

SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE DEPLOYMENT IN KOREA

1950 – 1953

James Findlay (Philatelic Society of Johannesburg)

Introduction: On 4 August 1950 the Union of South Africa government agreed to send a South African Air Force (SAAF) fighter squadron to support the United Nations forces in Korea against the communist invasion of that country. No. 2 Squadron – The Flying Cheetahs – was selected. The initial contingent was commanded by Cmdt. S. van Breda Theron and consisted of 49 officers and 157 other ranks. The squadron departed from Durban on the Royal InterOcean Lines ship *Tjisadane* on 26 September 1950 and sailed via Singapore and Hong Kong to Yokohama, Japan, where it disembarked on 4 November. The squadron then arrived in Korea on 16 November 1950.

Deployment: No. 2 Squadron was attached to 18th US Fighter-Bomber Wing. It initially flew F-51 Mustang aircraft and converted to Canadian built F 86-F Sabre aircraft early in 1953. The squadron operated from 9 air bases during this conflict. A total of 264 Officers and 555 Other Ranks (Total = 819) served with the squadron in Korea. The last combat sortie was flown on 27 July 1953 and the last SAAF members left Korea on 29 October 1953. Seven SAAF pilots were prisoners of war and 34 pilots lost their lives during this conflict.

Postal Arrangements: The Squadron did not have a Field Post Office (FPO) component and relied on the postal facilities of other contingents, which were mainly the United States and British FPOs but SAAF mail from the Australian and Canadian contingents is recorded.

The South African contingent was given the privilege of free postage while in Korea. However, this was withdrawn in January 1953. Existing internal surface mail letter cards were overprinted with 3 or 4 bars obliterating the value tablet, a 'By Air Mail' logo was added, "FREE FORCES MAIL / POSVRY VANAF MAGTE" was added, the postal instructions were obliterated, and the address of the South African Air Force Liaison Headquarters in the Far East was added. There are 6 variations in the overprinting applied to these letter cards. The study of these letter cards is excluded from the exhibit. From January to October 1953 British Forces Letter cards with postage applied were used although civilian stationery was also accepted.

Exhibit Lay-out and Description of Items:

This collection shows mail and postage items associated with No.2 Squadron, South African Air Force;

1. A map illustrating the dates and locations of 2 Squadron's deployment in Korea.
2. A letter from a member of No.2 Squadron posted at the RAF Kai Tak base in Hong Kong (only recorded cover).
3. Stamps that were issued to celebrate the unification of North and South Korea on 20 November 1950; three days later 300 000 communist Chinese troops invaded Korea and the war continued for another 3 years. A souvenir of the Korea campaign.
4. The earliest recorded postage free cover from a SAAF member in Korea to South Africa.
5. An example South African letter card (Type A2) with the "Free Forces Mail" overprint.
6. Used postage-free 'Free Forces Mail' letter cards (Types A4 and B3; in free postage period).
7. Used postage-free 'Free Forces Mail' letter cards (Types A4 and B4) with 2½^d airmail postage.
8. Air mail postage mail from the Australian APO 214 (Tokyo) and British FPO 798 (Pusan).
9. Postage free mail from American Army-Air Force Postal Service from a member of No. 2 Squadron.
10. Air letter cards from South Africa to SAAF members in Korea (rare).
11. A signed photograph of Lt. Dennis Earp, SAAF pilot and POW in Korea (later Lt. Gen. commanding the SAAF) (unique).
12. Original photographs of aircraft flown by the SAAF in Korea.

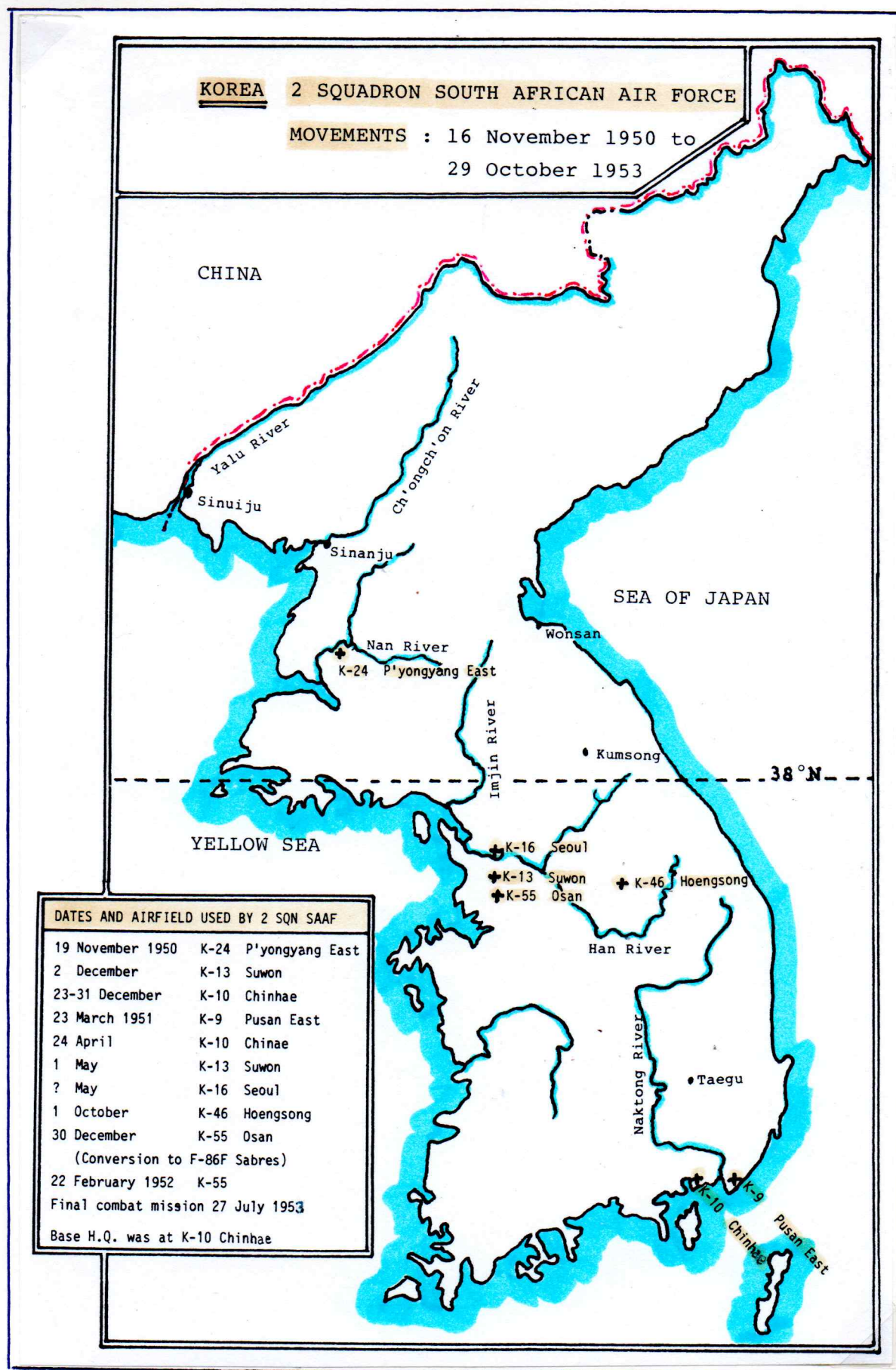
References

JBR Findlay and A Ganse: "South African Air Force in Korea Mail"; The Korean Philatelic Society Journal Vol. 7 No. 2 March 1995 pages 64 – 68.

JBR Findlay and A Ganse: "SA Air Force mail in Korea"; SA Philatelist, October 1995, Pages 130-132.

JBR Findlay: "Rare SAAF Mail" (2 Squadron, Hong Kong, 1950); S.A. Philatelist, Vol. 75, No.5, October 1999, page 126.

2 Squadron, South African Air Force, arrived in Korea from Japan on 16 November 1950 and the last members departed for the Union of South Africa on 29 October 1953. The nickname of the squadron was 'The Flying Cheetahs'. The map indicates the air bases that were used by 2 Squadron during the conflict.



The first contingent of 2 Squadron sailed for Korea on the Royal Interocean Lines ship "Tjisadane" from Durban on 26 September 1950. The ship stopped for 'a few days' at Singapore and 'a day' at Hong Kong, arriving at Kobe harbour, Japan, on 1 November and disembarked at Yokohama on 4 November 1950. The Squadron arrived in Korea on 16 November.

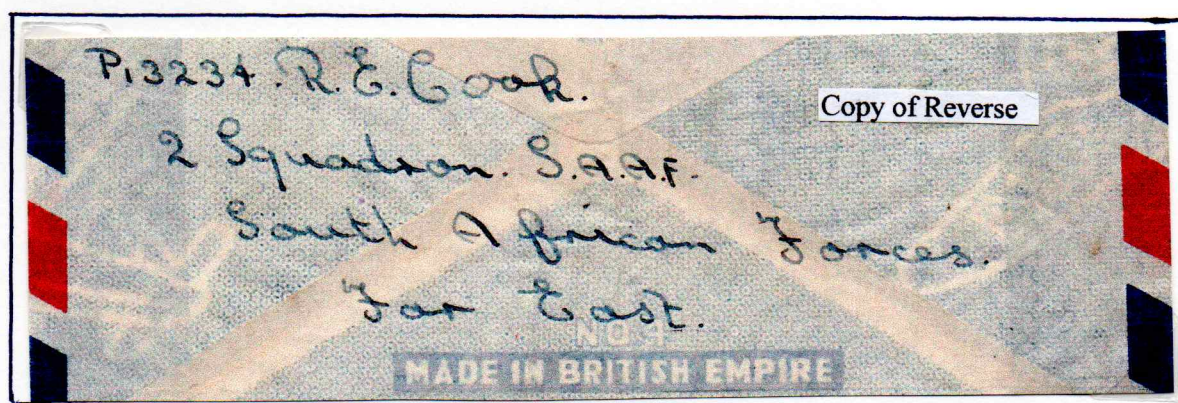
25 October 1950 S.A.A.F. AT THE R.A.F. KAI TAK AIR BASE, HONG KONG.

An air mail cover (postage 2½^d) from P13234 Air Mechanic R.E. Cook, 2 Squadron S.A.A.F., posted from the Royal Air Force Kai Tak Air Base, Hong Kong, to Pretoria.

Although the datestamp is indistinct, it is probably the British Army Field Post Office 701, which was at Kai Tak Air Base from 24 October 1949 to 27 January 1959. Alternatively, it could be F.P.O. 385 at Kowloon from 4 October 1949 to 24 May 1954.

The Royal Air Force cachet confirms this cover was posted in Hong Kong.

Cachet: POST OFFICE / 25 OCT 1950 / R.A.F. KAI TAK



Leading Air Mechanic Roy Edgar Cook served as a Flight Mechanic in World War 2 with 12 Squadron, S.A.A.F., in North Africa and Malta and with 27 Squadron in Sicily. He was discharged after the war and re-attested on 10 April 1949 and served with 2 Squadron until 10 November 1952. He served with the Kenya Police (1954), 3 Royal Rhodesia Regiment, Northern Rhodesia (1960-1964) and the South Coast Commando, South Africa, (1976-1984).

When the Communist North Korean forces invaded South Korea on 25 June 1950, the United Nations forces came to the support of South Korea and pushed the North Korean forces almost to the China border by November 1950. In view of the pending victory, a special set of "Unification of Korea" stamps was issued on 20 November 1950. The design of the three stamps included Dr. Syngman Rhee (100w, SG 137), the flags of the United Nations and Korea (100w, SG 138) and the two flags and a map of Korea (200w, SG 139).

On the night of 23 November 1950, 300 000 Chinese troops invaded Korea and the United Nations force was pushed back. The war ended in October 1953 with two separate countries. As a result, the "Unification of Korea" stamp issue was obsolete 3 days after being issued.



AMERICAN RED CROSS

C.W.Facer
2 Squadron
S.A.A.F.
Union SA Forces
S.A.P.O. 5301
Far East
7.3.51

Dear HOFFIE,

Enclosed are two stamps just been issued by the South Korean Government and as Ray mentioned you collect stamps I thought you would like these two types which are rare and you will probably be the first in SA to have them. They are stamped March 6 1951. I have been in Korea sometime now, we have gone through hell and one or two occasions we have had narrow escapes from guerrillas & the Chinese. We are nearly 12,000 miles from SA in bitter cold.

I will look around for others as I travel along.

Best Regards
Charles

from Guerrillas & the Chinese
We are nearly 12,000 miles from
SA in bitter cold.
I will look around for others
as I travel along
Best regards
Charles

(KOREA)



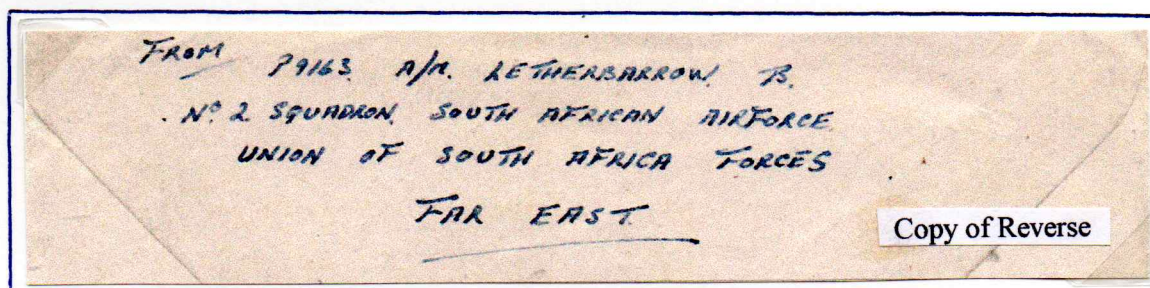
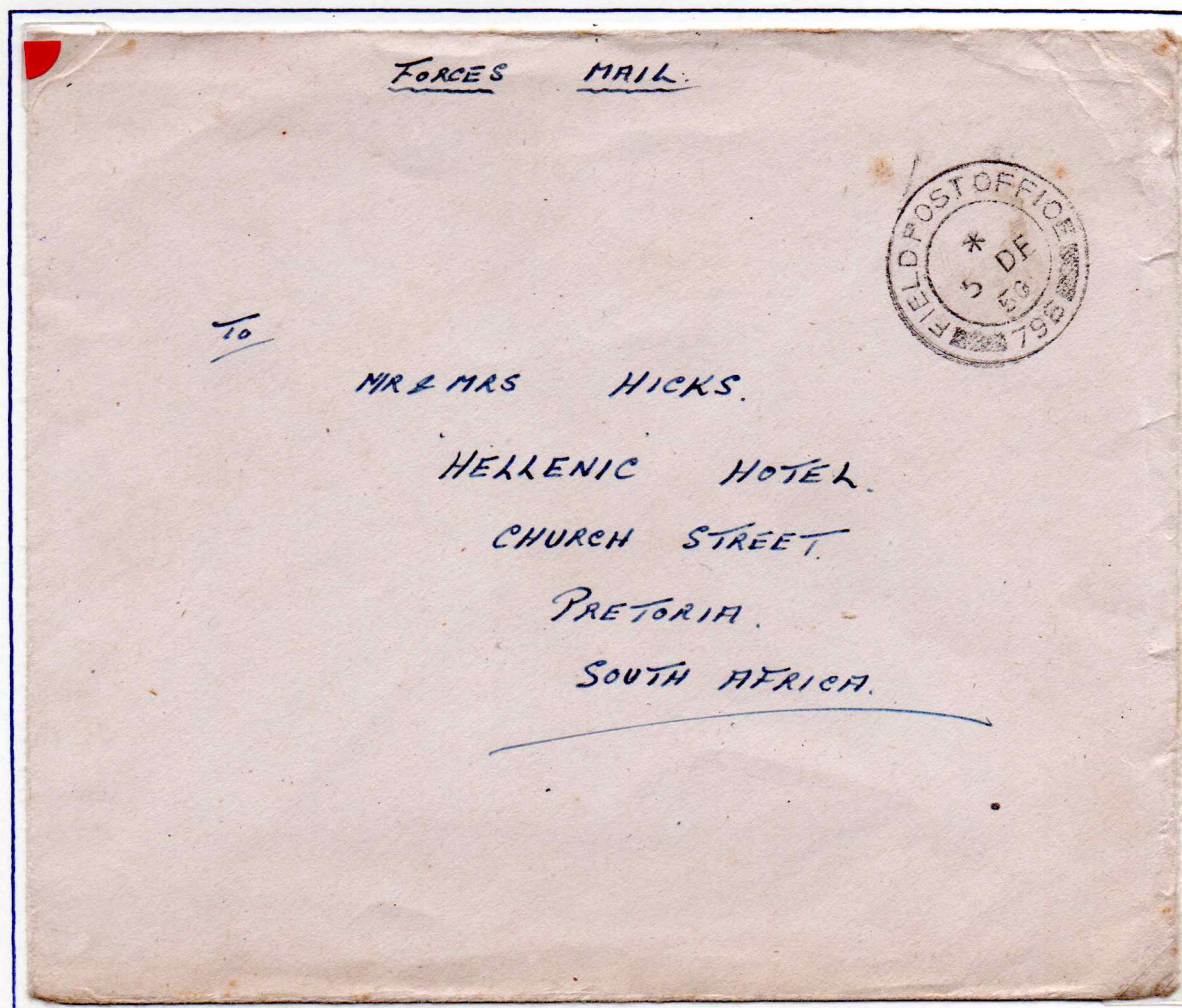
AIR MAIL
UNATIONS KOREA
FLAG

LAND MAIL



These 100w (surface mail) and 200w (air mail) "Unification of Korea" stamps were collected by Charles W. Facer, a member of 2 Squadron S.A.A.F. These were sent to his friend 'Hoffie' in South Africa. On the reverse of the note with the stamps is a message from 'Charles' to 'Hoffie' written on American Red Cross note paper. Both stamps are cancelled with the United States Army-Air Force Postal Service A.P.O. 709 on March 6, 1951.

5 December 1950 A postage free cover from P9163 Air Mechanic George B. Leatherbarrow, 2 Squadron S.A.A.F., at Suwon Air Base to Pretoria, South Africa. This was posted 3 days after arrival at Suwon from P'yongyang East Air Base, Korea.



(78429) Lt. George Beatie Leatherbarrow served with the Transvaal Scottish during World War 2 from 1942 to 1943. He was seconded to the British Army from January 1943 to September 1945. Via the UDF Repatriation Unit in Hove, he returned to South Africa and was discharged on 6 December 1945. In 1950 he resigned his commission when he joined the S.A.A.F. as an air mechanic.

The South African Air Force serving with the United Nations Forces in Korea was given the privilege of free postage for mail from Korea to the Union. Existing domestic air mail letter cards (postage 1½^d) were overprinted with (i) 3 or 4 bars obliterating the postage value and (ii) an air mail label together with 'FREE FORCES MAIL / POSVRY VANAF MAGTE'. The letter card was introduced in May 1951 and the 'Free Postage' letter card was withdrawn in January 1953 and the 'free postage' privilege was also terminated.

Inlae Verbode No Enclosures Permitted

BRIEF-KAART LETTER CARD

PAR AVION BY AIR MAIL PER LUGPOS

FREE FORCES MAIL POSVRY VANAF MAGTE

INDIEN 'N HOËR POSTARIEF VAN TOEPASSING IS OP DIE LAND VAN BESTEMMING, MOET DIE ADDISIONELE POSGELD VOORUIT BETAAL WORD

IF A HIGHER POSTAGE RATE IS APPLICABLE TO THE COUNTRY OF DESTINATION, THE ADDITIONAL POSTAGE MUST BE PREPAID

NAAM EN ADRES VAN AFSENDER
SENDER'S NAME AND ADDRESS

**SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCE
LIAISON HEADQUARTERS
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA FORCES
S.A.P.O 5300, FAR EAST**

EERSTE VOU—FIRST FOLD

TWEDE VOU—SECOND FOLD

An unused 'FREE FORCES MAIL' Air Letter Card with the S.A.A.F. Liaison Headquarters address.

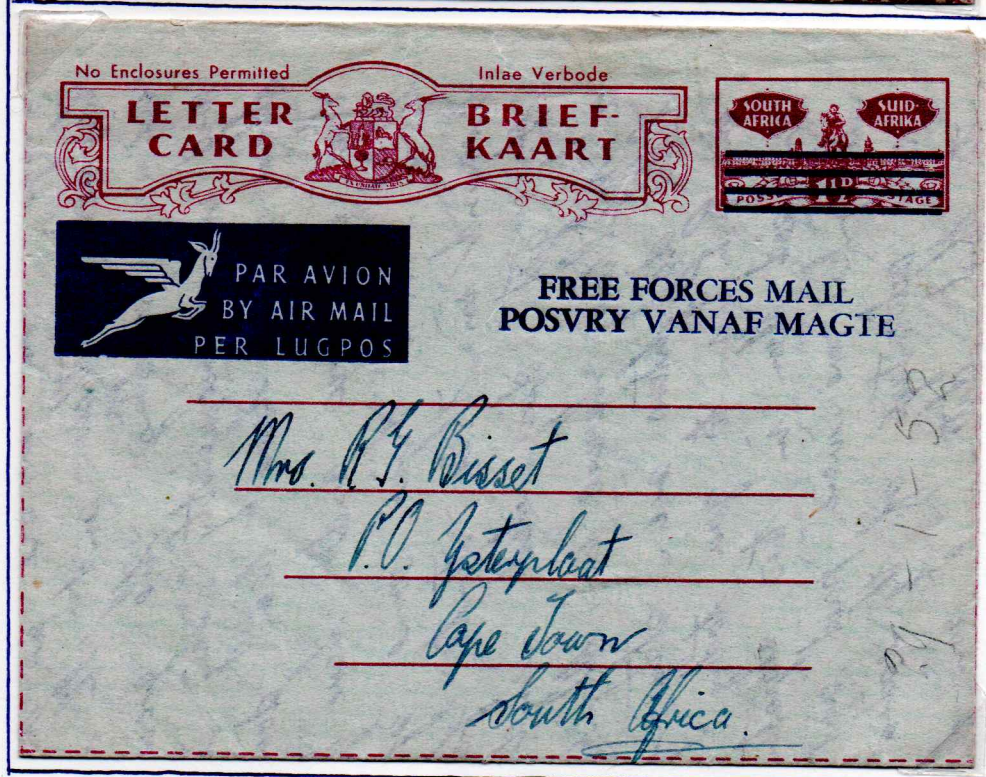
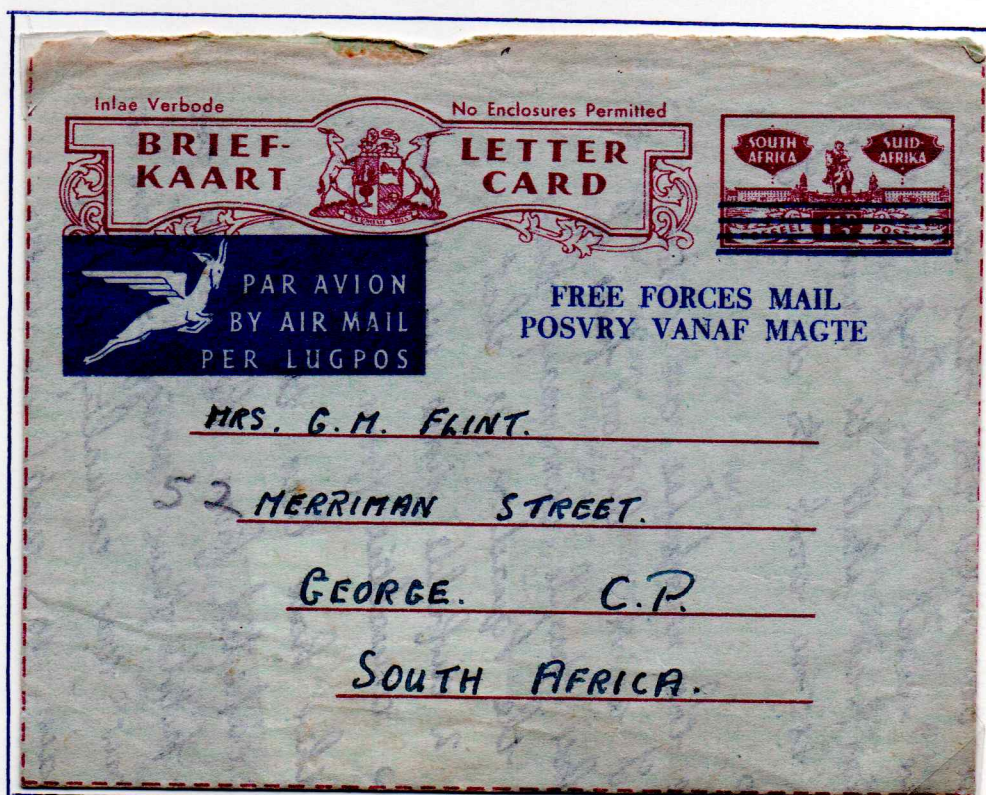
South African Letter Card over-printed 'FREE FORCES MAIL' – Type A2.

It is reported in various publications that 86 400 letter cards were over-printed in four batches of 21 600 each. There was a total of 819 S.A.A.F members that served in Korea. Since these air letters are scarce, it is probable that the total over-printed was 21 600 which results in each S.A.A.F. member writing 26 air letters during his tour of duty (rather than 109 per person).

South African Letter Card over-printed 'FREE FORCES MAIL' – Type A4.

10 January 1951

A postage free letter card from P11299 Air Mechanic Albert Heap written from K-10 Airfield at Chinhae, Korea, to Mrs. Flint, George, Cape Province. Although there is no datestamp, the date of writing is 10th January and in the letter reference is made as "All the best for 1951".



South African Letter Card over-printed 'FREE FORCES MAIL' – Type B3.

29 January 1952

A postage free letter card from 14485 Lt. Reginald George Bisset written from K-55 Airfield at Osan, Korea, to his wife at Ysterplaat Air Base, Cape Town.

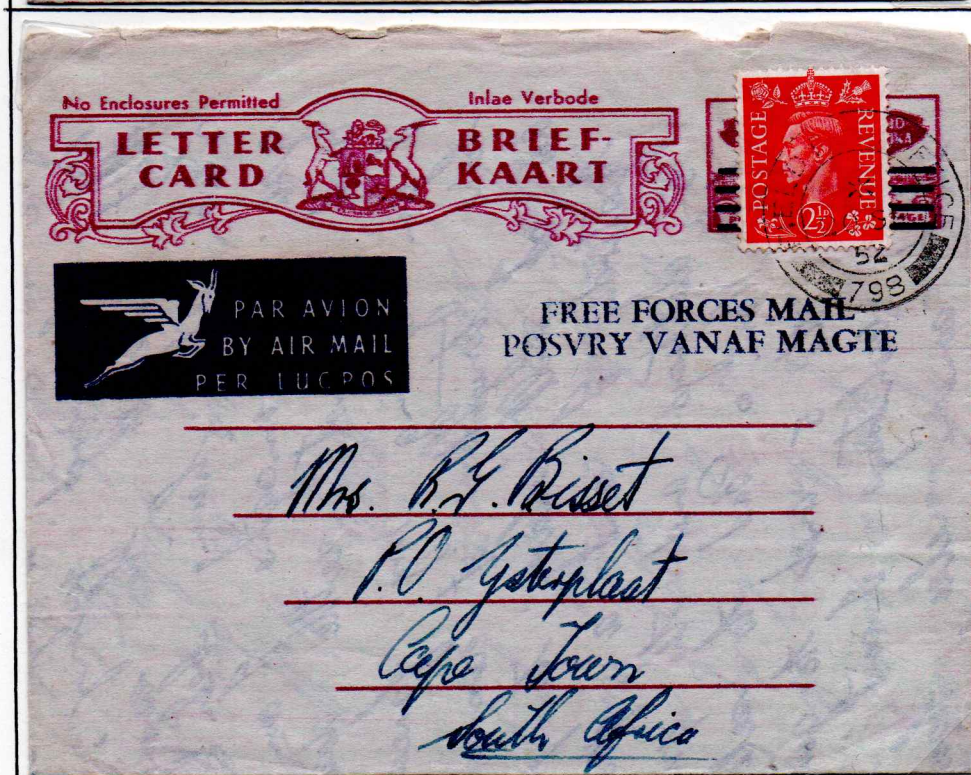
S.A.A.F. KOREA 1950-1953

POSTAGE PAID AIR LETTER CARD VIA A BRITISH F.P.O.

South African Letter Card over-printed 'FREE FORCES MAIL' – Type A4.

The 'Free Air Mail' postal concession for the South African forces was withdrawn in January 1953.

3 July 1952 A postage paid air mail letter card (GB 2½^d) from Lt. Rhenius Richards, a pilot with 2 Squadron S.A.A.F. from K-55 Airfield at Osan, Korea, to his daughter in Durban via the British Field Post Office at Pusan. The Squadron was flying F-86F Sabre aircraft at Osan with the Base Headquarters at Chinhae. Datestamp: British FIELD POST OFFICE 798 x 3 JY 52 (At Pusan from 31 Dec. 1951 to 24 Aug. 1953)



South African Letter Card over-printed 'FREE FORCES MAIL' – Type B4.

17 September 1952 A postage paid air mail letter card (GB 2½^d) from 14485 Lt. Reginald George Bisset written from K-46 Airfield at Hoengsong, Korea, to his wife at Ysterplaat Air Base, Cape Town, via the British field post off at Pusan. The correspondence indicates that he will be leaving Korea for the Union in 10 days. Datestamp: British FIELD POST OFFICE 798 x 20 SE 52 (At Pusan from 31 Dec. 1951 to 24 Aug. 1953)

S.A.A.F. KOREA 1950-1953

SOUTH AFRICAN STAMPS USED IN KOREA.

Commonwealth and NATO countries supported each other's contingents in Korea where possible. The Union did not have a military postal service for 2 Squadron, which then used United States, British and Australian field post offices. Squadron members used American, British and Australian post offices for mail to the Union.

9 October 1951 A cover with excess air mail postage (GB 2½^d air mail plus SA 6^d) from the Australian Army Post Office 214 in Tokyo, Japan, to Johannesburg.

The extra postage was probably intended to avoid any delivery delays.

Datestamp: AUST ARMY P.O. – 214 -90C51



3 July 1952 A cover with excess air mail postage (GB 2½^d air mail plus 2 x SA 1^d) from E13551 Leading Air Mechanic J.W. Baird, with 2 Squadron at Osan, Korea, to Johannesburg via the British Field Post Office at Pusan. The extra postage was probably intended to avoid any delivery delays.

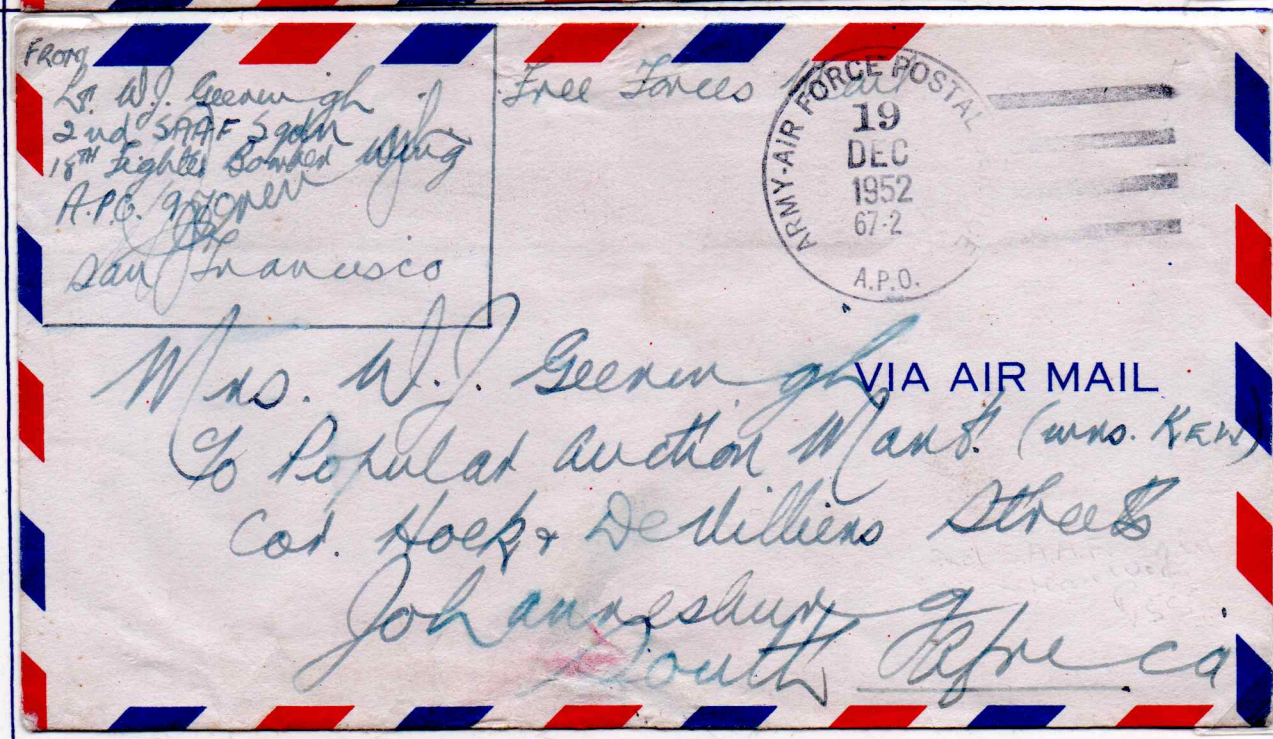
The use of 2½^d and 2 x 1^d postage indicates that the 'free postage' was not available via the British F.P.O.

Datestamp: British FIELD POST OFFICE 798 x 3 JY 52 (At Pusan from 31 Dec. 1951 to 24 Aug. 1953)

BRYANSTON 15 VII 52 (arrival).

There were indications that air mail from and to the Union of South Africa and Korea via Cairo was delayed for reasons unknown. The B.O.A.C. was responsible for British and Commonwealth mail services from Korea and Japan to Cairo and onward transmission where applicable. This resulted in 2 Squadron members using the United States Army-Air Force postal facilities in Korea via Hawaii to San Francisco and then onward to the Union. Illustrated are two types of United States Army-Air Force datestamps applied to mail to the Union.

16 December 1952 A postage free air mail cover from Lt. W.J. Geeringh (Max), a pilot with 2 Squadron S.A.A.F. which was attached to 18 Fighter Bomber Wing, United States Air Force, based at Osan Air Base (K-55), addressed to Johannesburg. Note that the 2 Squadron address is given as A.P.O. 970, San Francisco, U.S.A. Datestamp: ARMY-AIR FORCE POSTAL SERVICE DEC 16 1952 4³⁰PM (there is no A.P.O. identity)



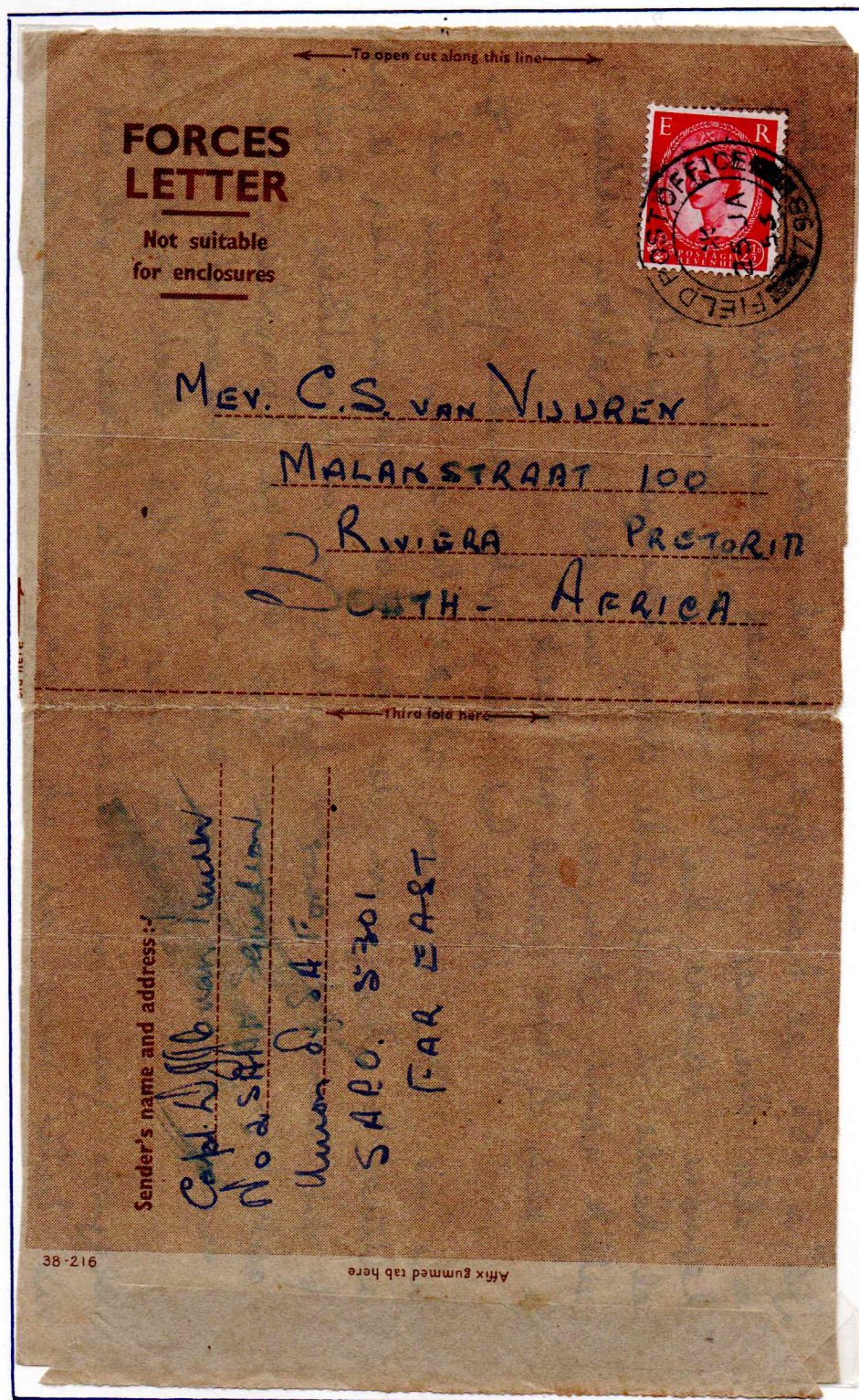
19 December 1952 A postage free air mail cover from Lt. W.J. Geeringh (Max) similar to the above cover but with a different datestamp type.

Datestamp: ARMY-AIR FORCE POSTAL SERVICE A.P.O. 67-2 19 DEC 1952

The British Field Post Offices did not allow the 'Postage Free' privilege for mail destined to the Union.

23 January 1953 A British Forces Air Letter with air mail postage (postage 2½^d; QE II SG 519 issued 5 December 1952) written by Capt. D.J.J.G. van Vuuren, a 2 Squadron Pilot at Osan Air Base (K-55) and posted at the British Field Post Office at Pusan to Pretoria.

Datestamp: FIELD POST OFFICE 798 * 25 JA 53 (at Pusan from 31 Dec. 1951 to 24 Aug. 1953)



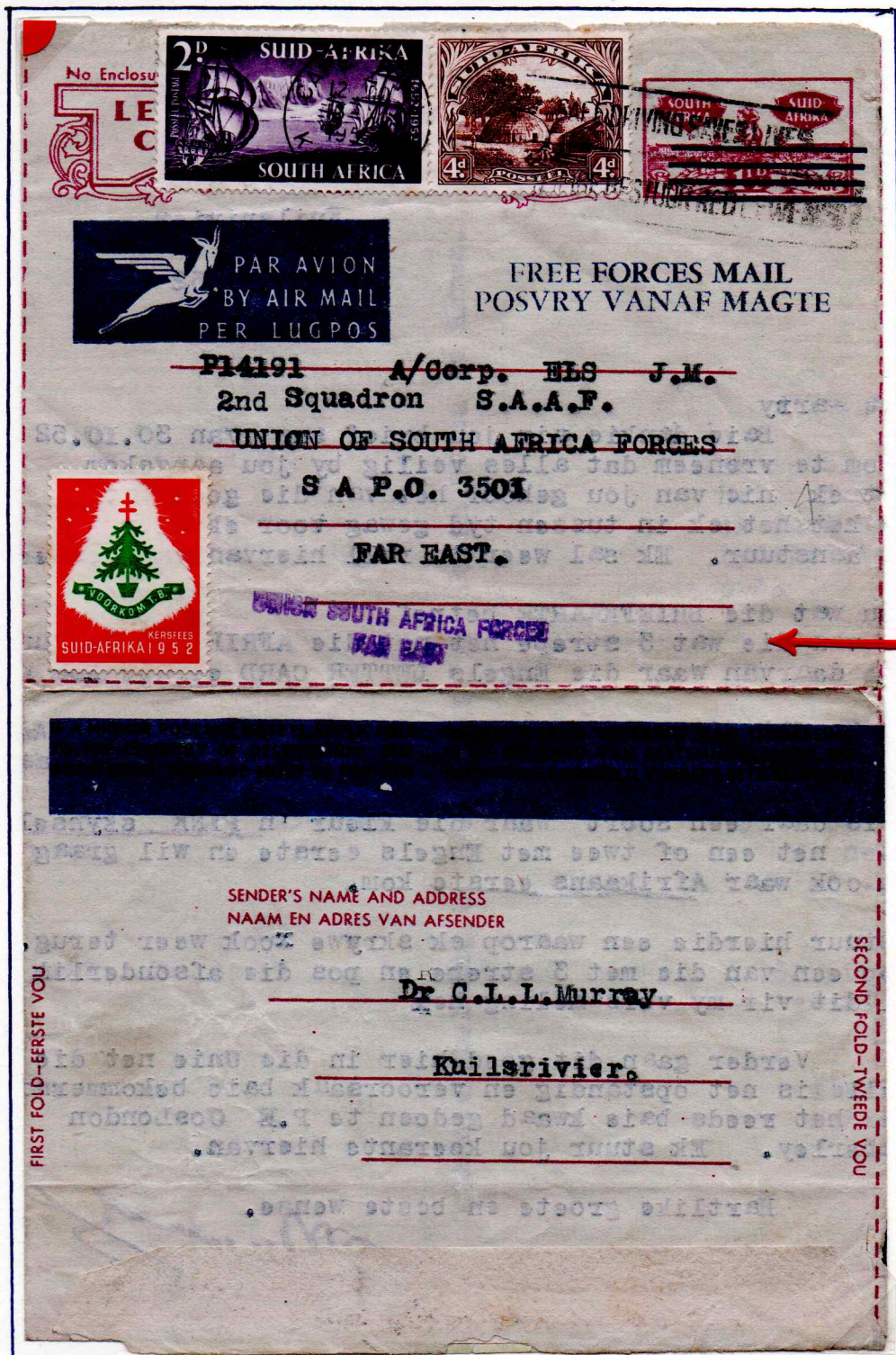
The issue of domestic letter cards over-printed 'FREE FORCES MAIL' to the S.A.A.F. Squadron in Korea was intended for the exclusive use of Squadron members for mail from Korea to the Union of South Africa. The use of these letter cards from the Union to Korea was not permitted and therefore air mail postage (6^d) was required. This use is extremely uncommon.

13 November 1952 A 'Free Forces Mail' letter card (Type B4) with air mail postage (6^d) added from Kuilsrivier, Cape Town, to P14191 Air Corporal J.M. Els with 2 Squadron, S.A.A.F., at K-46 Hoengsong Air Field in Korea.

Datestamp: CAPE TOWN KAAPSTAD 12 : 00 15 NOV 1952; Slogan SAFE DRIVING SAVES LIVES.

Cachet: UNION SOUTH AFRICA FORCES / FAR EAST

Label: 1952 tuberculosis fund-raising label at Christmas.



A South African Overseas Air Mail Letter (postage 6^d) from Mrs. C. Haskins (mother) in Durban to P 8596 Flight Sergeant William Benjamin Haskins, a member of 2 Squadron, South African Air Force, with the United Nations Forces at K-55 Air Field, Osan, in Korea.

Note the address as "South African Post Office 5301".

Cachet: UNION SOUTH AFRICA FORCES / FAR EAST

Datestamp: Machine; DURBAN18 VII 53 (?)

PAR AVION AIR MAIL LUGPOS

AEROGramme AIR LETTER LUGBRIEF

DURBAN 18 VII 53

SOUTH AFRICA POSTAGE 6^d POSSEEL SUID-AFRIKA

UNION SOUTH AFRICA FORCES FAR EAST

P 8596 F/Sgt Haskins W.B.

2 Squadron S.A.A.F.

Union of South African Forces

South African Post Office 5301

FAR EAST.

IF ANYTHING IS ENCLOSED THIS LETTER WILL BE SENT BY ORDINARY MAIL

AS ENIGIETS INGESLUIT WORD SAL HIERDIE BRIEF PER GEWONE POS GESTUUR WORD

FIRST FOLD-EERSTE VOU

SENDER'S NAME AND ADDRESS
NAAM EN ADRES VAN AFSENDER

Mrs C. Haskins
- 2 Southwold Ave -
- Montclair -
Durban
South Africa

SECOND FOLD-TWEEDE VOU

F/Sgt. Haskins served in World War II from 5 February 1940 to 26 September 1946. On 27 September 1946 he attested for service with 7 Fighter Bomber Wing, S.A.A.F.. He volunteered for service in Korea on 28 June 1952 was posted as a staff officer to the Air Chief of Staff on 22 September 1952 and was posted to 2 Squadron on 10 April 1953. He left for Korea on 15 April 1953 and returned to the Union on 12 November 1953.

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Lt. Dennis Earp completed 65 combat sorties in Korea. On his last sortie on 27 September 1951, his Mustang aircraft's cooling system was damaged by ground fire and he was forced to bail out over enemy territory. He was taken prisoner of war and spent 23 months as a POW. He participated in the "Death March" from 14 November 1952 for 12 days when the POWs were forced to march from P'oyangdong to Pyoktong in 12 days. Peace was declared on 27 July 1953 and he was released at the end of August 1953. He was one of five South African POWs captured in this conflict.



An autographed photograph of Lt. Denis Earp, a pilot in 2 Squadron, South African Air Force, taken shortly before his departure with the contingent to join the United Nations Forces in Korea, November 1950.

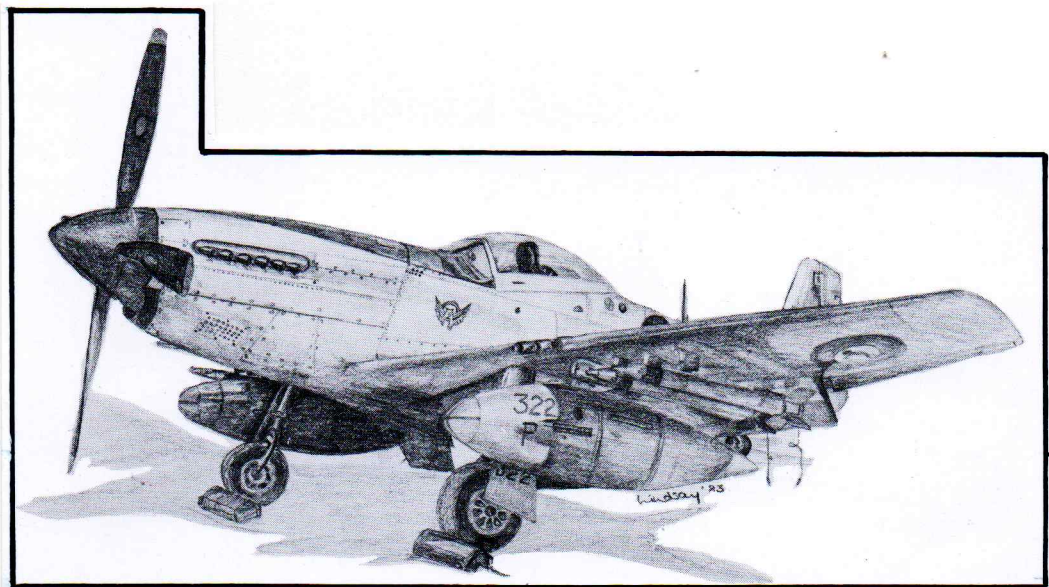
Lt. Denis Earp ended his career as Lt. Gen. D. Earp, SSA, SD, SM,
Chief of the South African Air Force from 1984 to 1988.



2 SQUADRON MUSTANG F-51D No. 384 "CLINKS-CLINKS".

Pilot: Lt. J. Moir.

An Official photograph of the Mustang F-51D No. 384 flown by 2 Squadron. It was delivered to 2 Squadron on 24 May 1952 by the United States Air Force (No. 45-11607). It survived the war and was returned to the U.S.A.F. on 22 December 1952.





2 SQUADRON SABRE AIRCRAFT PREPARING FOR TAKE-OFF AT OSAN.

An Official photograph of 2 Squadron Sabre F-86F aircraft waiting for take-off at K-55 Osan Air Base. There are two United States Air Force Sabre F-86F aircraft on the runway preparing for take-off. 2 Squadron flew Sabre F-86F aircraft from January/February to July 1953 when the war ended.