



From Fledgling to Eagle: The South African Air Force During the Border War

Dick Lord

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The crucible of combat over 23 years forged the fledgling South African Air Force into a formidable strike weapon, capable of defeating the best Soviet air defences of the time. From Fledgling to Eagle chronicles the evolution of the SAAF in the 'Border War' that raged in Angola and South West Africa (Namibia) from 1966 to 1989, covering all the major South African Defence Force (SADF) operations from Ongulumbashe to the 'April Fools' Day war' in 1989. Dick Lord, who writes in a 'from the cockpit' style, has drawn on his own first-hand operational reports and diaries, incorporating anecdotes from dozens of aviators from a wide variety of squadrons - Buccaneers, Canberras, Mirages, Impalas, Bosboks, C-160s and -130s, Dakotas and helicopters. He also expands on the close relationship the SAAF had with the ground troops in a variety of operations - such units as the Parabats, Recces and Koevoet. Angola was really just a sideshow for the Soviets who wanted to bleed the SAAF in a war of attrition before attempting total domination of South Africa - their ultimate goal. He is unafraid to admit SADF mistakes - of Operations Hooper and Packer he says: "Lines of communications were too long to ably support the battle, which is why we did not clear them off the east bank of the Cuito River and why they captured the three Oliphant tanks which was their only propaganda victory." Although he gives credit to the enemy when they put up a stiff fight, he clearly outlines the overwhelming South African successes and dispels, in accurate detail, all enemy claims by giving an accurate account of each battle. He says: "I agree with General Geldenhuys that we thrashed them severely on the Lomba in '85 and '87 ... much recent publicity has also been given to the so-called victory of the Forces of Liberation [SWAPO, MPLA, and 50,000 Cubans and Soviets] over the SADF at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988. Nothing could be further from the truth - it is blatant propaganda."

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