

MADAGASCAR

Introduction

Why invade and capture Madagascar. Clayton has a nice summary [Clayton p4]:

"Japanese naval and air bases on Madagascar would have constituted a severe setback. The British supply route around the Cape and through the Mozambique Channel to the Middle East theatre of war would have been severely threatened and possibly cut, with disastrous results for the British and Allied forces there. Even South Africa, not far away from Madagascar, would have been threatened. Later, Japanese submarines did sink shipping off the Natal coast. The purpose of the invasion and occupation of Madagascar was therefore to forestall the Japanese."

[Clayton p18] *"This was the start of the Japanese offensive in the Indian Ocean. It was carried out by Admiral Ishisaki commanding the 8th Submarine Flotilla, consisting of five large submarines and two supply ships. Two of the submarines carried aircraft and three carried midget two-man submarines. They sank a total of twenty-four ships in the Mozambique Channel including two off the Natal coast. The fears of the British High Command that the Japanese would penetrate the Mozambique Channel were thus substantiated."*

What to do? [Clayton p13]

"(a) Regular anti-submarine and shipping patrols out to sea and along the east and west coasts.

(b) Armed reconnaissance flights for the army.

(c) Attacks on enemy strong points and airfields to the south.

(d) Extensive road reconnaissances required by the army.

(e) Photographic surveys of large areas and roads to correct the very inaccurate maps of Madagascar. These were required by the army for the advance southwards."

[Clayton p13] *"The weather was appalling at times with very heavy tropical rainstorms. Col Melville reported that the pilots flew in appallingly dangerous weather conditions over mountains and wild jungle country, for hundreds of miles out to sea, and from airfields never designed for modern aircraft."*

Time Period

Opening entry 13 April 1942

Arrive in Madagascar 16 May 1942

Depart Madagascar 17 November 1942

Synopsis

[Clayton p5] *"The operation was planned to last six weeks, but it actually lasted six months due to various factors, notably the obstinacy of the French Commander-in-Chief (who must have known that he would eventually be overrun by a superior force), very bad weather, difficult terrain, and malaria."*

The S.A.A.F. had little to do leading Bull to write

(30 May) *"We're still leading our negative existence, nothing to do & all day in which to do it. "*

(22 August) *"If it can be humanly possible I think life here is getting more boring every gawdamn day - all one does is lie on your bed all day alternatively reading & sleeping - I won't be able to lie much longer, will be getting bedsores any day now."*

(30 August) *"It's a pity that we're going to miss this show on Majunga & Tananarive (as it must be) but even so I will have no regrets on leaving this island & this ruddy squadron."*

Bull became very disillusioned with things, particularly the Beaufort aircraft but also the utter lack of action.

Bull's seat was commandeered by Colonel Melville who treated the plane as his personal aircraft with Meaker as his pilot. This was after the move to Majunga & Tananarive when the other aircraft were put to some use.

Footnotes and Cross References

[Clayton] = The South African Air Force in Madagascar Campaign, 1942. Col. J.A. Clayton Military History Journal. Vol 9 No2 - December 1992. The South African Military History Society. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol092jc.html>

[AIR] = There is AIR-27-226 in 3 parts which is Squadron Number: 16 SAAF Summary of Events = the War Diary at the National Archives, Kew, UK.

Highlight

The adventure after being shot down. Starts 9 July. Page 24.
Ramilles torpedoing. Page 23
Beaufort's continuing saga. Pages 2, 8, 22, 48, 50, 66.
Aeronca reverse flight to East London. Page 51
Bull's War Diary entries removed. Page 71 73
Fooling the French officers they were being attacked. Page 86



War Medal
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_Medal_1939%E2%80%931945

Friday 13th [April 1942]

We touched in at Aden this morning for a few hours where we dropped our barrage balloon & a few passengers & picked up some more - we also picked up a cruiser, Colombo, [*] as escort! We are not making the speed we thought we would - only about 12 -14 knots. So far the order of the day has been sleeping, reading & relaxing - it's getting bloody hot.

[*] Colombo
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Colombo_%28D89%29



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Colombo_%28D89%29#/media/File:HMS_Colombo.jpg

Wingfield C.T.
24th April [1942]

Here I am back in the Union, & will be on my way out of it again in a day or two, but to get back to where I left off. - It proved to be a very quiet uneventful cruise, all except one evening when the South Africans got on the pots & tore the atmosphere to bits with unmelodious song. A tug-o-war was organised between teams from the Navy, RAF, Marines, the ship's company & the S.A.A.F. I was nearly one of the smallest in our team, & we pulled all the opposing teams off their feet. We touched in at Mombasa where a few of us went ashore. We reached Durban on 23rd Feb.

By Jove! did we find Castle Beer good? if I hadn't gone out dancing that evening I'm afraid I would have been *poegh-eye*.

We were all given a month's leave after which we had to report back to M.A.F. Pretoria for reposting. They wanted to make me an instructor, but I kicked up such a hell of a shindig that they let me off - I wanted to go onto the pilots course & would not be satisfied until I had seen Col. Steve Melville & the A.O.C. Air Commander Frew - they explained that there was a bottleneck in the P.P. courses & they would be full up for months, but I got their word that they would call the 3 of us, Pip, Erby & myself (I spoke for the 3 of us) up after about 3 or 4 months, & in the meantime we could pass the time on Coastal patrol.

Here I have been at Wingfield [*] for about a fortnight now & am on my way again - so much for 3 or 4 months.

[*] Wingfield

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wingfield_Aerodrome

There were 3 military airfields in Cape Town. Youngsfield where Bull did much of his initial training is in the Southern Suburbs, Wingfield & Ysterplaat

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air_Force_Base_Ysterplaat

Life down here at Wingfield isn't at all bad - very little flying - I haven't flown at all down here. There are two flights, 36 with Beauforts [*] & us, 32 with Marylands [*]. Pip & Brinkie were down here when I arrived & Fillie Kleyn, Archie Ruik & C.P. Marais rolled up a day or two after us.

[*] Beaufort

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Beaufort



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Beaufort#/media/File:Bristol_Beauforts_217_Squadron_in_flight.jpg

Maryland

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Maryland



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Maryland#/media/File:Martin_Maryland_RAF_North_Africa.jpg

I have been trying my hand at rugby down here & it is a hell of a struggle trying to get anything like condition - however I am playing for Air Force first at Newlands tomorrow in spite of my lack of condition.

Stanley [*] was wounded about a month ago, ground strafed by 109s, but he is out of hospital again now & doing well.

[*] Stanley = one of Bull's younger brothers. He was in armoured cars in the Western Desert. There are more family details in 03 Western Desert, entry for 21 Jan 1941

24 Squadron have had another Boston Tea Party, Lt. Col. Mossop the new O.C. was shot down but got back with a hell of a wound in his shoulder, & there are a couple of crews missing, among them Richie Tennant who is now a Maj. & George Bennett who was flying as his observer.

Pikkie Rautenbach & Bernie have been awarded the D.F.M. & Shuttleworth my first active service pilot the D.F.C. Major Jones, who is flying again has been awarded the A.F.C.

There have been rumours going the round for some time now, but now orders have come through for us to be ready to move off at 24 hours notice - all coastal flights, & altho' we are not supposed to know where we are going, we have a very shrewd idea that it is to, or at least against Madagascar. We have been told to prepare to be away from here for about a month - which of course may mean anything up to 6 months in the Army.

Lindi 9 May [1942]

We left Wingfield on Sunday 26th, we flying with Maj. Meaker the O.C. of 32 Flight, & when we landed at Z.A.S. we found the Durban contingent already there, as also Maj. Jones & Col. Durrant who is to be O.C. of the show.

Maj. Jones was put in charge of the Durban Flight of Beauforts, 37 Flight but flies a Maryland himself, & I was posted to 37 Flight to fly with him again, which of course was just what I wanted.

We hung around Z.A.S. for about a week while bombay tanks were being fitted to our planes. We eventually left - the whole flying circus of us, two flights of Beauforts & one of Marylands with two flights of Lodestars [*] & one of 52s [*] to carry the groundcrews & spares etc.

[*] Lodestar

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar



Picture source

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar#/media/File:Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar over Houston,1947-48.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar#/media/File:Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar_over_Houston,1947-48.jpg)

Junkers JU-52

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers_Ju_52



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers_Ju_52#/media/File:Junkers_Ju_52-3mg2.jpg

Clayton p11 states 6 Marylands, 11 Beauforts, 12 Lodestars & 6 JU 52 comprised the armada that went across to Diego Saurez. It was a 1190 km 4 hour trip.

Our Flight night stopped at Lusaka & at Kasama & arrived here 3 days ago, Piet Truter writing his Beaufort off landing here. The Maryland flight is here too, but the other Beaufort Flight is still at Kasama, Sam McPherson force landed in the swamp about 30 miles from Kasama - one engine cut, [*] so they are having a lovely time with the mosquitoes I suppose - the rest of them should arrive here this afternoon.

[*] The engines of the Beauforts gave endless trouble at this stage. It is detailed extensively throughout this report. Lower down Bull writes, *"Well I reckon I have qualified for the D.F.C. now - I went on a recce in a Beaufort today...."*

The official War Diary has:

"The aircrews have lost all confidence in the Beauforts, & are of the opinion that it is unfair to expect a person to fly over the sea in these aircraft."

The engine was the Bristol Taurus, a 2 row, 14 cylinder radial engine with sleeve valves.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Taurus



Source of picture https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Taurus#/media/File:Bristol.taurus arp.750pix.jpg

Wiki contains "*Unfortunately, the engine has also been described as 'notoriously troublesome'*"

Clayton writes this on p10:

"The problem with the Taurus engine was that it had an extraordinary sleeve valve design. Unlike the inlet & exhaust valves in the cylinder head of a normal engine it had a metal sleeve inside each cylinder which moved up & down & rotated uncovering ports in the cylinder wall, while the piston worked up & down inside the sleeve. Without any warning, a piston & sleeve would seize in a cloud of smoke & the engine would come to a sudden stop. Since each engine had eighteen cylinders, the aircraft had a total of thirty-six cylinders, so each time one flew off on a sortie there were thirty-six chances of not making it back to base. "

This article explains what the problem with the engine was. <https://fredstarr.com/wp-content/uploads/6.-Bristol-Sleeve-Valve-Aeroengines-Hassell.pdf>

"The design of the Perseus set the pattern for all subsequent Bristol sleeve valve engines, which despite extensive development, stuck to the same basic design. The sleeves are driven by simple offset crankpins mating with spherical bearings bolted to the bottom of the sleeve (Figure 9). The sleeves thus follow a sinusoidal path between bottom & top dead centre over a stroke of about 2.5 inches. The cranks are driven at half engine speed by a train of gears mounted on the front of the crankcase wall.

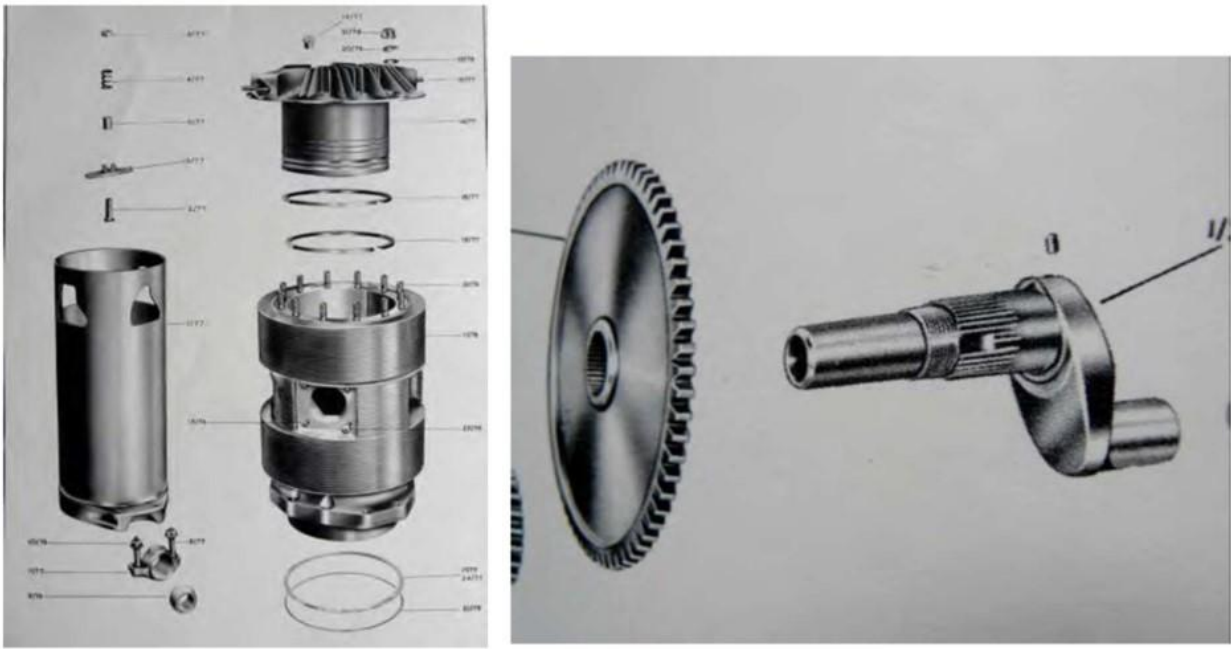


Figure 9 Sleeve and engine cylinder and sleeve valve crank.

Picture source: from quoted article.

As the sleeves rise, turn & fall, ports in the sleeve uncover the corresponding ports in the cylinder, two exhaust ports at the front & three inlet ports at the rear, covered by a common manifold belt. The sleeve itself has only four ports as one of their managers to act as both an inlet & exhaust in turn.

It [Taurus] was soon called on to replace the Perseus in Bristol's new Beaufort torpedo bomber, when changes in specification resulted in the aircraft weight out growing the power of the Perseus. The RAF's need for the aircraft to replace the biplane Vildebeest put great pressure on Taurus development & resulted in the engine going into service before all the problems had been fully sorted.

A particular problem was the crankshaft maneton clamp that was the so-called "hairpin" design which Ricardo had used successfully. Bristol however found it unreliable & of course if the maneton slips engine failure is inevitable. The problem was compounded by the Beaufort not having feathering propellers & thus being unable to fly on one engine except at very low weight.

A successful two-bolt clamp (Figure 14) replaced the hairpin but the engine had acquired an unenviable reputation that lingered long after its problems were cured. "

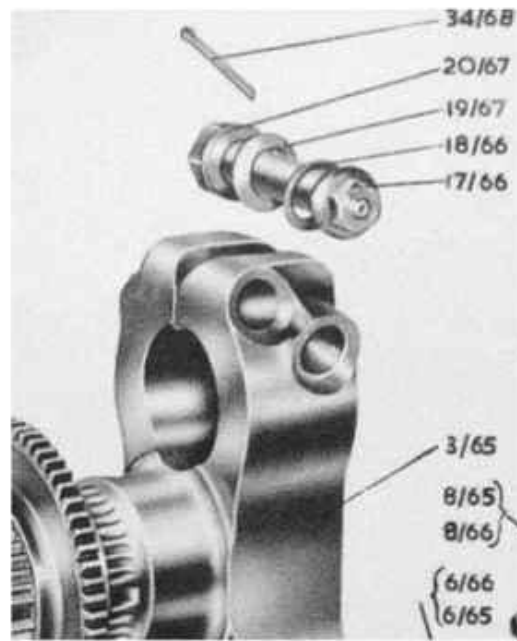


Figure 14. Improved design of maneton clamp incorporating two bolts.

Picture source: quoted article.

See entry for 30 may for Bull's opinion.

The attack on Madagascar started two days ago, & seems to be going O.K. - we are waiting here until the aerodrome near the Naval Harbour in the North has been captured, & then we will fly across.

Life here is something like the Kenya days, only more so - the aerodrome is near the beach among sisal plantations & coconut palms & paw-paw trees - about 70 of us officers are living in a vacated managers house on the Kikwetu Estate - a 9 room house with electric lights - not too bad at all.

Only a small percentage of the fellows have been in action before, most of the rest are looking forward to their first taste of action, & one or two I'm afraid are not looking forward to it at all - I forgot to mention that our old friend Gregory is with us in 37 Flight - they were pushed away from Durban in such a hurry that even he had no chance of wangling his way out of it. I notice he has wormed his way into such odd jobs as adjutant of the Flight & barman etc. etc., but I have sworn to myself that I will make it my business to see that he goes into action if there is any action, even if I have to do all the odd jobs myself so as to leave no possible loophole or excuse.

There are a very limited "*select*" few of us who have been on raids both in Abyssinia & Libya, namely Phillie Kleyn, C.P. Marais, Gerry Smith, Frank Ramsey & myself. I don't know of any others among us altho' there may be one or two more.

My greatest fear on this campaign is malaria - I would hate to catch it, but on the other hand I can't be bothered with all the precautions, especially the very doubtful one of taking quinine every day - I can't forget the fact that the only fellow who religiously took quinine every evening at Garba Tulla was the only fellow to go down with malaria, & he damn nearly pegged out I was told. Anyhow I haven't touched quinine so far, & don't intend to either.

There are millions of mosquitoes here, & we all sleep under nets & tuck them in around us every night but every night we get mauled about & butchered by the mosquitoes & find a couple trapped in our nets in the mornings - there must be some truth in Capt. Duggie Mail's story that he was woken up the other night by a heated argument at his bedside between 3 mosquitoes, carried out in a low hoarse stage whisper which made his forelock flutter in the breeze.

Said Mosquito No 1:- *“Now let's organise this thing properly, I'll pull the net off him then you two knock him over the head & roll him out of bed, then all 3 of us can get round him comfortably for the feast”*

Mosquito No.2 :- *“No! I reckon we carry him down to the marsh bed & all, & we can kill & eat him at our leisure there.”*

Mosquito No.3 :- *“You silly fools! we must get inside the net & eat him in bed, if we take him down into the marshes the big buggers will take him off us.”*

Capt. Mail let out a yell & made a grab for his revolver, & the 3 mosquitoes with the whirr of wings took off in splitarse formation which they only broke at the door where they formed up line astern to get through.

As for the spiders & centipedes! Gawd, the former are the size of side plates & seem to fancy our beds no end. Last night I was woken by a hairy monster walking over my feet, & when he walked back the way he had come I bundled out of bed in no mean hurry, & had to strike about a dozen precious matches before I could locate & stun him with a boot - it's just as well poor old Les isn't here, he would die a thousand deaths every night - the joke of him & the scorpion in his ball hairs wouldn't be in it.

The biggest centipede [*] are about 13 inches in length while 9 & 10 inches are simply the common herd. The strangest thing about them is that they carry ticks & lice on them like bloody cattle & niggers - I had to be shown it before I would believe it, & if I had to tell that to people in the Union I'd be called a bloody liar to my face - me of all people!

[*] Bull writes centipede but he describes a millipede. It is usual in ZA to call millipedes centipedes.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millipede>



Picture source https://www.zoonewengland.org/media/45708/_0001_102_0230.jpg

Exactly how we are going to operate we don't know, we are not a squadron but three distinct operational flights with the Loadstars as communication & transport planes. The 52s are not going over to Madagascar, neither is Col. Durrant, he is staying here at Lindi to organise things for us this end - Col. Steve Melville & Lt.Col. Mostert [are] at Madagascar & will take us over when we get there.

We are now just waiting for a signal from Col. Melville for us to do the hop - it depends on the weather (which is pretty foul & rainy 5 days out of 7) & the situation over there. When the drome is safe for us we will leave here.

Arrachart Drome

Diego Saurez

Madagascar

16 May '42

So red tab or no red tab, here we are, based out of Africa - as far as I know, the first body of S.African troops during the war, & I suppose the various opposition in Parliament will have a lot to say about it when it becomes known. However, its for them to worry about it, we certainly aren't unless we are going to be used merely as troops of occupation (peaceful) as the *soutpiele* [*] seem to think.

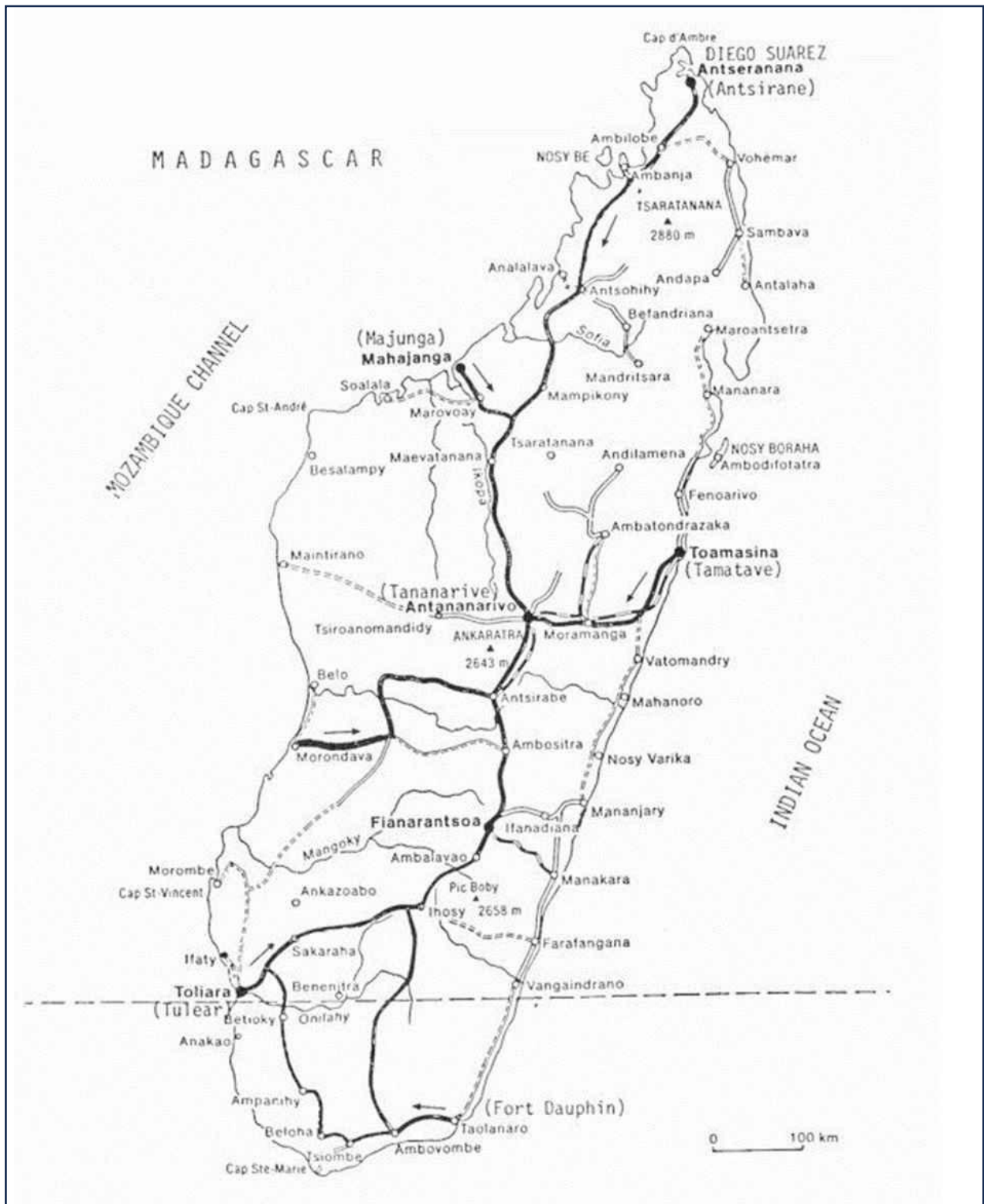
[*] soutpiel. Afrikaans disparaging nickname for Englishman. Literally salt dick (from the Boer War, the inference that standing with one foot in England & the other in South Africa their penis was dipped in the ocean). Soutpiele is plural.

We have been here 4 days now, & so far a lot of our initial keenness has been blunted - our hopes of participating in a quick spectacular exciting push through the island have been shattered, it appears that the general in charge of the show was given orders to take the naval base of Diego Suarez [*] & this drome, occupy it & hold on to it - that & nothing more. He has done that much & intends to do nothing more, but he says there is a bloke called Smuts in S. Africa who was kicking up a hell of a fuss about it - this man Smuts says that Madagascar is not an island at all, it's part & parcel of the Union, & that if the *Soutpiele* won't take it he will bloodywell send a lot of his South Africans across to take hold of it - Good old Oom Jannie!

[*] Diego Saurez = Antsiranana now

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antsiranana>





Picture Source: The South African Air Force in Madagascar Campaign, 1942. Col. J.A. Clayton Military History Journal. Vol 9 No2 - December 1992. The South African Military History Society. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol092jc.html>

Map showing the major places mentioned in this account.

We would look damn sweet if the Japs landed on the South of the island while we were sitting pretty here on the north end, & they started operating against the Union from there.

There is no fighting at all on the island now, altho' it was fierce & furious while it lasted. The invading force caught the Froggies absolutely with their pants down, in fact at 5 in the morning when they first landed they caught the garrison on the west of the peninsula in bed, & the first 10 miles or so there was no opposition at all, but after that the Frenchies fought every inch of the way, & fought damn well, they knocked out quite a few tanks with the 75 mm guns.

The landing was skilfully planned & a lot of use was made of dummy attacks - the navy staged a dummy landing on the East side of the peninsula with smoke screens & flares etc. while the real landing was being carried out on the West side, & later on the Naval aircraft dropped a lot of dummy parachute troops among the hills to the south of the aerodrome which drew away a lot of the defences in that direction.

There were 4 submarines & a sloop in the harbour, the sloop was run ashore by the Froggies & two of the subs were sunk by depth charges, & two merchantman were scuttled - the drome was bombed & a few aircraft damaged in the hanger, & then the town of Diego Suarez or whatever it's called gave in, but casualties were high on both sides, about 1000 a side.

The G.O.C. seems to think that we are here merely to do anti-submarine patrols out to sea, & an occasional recce over the lower portions of the island, but he can't know much about South Africans yet, but I reckon he'll know all about them before long as all our senior officers, from Col. Melville down to Flight Commanders are for doing something, & I reckon one of these days we will be going out on bombing raids on the dromes further south - I'm damn sure they won't keep me out here for 6 months doing Coastal reconnaissance - if I wanted to do that I could have stayed down at Wingfield with Brinkie & Pip.

The northern tip of the island seems to be the most unpleasant part of it from what I've seen of it so far - it's all hilly & mountainous & dusty & there always seems to be an unpleasant wind blowing - the soil is a red loose loam which is swept up & along by the wind & dirties everything & everybody & isn't very good for the temper at all, & the place is infested with horse flies which cling to you & literally bite you & the next day the bites come up in big bumps & stay Gawd knows how long & itch like the very devil - most of my bites are 4 days old & still itching & going strong.

We are living in the army barracks near the drome, & what a state they were in when we arrived! - looked like pigsties with shit all over the place - the French seem to be almost as dirty as the Itais. I must say tho' that one can't keep the place very clean with this ruddy wind & dust blowing about.

On the far side of the drome there is a very nice stream with a nice pool for swimming - something like Nanyuki, [*] only the water isn't as bitingly cold as the Nanyuki water.

[*] Nanyuki is in the O2 Abyssinia section.

We have been into the local town - Antsirana [*] I think it's called, & it's a dirty looking little hole too, & there is nothing to buy at all as the island has been cut off from all outside trade since the collapse of France. The only booze we can get is Rum & peppermint liqueur, both distilled from sugar cane; & what bloody poison! two tots of rum would make even a Frenchman fight I reckon - the bloody stuff burns when you put a match to it & you have to drown it in water before you can drink it (with your nose closed, as the smell is something Godawful - I reckon it's from rum drinking that the French have learnt to speak with their noses closed as they do.) We are told that owing to the petrol shortage, & having no export market for the rum, the civilians run their cars on rum, - 8 parts rum to 2 parts petrol - all I can say is that the French cars must have damn good innards to stand it.

[*] Antsirana = Antsirane = Antsiranana. On the map above.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antsiranana>

We don't seem to be very popular with the French in town here, especially the females - such as there are, they simply don't-wanna-know our troubles, but the other towns may be better, so I reckon the best thing to do is to go & do a bit of "*peaceful occupying*" down that way - they say the Capital, Tananariev [*] is a very nice place.

[*] Tananariev It is spelled variously as Tananariev, Tananerive & Tananarieve. I have recorded it as written. Now named Antananarivo. The French named it Tananarive. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antananarivo>
The Wiki entry has many photographs of the city. On the map.

We have lost one Beaufort over enemy territory already, day before yesterday Nicolas went out on a patrol along the east coast & force landed at Sahambava [*], & radioed back where he'd gone down & that the crew were all O.K., so yesterday a destroyer went down the coast & we flew down in our Maryland to locate the crash & to direct the destroyer where to put ashore the landing party which was to liberate the crew of 6, Nic, a Naval observer, Handley, the wireless operator & photographer. We located the remains of the Beaufort after a hell of a long search as Nic had set it on fire, & the French had later hidden it with big branches.

[*] Sahambava = Sambava (?) On the map
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sambava>

The landing party found out that the entire crew had been sent further south to Antalaha [*], so the destroyer went down there where they again put ashore a landing party, but found that the 3 officers had been flown to Tananarieve & so had to be given up as lost, but the gunner, wireless operator & photographer were brought back in the destroyer. They have just arrived back at Diego Suarez but have not got back here yet so I don't know what the cause of the crash was. It's a damn good show on the part of the Navy to do the rescue stunt - they are a damn keen lot of fellows.

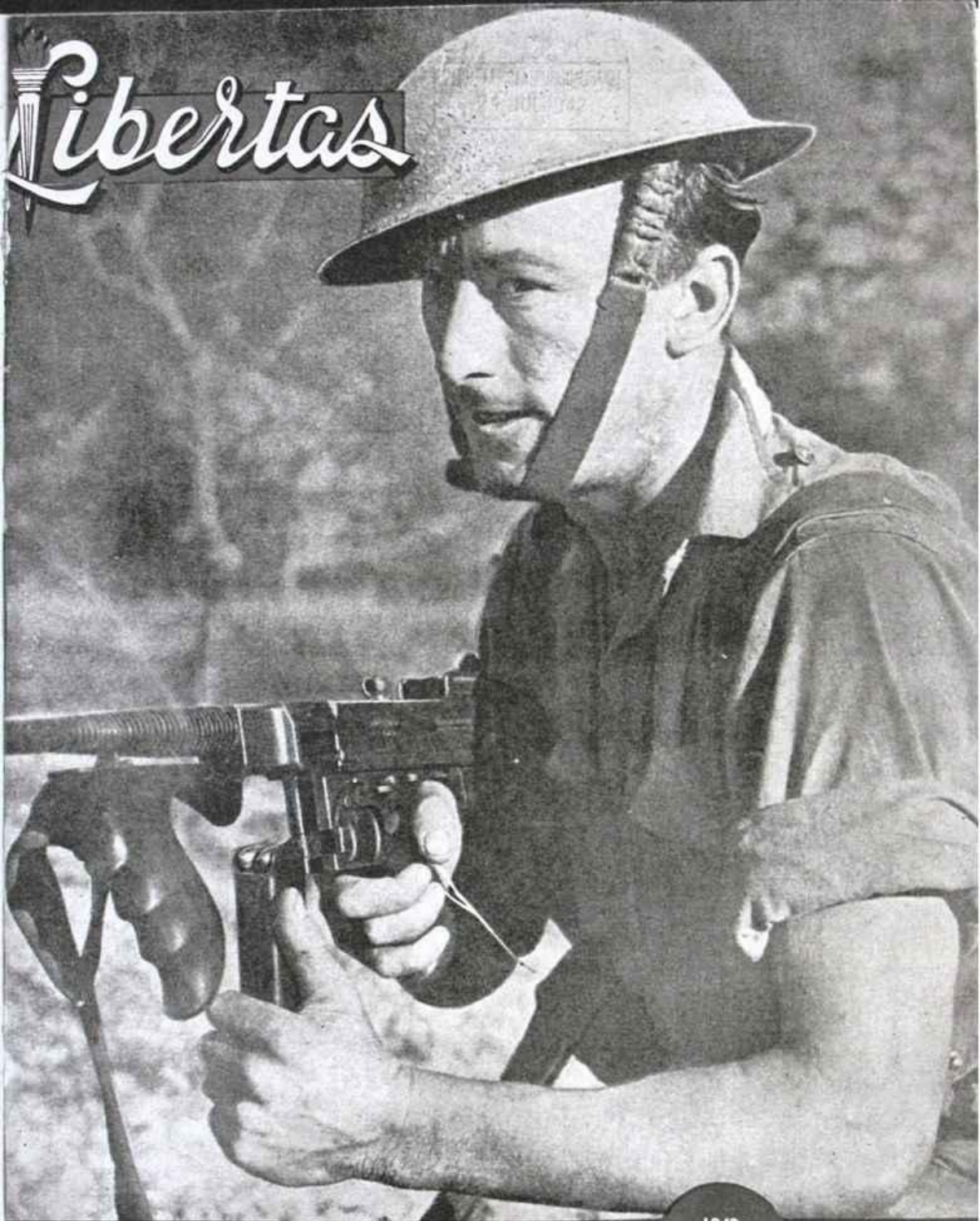
[*] Antalaha On the map
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antalaha>

Antalaha seems a very nice little town from the air, not as big by a long way as Antsirana, but very much more picturesque & clean. But the island as a whole looks much better down that way.

There is talk of us being treated as a squadron, but so far we are working as 3 distinct & separate flights, living, eating & working apart. The 3 Flights had been given (unofficial) names. We of 37 or called the Van Der Merwes, 32 are the Van Der Byls (English pronunciation "ile"), & 36 are the Papenpoeses, & a lot of kindly leg-pulling goes on between us. [*]

[*] Photo from July issue of Veritas. Veritas was a monthly magazine with short articles for general consumption showing what the armed forces were up to in a favourable light.

Libertas



Madagascar: We Defend an Island Outpost
Madagaskar: Ons Verdedig 'n Eiland-Voorpos

1942
July
Julie

Vol. 2
No. 8

Registered at the G.P.O. as a Newspaper
Aan die H.F.K. as 'n Nuusblad Geregtigst



HUNTING JAPS. Some of the officers and personnel of the S.A.A.F. photographed in Madagascar, where they are doing constant patrol work in and around the island.

'N AANTAL van die officiere en ander lede van die S.A.L.M. op Madagascor afgeneem, waar hulle die eiland gedurig afpatrolleer.

That issue included this picture. Bull is in back row 3rd from the right (judging by his boots).

Later:- The 3 rescued fellows are back. One of the engines packed up, & Nick put down a splitarse landing with his undercart only half out as he hadn't any time to get it out properly. When they had fired the machine they ducked into the bush, but when they started walking that evening they were seen from the village & were taken in & very politely asked to give up their weapons. They were given of the very best of everything, tinned chicken & goose, beer, brandy & wine. Next morning they were taken by lorry down to Antalaha where again they lived on the fat of the land & everyone went out of their way to make them comfortable. The 3 officers were then pushed off in a hell of a hurry, taken by plane to the Capital Tananariev, & shortly after the landing party from the destroyer came ashore & took the other 3 aboard. The villagers seemed to be very disappointed that the destroyer hadn't come to take over the town.

It appears that only the government officials are Vichy supporters - all the rest of the inhabitants reckon they are Free French & want us to take over the whole Island - that's the story at any rate.

24 May [1942]

Up till now nothing further in the line of fighting has happened - it's a funny state of affairs. Part of the Navy has left already, including the two Aircraft Carriers, the Indomitable [*] & the Illustrious [*] - we miss the Fleet Air Arm fellows, they were a damn fine lot of fellows. There was quite a big fleet here during the opening stages, the Battleship Ramillies [*], the two Carriers, two Cruisers, about 12 Destroyers & about 20 Corvettes, & about 20 troop & supply ships.

[*] Indomitable. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Indomitable_\(92\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Indomitable_(92))



Picture source

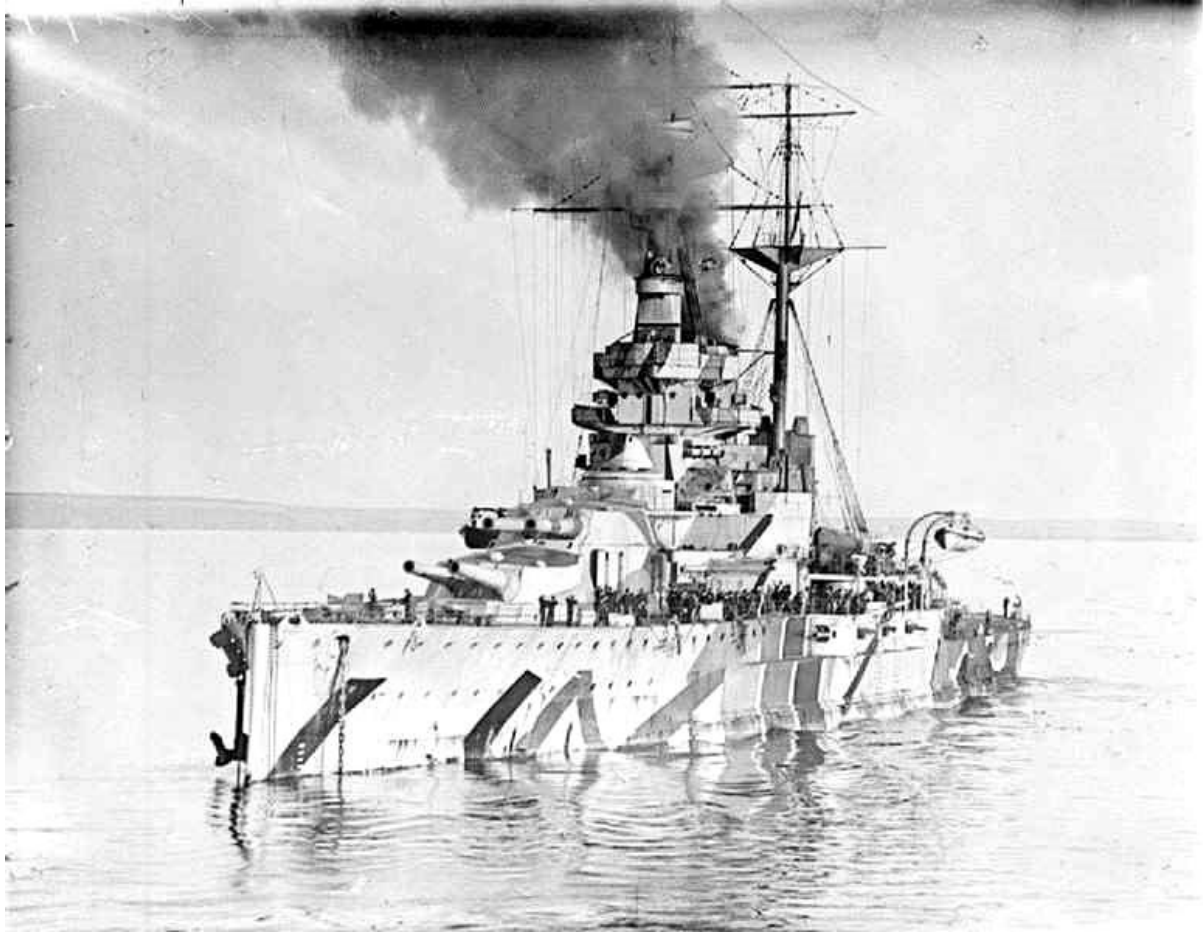
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Indomitable_\(92\)#/media/File:HMS_Indomitable_\(92\)_underway_1943.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Indomitable_(92)#/media/File:HMS_Indomitable_(92)_underway_1943.jpg)

Illustrious https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illustrious-class_aircraft_carrier



Picture source [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illustrious-class_aircraft_carrier#/media/File:HMS_Illustrious_\(ca._1954\)_20921205028.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illustrious-class_aircraft_carrier#/media/File:HMS_Illustrious_(ca._1954)_20921205028.jpg)

Ramillies [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Ramillies_\(07\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Ramillies_(07))



Picture source [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Ramillies_\(07\)#/media/File:HMS_Ramillies_WWI_IWM_SP_1718.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Ramillies_(07)#/media/File:HMS_Ramillies_WWI_IWM_SP_1718.jpg)

I reckon I have discovered why the fighting has stopped - we hear that an R.A.F Flight of Lysanders [*] are arriving here soon - 6 planes with a personnel of 130 & it looks as if they are kind of saving a bit of the fighting to give the Lysanders a chance - they have been outclassed in every Zone of the war so far & it looks as if this little show is in their class.

[*] Lysander https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westland_Lysander



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westland_Lysander#/media/File:Lysander_5_Aug_2012_a.jpg

A few days ago the 3 captured officers were swapped for 3 French officers. - it appears that our fellows when once they got to Tantaneriev were locked up in real p.o.w. style & did not have the picnic we thought they were having.

Malaria is rife among us now, about 35 - 40 fellows are down with it, some have it very bad & are at the stage now when they don't care whether they live or die - things are looking serious with 25% of us down. These fellows all caught it at Lindi, but our 10 days incubation period is over now, so any fresh cases will be Madagascar Malaria.

Sat. 30 May. [1942]

We're still leading our negative existence, nothing to do & all day in which to do it. There was a hell of a flap during the night tho' - at 10 last night a plane flew over the harbour, & it was identified as a seaplane. Now we have no seaplanes anywhere near here, so presumably it must have been an enemy plane, - there was no end of excitement on the part of the navy & the big shots in town, so early this morning everybody was woken up & put on immediate standby, & a few Beauforts sent out on patrol.

One of the Beaufort, flown by Scott of 36 Flight had an engine cut about 4 miles from the drome, & in she went, a complete & utter write off altho' the crew escaped with minor cuts & bruises. Its a damn good bit of work I reckon - the crew are O.K., & we have one less Beaufort on our hands. These Beauforts are not safe to taxi across the drome, let alone fly over land, & as for flying over the sea as

they were designed? to do!, it makes one weep. Any modern twinengined plane which can't take off & land on one engine, let alone fly on one, has no right to be accepted by any purchasing commission, so why Bristol built it & the R.A.F. accepted it Gawd alone will know. I would like to know how many have been written off through failure of one engine in flight. We alone have written off 3 that way since leaving the Union. Thank the Pope I don't have to fly in the bloody things. [*]

[*] See the 10 July entry lower down where the continual problems with the Beaufort engines are listed.

In the entry for 9 May I posted about the root cause of the problem with the engines of the Beaufort.

As for the local war, there simply ain't no such animal! Maj. Jones had a very nice job given him about 3 days ago, a recce down to Majunga [*], then to Tananariev & then home, a nice interesting 1200 mile job to which I looked forward, but next day when we were to take off the job was called off - there was a parly going on with the Froggies, & no aircraft is allowed south of the drome at all for fear of upsetting them. I only hope that last night's plane over the harbour will make the brass heads change their ideas.

[*] Majunga = Mahajanga now
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahajanga>



Picture source

[https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/image/PI3Z50bsOuZYovHsda15BoKMk0w/930x620/filters:format\(webp\)/outrem/2022/08/11/62f4bbc81f8ce_majunga-madagascar.jpeg](https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/image/PI3Z50bsOuZYovHsda15BoKMk0w/930x620/filters:format(webp)/outrem/2022/08/11/62f4bbc81f8ce_majunga-madagascar.jpeg)



Majunga from Google Earth. Showing the (very muddy) river estuary.

I see the local little paper that Gen. Smuts started yesterday that “*The South African Forces in Madagascar include a strong contingent of S.A.A.F.*” - so the Doc & his Hygiene Sgt. comprise the South African Forces & we are the “*Strong contingent of S.A.A.F.*” - what a bluff! the old adage that “*Bulshit baffles Brains*” has a lot to be said for it, especially in warfare & politics.

Half hour later :- I'd hardly put my diary away & was going to bed when the ball was set rolling. I am Duty Pilot today, so that's how I get the dope first hand. Frantic telephone calls - everybody on standby - there have just been two violent explosions & machine gun fire in the harbour - the Ramillies has been hit by two torpedoes. - so the plane over the harbour last night

9 July [1942]

I see I left off in the middle of a sentence on the night of the Ramillies affair - I'm not surprised, what with telephones ringing 2 & 3 together & everybody wanting to know what the hell - it was a glorious flatspin, & I really do think the Air Force spun the least of all.

All defences were put on immediate standby, & depth charges were going off in the harbour by the dozens, & at least half a dozen Victory Rockets were fired by over optimistic boats & batteries.

A hasty conference of Flight Commanders was called & it was decided to put every machine in the air at sparrow fart next morning & carry out an organised search for the Raider or submarine that was responsible for the night's work.

The crews were briefed & we had to work out our searches, & only got to bed at about 1:30 - to be up again at 4:30.

About 11:00 a plane flew over the harbour for about 5 minutes - quite high up, so even though it was bright moonlight I don't suppose they could have seen much. We couldn't see the plane, so couldn't place it as French or Jap, but decided it must be Froggie, so they must be responsible for the

torpedoing & plans for making a reprisal read on Tananeriev with long-range Marylands were discussed at that late hour, but nothing final was decided on.

Then George Raubenheimer & Doc [*], who had been on board the Ramilles when she was hit, came back & told us all about it - in the middle of dinner there was a hell of an explosion followed shortly afterwards by another. There was no panicking, but everybody rushed to their respective stations, & depth charges were heaved overboard by every ship in port. George says it was really worth watching. - A Tanker lying near the Ramilles was hit by the second torpedo & sank immediately, & lights & flares & guns were popping off from every ship. One gunner saw a little object on the water some way off - it was the submarine or rather its conning tower, so he opened up & gave it the works & then fired off a success rocket, but only then when they put the lights on it on it did they see it was a little rowing boat on the harbour.

[*] Clayton p17

"When the party was in full swing, the first torpedo struck. Everyone was rather taken aback. Our medical officer, who was also one of the guests and a rather heavy drinker; was so shaken by the sudden violent explosion under his feet, that he gave up drinking altogether."

The Ramilles was listing badly, but didn't sink. The Navy must have been badly shaken - being torpedoed right in port like that, with a Corvette on watch at the narrow harbour entrance. However, they seemed to think that the sub. - no matter how it got in didn't stand an earthly of getting out & in any case, judging by the number of success rockets it was sunk half a dozen times - why the bloody hell they didn't make a point of having a boom across the entrance I don't know - this show is supposed to have been planned months & months ago, & they knew all along there were subs about.

The old Navy very seldom seems to slip up, but when it does it's by way of being a ruddy avalanche.
[*]

[*] Clayton p17

"On the night of 29 May, an unidentified aircraft flew over Diego Suarez. It was thought to be French, but later it was established that it came from a Japanese submarine. On the following night at about 21:00, there were two enormous explosions in the harbour. A Japanese midget submarine had very skilfully entered the harbour; torpedoed the battleship Ramillies and a refuelling tanker, and escaped from the harbour. After the attack that night, the Japanese reconnaissance aircraft again flew over the harbour to observe the results."

Next morning we were up before light, but when we got down to the drome the Colonel said the plans had been changed, & that two long range Marylands were going down to Tenaneriv aerodrome on a reprisal raid, to shoot up any aircraft to be seen. We couldn't carry bombs so it would be a machine gunning raid.

The crews were Maj Jones ("The Oubaas" or "Oubaas v.d.Merwe" [*] as everybody was by then calling him) with myself, Cactus Friedman & Paul de Munnik, & Capt Lagerway with Fillie Kleyn as observer with the v.d. Byl longrange Maryland - we took off after breakfast.

[*] Oubaas = gaffer = male senior in age who employs others. A term of respect. Afrikaans.

To make things easy for me I will from here onwards crib the story of the next 8 days from the notes & rough copy of an article I wrote for the press (believe it or not) at the request of J.P.Vorster the War Correspondent. [*] I will put in place names etc which I obviously had to omit in the article. So far I haven't heard of it appearing in print yet, & have my doubts as to whether it ever will, & even if it has or does, I reckon it will be very much censored as regards language etc. - I somehow can't see an editor putting anything like it in print. If it does appear in print it will be interesting comparing the printed article with the rough one I wrote - here goes:-

[*] See 5 Aug entry below: It appeared in the August issue of Libertas.

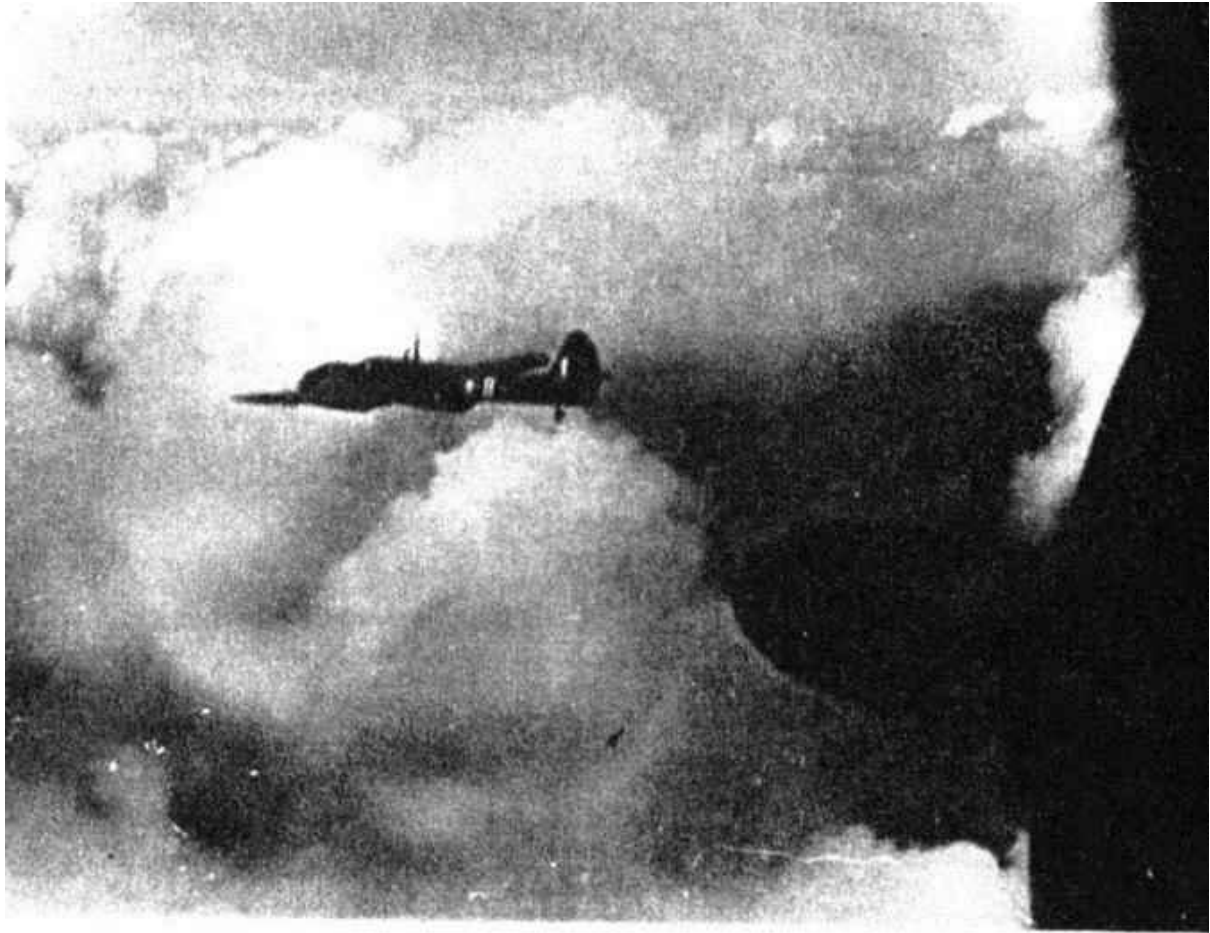
I went to the National Library of South Africa. I got a photocopy of the article. It is a nicely edited (shortened) version of Bull's account. It includes photos which I will insert here as appropriate..



" Four Robinson Crusoes—' Cactus,' ' Oubaas,' ' Paul ' and ' Bull,' " whose story appears in these pages.

Photo of the four characters. Captain Jones had the nickname of Oubaas but he looks little different from the others agewise.

We set off with two Marylands, ours from the v.d. Merwe flight & the other from the v.d. Byl flight, to shoot up the Tananariev aerodrome – a long & tiresome journey, but we were looking forward to the job as we didn't know what to expect there – might be anything. We came in right on the deck, & caught them with their pants down – absolutely unheralded by any alarm whatsoever.



“ We set off with two machines . . . ”

There were 3 hangers, two military & one civil & one plane outside on the tarmac (a Potez 25) [*]. On our first attack we pumped a lot of lead into the military hangers, leaving the civil one untouched throughout, & on our 2nd run we set the plane alight. We made 4 attacks each, but I was too busy in the nose of our plane with the big clumsy aerial camera to look about much & take stock of things, but I remember on our third run we flew right through the smoke of the fiercely burning plane with our front guns belching away into the closed hanger. We had no idea how many planes were inside but with all of that lead going in it is going to be a long time before a serviceable machine comes out.

[*] Potez 25 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potez_25



Picture source [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potez_25#/media/File:Potez_25_1_\(MAE\).JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potez_25#/media/File:Potez_25_1_(MAE).JPG)



In the meantime the v.d.Byls were playing up merry hell with the smaller military hanger, the door of which was open, exposing a lot of planes packed closely together, which suffered badly at their hands. By the time we came round for our third attack the ac-ac & m.g. fire was getting busy but as we were right on the deck all the time it was only the latter which could do us any harm – we thought. We came in for our 4th & last attack, pulled up over the hanger, & were on our way back home, the job done & well done.

We were about 5 miles away from the ‘drome when wham! Something hit us. I immediately turned round & saw that the Oubaas was O.K., & at the same instant I smelt something burning. Our starboard engine had a big gaping hole in the top cowling & a fire was burning away merrily inside the engine. The Oubaas switched on the extinguisher housed in that engine, switched off its petrol supply & feathered the prop (adjusted the propeller pitch to eliminate air resistance) & in no time the fire died out & we breathed freely again.

But our troubles were by no means over as we were 500 miles from home on one engine, high mountains to cross, & not enough petrol to get us home in any case as the 200 galls. In the starboard wing tank was so much dead weight – (the shell had severed the crossfeed pipe) & instead of doing a groundspeed of over 200 m.p.h. we were battling away at 130 – the jagged flap of cowling causing a lot of drag.

On the other hand however we were pretty damn lucky to be in the air at all with the Oubaas at the controls nursing one very good Pratt & Whitney engine, & it was very reassuring to see the other plane weaving above us keeping a lookout for any fighters.

We made for the coast in a roundabout way, keeping well clear of any towns & aerodromes. That engine & the Oubaas took us 300 miles, until, with only 30 galls. of petrol available we sighted a likely looking stretch of beach. In the meantime Paul was rattling out a running commentary on the morse key to our base, & after the Oubaas had circled the sandspit once to make sure, & straightened out for the landing he tapped out the last message – H.P.H

The Oubaas landed with his undercart up, making what is technically called a splitarse belly landing – the other kind being referred to as mere arrivals.

Well, there we were, all unhurt, at Fampotakely [*] on the east coast of Madagascar in one of the most delightful spots you can imagine – the lovely forest fringed beach of clean sharp coral sand at the mouth of a broad lagoon like river – huge breakers pounding the shore on one side of us & a lovely stretch of calm water on the other, & a neat little native village close by. An ideal picnic spot quiet & peaceful with the other Maryland circling about overhead. It was then Bunny v.d. Byl dropped us his emergency rations which so nearly hit yours truly in the clock.

[*] Fampotakley

<https://www.madacamp.com/Fampotakely>

GPS coordinates

S 15°35.673'

E050°24.093' 12m elevation

Google has Fampotakley but it is a bit inland at S15° 30' 24" E50° 13' 45" so I have used the coordinates listed above which is on the coast

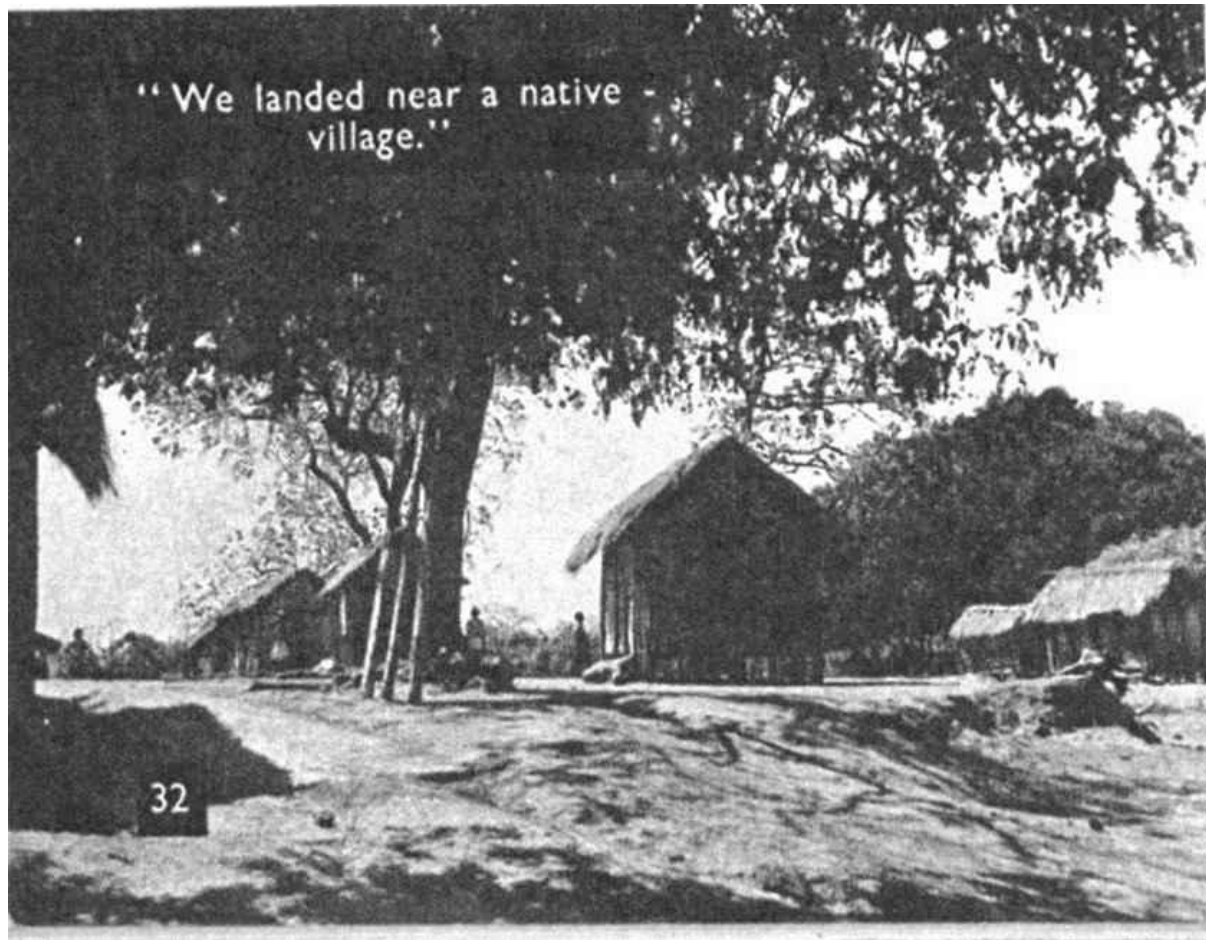


Paul in the meantime got busy on the radio again, requesting that a destroyer should be sent down to rescue us, so everything was tiggertyboo, & all we had to do was take life easy & enjoy ourselves where we were for a day or two – just what the doctor ordered.

The damaged engine baffled us no end tho', as we couldn't discover where the shell had entered. Not a sign of a hole anywhere except the big gaping one at the top. Then we noticed that some of the shrapnel holes were pierced inwards & downwards. The Oubaas solved the mystery – we had been hit from the top, & as we were flying straight & level at the time it was obviously the work of a spent but unexploded shell on its way back to earth. I wonder whether any other planes have been hit that way before? [*]

[*] When they eventually captured Tananarive & moved to the airfield they determined that it was most likely a 20mm shell. See entry for 5 Oct.

As soon as the other plane had left a lot of natives appeared from the jungle edge. They were the more daring element of the population of the little village on the river bank about 500 yards from the beach. They seemed quite friendly, & not a bit afraid. Not even of the villainous aerial camera which I was using.



Bull writes "*Their houses are all built in neat rows on stilts with slit bamboo walls & palmleaf thatching.*"

Paul came to the fore as being the linguist of the crew, & got on very well with the natives in spite of the fact that very few of them knew any French words. However, my faith in his French was badly shaken when he started parley vooing with one of the native women about buying some eggs. He was explaining to her with great gusto, but got stuck for words & had to resort to gestures, but his gesticulations were so confusingly eloquent that the dusky maiden got the wrong idea & went all coy & bashful-like, & tucked her chin into her shoulder over which she looked at him as much as to say "*Oh you naughty man!*" It was too much for me, my knees collapsed & I sat down on my haunches & howled with laughter. I still consider my attitude & my cackling worked the trick, because in no time the eggs were forthcoming. Paul however still insists that those eggs were his purchase.

The natives very soon brought us coconuts, bananas & Madagascar lemons, & those, together with the emergency rations of the two planes which included cigarettes, milk, chocolate, glucose sweets & the inevitable army biscuits & bully beef, formed fare fit for a king, & we lived like fighting cocks on the fat of the land ever after. I can't pass over the Madagascar coconuts as lightly as all that – By Jove!

They have to be tasted to be appreciated, with that characteristically elusive flavour – infinitely superior to those found on the East African Coast. We hardly drank any water at all, & we could get as much as we wanted – the natives brought it to us in 10ft lengths of bamboo, something quite unique in the water bottle line.

For our bedroom we used the leeward wing of the Maryland, sleeping on the opened parachute, & using our inflated Mae Wests as pillows. Very comfortable, & as one of us was continuously on guard there was ample room.

During the daytime we had very little privacy as the whole of that part of Madagascar & its family came to have a look at the plane & us. We made full use of their curiosity to obtain whatever labour we needed for collecting firewood & even digging a trench near the end of the sandspit, where, with our machine guns we were ready to hold the beach for days against any attack.

Cactus took on the job of cook, & a damn good one he made too with the able help of a very obliging healthy looking young native who attached himself to us on the second day. By the 3rd day when we realized that we were in for a Robinson Crusoe existence & the boy became all the more attached, what other name could there be for him other than Friday?

The cooking of Cactus & Friday was superb, especially after what we had been putting up with previous to that. We had one of those ‘*Army Chestnut*’ cooks in camp, you know the one I mean – “*Who called the cook a bastard???*” & the reply “*You mean who called the bastid a cook!*”

On the second day Paul & Cactus went to the village to do some marketing, & eventually returned with some coffee which had been burnt & ground for them on the spot, lots of rice, salt, sugar, a duck, & a fowl. I am sorry I missed that, but Cactus says Paul had to do a lot of quack quacking before he obtained the duck.

While the poultry was being plucked on the beach under the curious gaze of the usual crowd of about 30 natives, one of our planes came over to see how we were faring, & to drop us a note & further supplies. In no time every manjack of them had vanished into the jungle – it was a treat to see them “*skuif uit*” [*] across the beach. While the plane was circling about not one of them would come out of hiding.

[*] skuif uit = move out (Afrikaans)

When the machine had left the natives reappeared, & Friday brought me the dressed fowl, which I very nearly dropped. I was honestly puzzled for a split second. How had he managed to turn it inside out like that? There was the blinking rooster “*loering*” [*] at me through its own Pope’s Nose. Friday burst out laughing when he saw my momentary mystification. He had stuffed the rooster with its own kidneys, liver etc & its head. It looked so realistic & to me so absolutely ridiculous – I’m afraid I just naturally have that kind of low mind.

[*] loering = looking (Afrikaans)

That night we had a marvellous meal. Unpolished husked native rice – not the usual soggy civilized mess one could use for bill posting, but real rice. The chicken first boiled & then toasted on the end of a spit over the glowing coals until it was brown & crisp. I reckon Cactus & Friday could show Aunt Marina a point or two on how a rooster should be done, & that’s saying a lot.

No wonder I sat on the log that night as happy & contented as a cow with twin calves – life was indeed good, & the war seemed very very far away.

We never had a dull moment on that sand spit. Always something to do or future diversions to plan, such as our yachting episode on the lagoon with the dinghy & the parachute which caused so much excitement among the natives – I wonder what they thought of us.

Cactus & Paul were without hats so they made an appointment with the local seamstress. The resulting interview was a scream. Paul battling away in French & the chocolate maiden jabbering back at him in the native Malagache language. At 10a.m. the deal was done. At 12 they had the first fitting & at 2.30 Cactus & Paul were each wearing a home-made-to-measure native straw hat. Paul’s was a white one with a white ribbon chinstrap, & Cactus looked very demure in a lovely pink & white creation with ribbons & bow to match.

These natives have developed their home industries to a nicety. They live both literally & figuratively off the land. Their houses are all built in neat rows on stilts with slit bamboo walls & palmleaf thatching & coconut shells & bamboo for utensils. They weave their own cloth from fibre which they obtain from a very fine kind of wild sisal. From this cloth they make all their garments except for an occasional shirt or sarong & their hats & baskets they plait from another kind of straw like sisal, & very neat too.

The Oubaas & myself had a good hearty laugh at the expense of Paul & Cactus, especially the latter but the trouble probably was that they lacked the oval mannequin's face with which to show off the hats to the best advantage.

On the second day we received instructions by letter from the plane that as a destroyer could not be sent to pick us up the commando troops were on their way down to rescue us. We would have to march about 90 miles in 2 ½ days to meet them at the appointed place (a big inlet 15 miles north of Antalaha), [*] but as we would have to bypass Antalaha through the jungle, & cross something like 35 rivers on the way & had only flying boots in which to march, we replied "*Thanks a lot, very kind of you & all that, but can't make it – ons kuier lekker.*"

[*] Antalaha is on the map above.
ons kuier lekker = we are having a nice visit (Afrikaans)

The next morning another plane comes over, dropped another note of instructions, our post fresh from the Union, & 3 pairs of boots, & circled about while the Oubaas read the instructions & we inspected & sorted out the boots & post etc.. The orders were for us to start marching back at all costs, & if we thought it possible, to capture & hold Antalaha aerodrome where a plane would pick us up. Paul signaled back that we would capture the drome, only he had no boots & would they please drop him a pair size 10 – "*ons is mos van die groot voet v.d. Merwes.*" I thought to myself "*My Gawd! This is where they heave their ruddy dinghy overboard, knowing that we have a mate for it*" but sure as fate, out comes a pair of size 10's & Fillie v.d. Byl flew home minus his shoes.

[*] "*ons is mos van die groot voet v.d. Merwes*" = we are of the big footed v.d.Merwes (Afrikaans)

We read our post, the first parachute post in Madagascar, & I was very amused at Brinkie in his letter asking me to tell him all about the life in Madagascar & adding "*Maar jy sal my ook lekker bullshit dat ek niks sal glo sonder snaps nie.*" [*] Well Brinkie old pal I have done my best as regards snaps, only I hadn't a camera all the time, & I don't know what the censor will let through.

[*] "*Maar jy sal my ook lekker bullshit dat ek niks sal glo sonder snaps nie*" = But you will also bullshit me so nicely that I will believe nothing without pictures (snaps) (Afrikaans)

We packed up what we could carry, but it nearly broke our hearts to have to leave the Maryland & most of the thousands of pounds of equipment behind. We took along a few of the smaller instruments & two machine guns with about 500 rounds of ammunition, & set off at about 11 a.m., us 4 "*v.d. Merwes*" with Friday & another boy as bearers. It was heavy going as the 4 of us were carrying packs of about 60 lbs each, & the two boys nearly 200 lbs between them.

The Oubaas was leading, & set off at a brisk pace. After the first mile I was afraid I wouldn't make it, after the 2nd I was sure; at the end of the 3rd I was feeling too miserable to care one way or another – perspiration dripping down my legs into my boots. When we had done about 4 miles my hopes of passing out peacefully on the way were shattered, & I was afraid that I might have to stay the distance. Another mile & I was feeling O.K. & settling down into my stride nicely when we struck a little native village where one of our bearers caved in. He had been swaying a bit the last mile or two – knee action gone wonky. So we traded him in for a new model at the village & went on our merry way once more.

We must have looked a funny sight in Indian file, all unshaven & dirty. Cactus just about took the cake. He looked for all the world like a weather-beaten “*Dr Livingstone I presume.*” With his pink & white panama. The Oubaas was the image of Old Mc. Bein minus the .303. Paul reminded one of Goofy. As for myself – I wouldn’t know, I was spared the sight, but I must say I felt pretty second hand.

The path through the jungle was narrow & we had to stick to single file. Except for very occasional clearings the trees met overhead & one couldn’t see for more than 5 yards into the dense jungle either side. It was raining intermittently & the going was decidedly “*slippery, wet & greasy*”. More than one of us slipped on his guava down the inclines.

After we had done about 8 miles we called a halt for a bit of lunch. While we were busy with our bully 3 natives came along the path from the opposite direction & we tried to persuade them to join our happy family & help us carry the kit but they displayed a definite lack of enthusiasm. Friday, always the perfect gentleman, offered them some of his food, but we put a stop to that. “*No come along, no bully*”. That decided them & two of them joined us. We now had 4 bearers, & our packs were considerably lighter. One of these new bearers, also a clean looking strapping young specimen with a pleasant smile proved very intelligent & quick on the uptake – we named him Donerdag. [*] It was a treat to hear him whistle “*Abide with me.*”

[*] Donderdag = Thursday (Afrikaans)

Shortly after a plane came over again but had to circle about quite a long time before we could reach a clearing to be seen – they knew we were in the forest as we fired off a few Very lights. The first opening we struck was a river & we stood on the bridge waving an open parachute. Boxer & Mac v.d.Byl who were in the plane dropped us a parcel which damn nearly dropped into the river among the crocodiles. When we retrieved it we found it’s contents to be a lot of small change, some more bully, & a note stating that an armed escort with a military policeman were snooping around the drome investigating the disappearance from the army stores of a brand new motorcycle, the suspect being Lt. Bull v.d. Merwe. It beats me how people can jump to conclusions just because a Soutpiel Colonel lost a black motorcar, & two days later the v.d. Merwes were driving about in a freshly painted silver car. There were a lot of silly questions asked – the v.d. Merwes still have the Silver Streak. & Now this bike – she’s a honey, holds the road like dream at 70 (so I am told) but fancy coming to the v.d. Merwes for it & picking on me – nasty habit they’re getting into. However they haven’t found the bike yet & have given up the search – we hope.

Attached to the parcel was a large streamer, telling us in bold print to drink more Castle Beer – these v.d. Byls have a weird sense of humour.

We did about 12 miles that day, putting up at a rest house in the next little native village – very thoughtful of the French authorities providing us with the rest house. 3 Buildings, Cookhouse, bedroom & house of parliament complete with seat of government.

Here we bought another rooster & some coconuts & the bearers made a big fire in the cookhouse over which they dried our sopping wet cloths (it was raining cats & dogs by now).

That night Friday proved himself beyond all doubt. When darkness fell the Oubass said unto Friday “*Friday, there shall be light*” & lo! There was light. Friday with that Kolynos [*] grin of his, glided silently away into the dark wet night towards the village & in no time returned with a bundle of bone dry faggots of some special wood & a sheet of iron, & when he had made his little fire it was really amazing what a lot of light it provided.

[*] Kolynos was a toothpaste. Here is an advertisement from August 1942 issue of Veritas.

KOLYNOLEDGE

1

TOOTHACHE CURED BY WITCHCRAFT!

IN THE MIDDLE AGES WITCHES WERE BELIEVED TO HAVE THE POWER TO CURE TOOTHACHE BY MUMBLING THE FOLLOWING:—

"I GREET THEE, NEW MOON, FOR THE PAIN AND FOR THE GOIT, AND FOR THE THREE LITTLE WORMS WHICH ARE IN MY TEETH, ONE GREY, ONE BLUE & ONE IS RED, I WISH THAT ALL THREE NOW WERE DEAD. AMEN!"

2

DO YOU KNOW?

Kolynos is the MOST ECONOMICAL of all Toothpastes!

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J.W.T. 44

While our clothes were drying over the cookhouse fire we sat in the bedroom draped in pieces of torn up parachute looking for all the world like the Jolly old Tinker in the army song "With yards & yards of Jap silk hanging down below his heels."

When the chicken had been cooking for about 2 hours, & the 4 of us, clad like Gandhi were sitting around our bedroom light, Friday came from the kitchen, took one of the sharp faggots, speared a leaf, held it over the fire, glanced at Cactus & said only one word with a question in his voice — "Koekoe?". Just a nod from Cactus in reply, & out went Friday back to the kitchen — just like that, nothing more said, but the whole situation was as clear as daylight. — The Spaghetti waiter had come up to our table with his serviette over one arm, & one of those oily smarmy smiles plastered over his greasy face & gushed — "How would you like your chicken this evening? May I suggest it a-la-Cactus-Friday, crisp & done to a turn, yes, no?" & we knew that within two minutes that chicken would be toasting over the coals with a spit up its sunny side.

Friday, you are a real discovery & a precious gem — such complete understanding, so little fuss, just plain common or garden savvy. If only international understanding was half as complete & could surmount the language & other minor difficulties half as easily there wouldn't be any need for all this war.

That night we decided that when the time came we would give Friday the option of going back to camp with us to be head batman & mess waiter for us in the v.d. Merwe Mansions & on our return to the Union we could again put it to him — we could get round all the red tape of the immigration regulations we reckoned. But then on the other hand would it be fair towards him to exchange this free natural life of his for our so-called civilization?

We were very thankful for the rest house as it rained steadily all night, & next morning when we continued our 76 mile march to Antalaha aerodrome we knew there would be no planes over that day as it was raining so hard flying was out of the question – even the birds were walking.

10 miles through the dripping forest & we passed coming our way two natives carrying a big wooden chest, but we just kept marching on, the Oubaas in the lead setting the pace. Shortly afterwards Friday became agitated, & tried to tell us something pointing back along the path where the box had passed from view & towards the front & saying “*District Antalaha*”, but we couldn’t make out what it was all about, so we simply reassured him that everything was O.K. (a term he seemed to understand) & carried on. But 5 mins. later we discovered what the faithful Friday had been trying to explain to us – as we rounded a bend in the path we saw, not 50 yards from us, & coming towards us, a big party, native askaris with rifles & any amount of native bearers, & perched in a carrying chair on the shoulders of 4 of these bearers was a neatly dressed French officer who looked as if he had just stepped out of a Bond Street Tailors – What now!

The Oubaas spoke over his shoulder ‘*Get out your guns, I’ll go up & parley,*’ & strode straight on while Cactus, Paul & myself unpacked the machine guns & got out our revolvers & sat at the corner of the path all bristling with firearms like real Chicago gangsters.

After passing the time of day etc. it transpired that the Frenchman could speak English moderately well, so the proceedings went on in English, but Paul was called in to help out while Cactus & myself kept a watchful eye on the proceedings from the bend in the path. – This is more or less how it went:-

Froggie:- ‘*I didn’t expect to meet you here, thought you were still at the plane.*’

Oubaas:- ‘*Tired of sitting around, taking a bit of a stroll.*’

Froggie:- ‘*But you’re going wrong way, we must go south.*’

Oubaas:- ‘*No, we’re on our way up north.*’

Froggie:- ‘*But no! You must come with me, I have my orders to take you south to the Capital, & if you resist I must take you prisoners*’ & he points to his askaris.

Oubaas:- (going all Pygmalion) ‘*Not bloody likely! My machine guns say we’re going north, & what’s more, you’re coming with me,*’ & he then calls out to me ‘*Bull, skiet ‘n paar skote in die bos in.*’[*]

Prrrrrrt – Prrrrrrt

Froggie:- looks back at his askaris who are busy making a strategic withdrawal & at the spot where his bearers should be, but they have not been hampered by any strategy, they have simply ‘*skuifed uit*’ down the path. He shrugs his shoulders & says ‘*I can’t argue with machine guns, let us go.*’

[*] <i>Bull, skiet ‘n paar skote in die bos in</i> = Bull, put a few shots in the forest. (Afrikaans) <i>skuifed uit</i> = moved out

So we continue our interrupted journey, only now we have lots of prisoners to help us carry our kit. Just how many none of us ever knew, - we could never get them all together to count but they were about 25 – 30.

The whole affair had that typical v.d. Merwe touch. It reminded me of that night in Lindi on our way to Madagascar when the v.d. Merwes went to the native village to buy poultry. The villagers (natives) saw them coming, & started off with fancy prices. Flippie v.d. Merwe who was the spokesman would be quoted 500 cents for a rooster. ‘*How much? Nonsense, I give you 200 – Piet skiet daar ‘n paar*

skote.” – bang, bang, bang. “*How much? No not 300, I give you 200 – Piet, nog ‘n skoot*” – bang, - & the rooster becomes chicken for 200 cents.

[*] – *Piet skiet daar ‘n paar skote* = Piet, shoot a couple of shots.
Piet, nog ‘n skoot = Piet, another shot. (Afrikaans)

The Frenchman proved to be a very decent fellow, one of the best, & I hope to meet him again one day after the war. He told the Oubaas any promise & stick to it, if only we wouldn't take away the rifles from the askaris, or in any way make it obvious that they were our prisoners. It wouldn't do anybody any good & would only lower the prestige of the French with the natives, & when we left the island one day the French would have to carry on under a big handicap.

The Oubaas agreed to this, & the Frenchman was put on parole. He wouldn't try to send word ahead to Antalaha of what had happened & would be responsible for the good behaviour of all the askaris & natives with him. They shook hands on that, & the pact was kept right up to the end. I don't know what the askaris & bearers thought of it all, probably they thought that by some master stroke of strategy on their master's part we were his prisoners in spite of our machine guns. Anyway, nobody in the party bothered about it anymore, & the relationship was never mentioned again. We were one big happy party marching along in any old order, the askaris carrying their rifles under their cloaks & our bearers carrying our unloaded machine guns wrapped up to keep the rain out.

The Frenchman, whose surname was Roux, walked along with us & his 4 pallbearers must have been very pleased with the changed order. At the end of the days march Roux no longer looked like a tailor's model, he was wet through like the rest of us, but as it wasn't cold we didn't mind the rain much. We went swinging on through it all at a brisk pace.

Our prisoner-cum-friend explained that they had two seasons in that part of the island, the rainy season, & the season with rain, & this was the latter. I hope never to strike the rainy season in that part.

We swopped a lot of ideas on the war & politics in general. Roux fought against the Germans in 1940 & was wounded on the Somme. “*France is so unfortunate! In occupied France the Germans say ‘co-operate’, In unoccupied France the English say ‘co-operate’ – In Indochina the Japanese say ‘co-operate’, & now here you say ‘co-operate’. It is very difficult!*” & the look on his face & the wave of his hands spoke volumes.

By the end of that day's march we had covered 35 miles & crossed 13 rivers. I kept tally on the inside of my helmet, the only dry spot I could think of. Of these 13 only 5 had bridges & we had to be pulled across the others by canoe except in one case where we used the Frenchman's palanquin (the only really comfortable part of the journey). The total of 13 does not include little streams & rivulets, of which there were dozens.

The native dugouts are the best I've ever seen, or the Oubaas for that matter, & he has travelled all over Europe & Africa in his time. They are really works of art, hollowed out of sound solid tree trunk, absolutely symmetrical & streamlined to a nicety, & the load they will carry is really surprising. At every river without a bridge there are one or two of these canoes & ferrymen paid by the government, so for a man on foot transport is not too difficult. The rivers are all crocodile infested, & not safe to swim, & now I know Brinkie will call me a liar, - they contain fish which climb trees (nee so wragtig Brinkie) [*]. Actually they are called newts – of P.G. Woodhouse – Gussy Finknottle fame.

[*] *nee so wragtig Brinkie* = no honestly Brinkie (Afrikaans)

We did about 24 miles the 2nd day when we reached a lighthouse situated high up on the summit of a conical hill [*]. A stately pillar of white forming a sharp silhouette against the surrounding carpet of

green jungle. Roux suggested spending the night there. As we were out to capture an aerodrome, with probably a town thrown in, the taking of a solitary lighthouse with the keeper was a mere nothing to us. The Oubaas therefore agreed, provided the lighthouse keeper could put us all up, & Roux went up the hill to find out about accommodation & to explain the delicate situation of “*No argument at all or you argue with machine guns.*”

[*] Wikipedia has a list of lighthouses on Madagascar. The coordinates show that only Cap Est is near where they were. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_lighthouses_in_Madagascar Subsequently I noticed that the entry for 15 July states that it was Cap Est.



Screenshot from Wikipedia Note all the rivers they had to cross.

<https://www.ibiblio.org/lighthouse/mdg.htm> lists Cap Est & has a link to a picture of the original lighthouse. Note the building at its base.



Source of picture <http://www.madagasikara.it/Maxi/foto2004/cap-est3.jpg>

Here is the entry for Cap Est
anjona Antsirikos (Cap Est) (2)

"2007 (station established 1906). Active (?); focal plane 70 m (230 ft); two white flashes every 10 s. Approx. 19 m (62 ft) round cylindrical white concrete tower with a flared top. A photo of the new lighthouse (still under construction in November 2006) is at the top of this page & Google has a [satellite view](#) of the station. A distant [photo](#) of the former cast iron lighthouse is also available; it was demolished earlier in 2006. Aptly named, the lighthouse marks the easternmost point of Madagascar. Located about 5 km (3 mi) southeast of Ambohitralanana. Site status unknown. ARLHS MAG-018; Admiralty D6946; NGA 32408."

After a short conflagration with the keeper Roux appeared at the top of the path & beckoned us up. So up we went, keeping our eyes open, but as we noticed neither wireless aerial nor telephone wire we were satisfied there was no hanky panky business. The keeper, a jovial Frenchman by name of Orioux, veteran of the last war, with rows of medals, welcomed us with open arms, & what's more, it was genuine, he was honestly glad to have our company. He "*had not the English*", but that was no handicap. By Jove! He was a kind host, not the superficial gushing type, but real genuine hospitality. He made us take off our wet cloths & gave each of us a complete change, & then the first drinks appeared, - the first of many.

Nothing was said about it but by taking note of the photographs on the mantle piece we gathered like many of the Frenchmen in the colonies our host had taken unto himself a native wife & two marks on the white wall beside an outside door told us he had two kids & furthermore that on Dec 24th Jean was just 3 ft, while Marie looked down on her (or him) from the dizzy height of 3ft 4ins.

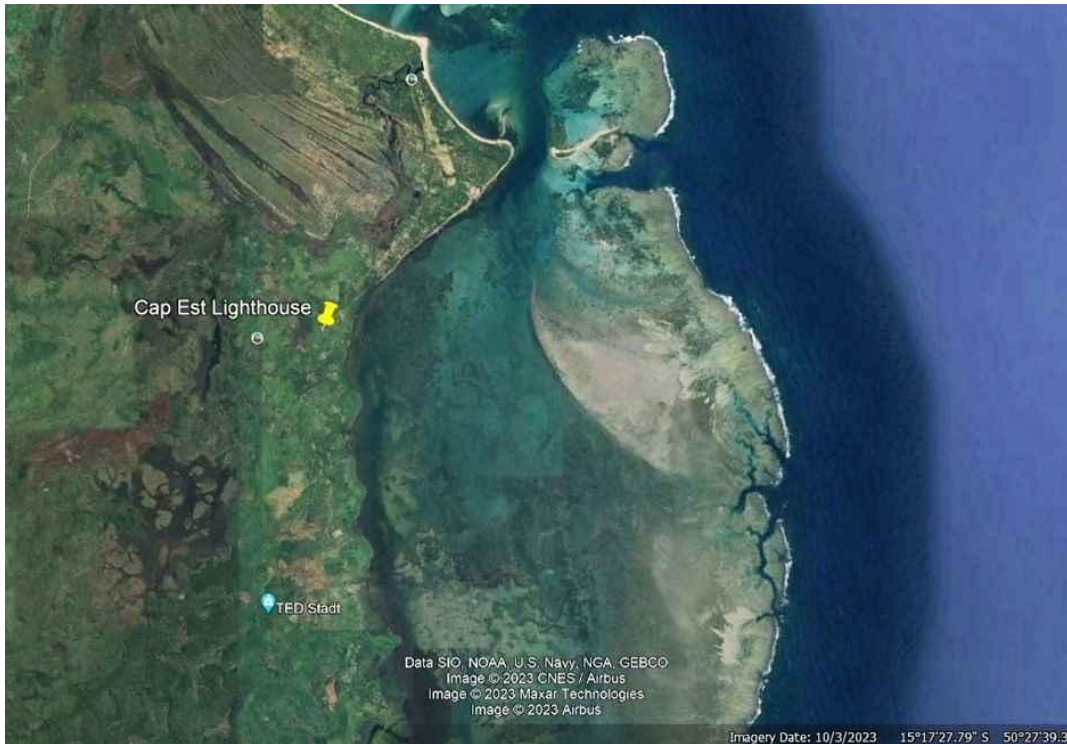
But we never met the family, they were evidently spirited away as we came up the hill so as not to cause any embarrassment.

That night we had a marvellous meal – how many courses I couldn't say. There was so much French & Morocco wine, & our host so much averse to an empty glass that I would have eaten the blinking plate without counting it as a course.

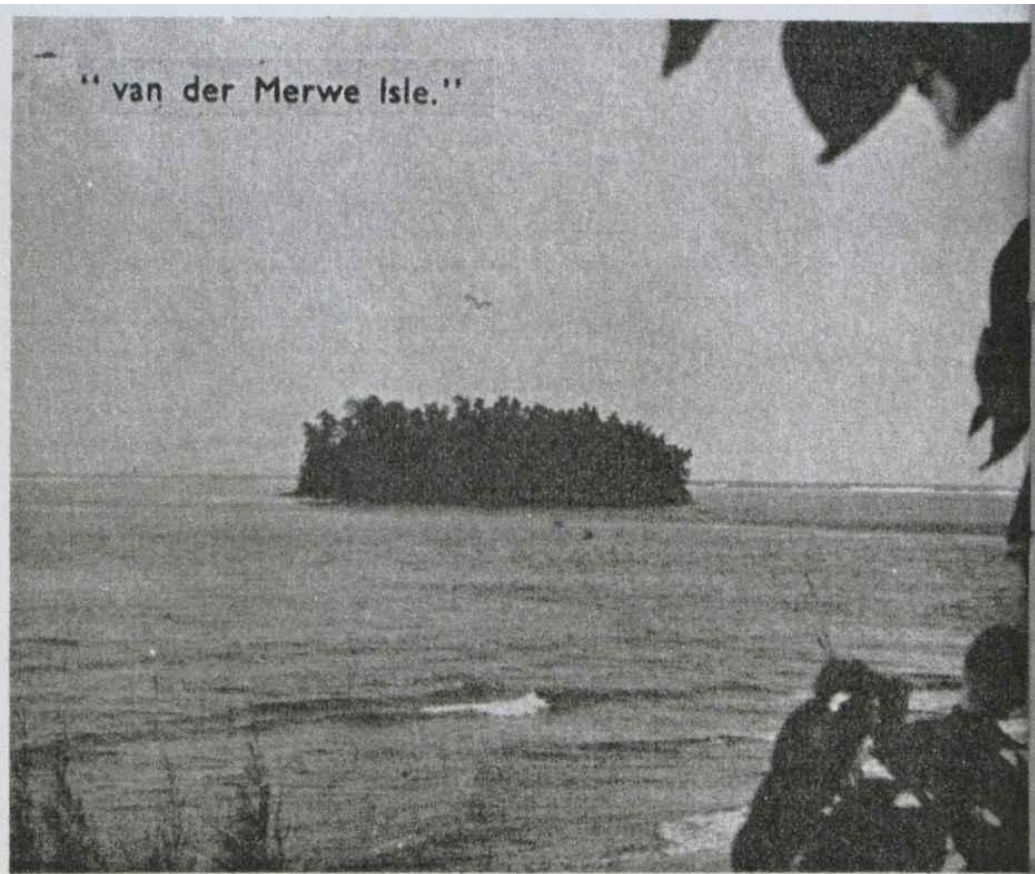
There was sleeping accommodation for all of us. The Oubaas & self in a double bed, Paul & Cactus in a double bed, & the two Frenchmen each on a stretcher, & the askaris & bearers in the native quarters. Next morning (Friday), after a hearty breakfast we thanked our host & set out again but we had done only 4 miles when a plane came over & dropped more supplies & instructions for us to hold out where we were as there was a good landing spot handy where a minesweeper would pick us up on Monday.

We were very amused by a personal note dropped by the observer of the plane warning us of our proximity to a lighthouse from where our Very light signals were most probably seen.

So back to the lighthouse we went, much to the obvious puzzlement of the natives (why couldn't these mad white men make up their ruddy minds as to whether they were coming or going.) Roux however, guessed at once that a boat was coming to pick us up, & said as much. The Oubaas admitted it, but did not say when we were expecting the boat. Once more the lighthouse keeper welcomed us like long lost brothers which made us feel decidedly guilty – we couldn't possibly lie on his neck until the Monday, & couldn't tell him the length of our stay either. However we had already seen a way out – there was a nice looking little island about 600 yds off the mainland, [*] & we decided to move out there the following day & set our prisoners free. Everybody would be happy, & we were confident of our ability to hold the island against heavy odds if need be, In the meantime we pooled our provisions & relaxed & swapped ideas & yarns.



Google earth showing the position of the lighthouse & the islands.
There is a photograph picture icon. It shows the jungle there.
I suspect van der Merwe Isle is opposite the little cape towards the top of the picture.



The lighthouse had a wonderful view, overlooking a wide expanse of wooded shore, the coral reef about a mile out forming a placid blue lagoon with “*our*” island (of about two morgan at the utmost [*]) sticking out so invitingly like a dog’s balls – all made to order, & waiting for “*us v.d Merwes*” to do their stuff.

[*] morgan = ancient unit of land area then (still?) used in ZA for farm title deeds.
2 morgan = 1.6 hectare

The two Frenchmen told us a lot of interesting things about Madagascar, all about the native runner system, & how the native dogs cross the crocodile infested rivers. – The dog first goes about 200 yards up along the bank & barks. The crocs, who are very inquisitive, go up to investigate, & the dog then runs back & swims across.

On Friday aft. We had a bit of amusement, a runner came from Antalahu (about 40 miles away). He had a letter from the District Commandant for Roux, who read the letter & seemed very worried. He then explained to the Oubaas that the D.C. had phoned the exchange at Sambuva the previous evening, & on being answered in English, had enquired who was speaking, “*Marie Antoinette*” was the reply – the English were on their way down, & he had to pack his bags & prepare to evacuate, but first of all he sent a note of warning to our prisoner, whom he thought had taken us prisoner.

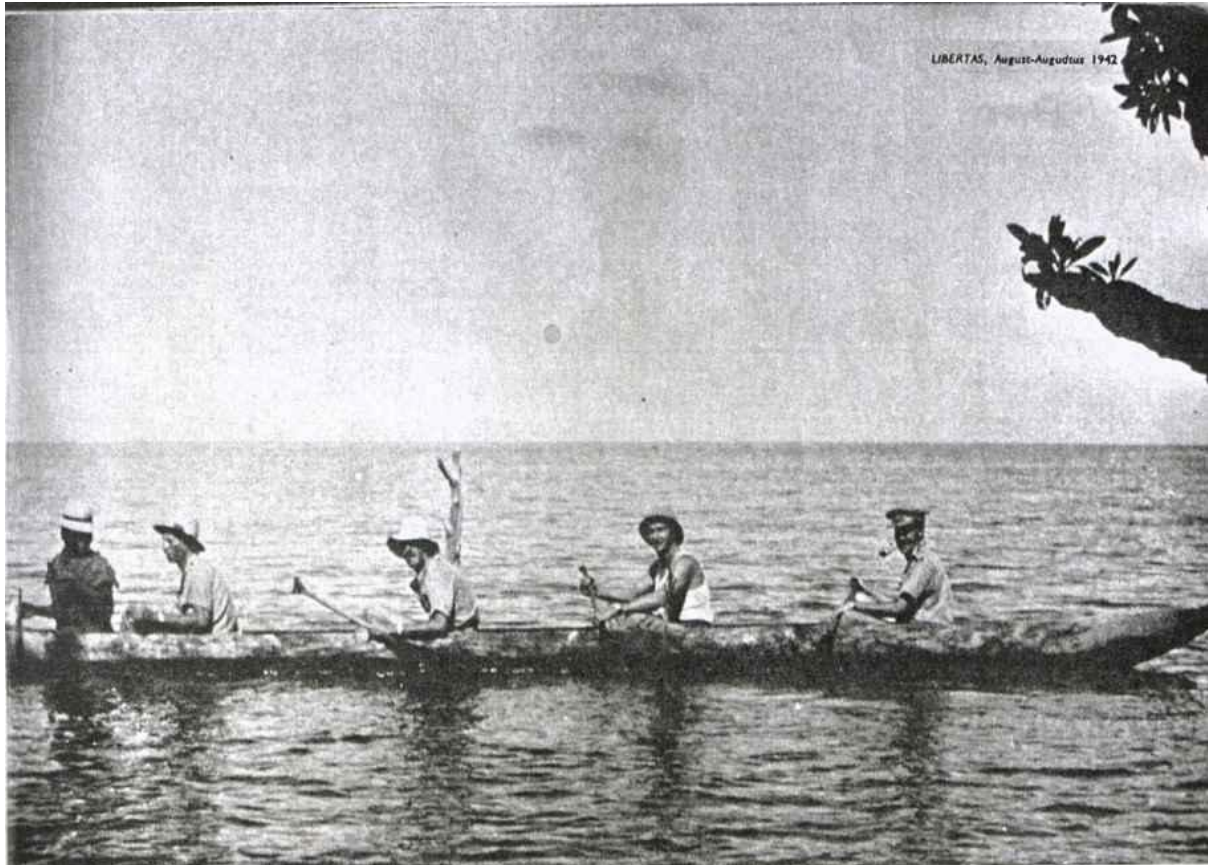
[*] Using Google Earth & using my Fampolakley it is 47 miles from Antalaha whereas Google’s Fampolakley is only 38 miles from Antalaha.

The Oubaas explained that it wasn’t an invasion, but only a body of troops on their way to “*rescue*” us, & that as long as we were safe these troops would hurt no one. With the Oubaas’s permission Roux wrote a note of reassurance to the D.C. This could do no harm, as we knew that the Commando Troops would withdraw as soon as they were notified by Base that we were being picked up by boat after all.

There was nothing to do but sit around in the sun in between showers, practicing our French, & looking through our host’s collection of profusely illustrated naughty French books of the “*Now look at the rest of the picture*” type. We brought two of the books back with us & these pictures now adorn the walls of the mess. Our art gallery is the envy of the v.d. Byls, the Papenfus’s, the Gons [*] & other visitors.

Gons = British; but I don’t know the derivation.

The next morning as we were preparing to embark for our island, another frantic arrived from the D.C. – the Commando Troops were in town, & he was in no end of a flat spin, some of them were then on their way by bicycle to the lighthouse to contact us, but the native runner had beaten them to it. We decided to postpone our occupation of the island until the troops arrived so that we could explain to them that as grateful as we were for their rescue efforts, we were quite happy & capable of looking after ourselves, & preferred a comfortable boat journey back to the bumpy one they had to offer, & would they please go back home & leave us to our little private campaign.



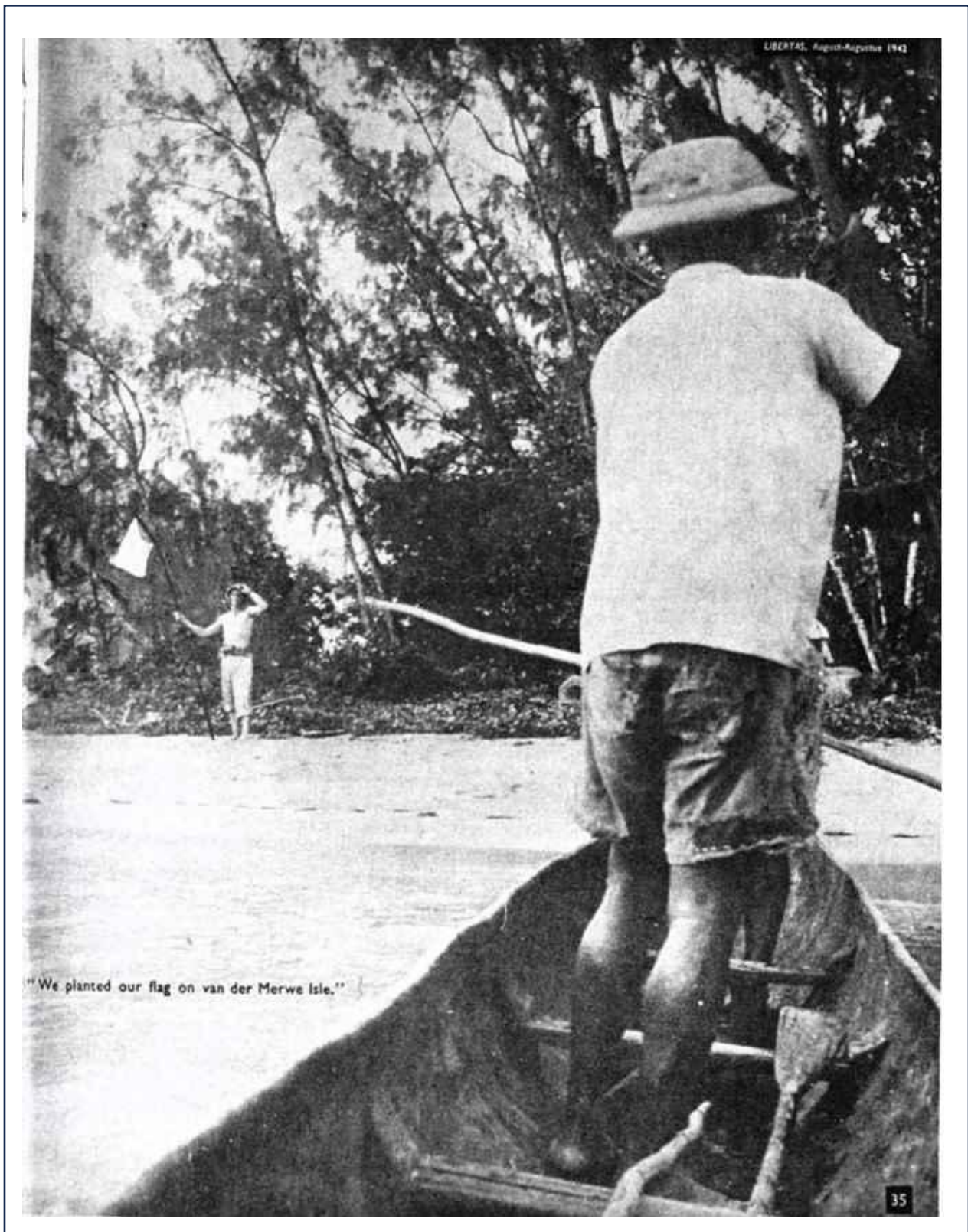
Picture is titled "... paddled across the lagoon in canoes to our island.
Oubaas at the front, Cactus (with moustache), Paul, Bull

These troops however never turned up (it later transpired they were recalled much to the relief of the French) so next morning we released all our prisoners, paid the three bearers, said fond farewells to our host & Roux, & with our man Friday & a supply of live poultry & eggs paddled across the lagoon to our island.

By this time we could all but talk to each other in French. The Oubaas was pretty good at it – At one stage at the lighthouse I saw him & the keeper alone together waving their arms about frantically as if warding off an attack by bees, but on getting nearer I discovered it was the Oubaas telling the keeper a yarn in French, the keeper helping out when a word was not forthcoming.

He was a great fellow that keeper, he gladly inconvenienced himself for us. I wonder how many bottles of his imported wines & liqueurs went the way of all good stuff – must have been two dozen at least. We have decided to fly over & drop both him & Roux supplies of razor blades, cigarettes & toilet requisites of which they are very short as a result of being cut off from all trade. It's the least we can do to repay in part the marvellous hospitality – he would accept no money.

We planted our flag on Van Der Merwe Isle, a dirty singlet scented with the v.d. Merwe perfume – Eau-de-B.O. This flag is rather appropriate you must agree after this airing of our dirty linen here in public.



After making ourselves nice & comfortable & going all Robinson Crusoe, the Navy put in an appearance late that afternoon (a whole day before they were due), & spoiled our fun. We were genuinely sorry at having to leave that lovely little island our stay on which showed promise of being even more enjoyable than the 7 very pleasant previous days.

The Navy was very surprised & amused to find us "*holding*" our island, & most pleased at our contribution of two fat live ducks, 4 dozen eggs & 3 fish which Friday had speared.

When we gave Friday the option of coming along with us he was very much in two minds, but eventually gave us to understand that he did not like coming alone. We regretted having paid off Donderdag – if we had not, they would both have been with us now. However, we paid him well & regretfully took leave of him, having provided him with the experience of his life.

So ended the most pleasant holiday I have ever spent, & if in the near future you hear of planes force landing in enemy territory around these parts don't worry, its only the v.d. Merwes taking their leave.

Maybe if the editor doesn't sling me out on my ear I will tell you some more about the v.d. Merwes one day – how they got their name & christened some of the other flights. But in the meantime I'm recuperating from a harrowing experience of 8 days hardship in enemy territory.

That's what I wrote, & now that I've gone through it all again I'm not bloody surprised that it hasn't been published. I reckon posterity will have to get along as best it can without any masterpiece of mine among the classics.

[*] Written at the top of this last page in the same pen but probably a different handwriting is F. Frisamaun. We know the names of the two Frenchmen, Roux & Orieux so it was not one of their signatures, anyway the book was not on the adventure.

Clayton p18

Not long after this, two Marylands led by Maj Ken Jones carried out an armed reconnaissance of Ivato, the main French air base at Tananarive, about 500 miles (800 km) south of Diego Suarez. There were four large hangars on the airfield which were packed with aircraft. Repeated low level attacks were made and a number of aircraft damaged and destroyed. Maj Jones' Maryland was hit by anti-aircraft fire from the ground and one engine set on fire and put out of action. He managed to extinguish the fire and attempted to return to Diego Suarez via the east coast to avoid the high mountains inland, but after 240 miles (380 km) he was forced to put the Maryland down on an open stretch of ground near the coast.

No one was injured and, after removing a machine gun from the rear turret, the crew set out on foot along a rough path to walk back to Diego Suarez. They heard sounds of an approaching enemy patrol and Maj Jones instructed his crew to hide in the bush while he remained visible on the path. Bull Malan, his navigator; had the machine gun.

The French officer in command of the patrol called upon Jones to surrender, saying in broken English, 'You are my prisoner'. Jones replied, 'No, no, monsieur le Capitaine. You are my prisoner.' The French officer looked surprised and repeated, 'You are my prisoner', pointing to his eight Malagasy soldiers armed with rifles. Then Jones, turning to the bushes at the side of the path, said in Afrikaans, 'Bull, - los maar 'n paar skote' (Fire a few shots), whereupon Bull opened fire with the machine gun. The French officer bowed with true Gallic grace and said, 'Monsieur, I am your prisoner'.

The patrol was disarmed and marched along the path which led to a lighthouse. The lighthouse keeper was forced to co-operate and a radio message was sent through to Diego Suarez. A Royal Navy minesweeper was immediately despatched and Maj Jones and his crew were picked up. They returned with a bunch of lurid pictures of French pin-up girls, the property of the light-house keeper. 37 Flight easily won the pin-up girl contest.

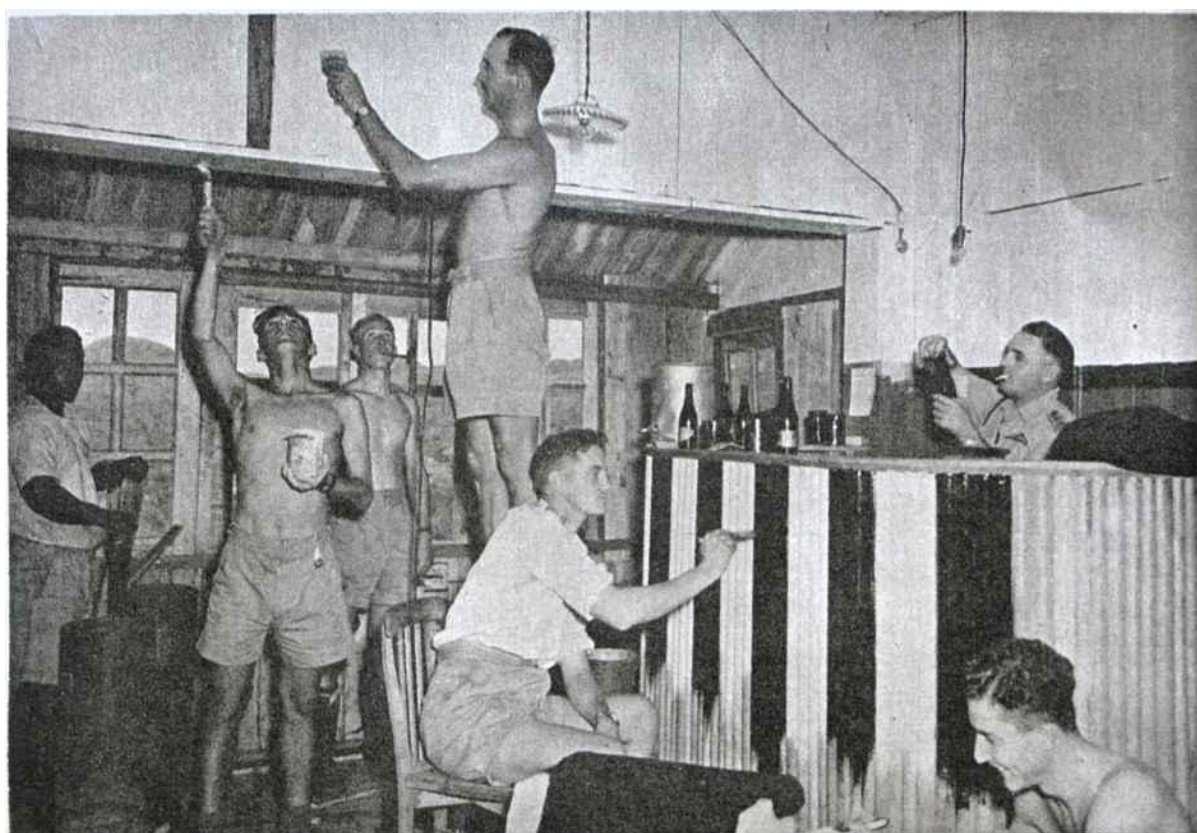
10 July [1942]

The minesweeper "Cromaley" which picked us up had a compliment of about 70, but it was ruled with typical naval red tape - it had 8 messes, two of which consisted of one member each, one engineer petty officer, & the other the skipper, a Lt. Commander. We hardly ever saw the skipper - he lived in his holy of holies.

When we got back we invited the officers & some of the N.C.O's to our two messes for a party that night, & what a party it was! the skipper, who was a tin God on board unbent altogether & got completely arseholes, joining in the songs & doing the highland fling on the Mess table & threw his arms around the necks of his N.C.O's who later in the night came over to the Officers mess - it is going to take him a long time to live that down on broad & regain all his lost "*Naval Prestige*".

In our absence the fellows had got stuck in & improved our mess no end, what with a glassed in bay window, stuffed benches & armchairs, tablecloths, white uniforms with black sashes for the waiters, & the whole mess lately painted, the colour scheme being black & white with a spot of grey thrown in, & - the best item by far, - an electric sign on the wall facing the door, reading "*Ons Van Der Merwes*". A real splitarse job.

[*] Pictures from July 1942 issue of Veritas





I will now quote from our War Diary written by Flippie Look in in his breezy style giving their side of the story when we were shot down:- [*]

[*] I can't find this War Diary at The National Archives.

At this stage there were 3 Flights on Madagascar. Bull explains (just after the map of Madagascar lower down) that they were not a squadron initially & the 3 Flights were given nicknames

32 = van der Byl

36 = Papenpoes

37 = van der Merwe

The 3 Flights moved to Madagascar on 13 May 1942 [Clayton p3]

They were combined to form Squadron 20 during August or September 1942 [Clayton p23]

These entries in the War Diary maintained by Flippie Look cover 31.5.42 to 8.6.42 so they pre-date the formation of Squadron 20 from the 3 Wings. At the National Archives I can find records for Wing 35 & 34 but not the 3 that were at Madagascar. It is a great pity as (to quote Bull) it is written in a "breezy style"

AIR-27-226-2_1 starts 1/8/42 as Squadron 20 in Madagascar. This fits in with the formation of the squadron.

AIR-27-226-2_1 p8 has for 4 September 1942 *"The Squadron is no longer to be No 20 Sqn (a UNION Coastal Squadron) but No 16 Sqn (a Bomber Squadron under Middle East Command)"*

Bull records the formation of Squadron 20 just after the Catalina picture. He quotes Flippe Look's entry in the War Diary.

Bull was appointed the War Diarist by Col "Mossie" Mostert (see entry for 2 August). There had been very unpopular decisions by Mostert in the days immediately before that but Mostert wrote the War Diary covering those days so Bull was spared having to write those entries. In the entry for 18 August Bull writes:

"Last night I managed to get a peep at the war diary & was rather amused to discover that everything I had written had been torn out & rewritten with very many omissions - so my shafts went home & have been duly noted - I don't think I will meet with much sympathy if I have to go up before the Adj. or O.C. in the future. I must say tho' to me it seems a pretty blatant admission of weakness or guilt or whatever one should call it for the Adj. and/or the O.C. to "disprove" [sic] of any statements the war diarist makes & not have them up on the mat for it - they seem to have chosen the underhand easy way out - putting discretion before valour. - Not a

good policy when you get caught out tho'."

So Bull was the official diarist for 2 weeks but his work was "redacted" (to use a current term)

31.5.42 "Great was the sorrow & long the lamentings of the v.d.Merwe clan when they heard that the machine had actually been shot down - & buy a Frenchie at that! Terrible was their anger at the hostile behaviour of our hitherto friendly enemies. The v.d.Merwes have always prided themselves on their sportsmanlike attitude towards this bloodless campaign - to be let down like that by the enemy was definitely 'not cricket'.

"Early in the aft. the v.d.Merwes were leaning on the bar counter, better to discuss the new & dreadful trend the war had suddenly taken. Something had to be done by way of reprisal, but what?

"The French would have capitulated instantly had they heard the v.d.Merwes after the initial shock was softened by a few sips of beer, brandy & Rhum (note the capital R) Terrible was the vengeance sworn & dreadful the oaths taken. We will close the bus service to enemy territory!! We will have nothing further to do with the beautiful French lasses in Diego Suarez!! We will not speak to the French Officers when we go to their side of the line to buy Rhum!! This enemy of ours will be made to suffer!

"The "Butch", more bloodthirsty than the rest, even suggested killing a few Frenchman. This proposal wasn't very well received. It was felt that such drastic measures will not be in keeping with the general policy of 'live & let live'"

"There was no time for dinner. As the evening wore on some bright spark remembered that it was Union Day, & a still brighter spark discovered that the Major had 128franks credit in the bar! This last discovery was received by rousing cheers - cheers which quickly changed to jeers when it was made known that Lt. Bull v.d.Merwe had left only 1 franc! We felt that we had been let down. However the total sum of 129franks quickly went the way of all good money."

"It is said of man that only under dire stress will he show his real character. The v.d.Merwes proved it this night. Suggestions for the rescue, brilliantly conceived, were received from the most unexpected quarters. These are far too numerous to mention here, but the scribe feels that he must mention at least one:"

"It was learned earlier on in the evening that the Navy could give us no help. Why not go now in the dead of night & steal one of their corvettes? Surely not a difficult task for the v.d.Merwes with their "taking ways". After a lengthy discussion it was reluctantly decided to abandon this plan. After all, it was just possible, even if very improbable that the Navy will discover that one of the two corvettes had disappeared. Everybody felt that after the regrettable "Ramillies" incident it would be unfair to inflict this on them."

"It was finally decided to drop all further discussions for the time being, as most of the v.d.Merwes had already dropped off their stools."

"The day ended as Union Day should, with the singing of "The King" & "Die Stem", & all crawled to their beds."

1.6.42 "Things are beginning to look up, late this afternoon the Commander set out with over 20 lorries to rescue the crew of the Maryland."

2.6.42 "From the pilot's report (the one which dropped instructions for us to meet the commandos) the crew, with the obstinacy which comes so natural to the v.d.Merwes, refused to walk."

4.6.42 “Sounds of great activity have been coming from the Officer’s Mess all day. When your scribe looked in to see what it was all about he was nearly dazzled by the whiteness of the walls. He was informed by Chief Interior Decorator Dempers that with the help of God & a few more willing hands the job will be finished in a day or two.”

8.6.42 “ ‘Our Castaways’ arrived here safely today - They gave a very vivid & amusing account of their stay in enemy territory. This evening & few officers & ratings from the ‘Cromaley’ were entertained in the mess. There was never a dull moment from the time the first drink was poured until the sailors were rolled into the boat.”

The torpedo attack on the Ramilles was solved while we were away - two Japanese Naval officers were discovered on the shore across the bay 3 days later - they resisted capture, so were shot. After this it was known that it must have been the work of a Jap two man submarine [*], & the submarine was discovered beached on the coral reef outside the harbour about 10 days later- so the Japs got in, did the job, and got out right under the nose of the Navy. The sub must have been damaged however, hence the beaching.

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_A_K%C5%8D-hy%C5%8Dteki-class_submarine

It has a description of the attack on the Ramillies



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Type_A_K%C5%8D-hy%C5%8Dteki-class_submarine#/media/File:HA-8,_Japanese_midget_submarine,_Submarine_Force_Library_&_Museum,_Groton,_Connecticut.jpg

The Navy now have a boom net across the harbour entrance - closing the stable door after the horse has escaped.

In the meantime the R.A.F. have arrived with their 6 Lysanders. They are a damn fine crowd of fellows, straight out from England, or rather North Ireland - they are staying in camp here with us, but a new drome is being built across the bay, & as soon as it's completed they will move out there. The island of Pamanzi, about 200 miles of the west coast of the island, in the Comoro group was also "taken" recently - actually there was & is nothing there at all except quite a good landing ground. Quite probably the Maryland Flight may move out there shortly to do the sea patrols over the shipping lane up the East African coast.

The Beauforts have been up to their usual tricks again – 100% on the ground, but in the air all kinds of funny things have been happening – bits of metal coming off the engines into the oil sumps – excessive vibrations etc. etc. – they have been placed U.S. [unserviceable] half a dozen times – an inspection staff of experts have been got up from the Union to strip them & hunt up the faults – half a dozen have been found, but nothing serious. It's a bloody farce – first totally U.S. then U.S. except in the case of extreme emergency, then only fit to fly over the land, then totally U.S. again etc. etc. – we don't know our arseholes from our elbows – again I will quote from the War Diary.

2.6.42 – *"36 Flight has again found pieces of metal in the oil filters in one of their Beauforts. As a result of this all Beauforts have been grounded until further notice."*

4.6.42 *"Beauforts still grounded."*

5.6.42 *"Beauforts still grounded, & will be for the next week or more."*

8.6.42 *"The Inspection staff arrived by Lodestar to look into the Beaufort trouble."*

9.6.42 *"The inspection staff has stripped the Beaufort engines, but thus far the cause of the trouble has not been found. We will just have to wait & see. The aircrews have lost all confidence in the Beauforts, & are of the opinion that it is unfair to expect a person to fly over the sea in these aircraft."*

15.6.42 *"The inspection staff has been unable to find out just why the Beauforts have been giving trouble. However Colonel Driver (O.C Inspection Staff) informs us that he has recommended that the Beauforts should not fly over the sea."*

16.6.42 *"Our Beauforts are in the air again! One of 36 Flight Beauforts vibrated excessively in the air, & on landing it was discovered that the airscrew of one engine had 'excessive play'. This was put down to reduction gear. Again we must 'wait & see'."*

19.6.42 *"This evening we were informed that the Beauforts were serviceable again. We wonder how long it will be before they are grounded again."*

26.6.42 *"Today it was discovered that the fuel pressure in the Beauforts is only 2 lbs per sq inch instead of 9 lbs per sq inch, so they are grounded again."*

27.6.42 *"We have seven pilots & 4 aircraft in the flight. We could do with a few more machines – but NOT Beauforts."*

These entries in an official war diary give one to think – It's all very well producing more & more aircraft to win the war, but one must at least produce an aircraft which can go out & do a job of work, & which if not shot down by enemy gunfire, will come home to fly again. But these Beauforts now – designed as coastal patrol aircraft to fly hundreds of miles out to sea – *hai-bloody-corna!* [Zulu for never, accentuated]

The main trouble seems to be in the Taurus engine, but even so, if fully feathering propellers were fitted she would still be able to fly on one engine. But what have we?

The Goddam plane is manufactured & sold with patents & manufacturing rights & yards & miles of red tape covering up & binding down everything. No matter what defect or fault one discovers in the plane, nothing may be done about it without getting permission from the Air Ministry, who have to get it from the manufacturers. So, in spite of the fact that everybody knows that fully feathering props, which, when feathered would offer no wind resistance, would make the Beaufort a more or less safe plane to fly, nothing is, or can be done about it, & in the meantime some patriotic capitalist way back in England is turning them out by the hundreds & thousands & with the proceeds is adding more plush to his already well upholstered [*] bottom & has acquired for himself a title or two for his good work, while the fellows who have joined up to fight for what they have been told is their Freedom? (makes me laugh) have to fly these deathtraps, these flying crashboats, & get killed in them miles & miles from enemy action, & write the planes off into the bargain so that Lord Sir Bloody Fool can sell the RAF another one to take its place to provide another flying coffin for another crew.

[*] I posted the story of Bull's downed Maryland on the Wild Dogs website. It was posted in the Aircraft board. I then also posted this whole bit about the Beauforts.

Consider what Bull was experiencing; he was losing friends & colleagues who were dying because of these aircraft. That he was bitter is obvious.

From the Wiki entry for the Bristol Beaufort:

"When it became apparent that the Taurus engines had problems, planning commenced to re-engine the aircraft with 1,200 hp (890 kW) Pratt & Whitney R-1830 Twin-Wasp radials, which were of similar diameter & slightly lighter, driving Hamilton Standard bracket-type variable-pitch propellers."

That was the engine used on the Maryland.

"The three flights on Madagascar were combined to create Squadron 20 which was renamed Squadron 16. After it left Madagascar it was re-equipped with Bristol Bisley aircraft (an updated Beaufort) but then they were withdrawn and they were re-equipped with Beauforts again but this time with Pratt & Whitney engines."
[Clayton p25]

Clayton p20

Col Driver, a SAAF pilot and competent engineer, together with an engines expert especially flown from the Bristol aircraft factory in England, arrived at Diego Suarez to investigate the engine failures.

The engines expert examined every engine and found metal filings in some oil filters. Subsequently, all oil filters were examined after every flight, but the basic problem, which was the extraordinary sleeve valve design, could not be solved.

That's what we're fighting for – freedom of mankind, democracy etc. etc. & all the other political catch phrases. I can now see how bolshevism & revolutions start – no matter what form of government one has, it is inevitably proved to be (if it doesn't prove itself) rotten to the core in at least one respect, so the man in the street or the bloody fool in the front reckons it's time for some other form of government, & hey Presto, we have a revolution, but the next government proves just as rotten as the previous one, in other ways.

I still reckon the good old Stone Age was the best, where it was the case of the survival of the fittest individual, every man for himself, & the weakling went down.

It's the weakling who can't fight his own way which has to resort to underhand ways of "*proving what a strong man he is*" & our modern age of civilization & law? Protects the cranky brained weakling & tells us what a big business man he is & what a boon to the country – bullshit!

Maybe someday when I read all this I might grin & call myself many kinds of bloody fool but at the moment I'm just bloody wild & wish I had Mr. Bristol or Mr. Beaufort or whatever his measly name

may be here to give him a workout & then a proper military deepsea burial in one of his own flying shithouses. If we had been over Tenanarieve on Union Day in a Beaufort instead of a Maryland I wouldn't have been here to tell the yarn – & yet the Yanks have long since stopped production of the Maryland – they reckon its out of date & our Bloody Prick is still building & selling his Beauforts.

Incidentally the bloody Beauforts are supposed to be serviceable again & are flying once more - I sincerely hope I manage to keep out of them. So far I've had only one flip in one, about a week ago when Maj. Jones was given dual & then did a few circuits & bumps, but I was expecting the bloody engine to cut any moment - I was damn thankful when it was over & done with.

We have been informed that we now fall under 207 Group in Nairobi, so once again we will be mixed up in R.A.F. red tape - at least we have been spared that out here so far. The local R.A.F. are very decent fellows & we get on famously, but they have had nothing to say over us, in fact it has been the other way about - they have also fallen under our O.C. Col. Mostert. I will again quote Flippie in the Squadron War Diary:-

30.6.42 *“A Catalina [*] flying boat arrived early this aft. carrying a multitude of VERY senior R.A.F. officers - it also brought other bad news.”* [AIR p2]

“This S.A.A.F. wing now falls directly under 207 Group (R.A.F.) Nairobi with Air Commadore Taylor as A.O.C. Everyone was disgusted when they heard the news. One wonders why the S.A.A.F are so loath to serve under the “Boys in Blue”. The Armaments Officer & Sqdn. Doctor are appalled at the returns which they now have to send in! There has been heavy drinking & low mutterings in the Messes tonight. In all it has been a very unhappy day.”

It's all very well for me to be outspoken & call a spade a bloody shovel here in what is after all my private diary, but I reckon old Flippie will get his balls chewed off for writing things like this in the official war diary.

[*] I have moved this footnote down because I want the above paragraphs to be contiguous.

Catalina
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consolidated_PBY_Catalina



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consolidated_PBY_Catalina#/media/File:RIHB_2022_PBY_Catalina.jpg

Bull is quoting from the War Diary. However AIR-27-226-2_1 commences 1.8.42 so it starts after this date so it is some other War Diary. I wish I could track down that War Diary. The problem is it covers the period when the S.A.A.F. was operating as 3 independent Wings and not as a Squadron. National Archives records are filed by Squadron number.

We have also been told that we are now a fixture on the island, & go under the name of 20 Squadron - we are being brought up to strength from the Union, & there is a possibility that we may be re-equip with “Venturas”, but I suppose this latter is more or less wishful thinking. [*]

[*] Clayton p23

“On instructions from Pretoria, the remainder of the three independent flights were amalgamated to form 20 Squadron and I was appointed Officer Commanding. But the squadron did not retain its number for long. Just two weeks later, a further signal arrived renumbering it to 16 Squadron, a number it retained until the end of the war in 1945.”

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Ventura

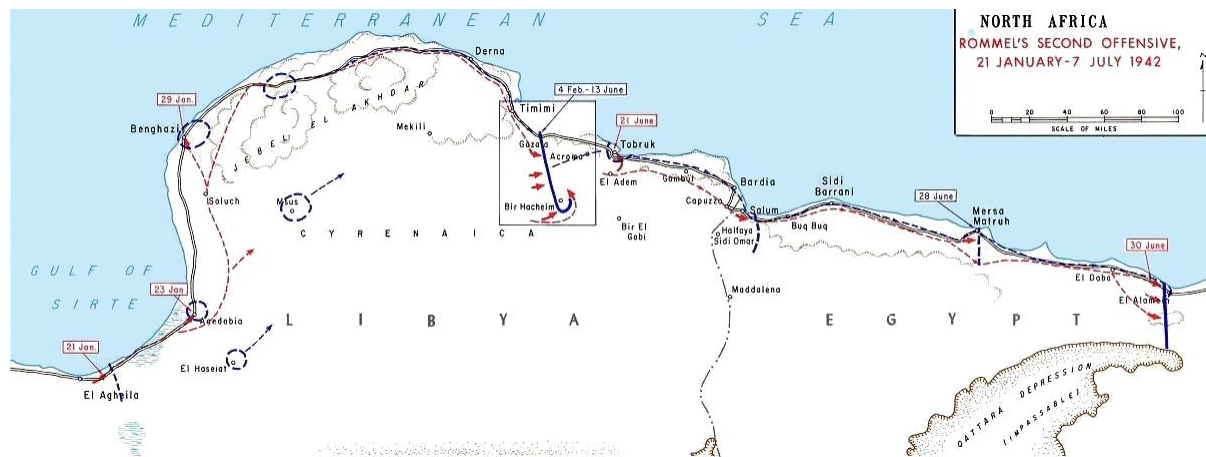


Picture source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Ventura#/media/File:Lockheed_PV-1_Ventura_patrol_bomber_in_flight,_circa_1943_\(fsa.8e01506\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Ventura#/media/File:Lockheed_PV-1_Ventura_patrol_bomber_in_flight,_circa_1943_(fsa.8e01506).jpg)

I don't know how this fixture business is going to affect my Pilot Course, but I have not yet given up hope of it eventually coming off - I spoke to Col. Steve the other day & he told me it was O.K., as soon as I get back to the Union he will see that I go on the course. Fillie Kleyn, Gerry Smith, C.P. Marais & Cheesie have also applied & the Col. has promised them he will do his best for them too. If the 5 of us manage to get onto the same course we will have lots of fun I reckon.

Hell sure is popping loose in the Desert & the positions up there is pretty bloody. [*] Gawd knows what's happening to Bunny - (the Loadstar service from the Union has been stopped now so we get no mail.) probably the big noises & brass hats who have been sitting in plush chairs on their big bottoms all along are busy evacuating themselves first, & doing it in such a hell of a hurry that they can't spare a thought for the safety of such trivial details as female nurses - No, I reckon the Continental Hotel & Shepherds will be the first to be evacuated to safety, probably quite rightly too, as after all, they are the "*brains*" behind our army - they have been planning everything round tables littered with glasses of whiskey & John Collins, the while they park said "*brains*" in the aforesaid plush chairs & sit on them.

[*] The Allies drove the Axis across Libya in Operation Crusader 18 November – 0 December 1941
The Axis drove the Allies back to Gazala in Unternehmen Theseus 21 January – 4 February 1942
The Allies were driven out of Gazala in the Gaza Gallop 26 May to 21 June 1942 known as Unternehmen Venezia by the Axis. This map gives the dates of the various actions.



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Desert_campaign#/media/File:AfricaMap4.jpg

Unternehmen Aida of 28 June the Allies were driven past Mersa Matruh (where Bunny was – had to beat a hasty exit) to El Alamein

Bull wrote this entry on 10 July 1942 when the Allies were in full retreat back to El Alamein.

First Battle of El Alamein 27 July resulted in little gains by either side.

Second Battle of El Alamein starting 1 November resulted in the Axis being driven right back through Libya to El Agheila.

Battle of El Agheila 16 December followed with the Axis being driven back to Tripoli & their surrender.

In my humble opinion I reckon the blame of most of our reverses up to now, & more especially the present debacle in the Desert lies at the door of our Propaganda system, & their policy of telling us that we are superior, or at the very least equal to the Germans in equipment & arms & armament & all the rest & lulling the public into a false sense of security, whereas we are definitely inferior in most departments, especially armament & more especially as regards tanks & armoured divisions in general - we simply don't shape man for man against the Jerries in that respect. If the public have been given the full facts all along they would have kicked up such a hell of a fuss as to have woken up our War Lords two years ago, & we would have been producing as good tanks etc. as the Germans have been turning out all along.

I wonder how much potential material has been lying about the workshops, assembly depots & dumping yards for months & months, unassembled, & yet counted on the report sheets (or whatever is used to win wars on paper) as first line fighting material in the Middle East (from which the bloke in his easy chair higher up in his office naturally assumes that the material is in the front line in the Desert.

Well do I remember last year all those Tomahawks, Bostons, Kittyhawks & Baltimores [*] were lying around Port Sudan, Kasfareet & the other assembly depots for months & months while the American mechanics who have been brought out to assemble them were ranging about foaming at the mouth trying to cut through all the red tape & get started on the assembling of the planes. But the Higher Ups wouldn't know their troubles, & the war as far as they were concerned still stopped on Wednesday afternoons, Saturday afternoons & all of Sundays. [*]

[*] Tomahawk = Kittyhawk = Warhawk

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curtiss_P-40_Warhawk



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curtiss_P-40_Warhawk#/media/File:Curtiss_P-40_Warhawk_USAF.JPG

Boston (UK name)= Havoc (US name)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_A-20_Havoc



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_A-20_Havoc#/media/File:Douglas_A-20G_Havoc.jpg

Baltimore

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Baltimore



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Baltimore#/media/File:Martin_A-30A.jpg

Lower down (after the Aeron bit) is Captain Jones's account of the Port Sudan assembly shambles.

That's where, contrary to (our) public opinion the Jerries have us beat - they don't spout a lot of piffle about what they going to do to us next year - they gloat of what they did to us last year & last month, & in the meantime they get on with the job. It's rather remarkable how we take it for granted that we're going to win the war, but do we do anything about it? - not at all, unless one can call an occasional day of prayer anything towards the war effort.

It makes me bloody wild to think that the Jerries are now occupying the dugin tent with the cemented floor at Fuka at which I worked so hard last year, & I don't see how we are going to chase them out there again in a hurry either - we must have lost a day's work of material of all kinds & descriptions in our colossal retreat. Rommel sure knows his onions.

Ach! it makes me feel bloody morbid. I reckon I'll wend my way pubwards & cheer up on a couple of spots before supper.

Later:- What with the Beauforts being grounded more often than not lately, & our Flight's one & only Maryland gone for a loop there hasn't been much flying done lately & time has been hanging rather heavily on our hands, but on the other hand, those of us who have motorbikes have been doing a lot of exploring & have had some really pleasant trips. There must be about 10 motor cycles in the Sqdn - most of them more or less honestly come by - I really think my Ariel is the pick of the lot - it had done only 47 miles when I "*took delivery*" of it. I kept it well out of the limelight for about a month but now after having camouflaged it & painted U. numbers on it I have come out of hiding with her.

We have had some very interesting trips on our motorcycles. The usual party being Oubaas v.d.Merwe, Oubaas Papenfus & myself, with occasionally a few others coming along - we go off the main roads & explore the side tracks - up into Mount Ambre behind Joffreville to the crater lakes [*] - really beautiful they are - something after Paradise Lake on Mount Marsabit in Kenya, only ever so much more so - down valleys & up on plateaux - open country & into dense forests - through small native villages & along footpath which seem to go on & on & never lead to anywhere or anything at all - it's been really good fun, & every day we seem to discover some new path to follow - I can't imagine what I would do if I didn't have a cycle.



Picture source https://www.123rf.com/photo_36357328_lake-in-amber-mountain-national-park-in-the-diana-region-of-northern-madagascar.html

There are many more pictures at that site.

Clayton entry:

"The lack of transport was alleviated to some extent by the acquisition of seven motorcycles. These were actually stolen from the British Army. One civilian Citroen motorcar was also acquired. This deed was organised by Bull Malan who was Ken Jones' navigator & the brother of Sailor Malan of RAF fighter fame. All British markings were obliterated that night, & the motorcycles & car repainted & given SA numbers. A couple of British officers arrived at our camp a day or so later to investigate the loss of their motorcycles. I think they suspected the South Africans, but the crime was never solved & we rode around happily on our machines.

On one occasion, Ken Jones led the seven motorcycles on a sightseeing expedition to an extinct volcano some 10-15 miles (16-24 km) south of our base. We travelled a little-used rough path through thick forest up to the edge of the volcano & were rewarded with the sight of a beautiful lake filled with clear, bright green water. Another ride was taken to visit the French fortifications at the harbour entrance. These were quite impressive, but the ride was uncomfortably bumpy."

A bit lower down Bull write:

"The Oubaas when he was much younger was the first man to ride a motorcycle from Cape Town through Africa & Europe to London"

So he was the right man to lead the expeditions.

I damn nearly did lose it the other day - if it hasn't been that Col. Mossie was such a good sort I would have been caught. An organised raiding party of M.P.s in charge of a Capt. came out to the drome to search for missing transport which they had a shrewd idea was on or about the Air Force premises. When they went up to Col. Mostert to get his permission to search the camp he sent me a hurried warning or to hide my bike - I was only just in time too. The M.P.s caught the Papenfuses

with a car & the R.A.F. with another car, but not a sign of the motor cycle. Col. Mossie is really a damn decent sort.

The South Africans have been here now for about a fortnight - a brigade of them mostly from the Transvaal. Now Our Butch no longer has the distinction of being O.C. of the “*South African Troops on Madagascar*”.

Now that we have sort of reconciled ourselves to the idea of remaining in Madagascar for the duration we are really settling down - already quite a large number of pets have been collected. Flippie has a pleasant little pup - full of life & bubbling over with energy - it is called “*Fruit Salts*” or sometimes “*Enos*”. Fillie Kleyn also has a pup, a dum [sic] looking one too - Niel Rose has called it “*Opsaal*” for him. There are about half a dozen other pups about the camp too, but the prize pet idea came from the Papenfuses :- they have a couple of geese, these geese strutted about camp very proudly & noisily until they were nice & fat, then they disappeared one dark night - next morning the Papenfuses were going about making enquiries as to who was having poultry that day.

The latest form of sport is shooting Flying Foxes [*] of an evening - there are hundreds & hundreds of them here, big bastards, measuring over 3 ft. from wingtip to wingtip. They come out just as twilight starts. The keenest shots are Nick, Bob Lee, the S.M. & a few of the gunners - the Gunners so far lead the field - some of them have about 4 confirmed & 3 possibles.

[*] Flying Fox <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pteropus>



Picture source https://www.drishtias.com/images/uploads/1692192064_image5.png

Of a daytime there are any amount of crows around camp - they kick up no end of the shindig as they curse & swear at each other. Crow shooting with rifles was a popular sport at first, but the shooting so upset the Malagashe natives working around the aerodrome that it was forbidden - at the sound of the first 3 shots the niggers would down tools & run like bloody hell across the drome & dive into the bushes on the river bank on the other side - they'd had enough of shooting when the island was first taken.

The Mess life in the v.d.Merwe mess is really of the very best - we're like one big family, but what a bloody family! Something like a miniature League of Nations as far as types go, & what a sight we must look. When we were shot down the rest of the v.d.Merwes expected us to get back with beards, so they grew beards in sympathy, & the style soon spread to the other flights - Authority, in the person of Col. Mossie discreetly looked the other day [sic] & the beards have been going strongly ever since - some good ones & some very very 3rd rate once (mine falls under the latter category)

Capt "Curly" Truter & George Raubenheimer just about take the cake - between the two of them they couldn't raise enough hair on the top of their heads to compete with a baby's bottom, but on the other hand, what magnificent beards - Curly's chin looks like the arse end of a bloody hedgehog. To encourage the hair on their all but bald pates they have shaved their heads, Curly just the bald pan on top, & George the whole issue - & what a sight for sore eyes.

We take it in turns to be what was first politely called "*Messing Officer*". the idea being that for that day you are on duty you supervise the sharing out of rations, & see that the cook boy washes his hands before he peels the spuds etc, but gradually the job developed into cooking as the so-called "*Cook*" boys knew very little about cooking, & when it first got that far the competition was very keen & every "*cook*" as the erstwhile Messing Officer is now called tried his level best to outdo the previous one & set a new standard of excellency. By Jove! our messing improved beyond all recognition & the food very soon lost that "*Army*" smell & greasiness - we were having crumb cutlets, eggs, fresh vegetables & toast & all kinds of hitherto unthought of delicacies.

The grand finalie [sic] came when the Oubaas decided to serve us a Rhum omlette one evening. He disappeared into the kitchen a few hours before supper, & at the "*Moment Criticue*" [sic] he sent the word into us to "*Stand by*" for the Rhum omelette, & enter the Oubaas carrying a dish of fiercely burning stuff. We reconsidered our first decision of calling out the fire picket & got stuck in. Wow! was that there omlette hot! we daren't light a single cigarette in the mess for at least 10 minutes after supper for fear of catching alight. The Oubas's recipe was very simple, - one egg, one bottle Rhum! - we all went to bed a bit arsholes after that effort.

I feel I must introduce a few "*personalities*" of the v.d.Merwe clan - I have already mentioned Curley & George, except that I must say this much for George -I always thought that when I put myself out to acquire something I could be quite hot at it, I reckoned I was pretty hot at scrounging, but now that I have seen George in action I can back down without any compunction whatsoever - George has me beat into a cocked hat - the way he "*organised*" his Norton motorbike out of the workshops in town, onto a lorry, right under the noses of guards & drove away with it will go down in history.

Actually the whole clan are quite capable of looking after themselves in that respect, & there is one phrase which is taboo in the mess - it is "*Where did you get -*"

There is Flippie (Capt. Looek) 5, 6" high by 3' broad, of good nature who has a very comical chuckley laugh - ever so infectious. He has very blonde hair & has been growing a moustache for the last two months, but it is so white that one can hardly see it - (much to Flippies annoyance). He pretends to be very hurt when you ask him why he has shaved off his moustache.

& My roommate Piet Truter, who ever since his very bad attack of malaria has been very quiet & short tempered & full of grudges against the world - he's been looking up a bit lately & will be fit to live with again one of these days.

Dempers who fondly imagines he can sing, but who has [as] much music in his makeup as a pig giving birth to two dozen pineapples. He leads the singing at our all too frequent parties, & the rest of us never know what key the next bar is going to be in - his idea of music is lots of indiscriminate discord, the louder the better. Fred is also very fond of hearing himself speak, & goes at it hammer & tongs whenever there are two or more people to inflict his opinions on, & he blathers away at such a

bat for fear that somebody else might get a word in that he stumbles over himself, recovers himself with a “*dinges*” here & a “*watchumicallit*” there & a lot of “*Ah Ah*”ing.

As a direct opposite we have George Grib, the signals officer who never says a word unless he has to.

& Then there is Coetzee, or “*Kozaai*” as he is commonly called, also very quiet. He sports the most evil smelling pipe it has ever been by ill luck to be downwind of - he is the nearest to a “*plaasjapie*” [*] type we have I reckon.

[*] plaasjapie = country bumpkin (Afrikaans vernacular)

I mustn't forget John Valentine, we all treat him with reverence lately, he sports a bit of untidy lawnlike moustache blending into a “*halter*” beard, behind which he looks benevolently out at you with a rather ecclesiastical set of features, - for all the world like the popular conception of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Passion Plays which was staged in Austria or Bavaria somewhere in Central Europe - John now answers to the name of J.C.

“*Pop*” Handley or “*Syncopation Steve*” as he is also called, & Kuhn, one can almost dispose of in one & the same paragraph. When they joined us they were the doziest, slowest, always late-est, pair one could possibly imagine. Pop has been waking up a bit lately after a few doses of extra Duty Pilot etc. & should be quite human before long, but we are still living in hopes of Kuhn coming out of his trance in the dim & distant future.

We may be a queer lot taken all round, but somehow or other our pub seems to be by far & away the most popular of the 3 up here, not counting the Go'ns [*] - one can't very well count them in with us. There always seems to be a jolly crowd in the v.d.Merwe Mess at any time of the night, & as it gets later & later you will find fewer & fewer v.d.Merwes in the pub - to end up at some unearthly hour with 2 or 3 v.d.Merwes entertaining about 10 visitors.

Of an evening we will be sitting down to supper as good as gold, with not the slightest intention in the world of doing anything in the world other than sit about in the mess swapping a yarn or two after supper - say for half an hour or so, & then we'll go to bed as we had a hell of a party last night & the 3 nights before that - Wishful thinking, because we have hardly had grub, & are still pulling the Cook's leg on his labours of the day when in walks the first of the absolutely unexpected guests - merely the thin end of the wedge, & before we know where we are the bloody party is in full swing & Caruso who firmly imagines his other name is Fred Dempers starts getting violent cramps in the abdominal regions, & howls out in great agony at the top of his voice, drowning all the minor little tummy aches put up by the rest of us.

Poor George Raubenheimer who is most probably trying his level best to keep in the various keys as led by comrade Dempers has a pained expression on his bald pated dial, & quietly slipped out to retune his Uke which is obviously false (he thinks, as he simply can't get any of Dempers' keys) but when he returns with the Uke the result is no better - strangely enough it took old George many many parties before he found out what the real trouble was.

On other all too rare occasions & number of us “*v.d.Merwes*” will be sitting in the mess all kind of mellow & peaceful like, & somebody will tell a yarn - some experience or other, & when he has finished someone else will oblige with another yarn more or less in the same vein, & it would develop into a really interesting afternoon or evening - you know how those pow wows happen - they just happen of their own accord, & many & varied are the yarns which are coughed up.

The Oubaas who is so quiet & who so rarely speaks about himself & his past life is strangely enough the most consistent contributor at these yarn spinnings. He has a very varied & most interesting past to draw from, & he has one of these here photographic minds which records an incident or a picture &

stores it away in an easily accessible pigeonhole from which he can trot it out when he wants to, but as I have said before, he very seldom does trot out these pictures or stories.

The Oubaas when he was much younger was the first man to ride a motorcycle from Cape Town through Africa & Europe to London - it took him the best part of a year as he travelled about taking his time & seeing as much as he possibly could. Helping out at a “*Wall of Death*” show, being put in jail a few times, sleeping in the same bed as a completely nude married couple with their two little children in Czechoslovakia or somewhere (The Oubaas says he at least kept his pants on), & again sleeping in a Palace & other occasions in the open veld or in pigsties & finally, when he arrived in London while the Wembley Motor Show was in full swing, being hailed as a hero & feted everywhere & have everything paid for him - these were some of his experiences.

Another good yarn of the Oubaas’s he tells of the opening stages of the war when he was in charge of the Coastal Patrol Flight at P.E. There was a hell of a strong wind blowing & a fellow (Haller) took off in an Aeronca. [*] The bloke headed into wind & took off & then hung there in the air, 20 feet up, not moving except for going forwards a few yards & then back again a few yards - heading into the wind all the time. Everyone on the drome saw that he seemed to be in trouble, so they run out & congregated on the drome under the quivering hovering little Aeronca.

[*] Aeronca [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeronca Aircraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeronca_Aircraft)



Picture source [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeronca Aircraft#/media/File:Aeronca 7ac champion g-bpfm 1946 arp.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeronca_Aircraft#/media/File:Aeronca_7ac_champion_g-bpfm_1946 arp.jpg)

“*What’re you trying to do?*” shouted someone from the ground.

“*I can't do anything*” was the reply shouted down from the little Aeronca.

“*Give her the gun!*” from the ground.

“*I can't give her anymore!*” shouted down from the Aeronca.

“*Try throttling back!*” & the Aeronca, still facing into the wind would slowly drift backwards.

“*Do you see what happens!*” from the Aeronca.

“*Try climbing!*” from the ground, & up would swoop the Aeronca only to come down again for some more advice.

“*You had better land!*” from the ground.

“*I can't! I will land backwards!*”

And then some bright spark among the spectators came forward with a really bright suggestion.

“*Try a turn!*”

Up came one wing & the Aeronca swung round & Phw-t, & next minute she was gone from sight over the horizon.

Two days later the P.E. Air station was informed by wire that Haller had landed safely at East London - he was flying to George! [*]

[*] P.E. = Port Elizabeth.
East London is 240 km East of P.E.
George is 280 km West of P.E.

One night a few of the greenhorns were moaning about wanting to get back to the Union, & how up to shit the life is here, & the Oubaas told them not to worry about it, - nobody in the Union was bothering about them any more, & he told him how, when he first went up to Egypt with 24 his post had gone astray, & he had no letters at all for two months & then eventually he had his first letter - one that had been redirected from half a dozen air stations in the Union, - but what pained him most of all was a big statement over the address in red pencil “*Not Known in the Union*”, & when he opened it he found it was an income tax form. I remember that letter turning up at Fuka.

Another yarn of the Oubaas's concerns the filming of part of Paul Robeson's picture “*King Solomon's Mines*”. They were doing the shoot near P.Maritzburg, & a special kaffir “*stad*” [*] had been built for the purpose & thousands of kaffirs hired to do some of the scenes. Major Jones went out one day to have a look, & found them rehearsing the scene of a kaffir Impi charging the stad with their spears & knobkierries (dummy ones made from rubber).

[*] stad = city (Afrikaans)

Everything was explained to the “*Impis*” & they withdrew, formed up behind a rise & at the command they made their charge. The director was very disgusted - there wasn't enough life in it at all, & the 2nd & 3rd attempts were no better, so he called a halt & shouted “*I say! bring along with that Gawd damn bowser!*”, & next minute the P.W.D. water wagon was driven up & the Director told the kaffirs to help themselves - the huge tank was filled with kaffir beer.

An hour later the scene was shot again, but what a difference - the bloody kaffirs ran through the stad & just about carried it along with them - the cameraman was knocked arseways & the camera wrecked - so they had to shoot the scene again with another camera.

Or probably one night the conversation would swing around to the big brass hats & Higher Ups who run our side of the war for us & how the Jerries must be ever so much better than we are in that respect as they couldn't possibly be any worse, & the Oubaas would tell us about his Port Sudan days

when there were any number of Tomahawks, Boston's & Kittyhawks ready to be assembled, & the Yanks assembly supervision staff were there waiting to get on with the job & the R.A.F. wouldn't allow them to get stuck in. The hanger was all but finished - only half the floor had to be cemented but the R.A.F. wouldn't allow the Tomahawks to be assembled in the finished half - no, the hanger must be completed first & the key publicity handed over at a ceremony by the P.W.D. - so the Yanks commenced assembling Tomahawks themselves in one corner of the aerodrome & the Wing Commander made them pack everything bar one completely assembled Tomahawk up again & wait there doing nothing until the hanger was completed - in the meantime the fellows in the Desert were crying out for more Tomahawks, & there wasn't a single Boston or Kittyhawk in the Desert.

I sometimes think I'm inclined to be too acid about the big R.A.F. noises, but when I hear the Oubaas & others go off pop on the subject I feel a saint.

One of the classic yarns of the v.d.Merwes concerns Flippie & George Raubheimer. It happened in Durban. When they arrived there they knew nobody, but were given the phone number of two girls who they were told, were always game for a party.

They rang the girls & were told they could come along. Our two Romeo's hereupon brought a bottle of Chateau brandy & a bottle of Old Buck gin & the barman poured the booze into Martell & Gilbey's bottles respectively & sealed them neatly up again, & then, dressed up to kill in their best baratheia uniforms they set out to keep the appointment. When they got to the girls' flat they were persuaded to come along to another flat where they would have one big hotcha party.

They went along with the two girls, two really top notch up-to-the-minute lasses & were taken to a hell of an expensive luxuriously furnished 6 room flat owned by a fat little Greek & an even fatter & greasier Jew - oodles of money.

Some more girls were fetched & the party began. Before long the doors of the flat were locked & everybody undressed & dancing in the nude began - Our two heroes were never before in their sweet innocent young (?) lives so embarrassed, but they weren't going to be outdone so they stripped - the clothes were put away in a bedroom which somehow also got locked, & they did the light fantastic, all coy & bashful like.

Later on in the evening cheque books were brought out & the two v.d.Merwes were badly shaken to overhear open discussions of payments of £50 for the night mentioned ever so casually & one of the girls threatening to tell the wife of the Greek all about it if he didn't cough up with a smile - it also transpired that paltry sums of £80 & £60 apiece were paid to the girls every week or so for their services.

When Flip & George were approached to the tune of £50 each by their partners they brushed the matter lightly aside, went into a hurried & unobserved conference & decided to clear out.

The difficulty however was to get hold of their clothes, & as their clothes were in different rooms they decided it was every man for himself. George managed to get hold of his uniform, but Flippie could not - what he did get hold of however was a white silk tennis shirt & a dressing-gown girdle. George slid down the drainpipe off the balcony, & Flippie managed to get out of the front door & run down the stairs.

They met outside in the street where they got hold of a rickshaw & told the boy to go like hell for the drome. There they had to walk in past the guard, George with his shirt over his arm & Flippie clad in only the white shirt with the girdle round his middle - no wonder the sentry as he saluted said "*Jesus Christ Sirs!*" To this day Flippie's uniform is in that flat, & he says he is not likely ever to fetch it.

A little while later they saw one of the girls' photo in the slush page of the Natal Mercury, as having been one of the celebrities at some or other social function - & she makes a living by high class prostitution with a bit of quiet black mail thrown in as a sideline.

It goes to show what goes on behind the scenes in our respectable ? country.

Another yarn against Flippie in Durban is his affair in Margate when he was on leave. He got mixed up with a married woman staying in the same hotel as he was, & when her husband rolled up she left him in the middle of the night & came along to Flippie's room, sobbing bitterly - she had had a row with a husband & wanted Flip to console her - Flip, not wanting to be involved made a dive for the door & spent the rest of the night sitting on the pavement up against a lamppost. Next morning he sent a hurried wire to the drome to be recalled from leave so that he could make an honourable exit.

Poor old Flip - he reckons he never looks for trouble with the opposite sex - it has a knack of coming his way & leaving him hopelessly compromised, be he no matter how innocent. But judging by the number of letters he gets when post comes in. I reckon he is well on his way to being ever so much more than compromised - I'm afraid his happy carefree bachelor days are numbered.

We have had some very elevating instructive discussions in our mess, such as what we will do in the next war, for unlike all these brainy politicians we are firmly convinced that no sooner will this one be over when there will be another one - a kind of a stocktaking one just to get rid of all the remnants & surplus ammunition etc.

Flippie's idea I must say seems to be the most sensible - he reckons he is going to be Pigeon Officer - O.C Pigeons, a nice easy safe job, & when we ask him whether he knows anything about pigeons & how to look after them & what to do if a pigeon has a cold in the head or it has eaten too much mielies [*] or whatever one feeds them on he is not in the least perturbed - he replies that he will have a sgt. who knows all about that side of the business. Our suggestions of being Quartermasters & Intelligence officers & O.C. W.A.A.F's etc simply don't come up to his standard. Old Flip has definitely got something there.

[*] mielies = corn as in dried sweetcorn = chicken feed. (Afrikaans)

It's a hell of a shame that they should have men in charge of pigeons in the Union tho' - Gawd! surely that is the type of job they could leave to a W.A.A.F or a parttime schoolboy, & fancy giving a man a commission for looking after a couple of pigeons -Fancy someday when your son gets to the stage when he starts asking awkward questions & he says "*Daddy, what did you do in the last war Daddy? How many Germans & Japanese did you kill?*" & you have to reply "*Johnny, daddy looked after a lot of nice little pigeons!*" I can just imagine the boy's face.

The other afternoon Flippie gave us a good laugh. Our latrine is on the edge of the escarpment overlooking the bay & the valley down below - a really splendid view, & one can sit there & meditate, enjoy the view & listen to the bad language of the crows who hop & fly all around you. Flip had just come from the latrine, all eager & enthusiastic about these Madagascar crows which can speak fluent Afrikaans - yes, he just heard one telling another about his transport riding days with an ox wagon, & Flip gave us & imitation, beginning in a slow drawn out croaking voice which finally rose to a high pitched squeak. - this is how it goes :-

"Swaar draa , - Swaar dra , hot hou - hot hou - passop die slaggate - O God!"

[*] swaar dra = heavy load. Passop die slaggate = beware the potholes (Afrikaans)

These are some of the little things which help to pass the time & turn on an otherwise very boring existence into what actually is a very pleasant mess life.

Official reaction & entertainment is also being organised lately to counteract the inactivity, such as a race meeting on the aerodrome on Durban July day. It was very well attended - there were about 30 horses & mules running - all captured from the French, but they are such poor specimens that no records were set up.

The other night there was a concert down in the hanger, turns were given by the 3 Flights & the aerodrome defence troops. One of the best turns was the “*drunks*” scene put on by sgts Clark & Blom - they didn't have to act it all, they were arseholes, in fact Clark fell off the stage backwards when he was gently pulled off. However very few of the spectators knew it was anything but very realistic acting.

This just about brings me up to date with this goddamn diary thank goodness - I don't think I'll let it get so far behind again in a hurry - I'm tired of the sight of my own writing after the last two days efforts.

11 July [1942]

Well I reckon I have qualified for the D.F.C. now - I went on a recce in a Beaufort today, took photographs of possible landing & invasion beaches on the West Coast. I nearly shat myself once when we hit a bump & one of the bloody engine spluttered.

The Oubaas was today informed that he has been appointed as the next O.C. of 12 Sqdn, & is to leave us on the next plane.

It has come as a bit of a shock to us - we don't like the idea at all of losing him, even if it does mean that he gets promoted to Lt. Col. But what gets us most of all is the fact that the signal says he must go as far as Lusaka & wait for a North bound plane there - straight to the Desert without so much as a day in the Union with his wife.

Half the v.d.Merwes have volunteered to go along with him if he can wangle it for them. Yet I, the one who is probably more attached to him than any of them have not volunteered - I am all set on getting back to the Union for the so long awaited P.P. course which now seems all but in the bag.

15th July [1942]

The last week has been one succession of parties, a farewell to the R.A.F. who are shifting over to the new drome, a farewell given the Oubaas by our mechanics & N.C.Os, a farewell given him by his crew, & last & heaviest of all, last night's farewell by the v.d.Merwe officers mess. - it's going to take us quite a few days to get back to normal.

The Oubaas is now Lt. Col. Jones, his promotion took effect as from today, & at 12 midnight last night a pair of pips were washed in neat whisky & he then had to drink the whisky - it was a hell of a party.

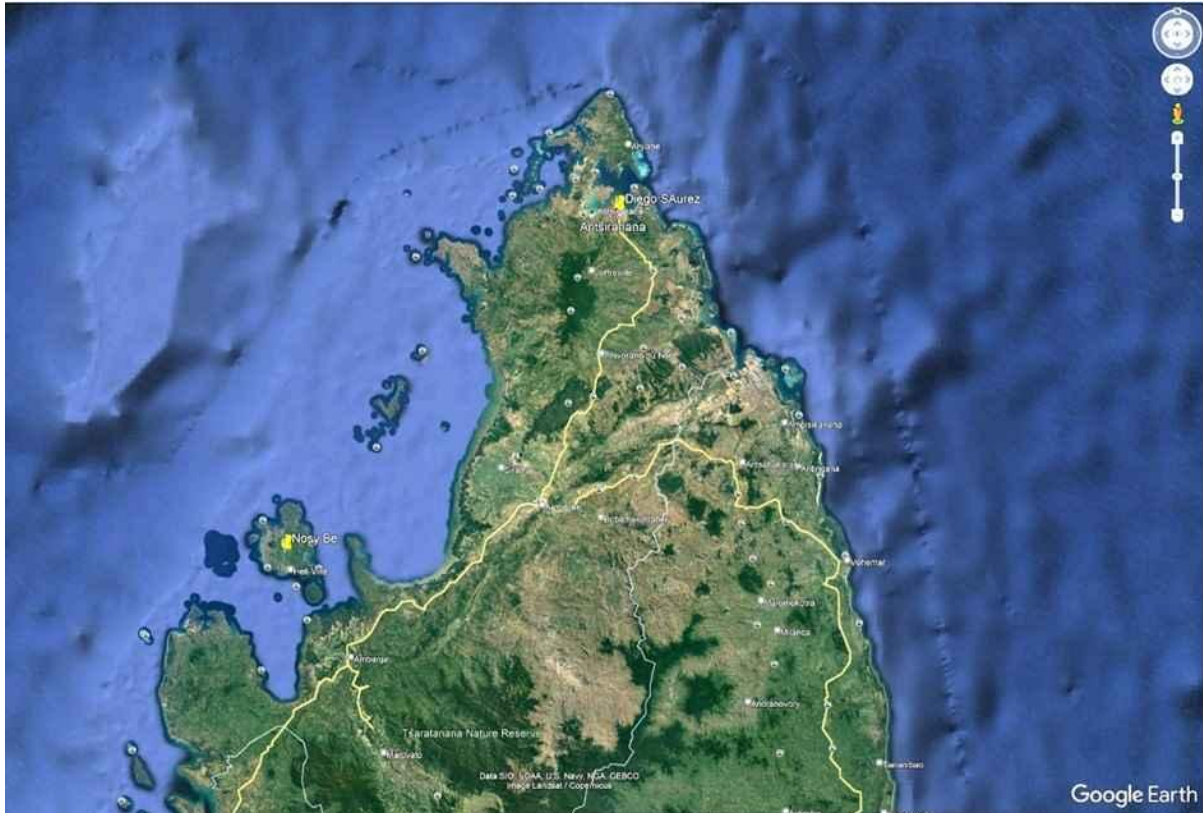
After one of the parties Dick Barfield woke Jock Bell up at 2.30 a.m. & handed him a pawpaw squashed between two whole army loaves “*Come on Jock our boy, have a hot dog!*”

Day before yesterday Curly, Cactus, Paul & myself went down to Aulalaha & the lighthouse at Cap Est [*] to drop parcels of smokes, blades, toilet requisite etc for Roux & the lighthouse keeper - I feel happier now that that moral debt is paid. When we got back we found a hell of a flap on the go - Fred, who had been out on a photographic job along the West coast spotted two submarines in a bay off Nosy Be, [Clayton p20] but as he was carrying neither depth charges nor bombs he could do nothing about it except signal back, & every available machine was sent off to find the subs, but naturally they couldn't be found again.

[*] Here is the confirmation that it was Cap Est lighthouse.

Next morning early Curly & myself were out at Nosy Be [*] searching all the bays for the subs, but naturally again without success. Nosy Be is just about the prettiest little island I've seen yet, & not only is it ornamental, but rich & fertile - it has everything one could wish - two little towns, harbour, narrow gauge railway, rich fertile lands (sugar growing) forests, mountain slopes with crater lakes all over them, its on the leeward side of Madagascar, so the sea is always calm, & there are very good beaches - an ideal Island, only about 6 miles off the mainland.

[*] Nosy Be https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nosy_Be



Google map showing position of Nosy Be wrt Diego Saurez (two yellow pins)

A Savoya 79 (captured in the Abyssinian campaign) [*] arrived with post yesterday, the first we have had for weeks & weeks, & it left again early this morning taking our Oubaas, Lt. Col. Jones along with it. The Oubaas has wangled it so that he goes back to the Union after all for the few days before he goes to Egypt. - I wonder where, when, & under what conditions I will meet him again.

[*] Savoya 79 = Savoia-Machetti SM 79

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savoia-Marchetti_SM.79_Sparviero



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savoia-Marchetti_SM.79_Sparviero#/media/File:Two_Savoia-Marchetti_S.M.79_over_Sciacca.jpg

Today another list of promotions came out, & our new O.C. has been appointed, Maj. Meaker leaves the v.d.Byles & becomes O.C. v.d.Merwes, & Capt Lagerway (now Maj. Lagerway) takes over the v.d.Byl Flight. The adjutant has also got his majority.

Maj. Meaker has brought a long range Maryland over with him & I am damn thankful for that as I presume I will fly with him & I don't need those bloody Beauforts at all - I nip buttons all the time I am in the air in the bastid things - I expect the damn thing to fall to pieces any minute even if the engines don't cut - she shudders & vibrates like a virgin on the verge. I hope never to put my foot in one again if I can help it.

Now with these new promotions & our new O.C. it means some more parties, & I just can't take it any more - there is one going on in our mess now, but I've slipped away while the slipping was good.

17 July [1942]

My mind is all the more made up to keep clear of the Beaufort.

Intelligence reported that a flying boat [*] carrying High Vichy & Nazi officials had left the African Coast for Madagascar & their destination would be Majungo or Lake Aloatra,[*] so this morning two Beauforts were sent to each place to look for it & shoot it up & bomb it.

[*] Flying boat. Eventually it turned out to be a Maryland that took 3 days to fly out from France. See pages 69, 74 & 99

Lake Aloatra. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Aloatra

Not on the map posted much higher up. Wiki entry has map showing where it is

I would have gone along with Curly to Majunga if it wasn't that Maj. Meaker was to stand by in the long range Maryland & wait for a signal from the Beauforts so as to take off & give a hand wherever the flying boat was located - I being on standby with the major. Curly force landed in the estuary at Majunga - what the trouble is we don't know, but I reckon one is safe in saying that it was just plain Beaufort trouble. The crew was seen to get safely into the dinghy altho' one appeared to be hurt, but there was a motor launch nearby which immediately went to their rescue, so we presume they are all prisoners by now. [Clayton p21]

It's bloody lucky for me that instead of me flying with Curly as I have been doing the last few trips, it was Aubrey v.d.Byl.

However we have lots of French generals & colonels etc which I suppose we will swop for them.

The flying boat wasn't located.

19 July [1942]

The Beauforts are grounded again, what the trouble is this time I don't know & I don't care much either - the only really serviceable & safe Beaufort it is a grounded Beaufort anyway.

We have done two long 6 1/2 hour trips in the long-range Maryland to Majunga & Lake Aloatra & Lake Itasy [*], but not as sign of the flying boat.

[*] Lake Itasy

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Itasy

Not on the map posted much higher up. Wiki entry has map showing where it is

The submarines which Fred saw the other day, & which the Navy seem to think were Pink elephants in another form have now been confirmed by the Navy themselves.

An order has come out that all beards have to be shaved off by tomorrow. Some of the fellows will look quite strange without their fungus. J.C. v.d. Merwe will lose a lot of his prestige minus his beard.

We hear a report that a couple of South Africans are up for the high jump. One of the units consists almost entirely of released prisoners (civil) & a real bad lot of men they are. A couple of them went along to a small Malagash village, tied the headman to a tree. raped his wife & daughter, & then as if that wasn't bad enough they added insult to injury by stealing his pigs.

22 July [1942]

We hear that the airmail service has been stopped again - What the hell!

It has been decided that the 3 Flights are to move into one mess & so lose their separate identities.

There has been some controversy as to whether, given height, speed & warning, a Beaufort can be flown on one engine - a few test flights & trials have been made - the Beaufort can't. But none the less they have been declared serviceable again.

24th July [1942]

Another hell of a party in the v.d. Merwe mess tonight - all through the Butch. He came in & introduced us to a new way of drinking brandy. You take a slice of lemon, pile it up with sugar, suck the juice of the lemon & the sugar into your mouth without swallowing it, take a dose of neat brandy & swallow the whole issue down together, & if you choke or sputter then wash the previous one down

with another. - Our mess looks a hell of a mess - lemon peels, sugar & empty brandy bottles all over the joint - I've never seen brandy go like that before.

It's not such a bad drink either, we call it the Madagascar Doctor. - I've had a bellyfull & am still ticking over - don't know what will happen when I roll into bed tho'.

25 July [1942]

After last night's Madagascar Dr. party we had some fun & games - we were woken up (some of us) at about 2 a.m. by a hell of a commotion next door in George Raubenheimer's room. Someone came into the room with a torch, & as George got out of bed to see what he wanted he was hit over the head with what later turned out to be a revolver butt. The culprit then run out.

We hopped out of bed & made a search but could not find anybody. In the meantime George was bleeding profusely from a deep gash on the top of his head, so he was taken to the Dr.

The suspect is one of two Imperial fellows whom George & Fred warned off the premises half an hour previously. This morning Maj. Meaker discovered that his revolver was missing, so the culprit must have been snooping around for some time - Gawd knows what else they pinched.

A search is being made for the two fellows, & Identification parades are being held, but so far without success.

Poor old George, first torpedoed on the Ramilles & now playing in a game of gangsters - what next?

Saturday 1st August [1942]

Morning

There was a tragic accident last night, while cleaning a rifle one of the Papenfus gunners shot his best pal dead as a doornail - the funeral of the gunner de Lange is taking place this afternoon. [AIR p1]

A few days ago we played a game of rugby against the South African Engineers - it was great fun, we drew 6-6. Our team should develop into a useful one with a bit of practice. Mac was unfortunate enough to break 3 ribs - he's in hospital.

On Tuesday the wind was blowing like hell, lot of dust about - a really unpleasant day, & Wednesday broke as perfect a day as one could wish for - not a cloud in the sky, & only a very slight breeze stirring the treetops. That night we heard great goings on in the Native village down in the valley, singing & shouting & dancing right through the night. We were told later that they were celebrating the change of the season, & funnily enough there hasn't been any wind since, the weather has been perfect.

We haven't managed to catch the bloke who bashed George on the head, & have given it up. We hear the good news that the Savoya is on its way from the Union again - we hope it brings our post along, it's about time we had a spot of post - the Authorities in the Union seem to have forgotten all about us out here.

Saturday night

All hell is lose, the heavy hand of authority has descended on the unsuspecting squadron like a ton of bricks, without any warning whatsoever - a bolt out of the blue.

We must admit that lots of little things have gone wrong lately, what with these Beauforts giving more trouble than they're worth, & the weather being very unfavourable for photography lower down

on the island with the result that very little actual work has been done for some time, & after all the flying & losing one aircraft on the job looking for the reported Flying boat with the Nazi & Vichy representatives on board we hear that there never was a flying boat at all - the big noises were flown over in a land plane which landed at Tananerive & was then flown away further south immediately. [Clayton p23]

As I say, things haven't been going too smoothly from an operational squadron point of view lately, & Col. Mostert has been looking a bit worried the last week or so, & last night's shooting accident was just about the last straw, but little did we know what was yet install for us.

Again I must admit that we have been having no end of parties - drinking parties, (the only kind one can have in this Gawddamn island) & a large percentage of fellows have been getting canned, - some consistently & persistently pissed at the least excuse.

Also there is no getting away from it, we have been allowed a lot of latitude in the way of transport, official, semi official, & transport borrowed, begged or plain bloody stolen. To take my motorcycle as a case in point, Col. Mostert has made no bones about it, he has actually gone out of his way to warn me when the M.P.s have been snooping around, & the same with George & his "*acquired*" bike.

But. What happens now? - it simply beggars description, & I'd better start at the beginning.

Last night at a party in 32 Flight a couple of fellows got hooched up, among them "*Gaatjie*" Snyman, "*Halfpint*" van Rensburg & Fillie Kleyn. So round about midnight they decide to go for a drive in "*Jallop*", their little ex French car. They couldn't make the corner at the bottom of the road, so carried straight on into the administrative part of the drome in front of the Gon's Mess where they climbed the island rockery & stalled Jallop on the rocks.

They then got one of the 3 ton Duty trucks & after a lot of revving of engines they eventually managed to batter & bash the little car off the island. Off they go on their merry way, but half an hour later the same thing happens, they come careering down the road & again miss their turn, & I'm buggered if they don't climb the very same rockery & stall at the top of the loop. This time they decided to use the Adjutant's little ton lorry as a battering ram. After lots of grating, looking for, & eventually finding, reverse gear, they managed to manoeuvre the lorry into position to the accompaniment of the sweet music of two engines revving at maximum boost & two drunken voices shouting contradicting commands in bellowing blasts which in the quiet of the night could [not] only be heard at the other end of the drome, let alone at the Gon's mess 100 yards away - no wonder the Adjutant came running out in his nightshirt with a torch.

Fillie Kleyn who is an old soldier made a bunk for it in spite of the Adjutant's "*Halt or I sh-sh-shoot!*" - not so the other two, they were caught, told to go back to bed, leave the car where it was, & they would hear more about it in the morning. However, within an hour they were back again, pushed the car off by hand, started her up & away they went on the long delayed joyride to Sakoramy. There the car passed out, & very soon they followed suit, waking up in broad daylight. A motor mechanic helped them fix the car & they got back to camp just in time for Gaatjie & Halfpint to appear before the Colonel.

They were prepped to be sentenced to a week's extra Duty Pilot, but one look at the Colonel's face made them alter their ideas - the Colonel was positively fuming, Snyman says the spit was positively sizzling in the corners of his mouth & steam was blowing out of his nostrils. Snyman reckoned it would be a fortnight extra duty instead of the expected week, but they weren't prepared for anything like what they got - 3 months transport guard, on duty 24 hours a day, not allowed to leave the transport park, no tent in which to sleep - they must sleep in the back of a 3 ton truck. [AIR p1]

Needless to say this sentence has not been at all well received by the squadron, but more was to come. Next thing an order came out for all transport, including cars bought privately, cars &

motorcycles “*on loan*” & motorcycles “*acquired*” in various ways to be paraded behind the Duty Pilot’s office this afternoon.

When we arrive there with our transport the Colonel appeared with the face looking like a thundercloud & told us we needn’t “*hang around*”, we could “*push off*”.

Then the most vindictive order it has ever been my lot to read came out :- Camp Order No. 9. to the effect that all transport would in future remain in the transport park in charge of 2/Lts Snyman & van Rensburg, & any man wanting transport would have to apply to his Flight Commander who in turn had to apply to the Adjutant who in turn would apply to the Colonel. It went on to say that the two above mentioned officers would be on duty 24 hours a day, would not leave the transport park & would not repeat not drive any vehicles.

We just don't know what the hell to think - the whole affair is so childish that we're expecting to see the colonel break down & cry any minute - he must be entering his second childhood or going mental - its plain bloody silly, he just plain bloodywell can't get away with it - don't know what's happened to him, it's so abso-bloody-lutely unlike him.

If he expected to put a stop to the parties his silly drastic step has been a most signal failure, because purely & simply as the result of today's developments, & in spite of this afternoon's solemn farewell there has been one hell of a party in our mess this evening, we cleared the pub out of all the booze & all we could get from other pubs except for half a bottle of whisky - even I was well on my way & am none too steady as I now write - that's probably why I have not been able to express even a fraction of our feelings.

We all know that that measly little double faced rat the adjutant is behind it all, but even so, it's no excuse for Col. Mossie to go off the rails like that. Actually he is suffering from the very Mother & Father of hangovers as he was pretty drunk last night.

As far as I can see today is the turning point in the history of 20 Sqdn. It had every promise of becoming a happy sqdn in spite of its aircraft - now however I reckon it is doomed - the fellows aren't going to do anything like their best. Of course there is the possibility that the Col. might take a large dose of liver salts & that the affair may blow over as suddenly as it appeared, but the dose of salts will have to come quickly.

The work on our new Sqdn mess has been getting on at a merry pace, but not a stroke of work was done this afternoon - there has been far too much to discuss.

2nd. Aug [1942]

The Colonel didn't take the salts - things are just the same - the future looks bleak - it's a pity Maj. Jones has left - he would have known what to do about it. I'm damn sure, I'm certain he wouldn't have allowed his bike to be taken away from him while all the Gon's retain their transport - The 5 Flight Commanders have decided to get hold of a mule cart & drive down to the daily Sqdn. Flight Commanders conference with the O.C. in it to pull his leg in the hope that they may restore his sense of proportion - personally I have my doubts as to whether they will get so far as to do it - lots of talk & not much action.

The sense of humour of the fellows is still 100% in spite of it all. The chirpiest of the lot are the two members of what we now call the “*Transport Mess*” - Halfpint has been elected P.M.C. & Gatjie secretary, Gatjie has lots of funny remarks on the situation, especially his imitation of Col. Mossie going off the deep end. “*You two little buggers will blurrywell sleep in the blurry trucks come Rain come Snow come Hail.*” Gatjie says he doesn't know where Mossie gets the snow from.

We have been working hard on the mess all day.

I have been told to report to Col. Mostert tomorrow morning, & have been given a hint what it's about - I will be given the new Sqdn. War diary to write, but I'm going to get out of it somehow - I believe it starts as from August 1st, & I can't possibly write about yesterday's happenings without being court martialled or victimized in some way, & on the other hand my sense of justice or fairplay or esprit de corps, whatever it is, (probably mere spite) won't let me leave it out of the diary.

We are unofficially opening the bar part of the new mess this evening - the missing part won't be ready for at least a week as the stove has been bugged.

5th Aug [1942]

The atmosphere hasn't cleared it all - Jesus! it's the longest & most intense hangover I've ever seen in any man, it's enough to put any man off drink for the rest of his natural.

I went & saw the Colonel fully convinced that I would wangle my way out of this bloody war diary job, but that's where I was wrong - he blew off pop & told me exactly who issues orders in this joint & just how meekly little worms like myself obeyed him - however he himself wrote the first 3 days of the month - the fireworks period, so I have been spared being put in the transport concentration camp with Gatjie & Halfpint as I most certainly would have been had I written up those first two days.

We are still on our feet - from the mechanics up to the Flight Commanders, & no chance of getting the transport back. It's only the sense of humour of the boys which keeps the spirits up.

Yesterday at 52 landed with a bit of post. There was a bit of a surprise on it for me, a package of 50 copies of the July issue of *Libertas* & a letter from Vossie the sub editor. He has given the Madagascar "*Campaign*", the SAAF & especially "*Ons v.d. Merwe*" a very good illustrated writ up. [AIR p2]

He says my article was long delayed in transit & arrive too late for the July issue. He is very satisfied with it, in fact he describes it as a "*Wow*" & he's putting it together with my snaps in the August number. He says he pruned it down to about half its length - so much for my long windedness. However I am now very relieved that I didn't do all that writing for nothing. What with articles, occasional letters, this goddamn diary & now the ruddy war diary I'm pretty fed up with writing & I simply can't do anything about it.

10th Aug [1942]

Things are looking up a bit again. Col. Steve went back with the 52 which may mean that he will remember to wangle the Pilots course for the 5 of us. Actually there are only 4 of us left now as Gerry Smith has just been classified as CS by the Butch - a murmur or knock in his heart, & has been put off flying for at least 6 mos.

In the meantime two ships have come in with mail - mountains of it, & all of us have done very well. The second ship brought 140 personnel for the sqdn. But what a bloody collection they are! for the most part they don't look very promising at all, typical little street corner toughs. There are two new observers for us too.

The atmospheric situation and/or the colonel's hangover seem to be passing over. He has let Gatjie & Halfpint off today with a caution. A few transport mechanics are among the new personnel, & they are taking over the transport. The 3 Flight commanders have been given back their motorbikes.

The bar part of this new mess has been completed for about a week & is in regular use, but the diningroom & kitchen part of it hasn't been making much progress at all, the fellows don't seem to think it much of an essential. We have had quite a lot of fun out of building the mess so far, the prize

item being Maj. Clayton hanging the bar door & then finding it wouldn't open as it scraped the cement floor, so no trouble at all, it chops away the floor.

The usual bevy of nudes are going up in the bar as mural decorations, & some very amusing bushman paintings have been added by one of the cypher officers. White, the other cypher officer has designed our squadron crest in which the TB.R.S figures very prominently (Torpedo Bomber Recce Sqdn) But we still reckon the T stands for "*Tank*" from the joke about the elephant food. This crest is up on the wall too.

On Saturday we had another rugby match, against the Pretoria Reg this time, they rolled up all resplendent in full rugby togs, & there were we in bathing trunks, sand shoes, vests, shirts, army boots & what have you. Actually we put up a good show to be beaten only 17 -5. [AIR p2]

There's very little flying here lately, & what there is is photography - I'm lucky if I get one job a week.

Bunny reckons she may be on her way back to the Union any day now, & here I sit doing absolutely nothing & may remain sitting here for months & months waiting for something to happen.

11 Aug [1942]

There is something coming off pretty soon - we are preparing for a move, but where to we don't know as yet - what is certain however is that we are going to take a new drome & will not come back here to Diego. Public opinion has it that Majunga is the place, but I reckon Portuguese East Africa is a better bet - some base from which we can petrol the Mozambique channel - however, time will tell

16 Aug [1942]

The sole topic of conversation nowadays is where we're going to & why. I seem to be about the only one who reckons we are not going to some other place on the island. Everyone else seems to record it is Majunga or Tamatave [*], & from there on to Tananarive, but it doesn't make sense to me & I've laid bets to the value of £5 already that we are moving off the island. Maj. Meaker is about the only other one who is laying bets "*off*" the island.

[*] Tamatave = Toamasina . On the east coast, marked on the map above. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toamasina>

There are great big gaps in the argument of both schools of thought - All the photographs we have taken, especially of Majunga, & the fact that the R.A.F. are moving too, seem to indicate Majunga, but on the other hand there is nothing to indicate that we may not take two places simultaneously, in which case Majunga will most certainly be one of them, & the R.A.F. could go there - they can't very well across the Mozambique Channel in their Lizzies. Bluff has played such a big part in the war so far & I can't get away from the thought that it is playing a major role in this contemplated move. I'm pretty sure when we have made the move we will realise that 50% of the "*indications*" which we argue about now are just so much Bluff.

Take the photographs of Tamatave & Brickaville [*] - we have been down there twice lately & haven't been able to take the mozaics we were sent down for - the cloud was too low, but when we got back nobody seemed to be disappointed or wanted a detailed report & description - especially yesterday when we flew 5 1/2 hours in an a/c which is overdue for an inspection because the job was "*most urgent & of the utmost importance*" - when we got back we weren't even called him for a report in lieu of the mozaic we couldn't take - it makes one bloody wild- if it was bluff they might at least have told us not to go to too much trouble, & if it really was important, why the hell not at the very least get a detailed report from us.

[*] Brickaville South of Tamatave. Not shown on the map above. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brickaville>

The Sqdn is just plain getting on my nerves now, it's becoming more of a Tonk Sqdn every day & in every way - we will be on a par with the best regulated girls school soon - we are treated that-a-way already.

The sqdn Mess was opened last night, the O.C. made a speech in which he talked a bit - not too much, & said absolutely nothing. I don't think I am very popular in that direction any more as I told him afterwards that it was a very up to shit speech - Tonk like the sqdn as a whole.

Thank Gawd I have been relieved of my job as Sqdn. war diarist in a nice peaceful way too, nothing said, but I know that the O.C. didn't like my style - I did manage to get in a couple of subtle jabs at the way things have been run lately tho'.

We had another shooting accident here the other day, - a damn fool armourer brought a fully loaded browning gun into the armoury & was playing around with it & off it went - the bullet passed between the legs of a fellow standing plumb in front of it, went through the wall hitting army Captain Pretorius who was standing outside in the leg high up - broke his leg making a big gaping hole & causing a hell of a lot of loss of blood. Capt. Pretorius died that evening of shock & loss of blood - we went to the funeral. [AIR p3] I don't know yet what is happening to the armourer, but reckon he is in for the high jump for disobeying the very first armoury rule re loaded guns in the armoury.

We hear that Col. Melville will be back on the 20th. Probably after that date by putting two & two together & making a baker's dozen we may form a faint idea where we are going, & then by eliminating that place we may even hit on the correct place. It now looks as if Col. Melville's sudden return to the Union was in connection with this move.

An interesting item of "*intelligence*"? we hear is the fact that the flying boat which we spent about 3 days looking for all over the island when Curly went down, & which has been reported by intelligence (?) not to have been a flying boat after all, but the land plane which landed at Tananarive, landed the passengers & then flew further south, was a flying boat after all, & that it landed on lake Aloatra the day before we searched there the first time. Some intelligence! [Clayton p23]

18 Aug [1942]

We can't make up our minds where we are bound for - there are new "*signs*" forthcoming every now & again, but they seem to contradict one another no end. - A hell of a lot of troops seem to be concerned in the move, & they all seem to think that Majunga, Tamatave & eventually Tananarive are the objectives. On the other hand some of them have been paid in English currency. Also most of our kit which is being packed up to go by sea is addressed to Roberts Heights, all dinghies have to be thoroughly inspected & all compasses swung & everybody is being injected against Typhoid.

Col. Melville will now only be back on Sat - he is going to Mombasa first. Soon after he gets back I suppose the advance party which is going by boat will leave. I am going with the advance party as the two Colonels & the bloody little runt of an adjutant are going with Maj. Meaker in the longrange Maryland - this also seems to indicate that it is going to be a long trip - surely they won't want to fly to Majunga.

I am rather pleased at being with the assault party - if there is any scrapping I will at least be near at hand if not in it - will probably see naval bombardment from the right end of the guns. Am taking a long 14" camera along to get snaps of any action going.

Last night I managed to get a peep at the war diary & was rather amused to discover that everything I had written had been torn out & rewritten with very many omissions - so my shafts went home & have been duly noted - I don't think I will meet with much sympathy if I have to go up before the Adj. or O.C. in the future. I must say tho' to me it seems a pretty blatant admission of weakness or guilt or whatever one should call it for the Adj. and/or the O.C. to "*disprove*" [sic] of any statements the war

diarist makes & not have them up on the mat for it - they seem to have chosen the underhand easy way out - putting discretion before valour. - Not a good policy when you get caught out tho'.

22 Aug [1942]

If it can be humanly possible I think life here is getting more boring every gawdamn day - all one does is lie on your bed all day alternatively reading & sleeping - I won't be able to lie much longer, will be getting bedsores any day now, & as for reading, apart from ones which can't stand the pace, things are pretty bad when not even Thome[?] Smith raises more than even an occasional feeble grin.

The wind which seemed to have dropped away entirely about 3 weeks or a month ago has been blowing great guns again recently, with an odd spot of rain. One lies down on one's bed with the wind blowing & the sky overcast, & you wake up with the wind howling through the eaves & a heavy pitter patter on the roof. You peep out of the window to see whether it's raining, but 10 times out of 9 you discover it's only the dust & grit kicked up by the wind which is falling on the roof - what the country for windmills.

The last two days I was convinced we were staying on the island, & that the assault was going to be against Majunga & Tananarive, everything seem to point that way, & the fellows were putting up such a sound arguments, but this evening I am at [sic] much at sea as ever & again reckon, or rather hope that we may be bound for Portuguese East or French territory round about Jabuti [Djibouti] way - don't know one bloody way or the other.

One thing is certain, if it is Tananarive then we are bound to be in for a stiffer proposition (on the ground) than we probably bargain for - what a hell of a come down it will be if we slip on our guava & have to make another of our strategic withdrawals - probably the propaganda blokes will get out of it the same way as they have passed lightly over the latest Dieppe show - maintain that everything went according to plan & that it wasn't intended to be anything more than just a quick raid "*to gain experience*".

If it is Tananarive then Pirrow's bush carts will come into their own most probably - they have been here about 3 weeks now, 50 odd of them with about 300 mules - it's nice seeing good S.A. mules again - so different from the French crocs we found here.

The J.U. 52 is late again, it is only expected here tomorrow - maybe we will hear something from Col. Steve, & maybe not, most probably not.

30 Aug [1942]

The 52 pitched up, but Col. Steve dropped no hint about where the move would be. All the boarded fellows went back with the plane, as also the Butch, Gerry Smith, Dempers, "J.C." Valentine & a couple of gunners.

Most of the Sqdn's money went with the plane - most of it in the Butch's pockets. There has been very heavy gambling lately, & no matter what form it has taken the Butch has always won - it has been nothing for a pool of from £40 - £70 to change hands on one hand or flip of the dice.

The Quack who has taken the Butch's place tells us that Maj. Jones has not left the Union - he is in hospital with stones in the kidney & will most probably have to be operated on. Also he is still a major as his pip only takes effect as from when he leaves for North - it's damn hard lines on the Oubaas.

Last night at supper time we had a very pleasant surprise - a signal came through from the Union that Maj. Meaker, Maj. Lagerway, Piet, Fillie, C.P., Ken Rutherford, Dick Barfield & myself had to return to the Union by first available boat. Did we give it a bang then! I celebrated the pants off of me - they

came adrift in shreds when Fillie & myself had a friendly wrestling bout. The fellows say we were drunk & all but disorderly, but who would worry!

We don't know yet what it all means, but we reckon that for the five of us observers it means the long awaited pilot course, & that Col. Steve did his stuff by us in the Union, but he won't say a word. We can't make out tho' why Cheesie's name isn't on the list - he also applied & should be on the list - there must be a slip up somewhere - If it's the P.P. course which after all these months seems too good to be true.

It may be some time before we go back as there doesn't seem to be any likelihood of a boat in the near future & we were told that there will be no more aircraft.

It's a pity that we're going to miss this show on Majunga & Tananarive (as it must be) but even so I will have no regrets on leaving this island & this ruddy squadron.

On board the Albosso 5 Sept. [1942]

There have been the usual Army changes of plan the last few days. A J.U.52 was sent up to fly us down to the Union, & a signal arrived calling Maj. Mostert back too - This sounded rather strange just before the coming move, as the advance party has been on board about 3 days now. Rumour has it that Col. Mossie is wanted for a court martial, but whether as a witness or otherwise I don't know - I almost hope it is otherwise. The rumour originated from him anyway.

We found out that we had not been called back to the Union specially for the P.P. course at all, we were merely being sent back as spare flying personnel, & Col. Steve had reckoned as we had seen the most service he would send us back.

The 52 arrived day before yesterday, & that evening we were all busy packing when another signal arrived & the Flight Commanders were called in for a conference after which we were told the news.

We were no longer going home, Col. Mossie would be the only one to go back. [AIR p8] The rest of us had been ordered to proceed to Nakuru in Kenya where we would join 16 Sqdn. on an O.T.U. course, after which 16 Sqdn would come to Madagascar in Blenheim's to relieve 20 Sqdn who would then go back to the Union.

However at the conference they decided to keep the two majors, Piet Truter & we 5 experienced observers in the sqdn, & send the batch of the rookies to join 16. Col. Steve wouldn't tell us this himself, said he didn't have the heart to face us & break the news, but he needn't have worried - when we heard that we had escaped only by the skin of our teeth being shoved into 16 Sqdn on getting back to the Union we were only too pleased at the prospect of taking a hand in this show & then returning to the Union directly after.

So here I am on board the Albusso with the rest of the fellows on the advance party as was the original idea - the whole Union flap has turned out to be what Charles Taylor would call S.A.M.F.U. (Self Adjusting Military Fuck Up) - the other two varieties are the O.G.F.U. (Ordinary General Fuck Up) & N.A.M.F.U. (Non Adjusting Military Fuck Up).

In spite of missing my trip to the Union & the P.P. course I'm quite happy & contented here now - on board a comfortable boat, in on this flap in a sqdn which, in spite of the adjutant may be O.K. now that Mossie is leaving & with a bit of action going on.

When the convoy is leaving of course nobody knows, but it shouldn't be longer than a day or two now. We are the biggest ship in the harbour so far, about 20,000 ton I would say, she is very comfortable & we are enjoying it to the full - soft beds & clean sheets to crawl into, decent food nicely served, easy chairs & no dust about - what it change. The grub in camp since we got the new

mess going has been pretty bad. There is quite a bit of wind blowing today, with red clouds of dust over the aerodrome, & here in the bay we are out of it all.

I only hope either we or the 52 pushes off so that things aren't changed at the eleventh hour again - I'm all keen for this spot of action now - It must be Majunga after all.

In the meantime there is action up in the desert again, but our news is so non-committal that one doesn't know what gives out - it gives one the impression that we are getting the worst of things again.

Most of this radio news is so much my eye - for instance when the Ramilles was hit & the tanker sunk here in harbour our news most emphatically refused that a battleship of the Prince of Wales class was damaged or that any cruiser was even hit, let alone sunk as the Enemy claimed - all perfectly true, but it makes one distrust everything one hears in the news.

Another instance was the big boost up they gave to our "*Capture*" of Mayotte [*] - as if it was a hell of a good show & made up for all the defeats we have suffered so far - I suppose this Majunga affair will be boomed all over the ether too - that's to say if the Froggies don't keep us out. I don't know what troops are taking part in the assault, but there are only K.A.R. askaris on this boat & I can't see them doing very much. In fact they are about the only disadvantage of this ship - they're perpetually going & coming up & down corridors & getting jammed or lost - I'd hate to see what happens if we had to get torpedoed - it'd be one hell of a gevolt [*] I think.

[*] Mayotte a small island off Madagascar
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayotte>

gevolt = rumpus (not a word I have ever met). Yiddish into Afrikaans

Wednesday 9th Sept [1942]

We eventually left Diego Suarez at 2 p.m. on Monday day before yesterday, a convoy of 13, 8 merchantmen, 1 light cruiser & 4 destroyers.

When we [were] outside the harbour we were all called together & told what it was all about. We are to rendezvous with 4 other convoys 30 miles south of Mayotte at about noon today, & from there we will proceed in one big convoy of 65 vessels to Majunga which we should reach about midnight tonight. The assault party will consist of the 29th Brigade Royal Welsh Fusiliers the East Lancs & a small contingent of Commandos. They will go ashore a few miles north of the town at about 1 a.m. & at 5 a.m. south of the town, take the town & then proceeded by the South African Armoured cars they will advance on Tananarive which they hope to reach on the 5th day. The most likely snags are the two big bridges over the river on the way which are all ready for demolition - if the bridges are blown up in time of course the assault on Tananarive will be held up a hell of a time if not given up all together. It seems rather too optimistic to hope that the two bridges, especially the big Commoro Suspension [*] bridge will be left intact for us. [Clayton p23]

Commoro = Komoro

<https://luxconsult.mu/portfolio-item/reconstruction-of-kamoro-bridge-madagascar/>

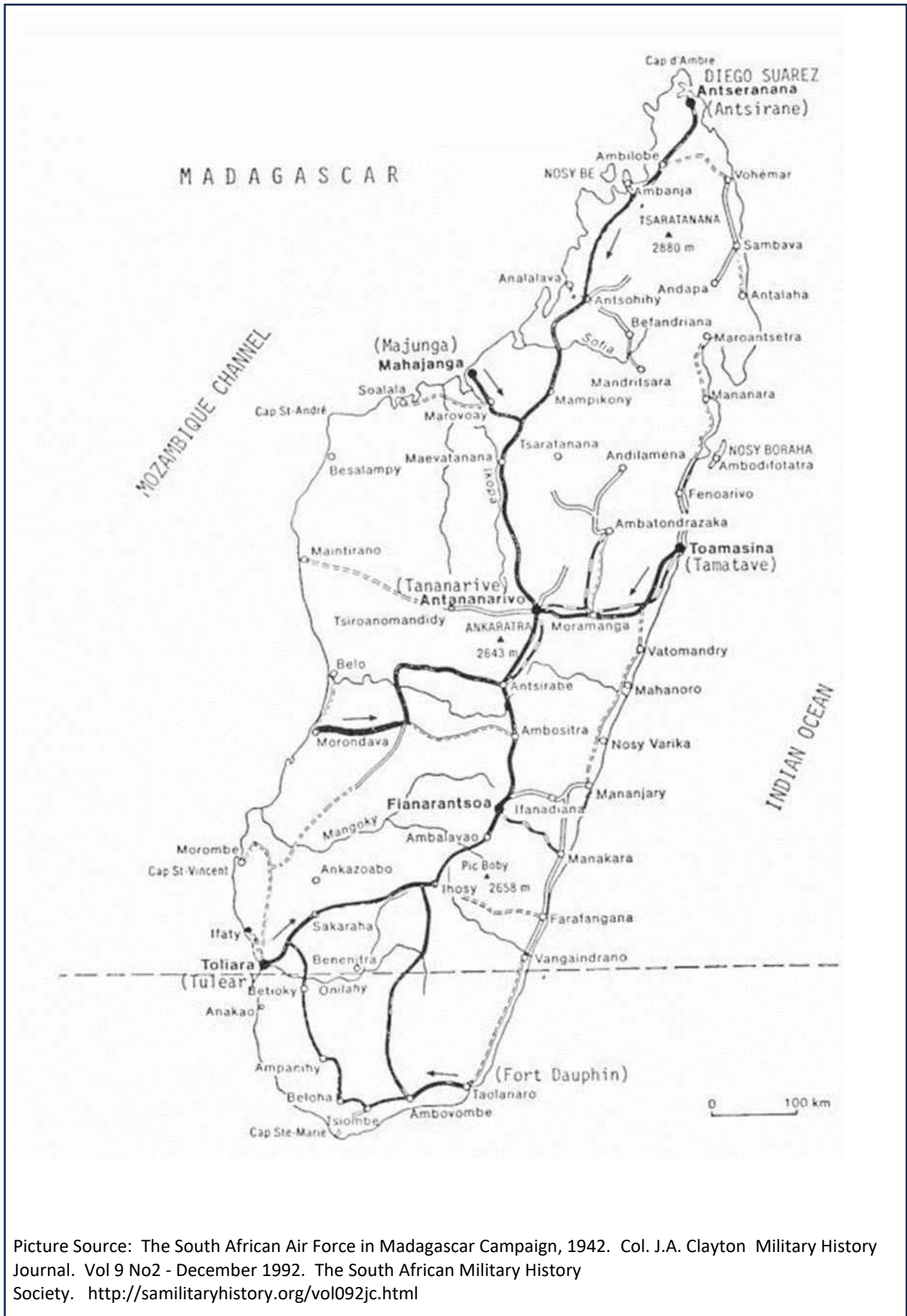


<https://luxconsult.mu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/komoro.jpg>

Original & new bridge

The Fleet Air Arm will be in the convoy & give a hand, & as soon as Majunga has fallen we from the S.A.A.F. will proceed to one of the aerodromes, get it serviceable, put up camp & our planes will fly down & commence operating right away.

One other convoy of 5 ships is already in sight (10 a.m.) -it looks like the one from Mombasa where the 29 Brigade have been doing their practice manoeuvres.



Picture Source: The South African Air Force in Madagascar Campaign, 1942. Col. J.A. Clayton Military History Journal. Vol 9 No2 - December 1992. The South African Military History Society. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol092jc.html>

So it's Majunga after all & then the whole of the island - What must one make of it. I don't see how we can point a finger at Hitler & his broken promises at all - surely it would have been quite easy to do the job 4 mos ago, all in one, instead of which the French have been given a hell of a lot of promises & soft soap to the effect that we didn't want their ruddy Island, only the naval base etc. to keep the Japs off - well, I don't know, it's above me - It's not my idea of a war this - I don't think the French will ever trust the English after this war, - or the South Africans either for that matter.

Personally I think that even if they don't blow the bridges they will make a stand in the hills between Majunga & Tananarive where a couple of 75s well dug in could hold off an army & be immune from aerial bombing.

We seem to have our 5th column well established in Majunga - a local "*yachting enthusiast*" will place lights on the two shoals out to sea tonight to guide us in.

The cruise has been very pleasant - the Abosso is a smaller ship than she looks - 12000 tons, she is flat bottomed & has a very shallow draught that's why she is so high above the water.

Majunga Friday 11th Sept. [1942]

Noon

To a certain extent things seem to have gone according to plan - & yet something must have happened which has put a spoke in our wheels.

We rendezvoused with the rest of the convoy on time - only there didn't seem to be 65 of us - we counted about 45. We got here on time, the assault troops got ashore on time, & by 7 a.m. the town was in our hands.

By 9 a.m. the two bridges were still intact according to the F.A.A. who flew out there to have a look see.

We lay about 3 - 4 miles out & couldn't see any activity at all other than the F.A.A. aircraft flying about over the town, but from radio messages intercepted we learnt that at one time there was fierce fighting in the streets.

Yesterday aft. we moved right into the estuary with all the rest of the ships except for most of the naval vessels which lay outside guarding the bay. [*] We thought we would be disembarking this morning, but it is now noon & no move has been made. The Brigadier came on board this morning & we are told that all previous orders have been cancelled - evidently some hitch has occurred. The most likely one I can think of is that the bridges have been wrecked which will mean that Majunga won't be of much use to us as a starting point for Tananarive. However its only conjecture on my part, none of us know what the snag is if any is.



Google earth showing the (very muddy) estuary at Majunga

Seeing that the bridges are of such great importance one wonders why they didn't think of dropping a number of specially trained parachute troops near the bridges the previous night, & they would have made sure of the bridges & everything would have been O.K.

In the meantime we are making the most of our stay on board, but even so it is becoming a bit boring having nothing to do. Anyhow, it's at least a pleasanter brand of nothing than we had to do at Diego. The only fly in the ointment is these Gawdam Wogs on board - they stink the place out & kick up no end of a noise with their loud voices & hobnailed boots.

It's a bit of a bugger being stuck out here on a boat not knowing what goes on. As far as I can make out it looks this way to me - The bridges must be down, so Majunga isn't of as much use to us it could be, & we may have to make another invasion elsewhere from which to reach Tananarive & that may account for us not being put ashore. We may simply carry on from here for the next landing spot. I won't be at all surprised to find the convoy on the move for Morondava, [*] or even Tulier very soon. Tamatave I think is a bit out of the running as river crossings form the same obstacle.

[*] Morondava is on the map above

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morondava>



The spectacular avenue of baobabs at Morondava

Picture source [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baobab Avenue Morondava Madagascar - panoramio.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baobab_Avenue_Morondava_Madagascar_-_panoramio.jpg)

Tulier = Toliara now. On the map above. Well south
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toliara>

We were told that the idea was to be in Tananarive in 5 days after taking Majunga - we'll have to get a move on as 1 1/2 days have already gone by.

Evening :- Our planes & the Lysanders arrived here early this afternoon, & landed on the North aerodrome, so evidently the drome has been made serviceable by the Engineers. So far none of us have been ashore, nor have we heard anything from the shore to indicate what is going to happen to us.

This afternoon word got around that one of the main bridges has been blown up, & that considerable damage was done in Majunga by the French before they gave in, the meat factory being wrecked & other important installations damaged.

This evening & extract from Winston Churchill's speech appeared on the notice board to the effect that Majunga, Morondava & another unnamed place on the West coast of Madagascar had been taken by us.

So in spite of the bridge being wrecked we have not been balked altogether, & now we know why the disembarkation has been stopped. Probably the big noises are having a conference to decide what to do next.

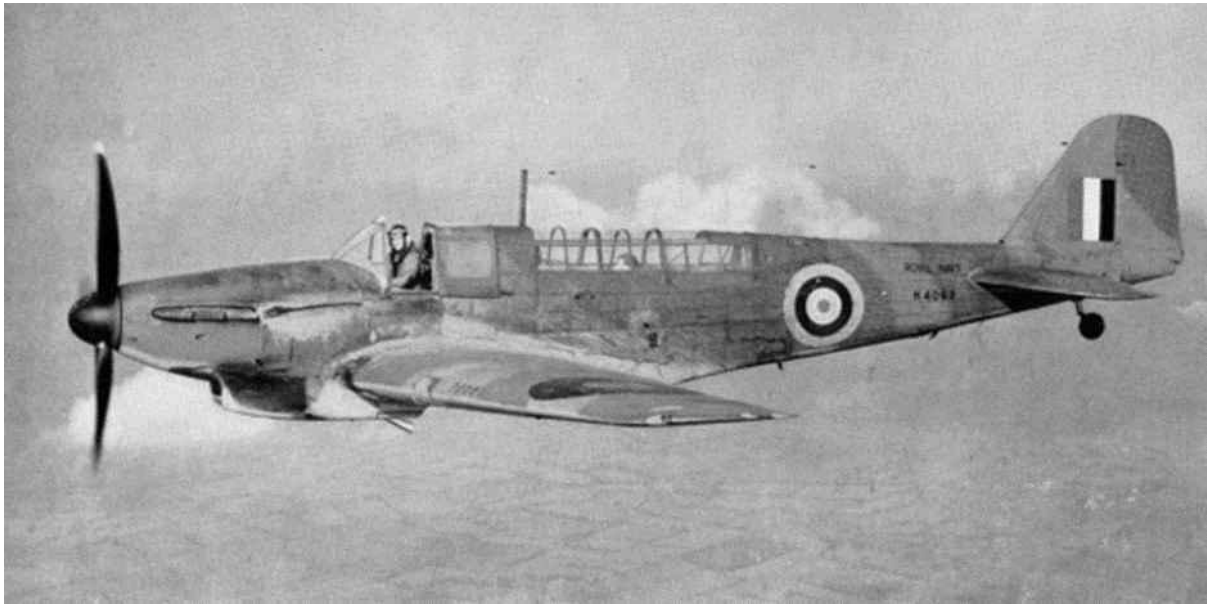
I wonder what the third point of Invasion can be, Tulier, or simply the coast opposite Nosy Be which the South Africans were supposed to take buy land from the north - I hope it's Tulier.

Tuesday 15th Sept [1942]

We were taken off the Abosso about noon on Sat 12th. Majunga by far exceeded my expectations, it's really a lovely little town. When I got out to the drome I found it full of planes. The whole of our Sqdn with 7 Beauforts & 5 Marylands, the R.A.F. 1433 Flight with 5 Lysanders, & the Fleet Air Arm with 6 Fulmars [*] & 6 Albacores. [*] The F.A.A. flew all the way from Tanga via Lindi & Pamanzi.

[*] Fulmar

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairey_Fulmar



Picture source [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairey_Fulmar#/media/File:Fairey_Fulmar_Mk_I_\(M4062\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairey_Fulmar#/media/File:Fairey_Fulmar_Mk_I_(M4062).jpg)

Albacore

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairey_Albacore



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairey_Albacore#/media/File:Fairey_Albacore.jpg

The Marylands, Maj Lagerway & Halfpint & Neil Ross & Fillie Kleyn were out on a road recce & raid on Tananarive.

It transpired that the planes were not supposed to land until at least two days later when the dry grass on & around the drome had been burnt, all the obstruction trenches etc properly filled in & cleared, the camp laid out & petrol & bombs laid on. But no sooner had the engineers started filling in the trenches when the whole sky was full of circling planes - the whole bang lot had arrived. They all managed to get down safely, but some of the landings were pretty nerve racking, missing trenches by inches & ending up in groundloops. The drome is very small & narrow, & with all these planes parked along the edges there is bound to be an accident before long unless we are very very lucky, as there is no room with which to play around, & if you swing off the runway you have your pick of umpteen holes & other planes to end up among. [AIR p9]

The two planes from Tananarive landed, & we noticed Niel Ross beckoning frantically & pointing to the observer's cockpit - we knew then that something had happened to Fillie Kleyn. We ran up to the plane & lifted out Fillie's dead body. He had about 4 shots through him, one in his chest with the Dr. says took the top of his heart away, so at least he died instantaneously & had no pain. [Clayton p23]

They had been hit by two explosive shells, one in the port engine which put two of the cylinders out of action, & the second hit the tip of the prop blade & the shrapnel went into the front cockpit & got Fillie.

So old Phill after all these months in Abyssinia & the Desert, after his 80 odd raids & his D.F.M., has gone & bought it here. Fate has its say, if that last minute signal had not arrived just in time up at Diego, Fil would have been down in the Union now.

Maj. Lagerway's plane also had two bullet holes in it - the aerodrome defences at Tananarive is pretty hot hitting 3 planes out of 4 on two raids, writing off one plane & killing one - but why should it be Fillie?

Niel Ross was very cut up - the two of them have been flying together for ever so long, ever since they started in the desert. The funeral was held next day, I was one of the escort.

We are now 16 Sqdn with Maj. Clayton the new O.C. [AIR p8] The Sqdn seems to have taken a definite turn for the better, & is becoming organised again. The intelligence section is going & we can get what dope there is available - there is a situation map up in the hanger & we can see at a glance where our troops are.

The army position is actually a bit vague just at present, but roughly the position seems to be that the main advance party from Majunga, consisting of 15 S.A. armoured cars & a company of K.A.Rs is about halfway to Tananarive (They should have been in the Capital according to plan). The Froggies are putting up quite a good fight under the circumstances, they have even gone so far as to bomb our troops with what is probably their one & only Potez. The suspension bridge is down in the middle & is lying in about 2 ft of water, but it still passable until it rains, when nothing will be able to get across it. The column from Morondava has advanced about 100 miles. The South African Brigade coming down from the north is quite near Ananalave already. Their chief opposition consists of the bridges being burnt in front of them.

The unloading of the ships is going ever so slow & it is all arse about face, those ships which have priority stuff on board are being unloaded last & others which are low down on the list have already been offloaded - & the whole operation gives one the impression of "*more is ook 'n dag*" [*] - a couple of barges are running to & fro from ship to beach & many more are lying alongside of other ships doing nothing all day. - We have no Wireless vans. no tools, no stores, no tents, in fact no

nothing, & are living under the wings of our planes on emergency rations. In a way it's by way of being a bit of a change, but at this stage of the war it's by no means novel any longer - however there is this much to it, it does kind of bring the crews closer together & help on the "family life" of the crews - I reckon it's a good thing now that we are going into action for a change. Only I must say its Gawddam hot, & we don't even have a decent supply of water as there is none handy & our water trailers haven't been offloaded. However, one can always get a bit of a kick out of noticing & enjoying the next door crew's discomfort & pull their legs about it - I have pinched a tent from the F.A.A. this evening & we will put it up tomorrow & then "*The House of Meaker*" (our crew) will have the laugh on the rest of the fellows. [Clayton p22]

[*] *more is ook 'n dag* = tomorrow is another day (Afrikaans)

In the meantime there is the usual O.G.F.U at the local H.Q. - After the Brigadier had taken it upon himself to signal for the aircraft come along, without consulting Capt. Bill Williams [*] who was specially sent down to judge when the drome would be fit for the planes, & all the planes had been here for 3 days, a signal was sent to the local H.Q. at eleven last night by the advance party asking for 3 Lysanders to do a recce flight at sparrowfart this morning. At 10 o'clock this morning H.Q. phone the drome & a bloke with an Oxford accent asks whether we can tell him whether 1433 R.A.F. Flight with the Lysanders are perchance on the drome here. - No doubt the B.B.C. is telling the world about the marvellous co-operation between the Army, Air Force & Navy in this campaign. Its a bit of a blue when the Army H.Q. of an advancing force don't know the whereabouts of their Army Co-Op sqdn, & take 12 hours to find out that they are 4 miles away in the only drome between buggary & Kingdom Come

[*] This is Bill Williams. In the Western Desert portion there is Jim Williams who was very brave & accomplished – shot down a ME-110 using the wing guns of his Maryland.

This Williams never went on a single action during his 7 months in Madagascar.

We haven't the faintest idea how the rest of the world is faring - for all we know peace may have been declared in Europe, or old Joe Stalin may have discovered that it's time the rest of the Allies did a bit of scrapping instead of cheering him on, & he may have done the switch over to the other side for a spot of much needed rest. We do hear tho' that the Governor of Madagascar has appealed to the Japs for help.

Yesterday aft one of the F.A.A. fellows was doing a spot of work on one of their planes with a blowlamp & set the grass on fire - burnt the tailplane of a Fulmar & one of the petrol & oil dumps - great excitement, so today it was decided to burn the grass on & around the drome. All the planes were parked in the burnt portion & the joint was set alight - took all day, & late this aft when all the fires had died down I'm bugged if the F.A.A. don't go & burn down one of their tents - silly buggers, they're really out of their element on land & they cause a lot of amusement, especially their mechanics.

Majunga is really a pleasant town - its shady streets & houses with gardens reminds one a bit of Stellenbosch in summer. There is a very nice swimming beach near the drome - the swimming is very much like that in the Med., only the water isn't anything near as clean & clear.

[*] Majunga same footnote as previously
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahajanga>



Picture source

[https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/image/PI3Z50bsOuZYovHsda15BoKMk0w/930x620/filters:format\(webp\)/outrem/2022/08/11/62f4bbc81f8ce_majunga-madagascar.jpeg](https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/image/PI3Z50bsOuZYovHsda15BoKMk0w/930x620/filters:format(webp)/outrem/2022/08/11/62f4bbc81f8ce_majunga-madagascar.jpeg)

We have been doing quite a bit of souvenir buying in town - crocodile leather work, silver filagree work & Madagascar stones being the most popular purchases. The snag with buying the stones is that none of us know anything about them & don't know whether we are buying good stuff or pretty glass.

Thursday 17th Sept [1942]

The v.d.Merwe blood has come to the surface again in at least one of the crews. Day before yesterday it was Piet Truter's [his signature is at the top of the page] & his crew's day off, so they went to town, had lots of this Madagascar Bourbognac [sic] to drink, had lunch at one of the hotels - had some more drinks, & then what with the heat & all the booze they felt ever so sleepy, but there was nowhere in town to go & have a lay down.

They strolled about for a bit & eventually they came to a nice big shady garden round a big imposing looking building with the guard at the gate. The guard saluted them ever so smartly, so in they went, had a look round, helped themselves to some oranges off a tree, & then parked themselves on the lawn in the shade & went to sleep.

Before long they were woken by a very agitated French official, but they couldn't make out what he wanted so rolled over & dozed off again. Again they were woken, this time by a fellow who could speak English. They explained their need of somewhere to pass the siesta hour & the Frenchman explained that they were making a doss house of the Governor of Majunga's front lawn. When he explained the position to the Governor the Gov. said to let them be.

When they woke up in the cool of the late aft. they noticed a pompous looking Froggie feeding the fowls, so no trouble to Kruger the Airgunner, he goes up to the Governor (for such it turned out to be) & started bartering with him for the evening's collection of "oefs".

Another one who has put his foot into it is George Raubenheimer. He flew up to Diego day before yesterday to fetch a Brigadier, spent the night there & came back yesterday.

A new R.A.F. crowd have taken over our old v.d Merwe pub. George noticed they had a pitch black nigger in a neat uniform behind the pub counter, & remarked on the barman's smart turnout to one of the fellows - it was then coolly pointed out to him that the "*pitch black nigger*" behind the counter was a Flying Officer with R.A.F. wings, was a highclass Indian, & was wearing ordinary uniform. - Needless to say George felt rather small.

George came back with the Brigadier & umpteen cases of booze, made a downwind landing - (no windsock or smoke), touchdown at about 120, ran the full length of the runway, swung slightly off near the top, tore off his undercart & tailwheel in the ditches & dongas on the edge of the runway & came to rest amid a black cloud of dust. - Nobody hurt, but Brigadier a bit shaken. Good show! another good Beaufort. [AIR p10]

Yesterday we had good news. The French are suing for peace, this morning Maj. Lagerway flew over to Tananarive to fetch their two delegates for a peace talk. He had hydraulic trouble there so Capt. Ramsay flew over, with a mechanic, brought the Frogs along & Lagerway came back here & his trouble had been fixed.

Our plane which has been unserviceable has been fixed up now & has been test flown this aft., so Maj. Meaker & myself are taking the Froggies back tomorrow unless the arrangements are changed overnight. [AIR p10]

Maj. Lagerway who spent the greater part of the day on Tananarive drome says it is very well defended indeed - 4 37 m.m. guns & any amount of multiple pompoms. - no wonder they shot daylight into our planes.

All our kit & stores & transport etc. has been offloaded & we will soon be well away. In the meantime "*The House of Meaker*" is leading the field as far as comfort goes - we are the only crew with a tent so far, & very nice too after 3 days in the boiling sun.

Wed. 23 Sept [1942]

As hot as hell, too hot for the ruddy flies so they make use of the shade of our tent & make our after lunch siesta more like an exhibition of 4 fellows with St. Vitus Dance.

The peace talks came to nothing - the Froggies decided to fight on, so we flew them back to Tananarive next day. [AIR p10] However, without their knowing it we turned the trip into a recce flight, taking note of all the roadblocks & blockhouses on the way & taking photographs of them. The pilots we met on Invato 'drome seemed very despondent & ready to call it a day, that told us quite openly that they had no more planes to fly & put up a show.

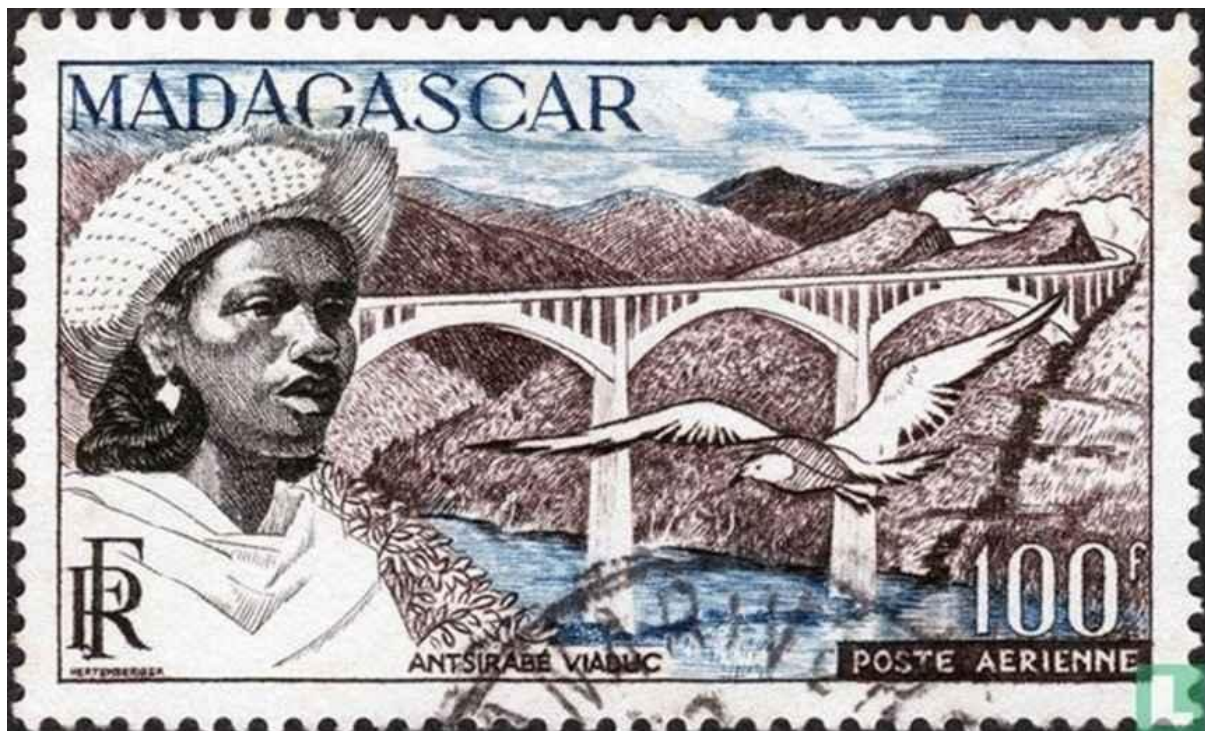
On the way there we shook the French peace delegates to the tits. Two of the F.A.A.'s Fulmars were up doing Fighter patrol, & it was arranged that they would intercept & give us the once over to impress the plenipotentiaries. - I didn't know about all this, & I must say it was so well acted especially by Maj. Meaker that I was had guessing for a few seconds. We were stooging along merrily when all of a sudden I heard a frantic "*Christ!*" from Maj Meaker, & he went into a steeply banked dive. I made a grab for the auxiliary stick, but just then Maj. Meaker pulled out & shouted to Lund at the back "*Fire a Verrey light quickly, they are our Hurricanes!*". Lund subsequently told us that one of the Frenchman bloody nearly shat himself when one of the Fulmars stall turned & whipped down onto our tail. Maj. Meaker was flying with 5° of flap & throttled right back to enable the Fulmars to manoeuvre around us. It was all very convincing.

The 29th Brigade landed at Tamatave about 3 or 4 days ago. The Froggies fired at them, but after a couple of Naval shells had been round about the town they gave in. 29 Brigade had no transport, so they hopped into a train, put the station master in the first coach & got as far as Brickavilla where they were halted by a blown up bridge, & now can't advance any further until the bridge has been repaired.

The general was afraid the Froggies would evacuate all the rolling stock from Tananarive south to Antsirabe [*] & blow the big bridge behind them, in which case we would not have enough rolling stock to make use of the main Tamatave - Tananarive railway, so for two days we tried to bomb a small bridge on the Tan - Antsirabe railway, first one Maryland & 3 Beauforts from high level - missed, then 3 Albacores dive bombing - missed, then next day 3 Beauforts low level with delay fuses, missed the bridge, about 4 bombs landing at the foot of the central pylon but doing no more than splash mud over it - they did manage to mess up an adjacent cutting tho'. This little bridge was a hell of a difficult target as it was only 35 yds long & very high so that nothing short of a direct hit would do any damage. [AIR pp 10 11]

[*] Antsirabe On the map above. South of Antanarive at the T junction.
Google links pictures of the good looking buildings. Train station in particular.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antsirabe>

The bridge was shown on a 100 Franc postage stamp in the 1950s



Source of picture

https://assets.lastdodo.com/image/ld_medium/plain/assets/catalog/assets/2021/5/16/2/e/a/pdf_2eaaca36-b64b-11eb-9ad5-fe3995664bfb.jpg

The South African Brigade & the small force going North from Majunga have joined up, so that part of it is in the bag. The Morondama landing was only a blind, a small force of commandos landed, cut the telephone line & then one of the commandos who could speak fluent French phoned Tananarive & gave them an hysterical incoherent story of a large force of English which had landed & were on their way to Tananarive. The B.B.C. also did their bit by announcing likewise.

The situation up to date is that our troops entered Tananarive at 5 this afternoon, they had heavy going from Mahitsy [*] onwards what with pill boxes with 75 mm & 65 mm guns & hundreds of roadblocks

& many destroyed bridges. I can't think why the Froggies didn't put up a show in the mountains between Ankazobe [*] & Mahitsy with a few 75 m.m. guns they could have held a big army at bay had they wanted to. Why they don't give in now I can't think either, they are only prolonging the agony & wasting needless lives - they have put up a good show & the Vichy & Germany should be satisfied. The R.A.F. moved up to an advanced drome with their Lysanders a day or two ago, & now that we have taken Tan I suppose we will move up to Inato any day now.

[*] Mahitsy. Not on the map above. Close to Tananarive.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahitsy>

Ankazobe Not on the map.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ankazobe>

The life here on the drome has been quite pleasant - our urge to go into town is wearing off now - we have seen it often enough, done all the souvenir shopping there is to be done, & all we want now is Tananarive & Antsinabe or home.

Some of the fellows have made feminine contacts in town, The Major & Flippie being the representatives from our flight - they got going with two pseudo French girls, but the language question was a bit of a handicap - however the Major wasn't going to be stumped by a minor detail like that, & great was our amusement when he one evening borrowed a French - English dictionary to take along with him.

Flippie was a keen competitor at one time too. The major bought a bottle of evil smelling Madagascar Eau de Cologne with which he used to de-odour his bathwater. One evening after Flippie was all dressed up for the kill prior to going to town the Major poured about half a bottle of the scent over Flippie's bush jacket. Flippie couldn't possibly go anywhere like that - he stank like a polecat in a bombed brothel, but nothing loth [sic], he went & changed his clothes & kept the love tryst.

Practical jokes have been the order of the day lately, mostly inter house, & so far the house of Meaker has scored off most of the other crews, the house of Looock being the chief sufferers as they are our nearest neighbours. The other day when the Looocks were out we put 50 grains of quinine in their one & only can of drinking water & they had to make the best of it until next day when they could get some more. This was in retribution of them changing our clean water tin for one which had a bit of 100 octane aviation petrol in it. Cactus was the man who suffered, he had a bottle of Corio whisky - that vile Australian fire water - Cactus had two whiskies with this 100 octane before you noticed anything funny with his drink.

Our one on the house of Raubenheimer took the form of selling Bob Lee a neatly stoppered bottle of water as a bottle of beer one evening. Bob saved it for the next day - a boiling hot day. He cooled his bottle of "beer" down all morning in a wet towel, & just before lunch he opened it, put the bottle to his mouth, & spat out the mouthful of water like so much poison.

We are a bit careful about the swimming now as we learn from the local inhabitants that there are a hell of a lot of sharks about, & they never swim here in the open sea - however not even the 20 ft sharks can keep us out of the sea altogether.

There is a J.U. 52 due here within the next few days & we are all looking forward to it eagerly - it's a hell of a time since we've had any post.

Sat 26 Sept [1942]

Morning

Days & dates have been a bit of a puzzle here lately, cut off from everything & everybody as we

are. George Grib our Signals officer went so far as to send the signal to Lindi the other day to verify the day & date.

The local war is still going on - Our troops are following the Froggies down to Antsirabe, & we have been doing a bit of light bombing, more for the moral effect than anything else, on fortified positions & a gang building up roadblocks. We have landed the R.S.F. (Scotch Fusiliers) at Manakara [*] on the East Coast to block that end of the railway down South. It amounts to this, the Froggies are blocked in every direction no matter where they move except for Tulear [*] & the southern extremity of the island - why they don't throw in the sponge nobody knows. They must have had pretty definite orders from Vichy to hold out to the bitter end, & are doing all they can to hold up our advance as long as they can. In the meantime they are doing a lot of senseless destruction of their own country, blowing bridges & burning the countryside which is as dry as tinder, as far as they go. Following the Russian Scorched Earth policy no doubt.

[*] Manakara. On the east coast on the map above.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manakara>

Tulear = Toliara. On the west coast down south on the map above.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toliara>

The South African Armoured Cars, in the lead of our advance, have been putting up a hell of a good show from all reports, charging along at a merry 40 m.p.h. The K.A.R. have had a couple of minor brushes with the Senegalese, & laid merry hell into them, relinquishing their rifles on occasions & getting stuck in with their pangas & carving the poor Senegalese up in slices.

[*] panga = machete

The French have left Ivato aerodrome absolutely unwrecked. Maj. Meaker flew the Col. up there early this morning after it was taken, took over all the keys & left Capt. Williams & Hal Smithers there to keep an eye on things for us. There is quite a lot of loot to be had there in the form of swords, bayonets & revolvers, but Hal is supposed to look after the whole lot so that it can be divided up equally when the rest of the sqdn move up.

The R.A.F. & parts of the F.A.A. have moved in already - the R.A.F. with two Lysanders, all they have left - they lost 3 at the advanced drome. We are moving up when enough accommodation is fixed up for us.

It looks as if I am finished with flying in this sqdn - having the longrange tanks in our plane we can't do any bombing, & as there is no longer range reconnaissance to be done (or so the General seems to think even with the southern portion of the island has not been investigated yet) we just don't fly, & the Col. has commandeered 1670 as his personal plane & Maj. Meaker as his personal pilot, so I have no say in the matter, I have to sit at home while they fly about. That is one aspect of flying with the senior pilot that I never thought of. [AIR pp 11 12]

When we leave the island & fly back to the Union I suppose the Col. will fly in my place & I will have to go by boat again. I think more better I organise me a berth on the next 52 that goes back to the Union when & if it ever does come. - The one which was supposed to be on its way has been cancelled, & we now hear that a Hudson [*] is coming from Nairobi.

[*] Hudson

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Hudson



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Hudson#/media/File:Lockheed_A-29_Hudson_USAAF_in_flight_c1941.jpg

The laugh was on the House of Raubenheimer yesterday - George had been moving his tent about all over the drome from place to place, pitching it & pulling it down again next day - never satisfied with the site. However, at last he seemed satisfied, & the tent stayed in the same place for 3 whole days. Yesterday morning while they were all lying down reading, a whirlwind came up, ran right through the tent, & when the dust & noise & petrol tins & bad language had died down there was George sitting up in bed minus his tent - so once more he had to pitch it.

The bane of our lives of a night time here is the local dog menace. The dogs from miles around have discovered that there is good scavenging to be had around our tents & we are woken up every half hour by the clatter of empty tins & snarls. The last few nights we have got stuck into them with catapults, but yet they come. If this goes on we will have to resort to revolvers & rifles.

evening:- We got orders this aft. that the first road convoy is to move off tomorrow morning, & as I suspected all along I am in it, our plane being booked for the Colonel & his ruddy staff. However I am not at all sorry as I have seen the country from the air quite a few times & can now see it from the road.

One of the F.A.A. Fulmars is missing. It left here at 5 p.m. yesterday for Tananarive, a damn foolish thing to do, as she would only just manage to do it before dark even if he managed to hit the place first time, & he took no observer to do his navigation for him. 3 Planes have been out looking for him today, but have found no trace of him - he will be damn lucky if he is alive to tell what happened, the country is bad enough for a forced landing in daylight with ample time to pick the least dangerous spot, but in the dark I reckon he is sure to have bought it. [AIR p11]

The people at home must have a funny idea of this campaign - the radio news is glamorizing it no end - the news last night said that the troops at Tamatave were met by the friendly populace among whom are pretty girls in scanty dresses, & now we hear that the people in Tananarive met our troops in the

streets, cheered them on, throwing garlands of flowers & scent at their feet - if the scent is anything like Maj. Meaker's my sympathies are with the troops.

The sun & moon rises & sets here in Majunga are by far the most beautiful I've ever seen at any time in any place. They appear & disappear on the respective horizons like dark red balls of fire - a sight any blinkin' poet would rave about. The last few evenings & mornings we have had double treats - the one appearing in the east while the other makes its exit in the west - too beautiful for words.

Avato 'Drome Tananarive
5 th Oct [1942]

Our convoy took 3 days for the trip - record time for a convoy up to date. Crossing the demolished Betsiboka suspension bridge [*] & 2 or 3 other rivers where the bridges had been blown took some time, but we got stuck in & made good time towing the heaviest trucks across. Again the Chevrolet Trucks proved the best allround vehicles.

[*] Betsiboka suspension bridge.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betsiboka_Bridge



Picture source <https://www.matiere-tp.fr/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/pont-de-rehabilitation-madagascar-22.jpg>

This is the replacement lattice beam bridge but it does show the obstacle which they crossed. There is a drone photo which shows the whole river very well but not free to use.

We got our last truck across Betsiboka in the dark the first evening & parked on the first likely spot & went to sleep. The next morning we discovered that we had slept in a blinking graveyard.

The road except for the demolished bridges was very good & is really a good job of work considering the mountainous & hilly country it crosses, but the country all the way has been burnt - this scorched

earth policy no doubt so there wasn't much in the line of scenery to relieve the monotony. We are told that most of the burning has been done by the Malagash who have taken advantage of the war to disobey the French authorities by burning the veld to get a new crop of grazing when the rains come - the whole island is either burnt or burning - every evening here the sky is lit up all around by the glow of veld fires - mostly to the east where there has been no fighting at all - of course our troops will be blamed for it.

The Fulmar which has been missing the last week was discovered this morning - it crashed at Antilampy about 60 miles south, pilot dead in cockpit poor sod - he paid dearly for his foolhardiness or that of his O.C. - I don't know whose idea it was.

This is a damn fine drome & Air Force camp - infinitely better than anything we have in the Union - the civil hangers are the best & most elaborate any of us have seen. I hand it to the French, they can do things in style when they set their minds to it. Aviation, especially Civil aviation in Madagascar was on a very sound footing, it's a pity the war came along & spoiled it.

The houses in the living quarter of the camp are nicely arranged & laid out. In peacetime the French Air Force personnel who are mostly married must have led a very pleasant existence here, practically a community in the own only about 10 miles from town. We have taken over some of the houses, but all the French families who stayed here are still living in the other houses - they are more or less on parole & nobody hinders them - two of the officers have been messing with us until day before yesterday when our planes arrived & there was not enough room in the mess.

The French officers here have been most helpful in every respect & have saved us a lot of poking about & finding things out for ourselves, but it is not quite good enough having them all walking about here with all our planes on the drome while there is fighting going on - They will probably be moved away elsewhere soon.

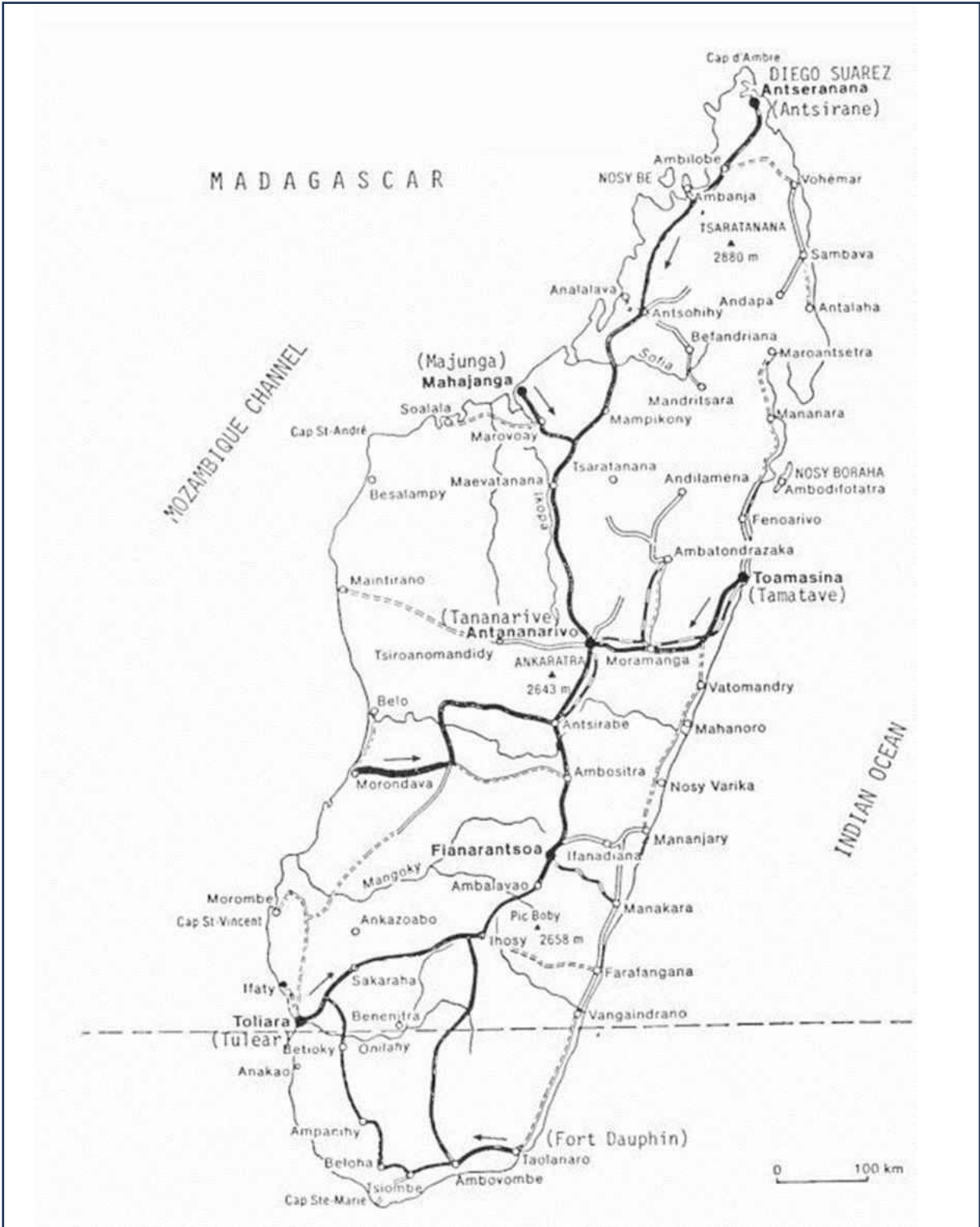
They did not have much ack-ack on the drome, but they made a damn good job at improvising, mounting all the available 20 m.m. Morane cannons on specially made tripods - these were the chappies which shot us up when we came down with the Oubaas, & killed old Fillie.

We took Antsirabe [*] two days ago, but the Froggies are still retreating south, blowing all the bridges behind them & building innumerable roadblocks. - They are merely stalling for time as they can get nowhere - we have landed at both Port Dolphin [*] & Tulear [*]. I reckon the Frogs have been given every chance now of throwing in the sponge without dishonour or fear of being accused by Vichy & Germany of not putting up enough resistance. We have tried to fight as cleanly & bloodlessly as is humanly possible, moving troops all over the ruddy island like chessmen rather than make any direct frontal attack, but the buggers are damn headstrong - I reckon we are now justified in going over a few times & bombing daylight into anything we see to shake up their ideas & make them see things as they could be - that may make them realise that there is still a war on & the sooner we all get it over & sign on the dotted line the better for all of us - all they are doing is to prolong the agony.

[*] Antsirabe. On the map. Footnote higher up.

Port Dolphin = Fort Dauphin = Taulanaro On map. On east coast.
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort-Dauphin_\(Madagascar\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort-Dauphin_(Madagascar))

Tulear = Toliara On map. On west coast far south.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toliara>



Picture Source: The South African Air Force in Madagascar Campaign, 1942. Col. J.A. Clayton Military History Journal. Vol 9 No2 - December 1992. The South African Military History Society. <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol092jc.html>

In any case, they have lost the best chance they had of keeping us out of Tananarive - with a couple of well placed 75 m.m. guns in the mountain pass near Ankazobe they could have kept an army at bay on the road from Majunga.

After the heat of Majunga the climate up here at 4000 ft is very bracing, one could almost say cold. Everything here is a change (for the better in most cases) after the Majunga life it is rather pleasant sleeping in houses & having our meals in a pukka mess again, & as for the meals as prepared by the French trained native cook - it's 100%, even the rice bread by way of a change is delicious.

The biggest drawback is the malaria menace. Tananarive is reputed to be a hotbed of malaria. There are enough mosquitoes about for half a dozen malaria epidemics - & such whoppers, as big as blinking crayfish - the type who carry you down into the swamps net & all, & when they have sucked you dry have the decency to use the net as a shroud for your mutilated body.

The town of Tananarive is quite a pleasant place in spite of all the big shops & business houses being shut down through lack of stocks, & in spite of the Froggies, as is only natural, not quite taking us to their hand carved bosoms what with their husbands, brothers, friends & what have you fighting against us - the male Froggies in town of course don't count one way or the other, it's the mademoiselles & what have you we want to make friends with.

The town itself is a mixture of ancient & modern - not too stinkingly ancient a-la Cairo & Jerusalem, & not too splendidly modern either. It is built on one high main hill surrounded by marshes & rice fields & shabby native suburbs on minor hills.

Right on the summit of the main hill is situated the old palaces of the Malagash Kings & Queens who ruled the island before the French invaded it. There are 3 palaces, reflecting the different stages of civilization of the Malagash at the time, & the foundations of a 4th, built by the last queen at the time of the French invasion. [*]



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antananarivo#/media/File:Antananarivo_Rova-Palast.jpg

The first palace is merely a glorified native hut built of wood, chief articles of furniture being two sleeping bunks built about 10 ft off the floor. The smaller one was the kings' & the larger one was shared by his four wives. The only means of access to & exit from the latter is via the first, & the guide in very expressive French told us that the old boy used to climb up first, then the queens one by one, & each in turn would tarry on the way, & when the king had given her the "*Royal Nightcap*" she would continue the climb to the harem bed & the next in line would go up for her sundowner, & so on until all four queens had received their just deserts & the Royal Family would sleep the sleep of the just after. Next morning the usual eye opener would be served up on the way down. No wonder being in the royal family in those good old days was such a popular job.

The other palaces go up the ladder of civilization until the large showy reception halls, throne chambers, coloured glass & pomp of the Victorian age is reached.

The place of public execution is just behind the palace - all very simple, a mourning party is arranged on the brink of a sheer cliff, a final handoff for the main actor in the day's entertainment & a good time is had by all.

The palace buildings are now used as a museum.

Curly Truter, Aubrey v.d.Byl, I & sgts Gillie & Lofty Hall, who were imprisoned at Lampy [*] between here & Antsirabe managed to escape when the French were retreating & are back with us, none the worse for their experience. They are booked for Union leave however & are leaving by Lockheed Hudson tomorrow via Diego & Nairobi.

[*] Lampy = Ambatolampy I believe. It is between Antananarive & Antsirabe. Bull may be using the shortened name. The Fulmar that crashed at "Antilampy" a few paragraphs above is probably the same place. It is 58 km from Tananarive

Flippie Loock left by Hudson this afternoon for Diego. He is bound for Nairobi where he is taking over a flight of Bristol Bisleys [*] which may or may not be issued to the new 16 Sqdn which may or may not take over from us here - nobody seems to know exactly what the position is, least of all Flippie himself. [AIR p12]

[*] Bisley was a variation on the Blenheim.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Blenheim

We have all been buying lots of souvenirs in town - the good Lord alone knows how I'm going to get all my junk home. Now that the Colonel has taken possession of our Maryland & there doesn't seem to be any likelihood of a plane to the Union I reckon I may have to return by boat, probably via Tamatave, in which case my kit will not be limited.

One can get any amount & description of curios in the form of hand carved wood [*], leather work & Raffia work in the well organized market place in the centre of town, & there are a couple of decent jewellers in town where one can I can get Madagascar stones without the fear of buying glass as most of us did in Majunga.

[*] These side tables - called "*bankies*" in ZA - were got in Madagascar by Bull.





The largest.



The smallest.

Bull brought back just the carved tops. Bunny had a friend at Brimble & Briggs, shopfitters in Cape Town, who made them up into the stacking "bankies". The wood used by Brimble & Briggs is Sapele "Mahogany"
<https://www.wood-database.com/sapele/>

The rum in town is the worst we have struck so far - that at Majunga was quite good after the Diego stuff, but this stuff in Tan is sheer unadulterated snake poison, guaranteed to turn your guts up & peel the lining. When you bring the glass up to drink the stuff you get the same effect as you would standing behind one of these French cars running on cane spirit.

Cactus Friedman & Paul du Munnik are now both flight Sergeants. Cactus has twice been put up for a commission, once by Maj. Jones & once by Maj. Meaker, but so far no more has been heard in the matter.

9th Oct [1942]

At last I've managed to get my own back on one of the local crooks. I discovered that a son of the rogue in Majunga who sold me the pretty bit of glass as an Aqua Marine [sic], runs a jewellers shop here in Tananarive so I went along & threatened to hand the matter over to the military police. The matter ended in him buying his father's glass back at a profit.

The mystery of the much discussed seaplane which was reported to have flown here from France while we were at Diego, which was subsequently in turn reported to have been a land plane & then again a seaplane has at last been solved. The French tell us it was a Maryland with a crew of two & the whole rear cockpit filled up with extra petrol tanks. What's more, there are lots of photographs in their photography section to prove it. The Maryland took 3 days from France to here & two days back.

The French had ordered 200 Marylands shortly before the war started. Wikipedia gives the details.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Maryland They had taken delivery of 125 when they surrendered. Most ended up with the Vichy French but some with the Free French and the 75 undelivered aircraft were obtained by the RAF; who also ordered more. So they saw service with both sides during the war.

Yesterday morning the squadron was reshuffled, the Beaufort are all pooled together in one flight & the Marylands into another. Capt. Frank Ramsay is O.C. of "A" Flight with the Marylands & Capt. Pappa van Blerk O.C. of B Flight with Beauforts. Maj. Meaker was made Camp Commandant which actually means he goes off flying & becomes a staff officer.

But half an hour after the reshuffle the Beauforts, which were out bombing the hangar at Ihosy[*] where the remaining French Air Force are said to hang out, reported 5 planes hidden away in the bush near the drome. A rush order for two Marylands to be on the job as soon as possible, but the only two Maryland pilots on the drome at the time were Maj. Meaker & Capt. Williams, both Staff officers. Maj. Meaker was in the air in the minimum of time, but not so Capt. Williams - he pleaded to sore knee (which incidentally didn't prevent him driving a car & walking all over the drome). [AIR p15]

[*] Ihosy. It is on the map above. South of Tananarive close to a T junction
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ihosy>



Picture source <https://media01.stockfood.com/largepreviews/MjlxMTk5Mzk2NA==/71354644-Busy-street-scene-in-the-city-of-Ihosy-Bara-tribe-Ihorombe-region-highlands-of-Madagascar-Africa.jpg>

I reckon Capt. Williams has put up a very bad show all round. He is a qualified Maryland instructor - reputed to be a good pilot, but up at Diego when malaria caused a shortage of Maryland pilots & Hal Smithers & Neil Ross had to be sent out from the Union to help out he never so much as went on a sea patrol, but he was O.K. to fly a Maryland from Majunga to here when we moved, & now when he had the chance of doing at least one operation in the war he hides behind a sore knee - I reckon it's a bad show no matter what excuses he may find.

I had to run about at top speed to scrape together what instrument etc were needed on the job, & it was only after we were in the air that I realised I had not set my altimeter on the ground or inquired what height above sea level Ihosy was, so my bombing was mostly by guess & by God what with other minor details such as using the MK.9 bombsight for the first time & not having a thermometer installed for computing height & airspeeds.

At least I must say I had the sense to realise that my instruments weren't much of a help to me so I kept on dropping sighters & gradually worked my way up to the aircraft from about 500 to 700 yd undershoot with the first bomb to a near miss with my last stick of two, the blast blowing a wing of a Potez 25 to pieces.

There were four planes, 3 Potez 25's & 1 Potez 63 [*], the 5th a Morane [*] we could not locate, it had been removed in the interval between the Beauforts leaving & our arrival.

Potez 25 was a biplane; footnoted in the lighthouse adventure section above.

Potez 63 = Potez 630 according to Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potez_630



Picture source

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/65/Potez_63.11_North_Africa_January_1943_342-FH_000704.jpg

Morane. Wiki identifies which model was in Madagascar

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morane-Saulnier_M.S.406



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morane-Saulnier_M.S.406#/media/File:Morane_D-3801_J-143.jpg

When I had finished bombing Maj. Meaker came down & gunned the planes, making quite sure of another Potez 25 & starting a grass fire under it. We circled about for 55 minutes watching the fire burn merrily all around & under the plane, but I'm buggered if the plane itself would catch alight, & eventually the fire died out. Then we flew low over the planes & Cactus fired a verey light into the trees among the a/c, but we couldn't start another fire.

On our way back we had to fly around a big storm, & on landing we were told that the Fleet Air Arm which was sent off with Fulmars to shoot up the planes had turned back because of the weather. Actually I think they could quite easily have got to Ihosy but no doubt having lost two planes just recently they didn't want to take a chance.

It was only this evening that I learnt that Ihosy is 2500 ft above sea level & not 3500 as I had thought - no wonder my first bombs were so bad. However it has taught me a lesson to get all the dope when next I am given a job.

Today the weather was bad all day with the result that no planes were sent out to make sure of the rest of the planes at Ihosy.

I reckon we have missed a golden opportunity of getting the planes while we know where they are - most probably by the time we do get down there again we will find the Froggies have removed them - or those which aren't absolutely irreparable.

I had a bright idea which didn't seem to find much favour in higher circles. I reckon that we could have taken off with the long range Maryland at sparrowfart this morning, tanks all full, guns belted with incendiary ammo, & 3 or 4 tins of petrol in the back thrown out the petron [?] one at a time trying to hit the aircraft - we would have got pretty near with at least one tin, & then go for the petrol with the front guns - we would have started a nice fire & the chances are we would have got all the remaining aircraft.

When we had done this we could have flown to Tulear, & if the weather was too bad there as is very unlikely, we could have gone from there to Majunga & landed there. - However, the scheme was pooh-poohed & nothing has been done all day - mostly because the Colonel is nursing the longrange Maryland - his personal plane he says, & won't risk it in any action as it has to fly him back to the Union when this affair is over & done with.

I really enjoyed yesterday's little show coming so unexpectedly as it did when I had resigned myself to moping about camp for the rest of my days on the island.

Another Fulmar went down yesterday in enemy territory south of Antsirabe, but what caused it is not known. It may be our own ground fire at Antsirabe. A Morane came over & ground strafed the troops & then flew off, & half an hour [later] the Fulmar came along, also flying low, so the troops don't ask no questions they up & let him have it. The Fulmar pulled up & then flew on as if nothing had happened - there is a chance that he may have collected a bullet in the radiator. We hear that the crew are p.o.w., but that they managed to set fire to the machine before they were taken.

The French Air Force personnel on the drome are being taken to an improvised p.o.w. camp tomorrow. I feel very sorry for them in a way as they seem a really decent lot & have been giving us no trouble at all, on the contrary they have been helping us whenever they have been allowed to, but none the less war is war, & we have been far too lenient all along in this campaign & the Froggies are making full use of our wasted opportunities to carry on as long as they possibly can - It's not good enough having all these Frenchman practically in among our planes here on the drome.

There is a hell of a stink about the bridge between Tananarive & Antsirabe that the Air Force bombed from Majunga. The Colonel has received a letter from the General tearing him off a hell of a strip. It appears the bombing was very good, one delay bomb actually hitting in between the rails & bouncing off, & another unexploded bomb being found lying on the rails at one end of the bridge.

It appears that if the bridge had been blown it would have been impossible to repair it during the war. The General took a hell of a poor view of such a big bridge being selected as a target after he had specified that a small bridge should be bombed. It is only the height of the bridge & the grace of God which has prevented us from falling into eternal disfavour. [*]

[*] This is puzzling. The entry for Wed 23 Sept covers the attempt to bomb a small bridge. It also shows the big bridge; which they were afraid the French would have blown up. There is no account of trying to bomb a big bridge - one of the other 2 Wings?

Bull writes: *"This little bridge was a hell of a difficult target as it was only 35 yds long & very high so that nothing short of a direct hit would do any damage."*

Squadron 16 War Diary (AIR 27-226-2.1 p40) has entry for 20 September saying a small bridge South of Tantanarive [sic] should be bombed. Van Heerden missed the bridge so 3 Beauforts went to bomb the bridge but they too missed it.

Then on 21 Sept Albacores had a go but also missed. But it goes on to state *"Photos later showed that several bombs had fallen near the bridge but owing to the depth of the ravine & the strength of the concrete construction of the bridge they had had no effect on it."* That seems to fit with the bridge illustrated earlier - certainly not a small bridge.

But see lower down.

The jigger fleas [*] have got going on us, some of the fellows collecting as much as 5 at a time - I've had two in my toes. Malaria has also started again. Paul de Munnick is down & one or two others have had relapses. With all these skeeters around we can expect much more of it.

[*] jigger fleas = https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tunga_penetrans

10th Oct [1942]

Piet Truter was sent to Diego today with the load of Brigadiers & Colonels, & has to bring another similar load back - we seem to be running a special ferry service for brass hats on sightseeing trips - I've never seen so many Brigadiers & Generals in my life before as on this job - most probably this accounts for all the disorganisation & changes of policy & plans. Whenever a comm. plane lands on a drome of ours a brace of brigadiers with their a.d.c.s & batman & pet dogs & tons & tons of luggage tumbles out of the plane - we have all but given up all hope of ever getting a stray bag or two of mail - the big noises all have priority - it's one hell of a time since we last had post - before we left Diego. We are told that there is a bit of a stink in the Union about it & that an official of the A.P.O. has been sent out to investigate the position - not that that means anything, it only means one more brass hat who has priority to mail.

This morning a Maryland was sent to Ihosy, van Heerden with Mac McIntyre as obs. They found only the two planes there, the one which my bomb had got & the other which Maj. Meaker had got with his front guns. The others had been taken away as we half expected. I can't help but feel that for finger trouble in higher circles we would have got the lot. Maj. Meaker is quite rightly claiming the two planes.

Van got shot up over the drome, one bullet passing underneath Mac & Van, going through the bombbay & lodging in a spar behind the wireless operator's back.

We have been doing the odd spot of work the last week or so, but not anything like what we could do if we were given the chance. The brass hats in charge of the show have not made anything like sufficient use of the planes at their disposal. It's high time we were sent out regularly on bombing raids against the French troops & were given more shows on bridges etc. beyond the Froggies to stop their retreat, or at least hold it up a bit so that we can put a stop to all this silly playing for time - time for what? It's also about high time a decent recce was made of the country well to the south of the Frogs around Tulear & Fort Dauphin & those places - with the Colonel's long range plane for preference.

The Frogs on the drome were taken to chookie today. A skeleton staff was supposed to stay behind to work the pumps for the water supply & work the power station etc, but at the last minute they went along too on their O.C.'s instructions - there was a bit of nastiness about their refusing to stay on & work, but I can't exactly say I blame them.

The R.A.F. gunner who was wounded two days ago died today - he was shot through the back - kidneys & bullet lodged in spine.

Zeeshan radio tonight claims to have sunk 12 ships just outside Cape Town harbour. There must be a bit of truth in it even if the No was only two - that was shake the people in the Union a bit - I reckon it's a good show on the Jerry's part. It may drive some of those gunshy base wallahs out of the Union & give a few of us a chance of getting back - we've been here a bloody long 6 weeks now.

15th Oct [1942]

After all these months of comparative idleness & boredom the Air Force is it last being made use of at this late stage. Since our show on the planes in the bush at Ihosy there have been two raids on the hanger on the drome, evidently the idea is that when the Froggies took the planes out of the bush they would have put them in the hanger. Personally I don't agree - the Frenchies wouldn't be such fools as to store their few remaining planes in a hangar which was being bombed off & on day after day - they would tow them along the road & hide them miles away, even if they couldn't use them against us.

The hanger has been having the luck of a poxdoctor, bombs all around it, but not a single hit - the mess about 100 yds from the hanger got a direct hit a couple of days ago, but eventually Mack planted a 250 lb bomb right in the hanger & the raids on Ihosy came to an end.

Then yesterday & today there were two raids on enemy fortifications & gun positions at Ambositra. [*] [AIR p18] If we carry on at this rate we stand a chance of getting home by Xmas.

[*] Ambositra https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambositra On the main road south of Tananarive. Shown on map above.
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We have had a regular influx of generals here lately. Day before yesterday general Platt left by the Hudson, & a guard of honour was turned out in his honour. I was orderly officer for the day & almost got roped in as officer of the guard, but managed to wangle my way out of it & Gaatjie Snyman was caught for the job - he made a signal success of the parade. General Platt proved to be a rather likable old bloke & very informal.

The joke was on me when the Colonel sent me a message telling me to be at the administration block in my capacity as orderly dog for the general's embarkation "*dressed otherwise than his usual scruffy self*" - people couldn't believe their eyes when I rolled up all toggged up in glamour pants

Yesterday General Sturgess came to lunch with us - a hell of a long drawn out affair lasting till 3 p.m. General Sturgess has a soft spot for the Squadron ever since the night of the concert in the hanger & the party which followed on it after which he had to be helped into his car.

With the reorganization of the Sqdn Cheeseman & myself find ourselves in A Flight as spare observers without pilots or planes & not much chance of getting into crews, & in spite of after C.P. Marais having the longest active service in the sqdn we stand a very good chance of when & if eventually the sqdn does return home we may follow on by boat. [AIR p15] So this morning we approached the Colonel through Maj. Meaker with a request to be sent back for the pilot course via Tamatave to catch a boat leaving for Durban in a few days time instead of hanging around here doing nothing. But our luck was out, the Colonel told Maj. Meaker he wouldn't even consider our request or see us in person, but he gave us his assurance that when the time came for the sqdn to return home or break up he would see that our case was considered - so that's that.

Hal Smithers is more or less leaving the sqdn too shortly, there is a crystal mine south of Antisaba which is at the moment in enemy hands, & as soon as our advances has got that far Hal is going to do a bit of mining for the Union Govt. The crystals are for use in wireless sets & binoculars etc.

Yesterday aft. I went to have a look at the much bombed bridge on the way to Antsirabe - No wonder with all those bombs planted under & around it she wouldn't play. Any near misses were wasted in the ravine 100 ft below - one hit the rock & exploded right under the bridge & did no more than blow big chips out of the concrete. [*]

[*] This may be the bridge in question - or a later replacement.



Picture source

https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipM48vsFYZ9i_wlI34Blju19zprQFerOJ8vIoN6w=s1360-w1360-h1020

Another F.A.A. plane has been shot up , the observer being wounded in the leg.

Now that the French have vacated the drome we have moved into the empty houses - a big improvement, now we can have hot baths when we want. As far as living conditions go I haven't had anything better in any camp in the Union.

22nd Oct [1942]

The war still goes on, Ambositra was taken about a week ago, but the Frogs have been putting up a stiff resistance along the guerrilla warfare lines - Day before yesterday there was quite a big battle south of Ambositra, we outflanked them & took a few hundred prisoners, but they don't seem to

consider giving in yet. A Morane has been putting in an appearance again subsequent to the bombing on Ihosy, which goes to prove that they weren't in the hanger.

Naffy's opened in town two days ago & we have now got our own little pub going & can wet our whistles on civilized drinks again - Rum in all its many forms & disguises is the thing of the past, but it did not leave the stage without its swan song - there was lots of fun the last week or so as a result of the said rum.

Gaatjie Snyman was due for a birthday, & as Halfpint was going to Diego he was given many francs with which to purchase booze for the birthday. I took Halfpint's turn at Duty Pilot, & just as well for me, as that night the boys went to town & painted the place red & many other colours. In the middle of the night the phone rang, I hopped out of bed & was given the following days Met report. It was only when the winds got stronger & stronger the higher it went that I caught onto it - Bob Lee was pulling my leg from town.

It was payday so everyone had lots of money, half of which they spent on souvenirs which they piled in the car, & the other half they promptly commenced to liquidate.

Dick & Bob got pretty arseholes & had some hectic dirt track racing in the entrance hall of the Hotel Commerce. Dick was put in a perambulator which was handy & Bob was behind pushing doing half rolls & stall turns & generally taking the corners on two wheels. Dick in the meantime reckoned they should change round & he be the driver, & the two of them were arguing at the tops of their voices using very naughty language as the Froggies present of course would not be able to understand English, let alone the army version.

An old lady who had been an interested spectator of all this eventually went up to one of the corporals who was standing by & said to him in perfect English "*Will you promise me to look after these two officers & see they get safely back to camp & into bed tonight?*" This steadied Dick & Bob up & they made a quick getaway.

When the pub closed the barman wouldn't serve any more drinks - said it was too dangerous as the General was in the hotel, but no trouble to Bob & Dick, they point out Colonel Melville & tell the barman that he & the general are half brothers & as the Colonel was their O.C. everything would be O.K. - the drinks were served.

When it came to leaving town the car wouldn't start, so Cheesy pinches Maj. Meaker's car for pushing purposes - in no time both cars are bugged & neither will start. After a lot of fuss & pulling to pieces & putting together again they get the car going (but not the major's) & set out for camp, but on the outskirts of town they have a puncture. Its pretty late, so they leave the car & walk to the nearest hotel & go to bed. Next morning when they get back to the car they find all the souvenirs which they had left in the car, gone. It takes them half a day to fix the car, in the meantime they are missed & looked for here at the drome. When they get back they are sentenced to a weeks continual attendance at morning parades.

Cheesman had tried his level best all evening to get the party back by car, any car - he had decided on half a dozen during the evening, but couldn't start them. Gaatjie Snyman reckons at one stage Cheesy led them into a backyard, telling them he had located a damn good little Citroen. Cheesy hopped into the driver's seat but could not get it to start. On closer investigation they discovered it to be an old wreck mounted on packing cases with all its wheels taken off - Cheesy is a great man for organising cars!

Dick Barfield managed to get a lift out with the Colonel that night, & maintains he was "*quite sober*"! when he undressed, but passed out when he tumbled into bed - the rum punch had its way. When he woke up next morning he discovered he was wallowing in gallons & gallons of his own puke. He had his batman, a local Malagash native wash all his blankets that day, but ever since then he had no hold

over the boy, every time Dick spoke to him the native would glance from him to the bed with a sheepish inane grin on his dial & snigger, so a few days later Dick in self defence, not to be reminded of his disgrace, a sore point with him as we had all pulled his leg unmercifully, had to sack the batman & hire a new one who commenced operations the morning following the opening of our pub.

Dick had gone to bed very much the worse for wear that night too, & Cheesy & Gaatjie had carried his bed out onto the stoep & parked it half way down the steps head first - That is the position Dick's new batman found him in the next morning, & Dick has had no end of trouble every evening since then preventing the wog carrying his bed out & parking it down the steps.

All in all I reckon the S.A.A.F. & the local rum have played up merry hell with each other with the rum getting slightly the better of the argument, but towards the end Cheeseman discovered the secret of drinking rum, his technique is to hold your breath while you swallow it, & when it is down to blow out all your breath (that is, what the rum has left you to blow out). In that way you have to put up with only the taste of the stuff & do away with the worst of the smells & fumes.

It shook us one evening in town when we poured some rum onto the counter & put a match to it - the bloody stuff burnt merrily away with a huge blue flame like methylated spirits, & we had our hands full putting it out before the counter caught fire.

Halfpint got back from Diego (he had flown up in a Maryland with Bill Williams who is never "*fit*" enough to go on an operation) the day before Gaatjie's birthday, but it was unanimously decided not to wait for the morrow so we got stuck in & polished off all the whisky, brandy, gin & beer seeing the old year out & to hell with the new - when Gaatjie's birthday broke, dry as tinder, all the booze had had it & half of us forgot to wish him the compliments of the sad day.

The Butch discovered any amount of neat alcohol in his hospital, & when the rum began telling on some of us some time back he came out with a special line of his own which proved very popular. With the addition of plenty of water & chunks of fresh pineapple & a bit of imagination & the knowledge that there was nothing better to be had it went down very well indeed.

A few days ago the Mail mystery was solved. Lately we have consistently heard rumours of mail being on its way, but the weeks have sped by without so much as a letter. Maj. Clayton met an A.P.O. official in town who wants a lift to Diego by plane. He said that the Dunbar Castle with 600 bags of South African mail on board had put in at Tamatave via Diego about a week ago, but before she could unload she was called back to Diego. Maj. Clayton told him he could get a lift to Diego the very moment he could produce proof that the mail was available at Diego. A plane would be sent up immediately to fetch our share of it - or two or three planes if necessary, - a week has gone by & nothing further has been heard. [AIR p20]

Day before yesterday the Hudson arrived from Nairobi & brought orders for Maj. Clayton to fly to Nairobi with it to take over the other 16 Sqdn the one which is supposed to relieve us. Maj. Clayton left with the Hudson yesterday. This can only be a good omen & means that the day of our relief is drawing nearer. Maj. Meaker is now our O.C.

Since Maj. Clayton has left there is a Beaufort without a pilot, & as we have a spare pilot in A Flight we have been pulling van Heerden's leg no end the last two days about his going over to B Flight & being converted on Beauforts. Van is very worried indeed as he naturally does not relish the idea of flying Beauforts after being on Marylands all this time. Poor old Van, we have just about convinced him, & he is a very worried man.

Popular opinion in the Squadron as to what to do with the spare Beaufort is that it be presented to the French to be put in a museum in town - that's where it would be most at home & everybody would be happy.

Two Marylands went out on a road recce this morning & took Ihosy in their stride & gave it another pasting. Cheesy put a bomb in the building alongside & Gaatjie put one in the hanger.

The rainy season seems to be on the point of starting - we have now had two afternoons of quite heavy rain. From what I have heard of the rainy season here I hope to be back in in Union when it starts in earnest.

Fillie's grave in Majunga has now been made up - very nicely done in a rather novel way - a prop boss for a headstone with one blade lying down lengthways towards the foot of the grave.

Monday 3 Nov [1942]

The last 10 days have been of the most enjoyable the Sqdn has spent since it has been on the island. [*] Just the last few days have been very quiet as far as the war goes, but about a week ago we had quite a lot of action bombing fortified positions at Alakamisy just north of the railway terminus Fianarantsoa. [AIR p18] We pasted them good & solid & in fact bombed them out of it. On the last raid I was flying with van Heerden, & had quite an interesting job - after we had finished bombing the fortifications we dropped pamphlets on the troops telling them not to be damn silly, but to stop this senseless resistance & give up. We also dropped leaflets on Fianarantsoa & Ihosy. The bombing had the desired effect as the enemy vacated the very strong positions, but I don't think the pamphlets were of any use unless some of the badly shaken Malagasche found them very handy as bumf just after the bombing. [AIR p19; Bull named]

[*] First entry for Madagascar is 16 May 1942. So this is 5 1/2 months later.

It's difficult to understand or anticipate the Froggies - not only are they blocking the road in front of our advance, but they have also blocked it good & solid in their own rear - what the idea is I don't know, probably they have no more fuel for the transport so they don't need the roads.

We have just had a most enjoyable weekend. On Saturday night we held the dance in the Hotel Commerce, only a small affair for ourselves & the R.A.F. It went off remarkably well & a good time was had by all - after the 5th whisky the language question was no hardship at all. Yesterday (Sunday) I spent the day with a family in town, & had a bonzo time, meeting quite a few of the English speaking community, mostly Swiss. [AIR p20]

There was a minor accident here yesterday, 3 Malagash coons were playing around with a hand grenade which duly went off - they won't fart in church again in a hurry!

Our post is still playing a game of silly buggers round & round the island, - a few days ago we got a signal from Diego to say our post was there. As we were very busy bombing at the time we couldn't spare a plane to send for it, but on Saturday a Beaufort went up for it. When it got there the post had been sent back to Tamatave by boat - where the hell it is now we don't know, nor do we know if & when the hell we ever will get it.

Cactus & Phil Lageson were called up to our mess by the Colonel a few days ago, & when they got here the Colonel gave them a good toasting about their alleged bad behaviour. He told them they were not worth their Sgt's stripes & he was demoting them to the ranks - their stripes were duly ripped off, then came the great moment, he produced pips & put them on the shoulders of the by now badly shaken men, & then for the first time he smiled & told them they were commissioned. Lageson was darn lucky to get his commission so soon, but Cactus really deserved it & I'm damn glad for his sake.

There has been a bit of movement up in the desert again - we have started a push, but whether it is the beginning of the annual big winter push or merely a minor flash in the pan we don't know.

We should be leaving the island pretty soon now as our planes are beginning to give in - they are all just about due for complete engine changes. One thing which points to our return is that the Col. went to interview the General, & now all our planes are going into the hangar for complete overalls. Our new Squadron Crest is being painted on them too - rather an ingenious one. We have taken the French Madagascar Air Force Crest, - a charging Malagasche bull with a huge pair of rampant swingers, & put a cowboy on his back.

The festivities over the weekend have played up hell with our finances - Cheesy is just about on the bones of his arse, today is only the 3rd of the month, & after turning out all his pockets all he could produce was one 3d bit, two East African 5 cent pieces, one Madagascar franc, & one hangover.

Evening :- I have got the story of the three wogs all arseways. They were playing about with some 20 m.m. explosive shells when one came unstuck. One of the coons has had it, he kicked the bucket in hospital today, the other two are pretty well messed about & look bloody silly. [*]

[*] The shell that brought down Bull's Maryland was probably also a 20mm explosive shell. See entry for 5 Oct.
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There is a heavy thunderstorm on again, these storms are the order of the day lately, they come up about 4 p.m. & clear up during the night.

Newest hobby now is fiddling about in the very well fitted out workshop here. At the moment I am busy on the lathes, hollowing out my native handcarved vases. Last week it was photography, a gang of us spent about 16 hours a day in the photography doing our own private stuff & printing some of the French negatives we fancy. Time hasn't been hanging heavily over our hands at all

6th of Nov. [1942]

The post eventually caught up with us - 2 1/2 months old, but post none the less. [AIR p21]

The French have at last made peace, so as from today the war in Madagascar is at an end. [AIR p21]

Two Marylands left for the Union via Nairobi yesterday, the Colonel, Capt. Williams, who has spent 7 months here without doing one single operation, Frank Ramsey & Dave Marsh. The Col. will find out particulars at Nairobi & signal Maj. Meaker who is now in charge, & when the word comes we will fly home via Tulear & then nonstop to Pretoria or Durban. [AIR p21]

The F.A.A. are also on their way back to East Africa as soon as they can get away, & the R.A.F., who have got a number of new Lysander's from Tamatave will be left here to carry on with what there may be to do until the new 16 Sqdn arrives. [AIR p22]

We have played a couple of very nice games of rugby here, against the K.A.R.s. The Colonel put a stop to flying personnel playing, but now that he has left Maj. Meaker has given Halfpint, Cheesy & myself permission to play in tomorrow's match against the Frenchman.

Things are going very nicely in the desert - we are knocking spots out of the Jerries - destroyed about 600 aircraft, taken many thousands of prisoners & over 200 tanks, & are now fighting at Fuka according to the news. I suppose all will go swimmingly until we reach Hellfire where the Jerries will most likely dig in their toes for a little while at least.

Friday 13th Nov. [1942]

Time is getting few now, we are moving off in about 4 days time, the three Marylands flying home via Tulear, & the Beauforts up to Nairobi where they will be left. There are only 4 Beauforts left now, one more has had it, burst an oil pipe on test flight this morning & engine seized up.

Latest joke is against Gaatjie, a few nights ago he came to bed assholes again. He couldn't ride the bed, & after falling off it 5 times he calmly threw all the clothes out of his big suitcase & proceeded to curl himself up & it - knew nothing about it next morning.

Things are going with a hell of a bang in the desert, we are in Tobruk already, & the Yanks are advancing from the West - it looks as if Rommel has had it this time.

The F.A.A. left a few days ago with a sum total of 5 Albatrosses & 2 Fulmars - all they have left.

17th Nov. [1942]

We are all packed up, the 3 Marylands leaving early in the morning home via Lindi - we were forbidden to return via Tulear. The Beauforts left after lunch today.

Had a very enjoyable weekend, went out to the farm - the only decent one I've seen on the island.

I have to put up with a lot of legpulling as the magazines with my article have rolled up here, together with my fanmail address to Bull v.d.Merwe.

In spite of the rather pleasant times we have had here in Tananarive lately we are all damn pleased at getting away at last. I only hope the Marylands make the take off as we have loaded a shithouse full of kit & loot & souvenirs into them, in the bombbay, the undercard bays & wing gun bays.

Johannesburg 20 Nov. [1942]

Back in the Union safe & sound - Pretoria from the air I think it's about the prettiest & most welcome sight I've seen for months.

The most pleasant surprise however was when we discovered that we were all given 49 days leave.

Will be on my way to Gawds Country in about two days time.