



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 1 - 9th April 2020

Good Afternoon All:

Trust you are all weathering the lockdown, and all that goes with it, reasonably well. We wait to hear whether it will end as advertised at the end of next week or be extended – Hopefully not! Remember that you can call any Committee member if you need to chat or there are any problems where you need assistance. We will try to help wherever possible.

Please have a look at www.rafoc.org to which Hanke Fourie has been adding items regularly.

Communication Received:

Publication of the April Newsletter coincided with a request for information received via the RAFOC website from Ineke ter Doest in the Netherlands, she had visited the website and wrote:-

“Dear madam /sir, I am writing a book on my father's wartime years in the RAF. My father was a (very young) flight engineer in the Dutch 322 Squadron. From 1944 till 1945 he serviced the Spitfire of commander Kuhlmann, who was a South-African. In September 1944 Major Kuhlmann's Spit was hit by flak. He had to bail out over France and was taken hostage by the Germans. According to my information he survived the war. Would you have any additional information on Kuhlmann? i.e. did he return to South Africa after the war? And do you have contact information regarding his family? Looking forward to your reply, kind regards, Ineke ter Doest”

Dear Ineke, It turns out that Major Kuhlmann did survive the war as a POW in Stalag Luft I near Barth, and returned to SA, where in 1948 as Captain Kuhlmann (his substantive rank) he was appointed the first Officer Commanding of 2 Squadron, SAAF, on its re-establishment at AFB Waterkloof. Some of our more senior SAAF members may well remember him.

We passed this info to Ineke, who replied:-

“Dear Bruce, thank you so much for your fast reply with ('already' useful!) information. I am very happy to hear that I might even get in contact with the family. Keith Kuhlmann was a very popular commander. On the day he disappeared, his two wing-commanders were also shot down and the 322 Squadron was entirely without command. Shortly after, my father managed to get on a pilot course himself and was trained in the RAF as a fighter pilot. But of course, the war was finished before he got his wings. As we now know he was the youngest person to travel from occupied Holland to England via occupied territory. He never told us much about it and we didn't ask”

A bit of Google on various sites established that his granddaughter, Gina Lopes (nee Kuhlmann) is living in Johannesburg and we were able to contact her and put her in touch with Ineke, who wrote back:-

Dear Bruce, this is really good news! I will certainly keep an eye on my junk box. I am happy about this speedy development because our manuscript (I write the book together with my twin sister) is rapidly approaching completion, which, sad enough, has to do with corona-isolation etc. It is nice to make good use of the strange circumstances.... Thank you so much, kind regards, Ineke ter Doest.

Another week in the life of a world gone mad....



GREETINGS: From Henry and Jean Tours in Plett, Derrick and Heather Page in Cape Town, Rob and Sandy Tannahill in Hermanus, Bruce and Pauline Prescott in Howick, Gordon and Sue Dyne in Johannesburg, Jean-Michel and Anne Girard in Mauritius and Stan Smith in UK.

OBITUARY:

GENERAL CONSTAND LAUBSCHER VILJOEN, SSA, SD, SOE, SM, MMM, a former commander of the South African Defence Force (SADF) and the founding leader of the Freedom Front Plus, has died at the age of 86. "I can confirm that General Viljoen has died on his farm in Ohrigstad (in Mpumalanga) surrounded by most of his five children at around 13:00 on Friday. He died of natural causes," said Pieter Groenewald, leader of the Freedom Front Plus. General Viljoen, who was chief of the army during the so-called Bush or Angolan War in the 1970s, rose to become chief of the defence force under then President PW Botha. He was considered "a soldier's soldier" and often took part in operations alongside his men. He is credited with helping to defuse the threat of right-wing violence ahead of the first democratic elections in 1994 and became the first leader of the Freedom Front who he led in the elections. "We would like to offer our condolences to his wife, Risti, and to pay tribute to General Viljoen, who enjoyed wide respect as a soldier and made his mark as a politician. He helped pave the way for a stable transition to democracy," Groenewald said.

OTHER BITS:

SIMONSTOWN, 1 April 2020: In an effort to raise funds to pay for anti-piracy patrols off the East Coast of Africa, the South African Navy will be allowing members of the public to book cabins on its

four Valour class frigates as they steam through the Mozambique Channel. From 1 April 2020, members of the public will be able to book a cabin at what Navy spokesman Captain Aquitas Sanitas called a 'competitive price'. While not as fancy as a cruise liner, the Navy's frigates will provide three meals a day, room service and a bar service to paying customers. They will also be able to navigate to places where cruise liners would never have the chance to go, including pirate-infested waters. For an additional fee, guests with valid firearm licenses will be able to rent assault rifles and heavy machineguns on board the frigates, and fire warning shots at illegal fishing vessels and suspected pirates. Ammunition can be bought per round or in bulk. If the plan succeeds, the Navy will make additional accommodation available when it takes delivery of its new inshore patrol vessels. It will also roll out discounts for pensioners and offer group rates, such as for school field trips. Journalists, however, will have to pay more!

BULAWAYO: Zimbabwe's second largest city, celebrated the landing of the first plane in Zimbabwe, the Silver Queen, 100 years ago, with a public talk held at the Silver Queen Memorial. The talk, hosted by Robert Burrett, a noted local Historian, focused on the Silver Queen II, a Vickers Vimy bomber, flown in by Lieutenant Colonel Pierre van Ryneveld, DSO, MC, and Flight Lieutenant Quinton Brand, DSO, DFC, at the actual crash site on the Bulawayo Golf Course. Bulawayo was a stopover on the first direct flight from Britain to South Africa and the Silver Queen II landed in the city on the Ascot racecourse on the 5th March 1920, crashing the next day while attempting to take off. "Four stamps will be issued to commemorate the 100 years of aviation in the country," said a representative of the National History Museum through their invitation to the public, adding that the Silver Queen will be the lead denomination.

THE MYSTERY P-51 PILOT: This 1967 true story is about an experience by a young 12-year-old boy in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. It is about the vivid memory of a privately rebuilt P-51 from WWII and its famous owner/pilot. "In the morning sun, I could not believe my eyes. There, in our little airport, sat a majestic P-51. They said it had flown in during the night from some U.S. Airport, on its way to an air show. The pilot had been tired, so he just happened to choose Kingston for his stopover. It was to take to the air very soon. I marveled at the size of the plane, dwarfing the Pipers and Canucks tied down by her. It was much larger than in the movies. She glistened in the sun like a bulwark of security from days gone by. The pilot arrived by cab, paid the driver, and then stepped into the pilot's lounge. He was an older man; his wavy hair was gray and tossed. It looked like it might have been combed, say, around the turn of the century. His flight jacket was checked, creased and worn - it smelled old and genuine. Old Glory was prominently sewn to its shoulders. He projected a quiet air of proficiency and pride devoid of arrogance. He filed a quick flight plan to Montreal ("Expo-67 Air Show") then walked across the tarmac. After taking several minutes to perform his walk-around check, the tall, lanky man returned to the flight lounge to ask if anyone would be available to stand by with fire extinguishers while he "flashed the old bird up, just to be safe." Though only 12 at the time I was allowed to stand by with an extinguisher after brief instruction on its use -- "If you see a fire, point, then pull this lever!" he said. (I later became a fire-fighter, but that's another story.) The air around the exhaust manifolds shimmered like a mirror from fuel fumes as the huge prop started to rotate. One manifold, then another, and yet another barked -- I stepped back with the others. In moments the Packard-built Merlin engine came to life with a thunderous roar. Blue flames knifed from her manifolds with an arrogant snarl. I looked at the others' faces; there was no concern. I lowered the bell of my extinguisher. One of the guys signaled to walk back to the lounge. We did. Several minutes later we could hear the pilot doing his pre-flight run-up. He'd taxied to the end of runway 19, out of sight. All went quiet for several seconds. We ran to the second story deck to see if we could catch a glimpse of the P-51 as she started down the runway. We could not. There we stood; eyes fixed at a spot halfway down the runway. Then a roar ripped across the field, much louder than before. Like a furious hell spawn set loose -- something mighty this way was coming. "Listen to that thing!" said the controller. In seconds the Mustang burst into our line of sight. Its tail was already off the runway and it was moving faster than anything I'd ever seen. Two-thirds the way down 19 the Mustang was airborne with her gear going up. The prop tips were supersonic. We clasped our ears as the Mustang climbed hellishly fast into the circuit to be eaten up by the dog-day haze. We stood

for a few moments, in stunned silence, trying to digest what we'd just seen. The radio controller rushed by me to the radio. "Kingston tower calling Mustang?" He looked back to us as he waited for an acknowledgment. The radio crackled, "Go ahead, Kingston." "Roger, Mustang. Kingston tower would like to advise the circuit is clear for a low-level pass." I stood in shock because the controller had just, more or less, asked the pilot to return for an impromptu air show! The controller looked at us. "Well, what?" He asked. "I can't let that guy go without asking. I couldn't forgive myself!" The radio crackled once again, "Kingston, do I have permission for a low-level pass, east to west, across the field?" "Roger, Mustang, the circuit is clear for an east to west pass." "Roger, Kingston, I'm coming out of 3,000 feet, stand by." We rushed back onto the second-story deck; eyes fixed toward the eastern haze. The sound was subtle at first, a high-pitched whine, a muffled screech, a distant scream. Moments later the P-51 burst through the haze. Her airframe straining against positive G's and gravity. Her wing tips spilling contrails of condensed air, prop-tips again supersonic. The burnished bird blasted across the eastern margin of the field shredding and tearing the air. At over 400 mph and 150 yards from where we stood, she passed with the old American pilot saluting!! Imagine. A salute! I felt like laughing; like crying; she glistened; she screamed; the building shook; my heart pounded. Then the old pilot pulled her up and rolled, and rolled, and rolled out of sight into the broken clouds and indelibly into my memory. I've never wanted to be an American more than on that day! It was a time when many nations in the world looked to America as their big brother. A steady and even-handed beacon of security who navigated difficult political water with grace and style; not unlike the old American pilot who'd just flown into my memory. He was proud, not arrogant; humble, not a braggart; old and honest, projecting an aura of America at its best. That America will return one day! I know she will! Until that time, I'll just send off this story. Call it a loving salute to a Country, and especially to that old American pilot: the late JIMMY STEWART (1908-1997), Actor, real WWII Hero (Commander of a US Army Air Force Bomber Wing stationed in England), and a USAF Reserves Brigadier General, who wove a wonderfully fantastic memory for a young Canadian boy that's lasted a lifetime."

THE END FOR TODAY:

This is the first weekly Newsheet - "Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings" - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest (nothing on the Minister of Transport, please!) that will help us all to keep in contact through the lockdown. So, let's hear from you.... Please send your suggestions or contributions to bookings@rafoc.org

Meantime, keep the bright side up – and remember, all this, too, shall pass...

Keep safe and well and stay at home.

The Committee