



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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BRYANSTON 2021

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RAFOC RAMBLINGS

20th July 2026

GREETINGS:

Good morning. Ramblings went silent when circumstances changed for the scribe, getting married, having an extended family that grew extensively and moving house all took its toll and he decided to take an open-ended sabbatical. It will be hard to replace his interest in matters military, so we won't replicate the past but just have a Newsletter at least once a month, and certainly before the next lunch gathering.

LUNCH PAST and COMING UP:

July Lunch saw us receive a talk about The Elephant in the room – or Game Park. John Ledger very well addressed the subject matter, and we had 61 booked and paid showing interest in the subject. Unfortunately, there was an occurrence where two people attended who just gate crashed and hoodwinked Wanderers to set a place for one male then an additional female came and was granted entry. As soon as the food was over, they disappeared into the void of the Club. We will have to be aware that when we have large numbers this may occur again.

7th August lunch. A few weeks ago, there was a section of Carte Blanche (a well-known DSTV program for those that receive this passed on and are outside our borders) which looked at a couple of incidences where South African Airways operated internal flights in a time of really bad weather. They had to divert but were dangerously low on fuel and certainly below minimums as required. SAA wanted to carry more load and then just took on fuel required for a 'normal weather' flight. This interested several of us and we have asked Karl Jensen, well-respected retired SAA captain, to come along and give his view of the situation and tell us what the operations in his time would have done. He, naturally, won't be too critical of SAA but will be factual in good operating practice. Please make your reservation at bookings@rafoc.org and deposit your R350 pp into our account. It will be a member's lunch and male guests are welcome.

OTHER BITS OF INTEREST:

WWII foes unite: the wheel turns:-

A German defence group has bought the gear maker for the UK's Spitfire, bringing together two companies that were on opposite sides of WWII.

Bavaria based Renk is acquiring David Brown Defence in a deal worth about \$200m.

David Brown (based in North Yorkshire town of Huddersfield) traces its history back to 1860 (pre-Spitfire!) supplied gears for the Spitfire plus made gearboxes for the Churchill tank and engines for bombers that devastated cities such as Hamburg & Dresden. Renk also drawn to David Brown's strong market position in the naval division, with access to high-value programmes in the UK, Canada, and Australia with long lifelines.

Renk was founded 1873 in Augsburg and was a key part of Germany's war economy, making gearboxes for Wehrmacht tanks.

Today both companies produce high-precision transmissions for heavy armoured & tracked military vehicles, as well as naval vessels such as frigates. Renk makes the gearbox for Germany's main battle tank, the Leopard 2, while David Brown makes components for the Challenger.

UK defence companies that compete for the Ministry of Defence's programmes have become attractive targets for European arms groups. Belgium gunmaker FN Browning Group announced in May, its acquisition of UK sniper rifle manufacturers Accuracy International.

Financial Times 4th July article by Laura Pitel

A recent Financial Times on this AI topic - - many notes of concern. Mind you, the advent of the horseless-carriage and the telephone also raised sceptical voices.

Some of these AI in war' commentary included thoughts on :-

AI systems sift torrents of intelligence data from drones, satellites, and other sensors/inputs and the systems generate strike options far faster than traditional human-led planning. "How do you lift the veil on a system making 37mn computations per second". *(faster than a speeding bullet)*

The concern is that AI has evolved to the point where it can locate, identify and prioritize targets and make the full 'strike' call, inclusive of selecting the appropriate weaponry. This AI is already in use. 'The Centre for International and Strategic Studies estimated the US used 168 Tomahawks in the first 100 hours of the war that started on February 28th.' (That's \$3.6mn a pop).

'Traditionally, kill chains involved printing off documents and waiting for a senior commander to study and approve it. "Those (older) kill chains are measured in hours and sometimes days" said a defence tech expert who asked to remain anonymous. "The point of AI is to shrink that into seconds and minutes, almost instantaneous".

COMMENT from Rob Tannahil: Besides potentially cutting out human decision-making (urgency alerts, etc) , unleashed AI will undoubtedly also produce multiple 'and often near-simultaneous calls' - way way too much volume and way too quick for time consuming human evaluation to be possible. One risk lies in inadequate control over the data that is the lifeblood of all AI systems - they are only as good as the information they are trained on.' And the inputting of data can be corrupted by human bias.

Never-before-seen footage filmed from inside the cockpit of a Concorde during a test flight in 1970 has been unearthed:

The footage was taken by the late Bristol MP Tony Benn who was technology minister for the Labour government at the time.

He sat in the cockpit for the supersonic test flight on a Concorde prototype, while wearing a parachute.

Years later, Benn told a BBC Radio 4 documentary he had offered the footage to the BBC soon after the flight, but it had been rejected as its quality "was not good enough".

Benn filmed on board the fourth supersonic flight in 1970 which took off from RAF Fairford in Gloucestershire with chief test pilot Brian Trubshaw and co-pilot John Cochrane.

Concorde 002, which is now on show at the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton, Somerset, was undergoing performance and handling checks as it increased speed over these tests from Mach 1 - which is equal to the speed of sound - to Mach 2, which is twice the speed of sound.

It had successfully gone supersonic on 25 March 1970 and would reach Mach 2 later that year on 12 November.

Benn family

Aviation expert Jonathan Glancey called it "a glorious piece of film." Aviation expert and author of Concorde: The Rise and Fall of the Supersonic Airliner, Jonathan Glancey, described the footage as "a piece of history."

"It's remarkable to find footage of that age, it's the real thing," he said. "Tony Benn flying in one of the first supersonic test flights with Brian Trubshaw at the controls. "It's a historic moment. It's a glorious piece of film that captures the sense of adventure and flight in just a few seconds."

PA Media

The footage was unearthed in the private collection of Tony Benn's family. The film has spent decades in the private collection of the Benn family which has given the BBC access to the footage. Benn's son Hilary, who is a Labour MP, said: "It was my brother who found it in boxes, he's been archiving his dad's work."

View the films at <https://bbc.com/news/articles/cz9lj2vjxxo>

Greek F-16 fighter jet crash-lands at busy Zakynthos airport 9th July.

A Hellenic Air Force F-16 fighter jet has crash-landed at Zakynthos airport, closing one of Greece's busiest summer holiday terminals.

The aircraft - which was on a training flight - landed (???) at about 13:45 local time (10:45 GMT) on Thursday after developing a technical fault, the air force said.

It added that the pilot was "in good health" and that the cause of the incident was being investigated. Greek media reported that the aircraft had received an indication of an onboard fire before landing and caught fire on the runway, prompting an emergency response from firefighters and airport personnel. The fighter jet landed without deploying its landing gear, causing it to slide dozens of metres along the runway, Greece's Kathimerini newspaper reported. The Hellenic Air Force has not commented on this report.

Video emerged on social media showing the jet ablaze while being doused by firefighters.

The air force said the aircraft was from the 335 Squadron of the 116th Combat Wing based at Araxos Air Base in western Greece.

The runway was closed following the incident, causing delays. The airport's arrivals and departure boards show information about all of Thursday's remaining flights delayed until 21:00 - including those scheduled to leave hours earlier.

The incident comes at the beginning of the summer holiday season, when thousands of tourists are estimated to travel to the island a week, primarily from the UK.

A specialist air force team was expected to travel to the Ionian island to remove the aircraft from the runway and allow airport operations to resume.

<https://bbc.com/news/articles/czrxz18720eo>

Rolls Royce:

The Trent 7000 has now passed 5 million flying hours, helping airlines carry 95 million passengers over more than a billion miles. Powering the Airbus A330neo, it brings together reliability, versatility and efficiency in real operations.

<https://share.google/lfr7QF9LV4kfs54hu>

Lancaster sends emergency alert after engine issue - 12 July 2025:

BBMF Lancaster suffers engine problem during flypast.

An investigation has been launched after a Battle of Britain Memorial Flight (BBMF) Lancaster bomber suffered an engine problem earlier, the RAF has confirmed.

The Avro Lancaster PA474, which had been taking part in the RAF Waddington Families Day in Lincolnshire, sent a general emergency alert as black smoke was seen coming from one of its four engines.

According to the RAF, the crew of the iconic World War Two aircraft "diagnosed unusual engine behaviour" and returned to its base at RAF Coningsby "as a precautionary measure."

An RAF spokesperson added: "Crew are well trained to handle such events, and an investigation of the aircraft has been launched."

None of the aircrew were injured and it's not known if the investigation will impact upcoming scheduled appearances.

The BBMF also operates five Spitfires, two Hurricanes and a C47 Dakota. The Lancaster is the most famous and successful RAF bomber of World War Two. Out of 7,377 that were built, the PA474 is one of only two airworthy Lancasters left in the world. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c17wvqgxz9do>

Red Arrows get first woman leader:

13 January 2026

Wing Cdr Sasha Nash says she hopes "to inspire future generations of aviators" during her time in the role

The Red Arrows will be led by a woman for the first time in its history.

Wing Cdr Sasha Nash, who has taken over from Wing Cdr Adam Collins as the most senior officer in the Royal Air Force aerobatic team, described it as the "opportunity of a lifetime."

Nash said she was "incredibly proud," adding she hoped to "inspire future generations of aviators from all backgrounds."

In 2023, the team faced criticism after an inquiry found predatory behaviour towards women within the team was "widespread and normalised".

The Red Arrows team has performed thousands of displays in more than 50 countries. Nash, a former Tornado pilot who has flown tours in Afghanistan, will command 150 RAF and civilian personnel at the team's headquarters at RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire, and have responsibility for overseeing all aspects of the operation.

"This is a career opportunity of a lifetime," she said. "If someone had told me 20 years ago that, one day, I'd be Officer Commanding of the Red Arrows, I don't think I would have believed it." Talking about her passion for aviation, she said it had all started when she was a child. "I was a six-year-old little girl when I decided to join the Royal Air Force and to fly fast jets – inspired by air shows and seeing the speed and excitement of aircraft displaying at those events.

"That ambition stayed with me throughout school, where I achieved a sixth form scholarship and subsequent university bursary to join the RAF."

Nash, who has previously worked alongside the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight based at RAF Coningsby in Lincolnshire, and played lacrosse for England at junior and senior level, paid tribute to her predecessor.

"I've worked alongside Adam over the last couple of years and witnessed, first hand, his utter dedication to both the team and the RAF."

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cedwg1q04zjo>

Drones over bases 'likely from Russia shadow fleet'

3 July 2026

RAF Lakenheath is home to the USAF's 48th Fighter Wing, aka the Liberty Wing.

Swarms of drones that flew over three air bases in Norfolk and Suffolk were likely launched from Russia's shadow fleet of cargo ships, according to experts. Unmanned aerial vehicles were spotted over RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk and RAF Feltwell in Norfolk in November 2024, sparking a major alert. An inquiry by the Ministry of Defence Police failed to identify any suspects. But an investigation by The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), a think tank, said the unmanned aerial vehicles were likely launched from Russian-linked commercial vessels in the North Sea.

Bob Jones/Geograph

Drones were spotted flying over RAF Feltwell in Norfolk in November 2024. The report by the IISS said about 170 sightings were reported between 20 and 26 November in 2024 over the three air bases, which are all used by the United States Air Force (USAF). The drones entered the air bases at low altitude with their lights visible and departed at higher altitudes, the report continued.

There were swarms of up to 20 drones at a time and some were said to be flying low over runway approaches.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ceqdw4d70q5o>

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