



October 2002

ISLAND

BREEZES

A newsletter for the employees of Tradewind Caribbean Airlines



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

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Inside TCA

Santhana Business Travel

Santhana is back again with two new Business Charters and the flights to the two final Formula One races at Indianapolis and Japan. In addition I worked hard on the Archive to get many of the past charters back online.

Next week I will present two Holiday Charters: First a flight to Skiathos (the Greek Sailing Paradise) and a charter flight to a very special Halloween Event at Las Vegas. Then - I hope - I will manage to present some pictures of my wedding and - of course - a honeymoon charter around the islands of Hawaii.

Good news?

Greetings,



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Thomas Than [#2503]
CEO TCA Santhana, Barbados
<http://www.santhana.org>

New Aircraft Delivery

One of the darlings of TCA from its inception, is the Vickers Viscount 800.



Also arriving is the Airbus 310-203. Pax and Logistics versions.



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Interview with Barry Blaisdell

Barry Blaisdell has been designing aircraft and panels for years. He has one of the most recognizable names in the business.

In his words

Hello! My name is Barry Blaisdell. I have been involved in some sort of aviation endeavor since I was a teenager. Whether it was flying SARCAPS in the Civil Air Patrol during the late 1950's or delivering ordinance over the Kep Rail Yards in Hanoi in the mid-1960's or flying Helicopters in the 1970's. And the list goes on and on. I have been designing FS aircraft for Microsoft's Flight Simulator ever since BAO's Flight Shop was released in 1995. I can still remember doing the TDM Goose with Rainer Labbie for FS5. I am also the designer of the "Ultimate DC-3" found in Trev Morson's commercial product "DC-3 The Legend" CD for FS98. I have also designed aircraft for VIP Panels, AETI, and Alpha Software. But thats just a drop in the bucket compared to my freeware work that I have shared with all my fellow simmers



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over the years. I will continue to do so in the future. Now at age 60, living in Stratford, Connecticut, USA, About three miles North of KBDR. I am married 36 years to my wife Carol and have a 25 year old son, Todd. Now as a semi-retired Manufacturing Engineer, working as a Senior Computer Numerical Control Programmer specializing in Laser Cutting Machines. In my off time I'm sitting at my computer designing aircraft and panels for FS2002.

Breeze: How and When did Premier Aircraft Design get started?

Barry: Well it started by accident around 5 years ago. My good friend Ralph Tofflemire (Ralph's Panel Shop) had some extra room on his Web Site and asked me if I would like to use it to show my designs on...I of course said yes and asked him to name it for me...He came up with "Premier Aircraft Design". For the last 2 years I have been on the FLIGHTSIM NETWORK, hosted by flightsim.com and have just surpassed my 500,000th visitor at the Premier Aircraft Design web site at <http://www.flightsimnetwork.com/premaircraft/>.

Breeze: How long have you been working with Bob May?

Barry: Bob and I got together about 2-1/2 years ago when he asked me permission to repaint one of my FS98 CL604 Challengers. He and I became fast friends and he has been my partner helping me with the painting of my designs at Premier Aircraft Design.

Breeze: Which do you like working on the most ? Panels, Aircraft, Other?


Barry: Aircraft design is my first love but I like doing both... My first panel was the Twin Otter Panel to complement my Grennlandair Twin Otter Package for FS98. It has been updated for FS2000 Pro and FS2002 Pro. I also have done panels for the Beech B1900C and B1900D and for the Shorts 330/360 to date... I'm working on and off on a CRJ panel as well.

Breeze: Your latest DHC-6 Pro Panel 2 is a great piece of work. How was the overall response from the flightsim community?

Barry: Thank You...AHhhh..The Twin Otter, My favorite Aircraft/Panel... I have flown in this bird many times back in the 1970's between Aruba, Curacao, and Bonaire while on my SCUBA Diving vacations in the Netherland Antilles. Needless to say my Twin Otter Pro Panel2 is the most accurate Twin Otter panel on the web and has the most features including actual photo views and realistic sound...It has been received very well by the flightsim community. Not a day goes by that I don't get an email saying thank you.

Breeze: Payware vs Freeware.....Your thoughts on keeping it free?

Barry: Freeware will always be around and the best part is if you don't like it...Delete it and go download another. The freeware developer does it for the love of the hobby and wants to share the fruits of his work with other simmers around the world to enjoy. Payware is OK too as long as you get what you pay for. But buyer beware...you



may have to eat it if it doesn't live up to the advertising. Only time will tell as to how freeware/payware will end up after the release of FS2004. Enough said I think.

One more thing before I forget... HAPPY BIRTHDAY TCA.



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FS Soundscape



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FS Soundscape is another revolutionary Flight Simulator Add-on from Lago. Inspired by their interactive scenery package "Emma Field" it adds yet another dimension to our flight simulator world. The idea is that users will be able to add sounds to their favourite airports or indeed any other location in the Flight Simulator environment. FS Soundscape is available from Lago-online (<http://www.lagoonline.com/eng/prodotti/pdt.asp?id=100013>) and costs a fairly low price of €10.00 although there is a free trail version available.

The program works in a similar fashion to FS Scenery Enhancer and is extremely easy to use. Simply place your aircraft on the ground from where ever you wish the sound to be heard select add sound from the LAGO menu which will be added to your FS menu during installation and choose the sound you wish to hear. It's possible to add layers of sounds (although the free demo version will only allow three sounds to be heard in any one place) so it's possible to make the airports you frequent sound very busy. There is a selection of commonly heard sounds available with the installation but it is also possible to record and add your own sounds as well!

As stated earlier FS Soundscape is really a spin off of Emma Field Lago's GA airfield Dynamic scenery package which broke new ground by adding interactive sound to the Scenery. Emma Field was an instant success largely due to the sound dimension it brought to FS2002. It didn't take long to realise that these sounds could be added to

(Writer & Reviewer)

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default scenery or even other Add-on scenery such as the TCA HQ in Hato or the new Chris Wilkes Islands of the West Indies.

The possibilities are endless! It just takes a few seconds to set up a new range of sounds every time you visit an airport so before long TCA pilots using FS Soundscape could have sounds set up for most of the Caribbean.



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The Virtual United States Coast Guard Semper Paratus

"PAN PAN, PAN PAN, PAN PAN, HELLO ALL STATIONS THIS IS UNITED STATES COAST GUARD GREATER ANTILLES GROUP, UNITED STATES COAST GUARD GREATER ANTILLES GROUP, BREAK"

"OCT 06 2002 15:00 COORDINATED UNIVERSAL TIME"

"PUERTO RICO - NORTHWEST OF AGUADILLA - THE COAST GUARD HAS RECEIVED A REPORT OF A VESSEL TAKING ON WATER IN THE VICINITY OF 45 NAUTICAL MILES NORTHWEST OF AGUADILLA. ALL VESSELS ARE REQUESTED TO KEEP A SHARP LOOKOUT, ASSIST IF POSSIBLE, AND REPORT ALL SIGHTINGS TO THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD SIGNED: UNITED STATES COAST GUARD GREATER ANTILLES GROUP, OUT."

The United States Coast Guard maintains the resources that patrol the coastlines of the USA, including the Marine radio communications and coordination like the example above for vessels in distress within 300 NM of the coastline, and sometimes beyond by request. They have Districts that cover all 50 states as well as US possessions and territories. While most people think about boats and cutters as the prime assets used by the USCG, they also maintain a modern fleet of mostly helicopters, but also include several fixed wing aircraft such as the HU-25A/B/C

Dessault Falcon Guardian, the HC-130H Hercules, and a couple of small jets for VIP flights such as a Gulfstream V. The USCG has about 210 aircraft in its fleet today, along with about 1700 boats and cutters of various sizes and roles. According to the USCG's web site, as you read this today, they will fly 164 missions logging 324 hours, with 19 of those missions flown off cutters. Together with their seaborne assets they will conduct 109 search and rescue missions which will save 10 lives, board 144 vessels for inspection or law enforcement, interdict and rescue 14 illegal immigrants, seize about \$10M in illegal drugs, investigate 10 collisions, and service nearly 170 aids to water navigation. They do this as a coordinated team of active duty, reservists, and auxiliary members. Within the VATSIM online flying world, there exists a group of individuals who have organized a Virtual US Coast Guard using MS Flight Simulator. The VUSCG is one of several VATSIM Special Operations VA's organized under an umbrella United Nations Armed Forces organization that is accountable to the VATSIM Board of Governors. Built along VA lines with military focus, these organizations do 100% of their flying online in the VATSIM environment. UNAF was organized by several former and active duty military veterans to build a place within VATSIM where real world military operations, complete with the normal coordination of ATC and flight operations they currently perform with the FAA, to bring the VATSIM world a little closer to "as real as it gets". The problem they hoped to solve was military VA's and their pilots were getting a bad reputation when an untrained individual, having just watched Tom Cruise bust up the skies in "Top Gun", jump in their F-16 or announce they are Air Force One on a secret mission, and ignore the VATSIM ATC, which hurts the experience of ATC and pilots alike. Real world military pilots do not do this, and these early pioneers wanted to provide a place where pilots and ATC both could be educated on how the coordination works successfully in the real world and keep VATSIM safe and enjoyable for military and civil traffic. UNAF wanted to provide a place for military VA organizations from all countries could become affiliated by satisfying some basic flight and VATSIM training and organization guidelines. The remainder of this article will focus on the VUSCG's operations as a reflection of how these UNAF organizations operate within VATSIM.

A pilot's first step in joining the VUSCG is to get an endorsement from an active and qualified VATSIM ATC member that states the pilot has demonstrated the ability to fly successfully within VATSIM. The VUSCG doesn't teach basic flying, VATSIM, or navigation and expects the successful candidate will already have these skills. If they don't, the VUSCG's training department can provide resources to gain the skills and encourage them to return when they have done so. Once the endorsement is emailed, the pilot may take a short online exam designed to both screen out pilots who lack those basic skills, like reading a METAR, as well as underline several VUSCG regulations about flying our training missions. This ensures the pilot will have a productive experience during training and avoid running afoul of VATSIM and VUSCG regulations. These regulations mimic the same ones fleet pilots observe as well, such as only flying assigned missions between VUSCG bases and stations, requirements for flight plans and ATC communications, and accepted online procedures.

When the new pilot has passed the online test, they are given a VUSCG trainee call sign, given the rank of Ensign and directed to Air Training Command Mobile, Alabama where they fly a series of ten training missions. These flights focus on flying the missions of the VUSCG and include basic helo and fixed wing flight operations in VFR, search pattern layout and execution, and since many military airfields lack ILS, VUSCG pilots need to know how to shoot a non-precision approach using a TACAN (similar to a VOR) or NDB. The training department teaches

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five different SAR patterns used by the aircraft during searches and also teaches the use of FSNav to create the patterns and make flying them a lot easier. The last flight is an IFR cross-country with arranged ATC into the JAX ARTCC. The VUSCG provides three aircraft for Ensigns; the HH-65A Jayhawk; the HU-25A Falcon; and the Navy T-34C Turbo Mentor. The T-34 is only used at ATC Mobile by students and instructors to slow things down during lessons.

When all the flights are completed, the Ensign takes a final graduation test that ensures they are prepared to succeed on the check ride. VUSCG check rides are done in about an hour and a half using the FS2002 Instructor's Station to monitor the Ensign's performance. The check pilot uses a checklist of tasks and minimum requirements to evaluate the Ensign's flight against. One a typical check ride, the Ensign will fly a HH-65A Jayhawk (the Falcon is also available but then limits the pilot to only flying fixed wing aircraft) and demonstrate he or she can handle the aircraft in VFR operations in and out of the airfield, radio navigation, a SAR pattern and package drop to the vessel, and a non-precision approach to a landing.

Most pilots within the VUSCG are helicopter qualified; many of them learned the skills at [Hoversafe Academy](#), an online helicopter flight training web site. As you can see, the skills required to fly for the VUSCG are beyond loading up the FMS with waypoints and blasting in straight lines between long stretches of concrete runways with the autopilot doing the work. It is this author's observation that, if the GPS and ILS were taken out of FS, more than half of the current crop of on line VATSIM pilots would be taken out of action. The good news is the skills can be learned (and are learned daily in flight schools around the world) and having these skills will actually make the flying experience much more enjoyable.

This rigorous training and testing process is designed to ensure this pilot will be able to perform basic VFR flight operations without disrupting the other ATC and pilots online with them. It is also designed to ensure the new pilot can report to his or her first duty station with the required level of proficiency in basic VUSCG patrols, SAR and law enforcement ops, and VUSCG text and voice communications. The District Commander gets a trained asset with a minimum known skill level to start and VATSIM gets a well-trained and predictable military pilot.

After graduation, the Ensign is promoted to Lt(jg) and assigned to a district, usually one they chose on their application. The new fleet airman reports to his or her duty station assigned after reporting to the District Commanding Officer's headquarters. Once there, the pilot may fly any of the posted or assigned missions for that station or district. These allow the pilot to fly solo and train and patrol their area of responsibility

This is one of the places where the VUSCG and UNAF units differ from many VA's and VATSIM flights; they only fly pre-approved missions and patrols. Pilots do not make up their own missions and only fly between other VUSCG/UNAF bases for their flights. They do take advantage of Bravo and Charlie airspace ATC from time to time to keep their IFR approach skills sharp, but most flying takes place near their station and in military MOA's, opened and controlled by UNAF ATC by Letter of Agreements with VATSIM ARTCC's and FIR's when requested. This cooperation between military and civil controllers is an everyday part of real flight operations and succeeds best with pilots and controllers trained in the specifics related to that cooperation. VUSCG training and

testing provides minimum levels of proficiency for all graduates to ensure the VUSCG pilots do their part in the cooperation.

The VUSCG also operates live missions, usually several each month. Sometimes these are done in conjunction with an ARTCC fly in, such as last month's Lake Tahoe - Reno Fly In held by ZOA where about 15 VUSCG aircraft and mission commanders flew for about four hours. They performed several rescue missions to vessels on the lake as well as a medevac of a jet ski accident victim to a hospital in Reno, which allowed the ATC and civil pilots to see a VFR helicopter enter and depart an IFR operation seamlessly. One SAR mission found and rescued a downed aircraft crew in the mountains south of the lake and several units intercepted a VFR aircraft that blundered into one of the FAA's popular Temporary Flight Restriction areas. The aircraft was intercepted and escorted to Lake Tahoe airport where local law enforcement and the FAA took over.

The more common mission night takes place these days with an email sent to all members outlining the starting set up of a mission, starting locations and aircraft to use, communications details, and the date and time. Pilots will usually fly from their current station to the mission location using a VUSCG fixed wing aircraft, or some will fly civil airlines and use their other VA's aircraft and PIREP to log the hours to get there (pilots can only log VUSCG PIREPS for VUSCG flights, not civil transport). Then they sign on and contact the mission commander on AIM or Roger Wilco for tasking assignments. Most communications are done using a dedicated voice server but some information is passed using their 'satellite secure' AIM screen names. The VUSCG used to use public RW rooms for their operations and outsiders were both welcome and usually enjoyed listening in on a mission. But repeated interruptions from disgruntled members who had been dismissed for violations of VUSCG and VATSIM regulations forced them to use the secure server. It is sad that the actions of one or two immature individuals prevent hundreds from enjoying their maximum from the hobby.

The VUSCG was started over two years ago by the leadership of ADM Ben Schwartz and ADM Ron Pecora and Commandant and Vice Commandant. Ben left his Commandant position last spring and ADM Chris Smith, who leads the organization today with ADM Pecora remaining as the Vice-Commandant, assumed the leadership of the VUSCG. RADM Schwartz stayed on the staff as the VUSCG's Judge Advocate General, a staff which also includes RADM Brian Smith as Engineering Director, RADM Ray Brower as Aircraft Fleet Director and RADM Chip Raymond as Surface Fleet Director. RADM Kyle Ramsey directs the VUSCG's training programs out of ATC Mobile, Alabama. RADM Ramsey is also the Pacific Area Commander and RADM Jason Pecora is the Atlantic Area Commander.

Besides the patrol, SAR, and law enforcement roles that fill most of the VUSCG airman's time, the VUSCG has several special operations units that mimic real world USCG operations. The Port Security Units use VUSCG-engineering designed FS2002 armed Inflatable Rigid Hull boats, complete with panels and sounds, deployed with helicopters to defend U.S. assets in foreign ports. PSU units train in District 9 and are deployed for training and actual deployments, but the pilots remain members of their home districts. HITRON-10, a drug interdiction unit that flies out of South Florida and the Greater Antilles, performs special operations to intercept and detain suspected drug vessels at sea using the only fast, armed helicopters in the USCG inventory. HITRON-10 trains in

District 7 and covers from Mexico to the eastern end of the Caribbean Islands.

The International Ice Patrol, flown by HC-130H's out of CGAS Elisabeth City in District 5, consists of long flights to Canada and longer patrols over the Atlantic ice fields. The USCG has flown this patrol since an iceberg sank the Titanic. District 1 is home to Cape May, the Surface Vessel Training department, likely the only place on the internet where you can learn to pilot a boat using a training program and scenery written by real world USCG coxswains. District 8 is home to ATC Mobile where the USCG and the VUSCG train their pilots. Not just for Ensigns, ATC Mobile also offers certification courses in air to air interception, Advanced SAR Techniques, and aircraft type rating checkouts, with a military IFR certification in the works for release in the fall.

Districts 1, 5, 7, and 8 and part of the Atlantic Area, commanded by LANTCOM RADM Jason Pecora. Districts 11, 13, 14, and 17 are under the command of RADM Kyle Ramsey, PACCOM, which covers the western USA, Alaska and Hawaii. District 11 covers all of California and part of Oregon, that coastline continues north to Canada under the watchful eye of the VUSCG airmen of the all-helicopter District 13. This district is also home to another VUSCG-built boat, the GMAX 51 foot unsinkable rescue boat, created by the district commander, a real world CG member. Districts 14 in Hawaii and 17 in Alaska are currently shut down until membership numbers require them to be opened, although Pacific Area pilots do fly to these districts for short TDY's to fly the missions and patrols of those districts.

The VUSCG is rightly proud of its training system, and it is equally proud of its engineering group, a small set of designers and painters who provide the aircraft and scenery for our missions. RADM Ray Brower is the Fleet Director over all the aircraft and helicopter aircraft, panels, and the adaptations of these to the VUSCG's requirements. RADM Chip Raymond is the head of the Surface Fleet that consists of driveable cutters and patrol boats. The centerpiece of VUSCG missions is the Scenery Commander and Generator, designed by CMDR Jordan Moore. This system allows VUSCG commanders to quickly move mission targets into position using a simple web page to enter the target information and load the web program such that anyone else with the Scenery Generator, a set of common textures and macros already loaded on the user's disk, to have the same scenery when the new positions are updated in seconds from a simple generator program (it produces and updates a .bgl file already on the user's hard drive). This allows for dynamic missions and the ability to add mission targets like sinking boats, people in the water, crashed aircraft, and cars and trucks very quickly and get the update to all users within minutes without long downloads or using scenery design tools to make the .bgl files.

It can be seen that this organization is not for the beginner pilot. The VUSCG seeks pilots with good flight and VATSIM skills and a passion for replicating the missions of the real world United States Coast Guard. They do so with a talented group of leaders and designers, the real core of the VUSCG. They also do it with the many individual pilots who bring their skills and enthusiasm to mission nights and to the learning of these skills. If you have a passion around life saving, humanitarian missions, and law enforcement on the seas, then please contact the VUSCG for more information.



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Alternate Air

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Jamaica Farewell

Owen Powell and Nick spent the next day flying from spot to spot, with Nick landing at each one to test the water and scan for hazards lying just under the water. Things like that will quickly turn a happy, revenue earning flight into a financial and public relations nightmare. The last the thing the new Seaplane Service needed was to sink an airplane. They had started just before 8 a.m. and had only stopped for about an hour in Ocho Rios, enjoying some local salted fish called ackee with a breadfruit pudding, the breadfruit brought to the island by a ship headed for a different destiny, the H.M.S. Bounty.

First settled over 2000 years ago by Arawak Indians who traveled from South America in wooden canoes, Jamaica was named by these people with a word that meant, "land of wood and water". These people farmed the land in relative peace until they discovered Christopher Columbus on their doorstep in May of 1494. Since there wasn't much to steal, the Spanish left Jamaica alone except for a few settlers until about 5000 Englishmen showed up and took control with little resistance. While the English also farmed and set up plantations, they also discovered a more lucrative industry in piracy, Port Royale being one of the foremost hang outs of many pirates of the 17th century until it sank into the sea during an earthquake in 1692. The Hand of God? Maybe.

Plantation life was the way to go for the island's Anglos until the slaves were set free in 1838, then that deal fell

apart. Today Jamaica is an independent Commonwealth of the United Kingdom, recognizing The Queen as their sovereign and having an appointed Governor-General from England to keep the good feelings rolling between the two countries. However the country is run by its own government since 1962 and makes its own deals and treaties. Jamaicans rely more on tourism and bauxite mining, along with traditional fruit and vegetable crops for most of the trade they are able to leverage. Home of Bob Marley, the Godfather of Reggae music, the number one cash crop of Jamaica is marijuana, brought to the islands by indentured servants from India who revered the smoke as much as today's Rastafarians.

Jamaica is an island of diverse landscape, with winding coastlines making hundreds of small coves around the island, except in the south where some beaches are long and ruler-straight. The flat plains ring the coastal areas, with a broad plain in the south while the center rose from the west, peaking in the Blue Mountains in the east central area, then tapering back to the coast in the east. Some parts of the interior were impassible masses of brush, sink holes and underground caves that would swallow up a man never to be heard from again.

Nick thought about that when flying over Jamaica since there wasn't really anywhere to set down if you lost the fans. Most flights here were twin engine and he was beginning to better understand that as Owen described the interior to him.

"I camped near the edge a couple of times when I was a teenager, and we told each other scary stories about ghosts and monsters who lived in there, but I never went in. There were plenty of stories about people who were never heard from again when they wandered in there. Monsters or not, it is not a great place to be."

"OK, we'll make a note to deny permission to crash land in the interior. Good thing we're a seaplane outfit I guess, the only flight over the island for us will likely be the shuttle between Kingston and Montego. I guess we can make sure they can glide to one side of the island or the other, declare a minimum altitude before crossing the island. Well, good suggestion anyway."

Nick turned the aircraft towards Kingston and started to descend. He was satisfied he had seen what he needed to see and wanted to wrap this project up and get back to Puerto Rico. All he needed to do was go over the notes with Owen and give him some details to follow up on with a date for his final report. They could do that in the TDM pilot's lounge.

It was getting too late to make a shot at flying back to San Juan that night, so he resigned himself to another night in Kingston. The real drag would be that tonight Amanda would not be there to entertain him. He missed her far more than he realized. Nick lined the Goose up on the runway for the final approach and slid the aircraft back to earth, then taxied back to the TDM ramp. Nick and Owen grabbed their equipment, charts and notes and headed out the crew door. They were met on the ramp by a tall young man with a large smile and long dreadlocks streaming out from under a rainbow colored floppy hat.

"A good afternoon to you, gentlemen. Do you need gas, mon?"

"Yeah, we ran it almost dry today, please fill it up to within about two knuckles of the top, OK? I plan to leave first thing tomorrow."

"Ya mon, no problem. You leavin'? Ok, say, there are two men with suits waiting inside for you. They aren't saying too much, makes me a little worried about them, ya know, mon? The kind of mon who wears a long coat on a warm day and talks into a rolled up newspaper, ya know mon?"

"For me or Owen? And they didn't say what they wanted?"

"No, mon, they asked for you, Nick, didn't say nothing about this fella."

Nick looked at Owen who shrugged his shoulders and they walked into the little office. They saw the two men at the same time they saw Nick and Owen. The two men set down magazines they had been leafing through and stood, walking over to Nick.

"Nick Collins?"

"Yes, I'm Nick Collins, what is this about?"

"Mr. Collins, is there a place we can talk? Privately."

"Uh, yeah, there is a small office in the back, come on."

The second man looked at Owen, "Sorry, we just need Mr. Collins."

"Nick, what do you want me to do?"

"Just go back to your office today and I'll call you later. Maybe buy you dinner and we can finish, how's that?"

"OK, you have my number, I'll wait for your call."

Nick led the two men into a back office and sat down on a small arm chair against one wall. The first man entered and sat on the edge of a desk, the second closed the door then stood next to it, leaning his back on the door to prevent anyone from opening it suddenly.

"We just have a few questions, may be nothing at all."

"Nothing at all? Ok, what is it?"

"We understand you had dinner last night with a woman named Amanda Burt?"

"Amanda? What is wrong with Amanda? Yes, we had dinner, then I put her on her plane to Hato Airport in

Curacao about 9 p.m."

"I'm afraid that airplane never made it to Hato, in fact we don't know exactly where it is."

"Oh my God, this can't be, and you don't know where it went down."

The man leaning against the door spoke, "We didn't say it went down, Mr. Collins, we said we didn't know exactly where it is."

Nick looked at the man against the door, "I'm confused, the plane is lost but not down, just lost? And Amanda is on the plane? And call me Nick. Say, can I see some ID?"

The first man reached into his breast packet and withdrew a thin wallet containing an ID card and a golden badge.

"I'm Bob Tallent, an investigator from the FAA, and this is Tom Hillermann from Tobacco, Alcohol, and Firearms. We are investigating the disappearance of Royal Island Cargo Flight 6122, which your girlfriend got on last night."

"What are you US Feds doing in Jamaica, and why aren't the local authorities running the investigation?"

"Let's just say they felt the scope was bigger than their resources could handle and asked us to help them out. We do tis all the time, great relations between the U.S. and Jamaica. Now, can we ask you a few questions?"

"Sure, if I can ask a few too."

"We'll see about that. So you say you dropped her off, about what time?"

"It was about 8:30, we had a short time to chat before she had to board."

"How many bags did she take on board with her?"

"Let's see, she had a purse and a shoulder bag, briefcase, I guess, then she had two other bags, a hang-up style and an overnight bag. They were a match set, you know, with the little Gucci labels on them and the colored band."

"And who else was around, anything suspicious?"

"No, it was just Amanda on the flight, and a sick person on a gurney with their wife and a nurse it seemed, going to a hospital down there I guess."

"Yes, we know some about them, can you describe them?"

Nick dove into his mind and tried to think back. He was so focused on Amanda; he had only glanced at the trio, now his memory of that glance may be all he has to get Amanda back. He gave all the details he could think of.

Age, height, weight, hair color, genders, dress, the stuff they had with them, oxygen tanks, medical bag, the like, nothing out of the ordinary in the Caribbean for sure.

"OK, how about anyone else?"

"The only other people I saw were Royal Islands people, the counter clerk and I saw Dan Lucas, the pilot, as he was pre-flighting the aircraft."

"You know Capt. Lucas?"

"Well we know about each other is a better way to say it. Freight pilots in the Caribbean is a small crowd and we all know each other, for better or worse."

"Was this Lucas a problem type person? Do you think he had any connections to, say," Bob pursed his lips, "Drugs?"

"Dan Lucas? Drugs? No, I would have a hard time believing that. Dan is a turkey sometimes, but he is straight as an arrow and a capable pilot."

"Did he owe anybody money?"

"Beats me, I knew of him more that I knew him, you see. But let's be fair, no one retires early on a cargo pilot's salary."

"I see. Well I guess that's about all we have for now," Bob stood up.

"Now my turn to ask some questions. Bob, if you are from the FAA, I'll eat this lamp. I've known and hated plenty of FAA guys in my time, and none of them ever asked questions like you do. FAA guys ask different questions, I've had plenty of practice with them. You sound much more like a cop."

"Sorry Nick, I'm not really at liberty to discuss such details. You can believe whatever you want to believe, my job is to figure this thing out and I thought you could help."

"And have I? Helped?" What about Amanda, do you think she had anything to do with this? We haven't talked at all about her. And her taking that flight was a last minute thing, I was there. She changed her plans in order to spend some time flying around Jamaica yesterday with me and Owen, but she got the cargo flight seat at the last minute."

Nick caught the two men trading a quick glance. Bob's lips broke into a slight smile.

"No, we think she was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Don't get us wrong, Nick, one of the main reasons the U.S. government is interested in this flight is a US citizen was aboard."

"Now see Bob, there you go again. There is no way a FAA man would ever fly all the way to Jamaica to find one journalist lost on an airplane over the Caribbean Sea. He might show up if there was a pilot's certificate to be suspended, but find a citizen or two, no way. What is this about, guys?"

Nick thought a moment.

"Have you guys filed a ARSA report on this yet?"

"Of course, all the required reports are filed. We work for the government and are very good at forms, Nick. Tom, make a note to be sure ARSA got their report."

Nick smiled slightly then narrowed his eyes as they drilled right into Bob's brown eyes.

"An ARSA form is used by U.S. pilots to report unsafe activities they might see or have happen to them, anonymously. It's is as close to a Get Out Of Jail Free card for FAA violations as you can get. The FAA gets the safety data it needs to fix problems and the pilot gets to keep his ticket, good deal for everyone. Well usually, it is still the FAA. Who are you guys because there is no way you work for the FAA?"

Tom spoke up, "Nick give us a minute to chat, OK?"

The two slid out the door into the hallway and spoke briefly in whispers. Nick strained to hear them just as a turbo prop outside spun to life, drowning out any hope of hearing. After what seemed to be an hour but was more like five minutes, the two returned. Tom sat on the desk this time and Bob leaned on the door.

"We really don't know what to tell you about your girlfriend. Amanda is either OK or she's not. We do not think the aircraft crashed, but instead is probably down in Colombia somewhere. If you will give us a number where we can reach you, we'll call if something turns up."

"Right, don't call us, I get it. Well gentlemen, if you don't have any other information to share, I guess I'll be going. I do want you to call if anything turns up or I can help get Amanda and that airplane's crew and passengers back safely."

"We'll do that, be in touch, that is."

The men said goodbye after Nick gave them his number at the TDS office. He was still feeling stunned by the news and didn't know what to think. He decided to call Sabrina back at the office and let her know what was going on and to arrange for him to get back quickly. He walked back into the office and lifted the phone, dialing the number she had given him.

"Tradewind Domestic Seaplanes, may I help you?"

"I need to talk to Sabrina, please, this is Nick Collins."

"Yes, Nick, she is looking for you too, please hold for a moment while I locate her for you."

Nick hoped Sabrina didn't have a load to stuff to dump on him, he just wasn't in the mood for it right now, as much as he liked her.

"Nick! Where the hell have you been? I have called your cell phone and sent you emails."

"Oh Sabrina, I haven't checked any of those gadgets, I don't use them much yet. I got to tell you about"

"I know about Amanda. There were a couple of guys here a couple of hours ago asking a lot of questions of me and Johnny about you and Amanda."

"What did they want to know?"

"If we thought you were running drugs."

"You got to be kidding, they think this is a drug thing?"

"Sounds like it. We, of course, vouched for you, so you better be clean, boy."

"You can take that to the bank. There isn't enough money to get me to haul drugs. I was also interviewed; they left a few minutes ago. One guy said he was FAA, the other didn't talk much and said he was ATF. I just had a quick feeling about the FAA guy, he didn't talk like any FAA guy I ever met, more like a cop."

"Everybody is suspicious, I guess. Anyway, Johnny said to tell you that you have the full support of the company and anything we can do to help get Amanda back just give him a call. These guys asked a lot of questions about you and your flying, they seemed very interested in the kinds of aircraft you could fly."

"This is too weird, Sabrina. And I've lost Amanda."

"I know, dear, and I'm so sorry. We all still hope she's OK. Did they tell you anything about the crash?"

"They don't think it crashed, they think it was hijacked by drug runners, I guess. But why would they take an airplane from this far away, with a bunch of people in it when it is easier to steal one off a ramp somewhere?"

"No crash? That's some good news, then she's probably still alive?"

"With dope runners you never know, they may have pitched all the passengers out at altitude, you just can't tell."

"If they are drug runners, they will likely try to ransom them, that's what they do down there with kidnap victims."

"Ransom! Yeah, why not? An American journalist, that's got to be worth some cash to them, right? Yeah, ransom, I'll bet you're right. Then we just got to get her out once we figure out where she is. You're a genius Sabrina, thanks, I feel much better now."

Nick jotted a note on the pad next to the phone then spoke again.

"I go the pager number of the FAA guy, maybe I'll call him later to see what he thinks, although he told me to sit tight and wait for his call. Oh well, he will get over it."

"One other thing, Carlos Cardenas called for you and left a number, said it was urgent and to have you call him as soon as you could."

"Carlos, huh? He was listening for a few things about another thing going on, maybe he found something. Thanks, I'll give him a shout."

Nick traded a few more details with Sabrina then hung up and called Carlos.

"Nick, I'm so glad you called. Did you hear about the Royal Islands Herc that went missing last night?"

"Not only did I hear about it, I put Amanda on it last night in Kingston? What's up?"

"Who is Amanda?"

"The woman I'm seeing right now. She's a writer I met in Cabo San Lucas last August and she's here writing about the Seaplane Service. She went to Willamstad to interview Andre and took that Royal flight; it was the last one that night. Dan Lucas was the pilot, I saw him walking around the airplane."

"I know, too bad about Dan, he is a good guy, I hope they didn't kill him."

"They would have needed him to fly the airplane."

"Yeah, I hope so. I have heard a few things and put a few others together. I heard from a buddy over at the air traffic center that there was a crossing of that airplane with another turbo prop out of Cuba that was headed to Cartagena, Colombia. The two aircraft actually passed within a couple of hundred feet of each other, it looked like one dropped a bit and the other rose a bit before they corrected just as they crossed their paths. It happened in a corner of three FIR's airspace that is not that well covered by radar, and there was a big storm out there last night, so nobody thought anything about it, both crews checked in on course a few minutes later and didn't report anything unusual."

"Really? Is that all he said?"

"Yes, that was it. They gave a bunch of tapes to some NSA guys for analysis, but he watched them with the Feds before they took them off."

"Wow, The National Security Agency, our signals snoops? I guess they'll study the hell out of those tapes, I hope they see a clue to where they are. I was interviewed by a couple of guys with more questions than answers."

"That's not all. Guess what that Herc was carrying?"

"I don't know, I saw some large crates going into the back of the thing while we waited."

"It was some special military hardware, like I was telling you the other day."

"Military hardware? These people aren't drug runners? That is what the Feds asked me about, if I run drugs."

"If you run drugs? That's ridiculous, why did they think that?"

"Feds think everyone runs drugs, I guess."

"Well not this time. This time it was someone trying to make a little sale down on southeast Colombia."

"The anarchists or the FARC?"

"Hard to say, but I hear the equipment fits up on a helicopter and provides a series of high tech sensors. It was on its way to Venezuela for a demonstration to use in drug interdiction funded by the US government. Apparently it can transmit its data to hand held displays used by ground troops and let's them see things they normally can't see. In the dense forests around there this would give the side with this technology a huge advantage to see and hear before being heard or seen."

"What kind of sensors?"

"I don't know, the info I got was kind of vague, came from a customs guy I play golf with on weekends. They are in a flurry trying to find this cargo, you can bet, he was jumping on an airplane and going to Willamstad and had to cancel for this week."

"So let me see, I've got Feds asking me about drug running, my girlfriend and fellow passengers get kidnapped in mid air along with Lucas and his crew with a load of high tech gear now probably in the hands of a bunch of basically bad people. Have I got this about right, Car?"

"Yeah, that sounds about like how the pieces are beginning to fit together."

"But what about the airplane, has anyone reported it?"

"No, the ATC tapes show it landing late at night in Willamstad but the crew waiting to unload it never saw the airplane show up on their ramp. They have searched the whole airport and anything big enough to land a Herc nearby as well, no Royal Islands cargo airplanes. They are calling airports all over Columbia right now."

"They saw it land at Hato? The Feds told me they thought it was in Colombia too, but they thought it was connected to drugs. Sabrina thinks they will want to ransom Amanda and the other passengers, what do you think?"

"A good chance, I'd say, except that would then point the finger at them for having swiped the gear, don't you think?"

Nick's heart fell.

"I didn't think of that. I just don't know."

"Yeah, we don't know. You'll just have to wait. If it is ransom, you'll hear from them soon enough. If not, you'll not likely hear from her again. Sorry."

"Oh, thanks for putting a point on that for me. Maybe I can take a plane down to Coloumbia and nose around a bit, see what I can learn, I think they'll give me the time and a plane."

"Step back and listen to what you just said. You want to go to COLOMBIA and ASK QUESTIONS about BAD PEOPLE, and you think they'll just think nothing of it, do you?"

"Hmmm, you got a point there, that might be a bad plan."

"Try to relax if you can, I know it's hard. When are you back in San Juan?"

"I want to come back tomorrow, I don't want to sit in a hotel room out here waiting to hear, plus Sabrina will be helpful in getting information for me as I need it. And I need to stay busy or I'll go nuts."

"OK, I'll keep my ear to the ground. You be careful with these people, Nick, and let me know what you learn."

"You got it, Car, see you tomorrow or the day after. And thanks."

Nick hung up the phone and sagged down in the chair. He reached for the phone and called Owen, making arrangements to meet him at the hotel restaurant for dinner and to wrap up their business so he could return the following day. Owen expressed his sorrow in hearing the news about Amanda, saying she was a nice lady and he hoped she would be found soon. He rubbed his eyes and glanced at his watch. Dinner wouldn't be for another two hours; he had time to go back to his hotel room and take a shower, maybe that would make him feel better. He reached over and turned on the radio on the nightstand next to the bed. Christie McVie of Fleetwood Mac was singing "Don't Stop",

*If you wake up and don't want to smile,
If it takes just a little while,
Open your eyes and look at the day,
You'll see things in a different way.*

*Don't stop, thinking about tomorrow,
Don't stop, it'll soon be here,
It'll be, better than before,
Yesterday's gone, yesterday's gone.*

Nick walked into the bathroom, peeling the last of his clothes off and trailing them behind him from the bed to the shower. He got inside and stood there for what seemed to be an hour. He was ready for today to be gone, although he had no idea what would come next. How could he concentrate on building the seaplane business with Amanda still out there? He needed to sleep

Someone kicking her feet awakened Amanda. She looked up to see the male nurse standing over her with a very large semiautomatic pistol in his hands. He asked her in Spanish who she was. The cargo hold of a L-100 is very noisy and Amanda cupped her hand to her ear to indicate she couldn't hear, and he repeated his question.

"Sorry, I don't speak Spanish, if that's what you are speaking, only English. Please don't hurt me."

He changed to bad English.

"We did not intend to have you on this flight. As long as you do not cause me any trouble, I will wait until we land to decide what to do with you. We should be landing in about thirty minutes, so sit down and place your on seat belt."

"Who are you people? I thought you were medical people? Where are you taking us? Where are the others?"

"You do not need to know many of these things, woman. Everyone is just fine, there is not reason for alarm, so please just sit down and shut up, OK?"

Amanda saw she wasn't going to get anywhere with this guy, probably too small a fish to make such a decision. She reached for the seat belt buckle.

"Fine, just please don't hurt me, I will be very quiet."

The nurse smiled and turned to go back to the ladder that led to the flight deck. It was still very dark outside and she had no idea where they were. Did they keep going toward Colombia or did they veer to somewhere else? She would just have to keep an eye open.

The aircraft started to descend in a few minutes and Amanda still could not see any lights out the small round

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windows. Before she was ready she felt the flare and then the tires barking as they hit the concrete runway. There were a few lights to be seen along the edge of the airport, but she couldn't see any people. With what little light there was she saw thick trees everywhere.

The Herc lurched to a stop and the four turboprops began to wind down. The nurse returned with the woman, each holding the same style pistol.

"Get up, and follow us, please."

Amanda rose and picked up her purse, then followed the man out the back ramp with the woman behind her. There were three large trucks and one long flatbed parked along the edge of the ramp. The woman grabbed Amanda's arm and shoved her into the back of the nearest truck. She reached her arm out toward Amanda.

"Sit here and do not move. Give me your purse, you will not need it. I will be right outside the truck watching so don't even think about trying to run for it, you understand?"

"I understand," she said, handing over her purse to the woman, glad she had removed the gun. There should be nothing but journalist and personal information left, and her money, credit cards, and passport, dammit.

She sat back there for what seemed an eternity. She could hear the sound of diesel engines running outside, then she felt the truck's engine start and jump into gear, rolling forward as the driver searched for the second gear. They drove for what seemed to be about three or four hours as best she could figure, having left her watch in her purse, over rough terrain that made the going slow. Then the truck came to a stop and the engine shut down. The rear door was opened and another woman, older with a hard face from years of living outdoors was waiting for her, a pistol in her hand.

"Get out, you will stay here tonight."

"Where are we?"

"We are a long way from America, I can tell you that, a long way. You will make yourself at home here. It is sparse, not as nice as I am sure you are used to, but it is both comfortable and secure. The area has many guards, so do not be stupid and try to escape."

"Where would I escape to?"

"Yes, exactly, you do understand, this is good. I will lock this door and will be back tomorrow with something for you to eat. We will decide what to do with you tomorrow when El Commandante arrives. Buenos Noches."

"Good night, I guess."

The door closed and Amanda heard the bolt close. She looked around and noticed this appeared to be a small

apartment with two small rooms and a smaller bathroom with an old tub, a sink, and a toilet. The front room had two chairs and a bed in it with a small kitchen, but here were no appliances, just a sink. The second room had a wooden table and five chairs around it with a bare light bulb screwed into a porcelain fixture in the center of the ceiling. There were also no windows except in the front on either side of the front door and there was no back door.

Well, she reasoned, in the words of another fine southern woman, tomorrow will be another day. She slid over to the bed and lay down, completely exhausted by the events so far. How would she get word to Nick? She wondered if he even knew. Of course, a whole airplane doesn't go missing without lots of people knowing, and Nick knew lots of airplane people in the area, surely he would find out soon.

She only hoped she could get away and get word to him and the others before they came looking for her. Well, and if she couldn't get out, then they would be coming, wouldn't they? Sure, they wouldn't let her stay here if they knew she was alive. Alive, yeah, she needed to figure out how to let someone know she was still alive.

14

Can't Put The Genie Back In The Bottle

The radio alarm clock snapped on to the local rock and roll station that Nick had set it on the night before, with Don Henley belting out his great tune, "The Genie":

*And the past comes back to smack you around
For all the things you thought you got for free
For the arrogance to think that you could somehow
Defy the laws of gravity
These are lessons in humility
Penitence for past offenses
Consequences, consequences*

*You can't get the genie back in the bottle
You can't get the genie back in the bottle
You can't get the genie back in the bottle
You can't get the genie back in the bottle*

Nick rolled over and reached out his hand, groping for the snooze button. He opened one eye and looked at the digital display, it was 0730. He closed his open eye and sighed deeply. He needed to get going, but he didn't exactly know where. He needed to get back to San Juan, he guessed, so that should be his priority. Still angry that Tom the ATF man had not returned his page last night, Nick decided to find his cell phone and get it working and page ole' Tom every thirty minutes until either the batteries in his pager wore out or he called back. He saw somewhere that it had a vibrate mode for ringing, maybe he would try that and keep the phone in his pocket, then he wouldn't miss any calls from anyone when he was within range of land.

Rising from the bed, he stumbled into the bathroom, his bladder about to bust. He was about half way through brushing his teeth when the hotel phone rang. He rinsed quickly and dashed over to the bed and grabbed the phone.

"Hello?"

"Nick? Is that you," a woman's voice said on the other end of the phone.

"Sabrina, hi, I was just getting ready to go to the airport in about a half an hour and head back home. What's up?"

"Nick, we have gotten a call from some federal agents, FBI, I think, they were asking about you. You're not gonna believe this, they want to hire you it sounds like."

"To go get Amanda, I'll do it for free, give me a break, tell me more."

"Well, first of all, it is a charter for TDS, so you can forget the for free stuff, and they want your help to recover the cargo and find the airplane and crew. At least that's what I have pieced together so far."

"Wow, you got to be kidding, wonder why they don't use their own people for this, they hire some good pilots."

"I don't know, but they should be contacting you soon, so just stay at the hotel until they call. If they haven't called by 11:00 then call me back and we'll see what else has transpired. But something is clearly afoot, there are special deals being worked in the background as far as I can see, but I have a few feelers out. TCA Ops is positioning several aircraft and it all seems to be related to this event, because it sure came out of nowhere and seems to be focused."

"So stay here, OK. I'll get some room service and try to kick back and wait. I hate waiting, Sabrina; it's one of the things about me. I'll be like a tiger pacing his cage the whole time."

"Goodbye, and hang on."

Nick ordered a couple of eggs, bacon, toast, and hash browns from the room service menu, along with a whole pot of coffee to give him something to burn the time. Then he sat at the small table in his room and pulled out the lap top computer. He spent the next two hours checking out the computer and trying out the satellite uplink,

downloading his email just the way Sabrina had shown him a couple of days ago, and surfing a few internet web sites. He used the CIA's World Factbook web page to look up some information on Colombia in case that turned out to be the place Amanda was being held. He had flown many sorties along the coast mostly, but he had done about three months in the interior about a year or so ago. It had huge mountainous areas with steep river valleys between them; thick forests with tropical underbrush just to making walking a real pain. Small airplanes have a huge advantage in Colombia and thus TDM had a permanent standing in the country.

In the southwestern part of the country, running all the way to the Venezuelan border, is an area declared neutral by the former president of Colombia. This area is overrun by the cocaine cartels and the FARC, a Marxist revolutionary group claiming a legitimate fight for independence from the government in Bogota. Mostly they were outlaws using protection, kidnapping and other extortion to finance their activities. Nick knew all about this area. He would fly at treetop level to give anyone on the ground the least amount of time to draw a bead on him, and he used random maneuvers to make his approach to an airfield less predictable, thus denying an attacker an advantage of position. The take off and final approach were the risky parts of the flight, but Nick had never been shot at, so either he was lucky or good. He preferred the latter but would take the former when all else fails.

Nick got up and moved the breakfast tray off the table and onto the floor, and warmed up his coffee cup from the pot. The phone rang.

"Mr. Nick Collins?"

"Yes, this is he."

"Mr. Collins, this is Tom Hillermann, we met yesterday."

"How could I forget. I paged you last night and you didn't return my call. I wanted to ask you about the possibility of ransom for Amanda. Do you think they will ransom her?"

"I don't know, and we don't want to wait any longer than we need. Mr. Collins, may I call you Nick? Nick, I need to come by your hotel room and chat for a bit. We have a proposition for you."

"You want to hire me?"

"Ah, you too have good intelligence, we should compare notes."

"Yes, we should. Do you know the way to this hotel?"

"Yes, I'll be there with a couple of associates in 20 minutes."

Forty-five minutes later Nick let three men into the room. Tom, who he had met the day before, and burley man with a full beard and a shaved bald head named Gilbert Silva, and another short white man in a suit who introduced

himself as Rex St. James. They pulled up chairs and Nick sat on the bed.

"Well, yes, you have heard we would like to hire you, how did you know that?"

"My admin assistant knows everything, I'm convinced of that at this point. I also have some friends in the aviation business around the islands that hear and see things. Like I know you guys are probably far more interested in the cargo of that airplane than the people on it, aren't you?"

"Very good, Nick, well done. Let me fill in a few blanks for you. First, yes, we need to get that cargo back. It is too sensitive to let get out on the black market and to be used against U.S or allied troops. So we do need to go get that back. But hey, I'm an American and I'd like to know my country will come get me if I fall into the hands of some bad guys, don't you?"

"I guess I'm just not as convinced the U.S. government is so interested in rescuing a few citizens when a letter expressing outrage to the local ambassador will do. I do think they will pull out the stops to get whatever that hardware is back, and that is my leverage to get Amanda back. What is your deal?"

"Nick, we want you to accompany Gilbert down to Colombia. We already have your transportation needs worked out and we can go over those details later. Gilbert is a trained guide and tactical assistant you will find very valuable. He knows how to get down there and get you, the crew, and the stuff out of there."

"And Amanda, and the other passengers too, right?"

"Ah, another detail. We now believe Amanda was the only real passenger. The trio you saw in the lobby was most likely the hijack team. We have gotten fingerprints and security camera shots that confirm they are from a small group of mercenaries from Argentina, flying being one of their advertised services. We think they overpowered your friend Capt. Lucas and his crew and took over the airplane."

"And what about Amanda?"

"We don't know anything specific to Amanda. We hope she is alright."

"So what is the plan?"

Gilbert opened a small case and withdrew a map, laying it out on the table. Nick rose to get a better view as the burley man spoke.

"We take a regular TCA flight from here to Panama City tomorrow, just like real tourists. Then we drive to Marcos Gelabert airport in Panama, a small airport where your company has positioned a Grumman Albatross for us to use, just a couple of fishermen on their way to Buenavista for fun and sun. In Buenavista, we meet up with an associate of mine for the trip into the interior. There your company is positioning a DC-3 for us to use to fly in and get the gear out. We fly from there to San Vicente where we expect to be able to recover the equipment nearby. I'll fill you

in on the ground portion of the operation as we fly; we'll have time to kill and to get to know each other. We fly the stuff out and go home."

"Just like that, we're gonna fly into the heart of FARC country in a nicely marked TDM aircraft, where it will be waiting to be picked up? You got to be kidding. Also, the DC-3 can't carry anywhere near the load of the Herc that stuff flew in on, to say nothing of the gear and the people, three crew and Amanda, me, Gilbert, and his playmate."

"Of course it isn't like that at all. The gear is in a warehouse about 100 kilometers from the airport. It is guarded but my associate and I will take care of that part. We'll just need your eyes and we'll want you to stay healthy, as you are our ride home. As to the weight, we don't need all the hardware, just some of it. The seven main parts we need weight about 60 pounds each, we don't really care about the mounting hardware, just the sensors and receivers."

Tom spoke up, "You two catch TCA's flight 0240 that leaves Manley at 0815 tomorrow. Nick, Gilbert will be by in our car by 0700 to get you to go to the airport. Nick, your airline has been very helpful to us in getting things going so quickly. We ran a search last night for pilots who knew the Caribbean and cross checked it with a few other goodies and your name came up number seven on the list. Imagine both my surprise and delight."

"Delighted to get a motivated volunteer, are you?"

"Volunteer? You should see what your company charges for airplanes and your services."

"Volunteer. You should see my paycheck."

"That's your problem, bud. We are paid in full at the front office, and you are hired to help with the flying duties, not the fighting duties, that's what Gilbert does very well."

"So I need to get ready to fly from Panama to somewhere in Colombia, then fly out. To where? Where do we fly?"

"I'll leave that to you, but the further north you get the friendly it gets. You could also head south and get out through Peru, but we'd need to make a bunch of phone calls to keep you from getting shot down and imprisoned."

"There are lots of mountains there, a hard climb for the DC-3, why that airplane?"

"Nick, the airplanes we chose and the routes were no accident. The TDM logo is common enough, but any aircraft with enough power or capacity to move more than the Douglas would attract a lot of attention down there, something we are trying to avoid if we can. Surprise is our number one advantage and we don't want to tip our hand, same reason I don't really want to call Peru, too many leaks. Even the Colombian government won't know you're down there until we get the signal you're out and on the way home."

"Keep your friends close and your enemies closer, huh?" Nick said.

Tom smiled, "In my line of work, words like enemy doesn't have a lot of meaning, as it tends to change over time."

This month's enemy is next month's ally. I love government work, keeps things from getting boring."

A cell phone went off in the pocket of the short man; he withdrew it and spoke.

"St. James. Yes, he is. We are talking now, looks good. What?"

His eyes looked right at Nick then to Tom.

"I see. Yes, I understand. I will tell him. Thirty minutes, we'll be there."

He dropped the phone back into his pocket and motioned for Tom, who talked over and they began to talk in whispers. At one point Tom's eyes got noticeably wider and he shot a glance at Nick. Then Tom walked back over to his chair.

"Well, news keeps coming in, Nick, it seems we think we have one of our associates on the ground in the vicinity of the cargo we are looking for. We just haven't been able to establish contact with her yet, but we will."

"You have a woman operative?"

"It appears so, not exactly by plan, but these things do have a way of working themselves out."

"Just not always to a successful conclusion, right? Bay of Pigs, Nicaragua, Panama, shall I go on?"

"Ouch, Nick, and those were CIA ops, do you think we are CIA or something?" He looked at St James, "They never want to talk about the wins we get, do they?"

"We don't exactly advertise those, now do we. When we do our job well, no one knows, but freedom is secure for another day. You only read about the misfortunes in the papers, not the disasters averted. CIA, you think?"

"I think I've been a bit in denial about it, but yes, I'm beginning to lean strongly that way. Who else would have this sort of international reach and get things moving with a few phone calls?"

"More than a few phone calls, trust me. It really doesn't matter since we all work for Team USA, right Nick?"

"Yeah, sure. I am ready to get this going."

"Tomorrow. In about an hour a courier will knock with a package of documents including some footage on DVD that will help you get some background on the mission, the people we are up against, their friends and enemies, and some information and pictures of the gadgets we are after so you can help round them up if needed. He will ask for Mr. Byron. If things are safe here, then tell him Mr. Byron is out and will return in thirty minutes. But if you feel it is unsafe for any reason, tell him he has the wrong room. He will leave and myself and a SWAT team will be at your hotel in about ten minutes."

"I sure hope you don't need to do that."

"It is not very likely, but we like to plan out these sorts of things so everyone knows what to do if things go poorly. Keeps us out of the news, you see," Tom said smiling broadly.

"Do you guys keep stats on your wins and loses, you know, make sure you are staying ahead of the game?"

"Nick, comments like that won't help us, you must remain positive. We will make a great team, and we'll get our folks and gear back, right?"

"Right. Now they are our folks, I'm so glad of that."

"Good morning Nick," the group rose to leave, "Use that pager number if you need to reach me."

"And you'll call back how much faster, Tom?"

"You're on the team now Nick, I'm right behind you all the way."

Nick wasn't sure he liked the sound of that. He turned on the TV set after they left to try to burn time until the courier arrived. Then he could consume the information and get a better idea of what was going on.

The courier arrived and left the package; Nick never having any feeling that anyone other than possibly Tom was watching him. The package had a number of reports, some of the filed by Gilbert himself, on the locations and what sorts of hazards and 'opportunities' might be available at each location. The airports reported the types of aircraft and the security around them, leaving Nick to suppose the data was to be used to steal an airplane if needed.

There were also several reports about the mercenaries who had moved in with the FARC in southwest Colombia. The FARC had brought them in to provide training and to assist in a few anti government operations, but when the job was done, the mercs decided they liked the protection business and stuck around, providing the local coca growers with a cheaper alternative to the FARC, a move the FARC could not afford to ignore. The report believed the FARC was beginning an operation to run off the mercs, but their defensive lines against the government could not be unmanned in case the government attacked, the more dangerous of the FARC's two foes.

Nick studied the maps, the terrain he knew all too well. He read some of the name places he recognized from his stint in the country before. The climates and vegetation vary quite a bit across the country, with the northern reaches of the Andean Mountain Range in the western portion of the country, where most of the people lived. These mountains roll south in three distinct mountain ridges with two great river valleys in between them, the Magdalena and the Cauca Rivers. They would fly in at Buenaventura, a shipping port that tends to attract the less refined traveler along the Pacific coast about two thirds of the way south. From there he saw they would travel past Cali to the east into a fertile flat area, San Vincente de Caguan, where he hoped to find Amanda. Oh, yeah, and the secret junk too.

The real problem he saw right off wasn't distance; it wasn't that far from Buenaventura to San Vicente but the three ridges would require them to climb the DC-3 to 15,000 feet to cross them. Then San Vicente was just on the other side of the last ridge at below 1000 feet, requiring them to spiral down over the airport to set up for a landing. The airport itself had an interesting twist as well, according to the charts he was provided. Seems the whole airport sits in about an 80-foot hole, requiring good short field technique for take off and landings. It would make getting out of there with a fully loaded DC-3 a whole lot of fun. They might have to walk home after all, trying to get out of there. Nick picked up a folder with several satellite photos showing the places they were planning to visit, plus some photos of the warehouse they thought the gear was being held in at a small airport hangar east of San Vicente at El Refugio, about 60 miles as the crow flies. Nick studied the photo carefully, looking for other buildings nearby that might hold Amanda and the crew of the Royal L-100. He looked at his watch; it was after three and he felt hungry, so he ordered room service, just a salad and tea. As he ate he watched the DVD's in the package. They were mostly news reports on the FARC and the political situation. He was finishing his last bite as his room phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Nick, this is Sabrina, I have some information for you."

"Great, I'm loading up on information right now."

"OK, no doubt, these guys are CIA. Well, the leaders are, they have some other outfits working for them, coordinating, they call it. All specialty stuff. We now know the National Security Agency is one of the co-operators, as is DEA and the FBI. This place has been crawling with feds all day."

"Well, they are very interested to get something back, I think."

"You think? They are going to use you to go get it, so yeah, I think. You better be careful. Hey, did you know they have an operative on the ground nearby? They were all excited this morning when they found out, sent several of them to quiet corners to make phone calls."

"Yeah, they told me, some woman. I hope she's a help and not a problem, this thing has lots of room for problems."

"Me too. You are set to get on the TCA flight to Panama City tomorrow with one travelling companion, what's he like?"

"Gilbert? I don't know too much, but according to the material I've seen, he knows a bit about that part of the world and just might be helpful. Actually he's doing the hard work; I'm just the pilot. He seems to be OK." "Alright, you just be sure to take your laptop and cell phone gear with you, in case I need to reach you or vice versa. There is an electric converter kit in there too, in case the power is different for charging them. When do you expect to get back?"

"That's a little vague. I suspect when we find what we're looking for. The flying itself will take two or three days if we do nothing else, but Gilbert indicated we have to do a few 'evasive maneuvers' in order to make sure we aren't being watched. I'd plan on a week and if I get back early it will be a bonus, because it means I found Amanda."

"Yes, I suppose I'm not surprised to hear that. You just be careful, it is very dangerous down there."

"I hear you. I'll call you in a few days when I can, OK. Leave me email if you get information as I can hook it up and download it while were cooling our heels wherever."

They hung up and Nick went back to the pictures and maps, studying them over and over. He knew he would lose the chance once he got into the car to go to the airport in the morning so he want to squeeze every ounce of information he could. He was also going to need some flying maps, he thought, so he called for a cab and drove to the airport to purchase a few charts to cover the trip. He may not get the chance down south and the FBO at Manley had a great chart selection to choose from.

He brought the charts back and started to work out a flight plan for the different legs. He set up the laptop and pulled up an aviation weather web page and started to take a look around. Those thunderstorms Amanda flew into had already moved off to the east, but a typhoon was brewing in the Pacific that would be pumping moisture into the area over the next few days meaning mostly some gusty winds and rainy weather. All the runways they were headed for claimed to be hard surface, but he might have to prepare for a soft field operation. He made a note to work out the take off and landing numbers well before he was going to need them so they could get the hell out when the time came.

Night came and Nick decided to get in bed early tonight. He packed and showered so he would only need to get dressed in the morning. He lay down, thinking of the kiss that he and Amanda had shared only twenty-four hours previous. He missed her, and he drifted off to sleep thinking of walking through the streets of Antigua San Juan with her what now seemed to be an eternity.

Amanda spent her first day as a guest of whomever, but she didn't see anyone else except the woman from the previous night who brought her a breakfast of thin soup and bread and a lunch of Sancocho de gallina, a soup of chicken, potatoes and yucca, with juice to drink. Amanda had found several magazines published in Bogota and Medillin, and she spent the time reading them, waiting for what would happen next. She had gone over several scenarios in her head, but none of them had presented themselves yet.

The woman, she had heard a companion call her Malvina, always had armed guards accompany her and she never let herself get backed into a corner positionally by Amanda. This one was smart, she guessed. They couldn't exactly be idiots if they were able to steal an airplane and its crew in flight. She wondered again what it was they wanted. It seemed stealing an airplane is a lot simpler on the ground and breaks a lot less international laws. They had not killed her or anyone else as far as she knew, and that was usually good news. If they didn't want to deal with them they had chances to shoot them and dump their bodies, but they hadn't. At least not so far, and they were feeding

her. She wondered about Nick, wondering if he even knew she was missing yet. He was probably out flying, with that slight grin on his face as he stares out the cockpit window while he flies. Amanda had noticed that now, having flown with him several times now. You could just see the love of flying twinkling in his eyes, and the ever-so-slightly upturned corners of his mouth was the only other outward sign. He loved to fly. She wondered if he could love her as much.

Amanda heard a key open the door's bolt lock and Malvina walked in with two other men in green dungarees holding AK-47's.

"Senorita, you will come with me now. El Commandante wants to see you now. As long as your company pleases him, he will let you live, so I advise you to behave."

She turned to walk out, the two guards stepped aside to let Amanda pass, then they fell in behind the two women, now heading for a two story building across an open grassy field. There was a short asphalt runway nearby and several older buildings and hangars scattered around the field. She could see two helicopters sitting inside a hangar across the field and three small single engine aircraft parked on the ramp. This was clearly not the same airport they had landed at last night.

She could see another set of guards escorting the Herc crew toward the same building, the one of them pushing a wheelchair with the pilot sitting in it. His leg and thigh were clearly bandaged and he clutched the armrests of the chair as it bounced along on the rough ground. The trio was led into the building through a side door ahead of Amanda.

She was led into a small room with seven or eight armed men in dungarees. At a table in the back part of the room was a gathering of three men, one of which was older with a thin beard and wearing a much more colorful array of emblems on his uniform than the others. He was tall with a tan face, clearly commanding the respect of all the soldiers in the room as he moved about. Malvina indicated Amanda should stop there and the two guards came up next to her on either side. Malvina then walked over to the table and leaned over the tall man's back, whispering in his ear, then standing up straight. The man stood and turned, looking at Amanda, but there was no expression on his face. He might as well have been looking over a bolt of cloth for sale. He leaned over to a man standing next to him and whispered something in his ear and the man took off out a side door. The tall man continued to stare right through Amanda.

Now what, she wondered?



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The Nest

News from Tradewind Domestic Seaplane Service

By Kyle Ramsey

The big news in island flying this month has been the first release of the series of sceneries called Islands of the West Indies (IWI) by Chris Wilkes. Chris' work has been a long time favorite of the TCA crowd because he created the first set of Caribbean scenery before Microsoft ever thought about it. Chris has started working on a version for FS2000 but the release was overcome by FS2002, so he turned his attention to that platform.

The first set of scenery includes the northern islands like St. Martin, St. Lucea, St. Kitts, and Saba. There are 13 reworked airports on several islands, including our favorite short field landing at Saba. What a great view of this interesting island! The winding road down from the top of the mountain to the airport is sprinkled with colorful houses along the way, giving the island new life and showing off the great mesh terrain Wilkes has done in the area.

Montserrat is also represented, with a dynamic volcano complete with spurting lava and steam. And there are several treasures buried under the water in the textures if you look carefully. This author has found a sunken ship right off the coast of St Martin, which now gets my eyes out of the cockpit and onto the water looking for more. And of course one of the more famous approaches in the Caribbean is well detailed at Sint Marteen over the beach and onto the runway at Princess Juliana.

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While this is a great scenery and a wonderful addition to any Caribbean pilot's world, it did cause a bit of concern at TDS as the install buried many of the Puerto Rico and USVI seaplane bases inland and caused those coastline to take on a block-ish appearance. This author posted a work around to restore the coastlines and seaplane bases, but it does take away some of the detail of the IWI scenery, most notably the nice road up Saba. The details for how to make the modifications can be found on www.simforums.com, Flight1 Software's help forum. Chris is working on a patch now to make it all better, we hope to get that soon. Also be on the lookout for the next release as he moves further down the islands, it is expected before Christmas

Look for TDS seaplane bases in Cuba next, while the IWI scenery works itself out a bit more.

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

Let's Get Wet!



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Caribbean Airline News

(Antigua) Airport Go-Slow - Security Staff Want Medicals, Pay Talks

Staff members of the security guard unit at the V.C. Bird International Airport staged a go-slow yesterday causing a number of flights to be delayed. The security's management team was forced to pitch in and assist with the checking of baggage in an attempt to deal with the backlog of passengers. Chief of Security Peter Abraham vowed that such action by the security officers "will not stop the aircraft from taking off from V.C. Bird International Airport but it will affect them in terms of delays." He said management had to put their shoulders to the wheel and "we will do anything that is necessary to ensure that our flights are on schedule despite the inconvenience caused by the go-slow. This is not about the Antigua Trades and Labour Union (AT&LU) and airport security, it is about Antigua & Barbuda, and as far as I'm concerned, nothing is more important than the people of this country because this is our gateway to the international world." The security officers' action comes during the peak of Carnival celebrations in the country. The workers, backed by their union, the AT&LU, are pressuring the management of the airport to begin salary negotiations and to conduct medical examinations of each member of staff in an attempt to monitor

their health condition. The workers are concerned about their health following the recent death of one of their co-workers from cancer and the diagnosis of another with the same disease. They want every member of the security staff at the V.C. Bird International Airport to be thoroughly examined by the competent authority and the equipment used in the course of their duties to be examined to ensure acceptable radiation levels. Abraham described the union's action as "premature" since government was already addressing the issue. He referred to two pieces of correspondence, one from Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Aviation Hazel Spencer to special adviser in the Ministry of Finance Keith Hurst dated 24 July to give "urgent attention" to the proposal for negotiations, and a response from Dr. Mulraine to George who stated that in order to address the issues raised in a meaningful manner, "the Ministry of Health will have to collaborate with the Ministry of Aviation." He disclosed that a decision was taken to hire an independent consultant from Barbados to conduct radiation tests at the airport and said security officers would be tested twice per year.

Abraham criticised George for not attending a scheduled meeting with the security's management team last week stating that there were certain things such as the shift allowance that could be implemented without waiting for negotiations to commence. "George never showed up for the meeting, what we have is a situation where he is playing for the cameras, when he is before the workers he is saying one thing and before management it is something totally different," he added. According to Abraham, in such sensitive times after 11 Sept., 2001 "when all eyes are on security, we don't want the international world focussing on us with a microscope when V.C. Bird International Airport is now considered to be one of the safest destinations in the Caribbean. "We have to let the international world know that notwithstanding whatever they are hearing, V. C. Bird International is ready for business and security is not compromised," Abraham said.

(Barbados) LIAT brand re-launched

St. Vincent's Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves (left) and LIAT chairman Wilbur Harrigan (right) shake hands in front of LIAT's re-branded Dash 8-300 aircraft.



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The LIAT brand was re-launched on Monday with the unveiling of the company's new corporate colour scheme. The re-branding ceremony consisted of several events including the hoisting of LIAT's new corporate flag at its headquarters in Antigua, as well as at airports in Barbados and St. Vincent. The ceremony also included the launch of promotional collaterals and the presentation of the new livery on the first Dash 8-300 aircraft joining the company's fleet as part of its fleet replacement program. At a Press conference held at St. Vincent's E.T. Joshua Airport, David Stuart, LIAT's director of corporate development, revealed that the company is aiming to replace its entire fleet with Dash 8-300 aircraft in another year to eighteen months. He also gave information about LIAT's new website. "You would have noticed that LIAT is advertising a website, FLY-LIAT.com. This is a new website, if you click into our regular website (Liatairline.com) it will hyperlink you to the new website, and progressively


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we will be announcing a booking engine where we will be facilitating customers who can book (on the website) with ease." He also revealed the company's new 800 line (888-844-LIAT) and noted that staff uniforms as well as LIAT check-in counters will also be changed as part of the company's re-branding exercise. "We will begin with the Antigua airport, our corporate headquarters, and then we will be fixing up the St. Vincent Airport as we move ahead," he said. Stuart also spoke about the LIAT Customer Survey. "We are building a new customer charter. We are going to our customers because they own the brand, and this survey will help us not just to meet our customers' expectations, but to go beyond them. We will use the results from this survey to put our staff through customer service and motivation training," he stated. Garry Cullen, LIAT's chief executive officer, pointed out in the medium to long term LIAT will be aiming to become strong and viable, get its costs down, and invest in its future. "We want to play our role in strengthening the indigenous air transport system within this region. It is something I am acutely aware of, as a foreigner coming from Ireland, and the steps we took (in Ireland) to make sure that the Irish air transport industry never had to rely on US carriers. LIAT has taken the steps now to give you an airline which you can be proud of and support," he noted. Cullen expressed the view that the combination of LIAT and BWIA will present a challenge which any competing carrier will find tough. "I am in favour of competition, but I think we need to be aware of the real dangers of letting the future of air transport in this region fall into the hands of foreign ownership, that would be an absolute tragedy," he said.

(St. Maarten) Delta officials here to discuss possible flights to St. Maarten

Delta Air Lines officials were on the island yesterday to continue discussions that could result in the US carrier's starting daily flights to St. Maarten out of its Atlanta hub as early as December. In a Power Point presentation meeting described as fruitful, the Delta officials met with Commissioner of Tourism Theo Heyliger, Commissioner in charge of the airport Michael Ferrier and other partners in the tourism/business sector.

The Delta officials are in St. Maarten at the end of July to look at various factors on St. Maarten as they pertain to how the airline would service the island. As reported almost two weeks ago, discussions with Delta were never abandoned after the airline opted not to start flying to the island after Hurricane Lenny in 1999. The damage caused by Lenny, as well as the non-availability of Maho Hotel at the time, deterred the carrier. Other factors included making a final decision as to which aircraft, the 737 or 757, would be servicing the island, as well as a lack of counter space at Prince Juliana International Airport. Director of the Airport Eugene Holiday recently confirmed in writing that he had managed to secure three counter spaces to accommodate Delta and all indications pointed to the airline's using the 757 aircraft. Although a final decision about Delta is still to be arrived at, Commissioner Heyliger is optimistic that the deal will be concluded and the benefits to the island "will be extraordinary." The Commissioner's sales pitch to the Delta executives included highlighting the variety of major activities, like the Heineken regatta and Carnival, which extends the high tourist season, the airport infrastructure, different local attractions and activities, i.e. beaches, casinos, shopping, dining, the weather, and finally the host of languages spoken on the island. In addition, a major factor in the growth and great potential that St. Maarten has, Commissioner Heyliger pointed out, is the hub that St. Maarten is and will become more so in the future. To



complement all these factors St. Maarten has to offer the Delta Airlines executive, St. Maarten has had and continues to have promotional efforts in the same cities in which Delta Airlines operates heavily, Commissioner Heyliger said. After the presentation, a lively discussion took place among the different individuals about the tourism industry, about strategies for attracting and ensuring that Delta Airlines comes to St. Maarten. "The Atlanta hub is one of largest in the US and the world. This will open new dimensions for us. It opens St. Maarten to the Southern US. We haven't marketed that region because we had no airlift. Delta offers us a good opportunity to do this and if all goes well, they should start making flights in December," Commissioner Heyliger said.



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