



ROYAL AIR FORCE OFFICERS' CLUB

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RAFOC REMINISCENCES AND RAMBLINGS – WEEK 291 13th FEBRUARY 2026

GREETINGS:

Another week in Wonderland... 36 years since Mandela's release from prison... Orange 5 Level severe storm warning for KZN... flooding in the Tankwa Karroo and vicinity of Hermanus... but "hier deur innie Bosveld" it's hot and sunny with the promise of more "hot weather ahead" from the Weatherman... Gaslighting, miscommunication and dry taps: Residents call for action on Joburg Water crisis: Dada dithers... O'Sullivan testifies, denies claims he and McBride targeted Phahlane... Blitzbokke won the Sevens in Perth, and the Proteas their opening T20 game against Canada... The parlous state of the nation – in the shadow of the watertanker... 17 000 KZN farms devastated by foot and mouth...

Keir Starmer on the brink after Monday's drama in Westminster... Furious female Labour MPs urge Starmer to make a woman his de facto deputy... Wizz overtakes Ryanair as "most complained about" airline... Crypto firm accidentally sends more than R700bn in bitcoin to users... Kyiv under "massive" attack by Russia early Thursday... UK pledges \$205-million in weapons and military aid to Ukraine... US warships used Diego Garcia to capture shadow fleet tanker... El Paso airport reopens after ground stop for immigration security reasons... Europe's fighter jet project is in jeopardy... 'I haven't seen the sun since January': Life beneath Aberdeen's record-breaking gloom... Meghan's confidant has written a novel so bad, AI would disown it... '

THE TIP OF THE SPEAR:



A pilot looks out from the cockpit of his Typhoon in Saudi Arabia (Pic:MOD)

Royal Air Force Typhoons could arguably be described as the tip of the spear when it comes to their combat effectiveness – and have been demonstrating that capability in Saudi Arabia.

The RAF jets have been taking part in Exercise Spears of Victory 2026, one of the largest multinational air exercises in the Middle East.

The exercise is hosted by the Saudi defence ministry at the Air Warfare Centre in the kingdom's Eastern Province.

RAF personnel have been operating alongside the Saudi armed forces and allies from across the Gulf, Europe, Asia and North America as part of a 15-nation coalition focused on strengthening joint air power, interoperability and operational integration.

Spears of Victory is designed to enhance combined planning and execution, improve combat readiness and improve the ability of allied forces to operate and work together in complex, high-threat environments. The training includes combined and joint air operations, advanced tactical missions and planning activities.

In further recognition of the partnership between Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom, Prince William is arriving in the country for a three-day visit that coincides with the exercise. (*ForcesNews*)

F35 VS TYPHOON:

In 2026, Europe has two equally lethal but very different fighter jets across the different nations' air forces. Both the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II and Eurofighter Typhoon are multinational defence programs with their supply chains distributed among different member states. Beyond that fact, the two share few similarities. The F-35 is America's latest stealth, fifth generation fighter while the Typhoon is an older fourth-generation-plus air superiority fighter that lacks stealth.

When it comes to answering the question of which is better, the context complicates matters. However, we have one case to help solve the mystery: a rare North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) drill over Germany, the stealthy F-35A met the agile Typhoon in a visual-range dogfight. The NATO exercise was held in September 2024, offering an invaluable look at how the two very different rivals match up when they collide above the clouds.



During a joint-training event at Ramstein Air Base, Captain Patrick "Hobbit" Pearce in a US Air Force F-35A sparred with 1st Lieutenant Alexander "Stitch" Grant who flew a German Air Force Typhoon. The pilots were sent to a set of coordinates, altitude, and time with no knowledge of the opponent until they arrived. As the two jets closed into the "merge," each pilot realized he was

facing a formidable adversary. The Medium recounted that Grant said he had never flown against an F-35, and Pearce had never engaged a Typhoon. Once the dogfight began, the Typhoon's two powerful engines and aggressive aerodynamics let Grant pull tighter turns and lose less energy than the single-engine F-35. He eventually pulled behind Pearce despite the high-G manoeuvring by both pilots and scored a simulated gun kill. Both pilots later described the physical punishment of fighting under 7-9 Gs while constantly craning their necks to keep sight of the opponent. (*SimpleFlying*)

FLYING OFFICER A P PEASE RAF:



Arthur Peter Pease was born on 15th February 1918 in London. His parents were (Sir) Richard Arthur Pease (1890-1969) and (Lady) Jeannette Thorn Pease (nee Kissel 1889-1957).

He was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read History. He was a member of the University Air Squadron and was commissioned in the RAFVR in September 1938. Called to full-time service in October 1939, Pease completed his flying training and was posted to No.1 School of Army Co-operation at Old Sarum in late May 1940.

He met Richard Hillary there and they became friends. They went to 5 OTU Aston Down on 23rd June and after converting to Spitfires they joined 603 Squadron at Dyce on 6th July.

On 15th September 1940 Pease was shot down and killed in combat. His Spitfire, X4324, crashed at Kingswood, near Chartway Street, Kent. He was 22 and is buried in the churchyard of St. Michael and All Saints at Middleton Tyas, Yorkshire.

A memorial was unveiled on 15th February 2018 close to his crash site in Kingswood, Kent, the event was reported in the newsletter of the Old Etonians Association, they kindly allowed it to be reproduced below:

“Born into a titled family, son of Sir Richard and Lady Pease, he was educated at Eton where he excelled and was a contemporary of DJC (Colin) Pinckney (1918-42). Both attended Trinity College, Cambridge, where Pease read History, and they joined the University Air Squadron.

He was commissioned in the RAF Volunteer Reserve in September 1938, and called to full-time service in October 1939, after the outbreak of the Second World War. He met Richard Hope Hillary

(1919 -1943) – who later immortalised Pease in his book *The Last Enemy* – during initial training at Old Sarum where the two became close friends. Pease and Hillary were posted to 5OTU Aston Down where they converted to Spitfires, and their kinship with Colin Pinckney resumed when all three airmen joined 603 (City of Edinburgh) Squadron.

Flying Officer Pease was considered one of the top fighter pilots in his squadron. On 7 September 1940 his Spitfire (L1057) was hit by a burst of fire during a fierce engagement with the Luftwaffe over London; he was fortunate to return to RAF Hornchurch and make a forced landing. However, on 15 September 1940 – the day now commemorated annually in the UK as ‘Battle of Britain Day’ – his luck finally ran out. 603 Squadron was scrambled from RAF Hornchurch at 2.45pm to combat a large force of enemy bombers bound for London and encountered numerous Dornier 17 and Heinkel 111 bombers over Maidstone; during the battle, Peter’s Spitfire Mk I (X4324) was hit and barely controllable. Reports claim that after being hit, the engine of his Spitfire was heard to rev, taking it clear of the houses in the village of Kingswood for which it was headed, and Pease was still in the cockpit when his blazing fighter dived into fields nearby at 3.05pm. It is thought that Pease may have committed this final act of bravery to spare civilian life. Flying Officer Pease was found dead at the site of the crash. For Leutnant Roderich Cescotti, of the Luftwaffe, piloting one of the German bombers that day, it was an experience he would never forget; the courageous Spitfire pilot he describes in the following account was consistent, both in manner and time and place, with the death of Flying Officer A.P. Pease:

“Few Tommies succeeded in penetrating our fighter escort. I saw a Spitfire dive steeply through our escort, level out and close rapidly on our formation. It opened fire, from ahead and to the right, and its tracers streaked towards us. At that moment an Me 109, that we had not seen before, appeared behind the Spitfire and we saw its rounds striking the Spitfire’s tail. But the Tommy continued his attack, coming straight for us, and his rounds slashed into our aircraft. We could not return fire for fear of hitting the Messerschmitt. I put my left arm across my face to protect it from the plexiglass splinters flying around the cockpit, holding the controls with my right hand. With only the thin plexiglass between us, we were eye-to-eye with the enemy’s eight machine guns. At the last moment, the Spitfire pulled up and passed very close over the top of us. Then it rolled on its back, as though out of control, and went down steeply trailing black smoke. Wagging its wings, the Messerschmitt swept past us and curved in for another attack. The action lasted only a few seconds, but it demonstrated the determination and bravery with which the Tommies were fighting over their own country.”

One of Churchill’s ‘Few’, and described by Richard Hillary as “liked and respected by everyone in the squadron.”, Pease was just 22 years old when he was killed. He was later buried in the Churchyard of St. Michael and All Saints at Middleton Tyas, Yorkshire, close to his family home.”

WE WILL REMEMBER HIM

JAPAN’S NEW MISSILE BENDS THE RULES OF THE SKY:

Japan is said to have crossed a red line with a new stealth missile capable of mid-air corkscrew manoeuvres to evade defences and strike targets more than 1,000 km away.



On a hazy spring morning off Japan’s northern coast, a gray shape slipped low over the water and vanished into the mist. On radar, it appeared as a jittery line, then a sudden gap, as if the sky itself had swallowed it. A few seconds later, the track reappeared, zigzagging in a way that made the operators in the control room glance at each other in disbelief. Missiles don’t move like that, one of them

In a test kept quiet for months, Japan had reportedly flown a new kind of stealth missile that doesn't just dodge – it twists, spirals and corkscrews in mid-air to escape interception and hit targets more than 1,000 kilometres away.

Some observers say this is the moment Tokyo quietly crossed a red line.

Imagine watching a slow-motion video of a stunt plane drawing a corkscrew in the air, except that plane is traveling at near-supersonic speed and carrying a warhead. That is the kind of image defence experts are starting to use to describe Japan's next-generation stealth missile, reported by local media and defence analysts over the past few weeks.

The core claim is simple and chilling. Japan is developing a missile that can twist mid-flight, sliding out of the way of enemy interceptors like a boxer slipping a punch, then curving back on course toward a ship or base hundreds of kilometres away.

According to leaks around Tokyo's defence establishment, the program grew out of Japan's "stand-off defence" push: long-range weapons designed to hit threats before they can strike the archipelago. Officially, the focus has been on upgrading existing missiles such as the Type 12 anti-ship missile to reach beyond 1,000 km. Behind the scenes, though, researchers at defence-linked institutes and major firms like Mitsubishi Heavy Industries have reportedly been experimenting with advanced guidance, canard control surfaces and thrust-vectoring. The goal: a stealthy cruise missile able to fly low, hug terrain, and perform mid-air spiral manoeuvres at the last moment to throw off enemy radars and interceptors. For neighbouring countries, that changes the mental map of the region. Full article at:

CADDS ([Containerized Autonomous Drone Delivery System](#).)

The entire U.S. military is now pushing to acquire hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of new drones, especially smaller types, in the coming years, spurred on by new direction from the Pentagon. In turn, a demand for new containerized launchers capable of rapidly deploying and, if need be, recovering those uncrewed aerial systems has now emerged. On several occasions in the past, TWZ has called attention to the value of exactly these kinds of launch capabilities, for use on land and at sea, especially for employing fully networked swarms.

Earlier this week, the Pentagon's Defence Innovation Unit (DIU) laid out broad requirements for what it referred to as a Containerized Autonomous Drone Delivery System (CADDS). DIU's central focus is on leveraging new and improved commercial-off-the-shelf technologies to help meet U.S. military needs.

"The Department of War (Down) faces a robotic mass challenge: current methods for deploying and sustaining unmanned aerial systems (UAS) rely on direct human interaction to launch, recover, and refit each system," the CADDS notice explains. "This 1:1 operator-to-aircraft model limits deployment speed and scale while exposing operators to unnecessary risks."

The "problem" to solve then is that "the DoW requires the ability to deploy large quantities of UAS rapidly, while minimizing the risk and burden to human operators executing kinetic and non-kinetic UAS operations in contested environments," it adds. Full article in The War Zone.

ARMIES ADD CHEAPER, COMMERCIAL DRONES:

As drones play a larger role in battle strategies across Africa, the continent's militaries are adding small, commercially available drones to their arsenals as an inexpensive and highly adaptable alternative to military-grade unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

In recent years, African militaries have gone on a UAV shopping spree with Turkey's Bayraktar TB-2 and Akinci drones becoming the most popular options. At \$5 million each for a TB-2 and up to \$50 million for an Akinci, the costs for cash-strapped militaries add up quickly.



A captured suicide drone in Sudan

Commercial drones, by comparison, cost anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars and can easily be outfitted to carry small explosive payloads. The low cost makes them essentially disposable, analysts say.

The shift toward cheaper drones, many of them quadcopters, is happening partly in response to terrorists adopting the same technology. In recent years, terrorist groups such as al-Shabaab in Somalia and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin in Burkina Faso and Mali have turned such drones into flying improvised explosive devices by mounting bombs to them.

Now, African militaries have adopted the same capability. "They have this in their backpacks, they go for missions and they're able to strike where necessary," Muhammad Umar, chief technology officer at Nigerian drone-maker EIB Group, recently told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Nigeria has become a leader in buying and building UAVs for military use. The Armed Forces of Nigeria have bought drones from a variety of suppliers, including Turkey and China, two of the biggest actors in Africa's drone market, according to an Africa Center for Strategic Studies analysis.

CHEERS FOR NOW:

Your scribe has been Blessed to spend the last week "glamping" in airconditioned luxury in the bushveld North of Brits in some glorious hot weather, with temperatures up to 35C, in contrast to our coastal members and countrymen..." where every prospect pleases and only man is vile" - and watching the rest of the world go by... Ah, well, someone has to do it...

Our February lunch was slow on bookings but in the event a respectable 20 members and guests sat down to lunch of grilled Sirloin followed by Apple Crumble... like the "Vicars Egg", it was good in parts according to our members (or victims, depending on their preferences), but our guests, happily,

found it excellent... our surprise speaker turned out to be Mike Moriarty, guest of Tony Hampson-Tindale. He gave us an interesting perspective on political developments in SA and fielded a short Q&A session – and the President will tell us more, no doubt, in SONA...

TAILPIECE:

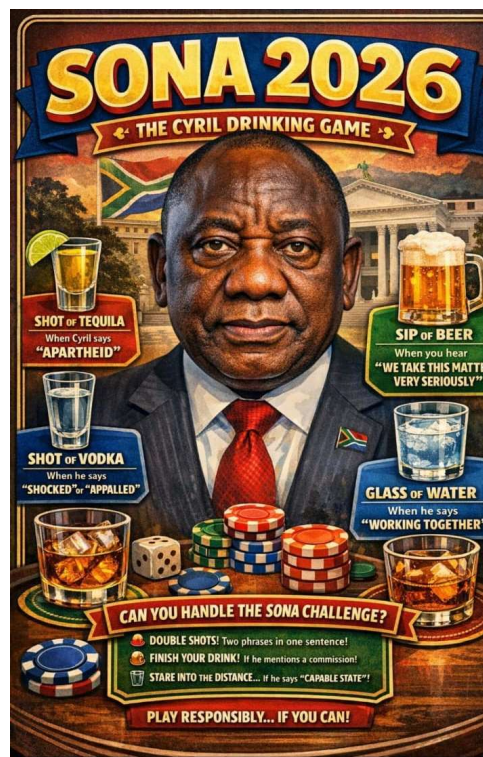
“Mankind invented the atomic bomb, but no mouse would ever construct a mousetrap.” (*Albert Einstein*)

Quinton de Kock smashed a career-best 115 from 49 balls as South Africa easily chased down a victory target of 222 to beat West Indies by seven wickets on Thursday and secure the three-match T20 series 2-0 with a game to go...

How Sweden defied liberal outrage to smash the gangs: In 2024, Sweden faced its worst wave of gang violence, and its politicians were running out of ideas. Near-daily gun attacks were driven by Foxtrot, a Middle Eastern narcotics gang, which was hiring children as young as 12 via social media. The way forward was abhorrent to Sweden’s liberal-minded society: police powers to search children, even when they have no suspicion of an active crime. Despite a rebuke from the UN, these measures have proved successful. In two years, Sweden has secured a major decrease in gun violence... (*Telegraph*)

Legal war is brewing in the small town of Graaff-Reinet, as residents and other stakeholders refuse to accept the government’s move to rename the 240-year-old town. Graaff-Reinet has been renamed to Robert Sobukwe Town, after Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture, the intellectual giant Gorgeous Gayton McKenzie signed off on the renaming of 21 places across South Africa.

Among them were Graaff-Reinet and East London, the latter of which has been renamed Kugompo City. Aberdeen also changed to Xamdeboo, Adendorp to KwaMseki, and Bishop Limba to KwaNoheleni. (*BusinessTech*)



How to play the SONA game. Let us know how you feel tomorrow! Enter your scores in the boxes.

THE RETURN OF THE 'HARRY S TRUMAN':

- a signal badly received by the US Navy facing future wars



The pier in Norfolk was a forest of phones held high, screens trembling slightly in the February wind. Families craned their necks, kids on shoulders, all eyes locked on the grey wall of steel gliding slowly toward its berth. The USS Harry S. Truman, back from the Mediterranean, looked almost unreal, like a moving city wearing a warship's silhouette. On deck, sailors in dress whites lined the rail, dots of human fragility against 100,000 tons of metal and history.

Down on the dock, someone muttered, "She shouldn't be here. Not already."

Because behind the hugs, the balloons and the welcome-home banners, another story slipped quietly into focus. A story about a Navy that needs its big ships far away, not tied to the pier. And a future war that might not wait for the next homecoming.

THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN THAT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE A VICTORY

From the crowd's point of view, the Truman's return felt like a movie ending. The ship had cut short its deployment to the Eastern Mediterranean, where it had been acting as a kind of floating fire extinguisher for a region simmering after the Hamas-Israel war. Now it was back, horns blaring, flags snapping, a living symbol of ****American power**** sliding into home port. Yet the timing hung oddly in the air.

Russia was still pounding Ukraine. The Red Sea remained a shooting gallery of drones and missiles. China was rehearsing blockades around Taiwan. And here was one of the Navy's most visible instruments of deterrence... parking.

Talk to sailors quietly, away from the official statements, and you hear a different tone.

Some were relieved the Truman didn't get pulled into yet another deployment extension, the kind of mission creep that turns "seven months" into nearly a year. Others felt whiplash. The carrier had been pushed forward as a show of force, then brought back just as storms on the horizon looked darker.

One petty officer described it like this: “We trained for the big fight. We got the standby mission instead. Then we came home while everything stayed messy.” That’s not disappointment in going home. It’s the strange dissonance of training for one kind of war while being used for another. Strategists see a deeper signal behind that dissonance. The Truman didn’t just come home; it came home into a debate.

The US Navy is being pulled in two directions at once. On one side, the old expectation: carriers everywhere, all the time, reassuring allies and intimidating rivals. On the other, the new cold reality: next-generation missiles, hypersonic weapons, swarms of drones that can hunt a carrier from much farther away than before.

A big deck like Truman still looks mighty in photos. On war-game screens, against China or Russia, that same ship sometimes looks more like a very expensive target.

Inside the Pentagon, the Truman’s early return is read less like a scheduling tweak and more like an uncomfortable confession. The Navy is overstretched, its maintenance cycles brittle, its crews exhausted from years of high-tempo deployments.

So the “gesture” becomes clear: pull a carrier off station, say the crisis has entered a new phase, and quietly admit that the fleet cannot be everywhere at once. That’s not cowardice. It’s arithmetic. The problem is that adversaries can count too. And they watch where American carriers are, and where they aren’t.

LOOK AT THE MAP.

A few months ago, the US had multiple carriers at sea as a show of resolve: one near Israel, one in the Red Sea/Arabian Sea region, another in the Pacific. The photos looked comforting. Jets taking off at night, decks lit in orange glow, headlines about “strong signals” to Tehran and Moscow and Beijing.

Then Truman turned back toward Virginia. Another carrier headed for maintenance. Task forces shuffled. Gaps opened.

No one announces those gaps on TV, but they echo through intelligence reports. Rivals test them with a few more drones here, a sharper naval manoeuvre there. The signal of American staying power, once almost taken for granted, suddenly looks... conditional.

FROM THE NAVY’S OWN PERSPECTIVE, THERE’S A QUIET DREAD BEHIND THAT CONDITIONAL PRESENCE.

Future wars, especially with a near-peer like China, won’t give the luxury of rotating giant ships like a shift schedule. Yet the whole carrier model is built on predictable cycles: train, deploy, repair, rest, repeat. When a Truman comes home early, it’s not just a scheduling story; it’s a crack in that rhythm.

*And when rhythms crack in peacetime, they tend to shatter in wartime. *

That’s why so many officers and analysts see the return not as a victory lap, but as a warning the Navy would rather not send.

Here’s the practical part no glossy video will say out loud: if the Navy wants its carriers to matter in the next big war, it needs to treat ships like Truman very differently starting now.

That means using every homecoming not just as a PR moment, but as a laboratory. Longer maintenance windows tailored for modern threats, not Cold War checklists. More drills with unmanned escorts, decoy ships and distributed strike groups that don’t gather everything in one floating bullseye.

It also means rethinking the old habit of “surging” a carrier at the last minute for every political crisis. The Truman’s return is a reminder that every surge burns future options.

We’ve all been there, that moment when you realize you’ve been running your life on emergency mode for so long that “normal” no longer exists. The US Navy is in that space right now.

For twenty years, carriers were used as flexible response tools for counterterrorism and small wars. Long hours, rapid redeployments, endless “presence missions.” That built a generation of sailors who are tough and experienced, but also worn down.

Let’s be honest: nobody really does this every single day without something breaking — crews, ships, families, or all three.

So when Truman ties up at the pier a little earlier than expected, it’s also a mercy for the people on board. The mistake would be pretending that mercy has no strategic price.

INSIDE THAT TENSION, YOU HEAR CANDID VOICES.

The future fight is not going to wait for us to feel rested.

That quote, from a retired admiral now working with think tanks, circles quietly in Navy circles. It sits next to a growing list of “to-dos” that feel less like strategy and more like emergency repairs:

Shift training from static deployments to contested, missile-saturated environments.

Pair big carriers with agile, smaller platforms that can absorb risk.

INVEST IN DECOYS AND DECEPTION AS SERIOUSLY AS IN NEW JETS.

Talk honestly with the public about what carriers can and cannot do in a China fight.

Each of those points has enemies: budgets, traditions, politics, comfort zones.

The Truman’s early homecoming throws them all into sharper focus, whether the Navy likes it or not.

WHAT THE TRUMAN’S PIER-SIDE SILENCE ASKS OF EVERYONE WATCHING

Stand by the waterline long enough, after the banners come down and the crowds thin, and a different kind of quiet settles over a carrier like Truman. The ship is still enormous, but stripped of its roaring air wing and churning escorts, it looks almost... vulnerable.

That vulnerability isn’t just steel and sensors. It’s a symbol of a country that has long believed its ships could show up anywhere, any time, to calm a crisis just by being visible. The world is testing that belief now, with longer-range weapons, tighter alliances among rivals, and a rising comfort with brinkmanship. For the US Navy, the question is brutal in its simplicity: can these monuments of the last century adapt fast enough to survive – and matter – in the next one?