

SAMVO Guidelines on the handling of Military Impersonators (v.2. 220117)

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SAMVO



**South African
Military Veterans Organisation**

SAMVOINT's dedication, motto and inspiration:

This Veteran Organisation, through its member organisations, globally, dedicates itself, in grateful recognition and memory of our countrymen, the Immortal Dead of South Africa, who, at the call of duty, made the supreme sacrifice on the battlefields of Africa, Europe and Asia, on land, at sea and in the air.

Their ideal is our legacy, their sacrifice our inspiration.

| | Regulation Amendment | Page | Para | Effective Date |
|----------|---|--------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Draft of original document. Circulated for comment and agreement. Adjustments made. | Complete document. | All. | |
| 2 | Document converted to meet SAMVOINT branding requirement in preparation for Website. | Complete document. | All. | May 2018 |
| 3 | Document reviewed in order to describe more fully what the SAMVOINT Executive responsibilities and actions should be. | Complete document | All | Nov 2020 |
| 4 | Document converted from a SAMVOIT document to a SAMVO document | Complete document | All | Jan 2022 |

Preamble:

SAMVO is an ‘*umbrella*’ ex-servicemen/women’s organisation and a full member of the Council of Military Veterans Organisation (CMVO), which represents military veterans who served in the statutory forces of South Africa. The CMVO has representation through to the Minister responsible for the South African Department of Military Veterans (DMV).

SAMVO also represents veterans who served in the SAP/SAPS, Prison Services and SARP..

SAMVO is committed to providing a “home” for its veterans where our five focus points are Remembrance, Brotherhood, Equality, Reconciliation and Respect.

SAMVO incorporates three ‘International Time Zones’ that cover the world and the broad structure of SAMVO is comprised of Club Veterans, Club Executives, Regional Executives, National Executives and an International Executive, being SAMVO.

The National or Zone boundaries are as follows:

Zone 1 – SAMVOA – Australia, New Zealand, Asia and countries peripheral to Zone 1.

Zone 2A – SAMVOZA – South Africa, Rest of Africa and countries peripheral to Zone 2A

Zone 2B – SAMVOE – Great Britain, Europe, Ireland and countries peripheral to Zone 2B

Zone 3 – SAMVOTA – United States of America, Canada, Mexico, South America and countries peripheral to Zone 3.

SAMVO has an absolute expectation that applicants will provide an accurate account of their service and that they will refrain from any embellishment, either in their application, by the medals and awards they wear, or by what they might tell their colleagues. Any attempt to deliberately mislead the Organisation or its members will be considered contradictory to the ethics we hold near and dear and will be dealt with in keeping with our abhorrence of a military impersonator or a “Wannabe”.

SAMVO is a single rank organisation and supports the concept that we are all equal in person and in service. There is no reason for any veteran to exaggerate his or her service in any way and it is expected that, when applying for membership, the applicant does so with the utmost honesty and that all information submitted is correct in every detail. No application will be accepted without a Force Number as an absolute minimum.

Purpose and Scope of this SOP:

The purpose of this SOP is to act as a guideline when Clubs or Regions find the need to deal with a suspected Wannabe or Imposter at Club level.

We define a Wannabe or Imposter as a person who makes false claims about his or her military service. This includes claims by people who have never been in the military, as well as lies, or

embellishments by genuine veterans. Some individuals who do this may wear uniforms or medals which were never officially issued to them.

Military imposters engage in a broad range of deceptive behaviours, all intended to achieve recognition from others. An imposter may make verbal statements, written claims, or create deceptive impressions through actions, such as wearing a uniform, rank insignia, unit symbols, medals, or patches to which they are not entitled.

Generally, imposters fall into two broad categories:

1. Civilians who have never been in any branch of the military.
2. Veterans who make false claims about their experiences or accomplishments.
 - i. Imposters in the latter category may claim any of the following:
 - a Being the recipient of awards that were not earned
 - b Having a longer service duration
 - c Having a more favourable discharge
 - d Holding a higher rank than the one actually held
 - e Having served with a different branch of the military
 - f Having served with a different unit that is more famous
 - g Being a different role or Military Occupational Specialty
 - h Involvement in a war or specific engagement that they were not present at
 - i Performing a brave or valorous act that never happened
 - j Participation in "special" or "secret" operations
 - k Being a prisoner of war (POW).

Wannabe situations or information on potential Wannabes may arise via;

1. **External sources** - For example;
 - i. Information from one of our host country's veteran organisations.
 - ii. Friends or contacts that hear bragging or stories from a veteran that are hard to believe.
 - iii. Veterans who knew that member whilst in service.
 - iv. Organisations who maintain a nominal role of their members.
 - v. Organisations that maintain a record of particular qualifying activities.
2. **Internal sources** – For example:
 - i. What they wear on their uniform whilst on parade.
 - ii. Presentations or stories that simply don't ring true.
 - iii. Members who talk too much and allude to operations, which they clearly know little about.
 - iv. Claims of having done something when that was not the way it was done.
 - v. Gut feeling.

SAMVO has a SOP on how to manage members who fall into disrepute.

- vi. This includes the revoking of membership, or the resignation by that member.
- vii. The purpose of this SOP is to detail how we expose a person if they present as a potential Wannabe or medal cheat.

Policy:

1. In terms of this Policy, a Military Impersonator will also be described as a Wannabe.
2. SAMVO will always strive to maintain the dignity and honour of the South African Honours and Awards systems and, out of respect for those who fell whilst in service of our Motherland, by exposing those who breach the code in order that we may protect our military heritage and traditions.
3. When dealing with a proven imposter and to discourage this practice, our objective will be to deal with this person in the strongest manner possible and by using all means available to us within our organisations and affiliations. This is for the protection of all our other veterans who served with honour, and to protect the reputation of the service.

4. Any applicant wishing to join a SAMVO Entity must provide his/her full military service and his/her Force Number, which will be an absolute minimum requirement.
5. Any SAMVO Member, who has provided false information on their application that embellishes their rank or provides misleading information about their service, medals, awards or insignia, shall be guilty of being a Wannabe.
6. In terms of our Constitution, every member belongs to a Club and it is incumbent on the Club to identify a Wannabe and to report this to the Regional Chairman and Regional Master-at-Arms in the strictest confidence. This should not be a witch hunt and common sense must prevail.
7. The Region is required to deal with the issue and must advise the National Chairman and the National Master-at-Arms that there is such a situation in progress.
8. A written statement by the informer of a suspicious person or persons is required, clearly stating the basis of their suspicion.
9. Should a Chairperson, be in question, the enquiry falls upon the next higher authority for evaluation and follow up.
10. It will remain incumbent on the "informer" to provide evidence in support of the enquiry.
11. Every case will be dealt with in a dignified manner and the subject of enquiry will be presumed innocent until proven otherwise.
12. The subject of the enquiry should be informed and given the opportunity to respond or provide proof to the contrary.
13. There are three likely reactions from the subject of enquiry during this process:
 - i. The subject of enquiry provides the required proof.
 - ii. Immediate confession and remorse.
 - a The fact that the subject of enquiry acknowledges wrongdoing when he/she is caught out will not influence the decision to expose him/her for what they are.
 - b Should there be genuine contrition on the part of the subject of enquiry and if they display the courage to face their colleagues and make amends, it will be at the entire discretion of the National Chairman whether this goes forward to the Wall of Shame or not, and this will be based on recommendations from the Region concerned.
 - iii. Absolute denial
 - a The Club and or Region should counsel the subject of enquiry on the evidence required to disprove the allegation and agree to a reasonable timeframe to do this. They should also describe the ramifications if the evidence is not supporting, or forthcoming.
 - b When a subject of enquiry resigns in disgust or threatens legal action (this is a typical reaction, which a Wannabe may undertake in the hope that SAMVO will not take the matter any further), SAMVO will take the matter further.
 - c Should the subject of enquiry refuse to provide the necessary proof of his/her service or awards, he/she will immediately have their membership revoked and they will be expelled from the Organisation and placed on the misrepresented Unit or Organisation's "Wall of Shame," never to be removed.
14. The SAMVO Executive, who is in liaison with the high profile Regiments of the Border War, archive sourcing and the South African Police, is responsible for maintaining open and good relations with these sources to ensure that SAMVO receives the correct and timely information on alleged Impersonators.

Action:

1. The SAMVO Website shall:
 - i. In making application for Ordinary Membership, the SAMVO Website shall not allow an applicant to proceed past their Force Number and a reply message will advise the applicant of this minimum requirement and that the application will not proceed. Should the applicant require advice, a contact form to SAMVO will facilitate this.
 - ii. A Heritage Member category applicant need not necessarily be blocked if they don't have their ancestors Force Number. However, they must state exactly who they represent, confirm that the ancestor is deceased, the theatre of war in which he/she served and that they will be the sole representative of that veteran.

- iii. The SAMVO Website will provide suitable advice that Wannabes or Military Impersonators will be shamed in the appropriate way.
 - iv. The SAMVO Website will make the rules of engagement clear with a disclaimer and terms and conditions statement, which must be accepted before applicants can complete their request for membership.
 - v. The SAMVO Website should include applicant and member information on:
 - Post nominal titles.
 - Medals and awards earned.
 - Proficiency badges or insignia awarded.
2. Club and Regional Masters-at-Arms will:
- i. Ensure that all members are aware of the SAMVO Dress Guidelines.
 - ii. Ensure that all members are made aware of the ramifications should they wear medals or insignia that they are not entitled to wear.
 - iii. Enable members to review their dress Code 1A and the opportunity to remove any insignia where there might be any doubt and there will be no ramifications.
 - iv. Encourage those where there is doubt to engage with the issuing authority in the event that they may be eligible to wear that medal or insignia.
 - v. Discretion and giving the benefit of the doubt should be exercised as long as the member is aware of the consequences of providing misleading information
 - vi. Deal in confidence with the matter until a conclusion is reached, having informed higher HQ in the first instance.
 - vii. Claims of ignorance of SAMVO rules and regulations, including statutory award criteria, will not be accepted as a valid reason for wearing unentitled awards or insignia.

Conclusion;

SAMVO finds no pleasure in exposing our own Military Impersonators, but unfortunately, human nature, being what it is, some civilians or veterans choose to create a new life, or embellish their own service with boastful and untruthful lies. They wear un-awarded medals, pins, "tin" and regalia, tell lies and boast to those who will listen.

Often called by the derogatory term "wannabe" these are men and women who may, or may not, have served in our Defence Force, but who have fraudulently misrepresented themselves as having served in a theatre of war, or operation, by their words and actions, and by the wearing of medals and other accoutrements to military service to which they have no entitlement.

In most of our host countries it is a federal offence to claim to be a returned serviceman and, as civilians of these countries, one could be liable to several months of imprisonment and a substantial fine. Furthermore it is an offence to wear a service decoration to which you are not entitled, attracting additional penalties.

The worse of this is the insult to genuine veterans of any conflict, who find their courage, honour and valour stolen by imposters. Do not ***misrepresent your service*** in any way. If you are unsure of what you are entitled to claim or display, rather discuss this with your Master-at-Arms and gain a higher level acknowledgement or authorisation through SAMVOINT.

Take careful note that claims of ignorance of the SAMVO rules and regulations, including statutory award criteria, will not be accepted as a valid reason for wearing unentitled awards or insignia