



# BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

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



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## PILOTS OF THE USA MAIL

These pilots were the forerunners of a pioneering mail service across the USA from coast to coast. How did they navigate across this vast country with almost six time zones within 24 hours (e.g. every 500nm = 30mins) considering their early flying times were in the region of 27 hours one way? Re-fuelling and rest periods would account for some extra time.

How long did it take the Pony Express? With little clouds of dust behind them as the ponies hooves pounded the dry ground ever bent on delivering the mail on time..! The rider knew every canyon and pass en-route and had no trouble navigating across the open prairie, even the pony seemed to know when to turn left or right, able to maintain an almost constant track heading to the mail depot. With their feet firmly on the ground, at all times. The telegraph system would be the demise of the pony express.

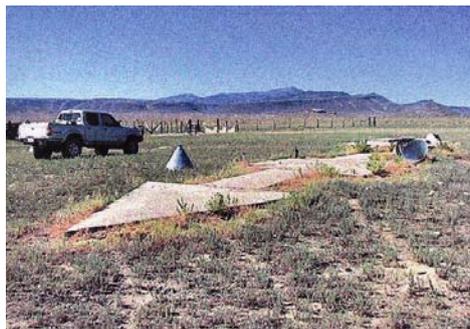
Then come the airplane, with their Barnstorming Pilots looking for new ways to fly, and so the air mail service began overtaking the pony express and the telegraph system.



Every so often, usually in the vast deserts of the American South West a backpacker or hiker will still stumble across some strange looking objects – a large arrow made of concrete about 70 feet long, painted yellow in the middle of nowhere.



What are these strange arrows? Are they some kind of landing aid for Flying Saucers or some form of landing aids for alien craft!

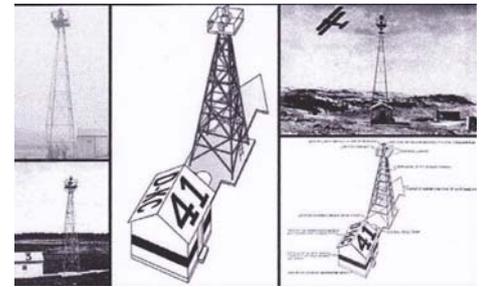


No..! These were the earliest form of navigation aids for the Transcontinental Air Mail Route across America from coast to coast. Even the dumbest of pilots should be able to follow these giant arrows just ten miles apart provided they could maintain a simple course, for the next ten miles...!

August 20<sup>th</sup> 1920 the USA opened the first coast to coast air mail delivery services Trans Continental

Air Mail Route, some 60 years after the 'Pony Express' closed shop.

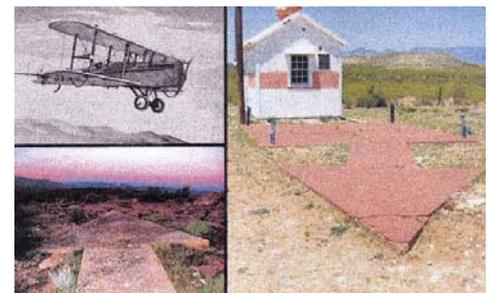
There were no aviation maps in those early days, so pilots had to eyeball their way using these land marks, flying in bad weather was difficult enough and flying at night almost impossible.



The Post Office system solved this problem by installing a series of Beacons every ten miles where pilots would pass a visible sign in the form of a large yellow arrow on the ground located with a 50 foot steel tower atop of which was a 1:000,000 candle power rotating beacon.

Now the dumbest of pilots it seemed, could not get lost with this magnificent array of navigation aids.

It had taken 9 years to complete this coast to coast navigation aid.



With the coming of Radar and other sophisticated methods of navigation in 1940 the steel towers would be torn down and melted

down for the war effort.



Is this daring mail pilot wearing a parachute? I thought they stayed with the mail, no matter what..!



10 cent Lindburgh postage stamp.

## AIRFIELD PERSONALITIES



### **BOB DENWOOD:**

A character who has been around Biggin Hill since the early 60's has a few stories to tell.

One such story is the ferry flight of 5 DC3's from Uganda in 1976 to Tel Aviv, Israel.

The politics in those days toward

Israel was tenuous, in that it was essential not to have an Israeli stamp or visa resembling any form of connection with this country in ones passport.

Furthermore it was essential not to make the slightest hint the final destination was Israel, but Cyprus.

Following a request for a quote for the flight, this was initially rejected which is not uncommon as the owner / agents never seem to understand the difficulties of flight planning and aggravation across these African states of political unrest and also raising the necessary currencies for buying fuel, hotels and bribes which go hand in hand.

Suddenly the trip is off because the agent / owner complains of the expense.

After a week or more the Ferry Company quote is accepted and, being one of the ferry co-pilots, Bob is detailed to sort out flight planning, sharing out finances between the aircraft so they can be independent lest problems arise.

Departure for Entebbe began with a short journey to Heathrow whence the 5 captains with 5 co-pilots boarded a 707 – Uganda bound.



Next morning Bob chooses his aircraft for the journey north.



It is a wonder they didn't get arrested for taking pictures on the apron of these soon to be ex-Ugandan aircraft.



Idi Amin used to train parachutists with these aircraft..!

Later on Idi Amin sent 8 women to Oxford for training to be his personal pilots, not one made the grade and returned to Uganda.

Climbing into our aircraft we found some spares plus a spare engine just sitting on a palette.

We questioned the safety of this heavy item should it move as it wasn't tied down.

The ground crew said they didn't have any rope, whereupon we informed them to take it off the aircraft as we would not fly unless it was firmly tied down.

The thought of having to lift this heavy object prompted them to search harder and they soon returned with some substantial hemp rope, anything loose was firmly secured and the pilots were happy.

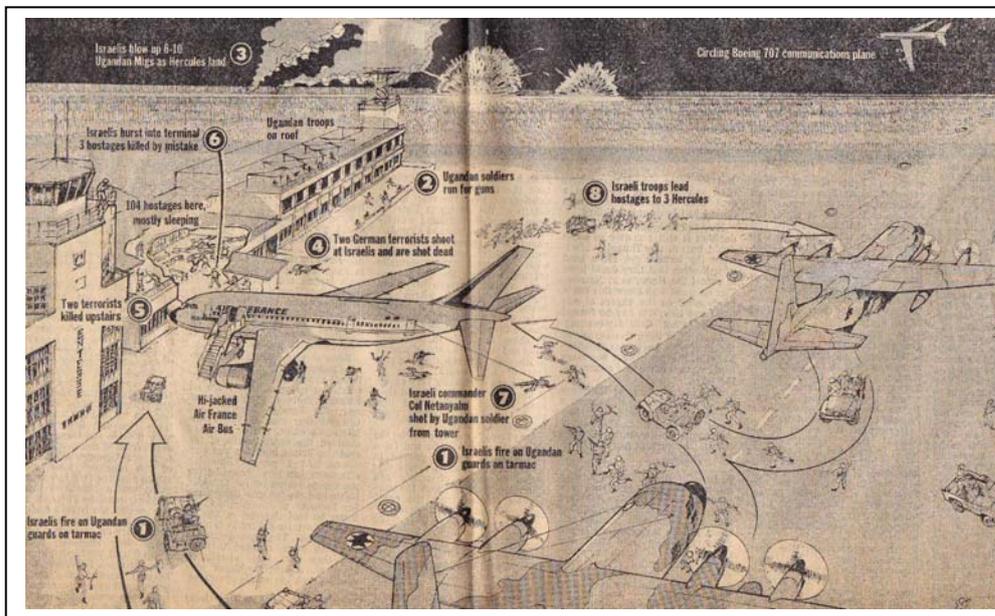
Whilst all this was happening we bumped into some Ugandan pilots who flew the Russian MIG's at the airfield and we asked if there was a chance of a quick circuit in one of these....!!

Finally our paper work was stamped by a Ugandan Colonel releasing the aircraft to our care.

We started all ten engines and roared off skyward, setting course due north for Khartoum, Sudan.

Little did these Ugandans know that in a couple of weeks the Israeli's would carry out a daring raid at Entebbe to rescue hostages being held in the old Terminal building in the middle of the night. The raid lasted just 53 minutes in the hours of darkness.

The soldiers stormed the airport building and shouted in Hebrew to sit down - those left standing were the terrorists and promptly shot dead. The hostages were released.



How many remember this exciting event carried out on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1976 against Idi Amin and his terrorist army, they never knew what hit them. Luckily we were long gone otherwise our aircraft (DC3's) may have been destroyed...!!



The tyrant of Uganda, Idi Amin, who did nothing for his country or its people (who became his enemy)

Meanwhile our story continues as we fly northbound. Having taken off line astern we formed up into a vic formation over lake Victoria. The rolling lush green hills gradually changed to dry arid land which was only suitable for growing cotton. Occasionally a lone tractor would be spotted in a field 50 -100 miles from anywhere. Who did the re-fuelling – did they have a fuel dump somewhere? We landed at Khartoum after 6 hours 45 the OAT gauge registered 45+C outside and it was probably another 10C deg plus inside.

When we opened the doors, immediately we were hit with searing heat like a blast furnace. The sun blazed down mercilessly and forced us to seek the shade of the wings. One of the aircraft had shed a piece of fabric off an elevator. Fortunately we found a friendly Sudanese engineer who produced a piece of fabric and doped it to the elevator, all in about 15 minutes due to the excessive heat it dried ready for flight almost immediately.

Eventually we left Khartoum for Luxor in Egypt. Night had fallen by the time we arrived at Luxor. Contacting the tower opened up an almost incomprehensible babble emanating from our headsets '404 are you landing at Luxor '405 what are your intentions, fortunately the captains had all experienced these methods of shouting at aircraft demanding multiple answers to their incessant questions. This ATC vocabulary has been developed over years of repetitive incomprehensible phrases that only those pilots with experience can begin to decipher.

I am about to meet a friend of the editor of the Bugle. Other pilots from Biggin Hill have suffered the wrath of this individual. 'Nagi Mohamed' whose name, I shall never forget, a tyrant

domineering person with a Kojak skull and a voice like a buzz saw.



Nagi Mohamed and Bob Denwood.



Other crew members with Nagi.

He passed us all into a hen coop type office situated in the old circular terminal building. He continually shouted to fill in this form and sign this piece of paper, and demanding to see our Health Certificate for inoculations for Yellow Fever. I thought to myself, no problem here as my Yellow Fever jab is up to date. On checking this document, dismay and alarm mine is three weeks out of date. 5 of us were out of date and were destined for a quarantine compound over night which was only suitable for pigs.

The next morning following our detention Nagi appeared with some sweet tea, insisting that we tell our captains that he "Nagi treat you well", snivelling git..!

Nagi had appointed himself as a medical officer at Luxor (Old Terminal) causing chaos to any who passed his way.

*The editor (JB) used to stamp his own Inoculation Form and Nagi*

never twigged. He had learned to understand his mentality and his documents were always stamped accordingly

Nagi had a wife and five daughters whom he claimed kept him poor and JB always carried cartons of tea bags for Nagi's family which he appreciated.

Nagi in turn helped JB to fill in the forms he produced for everything and anything. (JB was an individual ferry pilot transiting Luxor often and Nagi was always pleased to see him, with a 'Hello Captain' and much grovelling there followed)

Leaving our quarantine compound for the airport next morning Nagi, our chaperone, very kindly diverted our taxi to the Temple of Luxor with its magnificent stone lintel supports which were covered in hieroglyphic characters, inscribed thousands of years ago of Egypt's power and influence.

Leading away from the entrance gate was a broad avenue flanked with recumbent animal figures. All of which are sadly mutilated beyond identification.



Pictures from Bugle archive.



### **Sequel to the above story of Nagi.**

Some years later a new terminal building was erected at Luxor and Nagi wasn't allowed to go anywhere near it, which was almost the undoing of him.

Sadly he died, but his name lived on and I used his name for a long time after when I was being pestered for backshee at the airport and even down town Luxor I would say I was a friend of Nagi and the demand ceased.

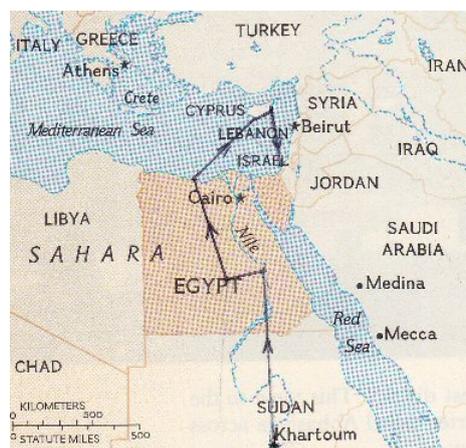
A nuisance he could be but he was well respected around Luxor. JB

On our arrival at Luxor Airport despite Nagi being in charge of our transport we arrive at the military gate instead of the civilian side.

The guard insists on phoning for permission to go to the otherside of the airport.

Nagi would take us to the quarantine office to collect our documents, and immediately he was on his home ground became the blustering, hectoring, pustule that we had encountered the previous night. However, he was careful not to aim his venom at us, but at the minor clerks and custom officers, who he chivvied unmercifully until our passports and papers were safely restored.

Smiling beautifully, he said, "You tell Captain Adams Nagi look after you good". Promising to see that his palm was greased, we scuttled into breakfast, and joined the others for some much needed protein.



After breakfast we made for the aircraft and taxied out for take-off.

Our route would take us via New Valley, which was 129nm west of Luxor. Approaching New Valley our radio failed.

(To the experienced passers by this was a known dead spot).

My Captain made a left turn to my consternation, as the track was to the north and to waste time trying to find our position because we had lost the formation which were just ahead of us up until this time we were where we should have been. I finally convinced him to take up our intended track of 355 deg to El Daba, the formation is by now 30 miles ahead of us.

After 1 hour and 30 minutes the radio's crackled into life and we were back in the fold so to speak.

We droned on across the arid land with a hazy horizon until we finally reached the Egyptian coastline at El Daba and set course for Cyprus,

Still searching the haze for a glimpse of our formation we suddenly saw what appeared to be a glimpse of Cyprus, my Capt called the formation and stated he had the island in sight.

A terse reply came back from the leader. "I hope you have got the right island, as we can't see anything yet." I literally cringed, after the fiasco at New Valley, another gaffe would be unpardonable.

Supposedly we were still behind the others. The answer came from Akrotiri Radar who said your straggler is 10 miles distant, the others were in fact 10 miles on our starboard quarter. (we were ahead). We were all swung onto an easterly heading to fly along the Southern Coast of Cyprus for a landing at Larnaca. This eventually places us



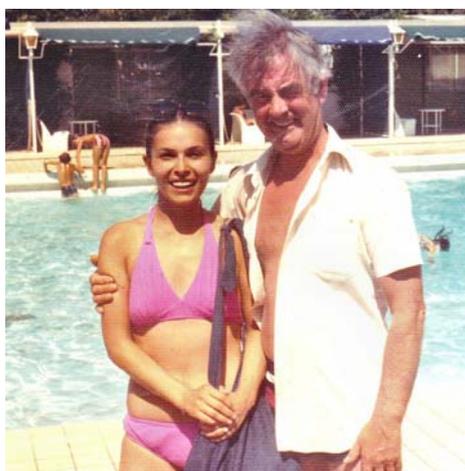
downwind for a landing at Larnaca after six hours and 30 minutes since leaving Luxor and the wrath of 'Nagi'



Having arrived safely we set about preparing the aircraft for the final leg to Tel Aviv tomorrow without any questions being asked. It is great to be at a civilised airport that understands pilots needs.



Our aircraft lined up at Larnaca being re-fuelled and prepared for the last day.



By the pool side, at the Hilton Hotel. Do not believe anything you see, or what you may hear.

Having spent the rest of the day relaxing we all headed for a Greek Taverner, a small restaurant cum night spot renowned for its display of Greek folk dancing late into the night.

We rose early next morning for a briefing for our next and final leg to Tel Aviv.

En-route altitudes, routes and turning points were duly noted and call signs allocated, emergency procedures decided upon, We would be flying into a zone bristling with suppressed aggression and indeed overt military action, for our route took us within sight of Beirut where battles at the moment were being fought.

We would catch the very next flight out of Tel Aviv to the UK.....! Journies end...!! BSD)

### NEWQUAY SECRET MISSION

This story began last November whilst attending the aeromobility dinner at Heathrow, relates Peter Greenyer.

I was unable to resist a flight in a Meteor T7 when it was offered at their charity auction.

Subsequently I was delighted to learn that my pilot for this extraordinary flight would be Dan Griffiths.

Eventually a plan was hatched for Dan, myself, Tony Habgood and Carl Ward to fly down to Newquay in our PA39 G-LARE where the Meteor operated by Mike Collet (of Air Atlantique fame) and his team as part of their wonderful collection of flying memorabilia now called the "Classic Airforce" The four of us left Biggin in indifferent weather on an August Friday morning but as predicted it steadily improved until we arrived at Newquay in glorious sunshine to be greeted like VIP's on the tarmac by Trevor Bailey the general manager of the "Classic Airforce" and their friendly team of helpers.

We enjoyed tea and the inevitable Cornish pasty in their restaurant and before long I was being expertly assisted by Dan into the beautiful meteor...!!

*(a bit like climbing a glacier without crampons)*

She is truly gorgeous and without complications of ejector seats or oxygen etc, seated comfortably...!!



I was just about managing to keep up with Dan's explanation of where and what the taps were for.



In no time at all Dan talked me through the engine start procedure and both started without hesitation.



This helmet will give you a sense



of purpose. The next thing I knew I was taxiing this fantastic machine out towards the westerly runway for departure.

Dan was kind enough to let me do the take-off and following his every word we manged OK – after that I seemed to run out of mind and ram and didn't have time to look at the instruments in the



cramped cockpit as the view outside the window and the feel of the aeroplane was just fantastic.

Whilst most of my brain was still somewhere back on the Newquay tarmac we did some gentle aero's which seemed much more fun than I remembered and in what seemed no time Dan was giving me vectors back to Newquay where we flew a circuit and again Dan very kindly and bravely allowed me to land this precious machine under his expert guidance.

In fact we were airborne for just 30 minutes but apparently we needed to land due to fuel (our lack of it) but the time remains one of the most memorable in my aviation life.



Our boys day out continued with all four of us jumping into the

collections wonderful Dragon Rapide G-AGTM, to be treated to more expert flying by Dan under the watchful eye of the collections chief pilot – John Corley – we then toured the local countryside and coastline for a further 30 minutes of gentlemen's aviation much more the sort of thing we are used to but in a style which cannot be bettered.



A view of Newquay, from the Rapides spacious cabin, each window allows a vista that the modern airliner seems to lack.



Finally after more tea, a tour of the collection and profuse thanks to all the team at Classic Airforce we took our little 'twin com' back to Biggin to conclude our day at the 'Old Jail' public house as per standard operating procedure.

Many thanks to all at the Classic Airforce and of course my pilot Dan Griffiths, who has the uncanny ability to fly everything, and yet maintains a true modesty and professionalism in all things aviation.

Peter Greenyer (filmstar aviation guru ?!!) recommends that any readers of the Bugle who intend to visit Cornwall should take a day out of their holiday to visit the 'Classic Airforce' collection at Newquay airport.

## ANOTHER CLASSIC FLIGHT

Graham Balls a well known pilot/owner at Biggin Hill for more than 40 years, visited Goodwood Airfield for a dual checkout flying in a Harvard prior to a flight in a two seat Spitfire (Graham had previously owned a Harvard), so this was no surprise as to what was to come with reference to tail wheel aircraft.



Kitted out for a new experience.!



Fantastic, wonderful feeling..!



Discussing the flight with the pilot John Dodd and one other lucky pilot named David.



One happy pilot steps down from the rear cockpit.

### NO NAKED FLAMES PLEASE



The Met Police Flying Club had a smoky bar-b-que due to the restriction of the no naked flame airside rule, the chef produced a wonderful smoke effect, brilliant..! Jeff Cleary the organiser was surprised at the interest shown and some 80 people attended during the course of the afternoon. Unfortunately the food supply was depleted quicker than anticipated. He had expected at most 50 would attend and catered accordingly, unfortunately he was swamped with an attendance of at least 80.

Jeff had organised something to occupy the children in the form of model aircraft kits. This young lad in the following picture built one in less than an hour. No excess glue, perfectly finished a splendid effort.



He may even build his own aircraft one day as did Jeremy Miller below, who built this RV7 Kit



plane which he bought as part built completing the build himself. He should be congratulated on a splendidly built aircraft.



The comfortable two seat cockpit sports a glass instrument panel and cruises at 165 knots which the editor calculates could have a possible range of 1237nm and possibly 7.5 hours endurance. These figures are unconfirmed and only an estimate of the editor



Much interest was shown in the various aircraft within the hangar of Shipping & Airlines.



Jeff and members express their thanks to S&A and Tony Habgood the use of their facilities.

Also a big thank you to ATC for slotting their trial flights onto runway 29.

Also thanks to Joe at Heritage Centre, for displaying one of their Spitfires within the hangar at Shipping and Airlines.

This famous aircraft created a lot of interest, most were surprised how large it was when seen so close.



Children gather around the Spitfire for one last picture before it is towed back to the Heritage Hangar.

During the day 11 flights taking 21 people into the air amounted to a lot of interest and several enquiries for learning to fly.

As a result of these flights two new members joined the MPFC at Biggin Hill.



For more information regarding membership to MPFC contact: < [jeff.cleary1@googlemail.com](mailto:jeff.cleary1@googlemail.com) >