



Charles F. Blair Jr. Seaplane Terminal Dedication Ceremony

Veteran's Drive
Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas
United States Virgin Islands

Tuesday, August 27, 2013
10 a.m.



**BGN Charles F. Blair Jr., USAF
Seaplane Terminal Facility Dedication**

Program

MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES

Monifa A. Marrero
Public Information Officer
Virgin Islands Port Authority

NATIONAL ANTHEM & VI MARCH

Musical Rendition by Mr. Everton Rush

INVOCATION

Brother Wingrove Fenton

OPENING REMARKS

Carlton Dowe
Executive Director
Virgin Islands Port Authority

REMARKS

Mr. Gary Floss
Chief Executive Officer and President
Seaborne Airlines

REMARKS

The Honorable Craig W. Barshinger
Senator at Large
30th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands

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PRESENTATION OF PLAQUE TO FAMILY

Mr. Robert O'Connor Jr.

Chairman

Virgin Islands Port Authority Governing Board

Accepted on behalf of the Blair Family by Mr. Ezio Marsh
Close Family Friend & Former Antilles Air Boat Employee

REMARKS

The Honorable Barbara Petersen
St. Thomas/Water Island Administrator

On behalf of The Honorable John Percy de Jongh Jr.
Governor of the U.S. Virgin Islands

UNVEILING OF SIGN

Dignitaries and Family

BENEDICTION

Brother Wingrove Fenton

Refreshments Provided by Nibbs Catering



CHARLES F. BLAIR JR.
1909-1978

Brigadier General CHARLES F. BLAIR JR.

Charles F. Blair Jr. was a United States Air Force Brigadier General, United States Navy aviator captain, a test pilot, an airline pilot, and airline owner. He died in a Grumman Goose seaplane crash while flying for his airline, Antilles Air Boats, from St. Croix to St. Thomas in 1978. The 28th Legislature of the U.S. Virgin Islands via Act No. 7172 has named the seaplane terminal located along Veteran's Drive in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas in his honor posthumously to memorialize the significant contributions Blair made to the aviation and travel industry in the territory.

Charles Blair was born July 19, 1909 in Buffalo, New York. He learned to fly at the Ryan Flying School in San Diego, California and he performed his first solo flight there at just 19 years old. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering in 1931. The following year, he was commissioned an Ensign as a naval aviator. He left active military duty in 1933 but remained in the Navy Reserves. He then joined United Airlines and flew for them until 1940 when he successfully applied for the position of chief pilot with the newly founded American Export Airlines (AEA). This had been founded by the shipping line of the same name to compete with Pan American on the North Atlantic. Its chosen equipment was the Vought-Sikorsky VS44. Blair test flew all that AEA ordered. Due to the United States entering World War II, AEA did not operate their transatlantic airline but instead, they operated for the US Naval Transport Service. Blair flew one such on the first non-stop Ireland-USA flight from Foynes to LaGuardia, New York in 1942. After World War II, AEA briefly operated the VS44 under its new title of American Overseas Airways before replacement by DC-4s in late 1945. AOA in turn was taken over by Pan American in 1950 and Blair went with them.

Blair established a transatlantic piston-engine flight record (New York to Heathrow) which still stands. The Excalibur plane that he flew is now in the Smithsonian museum. The return flight was made over the pole to Fairbanks Alaska to test his theories on polar navigation and incidentally was the first solo polar flight. At a White House ceremony the following year, Blair received the coveted Harmon International Aviation Award as "The World's Outstanding Aviator" from President Harry S. Truman. In 1953, he was commissioned a Colonel in the United States Air Force Reserve and spent up to 200 days per year on active duty during which he flew the most front line aircraft. In 1956, he commanded the first nonstop transatlantic jet fighter flight with three Republic F-84Fs. He left PanAm in 1962 and worked with NASA on navigational issues for proposed supersonic transports. However, he never lost touch with marine aviation. In 1964, he founded Antilles Air Boats, based at

St Croix in the Virgin Islands, using a single Grumman Goose. He had lived in St Croix since the early 1960s and was joined there by Irish-American film actress Maureen O'Hara who he married in 1968. Blair and his wife were the owners of Antilles Air Boats, which connected Virgin Islanders by offering inter-island flights between St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John, the British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. By 1971, he had 21 seaplanes and had purchased one of the few remaining VS-44s from Avalon Air Transport in California in 1968. Antilles Air Boats was the largest commuter airline at the time.



After flying it for a year, it sustained damage from rocks but Blair arranged for it to be restored for museum preservation. Its replacement was a Short Sandringham from Australia. Charles Blair bought it for Antilles Air Boats in 1974 and named it Southern Cross as N158C, later VP-LVE. Charles Blair returned to Ireland with VP-LVE in 1977 for a season of operating flying boat tours on charter to Aer Arann — a regional airline based in Dublin, Ireland.





Tragedy struck on September 2, 1978 when a seaplane piloted by Blair experienced engine failure. Blair had tried to fly his plane using only one engine. His training led him to fly close to the water, but the Goose struck the water, cart wheeled and broke up—killing him and three other passengers on board, including St. Thomas educator Vernon Scipio. The seven survivors of ill-fated flight were visitors from New York. Charles Blair, as a Brigadier General in the U.S. Air Force Reserve, was buried with full military honors on September 11 at Arlington National Cemetery outside of Washington, D.C. His survivors include his wife, Maureen O'Hara Blair, and four children from two previous marriages: Suzanne, Christopher, Charles Lee and Stephen Blair.



His wife kept Antilles Airboats going for two more years but eventually sold it. After their home on St. Croix was destroyed by a hurricane in 1989, Mrs. O'Hara Blair moved to Ireland. The same hurricane wiped out the fleet of Antilles Airboats' successor -- Virgin Islands Seaplane Shuttle.



For his significant contributions to the travel and aviation industry, the government of the Virgin Islands honors his memory with the naming of the public seaplane facility on St. Thomas in his honor.





