

COASTAL STRIKE

by

Colonel John Clements DFC (Ret)

with

Graeme Gibson

Colonel John Clements DFC (Ret), together with SAAFA's Historical Officer, Graeme Gibson, have pleasure in announcing the publication of "COASTAL STRIKE". This is the story of John Clements, affectionately known as "Clem" to all those who served with him in the SA Air Force and the RAF. It deals with the period of his service from April Fool's Day 1940 till the end of the war in Europe in May 1945.

The tale leads from Clem's pupil pilot training in the Rhodesian Air Training Group, to his secondment to the RAF in Scotland and subsequent posting to 227 Squadron (RAF) flying Bristol Beau fighters from the besieged island of Malta.

It was a fateful night in 1942 that was Clem and his observer down over Sicily. They became POW's of the Italians and it was only in 1943 that he managed to escape in the confusion of the Italian surrender. He successfully returned to the Allied lines. He completed his tour with 16 Squadron, SAAF, again flying Beau fighters, but the more potent Mark X equipped with rocket projectiles. As a Flight Commander in this fine Squadron he participated in leading many offensive sweeps off the Greek Coast and the Aegean Sea before being returned to the Union.

By 1945 he had been posted back to 16 Squadron, now operating in Italy as part of the Balkan Air Force that was tasked with support to Tito's Partisans. This Squadron was led by the remarkable Eric Lewis DSO DFC and Clem arrived to replace in as the war ended. Post war he continued to serve in the SAAF till his retirement with the rank of Colonel in 1986.

Clem's easy style of writing gives the reader a wonderful insight into those times without detracting from the grim nature of the conflict that the Democracies were engaged in. Indeed through his story, it is easy to see why, when questioned, all those who served with him, without exception, recall with great affection this wonderful man.

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