



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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BRYANSTON 2021

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NEWSLETTER – MAY 2017

MAY LUNCH:

The May lunch, attended by 43 members and guests, ushered in the first cold front of winter, which came in with an Antarctic blast. James Clarke set something of a new record by losing his car keys before the company sat down to lunch. Silvasale treated us to a beautifully dressed starter, followed by a Fillet of Pangasias, which although on the Green SASSI list, is alleged by right-wing members to be Red because it is farmed in Vietnam under a communist regime. We shall ask Silvasale in future to stick to fish caught in the Vaal Dam. Our speaker, new member Andrew Mutitt, gave an introductory talk on the Honorable Company of Air Pilots (HCAP, formerly GAPAN) and their wish to establish a Region in SA. This provoked a good number of questions from the floor, and even some written submissions after the Lunch. Watch this space! The raffle draw as usual drew howls of protest from disappointed punters and demands for a Public Protector investigation. The stayers - or survivors – adjourned to the Cigar Bar after Lunch, there to ward off the cold with liberal applications of red wine and raucous conversation and war stories which would not have been tolerated in Chariots...A good time, allegedly, was had by all.

“MILLER’S BOYS”: ALLISTER MILLER CENTENARY:

One hundred years ago, Major Allister “Mac” Miller and his mechanic, Sergeant Way flew their Bristol BE2e from Cape Town to Port Elizabeth. The first aircraft ever to land in PE, Miller flew over the city and landed on the 18th fairway (now the 9th) of the Golf Course on the 7th November 1917 and was forced to steer the plane into a bunker due to the crowds being too close. The plane tipped onto its nose, shattering the propeller blades, damaging wheels and a wing, however no one was injured.

This year (2017), the Port Elizabeth SAAF Museum is commemorating the centenary of this flight and Allister Miller’s achievements in a new display. One is an oil painting by SAAF Museum aviation artist, Don Bell, which depicts Miller circling over PE and the Donkin Reserve on his way to the golf course. This work will be included as a permanent element of the Miller display.

Lieutenant-Colonel Allister Miller DSO OBE (1892–1951) was a South African aviation pioneer, who contributed significantly to both military and civil aviation in his country during the first half of the 20th century. He originally qualified as an electrical engineer. On the outbreak of WW1 in 1914, he joined the British Army, from which he transferred to the Royal Flying Corps [RFC] as a pilot, in 1915. He fought in the skies over the Western Front in France and Belgium. During 1916 and 1917 he returned to South Africa on recruiting tours for the RFC, predecessor to the RAF. He recruited more than 8,000 volunteers, of whom 2,000 were accepted, most of them as pilots. They were known collectively as “Miller’s Boys”.

<http://thecasualobserver.co.za/allister-miller-south-african-air-pioneer-connection-port-elizabeth/>.

“BOTHAS BOYS” FINE RECORD:

A newspaper cutting dated July 22, 1944 read: “Since the outbreak of WW2, 46 former cadets of the S.A.T.S. General Botha have gained 58 awards including one VC, seven DSOs, 10 DSCs, four DSMs, eight DFCs, two

DFMs, two MBEs, two MCs and one MM. In addition 17 former cadets have been mentioned in dispatches and two in the London Gazette.

The V.C. was awarded to the late Wing-Commander J. D. Nettleton VC R.A.F. The Old Boys' Association of the SATS General Botha have launched a campaign to raise fund to commemorate suitably those Old Boys who have given their lives in the war. It is intended to Place a memorial of some kind in Stalplein (Simonstown) and a plaque in the ship itself, to found scholarships or bursaries to provide a General Botha training for the sons of Old Boys who have made the supreme sacrifice, and to create a fund for the relief of distress among Old Boys and their dependants. A ball in aid of the Memorial Fund is being held in the City Hall on Friday, July 28. It will be attended by Vice Admiral, Sir Robert Burnett, Commander - in - Chief of the South Atlantic Station, and Lady Burnett".

AUGSBURG 17 April 1942 (75th Anniversary):

"only to fly through cloud, through storm, through night unerring, and to keep their purpose bright, nor turn until, their dreadful duty done, Westward they climb, to race the awakening sun."

These words, from an unknown source, may well have been used to describe the historic raid against the U-boat diesel engine factory at Augsburg, deep in the South of Germany in the last war, led by Wing Commander J D Nettleton VC. To the world in general and Rhodesia in particular, the Augsburg raid was historic in the use of the immortal Lancaster bomber for the first time against Germany in a low level operation, which required a suicidal flight over 1 000 miles of enemy territory, without fighter protection, and of the two squadrons taking part, it was left to No. 44 (Rhodesia) Squadron to lead the way. The squadron was based at R.A.F. Waddington and it was to rendezvous with No. 97 Squadron R.A.F. from Woodhall Spa. Seven Lancaster's were allocated for the mission from each squadron. Of the seven, one was flown as a reserve from each squadron. For five of the six Lancaster's from the recently formed Rhodesian squadron at Waddington, it was to be a fearsome and hellish baptism under fire, and they "failed to return".



The contribution made by the little colony of Southern Rhodesia towards the war effort against Germany in 1939-1945 exceeded any contribution per head of population in the British Commonwealth at that time. Pilots and aircrew flocked to Britain to defend the homeland of their Fathers. The numbers, at first, were insufficient to make up complete Rhodesian squadrons. The tide increased when the Rhodesian Air Training Group, under the overall command of Sir Charles Meredith, began to turn out pilots and crews which were only in need of an Operational Training Unit, and slowly the young Rhodesians migrated into units of their "ain folk", and by 1942, 44 Squadron Royal Air Force became 44 (Rhodesia) Squadron, although the squadron crest, signed by H.M. King George, was not presented until 1943.

<http://www.ourstory.com/thread.html?t=481432&comments=1>

OBITUARIES:

SQUADRON LEADER DENNIS BARRY CROIX DE GUERRE RAF, who has died aged 95, was one of the first RAF pilots to convert to the Meteor jet fighter before flying against the V-1 flying bomb, and on operations over Germany in the final weeks of WWII. An experienced flight commander on No 616 (South Yorkshire) Squadron, he was one of the first 16 pilots "converted" to the Meteor at Farnborough. After two flights in a training aircraft, the pilots were clustered around the cockpit of the Meteor, were shown the instruments, briefed on the drills, and then told to take off on their familiarisation sorties. After five flights, they were deemed "qualified on jets". The aircraft had been rushed into service to help combat the V-1 flying bombs and were sent to Manston to operate over Kent. The Squadron enjoyed modest success against the bombs before the Allied armies overran the launch sites in the Pas de Calais region of France in the summer of 1944. After VE day in May 1945, the Squadron flew in a number of victory air shows. He was awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Palme. In May 1946 he was demobilised from the RAF and re-joined 616 Squadron Royal Auxiliary Air Force at RAF Finningley in March 1948, until July 1951. On 8th January 1950 he became the only pilot known to have successfully baled out of a Meteor without the aid of an ejector seat. Until late in life, he was a keen supporter of the 616 Squadron Association. Aviation historian Air Commodore Graham Pitchfork, said: "I never flew with him but, to do what he did and fly Hurricanes, Spitfires then become one of the first jet pilots, he had to be an extremely good pilot.". He is thought to have been the last surviving wartime Gloster Meteor pilot.

GROUP CAPTAIN J O “JOE” DALLEY OBE DFM LEGION D’HONNEUR RAF, who has died aged 96, was a Spitfire photographic reconnaissance pilot during the latter stages of the Siege of Malta in 1942. There he joined No. 69 Squadron, whose pilots played a crucial role in finding convoys of enemy ships resupplying Rommel's operations in North Africa. Dalley's sorties included long range operations over Sardinia and Cephalonia off the west coast of Greece with little hope of rescue if his engine failed. By late 1942, the many high-level flights in his unpressurised cockpit had taken a toll on his health, and he returned to Britain to take up instructional duties. By mid 1944 he returned to operations with No. 1 Squadron, based in Kent, whose primary task was to intercept the V-1 flying bombs launched from the Pas-de-Calais region. He was later involved in the assault on Arnhem and the Allied advance into the Netherlands. Post-war, he commanded in 1954 No. 141 Squadron, flying Meteor night fighters, and then RAF Binbrook, the home of the Central Fighter Establishment, equipped with a Javelin all-weather fighter squadron. Joe completed a full career in the RAF, leaving in 1975 to rejoin the Civil Service. On retirement he and Marjorie moved to Wokingham, where his wife predeceased in 2013. He passed away on 3 February 2017. He led a full life - a challenging life; and one of fond memories of Malta through which he maintained a strong bond via the George Cross Island Association. After tours in the MOD and NATO, he retired in 1975.

BRUCE LANGHORNE, who has died aged 78, was a guitarist, percussionist, acclaimed composer of film scores, and creator of what many consider to be the world's finest chilli sauce; he also spent five years as a macadamia nut farmer in Hawaii. Bob Dylan was inspired to write the 1965 song Mr Tambourine Man after he saw Langhorne at a party playing a Turkish tambourine close to a metre in diameter. Langhorne collaborated with figures such as Joan Baez and Harry Belafonte, but his most significant musical association was with Dylan: their collaboration began on the 1963 album 'The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan, and continued for a decade. He played guitar on many of the singer's greatest recordings, notably on every track on the 1965 album Bringing It All Back Home, including Mr Tambourine Man. He played the guitar on Knocking on Heaven's Door, and percussion on Like a Rolling Stone.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE MINE DUMPS GONE?

Should one drive out of Johannesburg eastwards along the N12 highway, a famous landmark is passed at the Snake Road exit, known as Benoni's mountain or more accurately the Kleinfontein Mine Dump. The Dump has been standing tall (92 metres) for over 90 years but will soon only be a memory as it is being reclaimed for the estimated 3½ tons of gold that it contains. For many it is an eyesore and good riddance, but others will be sad to see it go. Johannesburg is famous for being the only major city not built on a body of water yet it has a reef – the Main Reef, which stretches from Randfontein in the west, to Springs in the east, a distance of nearly 60 miles (96 km). The Main Reef was the gold bearing ore body that George Harrison stumbled over in 1886 which gave birth to Johannesburg. Forty years ago the view from the top of the Carlton Centre when looking south, east and west was to see mine dumps that stretched into the distance, from then until now the mine dumps have been levelled to the ground and their footprints have been rehabilitated in order that the land be redeveloped for commercial use.

Of particular regret was the reclamation of the Ferreira Dump, on which the “Top Star Drive-In” was situated. The Dump was sited in Park Central, just south of the M2 elevated highway and was a favourite spot for a night out to watch a movie, with the added bonus of the city lit up at night as a backdrop. The Top Star closed in 2006 a victim of the DVD. The car park was also used for buying and selling cars on a Saturday and Anglo American used it as a helipad for its “Top Brass”. Although the Ferreira Dump was considered to be of historical and cultural significance and a heritage assessment was undertaken it was to no avail and reclamation began in August of 2008 and it was no more by April 2011. Top Star is gone but not forgotten. The reclamation of the Rand mine dumps has opened up old sores and air and water pollution once again has become problematic, especially to those who live close by. Dust fall-out is of major concern as it reduces the quality of the air that the locals breathe leading to bronchial complaints. This along with acid mine drainage is a grave matter which must be addressed for the benefit of future generations as a toxic environment will be detrimental to Johannesburg's standing as the premier city in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Pictures and Story at:- <http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/where-have-all-mine-dumps-gone>

BRITAIN'S GREATEST BATTLE:

The 8th of May marked the end of WW2, so if your ancestor served during the war you might like to read this fascinating account of the twin-battles of Kohima and Imphal, known now as 'Britain's Greatest Battle' and also the greatest Japanese military disaster of all time. Written by Dr Robert Lyman, who joined the Light Infantry in February 1981, served in the British Army for 20 years, and is the author of 14 books General Mutaguchi

launched a massive attack in March 1944. Coming from the south, south-east and east, he hoped to cut off the British from the rest of India within days. Moving quickly with only the bare minimum of supplies the Japanese took on, however, far more than they could chew.

During July the entire structure of Mutaguchi's command disintegrated, men and units were left to fend for themselves in the life-and-death struggle, to evade the clutches of the slowly advancing XIVth Army – the “Forgotten Army”. By the last day of July 1944 the battle for India could be said to be over. So perished Mutaguchi's army and, with it, Japanese dreams of victory in India. Of the 65,000 fighting troops who set off across the Chindwin in early-March 1944, 30,000 were killed in battle and a further 23,000 were wounded, a casualty rate of an unprecedented 81 per cent of combat forces, and 46 per cent of the total size of Fifteenth Army. Only 600 Japanese allowed themselves to be taken prisoner, most of them too sick even to take their own lives. Some 17,000 pack animals perished during the operation and not a single piece of heavy weaponry made it back to Burma.

Of all the invading armies of history, it is hard to think of one that was repulsed more decisively, or more ignominiously, than this invasion. Its defeat was not the fault of the Japanese soldiers, who fought courageously, tenaciously and fiercely, but of their commanders, who sacrificed the lives of their troops on the altar of their own hubris. The importance of this victory was overshadowed at the time, and downplayed for decades afterwards, by the massive victories which brought the Second World War to an end in Europe and the Pacific.

But only as the generation that witnessed and participated in it passes away does the cool light of history begin to reveal that the battles in India in 1944, epitomized in the fulcrum battle at Kohima, were comparable with Thermopylae, Gallipoli, Stalingrad, and other better-known confrontation battles where the arrogant invader became, in time, the ignominious loser. It is clear that Kohima/Imphal was one of four great turning-point battles in the Second World War, when the tide of war changed irreversibly and dramatically against those who initially held the upper hand. The first was at Midway in June 1942. The second was at Stalingrad between August 1942 and January 1943, where only 94,000 of the original 300,000 German, Rumanian and Hungarian troops survived. The third was at El Alamein in October 1942. The fourth was the battle at Kohima and around Imphal between March and July 1944 when the Japanese ‘March on Delhi’ was brought to nothing at a huge cost in human life, and the start of their retreat from Asia began. Adjectives such as ‘climactic’ and ‘titanic’, struggle to give proper impact to the reality and extent of the terrible war that raged across the jungle-clad hills during these fearsome months. Lord Louis Mountbatten called Kohima ‘one of the greatest battles in history, of naked unparalleled heroism, the British/Indian Thermopylae’.

NEXT FUNCTION:

Our Next **Ladies Lunch** will be on Friday 2 June 2017, 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers.

Brenda Shepherd will be giving us a talk on her new book, “**The Men of the Mendi**” recently launched in Johannesburg in the Centenary year of this epic.

REMEMBER: Lunch Fees now R180 pp If you pay by EFT please use your name as "reference"
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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.