying skill Capt. Rogers and his co-pilot, Lt Norville Gorse, managed to correct the stall.”

The scattering bullets had also injured two of the crew, waist gunner Sgt Edwin Wolfekule, and tail gunner Sgt Edward Youngers.

The aircraft’s yoke – steering column – was pushed as far forward as possible but, with a missing stabiliser, it still continued to climb. Rogers and Gorse struggled to keep the plane steady, tying cords to the yoke which gave them enough control to fly back over the airfield where six of the crew bailed out safely. The injured Sgt Youngers had been hit in the spine so a rope was tied to his rip-cord before he was thrown out, enabling his parachute to open without his intervention.

Rogers and Gorse then bravely flew out over the Wash to jettison their bombs away from people before turning back, over land, so that the bombardier and navigator could bail out safely, near King’s Lynn.

Next, the hero pilot and co-pilot took their crippled plane back out to sea to ditch it away from built-up areas.

They both bailed out somewhere off Blakeney and the plane disappeared beneath the waves to be discovered 72 years later by the North Norfolk Divers team.

Lt Gorse was picked up by an RAF rescue launch and lived to fight another day but sadly, Capt. Rogers was in the freezing North Sea for some time before Sheringham Lifeboat “Forester’s Centenary” found him, unconscious. He did not survive and is buried in the American military cemetery, at Madingley, near Cambridge.

AVIATION MONUMENT RESTORED³

The long-awaited unveiling of the refurbished Goodman-Houshold aviation monument took place in Karkloof Valley at Demagtenburg recently (7 November 2015), attended by throngs of guests and aviation enthusiasts.



Note the correct spelling should be “Houshold”. Arrie is in the process of correcting this.

The initiative was at the behest of local retired SAA pilot Arnold (Arrie) de Klerk, who’d been stirred by the tale of the first man to fly in South Africa.

The official opening was by done by the president of SAAFA Maj. Gen. (ret) Hugh Paine SM MMM.

John Goodman Houshold is believed to be the first man to fly a glider in about 1871, on the farm called Der Magtenburg in the Karkloof Valley.

Apparently the young man used calico, light wood and

reeds for his gliders construction. His first flight was from a hill near the family farm. His crash landing didn’t deter him; although the wings were in pieces and no bones were broken. It’s said he later made a second flight, but this time broke a leg in the resultant

crash landing. He apparently destroyed the glider upon his parents insistence that he “cut out that damned fool flying stuff” before he got himself killed!

³ Adapted from an article from Village Talk, 20 November 2015 by Peta Lee.

In 1995, the Lion's River Heritage society, Howick Museum National Council, Mondi Forests, SAPPI, the SAAFA and the RAFA, erected a stone memorial, encircled by a fence as a tribute to the "First Glider Flight". On an out-of-the-way dirt road, with few interested parties passing by, weeds slowly took over the monument and eventually, it became all but invisible.

But then members of the SAAFA and SAPPI, began restoring the monument. Arnold de Klerk, past president of SAAFA, country vice president of SAAFA KZN and senior retired captain of SAA, drove the project, and at the unveiling of the refurbished monument Arrie said that Housholds memory should be preserved and celebrated. His sentiments were shared by many willing parties who contributed their time and efforts to the restoration job. Donations were received from different branches of the SAAFA, helping to pay for the costly signposting to the monument.



"It's an important piece of history, not just for the area, but for South Africa," said de Klerk. "Who knows where Houshold might have gone with his inventiveness had his mother not thrown up her hands in horror at his escapades?"

Well done Arrie for your great service to aviation in South Africa and the success of this project.

THE EVOLUTION OF SAAFA'S MEMBERSHIP

Message from the National President

The original membership of SAAFA was based on those servicemen and their dependents that had been involved in the Second World War. Less than a decade later there were SAAF members that served in the Korean War. Although the scale of operations was vastly different, there were many similarities in the types of air operations in these two conflicts. Following the Korean War there was a period of approximately twenty years before the SAAF was again involved in a substantial conflict, namely the Bush War. This conflict was to continue for over twenty years. With the political changes in the mid-nineties, the SAAF became increasingly involved in peace keeping operations in Africa and more lately, peace enforcement operations. This phase of the SAAF's history has continued for the past twenty years.

From the above it can be said that the SAAF has been involved in three distinct types of air operations in the seventy years of the existence of SAAFA namely, WW II/Korean War, the Bush War and African Peace keeping/enforcement operations. If one considers the makeup and experiences of SAAF members associated with these three groupings, it could be said that SAAFA has three distinct generations of members. While it is obvious that many members have overlapping experiences, these groupings can be useful in identifying the needs of SAAFA members. For example, the financial support systems that are available to the latest generation of SAAFA members are vastly different to those that were available to the first generation members.

This better understanding of the different needs and interests can be very useful in many ways. The task of running the association has in most cases moved from the first generation membership to the second generation membership. This second generation leadership needs to appreciate the makeup of their specific branch membership to remain relative and the needs of the latest generation to be able to attract new younger members. Branches that resist the change from the older leadership to the younger leadership are very likely to

alienate this generation, which in turn can lead to the demise of that branch. It is also possible that some proposed changes to the membership criteria are subtle attempts to retain a specific membership makeup rather than adapt to the changing makeup of members.

Over the years SAAFA has expanded the original objectives that had led to the establishment of the association. This can also be ascribed to the evolution of the membership and the shift in some of the needs that motivate people to become members of the association. Identifying the needs of current branch members in terms of the SAAFA objectives is the key to a branch continuing to be relevant to its members. Understanding the needs of the next generation in terms of the SAAFA objectives is the foundation of the SAAFA Recruitment Plan, whereby the association is attractive to the next generation.

Human nature is extremely diverse, but where there are commonalities and these are helpful in giving the association's leadership a better understanding, it is sensible to make use of this information. The makeups of the membership of the various SAAFA branches are also very diverse and it is therefore essential that each branch analyse and cater for its specific environment if it is to be successful.

Please review the National Presidents thoughts for discussion at Congress 2016. Ed.

SAAFA CONGRESS 2016



Congress 2016 will be held in Knysna at the “*Simola Golf & Country Estate*” from the 26th to 29th May 2016. The cost for the 4 days and 3 nights is R 2,100 per person, all included. Members may spend extra days at a cost of R 450 pp + breakfast per night in the 5 Star Hotel.





The Ladies Tours are to The Knysna Elephant Park followed by a lunch at the Knysna Yacht Club on the Friday. On the Saturday the ladies will go to the Market in Sedgefield. Transport from the Airport for all delegates flying into George or arriving by coach will be arranged.

Golf will be available each day.

IMPORTANT DATES TO DIARISE

Event	Date
SAAF/SAAFA Memorial Service	16 May 2016
SAAFA Congress	26 to 29 May 2016

TAIL PIECE

A guy walked into a crowded bar, waving a Colt automatic and yelled "I have a .45 Colt with an eight shot clip and I want to know who's been screwing my wife?"

A voice from the back of the room called out...

"You'll need more ammo!"

Please send any contributions to the Editor:

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