

## **MAJOR JOHN EVERITT FROST (1933-35)**

An Afrikaans children's book called *Suid-Afrikaanse Avontuur Verhale* by Phillida Simons, opens up with a story in which one of the leading figures is an OD. In the December 2009 DC Magazine this figure is described as "A True Hero". He was assumed killed on 16 June 1942, whilst in his mid-twenties, and it is therefore appropriate that we remember **Major John (Jack) Frost (1933-35)** on Youth Day.



**The adventure story referred to in the children's book, is described in the Magazine mentioned above:**

*"On 22 March 1941 soon after being awarded the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross), Jack was involved in an amazing rescue. During an attack on the Italian aerodrome at Diredawa his plane was hit, smoke enveloped him, and he was forced to land on the Italian aerodrome. Despite heavy anti-aircraft and other fire, a fellow SA Pilot brought his own machine down on the aerodrome, Frost clambered on to his shoulders, and eventually on to his lap, and they returned safely to their base. It is a very happy circumstance that this very gallant rescue, which was at once rewarded with a DSO, was made by a former Senior Prefect of the S.A. College School – Lt. R.H.C. Kershaw."*

**We pick up news of Major Frost in the June 1942 DC Magazine:**

*"By courtesy of the Cape Times we publish a photo of Major John E. Frost, D.F.C. (1933-5), Capt. Andrew Duncan, D.F.C. (1934-8) and Lt. Robin Pare, D.F.C. (1929-37) taken in the Middle East. Since that photo appeared at the end of April much has happened within a few days to these three distinguished airmen. In the heroic days of the recent enemy offensive in the Western Desert Andrew Duncan has, alas, been missing since Sunday, 31<sup>st</sup> May. On Wednesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> June, in a heavy and successful engagement over Bir Hakheim "Major J.E. Frost, D.F.C., also got a Stuka and then very pluckily and generously left the plums and went up to tackle the Messerschmitts by himself. Soon after the South Africans had mixed it with*

the Stukas the enemy fighters swept down. Outnumbering them by nearly 3 to 1 the enemy were able to pounce on the Tomahawks, which accepted battle and fought until they had no more ammunition. Five fighters of the S.A. Squadron did not return." Robin Pare must have been one of these five, for he was reported as having been forced to bale out near Sidi Rezegh, but the next day he was reported "unhurt and back with his Squadron." The same paper (Friday's) mentioned still another OD thus: "Capt. G.C. Bayly (1930-5) crash-landed near Knightsbridge. He made his way back to Tobruk and from there got back to his base." That left us anxious about Jack Frost. Saturday's paper, telling of Thursday's doings, answered that thus: "In



Thursday's battle Major J.E. Frost shot down 3 Stukas in 8 minutes." (In Somaliland he brought down 4 Italian planes in 7 minutes). And a few lines later: "Another Junkers 87 was destroyed by Capt. G. Bayly, who had walked back to his Squadron on Wednesday, after having been reported missing."

All this, and much more, happened within 5 days. What we have been able to piece together comes especially near to "Bishops"; yet it is but typical of the history that is being made. It is good to know that ODs shared so prominently in the message sent by the beleaguered Free French at Bir Hakheim: "Bravo! Merci pour la R.A.F.," who replied: "Merci a vous et merci pour les Francais."

#### **And later in the same Magazine:**

"Major J.E. Frost, D.F.C., who commands a Fighter Squadron, S.A.A.F., wrote from the M.E. on 29 March: "The Squadron has been out in the Dessert for about a month now; not right forward, but in a rather pleasant spot by the sea. A fair amount of vegetation here means less dust. We started off operations pretty well and have already got two Jerries down and several others damaged. Most of our work is over the sea looking after shipping. It's really a pleasure to be flying over the Med. on a clear day; it is such a wonderful colour. The work is very interesting, as besides looking after shipping we look after this area of the coast; a fair number of machines come over, though they are difficult to catch. I was very glad to get the last Mag. And lent it to others in the Squadron. As you know, I've got with me (Capt.) Andy Duncan, D.F.C., (Lt.) Robin Pare, D.F.C., (Lt.) John Lindbergh, and R.E.G. Dawes, who is a mechanic. The aircraft we have are good and are behaving fairly well. They are American and rather different to the Hurricanes we had in East Africa."

**Then in the September 1942 DC Magazine, ominous news is received:**

*“Missing. Four D.F.C.’s- In June we published a unique photograph of 3 young O.D.’s of the same S.A. Air Force Squadron in the Western Desert, all of whom had won the D.F.C. – Major Jack Frost (1933-5), Major Andrew Duncan (1934-8) and Capt. Robin Pare (1929-37). We then recorded that Duncan was missing since 31<sup>st</sup> May; that Pare had been missing about the same time for 2 or 3 days but had returned to his*



**Left: Lt R. F. Pare, Middle: Major J. E. Frost (O.C), Right: Capt. Andrew Duncan**

*Squadron; and that Frost had just shot down 3 Stukas in 8 minutes. Before that Magazine was in the hands of its readers news had come that Pare was again missing (June 3<sup>rd</sup>) and that Frost was reported missing (June 16<sup>th</sup>). That is how it still stands. Frost, we have it on good authority, was about to be placed in command of the South African Fighter Wing, with the rank of Lt.-Colonel –at the age of 23. May better news of these very gallant airmen still come? Our thoughts are with their parents, and Frost’s wife, in their anxiety.”*

**Later the September 1942 DC Magazine Reports:**

*“There is yet no further news of Jack Frost, who has been missing since 16<sup>th</sup> June. A message from Cairo published in the Union says: “Major Jack Frost, D.F.C., the South African fighter ace, is believed to have destroyed a total of 33 enemy planes – 17 in the air and 16 on the ground. In addition, he is credited with many probables and many others damaged. (In Somaliland Frost tackled five Italian planes single-handed and brought down four of them in seven minutes; and on 3<sup>rd</sup> June near Bir Hakheim he brought down three German planes in eight minutes). On 16<sup>th</sup> June the S.A. Force led by Frost was chased by Messerschmitts all the way to the target and all the way back. No one seems to have seen Frost shot down. His voice was last heard coming over the radio telephone warning one of his pilots that a Messeschmitt was after him.”*

*The Adjutant of his Squadron has written as follows to Jack Frost’s wife: “Major Frost took off at 6.40 p.m. on the 16<sup>th</sup> June, leading six other aircraft on Bomber Escort. About 15 miles South of Tobruk, the formation was attacked by a large force of enemy fighters which were kept away from the bombers by our top cover, led by Major Frost. Our aircraft were considerably scattered during the engagement and, after it was over, the pilots who were in the sortie reported that the order came over the radio, unmistakably in Major Frost’s voice, for them to form up. It was only after the aircraft returned to base that it was discovered that Major Frost and another were missing. All efforts to obtain any further information have been unsuccessful. The very fine reputation gained by the Squadron in the Middle East was due*

entirely to Major Frost's outstanding qualities in leadership and his brilliance as a fighter pilot and Squadron Commander. He had the absolute confidence of the pilots he led in the air and of the ground personnel, all of whom spared no effort to make his the most efficient Fighter Squadron in the Western Desert. Since arriving here he flew 140.20 hours on 83 operational sorties, destroying 8 enemy aircraft, probably destroying 4 and damaging 3 more. Adding these to his victories in the East African Campaign, I believe his record leads the field in the S.A. Air Force. It is impossible to write just what his loss to the Squadron and to our Air Force has meant at this very critical time. Owing to the rapid advance of the enemy it was impossible to instigate a search at the time. He had been shot down ten days before and had returned to the Squadron the following day; it was hoped that he would do so again. It is now thought that he forced landed and was picked up by an enemy column. If this surmise is correct then he is probably a Prisoner of War."

**The December 1942 DC Magazine reports next:**

*"S.A.A.F. - No further news yet of "The 3 D.F.C.'s" (Major Jack Frost, Major Andrew Duncan and Capt. Robin Pare), nor of Lt. J. Tzamtzis."*

**And finally we read in the September 1943 DC Magazine:**

*"Bar to D.F.C. - Major John Everitt Frost, D.F.C. (1933-5), who has been missing since 16 June, 1942, and whose death is presumed, has been awarded, posthumously, a Bar to hi D.F.C. for distinguished service in the Desert. Frost was credited with 33 enemy planes (certain). His first outstanding effort was the tackling of 5 Italian planes single-handed, near Dif, and bringing down 4 in 7 minutes. The 5<sup>th</sup> fled, and he returned with half his ammunition intact. A year later, commanding No.5 Squadron in the Desert, he brought down 3 Stukas in 8 minutes. Jack Frost, most modest and quiet of fellows, won the Sword of Honour at the S.A. Military College early in 1938. **His remains were never found.**"*

