



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

P.O. Box 69726

BRYANSTON 2021

info@rafoc.org

www.rafoc.org

President:	David MacKinnon-Little	
Vice Presidents:	Basil Hersov, Colin Francis, Geoff Quick, David Lake	
Chairman:	Bruce Harrison	bruce@jbharrison.co.za Tel: 011 673 0291 Cell: 083 325 0025
Vice Chairman:	Jon Adams	vice-chairman@rafoc.org Tel: 011 678 7702 Cell: 082 450 0616
Hon. Secretary:	Colin Ackroyd	Tel: 012 942 1111 Cell: 082 800 5845
Hon. Treasurer:	Jeff Earle	Tel: 011 616 3189 Cell: 083 652 1002
Committee Members:	Russell Swanborough	Tel: 011 884 2611 Cell: 083 263 2740
	Karl Jensen	Tel: 011 234 0598 Cell: 082 331 4652
	Jean-Michel Girard	Cell: 083 659 1067
	Geoff Fish	Tel: 012 667 2759 Cell: 083 660 9697
Web Master:	Hanke Fourie	Tel: Cell: 082 553 0210
Bank Account:	Nedbank - Melrose Arch	Br: 19 66 05 Account 19 66 278 063

RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 11 – 19th JUNE 2020

GREETINGS TO ALL:

Last week saw the onset of a real cold front which brought freezing temperatures to many parts of SA, with pictures of snow in the Clarens area and breakers coming over the sea wall in Three Anchor Bay in some major storms in the Cape. Also, rain, hail and some snow at O R Tambo on a very cold Public Holiday on Tuesday. Sadly, we also saw pictures again of the spectacle of a mob in London abusing the very freedoms their forebears died to win around the Cenotaph which commemorates their sacrifice, and that Cenotaph and other Memorials having to be boarded up to protect them. Strangely, it apparently took the threat of right-wing counter-demonstrations to galvanise the authorities into belated action, and we saw the Riot Squad in full gear, apparently for the first time, and a 5pm curfew. Boris was moved to tweet "racist thuggery has no place on our streets" and "Anyone attacking the police will be met with full force of the law". We shall see...and here at home, on Day 83 of the seige, announcement of some relaxation in the rules, but Level Two Lockdown is still, apparently, somewhere in the fog of Coronavirus...

GOING BANANAS:

Zoos and Safari Parks in England will be allowed to open from Monday 15 June, Boris Johnson announced last Wednesday, in a move that could save some of the nation's best-loved attractions from closure. Zoos had taken a financial battering from lockdown because of the continuing cost of looking after animals without any revenue coming in, and some had warned they were on the brink of going bust. Their reopening - on the same day that high streets are allowed to reopen - will give families a chance to enjoy days out that have been banned since March. However, indoor exhibits, such as reptile houses, must remain closed, and cafes on the premises will be takeaway only. Aquariums cannot yet open as they are largely indoors....

OBITUARIES

COLONEL MIECZYSLAW STACHIEWICZ, who has died aged 102, and so far as is known, the last of the Polish WW2 pilots, escaped from his native Poland following the German invasion, and after reaching England joined a Polish bomber squadron. Born in Warsaw in 1917, Stachiewicz had been studying architecture at Warsaw Polytechnic when war broke out in 1939. He took part in the Battle for Poland as a soldier before escaping capture by fleeing to Romania. After passing through France he ended up in Britain in June 1940. Stachiewicz was serving as a cadet with the 4th Air Regiment when the Germans launched their attack on Poland. Within days he joined a force to head east, and after the Soviet invasion two weeks later he crossed into Romania, where he was interned. He

escaped in January 1940 and finally reached France. Within weeks he had to escape again, this time to England. Joining the Polish Air Force, he completed pilot training in April 1942 and was assigned to RAF 301 'Land of Pomerania' Squadron, then flying Vickers Wellington bombers. He flew his first operation on May 5, when he attacked Stuttgart. At the end of that month he flew on the first "Thousand Bomber" raid when Cologne was the target.... After the war he remained in the UK, returning to studying architecture. Upon graduation he worked as an architect for many decades, while also taking an active role in the Polish cultural and social scene. Over his lifetime Stachiewicz received numerous awards, and in 2017 he received the Order of the White Eagle, Poland's highest award for merit, from President Andrzej Duda.

LAST OF THE DESERT RATS: Jimmy Sinclair of Kirkcaldy, Scotland, has passed away at the age of 107. He had the distinctions of being both the oldest living person in Scotland and the last surviving member of the Desert Rats. The "Desert Rats" were the British troops that fought and defeated Erwin Rommel's North Afrika Korps during World War II. Sinclair fought with the Cheshunt Troop of the 1st Regiment Horse Artillery in the 7th Armoured Division. When explaining why that group became known as the Desert Rats, he recalled a time that he held a piece of chocolate in his hand and a rat came out from between the sand bags to take the chocolate and then disappear back into the bags. (Rommel is also credited with coining the name "Desert Rats") His death came just weeks after he was honoured on the 75th anniversary of VE Day. The First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, called Sinclair "one of the most remarkable people she had ever met." She went on to say that she was proud to call him a friend. The heads of two different Scottish charities for veterans called Sinclair an "incredible man." They noted in a joint statement that Sinclair refused to wear his medals received for his service out of solidarity with his comrades who did not survive the war. Sinclair was born in 1912. His mother died a month after he was born so he was raised by his grandparents. After school, he began work as a slater. He joined the Territorial Army in 1931 and served with the Newburgh platoon of the Black Watch. World War II began shortly after he married and he joined the Royal Artillery. He received medals for his part in the siege of Tobruk, the battle of El Alamein and assaults on Monte Cassino in Italy. He was badly burned at Monte Cassino which left him in the hospital for eight weeks. After his recuperation, he became the driver for Hugo Baring of Baring Bank. After the war, Sinclair played trombone in an acclaimed brass band and worked for the Control Commission in Berlin. Jimmy also struck up a friendship with the son of the leader of the African-based German forces that he spent years fighting against – Erwin Rommel, and spent several years corresponding with Manfred Rommel until his death in 2013. His wife passed before him. He is survived by two children and three grandchildren. Until the end, Sinclair enjoyed a shot of whiskey every evening before bed. When asked the secret to his long life, he responded simply, "Johnny Walker." He also stressed the need to have a sense of humour and to keep a good attitude at all times. He maintained a correspondence with Camilla, Duchess of Rothesay, (Patron of the Desert Rats Association) whose father also served in the Desert Rats. She regularly sent letters and photographs to Sinclair. The Duchess called Sinclair "a true one-off," and praised him for his humility, his kindness and his sense of humour. She went on to say that it was a privilege to have known him.

DUNKIRK, THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN AND D-DAY:

The 4th June marked the 80th anniversary of the last day of the Allies' retreat from Dunkirk as the Nazis continued their march across Europe. With the last of the 'little ships' sailing home to the UK with what was left of the British Expeditionary Force on board, and the battered Royal Air Force flying home to regroup on this side of the Channel, they were dark days. The evacuation, codenamed Operation Dynamo, which began on 27th May and was to take just over a week, saw more than 338,000 men rescued, including almost 140,000 French, Polish, and Belgian troops. They sailed in 861 vessels, of which 243 were sunk during the operation. Two weeks later, as France capitulated, Prime Minister Winston Churchill told the nation: "What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions

and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be freed and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands." The speech ended with a call for people to "so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour'." Churchill was right in his prediction that Hitler was about to turn his attention to this country – and equally right in his optimistic assessment of the UK's response to the threat of invasion. As history relates, the men of the Royal Air Force made sure that the Battle of Britain, 80 years ago this summer, dashed Hitler's invasion hopes. They took to the sky in sortie after sortie, sometimes several times in a single day, to fight back against, and finally defeat, the numerically superior Luftwaffe. They became known as 'the Few' following another of Churchill's speeches in which he told the House of Commons: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed, by so many, to so few." Fewer-than 3,000 in number, their bravery and sacrifice saw Hitler abandon his plans, preserving this island as the springboard from which the Normandy invasion could be launched four years later and, in all probability, shortening the Second World War considerably. "Without the Battle of Britain, the D-Day invasion of June 1944 could not have taken place in the way it did," explained Group Captain Patrick Tootal, secretary of the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust CIO, which looks after the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel-le-Ferne in Kent. "The country owes the Few a huge debt of gratitude, not just for what they did in 1940 but for effectively turning the tide of the war." The memorial at Capel-le-Ferne, just outside Folkestone, is home to the National Memorial to the Few, a statue of a lone airman looking out over the English Channel, and to the Christopher Foxley-Norris Memorial Wall, on which are listed the names of all the Allied airmen known to have taken part. A replica Hurricane and Spitfire are among other features of the popular clifftop site. The site receives no public funding of any kind, and with the Covid-19 lockdown ending all funding streams, including the shop, café and Scramble Experience visitor attraction, life is currently very tough for the charity, which opened its Wing visitor centre in 2015. Group Captain Tootal said: "We had lots of events planned to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain but all of them had to be shelved," Patrick explained. "Life for charities is always tough, but the pandemic has reduced our income to virtually zero, and we still have bills to pay. "Anyone who would like to support the charity in memory of the Few and the sacrifices they made to keep this country free from invasion between 10th July and 31st October 1940 is asked to click on the *Donate* link on our website at www.battleofbritainmemorial.org

BATTLE OF BRITAIN MEMORIAL DAY TO MOVE ONLINE:

The Battle of Britain Memorial Trust has announced ambitious plans to replace this year's Memorial Day with an online event, allowing people around the world to join the commemorations to mark the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain. The Trust, which is responsible for the National Memorial to the Few at Capel-le-Ferne, is looking closely at the possibilities of a 'virtual' commemoration to replace the traditional event. "Clearly the coronavirus crisis means we can't have Memorial Day in its usual form, but we are committed to pressing ahead with a suitable commemoration of the RAF's victory in 1940," explained Hon Secretary of the Trust Group Captain Patrick Tootal OBE. "The country is facing a similar challenge to the one it faced in 1940 and we are determined to show the resolve that the men of the RAF showed in the face of adversity. We will not be beaten by the virus but will find other ways to commemorate this important year. Memorial Day is always held on a Sunday closest to the start of the Battle of Britain, which began on 10th July 1940, and following this year's virtual event, the next 'traditional' commemoration is planned for Sunday 4th July 2021. This year's online event is scheduled for 12th July. We are keen to ensure that the 80th anniversary of the RAF's victory is properly commemorated, and so we have already rearranged the dates of our Sunday afternoon talks, which will now happen in September and October. We were planning a year of special events and we are determined that they will still happen, even if we have to alter our plans significantly," Patrick said. "We hope the public will continue to support us in that ambition. We are proud of our role as guardians of the National Memorial to the Few, and with no visitor income at present we hope those who value the contribution made to Europe's freedom by the RAF in 1940 will play their part. We will be releasing more details of this year's online Memorial Day shortly, and in the

meantime please consider donating to the Trust in memory of the Few so that we can continue to preserve and enhance this tribute to their bravery and sacrifice.”

All the details and links at <https://www.battleofbritainmemorial.org/news-and-events/news/virtual-memorial-day-revealed/>

MEMORIES OF VE DAY: GREEN HOWARDS:

Andrew Muttitt wrote in response to the VE Commemoration: “Hi Bruce, thanks for remembering and paying homage to CSM Stan Hollis VC and 6 Battalion Green Howards in the latest edition of RAFOC Ramblings. My father's cousin, Pte Harold Whittaker was there with 6 Battalion on that bloody yet glorious day, though I am not sure whether he was a member of Hollis's company or another. It was an especially poignant day for Harold, as 4 years previously he had been evacuated from the Dunkirk beaches in one of the little ships, and this was “pay back” time. My paternal grandfather also served with the Regiment in the Great War, from the Somme 1916 to Arkangel 1919. Another interesting fact is that the Green Howards were the only British Regiment to land two assault Battalions on the Normandy beaches on June 6th 1944. 7 Battalion also came ashore at Gold Beach in the second wave. Both Battalions had fought side by side from Dunkirk, through the Western Desert, into Sicily, Italy, then on to Normandy. Interestingly, the 6 Battalion included, throughout, the remnant of a cohort of 200 Cameron Highlanders who had been allocated to the Regiment in the chaos after Dunkirk. Apparently, by the time the survivors reached Normandy they were died in the wool Yorkshiremen!

THE STORY BEHIND ‘ABOVE AND BEYOND’:

If you try to tell the story of American pilots flying variations of the German Messerschmitt BF-109 while escorting B-17 bombers on their mission, most people wouldn't believe you. It's also hard to believe that pilots flying British Spitfires were locked in deadly aerial battles against each other. But these things did happen in Israel's war for independence that began in 1948. While at EAA AirVenture 2015, ANN's Maxine Scheer interviewed Nancy Spielberg, who is the producer of a documentary movie titled, Above and Beyond, her movie documents the beginnings of the Israeli Air Force that was born with the help of Americans and others who were dedicated to seeing Israel survive as a nation. In 1948, a group of former World War II pilots, mostly from America, volunteered to fight for Israel in their war for independence. They not only flew and fought, they were also responsible for securing the aircraft that Israel needed in a time when a war materials embargo was in place. (A significant number of SA Veterans also volunteered, and the late Justice Cecil Margo was offered command of the Israeli Air Force – another RAFOC story) During the interview, Spielberg provides insights as to how she became involved in the project and produced this movie. Her description of what happened in those days and how she felt the need to tell the story is spellbinding. This interview is more than the story of producing a movie, it's a personal introduction to a time in history that is not well known, and it explains why the story must be told.

<http://aboveandbeyondthemovie.com> (sent in by Gen Des Barker)

OPERATION COPPER:

Operation Copper is a Southern African Development Community (SADC) initiated and approved tasking to prevent piracy and crime at sea in the busy shipping lane east of the sub-continent. South Africa is the lead nation providing maritime and limited airborne platforms with Mozambican military personnel aboard whichever SA Navy platform is on station. The extension of the Operation Copper maritime patrol mission in the Mozambique Channel for another year will cost the South African National Defence Force R154 million. This is according to a letter from President Cyril Ramaphosa informing the National Assembly of the extension of Operation Copper, from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021. The letter, dated 25th March, said that 200 members of the SANDF were employed to deter and prevent piracy in the Mozambique channel. “Due to the fact that maritime piracy remains a threat to all countries sharing borders with Western Indian Ocean, the employed members of SANDF will continue deterring and preventing piracy in the Mozambique channel.” “The expenditure expected to be incurred for this deployment amounts to R 154 000 000,” Ramaphosa stated. The Operation

Copper employment from 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019, in comparison, was budgeted as R127m.

RATE OF CLIMB:

Gordon Dyne advises: "I have had a very disappointing response to your mentioning my name as coordinator for Rick's book 'Rate of Climb'. Only Mark Clulow and Ian Grace have responded. With me that is three! Please give members a reminder in your next 'Ramblings' and if I do not have any response then I will just go with the names I have...Many thanks and cheers, Gordon"

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By Tracey Allen

Feature

RAF career inspired by father who was one of The Few



CLIMBED TO TOP: Rick Peacock-Edwards and night, and I greatly respected their efforts. They were very much the unsung heroes."

On introducing the Tornado F2/3, he said: "The early days... were exciting times, there were many challenges and also rewards. The aircraft, on retirement in 2009, some 25 years after its introduction to service, was a very capable fighter and it had been a long road to achieve this capability. However, I like to think that right back in the early days we sowed the seed that led to the great improvements that followed."

On what he called 'my last lap in the RAF', Rick was twice asked by the Chief of the Air Staff to become Air Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland.

He said he turned the job down for several reasons, adding: "To this day I often muse on this decision because there was so much to gain from taking the job - and yes, I do have my regrets but that is life."

A past-master of The Honourable Company of Air Pilots, Rick is a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society and the immediate past vice-chairman of the RAF Club in London.

A LREADY GARNERING four and five-star reviews, former fighter pilot Rick Peacock-Edwards' autobiography *Rate of Climb*, just published, is described as 'thrilling personal reminiscences' and 'a must for all lovers of derring-do in the air'.

Flying was in Rick's blood - his father was the South African Battle of Britain pilot Fg Off Spencer Ritchie Peacock-Edwards, known as 'Teddy', awarded the DFC for his achievements in the Easter Sunday Raid on Ceylon in 1942.

Rick said: "My father and his fellow Battle of Britain pilots were my heroes as a child and remain my heroes to this day."

"As the proud son of one of the 'Few', their selfless daring has inspired me throughout my life. Importantly, they influenced my decision to become an airman in the Royal Air Force, to become a fighter pilot like my father, and to live life with spirit as they had lived their lives. It is essential that their experiences live on."

During his long RAF career, Rick flew the Lightning, Phantom, Tornado F2/3 and other high-performance aircraft including the Hawk and the Hunter, and served in senior-ranking positions in the UK, Germany and the United States.

He was Station Commander of RAF Leeming, was closely associated with the Eurofighter Typhoon programme and appointed the Royal Air Force Inspector of Flight Safety.

In the book's foreword, Air Marshal Cliff Spink writes: "[Rick] followed the classic fighter pilot path - always striving for excellence when in the cockpit, and never far from trouble when out."

Rick joined the RAF in 1965 and spent more than three decades in the Service, retiring in 1999 as an Air Commodore.

He spent his flying career mainly on fighters and amassed more

than 1,000 hours on the Lightning, Phantom and Tornado. He also notched up more than 1,000 hours on the Grut, introduced the Tornado F2/3 into RAF service and commanded the first squadron.

His other outstanding career achievements include leading the hypost for The Queen's 60th birthday and for the opening of the 1986 Commonwealth Games.

He joined his first operational squadron, No. 92, in February 1968, a week after it had relocated to RAF Gutersloh in

Germany. He said: "I knew that I was joining a squadron with an illustrious history. I was also in awe of those pilots already there, most of whom had been operational Lightning pilots for a number of years."

He added: "The Lightning, at times, was not the most serviceable aircraft and, to fix a problem, an engine would often have to be removed to allow access to parts of the aircraft."

When I used to walk through the squadron servicing hangar, I marvelled at how the engineers used to, literally, take the aircraft apart and then put everything back together again for us pilots to fly. The engineers worked very hard, day



Bag yourself a copy **Win!**

WE HAVE copies of *Rate of Climb* (grubstreet.co.uk), rrp £20, up for grabs. For your chance to win one, send us the correct answer to this question: **In which year did Rick Peacock-Edwards join the RAF?** Email your answer, marked *Rate of Climb* book competition, to: competitions@rafnews.co.uk to arrive by June 26. Sorry, but due to the ongoing coronavirus crisis we are currently unable to accept entries by post.



CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

This is the eleventh weekly Newsheet - "Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings" - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest. (preferably nothing on the antics of Ministers (various) or NCCC!) that will help us all to keep in contact through the lockdown. Take care - keep safe in these troubled times, and remember that all this, too, shall pass... The first Flysafair commercial flights have started again this week, and engine maintenance flights permitted for private aircraft owners. So, let's hear from you... Please send your suggestions or contributions to bookings@rafoc.org

TAILPIECE:

The only way for a couple, confined to an apartment during lockdown, to make some quiet time for themselves on a Sunday afternoon was to send their 8 year old son out on to the balcony with a popsicle and tell him to report on all the neighbourhood activities...

"There's a car being towed away from the parking lot" he shouted, as he began his commentary and as his parents put their plan into action.

"An ambulance just drove past"

"Looks like the Andersons are having people around" he called out.

"Matt's riding a new bike"

"Looks like the Sanders are moving"

"Jason is on his skateboard"

After some moments of silence, he announced "The Coopers are having sex!"

Startled, his mother and father shot up in bed. Dad cautiously called out: "How do you know they're having sex?"

"Jimmy Cooper is standing on his balcony with a popsicle."

MATT

*'You'll have to spend
14 days in quarantine.
It will also give us time
to find your luggage'*