



THE DEATH OF PELICAN

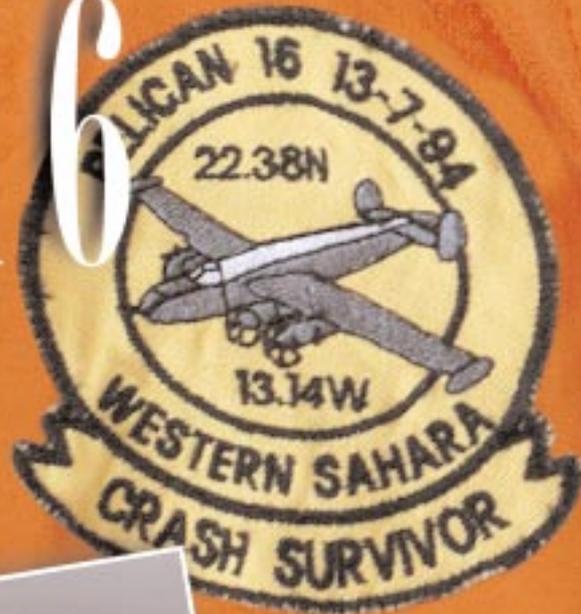
WEDNESDAY **RT,00** LATE FINAL

The Argus

**SAAF
PLANE
DOWN IN
DESERT**

ARGUS CLASSIFIEDS 488-4891

16



The Remarkable Story
Behind the World's
Last Flying
Avro Shackleton Mk3

AVAILABLE HERE ON



THE MAKING OF THE DEATH OF PELICAN-16

On the morning of July 13th 1994, the headline news read “SAAF Plane Down in Desert”. Nine years later this well remembered story about the miraculous escape from death by the nineteen crew members has been brought back to life by a Cape Town film-maker.

Avro Shackleton, serial 1716 was one of eight four-engined maritime patrol aircraft commissioned by the South African Air Force in 1954. In 1993, a Shackleton enthusiast had the ambitious plan to restore one of these decommissioned aircraft and turn it into a flying museum. The name of this aircraft: Pelican-16. July 1994, after ten years on the ground and two years of restoration work this magnificent aircraft flew again. Following an invitation to take part in the 1994 summer air-show circuit in the UK, Pelican-16 and its crew of 19 took off from Cape Town and headed north. But then in the dead of the blackest night, high over the Western Sahara the unthinkable happened; two engines on the starboard side failed within a period of just ten minutes. The aircraft and its crew went down. Flight commander Eric Pienaar and his crew performed a miraculous crash landing from which all walked away unaided.

The idea of making the film came to me when I heard a recording of the radio transmissions from Pelican-16 as it went down. Dramatic military efficiency done so well it is now used by the Air Force in their training as a text book example of how it should be done. I approached the SAAF Museum with the idea that while I would finance the film, they would provide the opportunity and we would both enjoy the rewards should the film be broadcast. The idea was liked so much that it eventually landed on the desk of the chief of the Air Force himself, Gen Roelf Beukes, who gave it the tally-ho.

Once the project was announced to the crew it was met by unconditional support and enthusiasm. Currently serving Air Force officers, retired and Reserve Force officers all put their time aside to participate. As the story unfolded it became even more dramatic than I first thought. To my delight the crew had not only filmed the restoration and

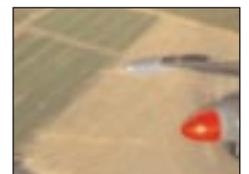


preparation of the aircraft but had filmed the crew on board, and immediately following the crash. In a sombre scene as daybreak edges over the horizon the light reveals their beloved aircraft strewn across a narrow plain between rows of steep hills. "It was a huge runway especially prepared for us", says Mission Commander Maj Horace Blok in his testimonial. While the aircraft looked almost intact, it was destroyed.

The one year of filming, collecting news-clippings and shooting testimonials was a wonderful experience. Every time we went out to shoot, something magical happened. One of the most memorable of these was the shoot at Cape Town International Airport. Pelican-22, Pelican-16's replacement was doing engine and fast taxis runs. Steve Searle, camera assistant and radio-ham suggested that if we could speak to the tower from his radio equipped Land Rover, maybe they would let us run alongside and shoot tracking shots on the runway. To my astonishment, air-traffic approved. And so there I was, braced on the roof-rack, camera in hand, screaming down the runway passing waiting 747s chasing a four-engined bomber. There is an unrivalled love for this aircraft and I reckon that's why we got permission to do it.

Early March 2003, on a sunny autumn morning, the crew climbed aboard Pelican-22 for Flight commander Eric Pienaar's final flight. Two months before the film was completed he lost his long battle with cancer. This mission: To scatter his ashes onto the gentle swell in Table Bay. Due to a faulty no.4 magneto the flight was delayed while Pottie Potgieter, chief of restoration, fixed the problem. When we eventually got airborne the light was amazing. While the crew bid their farewells, the light streamed through the open portholes and bathed the introspective crew in brilliant autumn sunshine. It was, as any filmmaker will appreciate, "magic time".

Being given the job to tell the story was a great privilege. The marvellous, unforgettable roar of the four Rolls Royce Griffon engines is combined with great orchestral music by Holst, Wagner and Tchaikovsky and builds into a fantastic soundtrack. Narration is by John Dickson and was recorded in London.



A DVD and VHS extended, 90-minute version is available in good bookshops, Exclusive Books being the first to order. Proceeds go to repay the crew for their efforts and also to the museum who for the most part battle for funds to keep not only Pelican-22 flying, but numerous other aircraft too.

Sadly, Pelican-22s last flying days are approaching. Pelican-22 is the last flying Mk-3 and its last flight may be during the Ysterplaat AFB Air-Show, 8th November 2003. For lovers of the Shackleton it may be the last time to hear the fabulous, Griffon Growl.

DVD or VHS copies can also be ordered through the mail by contacting the distributors, International Motoring Productions on 27 (0)21 852 9984 or directly from the Internet website, www.shortfinals.co.za

A year in production, The Death of Pelican-16 was made in conjunction with the South African Air Force Museum and with every copy sold a contribution is made to the Museum.

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SAAF Museum crews
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