

Jim Flanagan – Antilles Air Boats / S25 Southern Cross / Sept.-Oct. 1980

A Journal of the last trip of the Southern Cross

San Juan, PR / St. Thomas / St. Croix, USVI / Port Washington, NY / Gander, Nfld. / Shannon, Ireland

Jim Flanagan worked for AAB for many years and served as an A&P Mechanic, American Inter-Island CV440 Chief Inspector and 1st Officer, 1st Officer on G-73 Mallard, S25 Sandringham Flight Engineer as well as 1st Officer. Jim left AAB in 1978 to pursue more flight time on a wide variety of aircraft. After Charles Blair's death in 1978, the Sandringham's were no longer a useful tool for AAB. Mrs. Blair put them both on the market. Edward Hulton, a young British millionaire bought "Excalibur VIII" and "Southern Cross" was sold to a small underfunded group that purchased the aircraft from AAB with the hopes of making a small profit with a resale to a British museum. The understanding was that the sale would take place upon its arrival in England. Jim was contracted to assist with the movement of S25 Sandringham "Southern Cross" from its present location, Isla Grande, San Juan, PR. to England.

Crew;

Capt. Ron Gillies

First Officer - Jim Flanagan

Flight Engineer – Mike Coglean

Peter Arthur

Ted Pfeiffer

David

Noreen Gillies

The following is First Officer **James Flanagan's Journal** transcript...

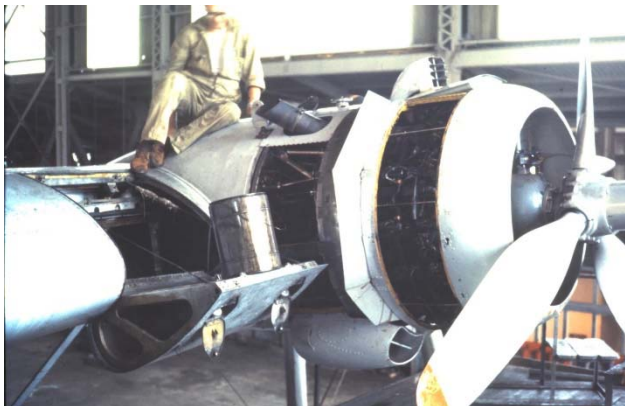
Sept 26th – Boarded Eastern flight 969 to San Juan at 1650 hrs. Sue dropped me off, she is not happy. Landed SJU and no one to meet me. Took cab to Green Isles. Met Noreen (Gillies). She has put on weight. Went to Ugo's Deli and had crummy conch and rice with lots of beer. Crashed 2300... forgot my toothbrush. Bleak.

Sept 27th – Out to aircraft. All green. It looks like a whale turd. It has a blue tail. The other one (BRF) is beautiful, 4 new engines, new paint and new interior. Real nice. Met Leo Soto today. He looks the same. Screwed around the hangar for a while, then tried to run aircraft. No luck. #3 the only to go. #4 wouldn't come out of feather. #1 and #2 wouldn't start at all. Finally got #4 to go after pulling out of

feather with paddle. #1 and #2 still no go. Had no ignition vibrator on either one. Got that fixed and it made no difference. Found 8 oiled plugs and started raining and gave up for the day and went to the place for beer. Back to Green Isles and had lamb chops with mint sauce and cake. Real good. Mrs. cooked. Crashed 2230.

Sept 28th – Out to aircraft early. After half day of thrashing around found #1 and #2 ignition switch wires crossed. No wonder. I nearly took my A&P out and shredded it. Meanwhile, #4 overheats during runup. Use primer to cool it and get the greatest fire you have ever seen. Fire bell going off, everybody running around like cut chickens. Resisted the impulse to shoot the fire bottles and got the fire out okay. Towed the aircraft over to hangar. Buttoned up, got cab over to PR joint where we got beer, then walked to hotel. Have supper in Ron and Noreen's place. I forgot my toothbrush when I left Miami. My mouth tastes like the foreign legion camel train. My leg hurts like hell, this whole situation sucks. Crashed 2300.

Sept. 29th – Worked like hell on aircraft today. Finally traced #1 engine problem to a bad ignition coil. Mike Cogan actually figured it out. He is pretty smart. Will write about the rest of the group later. Hot as blazes today. Back to our beer spot, had a few back at Green Isles, had stew for din-din, real good. Mrs. Gilles cooks in her room. Watched how Star Wars was made and a MASH that I had already seen. Had some warm milk, 2 bufferin and crashed 2315



Sept. 30th – Another day of busting guts on the airplane. Changed the mag on #2 and all seemed okay. Had Ted Pfeiffer helping me. He is really not so bad. I didn't care for him so much in St. Thomas. There is a Puerto Rican FAA tower guy from Isla Grande who comes over to watch us every day. He took some pictures of me

and the aircraft. Came home, ate at B'King, talked with house group by pool, crashed 2330.

Oct. 1st – Another hard day at aircraft. Looks like the impeller shaft seal is shot. Everybody's spirits are lagging. The other aircraft is owned by some silly young fat millionaire. He approached me but I didn't pay him much attention. George Allcock and Leo Soto are working on it. Nice white imron paint with blue lateral stripes. Working with a nice old guy named Peter. He doesn't know anything about airplanes but he works like hell and makes tea all day long. Bowlegged, one tooth missing and ragged beard. Back to Green Isles, shishkabob in Gillies quarters, crashed almost exhausted.

Oct. 2nd – Dropped intake pipes and out poured oil. Impeller dripping wet. Gillies calls Scottish Aviation in Prestwick, Scotland and they say run it and everything will be okay. Changed plugs. Everybody in better spirits, home, spaghetti with meat sauce. I was starving. Watching fights now on TV with house crowd. Holmes and Ali at 2200. Should be good. Crashed before the fight. Holmes won...too bad.

Oct. 3rd – Same ole shit at the plane. No fuel as usual. Too tired to do anything. Adjusted #4 idle, found a fuel leak at the balance line and saw the rudder trim out of rig. Daniel (one of the benefactors of this group) brings a loaf of bread and some cheese. I told Gillies I had to go home, he said he would get me some money but I doubt if he will. This is a real mickey mouse outfit for sure. Dinner at Gillies apartment, watching Maude, crash 2330.

Oct. 4th – Another miserable day on aircraft. Finally decided to change oil cooler. Tried to patch old one but it made it leak worse. The new one of course doesn't fit. Work till dark to get engine ready to accept new cooler when and if we get one. We work off a painter's scaffold covered in oil. I don't know why there hasn't been an accident yet. Back to Green Isles, had a nice barbeque, P'Chops, ribs and steak. Sue called as I had expected and she was furious. My fault I guess. I just never thought we would still be here. As it turns out I'll probably have to leave home again as soon as I get back. Missed my dinner because I was on the phone, rest of the evening downhill. Two guys here from D.C. They are comm experts. Doug Sanders came by with 2 Puerto Rican cuties. He is with the airtech crew working on the other airplane. The owner (Ed Hulton) wants me to work for him.

The money would be great but he is totally unknowing about aircraft and I have no idea who or what the pilots will be.



*Ed Hulton's
aircraft in front of the
hangar in San Juan, P.R.
The blue tail on the whale...
forefront*

Oct. 5th – Mrs. Gillies gave me \$250 this AM. Peter gave me \$200 last PM. Will send some to Sue...ASAP. Lunch at B'King, back to bed, up at 1700, watched the tube. Dinner at Duffy's. Not bad. Nice place. San Juan isn't so bad if you know your way around. Back to Green Isles, watched a movie about Marilyn Monroe. Bed, read, crashed 2200.

Oct. 6th - No change, patched oil cooler 3 times, still leaks. Bought another one for \$150 from a guy they suspect stole an engine from them. The other S25 got pushed out today for a run up. They brought in a dude from Miami. They had no success. Pushed back in hangar and eventually fired up #4 without any cowlings. What would they do if they had a fire. They couldn't use the bottles without accessory cowls. Back to Green Isles, sent out for pizza, over to Duffy's for a drink with Mike, crashed 2345. Called Sue tonight, she misses me, so do the kids, I miss them too.

Oct. 7th - Pumped fuel by hand. 600 gals. Pulled oil px relief valve #2. Regular day. Called Sue. She says she is mad. Dropped old Peter off at plane, back by Pinky's Folly and had a beer. Crashed 2300.

Oct. 8th – Couple hours hard work, presently poised at slipway ready to dump in water. Waiting for Gillies. The other aircraft is having engine problems. The special engine guy they sent down doesn't appear to be too sharp. Finally got into water. Went to St. Thomas. Landed Gregory Channel. Aircraft leaped out of the water and stalled. Found out later that the rear bilge was full. Spent night on board pumping. Had a fight with Mrs. Gilles. She is being a %&*#. Made a run to Crazy Cove about 1 am in boat. Was nice to be in the harbor under the stars. Finally crashed on floor upstairs at 2 am.

Oct. 9th - Blasted for St. Croix. Gilles take-off, my landing. Had to go around because too high first time. Nice touchdown. I know it couldn't be that hard. Finally, after all these years. Met everybody in STX. Lots of hugs and kisses. Julie, Ginny etc. Nice conversation with Charlie F., Bonny A., Victor P. Blue, etc. Shorty Small has religion now. Went to Tom's for supper and sleep. Got the house just below the pool where he first lived. Tom and Ann are good friends. Not many like them around. Delicious soup for din-din, conversation and crashed 2330.



October 10th departing St. Croix



Oct. 10th - I can't believe it. We left today 0717 local. #1 starter relay shot. I don't know what we are going to do later. If it quits while we are thrashing around Boston it will be hell trying to start. Every five minutes something else is breaking...the radio, the DME, the ADF's, the left boost pump, etc., etc. Sheeit. Presently 6 ½ hours out at 2,800 ft., nice day so far. Talked with Clipper 99 few minutes ago. They were annoyed to hear us at 2000 ft. All taking turns at stick. Mike is doing well at the panel (engineers). Ran one tank dry a couple of hours ago. No big deal. Another couple of hours and we spot the Outer Banks of NC. That was all fine and dandy, except we weren't supposed to be there. Followed the coast up to almost N.Y. and it gets dark. Ask for vectors to Long Island because we can't make Boston. Get handed off to 10 different controllers and finally end up somewhere around Long Island. We had a scary time going thru Pennsylvania control. We were damn near hit by a Sabliner climbing out. I pulled back Gilles stick and he passed right under us. Get tired of wandering around in circles and put down in Oyster Bay...a night landing in smooth water. After landing in Oyster Bay we had to tell everyone we were safe and sound. The only way to do that was to call overhead aircraft. They could not believe what they were hearing. We took a couple of ADF bearings and got a rough idea where we were. Spent the night on the water drinking rum (Cruzan) and freezing. A man named Mike Parker (English) came by in a boat and took Gillies and I to a yacht club. A real upper crust joint. Tried to call Neville but could only get some woman at his rest home. Mike then takes us to his home across the bay. Real nice-looking area. Water and wind ice cold. Had tea and pea soup prepared by Mike Parker's wife. Nice homey lady. Back to aircraft and spent uncomfortable night.

Oct. 11th - Fired up early and started taxing for Manhasset Bay. Ted made tea enroute. Taxied almost 1 ½ hours and got to Manhasset where we were a couple of years ago on our way to Ireland. The Coast Guard gave us a real ration of crap. They wouldn't let us off until they decided if we were spy, smugglers or what. Well eventually we got to shore. Seems we stopped right in front of Ventura Flying Service, a float plane base. We put some drums on a small barge, fill them with fuel and towed it out with a boat. Only put on enough to get to Boston. Meet a guy named Mike Cataggio who worked at Antilles Air Boats last year. Small world. Port Washington is a real pretty little town. The English guys really like it.

Got a room at North American Motor Inn. Went to Landmark Diner and had a pretty good dinner.



Oct. 12th - Gillies under much pressure from Mrs...decides to go direct to Gander. Spend the whole day fueling. What a job. Only four drums at a time and they have to be pumped by hand. It is cold, rainy and miserable. We get about 4 loads and call it a day. The APU craps and I let David tangle with it. He fools around with the brushes and puts it back together, no go. Get Ralph Fuller to come out from Brooklyn. Didn't know he lived here. Was real nice to see him. Seems he married again. Back to hotel, crashed.

Oct. 13th - Spend all next day fueling. What a hard job. People are sailing and windsurfing. What nuts. It's freezing cold. The harbor here is beautiful, boats everywhere. The seaplane base here has about 8 Cessna's on floats and 2 Beavers. Run by a guy named John O'Neil. Real nice guy, smokes a cigar and looks like George Burns.

Oct.14th – Out to aircraft and expect to blast but weather for Gander is shit. Also find out there isn't enough money to buy fuel for England. Well Sheeit, they had to know that all the time. Well now everyone is waiting on money to come from Colin in U.K. Mike, Ted, Peter and I go to a nice Greek greasy spoon and walk around Port Washington. I buy a pair of shoes in an Army-Navy store, \$30 made in Poland. Still cold and miserable. Accomplished jack shit the rest of the day. Had sent out the APU for repair. Found a bad armature as well as brushes. Back to hotel, dinner, gut busting dinner and bed.

Oct. 15th - Still sitting around. Gillies gets a brainstorm to take the aircraft to San Francisco to lease to some great agency that is also building a Solent. There are supposed to be a couple of movies too. He calls San Francisco and decides to think it over. In the meantime, everybody sits around with thumb up ass. There is a weird British aero engineer here who hangs around and acts obnoxious. A real intellectual but hard to get to like. Real thick British accent.

Oct. 16th - Spend today doing nil.

Oct. 17th - Try fixing a few items on aircraft. Take a drive around Long Island with Ted, Mrs. Gillies and others. Got lost, didn't see shit. Got a real bad cold. Terrific.

Oct. 18th - Another wasted day, weather is nice. Went for lunch with Mike Cogan and Peter Arthur. Mike is a nice guy, 40 years old, pretty fair mechanic and part owner in aircraft. I'm checking him out as flight engineer. Peter is 58 years old, walks like he has sore feet, thick fly around hair, a beard, thick glasses and a tooth missing in front. He looks like a real wild man. What a character. Argues about everything there is. Drives you nuts. Had supper at retired American Airline Captain Ed Harrington's house. Pot Roast with all the trimmings. Harrington flew for 51 years. Every airplane you can think of including the 747. Arnold Pierce, the British intellectual, got drunk and made an ass of himself. Farted for a while and passed up dinner. Gillies got into a fight with Peter in London, tells David to go shit in his hat too. Back to hotel, crashed.

Oct. 19th - Up early, out to aircraft. Get goodbyes from everyone. Fire-up #2, #3, #4. #1 no way. Thrashed around a while, nearly fell off wing going out to look at engine while taxing at 20 kts. Finally gave up and went back. Vibrator shot. Screwed around all day, finally took vibrator to a T.V. shop and got it soldered. No charge. Worked fine. Try again tomorrow. Slept on board...pumped bilges.

Oct. 20th - Gillies came at 0639 and we blasted. My take off. Nice job, lots of right aileron and just a little back stick. Up on step and a piece of cake after that. Climbed to 10,000 ft. heading 073. Mostly IFR to Gander. ADF's and VOR NFG. #1 begins to leak oil bad about 2 hrs. out of Gander. We talk it over and decide to shut it down at 6 gals. this comes about 50 miles out of Gander. Try to shut it down and comes almost to a stop and then overspeed's. Keep trying but can't shut down. Now we get ice all over windscreen, wings, engine cowls and down carburetors. Sheeit! Oil quantity now zero on #1. Try again to feather. Finally get

it to quit. Flying with windows open now. Getting radar vectors to Gander, finally. Tried 121.5 for what seemed like hours. Finally got another aircraft to relay that we had one shut down and were on instruments because we couldn't see out windscreen. They put helicopter rescue team on alert and gave us further vectors. Meanwhile we put on climb power to maintain altitude. Ted not realizing the situation asks if we want food, I say "No, we will be there soon and on 3 engines, so we won't have time". He thinks I'm joking and goes and makes chicken. Meanwhile, we are descending for the lake, during the last few minutes we are getting ice on our glasses and hair. Spot the lake and land downwind going North. Cheesecake landing, good job. Scraped ice off window and taxied 2 miles to dock with assistance of tower after I told them we were off the utility plant on shore. Ted brought tea for Gillies and me and we moored. Had a look and found #9 jug cracked. Eat my chicken and go to Gander Hotel, get drunk, almost get into scrap at bar, go to bed.



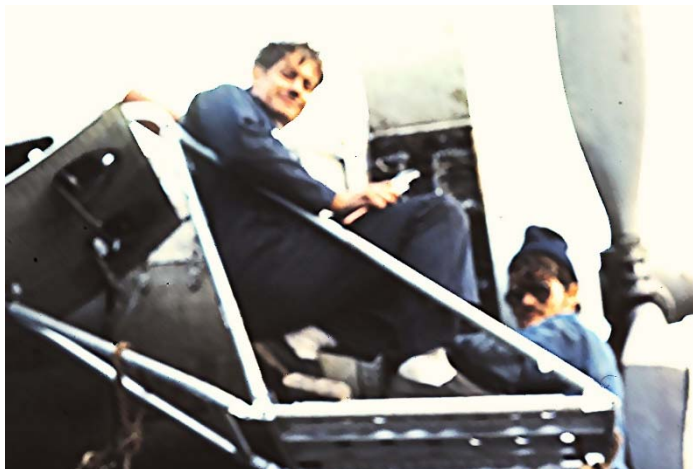
Oct. 21st - Spend day trying to scrounge tools and boat to attempt jug change. Hung over, got a cold, feel like shit. Go to Shell Oil to get ride to aircraft. Meet two ferry pilots taking a Citation to Lagos. Had some drunk Nigerian on board. Work on #3 for a while. It should be okay. Fixed the carb heat on #1. It was hung up on full hot. Back to Hotel, supper, crash.

Oct. 22nd – What a day. Meet Mr. Jameson, Airport Manager at Gander. He is at lake at 0900. He has a raft made of 6 drums in a wood frame. That with some planks and ropes are going to be our work platform



Peter gets on the raft and Ted and I tow him in a rowboat. Looks like some castaway with his raggedy clothes and beard. Get lashed up between the port float and the main door. Roughly under #1. Ted rigs sling of rope hanging from leading edge platform. He puts 2 x 4's with planks across and presto we have a work shop. Try to change #9 jug and see immediately that it is nearly impossible. Raft rocking, wind, cold. Our fingers only last a few minutes. Actually, the sun was shining but still chilly. Well we got a brain storm and decided to rig an oil bypass from #11 to sump and from the intake rocker to the sump through a "Y" pipe. Had to take #9 rocker cover and reverse it. Worked good. Went to town to local trade school where they had an R-1830 cutaway. I studied it a while and decided on the plan. Went to local shop (welding) and had a pipe made, picked up 2 hard wood dowels at hardware store. Met Keith Lacey (an Eastern Provincial Airlines - EPA/DC-9 Captain, friend who has helped in past) Nice young Newfoundlander named Chris is helping us. Everywhere someone seems willing. Back to aircraft and rig up our jury rig. Ted makes tea on the Coleman stove. A squall comes up and everyone wants to pack it in. No way. I cut my dowel rod and Peter and I use a lever to wedge the oil strainer spring in place. Peter cuts plugs for #9 exhaust push rod which should have no oil also for crossover pipe. What a shit rig. I am ashamed of it but I think it will work. Meanwhile, Shell on shore waiting to fuel. Hook tow line to a pleasure boat and pull. The wind then quits and we run into the boat mast. Get our fuel and oil, unfeather #1. Beautiful clean cold moonlit

night. Back to hotel and chow, bed with no shower. I'm afraid to get my hair wet. The crew is afraid for me too, Peter was packing me with blankets while I was working.

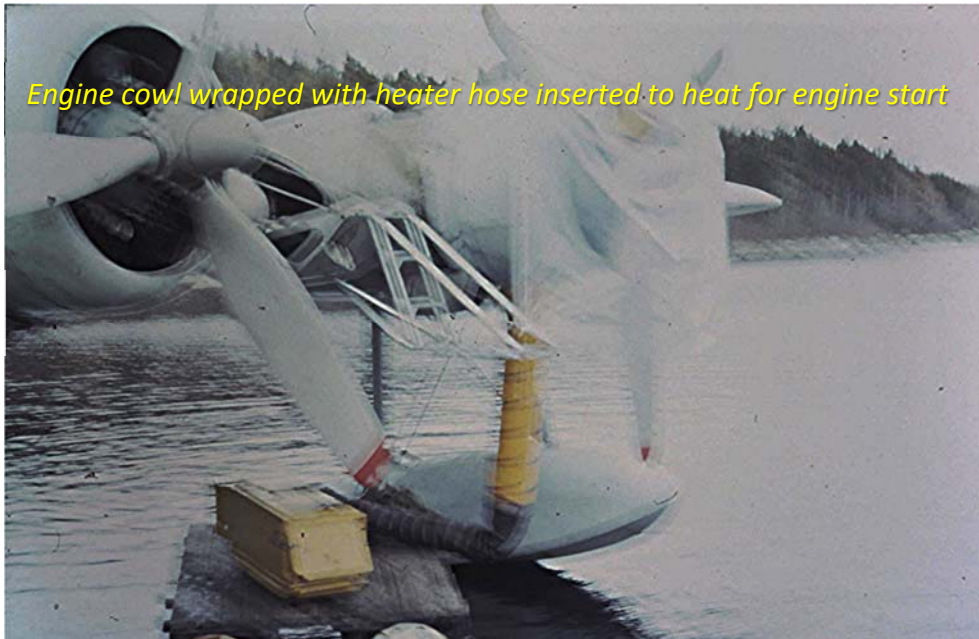


Gander Lake in October...freezing

Oct. 23rd – Called Sue last night, she sounded ready to cry. Was worried the aircraft wouldn't work this AM but finally went to sleep. What the hell, if it works it works. I hope I don't end up dead today. I have a bad feeling. Arrived at aircraft at 0400. Got #1 and #4 started. #1 started pissing oil immediately. The engine oil pressure was 200+. It spit the pushrod plug right out. Seems that the cam follower is in the perfect position to pass oil when it is extended. Damn. Shut it down and try to start #2 but it won't go. With only #4 for steerage we are just going in circles. Decided to wait till daylight before attempting mooring. Call Gander control on 126.9 and ask for assistance. Jack Jameson, the airport manager comes out in his boat but finally gives up after we nearly drift over him twice. Finally get moored, spend rest of the day trying to scrounge things to fix engine from local aircraft school, EPA, etc. No luck. Go to hotel, cod tongues for supper, not too wild about them. Sleep on mattress on floor, Ted got the box spring, Gillies got a full bed, Mike and Peter sleep on aircraft.

Oct. 24th - Go to Jenkins welding shop and have him weld another pipe on the one he made yesterday. Buy a plastic tarp, some socks, ski hat and thermal t-shirt. Mike seems determined to waste time. Just British way maybe. John Hunt didn't seem that way. Spend the day rigging engine, took 3 hrs. and for a 20-minute work. The push rod tube would beat us for sure. Wind whipping the lake into spray at times. The raft heaved so high the boards across our hanging platform were knocked off and we were left with only 2 boards to lay on. Only our shoulder width kept us from falling. Ted is making tea on the Coleman stove and drying sock and shoes over the fire. Mike and Ted have now gone to hotel to get Gillies. It's dark now and cold as hell. I have rigged a switch in the vibrator circuit so we can tickle the buzzer on #2, #3 anytime we want. I don't particularly like going across the North Atlantic at night with such a sick aircraft and NO deicing equipment at this time of year but it really doesn't matter day or

night we won't survive if we go down anyway. Everyone's life depends on the quality of my work. Lots of things in my mind now but I don't want to write them, I'll just feel foolish later. Sitting in cockpit rest chair now, APU running, charging batteries, blanket over me, wearing a t-shirt, thermal shirt, warm-up jacket, nylon jacket and coveralls and still cold. Waiting for Gillies now. This will be our last chance. Capt. arrives and we prepare for takeoff. Guess what, we can't start even one engine. Not one. Go to #1 and change plugs. Beautiful moonlit night but stone cold. Still no good. Rig up 36 volts start, still no good. Try a couple more hours, give up. Row to shore, go to town, get room in Airport Hotel at 0200, last room. Go to sleep with no shower or brush teeth. We are filthy, haven't bathed in 3 or 4 days too afraid of getting pneumonia



Engine cowl wrapped with heater hose inserted to heat for engine start

Oct. 25th – Up at 0730, get breakfast, go to aircraft. Changed front plugs in #2 and cleaned mag block. Soon a BT400 heater arrives like the ones I worked on in Air Force. Float it out on raft and put heater duct in ring cowl and closeup with canvas. Within 3 hours we have all engines running good. Tied tail to shore so I gave them a good blast. Capt. Gillies arrived and we cranked up at 1708 hrs. local. Don't you know that #2 tried not to start. Our jury rig with #1 seems okay. During takeoff, it performed well. Shortly after liftoff contacted Gander tower and filed

VFR for Shannon. Approaching lands' end we all felt like we were going over the edge of the world because if the aircraft doesn't work we will probably never live to tell it. Ran into bad weather and almost turned back but now we are okay. 5000 ft. beautiful moon, clear sky, -5° in cockpit, ½ hour to pucker point (point of no return). We all look like Eskimos with blankets on our heads and feet. Spot Irish coast at 0600. A welcome sight that was. Shannon radio calls looking for us because our flight time was up. Gave us vectors to Killaloe. Was good thing we got there. I was cold, almost to the limits of my endurance. Landed Killaloe 0803 rainy, cold. We all shake hands, Ted breaks out the champagne, I never thought we could do it. Go to dock with Kevin O'Farrell, have several Irish coffees, take customs men out to aircraft. Stayed 3 hrs. while aircraft was maneuvering to mooring. Just finished supper. Real nice. Garlic and butter baked mushrooms, cream veg. soup, Weiner schnitzel. Bathed for the first time in 3 days, felt great. Lakeside Inn the same. Fireplace in foyer, old time wallpaper, hand laid hardwood stair rails, gigantic big dog in lounge. Crash 2340 (37 hrs. awake)

Oct. 26th – Up at 1000 hrs., breakfast with gang, few drinks in pub. Take Ted and Peter to train station in Limerick. Was sad to see them go but was afraid if I went with them I wouldn't get out of London very easily. On my way back stopped at Pike's Post Pub with taxi driver and had a pint of Smithwick's and watched T.V. Funny Program about American football. Back to hotel and down to Kevin's for dinner. Missed a call from Mrs. Blair and Bronwynn (Fitzsimons). Decided to leave in A.M. Gillies says he will mail a check for \$950. I'll have to trust him, I haven't got a choice.

Oct. 27th – Got a ride with Kevin to Shannon. Caught Aer Lingus to New York. Met Sean Cousins at ticket counter. He was on one of the crossings a few years ago. Remember him heckling a girl singer (Irish) at the American Cultural Center in Gander. Mrs. Blair was in first class. After take-off, she got the steward to let me up in first class. Talked with her in upstairs lounge with a cool bourbon and H₂O and thought I was hot shit. Captain comes by invites us into the cockpit. What a gas. The instrumentation was a bit foreign to me but the job looked dirt simple. The engineer was younger than I am and the F/O was about the same age. Both with beards. Arrive N.Y. Go through customs in quick time with Mrs. Blair, get a big hug and kiss and go on my way. Pan Am to Miami. What a shit shower that was. They haven't got it all together yet since the merger.

Oct. 28th – Took this day off to be with family and rest.

Oct. 29th – Back to work... nothing changed, nothing at all