



In the battle against Covid-19 Ireland partners with Munich & Nuremberg laboratories resulting in nightly transcontinental missions to deliver additional efficient testing as we tackle the latest wave sweeping our nation

Transportation provided by an unlikely source

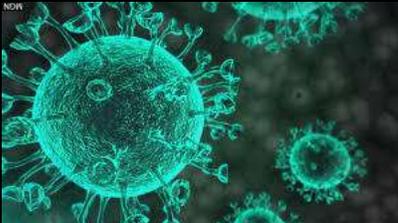
airliner
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OPERATION DEUTSCHLAND

by Aidan Nolan



Image by Ron Attwood



'HERO'S CAN COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES'



Air Taxi Europe
Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan II D-IATE on a night-stop
Image by Maximilian Hartmann

All doing our bit.....Shoulder to the wheel.....Doubling down.....Terms we are all familiar with from news and media reports throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Some efforts go further than others and some even continue below the radar, out of sight and away from public gaze. Hero's can come in all shapes and sizes.

Even before the numbers of Covid-19 cases in Ireland reached the current all-time high level post Christmas,

D-IATE Image by Phil Gaulton



our sample testing was not quite up to the task. As Irish laboratories ramped up capacity to manage the increasing numbers of daily tests required, an additional reserve was sought coming in the form of "Operation Deutschland".

The HSE and Department of Health engaged several testing facilities based in Germany. As independent testing centers, labs for example at Munich and Nuremberg would help alleviate the increasing quantity of analysis required and aid in dispersing the workload on the Irish system.

D-IATE Image by Phil Gaulton



'NIGHTLY MISSIONS.....D-IATE PERFORMS THIS VITAL SERVICE'

This agreement was reaffirmed in mid-September with a view to add surge testing capacity for the winter months.

It's true, there was reports early on of a discrepancy in some results obtained by a German lab but putting this down to teething problems and pressing on with the job in hand appears to have been the outcome as Munich remains very much a main contributor in the logistic chain that is the Irish Covid-19 testing process.

Air-Taxi Europe has been contracted with delivering the Irish samples to locations outside the State. On at least five nightly missions per week, Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan II (D-IATE) performs this vital service, ferrying the sensitive cargo from Dublin Airport the 750 miles to the southern German region, arriving at Munich Airport or on occasion, Nuremberg.



D-IATE seen operating in European winter conditions - Image by Anna Zvereva

Designed as a 12 seat twin turboprop commuter aircraft, this particular model (c/n 0007) first flew back in 1986. That's only 3 years after the German band "Nena" had their global No.1 hit, "99 Red Balloons" and the same year that "Berlin" had a No.1 with "Take My Breath Away", the theme tune to the Hollywood blockbuster "Top Gun" and our own Chris De Burgh sang about a Lady in Red, gaining a No.1 place the same year.

D-GBBB Diamond DA42 Twin Star
Image Right by Air-Taxi Europe



The "business end" of D-IATE - Snug fit
Image by Air-Taxi Europe

In its current role, D-IATE operates as a "mosquito freighter", the smallest sub-set of cargo aircraft. Perfect for this task, the F406 is small, nimble, efficient and economical, packing a performance punch belied of its appearance.

Arriving into Dublin Airport by late evening, D-IATE parks up awaiting its precious cargo. The Reims-Cessna F406 has a capacity to uplift 1,500kg of freight which can be in conjunction with a Euro-palette 600kg single mass loading if needs require. Capable of operating single-crewed, the twin Pratt & Whitney Canada PT6A-112 turboprop produce 500hp each, stretching the Cessna's legs to speeds of 250mph on its trans-European nightly runs. With a range of 1,327 miles, this "old-flyer" more than adequately covers the Dublin - Munich route.



Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan D-IATE poses at rest
Image by Air-Taxi Europe

Various glimpses of "The Caravan" D-IATE
Images below by Air-Taxi Europe



Trusty, the F406 must be, as in the UK, HM Coast Guard have used the type for maritime patrols, G-TURF is a working example of the model having been part of the Coast Guard fleet for many years along with G-EXEX, a Cessna 404 Titan and of course G-HMGB a Beechcraft 200 Super King Air.

Magical Munich City Center
Image right



Another fleet member
D-ICCC Cessna F406
Image below by Air-Taxi Europe





Irish Air Corps CASA CN235 (252) seen on patrol with an incredibly scenic backdrop
Image by Óglaigh na hÉireann

This "blue-light" service provided by Air-Taxi Europe is usually on its way by 1:45am departing a quiet Dublin Airport bound for the Bavarian region of southern Germany close to the Austrian Alps.

The 3hr 15min flight see's D-IATE cross the UK, passing overhead London before the English Channel, then transiting Belgium and into Germany, arriving at Munich or indeed Nuremberg at approximately 6:15am local time.



As darkness falls is often when D-IATE is at its most active
Image by Jonas Evrard

F406 CARAVAN



Blueprint elevation drawing of Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan II

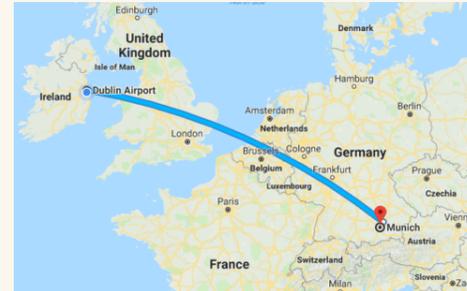
Air-Taxi Europe, based at Braunschweig Wolfsburg Airport, one hour east of Hanover, operates a small fleet of Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan II's, D-IATE, D-ICCC & D-ITTT along with Diamond DA42 Twin Star D-GAAA & D-GBBB.

However the German charter company was not the first operator to transport Irish Covid-19 test samples abroad on behalf of the State.



On the 3rd of May last year (2020) when the situation regarding the Coronavirus was looking extremely bleak, the Irish Air Corps conducted the first mission of delivering Covid-19 tests to Germany.

No.1 Operations Wing were despatched from Dublin using the newly acquired Pilatus PC-12NG (280), the first of an order for four of the Swiss designed 9 seater aircraft.



DUB - MUC a route well travelled by Air-Taxi Europe & the Irish Air Corps on nightly Covid-19 Test missions

Since then, the Air Corps has stepped into the breach on occasions when required, to ferry Covid-19 tests to Germany.

Irish Air Corps Pilatus PC-12NG 280 in "alternative" livery
Image below by Dave Haines



'STRETCHING THE CESSNA'S LEGS ON IT'S TRANS-EUROPEAN NIGHTLY RUNS'

An increase of this activity has recently been observed at the beginning of the New Year (January 2021) for example with Air Corps CASA CN235 performing flights from Dublin to Germany and Air Corps Pilatus PC-12NG (283) also flying these essential Covid missions.



Irish Air Corps Pilatus PC-12NG 280 seen receiving its precious cargo - C-19 Test Samples
Image by Óglaigh na hÉireann

'BLUE-LIGHT SERVICE BY AIR-TAXI EUROPE'





REIMS-CESSNA

Blueprint plan drawing of Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan II

It's interesting to compare both the Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan II and Pilatus PC-12NG, similar to each other in their roles but separated by 34 years of design progress.

Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan II

G-TURF of HM Coast Guard on maritime patrol Image by Airwolfhound - Wikimedia Commons



Wing span and fuselage dimensions are strikingly close, the main design difference is with the Pilatus incorporating a single engine whereas the Cessna goes with the more conventional approach of using twin power plants.

Both aircraft use Pratt & Whitney power, the PC-12NG relying on the much improved PT6A-6TP which produces considerably more power at 1,200shp, than each of the individual P&W PT6A-112's used on the Cessna F406.

EC-GJM
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EC-GJM

Flightline
Fairchild
Swearingen
Metroliner
SA227-BC III
- EC-GJM
operating
cargo
flights
throughout
Europe
Image by
Nik
Deblauwe



'PILATUS HAS BECOME RENOWNED FOR EXCELLENCE IN RELIABILITY & SAFETY'



PILATUS

Munich City Center in the shadow of the Alps
Image above

The more modern Pilatus is the quicker aircraft at cruise & maximum speeds and a higher climb rate than the Cessna.

It may be unfair to compare the two business commuters as three decades divides these aircraft but for some, the built-in reliance & safety of a twin wins over.

PC12

Although Pilatus has become renowned for excellence in reliability and safety, who needs 'double' when you have Swiss engineering, the engine isn't Swiss of course but is incorporated into the overall Pilatus product.

Moments before departure into the night for CASA CN235 (252) of Irish Air Corps
Image by Chris Lofting



CASA

Commence Start Up CASA CN235 (252) of Irish Air Corps
Image by Pete Callaway





Irish Air Corps Pilatus PC-12NG (283) at low-level above a patchwork of greenery
Image by Oglaiha na hÉireann

At or around the same time most nights (or early mornings), performing a similar flight to D-IATE is another twin turboprop of almost equal vintage. Fairchild Swearingen SA 227BC Metroliner III (EC-GJM) of Flightline can also be found on a "sortie" of its own.

For this 30 yr old turboprop freighter, departure is usually Birmingham Airport in the UK's midlands and its nightly destination just happens to be Munich.

The two come almost within visual distance sometimes over the southeast of England, each on their way, the Metroliner most likely in conjunction with the car manufacturing industry..

Towards the end of January and into February 2021, the baton was handed to another of Air-Taxi Europe's fleet members, D-ITTT, to continue the Dublin - Munich flights. This Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan II is sharing the Covid-19 Testing missions while D-IATE is occupied elsewhere.

'FAIRCHILD SA 227BC METROLINER III (EC-GJM) OF FLIGHTLINE CAN ALSO BE FOUND ON A SORTIE OF ITS OWN'

Fairchild Metroliner SA227-BC III - EC-GJM of Flightline departing on its next cargo flight
Image by Antonio Terra

Air-Taxi Europe Reims-Cessna F406 Caravan II D-IATE in its natural environment
Image by Ron Attwood



Irish Air Corps Pilatus PC-12NG (283) in "Battleship Grey" livery during a visit to Finland - Image above by Sebastian Vinikainen



Irish Air Corps Pilatus PC-12NG (283) painted a discreet stealth shade, on 'manoeuvres' at Gloucester Airport, UK
Image above by Dave Haines

Many small commuter freighters earn their keep performing mundane charters week after week for many years. In fact, long after their passenger carrying days have ended.



'MANY SMALL COMMUTER FREIGHTERS EARN THEIR KEEP.....LONG AFTER THEIR PASSENGER CARRYING DAYS HAVE ENDED'



Aerial view of Munich Airport and its twin 4,000m parallel runways - 08/26
Image by Munich Airport

The current global pandemic and in particular its effects on Europe, has elevated these aircraft and others to a status of major importance and yet their contribution remain virtually unknown to the public.

The aircraft and flight crews featured in this article are just some of the unsung hero's of this difficult crisis. They have carved out a niche based on design & ability like surgical implements, are helping to combat the dark forces we currently battle.

By Aidan Nolan - Airliner Experience

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