

to deliver to Kidlington, which she never found. On that bleak January day in 1941 the whole country was cloud-covered. I was lucky. Not only had the frontal system cleared south-eastwards; the tailwind swept me along and I was back at Fair Oaks (whose green grass never looked more welcoming) in an hour and a half, compared with the 1hr 50min it had taken me to get up to Warton. What a useful aeroplane the Gemini was.

In October 1960 I attended the annual conference of the Aerodrome Owners' Association (AOA), held in the stately Edwardian surroundings of the Grand Hotel in Folkestone, on the Leas, that wide green sward fronting the English Channel. I went down by train to cover the first day; a tedious journey indeed. So, as G-AKHC was free, I decided to fly down on the second day, which had a delightful consequence. The AOA's secretary, Sqn Ldr (Ret'd) Alan Day, had a very attractive PA/secretary, Mrs Essingman, and it transpired during the proceedings that she would like to get home that day. She asked whether she could fly back with me, and consequently I had delightful company on my return from Lympe to Ferrifield and thence to Fair Oaks, not an arduous flight. As my fair passenger, a doctor's wife, lived in Esher, I was able to drive her home on my way back to London. Not every day is one so lucky.

It was when G-AKHC was unavailable that I missed my favourite aeroplane so much. In November 1960 I used a hired Piper Caribbean from Panshanger to go up to Leeming with Ian Macdonald for a Gloster Javelin photographic sortie, flying with Flt Lt Eric Ginger in a T.3. On the way back we called in at Holme-on-Spalding Moor, the Blackburn Buccaneer development airfield, where test pilots J.G. Burns and David Lockspeiser were very intrigued with the Caribbean and insisted on "having a ride".

But my greatest "miss" was when I planned to fly off on honeymoon to Jersey on March 12, 1961, and G-AKHC was still undergoing a Certificate of Airworthiness check, and unavailable. I had to be content with an unfamiliar Gemini, G-AKEL, lent to me at very short notice (the afternoon before my wedding day; cutting it fine indeed). But that is another story.

I think my most momentous trip in Hotel Charlie was five days with Ian Macdonald on March



LEFT The Gemini had a neat and business-like instrument panel with a Plessey VHF transceiver installed in the glove pocket, leaving ample space for other uses.

19-23, 1962, to Landsberg in Bavaria, where the RAF had a training mission to the German Air Force. Our objective was to photograph the Germans' Fouga Magisters, those graceful jet trainers with their distinctive butterfly tails, against the majestic background of the Bavarian Alps.

We cleared Customs at Gatwick and crossed to Ostend, flew from there to Luxembourg to refuel and thence to Landsberg; 5hr 5min airborne. I shall never forget that Bavarian episode. Ian and I were very well looked after, in the air and on the ground. We were taken into Munich, a bustling city, and I was ineffably moved at the sight of Dachau, the first concentration camp, with its gas chambers. I was given a splendid familiarisation flight in a Magister by Sqn Ldr Ray Lofting, with aerobatics and touch-and-go landings. Then I flew with Flt Lt C. Simmons in the formation set up for the photo sortie, against that superb mountainous background. On the 23rd Ian and I set off on our return flight; 4hr 45min via RAF Wildenrath, Ostend and Gatwick, where we cleared Customs. We got back to Fair Oaks just as the lights were winking on in Woking.

Apart from a photographic sortie with "Mac" McLaren to Shelsley Walsh for *Autocar*, and some local flying with an ex-Middle East Air Force friend, my German outing was my last in Gemini G-AKHC, a graceful, nimble, reliable aeroplane for which I had a huge affection. It was then replaced as *Flight's* mount by a Beagle Airdale, sadly marking the end of my joyous Gemini Days. **A**

"We set off on our return flight from Landsberg in G-AKHC via Wildenrath, Ostend and Gatwick. We got back to Fair Oaks just as the lights were winking on in Woking"



LEFT A memorable visit in March 1962 to Landsberg in Bavaria to photograph German Air Force Fouga Magisters against the background of the Bavarian Alps gave an opportunity for the Gemini to pose with them. The flight took 5hr 5min airborne time and the author was given a familiarisation flight in the butterfly-tailed trainers, plus a formation photographic flight.