



BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

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'TURKISH DELIGHT' FERRY

Author: Rhys Perraton



In keeping with the modern way of things this trip got started with an email at Christmas time asking if I would be available to ferry a Twin Otter from Istanbul to Calgary during the first week of January. I replied that I would be and forgot all about it during the turkey and mince pie activities until a further electronic communication arrived a couple of days prior to Hogmany, lang may yer lum reek, to be prepared to travel to Istanbul on the second day of the New Year. That was followed by airline ticket information which revealed a rather lengthy journey by way of Toronto and Warsaw to arrive in Istanbul on the evening of the 3rd Jan. The original, and as usual optimistic plan, to depart there on the 4th was clearly out of the window but maybe the 5th, allowing a full day for aircraft and flight planning preparation would be possible. I was given a routing of Istanbul-Stavanger-Keflavik-Iqualuit-Calgary but due to finding Stavanger, Norway less than GA friendly on my previous trip from Sri Lanka decided to use Malmo, Sweden instead. It made for a longer 2nd leg to Iceland but still acceptable with the planned 10 hours endurance. Overflight and landing clearance requests were already submitted and as this aircraft was on Turkish registration the crew would need a temporary pilot licence validation by Turkish civil aviation department plus the usual ferry permit to fly over the normal all up weight for the purpose of the ferry trip. I was assured that all was in hand and amazingly that turned out to be the case. The flight out of Toronto was courtesy of LOT Polish airlines 787 Dreamliner which

I was hoping would have a serviceable battery. It may be the latest and greatest technology but from the point of view of the unwashed in cattle class it's no more, and maybe even less comfortable than other al 'u' minium tubes. The seats seem smaller, or maybe my rear is getting bigger, and the pitch on this one was such that leg room is just awful, though that is the airline's fault rather than Boeing. Also, a rather annoying foot rest arrangement that just gets in your way whenever you try to stretch cramped legs. Anyway enough whining, 'well for now at least'. From Warsaw to Istanbul was a very nice Turkish Airlines flight with lots of leg room, good dinner and excellent service plus complimentary wine, beer and liqueurs, and of course Turkish delight. Pretty good for a two and a half hour trip, and reminiscent a bit of how flying as a passenger used to be.

Arrival in to Istanbul was at around 9.30 pm, 10 hours local time and nearly 24 hours travelling, ahead of Vernon and the promised driver was waiting to transport us to the hotel, after easy and quick customs and immigration. My bag even arrived at the same time which was pleasing.

I had been told a couple of days before that the required permit to move the aircraft from the maintenance base to the airfield of Corlu, an hour and a half drive away, and the location for the final departure, was still not in place, but in fact was now told that it had come and the aircraft was now in Corlu



The next possible hurdle was that permission was still being sought to transfer the ferry fuel system from another aircraft, which was still not cleared by

customs after having been there for 6 weeks. As this was now Friday night the prospect was that nothing more could happen until after the weekend. Such is the frustrating red tape that is not unusual in such places. Anyway there being nothing more that could be done it was time to go to the hotel and see what the next day would bring.

Next morning, while enjoying an excellent buffet breakfast, a telephone call from the local airline manager informed me that all permissions were in fact in place and the mechanics were already on their way to install the ferry fuel system and prepare the aircraft. Assuming that this could all be completed that day there was now a prospect of a departure next morning. I asked for transport to Corlu, LTBU to at least meet up with the machine and start checking it out, plus a move to a local hotel closer to the airfield.

A driver duly arrived but took us to the float base to change vehicles but that seemed to involve a two hour wait before leaving on the next leg of the journey. The Twin Otters there are all on floats and one was bobbing about at the dock waiting it's next trip. Eventually more transport arrived and we set of for the hotel in Corlu to check in and drop bags and then go to the airfield to meet up with the aircraft and mechanics, which by that time was mid afternoon. With the help of a local agent we successfully negotiated security and



more red tape and got to the aircraft finding the ferry tanks installed plus the two additional drums and every other bit of space filled boxes of parts plus two

gear legs and a damaged elevator being returned to Canada for repair.

None of this was tied down so we eventually scrounged up some Herc' straps and rope to do the job. I noticed that the main tyres looked a bit low and the mechanic said yes they were but after changing from floats they left them until getting to Corlu. Unfortunately for some reason which could not be established security would not allow them to bring their nitrogen bottle on to the ramp and being a weekend there was not another available. I really wanted to refuel ready for an early start next morning but putting in about 6000 lbs of fuel and leaving the aircraft parked overnight at the approximately 3000 lb over normal max take off weight with soft tyres risked damaging them so booked a fuel truck for 0700 in the morning. I would have to take a chance on the tyres for take off and planned to get them put to proper pressure, plus a bit extra for the forthcoming low temperatures, at the first stop in Sweden. Normally before ferry flights it's usual to do a test flight to check things out in time for anything to be fixed but on this occasion due to the problem with getting local permission on the weekend, and as the aircraft had just flown the previous day I decided not to.

The mechanics had done the usual flow and leak checks of the ferry tanks and a good pre-flight so I hoped that would suffice. A quick look in the cockpit showed a pretty standard '70's era set of flight instruments and radios with the nice addition of dual Garmin 430 GPS's and a Sandel TAWS/RMI but seeing the circuit breakers were pulled for that I doubted it would be working. Two ADF's, nice back us even to this GPS world, although one of them never worked at all.

There are a number of different ferry fuel installations available for the Twin Otter, including a collection of 45 gal drums, collapsible bladder tanks and a couple of types of metal tanks. In this case we had two 925 litre metal tanks plus two drums. The tanks are plumbed in to the main fuel system which is under the floor so transfer is by gravity, which usually is pretty reliable. There is a vent system and an emergency fuel dump system which involves putting a large diameter hose out of a rear door and opening a valve. The drums are transferred in flight in to the ferry tanks by a stand pipe screwed in to the drum, with aircraft bleed air connected to pressurize the drum and push the fuel through a hose, this worked pretty well.

I made arrangements with the handling agent to send them the ATC flight plan for filing later in the evening and for a weather and notam briefing package for the morning.

Other than that everything was about as ready as could be so it was time to head back to the hotel for a meal and bed.

0600 the next morning saw us in a taxi heading back to the airport and after the usual security and outbound customs formalities, eased somewhat by having the local handling agent on our side, we were at the aircraft in time to meet the fuel truck. Leaving co-pilot Yosef to fill the tanks I went inside to check the flight plan and weather and send off an operational flight plan, (OFP) to the company dispatch office in Calgary who provide world wide flight following. ATC flight plans in Europe are processed by Eurocontrol in Brussels and any errors mean that you get it rejected and covered in red ink which is a frustrating process as they don't tell you what's wrong with the routing, just that they don't like it. On this occasion all was well and the flight plan was accepted. En-route weather looked reasonable but the forecast for arrival in Malmo was pretty poor but that was many hours away so no point worrying about it yet. I had filed for an 0830L take off on the basis that it's better to be early than late, you get more brownie points for being early, and that's how it worked out. Getting back to the aircraft after finishing the paperwork fueling was well underway and when completed the tyres looked a bit squishy but not bad really, definitely good enough for one take off. After a few minutes wait start up and ATC clearance was forthcoming and it was a short taxi to the active and airborne at 0820L, thus collecting the aforementioned brownie points.

Shortly after take off both forward main tank boost pump lights, which feed the right engine, started flickering but switching on the standby pump put the pressure lights out so we carried on to see how it would go. After a while, and before getting too high, flight planned cruise was for FL 120, the problem seemed to fix itself. This was the first of many, mostly but not all, minor snags that would appear during the trip no doubt due to the presence of those mischievous little chaps with the pointed ears, the Gremlins.



Leaving Istanbul the route was North over Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Poland then across the Baltic Sea to Malmo in Southern Sweden. It was mostly cloudy trip although we did see some of Poland,

then over the Baltic the weather got worse such that Malmo was looking pretty much on minima with rain and fog and the planned alternate, Copenhagen in Denmark wasn't much better. I talked to the tower at a place called Ronne, Bornholm, Danish territory on a small island in the Baltic and it had better weather and customs was available in the event we needed to divert. Getting set up for an ILS at Malmo the gremlins came out and failed the glideslope on the pilot side together with the compass on the co-pilot side, not an ideal combination for an approach to minimums. So we ended up on final with me flying the localizer and Yosef the glideslope, which would have been comical in better weather. As it happened we saw the ground intermittently through breaks in the cloud at about 400 ft and the approach lights shortly after so all was well and we landed in a wet and misty Malmo after a 7 hour flight.



We were met by the handling agent and a rather delightfully pretty customs officer who quickly inspected our passports and welcomed us to Sweden. This was followed by the arrival of a couple of mechanics with a nitrogen bottle, which I had arranged for, and the fuel truck. The tyres were soon at the proper pressure, all tanks filled, and we were off to the hotel, conveniently right by the airport. I left the ATC flight plan with the agent for filing and got the tel: number of the AIS in Stockholm so I could check up on it later in the evening. There was time for a bit of a walk to stretch the legs before supper.

Next morning breakfast started at 5am so we got picked up at 6.30 for the 5 min drive to the airport to settle the airport charges and check the weather for a planned 0730 take off. The flight plan was OK, I had been given a few route changes the night before by the nice AIS lady in Stockholm, so was ready for that. There was a bit of a frontal system moving across the first part of the route to Norway which looked like it would have some cloud and icing with it, and a forecast of strong winds but fairly clear weather for the arrival in Iceland. The weather before and over Norway didn't look too great which turned out to be correct.

Off on time, more brownie points, the route went over the Kattegat and

Skaggerak waters between Denmark, Sweden and Norway and then across the mountains of Norway, over Bergen, Flesland and then pretty well direct to Iceland passing right over the Faroe Islands and well North of the Shetland Islands of Scotland. Heading North we were soon into solid cloud and the ice started to build up. This aircraft, unlike some from overseas float bases, did have de-icing and was approved for flight in icing conditions. I knew the pitot and windshield heats, and prop de-ice were working OK but soon found that the wing and tail de-ice boots were not really working too well, so apart from the rest of the airframe hanging out there collecting ice the wings and tail also. It soon got to the stage where a change of altitude was needed to try and improve the situation which was no problem with ATC and after descending to FL 80 things improved. I knew that eventually we would have to either climb back up to cross the mountains of Norway or take a more Southerly route to remain over the lower ground and water but there was plenty of time to make that choice, things don't happen very quickly at 160 kts. Eventually we climbed back up to FL 120 and not picking up any more ice, but right over the middle of the mountains the Gremlins, having got fed up with playing in the fuel pumps and deicing decided to make the left generator fail. Not really a big deal in itself as long as the other one keeps working, so after some load shedding of non essential electrics carried on across Norway. The weather in Bergen, the nearest airfield at the time was windy but reasonable so even if all the electrics packed up I was confident I could clear the mountains, let down over the sea to the West and find my way visually to a landing. Attempts to reset the failed generator were not successful but the other one was coping well with the reduced load, the weather was improving, we were out of the icing, and it seemed reasonable to carry on. Soon a rather unfriendly looking wind and wave battered North Sea was visible below with numerous oil rigs and platforms in sight, a place where I had spent many hours looking at wild seas while flying helicopters to offshore installations in a previous life.



After a couple of hours another attempt to reset the failed generator was successful but I did wonder where the gremlins had gone to now. Soon we were able to look down on the wild and rugged Faroe Islands, Danish territory and after that were transferred to Iceland control.

Although we had an HF, and I had therefore indicated such on the flight plan equipment code, I knew it wouldn't work as the antenna was missing from the top of the fuselage. So a bit of bluff got us transferred to a satellite phone number to contact Iceland Radio for onwards clearance, the aircraft had an installed sat phone which worked great plus I had a spare hand held one as well. We were on the downhill slope now and after getting in to VHF range of Iceland were cleared on to destination, Keflavik. The snow covered landscape of Iceland's volcano's appeared and the strong winds started bumping us around as we descended towards the airfield. It was visual conditions for a right base on to runway 02 with winds out of the North East. Soon we were able to look down on the wild and rugged Faroe Islands, Danish territory and after that were transferred to Iceland control. descending towards the airfield. It was visual conditions for a right base on to runway 02 with winds out of the North East gusting to 30 kts, followed by a short landing for the first taxiway into the parking. Flight time 8 hours.



The South coast of Iceland.



From many past visits I knew that the service by Southair, the FBO, and customs would be excellent and was not disappointed. A marshaller was waiting with chocks, along with the fuel truck and customs, although this time the customs officer was extra laid back and went to drink coffee and chat in the FBO office until I made my way there with the passports, leaving Yosef to start refueling.

Getting back to the aircraft we soon got it packed up and secured and after leaving the flight plan for next day were off on the 10 minute drive to the Icelandair hotel. We had gained another hour from Sweden .and were now on GMT and although the daylight is short in Iceland in Jan, about 10am to 4 pm was again able to enjoy a walk along the sea wall where the strong winds were breaking waves over the rocks and across the path. I like getting away early in the mornings so as to arrive in time to relax a bit and enjoy supper is the best way and makes up for getting up at 5am. We took a 15 min walk to a local restaurant I knew of for a good meal and some local beer followed by the inevitable weather check back at the hotel to see what might be in store for us next day. I usually look at the public forecast to get an idea before the aviation weather and when I did that for Iqualuit was greeted with a blizzard warning for the next day. Further investigation of the weather charts and forecasts showed the same, a deep low moving North East towards Frobisher Bay with winds gusting to 70 kts, and zero visibility in snow and blowing snow, so I wasn't too optimistic of going in the morning. Still you never know so booked an early call, breakfast started at 5am, and a pick up at 0630 for a theoretical 0730 take off. Sure enough in the morning nothing had changed so after chit chatting with the weather office and FBO crew over coffee and biscuits, checked the aircraft was OK, cancelled the flight plan and headed back to the hotel.



A common sight around the airport and flying over the town on departure was a 757 of Icelandair, one of which they brought from the company that I worked for in Asia, so a level of nostalgia was in order. Some of their fleet is now fitted with the Aviation Partners blended winglets, supposed to reduce fuel consumption and add 200 nm range to a typical 757. They certainly look great anyway.

The next day brought no change, the blizzard and storm was still raging in Iqualuit so it was a case of keeping an eye on the weather and waiting. I looked at the possibility of going to Goose Bay but that didn't look good either, nasty conditions there plus bad en route weather and the positioning of the low pressure would have meant 40-50 headwinds.

By the evening it seemed like things would be better in Iqualuit for the next day

but looking at the weather maps and talking to the met office there was another problem. A nasty weather front West of Iceland with extensive cloud and moderate icing over Greenland plus 60 kt winds on the East coast of Greenland producing severe turbulence over the ice cap. Not really conditions suitable for an overweight Twin Otter with questionable de-ice capabilities and gremlins lurking aboard. Indications were that the next day would be better as the system moved slowly East and that taking a more Southerly route over Greenland would avoid the worst and also that there should be some decent tailwinds on the first half of the trip at least. The surface winds at Keflavik were shifting to the south east by then and picking up to 30-40 kts so a trip to the airfield to turn the aircraft into the wind was in order. After that plans were made to depart the following morning and I talked to AIS about getting a more southerly route which was given to me and a flight plan filed for a 0900 departure which should enable the crossing of Greenland to be made in the short amount of daylight available.



Next morning it was heavy rain and 35kt winds for the take off but the strong tailwinds were there and the chosen route kept us mostly out of the weather. We had a brief glimpse of some glaciers on the East side of Greenland but otherwise it was mainly obscured by cloud below which persisted until reaching the Davis Strait and turning West for Iqualuit.



Crossing over Godthaab on the West coast of Greenland a momentary break in the cloud put the airfield there in sight and there was some Greenlandair traffic in the area, Dash 7's doing commuter runs.

As forecast the winds now went around to the beam so it was goodbye to the nice tailwind for the rest of the trip on to Iqualuit. We soon realized that the GPS databases didn't have North America so had to make some manual entries for the Canadian airspace ahead. The sat phone was again useful for contacting ATC but we didn't get Montreal on the VHF until well inside Canadian airspace. Iqualuit

weather was good and the approach was a visual right base to 35 and down to -30 deg temps to meet customs. Flight-time a quick 7.7 hours thanks to the tailwinds. Customs was pre booked as required, we had updated the ETA by sat phone on the way, and I had all the necessary paperwork in hand so even the Turkish registration didn't cause any problems. The airfield was still digging out from the storm but seemed to be fully operational.



We dumped the two drums and refueled the rest of the tanks for the next day, not quite sure what winds and weather would bring for the flight to Calgary, but planning a fuel stop along the way somewhere, to be decided later. Overall a pretty easy day and after being outside in -30 for a bit it was nice to get to the hotel. The local company engineer had a good look around the aircraft and took the battery out to keep it warm in the hangar, no plug in heaters on the aircraft, so we were set for the next day. Also was able to swap the GPS data base cards for current North America ones for the last leg.

Having got used to Scandinavian breakfasts starting at 5am the 0730 hotel Saturday breakfast time was no good for a 6am pick up but it was going to be a long day ahead so best get at it while the mechanic replaced the battery we swept the nights snow off the aircraft and filed flight plans to Calgary with a fuel stop in Churchill, pretty well half way. It looked like 20-30 kt headwinds the whole way and maybe even stronger for the last hour in to Calgary, with strong surface winds and snow showers in the forecast.

After starting the engines, they needed a bit of time to get oil temps up, the gremlins had got back into the left generator which refused to come on line, so shut down and back to the hangar to talk to the engineer. As he didn't have authority to do much on a Turkish registered aircraft all he could do was check relays etc but after half an hour of sitting in the -30 aircraft he applied the tapometer to the right spot and the generator was back. I kept it running while he got out and Yosaf in, we were off albeit an hour late. It was nice to get the heating on and thaw out a bit. It was mostly cloudy until well on the way across Hudson Bay and apart from a few low

clouds around Churchill decent weather for the landing. After a fairly quick re-fuel it was off on a direct track to the first point on the arrival into Calgary from the East. Eventually we came down to 8000 ft for the last couple of hours to get out of the strongest headwinds, it's amazing how you can get excited about another 10kts when you are only grounding 120 or so. There was strange weather in Alberta, and very low pressure, with CB's and towering Cu, strong shifting winds and snow showers, and we had to deviate around a nasty looking one to the East of the arrival. It was very busy as usual at that time of the evening and arrivals were planned for Rwy 29 due to the 20-30 kt winds. By the time we were being vectored for the approach I could hear that aircraft were landing on 35L and the winds had now gone around to 340, 20 gusting 30 but they left us on 29 as Twin Otter speeds don't fit in too well with jet traffic. So the trip finished up with a night crosswind landing just for good measure.

So, mission accomplished, final taxi to story, maybe the hangar and shut down, flight time for the day 11.7. I filled a whole sheet with snags for the engineers pleasure. After unloading our gear and securing the aircraft we headed for the hangar and as I walked away I glanced back at the aircraft and I'm sure I saw some pointed ear little chaps tumbling out and scampering across the snow towards the hangar door. Once inside there were a couple of Twin Otters with Papua New Guinea registration being prepared for ferry flights, and I knew I hadn't imagined it. But that's another story, maybe.

Rhys Perraton is a well known character from Biggin Hill and of course the famous 'Surrey & Kent' bar at the end of the flying day. The old bar mysteriously burnt to the ground, the cliental, scattered.

Rhys, now lives in Canada.

The sequel to last month's Arrow Sport article will be published in the March issue:

