

First SA Navy African female submarine officer



Sub-lieutenant Gillian Malouw.

Sub-lieutenant Gillian Malouw is the first qualified non-white female SA Navy submarine officer.

She was recently presented with the coveted submarine badge number and leather jacket – worn only by those who are submarine certified – by Flag Officer Fleet Rear Admiral Bubhele Mhlana.

He said of her admission to the submariner ranks: “This talks to my vision of building a navy capable of sustaining itself through skills development and knowledge”.

Malouw was born in Port Elizabeth and when she was encouraged to join the Sea Cadets in the Windy City a naval career was always on the horizon. Cadets undergo training and courses to progress through a rank system much like the Navy. Additionally cadets acquire life skills including confidence, discipline and leadership.

By the time she was in Grade Nine Malouw had made up her mind on a career in the maritime service of the SA National Defence Force (SANDF) and was thinking of becoming a combat officer. She joined the Navy in 2010 and after basic training started a nine month candidate combat officer course.

Among subjects she and her fellow candidate officers learnt about was the sub-surface service. “Submarines interested me the most,” she told Navy News.

Malouw reported for duty at the Military Academy In January 2011 as a full-time student studying towards a bachelor’s degree in technology and defence management. The following year saw her as one of eight selected students to attend the submarine training centre in Simon’s Town.

“We spent 24 hours at sea on board SAS Queen Modjadji. At the time it was the best 24 hours of my life,” she said.

She completed her combat officer qualifying part one the following year and started the general submarine knowledge (GSK) course in 2015 completing the submarine warfare course later that year.

Malouw also holds the bridge watchkeeping qualification, earned on SAS Spioenkop. The way to this qualification was paved by Exercise Ibsamar V which saw the Valour Class frigate visit Mauritius, India for an international fleet review, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Madagascar. The voyage enabled her to log sufficient hours and exposure to start preparation for the bridge watchkeeping (BWK) board.

She also has sea time on the mine countermeasures platform SAS Umhloti where she earned her Officer of the Day certificate.

In March 2015 Malouw was drafted to the Heroine class Type 209 submarine as part of an initiative to help navy personnel qualify in different musters via a mentorship programme. Retired lieutenant commander Graham Mountifield and Warrant Officer Keith Marthinus were combat officer mentors.

“They were integral to my training and their guidance was crucial to me passing the Type 209 endorsement board. This meant I could stand watches on board submarines.”

Last year saw the keen as mustard naval officer pass her harbour watchkeeping qualification (duty technical rating) board and Officer of the Day.

In her future she sees command of a SA Navy sub-surface vessel but knows it will take hard work and dedication to make it through the ranks.

Other women are taking leading roles in all arms of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). For example, Major Mandisa Mfeka gained publicity when she took part in the recent Presidential Inauguration flypast as the first black female South African combat pilot, flying Hawks.

With the South African Army, Lieutenant Dimakatso Raisibe Margaret Maila serves as the only female platoon commander with the United Nations Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as part of the MONUSCO peacekeeping mission there.

The South African mission to the DRC also includes a female battalion commander (Lieutenant Colonel Tiisetso Sekgobela).

