

# FLYING SPIRIT

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## Tracy Curtis-Taylor – Cape Town To Goodwood, United Kingdom Flight

Towards the end of 2013, it became known that a lady aviator, Tracey Curtis-Taylor, was intending flying a 1942 Boeing Stearman, "Spirit of Artemis", from Cape Town to Goodwood in the UK. This was to recreate and commemorate the first ever flight of a light aircraft between South Africa and England in 1928 by Lady Mary Heath.

Largely forgotten today, Mary Heath was for a few years in the late 1920's one of the most famous women in the world, whose life was a succession of pioneering firsts. Having spent 2 years as a dispatch rider and ambulance driver during World War 1, she pioneered women's athletics in Britain (setting world records in the javelin and high jump in the process) and helped to introduce women's track and field items to the Olympics.

Turning her attention to flying, she became the first woman in Britain to obtain a commercial pilot's license; was the first woman in the world to parachute from an aircraft; became an airline pilot; and in 1928, the first person, male or female, to fly a light aircraft, an Avro Avian Biplane, from South Africa to the UK.



*Tracey Curtis-Taylor and her Boeing Stearman "Spirit of Artemis"*

Daan Badenhorst approached NEC regarding an idea Cape Town Branch had which was to hand, on behalf of the SAAF Association, suitably appropriate Philatelic First-Day covers to Tracey Curtis-Taylor which she would carry with her to Goodwood, and which it was decided, would be handed to the Master of the Guild of Air Pilots and Navigators (GAPAN), The Honourable Mr Justice Tudor Owen. The SAAFA National Executive were fully supportive of the Cape Town Branch initiative, and so it was that John Heath, Chairman of the Cape Town Branch, met with Tracey and ceremoniously handed her the covers for a most unusual air-mail carriage to England.



***John Heath, Chairman of Cape Town Branch, handing Tracey Curtis-Taylor the air mail covers.***

Born in the UK, Tracey Curtis –Taylor spent her early childhood in Canada before moving to New Zealand where she began to fly in earnest completing her PPL and Commercial licenses complete with instructor's rating. Tracey worked for 3 years as a flying instructor before working for an aerial photography and surveying company for a period of 6 years, during which time she joined up with the NZ War birds and started to fly old aeroplanes with a host of former military pilots. She returned to the UK permanently in 1997 where she works with the Historic Aviation and Air Show organisations, previously at Duxford and now with the Shuttleworth Collection.

Tracey's aircraft " Spirit Of Artemis " is a Boeing Stearman powered by a 300 HP Lycoming radial engine, a survivor from the 8 500 built during the 1930's and early 1940's, used by the U.S. military to train U.S. Army Air Force and U.S. Navy pilots.

The Stearman has been refurbished to an incredibly high standard and is quite magnificent to look at and, by all accounts, flies like a dream.

As many of us will now know, the trip proceeded without incident, apart from some weather delays, and the usual clearance problems that are part and parcel of aviation in Africa!

Certainly the mail Tracey carried to the UK for SAAFA were transported in unique manner, what a fine initiative by SAAFA Cape Town, and what an unusual way in which to bring attention to our Association!

## **Warrant Officer II D.G. Emslie Force Number 581341V (Article by Stanford and Gordon Long)**

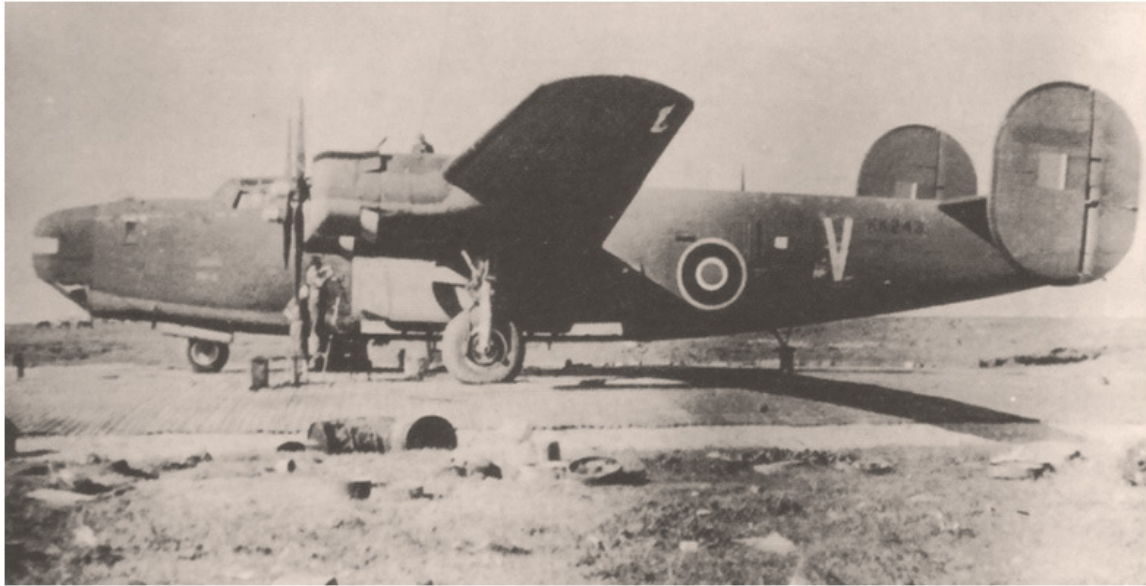
Desmond Garth Emslie was still a young lad when he went off to war. After joining the South African Air Force (SAAF) he gained his Air Gunner's half wing and returned to his home at Lovedale near Alice before going up North. With his cloths all washed, ironed and neatly marked by his mother's hand and packed, he was ready to return to duty after his short vacation.

Des was finally posted to 34 Squadron in the SAAF which was in the process of moving to Italy. On 5<sup>th</sup> July 1944 the squadron Liberators started ferrying ground personnel and squadron equipment to Italy from Almanza. On 21<sup>th</sup> July with the majority of the main ground staff still in transit at Bari the squadron was tasked to provide four bombers that night for an attack on the Fanto oil refinery at Pardubice in Czechoslovakia. This put the few unprepared 34 squadron members already in Celone, the new airbase, under severe stress,. The almost impossible was achieved and four heavily laden bombers and crew took off at 20H00. Unfortunately, though not surprising, under the circumstances, one aircraft developed engine trouble shortly after take-off and was forced to abandon mission, to be followed soon after by a second with electrical malfunctions. Yet a third had to turn back after accidently jettison its bomb load, leaving EW167'B to be swallowed up by hostile darkness in its quest to complete what now become a very precarious and lonely mission. Undeterred at the helm, Lt K.A Patton and his crew Lt's N. Cooney, T.R. van Graan, F.A. van Rensburg and WO D.G. Emslie unwaveringly pressed on. Liberator EW167'B was never to return.

To great anguish Desmond's parents received the dreaded notification of their son posted as "MISSING IN ACTION", as too was the case with the rest of the crew. It was Desmond's first raid over enemy territory. There was always hope for his return, undying hope, but the war ended and still his status remained unchanged. It came later to light that EW167'B, on its return from bombing the target, was shot down by Luftwaffe night fighters, and crashed in flames in the Austrian mountains near Liethaberge. The victims were buried in a communal grave at the remote site by peasant farmers and never reported it.

The crash site was discovered in 1947. Of the remains exhumed, Pilot Lt Patton and WO Emslie were the only two positively identified on site, the pilot by his rank insignia and Des by his name marked on the handkerchief retrieved from his pocket.

Finally confirmed, "KILLED IN ACTION 22 JULY 1944" and buried with his crew in the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery Klagenfurt, Plot 5, Row D, Grave 14, at the age of 19 years. So putting to rest, for him and his comrades, their loved one's years of torment, but not their grief.



#### ***Liberator Bomber***

I visited the grave yard in Klagenfurt on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1968. It was a beautiful scene with ground covered in pure white snow and the grave stones, simple white slabs, stood neat in rows, as if on military parade. And there, in that foreign land, I probably made what was the closest contact I ever had with Desmond – a moving experience.

**AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN AND IN THE MORNING WE WILL REMEMBER THEM**

### **SAAFA Battlefield Visit (Capt B.D. Skarda)**



On Tuesday 11 September 2012, 15 Squadron had the privilege of treating the local SAAFA members to an outing to Spioenkop near Ladysmith.

The battle of Spioenkop was one of the biggest and bloodiest of the Anglo-Boer war in the early 1900's. 3 Oryx's and a BK117 were used to transport the 40 odd SAAFA members to the site. Mr Ken Gillings, a well-respected military history enthusiast, provided a very detailed and informative narrative on the battle. Mr Gillings kicked off his talk by providing background information on the events leading up to the battle of Spioenkop. This was done by way of a briefing at 15 Squadron before departing.



On arriving the story was continued, although this time the actual “lie of the land” could be appreciated as Mr Gillings took us step by step through the battle. The temperature on the day was in the mid 30's and it is a testament to the fitness of “those that went before us” that they were able to keep up with the tour. A very interesting fact about this particular battle is that at some point during the conflict 3 very important men were all on this small little hill in Kwazulu-Natal. Sir Winston Churchill, General Louis Botha and Mahatma Gandhi were all present at the Battle of Spioenkop in some or other capacity. It is sobering to think of how the course of history may have been altered had any of those 3 men been killed.



The mess of AFB Durban provided an excellent packed lunch and a much-needed rest was taken in the shade of the main monument on top of the hill before concluding the tour and heading back to Durban. It is always an honour to interact with the SAAFA members and to see the passion for the Air Force that seems to still burn so deeply in them all these years later. These men and women served in very different times and are always an excellent source of old "war stories". Hopefully there will be many more opportunities to give a little back to all these members who have given so much to the SAAF.

## DECORATION FOR BRAVERY

Honouring true South African heroes - this is Flight Sergeant Vinesh Selvan, the first South African of Indian decent to be awarded a decoration for bravery.

He received the decoration for saving the life of an SANDF Special Forces Officer during 'Operation Fibre' in Burundi during February 2002

The decoration, part of the new set for bravery - the "Nkwe Ya Selefera - Silver Leopard" was received in recognition of conspicuous bravery during Military Operations. It was medal issue No. 001, so he was also the first recipient of this decoration.

Congratulations Sgt Selvan, your fellow brothers in arms salute you.



## COMPLACENCY, COMPLEXITY POSE PROBLEMS IN PILOT TRAINING (by Keith Campbell)

While the huge increase in automation in commercial aircraft in recent decades has greatly improved safety and accuracy, some unexpected and unintended consequences have emerged. These are leading to changes in how airline pilots are being trained.

“Pilots have not been properly trained to operate highly automated aircraft,” noted Comair crew resource management specialist Michael Bowyer (himself a pilot). “Inadequate crew knowledge of automated systems was a factor in more than 40% of accidents and 30% of serious incidents between 2001 and 2009.”

Automation should not be confused with fly-by-wire (FBW). Automation ranges from basic autopilots to full Flight Management Systems (FMSes). FBW replaces mechanical links from flight controls to flying surfaces with electronic links. Today, airliners can be flown manually (whether using FBW or mechanical systems), or by basic autopilot, or by FMS.

Two problems that have emerged with high levels of automation on airliners are “automation complacency” and “automation complexity”. The former results in pilots abdicating too much responsibility to the automated systems. The latter makes it difficult for the pilots to be “within the loop”. The increase in complexity can be illustrated by the comparison between the previous- generation C-130H Hercules, which had 60 aural warnings, and the new-generation C-130J Hercules II, which has 780 such warnings: an increase of 13 times.

Information overload can be a problem. A study has shown that pilots in complex all-electronic “glass cockpits” often scan their instruments in a disorganised manner, leaving out key instruments (this was not the case in the old days of analogue and mechanical instruments). “Is technology driving the captain, or serving the captain?” he queried.

“Automation may perform in ways that are unexpected, unintended and inexplicable to the pilot, leading to accidents,” he pointed out. “A small inconvenience can escalate into a desperate struggle to save the aircraft.” In consequence, the Royal Canadian Air Force has developed the concept of “automation airmanship”. This integrates traditional technical skills and human factor skills with automation, automation being defined as all the technology the pilot has to operate. Automation, previously subsumed under technical skills, has been separated out as a distinct skill, owing to its importance and complexity.

Automation is changing the manner in which flight crews interact with their aircraft and the means by which the aircraft communicates with its pilots. The aircrew need to use the appropriate techniques to avoid information overload and keep their eyes on the right information at the right time.

“Maybe we need to train crews to be assertive with automation,” suggested Bowyer. That is, train them to have the confidence to switch off the automated systems and fly manually, or opt only to use the basic autopilot and not the full FMS, depending on the circumstances. “All the technology in the world can’t replace a good captain,” he highlighted, quoting master mariner John Konrad.

“We are training pilots, not button-pushing system operators,” he affirmed. “Comair is changing its training system. We are in the process – I think it’s working very well at the moment.”

Bowyer was speaking at the 1<sup>st</sup> South African Symposium on Human Factors and Aviation, at Boksburg, east of Johannesburg.

## Inquiry about Colin David Blackwood

I am the older brother of Colin David Blackwood Hojem who went missing on 7 November 1999 and is presumed dead. I don’t think the police closed the file on his disappearance, but, after continuous inquiries to them by especially my sister and on occasion by myself over a period of 18 months, we decided that it was very draining and not worth pursuing. However, this enquiry is not to try and find him (or what happened to him), but rather, to find out whether you may have any record of his two years of national service in the South African Air Force (SAAF).

All I know is that he did his two years what I think was 1979/80. He did an officer’s course at AFB Hoedspruit but was unsuccessful. I actually think he was asked to leave the course due to some improper behaviour and spent his second year as a batman for a major operating out of military (or air force) headquarters in the main Pretoria CBD. I don’t think he did any camps and do know that there was confusion at times between him and another Colin Hojem (this was my father’s name, too, who served in 2 Squadron during WWII) and my father’s cousin’s son who was also Colin Hojem. I think the latter was targeted by the military police at times as they were mistaking him for CDBH, who I think was supposed to report for camps.

So, do you have any records at all as I am trying to piece together some family history and I would value any information that you may have in your database regarding men who served in the SAAF during the late 70’s and possibly 1980 and in particular, the actual dates.

I do not know David’s force number but should have started with 77. Information whether he qualified for any medals will be welcomed? Also, your record may even show a group photo of the course he was on at AFB Hoedspruit. Any such information will be very much appreciated.

Many thanks Warwick Hojem

Auckland, New Zealand

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