



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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BRYANSTON 2021

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 8 – 29th MAY 2020

GREETINGS TO ALL:

Well, the lockdown, enforced prohibition, obligatory masks and curfew continues until the end of the month. The announcement of the relaxation to Level 3 was a relief when it eventually came on Sunday evening - and the end of the alcohol drought - except for the continued ban on tobacco. The highlight of the past week must be the "Big Freeze" ushered in by the first serious cold front of approaching Winter – snow on the Drakensberg and in the Free State.

Had we been able to hold a lunch in May, it would have been a celebration of the 75th Anniversary of VE Day and we would have listened to the message from HM The Queen in circumstances quite different to those now prevailing. We would have been able to watch the Red Arrows flypast over packed streets in London, rather than over a deserted city, and watched Katherine Jenkins singing to a packed Royal Albert Hall, rather than an empty Auditorium. We would also have been able to raise a toast, together, to those who gave their lives in that great conflict to win the freedoms that we enjoy today.

Ironically, it is those very freedoms which are now constrained and imperilled, as never before, by the spectre of a rogue virus, the reaction to which is causing massive damage to the economies of the free world, while China seeks to preserve an "Oriental Inscrutability". The "Yellow Peril" as ever was! What Aldous Huxley envisioned in "Brave New World" and George Orwell in "1984", it appears, is finding fulfilment in our generation. The reaction of politicians to mass hysteria in the Media has been simply Orwellian in their efforts to lock down and isolate their respective populations and curtail or remove their civil liberties

This month, May 2020, marks a number of other significant Anniversaries: the 80th of Dunkirk and of the Battle of Britain, and the 80th of the DH 98 Mosquito "Wooden Wonder". The SAAF/SAFA Memorial Parade would have been held at the SAAF Memorial on Bays Hill. Last weekend, we would have celebrated the 150th Anniversary of the birth of General Smuts at a Memorial Service at Smuts House, and the 80th Anniversary of the WW2 JATS (Joint Air Training Scheme). This month also marks the 40th Anniversary of the storming of the Iranian Embassy in London by the SAS to release hostages, in which a distinguished RAFOC member participated. We'll try to give you more on some of these events, Obits etc, in the next couple of issues. Then some, less well known, but of Air Force and South African interest– Like the Springbok Rugby Team below. Our country has a rich aviation heritage.

MEMBERS NEWS:

The last issue of Ramblings brought a good reaction and further input from members.

Priscilla Henwood wrote in from Somerset West: "Thank you to the RAFOC Committee - my son Dennis has read the Ramblings Newsletter to me over the telephone as he monitors my email correspondence. The story of the Runnymede Memorial to the airmen, with no altar reminds me of the times when my husband Paul and I always visited the memorial as we arrived at Heathrow from South Africa. A magnificent tribute to a heart-breaking story, thank you. Rick Peacock-Edwards tribute to his father and mother is a tale that had to be told. The family were neighbours of ours in Inanda, and my daughter Sarah knew him when he was at Michaelhouse. I really enjoy these anecdotes that you produce - thank you!"

Joan Aldous wrote in with an item of RAFOC history a Press Cutting Obituary of **Group Captain Frank Hall**, President of the RAF Officers' Club – 1978. "Good Day, I found this press cutting amongst some of my late husband's papers. Maybe you have it on record already! Frank and his wife Yeola were very good family friends. Have really enjoyed the "Ramblings". Regards, Joan Aldous" See below.

Bob Napier wrote in from Pretoria to say thanks for the “Ramblings”, and send his regards to all - and promptly got conned into writing the piece on the Blue Party that follows

THE BLUE PARTY: BAOR: BRITISH ARMY OF THE RHINE 1985:

I am sure all military personnel remember their early Service with affection. When I joined the Army, the Royal Artillery and 40 Field Regiment in particular, we were about to move as a regiment (known as Arms Plotting) from Colchester to swap with another from Northern Germany – the frontier of Freedom and Democracy. The livers – in of the Officers’ Mess were presented with this dismal news, realising that London would now be too far away for recreation. However, under the guidance and direction of the Adjutant (himself a Liver-in) that 40 Regiment Junior Officers were told that this would not stand in their way of a good time and a reputation as “players”; the social challenge of the penal posting of Hohne was to be met head on. After all – wasn’t Hamburg just up the road? Almost immediately after arrival in our new Mess we received an invitation to the Station Officers’ Mess just up the road to a “Blue Party” at the weekend. Well, here was the chance to make a splash, particularly as the Station Mess, although full of old and bold staff officers, was also the only repository of female company. Enthusiastically we all bought suitable gear for the party in line with the “Blue” theme (After all – wasn’t Hamburg just up the road?); the Adjutant led from the front as Frank N Furter in his shortie diving wetsuit and stockings. Arriving at the appointed hour at The Station Mess, we found that our hosts were not yet ready, no doubt pushing the boat out on their costumes, so we tromped off to the bar to put a few warmers down range. About 15 minutes later the doors were flung open and in walked the Station Mess entourage dressed in Conservative Blue clothing. They stopped dead and just gawped in shock to see their bar being propped up by an assortment of what looked like particularly unattractive drag queens. Much to his credit The Adjutant, with great composure and apparent nonchalance, put his beer on the bar, walked up the senior person (a seemingly very old and traditional major from a County regiment), extended his hand and said: “Hello Sir – we are 40 Regiment. We appear to be early. I expect you’ll all want time to change.” As proof that thinking calmly under pressure is a much-valued character trait, The Adjutant retired as a Major General.

“THE LAST TOUCHDOWN” SUNDAY TIMES, 27TH MARCH 1983:

Group Captain Frank Hall RAF died in Johannesburg in March 1983 after a long illness and shortly before his 81st Birthday. His Obituary in the Sunday Times records “He was an Officer and a Gentleman. He trained more than 800 British and South African pilots, worked with General Smuts and knew Lawrence of Arabia. He began his RAF career in 1919 and became the first “Boy Entrant” to gain a Direct Entry cadetship to RAF Cranwell. During Service in India he was appointed personal pilot to the Viceroy. In April 1941 he was tasked to meet 850 RAF trainees and flying instructors to form an FTS (Flying Training School) under the JATS programme at Waterkloof. He served in SA until 1945 and retired from the RAF in 1947 and returned to SA to a career in business. He was elected President of RAFOC in 1978 and on his Birthday in 1982 his RAFOC colleagues honoured his “80 Momentous Years.”

OBITUARY:

ADMIRAL SIR BRIAN THOMAS BROWN, KCB, CBE (31 August 1934 – 27 April 2020) who has died aged 85, was a senior Royal Navy officer who served as Second Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Personnel from 1988 to 1991. He climbed almost to the very top of the navy hierarchy, with the unusual distinction of having come through the Supply and Secretariat branch. A shortage of naval aviators led to a few supply officers being selected for flying training, something that was highly unlikely before the General List of Royal Navy officers was established on 1 April 1956, whereby distinction between branches of naval officers reduced markedly. Brown joined RAF Syerston on 2 June 1957 for basic flying training (BFT) on Provosts before moving on to RAF Linton-on-Ouse to continue BFT and then undergo advanced flying training (AFT) on Vampires, being awarded his Fleet Air Arm pilot's wings on 11 July 1958. His operational flying training (OFT) began when he joined the Naval Air Fighter School, HMS *Fulmar*, flying Sea Hawks. He spent the next three years in flying appointments, before reverting to traditional appointments as a Supply Officer. In order to extend his time with the Fleet Air Arm, Brown volunteered for helicopter flying training and joined HMS *Seahawk*, in Cornwall, on 8 June 1959 for the helicopter conversion course with 705 Naval Air Squadron, flying Hiller HT Mk1 and Whirlwind helicopters. Brown was only the second “Pusser” officer to become a four-star admiral and the first to become second sea lord, a position until then reserved for executive officers with command experience at sea. That he did so was attributed to his exceptional skill in delicate negotiations with other service chiefs and with government ministers. It was for these qualities that Admiral Sir Henry Leach, the First Sea Lord at the time, handpicked Brown to be his secretary from 1979 to 1982 and relied heavily on his counsel during some of the most challenging years the navy had experienced. “Brian was a wonderfully steady hand during what was a very difficult time,” the former First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Jock Slater said. “These diplomatic skills came to the fore again during the rapid planning of a task force to sail the Atlantic with troops, armaments and equipment and take back the Falkland Islands after they had been invaded by Argentina on April 2, 1982.” For several weeks Brown was ensconced at the Royal Navy Commander Operations at Northwood, Middlesex, stealing away briefly to the family home in Hampshire to raise a glass to his son on his 21st birthday before hurrying back. Although Admiral Sir Brian Brown had seen action in the Korean War as a Midshipman, and later played a key planning role during the Falklands conflict, he considered that his greatest achievement was to

have persuaded the Royal Navy top brass to allow women to serve at sea. After the Falklands conflict, Brown's last decade in the navy remained on an upward trajectory and led to him becoming chief of naval personnel as Second Sea Lord from 1988 until his retirement in 1991. Back in civilian life he became chairman of Cray Electronics defence group, chairman of P-E International, a management consultancy, and a non-executive director of the IT support company Lorien.

Read the full obituary at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/admiral-sir-brian-brown-obituary-t5j0qlmv2>

THE MIRACLE OF THE LITTLE SHIPS:

80 years ago, on 26th May 1940, the mass evacuation at Dunkirk, described by Winston Churchill as the 'miracle of deliverance' began.

See the story and links at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Ships_of_Dunkirk

THE JOINT AIR TRAINING SCHEME (JATS):

"In memory of the members of the Royal Air Force, the South African Air Force and other Air Forces who paid the ultimate price while serving under the Joint Air Training Scheme in the name of freedom for all."

The British Air Council in October 1938 approved a scheme to locate flying training schools overseas. In September 1939, South Africa was invited to join talks being held in Canada at the time to flesh out the scheme. After initial hesitation due to the Italian threat in East Africa, General Smuts decided South Africa could offer facilities for training of both RAF and SAAF personnel. The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, also known as the Empire Air Training Scheme, Empire Air Training Plan, Joint Air Training Scheme or simply, The Plan, involved the countries and resources of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia during World War II. On 11th April 1940 an agreement for the Joint Air Training Scheme was signed by Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham and Sir Pierre van Ryneveld. It was immediately dubbed the "Van Brookeham Agreement", the official title being "Memorandum on the Expansion of Air Training Facilities in South Africa." By October 1940 the Scheme was operational. A Training Command under Lieutenant Colonel W T B Tasker supervised the SAAF's overall training programme. New flying schools were established at Pretoria, Germiston, Bloemfontein and Baragwanath. With the implementation of JATS under the command of the UATG (Union Air Training Group), ultimately 38 South African Air Schools were established to train RAF, SAAF, and other Allied air and ground crew. Aircraft and all necessary equipment required for the training schools were provided to South Africa free of charge by the United Kingdom. Under the scheme the SAAF increased its number of aircraft to a total of 1709, whilst personnel on strength grew to 31 204, including 956 pilots. During its five-year existence, the JATS turned out a total of 33 347 aircrew including 12 221 SAAF personnel. This was second only to Canada which ultimately trained 131 500 aircrew. There is no doubt that the "battle of Training" as it came to be called, had been well and truly won.

THE SPRINGBOK RUGBY SIDE THAT DOESNT APPEAR IN OFFICIAL RECORDS:



An international rugby team that played five matches remaining unbeaten, and who in their way, did as much to enhance the reputation of South African rugby, as any overseas touring side.

It was a team that proudly took the field wearing the green and gold and won every “international” match played in a prison camp at Mühlberg-on-Elbe in Germany in the spring of 1944. The team having been selected from only 700 South Africans soldiers in a total strength of nearly 12,000 prisoners-of-war being held at the camp. Their playing record was –

Beat a Combined New Zealand/Australian side, 21 – 0
 Beat a Combined England, Scotland and Ireland side, 14 – 3
 Beat Wales, 14 – 3
 Beat a Combined Rest of the World side, 9 – 0
 Beat Wales, 3 – 0

A word about the Stalag IVb Springboks that did so well, for the team included eight players who had represented their provinces in South Africa – two Natal, two Eastern Province, two from Border, one Northern Transvaaler and one from South-Western Districts, with the balance being made up of first team club players from Hamilton - Sea Point, Crusaders - Port Elizabeth, Police, Buffaloes - East London, Diggers - Johannesburg, Albany - Grahamstown and many from the country districts. The side was captained Barend Van Der Merwe, a pre-war Natal scrum-half, who was awarded the Military Medal for bravery at Tobruk, and who during the war years developed into a fine flank forward, remembered today by his nick-name “Fiks”, who in 1949 gained his official Springbok colours in the First Test at Newlands against the 1949 All Blacks. The team was coached by Noel Robertson, a former Junior Springbok, who had toured the Argentine in 1932. No sooner had the prisoners-of-war, having been transferred from Italy to Stalag IVb settled down, and getting over the disappointment of being captured, when that their thoughts turned to sport. A “Hut” league was formed, with committees, selectors and referees appointed. More than thirty huts entered teams and the men were from all parts of the British Isles, the Dominions, as South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, were then called. There were also teams from the United States, with each hut team playing under a name such as Wanderers, Barbarians, Rovers, Swifts, Harlequins, and United etc. Just when everything was ready, the snows came and epidemics of infectious diseases in the camp brought on a ban of all sport. This was when the South Africans did not stop their planning, for the selectors, drew up a comprehensive list of available players, seeded them and verified their records from home, and were ready for the tournament when time was called. Of interest a D. Katzeff, was elected as President of the South Africa Rugby Club in the camp? The South African supporters were also very active, especially those from Natal making elaborate plans for a Zulu war-dance to precede each match. Thousands of cigarettes went to the black market to buy black grease paint and various odds and ends to equip the Zulu warriors. Amateur carpenters and tailors worked long hours making shields, assegais, and all the trimmings and trappings required for the “Impi’s” to perform. The ingenuity of prisoners-of-war was legend. The jersey was made from Red Cross issue vests adapted by one of the prisoners who was a tailor by profession. To simulate the green – there were plenty of discarded olive-green Russian overalls lying around and these were boiled up together with the vests and military long stockings to produce the main colour. A willing Medical Corp prisoner produced the gold colouring, by boiling up anti-malaria tablets, resulting in a liquid mixture, which was applied to the collars and stockings tops. Italian white underpants were used for the shorts, whilst the Springbok badge was hand-stitched on to the jersey. Even boots did not produce a problem, for they used normal army issue boots, removing the heels, and from these they fashioned studs. For bootlaces they whipped the string out of the Red Cross parcel and that was that! Stalag IVb, had previously been a Russian slave labour camp and the playing field was a hard-corrugated piece of land, which were once the lime pits of the buried Russian labourers. For the match against Wales, a hand-written souvenir programme was produced in colour, with the Springbok head and the heraldic badge of the Prince of Wales displayed on the front page, with the teams listed inside as well as a page for the programme which showed Military Band at 2.30 - Teams presented to Major White – The Senior British Officer at 2.55 – Kick-Off at 3.00. Somewhat surprising there was a notice contained in the programme of a social evening to be held afterwards, at the “Empire Theatre”. This was a hut kept vacant specially, despite crowding in other huts, for concert evenings. Obviously there was no beer, only tea in mugs and snacks of German bread and biscuits obtained from Red Cross parcels, but it was considered a fitting banquet to end an international match and wound up to the strains of the song “Sarie Marais”. It was only after the victory against Wales that the South Africans agreed to play against the “The Rest”, a side picked from all the rugby playing countries. The date selected being the 31st May, in those days celebrated as Union Day so it was decided by the whole camp that it would be an all-South African day in Stalag IVb – a church service in the morning, followed by a P. T. display, given by picked South Africans, with the big match in the afternoon which, as had become normal, being preceded by the display of the well-rehearsed Zulu “Impi’s” to get our avid supporters in good spirits. It goes without saying that the spirit of the Stalag IVb Springboks and the difficulties they overcame was worthy of the green and gold jersey. There is a wonderful photograph of the team on record. This was arranged by bribing a young German guard with plenty of black-market cigarettes. To round off this tale, much of the information that has been used, is from an article which appeared, after the war, in the then popular local magazine “The Outspan” of the 14 June 1946, written by Eric Cowling, who was one of the prisoners-of-war at Stalag IVb. It was my good fortune to get to know him well, in later years, and in a way this article is a tribute to him, for he was a stalwart of Hamilton – Sea Point Rugby Club for well over fifty years, being of a generation that made sure that we, the young Under-19 players were well looked after, properly kitted out, driven in style to away matches and taken back to the Hamilton’s Clubhouse, for a beer or more which we were treated to, and being told to “bugger-off” at the appropriate time, before we got out of hand.

B. R. Forsyth

First Published in 2005 – Sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War 2. Sent in by Basil Hersov.

Stalag IV B was the largest POW camp on German soil during the Second World War and was opened in September 1939. From 1939 to 1944, captured soldiers from 33 nations passed through the camp. Stalag IV B was liberated by the Red Army on 23 April 1945. 3,000 internees perished in the camp due to sickness and life circumstances. The people who died in Stalag IV B were buried in a cemetery in Neuburgdorf

“WHO SHOT JR?”

Back in 1980, this was the question on everyone’s lips – and on car bumper stickers, T-shirts and mugs, too. It was emblazoned everywhere and it was inescapable. Some wags went for the cheeky variant slogan of “I shot JR”, which only teased us more. Forty years ago this week, it felt like the whole world was desperate to discover who had put two .38 calibre bullets into Dallas’s villainous oil baron JR Ewing (brilliantly played with flashing eyes and wolfish grin by the late Larry Hagman) in the finale of the US super-soap’s third series. This was water-cooler TV before watercoolers were even a thing. The amoral mogul had spent the previous few prime-time episodes making enemies, as he often did. One of them took justice into their own hands. When J R heard a noise outside his office late one night and went out into the darkened corridor to investigate, he was shot twice in the torso by an unseen assailant and left for dead. Roll credits. Cue agonised howls....

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

This is the eighth weekly Newssheet - “Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings” - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest (nothing on the antics of Ministers (various) or NCCC!) 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

Thanks again to all who have sent in notes of appreciation or contributions. We will do our best to fit them all into successive issues

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

Keep safe and well and stay at home, off the streets and out of trouble....Don’t bother queuing outside the bottle store next Tuesday – order online and have your purchases delivered... Remember, there’s nothing like a little tomato soup to soothe the soul. Even if it’s cold, with ice and a celery stalk, and Vodka...

TAILPIECE:

At this point I would feel safer if Coronavirus held a Press Conference telling us how it’s going to save us from the Government.....

