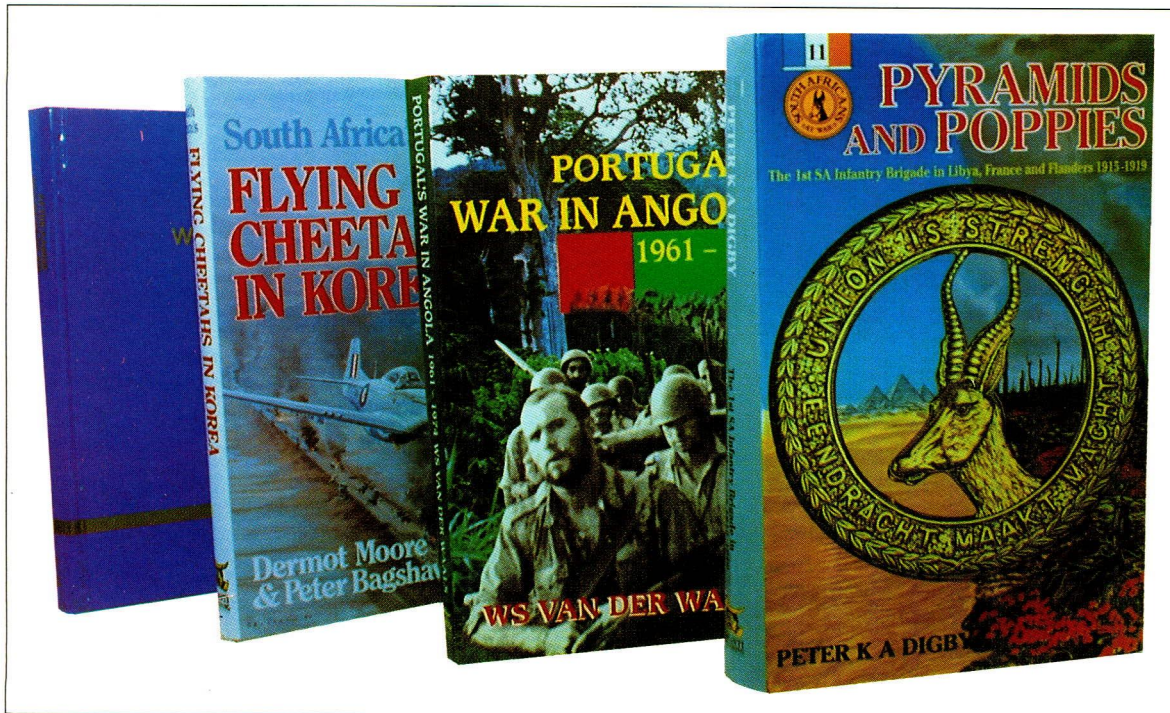


BOOK REVIEWS / BOEKBESPREKINGS



SOUTH AFRICA'S FLYING CHEETAHS IN KOREA

Dermot Moore and Peter Bagshaw

1991

Ashanti Publishing (Pty) Ltd, Johannesburg

illustrated

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On 25 June 1950, the army of North Korea crossed the thirty-eighth parallel to attack their southern neighbours. Western Powers responded quickly and despatched a multinational task force, under a United Nations banner, to the conflict area. The United Nations Forces (UNF) included a South African contingent of one fighter bomber squadron (No 2 Squadron SAAF), a liaison headquarters and ten army officers attached to 1st Commonwealth Division. By October, the North Koreans were routed. However, the intervention of Communist China resulted in a prolonged war which eventually ended in a stalemate at Panmunjom on 27 July 1953.

The writing of the history of the Korean campaign was initiated soon after the signing of the peace at Panmunjom.

Brigadier C.N.Barclay's history of the 1st Commonwealth Division was published as early as 1954. Many other volumes of a general and a monographic nature were to follow. These culminated in the publication of a six-volume history entitled *The History of the United Nations Forces in the Korean War*, published by the Ministry of National Defence, Republic of Korea, between 1971 and 1977.

However, in contrast to the numerous official and unofficial accounts produced by the other countries who sent forces to the aid of the South Koreans, very little literature has been generated by local and foreign historians, whether amateur or professional, on the role played by the Union Defence Force. Until 1982, the few works were mostly superficial and essentially of a commemorative nature. The writers had little regard for the historical method and heuristic procedure, and few, if any, consulted the primary material in the custody of Directorate Documentation Service (until 1990 SADF Archives). Dependence upon secondary sources inevitably led to superficiality, misinterpretation and perhaps even a certain amount of fabrication.

This meant that the official history produced by the Korean government contained the best work produced on No 2 Squadron until 1982, when Dr D.M. Moore rendered his monumental work entitled "The Role of the South African Air Force in the Korean War, 1950-1953" (D Litt et Phil thesis, Unisa).

However, Dr Moore's thesis and his *Militaria* (10/4 1980) article which preceded it, although vastly expanding our knowledge on 2 Squadron, did not address all of the shortcomings which were characteristic of the older published material. One expects from a thesis bearing the all-encompassing title "The Role of the South African Air Force . . .", more than simply an operational history. The hiatus regarding the SAAF Liaison Headquarters in Tokyo, and more particularly, the Army element, most of whom were (ironically) carried on the strength of 2 Squadron, remained unaddressed. This might possibly be attributable to the fact that the writer concentrated on the operational records generated by the squadron in Korea and as a result, much important material in related archival groups, which, *inter alia*, elucidate the role of the army members of the squadron, went unappreciated.

In 1991, the book now under review, made its appearance. However, this publication, *South Africa's Flying Cheetahs in Korea*, renders very little which is new. Seventeen of the eighteen chapters are a precis of Moore's thesis; with the disadvantage of having all the references and academic trappings removed. Thus, this book not only does not allow the reader to trace the sources; but has also inherited all of the hiatuses of the original thesis.

The Korean war documents in the custody of Directorate Documentation Service may be placed in four main geographical groups, which reflect the channels of Commonwealth liaison and military command at the time - from South Africa House in London to the Ministry of Defence and Defence Headquarters in Pretoria, and then via the office of the Senior Air Liaison Officer in Tokyo to No 2 Squadron in Korea. Unfortunately, Dr Moore concentrated on the documents generated by

the squadron in Korea, and thus his work contains only minor references to the records originally generated in Japan and South Africa. However, it is the sources containing the liaison correspondence with the British government generated in London and the high-level policy decisions made in Pretoria, which are the most neglected.

In terms of section 9 of the *Archives Act* (No 6 of 1962), a number of these archives groups were not accessible in the 1970s and early 1980s. However, Dr Moore restricted his research among the open documents at this level to the archives of the Adjutant General (ref. AG) and the Director-General Air Force (ref. DGAF). Cardinal material in the archives of the Military Advisor to the High Commissioner for the Union of South Africa (ref. MA) and the Secretary for Defence (ref. DC), in particular, was left untouched. With *South Africa's Flying Cheetahs in Korea*, it is truly a pity that the writers did not make use of the opportunity to consult material which was either not consulted or inaccessible when the thesis was written.

The only "new" material (chapter eighteen) is a collection of memoirs written by various members of the squadron. The decision to place these as a collection at the end of the book is also debatable. They might better have been integrated into the main body of the text.

In the discussion of their "Sources of Information" (page xviii), the writers state that "the five main collections" in which the Korean documents at Directorate Documentation Service are found, are unsorted. This may have been the case when Dr Moore conducted his research. However, today the five collections mentioned are arranged and catalogued, and two of the five are available on a computer retrieval system.

For the rest, *South Africa's Flying Cheetahs in Korea* is a sympathetic account of the operational role of the squadron in Korea. It is well-mapped and is tastefully illustrated, and very readable. Despite its shortcomings, it probably ranks as one of the better books of the South Africans at War series, be-

ing based by and large upon a doctoral thesis into which much archival research went. *South Africa's Flying Cheetahs* is recommended to those potential readers who do not have ready access to the original thesis.

Major I.J. van der Waag, Documentation Service, Private Bag X289, Pretoria 0001.

PYRAMIDS AND POPPIES

The 1st SA Infantry Brigade in Libya, France and Flanders 1915-1919

Peter K.A. Digby

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Pyramids and Poppies by Peter Digby is a book entirely devoted to the fortunes, and misfortunes, of the 1st South African Brigade during World War One. The Brigade was the first South African force ever to experience combat in Europe or North Africa. As this grants the contingent a distinctive standing in local military history, *Pyramids and Poppies* is a book which will be of interest, not only to World War One enthusiasts, but to most of warfare's other ardent fans as well.

Pyramids and Poppies commences with the formation of the 1st SA Brigade at Potchefstroom in 1915 and details the training and equipping of the Brigade in South Africa. The book then follows the Brigade through its early adventures in England and North Africa during 1915/1916. The Brigade was dispatched to Africa in order to lend assistance in the Sanussi campaign, which proved to be the ideal opportunity for the men to hone their combat skills. Suffering very few casualties, it was a time of excitement and new experiences for the Brigade's young soldiers. In addition, there were visits to Egypt's spectacular ancient monuments and the seedy delights of Cairo and Alexandria, to provide welcome breaks from army life.

However, by April 1916 the 1st SA Brigade was once more on its way to Eu-

rope. On arrival in France the South Africans at once departed for the Western Front. Here they fought and died in the great battles of Delville Wood, Marrières Wood, Warlencourt and Fampoux, to name but a few. The writer relates this time of tragedy, describing the constant stream of new faces as fresh drafts arrived to replace the dead and wounded. An effective picture of the hopelessness often felt is successfully conveyed. This is rather important as no other South African Brigade has ever suffered such high casualties. Thousands of young South Africans were lost in the mud of France and Flanders. More often due to the absolutely shocking and reckless tactics of the British generals rather than the superiority of the enemy. The writer weaves through this tale of misery and manages to prevent the sheer mass of facts and the tediousness of the war's cycle of trenches and death in detracting from the book's appeal.

Naturally *Pyramids and Poppies* is not without some flaws. In places the factual content is questionable. One inaccuracy appears on the front cover, which unfortunately means that it is very noticeable. The offending word is "Libya", where the term "Cyrenaica" would have been more appropriate, since at the time of the First World War, Libya did not exist. Secondly the inclusion of the flattering correspondence between the writer and Dr Farquharson (who wrote the book's foreword) was unnecessary. The same can be said of the writer's references to King Edward VII school. As it is stated on the book's dust cover that the author is a product of the above establishment the whole effect was rather transparent and would have been better left well alone. Source referencing could have received a little more attention. This is particularly true with regard to archival material. The referencing of primary sources refers to whole archive groups which is too generalised. It should also be pointed out that more use could have been made of these sources.

One area in which the writer has a definite weakness is that he favours the kilted regiment of the 1st SA Brigade, namely 4 SAI, over the formation's other three infantry units. This is per-