

FLYING SPIRIT

The Official National Newsletter of the SAAF Association

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Friends for Life

Lt Gen, then Lt Dennis Earp, a 2 Squadron Mustang Pilot was captured in North Korea by enemy forces on 27 September 1951 when he parachuted into enemy territory after his aircraft was shot down.

Major, then Sgt David Sharp; who was attached to the United Nations Partisan Forces under the command of the United Nations Tactical Intelligence Liaison Office in Korea, was wounded and captured at the Battle of the Imjin River in June 1951.

They both ended up in the same Prisoner of War (POW) Camp (Camp No 2) after both were detained in the notorious POW Interrogation Camp, Pakh's Palace.

They met early in 1953, five months before being released. Maj Sharp has the dubious privilege of being the last British POW to be handed over by the Chinese on 06 September 1953.

These two gentlemen are still good friends after all these years. Major Sharp has endless gratitude towards Lt Gen Earp for his support while being in the POW Camp.

In the photograph below are Lt Gen Dennis Earp and Major David Sharp 61 years later at the annual SAAF Association Banquet. It is wonderful to see the close bond between these two Korean War Veterans after all these years.



Lt D.J. Earp

Friends for life

Maj D. Sharp

That made me feel good about the SAAF— (Col Dries Ferreira SA Army (Ret))

These complements were received from Dries Ferreira of Hallsville, United States. Both stories made an ever lasting impression on him. It goes about the South African Air Force (SAAF) commitment till the end of the war and their contribution towards nature conservation. The bush war dragged towards its end and the United Nations were deployed to enforce a cease fire.

The Dakota with a flat rear tyre

1 April 1989, 21:00, dark as pitch at Air Force Base Grootfontein in South West Africa (Now Namibia). The enemy crossed the border that morning and as expected, back to business and we need to go, pronto! To hell with UNTAG.

A request from Air Force Base Ondangwa for R4 rifles with 5.56 ammo came late afternoon. 16 Maintenance Group responded in a flash. A Samil 100 logistic vehicle was loaded with both items on the list, off to the airfield to a dark silhouette of a Dakota (DC3). Start loading, no cargo plan, just load the aircraft as fast as you can.

I looked at the Dak's rear wheel. It was nearly flat and I gave order to stop immediately. The Samil was still half loaded. What now?

A big pilot came around, looked at the half flat tyre, called on his hand radio, ground crew came rushing up with a compressor. The order was reversed. Stock up the Dakota to maximum, immediately if not sooner!

The pilot took-off into the night, low level. I was amazed by the crew's commitment. I did not even say goodbye to him. Who was that Captain? Thanks mate. I salute you.



The story about the Kudu Bull and his harem:

Late November 1989, Grootfontein. We had a piece of land behind the Defence Force shopping centre (SADFI), fenced in a large Kudu bull with his harem lived there for quite some years.



Kudu Bulls

The hell with UNTAG! These bucks will go with us to Lohatla in the North Cape where 16 Maintenance Unit were supposed to redeploy. Pull a few strings here and there with Nature Conservation and the necessary permits were obtained to relocate the herd. My experience as game ranger before joining the Army help me substantially.

Couple long Army tent poles, eight long cargo nets bound together and held upright with the tent poles, covered at least 100 yards of trigger netting, 8 feet tall.

The troops hide behind the nest in the bush, a forklift and one 25 ton truck with rails were ready to make the big catch.

At H-hour I got into a waiting Puma. Short, low level flight to SADFI. There they are! Pilot carefully herd them in the right direction, they start running, and big bull covers the rear. It's going to work!

The first 5 bucks went into the netting at full speed, triggered the net one after the other. Troops jumped out, grabbed the bucks, the bull saw here's trouble, veered to the left, Puma on his tail, only a short, maybe 20 yards netting still up.

He went full speed into the net. Oh No! Only two troops left for the bull. The Puma backed off a bit, I saw the bull got up but the horns were stuck in the netting. The two soldiers started to throw boxes towards the bull – they are not prepared to tackle this bare handed. I tried to shout to them to cover the bull with the cargo net, but to no avail. The leader bull managed to escape.

I said to the pilot we must back off now. Troops quickly tied the trapped buck's feet and loaded them on the forklift pallet one at a time and into the truck. Five successes! One

young bull and four ewes.

Now the bull. Troops set the 100 yards netting. Here we go with the Puma again. Where the hell is the bull?? Back and forth, back and forth, no movement, no bull??

The Flight Engineer eventually observed the last bull. Stuck with his body completely into a thick thorn bush.

That day I saw nature survival at its best. The Puma hovered above the large bull. I could see the hair on his back blowing in the wind from the rotors. To say the least of the noise. But he kept his head down and stood his ground. "In those netting you will not get me again!"

Respect my man! We backed off. You made me feel like a fool old bull. I was so humbled by this natural instinct I did not even say thank you or goodbye to the pilot.

Who knows his name, and the Flight's Engineer? I salute you both.

I don't know the bull's outcome, we just cut the fence and left on 27 November 1989.

Two years later I came to Lohatla from Port Elizabeth and saw a nice herd of kudu there. That made me feel good!

The flying boats of the South African Air Force (SAAF)

During the darker days of World War II, the east coast of South Africa was a hive of SAAF activities. Admiral Karl Doenitz, Head of the German U-boat arm, deployed German U Boats on the east coast of Africa causing havoc amongst the Allied ships. To counter the threat, the Royal Air Force sent 262 Squadron, equipped with twin-engine (American) Consolidated Vultee Catali. As the U-boats expanded their operational zone towards Madagascar, so did 262 Squadron move up the coast. The two "air" bases for the aircraft were Congella in Durban and Catalina Bay on the eastern shores of Lake St Lucia.



Courtesy to the SAAF Museum

The Catalina was a big two engine graceful aircraft that could undertake extended patrols of more than 24 hoursIt carried two six depth charges that, if dropped accurately, could easily sink a submarine.

Flying-boats require a degree of "choppiness" on the water during take-off to allow them to "unstick" from the surface. However, landing in the dark at St Lucia posed some challenges to the crew as the "runway" was scattered with crocodiles and hippos at night. To make a successful landing, it sometimes required that the crewmen in the Catalina's had to take pot shots with heavy calibre machine guns at basking crocs as they flew along the Lake. The resident game warden was soon banging on the Base Commander's door!

On 7 June 1943, Catalina E from 259 Squadron based in Madagascar, lost power in one engine, stalled and crash into the shallow waters of Lake St Lucia. Only one survivor was found. Today only some remains of the aircraft protrudes from the mud.



The remains of Catalina E piloted by F/O Dick Lawson (Jeff Gaisford)

Another Catalina H crashed in a deeper section of Lake St Lucia but the wreck was never found by the Navy divers. According to eyewitnesses "H" took off towards the western shore, climbed steeply, stalled, nosedived into the lake and exploded. It was commonly accepted that it crashed into a deep hole between the Vincent Islands and the western shore of Lake St Lucia.



262 Squadron Catalina towed by RAF tender boat at Congella (Curtesy Johan Conradie)

The tide caused the water levels of Lake St Lucia to fluctuate greatly. This led to establishing a new base at Lake Umsingazi near Richards Bay as St Lucia became too shallow for the Catalina's. The last Catalina flew from St Lucia on 13 October 1944.

262 Squadron RAF duly became 35 Squadron of the SAAF stationed in Cape Town. The Catalina's were replaced by big four-engine Sunderland Mark 5 flying-boats whose ancestors were the Empire flying-boats that flew a regular passenger service to England before the war.

A group of enthusiastic people recently decided to restore a Catalina to its former glory. Here A few photographs taken when we did the restoration of N427CV at Rand Airport.



The 95% percent completed Catalina (Photo Brendan Odell) First taxi test of the Catalina (Photo Thinus vanStaden)

SAAFA Lines Book – it all began in 1945

In December 2013, proposals were requested from branches as how to celebrate SAAFA's 70 anniversary which is coming up in 2015. A suggestion was received which seems workable and a great idea. To implement the idea actually demands little effort from the branch executive committee and its serving members.

Branches publish periodically newsletters reflecting highlights as well as some history of their past achievements. The idea is to collect these newsletters (which should exist in paper or electronic format), consolidate and publish a "SAAFA Lines Book" reflecting the past 70 years of SAAFA.

Articles from available branch newsletters will be extracted and included into the Lines Book. Supplementing history about the branch not documented e.g. founder members, past chairpersons, important historical dates, projects completed, etc. forms part of the SAAFA Lines Book.

This SAAFA Lines Book can then be distributed to branches for fund raising projects or given to generous contributors as a token of appreciation.

Please let Jaap Rossouw know of your branch's intention to participate in this project.

SAAF Museum a Star at the African Air Defence (AAD) Show

The South African Air Force Museum contributed a substantial number of fixed and rotary wing veteran aircraft to amuse approximately 95000 spectators at the 2014 AAD show. During the open public days (Saturday and Sunday), the always popular Harvards, Cheetah, Impala and the iconic Vampire jet fighter put up breath taking aerobatics which brought back sweet memories of the past. Other aircraft in the skies over Waterkloof Air Force base included the P51 Mustang as well as various aerobatic display teams.

The day is aimed at aviation awareness, which is the basis for the existence of the SAAF Museum. The air show is held to demonstrate the heritage of the SAAF and its flying aircraft.

Missing from the Sunday air show day was the SAAF Hercules transport aircraft. It had apparently been deployed to Lagos in Nigeria to airlift those injured when a church building collapsed earlier in September. When the SAAF is called upon, it respond in the appropriate manner.



The Faith of SAAF Shackleton 1718 - 8 Aug 1963

An extract from the Aviation & Safety Magazine February 2008 issue – Original article by Clinton Barnard

Accident Summary Analysis

- Occurrence Date: 8 August 1963
- Aircraft Involved: One Avro MR. Mk 3 Shackleton (serial 1718)
- Aircrew & Aircraft Home Unit: 35 Squadron at DF Malan International Airport
- Aircraft Damage Classification: Category IIIa
- Accident Root Cause: Human error
- Total Human Involvement: 13
- Total Human Attrition: 13 killed



During a Cape Exercise (CAPEX) operation in August 1963, Shackleton 1718 of 35 Squadron was tasked to conduct an exercise with a Royal Navy submarine on the east coast of South Africa. A full briefing was given to the crew at 12H30 on August 8, 1963. The aircraft was based at DF Malan International Airport. The flying route was over False Bay and to continue seawards towards the exercise area. The Operations Officer warned the crew not to fly directly over land to Port Elizabeth due to anticipated high icing levels and expected bad weather conditions on this route.

Although the compasses had not been swung on their normal expiry date of July 19, 1963, Maritime Group gave authorisation for a month's extension provided that no major part of the aircraft was replaced. The Flight Office at Ysterplaat was uncomfortable about the weather conditions and telephoned the Maritime Group Operations Centre thrice prior to the departure of the Shackleton, in an effort to get the flight cancelled, but this request was not forthcoming.

Just minutes before take-off, the pilot, notwithstanding his briefing instructions, informed Air Traffic Control (ATC) that he would climb to 2 896 m (9,500 ft) AMSL and head overland towards Port Elizabeth.

The aircraft lifted off Runway 34 at 15H06 and turned right for the climb. Moments later, the ATC informed the commander that he is off course and gave instructions to safely avoid Tiger Mountain. The pilot acknowledged this transmission and reacted accordingly. After the lapse of about a minute, he requested clearance to resume his original course. This was the last radio transmission received from Shackleton 1718.

After the aircraft was approximately 40 km away from the base, the radar technician at DF Malan requested permission to deactivate the radar for about ten minutes due to flooding of the radar installation on account of the heavy rain. This permission was granted.

In spite of attempts to contact the aircraft by radio, no further contact could be established and evidence suggested that the airplane had crashed.

Due to the mountains area, adverse weather conditions, combined with the lateness of the hour, any meaningful attempt for a search and rescue exercise until the following day, August 9 was abandoned.

Various, helicopters and an aircraft were sent out on 9 and 10 August to the Wemmershoek area to report on the weather, which remained completely adverse. The wreck was finally discovered from the air at 17H18 just over two days following the accident. It was evident from the almost complete destruction of the aircraft that nobody aboard could possibly have survived the crash. The crash occurred about 25.8 km (16 miles from the nearest town, Worcester, in the Steynskloof valley between Paarl and Stellenbosch.

The Board of Enquiry established that the impact speed of the aircraft was high and that this, combined with the resulting fire following the crash, caused almost complete destruction of the aircraft. There was no attempt by the crew to use parachutes and all aboard are assumed to have perished in the high G impact.

The Board found the pilot solely responsible for the accident. The pilot displayed disobeyed a direct order to rather route south over False Bay and instead routed over land, where the mountainous terrain exacerbated the already foul weather conditions. The aerodynamic effect of heavy icing, strong and turbulent winds, the heavy weight of the aircraft combined with the possible over control by the pilot, placed an unusually high loading on the airframe. This resulted in the airframe exceeding its design limits and initiated disintegration, leading to the loss of control and the consequent fatal crash. The accident was classed as an avoidable major flying accident.