

# **G**eneral **A**viation

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The journal of  
the Aircraft Owners and  
Pilots Association

***New tricks***  
***Getting a gyroplane licence***

***Classic tailwheel tourer – the Cessna 170***

***AOPA awards – recognition for the deserving***





# Contents

**OCTOBER 2013**



36

## 4 Chairman's Column

Achievements in the spotlight.  
By **George Done**

## 5 AOPA Working for You

DFT says it again – IMC 'not safety critical'; more confusion over GARs; new President for AOPA US; GPS approaches under scrutiny; weather hits AOPA Bonus Day at Duxford; ground school clean-up may be on the cards

## 24 Helping ourselves

How to give yourself a fighting chance to keep your airfield open.  
By **John Walker**

## 26 Cessna 170

Successful post-war tourer that was overtaken by the nosewheel fashion, the appeal of the Cessna 170 endures, says **Mike Derrett**



46



40

## 32 The dark side

Searching for new flying experiences, **Roger Kimbell** ends up at gyroplane school – and loves it

## 36 Thanks, Pam

After almost 50 years, Pam Campbell flies her last AOPA sortie. She talks to **Pat Malone**

## 40 Out in style

Mike Hamlin winds up his management arm and makes his last flight with great ceremony, as **Pat Malone** reports

## 42 AOPA Working for You

Ground school clean-up may be on the cards

## 44 Cat III in a C150

Don't try this at home, kids... **Petros Kronis** recalls a remarkable landing with a remarkable instructor



32

## 46 Ken Wallis RIP

One of aviation's most fascinating characters checks out at 97; **Steve Slater** pays tribute

## 50 Briefings

Lydd's expansion gets green light; glider champion; Vintage Aircraft Club's 'late spring' outing



44



26



# Cyril Knight and the blind landing

*A Cat III landing at Biggin Hill in a Cessna 150 recalled by research engineer Petros Kronis*

The flight training experiences I had in England go back about 37 years ago to the King Air Flying Club at Biggin Hill. When I was a kid I wanted to become an airline pilot. My parents discouraged me. "What a terrible job" they said, "working away from home and your family all the time!" I suggested the next best idea. Aeronautical engineering. They were not amused. "This isn't any better" they grumbled. "Cyprus doesn't have an aircraft industry. You'll be away from home permanently". So to please them I ended up studying Mechanical Engineering at what was then the North East London Polytechnic with specialisation in gas turbines, aircraft engines, aircraft structures, and rockets (my own interpretation of the London University mechanical engineering curriculum).

At NELP I was elected president of the Manned Powered Flight society. In those days there was a competition with prize money for the first flying machine to fly a figure of 8 course using muscle power alone. With the resources we had at the time we managed to go as far as drawing board designs. My first job was with Freeman Fox and Partners, the steel suspension bridge consulting engineers, near Victoria Station. I went to the interview with a broken heart. Previously my applications for a job were turned down by Rolls Royce, British Aircraft Corporation and all the other aircraft industries. I accepted the job offered to me by Freeman Fox because as they explained, they were the inventors of the box girder type of bridge which works exactly like an aircraft wing, with skin and stiffeners. At the time they had two bridge collapses, one in Australia and one in Milford Haven in Wales, due to civil engineers underestimating the plate buckling problem, known very well to aircraft structural engineers. I worked in an office with other civil, mechanical and aircraft structural engineers, assigned to

**Right: Cyril overflew the VOR from the west and made a constant rate descending turn to starboard in IMC to line up with runway 03**

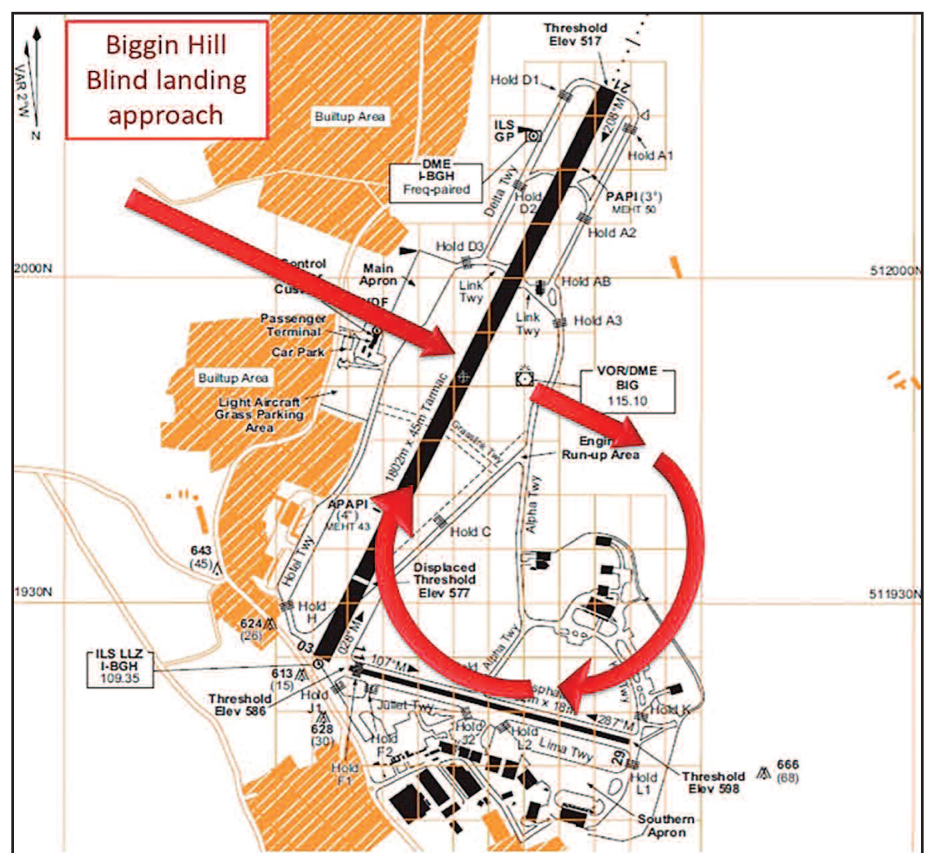


**Left: Cyril Knight, who pulled off a blind landing at Biggin Hill in a Cessna 150**

design of the fin structure, didn't have good words to say about this test pilot. He also told me about the machine gun platform he was involved in, which was placed on the stern of a gunboat to be demonstrated to the admiral visiting the shipyard. The gunboat captain was asked to make an impressive fast start. Unfortunately the acceleration put too much stress on the platform which sheared off the gunboat and fell in the water, together with the gunner.

Bridge design, next to John, was interesting but I longed for spending more time near aeroplanes. I must admit feeling uneasy if not frightened flying on Comets and Tridents from Cyprus to England and back in those days. A friend of mine, studying psychology, told me that the best way to fight fear of flying was to learn to fly yourself. So I enrolled at King Air Flying Club to do my PPL. My flying instructor was Cyril Knight, a tall, stout but aged fellow. Someone asked me at the club who my instructor was and when I answered Cyril Knight, he told me I was lucky as Cyril was the only pilot who could land an

analyse and reinforce all the existing box girder bridges. I worked next to John Rose, a stress engineer who had previously worked in the aircraft and naval industries and was near retirement. I enjoyed the stories he told me, including the tale of the visiting American test pilot who flew the Venom aircraft (if my memory serves me correctly), managing to bend the fin by exercising too much pressure on the rudder pedals. John, who worked on the





## One that didn't make it

Cyril Knight was one of my *ab initio* instructors at King Air Flying Club in 1984 and I concur with Petros's estimation of him as an exceptional pilot and a very adept instructor. He was also great company at the bar, full of ripping yarns. I never thought of him as someone to take risks of this sort, however, especially with a student on board. Perhaps the death of his brother Henry a few months before I started flying had made Cyril more circumspect.

Henry was also an experienced instructor, I was told, and he was noted for being able to get into Biggin in weather that would ground any other pilot. He died when his Cessna hit power lines on a five-mile final for runway 21 at Biggin. The story of the accident was recounted to me by another instructor as a cautionary tale; even the best of us won't get away with scud-running for ever. Later, someone told me he thought Henry had been killed when a PFL went wrong. I was never able to get to the truth of it. But the Cyril Knight I knew seemed to me to be careful and cautious, and preached all the right gospels.

— Pat Malone



**Above: the author's first solo flight certificate, signed by Cyril Knight 28th June 1975**

**Right: G-BA10, the aircraft in which Petros Kronis flew his first solo**



aeroplane in zero visibility. I thought he was exaggerating.

One Saturday the weather was foggy and was wondering whether we could fly. When I arrived at the club I noticed that the conditions were not suitable for flying. I met Cyril and said "pity we can't fly". "Who told you we can't fly?" he said. "It's the perfect day to do the instrument appreciation lesson. We won't need the hood". We lined up with the runway and shortly after take-off we found ourselves in cloud. Cyril asked me to fly straight, to execute turns and so on, when the tower came in over the radio informing us that visibility was 200ft and reducing. I learned the next day from the news that all major airports around London had closed that day. But we were flying and I was in command. Cyril asked me what I intended to do. I said our best bet would be to fly to Southend or Brighton in the hope of finding better weather to land. He was categorical. "We are flying back to Biggin

Hill". "You have control," I said.

Using the VOR the only navigation aid on the C150 we headed back. As soon as we flew over the beacon the VOR needle deflected and Cyril timed a perfectly executed descending turn in the calm air conditions. He asked me to look out for treetops and to inform him. I couldn't see anything, when suddenly the runway surface appeared. I said "Cyril, we're over the runway".

"I know," he said.

"Why don't you touch down?" I said.

"The runway is long", he said. "Why roll when you can fly!"

Many people gathered outside the club and applauded Cyril as we got out. They

**Right: author Petros Kronis today**



**Gordon King, great friend and employer of Cyril Knight**

gave me a strong black coffee to drink because they said I looked pale.

Just before Cyril sent me for my first solo flight he asked me to do a few take-offs and landings. Coming in to land I had the tendency to land near the threshold. During one

landing I came in too short, heading for the airfield fence. I noticed he became uneasy but he kept quiet. At the last moment I realised my mistake and applied power. "I should bloody well think so," he said. That day he sent me solo. He got out, told me to do one circuit only and slammed the door. On the base leg and as I selected flaps the starboard door opened, the air rushed into the cabin making a distressing noise. I was strapped in and couldn't easily reach to close the door. I thought, leave it, don't get distracted and concentrate on the landing. But then I had second thoughts. Would the door detach from the hinges on touchdown? I decided to lean over and close the door. I lost control and the stall warning sounded. I returned to the upright position, regained control and landed safely. I told Cyril about my adventure due to his failure to close the door properly. "Didn't you jump out?" he said. That was Cyril Knight, a great guy and a great flying instructor. Rest in peace Cyril. ■



**Author Petros at Biggin Hill in May 1974**