



March / April 2003

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

Contact

[Ken Malczynski](#)

(Editor)

[Rich Ellison](#)

(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

Due to health problems and life getting in the way, I regretfully must leave the Island Breeze. I leave the editorial duties to Rich Ellison, who is more than capable to handle the job. I will miss working with the other members of the staff, two great and talented guys, Kyle Ramsey and Terry Tyler.

Thanks to all you readers for the favorable comments we receive

Kyle Ramsey

(Author: Alt Air)

Terry Tyler

(Writer & Reviewer)

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about our mag. It really means a lot to us, and to me especially.

Blue Skies

Ken Malczynski



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Inside TCA

Battle of the Airlines

Congratulations to the Battle of the Airlines team from TCA who are currently in 6th Position in the competition. Battle of the Airlines now in it's 4th year has 56 airlines participating and over 500 pilots. Well done to Mike Redman and his Team.

Hanger News

This month I'd like to focus on the New aircraft available from different divisions of TCA, namely Tradewind Hellenic Airlines and TCA Alaska. All of these aircraft can be used to fly lines for TCA.

Tradewind Hellenic: Several new aircraft have recently been added to the fleet. Anyone who has the commercial PPS Airbus package installed will find re-paints for the entire series.

Contact

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The Project Opensky Boeing 747-400. A real long haul workhorse of the THA fleet with special livery.

The Mel Jet Boeing 777-200ER. Offers all the mod-cons of the 777-300 but has extra range.

TCA Alaska: De Havilland Canada DHC-6-300. This Aircraft was named in honour of Capt Marvin E Sandmire. AKA Snowboss, previously CEO of TCA Alaska and now runs the Iditrod supply flights. Here's that the TCA Alaksa Crew had to say about the "Twotter".



De Havilland Canada DHC-6-300. The Twin Otter is an all metal high wing monoplane with two wing mounted turbo shaft engines with reversible full feathering 3 bladed propellers. It is capable of carrying two crew and up to 20 passengers. It can be equipped for cargo, ambulance duties, fire fighting, supply dropping and aerial survey among other things. It can be adapted for wheel skis, spring skis and floats. It is no stranger to rough country and boasts large tires and engines high above stones and brush. It's STOL abilities allow it enter areas that usually cannot be attained in larger aircraft.



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Caribbean Airline News

From The Jamaica Observer, 09 March, 2003)

(Barbados) Concorde lands safely in Barbados after engine problems.

BRIDGETOWN, Barbados (AP)

A British Airways Concorde with 73 people aboard developed engine problems shortly after take-off from Barbados but was able to land safely in the Caribbean island, officials said yesterday.

No one was hurt on the Saturday flight, which was on its way to London's Heathrow International Airport, British Airways spokesman Al Gilkes said.

The plane experienced problems with a booster part, which provides supersonic power after take-off, Gilkes said. The captain recognised the problem after he took off before midday Saturday, he said.

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The reheat booster is responsible for making the Concorde break the sound barrier, enabling it to make it from Barbados to London in 3 1/2 hours instead of the normal eight hours, Gilkes said.

The passengers never were in any danger and the plane could have flown safely to London, he said.

The passengers were taken to hotels because the captain decided to remain at the airport overnight for spare parts not available in Barbados. They were due to arrive on the island late yesterday, the spokesman said.

The plane remained grounded yesterday and Gilkes could not say when the aircraft would depart Barbados' Grantley Adams International Airport.

On February 27, an Air France Concorde with 47 people aboard lost two pieces of its rudder during its flight from Paris but was able to land safely at John F Kennedy airport in New York.

Concordes, the world's only supersonic passenger jets, resumed flying about 15 months ago after being grounded following a deadly crash in France. British Airways and Air France are the only airlines flying in the Concorde.

The Concorde resumed its services to Barbados December 1, 2001, and flies the route once a week on Saturdays during the winter season, which runs December 1 to April 13.

Meanwhile, British Airways said nearly two weeks ago that the airline is considering taking its Concorde jets out of service altogether due to a drop in demand.

The airline is reviewing the service, which also includes New York, and a decision is expected in the months to come.


(From the Curacao Amigoe, 07 March, 2003)

(Bonaire) Twin Otter introduction not flawless.

BONAIRE

As many as 10 daily DCA flights were operated with the recently acquired Twin Otters between Curacao and Bonaire, and as many as 14 a day on weekends. According to the general manager of DCA, this had nothing to do with the coming competition of the DEE and the Divi-flights, but purely service to Bonaire.

The first flight with the Twin Otter became a one way flight to Bonaire. It could not go back to Curacao due to technical problems with the aircraft. It stayed overnight in Bonaire and after the technical personnel, who were flown in from Curacao, had fixed the problem, the plane could fly back.



Bonaire is well acquainted with the Twin Otter. ALM had purchased these type aircraft in the past and discarded them when they turned out to be too small to carry the diving gear of American divers that traveled via Curacao. That problem has been solved by all the diving facilities on the island that rent the gear, especially the tanks, so that the divers do not have to bring these along. The personal regulator does not take that much space.

Edited By Rich Ellison



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Flying in 3D

A review of eDimensional's 3D glasses

A few months ago, a "Quake 3" playing friend of mine (yes, I admit it - I too played "Quake3") told me of his experiences playing using a pair of 3D glasses from eDimensional, and set me wondering if they could be used when flying with FS2002.

After a little research and a few visits to their website, I decided to bite the bullet and buy a pair - after all I reasoned, if they didn't work with our beloved flight sim, they could still be used for other games which eDimensional claimed were enhanced by their use.

After smuggling the box containing the goodies past the eagle eye of my Crew Chief successfully, I ripped it open and the following items fell out onto my desk:

One pair of 3D glasses, looking for all the world like a pair of sunglasses with small flat lenses - a heavy looking frame with a sensor and "on" button just above the bridge of the nose. (if you so desire, you can have a pair of "Wired" glasses, the cable of which plugs into the dongle). The setup finally added a sensor which is applied (via a small Velcro patch) to the top or bottom of the monitor and which supplies the 3D signal to the glasses, which are

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[Ken Malczynski](#)

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[Rich Ellison](#)

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(Author: Alt Air)

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(Writer & Reviewer)

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of the "Shuttering" type as opposed to the red and green Anaglyph type.

A dongle which plugs into the monitor connection in back of the PC, and to which the monitor cable attaches.

A spare set of ear pieces - there's a choice of small to medium, or medium to large and each type is somewhat adjustable.

The installation software contains a list of games for which 3D glasses were compatible, so having experienced a trouble-free install, I set out to understand just how to set up the glasses for use.

The installation software contains a list of games for which 3D glasses were compatible, so having experienced a trouble-free install, I set out to understand just how to set up the glasses for use.

I have a GeForce Ti 4600, so it was off to the races! I found the drivers supplied were of about the same age as those I have installed, but of a different series, so I left well alone and continued with my current drivers. I visited nVidia's website, and downloaded the up-to-date version of the Stereo drivers, and installed those.

Setting up the glasses is, I must admit, somewhat time-consuming, but the instructions on the info sheet were pretty clear to follow once I'd read and re-read them a couple of times.

So, to test the "specs" - I opened up my favourite intellectual challenge (Quake 3 " again!) clicked on "Fight!" and immediately died a horrible death - my opponent leapt out of the screen and stuffed a rocket through my head. This game has now gained a new lease of life - faster, sharper, seemingly more colourful and with a much increased depth of field. Impressive!

However, back to the task in hand - what's it like in Flightsim2k2?

It should be noted that you have to turn the 3D effect 'On' with either a click on an icon which can be placed in the systray section of your desktop, or (as I have done after a short trial period with the icon) a "Hotkey" combination. The Info sheet gives various pre-set hotkey combinations for adjusting the 3D image if you need to do this.

I started FS2k2, hit the hotkey combination, and pressed the "on" button on the glasses. A short flickering of the glasses, they cleared and I looked around me at a changed world. Not changed by much I must say, but they have a definite effect on what you see, and how you see it. The major difference is that things appear sharper and crisper than before, and again, the depth of field is deeper. The display does need it's brightness and contrast increasing, due to the "sunglass effect" though.

The real surprise came when I opened the virtual cockpit of the Bell47G - the sense of vertigo was quite marked as I banked into turns and panned the view around the cabin. This was more like it!

I tried more of the same using the SeaBee's VC and compared it to the standard 2D cockpit, and in three or four

other types of aircraft - in all cases the results were the same - a much more distinct sensation of motion in flight. Adding real weather on a particularly wet afternoon provided me with a laugh - I found myself trying to dodge the raindrops as they streaked toward and struck my windscreen. For those souls who have purchased a copy of Chris Wilkes' IWI2, you really have a treat in store when using the glasses!

Having spent the last month assessing the kit, I think it's safe to say that there is a definite improvement to the sensation of flight with the glasses. It's impossible for me to quantify exactly how much of the experience is due to the 3D effect produced by the eDimensional glasses, and what proportion is purely subjective - I just know that every time I fly now, the specs are worn, the button is pressed, and it's into the VC wherever I'm flying.

Currently I'm lending a hand to our comrades in the frozen North - TCA Alaska - in preparation for the Iditarod Dog Race - flying in very low cloud, or with a snowbound cloud base has suddenly become very claustrophobic - there's a spin off from the glasses which I hadn't thought about before - they're improving my IFR skills immensely! They also have improved my approaches - seeing the runway and associated buildings in 3D makes it a lot easier to judge all those little things like touchdown points, sink rate and other niceties of a landing I can walk away from without blushing!

Concluding, this hardware and associated software is not necessary for the practice and enjoyment of our hobby - Flight Simulation. But, by Golly, it does add a few twists and turns that the "Vanilla" sim will always lack.

So, How Much? (I hear one or two of you cry)! Well when I first looked at them, the price was around UK£240 (approximately US\$391). Since those days, the price has dropped dramatically - I paid UK£109.95, roughly US\$179 - a drop in price of US\$212.

If you are interested, the site to visit is: <http://www.eDimensional.com> There's more to this 3D lark than meets the eye.....



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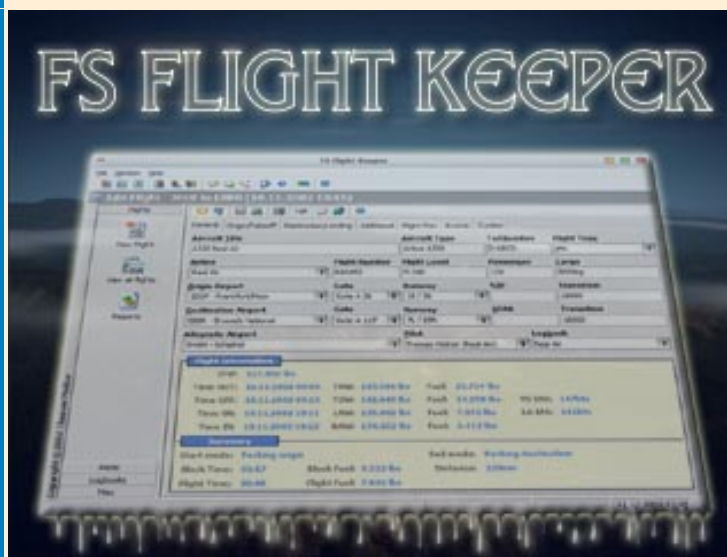
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FS Flight Keeper

Commercial Add-on review



I'm sure we've all been through it you've just landed at your destination after a long flight. Taxied to the gate and shut

down the engines you've used up all your computer time and you are thinking do I have time to file a Pilots Report to the office now? Shall I wait until tomorrow? Trouble is will the flight still be fresh in your mind tomorrow? All those bits of paper containing information about your flights are making your desk look untidy. Well Thomas Molitor, a flight simulator developer has created a add-on for Microsoft Flight Simulator that may just solve this problem.

A few weeks ago I was browsing the new releases at Flightsim.com and stumbled across Thomas Molitor's

Flight Simulator Add-ons web page, <http://www.molitor-home.de/FS/FLKeeper/>. I've always been a Big Iron Fan

Contact

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and spend a lot of my time flying medium and long haul airline flights. I also like to make these flights as realistic as possible so I'm always interested in tools that do just that. I decided I'd like to take a closer look at FS Flight Keeper and Thomas graciously agreed to supply me with a working Beta with which to review his product.

FS Flight Keeper completes two tasks in one, it's a Logbook and a black box style flight recorder. All flights made whilst running the program are logged and detailed flight information such as flight departure and arrival times, Aircraft used, route flown, fuel used, Take-off and landing weights, weather and much much more are all automatically recorded. The program then stops recording data when the aircraft arrives at the gate and the parking break is set. A few short clicks of the mouse and the flight is saved in the logbook and there is even an option to e-mail the report to the office.

One of the things that impressed me the most about FS Flight keeper is the fact that it's easy to use yet fully customize able. After downloading the program and running the setup program I was given a few options that help customize FS Flight Keeper to my own preferences. The process didn't take too long and soon it was time to fire up the flight simulator and start testing.

For my first flight I decide to make a short-(ish) shuttle flight in Boeing 737-200. I set up a flight as normal in Flight Simulator choosing a IFR flight plan and real weather. Once the flight was loaded FS Flight Keeper starts up and connects to the flight simulator using the FSUIPC module also used my squawkbox and other programs that need to constantly communicate with Flight Simulator. A message appeared at the top of my screen informing me that Flight Keeper had successfully connected to the flight simulator. It was time to taxi out and get airborne.

With all this communication going on between FS Flight Keeper and Flight Simulator I was worried about how much my frame rates would be affected so I kept a close eye on them through out the flight. At first there was a slight decrease but nothing to major. Taxing seemed to be affected the most but there again frame rates are always slower when the aircraft is on the ground. Once airborne everything settled down and there was no noticeable drop in frame rates until I was back on the ground. It was tempting during my flight to keep pausing the simulator to check out the features on FS Flight Keeper. Although this proved interesting I realised after filing my first flight report that FS Flight Keeper records everything including the fact that I'd paused the simulator 10 times during this flight!

FS Flight Keeper ran well with my other FS Add-ons I tested it alongside FS Maintenance from Lago and the Squawkbox program for VATSIM. No sytem crashes, no noticeable decrease in performance and no problems!! However for me the best part of FS Flight Keeper is the Flight report's that can be E-mailed straight to the office. They are extremely realistic and contain an amazing high level of detail.

Thomas Molitor realising the potential FS Flight Keeper has for Virtual Airlines offers a substantial discount for virtual airlines. Details can be found at <http://www.molitor-home.de/FS/FLKeeper/VA.html> There is also a trail version available for download and evaluation at his website.



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Alternate Air

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Florencia

Edgar Alberto Rosero Cruz walked into the hotel room door being held open by Teresa. Gilbert rose to greet him.

"Roserito, so nice to see you. Nick, this is Edgar, one of my friends in this area."

"Hello Edgar, Nick Collins."

"Pa servile a Dios y a usted, señor," he said as he extended his hand to shake Nick's. The grip was firm and the skin of his hands were rough from years of working with hand tools.

"He said 'To serve God and yourself', Nick. You will hear it here, a common greeting. These people are never far from their faith, and they can be trusted as one trusts a brother, isn't that right, Roserito?"

"Sí, Gilberto, you and I, we have to trust each other out here."

"OK, so what news do you bring us?"

"Well, I have some news, but I do not know if you will think it is good or bad."

"What about the American woman?" Nick asked, his face pulled tight, eyes narrow as he tensed for the answer.

"As far as I know, she is fine. In fact, almost too fine, Señor Collins. She has escaped from those who were holding her in town, with two companions."

"Escaped? Well, that sounds like good news to me! And please, call me Nick."

"Sí, Nick, it would seem so, but we do not yet know where they have escaped to, and this is a big area, very easy to get lost in the forests, many bandits out there, but many good people too. We hope they run into the good people before they run into the bad ones."

Gilbert sat back down in his chair, "And you have people looking?"

"Sí, but if I send too many looking we won't have enough to help you get the other American. But I have sent half of mi cuadrilla out looking for another....", he looked at his watch, "seven hours, then they are to return, but we have also put the word out to friends in nearby towns, if they come into one of them we will know about it soon enough."

"So who is this other person?"

"The pilot, Capt. Lucas. He was wounded in the take over on the aircraft and is being held under guard at a local clinic on the edge of town, but I need all mi cuadrilla to overtake this target, so the ones in the forests must return in time for us to make the penetration by dusk."

"And how is the good Captain? His condition?"

"I hear when they brought him in, he was near death. The doctor at the clinic said only God and whoever provided the little care he got saved his life. He said the bandaging was very professional. But now he is much better, which makes our job a lot easier. He has been seen walking with a nurse but under guard."

Nick thought back to the bandaging job Amanda had done on him in Puerto Rico and somehow felt he and Lucas shared the same angel.

"So if your boys in the jungle don't find Amanda you will just stop looking for her?"

"Señor, it is a very big jungle, more land than a hundred men could cover in a hundred days. And we have other work to do here. Gilberto has worked very hard to bring several things together at once to rid this area of those vermin mercenarios. The FARC is bad enough, but these people, they are very bad."

Gilbert cocked his head toward Nick, "Besides, she is just as likely to fall into the hands of friends, even while we are working other parts of the project."

"The project? I thought we were here to snatch some American citizens and get back some hardware you don't want them to have, what is the project?"

"Well Nick, these mercenaries, they are a real problem. The area has enough stability problems with the FARC having pretty much free rein of this area. The government in Bogotá is just starting to get tough after years of appeasement, with the support of our government in Washington. Beyond just money and Blackhawk helicopters, you will soon see even more Army Ranger advisors doing more than training. These people from Argentina moved in and have thrown the whole area into turmoil, even the FARC can't seem to get rid of them. So the project is to get rid of these mercenaries, or at least injure them enough that the FARC can finish the job."

"So we are in cahoots with the FARC?!?"

"Well, not in so many words, but let's say the FARC let it be known that if some help were to, oh say, materialize, they would find business to do elsewhere while we cleaned up."

"You have got to be kidding. And you trust them?"

"Of course not, we are monitoring their movements, which is what Edgar's people are supposed to be doing, but they are instead looking for your girlfriend. Well, not all of them, thank God."

"So it sounds like we are short of help for this project?"

"We always seem a little short handed, eh Roserito? But we seem to get through."

"Sí, always, but your back up is due in about 6 hours."

"My back up, Nick, I have some special ops types, seven specialists, flying in to help us later. We are to meet them at the airport, they are flying in on a Colombian Air Force transport airplane."

"Then why all the trouble to get us that old crate we flew in on?"

"At the time it was important, because of the FARC's spies, but with them out of the game, we should be able to get away with this. Plus we need to help, and these guys are the best. But now we should eat, there will be much to do later, and we will need our strength, so let's go eat. There is a small café just down the street in front of this hotel, let's go. Nick, don't talk to anyone, just laugh when we laugh and we'll get by."

Contact

[Ken Malczynski](#)

(Editor)

[Rich Ellison](#)

(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

[Kyle Ramsey](#)

(Author: Alt Air)

"Where the hell are we, Amanda?"

"Relax, George, we can't be more than 2 miles outside of town. We just need to circle back to be sure we haven't been followed, then we'll work back towards town and see if we can find Capt Lucas and get him out."

"I sure wish we had some kind of weapons, that would make this easier."

"I'll see what I can do, Terry, will a handgun be enough or did you have something in a submachine gun in mind?"

"Anything, Amanda, I just don't think we'll get too far if we have to duke it out with everyone we meet who, by the way, all seem to be carrying AK-47's."

"We'll move that request right on up the priority list, but we're going to have to get lucky in order to grab a weapon, I suspect."

"How will we get Capt Lucas out of there? Do you have a plan?"

"I hate to admit this George, but I am basically making this stuff up as I go. I don't have a master plan, and I do have a goal, but we keep adding sub goals along the way. What the military calls 'mission creep', which tends to muddy the original goal." A flash of light made them all stoop down quickly. Seconds later they heard the crack of lightening n the distance.

"Oh great, sounds like rain, that's just what we need right now."

"OK, let's get our butts back toward town and see if we can figure out what to do next, follow me boys."

"Right behind you, as usual."

The three slid carefully and quietly back towards the town, Amanda in the lead. After about fifteen minutes of thunder, the rain began to fall in large drops. Within another ten minutes they were soaked to the bone, and even in the warmer tropical climate Amanda felt a chill as she stood behind a tree and looked around carefully before moving a couple of hundred feet where she stopped and repeated the look before advancing another 100 feet. She kept this up for about an hour with Terry and George following behind her, glancing back to see if they were being followed. Then she saw some dark shapes moving towards them in the direction they were moving.

"Down!"

The three dropped onto their stomachs, right into about a half an inch of muddy rainwater to add to their discomfort. Amanda looked up carefully trying to spot the shapes she saw and put some identification on them. At this point if they were just locals she was ready to take a chance and see if they would help them. She did not want to walk right back into the hands of the bad guys, or the FARC, but she felt the locals would help them, especially a

Terry Tyler
(Writer & Reviewer)

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woman. Well, she hoped, Latin cultures are very maternalistic.

She caught another glance of one of the shapes and a burly man with a rifle slung over his shoulder, followed by another smaller man holding a rifle in front of him, ready to bring it to bear quickly on any threat. She watched this man scanning the areas to each side of their path as he went. She also noticed they seemed to be heading right at them but gave no indication they had been seen.

"I don't think they have seen us, so let's get off to the side of this line of march and see if they will walk on by."

"Line of march, is that any way for a woman to talk?"

"It means they are coming this way, Terry, now move your ass to the left, stay low and move slow. I'll keep an eye on them while you two move into cover, then I'll move while you watch for me. If they look like they see us, everyone bolt in different directions and try to get back towards town and find a villager, maybe we can get back together there. Do not run in straight lines as you are a lot easier to shoot if you do, otherwise and scared and moving target in all these trees will be hard to hit. Any questions?"

"Yeah, where did you learn this stuff, Girl Scouts?"

"I was indeed a Girl Scout, buddy, but let's just say I'm a resourceful girl."

"Yet another understatement. Young lady you have a British way of understatement, do you know that?"

"British? Hmm, maybe you're right. No time to ponder that one now, time to move. Slowly!"

Terry slid off to the left and George moved left with him, the two of them moving about thirty meters into a clump of low young trees. They buried themselves down into the loose leaves and fallen branches that covered the base of the trees. Then a hand rose up out of the humus, the fist clenched and the thumb raised upward for a few seconds then the thumb retracted and the index finger came out and pointed to Amanda indicating she should move out. Amanda had kept an eye on the two approaching men and their movements hadn't changed, still on an almost direct bearing to her position, but they were much closer now so she needed to be extra careful.

The approaching men were close enough that the lower ground Terry and George had taken was now pretty much out of the question so she looked around for another likely hiding place. Behind and to the right she saw a pile of broken limbs only about a meter high, but there was also higher brush to cover her movement toward it. She began an infantryman's crawl along the ground, moving along with a smooth grace and naturalness that had no other option but to blend her into the forest lights moving with the wind and rain. The rain covered the noise her movement was making; a small benefit; the proverbial sliver lining compared to the other discomforting feelings she had had about the rain up until then. One man's heaven is another man's hell; there it is again, only same 'man', she thought. She kept moving forward in that fluid motion until she was able to move left and then behind the pile of limbs. She rolled over onto her back and started looking for the approaching pair. They weren't where she

thought they would be by now. She began to widen her scan, trying to get another fix on the current threat, but they were no where to be seen. She looked back toward where the other men were hiding and saw no movement.

This was unnerving, she thought, where the hell are they? Uncertainty is hard to deal with, so she rolled back over onto her stomach then raised her head a bit higher, try to find her target. No luck. So she raised up a little higher. Now she saw what looked like two shapes lying about twenty meters away and she ducked back down. Had they seen her and ducked down? What had they seen that made them drop?

"They are quite dead, Señorita."

Amanda almost jumped out of her skin at the sound of the man's voice behind her. She cursed herself for focusing so intently on the men in front she dropped her guard behind her, stupid. She spun around quickly, still lying on the ground, to see a tall, smiling young muscular man standing over her with what looked like a deer rifle with a silencer on the end. Sniper, she thought. Then she noticed the other two men behind him holding AK-47's. Oh no, not the FARC, she thought! An older man walked up to her and stood next to the younger man.

"Are you Amanda? Please relax, we are friends, sent to find you."

"Oh yeah, I have a lot of friends out here. Yes, I am Amanda. And exactly whose payroll are you on, just so I know? I can't tell the players without a program in this country."

The two men looked at each other and broke into big smiles.

"We work for no one but ourselves and the honest people of Columbia, but right now we are helping a man who knows a friend of yours, Gilberto Alfonso Peña Silva."

"Gilberto Alfonso Peña Silva? Do I know a Gilberto Alfonso Peña Silva?"

"I do not know, but he knows you, and sent us out here to find you and your friends. You can tell them to come out from those bushes over there."

Amanda caught herself from showing surprise that he knew where George and Terry were hiding. She wondered how long they had been watching them. He extended his hand towards her and she grabbed it as he lifted her to her feet. She looked over toward the bushes hiding the other men and motioned for them to come on out. For a few tense moments nothing happened. Had they already bolted? Then she saw the underbrush rise up and the two men emerged, shaking off the debris from their drenched bodies. They started walking slowly and apprehensively toward Amanda with their arms raised over their heads.

"Gentlemen, we are your rescuers, not your pursuers, please relax."

Slowly they lowered their arms.

"What's up, Amanda?"

"George, this guy says he's a friend and been looking for us."

"Are you the one who shot the two guys coming this way? We saw them drop like a load of bricks from out of no where but didn't hear any shots. They haven't moved a muscle since"

The older man pointed to his younger companion.

"Silencer on a very nice sniper rifle. I bought this rifle for my son Manuelito here, and he is a very good shot. He is the best around here. He nailed them both, got the second man before the first one hit the ground, both very clean head shots."

"Who were they?"

"Those two, they were FARC, and they weren't looking for you. They were just in the wrong place at the wrong time, eh Manuelito?"

"Sí, viejo, or the right place in my case."

The father beamed at his son's remarks. Amanda looked him in the eye.

"And now where do you intend to take us?"

"We thought we'd take you to the Americanos in Florencia so we can get some dry clothes on, how does that sound?"

"Americans? There are Americans in Florencia"

"Si, señorita, and the number keeps expanding. Soon we will be a Little America here in Florencia. They also came to get you."

George and Terry looked at each other with big smiles.

"Do we live in a great country or what? They have pulled out he stops to get us back, I am deeply moved. Let's get back to town and those dry clothes!"

"We are not far from where we need to be, less than thirty minutes, please follow me, but do be careful, we're not the only ones looking for you."

Amanda and the two men fell in behind the older man with Manuelito and the other man bringing up the rear, both men sweeping the sides of their path looking for trouble as they walked. After what seemed longer than thirty

minutes they walked out of the forests and walked briskly down a few alleyways towards a cluster of buildings that looked like a small hotel. The older man walked up to a door and knocked while his two companions took up watch posts nearby. An older gentleman with deep lines in his face appeared at the door and exchanged a few words with their savior, then the older man looked over their rescuer's shoulder at Amanda and the two crewmen. His face broke into the large smile and he opened the door wider to let them in, spreading his arm into the small apartment and looking back into the darkness.

"Señor Nick, is this what you are looking for?"

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Who's This Blonde Stranger?

"Amanda! Oh my God, you're alright!"

Nick jumped off the chair he was sitting in and dashed over to her, throwing his arms around her and lifting her off her feet.

"Nick Collins, I'm beginning to think you're following me."

She grabbed his face and held it between her hands.

"I am so glad to see you, really. I'm sorry to get you into this."

"I'm pretty happy to see you too, you're why I'm here. I expected to have to go shoot it out with some bad guys to get you back. This is such a relief."

"Hello Amanda, I am Gilbert Silva," Gilbert walked over and extended his hand toward her. "It is a pleasure to get to meet you, even under these circumstances. I have, uh, read your work. In the travel magazines, you know."

"You are Gilberto Alfonso Peña Silva? My friend?"

"I am he, and I think I win friend status for the little rescue my friends did for you. Humberto here," he pointed to the father who had led them in, "is a friend of Edgar here, who is my friend, and Nick here is my friend, you are his friend, and these two boys you brought along with you, well I'll bet by now they are your friends. See all friends!"

He turned to Humberto.

"Where did you find them?"

"Ah, not far, about 3 kilometers south of town, about to get ambushed by a couple of FARC, but Manuelito was able to take them both out, very quietly."

Gilbert's brow darkened and he pressed his lips together.

"FARC? Are you sure? They should not be here."

"Well, I did not ask them, but I know FARC when I see them. They were FARC. But we got them and did not see any more."

"FARC in the area is not good," he said turning toward Edgar, "Have you any other reports of FARC from your patrols?"

"No, but they are not back yet for another hour, Gilberto. We will see then, but what can be done about this?"

"I think not much, but it will certainly cause us to be extra careful. Our next task is to hook up with the spec ops team inbound at the airport, then get Capt Lucas back from the clinic later tonight, then go get the equipment. Remember the equipment, Nick, we also came to get that, so the shooting isn't over yet, but we'll have enough guns to keep you out of it."

"I'm not afraid of being in it, Gilbert, I'm just damn glad to see this woman," he said as he stared at her, promising quietly to himself not to take his eyes off this woman ever again

"Well, I hate to break up the reunion, but we have some ops to plan, so let's get back to work. "

Amanda finished introducing Terry and George to the others then the three went to get cleaned up. A maid was summoned and she was sent off to round up some suitable clothes for them to change into and a runner was sent to get some food and wine for them. Suitable clothes turned out to be green dungarees, the Cuban type, and one size was supposed to fit all.

When the three returned to the front room Nick, Edgar, and Gilbert were gathered around a map spread on the table. Gilbert turned toward Amanda and began an impromptu briefing.

"Edgar's men have all reported in, and there were some other FARC reported out in the jungle. We have to go to the airport in thirty minutes to meet up with a few more friends coming in, some of the spec ops guys from the company just to give us some additional firepower. The pilot of your aircraft was in a lightly guarded infirmary but since you're escape they have really beefed up the guard on him. It might lead you to think they think we're gonna hit them. And since we are, we lose our element of surprise. They will be expecting us."

"Well, we just need to give them a reason to expect something different. I think their guard on Capt Lucas would diminish if they thought we were caught, right?"

Nick looked at Amanda in near disbelief.

"What the hell are you talking about? I'm getting you out of the way, Amanda. There is no way I'm letting you go into that trouble again."

"You're not going to 'let' me go, Nick?"

Gilbert had a huge smile on his face.

"'Let me', that's rich. Nick Collins, do you think it is pure luck that I have gotten us this far without getting shot? Is it conceivable to you that I just might be a very capable individual who can handle herself and be part of the solution instead of part of the problem? I am not some limp wristed, fainting ninny that needs a 'man' to take care of her in a tough spot. And, Mr. Collins, it seems to me this isn't the first time you've seen me handle a tough situation is it? Or have you forgotten the bar fight in San Juan when you and your friends had reached the end of their rope with those tough guys and who was it that pulled your collective, smelly, Tradewind asses out of that one, huh?"

Nick was back on his heels.

"Uh, yeah, San Juan, that seems so long ago, Amanda, but it wasn't, was it. And I never saw what happened to that last bad guy there. One minute he was about to bash my head open with that chair and then he decided to take a nap and we got the hell out of there."

He sat down in a chair at the table.

"Yes, I have noticed you do have some special talents, but that is part of what has attracted you to me, you are such a special person, and you have such a great sense of humor and timing, you are such fun just to be with."

Amanda's tight face loosened up and she broke a smile.

"Idiot pilot, you know just what to say to a girl. And I'm told I have a British sense of humor, right Terry?"

"Not sense of humor, sense of understatement, and would be funny when you're not being hunted by men with automatic weapons."

"Ah, yes, understatement. Anyway back to our problem. I was just thinking that if our problem is that they are expecting us to come after Lucas, then we just need to change their minds about that somehow. I noticed this Irish or Argentine or whatever bandit uses a lot of disgruntled employees of the FARC mostly, and they circulate around. These people don't know everyone they work with. I've seen them go through some meeting rituals that I can only associate with meeting for the first time. So my idea is to let them think Edgar's men, posing as local thugs, have caught us and have taken us too another location. Since we kind of torched our first home, we will need another spot, one visible enough that people will see us being taken there, then we send for more guards there. That

will draw them away from the infirmary and you guys make the snatch."

Nick looked up at her, "I see two problems with that plan." He rose, walked to a refrigerator and grabbed a beer.

"First is, doesn't that seem a bit dumb to invite the bad guys to come get you again, divide our forces, kind of like General Custer at Little Bighorn? Second problem, how do we get you back, once again because right after we get Capt Lucas the plan is to go to the airport and jump on a an airplane and get the hell out of here fast. You might not be surprised to learn I brought one."

"Oh really? You, an airplane? And for your information, it wasn't dividing his force that killed Custer, it was not listening to the advice of his scouts who told him that there were one hell of a lot more Indians there than he thought, and that they would not run as they had in the past. Disappointing results for Mrs. Custer."

Terry snapped up, "See there it is, that nice British understatement, classic."

"And so you're thinking I can't figure out a way to get away from a couple of half-wit mercenaries and find an airport, Nick? Is that about where we are, because I 'm liking my plan a whole lot, because it will work. And Gilbert, stop enjoying this so much."

"Ah, Amanda, sorry, it is just nice to have someone else to figure things out for me, keeps my head from hurting. I like your plan too. Let's work out the other details once we get the spec ops guys. It's time to go get them at the airport, that will give us a chance to scout a hideout for Amanda and Edgar's men, then we go to the airport so Amanda knows how to get there after the trap is sprung."

Nick stood up, "Sounds like a plan. I'd like to see Amanda's plan developed a bit more so let's get going."

"I got bad news for you, Nick," said George, "But she admitted to us that she makes it up as she goes. I'm betting you won't get to see a lot more of how her plan will work."

And he was right. They piled into two small cars and headed toward the airport. Along the way they found an abandoned house that had a few features she was looking for, like a good view and several ways in and out. Other than that she didn't seem to spend a lot of time worrying about the house, but she did spend time checking routes into and out of the house, then they proceeded to the airport. Amanda had them stop several times and she would study an intersection before waving the driver on. After a few minutes more they arrived at the airport and stood out on the ramp waiting on the government aircraft. A few minutes later Nick picked up the distinct whine of a turboprop engine in the distance and a minute later he was able to pick out the aircraft as it descended toward a downwind leg. It was a Cessna Grand Caravan in Colombian Air Force colors. The aircraft banked gracefully as it set up for landing on the base leg.

Nick only noticed a flicker of bright light jumping out of the trees toward the aircraft but the larger flash next to the slow aircraft startled him. Smoke poured out of the engine as the aircraft wallowed and quickly lost altitude,

mushing into the trees short of the runway by almost a mile.

"Oh my God, what was that?"

"Shoulder fired Stinger would be my guess," Gilbert said, "and FARC. Those bastards. Roserito, can you send a patrol to check them out, in case anyone lived. We will have to move on the clinic without their help; we cannot wait. If they find anyone, have them return here to the airport and meet us at the airplane. There were supposed to be three Americans on that airplane."

"Si, I will send someone right away," and he turned to one of his men who stepped then turned and headed out.

"This isn't too good, we needed all the people we had coming to the party. We're going to need Amanda's plan even more, but it has to be sure to take the clinic down to no more than five guards in order for us to get him out without hurting any innocent people."

"Well, how about a new twist to this one. We send word that some locals have captured us, make a big deal of marching us into that house, then send a runner to see Ramon, our former captors. Have the runner tell Ramon we are captured and a ransom is demanded. Since they had sent most of the soldiers over to the clinic it stands to reason they will then have to send people from there to try to swindle the locals out of their ransom. But of course we'll have some surprises ready for them."

"OK, I like that, and soon after the men leave to come find you, we'll jump in and make the grab on Lucas, then we'll head for the airport where Nick will be waiting with the aircraft ready to go within five minutes notice. When we are all together, we'll head out of here. Just a short flight, though, we go to San Vincente next to get Uncle Sam's toys back."

"Sounds good Gilbert. If you get here before I do it would be OK with me if someone heads back my way to provide some rear guard support while Terry, George and I bug out."

"That can work. Alright, Nick you stay here at the airport and keep a low profile. As I said in about an hour we need you to be ready to roll within a five minute window of notice, faster would be great. We'll go back into town and set up the trap and then Edgar's men and I will grab Capt Lucas and get here as fast as we can, then come back for Amanda and you other two. This is good as it maximizes our numbers in multiple places without overburdening one element, except maybe Amanda."

"Don't worry about me, the boys and I have gotten out of scrapes before and we'll be here on time to leave."

The rest of the group jumped back into the cars and headed back into town, leaving Nick by himself. He walked over to the Russian twin prop and did a walk around in the remaining light. She was ready to go. Now he just had to wait. He hated to wait. Digging into his flight bag he found a Plane and Pilot magazine and his CD player. Settling back into one of the seats he strapped the headset on and plugged in a Jimmy Buffett CD and turned up the

volume as he opened the magazine and tried to relax.

Relax hell. He got back up and found his semiautomatic pistol and stuck it in his belt in his lower back. Then he sat back down and picked up the magazine. Man, he hated waiting.

He heard a vehicle pull up outside the airplane and jumped up, running to the entrance door. Out hopped Edgar and Gilbert from the front seat then they opened the rear doors and helped a tall man Nick recognized as Dan Lucas out of the back seat. He wasn't able to walk on his own but otherwise he looked OK.

"Nick Collins? What the hell are you doing way out here?"

"Hello Dan. You lost my girlfriend, who I trusted in your care for the short hop over the Curaçao."

"Ran into a bit of trouble over the water, Nick, costs me a chunk of flesh for trying to stand up for your girl."

"Enough talking, help us get him into the cabin, Nick, we need to go back and cover Amanda's retreat."

Nick took Lucas at the top of the stairs and helped him into one of the seats.

"I guess your part went well?"

"And here is your Capt Lucas, and we have no casualties, although I can't say the same of the other guys. As soon as they heard Amanda was up for ransom most of them headed out quickly, only leaving three men. We only needed to kill one to convince his friends they didn't want to fight. The doctor was most helpful and gave us some dressings and antibiotics for him until you get him to another doctor in the states."

"OK, go get Amanda, please."

"We will be right back."

As they stepped out on the ladder they heard a burst of gunfire coming from Amanda's direction.

"Hurry!"

They ran down the ladder and back into the car. Now he was very worried, she didn't have a gun that he knew, but the bad guys did. And if all those people left the clinic then maybe she was up against more than she thought. Shouting from outside brought him back onto the ladder with this pistol drawn.

"Get that thing cranked up Nick," Gilbert said as he jumped out of the car, "Amanda and her two buddies are headed this way right now with a small band of angry mercenaries right on her heels. Edgar's men are holding them back to buy us time, and they are all fine."

"Amanda is OK?"

"Yes! Now crank this thing up and let's get going!"

Nick jumped into the cockpit and began his startup as Gilbert started to get into the copilot's seat.

"Not this ride, Gilbert. George is a pilot and I'd like to have him up here to help me."

Gilbert climbed back out of the cockpit, "No problem, but I did enjoy the ride down here."

Minutes later Amanda, Terry, and George came running out of the shadows and toward the airplane. Nick glanced out his window and saw Teresa was also with them, running at a full sprint. Man, how close are those bad guys, he thought? They ran up the ladder and into the airplane as the second engine caught and began to roar to life. He glanced back and saw George and Terry shove the ladder back while one of Edgar's men pulled it the rest of the way to clear the wings. George headed up front.

"Can you use some help? I've never flown a Russian airplane before."

"You bet, hop in. Russian airplanes fly the same you just have an uncontrollable urge for fish eggs and vodka. You guys did good, I take it?"

"All we did was what Amanda tells us to do, I'm getting used to that. She seems to come up with just the right thing at the right time, amazing. You're a lucky man, Nick."

"Yes I am, now let's see if our luck holds, let's get this thing out of here."

He added throttle and the airplane lurched forward, taxiing to the end of the runway to set up for a take off. Halfway down the runway back taxi Gilbert poked his head into the cockpit.

"Can you stop? One of Edgar's car's are chasing us now, they want us to stop"

"Sure, but make sure it is safe and then get them in here fast."

Nick looked back into the cabin and saw Amanda looking exhausted but she had a smile on her face as she talked to Terry and Lucas. She noticed him looking back and waved at him with a bigger smile. Nick swung his head to the window and saw the car pull up and two men got out and helped another man out who could not walk. There wasn't a ladder so the two men boosted their injured companion into the doorway first before they each jumped up with Gilbert helping to pull them in, then Terry secured the door and Gilbert came forward again.

"We are living good Nick, those were our spec ops guys. One was wounded in a small fire fight they got into with FARC probably, but they held them off until Edgar's men arrived and then they were able to retreat, and now they are with us, although they lost some of their special equipment in the airplane, but we will succeed anyway. Now

let's go!"

Nick shoved the throttles forward again and pushed the aircraft down the runway toward the end and brought it to a stop then swung it around for take off. As he aligned with the runway George was reading checklists and looked up to see a jeep turning into the airport property.

"We expecting any more passengers, Nick?" he said as he pointed to the jeep.

Nick noticed the men in green uniforms in the back of the jeep and what looked like a light machine gun mounted on the roll bar.

"No we are not," he said then looked back at the passengers, "We have company, we'll try to beat them out of here, hold on!"

Nick threw the throttles forward and the airplane began its roll, flaps set for a short field take off.

"We'll get up and over them before they can get down here, you get the wheels and flaps and I'll try not to hit the rising terrain in front of us or this will be a very short ride."

"Copy, let's go."

By now they had picked up enough speed to rotate the nose wheel off the ground, then the mains lifted off with the jeep still a quarter of a mile down the runway. Nick and George smiled at each other.

"Alright, this old crate has some life in her!"

"Yes, she flies pretty nice, let's climb."

Whump! Whump! Whump! Whump! Whump! Whump!

"Gunfire! They are shooting at us! Turn Nick, turn!"

Nick began to try some evasive actions but the aircraft was slow and climbing and not in the most maneuverable configuration. They were out of range before he had enough airspeed to do anything meaningful.

"We're still in the air!"

"Maybe not for long, George, look out at number 2, the gauges are showing she's sick."

"Oh yeah," George said as he reached over and started shutting down the engine. "That one is toast, Nick, they raked it over good and also chopped up some of the elevator. I see oil and gas streaming off the trailing edge of the wing."

They were level at 5000 feet, one engine down and about 60 miles to go to San Vincente. But there would be no mechanics there, and no parts stores, and they were headed for the heart of the bad guy's camp with no ride home.

Great, now what, he thought? Just when it seems we're out of the stew, something else pops up. When was his luck going to change.

"George, keep it on this course, I'm going to go back and talk to Gilbert to see what his next bright idea is. Just shout if anything else goes wrong up here. The airport is a good thirty minute away, I'll be back before the descent.

"Wilco, Capt., reassure the passengers for us, good call."

Who is going to reassure me, Nick thought?

I would like to add a personal thanks to my long time internet friend, Carlos Alberto Correa Lindarte of Santa Marta, Magdalena, Colombia for his invaluable assistance in writing the Colombian sections of Alternate Air. - kr



March / April 2003

ISLAND

BREEZES

A newsletter for the employees of Tradewind Caribbean Airlines



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TCA Alaska Iditarod 2003

TCA Alaska with the support of a few pilots from other TCA divisions have finalised the Iditarod support flights for the 2003 season. The first question on many peoples mind is what is the Iditarod? Well to put it in a nutshell it's a dog sled race that takes place during March of every year in Alaska.

TCA Alaska aim to mimic reality as much as possible incorporating fly support missions just like the real life Iditarod Air force www.iditarodairforce.com who make the race possible. Some of you may remember my report on last years support flights in Island Breezes, however 2003 was different.

In line with the previous last 4 years under the guidance of Captain Marvin Sandmire AKA "Snowboss" TCA Alaska started it's support flights long before the start of the race (March 1st), at the beginning of the year. Straw and dog food needed to be flown up from the mainland United States with part of it coming from as far away as Dallas Fort-Worth Intl. Airport. The operation continued for two weeks and then it was on to flying the supplies to the supply points along the trail. McGrath, Galena and Unalakleet. When each individual checkpoint was reached the Mushers (dog sled drivers) passed through the vital supplies of straw and dog food so that the Mushers could relieve their dogs for a brief but welcome period.

Contact

[Ken Malczynski](#)

(Editor)

[Rich Ellison](#)

(Assistant Editor & Webmaster)

[Kyle Ramsey](#)

(Author: Alt Air)

[Terry Tyler](#)

(Writer & Reviewer)

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Vetran Musher Ken Anderson and his team

Remarkably the entire process was completed in good time with the 27 pilots working on the project continuing to fly everyday. This was just as well because around two weeks before the race was due to start Officials at Race Headquarters in Wasilla decided to move the start of the Race to Fairbanks. The reason behind this is that the Anchorage area had an unusually mild winter producing more rain than snow. Conditions on the southern part of the trail were deemed unsuitable for racing. Snowboss and the Iditarod pilots now faced a new challenge; getting supplies to the new checkpoints along the trail. Pilots had just a few days to stock four extra checkpoints and many flights were made between Anchorage and Fairbanks ferrying people and supplies. As if this was not enough there was still to be a Ceremonial start in Anchorage two days before the official start in Fairbanks. Lots more shuffling around and a busy couple of days for the TCAA pilots.

Race Day! From here with the exception of a few shuttle flights in TCAA's 737-200 it was Bush Planes and Helicopters all the way. Snowboss had set up a mobile control centre in the DeHavilland Twin Otter the company had acquired just in time for the race and named in honour of him. From here he would start work in the small hours of the morning keeping a careful eye on the logistics of the race as it developed and assign flights to his team of pilots as the race developed. The next three weeks would be very busy. Some pilots were flying over three sorties a day and often as soon as one job was finished it would be time to fly another. The weather for this stage of the Iditarod support flights was surprisingly good, for the most part pilots flying along the trail enjoyed excellent VFR conditions. In fact as far as the weather was concerned the main enemy was the cold, with temperatures in Northern Alaska often dipping below minus 25 C the pilots' biggest worry was stopping their bush planes from freezing. Multi-player sessions were hosted by Capt Bob Dodge so that pilots could fly together online or just have someone to chat to while flying their individual assignments.



By the end of the Iditarod a grand total of 1781 hours had been by the team of 27 pilots. Many thanks on behalf of the TCA Iditarod team to Snowboss, Kodiak and Bob Dodge for the hard work and effort that went into making this years Iditarod the best yet!!!!

For those wishing to find out more about the Iditarod I've included a list of web resources below.

<http://www.iditarod.com>

<http://www.dogsled.com/>

<http://www.adn.com/iditarod/>

<http://users.iwworks.com/snowboss>

Report by Rich Ellison