



## Newsletter Number Three July 2004

In this issue:

- A Service Engineer tells of an incident that dampened his enthusiasm for ferry flights.
- The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of G -ANTP's first flight is only a year away – how will it be commemorated?
- Information wanted for a book and a documentary.

### I LIKE FLYING BUT.....!

Service Engineer L.N. (Pat) Palmer, en route from Southend to Dakar, didn't bargain for a mid night swim and three days on a Spanish fishing boat. Here is his story

Twin Pioneer G-APLN was to go to Dakar for some route trials with a view to purchase. It was being flown by a British United Airways pilot and I joined it at Southend. We were due to leave on 8<sup>th</sup> January but we were delayed by radio snags and left on the 9<sup>th</sup> for Toussus-le-Noble near Paris. The weather was bad and we were diverted to Beauvais, I noticed that the throttle spindle seals on the starboard engine were leaking so I arranged for some new seals to be sent to Toussus-le-Noble.

Captain Williams was in charge and a Captain Costa joined us at Beauvais. We had more radio trouble but managed to get to Toussus-le-Noble and then, because the facilities are much better, on to le Bourget. This was Friday the 11<sup>th</sup>, and while the radio was serviced I replaced the throttle seals. I was working single-handed and by the time the radio people had finished it was Monday morning. During the weekend we learned that we had to take on board a Pratt and Whitney engine so on Monday afternoon, I rearranged the seats and got the engine loaded and lashed down.

Captain Costa left us and another French pilot, Mr E. Medina, joined us. With the news that we were to take on still more spares at Casablanca we set off from Le Bourget on the 15<sup>th</sup> and arrived at Casablanca at about 8.30pm after stops at Biarritz and Seville.

Next morning we loaded what Beechcraft spares we could and set off again in the afternoon for Agadir. It was very rough over the mountains so

We are again indebted to Ian Adams for this story that first appeared in the Mar/Apr 1963 edition SALVO, the Scottish Aviation Staff paper.

*Les Palmer was in Jackie Logan's Service Department when I was an apprentice at Prestwick – I didn't know his name was Les – we always referred to him as 'Pat'. Where are you now, Pat? Editor*

the skipper decided to land at Marrakech. We got there about 5.30pm.

### Three hours 54 minutes to Las Palmas

Refueling at Marrakech was rough. The airfield is military. The first antiquated bowser was unserviceable and we had to wait for another. Oil was supplied in cans and there was no funnel, so altogether it took some time. I would liked to have stayed the night but Captain Williams decided to press on and we left at 7:45pm for Las Palmas with a flight plan time of three hours 54 minutes.

It had been very cold over France but it was much warmer here. We were in cloud and the rain was very heavy. I usually had plenty to do on these flights but after about four hours I began to think that we should be getting near Las Palmas. It was dark by now and soon I saw signs of something funny going on – there was a lot of conversation going on between the two pilots though they seemed quite calm. Captain Williams eventually called me up and told me he was unable to get one of the beacons.

Then I heard one of the pilots calling 'Mayday' on the HF and very soon we descended below cloud. It was still raining heavily. At first, I thought I could see lights but it was just fluorescence. Williams said to look for a light and that he was going to have to make an emergency landing on the water. We were lucky enough to find a ship's light and I was told to signal SOS on the cabin lights – and how to do it. We circled the ship several times and the pilot said he was going to

ditch. He told us to take off everything except our underclothes and to put on our lifejackets. I opened the top escape hatch and removed the cockpit to cabin door. I suggested a cigarette and Williams remarked that it was a good idea as it might be our last! I strapped myself in the second seat and waited.

### In the drink

There was plenty of time to think and plenty to think about. I naturally wondered if the Twin would go right over and whether the P&W engine would come forward at me. Would the props break off and come flying up in my direction? I thought of my family. I prayed. I armed myself with my screwdriver and concentrated on my lap strap release and the life jacket inflator and light. The impact was very sudden - whether I was knocked out or not I don't know but the next thing I knew was that I was floating near the roof with a mouth full of seawater. During the next few terrifying seconds I managed to feel my way forward and realised I was in the cockpit so I found my way back to the escape hatch. As I emerged, the pilot was on his way back to look for me - apparently he and Medina had left by the side windows that had been forced out by the pressure of water. Williams told me afterwards that he had seen a suitcase appear and thought - surely Les isn't throwing the suitcases out?

### Fished out

He checked that we were all OK and said we must stick together but get away from the aircraft. It was raining and the sea was rough and not too warm. We were about a quarter of a mile from the boat and kept losing sight of it but the crew knew where we were and gradually we made our way to it. It took us about thirty minutes but, at last, we got to within twenty yards, ropes were thrown and we were hauled aboard. Our lifejackets were cut off and we were given warm clothes and put into bunks. I had a fit of the shakes - probably because I heard the crew say that they were surprised they got to us before the fish did. Thank goodness I hadn't realised that there were sharks about or I would have had the shakes even sooner. The coffee wasn't much help but there was nothing stronger to be had.



G-APLN's one time stable mate, 5N-ABQ (Constructor No. 523 ex G-APLM) parked at Bristow's hangar at Port Harcourt, Nigeria in the 60s. Bravo Quebec was damaged beyond repair in 1967



*Three local inhabitants do you think? No, it's M. Medina, Capt. Williams and Les being kitted out in a store at Barbate.*

### 53 men in a boat

Three days and two nights in a small boat with fifty- three men on board, a rough sea, a diet of fish, beans and potatoes cooked in some crude oil, is not the best treatment for shock but the Skipper and his crew were very kind. Captain Williams tried to get him to put in at Agadir but he had to get his fish to Barbate and that's where we arrived on the evening of 19<sup>th</sup> January.

We were given some more clothing and next day were taken to Gibraltar by road, returning to London by BEA that evening.

Mr Capper tells me that he is delighted to get some useful information on how the Twin behaves when it's ditched, but I hope I shall be left out of future experiments.

### Trainspotters Corner by 'Anorak'.



The route followed by G-APLN. In the narrative Les talks about the unscheduled stop at Marrakech because it was 'rough over the mountains' The mountains he is talking about is a range called 'Haut Atlas' with a peak called Toubkal at 13,684 ft. Quite some mountains! The outbound route by Twin is shown thus ----- and the return by fishing boat and BEA is - - - - -

## Trainspotter's Corner (continued)

### **Route taken by G-ALPN on its planned flight from Southend to Dakar, Senegal.**

Date	Sector	Arr/Dep (Local)	Remarks
Wed 9 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1963	Southend - Beauvais		Diverted from Toussus-le-Noble
	Beauvais - Toussus-le-Noble		
Fri 11 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Toussus-le-Noble - Paris le Bourget		
Tue 15 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Paris le Bourget - Biarritz		
	Biarritz - Seville		
	Seville - Casablanca	Arr 20:30hr	
Wed 16 <sup>th</sup> Jan	Casablanca - Marrakech	Arr 17:30hr	Diverted from planned destination Agadir
	Marrakech - Las Palmas	Dep 19:45hr	Ditched 22km from Chepbeica off the Moroccan coast.

### **G-APLN's History**

#### **Constructors No. 526 Series 1 First Flight 13APR58**

Date	Transaction	Registration	Organisation	Remarks
			Trabajos Aeros y Enlaces	Not taken up
		G-APJK	Scottish Aviation Ltd	Not taken up
		G-APJN	Scottish Aviation Ltd	Not taken up
		G-APLN	Scottish Aviation Ltd	
26JUN58	Delivered		Fison-Airwork	
27SEP59			Airwork(Helicopters)Ltd	Operator's new name
NOV60	Reregistered	VR-NDN		
			Bristow Helicopters Ltd	Operator's new name
	Reregistered	5N-ABR		
				Withdrawn from service & stored
31DEC62	Reregistered	G-APLN		
16JAN63	Written off			Crashed in sea near Chepbeica, Morocco Crew 0 fatalities / 3 on board
JUL63	Reregistered	5N-ABR		Reregistered

Anorak asks -

Why did Les say that 'G-APLN was to go to Dakar for some route trials with a view to purchase?' The aircraft, along with G-APLM, was already registered to Bristow Helicopters or was there another operator in the frame. The history of G-APLN is closely linked to G-APLM - both aircraft were operated by Bristow Helicopters and went into storage and then were transferred from the Nigerian register to the UK register in late '62/ early '63. Both aircraft were reregistered in July 1963 in Nigeria. Although the re-registration of G-APLN took place after the loss of the hull it is assumed that the process continued because of an oversight. Where is Chepbeica? - no hard copy or electronic gazetteer lists the place.

FYI - To call someone an 'Anorak' is a term of mild abuse directed almost exclusively at men. Such men are usually obsessively interested in an obscure subject and/or activity - the archetypal one being trainspotting. Such activities often require the participant to spend hours out of doors doing not much and occasionally writing something in a little book. Hence, such people often wear anoraks because they are (a) cheap (b) practical (c) have lots of pockets for flasks, notebooks, pencils, other pencils etc. *Soi-disant* normal people often regard obsessive participation in such activities in later life with derision.

*Hmmmmmm! Editor.*

## Information wanted for the printed page and the small screen

**Alex Crawford**, a Scottish researcher and author from Glenrothes, is commencing work on a book on Scottish Aviation and the aircraft it produced. To that end he is looking for information from designers, production staff, pilots, maintenance people and warriors who operated and worked on the Prestwick Pioneer, Twin Pioneer, Bulldog and Jetstream aeroplanes.

Alex's book '*Gloster Gladiator*' is published by Mushroom Model Publications. Other manuscripts awaiting publication are on the Bristol Bulldog and Gloster Gauntlet, followed by works on Squadron Leader M T StJ Pattle and then the Curtiss Hawk II/III. Other projects are in train. As well as technical details Alex is looking for anecdotes and stories and points of view of people on the ground as this gives a better overall view of what it was like to fly and maintain the aircraft. Make contact with Alex at

acrawford@blueyonder.co.uk

**David Hatter** of Oval Films, London, is making a documentary for Discovery Channel on great-unsung British aircraft and the Twin Pioneer is going to feature. He is going to film Dougal MacIntyre and The Duke of Hamilton plus G-APRS at Coventry. He is short of footage of the aeroplane and would love to hear from ex-service pilots who flew them 'in anger' and others who may be able to help. David can be contacted at

David@positive.co.uk

Here is our chance to get the Twin Pin on the record in a quality way. I'm going to remind David that the Prestwick Pioneer aka Pioneer CC Mk1 has a pretty impressive record as a service aeroplane plus its little known deeds in all white livery during *The Secret War* - ('Nuff said' Editor)

## Who is in the Group?

I thought that if I put our email addresses in a group in Microsoft Outlook - the Twin Pioneer Group - anonymity would be retained but it was not to be. I'm sorry that did not happen.

The Group is growing every month and it covers a wide range of people from many walks of life. I'm very pleased with the feedback I've received.

## Happy Birthday!

Twin Pioneer G-ANTP first flew on 25 June 1955, although it is reported as having a 'hop' on the previous evening. I am writing this in New Zealand, just before the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the prototype's first flight but the one we will want to acknowledge is the half-century, of course. I'm pleased to say that John Hopkins, Chairman of the Prestwick Branch of the Royal Aeronautical Society has formed a small group to plan a commemoration of some kind. Leadership of the group has been vested in Quentin Wilson - a SAL veteran - and I'm going to ask Quentin if he could keep us up to date with his group's plans by writing a paragraph or two for the Newsletter each month.

## Design Apprentices from the 60s



Anorak asked me to check a couple of details for him when he was writing up his history of G-APLN and I found this photograph taken sometime in the early 60s, Mr Stephenson (third from the right) is sitting with his 'charges'. Can anyone help with names?



Here is John McCallum at Heathfield aerodrome in the trusty Bedford van used by John's Flight Test team. Note the coal being stored on the runway. Boscombe Down it wasn't!