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## Volcanoes in Central America

*by Bill Nash*

Not a cloud in the sky, but we were forced to fly by instruments in our Pan Am propellor planes over Central America, where a dense haze blotted out the world. Water droplets clung to the smokey exhalation of volcanoes, and warmer air over cooler ground caused the filmy yellowish smog to squat on the ground and thicken up to 11,000 feet. This was Central America in the winter.

In the summer a more direct sun heated the ground, and the ground passed this heat along to the air right above it, which, becoming lighter, arose high into the sky, carrying with it the coughings of the volcanoes. The resultant sharply clear visibility uncovered the beautiful mountainous terrain, exposing volcanoes for miles, north and south. Of course that rising air carried water vapor up with it, which, upon cooling to the dewpoint, condensed into visible behemoths of clouds we call thunderstorms. We could dodge around, under, and between them.

There was a volcano in Nicaragua by which one could set a clock. It spit every eleven minutes. With new first officers it was fun to point out that it would erupt, for instance, at 9:02 A.M. When it did, first officers initially would be wide eyed at the clairvoyance of their captain, but being sharp, they soon realized there was a more mundane reason for my talent. After the volcano had obliged by spouting smoke and rocks as big as automobiles at exactly 9:02, I revealed to my co-pilot its eleven minute time sequence, and that I had seen it go off in the distance at 8:51.

Often, for the passengers, I circled the cones of volcanoes, and they could look down into an old crater, with perhaps a lake in it 9,000 feet high, or into the volcano Poas next to San Jose, Costa Rica, with a gray mass of fluid magma surging back and forth. Other craters were dry, but perpetually smoked. I never flew passengers over Nicaragua's eleven minute cone, but did give them the time that it would spout if we were near enough to see it. I did not explain its regularity to them, but let them ponder the mystique of Pan American pilots.

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### No Password Needed for Members Only Section of the Website

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](http://www.clipperpioneers.com). To request a current membership list, email [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com) with your request. Click on the "Members Only" button on the righthand side to access the current and previous newsletters.

## Volcanoes in Central America

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Costa Rica is a land of flowers, colorful flower carts, and handsome people. This country spends more on its school children than it does on its military, and to this day it is one of the world's most literate nations. In 1954, my first wife and I adopted three siblings, two girls and a boy, from a Costa Rican orphanage.

San Jose was surrounded by mountains and two semi-active volcanoes. To get out of that valley without doing a hardness test on the side of a mountain, we would perform a climbing holding pattern before proceeding on course to Panama or Nicaragua. One of our planes, leaving the valley at altitude, but still flying by instruments, finally popped out of the clouds at Puerto Limon on the Caribbean coast. The pilots still could see nothing in front of them but gray. However, bright sunshine shone in the cockpit side windows. Then it occurred to the crew that the source of that pungent odor they had experienced inside the clouds was the furnace-like breath of a volcano. Tiny hot particles had frosted their windshield. At Panama they performed a tricky landing, able to see only through the side windows.

In Guatemala, 13,000 foot Mount Agua often smoked and regurgitated lava. Near it, at over 6,000 feet, an extinct volcano had left a huge crater lake. Once, while swimming in it, a huge living thing surfaced directly in front of me. It just looked at me, while I made a frothy retreat back to the boat. Later, some research indicated it to be a manatee or Dugong, huge but harmless. One of our stewards made many dives in this lake to recover items of archeological value - statuettes, pottery, etc.

The natives of Central America's countries grow some of the best coffee under the shade of trees on the sides of volcanoes. In San Salvador enterprising entrepreneurs built a scenic hotel on the slope of one volcano which faced another cone. Brave guests could watch the smoking, or its fire at night, while relaxing on an expansive veranda sipping the local coffee.

A University of Pennsylvania geophysical scientist, upon learning that I flew through Central America, asked me to photograph for him certain meteor craters that existed on a flat area between volcanic mountain ranges in Central Mexico. I did so, but wrote to him that I believed the "craters" were very old volcanic craters, not meteor craters as he had thought. Some of these "craters" had the sides of old cones projecting up around them. It appeared to me that material, washing down from the heights on both sides of the valley had caused the floor of the valley to gradually fill in, rising on the sides of many small volcanic cones until the sediment was level with their tops. Examining the photos, he agreed with me.

Navigation in Central America called for interesting innovations. Mexico City had the only precision approach system. Pan Am and some of the nations had installed omni-directional signal beacons at airports which we could use to follow bearings to or from the station and descend on for instrument approaches. In the summer, thunderstorms, generating electrical power for greater than our beacons, caused our instrument needles to point at the storms, not the beacon. For several airports we pilots worked out instrument approaches using powerful local broadcast stations (nothing else that powerful was nearby) without revealing this to either our company or

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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](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com).**

**Don't forget to check out our website at: [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com)**

## Volcanoes in Central America

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the Federal Aviation Administration. This procedure was not approved, but we were the ones whose necks were out there amidst all of that vertical real estate.

Navigating in the winter haze with mountainous terrain on all sides called for other non-airline techniques. We would fly by time and zigzag headings to artificial or natural prominences on the surface of the earth to destination airports. I still have my charts marking routes through canyons to destination airports. Short route legs held for minutes and seconds with magnetic headings for each were followed exactly, flying low enough to see the ground and to identify the prominences through the haze when they came into view. This required close attention, preventing our flying up blind canyons, which could become too narrow to turn in or too steep to climb out of. Using this method, the destination airport became the final prominence.

We could sneak into San Jose ,Costa Rica, this way, coming in from the Pacific coast at Punta Arenas and following the meandering track we had marked on our maps to the airport.

Medellin, Colombia, though it is not in Central America, was the southernmost destination on our Central American missions. The route from Panama to Medellin crossed Turbo, Colombia, the area of the world's heaviest rainfall, then to the headwaters of the San Jorge river and south through rugged canyons below the ridges to Medellin. Through these canyons, with an overcast below the ridges, we did our zigzag navigation until we came to Antioquia, (we called it Annie Oakley), a small red-roofed town on a river that ran left and right in a canyon across our course. Just beyond "Annie Oakley" a canyon wall arose in front of us to a plateau. We would spiral up to the overcast. Most of the time we could see across the plateau. If we saw a huge dead tree, we knew we were looking all the way across and could squeeze between the overcast and the plateau. After passing the dead tree we could drop down into the valley to Medellin. If the clouds covered the plateau we made a 30 degree climbing spiral into the overcast, then headed for our Medellin beacon or favorite broadcast station and made a descending race track descent to the airport.

We often overnighted in very clean Guatemala City. The air there was the most invigorating I have ever breathed. One just had to take fast walks and deep inhalations while inspecting the square block market and shops which exhibited colorful hand-woven textiles, wood carvings, leather work, silver and gold jewelry and, if one was lucky, some original Mayan clay figurines. Indians had secret sources they had uncovered while harvesting chicle from wild sapota trees.

Guatemala has at times experienced government changes by revolution rather than election. One of our crews' transports was mistaken for revolutionaries en route to the hotel from the airport and was shot up. The captain was hit, but recovered.

On certain religious holidays to remember the dead, huge heavy religious statues are carried in a parade by volunteers who pay to do so, the amount according to the distance they carry. They join many others by placing their shoulders long poles supporting the platforms. There is no music. All is hushed - no sound, except the shuffling of feet. The statues sway ghost-like, and the faces of both spectators and carriers are serious. It is an experience one cannot soon forget.

**TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE**

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

## Another Lesson Learned on a Very Hot Day

*By Captain Robert Lee Bragg Edited by Dorothy A. Boyd-Bragg, Ph.D.*

In the early 1980s, I was at the New Delhi (DEL) airport, on the ground, waiting to pick up a flight to Frankfurt (FRA). It was an exceptionally hot day as I recall. As “my” B-747 landed, fifteen of the seventeen tires deflated. As it slowly taxied up to the ramp, I could actually hear the fusible plugs in each wheel popping as they melted. The plugs were doing just what they were designed to do. Fusible plugs are a safety device that releases the air in a tire to prevent an explosion in extremely hot conditions.

After what he thought was a routine and smooth landing, the pilot realized when he got off the plane that almost all of the tires were flat - very flat. His only comment was that he hadn't hit the brakes hard - that the runway was simply very long and the tires had ample chance to heat and over-heat. There is, after all, no inside indicator to rely upon in a B-747. Inside, there is only a gauge indicating the temperature of the brakes, there's nothing about the air in your tires. It's not a bad thing. It's just something you need to be aware of on a hot day.

Within an hour, however, I was taking off in the same plane on my way to Frankfurt. As usual, the parts pool had the necessary replacement tires and had installed them efficiently. Life was good.

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## An Unknown Danger of Flight: Walking out the Back of a B-707

*by Captain Robert Lee Bragg edited by Dorothy A. Boyd-Bragg, Ph.D.*

At Pan Am in the early 1970's, when I was a first officer, we had an experienced flight attendant who accidentally walked out the rear door of a B-707. Since it was quite a distance from the ground, she broke her arm badly. She was actually lucky she didn't do something far worse.

After being off flight status for several months while her arm mended, she returned to flight status and was showing some of her friends how she had accidentally fallen out of the plane and – you guessed it – she once again fell out of the same door and once again broke the same arm. Talk about history repeating itself.

Now you know how the red strap used to cross the door at the back of the B-707 came to be known, at least to some, as the “Barbara strap.” I don't know whether or not the strap's namesake ever heard it referred to in that way – or, if she did hear reference made to a “Barbara strap,” whether or not she smiled. If I were a betting man, I'd guess she would have cringed or winced rather than smiled.

### Treasurer's Report

The current bank balance as of January 31, 2020 is \$18,246.05.

If you haven't sent in your check, your name will be dropped from the mailing list as of April's issue. For any information, please contact Stu Archer.

Thanks for your support of this newsletter and the website!

## Make Plans for our Next Cruise in 2020!

Dear Pan Amer's: I trust all of you got home safe and sound from our fabulous TransAtlantic cruise. It was wonderful meeting up with old friends and making new ones. I'm very happy to announce our next adventure is a great 11day cruise to the Caribbean. This is for all the Pan Folks and friends. Come join the fun, It is a great cruise and one of the very few for the entire year that will visit Panama and the best price of all. It's a great itinerary. If interested, get a deposit to Carmen, the only cabins available are those listed below.

### Serenade of the Seas Mar. 2, 2020

**Inside \$1050 / Outside \$1250 / Balcony \$1950**

RATES - are "from", Non-Refundable, per person, cruise only, double occupancy and based on availability at time of booking. Port / government taxes are additional (\$398. per person); surcharge for amenities (gifts, cocktail parties, etc.) is \$125. per person.. Deposit is \$450.00 pe person. Major credit cards accepted but checks are preferred. Make out to Interline Travels, 456 Merlin Ct., Tallahassee, FL 32301.

To reserve call Carmen direct 786-252-7838; [INTERLINETRAVELS@YAHOO.COM](mailto:INTERLINETRAVELS@YAHOO.COM). For questions and further information call Stu Archer (for Pan Am pilot and cruise coordinator) at 305-238-0911.

#### VISITING PORTS OF CALL

PUERTO LIMON

COLÓN, PANAMA

COLÓN, PANAMA

ORANJESTAD, ARUBA

PUERTO LIMON – Come to Puerto Limon ready to meet a raw and beautiful side unlike any other in Costa Rica.

COLÓN, PANAMA – Home to the Panama Canal's Atlantic Ocean entryway, Colón is the second-largest city in Panama.

COLÓN, PANAMA – Cartagena de Indias boasts romantic colonial architecture and a Caribbean coast glittering in shades of bright white and aquamarine.

ORANJESTAD, ARUBA – Welcome to Aruba— or as the locals say, Bon bini. Here Dutch traditions mix with island charm.

WILLEMSTAD, CURACAO – Curaçao is a treasure trove of cultural attractions, rich history, and natural scenery — from desert landscapes and rugged cliffs to 38 spectacular, and mostly secluded, beaches.

**Check out the website - [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://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!**

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

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## 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](mailto:cblayd@aol.com)

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## 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](mailto:davecriley@comcast.net), and send your email contact. They started out with 5 and have grown to 17. ~from Dave Criley

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## 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/>

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## Layovers for Pan Am

Check out Pan American layovers at [www.paacrewlayover.com](http://www.paacrewlayover.com), where some 81 cities and over 161 hotels are shown in photos.

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## Check Out the Lockerbie Website

A website has been created for Lockerbie. It can be viewed at [www.lockerbie103.com](http://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

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## 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](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com) or [jerryholmes747@gmail.com](mailto: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

**James Sieger** passed away Feb 3, 2020, in Las Vegas. He was 88 years old, born on June 15, 1931 in La Crosse, WI. He entered the Navy in 1955 and joined Pan Am in 1966 doing most of his flying on the west coast. He also spent 10 years with United before retiring.

**Hudnalle B. McLean, Jr.**, 84, passed away Wednesday, July 25, 2018. Born in Richland County, SC, he was the son of the late Hudnalle B. McLean, Sr. and Helen Allen McLean. He was a veteran of the United States Air Force and a retired commercial airline pilot for Pan Am. Mr. McLean was a devoted member of Sandy Level Baptist Church. He is survived by his wife Mittie Mclean, their children and grandchildren.

**Daniel Joseph Affourtit** passed away on Nov. 14, 2019. He was 82 years old.

**Chuck Bleakley**, 75, of Clyde, passed away peacefully at his home, surrounded by his family, on December 29, 2019. He was preceded in death by his parents, Charles McCrea, Jr. & Elizabeth Potter; and sister, Nancy. Chuck is survived by his wife of 42 years, Amy Denise Bleakley; daughter, Gina (Joe); son, Charles; grandchildren, Gigi, Abi, & Jase; brother, Mike; and sister, Mimi. Chuck served in the US Army during the Vietnam War. After being discharged from the Army, he became an airline pilot and flew for National, Pan Am, and retired from United Airlines. Chuck was a proud member of AA for 38 years. He enjoyed flying and anything aviation related, coffee, detailing cars, and being a clean freak. Chuck and Denise made a great team and he will be dearly missed by his friends and family. No Services are planned at this time.

**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](http://www.clipperpioneers.com). Know of someone from Pan Am who has passed? Email the obit to Jerry Holmes at [jerryholmes747@gmail.com](mailto:jerryholmes747@gmail.com) or [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com), or mail to: Sue Forde, P. O. Box 3457, Sequim, WA 98382**

## Reminders about self-protection

You can protect yourself from these types of dangers by keeping the following things in mind:

■ Never open your door to a stranger. Although this may sound like a common sense tip, many people will open their door to someone who presents himself as a maintenance worker or someone in authority. Always try to speak through the door and keep your door locked at all times. Be sure to keep your windows locked at all times as well, especially if you're on the ground floor. If you notice something suspicious call 911 right away. Don't try to take matters into your own hands.

■ Don't give personal information over the phone. These days there are types of scams out there, even from those pretending to be the IRS by scaring people to give them money. Never give your personal information or bank information over the phone. If you suspect you are being targeted by a scam artist, contact your local police department.

■ Invest in an alarm system. An alarm system provides great peace of mind when you're out and especially when you're home. Consider investing in one to deter intruders. Many alarm system companies will also provide you with signage to let others know an alarm system is on the premise. This can serve as a great crime deterrent as many would-be thieves won't try to break in if they think an alarm system is in place. (From Senior Living - <https://www.seniorliving.org/safety/home/>)

## Is that text message about your FedEx package really a scam?

You may be skeptical when someone you don't know sends you a text message you didn't expect and it tells you to click on a link. Maybe that little voice in your head starts talking to you. I know mine does. It says, "Hmm, this could be a scam. Maybe someone wants to steal my personal information. Or get me to pay for something."

I guess that's why scammers come up with new stories all the time, like a package tracking scam we're hearing about. Here's how it works.

Scammers send a text message with a fake shipment tracking code and a link to update your delivery preferences. In this case, the message says it's from FedEx.

But they might use the name of another well-known shipping company, or the good old U.S. Postal Service.

Cue that skeptical little voice in your head. Here's what it might be thinking:

"Was I expecting a package delivery?"

"Did I send a package to someone?"

"Did I ask for text notifications?"

Tip: If you get an unexpected text message, don't click on any links. If you think it could be legit, contact the company using a website or phone number you know is real. Don't use the information in the text message.

In this version of the scam the link takes you to a fake Amazon website. There, you're invited to take a customer satisfaction survey. And you might just win a free prize. But to get it, you have to give them your credit card number to pay for shipping.

Hopefully that wise little voice in your head is thinking:

"I shouldn't have clicked that link!"

"Why would a link to my package delivery preferences take me to an unrelated website?"

"You said the prize was free, but now I need to pay. What else am I agreeing to pay for?"

"I really shouldn't have clicked on that link!"

Tip: Some companies offer so-called "free trials" that come with hidden costs. Here's what you should consider before you sign up for a free trial offer.

Scammers may be turning to text messages as a new tactic. But there's a lot you can do right now to protect yourself. Read [How to Recognize and Report Spam Text Messages](#) to learn what to do about spam text messages and how to report them.

by Alvaro Puig, Consumer Education Specialist, FTC  
<https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2020/02/text-message-about-your-fedex-package-really-scam>

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

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