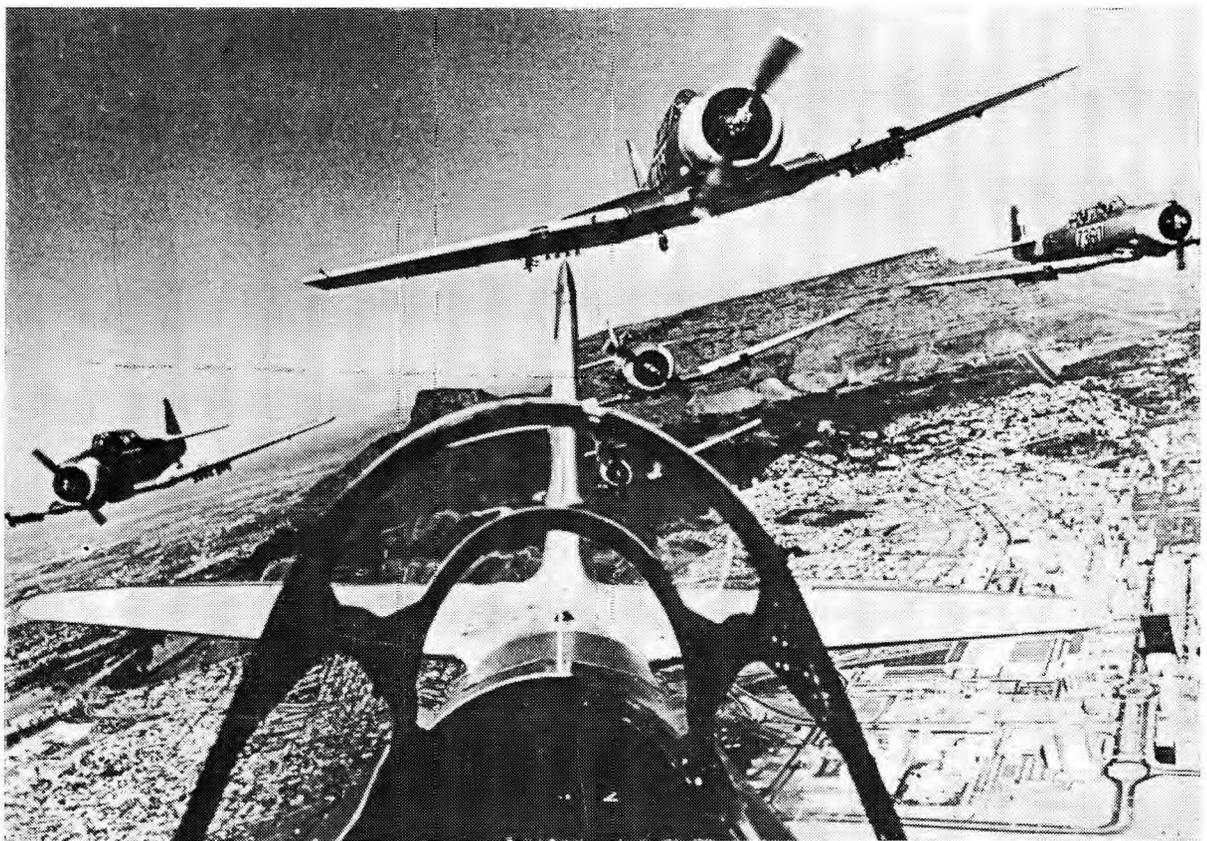




OC 7 Squadron leading his unit over Cape Town



Harvards of 7 Squadron with Table Mountain in the background

POST-WAR HISTORY OF NO. 7 SQUADRON

1951 - 1958

The Squadron was resuscitated in January 1951 under the command of Maj W. P. Stanford. Initially the Squadron was named No 17 Auxiliary Squadron but in August of the same year the unit was reorganised into two separate units: No 27 (Aux) Squadron and No 7 (Aux) Squadron, the former flying Ventura aircraft and the latter Harvards.

The Squadron was gradually brought up to strength with the influx of ex-wartime pilots who were recruited under the Post-War Pupil Pilot Scheme. The main duty of the Squadron during the year was training, with special emphasis on formation flying, aerobatics and instrument flying.

At the end of 1951 the unit could boast fifteen pilots on strength, as well as their new Officer Commanding, Lt E. Johnson, and a Flight Commander, Lt K. Darge.

During the Van Riebeeck Festival in March and early April 1952 the Squadron got the chance of proving their worth when they took part in the largest formation ever flown by the SAAF to that date — 108 aircraft in total were used in a fly-past.

One of the major problems of that period were that the pilots did not have time enough for training. Continuous training was scarce and non-continuous training was carried out spasmodically on every second Saturday. Lectures were provided but these were received less enthusiastically because it meant less flying time. It was only after Capt A. Q. de Wet was appointed as training officer in 1952 when the Squadron really started to show progress. In the period following his appointment the Squadron flew more hours per month than in the whole of 1951. A continuous training camp for the whole Squadron was organised at Swartkop Air Station during May 1952 boosting Squadron morale and efficiency considerably.

A less fortunate incident occurred on 1 September 1952 when four Harvards sent to

Springbok to participate in the "Copper Centenary" lost their way and overshot their destination. When eventually they had to force land due to fuel problems, one aircraft overturned.

The unit once again got a new commanding officer when Lt D. Mills was promoted to captain on 29 October 1952.

On 9 March 1953 tragedy struck the Squadron when two Harvards collided in mid-air over Blaauwberg. 2 Lt M. Crous and 2 Lt P. Theron were killed instantly when their aircraft was struck by a Harvard piloted by 2 Lt M. Griffin. 2 Lt C. Sampson, a passenger in the second aircraft, baled out whilst 2 Lt Griffin flew his damaged aircraft back to Ysterplaat — an act of bravery for which he was highly commended.



Capt A. Q. de Wet, training officer 7 Squadron 1952



7 Squadron in formation over Cape Town



Later in the same year another pilot, CO D. Gilcrest, was also killed when his Harvard collided with a small aircraft over Youngsfield.

During April 1954 Lt P. Conway succeeded Capt De Wet as training officer. The Squadron succeeded shortly afterwards in winning the first ACF inter-Squadron Shield Competition.

Capt A. B. Jackson assumed command of the Squadron on 1 January 1956. The year 1956 was highlighted by the Squadron participating in various air displays in the Cape. During a training session on 16 June 1956 two Harvards again collided during Battle Formation exercises and both pilots, Lt D. Stapleton and 2 Lt J. Bonnes, were killed when the aircraft crashed into the sea.

On 8 June 1959 No 7 Squadron was disbanded and all pilots were posted to the Special Reserve of Flying Officers.

1961 - 1975

No 7 Squadron was resuscitated in August 1961 with Maj W. H. van den Bos as first Officer Commanding with effect from 2 September. This was indeed a modest start since the Squadron had only four Harvards and twelve Citizen Force pilots. The majority of pilots were university students and as the date the Squadron recommenced flying coincided with preparations for the end of the year examinations, 1961 was not a very successful year as far as flying activities were concerned.

The next year was also without any highlights except for the fact that the number of Harvards on strength gradually grew to eight. On 4 August command was handed over to Maj G. L. H. Tatham.

During 1964 the Squadron's command again changed when Maj G. Thom became OC on 14 September. The year passed without any



Harvards of 7 Squadron disguised as Italian fighters for their part in the film 'Fighter Pilots'

noteworthy incidents apart from an occasional air display. Squadron records show that the unit became increasingly popular for air displays.

During May 1966 the Squadron gave no less than four such performances. Maj E. E. Earp took over as OC on 1 January 1967.

30 October 1967 was a red-letter day in the history of No 7 Squadron when the Acting State President, Mr J. F. T. Naudé, presented the Squadron with its colours during a parade at Air Force Station Ysterplaat. The Squadron welcomed yet another Commanding Officer on 19 April 1968 when Maj H. H. A. M. S. Lamoral was appointed in that post.

The base of the Squadron was moved from Youngsfield to Ysterplaat on 31 October 1969. The OC of the Unit was posted to 21 Squadron and succeeded by Maj M. J. Lamb on 10 March 1971. This appointment lasted only up till 2 October of the same year when Maj R. R. Robinson assumed command of the unit.

The Squadron was beginning to give good account of itself as proved by the Citizen Force Inter-Squadron Weapons Competition held in September 1972 when the Squadron came first in the individual as well as team air to

ground competition. The Squadron came second to No 40 Squadron who were the overall winners.

No 7 Squadron featured in a film production during December 1973 when their Harvards were used to portray Italian aircraft in the film 'Fighter Pilots'.

This final phase of this history of No 7 Squadron is marked with increased squadron activity and success at competitions. The records show that the members were always keen to attend courses and that the Squadron's **esprit de corps** remained high.

Maj Robinson's spell as Officer Commanding came to an end in December 1974. On 12 December he set out on his last flight as OC of the Squadron with Lt Williams in a routine formation training flight. Whilst flying over Melkboschstrand he experienced a loss of power and noticed a film of oil developing on his windscreen. His oil pressure had dropped and the engine was extremely rough. He therefore prepared for an emergency landing which was executed, wheels down, on the road leading out of Melkboschstrand. The only damage sustained was when the main plane struck a road sign.