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ICARUS NEWSLETTER Autumn 2020  
[Website http://www.icarusba.org.uk](http://www.icarusba.org.uk)

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

**Clive Breward**  
**Peter Horton**  
**Richard Long**  
**Mike Spinks**

**Keith Connor**  
**Peter Icke**  
**John “Dizzy” Millett**  
**Dick Stewart**  
**Dave Whittick**

**Peter Harrison**  
**Ken Johnson**  
**Martin Shaw**  
**Dick Twomey**

Regrettably the Icarus Spring meeting at RAGC had to be cancelled due to the pandemic and unsurprisingly the same fate has befallen the Autumn meeting. It would simply be unwise to encourage a gathering of members, some of whom maybe classed as vulnerable - the turnout would probably be a disappointment too! Let's hope that we can resume our popular get-togethers at RAGC in the Spring (8<sup>th</sup> April 2021), together with Tony Luscombe's golf event, for those of that persuasion.

### **People news:**

From **Fred Rivett**: I was based at RAF Bruggen in Germany on 213 Squadron flying the Canberra BI6 where our main role was LABS bombing but also ground attack with a gun pack containing 4 x 20 mm cannons and 2000 rounds of ammunition and 2 thousand pound bombs.

At the end of June 1961 we were told to get the aircraft ready for a transit to Sharjah as the Iraqi government were threatening to invade Kuwait which at that time was a British Protectorate. The aircraft were repainted in desert colours and the gun packs were fitted and harmonised and ammunition loaded. We were ready to depart on the 1st July.

The route was to El Adem we then fuelled up late evening so that the maximum weight of fuel could be loaded and departed for Khormaksar in Aden. We were told not to overfly Egypt but this was ignored - we were unlikely to get intercepted at night. We were at the limit of our range and the weather was not good at the destination with only an ACR7 available for the approach. Five hours later we landed at Khormaksar with lots of aircraft on the ground and then waited for fuel before departing for Sharjah which was then a rolled dirt strip. We arrived after 3hrs 30mins flying, having been on duty for 18hrs. Flight time limitations did not apply!

The flight commander decided to fly the next morning but, with an outside air temperature of 38C and a heavy aircraft, he was seen very low over the sea just about climbing. It was then we realised the aircraft could not be operated after 8am! Our target was Basra International but we must not hit any civil aircraft!! We could only make the target by flying Hi Low Hi and with help from the Navy we could just make it. We stayed at Sharjah until the end of the month then departed for Bruggen via Khartoum and Idris, but that is another story!

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A message from **John Russell** - "Hamble Course 694 will be holding their 50th Anniversary Course Graduation 3-day Celebration next May. Over the last many years, I have been trotting out the same photos as talking points at our Annual Reunions but would like to add some 'unseen' ones for this special occasion. Therefore I would be grateful if anyone who has any photos of the College, the airfield or any other related items, please get in touch via email at: [jr@theseplaneclub.org](mailto:jr@theseplaneclub.org). Scanned prints would be safest from the preservation point of view, but any hard copies subsequently posted (I will pay postage) will be returned by Royal Mail Tracked & Insured service. Thank You. John."

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Now an article by ex-BOAC **Captain Tony Spooner DSO DFC** about the Stratocruiser. Tony died in 2002 and "Aeroplane" magazine, who published the article in 1996, have kindly given me permission to reproduce it here:-



"I suppose that I must have been one of the first in BOAC to see and to fly the B377 Stratocruiser. It came about in May 1948 when Bill May (BOAC training captain) and I flew our Chairman Sir Miles Thomas and other nut-house bosses on a tour of the major American aircraft manufacturers. (I should explain that the nut-house was BOAC's grossly overstaffed HQ occupying a huge office building which had previously been the Simmons nut factory. "Nut House" was therefore an appropriate description!).

The purpose of the trip was to see what the Americans had in their shop window which might be suitable for BOAC's future trans-Atlantic services. We visited Lockheed, Douglas, Boeing and Convair. Rather shamefully all that Britain's premier airline could offer the Board was a converted Liberator bomber, with about a dozen seats rigged up in the unpressurised fuselage.

Our first stop on the tour was Wichita, Kansas where I was confronted by a unique problem, that of finding which of the eight airfields dotted around the city belonged to Boeing! This bizarre situation had arisen because, soon after Pearl Harbour, the Government ordered all the aircraft manufacturers to set up their facilities well away from any American coast for fear of attack. All had chosen to assemble aircraft on the flat plains around Wichita.

Boeing had a Stratocruiser ready for us to fly, which proved to be light-years ahead of our converted Liberator and, after visiting the other manufacturers, BOAC ordered the B377 Stratocruiser. The Airline's Atlantic base at this time was still at Dorval Airport, Montreal and, before deliveries could start, our chief engineer Digger Ifold went to examine the forthcoming type. At that time Boeing seemed to have developed a hatred of hydraulic systems, perhaps with good reason, as non-flammable hydraulic fluid (e.g. Skydrol) was not then known. As a result, the Stratocruiser was virtually an all-electric aeroplane. Even the retractable undercarriage was electrically operated and the emergency lowering system had to be seen to be believed. Digger was a friend of mine and, upon his return, I asked him for his views. He spoke slowly in his broad Yorkshire accent and said "Captain, I've never seen so many electrical circuits on one aircraft in my life - in fact I've never seen so many on TWO aircraft in all my life!"

Handed over at Seattle on November 15, the first aircraft "Caledonia" arrived at Heathrow on November 18 1949 at the end of her delivery flight. She then made her acceptance-cum-proving flight which terminated at BOAC's new maintenance base at Filton, Bristol.

The "Strat" was unusual in several ways. The double-bubble fuselage enabled a downstairs bar to be fitted, which was reached by circular stairs and, when TWA's Constellations were losing pax to Strats, their advertising advised "Fly TWA, no stairs to climb!" 32 of the Strat's 40 first-class seats could be converted into 16 upper and lower bunks, some big enough for two! These were enhanced by having spacious washrooms where pax could undress before tucking up for the night.

Flying-wise, a peculiarity of the aeroplane was that it both took off and landed on the nosewheel, a feature that made the Strat the most difficult aircraft that I ever operated. Power was provided by four enormous 3500hp P&W Wasp radial engines. Unlike most aero engines which in time have their power outputs steadily increased, this particular beast started and remained at 3500hp throughout. Generally, the engines were a troublesome feature and we pilots all chalked up a lot of 3-engined hours. I must have had about 100 shutdowns in my 4500 hours on this strange aeroplane. However, I never had to struggle home on two, like some of my fellow captains. An annoying aspect was that petrol rationing was still in place for cars in the UK and, as fuel often had to be dumped after an engine failure to get down to re-landing weight, we were chucking overboard c2500 gallons each time. During my time on the type, I calculated that I had dumped enough fuel to keep my small car going for 250 years!

BOAC didn't have any flight simulators so the early pilots were sent on a lengthy sim course with PanAm at La Guardia. The experience proved itself on my very first Strat trip in command when, just as we had got airborne at max t/o wt from KEF on a vile stormy night, I experienced a run-away propeller. After having been through the mill on the sim, it all seemed quite normal and we shut the engine down, dumped fuel and returned to KEF.

Another strange exercise that occasionally was necessary was the emergency lowering of the mainwheels. The first item was to remove the pax from the downstairs bar, which was no easy matter as the drinks were free on all BOAC Monarch flights. The E/O then had to remove the big mirrors which constituted the forward end of the bar behind which he unhitched a huge portable electric motor which looked like a roadworker's pneumatic drill. This was inserted into the motor of one undercarriage leg to drive it down and then subsequently to repeat the operation for the other leg. Lowering the nosewheel was much simpler. The strongest member of the crew was sent down into the nose where he unlocked a few catches and then heaved the nosewheels out, which took strength as the nosewheel leg was very stoutly made. The robustness of the nosewheel leg was proved on almost every landing as the Strat had a mind of its own near the ground. One did not land a Strat; one arrived, usually with an appalling thump. No amount of heaving back on the pole would induce the mainwheels to make contact first. Various explanations were offered for this peculiarity – some said that the wings (essentially those of the B-29) had been mated to the fuselage at the incorrect angle of incidence, while others blamed the pernicious lift spoilers.

Why build a splendid wing and then fit lift-spoilers? The story was that the US Civil Aeronautics Administration (pre the FAA) would not give the type its C of A because a wing was prone to drop when the aircraft was stalled. The CAA wanted the nose to drop first and the only swift remedy was to destroy an area of lift near the fuselage. Ironically, after BOAC had operated the type for nine years or so, it was decided that the lift-spoilers were unnecessary and they were removed. I was by then flying later types, but my colleagues still flying the Strat said that it was then a much better-behaved aircraft.

As the aircraft also ran on its nosewheel alone for several hundred yards on take off, this too could make the manoeuvre quite exciting in a strong crosswind, with the large fin trying to weathercock the aircraft into wind. Talking of the fin, it was hinged at the bottom, just above the tailplane, enabling it to be folded down to a horizontal position, so that the aircraft would fit into BOAC's smaller hangars - unnecessary of course when entering TBA

The cabin was pressurised at about 6.4 lbs per square inch, which would have enabled the pax to travel in comfort at 30000ft or higher, but as engine capacity never increased from the original 3500hp, the aircraft remained limited to an official 25000ft max where we were often tossed around in the cloud tops. Personally I never went above 31000ft (unofficially) but I believe that even greater heights were attained. At such heights the superchargers were apt to exceed limits so the gauges had to be carefully monitored to keep them out of the red zones and of course respect had to be paid to "coffin corner".

Our many engine worries were not helped when the engineering staff at Goose Bay, where the coldest I experienced was -40 degrees, decided to perform oil dilution. In those temperatures the engines were reluctant to turn over after an all-night cold soak, so they diluted the oil with petrol – Montreal were probably equally guilty. Soon engines began to fail with a regularity that surpassed the previous high rates. It reached a point where I was so alarmed that I delayed a flight by a few hours at Prestwick, for all the engine filters to be checked for traces of white metal, before tackling the Atlantic. The problem ended up with the Stratocruiser fleet being grounded for several weeks until the cause was determined. This was annoying personally as it meant that I was stuck in Montreal for the entire time on the then miserly meal allowance rate of about \$4 per day. The only way I could eat reasonably was to play bridge for money at a bridge club!

The Strat had slightly less range than the competing DC-6s and Constellations, so westbound non-stop crossings to Montreal (200 miles shorter than NY) were beyond its capabilities and refuelling stops had to be made. The advertised non-stop service sometimes involved a couple of stops en route, Prestwick or Shannon then Gander or Goose Bay. Iceland was also often a refuelling stop if Gander was fogged out but, even then, NY might still be beyond range, entailing another stop at Sydney or Monkton. When Bermuda services were added the same basic format applied and a stop at KEF was needed, if Gander was fogbound. It required stamina to convince pax for Bermuda that they were on the right aircraft when it stopped in Iceland!

As is often the case nowadays, BOAC used to pool spares with other airlines and I recall once having three engines with BOAC motifs and one with PanAm's. That was not too noticeable, but I once had to borrow one in KEF from American Overseas Airlines and their engine nacelles were painted bright orange!

As the UK had no FTLs at this time (until BALPA took the then M o A to court) it was not unusual to arrive in NY 16 hours or more after departure from London and I once did 21 hours on the route.

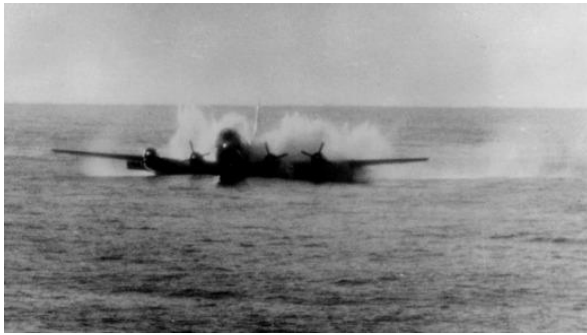
Certainly the Stratocruiser was a peculiar beast; its pilots never knew for certain what might happen next but at least we never had to ditch one, unlike PanAm who had to do so twice. An engine once caught fire but burnt itself out and then conveniently fell off. There were a few landing accidents and that great first gentleman of the air, Captain O. P. Jones (we were on the first Strat course together), later landed one short at Goose Bay luckily without hurting anyone. Next day he went out to see where his wheel marks were and resigned, never again to fly for BOAC. He had done enough for his airline and country.

All in all, the Strat was an unforgettable aeroplane. She was a great girl for comfort and fortunately flew nicely on 3 engines. Flying her across the Atlantic, as I've said, a route beyond her natural capabilities, provided some anxious but seldom dull moments. When the longer range jets came along, much of the fun finding a way across that ocean went with the Strat. Who now cares much about the temperature or dewpoint near dawn at Gander and who now tries to piggy back depressions to gain tailwinds? I recall being over Hudson Bay heading for NY once whilst benefitting from a 50kt tailwind – we skippers became meteorologists first and pilots second.

Did I call the Strat "she"? She certainly shared many of the fairer sex's qualities but I doubt there will be another like her.

*Steve W. adds: Tony's article brought back a few memories for me. When I first went onto the Concorde in the late 1980s, we had a service that night-stopped Miami three times per week. At that time, there were still active Stratocruisers and Constellations on the cargo apron transiting from South America and we sometimes reported early, prior to briefing for the flight home, so that we could go to the cargo area in the ground engineer's van, to climb aboard one of these classics. Their crews were pleased to show us around and were happy to give us a seat in the cockpit, so I became reasonably familiar with the Strat's flight deck. They were slightly less forthcoming about their cargo, describing it only as "flowers"!*

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



Oct 16, 1956 at 0615 LT. PanAm Stratocruiser N90943 Honolulu – San Francisco  
7 crew / 24 pax

PA006, commencing on October 13 1956, was a regularly scheduled “around-the-world” flight eastbound from Philadelphia to San Francisco with en route stops in Europe, Asia and various Pacific Islands. All prior segments had been routine and the flight departed Honolulu on the last leg of the trip on October 15 at 2026LT. There were 24 passengers aboard including 3 infants, and a crew consisting of Captain Ogg, F/O Haaker, F/E Garcia and Navigator Brown and 3 Flight Attendants. The 8 hour 54 minute flight was planned IFR and the aircraft carried sufficient fuel for 12 hours 18 minutes

The climb to initial altitude was normal and the flight proceeded in a routine manner. At OLO2, the approximate midpoint of the flight, a request for VFR climb to its secondary altitude of 21,000 feet was approved by ATC. After reaching 21,000 feet and simultaneously with the reduction of power, the No. 1 engine oversped. Airspeed was immediately reduced by the use of flaps and reduction of power. Attempts were also made to feather the No. 1 propeller. It was impossible to control the engine or to feather the propeller and the captain decided to freeze the engine by cutting off the oil supply. Shortly after this was done there was a momentary decrease in the r. p. m., followed by a heavy thud. The propeller continued to windmill. At this time airspeed had slowed to 150 knots and the aircraft was losing altitude at a rate of approximately 1,000 feet per minute.

The captain contacted the USS Ponchartrain, Coast Guard weather station “November” at 0122 alerting it to a possible ditching and asking for assistance. He also alerted the pax to the emergency and told them to prepare for a possible water landing. Course was altered to “home in” on station “November” and climb power applied to engines Nos. 2, 3, and 4 to check the rate of descent.

At this time, it was noticed that No. 4 engine was only developing partial power at full throttle. At 0125 the flight notified “November” that ditching was imminent and received a ditching heading from the ship. During the descent the crew found they could maintain altitude at an airspeed of 135 knots with rated power on engines Nos. 2 and 3 and the partial power on No. 4. The maximum range with the fuel remaining had been computed and it was determined to be insufficient either to complete the flight to San Francisco or return to Honolulu and at 0137 the aeroplane flew over the weather ship.

Mortar flares had been fired by the ship and electric water lights laid to illuminate a ditching track for the aircraft. However, it was decided to postpone the ditching until daylight whilst remaining close to the ship. About 0245 the No. 4 engine backfired, power reduced and its propeller was feathered normally. The flight was still able to maintain altitude and continued to orbit "November" to burn off fuel while awaiting daylight. At 0540 Captain Ogg notified the USS Pontchartrain he was preparing to ditch the aircraft. A foam path was laid along the ditching heading by the cutter and the aircraft was ditched at 0615. Passengers and crew safely evacuated the aircraft, boarded life rafts, and were completely clear of the aircraft at 0632. The aircraft sank at 0635 at position 30N 140W.

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Here's a quartet of nostalgic photos that your compiler (S.W.) recently found in a cupboard clear-out. In the top two, my mate **Dave Pascall** and I were co-opted to assist at a Denham Air Show in the mid 1960s. The AVRO replica aeroplane was being flown at the time by BEA Vanguard Fleet Senior Training **Captain Ron Gillman** and he is pictured in the left hand offering, standing proud in front of his steed. Prior to taxiing out, Dave (in shirt sleeves on the left wingtip and myself on the right, were detailed to assist stability, as Ron proceeded to the take off position.



The second pair of photographs was taken by a press photographer, who happened to be a passenger on one of my Vanguard flights from GLA - LHR, 10<sup>th</sup> Nov 1965, G-APEF. The crew comprised **Captain Tom Griffiths**, myself in the RHS and **Ian McNeilly** on the 3<sup>rd</sup> seat. We were obviously being well looked-after by the cabin crew beauty!





This was the happy scene last March 6th, when 125 ex-Airtours pilots, cabin crew, engineers and ground staff met at Ifield Golf Club, Crawley to celebrate the 50th year anniversary to the day, of BEA Airtours first Comet service to PMI. Glasses were raised at 3pm, the STD of the first flight, operated by Captain Peter McKeown, Geoff Evans and Peter Jarvis. The next anniversary celebration will be held on March 6<sup>th</sup> 2070!

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Loughton Town Council has recently installed a blue heritage plaque to honour Barbara Harmer, the first female pilot of Concorde, who was born at 91 Staples Road, Loughton.





From **Captain Phil Hogge**: You may remember that some of my writings appeared in the ICARUS newsletter. I have now found a publisher and a book, called SKY TALK, which was published on 28 July by Burnt Ash Publishing <https://www.burntash.eu/books-1> using some of the stories. It can also be found on the high street in Waterstones book shops <https://www.waterstones.com/book/sky-talk/philip-hogge//9781916216150>

All the stories are fictional with fictional characters, but based closely on fact and with the characters well disguised - at least I hope so.

On the same Burnt Ash page as Phil's book you can also find COMETS AND CONCORDES by **Captain Peter Duffey** who was the only pilot to fly the Comet 1, Comet 4 and Concorde.

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We've had some recent joiners:

**Capt. Simon Wijker** (BA retired 30-11 2019 HS748, ATP, 747 and 777)

**Captain Stu Atwill** (BA retired 11/07/20 737, 777)

*Welcome to you both!*

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Should the next Spring meeting be possible to schedule, virus-wise, the committee look forward to welcoming you all at:

**Royal Ascot Golf Club on Thursday April 8<sup>th</sup> 2021 at 1930.**

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

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Advertisement:

*DH Chipmunk share available.*

*This Thruxton based Chipmunk group was started in 1996 by a group of retired BA pilots and we have been happily operating this well maintained aircraft since then with mainly ex BA pilots. We will consider any pilot for membership, but it would be good to have pilots from the same or similar background.*

*For more information please contact Peter*

*Oglesby: [oglesby@go-plus.net](mailto:oglesby@go-plus.net)*



