

John Martin

February 6, 1923 - November 21, 2019



One of our senior members, and World War 2 Veteran, John Martin, passed on to Higher Service late on Thursday 21 November 2019, aged 96. He had been in Sandton Clinic as a consequence of a bad fall in his home earlier in the month.

John joined the South African Air Force (SAAF) in 1942 as a trainee pilot. He completed his initial training on De Havilland Tiger Moths from April to June 1943. He then transferred to 22 Air School in Vereeniging for advanced training on North American Harvards, and was awarded his wings on 13th November 1943.

The Harvard, "Schoolmaster of the Skies", came into service at the outbreak of the War and many are still flying today, a tribute to Dutch Kindelberger's North American design team. One of John's favourite 'throw away lines' was "that when he flew Harvards - they were new!"

He was flown to Cairo (Abu Seir) on 2 March 1944 and was posted to 73 Operational Training Unit flying Spitfire Mark 1s and 5s. He was then posted to Italy where he joined 4 Squadron SAAF flying Spitfire Mark 9s.

John's first operational flight was 29 May 1944, just prior to D-day and he made his last operational flight on 19 March 1945. His squadron operated from nine different airfields during this time, carrying 500-pound bombs and flying close support work with the army on the ground. 4 Squadron's role was also to bomb and strafe enemy airfields and road and rail convoys. This was more dangerous than 'air to air' combat due to intense anti-aircraft fire from the ground. The Spitfires had to fly very low to ensure bombing accuracy. In John's ten months of operations, 25 of the squadron's Spitfires were shot down or crashed and 13 of John's fellow pilots were killed. That was about 60% of the squadron. John lost some good friends. One of his Squadron mates who survived was Monty Montgomery, a lifetime friend, and who also passed on to Higher Service a few short weeks ago.

John celebrated his 21st birthday whilst on operations in Italy on 2 June 1944. On 19 March 2019, John celebrated his 74th anniversary of climbing out of his Spitfire for the very last time. He will be remembered as a Christian Gentleman in the full sense of those words.

RAFOC extends sincere condolences to his son Kevin and daughters Linda and Michelle and his extended family, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He will be missed – and we will remember him.

Written by : Bruce Harrison

