



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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NEWSLETTER – MAY 2018

MAY LUNCH:

On the first Friday in May 34 Members and Guests foregathered in the Gala Room for a lunch that was somewhat of a “Spitfire Celebration” as its focus was on the unveiling of the Spitfire Replica, in the markings of Sailor Malan’s personal aircraft, at the SAAF Museum, Port Elizabeth, as reported last month in the Special Edition Newsletter. Silvasale again put up a very tasty menu of Farmstyle Vegetable Soup, followed by rare Roast Rump of Beef with Seasonal vegetables (with mustard and horseradish) The company observed a Minute’s silence before the Grace in honour of Claus Keuchel and Maxine Frisch, good friends of many in the Club, who had tragically died in an aircraft accident near Vryheid the previous weekend.

Lunch over, our speaker Capt Karl Jensen presented a profusely illustrated account of the trip to and from Port Elizabeth and the actual Ceremony, with the special treatment and recognition accorded to John Martin, who as a WW2 Spitfire veteran performed the unveiling. John was persuaded to say a few words – he expressed his thanks and appreciation for the recognition and was given a standing ovation. We also said “Au Revoir” to Rob and Sandy Tannahill who are emigrating to Hermanus in retirement and acknowledged and thanked Rob for his service to the Club since 1999. The Raffle was drawn to a hubbub of general merriment, jeers and catcalls - depending on the ticket numbers of aspirant winners – before closure and adjournment to the Cigar Bar.

DAVID CROSBY - AMONGST MY SOUVENIRS:

David Crosby, another of our WW2 veterans, had a special treat in store for those who adjourned to the Cigar Bar. He produced a comprehensive set of photograph albums of his career in the RAF, training in the United States and posting to the Far East where he flew Hurricanes and Thunderbolts in Burma. David attested into the RAFVR in October 1941 and earned his Wings at 18 EFTS Fair Oaks as well as his nickname “Bing”. His Course was then embarked for a secret destination on a converted Polish freighter, the “Batory”. This was David’s first trip out of the UK.

Arriving at Monckton Transit Camp in Canada, they assumed that they would do their further training there under the Empire Air Training Scheme. However, after another train journey of 2 days and nights they found themselves in Mesa, Arizona, at 4 British Flying Training School, Falcon Field, where civilian instructors took them through the rest of their training on Boeing Stearman PT-17A, Vultee BT-13A Valiant and North American T-6 Harvards. They returned to UK for conversion to Hurricanes at 55 Operational Training Unit in Scotland. The photographs are being digitised courtesy of Karl Jensen and we look forward to a pictorial presentation on David’s service flying career in due course

INTERNATIONAL BOMBER COMMAND CENTRE (IBCC):

Hundreds of World War Two veterans from across the world officially opened the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC) on 12 April 2018. The £10m centre in Lincoln has the UK's tallest war memorial, which stands at 31m (102ft). Up to 4,000 people had been expected at the ceremony. Organisers said the event was likely to be one of the last formal gathering of Bomber Command veterans, as the youngest of the 300 invited guests is 92 years old.

- The centre, which took eight years to complete, includes a memorial spire, a peace garden and the Chadwick Centre, which tells the story of Bomber Command through galleries and interactive exhibits.
- Almost a million men and women served or supported Bomber Command during World War Two.
- More than 55,500 men from Bomber Command died in the skies over Europe.
- More aircrew were killed or missing in action during a single Nuremburg raid than in the entire Battle of Britain.
- Only 30% of those that flew reached the end of the conflict without being killed, injured or taken prisoner.
- Bomber Command crews came from more than 60 different countries.
- Every member was a volunteer.
- The average age of those killed was 23.
- Delivered the world's first airborne humanitarian mission, Operation Manna, delivering in excess of 7,000 tons of food parcels in 10 days over the west of Holland, where one million people were registered as starving.

OF SONS AND SKIES: by Robert Arley (Amazon)

Seventy years on, the British public have settled into accepting a simplified, sanitised perception of how airmen successfully resisted the menace of German aerial aggression. Celebrations of the Battle of Britain and the Dambusters, alongside TV programmes compressing six years of deadly challenge, have caused people to think the whole aerial activity was neatly straightforward and wonderfully fruitful. In fact, it was extremely difficult to convey armed planes across the sea to try to damage enemy forces, factories or civil facilities; a terrifying prospect in bad weather, facing guns on the ground, or aboard fast fighter planes determined to inhibit your passage. More than 70,000 of the young men who volunteered to impose aerial aggression on our enemies died in the process. In a great new book on War in the Air; a fresh, accessible exploration of the terrifying challenges, complexity and consequences of aerial combat. Ex-BBC factual programme maker Robert Arley brings a lay person's objectivity to the demands of that era. There is repeated recognition and respect for the vital input of Commonwealth and Dominion aircrew through those taxing times.

<http://www.ofsonskies.com/>

617 SQUADRON FLIES AGAIN:

The squadron immortalised by the Dambusters raid of World War II has been reformed to fly the UK's new F-35 fighter jets, the Defence Secretary has announced. Gavin Williamson announced the new 617 Squadron after an event in Washington DC to mark the centenary of the RAF, which was attended by Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier. The naming of the new 617 Squadron follows the 75th anniversary of the original formation of the squadron, commonly referred to as the 'Dambusters'. Originally set up for the highly-specialised mission to knock out dams and disrupt industrial production in the Ruhr Valley of Germany, the new 617 Squadron will be the first to fly the UK's brand new, state-of-the-art F-35 fighter jets – the most advanced and dynamic fighter aircraft in the RAF's 100-year history.

OBITUARIES:

WING COMMANDER HENRY COBB DSO DFC AFC RAF, who has died aged 95, flew Wellington bombers on night attacks and shadowing operations against enemy coastal naval forces; he was awarded the DSO and the DFC. Already a veteran of 30 bombing operations over North-West Europe and North Africa, Cobb was appointed to the newly formed No 524 Squadron in April 1944. The squadron flew specially modified Wellington bombers from an airfield in Devon. Its role was to attack enemy E-boats (heavily armed fast patrol boats) and fly anti-submarine patrols off the north French coast at night. It also shadowed and illuminated enemy coastal shipping for Beaufighter strike aircraft to attack with rockets. After the war he became a test pilot, initially at Farnborough and then at Boscombe Down. During a tour in Malaya he played a significant role in the creation of the Malayan Air Force and he was decorated by the Malayan Government. After retiring he continued to fly, mainly on crop spraying activities.

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT HUMPHREY PHILLIPS DFC RAF, who has died aged 97, flew as a flight engineer on Lancasters at the height of Bomber Command's main offensive against Berlin. In November 1943 he joined No 626 Squadron just as the main bombing effort was directed against the German capital. The Luftwaffe night-fighter force was at its most formidable and losses among the bomber crews were higher than at any other period of the war. Within the first five days of joining the squadron Phillips and his crew made three hazardous sorties to the city. Over the next few weeks he went on to complete nine operations to Berlin in addition to attacking other major industrial centres. He published his biography, 'A Thousand and One', becoming Britain's oldest published author just a month before his death.

MRAF SIR KEITH WILLIAMSON GCB AFC RAF, who has died aged 90, began his RAF career in 1945 as an aircraft apprentice and rose to become the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS); the only "Halton Brat" apprentice to reach the top post. He trained as a fighter pilot and after a tour on Vampires in Germany, he flew with Meteors in Korea with the Royal Australian Air Force. He flew Hunters and Lightnings before taking command of RAF Gutersloh. He served in SHAPE and was the Air C-in-C of Support Command before taking command of Strike Command. He became the CAS just after the Falkland's War and the RAF's role in the South Atlantic occupied much of his time. He was involved in the multi-national discussions to develop the European Fighter Aircraft, which became the Typhoon. He was not in favour of Michael Heseltine's reforms in the MOD, which involved the single services losing their policy and operational requirements staffs to a centralised organisation. In retirement he devoted much of his time to RAFA and served as President.

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY: ISRAELI COMMANDOS RETAKE FLIGHT 571:

On May 8, 1972, four Palestinian terrorists from Black September boarded Sabena Flight 571 from Vienna to Tel Aviv. Twenty minutes after taking off from a scheduled stop, the hijackers took control of the flight and instructed the Captain to continue as planned to Israel's Lod Airport (now Ben Gurion International Airport). Less than 24 hours later, Israeli commandos, among them some of today's most prominent Israeli leaders, launched a daring operation to rescue the flight's passengers and retake the plane.

Soon after realizing the gravity of the situation, English-born Captain Reginald Levy radioed ahead to Israel to notify authorities of the terrorist plot flying towards them at hundreds of miles per hour. Then-Defence Minister Moshe Dayan immediately began organizing a response, a perhaps far-fetched plan to rescue the passengers. The hijackers made their demands: They would free the passengers and crew in exchange for the release of over 300 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

After nightfall, Israeli forces disabled its hydraulic systems. Captain Levy kept the hijackers occupied through the night with constant chatter, discussing "everything under the sun ... from navigation to sex."

In the morning, they sent him to show the Israelis that they indeed possessed adequate explosives to destroy the plane. Levy, realizing that the only hope for him and the passengers (one of whom was

his wife) lay in the hands of the Israelis, provided detailed information about the hijackers' whereabouts.

Armed with a better understanding of what they were up against, 16 commandos from the elite Sayeret Matkal unit disguised themselves as airplane mechanics. The team was commanded by current Defense Minister Ehud Barak. Other members of the team included current Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, former MK and Mossad chief Danny Yatom and former MK Uzi Dayan. The commandos approached the plane and pretended to examine the equipment on its underbelly, then entered via the Boeing 707's emergency exit doors and immediately engaged the terrorists. Two of the terrorists were killed in the raid and two others, females, were captured. One passenger was killed in the firefight and six passengers were wounded. Netanyahu was also shot during the operation, reportedly by friendly fire.

In a touching close to the story, 35 years after the Sabena crew and passengers were rescued, one of the commandos who took part in the raid returned Sabina Captain Reginald Levy's captain hat to his daughter, Linda Lipschitz, then an editorial assistant at The Jerusalem Post. Levy, who remained in contact with Ehud Barak and President Shimon Peres for the remainder of his life, passed away last year at the age of 88.

Along with the Entebbe Operation four years later, the rescue of Sabena Flight 571 remains one of the most daring Sayeret Matkal operations known to the public. The operation has been studied and greatly praised by security forces the world over for its efficiency and success.

Full details here together with two links to YouTube videos of the rescue:

<http://www.jpost.com/Features/In-TheSpotlight/This-Week-in-History-Israeli-commandos-retake-Flight-571>"...

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

The Author of this new book, **Wing Commander Michael Napier** was Cookie Cookson's Pilot 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 April dinner - it is a splendid work. The publisher, Osprey, are not represented in SA. However, we can now confirm that Mike will bring a small number of copies of the book with him in September and will sign them for buyers. At prevailing exchange rates the price is likely to be approx R350. Please let us know if you want a copy – we already have 2 firm orders.

NEXT FUNCTION:

Our Next **LADIES LUNCH** will be on **Friday 1 June 2017, 12h30 for 13h00** at The Wanderers Club.

We hope, subject to final confirmation, that **Adv Gerrie Nel** will be giving us a talk on "**Corruption and Integrity**" - this depends on his Court commitments for Afriforum, so we may have a "Plan B"

REMEMBER: Lunch Fees are 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.