



BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

News from our Airport at Biggin Hill - established 2005



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12 th December 1983, Biggin Hill my phone rings just on midnight. It is a call from Central Africa from my friends Maurice Seree and Francise Cuville., they are stranded in Bangui, Maurice and Francise have a Trinidad and a 235E Rallye Gurrier without a pilot. The Gurrier needs to be rescued quickly.

No worries 'Capt Haddock' is on his way, instant travel without hesitation.

I have been asked to go to the Paris office (opposite Lang Champ Race Course) and collect a pocket full of money for three people and two aircraft and any other expenses we may be confronted with.

I am ready packed and will be on my way in a few hours.



By lunchtime the next day I am being wined and dined by the Socata Division whilst my Airline ticket was being arranged along with a large envelope stuffed with French Francs..with plenty of small change because no one has change.

Arrival time in Bangui was 02.00am Tuesday, and I would be met by Francis as we were staying in a private house because there were no hotels available.



Francise was nowhere to be seen and I didn't know where the French residential safe house was, so I was stranded along with a Chinaman with a large suitcase and he too did not have a hotel.

After two hours, I decided to go to the Flying Club and see if I could locate the Gurrier, and then found Francise asleep in the Trinidad, time now 04.00am.

I woke him to which he responded, ah! John I am looking for you, to which I replied, yes, I have been looking for you.

The pictures in previous column shows the view down the High Street from the French House. This street has 3 Bata shoe shops, 2 side by side and one more 30 yards further on.

The picture of the aircraft was at the Flying Club which had a well stocked bar with cold beer.

Having this day to spare, we decided it is best to plan our escape 'so to speak' and a suitable route.

We shared the money out, studying every airfield that we had never visited before and hope that no-one would notice we had no clearances, we were only going to the next place filing VFR. These places hopefully wouldn't have HF.

Francise (our technician) would deal with refuelling, whilst Maurice and I would file our flight plans and pay landing fees and leave. Whoever was ready to go would leave for the next destination and prepare everything for the one catching up.

With three of us we would swarm around the late comer and leave for the next destination.

Bangui is situated right on the equator with very high temperatures and plenty of mosquito's.

We spent the day resting up for the big departure.



We leave Bangui, Central Africa and pass Garoua on our way to Zinder in Niger.

It was so hot in the French House the night, I opened the fridge searching for a cold drink, and found not only cold water, but some Menthol flavouring.

Glug, glug glug..!! FATAL I broke a Golden Rule, never drink the water in a foreign land, because now, I have a gut's ache.



A map of NIGER with Niamey shown in bottom left.



Passing Bamako in Mali with its famous narrow bridge and horrendous traffic..



We arrive at Zinder, nobody seems any the wiser, whilst I make a hasty beeline 'pour le toilette' the others deal with paper work and refuelling my aircraft and left. I would catch up later.

Climbing to altitude, I unfolded a map and placed it over my head so I had some shade as it was so hot.

I took a parting shot departing Zinder, on route Niamey.

Surprise Bob Dioulaso a famous Islamic town, with multiple mosques. They didn't seem to notice our arrival.

Nevertheless it was friendly so we were grateful and left as peacefully as we had arrived working our way across the desert.



Landing at Nouakchott 16th December, so far so good we are moving closer to France. Whilst the airport is rather dusty it does have a hotel equally dusty but comfortable.

The coast line has some very good French restaurants.



Flying north along the Western Sahara pass the rocky protrusions known as 'Aadam Meselut' we are heading for Laayoune which has a military side and a civil side, the side we elected land, because we both had civilian markings.

We refuelled and booked out, Maurice had started his engine and I waived him on and he went,

I noticed a bloke walking my way in a smart suit, so I thought I can't afford to anger him. He was curious as to where I was going and where I had come from.



I told him I was going to Casablanca which he accepted and bid me farewell.



The Atlas Mountains near Agidir which rise up to 11,000ft and stretching across the North West of Algiers



The Moroccan landscape where they grow oranges.



We fly over Casablanca airport the largest city in Morocco, whilst we are heading for Rabat a nice airfield.

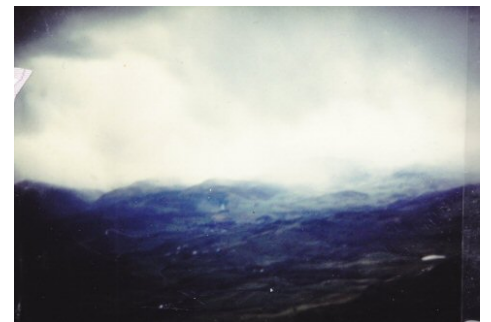


Whilst at Rabat we don't have to worry about being grounded as they are French orientated in their thinking. We were aware of some heavy snow across the Pyrenees and the Met Office was opposite to us on the airfield, far away, we had to get some one to drive us...!!

We decide to fly around the east coast of Spain, just in case as we have Perpignon as a diversion.



East of the snow capped Pyrenees shows some heavy snow has fallen during the last few days we head west toward Tarbes with heavy snow showers to our left.



From 12th – 18th December 1983 we covered 3958 nm, 26 hrs 50mins flight time over 3 days.

We spent the night in Tarbes before going our different ways once more.