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Volcanoes in Central America

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by Bill Nash

Many times, the Guatemala valley would be covered by clouds. We had our unique pilot-created approaches to keep us on schedule. None of these techniques ever caused a problem. Of course we couldn't use them if we had a check pilot or the F.A.A. aboard.

Once I off-loaded some cargo before taking off in a C-46 at Guatemala, destination Miami. Chief pilot cargo Vic Wright called me in and wanted an explanation. He was a very go-go guy. Guatemala was a dished high altitude airport. With my trusty computer, I showed him that if I lost an engine at speed between velocity one and velocity two, the runway climbed faster than the airplane with that cargo aboard. The end of the runway dropped off in a cliff. Vic growled and mumbled and went off stating - "we've got to make this cargo operation go!"

Guatemala and bordering Mexico were blessed with Mayan and Aztec temple ruins. As pilots, we could please our passengers and benefit our company by circling the pyramids of Chichen Itza, Uxmal, Tikal, Tulum, and others. Indian names given to towns and natural resources in those areas were rhythmic and slipped off the tongue with ease: Chichicostenango, Quetzaltenango, Tulencingo, Quintana Roo, Chilpancingo, and Thuantepec.

In approaching Tegucigalpa, Honduras, from the south, we could find the proper valley when we saw 2 small peaks on its southern ridge. The airport there was short, with the terminal directly at one end of the single runway and a 1500 foot deep crevasse at the other end. Under certain cloud conditions we had an approach from San Salvador that startled first officers who had not yet experienced it. We would climb up rising ground on the downwind leg, then, while climbing, call for gear down and add power. Then, following the

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Please note - we have changed the access to the online newsletters so that you will no longer need a password to access them. GO TO OUR WEBSITE AT: www.clipperpioneers.com. To request a current membership list, email sue@clipperpioneers.com with your request. Click on the "Members Only" button on the righthand side to access the current and previous newsletters.

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climbing terrain left we'd add more power and drop a little flap continuing to climb to the final approach, then suddenly see the runway, add flap and land short - since the runway was humped. If we landed too far down the runway we'd be going hell-bent downhill for the terminal. Strangely, the cloud ceiling climbed with us on this approach. It was an odd characteristic of the area. The new co-pilots thought so too.

At that time, the landing field at San Jose, Costa Rica, was a square of patchy grass. When it rained it became a muddy skating rink. One day, I started a take-off roll and went sliding sideways. Taxiing back, we tried again and went sailing off to the left again. I explained to the passengers that we were testing the traction prior to takeoff. The wind was only five knots so we went to the other end, found better traction and gave it to the first officer to take off. He did a fine job and we turned on course to David, Panama. David was my favorite place to land. It was a king-size square of beautiful grass, and, if possible, I worked it out so that it was my turn to land there. One could paint the wheels on that grass and never know when the plane was on the ground.

Our next stop south was Panama City. Usually I tried to leave David early and fly fast to the Bay of Panama. That gave us time to circle the beautiful Archipelago de Las Perlas - the Pearl Islands. I often wondered if I could ever become wealthy enough to buy one of those islands with its shining white beaches and green jungle. The television series "Survivor" beat me to it.

In Panama we stayed in a large wooden hotel that had been rushed to completion for Teddy Roosevelt's inauguration. High ceilings and tall windows gave each large bedroom good air circulation. - No air conditioning, of course. My first time there, I awakened in the morning to find a 3-foot dragon staring at me from a tree branch next to the unscreened window. It was my first close view of an iguana. Little did I realize that I would be eating fried iguana tail served on Pan Am's northbound clippers. It was delicious. The passengers acclaimed it to be the best fried chicken they'd ever had - but wondered why the bones were so white. On Panama's Central Avenue were kiosks selling delicious iguana sandwiches.

This old time tropical classic hotel had a huge expansive cool porch where many colorful planters punches were served to appreciative guests. I very much enjoyed the general ambience, as well as the planters punches.

One night in Panama, a very embarrassed assistant chief pilot, training, landed on the wrong side of the canal at the wrong airport. In another interesting incident one of our pilots experienced an engine failure while taking off in Panama flying a C-46. He dropped down out of sight of the tower controller, so the tower reported the plane crashed. Meanwhile, the pilot was busily zigzagging, dodging the highest terrain, unable to climb on one engine with the new 48,000 pound max load. After fifteen minutes he finally struggled around a hill, and there was the canal. He called the amazed tower controller and said, "I'm flying down the canal. Get everyone out of my way so that I can land" - and he made it.

One of our copilots, to get a date, would go to the American Army nurses' quarters in the evening and stand

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We'd like to have more stories to share! If you have a story you'd like to send, please send it in sooner rather than later! We appreciate you and the interesting stories you send in for all to enjoy! Email to: sue@clipperpioneers.com.

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

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outside and yell "Mary!" Of the several Marys who opened their doors, he would usually get his date.

Panama's main shopping street, Central Ave, was lined with East Indian and Chinese shops where one could buy at freeport prices, cameras, watches, jewelry, carved Chinese furniture, and get a fill of haggling. The sellers loved to haggle. If you bought at first price they were actually disappointed. It was their social life.

On a four-day layover at Panama, I asked my crew if they would like to ride through the canal in a ship. They were delighted with the idea. I visited the main canal office and learned that a cargo vessel was coming through the next day. They very kindly contacted its captain and he said to come ahead. There were four of us - the first officer, myself, a male purser, and a pretty strawberry blond stewardess. We climbed aboard an early train to Colon to cross the isthmus and were transported to the ship with the pilot boat. Captain Hardy Schultz, who welcomed us personally, was very enamored of our stewardess and invited us to dine with him in his quarters, where he regaled us with wartime stories of his trips to Murmansk. Then he spent almost the whole seven hours of the trip with us, explaining interesting points as we traveled through the canal. We anchored in Panama Bay and had a fun dinner with the friendly captain. Then we thanked him profusely and wished him clear sailing as we boarded a launch and returned to our big wooden hotel.

In about 1954 or 1955, on a layover in Managua, Nicaragua, I wandered alone to a rustic restaurant on lake Managua. As I was about to order, I heard a voice coming from a jovial group at a large table in the center of the room: "Captain, Captain, Pan American"! I looked up and one of the men at the big table was hailing me, "Come and join us, Captain! Welcome to Nicaragua!" I was not in uniform, but he had recognized me. I thought that was strange. I realized it was courteous to accept the invitation, so I joined the men at their table. In a few moments I realized I was in the company of Anastasio Somoza Garcia, the president of Nicaragua, and the presidents of two other nations: Jose Antonio Remon of Panama and Rafael Trujillo Molina of the Dominican Republic. They politely used English with me, and I tried my ruptured Spanish with them. They were kind enough to applaud my efforts. Looking around the restaurant, I could see tables with rough-looking men scattered about. Then I knew how I was known. When the president goes out, any strangers near him are identified by his "Secret Service".

Since I did not have to fly for two days, I accepted their generous offer of drinks and soon could hardly see what I was eating. These fellows all collected guns. Since I also was a gun collector we had something mutual to talk about. I made a big point of staying away from politics and so did they. They asked sound intelligent interested questions about flying. I told President Somoza how I used Nicaragua's 11-minute volcano for fun, and he really enjoyed that.

President Somoza insisted that I visit him the next day to see his gun collection. He sent an armored limousine for me, and fortified with aspirin I climbed in feeling quite grand, and a little hungover. We had an enjoyable lunch, then an enjoyable afternoon admiring and discussing his guns. Most were beautifully engraved presentation models. I drooled over a pair of pearl-handled gold and silver "Peacemaker" Colt revolvers. I wonder where they are now.

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Pan Am Historical Society has a Facebook page. You can view it here:
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pan-Am-Historical-Foundation/226994925218>

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Six months later, President Remon of Panama was dead - assassinated. Six years later, President Trujillo of the Dominican Republic was dead - assassinated.

Persons aspiring to become dictators should realize that life can be "short" - I don't know about "sweet".

Managua is located at the north end of the very large lake Nicaragua, the south east end of which was once connected to the Caribbean Sea. Eventually this connection closed and sharks in lake Nicaragua were trapped in what became a large fresh water lake. The sharks, I believe, are now the only fresh water sharks in the world.

This lake once competed with the Isthmus of Panama for the location of a canal to connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Some sly legislators in congress subtly influenced the vote by urging the U.S. postmaster to print U.S. stamps picturing erupting volcanoes and the word "Nicaragua" printed on them. Congressmen argued that volcanos and earthquakes would destroy a canal.

I learned that in this lake, not far from Managua, there was an island called Isla De Los Muertos - Island of the Dead, which was allegedly inhabited by spirits. Strange statues and idols of stone were scattered through the forest. No one knew anything about the origin of either idols or spirits. This place I just had to see. The local fishermen absolutely refused to take me. The word got around and no one would rent me a boat. Frustrated, I decided I'd have to make that visit in the future. That time has yet to arrive. The locals are deathly afraid of that island.

On a trip as a copilot on a C-46 flight with Check Captain Bob Pfaf, we took a load of U.S. dimes from New Orleans to San Salvador, El Salvador, just in time to pay the military their salaries. They used U.S. dimes for their currency, and Bob was told to get that cargo delivered in a hurry, so that the military did not rebel. He did.

One night in San Salvador, I was reading in bed. The room started to shimmy, and my bed danced away from the lamp. Mumbling to myself, I pushed the bed back to the light. Just as I started to read again, the bed tip-toed away from the lamp again. After two more times, I dressed and went downstairs. The desk clerk said, "So sorry, Senor. It is just one of our earthquakes."

Other than Brownsville, Texas, New Orleans was a northern destination of our Central American flights. We left Merida, Mexico, and arrived in early evening at our New Orleans hotel. We'd send our bags to the rooms while we bellied up to the shrimp and oyster bar. After a dozen raw oysters and a dozen steamed shrimp we would go upstairs, switch our uniforms for civies, head for Bourbon Street, and have dinner at perhaps Arnaud's famed restaurant. Our departure for the south run through Central America was the next night. We had time to stroll on Bourbon Street and enjoy the Dixie-Land bands.

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Treasurer's Report

The current bank balance as of February 28 2020 is \$16,988.75.

If you haven't sent in your check, your name has been dropped from the mailing list as of this issue. For any information, please contact Stu Archer.

Thanks for your support of this newsletter and the website!

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When the French colony was formed at New Orleans there was a severe shortage of women to marry and begin families. The colony leaders asked France to send women. France emptied its prisons and shipped the female convicts to New Orleans. These ladies did not settle down but proceeded to practice their lucrative occupation - the world's oldest - that had gotten them sequestered in jail in the first place. This would not do. The colony fathers again sent to France for women - demanding that they be decent. This time, young ladies from the middle class were encouraged to go. They arrived with nuns as chaperons. The colonists had built a large log hall for them, which they were not permitted to leave until married. Men could come and do their wooing in the well-lighted hall in the presence of the nuns. A priest married them, and they were then free to join society.

It appears that the first women sent over were all barren, and the second group all prolific, for today New Orleans society claims much descent from the second group and none from the first.

Some supplies were brought to the colony by tough barge men, who floated their barges down the Mississippi to New Orleans. They were paid in the French Colonial currency, mostly in ten unit bills. These bills had DIX printed on them, the French word for ten. The barge men called them "dixies," and eventually referred to New Orleans itself as "Dixie". When Daniel D. Emmett composed his popular marching song, he referred to the whole South as Dixie. Not many Southerners today realize that sobriquet was derived from early uneducated barge men who could not pronounce French.

As I write this (8/30/05), hurricane Katrina is still busy drowning New Orleans. How sad.

On a dark night, Capt. Jim Evans and a first officer were ferrying a DC 3 from the island of Cozumel to Merida, Mexico. Shortly after take-off, at about 500 feet, the pilots noticed that they were descending. Jim increased the power and eased the wheel back for more climb - and the descent increased. Soon they just stopped. "Well, what the hell," said the copilot." Jim said, "I second that." They aimed their flashlights at the side windows, and they saw - water! "How in hell did we do that!?", Jim exclaimed. They seemed to be floating well, so they put on life jackets, climbed out on a wing and up on the fuselage, and spent the rest of the night trying to figure out how they would explain this one to the chief pilot.

The blue light of dawn revealed the reason they had performed a skillful smooth water landing with a land plane: Number one engine Nacelle had snapped its upper engine mounts and allowed the engine to point forty-five degrees downward. Every time the captain had increased the power, the still running number One had pulled the plane down, until they eased into the water.

Soon a Cozumel fishing boat spotted the plane and crew and came to their rescue, towing their plane to shallow water. Airport ground crew then towed the DC 3 up on the beach and back to the airport. Mechanics from Miami brought two replacement engines and the plane was ferried to Miami for overhaul. This plane was back in service within four months.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE

Check out the website - www.clipperpioneers.com - for more detailed information about the ports of call - where you can go and what you can see!

Don't miss out - come and join us on this fun cruise with your fellow PanAmer's!

Thanks to those of you who have sent us stories! Keep 'em coming!

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

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/>

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.

Check Out the Lockerbie Website

A website has been created for Lockerbie. It can be viewed at www.lockerbie103.com. It might be a worthwhile site to check out, especially for those who plan on visiting Lockerbie. Be sure to enter the web address in the browser (not Google Search, etc.) with the www. Otherwise, they will get hundreds of Lockerbies and 103s and may not find the web site after 15 pages. ~Claude Hudspeth

Pan Am -- Personal Tributes to A Global Aviation Pioneer

The Pan Am Historical Foundation recently published the highly acclaimed *Pan Am -- Personal Tributes to a Global Aviation Pioneer*, a book that caught the attention of Pan Amers and aviation enthusiasts around the world. Visit <https://www.panam.org/shop/669-panam90-book> to order.

Thank You for the Stories You're Sending In! Keep 'em coming!!

We've been getting some good stories about memories of your times with Pan Am, and we want you to know we appreciate it! Keep them coming, and you will see them in the upcoming issues! Are there memories you've written down that you'd like to share with us in this newsletter - short or long? Have you come across an interesting article that you'd like to share with us? Would you share pieces from a book you've written? Send them to sue@clipperpioneers.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

Richard White passed away January 28, 2020 in Sun City West, Az. He was 85 years old, born on Jan. 5, 1935 in Connecticut. He was in the Air Force before joining PanAm. He also spent time with United before retiring. He will be dearly missed by his friends and family.

Captain John Andrew Ohrn, Sr., 80 years old, born in Hyannis, MA, August 17, 1939 passed away peacefully of natural causes in Jupiter, FL, February 16, 2020. John lived in Hyannis, MA and Jupiter, FL. J Captain Ohrn was born to Edna and Carl and raised on Cape Cod, MA. John attended Colby College, and matriculated to the United States Naval Aviation Academy in Pensacola, FL for flight school. He then became a Naval Flight Officer, stationed in Pearl Harbor, HI and met his wife Judy Joslin and began his family. Following his Naval career, John embarked on a prestigious career with Pan American Airways. His final base in Berlin, Germany as a Pan Am IGS pilot came with life long friendships and camaraderie that he maintained until his passing. Everyone who meets Big John remembers John and looks forward to seeing him again. Always quick with a joke, a flash of a smile and happy to tell a few tall tales, which oddly proved to be true.

Richard Bertoli, age 82, after surviving many years of death-defying illnesses, passed away on February 27, 2020 surrounded by his loving family. Rich was the first son of Charles "Chili" and Dorothy Bertoli. He was born in San Francisco on Nov. 28, 1937, and grew up in Berkeley, graduated from Berkeley High, Santa Rosa Jr. College, and Pensacola Flight School. Richard served eight years as a naval pilot and was hired by Pan American Airways in 1966. Rich relocated his family from Coronado NAS to Angwin in 1966 and St. Helena in 1977. As a PanAm pilot, he was able to take his family on many worldly vacations and after 28 years he retired as Captain. Rich loved nature, animals and was an avid birder with an extensive life-list. He enjoyed bluegrass and attending Dixieland festivals. He loved watching his children and grandchildren participate in sports. Rich and his family were at the 1982 Big Game to witness The Play. Rich is survived by his loving wife, Linda (nee Youso), of 57 years. They celebrated their 50th anniversary by renewing their vows in Reno accompanied by family. He leaves his three children, Paul, John (Jamie), and Sarah and four grandchildren, Charles, Callie, Jake, and Zac. He was preceded in death by his brothers David and John. Richard was loved dearly and will be missed.

Thomas Lester Wallace, 85, passed away April 11, 2019 in Las Vegas. He leaves behind his boys Lester, Darien, and Lyle, his wife Wanda, and his incredible passion for flying. You could take the boy out of Pan Am, but you truly could never separate Pan Am from Tom. Flying was Tom and Tom was flying. We laughed that you could start a conversation on any topic, and he could somehow link it to flying. Gorilla breeding in Argentina? He'd have a story about it. An exchange student told me he thought he might be an airline pilot, but I didn't see how that could happen as he didn't have that overwhelming passion for planes and flying that Tom did.

For more information and full obituaries 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 Sue Forde at sue@clipperpioneers.com, or mail to: Sue Forde, P. O. Box 3457, Sequim, WA 98382

Coronavirus: Scammers follow the headlines

Scammers are taking advantage of fears surrounding the Coronavirus. They're setting up websites to sell bogus products, and using fake emails, texts, and social media posts as a ruse to take your money and get your personal information.

The emails and posts may be promoting awareness and prevention tips, and fake information about cases in your neighborhood. They also may be asking you to donate to victims, offering advice on unproven treatments, or contain malicious email attachments.

Here are some tips to help you keep the scammers at bay:

Don't click on links from sources you don't know. It could download a virus onto your computer or device. Make sure the anti-malware and anti-virus software on your computer is up to date.

Watch for emails claiming to be from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or experts saying that have information about the virus. For the most up-to-date information about the Coronavirus, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Ignore online offers for vaccinations. If you see ads touting prevention, treatment, or cure claims for the Coronavirus, ask yourself: if there's been a medical breakthrough, would you be hearing about it for the first time through an ad or sales pitch?

Do your homework when it comes to donations. whether through charities or crowdfunding sites. Don't let anyone rush you into making a donation. If someone wants donations in cash, by gift card, or by wiring money, don't do it.

Be alert to "investment opportunities." The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is warning people about online promotions, including on social media, claiming that the products or services of publicly-traded companies can prevent, detect, or cure coronavirus and that the stock of these companies will dramatically increase in value as a result.

Most of all - be sure to wash your hands, and stay indoors if you have a cough or any kind of flu symptoms - and don't go out unless it's necessary. Stay safe!

(from <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/02/coronavirus-scammers-follow-headlines>)

You are a part of this wonderful Pan Am "family". Are there memories you've written down that you'd like to share with us in this newsletter? We've gotten some great response, and there will continue to be interesting stories coming in the upcoming months. Please share yours with us, as well! Please send them to Sue by email to: sue@clipperpioneers.com.

Please update your email address and phone number if it's been changed!

Email or write to:

***Clipper Pioneers, c/o Sue Forde, P. O. Box 3457, Sequim WA 98382
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