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ICARUS NEWSLETTER Autumn 2019  
Website <http://www.icarusba.org.uk>

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

**Phil Alston**  
**Barry Elsom**  
**Tony Meadows**  
**Ian Wallace**

**Howard Deck**  
**Ian Hannay**  
**Ron Summerton**

**George Duffee**  
**Alfie Holmes**  
**John Thorburn**  
**Don Witcher**

#### **People News:**

From **Alan Murgatroyd**: Thank you for the Spring Newsletter. The tale of the mix-up regarding the London Symphony Orchestra - or was it the Philharmonic! - reminded me of my own blunder one day. Then flying for Singapore Airlines, I landed at Heathrow with the CEO and his aides of S.I.A. amongst our First Class passenger load, and as we completed the landing roll along runway 28 L, I announced to the passengers that those seated near the right hand side windows would see the British Airways Concorde just getting airborne on the parallel runway 28R. I continued to say that the Concorde passengers would complete their journey to New York in half the time it had taken us to fly from Dubai, and about a quarter of the time that they had been sat flying from Singapore, but not to feel too badly about that considering that the Concorde passengers were sitting in a cabin dimension which was little more than that of one of our engines. I finished by saying " Thank you for flying **British Airways**"! A few years later, in presenting me with my retirement gold watch (yes, SIA did do that) the same CEO reminded me of that incident. He gave me the watch nevertheless!

From **Roger Mansfield**: Having just read the Spring issue of the magazine, I thought that you might be interested in the following.

I joined B.E.A. in 1957 from the R.A.F. where I had been flying Sabres and Hunters amongst other aircraft. I was posted to Glasgow (Renfrew) to fly Pionairs, and on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1959 I was rostered to do a **triple** Belfast with Capt. Don Hoare, a delightful chap. As was usual, the flying was shared out leg and leg about and, after the first five sectors, it was my turn to fly the aircraft back to Renfrew. Although we had been pretty full for the previous trips that day, for this sector we were empty, with the exception of the single flight attendant down the back. It was pitch black by then and as I lined up on the runway we were given take off clearance. I did a rolling take-off and all went well until at about 200 feet the port engine failed. Applying the appropriate amount of right rudder I climbed away at V2 or thereabouts, whilst calling out the engine shut down drill. The adrenaline was flowing pretty freely by then! At a thousand feet Don said "Well done Roger, I'll give you back the port engine now!" I think that this was the best piece of training that I have ever had, but what the flight attendant thought about it all I don't know. However knowing Don I am pretty sure

that he would have told the flight attendant what was going to happen. I suppose Don must have been pretty confident of my ability to cope and also his ability to rectify the situation had all gone pear-shaped.

Today is our 65<sup>th</sup> Wedding anniversary so I must have done something right during my flying career! How time flies when you are having fun!

Keep up the good work with the excellent newsletter; it's just so sad to read of many of our dear friends who have taken their last flights.

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Just to prove that the spirit of **BEA/BA Airtours** lives on, there was a gathering last April of ex-Airtours Comet, B707, B737 and TriStar stalwarts (mainly Icarus members) at Peter Heathcote's local pub in Berwick, East Sussex where tales of derring-do were aired. Those attending assembled outside The Cricketers for a celebratory photocall after lunch and the picture has now been consigned to the rogues gallery file! A further meeting of the LGW contingent is planned to take place before Christmas.

Happy Days.



The usual suspects, from left to right: Brian Hamilton, Ron Parker, Richard Paine, Bill Archer, Dick Linton, Alan Powley, Steve Wand, Howard Brunt, Peter Heathcote, Bill Pritchard, D'arce Bean, Mike Lodge, John Weddell, Peter Kennet, John Penfold, Jack Lawson, Fred Rivett and Howard Davies.

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**Brian Swift** was in touch recently regarding **George Duffee** who sadly appears among our absent friends. Brian had discovered that George features in the Imperial War Museum's sound archives, recounting his adventures after being shot down over Holland in 1943. The recording can be found at:

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80033409>

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## **East African Memories by Captain Phil Hogge**

I am an old man these days and people, knowing I had once been a pilot, sometimes ask, 'Were you ever frightened?' to which I reply, 'Of course, that's why I'm still alive,' and quickly pass on to other things. Then they may ask, 'Which was your favourite run?' as though I were a milkman doing the rounds. But the more perceptive say, 'You have seen many things, which were the most magnificent?' Now that really sets me thinking. Of human artefacts, the Taj Mahal is high on my list. Also, Chartres Cathedral dominating the landscape as, in the Middle Ages, most must once have done before being submerged by high rise buildings. Or Palmyra standing alone and proud in the desert. But, apart from creating Japanese gardens, mankind seems more intent on blighting nature with as much asphalt and concrete as possible. I have been fortunate enough to see sunsets at sea, green atolls in the Pacific, icebergs in the Antarctic, the Karakorum from the air and stars hanging low over the Arabian Desert, but none are as vivid as the untrammelled beauty of the East African plains and the mighty Nile.

If you drive northwest from Nairobi along the old Naivasha road, after about twenty miles you come to the edge of the Great Rift Valley. Here, the land drops steeply away to the valley floor almost a thousand feet below. I remember the first time I saw it. I stopped, left the car and walked along the top of the escarpment. The peace was astonishing, the only sounds distant voices and the gentle sighing of the wind. I remember the tangy herby scent of grass and leaves, with a faint hint of wood smoke. But the view, the view, the view – laid out before me as far as I could see was the plain below. I must have been able to see fifty miles, a hundred miles or, perhaps, for ever. It was a patchwork of gold and tawny browns, dotted with clumps of thorn trees and a few cattle. In the near distance, stood wooded fumaroles of long dormant volcanos, and above, in the vault of the clear blue sky, small white clouds marched purposefully off towards the west, chased by their shadows on the ground. Somewhere in this valley, not far to the south, is the Olduvai Gorge, where the earliest remnants of primitive man were found. If this was the birthplace of mankind, I could think of no more appropriate place. I used to fly through Nairobi frequently in the late 1960s and 70s. Nearly every time, I would hire a car, stop by this ridge on my way to Naivasha, Nakuru or Lake Elmenteita to see the pink flamingos, and walk along the escarpment to fill my senses with magic. Always, the same tawny gold in the dry season and, briefly, after the rains, a brilliant green. Such were my first impressions of Kenya.

Further to the west, lies Uganda, 'The Pearl of Africa', a country with an equable climate, abundant rain, a profusion of wild life – birds, insects, reptiles and beasts, lush forests and grasslands, the largest lake in Africa, and the Ruwenzori – 'The Mountains of the Moon'. Everything that man could want grows in this beautiful land. Not only does it flow with milk and honey, but from it also flows the White Nile. This great river, so long a mystery, disappears into the swamps of the Sudd, joins the Blue Nile at Khartoum, brings life to Egypt and, after a journey of over two thousand miles, flows into the Mediterranean. Perhaps Uganda was the Garden of Eden – that is until Idi Amin tried to ruin it.

Before Idi did his worst, BOAC VC10s regularly flew through Entebbe on their way to and from points south. The airport lies on the north shore of Lake Victoria, almost exactly on the Equator. Some seventy miles to the east lies the source of the Nile. When it was first discovered in 1862, the river tumbled out of the lake over spectacular falls. Unfortunately, they are now drowned by a hydroelectric dam a little further downstream, but it is still a mythic place to visit. On days off, I frequently drove there to ponder the problems and privations suffered by the early Victorian explorers – Burton, Grant, Speke and Baker – all searching for the source of this mighty river.

Then one day I decided to see a *real* waterfall – the Murchison Falls. I hired a car, persuaded the flight engineer and one of the stewardesses to join me, and consulted on what to do should we meet a rhino round a corner. Driving north out of the city, the busy streets and shanty-town suburbs soon gave way to exuberant trees, fields and banana plantations. When the tarmac stopped, we continued on unpaved murram roads, their bright red colour contrasting vividly with the lush green vegetation on either side. The long rains were still a month away, the road was dry, and the few cars we met trailed long clouds of fine red dust, everything was covered with it. Soon, so were we.

We wound our way through scattered woodland, hoping on every turn to meet an elephant, but all we saw were cannonball size droppings in the road. It was not until we came out onto the plain that we saw wildlife in abundance – elephants far away, and quantities of buck, deer and eland, a herd of buffalo, but no giraffes or lions. In the distance were the low hills towards which we were driving and beyond, a huge thunderstorm. As we neared the hills, we entered more forest. Recent rain glistened on the leaves and grass. The rough track became slippery. The air was heavy with the glorious pungent smell of freshly dampened earth. Then we were there, at the top of the falls. Before us, the whole Nile thundered, boiled and plunged through a gap in the rocks no wider than twenty feet down into the gorge 130 feet below. No sign of human activity could be seen other than a low pipe rail fence. It was one of the most magnificent natural sights I have ever seen. Dark rocks on either side of white water, clouds of spray, trees and hills glistening clean, lit by the sun behind us. Beyond a blue-black thunderstorm filling the whole sky. Shafts of lightening, the roar of water, and the rolling reverberations of thunder. To an ant-like human being walking upon the surface of the Earth, this had to be a creation of the gods rather than of nature. Did Thor or Zeus travel south to cleave the rock and unleash the Nile to take water to the Pharaohs? Or was it some unnamed African god? And did Wagner write the thunderous music of the heavens in the clouds above?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrnFXuG7mV8>

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



We will all no doubt be familiar with the two mid-air break ups that befell Comet 1s in 1954 which were caused by metal fatigue. However there had been several incidents and accidents prior to that, which are less well known, although they caused the aircraft to be written off.

**26<sup>th</sup> October 1952 G-ALYZ at Rome Ciampino.** During the take-off from Rome at a speed of 112 knots, the Captain lifted the aircraft from the ground by a positive backward movement of the control column and when he considered that the aircraft had reached a safe height he called for "undercarriage up". At about the same instant the port wing dropped rather violently and the aircraft swung to port; the controls gave normal response and lateral level was regained. At this point the Captain realized that the aircraft's speed was not building up, although he made no reference to the ASI. A pronounced buffeting was felt which he associated with the onset of a stall and in spite of two corrective movements of the control column the buffeting continued. Before the First Officer had time to select undercarriage up, the aircraft came down on its main landing wheels and bounced. It was now plainly evident to the Captain that the aircraft's speed was not increasing and he was convinced that there was a considerable loss of engine thrust. He was also aware that the aircraft was rapidly approaching the end of the runway, so a decision was made to abandon the take-off. The undercarriage struck a mound of earth as he was closing the throttles and the aircraft slid for some 270 yards over rough ground. The main undercarriages were wrenched off and considerable damage resulted; a large spillage of fuel occurred but fire did not break out. Apart from a couple of minor injuries, the passengers and crew were unhurt. The accident was due to an error of judgment by the Captain in not appreciating the excessive nose-up attitude of the aircraft during the take-off.

**3<sup>rd</sup> March 1953 C-FCUN at Karachi.** The crew and six De Havilland engineers were conducting a demo flight. While taking off from runway 25 (2,500 meters long) at Mauripur Airbase the aircraft failed to get airborne, overran, hit several obstacles, went through a perimeter fence and eventually crashed in flames in a small river. The aircraft was destroyed by fire and all 11 occupants were killed. The accident was caused by the nose of the aircraft being lifted too high during the takeoff run, resulting in a partially stalled condition and excessive drag. The pilot, who had only limited experience in the Comet aircraft, elected to takeoff at night at the maximum permissible takeoff for the prevailing conditions. The circumstances required strict adherence to the prescribed takeoff technique, which was not complied with.

**2<sup>nd</sup> May 1953 G-ALYV near Calcutta.** The aircraft took off from Calcutta bound for New Delhi. Six minutes later, while climbing, the crew encountered poor weather conditions and thunderstorms. The airplane went out of control, nosed down and crashed near the village of Jagalgori, about 24 miles from Dum Dum Airport. The aircraft disintegrated on impact and all 43 occupants were killed. The accident was caused by structural failure of the airframe during flight through severe weather.

**25<sup>th</sup> June 1953 F-BGSC at Dakar.** Following an uneventful flight and approach, the Captain landed the aircraft properly and started to brake, when one of the main undercarriage legs struck a hole in the runway surface. The leg broke off and the airplane came on its belly, slid for dozen yards and overran before coming to rest about 40 meters past the runway end. There were no casualties, but the aircraft was considered as damaged beyond repair. Brand new, it had only been delivered a few weeks before.

**25<sup>th</sup> July 1953 G-ALYR at Calcutta.** The aircraft's taxi lights were too dim to use at night, so the crew had to use the landing lights while taxiing. Both lights had to be alternated left and right to avoid a meltdown by using a switch behind the captain's seat. In a left hand turn the captain took his left hand off the steering wheel to select another landing light. The

steering centered and the aircraft's right wheel bogies ran off the paved surface and sank into boggy ground. Engine power was applied on the two right engines, causing the bogie struts to be forced up into the wing structure, causing such damage that the aircraft was written off.

So, quite a checkered career for the Comet, even before the two accidents that finally grounded the Comet 1. The only surviving Comet 1 fuselage (F-BGNX of Air France) with the original square windows, is on display at the De Havilland Museum at London Coney. The place is well worth a visit.

In all, there were 26 Comet hull losses of all marks, from 116 built, resulting in 426 deaths.

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The Air Pilots' (formerly GAPAN) annual Trophies and Awards are among the industry's most prestigious, because recipients are selected by their peers who have experience in military and civil aviation around the globe. They will be presented at London's Guildhall on Thursday 24th October. British Airways' Concorde notched up an impeccable record of operational excellence thanks to the dedication and teamwork of flight and cabin crew, engineering and marketing and sales staff. Since Flight Operations began in January 1976 to the end of service in October 2003, it conducted almost 50,000 flights carrying more than 2.5 million passengers. This incredible feat has been recognised by the Honourable Company of Air Pilots in the 50th year since Concorde's first flight by the award of the prestigious Brackley Memorial Trophy.

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New members:

**Red Blake** and **Nick Walford** who attended our last meeting, joined as associate members.

There are also two paid-up members who have recently retired and we hope that they will be able to attend the forthcoming members meeting to be presented with their gifts.

They are **Russ Williams**, and **Neil Hazlehurst**

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)**

**Thursday October 10<sup>th</sup> 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 2nd April 2020. Please note that this is the first Thursday in April 2020, as Good Friday falls on the day after the traditional second Thursday, to be avoided traffic-wise.

Best Regards,

STEVE WAND on behalf of the Icarus committee.