



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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BRYANSTON 2021

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 23 – 11th SEPTEMBER 2020

GREETINGS TO ALL:

Day 168 on the “Coronacoaster”...and a real “bad hair” day or two in the last week! Trump pilloried (again) as US continues the run-up for the “Plague Election”. The “Billion Dollar Border Town”, Dandong, on the border with North Korea, has shed a spotlight on Pyongyang's global money laundering networks and raised fresh questions about China's complicity in bypassing United Nations sanctions against Kim Jong-un's regime. Quarantine policy 'in tatters' as UK divides on Portugal; stuttering efforts to get Brits back to work; Wildfires in California (and Clicks!) Whatever next? Well, take your pick.....At home, we continue at Level 2, with surviving restaurants gradually reopening, but with the overnight curfew remaining in place, as well as the requirement for strict social distancing and restriction on numbers attending any gathering at 50.....George Bizos dies at 92, Fikile Mbalula “twitter celebrity”. Patricia hanging out the washing on the Beit Bridge line...United Airlines plans direct USA – Joburg flights. The unthinkable prospect of Rugby World Cup champions South Africa abandoning the Southern Hemisphere appears to be gaining traction, if media speculation is to be believed.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN 80TH ANNIVERSARY:



While, sadly, our local Battle of Britain Lunch and fly-past, and the Memorial Service on Sunday, have had to be cancelled due to the continuing Corona restrictions. Celebrations, many “virtual”, will be continuing in UK at various venues over next weekend 18-20 September. There will be the traditional Memorial Service at St Clement Danes in London on Sunday 20 September (pre-booking only.) At Duxford there will be an airshow with limited entry, by ticket only, mostly sold out. The weekend kicks off with the Battle of Britain Proms (including Land of Hope and Glory and Rule Britannia!) Sailor Malan features prominently in the logo, above. You will be able to follow on social media and the internet - Visit the site <https://www.iwm.org.uk/airshows/duxford-battle-of-britain-airshow>

UNKNOWN SOLDIER CENTENARY – 7th SEPTEMBER 1920:



On the 7th September 1920, in strictest secrecy four unidentified British bodies were exhumed from temporary battlefield cemeteries at Ypres, Arras, the Asine and the Somme. None of the soldiers who did the digging were told why. The bodies were taken by field ambulance to GHQ at St-Pol-Sur-Ternoise. There the bodies were draped with the Union flag. Sentries were posted and Brig.Gen. Wyatt and a Colonel Gell, selected one body at random. A French Honour Guard was selected and stood by the coffin overnight. In the morning of 8th September, a specially designed coffin made of oak from the grounds of Hampton Court, was brought and the “Unknown Warrior” placed inside.

On top was placed a crusader’s sword and a shield on which was inscribed: *‘A BRITISH WARRIOR WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR 1914 – 1918 FOR KING AND COUNTRY’*

On the 9th of November the Unknown Warrior was taken by horse drawn carriage through guards of honour and the sound of tolling bells and bugle calls to the quayside. There it was saluted by Marechal Foch and loaded onto HMS Vernon bound for Dover.... The coffin stood on the deck covered in wreaths and surrounded by the French Honour Guard.

On arrival at Dover the Unknown Warrior was greeted with a 19 gun salute (normally only reserved for Field Marshals). He then travelled by special train to Victoria Station in London. He stayed there overnight and on the morning of the 11th November he was taken to Westminster Abbey where he was placed in a tomb at the west end of the nave – his grave was filled in using 100 sandbags of earth from the battlefields.

When the Duke of York (later King George VI) married Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyons in the Abbey in 1923, she left her wedding bouquet on the tomb as a mark of respect (she had lost a brother during the war). Since then all Royal brides married in the Abbey have sent back their bouquets to be laid on the tomb.

The idea of the Unknown Soldier was thought of by a padre called David Railton who had served at the front during the Great War and it was the Union flag, used as an altar cloth at the front, that had been draped over the coffin.

It was the intention that all relatives of the 517,773 combatants whose bodies had not been identified could believe that the unknown warrior could very well be their lost husband, father, brother, or son.

THE MARINES ARE COMING!

Aircraft from V Marine Fighter Attack (VMFA) - 211 Squadron arrived at RAF Marham this week to start their UK detachment. The ten F-35B jets flew from their base in Yuma Arizona via MCAS Beaufort to visit the UK for the first time. The US Marine Corps Squadron will be working alongside 617 Squadron ahead of a Group Exercise in September where they will embark on HMS

Queen Elizabeth to take part in Exercise Joint Warrior. VMFA-211 Squadron will conduct synthetic training in the purpose built simulators at RAF Marham to familiarise themselves with the local airspace and procedures before they take to the Norfolk skies to fly training sorties alongside 617 Squadron in preparation for their embarkation with the carrier later this month. They will also be participating in Exercise Point Blank with their colleagues from local base RAF Lakenheath along with other NATO partners. On completion of Exercise Joint Warrior both 211 and 617 Squadrons will return to RAF Marham where they will then prepare to take part in a further exercise, Crimson Warrior which will allow the F-35's to conduct high end training, alongside other platforms, in a contested and degraded environment with this year's focus being on Multi Domain Operations.

OPERATION CORONA:

Although its main focus is on South Africa's land borders, Operation Corona is mandated to patrol South Africa's territorial waters, which includes its exclusive economic zone, continental shelf and Prince Edward and Marion islands. Eighty-four days of surface maritime patrols/deployments are allocated a year, while 22 days of sub-surface patrols have been allocated for the 2020/21 financial year. Joint Operations said that patrols can be carried out by vessels at sea (with or without helicopter support) or as fixed patrols from the shore. The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) conducts periodic patrols in hotspot areas and therefore disrupts illegal fishing and poaching activities in the patrol/deployment area for the duration of such activities, Joint Operations said. These activities are enhanced when the SANDF works in consultation with other government departments such as the South African Police Service (SAPS) and Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF). Successes are often measured by the absence/deterrence of illegal activities, not necessarily by arrests/confiscations. In addition to maritime patrols under Operation Corona, the SANDF also contributes to the maritime security component of Operation Phakisa, assisting the SAPS and DEFF on many coastal anti-poaching (crayfish and abalone) operations, particularly in the Western Cape. Joint Operations highlighted some areas for improvement, saying that operations should be intelligence-driven (intelligence is minimal or non-existent at present), that emergency procurement processes be put into place so ships can deploy quickly, that a larger budget is needed for days at sea and that better maritime domain awareness is needed to direct limited resources to hotspots.

IT'S A DOG'S LIFE...



More evidence of the adoption of combat-type operations in protecting South Africa's – and the southern African sub-continent's – natural heritage is in the latest Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) annual review with phrases such as “forward operating bases” and “strategic planning” widely used in reporting on anti-poaching activities. While it might seem to be an oxymoron, PPF has, in line with other conservation agencies, government departments and non-government organisations (NGOs) found fighting fire with fire the way to go if poachers are to be beaten.

The first six months of this year, with at least three of them under varying levels of lockdown, saw rhino poaching in South Africa decrease by half according to the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) under the leadership of Minister Barbara Creecy. A hundred and sixty-six rhino were killed for their horns compared to 316 in the first half of 2019. Creecy was reported as saying “we have arrested the escalation in rhino losses” while acknowledging the COVID-19 lockdown restricting movement of people contributed to the decline in rhino poaching.

DAG [Dyck Advisory Group] Conservation Trust:

DAG entered into a tripartite agreement with Mozambique's National Administration for Conservation Areas and Peace Parks to provide technical support in a newly developed FOB (Forward Operating Base). This resulted in a dramatic decline in incursions from Limpopo to Kruger, as well as a significant increase in the recovery of snares and gin traps.

RULE BRITANNIA!

Here is something you are unlikely to learn via the BBC. In the 17th century the seas around Britain were ruled by North African Muslim Slavers. They stopped British ships and carried off the crews to be sold as slaves in Algiers and Tripoli. The situation became so bad that fishermen from Devon and Cornwall wouldn't put out to sea in case they were captured by North African Slave Traders. Between 1609 and 1616, 466 British ships were captured by Slave Traders in the English Channel, Irish Sea and North Atlantic, and the crews were sold into slavery. In 1625 a raiding party landed at Mount's Bay in Cornwall and 60 people who had taken refuge in a local church were dragged out, loaded up and taken off to Africa to be sold as slaves. On 12 August 1625, the Mayor of Plymouth wrote to London for military help after 27 ships had been seized by North African Muslim Slave Traders in just 10 days. In 1645, 240 people were seized as slaves in Cornwall. The situation only began to change after the end of the English Civil War when the Royal Navy was built up under Oliver Cromwell. By 1700, North African Slavers generally knew better than to bother the British Isles in the search for slaves because of the Royal Navy. It was a triumph that Britain was finally able to control its own coastal waters. It was in commemoration of this that in 1740, James Thompson wrote 'Rule Britannia'. It is a hymn of thanksgiving rather than a proclamation of aggressive Nationalism. If you get this far and are interested to learn more, read "White Gold" by Giles Milton. Its recommended. Amazon have this book available in paperback and Kindle.

THE VAMPIRE:

Pray speak louder Carruthers ... what's that you say? What's to tell about the Vampire? She's an interesting bird. Hard to call her a she with a name like that. All craft are she though, so I suppose it is a she. Looks a bit like an old bat, so I suppose her name is apt. She does have four nasty teeth, though, 20 millimetre I believe. Her shape and her form? Well, a body in a million, or in your nightmares, eh Carruthers ... ? Compared to the Meteor? Those Gloster people! What a sham! Why do they have to carry a spare engine, and then stick it way out on the other wing? If the spare falls off, it will probably cartwheel; it could even turn into a Polish joke. Remember that bloke - Zuracoughsomething? He might give it a try. Not very good aerodynamicists at Gloster! Idiots! De Havealough always had the answer.

Where are we going to squirt the hot stuff out of this newfangled engine? Oh, I say Carruthers, remember the Vickers Gunbus of 1915, or was it 16? We made flying machines then! We solved that problem, so what's new? We'll put the engine in a pod, sling it between the wings and make a twin boomed tail so that the hot nasty stuff goes away without burning anything. How's that? Pardon a pilot ... ? Oh yes! That's a bit awkward. Do we need one? Yes ... oh well. I suppose we do. He'll have to sit somewhere in the pod too. We mustn't take up too much room though, Carruthers, and don't tell him about the tail. He might be a bit miffed if he has to jump out.

My goodness, it's a very funny engine, Carruthers. Looks a bit like an old stove. Principle seems the same too. Appears you squirt fuel into those funny chambers then set fire to it. I know the Sopwith Camel had a similar system, but its engine just flung itself around in opposition to the propeller. Somehow though, here they seem to have forgotten the propeller. Put that in a memo won't you, Carruthers, someone is bound to notice ... this is ridiculous. These Gobbling people say the fuel will burn like billy-oh, turn a thing called a turbine and blow out of a hole at the back. This will make the machine rush away like a balloon when you let go of the opening. Pretty rum idea if you ask me ... eh Carruthers? How will they steer it? Oh yes, the pilot. I suppose we'll have to give it a steering wheel and things like that. Does it need brakes?

Remember the Mosquito, Carruthers? It was mostly all wood. I don't trust all this metal; it's not very English you know. I say ... remember the bowmen of England, gosh, if they had their say ... ! I hear DeHavealaughs is thinking of an airliner. It will be called the Comet. Will take lots of people a long way at huge speeds, sort of like the balloon I was telling you about. The noise would cause me to ... oh never mind. Hope they remember wood is trusty; metal bends and breaks I have been told. Where was I? ... Oh yes, back to the Vampire. We'll have to put some metal in, if only as a sop to these new youngsters. When they're gone we can go back to the old ways.

They designed it, they built it, they flew it, they sold it. It is very old fashioned and historical today. But, what a very dear little aeroplane and such a treat to fly. The single seater I mean. I won't say a word about the cockpit. I have read too many Battle of Britain stories to criticise something that worked, even if it was an appalling ergonomic slum. The two seater was a cow. Dual controlled aircraft are for people other than pilots.

(A teasing, honest tribute to the De Havilland Company by Neil McGibbon (AIR HERITAGE 1999)

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

This is the twenty-third weekly Newssheet - "Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings" - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest (preferably nothing on the antics of Ministers (various) or NCCC!) that will help us all to keep in contact through the lockdown. Thanks again to all those who have contributed! We will use contributions progressively as we move upwards and onwards.... Thanks to Ian Grace for spotting that Rick Peacock-Edwards' book "Rate of Climb" can now be ordered locally at loot.co.za for home delivery or convenient local collection at Clicks (EFF permitting.) Remember, Scully Levin's great new book "Punching Holes in the Sky" is also now available.

Take care – keep safe in these troubled times, and remember that all this, too, shall pass.... We had hoped to be back at Wanderers for the Battle of Britain lunch, but the sad demise of SilvaSale and continuing restrictions precluded that. We'll keep you posted on developments at Wanderers... So, let's hear from you...Please send your suggestions or contributions to bookings@rafoc.org

TAILPIECE:

Won't be long – Nando's new slogan: "Our chicken isn't dry or damaged" #nandos

I got myself a Seniors GPS. Not only does it tell me how to get to my destination, it tells me why I wanted to go there...

My Wife says I'm tight, so to prove her wrong I'm taking her out for tea and biscuits today.... It should be quite exciting as she's never given blood before...

Last night, my neighbour came home drunk and banged on his own front door for, like, 5 minutes...Problem is, he lives alone, so I went outside and told him he wasn't there - he left!

PARROTS

A lady goes to her priest one day and tells him, "Father, I have a problem. I have two female parrots, but they only know how to say one thing."

"What do they say?" the priest asks.

They say, "Hi, we're hookers! Do you want to have some fun?!"

"That's obscene!" the priest exclaimed, then he thought for a moment.

"You know, I have two male talking parrots that I have taught to pray and read the Bible.

Bring your two parrots over to my house, and we'll put them in the cage with Francis and Job. My parrots can teach your parrots to praise and worship, and your parrots are sure to stop saying that phrase in no time.

"Thank you," the woman said, "this may be the solution."

The next day, she brought her female parrots to the priest's house. As he ushered her in, she saw that his two male parrots were inside their cage holding rosary beads and praying. Impressed, she walked over and placed her parrots in with them.

After a few minutes, the female parrots cried out in unison: "Hi, we're hookers! Do you want to have some fun?"

There was stunned silence.

Shocked, one male parrot looked over at the other male parrot and exclaimed, "Put the beads away, Frankie, our prayers have been answered!"

MATT



'We're going to cancel the Brexit trade talks and get a GCSE pupil to predict what the result would have been'

MATT



'I hate these primary school face masks. I've brought home the wrong child again'

