



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2020

JANUARY LUNCH

Forty members and guests congregated in the Gala Room on a warm Friday afternoon for the first lunch of 2020. Silvasale provided a Caprese Salad Starter followed by Rare Roast Beef with Seasonal vegetables. The Chairman introduced the Guest Speaker, Wilfred Mole, of Sandstone Estates (Pty) Ltd. This is a large commercial agricultural enterprise covering over 7,000 hectares (17,000 acres), located on the border with Lesotho in South Africa's Eastern Free State province, close to the Maluti Mountains. The nearest town is Ficksburg. It is also a hub of transport preservation with a unique collection of Afrikander oxen and wagons, a narrow-gauge railway, steam locomotives and rolling stock, steam traction engines, vintage and veteran tractors and military vehicles - and periodically, vintage and veteran aircraft. Wilf, "Baas van die Plaas" is an entrepreneur, successful businessman and commercial farmer, and preservationist of international standing, who gave us a fascinating, off the record, first hand insight into how Sandstone had come into being and developed into the unique, showpiece operation it is today. You can visit this showpiece at <https://www.sandstone-estates.com/> Jon Adams deputised for Russell and ran the raffle and draw to round off the afternoon, with the happy winners carrying off the wines and Scotch.

OBITUARIES

"THE FEW": The death in November 2019 of Battle of Britain veteran **Flight Lieutenant Maurice Mouldson**, at the age of 101, drew attention to the survivors of "The Few." A popular misconception is that the Battle of Britain was won by a few hundred dashing Spitfire pilots, whereas almost 3,000 men qualified for the 'Battle of Britain' clasp to the 1939-45 Star, the mark of a participant in the Battle. Eighty years after the Battle of Britain, with Mouldson's death, just 3 of these 2,936 men remain with us - The surviving trio are **Flt Lt William Clark** - 100, **Wing Commander Paul Farnes** - 101, and **Flying Officer John Hemingway** – 100, truly now 'The Few'. Since 1943, the deeds of these incredible men have been commemorated in an annual Service of Thanksgiving and Rededication, the first in St Paul's Cathedral and then from 1944 in Westminster Abbey. This service, organised by the RAF Ceremonial Office, follows a similar format today to that of over 70 years ago. The Roll of Honour is paraded through the Abbey, carried by a serving RAF fighter pilot. The Roll contains the names of 1,497 pilots and aircrew killed or mortally wounded during the Battle. Illuminated by Daisy Alcock, one of the greatest calligraphers of her century, the original work was paid for by Captain Bruce Ingram, proprietor of The London Illustrated News. "In the hearts of the British people there will always be a special place for The Few - the young men from Britain, the Commonwealth and Allied Countries - who fought and won the Battle of Britain in 1940. Without their courage, skill and determination in the face of fearful odds, who can tell what the final outcome of the

War might have been. Many of them gave their lives, young lives which held so much promise for the future. They will always be remembered.” (*Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother*)

WARRANT OFFICER PETER POTTER RAF, who has died aged 94, served in the RAF to the end of the war and subsequently became a renowned mental nurse, fire-fighter and businessman. In November 1944, then aged 19, he flew as rear gunner in a Lancaster bomber on a mission to lay mines in the Kiel Canal in northern Germany. RAF aircrews used to call mine-laying of this kind “gardening” a euphemism that belies the extreme danger and risks involved. The Lancaster had to fly at very low level to ensure the mines entered the water at the correct angle to prevent them from breaking apart. The intensity of the hostile fire turned night into day, and Potter knew that he and his crew had been exceptionally lucky not to have been shot down by what he later described as “intense and horrendous flak from every calibre of weapon.” When the aircraft got back to Wickenby the ground crew counted the number of holes in the fuselage: it had taken 54 hits. That mission was the 24th of Potter’s operational tour, which ended in December 1944. A great raconteur with a handlebar moustache, Potter enjoyed the attention he received in his later years as he attended RAF reunions and memorial services. He was outspoken in his defence of Arthur “Bomber” Harris and his fellow aircrew in Bomber Command. He believed they had been unjustly criticised after the devastating raids on Dresden in February 1945. “Our efforts before that had surely been an enormous help in turning the war. It is disgraceful that it took so long for Bomber Command to get any recognition for their sacrifice,” he said.

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT PROFESSOR BRIAN TIERNEY DFC AND BAR RAF, who has died aged 97, was a Catholic scholar who challenged the Church on Papal infallibility after his wartime service. Tierney enlisted in the Royal Air Force in July 1941 and served in Bomber Command until 1946, attaining the rank of Flight Lieutenant. He trained as an air navigator, partly in the U.S. at an astronavigation school conducted by Pan American Airways in Miami. After returning to England, he completed a tour of thirty missions flying over Europe in Wellington bombers. He served for a year as a navigation instructor and then returned to operational flying and completed a second tour of sixty missions on Mosquitoes with 105 Squadron of the elite Pathfinder Force. Tierney was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar for his RAF service. In 1946, Tierney was accepted as a student at Pembroke College, Cambridge. Tierney completed a Ph.D. thesis in 1951 and joined the faculty of The Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. and served as Instructor, Assistant Professor, and Associate Professor in the History Department until 1959 when he was appointed Professor of Medieval History at Cornell University. He retired as Bowmar Professor Emeritus in 1992.

COMMANDER JOHN LORIMER RN, who has died aged 97, was a sailor who in his midget submarine helped to put the mighty German battleship Tirpitz out of action; his war was 18 months of training, two weeks of operations and two years as a prisoner of war, including six months of solitary confinement. His two weeks’ operations were in X-6, a midget submarine commanded by Lieutenant Donald Cameron and crewed by Lorimer, Sub-Lieutenant Dick Kendall and Engine Room Artificer Edmund Goddard, who set out on a suicidal mission to sink the pride of the Germany navy. Operation Source, as it was known, began on 11 September 1943, when six large submarines, each with an X-craft in tow, crept out of Loch Cairnbawn and headed for Kaafjord in Arctic Norway: their target was the German battleship Tirpitz, which was threatening the convoys to Russia. Lorimer had joined the RNVR as soon as he could, and – “young, 19, and stupid” – he volunteered for special and hazardous duty without knowing that this involved an arduous training programme. Besides learning how to operate the four-man midget submarines, known as X-craft, he also had to train to trek great distances, in case he had to take the mountainous trail to Sweden after the operation. “There was an awful lot we didn’t know, such as the dangers of diving to 100ft with pure oxygen, which kills you in half a minute,” he recalled. “This all had to be discovered by experimentation, and there were casualties. But that’s war.”

WING COMMANDER GAVIN RICHARDSON RAF, who died suddenly in September 2019 aged 52, was a vastly experienced naval helicopter aviator, with meticulous attention to detail and a gift for

teaching future generations of aviators, who was unusual in having worn the uniform of all three armed services. His main career was in the Royal Navy, where he was an observer (or navigator) and also specialised in anti-submarine warfare. He was awarded his wings at Royal Naval Air Station, Culdrose in March 1993. Embarked in the aircraft carrier Ark Royal, he served in the peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, and thereafter 770 Search and Rescue Squadron. His professionalism in the air marked him out to become an instructor, and in his subsequent appointments Richardson mentored the next generation of aircrew on the Sea Kings of 810 Naval Air Squadron and the Merlins of 824 Squadron. He deployed operationally in the South Atlantic, Caribbean and Afghanistan. Richardson was an Army cadet before joining the Navy in January 1991. Retiring to Waddington in Lincolnshire, as a civil servant at RAF Cranwell he taught navigation and aviation instrumentation. Invited to join the RAF as a Wing Commander, Richardson thus became one of the very few people to have been in all three services. He served as part of the intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance team (ISTAR) as a full-time reservist at RAF Waddington, where he was responsible for some 250 training courses.

NEW YEAR GREETINGS to all at RAFOC have been received from Derrick Page, Rob Tannahill, Jean-Michel Girard, Stan Smith, Priscilla Henwood, and Rick Peacock-Edwards. Ernie Todd, now back in UK writes, inter alia: "Well Bruce, here we go again, wishing each other a better New Year than the last one, hoping, hoping. Thank you kindly for your mail and good wishes, they are surely reciprocated to all the stalwart RAFOC members (and friends). We find ourselves wishing once more and hoping so hard this time, for the coming year to be a great improvement on the preceding 365 days...I think of all my good friends in my "Homeland" and pray for them and for the whole country".

SANDF OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS..... The part-time or Reserve Force component of the SA National Defence Force (SANDF) is being "South Africanised" to cater for four defined capabilities. These are, according to SA Army Reserves Chief Brigadier General Gerhard Kamffer, "Conventional"; "Immediately Deployable"; "Specialist" and "Mzansi Home Guard". In response to a Defence Web enquiry, Kamffer pointed out that "a classic Western orientated reserve service system, where reserves predominantly serve on a part-time basis, is not deemed to be aligned to current socio-economic conditions in South Africa." In these dark days of unemployment and job losses, Mzansi Home Guard will provide new opportunity for us "old and bold" RAFOC members".

GREETINGS FROM ABU DHABI:



Wishing you a wonderful start to the next decade. Happy 2020 to you all from us in Abu Dhabi. The photo is from our New Year celebration! Like many of you, 2019 was a busy year that seemed to rush by in a flash. Work at the Embassy was exhausting at times; the Emirati military do have a stunning grasp of the term bureaucracy. That said, on the whole, the lifestyle here in the UAE and the warm weather makes up for the odd frustration. SMac is doing well albeit both of us needing the warm weather to assist with ageing bones! What has been very clear is that it is definitely time to depart from the RAF, despite now being able to grow a beard! It has been fun but after 38 years, it's time to look for a new challenge out of uniform. After all, SMac does not want me home 24/7 ... just yet. Actually we have a great opportunity to keep the grey matter ticking over, at least for a few short years, before proper retirement - updates to follow. The boys are both doing well.

James (and Izzy) have just moved to Berlin which has been exciting and daunting in equal measure. Josh (and Christie) are in London. He is enjoying his new job, which he started in the late Summer. They are young men now but we stay in regular contact, which is nice. Wishing all y'all health, wealth and happiness for the next decade. Cookie and SMac

PS. A slight hold on this message while latest world shenanigans played out - although no end in sight, the UAE remains one of the safest places in the world, for which we are truly grateful...oh and the sun still shines...every day :)

CAPE WIND WOES:

Exceptionally high winds, gusting up to 100 km/h, in the Cape over the weekend 18/19 January not only blew off roofs, caused widespread electricity disruption, and closed the Table Mountain cableway, but meant that 2 large cruise ships (MSC Orchestra and Artania) were unable to leave the Duncan Dock for their intended destinations. Tugs had to be used to keep the ships against the quayside because the wind threatened to break their moorings. One Kaapenaar lady tweeted: "It blew my earrings right out of my ears"

STOP PRESS:

Hanke Fourie has kindly taken on the role of Webmaster – have a look at www.rafoc.org

NEXT FUNCTION:

The February Ordinary Lunch will be on **Friday 7 February 2020**, 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers. We hope that our Speaker will be **Prof Justin Jonas**, Director of the Centre for Radio Astronomy, Rhodes University on **"SKA and MEERKATS"**.

REMEMBER: Lunch Fees **R250 pp**. If you pay by EFT please use your name 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.