

Cranfield University



The hot tarmac of the runway appears at the port side. Slowly, I terminate the approach turn and line up for the runway. Through the frantically rotating propeller blades, I see rows of Spitfires warming up in the strong midday sun. Controlled activity between the aircraft makes the airfield look like a disturbed ants' nest. Where possible, mechanics embark upon their damage-control activities, making the birds airworthy for their next mission. My aircraft willingly responds to my commands and I return to base safely.

By Arjen Balk

These could have been the words of an aviator during the Second World War, stationed at Royal Air Force Station Cranfield, United Kingdom.

Cranfield. Maybe the name sounds familiar. What was once established as an RAF base is now known as Cranfield University, renowned for her excellent reputation in the air transport industry. Besides the aviation related courses, the University also offers a wide variety of courses both in other Engineering disciplines and Management. The airfield itself is used by a number of flying schools, training pilots for both fixed and rotary wing aircraft. Cranfield University only recruits postgraduate students and whether

studying for an MSc or PhD, Cranfield provides an excellent opportunity to broaden your horizons and take your academic qualifications one step further after your first graduation at Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs (HBO) or university level.

In my final year of the 'Vliegtuig-operatie' course at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam (HVA), knowing I would graduate in June 2001, I decided to take that additional step. During the final year, my interests had focused on aviation safety. I wanted to

Another advantage of the aviation related courses is that students get the opportunity to have some 'hands-on' flying

know more about aviation safety and in particular, how fatal aircraft accidents could be prevented. I was also motivated by the fact that I wanted to improve my prospects of finding a job in the air transport industry and I wanted to study abroad. After some initial inquiries, I found myself searching through the list of courses on Cranfield University's internet site. I was looking for an MSc course because it would be completed within one year, unlike a PhD course, which would extend to three or four years. Due to my specific interests, the course also had to be related to aviation safety and as a result, only two courses were suitable. My choice was between Air

Transport Management and Human Factors and Safety Assessment in Aeronautics. Eventually, I chose the MSc course in Human Factors and Safety Assessment in Aeronautics because this entire course aimed to improve aviation safety and provide a broad view of the various safety factors in the air transport industry. However, the road to gaining a place at Cranfield University proved to be a long and uncertain one.

To gain a place at Cranfield University and ensure sufficient financial support, a process consisting of several selection procedures had to be passed. However, securing a place at the University is not only based on a selection procedure; Cranfield also operates a 'first come, first serve' policy. Thus, preparations and appointments for selection procedures must be made in advance, sometimes even before the results of previous selection procedures are known. The first selection procedure was at the HVA, which selected candidates for a scholarship. Nuffic, who



In front of the hangar.

provided the scholarship, then conducted a further selection procedure. The next step was a selection procedure by Cranfield University, itself, to see if my results from my previous studies and, more importantly, my motivations were thought sufficient to complete the course. My conditional place on the MSc course was now only dependent upon a successful completion of a compulsory English examination. With all the selection procedures completed, I found that I had been offered a place at the University and a scholarship was granted.



The library

The next step was to arrange accommodation in the United Kingdom. Most students live on campus and several possibilities are provided for on-campus accommodation. Also, guidance is provided when off-campus accommodation is preferred. After graduating from the HVA in June, I decided to work at KLM Royal Dutch Airlines for ten weeks to provide some financial backup and bridge the period between my graduation and the start of the MSc course in October. The financial backup proved to be necessary, for the United Kingdom is at least twice as expensive as the Netherlands.

The first half of the MSc course consists of lectures and exams. The way of assessing exams and assignments differs from the Netherlands, so

this tends to long days filled with lectures and lots of studying for the exams. Requirements are also higher and just passing the exams is not enough to graduate. Therefore, motivation is probably the most important element for getting through the course and acquiring the MSc degree. If a student performs the required work and keeps motivated, graduating with an MSc degree should not pose a problem.

The second half of the year consists of writing a thesis. Depending on the course, the students may choose their own topic, or a topic that is presented

to them by their supervisors or an industrial company. Many of the theses are written in co-operation with companies from all over the world. In each course, a flight in a Bulldog trainer aircraft is included, in which students are able to

gain some aircraft manoeuvring experience. In some courses, flights are also conducted in a Jetstream, which operates as a flying laboratory during experiments.

Campus life is something we do not experience in the Netherlands; maybe the country is too small for such a thing. On campus, your social life is involved in everything you do. Day in, day out, you are with other students: you live together, eat together, exercise together, drink together and study together. This creates a unique atmosphere and friends are easily made. Sometimes you will find yourself studying with a couple of fellow students until two o'clock in the morning, or supporting your

team mates during the departmental rounders match of the year, or cooking some delicious, exotic dinner for your flatmates.

Cranfield is one of the few Universities world-wide that provides postgraduate courses focused on the air transport industry (the other one is Embry-Riddle University at Daytona Beach, Florida) and because of this, the life on campus is very international. Students come from all over the world to study at the University and words cannot describe the opportunities to experience and build relationships with fellow students or neighbours from a multitude of cultures and backgrounds. My only advice is to experience it yourself. There is, however, a disadvantage of Cranfield University: its location is very remote. Therefore, the campus life and people you meet are very important. The campus itself provides a sports hall, a fitness centre and two pubs but for other leisure interests, students have to go to the nearest cities, which are ten to fifteen kilometres away. Over there, you can practise your skiing at the snowdome or prove your strength in indoor rock-climbing. Various restaurants and pubs provide some excellent opportunities to relax after examination periods and to escape the day-to-day life of the University.

Despite the remote location, living on campus is a very useful and special experience and you will, most likely, build friendships for life.

What more can I say? For people who want to take their education one step further, Cranfield University provides a unique opportunity to develop your knowledge with regard to aviation and experience a year living abroad.



Supper at Cranfield

For more information, visit the following websites: www.cranfield.ac.uk or www.cranfield.ac.uk/coa