



THE LAST FRONTIER

EARLY last month, a group of healthy young South Africans were sitting around with bandaged arms, or legs in splints, while others were hard at work dressing imaginary wounds. The very next day all 21 of them were scurrying around in a spacious kitchen, wearing cheerful red-and-white checked aprons and proudly slicing steaming loaves of bread, buns, scones and pies out of the oven. Still later, at Pretoria Fire Station, they were manfully trying to extinguish a blaze. Then they were whisked out to the mountains to do a bit of hazardous rock climbing.

These apparently unrelated activities are all part of the Department of Transport's three-week's training course for the team of men who sail down to Antarctica every year to man SANAE, the South African National Antarctic Expedition base just off the Southern Continent.

Every year, early in January, the ice-breaker *RSA* leaves Cape Town for

Above: RSA moored last year to the ice shelf for unloading. Goods are conveyed on vehicles to the 20km-distant... base

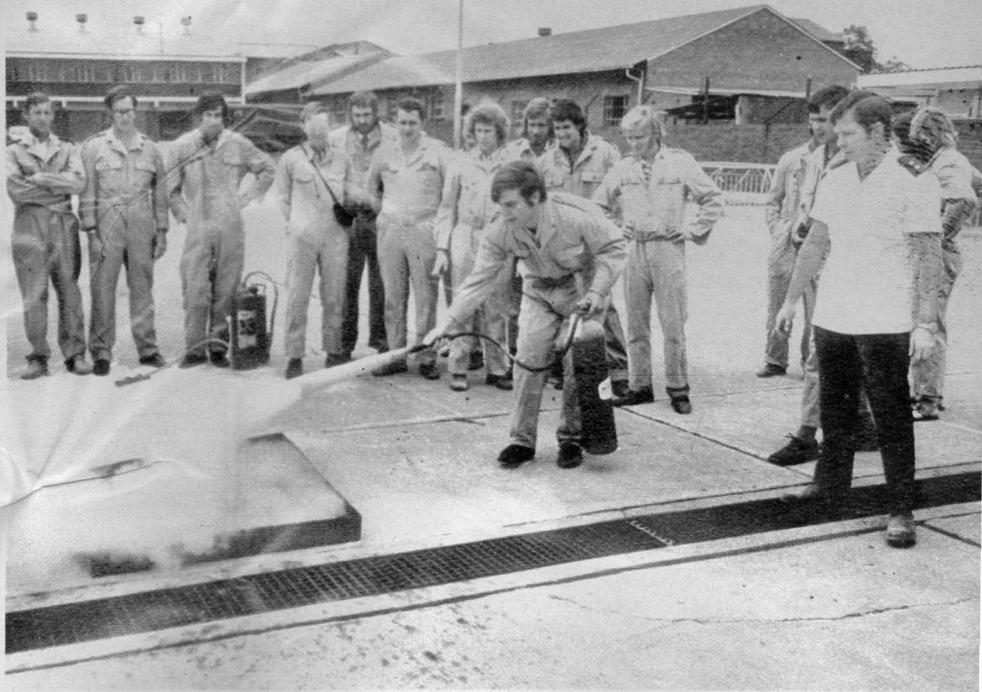
*Article: Wilna Rousseau
Pictures: Raymond Olle; Department of Information; Department of Transport*



Above: Terry dangle.

Left: Huskie

Below:
 Steve Mandv, radio technician of the SANAE 15 team, extinguishes a fire at the Pretoria Fire Station during the team's three-weeks' training course



the frozen south with a research team consisting of a leader, doctor, land surveyor, geologists, technicians, physicists, mechanics and communicators. After two weeks of rough seas and ploughing through thick pack ice, the ship reaches the 200m thick drifting ice shelf, pivoted on land shoulders, on which the South African base is built.

After a short period, RSA leaves again with the previous year's team on board.

The newcomers are faced with a bleak prospect - the monotony of an unchanging landscape, a seemingly endless succession of work days without the diversion of holidays or weekends, the almost unendurable cold of an Antarctic winter, and the hazards of exposure while out of doors.

Yet they are well-equipped for their task. The SANAE team is a picked group of men. A comprehensive series of psychological and other tests has indicated that they are social enough to get along with their fellows, and as

part of their training they have passed through a rigorous three-day survival course on the Transvaal Highveld that is designed to reveal self-reliance and the ability to take decisions.

The men have learnt the basics of retrieving vehicles that have overturned or fallen into crevasses. They have been taught how to signal in a helicopter, to get their bearings on the ice, to splice and knot ropes, to use rope ladders.

There is nobody to turn to for help from the present South African base. Its next-door neighbours are the British, some 600 icy kilometres to the east, and the Russian base 400km to the west.

In addition to his specially assigned job, each member helps with such daily chores as shovelling snow, melting ice for water, cleaning, making alterations to the base and, of course, cooking.

Away from the base, the men must cross glaciers, sleep out in small tents on the ice, cope with breakdowns, and



Start leader of the SANAE 15 expedition against a 16m cliff in the Transvaal during team's rock-climbing training

ed on short trips near the SANAE base. Picture was taken last year

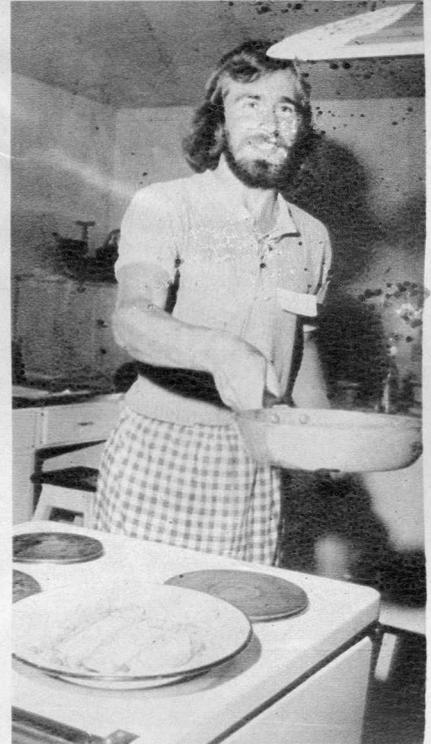


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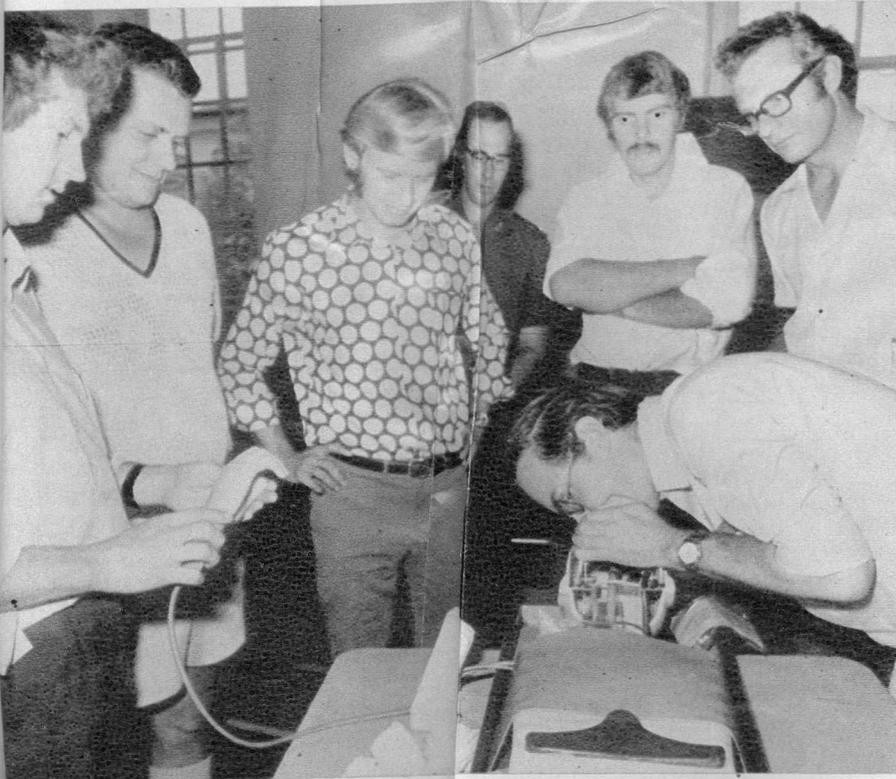
Hi-fi music while the men relax in the recreation room of the SANAE base

Below:

The cookery course for the SANAE team at the Pretoria Technical College. Dudley Rowswell, a meteorologist who has just returned to South Africa after a year on Gough Island in the South Atlantic, dehq; flips a pancake



Below:
During the first-aid course, the team practises applying artificial respiration. Guy Linscott, a physicist, tries to "re-ive" a rubber dummy



When winter sets in they are confined to a small prefabricated polar tent, since outside activity is impossible at temperatures that can drop below -50deg C (-58deg F).

In the "Spring" they split up into two groups and penetrate deeper into the highlands to explore and undertake surveys which will later be processed back in South Africa.

Birthdays and festivals, such as the Midwinter Festival, are celebrated with a banquet of special dishes, tables beautifully set and rooms decorated. On such occasions dress is formal in the extreme - to help break the monotony.

Their life is full of hardships, but they have willingly cut themselves off from the luxuries of civilisation and the company of friends and loved ones to explore this last frontier of the 20th-century, and to pit their strength against the uttermost forces of the elements.