I must stress at the outset that this is not my world and I enter it and see it only as an outsider. I am aware too that usage among National Servicemen differs from base to base - even from year to year - and that what I say therefore can only be impressionistic.

I am particularly indebted to the inspiration of two people for exploring troepie language a little further than might be expected of a respectable lexicographer and a female one at that. One is Brigadier J.H. Picard, Director of the Language Service of the SADF, whose article 'Roofies and Oumanne: is South African Military Language being Gyppoed?' spurred me on to find out a little more.1) My other inspiration was my publisher, Mr Neville Gracie of Oxford University Press, Southern Africa, at whose particular request I went hunting troepie-talk for the second edition of A Dictionary of South African English.2)

For the terms I have learnt, however unmentionable some of them may be, I am grateful indeed to many young servicemen and ex-National Servicemen, some of whom still appear in my office at Rhodes with 'Say Doc, have you heard this one?'

Before we read Brigadier Picard's article we had a few items of military usage in the dictionary files, like vasbyt, mindae, parabat, troepie and perhaps varkpan; but after 1975 the new language became a sharply focussed part of our brief. I was also
fast approaching the time when I would be an Army mum – and in for surprises. To most housewives and mothers basics are what one keeps in the store cupboard, intake something one tries to keep down when on diet, and contact what one tries to keep with one's friends. When my son went into the Armoured Corps and I heard of ratel, eland, olifant, buffel and others, it seemed to me to be strange and terrible that the names of familiar animals should become those of the vehicles of war, and to find the gharry of safari-style hunters, or the British Raj in India, a common mode of transport in a stern context. Today ratel, olifant, bosbok and buffel feature regularly in the press and one has grown accustomed to new words and ideas.

To digress a moment from this it is perhaps worth noting that while animal names for combat and transport vehicles appear to be relatively new, feminine names for guns go a long way back in time. To the troepie in the infantry his R1 (or R4) is his vrou, as was his musket, Brown Bess, to the British soldier in the Peninsular War. Ousanna features in many accounts of the early days in this country, as do the larger pieces like Ou Grietjie, comparable with the British Big Bertha and Muckle-mouthed Meg. Admittedly our Long Cecil and Long Tom somewhat spoil the symmetry of the picture!

To return: one can compare our own familiarization with these new terms with the way in which South African words spread into the English of England in the Anglo-Boer War. To the stay-at-homes in England the Khakis were their own men who were fighting in the koppies; kloofs, dongas, drifts, kranses, dorps and veld of an alien land, and it was their letters and press reports of actions that really spread South African words abroad. On the literary side there was also, of course, the Boer War poetry of Kipling published in 1903. There was too, what Charles Pettman, a Methodist minister, austerely described as 'the large amount of war literature directly or indirectly dealing with South African doings and misdoings, which has not yet ceased to flow from the press.' Now many of us are in a similar position to that of those families who waited for news and letters. Our boys and men are fighting in an environment most of us have never seen, and words like, The Yati, cuca shop, red area, witpad and bossies come out of it.

For the South African boys of today military service is not the group, family or community affair that it was in the burgher commandos, where men tended to know each other, to have similar backgrounds and ideals and all spoke the same language. Today Boere and Engelse, and other South Africans of various groups, are called up from every quarter with virtually nothing in common but their age, lack of experience, and the fact of their being South Africans.
Is it surprising that all speedily acquire the same lingua franca to describe every activity of an unfamiliar day? It has little in common with the blou taal (English), or the Code (Afrikaans) spoken on certain days by the Navy. It is what Brigadier Picard described as 'not merely a taal for takhare and backvelders, neither is it a language for lang hare and dik brille or Indoenas. It is a practical means of communication spontaneously accepted, and used by thousands of National Servicemen.' It is here I think that the Taal as Wapen theme comes into its own, because this common language is for them a weapon against isolation from their fellows, a safety valve defusing some of the frustrations of unfamiliar military discipline and over-zealous corporals, and a unifying factor among young men from every walk of life. (The inexhaustible ingenuity of SADF corporals in devising pejorative descriptions would fill a book on its own and I will not touch on it here!)

Troepies standing in the chow queue waiting for the pot tiffy or opskoppe, varkpan, grazing spanners and blinkbakkie in hand, or on the border with ratpack, ezbits and firebucket, are a far cry from theburghers on commando on the veld, or even in laager. There they were often several generations together - the first of Dad's- and Grandad's Armies of Southern Africa. Oupa, his sons and their penkoppe, and probably some of their neighbours, and neighbours' neighbours, could fry their stormjaers or maagbomme and eat them in company and surroundings not too strange to them.

Yet many National Servicemen are the descendants of those penkoppe that went out with their fathers to fight, and the names which they give to their food are as lively as maagbomme and stormjaers described by General de Wet, though some of them would have shocked Oupa - as would being told to 'Sluk nou kou later' - from panserkarre (hard meat balls), mangled mortier hoender, katkop, mindae chips, skrapnel, kojaks and unmentionable baked beans and even worse wors, to the Tarzan bars and doggies in their ratpacks - all of them named to lighten and bring a touch of humour to boring institutional food. Indeed the ratpacks themselves, far more hygienic and nutritionally sound as I don't doubt they are, are a long way from those saddlebags lovingly packed by the hands of wives and mothers with what Kipling described as 'is Boer bread an' biltong, an' 'is flask of awful Dop.'

The language of our young men shows both inventiveness and good humour: in the bungalow squaring off a gyppo bed (with unmentionable mattress cover), polishing their areas, skidding about on cloth taxis to protect the floor from the impact of their heavy boots, and even unpacking every article of their gear for an uitpakparade. The clothing in trommel, kas and balsak is
named piece by piece: the staaldak with its mosdoppie and doibie inside, the seven single of whatever colour, browns, the inevitable bosdrag and 'bushat', billowing Santa Marias, mooi-moios, step-out shoes, which always sound like an advertisement, and overalls with gyppo seams to help the ironing along. I would even suspect that the begrimed, self-washed, cardboard-like socks have a name worthy of them, though I have never learned it.

Their particular inventiveness is shown too in the naming of the tiffies who surround them, from the pot tiffy in the mess, to the pill (or unmentionable) tiffy in the sickbay, to the soul tiffy who conducts church parades, when they would rather gyppo out keeping clear of the sheriff (a wit ou, ek sê) or the Meat Pies.

All these terms speak somehow of the very young. The Aapkas, pampoen, marble and hondjie of the parabats' equipment make light of sometimes irritating or grim reality, like chicken parades in camp, spookloop, bobbejaankruip and leopard crawl in training or the blood (and other) budgies on the border.

Troöpie-talk is something which gives me great pride in our young men. They may not tree aan singing like Cromwell's New Model Army, nor (most of them) bring to their compulsory service the fiery and dedicated zeal of their Boer forbears, but they make the best of it and of themselves, and their taal is a reflection of this. Bakgat - and bless them.

VOCABULARY SAMPLE

1. VRYHEIDSoorLOG

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boere</th>
<th>dorp</th>
<th>(ii) Uniform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khaki</td>
<td>(ou) sanna</td>
<td>browns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burgher commando</td>
<td>Ou Grietjie</td>
<td>'bootse'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laager</td>
<td>staaldak</td>
<td>mosdoppie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oupa</td>
<td>doibie</td>
<td>bosdrag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>penkop</td>
<td>intake</td>
<td>'bushat'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stormjaer</td>
<td>roofie</td>
<td>seven single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maagbom</td>
<td>troepie</td>
<td>mooi-moios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boer bread</td>
<td>basics</td>
<td>step-out shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>biltong</td>
<td>vasbyt</td>
<td>santa marias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dop</td>
<td>blougat</td>
<td>gyppo seams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>veld</td>
<td>ou man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kloof</td>
<td>mindae</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>krans</td>
<td>klaar out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drift</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>donga</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(iii) Bungalow

area         tree aan      soul/siel tiffy
balsak       chicken parade parabat
trommel      spookloop     panserabt
kas          bobbejaankruip bokkop
square off   leopard crawl bok-etc.
gyppo bed    afk-kparade
p... vel     motivation PT (viii) Off duty
taxis        border
uitpakparade The Yati     on pass
           blood budgies  gyppo out

(iv) Training and Action

pill tiffy
t - tiffy

(v) Vehicles

cars/karre  Indoenas       bakgat
           lang hare en  hande skut
ratel       dik brille    kla on, etc.
eland      Meat Pies
buffel      sheriff
olifant     tiffy
gharry      pot tiffy

REFERENCES