



CLIPPER PIONEERS, INC.

FORMER PAN AM COCKPIT CREW

PRESIDENT

STU ARCHER
7340 SW 132 ST
MIAMI, FL 33156-6804
(305) 238-0911

VICE PRESIDENT

CG "DINO" VLAHAKIS
54 WESTVIEW LN
LEBANON NH 03766-2016
(603) 448-3729

TREASURER / EDITOR

GENE PATTERSON
1202 EAST RIDGE VILLAGE DRIVE,
CUTLER BAY, FL 33157
(305) 235-7613

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Midnight Sun – Report #66

By Richard Van Gemert

As printed in Business & Commercial Aviation, Nov. 2009

To most people Flying Boats mean majestic Pan Am Clippers, silver tea service with crumpets, and South Sea island girls wrapped in sarongs, waving. But to me they're cramped, hard-used machines, tepid coffee from a thermos washing down bologna sandwiches. As for island girls, there was Ms. "Cerlette the Cat" on Kodiak who could do amazing things on a saloon stage, but if she waved a come hither, it was best to run for the door.

My flying boats were jammed with vacuum tubed radios, sonobuoys, depth charges, and black magic stuff I still can't reveal. Back in 1962, our mission was to find the Soviet subs coursing south along the Santa Barbara Channel.

We boat aviators alternated among several positions. On this particular night mission, I was on the middle deck of our Martin P5M serving as technical coordinator, essentially overseeing everything except flying or navigating. Before launching from Whidbey Island NAS, we got a full briefing during which, among other things, we learned that the weather would be lousy -low ceilings, rain, fog, strong winds, and 12-foot seas.

Once on patrol the first officer, who was the plane commander, advanced RPMs on both props. This was SOP to help the electronics operator identify anomalies transmitted from the sonobuoys we'd deployed. However, this time the port prop kept advancing until it was screaming. A runaway. It roared past 4,000 rpm, its redline.

I could hear the pilots proceeding to shut down the engine and try to feather the prop, but without success.

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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. 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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Evidently the thing had gone beyond the low-pitch stop and was actually heading towards reverse pitch. We were in a bad way.

The U.S. Navy, as a matter of technical policy, did not require that its twin-engine flying boats maintain flight on one engine. The thinking was to load the aircraft with as much as it could carry on two, and if one failed, so be it; the runway was everywhere and infinitely long. The flaw in that premise was the runway undulated, and once the sun set, and especially if moonlight was blocked, it disappeared from view. Essentially, there was no such thing as a successful night ditching.

When our left prop went beyond the stops we were cruising at 2,500 feet, and we immediately started down at 800 fpm. Something unpleasant was going to happen and quickly.

“Ditching stations!” I shouted to all who could hear. There were 13 officers and enlisted on board that night. Everyone knew the drill, for we had practiced again and again. We cinched our harnesses and secured our stations. Long seconds later came the impact. Whooomp!

We were airborne again. Nothing seemed broken. Nobody screamed. And again, Whooomp! the jarring, and we were airborne a third time. Briefly.

Then Whaam! We were stopped. I looked around. The aircraft was whole. We were rising in the swells. The lights were on. No one shouted. There was no alarm. I began to move. “We’re OK back here,” I hollered towards the flight deck as I scrambled to check the situation aft.

Reaching the ladder to the lower deck, I saw water coming up. I quickly confirmed all the watertight doors were locked tight, and concluded that some part of the fuselage aft of the step must have been cracked in the hard landing. Whatever, we were going down.

I scrambled through the flight deck’s overhead, joining the forward crew on the wing. Someone launched our life raft in front of the wing, and it was immediately snared under it. At the same time, the crewmen in back launched their raft successfully, so we on the wing jumped into the water and swam to it. Now there were 13 of us we’d all survived uninjured - clinging to a seven-person raft.

As the Martin Marlin settled its T-tail began descending upon us. One sailor pulled out a knife, cut our tether, and we drifted clear just as the airplane disappeared in a chorus of bubbles and explosions of mini depth charges used for target range locating. Seconds later we were utterly alone, half of us immersed in 53 degree water, 150 miles from land, and evidently without any near likelihood of rescue since no one had successfully transmitted an SOS before splashdown.

As we began to chill, assess, and worry, an impossibly bright light appeared in front of us. Only those who

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Bank balance as of July 31, 2023 was \$20,775.50. The opportunity to renew your membership with your donation is on a form on page 7 of this newsletter, which will go toward continuing forward. Thank you to the those who have mailed in your donations in 2023 already! Be sure to clip and send in your check if you’d like to continue to receive the newsletter. Thank you!

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have spent nights on a blackened sea can fully appreciate just how dark dark can be. It was one of those utterly black nights in which your hands disappeared before your eyes. And yet we were suddenly bathed in light as if from the sun. Then came the voice of God:

“This is the USS Sea Dragon on patrol in United States waters. Identify yourselves.”

We had managed to come to grief in the exact place and time our Navy’s second nuclear submarine was surfacing after completing some trials en route to Hawaii. It had spotted our lights as we were impacting the sea. Had we come down just aft of the submarine, it may not have seen us at all. Instead of dying of hypothermia or drowning, we were all presented with bottles of brandy, which we gladly consumed as our clothes dried in the reactor room. The next night, the Navy had us back in the air on another mission.

I’ve thought about that night often and learned that you can improve your odds by being prepared - every crew member did exactly what he had been trained to do to optimize his chance of survival and working together under stress. Beyond that, it’s really helpful to be lucky, which I was that night.

So, knowing how important that can be, I wish all of you some really good luck when you need it most.

Problems/Solutions - a Little Humor Included...

P: Left inside main tire almost needs replacement.

S: Almost replaced left inside main tire.

*

P: Test flight OK, except auto-land very rough.

S: Auto-land not installed on this aircraft.

*

P: Something loose in cockpit

S: Something tightened in cockpit

*

P: Dead bugs on windshield.

S: Live bugs on back-order.

*

P: Auto pilot in altitude-hold mode produces a 200 feet per minute descent...

S: Cannot reproduce problem on ground.

P: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.

S: Evidence removed...

*

P: DME volume unbelievably loud..

S: DME volume set to more believable level.

*

P: Friction locks cause throttle levers to stick.

S: That’s what friction locks are for.

*

P: IFF inoperative in OFF mode.

S: IFF always inoperative in OFF mode.

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.

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

Dale's Cairo Story

by Dale E. Carman

Pan Am served Rome to Beirut with 737's in 1983 and 1984, as an extension of the JFK/Rome flight which was a daily flight to Cairo but made a stop in Beirut twice a week. In Beirut, the aircraft was always met at the runway and escorted to the terminal by a group of Marines. Upon departure, the Marines escorted us to the departure runway. I think those brave young Marines looked forward to spending that one hour with our fantastic flight attendants. My last flight through Beirut was just two days before a suicide bomber drove a truck-load of explosives into the Marine barracks. What a tragedy and loss.

I'd like to describe an incident that occurred during one of my Cairo layovers. The flight pattern involved a week-long trip out of Berlin: day one, we deadheaded to Rome and laid over; day two, we met the inbound flight from JFK and took the passengers bound for Beirut or Cairo to their destinations and laid over in Cairo. We would then spend a week flying Cairo-Rome-Cairo shuttles. The crew layover in Cairo was at the Heliopolis Sheraton Hotel at Cairo Airport. Our wake-up in Cairo was about 4:30 in the morning, and we would be back in the hotel at about 2:00 in the afternoon.

On one of my layovers in Cairo, I had dinner in the hotel with my first officer Mort Matheny and one of our flight attendants. After dinner, we sat around for a few hours, solving all the company problems. When I returned to my hotel room and got in bed, I had trouble sleeping, so I turned on the TV to watch the old movies that the hotel showed. After about fifteen minutes, the screen went blank. I figured the film had probably broken, so I tried to sleep again. I then thought that the film would probably be repaired and restarted, and I would be awakened by the sound at about 2:00 am, so I got out of bed to turn off the TV.

It was then that I noticed how dark it was in the room. Noticing that there was not even any light under the entry door, I opened it, saw complete darkness in the hallway, not even an emergency exit light, and I smelled smoke. I threw on some clothes, grabbed my flashlight, and headed towards the emergency exit.

The hotel had three floors, each of which had three hallways of rooms extending from a single elevator. The fire escape consisted of stairway encircling the elevator. I joined the crowd of people going down the stairs. The smoke was much thicker in the stairwell. When I arrived in the lobby, there was complete darkness there also. The only illumination was two or three candles at the reception desk. I proceeded outdoors to the lawn where I found all of my crew, except for the purser. I told the crew to stay together, and I would go back into the hotel to find the purser. At the reception desk, I asked for a copy of the Pan Am crew list. The clerk replied, "We can't give out that information." I said, "I am the captain of that crew, and one of our flight attendants is missing—Now give me that damned crew list." Who said you can get better results with sugar than with vinegar!

With the list in hand, I headed for the circular stairway. After fighting the mob of evacuees, I finally reached the third floor and knocked on the purser's door. She responded through the door, "Who is it?" I said, "It's Dale, the captain." She opened the door a crack, the security chain still attached, and asked, "What do you want?" I said, "The hotel is on fire." She said, "Should I put on a coat?" I responded, "Put on whatever you like, but let's get out of here." As we left, I noticed that her room was closer to the emergency exit at the end of the hallway than the emergency exit at the elevator, so we proceeded to the exit at the end of the hallway.

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

Dale's Cairo Story

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When we arrived at the ground floor, the emergency exit door was chained and padlocked. I tried to kick the door out, but I didn't have on my redneck steel-toed boots, so we then ran the length of the hotel to the lobby. When we arrived at the lobby, I told the desk personnel that the emergency exits were chained, and they had better open them.

We joined the rest of the crew to watch this fiasco unfold. About half an hour after this all started, a small fire truck and a paddy-wagon-style ambulance arrived. The two ambulance personnel ran into the hotel with no equipment. About twenty minutes later, they ran out with two bodies, not on stretchers, but on chaise lounges from the pool. They opened the rear doors of the ambulance, shoved in the lounge chairs, and slammed the doors. As the ambulance started to move, both rear doors flew open. I really expected to see the two bodies fly out on the street. At that point, I started to wonder if this was Candid Camera or a new episode of Keystone Cops.

After about an hour, we were told it was safe to return to our rooms. The hotel informed us that the cause of the fire was a worker smoking in the supply room, causing mattresses to catch fire. The smoke then caused the electrical systems to fail. I went to bed and set my alarm for thirty minutes earlier than usually, since the telephones were not working, and I was sure no one would give us wake-up calls. Sure enough, no one came around, so I knocked on the other crew members' doors to wake them.

Then I found the duty manager and I told him, "This is a poorly run and equipped hotel." He said, "Yes, we had a few problems last night." I said, "You were damned lucky this wasn't a real fire. You had no fire alarm; no one checked for guests remaining in rooms; there was no emergency electrical system, no emergency exit lights; and your three emergency exits were chained and padlocked."

I told him we would be returning to the hotel at 2:00 pm, but if the chains and padlocks were not removed from the emergency exits, I would take the crew to another hotel. When we returned that afternoon, the chains and padlocks had been removed from the emergency exits. Nevertheless, that was the last night we stayed in Heliopolis Sheraton.

In retrospect, I should have informed the Sheraton hierarchy of this episode. About a year and a half later, the *International Herald Tribune* reported that the Heliopolis Sheraton Hotel in Cairo was destroyed by fire with the loss of many lives.

Do You Know About Events that are Upcoming?

There are many events and get-togethers that may be of interest to our readers. If you know about one, or have a group that gets together on a regular basis - or even once in awhile - please let us know so we can share with our readers! :)

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

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

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/>

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.

Flying Somewhere? Useful Tip for Air Traffic

FlightAware is a free flight tracker that will change what you think about live flight tracking and aviation data. It can be seen at: www.flightaware.com/

Layovers for Pan Am

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

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

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

John Francis Grady, age 87, of Lake Forest, California passed away on Monday, June 6, 2022. John was born August 22, 1934. Perhaps, one of the greatest of men that I've ever known is now flying in the heavens above. My Uncle John was always kind, charming, witty, engaging, a wee bit sarcastic (Hey, we're Irish) but nonetheless a loving man that I was ever so fond and enamored of. I looked up to my Uncle John immensely as an incredible and amazing force of strength and endearing love to me and his family and friends. After many years of flying, his hearing began to wane and my Uncle John knowing about my own significant loss of hearing bought me a pair of hearing aids which I was indeed grateful for his and my Aunt Betty's benevolent gift. I'm proud that I was so lucky to spend time with my Uncle John and his family when visiting FL and CA. Those were the best of days with the best of people. Fly on my uncle, my uncle. We'll all see you in regaling and loving glory once again. – Kyle Grady.

Rex Smith passed away August 2, 2023 at age 92. More Information to follow.

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

RENEW TODAY!

In order to keep the newsletter and website going for the Clipper Pioneers, it's time for renewal donations. If you haven't already, please send your donation to: Clipper Pioneers, P. O. Box 3457, Sequim, WA 98382. Thank you!

Your Name: _____ 0 _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone #: _____ Email: _____

Amount Donated: \$ _____

(Make check payable to: Clipper Pioneers and mail to: P. O. Box 3457, Sequim WA 98382)

Thank you for your continuing support of the Clipper Pioneers!

The best way to protect your information from scammers?

Recognize a phishing scam

Scammers know how valuable your personal and financial information is — and they'll do or say almost anything to get it. What can you do to keep it safe?

The best way to protect your info from scammers is to recognize a phishing scam, but how do you know what to look for? Here's an example.

Say you get an unexpected text, email, or call that looks like it's from a company you know, like Microsoft or Apple. They claim there's a problem with your account and say you need to click a link or call a number to update your info as soon as possible. They might even say they've noticed suspicious activity or log-in attempts on your account. The alert may seem like it's coming from a company you know, but it's a scammer who wants to steal your info — which could lead to identity theft.

Here's how to keep your info safe from scammers:

- Don't give your info to anyone who contacts you out of the blue. Honest organizations won't call, email, or text to ask for your info, like your Social Security, bank account, or credit card numbers.

- Don't click on any links. If you get an email or text from a company you know and do business with, contact them using a website you know is real. Or look up their phone number — but don't call a number they gave you or the number from your caller ID.

- Update your security software. This will protect your computer and phone from security threats, which could expose your personal or financial info to scammers.

You might spot these frauds — but someone you know might need support. Please share this info with your friends, family, and fellow servicemembers and veterans during Military Consumer Month and all year round. And report scams to the FTC at ReportFraud.ftc.gov.

(By Andrew Rayo Consumer Education Specialist, <https://consumer.ftc.gov/consumer-alerts/2023/07/best-way-protect-your-information-scammers-recognize-phishing-scam>)

To Your Good Health....

As you get older, it can be easy to find excuses to let yourself slow down. However, exercise is vitally important for seniors. "Exercise improves your quality of life, meaning everything from how much activity we can do, to what kind of mood we're in," said Kristina Balangue, MD, a geriatrician at Banner - University Medical Center Phoenix. Try Tai Chi, Walking and Swimming to help keep yourself in good condition.

Most of us really don't think about our bones until one breaks. However, bone health, like other aspects of your health, needs to be worked on for years. The good news is that it's never too late to take care of your bones and slow bone loss. Some good tips can be found at <https://www.bannerhealth.com/healthcareblog/advice-me/for-seniors-a-checklist-for-good-health>

It was pointed out that there was a typographical error in the spelling of Charles A. Lindbergh's name in the last issue. Thank you for letting us know.