



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 87 3rd DECEMBER 2021

GREETINGS:

Day 617: Shades of the Dambusters! Another week in Wonderland... South Africans have become accustomed to crisis-surfing: load shedding, water shortages, insurrection(s), the pandemic, vaccine inequality, a bruised and battered economy... Now OMG! Omicron!... and (yet another) petrol price shock! Black Friday in with a bang and out with a whimper... Eskom employees break powerplants and cause load-shedding to make extra money... Eskom consider private prosecutions if NPA don't show progress soon... Prasa/Transnet mess – international investors want out... convicted rapist and fraudster elected Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Kannaland, Western Cape...

UK Experts have no idea what living a normal life is (Surprise!) BoJo has his booster... advises Brits not to cancel Christmas festivities... Batman and Robin break into Buckingham Palace... Barbados goes UDI – declares Republic... Joe Biden keeping his head, when all about are losing theirs and blaming it on him... Donald Trump senses his opportunity to win back the White House... Japan's party season loses lustre as workers dread drinking with the boss... Rising lithium prices hit EV dream... Protesters obstruct RNLI lifeboat sent to rescue migrants... End your 'sausage war' on British bangers, UK tells EU... Prince Andrew dragged into Ghislaine Maxwell trial... Meghan wins against the "Daily Fail" ...

A HELLUVA YEAR:

It's been another helluva year and South Africans deserve a good deal. After everything that has happened, retailers also deserve our support. We're not shaming Black Friday consumerism: trust you did your bit to help the economy. Before you show off the novelty pyjamas though, there is something else we as South Africans deserve more, which won't leave us with the heavy hangover of buyer's remorse. **A free, fair and functioning country.** We deserve an existence where we don't wonder where our taxes went (or into whose pockets), where we don't need to weigh up who to vote for based on "bad" and "worse" or wonder whether the entire infrastructure of South Africa will, finally, crumble. (*Daily Maverick, Edited*)

COMBINED 90TH ANNIVERSARY:



A formation flight of specially painted Chinook and Puma helicopter has taken place to mark over 90 years of combined service. The occasion saw the aircraft make a commemorative flight over a number of locations in the South of England displaying their bespoke anniversary tail art. The two uniquely painted airframes celebrated their individual anniversaries earlier this year, but this is their first formation flight as a pair. The Puma (XW224), from RAF Benson, has completed 50 years of service; while the Chinook (ZD984), from RAF Odiham, has completed 40 years of service. Each aircraft's tail art was especially commissioned to commemorate the significant anniversaries of their entry into service with the RAF. The flightpath included several iconic sites, stretching from the Isle of Wight to central London; with each location offering unique joint training opportunities for the crews who will often work together on operations. Both the Pumas and Chinooks have operated as part of the Joint Helicopter Command for over 20 years. The longest serving of the two aircraft, the Puma is a medium-lift support helicopter which entered service on 29th January 1971. Over the last five decades, it has supported combat and humanitarian operations around the world, including: Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, Mozambique and the Caribbean. In the UK it has also supported critical Defence tasks such as security for the Olympic Games in London and support for the Scottish Ambulance Service during the Coronavirus Pandemic. The Chinook, a heavy-lift helicopter with its distinctive twin engine, tandem rotor heads, arrived into RAF service on 22nd November 1980. Throughout its 40 years of service, the Chinook has operated in every major conflict since the Falklands War in 1982, including life-saving medical evacuations. It has made an immeasurable contribution to the Service, supporting communities across the UK with its extensive and adaptable lift capability including flood relief efforts and life-saving patient transfers in the UK. *(RAF News)*

PIRATES OF THE OUTER HEBRIDES:



RAF aircraft and personnel will deploy to Stornoway in the Outer Hebrides this week, in a major exercise to develop the future Agile Combat Employment concept. Agile Combat Employment is a new concept, which aims to enable the RAF to operate from a greater number of locations, to provide increased flexibility and resilience. It is being developed and implemented using a series of exercises over the next 3 years.

Around 60 personnel will deploy as part of the exercise, known as Exercise AGILE PIRATE, which will practice refuelling and rearming of Typhoon fighter jets from a forward location. Operating from Stornoway Airport, the Island of Lewis will play host to visiting Typhoon from RAF Lossiemouth and A400M from RAF Brize Norton. A Headquarters from 138 Expeditionary Air Wing based at RAF Marham will command the deployment made up of specialists in personnel preparation and admin, tactical refuelling teams, armaments experts, logisticians, Force Protection and not least civilian cooperation and support from Stornoway Airport. The Exercise is designed to test a fundamental question: what is the minimum footprint of people and kit and processes required to successfully deploy and sustain aircraft to a temporary location at short notice. (Appears the RAF are (re)discovering forward airfields) (*RAF News*)

MAGIC CARPET RIDE:



Over 350 RAF personnel from across a wide range of branches and trades have been working in the Omani heat over the last few weeks to ensure the success of Exercise MAGIC CARPET, a two-week exercise in the Air Exercise area in Dhofar Governorate, Oman. The Air Force personnel worked night and day to ensure that the jets of 2 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, 12 Squadron and the Voyager of 101 Squadron were available to fly a wide range of exercise scenarios, testing pilots, engineers and ground crew. While based in Oman, the team needed to be able to communicate with aircraft and ground controllers as well as access to communications back to the UK. The deployed team from 90 Signals Unit, normally based at RAF Leeming, maintained the vital communications network and equipment that allowed the detachment to talk in real-time between distant locations. The flying programme was completed last week, and personnel will depart from Oman over the next two weeks. (*RAF News*)

TUSSLE WITH TALIBAN:



The United Arab Emirates has held talks with the Taliban to run Kabul airport, going up against Gulf rival Qatar in a diplomatic tussle for influence with Afghanistan's new rulers, according to four sources with knowledge of the matter. UAE officials have held a series of discussions with the group in recent weeks to discuss operating the airport that serves as landlocked Afghanistan's main air link to the world, the foreign diplomats based in the Gulf region told Reuters.

The talks demonstrate how countries are seeking to assert their influence in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan even as the hard-line Islamist group largely remains an international pariah and its government not formally recognised by any country. The Emiratis are keen to counter diplomatic clout enjoyed there by Qatar, according to the sources who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter. The Qataris have been helping run the Hamid Karzai International Airport along with Turkey after playing a major role in evacuation efforts following the chaotic US withdrawal in August and have said they are willing to take over the operations. Yet the Taliban has not yet formalised an arrangement with Qatar, the four diplomats said.

THE LAST DAMBUSTER'S 100TH BIRTHDAY:



The last surviving member of the original Dambusters, Squadron Leader (Retired) George Leonard 'Johnny' Johnson, was born on November 25th, 1921. He went on to aid in arguably the most daring and innovative air-raid of World War II, earning him a Distinguished Flying Medal and Member of the Order of the British Empire, in 2017. Born in Hameringham, Lincolnshire, Johnny volunteered to join the RAF in 1940 as a navigator but was selected as a pilot instead. After training in Florida, Johnny chose to become an Air Gunner and was posted with 97 Squadron, to Woodhall Spa.

His first operational raid to Gdynia, Poland in 1942, had to be aborted due to an engine failure. But the following night saw the aircrew perform a successful raid on Nuremburg. Johnny trained as a Specialist Bomb Aimer at RAF Fulbeck, before embarking on his first sortie the following month in Munich. However, his Avro Lancaster had to make an emergency landing after it was attacked. Johnny went on to complete a further 18 missions with 97 Squadron. In March 1943, bomber crews from British, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Air Forces secretly formed 617 Squadron. They deployed on Operation CHASTISE, to disable the Eder, Sorpe and Möhne Dams that supplied hydropower and water to the industrial Ruhr region of Germany. By destroying the Dams, 617 Squadron hoped to ruin Germany's manufacturing capabilities and so shorten the war. Flying at 60 feet over the Sorpe Dam, after ten attempts, Johnny released the bomb... The Dam was damaged, contributing to thousands of Germans having to be withdrawn from their Atlantic defences to repair the Dams, and the 104 factories and 33 bridges impacted. The feat earned 617 Squadron the name 'Dambusters,' after the complex planning, ingenuity, skill and bravery it took to carry out the raid. Johnny went on a further 19 missions with 617 Squadron, before working as a bombing instructor until the end of the War. Commissioned, he then served as a navigator with both 100 and 120 Squadrons. Retiring from the RAF in 1962, Johnny became an educator of psychiatric patients, at Rampton Hospital and became a local councillor and the Chairman of the local Conservative Party branch. Other recognitions include an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Lincoln for Johnny's contribution to British Society, and an Honorary Life Membership to the RAF Club in Piccadilly, London. Johnny published an autobiography recounting his story, *'George 'Johnny' Johnson, The Last British Dambuster.'* (RAF News)

PRIVATE RAIL BOBAAS?

When we see in the media the awful depredations of criminals and vandals on our rail infrastructure, and one of the sets of the Blue Train, a national icon, wrecked as a consequence at Union Station, it's no surprise that international rail investors are talking exit from SA. But there is a

bright side in the shape of private operators. Andrew Thomas, CEO of Grindrod Rail updated the Railways Africa team on the status of their locomotive fleet rehabilitation investment programme, which is already two-thirds of the way through and should be completed within the next 18 months. This fleet was originally manufactured by Grindrod between 2011 and 2017. The work being executed is in line with the required 6-year service. Andrew is proud of the fact that at least 70% of the cost so far has been spent with local suppliers. In addition, Andrew discussed the prospects of deploying their fleet in South Africa and the company is looking forward to collaborating with Transnet in the future. Xolani Mbambo, CEO of Grindrod Freight Services, explained how the RailCo Africa consortium fits within the Grindrod group. RailCo Africa, consist of two segments being rolling stock leasing and operations. This enables the company to focus on its core competency across the region. With the improvement of commodity prices, there is considerable demand for leased rolling stock solutions. Xolani highlights some of their activities in Africa, and whilst open access in South Africa is gaining momentum, Xolani emphasizes that they are here to support Transnet – who they view as a key stakeholder. (Maybe Fikile Mbalula should lift up his eyes unto the private sector, from whence may come Transnet’s help...) (*RailNews*)

CYBERCRIMES:

President Cyril Ramaphosa has signed the Cybercrimes Bill into law, with parts of the bill now set to take effect from 1 December 2021. MyBroadband reported that these provisions criminalise sending certain types of harmful messages on social media in South Africa. Penalties for sending such messages include imprisonment for up to three years and/or a fine. The Cybercrimes Act defines three types of harmful messages that have been criminalised in South Africa. They are messages which:

- Incite damage to property or violence.
- Threaten people with damage to property or violence.
- Unlawfully contain an intimate image.

In addition to criminalising certain harmful messages, the Act also includes definitions for cyber fraud, forgery, extortion, and theft of incorporeal property.

TAILPIECE:

The music at the concert was absolutely pounding,
Which irritates the elderly in the surroundings,
It is the boom boom boom
That really makes me fume,
But the youth seem to enjoy - it's astounding!
(*The Sherriff of Nottingham Road*)

During a train journey from London to Manchester, an American visiting UK persisted in attempts to engage an Englishman, who was reading his newspaper, in conversation. It was clear that these attempts were unwelcome, but the American persisted and said: “The trouble with you English is that you are so bloody stuffy... You set yourselves above the average person. Do you really think your stiff upper lip attitude works? Look at me: I’m me! I have a little Italian in me, a bit of Greek blood, a little Irish and some Spanish blood. What do you say to that?”

The Englishman lowered his newspaper and said: “How very sporting of your mother...”

NAILED IT:

Maggie, a blonde city girl, marries a New Zealand dairy farmer. One morning, on his way out to check on the fences, farmer John says to Maggie, 'The insemination man is coming over to impregnate one of our cows today. I drove a nail into the rail above the cow's stall in the barn so you can show him which cow it is when he gets here, OK?' So then the farmer leaves for the fields.

After a while, the artificial insemination man arrives and knocks on the front door. Maggie takes

him down to the barn and they walk along the row of cows until she sees the nail, and she tells him, 'This is the one...right here.'

Terribly impressed by what he seemed to think just might be another dizzy blonde, the man asks, 'Tell me lady, how did you know this is the cow to be bred?'

'That's simple, by the nail over its stall', Maggie explains very confidently.

Then the man asks, 'What's the nail for?'

She turns and walks away, and with complete confidence, says, 'I guess it's to hang your trousers on.'

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

Almost two years since the pandemic began, the world around us still seems to be in a near-constant state of flux. Just when we're getting used to "new normal", whatever that is.....Now 617 days since the start of the great lockdown, this is the eighty-seventh weekly Newssheet - "Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings" - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other items of interest, that will help us all to keep in contact and entertained through the lockdown...the Coved clouds are lifting, but still threatening....

Just when it appears that things are starting to come back to some kind of normal, another bogeyman has appeared...

Thanks for the continued contributions! We'll use them in successive editions... And please continue to take care – Support others where you can. Don't spread alarm and despondency on social media and try to keep cool heads and perspective.

Remember that all this, too, shall pass... As you know we made a prudent call to cancel the Christmas Ladies Lunch on Friday 3 December – next year will be better...

MATT



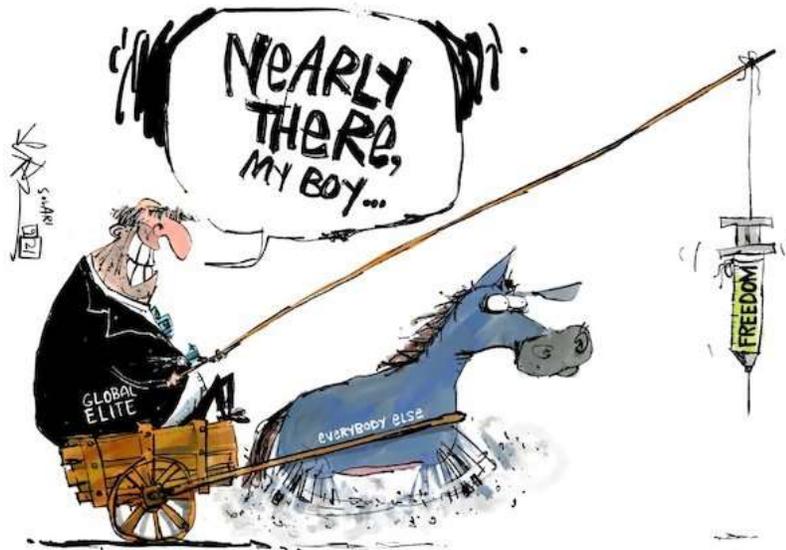
'They switched on the Christmas lights in the high street and two more energy firms went bust'

MATT



'Apparently, it's the new Christmas tree variant'





THE LAST OF THE FLYING BOATS: END OF AN ERA:



Flying Boats moored on the Vaal Dam

The UK government implemented the recommendations of the Hambling Committee about the future of British air services in 1931. Imperial Airways was incorporated on 31 March as the “chosen instrument” of the British government with the mission of developing British commercial air transport on an economic basis. The new airline was formed out of and took over the fleets of The Instone Airline Limited, The Daimler Airway, Handley Page Transport Limited and British Marine Air Navigation Co Ltd (operating a Southampton to Guernsey flying boat service).

Based at Croydon Airport, Imperial Airways would receive a government subsidy of £1m spread over ten years on the basis that they would be required to develop routes to the Empire – to South Africa, India and ultimately Australia – particularly for the carriage of mail. The Chairman was Rt Hon Sir Eric Geddes GCB, GBE. The initial fleet was three Handley Page W.8bs, two Supermarine Sea Eagles, one Vickers Vimy Commercial and seven DH34s. The primitive aircraft were used to develop the European routes to Paris, Zurich, Basle, Amsterdam, Hanover and Berlin.

The Government introduced an unsurcharged airmail scheme to many parts of the Empire. This ‘Empire Air Mail Scheme’ created a huge demand for cargo space on aircraft. Imperial Airways, therefore, took the bold step of ordering from the drawing board 31 large, modern, four-engined flying boats from Short Brothers, of Rochester, Kent, the famous C Class Empire Boats. These

boats carried a large volume of mail, whilst passengers were accommodated in luxurious cabins with a promenade area in which they could relax and gaze down at the passing scenery. By the mid-1930s all the mainline Empire routes were operated by these flying boats.

Imperial Airways' first through flying boat service to South Africa left Southampton, G-ADHL "Canopus". The route was Marseilles-Rome-Brindisi-Athens-Alexandria-Cairo-Wadi Halfa-Khartoum-Malakal-Butiaba-Port Bell-Kisumu-Mombasa-Dar es Salaam-Lindi-Mozambique-Beira-Lourenco Marques-Durban. The route had optional stops at Macon, Mirabella, Luxor, Kareima, Laropi, Quelimane and Inhambane. The first northbound service by G-ADVC "Corsair" left Durban on 6 June.

Following the formal declaration of war by the British Government on Germany in 1939, all civil flying ceased. The head offices of Imperial Airways, British Airways Ltd and the Civil Aviation Department of the Air Ministry were evacuated to Bristol. The airlines landplanes were moved from Croydon and Heston to Whitchurch and Imperial Airways' flying boats from Hythe to Poole.

Post war, BOAC introduced Short Solent flying boats on UK to Johannesburg service. The route was Southampton-Augusta-Cairo-Luxor-Khartoum-Port Bell-Victoria Falls-Vaaldam. The first flight was operated by G-AHIT "Severn". With the advent of the post war era, during 1945-1946 there were more significant changes ahead coupled with rapid expansion. A new cohort of younger men who had been recruited & prepared at Poole as Stewards for BOAC within the later stages of WW2, was now ready for ops on Hythes and later the Sandringhams: Plymouth and Bermuda Classes as newly converted from the Sunderland MkIIIs. Also, crewing the BOAC Land-planes which were initially based at nearby Hurn (Bournemouth)... and in competition with the Flying Boats on the restored Kangaroo Route to Australia - until Heathrow was opened. However, this did not stifle recruitment & training of Stewardesses: When recruited trainees were oft used for duties at Airways House or assigned to other sections until ready for such vacancies arising. These were to be required not only for short haul services but also for the implementation of transatlantic Routes... as well as for the Solent Classes modified after teething problems, which would now reinstate a Springbok Route by Flying Boats to South Africa (6,350 miles). This was trialed from Poole on 2nd. December 1947 with G-AHIT "Severn" with Olive Marshall as the Stewardess: However, the passenger services were delayed until after BOAC had switched to Southampton in 1948. Though terminating at Lake Vaaldam, 68 miles from Johannesburg, the route took in tourist attraction stops, principally Victoria Falls, which proved to be very popular with passengers & aircrews alike!

On 7 November 1950 BOAC replaced its Southampton to Johannesburg Solent flying boat services with a thrice-weekly Hermes service from London to Johannesburg via Tripoli, Kano, Brazzaville and Livingstone. BOAC then withdrew all Solents, which had been the airline's last flying boats. Imperial Airways and BOAC had maintained continuous flying boat operations since 1924. The era of gracious air travel had passed....



PFBC's Blue Plaques at Salterns in 2013; ...with Olive Carlisle (nee Marshall), who holidayed with PFBC