



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 74 3rd SEPTEMBER 2021

GREETINGS:

Day 526... The cold snap over, first day of Spring, trees in bud or early leaves – but another front on the way... ESKOM increases “profit” but still makes R18,9 billion loss?? Government backpedals on universal pension and basic income grant... Khanyago warns of biggest risks to SA as Eskom, Covid, commodity prices and unrest... Durban residents hold UPL responsible for toxic warehouse blaze... government bureaucrats have yet to share a single laboratory test result with the people who inhaled poisonous fumes... Mokonyane did not disclose R2.2 million Aston Martin but a handbag and some clothes made the cut... Zuma (still suffering from the peculiar malady of undisclosed medical condition) refuses to be examined by NPA Doctors... High likelihood that ANC MP Xiaomei Havard sharing classified information with the Chinese Communist Party... ANC can't pay salaries... Tobacco industry death squads... Zuma's private spy Dhlomo behind the KZN unrest. Global pulls out of SAA deal – or have they?... you just couldn't make this stuff up... another week in the great South African show – all singing, all talking, all dancing, all verneuking...

The Captains and the kings depart, the shouting and the tumult dies... Pen Farthing evacuated with 200 rescued animals... UK and Taliban in talks over evacuations on terrorism-prevention... unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan... Taliban supporters parade coffins draped in US and Union Jacks... Biden hails the withdrawal a “tremendous achievement” (no, you can't join these dots...) Bernie Ecclestone calls cancellation of Belgian Grand Prix cowardice (must have the same affliction as Biden...) Hurricane Ida devastates Louisiana – man chomped by alligator in his garden shed... Scots free to self-identify their sex - now there's a thing!! Future Queen of Belgium studies at “Hogwarts for Hippies” – Heaven help the Belgians! Prince Harry casting for the lead in “The Fresh Prince of Bel Air”??

OPERATION PITTING: WHOLE FORCE EFFORT:



At 01:30am on Tuesday 24th August 2021, an RAF Voyager aircraft touched down at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire with Afghan nationals evacuated from Kabul. Eligible local staff, who supported the UK Government in Afghanistan, and their families, have been relocated to the UK under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme. The Voyager arrived from Minhad Airbase in Dubai, where Afghan Relocation and Assistance Programme passengers had earlier arrived from Kabul in Afghanistan.

This aircraft is one of many RAF and chartered flights evacuating eligible personnel from the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. The passengers arriving on this flight included babies and young children as well as older family members and local staff. Operation PITTING has been a RAF "Whole Force" effort with troops, including a deployed RAF Police element, supporting the Operation alongside the British Army, Royal Navy, local authorities and aid organisations in Afghanistan and the UK. The full fleet of RAF transport aircraft from RAF Brize Norton have been flying around the clock to support the evacuation and will continue to do so over the coming days. No doubt there will be fuller reporting on what was really achieved in the last torrid days of August, notwithstanding Dominic Raab's recent "cut and paste" statements in the media...

FORCE BENEDICT: STALIN'S FORGOTTEN BRITISH LIFESAVERS:

The Obituary in last week's Ramblings raised interest in the events of 1941 when the RAF was deployed as "Force Benedict" to assist the Russians in the arctic. It also raised echoes of events 23 years earlier, when the newly formed RAF was deployed to assist the White Russians, and General Kenny van der Spuy and others ended up in Soviet jails for 18 months....

Eric Carter was a 21-year-old fighter pilot when he was piled onto a train in Hull with the rest of 81 Squadron and taken to Liverpool in 1941. There, they were ushered onto a ship and set sail for the open seas, none the wiser about their destination. Rumours in the squadron suggested they might be heading for Africa, but they soon found out they would be ditching their warm-weather gear for good.

Eric was part of Force Benedict, a clandestine operation to save the Russian port of Murmansk as the Nazi war machine marched on Moscow. The operation was top-secret because Stalin did not want the world to know his regime needed British assistance.

Eric lived in Chaddesley Corbett in Worcestershire in his last years. Perhaps the last surviving member of the secret squadron who helped save Russia from defeat by Nazi Germany, his story may never have been revealed had it not been for a chance discovery. The discovery of a medal awarded to Force Benedict's wing commander, Group Captain Henry Neville Gynes Ramsbottom-Isherwood, lifted the lid on the squadron's heroics. He was one of only four non-Russians given the nation's highest military award, the Order of Lenin, which was sold by Sothebys for £46,000. Eric said in an interview when he was 89: "Stalin did not want his people to know that he had asked the West for help and we were threatened with a court martial if we said anything. It was a very well-kept secret, but I was young and I must have been mad. Perhaps we were just a tougher generation. "I knew the average lifespan in the air was 15 minutes, but I was determined to volunteer after I heard of the atrocities the Germans had carried out on the Russians." Eric joined the Royal Air Force in 1939 and was posted to the 615 Squadron, in Wales. He served for a year, defending the skies over Liverpool and Manchester, before being transferred to 81 Squadron which, alongside 134 Squadron, made up the 151 Wing which was picked to save Murmansk. He said: "If Murmansk had fallen, we would have lost the war. We were only ten miles from the German base. Their general repeatedly asked Hitler for more men so they could overrun our airfield, but he refused. "Murmansk was like Beirut. It was all rubble. It was 40 degrees below most of the time. Our aircraft and vehicles had to be started every 20 minutes to prevent them from freezing. "The labourers working on the airfield would sometimes freeze to death after a night on the booze and, in the morning, they would be just scooped up and put in the back of a truck. "It made you have the strongest camaraderie with your pals because that is all you ever had. But we never thought it was hopeless."

In all, 151 Wing carried out 365 sorties during its stay, shooting down 11 Messerschmitts and three Junker 88 bombers before handing over to the Russians on October 13, 1941.

The people of Murmansk have never forgotten Eric's bravery and he was invited to the city many times in his later years, especially to unveil the Memorial pictured below.



USA AND MOZAMBIQUE:

United States and Mozambique have launched a second military Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) programme, which will see US Special Operations Forces train with more than 100 Mozambican commandos and rangers to improve capabilities on the battlefield. The US Embassy in Mozambique said the JCET programme was launched on 9 August. It follows the first JCET programme that was launched on 15 March this year that saw US military personnel train Mozambican marines. This concluded in May and was followed by tactical combat casualty care and combat lifesaver training courses in June 2021. “In addition to capacity building, the US Department of Defence (DoD) JCET exercise will strengthen the growing relations between the United States of America and the Republic of Mozambique. The US government will also provide medical and communications equipment to those units trained,” the US Embassy said. “This training programme doubled in size in just four months, proof that the United States is committed to capacity building within Mozambique’s armed forces,” said US Ambassador to Mozambique Dennis W Hearne. “In all of our security assistance, the United States prioritizes respect for human rights and the protection of civilians,” the Ambassador said. The United States is a bilateral donor to Mozambique, providing more than \$500 million in annual assistance to improve the quality of healthcare and education, promote economic prosperity and security, assist with climate adaptation and environmental protection, and support the overall development of this nation. One hopes that this intervention will end better than the US intervention in Afghanistan...

SPIRIT OF INNOVATION:

Rolls-Royce, earlier this year, has successfully completed the taxiing of its ‘Spirit of Innovation’ aircraft, the latest milestone on its journey to becoming the world’s fastest all-electric plane. For the first time, the plane powered along a runway propelled by its powerful 500hp [400kw] electric powertrain and the latest energy storage technology developed to set world speed records and enable a new generation of urban air mobility concepts. The taxiing of the plane is a critical test of the integration of the aircraft’s propulsion system, ahead of actual flight-testing. The first flight is planned for the Spring and when at full power the combination of electrical powertrain and advanced battery system will power the aircraft to more than 300mph, setting a new world speed record for electric flight.

Minister for Business Paul Scully said “The taxiing of Rolls-Royce’s ‘Spirit of Innovation’ forms part of an exciting new chapter in aviation as we move towards its first flight in the spring. Set to be the world’s fastest electric plane, this pioneering aircraft highlights the value of close collaboration between industry and government.

The ACCEL programme, short for ‘Accelerating the Electrification of Flight’ includes key partners YASA, the electric motor and controller manufacturer, and aviation start-up Electroflight. The ACCEL team have continued to innovate while adhering to the UK Government’s social distancing and other health guidelines.



RIAT 50th ANNIVERSARY:

As part of celebrations marking the Royal International Air Tattoo’s 50th Anniversary, organisers are promising a specially commissioned medal to anyone willing to put their best foot forward. The Air Tattoo 50th Anniversary Challenge is open to anyone who can clock up 50 miles over 50 days by either walking, running, swimming or cycling. The goal can be achieved on exercise equipment in the gym or at home, outside or in the pool. Taking place between September 1st and October 20th, the challenge has to be completed within this 50-day period but at a pace that suits each participant. Everyone who successfully reaches the target will receive a collectable Air Tattoo medal, based on the airshow’s striking 50th anniversary logo. The challenge, which seeks to raise funds for charity, is open to anyone, anywhere in the world and can be completed by individuals or groups. For families or those looking for a shorter option, there is the opportunity to complete 50km instead. Registration must be completed by the end of August. Everyone taking part will receive a step-by-step guide to help them successfully meet the challenge plus a logbook to keep track of their progress.

To join the Air Tattoo 50th Anniversary Challenge and to find out more visit - <https://www.nice-work.org.uk/virtual/AT50>

TYPHOONS IN UKRAINE:



RAF Typhoons currently based in Romania have taken part in a fly-past over the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, as part of the National Ukrainian Independence Day celebrations. Operation Orbital is the UK’s military capacity building mission to Ukraine. The Typhoons joined four Ukrainian Air Force MiG-29 aircraft in a formation flypast with the Ukrainian jets trailing yellow and blue smoke to represent the Ukrainian flag as part of the military parade in Kyiv.

The Typhoons that took part in the fly-past are from RAF Lossiemouth based IX (B) Squadron and flew from their temporary base in Romania to conduct the fly-past before returning to Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base on the Romanian Black Sea coast near Constanta. The UK has provided specialist military training for the Ukrainian Military since 2015 and together with other countries has offered this support following a request from the Ukrainian Government. The Royal Lancers during their deployment this year have delivered essential life-saving training to over 1500 members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

DONT GET CAUGHT....

Financial services firm FNB is urging customers to use trusted and secure merchants to avoid being defrauded by merchant fraudsters when shopping online, amid an increase in e-commerce activity brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The latest modus operandi involves 'enumeration' and 'account testing', where online merchant fraudsters use automated scripts or software to attempt transactions or payments. Trish Ramdhani, head of fraud at FNB Card, said to help minimise the risk of fraud, consumers should use trusted websites for online shopping. She said that consumers could identify the security of a website through 'https' or the padlock icon on the Uniform Resource Locator (URL – Website address). Below FNB shared additional safety tips that consumers should practice to protect themselves and their card details against fraudsters: When shopping online, do not click on links in emails or 3rd party websites; rather, type in the website address yourself. Never disclose personal information such as passwords and PINs to anyone. The bank will never ask you to process a transaction to reverse fraud. The bank will never ask you for your OTP or confidential information, such as your banking password.

Check your bank statement regularly and thoroughly for any unauthorised transactions / withdrawals. Use up-to-date software to perform regular anti-virus and malware scans on your personal devices. Never send e-mails that contain your account number, card number, and expiry date. Use a secure connection and avoid public Wi-Fi. Only enter card details when finalising the purchase. "More importantly, we urge consumers always to protect their personal information and to use any of our banking interfaces to report any suspicious transactions on their bank accounts immediately."

CHEERS! FOR TODAY:

Now 526 days since the start of the great plague, this is the seventy-fourth 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 under new legislation... Remember that all this, too, shall pass....

We are on track for the **Battle of Britain Lunch on Friday 17 September at Randpark Golf Club**. As advised, this has to be strictly by pre-booking due to current Covid restrictions. No walk-ins, so please book with bookings@rafoc.org spaces are limited. Thanks to those that have booked. There will be the traditional fly-past to mark the occasion, courtesy of Arnie Meneghelli and team. Overhead at 13h00 – so be in good time...

TAILPIECE:

My wife asked me why I was doing the dishes while sitting down – I told her it's because I can't stand doing it.

Please don't check your phone for updates while driving... you'll end up with more points than Arsenal....

Me: "Alexa, remind me to go to the gym"
 Alexa: "I have added gin to your shopping list."
 Me: "Close enough!"

The Institute of Unfinished Research has concluded that 6 out of 10 people...

I know a man who gives his wife surprises,
 I suppose she's not too worried about sizes,
 But as we all age,
 We reach the stage,
 Where surprises and sizes are all compromises?
(The Sherriff of Nottingham Road)

A Greek and an Irishman were sitting in a Starbucks one day comparing their two cultures. Over a double latte, the Greek mentions "We built the Parthenon, you may recall, along with the Temple of Apollo."
 "Aye, and it was the Irish that discovered the Summer and Winter Solstices."
 "But it was the Greeks who gave birth to advanced mathematics."
 "Granted, but it was the Irish who built the first timepieces."
 Knowing that he's about to deliver the coup de grace, the son of Athens points out with a note of finality: "Keep in mind that it was the ancient Greeks who invented the notion of sex as a pleasurable activity!"
 "Aye! True enough, but it was the Irish who got women involved."

Passengers travelling first class on British Airways Boeing Dreamliners are worried about a redesign which means some of the lavatories have windows. A woman travelling to New York complained there were no blinds... The stewardess listened patiently and responded: "Madam, if some pervert is clinging to the side of this aircraft at 35 000 feet, they deserve to see everything!"

A 65 year old woman had a heart attack and was taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she had a near death experience...
 Seeing the Lord she asked "Is my time up?"
 The Lord said, "No, you have another 33 years, 2 months and 8 days to live."
 Upon recovery, the woman decided to stay in the hospital and have a Face-lift, liposuction, breast implants and a tummy tuck. She even had someone come in and change her hair colour and brighten her teeth!
 Since she had so much more time to live, she figured she might as well make the most of it. After her last operation, she was released from the hospital.
 While crossing the street on her way home, she was killed by an ambulance.
 Arriving in front of the Lord, she demanded, "I thought you said I had another 33 years?
 Why didn't you pull me out of the path of the Ambulance?" 🚑
 And The Lord replied:
 "I didn't recognize you!!!!!"

MATT



I prefer online appointments with my GP. It's easier to lie about your lifestyle when you're not face to face'

MATT



'A member of the cast needs some groceries. Is there a lorry driver in the house?'



It's my wife's birthday tomorrow, she's been leaving jewellery catalogues all over the house, so I've bought her a magazine rack

THE FAMOUS GUINEA PIG CLUB 80TH ANNIVERSARY:

The Club, whose members were Allied airman who suffered horrific burns in conflict, mainly in World War II, marks its 80th anniversary this year. The club was named after the work carried out by pioneering surgeon Sir Archibald McIndoe, the New Zealander who developed new plastic surgery techniques to treat the men's injuries at the Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead. It became known as 'the town that didn't stare' because McIndoe told his patients to mix with the local population to help destigmatise their injuries, recognising the need for his patients' mental recovery from their life-changing injuries. He advocated the removal of rank once wounded personnel were on the ward and promoted a relaxed atmosphere where patients could take time away from the ward in between treatment and even observe operations.



McIndoe had a piano, and a barrel of beer, installed in the ward and encouraged socialising and singing among the men. When they went out, he encouraged them to wear their uniform to instil a sense of pride. Club member Jim Marshall, 98, has paid tribute to the brilliant medic. He said: "The Guinea Pig Club means to me what it means to many people – life. McIndoe was very approachable. He would come and talk to us all; he was very popular with all the patients. In fact, he asked us to his cottage, to get a change of air." Jim, who lives at the Erskine veterans' villages at Bishopston in Scotland, was treated by McIndoe after three years of painful rehabilitation. He joined the RAF aged 18 in 1941, training as a navigator in Wellingtons with 38 Squadron, and served all over the world. He flew more than 100 operations without incident until his aircraft crash landed during a search and rescue mission in Italy a month after VE Day. Jim was the only surviving crew member. He said: I don't know how long I was unconscious but eventually I woke and my clothes were on fire and I was on fire. So the first thing I did was get up on my feet and see what I could do. "Getting to my feet was a struggle, as was removing my clothes, which were still burning. My hands were of little help. My head felt like a block of lead. Standing naked in the trees, except for one shoe, there was nothing I could do but wait for help." Jim's rescuers took him to a local convent before he was transferred to an Italian hospital. He spent three years recovering from his injuries while retraining to become a civil engineer. He went on to work with the Air Ministry for 20 years, helping to develop some of the UK's RAF sites, including Kinloss. AVM Chris Elliot, Controller of the RAF Benevolent Fund, said: "Jim's story of overcoming adversity is inspiring and so typical of his generation. Rather than thinking of himself, and his injuries, for Jim the loss of his crewmates was the hardest thing to bear. "McIndoe encouraged in these men a positivity for the future, and a determination to recover and lead fulfilled lives. "Today, the same spirit lives on in the CASEVAC club, a group of veterans who were wounded during tours of Afghanistan and Iraq. As long as the RAF exists, the RAF Benevolent Fund will stand by all who serve their country, ensuring they are never alone in their hour of need."

To mark the Guinea Pig Club's anniversary the charity is encouraging people to share their own stories as well as their thanks to club members. *Go to: rafbf.dedicationpage.org*

Post script from Jon Adams – My mother was on the Strathallen when it was torpedoed and on her return to England became one of the theatre sisters with McIndoe and had many stories about her time at East Grinstead.