



## ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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BRYANSTON 2021

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## RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS - WEEK 286 9<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2026

### GREETINGS:

And so, 2026 arrives – just like that! We trust that all our members and readers had a good Christmas and New Year and were able to spend time with family and loved ones, as well as enjoy some respite from the hurly-burly of local and international news and events. This edition will be shorter than usual just to “open the batting” for 2026. The Committee wishes you all everything of the best for the New Year ahead.

### RINGING IN THE NEW YEAR:

It took a full 26 hours but 2026 finally arrived everywhere on Earth. The new year actually began (for some) at 10:00 GMT, Wednesday, on the Pacific atoll of Kiritimati - also known as Christmas Island - and ended around 1,300 miles away on Baker Island at 12:00 GMT on Thursday.

We've been hearing from people in every corner of the globe - including a couple among the first to celebrate on Kiritimati, to the crew of the RRS Sir David Attenborough sailing around the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. The world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, was lit up with a huge fireworks display, New York City's Times Square welcomed the new year with its famous ball-drop, and fireworks filled the sky over the Thames in central London – as they did as well closer to home, over the lower reaches of Loch Vaal.

And we heard from one new year enthusiast - a pharmacist from Coventry, UK - who took advantage of the peculiar time zone dynamics to welcome in 2026 twice. First in Samoa, and then 24 hours later and a short plane ride away in American Samoa. We also spoke to a bartender in Australia who walked into 2026 - and then walked out again. (*BBC News*)

However you chose to mark the moment, a final Happy New Year from us.

### WE'VE GOT THE ATNS BLUES....

The Air Traffic Navigation Services (ATNS) says it is addressing flight delays experienced at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg over the Christmas period. This comes as travelers returned from their holiday destinations after the festive season break.

Passengers took to social media on Sunday 6 Jan to vent their frustrations about the delays, saying they were not informed and that the delays were not communicated through the various arrival and departure information systems at OR Tambo International Airport.

ATNS Head of Corporate Affairs and Communications Mphilo Dlamini said the delays were primarily due to “temporary human resource constraints” at the Air Traffic Control station. *(somebody called sick)* “ATNS wishes to assure travelers, airlines, and all stakeholders that contingency measures have been implemented and additional resources are being deployed to stabilise operations. These interventions are expected to resolve the situation today and progressively restore normal service levels.” *(Citizen)*

Why are we not surprised?

## **CITIZENS OF LONDON:**

The Christmas break gave your scribe the chance to catch up on some reading. TC Schultz had kindly lent me some interesting books on WW2 in the course of last year which I’ve now had the time to read. Reviews follow for your interest:

"Citizens of London" by Lynne Olson is a compelling narrative that explores the crucial role of three Americans in forging the wartime alliance between the United States and Britain during World War II.

In "Citizens of London," Lynne Olson delves into the lives of three key American figures in London during the early years of World War II: Edward R. Murrow, CBS News, Averell Harriman, Lease-Lend Programme, and John Gilbert Winant, US Ambassador. The book highlights their efforts to support Britain during its darkest days and their influence on American public opinion and policy regarding the war. Olson's narrative is deeply human, brilliantly researched, and beautifully written, making it a significant contribution to the historical literature of this period.

"Citizens of London" is not just a historical account; it is a tribute to the courage and determination of those who stood by Britain during a time of crisis. Olson's portrayal of these three men and their relationships with key British figures, including Winston Churchill, offers readers a unique perspective on the complexities of wartime diplomacy and the human connections that transcended national boundaries. This book is highly recommended for anyone interested in World War II history and the personal stories behind the political decisions of the time.

## **THE LIGHT OF BATTLE:**

“The Light of Battle” In this book, Michel Paradis, acclaimed author of “Last Mission to Tokyo”, paints a vivid portrait of Dwight Eisenhower as he learns to navigate the crosscurrents of diplomacy, politics, strategy, family, and fame with the fate of the free world hanging in the balance. In a world of giants—Churchill, Roosevelt, De Gaulle, Marshall, MacArthur—it was a barefoot boy from Abilene, Kansas, who would master the art of power and become a modern-day George Washington.

Drawing upon meticulous research and a voluminous body of newly discovered records, letters, diaries, and firsthand accounts from three continents, Paradis brings Eisenhower to life, as a complicated man who craved simplicity, a genial cipher whose smile was a lethal political weapon. With a page-turning pace and an eye for the overlooked, Paradis interweaves the grand arc of history with more human concerns, bringing readers into the private moments that led to Eisenhower's most pivotal decisions. By deftly integrating the personal and the political, he reveals how Eisenhower's rise both reflected and was integral to America's rise as a global superpower.

An unflinching look at how character is forged, and leadership is learned, *The Light of Battle* breathes new life into the man who made "the leader of the free world" the mantle of the American presidency.

## **BREAKNECK:**

Rob Tannahill in *Hermanus* has also been doing some reading and kindly sent in this review of "Breakneck"...

Dan Wang is research fellow at the Hoover History Lab Stanford, previously fellow at Yale Law School's Paul Tsai China Centre. Born in China, lived there, was in China during COVID. The book deals with China and includes many sober comments on and comparisons with the USA. If this sounds dull, believe me, it isn't. It's a bit of a roller-coaster ride read, surprising in parts - immersively revealing in snippets you assumed had been covered in our press. You might mutter the odd EISH from time to time.

The basic premise is that the USA is shaped by lawyers and China by engineers. A very rational look at the pros and cons of both, including what both countries would do well to learn from one another.

Lawyers (way by far the majority filling the US political stage) are programmed to find (create) problems, act in the interests of the wealthy, feed off complexity, stall & debate projects (good and bad ones). The book compares many big construction projects (roads, dams, etc) in the two countries, and the USA doesn't exactly come out of it as a shining star.

Engineers (way by far the majority in the Chinese leadership) are programmed to apply black & white thinking. An example of this is the one-child policy - - despite warnings from their people in the social sciences that population growth will anyway be naturally controlled and tail off as people advance economically and educationally, the engineers simply saw 'Problem needs statistical CONTROL- - enforce limit on number of children! Many girl-babies died mysteriously. The engineers believed any approach not statistically measurable and controlled was abstract thinking. Modern day China now has a lot more men than women and a fast-reducing birth rate, proving that those social sciences people were right iro many of their warnings.

One thread that does run through the book is the sheer brutality of 'enforcement' in China (and how enforcement is hardening today). The chapters on the One Child Policy and during COVID enforcements will leave your hair standing on end.

Bottom line - - the young in China are gat vol.

Next? Another interesting bit is how the USA has suffered a massive loss of manufacturing skills due to decades of farming out production to cheap workforce countries - - not clear how Trump can now magically turn this manufacturing tap back on.

Seeing as China is not likely to leave the headlines any time soon, it may be as well to orientate a bit. A good book to use.

## **NEXT FUNCTION:**

Our first lunch in 2026 will be on the THIRD Friday of the New Year, 16 January 2026, 12h30 for 13h00 at Wanderers. As we have done for the last several years, Lunch will be followed by an Aviation Quiz, kindly prepared for us by Karl Jensen, and which will give us the opportunity for some friendly rivalry between competing teams, and of exercising whatever brainpower we still have left before AI overtakes us all.

Book and pay R350 pp to [bookings@rafoc.org](mailto:bookings@rafoc.org) then send a mail to confirm your attendance.

## TAILPIECE:



*'I never drink a whole pint of  
beer. The 20mph speed limit  
means I can't get home  
before I need the loo'*



*'Would you like some sparkling  
water? I'm doing dry January'*