



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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UNVEILING OF THE SPITFIRE MkIX REPLICA– PORT ELIZABETH 7th April

Four members of RAFOC made the trip to Port Elizabeth on Saturday 7th April; these were Jon Adams, Karl Jensen, Geoff Fish and John Martin. We will have more to say about John Martin further down in this Special Edition Newsletter.

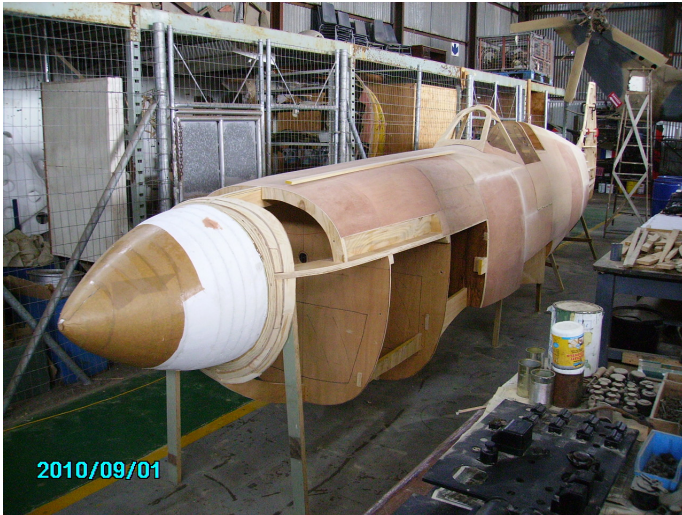
Karl, Geoff and John on SAA to Port Elizabeth



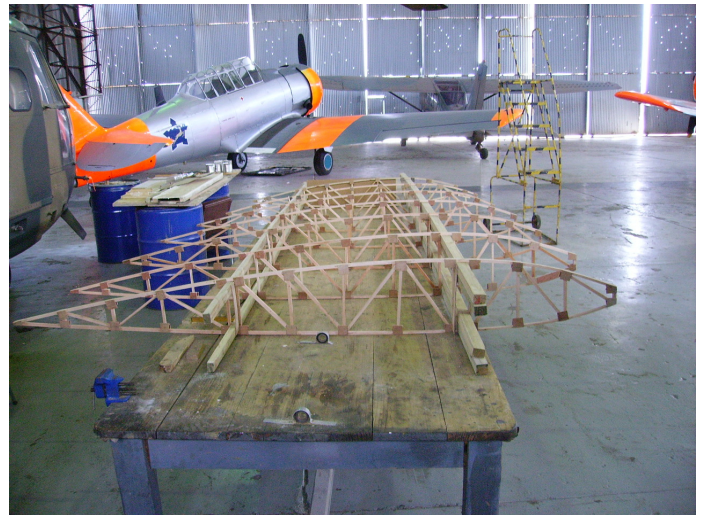
RAFOC had heard from our members that there was a project to build a replica Spitfire in PE and as it happens Jon Adams had a business relationship with the University in Port Elizabeth and went there once a month. On one trip some four years ago he made a visit to the Bellman hangar to see for himself what was going on and then gave a report back to the Club Committee in Johannesburg.

He was quite amazed with what they were doing and the fuselage was in a very advanced stage of construction.

The wings were in early manufacture and in the discussion with Rob Tribelthorn he indicated that they had a problem with the main spar in that using wood was not possible as this was heavy and the fuselage would not support it due to construction constraints. So they were looking for sponsorship, as all projects do, to buy some aluminum to save weight. I asked what money they were looking for and he indicated around R10,000. Jon then told Rob of being an ex RAF pilot and a member of RAFOC, saying he would see what could be done but giving no promises. When RAFOC approved supporting the project we had one request that the color scheme of the aircraft should be that of Sailor Malan as a RAF Officer and South African would be perfect. The rest is history as we have supported the project in further ways.



This is how it looked when Jon saw it.



RAFOC assisted with the purchase of aluminum for the spars in 2013.

Two ways that come to mind are the research of the tail number JK 769. We contacted a friend in the UK who we knew, Air Commodore Rick Peacock-Edwards who is also a South African who went to join the RAF, and using his contacts we were provided with the following information "JK769 was delivered to Biggin Hill as the Stn Cdrs personal aircraft that would have been allocated him rather than a Sqn."



The tail number JK 769



The canopy

The second support came for the canopy. Rob had trouble getting a SA manufacturer to blow the canopy and after some attempts he was losing confidence in being able to finish the project. As it happened Jon was in London in October last year at a banquet at the Guild Hall hosted by the Honorable Company of Air Pilots. He shared a table with Air Commodore Rick Peacock-Edwards and Air Marshal Cliff Spink and we talked about many things but one was this replica build. Rick put Jon in touch with people at Duxford and he communicated with them. Well out of the blue they said they had a MKIX canopy and could sell it for £400.

There was no argument and RAFOC paid them from London within 3 days to be sure they did not change their minds. Rob arranged for the delivery to London and then by a SAA Captain to South Africa and eventually here to PE.

Geoff and John arriving for a pre-inspection at the hangar. Note the MG's in the background in RED – WHITE and BLUE to honour the Royal Air Force 100th birthday.



NOW TO SAILOR MALAN

Sailor Malan was referred to by his colleagues as “THE KING OF THE FEW” and quite rightly so. He was a mans man and looked up to by all who served with him.

Born Adolph Gysbert Malan on 24 March 1910 in Wellington - Western Cape. At the age of 14 he joined the South African Training Ship *General Botha* as a naval cadet and on 5 January 1928 engaged as an officer cadet aboard the *Landsdown Castle* of the Union-Castle Line which later earned him the nickname of "Sailor" amongst his pilot colleagues. On 19 February 1932, he joined the Royal Naval Reserve as an acting sub-lieutenant, and was commissioned a sub-lieutenant on 18 June 1935.

In the same year the RAF started the rapid expansion of its pilot corps, and Malan volunteered. He learned to fly in the Tiger Moth at an elementary flying school near Bristol, flying for the first time on 6 January 1936. Commissioned an acting pilot officer on 2 March, he completed training by the end of the year, and was sent to join 74 Squadron on 20 December 1936. He was confirmed as a pilot officer on 6 January 1937 and was appointed to acting flight commander of "A" Flight, flying Spitfires, in August of that year. He was promoted to acting flying officer on 20 May 1938 and promoted to substantive flying officer on 6 July. He received another promotion to acting flight lieutenant on 2 March 1939, six months before the outbreak of war. 74 Squadron saw its first action only 15 hours after war was declared when it was sent to intercept a bomber raid that turned out to be returning RAF planes.

After fierce fighting over Dunkirk during the evacuation of Dunkirk on 28 May 1940, Malan was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross having achieved five 'kills'. During this battle he first exhibited his fearless and implacable fighting spirit. In one incident he was able to coolly change the light bulb in his gun sight while in combat and then quickly return to the fray. During the night of 19/20 June Malan flew a night sortie in bright moonlight and shot down two Heinkel He-111 bombers, a then unique feat for which a bar to his DFC was awarded. On 6 July, he was promoted to the substantive rank of flight lieutenant. Malan and his senior pilots also decided to abandon the "vic" formation used by the RAF, and turned to a looser formation (the "finger-four") similar to the four aircraft *Schwarm* the *Luftwaffe* had developed during the Spanish Civil War.

On 8 August 1940, Malan was given command of 74 Sqn and promoted to acting squadron leader. This was at the start of the Battle of Britain. Three days later, on 11 August, action started at 7 am when 74 Sqn was sent to intercept a raid near Dover, and this was followed by another three raids, lasting all day. At the end of the day, 74 Sqn had claimed to have shot down 38 aircraft, and was then known as "Sailor's August the Eleventh". Malan himself simply commented, "*thus ended a very successful morning of combat.*" He received a bar to his DFC on 13 August. On 24 December, Malan received the Distinguished Service Order, and on 22 July 1941 a bar to the Order. On 10 March 1941 he was appointed as one of the first wing leaders for the offensive operations for that spring and summer, leading the Biggin Hill Wing until mid August, when he was rested from operations. He finished his active fighter career in 1941 with 27 kills destroyed, 7 shared destroyed and 2 unconfirmed, 3 probable's and 16 damaged, at that time he was the RAF's leading ace, and one of the highest scoring pilots to have served wholly with Fighter Command during World War II. He was transferred to the reserve as a squadron leader on 6 January 1942. After tours to the USA and the Central Gunnery School, Malan was promoted to temporary wing commander on 1 September 1942 and became station commander at Biggin Hill, receiving a promotion to war substantive wing commander on 1 July 1943.

Malan remained keen to fly on operations, often ignoring standing orders for station commanders not to risk getting shot down. In October 1943 he became officer commanding 19 Fighter Wing, RAF Second Tactical Air Force, then commander of the 145 (Free French) Fighter Wing in time for D-day, leading a section of the wing over the beaches during the late afternoon. Although not an instinctive pilot Malan was an exceptional shot and a highly aggressive fighter-pilot, and above all a superb tactician who instilled the methods and techniques he had honed in 1940, which would cast an influence on successive generations of R.A.F. fighter pilots who followed after him.

He developed a set of clear rules for fighter-pilots, which was disseminated throughout RAF Fighter Command. During the latter part of the war these could be found tacked to the wall of most airfields' Orderly Rooms:

TEN OF MY RULES FOR AIR FIGHTING

1. Wait until you see the whites of his eyes. Fire short bursts of one to two seconds only when your sights are definitely "ON".
2. Whilst shooting think of nothing else, brace the whole of your body: have both hands on the stick: concentrate on your ring sight.
3. Always keep a sharp lookout. "Keep your finger out".
4. Height gives you the initiative.
5. Always turn and face the attack.
6. Make your decisions promptly. It is better to act quickly even though your tactics are not the best.
7. Never fly straight and level for more than 30 seconds in the combat area.
8. When diving to attack always leave a proportion of your formation above to act as a top guard.
9. *INITIATIVE*, *AGGRESSION*, *AIR DISCIPLINE*, and *TEAMWORK* are the words that MEAN something in Air Fighting.
10. Go in quickly – Punch hard – Get out!

After the victorious conclusion of World War 2 Malan resigned his commission with the Royal Air Force in April 1946, retaining the rank of Group Captain and returned home to South Africa, where he commenced a career in sheep farming.

Malan died at the age of 53 on 17 September 1963 from Parkinson's disease, at that time a rare and little understood medical condition. A considerable sum of money was raised in his name to further study the disease. A funeral service was held for his body at St. Cyprian's Cathedral in Kimberley, after which it was buried in a grave at 'West End Cemetery' in Kimberley, Northern Cape Province.

Another project by the RAFOC is to erect a fitting monument to Sailor Malan in Kimberley. At the present time his grave is just that and we feel that such a person needs to be remembered by the many that will follow us in this life. This project is in collaboration with Wing Commander 'Cookie' Cookson who was the Deputy Defence Advisor, BHC in Pretoria and now stationed in Abu Dhabi and is a staunch supporter of the memory of Sailor Malan and all those other South African pilots that served in the wars with distinction.

Jonathan Malan, Sailors son, was scheduled to be in Port Elizabeth but had to apologise due to ill health. Jon read a message from him about his father.

“SAILOR” MALAN AT HOME

The first memory of my “daddy” was not the fierce, aggressive killer he was sometimes reported to be. I was 3 yrs old (1943) and remember him happily playing little games with me when he wasn't cuddling my mother, while listening to the latest BBC News, often featuring Winston Churchill. I guess his aggressive, fighting days were over and he was thankful to be alive! He came across as a quietly serious person with whom I felt contented to have around.

As I grew up in South Africa in the late 40's I remember him being very close to my mother, with not a lot of time spent with us children. I guess that because most of his life had been in a men's world he may have felt a little inadequate as a father. However, if I got his attention, purposefully, he was easy to talk to, and I never felt uneasy or scared of him – unless I had been naughty. Then I would feel his hand on my backside very quickly. It did not scare me, but made me more careful to be a good little boy. :-)

I admired him as a calm affectionate man, sometimes listening to Strauss waltzes, and dancing with my mother and sister. They would sometimes have a few friends around for drinks and a dance. Mum and dad were sociable, and parties were enjoyed by most adults in the 1950's.

Occasionally we had political guests, and I remember him being embarrassed when they showed him too much honour. He felt that the praise was sometimes overdone. I asked him about this when I was a 13-year-old. I remember him pointing out to me that there were thousands of other men engaged in the same dangerous fighting, and not getting any praise for it. Two of his brothers were killed, doing the same dangerous job. He would rather not talk about how he got so famous. I did not raise the subject again; the subject evoked a deep sadness in him.

My knowledge of the famous “Sailor” Malan has been gained via the same channels as yours. He was, of necessity, a different person in the war. He had to quickly learn how to hate and kill.

I admired my father as a person before I learned about his war years. Since reading books which describe his warlike character my respect for him and his fellows has grown. Their courage is awesome.

In conclusion, because of who he was at home, a quiet friendly “daddy”, I have always wanted to be a respectable, friendly man, hoping to be a good example to my own children.

Jonathan Malan

“Lieutenant JOHN HENRY JOSEPH MARTIN – 508 hours on Spitfires.” This is how he is introduced by one of our club members at lunches.



John flew the Mk 1 and 5 and in 1943 was shown a MKIX in Italy and given 30 minutes to familiarize himself. He was then sent in to action and flew in excess of 200 hours with ~150 sorties on the MKIX. He was offered his third pip to stay on and do conversions for other pilots. As he had been away from home for over a year he turned it down and returned to SA.

Now to his trip. Karl Jensen picked John up and accompanied him to ORT to catch the flight meeting up with Geoff Fish at the airport. Karl retired from SAA in 2003 but still has tentacles into the airline. They were accommodated by SAA and all flew on Business Class with the commensurate service from the crew. Jon had arrived in PE an hour earlier on Mango to arrange the transport and check the hotel bookings.

Karl had written a short introduction for the Captain to announce over the intercom which went like this: *“Good afternoon Captain. Just for your info, I am on board with a 94-year-old World War II Spitfire pilot John Martin. John is one of very few living WWII fighter pilots. John, Geoff Fish and myself are going to PE for the unveiling of a Spitfire replica at the SAAF Museum this evening. The Spitfire 9 is painted in the colours of ‘Sailor Malan’ WWII South African fighter ace from the Battle of Britain. Lovely task! Regards, Karl Jensen”* after the announcement was finished the whole airplane burst into applause which was an emotional point for John. On the return flight Karl had done the same with a slightly amended announcement: *“Good afternoon Captain. Just for your info, I am on board with a 94-year-old World War II Spitfire pilot John Martin. John is one of very few living WWII fighter pilots. John and myself are returning from PE after the unveiling of a Spitfire replica at the SAAF Museum last evening. The Spitfire MkIX is painted in the colours of ‘Sailor Malan’ WWII South African fighter ace from the Battle of Britain. Lovely task! Regards, Karl Jensen”* and again the airplane applauded him. Karl had arranged for passenger assistance for John as it is quite a walk and a wheelchair was a welcome service. The difference between Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg is that the service vehicle has to attach at the rear of the aircraft, so as they were in Business Class they had to wait for the passengers to get off. This meant that they all had to pass John and almost all of them personally congratulated him on their way past. What a magnificent occasion for John.

Now to the actual unveiling of the Spitfire. John was treated as the Guest of Honor and would ceremonially cut a red ribbon in front of black curtains. As it was unveiled in the evening it was dark outside which added to the occasion. After the addresses by Jon and Capt. Mark Kelbrick, CO of the museum, John made a short address himself quite unplanned but really nice. He commented that he was humbled to be given the honor of unveiling the Spitfire and again reminded those gathered that we should remember those that did not return from the fight.



The curtains were opened and the Spitfire which was shrouded in smoke was revealed with lights showing the magnificent shape of the aircraft. The gathering was then invited to have a look at the Spitfire at close range.

John was able to get in and out of the cockpit with a little assistance. He looked fine in the seat and immediately at home and taken back to 1943 when it was the real thing. He knew at the switches and controls, which just goes to show what a good replica it is, and relived some memories.

Jon and Geoff were close at hand and were enthralled with the memories. Drinks and snacks were served in the hangar and after an hour we retired to the museum pub to carry on with the hangar talk. John is normally an early sleeper, just like Nelson Mandela was, but on this occasion he was kept up till 11h30.



John in the cockpit with Geoff and Jon.



Capt. Mark Kelbrick, Rob Tribelthorn, John Martin, Jon Adams

The Sunday morning started with a leisurely breakfast of close to 2 hours. Geoff went to visit family so Karl and Jon took John off on an ocean sightseeing trip along Marine Drive to Sacramento where we got out and had a bit of sea air. The time was getting close to return to the airport and catch the return flight.



Karl and Jon at Sacramento enjoying the sightseeing.



Jon and John just taking in the view and the sea air.



Mark and John



John and Rob

What a memorable weekend that was and we were privileged to be there.

Jon, Karl and Geoff