



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2019

JANUARY LUNCH:

The New Year seemed to be off to a quiet start as bookings for Lunch trickled in, with members easing themselves gently into routine after the Christmas break – that is until the January Lunch, with a very good turnout of 38 attending, which began decorously enough with a fine meal of Portuguese Salad and Chicken Breasts in White Wine, Pepper and Garlic Sauce provided by Silvasale, in a new location which was the Centre Court Deck. All was peace and light...BUT, after lunch, the January Aviation Quiz, again compiled and compered by Karl Jensen, lit the blue touch paper and the game was on. Squinting anxiously into the glare of the uncurtained floor to ceiling windows, few could see the screen, let alone what was on it...Amid a babel of wild guesses, shouted instructions, unheard answers, heckling, kibitzing, the temperature rose steadily until the rival Red and Blue teams were trading scurrilous accusations and gratuitous insults (no expletives deleted) with reckless abandon. As the quiz progressed, clear indications emerged of mental confusion, paralysis, hypotension, cardiac arrhythmias, heart failure and cardiac arrest. Symptomatic treatment with red and white wines proved effective. A health warning will be issued before the next quiz and Medical Certificates may be required....The Red Team "won" due only to unashamedly partisan scoring by the (Red Team) Quizmaster, who sailed serenely through the furore in an exemplary display of CRM, sangfroid.... And then declared a draw in self-defence. The Raffle draw, ably handled by Russell Swanborough, brought relief – and an additional prize of a new Spitfire DVD donated by Clive King. One of the members, who obviously retained some vague recollection of the events of the day summed up simply late in the afternoon as: "It was a good One!" This year is off to a good start...The Committee wishes all members and spouses everything of the best for 2019.

MEMBERS' GREETINGS:

Along with apologies for January Lunch came many New Year greetings and good wishes from members, locally and abroad. Dirk Ackerman in Wilderness, Ron Hammon in Napier, Mike Brown in Stellenbosch, Clive King, Philip Weyers in Australia, Tony Hampson-Tindale in the Himalayas, Mark Elder, Bruce Prescott in Howick, Rob Tannahill in Hermanus, Piet Visser in Magaliesburg, Derrick Page in Bloubergstrand, Geoff Quick in Tanzania, David Sleeman in Plymouth, Lawrence Milner, Ivan Erasmus in Port Alfred, and Priscilla Henwood in Somerset West, who wrote: "Thank you as always for your Christmas greetings. I am taking the liberty of sending you my 'Christmas story'. It comes with very many good wishes for all you do for the RAF Club in Johannesburg. Wish I could come to your meetings! Best wishes, From Priscilla". (we will attach her letter as a separate PDF for you to read)

OBITUARY:

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT ALWIN MAXWELL STONES "MAX" ELDER RAF, who has died on 11 December 2018, aged 96, was born in Lincoln, UK, in 1922. The family later moved to India, then part of the great British Empire, on which the sun was soon to set.... On the outbreak of the War, Max joined the Madras Guards Regiment and on 1 April 1940 (a significant date!) aged just 18, he obtained his PPL at Meenambakum,

Madras. In November that year he joined the RAF but was initially disappointed in his aspiration to qualify for pilot's "Wings" in being Coursed as Air Observer/Gunner. He was posted to 5 Squadron (Audax) Peshawar, N.W Frontier and then as Navigator in Coastal Command, Madras. Finally, he was at last accepted and qualified as a pilot.

In 1942 Max went to Ambala where he did his OTU (Operational Training Unit) on Vultee Vengeance dive-bombers and was posted to 110 Squadron in the Arakan. The Japanese were pushing up the east side of Burma, intending to invade India. Then in 1943 Max was told by the MO that he was suffering from Vascular Syndrome which is a problem factor in dive-bombing, but he refused to accept the information. He was then summoned to Air HQ Delhi where he was interviewed and appointed PA to Air Marshal Sir Guy Garrod KCB. OBE. MC. DFC. Deputy Air Commander in Chief of the whole of South East Asia Air Command, including the US Army Air Force. In January 1944, Max married Colleen and in February, Lord Mountbatten moved JIQ to Kandy, Ceylon and the RAF also moved down. Then in August 1944 with some help from Sir Guy, Max got back into Squadron life again as Adjutant of 273 Squadron (Spits) in the Arakan. There he was dropped short together with his colleagues in the Ramree Island invasion. About a dozen could not swim and were carrying heavy kit, but they all got to shore, some were carried! They went on to the Rangoon landings, but the Japanese had moved out to the North East of the city and there was no resistance. Lord Louis Mountbatten allowed him to hitch a lift from Chittagong, 19.09.1944, in his personal DC-3, "Sister Ann", captained by Flt Lt Howard Busfield, to New Delhi in order to be with his wife at the birth of his son on 21.09.1944. Max hitched a lift back to Chittagong the next day. Incidentally, "Sister Ann" crashed on the coast of China in the winter of 1946. Air Vice Marshal Goddard was on the Aircraft. He had dreamt about the whole affair and wrote a great book about his experience. A film was also made called: "The Night My Number Came Up".

In 1945 Max was posted to 681 PRU Squadron, Spitfires, in Rangoon. On August 15 the Japanese surrendered after the atomic bombs were dropped. He was posted to Rangoon HQ and stationed at Don Muang Airport, Bangkok, helping with repatriation of POW's to Calcutta Hospitals. Then Max (and family) was repatriated to Andover and joined a team selling surplus aircraft all over the world. In 1947, he was demobbed and sailed to South Africa arriving in October. He looked in wonder at Cape Town - and stayed. In 1955 the family moved to Johannesburg, where Max got back into commercial flying. A high point of his commercial career was flying his Aero Commander from the US, breaking the (then) embargo and was locked up in a Cairo gaol. He bluffed his way out, with his aircraft, and flew back to SA.

Max was a proud member of the Burma Star Association and attended all their functions and reunions until the final Lunch attended by the five survivors, including Stan Smith, also of RAFOC, at the Rivonia Country Club. He likewise attended every RAFOC Lunch until health issues intervened – his eyesight deteriorated, but Max was fiercely independent and insisted on driving himself to and from his Sandhurst home until almost every "sortie" ended in a collision of one sort or another and Max was obliged to yield to family pressure...His adventures in getting to and from Inanda Club became legendary, and the source of much hilarity to his fellows. He thoroughly enjoyed the camaraderie and repartee, and loved a good joke, as well as reminiscing about his wartime experiences with his peers. Another of our dwindling band of "old and bold" World War 2 Veterans has "slipped the surly bonds of earth." We salute his memory, and We Will Remember Him!

BAILEY BRIDGE: WON'T YOU COME HOME, BILL BAILEY?

The Bailey Bridge was the brainchild of Donald C. Bailey (later Sir Donald, knighted in 1946) who was a civilian Civil Engineer working for the British Army at the Experimental Bridge Establishment (EBE) of the Royal Engineers, experimenting and testing portable assault bridges developed from those used in the First World War; notably the Inglis type (Marks 1 to 3). He started work at EBE's barracks in Christchurch, Dorset in 1928, and at one stage he must have wondered whether he had done the right thing as the defence cuts of the early 1930's trimmed down his compliment of staff to seventeen (14 in the workshop, one draughtsman, a R.E. officer and himself). There was even a Treasury memo written entitled "Is Mr. Bailey really necessary?"

Well history has proven that he most certainly was, as the bridges that carried his name also carried the heavy military hardware that won the War. He sketched the original design for the Bailey Bridge on the back of an envelope as he was being driven to a meeting of Royal Engineers to debate the failure of existing portable bridges. When he was knighted by the late King George VI in 1946, the year after the war ended, and a toast was proposed to him, he said, "I think the toast should be to the men who put the Bailey Bridges up."

General Dwight D Eisenhower considered that the 3 most important keys to victory were radar, the long-range heavy bomber and the Bailey bridge...

There are bespoke manufacturers around the world that specialise in manufacturing and erecting Bailey Bridges – “Mabey Bridge Limited, UK” is one such company and they market their Logistic Support Bridge (LSB) system (using components from their Compact 200 range), which is based on the concept of the Bailey Bridge (Compact 100 in Mabey parlance) but has been brought up to date with an increase in depth to 7 feet and the use of steels with higher yield stresses than were used previously, which thus increase the strength as well as reduce the self-weight of a bridge.

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has stocks of Bailey bridging that are running seriously low, which means that the bridge building programme for assisting rural communities in disaster support or in bettering their communication could be under threat. With this in mind Mabey Bridge (now represented in South Africa by ECM Technologies) gave a presentation at the 10th Defence Symposium held on 15th September 2016 at the CSIR International Convention Centre entitled “Mabey Logistic Support Bridge: Essential Military Capability in Peace and War”.

<http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/bridge-wars-story-bailey-bridge>

<https://www.mabey.com/int/en/about-us/history-and-heritage/our-heritage>

WING COMMANDER IONNIS AGORASTOS “JOHNNY” PLAGIS, DSO, DFC & Bar,

RAF (1919 – 1974) was a Southern Rhodesian flying ace in the Royal Air Force (RAF) during the Second World War, noted especially for his part in the defence of Malta during 1942. The son of Greek immigrants, he was accepted by recruiters only after Greece joined the Allies in late 1940. Following spells with No. 65 Squadron and No. 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron, he joined No. 249 (Gold Coast) Squadron in Malta in March 1942. Flying Spitfire Mk Vs, Plagis was part of the multinational group of Allied pilots that successfully defended the strategically important island against numerically superior Axis forces over the next few months. Flying with No. 185 Squadron from early June, he was withdrawn to England in early July 1942.

After a spell as an instructor in the UK, Plagis returned to action in September 1943 as commander of No. 64 Squadron, flying Spitfire Mk Vc's over northern France. He took command of No. 126 (Persian Gulf) Squadron in June 1944, and led many attacks on German positions during the invasion of France and the campaign that followed; he was shot down over Arnhem during Operation Market Garden, but only lightly wounded. After converting to Mustang III's, he commanded a wing based at RAF Bentwaters that supported bombing missions. He finished the war with the rank of Squadron Leader and remained with the RAF afterwards, operating Gloster Meteors at the head of No. 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron.

Plagis was the top-scoring Southern Rhodesian ace of the war, and the highest-scoring ace of Greek origin, with 16 confirmed aerial victories, including 11 over Malta. Awarded the Distinguished Service Order and other medals, he was also one of Rhodesia's most decorated veterans. (See “Aces High”) The Southern Rhodesian capital, Salisbury, honoured his wartime contributions by naming a street in its northern Alexandra Park neighbourhood after him. On his return home after retiring from the RAF with the rank of Wing Commander in 1948, he set up home at 1 John Plagis Avenue, opened a bottle store bearing his name, and was a director of several companies, including Central African Airways in the 1960s. He contested the Salisbury City constituency in the 1962 general election, running for the Rhodesian Front, but failed to win. He died in 1974, aged just 55.

An unexpected call from a family member who is researching the family history brought great memories of “Johnny”. We hope to see Jill Plagis at a Ladies Lunch soon.

CLIPPED, CROPPED and CLAPPED:

Two Spitfires flown by Plagis have confused many researchers and aviation enthusiasts for years. With the photos and information published in this book, “**Greeks in Foreign Cockpits**” the authors believe they have managed to solve the mystery. Plagis was posted to No. 64 Squadron on March 4, 1943 and began flying with his new squadron from April 6 onwards. Although he mostly flew SH-D/AA927, he was soon assigned a new fighter, Spitfire Mk.Vb SH-B/BL829. He flew it until the middle of September and it wore the usual 'KAY' along with his eleven Malta kills. This fighter was a standard Spitfire Mk.Vb with the elliptical 'B' wing. It was an early Mk.Vb, having the rectangular rear-view mirror as well as an external armoured windscreen. The aircraft did not carry the nose art on its starboard side. John didn't claim any kills on this aircraft. The last entry of his logbook listing BL829 is September 16, 1943. Four days later he flew SH-B again, according to his logbook, but this time

BL734 was clearly written in the ORB of No. 64 Squadron. This time his new personal fighter is a Spitfire Mk.Vb LF/LR. On September 18, No. 64 Squadron exchanged their sixteen 'kites' with the ones of No. 118 Squadron. The latter unit was equipped with the Spitfire Mk.Vb LF/LR. This variant had reduced diameter supercharger impeller blades on the Merlin for optimum performance at lower altitudes and the wingtips were removed and replaced by short fairings to improve their rate of roll. The LF (Low altitude Fighter) designation referred to the engine performance and the LR (Long Range) to their ability to carry an external 'Slipper' fuel tank under the belly. Less than a dozen Spitfires were actually built as LF.Vs. These came in the very last batches of Mk.Vc Trop from Westland. All LF.Vbs, and virtually all LF.VCs were conversions from regular, often well worn, Mk.Vs. This led to them being referred to as **clipped** (the wings), **cropped** (the supercharger) and **clapped** (from the English expression 'clapped out' meaning extremely tired or worn out). The Spitfires were delivered with elliptical wingtips, although four of them, Plagis' BL734 was almost certainly one of them, considering he was the A' flight commander, had clipped wingtips. In the No. 64 ORB it's recorded that, for an unknown reason, although pilots were happy with their new fighter's performance, they hoped not to have to clip their wingtips, but instead return the four clipped aircraft to their full wingspan. Plagis flew BL734 from September 21, 1943, until June 17, 1944. While at the controls 'Johnny Spitfire' claimed three more kills which were later painted on the aircraft alongside 'KAY'. Also, his and his squadron mates' aircraft were later built Mk.Vbs as stated above, so were fitted with the circular rear view mirror and internal armoured windscreen. All of the above clears any doubt about the famous 'B' he flew and often characterized as a Malta 'Spit' serialised as BR329, despite the fact that no record of BR329 ever operated over the island. The real BR329 was a Spitfire Mk.VI and was flown by No. 421 and 124 Squadrons, but it was lost with F/S Eric J. 'Chunky' Phelps. *(Copyright Gaetan Marie)*

METEOR SUNSET:

A special event took place at **Bruntingthorpe Aerodrome** in Leicestershire on Saturday 5th January 2019. **Gloster Meteor NF-11 WM167**, the world's last Night Fighter version of the Meteor still flying, touched down for the last time after a short flight from Coventry in the capable hands of pilot **Dan Griffith**, who has flown this aircraft on the air show circuit over the years. Dan is a former RAF Harrier pilot, and while serving with the RAF was on exchange with the United States Air force at Edwards Air Force base as a test pilot. During his long career, Dan has flown over 400 types of aircraft and is well known around the air shows as a display pilot. WM167 was one of a number of Meteors built at Coventry in the early 1950s. It was appropriate that after she retired from RAF service she should be based at Coventry airport for a number of years as part of the Classic Air Force. Now at her new home at Bruntingthorpe, WM167, is in the care of the Classic British Jets Collection and will be kept in ground-running condition with her airworthy engines probably exported to the USA in support of another Meteor sold from the same collection last year.

ROLLS ROYCE ALL ELECTRIC:

Power systems provider Rolls-Royce is leading a highly specialised challenge of building the world's fastest all-electric aircraft, which is planned to take flight in 2020 on the Welsh coastline. The zero-emissions plane is expected to travel at a target speed of more than 300 miles per hour (mph), or more than 480 km/h, for more than 200 miles – for example, London to Paris, Nairobi to Mombasa, or Johannesburg to Durban. The aircraft will consist of three lightweight electric motors, generating 750 kW.

Rolls-Royce, in partnership with ElectroFlight and YASA, has already started on the development of the single-passenger, 24 ft wingspan aircraft, which has a total anticipated development time of 24 months up to 2020. The Acceleration of Flight initiative, which the aircraft forms part of, is the company's bid to build, test and commercialise a specially designed aircraft powered entirely by megawatts. The aircraft will be subject to test environments this year, before going for gold in 2020 to break the current speed record for an all-electric plane, which was set by Siemens in 2017 at 210 mph *(Cremer Media via Bruce Prescott)*

FIRST WORLD WAR: MBALA (ABERCORN) ZAMBIA:

The Last formal "Act of Surrender" took place not in Europe, but in (then) **Northern Rhodesia**.... After the signing of the Armistice of World War I on November 11, 1918, it took three days for German forces in East Africa to learn of the end of the war. On November 14th, German **General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck** was delivered a telegraph informing him of the end of hostilities and was ordered by British forces to march north to the town of Abercorn to

formally surrender his forces. A memorial in Abercorn, modern-day **Mbala**, marks the rough location where the German forces laid down their arms. The small monument, situated on a small grassy circle in the middle of a roundabout in the centre of town, features two plaques commemorating the historic event. During the war, General von Lettow-Vorbeck had led an effective guerrilla campaign to keep British forces occupied and away from the front lines in Europe. At the end of the war, his forces entered the British colony of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and captured the town of **Kasama**. There, the General finally learned of the armistice that had been signed in Europe three days prior. This event is marked by the **Chambeshi Monument** in Kasama. General von Lettow-Vorbeck was the only German Field Commander undefeated on the battlefield. His men were accordingly permitted to “lay down their arms” as opposed to surrendering them, a tribute to a doughty enemy. The British command then ordered General von Lettow-Vorbeck to march his forces to Abercorn, approximately 155 miles to the north, near the border of German East Africa (modern-day Tanzania). On November 25, 1918, a formal surrender Parade was held in Abercorn, marking the end of the Great War in Africa. Following the surrender, the German forces were directed to throw their weapons into the nearby Lake Chila, and then returned to German East Africa. German weapons remain to this day at the bottom of the lake. Examples of some of the weaponry recovered from the lake can be seen in the nearby Moto Moto Museum.

NEXT FUNCTION:

FEBRUARY ORDINARY LUNCH this will be on **Friday 1 February 2019, 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers.**

Speaker to be confirmed – negotiations in progress...

NB Lunch Fees still: **R200 pp**. If paying EFT, please use your “**Name + Lunch**” as “reference.” NEDBANK Melrose Arch, Branch **19 66 05** Account **19 66 278 063**

All bookings please to bookings@rafoc.org or if you do not have access to e-mail:

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Look forward to seeing you there!

Cheers,

Bruce