

INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority (UK CAA) was set up in 1972 following an act of Parliament. It has a number of regulatory functions, including personnel licensing of aircrew; this involves not only assessment of flying competence but also of medical fitness. By a set of curious chances, I was appointed as cardiologist to the newly formed CAA in 1974 as a result of the Hawker Siddeley Trident 1 disaster. This had occurred at Staines two years earlier. A contributory factor to that accident was concluded to have been the cardiovascular incapacitation of the Captain. Some of the foregoing relates to the steps that were taken in the hope of minimising the risk of recurrence of such an event.

One morning at the Civil Aviation Authority building in Gatwick South Area, a pilot presented himself in my consulting room for cardiological examination. He had been referred by Dr Michael O'Brien, a neurologist at Guy's Hospital, London (see photo plate 28); both he and I were advisors to the CAA Medical Department. The story was an unusual one and involved an executive jet flight between Milan Malpensa and Biggin Hill; the pilot I saw that day had been in command. The trip was uneventful, until the landing, when he had turned to the co-pilot and asked,

“Where are we?”

“Biggin Hill – where did you expect us to be?” his astonished colleague responded.

“How did we get here?”