



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2017

ANNUAL DINNER:

On a crisp Autumn evening a gathering of 82 distinguished guests, RAFOC members and their Ladies congregated in the Gala Room at Wanderers to celebrate the start of the Centenary Year of the RAF and the 54th Anniversary of the formation of the Johannesburg Branch of the Club in 1963. The Gala Room provided a splendid setting for the traditional "E" table with its white and blue napery together with silverware and the candelabra gave a special ambience to the "Black Tie" event. The animated buzz of pre-dinner drinks died away as the guests took their places and **Rev Trevor Slade**, Chaplain to RAFA and SAAFA led the Company in "The Airman's Grace". Silvasale provided a Savoury Starter, followed by Fillet of Beef, done to perfection, and complemented by Ginger Puddings. The meal was accompanied by wines from the historic Goudini Vineyards, all enjoyed to the accompaniment of a convivial hum of conversation.

Port was served after the tables were cleared, and **Jon Adams**, as "Mr Vice" proposed the Loyal Toasts to "The Queen" and "The Republic of South Africa". The Chairman then welcomed the guests and proposed the **Toast to the Guests and Ladies**. **Colonel Bob Napier RA** proposed the Toast to the RAF in fine style, to which **His Excellency, Her Majesty's High Commissioner to South Africa, Mr Peter Boxer** responded, eloquently, having just discovered his own family's RAF connections as a result of preparing to attend the dinner. The company then adjourned to the Cigar Bar for Coffee, cheese, fruit and biscuits followed by more fellowship, bonhomie and war stories. The evening drew to a (more or less) decorous close and (Uber) "carriages" were called at the appointed time, and various intervals thereafter. However, a good number lingered to enjoy fellowship over a glass (or possibly more) of Port or wine or Highland Water. Some found it prudent to nightstop with friends and others were found to be suffering from combat fatigue the next day....

CENTENARIES: DAME VERA LYNN:

You may have seen on Sky News that Monday 20 March was Vera Lynn's 100th Birthday. She was born in the East End of London in 1917, and began her stage career at the age of 7, singing in working men's clubs to supplement her father's wages. She first came to public notice in 1939 when she recorded "**We'll Meet Again**". Later in her radio request show, "**Sincerely Yours**", she read out loving messages from the home front to troops fighting in faraway lands. The RAF used to drop radios so that the men could listen.

Then, in 1941, she was nominated "Sweetheart of the Forces", in public recognition of her travels entertaining the troops. It was at her own insistence that she toured Egypt and India and, in 1942, visited the frontline in Burma where British soldiers were fighting a desperate campaign against the Japanese. Her most popular song was "**The White Cliffs of Dover**" and, to mark her birthday, Decca has issued an album of this and all her songs, accompanied by the Band of the RAF Squadronaires. Her image, 350 feet high, was also projected onto the cliffs on her birthday. Dame Vera said "It is an unprecedented honour. I will be thinking of all our brave boys. The cliffs were the last thing they saw before heading off to war".

MARY ELLIS "ATTAGIRL"

Mary Ellis, one of the last surviving pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), turned 100 in February and was honoured at a surprise party at Sandown Airport, Isle of Wight, which she ran for 20 years. Mrs Ellis said she had no idea everyone was planning to celebrate her centenary and had originally told everyone not to do anything because she "wasn't old enough" for a party. Family and friends gathered to kick off the celebrations and although weather conditions stopped a Spitfire flypast, there was a cake with a picture of the aircraft on top. The ATA ferried aircraft and pilots throughout the war until the service disbanded in November 1945. Mary Ellis, then Mary Wilkins, joined the ATA in 1941 after hearing an advertisement for women pilots on BBC radio. "At that time we were called the Glamour Girls and there were plenty of escorts around," she said. Women were allowed to fly military trainer and communications aircraft from 1940, despite some male opposition. The Editor of Aeroplane magazine, the redoubtable C G Grey, wrote in 1941: "The menace is the woman who thinks that she ought to be flying in a high-speed bomber when she really has not the intelligence to scrub the floor of a hospital properly."

Mrs Ellis recalled flying "about 1,000 aeroplanes" during the war, including some 400 Spitfires and 47 Wellington bombers, which she flew solo. After the war she moved to the Isle of Wight and took charge of Sandown Airport from 1950 to 1970. In November, she and fellow ATA pilot Joy Lofthouse were honoured in front of members of the Royal Family at the annual Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Mrs Ellis said the Spitfire has always been her favourite aircraft, she said: "I love it, it's everybody's favourite. I think it's a symbol of freedom."

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-38838973>

AN APPRECIATION OF VERA LYNN:

In many ways these two ladies personified the spirit of wartime Britain. The lines below were penned by a serviceman serving with the British 14th Army in Burma – the "Forgotten Army". Vera Lynn was the first ENSA entertainer to travel to Burma to entertain the troops. After hearing her sing he wrote:

"Tonight I saw an English girl
And heard the maiden's golden voice
She sang sweet songs of love to me
And made my homesick heart rejoice".

OBITUARIES:

GROUP CAPTAIN LEONARD BARTLETT RAF, who has died aged 100, flew Hurricanes during the Battle of Britain, and was later decorated for his service during the Italian campaign. He was credited with 5 "kills" in the summer of 1940. In the summer of 1942, he was given command of No. 253 Squadron and left for North Africa via Gibraltar to support Operation Torch, the Allied landings in Morocco and Algeria. The Squadron later provided cover over Naples. In early 1944, he was awarded the DSO for his "utmost courage and initiative". In the early 1950's he commanded the flying wing at RAF Wattisham, Suffolk, equipped with Meteor jet fighters. He retired from the service in 1966 and emigrated to Australia. Bartlett was one of 13 serving group captains, who had flown in the Battle of Britain, to march in Sir Winston Churchill's funeral cortege in 1965. In 2005, he returned to London for the dedication of the Battle of Britain Memorial on Victoria Embankment on the 65th Anniversary of the Battle. "We were young", he reflected, "and didn't really think about what we were doing. I don't think any of us really understood the importance of the Battle at the time"

WING COMMANDER TREVOR THAIN RAF, who has died aged 98, completed 42 bombing operations over Germany before becoming a specialist navigator. For two years, he was an instructor at one of the navigation schools established in Canada as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan. He later flew Dakotas and gliders on the Arnhem and Rhine crossing operations. After WWII, Thain was a navigation specialist at the Empire Central Flying School and then the Empire Air Navigation School. In October 1950, he was part of the crew of a converted Lincoln bomber which made a 3,064 mile non-stop flight to Khartoum, a record confirmed by the Royal Aero Club. The aircraft then headed for Mauritius before flying on to the RAAF base near Perth, arriving 62 hours after leaving Britain. Later, it completed a round-the-world trip, returning to its Lincolnshire base via Fiji, Hawaii and the US. Thain retired from the RAF in 1965.

ALL WASHED UP - DAMBUSTERS' BOUNCING BOMB:

Part of a bouncing bomb that was being tested in 1942-1943 for the raid on the Moehne and Eder Dams has been washed ashore at Herne Bay on the north coast of Kent near the approaches to the Thames Estuary. It was spotted by Environment Agency workers clearing shingle. Alan Porter, trustee of the Herne Bay seaside museum, said: "It is the end section of any early bouncing bomb, an Upkeep, which is a larger type than the complete one we have on display". He hoped that it would remain on the seafront as a public sculpture. As we know, the early tests of Barnes Wallis' bomb were failures because the bombs were dropped from too great a height. The officials from the Air Ministry, who were present, were not impressed. Nor was "Bomber" Harris, C-in-C Bomber Command, a good Rhodesian! He felt at first that the raid would divert vital resources from the bombing of German cities. It was Guy Gibson, apparently, who suggested that the bomb be reduced in size and dropped from only 50-60 feet. The rest, as they say, is history. But 56 RAF aircrew were killed on the raid in May 1943, and many of the general public do not know that.

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM CENTENARY:

This institution has stood the test of time — even if its creators' timing was odd. Britain's War Cabinet had plenty on its agenda in March 1917: deadlock on the Western Front; rampant U-boat activity, which had cost some 300 allied ships in February; Zeppelin raids on London; in Russia, a Tsar on the verge of toppling; in the US, the start of Woodrow Wilson's second term. Yet on March 5, ministers turned their mind to a very different kind of problem: should the country establish a war museum. Anyone who has strolled past the twin 15-inch naval guns that now front the old Bethlem Hospital on London's Lambeth Road will know the answer, as will anyone who has pressed on into the building's lofty atrium, with its artfully composed scatter of weaponry. The **Imperial War Museum** will celebrate its centenary with an imaginative series of exhibitions both in London and at its satellite sites in Manchester, Cambridgeshire and elsewhere.

SCOTTISH HORSE REGIMENT MEMORIAL:

This is one of Johannesburg's earliest war memorials, overlooking the site of one of the largest remount camps of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902. Originally a memorial to the Scottish Horse which was later disbanded, that regiment was antecedent to the famous Transvaal Scottish Regiment formed in 1902, which saw service in both World Wars. It contributes to a sense of multi-cultural heritage. This memorial was erected in 1905 and is the same as that erected on the Esplanade of Edinburgh Castle in Scotland. The only original difference between the two being that the hollow metal die replaced the solid granite die of the Scottish memorial to facilitate transport to and erection in South Africa.

The monument commemorates the officers, non-commissioned officers and men killed in action and died of wounds, disease and accident, who were members of the Scottish Horse Regiment, during the South African Anglo-Boer War in 1901-1902. The Scottish Horse was a mounted infantry regiment financed and led by the Marquis of Tullibardine (later the 8th Earl of Atholl) during the War. After the War, the Scottish Horse, in South Africa, was disbanded but parented the Transvaal Scottish Regiment. The Memorial is located on Caledonia Koppie, an easily accessible view point to the east of the city centre which is sometimes used for alternative Christian devotions due to an interpretation of it as being "a cross on a green hill outside of town". The position of the memorial was probably chosen as it overlooked the site of the Scottish Horse camp in Bezuidenhout Valley where the Regiment was involved with the guarding of the remount camp situated there during the war.

IN VINO VERITAS (Michael FRIDJOHN):

Like everything else that has been left to cadre deployment, essential infrastructure has collapsed in a welter of ineptitude and corruption. Not all these failures are equal: as the roads get worse, the number of off-road vehicles on urban roads simply increases. As power availability and distribution deteriorates, businesses which require ample supplies of electricity simply shut down or generate the own requirements. However, when, through lack of foresight and planning, the state fails to provide water for urban dwellers, there's no easy fix. If you think the current service delivery protests have the potential to turn scary, the great-granddaddy of them all lurks in the failure to deliver clean fresh water to the 15-million or so residents (12-million South African citizens and probably three-million foreigners) living in Gauteng and delivering more than a third of the country's GDP.

Just as the ANC cannot suddenly introduce meritocratic performance as an employment criterion anywhere that supporters have been rewarded with a job, the wine industry cannot suddenly abandon its accredited training systems and its community outreach projects, whether or not they are really producing palpable

benefits. However, there is also a difference: whatever the shortcomings of the industry's formal efforts, the intention is to produce a higher skills and happiness quotient. The same obviously cannot be said about cadre deployment.

THREE COINS IN THE FOUNTAIN:

A fountain built by Italian POWs who were interned at the nearby Zonderwater POW camp around 1943 has been moved from its original position to a new site in the garden of the McHardy House Museum in Cullinan. The fountain was built in an area called Hallsdorp. The miners' houses built in this area in the early part of the last century were demolished at the end of the Second World War. The area became derelict and the fountain was quickly forgotten.

Many decades later the Cullinan Heritage Society located the fountain and later applied for permission to move it to an area where it could be appreciated by the many visitors to the village. Volunteers of the Heritage Society worked to secure the fountain to prevent any breakage of the stone structure. The Petra Mine supplied the essential crane and transport to move the fountain. The operation progressed smoothly with no damage to 75 year old structure.

The Cullinan Heritage Society aims to restore the fountain to its original glory as soon as the necessary funds can be raised. The story of the fountain demonstrates what can be achieved when local enthusiasts, heritage officials and generous businesses work together for the common good. Full story with pictures:

<http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/forgotten-fountain-returns-limelight>

MEMBERS NEWS:

Cookie Cookson writes: "Wonderful to see the DHC at the RAFOC, I'm not at all surprised that Bob is front and centre. We still cherish every moment we spent in the company of RAFOC. Please send my very best to the whole team. My only request is to stop members getting the call from the higher power upstairs.....! Because I had to expedite my arrival and complete rehab from the knee replacement, I'm still flying solo. The house will be packed up by SMac in about 3 weeks and shipped over to Abu Dhabi. It is a wonderful location, but OMG expensive. God bless Her Majesty. We will finally be together in a house in late May. It's about 20 km from the Embassy, but quiet with all facilities on compound including a beach, pools and a supermarket with pork products! Good to see that Zuma is as comical as ever. No doubt Bob Napier will buy the beer as the Rand tanks again. All the very best to you all".

NEXT FUNCTION:

Our Next Ordinary Lunch will be on **Friday 12 May 2017**, 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers. Please note this is the **SECOND** Friday as Wanderers requested that we move our lunch so they could accommodate a large function, and as we get treated so well by them we of course agreed.

New member **Andrew Muttitt** will be giving us a talk on the Honourable Company of Air Pilots (HCAP) and his recent visit to UK. He is taking up the cudgels and has offered lead the start of a branch in Southern Africa.

REMEMBER: Lunch Fees now 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

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.