



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 26 - 2nd OCTOBER 2020

GREETINGS:

This week saw Day 187 of the plague and ushered in October – “die mooiste, mooiste maand”. The UK went into reverse overnight, amid much heated debate. Clearly it’s not over yet, even as SA “enjoys” Level 1 and a limited number of countries being “opened” for air travel to SA, and there’s no sign of the fat lady singing...As the US Presidential race heats up, we were treated to the spectacle of the adversarial Trump-Biden TV debate in the early hours of Tuesday morning. None of this (again) has done any good for the SA Rand, already beset by a “tsunami of sentiment.” The dire weather warnings on Wednesday for Gauteng came to naught, but Thursday morning was heavily overcast, with thunder rumbling and rain beginning to fall...As September closed the Battle of Britain celebrations and commemorations, there were reflections on its place in history and what the future might hold – see below.

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN - AFTER 80 YEARS IS IT STILL IMPORTANT?

This was the title of the Annual Air Pilots Tymms Lecture, presented virtually this year by Michael Fopp. As we are left with no one who actually participated in the Battle of Britain, how are we to ensure the country's, and the Royal Air Force's, "Finest Hour" is properly remembered? Are there lessons to be learned from the treatment over the years of Trafalgar and Waterloo? Michael, son of one of 'The Few', past Keeper of The Battle of Britain Museum and longest serving Director General of the RAF Museums reflected on his years researching the subject, and all the varied elements which made the victory possible. He recalled the personalities he met, the known and the unknown, the acknowledged heroes and the unsung participants. He examined the consequences for the world had the Battle not been won. He revealed the background to the creation of the most comprehensive and unique collection of Battle of Britain artefacts ever assembled and discusses how these have been conserved, displayed and contribute to the public's knowledge of the subject. Finally he asked how the future might unfold when political correctness and an attitude of "wokeness" allows storylines to be manipulated to appeal to 'specific' and 'local' communities, where war is seen as a negative history subject, and mass appeal coupled with entertainment, may appear more important than factual storytelling. In a mere 20 years it will be the Centenary of The Battle of Britain - what will our memories hold by then and how will they influence the commemorations?

(via Andrew Muttitt - a recording of the lecture is at: [Air Pilots Tymms Lecture](#))

BATTLE OF BRITAIN SCRAMBLE:

As we reflected last week on the Dowding System and QRA – RAF Typhoons scrambled to intercept two Russian sub-hunters just days before the UK marked the 80th anniversary of Battle of Britain Day. The fighters, currently operating from the former RAF Leuchars airbase, launched in response to a pair of TU-142 Bear F maritime reconnaissance aircraft entering the UK Flight Information Region. The zone of international airspace is monitored by UK civilian air traffic control to ensure the safety of transatlantic airliners and other aircraft. One of the pilots flying said: “This is a very evocative moment to scramble as it is nearly 80 years on from Battle of Britain Day, the date that now marks the end of the critical phase of the battle in 1940. Air defence now is as critical as it was then.” It’s the first time Quick Reaction Alert jets have scrambled from Leuchars, now home of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, since temporarily returning to the former RAF station while the intersection of the runways at RAF Lossiemouth is resurfaced.

THE DRONE BUSTERS:

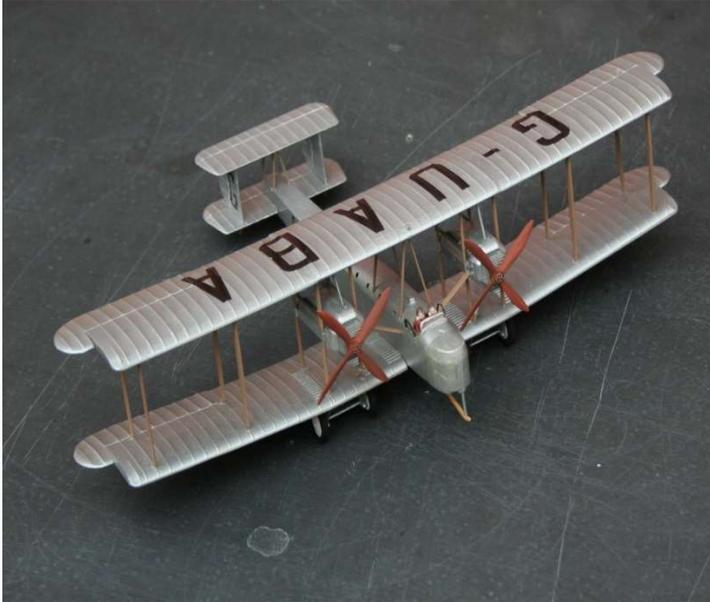
World - Class drone-busting technology is to be fitted to Typhoon under a £317 million programme. The next generation ORCUS radar system can jam radio signals from UAVs and has already been successfully used against those sited at airports. Defence Minister Jeremy Quin said: “It is vital that our Armed Forces are equipped with the latest technology to counter emerging threats from our adversaries.” The new kit will allow jets to locate, identify and suppress enemy air defences. It integrates the new European Common Radar System (ECRS) Mk2, based on active electronically scanned array technology, to give pilots the edge in an increasingly contested battlespace. Typhoon’s current mechanically scanning radar is designed to be continuously upgraded to meet operational demand whatever the challenge or threat. The ECRS Mk2 will allow the fighter to simultaneously detect, identify and track multiple targets in the air and on the ground. Planned to be in service by the mid-2020s, the device looks like a camera module placed on top of a tripod. It achieved initial operating capability after being used by the RAF following the drone sightings at Gatwick and Heathrow airports which caused massive disruption to travelers. The technology is part of the RAF’s Counter Unmanned Aerial System research and development programme with defence firm Leonardo to establish the most effective way to detect, track, identify and defeat hostile drones. The current phase of the trials, which started in 2019, is taking place at the company’s Basildon and Southampton sites with real-time testing at several MoD locations within the UK.

(Simon Mander in RAF News.)

LONDON CAPE TOWN FLIGHT:

In this Centenary Year of the London-Cape Town flight by Van Ryneveld and Brand, Dave Evans shares a picture of a memento of that pioneering flight:

“The Frog 1/72 scale model construction kit of the Vickers Vimy came out in 1964 – good grief – I was still at school! Not surprisingly, it was in the colours of the famous Alcock and Brown one, of the first aerial crossing of the Atlantic. Somewhere along the way, I picked up one – it may well have been from Dave Becker’s deceased estate: when Karel Zaayman emailed us all to let us know that the several hundred unbuilt kits had reached The Aviation Shop, I called in on my way home from work the same evening, and did buy several...I sat down to build it a few years ago, and probably don’t need to indicate that in this part of the world, a ‘Silver Queen’ version seemed more appealing. The nose skid was different, although the ‘spares’ box provided the necessary for that without too much trouble, and TAS came to the rescue again with decals. This is the markings of the original, complete with crew, which was written off in Egypt. The second was written off in Bulawayo. Not too long after that, one Vincent van Ryneveld – yes; Sir Pierre’s great grandson – joined the Friends of the SAAF Museum at Swartkop, so there was a certain inevitability about it being donated into his care. He now lives at Mtunzini, on the north Natal coast, so I haven’t seen it for some time – I assume he is still taking good care of it!”



The Original "Silver Queen" Vickers Vimy – a 1/72 scale model

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED...

THE UK'S adversaries are developing new ways of operating, backed up by cutting edge military capabilities using advanced technologies, the Chief of Defence Intelligence has warned. Lt Gen Jim Hockenhill has said that the shifting global picture has changed the character of warfare, challenging the West to keep pace with adversaries who do not play by the rules. Global players such as Russia and China continually challenge the existing order without prompting direct conflict, operating in the expanding grey-zone between war and peacetime. Conflict is bleeding into new domains, such as cyber and space, threatening defence cohesion and resilience and the UK's global interests. Lt Gen Hockenhill said: "Whilst conventional threats remain, we have seen our adversaries invest in Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and other groundbreaking technologies, whilst also supercharging more traditional techniques of influence and leverage. As we have seen in Salisbury, hostile states are willing to take incredible risks. "We must make sure that we have both the intent and the capability to ensure that such wanton acts of irresponsibility will not go unpunished.

1997 THRUST SPEED RECORD:

Mention of the Boodhound project last week called to mind that it was back in 1997 that (then) Tornado F3 pilot Sqn Ldr Andy Green set a new land speed record in the Phantom-powered Thrust SSC in the Nevada Desert. Thrust SSC holds the world land speed record, set on 15 October 1997, when it achieved a speed of 1,228 km/h (763 mph) and became the first land vehicle to officially break the sound barrier. The record still stands.

HERITAGE HAPPENINGS:

On Wednesday 23rd September, various events were staged at SAAF Air Bases throughout the country ahead of Heritage Day celebrations on 24th September, with Air Force Base Ysterplaat in Cape Town partnering with the residential SAAF Museum branch to allow units, sections and squadrons to adopt Museum aircraft and celebrate the SAAF's heritage. Officer commanding of AFB Ysterplaat, Colonel Carl Moatshe, noted with appreciation that "in the midst of the COVID-19 battle, members found the time to fix, clean and replace tyres on their adopted aircraft for this day." Planned to "unite Heritage with the future," younger members of all the lodger units on the Base were invited to clean and prepare their chosen SAAF Museum aircraft for display on the flight line and in so doing research the history of that particular aircraft for presentation to invited guests. Moatshe explained that AFB Ysterplaat is the only dedicated maritime air base in the country. "The pressure of the required maritime surveillance and patrol does not get any lesser," Moatshe said, "Air Force Base

Ysterplaat must be the centre of maritime excellence and capabilities because of the growing interest in maritime economy and attempts to demarcate new maritime boundaries.”

HERITAGE UP IN SMOKE:



Amidst the mayhem of SA’s railway infrastructure being systematically plundered, another artefact of SA’s railway heritage is irretrievably lost. The Potchefstroom railway station was destroyed by fire during the night of 19 September. This is a mere month after the General’s House, a declared historical building, succumbed to the same fate. The current station building was opened in 1919. It was once regarded as the third best railway station in the British Empire for its architectural features and beautiful lay-out. The Potchefstroom station used to be one of the grand old buildings of the city. Built in the Cape Dutch style, it is the second railway station of Potchefstroom and was in use since 1919. According to the Potchefstroom Herald, the fire was noticed by a security guard who saw flames coming out of the roof by 23:00. The fire brigade was immediately notified, but when they arrived on the scene, the roof of the building had already caved in. The fire was extinguished by 00:20 but the building was destroyed by then. (The Heritage Portal)

RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY (CLOSING THE STABLE DOOR?)

Government has developed an integrated plan, incorporating all law enforcement and prosecution authorities, to police and secure the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa's rail infrastructure. The PRASA Integrated Security Plan has been in operation since mid-August and has already recorded successes. In August, SAPS and PRASA protection services arrested six men in possession of copper cables and signaling equipment worth over R5.5 million. “None of our efforts will yield tangible results if we don’t pay closer attention to the scrap metal industry and second-hand dealers. These people create the market for the proceeds of crime. We will uproot those who continue to buy these stolen goods,” Fikile Mbalula said. The Minister said the prevalence of crime in the rail environment has reached alarming levels. “Theft and vandalism of critical infrastructure on our railways not only place the lives and livelihoods of those who rely on trains in danger, and it has dire consequences for the economy,” the Minister said. With government tightening its grip in fighting this scourge, the

Minister has called for prosecution-guided investigations and adherence to the principle of opposing bail.

MEMBERS REMINISCENCES AND FEEDBACK:

Bruce Prescott responded: Good Ramblings this week [as usual], but I found the tailpiece very apt and amusing. Good show all. Re the Smuts family, I met Oom Jan at a United Party fare in Benoni when I was aged 9. I valued that hand-shake and the ruffling of my mop which is getting rather thin now. And my dear Mom, as the senior member of the SA Red Cross Society, frequently met with "Ouma" Smuts, who very generously made cookies and cakes for the Red Cross, all volunteers [VAD = Voluntary Aid Detachments]. These were sold at cake sales to raise money for the Society Kind regards, Bruce

Clive King commented: Wow, another fantastic publication of RAFOC Ramblings! And General Des Barker's evaluation of the dismally failed, German attempt to brutally smash England into submission, was fascinating! Truly enjoyed reading both documents and thanks to you all, for all your hard work! Do we have any idea yet, as too when we might have a RAFOC Luncheon? I so miss seeing all my wonderful friends, at our lunches! Many thanks and kind regards, Clive

Karl Jensen wrote: Gentlemen, the RAFOC Ramblings are simply terrific and this issue is no exception. Thanks for your dedication to make our lives interesting and the prospect of a RAFOC lunch hopefully in the not too distant future. Without your efforts, RAFOC was rapidly fading in importance. Many thanks, Karl

Priscilla Henwood said: Dear Bruce, Thank you and your Committee more than I can say, especially for this story of the Battle of Britain. Interesting about all the intelligence reports from Germany. It must have been quite a circus with Hitler running the show, going from the Battle of Britain to the Battle of London, and then cantering on into Russia. He certainly contributed to us winning the war with all his ranting. Then there was the explosive end to the Japanese War. Paul was still was then in the East on his Destroyer "Rapid", so the end of that war was certainly a blessing for us all. Looking forward to the next edition of Ramblings. Best wishes and love from Priscilla.

Gordon Dyne said: Seriously, yet another brilliant Ramblings and great contributions by Karl and Des Barker. Both very well written. I loved the humour and the story of the wives texting their husbands 'I love you' is a classic. Well done. I presume you received my App on the dreadful business with those horses in PE and on a lighter note the picture regarding the Cessna door and the Air Force and its stars! Perhaps you can use the last two? All the best and stay safe. Cheers, Gordon

And again: Good afternoon gentlemen! Many congratulations to you Bruce and your team for yet another brilliant Ramblings. Fabulous! Fascinating and factual. I wonder how many readers will know the word 'ameliorate?!!' Even I had to look it up! Nice one! Loved the humour at the end! Looking forward to more news about the Armistice Day Lunch. Well done and thank you again. All the best en wees vielig! Gordon

Dave Evans mailed: Thanks gents - great as always. Full marks to the California National Guard (CA NG) - 'above and beyond the call of duty', as well as just as remarkable as you comment! Lindsay and I were at the 9/11 site that Christmas, so 3 months odd after the event. While the concrete pile was largely gone, it was still awash in flowers, posters, notes, etc., and practically every second car in Manhattan had an American flag flying! And as far as I know, I am not related to the recently deceased David (Parry-) Evans. 😊

Cookie Cookson wrote from UK: I trust that you, family and the RAFOC team are keeping well during indeed a very strange time! SMac and I have returned to our home in the UK on posting. We had to quarantine for two weeks, thank heavens that SMac knows how to get food (and drink!) delivery services, without which we would have really struggled. The next event is to retire from the RAF on 1 Nov; even that is proving challenging as getting hold of service personnel (mostly working from home) is near impossible! Whilst we have several irons in the fire for the future, we are making no rash decisions and keeping most options open. There is a possible role returning to the UAE in the

New Year, another Full Time RAF Reservist role (in Istanbul....!), or some part-time and therefore easier, local opportunities here in Oxfordshire. What is clear is that I need to be away from home whilst SMac brings it back to normal. I love her to bits BUT I am clearly....surplus to current requirements during the house reorganisation!

THE VALKYRIE:

The North American Aviation XB-70 Valkyrie was the prototype version of the planned B-70 nuclear-armed, deep-penetration strategic bomber for the United States Air Force Strategic Air Command. Designed in the late 1950s by North American Aviation (NAA), the six-engined Valkyrie was capable of cruising for thousands of miles at Mach 3+ while flying at 70,000 feet (21,000 m). At these speeds, it was expected that the B-70 would be practically immune to interceptor aircraft, the only effective weapon against bomber aircraft at the time. The bomber would spend only a brief time over a particular radar station, flying out of its range before the controllers could position their fighters in a suitable location for an interception. High speed also made the aircraft difficult to see on radar displays and its high-altitude and high-speed capacity could not be matched by any contemporaneous Soviet interceptor or fighter aircraft. The introduction of the first Soviet surface-to-air missiles in the late 1950s put the near-invulnerability of the B-70 in doubt. (Gary Powers and the U-2) In response, the United States Air Force (USAF) began flying its missions at low level, where the missile radar's line of sight was limited by terrain. In this low-level penetration role, the B-70 offered little additional performance over the B-52 it was meant to replace, while being far more expensive with shorter range. Other alternate missions were proposed, but these were of limited scope. With the advent of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) during the late 1950s, manned bombers were increasingly seen as obsolete. The USAF eventually gave up fighting for its production and the B-70 program was cancelled in 1961. Development was then turned over to a research program to study the effects of long-duration high-speed flight. As such, two prototype aircraft, designated XB-70A, were built; these aircraft were used for supersonic test-flights during 1964–69. In 1966, one prototype crashed after colliding with a smaller aircraft while flying in close formation; the remaining Valkyrie bomber is in the National Museum of the United States Air Force near Dayton, Ohio. *(via Bruce Prescott)*



SPITFIRE SUMMER – A EULOGY:



They were the young and the brave. In the high summer of 1940, some boys in blue uniforms, in a sky yet more blinding blue, took on a plague and defeated it. The plague was Nazism. Like Henry V's men at Agincourt, "The Few" — as Churchill unforgettably tagged the pilots of RAF Fighter Command — were outnumbered, but never outfought. Like Hal's soldiers in that muddy, storied French field, the fighter boys, too, had the benefit of British technology. Henry's comrades-in-arms toted the longbow; in the sunlit skies over England in 1940, above the immemorial patchwork fields, the ancient churches, the slumbering villages and the determined towns, the magnificent boys of the RAF

piloted machines of equal magnificence. Some sat behind the joystick of the Hawker Hurricane, a fine and steady gun platform. Others, in the Battle of Britain, had the fortune, had history's touch on the shoulder, to fly the Supermarine Spitfire. The Spitfire was technology. It was art. It was Mars in a sleek, all-metal monocoque with elegant, elliptical wings. The Spitfire made everyone who sat in the aircraft's tiny cockpit feel great, feel godly. One did not merely get into a Spitfire. One put a Spitfire on. Dressed in it. The late flying ace Group Capt Wilfrid Duncan Smith knew this: 'On taking over 64 Squadron, one of the first things I impressed on my pilots was that you did not "strap yourself in", you "buckled the Spitfire on", like girding on armour in days of old.' On the ground, however, everyone allowed, the Spitfire was a handful — 'a b***h', in the words of one American volunteer flying for the RAF. At first light, on the runway before a 'scramble', blue flames sputtering from its nose-exhausts, the Spitfire trembled like a muzzled greyhound at the gate. Even such an accomplished pilot as the legendary Douglas Bader 'piled' one on take-off. The Supermarine Spitfire belonged in the air, and only the air. To reach the heavenly heights, the Spitfire was powered by a Rolls-Royce Merlin motor, made in Trafford Park, Manchester; Glasgow; Derby; Crewe. The cognomen "Merlin" was in honour of the little bird of prey, but also for King Arthur's sorcerer-in-chief. After all, the Rolls-Royce Merlin V-12 did have magic secreted inside its cauldron; in level flight, it could pull a Spit along at 362mph. The Merlin sang an old song of war on its 12 pistons, a song passed down the generations. The song of the Saxon shield-wall. Between July and August 1940, the Spitfire and its warrior pilot — the two as conjoined as the knight and his charger — engaged the enemy; the Luftwaffe were flying as many as 1,786 sorties a day against southern England. Pilot Officer Roger Hall, peering through the inch-thick Perspex of his cockpit canopy, simply disbelieved the size of the 'aerial armada' hovering towards him, 6,000ft up. The fantastical scene, he thought, looked like something 'out of H. G. Wells' science fiction'. However, Hall cried 'tally-ho' anyway, went a-hunting, placed the red dot of his gunsight on a Dornier bomber almost vertically below him, gave it a 'squirt' from his eight Browning wing-mounted machine guns. Bits of the bomber's engine began 'to break off'. The 2,946 RAF pilots who served in the Battle of Britain formed the David who kept slinging stones, kept attriting the Goliath. Goliath hit back. Apart from the fire-power of its galleon-sized bombers, the Luftwaffe had its own state-of-the-art predatory fighter, the ME109 Emil. The Spit, however, had the edge. The chief architect of our quicksilver fighter was Reginald Mitchell. Riven with cancer, the more he ailed, the more he travelled to perfect his plane. He succeeded. The Spitfire did not 'fly' through the air, it cut and cleaved it, leaving white vapour trails — of strangely beautiful arcs and spirals — in the blue dome over Kent, a sweltering England and the upturned faces of an anxiously waiting people. The Spitfire, courtesy of those iconic wings, that matchless Merlin motor, was more agile, faster than the yellow-nosed Emil. The proof of the Spitfire's superiority came from an unimpeachable source. When Luftwaffe ace Adolf Galland was asked by his boss, Hermann Göring, what he needed to win the Battle of Britain 80 years ago, Galland replied without ado: 'I should like an outfit of Spitfires.' The summer of 1940, that perfect English summer, belonged to the Supermarine Spitfire. The RAF fighter boys — as young as 18 — fought hard and played hard, for tomorrow, they might die. Hall drank seven pints a night in low-beamed country pubs, before going on to parties with girls called Pam and Joyce, then back to base at 4am. Dawn patrol was at 5.30am, the hangover cured by putting the Spitfire's oxygen system on at full blast. Even the meticulous Mitchell didn't foresee such an imaginative use of his creation. The Spitfire and The Few deserve their plaudits down the decades. Rightly, they have their monuments and their museums. Their true memorial, however, is the freedom in the air we breathe. The air that was the Spitfire's natural element."

(Article by award-winning writer John Lewis-Stempel in Country Life: Sent in by Rob Tannahill)

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

This is the twenty-sixth 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 and continue to do so! We will use

contributions progressively as we move upwards and onwards.... Rick Peacock-Edwards' book "Rate of Climb" is available from www.loot.co.za for convenient local collection at Clicks.

Scully Levin's great new book "Punching Holes in the Sky" is also now available. Karl Jensen advises "I have read it and anyone with a smidgeon of interest in aviation, let alone knowing Scully, will simply love this "unputdownable", well written tome full of pictures. The books are on limited offer at R250 and are all signed by Scully personally" Karl has stock and has very kindly agreed to handle local orders: karlpix@icon.co.za or WhatsApp 082 331 4652

Take care – keep safe in these troubled times, use your PPE, and remember that all this, too, shall pass..... We are considering a November Armistice Day Lunch, Covid restrictions permitting. We'll keep you posted on developments at Wanderers as they occur...

So, let's hear from you...Please send your suggestions or contributions to bookings@rafoc.org

TAILPIECE:

My husband asked if he had any annoying habits – and then got all offended during the PowerPoint presentation...

I did a push-up today...Well, actually I fell down. But I had to use two arms to get up – so, you know, close enough....

When your wife is mowing the lawn is not a good time to ask her "What's for dinner"

Saw a flying saucer today – it appeared right after the flying cup my wife threw at me....

Some days I wake up Grumpy – other days I let her sleep in...

I've learned two important lessons in my life: I can't recall the first, but the second is that I need to start writing things down.

One of our members reports:

"During my physical examination, my doctor asked me about my physical activity level. I described a typical day this way: "Well, yesterday afternoon, I took a five hour walk about 7km through some pretty rough terrain. I waded along the edge of a lake. I pushed my way through brambles. I got sand in my shoes and my eyes. I avoided standing on a snake. I climbed several rocky hills. I took a few 'leaks' behind some big trees. The mental stress of it all left me shattered. At the end of it all I drank eight beers"

Inspired by the story, the doctor said, "You must be one hell of an outdoors man!"

"No," I replied, "I'm just a crap golfer"

Don't you hate it when you see a cat laying on top of your car?



MATT



'Don't come back from university with a mountain of dirty laundry, darling; I'd rather you came home with coronavirus'