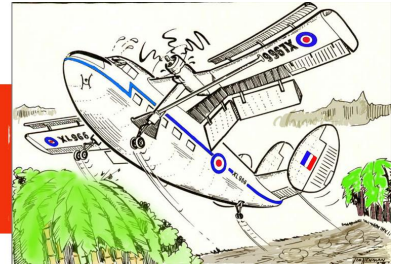


Scottish Aviation TWIN PIONEER



Newsletter Number Fourteen June 2005

In this Issue:

- The ultimate 'Now it can be told' story?
- The DC8 mystery deepens
- Anorak reports on a rare F47 camera frame and amazing coincidence



970 up to the axles in mud - a fine study of a Twin Pioneer in battle

Vic Dabin

Author, painter and pilot, Vic Dabin, has given us the unique opportunity to read and experience what it was like to go into battle in a Twin Pioneer. Although this episode in the history of the aeroplane has been told before in Number Four, the opportunity to have it told by someone who was actually there was too much to resist. The maps are authentic documents and were used in the planning of the raid.

Vic has created the mud chocks and the effect of too high rpm as The Queen's Own Highlanders left the aeroplane. The original painting was presented to one of the Highlanders who was in the second aircraft and now lives in Barnstaple, North Devon. Dougie Shepherd and Bill Clacher were there and are readers of the Newsletter. There is another person who was there on the database but all attempts to identify him have failed. If you read this please contact the Editor.

This Newsletter has no other purpose than to provide a bit of nostalgic fun for a few people who believe that the Twin Pioneer, in some way, had an involvement in their lives. It is published in a liberated way by Ron Tannock in New Zealand.

Contact him at r.tannock@xtra.co.nz



Vic Dabin

Most of the aircrew on No 209 Squadron was familiar with Brunei, Sarawak and North Borneo. For some years it had been part of the unit's responsibility to send either a Single or Twin Pioneer across the South China Sea from its base at RAF Seletar, Singapore on a short detachment working with the Police Field Force Units (PFF) and civil administration in the various divisions of the area, or on bigger schemes with the British Army. Therefore, when the Brunei rebellion started with little warning, or so it appeared to those crews dispatched with great haste by HQ 224 Group on Sunday 9 December 1962, they were well aware of the operating conditions there - made interesting by the mountainous terrain and associated variable weather - sometimes glorious, but most times atrocious.

We were enjoying the usual convivial Saturday evening in the Seletar Mess with wives and loved ones when the Senior Duty Officer bounded along the verandah with a message from our Commanding Officer. Three Twin Pioneers with

immediate servicing back up were to cross to Labuan on the morrow; RAF Labuan was an island staging post set just off the Brunei coast almost opposite the capital. I was one of those detailed to go. As I packed my kit later that night I reflected that this really was sudden. I had been in Kuching, Sarawak just a short time before and the PFF had appeared to know nothing of any troubles on the horizon. As the CO had recently joined the squadron he had not yet upgraded his flying category from 'freight only', so next morning he said he would come with me. The navigator would sit in the back for the crossing.

Positioning

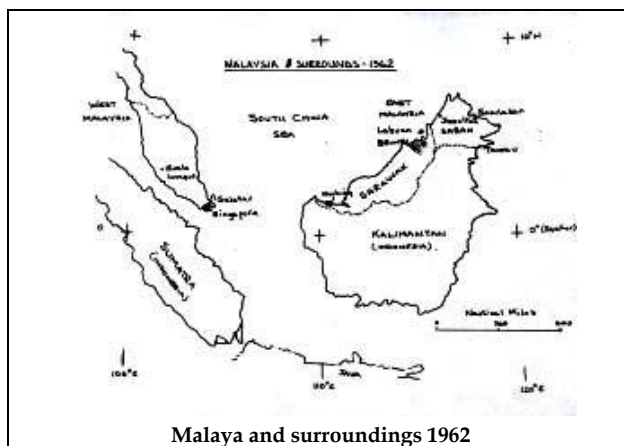
Three aircraft left at 0800hr on Sunday with additional crews as passengers; there were two Twins in Borneo already engaged on anti-piracy patrols at Tawau on the most easterly tip of the island. The remainder of the unit Twins would follow on as they became serviceable.

A North East Monsoon 'burst' - a mixture of thunderstorms, low cloud, heavy rain and strong winds - made for some unpleasant weather as we crossed the South China Sea on our first leg of 400 miles to Kuching. The low performance of the Twin Pioneer, a twin-engined short range transport aircraft, and lack of navigational aids caused air staff orders to be written about not penetrating cumim type cloud and not flying above more than half cloud cover. Such restrictions usually meant that crews spent most transit flights battling with the heavy rain and squally winds at about 800 feet. Luckily, in the tropics the main base of the biggest storms rarely came below 1000 feet. Until this particular crossing, it was mandatory that a Shackleton of 205 Sqn at Changi accompany us for communications and air sea rescue purposes, but there was to be no such luxury today, they were also busy getting a detachment together to go to Labuan. The 'Shack' crews did not particularly like the duty anyway as they spent their time orbiting around us, or loitering in a race track pattern waiting for us to catch up with their position; our modest 95 knots cruising speed made their 'Shacks' seem positively rapid!

When I started on the Twin Pioneer, the more experienced crews advised me to go for the blacker areas under the cumims (thunderstorms) when confronted with an unbroken line of them - as long as it was certain that it was not hard-centred with a mountain - as these were decaying cells and less likely

to have severe turbulence present. However, it was necessary to adjust the altimeter for the sharp drop in local pressure, be prepared for a strong down draught on entry, and expect the hammering of the very heavy rain which reduced forward visibility to nil. I was never convinced about this procedure, as I was very aware of the dangers of the gusty conditions present when taking off or landing under a thunderstorm. However, I was returning to Singapore from Borneo at one time, well past my point of no return, when my route was blocked by wall-to-wall active cumims. There was no obvious way round so I had to penetrate; I had to put the theory to the test. I put a few extra revs on the gallant Leonides, turned up the cockpit lighting to maximum, twirled off some millibars on the altimeter subscale, tightened my straps, advised the navigator and passengers to do the same, and headed for the darkest rain area with great apprehension. It was as black as your hat in there and the noise from the rain was fantastic, but after an initial downward surge it was surprisingly smooth. To my astonishment, at one stage the wind blew the rain in through the side window at ninety degrees to our direction of flight drenching me and filling the recesses of the rudder trim wheel - a replica of those used for elevator trimming except that it was on its side on top of the centre pedestal - before I could slam the window shut.

After what seemed an eternity of subjection to a cacophony of sound and darkness, split by vivid lightning, we burst out into an aura of sun-dappled seas with small fluffy clouds cruising sedately across an azure blue heaven. We were just south of Horsborough Light on the southern tip of Singapore Island. From then on I was a little happier about charging about under storm clouds in the Twin Pioneer.



Malaya and surroundings 1962

On this particular transit, after four hours, we arrived at Kuching sweeping north of Tanjong Datu to avoid the Indonesian territory of Kalimantan; we touched down in long line astern on a rain soaked runway. The crewmen got busy turning the aircraft round for the next leg to Labuan whilst we trudged across in the monsoonal downpour to the tower to file a flight notification. There was no overall air traffic control in Borneo in those days; we kept mainly to the coast whilst in transit and our only source of traffic and weather information came from the small airstrips, mainly on the coast, that we passed en route. The Chinese controller, who regaled us with stories of dreadful overnight happenings in Brunei, had already been on high frequency radio to Sibul, Bintulu and Labuan asking for weather actuals, and they were not good. All the way up to Labuan the storms were beating against the coast with strong winds and torrential rain. The CO, having studied the met, turned to a row of pensive faces ranged behind him and said with a wry smile, that under normal circumstances he would not ask us to proceed, but these were not normal times and we had to go. We forced on to Labuan in a loose gaggle keeping the coast in view on our right into the teeth of the northeast wind, and, although the visibility was very poor through rain, the weather seemed no worse than on the first leg.

Arrival in Labuan

We arrived at Labuan with aching limbs and ringing ears after a total of eight hours flying. Having shut down and discussed with the navigator how quickly the first pint of Tiger would be consumed, I was more than a little chagrined when I was told that after my aircraft was refueled, I was to go to Brunei with blood for those wounded in the fighting. It was on hearing this and observing the frenetic activity on the airfield that we realised that events had obviously taken a serious turn. We flogged across to Brunei, the weather was worse if anything and it was now dark. Having groped our way in from the coast just above the trees, a glimmer of rain bright tarmac was all that we could see of the runway in the gathering gloom. A swift change of heading and a dash through the relevant actions and checks was all that was necessary before slamming the Twin down. We delivered the blood and rattled off from Brunei in double quick time - the airfield was still not completely secured and the soldiers did not want us cluttering up their fields of fire. A wave top transit brought us back to rain drenched Labuan; the windscreen wipers could barely cope so the lack of forward view and the low cloud base made any organised arrival impossible. Having been cleared to land I did a 'split-arsed' turn on to finals and set up a hasty final approach, but just before touchdown a fire service Land Rover drove across the runway threshold in front of me. A quick burst of power, a loud expletive, and we leapt over it and landed on the other side. Having taxied in and shut down, my navigator, a phlegmatic Yorkshire man, disappeared into the night threatening terrible injury to the driver of the vehicle. I never did find out who it was.

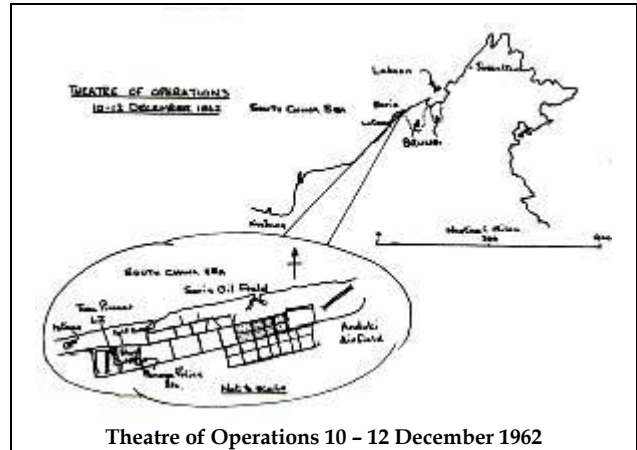
Almost immediately upon arrival all crews were used for aircraft marshalling duties. The airmen we had brought over were busy preparing the Twins for planned operations for next day. Beverleys, Britannias, Hastings, and even one Comet, were arriving with the troop reinforcements from Singapore and they had to be marshalled to a position on the small pan where they could unload their troops without stopping engines. There was no one else available so we did it. We were relieved at around 0400hr when airmen from Changi arrived on a Hastings and were organised into First Line servicing and marshalling parties.

Footsore, wet and weary, we found our kit, which had been stacked in the reception area of the Labuan Hotel - this was a grand name for a clapboard building close to the aircraft parking area that had seen better days so went in search of somewhere to set down our safari beds.

After an uncomfortable night sharing a tiny space with two others, one a Beverley navigator who spent what little there was left of the night snoring off a heavy intake of alcohol and frequent micturition over the low verandah railing, we had a hurried breakfast and presented ourselves at the makeshift Ops Room to see what was in store. I was tasked with picking up a small party of army and police at Brunei to take them on a recce of the coastal area immediately to the west of Brunei. Apparently, an air landed assault was being planned and a location suitable for both the army and the Twin Pioneer was being sought. I was able to assure the party that a strip of land, aligned roughly north south and around 400 yards long, close to the coast should be acceptable. It was near the Shell management married quarters, west of the Seria oilfield, near a place called Panaga. Later it was disclosed that this site had already been chosen on an earlier recce - my party were merely confirming its suitability for their particular requirements.

The Briefing

After returning to Labuan we were briefed on the proposed operation to secure the release of hostages held by the rebels in Panaga Police Station.



Five Twin Pioneers would insert troops of the 1st Battalion of The Queen's Own Highlanders into the strip at Panaga, whilst simultaneously, a Beverley with troops would land on the grass airfield at Anduki to the east of Seria thus forming a kind of pincer movement. I was to fly the third aircraft in the stream. We were to pick the troops up at Brunei, and before mounting the operation they would practice rapid deplanement from our aircraft. To facilitate this the passenger doors were removed; the troops would be in skeleton battle order with weapons, leaving haversacks and packs behind to ensure that they could move fast after deplaning.



At Brunei, the crews stood around watching the rehearsal mindful that the briefing officer had stated that in the event of any incident at Panaga, either because of rebel opposition to our landing (they were known to be deployed around there and had weapons) or because of accidents on landing or take off, we had to deliver the troops. If the strip was blocked we were to land on the golf course just to the east of the proposed landing area.

Underway - At last!

At the appointed time we mounted our charges, not feeling particularly war-like, but looking more the part as all officers, NCO pilots and warrant officer aircrew equivalents (master aircrew) now carried side-arms. We were all a little more apprehensive than usual sharing weak jokes with the already seated troops as we passed up the fuselage to the cockpit.



Practice makes perfect

A ridiculous rule on the issue of weapons had become evident; our NCO navigators were not entitled to sidearms so an antiquated .303 rifle had to accompany them everywhere. This ludicrous state of affairs lasted well into the Borneo Campaign until someone at Labuan used their initiative and authorised the issue of pistols to all without recourse to higher authority.



This time it's for real

The Twins banged into life, the starter cartridges producing smears of acrid smoke that blew in through the door apertures giving the troops a foretaste of cordite fumes. The second aircraft in the stream could not start one of his engines; in fact he blew a starter safety disc in his frenzied efforts to get the thing going. We taxied past him and took off with the instruction to fly out to sea at low level and wait for him. He was soon airborne, chasing after us, as we turned west to position for a final turn south before a quick pull up for landing on the 'strip' at Panaga. We were strung out in long line astern flying as low as possible over a restless turgid sea, maintaining radio silence in case someone was monitoring the R/T at Anduki. I briefed the navigator to advise me when we would be one minute from the final turning point, then busied myself with the routine of operating the Twin.

I was concentrating on height and heading when I felt an urgent tapping on my right shoulder. It was one of the troops, who shouted into my ear that it was important to the success of the air landed assault that the aircraft arrive in the original order. This set me a dilemma. The second aircraft was still well behind us and we were not to use R/T. How should I tell him? I reasoned that it was important to let him know that he should land in order, so after discussion with my navigator we broadcast the gist of what the soldiers wanted couching it in cricketing terms.

The captain of our side has said that the original batting order must be maintained or we may be out for a 'duck'. The other pilots quickly caught on and replied with suitable cricketing epithets. We set up an orbit well out to sea and the second aircraft turned inside us, and following number one, made for the coast which showed as a dark line on the horizon. As we approached the landing area, a large storm was drawing a broad curtain of rain on the sea behind us. It would seem that in its present position and with the prevailing wind, it could

make matters a little tricky in the area of the strip whilst we were there.

As the Beverley would by now have landed at Anduki, and the element of surprise lost, we began to use the R/T in plain language. The leader told the rest of us to orbit whilst he set himself up for a left-hand circuit to land on the strip from the south.

The Attack

Looking down at the landing area, it seemed to be a lot smaller than when I had flown over it in the morning. The trees surrounding the area were quite tall, and down the eastern side there were Shell employees' married quarters; the margins were quite tight, but well within the capabilities of the Twin Pioneer. Landing from the south appeared to be the optimum direction as the approach was clearer with most of the taller trees well away from the extended centre line of the landing zone. We milled around out to sea out of range of any possible ground small arms fire, and as the lead aircraft began his final turn into the strip the next one left the orbit and took up a downwind leg. The leader was just over the end of the strip when I turned to follow the number two. We had been briefed to land as closely together as possible, but it was necessary for the preceding aircraft to take off before the next one landed. I watched the first aircraft as it rounded out to land, he seemed a bit high and he floated a fair way before touch down. From where I was sitting I could see mud and water flying up from his wheels; he did not seem to be stopping. He skidded along gently slewing to the right coming to rest just above the deep monsoon drain that bordered the road on the northern end of the landing zone. The troops deplaned quickly through the open door and filed off at the double into the beluka on the side of the strip. A rather breathless voice then announced over the R/T that conditions were very wet and that approaches from the north may be better. However, the second aircraft continued his circuit for a landing from the south. The leader took off after turning round and immediately he was airborne he jinked left to the east to give the second aircraft a clear run in. He landed without further incident, but he confirmed that it was very wet and slippery and told me to come in from the north.

I advised those behind me that I was going to perform a wide right turn through 360 degrees and set myself up on a long final approach from the north. The navigator briefed the troops down the back that we should be on the ground in about three minutes and that features would be opposite to the way they expected them to be when they deplaned. As I straightened up on finals I could see that there was a very tall tree just to the left of the centre line on the seaward side of the road. Moreover, there was a large bush on the right threshold of the strip. Avoiding the two obstacles reduced the amount of strip available; obviously, it would be necessary to touch down just after the bush. I also noted that there were some buildings just to the west of the short final approach point position, and it passed through my mind that at that point we would be at about 100feet flying at 65 knots! If the rebels did have automatic weapons, we could be at the wrong end of a turkey shoot.

As I set the aircraft up for a STOL approach I decided that I would try for a really short landing so that I would be able to take off using the remainder of the strip, rather than waste time back tracking to the end - and be vulnerable to any ground fire for that much longer.

A month or two before I had been operating in Laos, with the same navigator, on some very short and difficult strips. Before taking on the most challenging of those we were to visit, a place called Phong Saly on the Chinese border, we had practised on Vientiane Airfield before leaving. With a good headwind and normal airfield approaches, I had managed to land and stop before reaching the runway markings, a distance of just over a hundred yards. But here things were very different. The approach was modified by the tree, it was not a nice big airfield I was aiming at, with a steady headwind; here

I was landing downwind on to a wet, slippery surface, and not a smooth concrete runway. I knew I would not be able to stop so soon under these circumstances. Also, there was the twitch factor. We still did not know if this was an opposed landing; the briefing officer had suggested that it could be; at this stage we did not know the rebels' strengths or weaknesses.



Panaga strip

Vic Dabin

The navigator chanted the challenges of the final approach checks, I sang back the responses as I selected landing flap, pushed the RPM levers to the fully forward position, adjusted the power and trimmed the aircraft attitude to achieve a shallow approach at 70 knots. The navigator pressed the para drop light switch to give a red indication to the troops. This was the 'Action Stations' signal we had agreed with the soldiers before take off.

I began the approach slightly off to the right to give the tree maximum clearance, I intended to just shave past the tree and then pull off the power and arrange to fly at 65 knots and land as soon as possible after clearing the bush. Working away at the throttles and pole I dragged her in, and as we approached the tree I thought I had misjudged it and that we were going to put the left wing through it! From the corner of my eye I noticed the navigator was staring mesmerised at the tree and he seemed to be lifting himself in his seat as if to will the aircraft over it. We passed.

It seemed very close, and I snapped the throttles shut and adjusted the attitude for a steeper approach. Now the Twin was a rather staid performer and what it did not like was a sudden change of technique or configuration when it was close to the ground. I saw that the airspeed was now reducing rapidly and I had not yet passed the bush on the right of the strip end. I had to re-apply power, quickly, or hit the bush. This upset my approach and I just managed to scrape past the bush, and hauling back on the control column and re-closing the throttles we 'arrived' in a three-point attitude. More a controlled crash than a landing, it had the effect of absorbing a lot of forward energy and we waddled to a stop with little recourse to brakes in about 150 yards. The navigator shouted to the troops to disembark whilst I swiftly reset the trims, selected take off flap and waited for the word that our passengers had left us. I could see that there was plenty of strip available for a take off from where I had stopped.

I glanced out of my side window and saw to my dismay that we had sunk up to the axles in mud, with a big chock of the stuff in front and between the twin main wheels. On enquiry, the navigator confirmed that it was the same on his side.

Realising that if my aircraft became inextricably bogged it would obstruct the strip and stop the rest of the troop lift, I broadcast to the other aircraft that I was mired and trying to move. Simultaneously, I released the brakes and shoved the throttles forward, but the Twin did not budge. I watched the main wheels anxiously as they appeared to be sinking deeper. Quite forgetting that the troops were still deplaning I opened up to full power. Mud and water flew backward in the storm like slipstream and for a moment or two longer the aircraft strained and pushed against the mud.

Then, as the departure of the troops lessened the aircraft weight we began to move forward slowly, then up and over the chocks of mud. I declared my freedom to the rest of the

aircraft, received a thumbs up affirmation from the navigator that the troops had gone, and without pause charged off down the sodden, puddle strewn surface on take off. We howled towards the beluka at the far end, and just before unstick speed we hit another soft patch and felt a marked deceleration. There was no room left to stop - we had to go. I held her down as long as possible, then hauled her off into a shuddering climb and the Twin, with her flying properties of a man lifting kite, staggered over the jungle tops just above the stall. Stuffing the nose down we achieved our majestic normal cruise speed of 95 knots and then swung north to clear the Seria area before setting heading for Brunei on the wave tops of the South China Sea.

The storm that had been hovering over the coast now dumped its contents on the Panaga area making the strip even wetter. The last two aircraft held off until it had passed and then delivered their troops - apparently, they used the full strip length for landing and took off in the reverse direction as by then it was obvious that the landing was not opposed and reducing ground time was not crucial.

As we clattered back to Brunei the navigator remarked that our load of troops should certainly have been in fighting mood when they met the enemy. My application of full power to unbog the Twin had covered the poor souls in mud and dirty water as they deplaned, and then as they ran into the full slipstream they had been blown off their feet under the tailplane!

Home safely

We landed at Brunei, and after loading more troops delivered them to the much more civilized grass airfield at Lutong Miri further west down the coast from Panaga. Upon return to Brunei we were briefed to load ammunition and take it to Anduki. By now it was dark and we thought that the strip would be unlit. However, on arrival some kind person had managed to provide a limited number of flares down one side of the grass runway. As I made my approach the windscreen suddenly became completely opaque. I just could not see through it. The navigator quickly adapted to the situation and said that he had some visibility through his side, so he talked me down the last fifty feet or so to a safe landing. When we got back to our temporary base at Labuan an investigation showed that a fine film of paint, or some paint preparation, had got on to the windscreen during the last re-paint of the aeroplane. The flares and my approach angle had caused the apparent mistiness.

So ended a rather hectic day. We were told that both air landed troop insertions had been successful with no loss of British lives. The hostages had been released, and our troops were well into clearing the whole area of rebel forces.

Our Wing Commander Operations opined later, over many cans of cold Tiger beer that we had all been involved in probably the first air landed assault, other than glider borne, since the quelling of the Mad Mullah in Iraq in the 1930s.

Shortly after Panaga, the Brunei/Borneo Campaign became largely a helicopter-orientated operation; they had not arrived in theatre at the time of the air landed assault. When it was needed, the Twin Pioneer had proved that it was a very useful, rugged short-range transport aircraft.

ERRATUM

Last Newsletter I committed an Editor's ultimate sin - I made a mistake in the spelling of the name of the author of the 'Now it must be told'. I, therefore, offer my sincere apologies to Fred Stanford. After, the edition went to 'air', so to speak, I learned that the paddy had a fair number of snakes running around. It also came to light that the two Air Dispatchers on board came to no harm.

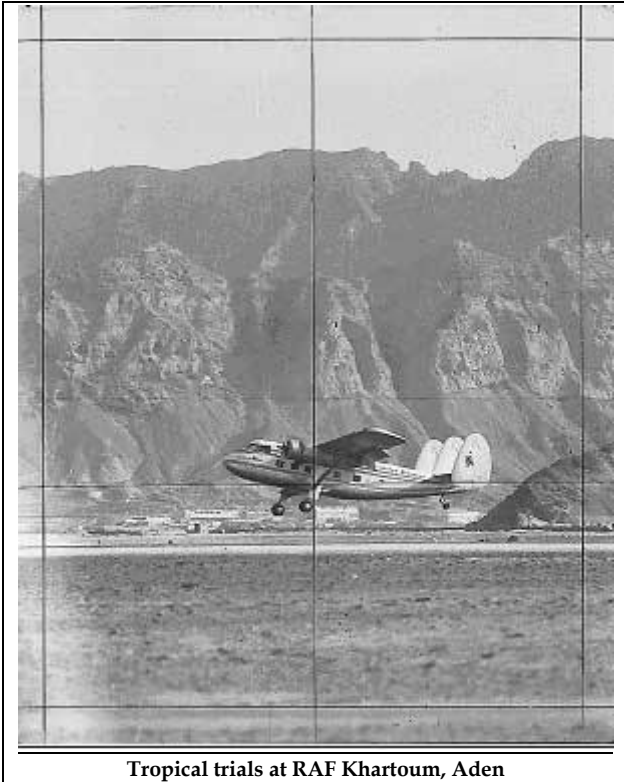


Trainspotter's Corner

by

Anorak

off performance measurement trials. There was mention that the Boscombe Down F47 camera had become available for the Tropical trials and had been used at Khormaksar. John McCallum went searching through his photograph collection and turned up the photograph shown below -



Tropical trials at RAF Khartoum, Aden

It shows G-ANTP with the grid positioned at the joint of the stub wing and the landing gear - the datum point. No matter how much the photograph is enlarged the centre grid wire crosses the registration mark but Andrew McClymont and Ian Adams provided the answer. Your reporter had to search the database to find a photograph of 'TP' with a white top - a successful search found one but the cheat line was above the window row. *Le grand fromage* at SAL must have decided that 'TP' needed a new frock to go abroad.

- The Editor leaves for Scotland in the next few days taking with him printed word on CD and video material on both mini DV and DVD that will be available for you to copy. If you are going to the event at Troon take along everything you've got in the way of Twin Pioneer, Scottish Aviation memorabilia and the like.

- Remember the story about the KLM DC8s with the split colour scheme - KLM on one side and VIASA on the other. I challenged Alan Sneddon to come up with the goods with a photograph (Top of next column). The trouble is he has compounded my dilemma. He has sent a photograph with VIASA on the port side of a DC8 so it must have been PH-DCM. OK so far - but the aircraft is not backtracking on R/W 31 it's taking off. Alan, is it possible to establish the date of the photograph? I'll stop now as I sense readers' eyes glazing over!

- Newsletter Number Twelve carried the story of the 'Likely Lads' that described the Twin Pioneer's temperate take



KLM/VIASA at PIK - a very fast backtrack

- John McCallum wrote recently to say that the Garage 'gaffer' who gave the Editor a 'bollocking' for filling the Bedford Dormobile at the wrong garage en route (Newsletter Number Twelve) was Jimmie Herron. It seems his brother was 'world famous' in Prestwick for the speed with which he could accomplish Glasgow to Prestwick on his motorcycle.

- The Editor was telling me that the trip on which the refueling 'incident' took place was to take spares and effect a repair to C/n 561 leased to British United Airways at Gatwick. The team was Bill Nimmo, Norrie McClintock and the Editor. Arriving at the BUA base it was to find that a brake problem had caused the wing tip to make contact with a hangar. The memory is a bit vague but the repair required the removal of the port wing. This was around 25 May 1961. A picture of C/n 561 is shown below in Sierra Leone Airways livery. By way of a further coincidence, the Editor was reading an article in the April 2005 edition of 'Classic Cars' magazine only the other day and came across an article on Austin Sevens. In recognition of 100 years of the Austin marque, there was to be a London to Brighton run. One of the checkpoints was to be Pease Pottage, near Crawley. That's where the SAL repair team had their lodgings in 1961.



C/n 561 is now better known as G-APRS

Today, C/n 561 is more familiar to us today as shown below -



The Editor is looking forward to renewing an acquaintance