One could regard Tiro Vorster, ASAA as either a very thorough aviation researcher who illustrates his work with beautiful paintings or an accomplished aviation artist who does meticulous research for every detail.

His latest painting, 44 x 60 inches, a commissioned work featuring the Lockheed C-130 Hercules on a nighttime mission over a moonlit ocean, confirms he is both.

As flight engineer with 4,500 hours of flying and self-taught, lifelong illustrator of iconic aircraft Tiro produced a brooding setting with the finest technical details: the vapor trails behind the Herc’s engines at 4,000 feet, and a boat about to be catapulted from the cargo bay by a drogue parachute blossoming behind the aircraft.

For Greydon Petzer, the new owner, this painting encapsulates his memories as a B category specialized navigator in the South African Air Force on the C-130 and several other aircraft including jets, his studies at the South African Military Academy at Saldanha on South Africa’s West Coast (the setting), and his respect for the South African Special Forces, known as the Reconnaissance Commando or “recce,” the equivalent of the Navy Seals in the US, (often operating from the C-130). He regards delivering boat platforms combined with “recce” water jumps as the most specialized of the C-130 flight profiles.

The painting completes a Vorster trilogy depicting Greydon’s personal experiences. He owns two Tiro Vorster paintings of the BAE English Electric Lightning (art titles, “Time-To-Climb” and “Lightning and Thunder”) depicting Mach Plus flights Greydon undertook in it. Does the final painting match the picture in his head? “It exceeds it. It is a complete work of art. Ultimately it is a journey with Tiro, the most gifted aviation artist I will know in my lifetime,” says Greydon.

On 4 June 2016 and for no reason, Tiro thought about the two works he had done for Greydon. That same evening he received a call from Greydon advising him to first sit down, before asking him to do the C-130. “I was excited,
and lost some sleep that night. I realized that it would be a mountain-sized challenge to combine all the elements of the brief. The next morning I started on the initial thumbnail pencil sketch. The third drawing was approved,” says Tiro.

The timing for the flight in the painting was around four o’clock in the morning. I had to know exactly how the coastline, moonlight, shadows and orientation would look 4,000 feet above the ocean.

“The commission required the drawings, research in my library and other sources. Conversations with a current C-130 commander and a recce expert, map and picture studies, and a nighttime helicopter training flight with Tiro and major “Gees” Basson of 22 Squadron, Air Force Base Ysterplaat in Cape Town over the exact location to observe all the details, and many conversations with and a personal visit to the client.”

“As the aircraft had to be depicted from behind and at an angle, it was critical to get the dimensions and perspective right. I also built a cardboard model of the boat to help with the painting. The detail and colors of the open cargo bay door, the boat, the position of the wing flaps and the drogue parachute proved challenging. Fortunately, I had flown in the C-130 and remembered the auxiliary hydraulic system opening the bay door with a distinct screeching noise,” says the international artist whose work has been showcased in publications and private collections.

The C-130 is a four-engine (Allison T56-A-15 turboprops, 4,590 shaft horsepower) military transport aircraft capable of using unprepared runways. Designed as a troop, medevac, and cargo transport aircraft in the fifties, the versatile airframe has produced a gunship (AC-130) and versions for airborne assault, search and rescue, scientific research support, weather reconnaissance, aerial refueling, maritime patrol, aerial firefighting and civilian flight. It remains the main tactical airlifter for many military forces with more than forty variants flying in over 60 countries. Nicknamed “Big Herc”, “Herky Bird”, “Fat Albert”, “Charlie One-Thirty”, and “Flossie” (in South Africa) the C-130 has character, presence and gravitas.

The painting shows the actual C-130 flown, SAAF s/n 406, call-sign Zuca 406, delivering a Special Forces boat, with Donkergat (“dark hole” and 4 Reconnaissance Regiment base) above the left and the Military Academy above the right wing.

The main art title will be Vicingi Husquarana, Latin for Viking Ghost Rider. Viking is a tribute to 4 Recce, sporting a Viking helmet on their regimental badge, and the C-130, often referred to as a ghost rider. The phrase also acknowledges the Military Academy’s Latin motto, “Discendo Armemus.”

It is seven months since the commission call. “As with my other paintings, this too was hard work and not all of
it painting away with artistic license! But this magnificent aircraft proved a wonderful subject for the painting. It depicts a special time in Greydon’s military career; it pays homage to the “recces” and the Military Academy. It was ultimately a labor of love,” says Tiro.


Above right: Tiro and Major Gees Basson flew over the landscape depicted in the painting to study detail, lighting and orientation. They are pictured here with the Westland Super Lynx helicopter, subject of another of Tiro’s painting’s “Lynx on the prowl”

Right: A South African Air Force C-130 is about to parachute a special forces boat into the Atlantic Ocean along South Africa’s West Coast where the Military Academy and special forces base are situated.

Right: Tiro Vorster ASAA next to his latest painting of a Lockheed C-130 Hercules about to drop a boat for special forces off South Africa’s West Coast.

(Photograph courtesy of Jean du Plessis)