

# Swans of the 70s: The First Women of the South African Navy's Permanent Force

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## Abstract

The service of women in the South African Navy and its predecessors can be divided into three distinct historical periods. Firstly, there was the service of the so-called Swans with the South African Naval Forces during the Second World War, followed by the service of women in the Navy's Permanent Force from 1972 with the South African Defence Force, and lastly, their employment in the Navy since 1994 when a new democratic dispensation saw the establishment of the South African National Defence Force. While the first and last eras mentioned above have received a good measure of attention in academic writing, the second has not.

This article attempts to provide much-needed focus on a neglected but important era in our naval history. It details the first permanent appointment of women in the South African Navy in 1972 and 1973, which marked the departure point of women's service in a permanent capacity – an important groundbreaking event that would lead to expanded utilisation in later years. The article discusses their experiences, particularly their utilisation and challenges to integrate into a male-dominated Navy during the early and mid-1970s.

The research methodology employed for the study on which this article is based, combined the traditional “top-down” (archival sources) and grassroots “from the bottom-up” (oral history) approaches. This method offered a balanced and corroborated view of these important trailblazing events that occurred 50 years ago.

**Keywords:** South African Navy, Women, Swans, Manpower, Gender, Military

## Introduction

The research underlying this article was directed at the rediscovery of women whose stories had been forgotten or never told. Interviews were conducted with those who first joined the Navy's Permanent Force (PF) in 1972 and 1973. Their most poignant feedback to the writer was a ‘thank you for telling our story’ and with that, the realisation that their narrative has in fact never been shared. This article is therefore as much a commemorative

contribution (celebrating 50 years) as it is a way to uncover aspects of their service that have never been told.

### **The Forerunners: Swans during the Second World War, 1939–1945**

The first instance of women who served in uniform with South African (SA) naval forces occurred during the Second World War. In comparison to the land and air force, the Seaward Defence Force (SDF) and subsequent South African Naval Forces (SANF) were the smallest of the three Union Defence Force (UDF) services, but their own rapid wartime expansion in 1940 and 1941 nevertheless required an immediate increase in personnel. The manning of requisitioned vessels for the SDF had been solved partly by the recruitment and utilisation of Cape Coloured sailors, but it was the requirement for even more personnel, specifically to bolster the new naval fixed defences ashore, that prompted the formation of a women's branch of the SANF, known as the Women's Auxiliary Naval Service or WANS – on 9 October 1943.<sup>135</sup> Soon after its establishment the women of the WANS started to refer to themselves as “Swans”. This became a general reference to women who served in the naval forces, and the term remained in popular use.

The establishment of the WANS organisation allowed for one officer and 280 ratings,<sup>136</sup> and the structure comprised communication, clerical, accounts and stores branches and several geographical detachments.<sup>137</sup> The work performed by these branches were all of a non-combatant nature, but the recruitment call for a technical branch stated, ‘recruits must be prepared for service anywhere in the Union’ and that they ‘must also be prepared to perform duties other than those of a non-combatant nature’.<sup>138</sup> The Technical Branch of the WANS had been created to support the SANF's Anti-Submarine Fixed Defences (A/SFD), and was the largest branch with around 130 Swans assigned as watch keepers at SA harbours fitted with A/SFD installations. As part of these tasks, Swans were trained to operate detection and defence apparatus, such as indicator guard loops, harbour asdics<sup>139</sup> and depth charge throwers. The port of Saldanha Bay on the Cape West Coast served as an important convoy assembly point, and a unique controlled mining operations section, manned by women, was employed for its defences.<sup>140</sup>

Esté Kotzé argues that the war provided the first intersection between military masculinity and civilian femininity. Even though the utilisation of women was of an auxiliary and support nature, such service provided the first instances of gender integration in the armed forces.<sup>141</sup> Even though the Swans were affiliated to their own corps, their service and duties converged with those of men on a daily basis. Furthermore, their service in uniform provided an important reference for and motivation to the future utilisation of women in the South African Navy (SAN) many years later.

### **The 1950s: Nationalist Masculinity**

There was considerable interest among women to continue to serve in the UDF after the war. The Chief of General Staff at the time, General Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, firmly supported the continued utilisation of women. A Women's Defence Corps (WDC) was established on 28 November 1947, which trained women as typists, clerks, storekeepers,



radar operators, and ambulance drivers. The appointment of FC Erasmus as Minister of Defence on 26 May 1948, however, spelled the premature end of the WDC. While Erasmus' opposition to the utilisation of non-whites<sup>142</sup> in the UDF was politically motivated, his resistance to the utilisation of women was guided by a strong traditional opinion that the military was reserved for men only. Such ideology was firmly rooted in the view Afrikaner Nationalists held of women, mostly as 'loyal loving wives to their husbands'.<sup>143</sup> This ability, to maintain 'a strong vigil on the home front', was most prominently displayed during times of conflict and specifically during the Anglo-Boer War.<sup>144</sup>

Erasmus rejected the findings of a national commission that recommended the amendment of the Defence Act in 1949 to make provision for the military training and utilisation of women. Erasmus disbanded the WDC in 1951 and from then on, women could only be appointed in the UDF as civilians.<sup>145</sup> Women's rights activists were angered by this decision, and the League of Women Voters described Erasmus' decision as blatant discrimination, which withheld women of their rightful choice to make a contribution to the defence of the country. Their objections did little to change Erasmus' mind, and he maintained his viewpoint for the rest of his tenure as Minister of Defence.<sup>146</sup>

### **The Revitalisation of the SADF: Dealing with Manpower Shortages**

In the early 1960s, the South African Defence Force (SADF) embarked on an aggressive programme of expansion. This was part of a deliberate effort by government to promote united white nationalism as a whole. The SADF was actively utilised to bolster the confidence of the nation and to promote a sense of security, especially in the wake of the Sharpeville shootings (21 March 1960), the ensuing state of emergency, and an assassination attempt on the life of the Prime Minister, HF Verwoerd (9 April 1960).<sup>147</sup>

The Navy was already the benefactor of the Simon's Town Agreement that was finalised in 1957, and the fleet grew exponentially with the addition of new ships. The transfer of the Simon's Town naval base and dockyard facilities from Britain to South Africa similarly demanded the enlargement of the organisation.<sup>148</sup> Such a requirement for more naval personnel was dealt with in three ways:

- The recruitment of coloured men from 1965, and Indian men from 1974;
- The introduction of Conscription or National Service in 1968;<sup>149</sup> and
- The reintroduction of women to the PF of the Navy, the focus of the current study and of this article.

Regardless of the views expressed by the Minister of Defence Jim Fouché, who had succeeded Erasmus in 1959 – stating, 'the SADF had no urgent requirement for the services of women in a military capacity'<sup>150</sup> – steps were nevertheless taken to investigate such possibilities. In 1965, the Mossop Commission was appointed to investigate the employment of women in the PF as a consequence of the ongoing manpower shortages. The commission found that there were a number of areas where women could be employed advantageously, and no fewer than 1 942 posts were identified that could be filled by women. However, the defence budget – already committed to the operational expansion of



the SADF – could not afford the required expenses at such short notice. A separate corps for women would demand the establishment of a command structure, administrative and training facilities, separate accommodation, medical and ablution facilities, and the design and fabrication of new female uniforms. In March 1967, the newly appointed Minister of Defence, PW Botha, decided against the militarisation of existing female posts, but approved the appointment of civilian women in more applicable posts.<sup>151</sup> To this end, the Navy proceeded to appoint 14 civilian women to its communications centres. This group underwent a six-month training course starting January 1971, at Signal School where they were instructed in telecommunication.<sup>152</sup> This group of civilian women were widely regarded as the frontrunners to the so-called “Comms Swans” that joined the PF towards the end of 1972.

This admission of women into a traditional male sanctum – albeit on a small and gradual scale – challenged military society’s outlook on women and femininity. The majority of male officers and men welcomed the utilisation of women in the Navy during the early 1970s, in fact, the Chief of the Navy, Vice Admiral HH Biermann, was a leading proponent. As early as 1963, he ‘reiterated that navy personnel deficiencies were “dangerous” in terms of envisaged requirements and insisted this would necessitate the vigorous recruitment of women.’<sup>153</sup> Then there were those who recognised the presence of women (or perhaps their “loveliness”) but had difficulty to believe that they could make a professional contribution to the organisation, and that women were ancillary and just a short-term solution to the manpower problem. The admission of women to Signal School – an operational training environment traditionally dominated by men – was well noted by the men. In a military environment where ‘male recruits were [supposedly] closed off from civilian life in an effort to transform them from “boys to men”’,<sup>154</sup> the presence of civilian dressed young women elicited a wide range of reactions. Seaman (later Warrant Officer) Peter John Haupt – who served there during his national service year in 1972 – candidly remarked, ‘we used to watch their moves whenever we passed them ... there were some lovelies!’<sup>155</sup>

‘Not taken too seriously’ is how one Swan perceived the general acceptance at the time.<sup>156</sup> Annette Ross’ recollections about male resistance (or the lack thereof) summed up the experience of most Swans at the time:

During my entire time in uniform I never experienced any incident or behaviour that would lead me to conclude that there was resistance from the males in the Navy. In almost every case they went out of their way to make us feel welcome. If there was any such resistance or resentment, this was kept to themselves. I expect however that this is in large measure due to the fact that we would not be going to sea. That might have been a step too far for the time and I think might well have led to some pushback.<sup>157</sup>

The SADF’s official magazine *Paratus* certainly demonstrated a certain degree of dichotomy. The front page of the February 1973 edition featured the State President’s Guard standing to attention in front of the sacrosanct “mother and child” statue at the Voortrekker Monument. Then, further on in the same edition, the achievements of women in uniform are celebrated, but – on the last page – the reader is presented with a scantily



clad female model!<sup>158</sup> The SA military media seemed intent on illustrating that military recruitment would not destroy female sexuality and that femininity remained intact even if female members assumed masculine roles.

*“Botha’s Babies”<sup>159</sup>: The Civil Defence College*

The rapidly changing Southern African strategic landscape of the 1960s had forced the SADF to reassess the nature of new threats. There were indications that the nature of warfare was changing, moving from the conventional to unconventional forms of war, such as insurgency.<sup>160</sup> One way to prepare for this was to improve resilience among the SA white society and to bolster the SA civil defence capacity. Women were expected to make a contribution towards such preparedness. To this end, a Civil Defence College (CDC) was established on 1 January 1971 in the town of George as a military training institution of the South African Army. The first group of 128 women commenced their military training in February 1971, but Kotzé pointed out that, at the time, ‘the role of the women was seen as being of the military but [that] they were not soldiers’.<sup>161</sup> The mission of the college was ‘to train young white women in civil defence techniques so that they would be prepared, in times of crisis, to serve under orders of their local [male] commanders’.<sup>162</sup> The military head of the CDC went so far as to say, ‘women inside or outside of the military must remain the driving force for men’.<sup>163</sup> Women were not however considered or expected to play significant leadership roles within the military.

By 1971, the manpower problems of the SADF had not dissipated, and the Director: General Personnel argued for the utilisation of women in certain PF posts that would allow men to be released for more physically demanding work. Approval was duly given that women could be recruited in a military capacity for officer and other rank training. As a result, 50 women – then under training at the CDC – showed an interest to join the PF of the SADF.<sup>164</sup> Vice Admiral Biermann indicated in August 1971 that 295 naval posts were available for women in uniform. At the time, these particular posts were filled by civilian women, such as those employed at SAN telecommunication centres. It was Biermann’s intent to militarise these posts for telecom operators (65 posts), writers (40 posts), and stores personnel (190 posts), while a further 66 typists and 91 clerical posts were earmarked for militarisation. It was however made clear that no live-in facilities (barrack accommodation) were available for women in Simon’s Town. At the time, Biermann maintained that recruits would have to find their own accommodation, and for that reason, only local girls who lived in the Cape Peninsula area were to be recruited.<sup>165</sup>

In the meantime, the CDC continued with training, and in its second year of its existence (1972), trained a total of 130 young women. The institution then became a feeder for the future employment of women in uniform, i.e. not just in the SADF, but also in the South African Police. Such utilisation was confirmed by Botha’s announcement on 3 October 1972 that women could be recruited from the ranks of the CDC to the different Arms of Service for employment in the PF. Botha also approved the recruitment of women from the private sector or “civvy street” for direct attestation to the various Arms of Service.<sup>166</sup>

**‘I don’t like the term “juffer” but I can suggest nothing better. Can you?’<sup>167</sup>**



The process to find the most appropriate Afrikaans description for female members of the Navy proved surprisingly cumbersome. English terminology and rank designations of the Second World War WANS organisation were brought across without any changes, but at Navy Headquarters, the choice between the Afrikaans terms “Swaan” and “Seejuffer” seemed a difficult one to make. The SADF’s Language Bureau recommended the use of the word “juffer” taken from Dutch, meaning “voorname, aanzienlijke dame”. Senior officers on the staff of Navy Headquarters – and apparently ‘the girls themselves’ – were however not in favour of the term “seejuffer”, and preferred the term “Swaan”.<sup>168</sup> The recommendation by the Language Bureau was however upheld, and final approval was eventually given in March 1974 for the use of the Afrikaans and English rank designations as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

<b>Afrikaans</b>	<b>Afkorting</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>
Seejuffer	SJ	Swan	SWAN
Bevare-seejuffer	BESJ	Able Swan	ASWAN
Baasseejuffer	BSJ	Leading Swan	LSWAN
Bootsjuffer	BJ	Petty Officer Swan	POSWAN
Eerste Bootsjuffer	EBJ	Chief Petty Officer Swan	CPOSWAN
Adjudant-offisier	AO (Mej of Mev)	Warrant Officer	WO (Ms or Mrs)
Adelbors	ADB (Mej of Mev)	Midshipman	Mid (Ms or Mrs)
Onderluitenant	OLt (Mej of Mev)	Sub Lieutenant	SLt (Ms or Mrs)
Luitenant	Lt (Mej of Mev)	Lieutenant	Lt (Ms or Mrs)

Figure 1: The first Swans: December 1972<sup>169</sup>

On 11 October 1972, the Navy received authorisation for the restricted employment of women in the PF, and specifically the Telecommunication Branch. This news was received enthusiastically by the civilian women who were serving at the SAN communication centres at Simon’s Town, Youngsfield and Silvermine. Barbara Bland (16) and Patricia Wood (17) from Simon’s Town, Megan Lewis (17) from Kommetjie and Juanita Retief (18) from Parow were the first to show an interest to join the Navy’s PF. Their fathers were all serving in the Navy at the time – a recruitment trend that would repeat itself in subsequent years. Bland, Wood, Lewis and Retief attested for service in Simon’s Town on 1 December 1972, and became the first women to join the Navy’s PF. Prior to that, a special arrangement was made to train the group, and they were accommodated at Naval College in Gordon’s Bay for a short basic training course from 11 November to 14 December 1972. The design of a naval uniform for women had just been initiated, and the group remained in civilian clothing and overalls during training.<sup>170</sup>

This internal re-appointment of civilian women to the PF was followed by an “open advertisement” on 27 November 1972 when the Navy announced a limited number of PF vacancies for women in the Telecommunication Branch. Unmarried white SA women under the age of 22 years who were in possession of a Standard 8 (now Grade 10) or



high school certificate (Grade 12) were invited to apply. Applications were considered in mid-December 1972, and the first enlistments were scheduled for early January 1973.<sup>171</sup>

### **Finding an Instructor for the Girls: Zelda la Grange**

To accommodate the subsequent basic training, a female instructor had to be found. Male Gunnery Instructors (GIs) remained in charge of regimental training at both SAS *Saldanha* (basic training) and Signal School (specialisation training) but a female instructor was needed as a link and facilitator. Zelda la Grange (later Grobbelaar) of Wynberg was appointed on 15 December 1972. La Grange was already 32 years old – more than ten years older than the other girls who joined, but she was specifically selected for that reason. Instead of being trained and utilised in the Telecommunication Branch, she was selected to become the first female instructor for the ensuing Swan intakes at SAS *Saldanha*. According to La Grange,<sup>172</sup> the selection board was impressed by her physical condition, dress, and bearing. To prepare her for the first basic training course, she received her initial instructor training at SAS *Simonsberg*, and was promoted to the rank of leading swan, a mere two weeks after she had joined the Navy.<sup>173</sup>

La Grange spent the first few months supervising the January 1973 intake that was undergoing specialised communication training at Signal School. She was then detached to SAS *Saldanha* to receive the second Swan intake of the year in June 1973 – the first basic training course for Swans commenced there. The course lasted until the end of August, before the January 1973 group – on completion of the training at Signal School – commenced their long overdue basic training at SAS *Saldanha* in September 1973.

Two basic Swan training courses were scheduled per year, and when not engaged at SAS *Saldanha* for that purpose, La Grange was employed in an administrative function at SAS *Simonsberg*. She also managed to complete a leadership programme and petty officer's qualifying course during this time. It was here that she demonstrated the spirit and determination that endeared her to many in the Navy. She later explained:

I was the only woman in the class and I was not going to let a bunch of guys beat me. It was tough and it encouraged me to do better than usual – which got me through in the end.<sup>174</sup>

La Grange continued as an instructor at SAS *Saldanha* until 1976 when she was promoted to the rank of petty officer and transferred to Gunnery School. She represented the Navy in service shooting, which resulted in a suggestion from the Officer Commanding at Gunnery School that she follow the gunner's course. La Grange passed the course and qualified as the first female gunner in the Navy. At the time, *Navy News* reported on her accomplishments:

Zelda is particularly well-known as an outstanding instructor and, through her determination and dedication has proved that she stands aside for no man – in fact she successfully breached the hitherto all-male ranks at the SAN Gunnery School in 1982 and became the first women to “man” the guns at Lower North Gun Battery.<sup>175</sup>



Zelda la Grange was a qualified gunner and weapon controller, but on account of the exclusion of women from combat posts at sea, she was only utilised intermittently as an instructor ashore and actually employed at Gunnery School as a Media Centre Coordinator.<sup>176</sup> In 1984 (by now promoted to the rank of chief petty officer), she was transferred to The Homestead in Fish Hoek as its first master-at-arms (MAA). In jest, *Navy News* referred to La Grange's position as "mistress-at-arms", but La Grange was proud of the appointment:

[I saw the task as] a challenge and a sort of homecoming. I had a lot to do with the original conversion from a hotel to a Swans residence and having come up through the ranks myself, I have experienced the sort of problems and good times that the Swans have at the moment. I feel I can communicate with the girls and relate better as a mother confessor or even act as a father figure when they need it!<sup>177</sup>

La Grange's career unfortunately took a turn for the worse. Due to health issues, she failed to complete the important Military Training for Ratings Part 3 (MTR3) course, required for promotion to the rank of warrant officer. The 1990 rationalisation, during which the Navy personnel component was cut by 22%, dealt a further blow when La Grange was one of 2 400 naval personnel that were retrenched.<sup>178</sup> She however re-joined the naval reserve and subsequently advanced to the rank of warrant officer class 2. Zelda la Grange was highly praised and recognised amongst her peers (male and female alike) for her early pioneering work and accomplishments.<sup>179</sup>

## **Second Group: The January 1973 Swan Intake**

Even though direct appointments from "civvy street" were permitted, the CDC was not neglected as a source of recruitment, and the Navy enlisted five former trainees from the CDC in George for the January 1973 intake. They were the twins Margaret and Anne Linden, Rosemary Buss, Susan Barnard, and Marina Mong. Because of the lack of military accommodation for women in Simon's Town, the five CDC girls were accommodated at the military hospital in Wynberg on their arrival in Cape Town.<sup>180</sup> The CDC girls who joined made up a quarter of this intake. Rosemary Buss later shared her motivation to join the Navy:

[I] was at the college and was so taken with the [navy] uniform and the presentation and with nothing to lose decided to join. [I was] very excited together with the other girls who were all in the same platoon. Sorry but I hate to admit it, but it was the Commander in his uniform that did the trick.<sup>181</sup>

The Navy indeed offered "something different". Further efforts in 1973 to recruit more CDC trainees however were not as successful. The Navy team that visited George in August 1973 reported that the girls under training were primarily candidate officer material and not interested to follow careers as junior rates or non-commissioned officers.<sup>182</sup>

Apart from the five CDC trainees, 15 other girls were selected for the January 1973 intake. They were all Capetonians and (again) a noticeable number were Navy offspring! Dale



McMurray was one of the selected 20. She was the daughter of Captain (later Commodore) Andrew McMurray and Anne Henny, a former (WW2) Swan herself. McMurray recalled that the recruitment drive was very much a “word-of-mouth” affair and that it was probably her dad who told her about the new scheme to recruit women to the Navy. Most were either uncertain about what they wanted to do in life or willing to do something more exciting than the typical office-based work. ‘I didn’t know what to do with myself ... I thought that it sounded like a challenge, so I applied to join.’<sup>183</sup> Another recounted, ‘I was uncertain of my career and [first] worked as a typist which was extremely boring.’<sup>184</sup> The influence of military family or friends no doubt “assisted” them to make the choice to join the Navy.

McMurray clearly remembered her interview for selection, and how one senior officer on the panel – as a closing remark – candidly quipped, ‘sex is here to stay’.<sup>185</sup> Passing remarks such as this – although casual in nature – were not uncommon and purported the maintenance of male dominance through the use of vocal expressions. Even though the entry of women into the Navy in 1972 and 1973 was supported by its leadership, the military remained “male territory” and women’s gradual penetration into the perceived masculine space must have disrupted the man’s world to some degree.<sup>186</sup>



Figure 2: Following selection, the Swans attested in the Navy’s PF on 8 January 1973. Three of the seven girls can be seen in CDC uniform with the recruitment officer, Lieutenant Commander “Speedy” van Eck.<sup>187</sup>

The design and production of the first female naval uniforms were yet to be finalised and, as a result, the basic training course scheduled to start at SAS *Saldanha* in January 1973 was deferred. The group was therefore first sent to Signal School to proceed with the communication course. There they received rudimentary basic instruction while still in civilian clothing! (see Figure 3). Dale McMurray reflected on what turned out to be a somewhat irregular training year:

Before we went to Saldanha, we first spent approximately nine months up at Signal School on a daily basis. We did not have uniforms until the end of our communications course, and we were trained to drill during that time, over and above the comms course. We drilled in our mini-skirts and slops. All of us passed the comms course [and] on completion of the course we were issued with our uniforms and then shipped off to Saldanha to do basic training. We lived in dormitories [the] same as the men but separately. [The] same rules applied with inspections etc. No men [were] allowed in our dorms and no women in their dorms. Mostly we were treated the same, however, there were the odd few that took the equal part too far. One GI (Gunnery Instructor) roared out a command; looking at my sister during parade drill, after noticing blonde [hair] down on the side of her face; [and ordered] all those who hadn't shaved that morning to fall out! Degrading to say the least, but those sort of things did happen. Generally we were treated more gently than the men, [but] we participated in all activities, boat pulling, rifle drill, cleaning stations, the same as the men.<sup>188</sup>



Figure 3: The January 1973 Swan intake receiving instruction from the GI, Chief Petty Officer Laubscher at Signal School. Civilian clothes (particularly mini-skirts) were not ideal for training.<sup>189</sup>

Margie Fishley (née Mitchell) also joined the PF in 1973. After school, she travelled overseas for two years, and when she returned home, she was uncertain what to do. On advice of a friend who was serving in the Navy, she applied, thinking of the opportunity as a 'good challenge'. Like Dale McMurray, she started telecom training at Signal School and basic training at SAS *Saldanha* afterwards:

We were all trained as telecom operators. We were given a mess<sup>190</sup> where we had meal breaks, and used to sit on Nuisance's<sup>191</sup> grave for smoke breaks. While at Signal School, we also had GI Laubscher drilling us in the

driveway in front of our mess. Warrant Eggleston was put in charge of us. We also went to the shooting range, wearing very “flattering” grey overalls. I think the GI was a bit wary of 20 Swans waving rifles around! It was also while we were at Signal School that we were issued with our new uniforms. That was when we became famous. The press were there in full force while we proudly paraded our new uniforms.

[At Saldanha] we were accommodated in the officer’s mess and taught how to make beds Navy style. Also packing away our uniforms was a bit of a mystery to the “manne” they weren’t quite sure where we should keep our underwear and other female requirements! We were really people of interest, lots of finger pointing and sniggering at our marching for the first few days, and peeping over the wall at our underwear hanging on the washing lines! The uniforms we were given were more or less action working dress, this was when we went up to Saldanha, up until then we wore civvies. We had black trousers, white shirts, blue jerseys and black lace up shoes. Grey overalls for the shooting range and assault course.<sup>192</sup>

### **Important functions: The Telecommunications and Tactical Data Branches**

The first branch or mustering to which women were appointed in the Navy was the Telecommunications Branch. The utilisation and suitability of women were specific to the requirements of this particular mustering. During the early 1970s, the clouds of displeasure at the policies of the SA government were gathering pace. The Navy’s communication network between land and sea was an important strategic capability that had to be maintained, especially during those years of increased isolation facing the Navy. An extensive and modern network had been inherited from the Royal Navy in 1957, known as Cape Naval Radio (CNR), which covered the entire South Atlantic area and a great part of the Indian Ocean. As part of the Simon’s Town Agreement, the CNR station was relocated from Simon’s Town to Youngsfield where a Communication Centre (ComCen) was established to control naval shipping as well as merchant service traffic. Telecommunication links were maintained with a host of other naval communication centres and stations in Africa, such as Lourenço Marques (now Maputo), Luanda, Dakar, Lagos, Accra, Freetown, the Royal Navy communication centre in Whitehall as well as the US Navy communication station in San Juan (Puerto Rico). At national level, the ComCen at Youngsfield enabled all the major military commands in the Western Cape to communicate with other commands and units of the SADF through Defence Headquarters in Pretoria.<sup>193</sup> Most importantly the Navy’s ComCen relocated from Youngsfield to the newly built Silvermine complex in 1973 (see Figure 4).

Two distinct career paths were available to Telecommunication Operators –commonly referred to as “TOs”. Those who were selected to serve at sea were trained and qualified to become Tactical TOs, but this was restricted to men only, given the fact that women were not allowed to follow a career at sea. The 20-week training course at Signal School involved the use of signal flags, lamps and lights as well as semaphores – communication devices typically used on naval vessels.<sup>194</sup>



Women, on the other hand, were trained at Youngsfield, Silvermine, naval area headquarters and communication centres as TOs for duties ashore. Their 29-week TO training course at Signal School included theoretical telecommunication subjects, an introduction to electronic warfare, the use of radio teleprinters, and the ability to receive and send Morse code expertly. Proficient typing skills were an important requirement that called for a high level of sight, hearing and hand coordination. TOs were required to deal with important and – in almost all cases – confidential information on a daily basis, and candidates therefore had to demonstrate intellectual capacity, reliability, and integrity. Naval authorities agreed that women suited these requirements well, and Swans therefore comprised the majority of TOs ashore from 1973 onwards. In turn, their utilisation freed up a significant number of men to take up TO positions at sea.<sup>195</sup>

The establishment of the advanced Maritime Operational Centre at Silvermine in March 1973 and the rapid conversion to computer technology required the creation of a new branch in the Navy. A Tactical Data Branch was therefore established on 8 May 1973 in which 24 new posts were created. Women were thought to be the most suitable candidates, and the new branch therefore mostly comprised Swans who became known as tactical data operators (TDOs). Apart from the equipment at Silvermine, computers had also been installed at the new Submarine Training School and the upgraded Torpedo and Anti-Submarine School in Simon's Town where Swans were employed during training courses as TDOs. To qualify as TDOs, the Swans had to complete basic military training and the associated nine-month specialist training after which promotion up to the rank of warrant officer was possible.<sup>196</sup>



Figure 4: Swan Barbara Bland with Commander JM Brink, the officer in charge of the Silvermine communications centre in 1973.<sup>197</sup>

## “The Swans’ Nest”: The Homestead

In order to accommodate the Navy’s new non-commissioned women (separately), a Naval Women’s Mess, better known as The Homestead, was established in Fish Hoek. This was a former farm homestead that was built in 1827, and later enlarged to serve as a hotel. The Navy purchased the three-star luxury facility – located a stone’s throw away from the Fish Hoek beach – early in 1974.<sup>198</sup> The first group of Swans took occupancy on 8 April 1974. In order to utilise the new facility fully the Navy made it compulsory for (single) women in uniform to live in at The Homestead. It was only under extraordinary circumstances that members could “live out”, but there were no unnecessary restrictions to control the movement of the girls after hours, and they had relative freedom to come and go as they pleased. Accommodation consisted of double cabins with en-suite facilities, while Swans who continued their studies were afforded single cabins. A well-equipped galley provided meals to the large dining hall area, while after hours’ leisure was mostly spent in the reception area, the TV lounge, or on the beach.<sup>199</sup>



Figure 5: Zelda la Grange (third from the right) in animated discussion at The Homestead in Fish Hoek, surrounded by younger Swans.<sup>200</sup>

The first female officers that required single accommodation after 1974 were re-located to the Naval Base Wardroom in Simon’s Town – also a former holiday hotel, near Seaforth – known as Rhodesia by the Sea.<sup>201</sup> Their entry into the male world of the wardroom afforded them more freedom and some form of gender integration.



## The First Female Officer

The first female officer appointed in the SAN PF was Lorina Liebenberg. She had obtained a diploma in social work in 1972, and worked as a child welfare officer. Liebenberg noticed a newspaper advertisement for a welfare worker in the Navy, and decided to apply, to ‘move to a man’s world’,<sup>202</sup> as she explained at the time. Liebenberg was accepted for the position, and following a short naval orientation course at Naval College, she took up her post in the Navy’s welfare section at the medical centre in Simon’s Town in March 1973.<sup>203</sup> The next year she married a naval officer, Lt Henri Laurie, whom she had met in Simon’s Town, and subsequently resigned her commission. In later life, she settled in Kimberley where she continued to work as a civilian welfare worker until her untimely passing in 2019.<sup>204</sup>



Figure 6: Centre of attraction. Lt Liebenberg enjoying “stand-easy” with fellow male junior officers in the wardroom of the frigate SAS President Kruger in April 1973.<sup>205</sup>

Lorina Liebenberg was just one example of direct officer appointments that were made during the 1970s. Direct recruitment was not limited to women, but provided the SADF with professional workers and graduates who, by virtue of their academic qualifications, could be considered for appointments as officers. Fran Hulett, a nursing sister at the military hospital in Wynberg, became the second female officer in the new Swans establishment when she was recruited by the Navy in 1974. She was appointed as a lieutenant, with the specific task to advise on the recruitment of Swans and to act as a divisional officer and mentor for the girls.<sup>206</sup>

## The Mother Hen: Fran Hulett

Fran Hulett wanted to join the Navy from an early age, but unable to do so, trained to become a nurse instead, and joined the SA Medical Corps in 1965 as a nursing sister at the military hospital in Wynberg. She had to wait until April 1974 to join the Navy when she was transferred and appointed as the first senior staff officer (SSO) of the Swans. At the time, Hulett acted as the liaison officer between the girls undergoing training and the various naval departments. According to Hulett, the Navy realised that they 'needed help in handling women'.<sup>207</sup> Apart from the day-to-day administration, she advised on the recruitment of women and on aspects of their training. The management of the Swans residence in Fish Hoek, The Homestead, was another important responsibility, and there she became the proverbial residence mother. She was there to listen to the everyday problems and to advise those who could not cope. Hulett later remarked about her motherly role that 'men did not know what to do with the tears'.<sup>208</sup>

In later years, Hulett reflected positively on her experience in the Navy, drawing comparisons to her earlier service and subsequent interactions with male officers from other arms of services:

I used to go with them [the Swans] to inter-force events. We went to Bloemfontein and Pretoria. I had to be very protective over the girls. In the Army there was a totally different attitude towards females. The Air Force was "in-between", [but] there was a difference between the Army, the Air Force and the Navy. For me it was a good "culture shock" to come here [to the Navy]. We had to go to a conference in George. Remember the 'George' girls? Two [of] our [naval] officers [a Lt Cdr and Cdr] accompanied me. We arrived at the hotel and were shown where to put our stuff down, and of course the girls were in one section and the officers were all waiting in the lounge. The girls were youngsters, kids really. I came through, passed two Army generals and an Air Force brigadier. I walked through and they made those disgusting noises that they like to make. I was furious, absolutely furious! The two [Navy] guys who were with me, got up and picked them out! The only one who apologized, was the Air Force guy, who turned out to be an ex-patient of mine.<sup>209</sup>

The cultural differences that existed between the Army, Air Force and Navy informed the different ways in which women in uniform were regarded during the mid-1970s. FC Erasmus' Afrikaner "transformation" of the UDF during the 1950s had shifted the composition of the PF to be predominantly Afrikaner-dominated, with the exception of the small English-oriented Navy in Simon's Town. Fifteen years after the end of his tenure as Minister of Defence, the effects of this affirmative action policy were still evident. In 1974, Afrikaners comprised approximately 85% of the total PF strength in the Army, 75% of the Air Force, and 50% in the traditionally Anglophone Navy.<sup>210</sup> Rear Admiral Chris Bennett holds the opinion that this rift was further expanded when the long-serving Admiral HH Biermann was succeeded by General Magnus Malan as Minister of Defence in 1976. The latter 'perceived the Navy to be rather snooty and a select "club" situated down in the



Cape'.<sup>211</sup> Conversely, naval senior officers tended to look down openly on Army and Air Force colleagues in the north "as belonging to the 'uncultured' crowd".<sup>212</sup> 'Deeply rooted gender norms'<sup>213</sup> held by Afrikaners were traditionally rather conservative (and critical), while English-speaking South Africans generally held liberal (and accepting) views of the future role of women in uniform and their participation in defence.<sup>214</sup>

In 1975, Hulett became the first woman in the Navy to be promoted to the rank of lieutenant commander. She received further recognition for the valuable work she had done when she received the SADF Commendation Medal from the Chief of the Navy in 1976, the first woman in the SAN to be bestowed this honour.<sup>215</sup> But much like Lt Liebenberg and other Swans who decided to "tie the knot", Hulett had a short career in the Navy. She resigned her commission in September 1979, married, and relocated.<sup>216</sup> The post of SSO Swans was abolished in 1991 as women were fully integrated and absorbed into the Navy. The Homestead in Fish Hoek subsequently became a combined senior rates mess and was renamed Southern Floe.<sup>217</sup>

Although the career progression of women was generally on a par with that of their male counterparts, it was often curtailed by their own commitment to marriage and motherhood. In this regard, SADF policy and the lack of service benefits to accommodate aspects, such as maternity, complicated matters and resulted in stunted career paths. The SADF went so far as to offer a so-called "marriage gratuity" to those who remained single for the first five years of their service in the Permanent Force. The only maternity "benefit" offered to married women (in 1977) was twelve months unpaid leave (without loss of seniority).<sup>218</sup>

### **Going to Sea: First Sea Training and Subsequent Developments**

The naval careers of women were strictly limited to shore-based appointments and mainly restricted to the telecommunication mustering. Their utilisation was aimed at allowing men to go to sea in support of deployments. The first permanent appointment of a woman to sea only occurred in 1996. Before that – for more than 23 years – Swans were only temporarily accommodated on navy ships on special occasions.<sup>219</sup>

The first opportunity to go to sea occurred when 12 Swans under the direction of Lieutenant Hulett spent ten days at sea (19–29 May 1974) on board the fleet replenishment vessel SAS *Tafelberg* on passage between Simon's Town and Durban. The training cruise was aimed to expose the Swans to shipping communication, watch-keeping and naval life in general. The Swans received lectures and tours on replenishment at sea, navigation, stores administration, the engine room, first aid, and nuclear, biological and chemical defence. They were slotted into the watch system, and worked the same watches as the men while their duties also included bridge look-out, bridge wireless office duties, tactical communication, and shifts as mess cooks. SAS *Tafelberg* – being the largest vessel in service at the time – was spacious enough, and the Swans were accommodated separately in vacant midshipmen's cabins. They were popular guests, and "well entertained" in the Senior Rates Smoke Room until 21:30 every evening, until the coxswain escorted them back to their quarters. Hulett reported favourably on the behaviour and discipline of the Swans noting that they had gained valuable experience. In terms of her own experience,



Hulett noted that the officers on SAS *Tafelberg* generously accepted her presence in the Wardroom.<sup>220</sup>



Figure 7: Swans conducting “both watches” on board the fleet replenishment vessel SAS *Tafelberg* in 1973.<sup>221</sup>

Although it was not the case at the time, the venture could have served as an early assessment for the future utilisation of women on board SAN ships. At the time, the success relied heavily, as Hulett explained, on ‘the complete understanding, encouragement and unfailing help provided by the crew of SAS *Tafelberg*’.<sup>222</sup> After all, the Swans were temporary guests on board, and were accommodated and treated as such.

### **Cygnets: The First Officers**

On 8 April 1973, the Chief of the Navy, Vice Admiral “Flam” Johnson wrote to the Chief of Defence Staff that there were officer’s posts in the Navy available for women – in administration, stores, as inspectors and at specialist branches. Johnson also pointed out, ‘resistance to the use of women in certain posts would have to be overcome’.<sup>223</sup> Employing women in officer’s posts in the Navy was however subject to certain limitations. Women had to be utilised ashore, as there was no provision to accommodate them on board ships and in posts that did not require an intimate technical knowledge of ships.

The first appointments of women to officer’s posts had been effected when Liebenberg and Hulett were transferred to the Navy in March 1973 and April 1974 respectively. The



selection of the first female SAN officers from within its own ranks occurred towards the end of 1974 when five Swans were selected for a month-long officer's orientation course at Naval College (see Figure 8).

The first "full-length" midshipman's course for Swans occurred a year later, and ran concurrently with the course for men from March to July 1976. Seven Swans, Midshipmen Croft, Devine, Dixon, Herselman, Swart and Whitehead were selected. Anne Croft (later Trueman) had worked briefly as a typist after she had matriculated but "found the work extremely boring".<sup>224</sup> Her older brother was a naval officer and encouraged her to join the Navy, which she did in 1975. Following basic training at SAS *Saldanha*, she completed the telecommunications course at Signal School and worked at Silvermine for a few months. The standard of training for midshipmen at Naval College in Gordon's Bay was high and not all midshipmen completed the demanding course.<sup>225</sup>



Figure 8: The first officer's orientation course for Swans was held between 4 December 1974 and 8 January 1975 at the Naval College, Gordon's Bay. Standing (L-R) Sub Lieutenant Stander, Midshipmen Struwig, McMurray, Jurgenson and Ross.<sup>226</sup>

Following midshipman training, Anne Croft completed a number of admin courses and was then posted to the office of Prime Minister John Vorster, as an assistant to his press secretary. Her tour of duty "outside the Navy" was typical of the wider application of female naval officers to other staff divisions of the SADF and even the Ministry.<sup>227</sup> By the end of 1977, Croft was re-assigned to the Navy projects office where, amongst others, she facilitated the return of naval members and their families to South Africa following the cancellation of the French corvette and submarine projects. Her final posting was to the Navy public relations office, serving there as a sub lieutenant, before she resigned in 1979 to travel overseas.<sup>228</sup>



## Keeping it in the Navy or not

Croft herself remembered most of the men in the Navy as ‘very respectful’ and ‘absolute gentlemen’.<sup>229</sup> One could argue that a number of navy men – and especially male officers – were smitten by the Swans’ entry into the Navy. Swans were however also enamoured of the presence and stature of male officers. By the late 1970s, the number of ‘dual naval weddings’<sup>230</sup> were most noticeable. Annette Ross, who completed the first midshipman’s course in January 1975, married Lieutenant Commander Andrew Rennie on 6 September 1975, while Maksie Viljoen, who attended the midshipmen’s course in 1976, married the course training officer Commander Jacques de Vos. There were several others that followed suit.<sup>231</sup>

But not all Swans left the Navy because they wanted to get married. Dale Slatem (née McMurray) reflected on the events that unfolded towards the end of the 1970s:

The month I left in 1979 something like 26 officers left, male and female and some highly qualified ones, because of the early retirement of my dad [Commodore McMurray], [Commodore] Jupp and [Commodore] Kramer. Magnus Malan replaced them with broederbonders [*sic*] and as a result those 26 left.<sup>232</sup>

As explained above, after the appointment of General Magnus Malan as Chief of the SADF in September 1976 following the retirement of the long-serving Admiral HH Biermann, there was an exodus of officers. Malan was a member of the Broederbond, and during his tenure, he often advanced the cause of Afrikaner senior officers, mostly at the cost of English-speaking senior officers who were considered to be part of ‘the old guard’.<sup>233</sup> Such political disruptions affected both male and female members, especially those who held a more liberal view. During the mid-1970s, the majority of senior naval officers and senior rates in Simon’s Town were of English orientation and they were obviously circumspect of the Afrikaner Nationalist ambitions.<sup>234</sup>

The presence of women became increasingly noticeable at a higher level, and by the early 1980s, positions were held by seasoned Swans who had progressed through the ranks.<sup>235</sup>

## The Aftermath

Twenty-five women had joined the SAN PF in (December) 1972 and (January) 1973. In April 1983, a parade was held in Simon’s Town to observe the ten years since the Swans were reconstituted. From the first group, only six had remained in the service of the Navy. They were Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Roach (née Retief), CPO Squier (née Buss), CPO Grobelaar (née La Grange), CPO McMeekan (née Lingard), Petty Officer (PO) Harmer (née Smit) and PO Visser – all received the Good Service Medal for ten years of service.<sup>236</sup> Three of them remained in the service to retirement by which time they had all progressed to the rank of warrant officer. This represented a small percentage but nevertheless proved that career progression could be achieved by women who had managed to stay on in the service “to the end”.



In 1992, twenty years after the Swans had been reconstituted, the last traditional Swans basic training course was presented at SAS *Saldanha*. From 1994 (there was no course scheduled in 1993), basic training courses were integrated into what became known as the Military Training for Ratings Part 1 course. At the time, approximately 300 women were serving in the SAN PF – a small but very noticeable six percent of the Navy’s total complement.<sup>237</sup>

The previous government’s policy of racial segregation affected women of colour who wanted to join the Navy more severely than their male counterparts. Coloured men (from 1965) and Indian men (from 1974) could join the Navy in limited numbers, but their female counterparts could only do so from 1987.<sup>238</sup> Even then basic training remained segregated until 1991. This disparity – especially as it related to the late recruitment of Africans (both male and female) to the Navy – was only fully redressed from 1994 onwards. A new democratic dispensation and a process of integration and transformation in the SANDF ensured the implementation of race and gender equality in the SAN.<sup>239</sup>

## Conclusion

This article focused on the first appointment of women in the Navy in 1972 and 1973. The motivation behind the recruitment and employment of women in the PF of the SADF and the SAN was rooted in the persistent manpower shortage that affected the organisation during the 1960s and 1970s. Their constricted but purposeful employment in support functions served a bigger purpose than just to allow more male sailors to be utilised at the “sharp end”. The unique abilities of women, especially in the telecom and training environment, enabled the SAN to maintain and develop important new capabilities from the mid-1970s onwards, especially in the telecom and technical data environment.

Moreover, the militarisation of women provided further weight to the wider militarisation of SA white society as a whole, which was an important component of the government’s national strategy during the 1970s. It was such policy that excluded women of colour from joining the SAN until it was partially resolved in 1987 and only fully re-dressed from 1994 onward.

The career progression of women was generally on a par with that of their male counterparts, but often cut short by their own commitment to marriage and motherhood. In this regard, SADF policy and the lack of service benefits to accommodate aspects, such as maternity leave, complicated matters and resulted in stunted career paths. As a result, a very small percentage of the original 1972–1973 group remained members for more than ten years, and even a smaller percentage to retirement. Irrespective of the years of service, those who were interviewed, revealed a very positive loyalty to their class and to the SAN overall.

The first Swans of the 1970s achieved many “career firsts” that broke new ground to the many other women who would ultimately follow in their footsteps.



## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>134</sup> Commander Leon Steyn is the officer-in-charge of the South African Naval Museum in Simon's Town and a master's graduate (*cum laude*) of the Department of Military History at the Faculty of Military Science of Stellenbosch University. His thesis focused on human transformation of the South African Navy between 1957 and 1993.
- <sup>135</sup> HR Gordon-Cumming, *Official History of the South African Naval Forces during the Second World War 1939–1945* (Simon's Town: Naval Heritage Trust South Africa, 2008), 199–201.
- <sup>136</sup> A junior enlisted sailor who is not a warrant officer or commissioned officer.
- <sup>137</sup> MPH Laver (ed.), *Sailor-women Sea-women, SWANS: A History of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943–1949* (Simon's Town: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), 46–58.
- <sup>138</sup> MPH Laver (ed.), *Sailor-women Sea-women, SWANS: A History of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943–1949* (Simon's Town: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), 61.
- <sup>139</sup> Sea-bed mounted sonar.
- <sup>140</sup> MPH Laver (ed.), *Sailor-women Sea-women, SWANS: A History of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943–1949* (Simon's Town: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), 88–96.
- <sup>141</sup> MPH Laver (ed.), *Sailor-women Sea-women, SWANS: A History of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943–1949* (Simon's Town: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), 215.
- <sup>142</sup> The terminology reflects the racial terms that were in use during the period under discussion and the historical record of the time. No negative connotation is implied.
- <sup>143</sup> Archive for Contemporary Affairs, University of Free State, PV 467, JJ Fouché, File 3/13/2 Speeches Defence General, 1962–1964, J Fouché speech, 'Die Rol van die Vrou ten Opsigte van Selfverdediging en Landsverdediging: Bloemfontein Damesklub, 18 September 1964'.
- <sup>144</sup> HM Ross, *A Woman's World at a Time of War: An Analysis of Selected Women's Diaries during the Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902* (MA thesis, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 2006), 97–98.
- <sup>145</sup> L Jooste, *FC Erasmus as Minister van Verdediging 1948–1959* (MA thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1995), 93–94.
- <sup>146</sup> L Jooste, *FC Erasmus as Minister van Verdediging 1948–1959* (MA thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1995), 93–94.
- <sup>147</sup> R Warwick, *White South Africa and Defence, 1960–1968: Militarization, Threat Perceptions and Counter Strategies* (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 2009), 49–51.
- <sup>148</sup> See A du Toit, *Southern Sentinel: The Anglo-South African Simon's Town Agreements and the Collective Defence of the Cape Sea Route during the Cold War, 1945–1975* (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, Sydney, 2019).
- <sup>149</sup> IJ van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2015), 240–241.



- <sup>150</sup> Archive for Contemporary Affairs, University of Free State, PV 467, JJ Fouché, File 3/13/2 Speeches Defence General, 1962-1964, J Fouché speech, 'Die Rol van die Vrou ten Opsigte van Selfverdediging en Landsverdediging: Bloemfontein Damesklub, 18 September 1964'.
- <sup>151</sup> JL Snider, 'The Reconstitution of the SWANS', in MPH Laver (ed.), *Sailor-women Sea-women, SWANS: A History of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943-1949* (Simon's Town: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), 394-395.
- <sup>152</sup> Correspondent, 'Van heinde en verre', *Paratus*, 22, 5 (1971), 28.
- <sup>153</sup> R Warwick, *White South Africa and Defence, 1960-1968: Militarization, Threat Perceptions and Counter Strategies* (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 2009), 261.
- <sup>154</sup> N Mankayi, 'Male Constructions and Resistance to Women in the Military', *Scientia Militaria*, 34, 2 (2006), 45.
- <sup>155</sup> PJ Haupt, *First Swans TO(R) Course*, Naval Heritage Trust Facebook group comment, 5 January 2018. <<https://web.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10155313069348233&set=gm.1980042572244467>> [Accessed on 5 January 2018].
- <sup>156</sup> SAN Museum Oral History Project, File: Dale Slatem (née McMurray).
- <sup>157</sup> SAN Museum Oral History Project, File: Annette Rennie (née Ross).
- <sup>158</sup> See *Paratus*, 24, 2 (February 1973), 52, 65.
- <sup>159</sup> The Minister of Defence, PW Botha, was a staunch proponent of the CDC and it was established in his constituency of George.
- <sup>160</sup> IJ van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2015), 241.
- <sup>161</sup> EM Kotzé, *Perspectives on Masculinity, Femininity and the South African Military: Gender Relations with Specific Focus on the Impact of the South African Army Women's College and the SADF 1971-1998* (MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, 2015), 62.
- <sup>162</sup> EM Kotzé, *Perspectives on Masculinity, Femininity and the South African Military: Gender Relations with Specific Focus on the Impact of the South African Army Women's College and the SADF 1971-1998* (MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, 2015), 63.
- <sup>163</sup> EM Kotzé, *Perspectives on Masculinity, Femininity and the South African Military: Gender Relations with Specific Focus on the Impact of the South African Army Women's College and the SADF 1971-1998* (MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, 2015), 62; Anon, 'Ons Maak 'n Sukses van 'n Eksperiment', *Paratus*, 23, 8 (1971), 40-43.
- <sup>164</sup> JL Snider, 'The Reconstitution of the SWANS', in MPH Laver (ed.), *Sailor-women Sea-women, SWANS: A History of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943-1949* (Simon's Town: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), 394.
- <sup>165</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps Chief of the Navy to Director General Personnel, VSH/1/20/7 (V), dated 7 August 1972, Recruiting of Permanent Force Women at the Civil Defence College; JL Snider, 'The Reconstitution of the SWANS', in MPH Laver (ed.), *Sailor-women Sea-women, SWANS: A History of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943-1949* (Simon's Town: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), 394.



- <sup>166</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps Commandant General to Chief of the Navy, HVS/209/14, dated 11 October 1972, Aanstelling/Attestasie van Dames in the SA Weermag; JL Snider, 'The Reconstitution of the SWANS', in MPH Laver (ed.), *Sailor-women Sea-women, SWANS: A History of the South African Women's Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943–1949* (Simon's Town: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), 394.
- <sup>167</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps Note II by DTM (C Navy) on letter Chief of Defence Force Administration, HWA/114/42/2, dated 6 November 1973, Designation for Female Members of the Navy.
- <sup>168</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps Memorandum SSO SKTB (Kol JH Picard), HWA 919/3/17, dated 11 October 1973, Benaming vir Vroulike Vlootlede.
- <sup>169</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps, Letter Chief of the Navy, VSH 1/55/12 dated March 1974, Rangbenamings vir Vroulike Lede van die SA Vloot. The year 1973 has often been cited in secondary sources as the year that the Swans were first reconstituted after the Second World War. Research has since debunked this – the first four women joined the Navy's PF in December 1972.
- <sup>170</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps Memorandum VSH/6/14/1/1, dated 30 October 1972, Employment of Women in the Permanent Force; Militêre Verslaggewer, 'Vloot Kry Sy Eerste Meisies', *Die Burger*, 22 November 1972, 11.
- <sup>171</sup> Press release dated 27 November 1972, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps, DoD Archives.
- <sup>172</sup> Naval Heritage Trust Oral History Project. File: Zelda Grobbelaar (née La Grange).
- <sup>173</sup> Naval Heritage Trust Oral History Project. File: Zelda Grobbelaar (née La Grange).
- <sup>174</sup> Anon, 'Zelda's Going Great Guns', *Navy News*, 1, 6 (1982), 13; Naval Heritage Trust Oral History Project. File: Zelda Grobbelaar (née La Grange).
- <sup>175</sup> Anon, 'Another First for Zelda: Mistress-at-Arms', *Navy News*, 3, 11 (1984), 8.
- <sup>176</sup> Anon, 'Zelda's Going Great Guns', *Navy News*, 1, 6 (1982), 13; Naval Heritage Trust Oral History Project, File: Zelda Grobbelaar (née la Grange).
- <sup>177</sup> Anon, 'Another First for Zelda: Mistress-at-Arms', *Navy News*, 3, 11 (1984), 8.
- <sup>178</sup> Naval Museum Archives, File: SAN Rationalisation, 1989–1990, *Briefing by Chief of the Navy, Vice Admiral RC Simpson-Anderson at a press conference on 9 December 1992*.
- <sup>179</sup> Naval Heritage Trust Oral History Project, File: Zelda Grobbelaar (née la Grange).
- <sup>180</sup> Signal Navchief to Surgeon General, dated December 1972, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps, DoD Archives.
- <sup>181</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Oral History Project, File: Rosemary Squier (née Buss).
- <sup>182</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps, Memorandum VSH 1/55/12, dated 21 Augustus 1973.
- <sup>183</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Oral History Project, File: Margie Fishley (née Mitchell).
- <sup>184</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Oral History Project, File: Anne Trueman (née Croft).



- <sup>185</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Oral History Project, File: Dale Slatem (née McMurray).
- <sup>186</sup> E Hertzog & A Lev. 'Male Dominance under Threat: Machoism Confronts Female Defiance', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 48, 6 (2019), 836–866; J Cock, *Colonels & Cadres: War & Gender in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991), 61.
- <sup>187</sup> Naval Museum Archives. File: Women in the SA Navy (1972).
- <sup>188</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Oral History Project, File: Dale Slatem (née McMurray).
- <sup>189</sup> Naval Museum Archives. File: Women in the SA Navy (1972).
- <sup>190</sup> An area where military personnel socialise, eat and live. Different rank groups of naval personnel belong to separate messes, such as the officers, warrant officers, senior rates or junior rates, e.g. the officers' mess.
- <sup>191</sup> Just Nuisance, a dog, famously enlisted in the Royal Navy at Simon's Town during the Second World War.
- <sup>192</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Oral History Project, File: Margaret Fishley (née Mitchell).
- <sup>193</sup> JC Goosen, *South Africa's Navy: The First Fifty Years* (Cape Town: WJ Flesch), 1973, 154–155.
- <sup>194</sup> Anon, 'SAS Simonsberg se Seinskool', *Paratus*, 24, 7 (July 1973), 28–30.
- <sup>195</sup> Anon, 'SAS Simonsberg se Seinskool', *Paratus*, 24, 7 (July 1973), 28–30.
- <sup>196</sup> Anon, 'Nuwe Rigting vir Vrouens in SA Vloot', *Paratus*, 24, 7 (July 1973), 47.
- <sup>197</sup> SA Naval Museum Archives, File: Women in the SA Navy (1972).
- <sup>198</sup> Anon, 'Home away from Home', *Navy News*, 2, 3 (1983), 20.
- <sup>199</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps, Chief of the Navy letter, VSH 1/55/12, dated 15 March 1974, Akkommodasie: SA Vlootdames.
- <sup>200</sup> SA Naval Museum Archives, File: Women in the SA Navy (1972).
- <sup>201</sup> Anon, 'Home away from Home', *Navy News*, 2, 3 (1983), 20.
- <sup>202</sup> Anon, 'Navy's First Lady Officer', *Paratus*, 24, 4 (1973), 44.
- <sup>203</sup> Anon, 'Navy's First Lady Officer', *Paratus*, 24, 4 (1973), 44.
- <sup>204</sup> Anon, 'As die Vloot Eers Begin Cupido Speel...', *Die Burger*, n.d. (presumably September 1974); Personal communication with daughter Nada Laurie, 19 December 2019.
- <sup>205</sup> Naval Museum Archives. File: Women in the SA Navy (1972).
- <sup>206</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Newspaper scrapbook no. 38, Women in Defence: SAN. 'Fran Heads the Petticoat Navy', n.d. (newspaper article without reference or date, possibly *Natal Mercury*).
- <sup>207</sup> Naval Museum Archives: Newspaper scrapbook no. 38, Women in Defence: SAN. 'Fran Heads the Petticoat Navy', n.d. (newspaper article without reference or date, possibly *Natal Mercury*).
- <sup>208</sup> Naval Heritage Trust. Oral History Project, File: Fran Hulett; Naval Museum Archives: Newspaper scrapbook no. 38, Women in Defence: SAN. 'Fran Heads the Petticoat Navy', n.d. (newspaper article without reference or date, possibly *Natal Mercury*).
- <sup>209</sup> Naval Heritage Trust. Oral History Project, File: Fran Hulett.



- <sup>210</sup> R Warwick, *White South Africa and Defence, 1960–1968: Militarization, Threat Perceptions and Counter Strategies* (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, 2009), 92; RS Boulter, *FC Erasmus and the Politics of South African Defence 1948–1959* (PhD dissertation, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1997), 68–69; also see IJ van der Waag, ‘Military Culture and the South African Armed Forces: An Historical Perspective’, in F Vrey, A Esterhuysen & T Mandrup (eds.), *On Military Culture: Theory, Practice and African Armed Forces* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2013), 12–13.
- <sup>211</sup> C Bennett, *Three Frigates: The South African Navy Comes of Age* (Durban: Just Done, 2006), 179.
- <sup>212</sup> C Bennett, *Three Frigates: The South African Navy Comes of Age* (Durban: Just Done, 2006), 179.
- <sup>213</sup> EM Kotzé, *Perspectives on Masculinity, Femininity and the South African Military: Gender Relations with Specific Focus on the Impact of the South African Army Women’s College and the SADF 1971–1998* (MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, 2015), 28.
- <sup>214</sup> EM Kotzé, *Perspectives on Masculinity, Femininity and the South African Military: Gender Relations with Specific Focus on the Impact of the South African Army Women’s College and the SADF 1971–1998* (MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, 2015), 44.
- <sup>215</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Newspaper scrapbook no. 38, Women in Defence: SAN. ‘Medalje-parade te Simonsberg’, n.d. (newspaper article without reference or date, possibly *Paratus*).
- <sup>216</sup> Naval Heritage Trust. Oral History Project, File: Fran Hulett.
- <sup>217</sup> Named after the Second World War minesweeping whaler HMSAS *Southern Floe* that was sunk by a mine off Tobruk on 11 February 1941.
- <sup>218</sup> Anon, ‘Beroepsvroue in die Weermag’, *Paratus*, 27, 1 (1977), 26.
- <sup>219</sup> L Steyn, ‘Women in the South African Navy’, in L Steyn (comp.), *The South African Navy: 25 Years of Democracy* (Simon’s Town: SA Navy, 2019), 42.
- <sup>220</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps, Memorandum SO Swans, VSH 1/55/12, dated June 1974, Swan’s Sea-training on SAS Tafelberg.
- <sup>221</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Newspaper scrapbook no. 38, Women in Defence: SAN.
- <sup>222</sup> DoD Archives, C Navy Group 11, Box 311, File: VSH/1/55/12 Vol. 1, Administration Recruiting of Women Defence Corps. Memorandum SO Swans, VSH 1/55/12, dated June 1974, Swan’s Sea-training on SAS Tafelberg.
- <sup>223</sup> JL Snider, ‘The Reconstitution of the SWANS’, in MPH Laver (ed.), *Sailor-women Sea-women, SWANS: A History of the South African Women’s Auxiliary Naval Service, 1943–1949* (Simon’s Town: Swans History Publication Fund, 1986), 395.
- <sup>224</sup> Naval Museum, Oral History Project, File: Anne Croft.
- <sup>225</sup> Naval Museum, Oral History Project, File: Anne Croft.
- <sup>226</sup> Naval Museum Archives. File: Women in the SA Navy (1972).
- <sup>227</sup> Anon, ‘Sy Maak Geskiedenis!’, *Paratus*, 27, 1 (1977), 36.
- <sup>228</sup> Naval Museum, Oral History Project, File: Anne Croft.
- <sup>229</sup> Naval Museum, Oral History Project, File: Anne Croft.



- <sup>230</sup> “When one military member marries another, the couple becomes a ‘dual military’ couple, also known as mil-to-mil marriages. Dual military couples are common, and the number of same-service couples may be larger than those who marry someone from a different branch of service”, from Veteran.com, *Benefits of Dual-military Couples*, 2022. <<https://militarybenefits.info/dual-military-couples/>> [Accessed on 29 January 2022].
- <sup>231</sup> Naval Museum. Oral History Project, File: Anne Croft.
- <sup>232</sup> Naval Museum Archives. Oral History Project, File: Dale Slatem (née McMurray).
- <sup>233</sup> Naval Heritage Trust, ‘R Adm Christopher Hart Bennett’, *Naval Digest*, 32 (November 2021), 92–93; Naval Heritage Trust, ‘Commodore Edward William “Ted” Jupp’, *Naval Digest*, 29 (October 2020), 95–100.
- <sup>234</sup> RS Boulter, *FC Erasmus and the Politics of South African Defence 1948–1959* (PhD dissertation, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1997), 75.
- <sup>235</sup> SA Naval Museum Archives, Swans Line Book no. 39.
- <sup>236</sup> Anon, ‘SWANS’ Ten Years’, *Navy News*, 2, 4 (1983), 13.
- <sup>237</sup> Anon, ‘21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Swans’, *Navy News*, 12, 5 (May 1993), 7.
- <sup>238</sup> L Steyn, *The Human Transformation of the South African Navy between 1957 and 1993* (MMil thesis, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, 2023), 128.
- <sup>239</sup> For further reading on the period after 1994, see L Heinecken. ‘The Challenges of Transformation: SANDF Officers’ Attitudes towards Integration, Affirmative Action, Women in Combat and Language Usage’, *Scientia Militaria*, 28, 2 (1998), 220–235; SB Kahn, ‘Employment of Women in the South African National Defence Force 1998–2008’, *Journal of Public Administration*, 44, 1 (2009), 196–208; E Molekane, ‘The Role of Women in the South African National Defence Force’, *African Security Review*, 5, 5 (1996), 23–26.

