



BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

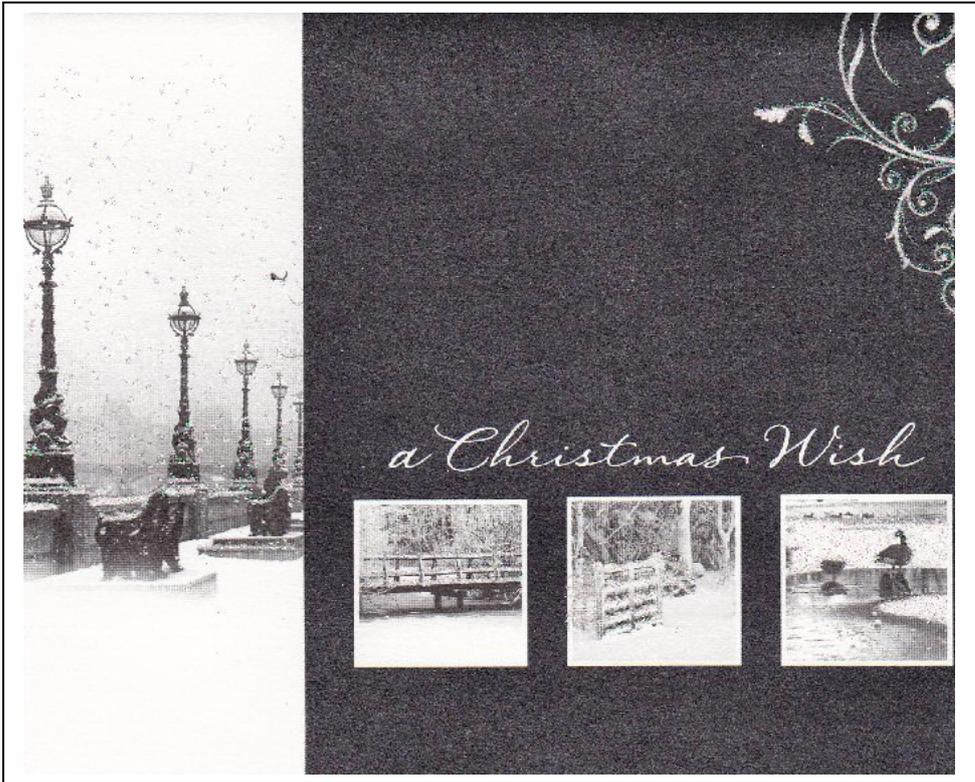
News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005



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May we at the Bugle take this opportunity to wish our readers a very Merry Xmas and a Prosperous Outlook for 2013. From JB & JW

XMAS AROUND BIGGIN HILL



FADEC (Fully Automated Digital Engine Controls). Sounds a bit of a mouthful, but it has advantages for the modern light aircraft, such as the Diamond diesel engine aircraft and of course the operator, the pilot.



Apart from turning on the fuel and starting the engine, there is almost nothing else to do. !!! Wow..!

You may ask, what is wrong with the simple magneto's? Nothing they only created a few sparks at regular intervals via the spark plugs igniting the fuel whereas Fadedc will prime the engine correctly for the starting and the engine will fire first time and away you go. (Whereas the old pilot will still be pumping the throttle, over priming into the bargain, wondering why the engine won't start). Whilst the FADEC system is electronic, it does have dual redundancy as well as a redundant electrical back up system.

Carburettor icing, is eliminated as the engine is fuel injected, the fuel air ratio is constantly monitored to an infinite degree.

Manifold pressure, temperatures too are constantly adjusted, even the propeller is controlled for best performance, the throttle too can be controlled.

The pilot can now concentrate on flying and making sure that he lands before his fuel is exhausted.

One well known light aircraft manufacturer fitted it to 50 aircraft and then stopped..!

We can only wonder why...!!

However, on the positive side this system was fitted to an F111 fighter and proved to be very satisfactory.

Unlike the pilot relieved of his fuel management, propeller levers and throttle adjustments during flight

finds himself returning home after a pre-xmas drinking binge, in the wrong street, trying to get into the wrong house, kicking their milk deliveries all over the place.



We continue now with another detailed account from the scribings of L.D Harris: his early days at the London Transport Flying Club are quickly becoming faded memories:

LET US GET AIRBORNE:

It was mid-1968 and having left one secure airline job for another with a promise of a command, the new company suddenly decided to cut costs by reducing its pilot staff. I was last in and thus first out and was now out of work with a new wife, new car and a mortgage to serve. The financial situation was getting desperate; my dwindling reserves began to evaporate fast and I desperately looked around for another position, but 1968 was a bad year for British airlines, no less than three major independents' went down the swanee putting many pilots out of work and flooding the market. Letters began arriving through the post from my creditors threatening to sue me. I faced up to my responsibilities and wrote to everyone in turn, explaining my circumstances; paying each one a small amount as a good measure to no avail. Every one of them callously demanded full payment or else! Then came the phone calls and unanswered knocks at the door... I was up the creek without a paddle!

Out of the blue, a friend of mine told me to contact a certain Andy Andrews, who owned a charter outfit called South West Aviation at Exeter, as they needed an extra DC3 captain.

Andy offered me the job on the spot so Carol and I locked up 'Gala' and drove to Exeter where he met us and took us to Norman and Doreen Parr's Trees Mini Hotel, in the middle of Exeter where Andy paid for our lodgings.

Actually, South West Aviation had originally been started by Brian Pocock when he left Libya but had later sold it to Andy. It was a small charter company consisting of a DC3 and two small twins; a Beechcraft Travelair and a Piper Aztec. Andy wanted me to fly the DC3 so he arranged for a British Midland flight examiner to travel down to Exeter to check me out. The aircraft was still being operated under the British Midland Air Operators Certificate (AOC), so they had to do the checks themselves.

Having been introduced to the examiner he then asked to see my licence and logbook. When he saw that I only had one hundred and twenty hours or so, on the DC3, he steadfastly refused to check me out as a captain. He said that under his company's rules I'd have to do five hundred hours as a co-pilot first. Sarcastically fetching his attention to the fact that I'd never flown the DC3 as a co-pilot before and as I'd already proved myself as a captain of one anyway, I couldn't fathom out the logic of having to prove myself as a co-pilot as well. He was adamant though and absolutely refused to even give me the chance to demonstrate my prowess to him in the air. I fumed with frustration at this totally illogical reasoning and told him so in no uncertain manner... He remained unmoved though.

Andy quickly stepped in and took me to one side, asking me if I would consider flying the two small twins instead as it was obvious this examiner idiot was not going to relent. Once again I was on the spot. If I refused I would be out of a job so I had no option but to accept. At least I now had full-time employment again although the pay was nowhere near as much as I had been getting previously but I could now begin to nibble away at the growing debts that were accumulating rapidly.

The DC3 captain they already had was a nice enough guy but had a drink problem and was inclined to be a bit cantankerous at times. He'd been flying the DC-4s with Lloyds at the same time as myself, but somehow we had never actually flown together. Andy wasn't happy with him as he was inclined to find any excuse to night stop instead of pushing through to Exeter with his payload.

One evening he was sent with the DC3 and crew to Edinburgh to pick-up a load of fish to fly back to Exeter. The cargo was a bit late arriving at the aircraft, by which time he'd decided that he might exceed his flight duty hours if he continued. Without given a second thought for the perishable cargo, he elected to take an eight-hour rest period at a hotel. Needless to say, when the fish eventually arrived at the market in the South West, most of it had gone bad and had to be destroyed. He could have easily continued the flight instead of taking the eight-hour break by utilising the discretionary powers he had, but no doubt the craving to get stuck into the booze over-rode common sense. This act had a serious effect on the narrow profit or loss margin for Andy, and although he managed to struggle on for another couple of years, eventually he went under. Soon after that poor Andy died. I was

very sad to hear that as we got on so well together.

This Captain hailed from a seaside resort in South Devon called Beer (pictured below: *the small village*)



– how appropriate I thought! He died some months later from alcohol abuse. What a shame that I wasn't allowed to fly the DC3 for Andy. I am certain that had I been allowed to I would have acquitted myself well for Andy's sake. I've always been a believer in giving one's best for the job you get paid for.

Carol and I got on well with the Parr's, and Andy took a shine to the pair of us. I think the reason for this really was that feeling a sense of loyalty towards the man who had offered me a job when I was desperately in need of one. In return I told him I would fly anything anywhere as long as I could stay within the narrow confines of the law. Andy took me to Bristol Lulsgate by car where I was to meet his chief pilot Norman Vacher. Norman and I later became good friends and I was to see a lot more of him in the future.

We picked up the Piper Aztec from Lulsgate and flew it back to Exeter with Norman checking me out on it during the flight. As I already had it on my licence it was more of a demonstration flight than anything. The next morning I flew to Colerne to pick up some passengers and then dropping two off at Manchester, proceeded up to Prestwick and then on to Macrihanish in the Scottish Western Isles.

Four hours later I took my passengers back via Prestwick and Colerne to Exeter. It had been a full day's flying, starting before sunrise and finishing well after sunset. I was glad to get back to the guest house for a bath, good meal, and a well earned sleep.



SWA Piper Aztec G-ASND.

During the short three months that I flew with South West Aviation I visited just about everywhere in the British Isles. The flying was varied and interesting. Norman checked me out on their Beechcraft 95A Travelair after I had passed the ARB written exams on it, after which I flew it most of the time. I felt comfortable with the aircraft.



SWA Beechcraft Travelair.

During that autumn we experienced some atrocious weather but I felt very safe and secure in her; she never once let me down.

On many occasions I was detailed to fly the newspaper contract. This entailed positioning empty up to Gatwick late at night, picking up bundles of heavy newspapers until I was at the maximum weight, then flying them across to Jersey in the Channel Islands, arriving just before dawn. Never once in all the trips I did there, did I actually see the Channel Islands; they were always blanketed in cloud or mist and my first sight of anything was

the approach lights on landing from the ILS.

Having disposed of my load I then flew empty back to Exeter, arriving there about breakfast time. Invariably I'd fly over the Trees Mini Hotel to let them know I had arrived back okay. Carol, Norman and Doreen would run out and wave to me as I circled around overhead.

Once I was asked to take some senior executives from the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Boscombe Down, to a ministry airfield called Llambedr, on the west coast of Wales. A lot of experimental work was carried out there including flights with radio-controlled aircraft called 'Jindivik'. (*Aboriginal for "the hunted one"*)

The majority of these RAPV's were tested initially at the Woomera rocket range in Australia which was 900 miles in length



These pilot-less aircraft reminded me of the dreaded V1 Flying Bombs of WW2. They'd be launched over the Cardigan Bay area, and after flying around for some time, would be fetched back to land on to the long concrete runway that ran parallel to the coastline. As I had time to spare waiting for my passengers to return, and nothing else to do, they gave permission to enter the control room in the control tower for me to observe an approach and landing of one of them. I watched as the Jindevig came in from the direction of the sea and approached on a right-hand base. Standing behind the Jindivik's controller at

the time, I was watching him manipulate the control column, guiding the robot in to land. All went well until the final touch-down when suddenly a strong gust of wind tipped it up onto its wingtip. It then performed a magnificent series of somersaults finishing up in an expensive crumpled mess on the runway... I was most impressed!

They told me afterwards that on one occasion when they were fetching one in to land, it refused to respond to the controller's demands and instead of turning to the right onto finals, it carried on descending into the interior of Wales. All they could do was to wait in agony for a report from the police as to where it had landed. They didn't have long to wait as it had taken the top clean off a small Austin car which was being driven leisurely along the road by an elderly couple.

The two ageing occupants were quickly brought back to Llambedr and wined and dined by the Commandant whilst a brand new replacement Austin was bought from a local car dealer and presented to them free. Being decent folk they accepted it without any fuss and promised to keep quiet about it, thereby avoiding any problems, and keeping the matter under wraps well away from the Press.

Exporting of Crayfish to the Continent was in vogue at the time and one day Andy asked me to fly a cargo of them to Dinard in France. Most were loaded into the back of the Aztec whilst the rest were loaded into the nose-compartment. Having checked to make sure everything was secure, I took off from Exeter. No sooner had I selected the gear up when the front hatch cover suddenly flew fully open, and then proceeded to slam closed and open again. I was concerned that the cover would be

torn free and get hurtled back in the slipstream to hit the tailplane with possible serious consequences. I declared an emergency and then discovered that if I skewed the Aztec a bit sideways, it kept the cover closed, so I flew the circuit in this fashion and managed to land safely. I was to learn later that it was a fairly common fault with that particular model and a modification with an extra hinge was embodied later.

Jackie Moggridge, a famous ATA pilot from the war, dropped in to see us one morning and I was enthralled listening to stories of her exploits. I had read her book 'Woman Pilot' previously and really enjoyed it. She flew everything from Spitfires to Lancasters. The best one I remember was when she beat-up the parade ground with her aircraft where her husband, an army Lieutenant Colonel, was taking the parade at the time. It completely



ruined the parade and her husband was rather irate when he got home.

Jackie died in 1981 after 40 years of aviation which she enjoyed.

I wasn't too popular with the other pilots at South West Aviation because I was constantly flying to keep Andy's outfit going and make a profit. On the few occasions I did meet them in Operations they

always seemed to be engrossed in discussing flight-time limitations, and I was regarded as a bit of a renegade by ignoring many of the rules, up to a point, which were designed to keep pilots on the ground. In order to help Andy to make a profit I disregarded most of them but was careful to cover it up in my paperwork. I was definitely his favourite pilot! He begged me to stay on and become his Chief Pilot but I had other thoughts in mind.

Andy wanted me to convert onto their newly-acquired Shorts Skyvan turboprop, but I had to be honest with him and decline his kind offer, explaining that it would cost him money and I was looking to get back into the airlines again to fly larger aircraft. With Andy's permission I would often take Norman Parr with me on flights if there was a spare seat, and he thoroughly enjoyed it. We became firm friends and often, when I had the time free, he would take Carol and myself off to a pub somewhere and we would have a riotous time, singing along with the locals in tune with the pianist. Great times we had together and I'll always cherish those few months at Exeter.

It was about this time that Norman Vacher told me about an advert in Flight Magazine wanting pilots for bush-flying in East Malaysia by Malaysia Singapore Airline's Rural Air Services. I saw the chance to get back into a warmer climate and to escape the awful British winter for a few months and immediately applied for an interview.

There were many British pilots out of work at this time as some of the Independents had folded, and I heard afterwards that in the first two days of interviews over two hundred of them applied. They only wanted four so my chances were somewhat slim to say the least. One thing I had in my favour

though, was that I was just about to fly one of these new Britten



Norman BN2a Islanders on a delivery flight to New Guinea for Bill Bright, so I could claim some experience on them, unlike most, if not all of the other applicants, as they were entirely new at the time and only a few had been delivered to anyone. I pointed this out to the interviewers at the time and they seemed suitably impressed.

Prior to this, Andy had agreed to release me for a few weeks to do the delivery flight, so once again I would be seeing the land of my dreams; the Far East. This time I would also be seeing Australia on my way to New Guinea. I hadn't been to Australia before so I was really looking forward to it.

The plan was that Bill Bright, with my good friend Don Bullock and myself, were to pick up three of these brand new BN2 Islanders from Bembridge, Isle of Wight, and deliver them accordingly. The two that Don and I were taking were destined for Port Moresby in New Guinea, whilst Bill's aircraft was only going as far as Bangkok where it was to be utilised for crop-spraying activities. Bill was then going as passenger to Tokyo via Singapore to collect a small four-engine aircraft called a DH Heron, then fly it down to Manila where Don and I would take a passenger flight from Port Moresby to meet him. All three of us would then take it in turns to ferry the Heron back to the UK.

On the pre-determined day the three of us met at the Birdham Hotel, Bembridge, and having

checked in, we went to the airfield to look at our new toys. Neither Don nor myself had never even seen one before let alone flown one, so it was to be a new experience for both of us!

Each of the aircraft was fitted with long-range fuel tanks in the form of four 44-gallon drums laying on their sides athwartships inside the empty fuselage. A small control panel accessible by the pilot in flight was also fitted. With full tanks, including the two standard wings tanks, it would give us a theoretical endurance of thirteen and a half hours, but as the early BN2s could only do 120 knots at best, we would need all of this for the long legs ahead.

As the gross weight with full fuel exceeded the maximum permitted all-up weight of the aircraft, a special dispensation had been granted for the ferry flight. Being foreign registered also, each of us had to be issued with a validation certificate, based on our British licences, for the ferry trip only. My BN2 had the Australian registration VH-ATK and Don's one was VH-ATL. Bill had a Thai-registered one.

The chief test pilot of Britten Norman's gave Don and I in turn a couple of circuits each to acquaint ourselves with its basic handling characteristics. Bill had actually delivered one before to Borneo so he didn't require a check-out. A short discussion followed on the various points, especially the operation of the long-range fuel tanks. That concluded, we retired to the Birdham Hotel for a meal, followed by what I naively presumed would be a quick drink and an early night in preparation for the long journey ahead of us. No so unfortunately – that quick drink lasted until the early hours of the following morning!

The new owner of the two aircraft destined for New Guinea was a chap called Dennis Douglas who ran an outfit called Aerial Tours Pty, based in Port Moresby. He had arrived at the hotel to see us off accompanied by his Chief Engineer; a great hunk of flesh and blubber, whom I was dismayed to learn was to accompany one of us out. I drew the short straw and it was decided by the toss of a coin that he would fly with me. As he couldn't fly an aircraft he was just dead meat as far as I was concerned.

There was little enough room in the front, what with the charts and bits and pieces one needs for such a lengthy flight. With this fat slob filling about two thirds of the small cockpit as well, it looked as if it was going to be a very cramped flight.

It was well past midnight before we all got to bed and were up again at six o'clock feeling very much under the weather. Our departure for Southampton, which was just across the water, to clear formalities was delayed until after nine o'clock due to the vast amount of last minute details that accompanies each aircraft on delivery flights.

The chief test pilot had previously given us some good advice regarding how to stay warm, and far more to the point, the toilet arrangement, bearing in mind that these small aircraft of course were not equipped with any form of heating or insulation being bound for the tropics. He suggested that we each get a sleeping bag apiece plus a hot water bottle. He was a bit of a wag and so I naturally presumed he was pulling our legs, but he was quite serious.

Once airborne, and until we land again many hours later, our feet became superfluous to requirements, and being in contact

with the metal floor, they would get extremely cold at high altitudes. We also obtained some thick polystyrene sheeting to place on the bare metal floor for added insulation. The object was that once airborne, and presumably no longer requiring our feet to operate the rudder pedals and brakes, we would slide into the sleeping bags up to our waists, zip them up, and therefore stay reasonably warm for the long flight ahead. The hot water bottle served a dual purpose. Not only could you relieve yourself into it, but having done so and screwed the top on again, you could slide it down into the sleeping bag to keep you warm as well! Crude? Yes! But very practical and effective.

Finally we got into the air at 0940am, heading off for Southampton to obtain Customs and Immigration clearances. After landing from the short hop across the water we refuelled to the maximum as the next leg to Naples in Italy would be at least eight hours.

Upon getting airborne we were asked to do a formation low-level flypast for some television camera crews that had arrived especially for this occasion. This proved somewhat demanding with our very heavy aircraft in the gusty wind conditions, and in my case, not only was I still suffering the effect of the previous late night session, but it was made a lot more difficult by my restricted space in the confined cockpit. The fat pig of an engineer was taking up more than his fair share of room which made it most uncomfortable for me. I was destined to put up with this inconvenient state of affairs for the following journey of almost 10,000 miles!

We finally landed at Naples eight and a quarter hours after departing from Southampton and within an hour were booking into a mediocre hotel. Leaving the obese engineer

to make his own arrangements whilst the three of us went looking for a place to eat. Needless to say, this was also accompanied by the inevitable beers plus a few more bottles of wine. As usual, it was well past midnight again before we got to bed.

The next day's flight was down the Mediterranean, out of sight of land most of the time, to Nicosia in Cyprus which we reached in eight hours and twenty minutes. Another long evening of revelry, with Bill leading Don and myself as usual, followed by yet another late turn-in.

From Cyprus we flew across the remainder of the Mediterranean, over Beirut, then across the arid desert to Bahrain in the Arabian Gulf, followed naturally by yet another long evening's entertainment. I was looking forward to our next night stop at Karachi where, due to the time difference, we would have to spend a long day's rest before heading further east.

It took nearly eight hours next day to reach Karachi by which time I was flagging fast. That evening in the KLM Rest House we sat down to an enormous meal accompanied by the usual victuals, when Bill suddenly had a brilliant idea. He reckoned that if we got going straight away instead of staying the night in Karachi, and flew by night to Calcutta, we could save ourselves a whole day which could then be spent in Singapore or Bali later. Don backed the idea wholeheartedly and they both turned to me for my response. I shrugged my shoulders in resignation and within the hour, we were taxiing out in the pitch dark night for a 1,000 mile flight across India by night.

Because of our heavy weights, mine being the heaviest with fatso on board, it took me an hour to climb to 9,000 feet. Both Don and

Bill were some way ahead of me by then, especially as I was the last to take-off. Eventually I caught sight of Bill's red anti-collision beacon in the distance, and for hours on end, with bloodshot weary eyes, I kept it in sight.

None of the ground radio beacons were of any use to us so for about nine very long hours we just flew blind heading eastward all the time. Fatso was worse than useless as he not only snored loudly all the time in deep slumber, above the noise of the engines, but kept rolling over to my side of the cockpit. I was forever pushing him back again. I swear that if he'd had a door on his side I would have opened it up and pushed him out!

We skirted around numerous thunderstorms which, not having any radar on board, became a nightmare trying to avoid them in the dark. I would strain my eyes continuously looking for the next lightning flash which would illuminate the storm clouds for a brief instant, then I'd plan my path through them. Finally the streaks of dawn appeared and with it I tried to make out features on the misty ground to hopefully map-read by.

I had lost contact with Don who had veered well south of track to avoid the storms but I was still in contact with Bill and kept talking to him. We saw what looked like a large river in the morning haze but we couldn't be sure.

At last the Calcutta VOR beacon began to give some readings; flickering on and off at first, then as the distance decreased, it began to give more reliable indications.

We finally managed to raise Calcutta on the VHF radio and requested their weather. They were having low visibility in the early morning fog. Fortunately we were equipped with ILS and having

locked on to it, I kept my strained and weary eyes pinned hard on the crossbars of the instrument until I crossed the threshold lights and landed at Calcutta's Dum Dum Airport, ten hours after leaving Karachi – the longest flight yet!

Apart from the brief stopover at Karachi, we had done over eighteen hours flying since the previous morning. I was absolutely pooped.

During the ride from the airport to the Great Eastern Hotel through the crowded streets of Calcutta I was appalled to see the poverty, with thousands of people living in the streets. I had been through Calcutta before with Lloyds but never in the early morning. It was pathetic to see their plight. It was quite true that every morning a cart would go around collecting the dead bodies of those that perished in the night... shades of the great plague of London in 1665.

We had all flown nearly fifty hours, in a five day period, with minimum sleep and by now were thoroughly exhausted. We were well overdue for a complete day's rest. But, needless to say, before retiring, Bill insisted that we both share a couple of bottles of brandy with him. I was determined to stay the course so another long drinking session occurred. By now it had become something of a competition to see who would be the first to careen over.

Bill had an Indian servant come up to his room, just so he could take Bill's boots off for him. I was disgusted at this shameful display and told him so, but he just laughed it off.

Trying to keep pace with the pair of them I had the great satisfaction of seeing both keel over completely. At this point I crawled to my room, crashed onto the bed,

and promptly passed into a state of oblivion.

The days enforced rest put us all back into fighting form again and were raring to continue with the flight.

At the airport I stressed to my slobbish engineer-passenger never to leave the aircraft unguarded for a second, but if it did become absolutely necessary for any reason, he must lock it up first as they were born thieves in Calcutta. Meanwhile I went to the control tower to do the paperwork, file the flight plan, pay all the fees, etc.

When I returned I found the Islander's doors wide open but no engineer in sight, with the Shell bowser now driving away in the distance. The first thing I noticed was that the map pocket in the pilot's door panel was empty, and my very expensive Aristo flight calculator missing.

I found the engineer in the terminal building who readily confessed that he had forgotten to lock the aircraft up. I raised hell with both him and the Shell refuellers. The calculator had not only cost me a lot of money but was a very vital piece of my navigational equipment. The Shell refuellers disclaimed any knowledge of its disappearance naturally, and I had to accept the fact that it had now gone forever. I felt pure hatred towards the thieving monkeys. What possible use could such an instrument be to them, but how immeasurably valuable was it for me? I told the cretinous, unspeakable, moron of an engineer precisely what I thought of him but he merely shrugged his shoulders and stayed quiet... I utterly despised him for it! Fortunately I remembered that I had a pocket-sized American standby calculator in my flight bag otherwise I'd have been really sunk.

It took seven and a half hours to reach Bangkok from Calcutta and we never spoke more than two words to each other during the entire flight. He slept most of the time anyway and I was constantly pushing his sweaty carcass away as he rolled over in my direction.

Bill's flight had come to an end on arrival at Bangkok and after spending a couple of hours showing the new Thai owners around the BN2, he joined Don in his aircraft for a ride down to Singapore where he was due to passenger up to Tokyo to collect the DH Heron. We were to meet him again at Manila.

This tale of adventure will be completed in January Bugle Issue 95 1st January 2013.

In the meantime, Laurie (Harry) Harris sends his greetings.



Cheers to all my friends out there..!

Harry Xmas