



# BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

*News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005*



CLUB AND AIRPORT NEWS

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## MEMORIES OF DON BULLOCK

### An aviator:

### THE FIRST AND THE LAST TIME

Don always seemed to be around. He was there on that memorable day in 1956 when I first walked wide eyed through the gates of Croydon Aerodrome in South London. He was nonchalantly getting out of an open cockpit aeroplane wearing an old World War Two leather flying jacket resplendent with silk scarf. To my eyes he looked the very epitome of what a pilot ought to look like. Another student pilot pointed him out and said "That's Don Bullock, he's very experienced".



Afterwards I would often see him mooching around the aerodrome, usually at weekends when I went out for my flying lessons. Like a lot of us aviation enthusiasts he was part of the aerodrome furniture. Don and I were only on nodding terms at first. After all wasn't he at least a solo student pilot, perhaps even a full blown private pilot? I, on the other hand was a lowly neophyte with only two or three hours in my log book. I knew my place and accorded him

the respect that his lofty status demanded. As my experience grew, Don eventually deigned to speak to me and over time I got to know him fairly well. He was flying with Rex Nicholls pictured left, Experimental Flying Group, on Miles Magisters as they were



(Rex Nicholls left) called in the R.A.F or the Miles Hawk 3 in civilian life. I was learning with Don Pertch and Alan Wilson at Croydon Flying Club/Group flying Tiger Moths. I still have a photograph of Don showing him as a very young man fuelling a Magister aeroplane at one of Experimental's summer camps that they used to go on.

It still surprises me to see it as, at the time, I thought he was quite old. Perhaps even as old as 22.



Later when Croydon closed down and all the clubs moved to the famous Biggin Hill Aerodrome in Kent I got to know Don even better. At a later stage of his life

Don was characterised as having a drink problem and suffering from depression. I have so say that he never presented as a depressive as far as I could detect. As regards a drinking problem, I think that anyone from today looking back at the Biggin Hill culture of the 60's



I would say that we all had a drinking problem! This was the sixties. We were young, indestructible and we were pilots, in my case a flying instructor. Quite a few of the older instructors were ex World War Two fighter and bomber pilots. We were all very much aware that we were flying from the most famous war time fighter airfield in Britain just 15 short years after the end of hostilities. An aviation romantic could still almost hear the roar of Merlin powered Spitfires, open gun ports whistling, as they returned from a Battle of Britain combat sortie over the green fields of Kent. Or at least I could. I'm sure Don could too. We used to park our club Tiger Moths in the old wartime Spitfire blast bays that were still scattered around the aerodrome. War surplus flying jackets, flying boots, flying suits and scarves were de rigueur. We were a wild bunch and many of us were mad keen on aerobatics.

We all used to drink in the Surrey and Kent Flying Club bar and Don would be there with everyone else but he was not a heavy drinker by the standards of the day.



Croydon before it closed with a Percival Proctor on the apron.

We all got older and in 1967 I took a flying job in Africa. First in Kenya and later in Rhodesia and so I lost touch with the Biggin Hill crowd, including Don. A few months after fleeing Rhodesia with my family I returned to Biggin Hill on 21st September 1980 for the annual Battle of Britain flying display. This was my first visit to Biggin Hill since I had left for Africa thirteen years before and I was hoping to bump into some of my old flying buddies from the sixties. The first person I saw was Mark Campbell who arranged for me, my wife and three young children to get into the pilots enclosure near the main runway up near the Westerham Road end. Mark had been a young 16 year old aeroplane re-fueller in my day but was now part of the Biggin Hill Airshow team. Sadly he was to be killed in a Harvard accident at an air show in Malta a few years later. The second person was Don Bullock - now an experienced air show pilot. I seem to remember that he was dressed in an old leather flying jacket but photographs taken immediately prior to his flight show him in flying overalls. One thing is for sure; I certainly remember that he looked quite haggard. Of course we had all aged since the salad days of our youth at Croydon and Biggin Hill but Don looked quite old and grey. I knew Don was on the

program to fly a World War Two twin engine bomber called a Douglas Invader



*(Don, Peter Warren, unknown)*

and as a war bird enthusiast I was hoping that I might score a ride in it during the display. I was reluctant to embarrass myself or him by asking outright for a seat during his display only for him to have to refuse for some reason or another. Instead I took to dropping some pretty unambiguous hints in that direction. I sensed that he was about to offer me a place so plucking up courage I thought I would ask anyway. Just as I was opening my mouth someone came up to us and told Don, quite sharply, to get down to the flight line or he would be late for his air show slot.

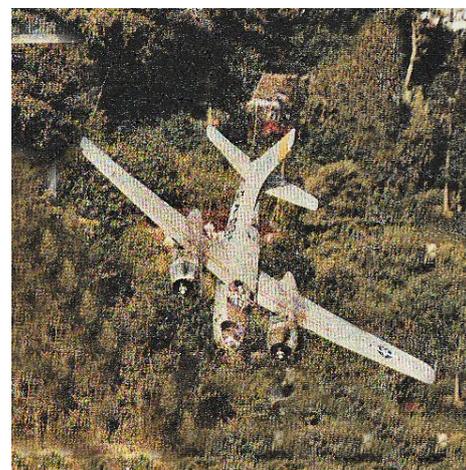
The moment passed and my first flight in an Invader and what would certainly have been my last flight ever, never happened. As Don turned away his last words to me were "See you in the bar this evening Bob". I would have been amongst the last few people to talk to Don. Ten minutes later he was dead. Right before the eyes of me, my wife and three children as he attempted on take off at zot feet, to barrel roll the Douglas heavy bomber. He lost it big time.

I believe that fatigue played a large part in Don's death. During the course of our conversation Don had told me that he had been doing a lot of air show flying on the continent recently and I quote him verbatim when he said, "I'm absolutely dog tired Bob, bugged; I'll be glad when the air show season is over".

Don came in for a lot of criticism

both official and unofficial for his actions on that fateful day. Certainly it was a tragedy for those on board and their families but it must also be remembered that everyone in that aeroplane were there because they wanted to be. Certainly they would all have known that Don was a very spirited air show pilot to say the least, and that air show flying carried and inherent risk. The carriage of passengers during an air show routine was not illegal at the time and more common than most people might think. Should he have attempted a barrel roll at that height? Of course not. But I'm sure that many a pilot will join me in saying that "There but for the grace of God go I!"

Now, the creepy bit. As Don started the fatal barrel roll a TV cameraman standing behind me was taking a video of it. At the very start of the actual rolling part of the barrel I shouted out "Shit he's lost it" and this was recorded on the video. I saw that video on TV quite a few times over the next few days and at the moment that my voice could be heard shouting that Don had lost it. The manoeuvre still appeared to be perfectly under control. voice synchronisation slippage or premonition. I will never know.



Don and six passengers died in a fire ball on that day. It was a close and lucky call for me that it was not seven passengers.

Don Bullock was an aviation enthusiast, a great air show pilot, a

bloody good bloke and a flying friend. I remember the first time I saw him and the last. Living the dream to the end.



Bob Needham  
Wauchope,  
N.S.W.  
Australia  
14<sup>th</sup> April 2013

## & THE EDITORS MEMORIES OF DON...!



Prior to this accident I was drinking with Don in the Swordfish Bar on the Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> September 1980 before departing to Paris to attend a wedding and then continue with a ferry flight to the Middle East with a Maule 235. Don requested that I hang on until after the Air Show as he said it's going to be good show.

Did he mean what he said, or did he have a premonition.

I was certainly surprised on the morning of the 22nd at Corfu airport when I saw the headlines of the local newspaper '**BOMBER CRASHES AT AIR SHOW**'

I phoned Biggin to confirm my worst fears.



Lt Commander Peter Sheppard, Fleet Air Arm with his Sea Fury, and Don Bullock at Biggin Hill.

The many pilots that knew Don flocked to the Swordfish Bar that evening where many tears were shed with lots of alcohol consumed.

More in shock, disbelief, perhaps sheer depression at what had happened this day 21st September 1980.

Meanwhile the editor was now at Corfu en-route to Dubai with a Maule 235.



With this trip I had decided to go via Baghdad despite the fact that Iraq and Iran were threatening to have a shoot up with each other. This confrontation had been going on for the past year or more and nothing had happened.

I had all the necessary clearances and proceeded to the flight planning office at Kerkyra only to be told that the FIR was closed. When I asked why, no one knew

anything. I hung around the airport for a while, enjoyed a very nice breakfast, then walked back to my friendly family 'Hotel Bretagne' which was only \$12 US daily.



This is still a very good hotel today, walking distance from the airport. The price has risen with the times (£54) but discount is available for aircrew

Returning to the airport the next morning I find that the FIR is still closed and when I enquired why, the man in charge said it was probably due to the Iraqi Iranian "fracas" which I had thought wouldn't happen – how wrong could I be.

They asked what my intentions were – I said, "I will go to Cairo". Do you have any clearances for Egypt? to which I replied, No..!

My plan was to pass through Cairo airport because it was a large area, very confusing for those without experience of the primary procedures at this very busy airport.

I had 17 hours endurance and gambled on the fact that I only required a technical landing facility.

I landed at Cairo, acquired the assistance of an airport apron boy who rushed me to the landing office and flight planning short circuiting immigration and customs I was airborne in an hour heading for Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

This is another airport that required infinite knowledge of their system. Nice place, but procedures and protocol must be adhered to.

Having arrived safely I refuel and depart for a hotel downtown.

The following morning I arrived at Jeddah International (*as it was then*) I met a friendly Arab who offered to get me in via the main gate which would save me a mile walk to the workers entrance and where most pilots entered. (*Through which I had exited the airport the day before*)

We failed at this attempt and my new found friend said to me, I am sorry, but "*what do you do with a dry mind*" referring to the guard who could see my aircraft but was adamant I was not going through this gate without a pass – I only had a pass for Dubai which seemed to work most other times I visited Jeddah whilst working in the UAE. He ignored aircraft documents my licence etc; whilst he could see my aircraft, just yards away. So I took the long mile walk to the little gate where a guard sat with his Lee Enfield 303 rifle and he let anyone in provided you had an authoritative presence and saluted.

I now have to walk back a mile toward my aircraft. I proceeded to the landing office to pay my landing fee and hopefully leave without too much fuss. The man started sifting through a pile of paper and when I asked him what he was looking for, he said; Your landing clearance..! I said to him, I haven't a clearance; relax he said, it is my job. After some time it dawned on him I was telling the truth.

Fortunately I knew an Arab Sheikh from Jeddah who owned a Cessna Seneca II which I flew around the Middle East for him and he happened to live in Jeddah. I phoned him up and explained my problem. No problem he says, but I am sleeping now (*time 1130*). Two hours pass, I call him again and he says he is coming. He finally arrives at 1430 and we now proceed to the Police Office

another mile down the airport in his car which he could drive across the airport at his pleasure.

After much socialising and several green coffee's we proceed to my aircraft and I show them the ferry tanks etc; which I had filled on arrival without question, thereby short circuiting what could have been another lengthy procedure.

I ended up leaving Jeddah at 1730 and arriving at Dubai at 02.00 hrs suffering an electrical failure.

I had been planning to meet two French Pilots at Baghdad and due to the hostilities between Iraq and Iran I now had no idea where they were.

The next morning I received a phone call – they were in Dubai looking for me because they were coming from Karachi and had to divert like I did.



Maurice Sereé et Francois Cuvielle at Jebel Ali Beach, Dubai.

They asked how I managed to get this far without clearances, and could they do a similar thing, to which I said, 'they will be waiting for you.'

We spent three days together on the beach at Dubai before they received a clearance for Bahrain and another two days before getting their final clearances for their journey back to Aerospatiale. During our association with Aerospatiale we spent 20 years travelling together throughout Africa enjoying some wonderful

times together, making many friends which were essential in this vast country where these remote pioneers seemed to appear from nowhere. They also knew the best bars and restaurants. To entertain lonely pilots in this wilderness.



Downtown Dubai – today Dubai is twice the size and still a good place for an absolute sunshine holiday.

Or better still, to be able to wake up every morning where everything is still warm from yesterday.

### **D.B's FLYING ADVENTURES**

Don Bullock started his aviation adventures at an early age when Croydon was the Airport of the day with direct access to London (*30 minutes*) by road in those days. Flying was a real advantage and travel to distant places not that far away for Don and this was to be the beginnings of his aviation travels. (*pic's from Don's album*)



He and his co-pilot hired an aircraft from the Experimental Flying

Group for an adventurous journey to the top of the British Isles via Newcastle, Edinburgh, Inverness and Orkney. One day they flew over Shetland and “looped the loop” over Lerwick for the Regatta crowds gathered below.



article. How many of you remember this early 3 wheel self propelled fuel bowser outside the old civil tower at Biggin Hill.



The White Nile originates in Uganda and flows north toward to Cairo and the Nile Delta.



A fantastic picture from Don's album taken at Richmond Park, perhaps he should have pursued a photographic career at this moment in time.

### BREAKFAST IN UGANDA



Don is pictured far right.



Merchison Falls on the White Nile, Uganda, through the lens of Don's camera. *(In colour...!!)*



A Percival Prentice receives some maintenance outside the old Surrey & Kent Bar, the first social bar for the flying clubs.



Whilst a large crocodile suns himself on the river bank before his breakfast until he warms up enough to make an effort to eat.



With ITV film crew during the Hutu and Tutsi revolt, between Rwanda and Burundi.

Closed on Monday's, everyone congregated at the Kings Arms, Leaves Green.

Some took leave of this moment in time to visit the cinema with this free time. TV being in its infancy.

Don with his team were told to leave immediately for their safety.



Don would go on to fly many different types of aircraft to far away places.

Quality cameras weren't an important item in his adventures he made up an album with some interesting pictures featured in this



Flying around Uganda is the only way to travel, where roads are rare.



A picture taken from the cockpit, at Southend, during the Carvair days when it was possible to fly your car to Le Touquet.

The Cross Channel Ferry Boats put paid to this idea because their carrying capacity was far greater.

Uganda is a large state within the large continent of Africa where communication was rather remote in these early days and fuel supplies were another desperate commodity and fiercely guarded.



Back to the bar for a well earned drink and some new ideas.



A real Coconut drink no alcohol.



With a Bristol Freighter bound for Canada – looks rather cold.



Cabin heating was not a priority in the Bristol Freighter hence a thick jacket was the order of the day. The freight bay below had no heating at all as the aircraft was not a long haul machine.



When the weather was bad at Biggin Hill, a little bit of clay pigeon shooting would be the order of the day over at the rubbish dump.

L-R: Don Bullock and Mike Shorno, other two unknown.



Don ferried quite a few of the Handley Page Jet Streams to the Sates during the winter months.



Landing at Narsarsuaq, Greenland where the safety altitude above this airfield is FL60 and straight ahead rising to FL100.



Future flight planning to Australia



ferrying Britten Norman Islanders.



Re-fuelling by hand in the far east.



Don, flying the B26 Invader



Don's travels around the world are depicted on this map.

### JACK WIEGAND AT BIGGIN



Jack a 20 year old pilot from Fresno USA passed through Biggin Hill on the weekend 11/12 May on his quest to be the youngest solo pilot flight around the world in his Mooney Ovation.

He plans to visit 14 countries on his record breaking journey. Hopefully this flight could inspire others to follow in his footsteps.

## THE DAY UEFA CAME TO TOWN

The weekend of 25<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> May saw an invasion of medium and large corporate jets to Biggin Hill Airport. The UEFA Champions League Final at Wembley Stadium between Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich on the evening of Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> May brought out the big money.

Biggin Hill Airport did what it does best – and showed how it is not intimidated at all by such traffic and appeared to cope admirably. Very impressive line out..



Runway 29/11 (29 threshold and Southeast Apron)



Runway 29/11 (Western end with Rizon hangar behind)



Runway 11/29 (viewed from short final to 03)