



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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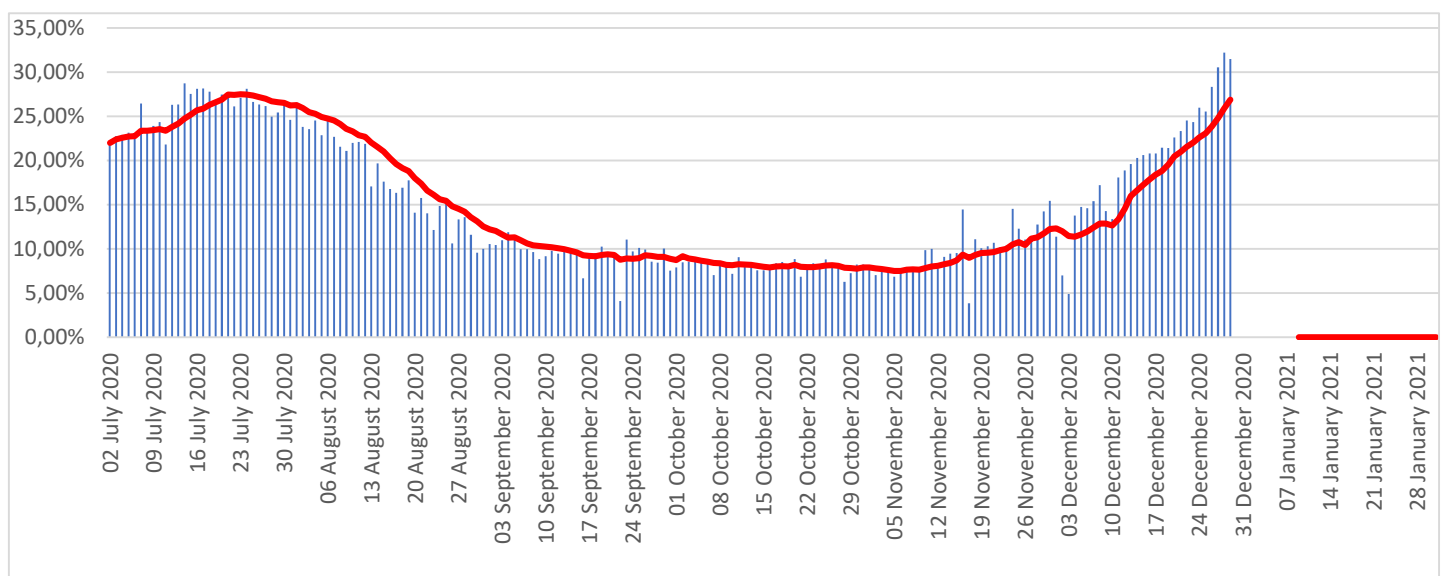
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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 39 – 31st DECEMBER 2020 – THE LAST ONE THIS YEAR and DECADE

GREETINGS – NEW YEARS EVE EDITION:

Although we did mention that there would not be a Ramblings this week, quite a lot has happened in South Africa with the State President telling us that the Country was now going into 'Level Three' lockdown and that this would be reviewed on the 15th January 2021. This was the planned date of the next RAFOC Lunch, and the Committee has made the decision to postpone getting back together again until a later date. This was taken in view of the Level Three lockdown and also that some of us would be coming back from a vacation to another province. We trust you understand our position and we have always had the best, and safest, interests of the Club Members as a priority. We will let you all know when we are sure it's safe to meet.

Jeff Earle sends out, to a few people, a daily Covid 19 review which has a series of graphs which shows the trends of the pandemic. Below is a trend which clearly indicates the Second Wave that is happening. 'Kims Trend' shows a 10 Day moving Average – Cases % from Tests.



GOOD AFTERNOON ALL: *This is how we started Week 1 of Ramblings – 9 April 2020*

Trust you are all weathering the lockdown, and all that goes with it, reasonably well. We wait to hear whether it will end as advertised at the end of next week or be extended – Hopefully not! Remember that you can call any Committee member if you need to chat or there are any problems where you need assistance. We will try to help wherever possible.

Please have a look at www.rafoc.org to which Hanke Fourie has been adding items regularly.

LIFE-LONG LESSONS FROM NAVIGATION MISTAKES BECAUSE I DID NOT APPLY THE RULES:

Lesson 1: Navigation training in the SAAF at Ysterplaat in 1954



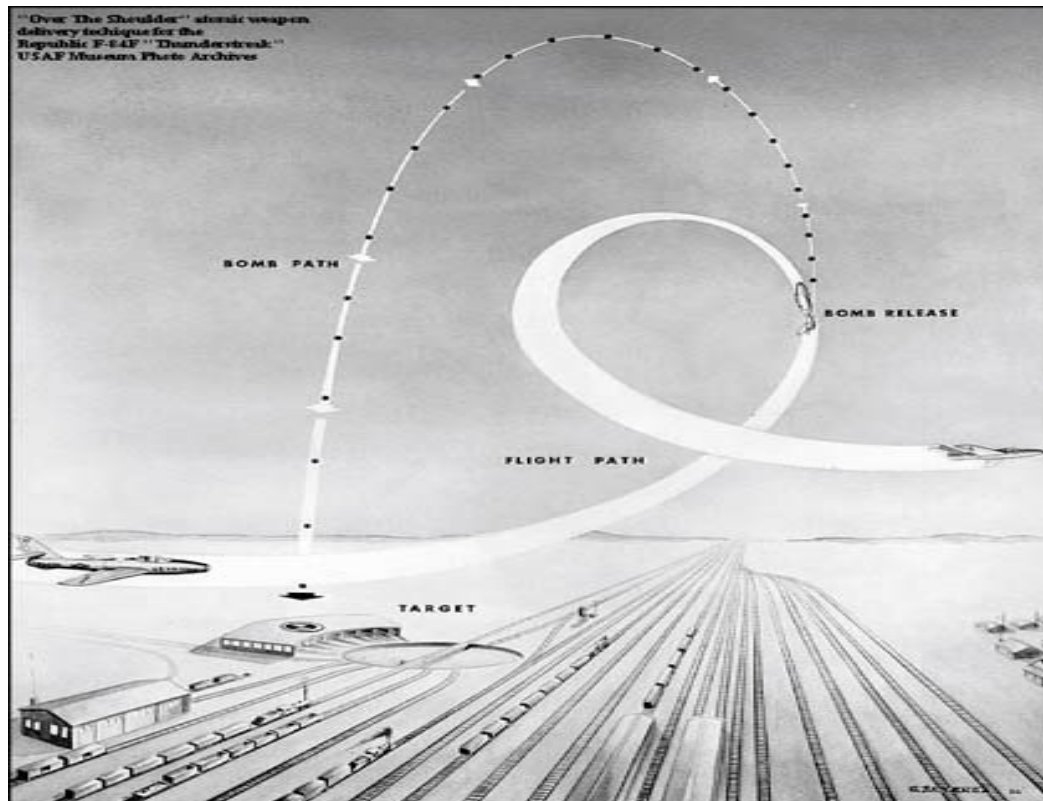
I have never forgotten this flight which, in its own way, was a 'near miss'. We did our navigation training in the Lockheed Ventura, which followed the 'Hudson', used for shipping attack roles. The SAAF used them for maritime reconnaissance, and they were later (about 1958) replaced by the Avro Shackleton MR 3. (Some years ago, we had a very interesting presentation by Harold Bloch on the flight that went down in the Sahara). The Ventura had a very old direct reading magnetic compass. (Forgive me for giving some theory, because some of our readers may not be familiar with this instrument). Magnets in a compass make it align with the magnetic North Pole. In airplanes, this compass is almost always set on top of the dashboard/instrument panel or hung from the top of the windshield frame, in order to keep it as far away from electrical gear as possible to reduce **magnetic deviation**. Instruments in an aircraft cause interference that affects this compass, and that interference is called **deviation**. A compass card is normally attached, showing what error correction to add for different headings, although the changes are normally just a few degrees. (That is the theory)! **Variation** is the difference between true north and magnetic north at any place. 'Isogonic' lines are drawn on navigation maps and charts to show different lines of magnetic variation to help with planning your magnetic heading. To find your magnetic course (in no wind, the heading you see on your compass), you'll either subtract easterly variation or add westerly variation. In this example, the variation is 14 degrees east, so you'd subtract 14 degrees from your true course to get your magnetic course. Isogonic lines are drawn on your sectional charts to show different lines of magnetic variation to help with planning your magnetic heading. The compass in the Ventura had many errors, and after altering heading, we were taught (as a cardinal rule!) that the navigator had to do a heading check, using a device called the 'Astro compass' which enabled us to check the true heading by using the sun, or star/planet at night. We were on a night cross country navigation trip, and I thought I would not bother (too lazy/lack of mental discipline?) do this check after a (about 15 degrees) heading change. Well, we did not see the lights of Cape Town as our ETA approached. The next thing is that the pilot said he could see Saldanha lagoon and lights of Langebaanweg airfield! We were only 110 Kms from our base! Fortunately for us it was a clear night, with no cloud below or above us. If the conditions had been different, we would have carried on over the Atlantic Ocean! Needless to say, I received a 'bollocking' (of magnitude 10) the next day during the debriefing and the assessment of my chart and log. It was a huge lesson for a 19 year old 'sprog'! It is a lesson that has lived with me for all of my life!

Lesson 2: Getting lost in a Canberra at low level in 1958.

I flew the Canberra B6 on my first flying tour. In 1958, we converted to the low level tactical nuclear strike role, using American weapons and the Low Altitude Bombing System (LABS). We called it the 'idiots loop' We would approach the target at 80 m above ground level and go into a 3.4 g pull up to roll out at about 1800 m above ground. This required very accurate map reading and timing to reach the pull up point on time. The correct technique was to select prominent ground features and the precise time we had to reach that point. Done correctly, very accurate navigation and timing was possible. Well, I thought it would be easy to map read without doing this! One day, flying over Germany, I realised we were lost! Unlike a car, you cannot stop to decide what to do! Fortunately, my pilot knew that part of the North German plain well, and we reached base OK.

Another life long lesson. *Never try to ignore the basic rules in a job!*

Colin Francis - 29 December 2020



SIMILAR HAPPENINGS:

You read last week the story from Geoff Fish and now this one from Colin. It is always good to share these happening, so if you have one you want to share please send it to bookings@rafoc.org and we will review and use it at some time.

WHATSAPP GROUP:

The Committee has a group where we circulate issues and outcomes. It works well as we do not use it for advertising or frivolous matters. It has been suggested to start one for RAFOC which will be used to alert members to bits and bobs. It will only be to be circulated by the "EDITOR" and replies cannot be made directly. If you would like to be included please send a reply to this Ramblings with your name and mobile contact number in order for us to comply with the POPI Act. We will then try to sort out a circulation list that shows only numbers and not names.

INTERESTING PODCAST:

'Great Lives' a BBC4 program is a talk show that discusses great people. In this Pod Cast the life of Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding as researched by British comedian Diane Morgan is aired. It's well

worth a listen as it covers areas that are probably little known about 'Stuffy' and how he was treated by Churchill after the Battle of Britain.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000qlxp>

A PILOT'S STORY ABOUT THE SR-71 BLACK BIRD – “SLED” DRIVER – BRIAN SHUL:

If you like good stories and like aircraft, then sit back and read through this well narrated account.... It has been edited to fit into the Ramblings. We know many of you would have read this before but..... To hear him follow this link to YouTube for a 1-hour talk. He is a motivational speaker.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oLFzT7SER8>



In April 1986, following an attack on American soldiers in a Berlin disco, President Reagan ordered the bombing of Muammar Qaddafi's terrorist camps in Libya. My duty was to fly over Libya and take photos recording the damage our F-111's had inflicted. Qaddafi had established a 'line of death,' a territorial marking across the Gulf of Sidra, swearing to shoot down any intruder that crossed the boundary. On the morning of April 15, I rocketed past the line at 2,125 mph. I was piloting the SR-71 spy plane, the world's fastest jet, accompanied by Maj Walter Watson, the aircraft's reconnaissance systems officer (RSO). We had crossed into Libya and were approaching our final turn over the bleak desert landscape when Walter informed me that he was receiving missile launch signals. I quickly increased our speed, calculating the time it would take for the weapons most likely SA-2 and SA-4 surface-to-air missiles capable of Mach 5 - to reach our altitude. I estimated that we could beat the rocket-powered missiles to the turn and stayed our course, betting our lives on the plane's performance. After several agonizingly long seconds, we made the turn and blasted toward the Mediterranean. 'You might want to pull it back,' Walter suggested. It was then that I noticed I still had the throttles full forward. The plane was flying a mile every 1.6 seconds, well above our Mach 3.2 limit. It was the fastest we would ever fly. I pulled the throttles to idle just south of Sicily, but we still overran the refueling tanker awaiting us over Gibraltar. Scores of significant aircraft have been produced in the 100 years of flight, following the achievements of the Wright brothers, which we celebrate in December. Aircraft such as the Boeing 707, the F-86 Sabre Jet, and the P-51 Mustang are among the important machines that have flown our skies. But the SR-71 stands alone as a significant contributor to Cold War victory and as the fastest plane ever-built and only 93 Air Force pilots ever steered the 'sled,' as we called our aircraft.

I had applied to fly the world's fastest jet and was receiving my first walk-around of our nation's most prestigious aircraft. In my previous 13 years as an Air Force fighter pilot, I had never seen an aircraft with such presence. At 107 feet long, it appeared big, but far from ungainly. Ironically, the plane was dripping. Fuel was seeping through the joints, raining down on the hangar floor. At Mach 3, the plane would expand several inches because of the severe temperature, which could heat the leading edge of the wing to 1,100 degrees. To prevent cracking, expansion joints had been built into the plane. Sealant resembling rubber glue covered the seams, but when the plane was subsonic, fuel would leak through the joints. The SR-71 was the brainchild of Kelly Johnson, the famed Lockheed designer who created the P-38, the F-104 Starfighter, and the U-2. After the Soviets shot down Gary Powers' U-2 in 1960, Johnson began to develop an aircraft that would fly three miles higher and five times faster than the spy plane-and still be capable of photographing your license plate.

In 1962, the first Blackbird successfully flew, and in 1966, the same year I graduated from high school, the Air Force began flying operational SR-71 missions. I came to the program in 1983 with a sterling record and a recommendation from my commander, completing the weeklong interview and meeting Walter, my partner for the next four years. He would ride four feet behind me, working all the cameras, radios, and electronic jamming equipment. I joked that if we were ever captured, he was the spy, and I was just the driver. He told me to keep the pointy end forward. We trained for a year, flying out of Beale AFB in California, Kadena Airbase in Okinawa, and RAF Mildenhall in England. On a typical training mission, we would take off near Sacramento, refuel over Nevada, accelerate into Montana, obtain high Mach over Colorado, turn right over New Mexico, speed across the Los Angeles Basin, run up the West Coast, turn right at Seattle, then return to Beale. Total flight time: two hours and 40 minutes.

One day, high above Arizona, we were monitoring the radio traffic of all the mortal airplanes below us. First, a Cessna pilot asked the air traffic controllers to check his ground speed. 'Ninety knots,' ATC replied. A twin Bonanza soon made the same request. 'One-twenty on the ground,' was the reply. To our surprise, a navy F-18 came over the radio with a ground speed check. I knew exactly what he was doing. Of course, he had a ground speed indicator in his cockpit, but he wanted to let all the bug-smashers in the valley know what real speed was 'Dusty 52, we show you at 620 on the ground,' ATC responded. The situation was too ripe. I heard the click of Walter's mike button in the rear seat. In his most innocent voice, Walter startled the controller by asking for a ground speed check from 81,000 feet, clearly above controlled airspace. In a cool, professional voice, the controller replied, 'Aspen 20, I show you at 1,982 knots on the ground.' We did not hear another transmission on that frequency all the way to the coast.

The Blackbird always showed us something new, each aircraft possessing its own unique personality. In time, we realized we were flying a national treasure. When we taxied out of our revetments for take-off, people took notice. Traffic congregated near the airfield fences because everyone wanted to see and hear the mighty SR-71. You could not be a part of this program and not come to love the airplane. Slowly, she revealed her secrets to us as we earned her trust.

The Blackbird had outrun nearly 4,000 missiles, not once taking a scratch from enemy fire.

On her final flight, the Blackbird, destined for the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, sped from Los Angeles to Washington in 64 minutes, averaging 2,145 mph and setting four speed records. The SR-71 served six presidents, protecting America for a quarter of a century. Unbeknownst to most of the country, the plane flew over North Vietnam, Red China, North Korea, the Middle East, South Africa, Cuba, Nicaragua, Iran, Libya, and the Falkland Islands. On a weekly basis, the SR-71 kept watch over every Soviet nuclear submarine and mobile missile site, and all of their troop movements. It was a key factor in winning the Cold War.

I am proud to say I flew about 500 hours in this aircraft. I knew her well. She gave way to no plane, proudly dragging her sonic boom through enemy backyards with great impunity. She defeated every missile, outran every MiG, and always brought us home. In the first 100 years of manned flight, no aircraft was more remarkable.

Out my left window, Libya looks like one huge sandbox. A featureless brown terrain stretches all the way to the horizon. There is no sign of any activity. Then Walt tells me that he is getting lots of electronic signals, and they are not the friendly kind. The jet is performing perfectly now, flying better than she has in weeks. She seems to know where she is. She likes the high Mach, as we penetrate deeper into Libyan airspace. Leaving the footprint of our sonic boom across Benghazi, I sit motionless, with stilled hands on throttles and the pitch control, my eyes glued to the gauges. Only the Mach indicator is moving, steadily increasing in hundredths, in a rhythmic consistency similar to the long-distance runner who has caught his second wind and picked up the pace. With the power of forty locomotives, we puncture the quiet African sky and continue farther south across a bleak landscape. Walt continues to update me with numerous reactions he sees on the DEF panel. He is receiving missile tracking signals. With each mile we traverse, every two seconds, I become more uncomfortable driving deeper into this barren and hostile land. I am glad the DEF panel is not in the front seat. It would be a big distraction now, seeing the lights flashing. In contrast, my cockpit is 'quiet'

as the jet purrs and relishes her new-found strength, continuing to slowly accelerate. We are a roaring express now, and as we roll through the enemy's backyard, I hope our speed continues to defeat the missile radars below. We are approaching a turn, and this is good. It will only make it more difficult for any launched missile to solve the solution for hitting our aircraft. I push the speed up at Walt's request. The jet does not skip a beat, nothing fluctuates, and the cameras have a rock steady platform. Walt received missile launch signals. Before he can say anything else, my left hand instinctively moves the throttles yet farther forward. My eyes are glued to temperature gauges now, as I know the jet will willingly go to speeds that can harm her. The temps are relatively cool and from all the warm temps we've encountered thus far, this surprises me but then, it really doesn't surprise me. Mach 3.31 and Walt is quiet for the moment. I move my gloved finger across the small silver wheel on the autopilot panel which controls the aircraft's pitch. With the deft feel known to Swiss watchmakers, surgeons, and 'dinosaurs' (old-time pilots who not only fly an airplane but 'feel it'), I rotate the pitch wheel somewhere between one-sixteenth and one-eighth inch location, a position which yields the 500-foot-per-minute climb I desire. The jet raises her nose one-sixth of a degree and knows, I will push her higher as she goes faster. The Mach continues to rise, but during this segment of our route, I am in no mood to pull throttles back. Walt's voice pierces the quiet of my cockpit with the news of more missile launch signals. The gravity of Walter's voice tells me that he believes the signals to be a more valid threat than the others. Within seconds he tells me to 'push it up' and I firmly press both throttles against their stops. For the next few seconds, I will let the jet go as fast as she wants. A final turn is coming up and we both know that if we can hit that turn at this speed, we most likely will defeat any missiles. We are not there yet, though, and I'm wondering if Walt will call for a defensive turn off our course. With no words spoken, I sense Walter is thinking in concert with me about maintaining our programmed course. To keep from worrying, I glance outside, wondering if I'll be able to visually pick up a missile aimed at us. Odd are the thoughts that wander through one's mind in times like these. I found myself recalling the words of former SR-71 pilots who were fired upon while flying missions over North Vietnam. They said the few errant missile detonations they were able to observe from the cockpit looked like implosions rather than explosions. This was due to the great speed at which the jet was hurling away from the exploding missile. I see nothing outside except the endless expanse of a steel blue sky and the broad patch of tan earth far below. I have only had my eyes out of the cockpit for seconds, but it seems like many minutes since I have last checked the gauges inside. Returning my attention inward, I glance first at the miles counter telling me how many more to go, until we can start our turn. Then I note the Mach, and passing beyond 3.45, I realize that Walter and I have attained new personal records. The Mach continues to increase. Walt and I are ultimately depending on the jet now - more so than normal - and she seems to know it. The cooler outside temperatures have awakened the spirit born into her years ago, when men dedicated to excellence took the time and care to build her well. The Mach eases to 3.5 as we crest 80,000 feet. We are a bullet now - except faster. We hit the turn, and I feel some relief as our nose swings away from a country we have seen quite enough of. Screaming past Tripoli, our phenomenal speed continues to rise, and the screaming Sled pummels the enemy one more time, laying down a parting sonic boom. In seconds, we can see nothing but the expansive blue of the Mediterranean. I realize that I still have my left hand full-forward and we're continuing to rocket along in maximum afterburner. The TDI now shows us Mach numbers, not only new to our experience but flat out scary. Walt says the DEF panel is now quiet, and I know it is time to reduce our incredible speed. I pull the throttles to the min 'burner range and the jet still doesn't want to slow down. Normally the Mach would be affected immediately, when making such a large throttle movement. But for just a few moments old 960 just sat out there at the high Mach, she seemed to love and like the proud Sled she was, and only began to slow when we were well out of danger. I loved that jet.

(Shortened from an article sent in by Clive King and we recommend viewing the YouTube video to hear how calm Brian Shul is)

THE END FOR TODAY: *This is how we ended Week 1 of Ramblings – 9 April 2020*

This is the first weekly Newsheet - "Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings" - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest (nothing on the Minister of

Transport, please!) that will help us all to keep in contact through the lockdown. So, let's hear from you.... Please send your suggestions or contributions to bookings@rafoc.org

Meantime, keep the bright side up – and remember, all this, too, shall pass...

Keep safe and well and stay at home.

The Committee

TAIL PIECE:

Angry husband is not happy with his wife, so he sent a message to his mother-in-law. "Your product does not match my requirements."
Smart mother-in-law replies: "Warranty expired, manufacturer not responsible after seal is broken."

Uncle Cyril, there are people swimming in potholes can we perhaps close them too?

Have a wonderful New Year's Eve and we are looking forward to a much better year in 2021.

At 1 second past midnight it can truly be said that when we look back over last year, we have 2020 vision.