

servists, mostly ground forces, but including an elite hard core of Citizen Force pilots who fly various aircraft types like Impala ground attack fighters and Albatross maritime reconnaissance aircraft.

The SAAF's cutting edge consists of some 23 squadrons flying about 370 aircraft ranging from Mach 2 Mirage F-1 interceptors to doddering but tough Dakota transports; the only sub-Saharan African country approaching that figure is Angola, which is said to have some 136 optional aircraft.

Strength

The SAAF's organisational tentacles extend to the four corners of SA and Namibia, and to understand why this is so it is necessary to understand the tasks — actual and potential — assigned to it.

If one translates the SAAF's assigned war tasks into realities, they boil down to the following:

It must discourage and if necessary fight off aerial attacks from Mozambique, Angola or other neighbouring countries, by hacking down the attacking aircraft as they cross the border or, if necessary/possible, knocking them out on the ground before they can take off;

It must damage invading enemy ground forces by attacking them with cannon, bombs and rockets;

In any "external" operation it must protect the ground forces from aerial attack by



Cheetah . . . attacker/defender

the enemy;

It must provide close-in fire support and a trooping/casualty evacuation capability for the ground forces during operations;

It must help to maintain surveillance over the seas around the South African coastline;

Air defence — not only of the industrial heartland but also of outlying bases and ground forces in combat — presents several characteristically South African headaches to SAAF planners.

What makes air defence of important static installations difficult is the fact that the SADF has no high-altitude guided missiles in service at all, although it does possess a limited number of old but efficient Cactus systems for warding off low-level bombing and strafing attacks. In addition, the Army's mobile anti-aircraft assets are also very limited.

The SAAF units with a primary air-defence role are 3 Squadron, operating Mirage F1CZ all-weather/ground attack fighters out of Air Force Base Waterkloof, near Pretoria, and 2 Squadron, the famed "Flying Cheetahs," flying the older Mirage IICZ day fighter/ground attack out of Hoedspruit in the eastern Transvaal.

The air-defence squadrons are backed up by 1 Squadron, also based at Waterkloof, which is equipped with the Mirage F-1AZ — primarily a ground attack fighter but with a considerable interception capability.

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comes into service it will probably also be used as back-up, although contrary to popular belief it is primarily a "bomb truck" for ground attack and not an air-defence fighter.

So far the SAAF's role as principal defender of the airspace over the administrative-heartland has never been tested, but at various times it has had to carry out all the other roles — principally in Angola.

All three operational Mirage squadrons have been heavily involved in providing close support, as well as air cover, although the latter has only once resulted in air-to-air combat (two Mirage F-1s providing air cover over a ground operation shot down two Angolan MiG-21s four years ago).

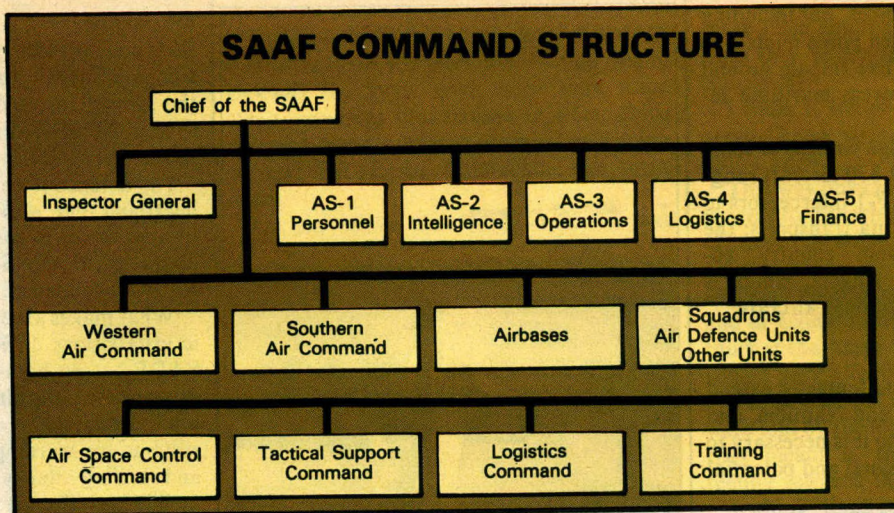
A range of other SAAF units have also been involved in close support to a greater or lesser extent: the Impala ground-attack squadrons, the Canberra light bombers of 12 Squadron (photo-reconnaissance and medium/high level bombing), 24 Squadron's Buccaneers (theoretically naval strike fighters but in practice used for interdiction and ground attack) and the light and medium-sized helicopters.

Almost all of this combat flying has taken place on or over the northern Namibian border.

During Operation Savannah (1975-1976) SAAF support consisted almost entirely of transport and casualty evacuation — the result, some observers claim, of a tacit agreement between the belligerents not to escalate the conflict.

Since the border war started in earnest after 1976, however, the combat aircraft

SAAF COMMAND STRUCTURE



have carried out numerous ground support attacks, air strikes and interdiction of approaching forces at various times, according to the requirements of whatever ground operation happened to be in progress.

The first significant occasion was the attack on Cassinga in 1978, when SAAF Mirages and Buccaneers plastered the central area with bombs, rockets and cannon fire to soften it up for the paratroopers, and later inflicted heavy damage on a Cuban armoured column approaching the little mining town. A celebrated SAAF feat was a sneak attack in 1981, when a small force of fighters knocked out radar installations in southern Angola to blind the MPLA air defence as a prelude to Operation Protea, a large-scale attack on Swapo installations north of the border.

The SAAF helicopters have seen continuous action for many years: one of the first Honoris Cruxes awarded in the SADF went in the late Sixties to a Puma pilot who was acting in support of the police, long before the Army was committed to the border war in any significant strength.

In the early Eighties, too, co-operation between the air and land forces had become

speaking the SAAF's light planes are intended mainly for various line-of-communication duties, but on occasion they are involved in more hazardous close-support duties.

The chain of command and the structure

The direct chain of command starts at SAAF Headquarters in down-town Pretoria, seat of the Chief of the SAAF, Lieutenant General Denis Earp, and his staff.

From there the orders flow down to two regional command areas, four "functional commands" and a number of air bases, squadrons and other units which for some reason or other do not fall under either of the regional command areas. They are:

Western Air Command

Controlled from Windhoek, Western Air Command controls all SAAF operations in support of counter-insurgency operations — reconnaissance, patrolling, close support, spotting, communications relay, supply and casualty evacuation — in Namibia. As such its workload consists of everything from shooting up a Swapo base and dropping troops in pursuit of fleeing insurgents to speeding wounded soldiers or ailing civilians to the nearest base hospital.

SQUADRONS OF THE SADF

SAAF Squadrons and Aircraft

1 Squadron — Hoedspruit	Mirage F1AZ	Ground attack/Day fighter
2 Squadron — Hoedspruit	Mirage III CZ	Day fighter/Ground attack
3 Squadron — Waterkloof	Mirage F1 CZ	All-weather fighter/Ground attack
4 Squadron — Lanseria	Impala II	Ground attack
7 Squadron — Langebaanweg	Impala II	Ground attack
8 Squadron — Bloemspruit	Impala II	Ground attack
12 Squadron — Waterkloof	Canberra	Photo Recce/Medium and high level bombing
15 Squadron — Durban	Super Frelon	Troop and equipment transport/Naval support/Search and rescue support
16 Squadron — Port Elizabeth	Alouette III	Battlefield support/Counter-insurgency/Search and rescue
17 Squadron — Swartkop	Alouette III	Battlefield support/Counter-insurgency/Search and rescue
19 Squadron — Swartkop	Puma	Troop transport/Casevac/Search and rescue
21 Squadron — Waterkloof	HS125 Mercurius/BE200/Citation	VIP Transport
22 Squadron — Ysterplaat	Alouette III/Wasp	Anti-submarine warfare/Search and rescue
24 Squadron — Waterkloof	Buccaneer	Naval strike/Interdiction
25 Squadron — Ysterplaat	Dakota	Short-range tactical battlefield support/Air support
27 Squadron — Ysterplaat	Piaggio 166S/Albatross	Inshore maritime patrol/Air/Sea rescue
28 Squadron — Waterkloof	C-130 Hercules/C-160 Transall	Medium- and short-range tactical air support/Search and rescue
30 Squadron — Ysterplaat	Puma/Super Frelon	Transport/Search and rescue/Casevac
31 Squadron — Hoedspruit	Alouette III/Puma	Battlefield support/Counter-insurgency/Troop transport/Casevac/Search and rescue
35 Squadron — Cape Town	Dakota	Long-range maritime patrol/Air-sea rescue
41 Squadron — Lanseria	Kudu/Bosbok	Light battlefield support/Battlefield recce
42 Squadron — Potchefstroom	Bosbok/Cessna 185	Battlefield recce
44 Squadron — Swartkop	Dakota/DC-4/Viscount	Passenger transport

so close that at times light helicopter pilots were actually directing ground battles at virtually zero altitude, in between dodging anti-aircraft fire and heat-seeking missiles.

Small wonder that Lieutenant General Bob Rogers, legendary former Chief of the SAAF, regards the light helicopter pilots as the legitimate heirs of the "Spitfire spirit" he and others exhibited during World War 2.

Southern Air Command

Headquartered at the super-secret Silvermine base between Cape Town and Simonstown, Southern Air Command works hand in glove with its fellow tenant, the South African Navy's Operations Command. Controlling all the coastal SAAF bases, it is responsible for all maritime operations, coastal and fisheries patrols, air-sea rescue operations, mercy flights and disaster relief.

There is, in fact, a strong maritime flavour to Southern Air Command. It has two maritime air patrol squadrons, a ground attack squadron, a transport squadron and several helicopter squadrons, one of which — 22 Squadron — flies anti-submarine Wasps which operate from South African Navy ships.

Air Space Control Command

Air Space Control Command, controlled from Pretoria, is responsible for the training of air defence units, early warning and air

defence. The early-warning component consists of two parts: the Highveld Air Space Control Sector, controlled from an underground complex at Devon, near Pretoria, and the Lowveld Air Space Control Sector, controlled from Mariepskop mountain in the eastern Transvaal. Both sectors also use mobile radar units as required.

The aerial defence task rests on Mirage F-1s and IIIs, backed up by mobile surface-to-air and anti-aircraft (AA) units deployed around key military and civilian targets, and Army AA guns to deal with threats below 1 000m.

In the event of conventional aerial attack, Air Space Control Command will be the PWV's shield against an onslaught. Mirage F-1s are on permanent standby at Air Force Base Waterkloof.

Tactical Support Command

Tactical Support Command's role is to establish and operate temporary air bases

wherever required. The men of its Tactical Airfield Units (TAU) are also the sappers of the SAAF when an airfield needs to be established — by extending and upgrading an existing runway, or hacking a new one out of virgin bush.

Air Logistics Command

Air Logistics Command supplies its specialised services to the SAAF. In addition to normal "housekeeping" — it has an inventory of almost 800 000 items, from screws to bully beef — it also initiates new designs and approves all modifications.

SAAF Training Command

Training Command controls all training institutions. In addition to providing normal basic training at the SAAF Gymnasium, it runs a logistics training school at Verwoerdburg, the SAAF College at Voortrekkerhoogte, the Central Flying Schools at Dunottar, six flying training schools and the Air Navigation School at Langebaanweg. ■

The SAAF's opponents

The quality of a country's aircraft and the men who fly them are important, but the third factor consists of the opposition they are likely to encounter, the nature of it, the quality — and how it is tackled

For the SAAF, its main opponents of the future are still to be found where they have been for a number of years: in Angola, where an ever larger arsenal of sophisticated Soviet military hardware has been accumulating in the past few years.

Angola seems to enjoy Moscow's especial favour when it comes to weapons. Russian client-states in Africa and elsewhere normally receive cast-off equipment like 30-year-

old tanks or "export versions" of jet fighters which have been gutted of their more sophisticated equipment.

But in Angola's case the Russians have untied the purse-strings to allow the supply of the deadliest missiles, combat aircraft and detector equipment allowed to cross Warsaw Pact borders.

So much so that as far back as 1985 the International Institute for Strategic Studies

(IISS) warned that Angola was the only neighbouring country to SA which might be capable of formal conventional military operations against her.

How likely are such operations? Not very, the IISS opined, because in spite of the huge increase in communist equipment and manpower, Angola was "stretched to her limits" in containing the rebel Unita forces and could not defend their territory against major South African offensive.

The 1987 picture is different, as can be seen from comments made in Windhoek on January 7 this year by Major General Georg Meiring in one of his last statements as GOC SWA Territory Force.

It was only a matter of time, he said, before Angola's conventional build-up boosted its self-confidence so it felt it could take on SADF/SWATF forces.

Meiring quoted facts and figures to support his contention:

- The Angolan air-defence system of radars, missiles and fighter aircraft now extends as far south as Cahama and Matala, less than 300 km from the international border;
- In addition to Mi-25 and Mi-17 gunship helicopters, Angola deploys MiG-21F, MiG-23 and Sukhoi Su-22 jet fighters;
- A wide variety of anti-aircraft missiles,



Soviet Mi-17 ... Angolan workhorse

including the SA-6 and SA-8, are linked to an extensive radar network with main bases at Lubango, Menongue, Luena and Cuito Cuanavale which covered northern Namibian air-space.

Cuanavale which covered northern Namibian air-space.

air supremacy that for the first time its pilots felt safe to fly to their southern border in search of action. A MiG-23 taking off from Lubango main air base can reach both Ondangwa and its nearby twin base of Oshakati, the main military headquarters in Ovamboland; in a mere 20 minutes.

From these figures it is obvious that the skies of southern Angola have ceased to be a virtual playground for fighter pilots of the SAAF.

The conclusion is obvious: if SA ever mounts another large incursion into Angola it will not be able to rely on almost automatic command of the air, or even aerial parity — an essential requirement for a ground operation.

The signs of a more aggressive Angolan

MAN: PLANE RATIO

Comparative Air Force manpower and aircraft strengths

Country	Manpower	Operational aircraft
SA	13 000	372
Angola	2 000	136
Ethiopia	4 000	(estimated) 145

Source: 1986/7 edition of the International Institute of Strategic Studies' annual publication, "The Military Balance."

attitude have actually been around for a long time. It would seem the Angolans have served notice that high-profile and therefore embarrassingly visible incursions like Operation Askari (December 1983-January 1984) will not be allowed to go unchallenged.

As it is, Operation Askari proved a shock to South African planners because Angolan ground forces did not hang back as had happened before but reacted aggressively and inflicted a number of casualties on the security forces.

It is not till recently, however, that the Angolan pilots began to assert themselves.

The Angolan aircraft, radar and 10 batteries of large surface-to-air missiles are deeply worrying to the SAAF, which cannot afford to lose any aircraft, particularly its high-tech ones.

In December of 1986 the authoritative Jane's Defence Weekly mooted the possibility that a number of Boeing 707s acquired by the SAAF for Waterkloof-based 60 Squadron were, in fact, dedicated intelligence aircraft which could be used for a range of information-gathering about enemy radar systems. This has not been confirmed or denied by the SAAF.

The chances of another incursion in the near future cannot be laughed off. Apart from striking at Swapo concentrations before they can cross the border, it might be regarded as politic to mount what boils down to a diversionary attack in order to draw some pressure off Unita — the MPLA is bracking itself for another all-out drive to capture its headquarters at Jamba. The loss of Jamba would be a catastrophe for Dr Jonas Savimbi and therefore for SA. ■

Lieutenant General Denis Earp

Forged in the air battles of Korea, tempered in the torture-chambers of communist prison camps, the Chief of the SAAF is an unostentatious man with a mind like a steel trap and a quiet charisma which makes slaves of his underlings

When Denis Earp took over as Chief of the SAAF on March 1 of 1984 a good number of the ignorant among non-Air Force service people wondered why such a backroom boy had been chosen, and speculated that this was more or less a caretaker appointment while younger senior leaders were maturing in their rank.

Those in the know, of course, realised that Earp would be anything but a caretaker or backroom boy, that he was a formidable combination of steely intellect and tremendous operational experience, backed up by no less than 30 in-service training courses.

At the time of his appointment Earp had earned a reputation as a superlative staff officer. Before that he had been a quintessential fighting aviator who was on active flying duties until the age of 44.

His chestful of medals makes interesting reading to the initiated eye. Hidden among the Pro Patria Medal and decorations for merit are two exotic "gongs", the United States Air Force's Air Medal with oak leaf cluster and the Korean Chungmu with silver star. Taken together with the local ones, they

attest to the incredible amount he has packed into his nearly 40 years in uniform.

Born at Bloemfontein on June 7 of 1930, he attested as a cadet officer in the SAAF in 1948, was commissioned as a second lieutenant in April of 1950 and got his wings in December of that year.

In May of 1951, after brief attachments to the Central Flying School at Dunnottar and 1 Squadron SAAF, he joined 2 Squadron, the famed "Flying Cheetahs", operating Mustang fighters in Korea (two of his fellow pilots were to become his immediate predecessors as Chief of the SAAF, the World War 2 veteran Bob Rogers and the younger Mike Muller).

It was an intense experience, but a relatively short one: after just over four months he was shot down. Unlike Mike Muller, who suffered the same fate but was picked up almost immediately, Earp was captured; he spent almost two years in prisoner-of-war camps, undergoing long spells of torture that left him unbroken but with a deep and abiding hatred of communism.

Set free in September 1953, he was posted



World War 2 veteran . . . Lt Gen Denis Earp

back to flying duties with 1 Squadron till January of 1957. Then he spent two years as an instructor at Central Flying Service Dunottar before being appointed as a pilot attack instructor at the Air Operations School.

In 1964, by now a major, he and his much-decorated colleague Bob Rogers spent time in England converting to Canberra light bombers, and on their return he served as a pilot at 12 (Canberra) Squadron at Waterkloof.

This was followed by a short stint as a staff officer before returning to flying duties as a transport pilot in 28 Squadron. In December 1967, in the rank of commandant, he returned to his old unit, 2 Squadron, as commanding officer. Eighteen months later he was appointed Commandant Flying at Air Force Base Pietersburg and little over a year after that Senior Staff Officer (Air) of the then Joint Combat Forces.

At this stage Earp's career took an unusual turn when he converted to helicopters and became OC 17 Squadron at Air Force Base Waterkloof.

It was his last flying command. From 17 Squadron he went on to become Senior Staff Officer Operations at SAAF Headquarters, then Director Operations for two years from June 1 of 1976, Director General Operations at Defence Headquarters in the rank of major general from June 19 of 1978 and finally Chief of the SAAF in 1984.

Of average height and appearance, Earp is not a man of dramatic aspect: he doesn't have to be. Those who have worked under him regard him with considerable awe, mixed with affection: "When he was Director Ops, the staff thought the sun shone out of him," says one, "and it was a reciprocal respect: he treated them like gentlemen."

"The Ops people used to work fairly long hours and sometimes they'd be in the office till late. So around 6.30 in the evening they'd go to the SAAF Headquarters pub and have a drink.

"Earp would join them, but if the barman had to stay on after his shift was finished Earp would have everybody chip in to compensate him for the extra duty.

"He's not very status conscious, although of course very much a military person. When he was Director Ops and a brigadier he used to catch the duty bus in the mornings.

No rank-pulling

"He's able to mix and converse with contemporary pilots. He'll talk to you as an equal in the pub. There's no rank-pulling with him; I don't think he has to pull rank because he commands respect naturally. In fact he inspires hero-worship."

Part of the hero-worship stems, of course, from the fact that Earp is a flyer's flyer. An officer recalls a favourite Earp story: "One day, during the time Earp was in England on the Canberra project in the 1960s, he was flying a B-12 very high, about 45 000 or 50 000 feet, which the Can can handle, and they sent up two Lightning fighters to do a mock interception.

"He waited till the right moment and then went into a very tight turn, and at that altitude the Lightnings nearly fell out of the sky and he didn't see them again. They're still quite proud of that at 12 Squadron."

Earp is so liddle given to histrionics that on first acquaintance he appears unremarkable. What they are actually seeing, his past and present subordinates aver, is a man in absolute control of himself, with a deliberate and logical thought process.

In manner he is the complete reverse of his Korean War old comrade-in-arms and predecessor but one, the revered Lieutenant-General Bob Rogers. Earp is as quiet as Rogers was mercurial. A retired officer who served under both says:

"The two strongest people I've ever come across are Bob Rogers and Denis Earp. Neither of them was afraid to take a decision and stick to it.

"Earp is as immoveable, but calm; he'd never raise his voice. He has a very deliberate way of speaking. His thoughts are clear in his mind; he measures every word because he wants to express himself quite clearly. I found that he never had to repeat himself: you always knew exactly what he meant."

Psychological torture

Probably his incarceration in Korea played a large role in shaping the Earp of 1987. While a PoW he underwent long bouts of psychological torture at the hands of his North Korean captors. Earp did not break, but fought back with a mixture of guile and sheer endurance.

On one occasion, says a former SAAF officer, he was kept without food and water in a lightless pit for three days, then hauled out and asked for the names of the pilots in his squadron. Earp — fluently bilingual as a result of his Free State boyhood — dredged up a variety of Afrikaans swear-words, appended a military rank to each one and passed it on to the interrogators.

"So somewhere in North Korea," chuckles the officer, "you've got a file full of names like Major Bliksem and Lieutenant Vuilgoed

and worse."

Another time the prisoners were being force-marched from one camp to another. It was a dreadful ordeal, because most of them were suffering badly from dysentery and other ailments. So was Second Lieutenant Earp, but throughout the march he gave moral and even physical support to the others.

There is also the matter of professional respect. Thanks to his latter-day switch from fighters to helicopters, Earp has a broader spectrum of flying experience than most of his contemporaries.

Thinks modern

"You might tend to think of the Korea people as anachronistic almost, a bit out of date," says a former SAAF officer, "but he has flown modern fighters and so he thinks modern all the time.

"He doesn't try to compartmentalise himself, to say: 'I'm a fighter jock.' He tries to see other people's point of view, to make you feel part of his team."

Earp's knowledge of the staff side of warfare, too, is encyclopaedic. His 1975-1982 service as Senior Staff Officer Operations, Director Operations and then Director General Operations means that he played a key role in every major "external" operation mounted by the SADF in the border war. It has left him with a strategic overview granted to very few senior officers in the SADF.

The war brought him respect and decorations for merit; it also brought him great sadness, for his son Michael, a Puma copilot, was shot down and killed in January of 1982.

It was typical of Earp that when the subject came up in a recent interview he described his son's death as "a rather traumatic experience". From someone else such a bald statement might have sounded callous; those who knew the man realised it was just that, as always, he had his personal grief as tightly under control as all his other emotions and feelings. ■

Small means, big task

The Navy might be small, but it has a variety of tasks with which to keep itself occupied, and these tasks also determine its structure

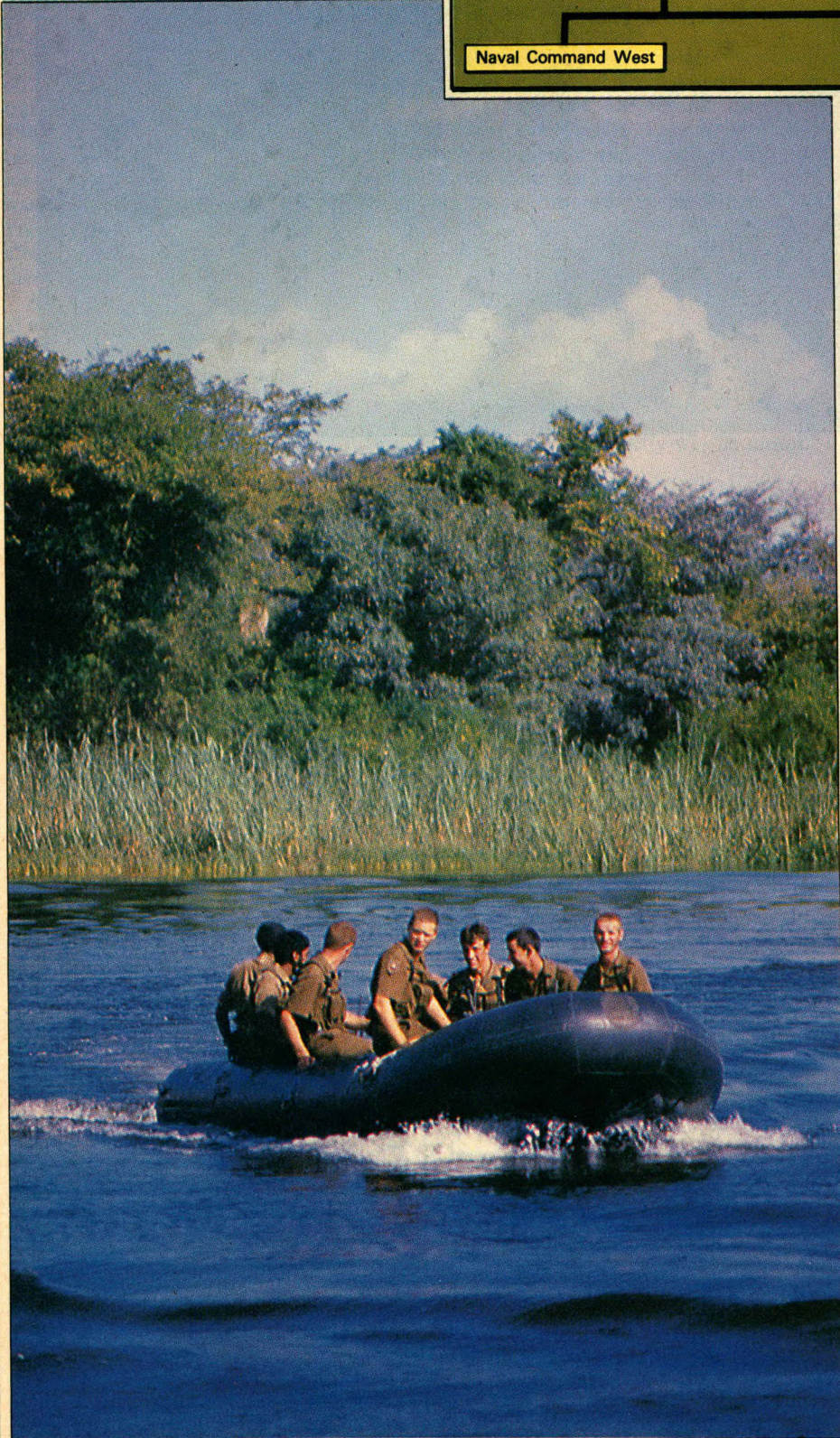
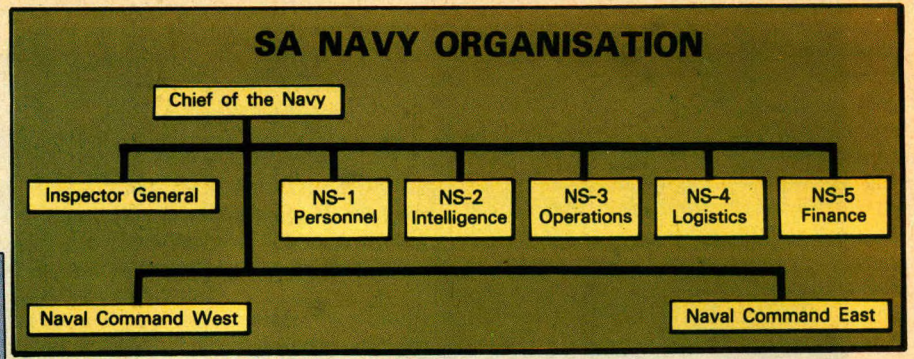
The Navy's first task is to protect the RSA's maritime interest. It also supports the appropriate government departments in controlling the 300 000-nautical mile exclusive economic zone round SA. Finally, its task is to deter other nations from mounting a conventional maritime attack on

SA if that becomes necessary.

Until very recently the Navy was organised into several operational and support service commands. Naval Operations Command was headquartered at the Silvermine maritime communications and surveillance centre near Simonstown. From here lines of

control and communication went out to COMNAVCAPE, headquartered at Simonstown, COMNAVNAT at Durban, and COMNAVWB at Walvis Bay.

Naval Logistics Command controlled the Simonstown and Durban dockyards — the best in Africa — while Training Command was responsible for a small training flotilla,



Maritime patrol ... the "brown navy" prowls the Zambezi

four training bases and the Naval Staff College.

Lately, however, it has undergone a wholesale re-organisation and streamlining. The supporting organisations have been absorbed and the Navy now has only two command areas — Naval Command West, stretching from Angola's Cunene River mouth around the Cape to a point just east of Knysna, and Naval Command East, which runs up to SA's border with Mozambique.

Little empire

To an extent each command, which is run by a rear-admiral, is a little empire of its own. Naval Command West controls everything within its area, including the expanded naval dockyard at Simonstown, the Naval Staff College and three training bases. Similarly, Naval Command East runs everything in its own bailiwick, including the large Salisbury Island base at Durban and a training establishment.

The chain of command is an uncomplicated one that starts at Naval Headquarters in Pretoria. It is an incongruous circumstance that still gives rise to unfeeling jokes about Pretoria ruling the waves, because the Navy is a relative newcomer in Pretoria.

Till a decade ago Naval HQ was at Simonstown and the Chief of the Navy lived in the beautiful old pile known as Admiralty House, with its fine view of Simon's Bay. Then, on a bitter day in the Seventies, it was decided that Naval HQ would have to move to Pretoria for greater efficiency and cooperation with the other services.

Stone frigate

The taste of that separation lingers on in Simonstown. But Naval HQ will never return to Simonstown. It is firmly established in its "stone frigate" (as naval men call a shore establishment), an office building named SAS Immortelle after one of the departed "little ships" of World War II and run, Navy fashion, along strictly seamanlike lines.

From SAS Immortelle the Chief of the Navy, Vice-Admiral Glen Syndercombe, communicates upwards to the defence staff and, helped by his own staff compartments, downwards to the two naval commands. Syndercombe is a thorough-going blue-water man, but he's known to believe that Pretoria is exactly where Naval headquarters should be. ■

The blue-water man

A "sailor's admiral," in the words of one of his officers, the Chief of the Navy rules the waves from Pretoria but remains a "blue-water man," even if he has to go boardsailing on the Transvaal's dams

A Cape Town man, born in Sea Point on November 17 of 1931, Vice-Admiral Glen Syndercombe has had an unusual career. It took him just 25 years to reach the top notch in his service — but he was already a veteran sailor with 11 years' merchant navy service when he joined the SAN.

Like at least three former Chiefs of the Navy and a boatload of other senior SAN officers of the past and present, he started his sea-going career by passing through the South African Merchant Naval Academy General Botha. Thereafter he joined Shell Tankers as a cadet in 1950 and spent the next 10 years on the oil run.

In 1960 he was appointed temporary master of the Division of Sea Fisheries research vessel *Sardinops*, but in August that year obtained an appointment as a lieutenant in the South African Navy and served as watchkeeping officer in the destroyer SAS *Transvaal*, the minesweeper SAS *Walvisbaai* and the frigate SAS *Vrystaat*.

In 1965 he was made navigating officer of the frigate SAS *President Steyn*, then spent four years on shore, first as head of the Navy's radar school and then on attachment to the project of building of the huge maritime surveillance station at Silvermine, near Simonstown.

In October of 1972 he became commanding officer of the destroyer SAS *Jan van Riebeeck* for two years before being appointed Senior Staff Officer Operations on the staff of the Commander of Naval Operations. This was followed by a one-year stint as a project officer and finally, as the culmination of his active sea-going career, as commanding officer of the newly-formed strike craft squadron from June 1976, in the rank of captain.

In 1979 he achieved his passport to the SADF's top echelons by completing the arduous Special Joint Staff Course at the South African Defence College and in January of 1980 was appointed Director of Naval Operations. In October 1982 he became a rear admiral and Chief of Naval Staff Operations, and in July of 1985 Chief of the Navy in the rank of vice-admiral.

For Glen Syndercombe the sea is both a visceral and intellectual passion. From an early age there was never any doubt in his mind about what he wanted to do with his

life: go to sea.

Four decades on, he has not only achieved his boyhood dream but has reached the top of his particular tree after a satisfying quarter-century of rich experience which took him from the "old Navy" of ex-World War 2 warships and a limited place under the Western umbrella to the new-look fighting force which goes to war in hard-punching strike craft venturing into a world full of new and dangerous enemies.

It is a fair bet that no matter what other heights he may yet reach in his life, none will give him the sense of fulfilment he enjoys in his present appointment.

The SAN has had a succession of very competent men running it since becoming a full service more than 30 years ago, but in latter years they have tended to become remote from their chosen element by the thousands of kilometres of dry land that separates Naval HQ in Pretoria from SA's Indian and Atlantic oceans littoral.

Needless to say Syndercombe suffers from the same problem, but his passionate attachment to the sea lures him back whenever he can get away from navigating a desk in Pretoria. In a sense he is the spiritual successor of such salty old sea-dogs as Vice-Admiral James "Vlam" Johnson, another former Chief of the Navy who is also an unashamed blue-water man and a fighting sailor who won a Distinguished Service Cross in the Mediterranean during World War 2.

"Syndercombe is a sailor's admiral," says one naval officer. "He goes to sea whenever he can and visits sea-going units wherever it's possible. He can see — and feel — things for himself, because he also started out scrubbing decks, and so no one can mess around with him . . . one can really say he's

an admiral with seawater in his veins."

Thorough-going sailor though he is, Syndercombe does not conform to the stereotype of the bluff, roaring, roistering seafarer. He is of medium stature and slightly built; he does not affect a handkerchief in the top pocket of his winter uniform jacket, as do many who are senior enough to get away with it, and he lacks that traditional mark of the sailor, a beard.

He is also a devout adherent of the Church of the Province of South Africa whose deep faith springs from conviction rather than habit. For much of his life, as he once said, he thought he knew everything and believed life was there simply to be enjoyed. Then he

underwent a spiritual transformation that left him with a deep and abiding belief in God.

Typically, however, Syndercombe does not impose his heartfelt beliefs on anyone, although he has the power to do so. He makes no secret of his faith but, as a naval staff officer says: "He doesn't make a great show of it."

Syndercombe, like many another senior officer, believes in physical fitness. He does not smoke, drinks little and keeps himself trim by indulging whenever possible in a sport one does not as-

sociate with brass hats — boardsailing on the dams around Pretoria.

His style of man-management, too, is characteristic of the man. Although a private person by nature, he relates well with people, both service members and outsiders, and is a good conversationalist with a fine sense of humour.

In addition, says a member of his personal staff: "He's open-minded, he's willing to listen to anyone, military or civilian, and learn from them if they have something to offer. But that doesn't mean he can be pressured. He's the boss. There's no doubt about it in



Glen Syndercombe . . . blue water man

A MAN OF MANY PARTS

Lieutenant General Nicolaas Johan Nieuwoudt, Surgeon General of the SADF, has an impressive string of orthodox professional qualifications — MB Ch B, M Sc, M Med (all from Pretoria University) — and one unusual one, a doctorate in aviation medicine from London, which speaks of his long interest in flying and its effect on people.

He has come a long way since his birth on October 23, 1929, at Louisvale in the Cape. After qualifying as a medical doctor in 1953, he set up a practice at Frankfort in the Free State. He might well have stayed there, immersed in a country doctor's usual frenetically busy practice, but soon after settling in Frankfort he attested in the Citizen Force as a medical officer. In 1960 he abandoned private practice and joined the Permanent Force with the rank of captain. It was a propitious move, since the then SA Medical Corps' role was just about to expand dramatically as the SADF was wrenched out of its post-World War 2 doldrums.

Even for a professional officer Nieuwoudt's climb through the ranks was spectacular. In his first year he went to England to take part in a primary course in aviation medicine; in 1961 he was promoted to major and appointed Assistant Surgeon General (Air) and Officer Commanding Institute of Aviation Medicine. He also found the time to go through the SAAF pilot's course to earn his wings. He has since attended and passed two SAAF conversion courses, not to mention several other civilian and military courses.

He was a member of the SAAF team which went to Europe in 1962 to deal with aspects of the Mirage-procurement programme; and in 1963, as a colonel, he visited the US on a tour sponsored by the US Air Force. In 1970 (by which time he was a brigadier and appointed Director of Medical and Personnel Selection to the Surgeon General), he was seconded to the Department of Transport to lead the South African delegation to the International Bureau of Aviation Investigation's meeting in Canada.

In September 1975 he was promoted to major general as the Deputy Surgeon General (Medical Operational Services). Two years later he became Surgeon General with the rank of lieutenant general — once again neatly in time for the service's greatest step yet — its transformation from an army corps to a separate service. He served as Surgeon General in the rank of major general for almost two years, before being promoted to his present rank in July of 1979.

But his rank and status sit lightly on the "boy from Louisvale." One of his staff officers says that in spite of everything he has accomplished, his most endearing personal characteristic is his genuine humility.

the minds of anyone under him, and not in his own mind either. You know where you stand with him and so people feel loyal to him."

Loyalty is something Syndercombe sets great store by. So is his sailor's love for neatness in everything, and his belief in good naval discipline.

In applying that discipline, however, Syndercombe is known as a just man in the full sense of the word. While humane in his judgments, he is a sworn enemy of the cover-up, that age-old military and civil way of dealing with malfeasance of various kinds by sweeping it under the carpet if at all possible.

"He believes in justice," says a staff member, "and also believes that justice must be seen to be done. As far as he's concerned, if something is wrong it's wrong, and there's to be no cover-up."

Syndercombe's interest in the sea covers both the local and international context. He does a great deal of after-hours reading to keep himself up to date with maritime affairs internationally, and at the same time goes to great lengths to combat what one of his predecessors, Vice-Admiral Ronnie Edwards, described as SA's "agricultural mentality."

Like Edwards and other former naval chiefs, Syndercombe is deeply worried about the fact that so many people in the country's great inland population and commercial centres like the Reef area "don't realise (as an officer at Naval Headquarters puts it) that SA is an island which gets more than 90% of its imports and exports through its harbours, but think of the sea as a place where you go for your holiday."

As a result, Syndercombe tirelessly promotes the concept of greater sea-mindedness, and strongly supports all efforts to get youngsters more involved in things maritime. One of his current preoccupations is encouraging the formation of more naval cadet detachments at schools to augment the 12 already in existence.

Syndercombe also spends a good deal of time thinking ahead, shaping the Navy not only for its present tasks but for a future role when it will not be as small and comparatively under-funded as it is at present. All going well, it is a process of development which will continue long after he has retired. A consolation is that others of his name will be there to help the process along: both his sons, Gavin and Brett, are midshipmen, the former in the Permanent Force. ■

Military medics

The SAMS is the antithesis of the medical services of long ago, when battlefield surgery consisted mainly of amputations

The SA Medical Services (SAMS) provides a well-nigh bewildering variety of services and medical care to the motley array of patients in its far-flung "practice." They include:

Nursing care. SAMS nurses, trained to civilian standards, serve in sick bays and military and civilian hospitals wherever South African administration holds sway.

Pharmaceutical services. SAMS pharmacists not only dispense medicines, they also test them, manufacture them if necessary, and maintain a continuous research programme aimed at meeting the SADF's specific needs.

Psychological services. Psychologists serve in SAMS not only to treat battlefield-derived problems, but also to advise the SADF on such matters as industrial psychology, personnel evaluation, leadership training, and motivation. The psychologists also supply free care to dependants of Permanent Force members, and carry out research projects of their own.

Aviation medicine services. The Institute of Aviation Medicine outside Pretoria provides specialised services which are not avail-

able from any other body to the SADF, other State organisations and the private sector. Among its most important work is the exhaustive testing of military and civilian pilots. Navy divers and submarine crews which were formerly tested at the institute, now have their physical and psychological tests done at Simonstown Naval Medical Centre. It also maintains research facilities into areas in its field.

Welfare services. SAMS welfare officers play a crucial role in the SADF. They visit and counsel the families of servicemen who are called away for long periods, and are also available to help the serviceman himself if he experiences personal problems.

Rehabilitation services. Rehabilitation has come a long way since the Napoleonic days, when a crippled serviceman would be turned out with a crutch and a licence to beg. The SAMS takes what it calls the "holistic" approach to rehabilitation: no avenue is left unexplored or unexploited — be it religious, emotional, physical, educational or psychological. This includes counselling his family, a vital part of his rehabilitation.

The main rehabilitation wing at the mo-

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