

FLYING SPIRIT



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The Official National Newsletter of the SAAF Association

MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT

2016 has seen a number of interesting heritage events unfolding. The first has been some very positive progress in the Blenheim project. On the night of 23 Jul 42 Blenheim Z7763 from RAF 72 OTU in Nanyuki, Kenya, with four SAAF crew on board went missing on a training flight. The crew were 2Lt. Charles Herbert Allen (pilot), 2Lt Hendrik Jacobus Petrus Lemmer (observer), Air Sgt. Simon Eliastam (wireless operator and air gunner) and Air Sgt. Lloyd Murray (wireless operator and air gunner). Despite extensive searches the aircraft was not found. In 2002 a poacher discovered the wreck and reported it to the authorities. He later led members of a British Army training group to the crash site on Mount Kenya, which was located in a very dense bamboo forest at about 10,000 ft. It took the team about 9 hours to cover just under 5 kms. Although they recovered the remains of the crew, they were instructed by their HQ not to remove them from the crash site, so they were reburied.

At the time it was not possible to locate any of the next of kin of the aircrew. In 2015 the next of kin of 2nd Lt Bokkie Lemmer requested the Ebo Trust's assistance in returning the remains of Lt Lemmer. The Ebo Trust was formed to repatriate the remains of the Ebo Four from Angola, which included two SAAF members. After a number of years and a number of physical visits they were successful in repatriating three of the members from Angola and have gained huge experience in how these matters need to be dealt with. Over the past year retired Maj Gen Opperman of the Ebo Trust has made great progress in liaising with the various authorities and getting the assistance of the British Army and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to recover the remains of the aircrew for eventual reburial in one of the Commonwealth War Grave sites in Kenya. An international treaty prevents the repatriation of remains to their home country. In August this year a final effort was launched to trace the next of kin and thanks to modern social media all four families were traced. In mid-October the British Army Training Unit sent a reconnaissance team to locate and accurately mark the position of the wreck, unfortunately due to the very dense vegetation they were unable to locate it. At the end of October an expedition was launched and they successfully located the wreck, but were unable to find the buried remains. Although the reburial has been scheduled for January 2017, it is not clear at this stage whether another expedition will be attempted or whether there will be a token burial with the various items and soil that was recovered during the latest expedition. As this saga draws to an end it must be very comforting to the families of these SAAF aircrew to know a lot more about the circumstances that lead to their demise.

The second heritage event during the year was a memorial in September for the passengers and SAAF crew of Puma 164 that was shot down on 6 September 1979 near Mapai in

Mozambique. Due to the fact that a Rhodesia Air Force Bell helicopter had been shot down the previous day, Puma 164 crewed by Capt Paul Velleman, Lt Nigel Osborne and Sgt Dirk Retief was tasked as a replacement for the operation into Mozambique. On the approach to the target it was hit by a RPG rocket and was seen to dive into the ground and was consumed by the subsequent fire. Although ground forces were dispatched very quickly to the crash site it was obvious that all the crew and passengers had been killed on impact. Unfortunately due to the close proximity of hostile forces it was not possible to recover the remains.

In April 2009 Rick van Malsen and his team undertook an expedition to Mozambique to locate the wreck site of Puma 164 and to erect a suitable memorial to the aircrew and soldiers that lost their lives. After a very successful expedition the team set about making contact with all the next of kin. This was the first time that the next of kin became aware of the real circumstances of how their loved ones lost their lives. Several other expeditions were later undertaken to the crash site in Mozambique. All the events around Puma 164 have been documented in the book "*The Search for Puma 164*" by Neill Jackson and Rick van Malsen.

On 3 September this year the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI) Regimental Association conducted a memorial service in Johannesburg to honour the men that lost their lives in Puma 164. SAAFA was represented by the National President and a wreath was laid. It is planned that this will be an annual event.

In line with one of SAAFA's main objectives, namely to honour those that have paid the supreme sacrifice in service of our country, it is a privilege to be involved with both of these events. As the year draws to a close we can all look back over the past year and reflect on the valuable contributions that our Branches make to improving the lives of those in need. I would also like to use this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Branches and the National Executive for their untiring efforts to make it possible for SAAFA to support its members. May we all enjoy the approaching festive season and use the time to appreciate the true value of family and friends.

CAMARADERIE

By Trevor Slade

The First Pillar on which the South African Air Force Association is founded reads thus, "Maintains and fosters Friendship and Camaraderie among all its Members and persons eligible for membership."

The French word "Camaraderie" (also "comradery") was first used in the early 19th Century and means a feeling of closeness and friendship that exists between companions especially between soldiers that have experienced the crucible of combat together.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the South African Air Force Association was created and established on the 26th January 1945 by comrades who had been in combat together and wanting this same camaraderie to continue. The Members of SAAFA have, since that time, strived to maintain and sustain this ethos of a camaraderie that would, (2nd Pillar) Ensure the support and care of needy Members; to (3rd Pillar) Perpetuate the memory of those who gave their lives in service to their country and to (4th Pillar) Promote the interests, image and history of both the SAAFA and the SAAF.

The word "Camaraderie" conjures up meanings and synonyms like brotherhood, fellowship, community, goodwill, harmony, concord, generosity, compassion, empathy, devotion, loyalty, reliability, courage and benevolence (which means "the desire to do good"). A word opposite to the meaning of Camaraderie is loneliness. Other words like deserted, abandoned, rejected and expelled come to mind.

In SAAFA the Members share that spirit of brotherhood, harmony, loyalty and benevolence. Our values, ethics, commitment, reliability and courage point us to "*Maintain Camaraderie*

among All our Members". None of us are perfect and we all fall short of the ideals mentioned above. But what is important is that we strive to share one another's burdens, weaknesses and failures; to stand together and support one another in a world that strives to break down and destroy.



I am reminded of the heart wrenching stories General Denis Earp told of his time of incarceration in North Korea. In Crow Stannard's book, "*Beyond the Edge of the Sky*", General Earp tells of the Death March to Camp 5 on the Yulu River and how he and his COMRADES supported each other through pain, sickness and the constant threat of death. This is true Camaraderie in action.

The example that Denis Earp and his fellow Prisoners of War set in Korea and, indeed, the stories of camaraderie that we ourselves have experienced in Military (and Civilian) service to this day, must be reflected in the way we support our fellow SAAFA Members when there is need of any kind and our loyalty,

forgiveness and compassion expected.

Lofty words set in the Pillars of our Association are meaningless unless the reality of those words can be seen in our actions.

The Benevolence Portfolio of the NEC would encourage every Branch and every Member of SAAFA to make the deepest understanding of the word, "CAMARADERIE", a reality in all that we do and in the companionship we enjoy with every Member of our Association. May we continue striving for that ideal that will make our Association a jewel in the lives of us all.

THE EVOLUTION OF SAAFA'S MEMBERSHIP

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 become 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.

WHO IS "THE LITTLE QUEEN MAUREEN?"

By Christel de Wit with Vernon Oosthuizen and Colin Trader

Meeting Maureen – the only woman in the world to have four, WW 2, Liberator Heavy Bomber aircraft named after her.

In January 1944, Sergeant William Nienaber, a member of the newly formed 31 Squadron SAAF departed from Durban, South Africa for Egypt and later from there to the Celone Aerodrome, just north of Foggia, Italy. For most of 1944 and 1945 the only two South African Air Force Heavy Bomber Squadrons (31 and 34 Squadron) were based at Celone, for war operations against the German forces.



Little Maureen, the Queen, as a baby

The Squadrons were under 2 Wing SAAF, which in turn was under command of the 205 Group RAF with the South African, Brigadier Jimmy Durrant CB DFC, in charge.

Air Mechanic, Colin Trader (92), who was an Airframes Fitter in 31 Sqn SAAF says: *"Shortly after our arrival there, we were handed the first of 4 American Consolidated Vultee B-24J (Mark VI) Liberator Heavy Bomber aircraft. It had the call-letter Q as part of its identification marking. Sergeant Nienaber (Sarge Willem, as he was known to his crew), asked if we (the ground crew) would mind naming the aircraft after his 6-month old baby daughter, Maureen. We of course had no objection to this and so it came to be that this*

Liberator was named The Little Queen Maureen."

In her wake followed 3 more Q Liberators for 31 Sqn and they were respectively named *The Little Queen II / III / IV Maureen*. Each one meeting its sad fate before the next was delivered to Sgt Nienaber and Colin Trader's crew. *The Little Queen IV Maureen* was the only one to survive the war and after VE day she flew supply support and troop transport to bring the Allied troops back to Egypt for their final journey home.

Christel de Wit whose father, Air Corporal Chris de Wit was a fitter/armourer in 31 Squadron SAAF, has been researching the history of 31/34 Sqn and 2 Wing and found Colin Trader, one of the few remaining 31 Sqn veterans, and subsequently Colin has been her great help in understanding life in the squadron. About three years ago, Colin asked Christel if she could find out what had happened to Sergeant Nienaber and his daughter Maureen, who by now could be married with a different surname.

The only lead was an old 1944 address in Johannesburg, as per the service record of Sgt Nienaber. With perseverance and the help of others, Christel found that sadly, Sgt Nienaber had passed away in Durban, but he had left behind a married daughter called Maureen van Zyl.



The Little Queen II Maureen.
Sgt Nienaber is on the far left and Colin Trader is on the far right.

Christel says: "In December 2013 I called Colin, saying your wish is fulfilled, our Little Queen Maureen has been found, and here is her number, I think you should be the one to call her."

Colin contacted Maureen and told her the story of how the 4 Liberators came to be named after her. Maureen was overwhelmed when told that she was the only woman in the world that had – not 1 – but 4 Liberator Heavy Bombers

named after her.

Maureen had known that there was a Liberator named after her, as her dad had shown her photos when she was a child, but never put a further thought to it, in her later life. Her joy at speaking first with Colin and then Christel was worth every moment it took to do the research and find her.

In July/August 2014 Colin and Christel went to the 70th Commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising in Poland and paid special tribute by visiting the crash site of the first *The Little Queen Maureen* Liberator EV 941 Q, which had flown supplies to the Polish Home Army in August 1944, before it was shot down by a Luftwaffe night-fighter over the village of Luborzyca in southern Poland. They visited the memorial to the crew in the Luborzyca cemetery and also the war graves of the 8 crew members in the Rakowicki War Cemetery in Krakow.

At the Polish War museum in Warsaw, they were able to see large sections of the fuselage of *The Little Queen Maureen* (including the section with the name) that had been preserved years after the crash.

At the Luborzyca cemetery Colin was touching the familiar propeller blades of *The Little Queen Maureen* after 70 years. The actual props are today the main feature of the memorial, carefully tended by the Polish people. These were very emotional moments.

Upon his return to South Africa, Colin recounted this story to the people attending the annual SA Air Force Memorial Service, held at St Paul's Anglican Church in Parsons Hill, Port Elizabeth. He expressed a wish, to one day, be able to meet Maureen.

Well, as fate would have it, Maureen came to Port Elizabeth three months later to visit family and they met, and so it would be, that some 70 years after Colin first played a part in marking their 31 Sqn ground crew's first assigned Liberator as *The Little Queen Maureen*, he would come face to face with the lady after whom these planes were named.¹

PAYMENT OF PRIVATE MEDICAL ACCOUNTS BY THE REGULAR FORCE MEDICAL CONTINUATION FUND (RFMCF)

Recently it came to our attention that some private medical practitioners and pharmacists in outlying areas more than 50km from Military Medical Facilities are demanding payments upfront from VPA members for the provision of services as they allege that the RFMCF is not forthcoming with monies owed. This was followed up with the Management of the RFMCF and they responded that VPA members are to be requested to ensure that the suppliers forward the accounts to the correct address as indicated on the DD2703 authorisation letter. Form DD2703 comprises two pages, the first page indicating the address of the issuing authority and the second page indicating the address of the payment authority to which the account must be forwarded.

In many instances the suppliers forward the accounts for payment incorrectly to the issuing authority (normally the local Area Military Health Unit) instead of directly to the payment authority (the RFMCF). This inevitably results in delays in payments. The RFMCF is committed to ensuring that all accounts are settled within 30 days of receipt.

TAIL PIECE

Children's Logic:

"Give me a sentence about a public servant," said a teacher.

The small boy wrote:

"The fireman came down the ladder pregnant."

The teacher took the lad aside to correct him. "Don't you know what pregnant means?" she asked.

"Sure," said the young boy confidently. "It means carrying a child."

Please send any contributions to the Editor:

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¹ In Memory of the Crew of EV 941 Q *The Little Queen Maureen* who were killed in action, 17 August 1944:

Capt L C Allen; Lt A J Munro; Lt W Klokow; Lt E B H Impey; WO1 D B Brandsma; WO1 D J Palmer all SAAF and WO E Bradshaw (RAF VR); Sgt J R W Nickerson (RAF)

Research request: A unique database has been compiled for 2 Wing and 31 Sqn and 34 SAAF 1944-1945 and if you know anyone who served in the above squadrons please come into contact with Christel de Wit on christelznc@gmail.com so that all information can be captured on the database. All original material will always remain with the Veterans and their families and only scans reside in the database.