

CHAPTER 12 – MORE ADVENTURES WITH TRADEWINDS

The following ‘adventures’ are not in any particular order, certainly not chronologically speaking, but just as I remember them and to illustrate what life was like flying for a charter, all-cargo, airline.

As a captain one was given a bag of money, usually travellers cheques, but sometimes quite a lot of cash in dollars or sterling and sent on ones way to wherever a cargo had to be delivered. Cash was needed in abundance when sent to Mogadishu, for instance, where we had to pay for the fuel in cash, because, for some reason they would not accept our fuel carnet with which we paid for fuel more or less everywhere else. It was quite normal to leave Gatwick with up to £40,000 in ones briefcase, and remember I’m talking about the seventies. In fact when I first got my command, in 1970, currency restrictions were still in force and all the captains had to have special dispensation to leave the UK with such large amounts of money.



As a captain with a company like Tradewinds one had to be more than just a good pilot. In fact one’s skill as a pilot was fairly low on the list of attributes needed to make a good commander. More than a smattering of knowledge of accountancy was definitely needed, as was the ability to

deal with unexpected situations like the one I related in the last chapter where we were forced to land in Manila. Also required was the ability to write sensible reports of situations that had caused delays etc.

One such happened in Lagos when we arrived during a strike by the ground engineers. Because of the way in which the engines were started on the CL44 an ‘Air Start’ truck had to be used. These provided a large volume of air at moderate pressure to get the propeller and turbine rotating. With the strike in progress such assistance was not forthcoming so we were grounded. I enlisted the help of the Pan American Airways station manager, who did his best to provide equipment to get the engines started. We tried high-pressure air bottles and all sorts of other ingenious methods to get the necessary volume and pressure of air, but it was all to no avail so we had to sit out the strike for the next three days. To show my gratitude to the PAA station manager I suggested that he might like to bring his wife to the hotel one evening so that I could buy them both a drink. They accepted my invitation, but when I asked them what drink they would like they said that neither of them touched alcohol - nor soft drinks like Coca Cola, nor tea, nor coffee. I eventually discovered that they were Mormons and so the most I could do was to get them a drink of water. Never before or since have I met a couple that lived their religion quite like them.

Speaking of Lagos – after the Biafran civil war we were chartered by one of the aid agencies to fly relief to Lagos. This took the form of seven Land Rovers, donated by the Rover Company and specially painted white with red crosses, plus a very large amount of medical supplies. After unloading at Lagos all the latter was stored in what was euphemistically known as the ‘cargo shed’. It was actually a series of lean-to sheds with corrugated iron roofs of great age that allowed the rain to leak in. When it rains in Lagos it really comes down by the bucketful, consequently by the time I got there again some three weeks later the medical supplies were not only still in the ‘cargo shed’ but also soaked with water and completely useless. I also learned that of the seven Land Rovers we had brought three weeks ago only one was still

serviceable. So much for giving aid to third world countries without proper supervision as to its use.

Going into Cairo one day we had to divert to Luxor due to bad visibility. Not having been there before I was apprehensive as to whether they had the correct facilities for handling a CL44, but I was assured by ATC at Cairo that all would be well. It was not! Next day when we came to start the engines we found that they did not have an air-start truck so we were forced to kick our heels in Luxor while one was driven by road from Cairo, a journey of 24 hours. I think something was lost in our communications because the people in Luxor who had assured us that they had an air-start truck, thought that the ground power truck was, as they put it, an 'electric air start'.

Whilst staying in Cairo for a day or two during one stopover I took the opportunity to see the Great Pyramid at Giza that was visible from our rooms at the Mena House Hotel, at that time one of the better hotels in Cairo. The inside of the pyramid is quite amazing not only for the sheer amount of masonry involved, but also for the accuracy with which each individual block has been finished. I didn't have one with me to try, but I'm certain a 10 thou feeler gauge wouldn't fit between the blocks. Whoever the masons were they certainly knew a thing or two about their trade!

I also visited the Cairo Museum, which at that time was appallingly badly cared for. Very few of the exhibits had any sort of labelling and those that did were a left over from the days of British/French influence. However I did find one exhibit that was labelled, this being a case full of stone tablets dating back 1000's of years, several of which had a translation of the hieroglyphics that were engraved upon them. One particularly caught my eye – it was from one king to another complaining that not only had he not had a reply from the message he sent seven years ago, but also he had not yet had his messenger returned and he would like both! I've often wondered what happened to the messenger – did he fall by the wayside, did he perhaps find the other kingdom more to his taste and decide to stay there? The possibilities seem endless.

Most people have heard of Poona, usually in connection with the British rule in India when it was used as a refuge for the women and children in summer when the temperature in Bombay became unbearable. I never expected to go there nor did I ever expect to pick up such an unlikely cargo. I was sent there to collect 27 tonnes of small petrol driven engines for forklift trucks. It seems that these were manufactured locally and a great deal more cheaply than anything available in the West.

The airfield at Poona is run by the IAF and is where they had a squadron of Canberra B(1)8's. I felt quite at home and we were right royally treated by the officers, including the Station Commander, a Group Captain, who was fascinated to learn that I had been a 'trapper' on the Canberra. In fact I was able to tell him that we had had a visit by two of his aircraft while I was serving at Bassingbourn.

Another interesting series of flights the company undertook was the transportation of the formula 1 racing cars to all their races around the world. When we first started this contract we were able to get 18 cars and several tonnes of spares into the aircraft, but by the second year the formula 1 had changed, making each car just a few inches wider. This meant that henceforth we could only get 12 cars plus spares into the CL44.

One destination I went to with the cars was Long Beach, California where we stayed for the duration of the race. Whilst there I was being driven with my crew to our hotel in a large American 'people mover'. At that time I had recently bought my first Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow and I got into conversation with the driver during

which we touched on the subject of fuel consumption. He asked me how many miles to the gallon my Rolls did, and when I said about 12 or 13 he said quite seriously, "Oh, an economy car!" It was the first time I've heard a Rolls-Royce called by such a name, but I suppose it is a matter of relativity, as the people mover only did 8 mpg.

During the period when President Idi Amin was expelling all the Asians from Uganda we were involved in transporting their possessions from Entebbe to Heathrow. No only was it a terribly sad sight to see all these refugees' three piece suites and so on stored on the tarmac out in the open and totally ruined by the rain, but also there was a considerable problem with the rats that were concealed among them, so much so that on one occasion I went up to Heathrow to fly one of our aircraft after it had just been to Entebbe to find that it had been impounded by the authorities until it had been fumigated with cyanide because a rat had been seen running about inside. YCNSTWLEM!

On the subject of authorities I must mention our Customs and Excise. Because aircrew go in and out of the country with such regularity we did not enjoy the same allowances in the way of duty free alcohol, cigarettes, etc. as passengers did. However we had a concession whereby we could bring in part of a bottle of spirits, say half to two thirds full, when we had been out of the country for a few days. Returning to UK we all filled in a Declaration Form saying how much alcohol, how many cigars or cigarettes we had and so on. The form was such that the space for each entry was only about half an inch square, so that to declare our alcohol there was just about room to write 'part bot'. When we got onto the stand at Gatwick, Stansted or Heathrow the duty Customs Officer would come on board and collect the form along with the other paperwork.

Usually they would take our word that we had got only what was declared on the form, but occasionally they would ask the crew to report to Concord House with their bags to have them inspected. It was on one such occasion that I was flying with another captain, who shall be nameless to avoid embarrassment should he ever read this and who was well known for stretching the rules somewhat. When we got to Concord House and opened our bags the Customs Officer expressed surprise that Captain X had got not only a bottle of whisky about half full but also a full, unopened bottle. The customs officer said, "What's this, Captain? You've declared a part bot!" "Yes," says the captain, "There's the part," pointing to the half full one and "There's the bot," pointing to the full one. The customs officer fell about laughing, but told Captain X not to try it on again!

Customs abroad were quite a different matter – for instance in Lagos it was normal to put a currency note on top of the contents of one's case if you didn't want them to rifle through it and confiscate anything that took their fancy. In India it was not permitted to take alcoholic drinks into the country at all, but as long as you didn't declare them it was a case of 'what the eye doesn't see, etc.'

Going into Delhi one time I was with another captain who was rather religious and therefore would insist on declaring the one and only bottle of beer he had in his case. The customs officer said that he could not take it into the country, unless he deleted it from the declaration form. He would not do this and the resulting argument got more and more acrimonious over the next hour or so until the Chief Customs Officer was summoned from his office. He wanted to know from me what was the matter with the other captain to make him so obstreperous? I could see that he just wanted to get us out of his hair so I put my finger to my temple and made a screwing motion with it, indicating that he was slightly mad, whereupon we were all allowed to

get into taxis and go to the hotel. There are quite definitely circumstances when it pays to be economical with the truth. The trick is knowing when!

One place we went to with monotonous regularity was Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, now part of Ethiopia. The city was very nice and the people very friendly. To illustrate this I am mentioning the day the crew and I were looking for a suitable restaurant to have a meal. We stopped outside one from which there came sounds of some sort of celebration. Through the open door we could see there was a wedding reception in progress, so not wishing to intrude we started to walk off to look for another watering hole. As we did so one of the restaurant staff rushed after us and insisted we come in and join the celebrations. It was fascinating and as far as I could see very much like a wedding reception at home, with the bride in a lovely white dress and the groom in a smart DJ. The only real difference I could see was the line of women sitting along one side of the room ululating very loudly every few minutes after each dance finished.

The airport in Asmara is just less than 8000 feet above sea level and because of this we had to take off with only sufficient fuel to get to Jeddah, across the other side of the Red Sea, with our load of 27.5 tonnes of fresh produce destined for various places in Europe. Because the temperature in Jeddah rises very quickly after dawn we used to leave Asmara as soon as it was light enough to see, which meant that we had to leave our hotel very early indeed. In order to have some breakfast before we left the night porter would provide us with toast and coffee and usually some hard-boiled eggs that must have come from very small chickens or probably bantams. Anyway they were most welcome for I have always liked to start the day with a hearty breakfast so you can imagine how I felt one day when after eating three of these miniscule eggs I was hammering the shell of the fourth and as it broke the contents trickled slowly through my fingers. Somehow it had missed the attentions of the chef the previous evening. YCNSTWLEM!



The filigree brooch on the left probably has the reader wondering what it has to do with Asmara. Wandering around some of the lanes in the city one day I came across a series of tiny roadside workshops where very skilled craftsmen were making all sorts of filigree work in gold and silver. I discovered that each craftsman had an apprentice, making identical articles to those produced by their masters, but in silver not gold. One they had completed their apprenticeships they were allowed to start making gold pieces. The gold one in the picture I brought back for Mella and I have shown it

to illustrate the incredibly intricate workmanship.

As I say, we had to get to Jeddah quickly so as to be able to get airborne with enough fuel to reach our destination in Europe while the vegetables were still fresh. The vegetables were usually either green beans (delicious with white sauce!) or green peppers. The latter had a very strong odour in bulk, strong enough to make one's eyes water even though the temperature in the cargo bay was kept just above freezing. The places to which we delivered these included Frankfurt, Munich, Stuttgart, Amsterdam and, of course, Gatwick. The picture shows peppers being unloaded at Gatwick, although what it doesn't show is the crew with their boxes given to them by the charterer. This was one rather nice advantage of carrying fruit and vegetables and

something my family missed when I gave up flying. Inevitably the produce we had given to us was much fresher than that one could buy.

Flowers were another fresh product we brought in quite often, usually from Nairobi, and once again this necessitated keeping the cargo bay at a low temperature to ensure the contents arrived in tip-top condition. The drawback from the crew's point of view of a low temperature cargo bay was that it meant the flight deck also got uncomfortably cold during a long voyage to the extent that most of us could be seen wearing our raincoats on top of our uniform, which leads me neatly into another true incident.



Tradewinds bought our uniforms from British Airways, the only difference being that we had buttons, wings and cap badges to our own company design. When in hot climes we wore 'shirt sleeve order' and that meant that we were indistinguishable from BA crews except for our cap badges.

After a night stop in the BA Hotel in Bahrain I came down to pay the bill for the crew and having done so I sat down in the lobby to await my crew before getting a taxi to the airport. I hadn't been sitting long when a BA stewardess came along and after wishing me a respectful 'Good Morning Captain', sat down beside me. It was not long before another joined us, then another and so on until I had the entire cabin crew from a 747 around me. By the time there were five or six around me I realised that they thought I was the captain for their next leg. This is not particularly surprising as BA cabin and flight crews often slip at different places. Anyway I thought the situation might lead to some amusement, so I said nothing until the 'real' captain appeared. His face was a picture of disbelief when he saw me sitting there with all 'his' crew – he had obviously been stuck in Bahrain for too long and was dying to move on. He said to me, "I thought I was taking the Frankfurt flight." I replied, "Oh, I'm on a different aircraft," to which his reply is ever etched on my memory, "Oh, you're Concorde are you?" I just smiled and sauntered off, collected my crew and went my way chuckling to myself.

The forerunner of BA was BOAC and before that Empire Airways. It was during the latter's heyday that they were forced to build secure accommodation for their passengers at each stop. In those leisurely days the trip to the Far East in the Empire Flying Boats had many stops, one of which was at Sharjah.

One day going in to Dubai, which is very close to Sharjah, I was informed by ATC that there was no hotel accommodation available due to some conference or other. Sharjah ATC, who were on the same frequency, chipped in to say that we could stay in 'The Fort' if we cared to. I agreed that I would like this, not knowing what 'The Fort' was. When we got there we found it was one of the old, fortified hotels built by Empire Airways to protect their passengers from marauding bands of Arabs.

Whilst there I heard a wonderful story, no doubt apocryphal, about the famous Captain O.P.Jones, who was well known as being a martinet. It was said that he never spoke directly to a First Officer, only through a Senior First Officer and was a stickler for etiquette and discipline. Apparently every time he climbed into the left hand seat on the flight deck he had a routine he carried out religiously before doing the pre-flight checks and getting airborne. He would produce a gold key on a chain from his

pocket to unlock a very small attaché case, open it and stare at its contents for a few seconds before closing and locking it. After putting away the key he would call for the checks and get on with the business of flying. Being such a martinet with a short temper nobody had ever had the temerity to ask him what the case could possibly contain that was the subject of such intense scrutiny before each flight. That is until his very last flight before retirement.

On this occasion he had with him a particularly brash First Officer who was determined to find out his secret. The young man asked what was in the case and to his surprise OPJ agreed to show him as it was his last flight. So, out came the gold key, the case was unlocked and passed to the brash young man for his inspection. Inside the case was a single piece of paper on which was written in capital letters, 'PORT IS LEFT'. Not many personalities like that around these days, which is, I think, a great pity.

Tradewinds undertook a series of flights to Muscat carrying fittings and furnishings for the palace being built for the young Sultan after he deposed his father. Up until then Muscat had been positively medieval in that the gates to the city were closed from six o'clock at night to six o'clock in the morning. There was only one small hotel of 12 rooms that always seemed to be full. Because of this we had, after unloading, to fly to Dubai to take our statutory rest. The head of the firm of architects who were overseeing the building of the palace was based in Dubai and on one flight he met us at the airport to express his thanks for our efforts and invited the whole crew to a meal at his house in Dubai that evening.

At this dinner I found myself sitting next to an Englishman who had recently arrived in the Gulf for a three-year stint and who told me that he had just been to his first proper Arab feast. This took place out in the desert in a very large tent with carpets decorating the walls and lit by oil lamps. Before going to this 'do' he had been briefed by his colleagues as to the correct etiquette, for instance always eat with your right hand and whilst sitting on the floor cross legged avoid pointing the soles of your shoes at anyone as it is considered very rude to do so. He was also advised that the enormous mound of boiled rice upon which a cooked whole sheep is brought on a vast brass tray stays hot or at least warm for a considerable time. As the evening wears on a handful of palatable rice can still be obtained by putting one's hand well into the pile. After some three hours or so sitting in the dim light on crossed legs he was taking this advice only to feel his fingers touch something wriggling in the centre of the mound! He immediately withdrew his hand very rapidly only to see the man sitting opposite do the same thing with an equally pained expression on his face. YCNSTWLEM!

We were stuck for accommodation on another occasion in Muscat and were helped out by some geologists working for the Seismic Survey group. In exchange for a bottle of scotch they offered us the use of a couple of their huts for the night. These huts were of the Nissan variety with a removable partition in the middle dividing them into two decent sized rooms. In the one I used the partition had been taken out and leant against the other half behind my bed in which, after a couple of scotches, I slept very soundly all night.

In the morning there was a knock at the door and in came an Arab servant with a nice hot cup of tea. Looking at him I immediately sensed that not all was well as he was not looking at, but behind, me. He took off his flip-flop and proceeded to hit something just behind and above my head a tremendous blow. With a grin he showed me what he had just killed – a fawn and white coloured camel spider about the size of my hand with, he told me, a very nasty bite. If I had known it was lurking behind my

bed all night I would most definitely have not slept so soundly. He spent the next few minutes looking for and despatching the male half of the pair. Two things about flying - It's a great life if you don't weaken! AND - If you can't take a joke you shouldn't have joined!

During the period of Idi Amin's rule in Uganda the coffee plantations in neighbouring Rwanda could not get their beans out of the country as the roads/railways were sealed off. In consequence I spent almost two months in the summer of 1977 shuttling between Mombasa and Kigali with 27 tonnes of coffee beans destined to be taken to Europe by ship. This was very a pleasant interlude from our normal flying as we only flew by day, Kigali not being open at night, and staying in a hotel on the beach in Mombasa, that these days is a much favoured holiday resort.

It goes to show that not all our stopover places were bad. The down side to this episode was the death of one of my colleagues as he was being driven from Nairobi to Mombasa along what is well known to be a very dangerous road. It is used by heavy trucks whose drivers work very long hours and frequently drop asleep at the wheel, as happened in this case when the truck hit my colleague's car head on. In twenty-nine years of flying I think I lost more colleagues in road accidents than in flying accidents, which says a lot about the relative safety of both forms of transport.

I had always had a yen to go to Indonesia so you can imagine how pleased I was to be briefed to take a load of cigarettes to Djakarta in October 1974, routeing via Istanbul, Karachi and Singapore. The last was to be just a refuelling stop and after paying the landing and handling fees I arrived back at the aircraft anxious to get airborne only to find all the crew lounging around with resigned looks on their faces. To my suggestion that they pulled their fingers out and got the show on the road they replied that one of the engines had seized, hence the looks of resignation. After consultations with 'Company Operations' at Gatwick it was decided that we should off-load the cargo and put it in bond, then when we had taken rest at a hotel in the city, ferry the aircraft to Hong Kong where a spare engine could be fitted to replace our failed one.

A great advantage of the CL44 was that it could be ferried with only three engines operative, provided that no cargo was carried and that the captain was suitably qualified. It was just as well that this facility existed as we went through a period when the rear bearings of the Tyne engine seized with monotonous regularity. The cause of these failures took some finding, but it was eventually discovered that a sub-contractor in Canada who was responsible for reconditioning the engines and who was supposed to replace old bearings with new, was in fact just exchanging the rollers without renewing the inner and outer races. False economy in every sense and the Tradewinds eventually obtained redress for the lost revenue that this poor standard of engineering caused.

The next day we set off for HK on three engines and we had got to about 100 feet above the ground when the fire warning went off for the other engine on the same side as the failed one. The flight engineer wanted to shut the engine down, but I forbade him to do this, since I was certain that it was a spurious warning. A check through the window proved this to be the case as no smoke or flames were visible and so we continued to HK without further trouble.

How was I so certain that it was a spurious warning? Well, this was one of those situations where intuition based on previous experience proved invaluable. The engine fire warning system of the CL44/Tyne installation consisted of a 'fire-wire' that went around the engine bay, held in place at strategic points by clips. If a fire occurred the wire would burn through and trigger the alarm bells/lights. The problem

with the system was that the wire passing through the clips sometimes chafed on parts of the engine resulting in a spurious warning. This had happened often enough to me to allow me to make the decision I did without endangering the aircraft or crew. In fact shutting the engine down leaving me to control the aircraft on two engines on one side was the more hazardous of the options available. After a three night stop-over in HK while the new engine was fitted and a new load taken aboard we flew back to Gatwick via Karachi and Istanbul without further incident. Experience is something that money cannot buy, but when you have it the result can be a great saviour!

I've already mentioned meat flights to Tripoli and the swarms of flies one encountered on these occasions, but there was another problem with going to Tripoli that was much more infuriating. The Libyan authorities would not allow the bills to be paid direct to the recipients in case anybody took advantage of the black market in their very much overvalued currency. As if we would! Consequently captains were obliged to collect the various bills from the handling agent, ATC and the Met office, take them to the National Bank of Libya in the main airport building and pay all of them in hard currency, i.e. Dollars or Sterling, then return the receipted bills to the correct office. This was bad enough and took a long time making a one-hour turnaround an impossibility, but every now and then a captain's worst nightmare would occur when you got to the bank. A shift change!!

As the bank was open 24 hours a day it was only reasonable that the tellers had to change over every so often. The problem was their method of handover! The teller handing over would count by hand all, and I do mean all, the money in the bank. Then the teller taking over would do the same. If their totals did not agree, which was always, then the whole process would be repeated until they did concur. For me the record time for standing in the queue was, incredibly, two hours!

Another irritant was that Colonel Gaddafi had decreed that all signs and notices were to be in Arabic *only*, and since I, and the rest of my colleagues did not read the language, this could cause further delays while we found our way around. No wonder we all hated going to Libya!

The only other destination I went to in Libya other than Tripoli and Kufra Oasis was Sebha. This was a strange place indeed and reputed to be the site for the Libyan's production of chemical and biological weapons. I never discovered whether this was the case, but there was a whole collection of what appeared to be houses like one might see in any town. The curious thing was that the whole area seemed to be devoid of human habitation, so my guess is that the houses were some sort of camouflage for nefarious activity. To my suspicious mind the place looked decidedly 'iffy'!

From Sebha we flew to Pisa where I saw the famous Leaning Tower for the one and only time in my life. The next day we went to Delhi via Shiraz in Iran where we stayed the night. I was most impressed by the roses that adorned the beds in the middle of the dual carriageway roads in the city. In my ignorance I thought it rather strange that roses should be found in great profusion in such a place and it was only much later that I learned that many roses were introduced into Europe from Shiraz. YCNSTWLEM!

When I was in the RAF somebody once remarked to me that "once an instructor, always an instructor" and I can confirm that this is entirely true as in January 1973, only two years after I was promoted to captain, I was sent to Stansted to do a two week course at the Civil Aviation Flying Unit (CAFU) to become once again, an IRE. I thoroughly enjoyed the course, as I knew several of the instructors on the staff from my RAF days. Oddly, you might think, there is no record in my

logbook of the flying I did in the twin-engined De Havilland Dove while on the course. The reason for this apparent omission is the fact I was not qualified on the type so I could not legally log the hours. In common with most other pilots who have done the course I had never before flown the Dove. The system was to put you in the left hand seat on day one and get you to fly an instrument rating test, which like everyone else you inevitably failed. Then one spent the rest of the time conducting mock IRT's on fellow students and the staff pilots and also conducting mock oral tests. After two weeks of this I was authorised to conduct IRT's for the company and thus I became once again a QFI or, in civil airlines parlance, a training captain.

It was not long after I was appointed to this post that I was acting a guinea pig for another training captain who was being tested by a CAFU examiner. I was doing a two engined night approach on the ILS (instrument landing system) into Gatwick and after I had landed I lowered the nosewheel onto the runway and there was a tremendous vibration caused by the nosewheel shimmying. Realising that all was not well I stopped and suggested that we should ask to be towed off the runway. However the decision by the commander was to continue taxiing very slowly off the fast turn-off, stop and investigate the situation further.

Once stopped the flight engineer opened the door and hung out with the aid of a rope. By the light of a torch he was able to see that we had only one nosewheel instead of two! The missing one was eventually found about half a mile further on down the airfield, where it had come to rest, fortunately without damaging anything or anybody. Investigation revealed that the four bolts that held it in place on the splined axle had all come adrift allowing the wheel to get free during the landing run. The incompetent engineer responsible for using bolts that were too short was, I believe, instantly sacked. And quite right too!

Now that I had a training role again I found myself commuting between 'Elmgate' and Gatwick rather more than hitherto and it was during this period that the incident with the police in Ware took place. By 1976 I was beginning to tire of all this travel through London and also because both my parents were getting on in years (Mella's parents had died in 1974) we decided to look for a house nearer to Gatwick. We eventually settled in Wivelsfield Green during the long hot summer of 1976, but all that is the subject of a later chapter.

Flying between Muscat and Khartoum on one occasion I crossed the so-called 'Empty Quarter' of Saudi Arabia and saw a sight to rival the changing landscape of Lake Chad. It looked from our height like a rock plateau on which there were hundreds of conical piles of sand arranged in neat lines with almost mathematical precision, just as though it had been done by human hand. Quite unique, but I never had a second opportunity to see it and observe whether the wind had changed it.

And speaking of sand and Khartoum where we went very frequently I must mention 'haboobs'. A haboob is the local name for a sandstorm that occurs quite frequently and without warning during a particular season of the year. The sand in this part of Africa is rather like brown talcum powder so that a comparatively light wind can get sufficient of it airborne to reduce visibility to the point where landing at Khartoum becomes impossible.

Khartoum is a very long way from the nearest airport suitable for diversion purposes and in cases like these the diversion fuel carried by law consists of what is known as 'Island Hold'. This is sufficient fuel for the aircraft to hold overhead a destination for $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours during which time the weather conditions almost always get better allowing a successful approach to be made. As a 'haboob' can blow up very

quickly you can imagine that pilots keep a very close watch on the weather while on the way to Khartoum during the 'Haboob' season.

On one such an occasion we had kept asking ATC at Khartoum for the visibility about every half hour all the way from Cairo. Every time we got the welcome news that visibility was 'unlimited'. However when we got overhead Shendi where it was normal to ask for clearance to descend from the usual flight level 170, we were given clearance to descend to 4000 feet and almost as an afterthought ATC mentioned the fact that the visibility was now down to 300 yards! Needless to say we did not descend, but stayed at FL170 to conserve fuel. Once we got overhead Khartoum we could see the airport through the dust but we could not legally make an attempt to land until the visibility rose above the limits for our type of aircraft, which after all these years I have forgotten.

Nowadays I understand the airport is equipped with ILS that makes a successful approach possible with much, much lower visibilities, but at the time this incident took place the only aid was a radio beacon. Fortunately, however, the road bridge over the Nile had some very bright sodium lighting and the road was more or less aligned with the runway. Consequently after we had held at FL170 for quite a while and when the visibility had improved somewhat I was able to land using the sodiums to find the runway, much to the relief of all on board including myself. This was an occasion when some local knowledge was worth a lot! The other problem with a haboob was that while the aircraft was being unloaded of the 27 tonnes of cigarettes we had brought everything became smothered in a fine brown dust that got onto ones uniform making all the crew look like 'dusty miller' on a day when he was grinding brown flour!

Using Bombay as a refuelling stop on the way to the Far East was looked upon favourably by the company as the landing and handling charges were very reasonable, so we often found ourselves transiting the place. The main drawback from the crew's point of view was the time it took to get Air India officials to prepare a bill. They had a vast office with many tables, most of which were presided over by some official shuffling mountains of paperwork, and most of whom were determined to ignore both us and our requests for some action to speed us on our way. In fact the Indians are extremely good at 'red tape', but then who am I to complain when you consider that it was the British that taught them!

One day going through with an experienced captain I learned how to deal with the situation in a somewhat unorthodox manner. Captain Nigel's solution was to march into the office without speaking to anyone, find an empty table and sit on it swinging his legs until finally somebody came and asked what he wanted. This usually happened quickly and I can only suppose it was so effective as the officials objected to his presence, which could be likened to that of a vulture waiting beside a kill for the tiger to move away.

Once when going into Bombay I decided to practice my *Indian Type Talking*. It's not possible to imitate this on paper so the reader must imagine the effect perhaps comparing it with the TV programme "Goodness Gracious Me". I started off as soon as I called Bombay ATC about half an hour out and kept up the pretence all the way in. After I had parked the aircraft ATC called me to say, "Will the captain please report to the tower, and by God he'd better be Indian!" Needless to say I didn't go anywhere near the tower and since I heard no more about it I am confident that they saw it as just as amusing as the rest of us.

In pursuit of good international relations I have always tried to greet foreign air traffic controllers in their own language, notwithstanding that English is the

language of air traffic control worldwide. At one time I could do this in American, Texan, Australian, French, Italian, Arabic, Japanese, Greek, German and Spanish.

There is, however a time and place for everything so when I was once doing a sub-charter for Al Italia taking off from Rome I checked in with my callsign and a suitable greeting in Italian. The controller responded with a stream of instructions in Italian that I had to ask him to repeat in English – most embarrassing and served me right for being too clever! However going into Cairo it was a definite benefit to be able to greet them with “Salaam Alekoun”, since the controller didn’t know whether I spoke Arabic fluently or just a few words as was the true situation. It would have meant a loss of face for them to ask me and the net result was that I usually got preferential treatment when I asked for clearance to descend! But I am digressing from my Italian story.

Going into Rome for this sub-charter we were handled most efficiently until we arrived at crew customs, at which point the system broke down completely. I was trying to find somebody to tell me which hotel had been booked for us, but not only could nobody help, nobody could provide me with the slotted coins that are needed to be able to use the public telephones in Italy. Finally I found an Italian employee of BEA who tried to assist only to become a victim of the favourite Italian ‘momento’ trick. You’ve not heard of this? Well, if you have not been at the receiving end of this annoying habit you will not know how frustrating it is.

What happens is this – you ring a number and the person at the other end answers with ‘Prego?’ You say to whom you wish to speak and the answerer says ‘momento’, puts down the phone, goes away, *and never comes back!* It is absolutely infuriating and especially so when you don’t speak the language. After about an hour and a half of this treatment the kindly fellow who was doing his best to help me finally turned to me and said, “No wonder we lost the last war!” I replied, “Well you said it!” Eventually we did get to the hotel for a much needed rest and recuperation.

Hong Kong was a ‘fun’ place to land at, especially when approaching on the landward side that meant a right hand circuit and a last minute turn at the ‘chequer board’. At this point you were lower than the skyscrapers and I’m sure if you had had the time for sightseeing, you would have been able to see in through the windows of the hundreds of flats.

Because we were not a scheduled operator we had to land at Hong Kong during off-peak hours. It was on one such occasion when I was training a senior first officer for promotion to captain that SFO John had landed after an approach round the chequer board, which meant a very long taxi back to the cargo area for parking and loading. John was taxiing extremely slowly for some reason or another when we got a call from the Australian controller in the tower, “I don’t want to worry you Tradewinds, but you’re just about to be overtaken by a snail!” So I said to John, “What have you got to say to that?” he replied, “Ask him if he knows I’m a black belt at karate!” When I did the Aussie came back with, “In that case I’ll shut up!!” Curiously I never did discover the reason for John’s snail like taxiing. YCNSTWLEM!