



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

P.O. Box 69726

BRYANSTON 2021

info@rafoc.org

www.rafoc.org

President:	David MacKinnon-Little
Vice Presidents:	Basil Hersov, Geoff Quick, David Lake
Chairman:	Bruce Harrison bruce@jbharrison.co.za Tel: 011 673 0291 Cell: 083 325 0025
Vice Chairman:	Jon Adams vice-chairman@rafoc.org 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
Almoner:	Rob Tannahill Cell: 082 806 6779
Bank Account:	Nedbank - Melrose Arch Br: 19 66 05 Account 19 66 278 063

RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 149

10th February 2023

GREETINGS:

Loadshedding continues – Cabinet still in the dark... Mabuza surprise resignation announcement sets cat amongst the pigeons.... wild jockeying for positions before SONA... another gobsmacking revelation of Satour's proposed waste of our hard-earned taxes... "Spurgate" develops legs, 3 Board members resign, CEO Kumalo apologies to Parliament... "own goal" for SA Tourism "ends here, now" says Parliament Committee... Lindiwe Sisulu dribbled into touch... protests on water shortages in Parys... crime spree continues unabated... 30 armed men rob Mpumalanga Mall... 10 people gunned down in mass shootings in the Eastern Cape... Eben Etzebeth named Player of Year. Death toll soars to 20,500 plus, and rising, after disastrous earthquake in Turkey and Syria... "miracle baby" born under rubble... Russia suffers 'deadliest 24 hours' in Ukraine... video appears to show Russian troops beating own wounded officer... Zelensky makes first trip to UK since outbreak of war – thanks UK for support and appeals for "powerful fighter planes"... Chinese spy balloon shot down off US Coast... row erupts with China... Blinken postpones China trip... Bitter fighting in Donetsk region of Ukraine... Dominic Raab under pressure over bullying allegations... On 3 Feb 1960 Harold Macmillan gave his famous "Wind of Change" speech... Van der Merwe scores winning try as Scotland beat England in first Six Nations game... Fawltly Towers reboot couldn't be better timed...

SAAF CASUALTIES IN DRC:



One South African Air Force (SAAF) crew member has been killed and another wounded after their Oryx transport helicopter was hit by a single sniper's bullet in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on Sunday 5 February. Flight Engineer Sergeant Vusi Mabena was killed Captain Mathew Allan wounded and, Major Omolemo Matlapeng unhurt. The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) confirmed the incident in a statement, saying that the Oryx (821) came under fire in Goma. Spokesperson Sipiwe Dlamini said, "A crew member was fatally shot. Another suffered injuries but continued flying the helicopter and landed safely at Goma Airport. The SANDF is in the process of informing family members of the soldiers involved in this unfortunate incident." Amadou Ba, a spokesman for the UN mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), said the incident happened mid-afternoon during a flight to Goma, and that the source of the gunfire has yet to be determined. The Oryx had taken off from the city of Beni. A United Nations incident report stated that the commander was shot in the shoulder and the flight engineer was shot in the chest. Another Oryx (819) took both to hospital, but the flight engineer passed away. Defence Minister Thandi Modise, her deputy, Thabang Makwetla, the Acting Secretary for Defence, Thobekile Gamede, and the Chief of SANDF, General Ruzdani Maphwanya, expressed their condolences to the family of the deceased and wish the wounded soldier a speedy recovery. MONUSCO chief Bintou Keita said she "strongly condemns this cowardly attack on an aircraft bearing the UN emblem," and added that "attacks against peacekeepers can constitute a war crime." MONUSCO will spare no effort in agreement with the Congolese authorities so that the perpetrators of this heinous act are brought to justice, the peacekeeping entity stated. Kobus Marais, Democratic Alliance Shadow Defence Minister, wished a speedy recovery for the commander, who is in a critical state in hospital. He also requested Defence Minister Thandi Modise to brief the Joint Standing Committee on Defence on the circumstances of the incident, and whether it happened while flying as a pair of Oryx and whether they were escorted by Rooivalk attack helicopters. "We cannot allow our soldiers to be unnecessarily exposed to dangers on foreign soil if it should've been prevented. Maybe it's time to consider whether the highest priority is still to have our air support capabilities in a foreign country while we have a critical shortage of air defence capabilities in South Africa and along our land and maritime borders," Marais said. This is not the first time that Oryx – and Rooivalk – helicopters have been shot at whilst deployed to the DRC. A Rooivalk was hit in the tail by small arms fire on one occasion, and at least two Oryx have been hit by small arms fire in the DRC over the last decade.

CAS APPEARS BEFORE COMMONS DEFENCE:

The head of the Royal Air Force has said that his service needs more planes. Appearing before MPs on the Commons Defence, Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston said: "If you are asking the Chief of the Air Staff if he needs more aeroplanes, Mr Chair, the answer is 'yes'." However, speaking about previous defence budget cuts that were made, ACM Wigston said that they were justifiable at the time, and he would not disagree with them. When challenged by Labour MP Derek Twigg whether he agreed that "you [the RAF] are underfunded and hollowed out", Sir Mike said: "Historically. When I look back to 2010 and earlier and look at some of the decisions our predecessors... were forced to take, I wouldn't disagree. But with the decisions that were made in 2015 to grow the Typhoon Force by another two squadrons, bring back Poseidon Maritime Control, the decisions that were made in 2021 to set up Space Command, to continue to grow the F-35 force beyond 48, so up to 74 aircraft, to continue to grow the Atlas Force with around another six platforms later this decade, that's not hollowing out, that is growth for a future, more uncertain, world," the Chief of the Air Staff said. According to the World Directory of Modern Military Aircraft, the RAF's current active aircraft inventory consists of 475 units. The force's airpower capability, specifically the fast jet capability, splits into two: the Typhoon Force, which the Chief of the Air Staff told MPs is an "established force, which is still a growing force" and the Lightning Force, a "force in growth still". Typhoon Force - ACM Wigston informed the committee that the Typhoon Force currently consists of 137 aircraft on seven squadrons, the operational conversion unit, and the trials unit. Last year, the force flew more than 21,000 hours, 5-10% more hours than in a normal year, and the RAF chief highlighted that "what was most significant was that it was almost a 100% increase in operational hours." He added: "When I talk about the backbone of the Royal Air Force, it's those seven combat air squadrons on Typhoon." "In the context of Ukraine facing activity, and NATO, over the last 12 months, they have flown over

500 sorties, from the north of Norway all the way down through the Black Sea into the Mediterranean." (ForcesNet)

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE...



Russia last Wednesday landed the world's biggest military aircraft in South Africa, the Tupolev TU 160 "Blackjack" in a rare display of cooperation between the defence forces of the two countries. The two bombers, which are capable of launching nuclear missiles, are the first to ever land in Africa and were escorted by fighter jets from the South African Air Force as they arrived at the border. The bombers arrived at around 4pm and a number of other Russian military aircraft will also land at the site.

The bombers had initially been scheduled to land earlier. "The military-to-military relations between the two countries are not solely built on struggle politics but rather on fostering mutually beneficial partnerships based on common interests," the South African National Defence Force said in a statement. Russia's defence ministry put out a similar statement.

Story and pics at <https://www.biznews.com/briefs/2019/10/23/russia-nuclear-bombers-sent-sa>

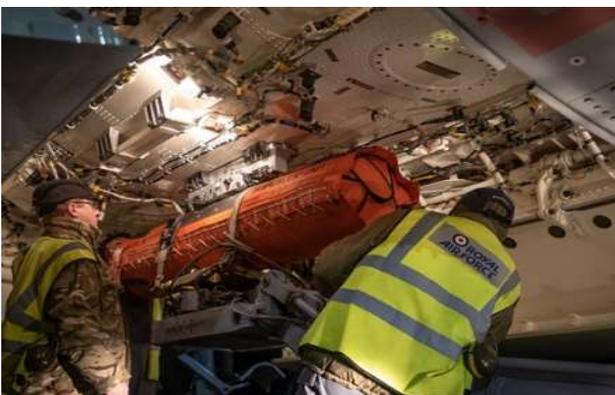
RAF UKRANIAN TRAINING AND SUPPORT:



The RAF has flown Ukrainian tank and artillery crews to the UK for training.

As part of the ongoing support to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, tank and artillery crews were flown on board an RAF Voyager. Since summer 2022, the RAF has flown over 11,000 Ukrainians to the UK for military training. The majority of the training has been infantry skills for Ukrainian volunteers. The most recent arrivals will be taught how to operate Challenger 2 tanks as well as AS90 mobile artillery, following the UK's commitment to provide them to Ukraine. Alongside these passenger flights, the RAF has also delivered large quantities of military equipment to Ukraine, this has included: 83000 helmets, 18000 ballistic vests, 14 aircraft pallets of medical equipment, winter clothing, missiles and ammunition.

RAF POSEIDON UPGRADE:



A RAF Poseidon MRA1 maritime patrol aircraft has successfully deployed Search and Rescue equipment capable of sustaining up to 100 persons in distress at sea for up to three days.

In trials conducted off the Southwest coast, a RAF Poseidon MRA1 dropped a UNIPAC-III Search and Rescue kit from its weapons bay into the sea. The semi-rigid aerial delivery container activates when impacting the water to provide an inflatable life raft & survival equipment for survivors.

The survival aid kit includes food, water, and communications to support up to 20 persons for 72 hours. Up to five systems can be carried by Poseidon and delivered in a single air drop if required, supporting up to 100 survivors. For the trial a Poseidon flew from RAF Lossiemouth where engineers had loaded the equipment aboard the aircraft. The flight was flown by personnel from 206 and CXX Squadrons. This trial proved the ability for UK Poseidon to organically deploy search and rescue equipment from the aircraft. Once additional activities have been completed, this will be added to the overall capability suite for the platform and declared for use by all Squadron crews; anticipated timeline April 23. The nine-strong fleet of RAF Poseidon aircraft has already conducted search and rescue missions, but the new equipment enhances the ability to support long range search and rescue and provide support to Royal Navy vessels including submarines. Importantly it will allow Poseidon to conduct the drop of search and rescue dinghies itself, rather than operate in tandem with others to do so. "As a dedicated maritime patrol aircraft Poseidon has the sensors and equipment to search wide areas of ocean quickly to locate those who may be in distress. The ability to deploy kit which enables people to survive in a hostile environment until they can be rescued is a welcome addition to our core capabilities of long-range anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions". Air Commodore Hicks Assistant Chief of Staff Capability Delivery Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance. *(RAF News)*

MEMBERS WRITE:

Dave Evans writes from New England: I don't have a lot of 'aviation' to update you on from New England - Jet Rangers and Robbie's, and the occasional Blackhawk and Chinook, and two F35s once, several months ago. There's a GA airfield towards the horizon west of our flat, and we're quite high up so have a good view that way - quite a few Pipers and Cessnas doing what I assume are training circuits. The main reason I'm writing is the weather: after a very mild winter so far, we've got -20C forecast for tomorrow morning, with wind chill on top of that. They are saying some places around here may register the lowest temperatures they've ever recorded! It's undoubtedly going to be the lowest temperature I've ever experienced. My son is saying that if you're not careful, exposed flesh goes numb before you even notice, and then frostbite sets in!

(RAMBLINGS received this just before a news report that record coldest wind-chill of -78F temperature was recorded last weekend in the North-East near Mount Washington after warnings over all of New England)

Bruce Prescott sends in a steady stream of aviation articles *(Thanks Bruce!)*: Emirates operated its first milestone demonstration flight on a Boeing 777-300ER, powering one of its engines with 100% Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), the first in the Middle East and North Africa to be powered by 100% SAF. SAF is produced by converting readily available materials into a drop-in replacement crude oil. Thus far, those materials have included soybeans and non-edible oils such as used cooking oils, and animal fats. Soon, sustainable biomass, such as forest trimmings and crop waste, will also be used to make SAF. The result is a fuel that's chemically identical to petroleum-based diesel and can be implemented without changes to aircraft technology.

TRANS KALAHARI RAILWAY:

Trans Kalahari Railway Project (TKR) Project Update – The Joint Ministerial Committee, responsible for Transport from the of the Republic of Botswana and Namibia – resolved to establish a Task Team during their last meeting in November 2022. The Task Team, consisting of representatives from Botswana Railways, TransNamib Holdings, and the two member states, were tasked with finding ways to expedite the Trans Kalahari Railway Line. From January 30 to February 3, 2023, the Botswana Railways Task Team visited Windhoek in Namibia. They aim to develop a blueprint document with their Namibian counterparts that will guide the two member states in expediting the delivery of the Trans Kalahari Railway Project (TKR) project. The railway line project, which has been in the planning stages since 2010, will stretch over 1,447 kilometres. The project was initiated with the commissioning of a feasibility study and was solidified with the signing of a bilateral agreement in 2014. The line will start from Mmamabula and Rasesa and will follow the Trans-Kalahari Highway through Mamuno and into Namibia, passing through Gobabis, Windhoek,

Okahandja, before finally reaching its endpoint at Walvis Bay. Since the early 1900's there have been a number of similar schemes for a rail link to link Zambian and Zimbabwean railway systems with the port of Walvis Bay.

TRANSNET RFQ FOR CONTAINER CORRIDOR:

After years of neglect and deterioration in infrastructure and capacity of SA's Rail system, Transnet has issued a Request for Qualifications to identify parties interested in a 20-year Operating Lease for the operation and maintenance of the Container Corridor, a key part of South Africa's freight rail transportation network. The lease aims to provide investment for the rail network, increase reliability and efficiency, and boost South Africa's trade competitiveness. Transnet is looking for investors to lease and operate its Container Corridor, a 670 km fully electrified double-tracked rail line running between Johannesburg and Durban, which is a key part of the country's manufacturing sector. The Container Corridor rail mainline is a fully electrified double-tracked rail line running from Booth in KwaZulu-Natal to Union in Gauteng. While the mainline is 670km in route length, the double line and various major marshalling yards and enabling rail lines takes the total track length of the Container Corridor to 1 621km. Transnet has released a Request for Qualifications to identify parties interested in a 20-year Operating Lease for the line's operation and maintenance. The Container Corridor, which includes the Bayhead Back of Port Terminal and defined Inland Terminals of City Deep, Kascon and Bayhead. The lease will provide investment for the rail network and rolling stock, as well as increased reliability and efficiency, with the goal of shifting containers from road to rail. It has been well documented, most recently in the Mining Indaba, that South Africa's export systems are underperforming due to insufficient investment in port and rail infrastructure, affecting the country's regional and global trade competitiveness. The Container Corridor, linking Gauteng and eThekweni, is a crucial part of the freight rail transportation network but is not performing optimally. Whilst improving rail service in the Container Corridor and the Port of Durban as a Container hub port would have wide-ranging benefits – Transnet's financial challenges limit its ability to invest in the Corridor's turnaround and take advantage of its growth potential. The RFQ briefing session will take place on the 2/17/2023 10:00:00 AM. *(good luck if they think that corrupt activities will not surface)*

BLEDISLOE CUP OBSERVANCES:

The schedule has been released for this year's Bledisloe Cup and all future International Ruby games. At 6pm players will enter the field and line up either side of halfway. There will be a Welcome to Country and then they will take a knee for 1 minute. A 'smoking ceremony' will then take place. All past and present elders will be honoured. After that there will be a minute's silence for everybody who has died. Indigenous people will then be recognised as the traditional owners of this country. White people will be acknowledged as invading colonialists. A formal apology on behalf of all heterosexual white males will be made by Kevin Rudd to all females in history who have been harassed or not being given equal pay. Both teams will then sing the National Anthems in Maori, Aboriginal and English. Only the 'white players' are expected to sing the anthems in English *(for the Wallabies that will only be about 2 or 3)*. They will then go to the middle of the ground where the All Blacks will perform the Haka. After that, players will go into their religious groups to sing and pay homage to their friends in the sky. Atheists will go into their own group to talk about what they have done to combat climate change. Both teams will then come together in the middle of the field and hold hands while putting rainbow tape on each other's arms. The Wallabies will be wearing their new strip designed by Lisa Wilkinson. It will have aboriginal artwork along with black, blue, white, red, pink and brown ribbons printed on the front of the jumper. The jumper will have a large Z on the front for the team's new sponsor, clean energy billionaire Zali Steggall. The Wallabies will be captained by Bill Smith as Joe Bloggs is still serving a 10-game suspension after it was discovered his great uncle made a feminist remark to a barmaid in 1965. The game will also have 2-minute time-outs after a try is scored so mental coaches can enter the field and talk to the players who have just been scored against, to discuss their emotions. Purple cards will also be used in the match for players to be sent from the field for 15 minutes if they say anything mean. The game should finish around 2am the next day. As the stadium is powered by 2 windmills and rooftop solar panels, if there is no wind or sun in

the 2 days prior to the game, it will be moved to an afternoon game starting at 12.30pm which is expected to finish before dark.

TURKIYE TERROR:



Spare a thought for the people of Turkey... More than 2,000 people have been killed after a second tremor struck Turkey just hours after a massive 7.8 earthquake hit the same region. The epicentre of the first quake was in the southern Turkish city of Gaziantep, with much of the devastation centred along the border with Syria, where hundreds of thousands of refugees reside. The second tremor struck around noon and is feared to have caused many more deaths. Frequent aftershocks have rocked the area since the initial quake and tremors were felt as far away as Cyprus and Egypt. The earthquake, the largest to strike Turkey in decades, wiped out entire sections of major cities in a region filled with people who have fled war in Syria and other conflicts. The tremors occurred in a seismically active area known as the East Anatolian fault zone, which has produced damaging earthquakes in the past. Geologists said the earthquake was a strike-slip quake, where two tectonic plates slide past each other horizontally, instead of moving up and down. The earthquake will force several million people living in the south of Turkey to camp out in the streets during an unusually cold period. Temperatures across the affected areas hovered around zero on Sunday night, and rain and snow is forecast for the next few years in a region where winters are typically mild. Heating is likely to be a lasting problem in the region as the authorities cut off gas supplies and electricity supplies were also disrupted by the earthquake.

CHEERS FOR NOW:

The next Ordinary Lunch Friday, 3 March 2023, 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers. It is the AGM of the Club, so please do come along and participate in the proceedings. Traditionally we do not invite guests to this lunch.

The last lunch was the first of the 'new beginnings' and was an experiment for both the Wanderers Banqueting and ourselves. It was not without a few glitches, which was to be anticipated. As expected, when we discussed it after the lunch there were a few negatives, but generally the lunch was better received than those we had before. If you have any more suggestions, please feel free to send them to us so the Committee can investigate at their meeting on the 21st February.

The Committee continues to look at other locations and we will report back at the AGM.

Please book with bookings@rafoc.org – it helps greatly to make the necessary organisation with the caterers.

TAILPIECE:

The years between 50 and 70 are the hardest. You are always being asked to do things, and yet you are not decrepit enough to turn them down." T.S. Elliot

"At age 20, we worry about what others think of us; at age 40, we don't care what they think of us; at age 60, we discover they haven't been thinking of us at all." Ann Landers

"The important thing to remember is that I'm probably going to forget." Unknown

"It's paradoxical that the idea of living a long life appeals to everyone, but the idea of getting old doesn't appeal to anyone." Andy Rooney

"The older I get, the better I used to be." Lee Trevino

"I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a lot more as they get older, and then it dawned on me... they're cramming for their final exam." George Carlin

"Grandchildren don't make a man feel old, it's the knowledge that he's married to a grandmother that does." J. Norman Collie

(Sent in by the Sherriff of Nottingham Road)

MATT

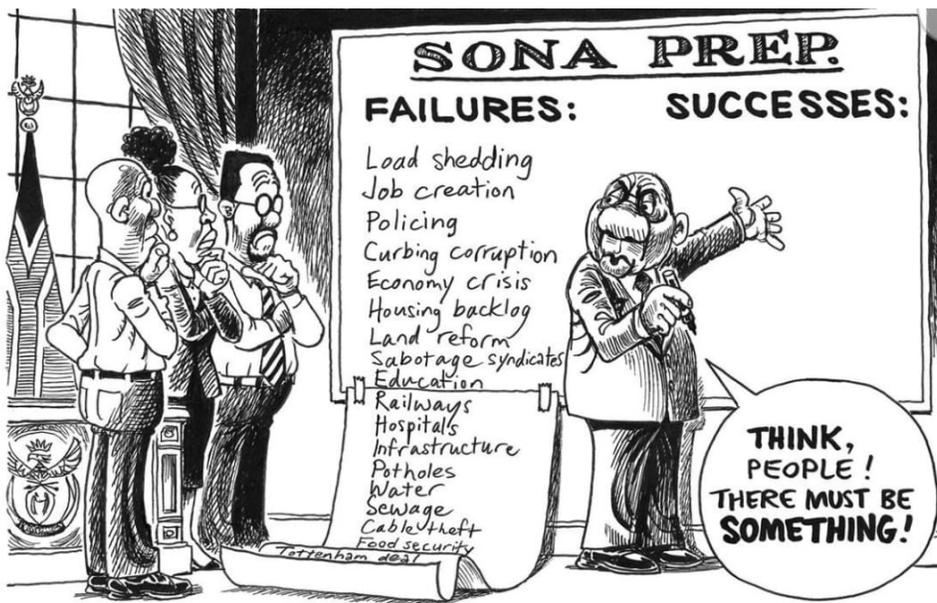


'Cheer up, this is the shortest month. There are only 28 strikes in February'

MATT



'The Chinese won't send a spy balloon to the UK. Our fridge and lightbulbs tell them everything already'





The Wright Brothers fly over the Carolinas, 1903.



The Wong brothers fly over the Carolinas, 2023.

"This month your wife will speak less"
 Nothing related to astrology ...it is just that this month has only 28 days!! 🤪



Meanwhile in SA...



The only thing I truly trust in the newspaper today, "" my "Fish 'n Chips"



- even that I'll take with a pinch of salt.

Carlos
 News24
 2.2.23

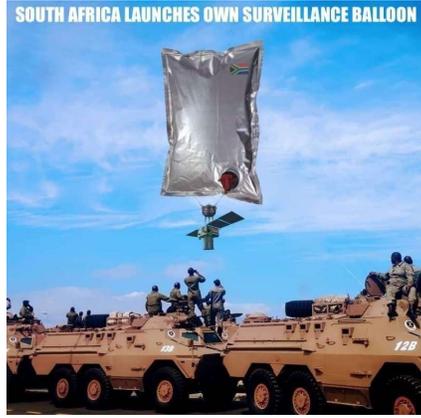


CYRIL IN BLUNDERLAND

CHINESE WEATHER RESEARCH AIRSHIP



SOUTH AFRICA LAUNCHES OWN SURVEILLANCE BALLOON



SAVE THE ARTHUR SCARF VICTORIA CROSS MEDAL:

The Royal Air Force Museum is calling on the public's support to help keep Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf's Victoria Cross medal in the UK.



Arthur Scarf was the recipient of the only Victoria Cross awarded to the Royal Air Force for services in the Far East during the World War Two. This incredibly rare medal, and Arthur's Story, is a national treasure which represents an extraordinary and highly poignant story of great personal courage, and the RAF Museum is determined for it to remain within the UK. The Museum is a registered charity and has just a few months to raise £660,000 to match the auction bid placed by an overseas buyer. If successful in the mission to acquire this one-of-a-kind medal, the Victoria Cross will be preserved in the RAF Museum's national collection on public display in London, for future generations to see. The Museum is hoping to raise £250,000 of the required funds through public donations. Money raised will be added to a contribution being made from the Museum's own funds, and a potential grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund. Donate to [#SaveTheScarfVC](#) on the Museum's dedicated Save the Scarf VC GoFundMe page. The Victoria Cross is the highest decoration for valour in the British armed forces, awarded for an act of extreme bravery in the face of the enemy. Such is the medals legendary status; recipients are often revered as heroes. Only 22 Victoria Crosses were awarded to RAF personnel during the World War Two, and just one, for their service in the Far East - the Victoria Cross that was awarded to Arthur Scarf. Arthur Scarf joined the RAF in 1936 aged 23, and three years later was sent to Singapore with No. 62 Squadron to join the forces in the Far East. On the 9th December 1941, he led a formation of Bristol Blenheim aircraft in a daylight attack on Japanese forces occupying airfields in Burma, what is today Thailand. As Scarf

became airborne, a formation of Japanese bombers swept over the airfield destroying every British aircraft on the ground. Realising that none of his squadron's aircraft had survived the Japanese bombing, Scarf was determined to complete his squadron's allotted task. Flying low for some 30 miles into enemy occupied territory, Scarf skillfully evaded several attacks by Japanese fighters, and released the bombs whilst his crew manned the machine guns. With the task complete and now heading home, more Japanese fighters arrived attacking at close range. Greatly outnumbered, hopelessly outgunned and in aircraft slower than the enemies, Scarf flew at tree top height, desperately seeking whatever protection he could find. Despite evading the worst of the Japanese attacks, machine gun fire riddled the Blenheim. Scarf was mortally wounded but continued to fly the aircraft while being held upright by his crew mates and managed to make a controlled crash landing at a nearby British controlled airfield without injury to his crew, but Scarf died from his wounds shortly afterwards. The Victoria Cross was awarded posthumously in 1946 and was presented to his widow, Elizabeth, by King George VI at Buckingham Palace. Not only does Squadron Leader Scarf's Victoria Cross represent his outstanding devotion to duty and supreme act of bravery, it is also a powerful reminder of the sacrifices made by all the British and Commonwealth service personnel fighting in the Far East, and the role of the RAF within this context. "This unique medal is part of our nation's heritage, and a significant element to a decisive moment in British history. There is an imminent risk of it leaving the UK, but we're hopeful that with public support we can prevent this from happening, and for the medal to remain on our shores. If we're successful, the medal will be displayed at the Museum, in the heart of our collection, helping us to share the stories of all those RAF personnel who fought, lived and died in the conflict". *Dr Harry Raffal RAF Museum Historian and Head of Collections.*



Single pilot controls



Mk IV

AROUND THE WORLD EPIC 1942...



The morning of 6th January 1942 was going to be a cold one. Not that this was unusual for New York, mused the night-shift air controller at LaGuardia's tower, but it did mean he'd have to wrap up extra warm when he headed home. He looked at his watch. It was 5:54 a.m. Two hours to go, then. Two hours more to stay awake. This was the downside of overnight duty: no planes to manage meant it was always a struggle to keep alert, but rules were rules and the tower had to be manned at all times. It made sense, he supposed, pouring himself another cup of coffee, but with America now at war surely there were more important things for a trained air controller to...

LAGUARDIA TOWER LAGUARDIA TOWER - OVER.

The sudden burst of sound from the radio caught the controller by surprise and he scrambled to try and stop his cup of coffee from falling to the floor.

LAGUARDIA TOWER LAGUARDIA TOWER. THIS IS PAN AMERICAN CLIPPER NC18602 INBOUND FROM AUCKLAND NEW ZEALAND. DUE TO ARRIVE PAN AMERICAN MARINE TERMINAL LAGUARDIA IN SEVEN MINUTES - OVER.

The confused controller gave up trying and let the cup drop, shattering on the floor. This made no sense, he thought. It was still before six and there were no seaplane flights due. Then, a new wave of confusion hit him: New Zealand was - almost literally - on the other side of the world from New York. There was no Pan Am route between those two places. No airline flew that far from the East Coast! The internal intercom next to the radio suddenly crackled into life.

"Erm... LaGuardia... this is Flight Watch at the Marine Terminal..." The voice sounded both amused and confused. "Did ya hear that too?! Sounds like we got ourselves a surprise visitor!" The controller grabbed the intercom. "Yeah.. uh... What the hell are we supposed to do with him?! He can't land in the seaplane channel in the dark! And where the hell did he pop up from anyway?!" "I guess we'll just have to hold him until daylight." Flight Watch replied, sounding just as baffled as he did. "I just hope he has enough gas."

The controller reached for the radio and thumbed it on.

PAN AMERICAN CLIPPER 18602. THIS IS LAGUARDIA. THE SEAPLANE CHANNEL IS CLOSED UNTIL DAYLIGHT. YOU WILL HAVE TO HOLD FOR ABOUT AN HOUR BEFORE WE CAN CLEAR YOU FOR LANDING. OVER.

The reply came swiftly. LAGUARDIA ROGER. NO PROBLEM. WE CAN DO THAT. OVER.

The controller paused for a second. He still couldn't believe this was happening. If Flight Watch hadn't heard it too then he'd have probably imagined he was dreaming. In the end he couldn't resist. He had to ask again. SORRY PAN AMERICAN CLIPPER 18602 BUT SAY AGAIN, CONFIRM YOUR DEPARTURE POINT. OVER.

There was a brief pause, and then the reply came over the radio crisp and clear, leaving no room for doubt. I SAY AGAIN, INBOUND FROM AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND. BY WAY OF THE LONG WAY ROUND. OVER.

San Francisco, December 1941

To Captain Bob Ford, a veteran pilot for Pan-Am, 1st December 1941 was just a day like any other. Sure, war was raging in Europe, but for now at least the USA was staying out of it. This meant it was business as usual out here on the West Coast at Treasure Island, the place from which Pan Am's clipper services departed on their regular scheduled flights across the Pacific ocean. Well, almost business as usual. Ford, like most other Pan Am employees involved in the airline's pacific trade, was aware that relations between the USA and Japan had been worsening for some time. Whilst few expected that it would come to war, even the airline itself had recognised that it was no longer impossible. By 1941 Pan American was a leviathan of aviation, largely thanks to the vision (and often cutthroat business practices) of one man - Juan Terry Trippe. Described by President Roosevelt as "the most fascinating Yale gangster I ever met," Trippe had spotted an opportunity to make money as the aviation age dawned and had set about building up an aerial empire. It had begun with a simple government contract to run mail to Cuba, but by the forties Pan Am had grown into a passenger and cargo carrier that spanned the world. Trippe was a man who always believed in the financial and publicity value of constantly pushing the frontiers of aviation. Nothing represented this better than Pan American's glamorous "Clipper" services. These stretched right across the Pacific, connecting the US West Coast to the likes of Hawaii, China and New Zealand beyond. The fleet of planes that serviced these routes consisted entirely of flying boats. They were the only aircraft with the range to get there. Even they couldn't do it non-stop. In order to run long-haul services then, Pan American had been forced to build a huge network of refuelling stations and bases on islands and atolls across the Pacific, and along the coasts of the Atlantic. They'd also been forced to push the very boundaries of engineering in order to build the seaplanes that would service these routes. The creative talent of aviation legends such as Glenn Curtiss and Igor Sikorsky had been commandeered by Trippe and Pan American, first to produce planes that could cross the still-vast distances required at all, and then to make them larger and larger in a constant quest to increase

the number of passengers, mail and cargo that could be carried. The seaplane that Captain Ford took command of that day represented the apex of that collective development. Over 100ft long and with a wingspan of over 150ft, the Boeing 314 was (and remains) one of the largest aircraft ever to take to the sky. It could carry up to 74 passengers and a crew of 11 and was one of the few planes with enough range to fly all of the long legs required to island hop from San Francisco to Auckland.

"Hold dinner for me"

This particular Boeing 314 was the California Clipper and Ford's crew was largely his usual one. There was one exception - his radio officer, Jack Poindexter. Poindexter was Chief Flight Radio Officer for Pan Am's Pacific division, and thus these days more likely to be found back in the office than on the planes. California Clipper had been fitted with some new radio equipment, though, and Poindexter wanted to see it in action. So when he discovered that the California was short a second radioman for the first leg of her trip (the short hop to Los Angeles) he had volunteered to come along. "I'll be a little late tonight," he'd told his wife on the phone. "But hold dinner for me." This last-minute change aside, all preparations went to plan and soon the California Clipper was airborne and heading for Los Angeles.



Clipper Flight Deck



Boeing 314 Clipper taking off to Hawaii.

Poindexter had just called his wife to let her know he had arrived in LA and would shortly be heading back when he saw Oscar Hendrickson, the California Clipper's Flight Radio Officer, heading his way. Instantly he knew it was bad news. That news was that Harry Strickland, the second radioman meant to join the California Clipper here at LA, had been taken to hospital with suspected appendicitis. Poindexter instantly knew where this was going. Pan American regulations were that no Clipper flight could go ahead without two radiomen - a necessity given the 15–18 hour flight legs involved. With no relief crew available at LA that meant Poindexter was the only man who could take his place. Despite having brought no spare clothes or money, he was going to have to go all the way with them to New Zealand. "I just got through talking to my wife!" He protested, although he knew it was in vain. "Now she'll be really tee'd off!" "Do you have a better idea?" replied Hendrickson, apologetically. Poindexter didn't, and when the California Clipper took to the sky that afternoon he was sitting at its radio desk next to Hendrickson. With the late afternoon sun glinting off her metallic grey hull, the flying boat turned and headed towards Pearl Harbor. Somewhere out there in the Pacific, a Japanese battle fleet was doing exactly the same thing.

Honolulu and Beyond

The California Clipper arrived at the Pan Am marine facility at Pearl Harbour on 3rd December, completing the longest leg of its outbound flight in the process. There they were joined by one more member of the crew - John Mack, who would be Ford's First Officer for the rest of the journey. Pearl was a popular stopover spot with the Clipper crews. The hotel facilities were comfortable and the presence of the US Navy on the Island meant there were plenty of things to do too. Bob Ford was also a keen surfer and kept a board stashed at the Pan Am facility there. Soon he was out riding the waves while the rest of the crew relaxed, playing volleyball, cards, or sunbathing. All the crew, that is, with the exception of Poindexter, who was soon out in Honolulu trying to find somewhere to buy a couple of spare shirts.

A Day That Will Live in Infamy

“Jesus H Christ!” shouted Eugene Leach, tearing the headphones from his head and pushing himself back from the radio desk as if trying to escape the enormity of what he’d just heard. It was now 7th December, the California Clipper having left Pearl three days before. The plane was now on the final leg of its journey to Auckland, having stopped off as planned at Canton Island, Fiji and New Caledonia on the way. Leach was a fellow Pan Am radioman who had joined them at New Caledonia. He wasn’t rostered to be part of the crew, but his own flight had experienced issues. In return for passage to Auckland he’d offered to help Poindexter and Hendrickson man the radio for the final leg of the trip. He’d been listening for local signals coming out of Auckland when he’d picked up the news. “What’s up Gene?!” Asked Rod Brown the plane’s Second Officer, who’d been close enough to witness the radioman’s reaction and now moved to his side. “The Japs have attacked Pearl Harbour!” “You’ve got to be kidding.” “No! No!” Leach insisted, “Just now... they bombed Pearl Harbour! No joke man!” Seeing the expression of horror on Leach’s face soon dispelled any doubt in Brown’s mind. And then the reality of what this meant hit him: if the Pacific was no longer a friendly sea then they were cut off. They had no route home. Brown headed towards the cockpit to warn the Captain. Ford took the news quietly and calmly. “You’re sure about that? You better confirm it.” Leach was already attempting to do exactly that and soon he had managed to lock onto the long-range signal from the Pan Am ground station in Noumea, New Caledonia, from whence they had just departed. The station was broadcasting morse code on a constant loop, itself a bad sign, and the translation left no room for doubt. PEARL HARBOUR ATTACKED. IMPLEMENT PLAN A. For a moment there was silence on the flight deck. Then Ford reached into his jacket pocket, pulling out a sealed brown envelope, breaking the seal. He was the only member of the crew to whom the last part of the coded message made any sense. It meant it was time to break open the envelopes that he, and every other Clipper Captain, had been secretly issued on every flight for a number of weeks now - since Pan Am decided to prepare for a war. Inside, Ford found he had new orders. To: Captain, PAA Flight 6039 — SFO-LAX-HNL-CIS-SUV-NOU-AUK and return flight 6040. From: Division Manager, Pacific Division, Subject: Special instructions to avoid hostile military activity. Pan American Airways, in cooperation with the Chief of Staff, United States Army, Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet Operations, the Secretary of War and the Secretary of State, has agreed to place its fleet of flying boats at the disposal of the military for whatever logistical or tactical purpose they may deem necessary at such time as hostilities break out between the United States forces and the military forces of the Imperial Japanese government. In the event that you are required to open and read these instructions, you may assume that hostilities have already occurred and that the aircraft under your command represents a strategic military resource which must be protected and secured from falling into enemy hands, Ford read on. Plan A, for the California Clipper, meant continuing on to the nearest friendly Pan American base known to be unoccupied by the Japanese, doing everything possible to avoid any contact with enemy forces. This meant continuing to Auckland. Ford had been a Navy pilot before joining Pan American. He knew exactly what to do. They needed to get away from their regular route - it was the first place any Japanese forces would sweep - and find a new path to Auckland. Rod Brown was dispatched to the map table to do so, and Leach was ordered to shut down the radio. From now they would continue in radio silence. This done, the rest of the crew were filled in on events, and all lights were extinguished. Finally, Ford unlocked his flight case and pulled out his .38 revolver. He strapped it to his hip.

The California Clipper’s war had begun. And she was a long, long way from home.

Second part to follow – the flight from Auckland to New York