



LFC Newsletter

The Newsletter of the Limerick Flying Club

www.limerickflyingclub.com

Mar 2010

Home from the sea!

By S N Walsh

In the middle of August 2009, John O'Shaughnessy was minding his own business and like so many of us, he was enjoying the flight in his 'Avid Flyer' light aircraft. The aircraft is a high wing fixed undercarriage type. However about 2 miles west of the Tuskar rock events took a nasty turn for John and he was forced to use all his experience and resources to survive the outcome. What should have been a routine flight between Wales and Ireland became eventful and life-threatening when the only engine on board decided to quit. Then John had the nightmare that none of us want, even over land not to mention over the sea. Alan Bramson once described that situation as 'a loud silence'. John has very kindly agreed to share his experiences and comments first hand with us about how he successfully ditched and survived the incident. This insight will be of great benefit from the point of view of instruction, because without practicing the exercise ourselves we could only pass on the theory of the techniques and hope it that would work out on the fateful day.

John says, "When the engine stopped my first reaction was to get a 'mayday' out informing Shannon of my position. During the glide the propeller was stopped. I changed fuel tanks, even though the valve is in a very awkward position behind me and hard to get at. When I made an attempt at an engine restart the propeller actually turned over but the engine did not start again. At that stage I decided to put all my emphasis on getting a proper glide angle and also decided that if a landing must be made in the sea it was probably better to do it with a stopped engine. I was also very careful not to get distracted from the main focus of making a good landing. As I got near the water I checked what way is the wind coming from and what way is swell, then watching the speed and keeping the nose up trying to get the back of the plane on to the water first. When the main wheels hit the water it was like two big oars going out on a boat, and caused the nose to pitch forward very positively into the water, I was on the water, relief 'thank God I am alive'. Then due to the pressure of the water I couldn't get the doors open because the doors push up from the bottom, they lift up. At this stage the aircraft was sinking and was going down quite rapidly, and the big fear was that I would finish up on the bottom of the sea, because for the time being I was stuck inside the cabin. While I was waiting for the pressure to equalise I undid the harness and put on my life jacket, I was already wearing the wetsuit. When I got the doors open I got out and swam out underneath the wing, under the water, and managed to climb on top of the plane."

John must be complimented for doing a textbook job. He is very glad to be able to talk about it now, but also admits that he has now come to realise how fortunate his escape has been.



Like so many other near misses there has always to be a set of circumstances which are in your favour when the chips are down. You may call it luck, but it is actually more than that. There is a lot of skill involved and congratulations John for doing a very fine job. However a dose of good fortune is also a useful addition to a cool head and skill. On the day the weather was pretty good and the sea was relatively calm. If there had been high winds, rough seas and poor visibility, or indeed if the touchdown was not perfect the outcome may well be very different. John also had taken the very wise precaution of wearing a wetsuit which of course vastly increased his chances of survival in the water by maintaining body heat, because the cold and hypothermia are the most direct causes of death following an accident. The fact that John was alone in the aircraft was also good luck because there was the reduced risk of having the evacuation and rescue hampered. Another stroke of gracious fortune was, that there were competition rowers in the vicinity who witnessed the ditching and they also sent out a 'mayday' and were able to pinpoint the downed aircraft position very accurately for the rescue services. John also wants to sincerely thank the Air-sea rescue services for their speed and efficiency during his rescue, he estimates that they were on site inside half an hour, a reassuring tribute indeed. A very important point also is that John was not injured during the ditching or the evacuation. If he had suffered injuries, broken limbs etc. then probably the outcome would be tragic. John does of course know that, and on reflection he is thanking his lucky stars that all the required good fortune was in the right direction.



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The lessons to be learned are of course that with the proper technique, skill and presence of mind it is possible to survive a ditching. Another important point is that nobody should be over the sea in a single engine machine without proper survival gear, and additionally a wetsuit. I have cringed over the years to see people heading off to sea dressed only in a shirt and trousers. A course on how to evacuate the machine in the water would also be a great asset to everybody, and we should actively consider finding and partaking in such an exercise. Many of our members regularly fly to the Aran Islands and of course there is a sea crossing involved there, and it is just as wet as the Irish Sea!



A point of interest is that the aircraft was not seriously damaged in the incident. Most of the damage, such as a broken propeller and a flap, was caused by inexperience and mishandling by people getting the machine ashore. There is a possibility that it will fly again at some stage. Hopefully if it does it will reach a ripe old age and will no longer have any inclination to go swimming.

Reference: Pictures complements *Irish Independent* [online] available from www.independent.ie edition 12 August 2009.

Big Brother recruits Little Sister

By Aggravated Aviator

A notice has appeared on the window of the terminal building on Inishere Airport on the Aran Islands. The notice is on IAA headed paper and essentially instructs the management of the airport and all the check-in clerks to report any aircraft which lands on the field without prior permission. The letter indicates that the registration letters of the machine and, when available, the name of the pilot in command, should be passed on to the authorities. Just to let you know that the warpath has been activated. So be careful and do please comply with

the regulations and ask for permission in future.

The true identity of 'Aggravated Aviator' is known to the editor and can be released if there is a legitimate reason for so doing. ED.

Joe Hennessy - Remembrance

By Roy McCormack

Sean Walsh contacted me some time ago and asked that I write a piece on Joe, for your Newsletter. I agreed, but I wish all of you to understand that I am not a writer and I do lack that descriptive gene that would deliver what I feel to be the required impact. To get me started I need a stage, a starting point, and that stage would be the time I first met him.

I met Joe during my first attendance at a meeting of the Limerick Scribblers. This is an organization, co-founded by Joe, which is devoted to helping and advising young writers. I cannot explain the whys and the wherefores, perhaps it would be better if I did not look for a reason or reasons, suffice it to say that from that first meeting Joe and I became friends.



Joe was a man of principle, his loves in life were his family, his writing, aviation and everything that had to do with aviation and America. He was very proud to be an American, and I have no doubt that the time he served with the organization, Air America, in the Far East was also a source of great pride for him. He served that organization with distinction and was duly honoured for his commitment and dedication.

There was sureness within Joe that was admirable. There were other admirable traits, he never mistook acquaintance for friendship, he was untiring and selfless with his time and advice to young 'would be' writers who sought his help with their writing.

A place dear to Joe was Coonagh, Happiness was a Sunday afternoon in Coonagh, to go to a place where he met with his friends and immersed himself in the many conversations about aircraft, logistics, scheduling and all the glamour that is part of aviation. He will be missed.



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What price should flying be?

By S N Walsh

It has occurred to me lately that flying may have become rather inexpensive when compared to other forms of entertainment. Consider the cost of an event which took place on 7th November 1963. That event was the concert played by the Beatles pop group in the old Odeon cinema in Abbey Street, Dublin. The price of admission to that concert was 6 shillings and sixpence. If I am allowed to use my calculator that amount of old money amounts to €0.41 in the currency of today. There are reliable reports that even for that seemingly paltry sum, many young people did not have enough money to buy a ticket. The main audience consisted of female workers from some factories, Jacobs among them, who had wages and could save up for the ticket.

In July 2009 Elton John played a concert in Thomond Park just up the road from Coonagh. The cost of the ticket to that concert was €79.25. Notwithstanding this massive amount the venue was packed out.

Now it is calculator time again. The cost of an hour of flying at Coonagh in 1963 was £4.00 or €5.08 in modern terms. If the ratio of increase is taken into account compared to the inflated cost of entertainment it would work out that the actual real cost on an hour of flying should be about €982. This is a very sobering thought. Is the cost of musical entertainment gone out of every proportion of reasonable amounts or is the cost of flying only a small fraction of what it actually should be? Maybe flying is not quite as expensive as we think!

Another young pilot

On Saturday 13th February Harry Humphreys joined a gallant band of pilots and carried out his first solo. Harry is among a group of a few people who have gone solo at Coonagh around their 16th birthdays. Harry may well be the youngest by some week of two, but in any case it is a brilliant achievement for anybody so young.

Best wishes and safe flying Harry.

Appeal

By Ed.

As in the past the Newsletter is for everyone in the club. It is meant to inform and gossip and whatever needs to be written from time to time.

However without some copy it becomes difficult to keep a credible show going. For that reason I would hope that there will be contributions from many of the club members and also from the committee officers. At this stage I want to thank the people who have contributed both to this issue and to past issues.

This is a re-launch of the Newsletter, and it was sad that it has been 'off the shelves' for so long due to lack of editorial input. This Newsletter will only be published on the Web, there will be no mail shot to anybody.

In the past few years, while we were away the club went through many changes. Among them was the purchase of two brand new Italian Tecnam aircraft, for the first time ever. We have had Jacek Rosik from Poland gain a PPL, the first person from Eastern Europe to qualify in the Club. We have had Thomas Richter an adult from Germany go solo in less than 8 hours. More details of all this will emerge as we progress. We of course have had some newly qualified PPLs and one very rare creature nowadays, a newly qualified Instructor.

Also we have had the sad event of the first fatal accident since 28th July 1963. Ironically the accident which killed John Keane R.I.P. also happened in the month of July.

Indeed many thanks to everyone who has already contributed articles for publication. Please keep up the good work and we will all try to make the Newsletter a worthwhile document to inform and entertain our members.

Ground school 2009/10

The ground school classes are continuing each Monday and Thursday nights. This year has seen an increase of interest and a better attendance than in recent years. New changes are taking place to aid teaching, including a facility to conduct classes live online to facilitate any student who cannot attend the club on the night for any reason. We are very happy that the changes are proving to be an asset to our students and the feedback is good.

Club AGM

The club AGM will convene in Hotel Greenhills Ennis Road on Wednesday 3rd March at 2000 hours. As this is an important event in the life of the club all members are urged to make a special effort to attend. If however this is not possible for you, please have the courtesy to contact the secretary with an apology.



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Online Booking System

By Tony Khan

It is the intention of the committee to continue phase II of the introduction of our online booking system by going live for online booking at the weekends. As part of a two stage implementation from Wednesday March 3rd online booking will be available for the weekends.

For the month of March ALL student bookings will still be flown in accordance with the present allocated slot system. I would however request that all students go online and book their present slot on the web so as to familiarise yourselves with the new booking system. This is the second stage of the implementation plan. It will be discussed at the AGM on 3rd March.

The online booking system will also be the tool for PPL bookings so I would urge all members to attend the AGM and address any questions they may have.

The Joy of Flight

By Foncy Hobbins

Two years ago Mark Conway arrived at Coonagh with a beautiful metal model aeroplane which he wanted to donate to the club, accompanied by his minder, John Curtin, who lives just next door to us at the airfield. Mark works at Clonroad Industrial Services which is owned by the Brothers of Charity Services in Limerick. Mark is slightly mentally challenged but has a passionate interest in many things including aviation. I met him and his friends and gave them the guided tour but unfortunately I was not able to grant Mark's wish of a flight as the crosswinds made flying too difficult that day. Promises were made and I resolved to ensure that a flight would take place in a matter of weeks, not months and certainly not two years!

During the weeks and months that followed I flew fairly regularly and occasionally looked at my 'promise list' of those I had offered a flight. Some worked out fine but others were dashed by miserable weather. We fly, but so too does time. Time for action I thought when I rang John to offer a flight in early 2009 for Mark who regularly asked about it at work! But health problems delayed any of those notions for John and I let things slip away.

And then the cold arrived this year but with it came clear, calm weather and a few weeks ago I made that call at short notice. Could they be in Coonagh by 2pm? You bet your life they could! The sight of sheer excitement on

Mark's face was worth it all and I felt delighted to finally bring Mark aloft in EI-LFC on a short but memorable trip around the city. I have never seen anyone so excited and WOW was a constant cry as we flew! His brief handling of the controls led to more yells of delight and the camera clicked often. He also played a clever trick on me by muttering into the radio fooling me into thinking I had traffic in the circuit! His laughter was infectious and we both had a good laugh!

There were more photos, more Wows and a very special flight for Mark. And it was special for me too. I had finally kept my promise but more important than that I had brought the joy of flight to someone that I know will always remember the 10th February 2010.

The prolonged winter 2009/10

By Aggravated Aviator

Most of us who have some grey hairs will not be unduly surprised by the long session of frost, snow and freezing fog. It indeed has happened before, and many of us seemed to be nostalgic in recent winters about the lack of clear frosty weather and therefore good flying conditions.

The past ten years or so have been very mild in winter and frost was almost unusual recently. I remember recalling to someone that this year was the first time since 1961 that I was able to walk across a lake near my home. That far back winter was indeed winter and we spent many hours skating on the ice of frozen ponds and lakes, it was almost a new lease of life to be able to do again this year.

However flying was disrupted around Christmas and afterwards because of severe weather at the airfield. On some occasions the runway was covered by slippery ice and as we had no resources to clear it, therefore operations could not take place. On at least another occasion the rollers of the hangar doors were frozen solid, so although the runway and the weather were both fine, we could not get the aeroplanes out. That was very disappointing.

However since early January there has been quite a lot of flying and it was nice to see the airfield very busy. On one Sunday recently every machine in the hangar was in operation. Who ever heard of recession or shortage of fuel etc, good to be able to buck the trend.

The inclement weather which we have had since November, first flooding then cold, frost and freezing fog, did however present very interesting photo subjects. Jim



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Keane has submitted very good aerial views, the best one I have seen for years is the exhaust plume from the Shannonbridge power station emerging up through the layer of fog underneath the aircraft.



Then of course there are a couple of pictures of the flooded lands around the Castleconnel area and the Mountshannon road, in the wider Limerick district in the aftermath of the severe rains that fell through a lot of the month of November.

The picture here by Jim gives a good impression of the misery that some people had to suffer, not to mention the problems for farmers and their animals.



That was fine work Jim and thank you for the pictures. We may have been feeling bad about having some flying disrupted by the weather, but that was a very minor pain

compared to that of the people living in the areas affected by the flooding.

Solo in very little time

Thomas Richter, from Germany, is among a very few people who have been able to achieve their first solo at Coonagh in less than 10 hours. This is Thomas and the Tecnam just after the flight in which he went solo in just over 8 hours of actual flying. What is unusual about Thomas is that he is not a teenager, unlike all the others who have gone solo with very low flying hours.



Articles

The LFC Newsletter is published monthly, in the first week of the month. All articles, letters, etc. must reach the Editor at least two days before distribution. All club members, and non-members who are interested in our club, or flying, are invited to publish articles. Please submit your article by email to newscoonagh@gmail.com or in person or by post. They may on any subject you wish, information, gossip, fun, logistics, or anything else.

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