



ΑΕΡΟΛΕΣΧΙ ΖΑΚΥΝΘΟΥ

the sew-europe partnership

'Across the Pond'

A little trans-atlantic flight . . .by **PIPER WARRIOR !**

written: Ian P.Sissons for Alex Arvanitakis

Trans-atlantic flights are now so common that the problem for the en-route controllers is keeping all those Boeing, Airbus and McDonnell-Douglas aircraft apart. There is a constant stream of commercial aircraft continuously crossing the north Atlantic in both directions. Efficient and reliable jet-engine technology ensures a fast and relatively comfortable crossing for most travelers in their wide bodied air-conditioned commercial airliners.

Nowadays the mighty multi-engined jets such as the Boeing 747 with its four Pratt & Whitney JT9D turbofans and the McDonnell-Douglas DC10 (and now the MD11) with three General Electric CF6 motors running cross the Atlantic as a matter of course in just a few hours. In recent years, with the advances in jet engine technology, these engines have become so reliable that we are seeing two engined aircraft being certified to fly transatlantic routes. The Boeing 767ER (extended range) is now crossing the Atlantic everyday with a fuel capacity of approx.63,000 litres and of course with inertial navigation systems and fully automated flight management systems, the workload has reduced for the flight crew to a level where even their numbers are being reduced.



This is the story of one such flight. It's about flying aeroplane's in one of the most inhospitable environments imaginable to Pilots. It is a test of their skill and endurance. It involves all the route planning, alternative airports in case of emergency, en-route weather, maintenance schedules, A/D's, navigation equipment, fuel calculations etc. But this story has a difference. No multi jet engines here, no inertial or satellite navigation

system or auto-pilot, no TCAS, no air-conditioning or in-flight services. This is the story of a flight across the atlantic in a light single engined aircraft. This is the story of how Alex brought our Piper Warrior home to Greece from the United States. It is a story of courage, determination to succeed and of man's ability to triumph when things don't go quite to plan. It is testament to the solid reliability of the Piper Warrior airframe and the Lycoming O-320-E3D engine and above all it is the story of two very brave men made of the 'right stuff'.

Let's go back to the beginning and a little boy's dream of flight. A dream that bought him to the United States, to IKAROS AVIATION at Medford, N.J. to become a pilot. To learn, to be amongst friends, to build relationships with people bonded by a common interest. Alex arrived in America with just enough saved to pay for his private licence. But his yearning and ability to learn was noticed and the flight school offered the full CPL/IR/Multi/CFI package on an agreement whereby payment could be made on his return to Greece. A bond and a trust had been built up which was later to prove itself beyond question. Now with all his ratings he could return to Zakynthos, to pass on his skills and teach other little boys who dream of flight in their native island home. But alas, a problem occurs. To instruct students to become pilots, one of the basic requirements is an aircraft to teach them in, an area in which the Air Club at Zakynthos was sadly lacking. There was of course the RALLYE! But the old girl was not up to the job. Years of being parked in the salty island air and the constant use and mis-use had taken its toll. The main wing spar was so badly corroded that economic repair was completely out of the question. She was 'put out to graze' until her final trip sent her to the great airplane heaven (in the sky, of course). (ed's note. the rallye actually ended up on somebody's roof - no really, watch this space for pics)



(author's note...Alex ARVANITAKIS is a 30 year old Commercial Pilot with both Instrument and Flying Instructor Ratings attached to his licence. He is a very professional aviator and a pleasure to fly with (he gives me a hard time because my landings are better than his). Author is holder of UK and American Pilots Licences for Single and Multi Engined Aircraft with Night Rating Attached, UK IMC Rating, and currently studying for the US Instrument Rating as of 27thMay 1999.

The Aircraft is found...she is a 1976 PIPER PA28-151 Warrior and she is beautiful.(every home should have one,although I don't think my wife would be inclined to agree...ed.) But no funding is available to purchase it. The bond and friendship which has developed during Alex's stay at N14 shows itself now when a once in a lifetime opportunity presents itself.. An offer which cannot be refused is made. "Take the aircraft home Alex and pay us in installments when you start to make a profit at the club in Zakynthos". A dream come true. An agreement is made and the aircraft is registered to Alex Arvanitakis, Bohali, ZAKYNTHOS 29100, Greece. A very proud day for the boy who dreamed of becoming a pilot". . **"Alex,the aircraft can be stripped,crated and shipped inside a container as sea freight". But it's an aeroplane,it is built to fly!!** **The decision is made,it will be flown home to GREECE!**



With a decision made,a plan must be formulated to get the Warrior home. Initial estimates are that the route will be about 5000 miles and will involve 60 hours of flying,some of it through the most inhospitable airspace and weather patterns in the world. We will need approx.500 gallons of AVGAS and a lot of determination.

To fly a single engine, light aircraft across the Atlantic you have to be crazy, lucky and very skilled. There are no Service Areas where you can stop for a rest and to get Gas, no pull-ins where you can stop to read a map and nobody to help you if you get into trouble (well not until it's too late). So we have to be sure that the aircraft and our equipment is 100% reliable and and that we are fit to face the ordeal of the North Atlantic.

Now follows a period of flight planning, fitting ferry tanks, testing fuel systems for leaks, testing the airframe for stability and performance when the maximum take-off weight is exceeded by as much as 30%. Will she fly, climb and be controllable with the loading we are expecting her to carry? Apart from the empty weight of the aircraft, we are adding 220kg for pilots and equipment and upto 370kg of fuel. Calculations show that the centre of gravity has shifted rearwards because of the ferry tanks and is perilously close to being outside the envelope. The take off roll of the loaded aircraft is calculated at 6000' with another 2000' to clear a 50' obstacle. Flight testing continues at N14 until we are satisfied that the aircraft is ready for it's Atlantic crossing. ADF and HF Communications Equipment (both of which were to prove useless later) are fitted as are power connections for the GARMIN GPS. Immersion suits are acquired along with a liferaft and the mandatory 'Ray-Ban' Aviators (well you have to look the part if nothing else).The PIPER Warrior has a normal



fuel capacity of 48 us. gallons, but with ferry tanks fitted, this can add another 87,giving a total fuel load of 135 us. gallons (810lbs). Fuel consumption, given the circumstances and weight of the aircraft, is calculated to be 8.5 us gals per hour, giving a fuel endurance of just under 16 hours. Full fuel, safety equipment and pilots would far exceed the MTOW and put into question the 'weight and balance/centre of gravity', so precise calculations of en-route wind, distance, groundspeed and time were of paramount importance.



The final decision is made to the routing. Given here is the distance and time en-route (brakes off to on) for each sector .Route sectors were **(N14) Flying W, New Jersey to (PQ1) Northern Maine Regional** distance of 502 miles and Actual Time En-Route 7hrs. **Northern Maine Regional** to (CYR) **Goose Bay (Labrador)** distance 498 miles ATE 6h. **Goose Bay (Labrador)** to (BGBW) **Narsarsuaq (Greenland)** distance 673 miles ATE 7h. **Narsarsuaq-** to (BIRK) **Reykjavik (Iceland)** distance 668 miles ATE 11h. **Reykjavik** to (EGGP) **Liverpool (UK)** - distance 875 miles ATE 12h 30m. **Liverpool** - (LFMN) **Monte**

Carlo (Nice) *** distance 705 miles ATE 11h. **Nice** - [\(LGZA\)](#) **Zakynthos** distance 716 miles ATE 9h.

*** Our original planned stop was at PISA-ITALY, but military operations required an en-route alternative.

Sadly the Warrior, unlike its larger relatives the Boeing 767, Airbus A340 etc. does not come equipped with two of the most important luxuries that any trans - atlantic aircraft should really have, a galley and a toilet. So the pre-flight planning also had to include some thought about 'high-energy' low volume foods. A qualification as a Dietician is not a legal requirement to attempt this trip, so after some thought, our in-flight menu will consist of, for starters Greek (naturally) Olives followed by a main course of pieces of chocolate and for desert a piece of fruit.

FLYING W (N14) is a small regional airfield in New Jersey and our starting point. So, we're off then! Ahead is a flight of lifetime, a feat that few will accomplish. An experience that will remain with us all the days of our lives. It's very early on a beautiful morning, September 3rd 1995. Everything checked and double checked and then checked again. Our calculations dictate that owing to the runway length, our weight must be reduced to allow us to complete the take off roll within the distance available. The ferry tanks will just hold 25 gallons for this sector. The Lycoming roars into life, as eager as we are to go home. "Cherokee N211SA departing Runway 01, Flying W". Just a few words which will launch us into the adventure of a lifetime! We taxi into position, check the 'climbout' for other aircraft, brakes off, throttles forward and we're rolling. After what seems an eternity the ASI creeps towards flying speed, we rotate, the Warrior limps into the air, straining to gain another foot of altitude under the load we have asked her to carry. Crossing the Hudson River and into New York State. Talking to New York now as we pass East abeam. Heavy Traffic at La Guardia, Newark and JFK. American, Delta, Continental, TWA. There's 737's, 747's, 757's and Airbus's aplenty, but they pale into insignificance compared to the trip we will make (in fact many of these aircraft will not have travelled as far as we will on this flight). The early morning light silhouetting the NEW YORK skyline. The Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, World Trade Centre, the Empire State Building, we're leaving it all behind. Everything running smoothly and with the abundance of Navigation Aids and Alternative Airports in case of emergency we relax a little. Crossing the State Line into Connecticut, passing SIKORSKY and HARTFORD and on into Maine for our first stop and Presque Isle (PQ1) which was 7 hours flying from takeoff at



N14.



PRESQUE ISLE (PQ1) September 3rd P.M. Leaving Maine in the Autumn, the beauty of this country remains with us. We enter Canadian Airspace and the scenery changes. As far as we can see is a wonderful country where the elements can be as hostile as the majesty of its beauty. Constantly aware of the elements and the environment now. Presque Isle. Only time to re-fuel and refresh here because we want to be in Goose Bay tonight, so that we can rest and prepare for our first over-water flight to Narsasuaq. We have to be there on time because a weather pattern is building and a delay now could set us back days, if not even weeks. We will have had a total time today of 13 hours in the air. At last we find the airport at Presque Isle. ATC is very helpful and an uneventful landing is made here.

GOOSE BAY (CYR) Here we are then, GOOSE BAY Labrador, right on schedule, six hours flight time. There will be food here, washing facilities and above all a real toilet! There is no NDB available, so we follow the river to get us to Happy Valley. The arrival airport name - 'Happy Valley'. It is a military airfield (and the weather is getting colder). There is other traffic here crossing the Atlantic too! It is a Learjet, en-route to Europe. The crew are very interested in our



exploits and laugh when we say, "we'll see you in Reykjavik". The Learjet looked beautiful in the sunlight. A day of enforced rest today, September 4th 1995. The weather would have prevented us attempting the run to Narsasuaq because the temperatures at 4000' and above indicate that severe icing of the airframe is a 100% certainty. Ice, the cold killer. As super cooled water droplets contact the airframe, they attach themselves and slowly build up a layer of ice which separates the laminar airflow from the wing and alters Bernoulli's law, the principle by which all aircraft fly. With any build up of ice, the efficiency of the wing becomes less until a point is reached where the wing cannot generate enough lift and the aircraft will not fly anymore. You do not want this happening at 6000'. But the brief for tomorrow from the military Met. guys is just what we want. Forecast winds are in our favour!!!! After convincing the Canadian Authorities that both Pilots were indeed sane and that the aircraft, equipment and planning conformed to requirements, permission to proceed is granted. This inspection by the Canadian Authorities is basically intended to ensure that if you intend to cross the bleak, inhospitable expanse of water between Canada and Greenland, you, your aircraft and your equipment are up to the job. It can be a costly exercise mounting a rescue operation which in most cases sadly, would not be successful. It is now September 5th. Today's forecast tells us that the weather pattern will be in our favour with winds aloft pushing us towards home. The decision to run for Narsasuaq and Reykjavik is made. We intend to be in Reykjavik tonight. Both Pilots and Aircraft have been rested and fuelled for the journey. Climbing slowly away from Goose Bay we are filled with a sense of uncertainty. Ahead of us is one of the most gruelling journeys either of us has ever undertaken. The absence of Nav-Aids means we are relying solely on the GARMIN GPS (and the backup) and our own skills at 'Dead Reckoning'. VHF radio contact with Canadian ATC is lost, so we continue to transmit position and estimate information of the HF radio, but we are getting no response from anyone! Frequencies are checked and double checked and are correctly tuned. We transmit blind every hour. Two hours into the flight, the winds are not quite what they were forecast at and our estimate is that they will probably add about 1 hour to the leg time to Narsasuaq. We are now outside the range of all ground based Nav-Aids. The GARMINS are a real asset, backing up what we believe to be our position. They allowed us to compensate for the wind aloft at a very early stage of our journey. As we head further towards Narsasuaq, the outside temperature is falling and we are concerned about icing. The outside air temperature has dropped as low as -5f degrees. Whilst we are above cloud the probability of icing is much less but we are still adding an 'icing check' to our routine in the cockpit more often than we would normally. It's bloody cold in here!



NARSARSUAQ (BGBW) In the distance, faintly distinguishable, appears a series of black jagged peaks showing thru the cloud. Landfall! GREENLAND! Narsasuaq, situated on the most southern tip of Greenland, is probably one of the most difficult airports to take off and land at in the world. Apart from unstable and inhospitable weather patterns, the airport is surrounded by mountains in every direction rising to almost 3000 metres. The approach is made up a fjord passing fishing villages as you head down finally to land. Must get fuelled up, the forecast and on our way to beat the weather. We are already over an hour behind.



The weather pattern is forming and the Met people tell us that there will be thunderstorms here in an hour and that the Airport will close in about 20 minutes time. Fuel calculations, although pre-planned before commencing the trip have to be checked and double checked. The forecast and actual weather are studied and cross referenced before a decision is made which can be looked upon in years to come as either correct or fatal.

It is now late in the afternoon and we have to beat the weather, so we decide real quick to go for Reykjavik. This means flying the leg from Narsasuaq to Reykjavik into the night. **We file our flight plan and head west into the dark hostile void that is the night.** The Warrior carries us up into the late afternoon sky. Climbing lazily, owing to the unforgiving burden we place on her, the Warrior cannot clear the mountains surrounding the airport at Narsasuaq. There is only one way now, around them! A decision which will add two and a half hours to our flight time for this sector. That is about 21 gallons of precious life giving fuel. The black peaks which we are seeing cannot be described for what they really are.

Their majesty and beauty haunt us and the sight will remain with us forever.

We are we believe, the first PIPER Warrior to make the crossing from Narsasuaq to Reykjavik at night.

The night enshrouds us very quickly because we are of course flying into it. Now we start to encounter problems. Usually the winds over the North Atlantic are Westerly. They should be pushing us towards Reykjavik. But tonight they conspire against us and calculations show that we are encountering 50 knot headwinds restricting our progress. We have no ADF and the Garmins are again advising us of 'Poor Coverage'. The HF radio is once again turning out to be just excess weight (we checked and double checked it. It was fitted and declared fit for service by a qualified engineer!!)

REYKJAVIK (BIRK) They know we are coming out of the night!

At these Northern Latitudes it is never completely dark Just a dark grey void into which our trusty steed propels us. It is night, it is very cold and we are alone here! The flight time from Narsasuaq to Reykjavik will eventually be just over 11 hours.

Cloud cover and height information recieved from the Met people has not proved accurate. Coverage is much thicker than

anticipated and layering means we cannot fly at our desired altitude. We have to climb higher because of the ever present danger that the airframe will start to 'ice-up'. With every crystal of ice that forms, the end of our journey gets nearer. Precious fuel is burned climbing at the expense of groundspeed. Levelling out, we now start the business of getting us and the aircraft on the shortest possible route to Reykjavik.

Forecast winds should have given us a ground speed of over 130 knots, the wind has changed direction and we are achieving only 70 knots. The fuel calculation will not allow us to continue more than two hours at this rate. Reluctantly, we decide at which point we will make a 180 and return to Narsasuaq. We were relying on the wind as a factor to help us achieve this crossing. Hope still burns inside us and we prey to our God and the Gods of the North Atlantic (and any other God who will listen to us) for favourable winds.

Suddenly, as though the power of two pilots desperately wishing it, the wind shifts in our favour and precious time is now being made up. 130 knots, 140 knots ground speed, time

to run is well inside the limits of endurance now, we continue. We have to be realistic and calculate a new point at which we will have to return to Greenland, only this time we have to include in the equation, the fact that the wind is not a predictable factor. The point of no return is reached and it is agreed that we will continue! Both the GARMIN GPS and the backup are telling us that satellite coverage is deteriorating here, there is also no Radio Navigation Aids and for the second time our HF Radio is proving unserviceable.



The VHF Comm allows us at least to transmit position and endurance information on 121.50 (well what we believe to be our position). KLM and UPS trans-atlantic traffic is very happy to re-transmit our information to Reykjavik because it relieves the boredom of supervising the actions of a \$40 million flying computer.

There are no visual references to assist us in confirming position, just a grey expanse where cloud is not distinguishable from the sea. All the skills we have ever learned are now put to the test as the only navigation tool we have is 'dead reckoning' and it had better be accurate. One hour follows slowly after another, secretly each of us is anxious about the situation. Cold, alone and unable to confirm our exact location. There is no worse feeling in the world than being isolated in a hostile environment, not 100% sure of your whereabouts and being in the dark. The only visitor we have is the moonbeams which play tricks as they dance off the clouds which surround us. Pressure is building up in the cockpit. Got to keep ourselves busy. More checks, constantly calculating fuel burn and reserves, navigation plots. Are we where we think we are? Are we off course? If so, how far, are we north or south of our intended route? Anxiety gives us a new determination to get this aeroplane and ourselves to Reykjavik. Our initial calculation of time en-route has come and gone. With the calculated wind shift, our new estimate has added another hour and a half to the sector. Vigilance has paid off! Icing conditions have developed between six and eight thousand feet. Carb. heat is applied and whilst one pilot continues to fly towards Iceland the other is constantly checking the wings for ice using our Maglite. As water is hitting the wings it is starting to ice up the airframe. Descend, descend, to a lower altitude where the air is warmer (well I mean where it is not so bloody cold). Down now at 4000'.

The airspeed indicator becomes inoperative. The fuse has blown in the pitot tube heater and it has iced up. Electrical failure is all we need now, so we turn off all unnecessary electrical equipment to conserve what power is left should we have a 'short circuit'. The stress and pressure is telling on us now. In addition to the apprehension we felt earlier, we now have the added problem of a suspected electrical failure and airframe icing. The point of return to Narsasuaq has passed well behind us and like any other pilot with problems in

flight we shall land at the nearest airport. The trouble is it is by our estimates over 250 miles away! The mood in the cockpit has reached bottom. Depair now raises it's ugly head, we start to resign ourselves that soon this trip may terminate. But we have to drive all negative thoughts from our minds. It is not easy being optimistic given our circumstances .

Looking now desperately for a break in the clouds but there are none. For an hour and a half we continue until someone up there decides to help. A break in the cloud layer. Descend, warmer air (well I mean not as cold as it is up here. SUDDENLY! out of the continuous crackle of static was that a voice in the distance. Indistinguishable, but there it is again, someone is answering our position broadcasts! Is it Reykjavik or another aircraft? We cannot distinguish who our saviour is yet. Tuning the VHF comm. to Reykjavik, we desperately hope they can hear us. A break in the cloud layer is spotted and we decide to descend thru it. At least we will be able to get a better picture of our circumstances below the cloud base. The voice in the distance has become much stronger, IT IS REYKJAVIK. They have been concerned for us and have been trying for the last hour to contact us. It seems to us here in our cold, cramped little cockpit that they are as relieved to hear us as we are to hear them and they talk us in for a landing at the most Northerly point of our trip. Exiting the aircraft, we now have to clear Customs. But there is no-one here. The Customs Officer, resigned to the fact that we were delayed, has decided that if he has to wait for us, he might as well get some sleep. Blissfully unaware of our arrival, he is asleep in his car and we have to announce our presence by knocking on the window. **Incidentally, the Learjet looked beautiful in the yellow quartz apron lighting.**



LIVERPOOL AIRPORT (EGGP), one of my favourite airports into which I fly regularly...ed) placed on the northern bank of the Mersey estuary. Runway designated 09/27 and is 2286x46 metres. This is an important mail and cargo airport and whilst jet traffic is seen here on a daily basis, this is the place to view turboprop operations. 748's, ATP's and BAe146 are constantly on the move here. Liverpool Approach is contacted on 119.85 who will give zone entry clearance (normally not above 1500' on the Liverpool QNH as Liverpool is underneath the Manchester



Airport TMA). Approach aids are ILS/DME 27 on 111.75 (I-LQ) and the 'LPL' NDB 349.5. Visual references on approach to runway 27 include the Runcorn Bridge. It's very late at night when we arrive at EGGP. The sector from Reykjavik has taken twelve and a half hours and we are very tired. No matter, we can find an hotel and rest for the run to Pisa. Suddenly we realise that we are in LIVERPOOL England, but we only have American and Icelandic currency and in the Terminal in the small hours, there is no Bureau de Change open! Sadly it would appear that Icelandic KRONER is not a negotiable currency in LIVERPOOL, but eventually we find a Taxi Driver who will accept US Dollars (albeit at a questionable rate of exchange). We tour the vicinity of the airport trying to find an hotel that is open, but to no avail. We decide that the rate the Taxi is eating up our undervalued US Dollars, it probably has a fuel burn that is higher than the Warrior and we decide to return to the airport to prepare for the next sector, but at least we are warm! It is now 3am and we are hungry. Sadly no cafeteria is available at Liverpool during the night, but at least we can rest here. Some well earned sleep. 6am and this regional airport comes alive, preparing itself for the new day which will see people busy going about their business. The



cafeteria is open, we can at least get some breakfast. We decide to purchase donuts for our in-flight meal, but they have no paper bags so we are given black trash can liners, novel I suppose, it's the first time in my life I have put my food in a trash can liner before I have eaten it! September 7th 1995. The 'Leaving of Liverpool' (this sector is flown under IFR). We file our flight plan for what is our original planned stop, PISA, Italy. But PISA will not accept us because of military operations in the area on that day so we go 'back to the drawing board'. We decide that Monte Carlo is our next best option because the Warrior can fly Monte Carlo to Zakyntos in one sector. After 30 minutes our flight plan is confirmed, Monte Carlo will accept us so we go ahead and file it. The weather is a little grey, with good cloud cover and winds. Tower gives us the local barometric pressure for the altimeter in milibars, but our altimeter is calibrated in inches so a request for advice in inches is made and given. Lift off and

straight into IMC conditions with some very strong updraughts. Change comm. to Liverpool Approach, flight plan is activated and acknowledged and a new altimeter setting is given, but it shows higher by a 1000' so we have to question it. Approach confirm that the setting is correct, so those updraughts must be mighty strong for our aircraft which is loaded with pilots, equipment and fuel to have climbed this quickly to our planned altitude of 8000'. Liverpool send us now to the en-route controller. We have a problem! The en-route controller has asked us to check our altimeter because he thinks we are 1000' lower than we have planned. His radar is telling him we are down at 7000'. Confusion, we are flying in cloud with an incorrect altimeter setting...VERY RISKY! Our controller advises us the correct barometric pressure and then all is well again. We route SSE to Honiley (Birmingham), skirting the huge Orange glow that is LONDON early on an autumn day in England and eventually coasting out at DOVER. The harbour can be seen in the early morning light. Crossing the English Channel is almost insignificant after all the water we have experienced on this trip. At the FIR boundary, we are handed over to French ATC for the sector to Monte Carlo which is another eight and a half hours flight time. I don't think most people realize just how big France is until they either fly or drive across. As we head south, the sun is shining and the climate is getting warmer. Monte Carlo, we will rest here in the playground of the rich and famous. This small principality on the French Riviera. Afternoon has come to an end as we arrive at Monte Carlo. The airport is not busy and an uneventful landing is made. Our Warrior is the smallest aircraft on the apron, but her heart is bigger than any of the Learjet's or Citations lined up and we are VERY proud of her. We know that Monte Carlo will be expensive, so we change what we think is enough money for an hotel for the night. ***It is just about enough for the taxi fare into town!***



MONTE CARLO (LFMN) Day 5, September 8th 1995 and were almost home. This will be the final leg of the journey. Leaving Monte Carlo we will route down the west coast of Italy and then across to BRINDISI. From BRINDISI we are expecting the ATHENS Controller to route us to KERKYRA (Corfu),



KESAL (waypoint, slightly North East of KEFFALONIA) and then direct ZAKYNTHOS. The weather now is most definitely in our favour. The pre-flight planning is done, we are fuelled and our flightplan is filed. Monte Carlo give us a special VFR clearance and we are off on the final sector. The Warrior will have to climb to 7500' to clear the mountains.



Turbulence is causing us a problem, mountain waves and windshear is throwing the Warrior around as though she is a piece of paper caught in a storm. Both pilots are on the control wheels to keep our baby in something like the correct attitude. Our ferry tank is straining on her straps and we are fearful that it may break loose. But as quickly as we had been hit by this turbulence it stops. We are clear of the mountains.

Visual navigation is a pleasure and of course now we are over land in Europe, Radio Navigation and the Garmins make our job very easy. The Mediterranean Sea looks beautiful from our view point as it slowly moves below us. Italy, we can see Italy now. Down the west coast of Italy, nearer and nearer home. The whole flight has been conducted using Instrument Flight Rules, but for this sector because the weather and the visibility are good, we have filed a Visual Flight Rules flightplan-BIG MISTAKE! Rome, Naples all now in the past as we make the turn across to the east coast. The controller at Brindisi is giving us problems, not only does he have a very heavy Italian accent, but he keeps telling us we cannot cross his FIR boundary into Athens airspace. Why? we ask only to be told that Athens will not accept our VFR flightplan because it is not valid in Greek airspace after the onset of official night (30 mins after local sunset time). After much confusion the Italian controller managed to understand our request to convert the flightplan to IFR and contacted Athens. The Athens people decided to accept us on IFR and we were cleared to enter Greek Airspace at the boundary. Whats this we can see, another aircraft. It would appear that we have a visitor. He's moving very quickly towards us. It's military, its an F14 and he's staying with us. There is no recollection of infringing any military zone and we are now over international waters, then we realise we are close to the old Yugoslav/Albanian border and this Jet Jockey wants to see who we are. Satisfied that our little Warrior is of no threat (and having checked the aircraft registration and flight plan), we get a gentlemanly acknowledgement before he leaves us to continue towards



home. At last Greek Airspace, we are entering the Athens (West) FIR, the end is so close we can almost touch it. CORFU and LEFKAS fall away behind as we enter the last few miles of what to us has seemed like an Herculean Feat.



ZAKYNTHOS (LGZA) Athens sent us now to Andravida Approach who cleared us direct to Zakynthos at 10,000' The lights of Keffalonia beckon us, they tell us we are nearly there, when suddenly out of the dusk on the horizon we can see



the lights of Zakynthos. Home! We can see the island now...A homecoming to us that is no less significant than that of Ulyses returning to Ithica.

We fly over the West side of the island, where there is probably the most famous shipwreck in the Mediterranean. Andravida Approach tells us to descend to 4000' and to contact Zakynthos Tower. Both the day and our trip are almost ended. Zakynthos Airport was due to cease operations at 9pm (local time) and our ETA was 9.03 (local) We are talking to Zakynthos Tower, to Panagiotis (Peter). He is very helpful and because the winds are calm, asks us which runway we would like to land on, 16 or 34. We choose 34 which will give us the opportunity to circle the airport, to take in the pleasure of seeing this beautiful place that is Zakynthos. "N211SA is finals for 34" . Five days ago, we seemed like a world away from this warm and beautiful island that is where my heart is. The joy of returning to the place of my childhood, my family and my friends fills me with a sense of well being. I am happy. 'N211SA, you are cleared to land runway 34 and **welcome home**'.

We land, we backtrack the runway and turn onto the Apron where a parking place is ready and waiting for us. Running thru the shutdown checks seems like a dream. To have completed a trip like this and to have accomplished this feat fills me with pride in both myself and my aircraft. But what's this I see. Coming towards us are 50 people, family, friends and even the local TV station has sent a crew to welcome us home. They ask too many questions, they want to photograph me, I am something of a local celebrity!

We have faced the unforgiving fury of the North Atlantic, we have placed ourselves at the mercy of the elements and placed our trust in God, the Air Traffic Controllers and Met. people on the route. We have stared death in the face and prevailed. But I have to say that I was only part of the formula and would like to thank the most important parts of the team, my Piper Warrior

'Sierra X-Ray .. Alpha Bravo Zulu'

In my life, if another opportunity to excel at something does not present itself, this will have been my greatest achievement and I am proud of it.

I have another dream now, to continue in the world of Aviation by moving on into Commercial Aviation. Sadly I have been rejected by our national carrier, OLYMPIC AIRWAYS, for not being experienced enough!!! But one day an opportunity will present itself and I will be ready.

(ed's note 10-12-06: Alex has indeed achieved his ambition, he was invited to join the Greek Airline Macedonian Airlines. He commenced flying BOEING 727's and has since moved onto the Next Generation 737's which Macedonian have introduced. And at 10-12-06 he now is first officer on ATR's with a view to getting his first command.)

Thank you for your time and for your interest in me. ALEX ARVANITAKIS, BOHALI, ZAKYNTHOS, 29100, GREECE

Regards
Alex

Thanks for writing
& Best Regards
Alex