



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 73 – 27th AUGUST 2021

GREETINGS:

Day 519, and here we are with the 73rd issue of Ramblings – who would have thought it? SA held its breath last Monday in the face of the threat of action to close SA down which had been appearing on various subversive social media sites.... but SAPS's presentations to Parliament show that inefficient administration is making South Africa unsafe... Placatory words from the senior spin doctor in the SA National Defence Force regarding an apparent lack of proper rations for soldiers on active duty is not cutting the mustard... Brigadier General Mafi Mgobozi stated the SANDF acknowledged "challenges regarding ration packs and payment of meal allowances."

The developing crisis in Afghanistan has dominated the news this last week..."No extension to Afghanistan withdrawal".... Poor Old Joe, the author of the catastrophic and shameful spectacle, just doesn't get it... 'the fall of Kabul has proved not so much the straw, but the sledgehammer, that broke the camel's back'... The Washington elite have turned on Biden. Watch out for the Harris presidency. US joins UK and Australia in warning against travel to Kabul airport; 1,500 Americans remain in country with only a few days left until deadline; Allies begin winding up evacuations... the horror for Afghans under Taliban rule is just beginning. Unsurprisingly, China has welcomed and acknowledged the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. A deafening silence from the Woke, Cancel and BLM brigades, eloquently showing them up for what they really are... Pen Farthing speaks for those who cannot speak for themselves.

AIR OFFICER COMMANDING:



Air Commodore Suraya Marshall, following her promotion to Air Vice-Marshal, has been appointed to be the new Air Officer Commanding of Number 2 Group, RAF. This appointment is the first time a woman has been appointed to command one of the RAF's two 'Operational' Groups.

The role of Number 2 Group is to generate, sustain and, when directed, command forces for current operations and develop forces for future Air Mobility, Force Protection, Battlespace Management and the Support Force. As such, Air Commodore Marshall will be commanding the RAF Squadrons that operate the Voyager, Globemaster C-17, Hercules C-130 and the Atlas A 400M transport aircraft plus the RAF Regiment and RAF Police amongst other force elements.

Air Commodore Marshall will be the first woman with an aircrew background to achieve command of a Group that also includes operational flying squadrons. Prior to her promotion and new appointment, Air Commodore Marshall has most recently been the Commandant of RAF College Cranwell, which selects and trains the next generation of officers and aircrew. Air Commodore Marshall joined the RAF as a navigator in 1994 and flew for three tours as a Tornado F3 navigator. During this time, she participated in numerous operational deployments to Iraq and conducted Quick Reaction Alert in defence of the UK and the Falkland Islands. She will be having a real baptism of fire in her new command with the RAF's response to the Afghani crisis and evacuation...

WE WILL REMEMBER THEM...



RAF currently based in Romania on a NATO Air Policing mission attended a memorial service on Sunday 8 August for the crew of an RAF bomber killed in the Second World War.

A team from the RAF's 121 Expeditionary Air Wing based at Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base in Southern Romania on a NATO enhanced Air Policing mission joined with local dignitaries to pay their respects to the crew of a Wellington bomber shot down over the village of Comana while on a bombing mission in Romania in May 1944. The UK Ambassador to Romania, Mr. Andrew Noble, attended the religious ceremony at the local Orthodox Monastery.

The ceremony was organised by local businessman Gelu Palamaru whose mother had witnessed the crash. In flames and heading directly for the village, the pilot of the stricken aircraft changed course at the last minute to crash into nearby marshes. The Wellington bomber from 150 Squadron was shot down by German anti-aircraft gunners on the night of 6/7 May 1944 while on a bombing mission from Amendola in Italy to the Romanian oilfields near Ploiesti. In 1946, the bodies of the five airmen: Warrant Officer Stanley Clarke and Sergeants Leonard Cox, Robert Scott, George Vaughan and Clifford Walker were disinterred and moved to the British Military Cemetery at Tâncabesti, near Bucharest.

This touching story was largely unknown outside of the Comana region until, in early 1990, just after the fall of the communist regime, the aircraft wreckage was rediscovered. In May of that year, the people of Comana held a commemorative Orthodox religious ceremony in honour of the aircrew at the monastery where the bodies were first laid to rest. The ceremony has been held annually ever since and over the years has attracted hundreds of local people, senior Romanian politicians and British Embassy personnel.

RAF BOMBER COMMAND 85TH ANNIVERSARY:



They came from near and far, united by past duty - and by a desire to honour their fallen comrades. All at least in their mid-nineties, surviving veterans of Bomber Command paraded on the 14 July 2021 to mark the 85th anniversary of its formation.

There were a few tears as eyes turned skywards for the fly-past by the Dakota paratrooper transport plane of the RAF's Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, itself a veteran of the Second World War. Bomber Command was key to defeating the Nazis, making frequent bombing raids on targets in Germany – but at a terrible cost: out of 125,000 aircrew, 57,861 lost their lives – at an average age of 23. Some 8,403 were wounded and 9,838 were captured.

But nothing was going to keep survivors from attending yesterday's ceremony at International Bomber Command Centre in Lincoln. Daily Express readers donated £140,000 to the building of the complex, which opened three years ago. At its heart is a steel spire - its 101ft height equalling the wingspan of a Lancaster bomber. It is surrounded by panels with the names of Bomber Command personnel who died in the war.

The £16million centre also has a museum and an archive of more than four million log- items, including crew logbooks and interviews. An emotional 45-minute service included the laying of wreaths.

Peter Francis, 95 – a Halifax rear gunner on one of the last raids on Germany – travelled from his Cornwall home and said: "It is vital to remember those we lost."

Just 19 when the war ended, Peter flew with 171 Squadron from RAF North Creake, Norfolk. He said: "I was due to fly on a special operation from Lossiemouth in Scotland, but I was on leave... John 'Jock' Downie took my place. There was a mid-air collision and he lost his life. His name is now here on the wall."

One-time Lancaster gunner Bert Hammond, 96, now lives nearby in Leasingham and made the short trip to honour his pals Richard Duffield and George Chapman, whom he had followed into the RAF. Bert said: "Neither of them made it back. I just wanted to come here and see their names."

The complex was sited in Lincolnshire because 27 wartime Bomber Command stations – more than a third – were in the county. Nicky van der Drift, its chief executive, said Bomber Command "defended our freedom, supported humanitarian missions and helped to keep the peace. Without the bravery, service and sacrifice of those who served and supported their work, the war could not have been won." (*International Express*, sent in by Gordon Dyne)

PATH TO VICTORY : A SINGLE-MINDED COWBOY FROM THE OUTBACK:

The Bomber Command Memorial celebration brought to mind Will Iredale's recently published account of "The Elite RAF Force that Turned the Tide of World War II" which begins, not over the Ruhr, Berlin or Dresden, but appropriately much closer to home. His account of the attack dubbed "Operation Moonlight Sonata," on Coventry on November 14, 1940, is a horrific harbinger of what was to come. And it is characteristic of this masterful account of a subject, to this day riven with controversy – area bombing – that Iredale balances perfectly his telling of the technical advances of air power and its horrendous human cost. For the attack, led by just 13 Heinkel bombers equipped with a pioneering X-Verfahren radio beam triangulation system that pinpointed targets for their incendiaries, then used as markers for the main bombing force, taught the RAF a lesson it would never forget. Iredale writes: "Over the next 11 hours, 500 tons of high explosives and oil bombs rained in torrents from 400 German aircraft ripping apart Coventry's cathedral and streets. The heat was so intense the lead from the cathedral melted down its drainpipes. The anti-aircraft fire was intense but largely useless – RAF air cover also proved impotent. Over 120 fighters were scrambled, but not one enemy aircraft was intercepted." The devastation was so great the Germans created a new word for it – Coventriren, to Coventrate. Britain's response was to form the Pathfinder Force in August 1942 because Bomber Command couldn't find targets in the dark. Created by direct order of Winston Churchill, led by 'a single-minded cowboy from the Australian outback' called Don Bennett, in the teeth of opposition from Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, it transformed the RAF's strike capability from only 25 per cent of its aircraft bombing within three miles of a target in 1942, to 95 per cent by 1945. To do this it recruited a diverse range of characters including:

- Geordie Ernie Holmes, son of an unemployed shipyard worker, rejected by the RAF Volunteer Reserves at 16, accepted at 19, he went on to command heavy bombers for the Pathfinders in raids on Dortmund, Hamburg and Berlin.
- DFC winner Allan Ball, who became a POW after being shot down. Repatriated because of his wounds, he became one of Sir Archibald McIndoe's plastic surgery guinea pigs when part of his right hip was transplanted to his skull to fill a three-inch hole left by German surgeons digging out a large piece of flak from his brain.
- Mosquito pilot Trinidadian Philip 'Ulric' Cross, awarded the DSO and DFC – the most highly decorated West Indian in the RAF during WWII, who later inspired a Ken Follett novel and a feature film. But, as Iredale points out, the secret of their success was the support team:
- From boffins, like Wilfred Coxon chemistry teacher and fireworks fanatic, whose pyrotechnic target markers nicknamed 'Christmas trees' revolutionised bombing accuracy.
- From veterans, like John Macgown former RFC fighter pilot and later Pathfinders' Group Medical Officer, who regularly flew missions to boost aircrew morale and worked to improve night vision and even the welfare of unmarried pregnant WAAFs.
- From the inventors of the Pathfinders' H2S and Oboe navigation systems – the most advanced technology in the world at the time.
- And, lastly, the designers of the iconic Lancaster (Chadwick) and Mosquito (de Havilland) bombers they flew. The nickname "Mossie" was hated by Harris, but it could deliver the same payload as a USAF Flying Fortress at twice the speed.

Former Sunday Times journalist Iredale navigates all this with a precision worthy of his subject matter, with a newsman's eye for a story and the ability to tell it, thankfully eschewing ranks and military jargon, with tremendous impact and clarity. But most of all, by balancing firsthand accounts of the few remaining Bomber Boys with a dispassionate historian's analysis of primary sources, he brings home a superb account of a bitter campaign whose heroes shamefully received no formal recognition or campaign medal for their valour.

"The Pathfinders" by Will Iredale is published by W H Allen priced £20. (RAF News)

“COUPE AÉRONAUTIQUE GORDON BENNETT”

This is the oldest and most prestigious event in aviation and the ultimate challenge for balloon pilots and their equipment.

This international competition was initiated by the adventurer and newspaper tycoon James Gordon Bennett Jr. in 1906, when 16 balloons launched from the Tuileries Gardens in Paris. Little did the crowd of 200,000 spectators know this race would continue throughout the 20th century and beyond.... The rules are simple and unchanged since 1906. All the balloons are of the same size and lift. They take off within a short “launch window” from the same launch site. The goal is to fly the furthest non-stop distance measured in straight line from the launch site. Landing on water is not permitted. This year the air space of all European countries is open to the pilots with the exception of Russia, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Malta and Iceland. Each team consists of two pilots. Pilots are airborne for up to three days and nights in an open basket, carried by the gas balloon and steered only by the winds in different altitudes. Ground crew (strategists, meteorologists, ATC specialists) help pilots to make the right decisions. Up to three teams per nation can enter the event. The nation that wins the race will host the event two years later. Thanks to the latest technology it is possible to follow the race in real-time (position, direction, speed, leader board). Poland won the Gordon Bennett Cup six times, in 1933, 1934, 1935, 1938, 1983 and most recently in 2018. The names of the victorious pilots: Franciszek Hynek, Zbigniew Burzynski, Wladyslaw Pomaski, Wladyslaw Wysocki, Antoni Janusz, Franciszek Janik, Stefan Makne & Ireneusz Cieslak have been cast in stone in the history of aviation. In the past Poland had the privilege to be the host and the organizer of the event three times. Unfortunately in 1939 the start from Lvov had to be called off due to the outbreak of the WW2 and in 1983 most complex political situation caused the organization and the launch site to be moved to Switzerland and postponed until 1984. Following the most recent victory of the Polish pilots Mateusz Rękas and Jacek Bogdański, who won the race in 2018, the organization of the 2020 event was assigned to Poland. Due to the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic the launch of the race had to be postponed until August 2021 and the venue changed from Wroclaw to Torun. *(Sent in by Hanke Fourie)*

WHAT THE GORDON BENNETT !

James Gordon Bennett Jr. (May 10, 1841 – May 14, 1918) was publisher of the New York Herald, founded by his father, James Gordon Bennett Sr. (1795–1872), who emigrated from Scotland. He was generally known as Gordon Bennett to distinguish him from his father. Among his many sports-related accomplishments he organized both the first polo match and the first tennis match in the United States, and he personally won the first trans-oceanic yacht race. He sponsored explorers including Henry Morton Stanley's trip to Africa to find David Livingstone, and the ill-fated USS Jeannette attempt on the North Pole. A very interesting personality all round.... Bennett's controversial reputation is thought to be the inspiration behind the phrase "Gordon Bennett!" used as an expression of incredulity.

OH DEAR, WHAT CAN THE MATTER BE?

On 17 July 1876, the world's largest swinging bridge was opened – a marvel of hydraulic engineering. Since that day, the Newcastle Swing Bridge, designed by William Armstrong, one of the greatest names in British engineering, has opened on about 300,000 occasions for the passage of about half-a-million vessels.



But last weekend, as hundreds gathered to witness this industrial wonder in operation for the first time for more than 18 months, something deep within its bowels jammed fast. The Port of Tyne authority, which is responsible for maintenance of the bridge, said the fault was “unforeseeable.” But the embarrassing malfunction has led to accusations the bridge is being allowed to fall into disrepair. Historic England, the body responsible for the county’s historic environment, said the bridge is a “symbol of Tyneside’s industrial heritage and status”. A spokesperson said: “The ability of the bridge to move as intended is a key part of its significance as a scheduled monument and Grade II*-listed building.” Historic England said it was in contact with the port authority about the bridge but there had been “no discussions about the problems” with its ability to swing. “We would be willing to discuss any repair issues to make it operate successfully.”

CONSTRAINED FUNDING, CONSTRAINED FLYING HOURS:

Constrained funding is affecting the ability of the South African Air Force (SAAF) to provide enough serviceable aircraft, which is negatively affecting flying hours. This was revealed during a progress report from the Department of Defence (DoD) presented at a Portfolio Committee on Defence and Military Veterans (PCDMV) meeting on 18 August. The Department of Defence said the reduced availability of aircraft is negatively affecting hours flown. Helicopter systems have a critical spares shortage which is because of procurement processes with long lead times and a backlog of spares. Transport and combat systems have similar issues. “Constrained funding is also affecting the ability to provide enough serviceable aircraft, although serious efforts are being made to ensure availability is increased within the reduced budget,” the Committee heard, after expressing concern about the fact that the SA Air Force is not able to meet its flying hour targets. Attention is being given to effective planning for spares procurement to try and compensate for long lead times. It is envisaged that this will aid the SA Air Force in obtaining higher levels of serviceability allowing more flying hours to be flown to achieve the stated goals as per the Annual Performance Plan,” the DoD said.

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

Now 520 days since the start of the great pandemic, this is the seventy-third weekly Newsheet - “Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings” - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest, that will help us all to keep in contact and entertained through the lockdown, until we are relieved! Thanks for the contributions! We’ll use them in successive editions... We’re all still hanging in there...

Please continue to take care (and keep warm!) – Support where you can. Don’t spread alarm and despondency on social media – you may become the target of a showcase trial... Remember that all this, too, shall pass. Given the “brighter” Covid outlook we have restarted informal lunches, Wanderers and other venues are open... We are propose to hold a battle of Britain Lunch on

Friday 17 September at Randpark Golf Club. This will have to be by pre-booking due to current Covid restrictions. We will have our own room. All being well, we will have the traditional fly-past to mark the occasion, courtesy of Arnie Meneghelli and team, which can be viewed from the verandah and gives a magnificent sight of the formation.

TAILPIECE:

I know a man, who was not doing well,
 But that was as far as anyone could tell,
 He was sent to jail,
 But that's another tale,
 And now relaxes in hospital and not in a cell.
(The Sherriff of Nottingham Road)

"This is the flying corps
 So people say
 Where Air Mechanics lay the drains
 For two bob a day
 Oh! You should hear them sing
 "Roll on when my four is in
 Then back home my hook I'll sling
 And there I'll stay."

This was sung by "Air Mechanics" ("Airmen" today) in the RFC. The reference to "my Four" is to enlistment, or reserve service, for four years. An erroneous impression existed that on completion of his four years, the "ack emma" would be able to return to civilian life whether the war was finished or not.

Sung to the tune: "There is a Happy Land" (Sent in by Sean Cronin)

During the Church service, the pastor asked if anyone in the congregation would like to express praise for prayers, which had been answered.

A lady stood up and came forward. She said, 'I have a reason to thank the Lord. Two months ago, my husband Tommy had a terrible bicycle wreck and his scrotum was completely crushed. The pain was excruciating and the doctors didn't know if they could help him.'

You could hear an audible gasp from the men in the congregation as they imagined the pain that poor Tommy experienced.

She continued, "He was unable to hold me or the children and every move caused him terrible pain. We prayed as the doctors performed a delicate operation. They were able to piece together the crushed remnants of Tommy's scrotum and wrap wire around it to hold it in place."

Again, the men in the congregation squirmed uncomfortably as they imagined the horrible surgery performed on Tommy.

She continued, 'Now he is out of the hospital and the doctors say, with time, his scrotum should recover completely.' All the men sighed with relief. The pastor rose and tentatively asked if anyone else had anything to say. A man stood up and walked slowly to the podium. He said, "I'm Tommy." The entire congregation held its breath.

"I just want to tell my beautiful wife the word is sternum."

Free Marriage Tip: Don't ask your wife when dinner will be ready while she is mowing the lawn...

A man ran home from work, pulled his wife into the bedroom, threw her on the bed and pulled the blankets over them. She was shocked – he hadn't been like this for 20 years! Then her husband said: "Look! My new watch glows in the dark!"

A man walks out to the street and catches a taxi which is just going by.
 He gets into the taxi, and the Cabbie says, "Perfect timing. You're just like Frank."

Passenger: "Who?"

Cabbie: "Frank Feldman... He's a guy who did everything right all the time. Like my coming along when you needed a cab, things happened like that to Frank Feldman every single time."

Passenger: "There are always a few clouds over everybody."

Cabbie: "Not Frank Feldman. He was a terrific athlete. He could have won the Grand-Slam at tennis. He could golf with the pros. He sang like an opera baritone and danced like a Broadway star and you should have heard him play the piano. He was an amazing guy."

Passenger: "Sounds like he was something really special."

Cabbie: "There's more. He had a memory like a computer. He remembered everybody's birthday. He knew all about wine, which foods to order and which fork to eat them with. He could fix anything. Not like me. I change a fuse, and the whole street blacks out. But Frank Feldman, could do everything right."

Passenger: "Wow, some guy then."

Cabbie: "He always knew the quickest way to go in traffic and avoid traffic jams. Not like me, I always seem to get stuck in them. But Frank, he never made a mistake, and he really knew how to treat a woman and make her feel good. He would never answer her back even if she was in the wrong; and his clothing was always immaculate, shoes highly polished too. He was the perfect man! He never made a mistake. No one could ever measure up to Frank Feldman."

Passenger: "An amazing fellow. How did you meet him?"

Cabbie: "Well... I never actually met Frank. He died and I married his wife..."
(Sent in by Karl Jensen)

MATT



'It's September soon. The autumn booster jab is my favourite one of the year'

MATT



'I still work from home. I'm shielding from a nasty new rail fare variant'



THE BEST QUOTE EVER



"If violent crime is to be curbed, it is only the intended victim who can do it. The felon does not fear the police, and he fears neither judge nor jury. Therefore, what he must be taught to fear is his victim."

**Lt. Col. Jeff Cooper,
U.S.M.C.**



**My dream...when I retire,
with my savings, living on
a small island somewhere!**

