



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

P.O. Box 69726

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info@rafoc.org

www.rafoc.org

President:	David MacKinnon-Little
Vice Presidents:	Basil Hersov, Colin Francis, Geoff Quick, David Lake
Chairman:	Bruce Harrison bruce@jbharrison.co.za Tel: 011 673 0291 Cell: 083 325 0025
Vice Chairman:	Jon Adams vice-chairman@rafoc.org Tel: 011 678 7702 Cell: 082 450 0616
Hon. Secretary:	Colin Ackroyd Tel: 012 942 1111 Cell: 082 800 5845
Hon. Treasurer:	Jeff Earle Tel: 011 616 3189 Cell: 083 652 1002
Committee Members:	Russell Swanborough Tel: 011 884 2611 Cell: 083 263 2740
	Karl Jensen Tel: 011 234 0598 Cell: 082 331 4652
	Jean-Michel Girard Cell: 083 659 1067
	Geoff Fish Tel: 012 667 2759 Cell: 083 660 9697
Web Master:	Hanke Fourie Tel: Cell: 082 553 0210
Bank Account:	Nedbank - Melrose Arch Br: 19 66 05 Account 19 66 278 063

RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 15 - 17th JULY 2020

GREETINGS TO ALL:

Last week Majorca's biggest nightspot was again playing host to familiar scenes over the weekend despite the introduction of a new "anti-trash" tourism law. Britons were up to their old tricks: drinking, singing, jumping on parked cars in the party strip on Punta Bellena. There was not a face mask in sight, nor any social distancing. The "strip" is now closed by Government decree .. and in UK a Telegraph columnist reflected that "It's hard to take a lecture from a prince who has benefitted from unearned privilege since the day he was born ... be honest, what was your reaction to the latest Cash and Harry video? The one in which the Sussexes hold forth on righting the wrongs of the "uncomfortable" Commonwealth. The same Commonwealth that Harry's grandmother calls "a very special family" and which Her Majesty has spent the past 73 years loving and serving without any apparent discomfort. Quick, get Granny on an unconscious bias training course! As Harry spoke fluent Woke and Meghan gazed at him with a look of terrifying, moist-lipped sincerity, I thought, "Just pay the ransom. Please. Whatever it costs, let's get him out of there." And here at home, we mark Day 115 of the seige, continuation of Level 3 and re-imposition of the ban on alcohol sales and overnight curfew. And loadshedding ... when days are dark....

FLYPAST FOR DAME VERA:



Armed Forces personnel paid tribute to Forces sweetheart Dame Vera Lynn at her funeral today, with street lining and a flypast by Second World War aircraft. Personnel from all three services formed a bearer party to carry Dame Vera's coffin into the funeral service. A Royal Marines bugler performed

'The Last Post' and the Reveille during the ceremony. Two Spitfires from the RAF's Battle of Britain Memorial Flight performed a flypast over Ditchling before returning to RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire.

Dame Vera enjoyed a special connection with the Armed Forces, and her family requested that military personnel take part in the ceremonies at her funeral today. The bearer party comprised personnel from all three Services:

- Engineering Technician Dan Slamaker and Engineering Technician Alex Bouleter from HMS Collingwood represented the Royal Navy
- Guardsman Junior Smith and Guardsman Louis Rogers from No 7 Company 1st Battalion The Coldstream Guards represented the British Army
- Lance Corporal Samuel Collins and Lance Corporal Benjamin Troughton from The Queen's Colour Squadron, the ceremonial unit of the RAF Regiment, represented the Royal Air Force.

In the private ceremony, Royal Marine bugler Corporal Kimberley Hare sounded 'The Last Post' and 'The Reveille.' The Armed Forces consider it an honour to have held such a prominent role in today's events and have had the chance to say goodbye to such a significant Forces icon in their own special way. Her legacy will live on forever within the military community.

“WAY TO THE STARS”

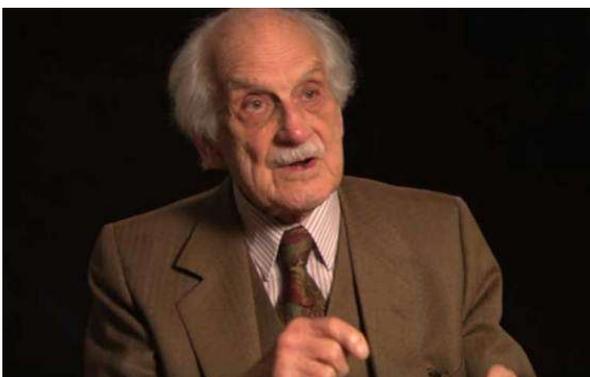
On the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, it is surprising to note that there are hardly any films about it. The 1969 film is well known. It has remarkable action sequences, but seems anachronistic - too many of the actors look and sound as though they are in 1969, not 1940. **Ernie Todd**, writing from UK, sends greetings and says: “An interesting article (but a shortened version, behind a paywall) in the DT this am (Saturday 11th July): It's about “The Way to the Stars”, not a film I know, altho' I shall be watching it tonight on Youtube. The film might well be a classic, I'll let you know (if I remember, of course) and if I remember to switch it on and if I remember what the B of B was and if I remember what the initials RAF stand for and and and and, sorry I forgot the next part ...I think.” After watching the film, Ernie writes: “It's an old-style film, about 1:49 and B&W, fairly standard stuff. No sex, violence, no gouging or dripping blood, nor foul language, zero nudity. Plot line weak and acting rather ordinary, but it was made, on a tight budget I guess, to boost morale and I'm sure it succeeded. Some smashing shots of ancient aircraft staggering into the air – marvellous. I enjoyed it, very pleasant.”

The film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dNdmG2eRso>

The Telegraph article: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/best-battle-britain-film-not-expect/?li_source=LI&li_medium=liftigniter-rhr

LAST OF THE FEW:

We noted in the last Ramblings that **John Hemingway DFC**, who turns 101 this month, is now the only surviving pilot to fight in the Battle of Britain, after his last fellow comrade died just a few hours before VE Day. "The lucky Irishman," was thought to have died. It was presumed that Hemingway



was dead due to the the official roll of honor naming the surviving veterans. The mistake has since been amended after the war hero's nephew got in touch with the Battle of Britain Fighter Association in 2019 and informed them that Hemingway was still alive and retired in Ireland. Hemingway has become the last living fighter pilot of the group of men Winston Churchill called "The Few", a group of 3,000 fighter pilots who saved Britain from Nazi invasion when they defended the skies in the Battle of Britain against the Luftwaffe in 1940.

On the very same evening that War was declared, on September 3rd 1939, John 'Paddy' Hemingway was awoken in the officer's mess and ordered to get his aircraft ready for action. As the (then) 20-year-old sprinted across the runway of RAF Debden in Essex towards his Hurricane, he remembers coming to the sudden and startling realisation that he must learn to cope “entirely on my own, no

matter the circumstances". Eighty years ago this month, on 10th July, the Luftwaffe mounted a series of attacks on shipping convoys in the English Channel marking the start of the Battle of Britain. Over the course of the next four months, the eyes of a nation were raised to the skies, watching its brave young pilots fight to the death in defence of the realm. Hundreds of books - and many popular films - have augmented the legend of how these airmen saved the country from a Nazi invasion in 1940. But you will rarely find references to fear, anxiety and unimaginable stress. Imagine sitting in a tin can full of petrol, 10,000ft above the earth, while enemy aircraft sprayed you with their guns. For that is the terrifying reality of what these young men faced - a constant gnawing fear they were forced to hide from their superiors for fear of being branded as 'LMF' (lack of moral fibre)....

"TAKING ALL PRECAUTIONS"

Wing Commander John Mitchell DFC RAF had a remarkable career. An RAFVR Officer, he was mobilised on the outbreak of war and posted to 58 Sqn flying Whitley bombers, surviving a tour of operations in 1940/41 including ditching in the North Sea. Awarded the DFC, he was sent to the USA to develop the first navigation training simulators. Returning to the UK in 1942, he was selected to join the crew of Winston Churchill's personal aircraft, one of the prototype Avro Yorks called "Ascalon" and for two years he navigated Churchill around the world, as well as numerous VIPs, including General Lyon and King George VI. In his book "Churchill's Navigator" he records his first meeting with General Smuts in 1943: "The next morning we were ordered to return to the UK at once, having picked up our VIP who turned out to be the 73 year old South African leader Field Marshal Jan Smuts, en route to London for a meeting of Commonwealth Ministers. Smuts, whose sprightliness belied his years, had flown as far as Algiers in a Lockheed Lodestar of the SAAF via Cairo. He was accompanied by General van Ryneveld his Chief of Staff, Captain Jannie Smuts (Junior) his ADC and the Rt Hon Harold MacMillan, then Minister to the Allied forces in North Africa, and John Wyndham, his number two. Sir Godfrey Huggins, Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia was the final member of his party. The Field Marshal was a charming passenger, appreciative of everything that was done for him and interested in anything we were doing. We had a relatively relaxed stopover in Morocco, time for briefing and supper in the Mess. It was a fine warm evening and we were undertaking our pre-flight chores before the passengers arrived. I opted to take a little stroll and make myself comfortable in the open air. As I did, a figure came and stood abeam of me; I assumed it was Jack the flight engineer with the same intention. I made some joke as one often does in such situations but instead of Jack it was a South African voice that responded "Yes, my boy, and a very good idea too!" The Field Marshal then went on to ask "Do you know what the Duke of Wellington said to his Officers before the Battle of Waterloo?" "No Sir", I said, guessing it was our South African VIP. "To take all precautions before the Battle lest there is not another opportunity to do so!" We left as planned and had a smooth run home. As soon as we landed, Smuts made a point of thanking the crew before being driven off to meet his peers. Not all of our VIPs would be so polite, or grateful, as we would later learn." (*Churchill's Navigator: Air Cdre John Mitchell LVO DFC RAF with Sean Feast, Grub Street 2010*)

CROYDON CENTENARY:

This year marks 100 years since the opening of Britain's first major International airport, London Croydon Airport, which during its time would boast many innovations and host a lot of the world's most famous aviators. The airport was born out of Waddon and Beddington, both RFC World War1 airfields, which were used to defend the capital from the threat of Zeppelin bombers during the war. These airfields were combined in 1920 to form London Croydon. Plough Lane intersected the land, and during the early years of operation would necessitate the use of a man with a flag to halt the traffic while aircraft took off and landed. This was later replaced with a gate. In 1924, Britain's first state airline was formed, Imperial Airways, based at Croydon. They would become the Government's choice serving the empire routes: to the Middle East, India, Far East and eventually Australasia in conjunction with Qantas. Flying to these destinations necessitated many refueling and overnight stops, and the longer routes would take several days. During the 1920's and 30's many aviation records were set, and Croydon would host Amy Johnson, Alan Cobham (later knighted for his record

breaking 15 hour flight to Cape Town) and Bert Hinkler, who set a record in 1928 flying from London to Darwin. Winston Churchill took flying lessons here in 1919, nearly killing himself in the process, thus abruptly ending his flying career. On 11th of July 1936, Major Hugh Pollard and Cecil Bebb left Croydon en route to the Canary Islands in a covert operation to pick up General Franco, flying him on to Spanish Morocco, thus triggering the Spanish Civil War. Croydon Airport was extensively used to transport mail and freight, including gold. In March 1935, 21 000 pounds in bullion and gold coins were stolen from a vault belonging to Imperial Airways. During World War 11 the airport became RAF Croydon and was utilised during the Battle of Britain, suffering heavy bombing and loss of life. In 1943 the airfield became the home of the newly formed RAF Transport Command, which was tasked to fly troops and equipment worldwide. The same year a record number of 230 000 personnel passed through the airfield. After the war, Croydon Airport resumed civil operations, but by 1946 aircraft were becoming larger and Croydon's grass runways unsuitable. Expansion was not an option due to the ever-growing conurbations, and to the west Heathrow would take the mantle as the capital's major airport. Services from Croydon started to decline. In September 1946 the ABC Guide listed 218 flights from Croydon; a year later this dwindled to 56. The final scheduled flight departed Croydon for Rotterdam at 6.15 pm on 30 September, 1959, flown by the aptly named Captain Geoffrey Last. By today's standards Croydon Airport was diminutive, but many of its innovations are incorporated at today's airports. Croydon Airport would have the first Air Traffic Control and the international distress signal MAYDAY was devised by Frederick Stanley Mockford who worked as a senior radio operator at Croydon. It also had the first arrivals and departures process, check-in desks, where passengers and luggage were weighed, customs facilities and the world's first airport hotel.

(Article by Christopher Rudd, This England, Summer 2020, sent in by John Page)

BOTHA HOUSE, UMDONI:

Some RAFOC members may be familiar with this historic residence. Devonshire men by origin, Frank Reynolds and his brother Charles, were sent by their father in 1874 to assist in the running of the newly established Umzinto sugar estate. The two brothers flourished and created an estate of thousands of hectares of sugar cane and the still fully functional Sezela sugar mill. Their homestead, Lynton Hall, stands as a testament to Sir Frank's unparalleled success. In 1918, Sir Frank's love affair with the natural beauty of the Natal coastline resulted in the purchase of the land that is Umdoni Park today. Gaining inspiration from an equally influential Englishman, his prospect included the preservation of all naturally occurring fauna and flora within its boundaries. Today, this park is maintained in line with that vision. Home to the Umdoni Park golf club and some of the most pristine and untouched coastal forests in the area. In his early notes Sir Frank Reynolds called the residence intended for the Prime Minister, "Botha Cottage". Sir Frank probably used the word "cottage" because General Botha had expressed the wish to build a cottage by the sea; or he might quite well have done so in a humorous vein, as he set about erecting an elegant Cape Dutch style house, around which much of the interest in Umdoni Park revolves today. The news of General Botha's passing came less than 3 months after the start of Botha House. He died on 27th August 1919. On 3rd May 1920, Sir Frank and Molly went to Parker, Wood & Co. in Durban to select the carpets for Botha House. By mid-May, the house was fully furnished, and the terrace completed. Sir Frank's entry for 16th May strikes a note in history for the record. "We all go down to Botha House, and I present the house to Mrs Botha for her life..." By now Sir Frank Reynolds had converted his private ownership of Umdoni Park and its improvements to a Trust, one of the clauses was that Botha House was "to be held and maintained to the use of Annie Botha, widow of the Right Hon. Louis Botha, P.C., during her lifetime and, at her death, to the Prime Minister of South Africa for the time being, and his successors in office. The remainder of Umdoni Park Estate to be held and maintained to the use of the public, subject to rules and regulations governing behaviour, visiting times, etc..." Mrs Botha came every year in the winter-time to stay at Botha House. During her latter years, Mrs Botha stayed permanently at Botha House until her passing on 21st May 1937. In July 1943 The Umdoni Park Trustees wrote to General Smuts requesting permission to use Botha House as a convalescent home for Imperial officers as there was great difficulty in securing accommodation for these officers in Natal. The Prime Minister agreed at once, the facilities were to be made available to the Imperial authorities when his daughter had concluded her holiday at Botha House. The convalescent home

was closed on 31st March 1946. Today, tucked away in the modern Pennington, the property is a splendid Guest House, as is Lynton Hall, the Reynolds family residence..

#DOWN WITH MEMORIALS:

History, it seems has a way of repeating itself, including in the matter of politically sensitive memorials ... In Church Square, Pretoria, stands a statue of President Paul Kruger flanked by four bronze sculptures of Boers (now fenced in for protection). These sculptures spent nearly twenty years, from 1902 to 1921, in England before being returned to South Africa eventually to take up their position on the square in 1954. The general belief has been that Lord Kitchener, Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in South Africa from 1901 to the end of the war 'stole' these statues as 'spoils of war'. This view has been espoused by biographers of Kitchener, such as Philip Magnus in 1958 who incorrectly claimed the statues were returned in 1909. John Pollock, Kitchener's most thorough biographer records that it was "opponents of Kitchener in his controversy with Curzon in India [who] had spread the rumour that he had removed statues of Kruger and other famous Boers from public squares in Bloemfontein and Pretoria." The statues were placed at the Royal Engineer Brompton Barracks in Chatham until 1913 when two of them were removed to Kitchener's estate at Broome near Canterbury in Kent before all four found their way back to SA and were finally united with Kruger in 1925, the centenary of his birth, not in Church Square but outside Pretoria Station. Prior to this, Kruger's statue was unveiled in Prince's Park, Pretoria West on 24th May 1913 having been kept somewhere (still to be located) between its arrival from Delagoa Bay in 1906 where it had remained since the 1899-1902 war. The sculptures were finally moved to Church Square in 1954. The facts are that statues had been commissioned by Sammy Marks before the outbreak of the 1899-1902 war, were sculpted by Anton van Wouw and cast by Italian Francesco Bruno in Rome. On completion, they were embargoed in Lourenco Marques as the war had broken out and were eventually, in 1902 donated to Kitchener by Marks himself.

Full article by Prof Anne Samson at: <http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/if-only-statues-could-speak-four-boer-statues-kitchener-stole>

WHISTLING WHEELBARROW: VAMPIRE T55:



Dave Evans, one of our aero modellers of note writes: "Thanks guys - excellent, as always - keep up the good work. I've just finished a 1/72 model of the Vampire T55 two seater which still flies at the SAAF Museum at AFB Swartkop, Covid permitting. It's accurate down to the serial number, so if you're desperate for a filler one week, you can pop that in..."

CAPE RAILWAY HISTORY:

In some exciting news for the railway heritage community, and South African historians and collectors, Dr Ronald Levine, antiquarian book collector and dealer, offered a remarkable Railway manuscript and some attachments for sale as a single lot, on the Antiquarian Auction last month, June 2020. There were 3 bids, and the lot sold for USD 5,250. The central item, the manuscript, is an original Cape Railway contract in calligraphic script dated 1858. This document is unique and Dr Levine has the view that this is one of the earliest and most important items of South African railway

history or Railwayana. It is a South African heritage treasure and an extraordinary legacy item from the Cape colonial era of the 19th century. For this reason Dr Levine has restricted sale to South Africa, which will ensure that the sale of the manuscript will comply with the National Heritage Resources Act and remain in South Africa. South Africa was relatively late to acquire its first railway lines. In 1857 there was another Government Select Committee. At that date it was the experienced railway engineer, John Scott Tucker who proposed the construction of a Cape Town to Wellington railway line. The Cape Parliament approved the plan and it was agreed that the line would run from Cape Town through Stellenbosch, on to Paarl and extend as far as Wellington. Enter a remarkable man, the civil engineer, William George Brounger, an Englishman born in 1820. He was a pupil of Charles Fox and as a young apprentice he was involved in the construction of the London Birmingham railway. He also worked on the 1851 Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace, London. Fox saw Brounger as the right man for the Cape project. Brounger was appointed the Resident Engineer in 1857. Within seven months Brounger completed a detailed survey of the proposed route. It is his map and plan that are included in the sale lot. Brounger earned a place in Rosenthal's Southern African Dictionary of National Biography and Engineer G R Bozzoli's book, "Forging Ahead" (1997, on pioneering engineers, also covered his Cape career).

Story on the website: <https://antiquarianauctions.com/lots/articles-of-contract-for-the-construction-of-the-cape-town-to-wellington-railway-original-handwritten-manuscript>

MORE CHEEK THAN...

The prime suspect in the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher is demanding "moral and material compensation" from the British police, according to court documents obtained by The Telegraph. Saleh Ibrahim Mabrouk has also accused John Murray, a retired policeman who cradled WPC Fletcher in his arms as she lay dying, of causing him "harm" by bringing a legal action against him. Dr Mabrouk, 62, who has been banned from the UK after being accused of war crimes in his native Libya, made his astonishing claims in a legal document lodged with the High Court. It is the first time he has spoken out in detail over accusations that have dogged him for years. He is being sued by Mr Murray, 64, a former Met Police officer, for a token £1 in damages over his alleged involvement in the unsolved murder of WPC Fletcher who was shot and killed while policing a demonstration outside the Libyan embassy in central London in 1984....

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

This is the fifteenth weekly Newssheet - "Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings" - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest (preferably nothing on the antics of Ministers (various) or NCCC!) that will help us all to keep in contact through the lockdown. Thanks again to all those who have contributed! Take care – keep safe in these troubled times, and remember that all this, too, shall pass...

Remember to contact Gordon Dyne re orders for Rick Peacock-Edwards book "**Rate of Climb**". So, let's hear from you...Please send your suggestions or contributions to bookings@rafoc.org

TAILPIECE:

The importance of accuracy in your Tax Return:

SARS has returned the Tax Return of a man in Vereeniging due to his answer to one of the questions: "Do you have anyone dependent on you?" The man wrote: "4.2 million illegal immigrants. 1.1 million druggies, 28.6 million unemployed, 245 000 criminals in overcrowded prisons plus 550 idiots in Parliament, thousands of "retired politicians" and "military veterans" and the former Presidents 5 wives and 24 children"

SARS replied stating that the response he gave was "unacceptable."

The taxpayer response to SARS was "Why? Who did I leave out?"

THE UMBRELLA - A TOUCHING STORY

On a rainy afternoon, in one of the many demonstrations in Washington, a group of protesters were handing out pamphlets on the "evils" of America. There was an elderly lady behind me, and a young

female protester offered her a pamphlet, which she politely declined. The young protester gently put her hand on the elderly lady's shoulder, and in a patronizing voice said, "Don't you care about the children of Iraq?" The old woman looked up at her and said "Honey, my father died in France during World War II, I lost my husband in Korea, and a son in Vietnam. All three died so a naïve, ignorant, self-centred bimbo like you could have the right to stand here and badmouth our country, - and, if you touch me again, - I'll shove this umbrella up your behind and open it!"

MATT



'With our recent bad weather and continuing restrictions, people returning from foreign holidays have been asked to shut up about it for 14 days'

MATT



'I bought this tiny mask for my phone. Apparently, it prevents the spread of Huawei'