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MAJOR-GENERAL W H EVERED POOLE,

CB, CBE, DSO: 1902-1969

PERSONAL RETROSPECTS

Major A B Theunissen, MBE (formerly SA Staff Corps)

Minor amendments (mainly for explanatory purposes for a non-military audience) completed by Robert PALMER, webmaster of www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk (January 2017)

The original can be found at: <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol095at.html>

See also: <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol014gb.html>

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A member of 6 South African Armoured Division undergoing training on a General Grant tank in the Middle East
[SANMMH]

On 30 July 1940, I (Lieutenant A. B. THEUNISSEN (Cadet Detachment No 21 – Durban High School [DHS])), was ushered by the Adjutant of the South African Military College in some trepidation into the office of the Commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. E. POOLE. *'Mr Theunissen, congratulations on having come first out of 123 officers on Course 581G – Regimental Officers – with distinction. Your report states that you are "bilingual and an officer of outstanding ability." Having no doubt about your instructional ability, I offer you a position here at the Military College as an officer instructor.'*

'Thank you very much, Sir', I replied.

'As you were commissioned in the Cadet Corps, you will initially revert to Second Lieutenant, regaining your second pip after doing a "Lieutenant to Lieutenants" course here, and after serving on the College staff for six months. I wish you a very happy period of attachment here. The Adjutant will make all the necessary arrangements, including your temporary return to D.H.S. to attend to your personal affairs.'

(I was not happy about losing a pip, as I had qualified a year previously on a Cadet Corps 'Lieutenants to Lieutenants' course, but, I was out of teaching for the duration, and a Second Lieutenant's pay was more than I was earning at D.H.S.. The only significant disadvantage of one pip was my relationship with the College R.S.M.! I was subsequently promoted to Lieutenant on 13 February 1941, having qualified in October 1940 on Course 607G. It could not have been foreseen that the above short interview, and Lieutenant Colonel POOLE's subsequent military career, would indirectly lead thirty months later, to a very close professional relationship over a period of two and a half years in the 6th South African Armoured Division. This led from Khatatba to the Alps, and thereafter to a treasured peace-time friendship until Evered POOLE's untimely death in 1969.

There is no doubt that Major-General POOLE is one of the most under-publicized of all South Africa's great generals, and he certainly would not have wished it otherwise. This article is in no way an attempt to remedy the deficiency. It is a brief history of important events in General POOLE's life, a record of some personal war-time experiences involving him, including details of generally unpublished special assignments on which he sent me, together with a short record of my own professional training and development for operational staff duties in war.

But first, some background historical information: In October 1901, Major William John Evered POOLE (previously of the 60th King's Royal Rifle Corps) married Miss Constance van BREDA, a member of one of the best-known Western Province families. William Henry Evered POOLE was born in CALEDON on 8 September 1902 and, as the first-born son, was given Evered as his last name in accordance with age-old POOLE tradition. He was educated at Saint Andrew's College in Grahamstown from 1911, and then from June 1917 until the end of 1918, he was at the Diocesan College (Bishops) at Rondebosch.

Shortly thereafter, he joined the South African Permanent Force and attended numerous courses, usually qualifying with distinction and often being placed first. On 24 September 1927, he married Elsie Irene, the elegant second daughter of Sir Johannes and Lady van BOESCHOTEN. He was a distinguished Transvaal advocate. The POOLE's had one daughter, Jennifer Ann Evered POOLE (now Mrs Jennifer Smith).

In December 1933, Major POOLE was appointed Officer Commanding the newly formed Special Service Battalion (S.S.B.). He was attached to the Brigade of Guards in London and Aldershot for over three months in 1935, and also attended a senior officers' course at Sheerness for a period of several months. Who could have guessed that a mere nine years later he would have a well-known Guards Brigade Group under his operational command in war!

Everyone regarded General POOLE as an outstanding staff officer, and assumed that he had attended one of the pre-war two-year staff duties' courses at Camberley Staff College. It has been established that he did not attend a Camberley staff course, and research also shows that he did not attend a similar course at the South African Military College. It has been said that the 1935 manoeuvres with the Brigade of Guards were probably a very good substitute for a conventional staff course!

On 10 June 1935, Major POOLE was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, and resumed command of the S.S.B. in February 1936. In late 1937, he transferred to the South African Military College, being appointed Commandant on 16 March 1938. Following the Union's entry into the War in September 1939, he organised the greatly expanded facilities at the College, including the huge 'B' Mess dining halls seating 500 officer cadets! (I was an officer instructor on two cadet courses between September 1940 and March 1941.)

Lieutenant-Colonel POOLE was appointed as General Staff Officer, 1st Grade (G.S.O. 1), of the 1st South African Infantry Division on 28 August 1940, with the rank of Colonel. He was transferred on 1 October 1940 as G.S.O. 1 of the 2nd South African Infantry Division. He was promoted to the rank of Brigadier on 17 April 1941, and on 11 June 1941, Brigadier POOLE was appointed to command the 2nd South African Infantry Brigade at Mersa Matruh. The brigade was part of the 1st South African Infantry Division. What a ten month period!

In May 1942, there was concern in high places about Brigadier POOLE's health at Gazala, and as a result, he was temporarily transferred on 25 May 1942 to Cape Town as Cape Fortress Commander. Command of the 2nd South African Infantry Brigade passed to Brigadier Matie du TOIT, previously Commander South African Artillery of the 1st South African Infantry Division. By the beginning of September 1942, Brigadier POOLE was back in the Western Desert, again commanding the 2nd South African Infantry Brigade, which did well as the 1st South African Infantry Division's right-hand attacking brigade at the battle of El Alamein on 23 October 1942.

On 12 November 1942, the division was *en route* to Quassasin in the Delta. At the Divisional Parade arranged for General SMUTS on Sunday, 22 November 1942, he announced that he hoped that the whole division would be given leave in the Union. He also mentioned the possibility of re-attestation for service anywhere in the world.

At a divisional parade held on the following Sunday, 29 November, General Dan PIENAAR confirmed that the division would be going home. He announced awards of Distinguished Service Orders to Lieutenant Colonel JENKINS, Colonel Freddie THERON and Brigadier POOLE, who had previously been Mentioned in Despatches. Nine weeks later, on 1 February 1943, Brigadier Evered POOLE was Major General W. H. Evered POOLE, D.S.O., General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.) 6th South African Armoured Division.

Meanwhile, I was being staff trained. In March 1941, the South African Military College was allotted seven places on the Fourth War Course (5 April to 25 July) at the Middle East Staff School in Haifa. The Military College officers were required to return to the College as Directing Staff (D.S.) on four-month staff duties' courses. I was fortunate enough to be a candidate, together with two Majors and four Captains. One of the Majors was Harold MORONY, already a most experienced officer, and my mentor and friend throughout the war. Later, as Lieutenant-Colonel MORONY, he was to play a significant role in the 6th South African Armoured Division's operations. We were visited on 22 April 1941 by Lieutenant-Colonel Harry CILLIERS from the Military College, and by the recently promoted Brigadier POOLE on 26 April. We were all awarded Camberley's war time pass of 's.c.' – a pass in the two-year peace-time course being 'p.s.c.', i.e. passed staff course. (I was recommended by the Haifa Directing Staff for appointment as Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General (D.A.A.G.), a Major's administrative post on a Divisional Headquarters. Back at the Military College, I (having been promoted to the rank of Captain as from 27 July 1941 and transferred to the South African Staff Corps) was a Directing Staff on the first two 'Haifa style' staff duties' courses (the first being 911G, and the second 1045G, which ended on 12 June 1942). I was thus involved, together with Major MORONY and the other Haifa members of the Military College's Directing Staff, in the staff training of some very capable officers who were eventually appointed to the 6th South African Armoured Division's staff.

One of these officers was Captain Herby WADE whose duties at the 6th South African Armoured Division's headquarters became more those of an alternate G2 (Ops) than those related to his appointment as G3 (Ops); but more of that later. There is no doubt that those officers who were privileged to attend staff duties' courses during the war, whether at Haifa, or the South African Military College or elsewhere, found the experience of great value to them in their subsequent post-war careers. On 11 April 1942, Colonel Harry CILLIERS, Commandant of the South African Military College, left the Union to take up his new appointment as G.S.O. 1 of the 1st South African Infantry Division, of which Major General Dan PIENAAR had been appointed G.O.C. on 10 March 1942. Within two months of Colonel CILLIERS' arrival at Gazala, he asked Defence Headquarters (D.H.Q.) to send me to join the 1st South African Infantry Division's headquarters as G.S.O. 3 (Operations).

I received a warm welcome at the divisional headquarters at Alamein on Wednesday, 8 July. I was soon told that the divisional headquarters had had quite a few G3 (Ops) staff officers since its arrival in the Western Desert, and I said: *'Well, this G3 has come to stay!'* I was immediately impressed by the efficiency with which the General Office was run under the Chief Clerk, Staff Sergeant (later Warrant Officer Class 1) Frank TURNER, who was also a meticulous and very neat typist. An efficiently run General Office is of great importance in any mobile force and Frank TURNER, the General Office and I were happy to be together in operations from Alamein to the Alps, covering a period of nearly three years.

On Saturday, 11 July (three days after my arrival), I attended the G.O.C's. Order Group for a 'murderous' attack (unless with strong armoured support) suggested by General RAMSDEN, in command of XXX Corps since 7 July. Colonel CILLIERS instructed me to draft the Operation Instruction, which involved some Natal units. I promptly produced the instruction in precise staff college style. Colonel CILLIERS' only comment was: *'Theuni, I wonder how many of your Natal friends and relatives will be killed as a result of your Ops Instruction?'* That remark instantly changed me from acting as a staff college Directing Staff into an operations staff officer in the field, which was clearly the G.S.O. 1's intention. His comment, more than any other war-time experience, was undoubtedly the major contribution to my military development. Harry CILLIERS was a very special man. The G.S.O. 2 (Ops) at Alamein was Major 'Aap' SMIT, an experienced and efficient staff officer. Unfortunately, he developed serious health problems and, on 14 August 1942 (the day that General MONTGOMERY first visited the division), Major SMIT was evacuated from Alamein by 18 Field Ambulance, and thereafter returned to the Union.

Colonel CILLIERS now used me as *de facto* G.S.O. 2 (Ops) – which valuable operational experience possibly led to my appointment to the 6th South African Armoured Division some months later. I assisted the G.S.O. 1 in the preparation of the seventeen page, '1 South African Operational Order No 46 – LIGHTFOOT' which detailed the division's plans for the great battle on 23 October 1942. Early in February 1943, I was notified of my appointment as G.S.O. 2 (Operations) of the 6th South African Armoured Division Headquarters, and instructed to report to Sonderwater on 11 February to assume duty. Lieutenant-Colonel Harold MORONY reported in as Brigade Staff Officer of the 11th South African Armoured Brigade on the same day.



Accompanied by the author, Maj-Gen POOLE attends a parade at Waterkloof on 19 February 1943, his first formal duty as G.O.C.. Both are wearing the new 6th South African Armoured Division Flash.

As the divisional staff officers reported in, I was very happy to know that my G3 (Ops) was Captain Herby WADE, the G3 (Air) Captain Bill WILSON (who had been on 1st South African Divisional Headquarters), the G3 (Liaison) Captain Stanley OSLER and, among others, Captain van DYK as Chief Liaison Officer. It was especially encouraging that the important post of G3 (I) was filled by that most efficient officer, Captain Bob LESLIE (the post being subsequently upgraded to G2 (I), with the rank of Major, reporting directly to the G.S.O. 1). It was a disappointment when the battle-experienced and very capable Captain Bill WILSON was seconded.

On Saturday, 13 February 1943, Major-General Evered POOLE, D.S.O., came out to the 6th South African Armoured Division H.Q. at Sonderwater. His first words to me (since 30 July 1940!) were to request me to act as his A.D.C. on formal occasions until the arrival of Captain Jack DAVY. The G.O.C. then invited me to drinks at his home near Swartkops on 18 February, and thereafter, to dinner at the Swartkops Country Club with six senior officers. It was a great privilege to meet Mrs Elsie POOLE for the first time – she was to become the much loved 'Aunt Ellie'.

On the day following the dinner, Friday 19 February, I accompanied General POOLE to 23 Air School at Waterkloof, where his first formal duty as G.O.C. was to present wings to newly qualified pilots. It was also the first day on which the new 6th South African Armoured Division flash was worn, as two sets had been given to General POOLE the previous evening for him and his A.D.C to wear at the parade. On 10 March 1943, I was given my first important assignment by General POOLE, which was to fly to Cairo on 15 March and report to Major-General Frank THERON (General Officer Administration, Union Defence Force, Middle East Forces).

In conjunction with General THERON's Staff, when relevant, and with the 6th South African Armoured Division's officers as they arrived, I was to plan and organise the multifarious training details, which needed action before the division would start arriving by the end of April 1943 to commence its training as an armoured division. Colonel CILLIERS would arrive several weeks after me, which would make the assignment easier for decision making.

I would be closely followed by Lieutenant Colonel W. G. PERKINS, the Divisional Signal Officer (newly appointed to succeed Lieutenant-Colonel E. FRUYBERG who had been killed in the Kisumu air crash) and by Major Ted LONG-INNES, Assistant Deputy Quarter-Master Technical (A.D.Q.M.T.) in charge of ordnance and all technical services. The G.O.C. said that it had been decided that the division would be accommodated in the Khatatba desert camp, where Major HOLLEY had already established an Armoured Training School for driving and maintenance. General POOLE then said with a rare smile: *'And don't forget to put up your crowns before you leave for the aerodrome, Major THEUNISSEN!'*

'Thank you very much, Sir.' This was the first notice that I had of my promotion.

I arrived in Cairo on Sunday, 21 March, and immediately reported to General THERON, whom I had often met during the months at Alamein. Lieutenant Colonel PERKINS and Major LONG-INNES arrived the very next day, followed by the G.S.O. 1, Colonel Harry CILLIERS, Brigadier J. P. A. FURSTENBURG (11th South African Armoured Brigade) on 8 April, and Lieutenant Colonel 'Copper' GILSON, the Commander Royal Engineers on 10 April. The arrival of the G.S.O. 1 ensured that much more G staff work could be done, especially as a skeleton 6th South African Armoured Divisional H.Q. had been opened with signals staff on 27 March. With hindsight, it would have made life much easier if a G staff officer, or the Liaison Officer, and the Chief Clerk had also followed me by air to Cairo, assuming seats had been available. On 25 April, General POOLE arrived, and on 28 April, all divisional staff who had been working in Cairo went to live at Khatatba tented camp. It was a most dreary place, even worse than the awful South African Base Camp at Helwan, some fifteen miles (24 km) or so out of Cairo. Khatatba was about fifty miles (80 km) from Cairo on the direct desert road to Alexandria. The camp was endured for the rest of 1943!

On 29 April, I accompanied the G.O.C. to Suez, as the first ship was about to arrive at Port Tewfik. On the following morning, General POOLE, and I circled the incoming ship by motor launch, to the cheers of the General's troops. I was happy to share a tent with Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Ted LONG-INNES at Khatatba for the rest of 1943. We had immediately established rapport in Cairo and I ensured that the A.D.Q.M.T. was thereafter kept in the General picture. Ted LONG-INNES was a wizard at procurement of tanks and other ordnance, which became most important when the division arrived in Italy. The Divisional Mechanical Engineer, with two of his troops, did an outstanding job in the mountainous terrain in which the division operated, often under appalling weather conditions. The magnificent work done by the Q and T Services in the 6th South African Armoured Division seems to have been taken for granted and would, even at this time, merit a book.

Training at Khatatba kept everyone busy. As tactical exercises developed, live ammunition was consistently used from platoon level upwards and a high standard was achieved. Hundreds of divisional personnel of all ranks were sent on courses both in the division and in Middle East training schools. Even the G.S.O. 1 attended courses! I did a senior officer's comprehensive course in tactics at the Middle East Tactical Training School No 14 at Deir Suneid from 5 to 24 July 1943. On my return to Divisional Headquarters, I felt that I had done more than enough courses and just wanted to serve those two wonderful officers, General POOLE and Colonel CILLIERS until victory. Alas, it was not to be – Colonel Harry CILLIERS was admitted to No 5 General Hospital towards the end of August and, apart from a short visit to Khatatba at the end of September, took no further part in the 6th South African Armoured Division, being eventually invalided to the Union.

By the end of August 1943, it had become clear that the division's operations would take place in close country, for which no training had been done and for which there were no standing orders. The G.O.C. gave me my second major assignment, which was to fly to Algeria on short attachments to British armoured divisions that had been in operations in the mountainous terrain of North Africa, namely the 6th Armoured Division and 1st Armoured Division, and to report on lessons learned. I should take a G staff officer with me, and chose Captain Stanley OSLER, the G.S.O. 3 (Liaison), leaving Captain Herby WADE to hold the fort in the absence of both the G.S.O. 1 and the G.S.O. 2. We left Cairo West by Dakota at 06:15 hours on Sunday, 29 August 1943, and, after a long and uncomfortable flight, arrived in Algiers at 19:40. The next morning at A.F.H.Q. (Allied Forces Headquarters) G Training knew all about us, but could not arrange air transport, so we had to leave by car the next day on the long trip to Phillippeville near Constantine. The route took us along the magnificent scenery of the Gulf of Bougie, a real treat after the months in the harsh barren desert conditions at Khatatba. On arrival at 12:00 on Wednesday 1 September, at 6th Armoured Division's headquarters at St. Charles, we found that headquarters knew nothing about us! But, no matter – the G.S.O. 1 mapped out a comprehensive plan for the rest of the week until Sunday afternoon, 5 September, including important talks with General KEIGHTLEY. On the Saturday night, OSLER and I were invited to a magnificent concert given by forty-eight members of the Welsh Guards' choir. The attachment was extremely valuable. No one could have guessed that the 6th South African Armoured Division would have periods in Italy with the 6th Armoured Division fighting on its right flank.

On 6 September, two seats were eventually secured for us on an aircraft for Tunis, where we arrived at 13:00 to find that the G.S.O. 1 of the 1st Armoured Division at St. Germain would send a car early the next day, but could give only one full day to the exercise. During the afternoon, a mutual friend of ours, Bruce ANDERSON, took us out to Carthage for an unforgettable visit. Most of the following day was spent with General GALLOWAY and his G.S.O. 1, Colonel FITZPATRICK, many of the lessons learned being predictably the same as the information obtained from the 6th Armoured Division. There was great emphasis placed on the organisation of movement control (especially on a single road), the employment of the armoured reconnaissance unit, and the movement of the large Divisional Main H.Q. in big bounds.



War-time flight accommodation

At lunch, the G.O.C. offered to have 'one officer per regiment' on attachment, provided we came with our own vehicles. Had the 1st Armoured Division been rather closer to Khatatba than Tunis, General POOLE would no doubt have given the friendly offer careful consideration! It was a well worthwhile day.

On Wednesday 8 September, Stanley OSLER and I had to attempt to get air priorities to return to Cairo. With Italy having signed the armistice on 3 September, it was extremely difficult to obtain seats for non-operational purposes. In the event seats were first obtained to Tripoli and, after a few more days, a seven-hour non-stop flight to Cairo Heliopolis eventuated on Wednesday 15 September, landing at 16:06. One advantage of the delays was that the time was used to write the reports. I arrived at Khatatba too late to report to the Acting G.S.O. 1, Colonel Steve JOUBERT.

On arrival at Khatatba in late April 1943, General POOLE had informed me that I would be invited to join the G.O.C's. small 'A' Mess, once operations commenced, but that during the training period it made good sense for me to join 'B' Mess, not only to get to know my own staff well, but also to establish friendships with my peers on the Admin and other staffs. I was invited to dinner in 'A' Mess on 16 September to share with the Heads of Services my general impressions of the trip with Captain OSLER to the two British armoured divisions. General POOLE had a thirty minute private chat to me about recommendations in my report, saying he would have a longer discussion early next morning. On that occasion, I spent an hour with the G.O.C., mainly devoted to discussions of movement control and the tactical handling of the armoured recce battalion.

At 11:00 I was called in again by General POOLE, who told me 'to leave at once' on a special mission to Lebanon and Syria with Lieutenant-Colonel 'Dum' OLLEMANS of General THERON's staff. We slept that night on the ground in the desert about 25 miles (40 km) east of Ismailia, having driven through Cairo to collect a Movement Order from G.H.Q.! This third special assignment was recorded from information which I supplied, as I was specifically instructed by General POOLE to report on the suitability of an area selected for the 6th South African Armoured Division by the 9th Army.

On 23 September, I reported back to General POOLE (and later confirmed in a written report) that I had reconnoitred the leaguer areas chosen for tanks, guns and motor vehicles and had ascertained from local sources that they would become morasses during the approaching rainy season, when all movement would be confined to the few roads in the area. I further stated that, in my view, 'it was quite unacceptable for the division to move there.' The next day, 24 September, General POOLE, Colonel Dum OLLEMANS and I went into G.H.Q. hopefully to squash the plan, seemingly with short-term success. I had so far had a busy September, travelling on General POOLE's assignments from as far apart as Algiers and Tunis in the west, and Damacus and Beirut in the east. In less than twelve weeks since 2 July, I had spent seven weeks travelling, during which time Captain Herby WADE had efficiently controlled the G Staff, while reporting to Colonel Steve JOUBERT, Acting G.S.O. 1, whose temperament was quite different from that of Colonel CILLIERS.

On Wednesday, 29 September, Field Marshal SMUTS visited Khatatba to inspect the division, part of the inspection taking place riding with General POOLE on one of the division's three tanks! In addressing the troops, he assured them that 'much hard fighting lay ahead.' The march past 'in column of nines' was a credit to the thousands of troops on parade and, therefore, to General POOLE. On this occasion, the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of the General Staff were fitted out (at very short notice by Lieutenant-Colonel LONG-INNES) with black berets, the Field Marshal wearing his at a jaunty angle.



Field Marshal Smuts and Maj-Gen Poole ride on a tank during an inspection, 29 September 1943

This parade proved to be the major turning point in my personal life, as one of the Cairo VIP's accompanying the distinguished visitors from the Union was the senior officer of the W.A.A.F's. in the Middle East, Major (Miss) Monica SMITH, whom I married in the Cairo Cathedral on 23 August 1944, after the liberation of Florence by the 6th South African Armoured Division. General SMUTS visited Khatatba again on 8 December 1943 on the conclusion of discussions in Cairo with Mr CHURCHILL and President ROOSEVELT. This time he was accompanied by General Sir Alan BROOKE, the C.I.G.S., and General Sir Henry Maitland 'Jumbo' WILSON, C-in-C Middle East. He had probably been alerted by General POOLE to the fact that his troops were becoming fed-up (the G.O.C. would not have used the then current phrase 'browned off!') by the long period of desert training. Thus General SMUTS firmly stated in his address: *'Ek sê vir julle – julle sal daar wees.'*

By November, it had become clear that Colonel CILLIERS would not resume duty as G.S.O. 1. Colonel Steve JOUBERT, (who had succeeded Colonel POOLE as G.S.O. 1 in the 1st South African Infantry Division in October 1940, being himself succeeded by Colonel CILLIERS in April 1942), had acted as G.S.O. 1 during the months of September, October and November, before leaving to join General EISENHOWER's staff.

It was clear to me (who would obviously not have been considered) that Lieutenant-Colonel Harold MORONY, Brigade Staff Officer of the 11th South African Armoured Brigade, was a strong candidate for the job. Alternatively, there was Lieutenant-Colonel 'Dum' OLLEMANS, who was battle experienced, Haifa qualified and of proven ability (and whom General THERON had suggested for the Operations Staff on General Eisenhower's H.Q.). The highly experienced A.A. & Q.M.G., Colonel Eugene MAGGS was appointed G.S.O. 1 from 29 November, with Colonel OLLEMANS as A.A. & Q.M.G.. It turned out to be a good decision, particularly when the division came under command of Fifth US Army, where the G.S.O. 1 is regarded as the Chief of Staff.

By this time, training was far advanced, with full-scale brigade exercises. On 18 November, General POOLE had made a brief visit to Italy, returning to receive first details of Exercise Tussle. This was planned by G.H.Q. to be a major armoured divisional operation astride the main Cairo to Suez road in mid-January 1944. The 'enemy' troops would consist of the 10th Armoured Division, 11th Indian Infantry Brigade, 2nd Belgian Infantry Brigade, and the 1st and 4th Egyptian Brigades. The first officer of Tussle Control arrived at Divisional H.Q. as early as 14 December.

Tussle took place from 15 to 21 January 1944 in bitterly cold weather, hardly to be equalled twelve months later in the Apennines, and ended in a great armoured 'battle'. The division was very glad to move to a new camp near the South African Base at Helwan and celebrated its first birthday there by a Retreat Ceremony on 1 February 1944. Training continued and Leap Year dances were held on 29 February! On 7 March, advance parties left for the division's move to Palestine, which had been ordered a few days previously. There was happiness among the troops at leaving the desert at long last.

I had been warned a few days previously by General POOLE to stand by to leave for Italy 'on a short "look-see"' with the G.O.C. and Colonel OLLEMANS. We flew out of Cairo on 9 March and three days later I was told by Colonel Steve JOUBERT in Naples that as the 6th South African Armoured Division was to join Eighth Army, I would be remaining in Italy! General POOLE consequently made a short trip to Helwan on 18 March, returning to Italy on 21 March.

The division arrived at Taranto on 20 and 21 April, and the first Order Group in Italy was held on 21 April. The 12th South African Motor Brigade Group was almost immediately sent to relieve the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade in the line, under command of the 2nd New Zealand Division, until the fall of Cassino. On 8 May, authority was given for divisional flashes and red tabs to be worn again, although security arrangements concerning the division's move had long since been vitiated on the docks in Egypt by the South Africans wearing their usual brown boots!

On 24 May, General POOLE was informed by Eighth Army H.Q. that the 24th Guards Brigade Group was coming under his command. This order was not only a signal personal honour for the G.O.C., but also, by virtually doubling the division's infantry strength, gave him much more flexibility in fighting the enemy in mountainous country. In fact, when it became clear that the Guards Brigade would be leaving the division, General POOLE announced the formation of the 13th South African Infantry Brigade on 7 January 1945. The infantry components of the Brigade Group were 1st Bn. Scots Guards, 3rd Bn. Coldstream Guards, and 5th Bn. Grenadier Guards, who were among the most experienced units in Italy. The Guards Brigade fought as an integral part of the division for nine months until 18 January 1945, the three battalions suffering 1,227 casualties. They proudly wore the 6th South African Armoured Division's flash, and when the Brigade returned to Eighth Army command, some of the men tried to keep wearing it!

The Pretoria Regiment, whose armour had supported the Guard's battalions throughout, were granted the unique privilege of wearing the Household Colours on their headgear. Many lasting friendships were made – I, whose duty it was as G.S.O. 2 to keep close contact with brigade majors, established a life-long friendship with Major (later Brigadier) Tommy BULKELEY, Brigade Major of 24 Guards Brigade.

Monte Cassino fell on 18 May, after the fourth battle. On 3 June 1944, the division's first operation order was issued, the Intention reading: '6 SA Armd Div will secure PIGLIO G2858 and PALIANO G2156.' In the first weeks of the Italian operations, the division had to learn its movement disciplines the hard way. Resulting from my recommendations on my return from the assignment with the 1st and 6th Armoured Divisions in Algeria, Captain Frank WALLER had been appointed Staff Captain (Movement) to control use of road space. The general techniques had been studied in training but obviously could not be practised around Khatatba.

At first, senior commanders in Italy were (without authority) ordering their units on the road in order to get them in the right place at the right time. The resulting traffic jams and confusion were indescribable. On more than one occasion, General POOLE had to go forward on the pillion of his provost escort's motor-cycle, leaving me to bring the Tac H.Q. jeep forward when possible. A movement control centre was therefore established at Main Divisional H.Q. under Captain WALLER. **All** movements, other than that of battalions of the leading brigades, and maintenance vehicles (which were limited to a certain number of vehicles per hour) were regarded jointly as G and Q moves. The system was soon working well.

On 6 June, the division began passing through Rome leading the Eighth Army's advance on Route 3 on the west of the Tiber. It was to be a well remembered treat to drive over bridges which had not been demolished, as thereafter virtually every bridge had been blown on the long advance to the Alps. In view of the uncertainty about security, General POOLE wisely accepted staff advice to travel through Rome in his command tank, accompanied by me, as was to be the general rule. In the event, the attitude of the Roman population was such as to make security precautions unnecessary. The G.O.C. and I soon took turns sitting on the turret, with the other listening on the second set to the BBC reports of progress with the D-Day landings taking place that day.

On 10 June, the 11th South African Armoured Brigade, leading the advance, came up against the anti-tank screen of the newly-arrived German 365th Infantry Division south of Cellano, to the east of the well-known resort of Montefiascone. Brigadier FURSTENBURG, for the first (and only) time, was able to deploy all his three armoured regiments, and his motorised infantry battalion, to gain an important victory. Lieutenant-Colonel Papa BRITS (S.S.B.) and Lieutenant-Colonel Bob REEVES-MOORE (J.L.H./Kim.R.) deservedly received awards of immediate D.S.O's. for their leadership resulting in their units so severely mauling the 365th Division. 11 Brigade's success permeated the whole division, and its effect on confidence and morale at that time cannot be over-estimated. Everyone in the division regarded the 11th Armoured Brigade's success as the division's success.

With the battle at its height, General POOLE came up in his command tank to S.S.B. Battle H.Q. alongside which Brigadier FURSTENBURG had his Tactical H.Q.. The brigade commander rather unfairly blasted me over the air for bringing 'the divisional commander under close enemy fire' (this was the G.O.C's. decision – certainly not mine) and told me to 'get the General to hell out of here immediately.' I fortunately was able to persuade the G.O.C. to withdraw, to the relief of the leaders concerned.

In discussing lessons learned after Cellano, General POOLE acknowledged that the G.O.C. should not be looking over the battalion O.C's. shoulder at the height of battle, but firmly stated that his policy would generally be to keep his small, highly mobile Tactical H.Q. well up with the leading brigade. Lieutenant-Colonel Copper GILSON, The C.R.E., was also a leader who fought his troops (engineers) from the front, and his characteristic comment on the G.O.C. at Cellano is most appropriate: *'I can condone it (the G.O.C. at S.S.B. H.Q.) as I was alongside in my jeep. If you train a new formation in a new arm, you cannot easily resist seeing them play their first match.'*

Colonel Neil ORPEN was the author of *Victory in Italy* (Purnell, 1975) and acknowledged the assistance of members of the War Histories Advisory Committee, which inter alia included former 6th South African Armoured Division officers such as Brigadier BESTER, Colonel MAGGS, Colonel REEVES-MOORE, Colonel GILSON, Lieutenant-Colonel JOHNSTONE, myself, Captain OSLER, Mr WALTON, and Colonel DUXBURY, Director of the South African National Museum of Military History. Lieutenant-Colonel Harold MORONY, among others, also provided valuable guidance to the author. A debate developed with Colonel ORPEN (quite unnecessarily in my view) concerning General POOLE's frequent movements away from the Main Divisional H.Q.; in other words, his almost continuous use of his Tactical H.Q. during operations, always taking me, the G.S.O. 2, with him in the command jeep, along with the signals wireless operator.

The division was often operating on a narrow front with infinitely varying and difficult terrain. General POOLE fought his division most successfully from his Tactical H.Q., with frequent face-to-face discussions with his brigadiers, resulting in speedy on-the-spot decisions. He was, of course, continuously in touch with the Main Divisional H.Q. through one of the two wireless sets installed in both his Tactical H.Q. jeep and in his command tank. There is no doubt that the sight of the G.O.C.'s pennant fluttering from his 'two star' jeep here, there and everywhere, well forward of the Main Divisional H.Q. had a significant effect on the fighting morale of his troops.

It is with great respect that I must differ from a statement made that I, the G.S.O. 2, 'was to become more of a close Personal Operations Staff Officer to the Divisional Commander than an understudy to the G.S.O. 1.' In the first place, the prime role of a G.S.O. 2 (Ops) is most certainly **not** to understudy the G.S.O. 1. As a result of General POOLE's policy of **commanding** from a Tactical H.Q., he clearly needed an experienced operations staff officer with him to ensure that his verbal orders received prompt and efficient staff attention. My duties at Tactical H.Q. in no way derogated from my authority or responsibilities as G.S.O. 2 (Ops), so I did not become a 'Personal Staff Officer' to the G.O.C.. The staff officer on duty at Tactical H.Q. could just as well have been one of the competent staff-trained G.S.O. 3's. The statement that 'General POOLE liked to be accompanied by the G.S.O. 2(Ops)' is irrelevant. The G.O.C. ordered me to accompany him at the very beginning of operations, probably because he knew that I had had battle experience at Alamein – including being on duty at General Pienaar's Tactical H.Q.'s. It must be stressed that General POOLE could not invariably have taken me with his Tac HQ were it not for the fact that the unflappable G.S.O. 3 (Ops), Captain Herby WADE, regularly acted as a competent alternate G.S.O. 2 at the Main Divisional H.Q. on those occasions. But now, back to operations.

The night of 21/22 June at Chiusi, some seven miles (11 km) south-west of Lake Trasimene, will always remain in the memory of veterans of this division. On this night of confusing information, 'A' Company The First City/Cape Town Highlanders (F.C./C.T.H. was leading the attack up the terraces around Chiusi town. Despite the great courage shown by 'A' Company under very difficult conditions and against strong enemy opposition closely supported by tanks, its surviving members had been forced to surrender by noon, 22 June. It was a great blow for the F.C./C.T.H. and, indeed, for the whole division.

Since the disaster at Tobruk just two years previously, the surrender of South African troops in the field had become an evocative matter. General POOLE had possibly (probably?) been informed that any further significant act of surrender would have serious political and military consequences. Obviously, the sad events at Chiusi in no way fell into this category, but it came as no surprise to the senior staff at the divisional headquarters to learn that General SMUTS, who had been meeting the British Chiefs of Staff on 21 June, diverted his aircraft to Orvieto airfield on his way back to the Union.

On Sunday morning, 24 June, General POOLE met General SMUTS and his high ranking entourage at the aircraft. As usual, I was carrying General POOLE's Tac H.Q. map. One duty of the A.D.C. was to ensure that the general's maps were kept up to date and, at General POOLE's instruction, I had marked up the talc with the Chiusi story. Generals SMUTS, van RYNEVELD and POOLE, and I went to General MONTGOMERY's famous desert open car (which had been lent for the day by Eighth Army commander, General Sir Oliver LEESE). With his elbow on the side of the car supporting the map, General POOLE explained the action at Chiusi to General SMUTS, whose sensitive fingers rested characteristically on his chin. The Chief of the General Staff listened intently behind the Commander-in-Chief, leaving him to ask the few questions.

After lunching at 'A' Mess, General Smuts addressed a representative gathering near Rear Divisional H.Q.. He told the men that when he had last met them in December 1943, *'ek het vir julle gesê: 'Julle sal daar wees' – en nou is julle daar!'* He said there was still hard fighting ahead in the 'terrible terrain' (which sounded very challenging in his usual Malmesbury 'brei') of Northern Italy. All at Divisional H.Q. were agreed that his short visit had been worthwhile, and indicated his genuine and continuing care for, and interest in, all members of the 6th South African Armoured Division.

On 26 June, the BBC news recorded that a flying bomb had destroyed the Guards Chapel the previous day, Sunday, 25 June. Although the 24th Guards Brigade Group had been under command for only a month, it was already fully integrated as part of the 6th South African Armoured Division, and the South Africans shared in the sorrow of their British comrades, so much so that there was a spontaneous move to donate a day's pay from every man in the Division to help with the Chapel's reconstruction after the war. The G.O.C. subsequently handed a cheque for £5,125 to Field Marshal. Sir Harold ALEXANDER (from memory, on 6 November 1944, when he visited the division). The Guards Chapel in London is well worth a visit, preferably on a Sunday morning, when the duty sidesman will happily indicate the 6th South African Armoured Division's commemorative plaque paid for by the Chapel's congregation after the war.



The author with Field Marshal J. C. SMUTS, Maj-Gen W. H. E. POOLE, and Lt-Gen Sir Pierre van RYNEVELD, in Italy, 24 June 1944, discussing the Chiusi affair.



Maj-Gen C VENTER and Brig P HINGESTON with the author outside the 'Gin Palace'

near Chiusi, Italy

By Bastille Day, 14 July, Siena (the Virgin's City), having been recently liberated, was the scene of joyous afternoon celebrations, to which distinguished guests had been invited. These included General Sir Oliver LEESE, General KIRKHAM (Commander of XIII Corps – with the 6th South African Armoured Division under command), General Frank THERON and General POOLE. As Siena was nearby, General POOLE decided to attend, but, as there were units in the line, he took his Tac H.Q. personnel (the signaller; the provost bodyguard and myself) with him.

Siena was the city where, since 1482, the famous palios had been held annually on 2 July and on 16 August. The palios were spectacular horse races, dishonourably and dangerously contested around the *campo* (city square) between the various *contrade* (city wards). The city was *en fête* with the splendid medieval costumes and banners taken out of moth-balls; truly an indescribably colourful and bizarre scene, with pikemen seemingly from another age lining the great stairway to the Palazzo Pubblico's Great Hall. I had parked the command jeep strategically where I could watch the signaller from a vantage point in the Great Hall. Sadly to relate, operational developments on the divisional front soon became such as to cause the G.O.C. to leave the celebrations – just as the most delectable eats were being served!

The division was now well into General SMUTS' 'terrible terrain', and the Guardsmen had been climbing peak after peak of the Chianti mountains, a necessary preliminary to the eventual liberation of Florence. One day, General POOLE asked a Grenadier in the forward area what he thought of the situation: *'Blimey, Sir, all I can say is that this 'ere FLORENCE is the most mobile city I've ever come across.'* One of the Coldstreamers, on the same topic, is reported to have said to his platoon commander: *'The noble Duke of York's army didn't have anything on us. We're always blinking well marching up to the top of a hill and marching down again.'*

The ubiquitous Pretoria Regiment, as usual supporting the 24th Guards Brigade, managed to get tanks to the very tops of the mountains. Small wonder that Eric LINKLATER was impressed enough by these performances to mention them in his delightful *Private Angelo*, an amusing read for divisional veterans, particularly if they had also had a spell in operations in the Western Desert. On 26 July, the King visited the division, being driven some way up the Divisional axis near Radda by the Eighth Army commander, General Sir Oliver LEESE, with General POOLE seated between General LEESE and the King, who was sitting on top of the back seat of the open staff car. As the division was engaged in heavy fighting a few miles to the north, it was not possible to arrange even a small representative group for the King to address. Divisional troops not in action therefore lined the road, and the car stopped from time to time to enable King George to meet troops and to have short chats.

The 6th South African Armoured Division was the first formation to enter Florence on 4 August 1944, having had nearly two months of hard fighting against a determined enemy since passing through Rome on 6 June. Major General POOLE issued an Order of the Day in which he mentioned some interesting statistics. For example, the Divisional Engineers had built sixty-five bridges (one a day!) and had made 196 major deviations necessitated by 'blows' and demolitions.

It was a sad day when the C.R.E., Lieutenant Colonel Copper GILSON, D.S.O., was very seriously wounded by enemy artillery fire on 23 July. The 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade relieved units of the 6th South African Armoured Division in the forward positions on the left bank of the River Arno, and the division moved to an area near Siena for a well-earned rest. On 31 August, Major General POOLE was made a Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (C.B.). He had certainly proved himself and his policy of fighting his division up front with a small, highly mobile Tactical HQ worked very well.

The Allied landing in the south of France on 15 August had seriously depleted General Mark CLARK's Fifth US Army resources. The large and powerful 6th South African Armoured Division (augmented on 18 August by the 4th/13th Frontier Force Rifles – Indian troops trained for fighting in mountainous terrain) was accordingly placed under command of 4th U.S. Corps and remained in the Fifth US Army until the German surrender in Italy on 2 May 1945. General POOLE, who had been serving operationally in Eighth Army since June 1941, now quickly had to re-orientate himself to the rather different U.S. Army methods and policies, which was no easy task for him, his staff, or his senior commanders. In a lighter vein, even the use of the field telephone had its surprises; after eventually being connected to Corps H.Q. the operator would say: *'Are you through?'* – *'Yes, thanks'* – and he would pull the plug!

Early in September, the division had crossed the River Arno and began the slogging match in atrocious weather up the secondary Route 6620 from Prato reaching Castiglioni Del Pepoli high up in the mountains by 26 September. Winter battle dress had just been issued. Little could anyone have guessed that Divisional Headquarters would still be in 'CASTIG' in the middle of April 1945, especially as Bologna and open tank country was only about 20 miles (32 km) away. General POOLE's official Operations Report (issued in June 1945) distinguished five stages in the 6th South African Armoured Division's operations in Italy, the first being: 'The pursuit in continuous contact, of an enemy endeavouring to carry out an organised withdrawal, i.e. Cassino-Castiglione.' The second phase (with the division now on a two axis advance) was about to begin: 'A series of set-piece attacks on strong natural positions against an enemy determined to fight it out, e.g. Monto Cattarelto, Stanco and Pt 826.' The other three phases were: Phase 3: 'The static winter phase, i.e. November 1944-December 1945', Phase 4: 'The break-through, i.e. the attack on Monte Sole' and Phase 5: 'The pursuit against an enemy becoming more and more disorganised and finally ending with capitulation, i.e., April-May 1945'.

The bitter fighting in the second phase involved the 24th Guards Brigade on the right-hand axis, and the 11th South African Armoured Brigade, and 12th South African Motor Brigade on the left. Sad losses occurred during this period of extreme gallantry under awful weather conditions, coupled unaccountably with serious shortages of artillery ammunition. The third phase saw guns and tanks dug into the deep snow, and mule-trains supplying troops in the line.

General POOLE spent many hours daily away from the cut-down Main Divisional Headquarters in the little village of Lagaro – some seven miles (11 km) down the valley north of Castiglione – in his command jeep visiting his snow-bound troops, sharing the driving with me on the treacherous roads and farm tracks, each being scared on occasion by the other's driving!

There are two happy interludes to recount. Some senior officers of 24th Guards Brigade (including the Brigade Major and the G.S.O. 3) were members of the Scots Guards, and predictably had organised a party for New Year's Eve at Brigade Headquarters which was in an imposing building well up into the line. General POOLE and I were invited guests. A printed menu lay beside each place. After the Pipe-Major had piped Major General POOLE in, he stood in front of the G.O.C. who handed him a glass of whisky. He gave a toast in Gaelic, and drained the glass. I asked my table companion, Captain David TRAILL, the G3, to write the toast on my menu. His reply was (phonetically): '*Dinna ya ken Chewnie, ye don't write Gaelic – ye chip it on stones, mon!*' There was an excellent band, with the numbers printed on the back of the menu! These included *Wiener Blut*, *Ten Minutes with Puccini*, Hungarian and Austrian songs, *The Merry Widow Waltz* and so on, concluding with *Lili Marlene*. It was a great start to 1945, the only pity being that 6th South African Armoured Division still had to attack Monte Sole. The other happy occasion was 6th South African Armoured Division's second birthday parade in the snow in the little square in Castiglione on 1 February 1945. General Mark CLARK, Commander of 15th Army Group since mid-December 1944 (with General Lucien TRUSCOTT – of 'lucky boots' fame – becoming Commander Fifth US Army) took the salute. He was a good friend of the division. On 15 January the division had been placed under command of II US Corps, Lieutenant-General Geoffrey KEYES, having been under direct command of Fifth US Army since early October 1944.

By 23 February, having reluctantly bid farewell to 24 Guards Brigade on 18 February, the division having been relieved by U.S. units started enjoying a period of rest around Lucca. On 31 March, the division began taking over its previous sectors in the line facing Monte Sole, preparatory to planning the capture of the fortress formed by Monte Sole, Monte Caprara, and Monte Abelle. This most challenging task was given by General POOLE to that redoubtable soldier, Brigadier Bobby PALMER, whose woefully under-strength 3rd South African Infantry Brigade had successfully defied Rommel's troops in the first desperate days at Alamein in late June/early July 1942. Brigadier PALMER decided to order F.C./C.T.H. under Lieutenant-Colonel Angus DUNCAN to assault and capture the division's main objective, Monte Sole.

Operational planning was on a scale reminiscent of that done before the battle of El Alemein on 23 October 1942. The newly formed 13th South African Motor Brigade, under Brigadier Jack BESTER, would play its first part in battle, together with the highly experienced and successful 11th South African Armoured Brigade under Brigadier FURSTENBURG. After sorties by heavy bombers and fighter-bombers during the afternoon of 15 April, followed by artillery barrages, the infantry attack went in at 22:30.

Second Lieutenant G. B. MOLLETT, commanding the leading platoon of 'C' Company F.C./C.T.H., reached the summit of Monte Sole in an incredible feat of bravery before 01:00 on 16 April, and was awarded an immediate Distinguished Service Order. Sadly, Lieutenant Colonel Angus DUNCAN was killed in the hour of victory.

The battle had been fierce for all the division's troops involved in the attack and in the succeeding exploitation and sad losses were incurred. But, the important opportunity had been created for the break-through to Bologna (which fell on 21 April) and the rapid advance thereafter across the plains of Lombardy. Major General POOLE now held important Order Groups around his jeep's bonnet. The traffic congestion was worse than the situation following the fall of Cassino, and the horrifying scenes south of the Panaro River at Finale Nell'Emilia begged description.



In an Order Group around the COG's famous jeep, Brigadier R. J. PALMER receives instructions from Maj-Gen POOLE. On the extreme left is Brigadier Nick BIERMAN, a former Springbok forward.

The Germans surrendered on 2 May 1945, just eleven days after Bologna was entered. On 30 April, the division had left II US Corps (General KEYES) and had again come under command of Fifth US Army. The next day, Major General POOLE was ordered from Mestre near Venice to the Milan area to help IV U.S. Corps, where two German divisions (the 34th Infantry and 5th Mountain Division) were holding out north-west of the city. It was a very long drive, mainly at night, of 200 miles (320 km) across the widest part of Italy. Fortunately, the divisions accepted that they too must surrender! Major General POOLE refused to enter Milan until the bodies of Mussolini and his mistress had been removed from the service station where they were hanging.

Major General POOLE addressed a representative group of all the division's units at the divisional Victory Parade on 4 May 1945 near Milan: *'Exactly one year ago today our Division went into action north of CASSINO for the first time, so what an anniversary it is today! On this great occasion, the greatest day in the history of this division, and for that matter of arms in the UDF, we thank Almighty God with all humility for this victory. We shall observe it in accordance with the direction of our Commander-in-Chief "with sober satisfaction and heartfelt gratitude" – We especially remember those comrades who started with us but who have been prevented from being with us today through wounds or through death.'*

Major General POOLE then gave the campaign statistics regarding South African casualties: Killed – 711; wounded – 2,675; missing – 157; total – 3,543. He stated that he would 'very much have liked to have had the honour of speaking to the whole division on parade' but that other priorities made such a concentration quite impossible. He had another parade in mind. Major General POOLE expressed his heartfelt thanks to those present – and through them to the rest of the division – 'for all you have accomplished. There is a saying that *"if you ride boldly enough at death it will get out of your way,"* and that you have done. You have played an absolutely major part in this final and complete rout and defeat of the arrogant *Wehrmacht*.'

After briefly reviewing the division's operations since Monte Sole, expressing congratulations, and looking ahead, Major General POOLE said he was about to unfurl a Union flag which had been given to him to be broken only in the division's hour of victory. In a corner of the flag the 6th South African Armoured Division flash was embroidered, and elsewhere the signatures of Field Marshal SMUTS and Lieutenant General Sir Pierre van RYNEVELD.



Maj-Gen POOLE having a lunch-break on the turret of his tank

On 14 May the whole of the division was on the Monza race track, complete with its tanks, artillery and vehicles. The Guard of Honour was formed by the S.S.B., Major General POOLE's first command. As General SMUTS was in San Francisco writing the preamble on Human Rights for the United Nation's Charter, he was represented by the Acting Minister of Defence, Commodore the Hon F C STURROCK. Commodore STURROCK made the speech, bringing the division the thanks of Field Marshal SMUTS and the people of South Africa for its part in the victory in Italy. He also took the salute (for a very long period!).

The top brass included General Mark CLARK (who inspected the S.S.B. Guard of Honour before the march past), General Lucien TRUSCOTT and Lieutenant-General Wallis D CRITTENBERGER (IV US Corps), all three having had the division under their command during operations from the Arno to the Alps. Lieutenant General Sir Pierre van RYNEVELD and Major-General Frank THERON were the distinguished South African generals present, together with senior Allied officers, including Italians. The parade was led by the ubiquitous Tactical Divisional H.Q. command jeep with its two star plate and, as usual, flying the G.O.C's. pennant which so many men had seen during the year-long trek from Cassino. Major General POOLE stood smartly at the salute as the battle-worn jeep came abreast of Commodore STURROCK, with me at the wheel and the wireless operator in the back, crowded in with both his sets. The Air O.P. pilots coincided their fly-past with the head of the huge march past. The command jeep then broke away, so that General POOLE could join Commodore STURROCK at the saluting base.

During the proceedings, General Mark CLARK, presumably in his capacity as the senior U.S. officer in the theatre, decorated General POOLE on behalf of the President of the United States with the Legion of Merit (Commander), the highest award which could be made to a non-American citizen. The decoration obviously took General POOLE completely by surprise, (General POOLE was awarded the C.B.E. on 7 July). The three brigades were now allotted their respective sectors; 11th South African Armoured Brigade along the Swiss border, the 13th South African Motor Brigade around Turin, and the 12th South African Motor Brigade in the Aosta Valley, contiguous to the Franco-Italian border, which was drawn on the high ground separating the two countries. Clearly, France would have gained a significant strategic advantage if the border were *de facto* extended down the reverse slope. General POOLE was alive to the dangerous possibilities inherent in the situation, which, happily, did not develop unduly although there were tense moments.

The Divisional Headquarters was established at Baveno, on the north-West shore of Lake Maggiore near the Swiss border. During the whole time of operations in Italy, General POOLE, as a firm personal policy, refused to be accommodated in Italian houses and lived in his caravan, even during the long, bitter winter months at Lagaro under four to six feet of snow. After the great parade at Monza on 14 May, the G.O.C. informed his A.D.C., Captain CRUSE, that he would now be happy to be suitably accommodated in a house, provided there were no other local occupants. The Divisional H.Q. Camp Commandant found a magnificent unoccupied(?) double-storeyed house at the north end of the promenade at Stresa, just a few miles on Lake Maggiore's shore south of Divisional H.Q. at Baveno, and General POOLE was delighted with it.

Among other features, the front garden had been built on piles over the water, forming a yacht harbour beneath with stairs leading up from the quay into the lounge! There was also a small shingly bathing beach adjacent to the house. Captain Peter CRUSE soon 'found' a small Italian E-boat with twin six-cylinder engines!

The G.O.C., the A.D.C., and myself having duly moved in, Mrs Elsie POOLE was flown up from the Union to join her husband. It so happened that my wife was then due to return to South Africa, having completed her years in the Middle East. It seemed eminently sensible that she spend her 'ex-North' leave in Stresa, which was expeditiously arranged and she flew over from Cairo to join me. There was only one fly in the ointment, which was that General POOLE now instructed me, in conjunction with himself, the G.S.O. 1, the Heads of Services and brigade commanders, to collate the 6th South African Armoured Division Operation Report, including lessons learned, and to draft those parts of the report which were the direct responsibility of the G.O.C.. So the 'Gin Palace' was trundled around from Divisional H.Q., and parked at the back of the house and connected up to the signals telephone lines. I worked office hours and found the project very interesting, though time-consuming, the main problem being the condensing of the sometimes voluminous reports that were submitted to the 'Gin Palace'.

Field Marshal SMUTS, accompanied by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr D. D. FORSYTH, and his daughter, Mrs CLARK, visited General POOLE on his way home from San Francisco in June 1945. The party was staying at the nearby Grande Hotel Iles des Borromeo. General POOLE hosted a small top brass dinner party at the hotel. The Field Marshal was in good form, and General POOLE asked him to propose a toast to 'our allies'. He rose, looked at the U.S. generals, and said with a wicked grin: *'Well gentlemen, I really think I should propose a toast to the Japanese!'* He paused and there was a stunned silence, which he immediately broke by saying: *'After all, gentlemen, it was they who brought you into the war as our allies!'* Roars of appreciative laughter came from the US top brass.

The following evening, Mrs POOLE arranged an intimate supper party for the Field Marshal on the tiny Isola dei Pescatori. It was a perfect summer evening with not a breath of wind to flicker the candle flames or rustle the oleanders. The nearby Swiss mountains stood out starkly in the twilight, in General Poole's words *'just as if they had been cut out of cardboard.'* Mrs POOLE had requested that the little restaurant be closed for the few hours that the Field Marshal would be there. Her party sat in the open air to enjoy the fabulous setting. Mrs POOLE had ordered a simple meal, to be accompanied with wine from Orvieto where the Field Marshal and the General had met a year previously under the very different circumstances after Chiusi.

General POOLE could not resist the opportunity of alerting General SMUTS to the requirements of military training in the post-war period in the Union. He said that every effort should be made to ship the division's armour to the Union. *'It is available virtually for the asking, Sir. It is the chance of a life-time.'* General SMUTS cut him short: *'General, if I were you, I would bring all 6th Division' tanks here to Stresa, load them on to the barges and sink them in the deepest part of Lake Maggiore.'* General POOLE was clearly taken aback and obviously hurt. General SMUTS put his hand on the G.O.C's. shoulder and quickly said: *'General, by the time you will need tanks for training, your division's tanks will be out of date.'* No more was said, and the small party enjoyed the brief opportunity for relaxation.

I do not consider it to be my function to attempt to assess General Evered POOLE, either as a soldier, or as the G.O.C. of the 6th South African Armoured Division, other than to record that once operations commenced in Italy, he quickly won the respect not only of his whole division, but also of all Allied personnel with whom he came into contact. Most of the military historians who have tried to compare Evered POOLE with Dan PIENAAR have not made a convincing job of it, for the simple reason that these two great South African leaders were really quite different in every way. But, one thing is certain: whenever groups meet in the future and talk of the Union at war from 1940 to 1945, both PIENAAR and POOLE will always be mentioned with justifiable pride. For an unprejudiced verdict on General POOLE and the 6th South African Armoured Division a succinct summary has been recorded by U.S. General Mark CLARK in his military memoirs. *'One of my visits (on his appointment as commander of 15th Army Group, succeeding Field Marshal ALEXANDER) was to the 6th South African Armoured Division, under a most competent leader, Major-General W. H. E. POOLE. This unit had previously been shifted to the Fifth Army front, and had performed splendidly under adverse conditions. It was a battle-wise outfit, bold and aggressive against the enemy and willing to do whatever job was necessary. 'In fact, after a period of day-and-night fighting, the 6th had in an emergency gone into the line as infantrymen. When the snow stalled their armour they dug in their tanks and used them as artillery to make up for our shortage of heavy guns. Their attacks against strongly organised German positions were made with great élan and without regard for casualties. Despite their comparatively small numbers, they never complained about losses. Neither did SMUTS, who made it clear that the Union of South Africa intended to do its part in the War – and it most certainly did.'* Enough said!

On 5 January 1946, Major General POOLE (still in the Middle East) was promoted to the substantive rank of Major General. In early March, he returned to the Union to learn on 6 March, not only of his (not unexpected) promotion to Deputy Chief of the General Staff, but also that he had been chosen to lead the South African contingent in the Victory Parade in London. Both these appointments were happily received by ex-servicemen and ex-servicewomen.

The new Minister of Defence, the Hon Mr F. C. ERASMUS, acted quickly following his party's election in May 1948. In June, the rank of Deputy Chief of the General Staff was abolished and by 8 September 1948, Major General POOLE was heading for the South African Military Mission (little more than a consulate under another name) in West Berlin – of all places – '*a big job for which General Poole is eminently suitable,*' according to the new Minister! Mrs Elsie POOLE did not accompany General POOLE overseas; the events of 1948 possibly led to their separation and subsequent divorce.

Major General POOLE soon became Head of the South African Mission in Cologne/Bonn (retaining responsibility for the West Berlin office). He held this post from 1949 to 1951. This experience no doubt resulted in his commencing his second distinguished career – that of South Africa's leading diplomat, becoming the doyen of the country's Diplomatic Corps in due time. I was fortunate enough to visit Major General Poole in Cologne on the way to the United Kingdom, Major General POOLE kindly arranged for his war-time G.S.O. 2 to fly into Berlin-Tempelhof for 48 hours to see the appalling extent of the bombing damage, which had not yet received attention. Back in Cologne, I was privileged to travel in the Army Commander's personal train along the Rhine, passing areas where the Allies had crossed the river; this was an unforgettable experience.

Later in 1951, Evered POOLE was appointed as the South African Ambassador to Italy with the title of Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, coincidentally succeeding General Frank THERON in Rome. When in Germany, Evered POOLE had met Miss Maureen NAISH-GREY, a Junior Commander (Finance) in the A.T.S.. Maureen was caring, supremely intelligent and had a natural flair for languages, and she and Evered just 'clicked'. Maureen left Germany to join Evered POOLE in Rome for their marriage. In 1954, General POOLE was transferred as Ambassador to the Argentine and Chile, residing in Buenos Aires. His first yacht, *Protea*, gave him and his wife Maureen much pleasure sailing the one thousand mile (1 600 km) River Plata. In 1961, General POOLE became Ambassador to Greece for the Republic of South Africa. He now had *Protea II*, with a 100 hp diesel engine. My wife and I enjoyed a happy day of cruising on *Protea II* when spending several days with the POOLEs. General POOLE retired from the Diplomatic Corps in 1966, leaving Athens to live in Hermanus.

General Evered POOLE died in March 1969, at the early age of 66 years. I joined the many ex-servicemen on 11 March in St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, to pay my last respects to a fine gentleman, a great leader and a special friend and comrade. General POOLE's military training and experience in battle had uniquely prepared him to be Chief of the General Staff in the Union at the age of forty-six. Although he must have felt very deeply hurt and disappointed at being torn away from his revered army, he certainly never showed it, nor spoke about it. Characteristically, he proved that, in peace as in war he would never accept defeat.

Synopsis of the career of Major General POOLE.

Major General William Henry Evered POOLE

C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

1902 – 1969

8 October 1902	Born. Son of Major W. J. Evered POOLE, 60 th Rifles (K.R.R.C.) and Henrietta Constance Van BREDA. Educated at St. Andrew's College, Grahamstown, and Diocesan College, Capetown.
1919	Served as Private in the Cape Peninsula Rifles.
1922	Private, 1 st South African Mounted Rifles.
1922	Cadet, South African Military College, Robert's Heights.
1923	Commissioned in the 3 rd Battery, South African Field Artillery, in the rank of Second Lieutenant (33848)
1925	Promoted Lieutenant.
1925	Transferred to the South African Garrison Artillery.
1929	Captain, Officer Commanding Signals Wing, South African Military College, Robert's Heights.
1931	Battery Captain, 2 nd South African Field Brigade, South African Artillery.
1934	Promoted Major.
1934	Second-in-Command, Special Service Battalion. As Major.
1935	Promoted Brevet Lieutenant Colonel.
1935 – 1936	Commanding Officer, Special Service Battalion. As Temporary Lieutenant Colonel.
10 June 1935	Promoted Local Lieutenant Colonel, whilst employed on Military duty in the United Kingdom.
1937	Awarded the George VI Coronation Medal.
1937 – 1938	Commanding Officer, Small Arms Wing, South African Military College. As Lieutenant Colonel.
1938 – 1940	Commandant, South African Military College. As Colonel? G.S.O. 1, 1 st South African Infantry Division. As Colonel. G.S.O. 1, 2 nd South African Infantry Division. As Colonel.
08/06/41 – 25/05/42	Commanding Officer, 2 nd South African Infantry Brigade. As Temporary Brigadier.
01/09/42 – 31/12/42	Commanding Officer, 2 nd South African Infantry Brigade. As Temporary Brigadier. Egypt – Libya.
15 December 1942	M.i.D.

31 December 1942

Awarded the D.S.O.. Citation:

FOR CONSPICUOUS GALLANTRY AND DEVOTION TO DUTY

During the Battle at El Alamein on the night 23/24 Oct 1942, whilst in comd 2 SA Inf Bde during hard and intense fighting, Brig POOLE controlled the battle of his Bde in such a calm and determined manner that enemy resistance was overcome. Although under heavy and sustained artillery and mortar fire at his Tac HQ he succeeded in maintaining efficient control over all components of his Bde. He at all times quickly realised when and where additional supporting fire was necessary to ensure success in the formidable task entrusted to his Bde. Throughout the battle up to and including the night 27/28 Oct., he frequently carried out personal reconnaissances regardless of the personal danger in order to ensure the continued success under his Cmd. At all times, he inspired quiet confidence and determination in all who served under him.

Recommended by Major General D. H. PIENAAR, G.O.C. 1st S.A. Infantry Division.

1st February 1943

Promoted Temporary Major General.

01/02/43 – 18/08/45

General Officer Commanding, 6th South African Armoured Division.
As Temporary Major General.

31st August 1944

Awarded the C.B. for advance to Rome.

5th July 1945

Awarded the C.B.E.

19th July 1945

M.i.D.

2nd August 1945

Awarded the Legion of Honor, Degree of Commander (U.S.A.)

1945 – 1946

General Officer Commanding, Union Defence Force, Mediterranean.
As Major General.

1946 – 1948

Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Union Defence Force.
As Major General.

1948 – 1951

Head of South African Mission to Germany.
As Major General.

1951

Retired.

1951 – 1954

Head of South African Mission to Italy, Greece and Egypt.

1954 – 1957

Head of South African Mission to Argentina and Chile.

1958 – 1960

Head of South African Mission to Argentina.

1960

South African Ambassador to Greece.

9th March 1969

Died after a long spell of illness, aged 66 years.

Married (1) 1927 Elsie Irene Van BOESCHOTEN, divorced 1951, one daughter
(2) Maureen WALSH-GREY.