



CAPT. SVEND OVESON (CENTER) IS 1ST NATIVE V.I. ANTILLES CAPTAIN
...Capt. Nicholas Castruccio (left) and Charles Billman offer congratulations

(Antilles Photo)

Antilles Names First Native VI Captain

CHRISTIANSTED -- When Capt. Svend Oveson lifted a sleek Antilles Air Boats' Grumman Millard into the air recently from the waters of Christiansted Harbor, there was little fanfare. But on board was his wife, Alfreda who knew too well the meaning of this historic flight.

With that take-off, Oveson became the first native Virgin Islander to captain an Antilles Air Boat, bringing to fruition the dream of the late founder, Captain Blair, wherein Virgin Islanders could be found doing productive work at every level within the Antilles Air Boats' system, according to General Manager Nick Castruccio.

Although Oveson was not the first co-pilot to upgrade to captain, Capt. Glen Arveson having accomplished the feat several months before, his feat had a different ring to it. Years ago when Oveson was manager of Pan Am facilities at St. Croix, he was encouraged by Captain Blair to take up flying. After acquiring his private pilot certificate, he availed himself of the G.I. Bill to earn his commercial and multi-engine sea ratings. Armed with these credentials and 200 hours of flying time, Svend was hired by then Chief Pilot Nick Castruccio as a part time first officer in 1976.

Svend's regular job as manager of Marriot Food Service on St. Croix prevented him from flying full time and the pay of a first officer was far less than he was making at Marriot so he continued to build up hours and experience on the weekends.

President Maureen O'Hara Blair stated that the program of up-grading first-officers to captain reflects the new direction at Antilles Air Boats which began with the appointment of Castruccio as general manager several months ago.

The program is being conducted on a merit basis wherein the whole person is weighed as well as the individual's piloting ability, Castruccio said. Those persons meeting the stringent requirements are then sent to the states for further training at Antilles Air Boats' expense in order to acquire the highest aeronautical rating, that of air transport pilot.

In addition to the internal promotion program, Castruccio reported several other achievements in the seaplane airline's operations. He said that 80 percent of all flights are taking off within 15 minutes of scheduled departure times to provide reliable service to passengers. Also new radio equipment is being installed in all of the 15-passenger Mallards to standardize communications within the fleet.