

## IFFR Trip around the Baltic

6-16<sup>th</sup> August 2005

Our IFFR Baltic trip began on Sunday with a literally flying visit to Neubrandenburg for customs clearance, refuelling and a very quick lunch before - onwards to Gdansk. The other members of the group had already started their odyssey with an overnight stop in Lelystadt, Holland and we were “catching-up” because 24 hrs previously we had been in Johannesburg. SA.

From the air Neubrandenburg looked exactly how you imagine a former East German city to look. Endless blocks of uniform grey flats, small “cottages” on the outskirts that looked very ramshackle from the air, however amidst all of this was the old town with an interesting clock tower belonging to an old church or city hall.



Arriving in Neubrandenburg

Getting to the next stop - Gdansk in Poland, was not without problem, as Air Traffic Control (based in Brussels because Poland is now in the EU) did not accept our first, second, third or even fourth flight plan and Colin was fast running out of alternate routes when suddenly Brussels called to say that they would accept the first flight plan we had filed (half an hour earlier!). On second thoughts it might have been quicker to submit a flight plan via Milano, Italy!

However we were eventually away with Colin muttering about “never flying your \*\*\*! flight plan anyway” which indeed we didn’t because as soon as we had left the airport zone, Air traffic control then asked us to go by a completely different and previously unimagined route.

We eventually arrived in Gdansk at 5pm, from the air the city looked as if it was made of Lego. Uniform apartment blocks in shades of pink, lilac, blue and green as well as the ubiquitous endless grey flats. We found our way to the hotel- *Palac w Lezie*, to meet up with the other assembled IFFR member, by now we numbered 11, in the hotel bar. Angus (Clarke) impressed us by producing a 500 zlotti note, little did we know that this was “old currency” and worth about 12p! After dinner and good fellowship it was off to bed.



Solidarity HQ in Gdansk

Monday saw us with a non-flying day to explore the ancient city of Gdansk. We had a very interesting journey by public transport into the centre of Gdansk where we met our guide, Elizabeth. She showed us around the city, the Golden Gate, golden street, church of St Mary's Basilica and so on. Gdansk is 1,000 years old and has many ancient historical features, old fortifications, the old armoury and beautiful houses rather reminiscent of Amsterdam but without the canals. We had a lunch and also discovered that Poland is not famous for its cuisine! We then experienced another interesting bus journey back to the hotel, where we had dinner and good fellowship.

Tuesday dawned alas not bright and cheery but rather dull and overcast which I'm assured is not good for most flyers and so after a long discussion over breakfast, with TAF's and NOTAM's we decided on a change in venue for the next leg of the fly around. We chose Kalmar in Sweden rather than Kuonos in Lithuania. This turned out to be a good choice because we found out that evening that the weather had been so bad towards Lithuania that a large helicopter had been lost in the storm over Estonia. Three of our party decided to call it a day here and they returned home to the UK from Gdansk.

Luckily we liased with Elizabeth Zander (IFFR Sweden) and she kindly found a suitable hotel and reserved rooms for us all at the Stadthotel right in the centre of Kalmar – all done from her holiday home in Öland - this what Rotary friendship is all about!



Aircraft make good umbrellas

We landed at 2pm in a torrential downpour, which persisted for all the afternoon, evening and until lunchtime the next day.

Wednesday was another non-flying day and we took the opportunity to revisit (we had an IFFR visit to Kalmar in 2002) the Kalmar County Museum and see the exhibits on the Kronan. This was a Swedish war ship, one of the largest of its time that was sunk in

1676 in the sea battle of Öland and has comprised a complete picture of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in miniature (a sort of Swedish Mary-Rose). The added interest is because of extreme weather conditions the Kronan can only be investigated in the summer months (if the weather that we experienced in summer is anything to go by – winter on the east coast of Sweden must be hell in winter!). So far they have salvaged unique bronze cannon, silver coins, sailors' chests, pipes, clothes, stockings and shoes and perhaps the most interesting of all, the largest gold treasure trove ever found in Sweden.

The next day, Thursday, saw an early start when we were all off to Västerås, near Stockholm for another unscheduled stop. Here we were met by Bo Näsell who organised lunch in the Officers Club followed by a trip to the local military aircraft museum and



Colin stealing a SAAB fighter

then an evening visit to Kurt & Heidi Bjerneby's beautiful home on the shores of Lake Mälaren for a magnificent buffet supper complete with live entertainment in the form of a local pianist. We later found out that the Bjernebys had been on their way to their holiday home in their RV when on hearing about our change in plans they had done an about turn to organise this lovely evening for us all.

Friday comprised the target, our most northerly destination – Jyväskylä (pronounced U-vascular) in Finland, for the Scandinavian Section's Annual "get together". The weather was still uncertain and so it was decided that if the weather made it impossible to land as we approached there we would divert to Tampere and hire a car for the onward journey. As it happens we landed just before a heavy downpour after a beautiful flight over a land filled with thousands and thousands of lakes, which we glimpsed through the towering clouds that were all around us.

Due to the poor weather 2 of the pilots (Ian and Mal) in the group who did not have any instrument ratings decided to leave their plane at Västerås and accepted Colin's and my offer to join us. One was Mal McLellen from New Zealand who had come 12,000 miles for the trip and we all felt it would be a shame if he couldn't reach his final destination because of the foul weather.



Storm clouds over Finland

At this point we had travelled a linear distance that placed us as far away from home northwards as Marrakesh is to the south.

Jyväskylä is known as Human Technology City and is the capital of central Finland. It has a population of 162,000 in the urban area with 30,000 students at its university and polytechnic. People earn their living from wood processing, service occupations, the manufacture of paper and paper machines and increasingly from the various sectors of information technology - the town of Nokia is nearby!

In the afternoon we visited the aircraft museum at Tikkakoski and later booked into the Hotel Alexandra in Jyväskylä. In the evening all 57 attendees met in the bar for drinks and we renewed friendships with the many members of the Scandinavian Section who we had met before in Billund, Kalmar and Friendrickstadt as well as many familiar faces who had come across to the UK meeting in Cambridge in 2003. Many people had flown in their own aircraft, but some had come by rail, scheduled aircraft or even by car.

Saturday saw a later than usual start for us because the Scandinavian Section had their AGM after breakfast and we visited Harvia – a major manufacturer of saunas. Some of the men experienced at first hand the pleasure of a sauna (without the dip in a freezing lake) while the rest of us chatted over coffee in the cafeteria.

In the afternoon we had a boat trip around lake Päijänne on the Suomi and later that same evening we departed for the Tikkakoski Officers Club (affiliated with the Finnish Air Force) where we had a Gala Dinner to celebrate 100 years of Rotary and 40 years of the IFFR with the President and members of the local Rotary Club and some Officers of the Finnish Air Force.

One of the British IFFR members, Ian Kerr from Perth, was honoured by being presented with the Nordic Trophy in recognition of his long-term support of the Scandinavian section meetings



Ian Kerr Honoured

Sunday was a late start with an early lunch at the hotel followed by goodbyes and a coach trip to the airport for those who were taking their own planes onward. For us it was the start of the return journey that would take us onto Johannisburg, near Stockholm in Sweden.



Swedish Swimming

We stayed at Lövudden Hotell and Conference centres on the outskirts of Stockholm.

This was to be our base for another unforgettable evening organised by Bo and Margot Johnsson, Bo and Berit Nåsell and their families with a barbeque on the forest clad shores of Lake Fiskkraken near Ramås, preceded by a swim, for the chaps that is, (Swedish style), in the crystal clear lake.

On Monday it was time for our penultimate leg to Flensburg in Germany. World President Angus Clarke, and his wife Alisma, left because they needed to be back home for another pressing engagement - a golf tournament.

So the remaining 6 of us were met by Ulrich Steiner (German IFFR) who had arranged for us to visit the Germany Navy's Command Centre deep underground in a nuclear hardened bunker, and to have a tour of its Air Sea Rescue Operations Centre. That evening we all met for a meal in the Gnomenkellern, good fellowship on our last night and then bed.



Ulrich, Jo, Colin, Graham, Rob & Mal

On Tuesday it was with great regret that we said our good byes. We had flown for 16 hours 42

minutes, and covered 2,997 miles, through Holland, Germany, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and back through roughly the same route, met some lovely people , made new friends including Peter from the USA and Mal from NZ and renewed many old friendships.

We hope to see Mal again next year when he plans to accompany us to the Scandinavian Section meeting in June.