



## ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

P.O. Box 69726

BRYANSTON 2021

[info@rafoc.org](mailto:info@rafoc.org)

[www.rafoc.org](http://www.rafoc.org)

President:	David MacKinnon-Little	
Vice Presidents:	Basil Hersov, Colin Francis, Geoff Quick, David Lake	
Chairman:	Bruce Harrison	<a href="mailto:bruce@jbharrison.co.za">bruce@jbharrison.co.za</a> Tel: 011 673 0291 Cell: 083 325 0025
Vice Chairman:	Jon Adams	<a href="mailto:vice-chairman@rafoc.org">vice-chairman@rafoc.org</a> 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 34 – 27<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2020

### GREETINGS:

This week started off like a house on fire – 26 trucks torched and, tragically, at least one driver murdered in the ongoing protest by SA Truckers against the employment of foreign nationals. We mark Day 246 of the “Great Plague” .... No shortage of other fascinating stories: still trending in SA is the “Great Bushiri Escape,” for which no-one, least of all Aaron Motsoaledi, is apparently to blame. Also, Zuma’s walkout from the Zondo Commission after Justice Zondo dismissed the application for his recusal. EFF openly inciting violence against the SAPS after Brackenfell. A severe storm, with winds gusting up to 140km/h, has left a trail of destruction in Mthatha in the Eastern Cape. Another dairy project in the Eastern Cape goes tits-up ... SABC in terminal turmoil. And on a national level, more aggravated home invasions, cash-in-transit heists, truck hijackings and commercial crimes are being committed. The SAA Rescue nightmare continues ... “Non-Negotiable that the new SAA be flown by black pilots” says Gordhan – he would, wouldn’t he? SA Cricket “has no time for tea” as the England tour arrives. The “Hand of God” takes Maradona. In UK, Britain endures the worst lockdown in 300 years. Lockdown will extend over Christmas (but with Covid taking a break (apparently) on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, (except in Scotland where Scots face harsher strictures, and Hogmanay is in any event more important). Elsewhere, Hurricane Iota has broken records as the largest hurricane ever to hit the Caribbean. Trump, Biden and the Thanksgiving Turkey ... Covid Vaccines are apparently, now to hand. Will they be compulsory?

### RAFOC DECEMBER LUNCH:

Our December Christmas Lunch will be on Friday 4 December 2020 12h30 for 13h00 at Rand Park Golf Club. We have decided to stay at RPGC, which is open and operating with the necessary protocols, as the best available venue since Wanderers is still refurbishing. Those members who attended the November Lunch will know it is a very congenial venue. As the organisers of a RAFOC lunch we will be accepting the responsibility for the wellbeing of all at the gathering. The risk is that if anyone attending tests positive at the time, or shortly thereafter, then all attending are required to go into quarantine. As far as we know, all RAFOC members have been able to “keep safe” and free from infection, so the material risk is the venue itself and its staff. We also respect the decision of members who continue to avoid gatherings. Lunch will be priced at R300 per head for a Christmas menu. PRE- BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL as only listed guests will be admitted, and we have to complete a register as part of the Covid protocols. Note also that pre-payment by EFT is essential,

that RPGC is a cash free venue, so you need to be prepared to pay by card for drinks. Bookings and proof of EFT payments, please, to [bookings@rafoc.org](mailto:bookings@rafoc.org) Look forward to seeing you there!

## **JOINT MILITARY FORCE TO COMBAT SHARED THREATS:**

Britain and France have announced they are now capable of deploying a 10,000-strong joint military force to combat shared threats. The announcement comes as both countries mark the 10th anniversary of the Lancaster House defence, security and nuclear treaties which established a long-term military partnership which will continue after the UK exits the EU. The deal set up a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force of two of the world's strongest militaries. And despite the impact of Covid-19 on training and exercises the force has now reached full operating capacity – ready to respond to high-intensity operations, peacekeeping, disaster relief or humanitarian assistance missions. Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said: “The UK and France face a range of security threats of increasing scale and complexity. Having a highly capable, high readiness force is essential if we are to protect both UK security and the security of our NATO allies. It is testament to our close defence relationship that we have achieved all the milestones set out in the Lancaster House treaties 10 years ago, working together to protect our mutual interests.” British and French paratroopers marked the milestone by joining forces for Exercise Wessex Storm on Salisbury Plain. The Lancaster House treaties included other goals such as building a joint nuclear facility, increasing cooperation around the aircraft carriers and developing the UK and French complex weapons sectors. Both nations are deployed in the Middle East, to combat Daesh and Estonia, as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. And in Mali, RAF Chinooks and 100 UK personnel support French counter-extremist operations.

## **NEXT OC BBMF:**

A former fast jet display pilot has been selected as a future leader of the iconic Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. RAF Coningsby-based 29 Sqn Executive Officer and instructor Sqn Ldr Mark Long will take command in 2024 to cover for the 2025-2027 seasons. The four-year lead-in to the role is required to enable him to gain the necessary experience and instructor ratings on all the unit's single engine aircraft types – Chipmunks, Hurricanes and five different marks of Spitfire – and to become the public face of the high-profile flight. Sqn Ldr Long, who was the Typhoon Display Pilot in 2016, said: “I am privileged to have the opportunity to join such a dedicated team.” Before then, the current OC BBMF, Sqn Ldr Mark Discombe, will hand over to his successor Sqn Ldr Mark Sugden, who will have completed four display seasons as a volunteer on the Flight by October 2021. Supersonic display ace slows pace. Sqn Ldr Long will train on Spitfire and Hurricane ahead of his move to BBMF.

## **CLOSING TIME AT SYN CITY:**

Developed to train frontline aircrews to operate with ground forces during the conflict in Afghanistan, the RAF Waddington-based Distributed Synthetic Air Land Trainer Centre, “Syn City” is to close after more than a decade. Set up as part of the Air Battle space facility to help Army, RAF and Navy teams to hone their combat skills together in realistic synthetic battle scenarios, the unit, launched in 2008, is to be replaced by a new Defence operational training centre next summer. A spokesman said: “Initially commissioned as a capability and concept demonstrator, it was later expanded to become a key component for air and land integration training during the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. All participants were put through their paces with the use of highly demanding and realistic scenarios in a highly realistic training environment.” The centre was equipped with Tornado GR4, Typhoon and the E-3D via role-specific cockpits and mission simulators which could be networked across remote training centres to create complex combat training missions. In 2016 a Navy Type-45 (Destroyer) from the training system at HMS Collingwood was linked for the first time, during Exercise Virtual Fury. It has also been digitally linked to the USAF and Canadian Royal Air Force during large scale synthetic closing time at ‘Syn City’ training exercises, supported by defence contractors QinetiQ, Boeing Defence UK, Inzpire and Plessey. A spokesman added: “Over the years there have been many awards bestowed on us, including a Royal Aeronautical Society medal and industry innovation

award. “Perhaps though the highest plaudits came from Army units, many of whom reflect upon DSALT as having provided high quality, invaluable training that was widely acknowledged to have saved countless lives on operations.” Matt Titchener.

### **FORMER RAF NURSE JOAN IS 101:**

A former member of Princess Mary’s Royal Air Force Nursing Service, who remembers marching in the first Battle of Britain parade, celebrated her 101st birthday recently. Joan Cool joined PMRAFNS in 1943 at RAF Halton and reached the rank of Flying Officer. She remembered: “I think there were about eight sisters taking part, but we had never done any drilling and we marched past the King on the saluting base at Buckingham Palace.” She was later posted to the RAF Hospital at Wroughton, Swindon, a casualty clearing station for D-Day. “We used to take in casualties every other night so we could deal with things that needed doing, then they would be passed on to a hospital probably nearer to their hometown. It was sad in a way because they were the youth of our generation. It was such a waste,” she said. After the war, Joan got a job as an industrial nurse at hat manufacturers Christy and Co, where she met her husband John. They married in January 1948 and had two children, Jaqueline and Michael. Asked about her longevity, Joan said: “I had two great-aunts, one lived until 102 and the other lived until she was 105.” A resident of care home Fairfield House in Lyme Regis, Joan celebrated her special birthday with lunch with Michael, a retired Air Traffic Control Officer, and her daughter-in-law. Joan was presented with a ‘pilot’ teddy bear by the Royal Air Forces Association’s Bridport and Lyme Regis branch. She has named it Rupert after a Sqn Ldr she first met during WWII at the Aircrew Receiving Centre at RAF Abbey Lodge in London who had escaped after being shot down over France. Their paths crossed again when she was posted to the RAF Hospital in Gütersloh, Germany.

### **CAPE to CAPE – RAF STYLE:**



Richard Bernard Pape MM (17 March 1916 – 19 June 1995) was a British Second World War escapee, adventurer, autobiographer and novelist. During the Second World War adventures, in RAF Bomber Command, he became a navigator in a Short Stirling bomber. He was shot down close to the German/Dutch border, was twice captured and twice escaped, and was eventually repatriated by the Germans after substituting a sick man's urine for his own. He subsequently suffered a drunken motorcycle accident on the Isle of Man, which led to his being hospitalised at Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, for pioneer plastic surgery under Archibald McIndoe: he thus became a member of the Guinea Pig Club. After the war, he wrote a book-length account of his adventures, ‘Boldness Be My Friend.’ The book was brought to Anthony Blond's London literary agency in 1952 by Vanora McIndoe, Sir Archibald's daughter. After being read and approved by Blond's colleague Isabel Colegate, it was published in 1953 by Paul Elek, who paid a £600 advance. Richard Pape thought the “export or die” attitude of the British motor-industry was all very well, but, what they should be doing in the post-war 1950s is to prove themselves to the rest of the world that

British engineering really was the best. So, he came up with the scheme to drive the latest model from the British Motor Corporation, a six-cylinder 2.6 litre Austin A90 four-door saloon, from the cape at the northern tip of Norway, to Cape Town. Nobody else had driven from cape to cape, and this "first" had Richard Pape really fired up. The youth of the 1950s might have been inspired by Boy's Own and Biggles, but now they had a new real-life hero in Richard Pape, who achieved a stunning race across the length of Africa in a car bought out of a showroom just days before setting out. The car today stands in silent testimony to a brilliant achievement in the Heritage Motor Museum in Gaydon, just off the M40 near Warwick. It still has the broken front spring that creaked as it limped into Cape Town on, and so sits a bit lopsided, and in the boot, are all the spares Pape had packed, along with a box of original 1950s Bronco toilet-rolls, baked brittle and as hard as tracing-paper by the Sahara sun. Pape's book about this drive, *Cape Cold to Cape Hot*, was written in the heavily timbered, black and white cottage of The Priest's House, Stratford St. Mary, near Colchester, in Essex, tapped out on a portable typewriter on a table to the left of a large open fireplace, and was published in 1955. Someone should put a blue plaque on an outside wall of this medieval house as a memorial to Richard Pape, author of three remarkable books. In June 1965, Pape returned his Military Medal to the Queen in protest at The Beatles having been awarded the MBE. He was quoted as saying: "The Beatles' MBE reeks of mawkish, bizarre effrontery to our wartime endeavours." He died in Canberra, Australia in 1995 at the age of 79. His Obituary in the Independent read in part: "Unique among the escapers of the Second World War, Richard Pape, author of *Boldness Be My Friend* (1953), was neither an officer nor a gentleman. He was, when illegitimacy rankled, in every sense a right bastard. A red-headed Yorkshireman, his frame bulged with un-officer-like qualities; he was brutally drunk, murderous, treacherous and sly, and his courage and endurance were unbelievable until one read the citation for his Military Medal. He was also quite fun. Richard Pape descended from that breed of Englishman (Viking?) which terrorised continentals from the Crusaders to the football hooligans (olligani, as the Italians call them) of today.

## **GREEN SCENE:**

The United Kingdom will ban the sale of new petrol- and diesel-powered vehicles starting in 2030, 10 years earlier than it had initially planned, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced in a press release Wednesday. It's the second time Johnson has accelerated the timeline to phase out combustion-engine vehicle sales — in February, he moved up the deadline from 2040 to 2035. The new deadline comes as part of a new 10-point plan for a "green industrial revolution" that the UK hopes will help it meet its goal of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050. The UK also plans to promote electric-vehicle adoption through a roughly \$1.7 billion investment in charging stations. "Although this year has taken a very different path to the one we expected, I haven't lost sight of our ambitious plans to level up across the country," Johnson said in a statement. What would Richard Pape have said??

## **COVID COMPLACENCY THREATENS SOUTH AFRICA:**

*While we usually avoid the Covid topic like the plague, it's instructive to see how South Africa is viewed in the British Media. –*

The Times carried the following article last week:

'The country's low death rate is deceptive and hides government incompetence and corruption.'

It has been one of the pandemics few pleasant surprises: South Africa has had far fewer deaths than expected. In the spring everyone, including the government, anticipated that the country, with the rest of the continent, would be hit hard by Covid-19. With its high levels of poverty, overcrowded cities, relatively few hospitals and doctors, and many diseases already endemic, it looked like a candidate for death on a grand scale. Instead around 19,000 deaths have been recorded in a population of 58 million. Ministers and officials have concluded that their strategies are working, and everybody from the World Health Organisation downwards has been speculating about the reasons; could it be due to Vitamin D, the protective effect of TB vaccinations, South Africa's young population, a fierce and timely early lockdown. It is none of the above. Epidemiologists and economists challenge the official figures. The emerging facts show that South Africa has been hit as hard as anywhere else. Excess natural deaths from May to October have been so high, at around 48,000, that the total death rate per

million has been in line with Europe during the first wave of the pandemic. “The government wants to claim, ‘we managed this.’ The reality is that in reality we didn’t,” says economist Alex van den Heever. The test and tracing programme was a shambles rapidly overwhelmed, lockdown devastated the economy, pitching it at 43% unemployment without preventing viral spread; some shattered hospital staff worked amidst rats, blood and filth and massive corruption crippled many of the contracts for PPE, emergency building and medical supplies. .... The government needs to focus intensively on testing, tracing, health planning, explaining the dangers of airborne transmission, and punishing those that have shamelessly used the crisis to steal from the public. It has only a few months in which to act before the next wave hits.

*(Abbreviated from THE TIMES 19 November 2020 by Jenny Russell. Sent in by Jon Adams)*

## **CHEERS! FOR TODAY:**

This is the thirty-fourth weekly Newssheet - “Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings” - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest (preferably not 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](http://www.loot.co.za) for convenient local collection at Clicks.

Scully Levin’s new book “Punching Holes in the Sky” is also now available – and nearly sold out. Karl Jensen says.” 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](mailto:karlpix@icon.co.za) or WhatsApp 082 331 4652

Take care – we’ve made it so far - keep safe in these troubled times, use your PPE, and remember that all this, too, shall pass ... We’ll keep you posted on further developments at Wanderers as negotiations progress.

So, let’s hear from you ... Please send your comments, suggestions or contributions to [bookings@rafoc.org](mailto:bookings@rafoc.org)

## **TAILPIECE:**

Woolworths now offers a truly South African Baguette: “Roast Beef and Criminalised Onion....”

Waiter: “How do you like your steak Sir?” Sir: “Like winning an argument with my wife.”

Waiter: “Rare it is, Sir!”

This Black Friday: Save 100% when you don’t buy anything at all.....

Despite the old saying “Don’t take your troubles to bed” many women still sleep with their husbands.

If you had to choose between a wonderful wife and a really nice new car, what would you choose? Petrol or Diesel?

I went to the psychiatrist today. She told me I had a split personality and charged me \$160. I gave her \$80 and told her to get the rest from the other idiot...

Let’s have a moment of silence for all those who are stuck in traffic...on their way to gym to ride a stationary bike...

Former employee at Boss’s funeral, kneeling and whispering at the coffin: “Who’s thinking outside the box now, Gary?”

Scientists have found that one dog year does not equal 7 human years. In fact the only thing that equals 7 human years is 2020...

WEMBLEY 2021: This may be of interest to one of you. A close mate of mine has two tickets in a corporate box for England v Scotland. He paid £300 each, but he didn’t know the other day when he bought them that it was going to be the same day as his Covid 19 postponed wedding. If you are interested, he is looking for someone to take his place - It’s at Hamilton Registry Office, at 2.30pm.

The bride's name is Moira, she's 5'4", about 8 stone, quite pretty, has her own income and is a really good cook.

**FALKLANDS VETERAN:** Picture the scene. A youngish man standing outside some railings in Grosvenor Square or similar. He is 'busking.' By his feet are a collection bowl and a biggish sign reading 'FALKLANDS' VETERAN.' A pin-striped suited businessman complete with bowler, broly and briefcase walks by and stops seeing the man. He says, "How woeful for you to end up like this after your service. I was in The Guards so I know what you chaps went through. Here is twenty pounds. Good luck!. The busker replies: "MUCHAS GRACIAS SENOR!! *(Sent in by Gordon Dyne)*

**PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM:**

Performers of the 60's are revising their hits with new lyrics to accommodate aging baby boomers. They include:

Bobby Darin --- Splish, Splash, I Was Havin' a Flash.

Herman's Hermits --- Mrs. Brown, You've Got a Lovely Walker.

Ringo Starr --- I Get By With a Little Help From Depends.

The Bee Gees -- - How Can You Mend a Broken Hip.

Roberta Flack--- The First Time Ever I Forgot Your Face.

Johnny Nash --- I Can't See Clearly Now.

Paul Simon--- Fifty Ways to Lose Your Liver.

The Commodores --- Once, Twice, Three Times to the Bathroom.

Marvin Gaye --- Heard It Through the Grape Nuts.

Procol Harem--- A Whiter Shade of Hair.

Leo Sayer --- You Make Me Feel Like Napping.

The Temptations --- Papa's Got a Kidney Stone.

Abba--- Denture Queen.

Tony Orlando --- Knock 3 Times On The Ceiling If You Hear Me Fall.

Helen Reddy --- I Am Woman, Hear Me Snore.

Leslie Gore--- It's My Procedure, and I'll Cry If I Want To.

And Last but NOT least Willie Nelson --- On the Commode Again

**MATT**



*'I have it, I don't have it...'*

**MATT**



*'Spoiler alert. Do you want to know how the Conservative Party ends?'*

AFRIFORUM



THE DEAFENING SILENCE?

## SPACE SHUTTLE TRIP REPORT:

*Sent in by Brian Stableford, this article is doing the rounds. Well worth the read:*

American ingenuity is something to be proud of. A quick "trip report" from the pilot of the 747 that flew the shuttle back to Florida after the Hubble repair flight. A humorous and interesting inside look at what it's like to fly two aircraft at once.

"Well, it's been 48 hours since I landed the 747 with the shuttle Atlantis on top and I am still buzzing from the experience. I have to say that my whole mind, body and soul went into the professional mode just before engine start in Mississippi and stayed there, where it all needed to be, until well after the flight ... in fact, I am not sure if it is all back to normal as I type this email. The experience was surreal. Seeing that "thing" on top of an already overly huge aircraft boggles my mind. The whole mission from takeoff to engine shutdown was unlike anything I had ever done. It was like a dream...someone else's dream. We took off from Columbus AFB on their 12,000 foot runway, of which I used 11,999 feet to get the wheels off the ground. We were at 3,500 feet left to go of the runway, throttles full power, nose wheels still hugging the ground, copilot calling out decision speeds, the weight of Atlantis now screaming through my fingers clinched tightly on the controls, tires heating up to their near maximum temperature from the speed and the weight, and not yet at rotation speed, the speed at which I would be pulling on the controls to get the nose to rise. I just could not wait, and I mean I COULD NOT WAIT, and started pulling early. If I had waited until rotation speed, we would not have rotated enough to get airborne by the end of the runway. So I pulled on the controls early and started our rotation to the takeoff attitude. The wheels finally lifted off as we passed over the stripe marking the end of the runway and my next hurdle (physically) was a line of trees 1,000 feet off the departure end of Runway 16. All I knew was we were flying and so I directed the gear to be retracted and the flaps to be moved from Flaps 20 to Flaps 10 as I pulled even harder on the controls. I must say, those trees were beginning to look a lot like those brushes in the drive through car washes, so I pulled even harder yet! I think I saw a bird just fold its wings and fall out of a tree as if to say "Oh just take me". Okay, we cleared the trees, duh, but it was way too close for my laundry. As we started to actually climb, at only 100 feet per minute, I smelled something that reminded me of touring the Heineken Brewery in Europe. I said "is that a skunk I smell?" and the veterans of shuttle carrying looked at me and smiled and said "tires"! I said "TIRES? OURS?" They smiled and shook their heads as if to call their Captain an amateur. Okay, at that point I was. The tires were so hot you could smell them in the cockpit. My mind could not get over, from this point on, that this was something I had never experienced. Where's your mom when you REALLY need her? The flight down to Florida was an eternity. We cruised at 250 knots indicated, giving us about 315 knots of ground speed at 15,000'. The miles didn't click by like I am used to them clicking by in a fighter jet at MACH .94. We were burning fuel at a rate of 40,000 pounds per hour or 130 pounds per mile, or one gallon every length of the fuselage.

The vibration in the cockpit was mild, compared to down below and to the rear of the fuselage where it reminded me of that football game I had as a child where you turned it on and the players vibrated around the board. I felt like if I had plastic clips on my boots I could have vibrated to any spot in the fuselage I wanted to go without moving my legs and the noise was deafening. The 747 flies with its nose 5 degrees up in the air to stay level and when you bank, it feels like the shuttle is trying to say "hey, let's roll completely over on our back"...not a good thing I kept telling myself. SO I limited my bank angle to 15 degrees and even though a 180-degree course change took a full zip code to complete, it was the safe way to turn this monster. Airliners and even a flight of two F-16s deviated from their flight plans to catch a glimpse of us along the way. We dodged what was in reality very few clouds and storms, despite what everyone thought and arrived in Florida with 51,000 pounds of fuel too much to land with. We can't land heavier than 600,000 pounds total weight and so we had to do something with that fuel. I had an idea...let's fly low and slow and show this beast off to all the taxpayers in Florida lucky enough to be outside on that Tuesday afternoon. So at Ormond Beach we let down to 1,000 feet above the ground/water and flew just east of the beach out over the water. Then, once we reached the NASA airspace of the Kennedy Space Center, we cut over to the Banana/Indian Rivers and flew down the middle of them to show the people of Titusville, Port St. Johns and Melbourne just what a 747 with a shuttle on it looked like. We stayed at 1,000 feet and since we were dragging our flaps at "flaps 5", our speed was down to around 190 to 210 knots. We could see traffic stopping in the middle of roads to take a look. We heard later that a Little League Baseball game stopped to look, and everyone cheered as we became their 7th inning stretch. Oh say can you see ... After reaching Vero Beach, we turned north to follow the coast line back up to the Shuttle Landing Facility (SLF). There was not one person laying on the beach ... they were all standing and waving!" What a sight" I thought ... and figured they were thinking the same thing. All this time I was bugging the engineers, all three of them, to re-compute our fuel and tell me when it was time to land. They kept saying "Not yet Triple, keep showing this thing off" which was not a bad thing to be doing. However, all this time the thought that the landing, the muscling of this 600,000-pound beast, was getting closer and closer to my reality. I was pumped up! We got back to the SLF and were still 10,000 pounds too heavy to land so I said I was going to do a low approach over the SLF going the opposite direction of landing traffic that day. So at 300 feet, we flew down the runway, rocking our wings like a whale rolling on its side to say "hello" to the people looking on! One turn out of traffic and back to the runway to land...still 3,000 pounds over gross weight limit. But the engineers agreed that if the landing were smooth, there would be no problem. "OH thanks guys, a little extra pressure is just what I needed!" So we landed at 603,000 pounds and very smoothly if I have to say so myself. The landing was so totally controlled and on speed, that it was fun. There were a few surprises that I dealt with, like the 747 falls like a rock with the orbiter on it if you pull the throttles off at the "normal" point in a landing and secondly, if you thought you could hold the nose off the ground after the mains touch down, think again...IT IS COMING DOWN!!! So I "flew it down" to the ground and saved what I have seen in videos of a nose slap after landing. Bob's video supports this! Then I turned on my phone after coming to a full stop only to find 50 bazillion emails and phone messages from all of you who were so super to be watching and cheering us on! What a treat, I can't thank y'all enough. For those who watched, you wondered why we sat there so long. Well, the shuttle had very hazardous chemicals on board and we had to be "sniffed" to determine if any had leaked or were leaking. They checked for Monomethylhydrazine (N2H4 for Charlie Hudson) and nitrogen tetroxide (N2O4). Even though we were "clean", it took way too long for them to tow us in to the mate-demate area. Sorry for those who stuck it out and even waited until we exited the jet. I am sure I will wake up in the middle of the night here soon, screaming and standing straight up dripping wet with sweat from the realization of what had happened. It was a thrill of a lifetime. Again I want to thank everyone for your interest and support. It felt good to bring Atlantis home in one piece after she had worked so hard getting to the Hubble Space Telescope and back".

A video, in case you haven't seen the Shuttle Carrier Aircraft: *(cut and paste to YouTube)*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wc11e4KiDv0>