



Gemini Days

When **HUMPHREY WYNN** joined *Aeroplane's* former rival magazine *Flight* in 1956, flying was part of the job — mainly in the journal's own Miles Gemini, G-AKHC. Even better, the little twin opened up opportunities for air experiences in such types as Vulcan, Canberra, Gannet, Vampire and more, as he recalls here

ABOVE The author flying *Flight's* Miles Gemini G-AKHC and using the hand mike in the late 1950s or early 1960s.

WHEN MAURICE SMITH, the editor of *Flight*, interviewed me for an editorial post in early 1956 he said: "You don't quite fit the vacancy we had in mind, but we'd like to have you on the staff". This qualified approval led to some of the most satisfying experiences I have ever had. After six years in newspaper journalism I was to learn about good writing from Rex King, the magazine's associate editor, and about magazine subediting, make-up and so on from Roy Casey, the production editor, with the splendid additional dimension of flying as part of the job.

Flight already had a team of skilled pilots: Maurice himself, ex-Bomber Command Avro Lancasters with two DFCs; Mark Lambert, who was jet-qualified and flew with No 600 (*City of London*) Sqn, RAuxAF; Ken Owen, wartime-trained with the US Navy; Alastair Pugh, who joined the editorial staff a week before me; and Blick Hodgson, the Dorset House manager, ex-Fleet Air Arm (FAA).

Maurice and Mark did all the test flying for the *In the Air* assessment articles. At that time *Flight* had a Miles Gemini that was hanged at Croydon Airport and used for editorial assignments. I had my first flight in it, with Maurice, on September 8, 1956, from Croydon to Fairoaks, where I did some circuits and landings, and back. This was the aeroplane I came to love over the next seven years, G-AKHC ("Hotel Charlie"), a lively four-seater, highly manoeuvrable, with twin fins and powered by two 145 h.p. de Havilland Gipsy Major engines.

I had done more than 2,000hr RAF/RAFVR flying when I joined *Flight*, but still needed to acquire a Private Pilot's Licence, so was packed off to school at Fairoaks. In that green classroom, under the genial tutelage of Wg Cdr Cyril Arthur and his deputy, Ron Cobbett, I did circuits and landings, stalls, single-engine flying, glide approaches and map-reading exercises. There, on January 13, 1957, I took my test with the "Wing-co" and flew back to Croydon.

The door was open for me to match my flying with my job, which was what *Flight* called "Service Aviation" — the coverage of RAF, FAA and Army Air Corps activities.

I discovered that there was no better way of getting on terms with Service aircrew than to fly in to their stations; you were then on the right footing. I also experienced what I can only call the catharsis of flying: that purging of the emotions which Aristotle originally ascribed to drama, but which also applies to flying. There is nothing like it, I often found, to put the surface world into perspective. I wish many more young people could fly: it would help them to get their priorities right. Here was I with a lovely twin-engine type available as part of my job, and which I could also use for pleasure flying at the weekends if no-one else had booked it. I used to fly down to Shoreham airport for lunch in the art deco terminal building, or to Bembridge in the Isle of Wight for a quick swim, looking down disdainfully, as I flew back, on the traffic crawling northwards.

One Saturday at Croydon I noticed a small boy peering over the fence. He was Richard Wood, whom I had known a few years earlier in Cheshire. I said: "Come and have a ride, Richard". We flew to Shoreham, making that familiar approach between the cement works with its smoking plume (now extinct) to port and Lancing College chapel to starboard. Later I gave him some local flying practice. Perhaps these experiences sowed a seed for Richard. He got into Air Traffic Control, serving at Gatwick, then won a place for pilot training with BKS. He then got into British European Airways as a first officer on BAC One-Elevens, and became a captain with British Airways on Boeing 757s and 767s. He is now retired, which makes me feel old.

The 1950s-60s, when I did my Gemini flying, were the post-war heyday of British civil and military aviation, with many aircraft companies and the Services at a technological peak. The RAF had V-bombers, Hunters, Lightnings and Javelins, and the Royal Navy was flying Scimitars, Sea

ABOVE The author's first Gemini flight was in G-AKHC with Maurice Smith on September 8, 1956, at Croydon, but here it is flown solo by Mark Lambert. This aircraft was first certificated on October 24, 1947, and in 1954 was converted to a Mk 3A. It was finally withdrawn from use at White Waltham in September 1965.

