



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 4 – 29th APRIL 2020

Greetings to All,

These weekly Newsheets have triggered a good number of responses and contributions, which we will feed into successive weeks during lockdown. Pictures and discussion on the Committee WhatsApp group about the Canberra led to Colin Francis recollections of "The Idiot's Loop." Contributions by Ernie Todd and Brian Stableford have brought further tales of the RAF in the 60's, some Air Force humour and also the South African Dakota story sent in by Karl Jensen.

AVRO VULCAN XJ781: A SAD END:

In the days of CENTO (Central Treaty Organisation) whose role was modelled along the lines of NATO in Western Europe, the goal being to establish a series of militarily powerful countries on the Soviet Union's southern flank and to counter any communist revolutionary forces emerging in the Middle East. It was headquartered in Baghdad, Iraq until 1958 when Brigadier General Abd al-Karim Qasim of the Iraqi Army overthrew and killed the last King of Iraq, King Faisal II. Iraq then withdrew from CENTO and the headquarters was moved to Ankara in Turkey. For the UK, its military bases on Cyprus were of high importance for the alliance with the RAF's Near East Air Force providing a nuclear strike capability with Avro Vulcan B.2s from early 1969. The aircraft were operated by Nos.9 and 35 Squadrons out of RAF Akrotiri which was by then the only RAF station left on the island after RAF Nicosia was forced to close in 1966 to become Cyprus International Airport. One of the advantages of being a member of CENTO was that British military units could undertake deployments to member states which for RAF crews allowed them to gain invaluable experience operating over the Middle East. It was not uncommon for the long-range Vulcans to fly to Iran or Turkey on goodwill flights or to train with their respective air forces and one place they would regularly visit was Shiraz Air Base in south-west Iran.

On May 23rd 1973, one such visitor to Shiraz was Avro Vulcan B.2 XJ781 operating with No.9 Squadron which, having completed a routine training mission turned towards the Iranian base for landing. In this instance, the usual crew of five were joined by a sixth man, an officer from the Imperial Iranian Air Force who was aboard acting as an observer. This was not uncommon but often proved problematic for the British crews as the observers almost never spoke any English leading to safety briefings being conducted with pointing at things hoping he understood. The observers also liked to smoke during the flight!

All had gone well until it came time to lower the undercarriage ready for landing. While the nose and starboard undercarriage legs lowered successfully, the port leg refused to budge despite the efforts of the crew. Low on fuel, the crew had no choice but to attempt an emergency landing at Shiraz. The ground personnel at Shiraz immediately went into action and began spraying down foam across one

of the two runways at the base in an attempt to cushion the port wing when it inevitably made contact with the ground and reduce the chance of fire. With the runway sufficiently doused down, the aircraft made its landing attempt.

The Vulcan touched down on its starboard undercarriage with pilot Flight Lieutenant John Derrick fighting to keep the wings level before the nosewheels made contact with the ground. The aircraft ran on just the starboard and nose wheels for a short while before the port wing was lowered as carefully as possible on to the ground. With the wing scraping along the foam-soaked runway it began pulling the aircraft to the left, sending it veering off the runway and across an adjacent gully that was not marked on any maps of the airfield. The nosewheel fell into the gully and was sheared off followed quickly by the starboard undercarriage leaving the Vulcan to slam down on to its belly before finally sliding to a halt. As the aircraft slid across the ground, the bomb aimer's window in the blister under the nose shattered sending clouds of dust in to the lower deck of the cockpit while the navigator's table collapsed temporarily trapping the two navigators by their knees. Aside from the bruised knees, the five crew and the Iranian observer were all unhurt and with the crew hatch stuck against the ground they left the aircraft through the canopy which had been ejected after the undercarriage collapsed. A maintenance team from Akrotiri was flown out aboard a Hercules cargo plane and immediately declared the crash as a Category 5(C) meaning it was beyond repair or salvage. The Iranians agreed to accept the airframe as scrap but insisted that British engineers familiar with the aircraft remove key military components. Thus, after twelve years of service XJ781 ended its days being broken up on a dusty Iranian airfield.

In many ways the crash of such a symbol of British military power as a V-Bomber symbolised the ailing position Britain found itself in when dealing with CENTO. A year after the crash, Turkey invaded Cyprus in defence of Turkish Cypriots following a military coup organised by the Greek Junta. (RIP Archbishop Makarios!) This forced Britain to withdraw all military support for Turkey and consequently CENTO itself which from then on existed only on paper. In 1979, whatever remained of CENTO was dissolved in the wake of the Iranian Revolution.

<https://www.facebook.com/samilhistory/photos/a.650185068514707/650185031848044/?type=3&theater>

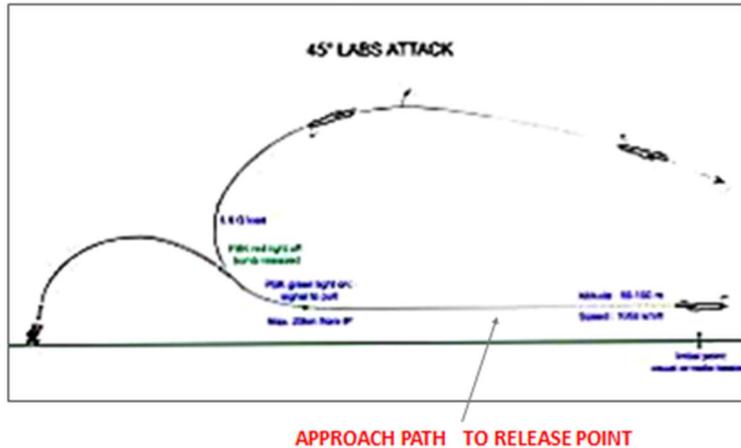
THE IDIOT'S LOOP:

RAF Germany and the Canberra B8 - The Historical background to those times was that "The Iron Curtain" (Winston Churchill's phrase) formed the imaginary boundary dividing Europe into two separate areas from the end of World War II in 1945 until the end of the Cold War in 1990. The term symbolized efforts by the Soviet Union to block itself and its satellite states from open contact with the West and non-Soviet-controlled areas. It stretched from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic. No 16 Squadron based at RAF LAARBUCH was one of 4 Canberra Tactical Strike aircraft squadrons in Northern Germany. The initial role was low-level tactical nuclear strike into targets in East Germany and Poland. The word 'tactical' means the support of battlefield operations. Typical targets were airfields, command and control centers, and major army bases and so on. Say, Johannesburg to Harrismith in distance from the RAF bases. When I first joined 16 Squadron in 1966, the role had changed to the Low Altitude Bombing System (LABS) using the "toss" approach. The system was originally developed by the USAF for the B-47 bomber. We flew the Canberra B8, similar to the B12 the SAAF had. (*Major General Des Barker has written extensively about the SAAF aircraft.*)

We would identify an Initial Point (IP) about 3 nautical miles (5 km) from the target, then entered the LABS bombing run at 450 knots IAS (Indicated Air Speed) at 200 feet above ground. A special instrument with vertical and horizontal bars indicated when to start the pull up into a half loop at 3.4 g. The pilot had to keep the bars vertical and horizontal, because any roll or yaw, resulted in less accuracy. The bomb would be released under computer control at 45 or 60 degrees nose up in the climb and fly up to about 8000 ft (about 2600 m) before descending to the target. At about 6000 ft. and 160 knots IAS, we then initiated a half roll out, (a hazardous activity!) completing a maneuver similar to an Immelmann turn or Half Cuban Eight. The bomb was tossed upward and forward, much like an underarm throw of a ball. It was known as the 'Idiots Loop' and I did over 150 of them in a few years. We did not have 'G' suits, nor did the Canberra have powered flying controls, so the pilot

worked hard to sustain the 3.4g pull up. It had to be precise, or the bomb went all over the place! However, with accurate flying, it was possible to get very close, or even hit the target. In the meantime, the manoeuvre had allowed the bomber to change direction and distance itself from the target. We did not practice at night or in cloud because of accidents and 'close calls'; the aircraft could either stall facing upwards or go into a spiral dive. The navigator counted out the time to roll and time to stop roll as a back-up for the roll off the top. A good friend of mine did the spiral dive, because he rolled out in cloud, became disoriented and made a deep hole in the ground. LABS bombing stopped in about 1967, because of the vulnerability of the aircraft during the pull up phase to Russian low-level air defences: SAM and ZSU 23-7 cannon.

Low Altitude Bombing System: LABS 'Toss' bombing: not overflying target



One 'funny' to end this story. My unfortunate friend who dived into the ground had a very nice wife, but who was rather naïve. At a cocktail party, they served 'John Collins' that were quite strong, but entirely to her taste, and she asked a bachelor Officer what it was. Fast as a flash, he said it was a 'John Thomas'. For the rest of the evening she was boasting that she had had 6 'John Thomas' and could not understand why everyone laughed!

Sent in by Colin Francis (who was there)

CHIPMUNK STORY:

Brian Appleton is the proud owner of this (ex-RAF) Chipmunk ZU-DXP. Here is the long arm of coincidence in these emails between Brian and Jon Adams.

"Hi Brian,

As a lot of people are doing, we were going thru many boxes of stuff and Angie came across my Logbook. I thought it was AWOL but obviously put away safely! Here are the pages that refer to the Chipmunk when I was in the RAF. Interesting to see if any numbers fit or you know the aircraft. See you after lockdown. Cheers, Jon"

"Morning Jon

You are a very interesting man. YOU FLEW MY CHIPPIE IN 1973. What are the chances of that? So as soon as we are up and running let's do what we have been wanting to do for a long time and get you reacquainted with an old friend. What are the chances? Have you got an anniversary of flying to celebrate? Why don't we do it then and write an article. Have you got some old photos and we can include these in the article? Just fantastic. WP 871. Looking forward to hearing where you flew this chippie.

Warm greetings, Brian Appleton.

Ps attached is how she looks today but you have seen her.



“Hi Brian,

That is a chance in a million is it not! I was at RAF Church Fenton in Yorkshire near Tadcaster *AND* WP871 is the aircraft I did my First Solo in on 9th January 1973. That’s a chance in a can’t even think of a number, and it was the only time I flew it and twice in one day! I will look at my logbook and try to find a date that has some memories, pity it was January that I flew it and not July! Will be in touch.

Cheers, Jon”

More to follow after the flight.

A VENTERSDORP CHRONICLE: NOU GAAN ONS VLIEG!!

Manually Starting a DC3 Dakota Saga.

Brian Stableford and I flew a DC3 on a charter with a Boere rugby team to Ventersdorp for a challenge game and to overnight after their game. Ventersdorp was Eugene Terblanche’s territory where not much English was spoken, or tolerated, as you can well imagine, especially in those days when he was heading the AWB. We had an early departure from Rand Airport with these hefty rugby players on a chilly Saturday morning in mid-winter. The Dak started, but only just, with what appeared to be a tired and not fully charged battery. The Dak had not flown for a while, so we figured that the battery would be fully charged again by the time we landed at Ventersdorp, about 40 minutes flying time from Rand. The flight was uneventful with its heavy and jovial self-loading cargo that included a few hangers-on. It really does not matter who the team represented, but they were certainly a spirited bunch. The rugby match against a local team was part of a harvest festival, some sort of fertility rite, nagmaal, or a Kerkfees. I doubt if the result of the game was of any consequence, but all the traditions were fully observed. The epic braai that followed included a lot of beer and ‘Klippien en Coke’ (Brandy and Coca Cola) met eisch. As often happens at these farming community events, there was much langarm (longarm) “tiekie draai” dancing in the adjacent shed with mielie meal sprinkled on the floor. All this to the throb of drums, the lilting tones of sakkie-sakkie concertinas and guitars, as the well-fueled “Orkes” upheld their reputations, national traditions and honour. Brian and I felt it was inappropriate that we join the melee for longer than was absolutely necessary, so with the with hostie (Cabin Attendant) in tow, we repaired to barracks, a B&B nearby. During the evening revelries, it so happened that the manne, no doubt seriously influenced by skinfulls of “Dutch Courage”, ordered a stripper from Johannesburg.

This artiste arrived around midnight accompanied by a burly pimp who was more threatening than an angry silverback lowland gorilla. He got the men out of bed to watch the show and pay the hefty bill – cash on the nail. Early next morning, after a mega boere “brekfis” that probably pushed our cholesterol meters well into the red, we were all conveyed to the airstrip in ‘Hardbody’ double-cabs with the entire team, hangers-on, and baggage. Naturally, those people would not be seen to load their own baggage while labour was available – on a Sunday, nogal. The loading was carried out through the Dak’s baggage door situated high up ahead of the Dak’s wing under our careful supervision and then secured with nets. Our responsible intention the night before had been to get to the airfield ahead of the rugby team to allow us to pre-flight the aircraft and run up the engines. Doors closed, we tried to start the engines - in vain. The battery was unable even to turn the cold engines, it was flatter than a flounder looking for food in the shallows. Brian, however, knew the secret manual

procedure that required a stout start strap which we perchance had on board. One end of the strap was wound around the dome on the front of the prop hub as one would wind the string on a top. With about 8 of the rugby team on the strap tug o' war fashion, at Brian's command in the cockpit "MAG ON - CONTACT", I shouted 'TREK, MANNE' and swung the prop to get the engine to start turning. The men pulled like crazy and as Brian engaged the start switch to energise the exciter coil 'Shower of Sparks' magneto, the engine turned about five blades and burst into life with clouds of smoke from the exhaust amidst hearty jubilation and mutual congratulations from participants and spectators. The seriously hungover pax clambered aboard amid much banter. By the time everyone was seated, with the battery now partially charged, together with the genny of the running engine, a start on the No 2nd engine was a non-event. We took off in the crisp Highveld air and had a ride that was silky smooth. Within minutes, all the passengers were fast asleep. Alles was heel rustig.... There was nary a chirp from them until our Dak's wheels softly squealed with a greaser landing back at Rand Airport that was smoother than melting ice, of course!

Karl Jensen

ANOTHER ONE FOR THE MODELERS:

After reading Dave Evans input in the last 'Ramblings' I remembered this article that was in the Monthly Newsletter some years ago. The article was entitled 'Geoff's Air Force' and was from Geoff Quick in Kigombe, Tanzania. This was just a selection from his vast model collection, only aircraft that were in service with the RAF from time to time were selected. Unfortunately, the collection is no more as their house was destroyed in fire in February 2019, incredibly sad as we had just spent the New Year with them. Angie was their first visitor just after the house was finished and Geoff had to go to London and she kept Sally company, and I guess she was the last (apart from me) to stay there before the fire.



Jon Adams

ERNIE SENDS GREETINGS

Ernie Todd wrote in with some reminiscences of RAF personalities, of which more later. He concludes: "In my first few RAF years, I flew with and socialised with many WWII aircrew, Pilots, WOP/AGs, Observers, Bomb Aimers, Navs etc. in the service and afterwards. It's from these magic chaps where I gleaned most of the above and below. It was an honour. They never ever spoke of personal events, not even after a jar or two, that was widespread, so I believe, a bit different from today's: "Me Me Me" crowd, Non ?

As for other matters, well, I do read the SA media occasionally, but it distresses me so much to see things not getting any better and the poorest of all suffer even more, nothing unusual there.

Naturally, I am cognisant of the way some “behave” if you can call it that, but a true Christian must do what he or she can do. No light shining anywhere – no Eskom I suppose.

Here in UK Land, life is difficult, unfair and impossible to understand. The numbers cannot be trusted, almost certainly other agendas, secret ones. So much uncertainty. Confidence is low, politics are assumed to be more important than saving lives, false data abound, unreliable data too. Except thousands are dying, alone, family forbidden to accompany them on their last journey. Churches are closed to their congregations, MacDonalD’s allowed to stay open. Civilised Non ? . . Non ?

The future is just guesswork, the only certitude is that Johnson & Co will borrow gargantuan sums, probably from China, Soros and the like, just to service previous loans. Interest rates must rise, followed by inflation.

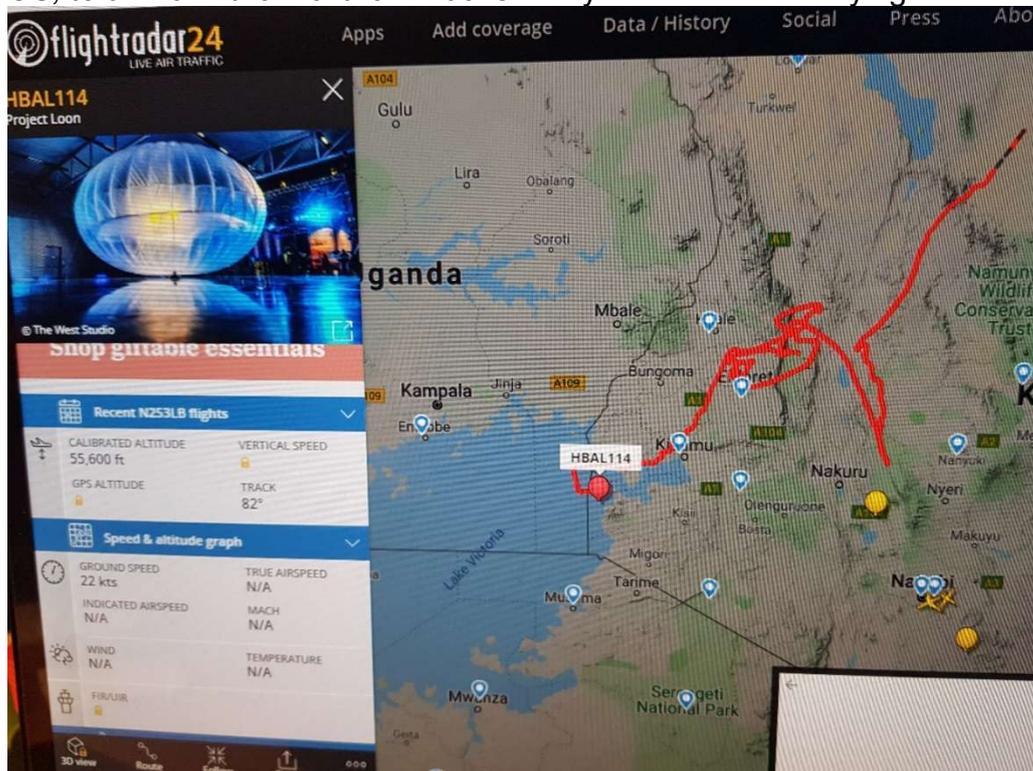
“Cheer up”, they all said, “Things could get worse!” So, I cheered up and things got worse.

Well, that’s the good news.....I gottago, All the best to all julle,

And Finest Kind from Ernie.

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS?

Telkom Kenya expects Loon’s internet balloons, which will be remotely piloted to the country from the US, to arrive in the ‘next few weeks’ They arrived and are flying.



For those that use www.flightradar24.com on a regular basis you may have seen the traces above. They are Balloons that have transmitters on them for Internet Access until satellites can be launched. They are all above 50,000ft so do not encounter aircraft. It is interesting to see their flight paths. High speed internet access balloons developed by Google’s parent company, “Alphabet, have finally been approved for use in Kenya, after President Uhuru Kenyatta fast-tracked regulatory approval to boost communications capabilities to help fight the spread of the coronavirus. The ambitious project, a joint venture between Alphabet’s Loon and the country’s third-biggest telecoms operator, Telkom Kenya, planned to use giant balloons to beam 4G data services to remote parts of the country but had been held up for almost two years pending approvals from the aviation authority and the Ministry of Transport. On Monday, Mr Kenyatta said those approvals had been granted as part of a raft of measures to mitigate the disruptions to our life arising from the pandemic.”

FINANCIAL TIMES - Tom Wilson in London MARCH 23rd, 2020

So, it just goes to show that there was graft somewhere in the approval system and they were not thinking about the people. Remind you of somewhere else!

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

This is the fourth weekly Newssheet - "Members News, Reminiscences and Ramblings" - items of Air Force interest, or greetings to the Club or any other happenings of interest (nothing on the what the "Levels of Lockdown" mean, OR the Minister of Police, please!) that will help us all to keep in contact through the lockdown, which, just maybe, will be (sort of) lifted soon. So, let's hear from you....Please send your 'polite' suggestions or contributions to bookings@rafoc.org

Thanks to all who have sent in notes of appreciation or contributions. We will do our best to fit them all into successive issues. Meantime, keep the bright side up – and remember, all this, too, shall pass...

Keep safe and well and stay at home, off the streets and out of trouble....

The Committee.