

***In memoriam* : Bill Johnston 1919 - 2011**

Bill's First Flight **by Bill Johnston**

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It was when I was still less than eight that I saw my first aeroplane. Four, I presume Air Force biplanes, flew over Enniskillen. That caused wild excitement and I was dying to see more of these strange birds.

Actually I did see more somewhat sooner than I had expected. I think it was in 1933 that Sir Alan Cobham brought his wonderful flying circus and gave a great display over Donegal Bay, centred right at Bundoran.



Sadly that must have been thirty miles away and I did not even have a bicycle. However, I was lucky as I had a kindly neighbour who had a boyfriend who actually had a motor car and he was taking Irene to Bundoran for this great show. I say I was lucky, what an understatement, because Irene realised how much a trip to this display would mean to her near penniless neighbour and she talked her somewhat reluctant boyfriend into bringing me along too.

It was magic. These great noisy monsters were almost within touching distance and taking off and landing had to be seen to be believed. I was probably over-excited and showing it as I gazed in envy at these lucky people who were wealthy enough to be able to spend five shillings to enjoy a flight with all the noise and the wind in the open cockpits and the beautiful view of Donegal Bay laid out beneath them.

But more magic when I heard Irene say: "Oh go on now, let him have a trip. At his age he will never forget it."

The reluctance was now very obvious to me, but Irene was strong minded and had great charm, and lucky me- I climbed into the cockpit which was the nearest approach to Heaven I knew I would ever make.

I am quite unable to tell you what my experience was really like. I was beyond rational thought, but I felt sure I would be a somewhat special person in school on

Monday morning. Strangely enough that was where it all fell apart. They were polite but nobody was really interested. It soon dawned on me that any hope I had of gaining fame would require much more effort. In fact many years later I was to become much more interesting to my friends by simply flying from America to London in an early Concorde. It's a funny old life, but that is a story for another day.