



## ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

P.O. Box 69726

BRYANSTON 2021

[info@rafoc.org](mailto:info@rafoc.org)

[www.rafoc.org](http://www.rafoc.org)

President:	David MacKinnon-Little	
Vice Presidents:	David Lake, Geoff Quick, Basil Hersov	
Chairman:	Bruce Harrison	<a href="mailto:bruce@jbharrison.co.za">bruce@jbharrison.co.za</a> Tel: 011 673 0291 Cell: 083 325 0025
Vice Chairman:	Jon Adams	<a href="mailto:vice-chairman@rafoc.org">vice-chairman@rafoc.org</a> Tel: 011 678 7702 Cell: 082 450 0616
Hon. Secretary:	Colin Francis	Tel: 011 706 4554 Cell: 082 853 8368
Hon. Treasurer:	Jeff Earle	Tel: 011 616 3189 Cell: 083 652 1002
Committee Members:	Russell Swanborough	Tel: 011 884 2611 Cell: 083 263 2740
	Karl Jensen	Tel: 011 234 0598 Cell: 082 331 4652
	Jean-Michel Girard	Cell: 083 659 1067
	Geoff Fish	Tel: 012 667 2759 Cell: 083 660 9697
	Rob Tannahill	Tel: 011 888 6074 Cell: 082 806 6779
Bank Account:	Nedbank - Melrose Arch	Br: 19 66 05 Account 19 66 278 063

## NEWSLETTER – SEPTEMBER 2017

### BATTLE of BRITAIN LUNCH:

The Battle of Britain 77th Anniversary Lunch on a warm Spring day, last Friday 8 September, was another outstanding function. Proceedings commenced with a flypast by **Arnie Meneghelli's "Flying Lions"** led by **Scully Levine**, which set the scene. Their Sponsor, **Puma Energy**, was represented at lunch by **Zorah McDooley-Aimone**. The weather, the venue, the flypast, the delicious meal, the Silvasale service, all combined to set the scene for the excellent talk on the Battle and its South African connections, by our "mystery guest", none other than **Wing Commander Cookie Cookson**. Cookie had made a private "flying visit" from UAE for the event. His talk, the company of the delightful Ladies and Guests and camaraderie all combined to make this a most enjoyable event, with 123 attending. The 4 World War 2 veteran pilots present were recognised and warmly applauded, and the slideshow of Battle of Britain scenes and personalities compiled by **Karl Jensen** made a fitting backdrop to the proceedings. Additional raffle prizes were generously donated by members and guests, the draw conducted by **Russell Swanborough**, and the winning tickets were drawn by guest **Brenda Shepherd**. There were numerous compliments from those present at lunch, which marked the start of a busy weekend, with the **Warsaw Flights Commemoration Service** on Saturday and the **Battle of Britain Memorial Service** on Sunday.

### BATTLE of BRITAIN:

The crucial week of the Battle of Britain was 7 – 15 September 1940. On the 15th, more than 200 German bombers flew with a heavy fighter escort toward London. The attack was met by over 300 Spitfires and Hurricanes – all the available fighter force – there were no reserves. Although 158 bombers managed to get through, visibility was poor and bombs missed their intended targets and were widely dispersed. The RAF pursued the retreating Luftwaffe to the Coast, and in the course of the raids 34 German bombers were destroyed and 20 were extensively damaged – a loss rate of 25%, which was unsustainable. Three nights later the Luftwaffe again sustained heavy losses when they attacked London with 70 bombers. After that, they switched to night-time raids which exacted a less heavy toll on aircraft and crews.

**September 15<sup>th</sup>** has ever since been celebrated as the **Battle of Britain Day**. The day when it was clear that however long the struggle might be, the RAF had maintained mastery of its skies, and there would be no quick or easy German victory – though no quick and easy British victory either. Five days later, Hitler postponed Operation Sea Lion indefinitely. The threat of military invasion was replaced by an entirely unprecedented test of civilian endurance in the Blitz which followed. "I think we have avoided losing the war" wrote Harold Nicholson to his wife Vita as the Blitz raged around

him and the Ministry of Information where he was working was “struck on the boko” by a Luftwaffe raid...”but when I think how on earth we are going to win it, my imagination quails”

## **BLOODHOUND:**

In their latest Newsletter, Richard Noble writes: “It’s no secret that BLOODHOUND has been going through a rough time and we are late – it’s still a secret that BLOODHOUND is now developing very strongly. Of course we had planned to make the 800mph runs in 2017 – but our difficulty has been cash flow and the essential linkage between successive deals. The key is the ability to structure payments so that we have a reliable steady cash inflow and that’s proved incredibly difficult. BLOODHOUND is a pretty tough call on the sponsors at the best of times – it gets even tougher when there is uncertainty in the economy and payments default or are late. It has also been very tough on our friends in South Africa who now have the Hakskeen Pan desert track ready to go. However, we will now be with them in late 2018 and there is a real buzz in the workshop in Avonmouth as we all realise that this is going to happen”.

## **CANBERRA WK163 - 60TH ANNIVERSARY:**

Monday August 28th commemorated 60 years since a Napier product helped achieve the world aeroplane height record in 1957. Fitted with a **Napier Double Scorpion** aircraft rocket engine, English Electric Canberra WK163 flew to a height of 70,310 feet (21,350 metres) around 20miles south of Shoreham-on-Sea. The following is an edited article extracted from ‘**This Is Napier Vol.1, No. 2 1958’ Up 70,310 feet by SCORPION**. For the third time in four years, Great Britain has set up a new world altitude record for aeroplanes. On 28th August 1957, Napier’s Chief Test Pilot, Mike Randrup, flying an English Electric Canberra fitted with a Napier “Double Scorpion” aircraft rocket engine, reached a height of 70,310 ft., beating the previous record, also held by a Canberra, by more than 4,000 ft. Randrup was accompanied by Walter Shirley, Deputy Chief Engineer of Napier’s Flight Development Establishment, which was responsible for the design and development of Scorpion rocket engines. They took off from Luton, home of the F.D.E., late in the afternoon and headed for Portland Bill, on the South Coast. They then turned east where, at 44,000 ft., a few miles south of the Isle of Wight they turned north-east, at the same time bringing the “Double Scorpion” into action. When it reached 70,000 ft, the Canberra was still climbing at a rate of some 8,000 ft. a minute, but the aircraft’s flying characteristics made it inadvisable for the pilot to go higher. He therefore leveled off, shut down the rocket engine and began his descent. The Canberra is a “sub-sonic” aircraft and has a comparatively low maximum safe flying speed. At 70,000 ft its stalling speed and its maximum safe flying speed are separated by a mere 20 m.p.h. The pilot had to keep within this slender margin, or the adventure might have ended in disaster. Every foot of additional height would have made his position more perilous. During the final stages of the climb, practically all the Canberra’s thrust came from the “Double Scorpion”. In that rarefied atmosphere, the two Rolls-Royce Avon turbojets could do little more than maintain the aircraft’s electrical and hydraulic services and cockpit pressurisation system. Full story, links and pics at: <http://www.vulcantothesky.org/news/910/82/Canberra-WK163-60th-Anniversary.html>

## **WE WILL REMEMBER THEM: TODAY, TOMORROW, FOREVER:**

Ten years ago, The Armed Forces Memorial, a national memorial in the United Kingdom, within the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, was officially dedicated on 12 October 2007 in a ceremony presided over by Queen Elizabeth II. It is dedicated to the (then) 16,000 servicemen and women of the British Armed Forces killed on duty or through terrorist action since the Second World War, and is updated annually. At the unveiling Prince Charles, the Prince of Wales said: “The magnificence of this new memorial will, at long last, provide a fitting recognition for all those killed on duty since the end of the Second World War. It does not differentiate between those killed in the heat of battle or on a training exercise, by terrorist action or on peace-keeping missions.” Its form is that of a burial mound, or tumulus, surmounted by a Portland stone circle, with openings to the East and West and an obelisk at the Eastern end. Within the circle are two straight stone walls, with bronze sculptures at their centres. The names of the 16,000 service personnel are carved into the Memorial’s stone walls, with space for an additional 15,000 names to be added. The names of all

those killed in combat, in training, on peacekeeping operations and on exercise are included. It includes the dead from operations in Palestine, Korea, Malaya, the Falkland Islands, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Northern Ireland. The bronze sculptures within are the work of Ian Rank-Broadley. The Stretcher Bearers sculpture shows a wounded serviceman borne by comrades, watched by grieving family. It represents the cost of armed conflict on those left behind. The Gates sculpture group shows the body of a fallen serviceman taken into the arms of his comrades, and a figure pointing through the Great Gates of Eternity to Paradise. The structure is aligned so that at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, the sun's rays will stream through the gap to illuminate the centre of the Memorial.

\*\*\*\*\*

## OBITUARIES:

**FLYING OFFICER KENNETH ASTILL "KEN" WILKINSON RAF** who has died aged 99, was one of the last surviving Battle of Britain Spitfire pilots, keeping a twinkle in his eye and a taste for red wine and blue jokes to the end. Wilkinson, who celebrated his 99th birthday in June, was one of the last of those dubbed "The Few" by Winston Churchill, at a time when the life expectancy of a Spitfire pilot was about four weeks. In an interview in 2015 the former pilot jokingly rebuked Prince William for "flying choppers" instead of "proper planes" recently, and after admitting that he had promised not to tell any of his extensive repertoire of dirty jokes, agreed to recount one by Royal Command – and did so. The Battle of Britain Memorial Trust described him as "a true gentleman who we shall miss dearly". Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier, the Chief of Air Staff, said: "Ken, as one of The Few, represented an extraordinary generation to whom we owe a great debt that should never be forgotten, our freedom being won by their sacrifices." Although he never forgot the horrors of the combat, recalling in one interview watching "friends fall out of the sky, aircraft go up in flames ...terrible things", Wilkinson is remembered by friends and acquaintances for his sense of humour. Deborah Burns, widow of, Flt Lt Owen Burns, was also a Battle of Britain veteran, recalled Wilkinson as one of "the Brylcreem Boys with a twinkle in their eyes". In the 2015 interview Wilkinson said: "I didn't carry any lucky charms, but I did wear a pair of my wife's knickers around my neck."

**JACK PERRY MBE**, who has died, aged 92, was one of the last surviving members of the "**Guinea Pig Club**", the organisation established in 1941 for badly burned airmen who were treated by the pioneering plastic surgeon **Sir Archibald McIndoe**. The 19 year old Perry was the flight engineer of a Halifax bomber and, after a crash in August 1944, he suffered 80% burns to his hands, face and ears. By April 1946, he had undergone 18 operations, but a further 12 operations were necessary before he was medically discharged from the RAF in June 1949. He was a devoted and energetic member of the Guinea Pig Club and became social secretary in 1967, a post he held for over 40 years. He recognised that a wide range of social activities was important in maintaining the cohesion and morale that McIndoe had seen as crucial elements in achieving psychological recovery and reintegration into society for RAF burns victims. Perry was a true advocate of McIndoe's ethos "to keep going cheerfully through adversity". He played cricket, snooker and golf - the latter until he was 88 years old. For his services to the Club and his dedication in supporting other sufferers, he was awarded an MBE this year.

**CAPTAIN JOHN SWANEPOEL DFC SAAF (Retired)** who has died on the on 8 September aged 93, served with 7 Wing SAAF during the Italian campaign in 1943 flying the Spitfire Mk IX. Shot down and captured in Northern Italy he spent a year as a POW in Stalag Luft III in Poland. He also served with 2 Squadron SAAF in the Korean War in 1952 where he flew the Mustang P51. Moving on to a career in commercial aviation, John flew 747s for Sabena Airlines until his retirement. Remembered as a thorough gentleman, Captain Swanepoel will be missed by his family, fellow veterans, friends and aviation colleagues. We salute his memory!

\*\*\*\*\*

## **GROUNDED! BMF 60<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY:**

More than half of the airworthy second world war-era planes flown by the RAF's **Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF)** were grounded in mid August over engine-related safety concerns. Aircraft operated by BBMF were scheduled to fly at the Biggin Hill festival of flight, near Bromley in south-east London, and the Eastbourne international airshow in East Sussex. But BBMF's Lancaster bomber, four Spitfires and two Hurricanes will not fly until they have been checked, after a fault was found with the engine of one of the Hurricanes. An RAF spokesman said the fault with the Merlin engine was still being investigated and it was unclear how long the planes would be grounded. "A routine inspection has highlighted a fault with one of the Merlin engines in a Hurricane aircraft," he said. "We are currently investigating the fault and, as a precaution, flying of Merlin engine-powered aircraft has been paused". The latest update is: "Our investigation has confirmed an issue with a pinion gear in a Merlin engine. With the precise cause of the problem known, each pinion gear is now being inspected to confirm it meets our exacting standards, with the BBMF and industry putting all of our efforts into getting these beautiful aircraft safely back in the air as soon as possible."

## **WOMEN WILL MAKE RAF FIGHTING UNITS STRONGER:**

On Friday 1 September, the RAF became the first military service to open all roles to both men and women, following the lifting of a Government ban on women in close combat roles. Women can now apply to join the RAF Regiment, which is deployed to protect bases and airfields across the world, and has previously sustained casualties in Afghanistan. **Group Captain Wendy Rothery**, head of RAF recruiting and selection, told the Daily Telegraph that the change would strengthen the force. "Combat is a very human thing," she said. "Women bring a different perspective, a different style of leadership to men and we've seen that in other roles in the Royal Air Force that we've introduced women into. Emotional intelligence would be one aspect of that." A former commander of British forces in Afghanistan said he was strongly opposed to the plans. Colonel Richard Kemp told the BBC that tough training would put too much strain on their bodies.

## **WAS IT REALLY 50 YEARS AGO?**

8 September, 1967 - It is officially disclosed that the South African Police are in Rhodesia actively helping in the fight against Nationalist guerrillas. This follows an attempt by several hundred guerrillas to invade South and South West Africa, from Zambia, at the urging of the Liberation Committee of the OAU in Kampala in July 1967. Source; <http://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/it-officially-disclosed-south-african-police-are-rhodesia-actively-helping-fight-against>

## **FROM THE ARCHIVES:**

Shelagh Anderson produced an album of newspaper cuttings from her late husband Roy's effects, which is a treasure trove of South African history between 1929 and 1936. It has a particular emphasis on aviation and the progress of Union Airways, of which more later. One of Durban's famous sons, Sqn Ldr L H Slatter, features in the 1929 entries. Air Marshal Sir Leonard Horatio Slatter KBE CB DSC & Bar DFC DL (8 December 1894 – 14 April 1961) was a naval aviator during the First World War and a senior Royal Air Force Commander during the Second World War. He ended his career as the Air Officer Commander-in-Chief of Coastal Command. Slatter was born in Durban, South Africa on 8 December 1894. He received his education at Dale College and Selborne College in South Africa and then at Battersea Polytechnic, training to be a civil engineer. With the outbreak of the First World War he joined the Royal Navy. He initially served as a dispatch rider in the Naval Armoured Car Division before transferring to the Royal Naval Air Service in 1915. After successfully completing his observer training, Slatter was posted in February 1916 to the Seaplane Squadron at Dunkirk. After the war, Slatter opted to remain in the newly formed Royal Air Force. He saw further active service as a flight commander on No. 47 Squadron RAF flying DH9's and DH9A's in southern Russia in the first half of 1919. Slatter received a permanent RAF commission in 1919 and promoted Flight Lieutenant. A distinguished career followed, before and during WW2. He retired from the RAF in 1949

**NEXT FUNCTION:**

The Next Ordinary Lunch will be on **Friday 6 October 2017, 12h30 for 13h00** at Wanderers. Our Speaker will be our own Fundi, **Dr John Ledger**, on “**Eskom and PPIs**”:

**REMEMBER:** Members Lunch Fees are still R180 pp. If you pay by EFT please use your name as "reference" **NEDBANK Melrose Arch, Branch 19 66 05 Account 19 66 278 063**

We are holding the price at R180 for the remainder of 2017 for Members Lunches - a 2 Course meal - and our Treasurer is still balancing the books with some of our retained earnings. Unfortunately we have had to increase prices for Ladies Lunches, which are three courses, plus additional wines, and Members Lunches will be R200 from January 2018.

All bookings please to [bookings@rafoc.org](mailto:bookings@rafoc.org) or if you do not have access to e-mail:

**Rob Tannahill**      Tel: 011 888 6074    Cell: 082 80 66 779    [tannahill@vitalitybroadband.co.za](mailto:tannahill@vitalitybroadband.co.za)  
**Jon Adams**        Tel: 011 678 7702    Cell: 082 45 00 616    [vice-chairman@rafoc.org](mailto:vice-chairman@rafoc.org)

Look forward to seeing you there!

Cheers, Bruce.