

**NEWS
IN BRIEF**

**CHANNEL IS
CHALLENGED**

A WATERFORD man hopes to celebrate his 40th birthday by swimming the English Channel.

Fireman Alan Smith, set himself the challenge to raise money for the Solas cancer centre in Waterford.

"It's something I've always wanted to do since I was about 12," he said. "I've been given dates from September 26 to October 1, it depends on the weather," he said.

**MAYO MAN
HONOURED**

A MAYO man who is one of only 19 people to have been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor twice is to be honoured in his hometown.

A statue of US Naval hero John King will be unveiled in Ballinrobe on Saturday, September 5th. The US Embassy confirmed the US Navy's "Five Brass" band will be perform at the ceremony.

EXCLUSIVE HOW OUR HIGH FLYERS

AIRWAY TO



REALITY: Geraldine, Brendan and Marie

Our girl proves a runway success as she takes to skies for pilot training

Holster Your Weapon.



Multiple Styles, Sizes & Colours

Now you can relax and remain calm. BigBoys revolutionary design takes men's underwear to the next level of comfort and design. So holster your weapon and experience a whole new level of comfort.

www.BigBoys.ie

Guaranteed to be the most comfortable underwear you've ever worn or your money back!



BIG BOYS
A PERFECT FIT FOR TOTAL COMFORT

www.BigBoys.ie

Cork 021 - 4627407

Text the word BigBoys, followed by your Name & Address to 087 - 9160619 for brochure via post

I'VE always fancied myself as a high-flyer.

So when Aer Arann invited me to pilot one of their planes, I was raring to go.

I was bitten by the flying bug at my first lesson at Weston Aerodrome a few years ago.

And it was, literally, chocs away when I got an scare-obatic lesson in an Air Corps Marchetti - and ended up threatening the instructor with a loaded sick bag.

I've also danced on the wings of a bi-plane, escaped from a submerged helicopter cabin as part of a military exercise, and more recently flew over Turkey in a microlight.

But nothing could beat the thrill of piloting a passenger plane.

Never mind the Mile High Club - this was the 3,000-Mile High Club, I thought as I winged it out to Dublin Airport before they could change their minds.

In 40 action-packed minutes I got to feel like... well, a hijacker.

Training

Luckily for Aer Arann - and their passengers - it wasn't an actual plane. But it was the next best thing. The ATR full-motion flight simulator is the only one of its kind in Ireland and the UK. Before it arrived in April, Irish pilots had to travel to France to do this kind of training.

The gadget is an exact replica of the cockpit of the Aer Arann planes which fly to airports all over Ireland and the UK. The steering column, gauges and controls for everything from the wing-flaps to wheel-carriage all behave the way they would in the real craft.

And the graphics are to fly for. The view from the screen in front of us was so realistic, I forgot I was in the Simtech hangar at the Airport Logistics Park and not on the runway at the airport a few miles up the road.

I even had real passengers - instructor Brendan Cahill and Sunday World snapper Ciaran McGowan.

And my co-pilot was an actual pilot. Like all commercial pilots, First Officer Maria Sweeney uses a simulator at least twice a year to keep her skills up to date.

This time she was stuck in the cockpit with the pilot from hell.

Call me plane crazy, but I got a real kick out of climbing into the cockpit - in my stilettos.

As the pilot, I made the rules. For once, I didn't have to strip off for



FIRM GROUND: Instructor Brendan Cahill with our Geraldine Comiskey



security, separate my liquids or worry about the size of my handbag.

This time I got to fly in style.

And in speed. It was like a scene out of Top Gun as we roared along the runway at Dublin Airport - or, rather, a realistic image of it - and did a near-vertical take-off.

I was all set to do a loop-the-loop, and laughed when Brendan warned we might crash - but it turned out he meant the simulator's computer would crash.

"We tried to fly directly up in another simulator but it just shut down. It took ages to fix it. Passenger planes are not meant to do aerobatics," he pointed out.

Brendan, who was Chief Pilot at Aer Lingus and is now Head of Training at Aer Arann, has flown everything from jumbos to light aircraft and has been using simulators since 1972.

"I've never seen anything as good as this", he said. "It's the perfect training tool for pilots."

To prove it, he let me fly through a storm - complete with thunder, lightning, swirling clouds and turbulence under the seat.

It whetted my appetite for a real storm - in Africa. But Aer Arann doesn't fly that far, so I had to make do with the Irish landscape.

Mind you, Irish weather is scary enough when you're up in the middle of it. As we flew through fog, I could see nothing but a grey shimmer. "This is what you'll see if you're flying above Ireland most of the time," Brendan explained.

Those complicated looking instruments on the dashboard in front of

us were our only hope of staying on course.

The nose of the plane kept veering to the left - but when I tried to correct it I banked dangerously to the right.

As we emerged from the clouds, I attempted a nose-dive, but Maria saved the plane from plummeting into Lambay Island.

We followed the Aer Arann route between Howth Head and Ireland's Eye. As we approached the airport, I was tempted to buzz a few realistic looking cars on the M50, but was soon distracted by a juicier target - a lorry on the runway.

Lights

At last, I thought, I could get revenge on all those cheeky truckers who honked their horns at me. I was all set to dive-bomb it - but Maria jammed on the brakes.

Next time we saw the airport, it was snowing. We could barely make out the landing lights - until Brendan switched the screen to night.

I was glad when Maria took the controls for the tricky bit - last time I tried to land a plane I nearly went into a barn instead of the hangar.

As the wheels kissed the runway, I took over with my feet. Brendan told me to taxi the plane around a corner, but all that air travel had given me that holiday feeling, so I shimmed along the runway. It was an uplifting experience, and to celebrate landing safely, I was all set to do a doughnut - but Maria took over again and jammed on the brakes.

My passengers, if I had any genuine ones, would all be airsick and terrified by now.

I later found out the simulator is also used by people who run courses to cure fear of flying. If they need a scary pilot, I'm definitely up for it.