

A NORTH ATLANTIC ODYSSEY



By: Dick Hansen

How many of you have ever dreamed about a fantasy flight somewhere? Perhaps coast to coast, or into Mexico or, perhaps even Central or South America or Alaska.

THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT JUST SUCH A FLIGHT.

For many years I fantasized about a flight to Europe; specifically to Düsseldorf, Germany to visit some friends. That, of course, was just the excuse to fantasize about flying the North Atlantic. While the North Atlantic is crossed almost daily by small aircraft, particularly in the summer, I wanted to do it in a vintage R985 powered aircraft, sort of "just because".

For a time, my good friend, Dick Perry, and I gave thought to doing this in our own Staggerwing's, until I looked closely at the engine where I saw the many hoses and clamps. If any one of these failed, it would have caused a cold water landing, which at best would have been a terrible experience, or at worst a last experience.

Having long admired John Parish's Beech 18, I utilized the desire to make such a flight as an excuse to seriously find a good Twin Beech and start preparing it for this "flight of fantasy".

To make a long story short, I was successful in buying Paul Poberezny's 1959 E18S in late 1983, becoming its third owner. Paul, as most of you know, founded the EAA. Paul and his partners had owned it for eleven years having purchased it from the first owner, Trostle Leather Goods of Milwaukee. This Super 18 was very well equipped as it

had been a factory demonstrator and was assigned to Tom Warner when he worked for Beech Aircraft. It even had JATO.

Dick Perry was enthused about making such a trip in the Twin Beech, and when talking about this at the 1984 Staggerwing Convention, casting about for two other souls to share this adventure and, of course, the cost with us, Marge Gorman immediately raised her hand and then her husband, Jim, said he probably should go as well.

So the trip was cast in stone and preparations were started to get the airplane ready including a fresh set of engines and a rebuild of the instrument panel, including Loran C, 3 Axis Autopilot and oil quantity gages. Of course a couple of trial runs had to be made, one of which was a "boys" fishing and sightseeing trip to Alaska, you know, to check the engines and so forth. Anyhow, the wives bought the Alaska idea and we did in fact break in the engines, and generally stayed out of trouble.

The European trip was set for June and July of 1987. The routing, of course, was set with the range of the E18S in mind and with an extra tank in the nose, we could go to Goose Bay, 1320 nautical miles and then on to Narsarsuaq, Greenland which is 725 nautical miles from Goose Bay. We could have gone the northern route from Goose Bay to Frobisher Bay on Baffin Island and then across the Davis Straights to Sonderstrom Fjord, an Air Force Base 400 miles north of our chosen destination, Narsarsuaq. But that was out of the way. Narsarsuaq was up a fjord in the southern tip of Greenland, and was chosen because of its historical connection to the WWII days and was known as Blue West One. It was a refueling stop for

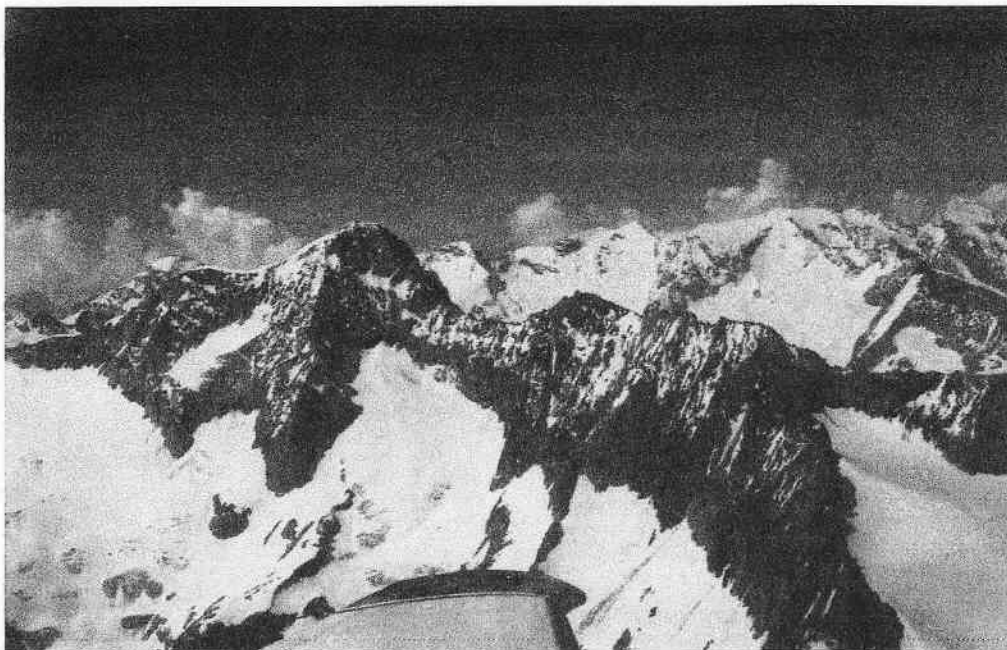
multi-engine aircraft being ferried to Europe.

Flying into Narsarsuaq would also be exciting because after one picked up the Simutek NDB Beacon on an island at the extreme southwest coast of Greenland, there were three divergent fjords and the correct one must be selected as the other two dead ended into mountains. The correct one to the airport, which lies right at the edge of the water, was the smallest, and the ADF bearing outbound of 089 degrees would confirm the correct fjord.

From Blue West I the route was then to be over the Greenland icecap to Reykjavik, Iceland, then on to Bergen and Oslo. The plan was that the Gorman's would then depart for a business trip to Egypt and to meet us later in Zurich, Switzerland. My wife, Joanne would join the flight in Oslo.

After Oslo, Düsseldorf, Germany was our next destination where we planned to meet up with long time good friends from Wuppertal, Germany, where I had worked in 1965. The Perrys would join us there. After some local site-seeing, the plan was to fly on to Salzburg, Austria, along the border of East and West Germany and then to Zurich to pick up the Gormans and two of their friends, and then across the Alps to Sion, Switzerland. Then finally back home via Zurich, Prestwick, Scotland, Greenland and Goose Bay in time for a big hangar party which was scheduled for Saturday evening, July 11, at precisely 7:30 p.m. whether I arrived back or not.

Well as you can imagine, a venture of this complexity, not everything was going to come off as planned. Unfortunately, UAL



own airplane and seeing the awesome Greenland coastline growing in size and seeing the icebergs at sea was quite a thrill.



As we got closer, the view was even more spectacular, the rocky coast rose sharply to the snow covered mountains. When we crossed over the NBD beacon, we were able to gain VHF contact with the approach facility and headed out of the fjord on the correct 089 degree radial proceeding up the middle fjord, which was the smallest of the three. We correctly identified it with a couple pictures and landmarks we found in a book called, "Ocean Flying" written by Louise Sache, who had made 236 Atlantic crossings.



For many years there had been the bow of a sunken freighter that served as a marker for the turn in the fjord where you dropped your

gear, preparing to land as the airport was immediately beyond. It had finally sunk, but fortunately we had good VFR in the fjord, because with a 500-700 foot ceiling, it would have been a sweaty approach. The only problem was that we had to avoid two 70 foot tall icebergs floating just off the end of the runway. I "S" turned around them and planted the mains on the runway which began at the shoreline and ended at a glacier at the opposite end.

Needless to say, stepping out onto the ramp in Greenland was exciting, as was the fuel bill 30 minutes later at \$7.00 a gallon plus

Stepping out onto the ramp in Greenland was exciting



the airport landing fee at \$300.00. Apparently their business model for the airport is, "If you can charge for it, do it, as you are the only game in town." Several years later on another stop in Greenland the airport fee was \$600.00 plus another \$600.00 because it was Sunday - nothing as profitable as a complete monopoly.

Because they wouldn't accept my Visa and only American Express would work, Jim Gorman said he would put the charges on his American Express credit card and I went

upstairs to the MET office to file out flight plan to Iceland while he took care of the bill. When I returned, Jim was visibly shaken at having to sign a \$1,650.00 bill for gas and landing fees and grumbled something about maxing out his card. I guess I forgot to warn Jim.

The weather for our 795 mile trip to Reykjavik was perfect and Lin Entz and Jim Gorman manned the cockpit while I took some great pictures of the icecaps as we climbed to 13,000 feet to clear the 9,000 foot mountains in the center of the icecap. However, recognizing that crossing the icecap on one engine was not an option should one of the trusty 985's pack it in, we all constantly checked the engine instruments as we did not want to become a permanent part of the Greenland icecap.



The scenery was spectacular in the bright sunlight. We looked down into very deep fissured in the glacier as it made its slow march to the sea. No chance for a survivable forced landing there! As we climbed out, the rugged mountain peaks jutted above the clean white snowcap as far as one could see. Then, they too were covered by snow at 9,000 feet and it was a pure white glistening world. Beautiful, but foreboding at the same time.

Cruising on to the rugged east coast and descending to our crossing altitude of 9,000 feet, we saw nothing but the Greenland icebergs and rugged terrain. Whoever discovered Greenland and named it must have come from the southwest as there were actually some patches of green down near the coastline there, but the East coast was totally inhospitable with no sign of life, and the icebergs were large enough for us to land the airplane. We arrived at Reykjavik and parked right next to the Lofleiter Hotel at

10:00 p.m. and, as it was summer solstice, it was as light as at midday. In fact the town was having a major party celebrating the longest day of summer. We finally had a late dinner ending at midnight in broad daylight.

The next day we departed for Bergen, Norway. Our route took us over the town of Vestmanmaeyjar, which had been mostly destroyed by fire and lava during a volcano eruption in 1973; there was still smoke coming up from some of the lava flows. It was an awesome sight. The weather continued in our favor and it was interesting crossing the North Sea seeing the large drilling rigs along the way. Of course being of Norwegian descent, putting the wheels of my airplane down on the runway in Bergen was a special treat. We spent time sightseeing in Bergen before flying a short IFR flight to Oslo, where Jim and Marge departed for a business trip to Egypt, and my wife, Joanne, arrived by airline. Because the Hansen family still had relatives in Norway, Joanne and I spent two delightful days getting to know our Norwegian connections before departing for Düsseldorf.

Our flight through Norwegian, Danish and German airspace was interesting, because of the different pronunciation of the controllers who, of course, spoke their version of English, and while I spoke relatively fluent German, I decided to let them do the work speaking in English, the international language of flight.

Flying through the once hotly contested airspace in Germany was a thrill for me and because visibility was poor, we shot the ILS 24 approach at Düsseldorf. We were directed to the very small general aviation area that had only six airplanes out on the ramp and two hangars, one of which belonged to the internationally famous Krupp Corporation.



Our German friends were there to greet us and a great celebration took place with the obligatory toasts with Schnapps. During our

several days in the Düsseldorf area, Dick and Carolyn Perry caught up with us, arriving by commercial air. We enjoyed sightseeing together before departing with the Perry's for our next stop, Salzburg, Austria.



My wife Joanne, Dick & Carolyn Perry

The IFR flight through Germany took us within 20 miles of the East/West border, and I could only imagine the East German radar sets tuned in on the rumbling Twin Beech.

A yellow Volkswagen van met the airplane with flashing lights, Swiss and American flags flying from it, and escorted us past all the international airplanes to GA parking.

Austria, of course, is beautiful and Heidi does a great job of keeping it impeccably clean. We enjoyed our visit there with Dick and Carolyn before they had to depart for the US, because Dick had schedules flying United DC 10's.

The last leg of the trip was to Zurich, Switzerland where Jim and Marge greeted us at the Zurich International Airport. A yellow Volkswagen van met the airplane with flashing lights, Swiss and American flags flying from it, and escorted us past all the international airplanes to GA parking. As it turned out Jim and Marge's friends were with the Airport Authority and Hans Nieffner was Assistant Airport Manager. He arranged this very impressive arrival for us.

We were in Zurich only long enough to put some gas on board as our Swiss hosts had arranged for us to stay overnight at Sion, Switzerland in the southwest corner of that beautiful country and we were treated to a spectacular flight through the Swiss Alps.

Hans sat in the co-pilot seat pointing out where the Swiss Air Force had bunkers inside of the mountains, and down in the valleys were the runways. He mentioned that those bunkers pre-dated WWII and the Swiss Air Force had at that time flown German Bf109's.

After a delightful evening at a resort area where we spoke a combination of German, English and French, we flew back to Zurich and bid our Swiss friends goodbye before departure to Prestwick, Scotland. Joanne boarded a SwissAir flight and Jim, Marge, and I filed for Prestwick, Scotland

I remember the French air traffic controllers were on strike during that time and we had to fly clear around France, adding about one hour to our trip to Scotland.



Departing Scotland, we again flew to Iceland and stopped in Greenland for fuel, but this time prepared for the highway robbery. However, a surprise was in store for us as we were winging our way west from Greenland towards Goose Bay. My E18S had the 318 gallon tank option, but for the purpose of this trip Nick Quint from Blackhawk had installed an 80 gallon nose tank which gave us the margin of safety I had desired.

We were cruising at 10,000 feet about one third of the way from Greenland, and because the gas gage of the nose tank was not accurate, I used my watch knowing that we had one hour and 45 minutes of fuel in that tank. As we were droning westward with the auto pilot turned on and the sun shining into the cockpit, I looked at my watch and made mental note that I had ten minutes to go before switching both fuel selectors from the nose tank. Well those ten minutes went by way too quickly in that warm afternoon sun, and we were all suddenly jolted by both engines stopping and just the flutter of the propeller blades replacing the 985's rumbling. Jim had been dozing in the right seat and Marge was asleep in one of the comfort-

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able cabin chairs. Of course, everyone immediately came to attention. I quickly put both my hands on the fuel selector valves to insure that they were both moved smoothly so we didn't risk twisting them off in a panic move. Within seconds the engine came back to life on fresh tanks with boost pumps turned on, but I can tell you that nobody dozed for the rest of that leg!

One more over night in wonderful Happy Valley, Goose Bay and we were ready to trek on home.



However, we were in for another surprise. Upon starting up the left engine, it barked and belched and wouldn't smooth out. A quick call to Nick Quint confirmed that we had an exhaust valve stuck in the open position and no trick of the trade; i.e. putting a rope with a knot in it through the sparkplug hole and turning the propeller would cause the valve to close. It was stuck firmly open.

The only solution was to change the cylinder. Another call was made to Nick and it was decided Nick would fly up to change the cylinder. That was accomplished the next day. Because it was high fishing season and we didn't have a reservation for an extra day, we had no place to stay for the extra night, but Jim Gorman was able to wrangle an overnight accommodation in the old Canadian BOQ using his Air Force Reserve Card. It cost \$3.00 per person.

Even though we were departing Labrador one day later than planned, by leaving early the next day, we would still be able to get back to the home airport at DuPage where my wife had planned a party at my hangar on that evening. The party was going to take place whether we were there or not. Needless to say, we ran the engines at sufficient power to get to the party on time, and arrived at 7:39 p.m. after being allowed by the tower to make a couple of low grasscutting approaches.

I hope you have found the tale of my Twin Beech North Atlantic Odyssey interesting. It is still possible for the adventurous to fly to Europe in the same fashion as we did. Although today you have the advantage of GPS moving map, satellite phones and better HF radios. The icebergs are still there and the water is still ice cold, but the 985's just as reliable, sort of. If you have ever contemplated such a journey, I can tell you that it is a wonderful experience, and although today's airport security makes it a bit of a hassle, the thrill of seeing distant foreign shores grow in your own windshield, it is well worth the experience!