



# LORD, OF THE SKY

Continuing our chat with Don Lord, longtime LAA member and volunteer, aircraft owner and professional cameraman

**W**elcome back, Don. I know that you were quite involved in the formative years of the PFA, could you please tell us something about that period?

I joined PFA in the winter of 1968 and went to my first Sywell Rally in 1969. As I walked onto the field, I met the Chairman, Dave Faulkner-Bryant, who asked if could I help out for a little while until someone turned up. I said okay, and we walked out onto the road, where I was tasked with directing traffic into the car park. That was my first job with the PFA, I was 'on the list of volunteers' a marked man!

On the following Monday afternoon, back at home, I received a call, asking whether could I go to Shoreham, to help unload the van that had returned from Sywell. My close association with the PFA office came about because I was often free on weekdays and I only lived ten minutes' away.

After Beagle Aircraft closed, John Walker, who was then PFA Chief Engineer, was able to spend more time in the Association's office and things started to build up quickly, including the membership. The magazine was printed in Wales and was delivered to the

(Above) Don at the annual LAA Rally, Sywell, 2017. (Photo: Neil Wilson)

office, where John's secretary would print the address labels before a call would go out to the local Strut for half-a-dozen members to go to Shoreham and, with the promise of a free pint, put the mags into envelopes and stick on the labels and stamps!

Each year, as the Association grew, so too did the size of the van going to Sywell, which became two vehicles. We'd acquired an ex-army marquee of about ten metres-square, which was used by 'Ted the Plumber' to cook a breakfast choice of a bacon roll or a sausage roll. We also had a Strut member who had two fish and chip shops, so he became the evening food supplier – he offered chicken and chips as an alternative.

About this time, the early-to-mid-seventies, the Berkshire Strut acquired a double-decker bus and that also became a must for Sywell. I drove it once, from Brighton to Clacton, for the PFA Summer Camp. It soon acquired a gas cooker, a fridge, and then a hole in the roof, as an observation platform for ATC.

It all seems so different from today's LAA Rally but we had a lot of fun, and back then it was a case of mucking in with what we could beg, borrow or barely afford. I couldn't be happier that the Rally has survived and matured, and is still such a popular event, for members and non-members alike.

During the seventies and eighties, Dave Faulkner-Bryant and I regularly flew together to France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland, and always made a point of promoting the Rally. We'd load up my Jodel with promotional stuff – magazines, ties, badges, PFA stickers and anything else that was going, and distribute it wherever we stopped.

I think, in many ways, things were easier then. I remember a trip to Hilversum, Holland, in 1978. It was a return BBQ with an overnight for the Tiger Club, as the Hilversum Club had visited its then base, at Redhill. About six of us at Shoreham were members of the Tiger Club, and in those days we were allowed to go overhead Gatwick as we went from one to the other. I often wondered what the people on the viewing terrace thought as we went over at 1,000ft.

(Left) PFA aircraft at Lelystad in the Netherlands, showing the Dutch authorities that homebuilt aircraft are perfectly capable and safe. (Photo: Don Lord)



(Left) Don working on the Walter Mikron engine in his Currie Wot. (Photo: Don Lord)



Filming *The Golden Year* at the 1990 Cranfield Rally. (Photo: Don Lord)



In 1979, a Dutch friend asked if the PFA would put on a special visit to Lelystad, which was then a brand-new airfield, with as many homebuilts as possible. They were lobbying to be allowed to operate homebuilts in the Netherlands. I think about twelve aircraft made it and certainly helped the cause because it wasn't long afterwards that their CAA had a change of heart and they were building and flying their own aircraft.

I think David and I did most of the French RSA rallies, and the NVAV in Holland, which awarded me a medal for ten appearances.

## Being a professional cameraman, did you do any filming for the LAA?

Yes, in 1974 Dave sanctioned about £24 to buy four rolls of 16mm to cover the Rally and I shot 400ft of film. Mike Vaisey – now of Moth fame – won the Best Homebuilt with his Luton Minor, and someone flew a Mignet 'Flying Flea', the only time I've seen one in the air. There were shots of various formations, spot landings, etc, but unfortunately the uncut film was passed to someone to be edited, whereupon it disappeared for six years. When it was finally returned to the

office, no work had been done to it but it had been shown many times and was so scratched that it wasn't worth spending money on it. It's still in my attic and, perhaps, may be restored one day.

Again, in 1988, Dave and John Walker thought it'd be a good idea for me to make a film, on tape, covering a year in the life of the PFA. It started at the 1989 Rally and went through to the 1990 Rally, which was thought to be the final time it could be held at Cranfield. It's titled *The Golden Year* and I think they had 200 copies duplicated.

## Do you have any hobbies or interests outside of aviation?

As mentioned last month, in the early sixties, I raced a motorcycle for six years, which was a lot of fun but family responsibility loomed, and I had to move on. I've always been interested in photography and had my own darkroom and equipment before joining the film industry.

I also had a long spell of painting in oils and became a member of the Guild of Aviation Artists. I tried converting to water colour but was no good at it. A number of members once flew to Marsh Gibbon, where friends from the

Guild were having a fly-in/paint-in day. They positioned your aircraft, where it had to stay for three hours, while it was painted by an artist. The pilots with two-seat aircraft then gave flights to the artists – most of them had never flown – and my logbook says I did two hours thirty in twelve flights.

## Have you had any 'hairy' moments in aviation that you've learned from?

I've had two engine failures in-flight, one in the RA-14 Loisirs, while flying home from Scotland, which I mentioned last month, and the other in a Kitfox 5 with a Rotec Radial, when the gearbox seized at 800ft on climb-out from Swanborough. After selecting a field, on getting closer, I saw that it had poles coming out of the ground – they were gas vents from a rubbish tip. So at 150 ft I chose the next biggest field, which was the lorry park for the rubbish tip! I dropped it in and with full brakes did a tight turn before hitting the hedge. My landing run was 140 yards.

Some of the workers turned up to help, I had to drain off forty litres of fuel, which I then gave to them, in order to fold the wings and afterwards I had to send the engine off to Melbourne in Australia for repair.



## MEET THE MEMBERS

Another bit of excitement was in Holland, coming back from Lelystad when bad weather came in off the sea about three miles from Midden Zeeland. After about twenty minutes of searching, going back east, I found a field and landed – luckily, it was a pea field which had just been harvested.

Perhaps my luckiest 'escape' was in about 1966, when I received a call to see if I could go to Ireland for three days, to shoot from a helicopter. The plan was to fly to Dublin on Friday, shoot the film on Saturday and return to London on the Sunday. They needed some extra shoots for the film *The Blue Max*, which was about British and German aerial combat during WWI.

Having shot on Saturday, the film was to be flown to London, developed overnight and checked on the Sunday morning. The shots they needed were of several British aircraft attacking a Zeppelin. The aircraft were Tiger Moths and Currie Wots altered to look like SE5As, a lot of the mods having been done by John Walker. Unfortunately, the return flight to London on the Sunday wasn't until lunch time, arriving at about 1330 local. I was due to depart about 1200, on a flight for a pre-arranged job in Portugal, so I had to drop out.

My place was taken by a very experienced air-to-air cameraman, and the helicopter pilot was someone I knew well, a Frenchman called Joubert who, at the time, was considered to be the best. The shot was to be from the helicopter at the hover over the Irish Sea, playing the part of the Zeppelin being attacked, with the fighters flying in and zooming over it. Unfortunately, one pilot misjudged it and hit the blades of the helicopter, and both aircraft fell into the sea, tragically killing everyone – the pilot in the mocked-up SE5A and four in the helicopter.

Later, there was a rumour that somewhere in Ireland there were three Currie Wots left in a barn but I've never heard any confirmation of it.

### Do you have any aviation heroes?

Yes, Neil Williams, Winkle Browne and the bomber crews of WWII. Plus my dear, late friend, Ken Browne, who built a Turbulent and who was brave enough to fly with me for fifteen years.

### Any favourite books?

Tony Bingelis's books are an absolute must if you're building, and I love any nonfiction



(Above) The book Don recently enjoyed.



Receiving a cup from Jean Louf of the Calais Chamber of Commerce for the most Channel crossings in a season – nine times!  
(Photo: Don Lord)

books about WWI and WWII. I've just finished *Shoreham Airport – An Illustrated History* by Peter C Brown (Amberley Publishing), which was full of stuff I didn't know.

### How has the LAA helped you?

I've been very lucky in working at something which was my hobby and that fitted in with flying, and having the luck to meet the PFA right at the start. That enabled me to build my Currie Wot and encouraged me to fly in Europe, and own a number of *Permit* aircraft over the years, which I could actually afford



(Above) One of Don's many volunteer jobs was looking after the LAA Trophies. He's seen here with fellow stalwarts, Mick Welch, Alan Dunn and Alan's helper.  
(Photo: Don Lord)

to fly. The PFA/LAA has been, and continues to be, a great institution, of which I'm proud to be a member.

### Finally, any advice for fellow pilots?

Once, when flying across France, following someone who knew the way, we ran into mist and I lost contact. I didn't know where I was! The lesson is always work out your own line on the chart. Also, when doing a preflight walk around, don't have someone talking to you or you simply won't do it properly, and you might miss something important. ■

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