

3 years after the accident of N7777V, I was subpoenaed to provide testimony in a deposition. My story of that day....

News - September 1978

Maureen O'Hara's husband killed as plane crashes into ocean near Virgin Islands

ST. THOMAS, Virgin Islands (AP) — An amphibious plane crashed in the ocean near St. Thomas Saturday, killing four of the eleven persons aboard including Charles Blair, the pilot and husband of former actress Maureen O'Hara, authorities reported.

Miss O'Hara was not on board the twin-engine Grumman Goose of Antilles Air Boats, a charter line owned by Blair. Miss O'Hara is publisher of the firm's in-flight magazine, "Virgin Islander."

According to witnesses, the craft's left engine appeared to explode as it approached the harbor of Charlotte Amalie, capital of this U.S. island, and pieces of metal flew through the air. They

said the plane struck the water, flipped over and sank within a few minutes.

Milton Penn, assistant civil defense director, said the seven injured survivors were picked up by boats manned by civil defense volunteers and divers recovered the bodies of the four dead.

All of the survivors were from New York City, according to officials at Knud Hansen Memorial Hospital in Charlotte Amalie.

Penn said the shattered plane sank in 50-60 feet of water, but could be clearly seen from the surface.

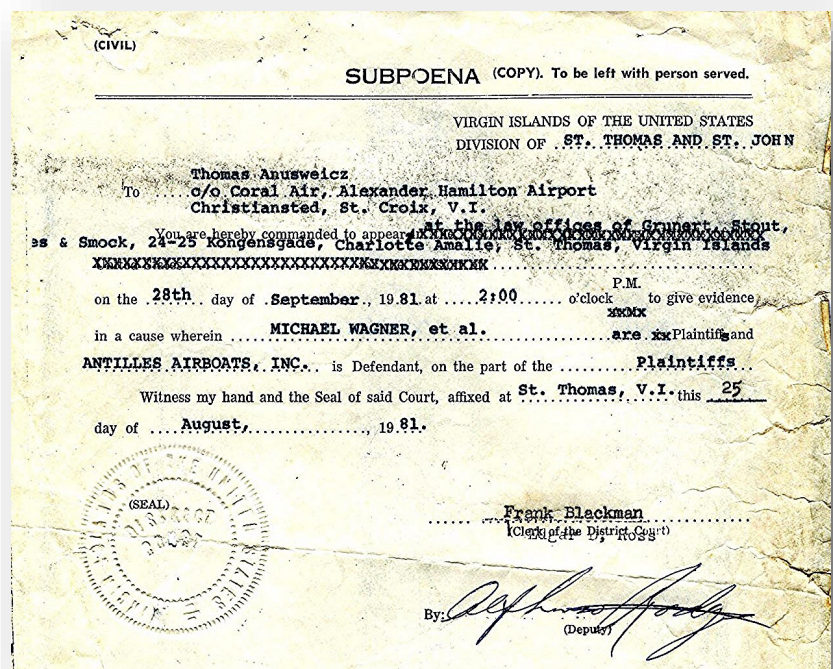
He reported that Vernon Scipio, about 40 and a resident of St. Thomas, also was

killed, but the names of the two other victims were not released pending notification of relatives.

Hospital officials gave the following listing for the survivors and their injuries:

Michael Wagner, 42, multiple injuries; his wife, Eko, 36, concussion and multiple injuries; their two sons, David, 8, bruised forehead, and Michael Jr., 10, no visible injury.

Lisa Devine, 36, concussion and laceration of the right forearm; Christopher Devine, 13, lacerations of the left arm and multiple injuries, and Frank Nobel, 51, head injuries.



My testimony of this accident at the NTSB hearings in late 1978 put me in position to continue to provide information, when requested by court order. This subpoena requested my presence at the Law office of Grunert, Stout & Snook at 24-25 Kongensgade, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas on September 28, 1981 at 2:00 pm. Four members of the Wagner family were on board, the day they would never forget. Michael Wagner was the plaintiff.

My story is not in anyway questioning Michael Wagner's position of suing Antilles Air Boats for what happened to his family that day in September 1978. Fortunately, Michael & Eko Wagner and their two children fared better than some of the other passengers.

My story is more of my observations on the deposition itself and the demeanor of the attorney that was questioning me. I found it to be an interesting afternoon.

I had left Antilles Air Boats some months before and was now working at Coral Air as Director of Maintenance. I flew over the St. Thomas earlier in the day to ensure I would be at the law office at the scheduled time of 2:00 pm. I was accompanied by an attorney that represented Antilles Air Boats which was the defendant in this case.

Two o'clock came and the court stenographer had not arrived, so we waited. Shortly there after the stenographer hurried in apologetically. She was at the beach and lost track of the time. This was her first visit to the Virgin Islands and was enjoying the sun... a little too much for she was redder than she should have been. She did not have time to change before arriving at the office. So this attractive young woman in a bikini with a sheer cover-up sat in front of me ready to take my every word.

The attorney representing Michael Wagner was from the states and made arrangements to use the offices of Grunert, Stout & Snook. I had been questioned on the matters of this accident since it occurred on September 2, 1978, so I certainly was prepared and ready to answer any questions that they may have.

I understand that the attorney represents the plaintiff and I was part of Antilles Air Boats, but I am not the enemy. He was very aggressive looking for me to confirm his belief that all AAB were in terrible condition and unairworthy.

He stated that he was aware that the pilots and mechanics referred to each aircraft tail number in a less than favorable manner. The aircraft involved with the accident was N7777V, the "V" for victor in the phonetic alphabet. He stated that 77V was referred to as "Vicious" because it was in such terrible shape. Another aircraft tail number was N5548A, he stated it was referred to 48Awful and he continue. I told him that I was not familiar with those particular names, but it wasn't uncommon to make up names for tail numbers. But they were not derogatory about their condition, just a name. When he thought he might have something with this answer he pushed a little more about tail numbers. So what other names were given to aircraft. Many were just numbers, so he looked for those that had letters. What about N26DF (Delta Foxtrot)? I stated that the DF actually stood for Dean Franklin, the seaplane broker that has been involved with many Grumman amphibian aircraft. But what did you call it, he asked. After a pause, I looked up and said "Delightful F?ck". The stenographer almost fell out of her chair, the attorney decided that we had enough for today. Meeting adjourned.

I was there to answer the question truthfully, completely which I did for the afternoon of September 28, 1981. Michael Wagner came to a settlement with AAB and everyone hoped for better days ahead.

Tom Anusewicz