



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

Johannesburg
P.O. Box 69726
BRYANSTON 2021

info@rafoc.org www.rafoc.org

President:	David MacKinnon-Little	
Vice Presidents:	Basil Hersov, Geoff Quick	
Chairman:	Bruce Harrison	bruce@jbharrison.co.za Cell: 083 325 0025
Vice Chairman:	Jon Adams	bookings@rafoc.org Cell: 082 450 0616
Hon. Secretary:	Colin Ackroyd	Cell: 082 800 5845
Hon. Treasurer:	Jeff Earle	Cell: 083 652 1002
Committee Member:	Geoff Fish	Cell: 083 660 9697
	Russell Swanborough	
Web Master:	Hanke Fourie	Cell: 082 553 0210
Almoner:	Rob Tannahill	Cell: 082 806 6779
Bank Account:	Nedbank - Melrose Arch	Br: 19 66 05 Account 19 66 278 063

RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 285 12th DECEMBER 2025

GREETINGS:

And has it come to this?: Assassinated whistleblower Marius van der Merwe: 'I want to speak out before they kill me'... Cry, Our Beloved Country" now a weekly feature on eNCA... Gauteng can expect week of humid heat, scattered storms, changeable skies...

Hijacked Bryanston mansion reveals informal settlement with over 100 tenants...

A Tale of Two Cities... Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) rapidly declining into crime and chaos under ANC management... (Joburg not far behind)... Pikitup 'oversight' causes waste collection delays as new service providers learn routes... South Africa has (once again) made the list for having one of the "sexiest accents" in the world. Ja, wel, no fine...

Eurovision faces boycott over decision to allow Israel... Pressure on Ukraine to settle by Christmas... what about Russia?... Britain's nuclear submarine fleet 'no longer fit for purpose'... Labour's abolition of our ancient liberties is putting us on the road to tyranny... Millions of workers caught in Reeves's salary sacrifice tax grab... Starmer hit by fresh Labour rebellion over Brexit ... Stop the boats, for Heaven's sake... 'Santa is fake' posters upset families at Christmas parade... Britain's "open borders" crime wave... Sexual predators target girls in mixed changing rooms... Sir Geoffrey Boycott: "England are irresponsible, rubbish and too far up their backsides to care..."

ROYAL NAVY'S FIRST CREWLESS HELICOPTER:

The Royal Navy's first crewless helicopter is one step from taking to the skies after completing successful trials on the ground.



Photo: Royal Navy

The helicopter "Proteus" is being developed by Leonardo under a £60m program, and is believed to be one of the world's first full-sized autonomous helicopters. The unit is the size of a traditional helicopter, but it is tasked by a pilot rather than flown manually.

The aircraft has been ‘flashed up’, with its engines, systems, and rotor blades tested, according to the Royal Navy. Senior officers and experts from the MOD were invited to Leonardo’s Yeovil site, where the aircraft was designed and manufactured, to see it ‘ground running’.

“Proteus is equipped with cutting-edge onboard software capabilities, carrying a suite of sensors and systems that allow it to sense its environment, make decisions and act accordingly. All of this processing is conducted onboard the aircraft, while operating in the most extreme environments, including high sea states and strong winds – just where the Royal Navy needs this kind of capability,” Nigel Colman, Managing Director Helicopters UK, Leonardo, said. “Proteus will be tasked to patrol specific maritime areas, drawing on information provided by other allied ships, helicopters, submarines, and detection systems to calculate the best chance of success in finding an underwater foe.” Initially, the demonstrator is being assessed for the ability of autonomous systems to support antisubmarine operations. To detect submarines, it will drop sonobuoy listening devices into the ocean to search the depths for the tell-tale acoustic signs that emanate from submarines. Once found, the system has the ability to report its findings back to the mission commander. By embracing drone helicopters, the navy aims to search wider stretches of ocean for longer periods without putting strain on aircrew, who could be deployed on other critical sorties. (Source: *Naval Today* 02/12)

FAIREY GANNET “JANET”:



Instantly recognisable as British; “Janet”-The Fairy Gannet

The Gannet was the product of the 1950s when aircraft designed and constructed in the UK had an identity and uniqueness all of their own. When Fairey displayed the T2 Gannet at Farnborough she shared space with the Vulcan VX770, Varsity VX835, Victor WB775, Sea Vixen WG240 and Javelin WT827, all unique and instantly recognisable as British. Designed to meet a requirement of the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm (FAA) for a carrier borne anti-submarine aircraft the Gannet was later to serve in the electronic countermeasures and carrier on-board delivery aircraft roles.

Possibly the most unique feature of the Gannet is its Armstrong Siddeley Twin Mamba gas turbine engine. The twin Mamba is essentially two Mambas mounted side by side and coupled through a common gearbox to coaxial contra-rotating propellers. Power was transmitted from each engine by a torsion shaft which was engaged through a series of sun, planet, epicyclical and spur gears to give a suitable reduction ratio and correct propeller-shaft rotation.

In the early 90's she was put up for sale by the Royal Navy's heritage trust that was in need of funds to complete its Swordfish restoration. The sale included a full complement of spares that would be sufficient to keep her airworthy well into the future. The buyer was a museum in the USA. In 1996 her assembly was completed and she returned to the sky for the second time in her life registered as a civilian aircraft.

In the same year, and then forty years old, Janet made her first appearance at AirVenture, Oshkosh where she drew the crowds. Unfortunately, the Museum closed its doors but fortunately Janet was placed in climate controlled storage. Years passed until 2004 when Shannan Hendricks became her proud owner. Arrangements were made to fly Janet to the UK but unfortunately she did not complete the journey. Airlifted back to base where her recovery team of international professionals, sponsors and enthusiasts worked tirelessly to get her back in the air and on 8th of June 2013 "Janet" rolled out of her hangar for the first time to meet the public since her refurbishments.

(Reproduced in, and Extracted from latest "Pilots Post")

ALLEN SWIFT'S ROLLS ROYCE:

Allen is the man who drove the same Rolls-Royce for 78 years - then donated it to history...



When Allen Swift passed away in 2005 at the remarkable age of 102, he left behind more than a long life. He left behind one of the greatest automotive love stories ever told. Swift wasn't just a man who liked cars; he was a man who bonded with one. In 1928, fresh out of school in Springfield, Massachusetts, he received a brand-new Rolls-Royce Piccadilly P1 Roadster as a graduation gift from his father. It was a striking green-over-green convertible, built locally during the brief era when Rolls-Royce manufactured cars in Springfield.

Most people would have driven it for a few years, then moved on. Allen Swift never did.

He cherished the car, cared for it, and kept it running for nearly eight decades. Over the years, he drove it more than 170,000 miles and maintained it so meticulously that even Rolls-Royce took notice. In 1994, the company honored him with a crystal Spirit of Ecstasy award, recognizing him as the longest continuous owner of a Rolls-Royce in the world.

By 1988, Swift had the beloved roadster fully restored, body off, engine rebuilt, ensuring it would keep rolling long into the future. And even as he aged, the car remained part of his daily life, as familiar and reliable as an old friend.

But Swift's devotion didn't end when he could no longer climb behind the wheel.

Before his death in 2005, he arranged a final gift: a \$1 million donation to the Lyman & Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History. The funds were dedicated to preserving his iconic roadster and creating an exhibit honoring the history of Rolls-Royce manufacturing in Springfield.

Today, Allen Swift's 1928 Piccadilly P1 Roadster sits proudly on display, polished, protected, and admired by thousands. It is more than a museum piece. It's a symbol of loyalty, craftsmanship, and a lifetime bond between a man and his machine. A car he loved for 78 years. And a legacy he ensured would never fade.

TRAXTION KICKSTARTS PRIVATE SA RAIL BOOM:

Private rail operator Traxtion will invest R3.4 billion in 46 locomotives and 920 wagons from KiwiRail in New Zealand – which operates the same Cape Gauge environment used in SA. The company says the investment is fully funded, with equity backing from Harith Partners, which owns 50.39% of Traxtion, along with debt funding from Absa. A further R2.4 billion in future investment is planned as SA embarks on crucial reform of its railway network, allowing private operators to run on independently managed rail infrastructure for the first time in nearly a century.



CEO James Holley says the investment reflects growing confidence in government's rail reforms, crediting the Department of Transport, Operation Vulindlela, Treasury and regulators. Image: AdobeStock

At a media presentation on Tuesday, Traxtion CEO James Holley said this was the largest private freight rail investment in SA history, and a direct response to the reform direction adopted by government. "Private capital flows when government policies create confidence in the private sector to invest. This investment is our vote of confidence in South African rail and in the reform momentum we are seeing," said Holley. "Every additional locomotive we put to work lowers logistics costs,

protects the road network, improves our environmental footprint and creates jobs in the upstream economy.”

The investment is a credit to the Department of Transport for the design of these reforms, Operation Vulindlela for driving them forward, and the supporting role played by National Treasury and independent regulator, said Holley.

Traxtion has been operating in Africa for 38 years, but this marks its first venture into SA rail – a market previously dominated by the Transnet monopoly. It operates 55 locomotives and maintains over 100 locomotives and 450 wagons on a daily basis across 10 countries in Africa. The investment will increase SA’s rail haulage capacity by 4.5 million tonnes (Mt) a year, equal to about 5% of Transport Minister Barbara Creecy’s target to boost rail volumes from 160 to 250 Mt annually.

The R3.4 billion investment comprises R1.8 billion in locomotives and R1.6 billion in wagons. It will take delivery of the first six of the 46 Wabtec locomotives in May 2026, upgrade them to C30ME1 specification, featuring new, fuel-efficient engines and advanced Brightstar control systems that improve performance and reliability. All upgrade work will take place at Traxtion’s Rail Services Hub in Rosslyn, anchoring local manufacturing and supplier participation. All equipment will be fully operational by 2028. (*Moneyweb*)

SA PULLS 90-DAY PALESTINIAN VISA WAIVER:

Minister of Home Affairs Dr Leon Schreiber has withdrawn South Africa’s 90-day visa exemption for Palestinian passport holders after a group of 153 Palestinians arrived last month on a chartered flight from Kenya. “Following investigations and recommendations by national intelligence structures, and consultations within the Security Cluster – which confirmed the deliberate and ongoing abuse of the 90-day visa exemption for Palestinian ordinary passport holders by Israeli actors linked to ‘voluntary emigration’ efforts for residents of the Gaza Strip – the Department of Home Affairs has withdrawn the exemption,” Schreiber said. He said that a short-stay visa exemptions are commonly used by countries to encourage tourism and short-term travel. However, investigations into the recent arrival of two charter flights carrying Palestinian passport holders revealed systematic abuse of the exemption, with travel “designed not for the purposes of tourism or short stays as intended, but to relocate Palestinians from Gaza.”

Schreiber said the passengers did not charter the flights themselves. Instead, intermediaries organised entire aircraft. Many travellers, he said, held one-way tickets to South Africa and were barred from bringing luggage, allowing only US dollars and essential items. On arrival at OR Tambo International Airport, officials found that many passengers lacked departure verification and accommodation details and did not have return or onward tickets. “Taken together, this constituted obvious abuse of the exemption by external actors for purposes other than its intended use,” Schreiber said. (*www.gov.za*)

CANBERRA:



Wonderful painting of a Canberra by Romain Heugault.

That drizzly sky and wet ramp recalls memories of RAF Upper Heyford (*Sent in by TC Schultz, who served there with the USAF*)

SIX SOUTH AFRICAN INVENTIONS:

South Africa has quietly been the birthplace of inventions that touch our lives from hospital wards to seashores, swimming pools to the Moon.

1. The CT (CAT) scan

The theory behind computed tomography (CT) - often called the CAT scan, was developed in part by South African physicist Allan MacLeod Cormack while working at the University of Cape Town and Groote Schuur Hospital in the 1950s.

2. Pratley Putty

George "Monty" Pratley developed a high-strength epoxy putty in South Africa in the 1960s.

3. Kreepy Krauly swimming-pool cleaner

The automated suction pool cleaner known as the Kreepy Krauly began as a South African invention. Hydraulic engineer Ferdinand Chauvier created an automatic cleaner that used the pool's circulation to sweep debris.

4. Coal-to-liquids

Large-scale, commercial coal-to-liquids (CTL) refining - converting coal into synthetic fuels was industrialised in South Africa by Sasol.

5. The first human heart transplant

On December 3, 1967 Dr Christiaan Barnard at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town performed the world's first successful human-to-human heart transplant, implanting a donor heart into Louis Washkansky.

6. Dolosse

Dolosse - those heavy, oddly shaped interlocking concrete blocks, were developed in the 1960s to protect breakwaters and harbours from powerful waves. Credited largely to East London harbour engineer Eric Mowbray Merrifield (with contributions from colleagues and contested claims by others), dolosse can be "sprinkled" into place and dissipate wave energy without precise placement.

(IOL Lifestyle)

MEMBERS NEWS:

Althea Page recently handed the Editor a file compiled by her late husband, John, one of our RAF members. It contains items of RAF interest, aircraft specifications, and details of a number of presentations he had made to various audiences, on subjects such as The Daily Mail Air Race, the Schneider Trophy, the Avro Vulcan and A Century of Aviation 1903 – 2003.

Dave Evans in the USA and Rob Tannahill in Hermanus send Greetings, as does Derrick Page in Cape Town, "My apologies presented for Christmas Lunch on Friday. I am sure much camaraderie, sumptuous food and beverages will be enjoyed. Please pass Festive Season Greetings to all attending. Kind Regards Derrick".

CHEERS FOR NOW:

Our formal event for the year was the Ladies Christmas Lunch on Friday 5 December, with 30 attending and enjoying a lunch of Gammon with all the trimmings, followed by Christmas Pudding and Custard. One member with strongly held views on the sanctity of traditions commented: "While the Christmas pudding was excellent, the lack of coins wrapped in grease proof paper caused some consternation. I know that Tickeys and Sixpenny coins are no longer available, so would suggest in future 1/10th Kruger Rands be used."

Entertainment was provided by a video presentation compiled by Karl Jensen of the “D-Day Darlings” singing traditional WW2 songs, followed by the iconic Vera Lynn singing some of the songs she made famous back in the day... judging by the buzz of conversation, the odd tear being shed and the comments of those attending at the time and since, everyone enjoyed the occasion...

This will be the last edition of Ramblings for this year. Your scribe needs to take a break from the daily round and spend time with his recently enlarged and extended family. His inherited grandson is playing very good rugby for the Junior Falke and will be attending Hoerskool Voortrekker in Bethlehem in the New Year on a rugby scholarship.

Enjoy the saga of Chief Engineer Victoria Drummond in the Tailpiece. Brave lady!
Your Committee sends you all finest Christmas Greetings and every good wish for the New Year....

TAILPIECE:

MATT



'No jury service, no Mayoral elections - the Eurovision Song Contest is the only thing Brits get to vote on'

MATT



'My husband can never remember names, so he uses facial recognition technology'



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VICTORIA DRUMMOND: THE LADY WHO WOULD NOT GIVE UP:

They failed her 37 times - not because she got the answers wrong, but because the examiners openly admitted they couldn't stomach a woman passing.



This is the story of Victoria Drummond, the woman Britain tried to break for 40 years - and failed. Born in 1894 at a Scottish castle, Victoria was Queen Victoria's goddaughter. Named after royalty, raised in privilege. Expected to marry well, host tea parties, and fade into the background of history.

At 22, she announced she wanted to be a marine engineer. Her family thought it was a phase. Her father arranged for her to work in a garage for a week, assuming the dirt and noise would cure her of such nonsense. She stayed for two years. Then she moved to the Dundee shipyards - the only woman among 3,000 men. This was 1916. Women who wanted to work with their hands instead of embroidery needles were called unnatural.

Victoria Drummond didn't care what anyone called her. She apprenticed under master engineers. She studied nights at technical college while working brutal days. She learned to read blueprints, rebuild engines, and ignore the men who told her daily she didn't belong. She worked harder than anyone because she had to prove more than anyone. In 1922, she got her

first berth - tenth engineer on a ship bound for Australia. Tenth engineer. The lowest rank. The dirtiest work. The hottest engine room. She took it without complaint.

By 1926, at age 32, Victoria Drummond earned her Second Engineer's certificate - becoming Britain's first certified female marine engineer. Britain celebrated this milestone by refusing to hire her as a Second Engineer. She took work as a Fifth Engineer instead. Three ranks below what she'd earned. A fraction of the pay. But Victoria had bigger plans. She decided to sit for Chief Engineer certification - the highest qualification, the position that would put her in command of any engine room.

1929 She sat the exam. Failed.

1930 Sat it again. Failed.

1931 Failed.

1932 Failed.

Year after year after year, Victoria Drummond sat before the British Board of Trade examiners and answered their technical questions about steam engines, diesel mechanics, fuel systems, and marine engineering. Year after year, they failed her. Not because her answers were wrong. They couldn't claim incompetence. They simply stated - sometimes openly, sometimes in bureaucratic language - that they couldn't accept a woman in charge of an engine room.

By 1939, Victoria had sat that exam 37 times. Thirty-seven rejections. A decade mostly on land, taking odd jobs to survive financially while Britain told her she'd never be good enough.

Then September 1939 arrived. World War II erupted across Europe. Ships became targets. Engineers became precious. Victoria tried to sign on with British merchant vessels. Britain still said

no. So she took a job on SS Bonita - a merchant ship registered in Panama, flying a neutral flag. August 1940. Mid-Atlantic. No convoy protection. A German bomber spotted them. The attack came without warning. Bombs screaming down through the sky. Near-misses sent shockwaves through the hull. Pipes burst. Water flooded toward the boilers. In the engine room, men panicked. Some ran for the exits. Victoria Drummond stood in front of the control panel and shouted one order: "Get out! Now!" When the last man scrambled up the ladder to safety, she stayed.

Alone in an engine room filling with scalding steam and seawater, bombs exploding close enough to rattle her teeth, Victoria did what Britain said a woman could never do. She opened the fuel injectors wider than they'd ever been opened. She opened the steam throttle past safe limits. She pushed those engines harder than they'd ever run. SS Bonita's maximum speed was 9 knots. A sluggish merchant ship - easy prey. Victoria Drummond coaxed 12.5 knots out of her. That extra speed - impossible speed, dangerous speed - let the captain zigzag between the falling bombs. That extra speed saved every soul on board. She refused to leave her post until the attack ended and the German bomber finally gave up the chase. When she finally climbed out of that engine room, drenched in sweat and seawater, her hands were burned from the overheated controls.

For her courage under fire, Victoria Drummond was awarded the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) and Lloyd's War Medal for Bravery at Sea. The first woman engineer ever to receive them. You'd think that would be enough. You'd think Britain would finally acknowledge what she'd proven. You'd be wrong. After the war ended in 1945, Victoria tried one more time for her British Chief Engineer's certificate. The Board of Trade told her she'd have to sit the exam again - for the 38th time - at age 51, after five years of wartime service that included saving a ship under enemy fire. Victoria Drummond looked at them and said no.

Instead, she applied for the Panamanian Chief Engineer's exam. The exams were anonymized - examiners didn't know the candidate's name or gender. She passed on her first attempt. For the next 17 years, Victoria Drummond sailed as Chief Engineer. But because British shipping companies still wouldn't fully accept her, she worked mostly on run-down vessels under foreign flags. Her last voyage came at age 66, aboard a barely seaworthy ship registered in Hong Kong.

Victoria Drummond retired in 1962 after 40 years at sea. She died quietly on Christmas Day 1978 at age 84. She's buried at Megginch Castle in Scotland, where she'd been born into privilege 84 years earlier.

Victoria Drummond proved - over and over, year after year - that skill has no gender. When someone once asked what drove her through all those rejections, she answered simply: "Because I loved the engines." Not to make a political point. Not to be a symbol for women's rights. Not for recognition or glory. She just loved the work. When you love something enough, you find a way. Not their way.

Victoria Drummond worked forty years at sea doing the work she loved, proving every single day that she belonged exactly where she was. Victoria Drummond (1894-1978) - Queen Victoria's goddaughter - chose engines over castles. Britain's first certified female marine engineer. WWII hero. The woman who was forced to fail 37 times and succeeded anyway. The engines didn't care about her gender. Neither did she. She just kept them running.

Salute, Chiefie! Salute!