

The Heicon Expedition!

PART ONE

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It was almost like a Diplomacy game, with a few side rules. If it were a game, John Boardman would probably detail it in Graustark something like this:

- A NEW YORK TO HOLLAND
- A HOLLAND (C) VIA NORTH SEA TO LONDON
- A LONDON TO WALES
- A WALES TO LONDON
- A LONDON (C) BY F NORTH SEA/SKAGGERAK TO DENMARK
- A DEN (C) BALTIC-SWEDEN
- A DENMARK TO KIEL
- A SWEDEN (C) BALTIC-DEN
- A KIEL TO MUNICH
- A MUNICH TO SWITZERLAND
- A SWITZERLAND TO BURGUNDY
- A BURGUNDY TO BELGIUM
- A BELGIUM TO HOLLAND
- A HOLLAND (C) NORTH ATL TO NEW YORK

Which should show you that the Heicon excursion was a most interesting and varied trip--even if we did make an illegal Diplomacy move or two.

IN THE BEGINNING

It all started with my catching an early Allegheny Airlines flight from Friendship International to La Guardia. There were, it seems, no direct commuters to JFK in New York until shortly before I was due to check in on the Heicon charter, so I had to go the long route. With a portent of good things to come, and for the first time in my long flying career, Allegheny Airlines managed to take off on time, have a trouble-free flight, and land in La Guardia early. I can remember that it was also the first flight I'd been on where one could really see the skyline of Manhattan.

With a bus change and a short ride, I arrived at KLM international departures desk a good three hours ahead of time.

Even so, some SF fen had already gathered, the first to be noted being Rick "Flash" Polsen, later nicknamed "Flash" for his superpowered unshielded Nikkon flash attachment. Before too long Rick and I had established that there were exactly 48 luggage lockers--all in use--in the total KLM terminal, so it became a game of watch the baggage. Ultimately we were joined by a friendly couple named Kennedy from Albany, and it was with Mrs. Kennedy standing guard that Rick took the male Kennedy and me over to the customs building to register our camera and other serial-numbered items so we wouldn't get charged customs duty on the way back. There I ran into the first of my own private group of Expeditioners, Ron Bounds, doing likewise.

After that was out of the way, we wandered back to the terminal and bought each other drinks in the KLM Flying Dutchman bar upstairs from the waiting room, and watched more and more faanish sorts drift in.

We'd been told to be there by 7:45 for the 9:45 PM scheduled takeoff, but Don Lundry, who had the tickets and such, arrived early--at about 5:30--and was immediately beseiged by the crowd, which had grown to forty or so. Cornered on

one ledge on the lower level, poor Lundry was dispensing tickets and packages as quickly as possible. The paper bag in which he'd carried the stuff broke at one point, causing endless confusion.

Soon others had drifted in--the Nivens, the Williamsons, the Lewises, and others from various spots around the country, along with the other two members of the Expedition--Jake Waldman and Norman Codner, both of NYC.

We all checked in, and Jake gave me the ferryboat ticket for the North Sea crossing that he'd bought for all of us earlier. Since it was still a couple of hours until flight time, I suggested to Rick that we go get something to eat. The airline restaurant was too crowded and the hot dog stand unappetizing, but we finally stood in the coffee shop line and, incredibly, got in within six or eight minutes, although we had to wait a while to find a seat. Ultimately we found a booth, and service was quick and the food edible, although not exactly wonderful. We returned to the KLM terminal before 9 PM, noting as we left the coffee shop that the Lewises and Ted Greenstone, who had been in there well before us, were still there.

They arrived at about 9:15, complaining that they'd had to wait almost two hours.

Rick and I just must have honest faces. Or look like big tippers.

It was getting close to scheduled boarding time, and I noticed several people running about, the most anxious of which was Larry Niven. It seems his baggage from his TWA flight from the west hadn't arrived at the terminal, and he jumped an airline bus to the other side of the enormous airport to find it. Fuzzy Pink then became a nervous wreck as departure time grew nearer and nearer and no Larry. Tony Lewis's comment that if Larry missed this plane he could always buy the next one relieved the tension somewhat.

Further anxiety resulted from the fact that KLM was announcing delays and cancellations like mad, one plane delayed from 10:15 to 5: A.M. KLM ticket agents kept reassuring us that we'd get off, although when it became 10:30 we began to wonder--as plane after plane was called but not ours. Alan Nourse and Don Lundry tried to get additional information, but were beset with KLM assurances.

Larry Niven made it--with baggage--about 10:15, too, and was most relieved to discover that we were all still there, crowded into the terminal. It looked like a con, what with the 77 or so Heicon charter folk mixed with a huge number of NY area fans come to see us off, and, as it got close to 10:45 I got up and announced that they were all welcome to Nycon IV. Actually, I was almost beginning to believe it.

We finally were told to start loading around 11:15, and we went down a long series of halls and stairs halfway in the process of being built, to a single-file stair. It was then that Al Nourse was informed that George Price's wife had gotten hungry, and, figuring the delay, had gone to get a sandwich. She hadn't yet returned, and Al went to look for her.

In the meantime, down the stairs near the door to the flight line, Lundry was having problems defending himself from some irate non-fans who were on our flight but had been told that they had to wait, we were boarding first. I almost thought we were going to lose Fearless Leader before we began.

Finally the KLM agent let us through, and we walked out amidst six or seven huge airplanes, down a long walkway--and on to a New York transit bus. Since there were no signs or other indications, I was unsure as to whether I was on the right bus, when a fan who knew me but whom I didn't know asked me whether I was certain that it was the right bus. Since I had Al Nourse's daughter in tow, I fervently hoped so.

Ultimately George Price and Al Nourse boarded, and I felt secure as we roared away. It was only later that I learned that everyone had boarded the bus only on seeing me at the window....

Once on the bus there were many suggestions from friendly folks--one of which was that they hadn't realized that the Heicon charter was a bus charter, another that, when the driver got up to speed, we'd all stick our arms out and flap in unison.

After a five minute ride that seemed like fifteen, we arrived at the plane, and boarded. I soon discovered I had a window seat on the inside of three-abreast. Since I am not exactly a midget, I soon decided that the seats had been made for someone the size of an eight year old, but I managed. Bob Vardeman was on the outside, and a fan whose name slips my mind--from Michigan, I believe--was in the middle.

I really did try to get some sleep on the flight, but it was well-nigh impossible, particularly since every fan in the plane was in the aisle starting the con, all night, and since, around 2:45 A.M. by my ticker the sun started peeking in through the windows. So I wound up in a long conversation with Al Nourse and a few others in the back compartment of the plane, near the coffee, for most of the evening.

The plane served both a dinner and a breakfast--the breakfast being a rather peculiar but oddly agreeable set of Dutch mixed egg and meal dishes, and, almost incredibly, we landed in Amsterdam exactly on schedule. Since we'd left two hours late we would only assume that KLM programmed in the delays.

A quick move down the moving walkways of the ultra-modern Dutch airport--which we'd see again, much later--and we found ourselves at the loading gate for part two of the trip, Amsterdam to London. The plane went off on time and without a hitch, with all of the bleary-eyed fans getting on and insisting it was five in the morning when any fool could see it was almost noon.

After a smooth, quick flight we landed in the first real country of our trip, Great Britain.

Emigration was rather simple, and we went into the baggage area to get our luggage. The luggage system at Heathrow is similar to that of many big airports--the baggage comes up and then goes around on a large turntable. Well, somebody's luggage came apart, and after horrible squealing the thing was shut off and a porter climbed into it, to throw out a pair of sox. It was restarted, then it stopped dead again. The porter submerged once more into the innards, and came up with practically a whole underwear ensemble. After that, it seemed to work out O.K.

My bags were out early, and I walked toward British customs. There were several aisles, two marked "SOMETHING TO DECLARE" and sporting a red dot, five marked "NOTHING TO DECLARE" and having a green dot. Since I had nothing to declare, I walked to the green dot, opened the door--and stepped out into the airport lobby!

Only one fan was stopped--Bill "Scratch" Bacharach, who looks and sounds sort of like a cross between Salvadore Dali and Harlan Ellison--and his search ended when the customs fellow came across the tail Scratch was going to use in his costume for the costume ball. The customs man then astounded everyone by putting it on and then walking around to the other customs men! British customs is strange.

After changing some money and finding a much-needed men's room, I returned to await the rest of the crew, who were not long in coming. The Second Day had begun.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 11, 1970

After discussing various alternative means of getting into town, Al Nourse suggested we all take the airport bus, which we did. It was then that I discovered I was to have a problem--I couldn't figure out the English change I had.

No, it wasn't a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. After all, I have a

British checking account. It was the New Pence coins which got me. Britain is in the process of converting to decimals, and the coins are in circulation. It drove me crazy, although I was repeatedly assured by Londoners that it drove them crazy, too.

Going in on the bus I had my first real look at London. I was fascinated by the driving on the left with the steering wheel on the right, little guessing that I would myself be driving like that within a day or two, and I gazed out soaking in England. I decided on the spot that there was just a look about it that I liked.

Al Nourse had informed me that my hotel had been changed--as had every other person who'd ordered a twin. Seems the staid Hotel St. Ermins had chickened out of hosting science fiction nuts. We thus took a taxi from the terminal to the Royal Court Hotel, leading a procession.

Upon arrival, though, we discovered that they, too, hadn't decided on us, and Al Nourse then discovered that we were now all in the Royal Court House. Back into the taxis, and this time we were O.K.

It looked like a converted row of town houses--and was--and the rest of the clientele seems to be Indian or Pakistani, but the rooms were very nice, even by American standards (considering \$5 a night), and we--Ron Bounds and I--lucked out and got one with bath and telephone.

I used the phone to call the St. Ermins, since the fifth and final Expedition member, D.C. fan Dave Halterman, was supposed to meet us there. He'd come over a couple of days earlier and didn't know about the switches. He was never informed.

Ron and I therefore decided, after getting settled, to go over to the St. Ermins and wait for Dave. We called Jake and Norm at the other hotel and arranged to meet for dinner at 6, then set out in search of Halterman.

Since he's well over 6 feet and almost 300 pounds, he was easy to locate, standing just outside the St. Ermins.

We walked in no general direction, passing New Scotland Yard on the way, stopping in a tea shop for a soft drink and pastry, then roaming down until we came to Westminster Abbey. It was off hours, the pubs were closed, so we went in, touring the outer part of the abbey and their little museum until after 5 PM. Unfortunately we weren't permitted inside the actual church. I did get one imposing picture of the Abbey, with TV antenna (the abbot likes his telly) in foreground, though.

We decided to call Jake and see if he was ready, and discovered that one operates an English call box--phone booth to us Yanks--a little differently. Even after mastering the split-second timing required to drop in the 6d and getting the right number, we discovered that Jake didn't have a phone in his room.

Being a little too worn out to walk, we hailed a taxi, and beat Jake down from his room to the lobby by about 5 minutes. We then waited a little longer while others, Al Rackland, Lee Beriwasser, and a couple of others whom I didn't know assembled, and then we set off for dinner.

My stomach protested Indonesian or Maylay food, and we walked for a long time trying to find an open restaurant, when we suddenly happened upon a little Italian place. They gave us a private room upstairs, an excellent Italian meal from soup to desert, and charged us about \$2.00 each, wine included.

Afterwards, Dave and I split from the group and wandered for a while, finally going into a British penny arcade, where we ran into not only the rest of our group but also Larry and Fuzzy Niven.

We played push-penny and other British penny games for hours, until I proved to them that I could win at any slot machine--and proceeded to clean one out--and then got thrown out for hitting the side of the booth in push-penny.

Dave and I split again, finally and slowly making our way through London's back streets. I stopped in at a chemists and got some shaving cream and tooth-paste, and we took the Underground--a cleaner but no newer version of New York's subways--to the Royal Court House, noting that I was just around the corner from Number 7B Praed Street, Solar Pons' address (it's a bar). After walking several blocks in the wrong direction before asking directions and finally finding my hotel, I bid Dave good night and plopped into bed. Ron came in about ten minutes later--they'd wandered down to Soho (Ron has an ESP knack about finding the low dives in any city--more of that later) and then decided they were tired and came back as well.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12, 1970

Wednesday, August 12 dawned bright and sheerful--except that, because of the lack of sleep and time differential, Ron and I both felt like we had hangovers. Dave had decided that today we were to see the changing of the guards, so we were off around 9:15 to meet him in Trafalgar Square, which, incredibly, we did. After catching a quick and not so hot breakfast, we went up to Whitehall to see the 11 A.M. changing of the horse-guards, a little-known but very colorful ceremony that, in the end, wasn't quite as spectacular as we'd hoped and was far too crowded.

After that, we ran up the King's Way to Buckingham Palace for the Changing of the Guard, managing to view it through fifty-deep crowds from atop Victoria monument. There we ran into other fen, most notably Tony Lewis, Paul Galvin, and Eliot Shorter. The changing of the guard is spectacular, but you just can't get close enough to really enjoy it unless you're there from around 5 A.M., I think.

Most surprising thing was that they didn't stop traffic at all. I often wonder how many a military band has been run down by London taxis.

After this I split with the rest of my party, as I had business. They went off to the British Museum, a pleasure I'll have to reserve for another time, while I caught a taxi to Lloyds of London, in which resides my bank.

After getting the wrong office twice, I finally found the place, and requested assistance from the West Indian clerk, who seemed incredulous that I indeed had an account there. I gave him the number, and he sold me a blank cheque for thruppence, and I withdrew the 100 pounds I'd planned on. This gave me my working capital for quite a while.

Now a rich plutocrat, I walked down to the Tower of London and toured the place. The tour--which has guides continuously or you can do it yourself--is truly excellent.

Out of the tower and two rolls of film later, I was enjoying a coke and watching an escape artist do his stuff for whatever coins the audience would throw in the parking lot of the Tower, and then a combination guitarist and bird act that I never did quite understand.

I'd called Ken Chaoman, who is the Mirage Press in London, but we were fated by time limitations never to meet this trip.

With not enough time to go out to Chapman's, I went over to Tower bridge and soon noticed a ferryboat going down the Thames and docking nearby. Since ferryboats are a hobby and love of mine, I quickly made my way down to the dock and boarded, intending to go one way down to Parliament and then over to link up with the rest of the crew.

In point of fact I wound up talking politics, history, and geography with the ferryboat captain and rode up and down the Thames three times--at his expense, so to speak--we finding ourselves in a multi-trip conversation. Like most river men I've known, he was witty and opinionated--and I'm opinionated--and

I totally enjoyed the discussion and the trip--and I think he did, too.

I had arranged to meet legendary British correspondence fan Alan Dodd at my hotel at 6--but, again, it was the St. Ermin's that was the rendezvous. So, off I went, arriving and going upon the old hotel's porch where we'd picked up Dave the day before. He and I spotted each other right off--it was our first meeting, even after 11 years of writing--and we settled back to wait for the others. Just as we were about to give them up and go get dinner, a taxi barreled into the courtyard and exploded, yielding Ron, Jake, and Norm. We set off, found a steak house, and had an excellent dinner, which, I fear, was marred only by my discovery that Alan Dodd has a weak stomach. The conversation got around to occupations, and Dave Halterman revealed that he was an autopsy technician that analyzed the scrapings from crashed Air Force pilots to see if they had taken anything to make them go down, and Alan seemed deeply affected in the abdomen for a short while after.

After this we did a bit of pub-crawling, including my introducing Alan to the Sherlock Holmes pub, which he'd never known existed (the back room is 221B Baker Street, and it's outfitted properly). Alan seemed amazed that I knew of pubs he didn't, but we had an enjoyable evening, spoiled only because Alan had to catch a bus out to the suburbs and the last one left at 9:15. We pub-crawled a bit longer after he left, then retired. The next day was to be a big one and we all knew it.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 13, 1970

Dave Halterman awoke us with a call from downstairs around 10:30, and we dressed and met him in the lobby. We met Jake and Norm, along with Lee Beriwasser, at the Hertz Rent-a-Car place and there Ron rented a 1970 Ford Zenith, about the size of a Fairlake and with floor shift and bucket seats. There were six of us, at least two of which could be labeled husky and two--Dave and myself--downright fat, but we squeezed in, with Ron Bounds at the right-hand drive wheel, and swung out into traffic for our one mini-expedition outside of London.

We were going to Stonehenge.

Driving was not all that bad, considering that Ron's driving is always a bit suspect, although Ron, and later I, discovered that it is very difficult to get the left-hand limit of the car judged correctly when driving on the left. We made it to Salisbury, though, and got directions from a gas station man on how to get out to the monument. After a while we felt we must be going wrong, though, so we pulled into a Mobil station and got out. Going up to the station man, I asked, "How do we get to..."

"...Stonehenge? Well, take a right at the next light and go straight on," he finished, obviously a bit used to all this. He sold us a map we'd need later.

The directions proved true, and, after a short additional drive, we came upon it--just like that.

The monument is fully as impressive as one believed it would be, although it does seem a bit smaller. Also, it amazed me to see that thousands of tourists could climb all over the ancient rock--no "Keep Off" signs here!

And yet one felt the antiquity and majesty of this place. It is indescribable. A picture was taken of me being sacrificed on the slaughter-stone by Halterman (the weapon is umbrella) and I then took a great many slides of the place, all of which turned out fantastic.

After a while we went back to the entrance, got hot dogs and cokes, and it was then decided--we'd go on, and see some of the lesser known majestic prehistoric remains! Piling into the car, this time with me at the wheel, we were off.

CONTINUED AT LEAST UP TO THE CON BY NEXT MAILING!