

# SOUTH AFRICA'S NAVAL FORCES, 1922 – 2012

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## **Abstract**

*This study analyses and evaluates ninety years of naval activity in South Africa. Although the Union Defence Forces of South Africa were established in 1912, the country's first permanent navy, namely the South African Naval Service (SANS) was only established in 1922. This article shows how in practice the SANS continued only in name from 1934 until 1939, and that when the Second World War broke out, South Africa had no warships. It then follows the establishment of the Seaward Defence Force (SDF) in 1939, how it was built up, became the South African Naval Forces (SANF) in 1942, and made a small but nevertheless significant contribution to the Allied war effort. It is shown how the post-war navy was drastically scaled down, but then gradually built up again to serve as guardian of the Cape sea route. The SANF became the South African Navy (SAN) in 1951, and acquired Simon's Town as its main naval base in 1957. The study indicates how political developments in the Republic of South Africa in due course impacted on the country's navy, leading to increasing isolation and eventually a mandatory United Nations arms embargo. The SAN's role in the post-apartheid South Africa is also discussed, with special reference to flag-showing cruises, and it is indicated how, after many years as a small-ship navy, the SAN regained its blue-water capability.*

**Keywords:** South African Navy; South African Naval Service; Seaward Defence Force; South African Naval Forces; First World War; Second World War; Cape sea route.

**Slutelwoorde:** Suid-Afrikaanse Vloot; Suid-Afrikaanse Seediens; Verdedigingsmag Ter See; Suid-Afrikaanse Seemag; Eerste Wêreldoorlog; Tweede Wêreldoorlog; Kaapse seeroete.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa has never had a large navy, and the South African Navy (SAN) and its predecessors have a chequered history to say the least, but nonetheless a fascinating one. Thus far only two books have been published on the history of the SAN as a whole, namely by JC Goosen,<sup>2</sup> and by CH Bennett and AG Söderlund;<sup>3</sup> both excellent publications, richly illustrated and directed towards as broad a market as

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2 JC Goosen (compiler), *South Africa's Navy: the first fifty years* (Cape Town, 1973). Also available in Afrikaans as *Ons vloot: die eerste vyftig jaar* (Cape Town, 1973).

3 CH Bennett and AG Söderlund, *South Africa's Navy: a navy of the people and for the people* (Simon's Town, 2008).

possible. Certain aspects of the history of South Africa's naval forces have been researched in greater detail – see in this regard the books by LCF Turner *et al.*,<sup>4</sup> HR Gordon-Cumming<sup>5</sup> and CJ Harris<sup>6</sup> on the country's naval role during the Second World War (1939-1945). To commemorate the SAN's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1997, the SAN published a richly-illustrated commemorative volume.<sup>7</sup>

Proceeding from the assumption that with a coastline of approximately 2 800 km, and with at least 90% of all its exports and imports going through its harbours, a country like the Republic of South Africa needs a well-equipped, well-trained and disciplined navy. It is the purpose of this article to supply a review of the establishment and development of the country's naval forces, and to analyse these naval developments in the context of developments in the rest of the world, for example the Second World War and the Cold War (1945-c.1990). Some of the questions that will be addressed, include the following: Why was South Africa's first naval force only established in 1922? What led to the demise of this force? What and how important was South Africa's naval contribution towards the overall Allied war effort in the Second World War? How did the Cold War influence the shape and size of the post-war navy? How did the arms embargo affect the SAN? What role did the SAN play during the Namibian War of Independence (1966-1989) and the conflict in Angola? What role has the post-1994 SAN played in the so-called new Republic of South Africa? What challenges are facing the SAN today?

Although the Union of South Africa was established on 31 May 1910 and the Union Defence Forces (UDF) on 1 July 1912, the country's first permanent navy was only established in 1922. Since 1806 Britain's Royal Navy (RN) continuously defended South Africa's coastal waters, as well as the Cape sea route, but on 1 July 1913 the South African Division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR(SA)) came into being. Earlier, part-time naval volunteer units had been raised in Port Elizabeth (1861), Durban (1885) and Cape Town (1905). During the Great (First World) War (1914-1918), members of the RNVR(SA) served in the campaign in German South West Africa (now Namibia), while 164 members of the RNVR(SA) served in the RN during the war.<sup>8</sup>

From its Africa Station and base in Simon's Town, with its new dockyard that was completed in 1910, the RN controlled the Cape sea route in the interest of the

4 LCF Turner *et al.*, *War in the southern oceans 1939-1945* (Cape Town, 1961).

5 HR Gordon-Cumming, *Official history of the South African naval forces during the Second World War (1939-1945)* (Simon's Town, 2008).

6 CJ Harris, *War at sea: South African maritime operations during World War II* (Rivonia, 1991).

7 *A navy for three oceans: celebrating 75 years of the South African Navy* (Cape Town, 1997).

8 A du Toit, *South Africa's fighting ships past and present* (Rivonia, 1992), pp. xviii, xx, xxii-xxvii; S Hay, *History of the RNVR South African Division* (Cape Town, 1920), p. 193.

British Empire and its allies.<sup>9</sup> But how long could South Africa afford not to have its own navy? People like Prime Minister Gen. Jan Smuts, believed that the country should at least to some extent take responsibility for its seaward defence.

## 2. THE SOUTH AFRICAN NAVAL SERVICE, 1922-1939

The SAN can trace its history back to 1 April 1922 when the Union of South Africa's first formal naval force, known as the South African Naval Service (SANS), was established. The fledgling navy's first ships were the hydrographic survey ship HMSAS *Protea* (ordered for the RN as the "Later Hunt" class minesweeper HMS *Crozier*, but completed as a survey ship) and the "Mersey" class minesweeping trawlers HMSAS *Sonneblom* and HMSAS *Immortelle* (formerly HMS *Foyle* and HMS *Eden*). The *Sonneblom* and *Immortelle* were, in July 1929, deployed on a flag-showing cruise to Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) in Portuguese East Africa (now the independent country Mozambique).<sup>10</sup>

The *Protea* conducted important survey work along the South African coast, but the world-wide great depression of 1929-1935 caught up with the SANS and led to its virtual demise, with the *Protea* being withdrawn from service in 1933 and the two trawlers the following year – and the SANS was thus left with no warships and only a skeleton staff consisting of two officers and three ratings.<sup>11</sup> This was the sorry state of South Africa's "navy" when the Second World War broke out in September 1939. Shortly before the outbreak of hostilities, the South African government planned to acquire the RN monitor HMS *Erebus* to serve as a floating battery (with its 15-inch/381 mm guns) to protect Table Bay and the port of Cape Town – but when the war broke out, the RN decided to retain the ship in home waters for the defence of the United Kingdom.<sup>12</sup>

Gen. JC Smuts became South Africa's new prime minister shortly after the war broke out – replacing Gen. JBM Hertzog, who favoured South Africa's neutrality in the war. The new United Party (UP) government in a short space of

9 For the history of the Simon's Town Dockyard, see *Simon's Town Dockyard: the first 100 years* (Simon's Town, 2010).

10 Du Toit, pp. 5-6, 10-11; *Navy News* 11, April 1992, p. 25. As far as more details with regard to flag-showing cruises and the role of South African warships as grey diplomats are concerned, see A Wessels, "South Africa's grey diplomats; visits by South African warships to foreign countries 1946-1966", *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 27, 1997, pp. 67-105; A Wessels, "Onwaarskynlike ambassadeurs: vlagvertoonvaarte deur Suid-Afrikaanse oorlogskepe, 1922-2002", *Journal for Contemporary History* 27(3), December 2002, pp. 54-81.

11 Du Toit, pp. 7, 9, 11-15.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 19-23; D Visser, "Anglo-South African relations and the *Erebus* scheme, 1936-1939", *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 35(1), 2007, pp. 69-98.

time placed South Africa on a war footing, and built up the UDF into a relatively formidable force.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. THE SEAWARD DEFENCE FORCE, 1939-1942

On 1 September 1939 the Seaward Defence Force (SDF) was formally established in the place of the SANS, and the SANS personnel were transferred to the SDF. By 15 January 1940 the SDF had 15 small warships used for minesweeping or for anti-submarine warfare (ASW), 12 converted fishing trawlers, two converted whalers, as well as the former fisheries research ship, *Africana*. The SDF's personnel consisted of 70 officers and 358 ratings, including several members of the RNVR(SA) who had volunteered for service. The Director of the SDF was Rear Adm. GW Halifax, a retired RN officer then living in South Africa. The SDF's headquarters were in Cape Town, with other bases in Durban, Port Elizabeth and East London.<sup>14</sup>

On the night of 10-11 May 1940, the German commerce raider *Atlantis* laid 92 sea-mines near Cape Agulhas, but the SDF minesweepers swept the minefield and ensured that no damage was done.<sup>15</sup> On 10 June 1940, Italy declared war against Britain and France. The next day, South Africa joined Australia and New Zealand in declaring war against Benito Mussolini's fascist Italy. With its four battleships, 22 cruisers, 59 destroyers, 63 torpedo boats, 68 motor torpedo boats, 114 submarines, 13 mine-layers, 41 minesweepers, 15 gunboats and a large number of auxiliary and support ships, the Italian navy was stronger than the German navy.<sup>16</sup> The Italian navy not only had the potential to swing the naval war in the Mediterranean in the favour of the Axis powers, but could also threaten other areas of operations, including the Cape sea route.

The SDF continued to expand, and by August 1940 it had 20 minesweepers, four ASW vessels, 183 officers and 1 049 ratings. On 20 November 1940 the RN asked the SDF to send ASW vessels to the Mediterranean. Four ships were sent, namely HMSA Ships *Southern Floe*, *Southern Maid*, *Southern Isles* and *Southern Seas*. They sailed from Durban on 15 December 1940, arrived at Alexandria in Egypt on 11 January 1941, and were operationally deployed for the first time on 20 January. On 11 February 1941 the SDF suffered its first war-time loss when HMSAS *Southern Floe* sank after striking a mine near Tobruk. There was only one survivor. HMSAS *Protea* was sent as a replacement ship. Later more SDF ships

13 See, for example, A Wessels, "Die opbou van die Unie-Verdedigingsmagte in die tydperk September 1939 tot September 1949", *Journal for Contemporary History* 19(3), December 1994, pp. 1-22.

14 Gordon-Cumming, p. 18; Goosen (compiler), pp. 37-50. For the first few months of the war's maritime operations in South African waters, see also Harris, pp. 8-24.

15 Turner *et al.*, pp. 25-28.

16 *Jane's fighting ships 1940 (s.l., s.a.)*, pp. xxiv, 247-292; A Preston, *An illustrated history of the navies of World War II* (London, 1976), pp. 44-52.

were deployed to the Mediterranean.<sup>17</sup> By September 1941 the SDF had 37 mine-sweepers and 13 small ASW vessels (all of them either converted fishing trawlers or whalers), with 216 officers and 1 427 ratings.<sup>18</sup>

In February 1941 the German pocket-battleship *Admiral Scheer* sailed from west to east round the Cape, and returned to the South Atlantic the next month.<sup>19</sup> From January 1941 onwards the SDF assisted the RN in intercepting Vichy French ships in South African waters.<sup>20</sup> On 28 March Rear Adm. Hallifax was amongst those killed in an air crash, and he was succeeded by Cdr (later Cdre) James Dalgleish as the Director of the SDF.<sup>21</sup>

#### 4. THE SOUTH AFRICAN NAVAL FORCES, 1942-1950

##### 4.1 The war years

On 1 August 1942 the SDF and the RNVR(SA) were amalgamated to form the South African Naval Forces (SANF). The war in North Africa and in the Mediterranean was still in full swing, and the SANF continued with operations in the Mediterranean.<sup>22</sup> Several more South African “little ships” were sent “up north”, and they were later joined by the salvage ship HMSAS *Gamtoos*, which did sterling service, for example in clearing the entrances to several harbours, and doing other important salvage work.<sup>23</sup> In 1943 the SANF acquired two boom defence ships, HMSAS *Barcross* and HMSAS *Barbrake* (later renamed SAS *Somerset* and SAS *Fleur*) for the new convoy assembly port at Saldanha Bay.<sup>24</sup>

In 1944-1945 the SANF was given three new “Loch” class frigates, namely HMSA Ships *Good Hope*, *Natal* and *Transvaal*. These ships were given to South Africa by the British government in recognition of the significant part played by South African volunteers in the war at sea since the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. On 14 March 1945 the *Natal* established a unique record when, some four hours into her maiden voyage, she sank a German submarine, *U-714*. The *Good Hope* and *Natal* did escort work in the North Atlantic and, shortly before the end of the war,

17 Goosen (compiler), pp. 51-70; Gordon-Cumming, pp. 97-114; TD Potgieter, “South African naval vessels in the Mediterranean during the Second World War”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 23(1), June 1998, pp. 43-64.

18 Goosen (compiler), pp. 71-80.

19 Turner *et al.*, pp. 63-69.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 89-95; Goosen (compiler), pp. 37-50, 201-206.

21 HJ Martin and ND Orpen, *South Africa at war: military and industrial organization and operations in connection with the conduct of war; 1939-1945* (Cape Town, 1979), pp. 114, 116.

22 See, for example, Gordon-Cumming, pp. 115-149 for more details.

23 Du Toit, pp. 130-132; Gordon-Cumming, pp. 123, 133-135.

24 Du Toit, pp. 139-144.

the *Natal* and *Barbrake* saw service in the Far East; i.e. towards the end of the war against Japan.<sup>25</sup> By war's end, 1 436 officers and 8 896 ratings had served in the Union's naval forces, and 87 vessels had been in service: three frigates, 42 mine-sweepers, 22 ASW ships, 11 harbour defence motor launches, two boom defence ships, three examination vessels, one cable-layer, one mine-layer and two salvage ships.<sup>26</sup> Of the more than 10 000 men who served in South Africa's naval forces during the war, 324 lost their lives whilst on active service. Furthermore, at least 2 937 South Africans were seconded to the RN during the war, of whom 191 died.<sup>27</sup> In the light of the prevailing politics of the day, no black people were allowed to serve on board South African warships. Coloured and Indian South Africans were not supposed to serve in a combatant capacity in the UDF, but those who manned South African "little ships" and HMSAS *Gamtoos*, were serving in operational units in a war zone.<sup>28</sup> At least 316 women served in the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service (established October 1943).<sup>29</sup>

## 4.2 The post-war navy

As was the case with most other Allied defence forces, the UDF, and in particular the SANF, were scaled down drastically after the cessation of hostilities. By 1946 the SANF only had three frigates, one mine-layer (HMSAS *Spindrift*, renamed SAS *Skilpad* in 1951), two boom defence vessels, and 11 harbour defence motor launches. On 1 May 1946, the SANF was reconstituted as part of the UDF Permanent Force, with an authorised establishment of 60 officers and 806 ratings. In 1947 the first post-war expansion of the SANF took place when two "Algerine" class fleet minesweepers, soon to be renamed HMSAS *Bloemfontein* (ex HMS *Rosamund*) and HMSAS *Pietermaritzburg* (ex HMS *Pelorus*), as well as the "Flower" class corvette *Rockrose*, were acquired from the RN. The *Rockrose* was converted into a hydrographic survey ship and commissioned in February 1950 as HMSAS *Protea*.<sup>30</sup>

In March 1948 the SANF moved its main naval base from Cape Town to Salisbury Island in Durban. From there, the SANF sent several of its ships on flag-showing cruises, for example to Mozambique (November-December 1948),

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 140, 158-161. For South Africa's role in the war against Japan, see A Wessels, "Die stryd teen Nippon: Suid-Afrika en Japan, 1941-1945", *Journal for Contemporary History* 30(4), December 2005, pp. 222-241.

26 See Du Toit, pp. 33-167 for particulars with regard to all these ships.

27 See Gordon-Cumming, pp. 333-343 for a roll of honour.

28 CJ Nöthling, *Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag 1* (Silverton, 1995), p. 58.

29 MPH Lever, *Sailor-women, sea-women, SWANS: a history of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service 1943-1949* (Simon's Town, 1986).

30 Du Toit, pp. 171, 183, 188-189; RVB Blackman (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 1950-1951* (London, 1950), p. 113.

and in August-September 1949 to Angola (then still a Portuguese colony) and the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC).<sup>31</sup> Then, on 29 March 1950, the SANF took delivery of its first destroyer and largest warship up to that stage in its history, when the former “Wager” class destroyer HMS *Wessex* was handed over by the RN in Simon’s Town. In South African naval service she became HMSAS *Jan van Riebeeck*.<sup>32</sup>

## 5. THE PROSPEROUS 1950S

In 1948 the National Party (NP) came to power, with as its main policy the idea of apartheid (separate development). In due course this racially-based ideology would cause much harm to South Africa and all its people, and impact on its armed forces; but for the time being it did not affect either the navy’s role as guardian of the Cape sea route, or its diplomatic functions. On 1 January 1951 the name of the Union’s SANF was changed to South African Navy (SAN), and as from 20 June 1952 the prefix of all South African warships changed from HMSAS to South African Ship (SAS) – symbolising the growing nationalism (“South Africanism”; read “Afrikaner nationalism”) fostered by the NP government in an effort to move further away from British influences. In the meantime, the “new” SAN successfully completed its most ambitious flag-showing exercise up to that time, when the frigate *Transvaal* visited Australia (January-February 1951).<sup>33</sup> A SAN task force also visited East African ports (August-September 1952).<sup>34</sup>

On 23 February 1953 the SAN took delivery of its second “Wager” class destroyer, HMS *Whelp*, which was renamed SAS *Simon van der Stel* (“Simon”). From July-December 1954, “Simon” visited several ports along the west coast of Africa and in Europe, and escorted back SAS *Gelderland*, the first British-built “Ford” class seaward defence boat (SDB; i.e. patrol boat) acquired by the SAN.<sup>35</sup> The three “Loch” class frigates were now taken in hand to undergo conversions: the *Good Hope* was converted (1954-1955) into a dispatch vessel (“flag frigate”; i.e. a ship able to act as headquarters for a Flag Officer); *Natal* was converted (1956-1957)

31 Du Toit, pp. 161, 184; *The Natal Mercury*, 29 November 1948 and 13 December 1948.

32 Du Toit, pp. 193-195. For more on the role played by the “Wager” class destroyers in the SANF and later SAN, see A Wessels, “Snelstomers: torpedojaers in Suid-Afrikaanse vlootdiens, 1950-1975”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 29(2), September 2004, pp. 25-42.

33 *Commando* 2(12), May 1951, pp. 4-7, 39 and 2(15), August 1951, pp. 4-7; *Navy News* 11, April 1992, p. 25.

34 South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Documentation Service Directorate (Pretoria), Group 5: log-book, SAS *Jan van Riebeeck*; Du Toit, p. 195.

35 Du Toit, pp. 195-196; Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Vereeniging (NZAV) Archives (Amsterdam), NZAV VI 1091: several letters.

into a hydrographic survey ship, and the *Transvaal* was modernised and converted (1957-1960) into a training ship.<sup>36</sup>

In the meantime, on 1 September 1954, negotiations between the governments of South Africa and Britain commenced with regard to the future of the RN base at Simon's Town. In the following year a basic agreement was concluded, and on 2 April 1957 the formal transfer of the base to the SAN took place. In terms with the Simon's Town Agreement, the RN and allied navies could still use the base facilities, and the SAN undertook to purchase additional warships to ensure the safety of the Cape sea route. As a consequence, the following ships were added to the SAN's inventory: the British-built "Ton" class coastal minesweepers (mine counter-measures (MCM) ships) SA Ships *Kaapstad* (1955), *Pretoria* (1955), *Durban* (1958), *Windhoek* (1958), *East London* (1958), *Port Elizabeth* (1958), *Johannesburg* (1959), *Kimberley* (1959), *Mosselbaai* (1959) and *Walvisbaai* (1959); four additional "Ford" class SDBs, namely SA Ships *Nautilus* (1955), *Rijger* (1958), *Haerlem* (1959) and *Oosterland* (1959); the Type 15 ASW frigate SAS *Vrystaat* (ex HMS *Wrangler*, a converted "Wager" class destroyer), and in due course three purpose-built Type 12 frigates<sup>37</sup> (see Section 6, *infra* for more particulars).

Now, from its new naval base, the SAN continued to take part in regular exercises with the RN, and sometimes also with ships of the United States of America (USA), France and/or Portugal, and also undertook several flag-showing cruises, for example to East African ports (July 1957),<sup>38</sup> and ports in Angola and in the Belgian Congo (August 1959).<sup>39</sup>

## 6. THE ROAD TO ISOLATION, 1960-1975

While 1960 afforded the SAN the opportunity to show the South African flag in Portugal and along the west coast of Africa,<sup>40</sup> the year was a turbulent one in the

36 SAN Museum (Simon's Town), SAS *Good Hope* (file): various documents; Du Toit, pp. 161, 163, 165.

37 *Die Burger*, 2 April 1957, pp. 1, 8-9 and 3 April 1957, pp. 1, 5, 7, 9, 15; *Die Transvaler*, 3 April 1957, pp. 1, 6-7; *The Cape Argus*, 3 April 1957, p. 11; PJ Henshaw, "The transfer of Simon's Town: Afrikaner nationalism, South African strategic dependence, and British global power", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20(3), September 1992, pp. 420-444; Goosen (compiler), pp. 131-148. For more on the role of the "Ton" class and other MCM ships in SAN service, see A Wessels, "Sestig jaar se myn teenmaatreëls werk in die Suid-Afrikaanse Vloot, 1947-2007" (three parts), *Journal for Contemporary History* 33(3), December 2008, pp. 177-191, 34(3), December 2009, pp. 190-206 and 35(1), June 2010, pp. 184-202.

38 SAN Museum: History of the mine counter measures [sic] flotilla 1922-1988 (unpublished manuscript), p. 23; SANDF Documentation Service Directorate: log-books, SAS *Vrystaat* and *Good Hope*; *Commando* 7(8), July 1957, p. 4 and 8(9), September 1957, p. 31; Du Toit, pp. 163, 213.

39 Du Toit, pp. 163, 202.

40 SANDF Documentation Service Directorate, Chief of Naval Staff, 273: Operations. Movements, docking and refits – non-routine movements. Visit to Portugal. 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary, death of Prince Henry the Navigator, August 1960; Du Toit, p. 202.



history of South Africa. On 3 February, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan delivered his “Wind of change” speech in parliament, Cape Town;<sup>41</sup> on 21 March, the so-called Sharpeville Massacre led to renewed and stronger than ever before world-wide condemnation of the NP’s apartheid policy – and to the government banning the country’s most prominent black liberation movements, namely the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC).<sup>42</sup> As a result of the referendum held on 5 October, during which the white electorate by a small majority (850 485 against 775 878) voted in favour of their country becoming a republic, the Republic of South Africa was established on 31 May 1961 – outside the British Commonwealth, because Prime Minister Dr HF Verwoerd withdrew South Africa’s application for continued membership in the light of sharp criticism against his government’s apartheid policy.<sup>43</sup>

While flag-showing cruises continued, the SAN acquired its first real modern warships, namely three Type 12 ASW frigates: SAS *President Kruger* (1962), SAS *President Steyn* (1963) and SAS *President Pretorius* (1964).<sup>44</sup> This led to the demise of three old frigates: *Vrystaat* (withdrawn from service in 1963), *Transvaal* (1964) and *Good Hope* (1965).<sup>45</sup> In the meantime, from 1962 to 1966, the SAN’s two destroyers were extensively modified and converted into helicopter-carrying general purpose ships, with each now carrying two Westland Wasp HAS Mk1 ASW helicopters.<sup>46</sup> And in an effort to increase the range of its ships, the SAN acquired the 1957-1958 Danish-built commercial oil tanker, *Annam*, modified her for naval replenishment at sea, and commissioned her on 10 August 1967 as SAS *Tafelberg* – the largest ship thus far to serve in the SAN.<sup>47</sup> In October–November 1967 the *Tafelberg* accompanied two frigates on the first-ever SAN visit to Argentina,<sup>48</sup> and

41 See RE Gordon and CJ Talbot (eds), *From Dias to Vorster: source material on South African history 1488-1975* (Cape Town, 1977), pp. 411-412 for extracts from Macmillan’s speech.

42 B Sachs, *The road to Sharpeville* (Johannesburg, 1961), *passim*; W Beinart, *Twentieth-century South African history* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 159-160; F Pretorius (ed.), *Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika: van voortye tot vandag* (Cape Town, 2012), pp. 375-376.

43 Pretorius (ed.), pp. 338-339; H Giliomee and B Mbenga (eds), *A new history of South Africa* (Cape Town, 2007), p. 336.

44 For more on the history of the Type 12s in SAN service, see CH Bennett, *Three frigates* (Durban, 2006), *passim*; A Wessels, *South Africa’s frigates and destroyers 1944-1985* (*Naval Digest* 11, 2005), pp. 15-31.

45 Du Toit, pp. 166, 205.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 196.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 240. For more details with regard to the *Tafelberg* in SAN service, see A Wessels, “Veertig jaar se ondersteuning ter see. Gevegsteunskepe in die Suid-Afrikaanse Vloot, 1967-2007 (1): SAS *Tafelberg* en SAS *Drakensberg*”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 32(2), December 2007, pp. 165-181.

48 SANDF Documentation Service Directorate: log-books, SAS *President Kruger* and *Tafelberg*; Du Toit, pp. 197, 226; information supplied by Cdr DK Kinkead-Weekes.

also supported two frigates during a visit to Australia (October-November 1968).<sup>49</sup> By this time the first SAN Type 12 frigate had started a major refit and modification, which included a hangar and facilities for a single Wasp ASW helicopter to be carried on board. (The third frigate completed her – more extensive – conversion in 1977.)<sup>50</sup>

While all these positive developments for the SAN took place, the first clash between guerrillas of the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the South African security forces took place at Ongulumbashe, in the north of South West Africa (SWA; today Namibia), on 26 August 1966.<sup>51</sup> This minor clash was the start of what became known as the Border War or Bush War, but which should rather be called the Namibian War of Independence (1966-1989), a struggle that in due course became intertwined with first, the liberation struggle in Angola and later, the civil war in that country.<sup>52</sup> In due course this war “up north” had a profound impact on the South African Defence Force (SADF), in particular the SAN, which had always been, but increasingly became, the Cinderella of the SADF.

Flag-showing cruises to the neighbouring Portuguese colonies continued,<sup>53</sup> and when the inaugural Transatlantic yacht race between Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro took place in 1971, the *Tafelberg* acted as guardship.<sup>54</sup> In the meantime, the SAN established a submarine branch and acquired three French-built “Daphné” class submarines: SAS *Maria van Riebeeck* (1970), SAS *Emily Hobhouse* (1971) and SAS *Johanna van der Merwe* (1971). This was a quantum leap forward for a small navy like the SAN. Under normal circumstances the Navy would probably have preferred to buy British “Oberon” class submarines, but the fact that there was a Labour Party government in the United Kingdom (UK), which staunchly opposed South Africa's apartheid policy, made this impossible.<sup>55</sup> When the Conservative

49 SAN Museum: Report of proceedings – visit to Australia – period 7<sup>th</sup> October to 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1968; *Commando* 20(4), April 1969, pp. 13, 15 and 20(5), May 1969, pp. 13, 15, 25.

50 Du Toit, p. 226-227; Bennett, pp. 83-89.

51 PJ Els, *Ongulumbashe: where the Bushwar began* (Wandsbeck, 2007).

52 For South Africa's involvement in the war in SWA and in Angola see, for example, FJ du T Spies, *Operasie Savannah: Angola 1975-1976* (Pretoria, 1989), *passim*; MN Louw and JS Bouwer, *The South African Air Force at war: a pictorial appraisal* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Melville, 1995), pp. 141-234; and for the SAN in that period of conflict, see A Wessels, “The South African Navy during the years of conflict in Southern Africa, 1966-1989”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, pp. 283-303. Inevitably, there is some overlapping between the latter article and the present study.

53 See, for example, Du Toit, pp. 197, 226; SANDF Documentation Service Directorate: log-book, SAS *Mosselbaai*.

54 Du Toit, p. 242; information supplied by Capt. RC Cousens. During several similar yacht races in the years ahead, the *Tafelberg*, and later the *Protea*, acted as the guardship.

55 For the role of the “Daphné” class submarines in the SAN see, for example, *Through the periscope. South African submarines: the first thirty years. Reflections past and present* (Simon's Town, 1999), *passim*; A Wessels, “Duikbote in die Suid-Afrikaanse Vloot: die eerste fase,

Party was returned to power in the UK, and adopted a more sympathetic policy towards South Africa, the SAN ordered a “Hecla” class hydrographic survey ship – to replace the *Natal* – from a British dockyard, and commissioned her as SAS *Protea* on 23 May 1972. The SAN also acquired two 19,6 m air-sea rescue launches from the UK (1973).<sup>56</sup>

When the SAN commemorated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1972, its fleet consisted of three submarines, two modernised destroyers, three relatively new frigates (of which two had been further modernised), three old frigates in reserve, ten coastal minesweepers, one old ocean minesweeper in reserve, four small patrol boats, one harbour defence motor launch, one large replenishment ship, one large and one small survey ship, one boom defence ship, one diver support/torpedo recovery ship, three air-sea rescue launches, one coastal and one harbour tug, three dockyard launches and a small training ship<sup>57</sup> – the strongest the SAN had ever been in its 90-year history. By the mid-1970s many coloured people were already serving in uniform in the SAN, and on 15 January 1975 a training base for Indians was established in Durban (later named SAS *Jalsena*). As from 26 June 1978, all SAN messes and clubs were open to all races that served in the Navy.<sup>58</sup>

Large combined exercises between units of the SAN and RN took place in 1973 (twice) and in 1974 (once),<sup>59</sup> but in the UK the Labour Party was returned to power, and on 16 June 1975 it unilaterally abrogated the Simon’s Town Agreement.<sup>60</sup> In the meantime, the “troubles up north” had escalated to such an extent that the South African (SA) Army took over all counter-guerrilla operations from the SA Police in 1973. This conflict grew in intensity after Angola became independent on 11 November 1975. (Mozambique became independent on 25 June 1975.) For the first time South Africa now had pro-communist neighbours. When civil war broke out in Angola in the run-up to independence and continued afterwards, threatening stability in Southern Africa, the SADF (with the tacit support of the USA and several other countries) sent in troops, supported by aircraft and helicopters of the South African Air Force (SAAF), in an attempt to assist the pro-Western Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA) and União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) against the pro-communist Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) government forces. Two frigates (supported by the *Tafelberg*)

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1970-2003: ‘n kort historiese evalueerig” (two parts), *Journal for Contemporary History* 30(2), September 2005, pp. 180-194 and 30(3), December 2005, pp. 92-108.

56 Du Toit, pp. 253-254.

57 J Moore (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1973-74* (London, 1973), pp. 267-270.

58 See, for example, *Phoenix* 2(4), 31 March 1984, p. 8; *The Daily News*, 14 November 1992, p. 6; C Bennett, *South African naval events day-by-day 1488 to 2009* (Simon’s Town, 2011), p. 87.

59 Du Toit, p. 230.

60 A du Plessis, *Die maritiem-strategiese betekenis van die Simonstad-vlootbasis* (Pretoria, 1979), pp. 26-27.

were sent to patrol off the coast of SWA and later also off the Angolan coast, and to lend support to South Africa's land and air forces where necessary. In the early hours of 28 November 1975, while patrolling off the Angolan coast, the *President Steyn* used its boats and Wasp helicopter to pick up 24 South African soldiers and two civilians, as well as some equipment, from the beach near Ambrizete, a small fishing village north of Luanda.<sup>61</sup> Soon these events would be overshadowed by what happened in 1976 on the RSA's home front.

## 7. THE ISOLATION YEARS, 1976-1989

The year 1976 held great promise for the SAN when it was invited – albeit somewhat belatedly – to send a warship to the USA to take part in the celebrations in honour of its 200<sup>th</sup> year of independence. The *President Kruger* was the first South African warship ever to visit the USA.<sup>62</sup> But while the *President Kruger* was away, serious riots broke out in Soweto, the sprawling black township southwest of Johannesburg – and spread to many other areas. World-wide indignation and renewed protests against the NP's apartheid policy followed.<sup>63</sup> Convinced that there was a “total onslaught” against the country, the NP retreated further into their laager and adopted measures to keep the whites in power. More organisations and publications were banned, and anyone who openly defied the government was dealt with harshly. On 12 September 1977, the black consciousness activist Steve Biko died in police custody.<sup>64</sup> South Africa's status as a pariah state was confirmed when, on 4 November 1977, the United Nations (UN) imposed a mandatory all-embracing arms embargo against the country.<sup>65</sup>

The embargo had profoundly negative implications for the SAN, because the delivery of two “Agosta” class submarines and two Type A69 light frigates, all being built in French yards, was cancelled. However, the country had foreseen that an embargo might be imposed and alternative options were considered. As early as September 1977, SAS *Jan Smuts*, the first new fast missile attack craft, referred to as strike craft in the SAN, arrived in Simon's Town, having been built in Israel for

61 Spies, pp. 141-142, 147, 168, 174-176; *Through the periscope*, pp. 48, 65; Du Toit, pp. 231-332; Bennett, *Three frigates*, pp. 159-166; W Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War 1966-1989* (Gibraltar, 1989), pp. 51-52.

62 *Navy News* 11, April 1992, p. 27; Du Toit, p. 232; information supplied by Rear Adm. PA Wijnberg.

63 See, for example, R Davenport and C Saunders, *South Africa: a modern history* (5<sup>th</sup> edition, London, 2000), p. 453; Giliomee and Mbenga (eds), p. 365; *The Natal Mercury*, 17 June 1976, pp. 1-5, 18, 18 June 1976, pp. 1-4 and 19 June 1976, pp. 1-2, 8-10.

64 See, for example, Giliomee and Mbenga (eds), pp. 353-354, 365; *The Star*, 13 September 2001, pp. 11 and 12, September 1997, p. 15; *Sowetan*, 12 September 1985, p. 4.

65 For more on the embargo and its consequences, see A Wessels, “The United Nations arms embargo against South Africa, 1977-1994”, *War & Society* 29(2), October 2010, pp. 137-153.

the SAN, and commissioned on 8 July 1977. Two similar craft were also built for the SAN in Israel, namely SAS *PW Botha* (also commissioned in 1977) and SAS *Frederic Creswell* (1978), while a total of six others were built in South Africa: SA Ships *Jim Fouché* (1978), *Frans Erasmus* (1979), *Oswald Pirow* (1980), *Hendrik Mentz* (1983), *Kobie Coetsee* (1983) and *Magnus Malan* (1986). (In 1997 the last eight ships received new names.) For nearly three decades, these small ships formed the backbone of the SAN's surface fleet.<sup>66</sup>

With the exception of the *Protea's* visit to Argentina in 1978 (during a krill research expedition) and to Uruguay at the end of the fourth Transatlantic yacht race (1979),<sup>67</sup> no SAN flag-showing visits took place for more than a decade, while only a few warship visits to South Africa, in particular from the Republic of China (Taiwan), took place.<sup>68</sup> At another level the SAN was also forced to reconsider its role. It was decided that the SAN would soon have to relinquish its blue-water role, no longer act as pro-Western guardian of the Cape sea route, and would henceforth become a small-ship navy that would concentrate on defending the RSA's coastline, harbours and its own maritime interests. Thirty small "Namacurra" class harbour protection boats (HPBs) were locally designed and built. Four single-role "River" class mine-hunters were also acquired (under the guise of being research ships): two built in West Germany, and two in South Africa. (All four were commissioned in 1981 and in due course named SA Ships *Umkomaas*, *Umgeni*, *Umzinkulu* and *Umhloti*.)<sup>69</sup>

The frigate *President Steyn* was withdrawn from service on 1 August 1980 and stripped to provide spare parts for her two remaining sister ships. Then, in the early hours of 18 February 1982, the *President Kruger* was sunk after colliding with the *Tafelberg* during exercises with other fleet units – 16 members of the frigate's crew were lost. The SAN's sole remaining frigate, *President Pretorius*, was decommissioned for the last time on 26 July 1985 and sold for scrap in 1992.<sup>70</sup>

In the meantime, the war in SWA and in Angola escalated and placed ever higher demands on the SADF's budget. In an effort to curb SWAPO infiltrations into SWA, the SADF launched cross-border operations into southern Angola, attacking SWAPO bases. The SADF succeeded in stabilising the situation to such an extent that it prevented SWAPO from breaking through further south into the

66 Du Toit, pp. 297-309.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 264-265; SANDF Documentation Service Directorate: log-book, SAS *Protea*; line-book: SAS *Protea; The Cape Times South Atlantic Supplement*, 12 January 1979, p. 3.

68 For the visits by warships from Taiwan, Malaysia, Chile and Israel to the RSA, 1977-1989, see A Wessels, "Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke aan Suid-Afrikaanse hawens (2): die periode van fluktuerende internasionale betrekkinge, 1961-1994", *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(2), September 2006, pp. 95-97.

69 Du Toit, pp. 233-234, 294-296, 310-315.

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 234-238; Bennett, pp. 187-201, 204-205.

predominantly white farming areas in northern SWA.<sup>71</sup> With most of the defence budget being canalised to the SA Army and SAAF, the SAN underwent drastic rationalisation, both in terms of personnel and ships, with six “Ton” class ships, all five “Ford” class ships, another small patrol boat, a SAR vessel, and the Navy’s last boom defence vessel all being withdrawn from service in the course of 1985 – together with the *President Pretorius*, whose withdrawal from service has already been mentioned. The only real highlight of the later 1980s for the SAN was the commissioning, on 11 November 1987, of SAS *Drakensberg*, a combat support ship designed and built in South Africa – the largest of any kind of ship thus far built in South Africa.<sup>72</sup> For more than two decades the SAN would henceforth be a 24-hull navy, with three submarines, nine strike craft, four mine-hunters, four minesweepers, two combat support ships (but no frigates or destroyers to support at sea), one hydrographic research ship and one diver support/torpedo recovery ship.<sup>73</sup>

## 8. THE 1990S: A DECADE OF NEW OPPORTUNITIES

In 1989 the Namibian War of Independence ended and SWA became independent as Namibia on 21 March 1990.<sup>74</sup> On 2 February 1990, South Africa’s new state president, Mr FW de Klerk, delivered a watershed speech at the opening of parliament, announcing the unbanning of the ANC and other organisations, and the release of Mr Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners. This set in motion a train of events which included multi-party negotiations with regard to the future of the country and, after several set-backs, a negotiated settlement, South Africa’s first-ever truly democratic elections in the last week of April 1994, and the inauguration of Mandela as the country’s first black president in a government led by the ANC.<sup>75</sup>

Even before South Africa was officially welcomed back by the international community, the SAN played a role on a diplomatic level to prepare South Africa for the exciting times that lay ahead. See in this regard, for example, the flag-showing cruises by the *Protea* to Portugal (April-July 1990),<sup>76</sup> *Drakensberg* and two strike craft to Taiwan (May-June 1990),<sup>77</sup> *Drakensberg* and two mine-hunters to

71 See, for example, Steenkamp, pp. 61-184.

72 Du Toit, pp. 316-320. For more on the role of the *Drakensberg* in the SAN, see A Wessels, “Veertig jaar se ondersteuning ter see (1)”, pp. 174-182 and “Veertig jaar se ondersteuning ter see (2)”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(1), June 2008, pp. 144-158.

73 J Moore (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1986-87* (London, 1986), pp. 450-454; R Sharpe (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1998-99* (London, 1998), pp. 629-633.

74 See, for example, *Beeld*, 21 March 1990, pp. 1-2.

75 Giliomee and Mbenga (eds), pp. 395-396, 400-408; *The Argus*, 2 February 1990, pp. 1-2; *Die Transvaler*, 2 February 1990, pp. 1-2.

76 Line-book: SAS *Protea*; *Navy News* 9, July 1990, pp. 12, 15, 17 and 11, April 1992, p. 27.

77 *Paratus* 41(6), June 1990, p. 32 and 41(9), September 1990, p. 26; Du Toit, pp. 307, 320; *Navy News* 9, August 1990, pp. 2, 10-11, 15-16, 20; *The Natal Mercury*, 12 May 1990, p. 4 and 26 June 1990, p. 2.

Zaire (August-September 1990),<sup>78</sup> *Tafelberg* to (and right around) South America (January-March 1991),<sup>79</sup> the *Drakensberg*'s humanitarian relief operation of July-September 1991,<sup>80</sup> the *Protea* once again to Europe (April-June 1992),<sup>81</sup> and the *Drakensberg*, a submarine and three strike craft to South America for the first-ever ATLASUR exercises with ships from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay (January-March 1993).<sup>82</sup> In the meantime, *Tafelberg* was replaced as a combat support ship by the Ukrainian-built ice-breaker transport ship *Juvent*, commissioned on 8 June 1993 as SAS *Outeniqua*.<sup>83</sup>

The birth of the "new" South Africa in April 1994 opened many doors (ports!) for the SAN, which wasted no time in embarking on several tailor-made flag-showing cruises, including to Europe (*Drakensberg*, May-August 1994),<sup>84</sup> Tanzania (*Outeniqua*, September-October 1994),<sup>85</sup> the Middle East and Indian sub-continent (*Drakensberg*, February-April 1995),<sup>86</sup> and South and North America plus West Africa (*Drakensberg*, June-September 1996).<sup>87</sup> In the light of the fact that the SAN no longer had any frigates or destroyers, its combat support ships became its most important grey diplomats, albeit that smaller ships like strike craft, MCM ships and even submarines were from time to time also utilised in this regard.<sup>88</sup>

With South Africa having been welcomed back into the international community, and rejoining the Commonwealth (17 July 1994), there was also a cavalcade of foreign grey diplomats that visited the country: ships from former naval partners like the UK, the USA and France, but also from countries that had never before sent ships to South Africa, like Singapore, India and the People's Republic of China. In

78 *Navy News* 9, January-February 1991, pp. 12-13; *Paratus* 41(10), October 1990, pp. 8-9; Du Toit, pp. 314, 321.

79 G Wardley, "Operation Gypsy – SAS Tafelberg's South American adventure", *Unisa Latin American Report* 7(2), 1991, p. 89; *Paratus* 42(2), February 1991, p. 5; *Navy News* 10, April-May 1991, pp. 12-16.

80 *Navy News* 10, November-December 1991, pp. 8-11 and 11, June 1992, pp. 8-9, 14; *The Daily News*, 6 August 1991, p. 4, 7 August 1991, p. 6 and 7 September 1991, p. 5.

81 *Navy News* 11, August 1992, pp. 9-10; *Paratus* 43(7), July 1992, p. 16; Du Toit, p. 265; *The Natal Mercury*, 24 June 1992, p. 1.

82 SAS *Scorpion*: Unit press cutting book [9.1.1993-28.5.1996]; line-book, SAS *Magnus Malan/Makhanda*; *Paratus* 44(2), February 1993 and 44(6), June 1993, p. 20.

83 *Navy News* 12, April 1993, pp. 10-11 and 12, July 1993, pp. 10-13. For more of the role of the *Outeniqua* in the SAN, 1993-2004, see A Wessels, "Veertig jaar se ondersteuning ter see. Gevegsteunskepe in die Suid-Afrikaanse Vloot, 1967-2007 (2): SAS *Drakensberg* en SAS *Outeniqua*", *Journal for Contemporary History* 33(1), June 2008, pp. 144-155.

84 *Navy News* 13, June 1994, p. 18 and 13, October 1994, pp. 12, 14-16; *Salut* 1(2), June 1994, pp. 50-51 and October 1994, pp. 26-28; *Ad Astra* 15(10), October 1994, pp. 18-19.

85 *Navy News* 13, October 1994, p. 2 and 13, November-December 1994, p. 9.

86 *Ibid.* 14, May 1995, pp. 12-14.

87 *Ibid.* 15, October 1996, pp. 13-18; *Salut* 3(11), November 1996, pp. 58-59.

88 For more details with regard to other flag-showing cruises in the 1990s, see Wessels, "South Africa's grey diplomats", pp. 90-101; Wessels, "Onwaarskynlike ambassadeurs", pp. 70-77.

1994 there were visits by 21 warships from eight countries, 26 from 12 in 1995, 27 from ten in 1996, and 35 from 15 in 1997.<sup>89</sup> The main reason for 1997 being such a hectic naval diplomacy year was the fact that the SAN's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary was commemorated on a grand scale in Simon's Town, Table Bay and in Cape Town, including an international naval review in Table Bay on 5 April 1997 in which 14 major SAN ships and a submarine, as well as 22 visiting warships from 13 countries took part.<sup>90</sup>

For many years the SAN suffered the consequences of a lack of funds, and its ships grew older, without the prospect of replacement. Credit is due to the SAN's commanding officers and all its other personnel that they were able to keep the SAN afloat in difficult times. See in this regard, for example, the modernisation (or rather "rebuilding") of two of the Navy's minesweepers (SAS *Walvisbaai* and SAS *East London*).<sup>91</sup> In the course of the 1990s, the new South African government decided to modernise the SANDF, and on 18 November 1998 the cabinet announced the approval of an arms package of (at that stage) some R30,4 billion, which included the acquisition of three Type 209/1400MOD(SA) submarines and four Meko A-200 frigates from Germany (and, in due course, also four Agusta-Westland Super Lynx 300 ASW helicopters from the UK to be deployed from the frigates).<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, allegations of irregularities with regard to the tender process have tainted this very necessary arms deal.

The transformation process that characterized the SANDF in the 1990s was also reflected in the SAN. Coloureds had been allowed to join the SAN and serve at sea since the 1960s and Indians since the 1970s; and, since 1994, black people have also been allowed this opportunity. As early as 14 December 1994, Cdr Yegan Moodley became the first "non-white" South African to take command of a South African warship, namely the strike craft *Jan Smuts*.<sup>93</sup> The first black person to command a "major" SAN warship, was Lt Cdr BK Mhlana, who took command of the minesweeper *Kapa* on 30 July 2003; and on 22 February 2007, now a captain, he became the first black person to command a South African frigate (SAS *Isandlwana*).<sup>94</sup> On 1 March 2005 Vice Adm. Refiloe Mudimu became the first black person to take over the command of the SAN.<sup>95</sup>

89 For more details on all these visits, see A Wessels, "Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke aan Suid-Afrikaanse hawens (3): die eerste dekade van die nuwe Suid-Afrika", *Journal for Contemporary History* 32(1), June 2007, pp. 223-232.

90 *Navy News* 16(3), 1997, pp. 4-7, 10-23.

91 See, for example, *Navy News* 12, May 1993, pp. 9, 18; *Die Volksblad*, 13 April 1993, p. 5.

92 *Salut* 6(1), 1999, pp. 14-19; *The Mercury*, 19 November 1998, p. 1; *Beeld*, 19 November 1998, pp. 1-2.

93 *The Star*, 14 December 1994, p. 10; *The Argus*, 17 August 1995, p. 10.

94 *Volksblad*, 31 July 2003, p. 18; *Cape Argus*, 23 February 2007, p. 5; *Navy News* 26(2), 2007, p. 20; *SA Soldier* 19(10), October 2003, p. 23; *Weekend Post*, 5 May 2007, p. 4.

95 Bennett and Söderlund, p. 219.



## 9. A NEW NAVY FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

To replace the remaining four “Ton” class minesweepers, the SAN bought six 1958-1960 vintage “Lindau” class Type 351 MCM ships from Germany. Only two were commissioned, both on 5 September 2001: SAS *Kapa* and SAS *Thekwini*, but *Thekwini* was withdrawn from service on 21 June 2002, and *Kapa* on 2 June 2006. Two others, that would have been named *Mangaung* and *Tshwane*, were never commissioned, while the last two ships were acquired to be used for spare parts.<sup>96</sup>

The SAN continued to excell on diplomatic level. For example, in February-March 2001 the *Drakensberg* visited India;<sup>97</sup> and in February 2002 the *Outeniqua* and a strike craft visited Tanzania.<sup>98</sup> Soon the four new frigates would take over the role as the SAN’s major grey diplomats. The four new frigates were named SAS *Amatola* (commissioned as a fully armed and operational ship in 2006), SAS *Isandhwana* (2006), SAS *Spioenkop* (2007) and SAS *Mendi* (2007),<sup>99</sup> while the new submarines were commissioned as SAS *Manthatisi* (2005), SAS *Charlotte Maxeke* (2007) and SAS *Queen Modjadji I* (2008).<sup>100</sup> Now that, for the first time since 1985, the SAN had major combat warships, they were as soon as possible deployed as grey diplomats, for example, the *Amatola* visited Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon and São Tomé (May-June 2006),<sup>101</sup> and the *Spioenkop* was deployed to Singapore, the Republic of China, Malaysia, India and Mauritius (September-December 2008).<sup>102</sup> The SAN’s new frigates, as well as its new submarines, have also taken part in several naval exercises, for example ATLASUR, IBSAMAR (with ships from India and Brazil) and Good Hope (with ships from Germany).<sup>103</sup> Since the beginning of 2011, SAN warships have also taken part in anti-piracy patrols in the Mozambique Channel.<sup>104</sup>

On the SAN’s 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary (1 April 2012), four patrol ships and three research ships belonging to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

96 *Navy News* 20(2), 2001, pp. 14-19, 20(5), 2001, pp. 20-21 and 27(6), 2007, p. 23; *The Mercury*, 14 March 2001, p. 4; *SA Soldier* 8(1), June 2001, p. 25.

97 *Navy News* 20(2), 2001, p. 22 and 20(4), 2001, p. 16.

98 *Ibid.* 21(2), 2002, p. 15; *SA Soldier* 9(5), May 2002, pp. 8-10; “SAS Outenique. Operation Tanzanite. Ship’s log”, <<http://www.simonstown.com/tourism/navy/otqreports.htm>>, consulted 6 March 2002.

99 S Saunders (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 2008-2009* (Coulsdon, 2008), p. 720.

100 *Navy News* 25(2), 2006, pp. 18-23, 26(3), 2007, pp. 18-23 and 28(3), 2008, pp. 16-17, 28-31; Bennett and Söderlund, p. 109.

101 *Navy News* 25(4), 2006, pp. 26-31.

102 *Ibid.* 28(1), 2009, pp. 16-20.

103 See, for example, *ibid.* 29(1), 2010, pp. 16-20 and 29(2), 2010, pp. 22-23; *SA Soldier* 14(4), April 2010, pp. 14-15 and 17(11), November 2010, pp. 20-22.

104 *Navy News* 30(4), 2011, pp. 23-25; *Maritime Review Africa* (2012), p. 44; several news items at <<http://ports.co.za>>, consulted 2011-2012.

were transferred to the SAN, after that Department's contract with a private company, which had operated the ships for twelve years, lapsed.<sup>105</sup>

## 10. CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES

In accordance with its core business, namely "To fight at sea", its mission, namely "To win at sea", and its vision, namely "To be unchallenged at sea",<sup>106</sup> it is imperative that South Africa's Navy must be a well-balanced, well-equipped, well-trained and disciplined force, and must be able to conduct operations in defence of South Africa and all the people of the country. But, in times of peace, the Navy has an equally important role to play, for example with regard to search and rescue operations, humanitarian relief operations, regional assistance operations, and diplomatic reach-out actions. With regard to all these aspects the SAN, and its predecessors, have been successful. Since the Second World War, 54 of the Navy's 57 major warships have taken part in approximately 90 flag-showing cruises, visiting more than 100 ports in some 50 countries. That included at least 29 ports in 23 countries visited during eight tailor-made flag-showing cruises in the three-year period 1994-1996, whereby the SAN's grey diplomats played a major role in re-establishing the ties of friendship that already existed with several foreign navies, but also establishing several new ties with, in particular, African and Asian countries. The SAN has demonstrated that it can successfully deploy ships and submarines on long diplomatic and other missions, and consequently that South Africa is a technologically capable state. Our shores have also been visited by more than 300 foreign warships in the years 1994-2012, whereas only ten flag-showing visits took place in the years 1977-1989.<sup>107</sup>

Today (2012), a hundred years after the Union Defence Forces were established and 90 years after South Africa's first permanent navy was established, the SAN has three submarines, four frigates, three gun-boats (former strike craft), three very small patrol boats, three mine-hunters, a hydrographic research ship, a combat support ship, three tugs, two multi-role tenders, plus a large number of small boats of various types and sizes.<sup>108</sup> Whereas, for most of its history, South Africa's naval forces were equipped with British-built ships, most of the SAN's major ships are now German-built. Were it not for apartheid and concomitant

105 *Cape Times*, 19 March 2012, pp. 1, 4; *The Mercury*, 30 March 2012, p. 2, 2 April 2012, p. 2 and 4 April 2012, p. 10.

106 Bennett and Söderlund, p. [vi].

107 See, for example, many articles with regard to SAN flag-showing cruises, as well as foreign warship visits to South African ports, in *Navy News* 13, June 1994 – 31(3), 2012.

108 <<http://www.navy.mil/za/equipment.htm>>, consulted 20 February 2012; S Saunders (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 2011-2012* (Coulsdon, 2011), pp. 738-743; *The military balance 2012* (London, 2012), p. 453.

sanctions, the SAN's developmental path, and equipment, might have been quite different. For example, the SAN would have preferred to buy three or more British "Oberon" class submarines instead of French "Daphné" class boats; the Second World War frigates and destroyers could have been replaced by two or more British "Leander" class frigates, but when that was blocked, there was the possibility of buying licence-built "Leanders", as well as submarines, from the Netherlands – but that also did not materialise.<sup>109</sup> Had the SAN been able to buy missile-armed frigates (or corvettes from or via Portugal<sup>110</sup>), the SAN would probably not have bought strike craft from Israel, or built additional ones in South Africa. And then there were the two "Agosta" class submarines and two Type A69 light frigates that were built for the SAN in France, but never delivered because of the UN arms embargo of 1977.<sup>111</sup>

Since 1994 there were also various arms procurement scenarios. There was the possibility that four frigates might have been built for the SAN in Spain;<sup>112</sup> at one stage there was the possibility of buying three "Kortenaer" class frigates and two refurbished submarines from the Netherlands;<sup>113</sup> the acquisition of the four "Upholder" class attack submarines from the UK<sup>114</sup> (which also did not materialise; a blessing in disguise in view of the problems these submarines have caused the Canadian navy, which bought them in 1998);<sup>115</sup> and the SAN could probably also have acquired four or five "Oliver Hazard Perry" class frigates from the USA. Ideally the SAN should have four submarines, five frigates, six multi-role ships (for example, for patrol and diver support work), four dedicated MCM ships, one large dedicated hydrographic research ship, one combat support/replenishment ship, and two helicopter-carrying assault ships (LHDs). All government research and patrol ships, as well as South Africa's new Antarctic supply and research ship, should also be under SAN control – but then the government must also provide the necessary additional funds to support these ships.

Notwithstanding all the good work the SAN has done in the course of so many years, there are still those who question whether South Africa indeed needs a navy. In the light of the fact that South Africa should adopt a threat-independent strategy for its Defence Force, and thus also for its navy, the question is not "What is the threat?", or "Who will attack us?", but rather "What are South Africa's interests?";

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109 As far as the possibility of acquiring warships and submarines from the Netherlands is concerned see, for example, S de Boer, *Van Sharpeville to Soweto: Nederlands regeringsbeleid ten aanzien van apartheid, 1960-1977* (The Hague, 1999), pp. 167-175.

110 Du Toit, pp. 280-281.

111 *Ibid.*, pp. 281-289.

112 *The Argus*, 12 October 1994, p. 13; *Die Burger*, 29 December 1994, p. 7.

113 *Die Burger*, 11 October 1995, pp. 10-11.

114 *The Star*, 15 October 1996, p. 2 and 25 October 1996, p. 18; *Die Burger*, 21 November 1996, p. 15.

115 Saunders (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 2011-2012*, p. 98.

“What must the SANDF/SAN do, and what equipment must it have, to support the regional and international interests – and policy – of South Africa?”; “How can the SANDF/SAN in practice give support to the realisation of the ideals of the African Renaissance?” Since 1922 South Africa’s naval forces have established a proud tradition of service – in war and peace – to South Africa and all its people, and can face the future with confidence.