



BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005



CLUB AND AIRPORT NEWS
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January has gone and February continues with the story of the 22 day 1982 sales tour of Africa with Aerospatiale:

TO OUAGADOUGOU



A town in Burkino Faso Land (land of the running man) formerly known as Upper Volta. This picture was taken outside our hotel Sofitel Sulimande.

BICYCLE REPAIR STATION



This bicycle and motor cycle was fantastic with hundreds of cycles being repaired and cleaned.

The country around these parts is very flat and suited to people using bicycles. They even have traffic lights to control the amount of traffic with bikes.

The airport supported a large flying club, mainly French pilots and very civilised.

I did quite a few demonstration flights with a lot of interest shown, but unfortunately that was all.

Flying around here in the late afternoon can take on some dramatic changes as the day cools.



The warm air above continues to rise and then finally dissipates.



Even the ground takes on a foreboding dramatisation of the land.



APAG OUAGADOUGOU



Our TB20 prepared for hangarage.

From Ouaga' we set course to Cotonou in Benin on the Ivory Coast of Africa.

Final approach at Cotonou:



This turned out to be a bit of a dead place, a policeman went to pull a gun on me and I threatened him with the name of our representative in Benin and he changed to a kind of grey colour and became very helpful after that.



The only good thing here was the swimming pool at the Sheraton Hotel where the drink was at arm's length, the beach was a little bit further.

From Contonou we head for Douala in Cameroon. Where we would spend the next five days.



Douala Airport is in the distance near the foot of Mt Cameroon which can be seen protruding above the ground in the distance rising to 15,000 feet and has had the odd aircraft embedded into its slopes. The weather around here can get rather cloudy at times and one should be prepared to divert.

However, flying around the region for the next few days was very interesting.

The airport is surrounded by water with very few roads in the dense jungle nearby. Small boats are an advantage in these parts.



Finals at Douala, Cameroon.



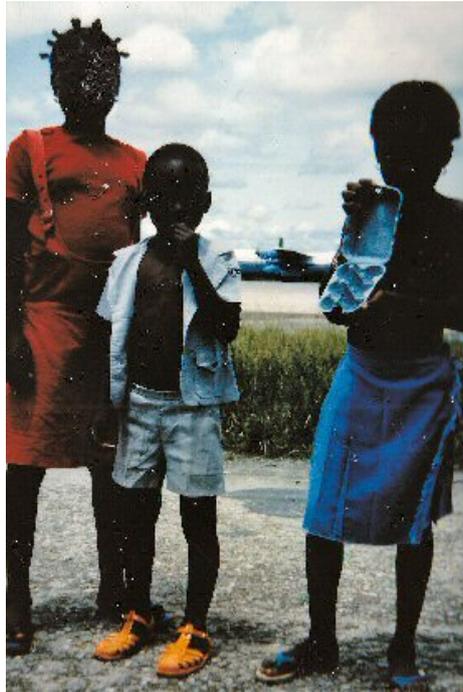
The first thing to get used to here, is the persistent rain every day.

The other noticeable quirk is that after heavy rain people drive around carefully, avoiding large puddles. We questioned their caution and they explained that it could be a big hole that someone had dug, and like most of Africa there are no warnings or fences around such placid looking pools of water, which could be as deep as

two metres. Therefore drive with caution after heavy rain..!!



This is a view of the domestic area with lots of foreign military aircraft.



There were many curious children who appeared daily, and whilst most of us needed passes to get on the apron, these kids just wandered across the airfield to get to their homes, even crossing the runways.

It was almost as bizarre for us at the end of our stay at Douala.

We decided to file our flight plan for departure early on the last day, only to be told we didn't have a departure clearance because we had used it up with our demonstration flights.

How do we get another departure clearance. Ah..! You must go to the DGCA authority which is at Yaounde 57 miles to the east and the capital of Cameroon.

Can we fly to Yaounde without a departure clearance.

No problem Sir!

You are not leaving Cameroon.

So we get in the aircraft and climb eastward toward the rising ground arriving at Yaounde 25 minutes later, with its red dirt roads and steep slopes, and a shanty village smack at the end of the runway.



Not the safest place to live, but life is cheap here.



We locate the DGCA building and park on the unpaved area.

This was a corrugated building without windows and stifling hot inside. After many apologies and several cups of African tea we obtained a clearance to leave Douala.

Whilst we were there a Fokker 28 landed and the Capt was a French friend of ours Capt Jacques Dufour who had accompanied me on several ferry flights across Africa. We wished each other well and have never seen each other since.

As far as we are concerned all is well, we have our clearance and return to Douala.

After landing at Douala we are confronted by a numbskull official who says we don't have a landing clearance. We explain to no avail that we are still in Cameroon and don't need a clearance.

There is no point arguing and we said we can't go back to Yaounde

because it will be dark very soon, to which he agreed. I explained we would fly to Yaounde tomorrow, to which he agreed.

My French colleague said to me we don't have time to do that, to which I explained that every morning there was a change of shift official at 0730am and if we came later tomorrow presenting our departure clearance to the new shift we may beat the system.

Success, nobody noticed anything as we presented ourselves to the new shift with our departure clearance.

A point of interest – Foreigners who work in Cameroon had to apply for a clearance to leave the country for their holiday, otherwise they couldn't return to work in Cameroon.

So many people didn't like Cameroon and would simply not return.

Unbeknown to us at the time whilst in Yaounde, the DGCA official who helped us to obtain a departure clearance was later convicted of granting a clearance to a Boeing 707 carry arms to Biafra during the conflict. He was given 7 years in jail poor bloke.

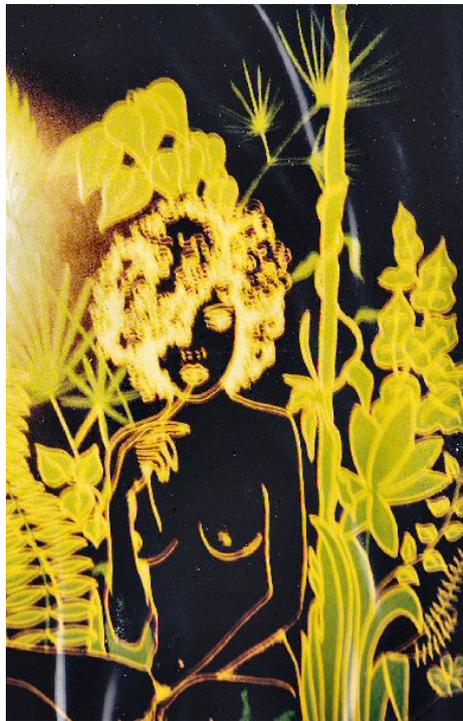
I only found this out later when I had a delivery to Francville in Gabon, which is south of Cameroon.

I was unable to obtain any clearance through Cameroon and was forced to route via Bangui of the Central African Republic, and via the Congo avoiding Cameroon territory.

This added another day to the trip, but I had a good welcome at Mvengue (Franceville) spending two days at the Flying Club checking students out on the TB10.

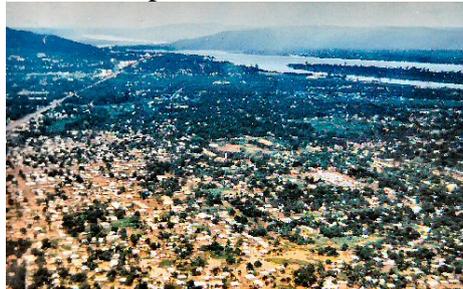


The Labaki Hotel was opposite the terminal building of Mvengue. Whilst it was a very comfortable hotel, the bar was devoid of any service or drink. Gasp..!! However my room was more elegant with an abstract mural on one wall.

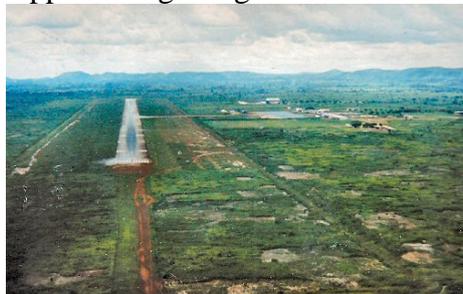


Back to reality:

We departed for Bangui situated on the Ubangi river, in the Central African Republic.



Approaching Bangui.



Finals at Bangui – this was a lovely place with a very active flying club which had a huge stock of cold beer and was a popular meeting point for the French flyers.

This town also had 3 Bata shoe shops, and two were side by side.

Bangui is 4 deg above the Equator and the temperature is never below 30 deg. Mosquito's are another story. It is almost essential to sleep in an air-conditioned room if you want to sleep peacefully.

One drawback to this place at this time was that it had only one functional hotel, so one had to book well in advance.

There were of course several open French houses, which too needed to be reserved or advised of your intended visit.

A half built hotel was eventually finished a couple of years later which was on the fast flowing Ubangi River.

A little more up-market than the original Rock Hotel, where the rooms weren't very secure, but it was quite safe considering.

ACROSS THE RAIN FOREST

The rain forest of Africa extends from Cameroon to the mountains of Rwanda some 900 miles in length and about 300 miles wide.

This is an area of lush green, dense jungle and few positive landmarks so time and distance become important when navigating above the dense green canopy.

After a few flights of this nature one begins to learn how to map read where nothing appears visible.

Here are some simple rules to follow, although not clearly obvious. USAF 1:000,000 charts are quite good, though detail is limited, but well trodden tracks become evident with some skilful map reading.

Roads although completely hidden below the canopy are detectable by a straight line in the canopy which has a lighter shade of green due to the fact of trees being cut down either side of the road and occasionally a clearing may be briefly visible as a staging post for essentials.

Rivers whilst being hardly visible are detected by a darker shade of green wriggling its way across the

canopy with perhaps a very brief glimpse of water reflection below. Navigation aids were sparse (before the advent of GPS) non-existent in fact. Therefore, attention to maintaining a good heading and track keeping was essential.

With the known true track over the ground a simple effective method of keeping straight was to align the aircraft with the true track and note the position of the sun, every hour. Following this procedure, resume your previous magnetic heading. Bearing in mind the sun moves 15deg every hour no matter where it is relative to the aircraft. There are various methods of calculating this angle – you will find your own. You may ask, 'what about the drift factor'? Well, if you can cope with the above method of keeping straight, you will learn to understand the drift and adjust accordingly. Good luck with your long distance flight, it can be quite rewarding after flying 9 /10 hours non-stop.

RAIN FOREST TO KIGALI



Kigali is in the middle of Rwanda which is rather high ground all around. The airport is 4892ft above sea level and the runway is 11,893ft in length.



Kigali is just above the equator and the temperature is always 30C. and density altitude probably 7500ft equivalent.

We called here during our sales tour for a meeting with the military which amounted to nothing. Whilst they had lots of Gold Braid they had no money.



Reflective qualities, after a very heavy shower, at Kigali.

LOST LAUNDRY

My colleague had decided that as we were in a good French hotel, Le Meridien he would have some shirts laundered and they would be ready by the evening. They were not ready in the evening. We were leaving in the morning early, but reassured all would be ready in the morning. Needless to say we left without the shirts, leaving with the remark that some African would have some new shirts to wear.

SIX MONTHS LATER:

A tattered brown paper parcel tied with string arrived at the offices of Aerospatiale Paris with the laundered shirts – happy ending.

LOST CAMERA LENS:

The editor was delivering an aircraft to Djibouti on the Red Sea and after arrival a friendly native helped me unpack the aircraft as I was proceeding from here to Madagascar and afterwards to Johannesburg to collect another aircraft for Germany after 3 week holiday break in South Africa. On arrival in Jo'Burg, I was missing a 40mm x 100mm zoom lens for my 35mm Minolta XD7. As I was using one case for two lenses I thought perhaps I had left it in the UK. Back in the UK a month later I realised that it was gone..! Never to be seen again..!?*

9 MONTHS LATER

I walked into the Aerospatiale office at Toussus Le Noble and a pilot friend of mine opened the drawer of his desk and said is this any good for you.

It was my lens. It had rolled under the seat and was found 3 weeks later at Djibouti by one of the club members. The President of the flying Club gave it to a French Air Traffic Controller who then carried it to Paris 6 months later when he was going on leave. He decided to take it out to Toussus Le Noble because he didn't know my name, but thought somebody may know something and left it in my friend's desk for safety.

My friend, returned to work and found it, but knew nothing of how or why it came to be in his desk. It was 9 months since we had last met due to our individual flying commitments. I phoned the Air Traffic Controller and thanked him for his sincerity. Ever since that day, I never let anyone help me unpack the aircraft after arrival.

FUEL SUPPLIES IN AFRICA

As time went on fuel (100LL) was beginning to get difficult to find in various places within this vast continent and this would often dictate the route to the Republic of South Africa.

If you take the Great Circle track along the East Coast, or through the Central Route, or the West Coast, there is very little to choose as the difference in distance was just a few miles.

However following a few trips through Rwanda (Kigali) which was often fraught with low cloud, I had to divert to Bujumbura in Burundi one day knowing that there was no fuel available here. I did in fact have sufficient fuel to make it to Kigali when the weather improved.

GAURANTEED FUEL SUPPLY

It was my good fortune on this day to meet with a Belgian Professor from the University of Bujumbura.

His name was Mr Verbanis, President of the local Flying Club which had two 150 Cessna's fitted with 180HP engines because the mountains around these parts rise to 10,000ft and power was the only solution to climb out of here.

BUJUMBURA FLYING CLUB



Mr Verbanis asked how often I came this way and he informed me that if I phoned him in advance he would ship in the fuel, but I had to buy the whole 200 litre barrel to which I agreed. As it transpired this was the solution to having to climb up to Kigali. (96nm away) I had a good relationship with Mr Verbanis for a very long period. Bujumbura is situated at the very Northern end of Lake Tanganyika, which is 2,000ft above sea level and the cloud has never ever been below 2,000ft over the lake, brilliant..!

LAKE TANGANYIKA



Dramatic end of day weather over the lake from my hotel room of 'Source du Nile'.

SETTING SUN FISHERMAN



On the lake at the end of the day.

FLIGHT CLEARANCE OFFICE

Bujumbura also had a direct connection to the aviation telex network from an office at the base of the Control Tower.

It became a simple matter to telephone direct to this office with all your details in an approved format, for landing and departure clearances.

You would be given a message number and the local lady in charge would advise you to phone back in 2/3 days. So simple, it worked every time.

On arrival at Bujumbura it was always necessary to pay the landing fee first.

This was taken by a thin man who sat at a small desk and he would calculate a huge amount of figures on an A5 sheet of paper which he would then pass through a serving hatch type door into the telex network office mentioned above.

45 minutes later an A4 sheet of paper would be passed back, all neatly typed for an amount of \$12US.

Of all my visits there I never got through this procedure in less than 45 minutes.

Plan ahead, 45 minutes is not to be ignored, it is part of your rest period – these people have all day to waste your time.

The small office where the man sat at his desk had metal framed windows and a door which had no glass because it had been broken a long time before, BUT, religiously he would leave his desk position each day and lock this door at 17.30pm and go home, returning in the morning at precisely 07.30am to unlock the door for another days business.

When it was just as easy to walk through the metal frame...!!

Such are the ways of Africa..!

A PAIR OF SHOES SIZE 11

This a true story (one of several) relating to obtaining a flight clearance in Africa. It is who you know that is important..!

A FLIGHT AROUND AFRICA

It was September 1996 when John Martin and Iris Blackman from Biggin Hill were flying down the East coast of Africa via Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Lanseria, Port Elizabeth, Durban and Capetown on a business trip.

They had planned to return via Central Africa but had a technical problem and returned to Lanseria.



Picture taken by JB at Lanseria.

L-R: Jeff Sharmin, of 'Jarlin Aviation' at Lanseria (Jo'Burg) with John Martin and Iris Blackman leaning on wing of their Aztec. John asked me how he could get a quick clearance through Malawi to which I replied, no problem..!

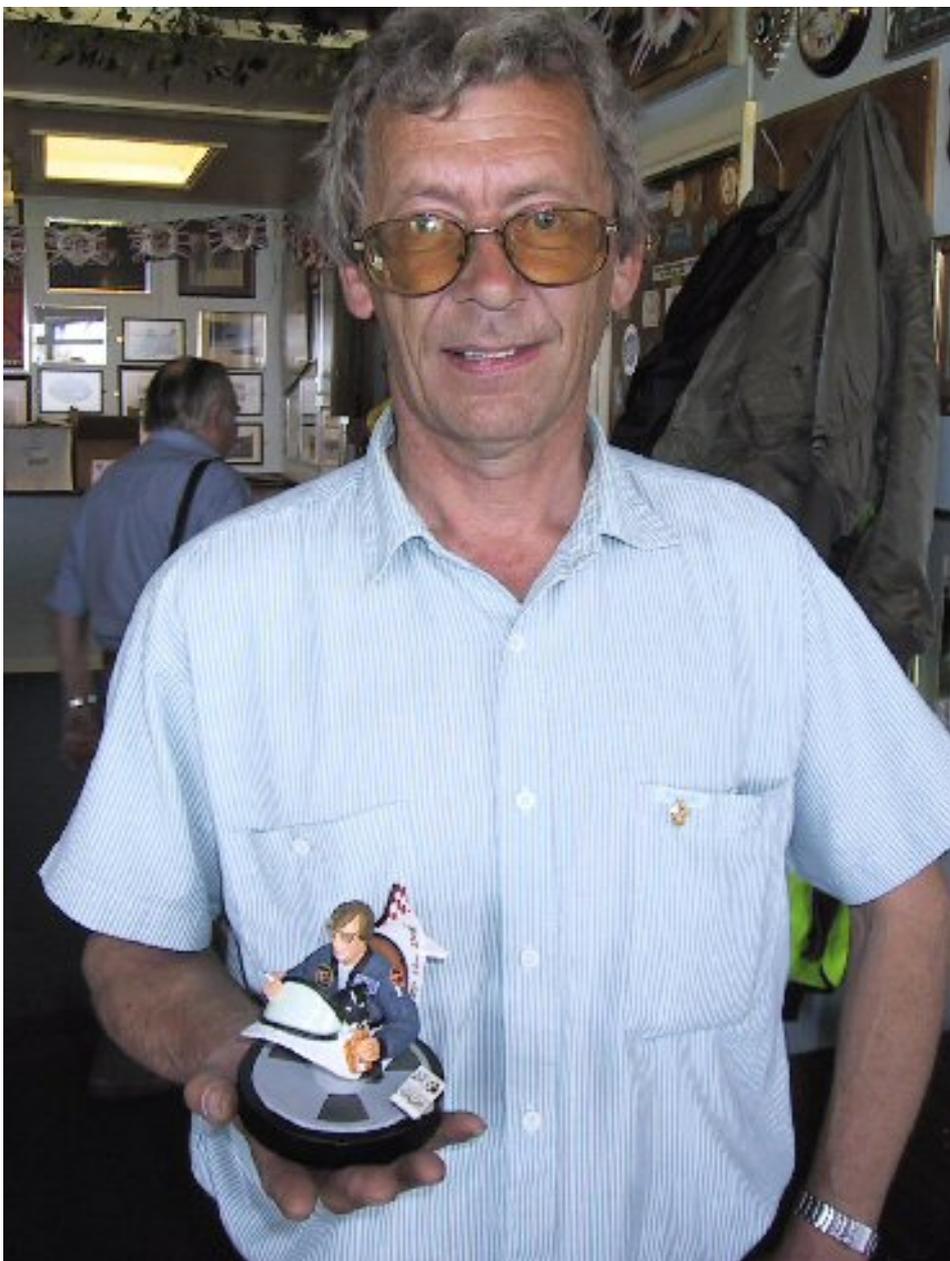
I made a phone call to my official aviation friend at Lilongwe and told him of their plight. He said, no problem Capt and could he please bring a pair of black shoes size 11 for my brother and I will arrange the clearance. Needless to say they left the next morning with a pair of shiny black shoes and we often laughed about these black shoes at Biggin, over a drink at Pilots PalsBar.

The editor also used to get many requests for electrical goods in return for landing clearances.

Days Electrical Shop on the Pantiles at Biggin Hill, gained quite a bit of business due to my African ferry flights, irons, kettles, food mixers.

Another favourite for getting things done, was to buy loads of tea bags in large boxes, also coffee in packets.

These items were of more benefit to the locals and very much appreciated.



ROGER (The Dog) TAYLOR

It is with deep regret that we have suddenly lost a real character from the airfield.

Roger came to Biggin Hill some 24 years ago and basically never left.

He was a genius at rectifying a solution from no toilets at Surrey & Kent to a flushing system, such luxury that the drinking members had not experienced for many years.

From this one job, Roger was in demand. Roger learned to fly on the Piper Tomahawks and when qualified he would take his dog 'Max' on regular flights.

The dog even had his own log book.

Eventually S&K Bar closed and Roger moved to Pilots Pals Bar as chief maintenance officer, regular attendee at the bar until he went to sleep in the sitting position.

'Max' was usually curled up in the front of his sagging sweater and would sleep in relative comfort.

The emblem Roger is holding was produced by an artist that came to Biggin Hill Air fair in 2003 and met Roger at the bar and produced this life like miniature Model.

The artists observations had Roger to a 'T' with every small detail evident.

The fag, the flying jacket, Max, on his lap a pint of beer, Pilots Pals Chequered Red & White Tail and the famous Cross Word book.

Roger and John Sealey built a brick Bar-B-Que at Pilots Pals one day and many a good feast was had from it.

