

Samuel Curtiss Johnson Jr. and his flight through Maui

It was early one morning, back in 1988, when I met Samuel Curtis Johnson Jr. and his wife Imogene. Samuel was the fourth generation of his family to lead S.C. Johnson & Sons. He had been chairman of this multimillion-dollar corporation for twenty years before that morning.

*I was the manager of Hemmeter Aviation at the Kahului Airport in Maui, Hawaii and we were preparing for the arrival of an inbound aircraft from **Hong Kong** with limited ground time and on to LAX. The process to handle international aircraft arrivals started days before. The airports in Hawaii are considered landing rights airports by U.S. Customs, which require prior approval before landing.*

Hemmeter Aviation was an FBO (fixed base operations) providing all the necessary services for transient aircraft. When communicating with the owner/operator of each aircraft days/weeks beforehand, we would receive all pertinent information to request approval from U.S. Customs. Information included but not limited to itinerary, individuals on board (crew/passengers) and passport information. The information is sent to U.S. Customs in Honolulu for approval. Back in the eighties, U.S. Customs - Maui did not have full time, experience personnel and on occasion would send a customs agent from Honolulu or they would require the aircraft be cleared in Honolulu before going Maui.

Approval was granted for the Falcon 900 jet - N910JW (JW for Johnson Wax) to land in Maui with the part-time custom agent handling the flight. Usually, flights departed their international airports in daylight hours putting them in Hawaii at zero-dark-thirty or very early morning.

All required services were prepared, and the aircraft landed on schedule with 2 crew and two passengers for a quick-turn. A quick-turn is providing all services expeditiously to limit ground time. This flight was not one of those.

All onboard came off the aircraft and entered the facility. The part-time customs agent reviewed the documents which included the approved landing rights form, passports, and general declarations. The individual general declarations specified any items purchased out of country. If the item was approved, a duty may be levied and paid.

*The Johnson's were cleared quickly, and the custom agent next handled the crew. This is where it came to a halt. When the captain was questioned about any purchases while spending time in Hong Kong and he stated "none", the agent got a sense that was not the case. After a lengthy and somewhat heated discussion, the agent requested the captain return to the aircraft where he commenced a search of the Falcon 900 as well as the captain. That is where the U.S. Customs agent found the **emerald ring**.*

The part-time agent would have preferred not to have found the ring. Probably not more than the captain but the agent was not sure what he was to do next. Phone calls back to Honolulu for advice. Abundant council came remotely with some discussion of impounding the aircraft.

Samual Johnson and his wife were informed of the captain not declaring the ring and they were not happy with their employee (at the time). They were also frustrated with the customs agent in not knowing what to do and making numerous calls to see what he was supposed to do next.

Mr. Johnson was making his own calls to his home office for assistance. It finally came down to the captain paying the duty and receiving a stern warning about not declaring items on future trips, even though future trips would not be for S.C. Johnson and Sons.

The quick-turn was not quick. The zero-dark-thirty event took several hours.

That was the morning I met Samual C. Johnson Jr.

Back in those days, there were other neighbor island international arrivals, that were similar, which prompted me to share advice with the international aircraft operators. Many operators thought that clearing on the more remote island would get a quicker turn. I gave a presentation at the International Operators Conference of the National Business Aircraft Association to let them know to be careful of that choice. Those years of part time customs agents may be problematic. At times, they would send a seasoned agent from Honolulu to do further training. Do you train not opening bags or opening bags. Training took time, the time of those that are trying to move quickly.

The private/business jet aircraft were not considered a high concern for non-compliance of the rules. When applying for landing rights and giving customs all the information regarding the flight and people on board, allows that pre-clearance to assist with ground time. In Honolulu, the crew and passengers were cleared on board the aircraft, no bags were looked at most of the time, unless the information sent earlier indicated another scenario.

By the 90's, international arrivals on the neighboring islands became easier with full-time experience personnel.

Tom Anusewicz

Hemmeter Aviation 1986 -1991