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THE RED ARROWS RETURN TO BIGGIN HILL ON 14th JUNE FOR 'FESTIVAL OF FLIGHT'



Flash back to 12th May 2005 when the Red Arrows celebrated their 40 years of displays at Biggin Hill. Some local school children were invited to this special occasion and were able to talk with a Careers Officer of the Royal Air Force, and the Princess Royal, Princess Anne, who flew in to cut the birthday cake for the Red Arrows.



This 'Festival of Flight' promises to be a spectacular event, unlike the old days of the very large air shows when traffic build up was horrendous taking hours to gain entry to the airfield.

'Festival of Flight' promises to be as exciting in a more controlled environment and plenty of interesting ground events to see and enjoy.



FLYING TO JOHANNESBURG

A delivery of five 235E Rallye aircraft to Lanseria, in South Africa from Tarbes in Southern France.



This was to be a leisurely affair showing the product en-route. We were five pilots and one technician, Our first destination was to be Cannes to clear customs before continuing to Corfu in Greece. Having passed Marseille we heard over the radio that Genevieve our lady pilot had diverted to Marseille with a broken canopy..?



With that we all piled into Marseille as we could possibly be stranded here for the night.

The cause of this incident seems to have been caused by a loose suitcase which slid during some turbulence down the inner side of the Perspex, pushing the panel out.

Capt Dufour discusses the problem with Genevieve Gilbert, as to our plan of action.



Fortunately for us there was a Socata Service agent at Marseille who agreed to fit a matching canopy from a new aircraft, which would be replaced by the factory at Tarbes.

We arrive at Cannes (Mandelieu), two aircraft are visible overhead the airfield, the second is over the far end of the short runway, can you spot it?

CAPT JACQUES DUFOUR



With his aircraft at Cannes,



On finals at Kerkyra (Corfu), our hotel is the large building far right. Our flying time for today was 8 hours since leaving Tarbes, which wasn't too bad considering our small hiccup with a canopy.

The next morning we head for Crete (Heraklion) 346nm for a fuel stop and a welcome break.



Cairo is another 446 nm which should make a comfortable day's flying arriving just after midday.

We have also been invited to the French Embassy in Cairo

On the apron at Heraklion, with Genevieve Gilbert, Jean Claude Ettiienne, and John Bryan the editor waiting for the fuel man.

There is no rush as we are well ahead of today's schedule.



After departing from Crete we climbed across the mountainous terrain and headed across the Mediterranean toward Egypt which became very hazy with no horizon.

We didn't see very much until the Pyramids at Gizza appeared out of the haze as we approached Cairo airport.



Visibility got better the lower we descended toward the airport.



This is a place to be avoided these days as it is a large space with the various departments that one has to visit are scattered all over the place.

An airport apron boy is the only option to guide you around the large terminal building.

Having re-fuelled the aircraft and tied them down we hired a couple of taxi's to take us to the French Embassy in Cairo.

We climbed the dark dingy stairs of the Embassy and were invited inside, shortly afterwards there was a knock at the door and there stood our two taxi drivers sweating profusely, having carried all our baggage up the dark stairway. There seemed to be a slight misunderstanding as we had told them to wait for us. They thought we were staying at the Embassy, and now they have to carry the bags back down the dark and rather hot stairwell.



The rear balcony of the French Embassy showing a roof barbecue across the street,



Also visible from the embassy was the Sheraton Hotel our abode for the night.



Departing Cairo next morning was a lengthy procedure, with each department inspecting every document over and over.

The only good thing appeared to be the weather, it looked wonderful. We weren't allowed below FL120,

on the way to Luxor. The visibility at this level was bad haze again with no horizon. We saw nothing until descent into Luxor.



Luxor, on the Nile from our Hotel.



This is the Novotel one of the new hotels at Luxor, the other famous one was the Great Western just down the road in the old part of Luxor. It wasn't air conditioned.

Leaving Luxor we headed south into Sudan with our destination being Khartoum some 415 nm into the interior.



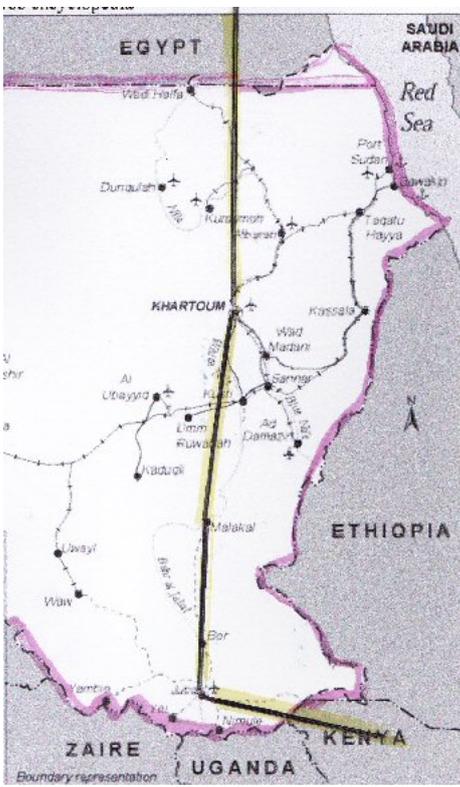
We arrived at Khartoum in hazy conditions with some incredible jabber on the radio in a high pitched voice of a Sudanese pilot flying a Mirage at very high speed saying he can't see the airport.

ATC asked us to remain clear until they got him on the ground.

He careered past us in a high bank angle and disappeared into the haze.

We never did see where he went after that and he didn't seem to be on the ground when we got there.

A bit scary to have a loose cannon in a machine like a Mirage, at full chat and not aware of his position.



Whilst vast tracks of land over Africa appears flat there are several hills protruding out of the ground rising to 900 feet or more, beware!



We had a bit of a problem finding a hotel, until we stumbled upon some BA aircrew who told us about their hotel with some pre-booked rooms which wouldn't be needed until the next afternoon and we would be long gone. The hotel allowed our request as we were pilots and knew the rules.

We were gone early in the morning heading south toward Malakal for a fuel stop.



On arrival at Malakal we met three other ferry pilots heading for Nairobi, with three Cessna 150's.

We learned later that one of them taxied into the hangar with his wing on arrival. How about that..! Leaving Malakal Genevieve does a low level over the swamp lands of Southern Sudan.



We are now approaching Juba, a place of which a BBC Journalist said, 'If the earth convulsed, not one ripple would be felt here'. If you ever happen to visit Juba, you will understand what he intended, to put across.



Juba airport, we arrive in a rather heavy shower which appeared out of nowhere with visions of being thoroughly soaked. By the time we had taxied to our parking spots it was totally dry. That's the heat of Africa.



Ground Crew at Juba with his waterproofs, doesn't let the rain stop his parking duties.

Juba has an old railway which ended here at the bottom of Sudan. Our hotel would be the old disbanded railway station.

Genevieve walked in, was greeted by some Frenchman and promptly disappeared with him, saying nothing about her / their return.

We could only hope she returned in the morning.



We departed Juba the next day with some relief, our destination today is Nairobi Wilson.

As we got nearer to Nairobi with high humidity some massive Cu Nim's developed and from a loose formation it seemed everyone was closing on me.



I had suddenly become their leader.



Relaxing by the pool at our very nice hotel near Nairobi Socata ferry crew:

Francois Montel, Francis Cuville.
Jean Claude Ettienne, Genevieve
Gilbert, Jacques Dufour, John
Bryan.



The Jomo Kenyatta building with Francois Montel in Nairobi.

We are at Nairobi Wilson early for our departure to Karonga in Malawi (The Heart of Africa). There are some serious hills rising up to 12,000ft as we head South.



Filing our flight plans we are ready to go fly.

This airfield is 6,000 ft a.m.s.l. and there is further high ground up to 9,000 ft in this area.

This is a very busy airport in Africa, being in the centre of the country where there are few roads and most people are traveling to Safari Parks with supplies to support all the staff in those areas.



Flying out of Nairobi shows the height of the ground nearby rising to 9,000 ft and caution is needed when departing in bad weather.



Karonga is in the north of Malawi. Blantyre is in the south.

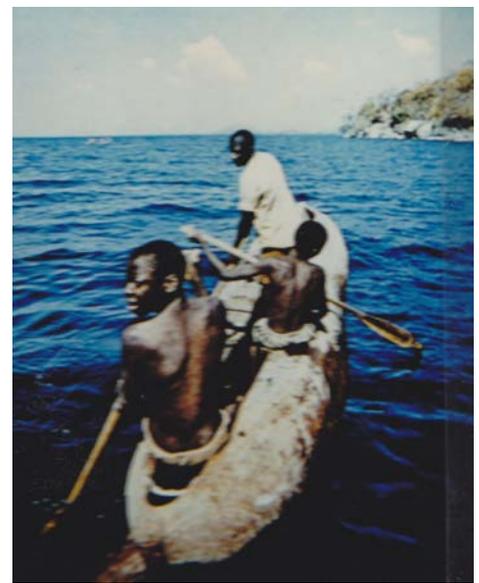


We eventually arrive at Karonga for a re-fuelling stop.

This is all done by hand pump and chamois leathers to filter out any impurities. Karonga is 1,762 feet a.m.s.l.



From here we will fly down the Western shoreline of Lake Malawi to Blantyre which is as far south in Malawi we can go, near the border of Mozambique, which is a bit unsettled at the moment.



Many fisherman can be seen on Lake Malawi.



Downwind, at Blantyre. Malawi.



Blantyre airfield, nice place with a good hotel and a hire car, with instructions to pull off the road if the Presidents entourage is seen coming in your direction.

Tomorrow we are making a technical stop at Beira, Mozambique as it is still somewhat unsettled in this country for the moment and remained uncertain for several years to come.



Beira airport, Mozambique we only stopped for customs clearance across their country.

Montel was our representative and he approached alone with all our documents and reappeared soon after. A successful mission.



One of the group follows me in the climbout, visible near my tailplane.

It isn't long before we are over South African territory en-route to Johannesburg.

All too soon we are flying over Johannesburg and will shortly land at Lanseria and park neatly outside Jarlin Aviation.



We are greeted by Mike Heaton and Eric Hipwell, Biggin hill-ites who now live and work in Johannesburg.

Three of us returned the next day to remove the ferry tanks whilst three had departed for France. We would depart the next day also.

