



September 2002

ISLAND

BREEZES

A newsletter for the employees of Tradewind Caribbean Airlines



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Welcome to "Island Breezes" the Official TCA pilots newsletter. Here you can expect to find articles on real world Caribbean airline news, developments and events within Flight Simulator community as well as stories about the pilots and crew of Tradewind Caribbean Airlines and Tradewind Domestic Mail.

Contact

[Ken Malczynski](#)

(Editor)

[Rich Ellison](#)

(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

[Kyle Ramsey](#)

(Author: Alt Air)

Terry Tyler

(Writer & Reviewer)

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Editorial

Well it's good to be back! After 2 major operations in 3 days and some recovery time, I'm glad to be back at the Breeze. Many thanks to Rich, Terry and Kyle for pulling the load. This month marks a full year that the Island Breezes has been in publication. (and you thought it wouldn't last) The Breeze was the brainchild of Rick Nathan who created the very first edition. I'm sure with the crack staff here, we can hope to see many more anniversaries.

This month, the tragedies of last year will be reminded to us all. Those who were lost on that fateful day, will never be forgotten.

Ken Malczynski

Editor: Island Breezes



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Inside TCA

Happy Birthday TCA!

This month, September 15th 2002, TCA will be starting it's 8th year. Born in 1995, no one thought that this VA would become the most popular VA on the internet. CONGRATULATIONS TCA! As with every TCA birthday celebration, expect a few Birthday gifts around that date.

Contact

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(Editor)

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(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

Kyle Ramsey

(Author: Alt Air)

Terry Tyler

(Writer & Reviewer)

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TDS Goose:



Check out Mike Stone's Grumman Goose V.2 along with the TDS textures from Jack and the boys at the paint shop. You can get it here: <http://216.73.113.34/TCA/aircraft/tdsgoose02.zip> (see the interview with Mike Stone)

TDS AI

Due out shortly will be more TDS AI works for Jamaica and the Cayman Islands from the AI guru Terry Tyler.

New KLM Homepage

The KLM division of TCA has a new home. There you will find aircraft in KLM livery, Events and flights to different parts of Europe, Links to cities and airports serviced by KLM.

"Bringing the Old World to the New World"

<http://www.tca.viscal.net/>



Wilkes IWI Release

If you haven't heard by now, Chris Wilkes has released Part 1 in his series of sceneries for the Caribbean. You can still see screenshots at our homepage. www.tradewind.org, and will be available in a download version at www.flight1.com.



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Interview with Mike Stone

Mike Stone has been creating aircraft For flight simulator's for years now and is also responsible for bringing back our beloved Goose.

A few words from Mike Stone

My name is Mike Stone and I'm a software engineer by trade living in St. Louis, Missouri USA, with my wife Janet and my two teenage sons. I'm 48 year's old and feel every minute of it believe me. I've been active in flight simming longer than I care to think about. It all started out with an Apple II computer and one of the first flight sims, which I believe was made by a company named Sublogic.



Contact

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(Editor)

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(Author: Alt Air)

[Terry Tyler](#)

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Your aircraft wasn't rendered at all, just instruments and the ground. All done in eye-popping 320x200 monochrome line graphics. Ughh. That's why I chuckle when some folks today complain because they can't see the lug nuts on the wheels of my planes. Flightsimming has come a long way indeed.

Breeze : You seem to run the gamut when it comes to types of aircraft you like to build. Airbus, Carabou, 727, Meridian, Grumman Goose. Is there a favorite? Big jets, privates, props ?

Mike : My main goal is not to get bored with it. Building a model in GMAX is extremely tedious and I want to avoid getting repetative. So I mix it up as much as possible. But if I had to pick a personal preference, it would be the big jets. The bigger the better. I'm also partial to older aircraft in any category. I think the vintage aircraft just look more elegant than some of today's planes. Some of the new aircraft today are built for efficiency and they are too smooth, too clean, and almost sterile looking. And considering my age, I've also flown on a lot of those old birds.

Breeze : It seems your 727 is in contention for being one of the most re-painted aircraft. You must be pleased with the acceptance within the flightsim world.

Mike: I'd be lying if I said I wasn't. Seeing how my designs are accepted is what makes it all worthwhile. Building a GMAX model is a lot of work, but its worth it when I see the download numbers adding up on one of my aircraft, or repaints being posted, or when my e-mail box fills up. It means my planes are being put to use, which is why I make them.

Breeze: It looks like you know G-Max like the back of your hand.

Mike: Well, I like to think that I have a pretty good handle on it, but I suspect its more like the back of my left pinky than the back of my hand. GMAX is extremely powerful, and with that comes complexity. It's been a learn-as-I-go experience and I learn some new tricks with every model I make. I find myself saying "Wish I had known that 6 months ago" after I discover I had been doing something the hard way all along. Which always makes me wonder just what else I haven't discovered yet.

Breeze : What do you have in mind for future projects?

Mike: That's hard to say, as I really don't plan much ahead. I try to judge the wind direction and go with whatever I'm getting the most requests for at the time. But it's a long request list. I also try to keep an eye on what other designers are up to so I don't duplicate someone else's efforts. Right now I'd have to say that the 757 is at the front of the line. I get a lot of requests for that. And the DC-10. I also get a lot of requests for a corporate jet, and I've got a couple of good candidates in mind. Toss in another bush plane and maybe another amphib (PB2M Mars???) and that should keep me busy for a while



You can see more of Mike Stone's aircraft at:
<http://www.avsim.com/hangar/utls/blade201/>



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FS Flightmax Update

How to keep your customers happy!

As I've been threatening to write an update on FSFlightMax ever since the original review appeared in this august publication, and not knowing how to compile it (there's that darn "C" word again - I'm doing too much AI work these days I guess), I had an idea.

For those users who might be a little behind the times with their toy, and those who may be wondering what it can do for them, here's what has been updated since good 'old FSFlightMax v1.1 hit the FS fraternity.

It's an object lesson in how to listen to, and keep your customers happy - for many of the 'fixes' and add-ins you'll see below derive directly from FSFM users and have been offered to the development team as something which others might like to see included.

Contact

Ken Malczynski
(Editor)

Rich Ellison
(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

Kyle Ramsey

Although things have quieted down somewhat since the heady days of it's first release, improvements continue to be made to the basic FIC, with the result that ever more information is now available at a click of the mouse button. And all this info is on hand without deterioration in frame speeds, and as you can see, the surround can be re-sized, placed on a panel and it's position can be saved for each aircraft that you may fly. A new *.ini configuration editor with a pleasing look (and a wealth of "skins" for more eye-appeal) can make short work of configuring the FIC to your own delicate tastes - including a *.bgl extractor which translates all the AFD files you've crammed into Flightsim since AFCAD appeared into visible information as to Airfields and NAVaids. All this - available "on the fly" (pun intended!)

If you have FSFM, take a wander through the listings below - maybe there's something there which will satisfy that small voice in your head that says, each time you fly,...."now, if I could do _this_ with FSFM, I'd be a much happier pilot.!"

And the best part is.....development is still going on!

Version 1.2 Pre-Release 1

01. Intersections now included
02. Airways now included
03. FDC hotkey incompatibility fixed
04. Missing radar returns fixed
05. Support for international versions of FS added
06. Crash whilst loading a flightplan during flight fixed
07. Crash whilst loading a flightplan containing strange characters fixed
08. Map not "remembering" navaid and declutter settings fixed
09. Navaid radius limit now configurable
10. Weather conditions radius now configurable
11. Display bug when going from "Traffic" to "System/Settings/OK" fixed
12. Some chart names appearing as "-" in "Manage Charts" fixed
13. Internet lookup re-enabled and now configurable
14. Terrain altitudes configurable via ini entry (feet or meters)
15. Completely resizable now (woohoo)
16. Massive speed improvements with database loading (300% faster)
17. Digital charts directory location now configurable
18. Digital charts load time now faster
19. Can now be powered off/on fairly quickly without access violations

Version 1.2 Pre-Release 2

01. Charts alternate directory location now working correctly
02. Charts maximum range increased to 200nm

(Author: Alt Air)

Terry Tyler
(Writer & Reviewer)

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03. Charts selection grid may now be scrolled a page at a time (using outer knob)
04. Charts selection grid now sorted by chart name
05. Charts "Type" filters now functional (ALL, IFRH, IFRL, SEC, TAC, WAC/ONC)
06. Flightplan selection now grid based not line based
07. Flightplan is now displayed on top of wx and lightning, not underneath
08. Initial support for FSMeteo
09. Rubbish value being displayed in "TO WPT+ETE" datablock entry fixed
10. Radar tilt operations re-enabled
11. Radar altitudes now correct (due to 10 above)
12. Radar gain now operational
13. TCAS symbols changed to match real FlightMax (advisory - closed yellow circle, proximate - white closed diamond, general - white open diamond)
14. No FSFlightMax button/knob sounds if sound is turned off in Flight Simulator
15. Radar stabilizer now functional

Version 1.2 Pre-Release 3

01. Maximum number of flightplans that FSFlightMax can handle increased to 1000
02. Flickering introduced in 1.2 Pre-Release 2 fixed
03. Surround images with names different to day.bmp and night.bmp may now be used
04. Initial support for new ECW charts from AVGPSMAPS
05. Optimization option for those with color problems using digital charts
06. Map terrain texture showing through in TCAS screen fixed
07. Terrain scale now drawn on top of compass rose not underneath
08. Intermittent "Access Violations" experienced by some fixed
09. Initial support for FSMeteo online mode
10. Nearest airport information now displays all radio frequencies including ILS, Control Tower etc
11. Nearest airport information now includes the current airport (this was excluded previously)
12. "About" removed from the "FSFlightMax" menu. Version info is now on the main FSFlightMax startup page
13. "Nearest" grid may now be scrolled a page at a time by holding down the Shift key when clicking the lower knob
14. Airport information page may now be scrolled by line or by page
15. Airport information may now be copied to the FS kneeboard
16. Size and position of FSFlightMax may now be stored on a per-aircraft basis
17. Icons removed from message center, causing resource shortages (quicker now too)
18. Message center messages limited to 500, massive load speed improvements
19. Initial Special Use Airspace (SUAS) data: Flight Information Regions, Restricted Airspaces, Prohibited Airspaces.
20. Radar tilt altitude now calculated correctly when radar is tilted down
21. Bug with chart snapping back to center when "Untethered" fixed
22. Extra checks added for some code dealing with non-english versions of Flight Simulator
23. Radar tilt angles now cannot be changed if radar stabilizer is on (as per real FlightMax)



Terry Tyler
August 2002



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(Writer & Reviewer)

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I know there are a few of us who just love flying these Mustangs. So here is a piece of scenery that may interest you, by Michael Carr at FSMC Designs. You can download it at www.avsim.com filename: mland.zip



Mustang Landing, a small vintage airfield, located just north of Los Angeles, near Camarillo, It's the perfect place for vintage-minded pilots. Detailed scenery featuring custom textures, night lighting, vintage hangers, refueling, people and vintage static's, including a hot air balloon and P-51 Mustangs. With all the textures available for the P-51, (around 40 that I know of) and a little AI experience (you know who you are) You can make the landing come alive with different textured P51's.





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Contact

[Ken Malczynski](#)

(Editor)

[Rich Ellison](#)

(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

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(Author: Alt Air)

Terry Tyler

(Writer & Reviewer)

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Pilot Number: 2047

Ron is a long time Pilot of TCA who in the real life spends his time sailing around the Caribbean in his boat. He has a laptop computer which he uses to fly for TCA in his spare time and when he comes into harbour he E-mails his PIREPs into the office.

Just another fine example of the true spirit of TCA. Keep it up Ron!!





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Alternate Air

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Tradewind Domestic Seaplane Service

Nick glanced at his watch, it was 7:48 p.m. and Amanda was late. He had arrived at the restaurant at 7:15 and was seated quickly by the matre d' who seemed annoyed that Nick wasn't ready to sit. He sipped his water and waved at the waiter walking by.

"Hey could I get something from the bar, please?"

"Why certainly, senior, what would you like?"

"I'll have a shot of Patron Anejo Tequila and a Medalla beer, please."

"Bueno, senior, I'll be right back with your order."

The drink would help Nick settle down. What a day it had been, it had been one high point after another. And Johnny Issacs had treated him like an older brother; he just might get to like that guy.

The day began with Nick arriving at the office Karen had shown him the night before by 0730. The whole building was now crowded, more than usual he guessed, as today was the grand opening of the Tradewind Domestic Seaplane Service. Nick picked his way up the stairs past two men chatting about the price of avgas and headed for his office. Johnny intercepted him at the top of the stairs.

"Nick! Hello, so glad to see you made it, quite a mess, isn't this?"

"Sure, I guess I didn't expect this crowd, what's up and what do you want me to do?"

"Yes, well we have a staff meeting at 0830 in the conference room down this hall, then we have to prepare for the press conference out on the maintenance pier at 1100. I will introduce you and you may have to answer a few questions for the reporters. Nice tie, what happened to your face, you in a crash?"

"Oh, a couple of the other TDM guys and I had a run with some locals last night, nothing broken and we won, thanks for asking."

"How come every time your name comes up there is some violent activity going on?"

"I am not a violent person, but lately it has been seeking me out, I'm just responding to a world full of idiots God put here to annoy me. And yes, I have a tie, and I know how to tie it on too. You're not expecting me to wear it a lot, are you?"

"No, when you fly you don't need it, but I would keep it and a clean button shirt in your office for when customers or government types drop by and we need to properly entertain. I know you don't like them but they are a reality of modern business, and we don't want potential customers to think we're a bunch of cowboy pilots, do you?"

"We are a bunch of cowboy pilots. By the way, when do I get to meet my pilots?"

"I said we don't want them to think we're cowboys, your tie will go a long way, keep it handy. I have called a pilot's meeting for you in Hanger 2 at 2 p.m. a couple of them are out right now but the other three are here and they are anxious to meet you, they've heard a lot about you."

"The other three? Exactly how many pilots do we have?"

"Counting you, five, with one new hire coming next week."

"Five, gonna be six. That's not very many, is it? How many airplanes and routes?"

"Well I knew you liked to fly, so I factored that in. It's OK with me if you only make the office once or twice a week. Mostly I need you at our staff meetings and for business development meetings, both weekly right now. I'll have a lot of details at the 0830 meeting on routes and assets, even a report on seaplane base development. And you

can stay in that suite you used last night for the next six months, then we'll see what's next at that time."

"Five pilots. That puts a few things in perspective for me. Yeah that suite is nice, thanks. OK, then the next meeting is at 0830, is there some coffee I can get around here?"

"There's a break room downstairs with coffee, go grab a cup and get settled in your office and I'll see you in a bit."

Johnny whisked off, greeting another group talking in a doorway down the hall. Nick headed downstairs, found the coffee and maneuvered back up the staircase to his office. He shut the door and walked over to the chair behind the desk. Opening the thin middle drawer he found a couple of tablets, and couple of notebooks, and a selection of pens, pencils, highlighters, and colored markers. The other drawers were empty except for some dividers.

Nick sat down and spun the chair around toward the computer on the table behind the desk. He flipped the power switch on and it booted quickly, with a nice TCA logo desktop screen. Nick would have to have a look later to see what goodies the computer had on it. He rose and walked to the window looking out over the harbor. He could see the 185 they flew into San Juan the previous night moored in the slip near one of the piers. A DeHaviland Otter was moored next to it and Nick could see a Bombardier CL415 parked in one hanger with the engines being serviced it appeared. He could see the tail boom of what could only be a Bell Model 47. That must be his helicopter that Johnny mentioned; well he had to share it with the maintenance crew. San Juan harbor should be a blast to buzz around in that old fling winged beast.

He thought about Amanda and the fight last night, touching his swollen cheek. He was excited to see her again at 1100 for the press conference. How exactly she took out that last guy before he split Nick's head open was still fuzzy, he'd have to ask her when he saw her later. He was sure glad she did show up when she did because that guy had mortal injury to Nick on his mind, there was no doubt. Exactly how they got into that brawl was also fuzzy. Ole and Robert were being a little weird, but it didn't seem to add up to those guys wanting a piece of Nick and his friends. Man, he really did seem to attract people who needed a thumping, starting with Bahama Bob's gang and now this. He wondered if those guys last night had anything to do with Bob's outfit, but still no reason why was apparent? They did know they were TDM pilots, although Nick didn't remember announcing that to anyone. Well, except for that guy, the businessman who bought them a beer. Could he be involved with last night's mess?

Nick's thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Mr. Collins?" An attractive woman of about 35 with short black hair leaned into the room through the door.

"Mr. Collins, I am Sabrina Quiones, your administrative assistant, good morning, I see you already have coffee, I guess you found the break room."

"Yes, good morning," Nick shook her hand, she had a firm grip for a woman. "Pardon my ignorance, but just exactly is an administrative assistant? Is that like a secretary or something?"

"An admin assistant is like a secretary like a surgeon is a car mechanic. My job is to make you look good, be on time, never miss a deadline, save you from butchering the English language in correspondence, keep idiots out of your office while making the good ones feel like they are at home. Whatever this office needs to succeed, I probably know how to do it. You have one job, really, make money for this airline and keep me employed. You owe me one thing, so far, and that is be kept in the loop about almost everything in your life. Without that, I don't have a chance to provide you with the best professional environment it will be your pleasure to experience. I also provide these services to a couple of the other staff members, so I'm also not an exclusive deal for you. Do not forget this, OK? Now, we have ten minutes before we go into the staff meeting, sit down."

Nick realized his mouth was hanging open in the face of this barrage. He obediently slid backwards toward the chair behind his desk. Sabrina sat in one of the smaller armchairs in front of the desk. She opened her notebook, scanned down the page, then looked back at Nick.

"Call me Sabrina."

"Call me Nick. Sorry if I offended you, it's just been a while since I worked anywhere near an office, so I'm afraid I might have a few old fashioned ideas. But I listen well and learn better, and I like straight talkers, Sabrina, so thanks for getting me straight on this administrative assistant thing, it won't happen again."

"OK, I like straight talkers too, but you're a pilot, and I know pilots. My father flew for the Coast Guard out of Borinquen for years, so I know all about pilots."

"Well, those guys are hero pilots, very different from freight dogs like me. I'll let you be the judge of which is worse, and I'll try to behave, I promise."

"I'll keep an eye out and let you know, but I got to say I am underwhelmed with your crew so far, we'll get to them. Johnny has assigned me to you for a few days to get your office started, so try to keep up with me, OK?"

Nick opened the desk drawer and took out a notebook and a pen. He wrote his name in the top right hand corner of the outer cover and put today's date under it.

"I am all yours."

Sabrina launched into a blaze of information. Nick wrote furiously but kept having to stop her to add some detail missed as he wrote. She covered the meeting schedules, the reports due and when, planning meetings, key contacts, and some of the rules of the TCA office world. The details she had and threw at him in an incredibly short time made him feel like he was drinking from a fire hose. Then she glanced at her watch.

"OK, time to go to the conference room. Do you think you have any personal plans today I should know about? We'll get to the rest of your life soon enough."

"I do have hopes of taking a lovely journalist to dinner tonight, is that going to be a problem?"

"A pilot and a reporter, bad combination. As long as it doesn't start before about 1830 we should be OK. Let's go to work, Nick."

They walked together the short distance to the conference room. Johnny was already there, with Andre' Deiss and four other men and two woman he did not recognize. They all rose as Nick entered the room.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, as I promised, Mr. Nick Collins, our Chief Pilot," Andre' shook Nick's hand then turned to the first man next to Johnny.

"Hello, Nick, I'm Scott Dailey, the maintenance manager, you and I will get to work closely to keep those seaplanes flying."

"Great, I like maintenance guys, nice to meet you."

"Salvatore Benedinni, I am the Seaplane Division Operations Manager. Johnny hired me from a similar operation in the Greek Islands. Please call me Sal."

"It is a pleasure, Sal. I guess that means you run the day to day around here?"

"That's right, Johnny has enough to do running TDM and those pirates he calls pilots out on St John."

Johnny laughed loudly, "Nick is one of those pirates, Sal, watch it. I stole him right off The Roost itself."

"Is that right? Well, we'll have things to talk about later then."

Nick held his smile longer on purpose to keep from scowling. The next man stepped forward.

"Francisco Morales, Nick, I mange the freight and passenger operations, and am in charge of new seaplane base construction too."

"OK, the revenue part of the business."

"I'm Miguel Rodriguez, nice to meet you. I am the comptroller, the guy who pays all the bills."

"A pleasure."

"Hello Nick, I am Carmella Martinez, the office manager, and I run the office and the computer systems, including the web site."

"We have a web site, cool."

"Of course we have a web site, Nick," Andre' said, "If you're not on the Internet, you're not on. Lastly I'd like you to meet Barbara Camarillo, she is a marketing consultant I have hired to help get the word out."

"Glad to meet you, Nick, I'd like to take a ride with you soon to help me get a better flavor for seaplanes."

"I think we can surely do that, Barbara, it will be my pleasure."

The door opened and a small, well-dressed man with his hair slicked back walked in.

"Ah, Nick, and this is Juan Conseco, he is my Public Relations man for TCA. Juan, this is Nick Collins, our Chief Pilot for the Seaplane Division."

"Got here in the 'nick' of time, hey Nick," he smiled

"Yes, I guess I did," Nick said, trying to hid his displeasure with the pun.

Andre' walked to the front of the room and pulled down a projection screen.

"If everyone will sit down we'll get started. I just have a few remarks then I'll turn it over to Johnny. "

"First I want to thank you all for putting together this team to dive into the seaplane market, an unlimited number of runways, if you will, so an huge, untapped market. It also gives me great pleasure to see this Seaplane Division of prop airplanes spring from the birth of the TCA airlines many years ago with a rented Beech 18. I will be with you today until after the press conference, then I must rush back to Curacao in the Gulfstream. And Aaron sends his regards. He is up in Wichita talking to the Cessna people about some airplane orders. And now, Johnny."

Andre walked to his seat and Johnny sprang up

"OK folks, we have a tight schedule today, so let's get started. We have a lot of ground to cover."

Johnny nodded at Sabrina sitting at a computer terminal. The screen lit up with a big golden trident, the TDS logo. He then launched into what seemed to Nick to be another incredible stream of information about the seaplane business and the company strategy. Johnny started off with a series of graphs predicting the growth of the business in various locations, competitors, and logistics issues like the local cost of avgas.

Nick also began to get a better feel for the aircraft and routes they would be flying as Johnny talked.. The current fleet inventory included twin radial and turboprop Canadair water bombers converter for passenger and cargo, Gumman Albatross and a Goose, then some single engine Cessnas, two turboprop C208's, two 206's, and two 185's. And one Bell 47 and a Hughes 500 helicopter. There was even talk about a restored old four-engine Clipper someone knew where to get and flying some nostalgia flights in grand luxury.

TDS had the main base here in San Juan harbor and several piers around Puerto Rico, east to the Virgins, northwest through the Turks, Caicos, Bahamas, and the Florida Keys, and bases under construction in Hispaniola. Jamaica was the next island that needed scouting, that would be one of Nick's first assignments and he would be leaving soon, he gathered. As the company picked up momentum the plan was to ring the entire Caribbean, bringing cargo and air taxi services to a large population that didn't live near an airport in areas with poor ground transportation resources.

They spent almost two hours going over many details. Johnny got bits of information from each of the others in the room. Nick didn't have much to give but sure seemed to be getting a lot of things to go figure out. He needed to meet his pilots, look over the routes, see about hiring more pilots, work with maintenance to keep costs low, find more pilots, and go scout Jamaica for new bases using Kingston as the island base. And in his spare time he could locate other airworthy seaplanes, keep an eye out for new revenue making ideas, and finding new pilots. Oh, and he could fly some too. Nick flipped back through three pages of notes in his notebook as Juan Conseco got up and Johnny sat down.

"OK, we're on in just over thirty minutes. We all have chairs on the stage behind the podium. I will open by introducing this staff and welcoming the reporters and introducing Andre', who is followed by Johnny. After a few remarks Johnny will open it up to questions. Then we break up into smaller groups and take select reporters and some local officials around the facility using the golf carts. We should be done by 1 p.m. in time for Andre' to get to the airport. Then we all have work to do."

The meeting broke up and Nick left the room with Sabrina right behind him

"Nick, we have about thirty minutes to go make some plans, let's go to your office."

They went over the notes, and Nick noticed Sabrina's eye for detail was a lot better than his, she didn't miss anything. She helped him put together a quick agenda for his pilot's meeting at three, and got some information so she could get him a hotel room in Kingston for the day after tomorrow so he could have his first look around the island. He was also scheduled to fly each of the aircraft with the maintenance chief to start developing procedures to squeeze all the life out of these machines as possible at the lowest cost.

Before he knew it they were in a large golf cart and headed for the pier where they were set up for the grand opening. They mounted the stairs to the podium and Nick scanned the audience for Amanda. He saw her and noticed she had already found him; they traded a short wave and a smile. Sabrina leaned over toward Nick's year.

Is this the reporter with whom you are having dinner?"

"I sure hope so."

"Hmm, a pretty reporter and a pilot, strike three."

Contact

[Ken Malczynski](#)

(Editor)

[Rich Ellison](#)

(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

[Kyle Ramsey](#)

(Author: Alt Air)

Terry Tyler

(Writer & Reviewer)

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"I'll take that as a complement."

"You can take it to the bank. I'll make sure she gets in our golf cart for the tour, how's that for a good sport?"

"You're the best, Sabrina."

"Yes, I am, don't you forget it, pilot."

Juan stood at the podium and opened up with a welcome, then he introduced the staff on the stage. Nick stood and nodded his head quickly then returned to his chair. Juan droned on for a few minutes then he introduced Andre' who spoke for a few minutes. Next Johnny was introduced and spoke for about 15 minutes before opening the floor to questions. The questions went on for thirty minutes, none of them required Nick to speak up, and a good thing because he didn't feel like he knew squat yet. Then Johnny closed the questions and invited the interested reporters to join them for a short tour of the San Juan harbor facility. The staff left the stage and headed for the golf carts. Sabrina walked over to a dark haired man, said something to him and pointed at Amanda. He nodded and Sabrina rejoined Nick.

"Jump in this cart, you drive, I'll talk. Your date will be joining us."

Nick drove the cart into a line behind the others as they approached a queuing line of reporters. As they drew up, the dark haired man tugged on Amanda's blouse and she stepped forward, then he filled the rest of the cart with other reporters. Amanda sat behind Nick with a broad smile. Sabrina turned to the passengers.

"Welcome to our short tour. We'll first go over to the maintenance hangers, then to the piers, executive suites, and crew quarters and we'll wind up back here for a short tour of the headquarters building. Please ask any questions you might have as we go, don't hold back."

They drove from spot to spot and Nick would stop and let the group hop out and poke around while Sabrina talked about the construction and the capabilities of each building. Nick continued to be impressed with what this woman could capture in her brain. He and Amanda didn't get a chance to talk until they had returned to the main building and parked. Sabrina turned to Nick.

"Why don't you take your friend and show her your office. I'll handle the rest of the tour."

Nick and Amanda walked up the stairs to Nick's office and he closed the door behind them.

"Whew! And you do this reporter thing for a living, huh?"

"Yes, I get paid to do this, amazing isn't it. Well Nick, I must say I'm very impressed with this operation, sounds like you have a winner.

"Amanda, I am so happy to see you. I wish you had called or something to let me know you were coming."

"It kind of came up quickly, sorry, I had to move quickly to make it too. I was headed to Cape Cod before I heard about this. I also was able to swing an interview with your big boss Andre' Deiss, so there was no way I could pass it up; the Cape will just have to wait."

"Great, well Andre' is leaving right after this, when are you going to interview him?"

"I am supposed to meet him after lunch in three days, so I got three days to burn, and check out the local digs. I'd sure like to have some company if you know of anyone who might be available."

"Today I can't leave until after 6:30. Sabrina said so."

"The woman with us on the tour? Is she your boss?"

"No, but I think she must run the place. She's the staff administrative assistant, and I can't do anything without her knowledge, apparently."

"Admin assistant, the bane of all reporters. I'll bet she's a good one, she has an air of deep confidence about her, and she sure knew a lot out the tour."

"You're not kidding, I don't think anything gets past her. Hey, let's make plans for dinner."

They found a phone book and looked up a nice seafood restaurant not too far and agreed to meet there just after 7 p.m. Nick explained he had meetings all afternoon but he was really looking forward to spending some time with her tonight. He also told her he was off to Jamaica to scout new locations the day after tomorrow, so they would have to say goodbye and he would have to leave her here to catch a flight to Willamsted in time for her interview.

There was a knock at the door and Sabrina leaned in.

"Nick, we need to be over at the hanger for your pilot meeting in ten minutes."

"Sabrina, I'd like you to meet my friend Amanda Bert. Amanda, Sabrina Quiones."

"Nice to meet you Amanda. Let me give you my number because if anyone will know where he is at any given moment it will be me."

"Why thank you," said Amanda as she dug her day planner out of her purse.

They traded information then Sabrina turned to Nick.

"Time to go, nice to meet you Amanda."

"Amanda, I'll see you tonight." He reached over and gave her a quick hug. A lot quicker than he wanted but after last night he wanted to be more careful.

They walked downstairs and hopped in a cart, Sabrina driving as she talked, giving Nick more details. They pulled up to the hangar and she brought the cart to a quick stop, the tires sliding a bit on the loose gravel. She led him into a large briefing room inside the hangar, explaining this was where the pilots could do their preflight work and meet for training and meetings. Inside the room were several desks with a chair under each one. At one end was a large wooden table with eight chairs around it and a white board near one end. On the walls was a large map of the Caribbean with pushpins showing the various locations and their state of use or construction. There were also pictures on the wall of various seaplanes from the 1930's to the more modern designs. Well, as modern as they are. They would be flying Korea era twin props, at least the Canadair's were a bit more modern and he was looking forward to flying them. He had experience in the Albatross and Goose, so they would be no trouble.

At 1 p.m. precisely by Nick's watch, the door opened and three young men walked in the door and toward the table where Nick and Sabrina had already set up their notebooks.

They introduced themselves in turn, then took a seat. His new pilots didn't look old enough to shave. The first was an island local named Hipolito Santos but the other two were imported from the States, Curtis Black of Chicago and Tony Jessup of Mobile. All three had good experience flying seaplanes. When they say down, Nick told them a little about his background. He had flown more prop aircraft types than he could count, probably more than most pilots. But then most pilots move quickly into the Big Iron cockpits and fly only a couple of aircraft types after that. Nick just had a love for props that kept any desire to fly Big Iron from encroaching into his flying life. He told them he was meeting with the maintenance manager later that day to start working up some procedures for them to use. Then tomorrow he was going to fly some of the types he was less familiar with and wanted them to fly copilot with him and a check pilot in the jump seat so he could talk about the way he liked airplanes to be treated and how to stay on time. Nick stressed being on time as one of his pet peeves and he wanted them to develop the habits that keep pilots on time, mostly knowing their aircraft, airports, or in this case harbors, and they needed to know their customers. Happy customers keep airplanes filled with cargo and passengers that folks will trade us money for, Nick explained. Full airplanes equal full employment. Nick also talked about safety and how it was important that they not shrink back from weather when it is a bit crappy, but also do nothing to place yourself, your cargo or passengers, or the airplane in peril. The old flying adage was that when you die on a bad weather day they would bury you on a sunny day.

They agreed to meet the next morning at 0730 at the hanger to begin flying. The young pilots hung around a few minutes telling Nick how much they were looking forward to flying with him, how they'd heard so much about his prop flying skills. Nick thanked them all again then he and Sabrina were off to the next hanger to chat with the maintenance chief.

Sabrina walked briskly, leading Nick toward the next hanger. Scott Dailey was waiting for them at the hangar door and led them into his office.

"Nick, the secret to making money in the small airplane business is twofold. First we must squeeze every ounce of gas mileage out of these birds, and second we must make them and all the little parts inside last as long as possible. Broken airplanes cost money, not make it."

"I couldn't agree with you more, and I'm sure we can teach these young pilots how to fly them for profit."

"I understand you intend to fly several of the airplanes tomorrow?"

"Yes, I haven't flown either of the Canadairs, although I know those engines well enough. I have time in both the Grummans and the single engines Cessnas are my bread and butter. I need some time with the check pilot in the Canadairs to get signed off, and a quick ride with him in the two Grummans will bring my logbook up to date. I also want to fly with my youngsters and show them how I want them to fly."

"That sounds great, good plan. Do you want to go over some of the performance charts and maintenance details now?"

"You bet. Sabrina, are you going to listen to all this too?"

"No, I guess not. I think I'll head back to the office and get some other work done, and get your hotel set for day after tomorrow."

"Yeah, Jamaica. Say, I'd like to take one of the twin props if possible."

"How many days you gonna be gone?" asked Scott.

"This is just a survey flight, I don't think more than two days, maybe three."

"OK, I can spare a Goose for a couple of days. Sabrina can you let the dispatcher know Nick will take a Goose for a couple of days?"

"Be happy to. You gentlemen have fun with your charts."

And they did. As it turned out, Scott was also a pilot so he understood the operational side of flying as well as the wear that places on an aircraft. They talked and solved a hundred little problems for the next few hours. They reviewed the performance charts, calculated full load take off runs and got out maps to measure the designated waterways to ensure each aircraft could make it, or to make sure the larger aircraft weren't tasked to those with less than optimal water runways. They calculated full load fuel burns and set goals for each aircraft the pilot could gauge his or her actual performance against. Nick would also work to find settings and configurations that might yield even better numbers.

They spent the last thirty minutes together working out a few weight and balance problems, standing inside the

cargo bays of the aircraft with a measuring tape and an electronic E6B flight computer checking their calculations against the weight and balance charts. Scott would have some load guides put together and placed in each aircraft's book with suggested layouts and weight distribution configurations for cargo and passenger configurations, as well as mixed. Nick and Scott had agreed early these were the tools the pilots needed to be fast and efficient, provide job aids that helped them get the answers right more often and lots quicker. Large airlines had central computers that did all this from the comfort of the air-conditioned dispatch office at the local airport. Where the Seaplane Service was flying, even air-conditioning would be hard to find, computers were out of the question. The pilots would be on their own and needed good answers. Nick looked at his watch and saw it was 1730.

"Wow, having too much fun, Scott, but I need to go check back in with Sabrina and then I have a date in two hours."

"Sabrina is in charge, isn't she? She does great work, makes us all look good, so cooperate with her and you'll like the results, believe me"

"I am very quickly figuring this out. Is she up for sainthood or something?"

Scott let out a huge laugh, "No, but I can relate to that feeling. See you in the morning with your pilots, Nick, it has been a lot of fun working together, we'll do some more as these things start breaking, work to solve problems together."

"I look forward to it, sir, good night."

He headed back to the office and found the building nearly empty as he walked up stairs to his office. He walked in but it was too quiet and undisturbed. He turned to leave as the door opened.

"Not so fast, I have you until 1830 pal," Sabrina said as she grabbed chair and slid it over toward the computer table behind his desk.

"Sit down and let me show you a few tricks with this computer."

Nick sat down in his big chair and pulled out his notebook. Sabrina went over email, the calendar system, the web site, and the staff web site with its own password. She showed Nick how to navigate the TCA dispatch system and to look up maintenance and other performance records they kept on the aircraft. There was a report generator that would slice and dice the data more ways than Nick had thought possible and produce slick color graphs that he could print to any one of four printers or even upload it to the web site for others to see. Nick looked at his watch; it was 1815. He looked at Sabrina who was showing no signs of slowing down anytime soon.

Sabrina opened the cabinet below the monitor.

"This, by the way, is a laptop in a docking station. You can take this computer with you when you travel and use

the modem to call into the system so all this can be at your fingertips almost anywhere in the world."

"Almost, many of our locations won't have phone lines, just cell phones and radios."

"If that becomes a problem I can look into satellite uplinks, but they are pricey. Oh and here is your cell phone, the number is written inside the instruction booklet in the box."

This was way more organization than Nick needed in his life.

"It may take some getting used to, all this. I'm not that sophisticated, you know."

"They can become indispensable tools if you'll learn to use them."

"We'll see, I'll give them a try."

"Try more than just try, OK? Now, it is time for you to go get ready for meeting Amanda, I'll see you in the morning."

"Thanks Sabrina, I'll be in before 0700."

The waiter brought Nick his drinks just as he saw Amanda arrive at the front of the restaurant. He waved to her and she walked over, the waiter taking her drink order of a margarita.

"Well, how was the first day on the job?"

"Unreal, at times I wondered what the hell I was doing here. The morning was full of office stuff, and staff meetings, and meeting Sabrina, what a pistol she is. The afternoon was a lot more fun, talking to my pilots and working with the maintenance chief setting up preference guidelines for the aircraft."

"Sounds like you had fun. You looked so intense sitting on the stage at the press conference, and were so quiet during the tour."

"Just trying to pay attention and not embarrass myself. Plus Sabrina didn't need any help on the tour."

"I agree, she was very helpful. So when are you going to Kingston?"

"I have to be there by lunch day after tomorrow, why?"

"I was just thinking, I don't have to be in Willamsted for another day after that. I was thinking, if you don't think it will be a problem, that I might go along with you to Kingston and pick up a flight out of there. What do you think? I'll pay my own way"

"I think that's a great idea! We can get up early and make the flight. Scott . . ., oh he's the maintenance chief, he gave me a Goose for the trip, so we can leave when we want."

"What's a Goose?"

"Grumman G-21 Goose, it's an amphibious seaplane, twin radial engines, does about 150 knots when all is right with the world, but operates well in open ocean water. Jimmy Buffett has one, maybe you have seen a picture of it."

"Oh sure, I've seen his airplane at St Maarten before. Sounds like fun."

They ordered dinner and continued to make plans. Being a travel writer, Amanda had a wealth of knowledge of Jamaica as she reeled off a number of sights to see and places to eat or just hang out and watch the tides change. Nick pointed out he had to work the afternoon and wanted to fly the island, maybe test out a few waterways to plan the next day's survey work. She asked if she could tag along for that and he didn't see why not. After all he was the chief pilot, seems like he can make those sorts of decisions.

Talk then turned to making plans for tomorrow. Nick told her he planned to start before 0700 and spend most of the day flying the airplanes and working with the pilots. He also had a meeting with Francisco Morales to see the current routes and contracts they had as well as the ones they were working on. Nick was also expected to prospect for business in his daily work and travels so he needed to know what was going on and how to get customers plugged into the Seaplane's business office without delay or inconvenience. Amanda said she planned to take a walking tour of Antigua San Juan and maybe do a short piece for an insert on a larger article on the city and Puerto Rico. It's those little boxes of extra information you see embedded into an article; they don't pay a lot but they keep a writer's name in front of the publishers, she explained. Then some shopping in the downtown for some clothes as it looked like she might be hanging around the Caribbean a bit longer than she had first expected, news that was not lost on Nick.

"So you will be around after your meeting with Andre'?"

"It looks like it, not very long, but probably another week. I'll stay in Willemsted for a couple of nights too, longer if I get over to Aruba. But I can probably swing by wherever you are on my way back to the States. Sounded like Sabrina can locate you for me, so that should be easy, unless you wind up in some God forsaken spot even she can't reach you."

"Hey, I've got Satellite uplink for my laptop, whatever that is. You can find me if I can figure out how to log on the thing, even has batteries so I can log on in the air. As if you could fly and run this thing too."

"On the autopilot?"

"Hmm, yeah, as long as you could set it up in the cockpit, the right seat maybe, you could run it in areas with light traffic, but someone would have to be looking outside all the time who could also do something about it, like

dodge."

They finished their dinner with a glass of wine then left and walked outside. Nick and Amanda walked down toward her hotel, four blocks down the street. They finalized their plans to meet the following night for dinner and to go hear some local bands. They stopped outside the doors of the hotel and turned to each other. Amanda smiled brightly as she stared into Nick's eyes.

Kiss her, he thought. No, too soon, wait for her to give you a sign. She smiled, wasn't that a sign? Maybe he should just go ahead. He was about to explode.

"Well, thank you for a lovely dinner, Nick, and congratulations on your new job."

She held out her hand. Nick shook it, his heart sinking.

"Thanks, I had a great time too. I guess I'll see you tomorrow. You'll pick me up at my suite at seven, right?"

"That's right, seven it is, good night."

She turned and walked toward the door. Nick walked toward the street to catch a cab.

"Nick!"

He turned to see her standing with the door half-open, looking back over her shoulder. He took a couple of steps back toward her.

"Yeah?"

"It OK to think about me tonight. I'll be thinking about you."

She winked at him, pulled the door all the way open and walked inside, the door slowly closing behind her.

Nick's heart almost leaped out of his chest. He turned back toward the street and hailed a cab, one slid over toward him quickly and he hopped inside.

Nick thought it would be hard for him to think about almost anything else tonight. He sat back in the seat and relaxed after directing the driver to his suite. After pulling out into the street the cab driver reached over and turned up the radio. The station was playing a Bob Marley tune, Is This Love.

I'm willing and able
So I throw my cards on your table
See I wanna love you, I wanna love and treat
You right, I wanna love you, every day and every night
We'll be together, with a roof right over our heads
We'll share the shelter, of my single bed
We'll share the same room, JAH provide the bread

- 12 -

Red Eye to Hato

Carlos Cardenas was a short, balding man with bowed legs and a wrinkled face, but he was one of the best known seaplane pilots in the islands and supported his retirement by giving checkrides, still holding his Designated Examiner license from the FAA. He was tough but very fair, and didn't mind showing you a few tricks.

He sat in a jump seat behind Nick on the left and Tony Jessup was in the co-pilot's seat on the right in the Canadair CL415 twin turboprop, the heaviest lifting aircraft they had. Nick had taxied them out into the harbor and lined up into the wind for a takeoff. Tony read off the checklist as Nick checked and set each item, then called for a takeoff.

Nick shoved the throttles forward and the props bit deep into the air, the airplane lurching ahead into the water. They picked up speed as the aircraft slid up on the wave it was pushing ahead of it, then it broke free of the water and rose into the sky. When they were about 300 feet in the air, Carlos reached forward and pulled the number one engine power handle to the idle position.

"You make it look too easy, Nick, let's see how it does on single engine, shall we?"

Nick quickly smiled over his shoulder at Carlos while he and Tony whipped through the procedure.

"No problem, this turboprop has power to spare," he said as the aircraft stabilized under the one engine. When they had reached about 1000 feet, Carlos slid the handle back to the flight position and the engine roared back to life while Nick retrimmed the aircraft. Nick looked over at Tony.

"What is the fuel flow showing in this climb configuration, make sure you get it recorded."

"Don't worry Nick, I already have it here, I knew before you asked this time."

Nick had been flying since daylight, now eight hours past with a short break for lunch. The CL415 was Nick's last checkride with Carlos for the day but he had been working the young pilots hard all day, making them record and re-record data to confirm his and Scott's calculations from the previous day. They turned the aircraft to the north

and flew out over the water to get clear of the air traffic in the area. When they had put about 40 miles between them and San Juan, Carlos had Nick go through a couple of other maneuvers, steep turns and stalls, then Tony did the same. Then Nick took the controls and Chandelled up to about 5000 feet, then Tony took it for an emergency descent. Carlos smiled broadly after Tony leveled off at 2000 feet.

"OK, you boys need to show me a short field landing at the airport of your choice and we'll be able to call it a day. And a long one it has been. Nick, I've flown with you many times in the past but you have worked my butt off today. Wait until you get my bill."

"We'll gladly pay it, Carlos, you do great work. I sure thank you for letting me and my pilots caught up on our type ratings and checkrides. I have been stressing the importance of safety and pilot proficiency to them as the solution to so many problems that come up during a flight."

"You got that right. There are no shortcuts to this type of flying. Well, none anyone will live long using." He reached over and slapped Tony on the shoulder. "You boys will do well to listen to this old prop jockey. He may be a little crusty, but he sure knows the props. I never fly with him without learning something new."

"Ditto here, Carlos, you still have some good tricks yourself. Tony, head toward Dorado and we'll drop in there for the short fields then we can slid back to the harbor from the west and avoid the mess over Marin airport."

"Roger, Dorado it is."

Tony started to lose altitude and turned toward Dorado. Nick pulled out the flight manual and began checking the set up and airspeeds for the short filed landing in this aircraft, reading out important points as he read for Tony's benefit. Nick tuned the ATIS to get the wind, barometric pressure and temperature then went back to a page in the flight manual with graphs where he dragged his finger across the graph, then looked up.

"My read is this landing can be done in 1350 feet, give or take a few. Reversing props are nice for this sort of work."

"That sounds about right, let's do it then. You going first, Nick?"

"No, Tony can do the first one, right Tony?"

"Be happy to show you the new guy can handle this aircraft, sir."

"That's the spirit son. Why don't you give me the wheels on the second centerline marker, touch and then we'll go see if the old dog can find his way back to the runway."

Nick grinned at Carlos, "Funny. He's funny, isn't he Tony"

Tony ignored them both as he set up for the approach. Carlos looked over at Nick.

"Nick, I wanted to ask you about something, something I heard."

"Sure, anything Carlos."

"Have you guys gotten any orders to carry unusual payloads into Colombia for any private contractors?"

"To be honest I don't know for sure. I know we have TDM routes there now, Colombia is not new to this airline. Why do you ask?"

"Maybe it is nothing, but I have picked up some very odd tidbits lately about a contractor trying to get someone to haul some special freight into San Vicente, east of the Magdalena Valley. But when I poke into this thing, it looks like someone is trying to move some high-end military equipment down there. And there is only a couple of buyers of that sort out there "

"San Vicente, wow, that's pretty deep into FARC territory isn't it."

Tony glanced over at Nick, "What's the FARC?"

Nick looked at Carlos.

"Well, it kind of depends on who you ask. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia fall somewhere between patriots fighting for their freedom to murderers and thieves, kind of depends on your politics. Isn't that about right, Carlos?"

"You stateside Americanos see the rest of the world in such simple terms. The FARC is probably just a bunch of bandits in the end, but they are a force to be contended with. They have been in business since 1964 and have sure given the US-backed Colombian government a run for their money, to the point El Presidente Pastrana declared some of that area near Vicente as neutral. I read that as giving up myself as it really took some pressure off the FARC. They sure haven't slowed down on kidnappings, murder or extortion. I guess the only good part of it is they extort more from the drug makers down there than the rest of the population."

"And you think these guys are trying to get something interesting down there? From where?"

"Out of the US, I'm told, but it sounds like it may have gotten there through one of those torturous paths; you know the kind, the ones that make it hard on a customs man. Kind of like Sean's Little Locker."

"Yeah, I know the path you speak of. Sean's locker, huh, what do you know about that?"

"More than I want to already and I'd just as soon stay in denial on that one. You know that hole you guys live in has been home to misfit pilots, both the air and sea variety, for years. Piracy is just in the water over there."

Tony flared the aircraft and bumped the throttles up a fraction to add enough power to hold the aircraft in ground effect as it slid over the threshold. He chopped the throttles to idle as the aircraft settled right in the middle of the second centerline mark on the runway, then cleaned up the flaps and pushed the throttles forward, gaining speed until they rose into the air. On the downwind leg he gave the controls to Nick, who repeated the short field landing as well, then they climbed to 2000 feet and headed east toward San Juan.

"There is another group in town down there, Vicente, I mean. They came in from Argentina and Chile about a year ago. They claimed to be freedom fighters coming to join the FARC, and they were welcomed at first. But it turns out these mercenaries shocked the sensibilities of even the FARC's leadership who threw them out. Of course they just moved a few miles down the road and set up shop offering protection from the FARC and the government for the right price. The drug runners have been paying out the nose for years to the FARC for protection so they are enjoying letting these two competitors hammer it out. The free market system at its worse, I suppose."

"And you think these guys might be trying to get the hardware? Would they have the resources?"

"That is one of the mysteries, Nick. They seem to have flush pockets, a financier of some sort. I hear they have all of the best stuff, so maybe it is them, sure."

"And who do they protect the drug runners from? The FARC?"

"You might guess the biggest threat is to those who don't think anything bad will happen to them or their business. People who refuse protection have the worst luck."

"Oh yeah, we know that one in the States. Sounds like they would make the Mafia proud. Well, I will have a peek later and see what I can learn. I'll also see if we have had any odd inquiries along these lines. Thanks for the tip, Carlos."

"You just be careful, Nick, these are some bad fellows, not like those wimpy pilots Bahama Bob hires for you to beat up. These are professional anarchists and there are too many places to lose a body in these islands, if you know what I mean."

"You too? What is going on with Bahama Bob's people, do you have any idea?"

"I think they are just jealous of your success. Didn't Bob try to hire you away once?"

"Twice, and I told him No the first time and Hell No the second time."

"See, just a little Caribbean payback is all, try not to take it personally Nick," he laughed.

"You want me to not take people trying to bash my head open personally. How exactly would you suggest I take it then?"

"With aspirin would be my guess." He then leaned back laughing. Even Tony started to chuckle. Nick glared at him.

"You fly the airplane, young whipper-snapper. These guys of Bob's are not small people and they keep popping up at the weirdest places, wanting to fight, for God's sake. By the way Carlos, since you have such a good ear around here, did you hear me and some of the guys from the Roost got jumped in a little bar not far from the TDS piers?"

"No, sorry I didn't hear anything, but I'll keep an ear open for you, what happened?"

"Doyle, Robert, Ole and I were in there getting some chow and having a few beers. Ole and Robert got a little loud and these six guys materialize and decide they want to beat us up. Well, we just couldn't just stand there and let them so we waded into them. I think we were just one guy short of having the edge, because we almost whipped them all. There was one guy left in the end."

"One guy? You? Or you and one guy?"

"Hmm, well that part is a bit fuzzy, to tell you the truth. I think this last guy had the upper hand on me, the other guys were all out cold. But then Amanda came in and he went down, she must have chopped him from behind or something, but I never heard anything. He sank to the ground and she was standing behind him."

"Who's Amanda? She some black bag woman or something?"

"She is a woman I met in Cabo San Lucas as while back. She's a journalist covering the opening of TDS. By black bag do you mean spooks, spies, ravens, sneaky Pete's?"

"A woman you met, that called you back? Hmm, maybe she had some James Bond dart thing that paralyzed him, took him out and saved you."

"You have a vivid imagination, Carlos. I have obviously worked you too hard today, you're going soft in the brain. Tony, get us out of this airplane, boy."

"Well, look at who you were hanging with, that's the source of your problem. Those Five Commandments guys are trouble looking for a place to happen."

They all laughed as Tony set up a base leg approach to the harbor.

Amanda picked up Nick promptly at 7 p.m. in a cab. They found a small intimate café near the water and had dinner before walking down the street looking into shop windows on their way to a local live music venue. They talked about their day.

Nick's was easy; he did the same thing in several different aircraft but he told her how much fun he had even though it really did wear him out. He had also met with Francisco Morales and learned about the routes and what

they were looking for in Jamaica.

Amanda went into detail about her adventures. She started with a walking tours of El Morro and San Cristóbal forts, the main attractions in the 465 year old neighborhood of Antigua San Juan, with narrow streets and alleyways and cobblestones made from slag used as the ballast of Spanish ships hundreds of years ago. She shopped and took several photographs of the colorful shops and street merchants selling off wooden carts in the four plazas of the old city.

After lunch she took a cab into downtown San Juan and found a mall where she loaded up on a couple of new outfits and shoes, essentials, she assured Nick. Then she trucked her new threads back to her hotel and spent a few hours typing up her notes and downloading her pictures.

"You know email has really made my job so much easier, I can keep in touch with editors and other leads as well as send in material, all from my laptop in my hotel room."

"No kidding. When I got back to the office after flying all day Sabrina had gotten me a satellite uplink system, because I told her a lot of our spots won't even have phone links, she is something. But now I have something else to learn, dammit."

"A new toy, sounds like fun. Well it will keep you busy and out of trouble when I'm not around to keep an eye on you."

She reached over and took his hand, interlacing her fingers slowing into his, then pressing her palm into his. She looked at him and smiled broadly then they walked down the street toward the club. They found a small table with a couple of chairs and ordered a beer. The band was playing reggae favorites and weren't too bad, Nick thought. The music made him think of their upcoing flight in the morning.

"The Goose will be ready for us no later than 0630, and the flight is a good four hours, can you make it by 0630?"

"Sure, I'll have my bags packed and ready, no problem. Will I need to get a ticket?"

"No, you won't, this isn't a revenue making flight, and you are my guest."

"Four hours, all over water?"

"No, actually this is a nice route, the first part anyway. We take off out of the harbor then fly right down the middle of Puerto Rico, fly just north of Isla Mona then hug the southern coastline of Hispanioa . Then we go out over water for a long while, but unless the wind is just wicked, and its not supposed to be, it shouldn't be much more than four hours."

"Sounds very scenic, I can't wait. And I have never flown in a seaplane before, this will be a first too. You won't mind if I use some of this as material, do you?"

A thought flashed into Nick's head; was she just using him to get a story?

"No, sure, I don't mind, as long as you don't put everything in the story."

"Hmm, well, OK, not everything," she smiled at Nick.

"How long are you going to stay in Jamaica?"

"Just two days. I'm meeting a guy in Kingston who has already done some preliminary work. I just need to check his stuff out and make sure he didn't miss anything. You still going to be in Willamsted for a week?"

"Yes, it should be a good trip though, I have a couple of leads for good material in that area. I have found a ride out of Kingston late that day for Willamsted. Sorry, it's your competition, Royal Islands. I'm catching a ride on a red-eye cargo flight, it was all I could find."

"We have flights from Kingston to Hato, don't we?"

"Your last one leaves Kingston about 11:30 a.m., that would be too tight for the flight we would be making. Besides I wouldn't get to fly in the afternoon with you. My flight doesn't leave until about 9 p.m. I don't meet with Andre until that afternoon so I'll have plenty of time to grab some sleep and get cleaned up."

"Royal Islands huh, why don't you just stomp on my ego."

"Oh good grief, it's a cargo hop, no frills. Don't worry, I promise TCA will stay my favorite. TCA, the Only Way."

"That's right," Nick said, settling back into his chair to listen to the music. They listened to two more songs then Amanda suggested they get back and get some rest for the long day ahead of them. They walked outside and got a cab, dropping Amanda off at her hotel first. She gave him a big smile as she slid out of the cab, then the cab took Nick back to his suite.

Nick was at the hangar by 0600 the next morning and completed his preflight of the aircraft on dry land. By 0630 Amanda had shown up and he helped her get her bags into the cargo hold and found her a headset she could use for the flight. Nick had also brought a small cooler with some bottled water and a couple of cokes in it as well as a bag of trail mix to munch on for the flight. The sun was already beginning to fill the sky with light as Nick and Amanda strapped into their seats and Nick fired up the engines.

He taxied out of the hangar and into the water, then water taxied out of the pier area and set up for a smooth take off to the southwest. The twin radial engines roared as the aircraft lifted out of the water and started to climb out, flying over a group of fishing boats moored on the other side of the harbor by a couple of hundred feet. Amanda could see the crews working the decks, getting the boats ready to go out for the day's fishing.

Nick turned on course to the west as he continued to climb. They punched through a low layer of thin stratus clouds at about 4000 feet and they leveled off at 8000 feet for the trip. They were flying right down the center of Puerto Rico, with water visible on both sides of their flight path.

"Wow, Nick, this is great. I need to get some pictures."

"No problem. You may want to unstrap and go shoot from the back to get better angles than you can get from the cockpit."

She went aft for about twenty minutes before returning with her camera still in her hands.

"I want to get some shots from the cockpit too."

She strapped back in and began shooting out her side window.

"The mountains are just beautiful, aren't they?"

"Yes they are, and we have lots more to see. We'll leave the PR behind here soon but it is a short thirty-minute ride over to the Dominican Republic and Haiti, more nice mountains. The long over water part will be about an hour and a half between Haiti and Jamaica. All the action will be out your window, though, so you should get some good shots."

The two chatted for a while, broken only by Nick pointing out Isla Mona off the left wing and reminding her that one of Andre' Deiss' homes was down there, along with an orphanage and school he built. She should see if she could visit there sometime, he'd be glad to take her. He told her about his recent flight out there and meeting Johnny. He also told her about Juanita helping him write the letter.

"You had help, huh? I thought they were awfully sensitive for a pilot."

"No, I meant every word. They were my words, Juanita just made sure I made sense, and she made me write the letter."

"She must be a smart lady, that letter was important to me as it really let me know you might not be just another man I meet that passes into the night."

"Then I'm really glad I wrote that letter," he laughed.

As they flew along the southern coast of the Dominican Republic Amanda snapped a few more photos. The clouds ahead of them were thickening up a bit, as the forecast said they might. Nothing he and the Goose couldn't handle, maybe just a short squall but it was more likely just to make their ride into Jamaica a bit bumpy.

And he was right, it was bumpy for the last two hours of the flight. The biggest clouds were developing much

higher than their flight path but the updrafts knocked the airplane around enough to keep them both in their seats for the remainder of the trip. About 30 NM out Nick pulled the throttles back and started to descend after calling the local air traffic control to get set up for a landing a Kingston's Tinston Pen airport, where TDM had an office. Nick entered the pattern over the city then turned back to the east to land and taxi to the parking area in front of the TDM office. They climbed down the crew stair and stretched after the long flight.

"So what next?"

"Potty stop, grab a bite to eat, I'm supposed to meet a guy here at 1230, so we have about an hour to rest."

"Good call on the potty stop. The hotel coffee is ready to go. Where do we eat?"

"I'll ask inside for some suggestions, hang on."

Nick went inside and came back out in less than five minutes twirling a set of keys around his middle finger.

"Got us some transportation and some directions, let's go. This is how freight dogs eat; find a close spot and borrow the FBO's truck. Fast turns are the key to staying on time.

They jumped in and drove off for lunch, finding their way back by 1215. Owen Powell was sitting outside the TDM shack on a wooden bench smoking a long cigar as they drove up.

"Mr. Nick Collins?"

"Yes, that's right. Are you Owen?"

"I am indeed sir. I was told you would be in the company of a lady but they failed to mention what a lovely creature she is."

"An honest mistake, I'm sure. I'm Amanda Bert, a journalist working on a story about he seaplane service."

She turned to Nick, "I need to check on my flight to make sure it is on schedule. You know how those cargo types are."

"You mean those Royal Island types, I know them well. You go call and Owen and I will get ready for the checkout flight."

Amanda walked inside the TDM shack while Nick and Owen walked out to the aircraft. Owen had a large leather briefcase with him and Nick wanted to look at his sectional charts side by side with Owen's maps.

Owen was a civil engineer and was hired to find locations for bases near where the business office felt like they had some leverage. He had marked about fifteen spots around the entire island and they needed eleven. Owen briefed

Nick on some of the locations and their relative strengths.

"So what do you look for in a good site?"

"The most important feature is protection from the open ocean. It can tear your base apart in just a few years, plus you need calm water to load passengers and cargo. In order to get anywhere close to some of the spots your office wants we're going to have to build a few jetties as a breakwater. Then seaplanes don't have a deep draft, but they need a wide area for turning around without snagging trees, so we can take advantage of waterfronts with a shallow draft the boats can't use. Then lastly, can you afford the price of the land. These blokes have already gotten wind that you are looking and I promise that will cause the price to rise dramatically. It will do us well to avoid the appearance of looking. I have done plenty of scouting on the ground, this will be my first look from the air, to tell you the truth."

"I see, well, that's interesting. We need to get going to get around the island before dark"

They two men then laid out a quick flight plan to go see the locations in the Goose. The fuel truck had arrived and they stood on the ramp while the linesman fueled both wings. Amanda emerged from the office and walked up.

"Yep, flight still leaves at 9 p.m. from Norman Manley International to Willamsted in something called an L100. Do I need to find a way to the airport? I can call a cab."

"That's a C-130 Hercules, the L100. Not the greatest in comfort but very reliable airplanes. I'll give you some earplugs, you'll thank me later."

"Sounds good, so what's the plan?"

"Owen is going to fly with us to check out some locations he has scouted. We'll take a look from the air and see if my requirements for landing and taking off eliminate any of them on the list. Then tomorrow we will go check each site by landing and taking off, see how the aircraft handles in the local water. We should be done today in plenty of time to get you over to Manley before that flight leaves. I want to see who the pilot is anyway."

The trio loaded up in the Goose and cranked up the engines. Owen sat in the copilot's seat while Amanda sat in a jump seat between and behind them. They taxied out and took off to the east. Turning left quickly to avoid the traffic at Manley airport while getting them headed west. As they came abreast of the airport off their left wing Owen pointed low out Nick's side window.

"See that small slip area, just the other side of that large container operation? That is the location of the TDS Kingston base. Construction starts in two weeks. That was the first property I secured. I could not get any property near Montego Bay, so you guys will have to run a shuttle between Montego and Kingston."

Nick nodded as he looked out at the dilapidated pier and junk pile that was the current resident. They had a long

way to go. He could not help but think about the irony that these remote locations, some of the lowest tech places on earth, required him to have a satellite uplink system for his laptop.

The first two locations were Portland Point and Treasure Beach. The latter's name had promise, Nick thought. The business model here had them flying north and south shoreline routes as well as a shuttle to Montego Bay, just like Owen had suggested. Most of the clientele were tourists running between hotels, casinos, and diving locations. They also had a few commercial contracts with some of their regulars like Fed Ex and UPS as well as some local carriers. As Nick approached Portland Point he pulled back the throttle and lowered the nose, leveling off at 1000 feet. As they passed overhead Owen described what he had in mind. Here there was no existing pier, they would have to build from scratch, but it is inside a wonderfully protected bay. Owen said later he would show him some examples of the jetty situations and wanted him to see how Mother Nature did it. They departed Portland Point and headed for Treasure Beach. There they were supporting a radar station, one that looks for smugglers Nick guessed. This area had a few of those running through it, that's for sure. Treasure Beach was too exposed to the ocean and Owen described how they would follow the sea floor line, only about thirty feet deep, and make a mile long jetty to give his planes a soft place to land and unload.

"My, these mountains here are wonderful, and what white beaches, do you see them, Nick"

"You know it strikes me that, no, I'm so involved with the survey I have overlooked the rest of the island. You're right, it's a great place."

"I've been here before but never just flown around it at low altitude like this. This is a great way to see the Caribbean.""

"And they pay me to do this, unbelievable, isn't it?"

Nick smiled broadly as he nudged the throttles forward and pulled the yoke back gently as the aircraft rose. They flew to the western end and looked at a spot, but Nick saw too many low lying rocks that will rip a seaplane apart, so they flew north towards Lucea to look at the next spot. They continued flying from spot to spot on Nick's map, flying low overhead while Owen talked about each one's layout. Nick looked over his shoulder at Amanda and the huge smile on her face.

"You really like this low level flying, don't you? You sure you're not a pilot at heart?"

"I don't know, it is kind of a rush. I do enjoy the feel of speed close to the ground."

"OK, this is the last stop, Port Morant, with lots of time to spare."

Nick went through the normal routine; throttle back, drop the nose, level off at 1000 feet, crane their necks trying to see what Owen is pointing to on the ground while trying not to attract too much attention. Nick pushed the throttles back up and climbed while giving Manley Approach a call to get cleared into Tinston Pen. He noticed the cumulus

clouds building into a storm to the south, the direction Amanda was flying in just a few hours, but the Herc has radar, so they should be able to get around the nasty stuff.

In short order they landed and Nick secured the aircraft for the night. It was 1830, they had about an hour before she needed to be at the airport, so they caught a cab and found a small café for a drink and a snack.

"Thank you for the flying today, I had a blast. You have a great job, Nick."

"I think I do, yes. It doesn't pay great but the fringe benefits are pretty hard to beat. The food could be better."

"I will give you a call at your hotel in a day or two and we can start making plans to see one another again before I have to go back to the States."

"You don't know what hotel I'm staying at, do you?"

"Amanda called me yesterday and left it on my hotel voicemail. I got you big fella. Well, it is time to get going to the airport."

"OK, give me a sec to finish this beer and we'll catch a cab."

It only took them fifteen minutes to arrive at the cargo counter of Royal Island Airlines. Nick hoped to get a look at the pilot to see if he knew him. They walked to a window looking out over the ramp. A large forklift was driving up the back ramp with several very large crates being unloaded from a flatbed semi rig.

"That's what the Herc does best, take big loads a good distance and doesn't need much runway, great hauler."

He pointed to a tall man walking under one wing looking up with a flashlight.

"That's Dan Lucas, looks like he's your pilot."

"So you know him? Is he a friend?"

"To say a Tradewind pilot is friends with anyone at Royal Island is kind of a stretch, but Dan is a good pilot, very thorough, although not really a great person to hang out with. He is pretty caught up with himself, you watch it, he thinks he's a real ladies man."

"Let him try, I've sent bigger egos than that packing."

Nick looked around the terminal area. There was a woman behind the counter and a man on a gurney complete with an IV bag and oxygen tank. He was attended by a male nurse and a woman who was likely his wife. There wasn't anyone else in the room.

"Looks like a small crowd, you should be able to stretch out a bit and relax."

"Do you see that lightening to the south, is that a problem?"

"It shouldn't be, that airplane has weather radar so they can divert around the bad stuff, it may make your trip a little longer than you first thought."

"Amanda Bert?"

The woman behind the counter called out loud and Amanda walked over. They conducted a little business that involved Amanda's credit card then she walked over to a door leading to the ramp, inviting the medical group to go ahead and load. Amanda walked back over to Nick and looked him in the eye. They stood there for what seemed like an eternity.

"If you don't kiss me, Nick, I may not call you back."

"Well, I can't allow that to happen," he wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her to him, kissing her gently on the lips. They separated and Amanda picked up her suitcase.

"I'll call you soon. Have fun with the Goose."

"I will, be careful, see you soon."

Nick watched Amanda walk out on the ramp and step up on the forward crew door, helped by a ramp agent to get her bag in the door. Nick walked back outside and hailed a cab, jumping in and giving the driver his hotel.

He kissed her; it was real. He couldn't believe it, but it was happening. He was starting to get that feeling of despair when someone close to your side leaves your side. He would have to throw himself into his work to keep from missing her so much. What would he do when she had to go back to the States?

Amanda had fallen asleep soon after take off but some turbulence from the storm must have jolted her around to wake her up. She sat up and rubbed her eyes, checking her watch. They had only taken off about 45 minutes ago. She looked outside and saw lights right off the airplane's wing. Was it reflections of their lights off the clouds? She squinted; no, it was another airplane, it looked like another L100 like she was flying in. The aircraft then turned sharply right while the other aircraft appeared to continued to fly along the same course. She looked around for the medical team, but they were no where in sight, and the gurney was empty! She stood up and looked around the entire cargo bay. Walking back over to the ladder to the flight deck she saw a sight that made the blood rush out of her face.

Both pilots and the flight engineer lay on the floor, their hands and feet taped with duct tape and gags in their mouths. Dan Lucas was bleeding from his thigh and looked like he was passed out. What had gotten on the airplane as the medical group was now flying the airplane, the sick man in the pilot seat, the woman in the copilot's seat, and

the male nurse seemed to know a lot about the flight engineer's station. She went back to her seat.

Think, think. Got to think. Where are we going? Amanda dug an airline magazine out of her suitcase from an earlier flight, then dug a small compass out of her handbag. She made a few guesses about where they had been after leaving Kingston and guessed the sharp turn she felt was when they altered course. She laid out the headings carefully then took a pencil and drew a line to the southwest.

Colombia. Damn, not Colombia, she thought. Not as many friends down there. She wondered why they hadn't tied her up... they didn't see her as a threat. Well, that was one element in her favor, she was most certainly a threat, they just didn't know how much. And, she decided, the longer they were kept from that knowledge the better. She reasoned that if they were FARC they might be persuaded to ransom her back to her publishers, that would buy her time.

Colombia, damn! How would she get word to Nick, he'll be worried. But surely they will notice this airplane missing very soon and start looking for it. Colombia, dammit! She slumped down in her chair and tried to think how she would handle it when they came back to deal with her. She reached into her purse and felt the small .22 caliber semi automatic pistol. She decided having it on her person was a greater liability than ditching it and relying on her wits and training. It was really all she had. Even if she disabled the hijackers she couldn't fly the airplane and she was betting more friends of the bad guys would meet them at their destination. She took the pistol out of her purse and stashed it behind some soundproofing material lining the interior of the Herc.

On the flight deck, the hijack crew smiled at how well the plan had gone. Inside the oxygen cylinder was a couple of handguns they used to subdue the crew. The pilot had hesitated and needed to be motivated, so the male nurse nailed him in the thigh. After they had the crew secured, they made contact with another C-130 flying on a flight plan from Cuba to San Vicente, Colombia. The two came together for a short period, then Amanda's airplane veered south to Colombia while the other aircraft flew on to Willemsted. Amanda, along with this Herc and its cargo would be very long gone somewhere in Colombia before anything was noticed in Hato.

Very long gone, and without a trace it would seem.



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ISLAND

BREEZES

A newsletter for the employees of Tradewind Caribbean Airlines



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The Nest

News from Tradewind Domestic Seaplane Service

By Kyle Ramsey

Contact

[Ken Malczynski](#)

(Editor)

[Rich Ellison](#)

We made it through the tough summer months! Summer always results in a slow down of flight sim activity as schools are out and people travel and do outdoor activities. Well, enough of that happiness! Time to get back to flying. And the Seabirds have been busy all summer working to provide you with the best in virtual seaplane flying.

Several new items were added since our last update here. The hangar crew has been busy and we now have a new seaplane in Jack Ford's repaint of Mike Stone's Grumman Goose. What a wonderful airplane this one is proving to be, and another great paint job. The aircraft has been named after our own Larry "Oso" Clark. Be sure to grab your copy at the Seaplanes Hangar. There is also a great new panel available on www.avsim.com for the Goose (goose_panel.zip), a very nice update of J.L. Stubbs' FS98 panel by TCA's Dorian Davis.

We have also added eleven new seaplane bases in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. Be sure to visit the Seabirds page or one of the freeware sites and get the new scenery and updated TDS.txt routes file for your LineIt! Tool so you'll have all the new routes using the new scenery. Jamaica celebrated its 40th Birthday in August and is a great VFR island to fly. The Caymans are one of the best diving spots on earth and then scenery includes a diving

(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

[Kyle Ramsey](#)
(Author: Alt Air)

Terry Tyler
(Writer & Reviewer)

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party near one of the TDS piers.

One last bit of news is about Chris Wilkes' IWI scenery, which should really boost the Leeward and Windward Island's scenery for us to fly. We'll have to take a look at the impact this new scenery has on our old bases and integrate our future plans around this new package.

Well, while we figure out the new Wilkes scenery, we're on to Cuba next! That scenery should be out in late September. Man, that is one big island.

And be sure to download Terry Tyler's AI tools so your seaplane bases will operate with AI aircraft on the official TDS schedule. His files can be found at the Seabird's Yahoo file site.

If you aren't a member of the Seabirds Yahoo group, you need to be! Contact Oso or Terry for information.

Let's Get Wet!



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Caribbean Airline News

(Antigua) Caribbean Star gains from BWIA's problems.

The problems currently being faced by BWIA have made the travelling public in Trinidad and Tobago more aware of the presence of Antigua-based Caribbean Star Airlines. According to newspaper reports in that country, a former president of the Travel Agents Association has said that customers were now specifically booking flights on particular airlines, including Caribbean Star. Sherida Lowrie said that irate passengers had been calling her agency and blaming it for BWIA's delays and cancellations, according to the reports, and this was causing the employees to spend more time dealing with complaints than with accommodating new booking requests. After more than a month of turmoil in its services, BWIA services seem to be settling back to normalcy. But its major hurdle right now is dealing with the board mandate of restructuring the company to save it from total collapse.

(Guyana) Aviation fuel price up some 12.5% from today.

Hinterland travel to be hardest hit.

Contact

[Ken Malczynski](#)

(Editor)

[Rich Ellison](#)

(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

[Kyle Ramsey](#)

(Author: Alt Air)

Terry Tyler

(Writer & Reviewer)


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Ticket prices for domestic flights, especially those to inaccessible interior locations, are expected to rise from today when the aviation fuel price hike comes into effect. The fuel hike, being blamed on increases in acquisition costs, according to one aircraft operator, will definitely impact on fares to several routes. The cost of aviation fuel will increase from \$496 to \$531 a gallon, a hike of some 12.5%. Head of Trans Guyana Airways Ltd, Captain Roy Jainandan, said the rise would affect the company directly since fuel is a crucial cost component for the business. However, he said, his company would try to cushion the effects of the price hike as long as possible while continuing to operate its regular schedule. Prices of fares for scheduled flights are not expected to increase, at least not in the near future, but the cost of chartered flights will go up. Head of Air Services Ltd, Mazahar Ally, had told this newspaper that the increase would have a severe impact on both operators and consumers. The rise in price, he told Stabroek News, came as government was urging operators to find ways to keep airfares at a level where they would reach the target market. "This will definitely see a rise in cost to customers using the service," Ally said. Roraima Airways head, Captain Gerry Gouveia, described the hike as a blow to residents of the hinterland, whom he said were likely to suffer the most as a result of the fuel rise. According to Gouveia, in the short term, Roraima Airways would avoid passing on the increase to customers although it would be difficult. However, he posited that as members of the private sector it was important that operators find innovative means of meeting such challenges. He pointed to the shuttle system being used by his company, which involves a combination of land, sea and air transport to aid in the reduction of costs especially in the movement of commercial goods across the mountains. According to Gouveia, the price of aviation fuel has been rising regularly over the past years resulting in cost of living increases especially among interior residents. However, he acknowledged that operators would have to devise new strategies for dealing with the increased costs. Texaco West Indies Ltd is the sole distributor of aviation fuel locally.

(Nevis) Newcastle Airport terminal to open on Independence Day.

NEVIS

The Nevis Island Administration's Cabinet has announced that the new passenger terminal building at Newcastle will be officially opened on Independence Day Thursday, 19 Sept. A dedication ceremony for the recently completed island main road will also be held on the same day. Minister for Planning, Infrastructure Development, Environment and Natural Resources Michael Perkins announced that 19 Sept. would be a special day for Nevisians. "I take this opportunity on behalf of the Nevis Island Administration to extend an invitation to all the people of Nevis," said Perkins. "The basic plan is that we would first have a ceremony in the area of Five Turnings, Cotton Ground, to officially open and bless the new roads that we are now enjoying." Perkins noted that immediately following the ceremony, those present would travel to Newcastle where a formal opening ceremony for the terminal building would be held. "So there are two events being planned for Independence Day, but the main event would be the ceremony to open the new airport terminal building at Newcastle Airport," he said. He explained that the new facility was a state-of-the-art building with security features of an international standard. The Venezuelan company Grupo Deyca Internacional, constructed the terminal building at a cost of nearly EC \$15 million and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development extended a loan of EC \$10.2 million to the Nevis Island Administration. The minister said: "One of the features of the new facility will be the local input by some of our



local craftsmen. "The landscaping itself is going to be a beauty and presently we have sub-contractors laying local stone tiles in various areas of the terminal building, and I think these two things, the landscaping and the stone work, are going to stand out as permanent features at the new airport terminal," he said.