



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 18 – 7th AUGUST 2020

GREETINGS TO ALL:

Yet another week on the “Coronacoaster ...” Blasts in Beirut, breweries closing in SA, more Chinese Cities on Lockdown in Covid resurgence, more floods and earthquakes, charges of slave labour now in the UK. Continued chaos in the UK holiday travel business Beavers reintroduced to the UK after 400 years. At home, in the face of Olympian silence from the NCCC the Rand plumbs new lows, and in a dramatic development SA’s major brewers have suspended operations ... And so, we mark Day 134 of the siege, continuation of Level 3 and the ban on alcohol and tobacco sales and overnight curfew Some restaurants and coffee shops are open – leisure travel within Provinces - but no beer or wine. And, yes, more loadshedding ... Another week in Happy, happy Africa....

ALL PUBS WITH NO BEER:

Both Heineken (see below) and Anheuser-Busch Imbed have suffered a decline in local and international sales as a consequence of the crisis. However, (with the obvious exception of SA), AB says beer drinkers are returning. Meanwhile, it's engaging the government on measures that would meaningfully combat the public health crisis, while supporting the country's much-needed economic recovery. Oh, for a return to SA's time-honoured Dop System – “Let my people drink!!”

FOG OF WAR:

In the 19th century the Prussian military genius Carl von Clausewitz coined the term the 'fog of war', to describe the uncertainty commanders face in battle. To Clausewitz, 'War is nothing but a duel on an extensive scale ... an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will, “directed by political motives and morality.” Makes you think about the Coronavirus?

CAS SUMMER MESSAGE:



The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Mike Wigston, has released a summer message to RAF Whole Force Personnel. In the message the CAS reflects on what has been an extraordinary year so far for the Royal Air Force. Air Chief Marshal Wigston highlights the efforts of the RAF Whole Force in contributing to the national effort against COVID-19, all while continuing to deliver on Defence commitments and supporting international allies. Looking forward, the Chief of the Air Staff invites the Service to consider what lessons from COVID-19 can be taken forward as part of a wider commitment to working and thinking differently under

Astra - the Royal Air Force's journey to the Next Generation Air Force. In closing Air Chief Marshal Wigston expresses his thanks to the RAF Whole Force, saying: "2020 has been an extraordinary year so far and looks set to continue that way. Whatever the challenges and threats we face, I know you are always there, and always ready. For that I am extremely grateful. Thank you."

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/news/articles/chief-of-the-air-staffs-summer-message/>

RAF OPERATIONS IN MALI:



Personnel based at RAF Odiham have returned from a demanding and intense 4-month operational tour in the West African state of Mali, supporting the French-led Op Barkhane counter insurgency operations in the region. The personnel from 18 (Bomber) Squadron RAF, together with supporting elements from the Tactical Support Wing and Joint Helicopter Support Squadron, formed 1310 Flight RAF to operate the RAF CH-47 Chinook helicopters that are currently based at Gao Mali. During the tour, the Chinooks of 1310 Flt have carried out several

significant operations. One of them saw the Chinooks conducting a series of company sized air lifts of units of the French Army's Groupement Tactique Desert 1 across central Mali. During these operations, the detachment has been required to overcome extreme weather conditions, both heat and violent thunderstorms. Recently, one large thunderstorm developed into a 200 nautical mile wide supercell as it passed through the whole Sahel region. This resulted in the planned night inserts being delayed, but once the storms had passed, the crews again worked through the night to drop the troops at first light, to again conduct a successful clearance patrol. Once established these bases will be handed over to the local Malian Army to enable a transition to autonomous security in each area that the base will cover.

OBITUARY

“OOM ABE” ABRAHAM PHILLIP DE KOCK 1925 – 2020:

It is with much sadness that we have to record the passing on Tuesday 28th July 2020 of Abraham Phillip de Kock at the age of 95 years. He was better known as “Oom Abe” and is surely one of the last of the South African World War II veterans. Abe served with distinction in No 12 Squadron of the SA Air Force as a pilot and completed forty-three combat missions in Marauder Aircraft. After the war Abe married Hermie and they had five children, four sons and a daughter and lived and farmed on the farm “Mooindraai” in the Sasolburg district, Orange Free State. He served for some years as the President of the Angus Cattle Society and also as a judge at the Rand Easter Show. He was also a Life President of the Witwatersrand Agricultural Society. Abe was also a highly respected and venerated life member of both the M.O.T.H. and the SA Air Force Association. In spite of all his achievements Abe and his late wife Hermie were very humble people. They will be sorely missed.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN:

The Battle of Britain, which began 80 years ago this July, occupies a unique place in our island story. Its epic moral quality, representing the triumph of freedom over tyranny, continues to resonate to this day. The RAF's victory marked a crucial turning point in the war; it was the first time the Nazi machine had suffered a defeat. If the Luftwaffe had gained the mastery of the skies over southern England in September 1940, the Germans might well have been able to launch a vast, seaborne invasion across the Channel. Beaten in the West, the Reich had to turn eastwards, to Russia, with disastrous consequences. What makes the tale all the more gripping is the narrow margin of the RAF's success. The Luftwaffe had overwhelming superiority in numbers, with an attacking force of

more than 2,600 planes, including 1,200 bombers and 980 fighters. That compared with a total of around 900 aircraft in RAF Fighter Command at the start of the battle in July 1940. Despite the heroism of the British pilots, the Germans' numerical ascendancy began to make itself felt by the end of the summer of 1940. On 7 September, Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, the austere chief of Fighter Command, warned his fellow officers that his force was 'going downhill.' But that same day Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering, the head of the Luftwaffe, made a major error. Thinking that Fighter Command was finished, he ordered his planes to switch the focus of their assault from the airfields to London. The change in strategy brought carnage to the East End as the Blitz began, but it gave Fighter Command a vital breathing space, during which squadrons were replenished by new planes and pilots. When the Germans renewed their offensive on 15 September, they were astonished to be confronted by reinvigorated defences. Having suffered crippling losses, the Germans abandoned the struggle. On 17 September, Hitler postponed his plans for an invasion. The narrative of bleak adversity followed by the glorious salvation is a stirring one. Yet it can be argued that the RAF should never have been brought to the brink of defeat in early September. The fact that the Luftwaffe almost gained aerial supremacy was partly due to Fighter Command's tactical inflexibility, poor deployment of resources and limitations in Dowding's leadership, as well as longer-term failures in aircraft production. A widower of Scottish descent, Dowding was a somewhat incongruous figure to be a fighter leader. Aloof, cold to the point of frigidity, he was known as 'Stuffy' because of his social awkwardness. But he also possessed an unconventional mind that embraced vegetarianism, spiritualism, and reincarnation; he claimed that in a previous life he had been a Mongol chieftain. This unorthodoxy extended to his work in charge of Fighter Command. A visionary technocrat, he not only presided over the introduction of the revolutionary fast Spitfire and Hurricane monoplanes, but also the creation of a sophisticated ground-control network which used information from radar stations and the Observer Corps to guide the RAF fighters to the incoming targets. Under this system, Fighter Command was divided into four geographical groups, the most important of which was No. 11 in the south-east of England, commanded by the purposeful but prickly New Zealander Keith Park. Throughout the Battle of Britain, the central aim of Dowding and Park's strategy was to protect their resources by deploying only small numbers of squadrons on combat missions. Since Fighter Command was heavily outnumbered by the Luftwaffe, they felt it would be folly to send massed RAF formations into the fray. Caution was their watchword, attrition their goal. But this guarded approach could be counter-productive. In practice, the reluctance to engage in large-scale attacks allowed too many bombers through, bolstered German morale, and kept Fighter Command on the defensive. In one of his combat reports, the renowned RAF Polish pilot Witold Urbanowicz complained that the enemy had 'a free passage', when instead the RAF should have been 'putting everything in the air and sweeping it clean.' After the war, the senior RAF commander Sir Philip Joubert de la Ferté wrote that Park's 'spoiling tactics' were 'very exhausting for our fighters and it is possible that our losses were greater and our successes not so decisive as would have been the case if we had attempted to throw larger concentrations of our own fighters into the battle.'

(Part 1 of a Series by Leo McKinstry in The Spectator, Sent in by David Haggie.)

MOMENTS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - FOREVER:

At 8.15am on 6 August 1945, USAAF B29 bomber 'Enola Gay' dropped the world's first operational atomic bomb, nicknamed 'Little Boy.' An estimated 120,000 people died within the first four days following the blast. Three days later, on 9 August, another B29 bomber dropped the second operational atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki, causing the deaths of over 70,000 people. The bombing of these cities in August 1945 brought an end to the Second World War, but at a terrible cost to the Japanese civilian population and signaling the dawn of the nuclear age. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were experiments in a new kind of warfare, whose full implications were not entirely understood at the time. *(From the IWM Newsletter, sent in by Gordon Dyne)*

As he witnessed the first detonation of a nuclear weapon on July 16, 1945, a piece of Hindu scripture ran through the mind of Robert Oppenheimer, the Physicist leading the Los Alamos team: "**Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.**" It is, perhaps, the most well-known line from the Bhagavad-Gita, but also the most misunderstood. As wartime head of the Los Alamos Laboratory,

the birthplace of the Manhattan Project, he is rightly seen as the “father” of the atomic bomb. “We knew the world would not be the same,” he later recalled. “A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent.”

BEIRUT BLAST:



The blast was so huge that it rattled shutters 150 miles away in Cyprus. Hospitals in Beirut were overflowing with casualties after a massive explosion that the governor of the Lebanese capital likened to Hiroshima. (He now understands what the Mayor of Hiroshima felt) By Wednesday, at least 135 people were confirmed dead and around 5,000 were injured - although the death toll was expected to rise – and 300 000 homeless. The cause of the blast was not immediately clear,

but happened in the port area of the city - where state media and security sources reported there were warehouses storing some 2750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate in unsafe conditions ... News channels were filled with dramatic video footage from different angles of the moment the explosion erupted, and showing how the ancient city was ripped apart. It is hard to pinpoint exactly where it all went wrong for Lebanon. The country - described in better times variously as the “Paris of the Middle East” for its exuberant glamour and the “Switzerland” of the region for its exemplary banking sector - had looked to be thriving in recent years. But the image belied a much more complicated reality with Hezbollah and other Arab extremists as the “agents provocateurs.”

SPACEX’S CREW DRAGON:

US astronauts Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley, who flew to the International Space Station in SpaceX’s new Crew Dragon, splashed down in the Gulf of Mexico on Sunday 2 August after a two-month voyage that was NASA’s first crewed mission from home soil in nine years. Behnken and Hurley, tallying 64 days in space, undocked from the station on Saturday (overhead Johannesburg) and returned home to land their capsule in calm waters off Florida’s Pensacola coast on schedule at 2:48 pm ET following a 21-hour overnight journey aboard Crew Dragon “Endeavor.” “This has been quite an odyssey,” Hurley told senior NASA and SpaceX officials at a homecoming ceremony at NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. “To be where we are now, the first crewed flight of Dragon, is just unbelievable.” The successful splash-down, the first of its kind by NASA in 45 years, was a final test of whether SpaceX Chief Executive Elon Musk’s spacecraft can transport astronauts to and from orbit - a feat no private company has accomplished before. “This day heralds a new age of space exploration,” Musk said. “I’m not very religious, but I prayed for this one.” NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine said the successful mission marked “a new era of human spaceflight where NASA is no longer the purchaser, owner and operator of all the hardware” but one of many future customers of space travel. “Today we really made history,” Bridenstine told an earlier press conference.

MOZAMBIQUE:

Back in Happy Africa, the northernmost Cabo Delgado province of South Africa’s eastern neighbour Mozambique finds itself in an untenable situation with Islamist violence ongoing while preparatory work for exploiting massive offshore gas finds is underway. South Africa has been dragged into the fray with Islamic State (IS) via an Arabic newsletter apparently warning the country not to become militarily involved. Extremists in northern Mozambique, going under the name “Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama” have proclaimed allegiance to IS. Whether the threat is real, or propaganda has not been admitted by the South African government. What it has done is attract the attention of South Africa’s ministers of State Security (Ayanda Dlodlo) and Defence (Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula). Dlodlo is reported as saying the IS threat is taken “seriously” and Mapisa-Nqakula, via an answer to a

Parliamentary question bounced the issue to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the country concerned – Mozambique. She told Democratic Alliance (DA) shadow state security minister Mimmy Gondwe: “The coordinated response of SADC to the insurgency in Mozambique is a matter involving the member state and the regional body. Details of that response can best be articulated by the Chair or the Secretariat of SADC. (This in the face of masterly inactivity from the said SADC) The establishment of the terrorist groups al-Shabab and the Islamic State with claims to establish the Islamic Law, the corporate interests of the oil industry and the lobby of Erik Prince, a former operative of the American military elite, now at the head of a private business proposal to pacify Cabo Delgado, are considered so far by academics, press and the civil society as the motivations explaining the armed insurgency in the potentially richest province of Mozambique. By far, heavy drug trafficking and the illegal extraction of resources are framed in the equation. However, as documented by international reports and frequent police seizures, the coast of Cabo Delgado has been an important drug corridor in East Africa since the 1990s, a position recently expanded after Tanzania and Kenya repressed the trafficking networks, pushing them into Mozambican waters.

HEINEKEN ON HOLD:

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and the collapse of the restaurant and bar trade, Heineken South Africa has been forced to shut down production entirely. This has significantly impacted the company’s ambitious growth strategy, with the beer giant withdrawing its plans to expand its geographic footprint onto the North Coast. Heineken’s proposed R6-billion production facility was expected to provide a massive financial boost for the region, creating 400 permanent new jobs and making many more service-related employment opportunities available. The Inyaninga site near Dube Trade Port had been earmarked for its new brewery. The Heineken portfolio includes eight brands: **Heineken, Amstel, Windhoek, Sol, Miller Genuine Draft, Strongbow Cider, Soweto Gold** and **Tafel**. The company said with no end date in sight for the ban on alcohol sales, executive salaries had been cut by 20% from May to December and no bonuses would be paid. The South African Liquor Brand owners Association (Salba), the Beer Association of South Africa, Vinpro, and the Liquor Traders Association of South Africa have warned that restricting legal alcohol sales will lead to the growth of illicit alcohol trade. “The liquor industry has a wide and deep value chain employing almost one million people across the country. Government’s decision has serious economic consequences, placing hundreds of thousands of livelihoods at risk.”

<https://northcoastcourier.co.za/156261/heineken-sa-shuts-down-production-halts-r6bn-expansion-plans-for-north-coast/>

NEVER SAY DIE....SEAN CONNERY TURNS 90 THIS MONTH:

“The name’s Bond, James Bond.” Sean Connery turns 90 on August 25. His beautiful wife of 45 years, Micheline, is now 91. The cute couple has defied Hollywood odds in celebrating an impressive 45 years of marriage! The veteran actor embarked on a passionate affair with French artist Micheline Roquebrune – who he later wed in 1975 – while he was still married to Australian actress Diane Cilento, Not only is she the second wife, but has also stayed with him the longest. They have beaten the Hollywood odds. Micheline is known for her work on *Never Say Never Again* (1983), *International Pro-Celebrity Golf* (1981) and *Sean Connery, an Intimate Portrait* (2002). She said “For the whole world, he’s a huge star, but for me, he is, above all, the man of my dreams.” He says “Micheline is an amazing woman. She is the love of my life.” Ah, L’amour ...

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

This is the eighteenth weekly Newssheet - “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. Thanks again to all those who have contributed! We will use contributions progressively. Take care – keep safe in these troubled times, and remember that all this, too, shall pass ... So, let’s hear from you ... Please send your suggestions or contributions to bookings@rafoc.org

TAILPIECE:

Today is International Beer Day. South Africa is not invited to the Party this year ...

Getting older sucks! I used to wake up feeling like a million dollars ... Now I feel more like a bounced cheque...

Used to be rock around the clock ... Now it's limp around the block...

Shock is when you read your wife's high school report ... "Obedient and softly-spoken."

HOLY COW:

In a convent in Ireland, the 98-year-old Mother Superior lay dying. The nuns gathered around her bed trying to make her last journey comfortable. They tried giving her warm milk to drink but she refused it. One of the nuns took the glass back to the kitchen. Then, remembering a bottle of Irish Whiskey that had been received as a gift the previous Christmas, she opened it and poured a generous amount into the warm milk. Back at Mother Superior's bed, they held the glass to her lips. The frail old nun drank a little, then a little more and before they knew it, she had finished the whole glass down to the last drop. As her eyes brightened, the nuns thought it would be a good opportunity to have one last talk with their spiritual leader ... "Mother," the nuns asked earnestly, "Please give us some of your wisdom before you leave us." She raised herself up in bed on one elbow, looked at them and said: "DON'T SELL THAT COW!"

MATT

*'Every day there's a new,
contradictory piece
of advice'*

