



A FLIGHT OF FANCY!

By Geoffery Dunster OW 51-53



A glance through the Membership List of our Yacht Club will show that many OWs – who have spent their working lives on the bridge of ship – have as their principle recreation a recreational craft of some sort to continue their fascination with the sea as a hobby continuing long into retirement. For some, pottering around the Solent will satisfy that urge whereas the more ambitious have made more than one long excursion including many trips across the Atlantic and at least one circumnavigation of the world!

A parallel exists for those like myself who deserted the sea for the sky – a fascination with the achievements of those pioneer aviators of nearly one hundred years ago. In crude - and by today's standards unreliable - aircraft flights were made across the Atlantic and to remote parts of the world in machines lacking even a self-starter and a cabin heater. They carried no radio equipment and had only the most basic flight & engine instruments.

London-Sydney Air Race?

A London to Sydney air race, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1919 pioneer England-Australia flight by Ross and Keith Smith, is being planned for December of this year. It would also inaugurate the 200th anniversary celebrations next year of Captain Cook's discovery of Australia in 1770.

The chairman of the Captain Cook bi-centenary year committee, Mr Asher Joel, confirmed recently in Sydney that negotiations for the race were under way at both state and federal levels. A trophy plus a \$A25,000 (£12,000) first prize is among proposals for the event, which would be for "general aviation" aircraft.

A spokesman for the Royal Federation of Aero Clubs of Australia said that the federation and the Royal Aero Club of London were hoping to sponsor the race and had been discussing it for some time.

After many years of flying around Europe commercially the chance of a trip to Australia in a small aircraft seemed very remote.....apart from other considerations, but the wall of bureaucracy involved in flying through so many parts of the world is enough to put most people off the whole idea. For example, some countries will only permit you to over-fly their territory if you land at some prohibitively expensive airport en route where they will not even accept their own currency for payment of charges – the almighty US Dollar rules but only in cash.....take it or leave it! They also tend to rather dilatory in responding to signals requesting permission which mysteriously tend to disappear without trace into the ether!

However, early in 1969 an announcement was made which

would hopefully blow away some of the problems. In conjunction with BP, the Australian Government announced a Commemorative Air-Race to celebrate the 50 years that had elapsed since the first ever flight to Australia in 1919. This was made by two Australian brothers Ross & Keith Smith who were returning home after service in the Royal Flying Corps in WWI. With the incentive of £10,000 (nearly a century later worth over £250,000!) prize for the first such flight they used a Vickers Vimy bomber – the same type as Alcock & Brown had used for the first flight across the Atlantic earlier in the same year. The Smith brothers were national heroes for the rest of their lives and the aircraft they used is happily preserved in a large glass hangar at Adelaide Airport.



Video Link [HERE](#)

Picture of Ross and Keith [HERE](#)

Some More [HERE](#) with a good PDF file for Download as well.

I managed to find two like minded companions – one, a Captain on leave from the then package-tour airline Autair. The other had recently completed an 18 month course with the then BEA/BOAC training school and had promptly be declared redundant – however, he had the right to an Australian passport so was after a one-way passage as he hoped to find employment “Down-under”.

After some research with a broker or two we found that there was a ready demand in Australia for second-hand Piper Comanche aircraft – a single engine four-seat machine of which some 4000 were produced between 1957 & 1972. Like the Supermarine Spitfire, the Comanche has the engineering accolade that it “looked right” and it proved to be a delight to fly. The aircraft we found was the model fitted with a 260 h.p. six-cylinder engine and was fitted with “tip-tanks” which gave a total capacity of 100 imperial gallons of fuel spread across six tanks. It had a variable pitch propeller to make best use of the engine power available in climb or cruise configuration and a retractable undercarriage. Cruising at 150 knots she consumed 10 gallons an hour with her best performance given between 8/10,000 feet. We planned legs of around 1,000 miles allowing ample fuel in hand for holding and diversions.

The aircraft was fitted with a full night and blind flying ‘panel’ – a combination of pressure and gyroscopic instruments which included a basic autopilot. There was also an ‘airways’ standard radio station permitting flight in ‘controlled airspace’ including the world’s busiest airports. This consisted of duplicated 360-channel VHF communication transceivers, a duplicated VOR installation (one of which incorporated an Instrument Landing System receiver), an Airways marker beacon receiver, an Automatic Direction Finder operating in the Medium & Long wave bands normally using NDBs and finally a radar transponder with automatic height reporting. At the height we normally operated at our VHF equipment had a maximum range of a hundred miles or so.

Technical Notes: The VOR system was a development of a wartime navigation aid and was adopted post-war by ICAO (The International Civil Aviation Organisation – a United Nations agency) as the standard short-range navigational aid for aircraft and ground transmitters were installed throughout the world. The range achieved depended largely on the height of the aircraft but could exceed 200 miles. The cockpit display was normally in the form of a CDI (Course Deviation Indicator in Americaneez; in their language “course = track”!) – a desired track to or from the transmitter was selected and the track error – if any – was displayed on the dial. The Marker beacon gave an aural and visual indication of passing a specific point.

A later development of the VOR system was DME (Distance measuring equipment) which gave an indication of distance to or from a ground station. If a VOR transmitter is located on or near a runway it could also be used as a basic landing aid in poor weather. Both systems are now largely superseded by the worldwide G.P.S. system.

Most NDBs have also been superseded as en route aids – their saving grace is the base station is relatively cheap and simple to install but very prone to interference from the weather and other stations operating on adjacent frequencies - but many are still in service forming part of an Instrument Landing System (ILS) to initially establish the aircraft in an instrument approach. An NDB can also serve as a stand-alone landing aid....but probably needing at least a 500’ cloud base to be used in anger as it is relatively inaccurate aid when used in that mode so not much use for scheduled services. The equipment is also useful for keeping up to date with the “Archers” or the Test match score... Our ADF (Automatic Direction Finder) was used in the same way as the former Marine version but automatically aligned the cockpit indicator. Aircraft beacons (NDBs) transmit continuously – there is no time at the groundspeed of the slowest aircraft to listen in turn to a chain of beacons.

The Instrument Landing System (ILS) used a similar cockpit display in the aircraft and interpreted ground transmission from aials adjacent to the active runway with indications of the correct

alignment with the centreline and angle of descent. Landings down to a 200' cloud base can be achieved. This was the standard precision landing aid in use at the time.

The number of VHF Communication frequencies available was later doubled to 720 - all from a set the size of a cigar box!

Much of the world – particularly in the busiest areas and around the larger airports is designated "Controlled Airspace" and may extend from ground level to 50,000'+. It can only be entered with permission from Air Traffic Control which is only granted if the aircraft has the right communication and navigation equipment and the pilot has the right qualifications. Some countries – Saudi Arabia is one - designate ALL their airspace as controlled. In some areas of certain countries over-flying is prohibited at all times.

Sadly, Decca never achieved the world wide coverage required for universal adoption by the world of aviation.

For operation in the more remote areas of the world – basically from Beirut onwards – we needed an HF transceiver to be installed which given favourable conditions had a range of several thousand miles. We used a fairly basic set which performed well but with two drawbacks – it only had ten frequencies and depended on a trailing aerial; this operated with a "fishing reel" of wire in the cockpit which went out through the bottom of the fuselage and through a fairlead on the tail to a drogue. The amount of aerial extended "tuned" the set and we found ourselves frantically winding in and out when told to change frequency. One of our spot frequencies was reserved for the international emergency frequency of 2182 k/c – the remaining nine had to cover the trip from Beirut through to Sydney which we just managed; different frequencies are used at night and the vagaries of "skip" distance frequently meant we could not talk to stations a couple of hundred miles away but one thousands of miles away would sound as if they were in the next room..... we soon learnt that this was par for the course and got used to relaying messages for other aircraft large

and small as they did for us. One penalty one pays with HF usage is a constant background of crackles and bangs – very strange after the dead silent VHF we were accustomed to!



Piper PA-24 260B Comanche Instrumentation

Technical Note: Due to the huge distances in Australia some light aircraft only carry an HF set for communication with a "bird's" nest of wire from fin to wing tips providing the aerial.

Happily, the race organisers used their world wide contacts to smooth out the bureaucratic problems – we all had to carry a prominent race number and this was also used as our radio call sign rather than the more usual registration or flight number.....we were "Air Race 49" across the world!

The 1919 flight had ended in Adelaide so that was our original destination – but sadly difficulty in raising sponsorship cash meant a re-think in the final route. Happily the bi-centenary of the arrival of Captain Cook fell in 1970 which produced more money so the race was divided into halves.....Leaving Gatwick in mid-December we had two weeks to get to Adelaide – then a 48 hour stopover which took us into January – then a one –day race to Sydney (near where Cook had arrived) to round the trip off!

The race started from London (Gatwick) and we had to land at the checkpoints of Athens, Karachi, Calcutta, Singapore and Darwin. We had a time allowance of two hours at each place. If we needed to make additional landings – as most of us did – the choice was ours but the time allowance was reduced to one hour.

Part of the extensive planning before our departure entailed deciding where these extra stops would be...was the chosen place open all night, was the weather normally good, how efficient were the ground services and so on. As we wished to avoid landing in Italy for our first stop, we decided on the airport of Bastia on Northern Corsica. We wrote to the airport manager (as we did with all the others) well in advance setting out our requirements and seeking his assistance....we were a little worried when we subsequently learnt we were the only competitor planning to stop there; had we made a terrible mistake?

We left Gatwick on a snowy December evening....despite the aircraft being overloaded with equipment, luggage and spares she soon climbed above the cloud and we had an uneventful flight the length of France and on to Bastia where we arrived at about 0200 – and what a reception was waiting for us!....We seem to have been adopted as “their” aircraft and all the stops had been pulled out. Firstly, the Mayor -

complete with Tricolour sash - greeted us in the true Gallic fashion (including kisses!) and we listened patiently to his speech of welcome impatient to get on – and visit the facilities! Two fuel trucks were positioned – one on each wing – to fill our needs of only 60 gallons of fuel! The Chief Meteorologist presented a complex weather briefing for our next leg to Athens and also had landing forecasts for our route as far as Singapore! A huge box of sandwiches and fruit was passed on board complete with flasks of coffee and after more salutations from all concerned – including the Mayor – we were waved off with a waiving of all charges for everything including the fuel! All this happened in the middle of the night....I understand a photograph of our/“their” aircraft with details of the flight still hangs in the terminus some 40 years later!



The aircraft used in the Race - A Piper Comanche PA24-260 pictured in the snow at Stapleford-Tawney Aerodrome in Essex where the HF radio was installed before departure.

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We joined the Airways system down the western coast of Italy and crossed to the east coast routing from across the toe of Italy from Naples to Brindisi. At the time the Italian air traffic system was under the joint control of the civil and military authorities with a notorious degree of chaos hence our reluctance to land there. Soon after crossing the coast we entered Greek airspace and crossed the Adriatic heading for Corfu and our next landing at Athens.

This was the first official “checkpoint” of the Race and Olympic Airways – who were “handling” the transit of competitors – were clearly determined to set a good example! Each aircraft was allocated a pair of knowledgeable staff members to act as “marshals”so guidance to the location of the Customs Bureau, the Meteorological Office and re-fuellers were all efficiently to hand.

The race organisers had scheduled the next “checkpoint” as Karachi leaving competitors with the difficult choice of route which left three alternatives. The shortest route was over Damascus en route to Bahrein – unfortunately the Syrian regime would only allow transit through their airspace if a

landing was made at Damascus which sounded as if we would experience many delays. The second alternative was routing across Turkey but flying over their long range of 10,000 foot plus hills in the depths of winter was not a happy alternative. The third was a long diversion to the South & East via Egypt and Saudi Arabia which would have lengthened our journey considerably – one competitor who did follow this route had no option since he was flying a military registered Auster aircraft and was debarred from taking the alternatives for political and safety reasons!

Our landing at the huge but deserted Damascus Airport was uneventful save for the amount of time spent taxiing up and down the huge new runways – the airport had recently been rebuilt by the Chinese as a “friendly gesture” and featured four parallel runways which even today Heathrow could not fill! The huge fuel truck was highly amused at our minute requirement (about a 1/100th of his normal delivery) – but, as with the airport office – would only take US dollars in payment.....frustrating since I had gone to considerable trouble to gain some Syrian currency in the U.K. before departure which the bank would not change back afterwards!

The Despatch clerk kept us waiting whilst he wrote out a long document in Arabic. As we champed at the delay he stated – whilst caressing his machine gun with his other hand - we would not be permitted to leave without it.....when at last it was finished it was handed to me, no one subsequently asked to see it and to this day I have no idea what it all means!

Soon after we were airborne for Bahrain we passed into Saudi airspace – at the time, as with much of the Middle East, air traffic control was operated under contract by a British company and it was re-assuring to hear those confident voices who at least knew who we were and where we were going!

The “airway” largely follows the route of an oil pipeline which crosses the desert en-route to the Mediterranean. Every hundred miles or so there was a small settlement around a pumping station – their facilities normally included a radio beacon and a basic airstrip; what a lonely life for the inhabitants!

Although not an official “checkpoint” it turned out that almost all the competitors landed in Bahrain and the R.A.F. – who at the time had a large presence on the island – took over marshalling competitors as a training exercise. Each crew member was given a commemorative coin from the Sheik which was presented with due ceremony. The RAF knew we only had a time allowance of 60 minutes and had worked out exactly our needs....a fuel truck met each aircraft as did a mobile washroom (hurrah!), a clerk with a weather briefing for the leg to Karachi, a Customs Officer complete with his rubber stamp at the ready and a service truck with a team of engineers if required including one who diligently set to and cleaned all the windscreens as soon as our engine had stopped.

Our flight plans for the trip – all of which had been filed at Gatwick before departure – had caught up with us (as at other stops on route) and we were airborne once more in less than thirty minutes with clearance for Karachi.....incidentally, if a flight plan has been filed for a flight (which gives details of the aircraft, POB, endurance, route etc.) it is always followed up with a “departure message” giving the actual – rather than planned - departure time to update the plan to all the interested parties en route. We had included as an addressee in our flight plans our base airfield in Sussex whose controller kindly passed on details of our progress to our worried friends and families!

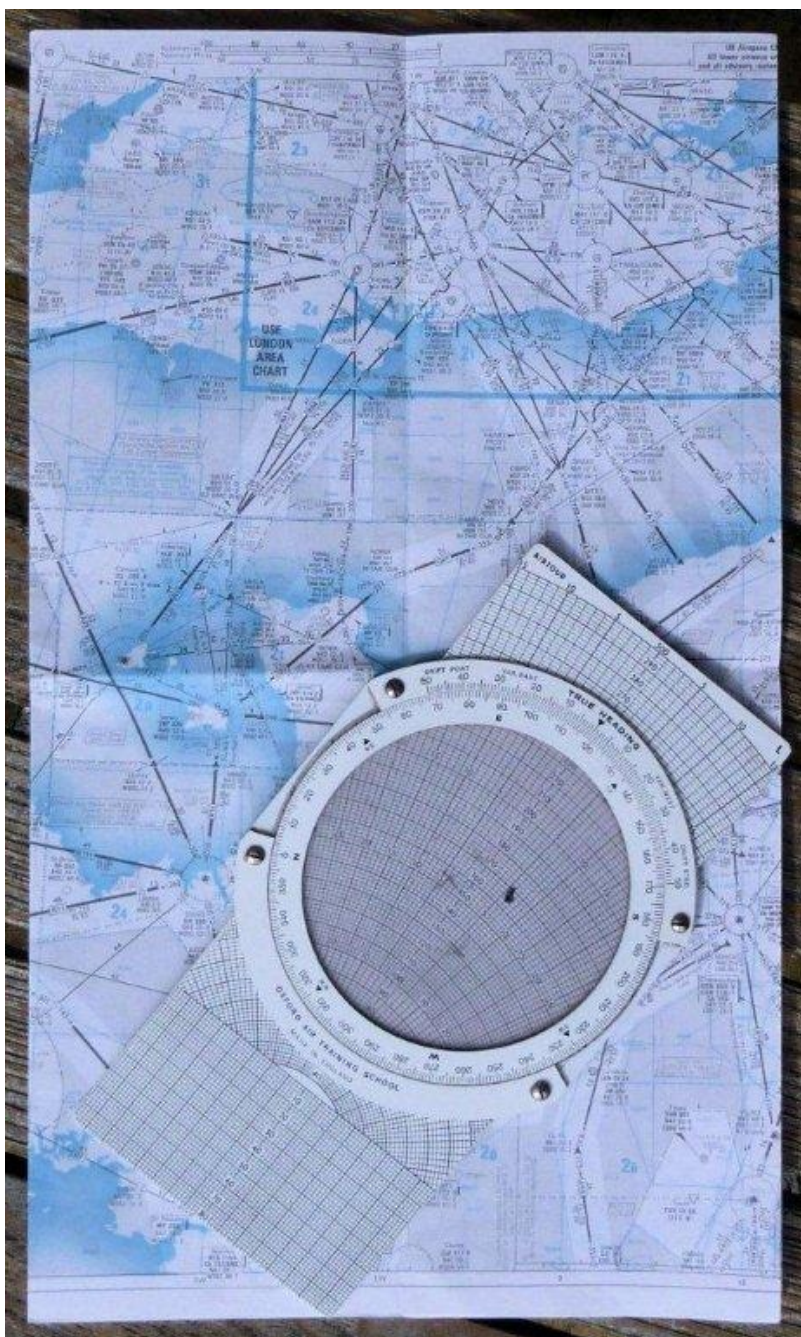
As we entered Pakistani airspace the change of style of the air traffic control service was very noticeable. They had limited coverage of their airspace on VHF radio and the HF service was very spasmodic.....but in the format of the time we found a Lufthansa Jumbo helpfully relaying messages for us when we could not contact the ground station – and to our delight we found the reverse applied a little later as both aircraft moved along the “skip” gaps in HF coverage. Their skipper came

to say "Hullo" in Karachi and confided he thought we were "quite mad" going so far in such a small aircraft!

The flourishing Aero Club at Karachi Airport provided stewards for each competitor and our team soon took us in hand – first stop, the showers (we had now been crammed in a very small aircraft for over 24 hours almost non-stop!), instant laundry service, weather brief – all done by hand with coloured pens and the like; no computers or faxes here – window and aircraft clean, refuelling courtesy Esso and so many other kindnesses. Much refreshed we were ready for the next leg – the prevailing wind meant we could not make the next checkpoint in Calcutta non-stop so we planned to call at Nagpur more or less in the middle of India. We left with a reminder that at the time India was at war with Pakistan!

We were getting to grips with radio communication swapping between VHF & HF and sometimes wondering if the limited number of HF frequencies we carried would see us through to Australia. As we approached Nagpur, a new crisper approach to Air Traffic Control was detected – for this area was under the control of the Indian Air Force. The grass areas of the immaculate airfield was being groomed by a small army of sari-clad ladies equipped with hand-shears – but their cheerful smiles as we taxied past their back-breaking task was a wonderful welcome. This brought back memories for me of seeing a similar crew of graceful ladies "coaling ship" by hand in Calcutta many years before.

On the apron we were welcomed by a smartly-dressed group of IAF personnel who saluted us individually over and over again! Their welcome was sincere but a little reserved since we were the only race-competitor to have landed there....but when we explained our range problems it was then smiles all the way! A large staff car produced the immaculate CO (an ex-Cranwell man) – "Are you sure there is nothing else you need" – and he insisted his staff would attend to aircraft as the restaurant manager had prepared a special British- type meal for us. Off we went in his staff car to be solemnly served egg & chips, bread and butter and lots of tea! The manager reckoned we were the first British registered aircraft to have landed there since Partition and how did we get permission? – little did he know the wire pulling that had gone on with the Indian Air Attaché in London who happened to be a sailing fanatic! It's not what you know etc.!



The Tools of the Trade - a Radio Navigation Map as used on the trip & Drift Calculator

After our brief but delightful stop – I am afraid we overran the time allowance - we were off to Calcutta.....I might add after take off we could at last release our built-up but suppressed laughter as many of our charming hosts reminded us of the late Peter Sellers in one of his Indian roles!

Calcutta was a vast, chaotic airport where our problems were smoothed over by our flight being handled by an efficient if rather condescending agent from British Airways. A catering truck pulled up alongside and trays handed over with a cold meal for each of us – First Class standard no less – and a casual wave of the hand was given when we enquired what to do with the empties! Again, a first class weather briefing for our next leg to Bangkok with an indication of what we could expect near the Equator where the inter-tropical front was lying South of Singapore. No less than 30 copies of our Customs Declaration were required despite our transit status.

We were soon in Burmese airspace for a cool if efficient transit enhanced by the sight of the famous gold-roofed temple at Rangoon seemingly ablaze in the setting sun. There was a great change in Air Traffic service when we entered Siamese airspace since at the time Bangkok Airport was largely used as a transit stop for American aircraft en-route to Vietnam. All the controllers were clearly American trained complete to their slightly odd command of English and we were constantly pressed for confirmation of our position and ETA at the next check point as we later learnt we were regarded as a highly suspicious aircraft! This was borne out when we landed when an armed party surrounded us which had us somewhat concerned – happily an airport official appeared who, on sighting our large race number painted on the tail, shooed the guards away and rapidly sorted out our problems as a personal challenge.

We were soon off again for Singapore....the change of weather as we neared the equator was soon obvious with towering build-ups of cloud as the day progressed and much thunderstorm activity in the afternoon – the amount of energy locked up in these clouds makes even the largest aircraft keep clear but they normally fly high above them. We had to stay low weaving in and out of the many obstacles with our duty-navigator trying to keep track of our somewhat erratic progress as we stumbled along.

Our landing at Singapore was handled in a similar manner to our experience in Karachi – a well-briefed team of stewards from the Aero Club which, despite the blinding heat day and night, was tastefully decorated out for Christmas with many cotton-wool snowballs and a six foot long cracker suspended over the bar! Thus served we braced ourselves for perhaps the most formidable two legs of our flight. The next 1750 miles was nearly all Indonesian airspace as far as Darwin with a stop at Bali halfway.

In our pre-flight planning we had secured radio-navigation and topographical maps for the whole route to our final destination of Sydney....a formidable pile of paper, manuals etc. The flight guide company of Jeppesen had supplied each aircraft with a manual with details of most of the airfields we could possibly have used en route. We had shipped half the pack to Calcutta to collect en-route but the latest up-date for the section Singapore/Bali/Darwin revealed many of the charted radio aids along the route were now reported as either "unserviceable", "temporally withdrawn" or simply shown as "planned"!

Happily, the authorities at either end had anticipated possible problems and had installed a very powerful NDB with a range of well over 600 miles by day or night leaving a relatively modest gap in the middle where hopefully we would find Bali without too much difficulty. In addition, the Darwin transmitter also included "Radio Australia" instead of just a rather monotonous call-sign endlessly repeating itself. Other than endlessly twisting to and fro to escape the substantial cumulonimbus activity our flight was uneventful but sadly during our very brief stop at Bali we saw nothing of the now famous sights of that fabulous area.

We took off into the dusk for the 1000 mile leg to Darwin across the Timor Sea somewhat comforted by the knowledge that an Australian destroyer would "coincidentally" be on patrol in the area if things went wrong.....and at times we thought they were going to as we had a very rough trip in the night-time thunderstorm activity which at one time nearly inverted the aircraft. Happily, if a little bruised and battered, we landed soon after midnight in a horrendous tropical downpour which had the rain bouncing off the tarmac like bullets. We were instructed to park well away from the main terminus and were only too glad to vacate the by now rather smelly & chaotic aircraft despite the rain.

We then had an unfortunate clash with officialdom when a car appeared through the murk marked "Australian Customs". The occupant lowered his window and shouted we should report immediately to his office in the far away terminus with all our belongings - he then promptly drove off again!

We were so appalled at our reception that we radioed the Control Tower for a parking stand closer to the Customs office.....before they had the chance to reply the unpleasant gentleman re-appeared in his smart vehicle enquiring the reason for the delay. By this time we were completely soaked, tired, hungry, and still a little frightened from our recent experience and had rather gone off Australia!

We took the situation in hand by insisting the official got out of his (nice dry) vehicle before he addressed us and then reminded him we had flown all the way from Europe to celebrate a great historical event of his – not our – country. Warning to our theme – and watching him get wetter and wetter as he stood there – we reminded him that, under the rules of the Interna-



tional Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) of which Australia was a founder member, if we claimed to be in transit he had no right to remove or inspect any item from the aircraft and we were going straight back to Bali if that was the best he could manage as a welcome on behalf of the Australian government.

I am not too sure how correct we were in our claims and whether perhaps we had gone too far - but suddenly we all saw what a ridiculous spectacle we all made and all started laughing at each other! We piled in his van clutching nothing but our passports and were whisked to his office and within minutes were back at the aircraft where the re-fuellers were just finishing – "We topped you right up – fuel is cheaper here than anywhere in Australia – enjoy your stay" was their greeting and they cheerfully refused our payment. "Just doing my job, fellas" was the farewell of the Customs man.

We took off for Alice Springs 1000 miles south and within an hour or so ran out of the rain and marvelled at the vastness of the countryside – only a very occasional light was seen on the ground and bore out the legend on so much of our topographical maps of Australia – "Unexplored"! What was quite unexpected was a change of voice on the radio to a charming young lady. "How many of you are on board and how does steak with an egg on top sound for breakfast when you land?".....Australia was redeemed!

Dawn was breaking as we landed at Alice and there beside the control tower was a "Barbie" as only the Australians know how to make going full blast with our breakfast. As we dined – the first proper meal in days other than eternal sandwiches – the aircraft was taken over by the Aero Club and cleaned, serviced and refuelled. There was even a mobile shower on site!

We were soon off on the final leg of the race to Adelaide and that last 1,000 miles reminded us yet again how vast the country was with huge areas of scrub and only occasional signs of civilization – the huge Broken Hill open cast mining operation was quite an eye-opener but we were now getting excited at our arrival as we had made good time so far.....in fact, it turned out to be the best performance by an un-modified aircraft.

Our official touch-down time was solemnly reported to us and we were off to the aircraft park. We later discovered of the 80-odd aircraft that had left Gatwick just over 60 made it through to Adelaide. We were allowed 14 days to complete this first sector but the majority arrived in less than a week. The plan was that to be fair to any latecomers after the 14 days there would be a compulsory 48-hour break followed by a final one day dash of some 700 miles to Sydney with a technical stop roughly halfway en route at Griffith – a small town that claimed to be the "Prune Capital of the World".

At this point the otherwise immaculate arrangements for the Race went slightly haywire. No-one had bargained for the fact that so many of us would arrive so soon – it was assumed we would night-stop along the route – and no arrangements had been made to entertain us in any way over the Christmas holiday! Happily, we had family in Queensland so off we went for a splendid Christmas with them.

Sadly the weather was against us for the final day of the Race. The start was delayed for several hours but with an improved forecast we finally set off.....unfortunately, the improvement did not materialise and one or two aircraft diverted and at least one – with minimal fuel load – failed to find Griffith Aerodrome and ended up in a field! The airfield only had an NDB as an approach aid which was of limited use in the very poor weather we experienced.

The little town was very excited at the prospect of the "Great International Air-race" passing through but when over 50 aircraft were stuck there they certainly had their hands full particularly since the murk did not lift for two days. We were all made Life Honorary members of the local branch of the famous R.S.L. which seemed to be largely financed by the revenue from the armoury of slot-machines or "pokies" and visited the local winery & prune factories to pass the time. The R.S.L. had a preserved Spitfire on a mount as their trademark seemingly flying up the high street at 50' in the fog!

The last leg proved to be somewhat of anti-climax – the "massive public welcome" we had been assured was awaiting us had largely dissipated by the time we arrived two days behind schedule. However, our hosts in the flying world were kindness itself and even the most bizarre wishes catered for.....for example, a party climbed over the Harbour Bridge – very much a tourist attraction now – and I was thrilled to be let loose for a brief time on the Sydney Town Hall organ which at the time was one of the largest in the world.

The heroine, of course, was our splendid aircraft – grossly overloaded, it operated perfectly in many differing types of weather conditions from snow to thunderstorm and below freezing to 100 degrees plus in the tropics. What an adventure!

The race was won on handicap by a Britten-Norman Islander aircraft being delivered by a ferry crew who made the trip every month! The cabin of the aircraft was filled with fuel drums plumbed into the fuel system which gave an amazing range cutting out the many fuel stops made by most entries!

The final chapter in the story took a strange turn in many ways. Our plans to sell the aircraft came to nothing – new regulations meant she required expensive and extensive modifications to put her on the Australian register so disposal out there would have been a problem. However, we had an urgent message from the UK broker who had supplied it – he was desperate to find an example of this model for a customer apparently waiting with cash in hand....back in the UK!

My Autair colleague had to get back to work with the bucket & spade trade and our ex-BEA/ BOAC tyro found a job flying cannibals (well, so he said!) for the Franciscan mission in New Guinea....an 18 month stint with no pay other than his keep but lots of turbine hours in his logbook so valuable to a pilot looking for a job in a depressed market. He marvelled that many of his passengers were experienced air passengers but had never been in a car! So I was left to make a solo flight back to the UK....not a thought to be relished!

I followed much the same route back and by unofficially using my air race call sign "Air Race 49" I am convinced I overcame many potential bureaucratic problems. I took about 14 days in all with nightstops in most places. I was arrested once in BaIi because I did not have a visa but happily an Aer Lingus Captain – also homeward bound after the race and about to suffer the same fate- quoted some obscure rule of ICAO (Indonesia being a member) claiming aircrew did not require a visa for transit stops of less than 48 hours. This experienced gentleman turned out to have no less than five genuine Irish passports with him in case he ran into problems!

Marking our progress back towards Europe was a slow change in the "dip" of the compass as we neared our normal operating area which had become excessive when South of the equator. Most aircraft use the magnetic compass as their basic heading reference whose information is transferred either manually or automatically to a gyroscopic direction indicator (or DI) which has no north-seeking properties of its' own. In Australia the edge of the compass card – a peephole type - had been barely visible due to excessive dip!

Landing in Ahmadabad in western India the aircraft was arrested when I remarked my next stop was Karachi – remember they were at war? This was done by a policeman with a large ball of string who tied the aircraft up like a giant parcel and fixed a large seal on the knot! However, the next day after solemnly declaring to the Customs how many ballpoint pens I had on board the restriction was removed on payment of a fee of 5 rupees....the biros were probably worth more.



On landing at Karachi I found a greeting from my Aero Club steward on the outbound trip – he turned out to be the Esso manager at the Airport who kindly invited me out to dinner. He took me to the Gymkhana Club – a rather run-down relic of the Raj where we solemnly waded our way through Brown Windsor Soup, Steak & Kidney pie and Cabinet Pudding accompanied by large quantities of lukewarm Guinness!

Geoffrey later in his career in the 80s. Channel Islands to Gatwick

A call in Nicosia produced enquiries about firearms on board and I honestly declared my automatic pistol – the Customs insisted I left an aircraft key with them when they were quite happy...despite the fact it had the word "Cessna" boldly stamped on it!

After a stop at the terrifying airport in Genoa – built along the harbour breakwaters – I set course for Cherbourg where the new owner was going to join me for the last leg to the UK. He was most impressed that our well tried fuel management programme proved one tank was still full of the same fuel we had loaded some weeks previously at Gatwick!

The aircraft has changed hands several times since but is still flying – sadly her registration is now scarred in Europe after she was impounded by the Customs following a drugs incident!



This Medal was awarded to competitors completing the course. This is Geoffrey's.

Geoffrey Dunster (Old Worcester 53) served his time with P&O and started flying during RNR training. He worked in civil aviation for 39 years and logged over 18,000 flying hours. He was a flight, ground and radio examiner with CAA and was the recipient of the "Lennox Boyd" trophy given by them for operating the best flight training operation. He retains his interest in radio and perhaps uniquely holds Operators Licences for Air, Marine & Amateur use. He served in the RNR for over 35 years as a Naval Control of Shipping Officer & Communications Specialist. He regrets never having to take up his emergency "Dormant Appointment"with the Naval Officer in Charge in Barbados!

Another story by a John Wynn in an Airtourer 100, VH-MUJ, "Little Nugget" from the 1969 Race [HERE](#)