



## ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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## NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2018

### JUNE LADIES LUNCH:

This Ladies' Lunch broke records: more than 137 members and guests filled the Vista Room to capacity. The main reason was our guest speaker **Advocate Gerrie Nel**, arguably the best-known prosecutor in SA after the Oscar Pistorius trial, the first to be televised live in SA. Lawrie Poorter asked on arrival if so many people were present because they all had guilty consciences! Our Hon Treasurer was so overcome by the sense of occasion that he arrived a full hour early.... The lunch itself was very good, SilvaSale presenting a Roasted Rossa Tomato with Pesto dressed in Balsamic – followed by Chicken Supreme served on Buttered Mash Potatoes, Kenyan Green beans & Salted Patty Pan finished off with Creamy Garlic Sauce with a Chai Tea Crème Brulee garnished with Cream and Cape Gooseberries as the desert, after which the Chairman introduced the Guest Speaker.

Gerrie Nel in person is an unassuming and modest man with 36 years of service as a Public Prosecutor. He gave us an insightful and challenging talk on corruption and integrity, the villains and heroes of recent years and cases on our equality before the Law and the down-to-earth challenge that a better society depends on each of us and our behaviour as individuals when faced with corruption. He described the process of bringing private prosecutions, which is now his role with activist group Afriforum. At the end of his talk, he answered the many questions from the floor in an insightful, humorous and thought-provoking manner, challenging many perceptions formed by selective media reporting. As he remarked wryly, the televising of the Pistorius trial created 52 million experts overnight, and only he and Billy Downer for the defence still had to establish the facts of the matter! To rousing applause, Gerrie was presented with a RAFOC Tie and cap as a token of the Club's appreciation.

The raffle, run by Russell Swanborough, was drawn by guest Ashley Adams, with the numerous prizes going to appreciative winners. Before Gerrie could take his leave, however, he was besieged by guests wanting to congratulate him, shake his hand and get his autograph, all of which he handled with patience and good humour before taking his leave to brave the Pretoria-bound Friday afternoon traffic.

### POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE:

Watching the much publicised Royal Wedding brought to mind a traditional June ceremony full of military pomp and pageantry: **Trooping the Colour on Horse Guards Parade** - a ceremonial military parade that has taken place in London for two centuries. After existing in various forms since the 17th century, the Trooping the Colour ceremony has been held in June every year in London to mark the sovereign's official birthday since the accession of King George IV in 1820, except during the world wars and a national strike in 1955. Although the Sovereign's official birthday is celebrated in June, Queen Elizabeth II's actual birthday is on 21 April. Monarchs are traditionally given a second birthday if they were not born in the summer, in case the British weather is unsuitable for an outdoor event! There were and still are Queens Birthday Parades in the former Dominions and some Commonwealth countries.

Marking the **Queen's** official birthday, this annual event features hundreds of officers, horses and musicians from the Household Division in ceremonial uniform. The Queen herself attends the ceremony. She is first escorted in a carriage from **Buckingham Palace** along **The Mall** to **Horse Guards Parade**.

There, she carries out an inspection of her troops, before leading her guards in a parade back to Buckingham Palace. Once at the palace, the Queen takes the salute, and guns are fired in **Green Park** and at the **Tower of London**. Finally, she joins other members of the Royal Family on the palace balcony to watch the traditional **Royal Air Force fly-past**.

### **DUNKIRK and the LITTLE SHIPS:**

They were the "Little Boats", credited with saving Britain during its darkest hour in 1940. Now one of the boats which rescued as many as 600 British soldiers from the beaches at Dunkirk has been saved from destruction. After crossing the Channel to take part in the evacuation, the 45ft river boat, the "Vanguard", fell into disrepair and was abandoned in Canvey Island near the mouth of the Thames Estuary, where it was plundered for firewood. A campaign has now begun to raise the £500,000 required to make the former oyster dredger shipshape once again. Fundraising plans include the sale of a beer called the Vanguard, created by a local brewery. One of the team involved in the restoration of the Vanguard said "when she was found, people were cutting chunks out of her for firewood". Thankfully, the owner donated her. He said "If you can, take her and save her". There has been renewed interest in the flotilla of little boats, which helped evacuate 330,000 Allied troops between 27 May and 2 June 1940, since the recent release of the new film DUNKIRK. *(Contribution by David Sleeman from the UK Press)*

### **GET OUT OF JAIL...FREE:**

Starting in 1941, an increasing number of British Airmen found themselves as the involuntary guests of the Third Reich, and the Crown was casting about for ways and means to facilitate their escape... Now obviously, one of the most helpful aids to that end is a useful and accurate map, one showing not only where stuff was, but also showing the locations of 'safe houses' where a POW on-the-lam could go for food and shelter. Paper maps had some real drawbacks - they make a lot of noise when you open and fold them, they wear out rapidly, and if they get wet, they turn into mush. Someone in MI-5 (similar to America's OSS) got the idea of printing escape maps on silk. It's durable, can be scrunched-up into tiny wads and unfolded as many times as needed, and makes no noise whatsoever. At that time, there was only one manufacturer in Great Britain that had perfected the technology of printing on silk, and that was John Waddington, Ltd. When approached by the government, the firm was only too happy to do its bit for the war effort. Waddington was also the U.K. Licensee for the popular American board game, Monopoly. As it happened, 'games and pastimes' was a category of item qualified for insertion into 'CARE packages', dispatched by the International Red Cross to prisoners of war. Under the strictest of secrecy, in a securely guarded and inaccessible old workshop on the grounds of Waddington's, a group of sworn-to-secrecy employees began mass-producing escape maps, keyed to each region of Germany or Italy where Allied POW camps were regional system). When processed, these maps could be folded into such tiny dots that they would actually fit inside a Monopoly playing piece. While they were at it, the clever workmen at Waddington's also managed to add:

1. A playing token, containing a small magnetic compass
2. A two-part metal file that could easily be screwed together
3. Useful amounts of genuine, high-denomination German, Italian, and French currency, hidden within the piles of Monopoly money!

British and American air crews were advised, before taking off on their first mission, how to identify a 'rigged' Monopoly set - by means of a tiny red dot, one cleverly rigged to look like an ordinary printing glitch, located in the corner of the Free Parking square. Of the estimated 35,000 Allied POWS who successfully escaped, it is estimated one-third was aided in their flight by the rigged Monopoly sets... Everyone who did so was sworn to secrecy indefinitely, since the British Government might want to use this highly successful ruse in still another, future war. The story wasn't declassified until 2007, when the surviving craftsmen from Waddington's, as well as the firm itself, were finally honoured in a public ceremony. It's always nice when you can play that 'Get out of Jail Free' card! *(article contributed by Clive King)*

### **SKA – THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES....**

The South African component of the international Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope programme had become a major "headache" for the South African aviation sector, Air Traffic and Navigation Services(ATNS) executive manager Jeffrey Matshoba pointed out in his presentation to the Commercial Aviation Association of Southern Africa (CAASA) Commercial Aviation Symposium. "We did not realise the impact it would have on aviation," he said. The Cape Town-Johannesburg air route is the 12th busiest air route in the world, he

highlighted. And all the domestic Gauteng-Cape Town air routes overfly the SKA reservation in the Karoo region in the Northern Cape Province. It was a requirement of the SKA that no air routes pass over its sites. Consequently, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) was adamant that the ATNS move these air traffic routes. "We have to redesign those routes," he stated. They will all have to be shifted eastwards, to pass the SKA reservation. But moving the air routes would increase the distance the airliners have to fly. This will increase their fuel consumption and so their costs. These increased costs will come to just over R2-million a year, reported Matshoba. The aviation industry, he averred, had to convince the DST that there was a technical solution to the problem. This would allow the SKA and aviation to co-exist.....Really? *(Article contributed by Dr John Ledger, from Engineering News)*

## HISTORIC AEROPLANES:

The number of British-designed aircraft types to see service with the Royal Air Force during its first century of flight is legion. Most people have heard of the **Supermarine Spitfire** and **Hawker Hurricane**, of Battle of Britain fame, and certainly some know of the **Sopwith Camel**, thanks either to Charles M. Schulz or that master writer of aviation fiction for youngsters, Captain W.E. Johns.

What, though, or the **Supermarine Walrus**? The Walrus, for example, was born of an Australian Navy requirement for a catapult-capable spotting aircraft. Powered by a Bristol Pegasus VI engine driving a pusher propeller, it was extremely successful as a general-purpose amphibian. Hard to believe it was designed by **Reginald Mitchell**, the man who gave us the immortal Spitfire. At one stage, Supermarine supplied the RAF with its fastest front-line aircraft, the Spitfire, as well as its slowest, the Walrus.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, Britain was under a financial depression, with little money to spend on the RAF. The 1927 **Westland Wapiti** was the result of a competition to design a general-purpose military aircraft, mostly for use overseas that incorporated as many parts as possible from the **de Havilland DH.9A**, which the RAF had in great supply. Westland won the competition, mainly because it had been a DH.9A contractor. They were the first military aircraft to be built locally in SA – 31 served in the SAAF, Serials 601-631.

The Wapiti's odd-looking tail resulted from a mistake. A two-foot-long section of fuselage was accidentally left out of production plans, giving rise to very bad handling characteristics. To improve flyability, engineers added more area to the fin and rudder, as well as horn-balanced ailerons. When the original error was discovered, Westland decided to leave the (modified) aircraft as it was, and by 1933 there were no fewer than 20 squadrons in RAF and Auxiliary Air Force units at home, in Iraq, and in India, as well as the SAAF. Amazingly, some Wapitis were still flying in India during early World War II; until finally phased out in October 1940.

Read more at <https://www.airspacemaq.com/daily-planet/lesser-known-types-raf-180967519/#zwdmSurVsKPMitYC.99>

## 617 SQUADRON RAF "STANDS UP":

**Wing Commander Clive Mitchell**, a past Deputy Defence Adviser at the BHC in Pretoria, sends greeting from Washington where he is currently serving to all who know him, says that he would be wearing his Springbok Jersey for the game against Wales. He was the last CO of 617 Sqn before the Canberras were withdrawn from service, and responding to the May Newsletter, says "617 Sqn actually stood up during our RAF 100 in US Reception on 17 Apr. Photo attached": Clive is second from the left.



## **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 Tornadoes, 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 6 firm orders to date.

## **“BETTER LAKER THAN NEVER”.... 40 YEARS AGO. REMEMBER WHEN?**

The trouble in July, August and September 1978 was caused by one simple fact. During May and June, many thousands of passengers had been ferried across the Atlantic by Laker and at standby fares by other airlines. When they wanted to go home again, all the airlines were at their busiest time of the year and there were simply not enough seats available. So the passengers piled up in enormous human traffic jams. Many of them had little more than their fare left. What happened was briefly but skilfully described by a London journalist who devoted special attention to these strange happenings. “Lakerville”, that instant shanty town in the streets around Victoria Station continued to grow yesterday as the summer, nearing its height, unleashed a second day of torrential rain on the flimsy shelter of its two thousand inhabitants. “The Queue”, as it is affectionately known, edges its way towards its goal, the Skytrain office in the Station where each day, several hundred people pay GBP 95 for a one-way ticket to New York, courtesy of Sir Freddie Laker. While they wait, and it may be for as long as four or five days, Lakervillians build, erecting makeshift homes of tarpaulin, plastic sheeting, polythene and tents against the iron railings and walls of the neighbourhood, keeping them together with string and good humour....”

## **NEXT FUNCTION:**

Our Next **Ordinary Members Lunch** will be on **Friday 6 July 2017, 12h30 for 13h00** at Wanderers. We expect, subject to the exigencies of the service, that **Col Keith Fryer** former **OC 21 Sqn SAAF** will be giving us a talk on this Squadrons' Aircraft and Operations.

## **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](mailto:bookings@rafoc.org) or if you do not have access to e-mail:

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## **A REQUEST FROM THE BOOKINGS MAIL ADDRESS:**

Some members just pay into the account without sending a confirmation email to [bookngs@rafoc.org](mailto:bookngs@rafoc.org) which causes some problems, as it did for the June lunch with space constraints, so please do confirm either by phone to one of the above or send an email that you have made payment. The Bank account is not monitored continuously but the email is.....

Look forward to seeing you there!

Cheers, Bruce.