

impossible for bomb trolleys and trucks to reach this area. The ground crews had to work in rain and sleet, and endured terrible conditions. Many of these factors contributed to the drop in effectiveness of the whole squadron.⁶⁹ The squadron nevertheless still completed 90 operations. 31 Squadron flew 105 sorties.⁷⁰

In December, Dirkie Nel, commander of 31 Squadron, returned to the Union of South Africa.⁷¹ He was succeeded by Lieutenant-Colonel C.M. Smuts, the senior Flight Commander of 34 Squadron.⁷²

2.2.4 SQUADRON ACTIVITIES DURING 1945

In January 1945, 31 Squadron carried out 57 sorties, which totalled 276 operational hours.⁷³ The main object of these operations was to drop supplies to Italian partisans. These operations represented the smallest-scale effort since the squadron's arrival in Italy. In addition to these operations, three bombing attacks were also carried out on railway bridges and industrial facilities.⁷⁴

A total of 200 sorties⁷⁵ were carried out during the month of February, 947 operational hours in total.⁷⁶ The squadron was moved from Foggia to Celone,

⁶⁹ To add to the already varied tasks of the crews, troops were now also transported to Greece. Night bombing operations were performed on communications in Italy and Yugoslavia. Day bombing operations on enemy motor transport columns were also undertaken but were only moderately successful, because of the Liberators' lack of manoeuvrability.

⁷⁰ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.191.

⁷¹ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.186.

⁷² H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.373; D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.30848.

⁷³ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39721.

⁷⁴ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39721.

⁷⁵ The 200 sorties flown by 31 Squadron during February exceeded the number flown in any previous month and was the highest tally in 205 Group; D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39746.

⁷⁶ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39746.

where they experienced much better living conditions.⁷⁷ During this month, night and day bombings on marshalling yards were carried out, as well as supply-drops to partisans in both Italy and Yugoslavia. This month also brought forth an astonishingly successful daylight attack on the Naval Armaments Depot at Pula in Yugoslavia.⁷⁸

In March, 31 Squadron completed 190 sorties, a total of 955 operational hours.⁷⁹ Activity during this month was one of constant movement. The enemy moved their positions constantly, because of continual reverse fire suffered on the Eastern and Western fronts. The squadron's main objective was the bombing of marshalling yards in Italy, Austria and Yugoslavia. At Brickts more than 300 railway wagons and 16 locomotives were attacked with limited success, resulting in the loss of a 31 Squadron Liberator. Twenty thousand kilograms of supplies were also dropped on Yugoslavia, for the partisans.⁸⁰

During April, 31 Squadron flew 165 sorties, totalling 796 operational hours. They operated in support of the advancing Allied ground forces in Italy.⁸¹

After 8 May their efforts focused on the continuous transportation of freight to the Udine area in North-east Italy and the transportation of prisoners of war from Italy to Britain as well as the repatriation of troops.⁸²

To maintain this extraordinary effort, the ground crews had to work night and day. Often the opinion was voiced that the few months after the war entailed a greater endeavour than the war itself. During June, the squadron carried out a number of flights from Italy to France, repatriating French prisoners of war.⁸³

-
- 77 L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.199.
- 78 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39746; H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.417.
- 79 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39794.
- 80 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39794.
- 81 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39844.
- 82 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39895; L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.243.
- 83 L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.246.

2.2.5 FURTHER ACTIVITIES

With the cessation of hostilities in Europe the squadron's prime role as a heavy bomber force ended, and for the remainder of the war against Japan the squadron continued operating in the Mediterranean, carrying out tasks like the transporting of troops and freight, the dropping of leaflets etc.⁸⁴

On 15 September 1945, the squadron was moved from Celone to Shallufah in Egypt and reinstalled there.⁸⁵

The squadron was disbanded after the war and the final parade took place in December 1945. Thirty seven years later, in January 1982, 31 Squadron was re-established at Air Force Base Hoedspruit as a helicopter squadron equipped with Pumas and Alouette III's. In the 11 years until the squadron was disbanded again, the squadron demonstrated its capabilities in many fields. Working together with police units, Alouette and Puma crews took part in many successful anti-dagga operations in the Eastern Transvaal. During February 1984, 80 tons of dagga, worth some R40 million, were destroyed in the Barberton area. 31 Squadron disbanded on 31 January 1993.⁸⁶

2.3 34 SQUADRON SAAF

In March 1944, most of the ground crews of 34 Squadron left Durban aboard H.M.T. Salween.⁸⁷ The squadron was formed at Almaza in Egypt and came into existence officially on 14 April 1944.⁸⁸ Lieutenant-Colonel F.A. (Frank) Hofmeyr

⁸⁴ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, pp.241,243,245.

⁸⁵ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.287.

⁸⁶ D.W. Pidsley, *The South African Air Force: A Perspective in the Context of the Growth and Development of the South African Society up to 1985*, p.133.

⁸⁷ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54628.

⁸⁸ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54628.

was appointed Officer Commanding.⁸⁹ During April, they were involved in many operations. The squadron attacked the Freilassing Nazi camp, close to the Austro-German border west of Salzburg, and left it completely destroyed. Other targets included bridges, coaling facilities, and harbour and shipping installations. On the 21st of April, they destroyed the Verona-Parona railroad bridge in Italy. The crews were filled with an air of energetic optimism.⁹⁰

During May, more than 1 100 operational hours were flown and 759 passengers were transported. The total of freight transported during the month, was 238 000 kilogram of petrol, 201 000 kilogram of rations and 11 000 kilogram of oil. The ground crews had to work night and day to maintain this extraordinary effort.⁹¹

At first, 34 Squadron was based at Almaza but during May 1944 the squadron moved to a new military base at Gebel Hamzi in Egypt. This base was called Kilo 40. They were still getting organised here, when suddenly they received instructions to join 2 Wing at Rasin-el-Boud in Syria.⁹² The unit left Kilo 40 on 30 May 1944 and arrived at their new destination on the 4th of June with a convoy of 97 vehicles.⁹³ On the 8th of June, the first of 34 Squadron's Liberator aircraft arrived. The squadron was continuously involved in transport operations. Two major runs were carried out in transporting Union Defence Force (UDF) and SAAF personnel to the Middle East, and transporting former British POW's to Britain. In addition to these, flights were also carried out from Italy to France, repatriating French POW's. A total of 124 flights was flown. A record number of 1 720 operational hours was flown.⁹⁴

89 Frank Hofmeyr was an experienced wartime commander. In June 1942 he became Officer Commanding 12 Squadron. He returned to South Africa towards the end of 1942 and was appointed Commander of Fortress Air Defences at Cape Town. He held this command for about a year and was then posted to Italy to form 34 Squadron; L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.43.

90 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39844.

91 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39895.

92 H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.192.

93 H.J. Martin & N.D.Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.192.

94 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39920.

34 Squadron was now stationed alongside 2 Wing at Rasin-el-Boud in Syria.⁹⁵ Hofmeyr arrived on 18 June ⁹⁶ The Allies then decided to stage a phoney war of intimidation. To convey the impression that a force of considerable strength had been assembled, the Liberators of 34 Squadron took part in daily flights over the Turkish border. This game of bluff continued until 27 June, when 2 Wing and 34 Squadron were instructed to move back to Egypt on the first stage of their journey to Italy.⁹⁷

During the first week of July, the aircrews of 34 Squadron arrived with their Liberators in Italy. A limited number of ground staff also arrived with them.⁹⁸

During July, the squadron continued with troop transporting operations. Their first bombing operation took place on the 21st of July when four aircraft took part in a raid on the Fanto oil refinery in Czechoslovakia. This was their first operation in collaboration with 31 Squadron.⁹⁹ From the 4th of July, aircraft of 34 Squadron arrived at the Celone landing strip in Southern Italy. The pilots were trained during this period by undertaking nightly preparation flights. The training included gun-testing and low-flying in preparation for attacks on oil refineries on the 26th of July. With Hofmeyr seconded to fill a new post at Headquarters, Major C.M. Smuts acted as Officer Commanding.¹⁰⁰ 34 Squadron became fully operational on 31 July 1944.¹⁰¹

During August 1944, a sharp decrease in activities was experienced and only a few aircraft of the squadron operated between Scalene and Cairo West. During this time ten Liberators disappeared mysteriously to an unknown destination

95 The Liberator heavy bombers of 31 Squadron and 34 Squadron SAAF were controlled by 2 Wing, and became the SAAF's only heavy bomber formation; H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.233.

96 H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.233; D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54632.

97 L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.44.

98 L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.43.

99 The details have been discussed earlier in this chapter; L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.48.

100 H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.242.

101 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54635.

for modifications.¹⁰² All the aircraft returned to Celone on Friday, 11 August. Everybody awaited the announcement of a very important mission when they heard that Churchill, General C. de Gaulle, leader of the French National Committee, and Field-Marshal Lord Gort, governor of Malta, were in Algiers.¹⁰³

The crews were briefed on the mission for the first time on Monday, the 14th of August. This was to be the most important mission the crews participated in since the squadron had become officially operational. The squadron was to join in locating German radar prior to new Allied landings in Southern France. Nine aircraft were to participate in this operation, which lasted almost 12 hours. This was a record time for aircraft to stay operational. All the aircraft returned so quietly that the actual landings went unnoticed by other crews. During these operations the aircraft carried 10 053 litres of fuel weighing 37 842 kilogram.¹⁰⁴

On the night of the 16-17 August, Lieutenant D. Cullingworth and his crew flew on a nickelling raid over Southern and Western France, carrying 10 053 litres of petrol. This journey took them within 160 kilometres of Biscay. On the 21st of August, Lieutenant D.D. Gordon and his crew failed to return from a raid on the Herman Göring Niebelungen Werke at St Valentine in Austria. This was the crew's first target after landing at Algiers for the fitting of the jamming equipment in their Liberators. They had experienced a delay at Algiers because of problems with the fuel tanks of some of their Liberators. During the operation against the Pesaro defences in Italy on 26 August, the aircraft carried bomb loads of up to 5 450 kilogram for the first time. The next day the Pesaro defences were once again attacked by ten Liberators of 34 Squadron. On the night of the 28th, six aircraft set out to bomb installations along the Danube and four bombed the Pesaro defences again.¹⁰⁵

From 14 to 31 August, 34 Squadron participated in 18 separate operations and completed 103 sorties. These included ten bombing raids, six raids on

¹⁰² The aircraft were fitted with a top secret devise capable of jamming the enemy's radar warning system.

¹⁰³ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54636; H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.244.

¹⁰⁴ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54636.

¹⁰⁵ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54636.

marshalling yards and one mining raid.¹⁰⁶ Although two aircraft failed to return and seven aircraft did not finish the tasks at hand, 94 of these sorties were successful. In total, 325 000 kilogram of bombs and 15 000 kilogram of mines were dropped.¹⁰⁷

The crews realised that they would be stationed here at Celone for a long time. Peace would only become a reality when the war in Europe finally ended, or when they were moved to the Far East.

2.3.1 SEPTEMBER 1944

During September 1944, Ferrara and Bruscia in Italy were successfully attacked. The squadron was also involved in a few major operations which were directed at tactical targets like marshalling yards.¹⁰⁸

Because of the decrease in rail communications in the Balkans, the enemy had to rely almost solely on air transport to evacuate its troops from Greece. On the nights of 13 and 14 September, seven aircraft successfully attacked the Kalamaki aerodrome near Athens.¹⁰⁹ An attack carried out on the port of Salonika in Greece on the night of 21 September, was also successfully completed.¹¹⁰

Many tasks, like the dropping of 2 000 kilogram of pamphlets on the Italian towns of La Spezia, Bologna, Padua, Venice and Trieste and the dropping of gifts to partisans, were performed during September. Although enemy resistance was encountered during these missions, these operations were completed successfully. During the same period 34 Squadron took part in very effective strikes at the Szekesfehervar and Hegyeshalom marshalling yards.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54636.

¹⁰⁷ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54637.

¹⁰⁸ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54974.

¹⁰⁹ H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.333.

¹¹⁰ H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.333.

¹¹¹ H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.333.

2.3.2 OCTOBER 1944

In October, weather conditions deteriorated even more. Most of the time, except on 4 and 5 October, bad weather prevailed. Because of this, flight operations were postponed. Activities resumed on the 11th and 12th of October, when the weather improved a little. On the 13th and 14th, an attack was launched against marshalling yards at Szekesfehervar in Hungary.¹¹² Although cloud cover and haze hampered the operation, the target was successfully attacked.¹¹³

On 15 and 16 October, the squadron attacked the marshalling yards at Opicina, North of Trieste. Later, although 82 aircraft participated, only six aircraft were successful in attacking the marshalling yard at Zagreb in Yugoslavia.¹¹⁴

On the 17th and 18th, four aircraft attacked the Vinkovci marshalling yards and the Maribor marshalling yards in Yugoslavia.¹¹⁵

When the German forces started to retreat, 34 Squadron changed its priority and concentrated on the dropping of supplies to partisans. They successfully carried out 34 sorties to Yugoslavia. Unfortunately they could not complete the supply dropping on the 13th and 14th, as they had to return because of cloud cover. On the 20th and 21st, 11 aircraft attacked the Szombathely aerodrome installation in Hungary. This installation was used by enemy troops as a night fighter base and as a refuelling base for evacuating troops. Because of their inability to get a focus on the target during their attack, six of these aircraft had to do a rerun. In October, the squadron undertook a bombing attack on the Danube and were involved in the dropping of pamphlets during a nickelling sortie.¹¹⁶

¹¹² H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, pp.331,333.

¹¹³ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54977.

¹¹⁴ H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.334.

¹¹⁵ H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.334.

¹¹⁶ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54977-54978.

2.3.3 NOVEMBER 1944

In November, a record number of 192 sorties were flown. During these sorties, 464 000 kilogram of bombs and a total of 980 containers were dropped.¹¹⁷ Daylight operations were undertaken for the first time, during which the aircraft were escorted by fighter aeroplanes. The main focus of operations during this month was to attack German forces, to support Allied partisans with attacks and to supply them with ammunition, arms and medical supplies. Enemy forces were attacked at Podgorica, Sjenica and Rogoznica in Yugoslavia. A very successful attack was also made on the town of Podgorica on the 19th and 20th, when 2 500 enemy troops, 1 500 vehicles and 50 tanks were attacked.¹¹⁸ Fifty-four thousand kilogram of bombs were dropped during this mission, and the enemy sustained heavy casualties. Another bridge over the river at Visegrad in Yugoslavia on the enemy's main escape route was successfully bombed by 12 aircraft on 20 November.¹¹⁹ The next day the Germans tried to escape by using a pontoon to cross the river but were attacked by ten of the squadron's aircraft.¹²⁰ On 22 November, 11 aircraft attacked the Szombathely marshalling yards in Hungary.¹²¹ Two aircraft failed to return, having been shot down by enemy fighters. At the target area no identifying markers could be seen and therefore this operation had to be abandoned. During this month the squadron did have success but also had to contend with serious losses.¹²²

2.3.4 DECEMBER 1944

In December, the squadron experienced a setback because of bad weather and the unserviceability of the aerodrome. When the weather cleared, 11 aircraft dropped supplies to partisans in Yugoslavia. In an attempt to supply the

¹¹⁷ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54979.

¹¹⁸ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54979.

¹¹⁹ H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.352; D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54979.

¹²⁰ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, pp.54979-54980.

¹²¹ H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.243.

¹²² D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, pp.54979-54981.

partisans, 11 containers were dropped off-target, but were fortunately recovered. From 11 December, 15 aircraft were assigned to transport troops to Hassani in Greece. Churchill himself ordered more forces to assist the squadron in this operation. The next day, these forces arrived and 129 army personnel left for Hassani. No opposition was encountered and therefore the operation went according to plan.¹²³

On December the 13th, a similar operation was carried out and 161 army personnel were transported. Due to bad weather conditions, one aircraft had to return and one stayed over in Greece. On the 18th of December, seven aircraft bombed enemy vehicles on the road to Bioce-Matsevo in Yugoslavia. Seven and six aircraft respectively flew ammunition to Hassani on the 20th and 21st of December. Supplies were to be dropped on the 22nd by five assigned aircraft, but they had to return due to bad weather conditions. On the 25th, this operation was successfully carried out by eight aircraft. Ten aircraft were again assigned to drop supplies on the 26th of December. Eight aircraft successfully completed the operation, but two failed to do so, due to heavy night haze over the target.¹²⁴

A railroad bridge was bombed at Piave-Susegana in North-eastern Italy on the German supply route.¹²⁵ In the last supply-dropping operation, six aircraft successfully participated. Supplies were dropped on a red parachute which was spread out on the snow. During the last three days of the month, no operations took place, because of prevailing bad weather conditions.¹²⁶

2.3.5 JANUARY 1945

In January 1945, the squadron's perseverance was tested to the utmost. It was the coldest month since the squadron's arrival. It was so cold that in the morning by 9:30 the temperatures measured was still minus degrees Celsius. The mud was frozen solid. This severe winter weather made the living and

¹²³ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39919.

¹²⁴ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39920.

¹²⁵ H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.373.

¹²⁶ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39921.

working conditions for the men almost unbearable. As a direct result of the extreme cold conditions, the squadron operated on only six days, although operations were scheduled for every day of the month. Most of the scheduled operations were cancelled just before take-off.¹²⁷

On January the 3rd, eight aircraft left to drop supplies to the partisans in Northern Italy. Six aircraft successfully dropped the supplies on target, but two failed to do so, due to the hilly countryside. A total of 152 containers were recovered. On the 4th of January eight aircraft were scheduled to bomb the Latisana road bridge between Venice and Trieste in Italy. Only seven aircraft managed to take off and bomb the target. On the 15th, ten aircraft were to make supply drops to Northern Italy, but eight aircraft had to return with their loads because of bad weather conditions. The same operation had to be postponed to the 18th, when ten aircraft successfully dropped supplies in a daytime operation. No opposition was encountered, although aircraft were escorted by fighter planes.¹²⁸

Although operations were cancelled daily, the mechanical personnel at 2 Wing had a difficult time repairing the aircraft and keeping them airborne. During the second half of the month, only three successful raids were carried out by 34 Squadron in collaboration with 31 Squadron.¹²⁹

No further operations could be carried out for the duration of the month, because of a deterioration in weather conditions. Despite the bad weather, crew members were in good health, and few reported sick. Some crew members were transferred during this period and six new crews arrived.¹³⁰

2.3.6 FINAL OPERATIONS

During February 1945, 169 sorties were carried out; a total number of 174 aircraft operated for 783 operational hours. The main objective of the squadron during this month was to disrupt the transport lines of the enemy

¹²⁷ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39961.

¹²⁸ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39961-39962.

¹²⁹ H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.383.

¹³⁰ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39963.

forces from Italy and to attack the most important communication centres from Bruscia to Udine in North-east Italy. Main shipping bases were also attacked and supply drops to partisans in Yugoslavia and Italy were carried out.¹³¹ On 27 February, the Verona marshalling yard was attacked. Several Liberators were severely damaged during this operation.¹³²

With the cessation of hostilities in Europe, 34 Squadron took on a new role. Their former role as a heavy bombing force ended, and its new task was now to transport troops and freight to the Udine area in North-eastern Italy. The squadron now became very much involved in assisting with the repatriation of ex-prisoners of war. About 150 prisoners of war were safely transported from Pomigliano and Bari to Britain. Later the squadron also transported troops to the Middle East.¹³³

Transporting prisoners of war on a large scale, the crew members realised that the end of the war in Europe did not actually mean the end of operations for them. Although peace had returned to the rest of Europe, they would have to carry on with these sorties for some time.¹³⁴

In May 1945, the Director-General of the Air Force had issued instructions for the establishment of a special headquarters to run an intensified transport service to repatriate South African troops from the Middle East, and by June, the activities of 34 Squadron were almost exclusively concerned with evacuating and repatriating South African troops. They flew as far as Cairo West.¹³⁵ From here the troops were later transported to South African by other squadrons. They also assisted with the repatriation of French ex-prisoners of war from Belgrade to Istres near Marseilles. Altogether 290 Frenchmen were flown during the month of June. From then onward, the

¹³¹ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.39980-39981.

¹³² L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.203.

¹³³ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.40212.

¹³⁴ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.243

¹³⁵ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.40214.

squadron continued with transporting troops, mail and freight to and from the Middle East and Britain.¹³⁶

During September 1945, the entire squadron moved back to Egypt and after more transport services around the Mediterranean and Middle East, the squadron disbanded on 15 December 1945 and was never re-established.¹³⁷

2.4 CONCLUSION

Crews of 31 Squadron and 34 Squadron SAAF participated in many operations during the Second World War. Both squadrons were involved in the mining of the Danube, bombing raids on enemy installations, and operations against targets in the north-west of Italy. The squadrons also took part in many bombing operations and repeatedly attacked and bombed marshalling yards. The aircrews were constantly subjected to danger. Later, these operations became even more delicate because of the many enemy anti-aircraft batteries protecting the Danube and other installations elsewhere.

The detailed description of the daily camp activities at Foggia in this chapter provides us with a better understanding of the living conditions of the aircrews who participated in the operations to Warsaw. From the outset, the South Africans were subjected to many frustrations. A lack of sufficient aircraft, poor technical equipment and inadequate aircraft stores had been the order of the day since their arrival in Africa. Right through the war they had to do without many crucial commodities. But, in spite of all these problems, the two squadrons' morale and enthusiasm never seemed to fail.

The contribution of 31 Squadron and 34 Squadron SAAF represents a commendable effort in the war. They participated in probably the most hazardous operations undertaken by the SAAF when they took part in supply dropping operations to Warsaw.¹³⁸ Their efforts led to their being reckoned as

¹³⁶ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.245.

¹³⁷ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.287.

¹³⁸ In chapter 4 to chapter 9, their participation will be described in detail. In chapter 10, a statistical evaluation of the success achieved by the South Africans will be undertaken.

two of the finest squadrons of the Allied forces. 31 Squadron especially, which played the major role of the two SAAF squadrons, won high praise for its achievements.

Although 34 Squadron played a minor role in the Warsaw Airlift, its contribution towards other operations was considerable. After the Warsaw Airlift was cancelled, the South African squadrons once again attacked and bombed enemy installations and oil targets in Hungary, Northern Italy and Yugoslavia. They had much success during these operations and considerably boosted the morale of the aircrews. To maintain this extraordinary effort, the ground crews had to work night and day. After the war ended, both squadrons were involved in the transporting and repatriation of troops. Later, their efforts were focused on the continuous transportation of freight and prisoners of war from Italy to Britain.