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BRYANSTON 2021
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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 157
7th APRIL 2023

GREETINGS:

Every day is April Fool's Day in SA... Curiouser and curiouser – Thabo Bester escape... allegedly paid warders R5m… He and Dr Nandipha made millions from construction company… Braai pain for SA... Consumers face empty shelves and long queues in South Africa... Eskom corruption "disappears" - Eskom "exempted" from reporting wasteful and irregular expenditure?? WTF!... New kykNET doccie tackles Eskom saga… ANC seeks audience with Mbeki over Phala Phala... "Russia is a friend" says delusional Pandor... "South Africa must leave ICC..." Paul Mashatile's night of misplaced jokes, awkward photographs, empty promises and vague sweeping statements… Lesotho aviation company claiming damages from mines – for not working... Oscar denied parole... City of Johannesburg new property valuation roll is 12% up, and other swingeing increases... we should not have to be saving for inverters, solar panels, battery lamps and candles... SA world leaders in self-flagellation and talking each other into a perpetual state of depression? Well, now.... Peter Hain says South Africa heading toward being a failed state (What did he think?)…
Former US President Donald Trump has been arraigned... Biden's America is splitting at the seams... Joe Biden will not attend the King's Coronation next month – "too old to travel", say insiders... Rishi Sunak facing Tory revolt over "draconian" labour laws... Starmer says 99.9% of women don't have a penis!!!!... trans-activism "sexist and delusional"... Has London reached peak toxicity?... Russia takes charge of UN security council - taking absurdity to a new level... Putin's nuclear war threat - "the bulls-eye he's aiming for is fear"... 'The main enemy of Russian culture is the Russian regime'... Moscow to trade food for North Korean weapons... Surrounded and outgunned, Ukraine's tank crews prepare for battle of Bakhmut... Pro-war military blogger killed in blast at St Petersburg café... Wagner claims "Victory" in Bakhmut... Wimbledon lifts ban on Russian players... "I wasn't expecting a full-on kiss on each cheek. It felt a bit forward."

THE KING'S ROYAL CYPHER:

RAF aviators on parade at the Coronation in May are honoured to be among the first to wear The King's new cypher on their uniforms, alongside their Royal Navy and British Army colleagues.
The new design of the RAF cap badge, and other adornments to RAF uniforms, reflect the style of crown personally selected by HM The King to represent his sovereignty. The Royal cypher is a monogram-style design used by the reigning monarch.

Queen Elizabeth II's cypher was featured on RAF uniforms from Her Majesty's coronation in 1953 and consisted of the letters EIIR with St Edward's Crown above. King Charles' cypher features the letter 'C' intertwined with the letter 'R' for Rex (Latin for King), with 'III' within the 'R' and the Tudor Crown sitting above. The eventual changing of all RAF uniform items to include The King's cypher will not happen just yet. Existing uniform stocks that feature Queen Elizabeth II's cypher will continue to be used for a period of several years. The exceptions will be for new recruits at RAF Halton and RAF Cranwell, aviators who are involved in delivering ceremonial duties, such as The Kings Colour Squadron, RAF Musicians, and senior officers. The King has a close affiliation with the RAF, having served as an RAF Officer in the 1970s. The Monarch is the Head of the Armed Forces and The King maintains a close bond with the Service. In November 2022, the RAF's ceremonial unit was redesignated to become The King's Colour Squadron.

AIR MARSHAL SIR RICHARD KNIGHTON APPOINTED CAS:

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has confirmed that His Majesty the King has approved the new appointment of the Chief of the Air Staff.

Air Marshal Sir Richard Knighton, KCB, FREng, is to be appointed as Chief of the Air Staff and Aide-de-Camp to His Majesty in the rank of Air Chief Marshal, in succession to Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston, KCB, CBE, ADC, in June 2023. The Defence Secretary said: "I am delighted to congratulate Air Marshal Sir Richard Knighton on his promotion and appointment in June as Chief of the Air Staff. His previous roles have equipped him well to lead a modern, innovative and diverse Service. As the first ground branch officer to command his Service, his appointment marks a new milestone for the Royal Air Force."

"Under Air Marshal Sir Richard's leadership, the Royal Air Force will be in excellent hands. He takes up his appointment at a crucial moment for the Royal Air Force as it evolves to meet future threats while continuing to conduct operations to protect our security and support our allies and partners. "I would also like to recognise Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston's loyal service to the nation over his military career. Sir Mike has delivered a lean, effective, modernised force that has offered phenomenal operational effect across the globe, and I wish him all the best in the future."

Brought up in Derbyshire and educated at the local Secondary School, he joined the Royal Air Force in 1988 as a University Cadet and studied Engineering at Clare College Cambridge. He spent his early career in frontline roles working on Nimrod Maritime Patrol Aircraft, Tornado and in several roles within the Harrier force. He has served as the Station Commander at Royal Air Force Wittering where he was also the RAF's Logistics Force Commander. He has held a range of staff appointments in the Ministry of Defence, Air Command and in equipment acquisition and support. He has been closely involved in strategic and capability planning for the Royal Air Force and Defence. He has been the Assistant Chief of Air Staff, where he was responsible for the strategic coherence and coordination of the Royal Air Force and planning for the RAF100 centenary programme. The most senior role he has held in the Ministry of Defence was as the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff for Military Capability. He is currently Deputy Commander Capability and People at Air Command, where he is responsible for the strategic planning and delivery of all aspects of Royal Air Force capability including people, equipment, infrastructure and training. He has completed the Advanced Command and Staff Course, the Royal College of Defence Studies and the UK Pinnacle Course. He is also a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineers. He is a Vice Patron of the Royal Air Force Charitable Trust, an ambassador for the Royal Air Forces Association and President of the Royal Air Force Winter Sports Federation, Hockey Association and Powerlifting Association. He

was appointed to the Military Division of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath as a Commander (CB) in 2017 and as Knight Commander (KCB) in 2023.

Career History
1988 - joined RAF
2004 - Military Assistant to Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Equipment Capability)
2007 - promoted to Group Captain and became Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff Strategy and Plans at Air Command at RAF High Wycombe
2009 - Logistics Force Commander Station Commander at RAF Wittering
2011 - promoted to Air Commodore and became Head of Finance and Military Capability (Air)
2014 - set up and led the Future Combat Air System (FCAS) Programme
2015 - promoted to Air Vice-Marshal and appointed as the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff
2017 - Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (Capability and Force Design)
2019 - promoted to Air Marshal and appointed Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Military Capability)
2022 - Deputy Commander for Capability and People

HIGH WYCOMBE RAISES £5,000 FOR HOUNDS FOR HEROES:

RAF High Wycombe's Thrift Shop sells items donated on behalf of its customer, with a percentage going towards charity. Over the past two years, volunteers have raised £5,000 for renowned charity 'Hounds for Heroes.'

To show their appreciation of the money raised, Hounds for Heroes will give RAF High Wycombe the honour of naming the next puppy the charity takes on for training. The RAF High Wycombe Thrift Shop has been part of the local community for several decades and is open to both the military and civilian community.

The shop is run by a team of very loyal and friendly volunteers who take great pride in both the service they provide to their community and for the money they raise for charitable causes each year. The shop is open 0900-1300 on Wednesdays (term time only) and is situated just before the entrance to RAF High Wycombe 3 Site - new customers are always welcome. Allen Parton, the Founder and Vice-Chairman of Hounds for Heroes and his current Assistant Labrador, ET, attended a special gathering at RAF High Wycombe, to accept the cheque on behalf of the charity. This was followed by a lunch provided at the Officer's Mess, with the event organiser, Wing Commander Stowers, and representing the Station Commander, Squadron Leader Mepham-Stone. Volunteers from the Thrift Shop also joined the gathering.

GREAT WAR MEDALS ACE IT AT AUCTION:

AN OUTSTANDING group of 11 medals won by Britain's Great War 'Ace of Aces,' has fetched a hammer price of £36,000 at auction.

Air Commodore Philip Fletcher Fullard, CBE DSO MC* AFC MD Croix de Guerre (27 May 1897 – 24 April 1984) was an English flying Ace, one of the most successful fighter pilots of the RFC, with a reputation as a superb combat leader. With 40 confirmed victories, he was the top scoring ace of WW1 flying Nieuports, and overall the 6th highest scoring British pilot, and the 2nd highest to survive the war. As reported in RAF News the collection was awarded to the former RFC and RAF pilot who at 20-years-old had 40 confirmed aerial victories in just eight months during 1917. Air Cdre Fuller is likely to have had many more if he hadn't broken his leg in a football match. The decorations were bought by a private collector of early flying pioneer and WW1 artefacts. Auctioneers Noonans head of client liaison Christopher Mellor-Hill said: "We were very pleased to sell the prestigious medals of Philip Fletcher Fullard, who by the end of the Great War was the seventh highest scoring British Ace and the second highest living." Fullard retired from the RAF on 20 November 1946 at the age of 49, and served as chairman of several engineering companies. In 1978, at the age of 81, he was interviewed by Peter Liddle, and his recollections formed part of a book published in 2011. He died in a hospital at Broadstairs, Kent, England, near where he lived on 24 April 1984, a month before his 87th birthday. At the time of his death, he was highest scoring living British ace, and after Donald McLaren, who died four years later highest scoring living ace of WW1 overall.

COMMONWEALTH DAY:

MILLIONS OF Commonwealth citizens who fought for Britain during two World Wars were remembered at a special service in London.

The King and Royal family and Defence chiefs including Chief of the Air Staff, ACM Sir Michael Wigston, joined foreign dignitaries to lay wreaths at the Memorial Gates on Hyde Park Corner on 13 March 2023 in an annual ceremony started by Queen Elizabeth II. The monument was erected in 2002 to honour five million people who left their homes in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean to fight alongside British forces.

There are currently 5,200 Commonwealth citizens serving in the UK military and this year personnel from Australia, New Zealand and Canada have helped train more than 10,000 Ukrainian recruits to defend their country from Russian aggression. Defence secretary Ben Wallace said: "Commonwealth Day is an opportunity to celebrate the longstanding and historical Defence relationships and values that have united our nations for over 70 years." The service included a two-minute silence sounded by a bugler and a piper from the Irish Guards with music provided by the Band of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst.

THE BEST LAID PLANS...GANG OFT AGLEY...

Has any war in history gone according to plan? Monarchs, dictators and elected leaders alike have a dismal record on military decision-making, from over-ambitious goals to disregarding intelligence, terrain, or enemy capabilities. This not only wastes the lives of civilians, the enemy and one's own soldiers, but also fails to achieve geopolitical objectives, and usually lays the seeds for more wars down the line. We are watching the process unfold yet again in the Ukraine. Conflict scholar and former soldier Mike Martin takes the reader through the hard, elegant logic to fighting a conclusive interstate war that solves geopolitical problems and reduces future conflict. In cool and precise prose, he outlines how to orchestrate military forces, from infantry to information, and from strategy to tactics. *"How to Fight a War"* explains the unavoidable, yet seemingly elusive, art of using violence to force your enemies to do what you want. It should be read by everyone seeking to understand today's wars, as well as those wishing to lead us through the coming decades of conflict. An indispensable guide to understanding modern warfare, especially the decisions made by politicians and generals—both good and bad.

https://www.amazon.co.uk/How-Fight-War-Mike-Martin/dp/1787389308

HOW LONG IS LONGSTANDING?

The ANC visited Moscow this weekend to meet its “long-standing ally and friend”, Russian president Vladimir Putin’s United Russia Party (URP), even though the relations between the two parties seem rather skimpy. This excursion seemed to be more about demonstrating solidarity with the increasingly isolated Putin regime than about anything the two parties may have in common. It looked like yet another instance of the ANC’s “nostalgia” for a very different Russia than the one that supported the ANC’s armed struggle until the late 1980s. South Africa’s ruling party seems to have rediscovered – or perhaps reinvented – this “long-standing” friendship with the URP when Putin ordered Russia’s military to invade Ukraine on 24 February last year. Since then, the ANC seems to have found it convenient to conflate the URP with the Soviet Union Communist Party, which was the organisation that supported the ANC. It stopped its support even before the USSR disintegrated in 1991.

FLIGHT OF FANCY? UKRAINE TO REBUILD MRIYA:

The Russian invasion of Ukraine continues to rage on, but that doesn’t mean Ukrainians have stopped having dreams and inspiration. The An-225 Mriya was designed and created in the 1980s by the Soviet (later Ukrainian) state aircraft manufacturing company Antonov. ‘Mriya’ means ‘Dream’ or ‘Inspiration.’ As an enlarged strategic airlift cargo plane, CNN highlights that the Mriya was built to carry space shuttles for the Soviet space program.

The Mriya was later used for transporting objects most airplanes can’t such as wind turbines and locomotives. Only one was built and for a reason: Capable of taking off while carrying 80 tons, the Mriya has been called by CNN the largest commercial aircraft ever made. To put that in perspective, it doubles the capacity of a Boeing 747. A symbol of Ukrainian national pride and an icon of Soviet engineering accomplishment, it became a casualty during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Between February 24 and 25, 2022, the Mriya was destroyed during the Russian takeover of Antonov Airport in Hostomel, nearby Kyiv. Ukraine eventually regained the airport during the pushback of Russian troops. Now, in a controversial decision, there have been talks to rebuild the Mriya. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced back in May 2022 that the country would eventually reconstruct the An-225. British billionaire and aviation enthusiast Richard Branson visited the wreckage during the summer of that year, excited about the opportunity to help with the project. The New York Times reported in March 2023 that Antonov workers have been dismantling the An-225 Mriya to salvage parts and eventually reconstruct the aircraft. However, critics argue that such effort isn’t a priority as the war is going on, particularly given so many cities and people have been affected during the Russian invasion. Aviation analyst Valery Romanenko was quoted by The New York Times arguing that Antonov should be doing “something urgent for the armed forces” such as fabricating drones. Bloomberg highlights that Antonov has stated that details on the rebuilding of the aircraft will only be possible after the war is over, whenever that happens.

MEMBERS WRITE:

Derrick Page writes from Melkbosstrand, Western Cape: “I trust the Saturday Ladies Lunch was a resounding success. Promptly at 1300B I raised my glass three times in toast to the RAF, SAAF and RAFOC JNB. A number of toasts followed thereafter to my absent family (daughter in New Zealand), absent friends long last seen, those I knew who have passed on including our 15-year-old

Dachshund, Max last week Monday (We Will Remember Them). Then the last of the splendid Port a toast to me! Have a good week, kind regards, Derrick.

Philip Weyers (Down-Under) writes: Many thanks Bruce, I've no doubt it was a splendid lunch and that your talk was exceptional as they always are! Had a Dimple at 13:00B (think it was a triple!) and raised my glass to you, the RAF and RAFOC! I'm delighted that Mark and the Welsh Male Voice Choir will be back at the memorial service, they add immeasurably to the event. Not sure what happened last year, but it fell short in this and other respects. Also, not sure who is running the show this year but seems an improvement? Take care, it's dangerous out there (Hill Street Blues) and be well!

THE WESTERN FILMS:

Once upon a time, the Western dominated the silver screen. Dating all the way back to the 1940s and 50s, the genre proved to be one of the first true box office hits, transforming Hollywood from a small-time fad into a bonafide industry. In fact, many studios today owe their wealth and success to those Western hits of yesteryear. Westerns have gone in and out of popularity. They were all the rage during the Silent Film Era, but their popularity dipped in the late 1930s. It went back up again as one of the most-watched movie genres of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Westerns speak to a bygone era, but the history in each Western makes them valuable. From Disney to Warner Brothers and MGM, studios cemented their box office revenues with dependable flicks (and movie stars). Without these classic Westerns, it's unlikely the entertainment industry would be as profitable as it is today. For those of us who grew up with the genre, Investing.com has produced a comprehensive list of the top Westerns.
For a trip down memory lane, visit: https://za.investing.com/magazine/best-westerns-ever-made/?origin=google&utm_source=Google&utm_medium=19868779667&account_id=6300771544&gl%5bcampaign_id%5d=19868779667&gl%5badgroup_id%5d=148008543595&gl%5bad_id%5d=652091342524&gl%5bnetwork%5d=&gl%5bdevice%5d=m&gl%5btarget_id%5d=&gl%5bpublisher_id%5d=&gclid=Cj0KCQjwz6ShBhCMARIsAH9A0qXkh0lzpWDtDYX7A6mqCXSgWgnsmKl48lyM1kzBPHCN2gq4B4tSX20aAqx2EALw_wcB

CHEERS FOR NOW:

The Annual Lunch on SATURDAY 1st APRIL was well attended by 40 sitting down to eat and drink. The Loyal toasts were proposed, and it was noted that this was the first occasion toasting The King. The timing of the lunch was generally accepted as much better than an evening function with all the problems of travelling at night. The Committee will be discussing the date and time in the near future, so again look forward to an Annual event.
The next lunch will be on Friday 5th May at the Wanderers – 12:30 for 13:00. More details closer to the occasion but please put this in your diary as a reminder to come along.

TAILPIECE:

THE AVIATION - When it comes to classic gin cocktails, few are as revered by bartenders as the Aviation. On the other hand, even fewer are reviled like a poorly made Aviation. The drink is built on a delicate balance of strongly flavored ingredients, which can easily cause ruin when out of proportion. But done right, you're guaranteed to convert anybody who claims they "don't like gin." The first printed mention of the Aviation on record is in Hugo R. Ensslin's 1917 classic compendium, "Recipes for mixed Drinks". A variation on the gin sour, the Aviation replaces simple syrup with maraschino liqueur, balances it with lemon and introduces a wildcard, Crème Yvette. Crème Yvette is a violet herbal liqueur - a proprietary blend modeled after the more generic crème de violette that was integral to the original Aviation. It provides the Aviation's distinctive, sky-like blue/grey hue (the source of the drink's name) and signature floral punch. Bartenders are often split on preference of Crème Yvette, with its addition of berry, vanilla and spices, or the less-complex but more violet-forward crème de violette. Crème Yvette did become a hot commodity after production

stopped in 1969 and options for a proper Aviation became limited, causing the drink to lose the public's interest and fall out of sight. In 2009, after 40 years, the long-sought ingredient was revived, and the once-forgotten Aviation began to find a new audience. With Yvette's pungent blend of aromatic ingredients, a little goes a long way. One extra dash has been known to ruin the drink (a slightly heavier hand can be used with the less-sweet violette). If you follow this recipe, though, you'll have made one of the cocktail world's most perfect gin creations.

- 2 ounces gin
- ¾ ounce fresh lemon juice
- ½ ounce maraschino liqueur
- 1 bar spoon Crème Yvette (or crème de violette)
- Maraschino cherry, for garnish

Add all ingredients except garnish to cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake vigorously until well chilled. Double-strain into a chilled coupe. Garnish with maraschino cherry.

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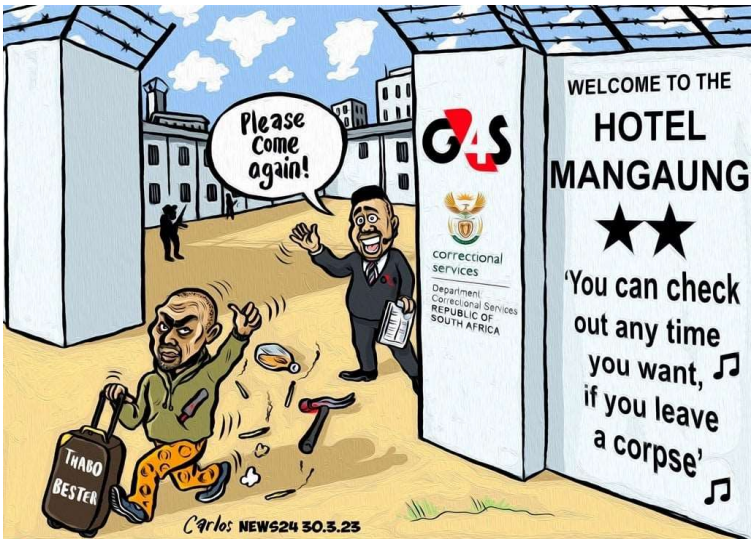
MATT

'I'm sorry, officer, we've converted our car to run on laughing gas'

MATT

'I bought a petrol car so I can drive round looking for a working charger for my wife's electric vehicle'



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BILL WEAVER SR-71 Breakup:

Dec 6, 1928 - July 28, 2021

Among professional aviators, there's a well-worn saying: Flying is simply hours of boredom punctuated by moments of stark terror. And yet, I don't recall too many periods of boredom during my 30-year career with Lockheed, most of which was spent as a test pilot.

By far, the most memorable flight occurred on Jan. 25, 1966. Jim Zwayer, a Lockheed flight test reconnaissance and navigation systems specialist, and I were evaluating those systems on an SR-71 Blackbird test from Edwards AFB, Calif. We also were investigating procedures designed to reduce trim drag and improve high-Mach cruise performance. The latter involved flying with the center-of-gravity (CG) located further aft than normal, which reduced the Blackbird's longitudinal stability. We took off from Edwards at 11:20 a.m. and completed the mission's first leg without

incident. After refuelling from a KC-135 tanker, we turned eastbound, accelerated to a Mach 3.2 cruise speed and climbed to 78,000 ft, our initial cruise-climb altitude. Several minutes into cruise, the right engine inlet's automatic control system malfunctioned, requiring a switch to manual control. The SR-71's inlet configuration was automatically adjusted during supersonic flight to decelerate air flow in the duct, slowing it to subsonic speed before reaching the engine's face. This was accomplished by the inlet's center-body spike translating aft, and by modulating the inlet's forward bypass doors. Normally, these actions were scheduled automatically as a function of Mach number, positioning the normal shock wave (where air flow becomes subsonic) inside the inlet to ensure optimum engine performance. Without proper scheduling, disturbances inside the inlet could result in the shock wave being expelled forward - a phenomenon known as an "inlet unstart." That causes an instantaneous loss of engine thrust, explosive banging noises and violent yawing of the aircraft--like being in a train wreck. Unstarts were not uncommon at that time in the SR-71's development, but a properly functioning system would recapture the shock wave and restore normal operation. On the planned test profile, we entered a programmed 35-deg. bank turn to the right. An immediate unstart occurred on the right engine, forcing the aircraft to roll further right and start to pitch up. I jammed the control stick as far left and forward as it would go. No response. I instantly knew we were in for a wild ride. I attempted to tell Jim what was happening and to stay with the airplane until we reached a lower speed and altitude. I didn't think the chances of surviving an ejection at Mach 3.18 and 78,800 ft. were very good. However, g-forces built up so rapidly that my words came out garbled and unintelligible, as confirmed later by the cockpit voice recorder. The cumulative effects of system malfunctions reduced longitudinal stability, increased angle-of-attack in the turn, supersonic speed, high altitude and other factors-imposed forces on the airframe that exceeded flight control authority and the Stability Augmentation System's ability to restore control. Everything seemed to unfold in slow motion. I learned later the time from event onset to catastrophic departure from controlled flight was only 2-3 sec. Still trying to communicate with Jim, I blacked out, succumbing to extremely high g-forces. The SR-71 then literally disintegrated around us. From that point, I was just along for the ride.

My next recollection was a hazy thought that I was having a bad dream. Maybe I'll wake up and get out of this mess, I mused. Gradually regaining consciousness, I realized this was no dream; it had really happened. That also was disturbing because I could not have survived what had just happened. Therefore, I must be dead. Since I didn't feel bad - just a detached sense of euphoria - I decided being dead wasn't so bad after all. AS FULL AWARENESS took hold, I realized I was not dead, but had somehow separated from the airplane. I had no idea how this could have happened; I hadn't initiated an ejection. The sound of rushing air and what sounded like straps flapping in the wind confirmed I was falling, but I couldn't see anything. My pressure suit's face plate had frozen over, and I was staring at a layer of ice. The pressure suit was inflated, so I knew an emergency oxygen cylinder in the seat kit attached to my parachute harness was functioning. It not only supplied breathing oxygen, but also pressurized the suit, preventing my blood from boiling at extremely high altitudes. I didn't appreciate it at the time, but the suit's pressurization had also provided physical protection from intense buffeting and g-forces. That inflated suit had become my own escape capsule. My next concern was about stability and tumbling. Air density at high altitude is insufficient to resist a body's tumbling motions, and centrifugal forces high enough to cause physical injury could develop quickly. For that reason, the SR-71's parachute system was designed to automatically deploy a small-diameter stabilizing chute shortly after ejection and seat separation. Since I had not intentionally activated the ejection system - and assuming all automatic functions depended on a proper ejection sequence - it occurred to me the stabilizing chute may not have deployed. However, I quickly determined I was falling vertically and not tumbling. The little chute must have deployed and was doing its job. Next concern: the main parachute, which was designed to open automatically at 15,000 ft. Again, I had no assurance the automatic-opening function would work. I couldn't ascertain my altitude because I still couldn't see through the iced-up face plate. There was no way to know how long I had been blacked-out or how far I had fallen. I felt for the manual-activation D-ring on my chute harness, but with the suit inflated and my hands numbed by cold, I couldn't locate it. I decided I'd better open the face plate, try to estimate my height above the ground, then locate that "D" ring. Just as I reached for the face plate, I felt the reassuring sudden deceleration

of main-chute deployment. I raised the frozen face plate and discovered its uplatch was broken. Using one hand to hold that plate up, I saw I was descending through a clear, winter sky with unlimited visibility. I was greatly relieved to see Jim's parachute coming down about a quarter of a mile away. I didn't think either of us could have survived the aircraft's breakup, so seeing Jim had also escaped lifted my spirits incredibly. I could also see burning wreckage on the ground a few miles from where we would land. The terrain didn't look at all inviting - a desolate, high plateau dotted with patches of snow and no signs of habitation. I tried to rotate the parachute and look in other directions. But with one hand devoted to keeping the face plate up and both hands numb from high-altitude, subfreezing temperatures, I couldn't manipulate the risers enough to turn. Before the breakup, we'd started a turn in the New Mexico-Colorado-Oklahoma-Texas border region. The SR-71 had a turning radius of about 100 mi. at that speed and altitude, so I wasn't even sure what state we were going to land in. But, because it was about 3:00 pm, I was certain we would be spending the night out here. At about 300 ft. above the ground, I yanked the seat kit's release handle and made sure it was still tied to me by a long lanyard. Releasing the heavy kit ensured I wouldn't land with it attached to my derriere, which could break a leg or cause other injuries. I then tried to recall what survival items were in that kit, as well as techniques I had been taught in survival training.

Looking down, I was startled to see a fairly large animal - perhaps an antelope - directly under me. Evidently, it was just as startled as I was because it literally took off in a cloud of dust. My first-ever parachute landing was pretty smooth. I landed on fairly soft ground, managing to avoid rocks, cacti and antelopes. My chute was still billowing in the wind, though. I struggled to collapse it with one hand, holding the still-frozen face plate up with the other. "Can I help you?" a voice said. Was I hearing things? I must be hallucinating. Then I looked up and saw a guy walking toward me, wearing a cowboy hat. A helicopter was idling a short distance behind him. If I had been at Edwards and told the search-and-rescue unit that I was going to bail out over the Rogers Dry Lake at a particular time of day, a crew couldn't have gotten to me as fast as that cowboy-pilot had. The gentleman was Albert Mitchell, Jr., owner of a huge cattle ranch in northeastern New Mexico. I had landed about 1.5 mi. from his ranch house - and from a hangar for his two-place Hughes helicopter. Amazed to see him, I replied I was having a little trouble with my chute. He walked over and collapsed the canopy, anchoring it with several rocks. He had seen Jim and me floating down and had radioed the New Mexico Highway Patrol, the Air Force and the nearest hospital. Extracting myself from the parachute harness, I discovered the source of those flapping-strap noises heard on the way down. My seat belt and shoulder harness were still draped around me, attached and latched. The lap belt had been shredded on each side of my hips, where the straps had fed through knurled adjustment rollers. The shoulder harness had shredded in a similar manner across my back. The ejection seat had never left the airplane; I had been ripped out of it by the extreme forces, seat belt and shoulder harness still fastened. I also noted that one of the two lines that supplied oxygen to my pressure suit had come loose, and the other was barely hanging on. If that second line had become detached at high altitude, the deflated pressure suit wouldn't have provided any protection. I knew an oxygen supply was critical for breathing and suit-pressurization but didn't appreciate how much physical protection an inflated pressure suit could provide. That the suit could withstand forces sufficient to disintegrate an airplane and shred heavy nylon seat belts yet leave me with only a few bruises and minor whiplash was impressive. I truly appreciated having my own little escape capsule. After helping me with the chute, Mitchell said he'd check on Jim. He climbed into his helicopter, flew a short distance away and returned about 10 min. later with devastating news: Jim was dead. Apparently, he had suffered a broken neck during the aircraft's disintegration and was killed instantly. Mitchell said his ranch foreman would soon arrive to watch over Jim's body until the authorities arrived. I asked to see Jim and, after verifying there was nothing more that could be done, agreed to let Mitchell fly me to the Tucumcari hospital, about 60 mi. to the south. I have vivid memories of that helicopter flight, as well. I didn't know much about rotorcraft, but I knew a lot about "red lines," and Mitchell kept the airspeed at or above red line all the way. The little helicopter vibrated and shook a lot more than I thought it should have. I tried to reassure the cowboy-pilot I was feeling OK; there was no need to rush. But since he'd notified the hospital staff that we were inbound, he insisted we get there as soon as possible. I couldn't help but think how ironic it would be to have survived one disaster only to be done in by the helicopter that had come to my rescue. However, we made it to the hospital safely -

and quickly. Soon, I was able to contact Lockheed's flight test office at Edwards. The test team there had been notified initially about the loss of radio and radar contact, then told the aircraft had been lost. They also knew what our flight conditions had been at the time and assumed no one could have survived. I briefly explained what had happened, describing in fairly accurate detail the flight conditions prior to breakup. The next day, our flight profile was duplicated on the SR-71 flight simulator at Beale AFB, Calif. The outcome was identical. Steps were immediately taken to prevent a recurrence of our accident. Testing at a CG aft of normal limits was discontinued, and trim-drag issues were subsequently resolved via aerodynamic means. The inlet control system was continuously improved, and, with subsequent development of the Digital Automatic Flight and Inlet Control System, inlet unstarts became rare. Investigation of our accident revealed that the nose section of the aircraft had broken off aft of the rear cockpit and crashed about 10 mi. from the main wreckage. Parts were scattered over an area approximately 15 mi. long and 10 mi. wide. Extremely high air loads and g-forces, both positive and negative, had literally ripped Jim and me from the airplane. Unbelievably good luck is the only explanation for my escaping relatively unscathed from that disintegrating aircraft. Two weeks after the accident, I was back in an SR-71, flying the first sortie on a brand-new bird at Lockheed's Palmdale, Calif., assembly and test facility. It was my first flight since the accident, so a flight test engineer in the back seat was probably a little apprehensive about my state of mind and confidence. As we roared down the runway and lifted off, I heard an anxious voice over the intercom. "Bill! Bill! Are you there?" "Yeah, George. What's the matter?" "Thank God! I thought you might have left." The rear cockpit of the SR-71 has no forward visibility--only a small window on each side - and George couldn't see me. A big red light on the master-warning panel in the rear cockpit had illuminated just as we rotated, stating, "Pilot Ejected." Fortunately, the cause was a misadjusted microswitch, not my departure.

Bill Weaver flight tested all models of the Mach-2 F-104 Starfighter and the entire family of Mach 3+ Blackbirds - the A-12, YF-12 and SR-71. He subsequently was assigned to Lockheed's L-1011 project as an engineering test pilot, became the company's chief pilot and retired as Division Manager of Commercial Flying Operations. He still flies Orbital Sciences Corp.'s L-1011, which has been modified to carry a Pegasus satellite-launch vehicle (AW&ST Aug. 25, 2003, p. 56). An FAA Designated Engineering Representative Flight Test Pilot, he's also involved in various aircraft-modification projects, conducting certification flight tests. *(Sent in By Karl Jensen)*

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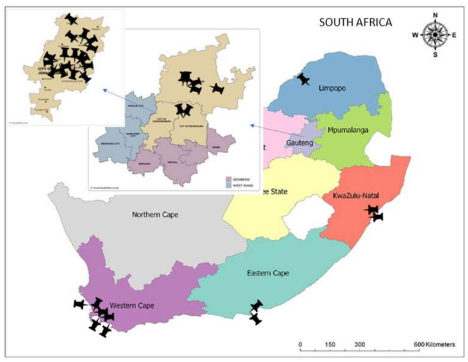
WHERE DOES RAMBLINGS GO AROUND THE WORLD:

This is still a work in progress as we only have around 30% of readers located, but maybe you are not the only person in a location that reads Ramblings sent from our mailing list or forwarded by members. We will update the maps as and when we receive more locations. You will only be identified by the pin and no other details will be shared to comply with the POPI act. Can you see where you are?

If you do share with other interested people, let us know where they are.



HAPPY EASTER TO YOU ALL – THE COMMITTEE