

## Banquet speech - International Loran Association - 9 October 2001

Ladies and gentlemen, good evening!

I was more than somewhat surprised to be asked to be the Banquet Speaker this evening. But, to be absolutely fair to John Beukers, he did mention it first *before* lunch today rather than *after*! I'm sure *most of you* are much better prepared than I am and actually keep a spare after-dinner speech or two about your person. But, I don't!

Now, here's why not. Some of you may not know this, but I'm actually *British*. And you see the British leave this sort of thing - speech-making and so on - to the Royal Family. And I'm not actually a member of the Royal Family. No. You see, the thing is, you need qualifications to be a Royal: you need blue blood, German ancestry and a distinctly rocky marriage. I'm red-blooded, been happily married and entirely British, so I won't do at all.

And the other problem with giving a speech is Loran. Loran's really not something the British do. We had our own low-frequency system called Decca Navigator and that's what I used to know about. We didn't bother with things like Loran, sounded foreign to us. And all good British fellows know that funny things go on abroad: foreigners, chaps who eat garlic and beat their wives and so on.

Anyway, one day about 10 years ago, Nick Ward over there asked me whether I knew anything about this Loran thingy, 'cos he didn't and apparently the US Coast Guard johnnies had come round saying they planned to give all their European Loran stations to the natives, with some coloured beads and little mirrors, and he wanted one. He needed a well-paid consultant who knew about Loran. So, of course, I said ... Loran, know all about it, splendid system, finest there is, what do you want to know? That's the way consultants talk. Didn't work of course. After all, we are dealing here with Nick Ward and the Corporation of Trinity House. Not one of your Johnny-come-latelys like the US Coast Guard. Trinity House was founded in the year 1514 by King Henry the Eighth - the one who had six wives - not all at once, of course, that wouldn't be British. No, he had standards. He'd chop off their heads before getting a new one.

So Nick said ‘you’d better go and read all about it.’ And I did and he and I and spent a lazy summer around the pubs of England and Ireland measuring Loran signals. And we were amazed! D’you know, it really work, jolly well. Better than Decca, actually. So we wrote a great big report all about it and headed off to present it at this Wild Goose Association thing.

That was a strange experience. They were all there, all the experts, everyone you’d ever heard of in Loran. It was like our list of references made flesh. Lilley and Roland and Beukers were real people. There were manufacturers, government folk, Coast Guard, academics, users, every kind of Loran specialist. It was simply the most focussed, the most effective technical conference I had ever attended. It was - and it’s gone on being - truly impressive.

On the other hand, what on earth was this mysterious Wild Goose business? Apparently, it involved this bird - not a noble swan, not even a decent duck, but a Canada Goose. Now the Canada Goose is well known to ornithologists. It is a majestic bird - but also as one that pursues a lifestyle of quite remarkable stupidity. The ancient parchments of the Wild Goose Association tell us that it *navigates thousands of miles with unerring accuracy*. The unerring accuracy is a great credit to it, but apparently it flies *so many* thousands of miles that as soon as it’s got to the other end, it’s time to turn around and navigate back with unerring accuracy over the same thousands of miles. It is a life of quite unceasing and pointless effort. Tell me, can you think any other creature that devotes its life to navigation and commutes unceasingly back and forth over thousands of miles of ocean with unerring accuracy? Can *you*, John Beukers?

Despite its exhausting lifestyle, the Canada Goose is a very successful fowl. The BBC News reported recently that: the population of Canada geese had increased to such numbers that they had become a major nuisance in the north-eastern US. So they’re culling the geese. Culling so many of them there’s now a surplus of Goose-meat. According to the BBC, the hottest thing in the local Macdonalds up there is now: the Gooseburger. I’ve proposed to the Board of Directors that at all future banquets the main dish should be gooseburgers - let’s eat the Wild Goose!

We were the Wild Goose Association from the very beginning. I have the very first issue of

the Goose Gazette. They're all there, of course: the young Paul Johannesen, a boyish John Beukers, and a positively dashing William Roland, United States Coast Guard, complete with medals. 'What men they were', I hear you cry, 'what giants bestrode these United States'. Well, up to a point. Things have certainly changed in this organisation: here's a photo of Miss Wild Goose - Marianne O'Rourke. A fine, if perhaps not overdressed, young woman of good breeding stock. 'Marianne', we learn, 'was the overwhelming choice of *all* the WGA officers.' How she was chosen we are not told. But 'everyone' says the Goose Gazette 'everyone, will be looking forward to seeing her at the next convention'. For those unable to attend, Marianne's phone number was 617-861-3024.

Now here's a funny to-do. Leaving aside political correctness - for this was the 1970s - what do you make, ladies, of a bunch of fellows who call themselves *geese*. Where I come from all geese are female. The daddies are called 'ganders'. Little geese are 'goslings'. So the *only* true goose was Miss Wild Goose - apart from a cartoon character called Gloria the Goose. And we're back to Gloria in Europe! The men only thought they were geese when really they were, at best, ganders. And why don't we have a Miss Goose any more? What became of the office in the ILA? There's no-one on the current Board of Directors with that title. And what became of Miss Goose herself, the lovely Marianne - did she perhaps turn into Mother Goose?

This 'next convention' at which we're invited to meet the pulchritudinous Miss Goose - and possibly Gloria too for all I know - was to be held at the Playboy Club. Here the whole thing turns quite bizarre: I quote 'We drakes' it says 'must stick close to our friends, the Bunnies'. Now where I come from, we don't organise matters like that at all - not even the Royal Family go in for that sort of thing. Let's work this out calmly: Where do little goslings come from? Are there any young geese - goslings - here tonight - Wouter, perhaps - whose daddies are men who think they are female geese though they call themselves 'drakes' - that is ducks - and whose mummies are rabbits?

And what on earth *all this* had to do with *Loran* I can't imagine. Because it was supposed to be about Loran. The Goose Gazette and the Convention at the Playboy Club were full of Loran. And although Miss Goose has gone, and the bunnies, it is still about Loran. And it's remarkable what else has stayed the same.

Here's the Editor of that first Goose Gazette. He says, listen: 'against ... a background of advances ... we ... see a gloomy picture of funding cut-backs and political strife.. Loran is besieged by alternative systems which, claiming better performance ... compete for scant ... dollars.' 'Worse yet' - this is 30 years ago - '*Loran-C phase-out* is being discussed, not in terms of *why* but of *when*.' The more things change, the more they stay the same! 'Ask not' thunders the Editor, 'what the *government* can do for Loran, ask ... what you can do for it. Educate ... members of Congress on the threat now faced by Loran if funding cutbacks force its replacement by other systems.' Oh my!

How things stay the same ... The Best Paper Award that first year went to Doherty & Johler for a paper we were using in my research group just last week. Such giants! And the keynote speaker - I'm not sure I believe this - was a chap called 'Gansler' which is *very suspicious* because Gansler is German for a Goose-keeper.

They've all gone, Miss Goose, the bunnies, Gloria, the Goose-keeper, the great days.

But Loran has stayed. Loran stayed, flourished, turned into a magnificent system: the first precision navigation system to make the breakthrough from specialist navigation aid to consumer product. From obscurity to a million users. The one that opened the door to the world of navigation we now take for granted. Loran was the first golden egg laid by the geese.

But, of course, back then Loran was an Irish plot. The British can spot an Irish plot at 463 metres. I saw it was an Irish front organisation at my first convention. The key authors were, some of you will remember: Cassidy, McGann, Docherty, Moroney - even Miss Goose was called O'Rourke, for heavens sake. It was held near Boston, a town to be avoided by the British at all costs. The only chap there who wasn't Irish was called Beukers - and no-one approved of him. The Americans because he was British, the British because he'd become American, and the Dutch simply couldn't forgive a chap who had a perfectly good Dutch name and couldn't even pronounce it: 'Beukers' they said, 'Jan Beukers'. Well you can say this for being called 'Jan Beukers': it's certainly not Irish.

And Loran - this Irish system - what a trial it has proved to its motherland. Have you heard the one about the Irish Loran station. Those of us intimately concerned, who have suffered for Loran and grown grey hairs for Loran (ask not what Loran can do for you but what you can do for Loran) will never forget it and it isn't over yet.

The Irish signed a Loran agreement with the Norwegians and the Danes, Germans, Dutch and French, and chaps like that. Not Britain of course - that was part of the attraction for the Irish. So then they had to build an Irish Loran station. So Colin Day over there - who's chief Irish honcho for Loran - decided to put the mast on a bleak windswept headland so far west as to be virtually East Boston.

No-one lives there, of course. But the local *planning authority* still raised objections: it would be tall, they said. 'True', said Colin, 'but *very thin*'. It would have wires that would whistle in the wind. 'True', said Colin - 'but *everything* whistles in the wind on the west coast of Ireland and you can't hear them for the gales and the pounding of the surf'. It would radiate, they said. 'True', said Colin, 'that's what it's there for, to radiate'. 'Ah', they said, 'but the radiation will boil the *brains* of the locals'. Colin had no answer to that.

So Colin and Stuart Ruttle called a public meeting to tell the locals what a good thing Loran was. No expense spared, top experts flown in - well me actually - to explain that far from doing any harm, Loran would cure every known medical ailment from the King's evil to ingrowing toenails. The locals smelt a rat and invited Colin, if it was such a good thing, to shove it up in his own back yard. One or two of the more vulgar elements suggested an alternative, even less congenial, site.

The locals were roused, rumours spread - Cassidy's relations talked to Moroney's, Moroney's cousins talked to the McGann's and they spread dark tales about what young Miss O'Rourke had got up to with Loran in that United States and it all spiralled out of control, as these things will. Pretty soon - and Colin will tell you this is true - the lanes and buildings of the west of Ireland were festooned with signs. 'No', they said, 'No to Loran-C!' Loran-C out! Stop Loran-C! It looked just like the FAA building!

The public enquiry was thronged by large and vociferous crowds, some carrying shillelaghs,

others GPS receivers. We all feared for our lives. For months it went through the courts. Then the decision: the Irish Lighthouse Authority were entitled by law to build lighthouses, trim wicks and erect and light beacons. But, as the learned judge sagely pointed out: the Merchant Shipping Act of 1894 had failed to mention Loran stations - despite Loran's being an Irish system.

Ah, said Colin, it's a *radiobeacon*. Oho, said the forces of darkness, there's nothing in the 1894 Act about radiobeacons either, you can't have one. 'But we've been building them since the turn of the century', says Colin. Then you'll just have to take them all down, every radio station ever built in Ireland for marine navigation is illegal. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is what comes of messing with Loran - and the Irish. All aids to navigation turned off. Colin to be cast into a deep dungeon for operating illegal radio stations. Ships will run ashore, the coastline ruined, the economy collapse; the population will riot and Ireland will sink back into the Atlantic from whence it emerged. All because of Loran. And let that be a lesson to the Irish: if they'd stuck to a good *British* system like Decca Navigator there'd be none of this trouble!

It's all become far too stressful, in my opinion, this navigation business. Those of us who support Loran are under constant attack, not least in the US - the home of the Goose. We've all read the US Presidential policy - replace all terrestrial navigation systems with GPS. But very few people know there was a secret protocol to that policy, a hidden agenda. I shouldn't tell you this but - well, I'm British after all.

In the year 2000 selective availability was to be withdrawn. In 2002 the US plans to withdraw the North and South poles. Terrestrial! There were strong objections from the South Pole, which turns out to be a US base. As a compromise only the *North* Pole is to go, leaving the US with a dominant position in both the GPS and pole industries.

In 2003 latitude and longitude go. Greenwich moves to Washington. The *Sun* becomes a satellite of the *earth*, controlled from Colorado Springs.

In 2004 all terrestrial aids to navigation become illegal. Road signs will be all be taken down. Finally, in 2005, terrestrial gravity will be withdrawn. And all the satellites will disappear!

Of course, that's ridiculous. But *so* are *many things* now being promoted in navigation. Be in no doubt: there is a *mighty struggle* going on, not just in the US, but world-wide. It is often presented as a struggle to *maintain Loran* - but that is just a *part* of it. It's presented as a struggle *against satellite systems* - and that's *no* part of it. And on the Loran side it's led by people who have to argue a deeply-unpopular set of views, who are represented by their adversaries as old-fashioned, inward-looking, backward-looking. That battle is being fought in the US and equally in Europe, in Brussels, in Norway, here in France.

And in all those areas the fight is not a fight to return to the past, but a fight for *common sense* and for *safety*. Not anti-US, but promoting a wider vision of the future of navigation. And in this continent and across the Atlantic it is an argument led, to a quite remarkable degree, by the *Geese*. They themselves are the second, even greater, Golden egg.

So let us look *back* tonight over not 25, but now 30, years and celebrate this Association. But let us also recognise what its members are doing, courageously, effectively, world-wide, for navigation in the future. And if standing up for common sense in navigation means being called a goose then I'm proud to be one. Fellow *Geese* - I salute you.

Thank you.

24 minutes, with no pauses

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