

## MAJ ANTONIE CRISTOFFEL SMIT

1912 – 1993



Image 1: Photograph of Maj A C Smit with the Mosquito aircraft, after he is believed to have flown it in a record run between Cape Town and Swartkop. Image provided by his son, Col (ret) Tony Smit.

### INTRODUCTION

Major (Maj) A C Smit served in the South African Air Force (SAAF) before, during and after World War II (WWII).

He is the father of Colonel A E V R Smit, who was the Officer Commanding (OC) of the SAAF Museum Air Force Base (AFB) Swartkop, from January 1986 to January 1991.

### EARLY CAREER

#### AIR FORCE BASE SWARTKOP AND CAPE TOWN

Maj A.C. Smit was born in Ladybrand, South Africa (SA) on the 28th of August 1912. He started flying on the 6th of January 1936 at AFB Swartkop.

He acquired his Private Pilot's License (PPL) with the Citizen Force (CF), flying on weekends, while he was working privately. He received his wings in 1938. Later he acquired his Commercial Pilot's License at Rand Airport Germiston.

His son, Col (ret.) Tony Smit was born in 1936.

After joining the South African Air Force Maj Tony Smit (senior) proceeded to do an instructors course at Central Flying School (CFS) Swartkop. At this point he would have carried the rank of Lieutenant. CFS at Swartkop trained both pupil pilots and instructors using DH-9 bombers, Avian IVM and Westland Wapiti III aircraft. After this he was posted to do coastal patrols for 2 years in Cape Town.

In 1942 he was posted back to CFS Swartkop as an instructor, after which he was based at 22 Air School Vereeniging as Flight Commander and then posted back to 66 Air School Youngsfield Cape Town as Flight Commander, instructing on Avro Ansons, Airspeed Oxfords and Hawker Hartebeest.

He was promoted to captain in around 1940.

## TRAINING FOR WORLD WAR II

### ON TO KIMBERLEY, AFRICA AND ITALY

1941 Capt. Smit was posted to Kimberley SAAF Air School where he flew Hawker Harts and Miles Masters and gave instruction on Westland Wapitis, Hawker Hartebeests and Airspeed Oxfords. Kimberley was one of the training bases in South Africa where pilot training took place for the Royal Air Force (RAF) during the WWII war effort. He also instructed bomber pilots, navigators, observers and gunners on Avro Ansons. The training he gave included foreign pilots.

In January 1943 he was posted to North Africa to join 21 Squadron. They first went to Kenya (East Africa) where the squadron underwent operational training on the Bristol Blenheim, Bisley Bomber and Martin Baltimore. From there they were posted to North Africa via Somalia, Khartoum in Sudan, Tripoli in Libya and Tunis in Tunisia, on to the Western Desert. During his time in the Western desert he converted onto and trained on the Martin Maryland, then Martin Baltimore, Boston bombers, Bisleys (a Blenheim variant) and Martin B-26 Marauders. He spent most of the time "up North" on Baltimore bombers.

After the 2nd Battle of El Alamein, where they operated very successfully together with 3 Wing (12, 21 and 24 Squadrons), causing the Germans to surrender, 21 Squadron moved on to Malta, from where they bombed Sicily. They moved north eastwards into Italy where they were based at Foggia, operating from there around eastern Italy until disbanding. He finally completed 101 sorties and 87 raids in Italy. Capt Smit, while flying for 21 Squadron, was involved in Night operations, something that no other squadron had done before.

### POST WW II

After the war, Maj. Smit returned to Air Force Base Swartkop, flying Havilland DH.98 Mosquitos, Harvards, Dakota C-47s and Lockheed Venturas, again with 21 Squadron, until he left the SAAF circa 1951.

He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) in 1944, which was presented to him by King George VI during the Royal visit to South Africa in 1947.

After the war, the SAAF re-equipped with 136 Spitfires. Maj Smit and a number of Ventura pilots flew Spitfire pilots up to Egypt around the beginning of June 1947, to ferry down the Spitfires that SA had received from England. The Ventura's escorted the Spitfires back to SA.

Maj Smit continued with a civilian flying career on and off.

He passed away on the 20th of July 1993 at the age of 81 years.



Image 2: This painting was done, probably in Italy, by an Italian Prisoner of War (POW) signed B. De Lacucci. Date and time unknown. Image of painting and medals provided by his son, Col (ret.) Tony Smit.  
Photograph by Shirlee Smit.

Article compiled by Lynn Greyling, member of the Friends of the SAAF Museum.

#### POST SCRIPT

This article is based on an interview with his son on the 26th of July 2019, and correspondence between Col Smit and myself. In due course, another article will follow this one, to describe some of Maj Smit's exploits during WWII in more detail.