



CAPTAIN NICK

Antilles Airboats' Chief Pilot Helped Design Automatic Pilot

FLYING the Goose between St. Croix, St. Thomas, Tortola and Puerto Rico, may seem a far cry from steering a jet fighter onto the pitching and heaving deck of an American Seventh Fleet aircraft carrier cruising off the coast of Korea, but for **Captain Nick Castruccio**, Chief Pilot for Antilles Airboats, piloting the airboats is the most exciting form of flying open to a civilian.

Captain Nick, as he is known to his colleagues on Antilles ramps on the six different islands served by the Goose, spent many hours flying jets off carriers during his service in the U.S. Navy. Later he applied his long experience and skill to helping civilian designers develop new kinds of Naval attack aircraft and in fact contributed to the development of the automatic throttle control now used extensively in automatic landing systems for both military and civilian aircraft.

Nick bought land in St. Croix while still working for the Navy in Washington. At that time Captain Charles Blair was just setting up Antilles Airboats, though Nick didn't even know about that.

It was only when he came back to St. Croix in 1970, just prior to his retirement from the Navy, that someone suggested he take a job with Antilles. Having never flown airboats before, Nick managed to put in enough time with the Air Guard flying one of their Albatross sea rescue craft, to qualify

for a military competency in seaplane operation.

The following year he moved down with his family and joined Antilles Airboats.

Captain Nick, who is rather reluctant to talk about himself or his exploits, is nevertheless a vital link in the operation of the airboat commuter service, being responsible for the day-to-day scheduling of pilots and the hiring of new men as well as putting in his hours as a regular pilot.

But apart from his present duties, Nick has a service background any man could be proud of. He made two carrier cruises to Korea in 1950 and '52, flying single seater jet fighters over the Korean mountains on ground attack, troop support and flak suppression missions. On these latter flights, his job was to strafe the enemy gun positions and keep the gunners away from their weapons while the propeller driven bombers lumbered in to deliver their deadly cargoes.

For Nick, landing a jet, often riddled with flak holes, on the deck of a heaving carrier at night was the epitome of flying. You had to be at the very peak of your performance and flying with needle-sharp concentration.

"I got too old to fly jets off carriers," said Nick with a rueful grin, "and that's when they gave me the job in Washington." But flying the Goose, where every landing presents a different set of circumstances, is a

similar sort of challenge. You have to assess the height of the swell, the wind direction and velocity and put the aircraft down with just the right touch of the throttle.

Nick is actively engaged with the local Scouts and acts as technical advisor to the Aviation Explorer Post which is sponsored by Antilles Airboats. Two boys from St. Croix have learned to fly with Captain Nick and one of them is now at the U.S. Naval Academy from which Nick himself graduated in June of 1948.

Capt. Castruccio, lives in St. Croix with his wife **Anne** and four of their six children. **Carolyn**, who is 26, is a teacher at Grove Place School, **Anthony**, 18, is a senior at St. Joseph's, **Susanne**, 16, is a junior at the same school and **Cecile**, 11, is in the sixth grade at St. Mary's. Two other daughters, **Nicolette**, 21, and **Constance**, 23, are married and live off island.

"We should be talking about my wife, not me," said Nick modestly. "She had to bring all those kids up while I was away at sea. She's the one who deserves the limelight."

THE COMPASS ROSE

MAIN STREET - ST. THOMAS
COMPANY STREET - ST. CROIX

precious
coral
and
other
gems

Seiko Watches - Ivory - Silk Screens