



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2018

RAF CENTENARY DINNER:

On a mild Highveld Autumn evening a gathering of 82 distinguished guests, RAFOC members and their Ladies foregathered in the Gala Room at Wanderers to celebrate the Centenary of the RAF and the 55th 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. After traditional Sherry and pre-dinner drinks 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 Tartlet Starter, followed by Fillet of Beef, done to perfection, and complemented by Malva Puddings. The meal was accompanied by selected wines from South African Vineyards, all enjoyed in a convivial hum of conversation.

The tables cleared, Port was served and Geoff Fish, as “Mr Vice” proposed the Loyal Toasts to “The Queen” and “The Republic of South Africa”. The Chairman then welcomed the guests of honour, General Denis and Mrs Beth Earp, and proposed the Toast to the Guests and Ladies. Philip Weyers proposed the Toast to the RAF in fine style, to which Jon Adams responded; as is tradition to have RAF past or present personnel make the reply. The formalities over, the company adjourned, progressively, with the surviving wines, to the Cigar Bar for coffee, cheese, fruit and biscuits in a cheery haze of fellowship, bonhomie and war stories. “Carriages” were called at the appointed time; however, a good number lingered to enjoy fellowship over a glass (or possibly more) of Port, wine or Highland Water. A seasoned veteran of such events wrote: Congratulations on a superb evening last night – it was quite apparent that a tremendous amount of effort was expended to make the auspicious event just that. Speeches great, food and service top of the line. And libations vertiginous...”

REPLICA SPITFIRE Mk IX “AGM”

Two other events on the same weekend also marked the Centenary of the RAF. On Saturday 7 April, a replica Spitfire Mark IX was unveiled by RAFOC member and WW2 Spitfire pilot **John Martin**, at a special event at the SAAF Museum, Port Elizabeth, the culmination of an 8 year project by dedicated volunteers and to which RAFOC has contributed. **Sailor Malan** flew the original aircraft when it was allocated to him personally when Station Commander at RAF Biggin Hill. The replica is finished in Sailor Malan’s personal “Alpha Golf Mike” (Adolf Gysbert Malan) markings, and will be on permanent display as a Memorial to him. A full account of this event has been circulated in a “Special Edition” Newsletter.

RAF CENTENARY: BAYS' HILL, AFB SWARTKOP:

On Sunday 8 April, the **Centenary of the Royal Air Force**, together with the **Annual Royal Air Forces Association Memorial Service** for the Royal Air Force Joint Air Training Scheme was held at Bays' Hill, AFB Swartkop, hosted by RAFA Gauteng. A Harvard flypast by the SAAF Museum opened the proceedings. The Welsh Choir performed a number of pieces and led the Congregational hymns in the Service led by Chaplains Trevor Slade and John Westwood, in tribute to those who had given their lives. The role of General Smuts in the formation of the RAF, and South Africa's contribution to the wartime Air Training Scheme were also recognised and honoured. Wreaths were laid by Diplomatic, Military and Veteran representatives. The company adjourned to the Gymnasium at AFB Swartkop for lunch, at which the Welsh Choir again sang.

“WHO WAS THIS CHAP MALAN, AND WHAT DID HE DO?”

In 1966, members of 74 Squadron conceived a Memorial for Sailor, **The Malan Memorial Sword**. It was made by Wilkinson, and on the evening of 5 July 1966, the magnificent trophy was presented to the Squadron at Bentley Priory, the great house on the hill above Stanmore, North of London, the Headquarters of RAF Fighter Command in WW2. Accompanying the sword were the portrait of Sailor by Cuthbert Orde, and a drawing of 2 Spitfires in the markings of 74 Squadron by Gp Capt Norman Hoad.

The speech was made by Gp Capt D S Brookes:

“The presentation of this sword is made by 28 former members of the Squadron in the years 1939-45 and I am deeply honoured to represent them tonight. Sailor was, I think, the outstanding fighter pilot of WW2 and accounted for over 30 enemy aircraft destroyed and another 20 probables. He joined 74 on the day he left Flying Training School, an Acting Pilot Officer, and served in all ranks until on 8 August 1940, at the height of the Battle, he assumed command as a Squadron Leader. He left when promoted to Wing Commander in March 1941, to become Wing Leader of the fighter Wing in which 74 flew, but he continued to fly with 74, and in fact was never in any other Squadron. So it seems entirely appropriate that this presentation should be a family affair of past and present members of Tiger Squadron. From a personal point of view, I find that the most endearing thing about him was that, apart from being an exceptional shot, he was just an ordinary chap; quiet, unassuming, and gentle in manner. His great gifts came from within when great gifts were called for. Tremendous courage, relentless determination and that quality of leadership which carried the whole Squadron to great deeds with him. For in those dark but glorious days the record of the Squadron was, as in 1918, second to none. This small book, which we shall, for want of a better name, call *The Charter*, is devised to place the presentation on record and to act as a record of subsequent changes of command, when the custody of the Sword will devolve upon the new Commander. It also ensures that in years to come no young member of the Squadron need ever ask: “Who was this chap Malan, and what did he do?”

RAF COMMEMORATIVE ANTHOLOGY

Deep in the archives of the RAF Museum in Hendon are the remains of an identity card. It bears the photograph of a young pilot who like many of his wartime generation had sprouted a pencil thin moustache in an attempt to persuade the airfield ground crews he was older than his 23 years. The name Edgar John Wilcox is still legible, as well as his rank of Flying Officer and the Station where he was posted: RAF Acklington. All else on the card has been scorched black by the inferno where he met his fate. Wilcox was killed on August 31, 1940, during the height of the Battle of Britain which raged between June and October of that year, as Hitler tried to destroy the RAF ahead of a planned invasion codenamed Operation Sealion. Wilcox, a former public schoolboy from Surrey who had already fought with distinction during his short piloting career, had been scrambled in his spitfire to the Kent coast to engage in a dogfight with Luftwaffe aircraft flying in from the Channel. In the ensuing chaos his spitfire P9457 was shot down. His body was buried near to the crash site at All Saints Churchyard in Staplehurst, one of 554 British and Allied pilots who died during the Battle of Britain. His RAF wings and identity card were recovered from the wreckage and placed in the archives with a letter from his sister, Jess, sent just nine days before his death.

His story is one of countless threads that make up the 100-year history of the Royal Air Force. Often they have been forgotten in the fog of war or even simply never told. However a new book compiled to mark the centenary of the RAF has pulled together this vast archive to create what it claims is the “ultimate documentary history” of the winged branch of Britain's Armed Forces. The book, entitled **The RAF Commemorative Anthology**, has been compiled by the publishing house Extraordinary Editions from a treasure trove of lost

and forgotten documents in the RAF archives in Hendon and produced in conjunction with the RAF100 Appeal with regimental charities receiving benefit from every sale.

THE FEW and THE MANY:

Peter Devitt, a curator at the RAF Museum who has assisted with the research of the book, takes the view that the “Few” quoted by Winston Churchill when he acclaimed the heroics of the 2,937 RAF and Allied aircrew involved has obscured the reality. In fact, he argues, the pilots were the “teeth” of a complex defence system relying on thousands of RAF and Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) personnel and volunteers from the Royal Observer Corps. “The Battle of Britain is the defining moment for the RAF,” he says. “There’s this huge pyramid of which the pilots are just the pinnacle.”

After initially being recruited to fill clerical and transport posts to release men for frontline duty, the women of the WAAF soon became a vital cog in the war effort: working as codebreakers, mechanics, engineers, and reporters and plotters in Britain’s air defence network known as the Dowding system. During the Battle of Britain, their work was of vital importance and shattered the outdated perceptions of women’s role in society. Devitt cites three stories which have been taken from the RAF archive as part of research into the book.

On Sunday August 18, 1940, Elizabeth Mortimer was manning a switchboard in the armoury at Biggin Hill airfield when Luftwaffe bombers initiated a heavy raid. Bombs rained down on the airfield, destroying several motor transport sheds and smashing a nearby anti-aircraft gun to pieces killing those manning it. But the 28-year-old Mortimer remained at her post throughout the chaos, calmly relaying messages to the defence positions. As a result of heroism, she became the first WAAF to be awarded the Military Medal. Two other women posted at Biggin Hill during the Battle of Britain also received the honour: Elspeth Henderson, who on August 30 helped dig out the wounded and dying from the rubble of an air raid shelter at the airfield after nine Junker 88 bombers delivered a devastating attack; and Helen Turner, who similarly remained at her post in the adjacent emergency telephone exchange. On November 2, 1940, at the end of the Battle of Britain, all three were recognised for their “courage and example of a high order”.

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE: A CENTENARY OF OPERATIONS: MICHAEL NAPIER

(The Author of this new book, **Wing Commander Michael Napier** was Cookie Cookson’s “Front” on Tornados, and is brother to Bob Napier. We anticipate he will be our Guest Speaker at the Battle of Britain Lunch in September. Bob brought a preview copy of the book to the dinner - it is a splendid work)

In the 100 years since the end of World War I, the service has been involved in almost continuous operations around the globe, giving the RAF the longest and most wide-ranging history of any air force in the world. But over the years this history has also become entangled with myths. This book will set the record straight, dispelling these as it uncovers - in both words and photographs - the true exploits and accomplishments of RAF personnel over the last 100 years. From its formation as an independent service in the dying days of World War I, its desperate fight against the Axis air forces in World War II, to its commitments during both the Cold War and modern times, this is the complete story of how the RAF has defended Britain for a century.

Michael Napier joined the RAF in 1978 as a university cadet and studied aeronautical engineering at the Imperial College, London. His military flying career encompassed both the Cold War and operations over Iraq after the Gulf War. He left the RAF in 1997 and joined British Airways; he has over 15,000 hours’ flying experience and lives in the UK .Michael has written a number of articles for aviation magazines including Aircraft Illustrated, Flypast, Aeroplane Monthly and Cross & Cockade. He has also appeared on BBC radio and television and BFBS radio. He is the author of four books: Winged Crusaders: The Exploits of 14 Squadron RFC & RAF 1915-1945, Blue Diamonds: The Exploits of 14 Squadron RAF 1945-2015, Tornado Over the Tigris: Recollections of a Fast Jet Pilot and Gloster Javelin: an Operational History.
<https://ospreypublishing.com/the-royal-air-force>

A YEAR OF HISTORY:

2018 will be a major Year of History on the BBC to mark the centenary of 1918, a seismic year in the history of Britain and the world. Over the course of just 12 months, propertied women over the age of 30 were given the right to vote for the very first time, the Armistice was signed bringing World War One to a close, the RAF was formed and the influenza pandemic, known as Spanish Flu, swept across the world infecting an estimated 500 million people.

A century on, as a culmination of the BBC’s ambitious four years of programming for the World War One centenary, the BBC will mark this major turning point with a compelling range of content across television, radio and online, collaborating with 14-18 NOW on major projects and with partners including Imperial War

Museums, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Wellcome Trust and others across the UK. Through live events, presenter-lead series, testimony-driven documentaries, digital content and a range of collaborations, the programming will explore the political, cultural and social shifts which would set the agenda for the next 100 years and shape the world as we know it today.

Tony Hall, Director-General, BBC says: "We see 2018 as our chance to inspire a new generation with extraordinary stories of courage and sacrifice. Over the last three years, events staged by 14-18 NOW, and programming broadcast on the BBC, have moved us in our millions and I hope through our Year of History, we can galvanise even more people. 2018 gives us the chance to look back - and to shine a light on who we are today."

BERLIN AIRLIFT 70TH ANNIVERSARY:

The airlift began in late June 1948, ignited by a spat over currency in divided Germany. The Soviets closed road, rail and canal traffic to Berlin from western Germany, hoping the allies, whose tactical situation was hopeless, would collapse and abandon Berlin. A stubborn and occasionally petulant Army engineering officer, Gen. Lucius D. Clay, thought otherwise and pledged to sustain the city via an air bridge. The Soviets believed the very notion was patently absurd. Even the wise men in Washington counseled Clay, who had been assigned as Allied Governor of Germany, that the plan was untenable during the summer, much less during Germany's notoriously foggy winter. Gen. Omar Bradley, then Army Chief of Staff, and Gen. George C. Marshall, then Secretary of State, advised President Harry Truman that a withdrawal from Berlin would be inevitable. Truman rejected the advice. "We stay in Berlin. Period," he said. The record isn't clear if Truman had the vaguest inkling of how ill-prepared the Air Force was to undertake such an operation. Clay was no better informed.

Wolfgang Samuel, a young German boy living near the end of Tempelhof's runway, would later write: "One of those C-54s turned over our barracks on a clear December night and then fell like a rock out of the sky. The two pilots were killed. Only three years ago they were fighting against my country and now they are dying for us. The Americans were such strange people. I wondered, as only a boy can wonder, what made these people do the things they did?" Harry Truman may have known the answer to this, even if he couldn't have articulated it. But we do know the world is a far better place for those people having done the things they did.

NEXT FUNCTION:

Our Next Ordinary Lunch will be on **Friday 4 May 2017**, 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers.

We had anticipated that Wing Commander Kevin Rayner would be our Speaker, but regret that again the "Exigencies of the Service" require that this be postponed to a later date.

Instead, we will have an audiovisual presentation on the story of the replica Spitfire Mk IX in the SAAF Museum, Port Elizabeth. The presentation will be done by the team of Jon Adams, Karl Jensen and Geoff Fish, who accompanied John Martin to the Unveiling Ceremony. RAFOC has made a series of contributions at key stages of this project.

REMEMBER: Lunch Fees now R200 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.