



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 47 – 26th FEBRUARY 2021

GREETINGS:

Day 336, and a week of high drama in SA as Justice Zondo applies to the Constitutional Court for the arrest of Jacob Zuma. President Ramaphosa sends warning over attack against the Constitution. Cele takes tea with Zuma at Nkandla. People's lives "left on hold" while Master of the High Court turns away clients... SA to sell AstraZeneca vaccines to African Union to help 20 countries vaccinate health staff... Rand subdued running up to Finance Minister Tito Mboweni's address at 14h00 on Wednesday - narrowing the deficit and avoiding a sovereign debt crisis were the highlights. South Africa has now hit a tax wall... But - is the public wage bill the war elephant that tramples Mboweni's hopes? Top education official in court after 100 head of stolen cattle allegedly found on his farm. Happy, happy Africa...

Elsewhere - Tiger Woods 'Lucky to be alive', police say, after car crash in California, amid a torrent of social media posts... Justin Trudeau praises Joe Biden on climate change in first meeting (He would, now, wouldn't he?) Australia is preparing to force Big Tech companies to pay publishers for hosting news content - the EU has shown appetite for a similar law. Boris unrolled his roadmap – and the Labour MPs looked utterly lost... Scotland will return to a tiered system from the last week in April, Nicola Sturgeon has said, in confirming her updated "rival roadmap" out of lockdown. Big freeze in Midwest USA

And – "The scoop of the week?" The Government Employees Medical Scheme (GEMS), which is positioning itself to administer the National Health Insurance (NHI) fund, has been rocked by allegations of tender rigging, fraud, maladministration, and corruption totaling more than R300 million. These are detailed in a series of 10 explosive forensic reports which show that over a period of five years the scheme had appointed and paid more than R300 million to companies in which some of its executives had direct financial interests... Like Ol' Man River; it just keeps rolling along...

"The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it." (George Orwell)

"ZOOM BOOM": SIGN OF THE TIMES:

Investors moving their wealth around the world in search of greener pastures, greater returns and more security is not a new concept. Now, influenced by the 'Zoom Boom', major cities are experiencing a mass exodus as property buyers invest in smaller, mostly coastal towns which offer a higher quality of life for a fraction of the cost.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:

Members are reminded that our AGM will be held as a virtual “Zoom” Meeting at 13h00, next Friday 5 March 2021. The Link will follow to members only by email with guidance on how to use Zoom for first time users. Karl Jensen has offered to assist anybody who is not sure how to use Zoom, he can be contacted on 082 331 4652. Just click on the link to join. Link will be open from 12h45 – please give yourself time to sign on as the AGM is scheduled to take-off at 13h00.

SEVEN MINUTES OF TERROR:

At 22h55 SAST on Thursday 18 Feb 2021, just as the last issue of Ramblings went to press, space and aviation history was being made. NASA landed a new robotic rover on Mars, its most ambitious effort in decades to directly study whether there was ever life on the red planet. While the agency has landed other missions on Mars, the \$2.7 billion robotic explorer named Perseverance carries a sophisticated set of scientific tools that will bring advanced capabilities to the search for life beyond our planet. Perseverance was the third robotic visitor from Earth to arrive at the red planet this month. Last week, two other spacecraft, Hope from the United Arab Emirates and Tianwen-1 from China, entered orbit around Mars. But NASA’s spacecraft did not go into orbit first. Instead, it zipped along a direct path to the surface.



At 3:48 p.m. Eastern time USA, controllers at the mission operations centre at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory near Pasadena, Calif., received word from Perseverance that it had entered the top of the Martian atmosphere at a speed of more than 12,000 miles per hour. The spacecraft was beginning the landing manoeuvres that would bring it to a soft stop in just seven anxiety-drenched minutes. All that anyone on Earth could do was watch and hope that Perseverance performed as designed. At Mars, the fate of the rover was already determined. Mars is currently 126 million miles from Earth. Radio signals, travelling at the speed of light, take more than 11 minutes to travel from there to here. That means that when the message announcing the start of the landing sequence reached Earth, the rover had already been on Mars for four minutes. The only uncertainty was whether it was safe there in one piece, or crashed into many pieces, another human-made crater on the surface of Mars. The atmosphere of NASA’s operations centre — more sparsely filled than previous Mars landings because of precautions required by the coronavirus pandemic — was pensively quiet, broken by applause as specific events unfolded without problem. There were periodic announcements of the spacecraft’s progress through the atmosphere, the deceleration and heating as it sliced through the thin Martian air, the deployment of a huge parachute even as it was still supersonic in speed, the shedding of the rover’s heat shield so that its cameras could navigate to its destination, the firing of rocket engines to further slow its descent. In the final step, the rover was lowered at the end of a

cable beneath a rocket-powered jetpack until it touched the surface. At 3:55 p.m. cheers erupted in the control room with the announcement that Perseverance was intact on the surface.

“Touchdown confirmed,” said Swati Mohan, the engineer who provided commentary on the descent. (Kenneth Chang in *New York Times*)

RAND A PENSIONER:

On the 14th of February 1961, well within living memory of most RAFOC members, South Africa introduced the Rand as its currency, replacing the British pound Sterling at an exchange rate of approximately R2 for £1. Today the exchange rate was R20,28 for £1. Over the decades the Rand sure has had its share of adventure. The change in currency happened just three months before South Africa declared itself a republic and left the Commonwealth of Nations on the 31st of May 1961. For the year of the Rand's release, the annual inflation was 1.6%, and the average for the whole of 1961 was 1.9%. The 1960s was a period of generally low inflation, reaching a peak of 4.6% in November 1966, and during the 1970s and 1980s, inflation climbed to reach its highest recorded level of 19.7% in September 1986. Annual inflation has averaged 8% in the period since the Rand's introduction. Statistics South Africa's Patrick Kelly explains: "Essentially if you had R100 in 1961 and you bought a set of goods and services, today you would be paying R9,700 for the same items. So, that's an increase of almost 97 times by that amount over the last 60 years." Stats S.A. provided an amusing look at how prices have changed from 1961 to today in the image below.



THE NEXT MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE:

TIME Magazine - “Amid a global pandemic, deepening inequality, systemic injustice and existential questions about truth, democracy and the planet itself, the individuals on this year’s list provide “clear-eyed hope.” Doctors and scientists fighting COVID-19, advocates pushing for equality and justice, journalists standing up for truth and artists sharing their visions of present and future. Everyone on this list is poised to make history”, according to Time...

REFLECTIONS ON VALENTINES DAY:

Johannesburg - The Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on almost every facet of social interaction and now appears to have also put a spanner in the works of the most romantic day of the year. A new study revealed that the majority of South Africans would not be receiving or giving gifts this Valentine's Day. "It's certainly not that South Africans aren't romantic," explained Estelle Nagel, the head of communications at Gumtree, who conducted a survey of the nation's expected spend this Valentine's Day. The classified advertisements and community website explained that prior to the arrival of the novel coronavirus, the "love economy" was on the increase in South Africa. This was reiterated by a study conducted by Mastercard last year which revealed that Valentine's Day spend was up 11% in 2019. Their analysis of card transactions, which formed part of the Mastercard "Love Index", examined spending habits and trends around Valentine's Day from more than 53 countries around the world, including South Africa. The study found that hotel bookings for and around February 14 accounted for 38% of South Africa's Valentine's Day spend. But these unprecedented times have had financial implications and have left many South Africans with little to no cash to splurge on their lovers this Valentine's Day. "Budgets are so much tighter in 2021 due to the current tough economic climate," Nagel said. As a result, the Gumtree poll revealed that a whopping 69% of South Africans wouldn't be spending a cent on their squeezes for Valentine's Day. South Africa is not the only country seeing a slow-down on Valentine's Day spending. In the US, consumers planned to spend \$32 (about R475) less than they budgeted last year. (IOL) (See TAILPIECE for a South African Valentine...)

RAF SMITING THE UNGODLY:

Royal Air Force Typhoons for the second time this year have carried out airstrikes against Daesh targets in Iraq using Paveway IV precision guided bombs. The airstrikes occurred on Thursday 11th February, when two RAF Typhoon FGR4s were tasked to conduct the strikes against terrorists who had been identified occupying two dispersed encampments on the banks of the Tharthar River, west of the city of Bayji. The strikes were carried out following a check of the area which revealed there were no signs of any civilians who might be placed at risk. This allowed the Typhoon pilots to release their Paveway IV guided bombs striking the targets. Further surveillance of both sites confirmed that the series of different targets within the encampments were struck and the mission had been a success. The RAF's armed reconnaissance missions support the enduring work of the Iraqi security forces to prevent any resurgence of the Daesh terrorist movement within their country as part of Op Shader, the UK contribution to the US-led international counter-Daesh operation.

OBITUARIES:

Flight Lieutenant Bill Eames RAF, who has died aged 97, was one of the last remaining aircrew who took part in the D-Day landings and during the ill-fated "Operation Market Garden." In September 1943, he was posted to 570 Squadron based at Harwell. The squadron was equipped with the twin-engined Armstrong Whitworth Albemarle aircraft engaged in training airborne troops with glider towing and parachute dropping.



In February 1944 it began supply dropping missions to resistance forces in occupied Europe. On one occasion Eames and his crew dropped a female SOE agent. The crew were not permitted to see the operative in case they were subsequently shot down, captured and interrogated by the Gestapo if the brave woman had also fallen into enemy hands. Shortly after D-Day the squadron converted to the four-engine Short Stirling bombers modified to be supply aircraft. Nineteen Stirlings, including Eames's aircraft, towed Horsa gliders during the airborne assault at Arnhem on September 17.

Two days later on a re-supply sortie, his aircraft was hit by flak and Eames was severely wounded. A fellow crew member, also from Co Fermanagh, who had enlisted at the same time as Eames, saved his life by applying tourniquets and field dressings. Eames spent many months in hospital, and until the end of his life pieces of shrapnel would regularly emerge from his body. He was "Mentioned in Despatches." Due to the injuries he sustained over Arnhem, Eames's flying career was over. He left the RAF in June 1947 to pursue a career in civilian air traffic control. For his last 12 years of service, he was the Chief Air Traffic Controller for Northern Ireland.

Flight Lieutenant Arthur 'Dickie' Bird DFC RAF, who has died aged 100, flew intruder missions over Germany to attack airfields and suppress the activities of the Luftwaffe. He was awarded the DFC. In 1937 he joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve and learnt to fly at Carlisle. He was already mobilised when war broke out. Of the 30 pilots in training with him, only seven survived the war. After further training at RAF Cranwell, he was commissioned and joined 23 Squadron at Ford, in Sussex, in November 1940. The squadron flew Blenheim fighters and was soon tasked with night intruder flights over enemy airfields. In April 1941, the squadron re-equipped with the American-built Havoc, a fighter derivative of a light bomber. On August 12, Bird was patrolling over the Dutch airfield at Gilze-Rijen when all the airfield lights were suddenly switched on. He saw numerous aircraft in the circuit and immediately engaged them. He attacked seven and claimed two probably destroyed and five damaged before the airfield doused their lights. To add to the confusion, he bombed the aircraft dispersals. In December 1941, Bird transferred to an experimental unit, which was equipped with the Havoc. A searchlight was mounted in the nose of the aircraft so that the bomber, given the name Turbinlite, could illuminate enemy planes and allow two accompanying Hurricane fighters to attack. The experiment had very limited success. After a series of appointments training night fighter pilots, Bird, together with his navigator Les Hodder, joined 605 (County of Warwick) Squadron equipped with the Mosquito. During the next six months they flew 60 operations, some over five hours long. The squadron's role was to fly at night and patrol near enemy airfields in France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany to attack German night fighters as they took off to intercept raids mounted by Bomber Command. No 605 employed numerous aircraft in succession over each target in order to catch returning enemy fighters. On January 28, 1944, Bird and Hodder headed for the Baltic coast to patrol over the airfield at Grieswald. They recorded activity before departing, and when they landed, they had been airborne for almost six hours and had barely sufficient fuel to reach their airfield in Essex. In February 1944 they shot down an enemy aircraft over an airfield in Belgium and a week later damaged another over Eindhoven. Occasionally their aircraft carried bombs to drop on airfield installations, but the Mosquito's main weapon was the cannon. On missions when they failed to find enemy night fighters, Bird and Hodder attacked road and rail transports and on a number of sorties, they destroyed a locomotive and rolling stock. On March 30, the night that Bomber Command attacked Nuremburg and suffered its greatest wartime losses, Bird was patrolling over an airfield near Mainz. He was about to attack a Dornier aircraft when a Focke Wulf 190 flashed passed him. He gave pursuit but was unable to engage the fighter. Instead he headed for Mainz railway station and attacked trains standing in a marshalling yard, destroying at least one locomotive. On May 6, flying from Manston in Kent, he took the US General George Patton for a flight in his Mosquito. Flying at low level along the south coast, Patton was able to see the troops assembling for the Normandy landings. Both Bird and Hodder completed their tour of operations in May, when they received the DFC. The citation for Bird commented on his: 'skill and courage of a high order, setting an excellent example'. In September 1944 he joined a Ferry Unit at Pershore in Worcestershire. During this period he flew a wide variety of aircraft on delivery flights ranging from the Spitfire to the Halifax, converted for transport duties. He left the RAF at the end of 1945 and returned to the family dairy farm near Penrith.

AsCENSIONS' GOT IT VAXXED...



Earlier this week, a LXX Squadron (70 Squadron) RAF A400M aircraft transported doses of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine to Ascension Island – a UK Overseas Territories in the South Atlantic Ocean. Due to its remote location and small population of just over 800 contractors and military personnel, it will become the first island to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Upon departing RAF Brize Norton, the vaccine, which must only be out of refrigeration for a maximum of 72 hours before entering refrigeration in Ascension Island again and must be stored at between 2-8°C. After a quick refueling stop on route, the crew delivered the precious cargo into the safe hands of RAF movers on the ground, which later was given to the Ascension Island Government to begin distribution. DCO – “Duty Carried Out...” Delivered on behalf of the FCDO, the delivery reaffirms the UK Government’s commitment to supporting its Overseas Territories. “The role of the RAF is multipurpose. From the moment that the vaccines arrive at the front gate of RAF Brize Norton, the Brize Norton machine kicks into gear. The RAF is well placed to deliver and manage this vaccine delivery, and we’re extremely proud to be a part of providing this support to our Overseas Territories.”
Wing Commander Lee Roberts, Officer Commanding 70 Squadron RAF.

FLOAT MY BOAT, Jasmine Harrison – RUDDERLY MAD!



A 21-year-old swimming teacher has become the youngest woman to row solo across the Atlantic Ocean. Jasmine Harrison, from Thirsk in North Yorkshire, set off on her 3,000-mile (4,828km) journey from La Gomera in the Canary Islands in December last year. She docked in Antigua earlier, completing the journey in a new record time of 70 days, three hours and 48 minutes. After arriving in

the Caribbean, she said the experience had been "amazing" and "everything I wanted it to be". Ms Harrison, a part-time swimming teacher and bartender, decided to sign up for the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge three years ago after watching the finale of the 2017 event. Asked about her epic challenge, she said it had been a mix of "good and bad memories" but said she had relished the chance to escape from day-to-day life. "There's nothing like it, actually getting away from everything - social media, bad news, from literally everything," she said. Ms Harrison's crossing was not without difficulty and she capsized just two days before crossing the finishing line, injuring her elbow in the process. As well as rowing into the record books, Ms Harrison has also raised more than £10,000 for charity.

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

Ten months, 335 days since the start of the great modern rinderpest, this is the forty- seventh weekly Newsheet - "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 and entertained 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....

Please continue to take care – we've made it so far – enjoy the relaxation of prohibition and restaurants re-opening – but continue to keep safe in these incredibly troubled times: wash your hands, cover your face, make space, avoid gatherings and remember that all this, too, shall pass....

We'll keep you posted on resuming lunches when we can, and further developments at Wanderers as they resume services.

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

TAILPIECE:

Don't forget that this month we are celebrating those three days when men are always right – 29th, 30th and 31st February!

During an argument with her husband, a wife was about to calm down. But then her husband asked her to calm down....

Nothing prepares you for the moment you realise your parents were right about everything.

No matter what life throws at you, a cold beer will always help...

Daughter's text to Dad: "Daddy. I'm coming home to get married soon, so get your cheque book ready LOL! As you know, I'm in Australia and he's in the US. We met on a dating site and became friends on Facebook and had long chats on WhatsApp. He proposed to me on Skype and now we've had a 2-month relationship on Viber. Dad, I need your blessing, good wishes and a really big wedding. Lots of love, Lilly".

Dad's reply: "My Dear Lilly, Like, Wow! Really? Cool! Whatever... I suggest you two get married on Twitter, have fun on Tango, register for your stuff on Amazon, and pay for it all through PayPal. And when you get fed up with this new husband, sell him on eBay. Lots of Love, Dad."

A true story - - told to me by a chap who was sitting opposite these two :-

In a train from London to Manchester, an American was berating the Englishman sitting across from him in the compartment. "The trouble with you English is that you are too stuffy. You set yourselves apart too much. You think your English reserve and stiff upper lip makes you above the rest of us. Look at me... I'm me! I have a little Italian in me, a bit of Greek blood, a little Irish and some Spanish blood. What do you say to that?" The Englishman lowered his newspaper, looked over his glasses and replied, "How very sporting of your mother".

A SOUTH AFRICAN VALENTINES POEM ...

I smaak you stukkend, please say you'll be mine
 You're my moon, my stars, my Camps Bay sunshine
 You're my beaded love-letter, my breeze in the night
 You're my rooibos, my koeksister, my blitz firelight
 You make me feel better, you have the know-how
 I smaak you even more than Durb's bunny-chow
 You're my lamb-chop, my ribbetjies, my dröe wors et al
 You're my Mrs Balls chutney, my samoosa Halaal
 One smile from you and I float to the sky
 I feel like the Springboks have just scored a try
 You're my chilli, my roti, my eskimo pies
 I'd rather have you than the Lotto first prize
 And this letter my skattie, is only the start
 'Cos you've taken the cable-car straight to my heart
 You're my best friend, my lover, my very own wife
 You're truly the tomato sauce on the slap chips of my life.

MATT



*'Your teachers want you
 to attend summer school.
 They estimate that you've
 missed up to 20 detentions'*

MATT



*'The interminable lockdown
 restrictions just became
 too much for him'*

THE GREAT RESET



THE GREAT ESCAPE: 'games and pastimes'

A tribute to those brave men who planned and executed, and died in the “Great Escape”

Many of the recent generations have no true notion of the cost in lives and treasure that were paid for the liberties that we enjoy in this United States. They also have no idea in respect of the lengths that the “greatest generation” went to in order to preserve those liberties. Below is one true, small and entertaining story regarding those measures that are well worth reading, even if the only thing derived from the story is entertainment... Escape from WWII POW Camps — starting in 1940, an increasing number of British and Canadian Airmen found themselves as the involuntary guests of the Third Reich, and the Crown was casting about for ways and means to facilitate their escape. Now obviously, one of the most helpful aids to that end is a useful and accurate map, one showing not only where stuff was, but also showing the locations of 'safe houses' where a POW on-the-lam could go for food and shelter. Paper maps had some real drawbacks -- they make a lot of noise when you open and fold them, they wear out rapidly, and if they get wet, they turn into mush. Someone in MI-5 (similar to America's OSS) got the idea of printing escape maps on silk. It's durable, can be scrunched-up into tiny wads and, unfolded as many times as needed and, makes no noise whatsoever. At that time, there was only one manufacturer in Great Britain that had perfected the technology of printing on silk, and that was John Waddington Ltd. When approached by the government, the firm was only too happy to do its bit for the war effort. By pure coincidence, Waddington was also the U.K. Licensee for the popular American board game “Monopoly”. As it happened, 'games and pastimes' was a category of item qualified for insertion into 'CARE packages', dispatched by the International Red Cross to prisoners of war. Under the strictest of secrecy, in a securely guarded and inaccessible old workshop on the grounds of Waddington's, a group of sworn-to-secrecy employees began mass-producing escape maps, keyed to each region of Germany, Italy, and France or wherever Allied POW camps were located. When processed, these maps could be folded into such tiny dots that they would actually fit inside a Monopoly playing piece. As long as they were at it, the clever workmen at Waddington's also managed to add:

1. A playing token, containing a small magnetic compass
2. A two-part metal file that could easily be screwed together
3. Useful amounts of genuine high-denomination German, Italian, and French currency, hidden within the piles of Monopoly money!

British and American air crews were advised, before taking off on their first mission, how to identify a 'rigged' Monopoly set – by means of a tiny red dot, one cleverly rigged to look like an ordinary printing glitch, located in the corner of the “Free Parking” square. Of the estimated 35,000 Allied POWS who successfully escaped, an estimated one-third were aided in their flight by the rigged Monopoly sets. Everyone who did so was sworn to secrecy indefinitely, since the British Government might want to use this highly successful ruse in still another, future war. The story wasn't declassified until 2007, when the surviving craftsmen from Waddington's, as well as the firm itself, were finally honoured in a public ceremony. It's always nice when you can play that 'Get Out of Jail' Free' card! Some readers of this email are probably too young to have any personal connection to WWII (Sep. '39 to Aug. '45), but this is still an interesting bit of history for everyone to know.

Members may remember that John Page brought a genuine Waddington's silk map to a previous lunch in the happier days when we were having lunches... that map came from the “Escape Kit” issued to his late father.