



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg

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BRYANSTON 2021

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 28 - 16th OCTOBER 2020

GREETINGS:

Day 200 of the great lockdown arrived this week, with the WHO (allegedly) changing stance on lockdowns now that the real economic consequences are apparent, and Covid cases fall far short of early "doomsday predictions". Otherwise, it was quite a week – the heated debate on testing and preventive measures continues in the UK, with pubs and restaurants being closed, and Sir Keir Starmer accusing the PM of causing "confusion, chaos and unfairness" by waiting until this week to announce a new local lockdown system. (He would, wouldn't he?) Indonesia using scarecrows to keep Covid away.... The next turn in the US Presidential election campaign was that Trump, having tested positive for Covid, is now "immune"...the media frenzy continues. In SA, the State of Disaster has been extended for another month the Senekal Saga continues, and more arrests for corruption of some senior SAPS officers as well as businessmen. NPA acts on Regiments Capital – hopefully, the chickens are coming home to roost!! South Africa's acting ambassador to Sudan accused in assassination and murder plot – diplomacy by other means? Fikile Mbalula is in hot water for cancelling fraudulent Transnet contracts. The ANC is to pay back a "little bit" of the costs of their jaunt to Zimbabwe – and is proposing that political parties be Government funded. (That means by you and me as taxpayers.) The SA wine industry struggling, with sales at 50% of pre-Covid levels.... "Study, get a good job and work hard, - and we will redistribute your money to someone who didn't"

RAFOC LUNCHES:

As advised last week, we are planning an Armistice Day Lunch, on Friday 6 November, Covid restrictions permitting, at the Rand Park Golf Club, which has reopened and is operating with all the necessary protocols, looks the most likely venue. As the organisers of a RAFOC lunch we will be accepting the responsibility for the wellbeing of all at the gathering. The risk is that if anyone attending tests positive at the time, or shortly thereafter, then all attending are required to go into quarantine. As far as we know, all RAFOC members have been able to "keep safe" and free from infection, so the material risk is the venue itself and its staff. The lunch will be a buffet to limit the number of staff required.

Update: Wanderers Committee have now confirmed that they have appointed new catering contractors who they are hoping will be able to start operations on 1 November. The new caterers are currently doing some modifications to catering arrangements in the bar and kitchens before reopening. It is not yet clear when the new company will be able to cater for functions. We will also

need to negotiate acceptable terms and conditions for our lunches to resume there. This is WIP - Further announcements to members are awaited.

RAF DISPLAY CENTENARY:

100 years ago on 3 July 1920, the first RAF Tournament (later known as the RAF Pageant then the RAF Display) took place at Hendon. It attracted 60,000 spectators. Originally a civil airfield established by Grahame White Aviation Company in 1911, Hendon was requisitioned in 1914 for air defence purposes. The pageants drew huge crowds for many years and were a chance for spectators to see aircraft fly, to experience technology they had never seen before and to see the Royal Air Force in action and meet the personnel. One of the best impromptu RAF displays was given by Flt Lt Alan Pollock in 1968, when he beat up Parliament and flew through Tower Bridge – the YouTube video has been doing the rounds - see attached interview, 50 years later!

PRINCESS ANNE CELEBRATES 70th BIRTHDAY:



The Princess Royal – whose birthday was in August – has been promoted to the roles of General in the Army and Air Chief Marshal in the RAF. This is in line with royal tradition, as senior royals are treated as though they are members of the military with ranks to reflect this. The Ministry of Defence said: “This promotion on her 70th birthday recognises her invaluable contribution and commitment to the military. “This includes long-term links with the Royal Navy, initially through the Women’s Royal Naval Service and her promotion to Admiral Chief Commandant in 2012. More recently, she visited the Royal Logistic Corps in Northern Ireland and paid tribute to the Royal Corps of Signals to mark their 100th birthday in June.” Princess Anne has a number of roles within the military (27 of them), serving as Colonel-in-Chief of multiple regiments. In an earlier interview, she was asked whether she believed that, at her age, there was any reason to slow down. She drew attention to the rest of her family, and said: "Look around at the members of my family who are considerably older than me and tell me whether you think that sets an example that suggests I might?".

SERGEANT JAMES ERIC WILLIAM BALLARD:

Another Spitfire pilot has been added to the ranks of “The Few”, 80 years after the end of the Battle of Britain. Sergeant James Eric William Ballard of No 610 (County of Chester) Squadron has been posthumously added to the list, after his logbook was discovered. It shows an operational sortie flown on 8 October 1940, a flight that was confirmed by the signatures of his commanding officer and flight commander. As the Battle of Britain is considered to have taken place between 10 July and 31 October 1940, the RAF Air Historical Branch has concluded that Sergeant Ballard meets the criteria to be awarded the Battle of Britain Clasp to the 1939-45 Star. Group Captain Patrick Total, OBE, and Secretary of the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust, said: "It is rare to be able to add a new name to the list of those who took part, especially a Spitfire pilot. Such was the desperate need then for fighter pilots that Sergeant Ballard had only nine hours of flying time before joining his squadron."

(More from the Battle of Britain Memorial site: www.bit.ly/TheFew)

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FLIGHT MECHANIC:

Jeff Brereton volunteered for the RAF in January 1940, following his 19th birthday. He was called up that spring, sent on an aero engineering course and qualified as a Flight Mechanic – Engine. He joined 605 Squadron at RAF Croydon and was soon repairing Hurricanes in the hectic world of an RAF station during the Battle of Britain. Training was a crash course at RAF St Athan Technical Training College in South Wales. It lasted 13 weeks and was all theoretical for engine mechanics and practical for riggers. Experience was to be gained on squadrons. He recalls: “Those I was with were all conscripted between the ages of 20 and 40 and I was a 19-year-old volunteer. The squadron was heavily engaged in the Battle of Britain and was flying five sorties a day. The squadron was very successful and at least one pilot was an ace before I arrived, as he had shot down five aircraft. That said, we were losing pilots and aircraft, and often had to fly undermanned until replacements came in. Aircraft were often returning with their airframe covered in bullet holes – as they were made of wood and covered with canvas. The ground crew had the job of cutting a piece of canvas to cover the damage and had two tins of quick drying synthetic camouflage paint, which was used to attach the canvas to the aircraft. There was only one petrol tanker and oil browser, so it was quite a rush to get the aircraft serviced in time for the next take off. Often the aircraft took off while the paint was still drying, and it was also common to see an airman stretched out across the tail plane helping to keep the rear wheel down on the ground. As all our Hurricanes were new, we didn’t have to do routine servicing, and major work was done at our parent aerodrome at RAF Kenly. Of the twelve Hurricanes that started at the beginning of September 1940 only one survived, R4118 UP-W, though it was badly damaged. I worked on UP-W until the end of October 1940, when it left for major servicing”.
(Interview in July-September 2020 RAFA “Air Mail”)

CAS VISITS CYPRUS AND MIDDLE EAST:

The recent visit by Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Winston, KCB, CBE included stop offs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, as well as visiting the deployed 83 Expeditionary Air Group and 903 Expeditionary Air Wing to meet RAF personnel conducting operations in the fight against Dash, as part of Operation Shadier. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia ACM Winston held discussions with the Commander of the Royal Saudi Arabian Defence Force to reinforce the UK’s enduring support and commitment to the region. Whilst in Oman the Commander of the Omani Royal Air Force conducted ACM Winston on a tour of their Military Technological College and in Qatar, he toured the Qatar Emir Air Force, training facilities and met their first female fast jet pilot trainee. ACM Winston also visited the US led Coalition’s Combined Air and Space Operations Centre where he saw first-hand the contribution of UK personnel in the ongoing fight against Dash and was also briefed on current operations by Major General Michael Koscheski USAF, the Deputy Combined Force Air Component Commander who oversees the command and control of air operations in a 20-nation area of responsibility.

AERO CLUB CENTENARY HOT AIR BALLOON:

On the 10th October 2020, after many months after postponement since C-19 made us all go into hiding, the Aero Club’s official Centenary Balloon Launch took place at Bill Harrop’s Balloon Safaris, Skeerpoort, in the Magalies Valley. Aeroclub Chairman Rob Jonkers said: “There is a sense of achievement on reaching a Century, on all manner of occasions it calls for a celebration, subject for congratulations on the significance, and justifiable pride. The past century of the existence of the Aero Club of South Africa has been integral in seeing the growth in Recreational Aviation, the collective of the various disciplines that make up flying for fun, that have allowed the freedom of development in the achievement of products, ideas, adventures, competitions that are existential of this magical world that is recreational flight.” Chairman of BAFSA Richard Bovell who was also this Centenary event organiser was the first pilot, and supported by student pilot Sema Mathebula, got the balloon off the ground in somewhat gusty conditions, the wind at that stage not favourable to

actually fly. Hanke Fourie took over from Richard for a second tethered stint, giving a good photographic opportunity for the guests in attendance. Richard thanked the guests and handed over the very first “Aero Club Centenary Yearbook” which is hot off the presses to the Doyen of Ballooning in South Africa Terry Adams, who since his arrival in SA in 1976 has been the mainstay of balloon manufacturing and pilot training in SA.

LIEUTENANT TERRY ADAMS RN:

Your scribe was privileged to meet Terry after breakfast and have a very interesting chat with him about his days in the Royal Navy, when he served as an Engineer Officer on the HMS Ark Royal under Captain Raymond Lygo RN (Who famously had “FLY NAVY” painted on the ship’s sides)



HMS Ark Royal (R09) was an Audacious-class aircraft carrier of the Royal Navy and, when she was decommissioned in 1979, was the Royal Navy's last remaining conventional catapult and arrested-landing aircraft carrier. She was the first aircraft carrier to be equipped with angled flight deck at its commissioning; her sister ship, HMS Eagle, was the Royal Navy's first angle-decked aircraft carrier after modification in 1954. Ark Royal was the only non-United States vessel to operate the McDonnell Douglas Phantom at sea. The scrapping of Ark Royal in 1980, two years after Eagle, marked the end of conventional fixed-wing aircraft operations aboard Royal Navy carriers. She had borne so many innovations, yet her replacement was not equipped with any of these. There was some discussion about preserving her as a museum ship, and some private funds were raised; the MOD would not sanction these efforts. The Fleet Air Arm Museum has subsequently mimicked the ship's island and flight deck in its central hall as an Aircraft Carrier Experience exhibition.

THE “BRISTOL BELLE” (G-AVTL):

This was the name given to the first modern hot air balloon in Britain. The balloon was created from an idea developed by members of the Bristol Gliding Club in the UK. Following developments by Ed Yost in the United States, members of the Bristol Gliding Club decided to create their own hot air balloon. Bill Malpas (Chairman of the project), Mark Westwood, Giles Bulmer of the Bulmer cider making family and Don Cameron were the four project creators. The first flight of the Bristol Belle took place on 9 July 1967 from RAF Weston-on-the-Green and was covered by the Daily Telegraph and other media. The balloon took part in some famous flights including one from HMS Ark Royal, where it was piloted by Lt Terry Adams, accompanied by Lt Howard Draper both of 849 Squadron, B Flight. This early morning launch carried mail to Malta while the Ark Royal was steaming off the southern coast of the island on 29 November 1970.

<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVA5QIFFJU5U3HSLJ5X4FUTIWQHG-AT-SEA-HOT-AIR-BALLOON-CARRIES-TWO-MEN-FROM-AIRCRAFT-CARRIER-ARK/query/hot>

NOW THAT’S A FLY-PAST:

RAF pilot Alan Pollock has only seven seconds to make a life-and-death decision. He’s just feet above the waters of the River Thames in a fighter jet travelling at 300 miles per hour. Less than half a mile ahead, blocking his way, is Tower Bridge. He can see that it’s busy with pedestrians and that a

double decker bus is driving slowly across it. Should he fly through? In the end, he decided to go for it..... It was April 5, 1968. Harold Wilson was prime minister, there were protests against the Vietnam War in London, and the Beatles' Lady Madonna was No. 1.



The start of the month had also marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Royal Air Force. The RAF was much loved — the feats of the pilots in the Battle of Britain were still fresh in the memory, and the new generation of jet pilots were in the front line of Britain's Cold War defence. Thirty-two-year-old Flight Lieutenant Alan Pollock was one of those pilots. He had joined the RAF in 1953 and had risen through the ranks, gaining experience in aircraft including de Havilland's Vampire jet fighter and its successor the Venom. He had served in Germany and the Middle East and as an aide-de-camp to Air Marshal Sir Humphrey Edwardes-Jones during his time as Nato Air Commander. Alan loved the RAF and felt its 50th anniversary should be celebrated with a flypast over London. There had been an official dinner and a few parades — but no flypast. This, he felt, was a terrible slight. One thing that was in the Air Force's blood was that you celebrated in the air, not on the ground,' Alan, now 82, says at his home in Surrey. He was serving at the time in No. 1 Squadron. This is the RAF's oldest unit and as such he believed it had a responsibility to take the lead in ensuring the half-centenary was celebrated properly. Alan decided to take matters into his own hands by staging a flypast of his own. On April 4, Alan and three other Hunter pilots from his squadron had flown from their base at West Raynham in Norfolk to RAF Tangmere in Sussex, the former home of No. 1 Squadron, where they were helping to celebrate the base being given the freedom of the city of Chichester. He decided that the following day, on their way back, he would make a detour over the capital. 'It was worth flying over London, even if I was going to get court-martialled,' Alan says. At the very least, a trial would give him a chance to have his say on the problems facing the Air Force. Soon after the Hunters took off on the morning of April 5, Alan slipped away from the others. By tapping out coded messages using the transmitter button on his radio, he told his colleagues he had lost visual contact and that he was having problems maintaining spoken communication. All Alan had with him for reference was a borrowed AA map, on which he had marked a route across London. Within a few minutes and keeping low to avoid commercial air traffic, he reached Heathrow Airport where he turned right and headed for Richmond Park and then the Thames. Flying over the river would be the safest and quietest route through the capital. 'I went over the Thames because I didn't want to cause any trouble,' Alan says. His memories of the flight are vivid. The Hunter was flying in a 'gin-clear' blue sky and 'one felt like Gulliver looking down at Lilliput'. He dropped to about 150 feet and began to fly over the bridges, keeping to the middle of the river and looking out for helicopters. Alan, angry at defence cuts and what he saw as the Labour government's complicity in the lack of celebrations for the anniversary, headed for Parliament and Downing Street. As he crossed Vauxhall Bridge he saw Westminster in the distance. Just as Big Ben struck midday, he opened the Hunter's throttle and began three low, loud circuits of Parliament. 'I put the power on then. I thought: "Stuff it, let them hear some noise!" The funny thing was that at the time, they were discussing noise abatement.' One building annoyed him — 380-foot Millbank Tower, just upstream from Parliament. 'I hadn't expected Millbank Tower to be there, which was a dirty great thing. It spoiled my turns.' Alan was told later by Iain Duncan Smith's father, Spitfire ace Wilfred Duncan Smith, that he heard Alan's engines from on the 6th floor of the Ministry of Defence building as he talked to Sir John Grandy, chief of the Air Staff.

Sir John looked up towards the sky, trying to see the plane. Duncan Smith had to put him right, telling him, 'No, look down there!' Meanwhile, Alan was searching for Downing Street. 'I wanted to make a noise over No. 10 as well. I didn't have a target map so I couldn't see where it was.' He waggled the Hunter's wings in tribute as he passed over the RAF Memorial by Whitehall and then headed downstream towards the City. The jet flashed safely over Hungerford Bridge, Waterloo Bridge, Blackfriars Bridge, Southwark Bridge and London Bridge. Then he was in for a surprise. 'There, staring me in the face, was Tower Bridge. I'd forgotten it was there! 'I could have gone over it, but I was intrigued by it as a target.' He decided to fly through it, squeezing the aircraft at high speed between the busy road and the walkway over it. The cranes of the Pool of London were to his left as he took the Hunter even lower over the water, his altimeter barely registering. Peter Arnold, a steward on the cargo ship Baltic Sun, was terrified the jet would crash but 'it straightened out and shot over our heads. I thought I was dreaming'. Alan recalls: 'Right at the last minute, as my cockpit canopy was just below the bridge and the girders were all around me, in that microsecond I remembered I'd got a tail fin behind and I thought: "I'm going to lose the fin!" ' Somehow, the Hunter made it through. A cyclist on the bridge tumbled off his bike in fright, tearing his trousers. George Tapper, the Tower Bridge Watchman, was nearby. 'There was the most thunderous roar. I looked up and, whoomph, a big silver jet roared by,' he said. Alan pointed the Hunter's nose downstream and kept going. Once he was over Essex, he headed north, back to base at RAF West Raynham. Flight Lieutenant Pollock's unofficial fly-past was over. When he landed, the first thing he did was burn his AA map. If he did end up being court-martialled, he didn't want such an embarrassing piece of evidence being made public. Then he rang his wife's mother. 'There might be a bit of trouble — but not to worry,' he told her. He was right, there was trouble — the RAF top brass was not impressed with his exploits. He was put in close arrest for two days and a psychiatrist concluded that Alan was lucid enough to face a court martial.

Hundreds of letters of congratulation from RAF colleagues and members of the public arrived at Alan's squadron, along with a barrel of beer from BOAC. An all-party motion of support, tabled in the House of Commons, was signed by six MPs (four of whom had been in the RAF). In the end, Alan was given a medical discharge instead of a court martial, possibly to deny him the chance to explain his reasons for the flypast. After leaving the RAF, he went on to work for Ford and the fire engine manufacturer Dennis. Looking back now, he has no regrets. 'I left on a high point and I was so lucky to be flying such a magnificent aircraft as the Hunter,' he says. 'The RAF is the best career you can have.' And 50 years since his daring flight, he has been delighted to see that there was no need for one of his successors to stage a similar protest. 'For the 100th anniversary, the RAF has had quite a few events going on over a number of days,' he says. 'Good for them!'



PROTECTOR ISTAR DRONE:

Britain's latest drone, the Protector RG Mk1, has hit a major milestone by completing its first flight before its 2021 delivery date. The drone, internally known as GA-ASI, will be delivered to the UK Ministry of Defence and provide intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and reconnaissance support from above. On Friday of last week, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems completed the first flight of the Protector RG Mk1 drone in collaboration with the UK Ministry of Defence and the U.S. Air Force. Once the initial testing phase is complete, the drone will stay in the U.S. for Royal Air Force testing before being sent to the UK for delivery in 2021. Group Captain Shaun Gee, the RAF's Director Air ISTAR Programs followed with: "Protector will be deployed in wide-ranging Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) operations where its ability to fly consistently for up to 40 hours will offer a vastly improved ISTAR capability. Given that it is designed to fly in non-segregated, civil airspace, the Protector RPAS will be able to respond rapidly and offer flexibility, delivering many types of military or civil authority support missions, including search and rescue." The Protector drone is a custom variant of the MQ-9B made to order. The exact specs of the custom version are unknown, but we do know the specs of the base variant. The MQ-9B began development back in 2014, funded by the company itself, to produce a drone to meet NATO's stringent airworthiness type-certification standard (STANAG 4671). The STANAG certification will allow the company's current drones, the SkyGuardian, SeaGuardian, and other MQ-9B variant drones to safely operate in civil airspace and better perform border patrol, fire detection and firefighting support, maritime patrol, and resource monitoring missions. GA-ASI President David R. Alexander said: It was exciting to see the first flight of MQ-9B in the Protector configuration. The Royal Air Force has been a great partner for GA-ASI for more than a decade. We're thrilled to see this first customer aircraft completed and we look forward to delivering their Protector fleet and gaining more MQ-9B SkyGuardian customers in NATO and around the globe."

CABO DELGADO CRISIS:

During the now notorious visit by the Minister and ANC delegation to Zimbabwe, One of the issues apparently discussed was an already precarious humanitarian situation, added to increasing conflict with IS terrorists, which has forced over 300 000 people from homes and villages in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province, according to UN agency, the World Food Programme (WFP). "We are concerned about the unfolding humanitarian situation in Cabo Delgado where conflict and violence have left people without access to food and livelihoods," Antonella D'Aprile, WFP Mozambique representative said in a statement last week. "Growing insecurity and poor infrastructure mean reaching out to people in need is harder and with COVID-19 the crisis becomes more complex," she said. Latest findings from the famine early warning system (FEWSNET) indicate communities will continue to face "crisis" levels of food insecurity – IPC3 (infection, prevention and control) – into at least the early part of next year. Additional shocks could worsen the situation, especially for women and children, according to the UN agency. Since 2017, Cabo Delgado has been under attack by non-State armed groups leading to gradual displacement of communities, WFP said. The attacks resulted in deaths and damaged infrastructure, causing disruptions in access by humanitarian agencies to those most in need. With the latest violence forcing thousands of refugees across the border into Tanzania, concerns over possible regionalisation of the conflict have been raised according to the WFP country representative, The situation is made more worrisome given that Cabo Delgado has the second highest rate of chronic malnutrition in South Africa's eastern neighbour, with more than half of children under five chronically malnourished. In addition, with the province currently recording the second-highest number of COVID-19 cases in Mozambique, population displacements have potential to accelerate the spread of corona virus.

CANADA SUSPENDS DRONE EXPORTS:

Canada has suspended the export of some drone technology to Turkey while it probes allegations the equipment was used by Azeri forces involved in fighting with Armenia, a senior official said on Monday. Project Ploughshares, a Canadian arms control group, says video of air strikes released by Baku indicates the drones had been equipped with imaging and targeting systems made by L3Harris Wescam, the Canada-based unit of L3Harris Technologies Inc. "In line with Canada's robust export control regime and due to the ongoing hostilities, I have suspended the relevant export permits to Turkey, so as to allow time to further assess the situation," said Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne. The Globe and Mail said L3Harris Wescam had received permission this year to ship seven systems to Turkish drone maker Baykar. Turkey is a key ally of Azerbaijan, whose forces are fighting Armenians over the disputed enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh.

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

This is the twenty-eighth weekly Newssheet - "Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings" - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest (preferably not 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 and continue to do so! We will use contributions progressively as we move upwards and onwards....

Rick Peacock-Edwards' book "Rate of Climb" is available from www.loot.co.za for convenient local collection at Clicks.

Scully Levin's new book "Punching Holes in the Sky" is also now available. Karl Jensen says "I have read it and anyone with a smidgeon of interest in aviation, let alone knowing Scully, will simply love this "unputdownable", well written tome full of pictures. The book is in limited offer at R250 and are all signed by Scully personally." Karl has stock and has very kindly agreed to handle local orders: karlpix@icon.co.za or WhatsApp 082 331 4652

Take care – keep safe in these troubled times, use your PPE, and remember that all this, too, shall pass..... We'll keep you posted on further developments at Wanderers as they occur... So, let's hear from you... Please send your suggestions or contributions to bookings@rafoc.org

TAILPIECE:

Before I got married, I didn't know there was a wrong way to put milk in the fridge.

Wife: I'm heading to the store. Do you want anything?

Husband: I want a sense of meaning and purpose in life... I seek fulfilment and completeness within my soul....I want to connect with God and discover the spiritual side of me....

Wife: Be more specific – beer or vodka?

Aggrieved wife: Cheating on me is easy, but trying to stop your car without brake fluid isn't...

If Liars' pants really did catch fire, watching the news would be a lot more fun....

Irish Historians have discovered what they believe to be the headstone of the grave of the world's longest-living man. He was 193 years old and his name was Miles, from Dublin.

Matt on the positives of his coronavirus cartoons. We have all needed to respect social-distancing guidelines this year, but when it came to joking about the corona virus, Matt Pritchett, The Telegraph's front-page cartoonist, imposed his own rule. "You have to stay a good two metres away from the subject of people actually getting ill," he said with a grin. Over the past 32 years, Matt has managed to give us laughs from the unlikeliest source material: terrorist attacks, natural disasters, celebrity deaths... If there's a story, he can generally find a joke in it. But a pandemic? That was a new one.....

MATT



*It's 10pm, gentlemen,
please. Haven't you got
illegal raves to go to?*

MATT



REFLECTIONS ON TECHNOLOGY (by a senior RAFOC Member)

"When I bought my Blackberry, I thought about the 30-year old business I ran with 1800 employees, all without a cell phone that plays music, takes videos, pictures and communicates with Facebook and Twitter. I signed up under duress for Twitter and Facebook, so my seven kids, their spouses, 13 grandkids and 2 great grand kids could communicate with me in the modern way. I figured I could handle something as simple as Twitter with only 140 characters of space. That was before one of my grandkids hooked me up for Tweeter, Tweetree, Twhirl, Twitterfon, Tweetie and Twittererific Tweetdeck, Twitpix and something that sends every message to my cell phone and every other program within the texting world. My phone was beeping every three minutes with the details of everything except the bowel movements of the entire next generation. I am not ready to live like this. I keep my cell phone in the garage in my golf bag. The kids bought me a GPS for my last birthday because they say I get lost every now and then going over to the grocery store or library. I keep that in a box under my tool bench with the Blue tooth [its red] phone I am supposed to use when I drive. I wore it once and was standing in line at Barnes and Noble talking to my wife and everyone in the nearest 50 yards was glaring at me. I had to take my hearing aid out to use it, and I got a little loud. I mean the GPS looked pretty smart on my dashboard, but the lady inside that gadget was the most annoying, rudest person I had run into in a long time. Every 10 minutes, she would sarcastically say, "Re-calc-u-lating." You would think that she could be nicer. It was like she could barely tolerate me. She would let go with a deep sigh and then tell me to make a U-turn at the next light. Then if I made a right turn instead - Well, it was not a good relationship. When I get really lost now, I call my wife and tell her the name of the cross streets and while she is starting to develop the same tone as Gypsy, the GPS lady, at least she loves me. To be perfectly frank, I am still trying to learn how to use the cordless phones in our house. We have had them for 4 years, but I still haven't figured out how I can lose three phones all at once and have run around digging under chair cushions and checking bathrooms and the dirty laundry baskets when the phone rings. The world is just getting too complex for me. They even mess me up every time I go to the supermarket. You would think they could settle on something themselves but this sudden "You want bigs?" every time I check out just knocks me for a loop. I bought some of those cloth reusable bags to avoid looking confused, but I never remember to take them in with me. Now I toss it back to them. When they ask me, "You want bigs?" I just say, "Doesn't matter to me. I am big enough." Then it's their turn to stare at me with a blank look. I was recently asked if I tweet. I answered, No, but I do toot a lot."

P.S. I know some of you are not over 50. I sent it to you to allow you to forward it to those who are. We senior citizens don't need any more gadgets. The TV remote and the garage door remote are about all we can handle....."