



October 2009

SKYWRITINGS

Newsletter of the *Mid Kent*



Light Aircraft Association

Mike's Mutterings

Mike Negus -
Editor



War Rooms at Uxbridge

By Gary Smith

The battle of Britain conjours up a picture of Spitfires chasing Messerschmitt, heroes in flying jackets and heroines around a plotting table logging the Germans every move.

The skies are free and the people mostly gone but the plotting table and all of its artefacts are totally preserved in the 60ft deep "war rooms" bunker located in the grounds of RAF Uxbridge (west London). The site is not open to the public and following prolonged correspondence with the RAF we finally got on the visitors list (unfortunately it was at short notice and the invite never got in our maga-



Entrance to the War Rooms - RAF Uxbridge

October Meeting

29th September 2009

Talk by John Thorpe on Bristol Test Centre (inc Concorde)

zine). A group of 14 mid Kent strut members ventured around the M25 on Tuesday 6th Oct to discover the secrets of the bunker and what a place to visit.



There has never been an airfield at Uxbridge despite it being an RAF camp. During the first world war the grounds were used to train air bourn gunners whilst Hillingdon house (the once large hunting lodge) was used as a convalescent hospital. In inter-war period saw it develop into a recruitment base as well as a centre for archives and general RAF administration. The first “operations rooms”(opened in 1925) were wooden sheds in the grounds of the old lodge. Whilst these were totally unsuitable for war, but the location of site was ideal :- close to parliament but not in central London, not on an airfield so less likely to be a primary bombing target and west of London so less likely to get the brunt of any attacks. With war imminent, plans were quickly drawn up to move the

No matter how much you push the envelope, it'll still be stationary.

“equipment” underground. Work commenced in February 1939 and the “11 Group Operations Rooms” were completed by August the same year, just 10 days before the outbreak of war.

Having passed through the gas tight doors and descended the 66 steps, the plotting room is the focal point of the bunker. On the floor stands a large 10” x 20” table depicting a map of the south east of England and coast of France. A call from a coastal radar station would pass information to a “table operator” who would place a block on the map depicting the incoming raid and there could be up to 20 people at a time plotting 24 hours a day.

The wall behind the table was awash with lights depicting the status of the squadrons at various airfields like Tangmere and North Weald. The “operations director” could then look at the enemy “plots” on the table and judge when he should scramble his own aircraft such that they can send the “bosh” packing with minimal impact. Whilst a squadron is fighting its wall light turns red to show that shortly it will need to refuel and will not be available. The plotting table is set for 11:30 on 15^h September 1940 after a particularly heavy raid on Biggin Hill. Winston Churchill, watching the proceedings in the bunker, saw all of the lights turn red and asked “what reserves do we have”. The reply..... “we have no reserves, everything we have is flying.” Churchill is then alleged to have quoted :- “Never in the history of human conflict has so much been owed to so many by so few”.

The operations room was used throughout the war including the evacuation of Dunkirk and D day. With the invention of ground Interception radar the bunker closed in 1958 and lay moth balled until

1975 when it was restored by 9 Signal regiment.

2010 will see the total closure of RAF Uxbridge and the relocation of all operations to Northolt. The bunker will remain but surrounded by a new housing estate (we could do with a few of those bombs now eh!). We are hoping the curator will give us a talk in the new year so watch this space and please come along.

Classic Wings by John Woodcraft

So, here I am, on the way to Duxford, my initial feelings of bravado fading with every mile along the M 11. If you are an aviation enthusiast and have never been all I can say is why. However, on this occasion I am hoping to join Classic Wings as a volunteer, without making too much of a fool of myself. (I was unsuccessful in this!)

Greetings exchanged and introduction completed I was introduced to the wonderful Dragon Rapide, which looks a great deal bigger on the ground and for some reason more "macho". Pre flighting included all the usual elements, but also reaching right in to the beasts body (a little poetic licence please) and pumping the fuel through with one hand, whilst tickling the carb. With the other all the while on ever extending arms and legs. All quite normal for a vertically challenged person like me. Upon entering, the Dragon gives the immediate feel of bygone era, I was almost expecting to

A rubber band pistol was confiscated from algebra class because it was a weapon of math disruption.

see Bette Davis sitting there smoking with an impossibly long cigarette holder. A quite steep climb to the small single seat cockpit for the Captain, (as ever, disgustingly young and fit), it presents no problems., the battery however is another matter, under the floor by the front seat, must be re-connected and involves some athleticism on a sloping deck, all done with the minimum of fuss by the man I am shadowing. Just time for a quick look round and its back to the office, the first customers begin to arrive, and I am reminded that this is very much a commercial operation.

Like all customers carrying enterprises, customers need to be briefed for, elf and safety reasons, and this can be quite daunting but, having faced a class of, (don't want to be here), apprentice bricklayers, not too bad. Passengers need to be loaded carefully with consideration given to C & G, some diplomacy is needed at the weigh-in. As yet, I have not mastered the loading and was very politely, on this occasion, made aware of this. Well despite my best efforts, the Dragon managed to climb away.

Flushed with success or more aptly, embarrassment, I was called to help with the tigers. This involves, amongst other things, old passenger out, new one in, change the film, accompany passenger back to the office. By this time, the Dragon has landed and the whole procedure is repeated. I found that as the day wore on the pace picked up. The pilots and everyone else, working hard but still having time for a fair amount of banter.

Although completely undeserved, I was given a ride in the Dragon, it flies exactly like it looks, slow, gracefully and swan like with the pilot working his butt off up front.

So ended my first day and much to my surprise, they invited me back. I won't mention the numerous mistakes I made but I enjoyed the whole thing. Now how to wangle a ride in the tiger? Washing up, Hoover the office, perhaps I am grovelling, save that for the Harvard.

Strut Flyout to Abbeville

It was a great day out - the weather helping to make it one of the best. Warm and sunny, though a bit marginal at times. 15 planes made it to Abbeville the largest contingent coming from Biggin Hill. It was a real treat to see them.



We were made very welcome in the restaurant on the airfield and 20 of us sat down for a very enjoyable lunch. After a very long natter and a walk round the aircraft we gradually drifted away about 4pm.

Brian Hope's Musings

Mike asked me to knock something together for the newsletter so rather than conjure up an article, I thought I'd empty my head of some of the things that have occupied me of late. Only today I was up at the strip to organize the hangar for a composites course for the LAA Educational Trust. As you will have read in Light Aviation, following the success of the 08/09 winter season, LAA ET has again organised a series of training courses on such things as aircraft woodwork, aluminium construction, aircraft wiring etc, and Strut members Steve Brown and Mike Roper had kindly agreed to present a course on composite aircraft construction. Both are well versed on the subject, having built Rutan designs, Steve also being an LAA composite inspector. Gary Smith, who is heavily involved in presenting the aluminium construction courses that we run up at Turweston, was a tremendous help in organizing the tables and chairs etc that we needed to convert a hangar into a classroom for the day, particularly as I ended up being laid up for a few days with back trouble. The course went off extremely well, with delegates coming from the midlands, the west country, and even one chap from Brussels. Thanks to Steve, Mike, Gary and the residents and owner at Farthing Corner for allowing the use of the hangar for a day.

LAA-wise the EGM to vote on a motion to restructure the Association went off

A hole has been found in the nudist camp wall. The police are looking into it..

without a hitch. Basically the Association was owned by a company, Ulair Ltd., and not by the members - a situation that developed for convenience many years ago and though revisited occasionally, never resolved. As a result of the due diligence carried out as part of the preparation for the failed LAA/BMAA merger talks, LAA was advised by its lawyers to restructure the Association in order to protect current and former Executive Committee members from potential liability in the event of the Association being successfully sued. Under the new structure, the members own the Association, each receiving what is termed a beneficial share, though shares are obviously not issued for logistical reasons. In truth, members will see little change, the most tangible benefit being the introduction of proxy voting for all motions at future AGMs, a significantly more democratic system than allowing the handful of members that attend a typical AGM from having full sway on how the Association is run. One other point of note is that the Executive Committee now actually becomes the Board, and is being reduced in number from 18 to nine elected members, plus the CEO. It will also have the option to co-opt members onto the board with specific skills, those members having to stand for election at the next AGM. I have been invited (and accepted) to be on the new board.

The day to day running of LAA will remain unchanged; sub committees will continue to research and formulate policy and initiatives which will then be presented to the Board for approval. I am involved with the Marketing committee, initially because Light Aviation is one of the Associa-

tion's marketing tools, but of late we have been deciding on how best to promote LAA to a wider audience. We are currently working on upgrading the LAA website with a promotional video and intro pages to show what the LAA is about. Currently the website's primary function is to service existing members by providing further information about LAA activities - such as the Pilot Coaching Scheme or Engineering department Information Leaflets and forms etc. A complete overhaul of the site is not possible in the current financial downturn, which incidentally the Association is weathering very well, so the idea is that a temporary 'fix' will make the site more appealing to potential members. We have also been working on a marketing plan for 2010, deciding on priorities and how to get the best bang for our buck.

The Sywell Revival was an undoubted success, with many members absolutely delighted that an annual event along the lines of the old PFA Rallies had been re-instated. The 'back to basics' nature of the event went down extremely well, and enabled the Association to be protected from financial risk, and the exhibitor and entry fees to be kept to a minimum.

A proposal for 2010 is already being prepared, and hopefully will be approved at the EC meeting (not yet a Board meeting as we are currently in a transitional phase) in late October. Expect a similar event format with potentially many more exhibitors and aircraft arrivals.

One other thing I have been mulling over for some time is an SSDR (single seat deregulated) microlight design that I can to operate when I am old(er) and grey and can no longer afford to oper-

ate the Jodel. I am intrigued by the SDDR category because it appeals to my innate desire to be able to simply get on and do what I want to do without undue let or hindrance. No approval, no build inspection, no permit or annual inspection - just build it and go fly - and take responsibility for your own decisions and actions. There is no cheaper way to fly than an SDDR that can be de-rigged and kept at home, the only mandatory expense is third party insurance, perhaps around £200. Get signed off by your doctor for an NPPL for a few quid and the only other personal expense is doing a biennial flight check to keep your license current. After that it's just fuel and maintenance. I have been keeping abreast of what is available for the homebuilder to build from plans in this sector and there are a number of designs worthy of consideration. More anon maybe.

Well that's about all of any interest I have to say for now other than to remind everybody that if you don't wish to suffer my ramblings again, turn on your computer and write Mike a few words about what you have been up to!

Young Aviators 2009 by Simon Pratt

There were 36 cadets flown on Sunday. A special appearance was made by Steve Solley who didn't fly any cadets but supplied much appreciated ice cream to them and thanks to Shirley Hammond for doing all the administration on the day. We need to thank Rochester Airport for allowing the event and waiving the landing fees. Also thank Courtney in the tower for putting up with us all. The cadets put up tents and made refreshments such as tea, coffee, soft drinks, bacon rolls, sausage rolls and sweets available. We had 13 aeroplanes from various airfields (Ripple / Farthing corner / Ladding-

ford/) and flew 36 aviators and there was some money left over (perhaps from the ATC budget) which has been offered our way (to the pilots and Shirley) however the consensus was this should go to the Air Ambulance.

Kevin Doyle even took Julia for a flight. One young lad, when it was thought that all had been flown, said to Julia " I haven't been up yet". She



said "I don't have any forms left over. Everybody that gave me a form has flown" at which point he pulled his form out of his pocket. Julia just stood with her hands on her hips and looked at him. A voice from one of the pilots



said "I'm going to be careful what I say on the radio in future, I don't want to imagine I'm getting that look" (Editors Note)I must add that Julia sent me a note thanking the Strut for our efforts, which appears below.

Young Aviators 2009 by Julie Camp

Despite the nerves and the double checking of the weather forecast leading up to Sunday, the weather was better than I had hoped for so it was all on. Anyone who arrived early saw the initiative exercise that was putting up the marquee, but I am glad to say that the urn was on early so tea was soon available.

Eventually I managed to sort out my end of the deal, and the steady flow of cadets taking to the sky could start. It seemed in no time at all, the cadets started coming back with big smiles on their faces and soon enough all the cadets had flown.

The cadets had a great time, and all enjoyed their flights, with more than one asking if they could again (I did tell them maybe next year). For most of the cadets, this was their first experience of small aircraft which made the day that more special for them.

The day was a huge hit but none of it could have happened without people volunteering their time and their aircraft, and for that I am hugely grateful. The cadets have asked me to pass on their thanks and appreciation, and I must add mine on top and that was before they were given their ice cream!

Thank you again for making it possible for the cadets to experience proper flying. I should just add a special Thank You to Simon for putting up with me, hopefully I didn't put him off helping again.

The short fortune-teller who escaped from prison was a small medium at large.

Fireworks and Bar-B-Q Saturday 7th November

Flying seasons over, but life carries on - just!

Saturday 7th November Strut BBQ and Firework Party, bring the family. At Farthing Corner Airfield, food and drinks included £5.00 per head, under 16's free, bring a firework. Cooking starts at e-mail farthingcorner@yahoo.co.uk to give us an idea of numbers or tell one of the committee members.

Martin and Alan have once more stepped in to the breach with a little help from their friends and Alan Jubb so we look forward to a culinary experience and a great display to celebrate the fact that Parliament escaped being blown up. Come to think about it is this still a cause for celebrating??

Christmas Dinner Saturday 19th December

Saturday 19th December is the day to put in your diary. Unfortunately the meal and price attachment did not come through in time for this newsletter so I am waiting for the details but we will be having an update at Octobers meeting and a flyer will go out so that we can receive your bookings for the final event of 2009.

Who Do You Think You Are Talking To!

Profiling a number of people we have more than likely spoken to either on the radio or when dropping in to, who better to start with than Kelvin Carr. Over to you Kelvin ..

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Kelvin Carr Operations Manager at Rochester Airport. Joined the company full time back in June 2004. Can be found working anywhere around the airfield. Supported since BAE Systems handed over the Airport over to Medway Council. Obtained a FISO licence August 2001. Learnt to fly at Rochester Aviation - Merrick Chrusciel and John Coles were my main instructors. Have been known to fly PA28 and DR400s. Had an interest in aviation from an early age. My dad was in the RAF, his last base was Watton".



Two silk worms had a
 race.
 They ended up in a tie

Dates for your Diary

Oct 29	John Thorpe—Bristol Flight Test Centre
Nov 7	Bonfire & BBQ