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Tales from the Tenerife Crash that Never Got Reported

by Captain Robert Lee Bragg edited by Dorothy A. Boyd-Bragg, Ph.D. - (Continued from last issue.)

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. Did he have any family members involved? 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. He agreed, 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

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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.

Tales from the Tenerife Crash that Never Got Reported

~ continued from previous page

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 concern was very much appreciated. There was also a Pan Am captain who came from Berlin who joined us a bit later, and the union's safety chairman from the Berlin base. The Iberia captain was on a layover at Tenerife when the accident occurred, the Pan Am Captain, as soon as he heard about the accident, came by any mode of transportation he could find to get to Tenerife. The union representative (ALPA) came because of job responsibilities.

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 them, but memory is short, and I do not, unfortunately, recall their names.

The Gaggle Finally Arrives

The next morning, Tuesday, representatives from Pan Am, FAA, NTSB, Boeing, Pratt & Whitney, as well as representatives from KLM, all showed up in my room and started asking questions. After a while, I stated that I had written ten pages of notes regarding the night of the accident and would be glad to read it to them. All agreed that this was a good idea.

After I was finished, one of KLM's attorneys stated, "It looks like our man took off without a take off clearance." I couldn't believe what I heard. I was sure he heard about his statement later – basically he had admitted that the accident was caused by KLM.

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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.

Tales from the Tenerife Crash that Never Got Reported

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After this group departed a U.S. Air Force colonel appeared and, after introducing himself, told us that he had just arrived from Frankfurt (Rhein/Main Airport) with a C-141 and a C-130 and that they would be evacuating all crew members and passengers within the next few days. The C-130 flew from Las Palmas to Tenerife, landed on the taxi way, boarded all stretcher cases, flew back to Los Palmas, transferred the stretchers to the C-141, which in turn evacuated all stretcher cases back to the states. It took quite a while to get the job done but no one complained.

The Handling of the Deceased

Ultimately, there were 583 bodies from the accident. The airport authorities selected the largest plane hangar at the Tenerife airport and designated it as a morgue. They also informed both airlines, Pan Am and KLM, that if the bodies weren't removed from the island within three days that a mass grave would be dug and all bodies would be buried together.

Both airlines decided to remove their passengers' and crew members' bodies back to their departure points – Amsterdam for KLM and the U.S. for Pan Am. California or elsewhere? The first problem was that of locating enough caskets. Pan Am secured their required number from the U.K. and flew them to Tenerife. KLM secured theirs from the Netherlands. To my knowledge, this was the first accident where bodies were brought back to their country of origin.

Later Peter Jennings, then ABC's Middle East correspondent, told me that seeing all of the bodies in the Tenerife hangar was one of the worse scenes he'd ever seen, and he was a war correspondent in Vietnam. He admitted that he'd learned that things can always get worse.

Hotel Menzies, Santa Cruz, Tenerife

After being at the hospital for three days, I was definitely ready to get out and head home. Just prior to my departing the hospital, one of the male flight attendants who had been assigned to assist the crew members in the hospital came by my room and asked what clothing I needed. My response was simple, "Everything." I had lost my suitcase in the crash. I gave him underwear sizes, shirt sizes, pants sizes, etc. Later, the Iberia captain & the Pan Am captain based in Berlin helped me physically get from the hospital to the hotel.

When we arrived at the hotel and as I walked through the lobby, I happened to see Pan Am's Amsterdam manager, who had been brought down to translate KLM's news releases as they were all in Dutch. I walked over and asked him if he knew anything about Pan Am's plans to evacuate the crew. His response back was, "I had nothing to worry about as many would never leave the island." To say that this statement really got to me would be a gross understatement. I grumbled even more as I hobbled back to my room, which was at the rear of the hotel - remember I had a very heavy cast on my leg.

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

Tales from the Tenerife Crash that Never Got Reported

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When I got into my room, here is what our flight attendant had graciously provided me with: a very small sweater; an even smaller pair of jockey shorts; a pair of beach sandals; a tooth brush, and no tooth paste. To say the obvious, I couldn't wear any of the clothes, and I was even more annoyed than I had been before.

I managed to hobble back to the lobby and proceeded to tell Pan Am's Amsterdam manager what I had found in my room and that it was my intention to call a press conference and tell everyone how poorly Pan Am crew members were being treated. Very shortly after my statement, he took off and within five minutes our vice president for operations came back and started telling me how glad everyone was that we had survived the crash. My immediate thought was, "Why in hell didn't someone call us back instead of our waiting in the hospital for two full days, not knowing what was happening." I was then ushered into the dining room where you would have thought a big party was going on. Wine, beer, and lots and lots of food were everywhere.

I didn't think it appropriate for airline officials to be in a party atmosphere at the main hotel where the accident investigation was just getting underway. I said what I thought. I think it was at this time it was decided to get me off the island just as soon as possible. I was told that if I wished I could leave the next morning – along with Peter Jennings. I finally thought most of the problems were behind me. I was wrong.

The Trip from Tenerife Back to the U.S.

Peter Jennings, eight of the Pan Am passengers, and I departed early the next morning on a small commuter plane for Los Palmas, to connect with a non-stop flight to London. We were met at Los Palmas by a Pan Am ticket agent at the gate who told us he had our tickets and that he would be back to show us to the departure gate. He didn't show up until the Iberia flight had departed for London without us. Peter Jennings then took over and arranged for a flight to Madrid connecting with another London Flight.

When we arrived in Madrid, no one met us, and Peter Jennings once again arranged things. Among other things, he got us taxis to the international departure terminal. We had no funds.

This was even more frustrating as Pan Am had a ticket counter and operations at the Madrid Airport. Ultimately, we finally made it to London and connected with Pan Am's "Round the World" flight back to New York.

Everything that Pan Am had arranged for the crew didn't work. On a look back basis, I should have worn what Pan Am had provided me with instead of the borrowed clothes that I did wear back. Then I would have really been able to draw attention to Pan Am's appalling lack of concern for the crew members and surviving passengers. I had missed my chance.

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

ADVENTURE OF THE SEAS

JUNE 7, 2021 – JUNE 17, 2021 Round trip Copenhagen

Dear Pan Amer's:

To our family of travelers, travel is not about merely grazing the surface of a destination; it's about learning, building human connections, and exploring what life has to offer. For all of us ex us ex Pan Am—travel is life. We will emerge from this crisis more empathetic, engaged, and eager to travel more than ever before and will be much more appreciative of the world and all its beauty. Therefore, after much thought and consideration on our next cruise, we have chosen to explore the Baltic and its beauty.

We'll be sailing on Royal Caribbean's Adventure of the Seas June 7, 2021 for an 10 day venture giving plenty of leeway for safe travel. Our cruise includes all meals, Vegas style shows/ entertainment ,accommodations of your choice and a wide variety of activities onboard. Join our Captain Stu Archer in special Pan Am cocktail parties plus some other tricks up his sleeve, ports of call to dream about and much, much more. This is an open invitation for your family and friends to join the fun and have a great time.

ITINERARY:

Mon 07 Jun 2021	Copenhagen, Denmark	05:00 PM		Boarding
Tue 08 Jun 2021				CruisingCruising
Wed 09 Jun 2021	Riga, Latvia1	0:00 AM0	6:00 PM	Docked
Thu 10 Jun 2021	Tallinn, Estonia	11:00 AM	07:00 PM	Docked
Fri 11Jun 2021	St. Petersburg, Russia	07:00 AM		Docked
Sat 12 Jun 2021	St. Petersburg, Russia	06:00 PM		Docked
Sun 13 Jun 2021	Helsinki, Finland	07:00 AM	05:00 PM	Docked
Mon 14 Jun 2021	Stockholm, Sweden	08:00 AM	05:00 PM	Docked
Tue 15 Jun 2021	Cruising			Cruising
Wed 16 Jun 2021	Copenhagen, Denmark	11:00 AM		Docked
Thu 17Jun 2021	Copenhagen, Denmark			Departure

Cabins from: \$999 Inside * \$1199 Ocean view * \$1959 Balcony *\$2450 Jr. Suites

Rate factor 5/15/2020—cruise only, per person, double occupancy (singles pay 200%) and based on ongoing daily pricing at time of booking with Royal Caribbean. Port charges and government taxes additional (\$456.24PP). Book early and lock in your price. Insurance is available according to category of cabin chosen. Look and book thru Royal Caribbean's AIR2SEA program and get the best airfare deals. Third/fourth passenger rates available upon request. Deposit is \$450 per person and all major credit cards are accepted ; however, and as always we prefer and appreciate to receive deposits and or full payments by check. Additional is a fee for Pan Am amenities at \$125 per person for onboard parties, discount at specialty restaurants and gifts; this is a private fund for Pan Am activities and only checks are accepted. Checks payable to and mail to INTERLINE TRAVELS, 456 MERLIN CT., TALLAHASSEE, FL 32301.

Throughout the months we will be sending out updates on all the different ports of call to help you plan your itinerary and make the most of your travel photo album. ~Carmen (786-252-7838).

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

Jean-Jacques Pierre Aime Joseph (JJ) LeBlanc passed away on Friday, June 19, 2020 at the age of 85. He was born to Dr. Jean and Marie LeBlanc in Manchester, NH on December 8, 1934 along with his twin sister, Jacqueline.

JJ served as a lieutenant in the US Navy as a Naval Aviator. After his military service, JJ worked for PanAm as a pilot, where he met his wife of 53 years, Joan Novak. JJ finished his career with United Airlines.

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**

CORRECTIONS: In the recent Clipper pioneers, Bob Bragg mentions Pan Am went out of business in 1989. Pan Am went out of business on December 4th 1991. Another date that will live in infamy. I was in Rio. ~ Ed Spellacy

Health Tips

Knock one back. [A glass of red wine](#) a day is good for you. A number of studies have found this, but a recent one found that the polyphenols (a type of antioxidant) in green tea, red wine and olives may also help protect you against breast cancer. It's thought that the antioxidants help protect you from [environmental](#) carcinogens such as [passive tobacco smoke](#).

Bone up daily. Get your daily calcium by popping a tab, chugging milk or eating yoghurt. It'll keep your bones strong. Remember that your bone density declines after the age of 30. You need at least 200 milligrams daily, which you should combine with magnesium, or it simply won't be absorbed.

Berries for your belly. Blueberries, strawberries and raspberries contain plant nutrients known as anthocyanidins, which are powerful antioxidants. Blueberries rival grapes in concentrations of resveratrol – the antioxidant compound found in red wine that has assumed near mythological proportions. [Resveratrol](#) is believed to help protect against heart disease and cancer.

Tomato is a superstar in the fruit and veggie pantheon. Tomatoes contain lycopene, a powerful cancer fighter. They're also rich in vitamin C. The good news is that cooked tomatoes are also nutritious, so use them in pasta, soups and casseroles, as well as in salads. The British Thoracic Society says that tomatoes and apples can reduce your [risk of asthma](#) and [chronic lung diseases](#). Both contain the antioxidant quercetin. To enjoy the benefits, eat five apples a week or a tomato every other day.

(from <https://www.health24.com>)

First Flight on Pan Am - Giving up my seat to Charles Lindbergh

by Carl Stevenson

After finishing Navigator training in 1964, I was scheduled for my first training/observation flight from JFK to LHR. I had never been on a Pan Am flight so this would be my first.

I checked in at JFK and went to the cockpit of the 707 and met the crew. I would have the observer seat behind the captain.

After strapping in and getting hooked up with the headset I was about to watch the show.

A few minutes before they closed the door, a customer service rep entered the cockpit and told me I would have to give up my seat. Being a new-hire with practically no seniority I was not about to question this decision.

So I unhooked my headset and unstrapped from my observer seat and headed for the back of the plane to find my new seat.

Just as I was standing in the cockpit doorway, a tall, pleasant gentleman shook my hand and apologized for taking my seat.

He was Charles Lindbergh and was flying as a consultant to Pan Am. He told me I could have my seat back when the flight reached top of climb, but he would need to return for the approach and landing in London.

I was given a seat in First Class and returned to the cockpit at top of climb when Charles Lindbergh left to take his seat for the trip to LHR.

I thoroughly enjoyed my flight, receiving good instruction from the Navigator.

As we approached our destination I was told to ask Mr. Lindbergh to return to the cockpit.

That was my first flight on Pan Am.

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
or email to: sue@clipperpioneers.com***