



# BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

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



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## SUEZ HERO CAPTURED

An old soldier from the 1956 Suez crisis disgraced himself recently following a flight to Caen by the graciousness of two pilot chappies from Biggin Hill. This old soldier was keen to see the famous 'Pegasus Bridge' the scene of bitter fighting during the 'D day' landings in 1944. He was advised not to go wandering off alone, but stay with a group, as the area is still somewhat sensitive. Ignoring this sound advice, he wandered off and was soon rounded up by a Yank..!! Albeit a plastic model, representing the invasion period at Pegasus Bridge during the invasion of 1944.



"Hands up Limey, or I'll drill ya".  
"Hey, I'm on your side Yank", explaining, that he fought at Suez in 1956. "JB the editor can vouch for me, he was approaching from Suez and I was at Port Said". "Sorry mate you had me totally confused. I didn't know there was another war going on". The Yank wandered off down the road shaking his head in total bewilderment to this strange place called Suez. "Where the heck is that" he muttered to himself as he walked up the road toward the bridge, only to find, it had been captured by a British Airborne Division sometime before his

arrival. They had landed their Hauser Gliders within a few yards, which can be seen across the canal. He was still muttering and mumbling – as he arrived at the bridge. "Goddam Limey's, dressed as civilians, we'll be fighting terrorists next..!!"



Look at those, Limey's in their Bedford trucks driving on the wrong side of the road, someone's gonna have a real nasty accident..!! Whilst these two stories appear to be far fetched they are nevertheless half true

## SKY WATCH continued.....

**Introduction:** A unique volunteer resource, Sky Watch Civil Air Patrol (SWCAP) was initially set up in Yorkshire in 2000 and has since become the largest voluntary air observation service in Europe operating a fleet of over 200 aircraft, including helicopters and autogyros. Pilots donate their aircraft and time free of charge. SWCAP is not an emergency service, and confines itself to the role of aerial observation and photography. All aircraft are maintained to Civil Aviation Authority agreed standards, and are insured to carry

passengers and for third party liability.

The service works with the emergency services, local and regional government bodies, recognised voluntary organizations and community groups.

Sky Watch Civil Air Patrol is Registered as a Charity with the Charity Commission for England & Wales. Registration No. 1113079



These are some of the services that Sky Watch assist in their volunteer role; Police, Ambulance, Mountain Rescue, & Life Boat Rescue



Services, providing valuable back up information. These volunteer personnel provide a valuable service to the counties they serve. A variety of aviation machines are utilised in this unique volunteer service without recompense. If anyone is able to offer their services or aviation assistance please contact: 01905 429694 or [skywatchapsec@btinternet.com](mailto:skywatchapsec@btinternet.com)

## A PHOTOGRAPHIC MISSION

*(story submitted by old Biggin Hill'ite – names removed to protect those involved)*

“I want some shots of aerobatics in the Alps. An RF5 and the Milan will do fine. We'll base the operation at Sion. ‘B’, can you and ‘J’ get the aircraft there for me” says ‘M’. We were soon on our way to Sion. (seen below)



The Milan is a long winged version of the RF4 using the wings of the SE27 glider on an almost standard RF4 fuselage. The RF5 was Papa Foxtrot, the original RF5 prototype that Sportair had bought from the factory. Having left Biggin in the morning we had a pleasant uneventful trip to Macon where we refueled and had a bite to eat. Geneva was to be our entry point in Switzerland, and Macon is conveniently located just the other side of the French Alps.

The weather at Geneva was excellent with only broken cloud and good visibility. The part in between was difficult to determine, so with full tanks we decide to do a reccé and make our decisions en route. I was lead aircraft but we maintained VHF contact so we could share our opinions and check on each others status. As we headed East the ground rose to meet the lowering cloud base and at one point we discovered that our retreat to Macon was blocked. Vertical visibility was still good, so we climbed until we were able to see clear skies to the East. “Let’s head East and get to the clear weather. We can always turn back to Macon if necessary” I suggested to ‘J’ who was formatting close on my Port side. “OK, I’ll keep in close, looks like we might have to go through some cloud” he replied. We were flying at 10,000ft. There is some cumulo granitus up above 7,000ft on our route. The cloud that

soon confronted us, went way above our altitude so flying over it was no option. “Let’s give it a try, it can’t be far to the other side” I suggested to ‘J’. “Roger” came his reply, so in we went. Both aircraft were equipped marginally for instrument flying, so that was OK. Just a minute later I said, “I’m icing up and losing contact with you”, followed by a similar call from my wingman, “I’m icing up too”. “You do a 180 to Port and I’ll go to Starboard. See you later”.

Now airframe icing on a Founier is definitely not comfortable! Within a minute visibility through the canopy was almost nil and the airspeed indicator stopped working. After the 180 degree turn I expected to be out of cloud in a very short time. Not so, and to make matters worse and more tense, I received an almost panicky call from my pilot colleague that his instruments had packed up and he was in a spin! My RF5 was, mercifully, still flying straight and level but the compass, turn and slip, engine revs and feel were the only confirmation of this. Suddenly, I was out of cloud with a green valley beneath. My relief was doubled when I got a call from ‘J’ saying that he too was in the clear. Like me, still iced up but clearing rapidly. He even suggested gliding inverted to de-ice the underside and pitot quicker! I don’t think he resorted to this. Our plan was to return to Macon and that obviously meant flying West. The cloud was low over the ridge on the Western side of the valley and I made a couple of attempts to fly over it. Each time the downdraft was greater than my rate of climb, so I gave up that idea!

I was still uncertain of my exact position but some map reading plus some basic calculations put me in the valley that would lead me to Geneva. The wind was a lot stronger than forecast and then I realised what had happened to us. We had flown into a lenticular cloud and at that altitude the wind

was probably around 70 knots.



The cloud is stationary in relation to the ground. We had flown into it at, say, our airspeed plus 70 knots, but tried to fly out of it at our airspeed minus 70 knots. Fortunately the angles meant that we were literally blown sideways across the Alps! ‘J’ came to exactly the same navigational conclusion and, as I was landing at Geneva, I heard him calling for landing instructions. We were both lucky to have escaped with our lives.

Moral of the story...Don’t fly light aeroplanes over the mountains in anything but CAVOK conditions..!



### **Lenticular cloud or Wave cloud**

usually consists of moist air which has been lifted becoming visible. Whilst it remains relatively stationary with the ground there are often high standing waves associated within its vicinity. Glider pilots will seek these out for their strong wave lift, whereas powered aircraft avoid them. Although it is possible to pick up a high ground speed on a long ferry flight, provided you are on the correct side of the associated wind direction. These moving air masses can produce severe rotor winds as they come into contact with air mass below that are held back by ground friction. These ‘Lennies’ form anywhere within a large moving air mass.



## AIRFIELD PERSONALITIES



**Bob Needham**, old 'Biggin Hillite', one of the earliest invaders from Croydon in 1959, now resides in Australia at Wauchope, NSW.

His chequered career is reported here in lurid, if not lucid detail. Read on....

As reported in the September issue Bob had a slight incident with a low flying machine which replaced this story for a month.. Bob started flying in 1955 at RAF Hawkinge with the ATC. He went solo in a Kirby Cadet Mk3 glider after just 57 minutes of dual training from scratch. Those ATC Instructors were brave fellows says Bob. He never got over the shock of being sent aloft alone and has struggled for the last 54 years to come to the conclusion, that he must have been a genius. (*Actually the controls of these gliders were limited like a kiddies Balsa Wood Kit and would land quite safely every time*).

So there you have it, the true beginning of this life history..!

1956, Bob started power flying in Tiger Moths with the Croydon Flying Club with George Stewart, Alan Wilson, Don Perch etc;

1959 he arrived at Biggin Hill with everyone else from Croydon FC which was renamed Biggin Hill Flying Club. He would complete his Flying Instructors course with the late 'Bunny Bramson' and continued instructing with County Flying Club owned by Mick Ronayne. He also instructed for Moon Pacer Flying Club which

operated a Mooney, courtesy of Rod Forward and Dennis Andrews. Domiciles whilst at Biggin Hill consisted of his car, parked in the car park, various aeroplanes, a flat in Bromley shared with a couple of birds (ladies), a back room at County FC, also Alouette FC, where he inserted an electric fire into his sleeping bag on a very cold winters night. Yes, you have guessed it – the whole thing caught fire, and but for the quick thinking of Terry Leake, who happened to be sharing the abode on this winter's night (sounds like a fable from Charles Dickens) he would have been totally frazzled. For a while they resided in the old Surrey & Kent Bar (as night watchmen..!!) S&K became a bit suspicious of their rising electricity bill so they vacated to a rented house toward the Westerham end of Biggin Hill village, with various aviation types of the time. Bob would have two crashes at Biggin. One was an engine failure in Vendair's (another flying club of the day) Auster XP with Clive 'Eyebrows' Border on board as his student. Clive was known for his extremely bushy eyebrows, and his "hut, hut" characteristic laughter. They finished up in a muddy field in Essex, upside down.



**Clive is pictured far right.** He too left Biggin Hill (*and JB, the editor, would meet Clive in the UAE some years later at Ras Al Kaimah.*) Bob's second was in an Aeronca 7AC on the short runway at Biggin. The student pulled hard back on the stick just after lift-off, to Bob's total surprise. The aircraft promptly stalled and spun in from about sixty feet, and was a write off although neither suffered a single

scratch. **"If you can't be skilful, at least try to be lucky"** became his Motto"



**Instructing days at Biggin Hill** (in the 60's with an unknown student who obviously wishes to remain anonymous, or was just petrified.) May 1967 saw Bob doing a beat up of the airfield at the end of flying in the Tiger Moth, scraping a wing tip along the ground as he flew between the hangar and S&K bar. (*the editor witnessed this event*) This was fortunately immediately prior to his departure for an instructing job at Nakuru Aero Club in Kenya! He also did crop spraying in Kenya with Cessna 185's and Agwagon's from small strips 9,000ft AMSL at temperatures of 30C (our readers can calculate the density altitude).



**A typical load for a C185** a Lister Generator, a solid lump of metal, loaded where the passenger seat is normally fitted. Flown with the door off because the flywheel didn't quite fit inside. Whilst working in Kenya, he ferried a Turbo Porter from Switzerland to Nairobi. His last job in Kenya was flying for an American oil exploration company flying the Gas Turbine Pilatus Porter transporting dynamite and detonators (never the two together) out to very small strips near the Somalia border. He also gained a wife and daughter whilst in Kenya. March 1971 saw another move



within Africa, this time to Rhodesia, thinking that nice Mr Smith would win the elections and things would be rosy. However, undeterred he started the Matabeleland Flying School and charter flying in Bulawayo. with his Phoebe, his wife. Whilst in Rhodesia he fought a terrorist war with Mr Magabe and his mates. Magabe came first and Bob came second. He claims Magabe was supported by the UK, America, the UN and that swine Malcom Fraser, of Australia.

All males in Rhodesia at this time were press ganged into part time military call up. In Bob's age group, this required 70 days, to be done in two week stints. Fortunately he was able to do his by flying with the Police Air Wing. Nearing the end of his time in Rhodesia, the roads out of Bulawayo were being mined and cars and farms nearby were being ambushed and confiscated. Hardly a day went by without civilian and military losses.

For eight years Bob and his wife Phoebe carried side arms and were never too far from other automatic weapons. Even their children were able to load a magazine with bullets and were taught what to do in case of an ambush.



The above news paper picture shows Bob (2<sup>nd</sup> from right) with some colleagues from the Police Reserve Air Wing (PRAW as it was known). Bob said there was only one Air Wing, and they were it. Bob became the flight standards officer for the Matabeleland Province. It was soon after this period of his flying career, that the political situation became frustrating, and extremely worrying because those who had a brain could see the writing on the wall, and became concerned for their own immediate safety and financial

security. Bob and Phoebe had six aeroplanes, a house, all paid up, a half share in an aircraft engineering business, and a fuel agency at the main airport. Life had been good while it lasted in Rhodesia – good country about to be ruined by a sub standard gorilla. Rather than wait to see what this Magabe had already decided – they, like many others would leave Rhodesia. All the members of the Police Air Wing were placed on a the black list and Bob and his family weren't waiting for the final outcome.

28<sup>th</sup> February 1980 they all left for the UK – Whilst in the UK, scratching his head, and wondering what to do, he came up with a brilliant idea of emigrating to Australia. The Aussie Embassy staff at Australia House in the Aldwych took one look at him and rejected him flat, saying they didn't need pilots. He found out later, they needed plumbers. He returned to Australia House claiming to be a plumber, as well as a pilot. Ample qualifications! With some forged plumbing documents in a small folder he was thwarted by the fact that he would be required to do a practical trade test in the basement of Australia House. Aah!! never thought of that one.

In the end it was his wife Phoebe Ann who would become the immigrant as a qualified shorthand typist and Bob would trail along as a dependent with the kids. Prior to setting course to Australia he



visited Biggin Hill for the Battle of Britain show and spoke to Don Bullock prior to the fatal crash (21<sup>st</sup> Sept 1980). He was about to ask

him for a ride in the B26, but Don was called forward, before he had plucked up the courage to ask for a ride. Once again, the “**better to be lucky than skilful**” motto, saved his neck.

Finally the Needhams departed for Australia to ‘Botany Bay’, a land of golden sunshine where the streets were paved with gold etc., etc. They would start the Port Macquarie Flying School in NSW. Hardly gold plating, but he was back doing what he did best.

However, we at the Bugle, know



all, with this report of another incident in his chequered aviation career when the landing gear of this Cessna 210 failed to lower. He may have luck on his side, but nothing is secret in the world of aviation.

Bob returned for a visit to the UK in 2001 wearing his now famous lucky blue scarf (never washed or ironed since purchase, 49 years ago). Unfortunately he didn't have it in his charge recently when he had an altercation with a land based vehicle as he was crossing the road, ending up with a broken leg.



He then returned in 2003 dragging along another Biggin Hillite, Terry Leake an old BHFC member who migrated to Australia years ago..!





**Bob, Terry, JB** (the Bugle's editor), another Instructor Examiner who migrated to the UK in 1956. JB has travelled in all directions world-wide from this famous Biggin Hill base. This place is central to most places allied to flying. The rest of the world is just over the airfield boundary fence. 2006 – Bob invades Biggin Hill yet again. (Does he have no respect for our privacy.!) (Sorry Bob, had to get that one in).



**Bob after a flight** around the South East of England with John Willis in his PA39



Bob has another hidden talent, he is a talented artist, this canvas was painted at Castle Coombe, Wilts.



Give him a pencil and he will produce a perfect black and white picture with infinite detail. The

sketch of the Old Jail shows it has changed little over the years although the traffic has increased compared to this quite scene some 40 years ago.

The Needham family are skilful fliers. Their son Anson is a Qantas Pilot on Boeing 767's and a Lieutenant Commander in the Australian Navy Reserve flying Twin Squirrels on his time off. Their youngest daughter Imogen is an Air Bus 330 pilot flying for Qantas, whilst the eldest daughter Tana is a Lieutenant Commander in the Australian Navy (serving on the USS Nimitz – nuclear powered aircraft carrier during an exchange visit) is also a Ships Pilot. (Slightly different, but a pilot nevertheless) Bob's wife Phoebe is also a pilot and loves aerobatics. Finally, the Bugle can reveal that Magabe, the gorilla from Zimbabwe wants Bob registered as a 'Stateless Person' because Bob abandoned the cause, whilst he, Magabe, was trying to coin in all the money that was meant for the economy of Zimbabwe, Bob with his family were forced to leave Zimbabwe. Magabe got the planes and the bed linen.! Bob now lives quietly in this remote area of Australia hidden behind some natural grown foliage. Bob doesn't do gardening! Magabe the Gorilla won't be granted a visas to visit Australia, that's for sure. The foliage will obliterate the area in a short while just the way the bush reclaimed Rhodesia. Bob therefore may remain Stateless and secure, this address being erased from the records of the Land Registry.



*Those wishing to get in touch with Bob, please contact the editor of The Bugle..!! He knows everything, and nothing is secret..!*

## THE DANGERS OF FLYING

Decide for yourself some of the risks involved.

Some research has shown that if you fly with the **top 25 airlines more than once**, your chance of survival is **1:8.47** per million passengers carried.

If you fly with the **top 25 airlines just once**, your chances of survival is improved to **1:1.7** per million passengers carried.

By coincidence if you fly with the **bottom top 25 airlines more than once**, your chance of survival is slightly better at **1:8.3** per million passengers carried.

Now if you chose to fly with the **bottom 25 airlines just once**, your survival rate improves further to **1:1.3** per million passengers carried.

The answer appears to be; to book your holiday flight with the lowest rated airline and fly with them only once. This way you should have the very best chance of a successful flight without too much stress.

## FATALITIES PER MILLION FLIGHT HOURS:

Schedule airlines the rate is **4.03**  
 Commuter airlines the rate is **10.74**  
 Air taxi airlines the rate is **12.24**  
 General aviation the rate is **22.43**  
 It would appear that the schedule airliners that have had accidents are still a good risk, but you shouldn't book your holiday with them, far too risky, and GA a definite no, no.

There are in fact 99 schedule airlines operating World Wide which haven't had a single accident and therefore of course no fatalities. Where are the travel agents for these airlines? Siberia, Outer Mongolia, South America, Central Africa, Myanmar, Car Nicobar Islands..??

Bit far away you say! If you want 100% safety, then you must make the effort to find your travel agent.