A TOAST TO THE ACES OF CHEETAH SQUADRON

By CAREL BIRKBY

Hurricanes, Tomahawks and Kittyhawks; in Europe, Spitfires IXs; in Korea Mustangs and Sabres; back home, Harvards for training and Vampires. Now they have Mirage F1 supersonic fighters.

The squadron owes its proud nickname to its early days in Kenya, when a farmer at Nanyuki offered it a Cheetah as a pet while a South African bomber squadron adopted a lion cub. Now again the squadron has a cheetah as a mascot at Hoedspruit. Named Aqua, it is the gift of a Lowveld farmer.

Wilfred Isaacs, the South African business and cricket personality who was a Cheetah pilot during the Second World War and is now the unit’s honorary colonel, said last night:

“For its Far Eastern service in the 1950s the squadron received the US Presidential Unit Citation and a similar honour from the President of Korea. But it cherishes even more the order issued by the commander of the 18th Fighter Bomber Wing in which it served. This order went:

‘In memory of our gallant South African comrades, it is hereby established as a new policy that at all Retreat ceremonies held by this Wing, the playing or our national anthem shall be preceded by playing the introductory bars of the South African national anthem, Die Stem van Suid Afrika. All personnel of this Wing will render the same honour to this anthem as to our own.’

‘This is a heartening reminder of a long standing friendship between the United States and South Africa — a friendship based on service in a common cause, now likely to become warm again.’

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