



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2019

FEBRUARY LUNCH:

The pressures of the new business year are starting to become apparent with some last-minute apologies, and the traffic did not help either.... This month's lunch was attended by 35 members and guests. Sadly **John Martin** was not able to attend as he is back in hospital. However, a very palatable lunch of Seared Duck Starter, followed by Battered Hake on Mash accompanied by a selection of wines was enjoyed by all who did take their seats. Our Guest speaker, **Rob Milne** is a noted historian and author who conducts tours of the Anglo Boer War sites in the Magaliesberg region. His talk entitled "**Trenchard and Dwarsvlei**", gave a gripping account of the battle that took place alongside the present road to Hekpoort, and the near-fatal wounding of Trenchard, then a Captain in the Royal Scots Fusiliers. As a result of his injuries, he lost a lung, was partially paralysed and returned to Great Britain. On medical advice Trenchard travelled to Switzerland to recuperate and boredom saw him taking up bobsleighting. After a heavy crash, Trenchard found that his paralysis was gone and that he could walk unaided. Following further recuperation, Trenchard returned to active service in South Africa. In Summer 1912, Trenchard learned to fly and gained his aviator's certificate (No. 270) on 31 July flying a Henri Farman biplane of the Sopwith School of Flying at Brooklands, and subsequently appointed second in command of the Central Flying School. He served as the commander of the Royal Flying Corps in France from 1915 to 1917 and in 1918, he briefly served as the first Chief of the Air Staff before taking up command of the newly independent RAF in France. Returning as CAS under Churchill in 1919, Trenchard spent the following decade securing the future of the Royal Air Force. He was a staunch defender of the RAF in his later years and is recognized as one of the early advocates of strategic bombing. Lunch drew to a close with the raffle, (with an extra prize donated by **Willie Simon**), run with aplomb by **Russell Swanborough**.

NEW MEMORIAL MUSEUM OPENS AT BIGGIN HILL:

In early February 2019, a new museum will open at Biggin Hill in Bromley, south London. Adjoining the historic Chapel, it has taken 16 months to build at a cost of around £5 million (£2 million of which came from a Heritage Lottery grant). Several hundred aircrew were stationed at RAF Biggin Hill during WWII but managed, against desperate odds, to bring down nearly 1400 Luftwaffe aircraft during the Battle of Britain in 1940. That contribution, which not only blocked Hitler's planned invasion but laid the ground for his eventual defeat, was one of the most pivotal of the entire war. Their victory led Winston Churchill to describe Biggin Hill as "the strongest link" in his line of defence between continental Europe and London. The museum has been given, among other things, two drawers full of undeveloped negatives which had been acquired by a local historian when the RAF left Biggin Hill in 1992. They date back to the 1920's, when Biggin Hill was just a grass airstrip, part of the London Air Defence Area that was established in 1917 in response to Zeppelin bombing attacks on the City. Towards the end of the

exhibition space, the architects have created a Sky Room, essentially a white box with a lightwell. It is primarily designed to give visitors a moment of quiet before they enter the chapel after the intense stories of the preceding rooms. *(Sent in via David Sleeman)*

OBITUARY

WING COMMANDER JOHN FRANCIS DURHAM "TIM" ELKINGTON RAF, who has died aged 98, flew during the Battle of Britain, and was one of the last surviving aircrew known as "The Few". Best estimate is that there are now only 6 survivors. He was commissioned on 14 July 1940 and joined No. 1 Squadron RAF at RAF Northolt a day later and flew Hawker Hurricanes during the Battle of Britain. His first confirmed "kill" came on 15 August 1940, downing a Messerschmitt Bf 109. A day later he was shot down and wounded on 16 August 1940 (research shows that he was shot down by Helmut Wick). After recuperating at the Royal West Sussex Hospital at Chichester he rejoined No. 1 Squadron on 1 October 1940 at RAF Wittering. On 12 August 1941, 134 Squadron embarked on HMS Argus and took off from the carrier on 7 September for an airfield near Murmansk. Until mid-October 1941 Elkington took part in escorting bombers and also trained Russian pilots to fly the Hurricane. Returning from Russia in 1942 he joined the Merchant Ship Fighter Unit (MSFU) at RAF Speke until August 1942. After various postings he arrived at RAF Tangmere, from where he was posted to No. 67 Squadron RAF at Alipore, Calcutta in December 1943. When the tour expired, Elkington spent three years commanding AFDU at RAF Amarda Road and he returned home in October 1946. He remained in the RAF and retired in 1975, setting up an art and picture-framing business.

LEST WE FORGET....

Within a year of the Armistice whose centenary was commemorated on 11th November 2018, the victorious Allied powers had imposed upon Germany the **Treaty of Versailles**. That its punitive terms helped to lay the foundations of the Second World War is now widely believed among historians. Fewer people predicted that outcome at the time, but among them were **JC Smuts**, soon to replace Louis Botha as South African prime minister, and **John Maynard Keynes**, the British economist. His book "The Economic Consequences of the Peace" made him a global celebrity, but it was not until the end of the Second World War that his ideas were followed with the introduction of the Marshall Plan to rebuild the devastated German and other European economies with American money. Smuts signed the treaty because he welcomed the promised destruction of Prussian militarism and the establishment of the League of Nations, and because he wanted formally to close the war. But he wrote to the British prime minister, David Lloyd George, and the American president, Woodrow Wilson, warning them that "under this treaty Europe will know no peace". In the election in 1928, Hitler's Nazi party won just 810 000 votes and 12 seats in the Reichstag. But Hitler was able to exploit the depression (and unemployment) just as he had exploited hyperinflation. In the 1930 election the Nazis won 6.4 million votes and 107 seats and had grown from the smallest to the second largest party in the Reichstag. In January 1933 Hitler became Chancellor. His first military success was the occupation of the Rhineland in 1936. Emboldened, Hitler soon swallowed up Austria and Czechoslovakia, supposedly to unite with their homeland all the ethnic Germans excluded from it by Versailles. Wrote Keynes: "In the great events of man's history, in the unwinding of the complex fates of nations, Justice is not so simple. And if it were, nations are not authorised, by religion or by natural morals, to visit on the children of their enemies the misdoings of parents or of rulers."

(John Kane-Berman on 5 November 2018, sent in via Jim Powell)

GOTHS AND VANDALS:

Police have launched an investigation after white paint was thrown over a war memorial and a statue of Sir Winston Churchill in late January. Britain's last surviving Dambuster has criticised the "mindless vandalism" of white paint being thrown over the Bomber Command Memorial as it emerged it marks the fourth time in six years that the memorial in London's Green Park had been sabotaged,

the RAF Benevolent Fund said. Former Dambuster Squadron Leader George “Johnny” Johnson, 97, said: “What a disgrace – such mindless vandalism. How disrespectful to the nearly 58,000 people who gave their lives so that these thugs have the freedom to carry out such acts. I hope they are caught soon, and suitably punished.” Bomber Command veteran Air Commodore Charles Clarke, who was imprisoned in the Nazis’ Stalag Luft III, called the act “disgraceful and mindless”, adding it “did not achieve anything”.

INDIAN WAR MEMORIAL:

The memorial commemorates the sacrifices of Indian auxiliaries who lost their lives during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Erected on the Observatory Ridge, one of the highest points in Johannesburg, it is the oldest war memorial in the City, unveiled on 31 October 1902, five months after peace was declared. In total some 9 000 men were brought out from India to bolster the British forces. They took up non-combatant functions as stretcher-bearers, farriers (‘nalbands’), veterinary assistants, grooms, orderlies, ammunition and water carriers and washermen. An Indian detachment staffed a large remount camp in the valley below the memorial site, in what is now Bezuidenhout Park. Up to 4 000 horses could be accommodated at Bezuidenhout Valley’s large central remount station. Indian troops camped in the valley on the south side of the ridge on which the Indian Monument was constructed. The campsite, in what was to become Observatory Park, was chosen mainly for its abundant water – needed by both men and horses – supplied by natural springs. The monument was initiated in the first flush of victory, during a surge of patriotic feeling which followed the end of the war. It was unveiled by Hon. N.G. Lyttleton, the officer commanding the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies. Funding came partly from public subscriptions, with contributions from the local Indian community.

DRONES – GATWICK AND HEATHROW:

The increasing availability of drones has finally prompted two major international airports, the U.K.’s Heathrow and Gatwick, to procure anti-drone systems. While these moves may signal a boon for counter-drone technology, they also underscore the danger of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) use in restricted air space. Canada has recently released new, stricter guidelines for commercial drone use; the U.S., the EU and China also have regulations in place. Since 2017, at least three drone-plane collisions have been reported, and there have been numerous instances of near misses. Gatwick suffered a spate of drone sightings in a three-day period leading up to the 2018 Christmas holiday, according to Reuters. The airport cancelled more than 1,000 flights in late December, impacting 140,000 air travelers. The local police force reported UAV sightings from 115 witnesses, including airport staff, police officers and a pilot. The U.K. military – members of the Royal Air Force – deployed anti-drone technology during the disruption. Two people were arrested on December 22 for “criminal use of drones” but released without charge. Heathrow and Gatwick announced they will be investing millions of pounds in anti-drone systems, which can detect and jam communications between a UAV and its operator. Globally, the anti-drone market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28.8% over the next five years, from \$499 million in 2018 to \$2,276 million by 2024,

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE:

The poisoning of the Russian former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia last Spring was a low point in relations between London and Moscow. To international observers, how and why the UK took the episode so seriously was of great interest. The events, however, were not isolated — in the last decade, Russia has actively sought to antagonize and unsuccessfully undermine Europe’s greatest military power. In the skies above and around Britain, Russian aircraft regularly have to be escorted out of the UK’s area of interest, often anything from 40 to 100 nautical miles from the coast. In November, Gen. Mark Carleton-Smith, head of the British Army, warned that Vladimir Putin’s Russia presents a greater threat to British national interests than Daesh terrorists. Last year, 2018, was the busiest in a decade for quick reaction alert (QRA) missions by the Royal Air Force (RAF) which has

been forced to intercept Russian military aircraft more than 80 times. Bombers from Russia approaching the UK are routinely intercepted after failing to respond to air traffic control in brazen attempts to threaten the UK, and ergo NATO. Disturbingly, they are also making international airspace more dangerous to civilian aircraft. The threat, increasingly made by long-range Blackjack bombers and submarines lurking in the North Sea, is being met by rapid reaction teams at some of the UK's air force bases. RAF Lossiemouth, arguably one its busiest, has had to supplement its force with nine submarine-hunting P-8 Poseidon spy planes. Meanwhile, last November, HMS St. Albans escorted a Russian cruiser through the English Channel as it was returning from the Mediterranean.

A CENTENARY OF OPERATIONS (REVIEW):

A magnificent copy signed by both the author **Michael Napier** and **Cookie Cookson**, arrived here at Haraka House courtesy of Jon Adams at the end of December. I have read quite a lot of Michael's work but was unaware of this compendium. The sub-title aptly describes the content. It is an *Operational* history of the RAF and the first point that hits home is just how very many operations the Service has been involved in, and indeed on occasion led, over the last century. I would suggest far more than the average civilian or indeed, now, service person appreciates. That many of these campaigns actually kept the RAF independent due to its efficiency is perhaps food for thought with today's financial constraints in mind. I was delighted to see that, with certain RAFOC members' assistance, Jan Smuts has been given his proper place in our history, underlying the fact that it wasn't all down to Trenchard, whose biography incidentally was issued to every Cranwell Flight Cadet. Hence "Work hard, Play hard, Trenchard! (The b*stard)" Getting stuck in to the First World War, the author brings home important points, including that RAF Operations were in many theatres beyond the Western front. In addition the overwhelming significance of the two-seater sorties in support of the Army for reconnaissance and artillery co-operation is given proper recognition. Indeed, beyond that war and in the colonial policing activity, it was these aircraft and crews that showed the government that Air Power was extremely cost effective. It could well be argued that this fact kept the RAF independent. The book continues in this well thought out approach with the campaigns and the individual squadron involvements telling the RAF's story of service to the Nation from the "front end" right up to date. I thoroughly recommend this work for the coffee table and, once read, for perusal from time to time, to refresh appreciation of a Century's work well done.

(Review by Geoff Quick, Tanzania)

RED ARROWS:

Flt Lt Sean Cunningham, 35, was killed at RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire on November 8th 2011 after he was accidentally ejected from his Hawk T1 aircraft while it was on the ground. Flt Lt Cunningham, who was born in South Africa and grew up in Coventry, was propelled 220ft in the air from the cockpit of the plane. A coroner has described a safety pin on an ejection seat that threw a Red Arrows pilot to his death as "entirely useless" and criticised its manufacturer for failing to warn the RAF of the defect. The court heard that testing of the Mk.10 Martin-Baker seat showed it was still possible to insert a safety pin into the seat even when it was in an unsafe position. The failures associated with the ejection handle should not have proved fatal as Flt Lt Cunningham should have been saved by his parachute. However, Mr Fisher told the hearing that the main chute failed to deploy because a nut and bolt had been fastened too tightly. In February 2018, after protracted legal action, Martin-Baker Aircraft admitted failing to ensure the safety of non-employees at a hearing into Cunningham's death, and was fined £1.1m, having already agreed to pay £550,000 in prosecution costs.

NEXT FUNCTION:

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING - Friday 1 March 2019, 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers.

As is customary, there will be no speaker or guests at the AGM, as this is the opportunity for Members to review the management and health of the Club and elect the Committee of their choice.

In accordance with Club Rules, Motions or Proposals will not be accepted from the floor at the AGM. Any Member wishing to raise a subject at the AGM is requested to notify the Secretary in good time, at least 14 days before the meeting.

Lunch Fees: R200 pp. If paying EFT please use your "Name + Lunch" as "reference"
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Look forward to seeing you there!

Bruce.