



January 2002

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

Caribbean Fly-In Scheduled

A word from the Director of VATSIM Caribbean Operations: Jose Gonzalez

(VATCAR hat on..) As some of you know, I accepted the position of Director of VATSIM Caribbean a while ago. We have gotten the final approval by VATSIM to operate our own "stand-alone" division. I have put together the directors of the division and not surprisingly, they are all TCA members. Bill Raymond is the Deputy Director, Jesus Betancourt is the Events Director (like he doesn't have enough work as it is *g*), and the Training/promotion Director is Miguel Armas, our friend from Cuba.



We have selected FIR chiefs for all FIRs in the Caribbean (except Piarco) and we are ready to inaugurate the division with a Caribbean fly-in which includes Cuba, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Curacao, Trinidad.. etc... Hopefully we can cover all the Caribbean at some level of ATC. The event will take place in March (probably around the 16th). We will invite everyone to this event and we will try to reach all the virtual airlines we can.

[Visit the VATCAR website](http://www.vatcar.com)

New TDM and Cargo Additions

The paint is dry on the new TDM Caravans. You can pick up the keys at the TCA homepage. Finishing touches are being finalized on the TDM version of Banting's Turbo Beaver. No release date set. And if you didn't know already, The new Boeing 707 series was rolled out last week.



Boeing 707-320C

Registration: PJ-TBU / PJ-TBW / PJ-TBV

Name: Keiko / Arawak Trader / Windward Trader

Designer: Historic Jetliner Group / Jack Ford

Date: January 2002



Cessna Caravan

Registration: PJ-THO

Name: Cay Sal

Designer: MS / Han Tilroe

Date: January 2002



Cessna Caravan Amphibian

Registration: PJ-THA
Name: Calico Jack Rackham
Designer: MS / Patrick Hanna
Date: January 2002

It looks like Quality FS2002 aircraft are starting to arrive! Thanks to the Hanger Crew for all their hard work. Also Congrats to Han Tilroe for such a fine job on his first official TCA re-paint.

Pilot Profiles

The Breeze is looking for jpegs of you handsome gents for the Pilot Profile pages. Please submit a pic of yourself to the Breeze and we will send out a questionnaire for you to fill out. Could be of yourself or with your Crew Chief. No pet co-pilots please.

THA Update

From the CEO of Tradewind Hellenic

Hi Guys....

Big updates at THA this week revolving around the relief flights to Afghanistan... word was filtering back that both our insurance company and the head of THA Air Cargo were getting upset about the use of the Cargo aircraft for therelief missions, the insurance company was nervous that the aircrafts were being used for duties that they were not originally insured for and the cargo head was getting upset that the regular cargo routes were being cancelled because of the lack of aircraft... soooooooo.. to make everyone happy.. a new wing has been created to fullfill



the mandate we have in Afghanistan and elsewhere.. Three new aircraft have been purchased and will now form what will be referred to as TradeWind Air Sea Services.. this branch will be responsible for all the relief missions. A Hercules C130 , Sikorsky CH53 Heavy Transport helicopter and a Lockheed P-3B Orion will be used for these missions. Along with the relief work, the Orion will be used to gather weather information data on severe storms such as hurricanes and typhoons. Simular to the famous Hurricane Hunters in the States, the Orion will fly into the center of the storms and gather information that will be used in the tracking of the storm and early warning to areas in it's path. All three aircraft will also be assigned Search and Rescue duties for ships lost at Sea etc.. you can see the newest additions to the fleet by clicking on the TASS link on the main hangar page.

Getting back to the missions in Afghanistan, we have received permission to start flying relief flights into Afghanistan. Areas in the eastern and northern region of the country have been cleared for flights. Medical and food supplies can now be flown into these areas. As such, two new missions have been created and loaded up to the relief page. www.tradewindhellenic.com/gfl.html These are C130 flights. The forward supply bases are close to being fully operational but still will need constant resupply with the C130. When the CH53 arrives in the area, it will be used to make supply drops in areas not serviced by an airport.

The assistance we have been giving Sandy over at the Alaska division has been greatly appreciated. Both Rich and Christian are over there right now taking part in the Idiatrod runs.. it is an incredible area to fly in but as Christian found out.. very COLD :)

Just a reminder.. the new Spring routes are being done up.. if you wouldlike to have some of your favorite destinations added to the flight schedule.. just send me a quick line.. So far, the following destinations are being examined: Edinburg Scotland, Bremen Germany, Palma De Malorica, Hong Kong, Tokyo Japan... destinations in Ireland, Sweden and Norway are also being looked into.

For those that haven't filed reports in the last month or two, please let me know if you still wish to be kept on the roster.. If I do not hear from you I will assume that you will to "retire" and you will be taken off..

Take care all...
See you in the skies.

Patrick Hanna
CEO

TCA Flight School

Be advised that the flightschool will loose it's webadress in the coming weeks, dunno how long my former ISP keeps the place open.. In a couple of weeks, the flightschool will return with the same content in a different format, including some new articles... To early to tell a date though....

Regards,
Han Tilroe



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Paul Golding's B707 Panel



January has seen the introduction of B707-320C into our Cargo fleet. There are three versions; "Keiko", already a TCA Cargo Veteran which has been upgraded for use with FS2002 although it does keep its original blue and white colour scheme. In addition to "Keiko" TCA has acquired two more B707's, "Arawak Trader" and "Windward Trader" these aircraft have been painted in the new Red and Ivory colour scheme. The B707's came courtesy of the "Historic Jetliners Group" which specialises in creating quality aircraft from the early jet age for Flight Simulator 2000 / 2002. Paul Golding who worked on the .air file for this aircraft has also created a outstanding B707 panel for use with FS2002.

Paul Golding's Boeing 707 panel can be downloaded directly from his home page at <http://www.paul.golding.btinternet.co.uk/> it's a fairly large download at 6.36MB but most of the TCA pilots who have already tried the panel agree it's worth the time spent downloading it. There is a slight reduction in frame rates when running this panel but it's only just noticeable and acceptable to most people who run it.

For those who are used to flying more modern aircraft with glass cockpits, fly-by wire technology and integrated GPS navigation systems, etc. (including myself) at first impressions the B707 seems a little daunting. The panel has a large number of dials, buttons and switches so it's worth reading the documents what come with the download and spending some time sitting in the cockpit before you take to the air.



Paul Golding's 707 panel with overhead panel on.

As well as the main panel there is a over-head panel which mostly houses the exterior lighting switches and fuel management system. This panel can be toggled on and off using the compass switch on the main panel.

Once familiar, the panel proves to be a realistic and very reliable platform for operating the B707. There is no integrated GPS but this would be un-realistic for an aircraft that is over 30 years old. The interior panel lighting system is excellent allowing you to choose the level of lighting you prefer.

It's hard to find the right panels for FS2002 aircraft and it's taking a very long time for quality panels to arrive compared with previous versions of Microsoft Flight Simulator. I decided to contact Paul Golding himself and ask his opinion on the matter.

Island Breezes: "How long have you been designing Flight Simulator panels?"

Paul Golding: "A few years, I first started by modifying Eric Ernsts' MD panel for myself before remaking an early version of his 767 panel and releasing it to end up winning the AVSIM Blue Ribbon award."

Island Breezes: "Quality FS2002 panels are hard to come by why do you think there are fewer FS2002 panels being released than in previous versions of MSFS?"



Paul Golding: "No idea really. Most FS98 gauges (let alone FS2000 ones) work fine still - which is just as well because the 707 uses mostly gauges that were originally programmed for FS98! I think many people are feeling that if they don't create an all singing all dancing panel with full electrics, hydraulics, starter and fuel control (not to mention all round views), then there's not much point."

Adding all the extra bits is a big pain, especially for someone like me that can't program, but if what I do is OK then that's great.

Of course, there's a future 727 and 707 in the pipeline already that will have all the extra's, but it'll be at a price instead for free."

Island Breezes: "What inspired you to design a FS2002 panel for the Boeing 707?"

Paul Golding: "I love old planes :-)"

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ALLIANCES

This document summarises major alliances concerning Caribbean carriers.

CaribSky

Following discussions from October 2000 between [LIAT](#), [WINAIR](#) and [Air Caraibes](#) (BWIA was invited to join the discussions but declined), the CaribSky alliance was launched on 08JAN01 by the three airlines plus [Tyden Air](#) and [Caraibes Air Transport](#). Essentially, this alliance is about how the airlines can collaborate on the 32 airports they serve in order to cut costs and increase revenue. A key component of the agreement is that the partners should focus on their routes from their home bases and feed traffic to alliance members. So, the following bases were established:

- Barbados (BGI) - LIAT has since made BGI its biggest hub for connecting traffic; BGI is the biggest international gateway in the Eastern Caribbean
- Antigua (BGI) - base of LIAT, international gateway
- St Lucia (SLU) - LIAT has a major operation
- Guadeloupe (PTP) - base of Air Caraibes, gateway to French Caribbean
- St Maarten (SXM) - base of WINAIR, big international gateway to Dutch and French Caribbean
- San Juan (SJU) - biggest Caribbean gateway, feeder for LIAT and Air Caraibes
- Santo Domingo (SDQ) - strange base as only Air Caraibes serves this airport (with a daily flight from Point-a-Pitre)

One consequence of the alliance has been the axeing by LIAT of its flights to Fort-de-France and Point-a-Pitre and replacing them with flights operated by Air Caraibes. Another was the termination of its services into St Vincent and Union Island out of Martinique by Air Caraibes. This was a blow to St Vincent which had expected the merger of airlines into Air Caraibes to increase traffic to its country, and followed a drastic drop in traffic following the axeing of [American Eagle](#) flights in January 2001.

The alliance is hampered, however, by having three incompatible reservations systems.

BWIA/LIAT

On 16NOV00, BWIA and LIAT signed a memorandum of understanding to enter into a comprehensive strategic alliance to increase the opportunities for the airlines to offer joint competitive and cost-effective air transportation services. Both carriers said that there were tangible and significant benefits to be derived from harmonising their flight schedules and services, eliminating inefficiencies, optimising the use of resources and combining the strengths of each. It was also noted that the airlines were aiming to improve the quality of the interline air transportation they now offered. And through a series of initiatives, they plan to provide the Caribbean with new and enhanced service options and further alternatives designed to facilitate the easy flow of passengers and cargo in the region and internationally, thereby increasing overall revenues and reducing costs. This alliance, however, has not resulted in the demise of BWIA's BWee Express which competes with LIAT, nor was it a help in LIAT's establishment of its single reservations centre in Port of Spain (BWIA was not chosen to provide the service).

On 08JAN02, the two airlines announced their alliance, claiming to have overcome their mutual distrust and different cultures which had prevented close co-operation for decades. The major purpose of the alliance is cost reduction, made more urgent since the events of 11SEP01, through joint purchasing and sharing of many services in other areas, as well as increased revenue through marketing both airlines as one in all their destinations. It is intended that passengers will benefit through integrated schedules and better baggage handling. The agreement takes effect on 01MAR02, following the code-sharing agreement to be signed later this month.

Neither airline has invested in the other.

Air Jamaica

11JAN02 Air Jamaica plans to restore its operations, currently 8-10 percent down since 11SEP01, to normal from April 2002. The reduced operation, which had peaked at 15 percent just after 11SEP, has cost Air Jamaica at least US\$25-US\$30 million in lost earnings. Apart from the significant UK expansion already announced, the airline aims to launch flights to Belize in May 2002 and Washington DC in June 2002. The latter flights had been planned to start in mid-November 2001 but had not taken off. Also planned is a doubling of the airline's Caribbean market which only accounts now for 3-5 per cent of its business.

10JAN02 Air Jamaica has scaled back its planned weekly flights between Jamaica and Heathrow from nine to eight next summer. Manchester flights will be twice-weekly as planned, so there will be 10 weekly UK flights (a doubling of existing frequency). The two A340s will therefore be under-utilised as 12 weekly flights are possible, though 11 flights are a sensible maximum

BWIA

02JAN02 A BWIA MD-83 ran off the shortest runway at Miami International airport yesterday. None of the 120 passengers aboard the aircraft were injured. Flight BW432 had originated in Georgetown and had landed in Miami

via Barbados. An airline official said that the pilot's landing was "not executed well" and that the pilot then decided to let the slowing plane run into soft sand off the runway. The plane's front wheel apparently hit hard, causing a long landing runout on the runway.

Edited by Ken Malczynski



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TCA Cargo Newsletter



Now that FS2002 has been on the scene a while, some of our favorite cargo aircraft are starting to appear in the new format. The TDM DC-3 has now been upgraded to be compatible, and it's a real bargain for \$5.00 (US)! Besides, the money is going to a great cause; to keep the MAAM DC-3 operating. All of the donation-ware funds are being used for a new engine for the plane.

Some comments from one of the "Geezers":

I really am amazed at the realism in FS2002, but I'm also afraid that some of the older props are going to disappear as we move forward with the newer versions of sims. I joined the Cargo Division because I loved the freedom of non-scheduled flights and being able to hop in one of a variety of planes from the Super Connie to the Albatross and hop around the Caribbean and South America. I, for one, am hoping the design guru's don't forget the "classics".....after all, aviation wouldn't be where it is today without the pioneer aircraft. (*Stepping down from my soapbox now! *G**)

Speaking of classics, I recently discovered some great videos shot in South America which show a lot of DC-3's, DC-6's, C-46's and a flight in a Caravelle where the passengers sit on and around the cargo. There is also a video of a flight in a Constellation. These are great videos for the prop fans! Check em out at: <http://www.apvw.nl> (Also available through AVSIM.com) All of the videos were shot by Alex Waning. I have had a few conversations via email with him and he tells some very interesting stories about how the videos were shot (such as having to watch out for bandits while in the Colombian jungle!).



Hard to believe the Cargo Division now has over 150 pilots! Far cry from where we started. Thanks to all you cargo jocks for keeping the islands supplied with all the essentials, tanning oil, margarita mix and cerveza!

NOTAM

Paquito and Wet Willie, our maintenance experts are experimenting with the AKM. seems they have come up with a way to attach old boots to the 4 blade propeller of a DC-6 and with the old Pratt & Whitney revved up, they feel it may be more efficient! What a couple of great guys! Always thinking of ways to help out the Cargo pilots!

Until next time, keep the runway underneath the plane and if you want to join the Cargo Division or TDM, email the office or myself at:

TradeWind@compuserve.com

Or.. capn@mediaone.net

Dave McElroy "capn"

Cargo CEO



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Pilot Profile

Rich Ellison
Pilot #: 2858

How long have you been with TCA or TDM?

About 2 years, before that I was flying with Gateway Airlines and had around 1000hrs logged. I have learned so much about flying since being here at TCA.

Your current position at TCA?

Assistant Editor and webmaster for "Island Breezes".

Your favorite aircraft to fly?

That's a tough one! Mostly I fly the Boeing 737-300 because it's so versatile, I also like to fly the DC3 and other turbo props too and

the new Boeing 707's are great!

Your favorite division to fly with?

Tradewind Hellenic: I live in Europe Greece is a lot closer to my time-zone so it's easier to find ATC when flying online. THA has a great fleet flying to some of my favorite destinations.

In your opinion, what keeps you flying for TCA?

The pilots: No actually I mean that, flying for a Virtual Airline can get pretty boring there is no interaction with other virtual pilots. TCA provides a great community which encourages pilots to interact with one another and that's what stops it from getting boring.

Comments:

Clear Skies, Fair Winds and Three Greens.

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We have PIREPS

Preparations for the TCA Alaska Iditarod support flights are well underway. Many support flights are being flown online on the VATSIM network.

Rich Ellison of "Island Breezes" has spent the month flying with TCA. Last week while flying straw up to Nome he was joined by Rui, a TCA Alaska Veteran. They decided to do some formation flying. Here's Rui's report.

These pictures came out from a flight me and Rich (TCA2858) did online after we met casually in Anchorage. I boarded the 707 just as Rich's DC3 could be seen turning from departure to enroute. While I was taxiing the idea of trying to see if a 707 could fly side by side with a DC3 popped into my mind. Spoke to Rich, arranged to meet him enroute and thought to myself, after the pics are taken (and assuming we both survive) I will break from formation and proceed with my mission to Ketchikan.

After a few minutes I had Rich in sight. We managed to find each other by flying the same radial to McGrath. I positioned with difficulty on Rich's right side. The difficulty arises from the fact that, for some reason, an aircraft from an online pilot keeps jumping back and forward. As we approached I had to slow from 320kts to 160. Engines cut, Spoilers up, then flaps down in stages, spoilers down (advisable not to use both in the 707) gear down to break speed, flaps to 4th position, gear up, Auto throttle fixed at 160kts. Me and Rich didn't seem to be using the same altimeter setting so my 11000 weren't his - so manual change in altitude - up and down, up and down.. finally got it enough right! The camera's turn to work.

To me, pic 5 catches the essence of flying for TCAA... a lone airplane, and a special one - the DC3, and the rugged alaskan wilderness in a beautiful setting sun - a calm moment in a gorgeous scenery... man and nature, in harmony.

Then I was thinking - going to Ketchikan might not be a good idea... in fact - tomorrow I may not have my license anymore - as soon as snowboss sees these pics... so I decided to follow Rich into mcgrath. I was unprepared but I knew that somewhere in the 707's cockpit there was an approach plate for mcgrath.. I just had to search while I was approaching the Vor.. and there it was, stained with coffee and with a footprint on it,



hidden under the copilot's seat. So now approach was planned, using the locator app. When I was on short final I confess that I doubted this huge bird was going to stop ON the runway.... so I slowed it down to 120 until it felt like it was going to stall any moment, full flaps (that meant FULL 50 degrees, not the usual recommended 45 degrees), and cut the engines at threshold (I know that's not good in a 707!). We touched down hard with a BUMP. Immediately we hit the spoilers, reversed the engines and hit the brakes... and uff I sighed with relief, because this baby was going to stop with full room to spare... I worried too much.

As we slowed down we saw Rich's DC3 parked left of rwy. Decided to stop by him but I then caught a scare - felt like a breaking nose gear! (And I swear I even heard the screams of unexistant passengers!) No wonder - I was entering rugged ground - I had momentarily forgotten that a 707 is not a DC3! We managed to taxi to solid ground and park on the ramp for inspection. 12 hours should suffice for repairs. I decided to just relax and enjoy the northern lights mixed with dusk colours....

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Alt Air

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Limetree Cove

Nick was up by 0400 at the hotel outside San Juan's Luis Munoz International Airport. By 0500 he was on his way by taxi to Roosevelt Roads Naval Air Station, about 30 miles southeast of San Juan along the coast. Tradewinds Domestic Mailservice had a small operations office there and ran a couple of mail routes out of there. Nick planned to catch the first flight out, Line 4970, which left the ramp at 0700 sharp. Although the drive wasn't very far, the roads wound around the hills and Nick allowed for plenty of time to make the flight.

Everything on a Navy base happens sharply, TDM's operation was not exempted. He arrived at the Rosy Roads gate at 0545, showed his TDM ID card to the Marine in his crisp tan shirt and blue trousers with the red stripe. Nick glanced at his young but serious face as the Marine studied the card, studied Nick's face, then studied the card again. Handing it back to Nick, the Marine stood erect and smartly waved the taxi through the gate and on to the TDM operations shack. Walking inside, he tossed his bags beside the couch in the lounge then walked over to the dispatch counter.

Hi, Frank, I'm gonna catch the 0700 to St. Thomas, OK?

Frank Montgomery glanced up from the ledger he was reading. "Sure, Nick, no problem, Rene Phillips is the pilot, he's flying that Shorts 360 out there on the ramp. Rene is out preflighting, but you can throw your stuff on board anytime. He doesn't have any passengers today, I don't think."

"Gotcha, thanks."

Nick grabbed his bags and headed out the door onto the ramp. It was still dark but he could see the outline of the twin vertical stabilizer and the boxy fuselage of the Shorts design against the ramp lights. He could see Rene's flashlight working around the left engine nacelle.

"Hey Rene, mind if I hitch a ride to St Thomas this morning."

“Sure, jump in. And could you start that power unit for me, and get us juiced up?”

“You bet, standby one.”

Nick walked up the rear ramp and tossed his bags into a seat, then went back out and started the power unit, dragged the umbilical cord over and plugged it in. Climbing back on board to the cockpit he energized the electrical bus, flipping on all the lights he knew Rene would want to check. The cockpit and cabin white lights also came on, causing Nick to squint a bit from their brightness. He walked back out the ramp and found Rene.

“How’s that? Anything else?”

“Nope, that should do it, I expect to be airborne on time so stay nearby.”

Nick waved, walked back into the operations office and got a fresh cup of coffee, bought a San Juan newspaper from a rack, then returned to the aircraft and settled in to wait for their departure. He noticed a mail truck and a UPS van pulling up outside and their drivers began to bring their loads aboard. Rene had come aboard to supervise their work as shifting loads can spell disaster to an aircraft. He also collected the weights of each bag or box and filled out his weight and balance sheet.

Right on time, Rene cranked up the turboprops on the Shorts and began taxiing out to the westbound runway. The Shorts 360 is a great little STOL aircraft, prefect for island flying with the numerous but short runways on many islands. The Shorts can take over 15, 000 lbs. in and out of 2000-foot runways all day long, although they lacked significantly in soundproofing, which prompted Nick to dig out some earplugs from his flight bag.

After takeoff they made a left turnout for the flight to Culebra before St Thomas. Nick would get out there, at Cyril King International, but Rene and this route would fly on to Beef Island in the British Virgin Islands before returning to Rosy Roads. Rene would repeat this flight four times today, a long eight-hour day of dragging mailbags and parcels in and out of his cargo hold.

The stop in Culebra was a quick 10-minute turn before Rene had the aircraft headed for the runway and off again for the quick 20-minute flight to St. Thomas. As the sun began to rise higher in the sky the air became bumpy. Rene would do a straight in approach from the west, so Nick began to gather his bags together as they descended toward the runway at Cyril E. King Airport in the town of Charlotte Amalie. Looking out the right side window Nick saw a TDM Lake Renegade taxiing toward to a pier in the harbor. That seaplane was one of the numerous means of transportation for the pilots and support crews living near the Goose Roost. There were a couple of seaplanes and boat venues to St John Island, some owned by TDM or its pilots, some more public means of transportation. The public ferry from Charlotte Amalie to Cruz Bay took about 45 minutes and there were also other boats departing in that direction if you were desperate.

Nick counted his good luck and checked the time. He should easily be able to catch a ride back with whoever was flying it, probably on a booze and grocery run anyway. The aircraft taxied to the ramp in front of a small TDM shack and killed the engines as Nick unbuckled his seatbelt and, picking up his bags, headed for the passenger door as Rene was emerging from the cockpit.

“Thanks for the ride, Rene, and Blue Skies to you.”

“Anytime, bud. Hey are you gonna be at the beach party tonight? Sounds like its gonna be a blast.”

“I got to rig the sound system for some dumb karaoke fools. Can you imagine this group of drunks trying to sing, and using a sound system to amplify the whole mess.”

“Oh, sure, my singing voice gets much better after being lubricated by a couple of rums or Margaritas, you know,” Rene said with a wink.

“I’ve heard you sing, better keep the flying job, Rene.”

Rene laughed and turned back toward his aircraft to make the turn around and stay on schedule. Nick turned toward the terminal to see if he could get a ride to the pier. One of the TDM line boys fired up an old Ford pick up truck and Nick hopped into the passenger side after tossing his bags into the bed.

When they arrived at the pier, Nick didn’t see any of the pilots around, but he Renegade was tied up to the end of the pier. Walking down to the aircraft and lifting open the door, he noticed the headset belonged to Ernst Muelhauser, a young German pilot working his way up the aviation career ladder. Nick liked Ernst; he was a ready student and soaked up everything the older pilots would teach him.

“Hello, Mr. Nick,” came a voice behind him.

Turning around, Nick was face to face with Fisk Caskey, one of the men who worked the pier.

“Hi Fisk, have you seen Ernst, I need a lift home.”

“Ah, sure, he went up to get some hardware and other supplies, said he would be back in a half hour.”

“Great, I’ll just throw my stuff in the airplane and wait, thanks, Fisk.”

“Ah, sure, Mr. Nick, I’ll let Mr. Ernst know when he gets back, so you don’t scare the young lad.”

Nick stowed his bags in the cargo compartment and climbed into the cockpit and into the right seat. There was a day old copy of the St Thomas newspaper on a rear seat Nick picked up and began to read. The usual news, a gravel truck coming down a hill lost its brakes and crashed into a warehouse, a string of burglaries were being investigated, and the governor had just returned from Washington, D.C. where many promises to be broken later were made.

By the time he had read through the whole paper, he saw Ernst pushing a cart loaded with paper bags and boxes with Fisk walking next to him waving his arms as he talked. Nick jumped up out of the cockpit and onto the pier.

“Hi Ernst, you gonna have room for me after you get all that aboard?”

“Oh, hello, Nick, good to see you, we were wondering when you would be home. Oh, yes, we can get it all in and you too. Give me a hand with all this, OK?”

They both turned to loading the bags and boxes into various nooks and crannies inside the aircraft until the entire cargo and passenger areas on no space left. Looking very satisfied with themselves, the two men then crawled into the cockpit and trapped in, one of the sacks falling and spilling its contents of mangos and oranges into Ernst's lap. Nick lifted the bag, tossed the fruit back into the bag and then gave it a hard push to wedge it into place. Smiling at Ernst, Nick signaled to Fisk to push them off the pier while Ernst began to crank up the single prop engine and taxi out of the harbor for a quick takeoff.

The flight to St John's was a short 5 minutes from Charlotte Amalie's harbor. The small green island rose sharply out of the sea, leaving little areas for beaches. St John, along with the other islands in the Virgin chain, were first seen by Europeans in 1493 when Christopher Columbus happened by, naming these islands "Las Virgenes". The whole island only covered about 20 square miles, most of it hilly and loaded with trees and other vegetation. The Danish built sugar cane and cotton plantations on these islands, the labor borne on the backs of the slaves brought in to work them. After slavery was banned in 1848, the plantations fell into ruins, several of which are still preserved to show the plantation life of Caribbean planters. The United States gained control of the southern three islands, St John, St Thomas, and St Croix, the latter the home of future US president Alexander Hamilton. Most of St John is a US National Park, given to the US Government in 1957 by Laurance Rockefeller, with private land on both ends and embedded in the park. Cruz Bay is the only real town on the island, situated on the western end with The Roost on the other side, about 10 miles away using the only road, Highway 10.

Cruz Bay appeared quickly off the left of the aircraft as it flew along at 1500 feet, just a few hundred feet higher than St John's highest peak, Camelberg Peak. The East End was a narrower stretch of the island, lower in elevation, with a large harbor on the south side named Coral Bay. Round Bay, nested inside Coral Bay, had a small beach called Limetree Cove, home of The Goose Roost, Tradewinds Domestic Mailservice, and Nick Collins. Ernst rounded Salt Pond Bay and turned into Coral Bay, lining up with a set of lights set in the water marking the seaplane runway. Ernst squeezed the mic switch on the yoke.

"Goose Roost, Tradewinds 9633 on 3 mile final."

The Renegade began to sink toward the water as Ernst pulled back on the throttle. The airplane settled into the water, the drag of the water quickly slowing them. Ernst steered them toward the pier in the middle of the cove, with the High and Dry Bar and Grill prominently in front of it. These two features were the real authentic elements of the Goose Roost itself, the rest added much later. There were many small bungalows along the small beach and two larger buildings, one a small hotel, the other the TDM pilot housing 'condominiums', they called them. A TDM Caravan Floatplane was the only other aircraft tied to the pier, along with three small boats and one cabin cruiser. Nick saw Alfie Biddlecombe walking out of the door of the High and Dry, spotting them and grabbing a cart, he began pushing it down the pier after first carefully balancing his beer glass in the middle. He hit a big bump two or three times where he would have to quickly grab the glass to keep it from spilling. On the fourth bump, he lifted the glass to his lips, drained its contents down his throat, and set the glass on the pier railing before continuing down toward the Renegade, now gliding up to the pier as Ernst killed the engine.

Nick popped out the hatch and tossed the line to Alfie.

"G'day, Nick, how have you been?"

"Hi Alfie, been good, but good to be home."

“I heard Ernst call on the Unicom, thought he could use the cart.”

After tying the aircraft up, the trio began to unload the interior of all the bags and boxes, handing them up to Alfie who placed them on the cart. Nick then dug his bags out of the cargo compartment.

“Thanks for the lift Ernst.”

“Ah, you bet, see you later.”

Nick walked to the end of the pier, then started to turn up the small roadway toward his condo. He heard a car pull up just behind him, the brakes squealing as they brought it to a stop. A small red headed man stepped out of the passenger door. It was Doyle Locke, with Robert Trayhan driving, two of the quartet known on the island as The Five Commandments Club. They shared one of the bungalows on the beach and threw wild parties. The club’s name came from the idea that Mel Brooks should have dropped another tablet in his movie, “History of the World, Part I”, where as Moses, Brooks comes down from the Mount with three tablets, announces God has given them these 15 commandments, then adjusts to 10 when he drops one of the tablets. They thought five of the commandments didn’t fit into modern times and chose not to hold themselves accountable to them. The excluded commandments were stealing, adultery (they weren’t married, after all), giving false witness, taking the Lord’s name in vain, and keeping the Sabbath. At least you knew where you stood with this bunch, and they were all good pilots.

“Hey, Nick, we’re on our way to get a burger and beer at Skinny Legs, want to go?” Doyle said.

Nick looked at his watch. He had lots to do but realized he hadn’t eaten recently, and a Skinny Leg burger and beer would hit the spot.

“OK, I’m in, pop the trunk so I can throw in my bags.”

Skinny Legs was a small local eatery with great burgers and cold beer with a nice view of the water. The three of them arrived in minutes, jumped out and grabbed a table inside while Doyle and Robert listened to Nick talk about the cargo run to Tijuana and meeting Amanda in Cabo San Lucas. Doyle told Nick the story of his dogs’ run in with Eduard, laughing hard and often, making the story drag out even longer. They were soon on their way back to Limetree Cove, dropping Nick at the front of the condos then speeding off toward their bungalow.

Nick walked into the lobby, which was empty except for a small desk with a phone and a lamp on it, two couches, two easy chairs, and a TV set. He went to the elevator and rode up three floors to his room, dropped off his bags, then walked down the hall and knocked on another door. Sean O’Donovan opened the door.

“Well, bejesus, its about time you got here, mate, come in. Can I get you a beer or Margarita to drink?”

“I just need to get my mail and my dogs, Sean, don’t have time to socialize right now.”

“Right, the dogs. Mind you Eduard is still swearing he’s going to kill them, so I’d watch it were I you, mate.” He walked over to his kitchen table and lifted a stack of mail. “And here you go, your mail.”

Sean then walked to the back, opened the spare bedroom door, and out came Boris and Natasha, jumping on Nick’s

legs and running around him.

“Thanks for watching them, Sean, I owe you. What time does the festivities start tonight?”

“At 7 PM sharp, that gives you six hours and 15 minutes, bags of time, man.”

“And I’d better get going. See you later.”

Nick retreated to his room with the dogs, filled their food and water bowls, then started going through his mail. Most goes into the trash, some goes into the bill pile, some into the read later pile. He was three quarters of the way through the stack when he uncovered a postcard with a picture Lover’s Beach in Cabo. He picked it up and flipped it over; it was from Amanda.

Nick,

It’s the day after our flight and dinner. The girls and I took a trip into the mountains earlier, which was great fun, but it didn’t come close to the fun I had with you yesterday. I’m dropping you this short line to thank you again for a wonderful time and the great company. I hope to see you again sometime soon.

*Love,
Amanda*

Nick broke out into a big smile. Wow, he thought, she thought enough to send a note. He made a mental note to send one to her, after he found her address in his stuff. He finished sorting his mail, then paid bills. He then picked up the phone.

“Sam, this is Nick. I’ve got to get the sound system to the beach for tonight, what equipment do you have for this?”

Sam, or more properly Samantha Fajardo was the barkeeper at the High and Dry. Call her Samantha and you might get to see the Smith and Wesson .357 Magnum she keeps under the bar for troublemakers. While an island beauty, none of the pilots dared ask her for a date more than once.

“I got the amplifier and speakers, Nick, and a couple of mic’s, but it’s more than 40 meters from the nearest electrical outlet, and I don’t have an extension cord that long.”

“No problem, I can round up extension cords. What about the monitor for the lyrics. Those drunks would be even worse if they didn’t have the words fed to them.”

“You got to go pick that up at Eduard Vladimirski’s bungalow, he borrowed it last.”

“No kidding, Eduard, huh? That’s cool, I got to go talk to him anyway. And can I borrow your golf cart to run around to get the set up?”

“I don’t know Nick, the last time I loaned you my cart I had to pick it up over in Coral Harbor.”

“Now that wasn’t my fault, Sam. Iqbal Aziz took advantage of my good nature and stranded the cart. I was way too

drunk to know where he was going, I thought it was home, but when the lights got real dim and then the cart gave out, I knew we were screwed. I woke up the next morning in a small field with one of the wild donkeys licking my face and Iqbal no where to be seen. By the time I got back to where we had left the cart, it was gone. I now know that you recovered it, but I thought it was stolen, so I freaked out. I promise to have it back before touching a drop, and I won't let anyone else drive it, please Sam?"

"I like you Nick, but one more screw up like that, and I'll have to kick your butt, got it?"

"Yes, I'm sorry, it won't happen again, although the thought of getting my butt kicked by you doesn't sound so bad."

"Trust me, smart ass, you wouldn't like it anywhere near whatever your perverted mind could conjure up. OK, you can use the cart."

"Thank you, I'll be right over."

Nick picked up the bills and a small toolbox then headed out the door, down the elevator and through the still empty lobby. He quickly hiked down the hill to the High and Dry, dropping his bills in the mailbox on the establishment's covered porch. He opened the door and walked into the bar.

The High and Dry was a large wooden structure with two main rooms, the larger one for drinking and the smaller one for eating, although no one respected the distinction and did either in both. There were also several smaller rooms in the back, an office and a couple of rooms Art Hudson, the owner, would rent to his help. Sam lived in one of the rooms. The dining area had four plastic round tables with four plastic chairs at each table while the bar area had a large mahogany bar along the length of the back wall with bar stools lined up along its length. Six old wooden tables with steel folding chairs provide most of the seating except for two couches near the TV. Behind the bar was a large mirror with hundreds of photographs and other memorabilia from the thousands of pilots and seamen who had passed through the Roost over the years, each leaving a small piece as evidence of their passage. Sam stood behind the bar, watching a baseball game on the TV, with Ernst and Alfie having a margarita and deep in some conversation. Art sat at one of the wooden tables working over some sort of ledger. Wallace Shiflett, another young TDM pilot was lying on one of the couches, a cap pulled down over his eyes and a soft snore drifting from under it.

Art looked up at Nick. "Thanks for the warning about Aaron. We heard he was on his way, then something changed and he aborted at the last minute. Now we hear Aaron's hired a site manger for you TDM boys."

"A site manager, man. The last one was a real pain."

"You guys are lucky he didn't file charges against you for that last prank. Sometimes you guys don't know any limits."

"Our lack of limits have been lining your pockets for years, Art. He deserved it, and the iguana wasn't anywhere as big as he said it was; he was hallucinating. That's my story and I'm sticking to it."

Art smiled, "I never saw a whiter man in my whole life when he came busting in here that night screaming about man-eating iguanas after him. How did you guys get it into his room?"

“Can’t be giving secrets Art, especially to an ex-cop, makes me kind of nervous, you know.”

“That’s retired, not ex, and the only person you can trust more than me is your mother.”

“Let’s just say that here in the islands it is definitely who you know that makes all the difference.”

“Amen to that, Brother Nick. Sam says your gonna use the golf cart for a bit. It’s all charged up in the back, get the keys from behind the bar. We’ll keep an ear out for news of the new site manager.”

Nick walked to the bar toward Sam. She reached down under the bar, then slowly drew her arm up, the keys dangling from her fingers.

“Don’t blow this Nick, get it back in one piece, OK?”

“I promise, as soon as I’m done.”

“OK, the sound system and mics are back here in the storage room, you can come grab them.”

Nick made three trips to haul the sound system out to the golf cart where he placed the components in the wire basket on the rear of the cart. Then he looked down the path at Eduard’s bungalow and remembered the tequila, so he first drove back up to the condos, ran inside and up to the third floor, grabbed one of the bottles, then raced back downstairs to the cart. Pointing the cart downhill, he stepped on the accelerator and headed toward Eduard’s shack. He could see Eduard sitting in his rocking chair on the porch with Le Nguyen drinking margaritas. Eduard saw Nick on the cart and pulled his large frame up out of his chair and walked to the edge of the porch’s railing as Nick brought the cart to a stop.

“Nick Collins, I’ve been waiting for you, my friend. I owe you a butt kicking, I think. Stay right there and I’ll be down to deliver it to you,” he said as he pulled off his shirt.

“Now, Eduard, I don’t want any trouble with you. I’m sorry about the dogs, I promise to keep them out of your way in the future.”

“I will eat those dogs if I ever catch them.”

“Now you don’t want to do that, they are just dogs, they don’t know any better.”

“That is garbage, those dogs target my house and I’m tired of it. Sometimes I think you trained them to do it, so I think I need to kick your butt, there is only one solution here.”

“Your dogs made a big mess, Nick,” said Le, still sitting in his chair behind Eduard."

“Stay out of this Le,” said Nick, “Eduard, I have brought you a gift from Mexico, some fine Blue Agave tequila from the Cabo Wabo Bar in Cabo San Lucas, as a peace offering to forget the whole thing, and I’ll keep the dogs put up.”

Eduard looked very interested now. “Tequila? 100% Blue Agave? Let me see.”

Nick handed him up the bottle and Eduard studied it closely.

“Yes, this is good looking stuff. You Americans drink the diluted stuff, so I am always suspicious when you guys say good tequila.”

“Straight from Sammy Hagar, I drank some in Cabo and it was very good. Try a belt.”

Eduard tore off the paper wrapping and pried out the cork and lifted it to his lips. Le was now on his feet.

Eduard’s nose wrinkled as he swallowed. “Oh yes, very nice stuff,” he said. Le tugged on his arm and Eduard handed the bottle back to him as his eyes returned to Nick.

“Maybe I just keep the tequila and still kick your butt, I’ve been waiting for you to return for some time, my friend.”

“Eduard, if you really think you can whip my butt, why don’t you come on down here and get started. I’m tired as hell and been gone way too long but I haven’t had squat to drink, which I can’t say the same for you. Now, I’ve said I was sorry and I brought a peace offering which you seem to have taken a liking to, so if that’s not good enough for you, then you can give me back my tequila and just bring your big butt down here and get ready for me to pour a can of whoop ass all over you. But hurry up, because I’ve got too much to do and don’t have time to screw around.”

A large smile swept across the face of the big Russian. “The tequila is very good, my friend. I accept your apology and your peace offering, this time. But you better keep those dogs off my property, you hear me.”

“Indeed, Eduard, I do. Thanks. Now, I need the karaoke video equipment for the party tonight, may I please have it?”

“Sure, it’s in the living room. Le, give me back that bottle and help Nick load that stuff. And I saw you take a second drink, don’t make me have to kick your butt, little buddy.”

Nick and Le had the equipment loaded in no time at all and Nick was on his way toward the beach to check out the set up. His watch indicated it was now 2:30 p.m. He got to the beach and began to survey the situation. He would need one large table to get the equipment out of the sand, and began to pace off the distance from the beach to Ian McClellan’s bungalow, the nearest source of power. As he approached the outlet, Ian’s head popped out the window.

“What’s up, laddie?”

“Setting up the sound system for karaoke tonight, Ian, how are you doing?”

“Oh, I’m fit as a fiddle, thanks for asking. So you planning on hitting me up for the juice to run this operation, are you?”

“That’s right, Ian, its all for a good cause.”

“So it is, yes, I suppose it is. What time does all this start? I just got back from Hato late last night and haven’t caught up with all the news.”

“I just got back from a cargo and ferry run to Mexico myself, plus I flew a day out of Opa Locka for Seymour yesterday. I flew to Mexico with Aaron Garcia and got a tip that he’s on to the cigar caper, so keep yours out of sight, and Art told me they are sending a new site manager out soon, probably for the same reason. Like we need a babysitter. Oh, and the party starts at 7.”

“Did you guys think Aaron is that dumb that he couldn’t figure out Sebastiano nabbed those cigars? He’s a lot smarter than he looks, you know.”

“As a person he’s alright, I enjoyed the trip with him, but he’s still a manager.”

“Ah yes, that he is, that he is, and its hard to overcome that, isn’t it, laddie?”

“Yes, it is. Well, got to go. Say you don’t have a large table I can use to set this equipment on, do you?”

“No, I don’t, but the Queens of St. John have a nice one, why don’t you try over there?”

“OK, thanks, and I’ll see you at the party, Ian.”

Nick jumped back into his cart and turned it along the single lane pathway that served as their local road. Nick would go find the extension cords first, then go get the table. He pulled up in front of the TDM condo. He ran inside and found Sean lying on the couch in the lobby.

“Sean, I need about 150 feet of extension cord, can I hit the storage shed out back?”

Sean never stirred. “Sure, mate, the key is in the right top desk drawer, just don’t forget where you got it, OK?”

“No problem, and don’t work too hard.”

Sean waved his hand at Nick without looking up from his nap.

Nick grabbed the keys and jumped back into the cart, driving around the back of the building he parked in front of a large metal shed. He jiggled the lock after twisting the key and it popped open. Rummaging around inside he found two 100 foot long cords and returned to the cart after shoving the cords into the basket, then he started back down the road toward the Queen’s bungalow.

The Queens of St John were a gay couple, Richard Blount and Jody Hicks, both young pilots flying for TDM. They were an interesting couple, to be sure. One would never guess Jody was gay to meet him as he had none of the mannerisms normally associated with gay men, but with Richard there was no doubt after even the shortest time talking to him. While most of the other pilots at first were very hesitant to allow these two into the local society, they both proved to be very capable pilots, which was the real measure of an individual in these parts.

Nick rolled to a stop in front of their bungalow and heard them arguing through an open window.

“Richard, why is the kitchen a mess? You were the last one in there. And your clothes are all over the bedroom floor. Are you waiting for the maid to show up or something? Didn’t your mother teach you how to pick up after yourself.”

“Hey, relax, I’ll get to it later, you don’t have to do a thing.”

“Yes, I do, Richard, I live here, and I have to step over your trash. Later won’t work, I want you to take care of it now!”

“Oh, all right. What an ass you can be, Jody. You’re too uptight, you need to relax.”

Nick banged on the door, “Hello inside, got a minute?”

The door swung open with Richard standing in it.

“Hi, Nick, always a pleasure to see you, won’t you come in?”

Nick walked in and looked at Jody.

“Hi Nick, pardon Richard’s mess, he was just getting to it. Now.”

Richard threw his hands up, glared at Jody with his lips pursed tightly and walked back toward the kitchen, “Yes, Nick, I have to do my chores, I’ll talk to you later.”

“Now, what can we do for you, Nick? Are you going to be at tonight’s party?”

“Yeah, and I’m in charge of the karaoke set up and need a large table. Ian said you might have one.”

“We do indeed, come back here and I’ll help you carry it outside.”

They went into a back room and emerged with each holding the end of a long folding table. The two men lifted it onto the top of the cart’s roof and secured it with a length of rope.

“OK thanks for the help, Jody, see you and Richard at the party tonight.”

“If we don’t kill each other first, we’ll be there with bells on. We have a duet planned that will win the karaoke contest for us hands down, and once the music and the margaritas start flowing, so will Richard on the dance floor.”

“I can’t wait. See you later and thanks for the table.”

Nick jumped back into the cart and started down the road toward the beach area that would serve as tonight’s venue. He arrived at Ian’s bungalow and plugged the extension cord into the socket and tied off that end to a nearby

water pipe to keep anyone tripping over it from disconnecting the power. Nick set the remainder of the cord on the seat next to him, hopped into the drivers seat and began driving slowing, paying out the cord as he went, stopping only to hook up the second cord and tie a knot between them for trip insurance, then slowly drove onto the beach, rolling to a stop as the extension cord came to its end.

Finding a level area nearby, Nick untied the table and dragged it off the roof then picking up one end dragged it over to the chosen location, flipped the legs down and locked, and stood the table upright. After several trips between the cart and table, the sound and video equipment lay piled onto the table. Nick tied the end of the extension cord to the table leg first before rearranging the components into what appeared to be a safe configuration, then went to plug the cords into the cord only to realize there was only a single outlet on the cable.

Ah well, he thought, put that on the list, one multiple outlet converter. Let's see, going to need at least a 6-holer for this job. No problem.

The speakers were the last rigging to complete, using the roof of the golf cart to stand on while hanging the speakers and two video monitors by a wire from a couple of nearby palm trees and stringing the appropriate wires.

Finishing up, he stepped back from the table about 30 yards to survey the job. Yes, he thought, very nicely done. OK, checklist, what was missing? He needed the multiplug, he needed to test the whole mess out, and he needed something to drink.

A quick drive brought him back to the High and Dry where he parked it, plugged it in to recharge and took the keys back inside. Sam was still at the bar, talking on the phone and Wallace was still asleep on the couch. Art was sitting on the porch smoking a cigar.

"Here's the keys, Art, thanks for the use of the cart, it was a big help."

"You all done? Got the whole thing set up," he said as he squinted into the lowering sun toward the beach at Nick's rigging job.

"Almost, got a few things to add, but I got it under control. Just want to make sure I get a shower and something to eat before the festivities start."

"Ah yes, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we might die. Or maybe just have a manager show up."

"What are you talking about? Have you heard anything else?"

"Yeah, Sean was by about a half an hour ago and said he had to go get the TDM VIP bungalow ready for the new site manager, he'll be here tomorrow afternoon. And guess what else, he's bringing a new woman pilot with him. You Mailservice guys sure know how to screw up a good thing, you know it?"

Nick stood and started in disbelief for a moment and felt the blood drain out of his face. "That old dog Aaron is digging at me. I made a smart-ass remark in Mexico about the last woman pilot experiment and he's gonna try it again. Man, that pisses me off, this political correct quota crap. She'll probably be a crummy pilot like the last one, and I'll probably get stuck giving her all the check rides. Man!"

“Probably. But I think that woman is the least of your worries. Think about a site manager climbing up your butts on a daily basis. He’s very likely to hamper some of my enterprises too, now that makes me mad. You boys better start thinking about a plan, that’s for sure.”

Art leaned back in his chair and took a long drag on the cigar, then let out a long stream of smoke.

“Yep, this was a nice place, now see what’s moving in. How much farther from Brooklyn does an old cop have to run? I don’t want much, just to do what I want when I want, is that too much?”

“We’ll see on the site manager dude, we can send him on all sorts of wild goose chases, that will entertain us for a while until he catches on. Ah well, maybe I’ll just fly more, I need the money anyway. I can’t get into trouble if I’m not here, can I?”

“We’re talking about Mailservice pilots here, let’s not raise the expectations of your gene pool too much, OK? Yeah, it will work out, it always does, but I fear those bosses of yours won’t give up trying to find someone to run this asylum.”

“Yeah, me too. Well, I’m gonna have Sam whip me up some chow and a brew, then go finish the hook up and get it all tested. That should give me time to shower and get into my party gear.”

“OK Nick, I’ll see you later, you take care.”

Strolling inside, he sat down at the bar, picked up a menu and held it up, pointing to his choice as Sam nodded while on the phone. He pointed at the beer tap and she walked over, cradled the phone between her shoulder and ear while pouring up a glass of beer and placing it on the bar in front of him with a coaster. Nick turned to watch the news on the TV while Sam went back into the kitchen and emerged with a sandwich and chips on a plate. He finished the meal and beer, tossed a ten on the bar and strolled out, taking a big breath of clean sea air into his lungs and blowing it out slowly. He turned up the path toward his condo.

After a long hot shower he felt great. Standing naked in his bedroom closet door, he selected appropriate attire for the night. Some properly aged Levi cutoffs, a Hawaiian shirt with half-naked hula dancers and palm trees, Nike’s, Ray Ban’s, and a Margaritaville Café baseball cap. No underwear, he was living dangerously tonight. He wasn’t particularly concerned about where he might wake up the next day as he wasn’t flying again until that night and had plenty of time to sober up.

He dug around in a box and located a power strip with eight outlets. Reaching into the back of a closet, he drew out a folding beach chair and then headed downstairs and back to the beach.

By the time he got back, Luca Mirra was building a large fire to roast the goat he had picked up for the purpose, Wallace was off the couch and stringing up the volleyball net, and Alfie Biddlecombe was setting up a Margarita bar at another table he had set up with coolers and two blenders to keep up with the demand. Nick hooked up the multiplug and then plugged all the components into it and began firing up the equipment. He tested the microphones and checked the lyrics text on both monitors hanging on the trees, then he dug a Steely Dan cassette out of his pocket and loaded it into the stereo system and pressed the play button. The laid back lyrics of “FM” began to wail out of the speakers.

*“Worry the bottle, Mamma, it's grape fruit wine
Kick off your high heel sneakers, it's party time
The girls don't seem to care what's on
As long as it plays till dawn
Nothin' but blues and Elvis
And somebody else's favorite song*

*Give her some funk'd up music she treats you nice
Feed her some hungry reggae she'll love you twice
The girls don't seem to care tonight
As long as the mood is right.”*

Nick saw other pilots beginning to wander down to the beach with chairs and coolers in tow, picking out their spot. Dinesh Gupta, a pilot from Trinidad who was about Nick's age walked up and plopped his cooler down next to the table. He flipped the lid open and dug out a couple of beers.

“Very nice, Nick, beer?”

“You bet, Dinesh, thanks. You ready to party tonight?”

“Yes, it is a good night for a party. Just look at that sunset.”

The two men turned and faced the sun's orange glow as it sank slowly below the horizon, slowly raising the beer to their lips, just watching. They both stared in silence for several minutes, only the Steely Dan music and the lapping waves adding to the ambiance.

Nick unfolded his chair and sat down, Dinesh sat on his cooler and they traded stories on their recent flights. Dinesh had been flying mail along the Amazon for several weeks and had lots for stories to tell of the people and towns along the big river. Jean Boyer wandered up and pulled out a chair, sitting down to listen to the tales. Nick began to relate the ferry flight to Mexico and meeting Amanda in Cabo. Luca now had the fire roaring and, with some help from Rene Phillips, he mounted the goat on a spit and began the roasting.

The four members of the Five Commandments Club showed up together and popped open their chairs in the growing circle of drinking men. Besides Doyle Locke and Robert Trayhan, who Nick had lunch with earlier in the day, Ole Krogsgard and Emil Beltran also sat down. Sebastiano Fontana began lighting the Tiki lamps that, besides Luca's goat roasting fire, provided the majority of the light for the beach.

Other clusters of pilots were now evident along the beach. Wallace Shiflett, Iqbal Aziz, and Ian McClellan sat together about 20 yards from Nick's table. Richard Blount and Jody Hicks approached and set their chairs up with their cooler between them. Richard withdrew a large candle from his bag and set it on the cooler after lighting it.

Eduard and the sound of the blenders tuning up for the night broke the men's stories. Le Nyugen was loading ice into each one as Eduard measured the ingredients then flipped the switch to blend the Nectar of the Islands. Jean rose from his seat.

“Can I get anyone a margarita?”

Nick raised his hand, "I'll take one."

As Jean walked over to the table, Sean O'Donovan and Ernst Muelhouser approached the growing group of pilots and found themselves a seat. Jean returned shortly with four margarita glasses.

"Didn't want to be making a lot of trips, you know," he said as he handed two of them to Nick, who took them and nodded in thanks.

Ernst began to talk about flying in Cuba recently and some of the great places to eat he had found near the airports. This was a topic of intense interest to all the pilots who flew the islands. One of the benefits of flying TDM mail routes was the exposure to some of the greatest cuisine the world has ever known, and representing most every culture around the globe due to migration, some of it voluntary, some of it not. But the result was an eater's delight. The downside was most of the time the pilot's had precious little time to go hunting for this treasure, therefore tips for fast runs for good chow were traded among the pilots and was a common topic of conversation.

Richard and Jody challenged Eduard and Le to a volleyball match and soon the rest of the men were involved in the match, cheering and providing mostly unwanted advice to the players on their technique. Iqbal Aziz had taken over the margarita blenders and the cold liquid ran like a Puerto Rican waterfall, increasing the men's volume and the intensity of their stories and cheers for the players. The Queens beat Eduard and Le soundly in two matches, the pilots all gathered around the volleyball court and cheering.

As they were deciding who would challenge the Queens next, Ole Krogsgard picked up the microphone while Doyle queued up the lyrics and backup music for him. The first strains of the Eagles' "Hotel California" flowed out of the speakers followed by Ole's strong Scandinavian accent as the pilots turned to give him their attention:

*"On a dark desert highway, cool wind in my hair
 Warm smell of colitas,
 rising up through the air
 Up ahead in the distance,
 I saw a shimmering light
 My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim
 I had to stop for the night
 There she stood in the doorway;
 I heard the mission bell
 And I was thinking to myself,
 'This could be Heaven or this could be Hell'
 Then she lit up a candle and she showed me the way"*

Despite his strong accent, he was actually pretty good. The bulk of the pilots had returned to their chairs to listen to Ole while others refilled their margaritas. Richard and Rene were at the karaoke machine flipping through the menu for their choice of songs

*"'Relax,' said the night man,
 We are programmed to receive.
 You can checkout any time you like,*

but you can never leave!”

Ole finished the song to the cheers of the gathered men. Rene took the stage as Ole passed him the mic and Doyle cranked up the equipment. Rene pounded out an old rock ballad by Bob Seger:

*“Just take those old records off the shelf
I'll sit and listen to 'em by myself
Today's music aln 't got the same soul
I like that old time rock 'n' roll
Don't try to take me to a disco
You'll never even get me out on the
In ten minutes I'll be late for the door
I like that old time rock'n' roll”*

Rene had a great voice and a wonderful stage presence as he worked the crowd to the howls of approval from the pilots. Rene took in the praise as Richard and Jody stepped up and began a duet to an Enrique Iglesias song called “Bailamos”

*“Tonight we dance
I lay my life in your hands
We take the floor
Nothing is forbidden anymore*

*Don`'t let the world in outside
Don`'t let a moment go by
Nothing can stop us tonight*

*Bailamos, let the rhythm take you over
Bailamos, te quiero amor mio
Bailamos wanna live this night forever
Bailamos te quiero amor mio te quiero”*

The two finished the song, adding their expected flair and showmanship as the men cheered and went to refill their drinks, slapping the entertainers on the back in congratulations.

As they wandered back to their seats the talk turned to the impending arrival of the new site manager.

“I just know this is my fault,” said Sebastiano, “I should have never got into those cigars.”

“Nonsense,” said Sean, “this is about me, I keep lousy books and the costs here have been rising lately, he’s coming to replace me, I fear.”

“It doesn’t matter why he’s coming, he’s coming,” said Nick, “we just got to figure out how to deal with it this time.”

“Why don’t we just keep things on the down low when he gets here, try to toe the line and maybe they will think

he's not needed," said Wallace.

Eduard reached over and smacked him in the back of the head. "Because, you idiot, then he would get credit for cleaning up the Roost and make them think that this is the right medicine for us pilots."

"I'm afraid he's right, you guys," said Doyle. "If the problems go away we'll be stuck with him for a long time. I think only a well planned campaign of terror and sedition waged upon his head will be the only solution."

"And what about the woman he's bringing," said Ernst, "I don't understand why you guys are against them so much?"

"The last time Aaron tried to put women here it was a disaster, laddie," said Ian. See that nice new dock in front of the High and Dry? That woman came in too hot one morning after too much fun in St Thomas and plowed into it. I thought Art was going to kill her. I know Nick wanted to because she pranged his ride for his next flight and he was late."

"And she dragged the worse kind of riff raff into our home, Royal Caribbean Cargo pilots, she actually dated one of them!" said Emil.

"Well, I'm looking forward to it," said Ernst. "I'm not a broken and bitter old man like some people around here, I like the company of women."

"What are you talking about, boy, I've forgotten more about flying than you'll ever know. If you don't get too tied up with women, you too might live this long," said Robert Trayhan.

Eduard stood up and stretched his whole body. "Well, there's only one thing to do then. Carrier Landings."

A cheer of approval came from the group and they turned to setting up.

"What are carrier landings?" said Andy Clack.

Nick stepped up and threw his arm over Andy's shoulder. "Ah a sheltered life, its so rare gentlemen. I guess a couple of you guys will need a check pilot for this operation. Andy, you, Wallace, and Ernst follow me and we'll begin the ground school portion"

As Nick talked, the other men cleared both long tables of sound and drink gear.

"Gentlemen, you are about to fly some of the most dangerous air in the sky, the carrier landing. Some say to get an idea of how tough, place a postage stamp in your living room, turn out the lights, jump at it and try to hit it with your nose. Truly the test of a naval aviator, the carrier landing."

"OK, as you can see, they are now laying the carrier deck with the two tables end to end. And you see those guys over there with the towels, they will stretch them across the table on the threshold end of our deck to act as the wires that you catch with your feet. You get four wires tonight gents, nothing to it."

“OK,” said Wallace, “but what are they doing with the ice chests over there?”

“Now you wouldn’t want this to be a cake walk would you? Of course not, so we will be able to simulate marginal weather for this landing. The ceiling is 500 feet with ice and rain tonight, gents.”

“So if you miss the wires, how do you do a go around?” said Ernst “A crash and dash?”

“Oh sorry, didn’t I tell you, you’re out of gas so they’ll be no go arounds. If you miss the wire then you will die, of course. To simulate death, a suitable obstacle will be placed on the end of the deck. Don’t worry, its practically painless.”

“Oh sure, this sounds like a set up, lay this all out and let the rookies make a fool of themselves because its impossible.”

“Impossible? Not so, step back and let the master demonstrate. There will be a test later.”

Le and Dinesh piled several of the men’s beach chairs at the end of the tables while Iqbal and Sean manned the ice chests are first appropriately wetting the deck. Three towels were stretched across the near end of the deck as Nick walked back about 20 yards, kicked off his Nike’s, and turned around. He placed his arms behind his back and clasped his hands together, then he turned to Jody standing at the end of the table acting as the Landing Safety Officer.

“Cleared for landing!” he said.

Nick leaned forward and started running, then leap toward the table, his gaze locked on his landing point. Iqbal and Sean threw handfuls of icy water at him in flight. His belly hit the table with a splat as he slid across the towels and locked his feet to catch them. His foot flipped over the first towel and caught on the second, bringing him to a quick stop to the cheers of the crowd. He leapt up with his arms over his head in victory and danced back and forth.

“Now see boys, nothing to it. Who’s next?”

Wallace raised his hand, “I’ll go next.”

He and Nick took up the initial position. “Now you want to not go over the wires, you want to aim at them so your feet have a chance to catch them, then lock your feet hard and hope for the best!”

Wallace locked his hands behind his back and nodded at the Jody.

“Cleared for landing!”

Wallace ran forward and dove as the ice pelted his face. He hit the deck a bit long but managed to catch the last wire. The crowd cheered as Wallace jumped to his feet.

“Wow, those chairs at the end got really big!” he said.

Ole lined up next and, after getting his clearance, landed and caught the third wire with more cheers.

“OK, I’m next,” said Andy as he took up position, then stepped back even more.

“You better be careful boy,” said Sean, “don’t use too much throttle on this.”

“No problem, I can do this easy,” he said to the laughter of the men.

“Famous last words, my friend,” said Eduard.

Andy got up a full head of steam and came running at his target, leaving his feet at a full run with a blitz of ice hitting him. His momentum carried him over all but the last wire that he failed to catch.

The whole crowd cheered as he plowed into the chairs. Andy picked himself up slowly and stood up slowly. As the Tiki lamp light flicked in his face, Nick could see blood rolling down Andy’s face.

“Oh, no, he’s cut himself. Give me one of those towels.”

Nick walked over, found the source of the blood flow and clamped the towel over it. Richard brought another towel to wipe the blood out of his face.

Nick grabbed Andy’s arm and started up the path. “I’m gonna take him to see Art.”

Nick and Andy walked up the path toward Art’s bungalow while the party went on. Having been a NYPD cop for so many years, Art had developed many skills, bathroom surgery not the least of them. They got Art out of bed banging on his door.

“What do you drunks want! I didn’t come to the party so you’re bringing it to me?”

“No Art, Andy here fell down and banged his head. Except that he might bleed to death, I don’t think it’s serious.”

Art brought them into his kitchen, turned on the bright overhead lights and removed the towel on Andy’s head. He dragged Andy over to his sink and forced his head down while he turned on the water and picked up the vegetable sprayer.

“Watch it Art, that water is cold!”

“Quiet you, I need to see what I’m dealing with here. Man, you busted it open wide. I’m gonna need to put in three or four stitches. Nick, finish cleaning him up and I’ll grab my kit.”

After much protesting by Andy due to no anesthetic, Art managed to get four stitches into Andy’s head. He also gave him some Vicodin painkiller.

“Now you won’t be able to fly for a few days Andy, so be sure to call in.”

“Oh no, I have to fly tomorrow. I got to fly a short run from St Croix to Isla Mona to take some equipment and supplies to The Boss’s place. I was late the last couple of times and I have to deliver that cargo or I’ll probably get fired.”

Nick sighed, “I’ll take it, just give me the details. I don’t fly until late anyway.”

“OK, no flying for three day, Andy,” Art said as they left.

Nick walked Andy back the condo discussing the cargo mission details and helped him get into his room. Well, better get some sleep if I’m going to make a 0600 flight he thought.

Nick went down the stairs to his room. He could still hear the echoes of the other men still going on the beach. Walking into his bathroom, he dug out some aspirin and swallowed a couple of the pills. Then he flopped into his bed, remembering he had left his shoes and other stuff on the beach. Oh, well, it shouldn’t get stolen, and he liked going to Isla Mona, the Boss’s home plate.

He closed his eyes and looked forward to the next day.

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