



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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BRYANSTON 2021

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS – WEEK 290 6th FEBRUARY 2026

GREETINGS:

Malema says white people must pay for water and electricity for poor South Africans... Mashatile's son surfaces in massive R836m IDT oxygen plants bid... From grill to gold: How Cat Matlala's wife scored R3.7m Ekurhuleni deal... More smokers paying less tax: Illegal cigs have swept away SA's anti-tobacco gains... Eskom calls creditors' meeting amid uproar about unbundling plan... Fruit industry loses R350 million this season due Cape port's operational failures... Air Force Sergeant Michael Swanton gunned down on Mabopane road by "blue light brigade"... Proteas depart for India and World Cup... reckless, irresponsible Stormers go into crisis mode...

Trump fears Chagos deal will leave US base vulnerable to Chinese spy boats... China is leading the charge to nuclear Armageddon – and Starmer barely noticed... Lord Mandelson is seen wearing what appears to be a pair of white Y-fronts... resigns from Labour over links to Jeffrey Epstein... Starmer forced into U-turn over Mandelson by Labour MPs... "Andrew must reveal all on Epstein' (Really?)... When it comes to protecting the monarchy, the King's actions have spoken louder than words)... Trump threatens to sue Trevor Noah over Grammys Epstein joke...

In today's NHS, it's easier to get an exorcism than an X-ray... Tomatoes face the axe under Labour's 'nonsensical' junk food crackdown... 'People of all ages should have sex on screen'... (well, now!!!)

EX RED FLAG 2026 – EXPLAINED:

Every year, the Royal Air Force joins the United States and partner forces on Exercise Red Flag. It's one of the world's toughest air combat training environments, allowing participating nations to hone their war-fighting skills.

- 2.9 million acres of Nevada training area
- 12,000 square miles of airspace
- 3,000 personnel from 32 units

The Exercise was established in 1975 after the Vietnam War showed that the first ten combat missions flown are the most dangerous for aircrew. Red Flag recreates the first ten missions of a modern air campaign to provide pilots and crew with realistic combat scenarios. It covers more than 12,000 square miles of airspace and 2.9 million acres of land at Nevada Test and Training Range (NTTR) and elsewhere in the southwest of the United States.



This year, it will bring together approximately 32 units and 3,000 participants from across the USAF and Space Force, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, Air National Guard, alongside the RAF, and Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

Exercise Red Flag isn't just about the pilots - it's a comprehensive combat training package involving ground crews, maintenance personnel, intelligence specialists, and support staff. They ensure aircraft are mission-ready, provide crucial intelligence support, and manage logistics to enable a comprehensive training environment that simulates the full scope of modern military operations.

The Tactical Command and Control Team manages and controls all the aircraft and units working in the ground, maritime, cyber and space-based domains, to accomplish the mission. The scale and complexity of the Exercise builds experience and reinforces the close working relationships between the UK, the United States and Australia.

Red Flag continues to evolve to reflect the threats and challenges of modern operations. It is renowned for its use of 'aggressor' forces, including simulated enemy fighter aircraft, ground-based radars and simulated surface-to-air missiles – and even cyber and space-based elements that simulate threats to each mission. With approximately 2,200 targets, realistic threat systems and an opposing enemy force that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world, Nellis Air Force base and the NTTR enable combat air forces to train to fly and fight together. *(RAF News)*

UKRAINE UPDATE:

In Donetsk Oblast, Russian forces are continuing grinding assaults on Pokrovsk and Myrnohrad. Some Ukrainian soldiers approaching Pokrovsk intercepted the video feed from a Russian drone and watched as it followed them. The soldiers' vehicle carried electronic warfare kit that jammed the drone's signal and stopped them from being hit.

And while the Russians are pounding Ukrainian positions inside Pokrovsk with artillery fire, Russian soldiers are still being relentlessly hunted by Ukrainian drones.

On the frontline, Russian priests were filmed blessing uncrewed ground vehicles.

Ukraine's security service, the SBU, released footage of drone attacks carried out by its Alpha Group against Russian airfields in 2025. The SBU says it carried out five attacks, destroying 15 aircraft worth \$1bn.

In Ukraine's Kharkiv region, five people died when three guided Shahed drones targeted a passenger train. President Volodymyr Zelensky described the attack as an act of terrorism.



On the frontline, a Russian priest has been filmed blessing uncrewed ground vehicles (Picture: Russian social media)

Around Lyman in the east of the country, Ukrainian special forces captured two Russian soldiers hiding in a house.

Meanwhile, in Zaporizhzhia in southern Ukraine, the Russian army has been assaulting Ukrainian defences around Huliaipole. The Kremlin's forces are believed to have advanced to within 11 miles of the city of Zaporizhzhia.

And in the city of Kupiansk, to the east of Kharkiv, Ukrainian forces continue to clear Russian infiltrators. In December, Moscow claimed it had captured what remains of the city. To prove the Russians wrong, a Ukrainian commander filmed himself walking through Kupiansk.

British intelligence estimates the Russian army lost 27 times more men than the Ukrainians in the fight for the city.

Over Ukraine, there were sightings of a jet-powered Geran-2 loitering munition – Russia's version of the Iranian Shahed-36. And several Russian soldiers had a narrow escape when a Ukrainian drone flew inside their vehicle – but failed to explode. (*ForcesNet*)

AIR INUIT CANADA INTRODUCE FIRST BOEING 737-800 COMBI JAN 13, 2026:



The aircraft, registered C-FTUW (manufacturer's serial number 40852), flew its initial service on Air Inuit's route from Montréal/Trudeau International Airport to Kuujuaq in the Nunavik region of Québec, Canada.

KF Aerospace at Kelowna International Airport in British Columbia, Canada undertook the conversion. Transport Canada approved the combi modification through a supplementary type certificate (STC) on January 8, 2026, clearing the way for the aircraft to enter service.

Air Inuit provides air connections to Nunavik, the Inuit homeland in northern Quebec, and its 14 remote coastal villages located along the coasts of Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay.

Combi aircraft transport both passengers and cargo. The 737-800 Combi features a forward cargo compartment with capacity for five freight pallets and an aft passenger cabin with 90 seats. A January 8, 2026 KF Aerospace press release said: "This innovative layout makes it the first 737-800 aircraft of its kind anywhere in the world, with no comparable combi currently in operation in the United States, Europe or other international markets."

FIFTY YEARS AGO...

1975 - CFS Dunnottar received a visit from a Supermarine Spitfire Mk V for a Medal Parade. It had once again been painted in SAAF 40 Squadron livery with Bob Rogers initials and markings.

Lt General Robert Rogers was a highly decorated pilot who served in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, and Austria, and later became the Chief of the South African Air Force. SAAF Historian Alan Taylor comments: "This is a Spitfire Mk V, not a Mk IX. No Mk Vs came to South Africa, unless AI has butchered a newspaper image again" (*Springs Museum*)



BAD NEWS FOR SA F1 FANS:

The wait for South Africa's first Formula One race in over 30 years will continue to drag on after it was confirmed that no race will take place in the country in 2027.

Bringing F1 back to our shores is something the Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture, Gayton McKenzie, alongside the owner of the Kyalami Grand Prix Circuit, Toby Venter, have been trying to achieve for years.

Work to bring the Kyalami track up to Federation International de l'Automobile's (FIA's) high standards is underway, and the South African government's backing is helping to make a push for a race to be held locally.

The process has not been without its stumbling blocks, despite the progress made since McKenzie's first meeting with Formula 1 CEO Stefano Domenicali at the Azerbaijan Grand Prix in 2024. The latest setback in the bidding process, which The Citizen reported, is that McKenzie's dream of hosting a Grand Prix by 2027 will have to wait....



The minister admitted that South Africa underestimated the requirements for staging a Formula One Grand Prix. Despite this, he announced that a team of experts have been appointed to help the country prepare stronger bids for 2028 or 2029. "Next year, definitely not, because we have underestimated what is required to host the F1 event," McKenzie admitted. "But F1 has held our hand. So now what we're doing is, we've got the experts, and we're putting together a bid. We give them an offer, they can't refuse." (*TopAuto*)

RARE SOUTH AFRICAN BLUE DIAMOND:



A South African blue diamond of nearly 42 carats, unearthed from the world-famous Cullinan Mine in Gauteng, looks set to break value records. This is according to Petra Diamonds Limited, the company who recovered the rare blue diamond 'of exceptional colour and clarity.' Cited as one of the most significant finds ever, the South African blue diamond is also unique in that, from certain angles, it appears to be shaped like Africa. Moreover, experts in the field believe it will net \$57.5 million (R905 million), or more,

at sale.

Petra Diamonds Limited says the South African blue diamond has been classified as a Type IIb stone. This places it in an ultra-rare category due to its boron and nitrogen content. According to the

company's release last week, it is still in the process of fully analysing the stone. In the meantime, it is assessing preferred sales methods, too.

(Type IIb diamonds make up about 0.1% of all natural diamonds, making them one of the rarest natural diamonds and very valuable. In addition to having very low levels of nitrogen impurities comparable to Type IIa diamonds, Type IIb diamonds contain significant boron impurities. The absorption spectrum of boron causes these gems to absorb red, orange, and yellow light, lending Type IIb diamonds a light blue or grey color, though examples with low levels of boron impurities can also be colorless. *(Various sites)*)

“MANNERS MAYKETH MAN”

Every weekday, Orlando Bird, our loyal reader correspondent, shares an off-piste topic that has brought out the best of your opinions and stories.

Orlando writes...

A question of etiquette, from Isabel Wood: “There used to be a lot of rules about gloves, and when and when not to wear them. For instance, when calling on someone, you removed your gloves after you sat down. At the end of your call, you pulled on one glove as a signal that you were about to get up and leave. Does anyone still remember these things?”

I'm not sure I even own a pair of gloves, so confess I hadn't given these matters much thought. But Geoff Neale had, and he had another query: “As a young man, I was taught that it was impolite to shake hands while one was wearing gloves. Does this still hold true?”

At the time of writing, no definitive answer has been offered – so here's your chance.

For Mavis Howard, the discussion prompted “a flashback to my mother buying gloves in Harrods. She sat on a chair at the counter, and a small velvet cushion was provided for her elbow to rest on, while the assistant eased the glove over her hand. Mother would also frequently tell me that a duchess puts her gloves on in her bedroom, a lady puts her gloves in the hall, and a woman puts her gloves on in the street.”

Amoret Tanner added: “Whether you are a duchess, a lady or a woman putting her gloves on in the street, with St Valentine's Day fast approaching, the essential fact to remember is that their use has a significance similar to the flirtatious language of the fan.” Handle with care.

That's all from me for today, folks. I'll be back bright and early to bring you the best Telegraph talking points. *(Telegraph)*

CHEERS FOR NOW:

When you are reading this it will be our February Lunch. We will have some surprises today, one being that a new wine has been selected. Ken Forresters Petit range will be on the table. Enjoy the company, food and libation.

TAILPIECE:

'I was a loner until my wife told me to get my act together'

MATT



'I'm not sure but I think he said he was bored of peace.'

MATT



'The Government has introduced assisted dying, but only for pubs, small businesses and hospitality'

See more Matt



MORE ON GIUK: MORE BOATS MEAN MORE RISK FROM RUSSIA:

In his comments last week on the GIUK (Greenland-Iceland-UK Gap) Captain Ryan Ramsey RN (Retd) went on to say: "Russia has significantly invested in its submarine fleet, with more than 30 boats commissioned since the mid-2000s, including attack vessels such as the Yasen and Kilo-class attack subs. All the Russians have done since 2005 onwards is invest in more and more submarines, increasing the pace of build, increasing the pace of operations, increasing their operational tempo, and we haven't been able to match that," Mr Ramsey said.

"And now it's come to this crux point when finally, we realise that there's a real problem we need to deal with it, and then how are we going to do that because the pace of build for an Astute class (UK submarine) is ridiculously slow." He added you have to look for other technologies to be able to do

that, which is where aerial and underwater drones come in. "I think you're talking about an increase in maritime capability of two to three times what we have right now," he said.

"Asset availability is the key thing with this. If you say you have seven Astutes, but three are in maintenance, one might be a sea, one's under training, that doesn't leave many left. And this is the same with ships. So towed array frigates, there are less and less of those. Destroyers we have aren't towed array-capable. They've got active sonar but they don't have towed array, so the anti-submarine capability is far less than it should. If it was for me, I'd be turning around and saying we had two, three times the amount of maritime patrol aircraft that we've ordered.

"We'd have three to four times the amount of submarines that we have and I'm not saying about having very expensive Astute-class submarines, but some other submarines that can do anti-submarine warfare with loads of drones that are available. And then of course, towed-array frigates, you'd need more of those."

Threat to critical infrastructure

As well as providing Russian vessels a gateway into the Atlantic Ocean, the GIUK Gap is also vital to the UK's way of life. Deep-sea cables run through the area and have been put at increasing vulnerability due to mapping by Russian vessels.

Mr Ramsey said: "This is not about the deterrence getting detected, because they're not going to go around attacking the deterrent whilst we're not in a war state, but what they can do without any effect whatsoever is attack our critical national infrastructure. Ninety-nine per cent of all of our communications come through cables across the sea as opposed to by satellite. You cut that – you chop our economy – and it creates disaster. They've been doing it for years and years, but now they're increasing their capability, and they're coming closer to the Yantar [Russian surveillance vessel] operations, closer to the UK, and they're becoming more belligerent about the way they do it.

"They don't see that there's any opposition that goes with this and they can do what they want, and we need to get control of that to make sure that we protect ourselves. So if I was in government, I would genuinely be worried about this." (ForcesNews)

TOP 10 AFRICAN COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST MILITARY AIRCRAFT :

1. Egypt (1,088)

Egypt possesses Africa's largest and most powerful military aircraft fleet, ranking ninth globally with 1,088 aircraft. Its air force forms the backbone of the country's military capability, supported by decades of heavy investment and strong defence partnerships with the United States, France, and Russia. Egypt operates advanced platforms such as F-16s, Rafales, and MiG-29s, alongside attack helicopters and transport aircraft. Its strategic location at the crossroads of North Africa, the Middle East, and the Red Sea makes air superiority a critical priority.

2. Algeria (620)

Algeria ranks 16th globally with 620 military aircraft, making it one of Africa's most formidable air powers. Its fleet is heavily shaped by Russian hardware, including Sukhoi and MiG fighter jets, as well as advanced air-defence systems. Between 2018 and 2022, 73% of Algeria's military equipment imports came from Russia. Air power is central to Algeria's strategy for securing its vast territory, protecting energy infrastructure, and maintaining regional balance in North Africa and the Sahel, particularly along its long borders with Mali, Niger, and Libya.

3. Angola (278)

Angola holds 278 military aircraft, placing it 35th globally. Much of its air capability traces back to Cold War-era acquisitions from Russia and former Soviet allies. The fleet includes

fighter jets, transport aircraft, and helicopters used for territorial defence and internal security. Angola's sizeable air force reflects decades of military investment following a prolonged civil war.

4. Morocco (271)

Morocco ranks 37th globally with 271 military aircraft. Its air force is among the most modernised in Africa, benefiting from close defence ties with the United States and European partners. The fleet includes F-16 fighter jets, transport planes, and surveillance platforms that are central to Morocco's security strategy, particularly amid tensions over Western Sahara and its broader regional ambitions.

5. Sudan (183)

Sudan has 183 military aircraft, ranking 47th globally. Its fleet comprises fighter jets, attack helicopters, and transport aircraft, largely sourced from Russia and China. The air force has historically played a major role in internal conflicts, border disputes, and troop mobility across the country's vast terrain. However, prolonged political instability, sanctions, and ongoing conflict have strained maintenance capacity and operational readiness.

6. South Africa (181)

South Africa ranks 48th globally with 181 military aircraft. Once home to one of Africa's most advanced air forces, its fleet includes Gripen fighter jets, transport aircraft, and helicopters. South Africa remains a key contributor to peacekeeping missions, disaster response, and regional security operations under the African Union and the United Nations.

7. Nigeria (159)

Nigeria holds 159 military aircraft, placing it 54th globally. Its air force has expanded in recent years to support counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram and other security threats. The fleet includes fighter jets, attack helicopters, drones, and transport aircraft sourced from the United States, China, and Europe. Given Nigeria's size, population, and security challenges, air power plays a central role in its internal security strategy.

8. Tunisia (155)

Tunisia ranks 56th globally with 155 military aircraft. While relatively small, its air force is strategically focused on border security and counterterrorism. Tunisia relies heavily on partnerships with the United States and NATO allies for training, equipment, and intelligence. The fleet consists mainly of light aircraft, helicopters, and a limited number of combat platforms, but it remains crucial for monitoring borders with Libya and supporting internal security operations.

9. Kenya (154)

Kenya holds 154 military aircraft, ranking 57th globally. Its air force supports regional security efforts, particularly operations against militant groups in Somalia. Kenya operates fighter jets, helicopters, and surveillance aircraft acquired largely through Western defence partnerships. Air power enables rapid troop deployment, intelligence gathering, and maritime patrols along the Indian Ocean coastline.

10. Ethiopia (104)

Ethiopia ranks 70th globally with 104 military aircraft. Its air force is one of the most experienced in the Horn of Africa, shaped by decades of regional conflicts. The fleet includes fighter jets, transport aircraft, and helicopters, mainly sourced from Russia and Eastern Europe. Although smaller in size, Ethiopia's air force remains vital for internal security operations and border defence.