



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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RAFOC NEW RAMBLINGS 31st AUGUST 2026

NEXT LUNCH – 11th SEPTEMBER 2026:

The lunch will commemorate the Battle of Britain and is a Ladies and Guests lunch. Bring along your friends as a fly-past is being organized. Traditionally this will be overhead the Wanderers at 13.00 where we view it from the lawn outside. Please book you and your guests at bookings@rafoc.org – the cost is still R350 pp which includes a two-course offering and wine on the tables. Book early so we know the numbers that will attend.

Churchill said, in the heat of the battle, as the RAF were repulsing wave after wave of aircraft, that:

"The gratitude of every home in our Island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the World War by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."
(those immortal words still live on in our lives)

The pilots were not just British; many were from other countries such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, South Africa, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and the RAF Benevolent Fund feel that it is important to recognise the contribution that everybody made to the immense effort involved to protect Britain from invasion and carry the fight against the evils of Nazism.

Next week we will dedicate Ramblings to the Battle of Britain and especially the 25 South African airmen that were involved.



The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund web page is well worth a visit as it has a lot of detail on the battle.

NIGEL LAMB - FROM RHODESIAN SKIES TO RED BULL WORLD CHAMPION:



There are some pilots whose careers are impressive because of the number of aircraft they have flown, the countries in which they have flown them, or the championships they have won. Then there are pilots whose entire lives seem to have been shaped by an almost instinctive relationship with the sky. Nigel Lamb belongs firmly in that second category.

Born on 17 August 1956 in the Eastern Highlands of Southern Rhodesia, Nigel Lamb grew up in a part of the world where the landscape itself could awaken a fascination with flying. His father had been a Royal Air Force fighter pilot during the Second World War, and aviation was therefore already part of the family story.

Lamb later recalled that he had been fascinated by flying from childhood and that he had written to the Air Force when he was only eleven years old asking to join. He was told, in effect, that he would have to wait. At eighteen he was finally accepted into the Rhodesian Air Force.

For a young man growing up in Rhodesia during the 1970s, becoming a military pilot was far more than acquiring a licence and learning to handle an aircraft. It meant entering a profession in which discipline, technical competence, courage and judgement were essential. Lamb gained his wings and went on to fly both fixed wing aircraft and helicopters. His early military career included the de Havilland Vampire and later the Alouette II, Alouette III and Bell UH 1H helicopters. During the Rhodesian Bush War he flew operational missions and subsequently became an instructor. There is an interesting point here for anyone who has known military flying. Aerobatics and combat flying may appear to belong to completely different worlds, yet they demand many of the same fundamental qualities. The aircraft must become an extension of the pilot. Altitude, airspeed, attitude, engine performance, position and surrounding hazards must be absorbed almost instinctively. There is very little room for hesitation. The pilot has to remain mentally ahead of the aircraft.

Lamb's career was about to take a dramatic turn. In 1980, following the political transformation of Rhodesia into Zimbabwe, Lamb left the Air Force and moved to Britain. He joined the Marlboro Aerobatic Team and began what would become an extraordinary civilian career as a professional display pilot. What followed was decades of flying at the highest level.

Lamb became one of Britain's most accomplished aerobatic pilots. He won the British National Unlimited Aerobatic Championship eight consecutive times, an achievement which demonstrates just how exceptional his technical ability and consistency were. He went on to perform thousands of public displays around the world, flying before enormous crowds in more than thirty countries. At various stages of his career, he flew some of the world's most famous historic aircraft, including the Spitfire, P 51 Mustang and P 40 Kittyhawk. His flying also took him into the film industry, where his skills were used for major productions requiring highly experienced display and warbird pilots. But there was another mountain to climb.

In 2005 Nigel Lamb entered the Red Bull Air Race World Championship. This was a very different form of flying. The aircraft had to pass through a carefully defined course marked by enormous inflatable pylons, at extremely high speed and remarkably low altitude. The pilot was racing against the clock while performing rapid changes of direction and enduring enormous G forces. This was flying in which precision mattered as much as courage.

The Red Bull Air Race demanded the ability to fly the aircraft almost at the limit of its performance while maintaining the concentration necessary to make tiny corrections at extraordinary speed. A fraction of a second could separate victory from defeat. A small error in altitude, heading or energy management could destroy an entire run.

Lamb proved that his skills had not diminished with age. They had matured. In 2014, after years of competition, Nigel Lamb became the Red Bull Air Race champion.

This article was sent in by Norman Ingledew who also said that Nigel was his first flight instructor.

From Bruce Harrison - Good show, Nige! I was at Thornhill the day he force landed a Vampire FB 9 - and walked away, and then - many years later in 2019 - privileged to be at the HCAP (Honourable Company of Air Pilots) Awards Gala Dinner when he received the Ray Hanna Trophy....

MEMORIES OF 'SNOOPY':

By Sqn.Ldr. Charles Slatter – more on him at the end of the article.

The recent article in 'New Ramblings # 5 (and the Editor's prompt!) on NASA's Dragon Lady took me back over 25 years to my short tour as Captain of the Hercules C-130W2 XV208 meteorological research aircraft, commonly known as 'Snoopy' due to the elongated nose. In all I completed over 36 years in the Royal Air Force as a pilot, totalling over 10,000 flying hours. Many of these were as an instructor and in a tactical role (*low-level and dropping*), but the flying in Snoopy proved to be some of the most stimulating of my career. Many hours were flown at medium or high level over water with no other features (*apart from weather!*) to break the monotonous outlook but trying to put oneself in the scientist' mind to achieve what he sought resulted in long games of three-dimensional chess.



Snoopy was designed for atmospheric research and reconnaissance missions, allowing study of atmospheric dynamics, collection of data on weather systems and monitoring severe weather phenomena such as hurricanes and typhoons. Contrary to popular belief we did not race to fly into the eye of the severest storms and CBs; there is no future in that as instanced by the C141 Starlifter that fell out of the bottom of a major storm over East Anglia, UK in August 1976 minus a fractured right wing and tailplane. Experiments various were conducted on behest of the Meteorological

Research Flight (MRF) of the UK Met Office at medium and low-level, some sponsored and funded by academic institutions but most directly by the MRF. Snoopy was used for atmosphere sampling throughout the Kuwait area following the end of the first Gulf War and the pollution from the burning oilwells. Other random experiments I took part in were research on 'gravity waves' (*the Met man's terminology for 'standing waves'*) over north Norway, Sweden and Finland – the downdraughts were truly epic, as I fought to maintain speed for the level experimental run with the throttles of the 4 Allison engines going from zero thrust to full power of over 4,500 shp each in seconds; many hours of low-level over the coast of Southern Ireland sampling the condensate on particulates given off by rotting seaweed (*yes, it's true!*) – this detachment got us thrown out of the country by the Irish CAA, causing continuing diplomatic clearance problems for ministerial aircraft from the UK wishing to fly into Dublin (*but that's another story!*); and having a prime seat for the total eclipse of the sun over the UK in August 1999. The latter flight was carried out to mid-Atlantic at levels about 20,000 ft to avoid the cloud obscuring the eclipse overland UK. At early morning briefing we were phoned by a Nimrod crew from RAF Kinloss: "could we share our airspace with them as they were airborne that day and thought it might be nice to see the eclipse" – answer a resounding NO as we had booked this airspace for sampling the atmosphere in these conditions over a year in advance. I still have a large photo of the total eclipse with the ring of fire taken by the station photographer, totally bricking himself because he knew he only had one go at it. Another enjoyable detachment was of several weeks in Innsbruck in late Autumn. This was an international research venture of 14 countries and half a dozen dedicated airframes. Whilst the pre-brief had stated that all research would be from medium altitude, we were delighted to turn up at briefing on the first morning to be told to carry out low-level research for 5 hours through the Alps and down the Rhine Valley. For the remaining sorties we flew as expected, ejecting numerous radiosondes over the mountainous terrain; the aircraft data receiver could handle up to six of these in flight at any one time, recording altitude, temperature, pollution, wind etc and transferring the data by satellite link direct to the Met Office in UK. Despite the sondes having a GPS facility, and a notice to report any find to the given number, the scientists failed to retrieve any of the dozens we ejected over the Alps that Autumn.

It was of interest to read about the NASA research aircraft and its operating altitudes around 65,000 feet. If Snoopy had one shortcoming it was its limited operating altitude of generally mid-20,000s or 30,000 at a push. To this end we co-operated occasionally with the German Met Research aircraft, a twin jet operating out of Oberpfaffenhofen near Munich. We surveyed the lower altitudes whilst they operated above us, exchanging data in flight by datalink to ensure correlation. We even formatted for some data runs with us (*the military experts!*) leading the formation from the close station tucked in behind them.

Sadly, Snoopy's days came to an end in 2001 when the new contract was lost to another bid, notwithstanding that the Snoopy bid won not one but two successive tenders in open competition between five bidders, politics won out as ever. The airframe reverted to Marshalls at Cambridge, being used for spares until eventually being broken up.

Chas Slatter

(ED. Chas and I were at RAF Leeming together going through the BFTS on the Jet Provost Mk III and V. We graduated with our Wings in December 1973. We had several formation flights together, all authorised I seem to distantly remember, and one was a three-ship approach to Teesside airport as our 'lead' instructor knew one of the controllers on duty. It was only 25 kms from Leeming so quite close as the bird flies, or even a JP5. Those were the days when the aircraft did not have 'recording' devices fitted. Chas was the Best Man at my wedding to Angie, which was in uniform with swords. Chas finished his RAF career as a Squadron Leader – Specialist Air Crew – having taken the decision not to fly a desk but keep a plane strapped to his bum. I am convinced he would have made Air Officer rank. He was the most experienced and qualified C130 pilot in the RAF when he retired with some 7,000 operational hours. We lost track of each other for many years and only reconnected some 3 years ago after some sleuth work from my side. Keep in touch with friends as they are special to have a beer with and hangar-fly.)

HERMANUS HISTORY AND POWERED FLIGHT:

7 Jan 2021 - By Robin Lee

(ED – This will be a multi part series as the article is too long for one edition. Additional pictures have been added.)



Hermanus, everyone agrees, is a seaside town. The names tell you that: the Old Harbour, the New Harbour, Voelklip Beach, Harbour Road, Poole's Bay, Kwaiwater, the Klein River and Onrus lagoons – the list goes on.

Yet for well over a hundred years, Hermanus has had a surprisingly extensive history of contact with powered flight and aircraft. It all started just thirteen years after the Wright Brothers achieved the first 12 seconds of powered flight by human beings on 17 December 1903. In 1916, eighteen-year-old Henry Luyt, son of P John Luyt, the Marine and Riviera Hotels owner in Hermanus, left school and went off to join the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in England to fight in World War I.



Henry Luyt during World War I (Old Harbour Museum Trust)



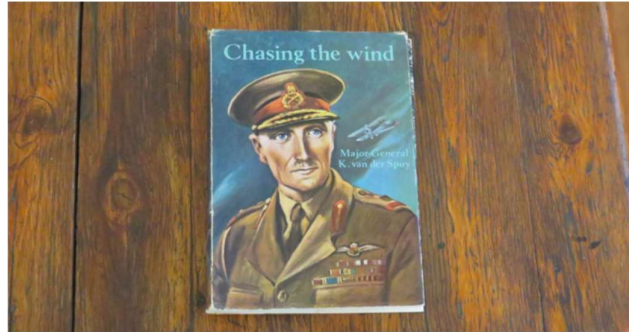
Amy Johnson (Our Generation)

He received three months training and flew sorties over the German lines for a month or so, before being shot down by anti-aircraft fire. Fortunately, his plane landed upside down on an unoccupied enemy trench in Belgium, and he survived. He released himself from the upside-down position in which he had come to rest, evaded capture and returned to his work in the RFC.

In 1919, he returned to Hermanus, where his father persuaded him not to fly again –instead, he bought Henry a sports car that Henry named *The Red Devil*, and drove at high speeds around the Overberg and all the way to Cape Town.

Henry remained friendly with a circle of young men who did own planes, and, for most of the 1920s, they regularly flew to Hermanus during the 'season' (December and January), landed on Grotto Beach and then took astonished holidaymakers up for what were called 'flips' over Walker Bay and inland to the mountains. The area known as 'Die Plaat', on the western side of the Klein River mouth was regarded as the first 'airstrip' in Hermanus.

The South African Air Force was established in 1920, based at Zwartkop, with another base at Youngsfield near Cape Town. Closely involved in this development was Major-General Kenneth van der Spuy (1892 – 1991), a resident of Stellenbosch. He and his wife, famous horticulturist Una van der Spuy, were frequent visitors to the Marine Hotel in Hermanus, though he does not seem to have flown to the town or patrolled the area from the air- after all, he was on holiday.



Chasing the Wind by Kenneth van der Spuy

(ED – The great man attended a RAFOC Annual Dinner at the Rand Club in the mid 80's and I had the privilege to sit by him for about 10 minutes. What an interesting man he was.)

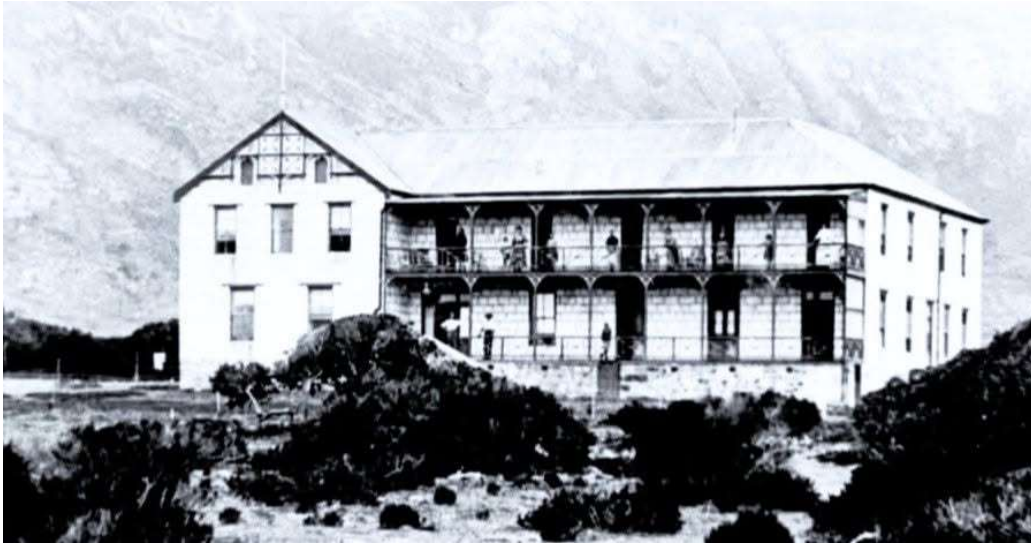
Later, van der Spuy became friendly with Sir Thomas Sopwith, perhaps the most famous aircraft designer and British aeroplane manufacturer in the 20th century. Sopwith owned extensive property in Voëlklip later in the century, notably a farm called Onderberg, up against the mountain in the vicinity of First Street.



Sir Thomas Sopwith (Wikipedia)

Henry Luyt's passion for planes got another boost in 1932 when the famous British female flyer Amy Johnson stayed at the Marine Hotel. She had just flown solo from London to Cape Town in a women's record time and was the darling of all the media. She had previously flown solo from London to Australia, also in record time and been awarded the title CBE (Commander of the Most

Excellent Order of the British Empire) by King George V. In 1936, she would repeat her flight from London to Cape Town, breaking the men's record as well as her own, but did not come to Hermanus that time. Sadly, she was to die in controversial circumstances in the early years of World War II. On a routine flight from the north of England to Oxford, her plane was seen way off course over the Thames Estuary, where she was observed to parachute down into the freezing water and disappear. Her body was never found, but some personal items confirmed that she had died there. In the early 1940s, the Royal Air Force established a flying boat base on the Bot River Estuary. Many sorties were flown against German U-boat operations along the South African East Coast using the famous Catalina flying boats. South African radar installations supported the Catalinas from Betty's Bay and other locations. Many of the RAF pilots stayed at the old Onrus Hotel during those years and were involved with the social life of Hermanus. Three are known to have married local women after the War and settled in Hermanus.



ED – Added picture - The Onrust Hotel, built in 1911, is a cornerstone of Onrus's early history as a coastal retreat. Built during a brief but determined push to turn the quiet farming area into a destination for seaside holidays, the hotel became a symbol of that vision. Although multiple development companies behind the idea failed financially, a few key structures, like the Onrust Hotel, were completed and gave the area its first taste of a tourism-based identity.

Alongside the hotel, 1911 also saw the opening of the Ysendyk inn and the building of "On Trust," a holiday home owned by Caledon pharmacist T.J. Davies. Davies proved to be an early influencer in the region's growth; his encouragement led Alexander Grant to open a pharmacy branch in nearby Hermanus, which still operates as the Alex Grant Pharmacy. These small but significant beginnings helped lay the groundwork for the transformation of Onrus into the holiday haven it is known as today. The Onrust Hotel remains a quiet witness to this history—a relic of optimism, ambition, and the enduring allure of the South African coast.

(to be continued in future Ramblings.)

BRITISH MAN ACCUSED OF SPYING ON CYPRUS RAF BASE FOR IRAN:

Sean Seddon from BBC online



A British man has been arrested on suspicion of spying on a UK military base in Cyprus on behalf of the Iranian military.

Rashad Sultanov, 44, of Islington, north London, is accused of carrying out "hostile surveillance" on RAF Akrotiri and sharing information with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps.

Sultanov, who also holds Azerbaijani citizenship, was arrested by Cypriot police on 17 July and is in custody pending extradition proceedings.

The Crown Prosecution Service has said he will be charged under the National Security Act - the first time an alleged offence under the 2023 law has been investigated in an overseas territory. Commander Helen Flanagan, head of CTP London, said: "This case shows we are able to use the National Security Act overseas when British military bases are allegedly targeted by hostile state activity.

Commander Helen Flanagan, head of CTP (*Counter Terrorism Police*) London, said: "This case shows we are able to use the National Security Act overseas when British military bases are allegedly targeted by hostile state activity.

"A huge amount of partnership work has been carried out between British and Cypriot law enforcement agencies.

"We continue to work with colleagues from the CPS, National Crime Agency and Cypriot authorities as extradition proceedings progress."



The 'bad guys' are over in this direction and 1,700 kms away to Tehran after overflying Syria and Iraq.

A Typhoons combat radius is typically around 1,390 km (864 miles) or roughly 1,000 nautical miles depending on the specific multi-role payload, altitude profile, and whether air-to-air refueling is used.

Standard unrefueled combat air patrols typically last around 2.5 hours, though this is heavily extended via strategic tanker refuelings demonstrated during long-range missions.



Typhoon FGR4



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