

## **G-TOUR Goes Touring: Pas de Calais – Danny Elliott**

It was the weekend of the Goodwood 'revival' meeting, and the airfield was to be closed from Friday to Sunday inclusive for general and training activities. Anything to do with the meeting was O.K but we lesser mortals were excluded. It was in order to depart but not return early on the Friday, and vice versa on the Sunday, by special approval of course. John Bond and I decided we would take G TOUR, the Plessey Club Robin 200, and 'do' the weekend over in the Calais area on a 3 day tour of the Pas de Calais and perhaps look at a couple of WW1 RFC airfields.

Friday morning came, looking good so John and I turned up bright and early clutching our 'special' passes to get to the aircraft which we had left prepared for the trip on runway 28 now being used as an aircraft parking area. We were anxious to get away and were soon sitting at the hold of 14R waiting for slot release only to be baulked by a long Spitfire display up and down said runway. It was going to take awhile so we switched off and enjoyed the best and closest Spitfire display we had ever seen.

We eventually got away and departed towards the east for the channel crossing. Although the viz from the ground looked excellent, at 2000' it was as murky as you know what and only just VMC all the way to Lydd and halfway across the channel. Here the French authorities (Lille) kicked in and the weather immediately upgraded to "Gin clear". We landed at Calais, my first time here, and we taxied in to a small landing fee and then into the restaurant where we enjoyed a tasty yet cheap meal.



**Calais**

The only drawback to this trip for me was that, having only an NPPL, I personally could not share the P1 job as that is illegal, however I did get to do the navigation and some radio as far as my limited French would allow. We then left Calais for St Omer which had been a large RFC base for Maintenance, repairs etc. and personnel movements, and was the main centre for the Corps HQ. It is now considered as the birthplace of the RAF.



**St Omer**

We landed and strolled into what passes as the control tower and cafe on the airfield. There is a larger "restaurant just outside the main gate. Once inside we ordered two cups of coffee from a young (10) boy who served up our order free of charge. We were then told by the lads' grandmother "there is no charge for the landing m'sieu. Can you imagine that in England ?

We wandered around the airfield, but of course there was no sign of the huge encampment we had seen pictured on the walls of the cafe when it had been some establishment. We then came upon a brand new memorial stone some 5' by 8' commemorating the events of the base during the 14-18 war and the sacrifices of the members of the RFC. I later saw the unveiling of this memorial on our local TV. Having taken a couple of pictures we then decided to depart for Abbeville where we planned to spend the night. This was at 16.55 local and the trip in the calm evening air was uneventful with excellent views of the rather flat landscape which comprises that area. Touchdown was at 17.25 and the sheep which cover the airfield had been rounded up by the two duty dogs and the resident shepherd. We spent a pleasant evening, after an excellent meal with some very nice wine, wandering about the airfield chatting with other



## **St Omer**

overnighters then slept in comfortable beds in a “Chambre” for three. The cost for this all in was 89 Euros for the two. The landing here was 9 Euros.

The next day we left Abbeville at 11.35 local and departed east to Arras where we landed at 1200. The day was bright and sunny and there was little activity.



St Omer



**Arras**

This had also been an RFC base (again no signs of course) and again no landing fee but the coffee was, I think 0.25 Euros from the little cafe, served again by a small boy and his mother. There was little to do here so we left for Amien (Glisy), heading back west.



**Amiens**

We landed at Amien which was very busy with gliding activity and some very good fliers practising their aerobatics. The place was full of aircraft and flying clubs but everyone too busy to talk to us even for the collection of a landing fee. There appeared to be no open eating facilities so we walked the short distance to a nearby (huge) shopping mall where we ate a reasonable lunch. On arrival back at the field there was still no one interested in chat or landing fees so we took off again with the usual blind calls as we did on our arrival.....still no responses.

On our way to Amien we had intended to land at Albert but discovered that they were closed for runway repairs, so we made do with an overfly and decided to do that one another time (a good excuse to go back). Again, there no signs of any WW1 relics from the air.

Having left Amien we flew back towards Abbeville where we had decided to spend the second night. This entailed a route along the course of the Somme. Looking down on the river one could easily see why the conditions of the 14-18 battles were fought in mud as the river is really not one bed but is made up of a whole series of parallel courses covering a very wide area and, given the flat terrain, likely to spill over everywhere under rainy conditions. No wonder it turned into a quagmire. We arrived back at Abbeville to spend another pleasant night.

After our meal we sat outside talking with various English fliers who were either going to, or coming from, some French rallies. There was one group of 7 Pitts Specials, another with one particular microlight type and various "ULAs". Things were quite busy in the restaurant that evening and we finished up with a constitutional in the dark along the length of the longest runway, which had once been used by the infamous yellow nosed ME109's. It was their group that built the hard runways thank you very much!

The next morning we took off for Le Touquet to sign out with Customs. While there, we walked into Le Touquet town where we had a nice meal (no wine) and then walked back to the airfield some 3 miles or so which seemed like 5 in the hot sun though we did manage to get some shade under the trees. Once back at the field we departed at 15.30 for Goodwood by running up the coast to Cap Gris Nez where we coasted out for Dover. As usual, as we did so the English weather did its thing and we ran straight into the murk and even though climbing were stuck with it. This is where John's IMC got a bit of practise and he was very pleased when I said, "We have the white cliffs in clear view".

We made it back to Goodwood at 15.55 with a straight in and parked up. Having put the aircraft to bed, we fought our way out through the still massive crowd and escaped despite various marshals trying to "direct us" elsewhere. Our lift was waiting for us and we arrived home to a welcome cup of tea. It was a thoroughly good weekend with plenty of flying good company, food, etc, and I would gladly do it again and probably will next year but going more westerly. Roll on 2005.