



LFC Newsletter

The Newsletter of the Limerick Flying Club

www.limerickflyingclub.com

Nov 2011

Sunday Breakfast is back...

By Mark Lloyd

After a greatly missed gap in what used to be the club's unofficial weekly get together, Jane Magill has agreed to take up the mantle once again and look after the catering/cooking of Sunday Breakfast in the Clubhouse, much to the delight of those "Usual (Sunday Morning) Suspects".



The weekly Sunday Breakfast was started by Jane some years ago while she was still training to get her PPL. While she would be waiting for her lesson she would somehow rustle up all the ingredients of a 'Full Irish', including OJ, tea, coffee, etc for any members, instructors and Duty Officers in need of solid refuelling. Needless to say the word got around, and before too long the atmosphere when you walked into the Clubhouse on a Sunday morning resembled that of a packed pub the night before, you practically needed to shout to be heard! Generally, anyone who experienced the craic, atmosphere and banter (even some character assassination) of the Sunday morning in the Clubhouse returned week after week regardless of bad weather or flying conditions, which tells a story in itself. Even if you knew you weren't going to be flying you would still make it out to the club for a bit

of a 'chin-wag'. I would strongly recommend it to any new members and students because this is the part of your unofficial flying training that you may have heard about, known as Hangar Flying. You will learn as much about flying, and the club, in this unofficial class as you will while sitting in an aircraft or in formal groundschool.

Sunday Breakfast also developed into a sort of catch up for members. It became a place where you could find out what had been happening within the club, who was flying where, or if there was a spare seat available! Also find out what was planned for the future and what was happening socially within the organisation. There were usually a couple of Committee Members present on most occasions which allowed members to put any issues to the powers that be if they felt the need to, which was very useful in that it gave feedback to the Committee about the membership in general, which was very positive from both perspectives.

Jane has said that she will happily run the show for the foreseeable future, subject to her not having prior commitments at Atlantic Airventure in Shannon. She is confident that on most Sundays the gig will be covered. If there are any members who are interested in covering for Jane if or when she can't make it, please contact me so that I can allocate you on the duties roster at the club. As most of you will know, Jane does this voluntarily and buys the grub herself so a voluntary €3, or more is much appreciated, which is excellent value for a breakfast which includes unlimited tea coffee and bikkies throughout the day. Additional donations such as teabags, coffee, bikkies etc are also more than welcome, but unfortunately it won't get you out of paying your €3! Any monies collected in excess of the cost of the grub to Jane go to the Clubhouse improvement fund, so please do support it as best you can so that we can try to constantly improve the



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facilities for all members. We hope that Sunday Breakfast will be as popular as it always had been, now that it is back and we look forward to seeing you all there, from 11:00 every Sunday, regardless of weather forecast.

Dad, again...

Congratulations to our illustrious Chairman Mr Joe Johnston who has managed to sire yet another son in recent weeks. What many of you don't know is that we had a little gathering under the guise of a head-wetting party in the city a couple of weeks ago.



The evening started in the Mogul with an Asian meal with some club members which was organised primarily by Tony Khan. When the payments were made for the food the party moved initially to the Shannon Rowing club on Sarsfield bridge and to the misfortune of that club our people discovered a very fine snooker table. This led to a very boisterous table game called Crud which got fairly wild for a while, even the referee Michael Kerrison lost track of who was supposed to be in charge.

However it was good fun and the management

of the rowing club had not quite got around to throwing us out when the next phase of the plan was implemented. This was largely based on a 'witch's brew' of salt tequila and lemon which all present had to endure briefly before the whole entourage walked to the Locke pub for a more conventional 'pissup'. I can't remember any more, I was probably gone home to bed before the final calls in that establishment.



No Harry, you can't keep it, sorry!

The 'Celestial Dawn' operation...

By Derek Nequest

We had just finished our evening meal in the crewroom, which is on the first floor of the Shannon SAR Hangar, when the siren sounded, drowning out the evening news, or whatever was on TV at the time. It was 1915 on Sat 2nd Feb 2002 and we had been 'on-shift at 15 min readiness' since 1300, and our shift would end at 1300 the following day, as usual. We were the duty SAR Helicopter crew comprising, Captain (P1), Co-pilot (P2), Winch Operator, Winchman and two Engineers one an avionics specialist and one engine/airframes.

The siren can be activated either manually from the operations room below, or by a direct link between the Shannon SAR base and Valentia Coast Guard. We knew it was an immediate call-out from Valentia, as they would normally notify us of less urgent jobs without activating the siren! The P2 and the engineers immediately rushed downstairs



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to prepare the helicopter for take-off. P2 donned his immersion suit, ready to start the aircraft once the engineers had opened the hangar doors and moved the Sikorsky S61N out on to the dispersal. Our next priority was to obtain sufficient information about the job to determine if there were any special requirements before take-off eg additional fuel and to then to carry out essential flight planning.

It had been a filthy day, not uncommon in February and throughout the afternoon the weather had been completely unsuitable for winching training, which all SAR crews practise as much as possible (you never become proficient at anything without practise), but instead we opted to go for an hour and a half of instrument flying training, which turned out to be very relevant later!

We had 15 mins to get airborne from the moment the siren sounded, and we knew that was sufficient time to flight plan, refuel if required and load up additional equipment if necessary. The initial details from the Coast Guard were necessarily minimal, but sufficiently detailed to 'get the ball rolling'. The Celestial Dawn an Irish registered, Spanish crewed trawler had come to grief at the entrance to Dingle Harbour, while attempting to put out to sea. There were 10 crew members on board and the vessel had struck rocks and capsized.

It was also a filthy night and the weather conditions dictated that an IFR transit to the area would be necessary. There was no assurance at that time that Kerry Airport would be in the clear, so it was essential to carry sufficient fuel to complete the job and return IFR to Shannon. So a quick decision was made to take on additional fuel, although with the prospect of lifting 10 survivors, we didn't want to take any more than was absolutely necessary as weight and, therefore power margins could be a problem later.

The remaining 3 members of the crew decamped down stairs as quickly. The engineers refuelled the aircraft, while basic flight planning was completed and Valentia Coast Guard was informed of our initial plan. We would carry out an IFR transit to overhead Kerry Airport, and then fly directly to Dingle Bay. The urgency of the situation meant that we could not afford the time to complete an ILS which might have given us the opportunity to get

below the cloud base. Using a combination of the Kerry NDB and the three GPS receivers supported, by the excellent radar on the S61, we navigated to an area off-shore where a safe let-down could be carried out, hopefully below the cloud base! Once 'on-scene', the situation would be assessed, the rescue completed, if possible, and the survivors taken to Tralee Hospital or more likely in view of the cloudbase to Kerry Airport or if all else failed back to Shannon where we knew we could recover on ILS. The Coast Guard set the wheels in motion to have ambulances available, wherever!

We were fully kitted up by this stage and rushed out to join P2 in the mighty S61, which was now 'turning and burning' ready to go. The clock had been running for about 10 mins from the time the siren sounded, so we had sufficient time to brief P2 about the plan and complete essential checks, before taxiing out for an immediate IFR departure from taxiway D2. The wind was southerly, so we took off in the right direction for Farranfore.

Following SOP's, P2 flew the aircraft to the scene of the incident while P1 carried out navigation and sortie management functions ie entering RNav waypoints, terrain clearance, avionics selection etc. P1 would take over control to complete the rescue once at the operational area. The winching door and the winch are on the starboard side of the helicopter, so it is usually preferable for the Captain to fly the aircraft during the rescue phase, as unlike fixed-wing aircraft, he occupies the right hand seat!

We were airborne in less than 15 mins from the initial call-out, and entered cloud almost immediately. The cloud base was about 400 ft and icing level just above our planned transit height of 3,000 ft. En-route, Valentia Coast Guard provided the latest info, the stricken crew were clinging on to the upturned hull, the Dingle Coast Guard, the Cliff Rescue Team and the Valentia RNLi Lifeboat were 'on scene'. We flew to overhead Kerry using the NDB, DME, GPS combination and then set off, maintaining altitude, towards the centre of Dingle Bay using the same nav equipment, but now also assisted by radar. There is low ground all the way, provided you don't stray too far either side of the direct track! Once Inch Point had been identified, by this time radar was proving to be invaluable, both displaying and verifying the ground position of



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all waypoints entered into the RNav. A gentle descent was initiated down to whatever the cloudbase was and it turned out to be about 300 ft amsl. With the rad alt and airspeed holds engaged at 200 ft amsl, we were due south of Dingle Harbour and so turned to the north (downwind). There was about 3 nm of sea room to the nearest point of land, but all was blackness! We could see no lights whatever, so we continued cautiously towards the entrance of the Harbour with the radar painting a beautiful picture. Now all those training flights were definitely starting to pay big dividends!

About one nm from the Harbour entrance, we started to pick out some lights, and at that point the P1 took control. On approaching the scene we were able to climb up to just below the cloudbase to give a bit more manoeuvring space, and we flew slowly by the stricken trawler, still heading north, to make the initial assessment. The vessel was stuck on the eastern side of the Dingle Harbour entrance. We would need to make our approach into wind (southerly direction) and once in the hover, turn the helicopter to point north (downwind again) to place the trawler on our starboard side, for winching, and to take advantage of the available lights. Once this manoeuvre had been completed, which took about 3 mins we were established in an 80 ft hover over the trawler, ready to go!

This was the first opportunity we had had to really take in the full picture which was like a scene from a disaster movie, but this was for real. The trawler was caught firmly on the rocks, upside down, and the 10 men were in a row clinging desperately to the upturned keel. The Coast Guard Cliff Rescue team were illuminating the ship with powerful lights from the cliff top, and the Valencia Lifeboat was also providing some light from the seaward side, albeit less stable than the cliff top lights.

The lifeboat had attempted to take the crew off before we arrived, but this proved to be impossible. The sea state at the relatively narrow entrance to the Harbour was amazing as the waves rushed in, reinforced by the wind, like a venturi, creating a very big sea concentrated at that point. All the RNLI guys could do was to watch in frustration and stand by in case one of the crew was washed off the hull. However, it was virtually certain that anyone falling into the water that night would have

perished long before the Lifeboat could get close enough. It was quite surreal as the area was well illuminated, lots of people watching helplessly, and huge waves breaking over the trawler and crew, moving the vessel constantly and making it only a matter of time before, one by one, the sailors lost all strength and drowned! They were literally only yards from safety, but the only way to remove them from danger was to winch them into the Helicopter.

In a rescue involving multiple casualties, the preferred method of recovering them to the helicopter is to lower the Winchman to the vessel, cliff, or whatever where he detaches himself from the winch hook, and then proceeds to feed the casualties up on the winch in pairs. This is usually the quickest method of rescue. The cable can only take two people because there is a chance of it being placed under high stress, which is always a possibility in most 'operational' winching situations. However, in this situation, in view of the very low chance of the Winchman being able to avoid being washed off the upturned hull, if he detached himself from the hook, and therefore, the very high risk of ending up with 11 casualties instead of 10, the necessary decision was taken for the Winchman to remain attached to the cable at all times. Then he had to take each survivor up in a 'double lift' one at a time, and this was going to be exceptionally hard physical work for the Winchman!

We worked as quickly as possible, always conscious of the fact that the ship's crew were clearly very tired and must have been losing strength rapidly. In the end it took about 25 mins to winch everyone on board the helicopter and during the process the Winchman was washed off the hull on at least two occasions! Needless to say it was a good job he remained attached to the winch cable! One of the many problems facing the Winchman that night was that, although the ship's crew were tiring they all had a very firm grip on the keel. There is no such thing as a fisherman who does not have a vice like grip and, understandably, they were reluctant to relinquish their hold on life. Even when the rescue strop had been placed around each one in turn they still didn't want to let go! The Winchman, therefore, had to use a fair amount of 'persuasion' and, occasionally, it took both hands to do the job – that's when he got washed off usually! He subsequently received a very well deserved



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award from the Minister for his actions that night.

When in the hover, the pilot cannot see directly beneath the helicopter and, therefore, is unable to maintain the required precise position over the vessel without directions given to him by the Winch Operator, who maintains a constant 'patter' painting a verbal picture of what is going on below, and giving the necessary corrections to the pilot. The Winch Operator was a very busy man that night! It was fortunate that both Winch Operator and Winchman were two of the most experienced SAR crew in the business, that fact alone was crucial to the successful outcome of the operation.

Once we had all 10 crew and our Winchman aboard, it was time to head speedily for the nearest hospital, or at least as close as the weather conditions would permit. We knew that the survivors were suffering from exposure but we just hadn't had time to see if there were any injuries. So it was a case of 'haul in as much power' as the beast could manage for a downwind transition pointing towards Dingle Town. The illumination from the town allowed us to dive to gain airspeed quickly to achieve single-engine safety speed, a luxury that had not been available during the actual rescue operation. We circled Dingle at low level and it was clear that, as suspected, we would not be able to make the landing site at Tralee hospital. We elected to go for our second option Kerry airport and set off at low level over Dingle Bay back towards the airport in the hope that we could avoid a lengthy ILS procedure and make it in visually, thus saving valuable time, and ensuring that our band of survivors received medical attention as quickly as possible. A brief call was made to Valentia Coast Guard and Shannon ATC informing them of our intentions. As luck would have it when coasting in at Inch and flying up Castlemaine Harbour it became clear that it would be possible to make a visual approach to the airport.

The rest of the night's story was straightforward. On arrival at the airport we were met by a fleet of ambulances as Valentia had also been very busy organising everything while we were 'on scene'. We remained rotors running while our casualties were escorted to the waiting Ambulance Service personnel for the trip to Tralee hospital. We then took on a little more fuel for the return journey, just

in case, never miss an opportunity to take on fuel if there is available payload! A final IFR transit and ILS approach into Shannon saw us back at base, and the helicopter tucked up in the hanger once more, after a sortie that had lasted 2 hrs 10 mins.

The following day it was confirmed that none of the 10 survivors had sustained any injuries during their previous nights excursion and they were released shortly afterwards. They had been very lucky to have escaped unscathed. It was ironic that the Celestial Dawn had sought shelter from the bad weather in Dingle Harbour a couple of days before the disaster, and had only attempted to continue with its fishing expedition at a time when the crew thought it was safe. However the Celestial Dawn, a 98 ft steel hulled, stern trawler had managed only 15 mins of its planned voyage before the accident, which was believed to have been caused by steering problems. The vessel, therefore still had some 39 tonnes of Gas Oil and 400 litres of lubricating oil on board which presented a potentially serious pollution hazard. Needless to say we were airborne bright and early the following day to conduct a 'pollution check' flight. In the event there was a little pollution from leaking diesel but thankfully it was not too bad. Although the vessel was seriously damaged it had, fortunately, retained most of its structural integrity, at least in the area of the fuel tanks.

Nevertheless the vessel was lying in a dangerous position on a shelf underneath the lighthouse at the entrance to Dingle Harbour. If she were to slip from the shelf she could easily have blocked the Harbour entrance. Enter the salvage operation very impressive! It was necessary to secure the vessel to the cliff in the first instance. This was carried out by building a road to the lighthouse to allow access for vehicles, and then inserting rock anchors in the cliff and securing the vessel with mooring ropes. The operation then continued by pumping the oil ashore up the cliff. Finally, a few days later, the Celestial Dawn was removed by the heavy lift shearlegs barge 'Norma'.

SAR is a funny old business. It involves a great deal of time hanging around waiting for something to happen, spending as much time as possible training and preparing for the next 'big one', which can happen at any time and enjoying brief periods



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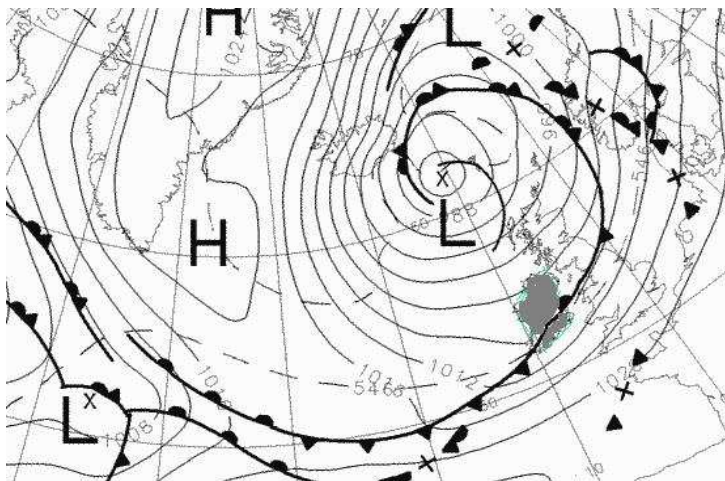
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of extreme excitement! It is during the latter of those times that all the training and experience come into their own and, hopefully, enable the guys to make a difference and to contribute something back to society. Needless to say, all SAR crews find the job both demanding and very rewarding, and on the night of Saturday 2 February 2002, everything came together just right! It was extremely gratifying to have such an 'all-round' happy ending to this particular story. It is not very often in SAR, which is unpredictable at the best of times, that it can be stated with confidence that lives would have been lost without the intervention of the SAR helicopter. On this occasion there is little doubt that without a bit of 'rotary help' all 10 crew members would have perished.

The Weather Exile...

By S N Walsh

What with a series of complex lows during the latter part of the 'summer' especially during September and October the visibility and visual flying conditions were very poor. There were some unusual occurrences, among them at least two instances of complex depressions which had no fewer than four low centres enclosed in their circulations. The proliferation of warm, cold, occluded and even bent back occluded fronts led to some unusual weather chart patterns which are rare even in this very unpredictable weather region of the world. On some occasions there were even cold fronts tied onto the end of a warm fronts, totally omitting any warm sectors.



As if that was not bad enough in itself on some occasions whole systems moved back from the East again for another 'go' at us.

All this of course led to some very bad VFR weather and that was reflected in the lack of flying activity for a couple of months, especially at weekends. What I am really saying is that of course there was practically a whole month of fog, mist, drizzle and low clouds which may have some of the more cynical of us express the exclamation 'Dear God when will I see my country again'?

However it seems that God is good also, because November has started off very nicely and on the weekend of the 5th and 6th Coonagh airfield was like a swarm or upset hornets, due to the proliferation of flying activity. Fortunately the weather has improved this month and we look forward to seeing some flying activity again, even while breakfast is being consumed in the clubhouse.

Airway robbery in daylight...

Galway airport are still charging a transit fee for comms. service by their ATC unit. This has been confirmed to me by contact with Gillian in airport management. The charges are set at 2/3 of the landing fee and will amount to about €12 per operation for light aircraft. This fee is still being charged despite the fact that the commercial schedule at the airport is more or less non-existent due to the withdrawal of the Aer Arann winter operations. However there is still a class C zone operating during ATC hours which Galway airport has confirmed are now 0830 – 1730 Mon – Fri 0930 – 1700 Sat – Sun. The only good news is that EICM zone is so small it will be possible to avoid it altogether.

Deadline...

Many thanks to who have contributed articles. The deadline for December issue is 6th Dec. Please have your articles in by that deadline, so the Newsletter can be published on time. Thanks, ED.