

'Hello darling - I'm not dead'

News of ferry pilot David Plange's death was, happily, an exaggeration. Here, he tells how it really happened

This trip was the first I have been involved in where we've flown two aircraft together. Two G1000-equipped C182s were collected from the factory on Monday 7th December by myself and my colleague Dustin Rabe from San Francisco. We filled out the acceptance paperwork after having checked around the aircraft with Debbie from customer support and waived the training flight. We had checked the weather and were keen to get airborne as there was a deep low pressure system sweeping across central America, moving northwest. We filed for Buffalo and were wheels-up at around 1330. The visibility was poor but we were forecast to have strong tailwinds due to the low pressure system. At 3,800 we broke cloud and could see forever. Dustin was away five minutes before me; he called me up on 123.47 and seemed really happy with his ground speed in the climb. I levelled out at my filed altitude of 11,000ft and watched the groundspeed build to just over 190kts, with a TAS of 152 running at 24 squared. Safe to say this first leg was going to be a breeze (excuse the pun).

En route we continued to check the metar for Buffalo which was slowly worsening and 30 minutes out after just over 3.5 hours of flight the weather was down to half a statute mile with blowing snow and freezing fog. Well, that was an easy decision to make – we would be continuing another 30 minutes to our alternate of Rochester in upstate New York. As we descended through the cloud layer into the evening sky, I switched on the hot prop and pitot heat and made the approach for ILS Rwy 22. On landing the girl from the FBO said there was a telephone call for me, which seemed really strange as no one really knew where I was. Puzzled, I took hold of the telephone and verified my identity to a David Neave from international search and rescue. It appeared my spot tracker had falsely sent out a distress signal an hour before, while I was over Lake Erie, and they had contacted my fiancée Caroline some 45 minutes ago and



Top: David Plange on the apron at Bangor, where the stamp attests that he 'arrived alive'
Above: the two C182s flown by David Plange and Dustin Rabe from Kansas to Denmark
Below: rows of Cessnas parked outside the factory in Wichita





informed her that the aircraft had gone down! Imagine that. I called home and found a sobbing wreck on the other end of the phone – Caroline simply couldn't believe she was talking to me, and I was alive and well. She said she'd gone into our 18-month-old baby Bailey's room and stood staring at him, thinking he would never see his daddy again. It was a horrible experience for her. Suffice it to say I decided we would stay for the night in Rochester so I could get my head around what had just happened.

We decided we would get an early start the next morning to try and make Goose Bay after

then you walk it across to the indoor BBQ and cook it to your taste, to coincide with the waitress bringing out your portion of fries, onions and mushrooms.

Next morning we booked our wake up call for 0530 and were collected at 0600 by a Woodward's aviation rep. We made the short journey to the apron and scrutinised the weather and winds. The trip was do-able, and we opted for a full one-hour pre-heat per aircraft. It was minus 16 with minus 27 wind chill factor. I was first up, and when the pre-heat finished I started my aircraft to get the engine and oil up to operating temperature

while Dustin's was being pre-heated. We then set about removing the coating of frost with de-icing fluid and a soft brush – certainly not kind on the hands. We eventually managed to get airborne and landed some five hours later at a blustery Narsarsuaq after flying down the fjord and contending with 40 knot gusting winds. Unbelievably, the surface wind was calm.

I got out of the aircraft and shook my arms to get the blood flowing again. We overnighted in the one hotel in town and had a nice meal, over which we met some interesting pilots who were part of a crew working for Hawker Beechcraft. They were assigned to deliver 50

Above: flying up the fjord towards Narsarsuaq in blustery winds

Right: a welcome first sight of the runway at Narsarsuaq

stopping in Bangor to clear customs. On finals to Bangor I was slotted in behind a Canadair regional jet and given the usual 'caution, wake turbulence' call. I landed across the snowbanks onto the tarmac of runway 15. We had a relatively quick turnaround and I got the usual quirky stamp in the log which reads 'Arrived alive in KBGR'. After departing we climbed respectively up to 13000 and 11000, and again on 123.47 we determined we were about seven miles apart in bright clear skies, so we elected to cancel IFR and close up to fly in formation. This was probably the most fun leg of the trip and we managed to get some great video footage – it's on Youtube if you want to have a look at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTxJsiNW6lO>. We arrived in Goose Bay at around 1830 and weren't able to get in at our favoured hotel, North 2, so we booked into the Labrador Inn, which we'd always been warned to steer clear of – but surprisingly it was quite comfortable. We ate as usual at the famous Trappers Cabin, where you order a steak of your choice and they deliver it raw on a plate,





T-6 Texan aircraft to Jordan, Israel and Iraq. These jet props looked great, but then they started telling us that they are always freezing and have no de-ice, the internal heating doesn't work and they are usually at 28,000 as that's the highest they can fly without RVSM, so its pretty cold up there. They have 2hr 46 minutes to reserve, and so could only take a nett zero wind component for the crossing. This was really interesting to learn,



Top left: lined up on 07 at BGBW, Narsarsuaq

Left: T-6 Texan – with no de-ice or internal heating, they're no fun at FL280 over the Atlantic

Below: beautiful weather but uninviting forced landing territory over the Greenland icecap

although it took a bit of perceived glamour away.

The next morning at breakfast they had worked the trip out to 2hr 45 to Reykjavik and they were happy to be going. Another minute and they'd have been waiting until the winds improved.

Attack of the Ice Feds

Our crossing time to Keflavik was around 4.5hr and when we landed and refuelled, we taxied across to South Air to find two Icelandic CAA representatives. They requested to check the aircraft's paperwork and look inside the cockpits. They weren't happy with the paperwork for Dustin's HF radio, so we were grounded until they decided what to do. They eventually stated that they wanted the installation removed by an FAA approved A&P, but they would not do it until Monday due to the 60knot winds and driving rain at the surface. About an hour later two more ferry flights arrived direct from St John's. These two brand new 172s were tanked and it transpired that it was actually these two aircraft that the CAA officials were looking for. Talk about being in the wrong place at the wrong time! It cost €1000 for the HF installation to be removed, which took 30 minutes. We spent a couple of



days with the 172 pilots as we were waiting for clearance to depart and it became apparent that they had a few more issues to deal with. They were both Learjet captains with thousands of hours who had fallen on rough times due to the shortage in demand for Learjet 35s in the modern corporate climate, so were filling in until they retrained or found someone to pay for new type ratings. This was only their second ferry flight and they hadn't managed to get acceptance to transit Canada in an overweight state, and also didn't realise they needed overflight permits for every country whilst operating over max gross weight on a special permit. The Ice Feds, as we endearingly called them, were having a field day. Anyway, we had a couple of days swapping stories, and I am informed they departed Keflavik some days after us on their way to deliver to St Petersburg via Latvia, where the ferry tanks were being removed.

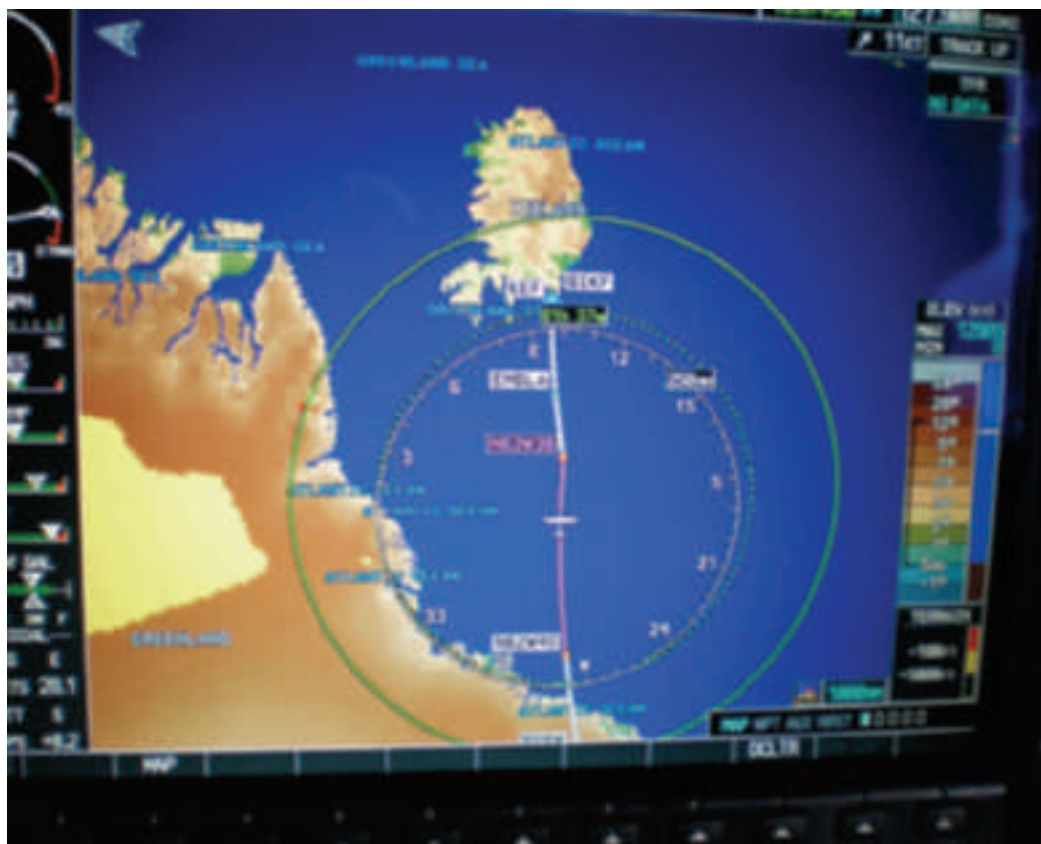
We departed Keflavik on Sunday 13th at 0930 in total darkness and climbed above the clouds to wait for the sun to rise. It was an uneventful trip across to see Andrew at Far North aviation in Wick and pick up the T1 customs form, then a quick turnaround en

A to B, no problem

David Plange is a former rugby league star who played for England in 1988 and 1990 and was a key member of the Castleford side which won the Challenge Cup Final at Wembley in 1985. He was player-coach of Hunslet Hawks when they won the RL Grand Final in 1999, and was runner-up Coach of the Year the same season. Among his business ventures is Alpha2Bravo, an aircraft ferry company which he operates in partnership with American Dustin Rabe and others. The story of David's first transatlantic ferry flight was told in the October 2009 issue of *General Aviation*. Dustin Rabe already has some 30 ocean crossings behind him, while David, with seven, is just starting out. Alpha2Bravo employs its own pilots, rather than using freelancers, in order to ensure



that aircraft are treated well. The full impact of the change in Danish VAT has yet to make itself felt, but the company has established a good reputation with dealerships and is well equipped to handle increased volume. For full details see alpha2bravo.com



Above: the awesome G1000 with our filed route to Keflavik

route to Aarhus in Denmark to import into the EU. About 40 miles out in the North Sea I started to pick up ice at FL130 so requested FL170 – usually a change of 3,000ft up or down will take you out of icing conditions. The important thing to remember, though, is that if ice pellets are encountered, then going up is out of the question as there would be freezing rain at a higher level, and that really would spoil your day. I was offered FL190 as Dustin was at 170 about eight miles ahead and reported in the clear. I climbed to 190 but was still in cloud and couldn't contact Scottish or Copenhagen, so there must have been a fair bit on the aeralis too. I reached Dustin on 23.47 and had him request FL230 which was assigned and got me in the clear. Now a C182Turbo has a service ceiling of 20,000ft but there seems to be a bit of ambiguity about

its absolute ceiling. This one climbed to 23,000ft at 400ft per minute and never faltered even with the ice that had accreted. After taking the ILS 10R approach into Aarhus, I taxied around to GA, and as I put on the brakes, it looked as though I had just hit a glass window panel as all the ice crashed from the leading edges onto the ground. I am glad I was in a turbocharged aircraft with a heated propeller. ■

Below: landfall in Scotland – on finals for Far North Aviation at Wick

