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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.*

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, over 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 Richer 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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### 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.

## Tales from the Tenerife Crash that Never Got Reported

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### Photos from the Crash

Very shortly after the actual crash on Tenerife in 1977, still the worst crash in commercial aviation history, 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.

These were the pictures that appeared in *Time* magazine, in the 11 April 1977 issue, which featured the Tenerife Accident. The morale in this story is that if you ever get offered money from this type of publication make sure you get your money before releasing your photos. 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 and 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.

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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)***

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## Tales from the Tenerife Crash that Never Got Reported

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### A Survivors List

When I was transferred to the main hospital from the satellite facility, I found the captain, the flight engineer, 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.

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 had received. I basically told them that a KLM B-747 had taken off without a clearance and hit us and 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 Ok.

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 asked one of our chief pilots why I was never called back, his response was "In times like this, things get forgotten." 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, just 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 48 feet, I had x-rays taken of my right leg and a 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 ever heard of it. Wish I knew where it ended up.

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

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## Tales from the Tenerife Crash that Never Got Reported

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My first visitor was a Spanish Air Force Colonel, who couldn't have been nicer. We talked for a while 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. 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 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.

**TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE**

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## Health Tips

**Learn to do stretching exercises** when you wake up. It boosts circulation and digestion, and eases back pain.

**Don't skip breakfast.** Studies show that eating a proper breakfast is one of the most positive things you can do if you are trying to lose weight. Breakfast skippers tend to gain weight. A balanced breakfast includes fresh fruit or fruit juice, a high-fibre breakfast cereal, low-fat milk or yoghurt, wholewheat toast, and a boiled egg.

**Neurobics for your mind.** Get your brain fizzing with energy. American researchers coined the term 'neurobics' for tasks which activate the brain's own biochemical pathways and to bring new pathways online that can help to strengthen or preserve brain circuits. Examples: Brush your teeth with your 'other' hand, take a new route to work or choose your clothes based on sense of touch rather than sight. People with mental agility tend to have lower rates of Alzheimer's disease and age-related mental decline.

**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).



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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).

*...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

**Capt. Carl H. Mohr** passed away on April 25th due to complications from Covid-19.

**Roy Sydney Griffin**, age 87, passed away on March 5, 2020 at home. He was born on May 17, 1932 to Conrad Perry Griffin Sr and Owena Frances Sydney in San Mateo, CA. He attended Mt Carmel High School and graduated in 1951. After graduation, he enlisted in the US Navy as an Aviation Technician during the Korean Conflict and was honorably discharged in 1955 as an AT2. He then attended University of Minnesota where he graduated with a degree in Architectural Engineering and accepted a commission as a LT in the US Navy as a pilot. He worked in the US Space Program at Pillsbury and at EG&G in Nevada, where he relocated to in December of 1963 with his wife. He flew as a pilot for Pan American Airlines and was an engineer for Becker Homes. He then went to work at Central Telephone in 1969 as an engineer and retired in 1994.

**Jerry M. Noosinow** was a flight engineer with Pan American for 37 years. He was part of the crew that brought back many Americans that were stranded in Iran after the revolution in 1978. This was just one of the things for which he received commendations. He was in Miami as a 747 Flight check engineer when Pan Am folded. He, along with several other crew members, flew many of the tired and somewhat disabled planes back to whoever owned them at the time. He was an important member of the Pan Am family. He died May 27 2020.

**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 Sue Forde at [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com), or mail to: Sue Forde, P. O. Box 3457, Sequim, WA 98382**

## Ways to Avoid Fraud

Crooks use clever schemes to defraud millions of people every year. They often combine new technology with old tricks to get people to send money or give out personal information. Here are some practical tips to help you stay a step ahead.

- 1. Spot imposters.** Scammers often pretend to be someone you trust, like a government official, a family member, a charity, or a company you do business with. Don't send money or give out personal information in response to an unexpected request — whether it comes as a text, a phone call, or an email.
- 2. Do online searches.** Type a company or product name into your favorite search engine with words like "review," "complaint" or "scam." Or search for a phrase that describes your situation, like "IRS call." You can even search for phone numbers to see if other people have reported them as scams.
- 3. Don't believe your caller ID.** Technology makes it easy for scammers to fake caller ID information, so the name and number you see aren't always real. If someone calls asking for money or personal

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## Ways to Avoid Fraud

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information, hang up. If you think the caller might be telling the truth, call back to a number you know is genuine.

**4. Don't pay upfront for a promise.** Someone might ask you to pay in advance for things like debt relief, credit and loan offers, mortgage assistance, or a job. They might even say you've won a prize, but first you have to pay taxes or fees. If you do, they will probably take the money and disappear.

**5. Consider how you pay.** Credit cards have significant fraud protection built in, but some payment methods don't. Wiring money through services like Western Union or MoneyGram is **risky** because it's nearly impossible to get your money back. That's also true for reloadable cards (like MoneyPak or Reloadit) and gift cards (like iTunes or Google Play). Government offices and honest companies won't require you to use these payment methods.

**6. Talk to someone.** Before you give up your money or personal information, talk to someone you trust. Con artists want you to make decisions in a hurry. They might even threaten you. Slow down, check out the story, do an online search, consult an expert — or just tell a friend.

**7. Hang up on robocalls.** If you answer the phone and hear a recorded sales pitch, hang up and report it to the FTC. These calls are illegal, and often the products are bogus. Don't press 1 to speak to a person or to be taken off the list. That could lead to more calls.

**8. Be skeptical about free trial offers.** Some companies use free trials to sign you up for products and bill you every month until you cancel. Before you agree to a free trial, research the company and read the cancellation policy. And always review your monthly statements for charges you don't recognize.

**9. Don't deposit a check and wire money back.** By law, banks must make funds from deposited checks available within days, but uncovering a fake check can take weeks. If a check you deposit turns out to be a fake, you're responsible for repaying the bank.

**10. Sign up for free scam alerts from the FTC at [ftc.gov/scams](https://ftc.gov/scams).** Get the latest tips and advice about scams sent right to your inbox.

If you spot a scam, report it at [ftc.gov/complaint](https://ftc.gov/complaint). Your reports help the FTC and other law enforcement investigate scams and bring crooks to justice.

(from <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0060-10-things-you-can-do-avoid-fraud>)

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