

## **TRIBUTE: Stan Smith**

Stanley George Smith was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1928 in Musselburgh, a small coastal town not far from Edinburgh, in Scotland. His father, George, worked in the Inveresk Paper Mill, in the town. He had a younger brother, Gordon, who unfortunately died aged 12, in a drowning accident. When Stan got to the age of going to Secondary School, his mother, Elizabeth (known as Bunty) took the unusual step of going out to work in the office of a large department store in Edinburgh, to earn enough money to pay the fees for Stan to go to the Loretto School. His parents wanted to give him the best education they could, so he could do well in life. (Loretto School is famous as the oldest Boarding School in Scotland, founded in 1827)

However, (as Stan freely admitted in later life) he wasn't really an academic; he was much more interested in practical things. He left school at 17 and joined the RAF in 1945, to train as an aircraft engineer. He immediately took to Air Force life and to engineering. He was moved to different RAF bases, and really liked seeing new parts of the country. In 1947, at a base in Cornwall, right down in the south-west of the UK, he met Iris, who was in the WRAF, as a telegraphist. They married the next year, by special licence in Edinburgh, as the embarkation papers had come through for Stan to be posted to Egypt.

This was at a time when international focus was already on the Suez Canal area. France, the UK and the US all wanted to ensure the free passage of their shipping for trade routes and access to the developing oilfields in the Middle East. There was a large build up of forces in northern Egypt. Iris travelled out on the HMS Empire Windrush, a converted troopship. (The same ship that featured in last year's "Empire Windrush" immigrant uproar in the UK) Stan had to take a quicker route, by train to the 'toe' of Italy, then by ship. (He hated this part, being a lifelong sufferer of seasickness!)

When he got to Egypt, there wasn't sufficient accommodation for the sudden influx of personnel, so he was given a spade and a tent, and told to dig a deep hole in the sand, pitch the tent over the hole and that's where he lived for the first few weeks of his posting. His time in Egypt left a big impression on Stan. He was busy with his work, which he relished and he discovered a fascination with Egypt's ancient history. He visited the pyramids and the Sphinx and for the rest of his life, he said that Cairo was his favourite city in the world.

These were the "Last Days of Empire"; from its peak strength of over 1 million personnel at the end of WW2, the RAF was reduced to one third of that size by the end of 1946, the operations in South-East Asia were winding down, and for much of the Service there was little activity as personnel numbers were drawn down by the "de-mob" process and as Squadrons were reduced in strength or disbanded completely. But as Stan might have said, "There was trouble down at Mill", with aggressive Russian Communism and the Berlin crisis brewing, leading to the Airlift, Independence of Israel leading to the first Arab-Israeli War, Egyptian Nationalism leading to the later Suez Crisis, the State of Emergency in Malaya and the incipient Korean crisis leading to that War. All of these meant plenty of "trade" for the contracting RAF.

His tour of duty finished at the end of 1951 and he returned to the UK. Shortly after that he left the RAF, still rapidly shrinking in the post-war contraction and rationalisation... He carried on working in engineering, but remained interested in the RAF and became involved in the Air Training Corps, working with young people wanting to join the RAF or become pilots when they got older. He had two daughters, Sue and Dorothy, and there were family visits to air shows when time allowed. As the years passed, Stan started to study at Night School to gain qualifications in management,

while still working in engineering by day. This paid off, and eventually he left the workbench for a management post.

In 1981, he left the UK with Peggy, his second wife, for a new life in South Africa. The economic downturn in the UK had meant many redundancies, and it was clear that this would continue for a good while. Stan always kept his interest in engineering, though. His workshop at home was very well equipped and he always had some 'project' on the go. He also kept his interest in military history in general, and flying in particular. He worked for a time for our Club President, David MacKinnon-Little, and towards the latter part of his working career in South Africa, Stan ran projects for the Byrne Fleming Management Consultancy

Stan and Peggy were stalwart members of RAFA Johannesburg (Royal Air Forces Association) and served on the Branch Committee for many years in various capacities. Stan likewise was a long-standing member of RAFOC and served on that Committee for many years. On a now-legendary occasion, Stan had mistaken the date of a Committee Meeting and turned up at the Inanda Club to find no-one else there. Always diligent, Stan sent out Minutes of the Meeting straight afterwards, recording that only the Secretary was present and that "after an acrimonious conversation with himself, declared the Meeting closed"! He was also a member of the "Burma Star" Association and I was privileged to go with him as his guest to the last Burma Star lunch here in Joburg - there were just 6 of us present. On a personal level I miss the many times when Stan and I would get together for a "crack" and a drink - he was like an elder brother, and a good mate.

After nearly 30 years in Africa, he moved back to the UK in 2010 after Peggy's death, to be near his family in Morpeth, in the north of England. He found a flat in Matheson's Gardens so that he could live independently, although near his younger daughter and son-in-law, who "kept an eye" on him. One of his early experiences in his first winter was to go out shopping (against advice) and execute a "wheels up" landing as a result of ice on the pavement, fortunately without serious consequences! He also managed a holiday trip to Spain while he was still able to travel independently. Later, his elder daughter took him away on holiday for a few days, which included a visit to the aircraft and flying museum at York. He was then about 88 years old, and no longer very steady on his feet, but when he was ushered on to a flight simulator, his take offs and landings were perfect! He was very pleased!

And so the years rolled by, and each year, a Christmas Card (often much delayed by SAPO) arrived from Stan with a short update and his greetings to RAFOC. Earlier this April his son-in-law, acknowledging the latest RAFOC Newsletter which he printed for Stan each month, wrote "Stan is well but is in hospital for a few days. He should be home at the end of the week but is being told to self-isolate for 16 weeks. We will be keeping an eye on him and doing his shopping". His daughter Dorothy visited Stan daily to look after him, but a persistent infection meant that he had to be readmitted to hospital, where he died peacefully on Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020. He is survived by his two daughters, 6 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.

We salute his memory, and we will remember him!

(With grateful acknowledgement to Stan's daughter Sue for the family's earlier history)

JBH.

April 2020.