

Remembering the Small Moments

BY JOE DA SILVA

FAREWELL TO MY
GOOD OLD FRIEND
BRIGADIER GENERAL
CHUCK YEAGER,
**“AMERICA’S
GREATEST LEGEND
OF ALL TIME”**

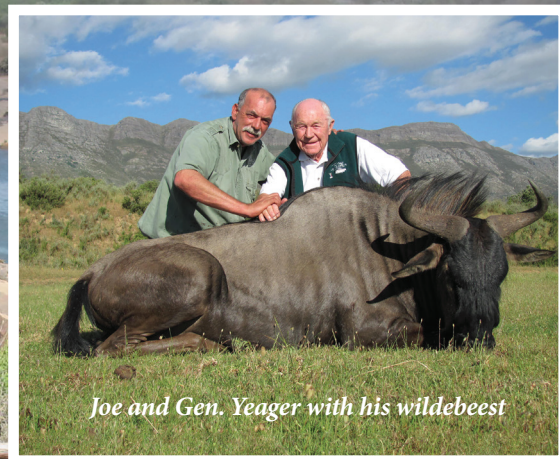
We at Cape Town Hunting Safaris and Tours had the absolute privilege and honour to have the Late Brigadier General Chuck Yeager and his wife Victoria visit us twice in South Africa.

During their visit in 2010, they spent two weeks with us hunting and touring. This was General Yeager’s first time hunting and touring in Africa. However, the General did mention to Nicole that he had “bombed” Libya (gunnery practice at U.S. air base there) many years ago while still on active duty but guessed this did not count as a visit. Needless to say, that trip was not arranged by any tour company...

The time we had with the General was incredible, like standing in the shadow of an elephant. He had an excellent memory and incredible dry sense of humour, often laced with technical information and sound advice. On hearing of his passing on December 7, 2020, we sat around a fire that night, something he enjoyed very much, and toasted the General, reminiscing some memorable moments of our time with him.

To share but only a few: upon their arrival at Cape Town International, we drove them to their Waterfront hotel. When we got to the hotel, the General said, “You should check your left front tire it needs more pressure.” I looked at him with surprise and said that I just had the vehicle serviced, including wheel balancing and tire pressure. “Mmhh, check it out tomorrow when you come and collect us from the hotel,” he offered. This bothered me the whole night, so the following day I woke early and proceeded to check the tire pressures. Yip, he was right, the front left needed one more bar pressure. Then I knew he definitely had the right stuff.

On another occasion, while we were busy hunting, he noticed a water reservoir about 150 yards away from where we were standing and asked me to drive to it as he said, “the water pipe is leaking, and we need to check it out.” It looked fine to me, but he insisted. Well, upon arriving, to my surprise



Joe and Gen. Yeager with his wildebeest

General Chuck Yeager and Victoria at Kruger National Park



Joe and Gen. Yeager sitting behind the “Beechcraft Bonanza”

he was right again, the pipe was leaking. He asked me if I have pliers and if so, could I please bring it to him. So, I did. After which he proceeded to repair the leak himself. A genuine humble man of the soil and sky. What was more amazing was that every time the General came to sit with us at our stand at the DSC shows, he would ask me if the pipe had ever leaked again. What a memory he had!

He would tell me about the times when he grew up on a farm in West Virginia and would help his dad, repairing things around the farm. As he said, in those days, you did not have all the modern equipment like today and you had to make use of what was at hand. This no doubt had an influence for his love for wide-open spaces and all things mechanical.

Another incredible moment I remember well is from when we were hunting a Blue Wildebeest. The Blue Wildebeest was standing about 120 yards from us on its own. I got the General on my shooting sticks and said he should wait for the wildebeest to turn broadside. The wildebeest must have got wind of us and decided to take off, running to left at full speed. The General, not to miss an opportunity, suddenly took the rifle off the shooting sticks, mounted the rifle to his shoulder and he took a running shot at the wildebeest. To my absolute awe, the animal dropped like a stone, a perfect heart and lung shot. This at the age of 87. I asked him how he did it. Cool, calm and collected he said, “That’s how we shot those enemies in my P-51 Mustang.” Well, all I could do was shake my head and laugh. Now I know why you are the greatest pilot of all times with the real Right Stuff. The General had 20/10 vision and awesome hand eye coordination that helped him become the outstanding pilot he was.

On another occasion, something I will never forget (and then again, I could go on writing more stories of the General), but this one shows how in-tune he was

with flying machines. I arranged a flight with one of my friends from the Stellenbosch Air Club. We flew in a Bonanza Beechcraft to a farm just outside the small town of Citrusdal, which is renowned as the Rooibos Tea growing area. Of course, the General’s wife, Victoria, is a big tea lover so I arranged to visit one of the large Rooibos tea farms whose owner is not only a big tea grower but is also an avid pilot with his own hanger of planes and landing strip! Taking off from Stellenbosch myself, the General sat at the back while Victoria, who also flies, sat as co-pilot. She flew most of the way there and back. While we were flying and chatting over the microphones, General Yeager called out, “You might want to adjust your trim.” We all had a good laugh. He was right again, that was just unbelievable.

During the second week, we flew to Johannesburg and stayed in Pretoria where we arranged a very special dinner for the General and Victoria with our then-current Chief of Air Force, Lt. General Carlo Gagiano, previous Chief of Air Force, the late Lt. General Dennis Earp, the Generals’ wives, Fiona Capstick, the Late Adelino Serra Pires and me. This was quite a historical moment for me to be with such accomplished people who have impacted the lives of many. Thanks to Fiona arranging this special day indeed.

We concluded our time up north by visiting the air force base called Makhado that was all arranged by Lt. General Gagiano. We spent some time in Kruger National Park and then returned to our home in Cape Town. It was a trip I will remember forever. There is a complete story of their whole trip published in DSC *Game Trails*, 2012 Convention issue. It can also be viewed on my webpage “About us” under News Articles www.capetownhunting safaris.co.za.

So, goodbye my dear friend, until we meet again high in those blue skies you know so very well.



At Makhado Air Force base, Gen. Yeager passing on a joke to our South Africa Hawk squadron Pilots