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**THE SOUTH AFRICAN NAVY AND ITS PREDECESSORS, 1910-2009:
A CENTURY OF INTERACTION WITH COMMONWEALTH NAVIES**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Compared with major Commonwealth navies like the Royal Navy (RN) and the navies of Australia, Canada, India and Pakistan, the South African Navy (SAN) is very small. Yet its history dates back to at least 1922; and even before that, South Africans served in the RN in World War I. Proceeding from the assumption that the SAN and its predecessors played a vital role in safeguarding the strategic Cape sea-route in the interest of the Commonwealth, as well as of the Western World, the aim of this paper is to provide a brief review of the chequered history of the SAN and its predecessors, with the emphasis on interaction with Commonwealth navies. Questions that will be addressed include the following: Why did South Africa only receive its first naval force in 1922, i.e. twelve years after the establishment of the Union of South Africa? What role did South Africa’s naval forces play during World War II? To what extent was contact with Commonwealth navies limited to the RN, and why? What were the implications of the so-called “war years” (1966-1989) for the

¹ The presentation of this paper at the 2009 “King-Hall” Naval History Conference was made possible by the fact that I was appointed as a Visiting Fellow in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS), University College, University of New South Wales at the Australian Defence Force Academy (UNSW@ADFA), Canberra, and my trip to Australia and back to South Africa, as well as my stay in Canberra, was consequently sponsored by the UNSW@ADFA. The kind assistance so generously provided, is gratefully acknowledged.

SAN? How have the political changes brought about by the advent of the so-called “new South Africa” in 1994, affected the SAN, and in particular its relations with other Commonwealth countries? Where possible, parallels will be drawn between developments in the SAN and developments that took place in the navies of other Commonwealth countries.

2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NAVAL FORCES FOR SOUTH AFRICA, AND THEIR ROLE UNTIL 1945

After the Dutch East India Company had established a refreshment station in 1652 in the region that in due course became Cape Town in South Africa, the area remained under Dutch control until the British occupied the Cape Colony in 1795. With the exception of the years 1803 to 1806 (when the Cape was under Dutch Batavian rule), Britain controlled the strategically important Cape sea-route until the Union of South Africa (comprising the four British colonies, namely the Cape Colony and Orange River Colony, as well as the Transvaal and Natal) was established on 31 May 1910.² There was no need for the coastal regions (i.e. the Cape and Natal) to form their own naval forces, as the RN defended the Cape sea-route and adjacent areas, from their naval base in Simon’s Town, and this continued to be the case even after Unification in 1910, when the RN retained this strategic base. However, there was a South African Division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR(SA)). The RNVR was established in the United Kingdom in 1903, and the RNVR(SA), which came into being on 1 July 1913, was formed by amalgamating the Natal Naval Volunteers (founded in 1885) and the Cape Naval Volunteers (founded in 1905).³ This followed after the establishment of the Union Defence Forces (UDF) on 1 July 1912 (by virtue of the South African Defence Act; Act No 13 of 1912, proclaimed on 14 June 1912), which made provision for the establishment of a permanent force, a coast garrison force, a citizen force and a Royal Naval Reserve,⁴ but for the time being there was no navy. (An air force would follow in 1920.) However, there was some naval interaction between South Africa and other British or former British territories; for example, in 1913 two new Australian warships, the battle-cruiser HMAS *Australia* and the light cruiser HMAS *Sydney*, sailed from where they had been built

² For a review of the history of the region now known as South Africa, from the earliest times to 1910, see for example T.R.A. Davenport and C. Saunders, *South Africa: a modern history* (5th edition, London, 2000), pp. 3-264; E.A. Walker (ed.), *The Cambridge history of the British Empire 8: South Africa, Rhodesia and the High Commission Territories* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 1-660; H. Giliomee and B. Mbenga (eds), *New history of South Africa* (Cape Town, 2007), pp. 3-232; F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: an introduction to the history of the Republic of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1975), pp. 1-231.

³ A. du Toit, *South Africa’s fighting ships past and present* (Rivonia, 1992), pp. xviii, xx.

⁴ *Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1912* (Cape Town, 1912), pp. 190-290.

in Britain via South Africa to Australia, visiting Cape Town and Simon's Town (26-29 August 1913); and the *Australia* also visited Durban (31 August - 6 September).⁵

During World War I (1914-1918), members of the RNVR(SA) served in the South West African campaign (when UDF forces conquered German South West Africa, today Namibia). They also manned ships that patrolled South Africa's coasts against German surface raiders and helped to clear up the mines laid by the surface raider *Wolf*. A total of 164 members (five officers and 159 ratings) of the RNVR(SA) served in the RN in the course of the conflict, seeing action in many theatres of operation, including the Dardanelles campaign, and in that sense co-operated with other members of the British Empire. There were also South Africans who made a career of serving in the RN and Royal Naval Air Service, including Capt. (later Vice-Adm.) V.B. Molteno, who was the commanding officer of the armoured cruiser HMS *Warrior* during the battle of Jutland. The RN's strategic Simon's Town Naval Base was, of course, of great importance to the Allies during the war. A total of 412 South Africans, including 24 officers, served in the RNVR(SA) during the war. Of these, one officer and eight ratings died; and the RN acknowledged South Africa's role in the RN's/Allied war effort by giving some of their ships South African names: the destroyer-leader *Botha* (1915), destroyer *Springbok* (1917), light cruiser *Durban* (1921) and light cruiser *Capetown* (1922).⁶

After the war, Prime Minister Gen. Louis Botha was determined that South Africa should establish its own full-time navy. He died on 27 August 1919 and was succeeded by Gen. Jan Smuts, who, at the 1921 Imperial Conference in London, agreed with the British government that South Africa should indeed acquire its own navy. On 1 April 1922, South Africa's first-ever naval force came into being with the establishment of the South African Naval Service (SANS), which had at its disposal a small hydrographic survey ship, HMSAS *Protea* (an ex-RN minesweeper), and two minesweeping trawlers (also ex-RN ships). However, the Great Depression (1929-1933) and other factors led to the virtual demise of the SANS – the *Protea* was withdrawn from service in 1933, and both trawlers were withdrawn during the next year.⁷ Compare this state of affairs with the situation that prevailed in, for example, Australia – a country which, in 1922 already, had a relatively large navy (established on 1 March 1901 as the Commonwealth Naval Forces), with three light cruisers,

⁵ B. Rice, *The Royal Navy in South Africa 1900-2000* (Liskeard, 2001), pp. 3, 29; *The Natal Advertiser*, 1.9.1913, p. 3 and 6.9.1913, p. 3. The RN's battle-cruiser HMS *New Zealand* visited Simon's Town (March) and Durban in 1913. Rice, p. 30; T. Pearson, "*African keyport*": *story of the port of Durban* (Rossburgh, 1995), p. 187.

⁶ Du Toit, pp. xxii-xxvii; J.J. Colledge, *Ships of the Royal Navy* (London, 1987), pp. 59, 72, 116, 326; S. Hay, *History of the RNVR South African Division* (Cape Town, 1920), p. 193; information supplied by Cdr W.M. Bisset, 23.2.2009.

⁷ Du Toit, pp. 3-16.

12 destroyers, three sloops, one submarine, one torpedo boat, three depot ships and two other auxiliaries.⁸ In the case of New Zealand, the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy was established in 1921, and had two light cruisers in 1922.⁹ In the meantime, the British Commonwealth developed from the Imperial Conferences, with Britain and its dominions acquiring equal status in the British Commonwealth of Nations in 1926 – a relationship that was formalized by the Statute of Westminster (1931).

By the time World War II broke out on 1 September 1939, the SANS of South Africa amounted to little more than a nominal naval organization, with only three officers and three ratings¹⁰ and, obviously, no warships. In comparison, when the war broke out, the personnel of the Royal Australian Navy numbered 5 440, with six cruisers, five destroyers, three sloops, one depot ship and one other auxiliary,¹¹ while the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy had about 1 340 personnel (of whom some 46% were RN), two cruisers and a minesweeper.¹² In the white Afrikaans-speaking community, there were strong sentiments against the prospect of South Africa entering the war on the side of Britain – in fact, there was even some support for Nazi-Germany; but on 4 September 1939, the whites-only parliament decided (with 80 votes to 67) to participate. Two days later, war was declared against Germany.¹³

Almost from the start of hostilities, German surface raiders, submarines and mines threatened the Cape sea-route, as did Italian and Japanese submarines in due course; and a total of 155 merchant ships (of 885 818 gross tons) were sunk within a radius of a thousand nautical miles (1 852 km) from the coast of South Africa and South West Africa (133 of these merchant ships – totalling 743 544 gross tons – were sunk off the coast of South Africa), while only three enemy submarines were sunk in that area.¹⁴ The SANS was soon built up again, acquiring several minesweepers and small anti-submarine vessels (all of which were either converted trawlers or whale-catchers). As from 15 January 1940, the SANS became known as the Seaward Defence Force (SDF), and took over the minesweeping activities off

⁸ D. Stevens (ed.), *The Royal Australian Navy* (Melbourne, 2001), pp. 11-22, 300-301.

⁹ C. Howard, *The navy in New Zealand: an illustrated history* (London, 1982), p. 35; F.J. McDougall, *New Zealand naval vessels (s.l., 1989)*, pp. 2, 11, 16.

¹⁰ J.C. Goosen (compiler), *South Africa's navy: the first fifty years* (Cape Town, 1973), p. 37; C.H. Bennett and A.G. Söderlund, *South Africa's navy: a navy of the people and for the people* (Simon's Town, 2008), p. 19; *A navy for three oceans: celebrating 75 years of the South African Navy* (Simon's Town, 1997), p. 2. The RN retained five officers, twelve ratings and ten civilians to train the RNVR(SA).

¹¹ Stevens (ed.), pp. 302-303; information supplied by Dr David Stevens, 23.2.2009.

¹² McDougall, pp. 5, 25-26, 62-63.

¹³ *Union of South Africa, debates of the House of Assembly. Third Session – Eighth Parliament, 2nd September - 5th September, 1939* 36 (Cape Town, s.a.), columns 17-100. See also L.J. van der Westhuizen, *Die neutraliteitsvraagstuk as verdelingsfaktor in die Suid-Afrikaanse politiek (1933-1940), met besondere verwysing na die rol van genl. J.B.M. Hertzog* (M.A., University of the Free State, 1984), *passim*.

¹⁴ For a review of the naval activities off the South African coast, see L.C.F. Turner *et al.*, *War in the southern oceans* (Cape Town, 1961).

the South African coast from the RN and RNVR(SA); in due course it was also responsible for anti-submarine operations in South African coastal waters. From January 1941 onwards, a number of SDF anti-submarine trawlers served in the Mediterranean. On 1 August 1942, the SDF and the RNVR(SA) amalgamated to form the South African Naval Forces (SANF), which continued to safeguard the strategic Cape sea-route as best they could, launching anti-submarine operations, minesweeping operations (German surface raiders laid several mine-fields), and escorting convoys.¹⁵ In October 1943 the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service (SWANS) was established.¹⁶ Political considerations of the day precluded "non-white" South Africans from fighting in uniform, but many did serve, mostly as non-combatants, on board the SANF's "little ships", for example as cooks and general deck hands.¹⁷

After the conclusion of the war in the European theatre of operations, the SANF sent two of its ships to the Far East to serve in the continuing war against Japan, while two RN ships, which were wholly manned by South Africans, also served in that war sector.¹⁸ At least 2 937 South Africans served in the RN during the war, of whom 191 died in active service. These South Africans served on board RN ships in all theatres of operations, and they also co-operated with other Commonwealth naval personnel – including in the struggle against Japan.¹⁹ By the time the war ended, 1 436 officers and 8 896 ratings (of whom 324 were killed in action or died in service) had served in South Africa's naval forces; and in the course of the war, 87 vessels had been in service, including three "Loch"-class frigates – the first major warships acquired by the SANS.²⁰ South African ships and/or sailors had served in all naval operational areas, and had played a small but meaningful role in the defeat of the

¹⁵ A. Wessels, "Die opbou van die Unie-Verdedigingsmagte in die tydperk September 1939 tot September 1941", *Journal for Contemporary History* 19(3), December 1994, pp. 1-22; A. Wessels, "Die aanwending van die Unie-Verdedigingsmagte in die tydperk September 1939 tot September 1941", *Journal for Contemporary History* 20(1), June 1995, pp. 1-23; A. Wessels, "The first two years of war: the development of the Union Defence Forces (UDF), September 1939 to September 1941", *Military History Journal* 11(5), June 2000, pp. 165-172, 185; Du Toit, pp. 27-31.

¹⁶ See M.P.H. Lever *et al.*, *Sailor-women, sea-women, SWANS: a history of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service 1943-1949* (Simon's Town, 1986).

¹⁷ C.J. Nöthling, *Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag* 1 (Silverton, 1995), p. 58.

¹⁸ For a review of South Africa's role in the war against Japan, see A.Wessels, "Die stryd teen Nippon: Suid-Afrika en Japan, 1941-1945" in *Journal for Contemporary History* 30(3), December 2005, pp. 222-241; A.Wessels, "South Africa and the war against Japan 1941-1945", *Military History Journal* 10(3), June 1996, pp. 81-90, 120.

¹⁹ W.M. Bisset, "SA naval personnel seconded to the Royal Navy during the Second World War 1939-1945", *Simon's Town Historical Society Bulletin* 12(2), July 1982, pp. 55, 59; *The South African naval forces 1939-1945* (brochure; s.l., 1990); André Wessels Private Document Collection (Bloemfontein), S.A. Vloot (file): W.M. Bisset – A. Wessels, 6.5.1992 (letter). For a review of the role of South Africans in all naval sectors, see C.J. Harris, *War at sea: South African maritime operations during World War II* (Rivonia, 1991), *passim*.

²⁰ Du Toit, p. 32. For more information on all the South African ships that took part in World War II, see *ibid.*, pp. 33-167.

Axis powers, co-operating closely with the RN and the navies of the other Commonwealth countries. In the course of the war, approximately 19 000 ships (including nearly 1 000 warships) visited Cape Town, while about 2 000 ships (including almost 1 000 warships) visited Durban, including many from Commonwealth countries.²¹ In addition, approximately 400 convoys and 50 000 ships with about six million Allied (mostly Commonwealth) troops visited South Africa on their way to or back from the operational areas in North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Far East.²² Once again, Simon's Town was also of great importance, and many Allied, mostly Commonwealth, warships visited its docks. Moreover, many warships were repaired in Simon's Town, including the Australian heavy cruiser, HMAS *Canberra* (after problems were experienced with one of her propellers), at the end of July/beginning of August 1940.²³

3. THE PROSPEROUS YEARS, 1945 - 1966

After the end of World War II, the SANF – in line with most other navies – was scaled down drastically. On 1 May 1946, the SANF was reconstituted as a permanent part of the Union Defence Forces, with an authorized establishment of 60 officers and 806 ratings; but by that stage it only had three frigates, one small minelayer, two boom defence vessels, and eleven very small harbour defence launches.²⁴ Its base, as from 1948, was the one that had been built for the RN on Salisbury Island in Durban during the war, after the fall of Singapore. In 1947 the SANF acquired three RN ships: a corvette (to be converted into a hydrographic survey ship) and two fleet minesweepers (one of which was Canadian-built).²⁵

In May 1948, the National Party (NP) came to power,²⁶ and soon started with the implementation of its racially-based policy of separate development (apartheid), which in due course not only harmed millions of black, coloured and Asian South Africans, but also the country's foreign relations, including those with Commonwealth countries. This in turn affected naval relations. However, for the time being, South Africa still had strong ties with the Commonwealth, and with Western powers in general, because in the course of the 1950s

²¹ Turner *et al.*, p. 259.

²² H.J. Martin and N.D. Orpen, *South Africa at war: military and industrial organization and operations in connection with the conduct of war, 1939-1945* (Cape Town, 1979), p. 352; *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa (SESA)* 9 (Cape Town, 1973), p. 236.

²³ Information supplied by Capt. Bill Rice, 24.2.2009.

²⁴ Du Toit, p. 171.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 171, 182-192.

²⁶ P.W. Coetzer (ed.), *Die Nasionale Party 5: Van oorlog tot oorwinning* (Bloemfontein, 1994), pp. 596-709; A.J. Posthuma, *Generaal J.C. Smuts en Afrikaner-opposisie 1939-1948* (D.Litt. et Phil., University of South Africa, 1990), pp. 176-277.

and 1960s the Cold War became more intense, and the West needed the support of South Africa in order to safeguard the strategic Cape sea-route. On the other hand, South Africa was not only prepared to assist the West in the struggle against communism, but the NP government also wanted to strengthen the Union's position as an important regional power.

In the years 1945 to 1966, the SANF (and later SAN) sent its ships (which can be referred to as "grey diplomats") on many flag-showing cruises. During these years, most of the visits were made to ports in Angola and Mozambique – both Portuguese colonies until 1975.²⁷ But there were a few exceptions, perhaps the most noteworthy being the visit to Australia in 1951. The "Loch"-class frigate HMSAS *Transvaal* (under the command of Lt-Cdr James Johnson, later Chief of the SAN) departed from her base in Durban on 26 December 1950, called at the meteorological station on Amsterdam Island (to this day still a French possession), and arrived at Fremantle on 10 January 1951. From there, the ship sailed to Sydney to take part in the two-week-long Australian Jubilee Celebrations. On arrival in Sydney on 29 January, the *Transvaal* took part in exercises with ships of the Australian, New Zealand, Indian and Pakistani navies, as well as the RN. The South African ship subsequently visited Jervis Bay, Melbourne, Adelaide and, once again, Fremantle, before returning to South Africa, arriving back in Durban on 4 March 1951 – albeit minus seven of her crew, who had gone AWOL. (Four had left in Melbourne, two in Adelaide and one in Fremantle. Five had been offered lucrative employment opportunities, while two had fallen in love.) This was the longest and most ambitious exercise that had been undertaken by the SANF since its inception, and the epic voyage was a resounding success.²⁸ While this grey diplomat was away, the SANF was renamed as the South African Navy (SAN), on 1 January 1951.²⁹

In 1950 the SANF took delivery of its first destroyer, an ex-RN "Wager"-class ship, followed by a sister ship in 1953.³⁰ On 20 June 1952, the prefix of all South African naval ships was changed from "HMSAS" to "SAS", reflecting the growing Afrikaner nationalism since the NP had come to power. In 1954 the SAN acquired a "Ford"-class seaward defence boat (SDB) from Britain,³¹ and during that same year, the South African and British governments started negotiations on the future of the RN's base at Simon's Town. The

²⁷ For more information on the role of South Africa's grey diplomats, see A. Wessels, "South Africa's grey diplomats: visits by South African warships to foreign countries 1946-1996", *Scientiae Militaria* 27, 1997, pp. 67-105; A. Wessels, "Onwaarskynlike ambassadeurs: vlagvertoonvaarte deur Suid-Afrikaanse oorlogsskepe, 1922-2002", *Journal for Contemporary History* 27(3), December 2002, pp. 54-81.

²⁸ *Commando* 2(12), May 1951, pp. 4-7, 39 and 2(15), August 1951, pp. 4-7; *Navy News* 11 April 1992, p. 25; Du Toit, p. 161.

²⁹ Du Toit, p. 172.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-200. For a review of the role played by these two destroyers, SAS *Jan van Riebeeck* and SAS *Simon van der Stel*, in the SAN, see also A. Wessels, "The South African Navy's destroyers, 1950-1975" in *Naval Digest. Journal of the Naval Heritage Society of South Africa* 11, November 2005, pp. 37-57.

³¹ SAS *Gelderland* (ex-HMS *Brayford*). See Du Toit, pp. 206-207, 210.

Simon's Town Agreement was concluded in 1955. In accordance therewith, South Africa undertook to expand its Navy by purchasing an additional six destroyers and/or frigates (in practice, only four frigates were acquired), ten coastal minesweepers and another four SDBs from Britain, and the Simon's Town Naval Base was formally transferred to South Africa on 2 April 1957. However, according to the Agreement, Britain, the other Commonwealth countries and allies could still use the base facilities.³² (The RN still had a frigate permanently stationed there until 1967.³³) Although the Commonwealth Office had reservations about handing over the Simon's Town Base to South Africa, and although the NP government had a political rather than a strategic naval agenda with regard to its endeavours to acquire the base, this step did, in fact, eventually lead to the expansion and development of the SAN.³⁴

In the light of the Cold War and the threat posed by the Soviet Union to the Cape sea-route, it was very important that the Commonwealth navies (as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO) should have access to such a relatively large and sophisticated base. After World War II, ships of the SANF (and later SAN) regularly exercised with ships of the RN, and also sometimes with visiting warships from France and Portugal (which had come from the naval bases in their African colonies), as well as from the USA. The exercises were initially called the Durban Exercises, i.e. DURBEXs. After the SAN moved to Simon's Town, they were known as the Cape Exercises, i.e. CAPEXs, from 1957 onwards, until 1965, when the RN requested that they should be called Weapons Training Periods (WTPs). Later on they were referred to as the South African Naval Exercises, i.e. SANEXs.³⁵ Thus, interaction with the Commonwealth was still limited to co-operation with the RN; but this co-operation was of considerable importance. After 1957, many RN warships continued to visit Simon's Town, as well as other South African ports; and there were also sporadic visits by grey diplomats from other countries, such as the Netherlands, the USA and France, as well as a visit by a Spanish sail-training ship, and two visits by warships from other Commonwealth countries: the Canadian (ex-RN "Colony"-class) light cruiser HMCS *Quebec* (Cape Town, 1953 – 44 years would elapse before another Canadian warship would visit South Africa,

³² Goosen (compiler), pp. 133-146; P.J. Henshaw, "The transfer of Simonstown: Afrikaner nationalism, South African strategic dependence, and British global power", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 20(3), September 1992, pp. 420-444; A.Wessels, "Die Simonstadse Ooreenkoms", *Yesterday and Today* 14, September 1987, pp. 18-21; *Die Burger*, 2.2.1957, pp. 1,8,9; *The Cape Argus*, 3.4.1957, p. 11.

³³ *Navy News* 13, March 1994, p. 12.

³⁴ Bennett and Söderlund, pp. 43, 45.

³⁵ See, for example, *Commando* 8(7), July 1957, p. 4, 8(12), December 1957, p. 37 and 10(11), November 1959, pp. 6-7; *The Admiralty News Summary* 105, May 1955, p. 15; *The Cape Argus*, 20.6.1959, p. 3 and 24.9.1959, p.1; information supplied by Rear-Adm. Chris Bennett, 23.2.2009; C. Bennett, *Three frigates* (Durban, 2006), pp. 106-115.

namely HMCS *Halifax*, in 1997) and the Pakistani frigate *Tippu Sultan* (ex-RN “O”-class destroyer) in 1956.³⁶

From 1955 to 1959, the SAN commissioned ten “Ton”-class coastal minesweepers and four “Ford”-class SDBs that it had bought from Britain,³⁷ and on 29 November 1956 the frigate SAS *Vrystaat* (a converted ex-RN “Wager”-class destroyer) was commissioned.³⁸ These and other SAN ships took part in many flag-showing cruises.³⁹ In the meantime (until 1959), the Australian and New Zealand navies took part in the war in Korea (1950-1953; the South African Air Force also took part). In addition, the Australian Navy acquired two aircraft carriers (1948 and 1955), implemented its “long haul” defence policy and “forward defence”, and also acquired five destroyers; after gaining independence in 1947, India acquired two cruisers, five frigates and, in due course, also an aircraft carrier; Pakistan acquired a cruiser and nine destroyers; New Zealand obtained two cruisers and six frigates; and Canada acquired an aircraft carrier, three destroyers and 17 frigates that had been locally designed and built.⁴⁰

The year 1960 was a turbulent one in the history of South Africa. The most important events included British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s “Wind of Change” speech, the riots in Sharpeville and other so-called townships (which led to protests in many countries against South Africa), the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and the referendum during which the white electorate – by a small majority – voted in favour of their country becoming a republic.⁴¹ In March 1961 the South African Prime Minister, Dr H.F. Verwoerd, went to Britain to attend the annual Commonwealth conference, with the intention of requesting permission for his country to remain in the Commonwealth after becoming a republic (as was the case with India). Sir Robert Menzies (Prime Minister of Australia) believed in non-interference in domestic policies of fellow Commonwealth member states, and he was supported to some extent by Keith Holyoak (Prime Minister of New-Zealand); but when certain Commonwealth

³⁶ For a review of visits by warships to South African ports until 1961, see A.Wessels, “Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke aan Suid-Afrikaanse hawens (1): vanaf die V.O.C.-tydperk tot 1961”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(1), June 2006, pp. 81-98.

³⁷ Du Toit, pp. 206-219; SA Naval Museum (Simon’s Town): History of the mine countermeasures flotilla 1922-1988 (unpublished manuscript), pp. 23, 25-26; SANDF Documentation Service (Pretoria): Log-books of SAS *Johannesburg*, *Kimberley* and *Walvisbaai*; *Commando* 9(8), August 1958, pp. 22-23.

³⁸ A. Wessels, “Vrystaat ... fregat van die Suid-Afrikaanse Vloot”, *Seeredding*, June 1985, pp. 9-11, 21; Du Toit, pp. 201-205; SANDF Documentation Service: Log-book of SAS *Vrystaat*.

³⁹ See, for example, SANDF Documentation Centre: Log-books of SAS *Vrystaat* and *Pretoria*; Du Toit, pp. 163, 202, 213; *Commando* 8(7), July 1957, p. 4 and 8(9), September 1957, p. 31.

⁴⁰ Stevens (ed.), pp. 155-190; J. Goldrick, *No easy answers: the development of the navies of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, 1945-1996* (New Delhi, 1957), pp. 1-32, 45-56; R.V.B. Blackman (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1960-61* (London, 1960), pp. 59-90.

⁴¹ Giliomee and Mbenga (eds), pp. 333-335; W. Beinart, *Twentieth-century South Africa* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 156-162.

representatives, led by John Diefenbaker (Prime Minister of Canada), sharply criticized the South African government's apartheid policy, Verwoerd withdrew South Africa's application for continued membership on 15 March 1961. And so, on 31 May 1961, South Africa became a republic outside of the British Commonwealth.⁴² However – at least for the time being – this did not impact negatively on the Republic of South Africa's (RSA's) naval relations with the RN or other countries. Flag-showing visits by SAN warships continued, and South Africa continued to welcome many foreign grey diplomats to its ports. These were mostly RN warships, but there were also some visiting ships from the navies of the USA, Portugal, France, Italy and Spain.⁴³ In the meantime, the SAN commissioned three new Type-12 frigates (1962-1964) – at that stage the largest ships in the Navy.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, many African countries had become independent, changing the face and character of the continent, and to some extent also that of the Commonwealth; and their attitude towards South Africa hardened. Internationally, South Africa was gradually becoming a pariah state. In 1963 the Security Council of the United Nations (UN) approved a voluntary arms embargo against the RSA, and when the Labour Party came to power in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1964, South Africa's oldest naval ally decided that it would henceforth supply no further arms to that country.⁴⁵ And now “storm clouds” were also brewing in South West Africa (today Namibia).

4. THE “WAR YEARS”, 1966 - 1989

In 1914-1915, during the first few months of World War I, South African forces defeated the German forces in what was then known as German South West Africa. On 17 December 1920 this territory, henceforth known as South West Africa (SWA), became a Class-C Mandate under the administrative control of South Africa, albeit that in practice it was governed as if it were a fifth province of the Union. In due course, many members of the local black population, which outnumbered the white population by about ten to one, began to agitate for independence. In 1960, the black inhabitants of South West Africa found an important mouthpiece when the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) was

⁴² O. Geysers, *Watershed for South Africa: London 1961* (Durban, 1983), pp. 76-100; G.D. Scholtz, *Dr Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd 2* (Johannesburg, 1974), pp. 91-119.

⁴³ For a review of visits made by warships to South African ports, 1961-1966, see A. Wessels, “Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke aan Suid-Afrikaanse hawens (2): die periode van fluktuierende internasionale betrekkinge, 1961-94”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(2), September 2006, pp. 78-82.

⁴⁴ Du Toit, pp. 220-239. For the role played by these and the older frigates in the SAN, see A. Wessels, “The South African Navy's frigates, 1944-1985”, *Naval Digest* 11, November 2005, pp. 1-36. For more on the Type 12s in SAN service, see also Bennett, *passim*.

⁴⁵ J.P. Williams, “The arms embargo against South Africa: success or futility?”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 13(1), June 1988, p. 1.

established. In due course, SWAPO resorted to the taking up of arms against what they regarded as the unlawful South African occupation force in SWA, and on 26 August 1966 the first clash between SWAPO cadres and South African security forces took place at Ongulumbashe in the far north of the territory.⁴⁶ Over the course of time, a full-scale guerrilla conflict ensued in the north of SWA, which spilled over into Angola (from whence SWAPO launched most of its attacks), became intertwined with the liberation struggle (and later civil war) in Angola, and culminated in a conventional conflict in Angola, in which thousands of Cuban soldiers – as well as advisors, etc., from many other countries – were also involved.

The South African Defence Force (SADF) mainly deployed the South African (SA) Army (i.e. ground forces) “up north”, supported by aircraft and helicopters of the South African Air Force (SAAF), and with members of the South African Medical Service (SAMS) playing an important role in evacuating and treating casualties. The role of the South African Navy (SAN) in the conflict was ostensibly very small, and yet – as will be pointed out in due course – it was in reality quite significant.⁴⁷ However, of greater importance in terms of the history of the SAN, is the fact that during (and because of) these war years, the composition and role of the SAN gradually changed, as did South Africa’s international position, which had far-reaching consequences for naval co-operation between the RSA and Commonwealth (and other) countries.

By 1966, the NP government was implementing its racially discriminatory policy of apartheid more vigorously than ever before, with B.J. Vorster as the Prime Minister as from September 1966 (in the place of the murdered H.F. Verwoerd), and P.W. Botha as Minister of Defence as from April 1966. International pressure was mounting against the RSA, but the SAN still enjoyed normal interaction with the navies of most Western countries. Examples in this regard include, *inter alia*, the flag-showing visits conducted by the SAN (which will subsequently be discussed in more detail), as well as similar visits to South African ports by foreign warships, often with concomitant joint exercises. When the Six Day Arab-Israeli War (1967) led to the closure of the Suez Canal (1967-1975), it also led to an increase of commercial traffic around the Cape, while many more foreign warships now also used the Cape sea-route, often calling at one or more South African ports. For example, in 1968 at

⁴⁶ For the purpose of this paper, the finer details of the Namibian War of Independence are not important. For more on the conflict see, for example, W. Steenkamp, *South Africa’s border war 1966-1989* (Gibraltar, 1989), as well as the special editions of the *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006 and 34(1), February 2009, which deal with the war.

⁴⁷ For more details re the SAN’s role in the war, see A. Wessels, “The South African Navy during the years of conflict in Southern Africa, 1966-1989” and A. Wessels, “Skout-admiraal (J.G.) André Burgers se Vlooterinneringe aan die jare van die ‘Grensoorlog’, 1966 tot 1989” in *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, pp. 283-303 and pp. 310-323.

least 44 RN (and auxiliary) ships visited Simon's Town; in 1969 there were at least 39 such visits; in 1970 at least 36 visits; and in 1971 at least 50 visits.⁴⁸ Most exercises involved RN ships (and sometimes also a submarine), but ships from the following countries also participated from time to time:

- France – until 1960 this country had many colonies in Africa, and thereafter still a few possessions. France was determined to make its influence felt on the continent and especially in the Indian Ocean.
- Portugal – the oldest colonial power in Africa. Until the mid-1970s, this country was determined to cling to its colonies, notwithstanding the fact that it had to fight anti-guerrilla wars in Portuguese Guinea, Angola and Mozambique.
- USA – in the context of the Cold War, the USA was the West's only superpower in the struggle for world domination, and was determined to ensure that the strategic Cape sea-route would not fall into Soviet hands, or come under their influence. However, when the aircraft carrier USS *Franklin D Roosevelt* visited Cape Town in February 1967, black sailors were not allowed to go ashore (because under apartheid laws they could not be guaranteed equal treatment), and that put an end to USA naval visits to the RSA for nearly three decades.⁴⁹

In 1967 the SAN acquired the Danish oil tanker *Annam*, converted her into a replenishment (logistic/combat support) ship, and commissioned her as SAS *Tafelberg* – the first such ship in the Navy.⁵⁰ Henceforth the SAN could deploy its other ships independently of foreign ports and over larger distances than ever before. This capability was successfully demonstrated when the tanker accompanied the frigates SAS *President Kruger* and *President Steyn* when they visited Argentinean ports for the first time in October-November 1967.⁵¹ While new naval ties were forged in South America, the Navy's grey diplomats continued to

⁴⁸ André Wessels Private Document Collection (Bloemfontein), Grey diplomats (file): W.D. Jones, List of ships visiting Simon's Town 1965-1978 (copy supplied by A. Söderlund) [henceforth referred to as the Jones manuscript], pp. 2-8.

⁴⁹ *Die Burger*, 10.11.1994, p. 15. The next USA warships to visit were USS *Gettysburg* (cruiser) and *Halyburton* (frigate), in 1994. See *Salut* 1(8), December 1994, pp. 28-29. Since 1967 no other USA aircraft carrier has docked in any RSA port, albeit that USS *Theodore Roosevelt* anchored in Table Bay during October 2008. See several SABC TV news broadcasts, 4-9 October 2008.

⁵⁰ For more on the role played by the *Tafelberg* in the SAN, see A. Wessels, "Veertig jaar se ondersteuning ter see. Gevegsteunskepe in die Suid-Afrikaanse Vloot, 1967-2007 (1): SAS *Tafelberg* en SAS *Drakensberg*", *Journal for Contemporary History* 32(2), December 2007, pp. 164-182.

⁵¹ Du Toit, pp. 187, 226; SANDF Documentation Service: Log-books of SAS *President Kruger* and *Tafelberg*; information supplied by Cdre D.K. Kinkead-Weekes (†).

strengthen the existing ties with Portugal, by undertaking several flag-showing cruises to Angolan and Mozambican ports.⁵²

Over and above the visits by RN ships already referred to, 1968 also brought two other very significant Commonwealth grey diplomats (albeit that they were painted black) to South African shores. The first was the Pakistani “Tench”-class submarine *Ghazi* (S130; ex-USS *Diablo*), which was in Simon’s Town from 28 March to the beginning of April 1968, en route back from Turkey (where she had been refitted) to Pakistan.⁵³ In the meantime, the Royal Australian Navy decided to acquire six British-built “Oberon”-class submarines. The second of these, HMAS *Otway* (No 59), visited South African ports on her delivery cruise, arriving in Cape Town at the end of July 1968, in Simon’s Town on 27 August, and also visiting Port Elizabeth and Durban before crossing the southern Indian Ocean to Australia. The other five new Australian submarines sailed to Australia via the Suez Canal (one) or the Panama Canal (four).⁵⁴

The above-mentioned courtesy visit by an Australian naval unit to South African ports was followed by the SAN’s second (and, thus far, last) flag-showing cruise to Australian shores. A task force comprised of the frigates SAS *President Steyn* (238 crew members; Capt. D.K. Kinkead-Weekes) and *President Pretorius* (238 crew members; Capt. A.C. McMurray), and the replenishment ship SAS *Tafelberg* (125 crew members; Capt. R.C. Cousens) – all under the overall command of Cdre James Johnson (Senior Officer of the 10th (SA) Frigate Squadron) – left Simon’s Town on 7 October 1968 for the long trip across the Indian Ocean to Fremantle (arriving on 23 October – departing on 26 October), Sydney (2-8 November), Melbourne (10-14 November), and back to Fremantle (18-21 November; *Tafelberg* anchored in bay). The task force arrived back in Simon’s Town on 3 December 1968, having sailed 14 642 nautical miles in the course of their 58-day cruise.⁵⁵ In the meantime, a decision was made to convert the Type-12 frigates into Wasp helicopter-carrying ships (with a capacity of one helicopter per ship), with the conversions taking place from 1968 to 1977.⁵⁶

⁵² SA Naval Museum: Newspaper cuttings (file) and History of the mine countermeasures flotilla 1922-1988 (unpublished manuscript), pp. 41-42, 46; Du Toit, pp. 197, 213, 226; SANDF Documentation Service: Log-book of SAS *Mosselbaai*; information supplied by Capt. R.C. Cousens (†).

⁵³ SA *Navy News* 2(11), 1968, p. 17; *Navy News* 11, June 1992, p. 6; Simon’s Town (town) Museum press clipping book. She was Pakistan’s first submarine. During the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 she was sunk with all on board (4 December 1971). R.V.B Blackman (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1966-1967* (London, 1966), p. 202; R.V.B Blackman (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1972-1973* (London, 1972), p. 247.

⁵⁴ Information supplied by Rear-Adm. (J.G.) Arné Söderlund, 7.3.2005, Mr Vic Jeffery, 12 April 2005, and Mr Peter Reid, 27 April 2005. For more on Australia’s “Oberon”-class submarines, see R. Sharpe (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1990-91* (Coulsdon, 1991), p. 29.

⁵⁵ SA Naval Museum: Report of proceedings – visit to Australia – period 7th October to 3rd December, 1968; *Commando* 20(4), April 1969, pp. 13, 15 and 20(5), May 1969, pp. 13, 15, 25; Goosen (compiler), pp. 197-198; Du Toit, p. 226; *Navy News* 8, December 1986, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Bennett, pp. 83-89; Du Toit, pp. 249, 252, 260.

In line with many other navies, the SAN decided during the course of the 1960s to acquire submarines, in order to enhance the strength of the Navy. Several Commonwealth navies had already followed the same path, with Canada acquiring its first modern submarine in 1961 (having had two submarines from 1914-1920), Pakistan in 1964, Australia (to which reference has already been made) in 1967 (having had a few submarines in World War I, and in the 1920s to the beginning of the 1930s, and one for a short time during World War II) and India in 1968.⁵⁷ As early as 1964, the South African cabinet decided to equip the SAN with submarines. The SAN would have preferred to acquire British “Oberon”-class submarines, in line with Canada and Australia, but when the Labour Party came to power in the UK in 1964, it decided not to supply any further arms to South Africa, although it did not (at least for the time being) curtail naval or other military contact. Consequently, the RSA ordered three “Daphné”-class patrol submarines from France – commissioned as SAS *Maria van Riebeeck* (S597; 24 July 1970), *Emily Hobhouse* (S98; 26 February 1971) and *Johanna van der Merwe* (S99; 27 August 1971). Each of the new submarines was escorted to South Africa by a Type-12 frigate, affording the SAN an opportunity to show the South African flag in overseas ports, including those of the UK.⁵⁸

In the meantime, the SAN’s new hydrographic survey ship, SAS *Protea*, was commissioned at Glasgow on 23 May 1972⁵⁹ – to this day, the last major warship ordered by the SAN from the UK. This was made possible by the fact that the Conservative Party had come to power in the UK in 1970. After the delivery of the *Protea*, the SAN also received (in 1973) two small 22-m air-sea rescue launches (merely known by their pennant numbers, P1554 and P1555),⁶⁰ but in 1974 the Labour Party once again came to power, and all arms sales to South Africa were prohibited; as a matter of fact, even the delivery of the last of seven additional Wasp helicopters to the SAAF was cancelled.⁶¹ The last major naval exercises involving the SAN and the RN took place in 1973-1974. Firstly, a task force of the RN, comprising the nuclear-powered submarine HMS *Dreadnought*, a cruiser, three frigates

⁵⁷ Blackman (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1966-67*, pp. 12, 35, 202; R.V.B Blackman (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1968-69* (London, 1968), p.130; Blackman (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1972-73*, p. 154; R. Sharpe (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1990-91* (Coulson, 1990), p. 23; Stevens (ed.), pp. 298-309.

⁵⁸ SANDF Documentation Service: Log-books of SAS *Johanna van der Merwe*, *President Kruger*, *President Steyn* and *Simon van der Stel*; Du Toit, pp. 226, 228, 242, 271. For more on the history of the “Daphné”-class submarines in SAN service, see SA Naval Museum: History of the South African Navy submarine service (typed manuscript), and Abbreviated history of SAN Submarine Branch (typed manuscript); *Through the periscope. South African submarines: the first thirty years. Reflections past and present* (Simon’s Town, 1999), *passim*; A. Wessels, “Duikbote in die Suid-Afrikaanse Vloot: die eerste fase, 1970-2003” (published in two parts), *Journal for Contemporary History* 30(2), September 2005, pp. 180-194 and 30(3), December 2005, pp. 92-108.

⁵⁹ Du Toit, pp. 263-266.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 253-254.

⁶¹ H. Potgieter and W. Steenkamp, *Aircraft of the South African Air Force* (Cape Town, 1980), p. 113.

and three RFA (support) ships, visited South Africa en route to, and again on the way back to, the UK from the Far East (this was the first time that a nuclear-powered submarine had berthed in a South African port). Secondly, in August 1974 the *Dreadnought* was back in RSA waters, together with a destroyer, five frigates and three RFA ships, to exercise with the SAN and SAAF. Finally, in October 1974, the nuclear-powered submarine HMS *Warspite*, accompanied by a cruiser, six frigates and three RFA ships – comprising the strongest RN task force to have visited South Africa in peace-time up to the present day – exercised with the SAN and SAAF.⁶² However, this was also the last occasion, for 20 years, on which RN ships would visit the RSA, because on 16 June 1975 the Simon’s Town Agreement was abrogated.⁶³ In the meantime, a number of warships from the navies of the Netherlands, Argentina, France, Italy, Spain, Iran, Uruguay, Belgium, Thailand, Israel, Colombia and Germany visited South Africa, as well as five ships from Commonwealth countries, namely the French-built “La Combattante II”-class missile fast-attack craft *Perdana*, *Serang*, *Ganas* and *Ganyang* from Malaysia (which arrived in Simon’s Town on 5 June 1973 on their delivery cruise), and the British-built Kenyan patrol boat *Mamba* (which arrived in Simon’s Town on 22 May 1974 on its delivery cruise – the first-ever warship from an independent African country to visit the RSA).⁶⁴

While all these developments were taking place, the war “up north on the border” gradually intensified. Since 1966, the South African Police (assisted by SAAF helicopters) had been able to contain SWAPO’s incursions, but in the light of the escalation of the conflict, the SADF took over the counter-insurgency operations in 1973. As long as there were pro-RSA governments in Angola and Mozambique (both still governed by Portugal), and in Rhodesia (governed by Mr Ian Smith), the RSA had a physical buffer separating it from the rest of Africa, and SWAPO, the ANC and the PAC found it difficult to infiltrate and attack targets in SWA and the RSA. But in 1974 there was a regime change in Portugal and during the next year, Portugal withdrew from Mozambique (which became independent on 25 June 1975) and Angola (11 November 1975). South Africa now had pro-communist neighbours, and the SAN’s ships were no longer welcome in Mozambican and Angolan ports.

In Mozambique, the pro-communist Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) came to power in 1975, initially without any substantial opposition. In Angola, the pro-communist Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) took control of the

⁶² Jones manuscript, p. 10; Du Toit, pp. 229-230; Simon’s Town (town) Museum, newspaper clipping book.

⁶³ Du Toit, p. 176.

⁶⁴ Jones manuscript, pp. 10-11. See also Wessels, “Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke ...” (2), pp. 82-93.

government in Luanda, but was opposed (especially in the rural areas) by the pro-Western Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA) and União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA). In October 1975 South African ground forces, supported by the SAAF, and with the tacit support of the USA, invaded Angola in support of the FNLA and UNITA, advancing rapidly, brushing opposition aside, and covering 3 159 km into the interior of Angola. However, when the South African forces were already in sight of Luanda, political/diplomatic considerations forced them to withdraw, with the last troops leaving on 27 March 1976.⁶⁵ Most of the fighting was carried out by the South African land and air forces, but the SAN played a small but noteworthy and successful role: for the duration of Operation Savannah, several SAN units were deployed off the coasts of SWA and Angola, either as single units or as task forces, including two submarines, two frigates, several minesweepers, and the *Tafelberg*. This was the first time since World War II that South African naval units had undertaken operational patrols. They were also on stand-by, in case SA Army personnel had to be evacuated (indeed, the *President Steyn* conducted the evacuation of troops off Ambrizete, north of Luanda), and to monitor the movement of Soviet Block ships that might have been transporting weapons, etc., to the MPLA.⁶⁶

Strictly militarily speaking, the SADF was successful in Angola, but politically and diplomatically the RSA was nose-diving. The SAN received a somewhat late and reluctant invitation from the USA to send a warship to take part in that country's bicentennial independence celebrations in 1976. The *President Kruger* was sent to New York; the first-ever SAN ship to visit the USA⁶⁷ – and also the last, for 20 years. While the SAN frigate was still on passage to the USA, riots broke out in the sprawling Soweto (black) township near Johannesburg, spreading to many other areas, and leading to the implementation of intensified measures by the apartheid regime to quell all opposition. This, together with the death in police custody of black consciousness leader Steve Biko (12 September 1977), in turn led to the further isolation of South Africa, including the imposition of an all-embracing mandatory UN arms embargo (4 November 1977). This dealt the SAN a serious blow,

⁶⁵ F.J. du Toit Spies, *Operasie Savannah: Angola 1975-1976* (Pretoria, 1989), *passim*; S.L. Barnard, “n Historiese oorsig van die gewapende konflik aan die noordgrens van SWA/Namibië 1966-1989”, *Acta Academica* 23(1), March 1991, pp. 112-114; C.J. Nöthling, *Geskiedenis van die Suid-Afrikaanse Weermag* 2 (Silverton, 1996), pp. 18-19, 24.

⁶⁶ Bennett, pp. 155-166; Spies, pp. 141-142, 147, 168, 174-176; Du Toit, pp. 231-232; Steenkamp, pp. 51-52.

⁶⁷ Information supplied by Rear-Adm. P.A. Wijnberg; *Navy News* 11, April 1992, p. 27; Du Toit, p. 232.

because the delivery of its two new Type-69A light frigates and two “Agosta”-class submarines, all nearing completion in France, was embargoed.⁶⁸

By the mid-1970s, many so-called coloureds were already serving in uniform in the SAN, and when a training base for Indians was established on 15 January 1975, members from that community also joined the SAN in numbers, but black people were still barred from serving in uniform. In due course, more women would also serve in uniform in the Navy. While the SAN gradually rid itself of apartheid’s shades, the RSA as a whole was still firmly under the control of the NP and its outdated policies. As the regime anticipated growing international isolation, also from the UK and other Commonwealth countries, it strove to acquire new allies. Links with Israel were established, and in 1977-1978 three “Reshef”-class missile-carrying fast-attack (strike) craft, built in Haifa, were commissioned by the SAN, followed by six similar craft built under licence in Durban, South Africa, and commissioned in 1978-1980, 1983 and 1986.⁶⁹ The SAN thus entered the missile age. In other naval developments, two of the SAN’s “Ton”-class minesweepers were converted into patrol ships, while two others were converted into the Navy’s first-ever minehunters. For a brief period (1978-1980), the A331 (the former Antarctic supply and oceanographic survey ship *RSA* of the Department of Transport, now simply known by her pennant number) was in SAN service, and was apparently used for electronic surveillance along the coasts of Angola and northern SWA, in support of the SADF war effort.⁷⁰ In the meantime, on the naval diplomatic front, the “new” Pakistani submarine *Ghazi* (ex-Portuguese “Daphné”-class French-built *Cachalote*) visited Simon’s Town at the beginning of 1976, on its delivery cruise from Portugal to Pakistan.⁷¹

After 1977, the RSA was almost totally isolated internationally, with condemnation of its apartheid policy, as well as of its so-called unlawful occupation of SWA and destabilization actions in Southern Africa, emanating from various podiums, including the UN and the Commonwealth. In the meantime SWAPO, having acquired new base facilities in Angola, started to infiltrate SWA with ever-larger groups of guerrillas. The South African government reluctantly ordered the SADF to launch cross-border operations, the first being Operation Reindeer (May 1978), which included the attack on Cassinga – which in due

⁶⁸ Du Toit, pp. 281-289; T.D. Potgieter, “Another apartheid dilemma: corvettes for the South African Navy”, *New Contree* 47, September 2000, pp. 94-95. For the run-up to and consequences of the UN embargo, see A. Wessels and L. Marx, “The 1977 United Nations mandatory arms embargo against South Africa: a historical perspective after 30 years”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 3(1), June 2008, pp. 70-86.

⁶⁹ Du Toit, pp. 303, 309.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 213-216, 242, 291-293.

⁷¹ For more on this submarine, see R. Sharpe (ed.), *Jane’s fighting ships 1994-1995* (Coulson, 1994), p. 475.

course led to much controversy.⁷² Over the course of time, the Namibian War of Independence (1966-1989) became inseparable from the civil war in Angola (1975-2002), with the conflict inside Angola developing from a semi-conventional war to a full-scale conventional struggle, and with the SADF sometimes fighting pitched battles against the MPLA and their Cuban, Eastern European and Soviet allies. Indeed, Angola became one of the most important and tragic battlefields of the Cold War.

On 1 August 1980 the frigate SAS *President Steyn* was withdrawn from service, henceforth to be used for spare parts, and when the frigate SAS *President Kruger* was recommissioned on 15 August 1980, after an extensive refit, the Chief of the SAN, Vice-Adm. R.A. Edwards, made it clear that the frigate era of the SAN was virtually something of the past. The SAN had to adopt a new role: henceforth it would no longer defend the Cape sea-route in the interest of the West, but would concentrate on safeguarding the RSA's harbours and coasts, in due course becoming a small-ship force (with the strike craft being its backbone). The Army-dominated Defence Headquarters used the war "up north" as an excuse to drastically reduce the naval portion of the Defence budget (for example, from about 17% to less than 9% in 1979).⁷³ To safeguard the RSA's harbours against sabotage by insurgents, 30 "Namacurra"-class harbour protection boats were built locally (1979-1981). They were manned by the Marines, a branch of the Navy that was resurrected in 1979 (having previously existed in 1951-1955). One of the Navy's reasons for re-establishing the Marines, was to acquire a greater role for the SAN in the struggle "up north" in SWA and in Angola. Hundreds of Marines were sent to the Zambezi River, where for some distance, the river forms the border between SWA and Zambia, and at the furthest eastward point of the Caprivi Strip, also meets Botswana and Zimbabwe. Here the Marines patrolled the Zambezi and surrounding areas.⁷⁴ In the meantime, the SAN also acquired four German-designed "River"-class minehunters, two of which had been built in Germany under the guise of research ships, and two in Durban. Their true identity only came to light in 1988.⁷⁵

In 1980 Zimbabwe became an independent country recognised by the international community, but potentially hostile towards the RSA. On the home front in South Africa, the ANC's armed wing intensified its armed struggle, while black-on-black violence also

⁷² Steenkamp, pp. 61-87; Barnard, pp. 116-119; Nöthling, pp. 25-26; L. Barnard, "The battle of Cassinga, 4 May 1978: a historical assessment. Part 1: The course of the battle and ensuing controversy" and "Part 2: Interviews of two SADF soldiers", *Journal for Contemporary History* 31(3), December 2006, pp. 131-146 and pp. 147-160.

⁷³ Du Toit, pp. 232-234; *The Cape Times*, 18.8.1980, p. 8; Bennett and Söderlund, p. 35.

⁷⁴ Du Toit, pp. 294-296.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 310-315.

increased.⁷⁶ “Up north”, the SADF launched an extensive cross-border raid into Angola in August 1981 (Operation Protea), in which SWAPO suffered huge losses. After this operation, the SADF did not withdraw all its troops from Angola – small units remained to disrupt SWAPO’s infrastructure. Other SADF operations included Daisy (October-November 1981), Super (March 1982), Phoenix (February 1983) and Askari (December 1983-January 1984).⁷⁷

In the meantime, larger surface units of the SAN continued to undertake electronic and other patrols along both the west and east coasts of Southern Africa, sometimes in support of missions undertaken by special forces, strike craft and/or submarines. The lack of unclassified archival sources makes it impossible to give full credit to the SAN for their military achievements in this regard. The role played by the SAN in this context must still (if possible) be thoroughly researched, but there are a few references to these clandestine operations in a number of secondary sources.⁷⁸ Indirectly, the SAN’s submarines contributed greatly to the SADF’s war effort, because they deterred the Soviet Union from sending a large intervention force to Angola.⁷⁹

On 18 February 1982 the SAN suffered its greatest (and most embarrassing) tragedy to date, when the frigate *President Kruger* sank after colliding with the replenishment ship *Tafelberg*. Sixteen lives were lost.⁸⁰ (A similar incident had occurred 18 years earlier, entailing the loss of the Australian destroyer HMAS *Voyager*, with 82 lives, after it had collided with aircraft carrier HMAS *Melbourne* on 10 February 1964.)⁸¹ In 1985, 15 SAN ships (of which all but one were of British origin) were withdrawn from service in an effort to save money: the last remaining frigate, six “Ton”-class MCMs, five small patrol boats, a small survey ship, a boom defence ship and an air-sea rescue launch.⁸² The only major acquisition during these years was the combat support ship SAS *Drakensberg* (11 November 1987), the largest ship thus far designed and built in South Africa. For two decades, she was the most important ship in the SAN.⁸³ From 1985 to 1998, the SAN would be a 24-hull navy. In the meantime, the war “up north” intensified. The MPLA, SWAPO, Cuban and allied forces launched several attacks against UNITA, which would not have survived without

⁷⁶ T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: a modern history* (4th edition, Basinstoke, 1991), pp. 397-437; Beinart, p. 229 *et seq.*

⁷⁷ Steenkamp, pp. 89-117; Barnard, p. 119; Nöthling, pp. 37-40.

⁷⁸ See, for example, P. Stiff, *The silent war: South African recce operations* (Alberton, 1999), pp. 48-52, 260, 272-273, 347-350, 357-358, 372-373, 392, 458-469; G. Mills and D. Williams, *Seven battles that shaped South Africa* (Cape Town, 2006), pp. 173-175.

⁷⁹ D. Walsh, “Why do we need submarines?”, *African Armed Forces Journal*, February 2005, p. 22.

⁸⁰ Bennett, pp. 187-201; Du Toit, pp. 234-236.

⁸¹ For more on the *Voyager* disaster see, for example, Stevens (ed.), pp. 201-202. Later, on 3 June 1969, the *Melbourne* collided with and sank a warship from another country (the destroyer USS *Frank E. Adams*). See *ibid.*, p. 203.

⁸² Du Toit, pp. 142-144, 176, 178, 207-210, 218-219, 255, 278-279.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 316-322; Wessels, “Veertig jaar se ondersteuning ter see”(1), pp. 174-182 and (2), pp. 144-158.

SADF assistance. But in August 1988, the last SADF forces left Angola. Negotiations followed, which eventually also led to the withdrawal of the RSA from SWA (20 June 1989); and the latter territory at long last became independent, as Namibia, on 21 March 1990.⁸⁴

During the 23 years of conflict, the SAN controlled the seas around southern Africa, deterred superpowers from intervening from the sea, and enabled the SA Army (supported by the SAAF) to project its power in areas such as the north of SWA and in Angola. The SAN had played a small but very important role in bringing about a negotiated settlement in SWA and Angola (albeit that in the latter country, civil war flared up again and would drag on until 2002), but the SAN had to pay a high price: the costly RSA war effort meant less money for the Navy, which necessitated a scaling down of personnel and ships, and a change in naval policy. The 1989 SAN was indeed a totally different navy from that of 1966, having lost all its major large-surface combatants, and with them its anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability, and retaining only a limited anti-aircraft capacity. It is also interesting to note that, whereas in 1966 all 26 major units of the SAN were British-built, the origins of the 24 hulls that were in service in 1989 were diverse: five were British, three French, three Israeli, two German and one Danish, while no fewer than ten were locally built.

In the 1980s there was an almost total naval isolation of the RSA, with only four overseas flag-showing visits by the SAN (one by the *Tafelberg* and a strike craft to Mauritius to help find the wreckage of a South African Airways jet that had crashed (1987); another by the *Drakensberg* and a strike craft to Chile (1988); and two by the *Drakensberg* to Mozambique to transport non-combat equipment to that country (1988)),⁸⁵ and six visits by warships from overseas countries to South African ports: two by Chile (1981 and 1988), three by Taiwan (1981, 1985 and 1989)⁸⁶ and, interestingly enough, one by a Commonwealth country, when the two new Malaysian light frigates, *Kasturi* and *Lekir*, visited Simon's Town – for only approximately one day – for bunkers (October 1984), during their delivery cruise from Germany.⁸⁷ Otherwise, there was no formal naval contact with Commonwealth countries.

It is interesting to note that, while the SAN shrank in the years 1966 to 1989 (for example, in terms of major combat units, from two destroyers and six frigates to only three submarines), this was also true of the RN (which was reduced from 45 submarines, five aircraft carriers, five cruisers, 22 destroyers and 67 frigates, to 30 submarines, three aircraft

⁸⁴ Steenkamp, pp. 117-184; Barnard, pp. 119-125; Nöthling, pp. 40-42; P. Stiff, *Nine days of war* (2nd edition, Alberton, 1991), *passim*.

⁸⁵ Du Toit, pp. 243, 320; *Navy News* 7, June 1988, pp. 2, 7-10; Nöthling, 2, p. 35.

⁸⁶ *Navy News* 4(3), 1985, pp. 3-7, 11-14; *Paratus* 29(1), January 1978, p. 2 and 32(6), June 1981, p. 16; S.A. Naval Museum, Chilean ship *Esmeralda* (file): various documents.

⁸⁷ *Navy News* 3(10), 1984, p. 3.

carriers, 13 destroyers and 33 frigates) and the Royal Canadian Navy, known as from 1968 as the Canadian Forces Maritime Command (reduced from two submarines, one aircraft carrier and 33 frigates, to three submarines, four destroyers and 15 frigates). On the other hand, the New Zealand Navy's strength remained much the same (four frigates in 1966 and in 1989), the Australian Navy's strength increased, owing to the acquisition of submarines (two aircraft carriers, eight destroyers and 11 frigates in 1966; six submarines, three destroyers and nine frigates in 1989), the navy of Pakistan was strengthened (from one submarine, one cruiser, five destroyers and two frigates, to six submarines, seven destroyers and eight frigates), while the Indian navy's strength increased dramatically (from one aircraft carrier, two cruisers, three destroyers and 14 frigates, to 17 submarines, two aircraft carriers, five destroyers and 19 frigates).⁸⁸

5. FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA, AND BEYOND, 1990-2009

Shortly after the Namibian War of Independence had ended, the SANDF was drastically rationalized, particularly the Army and SAAF, albeit that the SAN also had to make additional sacrifices with regard to personnel.⁸⁹ The end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s heralded the end of the Cold War (and of the Soviet Union); and 1990 marked the start of a new era in the history of the RSA, with the unbanning of several political organizations, followed in due course by the commencement of political negotiations, and the first truly democratic election of 1994, which brought a predominantly black political organization (the ANC) to power. The SADF was transformed into a new South African National Defence Force (SANDF),⁹⁰ and on 17 July 1994 – after an absence of 33 years – South Africa once again became a member of the Commonwealth.⁹¹

Whereas the SAN remained a 24-hull navy from 1986 to 1998, the end of the Cold War led to the drastic rationalization of the RN (entailing a reduction from 32 submarines, three aircraft carriers, 13 destroyers and 36 frigates in 1990 to 17 submarines, three aircraft carriers, 12 destroyers and 22 frigates in 1994), while the strength of the navies of Canada,

⁸⁸ Blackman (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 1966-67*, pp. 11-17, 34-39, 125-129, 193-194, 202-204, 272-298; Sharpe (ed.), pp. 23-26, 77-82, 262-268, 407-409, 430-433, 675-690.

⁸⁹ Compare the force strength and inventory of the SADF in 1989 with those of 1994, as supplied by *The military balance 1989-90* (London, 1989), pp. 139-140 and *The military balance 1993-94* (London, 1993), pp. 217-219.

⁹⁰ For the transformation of the SADF (1989) into the SANDF (1994), and in particular the development of the latter in the years 1994-2004, see, for example, A.Wessels, "Die Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Weermag, 1994-2004" (published in two parts), *Journal for Contemporary History* 28(3), December 2004, pp. 168-183 and 29(1), June 2005, pp. 103-118.

⁹¹ *The Cape Times*, 20.7.1994, p. 6; *The Star*, 19.7.1994, p. 9; *The Citizen*, 21.7.1994, p. 1.

Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Pakistan remained more or less the same, and the navies of India and Singapore increased in strength.⁹²

With political changes in the air, and in anticipation of great opportunities lying ahead for the SAN, the Navy embarked on several flag-showing cruises, including one to Europe (*Protea*; April-June 1990; she had been the last SAN ship in Europe, in 1972, and was now the first to visit again after so many years),⁹³ one to Taiwan (*Drakensberg* and a strike craft, May-June 1990; this was the first time that South African warships had visited the Far East since 1945);⁹⁴ one to Zaïre (*Tafelberg* and two minehunters, September 1990);⁹⁵ and a cruise right around South America (*Tafelberg*, January-March 1991).⁹⁶ Thus, even before political parties in the RSA had sat down for negotiations, and before the country had been officially welcomed back by the international community, the SAN was already restoring military and diplomatic ties and, in some cases, forging new ones. Of course, it must be kept in mind that the SAN emerged from the apartheid era with the least tarnished reputation of all the armed forces. Consequently, it was also the SADF service with the least apartheid baggage.

Visits to Commonwealth countries followed. In March 1991 a strike craft and a minehunter intercepted three Spanish trawlers that were conducting illegal fishing activities off the coast of Namibia, and handed them over to the Namibian authorities. The SAN then visited the Namibian port of Lüderitz – the first visit by the SAN since that Commonwealth country had become independent in 1990.⁹⁷ In June-July 1991 the *Drakensberg* visited the British island possession of St Helena,⁹⁸ and in July-September 1991 the ship visited Bangladesh (to offload disaster relief supplies for flood victims), Turkey and Mozambique (also with the objective of offloading supplies in both countries).⁹⁹ In June 1992 two strike craft visited Kenya,¹⁰⁰ after which that country was also visited by the *Tafelberg* in September 1992,¹⁰¹ shortly before the ship was withdrawn from service, and replaced by a

⁹² Sharpe (ed.), pp. 675-690; R. Sharpe (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 1994-95* (Coulson, s.a.), pp. 23-36, 84-102, 279-295, 411-419, 450-453, 474-482, 619-623, 730-742.

⁹³ Line-book: SAS *Protea* (consulted on board the ship, July 1997); *Navy News* 9, July 1990, pp. 12, 15, 17; *The Natal Mercury*, 5.6.1990, p. 6.

⁹⁴ *Navy News* 9, August 1990, pp. 2, 10, 11, 15-16, 20; Du Toit, pp. 307, 320; *The Natal Mercury*, 12.5.1990, p. 4 and 26.6.1990, p. 2.

⁹⁵ *Navy News* 9, January-February 1991, pp. 12-13; *Paratus* 41(10), October 1991, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁶ *Navy News* 10, April-May 1991, pp. 12-16; G. Wardley, "Operation Gypsy – SAS *Tafelberg*'s South American adventure", *Unisa Latin American Report* 7(2), 1991, p. 89.

⁹⁷ Line-book: SAS *Oswald Pirow/René Sethsen* (consulted on board the ship, July 1997).

⁹⁸ *Navy News* 10, August-September 1991, p. 9; Du Toit, p. 321.

⁹⁹ *Navy News* 10, November-December 1991, pp. 8-11 and 11, June 1992, pp. 8-9, 14; *Sunday Tribune*, 25.8.1991, p. 19 and 8.9.1991, p. 17; *The Natal Mercury*, 7.8.1991, p. 6 and 7.9.1991, p. 1; Du Toit, p. 321.

¹⁰⁰ *The Natal Mercury*, 19.6.1992, p.1 and 25.6.1992, p. 12.

¹⁰¹ *Navy News* 11, November-December 1992, p. 2 and 12, January-February 1992, pp. 10-11; *Paratus* 43(11), November 1992, pp. 18-19; *Sunday Tribune*, 11.10.1992, pp. 8-9.

former Ukrainian-built Arctic icebreaker supply ship, commissioned as SAS *Outeniqua* (8 June 1993).¹⁰²

Over and above the fact that the SAN has assisted African Commonwealth countries in patrolling their coasts (in particular with regard to illegal fishing), the SAN has also carried out survey work along the coasts of some of these countries; for example, in March 1993, the *Protea* worked along the southern Mozambican coast and visited Maputo.¹⁰³ In May 1993 the *Drakensberg* visited the UK for the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Atlantic.¹⁰⁴ In the meantime, the *Outeniqua* visited the Seychelles and other islands in the Indian Ocean (June-July 1993),¹⁰⁵ and then went to Europe on a relief operation, sailing right around Africa, and also visiting Kenya and Namibia.¹⁰⁶ In the years 1990 to 1994, a number of warships from Uruguay, France, Taiwan and Portugal visited South Africa – and in January 1994, the RN paid its first visit in nearly 20 years, when the frigate HMS *Norfolk* was alongside in Cape Town (27-31 January) and Simon's Town (31 January - 1 February), together with the oiler RFA *Green Rover* (Cape Town, 27 January - 1 February).¹⁰⁷

Shortly after the watershed elections of April 1994 and the inauguration of Mr Nelson Mandela as the RSA's first democratically elected president, the *Drakensberg* departed on a 92-day cruise to show the new flag of the new RSA in overseas ports, including Rosyth in Scotland (in order to also take part in the Joint Maritime Course 942 ten-day exercise with other navies), London (to coincide with South Africa's re-admittance to the Commonwealth on 17 July 1994) and Portsmouth.¹⁰⁸ Two small SAN ships then visited islands in the Indian Ocean (September 1994);¹⁰⁹ and the *Outeniqua* went to Tanzania to offload some 8 000 tons of maize-meal and other food in Dar Es Salaam for Rwandan refugees who had fled their country following the bloodshed caused by the civil war,¹¹⁰ while the *Drakensberg* visited the

¹⁰² For the role of the *Outeniqua* in the SAN, see Wessels, "Veertig jaar se ondersteuning ter see. Gevegsteunskepe in die Suid-Afrikaanse Vloot, 1967-2007(2): SAS *Drakensberg* en SAS *Outeniqua*", *Journal for Contemporary History* 33(1), June 2008, pp. 144-145.

¹⁰³ Line-book: SAS *Protea*; SANDF Documentation Service: Log-book of SAS *Protea*; *Die Volksblad*, 19.3.1993, p. 9; *Navy News* 12, May 1993, p. 16.

¹⁰⁴ *Navy News* 12, August 1993, pp. 8-11, 14-15; *The Natal Mercury*, 25.5.1993, p. 5; *Paratus* 44(6), June 1993, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ *Paratus* 44(8), August 1993, p. 32 and 44(9), September 1993, pp. 26-28; information supplied by Capt. E.H. Lochner (SAS *Outeniqua*).

¹⁰⁶ *Paratus* 44(11), November 1993, pp. 18-20 and 44(12), December 1993, pp. 37-38; *Navy News* 13, January-February 1994, p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Navy News* 13, March 1994, pp. 11-13; *Die Burger*, 5.1.1994, p. 1 and 27.1.1994, p. 17; *The Star*, 5.1.1994, p.1 and 28.1.1994, p. 5. See also Wessels, "Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke (2)", pp. 99-101.

¹⁰⁸ *Navy News* 13, June 1994, p.18 and October 1994, pp. 12-16; *Salut* 1(2), June 1994, pp. 50-51 and 1(6), October 1994, pp. 26-28; *Ad Astra* 15(10), October 1994, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁹ SA Naval Museum: Report of proceedings – Operation Maroela 02 to 29 September 1994; *Navy News* 13, November-December 1994, pp. 12-13; *Sunday Times*, 16.10.1994, p. 4.

¹¹⁰ *Navy News* 13, October 1994, p. 2 and November-December 1994, p. 9.

United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, India and Oman (March-April 1995)¹¹¹ – countries never visited before by the SAN. In April 1995, two SAN minehunters conducted a fishery protection patrol off the Namibian coast and visited Lüderitz and Walvis Bay.¹¹² In July 1995, the *Outeniqua*, a submarine and two strike craft visited Mozambique and Tanzania, also taking on board naval personnel from those countries for sea-training.¹¹³ On 7-8 August 1996 the naval chiefs (or their representatives) from 11 countries (including members of the Commonwealth) attended a meeting of the Southern African Inter-state Defence and Security Committee (and the Standing Maritime Committee Southern African States), formed to promote regional co-operation with regard to defence and security matters.¹¹⁴ In the meantime, the *Drakensberg* visited the USA, and also stopped over in Senegal and Ghana en route back to South Africa (June-September 1996).¹¹⁵ So, the years following the RSA's re-admittance to the Commonwealth and to the international community at large, were characterized by an enormous increase in the SAN's diplomatic and humanitarian opportunities and responsibilities. In the light of the fact that the Navy no longer had any destroyers or frigates, combat support ships and small combatants were deployed as grey diplomats.

Since 1994, a stream of foreign grey diplomats have also visited South African ports, including ships from countries such as Russia, Denmark, India, Poland and Gabon; and visits have also been made by coast guard ships from Japan and Mauritius – countries that had never before sent warships on visits to the RSA. In the course of 1994, 21 warships from eight countries visited South Africa; 26 such visits were made by warships from 12 countries in 1995; and 27 visits from ten countries ensued in 1996. Although several of these ships were from the RN, British ships were in the minority, with most of the visitors coming from France. Over and above the RN ships, there were also visits by other Commonwealth countries, namely India (1994), Malaysia (1995), Pakistan (1995) and Mauritius (coast guard, 1996).¹¹⁶

In April 1997 the SAN celebrated its 75th anniversary in style, with several events in Simon's Town and Cape Town, including a fleet review – attended by 15 SAN and 22 other warships (from 13 countries, including six that belonged to the Commonwealth: Britain,

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 14, May 1995, pp. 12-14.

¹¹² *Ibid.* 14, September 1995, p. 4.

¹¹³ *Salut* 2(10), October 1995, pp. 4, 34-36; *The Mercury*, 4.7.1995, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ *Navy News* 15, September 1996, p. 19.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 15, October 1996, pp. 13-18; *Salut* 3(11), November 1996, pp. 58-59.

¹¹⁶ See A. Wessels, "Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke aan Suid-Afrikaanse hawens (3): die eerste dekade van die nuwe RSA, 1994-2004", *Journal for Contemporary History* 32(1), June 2007, pp. 223-227.

Kenya, Pakistan, India, Malaysia and Singapore).¹¹⁷ Over and above flag-showing cruises to other countries, the SAN continued to pay visits to African (and sometimes other) Commonwealth countries to strengthen ties and assist where necessary and possible, for example Namibia (two strike craft, August 1997);¹¹⁸ Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya and the Indian Ocean islands (*Drakensberg* and two strike craft, September - October 1997),¹¹⁹ and Mozambique and Tanzania (*Outeniqua* and two MCMs, August-September 1998).¹²⁰ In April 1999, an Indian navy offshore patrol vessel participated in “Operation Blue Crane” along the east coast of South Africa.¹²¹ In May 1999, personnel from Mauritius and the Seychelles were amongst those who served on board SAN or French warships during Exercise Tulipe 99 in Madagascar’s territorial waters.¹²² In July 2000, the *Drakensberg* visited the USA once again, and this time also Canada, thus becoming the first-ever SAN warship to visit that Commonwealth country.¹²³

After the SAN 75 celebrations, foreign grey diplomats continued to stream to the RSA, with a total of 35 warships from 15 countries visiting RSA ports in 1997, making it the busiest naval-contact year since 1972 (albeit that in that year most of the foreign warship visitors were from the UK). Then, gradually, the number of visitors decreased, with only 17 (from six countries) in 1998 and ten (from five countries) in 1999. However, 2000 saw an increase in the flow of incoming foreign sea-traffic once again, with 22 ships from four countries visiting – most of them from France. Commonwealth visitors came from Britain (every year) and India (1999), and first-time visitors arrived from Sweden and the People’s Republic of China.¹²⁴

At the start of the new millennium, SAS *Drakensberg* visited India (February 2001),¹²⁵ and SAS *Outeniqua* and a minehunter visited St Helena (June 2001).¹²⁶ The SAN received an invitation to send a ship to attend Australia’s centennial in October 2001. Under the codename “Operation Migrant”, the combat support ship *Outeniqua* was on her way to Australia, when the fleet review that would have taken place in Sydney was cancelled in the wake of the 11 September terror attacks in the USA. The *Outeniqua* was consequently

¹¹⁷ *Navy News* 16(3), 1997, pp. 4-7, 10-23.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 16(5), 1997, p. 7 and 16(6), 1997, p. 32.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 17(1), 1998, pp. 12-17; *Salut* 5(1), January 1998, pp. 32-34.

¹²⁰ *Salut* 6(1), January 1999, p. 33; *Defense Affairs of Africa and the Middle East* 1(3), November 1998, p. 13.

¹²¹ *Navy News* 18(4), 1999, pp. 10-15; *The Mercury*, 21.4.1999, p. 7 and 28.4.1999, p. 9; *Daily News*, 14.4.1999, p. 1.

¹²² *Navy News* 18(7), 1999, p. 15; *The Mercury*, 12.5.1999, p. 9.

¹²³ *Navy News* 19(6), 2000, pp. 29-31; *Salut* 7(9), September 2000, p. 63 and 7(12), December 2000, p. 37.

¹²⁴ Wessels, “Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke ... (3)”, pp. 230-237.

¹²⁵ *Navy News* 20(2), 2001, p. 22 and 20(4), 2001, p. 16.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 20(5), 2001, p. 14.

diverted to La Réunion.¹²⁷ From 11-24 February 2002, *Outeniqua* and a strike craft took part in “Operation Tanzanite”, a peace-keeping exercise conducted along the coast of Tanzania.¹²⁸

From 2001 until the end of 2004, many foreign warships continued to visit South African ports, including many from the UK; but there were only four visits from other Commonwealth countries, namely India (2003 and 2004)¹²⁹ and Kenya (two ships, end of December 2004/beginning of January 2005).¹³⁰ In June 2002 the *Drakensberg* visited St Helena,¹³¹ and in December 2002 the *Outeniqua* once again visited the island, as well as Namibia.¹³² In December 2003 - January 2004, the *Drakensberg* visited Haiti.¹³³

In the meantime, in April 2001, the navies of South Africa and Australia co-operated, for the first time ever, in apprehending a fishing trawler that was fishing illegally in Australia’s Exclusive Economic Zone. The *South Tommi* (registered in Togo, but with a Spanish captain and crew) was confronted by the Australian fisheries patrol ship *Southern Supporter* and ordered to sail to Fremantle. However, the trawler escaped, sailing towards South Africa, pursued by the Australians, but outrunning the patrol boat. The SAN was requested to render assistance, and the hydrographic survey ship *Protea* and the strike craft *Galeshewe* were sent out to intercept the trawler. Australian naval and army personnel (41 in total) were flown to South Africa and accompanied the SAN ships, with Cdr Daryl Bates on board the *Protea*. On the evening of 12 April the SAN ships intercepted the trawler, and found nearly 100 tons of Patagonian toothfish on board. The *Southern Supporter* towed the trawler to Cape Town to refuel, and the military personnel then escorted the trawler to Fremantle. Operation Lariat was a great success, providing ample proof of how well Commonwealth naval personnel can co-operate with one another.¹³⁴

In August 2003 the South African and Australian navies once again co-operated in apprehending a suspect fishing boat, the *Viarsa I*, in what became known as Operation Lariat II. The Uruguayan trawler was chased by the Australian fisheries patrol ship *Southern Supporter*, and the South African authorities were asked for assistance. The South African Antarctic supply ship *SA Agulhas*, together with the salvage tug *John Ross*, took part in the

¹²⁷ Line-book: SAS *Outeniqua* (consulted at the SA Naval Museum); “SA Navy. SA Vloot. SAS *Outeniqua*. Ile de la Réunion. Ship’s log”, <<http://www.simonstown.com/touris/navy.otqlogs.htm>>, 2002; *Navy News* 20(6), 2001, pp. 14-16.

¹²⁸ *Navy News* 21(2), 2002, p. 15; *SA Soldier* 9(5), May 2002, pp. 8-10.

¹²⁹ Wessels, “Buitelandse vlagvertoonbesoeke ... (3)”, pp. 237-242; *Navy News* 23(4), 2004, p. 6.

¹³⁰ Seen by the author in Durban, 28.12.2004 - 1.1.2005.

¹³¹ *Navy News* 21(4), 2002, pp. 20-22; *The Mercury*, 7.6.2002, p. 3.

¹³² *Navy News* 22(1), 2003, p. 12; SABC TV2 news bulletin, 21.12.2002.

¹³³ *Navy News* 23(3), 2004, p. 24.

¹³⁴ Several SABC and etv news bulletins, 13.4.2001; Bennett and Söderlund, pp. 61, 63; *S.A. Shipping News and Fishing Industry Review* 56(3), May 2001, p. 12; SAN Info Bulletin 46/01, 22.11.2001; SA Navy Info Bulletin 16/01, 17.4.2001; *South African Soldier* 8(2), June 2001, p. 20; *Navy News* 20(2), 2001, pp. 2-4.

chase, and at the beginning of September, the SA *Agulhas* intercepted the trawler, and was joined by the *Southern Supporter* and *John Ross*. Patagonian toothfish that had been illegally fished were found in large quantities on board. The combat support ship *Drakensberg* arrived at the scene on 5 September, with Australian Cdr Paul Bartlett and 26 other Royal Australian Navy personnel on board. The Australian naval personnel, who were to form the steering party for the *Viarsa I*'s trip back to Australia, were flown to the *Viarsa I* on board an SAAF Oryx helicopter.¹³⁵

Soon afterwards, the first of the SAN's four new frigates, SAS *Amatola*, arrived in Simon's Town on 4 November 2003, followed by the *Isandlwana* (25 February 2004), *Spioenkop* (31 May 2004) and *Mendi* (17 September 2004), all built in Germany, but with their weapon suites, etc., having been fitted in South Africa. These were followed by three new German-built submarines, which replaced those of the "Daphné" class: SAS *Manthatisi* (date of arrival: 7 April 2006), *Charlotte Maxeke* (26 April 2007) and *Queen Modjadji I* (22 May 2008).¹³⁶ These new ships and submarines form part of the arms package that was approved by the South African cabinet and subsequently announced on 18 November 1998 – comprising a timely "emergency buoy" thrown out at the SANDF, and the Navy in particular. However, the weapons package was subject to controversy from the outset. There were questions about the choice of weapon systems and the high cost involved, as well as the tender process.¹³⁷

Whatever the outcome of the ongoing debate with regard to allegations of irregularities, the fact of the matter is that, for the first time since 1985, the SAN now has major surface combatants that can be used for extensive patrol work, but also to take part in exercises with ships from other countries. In addition, these combatants can be deployed as impressive grey diplomats on tailor-made flag-showing cruises. The new SAN frigates have visited Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon and São Tomé (May - June 2006); Argentina, Brazil and Chile (October - November 2006); Plymouth (July 2007); Brazil and Ghana (September - October 2007) and the Far East, including Singapore, the People's Republic of China, Malaysia, Vietnam, India and Mauritius (September - December 2008).¹³⁸ In the meantime, foreign grey diplomats continue to visit South Africa's shores, in particular ships from France

¹³⁵ *South African Soldier* 12(11), November 2005, p. 22; SABC TV3 news bulletin, 5.9.2003; *Navy News* 22(6), 2003, p. 11.

¹³⁶ *Navy News* 22(6), 2003, pp. 16-18, 20, 22-23; 23(2), 2004, pp. 17-19, 22-27; 23(3), 2004, pp. 15-22; 23(5), 2004, pp. 21-28; 25(2), 2006, pp. 22-23; 26(3), 2007, pp. 18-23 and 28(3), 2008, pp. 16-17; *South African Soldier* 11(5), May 2004, pp. 18-19; 11(9), September 2004, p. 5 and 11(11), November 2004, pp. 18-20.

¹³⁷ *Salut* 6(1), January 1999, pp. 14-19; *The Mercury*, 19.11.1998, p. 1, 19.4.2000, p. 7, 12.10.2000, p. 1, 14.11.2000, p. 25 and 25.1.2001, p. 4; *Beeld*, 19.11.1998, pp. 1-2 and 4.10.2001, pp. 1-2; *The Independent on Saturday*, 20.1.2001, p. 1.

¹³⁸ *Navy News* 25(4), 2006, pp. 26-31; 26(3), 2007, pp. 26-33; 27(6), 2007, pp. 18-21 and 28(6), 2008, p. 20.

and the UK; but during the years 2005 to 2009, there have also been visitors from other Commonwealth countries, such as India (June 2005), Pakistan (July 2006) and, once again, India (September 2006).¹³⁹ Visits by SAN warships (other than those made by the frigates already referred to) to Commonwealth countries in the period 2005-2009 included the visit by *Protea* and two strike craft to Mozambique, Tanzania and Kenya (October 2006).¹⁴⁰

There was a possibility that the Australian frigate HMAS *Canberra* might visit South Africa in approximately April 2001, but this did not materialize.¹⁴¹ The first peace-time Australian naval visit to South Africa in 37 years took place in July 2005, when the frigate HMAS *Anzac*, en route back from Europe after taking part in the Fleet Review in the Solent to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar (and participating in the Festival of the Sea in Portsmouth; events also attended by South Africa's combat support ship SAS *Drakensberg*), visited Simon's Town (23-26 July) and Cape Town (26-28 July 2005).¹⁴² When a NATO task force visited South Africa for the first time in August 2007, the Canadian frigate *Toronto* was one of the six visiting warships that exercised with units of the SAN.¹⁴³ In May 2008 the first Exercise IBSAMAR was held, off the South African coast, involving warships from South Africa, Brazil and India, and with an observer from Tanzania on board one of the SAN frigates.¹⁴⁴ With the exception of New Zealand, Nigeria and Ghana, South Africa has, in the course of the past century, hosted warships from most of the major Commonwealth countries in peace-time.

Finally, as far as contact between the SAN and other Commonwealth navies, and co-operation with them, are concerned, mention should be made of the fact that the SAN has donated a total of six small "Namacurra"-class harbour patrol boats to three Commonwealth countries in Africa: two to Malawi (in 1988 and 2008), two to Namibia (2002) and two to Mozambique (2004) – in the case of Mozambique, these boats today (2009) constitute the only worthwhile assets of that country's navy.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ See, for example, *ibid.* 24(3), 2005, pp. 16-17; 24(4), 2005, pp. 7, 14; 24(5), 2005, p. 7; 25(4), 2006, p. 15 and 26(1), 2007, p. 5.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 25(6), 2006, pp. 18-23.

¹⁴¹ Information supplied by Mr Vic Jeffery, HMAS *Stirling*, Garden Island/Cockburn Sound, West Australia, 8.7.2003.

¹⁴² *Navy News* 24(4), 2005, p. 7 and 24(5), 2005, pp. 24-31; *The Mercury*, 22.7.2005, p. 7. For the Fleet Review and the Festival of the Sea, see André Wessels Private Document Collection, Portsmouth 28.6.2005-3.7.2005 (files): several brochures, etc.

¹⁴³ *Navy News* 27(6), 2007, pp. 12-17; *The Mercury*, 29.8.2007, p. 4, 5.9.2007, p. 1 and 12.9.2007, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ *Navy News* 28(3), 2008, pp. 18-21; information supplied by Cdr Gerard Wessels, 23.4.2008; *The Mercury*, 23.4.2008, p. 4 and 25.4.2008, p. 14.

¹⁴⁵ S. Saunders (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 2008-2009* (Coulsdon, 2008), pp. 8, 480, 525, 532-533. Two Namacurras were also donated to Angola (2006).

6. CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES

In this paper, the history of the South African Navy (SAN) and its predecessors has been reviewed, and the extent to which interaction with other Commonwealth navies occurred during the years 1910 to 2009 has been indicated. It has been pointed out that although the Union of South Africa was established in 1910, and the Union Defence Forces in 1912, the Union only acquired its first naval force in 1922, when the South African Naval Service (SANS) was formed. In the meantime, the country's naval defence was conducted by the Royal Navy (RN), albeit that the local South African Division of the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR(SA)) was also in place. During World War I, 164 members of the RNVR(SA) served in the RN. The SANS's three small ships were withdrawn from service in 1933-1934 because of the Great Depression, and it was only during World War II that South Africa built up its first relatively substantial naval force. The country entered the war against Germany on 6 September 1939, and in the light of the threat posed by submarines and mines, several trawlers and whalers were converted into minesweepers and/or anti-submarine patrol vessels. By the end of hostilities in September 1945, South Africa's naval forces had not only operated in local waters, but had also seen action in the Mediterranean against German and Italian forces, and had sent ships to serve in the Far East against Japan, thus co-operating with other Commonwealth (and other) navies in all the war zones. Nearly 3 000 South Africans also served in the RN.

It has also been pointed out that in the wake of the world war, South Africa's naval forces were rationalized, but – in the context of the Cold War and the Soviet threat to the strategically important Cape sea-route – the SAN then gradually grew in size and importance, albeit that it was (and today still is) small in comparison to other Commonwealth navies such as the RN and the navies of India, Canada and Australia. It has been noted that, in accordance with the Simon's Town Agreement, the RN handed over its Simon's Town Naval Base to the SAN in 1957, and that the SAN acquired several new warships from the United Kingdom. In the meantime, South Africa gradually became more isolated internationally because of the National Party government's racially-based policy of apartheid. As has been indicated, this in due course also impacted negatively on the SAN and on its interaction with other Commonwealth navies. For many decades, the RN was the SAN's main naval partner. Many RN ships visited South African ports, and regular exercises took place between SAN, RN and sometimes also other warships; but in the course of the 1970s this came to an end. In 1975, the Simon's Town Agreement was abrogated, and in 1977 the United Nations (UN) imposed

a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. The country had to seek new allies, and the SAN established close relations with Israel, the Republic of China (Taiwan) and Chile.

In the meantime, South Africa became embroiled in the Namibian War of Independence (1966-1989); a war that spilled over into Angola. The paper has indicated the limited, albeit important, role played by the SAN in this conflict, as well as the serious negative implications that the conflict had for the Navy. Throughout the paper, the strong ties that the SAN enjoyed with the RN, in contrast to the SAN's limited contact with the navies of, for example, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, India, Pakistan, and other Commonwealth navies, were considered, and where possible, parallels were drawn between the development of the SAN and that of other Commonwealth navies. In the course of the twentieth century and beyond, to a large extent, contact with Commonwealth navies has, indeed, been limited to contact with the RN; initially because of the physical RN presence in South Africa, owing to the fact that the RN controlled the Simon's Town Naval Base until 1957, but also because of political considerations (with many countries boycotting South Africa because of the racial policy that was followed until 1990, with even Britain eventually severing military ties). Other contributing factors in this regard included the distance of South Africa from far-flung countries such as, for example, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (with other countries also having other commitments and spheres of influence), as well as the relatively small size of the SAN. Since 1994, most of the naval ties between South Africa and other Commonwealth countries have chiefly entailed contact with African member states, taking the form of humanitarian aid, assistance in patrolling the coastal waters of these countries, and supplying sea-training for their sailors (with most of these African navies having very few, if any, ocean-worthy warships).

The advent of the truly democratic South Africa in 1994 opened new doors (ports) for South African warships, and many flag-showing visits have since taken place, while many foreign warships (grey diplomats) have also visited South Africa, sometimes participating in exercises with the SAN. Whereas in the years up to the mid-1970s, most foreign grey diplomats were RN ships, there have been many more visits by ships from other countries since 1994. This should not be seen as a deliberate moving away from the RN and other predominantly white Commonwealth navies by South Africa, but rather as an indication of how the country's interests have diversified, with more emphasis now being placed on contact with Third-World countries (including Commonwealth countries that previously shunned South Africa) and powerful non-European/non-US countries such as Brazil, India and the People's Republic of China. The changing nature of global connections obviously also needs to be taken into account in this regard. Since 1994, the RN has still been a

frequent visitor to South African ports, with more visits by its warships than by the warships of any other country occurring in 2001; but relatively large formal exercises now take place on a regular basis with ships from Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay (ATLASUR), as well as Brazil and India (IBSAMAR). Hopefully, closer ties with – especially – Australia will also become a reality in the future.

Another factor that has to be taken into account in evaluating the history of the SAN, and its co-operation with Commonwealth (and other) navies in the course of the twentieth century and beyond, is the shifting demands confronting navies. The SAN and its predecessors developed from a small coastal force (1922-1933) to a navy participating on a limited scale in a world war (1939-1945), a (small) blue-water navy (1945-1985), a navy that placed the emphasis on defending its littoral waters (1985-2006), and finally, to a navy that is once again a small-scale but modern blue-water force. At the moment (July 2009), the SAN has¹⁴⁶ approximately 7 000 personnel (including more than 2 000 civilians), three 2001-2008 German-built “209”-class (Type 1400 MOD) submarines, four 2001-2007 German-built “Valour”-class Meko A-200-Type frigates, two 1978-1983 locally-built (Israeli-designed) “Warrior”-class gun-boats, three 1979-1981 German-/South African-built “River”-class minehunters, three small 1991-1996 South African-built “T”-Craft inshore patrol boats, 21 small 1980-1981 South African-built “Namacurra”-class harbour patrol vessels, one 1984-1987 South African-built combat support ship, one 1970-1972 British-built “Hecla”-class hydrographic survey ship, plus three tugs and two multi-role tenders. Whereas until 1967 all the major SAN ships were designed and built in the UK (thus endowing the SAN with the character of a “mini-RN”), most of the major SAN units of today are of German origin.

In comparison with other Commonwealth navies,¹⁴⁷ it is clear that the SAN, with its three submarines and four frigates, is much stronger than the navies of, for example, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya and the many small island countries; stronger than the New Zealand navy (two frigates); comparable to the navies of Malaysia (one submarine plus one fitting out, and four frigates) and Singapore (four submarines plus two more in the pipeline, and six frigates); but weaker than the navies of Canada (four submarines, three destroyers and 12 frigates), Australia (six submarines and 12 frigates), Pakistan (five submarines and six frigates, plus four building), and India (16 submarines, one aircraft carrier, eight destroyers and 13 frigates, with three destroyers and five frigates building), while of all the Commonwealth navies, the RN is still the strongest (12 submarines plus three building, three

¹⁴⁶ According to Saunders (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 2008-2009*, pp. 718-723.

¹⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, *passim*.

aircraft carriers, eight destroyers plus six building, and 17 frigates), albeit that the RN has been considerably scaled down ever since the end of the Cold War.¹⁴⁸

At the moment, ever-increasing demands are being made on the South African National Defence Force to participate in UN or African Union peacekeeping operations. For this reason, it is also probable that the SAN will be more geared towards humanitarian and peace-support operations in future. Consequently, the need for at least one amphibious assault ship (or, preferably, two) has been identified, while the remaining gun-boats and minehunters will probably be replaced in due course by six multi-mission offshore patrol vessels. Comparable developments in other countries include the Australian navy's decision to acquire two large amphibious assault ships, as well as three air warfare destroyers; Canada's intention to acquire three multi-role joint support ships, and the New Zealand navy's acquisition of a large multi-role ship, two offshore patrol vessels and four inshore patrol vessels.

The modern "new-look" SAN of the future will undoubtedly be able to play a meaningful role with regard to humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, and contribute towards the combating of piracy (as it is currently already able to do, albeit on a more limited scale). It will also be able to contribute towards the envisaged African rapid-reaction force.¹⁴⁹

At the moment, financial constraints and the lack of a maritime culture amongst the largest portion of the population, comprise challenges that are being faced by the SAN – both in terms of the present, and also the foreseeable future. One can only hope that the political context will be conducive to the development and maintenance of a small but modern and well-trained naval force, on the one hand, and that within this context, the SAN will be utilized in a professional and circumspect manner, on the other hand. After all, the navy is a very important instrument in foreign affairs, especially on a diplomatic level. South Africa cannot afford to be isolated, as was the case from the early 1960s until the late 1980s. Hopefully, in the course of the next decades of the 21st century, the SAN will build on the naval ties that it has established since 1994, without neglecting its very important co-operation with Commonwealth navies – co-operation that dates back for nearly a century.

¹⁴⁸ In 1990 the RN still had 32 submarines, three aircraft carriers, 13 destroyers and 36 frigates. See R. Sharpe (ed.), *Jane's fighting ships 1990-91* (Coulson, 1990), pp. 675-690.

¹⁴⁹ For more on the African rapid reaction force see, for example, A. Wessels, "n Snelontplooiingsmag vir Afrika: enkele historiese perspektiewe", *Journal for Contemporary History* 28(1), June 2003, pp. 1-15 and A. Wessels, "A rapid reaction force for Africa, with special reference to Southern Africa and the role that the South African National Defence Force can play" in T. Potgieter (ed.-in-chief), *Regions, regional organisations and military power* [proceedings of the XXXIInd International Congress of Military History, Cape Town, 2007] (Stellenbosch, 2008), pp. 603-613.