



ANTARKTIESE BULLETIN

SEPTEMBER, 1964 — No. 5 — SEPTEMBER 1964



Published by the South African Antarctic Association
16, Anderson Street, Brooklyn, PRETORIA.

Uitgegeve deur die Suid-Afrikaanse Antarktiese Vereniging
Andersonstraat 16, Brooklyn, PRETORIA

Patron/Beskermheer: Prof. S. P. Jackson, M.A., D.I.C., Ph.D.

Editor/Redakteur: J. J. Taljaard

CAPTAIN ALFRED RITSCHER, 1879 - 1963

by V. von Brunn

The name of Alfred Ritscher may closely, though indirectly, be associated with South African expeditionary teams operating in the Atlantic sector of Antarctica; the area shown as Ritscher Upland on a number of Antarctic maps (e.g. USAF Global Navigation and Planning Chart, 1961, 1-5,000,000) lies to the south of SANAE base, while the Ritscher Peak (Wohlthat Mountains) in western Dronning Maud Land, is one of the highest rock exposures in Antarctica.

A brief glance at Ritscher's life history reveals him as having been not only a seaman, but also an airman and a polar explorer who has published much, including several papers on aerial navigation. For his outstanding services rendered in both the Arctic and the Antarctic, Ritscher was awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz and the silver Kirchenpauer Medal of the Geographic Society in Hamburg. Furthermore, he was elected as first chairman of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Polarforschung.

One of the most remarkable features in Ritscher's career is the part he played in the rescue of the ill-fated Schroeder-Stranz expedition in 1912-13. Captain Ritscher had been appointed master of the expedition vessel, *Herzog Ernst*, which sailed for Spitzbergen in summer 1912. Disaster befell the expedition when the leader, Lieutenant Schroeder Stranz, with three of his companions, disappeared on a reconnaissance journey. Not long afterwards the ship was enclosed by heavy pack-ice in the Treurenburg Bay and Captain Ritscher had to beach her in order to prevent the vessel from being crushed by the encroaching ice. As there was sufficient food for only another four months left on board, the majority of the expedition members decided to attempt to reach the mining settlement of Longyearbyen on Advent Bay, a distance of 210 km away. The ventures proved to end in failure—three men perished and six others were forced to find shelter in disused huts, due to foul weather and increasing darkness, as winter was approaching.

Alfred Ritscher, realising the precarious situation, set out alone on skis, accompanied only by an expedition dog, Bella, to seek aid for his crew and members of the expedition. In polar darkness and at temperatures varying from -27 to -29°C he accomplished the 210 km journey across Spitzbergen in 7½ days, with only very little food, and without a tent or sleeping bag. Prevailing low temperatures did not permit much time for resting; however, when fatigue overwhelmed Ritscher, he lay down to sleep, pulling a rucksack over his head and covering his feet with snow. In his gloved hand he held against his ear an alarm clock which would wake him again after 10-15 minutes. When making lengthy detours around an ice-fjord he broke through thin ice and had to continue on the final 55 km of his journey without a prolonged pause. In a state of delirium and near-collapse, with both feet and a hand frozen, Ritscher succeeded in reaching Longyearbyen on the 27th of December 1912. On the following day he organized a rescue expedition from his bed, but as a result of mist and incessant blizzards the rescuers were forced to return to base after having abandoned all their gear. Telegraphic aid was sought from Germany. In April 1913, members of the Schroeder-Stranz expedition and crew, who had meanwhile managed to return to the *Herzog Ernst*

were rescued by Norwegian and German rescue teams. The expedition vessel was later brought back to Tromsø, still in good condition, by her master, Captain Ritscher.

In 1938, Ritscher, on merit of his wide polar and aeronautical experience, was appointed leader of the "Third German Antarctic Expedition", 1938-39. The scientific programmes of this expedition were to be a continuation of those previously carried out by the Erich von Drygalski (1901-03) and Wilhelm Filchner (1911-13) Antarctic expeditions, and were thus to include biology, geophysics, geography, meteorology and oceanography. The ship to be used by the expedition was the M.S. *Schwabenland* (ex-*Schwarzenfels*, built 1925) which was equipped with scientific instruments and two catapult-launched flying boats of the Dornier-Wal type. Apart from the scientific team, two aircraft pilots and two aerial photographers joined the expedition. The "Schwabenland Expedition" (as it has also become known) was sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (which, together with the German Hydrographic Institute is at present conducting oceanographic research from the new vessel *Meteor II*, launched in 1964).

During the short period of time that the *Schwabenland* steamed off the coast of Dronning Maud Land, from the 19th January to the 15th February 1939, aerial reconnaissance and photography of the hitherto still unknown inland areas was carried out between meridians 20°E and 12°W , and from the edge of the ice shelf down to latitude 78°S . On these photogrammetric route-flights a total number of 11,600 aerial photographs ($18 \times 18 \text{ cm}$) and 2,285 m of 16 mm film was taken over a flying distance of 16,000 km. The area was named Neu-Schwabenland within which the major geographical units constitute the Wegener-Inlandsis of the polar plateau, the newly-discovered mountain ranges, namely the Wohlthat Massiv and the Mühlig-Hofmann Gebirge, and the Ritscher Hochland, west of the Penck trough. No names were designated to the coastal areas, as the Norwegian names, Kronprinsesse Märtha-Kyst and Prinsesse Astrid-Kyst were recognised. The flying boats landed on the ice on one or two occasions but sledging journeys were not undertaken by the "Schwabenland Expedition". Meteorological work included 119 radiosonde soundings, in the South Atlantic Ocean (36 of them south of the polar circle) while depth sounding was also carried out with echo-sounders in the Antarctic coastal waters.

The weather had been particularly favourable for the aerial reconnaissance work, but the political climate in Europe was meanwhile deteriorating rapidly. Shortly after the return of the expedition to Germany, World War II broke out. In the dark years that followed, several of the expedition's young scientists were killed and much of the valuable data collected by the "Schwabenland" team was destroyed, including the geophysical material which was lost in the fire which gutted the Geophysical Institute in Leipzig. Captain Ritscher set himself the exceedingly difficult task of publishing that which could still be saved. In 1942 the first volume of "Wissenschaftliche und fliegerische Ergebnisse der Deutschen Antarktischen Expedition 1938/39" appeared, followed by the

second volume in 1958. A preliminary copy of the Neu-Schwabenland map (1:500,000) based on photogrammetric data, was published two months after the return of the expedition and was presented at the International Whaling Congress in London. A revision of the map was completed in 1952 and includes data collected by the Norwegian-British-Swedish Antarctic Expedition (1949-52) which had carried out valuable field work within the Dronning Maud Land area reconnoitred by Ritscher's expedition before the war.

Mountain ranges, peaks, nunataks, etc., shown on the Neu-Schwabenland map bear the names of outstanding scientists (e.g. Alexander Humboldt Gebirge, Penck Mulde), polar explorers (e.g. Filchner Berge, Drygalski Berge), expedition members (e.g. Gburek Spitzen, Regula Kette, Barkley Berge, Lange Platte), or personalities associated with the organisation of the expedition (e.g. Wohlthat Massiv). As a matter of interest it may be added that the two cone-shaped dolerite nunataks, Boreas and Passat, which were visited by members of S.A.N.A.E. I (1960), were originally called Kugel (ball, bullet) and Kegel (cone) by the pilots for whom they served as useful landmarks on their reconnaissance flights into the interior. Captain Ritscher, when he flew over these outcrops himself, suggested that the names be changed to Boreas and Passat, the names that had been given to the two aircraft. The names given to the various geographical objects by the German Antarctic expedition were accepted and published in the "Bundesanzeiger" (No. 149, Aug. 1952) and were taken over by the U.S.A. "Gazetteer" (14. Antarctica, 1956). The Russian expeditions based at Novolazarevskaya, in Dronning Maud Land, have apparently accepted the German names and have also added more of their own. On a 1:2,500,000 geological map accompanying a preliminary report in the "Information Bulletin" of the Institute for Arctic Geology (Leningrad, Vol. 25, 1961), names such as Vol'tat Massiv, gory Hofmann, gory Hermana and Drygalskogo are shown. The

latest (1961) 1:250,000 Norwegian maps show some changes and also additions of names to both small isolated rock outcrops, e.g. Robertskollen (= Witte Spitzen on the 1952 Neu-Schwabenland map) and to major topographical features such as Giaefer-Ryggen, Jelbartisen and Jutulstraumen.

Those who knew Alfred Ritscher personally have described him as a man of tall, broad-shouldered stature who bore out perseverance and endurance, but also one of great modesty, restraint, and cautiousness, a person with wisdom in leadership, combined with an ability of grasping the essential. Towards his subordinates he showed great respect, encouraged interest in their tasks and guided them as a companion.

On the 30th of March 1963, Captain Alfred Ritscher passed away in Hamburg, having attained an age of almost 84 years.

REFERENCES:

- Georgi, J.—Polarforscher Kapitän Alfred Ritscher (1879-1963). Polarforschung, Band V, Jahrgang 32, Heft 1/2, 1962.
- Hassert, K.—Die Polarforschung. München, Wilhelm Goldmann Verlag, 1956.
- Kosack, H.-P.—Übersichtskarte des Arbeitsgebietes der Deutschen Antarktischen Expedition 1938/39. Neu-Schwabenland, 1:500,000, Hamburg, Mundus Verlag, 1952.
- Stocks, Th.—In Memoriam, Alfred Ritscher, 1879-1963. Deutsche Hydrographische Zeitschrift, Bd. 16, Heft 2, 1963.
- Vetter, O.—Alfred Ritschers Beiträge zur Verbesserung der Karten der Antarktis und des Südatlantischen Ozeans. Kartographische Nachrichten, 13. Jahrgang, Heft 4, 1963.

Note: The writer is greatly indebted to Frau Ilse Ritscher, Hamburg, for having kindly made available much of the above information.

THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE FOR ANTARCTIC RESEARCH (SCAR)

by J. J. Taljaard

Whenever I hear or see the name SCAR I think of a practical joke played by Dr. T. Gjelsvik of the Norwegian Polar Institute on Dr. Gordon Robin of the Scott Polar Research Institute. The occasion was the official dinner given in the Castle, Cape Town, in honour of the delegates to the Seventh Meeting of SCAR in September, 1963. Dr. Gjelsvik handed round a book and asked all the delegates and advisers to sign it for presentation to Dr. Robin as a token for his many years of devoted service as Secretary of SCAR. The book was entitled "The Scar", but it was nothing more than a cheap, soft-cover novel, showing a man with a blood-stained gash across his arm!

Before the International Geophysical Year of 1957/58 a special committee was established by the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) to plan and co-ordinate the scientific programmes for this period of international co-operation. A sub-committee of CSAGI, as this special committee was called, was appointed to take care of the programmes of the twelve nations which undertook investigations on Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic islands. These nations were Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Chile, France, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. I attended (by chance) one meeting of the Antarctic Committee in Paris in June 1957.

As the IGY neared its conclusion some of the nations which had established scientific stations in the Antarctic felt that it would be a great pity to close their stations after only two or three years, with so much remaining to be investigated. The United States took a lead in this matter and so it happened that ICSU established its Special Committee for Antarctic Research, SCAR, in 1958. This Committee met for the first time in the Hague in 1958, where its constitution and the main recommendations for the scientific programmes were drafted.

In the constitution it is stated that "SCAR is . . . charged with furthering co-ordination of scientific activity in Antarctica, with a view to framing a scientific programme of circumpolar scope and significance". As a non-governmental body with limited funds it can act only in an advisory capacity, but in practice it is found that its recommendations bear great weight in the formulation of the Antarctic programmes of the participating nations.

Because the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research is the South African institution adhering to ICSU, it is appropriate for the CSIR to liaison with SCAR and not the Department of Transport. The Department provides the funds for supplying and maintaining our stations on Antarctica, Marion and Gough Islands.

Soon after the establishment of SCAR, national committees for Antarctic research were formed by the member nations, including South Africa. The South African National Committee for Antarctic Research, SANCAR, was composed of the co-ordinators of the various scientific disciplines, together with representatives of the Departments of Transport, External Affairs and Defence and of the universities. Mr. M. P. van Rooy, Director of the Weather Bureau, was chairman of SANCAR until 1962, when the organization was reconstituted. A Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research was established within the CSIR and Dr. S. M. Naudé became chairman. The Scientific Committee advises an Inter-departmental Committee, consisting of the Secretaries of Transport, and External Affairs and the President of the CSIR, on the scientific aspects of the research programmes at SANAE and the islands.

When the Antarctic Treaty was drafted and ratified by the twelve "Antarctic nations" during 1959/61, SCAR felt apprehensive of maintaining its position as scientific advisory body for Antarctic research, but at their first meeting in Canberra in 1961 the Treaty powers decided that SCAR should be looked upon by governments as the appropriate body for making recommendations on scientific research in Antarctica. Reassured by this governmental blessing and of its continued existence, SCAR changed its name to Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research.

Since its establishment in 1958 SCAR has assembled regularly each year. I have been privileged to attend four of the eight annual meetings held so far, viz. those in Canberra (1959), Cambridge (1960), Cape Town (1963) and Paris (1964). A suggestion in my report after the Cambridge meeting, viz. that South Africa should invite SCAR to meet in Cape Town in 1962, germinated successfully, but invitations from New Zealand and the U.S.A. had already been deposited and so South Africa got its turn only in September 1963. The Cape Town meeting, I feel sure, was one of the most enjoyable and sociable meetings of SCAR held to date.