

TCA



Issue No.4 October, 2001

Island Breezes

A newsletter for the employees of Tradewind Caribbean Airlines



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.

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Inside TCA



TCA Fleet Re-vamped

Many of our Crew will have noticed there are some changes going on down at the TCA hanger as well as offering several new aircraft there is a new look and feel to the Hanger. TCA Fleet Manager Jack Ford had the following to say.

"The plan is to completely revamp the hangars to a more functional arrangement that will allow, amongst other things, more flexibility in searching for aircraft, departments etc. but without becoming too complicated.

At the same time we will be rationalising the files to achieve a well balanced and good quality fleet whilst taking advantage of improvements in painting techniques and with the release of fs2002, the sims themselves. No one should panic because older files will be available as an archive, but more simply presented.

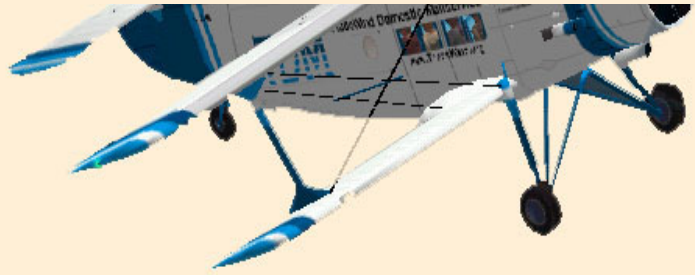
To deliver this a fine band of talented, and in some cases press-ganged, individuals has been assembled to work under my beady eye. They are laughingly known as the Hangar Crew. I'm constantly on the look out for talent so be warned ! "



"Fly the Friendly skies"



Jack Ford
Fleet Manager
Tradewind Caribbean Airlines (TCA) VA
(EGCC~UK)



On behalf of all the crew at TCA we'd like to thank the "Hanger Crew" for all their hard work and congratulate them on their achievements so far!

New aircraft added to the hanger include...

AirCargo has a new DC-8-62F (Patrick Hanna)
TCA has a repaint for the Dreamfleet Boeing 737-400 (Jack Ford)
Project Opensky's 747-400 (Patrick Hanna)
More to come!



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TradeWind Hellenic Airlines

There have been some interesting developments over in Athens Tradewind Hellenic Airlines CEO Patrick Hanna has sent us his monthly report.

TradeWind Hellenic Airlines Monthly Report

Over at THA flight planning, Tony Wedgwood has just completed the creation of Flight plans for TDM Hellenic. Tony put a lot of effort into the project and much thanks goes out to him. The flight plans have been uploaded to the TDMH page.

Hellas 2001 has just released the latest version of their fantastic scenery for the new airport in Athens, LGAV. It is a very detailed rendition of the airport and can be downloaded at the Hellas 2001 home page. This latest version goes hand in hand with the release of their LGAT scenery which THA uses as the base of operations for its cargo division. If you are flying in this part of the world, a stop at their website is a must to download these as well as other fantastic sceneries. Speaking of sceneries, my next project will be the creation of THA scenery. I have been going thru the scenery creation software trying to get the hang of things and hope to get some stuff out shortly. You can look forward to having a nice little THA hotel to stay at in the Greek Islands if you ever are in the area.



Hellas 2001 Main Page:

<http://avsim.com/greece/scenery/>

Until next month keep the wheels pointing down.

Patrick Hanna

Divisional Manager/CEO

TradeWind Hellenic Airlines

www.tradewindhellenic.com

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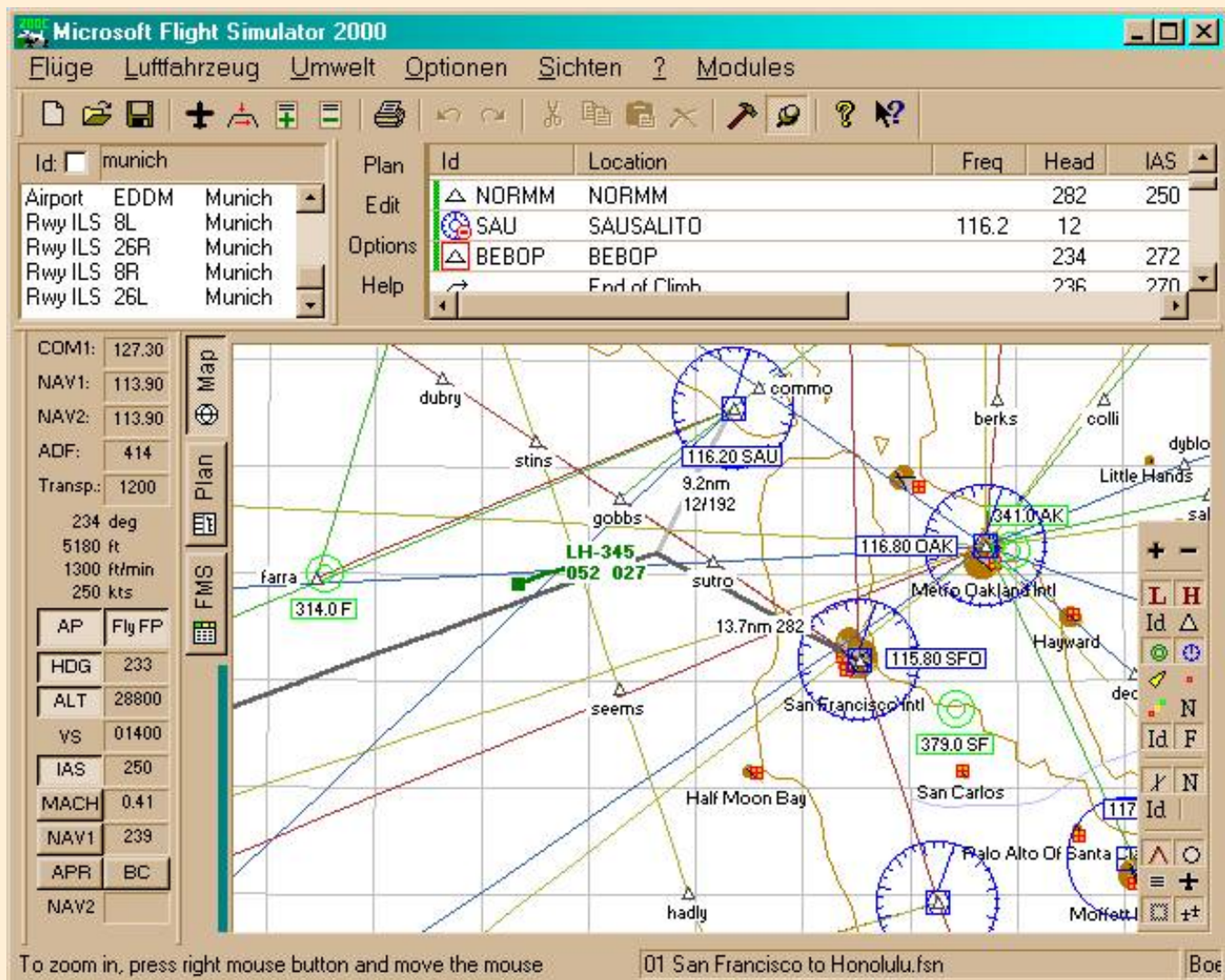


Flight Simulator add-ons

Well for some of us at least Flight Simulator 2002 is finally on the shelves. Those of us that already have a copy of FS2002 are busy playing with it and checking out the new features. However for the time being the rest of us are stuck with FS2000 indeed there are many within the Tradewind Ranks who are still using Flight Simulator 98. Just because you don't have the latest version of the sim doesn't mean that you'll be missing out on all the Fun!

As you will already be aware the Microsoft programmers made the FS 5, FS98 and FS2000 wide open for developers to create lots of interesting add-ons and utilities for the Simulator. This is what stops us from getting bored. TCA has a whole page dedicated to these utilities that can be found from the main "Flight Centre" menu under "FS tools". Everything found on the FS Tools page is "freeware" which means that you don't have to pay a penny to use them.

If money is not of concern then there are some fantastic commercially available utilities on the market. My own personal favourite is FS Navigator 4.4 which can be found at (<http://www.fsnavigator.com>) although a little on the pricey side the program which integrates with Flight Simulator to aid navigation, flight planning and even has the ability to fly your entire flight plan for you while you sit back and read a book! Errr I mean keep a careful eye on the instruments!



A Screenshot from FS Navigator 4

I have heard many TCA pilots say that if they could only have one add-on utility for Flight Simulator then FS Navigator 4.4 would be it! Other useful features include the ability to show High and Low altitude airways and fly Standard Instrument departures and arrivals enabling us to fly ever more realistic flight plans. You can download a free trial of FS Navigator 4.4 from www.fsnavigator.com which will give you full unrestricted use of the utility of 20 sessions after that if you like the program you can register it for \$35.00 or €30.00.


For the more cost conscious or those of us with older or more modest systems or don't require such an in depth complex flight planner you can download the totally free FS Navigator 3 from the following link.. <http://www.simviation.com/fsdutilsnav1.htm>.

One of the main drawbacks for the Flight Simulator series so far is the fact that there are no other planes in the sky, admittedly this problem has been addressed in FS2002 but that doesn't mean that those of us without FS2002 have to fly around by ourselves thinking we are the only aircraft airborne in the entire world. Another commercially available product "FS Traffic" developed by Lago solves this problem. FS traffic allows you to add moving aircraft departing and arriving at the airports you fly to and from. The aircraft are taken from your own personal Aircraft directory so expect to see lots of other TCA aircraft operating in your area. For more information on this product you can visit: <http://www.lagoonline.com/ENG/prodotti/FSTraffic/ptd.htm>

A free trial version of this product is available. The trial version of FS traffic will run with full functions available for 30 minutes, after this time FS traffic will become disabled and you will have to re-boot Flight simulator to continue using it. The free trial version can be found at: <http://www.simviation.com/fsdfstraff1.htm>



Of course most of our crew will already be familiar with these add-ons indeed they are very popular programs and make Flight Simulator much more interesting and realistic. There are many lesser know programs that can prove very useful. A recent newcomer know as ChartViews V1.0. ChartViews is a small 'stand-alone' Windows utility for Flight Simulators allowing a number of airport charts to be stored and available on screen whilst still flying. The programme can load up to 8 files, 4 each of either .pdf files or picture files. Chartviews can be found at : <http://www.simviation.com/fsdutilsnav5.htm> it should also be

 know that abobe Acrobat reader is required to run this program.



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Caribbean Airline News

(St. Maarten)

PJIAE to submit proposal on American Airlines request.

PHILIPSBURG: Management of Princess Juliana International Airport (PJIAE) will submit a proposal to the Executive Council regarding the request from American Airlines for a reprieve. The Executive Council met today with members of the 9-11 task force that was put in place to evaluate the impact of the September 11 attack on the island and ways to alleviate the situation.

St. Maarten had originally intended to offer American Airlines and the other carriers a package in conjunction with the other Caribbean partners. Commissioner of Tourism Theo Heyliger travelled to a Caribbean Tourism Organization business meeting in the Bahamas where the Caribbean partners were supposed to formulate their proposal to the airline. However, a number of the islands had already made individual deals with American Airlines, forcing the other islands, including St. Maarten, to tailor their own packages for American Airlines.

Ferrier explained that PJIAE and the Island Government of St. Maarten are unable to fulfill the entire request made by American Airlines, especially given the depleted coffers of the PJIAE. The aviation commissioner told The Daily Herald that PJIAE had extensive commitments for phase one of the airport project and that many of these commitments had been made based on the income of the airport. According to Ferrier, since the September 11 attacks, persons have been travelling less, which has severely depleted the revenues generated at PJIAE through departure fees. Commissioner Ferrier reiterated that from the onset he had favoured granting the airlines a reprieve and added that both the Executive Council and the management of PJIAE were in favour of assisting the airlines, but not to the detriment of the island or the airport.

During yesterday's meeting, members of the task force were also commissioned to host discussions with the St. Maarten Hospitality and Trade Association (SHTA) to gauge hotel response to the American Airlines request for cheaper rates for crew members while the crisis continues. The commissioner stressed that St. Maarten would make the best deal it could with the airlines, but that the load factor of the airlines and the financial capabilities of PJIAE would be significant issues in making an agreement.

(Guyana)

High-level team to meet BWIA on poor treatment of Guyanese.

A high-level team is to meet the management of BWIA to address the manner in which increased security procedures for flights to the United States of America are being implemented. Cabinet Secretary, Dr Roger Luncheon told reporters at a post-Cabinet press briefing on Wednesday that the meeting would address concerns about the procedures being implemented in the context of the decline in the industry and Guyana's need to attract more flights to service Guyanese travelling to and from the United States of America. Dr Luncheon explained that Cabinet's decision was prompted by the verification of complaints by the public about the insensitive treatment to which they have been subjected by BWIA counter staff at the Cheddi Jagan International Airport, Timehri. He said that the complaints had been verified by government officials who had visited the airport and observed "some gross insensitivity by BWIA staff and officials." Dr Luncheon said that "these concerns have been expressed in an already strained relationship between BWIA and government agencies particularly the regulatory Civil Aviation Authority and the Cheddi Jagan Airport authority."

(Jamaica) Air Jamaica stamp duty arrears hit \$400m mark.

Air Jamaica continues to owe the Government millions of dollars in unpaid stamp duty, the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament (PAC) heard Tuesday. Vinette Keene, Commissioner of the Taxpayer Audit & Assessment Department (TAAD) told the PAC that the national carrier's outstanding payments had now hit the \$400 million mark. Responding to the issue which was contained in the Auditor General's report, the TAAD head said talks were taking place to have the money paid up. "Most of the other airlines have paid up their arrears and the interest associated with them," Mrs. Keene said. "There is still some arrears outstanding from Air Jamaica but the Ministry of Finance and ourselves are working with them to work out the payment schedule." It was not the first time that the issue of Air Jamaica's outstanding stamp duty had come before the PAC.

At a sitting in 1999, the PAC heard that the national carrier owed more than \$341 million for stamp duty it collected on tickets and that it was in talks to see the debt removed as part of a deal with Government. The stamp duty, collected on the purchase of airline tickets, amounted to \$293 million plus \$48 million in interest accrued dating back to 1994.

At that time Stamp Commissioner Marlene Humphrey told the Committee that Air Jamaica had not paid over the stamp duty it collected since 1994. She added that the airline owed \$15 million in stamp duties when majority ownership in the entity was sold by the Government. The Air Jamaica Acquisition Group led by hotel magnate Gordon 'Butch' Stewart bought a controlling stake in the carrier that year, while the Government retained 25 per cent interest. Miss Humphrey said when Air Jamaica was being divested, an arrangement was made for the airline to pay off the \$15 million debt. She revealed that the airline paid about three instalments and then stopped. "We have tried from time to time to take them to court but so far we have not succeeded in doing so," she said. Payment of the arrears is likely to put a heavy financial burden on the company, which continues to reel from the dip in air travel, following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. Immediately following the attacks, Air Jamaica reported that it had lost US\$11 million.

(Barbados) American Airlines May Get Their Way.

Help to the airlines serving Barbados and drastic reductions in hotel rates. Those are the steps the island is expected to take to counter the 'declining demand' for the island's tourism product. The concessions to the airlines were designed to encourage them to maintain their schedules during the usually lucrative winter season. Help to American Airlines and other carriers, which are suffering from the fall-out of the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, is expected to include reduced landing charges and cuts in parking fees. In an exclusive interview, acting president of Barbados Tourism Authority, Oliver Jordan, told the Weekend Nation some hotels in the island might have to cut their rates by as much as 35 per cent so as to attract North American visitors.

"From our discussions with our travel partners in the United States and Canada, it is clear that the market is demanding cuts in rates," he said after meeting with travel industry executives in New York and Montreal.

The move to aid the carriers followed an American Airlines request to Barbados for a complete waiver of landing fees and parking charges at Grantley Adams International Airport for one or two years to help maintain its existing flights which were travelling with about a third of average passenger loads. "Government has indicated to them that [request] is going to receive favourable consideration." "I think we are looking at possibly a 15 per cent waiver of those fees for a fixed period. So far, they [American] are the only airline which has come to Government directly and asked for support. But we have actually gone to other airlines and are trying to find out whether they would be interested in any kind of support in order to maintain capacity to Barbados," he said. Jordan said Government's ability to respond to the request was influenced by international aviation agreements which prevented the country from taking such a drastic step. Instead it offered the reductions. However, there are other steps which Jordan insists may have to be taken to lure tourists to Barbados. "Our demand is declining and our prices are coming down. That's our big challenge and its one we don't really have a lot of control over," he said, that was why the island's hotels might be forced to slash their rates. The market is demanding it. "Obviously, some hotels can meet that and others can't. As an industry what we are recommending in Barbados are 30 to 35 per cent reductions. But some hotels are doing so well out of the United Kingdom so they don't need to cut rates right now. But others do. I don't think it is something that hotels can ignore because the business is going to go elsewhere."

(Barbados) BWIA Flight Check in New York.

Three passengers on a BWIA flight were left behind in New York yesterday after their luggage was pulled for investigation. The flight was bound for Barbados and Trinidad. Shortly before the airline was due to depart JFK yesterday morning, warning signals triggered an extensive and wide investigation into the possibility that a few pieces of luggage might have contained chemicals used in the making of explosives. In the end, though, the searches of the entire plane, a thorough inspection of all luggage, not to mention investigations and interviews with some of the passengers, turned up nothing unusual, and Flight 427 was allowed to leave three hours later. The owners of the luggage, however, were interviewed by security officials and other federal authorities and were asked to change their bags and return to the airport for a later flight.

"Since the events of September 11, there is heightened security, and our passengers and crew took it all in stride," said Clint Williams, BWIA's director of corporate communications in Port-of- Spain. "The flight was eventually cleared and all's well that end's well. What we had was a mixture of security taking all of the necessary precautions and BWIA not prepared to leave until we were sure that everything was put to bed," he added. The incident began when the passengers' luggage "tested positive" during a swab exam for the

presence of chemicals associated with the making of explosives. “It is also interesting to note that these chemicals also exist in other benign substances,” Williams explained. It is understood that the chemicals were in traces of oil discovered on the luggage. The bags were taken off the plane and their owners were “denied boarding”. “It appeared that the bags rather than the contents were testing positive,” Williams pointed out. But the story didn’t end there. The aircraft’s pilot insisted that a thorough search of the plane be undertaken before he would take the plane and the passengers to the skies. It was the first time that BWIA was forced to take such drastic security steps since the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. BWIA Flight 427 later landed safely in Barbados about 3:30 p.m.

Edited by Ken Malczynski

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Pilot Profile

Marcel Ritzima



How long have you been with TCA or TDM?

Almost since the beginning (1996)

Your current position at TCA?

Retired Hanger Chief. Scenery and aircraft designer

Your favorite aircraft to fly?

PC-12, RJ85, B747

Your favorite division to fly with?

TDM/Air Cargo

In your opinion, what keeps you flying for TCA?

Have fun under the Caribbean Sun ;-)



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We have PIREPS!

Our company secretary, Sue has been sending us her favorite flight reports. Every month we pick out our favorite and post it right here on our very own PIREP page.

Tradewind Caribbean Airline
WIN-Airline-Reporter

Flight : Csep2
Report #: REP39349.TCA
Date : 09/20/2001
Name : Biff Blowhole #9166
Callsign: Krazy Pirate
EMail : Krazypir8@aol.com
Aboard: 1
VFR/IFR : VFR
Aircraft: Rockwell Twin Commander
Depart. : Cayes Haiti, MTCA
Destin. : Sangster Int'l Montego Bay Jamaica
Dep.time: 13:20
Enroute : 01:10
Fuel : 82gal
Route1 : MTCA--BENET--MKJS
Speed : 220kias
Altitude: 10000ft



Remark 1: After a quiet but warm night sleeping in the plane I was anxious to get airborne and out of Haiti. I had to wait around until the last mail truck came at 13:00 before I could depart. Tell the Cargo guys to try and pick a better pick up point that this place, it is very desolate. Anyway I got airborne at 13:20 and intercepted the "G633" airway and soon got an IFR pickup to Montego Bay. I filed for 12,000ft but was unable to get that high due to weather. When I got out over the Jamaica Channel the afternoon thunderstorms that are so prevalent in this area were building rapidly. Upon passing 10,000ft I noticed I was in between two cloud layers about a thousand feet apart so I asked to level off here. It was an eerie sensation socked in a storm but still VMC. The ride was slightly bumpy but very comfortable. By the time I got 40 miles from the Jamaican coastline the clouds were all gone. I like when mother nature parts the weather for me as if she was rolling out the red carpet! I descended down to 6000ft for the ride into Montego Bay and once I had the field in sight I canceled my IFR flight plan and set up for a left downwind entry into the pattern. The winds were 073 degrees at 13knots right down the runway. Thanks again Mother Nature! This was almost too easy. When I was on a 1 mile final at 700ft the winds started shifting around a little and I had to start pumping the rudder pedals and ailerons to stay lined up. Now I know why my doctor recommended I stay grounded a little longer as my knee was really hurting. In two more minutes I was on deck and 15 more found me up in "The Left Seat Pub" at the base of the tower having a little reunion with old friends and sampling the local Myers rum. I love this job!!! Biff -----



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Cabo Wabo

Nick awoke at about 0500 local time, early for the location but he was still on Eastern Caribbean time. Not able to fall back to sleep, he pulled out his copy of Plane & Pilot magazine and started thumbing through the pages. Beyond the ubiquitous John and Martha King two-page color ad for Kings Schools, he found a couple of ads for handheld GPS systems that could mount on a yoke. John's widget had been handy on this flight and Nick could just imagine the usefulness flying the islands as he could recall several frantic scrambles for charts in the night as he watched an engine go bad or lost the vacuum pump. They are pricey little things, though. But how much was his hide worth? He'd have to investigate further. He went on to read an article about the Aviat Husky, a short field two-seater he had flown a couple of times in Colorado. By 0600 he couldn't lie in bed any longer and decided to start his morning routine.

First, Nick spent a few moments with the toilet, taking the magazine with him, then into the shower. He let the hot water cascade over his head and shoulders, rinsing any remaining effects of his slumber down the drain. Starting the soap on his chest, he then lathered up his shoulders and down each arm, then down below the waist and down the legs. After rinsing, he lathered his face, rinse, then shampooing his hair. One more rinse of the whole body and he was out and toweling off in less than three minutes. After drying off he attended to brushing his teeth and running his electric razor over his face, completing a routine started in college where he learned to go from bed to bike in less than six minutes.

Opening his flight bag and pulling out a fresh set of clothes, he dressed in his normal attire for these cargo flights. Pressed blue Dockers, polo shirt with the company logo and a pocket for his sunglasses when they weren't on his face, and brown bullhide cowboy boots. Nick considered this dressing up as he usually wore shorts and Nike's for flying the up and down hops from island to island in the small mail planes used by TDM.

By 7 a.m., Nick was in the hotel café, ready to order his breakfast. He found a USA Today newspaper and began to scan the front page for interesting news or anything from home. Aaron arrived as the waiter was pouring up Nick's coffee and the waiter poured a second cup for Aaron.

"Hey, how did you sleep, Nick?" he asked with all the sincerity he could muster.

"Oh, yeah, I never have trouble sleeping," Nick said, "A habit borne of having to grab sleep in cockpits too much, I guess."

"I know what you mean, that part of flying routes I don't miss."

"You like this office job, Aaron, don't you miss flying the line?"

"Hey, flying is a young man's game, especially these island routes. The Boss manages to keep me busy watching over the Air Cargo and TDM pilots."

Nick noticed Aaron didn't really answer his question and decided to drop it for now.

"I'll bet that does keep you busy. Must be about like herding cats watching over all those folks. We don't see you much out on St. John's."

"I should go out there more often, and think I need to up my visits or find someone to help. On the other hand, I always find something and then I have to do something about it. It's like, don't ask, don't tell at one level. And then we'll get a call from the St. John's Police and I have to ask."

By the time the two men's breakfast arrived from the kitchen, John came strolling up, still wiping the sleep out of his eyes. "Good morning all," he said with a big smile as he swung himself into the chair between Aaron and Nick.

"About time, now we gotta wait for you to eat too," Nick said. "What's the matter, can't keep up with the old guys?"

"Now, both you guys got a couple of hours before the engine went out, so don't give me that," John said with his face scowling.

"Just order your breakfast, make it quick, I don't want to make Miguel's driver have to wait on you," Aaron said as he winked at John.

By 8:30, they were all in the lobby with luggage and checked out. They sat in the lobby and waited for their ride. At 8:55 the driver arrived and hustled their luggage into the sedan. He started the short trip to the airport through the narrow streets until they got out of town a bit.

At the airport they checked in at the immigration office to get through passport control, then they were allowed out to their aircraft. The local mechanics were still working on it with several panels lying on the pavement, but as they approached they could see they were replacing them one by one as one of the men inspected each compartment.

Nick and John paid a quick visit to the weather office and filed a flight plan. This leg would be a quick 400 miles, would be just under two hours and would take them over to Puerto Vallarta and then over water for nearly 300 miles to San Lucas. The weather was clear with no wind, and it looked that way the entire route.

Nick started preflight on the rest of the aircraft while John went to check on the repairs. Aaron went to complete the paperwork with Miguel and say his good-byes to his old friend. A few minutes later he came storming out of the office with an armed soldier in trail.

"You guys are not going to believe this! These guys say our client owes taxes in Mexico and they intend to seize the remaining cargo and impound our airplane!"

"What?!?", Nick spun around, "You've got to be kidding!"

John came from around the number 2 engine to see what the commotion was about. "Impound? You mean like we can't leave?"

"Yes John, that's exactly what it means. I hope this is a mistake, sometimes their records can be outdated, so the guy is calling Mexico City now. In the meantime this fine gentleman gets to guard our airplane and they want us off it until we get it resolved," Aaron said, gesturing toward the soldier still right behind him.

Aaron glanced back over his shoulder at the office he had come from. "I'm gonna go call the client back in Cuba to see if he can't help figure this out or at least get our airplane released. I'll also let the office know what's going on if it lasts much longer."

He turned quickly and strode back into the building for his briefcase, his office away from home. Nick stepped aside and motioned to the soldier, "Your airplane, señor," he said with a sweep of his hand toward the crew door. The soldier stationed himself at a loose parade rest next to the crew door. Nick looked at John. "Well, what the hell do we do now?" John asked with his jaw still loose with disbelief.

Nick narrowed his eyes and looked right at John. "Does it look like anyone is consulting with us on this one, John? Uh, No, John. You and I will sit our butts right here and wait to see what happens next. This one is clearly up to Aaron and he will get this sorted out, don't worry. We need to not become part of the problem, so just try to relax."

Nick wished he believed Aaron could fix this one as much as he tried to convey to John. Yet again another delay, he hadn't been able to count on much of anything on this trip, his visions of hanging out in Tijuana for a while fading fast. He sat down on the tarmac under the wing of the turboprop more because he didn't know what else to do right then. John squatted down next to him.

Nick stared off in the distance, trying his best to not let the unfolding situation get to him and drive him to do something he would later regret. John started to whistle some tune Nick didn't recognize, so he brought his stare back out into the distance. What crap, they couldn't even try out the work done on the engine until this got cleared up.

Within five minutes, Nick had hit his limit of patience. "C'mon, John, we have some work to do. Let's go talk these guys into letting us check out the engine so we can get out of here as fast as possible when the time comes."

John leapt to his feet and bounded up next to Nick's right side. "Now you're talking!"

The pair strode into the office they had seen Aaron disappear into earlier. Inside were four metal desks, one against each wall. They were of the military gray metal variety with the simulated wood grain contact paper missing in large scallops around the edges and

several stenciled identification numbers spray painted on them from past inventory audits. Each desk had a rolling swivel chair, the padding missing in some places, two of them had men in uniforms at them typing. Aaron sat in a regular government chair next to one of the empty desks talking in rapid Spanish into a phone to someone on the other end. A third uniformed woman was searching through a set of file cabinets.

“Aaron, who the hell do we need to talk to to get a run up on Number 2? We’re sittin’ here on our butts and we could be checking that engine so when you guys get this figured out we can get going.” The three uniformed workers stopped and turned toward Nick.

Aaron stopped talking into the phone and turned his attention to Nick. “Ah, Nick, I don’t think this is the time to be asking for favors, and I’m kind of busy right now.”

“Why not Aaron? It’s a simple thing, and we’re not going anywhere. Besides John and I are about to go crazy just sittin’ around!”

Aaron breathed in deeply and let out a big sigh. He looked at the woman at the file cabinets and started talking to her in Spanish. Nick heard him tell her we had work done on an engine and wanted to test it. Then he said something else Nick didn’t understand, but the woman glanced at him and laughed out loud, so Nick figured it probably at his expense.

It didn’t take Aaron long to convince her, but just to be sure she sent one of the uniformed typists with them to sit in the cockpit so they didn’t try anything. Nick marched back to the airplane with John and his new cockpit companion in trail. John secured the loose engine covers out of the way while Nick climbed into the cockpit and sat in the right seat, the uniformed officer right behind. He pointed to the left cockpit seat.

“Sit there, and don’t touch anything, comprende amigo?” Nick said slowly, looking at the man with narrow eyes to convey his seriousness.

“Yes, señor, as long as you don’t start anything but that engine, I will just watch, comprende amigo?” the officer shot back in crisp English with only a hint of an accent.

Nick’s lips started to break into a smile but went right to a laugh. “I’m such a jerk sometimes, sorry!”

He smiled, “No problem, I lived in East L.A. until I was 12.”

Nick laughed again and fumbled around for the checklist book. After setting a few switches and starting the APU, Nick slid open the side window and looked out at John standing in front of number 2. He had been joined now by two of the mechanics that worked on the engine.

Nick gave him the thumb’s up sign that John followed by holding up two fingers on his left hand and holding his right hand raised with the index finger extended and rotating it around in circles. Nick hit the starter and the prop began to spin up with the bleed air forced into it by the APU. Seconds later the burners lit up and the engine quickly gained speed, the prop turning into a blurry disc.

Nick slid the prop control lever up and down, moving the big prop blades through their range of movement. John and the mechanics walked around the prop and approached the exposed engine from the rear to inspect the work and look for any other signs of trouble. Nick continued to cycle the prop control up and down, the prop’s pitch changing each time.

Within two minutes John came out from around the engine into view and gave Nick a thumb’s up sign, indicating everything looked OK so far. Nick pulled the engine lever to idle and set the prop full forward, then switched the fuel pump off. The engine began to wind down slowly. He then killed the APU and electrical switches.

“OK, that’s it for now,” Nick winked at the officer next to him. “After you,” he motioned for the man to exit to cockpit. The uniformed man slid out of the seat and headed for the crew door while Nick secured the battery switch and climbed out after him.

John walked up to Nick with his big smile firmly in place. “Looks good, Nick, I told them to button it up,” he jabbed his thumb over his shoulder at the mechanics lifting the panels back into place.

“OK, that’s good.” Nick waved at the uniformed officer as he walked back toward his office. “Hey, thanks again.”

The officer turned around and gave him a thumb’s up sign with his right hand, then turned and returned to his work, grateful for the short diversion.

“Ah, well, now what John, this really sucks,” Nick said after drawing a deep breath. “What shall we do to entertain ourselves now?”

“How about some coffee over there at that little cantina?”

“OK,” Nick said, “That works for me.”

The two men started walking across the ramp after securing the aircraft.

The cantina was a small room, no more than 400 square feet, with six small round tables and three thin black wire chairs at each table. On the wall opposite the doorway was a small grill area with a large silver refrigerator next to a table with a stack of plates and glasses. Not counting the man standing at the grill and the waitress, they were the only ones in the place.

They had just poured their second cup of coffee when Aaron came busting into the room. “Hey, there you are. We are ready to go, I’ve got it all straightened out now.”

“Ya, good,” John said as he stood up

Nick sat upright in the flimsy chair and checked his watch; it was 11:55 a.m. “Really? What happened? Sit down John - you too Aaron, want some coffee.”

Aaron grabbed a chair in his huge hand and flipped it around and under his rear as he quickly sat down, John also lowering himself back into his chair. “Hey, it took a while to get back to the distributor, but we did and he wired the taxes to Mexico City on the spot. These guys were going to impound our aircraft and cargo indefinitely for about \$350 US, pocket change!”

“But now we can go?” John’s face took on his hopeful look.

“Yes, so drink up your coffee and let’s get in the air!”

Nick raised the cup to his lips and drained its contents. “OK. John, I’m going to swing by the weather office and check one more time to make sure no surprises have shown up and refile, then I’ll meet both of you at the plane.”

When he arrived he found them talking to Miguel, their host from the previous day. Nick grabbed John’s arm and pulled him toward the crew door. Aaron started to follow them as he continued to talk with his old friend. Miguel leaned into the cargo door and shouted toward the cockpit.

“Good Luck, gentlemen, the very best mechanic on the airfield has worked on your airplane, and he was trained by the Russians on these types in Cuba, you are very lucky indeed,” Miguel said, then Aaron pulled the cargo door closed. Nick started the number 2 engine chuckling to himself about how lucky they had been so far.

After running through the checklists and getting taxi clearance, Nick slid the throttles up a bit to get moving, then tapped the top of the rudder pedals to check the brakes. The aircraft’s nose dipped as it came to a quick halt, and then Nick brought the throttles up again to begin their taxi.

They taxied to Runway 10 and set up for take off, getting the clearance from the tower even as they rolled up to the edge of the runway, so they kept rolling onto the runway and lined up on the centerline. “Let’s go,” Nick said into the intercom, “Take off time is 1235 local.” John made a quick note.

John then rolled the throttles to full power as the aircraft sped down the runway, lifting into the sky as Nick pulled back on the yoke. Nick kept looking at the number 2 oil pressure gauge, but it continued to look good. He noticed John was also spending more time than usual looking at the same thing. John looked over at Nick, “Seems to be holding.” Nick nodded as he brought his scan back outside the cockpit. Over the intercom came Aaron’s voice, “Number 2 seems to be doing OK from back here.” Well, Nick thought to himself, we’re all on the same page for this one.

At 7000 feet, Air Traffic Control directed them to turn left on course, the long way around but got them a bit higher for the mountains. They crossed back over the field at 12,000 feet before turning west toward Puerto Vallarta and the coast only about 100 miles in front of them. Leveling off at 16,000 feet, the green mountains rolled by under their wings and a huge lake appeared on their left side, southwest of the town.

The Antonov turboprop crossed long high ridges running north and south, each successive ridge getting higher as they flew west. At about 50 miles from Puerto Vallarta the Pacific Ocean came into view over the top of the last high ridge. The tropical green land dropped off quickly into the sea at the coastline with the bright white beaches highlighting the change from the land to the foam of the surf.

They crossed the coastline with about 300 miles to go, all over open water. Nick glanced at his watch and clicked his intercom switch on, “What time does that GPS say we’ll get there?”

“Well, I have us with about 50 minutes of flight time at this airspeed, add a few minutes for approach, so let’s say an hour, putting us on the ramp by about 1415 local time.”

“Good, we need to clean it up for the new buyer before we kick back there, we won’t want to have to do that in Tijuana, right?” Nick said.

“Ya, but I’ll be hungry, so we should eat first, then we’ll wash the airplane and sweep it out. After that we’ll hit the beach and have

some fun,” John countered.

“Oh, OK, lunch first, then we wash it. Aaron said he would sweep out the interior for us, what a guy.”

A string of small islands stretched from the coast out over 100 miles before only water lay between them and the Baja Peninsula, getting a deeper blue as it extended out over the horizon.

At about 60 miles out, the shoreline appeared through the haze. Air Traffic Control cleared them to descend to 4000 feet to get ready for a visual approach to Los Cabos International Airport Runway 34. This mountainous desert landmass looked very different from the one they just left with its white beaches that slope upward quickly to low brown mountains along the center of the peninsula. It was also a rocky coastline, with large rock formations along the beaches just offshore. Los Cabos International Airport, serving San Jose Del Cabos and the rest of the peninsula was inland against the foothills just north of the town.

At 20 miles ATC let them come down to 1500 feet and set up for a base leg entry for the visual approach to Runway 34 as John started the approach checklist. Nick slowed the turboprop to 160 knots for the approach. About 6 miles out, they turned for the base leg, then turned final, starting their final descent. The tower cleared them to land.

They taxied to the ramp as directed by the tower, rolling past an Aeromexico Dash-8 loading passengers from the terminal. They found the linesman to direct them into their spot, then shut down the engines. Both pilots looked at each other and breathed a big sigh, then both grinned just a bit before turning to gathering up their equipment and stowing materials from the cockpit. Aaron already had the cargo door open and the ocean breeze was floating up through the hold to the cockpit.

Two men walked up to the aircraft and shook Aaron’s hand, starting into rapid Spanish. It was clear to Nick, however, that this was our last cargo pick up crew. As soon as they got done with that business, they could clean up the airplane. Then they had planned to catch a taxi out to Cabo San Lucas, a Mecca of the party life on the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula with great Pacific beaches strewn with huge rock formations. They would return for the 700-mile flight to Tijuana the following day so they could catch a ride home in San Diego that evening or the next day.

It took the workmen less than thirty minutes to get the last pallets off the aircraft and onto their truck. Aaron supervised the unloading and got his paperwork from them completed.

“OK, let’s go find some lunch and then we wash the airplane for tomorrow.”

John latched the cargo door shut and jogged to join Nick and Aaron as they walked toward a cluster of buildings, one of which they had been told was a restaurant. They found a table in the dining area, which was just finishing up the lunch time rush. Their waitress was a small woman with the first signs of gray hair showing up under her hat. She smiled as she took their order and then hustled away to the kitchen. She returned in 15 minutes with everyone’s order and they dug into the meal.

“Hey, that’s about all I need,” Aaron leaned back in his chair and rubbed his stomach. “I’m going to go find us a place to wash the airplane, then find us a ride to Cabo and make sure we’re ready for tomorrow’s departure.”

He rose and slid his chair under the table. “You two hurry along, the wash rack is waiting.”

Nick stuffed another mouthful into his face and waved his fork at Aaron.

“Ya, it shouldn’t be long for us,” said John after taking a long swig off his beer.

Soon the two men finished their lunch and paid the bill, then began walking back to the airplane. Aaron was standing outside talking to a tall man wearing overalls and a straw cowboy hat. The man in overalls looked to be about sixty or so, with a full head of white hair sticking out from under the hat. Aaron threw his long arm around the man’s shoulders and waved at them as they got closer.

“Hey Nick, I got one more flying job for you today.”

Nick’s shoulders sagged, “What are you talking about, Aaron, we’ve got to get the plane cleaned up, it is the priority.”

“Ah, hey, that is the best part, here’s the deal, amigo. Humberto here”, he gave the man a squeeze with his arm, “has a charter flight for three American tourists scheduled down in the little strip at Cabo San Lucas but his pilot can’t be reached. In exchange for you taking his sightseeing charter this afternoon, he will pay you \$75 US and his ground crew here will wash the airplane and clean it up for us.”

“Am I good or what?” Aaron stood up tall and beamed.

“Why me, and what about you guys,” Nick asked.

“I told him you were the best prop pilot in the Caribbean, Nick, and you can take us to Cabo airport when you pick up the job. And he said we could use it to fly back tomorrow.”

“Hmm, and how long will this take?”

Humberto spoke up, “It will only take you about 2 hours of flying, señor. It is easy money and these American tourists tip well.”

“Uh huh, so let me see if I got this straight - I get to fly a couple of fat, rich Americans around the beach for two hours, you two get a straight shot to the hotel while I do it, and these other guys will clean the plane.”

“Si, señor,” Humberto said, “The three women will be waiting for you at the airport, so there will be no delay.”

“Three women?” Nick’s mood changed quickly, almost caught off guard by his own good luck. “Well, now I suppose I could find my way to do all you guys this little favor. What do we do this little job in, not our airplane?”

“Oh no, señor, I have a fine Cessna 206 right over there.” He pointed behind Nick to a tired looking Model 206 sitting under a sheet metal covered parking area with other Cessnas, Pipers and a couple of Beech types. It was overall white, with faded red and brown stripes. It still had its wheel pants in place.

206, thought Nick, a great little workhorse piston. “OK, let me take a look at the plane real quick, then we can go for it. I’ll need some contact information in Cabo, and do you have a map that shows your route?”

“Si, follow me into my office.” He started walking toward a small building.

Nick looked back at Aaron and John. “You guys get our gear, John grab my flight bag and make sure those guys know what they are doing, then get them started cleaning.”

The charter operator’s route was simple; fly 17 miles over to Cabo San Lucas airport, pick up the clients, then take them west and then north up the beach at 1000 feet for about 50 miles. After beach combing cut across the peninsula, climb to 5500 feet to cross the low brown Sierra De La Laguna Mountains on their northern foothills. Approaching the coast south of Punta Pescadero, they would then turn south back along the beach back at 1000 ft, follow it to the southern tip, turn west and fly along The Corridor, then to Cabo’s Arches, land and thank the nice people for their business. The whole trip was about 200 miles long, or about one hour and thirty minutes of flying.

When Nick got back outside with the keys and the aircraft documents, he saw Aaron and John already standing outside the high wing single waiting for him, their bags sitting next to the main landing gear. He walked quickly over to the airplane, opened the doors, and began to preflight while the other two loaded their bags and got strapped in. Nick was grateful for the tin roof cover while they worked to get the aircraft ready as it kept the late afternoon sun directly off the aircraft. The cabin was still too hot for John and Aaron to sit in, so they hopped back out onto the ramp about the same time a fuel truck pulled up to top off the tanks.

Ten minutes later they were strapped in with headsets and Nick called, “Clear Prop!” out the little window just before engaging the starter. The 285 horsepower engine turned the prop four times before sputtering to life, Nick throttling back to 1000 rpm as it settled into a purr. Nick taxied to Runway 34 for take off, got clearance from the tower and rolled onto the runway, applying full power as the aircraft’s nose aligned with the runway center stripe. About 900 feet of take off roll had the aircraft lifting into the afternoon skies, only a few clouds at about 4000 feet and light winds.

Nick cleaned up the flaps as the tower cleared them visual to Cabo San Lucas airstrip. He climbed to 2500 feet to clear some low terrain between the two airports. In just a few minutes, the airport came into sight as Nick began descending and setting up for a landing on Runway 26 and switching to the Unicom channel to broadcast his approach to the airport.

Aaron was sitting in the front right seat and looked over at Nick. “You go do this job and we’ll get hotel rooms for us all. It is now 1535, so add two hours and that makes it 1730. John and I will meet you at the Cabo Wabo Bar by 6 p.m. for a quick beer then we’ll go for an evening swim or something, how’s that?”

“Yeah, OK, that will work I guess.” Nick crossed the top of the airport and turned the aircraft onto the downwind leg at 1000 feet and dropped one notch of flaps. Turning base, he slowed, dropped one more notch of flaps and started a gentle glide with the runway off the left wing. Nick keyed the mic and announced their turning final for Runway 29, the aircraft sliding gently to within 20 feet of the runway surface as Nick pulled the yoke to flare it, holding it slightly nose high as the airspeed bled off and it settled to the ground.

With no taxiway on the asphalt runway, he spun the plane around and back taxied to the lone building on the airfield, with two cars and a pick up truck parked outside and a small fuel truck, rusted and up on blocks. Nick brought the aircraft to a stop in front of the building, next to a Piper Cub and an old Taylorcraft. Off to one side of the runway were hulks of three aircraft, two twins and a single, rusting in the Baja sun.

Pulling the mixture, the engine quickly wound to a stop, the doors flew open and the men’s bags dropped to the ground. Out of one of the parked cars, a Chevrolet station wagon with a hotel sign on the side, emerged four people, three women and a man, the driver. The women were all dressed in cut off jeans, t-shirts, sandals, sunglasses and wide round straw hats. They all appeared to be in their 30’s

and all healthy examples of American womanhood, long legs and arms brown from the sun. The group walked toward the aircraft.

“Are you Mr. Collins?” The tallest woman said in a deep South Texas accent to Aaron, he no doubt looking like the guys in charge. Aaron returned her smile and motioned toward Nick. “No, Ma’am, this would be your pilot this afternoon, Capt. Nick Collins.”

“Captain Nick Collins, huh,” she said, her smile never leaving her face, left hand removing her sunglasses as she extended her right hand, “Well, Capt. Collins, I am Amanda Bert, I’m the one who hired you through Humberto over in Los Cabos. We’re ready to go.”

Amanda looked at the logo on Nick’s shirt. “Tradewinds, huh? Aren’t you boys a little far from your usual playground?”

“Well, yes ma’am and no, ma’am,” Nick said after a quick pause, looking for something clever to say. “The Caribbean is our main territory, but we actually cover the world in one way or the other, especially our specialty operations like Air Cargo, the outfit I work for right now.”

“Yes, Capt. Collins, I know about TCA. I’m a freelance magazine writer and have had the opportunity to enjoy to charm of Tradewinds Caribbean in the past on assignments. Why I’ve even flown in their quaint air taxi, Domestic Mailservice, an interesting bunch, those pilots,” she said with a half smile on her face, looking him directly in his eyes. She looked over her shoulder at her companions, “Oh ladies, I must tell you about a ride in a Mailservice DC-3 one night from Montego Bay to Kingston in a thunderstorm, I really should write that story someday. The roller coaster at Six Flags couldn’t hold a candle to that one, we hit zero gravity a couple of times, floated my laptop right off my lap. The pilot was a short little guy wearing Bermuda shorts, a Hawaiian shirt, sandals, and sunglasses. Now mind you this was a night flight!”

“Yes, ma’am,” Nick smiled back, his brain running through five or six pilots who fit that description. “Most of my flying is with TDM, but I get some pick up flights with Air Cargo to fill out my spare time, besides Air Cargo generally pays better than the Jamaica mail run you just described.”

“Splendid, Capt. Collins, then I’ll be in familiar hands,” her eyes staying fixed on his just long enough to complete the flirt, then looking quickly at John and Aaron, both in quiet awe of this woman. “In fact, I’d love to chat with you gentlemen later about your airline, maybe I could get some background information for future articles.”

Aaron quickly spoke up, “Hey, you bet, we’d love to tell you ladies about TCA, maybe later in Cabo then?” He bowed slightly and her smiled broadened, then she turned back to Nick.

“Capt. Collins, I’d like you to meet my friends, Pat Mitchell and Julie DePalma of Houston, Texas.” The two women held out their hands, Nick smiled and shook each one gently.

“Ladies,” Nick said, “Do you have any baggage?”

Julie spoke up first, her Texas upbringing apparent, “No, just our purses and our cameras, sir, lead the way.”

Aaron had already struck a deal with the hotel driver to take them back into Cabo San Lucas. “Hey Nick, We’re going to get rooms at the Hotel Mar de Cortez, right across the street from Cabo Wabo. You can ride back with the ladies, he’s coming back to get them in two hours.”

Nick got the women strapped in and headsets adjusted, Amanda Burt sat up front with Nick and her companions took the two middle seats behind them. Nick cranked up the engine and taxied to the end of Runway 29 in a cloud of dust. He lined up on the runway, dropped a notch of flaps and pushed the throttle all the way to the wall. Once airborne, he turned south and climbed to 1000 feet, the ocean quickly coming into view in the afternoon sun.

Humberto had given Nick a tourist’s map with a few notes scrawled on a few of the points of interest. He was supposed to point out these landmarks he had never seen. As he trimmed the aircraft and set the throttle for cruise at 1000 feet, he began to study the map.

“Now don’t tell me you don’t know where you are going,” Amanda said, watching him study the map.

“Negative, ma’am, just looking at the points of interest I was asked to show you along the way.”

“I must say, I’m not sure I’m getting my money’s worth on this flight, I’ll have to take this up with Humberto tomorrow.”

Nick shot a glance at her long enough to see her half smile firmly in place as she looked out the front windshield.

“Not to worry, Capt. Collins, I have made this flight before and will be able to do the color commentary for you if you can get us around and back.”

“That will not be a problem, ma’am. And thanks.” He was relieved he wouldn’t have to worry about that part of the flight. “If you want me to fly closer to something, please just let me know.”

“You can count on that, Capt. Collins, you can count on that.”

Nick wasn't sure he liked the sound of that. Amanda turned her attention to her companions and began talking about what they would see. “If Capt. Collins stays on this course, ladies, we will cross the beach with Playa de Amor, or Lover's Beach on our left and the Cabo Arches, a couple of large rock formations.”

“Then we will turn to the west,” she looked over at Nick who nodded in confirmation, “and fly up the Pacific Coast with the Sierra de la Laguna Mountains inland. Notice how quickly the land drops into the sea here, and how barren the landscape is that's not near some underground spring.”

At the coastline just south of San Cristobal, Nick flew out about a half mile then turned west to parallel the beach as it curved up northward along the Pacific coastline. Highway 19 follows the coastline along the Pacific and was visible above the high rocks along the shore. The high ground ran right up to the sea.

Amanda's voice broke the drone of the engine. “Ladies, the town right up ahead is Todos Santos, an artist's colony, then there's not much else along this way until you get to La Paz north of here.”

After they passed the small town, Nick's map showed they should go up the coast another 20 miles to get north of the Laguna Mountains.

“Capt. Collins, can you fly a bit lower? I like flying low and there's not as much to see here anyway,” Amanda said.

“Sure,” Nick pulled the throttle back and allowed the aircraft to sink to 500 feet, then started to add power back in to level off.

“Can you get lower?”

“Sure, do you always live on the edge like this?”

Amanda laughed, “I suppose I do at that, sir.”

Nick pulled the throttle back again and the aircraft sank again, this time he leveled off just under 100 feet, skimming along at 140 knots indicated, the waves about 80 feet below the wheels and the mountains inland disappeared below the coastal bluffs as they dropped below them.

“Woooo Hoooo! Yeah, baby, this is flying! Girls, now this is flying.” Amanda twisted around and looked over her left shoulder at the two women in the rear seats.

“Manda, honey, are you sure this is safe? We're mighty low,” said Pat over the intercom.

“Relax girlfriend, we're in good hands, the best prop pilot in the Caribbean, right, Captain?”

“Yes ma'am, besides its time to turn east, so we need to climb anyway,” Nick said as he added power and began the climb to 5500 feet. The Sierra De La Laguna Mountains loomed in front of them as he turned right, the reason for the climb before reaching the Gulf of Cortez coastline. Humberto said 5500 feet would get them over the last high line of ridges comfortably and still allow him to get back to 1000 feet at the coast.

This eastbound leg took them just south of San Padre, north of Highway 1. The land was rising under them almost as fast as Nick was climbing. But after about five minutes he could see they would clear the last ridge with ease. Nick was glad for the lack of wind as flying this close to mountains in windy conditions can provide a bumpy ride, but today's air only had small thermal bumps. These are columns of rising air that, when the aircraft flies through it, gives the airplane a small kick.

“So you fly for Tradewinds, Capt. Collins, how long have you worked for them?”

Nick shot a quick look at Amanda seated next to him, her thin smile in place, “A bit over a year now, and more specifically, I fly for TDM, Tradewinds Domestic Mailservice. Those are little airplanes mostly, hopping between the islands.”

“Yes, as I said earlier, I have ridden in them, but you also have a regular airline too, right?”

“Yes ma'am, Tradewinds Caribbean is the mother company and flies turboprops and jet service around the islands and jet service to international destinations. We also have an Air Cargo service, who I'm flying for at this moment on loan to deliver an aircraft to Tijuana with my associates you met on the ramp. There are some other operations I'm not as familiar with, you should ask Aaron, he's been with the company for a long time and is part of the management team.”

“Really, a TCA manager? Yes, we will surely need to talk to Aaron. And how did you come to get this job today, how did Humberto find you?”

Nick's smile became very big, “Hah, well, it is a bit of a story, but the short of it is we were supposed to fly an Antonov airplane -“

“Antonov?”

“Antonov is a Russian aircraft builder, this one is a twin turboprop cargo airplane. Anyway we were supposed to fly it to Tijuana from Miami then Aaron found a load of Cubano cigars going our way so we picked them up and dropped them off in a couple of places in Mexico. Then we lost an engine near Guadalajara and had to spend the night there before getting here, our last stop.”

He paused for a few seconds, “We were supposed to wash and clean the aircraft for delivery tomorrow, a hot, sweaty job, then Aaron found Humberto, who needed a pilot. Humberto got a pilot and Aaron, John and I got to skip the wash job because Humberto’s ground crew would do it in exchange.”

“You are right, that is quite a story. I can’t wait to hear more tonight. You don’t think Aaron will mind if I probe a bit, do you?”

“No,” said Nick, a bit disappointed at her interest in Aaron, “Aaron likes to talk about the airline, it is his life. I guess its mine now too.”

“Splendid, Capt. Collins, we shall have great fun tonight talking!”

The women turned to talking about shopping plans for the next day as Nick pulled the throttle back when they crested the last ridge and began a steep descent toward the Gulf of Cortez now fully in view in front of them. They crossed the coast at 1500 feet south of Punta Pescadero, right on target by Humberto’s instructions. Turning south, the town of Los Barriles Bunea Vista came into view, and soon Highway 1 turned southwest, a dirt road staying along the coast.

Nick followed the dirt road at 1000 feet while the women enjoyed the sights and shooting pictures. Amanda again twisted around in her seat to get a picture of the women in the back seat, big smiles framed by the Dave Clark headsets.

“Oh, I want a picture of our pilot - do you mind, Captain?” Pat said.

“I guess that depends on what you have in mind, ma’am.”

Amanda jumped in, “Oh, Capt. Collins, just look back and give her a wave, it’s not that tough and it keeps the customers happy.”

“Alright, give me a second to get it trimmed.”

After reaching down to give the trim wheel one small twist Nick turned and looked over his right shoulder at Pat, sitting behind Amanda, her camera at the ready. He managed a smile and raised his right hand in a halfhearted attempt at a pose. The flashbulb blasted Nick’s vision, then he turned around, blinking to get the light spots out of his eyes.

“Thank you, Captain,” Pat said over the intercom.

“My pleasure, ma’am.”

They coasted down the East Cape area enjoying the rising mountains to the west and the Gulf of Cortez with its many fishing boats heading in and out of the small fishing towns along the water’s edge. As they approached the southern end of the Cape they began to turn back toward the southwest as the town of San Jose Del Cabo came into view.

“OK ladies now we will see The Corridor from the air.”

“Oh, look at the hotels lined up,” said Julie, “They are impressive even from up here.”

“The Corridor, Capt. Collins, is this section of land between San Jose and Cabo San Lucas where we see all the tourist hotels and golf courses lined up one after the other, all collecting those tourist dollars,” Amanda said.

“This used to be the exclusive land of the bill fisherman and only rich Americans and movie stars came here to fish. Then in the 60’s and 70’s, it was discovered by the mainstream tourist industry, and discovered again in the 80’s and 90’s when the band Van Halen opened the Cabo Wabo Bar and restaurant. That’s where we are supposed to meet your companions later, Captain.”

“Looks like the bill fishermen have gotten pushed out,” said Nick, examining the opulence of the line of hotels spread out down the coastline separated by short open areas of desert vegetation.

“Oh, I don’t know, they still seem to do a booming business, look at those boats coming in from the open water, most are bill fishermen, I think.”

“Yeah, I see those, that would be great fun, I should try it sometime.”

“Oh you should, yes you should, maybe you could rent a boat tomorrow.”

“No, we need to get that airplane to Tijuana tomorrow, and I’ll be glad to get this mission over with and get home.”

“And where is home, Captain.”

“I live on St. John’s Island in the US Virgin Islands.”

“Oh, that is a very nice place, I’ve explored that island before, it is very nice.”

“Well, its home, and I’ve been gone for several days now. Plus, I do most of my flying alone and I’m ready to get back to not having to share my cockpit.”

“Amanda straightened up just a bit, “Is there something wrong with me being in your cockpit?”

“Oh no, ma’am, present company excluded. John’s a nice guy, but young and gets excited easily. Aaron gets on my nerves just a little bit, but he’s really a good guy. It’s just that I’ll be ready to get home as soon after I deliver this airplane as I can.”

They flew low past hotel after hotel, a few golf courses, some with fairways right up against the shoreline, and Nick could even see a couple of the nicer ones had small dirt landing strips next to them. This area was also covered in beaches, with many clumps of people and their beach gear strewn about. A quick glance at his watch told Nick it was ten after 5 p.m., this flight as nearing its end and he would soon be enjoying some fine Mexican beer and food.

“And in front of us, ladies, you see the arches coming back into view, about where we started our adventure,” Amanda said. See the one with the hole in the middle, it looks cool, doesn’t it? Those rocks were shaped by the waves over many hundreds of years.”

“Yes, my husband and I took a taxi boat out there yesterday, it was very nice and I really enjoyed the time we spent together. No phone, no computer, no TV, he gave me his undivided attention. Oh, it was marvelous! We went out to Lover’s Beach, which cuts through those rocks to the other side”

“You’re a lucky girl, Pat,” said Amanda, “And he’s a wonderful man, you are both blessed. He is sure a better catch than the first one.”

“I could have gone the rest of my life without you bringing up Robert, now shut up and enjoy the flight.”

The city of Cabo San Lucas was nestled into the line of hills that ran out into the water known as the arches. San Lucas Bay curved inward and was all beaches, with the town at the far end with the marina in front. As they flew over the arched rocks, Nick banked the aircraft to the north; the airport was only 7 miles away. “OK ladies, we’ll be landing in just a minute so please make sure your belts are tight and your belongings are secured.”

The airport came into view and Nick lined up for a base entry to Runway 29. Turning final, he set the last notch of flaps, pulled the throttle out and the little aircraft sank toward the runway. Flaring over the runway at 5 feet, the Cessna settled onto the asphalt as Nick braked to a stop, then turned the aircraft around and back taxied down the runway to the parking area. He could already see the station wagon with the driver sitting on the hood smoking a cigarette as he pulled into a parking spot on the dirt ramp.

As the prop quickly wound to a stop and the doors popped open, Nick jumped out of his seat and began to tend to the women exiting the aircraft. After the last one had gotten out, Nick secured the aircraft, locked the doors and chocked the main left wheel. The women had already drifted over to the station wagon and the driver had started it up as Nick walked toward them.

“Hop in Capt. Collins,” Pat said to him as he approached the car, “And off we go back to Party Town!”

It was about a fifteen-minute drive from the little airport to the town of Cabo San Lucas. Being late afternoon, many of the tourists were still on the beaches, but they passed shops and restaurants along the way with throngs of people walking along the small sidewalks between the shops. Nick enjoyed having the time to gaze out the window and study the landscape and people in more detail. The women continued to talk excitedly about what they saw on the flight and began plans for a jeep expedition into the Sierra De La Laguna Mountains the following day.

The hotel car pulled into the driveway in front of the Hotel Mar de Cortez, a colonial style two story hotel with a white stucco exterior and broad balconies. The car doors flew open as soon as the driver brought the car to a stop and everyone jumped out. Amanda went over a tipped the driver with a \$20 bill and shook his hand as Nick followed the other two women into the lobby. The women stopped ten feet in the door and turned around toward Nick.

“Thank you so much for filling in as our pilot today, Capt. Collins, I really enjoyed the flight and you are a great pilot,” Julie said with her hand extended.

“The pleasure was mine, Ladies,” he said as he took her hand, “I got a free tour of the area too.”

“Oh, yes, I enjoyed it very much, and thanks for the picture too,” Pat said, clasping Nick’s hand.

“Have a good night, sir,” Julie said, waving as she and Pat walked toward the stairs.

“Good night, ladies,” Nick said back with a wave. He noticed Amanda walking in the door.

“here is your tip, Capt. Collins, thank you for the flight.”

“Oh, no, I couldn’t, but thanks anyway.”

“Are you sure.”

“Affirmative, ma’am.”

“I hope the invitation to chat with you gentlemen is still open, Capt. Collins,” She said with her half smile, “I really did enjoy the flight today.”

“I did too, ma’am, and it would be a pleasure to have your company. I know Aaron likes to talk about the airline and I might even learn something new myself. The airline has quite a legendary history and I suspect some of it is probably true. And please, call me Nick”

“Marvelous, Nick, and please call me Amanda,” she said as they shook hands.

“I’m supposed to meet those guys at 5:30 over at the Cabo Wabo. They said it was across the street, I hope I can find it.”

Amanda let out a short laugh, “Oh, that should not be a problem Nick, Cabo Wabo has a tall lighthouse on top of it that is, well, obvious. You’ll know what I mean when you see it.”

“You should join us then, if you don’t have other plans.”

“I need to take care of a few phone calls, but I can be there no later than 6 p.m.”

“Great, I’ll see you then.”

Amanda turned and walked toward the stairs while Nick went to the check in counter. Aaron had already gotten him a room, so he just picked up his key and walked to the ground floor room down a long hallway. Opening the door he found nice room with an easy chair next to a small table with a lamp near the sliding glass door, and a bathroom with an ample shower. His flight bag was already in the room. Nick looked at his watch and saw it was 5:30, so he did a quick check of his flight bag then hurried out the door toward the lobby, ready to dig into a cold beer and a nice big dinner.

Tradewinds Caribbean Airlines

Nick stepped outside the lobby and into the late afternoon air. He squinted into the bright sky, shielding his eyes from the sunlight, looking for the lighthouse. And there it was, just down the street from the hotel. Now Nick knew why Amanda had made the remark about the shape of the lighthouse; it did have a particularly obscene look to it. He walked diagonally across the street, dodging the small cars in the street.

The building was brown adobe with large windows and benches formed from adobe along each wall as it pointed toward the foyer. The entrance was a broad brick terrace with palm trees; the suggestive lighthouse painted all white except for a red ring below the domed white top about 30 or 40 feet high over the entrance. He saw Aaron and John seated at a small round table with tall stools around it in the bar area.

“Hey, we’re over here,” Aaron waved at him standing in the doorway. He then waved for the waitress to get Nick’s drink order. Nick sat down as she approached.

“Dos Equis, please.”

“Si, bueno,” she said then turned to get his beer.

“How was the tour, Nick, you didn’t make any of those nice ladies sick, did you?”

“No Aaron, it was an easy flight, some of it interesting, some of it not. The passengers were just fine. That one lady, the journalist, is coming over at about six to join us, she wants Aaron to regale us with the legends of TCA.”

Aaron looked at his watch, “Hey that’s good, we can wait here and have a beer, then have dinner with that lovely lady.”

Nick’s beer arrived and he took a long pull on the upended bottle, the cold liquid felt good running down his throat. Then he proceeded to tell the other two men about his flight and assured them the aircraft and their ride back to the Antonov was safely locked up. He also

told them about Amanda's request and enthusiasm at low leveling over the water on the Pacific side, the sure sign of an adrenaline junkie.

Nick ordered another beer as did the other two, and was half way through them when Amanda came walking in the door. Nick stood up and waved at her and she began walking over. Aaron and John also rose as she approached.

Amanda had changed into blue jeans, a peach blouse and tennis shoes. Her light blonde hair was neatly brushed and hanging just beyond her shoulders, shining in the neon lights. As she approached, Nick noticed for the first time her electric green eyes that had stayed hidden behind her sunglasses previously.

"Hello gentlemen," She said, "Nick, again thank you for the great flight this afternoon."

"Hey, Nick is it now? He must have done OK, then. I'm Aaron Garcia and this is John Baaker," Aaron said as he shook her hand.

"Please call me Amanda."

"OK, let's get a table, I'm ready to eat," said John as he waved for the waitress.

They were seated in the main dining area and everyone ordered another beer, Amanda her first. Nick studied his menu, looking for something special to mark the first visit to Cabo. He noticed that Cabo Wabo had its own brand of tequila, being hawked by the restaurant's part owner and front man, the Red Rocker Sammy Hagar. That was usually a bad sign for the tequila when it takes a big name rock star to push the stuff, and most tequila made for the USA markets was loaded with sugar.

The waitress arrived with fresh beers and set her drink tray on an empty table, taking out her notepad.

"What will you have today," she said, looking first to Amanda.

"Hmmm, I'd to try a bowl of the tortilla soup to warm up, and I'll have the chicken breast, no butter or oil in the preparation, please."

Nick looked at the menu again quickly while the waitress took Aaron's order, then it was his turn.

"Yeah, I'll have the tortilla soup too, and I'll have the peppercorn filet of beef, medium rare. And what do you have in a good tequila?"

"Señor, we have a wonderful house brand, the Cabo Wabo tequila, it is very good."

"Yes, I saw that, but it looks like Norte Americano tequila, do you know what I mean?"

"Si, señor, but this is 100% blue agave. There is a story that the last tour the Rolling Stones had in Hawaii, they took 12 cases back to England."

Aaron roared with laughter, "Now what better endorsement do you need than that, hey amigo?"

"OK, I'll take a shot of the Cabo Wabo tequila, the anejo, please."

Amanda spoke up, "Yes, please, I'd like to try one too." She smiled at Nick, then turned her eyes back to the waitress.

Nick went into analyze mode as the waitress took John's order. He wondered if she was trying to send him a signal or something. Maybe she thought he sent her a signal when he ordered the tortilla soup? She did look at him, or was she just being polite? God, he hated trying to figure out women, but this one had a special attraction he could not quite put his finger on.

"OK, now we can have a great dinner, lady and gentlemen," said Aaron as the waitress hurried off toward the kitchen.

"Amanda, did you say you were a journalist earlier," John spoke up. "What sort of things do you write about, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Why, no John, I love to talk about my work, but you gentlemen have to promise to give me something in return. I am very interested in hearing more about your airline, TCA."

"I don't fly for an airline," Nick muttered under his breath, but loud enough to convey his attitude.

"Ah, please excuse my amigo here," Aaron said, "he has a dislike of the airline business and prefers to spend his time with inanimate objects like cargo and mail."

"Yeah, well they don't complain about the bumpy ride, the gourmet meals, or the smelly toilets."

"Yes, ma'am, real people persons, our pilots, and I'd love to tell you about our airline, but we should hear about you, ladies first."

"Well, OK, I grew up and now work out of Austin, Texas, and I'm a freelance writer mostly, but I like to travel so I find writing about travel pays for itself. That's how I've run into your airline before, I've done several pieces on the Caribbean and have used your routes

to move around. It has a special aura about it, the moment you enter the aircraft.”

“Would that be the smell of your money being vacuumed out of our pockets?” Nick said with a smile.

“Now I have never found your rates to be unreasonable or out of line with the going rate. My, Nick, you are a bit bitter.”

Nick decided he should maybe talk less right now, the current flavor of his charm was obviously missing the mark if he intended to impress her. She went on with her story.

“As I was saying, I have made five or six trips into various islands to write articles. I have also covered Central and South America, and a couple of the magazines I write for are asking me to go check out the Greek Islands. There are many places I’d love to see and write about.”

“That’s so cool,” said John, “What sort of magazines do you write for?”

“There are a couple of airline magazines, a few special interest groups like AARP and AAA, and occasionally I can get the folks at Conde Nast to return a call. I do lots of stuff for just about anyone who will pay for it. The contract I’m on right now is for a retired military group magazine, not a big payday, but the trip has been fun, and I’ve now met three new gentlemen to add to my list of friends.”

“Yes, it sounds like a wonderful way to make a living,” said Aaron, “and you get to see the world on someone else’s dime, great deal.”

“It has its days, of course. I miss being home sometimes, and I miss my dogs and my boat. I have a small home on Lake Travis just north of the city and a friend watches it for me, but I’m really a homebody deep down inside. Isn’t that odd, a girl who loves to stay home makes her living traveling.”

“Not really,” said John, “how about a guy raised on an island who is terrified of the ocean. Now that’s odd.”

“Yes, I think you have me there, John. How about you Nick, any contradictions in your life?”

Nick could not suppress a huge smile. “The list may be long, but it is distinguished, ma’am.”

The table erupted in laughter. “Boy is that an understatement,” said Aaron, “How do you explain the greatest natural pilot I’ve ever met who doesn’t want to fly the nice big jets. He could walk into the cabin of a Boeing or Airbus tomorrow. All he has to do is pick up the phone and ask, but the phone never rings.”

“Yeah, Nick, I never could figure that out either. They say you’re a great pilot, and I’ve enjoyed flying with you this trip, but why do you stay in Mailservice?”

“I like the company.”

The two men burst into laughter again, Amanda smiling broadly but not understanding the inside joke. Aaron began wiping tears from his eyes.

“Oy, amigo, you are too much. Amanda, Mailservice is thought, by some, to be either the entry level of the airline business or a holding area for pilots who can’t quite get the hang of the customer relations and other basic social skills.”

“Some of these pilots TDM hires to fly its barely starvation wage routes are, generally speaking, not usually society’s proudest moments. Many of them found their way to the Caribbean to avoid being someplace else. They are all able pilots, but not the kind you could imagine in a captain’s uniform on a Boeing flight deck. No, this bunch is a lot more comfortable flying in Bermuda shorts, Hawaiian shirts, Nike’s, Ray Ban sunglasses, and usually at least a day from the last shave.”

Amanda smiled and glanced at Nick, “Yes, I know the type exactly.”

Uncanny, thought Nick.

“In the grand scheme of things, we in the head office like to think of TDM as a place for the young pilots to grow up before they take serious passengers, our most precious cargo. There is also that bunch that never seems to grow up, only older, and some of them are drawn to TDM flying for as many reasons as there are members of that club. I’ve heard them called the last legal pirates in the Caribbean.”

“But Nick, as you can see, scrubs up nicely, and he managed not to scare you ladies off today, so he is somewhat of an enigma to me and the Boss.”

“Oh, you call him the Boss? You must tell me more about him and the whole airline. You are a member of management, right Aaron?”

“Si, I was the 47th pilot the Boss hired, and now work in the main office. I am the operations manager for the Air Cargo and TDM

operations, and I also do special projects for the Boss. I've been with TCA for 13 years now!"

"Aaron doesn't do himself justice, Amanda," John said, "He is a genuine Caribbean legend in his own right, and I've gotten to see some of it on this trip. I've heard he knows his way around every dirt strip and weak AM radio station to navigate from in the islands. You should have seen him work the Mexican customs guys, why he had the paperwork he knew we'd need filled out ahead of time and we blew through without a hitch."

"Well, almost without a hitch, except for that little problem in Guadalajara where we got our airplane and cargo impounded," said Nick.

"And got it un-impounded in less than two hours, Aaron you are a master."

"Now John, you are giving away company confidential information," Aaron said with his big smile.

"Oh you boys stop. Now Aaron, please tell me about TCA."

"OK, well the Boss is Andre Diess, born and educated in Europe, Germany, I think, who showed up in Haiti about 17 years ago during the reign of Jean Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. The Boss set up a clinic and a school out on a peninsula near the town of Port Salut, about 120 kilometers from Port-A-Prince, the capital. Well, Baby Doc had a bunch of thugs called the Tonton Macoute he used to 'influence' his rivals and others he didn't like. And he didn't like a European setting up shop and spreading anything he or his government couldn't extort something from. They came after Andre, and he escaped from his house with only ten minutes to spare, warned of the approaching kidnappers by a village boy from his school. He got off the island in the next 12 hours completely broke with the clothes on his back, and headed east to find a new start."

"Having had the good sense to learn to fly while in college, he started flying pick up cargo jobs around the islands with a rented Beech D18S twin prop and borrowed gas and slowly built up more business. I don't know if you boys know this or not, but the start of TCA was really a mail route contract in the French West Indies based on Guadeloupe and flying the Leeward Island area. The first flight in an airplane the Boss owned was a Cessna 182 to Saba Island, one tough landing in anyone's book."

"Oh sure, I've seen that one," Amanda said, "But I've never had the nerve to take an airplane to the postage stamp sized runway. I'll stick to boats, thank you."

"Yeah, it can get your pulse rate up just a bit on a windy day," said Nick.

The waitress arrived with their drinks and appetizers. Nick brought the shot glass of tequila to his nose and drew in the aroma. It had a soft sweet smell and a pale golden color when he held it up to the light. Looked good so far and he raised his shot glass toward Amanda.

"Thank you for the opportunity to fly you and your friends today, Amanda."

She raised her glass after quickly sniffing it to see if she was missing something. "Oh no, thank you for the great flight. I've done that flight before and I had much more fun on this one. Besides you let me be the tour guide and that allowed me to use one of my biggest talents, talking!"

They both lifted the small glass to their lips. "Wait!" Amanda brought her glass down. "What about the lime and salt?"

"You go ahead if you want, I never dilute my liquor."

"Ah, a macho thing. OK, well, I do like the salt and lime, that's the way I was taught in Texas."

She licked the crook of her left hand between the thumb and forefinger, then sprinkled the salt liberally onto the moist area. Then she lifted her shot glass. "To our flight, Nick."

Nick raised his glass and let the pure agave slide down his throat. It was quite smooth; maybe he would need to grab a couple of bottles for home. Amanda licked the salt off her hand and quickly lifted the glass straight up and back down just as quickly. Then she grabbed the slice of lime and bit directly into the sour pulp, sucking the bitter juice after the tequila, then dropping the spent lime slice into the shot glass.

"Oh, that's very smooth, not like the Jose Cuervo Gold back home."

"No it is not at all like that stuff. Jose is OK for margarita mix, but a poor shot drink. I have always preferred the pure blue agave brands, although they are usually quite expensive. American tequila uses sugar in the process and it ruins the stuff," said Nick.

"I like a man who knows his tequila," Amanda said as she raised her beer in salute toward Nick. "Now, back to the story, please."

"Hey, OK, where was I? Ah yes, Saba. Well, not too many pilots would sign up for that area because of landing on Saba. If you are a

little high or a little fast, you won't make it, and in scud weather it is real tough. But the Boss, well he was hungry, so he said he'd take the routes and began flying daily circuits. As business got better, he bought an old DeHaviland Dove to carry bigger loads a bit farther. And his hard work was rewarded with more offers of contracts, then he started to hire other pilots to fly the routes too, and he added a DC-3, a DC-6B, a Grumman Goose, an An-2 Colt, and a PBY Catalina. Later aircraft he went into turboprops like the DHC-5 Buffalo, the Embraer 120, the Shorts, and later the sexy Pilatus PC-12. The boss has had all sorts of different aircraft over the years, and he saves money by purchasing older airplanes and cleaning them up for our use as the depreciation does not hit the cash flow quite as hard that way."

"Hmm, well, I don't recognize all those airplanes you mentioned, but it sounds like he made his hard work pay off."

Nick said, "Most of them you would recognize if I pointed to one on the ramp, they are pretty common airplanes found the world over."

"Yes, that's right," Aaron said, "and the mail delivery service and air taxi service was doing very well for the Boss and about 20 other pilots. He had begun to expand southward down island as well as westward, winning several big contracts in Puerto Rico and Jamaica. About that time, the company had been operating for about 2 years, there was a bigger airline throwing its weight around and trying to scare off competition. Royal Island Airlines was well established in most of the airports throughout the islands and wanted to expand its jet service to Europe and Asia. They had nice new aircraft and good pilots, but they could also get cutthroat when it came to keeping others out of their share of the island pie."

"The Boss kind of got ahead of Royal and worked a code share deal with a couple of European airlines. He was able to borrow a couple of Beech 1900D's, ATR-42 and -72's, and several Fairchild 27's, basically whatever he could find. Then he began running passenger shuttle service between the islands to spread out and bring in the waves of tourists arriving hourly in the major airports, hiring another 70 pilots along the way, including yours truly here."

"Now I know the Beech and the ATR, I've got plenty of turbulent hours in those beasts. So this start of passenger service was the start of TCA the airline?"

"Yes, the Boss opened TCA and, after securing several great routes from the islands into Venezuela and Columbia, he got a long term lease on ramp and hanger space at Hato, Curacao's airport where we headquarter our passenger operations to this day."

"Well, all this success really got Royal Island mad and they started trying all sorts of stuff to drive us out and we countered with our own tactics. They sued us, threatened us, terrorized us, even once did a little kidnap bag job on one of the Boss's key staff members, we were just never able to prove it. You see, they threw him in the trunk and started to drive away. When they stopped to turn onto the main road, he discovered the trunk did not latch so he simply hopped out and they never saw him sprint away."

"It was a war, with the prime Caribbean routes as the prize. Royal intended it to be a winner take all fight and it planned to win. As soon as we would set up a ticket counter in a new airport, they would do small things to try to hurt our business like 'accidentally' tripping the breakers for the power to our reservation terminals. Another time they parked their delivery truck right in front our curbside baggage drop off location. And in some places they bribed local officials to inspect us harder and trump up allegations of non-compliance or other delay tactics to keep us from getting permits. The Boss defeated all these one by one, but it sure took a lot of our resources."

"I have heard the airline business was tough, but that's not even fair," Amanda said. I know of Royal Island and never thought they were a bad airline."

"No, not a bad airline, just some bad leadership," said Nick, "But it rippled all the way down through the ranks and to this day Royal and TCA pilots can't seem to be able to bear the sight of each other. There was a brawl in San Juan not too long ago where a TCA crew had to beat up two Royal crews in a bar near the airport. I saw our guys; the Royal guys must have been real beat up! Even their stewards jumped in, but our guys said that was the good part."

"Yeah, I'll bet. Men like to wrestle with girls, damn near lost my virginity at 16 doing just that very thing with the boy down the street."

"I have been hearing TCA versus Royal Island stories my whole life," John said. "In aviation circles, people have taken sides. Some airports give better service or gas prices to one airline or the other, it kind of defines who you are."

Their waitress arrived with a large tray of their food. She quickly distributed everyone's dishes, made sure they had fresh flour tortillas, refilled their water, and took an order for another round of beers. She surveyed the table to make sure all was in order, then spun about and headed back toward the kitchen.

Aaron picked up his story. "Hey, then Royal had a couple of bad luck hits. They lost an airliner full of 130 people into the side of a mountain in Venezuela in the fog, lost another airplane but no one was hurt when a main gear collapsed on landing in Kingston. The next hit to them is still not understood well. They got thrown out of Columbia by the government for some reason. Of course everyone wants to say they must have got caught smuggling drugs or something, but both Royal and the Colombians deny it, so I don't know

what it was. Anyway, all this started to sap their resources such that they needed to turn them inward for survival and had to leave TCA alone. We also were able to take over all their Colombian routes both in and out of the country.”

“Not long after that TCA added its Air Cargo division and has also opened small area routes using the Boss’s recipe for airline expansion with differing success. We have operations across the globe but our real strength is within the Caribbean itself. The Caribbean was smack in the middle of the high-octane economies growing in North, Central, and South America, and the same economic boom fueled our airline’s growth from out of nowhere to serious contender for the lucrative tourist flights to the vacation capital of the world. Hey, even American and United were taking notice. The airline grew from that one borrowed Beech to several different divisions serving passenger, cargo, and mail routes throughout the Caribbean and covering all directions of the compass around the world. We have always tried to offer a special charm unlike others serving the same market. And we base our success on having a healthy respect for the multicultural island nations we serve and bring that same island hospitality into the aircraft cabins worldwide, attracting the same diverse passenger everywhere we go.”

“Wow, that’s a great story. I’d love to meet the Boss sometime, he sounds like a great interview subject. The magazines love success stories. What was his name, Andre Deiss? Yes.” She scrawled a few notes on a notepad. “And John, what about you and TCA.”

“Well, I wanted to fly my whole life. Living on an island, if you wanted to go anywhere you needed a boat or a plane, and planes are lots faster, so I took a liking to them. Plus I hate the water. After college in Amsterdam, I came back and learned to fly in Puerto Rico. I worked as an instructor for a while then, about six months ago I got a call for an interview to TCA’s Air Cargo, and here I am!”

“And you want to fly the big jets, right?”

“Yes ma’am, more than anything I want to be a captain of my own airliner, with hundreds of passengers counting on me to get them safely to their destination.”

“Oh please, John,” Nick said, “You’re going to ruin my appetite with talk like that, sucking up to Aaron, is just not right.”

“Ya, well, you don’t care if you fly the big iron, Nick, but I do, and I believe every word of that, its not just the company line.”

“That’s right, Nick,” Aaron said, “And it is a good attitude like that that will ensure he makes it to that goal flying for us soon, I’m sure. You just have to get the right experience and work very hard, John, that is what the Boss rewards. And it is his interview you have to pass, you know.”

“Yes, and I will be ready! I study all the time and fly as much as the law and our rules will let me. I don’t have any family to take care of as long as I stop in and see my mother every month.”

“OK, Nick, how about you? You said already you’ve been with TCA for about a year, right?”

“I’m with TDM, the mail service, not TCA.”

“Oh yeah, I forget you like to make that distinction.”

“I guess I do. And what about me? Well, I grew up in New Mexico, son of a mining engineer. Followed in dad’s footsteps and went to Colorado School of Mines then joined his firm after graduation. During college I learned to fly and just kept adding ratings to stay proficient over the next few years. Well, it only took fifteen years of the mining business and a failed marriage to bring me to re-evaluate what I was doing with my life, so I quit it all and began flying freight throughout the Rockies. If it has a prop on it I’ve probably flown it, including float versions, in and out of some tight places. Then I invested in an aircraft sales venture that turned out my partner embezzled all the cash and took off for parts unknown, leaving me holding the bag and the bankruptcy notice. I lost everything except enough cash to get to the islands and two changes of clothes. I had met a couple of Air Cargo pilots as they flew through the States and thought I’d give that a try. TDM had openings, I took the job, and here I am. Oh, and I get to do some work with Air Cargo from time to time when they are short handed.”

“So you live in the islands now full time? Oh yes, St. John. Why there?” She made another note in her pad.

The other two men started to chuckle, the joke from earlier still lingering.

“Like I said, I like the company.” The two broke into laughter.

“Pay no attention to those two boobs, St. John’s is a great place to live. Plus it is the main residence for TDM pilots everywhere. The crew all live on the east end of St. John’s on a natural lagoon called The Goose Roost by locals and is accessible only by boat or floatplane. The Roost has one bar, The Hurricane Hole, run by a retired cop from Brooklyn, a Hilton Hotel, a TCA hotel, and a couple of private bungalows along the south beach. It got its name because its safe mooring in the lagoon and the bar were big attractions to seaplane freight dogs from all over the islands. Many of them flew the war surplus Grumman Goose amphibian aircraft, and it wasn’t uncommon to see several “Geese” tied up to the dock at roost. Its off-the-beaten-path location is missed by most of the mainstream public as well as TCA managers, and we like it that way.”

“And do you live in one of the bungalows?”

“He wishes,” said Aaron, “The pilots live in the hotel, but they are actually nice little condos. The hotel is owned by the airline, so the pilots pay only a modest fee for their home base accommodations. We have hotels on several other islands, and there are rooms available for transient pilots. The Roost has no such transient problem, which contributes to the general decline in the social skills on the island. While we at TCA had opened our doors to women pilots long ago, not one has ever survived more than a couple of weeks at TDM before they left in disgust over the sophomoric pranks aimed at them by these reprobates.”

“Those were women?” Nick said.

“You better watch it boy,” Amanda said.

“So you see what I mean, right?”

“I guess I do. A bar run by a retired Brooklyn cop? Now there’s bound to be a story there.”

“Everyone at The Roost has a story to tell,” said John, “and some of them are even true.”

The group finished eating and the waitress returned to clear the table. With all the food they ate, they didn’t have room for dessert. A few minutes later she returned with the bill.

“I’ll get that tonight, gentlemen,” Amanda said, “Since we talked shop I can write it off as an expense for the trip.

“Well, thank you very much, Amanda,” said Aaron

“Ya, thank you,” said John

“Absolutely, me too,” said Nick. “I think I’ll go pick up a couple of bottles of that Cabo Wabo tequila, then I’m gonna turn in, its been a long day.”

“OK, we’re going to go check out that shop across the street for souvenirs then we’ll be heading back to the hotel ourselves.”

“You know, I think I’ll grab a bottle too, hang on Nick,” said Amanda. “Gentlemen, it was a pleasure breaking bread with you tonight, and thanks for all the great background, my mind is already going thinking of projects.”

“The pleasure was all ours,” Aaron said. “I hope to run into you again sometime. If you are ever in San Juan, P.R., call the TCA office and ask for me.”

“I’ll do that,” she said, “good luck on the rest of your trip.”

She caught up with Nick as he walked to the cashier’s desk where he ordered three bottles and she ordered a single bottle. Then they headed out the door and across the street toward the hotel.

“I sure did enjoy myself, Nick. I don’t suppose you would mind if I gave you a call when I go down island next, do you? Maybe you could show me around, I’d love to go flying around they islands there with someone who knows the area, It would be great material.”

“Even Saba?” Nick said, “You’d land at Saba?

“If you are the pilot, sir, I’ll go.”

“OK, sure, I’d love to hear from you again.”

They walked into the hotel lobby and stopped, turning to face each other. Amanda set her tequila package down on a coffee table and reached into her purse. She pulled out a business card and handed it to Nick. He glanced at it then shoved it in his breast pocket.

“Do you have a card, how will I contact you?”

“Yeah, believe it or not I do.” Nick set his bottles down and reached back and pulled his wallet out, digging a card from the inside. He handed her the card.

“Oh, you have email. Give me back my card and I’ll give you mine.”

Nick dug the card out of his pocket and handed it back. She flipped it over and bent over to write on the coffee table, then straightened up and handed it back to Nick who had recovered his packages.

“There you go, now you’ll know who it is when you get my message!”

“Yep, thanks, I’d love to show you the islands I fly.”

“And I’d love for you to show me,” she said. Then she reached over and gave Nick a hug. He tried to return it while holding the tequila bottles but couldn’t do more than squeeze her shoulders.

“Good night, Nick, and thanks for everything.”

“Yourself, Amanda, good night and good bye.”

She picked up her tequila and walked toward the stairs, Nick walking the opposite direction. Nick wondered if she would really look him up. He just couldn’t believe a woman that sophisticated would be interested in an old freight dog like himself. Maybe when she saw him in his more natural TDM environment the shine would wear off. Maybe she just wants to use him to get her stories, and will be nice and flirty to get what she wants?

Women, he just couldn’t figure them out. His ex-wife had told him he just didn’t understand her and her needs, and he agreed, leading quickly soon after by a swift divorce. With no kids, it was a clean break but expensive. He had sworn that if he ever got the urge to get married again, he’d just find some woman to kick him in his nuts and he would just give her half his money and skip all the other pain. One of the very reasons he was in the islands was to stay away from any relationship, so he didn’t understand completely why he was so taken with this woman.

Nick opened his room door and pulled off his shoes and socks, then stripped off his shirt and trousers. He pulled back the covers and piled the two bed pillows on top of each other. Flipping the bedside lamp off, he wondered when or if he would see her again. He was asleep without another thought seconds later.

Amanda also dressed quickly for bed and brushed her teeth and hair. She set the alarm she brought to make an early wake up to meet her friends for a jeep trek into the mountains for a picnic. As she switched off the light, she rolled over on her side and closed her eye. A smile came to her face. What was it about this pilot that made her insides heat up. She had a habit of picking men with some problems so she wondered what was wrong with Nick. He was surly, yet there was just something about him, a higher quality, and she knew she would see him again if even just to figure him out.

Tijuana

Nick was up early due to the time zone changes and went for a run down the beach before he ate breakfast. He showered and dressed in a clean polo shirt, then packed his bags. He grabbed a bagel and a cup of coffee and sat in the lobby, reading the US newspapers on the table. Aaron and John came down about 20 minutes later and they all checked out of the hotel and arraigned for transportation back to the airport and the Cessna 206.

The station wagon met them out front and they threw their bags into the back and hopped in for the short ride back to the airport. Nick checked his watch, it was 0810 local, plenty of time to get back to Los Cabos International, check out the Antonov clean job, and get the preflight and flight planning completed. He estimated they would get into the air about 1000 and the flight to Tijuana would be about three hours max, putting them into the airport by lunchtime.

“So how did things work out between you and Amanda last night, Nick,” John asked as he punched Aaron with the back of his hand.

“Just fine, John, she gave me her card and said maybe she’d look me up, go fly the Saba flight with a real pilot.”

“Sure, I’ll bet you didn’t even get a good night kiss, did you?” said John.

“A kiss off is more likely,” said Aaron.

“Ah, you guys’ jealousy is screaming through, it’s really unbecoming.”

Aaron leaned forward, “I’ll bet you a bottle of good scotch you never see that one again, amigo. Just let it go now.”

“I’ll take that bet, I got a good feeling about this one, she is genuine.”

The driver pulled onto the airfield and up to the 206. The three men jumped out, Aaron and John grabbing their bags, Aaron tipped the driver while Nick started to unlock and preflight the aircraft. John started to load their bags into the rear compartment. Nick was completed with the preflight within 10 minutes and started climbing into the pilot’s seat and grabbed the checklist.

Aaron walked toward the aircraft as the station wagon drove away in a cloud of dust. John climbed into the back seat and found his seatbelt, Aaron hopping in next to Nick in the front.

“Let’s go get this one over with, amigos, so we can all go home. I hope Humberto’s guys took care of the clean up.”

Nick nodded then propped open his side window and leaned out, “Clear!”

The prop started to turn over, then caught and the engine sputtered to life. Quickly completing the cockpit check, he taxied to the end of Runway 11, then wheeled the aircraft around to align it with the runway centerline. He did a quick run up to check the magneto and vacuum pump.

“Cabo traffic, departing Runway 11, northeast bound,” Nick said as he keyed the mic on the common traffic advisory frequency listed on the chart for the airfield. It was the simplest way to help any other pilots in the area from running into them, by announcing their position and intentions. Nick ran the throttle up full and released the brakes, starting the short take off roll, pulling the nose up at 65 knots as the Cessna jumped into the clear blue sky.

The aircraft climbed and headed toward the sea. At 1000 feet, Nick brought up the flaps, then banked to the right toward the city of Cabo, still climbing. As they crossed the coast, he turned right again to follow the coastline to the west. The arch rocks west of the town ahead of them, Nick could make out the phallic lighthouse on top of Cabo Wabo in the town. He smiled as he thought of Amanda and wondered when he would see her again. Leveling off at 2500 feet, he passed the arch rocks and completed his right turn toward Los Cabos Airport.

Aaron and John were quiet as they flew the short seven-minute flight to the airport. Nick turned right about 30 degrees in order to line up for Runway 34 and dodging a bit of high ground northwest of the airport. He started his descent to pattern altitude and to set up for a left base entry after checking in with the tower. As he flared for the landing and the nose settled, he could see the Antonov sitting on the ramp ahead of them. He had plenty of runway remaining and allowed the small airplane to coast down it toward Humberto’s ramp area. He flipped the flap lever up as he exited the runway and pushed the throttle up a bit to taxi to the parking spot where he had picked up the Cessna.

A short man in overalls came running out of a hanger and came to a stop in front of the Antonov, raising his hands above his head indicating he wanted Nick to taxi to him. Nick pointed the nose of the aircraft directly at the man as he waved his left arm for Nick to turn left. As he approached within a few feet, the man brought his arms over his head then crossed them for a stop. Nick stretched his toes on the top of the rudder pedals as the nose dipped to a stop, and then he pulled the mixture to idle cut off and killed the electrical switches, securing the cockpit. Aaron popped his door open and flipped the front seat forward for John to exit, then walked around and opened the cargo door to get their bags.

Humberto emerged from the hanger, wiping his hands with a red rag. “Buenos dias, señors, I see my airplane is still in good condition. And I got a call from the client yesterday afternoon saying they were very happy with the flight, thank you very much.”

“It was my pleasure, I think I had as much fun as the passengers, to tell you the truth.”

“Enough, please follow me so you can see the wonderful job my crew has done on your airplane, it is muy bueno.”

He started to walk briskly over to the Antonov; the other men grabbed their bags and followed. The aircraft shined brightly in the morning sunlight after the wash and wax. Humberto reached up and opened the crew door, climbing the stairs into the aircraft, followed by Aaron, John, and finally Nick.

As they looked over the interior, it became apparent Humberto spoke the truth. His crew had scrubbed, vacuumed, polished, wiped, and swept every inch of the interior. The cockpit was spotless; all the instruments were wiped clean without a spot of dust in sight.

“Wow, your crew really did a nice job, thank you,” said Aaron, “Our customer should be very pleased.”

Humberto reached into the right front pocket of his overalls and extracted a wad of US dollars. “And here is the fee I promised as part of the deal, thank you again for taking the job and saving my business from a black eye.”

Nick waved his hand, “You know what, your guys did such a good job on this airplane and I had too much fun to take your money, just keep it and we’ll call it even.”

“Are you sure, señor, I am a man of my word and live up to my end of the bargain?”

“Yes, I’m sure, plus you saved us the taxi fare from here.”

“Si, well, you gentlemen are always welcome here, just be sure to ask for Humberto!”

They shook hands all around and Humberto ran down the stairs and headed back to his hanger. They went into the government office on the field to get weather and file their flight plan. Aaron excused himself to go make some phone calls while the other two completed the flight planning. They were back in the aircraft doing their preflight within 25 minutes, Nick doing the cockpit checks while John did the exterior walk around. By the time Aaron came walking out of the government office toward the airplane both were in the cockpit completing the start up checklist.

Their flight would cover about 700 miles straight up the Baja Peninsula to Tijuana and they estimated it would take just about three hours due to some headwinds at 16000 feet, their cruising altitude.

Aaron climbed up the crew door and pulled it shut, then flashed John and Nick a thumb's up sign. He started getting settled into his seat in the rear while Nick began cranking the first engine up. In just a few minutes they had both engines up and running and started to taxi to the end of Runway 34 for take off. At the end of the runway he swung the aircraft around and brought it to a stop. He and John completed the pre take off checklist and radioed the tower for release, which they replied affirmative quickly. John shoved the throttles slowly up, allowing the Russian turboprops to spool up. Nick released the brakes and they began rolling down the runway, John calling airspeeds out to Nick. At 85 knots he pulled the yoke back toward his lap and the big aircraft made its last take off for Tradewinds Air Cargo. They climbed straight out, pulling in the gear over the runway and the flaps at 500 feet, then they continued to 3500 feet before being cleared on course, turning left and climbing out over the Sierra De La Laguna Mountains, brown and tan beneath them. Nick turned the aircraft toward La Paz.

"I took the women right up the Pacific coast over there," Nick said as John raised up out of his seat to see the opposite side of the aircraft. "Then we cut across the north end of these mountains and flew down the Gulf side right over there."

"Ah, yeah, I see," said John.

As they crossed the airport at La Paz, they turned north along the Gulf of Cortez coastline toward Loretto. John settled back in his seat for the long haul, scanning the engine instruments, then he turned to programming his GPS bolted to the yoke.

"How about some music, Maestro?"

"OK, hmmm, oh, here we go," John flipped through his CD case looking for something. "He he he, watch this. You old guys should like this one."

"What is it?" Nick said, craning his neck to see the disc.

"Santana, Supernatural, but this one track will light up Aaron for sure. I've seen him back at Air Cargo Operations in his office. You old guys are funny to watch."

John placed the CD in his player and bumped up the track a couple of times. Smooth started playing with the thump of the drums, a sultry, soulful song with Santana belting out his trademark guitar licks, reaching the high notes, each one distinctive and sharp, and sung by Rob Thomas.

*I hear you whisper and the words melt everyone
But you stay so cool*

Wow, thought Nick, that sure reminded him of Amanda, she was definitely smooth and cool.

Rob and Carlos built the song up in intensity, the soulfulness turning into a higher spirited verse, with Carlos digging in on his guitar. Looking over at John, he noticed the young man had a huge smile, his head bobbing back and forth to the rhythm, then John looked back over his shoulder toward the cargo area and started laughing.

"There you go, Elvis himself!"

Nick looked back and saw Aaron was up, his headset hooked into a walk around cord. His full frame was standing with his back arched backward, his head tilted back, his eyes hidden behind his dark sunglasses, and both hands around an air guitar, hitting every lick right with The Master. His foot tapped time and his face tightened up as he traveled up the fingerboard to the high notes.

Nick smiled, "I had no idea we were travelling with such talent," then he turned his head forward again. Loretto was approaching and he checked the next turn toward Guerrero Negro as his foot tapped time with the song against the rudder pedal. As the end approached and the guitar intensified, Nick glanced back and saw Aaron still holding pace. He could almost see the multicolored lights of a rock and roll stage flashing around the big man.

"Hey, I love that song!" said Aaron when it was over, walking up to the space between the cockpit seats. "And I've always loved Santana from my college days."

"Yeah, me too," said Nick, "He is one of the Masters, no doubt. The man is one of the top guitar players of all time. I put him up with Eric Clapton, Eric Johnson, Jeff Healy, and Mark Knoffler of Dire Straits. Oh, and let's not forget Stevie Ray Vaughn"

"Who's Eric Johnson and Jeff Healy?" said John.

"Eric Johnson is a phenomenal guitar player from Austin, doesn't sing much and mostly does session work for other bands, but I've seen him a few times in Dallas night clubs and have one of his CDs at home, he's very good, try him sometime. Jeff Healy is a blind

guy from Canada, he sits in a chair on stage with his band and he lays a standard guitar in his lap and picks that thing like there's no tomorrow."

"Well, if they're as good as Santana, then I'll sure keep an eye out. I'll bet you two are both Parrotheads, I know Aaron is, here's one for you guys," John said as he slipped the Santana CD out and replaced it with another. In a few seconds, the slow guitar cords of "Come Monday", Jimmy Buffet's first hit song. This song always made Nick think about return flights.

The Baja landscape below them turned to all brown, dunes in places, with low rolling hills as they turned northwest from Loretto for the trip across the vast desert. Ten minutes past Loretto there wasn't another town in sight. Soon San Igancio came into view, and a short time after that the Pacific Ocean started to show through the light haze. Nick looked at his watch, about an hour to go to Tijuana. He looked over the chart into the area and looked over the airport diagram. No sweat, this one is easy. The blue Pacific opened up in front of them, the white surf of the coast turning from light blue to a darker color as they flew further out. Crossing San Quintin left about 150 miles to Tijuana as they skimmed along the Pacific coastline. Checking out the map, Nick could see the airport was northeast of the town, right next to the US border

The radar began to show rain ahead of them. "John, dial up enroute weather and let's get an update on Tijuana, looks like we got some clouds moving in."

"Roger," said John as he sat up and grabbed his chart, then dialed in the station. A quick check with the enroute weatherman showed scattered clouds with some rain, winds were from the west at 8 knots, and the visibility was 10 miles, still VFR all the way. At 90 miles out, the air traffic controller cleared them to 6000 feet. Nick eased the throttles back and disengaged the autopilot, allowing the nose to drop, then trimming the elevator to maintain airspeed and rate of descent. The aircraft began to sink toward the clouds below them.

They crossed Ensenada at 6000 feet, the clouds above them by now, but the humid air reducing the visibility to below 10 miles. The ocean was off the port wing and the land rose quickly inland on the starboard side. Nick slowed the aircraft to 170 knots and looked at his watch, it was almost 2 p.m.

"Aaron, what time does the ride home through San Diego leave Lindbergh Field today?"

"Hmm, hey, well, I think it leaves at 6:30 p.m. Do you think we can make it tonight?"

"Sure, it's almost 2 p.m. now, you can get the paperwork done in an hour, right? Then we catch a cab to the San Diego Trolley at the border and were to the airport in about an hour for two bucks. That puts us there at, say, between four and five o'clock, plenty of time to make that flight."

"OK, then we'll shoot for that plan," said Aaron, "I'm ready to get home to mama."

About 20 miles out air traffic control turned them north for landing on Runway 27. Low rolling hills surrounded them on all sides as the city began to break through the haze. The hills seemed to be reaching up and they were holding them at the high altitude, which would mean they would have to dive bomb into the airport area. ATC turned them to the west and as he straightened out on the westbound heading he began to descend toward the airport, first to 3500 feet, then dropping further to 1500 feet.

The airport lights appeared through the haze and Nick lined the aircraft up with the runway, noticing they were still high. Nick pulled the throttles back, called for the gear and two notches of flaps, which John quickly provided. As the aircraft slowed, Nick pressed the right rudder and cross-controlled the yoke to slip, losing altitude quickly without building airspeed. As the first red light of the VASI popped up from white Nick let off the rudder and brought the yoke back to center.

As the aircraft cross the threshold, Nick pulled the throttles all the way back and leveled the aircraft just over the runway until it settled the last few feet to the asphalt. John pulled the throttles to reverse the props for a few seconds while Nick gently applied brakes until they approached the taxiway and turned off. The ground controller cleared them to the FBO where their customer would hopefully be waiting.

And he was. They pulled up, directed into the parking place by a linesman with orange wands. Two men with big smiles came walking out of the FBO office to greet them as Aaron opened the crew door while John and Nick finished securing the cockpit.

"Buenos Dias," said the first man as he stretched his hand toward Aaron, "Mi llama Ernesto Ocampo."

Aaron took the man's hand, "Aaron Garcia, do you speak English? My colleagues don't speak Spanish."

"Oh yes, very good English. I am Ernesto Ocampo," He said as he shook Nick's hand.

"Well, my Spanish isn't so bad that I didn't catch that part, I'm Nick Collins the pilot, and this is John Baaker, my co-pilot, are you the buyer?"

"Si, and this is Jaime Rodriquez, my pilot," Ernesto said as he shook John's hand, then more handshakes all around with Jaime.

“Jaime, will you go with the pilots and check out the aircraft while Aaron and I complete the paperwork for the title transfer.”

“OK, we will meet you back inside when we are done, this should not take long,” said Jaime, then he turned toward Nick. “I will need to see the log books, airworthiness certificates, radio license, registration, and manuals, then I will take a peek at a few things on the aircraft.”

“Are you familiar with this aircraft,” asked John.

“Yes, I have about 800 hours in this type, my boss has two others. How does it fly?”

“Like an Antonov,” said Nick, “handles like a bulldozer with wings.”

Jaime smiled, “Yes, but they are very reliable and can handle the short dirt fields we operate from.”

“What business are you in?” asked Nick.

“My boss owns several mines throughout Northern Mexico, we use these to fly people, supplies, and equipment between the sites.”

They climbed up the crew door stairs and John gathered the various books, manuals and documents as Nick sat with Jaime and went over each one with him, answering any questions. They studied the maintenance logbook first.

“Trouble with Number 2 engine twice on this trip?”

“No, one really. The pressure-sending unit was intermittent back in the US and it was replaced, and the fitting loosened up near Guadalajara, we lost oil pressure and shut it down in flight. The guys in Guadalajara did a great job and we haven’t had any other trouble since then, purrs like a kitten. It is really a very good airplane, I’ve got about 120 hours in it, flying mostly some of our light cargo routes in Venezuela and Columbia out of Hato.”

“OK, that’s OK.” Jaime turned back to flipping through the logbook.

“Good, no crash damage, now let me see the registration and airworthiness.”

John handed him each document in turn, and he asked a few questions, Nick answering each one.

“OK, this is all good, and the aircraft looks very clean, that will change soon enough in the field,” Jaime said, “Now let me walk around and have a look. I need a stubby screwdriver with reversible ends, do you have one?”

John fished one out of his flight bag and handed it to Jaime, he proceeded to walk around the cargo area first, pulling on wire bundles and peering behind soundproofing. He opened and closed all the doors, then entered the cockpit, where he sat for about 10 minutes looking at various items and making a few notes to get various instrument times.

He climbed out of the cockpit, smiled at Nick and John, then swung out the crew door to inspect the outside. He grabbed a small, elevated work platform on wheels and slid it up next to the Number 2 engine, climbed up it and popped open the cowl to inspect the engine itself. After a few minutes he buttoned it back up and hopped down off the platform, then walked around the aircraft, opening various avionics and control access bays then closing each one. He met Nick and John back at the crew door.

“Everything on this airplane looks to be in good order, your mechanics have taken good care of her. Let me grab a few of those documents for Ernesto and we can go inside.”

After climbing back into the aircraft, he emerged with several documents, then walked quickly toward the FBO office; Nick and John fell in behind him. Inside the office, they found Aaron sitting with a cup of coffee next to Ernesto. A third man was also seated; he was working on a pile of documents for the ownership transfer. He looked up at Aaron.

“You certainly are right, your paperwork is all completely correct, I don’t think I have ever seen this before.”

“I have lots of practice,” said Aaron as he winked at Nick and John.

Jaime gave the man the documents he brought in from the airplane. The man checked the numbers on the various documents against the sales and registration documents.

“OK, all is in order, I just need Ernesto to sign here, and Aaron to sign here, and we are done.”

“Almost done, Ernesto, I think, has a check for me?”

“Oh, si, here,” Ernesto said as he reached into his breast pocket and withdrew an envelope, handing it to Aaron. Aaron opened the flap and peeked inside.

“Yes, everything is in order.”

Both men signed the documents, then everyone shook hands. Ernesto called a cab for the men while they collected their bags off the aircraft. When they returned the cab was waiting for them and they piled their bags into the trunk and hopped into the cab.

“Please take us to the San Diego Trolley Terminal,” said Nick.

“Si, bueno,” said the driver as he put the car into drive and stomped down on the gas, jerking them back into their seats as he sped away. It was a short 15-minute drive through traffic to the trolley terminal. They hopped out as the driver opened the trunk and started handing out their bags. Aaron paid the driver and they went inside, purchased a ticket and waited for the next trolley north. The terminal was packed with tourists from the US, some from as far away as Los Angeles. John studied a tourist brochure as he sat on the bench.

“Hey do we have some time to do some shopping? Look at all the shops at this place, Seaport Village, and it’s only a couple of miles from the airport. The trolley drop off is only a short walk. I want to find some new CD’s.”

Nick looked at his watch. It’s about ten after three now, it takes about 45 minutes on the trolley. We could spend an hour, but no more, what do you think, Aaron?”

“OK, I could use a new book, and we can grab a bite to eat, I see lots of food places listed there as well.”

They had only been sitting about 10 minutes when the trolley was ready to board. They got on and got seated; the trolley started moving a few minutes later. After a short ride into San Diego, they got off on the 12th and Market terminal and transferred to the East-West line, got off at the Seaport Village stop

Nestled at a point along the harbor near downtown, Seaport Village contained a couple of hundred shops, from clothing, books and restaurants to flags and art. John was interested in a music store, Aaron found a bookstore, and Nick just sat outside by the tiled water fountain and watched the multitudes walk by. There was a small carousel housed in one small building, with an old merry-go-round inside. Looking south down the harbor Nick could see the Coronado Bridge arching across the harbor to Coronado Island as well as a row of large Navy ships including aircraft carriers along the piers. Seagulls squawked and circled overhead, looking for dropped food. It seemed like he had just sat down when Aaron and John found him.

“We got what we were looking for, how about you?”

“Wasn’t looking for anything. How about a quick burger, there’s a place right over there?”

They walked over to the window and ordered a burger, fries and a coke each, then sat down on the patio to wait for the order to be called. Within 10 minutes they were devouring the burgers. As the last one finished and got up to throw his trash away, Nick looked at his watch.

“Let’s go grab a cab and get to the airport, we don’t want to miss the flight now.”

They hurried out to the cabstand with their bags and jumped into the first one in line, telling the driver they needed to go to Terminal 2. Their TCA code share here was with Delta. The Delta flight was direct to Miami and Nick and the others would catch a ride back home from the TCA operations there.

The cab ride was a quick ten minutes along the harbor, the traffic was thick and fast. They drove past the Star of India, an old sailing ship of British trading origin turned into a museum and several rows of Navy buildings, supporting the Pacific Fleet they were assured by the signs posted on them. They turned onto Harbor Drive, taking them into the airport and along several marinas with some very nice yachts moored next to each other. As they entered the airport property Nick noticed a US Coast Guard hanger with a Dauphin helicopter sitting outside on the ready pad. He saw a second one coming in and flaring for a quick stop to a hover, then down onto the pad. Looking forward, Nick could see the terminal signs directing them to their drop off. The taxi flowed into the traffic patterns then emerged and came to a stop, everyone jumping out and heading for the rear of the cab. Retrieving their bags, they hurried inside and got into the security check line. The lines moved slower these days, what with the higher security on the look out for terrorists. They made it to the front of the line and opened their bags for the inspectors after walking through the metal detector, then zipped everything up and walked to Gate 38.

“I called ahead and already have seats for us,” said Aaron as they sat down. It was 5:30 and the gate desk opened for check in, so they struggled to their feet again, keeping their luggage next to them, and checked in. With seats in place all the way back to Miami, the crew all breathed a deep sigh of relief. Their mission was done and they had earned their pay on this trip. Nick slid down in his seat, tilted his head back, and closed his eyes.

In what seemed like no more than an instant, Aaron was nudging him. “Hey, c’mon, they are calling our rows.”

Nick’s eyes popped wide open and he sprang to his feet. He grabbed his bag, pulled his boarding pass out into his left hand and fell in line with the travelling public. Nick followed John onto the airplane, taking a window seat just aft of the starboard wing after shoving

his bags into the overhead bin. He snapped his seatbelt on and settled back for the long flight. They would arrive late in Miami so he would have to spend the night. He knew he could catch a hop out of Miami in the morning going to Puerto Rico or somewhere nearby so he could get back to St John's to see when he flew next.

The Boeing 767 taxied to Runway 27 and lined up for take off. They were first off, so the pilots kept it rolling onto the runway, then threw the coals on. As they lifted off, Nick could see Mission Bay and Sea World off the right wing, and the coast with its many hotels lining the beaches. They climbed for a while, looked to be about 5000 feet, then they turned left on course to Miami. San Diego disappeared behind the big Boeing. The video playing on the screen in front of him promised a Gene Hackman thriller later in the flight, after a few warm up programs and cartoons. The flight was scheduled to be about five hours long and Nick looked forward to the distraction of a movie to pass the time. The stewards came by and passed out drinks and peanuts, then came back with a cold sandwich, an apple, and two cookies in a small bag. Nick set the sandwich aside and ate the apple along with a beer he paid \$3 for from the service cart. After food and drink service was completed, the programs started from the small video screen in the seatback in front of him. The first was a Woody Woodpecker cartoon, so Nick leaned his seat back a bit and settled into his seat.

It was the last thing Nick would remember before being woke up by the flight attendant as they were approaching Miami.

Written By Kyle Ramsey

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