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ICARUS NEWSLETTER Autumn 2018

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We send our condolences to the families of the following absent friends:

Vic Catherall
Dick Fuller
Colin Ostridge

Ronald Cox
Laurie Nutton
Charles Owens
Forrest Robertson

Roger Entwisle
Chris Orlebar
David Porteous

People News

From **Brian Jordan**.

Alerted by your reference to the BA Clubs absent friends pages I went to see if I had missed the passing of anyone I knew. The search was successful in that most of my contemporaries have yet to make the list and I was already aware of those we have lost. I did discover one glaring error in that I am myself listed in the June 2016 report! I have just checked and can confirm that I am still warm and that almost everything is in good working order.

I note that the information was provided by BA pensions who in 2016 sent a letter to my representatives insisting they send a death certificate while simultaneously stopping my pension payments. I made a few phone calls from beyond the grave and convinced them that they were mistaken but not before, it would seem, they had made news of my passing public. I did receive a full explanation and fulsome apology, via a personal call from a senior manager at BA Pensions.

I still live in the beautiful Test Valley and am about to embark on yet another season of motor racing (probably my last, as I have been telling Mrs J for years!)

Nostalgia

My thanks to our esteemed committee member **Keith Lakin** for the following:

A Flight to Remember –and not Forget!

This summer I achieved a long held ambition to fly a seaplane! In fact it was my daughter who spotted the opportunity for a ‘Splash & Go’ experience arranged via the MerseyFlight flying school based at Liverpool airport. The aircraft they call in, an Aviat Husky A-IC, is owned and operated by Angus Whyte, a highly experienced instructor and examiner. Rather like a modern version of a Super Cub, the Husky was designed and built by Christen Industries, who also created the Pitts Special. Based in Afton Wyoming, the company is now owned by Aviat Aircraft Inc. The Husky is top of its class in performance, having a gross weight, when amphibious floats are fitted, of under 1000kg owing to the extensive use of the Dacron polyethylene skin material.

A lively 180hp Lycoming engine and a constant speed high spec Hartzell prop, allows the aircraft to take off from water in 278m and deliver a high rate of climb thanks to clever wing design.

After the usual paper work, Angus gives me a thorough briefing and I quickly realise that despite his day job as a Jet2 737-800 Captain his real passion over many years is for seaplanes. In 2014 he finally went to Wyoming to specify the fit and livery he wanted for his own aircraft. Yes, he arranged the cool registration too. G-ODIP ! It was then crated and shipped to Swiftair Aircraft maintenance based in Leicester who put it together.

There’s a trick to being shoe-horned into the rear seat, but once there it is surprisingly comfortable. There are rear stick, rudder and throttle controls but the instruments are all neatly mounted forward, such that Angus needed to lean sideways for me to see them fully.



The take off from John Lennon's runway 27 was astonishingly smooth and short and we were soon at 1500' enjoying the view of the 1930's art nouveau of Speke's original terminal building – now a stylish Crowne Plaza hotel. It was a perfect day for flying and I was quickly invited to take control. It was a lighter and more responsive than I'd imagined.

'Head over there' said Angus pointing to the mouth of the Mersey. No compass heading was necessary! The views of the old docks and estuary were superb, as were the sandbanks off the Wirral coast, one of which was home to dozens of grey seals basking in the sunshine. Turning southwest we headed for north Wales where the land came up to meet us. Taking back control for a while Angus pointed out some lakes and reservoirs. Noting the orientation of some conveniently located air turbines, he positioned downwind to a lake and set the Husky up for a water landing. A loud automated voice, which must be manually cancelled, forces you to check the wheels are up. If they're not, there is a risk of ending up in the water. Nose first!

After a smooth landing on the 'step', the Husky settled onto the floats and we taxied back. I was surprised how much even 10kts of wind affected directional control, which is helped by two small rudders fitted to the floats. Natural weather-cocking on water ensures an into-wind take off and in no time we were climbing away. We then executed a couple of neat 'splash & go' circuits, before heading off along a long reservoir, low level to the delight of the local anglers. Sadly, we were soon heading back to Liverpool and instructed to join the circuit via the 'Jaguar - Landrover Factory' VRP. Slotting in behind an Easyjet aircraft we settled onto the approach, and were again obliged to cancel the voice command to check the gear was indeed extended from the floats. Angus likened the exercise of touching down on four wheels, to landing a supermarket trolley!

It was a terrific experience and one I would recommend to anyone.

Now for a piece written by **Captain Phil Hogge** about flying the VC-10 in Africa.



I was on the first Hamble intake to join BOAC in 1962, converting to VC10s in 1964. This was my first jet type, and looking back, I realise now how lucky I was, not only to fly this magnificent aircraft, but also to do so on such an extensive route structure, first to West Africa, and then to the rest of Africa, the Far East, the Americas and across the Pacific to Australia.

In the early 1960s, the world had not changed so much from pre-war days, and, except in the USA and a few other places, high rise buildings were the exception. Dubai for example was still a small trading station on a creek in the desert with wooden dhows drawn up on the strand. The crew hotel was one of the tallest buildings in town, all of about four or five stories – a far cry from the ‘Las Vegas’ it has become today.

I have few exciting tales to tell, most of my memories are of the wonder of being able to explore much of the world before it became homogenised. Of all these memories, flying through Africa is perhaps the most intense. Communications were, by modern standards, primitive (overseas telephone calls had to be pre-booked several hours ahead), HF radio communications could be hit and miss, navigation aids frequently did not work, airfield lighting was sometimes only partly available, met reports could be highly dubious (it was better to ask the BOAC station officer to look out of the window and tell you what he saw than to rely on the official weather observation) and en-route ATC was often ‘do it yourself’. When away from London, you were very much on your own with no instant data-link back to head office – far more fun, if somewhat less efficient.

Most of the captains I first flew with were either ex-Imperial Airways or ex-RAF bomber pilots. Their stories of flying boats through Africa told of a magical mix of flying, ‘sea faring’, night stops in lonely staging posts on rivers and lakes, and low sight-seeing over vast herds of wild game.

The ex-RAF people, understandably, had less to say, some of their experiences being too harrowing to tell except after many beers. But all felt that flying was ‘not what it was’, a feeling that exists in every generation, including my own.

The VC10 was designed for the hot high short runways of the African routes. Therefore it had an excellent take-off performance, a little over-powered from an accountant’s point of view, but much enjoyed by us pilots. It was a real pilot’s aircraft; lots of performance, precise powerful controls, very stable and with an ability to flatter even the most ham-fisted pilot. It also had a roomy well laid out flight deck, with large windows giving good visibility and a legendarily quiet cabin.



But it was Africa which captured one's heart. Flying south from Cairo towards Khartoum along the Nile, you could see this thin green ribbon stretching far out ahead, winding through the vast brown desert, first far out to the eastern horizon towards Luxor and Aswan, then back underneath near Wadi Halfa, only to disappear in the west towards Dongola, returning once again as it wound its way east towards Atbara, and finally to Khartoum. This was indeed to see one of the wonders of the natural world. I remember once, later when I became a captain, going through the cabin to talk to the passengers after a long delay in Rome on our way to Nairobi, being accosted by an irate lady passenger who was upset by being only a few hours late. She was most unimpressed when I pointed out that the journey we were now taking in little more than six hours would have taken her over six months only 100 years before. In the 1960s, when daily services were a rarity, one had many days off at slip stations. There was time to explore: to hire horses in Cairo and ride out into the desert to see the stepped pyramids at Saqqara; or to go sailing in Khartoum on the Blue Nile from the Blue Nile Sailing Club whose club house was the Melik, Kitchener's gunboat, built in 1896 and used at the relief of Khartoum in 1898.

There was time to hire cars and drive out from Nairobi up the Rift Valley to Naivasha, and then north around Mount Kenya via Gilgil, Nakuru, Thomson's Falls, Nanuki, Meru, Embu and Fort Hall. On one memorable trip we hired a car in Kampala and drove to Murchison Falls and Lake Albert, arriving just after a thunderstorm had passed. The sky was dark blue/black, the earth and trees newly washed sparkling clean. There was no one around, the only sign of human existence being a low pipe rail fence. And there before us, only yards away, the whole White Nile thundered 140ft down through a gap little more than 20ft wide. That image is still vivid in my mind.

Other occasions that live in my memory include hiring a minibus and driver in Addis Ababa and taking an entire VC10 crew to the Blue Nile gorge, second only in size to the Grand Canyon; taking the train from Lusaka and staying in the Victoria Falls Hotel right on the edge of the falls; going down a gold mine near Johannesburg to a depth of around 6000ft (well below sea level); walking through an African village on the banks of Lake Malawi at dawn (I was still on the wrong time zone and couldn't sleep) and being greeted by happy villagers who must have been very surprised to see a lone white man passing by.

I remember one day early on in my career the aircraft went sick in Kano (even VC10s did that sometimes), forcing us to stay until the spares arrived. It was a real lesson in how to handle a problem, one that I tried to emulate later in my career. The captain and station manager organised hotels and hired buses for us all (passengers and crew) to tour around the old city. In 1965 Kano was like something out of Beau Geste, with aircraft being greeted on landing by robed men on camels blowing long trumpets! At the end of our enforced stay one of the passengers remarked that he had never really wanted to be delayed in Kano but was surprised to have enjoyed it so much.

But there were darker sides too. Like several days spent at the Ikeja Arms hotel in Lagos with no power or telephones while rumours of riots ran rife. This was shortly after the massacres in The Congo and in circumstance like these the imagination runs away so easily. Being driven to Lagos airport in the crew bus during the Biafran war, coming to a road block with soldiers armed with rifles and machine guns, and the driver not stopping at the barrier but accelerating through, and all of us crew members throwing ourselves under the seats – but nothing happened, although it was the only time I saw a black African go white with fear!

On another occasion, unloading the aircraft at gunpoint in Tripoli while Algerian air force fighters refuelled on their way to Cairo to support the Egyptians in the Six Day War. No one would refuel our aircraft or unload the holds and when we started to do it ourselves the army stopped us by surrounding the aircraft. Eventually after a lot of shouting and arguing we unloaded everything onto the tarmac, threw the joining passengers' luggage into the holds and departed. The fastest start, taxi and take off that I can remember – just in case they changed their minds.

Some of the flying problems were interesting too. Early morning arrivals at Nairobi often encountered low cloud which, before the days of autoland, meant holding before the cloud lifted. On some occasions it was necessary to have to work out how best to make the approach with a mixture of navigation aids that were only partly working. Or arriving in Lagos to find that half the runway lights were unserviceable because the locals had stolen the copper wires to make bangles. Or taxiing out at Entebbe for a heavy weight departure for London with a growing feeling that something was wrong until it dawned on us that the grass was leaning the wrong way. We stopped on the taxiway and, after a long 'discussion' with the tower, got them to admit that the anemometer had been broken for several days and the wind data they had given us was three days old. So we each made an assessment of the wind speed and direction by looking at the grass, re-did the take-off calculations using our combined estimates, and took off in the opposite direction to ensure we had a head wind!

I have often been asked which was my favourite route. To me, the best was a 10 day triangular trip that could be done in either direction with different selections of stops. For example, the first leg might be to Bahrain, the next to Bombay or Calcutta. Then to Singapore and Hong Kong; back via Singapore and Colombo; then across to the Seychelles and on to either Blantyre or Johannesburg. And finally back to London via Nairobi or Entebbe with night stops all along the way. What a diverse selection of cultures and aeronautical problems; the monsoon in India, the Chung Cheu ADF approach through the harbour to Hong Kong; back to Colombo flying along beside the awe inspiring thunderstorms of the ITCZ, filled with sheets of almost continuous lightening. The VOR let down on limits to the Seychelles which involved flying overhead the VOR, heading southeast out to sea, descending to break cloud and then turning back towards the island, peering through low cloud and driving rain trying to see the lighthouse at Victoria and then flying along the coast until the approach lights of the airport appeared from behind the hill. All good Mark 1 eyeball stuff. Then on to Africa for a landing at Blantyre where the narrower than normal runway made it difficult to judge the flare height – the locals used to come out specially to watch the resulting spectacular bounces. Or, alternatively, to Johannesburg with an elevation of 5,500ft.

What a wonderful trip, and with time off at most of the stops to explore. Rose-tinted spectacles? Yes, most certainly – but that is what memories are made of. What a magnificent aircraft and what wonderfully diverse routes for us to enjoy!"

Flights to Remember.....(or forget!)

12th March 1950, Avro Tudor 5 G-AKBY, Llandow near Cardiff, Capt D J Parsons.

The Avro Tudor was a pressurised British transport aeroplane, developed from the Lincoln bomber and was not the prettiest aircraft in the sky, first flying in June 1945. There were seven different versions, normally a clear sign that the performance and range was unremarkable, evidenced by BOAC's rejection of the type in 1947. Fewer than 40 were built with the last few fuselages used for the Avro Ashton jet experimental type.

The Tudor's main claim to fame was on the Berlin Airlift, operated by several Independent airlines, after which they were used for passenger and freight work, often on contract to the RAF. G-AKBY was one of two Tudors operated by Fairflight Ltd, a small outfit based at Langley Airfield just north of what is now J5 of the M4 and run by the famous AVM Don Bennett. The trip on this occasion involved a test flight from Langley before positioning to Llandow, an RAF station between Swansea and Cardiff, to pick up 78 pax with a crew of 2 pilots, an R/O, a travelling ground engineer and what the subsequent inquiry nicely termed "an air girl". The passengers were all rugby fans travelling to Dublin for an Ireland v Wales International match. The outbound flight on 10th March to Dublin was uneventful, although it is significant that Llandow had no facilities for checking pax or baggage weights for the load and balance, to determine adherence to the C of G limits (most of the men aboard were active club rugby players!).



G-AGRY and G-AKBY on the Berlin Airlift, 1948/1949, mainly transporting fuel.

Prior to boarding for the return flight to Llandow on 12th March (Wales had won the match), there was again no weighing of the pax or baggage, the latter being mainly cabin loaded.

Although the Court of Inquiry held after the accident had the impression that Captain Parsons was uneasy about the limited runway length at Llandow (R/W 28, 1600 yards), it was satisfied that there should have been no difficulty landing there with a proper disposition of

weight and a headwind component of 10 to 15 knots. The Captain had been personally trained by AVM Bennett onto the Tudor and was described by him as a good pilot, a conscientious commander, altogether a damned fine chap. From witness statements, the approach appeared to be normal, except that it seemed the aircraft would touchdown well short. About half a mile from the start of the runway there was an increase in power which slightly reduced the rate of descent, but it was followed by a sudden roar, indicating the application of full power. A steep and rapid climb developed to about 350ft when, at a pitch angle of 60 to 70 degrees, all engine noise ceased, the aeroplane stalled and it fell away turning to starboard. The Tudor then hit the ground, 60 degrees nose down and 45 degrees of roll to starboard, on farmland in the village of Sigginstone.

Later examination of the wreckage suggested that one or other of the pilots had switched off the ignition, probably accounting for the abrupt cessation of noise before the crash. There was no fire after the impact but all of the crew and 75 of the 78 pax were killed. Two pax in the last pair of seats and a passenger in the toilet at the time survive. All possible theories were examined during the Court Investigation and, upon consideration of the evidence, it concluded that the most probable cause of the accident was that the loading condition of the aircraft gave a centre of gravity position considerably aft of the permitted limits authorised by the relevant C of A. It was established that for the flight in question stowage of a ton or so of extra baggage or ballast in the forward section of the fuselage would have been necessary to remain within the C of G limits. The load distribution resulted in there being insufficient elevator control remaining to lower the nose after the application of full power, creating a condition of acute instability. The Court made various general recommendations regarding aircraft load and balance.

The following piece was sent to me some time ago about Vanguard flying controls, but I haven't the author's name and hence there is no acknowledgement attached. If the writer could let me know their name I will give an appropriate acknowledgement next issue.

“It was a gentle day with a bit of Strato Cu and not much wind. The flight was LHR to EDI, the skipper was Eric Ward who was always a pleasure to fly with, and I was P2. Eric operated the first leg, and on landing as normal asked me to engage the control locks when the speed had reduced at the end of the landing roll. Having pulled the control lock rearward, I engaged the elevators by pulling the stick just past the centre position and felt the controls resist any more movement with a slight click. The ailerons performed similarly left to right, but after the slight click, the controls continued moving without any apparent resistance or weight.. I secured the rudders, and then mentioned to Eric that things did not seem to be normal with the ailerons, which he agreed with after trying them also. The engineers were called to attend the aircraft on arrival for this specific issue.

After parking the engineer opened the hatch below and forward of the flight deck which gave access to the control runs from the pilot positions. These runs were not cable operated as might have been expected, but were tubular aluminium about 1½ inches in diameter. After joining the right stick with the left, a tube ran at right angles toward the port side of the fuselage, where it was bolted vertically through a bush to a 90 degree quadrant fastened to the fuselage by another bush, bolt and bracket. The tube then ran down the port side of the aircraft under the floor from another bush and bolt at the other side of the 90 degree quadrant, the curved exterior line of which had one tube in, and one tube out.

The tube coming from the sticks was dangling from its former position with a bolt still in the bush, but it had sheared off leaving the remainder inside the nut which had dropped below somewhere. The ailerons had broken, the last nudge to lock them enough to finish off the bolt.

It transpired later that the bolt had been over tightened during what must have been major work, thus leading to the incident. The debate following our incident was whether following a flight control failure of the sort we had experienced, could have been overcome by reverting to autopilot control rather than asymmetric engine use or rudder to pick up a wing. This option might also have been used in the event of elevator or rudder failure. In which case getting rid of the autopilot at 1000ft did not make much sense. An attempt to pursue that line of thought did not get very far, but there was a focus on getting the torque right on the bolts in the control run. I must say though that every pilot's instinct to revert to manual control in the event of stability or control problems, was for ever after accompanied in my case with a reminder that under some circumstances the autopilot might be very useful."

One retirement:

Richard Freeland 777

We've also had some recent joiners: **Stan Bobrowski, Bob Clarkson, John Fairlie, Adrian Keenan, Chris Murray and Stuart Slater.**

Welcome to you all!

The committee look forward to welcoming you all to the Autumn Meeting at:

Royal Ascot Golf Club, SL5 7LJ, 01344 625175 on Thursday October 11th at 1930. The Club is situated just off the A330 Winkfield Road, to the east of the Racecourse.

Should you not be able to attend this time, make a note in your diary that the next function will be an evening meeting on Thursday 11th April 2019.

Best Regards,
STEVE WAND on behalf of the Icarus committee.