



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 271 5th SEPTEMBER 2025

GREETINGS:

The great Circus rolls on... SA's investigative journalists who expose corruption, patronage and state failure... all in evidence in SAPS leadership riven by accusations and counterclaims... Sibiya vs Masemola.... MaMkhize amid Mkhwanazi bombshells: 'Let my silence speak volumes'... Cachalia, Masemola reach truce over political-killings dockets (was there a war?)... Assault stats reveal a dark reality in SA... New report finds that Southern Africa has become a hub for organised crime... Criminal syndicates plunge people in South Africa's richest city into darkness... Two years and R215m later, Lilian Ngoyi Street "reopens" — but not for traffic... Eskom's Daphne Mokwena says "load reduction" is taking place to prevent a grid collapse (where is the comrade who masquerades as the Minister?)... Comrades Marathon appoints new race director... Is Nandipha Magudumana pregnant?

Massive Chinese Victory Day show of force (back to the days of brinkmanship)... Levy describes his release after 491 days as a hostage of Hamas... Ukrainian paratroopers win a stunning victory against Russian forces... Nigel Farage speaks for the millions ashamed of what Britain has become... Jailed Iraqi goat herder is a parable of Britain's broken asylum system... Angela Rayner dodges £40,000 stamp duty - her career now hanging in the balance... How Starmer humiliated Reeves as he poached her Treasury deputy... Migrants could be moved from hotels to warehouses...

CELEBRATIONS:



A small select group of RAFOC and SAAFA met at the Rand Club on the 4th September for a lunch to celebrate the entry into his 100th year, guest of honor was Basil Hersov. Several stories on his life were told. More in future Ramblings.

For those that do not know Basil, he is wearing the pink shirt and looking as young as several other attendees.

CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF SIR RICHARD KNIGHTON:



The Defence Secretary has thanked departing Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Sir Tony Radakin for his service during an address to Parliament on Ukraine, describing him as a "driving figure of the Coalition of the Willing". "He's widely respected... a true friend of the Ukrainian people..."

As President Zelensky himself said last week," said John Healey, referring to Adm Radakin's recent visit to Kyiv. Mr Healey also told MPs the UK is stepping up efforts to support Ukraine in its fight against Russia, with an accelerated push to deliver extra munitions over the summer – a part of the increased £4.5m budget for Ukrainian military aid in 2025.

Admiral Sir Tony was accompanied by the new UK defence chief, Air Chief Marshal Sir Rich Knighton, when he met President Zelensky to reassure him that the UK's military backing for Ukraine would remain consistent under his successor.



"Our support for you and for Ukraine is not personality dependent; it's nation dependent and [Sir Rich Knighton] will continue that level of support in exactly the same way that you would expect," he told the Ukrainian leader. In his address to Parliament, Mr Healey said the UK has delivered around five million rounds of munitions, as well as 60,000 artillery shells, rockets and missiles, 2,500 drones, 30 vehicles, engineering equipment, 200 electronic warfare and air defence systems to Ukraine in the last 50 days alone, as Russia continues to make small advances in the east of the country.

(ForcesNet)

NEW CAS: AIR CHIEF MARSHAL HARV SMYTH:

He succeeds Air Chief Marshal Sir Rich Knighton, who is moving on to the role of Chief of the Defence Staff, head of the UK's military. Born and educated in Northern Ireland, ACM Smyth joined the RAF in 1991 and spent 15 years as a frontline Harrier pilot and weapons instructor, having flown hundreds of operational missions over Bosnia, Kosovo, Serbia, Iraq and Afghanistan. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He retrained as a Tornado pilot in 2013 and became Station Commander at RAF Marham, helping deliver operations in Afghanistan, West Africa, Iraq and Syria. He has held a range of command positions

since being promoted to Air Commodore in 2015 and was recently the Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff for Military Strategy and Operations.



ACM Harv Smyth has started work as the new head of the Royal Air Force. The RAF celebrated ACM Smyth's appointment in a post on X, accompanied by several images of Air Chief Marshal Sir Rich Knighton with the new Chief of Air Staff. "Welcome Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Harv Smyth, and thank you, Sir Rich Knighton," the RAF said.

"Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Harv Smyth succeeded Sir Rich Knighton, who will next week take over as the new Chief of Defence Staff for the UK's Armed Forces." *(RAF News)*

UK F-35 PROGRAMME AUDIT:



A report by the National Audit Office (NAO), the UK's independent public spending watchdog, has delivered strong criticism of the UK F-35 programme, citing cost overruns, delays, and shortfalls in operational capability.

In 2024 the UK F-35 fleet had a mission capable rate, defined as the ability of an aircraft to perform at least one of its seven possible required missions, approximately half of the Ministry of Defence's (MoD's) target. It had a full mission capable rate, defined as the ability of an F-35 aircraft to perform all required missions, approximately one-third of the MoD's target. Notably the MoD's targets are themselves lower than global programme targets.

Maintenance delays, inadequate infrastructure and shortages of spares have seen flying hours reduced by 20%, compounded by unexpectedly high corrosion in the maritime environment. The MoD is heavily dependent on the performance of the Joint Program Office (JPO) in Washington DC for cost-effective delivery of aircraft, engines and provision of support, but is fully responsible for all other elements of capability, including providing pilots and other personnel, infrastructure, weapons, and logistics. *(Euro Security and Defence)*

B1 B LANCER:



The B-1B's combat debut in December 1998 was a far cry from the role for which it was conceived - the aircraft progressed from nuclear to conventional bomber. At the conclusion of its first flight on October 18, 1984, the first B-1B, 82-0001, landed at Edwards AFB, California, having departed Palmdale in the Mojave Desert, where it had been assembled.

It joined the B-1 Combined Test Force, initially assigned to basic flight control and flutter tests. The second B-1B, 83-0065, became the first delivered to Strategic Air Command (SAC) on June 27, 1985, arriving at Offutt AFB, Nebraska, after flying from Edwards AFB. It was due to be handed over to the 96th Bombardment Wing (BW) at Dyess AFB two days later, but one of its engines suffered foreign object damage at Offutt. Instead, 82-0001 was drafted for the ceremony at the Texan base. Named The Star of Abilene after the city near Dyess, 83-0065 was finally turned over to the 4018th Combat Crew Training Squadron of the 96th BW on July 7, allowing 82-0001 to return to Edwards to continue weapons test. A product of the Cold War, the North American Rockwell B-1 bomber was conceived as a strategic nuclear deterrent, with a greater payload, range, survivability probability, and penetration capability than the mainstay of the United States Air Force (USAF) Strategic Air Command (SAC), the Boeing B-52. Initially a Mach 2.2 design in the B-1A, and subsequently cancelled, the bomber was reimagined and resurrected as the Mach 1.25 B-1B with improved low-level penetration capabilities. Soviet air defenses continued to improve, and high-altitude aircraft were at risk, as proven by the earlier U-2 incident. Consequently, the USAF shifted strategy to high subsonic speed low-level penetration attacks. With the fall of the Soviet Union the nuclear role of the B-1 was soon ended, leading to the aircraft being converted for conventional roles, at which the heavy bomber has become very adept. (*Aviationist*)

UKRAINE HITS RUSSIAN MISSILE SHIP:

Ukraine said it carried out drone strikes on a Russian warship in the Sea of Azov last Thursday. Footage shows what appears to be two direct hits on a guided-missile corvette. The strikes marked Ukraine's latest attack on Russia's battered navy.

The Ukrainian military said on Thursday that it carried out a drone strike on a Russian warship capable of launching cruise missiles, marking the latest attack on Moscow's wounded navy.

Ukraine's military intelligence agency, the HUR, said in a statement that it targeted a Buyan-M-class (or Project 21631) corvette operating in the Sea of Azov, a body of water that separates Russia from occupied Ukraine.

Rather than engage the Russian vessel with exploding naval drones, the HUR said that it used an aerial drone to strike and damage the ship's radar station while another drone attacked the side of the corvette. This kind of ship is a relatively small vessel that can launch powerful Kalibr cruise missiles.

Ukraine shared footage of the attack online. The video showed two separate strikes on the corvette. It wasn't immediately clear what types of drones were used. It said that the targeted enemy ship was operating in a potential missile launch zone but was forced to leave the area. (*Yahoo*)

JUST ONE HELICOPTER:

Motshekga Says Help Was Not Sent to Flood Victims Because 'The Helicopter Was Still Being Washed'....

Defence Minister Angie Motshekga has explained why the South African Air Force (SAAF) only managed to send one helicopter to assist Eastern Cape flood victims - the chopper was still at the car wash.

"Yes, lives were lost, but we must understand that our Oryx helicopters also deserve dignity," Motshekga told Parliament. "We cannot send a dirty helicopter into a crisis. Imagine the embarrassment if CNN filmed it with mud still on the wings. That would have been a national scandal." (*wings??*)

Sources within the SAAF confirmed the Oryx was stuck in the "Deep Clean & Polish" lane at an Air Force Base car wash, behind a Toyota Hilux belonging to a brigadier. "We tried to push it forward," said one technician, "but the Colonel insisted on adding the 'engine fragrance spray' option. That alone delayed operations by 72 hours."

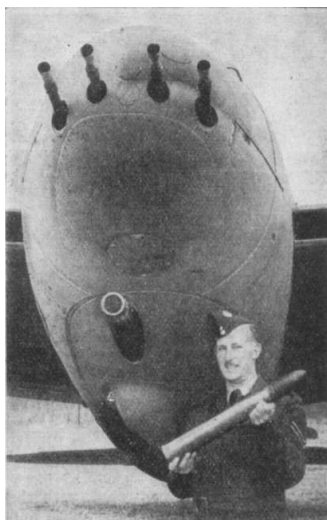
EFF MP Carl Niehaus, known for asking tough questions and unpaid electricity bills, was unimpressed. "So people must drown because the chopper was having a bubble bath? Why didn't you just send it with streaks of soap? At least the rain would've rinsed it off on the way!"

The DA's Patrick Atkinson went further, suggesting the helicopter should have been sent dirty: "It's a rescue mission, not the Durban July. Nobody cares about the shine on the rotor blades."

But Motshekga stood firm. "Technical challenges were involved," she insisted. "By technical, I mean the wax had not yet been buffed in. If you don't buff it properly, the helicopter loses aerodynamics. That's just science." (*DefenceWeb*)

Meanwhile, Denel denied responsibility, claiming they had no part in the washing delay but admitted they have been unable to supply new sponges or microfiber cloths for three years due to budget cuts. As South Africans continue to ask why flood victims waited nearly two weeks for a single helicopter, the SAAF has reassured citizens: next time disaster strikes, they will at least move the aircraft into the "express wash" lane.

DH MOSQUITO MK XVIII "TSETSE"



The DH Mosquito Mk XVIII was designed as an anti-Submarine weapon. The Germans had responded to the increased threat from Allied aircraft by arming their U-boats with anti-aircraft guns. U-boats were then able to stay on the surface and fight it out with attacking aircraft. The solution tested in the Mosquito FB Mk XVIII was to fit the aircraft with a massive 57mm Molins anti-shiping gun. Tests using the fuselage of a crashed Mosquito FB MK VI and a six pounder field artillery gun proved that the idea was feasible. The prototype Mk XVIII flew in mid-1943. After air firing tests in June 1943, eighteen FB Mk VIs were converted to carry the big six pounders in place of the 20mm cannon. The .303in machine guns were retained to help the pilot aim the big gun, which only carried 25 shells. The big gun earned the Mk XVIII the nickname "Tsetse" (after the African Fly carrier of sleeping sickness).

The main problem with the 57mm gun was that it required a long steady attack run. Starting from an altitude of 5000ft, the aircraft would have to dive at 30 degrees until it was within 1800 yards of its target, leaving the Mosquito rather vulnerable. The first unit to use the Mk XVIII was No. 248 Squadron, which added it to their Beaufighters. Operations began on 24 October 1943. The first U-boat kill came on 25 March 1944, when U-976 was sunk in the Bay of Biscay by two Mk XVIIIs. The Mk XVIII was also used by Nos. 235 and 254 squadrons, and saw action against surface ships in the build-up to D-Day. However, the heavy cannon was generally felt to be less effective than normal rockets, which could be carried by the standard FB Mk VI. (*HistoryofWar*)

CHEERS FOR NOW:

By the time you read this we will be just a week away from Our Battle of Britain Ladies Lunch on Friday 12 September 2025 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers Club. We have for many years been privileged to have a Flypast by the Flying Lions to commemorate the Battle of Britain, for a number of reasons this was not going to be possible this year. However, through the intervention and generosity of spirit of one of our members and his family we should have a fly-past at 13h00 sharp, which we will view from the lawn outside the Vista Room... Please book and pay by EFT to confirm if you've not already done so...

TAILPIECE:

Rolls-Royce North America has retired its iconic Boeing 747-267B testbed after nearly 20 years of groundbreaking flight trials.

Woolworths R9,999 grocery item sparks hilarious chatter

Xi Jinping flexes China's military muscle, with Kim & Putin at his side...



'I've lost two stone on Mounjaro. After paying for the jabs I couldn't afford to eat'



'Don't touch it. Angela Rayner might have registered it as her main residence'



Did you know?
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 If you lose a
 sock in the
 laundry - it
 comes back as a
 Tupperware lid
 that doesn't fit
 any of your
 containers. 😂
 🧦 🤪

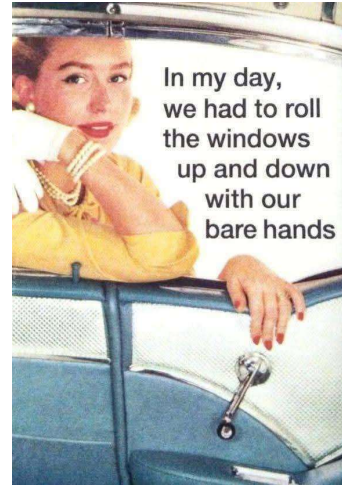


"Welcome back, sir. Are you planning on being our guest for one night only, or will this be your usual extended stay?"





"I know you're my family, but I don't find these visits comforting."



BEFORE THE MATCH:

Rassie Erasmus has downplayed Eden Park's historical significance as the Springboks prepare to face the All Blacks at the storied venue...

There's a peculiar kind of silence that settles in the days before South Africa face New Zealand. It isn't the absence of noise, but rather the anticipation of something about to crackle into life - the kind of hush that precedes a thunderstorm. This week, that tension deepened when Rassie Erasmus quietly pulled Faf de Klerk back into the Springbok fold. The name alone sparks memories of chaos and brilliance, but the recall was less about rewriting history and more about caution. And yet, as is always the case with the Springboks, nothing ever feels entirely simple.

For a brief moment, the story looked like it might echo the World Cup of 2023, when Handré Pollard was flown in as a shock replacement for Malcolm Marx after injury reshaped South Africa's campaign. That move carried a whisper of genius, a trick Erasmus seemed capable of pulling from nowhere, and many wondered if de Klerk's call-up signaled something similarly seismic. But Erasmus, ever direct yet never without layers, set the record straight: this wasn't about replacing Bongi Mbonambi. It was about a "niggle," the sort of word that feels too small to stir such speculation, yet big enough to alter plans when it lingers over a player like Morne van den Berg.

Bongi's absence, too, carried a different weight. Not injury, but family. Illness back home, a reminder that rugby is never entirely insulated from real life. Erasmus explained that Mbonambi would join them soon, but the hooker's absence left a ripple of unease, not because the team lacks options - Malcolm Marx is still the anchor, with Marnus van der Merwe and Jan-Hendrik Wessels ready to step in - but because Mbonambi's presence is woven so tightly into the Springbok identity. It is moments like these that reveal how much this team is more than the sum of its tactics.

What made Erasmus's explanation intriguing was not only his handling of the questions about selection but also his decision to play his cards closer to his chest this time. In a game where analysis is practically a religion, the All Blacks and Springboks know each other too well. Every weakness is studied, every tendency dissected. By delaying the squad announcement, Erasmus has essentially taken the chessboard and spun it around, asking New Zealand to wait in the same fog of uncertainty that his own camp faces with its injuries and absences. It's a small act of gamesmanship, but one that fits seamlessly into the ongoing psychological duel between the two old rivals.

And yet, behind the tactics and the press briefings lies the deeper story: this match at Eden Park is not just another chapter. It is South Africa stepping into the heart of their greatest challenge, the fortress where the All Blacks have humbled so many. Faf de Klerk's return, precaution or not, brings with it the spirit of defiance that defines the Springboks. The platinum hair, the restless energy, the way he harasses opposition fly-halves until they see him in their sleep - those are not qualities that exist quietly. If he takes the field, it won't feel like a footnote.

Erasmus knows better than anyone that South Africa's strength lies not just in physical dominance, but in the sense of unpredictability they carry. A team that can grind you down with scrums and mauls one week, then play with audacious speed the next. A squad where the absence of one player, even a leader like Mbonambi, doesn't dismantle the whole machine but instead forces it to evolve. That adaptability is their greatest weapon, and perhaps what makes them most dangerous when the world assumes they're weakened.

So, as the countdown to Eden Park ticks away, the Springboks are wrapped in both uncertainty and quiet menace. Faf de Klerk may only be cover, Bongi Mbonambi may only be temporarily absent, but in the shifting shadows of Erasmus's plans, nothing is ever "only." For the All Blacks, this week's silence may well be the loudest warning yet.

#RugbyChampionship #Springboks #AllBlacks #FafDeKlerk #RassieErasmus #BongiMbonambi #NZLvRSA #EdenPark #SouthAfricanRugby #RugbyUnion



*Beautiful day for a dust bath
Simone Sim*