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September 2017 - Clipper Pioneers Newsletter

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A Few Tales from the Tenerife Crash that Never Got Reported

by: Captain Robert Lee Bragg

This is not really intended to be a “feel good” story. It is intended to be factual. It’s about the things that occurred during the Tenerife crash in 1977, still the largest disaster in commercial aviation history, that never got reported. As pilots and aviation enthusiasts, you have probably read about the details of the accident and know that I was the first officer on the Pan Am flight, but did you know that I wrote down what occurred immediately after the collision? I wrote my observations on lined paper while I was in the hospital. It was ten pages in length.

In all, 583 people died at Tenerife when a KLM 747 smashed into our Pan Am 747 on the runway. Both were charters. Many on the Pan Am plane were from California, bound for a cruise originating in Las Palmas, in the Canary Islands, on the ship “Golden Odyssey.” They, like many others, were forced to land at Tenerife instead, due to a terrorist attack at the Las Palmas airport. The number of dead included everyone on the KLM flight and all but 55 of those on the Pan Am. Journalists came to cover the story from all over the world.

After the investigations following the crash, my first-hand account dropped out of sight. Later, much later, I thought that it had ended up in the boxed material turned over to the archives at Richter Library at Miami University when Pan Am went out of business in 1989. Sadly, I have been unable to locate it there. I’m broadening my search, however - I don’t give up easily. I suspect that I would change very little if I were writing the material today. The only thing I probably would modify would be in terms of providing greater, much greater, detail.

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Please note - we have changed the access to the online newsletters so that you will need a password to access them. We’re hoping this will help past members who haven’t paid their dues to do so, in order to read the newsletter. This password will also give you access to the membership & phone list. GO TO OUR WEBSITE AT: www.clipperpioneers.com.

Click on the “Members Only” button on the righthand side. The password will be: captain.

Dues are \$20 per year. Once you’ve paid through 2018, no more dues are required. Make them payable to Clipper Pioneers, and mail to Jerry Holmes at 192 Foursome Dr., Sequim, WA 98382.

A Few Tales from the Tenerife Crash that Never Got Reported

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Pictures

Very shortly after the actual crash on Tenerife in 1977, and a very few minutes after I had jumped from the cockpit to the ground and when I was still yelling at our passengers who had gone out on to the left wing to jump, I saw one of our passengers taking pictures of the burning wreckage – and taking those pictures as fast as he could.

I was later told that one of the “RAGS” of the grocery store periodicals had offered the picture-taker \$50,000 for his photographs. He accepted their offer and gave them his pictures. Sadly, he never saw the promised \$50,000 or his pictures again. Many decades later, he contacted me, and I learned his name was David Alexander. He said that he was then writing a book on the crash, but as he never got back with me, I can’t say for certain.

His pictures were supposedly the ones that appeared in *Time* magazine in the 11 April 1977 issue, which featured the Tenerife accident. How the pictures were acquired by *Time*, I can’t say. The moral of this story, however, is that if you ever get offered money from one of the sensational grocery store publications, make sure you get your money before relinquishing your photos or information. I speak with some personal experience. I was offered \$50,000 for an exclusive article concerning the accident, which I refused. I should have accepted the money as the same “publication” referred to in the above “picture taking” comment went ahead and printed an article attributed to me anyhow.

Taxi Cabs

Probably within fifteen minutes after the actual accident occurred, I saw a gentleman wearing a suit come up to me. He said, “Everything is under control,” and immediately thereafter, a taxi cab came up beside him and the suited gentleman opened the taxi cab door and pushed me in. The taxi cab took off and went up to the airport terminal building, the door was opened and someone pulled me out and pushed me into another taxi cab which then took off as fast as it could – I didn’t have a clue where he was going. The cab driver was going so fast, I actually asked him to slow down. We arrived at a satellite of the main hospital very shortly thereafter.

This is the only time I’ve ever heard of an airport that used taxi cabs after an accident. As soon as the tower discovered that an accident had occurred in the dense fog and realized that two B-747’s were involved, they sounded the alarm and sent out the airport’s emergency vehicles, which consisted of two fire trucks, an ambulance, and two range rovers. They very quickly realized that this wasn’t nearly enough equipment. They then opened the airport gates and ordered the taxi cabs to come to the scene of the crashes. Many of our passengers got to the hospital in the same way I did, via those taxi cabs. The use of taxi cabs by the Tenerife airport was a very, very smart idea.

A Survivors List

When I was transferred to the main hospital from a satellite facility by one of the Spanish doctors, I found the captain, Vic Grubbs, the flight engineer, George Warns, and four of our flight attendants were already there. I got to wondering who else was there. And, then I got an idea. Where I came up with this idea I’ll never know – possibly in an early emergency class in the Air Force. The idea was very simple. I found some tape, cut off small pieces, and placed a piece of tape on each person’s wrist. Then, I printed their name and a number on the tape. At the same time, I found a piece of paper and printed the number and name on the list. Talk about low-tech.

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I then went and found a phone and made a collect call to our dispatch at New York's JFK International Airport. When I finally got someone on the line, I introduced myself and said, "I'd like to give you some information on our accident in Tenerife." The response was, "What accident?" They hadn't even heard of the accident and my call was the first they received. I basically told them that a KLM B-747 had taken off without a clearance and hit us, and that it was my belief that we had lost an awful lot of people. I then read them my list of survivors, asking that they call each person's family and tell them they were alive.

Over the next several hours, I called Pan Am seven or eight times, mainly updating the survivors list – each time I left the number I was calling from. I never received a single call back from Pan Am. Later, when I later asked one of our chief pilots why I was never called back, his response was "In times like this, things get forgotten." He went on to say that I might consider going with a smaller airline. My reply was terse, "I think you're right." My thought was that Pan Am should have done better, much better. It was not as if Tenerife was their first accident. I didn't like the answer then, and I don't like it any better now.

The Hospital

The main hospital on the island, La Candelaria, located at Santa Cruz de Tenerife, did a fantastic job on the day of the accident. As soon as they heard about the accident, they got on the public radio and television and requested all hospital workers to report for work just as soon as they could.

Each surviving passenger, as soon as they arrived at the hospital, was taken immediately into the emergency room and given a thorough examination – and appropriate care. Later during the early evening, each passenger and crew member was assigned a room somewhere in the hospital. I happened to be assigned a room in the maternity ward. Previously, since I was limping as a result of jumping from the cockpit to the ground, a distance of forty-eight feet, I had had x-rays taken of my right leg and a very heavy plaster case was placed on my ankle.

After getting to my room, I asked for writing paper and wrote down about ten pages of notes on what I could remember about the accident. I later gave it to the Pan Am people and that was the last I heard of it.

My first visitor was a Spanish Air Force Colonel, who spoke perfect English and who couldn't have been nicer. We talked for awhile and then he asked whether or not I felt the tower operators were at fault, and I responded by saying, "Not at all." He was obviously very glad to hear this, since the airports in Spain were then controlled by the Spanish Air Force.

About an hour later, a four star Spanish Air Force general showed up and, as with the colonel, he couldn't have been nicer and also spoke impeccable English. After a short period of small talk, he asked the same question that the colonel had earlier about the tower operators. He was also very glad to hear what I said about the tower operators not having caused or contributed to the accident in any way. I told both the colonel and the general that I thought the KLM plane had taken off without a clearance. I thought that then, in 1977, and I still think the same thing today.

A bit later, I received another visitor in my hospital room. A very loud person came rushing into my room and stated he was the American Consul for Tenerife and "demanded" that I give him the survivor passenger list he thought I had. As politely as I could, under the circumstances, I told him he wasn't in any position to be demanding anything and that I didn't have a survivor list, and that even if I did have a list, I wouldn't release it to him. I went on to threaten that if he didn't leave the hospital soon, I'd have him shown out by security. I

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then called a member of hospital administration and asked that they not allow any more pseudo-officials or members of the press to have access to any crewmember or passenger.

Champagne in the Hospital

About 10:00 p.m. that night, one of our passengers came into my room, and we talked for about an hour. Fortunately, both he and his wife recovered from their injuries. I wish I could recall his name. He was a genuinely good man. During the entire time I was in the hospital, I never had a single passenger blame our crew for the accident.

After we talked for a good while, I told him that I'd never felt like having a beer more than I did at that moment. He agreed with me, saying he felt the same way, so I called the nurse and asked if she could get us two beers. She didn't understand exactly what we wanted and went out and got a doctor. I made the same request for beer to the doctor. He left and in about thirty minutes came back and said he couldn't find any beer but that he had found something we might like just as well. He opened a brown paper bag and pulled out a bottle of cold champagne. Our passenger and I continued talking and drank the entire bottle. It tasted wonderful. Thinking back, I think it was a good thing that I had ended up being housed in the maternity ward of the hospital. It's likely they had more champagne handy than the other wards in the hospital.

Organization at the Hospital

The next morning, Monday, the hospital moved all crew members and passengers into one wing of the hospital and posted security guards at all entrances and exits for the wing. The captain, who was badly burned, the flight engineer, and I were located in three adjacent rooms. This gave us a chance to visit and talk at length about what had happened. We all concurred that the KLM pilot had taken off without a take-off clearance.

The purser and I decided to visit our passengers. The captain couldn't join us because of his burns. We went into each passenger's room, introduced ourselves, and asked if they needed any thing. The women all wanted make up, and the men wanted razors and shaving cream – with one exception. An oriental passenger who had lost at least two members of his immediate family asked who would be paying for his baggage. I assured him his baggage would be paid for by Pan Am.

I also told each and every passenger that they could call anywhere in the world to reassure their families and friends. I wonder how much of Pan Am's money I spent that day. I definitely thought it was the right thing to offer.

When I got back to my room, an Iberia Airlines captain came into the room to check on us. He was the first of our airline visitors and his genuine concern was very much appreciated. He had been on a layover at Tenerife when the accident occurred. There was also a Pan Am captain, Rich Self, who came from Berlin and joined us a bit later. He was ALPA's safety chairman. He came as soon as he heard about the accident - despite the difficulties of transportation to the island at that time.

In times like this, the presence of these men was very much appreciated – keep in mind that this was about eighteen hours after the accident and I still hadn't heard a thing from Pan Am. It would be awfully nice to be able to thank the Iberian captain, but memory is short, and I do not, unfortunately, recall his name.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Pan Am Cruise Reunion set for 2018 - Royal Caribbean's Navigator

Dear Pan Amer's:

We are very excited about our next (and much asked for) Pan Am Reunion Transatlantic Cruise from Miami to Southampton, England. The crossing will be a 15 day trip to Portugal, Spain and France. The cruise begins with six relaxing days at sea where you can melt away stress, relax poolside reach out to old friends and much more. Enjoy gourmet style dining in their top notch dining rooms or be pampered totally in the specialty pay bistros. Remember to leave a little room for savoring favorites in the different ports of call stops.

Your price includes: registration fee towards amenities, Vegas style shows, use of pool, tours of kitchen and such. Food is virtuously non-stop and even room service can be ordered up to midnight free. Games, movies, etc.. Look forward to great times at get together's and cocktail parties. We are on the beginning stages with Royal Caribbean to plan special tours at the different ports at prices only available to the Pan Am guests.

Rates: are per person, double occupancy, cruise only and based on availability at time of booking. Port charges are \$230.; government taxes are additional and fluctuate daily. **Singles** pay 200% of cruise, port charges and deposit plus one time tax. Once our allotment is gone, prevailing rates will take effect. We check prices to make sure you get the best, taking everything into consideration. Call to reserve now; a deposit of \$450 per person will lock in the current price which may increase in the future. As usual, all major credit cards are accepted but checks are preferred in an attempt to keep down credit card fees and pass the savings toward our onboard amenities, parties and the like. Insurance is available and highly suggested; call for your quote. Contact Stu Archer, former Pan Am pilot and cruise consultant, at 305-238-0911. Email stunjune@aol.com. More info to come. Call ChoiceAir **800-533-7803** for Royal Caribbean's best air quote.

Inside from \$799 /	Outside from \$1099 /	Balcony from \$1859.
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<u>Date</u>	<u>Port of Call</u>	<u>Arrive</u>	<u>Depart</u>	
Sun 22 Apr2018	Miami, Florida	-	5:00 PM	Boarding
Sun 23-28 Apr2018	Cruising	- -		Cruising
Sun 29 Apr2018	Ponta Delgada, Azores	7:00 AM	3:00 PM	Docked
Mon 30 Apr2018	Cruising	- -		Cruising
Tue 01May2018	Lisbon, Portugal	10:00 AM	6:00 PM	Docked
Wed 02May2018	Vigo, Spain	11:00 AM	6:00 PM	Docked
Thu 03May2018	La Coruna, Spain	7:00 AM	6:00 PM	Docked
Fri 04May2018	Cruising	- -		Cruising
Sat 05May2018	Paris /Normandy (Le Havre), France	7:00 AM	9:00 PM	Docked
Sun 06May2018	Southampton, England	5:30 AM		-

CALL CARMEN JAQUET – INTERLINE TRAVELS, INC. 786-252-7838 Direct Line – 1-888-592-7245 456 MERLIN CT., TALLAHASSEE, FL 32301

Information about Ireland Reunion on next page

Pan Am Reunion scheduled for Foynes, May 2018

Margaret O'Shaughnessy is planning a Pan Am Reunion in Foynes & Limerick with chosen dates to suit the Pan Am Cruise which will arrive in Southampton on May 6th so that you can fly or cruise to Ireland. PLEASE just let Margaret know if you plan to attend. At this time we do not need deposits, etc., just names. Spread the word, and I look forward to hearing from you all. Contact Margaret O'Shaughnessy at margaret@flyingboatmuseum.com. Margaret O'Shaughnessy is the Director of the Foynes Flying Boat & Maritime Museum, Foynes, Co Limerick, Ireland. Mobile: +353 87 2490830. Or contact Stu Archer at stunjune@aol.com.

25th Annual Family Reunion & Oktoberfest

This year the Family Reunion & Oktoberfest will be held on Sunday, October 1, 2017, at the Two Steps Downtown Grill, Ives St., Danbury, CT. There will be a luncheon buffet from 1400 'til 1700. No charge for beer and wine; a pay bar is available. The cost is \$26.00 per person, all inclusive. Tell all your Pan Am friends! Casual dress.

Make checks payable to Alan Vale, write "Reunion" in the memo. Please include your name, address, phone number and email address, name of your guest(s), and how many will attend. Send your check to Alan Vale, 40 Britannia Dr., Danbury, CT 06811-2612. Alan's phone number is (203) 778-2993; email address is av747@att.net.

Pan Am Philadelphia Area Pilots (PAPAP)

We meet the second Tuesday of every quarter at the Continental Inn in Yardley, PA at 1200 for a bit of BS before going to our private conference room upstairs for lunch.

Been going on since 1992 and it's a great way to stay together. Contact: Chris Blaydon [215 757 6229](tel:2157576229) or cblayd@aol.com

Come Join the Santa Rosa Breakfast Group!

The Santa Rosa Breakfast group meets about every six weeks. They have 17 pilots, FA's and FEO's that get together to discuss the old days. Anyone in the Sonoma, Napa, and Marin county areas north of San Francisco who would like to join them should email Dave Criley at davecriley@comcast.net, and send your email contact. They started out with 5 and have grown to 17. ~from Dave Criley

Share Your Memories

Please send your stories to Jerry or Sue by email to: sue@clipperpioneers.com.

Layovers for Pan Am

Check out Pan American layovers at www.paacrewlayover.com, where some 81 cities and over 161 hotels are shown in photos.

***Please update your email address and phone number if it's been changed!
Email or write to Jerry Holmes - 192 Foursome Drive, Sequim, WA 98382
or email to: jerryholmes747@gmail.com***

*...and God will lift you up on Eagle's Wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of His hand.*

IN MEMORIAM

Buck Clippard passed away recently. There will be a service at noon, August 19, Saturday at the Church by the Sea, 2700 Mayan Drive, Ft Lauderdale. More to follow.

Joe D'Esposito passed on Monday, July 17, 2017. Viewing at 10:00 AM and Service at 11:00 AM at Oakwood Chapel, 3301 Paul Sweet Road, Santa Cruz, CA (across from Dominican Hospital).

Rayburn Abercrombie, 101, passed away Friday, July 14, 2017, at West Georgia Hospice. He was born January 28, 1916, in Carrollton to the late Thomas H. and Sarah M. Banks Abercrombie. He was a member of First Presbyterian Church of LaGrange. Mr. Abercrombie married the love of his life, Lathan Justice on July 6, 1941. Mr. Abercrombie proudly served his country, during WWII as a Sergeant in the United States Air Force, where he fell in love with planes. After the war, he continued his love for flying as a pilot/engineer for Pan Am Airlines. Rayburn and Lathan traveled the globe together and enjoyed seeing the world.

William (Bill) Ralph Jordan passed away peacefully July 21, 2017 at his home in Novato, California. His devoted friend and companion Susannah Cooper was by his side. He was 93. Bill was born on June 10, 1924 in Whittier, California. Bill grew up in Redwood Valley, California and graduated from Ukiah High School in 1942. Bill joined the Navy and received flight training in Pensacola, Florida to become a pilot. Bill attended U.C Berkeley (or Cal as he called it) in hopes of being a Dentist. Pan American Airlines was hiring and Bill quickly applied to pursue his love of flying and traveling. He was hired as a navigator. He became First Officer, then Captain on the Boeing 747 and Check pilot on the 747.

Ira (Joe) Moore, age 95, died peacefully at home at La Vida Real in El Cajon, CA on November 2, 2016. In 1945, Joe was hired by Pan American World Airways (Pan Am), and was based in Brownsville, TX, New Orleans, Bogota, Columbia, Miami, New York, Rome, Italy, and San Francisco. Joe flew many aircraft for Pan Am, including Boeing 707 and 747 aircraft. In 1980, when diplomatic relations with China were resumed, he was honored to be a pilot on the first scheduled commercial flight into China since before WWII.

For more information about each of these friends who will be missed, click on "In Memory Of..." at our website: www.clipperpioneers.com. Know of someone from Pan Am who has passed? Email the obit to Jerry Holmes at jerryholmes747@gmail.com

REMINDER: CLIPPER PIONEERS NEWSLETTER'S
LAST PRINT EDITION WILL BE DEC. 2018

Having trouble viewing the membership list online? When you open the list, go to the top of your screen - you should see that it is set at a percentage. Click on that to make it larger.

Don't forget to check out our website at: www.clipperpioneers.com

We Are The Silent Generation

(Continued from previous issue)

The radio network expanded from 3 stations (NBC, ABC, CBS) to thousands of stations. The telephone started to become a common method of communications and "Faxes" sent hard copy around the world. A neighborhood television set was a rare phenomenon (circular B&W 10" screen). Most families could not afford such a luxury, so as kids, we'd head to the closest TV appliance store. which always had a TV in the sidewalk display window, where we would watch Milton Berle and his Texaco Comedy Hour and, sometimes, even a major league ball game from New York City.

Our parents were suddenly free from the confines of the depression and the war and they threw themselves into exploring opportunities they had never imagined.

We weren't neglected, but we weren't today's all-consuming family focus. They were glad we played by ourselves "until the street lights came on." They were busy discovering the post war world.

Most of us had no life plan, but with the unexpected virtue of ignorance and an economic rising tide, we simply stepped into the world and started to find out what the world was about.

We entered a world of overflowing plenty and opportunity, a world where we were welcomed. Based on our naive belief that there was more where this came from, we shaped life as we went.

We enjoyed a luxury. We felt secure in our future. Of course, just as today, not all Americans shared in this experience. Depression poverty was deep rooted. Polio was still acrippler. The Korean War was a dark presage in the early 50s, and by mid-decade, school children were ducking under desks. Russia built the Iron Curtain and China became Red China. Eisenhower sent the first "advisors" to Vietnam, and years later, Johnson invented a war there. Castro set up camp in Cuba and Khrushchev came to power.

We are the last generation to experience an interlude when there were no existential threats to our homeland. We came of age in the 40s and early 50s. The war was over and the Cold War, terrorism, civil rights, technological upheaval, global warming, and perpetual economic insecurity had yet to haunt life with insistent unease.

Only our generation can remember both a time of apocalyptic war and a time when our world was secure and full of bright promise and plenty.

We have lived through both. We grew up at the best possible time when the world was getting better, not worse.

We are the Silent Generation, "the last ones." The last of us was born in 1945, more than 99.9% of us are either retired or dead, and all of us believe we grew up in the best of times! Amen to that!

from June 2017 RUPA NEWS

Flying Boat Reunion clip now available for viewing

A 15-minute special that aired April 27, 2016 on Ireland's popular RTE TV show "Nationwide" is now available for viewing. China Clipper First Officer Robert Hicks (94); Merry Barton, daughter of Folger Athearn (Pan Am's station manager in Noumea, New Caledonia in 1941); Director of the Foynes Flying Boat Museum Margaret O'Shaughnessy; Ed Trippe and Mary Lou Bigelow were interviewed during the Foynes Flying Boat reunion. <http://www.rte.ie/player/us/show/nationwide-21/10566026/>
