



## ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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## NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2018

### JANUARY LUNCH:

The New Year got off to a muted start with members easing themselves gently into routine after the Christmas break – that is, until the January Lunch, with a good turnout of 39 attending, which began decorously enough with a fine meal of Carpaccio and Portuguese Hake Steaks, provided by Silvasale. After lunch, the January Aviation Quiz, compiled and compered by Karl Jensen, lit the blue touch paper and the game was on. Amid a babel of wild guesses, unheard answers, heckling, kibitzing and copious quaffing of wine the temperature rose steadily until the rival Red, White and Blue teams were trading gratuitous insults (no expletives deleted) with reckless abandon. The Red Team “won” due only to unashamedly partisan scoring by the (Red Team) Quizmaster.... This, the Centenary year of the Royal Air Force, is off to a good start...The Committee wishes all members and spouses everything of the best for 2018.

### WRAF CENTENARY:

As the Great War continued far longer than anticipated, it became evident that more men were needed on the battlefields. For each man that was pulled to the front, someone needed to take his place. In 1917 the British government began to create a women's branch of the military for the various forces. The WAAC and WRNS were formed in 1917 The first Women's Royal Air Force WRAF was an auxiliary organization of the Royal Air Force which was founded in 1918. The original intent of the WRAF was to provide female mechanics in order to free up men for service in World War I. However, the organization saw huge enrollment, with 32 000 women volunteering for positions as drivers and mechanics and filling other wartime needs. This first WRAF was disbanded in 1920. The last veteran from this era was for a while thought to be Gladys Powers, who died in 2008, but Florence Green, who died in February 2012, was subsequently found to be the last-known surviving WRAF veteran. On 1 February 1949, the name was revived when the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, which had been founded in 1939, was renamed the Women's Royal Air Force. The WRAF and the RAF grew closer over the following decades, with increasing numbers of trades opened to women, and the two services formally merged in 1994, marking the full assimilation of women into the British forces and the end of the Women's Royal Air Force.

### FIRST NIGHT FIGHTER VICTORY: JANUARY 1918:

A major German bombing raid against the United Kingdom in January 1918 saw 13 Gotha and two Giant (Riesenflugzeug) bombers set out to bomb England. Six Gothas turned back due to poor visibility, but the other bombers attacked targets in England, killing 67 people and injuring 166, including 14 killed and 14 injured in stampedes when "maroons" – warning rockets – warned them of an imminent attack while they queued for admission to air raid shelters; another 11 people were injured by falling shrapnel from British anti-aircraft shells. Many of the casualties resulted from a single 300-kg (661-pound) bomb that hit the Odhams printing works in Long Acre, London, where people were sheltering. British aircraft flew over a hundred defensive sorties, and two Sopwith Camels of the Royal Flying Corps' No. 40 Squadron shot down a Gotha, the first victory over a heavier-than-air bomber over the United Kingdom for British night fighters; their pilots,

**Second Lieutenants Charles C. Banks and George Hackwill** received the Distinguished Flying Cross for the achievement.

### **SAVE TANGMERE TOWER!**

A team of UK historians has launched a "Save Tangmere Tower" campaign. They want Sir Douglas Bader's former RAF base near Chichester in West Sussex to be returned to its former glory after being allowed to fall into ruin in the 1970's. It was arguably Britain's most important airfield during WWII and played a vital role in the Battle of Britain. Douglas Bader commanded a squadron at Tangmere and Johnnie Johnson, the RAF's top-scoring fighter ace of the war, was also based there. It was also used for covert flights for agents of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), including Violette Szabo, who was posthumously awarded the George Cross for her heroism on missions in occupied France. The base was closed in 1970 and most of its buildings were knocked down to create space for housing, although some were used to establish the present Tangmere Museum. All that remains of the three-storey control tower is a dilapidated shell in the middle of an overgrown field. The historians want the top floor of the tower to be turned into a replica of the control room as it was in 1945, while the bottom and middle levels could become an educational facility for schools.

### **CHEETAH CHRISTMAS:**

Cape Town - State-owned arms manufacturer Denel announced in December that it will sell 12 SA-designed supersonic Cheetah fighter jets to US-based Draken International. A previous batch of 12 Cheetahs were sold to Ecuador in 2010. According to its website, Florida-based Draken operates the largest fleet of privately owned tactical aircraft in the world. "Draken supports military training objectives around the globe, providing tremendous cost savings over the use of traditional military fighter assets." Denel said the contract with Draken includes returning the aircraft to service, local flight acceptance tests, and delivery of the aircraft to the US. It did not say how much Draken was paying for the aircraft. The sale includes nine Cheetah C jets and three dual-seat Cheetah D planes. "In addition, Denel is also pursuing post-delivery logistics support for the duration of aircraft operations," it said in a statement.

### **THE MIGHTY FEW:**

It's been 72 years since the end of World War II, and most vets who served have passed away, with many of them honoured as being part of the "Greatest Generation." However, a few of those still alive are fighting for the recognition they believe they are due, including the one of the last surviving aircrew who took part in one of the most famous attacks in World War II. According to a report by the London Daily Mail, former RAF aircrew man Johnny Johnson, MBE, who took part in Operation Chastise – the attack on the Mohne, Elbe, and Sorpe dams in 1943, is among those campaigning for World War II veterans of the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command to receive a medal. And he has some very harsh words for some historians. He pulled no punches in a recent BBC "Hardtalk" interview...."I have a pet hate of what I call 'relative' historians. I ask them two questions: 'Were you there?' and 'Were you aware of the circumstances at the time?' The answer is no, so keep your bloody mouth shut," he said.

RAF's Bomber Command, famously lead by Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, carried out numerous bombing missions against Nazi-occupied Europe during World War II. Bomber Command launched missions against German industrial cities, notably the 1945 bombing of Dresden, often sending over a thousand planes to carry out area-bombing missions against targets at night. The Daily Mail noted that the tactic caused heavy civilian casualties, causing the same politicians who ordered the bomber crews to carry out those difficult missions to distance themselves from the bomber offensive after World War II. According to the Royal Air Force records, 55,573 men who served in that command made the ultimate sacrifice. A memorial to Bomber Command's fallen was eventually commissioned in 2012. A clasp was also awarded to veterans of Bomber Command, but Johnson is not satisfied.

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### **OBITUARIES:**

**FLYING OFFICER ALFIE MARTIN DFC RAF**, who has died aged 97, was the bomb aimer of a Halifax bomber shot down over Belgium during the Second World War; with the aid of the Belgian Comet Escape Line, he avoided capture and returned to his base two months later. On April 16 1943, Martin's target was the Skoda works at Pilsen in Czechoslovakia. With the experienced pilot Squadron Leader Wally Lashbrook at the controls, the Halifax was on the return flight when it was attacked by a night fighter and set on fire as it crossed the French-Belgian border. The rear gunner was killed but the rest of the crew bailed out and landed safely. Martin moved away from the area and in the morning he was discovered by a 12-year-old boy, who took him

to his home where Martin was fed before he headed west. After two days' walking he met the Coolen family who looked after him for six weeks and then was smuggled to safety by the Resistance. Alfie later wrote a bestseller called **Bale Out!** about his experiences in enemy-occupied territory. His friend, another RAF veteran and former test pilot Paddy Crowther, recalled: "A great character and a brave man, Alfie is one of the last survivors of the Caterpillar Club whose members are all airmen who survived stricken planes by parachute. He will never be forgotten." The old flyboy was a regular at social events at the Aldergrove RAF/Army base, where he was a popular wartime figure.

**GROUP CAPTAIN JOHNNIE FOSTER DFC RAF**, who has died aged 95, spent the majority of his long service in the RAF as a fighter pilot, and earned a DFC for his support of operations off the Norwegian coast. In late 1944 Coastal Command's strike wings of Mosquitos and Beaufighters based on the Moray Firth made concentrated attacks against enemy convoys carrying Swedish iron ore to Germany and shipped from Norwegian ports. The Luftwaffe's fighter squadrons based in Norway and Denmark posed a serious threat to these operations, so it was decided to escort the strikes with long-range fighters. Foster was the flight commander of No 65 Squadron when it was transferred to Peterhead with US-built Mustangs to fulfill this role. When shipping was identified off the Norwegian coast, formations of up to 36 strike aircraft were launched, with Foster and his pilots providing an escort. The Luftwaffe countered with fighters...

**AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR PETER TERRY GCB AFC RAF** who has died aged 91 had a long and distinguished career as a pilot and as a commander in the RAF and in NATO but will best be remembered for his role in the shooting by the SAS of three IRA terrorists in Gibraltar. At the time he was the Governor of the British territory and gave the Gibraltar police the authority to mount the security operation to apprehend the three in March 1988, Terry's actions precipitated one of the most controversial episodes of Margaret Thatcher's administration. In 1990 he was severely wounded in a revenge attack at his home when he was hit by nine bullets fired through the window of his house in Staffordshire. The IRA claimed responsibility. The bullet that lodged in Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Terry's skull in September 1990 was "the thickness of a cornflake" away from exacting fatal revenge for his decision to order the killing of three suspected IRA terrorists in Gibraltar.

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## **THE NAVY LARK...**

The Royal Navy says it is dropping the traditional sailors' toast to "our wives and sweethearts", replacing the timeworn language with a gender-neutral reference to "our families". In a statement, the military said the Saturday night toast was being updated to "reflect cultural changes" in the navy, which has included female sailors for more than two decades. The practice of toasting "our wives and sweethearts" - occasionally followed with a bawdy "May they never meet!" - has long been a part of naval culture and is one of the seven traditional toasts delivered over dinner for each day of the week. The Tuesday night toast to "our men" has also been updated to "our sailors," according to the statement. Would Nelson turn a blind eye?

## **HMS Queen Elizabeth:**

The Royal Navy's biggest-ever warship, has sprung a leak, only two weeks after it was commissioned into the Royal Navy by Queen Elizabeth. The vessel, which cost \$4.1bn to build, has been taking on water for some time due to a problem with a shaft seal. The 280m-long, 65 000 Tonne aircraft carrier, the most powerful ship Britain has ever built, is undergoing sea trials and is due to enter service in 2020. It can operate with a crew of 1000 and 40 aircraft on deck. These will include the new F35 Lightning. The problem will be repaired when the warship is in dock at Portsmouth. "This is the reason why we have the sea trials – to make sure that everything is working absolutely perfectly," said Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson. "HMS Queen Elizabeth is the most magnificent aircraft carrier in the world. She is going to make a significant difference as to what we can actually achieve and what we are able to do as a global power."

## **SAN SOUCI: WHO REMEMBERS THIS HOTEL?**

Development is once again underway on the Napier Road site of the historic Rand Steam Laundry, demolished 5 years ago by Goths and Vandals masquerading as property developers. The Milpark Waterfall occurs about a kilometer downstream of the confluence of three perennial north-flowing streams which together form the Braamfontein Spruit. These streams are the one which rises in the grounds of the Barnato Park School in Berea (originally the residence of Barney Barnato); the so-called "Gasworks Spruit" which rises

in the Braamfontein cemetery and flows along a course which includes the site of the Johannesburg Gas Works (now Egoli Gas) and then into the Frank Brown Park; and the so-called Country Club spruit, which rises in the grounds of the Country Club, Johannesburg, probably on Brixton Ridge. The three streams converge in Parktown - more specifically at a place once known as Sans Souci - which was the place where the Zulu Amawasha and a few Indian Dhobis plied their trade as laundrymen. This was later the site of the Sans Souci Hotel, a popular watering-hole and weekend retreat in earlier years, with a pleasant garden overlooking the stream. The Hotel building still exists in the Milpark Hospital parking. These perennial water-courses have been canalised in many places, and even the falls in question now flow into an ugly concrete basin, constructed when Barry Hertzog Avenue was being built. This stream is one of the headwaters of the Limpopo River: the Braamfontein Spruit flows into the Jukskei River, which, via the Hartbeestpoort Dam, in turn flows into the Crocodile and then into the Limpopo. This fact is commemorated in the name of the small Anglican Chapel near the Brenthurst Clinic in Parktown, which stands on the stream rising at Barnato Park School, and which is called "St Mary's-on-the-Limpopo."

## MEMBERS NEWS:

Sadly, we received the belated news that senior member **John Greenfield OBE**, passed away in UK in July 2017. Older members will remember that John and his wife were "swallows" for many years, spending UK winters in South Africa, and regularly attending RAFOC functions while here. We will remember him! New Year greetings received from Stan Smith, David Sleeman, Derrick Page, Priscilla Henwood and Shelagh Anderson, who is making a good recovery from a broken hip which has kept her out of circulation for several weeks. Colin Francis is back with us, well on the road to recovery from his cardiac episode of last year, and so is Eugene Couzyn after his extended stay in Sunninghill, now equipped with latest mod-state of valves and pacemaker.

**NEXT FUNCTION: 2 FEBRUARY ORDINARY LUNCH** - 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers. We will advise the speaker in the reminders in the next weeks.

**NB:** Lunch Fees: now **R200** pp. If paying EFT please use your "**Name + Lunch**" as the reference. NEDBANK Melrose Arch, Branch 19 66 05 Account 19 66 278 063

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

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Look forward to seeing you there!

Bruce.