Masters of unseen battle shares knowledge at CSIR

"Electronic warfare (EW) can save lives," said Major General Mario Brazzoli speaking at an international EW conference held at the CSIR recently.

The conference was organised by the South African Chapter of the Association of Old Crows (AOC) - the Aardvark Roost.

Brazzoli is the South African National Defence Force's Government Information Technology Officer.

An independent defence analyst and a South African correspondent for Jane's Defence Weekly, Helmoed Römer-Heitman, told delegates "the world has not suddenly become a more peaceful place".

Major General Mario Brazzoli speaking at an international EW conference held at the CSIR recently

The conference took place on 25 and 26 August at the CSIR International Convention Centre in Pretoria, South Africa.

The conference theme was, "*What will the expected nature of the threat be beyond 2020 and what should the Electronic Warfare (EW) community do to meet the challenge*".

CSIR EW engineer and Aardvark Roost vice president, Christo Cloete, said the conference aimed at bringing the EW community together. "We want to create a platform for knowledge sharing among EW specialists," he says, adding, "We are also trying to get younger engineers interested in electronic warfare."

"We brought these groups together to look at how EW can contribute to the potential threats that our country could face in future," he said. EW is a mechanism to enhance situational awareness and survivability of people and equipment both in wartime and during peace operations.

President of the South African chapter, Gerrie Radloff, explained, "EW is not only required in times of war. The post Cold War era is characterised by the increasing need for peace keeping type operations where participating forces need to protect themselves against the sudden eruption of hostile actions from the parties at odds with each other.

"EW plays a very important role in providing that protection. The same is also true for protecting assets and people against acts of terrorism - but the timing and location of these deeds are more difficult to predict," he says.

Radloff added that the EW community has to create awareness and give decision makers a better orientation and understanding of this field to help them make sensible decisions.

The AOC has an important role to play in this regard. "We have to be the champions of EW and if we are successful, the future for EW will be secure, and our people will be safer," he says.

This is a challenging task as it is a relatively unseen discipline, partly because of secrecy usually associated with EW. Specific technical features of EW equipment and especially application software are best kept secret. Compromising what should have been a winning edge in combat, would be extremely negligent and irresponsible. Industrial espionage in EW is another good reason to have high levels of security, he concluded.

- Mzimasi Gcukumana