LIFE ON THE BORDER: A SOCIO/HISTORIC STUDY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE DURING THE "BUSH WAR", 1966-1989

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The South African Air Force had participated in the "Bushwar/Border War" way before the first shots were fired at Ungulumbushe in 1966 until the last personnel and freight were flown out of Namibia in 1989.[1] This article deals with the manner in which the individual lived during the more than two decades in which the Air Force was directly involved in the military activity in this specific region. It is to be noted that this was never a declared war, but in the eyes of the South African Air Force that participated, it was a full-scale war.

The border war became a lifestyle. Junior corporals or lieutenants who had served on the border in the mid-1960s, were often holding senior positions of responsibility two decades later. In a paper written by a young 2nd lieutenant early in the conflict he described the region as "the vastness of nothing, kilometres of empty space, a flat bushy land, an untamed land".[2] It was from descriptions like these that the conflict gained the unofficial title of the "Bush War".

The Air Force could not permanently post all their members to the border. The vast majority of SAAF personnel rotated through the region on "bush tours", varying in length from two weeks to three months. However, a handful of senior and non-commissioned officers (NCO's) were permanently appointed to add continuity and experience to the conduct of operations. These men were allowed to be accompanied by their families on tours varying between one and three years. Every person in the Air Force was rostered for border duty in an attempt to share the burden.

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1 SL Barnard, "'n Historiese oorsig van die gewapende konflik aan die Noordgrens van SWA/Namibië, 1966-1989", **Acta Academica**, Vol. 23(1), March 1991.

2 Interview, Brig. Genl. Faan de Villiers.

In the beginning, the tendency was to post people to the border on long bush tours, until it was discovered that this had a negative effect. Long periods away from home and tension on the border took their toll. Psychological problems developed which, in the words of an airman, tended to be treated by "drinking petrol (troopie slang for alcohol) as if it was going out of style". Shorter tours towards the end of the war solved many of these problems. They held the added advantage that every member of the unit was exposed to the experience gained in the war situation.

If there was one exception to the rule, it must have been the helicopter crews who participated in the Angolan and other border war theatres. To be at home became a rare experience for these men. One of them claims to have spent only 13 months at home in a period of five and a half years and others say they were at home even less than that. One of the best-known chopper pilots from this era, Col. Breytie Breytenbach, noted with regret that he had only celebrated two birthdays of his twin daughters at home by the time they had turned 16.[3] The first time was at their birth. Johan Ströh, a fellow chopper pilot, mentioned with a grin that he had to arrange the wedding of his best friend, Col. Rassie Erasmus, as Rassie was away in the bush.[4]

A "bush tour" began at Air Force Base Waterkloof in Pretoria, when the Air Force member would board a Flossie or a Boeing belonging to SAFAIR, to be flown to the operational area. A young pilot from 42 Squadron described his first bush tour in these words: "There was nothing fancy about a bush tour, domestic-wise that is; one or two sets of nutria clothing, underwear, toiletries, flying kit or tool kit, books and the latest newspapers." With the exception of night-time in winter, the climate was exceptionally warm and 45°C in the shade was not uncommon.[5]

After a flight of nearly three hours they would arrive at Grootfontein. From there they would continue the journey to their appointed destinations, usually Ondangwa, Rundu or Mpacha, if they were not to stay at "Grooties" itself. Destinations could also be the Forward Air Force Command Posts, co-located with Army head-quarters, at Oshikati or Katima Mulilo, or even Army units in the case of members joining MAOT (Mobile Air Operations Teams). Accommodation at these bases differed radically. In the early days most people slept in tents. Through the years, however, some bases received permanent or prefabricated housing, while others remained with tents.[6]

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3 Interview, Col. Breytie Breytenbach.
4 Interview, Col. Johan Ströh.
5 Interview, Col. Steyn Venter.
6 Interview, Brig. Genl. HAP Potgieter.

Only those who experienced it can fully realise how uncomfortable this kind of living can be. There was no escaping the climate, which in Namibia is extreme. They had to face very hot summers, severe tropical thunderstorms, flies, mosquitoes, dust and, at Oshikati, white sand that reflects the burning sun. The semi-permanent accommodation, used mostly by officers and aircrew, was small and crowded, without cupboards. Clothes were hung against the walls or kept in suitcases. As many of the flights took place at night, aircrew would try to sleep during the day. Under mosquito nets (used to keep flies away) the temperatures were so high, that only exhausted people could sleep. To make matters worse, noisy generators that supplied electrical power to the camps, ran day and night. Carlo Gagiano, an experienced fighter pilot, explained that these conditions were totally unsuitable for those flying on operations, where the slightest lapse of concentration could have disastrous consequences.[7]

With the exception of the sleeping accommodation, the Air Force tried its utmost to make the rest of the buildings as attractive and comfortable as possible. It was here that individual initiative flourished. Countless schemes were tried to reduce the effects of the climate. A prime example was the building of a facility at Ondangwa that was used as a church, assembly area, recreation facility and a pub. It was not unusual to shift the chairs, relax and open a beer after church on a Sunday.

The Jakkalsgat at Rundu (the oldest Air Force base in the bush) will be remembered with nostalgia for the wonderful days and nights spent in that building. At Oshikati, the Air Force members, enabled by a donation from Corobrick of Pretoria, built their own swimming bath. This pool, so refreshing in summer, was surrounded by pot plants and bird cages that ensured a relaxed atmosphere.

The base at Mpacha was without doubt the favourite Air Force establishment on the border. The grandeur of the thick tropical bush made it a particularly attractive base. Wild animals were plentiful and elephants were often seen grazing within metres of the living quarters. SAAF City was erected to serve as the recreation facility for Air Force members in the area and their guests. This popular pub became a landmark in the Caprivi, as outside it boasted the only set of traffic lights in that part of Africa. However, the lights did not control vehicular traffic. The green light indicated that the pub was open. Very rarely the other lights were illuminated. These lights were the brainchild of Sgt. "Soutie" Sowden, one of the well-known bush warriors.[8]

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7 Interview, Brig. Genl. Carlo Gagiano.
8 Interview, Sgt. "Soutie" Sowden.

The other big attraction of Mpacha was the great Zambezi River which flowed nearby. No one can forget the tiger fishing, exquisite sunsets and tropical splendour of that wonderful river.

Air Force personnel from time to time operated with the Army as members of MAOT. These ground force operations often took place deep behind enemy lines, and sometimes members would longingly remember the poor accommodation at forward bases. On mobile MAOT deployments, trenches had to be dug every time the vehicles stopped - the closest an airman came to the life of a pongo (infantry soldier). Fresh rations were rare and after a few weeks ration packs lost their novelty. A Puma taxi service was often instituted to bring in fresh rations, when the dust, flies, thunderstorms and "ratpacks" became too much. Fresh roast meat, chocolates, socks, writing-paper and blades would fill the cabin of the helicopters to bring a little relief to the troops.[9]

During each tour the Air Force personnel worked hard - the number of flights and operations bears testament to that fact. However, there were moments of relaxation when the long hours became tedious. A number of activities used to fill these waiting hours. The most popular was probably playing volley ball. Often, the first facility to be constructed at a new base was a volley ball court.

Many hours were spent beside swimming pools. These were often makeshift contraptions, where a tarpaulin was used to line a hole dug in the ground, which was then filled with water. A person, newly returned from the border, could be recognised by the dark tan he had acquired in the Namibian sun. Products that ranged from Johnson's Baby Oil, Brylcream and even gearbox oil were used to become the brownest of the brown. Those who did not want to imitate Hercules spent their time reading, playing darts, table tennis and cards (bridge, Mississippi poker, and "soekie hoer" (the Queen of Spades)) or watching films.

Braaivleis (barbecue) and potjiekos (food prepared in a three-legged "missionary" cast iron pot), bring back nostalgic memories to those who served many tours on the border. Food, and its preparation, was never far from the minds of those on active service. Throughout history it has been said that an army marches on its stomach. During the long border war, Air Force personnel generally received the highest quality fresh rations. Vegetables, fruit, the best cuts of lamb, pork and chicken were made available. It was then the responsibility of the chef and his kitchen staff to prepare attractive and tasty food. Over the weekends there always seemed to be extra meat that was then roasted on the coals of Namibian hardwood.

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9 Interview, Col. "Crow" Stannard.

These occasions were usually held to welcome newcomers or to say farewell to those that had completed their tour of duty.[10]

In spite of good preparation the food tended to become uninteresting, as in any other institution. Under these circumstances Air Force personnel demonstrated their ingenuity. A huge variety of herbs, spices and garlic accompanied some of the diners to table. Whenever friendly farmers presented game, this was transformed into gourmet food by the chefs.

The pub was the centre of activities on every border base. Here the men swopped stories, built up friendships and camaraderie and allowed the tensions of the war to dissipate. In truth, it was the only place where the men could really relax, because in the tents and accommodation blocks there just was not enough space available to let their hair down. Over the years, the cost of drinks, and other commodities, increased. In the early days, the cost of a tot of brandy, cane or vodka varied between 5 and 8 cents, while whisky and rum cost ten cents. The joke was that it was the 25 cent Coke that made an evening in the pub expensive! A packet of Chesterfield cigarettes, that had newly come onto the market, cost only 15 cents.[11]

Each border pub developed its own characteristics and traditions. For example, in the bar at Mpacha it was traditional that each newcomer had to master the "green mamba" (peppermint liqueur), to be accepted as a full-fledged member of the community. On leaving the base, a brown liqueur was downed which made experienced eyes water and knees buckle. Another custom that gained stature was one known as "saddle the horse". On arrival at the pub the barman was asked to place all the White Horse whisky bottles on the counter. After the sums had been made and the contents paid for, all the corks were removed, thrown on the floor, and tramped on. The next day there were throbbing heads, red eyes and dark glasses, and the pub supplies had to be replenished.

One of the best known traditions in the border pubs was the so-called "train ride". On Friday nights the short train journey arrived at its destination at 21h00. At other times however, the train embarked on the long ride and lasted until there were no more stations to be visited... The train ride consisted only of members who elected to take the journey - once on board no one was allowed to disembark. The person responsible for each round (the engine driver), would decide which drink would be served. As the evening progressed everyone on board would be given the opportunity to drive. The last passenger standing was responsible to guide the train safely

[10] Interview, Col. P. Wilkens.
[11] Interviews with Col. P. Kruger, Maj. Heinz Katzke, and Brig. Genl. Brand Haasbroek.

into the final destination. After these evenings it was not uncommon for some of the passengers to be placed on a "drip" before they could report for duty.

Life on the border did not only consist of pranks, drinks and pub stories. Naturally the men also longed for their loved ones at home, especially during the long bush tours. Postal deliveries were never regular. Many received a whole bundle of letters the day they were returning to South Africa. Telephone communications were equally bad. Queues of one hundred metres were common outside the few telephone booths. Often after the long wait they only found that the phone line had been blown up or the family was not at home. The lucky few who had friends in the radio communications departments, managed fairly regular contact with their homes.

What influence did these long separations have on the family and marriage life of Air Force members? On this question opinions are divided. On the one hand there are those who state categorically that SAAF participation in the border war had no effect on their families. They back this up with the argument that they married women who accepted the Air Force culture and the fact that the job called for the men to be away, sometimes for long periods. These ladies developed their independence and could mow the lawn, change motor car wheels, carry out the domestic rubbish, replace light bulbs, etc.[12]

The second reason why relationships stayed sound, was the existence of the SAAF Ladies Association This club played an active supporting role to assist wives and families while they were alone. A system of "ghost friends" was introduced so that each lady was aware that someone was watching her and her family and was caring for them. Ladies' club meetings were held to offer advice and assistance in a wide range of family matters, not, as Breytie Breytenbach stated, to decide whose dress was the prettiest or whose cakes were the sweetest.[13] Naturally everyone was affected by the war, but the feeling was that the women coped very well and held the families together.

However, strong opinions from the opposite point of view were also voiced. The biggest and most trying factor was that in most cases the wives and families never knew where their men were or what they were doing, as it was a clandestine type of war. Coupled to this was the fact that the men were often sent away at very short notice, before arrangements could be made and sometimes even without time to say goodbye to the whole family. Another unsettling effect was that during long absences the roles traditionally played by mother and father in a healthy family life,

12 Interviews with Maj. Adi Jones, Me. Cecily Rautenbach and AOI A Barnard.
13 Interview with Col. B Breytenbach.

were reversed. Mothers had to know everything and discipline children at the same time. Often, when the father came home, he had lost the knack of being a father and husband. He was used to being one of the "boys", taking part in the hard work and play and, in the case of aircrew, the dangerous cross-border flights, followed by the almost obligatory visit to the pub to relax.

These families also suffered from the posting process in the SAAF, where personnel were continually posted from one base to another. Roots could not be established by parents or children. It was frustrating to move 15 times in so many years - a large number of the wives never bothered to unpack as they knew the next move would be only weeks or months away.

There is another important aspect. During an interview with Cecily Rautenbach, wife of WO Bachus Rautenbach, she stated that in their 31 years of married life, she only knew her husband for 19 years.[14] The rest of the time he was either on the border or away on training exercises. It would not be surprising if Air Force men would erect a monument as high as Table Mountain for the sacrifices made by their wives during an Air Force marriage.

The two diametrically opposed worlds of man and father in a war and mother at home, placed an enormous burden on family life and marriages. High divorce rates attest to the fact that not all couples could cope. Estranged relationships with children were also hard to accept. Maj. André Hattingh, like most of the chopper crews, spent long periods on the border. After the birth of one of his children he was away for months. In spite of telephone calls and letters, his son grew up to know him as the uncle on the photo next to Mum's bed. On arrival back at Waterkloof, despite all attempts to persuade the little boy, he was not convinced that his dad was the same man as on the photo, and refused to leave his mother's arms.[15]

Despite differing opinions, it is clear that SAAF participation in the border war affected all participants to a lesser or larger degree. It was true however, that all the men yearned for the opportunity to go home. The following joke was often heard: "How do you know when it is time to go home? ... When the ugliest girl on the base starts to look pretty!"

Although the perception is often voiced that the men on the border were "out of sight and out of mind", the opposite is more accurate. Under the professional leadership of Mrs Albrecht, the Southern Cross Fund was established to make life on the border as comfortable as possible. Recreation equipment was bought and

[14] Interview with Me. Cecily Rautenbach.
[15] Interview with Maj. André Hattingh.

despatched to the border. Books, magazines, soccer and volley balls, snooker and table tennis sets, video and TV machines, cards, cold water and ice-making machines were distributed amongst the bases. Each man was presented with a handy and well-made presentation case containing writing-paper, envelopes and pens, a Swiss army knife, a needlework set and personal items such as toothpaste, adhesive plasters and boot laces. The fund was also responsible for the special meals that were arranged for those on duty over Christmas. These special meals, prepared with care by the chefs, provided that little extra bit that made these occasions memorable.[16]

Another aspect that must be mentioned is the activities of the Air Force department of free time utilisation. These activities were divided into two categories. In the first place provision was made for the wives and children who were living on the border with their husbands and fathers. The men were out all day working long hours. The families, subjected to sporadic mortar or rocket fire, lived under conditions of tension and fear. Midnight trips to bomb shelters were not uncommon. Cmdt Elsa Botes, who for many years worked with these border families, is of the opinion that the isolated lives led by the wives on the border occasionally created difficult problems that needed careful handling.[17]

The children accepted bush tours as one long holiday. They could go to school barefoot, and were transported in mine-protected armoured vehicles. They continually played with makalani nuts, tame monkeys and expended cartridge and shell cases. For the wives it was a different story. They lived on bases where there were no shops, shopping centres, cinemas,. hairdressers, chemists or relaxation facilities. All purchases had to be made in bulk and fine planning had to be done to ensure that stocks lasted in this isolated world. On top of this was the fact that Air Force ladies were besieged by one visiting group after another. The messes could not always cope with the number of visitors and the Air Force wives were expected to step in and help.

Under the leadership of Elsa Botes and her team, attempts were made to improve the quality of life for the ladies on the border. As flowers were not readily available, wives were taught to arrange decorations from a variety of unusual materials. Branches of trees, makelani palms or tree stumps were decorated with flowers made of mealie leaves or crinkle paper. Members of the Meat Board were invited to give lectures on buying and storing meat in bulk and the preparation of the best cuts. Lectures on needlework and wood-carving were arranged and hairdressers paid regular visits to the forward bases.

[16] Interview with Lt. Col. Elsa Botes.
[17] Interview with Lt. Col. Elsa Botes.

Fashion parades were held and clothes, bought on "appro" by Elsa, were either sold to the ladies or returned to the shops in the Republic. The needs of children were catered for by visits from child psychologists, dieticians and teachers who gave advice on preparing children for school. Elsa and her team made a very positive impact on these border ladies, helping to stabilise the home situation and allowing them to fully support their menfolk. Elsa's activities were in turn supported by the command council of the Air Force, so air transport was never a problem to get her to and from the border.

The other aspect of free time utilisation was that of entertainment. Musicians, singers or groups were moved between the four main bases of Grootfontein, Ondangwa, Rundu and Mpacha to entertain and perform. Where proper halls or theatres were not available, stages were fashioned from the back of low-bed trucks. The audience often sat on the ground but were always wildly appreciative of these concerts, which reminded them so much of home. Often, personnel from forward units were flown back for the performance, inter alia to allow the groups consisting mainly of men to mix with the groups of mainly female artists at the functions held after the concerts.

Artists who had the greatest appeal were country and western style singers and those who sang Afrikaans songs. The Montoya Dance Group were also firm favourites. For lonely men, this Spanish dance group and the Delia Sainsbury dancers, with their lovely slender bodies and evocative music, were a tonic that allowed them to see out the rest of their tour in good heart. An article which appeared in **Ad Astra** after one of these visits, used these words: "The lovely members of X group had the entertainment starved troopies lapping at their feet."[18] However, it must be stated that the programmes were always carefully selected and vetted. The dance routines, always favourites, were viewed by the Air Force hierarchy in Pretoria to ensure suitability. Strict rules had to be abided by; costumes had to be such that the dancers' bodies were properly covered; no suggestive dances or lyrics were allowed. The only relaxation of the rules was that longish splits were allowed in the skirts... . During the 1½ hour long concerts, the master of ceremonies had to maintain decorum - one slip of the tongue would result in that group not again being invited to the border. To satisfy everybody, different programmes were compiled including among others German beer festivals with the traditional oompah bands.

[18] **Ad Astra**, 1986.

Each arm of the service decided on the programme best suited to their section. The SAAF visits were always well attended and appreciated.

People could be forgiven for thinking that life on the border was one long party, with entertainment groups, evenings in the pub, swimming and tanning in the sun being the order of the day. The other side of the coin was the war - the only reason for these men being in Namibia. Some of the personnel, especially pilots and air-crew, lived under continual high stress conditions, a good example being the day Lt. Gibson was putt-putting along in his unarmed Bosbok when two MiG-23s flashed past and disappeared into the clear blue sky. For long seconds he maintained radio silence, then, when the adrenaline rush had subsided, he pressed the radio transmit button and asked: "Have those f.. MiGs filed a flight plan?" It is no easy matter to fly your helicopter, fighter or transport aircraft under heavy enemy fire and still bring it back safely to the base. It is under these circumstances that the role of religion and the chaplain became important.

Chaplain Lucas J Potgieter, who later became director of Chaplain's Services in the SAAF, was very involved with personnel on the border. Full-time chaplains, supported by chaplains on bush tours, administered the religious needs of personnel in the operational area. These chaplains held church services on bases and close to the battle lines. It was probably the presence of these men, demonstrating that although they might also be scared and their adrenaline pumping, they still managed to preserve their faith and belief in the power of prayer, that helped the men to maintain their sanity.

The worst moments of the chaplain's life was to return to South Africa to tell a young expectant wife that her husband had been killed on the border. At the garden gate he could hear the laughter of the young mother as she was playing with her first-born. When he pressed the bell, everything would suddenly become quiet. When she saw the chaplain, she would close the door and refuse to open it. She did not want to hear about the harsh realities of the war and how they would impact on her future life.[19]

The chaplains were there to serve. They were not only interested in ensuring that there was a coffee bar available for those who did not want to frequent the pub. The chaplains were often seen, Coke in hand, drinking with the men in the pub and making themselves available to every serving member of the Air Force. The little red Bible, presented to every member departing for a bush tour, became the most valuable possession for many members.

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[19] Interview with Chaplain Lucas Potgieter.

Another facet of the war which people had to take into account, was that it was not only the enemy who suffered casualties. Under these circumstances, many Air Force members had their first encounters with the death or injury of a close friend. They were also exposed to the trauma associated with the sight of bodybags, dying people and helicopters awash with blood. In this regard, the SAAF, and in particular the Puma helicopter crews, played a major role, extracting casualties and corpses from combat zones, often under these awful circumstances, to ensure that the chopper, patients and crew would be flown safely to the base where medical assistance was available.

Perhaps the most comforting thought for any troopie involved in the war was that, should he be injured or wounded, helicopters would be there within minutes to transport him to medical facilities where the highest calibre of services was available. Co-operation between Army and Air Force during casualty evacuation was outstanding. In bad weather conditions, under enemy fire or at night, the aircrew flew out badly injured or sick personnel to save lives. The troops were confident that the "choppers" would get them out of the battle area and that the "Flossies" would get them back to the "States".[20]

Helicopter crews have dozens of casevac stories. One story which epitomises the situation, is about Rod Penhall's experience during operation Firewood. On 31 October 1987, the Firewood force received heavy enemy resistance and suffered many casualties. Some of the very seriously injured men required immediate evacuation. Penhall landed his Puma under heavy enemy fire and the casualties were quickly loaded into the cabin. Suddenly, out of the smoke and dust, the face of a young troopie appeared next to Penhall's window. He explained that he was not injured but asked if there was space in the helicopter for him. From his huge eyes and trembling voice it was evident that the young man had seen enough trauma and blood.[21] Penhall allowed the man aboard. This is a typical example of how the helicopter and the aircrew were held in awe by the frontline troops. They provided relief from fear, anxiety and exhaustion and, despite their dangerous missions, they were seen as the light at the end of a very dark tunnel by hundreds of grateful men.

Another interesting aspect of life on the border was the number of tame and wild animals that were housed at Air Force bases. They ranged from cats, dogs and ostriches to monkeys, zebras, a donkey, a baboon with the name Dikkes and, be-

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20 "Choppers" = Puma or Alouette Helicopters.
"Flossie" = C 130 or C 160 Transport Aeroplanes.
"States" = All the bases in South Africa.

21 Interview with Col. Rod Penhall.

lieve it or not, wild lions kept as pets. The full story of Terrie the lion will probably never be told, as certain members of the recces and some chopper pilots would not like their relationship with this male lion to be discussed. Reading through Charlie Marais's manuscript "Charlie se chopper manewales" (Charlie's Chopper Antics), one can detect the nostalgia when he refers to Terrie - the young, full-grown male lion, that was stronger than 20 recces. He tells the tale of how Terrie frightened an American who was in a compromising position, with his trousers round his ankles.[22]

ENDNOTES

The 23 year long war affected the lives of all members serving in the Air Force over that period. For most of them life on the border became a lifestyle. Interestingly, a large portion of these people left the service soon after the war had ended. From interviews it was obvious that everyone considered their participation in the war as the undoubted highlight of their lives. For aircrew, flying is their life which they do in the Republic, but during the border war their flying was unique. No one boarded the Flossie at Waterkloof without butterflies in his stomach. Once on the border, the enemy would do everything in its power to destroy SAAF aircraft and personnel - it was war, declared or not.

Every member has his own reasons for remembering the bush war. Some learnt lessons about life that would stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives. Others learnt that cooperation was the key to success. By working and standing together, aircraft could be kept serviceable and relationships could be built on trust. Techniques and tactics, often learnt the hard way, became the way of life on the border. Unfortunately, since the war ended a number of these lessons have been forgotten.

Some people remember the physical hardships of life on the border: sleeping under canvas which did little to protect people from the biting cold of winter or the unbearable heat of summer; the heavy thunderstorms; going to sleep wet; mosquitoes; the blinding white Ondangwa sand and the millions of flies.

Others remember the tension, fear and adrenaline surges where the heart was pumping overtime; the trauma at the death of a friend and companion; the endless waiting for aircraft to return from operations and the anxious count to see if all aircraft had made it back; the anticipation of the arrival of your replacement and the bitterness of his non-arrival; the influence that long periods of absence had on a

[22] Unpublished manuscript by Col. Charlie Marais, **Charlie se chopper manewales**, s.a.

marriage and family life and the difficult adaptations that had to be made on arrival at home after months on operational duty.

Other people will recall with pleasure the social side of life in the bush; the evenings around the fire; the wonderful braais; the camaraderie of the pub; the pranks and jokes that helped to pass the time; the fishing trips to the Skeleton Coast to check that the enemy had not encroached into that region; the endless anecdotes about the bush, most of which could be taken with a pinch of salt - or as Heinz Katzke, one of the experienced chopper drivers, would say: "Don't spoil a good story by sticking to the facts...!".[23]

More senior personnel will remember the long hours of tension spent in command posts, wondering if your decisions had been correct; whether all the aircraft you had tasked for a mission would return safely; whether casevacs could be reached in time to prevent needless loss of life; the long wait for aircraft flying radio silent, clandestine sorties to make a welcome reappearance on radar or back at base and worrying about the safety of small Air Force MAOT operating deep inside Angola.

Whatever the difference in viewpoints, one fact remains constant: the camaraderie built up in the Air Force during the bush war, will remain etched in the memories of all who participated.

[23] Interview with Maj. Heinz Katzke.