

# The South African Air Force and the Warsaw airlift of 1944

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## Introduction

The overall participation of the SAAF in the Second World War contributed to the Allied successes. Therefore, in this article, before evaluating and interpreting the contribution of the SAAF in the Warsaw Airlift, it will be necessary to determine the role it played in the overall Allied effort.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 50 000 members of the SAAF participated in the war, and South African airmen played a decisive and major role in many theatres of the war.

South Africa was the first dominion air force to be formed and played a role of equal importance to those of other dominions, including Australia and Canada.

In East Africa, SAAF squadrons made a considerable contribution to ultimate victory. They also played a valuable part in operations in the Middle East. SAAF squadrons successfully bombed enemy occupied airfields, and undoubtedly played a vital role in reducing the enemy's air strength in the Western Desert, where they achieved numerous successes. The SAAF participated in nearly 34 000 operations in North Africa alone and were also actively involved in operations in Sicily and the Dodecanese islands.

Another major contribution made by the SAAF was the training of RAF pilots and instructors in South Africa during the war.<sup>2</sup> The Union Defence Force also

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  - 1. This Article is based on a paper delivered at the International Conference on New African Perspectives: Africa, Australasia, and the Wider World at the End of the Twentieth Century, held at St. George College, the University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia in 1999.
  - 2. SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE FORCE ARCHIVES, Pretoria (D DOC S), SAAF, Unit History File, 1920 - 1980, Vol. I, p. 4.

realised the importance of the developing and training of personnel for the Air Force and therefore embarked on an ambitious and dynamic training programme, in cooperation with the Royal Air Force.<sup>3</sup> J.C. Smuts, who again became Prime Minister in September 1939,<sup>4</sup> also requested Britain to establish flight training facilities in South Africa. An initial agreement was signed in June 1941. This training programme became known as the Joint Air Training Scheme (JATS). In accordance with JATS, South Africa was to provide the facilities for the training and Great Britain the aircraft and equipment.<sup>5</sup> The training programme made provision for the establishment of 24 flying schools. The target was to have at least 3 000 pilots and 2 000 observers trained by 1942. The training of ground personnel was also included in the programme. JATS can be seen as the turning point in South Africa's Air Force training programme. It constantly had to be revised owing to developments in operations during the Second World War.<sup>6</sup>

Crews of 31 Squadron and 34 Squadron SAAF also participated in numerous other operations during the Second World War. The contribution of these squadrons in the airlift is one of the most outstanding accomplishments in South Africa's military history. The Warsaw Airlift represents an incident in the history of the Second World War that has many, often complex, facets. These SAAF squadrons participated in probably the most hazardous operation undertaken by the SAAF during the war when they undertook dropping supplies to partisans in Warsaw during August and September 1944.

### **The Warsaw Airlift**

Soon after the German occupation of Poland in September 1939, Polish liberation movements were formed to coordinate all resistance activities against

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3. D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, Unit History, Container 4, File AA/5: Manuscript of Lt. A.C. Parker's History of SAAF (Appeared in August '45 copy of *Libertas*), p. 2.
  4. When the outbreak of a Second World War became a reality, General J.B.M. Hertzog, Prime Minister of the Union since 1924, proposed a policy of neutrality, since the country was a self-governing dominion within the British Empire. The Deputy Prime Minister, General Smuts, disagreed and advocated active support of Great Britain. The crucial vote after a very stormy debate in Parliament, where 80 members voted for and 67 against participation in the war, left Hertzog with no choice but to resign and Smuts became Prime Minister for a second time; J. Van der Poel, *Selections From the Smuts Papers*, Vol. VI (Cambridge University Press, London, 1973), p. 187.
  5. J.A. BROWN, *Eagles Strike* (Purnell, Cape Town, 1974), p.17; D. Becker, *On Wings of Eagles: South Africa's Military Aviation History* (Durban, Walker-Ramus, 1993), p. 61; J. Keene, *South Africa in World War II* (Human & Rousseau, Pretoria, 1995), p. 33.
  6. 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* (Pretoria, SAAF Col. Publishers, 1989), p. 49.

the Germans. On 1 August 1944 the Polish partisans instigated an uprising against the Germans in Warsaw and occupied major sectors of the city.

The situation in Warsaw soon became desperate for the partisans because they needed armour and ammunition, as well as medical supplies. On 3 August 1944, General Tadeusz Bor-Kommorovski, the Commander of the Polish partisans in Warsaw, called for urgent help from the Allies.

In response to the urgent, insistent appeals from the Polish underground government, Churchill decided to increase the effort by using more aircraft.<sup>7</sup> Therefore 205 Group, commanded by a South African officer, Brigadier J.T. (Jimmy) Durrant<sup>8</sup> was ordered to assist Polish Special Duties Flight 1586.<sup>9</sup> 205 Group included 178 Squadron and 148 Squadron (334 Wing), Royal Air Force, and 31 Squadron and 34 Squadron (2 Wing) South African Air Force. This operation became known as the “Warsaw Airlift”.<sup>10</sup>

The flights to Warsaw took place from 13 August to 22 September and represented a round trip of 2 815 kilometres over enemy controlled areas.

For the greater part of this great distance from Brindisi to Warsaw, the aircraft flew over enemy territory, while a large part of the flight also took place in broad daylight.<sup>11</sup>

The aircraft involved did not fly in closed formation although they left approximately at the same time. In close formation enemy searchlight batteries

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7. H.J. MARTIN and N.D. ORPEN, *Eagles Victorious* (Purnell, Cape Town, 1977), p. 249.
  8. During 1943 Colonel Jimmy Durrant was officer commanding 3 Wing SAAF. He later took up a post with the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces. On 3 August 1944 he became Officer Commanding 205 Group. This Group included 178 Squadron RAF and 2 Wing, SAAF with 31 and 34 Squadrons. He was promoted brigadier on assumption of his new duties; H.J. MARTIN and N.D. ORPEN, *Eagles Victorious* (Purnell, Cape Town, 1977), p. 233.
  9. A.E. VAN JAARVELDT, “Die Warskoudebakel”, *Militaria* 7(4), April 1977, p. 30.
  10. In day to day parlance this airlift is referred to as “the Warsaw Concerto”. The research for this study was conducted at archives in South Africa, Britain, and the United States of America. South African military archival sources, which include war diaries, divisional documents, documents of the Union War Histories Advisory Committee and original sortie reports, were consulted. Most of these documents are kept at the South African National Defence Force Documentation Services’ Offices in Pretoria. In Britain, archival investigation and study were carried out at the Public Records Office, Kew Gardens, London, as well as the Imperial War Museum, the Royal Air Force Museum, Colindale Newspaper Library, the British Library, the British Library of Political and Economical Science, the British Newspaper Library, the House of Commons Library, the House of Lords’ Record Office, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office and the Ministry of Defence, Lacon House, London. In the United States, much time was spent at the National Archives as well as the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
  11. N. ORPEN, *Airlift to Warsaw; The rising of 1944* (New York, Foulsham & Company, 1984), p.81; H.J. MARTIN and N.D. ORPEN, *Eagles Victorious*, p. 250; J.L. van Eyssen, Personal interview, 15 August 1983; Anon. “SAAF heroes in Warsaw Airlift”, *Paratus*, 34(9), September 1983, p. 22.

could spot the aircraft more easily and pinpoint them as targets. German night fighters, taking off from Szombathely in Hungary and Cracow in Poland, could also intercept these Liberators more easily in a closed formation. The Allies did not have any fighter aircraft available to accompany the Liberators during the long flights to Warsaw.<sup>12</sup>

The route extended from the heel of Italy across the Adriatic sea, Yugoslavia, Hungary and the eastern parts of Czechoslovakia to the Carpathians. Pilots then had to follow the Vistula river to Warsaw,<sup>13</sup> where they had to pass over four prominent bridges across the river. The aircraft flew at a speed of 260 kilometres per hour and descended to an altitude of 152 metres. At the fourth bridge they had to turn left, flying westward for a short distance, before turning in a southerly direction again. Supplies had to be accurately dropped on identified street areas or air-supply zones.<sup>14</sup> The Liberator bomber, which was used for this exercise, weighed 25 480 kilogram (28 tons) and was equipped with four engines, each developing approximately 150 kilowatt.<sup>15</sup> Each aircraft carried 12 metal containers, 2,45 metres long, weighing approximately 150 kilogram each, a total of approximately 1 800 kilogram of supplies.<sup>16</sup> The fuel capacity of the aircraft was roughly 9 000 litres and the fuel consumption nearly 4,5 litres per 1,857 kilometres. Therefore the aircraft could fly a distance of 3 714 kilometres. The aircraft was armed with ten half-inch machine guns. Only a small amount of ammunition and arms could be carried on each flight since the largest part of the aircraft's carrying capacity was taken up by fuel. Usually during ordinary flights the calculated fuel reserve would be 25% to account for possible emergencies. During the flights to Warsaw the estimated reserve was only 9%.<sup>17</sup>

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12. The Americans flew in a closed formation to Warsaw on 18 September because they were escorted by P-51 aircraft.
  13. In the south, the Vistula river, north-east of Cracow, followed the shape of a half-round arch and then narrowed to 350 - 400 metres, where it flowed through the city of Warsaw. There were four prominent bridges across the Vistula: Poniatowski bridge, situated between the centre of the city and Saska Kepa; a train bridge between the eastern and central stations; Kierbedzia bridge, between the old city and the suburb, Praga; and the fourth, the Citadel bridge; H.J. MARTIN and N.D. ORPEN, *Eagles Victorious* (Purnell, Cape Town, 1977), p. 250.
  14. H.J. MARTIN and N.D. ORPEN, *Eagles Victorious* (Cape Town, Purnell, 1977), p. 258; A. Blake, *Die vlug na Warschau* (unp. document, File B421, South African National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, 1981); L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, (unp. Document, Library, Documentation Services of the South African National Defence Force (DOC S), Pretoria), p. 88
  15. A. BLAKE, *Die vlug na Warschau* (unp. document, File B421, South African National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, 1981).
  16. J.L. VAN EYSSSEN, Personal interview, 15 August 1983.
  17. A. BLAKE, *Die vlug na Warschau* (unp. document, File B421, South African National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, 1981); J.L. van Eyssen, Personal interview, 15 August 1983.

Naturally, flying this great distance, these Liberators would be easy targets for enemy aircraft and anti-aircraft artillery.<sup>18</sup> These German night fighters could strike at any time and posed a constant danger. This caused the aircrews great stress and anxiety and made the flights extremely perilous<sup>19</sup> Many aircraft were damaged so badly they had to carry out forced landings. Others were shot down by night fighters or anti-aircraft guns.<sup>20</sup>

For most of the flight, navigators were unable to communicate with radio transmission from ground stations on their radios because they were out of reach. Under normal conditions these ground stations helped the navigators to maintain the aircraft on course. Pilots also had to be on the alert to spot high mountain ranges like the Tatra mountains in Czechoslovakia and the Carpathian mountains closer to Warsaw.

Upon reaching the Vistula, the aircrews became aware of a dim glow on the horizon. As they approached, it slowly became bigger until it developed into a bright inferno. This was Warsaw, the capital of Poland, burning.<sup>21</sup>

The aircraft trembled<sup>22</sup> as they flew at approximately 350 metres above the burning city. The warm air and smoke inside the aircraft became almost intolerable. Fires lit the sky above the city, making the aircraft easy targets for enemy machine guns positioned on the roofs. Pilots were often blinded by the searchlight batteries stationed across the city.<sup>23</sup>

The air was streaked with tracer bullets and, when a Liberator exploded after a direct hit, it appeared like a small spark against the background of the burning city. The Polish partisans usually marked the supply zones with flare-strips. To mark the target at night, large fires were lit, approximately nine metres apart. At Krasinski Square the dropping zones could be identified because white lights had been placed by partisans in a diamond-shaped lane to indicate the drop-zone. When big fires were burning nearby, fires were only lit when the aircraft reached the dropping zones and the pilots had flashed an identifying code letter. When enemy flights across air-supply zones were a threat, fires were only lit after identifying code letters had been flashed by both the pilot and the ground

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18. H.J. MARTIN and N.D. ORPEN, *Eagles Victorious* (Purnell, Cape Town, 1977), pp.250-251.
  19. A. BLAKE, *Die vlug na Warschau* (unp. document, File B421, South African National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, 1981).
  20. BRITISH MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, London, Air Historical Branch, London, File 13: Air supply for Warsaw, n.d.
  21. A. BLAKE, *Die vlug na Warschau* (unp. document, File B421, South African National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, 1981); J.L. van Eyssen, Personal interview, 15 August 1983.
  22. This was because of the thermal effect of the fires in the burning city.
  23. L. ISEMONGER, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, (unp. Document, Library, D. DOC S, Pretoria), p.93.

forces. Since aircraft flying at such a low altitude were an easy target, it was necessary to select air-supply zones very carefully. Even if visibility was excellent, crews were still exposed to the dangers of flying low over unknown areas. To enable the ground forces to collect the containers quickly, the pilot flashed another code letter to notify ground forces when the supplies had been dropped. Ground forces then flashed again to indicate whether or not the containers had been received. This procedure enabled pilots to report immediately on the success of the mission.<sup>24</sup> The reason that different code letters were used was to prevent the Germans from intervening. German flights across air-supply zones were always a threat to the partisans. If the enemy knew where the dropping zones were, they could inform the German ground forces about the whereabouts of the partisans. Sometimes German forces also tried to confuse the Allied aircrews from positions on the ground by flashing codes in order to get them to drop supplies in areas that they controlled. The codes were usually pre-arranged with the aircrews at the briefings and were to indicated by different letters of the alphabet.

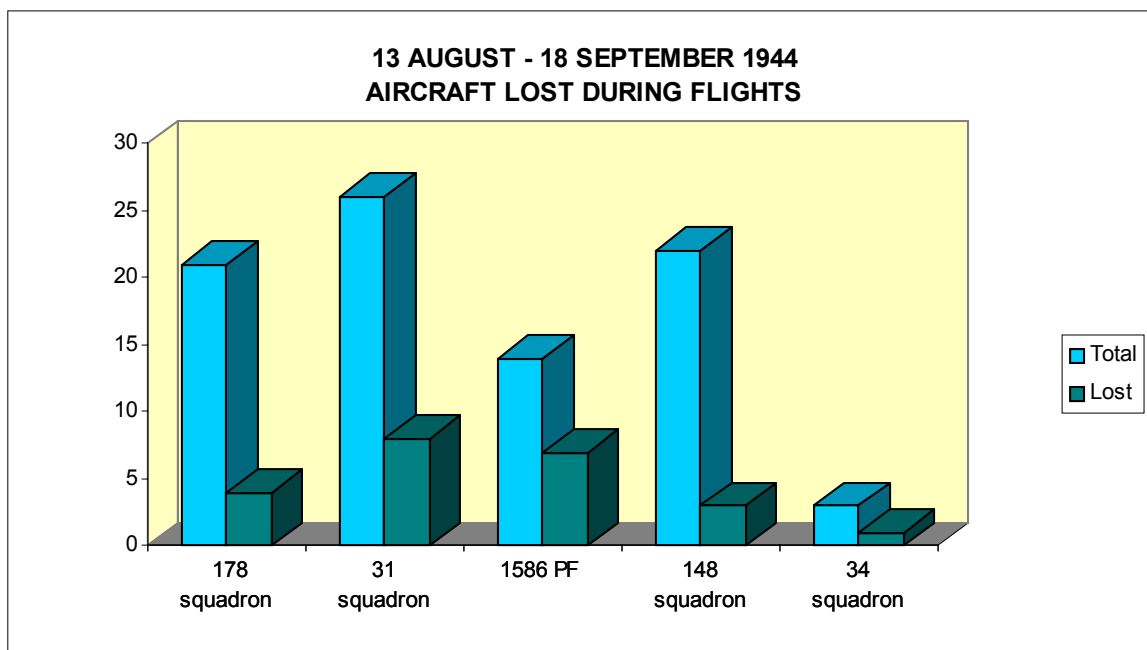
In spite of these precautions, large quantities of the weapons and ammunition in the metal containers were intercepted by the Germans.<sup>25</sup>

The following statistical information is essential in order to contextualise the contribution of the squadrons that participated in the Warsaw Airlift.

### **Graph 1: Aircraft lost since the start of the Warsaw airlift on 13 August**

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24. A. BLAKE, *Die vlug na Warschau* (unp. document, File B421, South African National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, 1981); A.E. VAN JAARSVELDT, “Die Warskoudebakel”, *Militaria* 7(4), April 1977, p. 30; BRITISH MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, Air Historical Branch, London, File 13: Air supply for Warsaw, n.d.
  25. A. BLAKE, *Die vlug na Warschau* (unp. document, File B421, South African National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, 1981); L.J. VAN EYSEN, Personal interview, 15 August 1983.

Warsaw airlift of 1944

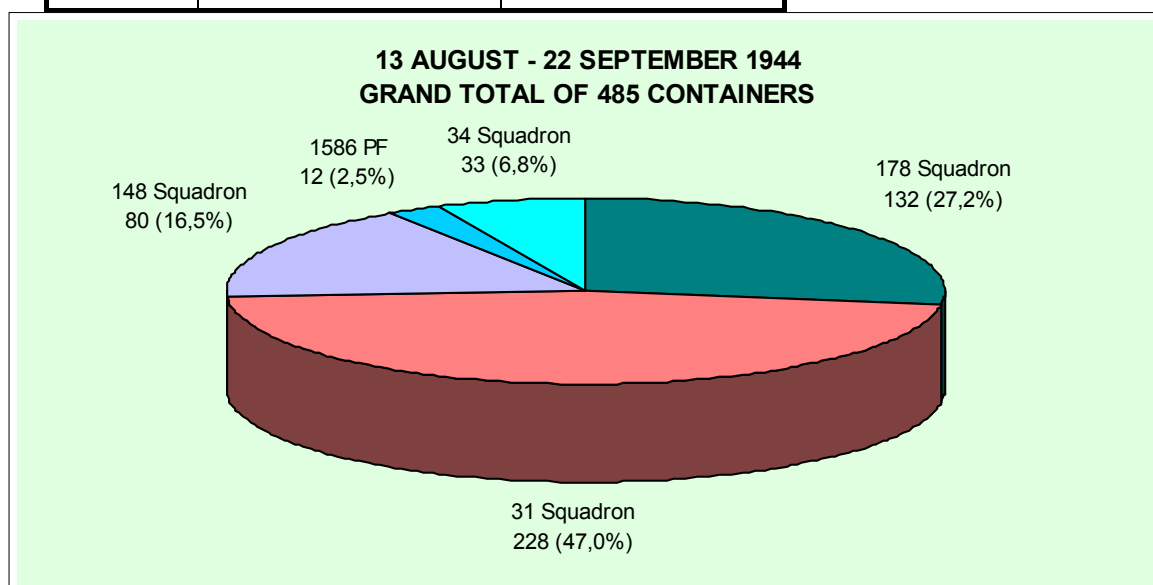


| Squadron | Number of aircraft that participated | Number of aircraft lost | Percentage of aircraft lost |
|----------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 178      | 21                                   | 4                       | 19,0%                       |
| 31       | 26                                   | 8                       | 30,8%                       |
| 148      | 22                                   | 3                       | 13,6%                       |
| 1586 PF  | 14                                   | 7                       | 50,0%                       |
| 34       | 3                                    | 1                       | 33,3%                       |
| Total    | 86                                   | 23                      | 26,7%                       |

**Graph 2: Grand total of containers dropped on Warsaw since the first operations on 13 August to the last operation on 22 September 1944**

| Squadron | Number of containers | Percentage of containers |
|----------|----------------------|--------------------------|
|----------|----------------------|--------------------------|

|            | dropped | dropped |
|------------|---------|---------|
| 178        | 132     | 27,2%   |
| 31         | 228     | 47,0%   |
| 148        | 80      | 16,5%   |
| 34         | 33      | 6,8%    |
| 1586<br>PF | 12      | 2,5%    |
| Total      | 485     | 100%    |



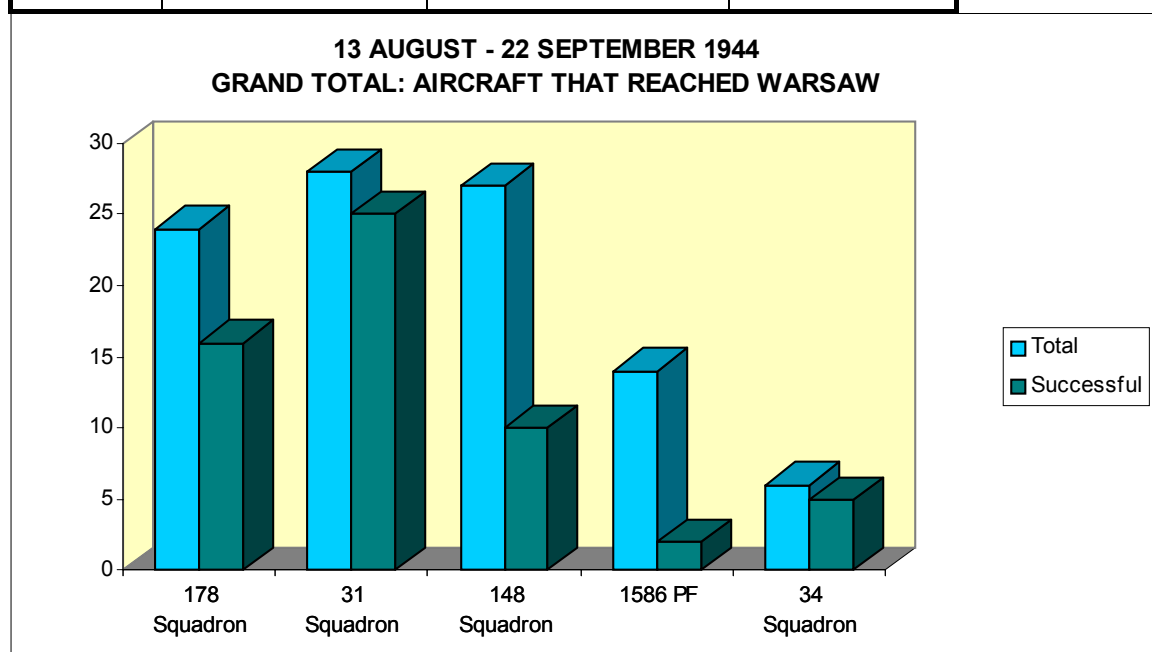
In total, 99 aircraft participated in the flights from Italy. (Graph 3) Only 68 aircraft succeeded in reaching Warsaw. 31 Squadron did especially well because 25 Liberators of the 28 Liberators detailed for the flights, succeeded in reaching Warsaw. This represents a success rate of 89,2%. Against this, 178 Squadron had a success rate of 67%, 148 Squadron a success rate of only 37% and Polish Special Duties Flight 1586 a success rate of only 14%. (Graph 3) 34 Squadron only took part in the last sorties but managed to obtain a success rate of 83,3%. Five of the six Liberators that participated reached Warsaw. (Graph 3)

**Graph 3: Grand total of aircraft that reached Warsaw since the first flights on 13 August to the last flights on 22 September 1944**



Warsaw airlift of 1944

| Squadron | Number of aircraft that participated | Number of aircraft that reached Warsaw | Success rate in percentage |
|----------|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 178      | 24                                   | 16                                     | 66,7%                      |
| 31       | 28                                   | 25                                     | 89,3%                      |
| 148      | 27                                   | 10                                     | 37,0%                      |
| 1586 PF  | 14                                   | 2                                      | 14,3%                      |
| 34       | 6                                    | 5                                      | 83,3%                      |
| Total    | 99                                   | 58                                     | 58,6%                      |

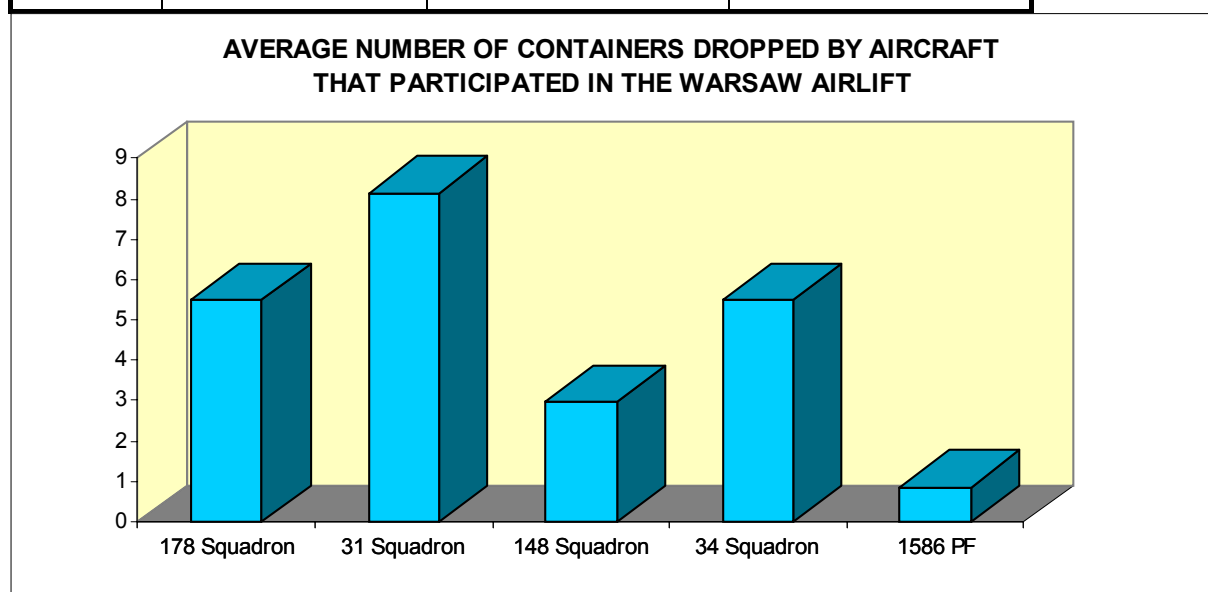


An analysis of the number of containers successfully dropped compared to the number of flights undertaken to Warsaw will indicate clearly that the South African squadrons achieved a much higher success rate.(Graph 4)

**Graph 4: The success rate of containers dropped by each squadron during the Warsaw airlift**

| Squadron | Number of containers | Number of aircraft that | Average number of containers |
|----------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
|----------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|

| on      | dropped | participated in the flights to Warsaw | dropped by each aircraft |
|---------|---------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 178     | 132     | 24                                    | 5.5                      |
| 31      | 228     | 28                                    | 8.14                     |
| 148     | 80      | 27                                    | 2.96                     |
| 34      | 33      | 6                                     | 5.5                      |
| 1586 PF | 12      | 14                                    | 0.86                     |
| Total   | 485     | 99                                    | 4.9                      |



This statistical information gives ample evidence of the sound training, courage and perseverance of the South Africans involved in these taxing flights.

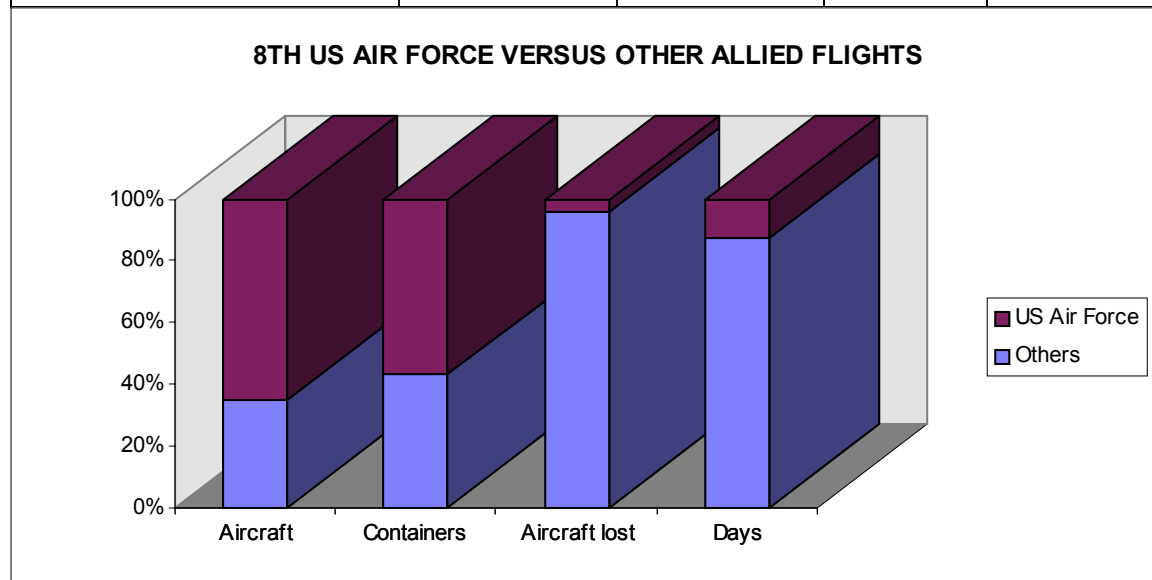
### **The participation of the Americans**

It is of the utmost importance that the participation of the 8th USAF must be seen within the context of the combined Allied effort. Statistical calculations show that, in the single operation of the Americans, 640 containers were dropped, which represents 54% of the total effort of the Warsaw Airlift. The other Allied squadrons flew on seven alternate nights and dropped 457 containers, which represents the outstanding 46%.

### **Graph 5: A Comparison between the Allied squadrons that operated from Italy and the single daymission by the Americans**

*Warsaw airlift of 1944*

|                        | Aircraft that reached Warsaw | Containers supplied to partisans | Aircraft lost | Number of days flown |
|------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| 8th USAF               | 110                          | 640                              | 1             | 1                    |
| Other Allied squadrons | 59                           | 485                              | 23            | 7                    |



It would, however, certainly be unfair to judge the efforts of the Allies who flew from Italy to Warsaw on the same grounds as the single effort of the Americans. No real comparison can be drawn. The effort of the Allied squadrons, operating from Italy, was a massive undertaking. It exceeded, in effort and duration, all other initiatives undertaken by any other Allied power, at any other time, in an effort to help the Polish partisans. The fact remains that the supplies dropped by these Allied squadrons meant the difference between survival and defeat in Warsaw. In the later stages of the Polish uprising, the help became even more crucial. It meant the difference between life and death for the Polish people in Warsaw. Moreover, the continuous arrival of Allied planes to drop supplies must have had a salutary effect on morale and revived partisan hopes for ultimate victory.

The effort of the Americans was commendable. It represented a much better planned operation than those of the Allies and, seen from a military perspective, the mission complied with all the strategic requirements for an operation of this nature. The 110 bombers which carried the containers were accompanied by 64 fighter aeroplanes to protect them from possible attacks by enemy fighters. The slow moving aircraft of the Allied squadrons which flew from Italy, on the other hand, were on their own and had to defend themselves against enemy fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft fire. In fact, they were, most of the time, sitting ducks.

The Americans flew from Britain on a daylight mission and landed on Russian airfields. The other Allied crews flew from Italy and had to fly back from

Poland before landing. Furthermore these flights were conducted at night when weather conditions were, as a rule, worse than by day.

The Americans dropped the containers from a height of more than 4 000 metres. This was one of the reasons why less than 50% could be retrieved by the partisans. Accuracy could have been increased by reducing the dropping altitude, but this was, according to military experts, not recommended under the prevailing circumstances. On the other hand, most of the Allied aircraft dropped their containers from an altitude of about 200 to 300 metres.

The supplies received by the Polish population after the American sortie were said to be crucial but the most important contribution the Americans made was that their effort raised a terrific enthusiasm among the populace in Warsaw. The morale and the feelings of the people in Warsaw improved immensely and it was seen as the first effort of many to come. The containers fell far and wide, and many into German controlled zones, but the mere fact that the American had rendered help was perhaps even more precious to the exhausted defenders than the supplies.

If military considerations alone had governed the decision to fly sorties to Warsaw, three or four daylight missions would have been sufficient to relieve the Polish partisans. Yet, the flights from Southern Italy were too dangerous to undertake and the distance was too great for a combined effort such as that of the Americans to be undertaken. Only a few types of aircraft could fly such a distance. Allied squadrons were, at the time, also involved in many other important operations, like the mining of the Danube. It must furthermore be kept in mind that Churchill ordered the flights because of political considerations. There is no doubt that he must have been concerned about the probable military consequences. It must also be remembered that he also had certain reservations about the way in which the revolt in Warsaw had been conducted. On 18 August he wrote to Roosevelt that he was convinced that the Warsaw revolt represented a reckless adventure.

### **Ultimately in vain, but a contribution of great significance**

As far as the Warsaw Airlift is concerned a military lesson is to be learned from this episode: Adventurous initiatives which are unlikely to work should not be undertaken for purely political motives. The flights undertaken from Italy were conducted under the most hazardous circumstances and, as indicated very clearly in the individual flight reports, the crews were battling against overwhelming odds. Their objectives were unrealistic and militarily catastrophic. Seen from a military perspective, this operation was reckless and should never have taken place.

Today the aircrews are honoured for their brave actions when the gallantry of South Africans in the war is commemorated. The Polish community gathers in

Johannesburg in September every year to commemorate these events. During this annual memorial service, pilots, aircrews and ground personnel of 31 and 34 Squadrons SAAF are entertained as guests of the Polish community in South Africa.<sup>26</sup> The Poles arrive in great numbers to pay homage to the small number of remaining survivors and also to the memory of those who died during the Warsaw Airlift. Altogether 44 crew members of the SAAF died during the flights to Warsaw. The climax of the commemoration is reached when the courageous contribution of the airmen who participated is honoured during a wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph Graveyard in Johannesburg.<sup>27</sup>

The Warsaw operation resulted in a firm bond of friendship between the crew members who took part in the task flights to Warsaw and the free Polish community in South Africa.<sup>28</sup> The Warsaw Airlift is, therefore, important from a cultural-historical perspective.

Similar commemorating services are held in Poland. Every year on the evening of "All Saints Day" fresh flowers and candles are put on the airmen's graves in the graveyards of Warsaw and Cracow.<sup>29</sup>

Although the episode of the airlift was in many instances futile and utterly senseless,<sup>30</sup> it invokes feelings of deep respect for the aircrews who participated in the flights to Warsaw and risked their own lives.

Allied squadrons have been widely praised for their courageous conduct, perseverance and sense of duty whilst participating in the Warsaw Airlift. Several individuals received awards for gallantry, including the Distinguished Flying Cross. Both strategists and statesmen have commented on these operations. In his book, *The Central Blue*, Air Marshal Sir John Slessor referred to these flights as

a story of the utmost gallantry and self-sacrifice on the part of the air-crews who participated.<sup>31</sup>

Josef Garlinski says that

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26. J.L. VAN EYSEN, Telephonic interview, Johannesburg, October 1992.

27. J.L. VAN EYSEN, Telephonic interview, Johannesburg, October 1992.

28. *The Citizen*, January 1978 (K. Swaift: Death and destruction in the skies), p. 5.

29. BRITISH MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, London, Air Historical Branch, General File: Pamphlet on commemorating services.

30. When Bor-Komorowski surrendered to the Germans, the partisans had vainly tried for 63 days to liberate their capital. Of the approximately 40 000 men and women who were members of the underground army, roughly 18 000 died. About 25 000 were wounded, 6 500 seriously, and the total number of civilian casualties was estimated at 180 000 people.

31. J. SLESSOR, *The Central Blue* (Cassell, London, 1956), p. 621.

the great sacrifice of the young men who died with the full knowledge that their death could not alter the course of the events, is an example of the utmost heroism<sup>32</sup>

and Winston Churchill describes the courageous conduct of these air crews as “an epic of human courage”.<sup>33</sup>

It is one of the tragedies of war that sacrifices like those of the Allied airmen, who gave their lives to assist their Polish Allies, were ultimately in vain.

### *Opsomming*

## **Die Suid-Afrikaanse Lugmag en die Warskouse lugbrug van 1944**

Dit is ‘n bekende feit dat die Suid Afrikaanse Lugmag (SALM) ‘n belangrike rol in die Tweede Wêreldoorlog gespeel het. In die artikel word aandag gegee aan die rol wat die SALM gelewer het in die *Warskou Lugbrug*. Statistiese data word gebruik om die deelname van die SALM met die van die Britse Lugmag (RAF) en die Poolse Spesiale Taakvlug 1586 (Polish Special Duties Flight 1586), asook met die enkele missie van die Amerikaners, te vergelyk en dan te evalueer.

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32. J. GARLINSKI, *Poland, SOE and the Allies* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1969), p. 206.

33. L. CAPSTICKDALE, “Warsaw a South African epic”, *South African Panorama*, November 1980, p. 44.