



# Letters to the Editor

## See and avoid?

Sir,

As usual *General Aviation* is of interest, sometimes of great interest. The December 2007 issue is one of those of great interest, with articles on the Piper Aztec and fast jets titled 'What the Hell was That?'

Some years ago having made up my mind to leave the UK and on March 1st 2000 I made one last trip from Blackpool in a beloved Piper Warrior to have a last look from above at my house, which I'd sold. I had a very good friend with me who is now flying business jets all over the world, so between us we had lots of safe hours, qualifications and experience. According to Google Earth my house was located at 54°07' 32.29N 2°25'00.75W in free airspace, but known for low flying by RAF jets. My course was being plotted continually on radar and some ten miles short of my house I checked by radio to see if there was any fast jet activity to be told there was none. So far, so good.

Arriving over my house we identified three fast jets, and I knew that where there were three, the fourth must be around so I did a 180 to clear the area while we both continually scanned for what I believed must be a fourth jet. We never saw it and safely returned to Blackpool. My wife and I then left on holiday.

When we returned there was a message asking me to call a number. When I did I was told that I'd been involved in an airprox incident two weeks previously and that this was being investigated. A Tornado pilot had

undying thanks.

In my defence I stated that I was being plotted on radar (the Airprox Board used this in their case), I was in radio contact with a ground controller and both pilots were keeping a good visual scan. I further added that a Tornado, camouflaged and flying fast, was a damned hard thing to see. The outcome was that I was held partially to blame for a Category Class 'C' incident by a majority percentage and warned to keep a better lookout in future, but no further action would be taken against me as definite blame could not be apportioned.

I quote from the summary of the Board's discussions. "It was suggested the occupants of the PA28 may have been paying too much attention to the features they were orbiting around and this may have reduced their capacity to look for aircraft at the critical moment." In actual fact we were not orbiting but turning 180 to 'get the hell out of there' whilst dipping each wing occasionally as we turned to get a good scan.

The outcome of the incident for me was that even when doing everything as right as I could I still nearly died that day. Before and after this incident, I had the reputation amongst my peers as a very safe pilot. I had double-checked everything I could have checked pre-flight but that was not enough. I then got another reputation of being neurotic in my pre-flight preparation as everything was triple checked. Maybe I was, but I'm still alive.

The article in GA brought the incident back to me, and to see the warning in print was an excellent thing. GA pilots in particular should be made aware continuously of the hazard of low flying fast jets. I was very aware of them and still very nearly died. Pilots be warned.

I continued to fly here in Spain, dodging the commercial traffic at Malaga – see the article on UK to Morocco in the previous GA edition. There is, for anyone doing the UK to Morocco trip, an excellent small airfield just to the east of Malaga at Axarquía but here it is locally controlled traffic by the pilots and Spanish is spoken. Alas, a recent minor heart problem has grounded me so I doubt if I'll ever have the sheer pleasure of being a truly active pilot again unless with a safety pilot, which is permitted, but that's not the same. I'm still an AOPA member and as I believe in the good work done will continue to be and pay my subscriptions to give my small financial support.

David Ritchie

## Money-grabbing

Sir,

First may I say how much I enjoy the magazine, although there is so much bad news around these days I am almost afraid to open it up!

Whereas, thankfully, I have not had to call upon AOPA to assist me personally in any important matter, I do recognise how much is done by AOPA and how much I have benefited indirectly. For example, successfully resisting the individual pilot's security vetting must have saved me a fair bit of cash as no doubt the costs of each vetting would fall upon individuals.

I want to suggest something in relation to the proposal to do away with the rights previously enshrined in my old UK licence, first issued in 1963. (Still kept in its original brown cover... Ministry of Aviation... Pilot's Licence (Flying Machines.) Personally I would have no objection to having a JAR-FCL licence

providing it did not cost me anything for the privilege. My proposal is that the CAA issue me with my JAR-FCL licence free of charge and renew it FOC for the rest of my life, or as required. (At a push, maybe I would be prepared to pay £5 for the postage etc.) If the CAA accepted this proposal, they would get what they wanted and they would be able to demonstrate that they were not just a load of money grabbing b\*\*\*\*\*s. One thing is certain; the number of FOC renewals could only diminish in time so the CAA would not be entering into an agreement with an unknown escalating cost.

In my dealings with the CAA I have always found the individuals with whom I have come into contact to be friendly and correct. It must be the 'system' or the 'accountants' that get in the way of common sense.

On the question of remembering to renew the licence every five years, I don't think it's too much to ask individual pilots to think for themselves. A simple 'aide memoire' stapled to one's certificate of experience, renewable every two years, would suffice for those of us for whom remembering where we put the screwdriver we had in our hands five minutes ago is a bit of a challenge.

Thanks and good luck

Ron Turner

## Licence reminders

Sir,

I would like to correct a point you made in your article 'DFT to dump CAA licences' (*General Aviation*, December 2008). You state that the CAA does not send out warnings to private pilots whose five year JAR-FCL licences are due to expire. This is not the case. We have been issuing renewal reminders to private pilots since January 2007 and have sent out some 2,500 reminders to date. We hope that this helps pilots with their legal responsibility to ensure that all licences and approvals are up-to-date before flying.

Ben Alcott

Head of Personnel Licensing Department  
Civil Aviation Authority

Apologies for passing on the misinformation; unfortunately it makes the 70 percent drop-out rate all the more devastating. – Pat Malone

## Live props

Sir,

I was grateful to Tim Desbois (*General Aviation* letters, December 2007) advice on hanging round too near my prop! I always take care not to move the prop but it is indeed worthwhile emphasising that although the magnetos may be off and keys, where fitted, may be out of the ignition, a faulty earthing wire could always mean that the prop is live. Advice well taken!

Polly Vacher

## Finger trouble

Sir,

A tiny correction to the excellent article (*General Aviation*, December 2007) on the assistance available from the military: the UHF distress frequency is 243 mHz (twice 121.5), not 234.

Jeremy Miles

My apologies, and thanks to Jeremy Miles, Nigel Charles and others who wrote to point this out; it was indeed finger trouble of the sort that has caused many an aviation disaster down the years. – Pat Malone ■



Philip Stevens

**Above: a Tornado pilot had reported being on a collision course with my aircraft**

reported being on a collision course with my aircraft and I'm alive to write this e-mail because of the skill of the RAF pilot who actually ducked under my aircraft. Even keeping an 'extra good' lookout, neither I nor my friend saw, heard or felt the fast jet. Whoever that RAF pilot was, he has my

