

The Accident of Grumman Goose N777V - September 2, 1978

Comments by Tom Anusewicz

“There are no new types of air crashes - only people with short memories. Every accident has its own forerunners, and everyone happens either because somebody did not know where to draw the vital dividing line between the unforeseen and the unforeseeable or because well-meaning people deemed the risk acceptable”.

“If politics is the art of the possible, and flying is the art of the seemingly impossible, then air safety must be the art of the economically viable. At a time of crowded skies and sharpening competition, it is a daunting task not to let the art of the acceptable deteriorate into the dodgers' art of what you can get away with”.

- Stephen Barlay, March 1990.

The above statement was made just over 11 years after Charles F. Blair Jr. died in the Goose accident of September 2, 1978. The quote was just as pertinent on that unfortunate Saturday morning as it is today.

The NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD (NTSB) Report # NTSB-AAR-79-9 is a 45-page document that speaks to the probable cause of the accident as well as some of the inadequacies of Antilles Air Boats that contributed. It is a thorough report and I will make some comments on various days leading up to the hearings as well as some findings of the report.

A little bit of history will allow for a better understanding of some of the dynamics during the investigation. *The origin of the NTSB was in the Air Commerce Act of 1926, which assigned the United States Department of Commerce responsibility for investigating domestic aviation accidents. The USA's first "independent" Air Safety Board was established in 1938: it lasted only fourteen months. In 1940, this authority was transferred to the Civil Aeronautics Board's newly formed Bureau of Aviation Safety.*

In 1967, Congress created a separate cabinet-level Department of Transportation, which among other things established the Federal Aviation Administration as an agency under the DOT. At the same time, the NTSB was established as an independent agency which absorbed the Bureau of Aviation Safety's responsibilities. However, from 1967 to 1975, the NTSB reported to the DOT for administrative purposes, while conducting investigations into the Federal Aviation Administration, also a DOT agency.

To avoid any conflict, Congress passed the Independent Safety Board Act, and on April 1, 1975, the NTSB became a fully independent federal agency. (Wikipedia)

Even though the NTSB had been independent for three years before the accident of N777V it still was dealing with issues of previously being under the FAA. The Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 (signed 10/24/78 by Jimmy Carter) also influenced agencies current oversight. Deregulation would increase the number of commuter airlines while it was the commuter airlines that had the increase in incidents and accidents at the time.

I mentioned the above because it was evident that the NTSB was not only looking at Antilles Air Boats but at the Federal Aviation Administration and now they had the authority to do so. It was also evident that the FAA knew they would be scrutinized and positioned accordingly. AAB was certainly at fault but the FAA oversight or the lack of, existed. Penalties and fines were just part of the economics (addressed in the report). The accident investigation of 1978 was a very interesting exercise. There were a number of agendas in play.

Immediately following the accident investigators came in droves. Charles F. Blair Jr. was no longer available to keep agencies at bay. In the past, he had seemed to have an influence of agency oversight.

Maureen O'Hara Blair was now in charge. Mrs. Blair was devastated at the loss of her husband but was equally determined to fill his shoes and keep AAB flying. The FAA from Washington were indeed in route (24hrs.) to close AAB down. Mrs. Blair was prepared to not let that happen.

I remember her orchestrating the meeting that was to take place with the FAA. Mrs. Blair stated that it would take place at her home. She prepared the room. She was to sit at the end of the table. The senior representative from the FAA would sit to her left. His seat would be such that it was lower and non-adjustable. Other seats were set the same as well. Mrs. Blair wanted to be sure that she sat higher than everyone, they need to look up to her. Mrs. Blair had set the stage! At the end of the meeting, Antilles Air Boats was still in business. Multiple restrictions in various operations but still flying. Mrs. Blair was indeed the new President of Antilles Air Boats.

Now the in depth investigation begins.

To discuss my thoughts on the accident of September 2, 1978, Capt. Charles Blair and my opinion of management of Antilles Air Boats, I need to talk a little about my arrival to this organization. An organization that I was excited to be a part of and continue to look back with pride despite some unfortunate occurrences.

I arrived in St. Thomas in 1975 looking for an opportunity to work for Antilles Air Boats. My first dialogue was with Capt. Ron Gillies. Capt. Gilles arrived at AAB with the S-25 Sandringhams, to be its senior pilot and became an advisor to Capt. Blair. After reviewing my limited aviation background, Capt. Gillies told me to return in a few days to meet Capt. Blair and discuss employment. I knew Charles F. Blair Jr. as a true pioneer in aviation and was excited to meet and talk with him. When we met, Capt. Blair was interested that I worked as a structural mechanic for the U.S. Coast Guard on the HU-16 Albatross. I also did some minor contract work on the Sikorsky VS-44 when I was stationed at the U.S.C.G. Air Station San Juan. When I traveled from Massachusetts to the U.S. Virgin Islands I just packed a duffel bag with a few necessities but did include a file with a few documents. When Capt. Blair asked if I had an Honorable Discharge from the Coast Guard, I was able to hand it to him to seal the deal.



I first joined AAB as an unlicensed mechanic (military aircraft mechanic experience) but in few years, was asked to assist with maintenance scheduling, record keeping and other related duties. The NTSB report relates to the Maintenance Coordinator. When you work as a mechanic in the hangar you are somewhat isolated from the inner workings and pressure of operating over 125 flights a day. Once I took on the new role there was no escape.

Capt. Blair spent his earlier years flying for the newly formed airlines with most of those years being with Pan American, but he also served in the military reaching the rank of Brigadier General. Most pilots came from the military with a number of those serving in high ranking leadership roles. That made for a unique environment in this civilian operation. Even though we called them Captain many were retired Majors, Colonials even a Brigadier General and a few reminded us frequently. Most pilots had a full career in the military and joining an airline in the Virgin Islands and fly a few days a week was not a bad job at all.

Two individuals that took on additional duties beyond flying the aircraft was Brian Lincoln and Robert Scott. Capt. Lincoln was Vice President/Assistant General Manager and Capt. Scott was Vice President / Operations and both were beyond Captains.

Brian Lincoln served as a Colonel with the U.S. Air Force flying many aircraft including F-111, F-4 and F-105 fighters. He served at the Pentagon conferring with the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Robert Scott was also a Colonel who served in WWII, Korea and Viet Nam. He was the Commander of the 355th Tactical Fighter Wing in Thailand before retiring to the U.S.V.I.

If management were Colonels, that put me in the enlisted category and certainly at the lower end. I would have to say that on more than one occasion I could be considered insubordinate. It wasn't that I didn't recognize and respect their positions and accomplishments. They were my superiors regardless. I usually would voice my opinion over a policy or procedure that effected maintenance or operations. (see comments on N74676).

No doubt, as time went by it was getting more difficult to operate AAB in the black. The cost continued to go up and Capt. Blair was adamant to keep ticket prices as low as possible for the Virgin Islanders to transit between the islands. I believe that Capt. Blair wasn't looking to make grand profits but could not continue to loose money and he did have some investors that were hoping for a return. Some of those investors also flew the aircraft.

Another concern was the ability to ensure that the Goose's ten seats were occupied on each flight. Weight and Balance configuration didn't always allow for that. The usable weight was based on the FAA approved gross weight minus the empty weight of the aircraft. So, you would want the lightest possible empty weight and the highest possible approved gross weight. The NTSB Report on N7777V gets into some detail on this matter.

Each aircraft was required by FAA to be weighed every three years. Any additions or deletions from the original FAA certifications needed documentation and approval. If you were removing and replacing a seat or floor boards with a lighter product it must have received the proper approval from the FAA. Empty weight was important.

On one occasion, I overheard Capt. Blair give instructions to the telex operator (Bernard in aircraft operations) that new empty weights for several Gooses were just established and for all stations to use the new weight for weight and balance computations, effective immediately. As the operator completed the typed communications, I tore it off the telex and confronted Capt. Blair as he walked across the ramp. I asked him directly where these new weights came from. Capt. Blair told me that he had ordered the aircraft to San Juan for reweighing by a team he brought in from California. As Assistant Director of Maintenance it was my responsibilities to schedule aircraft maintenance. I would work with flight operations to ensure that individual aircraft ended each day at one of the three maintenance bases. The aircraft in question never went to San Juan. Capt. Blair was furious that I had questioned him and continued to explain how they were weighed. He then asked if I was going to call the FAA. I explained that I understand the reason for reduced empty weights but let us do everything we can to legally lighten the aircraft and reweigh accordingly and no, I'm not going to make any calls. He rescinded the directive to stations on new empty weights and we reviewed each aircraft for possible changes that could reduce the weights. Those that witness this heated discussion from a distance thought that would be my last day. I thought that was a possibility as well. I believe that Capt. Blair wrestled with some of these decisions and I just helped him go in a better direction. Capt. Blair was certainly a strong influence on any individual in the company and several people would give him the answer he wanted to hear and not the one that he needed to hear.

Capt. Charles Blair's flying career of over 45,000 flying hours with over 40 years flying some of the most incredible airplanes of its time. Those early years of making each flight work without much in the way of regulations. Many people thought that Capt. Blair could fly a refrigerator if it had wings. I believe he thought the same. He flew N8777V that day because he felt that it was a perfectly good aircraft that a rule stated that it was not.

September 2, 1978 was a day that changed many things for many people. First the loss of life and the difficulty for the families of those that perished. It was also difficult for the employees and friends of AAB. Regardless of dealing with certain improprieties at AAB, we lost an incredible man.



Immediately following the accident, Capt. Brian Lincoln very firmly instructed me not to discuss N7777V with FAA and NTSB investigators. The NTSB investigation would primarily be conducted by reviewing records which I was responsible for and being instructed not to talk to them was irresponsible. The investigators ask me questions and I must refer them to Capt. Lincoln. He continued with the aircraft was parked until that morning of Sept. 2nd.

I told Capt. Lincoln that he was digging a hole with his position that N7777V didn't fly for several days. The investigators already have confirmed the daily flights of the aircraft. There are at least six reasons that they know that it flew. He asked, "How?"

1. Tower communications (St. Thomas Air Traffic Control Tower)
2. Fuel records (refueling inventory records)
3. Weight & Balance / Flight records
4. Station Telex communications
5. Daily Aircraft Assignment cards

"You said six, what is the sixth" he asked

They can ask me! The day will come, and I will not perjure myself when asked.

After about the third day into the investigation he dropped the position that the aircraft didn't fly.

NTSB Document -NTSB-AAR -79-9 / 1.6 Aircraft Information

(page 5)

*The aircraft was certificated to Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations. The Safety Board requested all records and logbooks related to N7777V from the company in order to determine the airworthiness of the aircraft. The following records were not available: The aircraft logbook, which was not recovered from the wreckage, and the logbook sheets (Form M2-6) for August 28, 29, 30, and 31, which were supposed to be filed with the Maintenance Coordinator. Although propeller logbooks were supplied, they did not match the serial numbers of the propellers recovered from the aircraft. The company could give no reason for this discrepancy. **After company officials had stated that the aircraft did not fly between August 27 and September 2, 1978**, the Vice President-Assistant General Manager stated, "I have not seen nor to my best information and belief does Antilles Air Boats, for the period August 28 to September 2, 1978." Inc., have the aircraft flight log sheets of N7777V in our possession.*

(Page 7)

The Vice- President / General Manager stated that he was not aware of N7777V was overdue for an inspection when he flew it on August 29. The logbook showed there was sufficient flight time remaining for the trip and the log was signed by a certificated mechanic. The line captain who flew N7777V on August 30 stated that, when he looked at the log sheet, there was sufficient time remaining for him to fly his trip and that the log sheet had been signed by a maintenance person who certified the airworthiness of the aircraft.

At the end of flying day (sunset/twilight) the aircraft at each station would be prepared for the next day. A review of the aircraft log book for pilot write-ups (discrepancies) as well as time remaining before next inspection, a post flight inspection would be performed and once the aircraft was deemed airworthy the log book was signed by a licensed mechanic releasing it for operations. Every post flight was performed on every aircraft every night. If an airworthy discrepancy was found and could not be corrected overnight the aircraft was grounded until proper repairs were made. If pilots didn't log time into the logbook the mechanic may not be aware that the log times were erroneous.

The log book would indicate that there still was time before inspection. The Captain would fly his first leg STX-STT and log .3 hrs. for the flight and would continue his round trips between STX-STT-STX without logging any time in the logbook. On his last leg STT-STX he would record .3 hrs. indicating the aircraft flew .6 hrs. for the day. Also, a Captain may not log any time in the logbook. A few hours remaining before an inspection could last for several days.

Capt. Blair could not see, what he considered a perfectly good, aircraft sitting on the ramp when it was needed for operations. Only a few Captains would fly an aircraft under these conditions.



AAB—St. Croix Maintenance Record Office

Daily Aircraft Assignments

As Assistant Director of Maintenance, it was my responsibility to schedule the maintenance inspections for all aircraft flown by Antilles Air Boats. AAB was a day VFR operation so all aircraft came home to roost each evening at one of our three maintenance bases, St. Croix, St. Thomas and San Juan. St. Croix was the primary base.

As an FAA Part 135 certificated airline, maintenance inspections were to be performed in accordance with approved operation specifications. The AAB - Grumman Goose was approved for 100-hour inspection for both engine and airframe. The engine and airframe inspections were alternated so every 50 flight hours the aircraft would be brought in to maintenance. The maintenance department would perform an engine inspection and 50 flight hours later brought back in for an airframe inspection and so on. Engine inspections basically could be performed overnight. The maintenance department had sufficient licensed and unlicensed mechanics to address any airworthiness discrepancies noted in the aircraft logbook, a nightly post flight walk-around as well as any engine inspections scheduled. If during an inspection an issue was noted than corrective action time line would vary. Airframe inspections were more progressive at each 100-hour interval with a "6C Check" being a complete and thorough look at the aircraft. The airframe inspections varied in time to complete from one day to 2 weeks or more based on findings.

No doubt, each night's workload would vary but mostly just busy.

To ensure that all maintenance inspection were performed at their appropriate intervals, I needed to have some control over daily flight times of each aircraft. The busiest route was between St. Thomas and St. Croix with each flight being approximately 20 min. St. Thomas to San Juan 30 minutes with St. Croix to San Juan about 50 minutes. AAB designed schedules to meet the passenger demands with numerous aircraft with each aircraft being assigned to a colored schedule flying a designated allotted time. A pilot would be assigned to a color and I would assign the aircraft. Each colored schedule varied in total daily flight hours. I may schedule an aircraft to start in St. Croix and switch in St. Thomas later in the day. This scheduling procedure allowed me to control the spacing of inspections and which station would perform each inspection.



Even with a very experienced maintenance staff, extensive supply of parts, including standby engines and propellers at the ready, there were times that insufficient aircraft were available to meet the schedule.

Aircraft that had reached their inspection due time had to sit until we could get through the back log.

As stated earlier, engine inspections could be accomplished relatively quickly. The engine inspection included but not limited to;

1. Oil Change with filter/screen & sump checks.
2. Valve adjustment – Positive or compression.
3. Ignition timing check – Spark plug servicing.
4. **Compression check ***
5. Air filter and carb – heat system check.
6. Fuel System Screens.
7. Cylinder Head Checks.



***Compression checks:** These checks are valuable tools in determining the health of an engine or cylinder. Differential Pressure Compression Test. The differential pressure tester is designed to check the compression of aircraft engines by measuring the leakage through the cylinders caused by worn or damaged components. The operation of the compression tester is based on the principle that, for any given airflow through a fixed orifice, a constant pressure drop across that orifice will result. The restrictor orifice dimensions in the differential pressure tester would be sized for the R-985 engine.

Note: N7777V was overdue for an airframe inspection. The last engine inspection did not indicate any abnormalities.

Even if a discrepancy was found that required a complete engine change it could be done overnight with a test flight at first light and back on the line. It was the more vigorous airframe inspections that could set us back.



The maintenance workload was on the rise. The inspection process is predictable, the inspection criteria was thorough, and the level of expertise was high. Once the INSPECTION is completed the list of discrepancies are recorded and assigned for corrective action. That corrective action can be the unpredictable factor regarding time out of service. If the discrepancy was a non-airworthy item, it may be deferred in accordance with proper FAR procedures. Airworthy items MUST be completed before return to service.

The Daily Aircraft Assignment cards below would indicate the procedure that would be sent to stations for pilots and ops agents to assist with aircraft time management.

Most pilots worked with us, but some had issues with the process. They preferred to start and end with the same aircraft. Some requested their aircraft of choice rather than the one assigned but overall, we worked well together to accomplish the task.

The Daily Aircraft Assignment cards below are also significant based on the dates. I have included August 28th through September 1st, 1978. The card for Sept. 2, 1978 was taken in evidence by the FAA / NTSB for the accident of N7777V which Capt. Charles Blair and 3 others died.

MON 28 AUG

COLOR	A/C.	SWITCH	TIME	STA.	PILOT
BLUE	676				JOHANSON
BLACK	901				KAMBO
YELLOW	77V				BLAIR
ORANGE	48A	CP Mc Cook			MARLE
GREEN	283				ALBERTSON
LIME	550				PENNLEY
PURPLE	229				MORRISON
BROWN	588				THOMPSON
RED	-				-
STANDBY					CRONER

N7777V flown by Capt. Blair

TUES 29 AUG

COLOR	A/C.	SWITCH	TIME	STA.	PILOT
BLUE	283				ORREN
BLACK	550				AUSTIN
YELLOW	77V				LINCOLN
ORANGE	48A	MARLE +			HARRIS
GREEN	229				SCOTT
LIME	901				KADDELL
PURPLE	676				CRONER
BROWN	588				THOMPSON
RED	-				-
STANDBY					BLAIR

N7777V flown by Capt. Lincoln

WED 30 AUG

COLOR	A/C.	SWITCH	TIME	STA.	PILOT
BLUE	283				ORREN
BLACK	550				AUSTIN
YELLOW	676				LINCOLN
ORANGE	229				MARLE
GREEN	48A	SCOTT			HARRIS +
LIME	901				MORRISON
PURPLE	77V	BLAIR			SCOTT
BROWN	588				THOMPSON
RED	-				-
STANDBY					
PINK	CX				PENNLEY

N7777V flown by Capt. Blair / Capt. Harris with Capt. Scott scratched

THURS 31 AUG

COLOR	A/C.	SWITCH	TIME	STA.	PILOT
BLUE	676				PENDLEY
BLACK	550				AUSTIN
YELLOW	283				DRPEN
ORANGE	48A		LINCOLN		HARRIS
GREEN	229				SCOTT
LIME	901				MORRISON
PURPLE	77V				BLAIR
BROWN	588				McCook
RED	-				-
PINK	6X				-
STANDBY					THOMPSON

N7777V flown by Capt. Blair

FRI 1 SEPT

COLOR	A/C.	SWITCH	TIME	STA.	PILOT
BLUE	676				PENDLEY
BLACK	550				MADSEN
YELLOW	284				DRPEN
ORANGE	77V	356		STX	MABLE
GREEN	48A				THOMPSON
LIME	901				MORRISON
PURPLE	229	588			SCOTT
BROWN	283				McCook
RED	77V				BLAIR
PINK	588 229				CROZIER
STANDBY					-

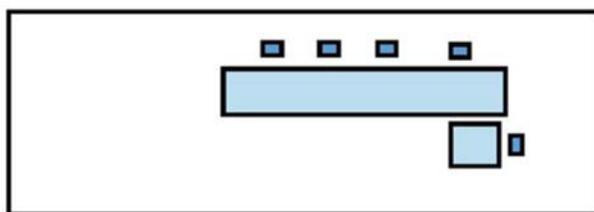
N7777V flown by Capt. Mable then switch to N7356 (Mallard) in St. Croix

N7777V flown by Capt. Blair

N7777V flown by Capt. Blair on Saturday, Sept. 2, 1978

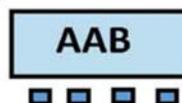
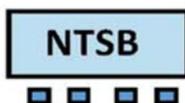
The days leading up to the NTSB hearings were extremely busy. Not only were we dealing with new operational restrictions, reviewing and rewriting policies and procedures, rebuilding aircraft from the ground up but some of us had to deal with the attorneys preparing us for the NTSB Hearings that would commence on November 6, 1978.

I was 29 years of age and even though I was not accustomed to the legal and political aspects of the proceedings, I was up for the challenge. I had been a big part of the previous 60 days of working with the FAA and NTSB and certainly got a sense of each's agenda. Even though the investigation was complete it was the sworn testimony that will finalize the outcome.



The Frenchman's Reef main ballroom was used for the NTSB hearings

The layout was the NTSB Chairman and board members on the stage with the witness stand.



The FAA, NTSB and AAB tables each had attorneys representing their agency.

The main ballroom was full of interested parties from the media, regulatory agencies and the general public

The questioning started on the left and moved to the right, across the head table and then the process started again.



Frenchman's Reef

The NTSB Hearings were conducted at the Holiday Inn - Frenchman's Reef Hotel a couple of months following the accident. The ballroom was the only room that was large enough to hold the hearings. I was not looking forward to testifying but I was prepared and ready to give the facts as well as defend Antilles Air Boats in any way I could.

I was called on the afternoon of the first day. I remember Mrs. Blair and others complimenting me on my positive testimony. I knew that the tough questions were yet to come. The following day I took the stand once again and began talking about the out of time aircraft and who flew them.

I knew that the FAA was aware of specific deficiencies at AAB including flying aircraft past inspection due time before Sept 2, 1978. There was reference to a joke at the FSDO... "How do you tell an out of time aircraft at AAB?" The aircraft flown by Capt. Blair, Lincoln or Scott."

During my testimony, I stated that Capt. Lincoln and Capt. Scott flew out-of-time aircraft. There were others but I gave them the names they wanted, the names that they already had. They never asked me if there were others but if asked I would have to answer. That question didn't come up. The "others" were relieved.
(see testimony transcript)

Some at AAB were not pleased that I gave their names. Brian Lincoln and Bob Scott did not fly again after the dust settled on all the proceedings and subsequent actions.

Another example of management circumventing proper maintenance practices came in testimony on the second day.

1.15 Survival Aspects

...When the aircraft cartwheeled, the cabin ceiling and right wall separated, which greatly enhanced egress from the cabin and cockpit. The passenger seats were mounted on floor channel structures which, in turn, were fastened to the floor of the cabin. During the accident sequence, the floor channel structures were found outside the cabin. No cabin seatbelts failed, and three were separated from the floor, and most seats and floor channel structures found buckled.

During the investigation it was noted that the floor channels that the seats were mounted were installed improperly which allowed its failure and immediate exit from the aircraft. In this situation, it could be said that the improper installation allowed those passengers sitting in those seats to survive.

Maintenance Supervisor, Charles Freehling testified at the NTSB hearings and had to answer questions regarding the improper seat channel installation. The NTSB had specific documentation on an installation of the seat channel on N7777V. The documentation clearly stated that installation was done correctly and approved by Charles Freehling but what was found was a seat channel that was popped riveted to the floor stringers. Pop rivets are clearly unacceptable.

A year or so after Charles Freehling's approved installation additional work needed to be accomplished which would require new seat channels to be installed. A proper installation would require the aircraft to be in maintenance for a longer period. Capt. Blair wanted the aircraft on the line sooner, so he called in George Molitor, a sheet metal/fabric specialist that provided services to AAB that included circumventing proper procedures in order to meet Capt. Blair's scheduling requirements. No documentation was made on this improper repair, so the records indicated Charles Freehling's previous installation.

When Capt. Blair asked George Molitor how long it would take him to make this repair compared to our staff, he stated he could do it over night rather than a two-day repair. George told Capt. Blair what he wanted to hear, not what he needed to hear. Even though AAB had incredibly knowledgeable personnel without the full support of a Director of Maintenance it made it difficult to work with management.

The NTSB Report also gets into quite a bit of discussion on the origin of the failed left engine. Maintenance accepted the engine from its own engine shop (Caribbean Airmotive-San Juan) as advertised, a PW R-985 with 361.05 total hours. (1,200 hrs. TBO).

After the accident, between investigator's and our maintenance management staff we determined that this engine should have never been installed on an aircraft without first being totally overhauled. The French Air Force was disposing of a number of engines that I believe wound up going from France to Canada to California and then to San Juan, P.R.. The lot was originally bought as run-out engines to be used as cores for total overhauls.

Fred Wheeler was responsible for the engine overhaul shop and was also given responsibility to oversee all AAB maintenance. Some of us recognized that we had another "Yes Man". He would do whatever to keep cost down and aircraft moving to accommodate management. He took the engine, ran it up on a test stand in San Juan and put a Repair Station stamp of approval in a revised engine log book (not the French logbook) and sent it on to St. Croix. After the fact, I would question the 361.05 hrs. As stated earlier, all engine inspections (every 100 hrs.) did not determine any defects. Even adding on the additional hours, that were not logged during the days leading up to Sept. 2nd, would not have exceeded the next engine inspection. The cylinder hold down studs failed on #5 and if fatigue was a factor it may represent that the engine had more time than indicated. The NTSB had the engine at 921.5 total hrs. at failure.

The 3-bladed Hartzell propeller was also in question. The original Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) gave the G21A an increase gross weight of 8,750 lbs. which was found to exceed its true performance. The propellers blades were inspected each night and every night you would find the blade edge pitted from hitting water spray on landing. Each night you would dress (file) the leading edge. A template was used as a guide but blades were filed beyond their optimum performance adding to poor single engine performance. (see NTSB report) (see comments N74676)

Over the years AAB had numerous incidents and accidents. When reviewed you could say that all were avoidable. I don't believe you could say it was aircraft design. The Grumman Goose was a solid aircraft if flown and maintained properly (by the end of 1978, the Goose lost credibility with the flying public). Some of the accidents were pilot error. Sometimes it was hard to believe due to the fact that the pilots arrived with incredible aviation background. AAB had some of the finest maintenance personnel. Even some of the non-certified mechanics from the islands were more knowledgeable than many certified mechanics on the Goose. The senior maintenance supervisors were the most experienced seaplane mechanics in the industry. If supported properly through the years I believe AAB would have fared better.

Improper management decisions in many aspects of AAB operations were the single most contributor to the accidents. The issues of aircraft weight & balance is probably the second contributor to AAB accidents. As stated earlier, aircraft were too heavy and single engine performance was always questionable. Engine failures should not have translated to accidents. A true safety culture was non-existing at AAB.

With all that has been said, I still believe that all were good men, making a brief deviation from best practices for what they thought was good for the company. It was 1978. Never to be repeated again.

I too am accountable for my part, I knew they were manipulating the flight times but didn't stop it. I was assigning aircraft because that is what I was told to do. I submitted log books to the FAA that I knew had erroneous entries. I could have left the company but preferred to stay and promote positive change. It had worked at times before but this time it came at a higher price. It took that price to finally make changes.

After September 2nd things changed. Maintenance was performed in accordance with proper procedures. The records keeping was impeccable and maintenance forecasting became an art. This all came with a price and the economics of keeping AAB flying was indeed being reviewed.

My employment at AAB was part of my early career in aviation, close to 40 years ago. 1978 would have a profound effect on my years to follow. I became the teacher of what not to do. I have been involved with a number of airline certifications, audits and reviews and have used best practices in all my endeavors.

“In almost every accident analysis, there is a chain of events that can be followed all the way up to the accident. It is never just one thing, but a combination of bad choices that ultimately lead to the final event.”

Tom Anusewicz

*The comments made are my informed opinion from my unique position
while being thrust into the many events of 1978*

As the months went by, it was evident that Antilles Air Boats, even under new ownership, was having difficulty with profitability. It was only a matter of time before Resorts International made the decision to shut down. I requested a letter from Ron Gillies to help in whatever was going to be next. Ron was a good friend and I appreciate his kind words. My efforts throughout the investigation, testimony and reorganization was one of credibility and trust that was recognized by the governing agencies which helped AAB have the opportunity to rebuild.



ANTILLES AIR BOATS, INC.

SEAPLANE RAMP • VETERANS DRIVE • ST. THOMAS • U. S. VIRGIN ISLANDS • 00801 • PHONE 774-4578

July 25, 1979

To Whom It May Concern:

This will verify that Thomas Anusewicz has been in the employ of Antilles Air Boats, Inc. since October, 1975.

He was employed initially as a mechanic, but was found to possess an above average ability in general organization. As a result he was given the job of up-dating and maintaining all Company aircraft maintenance records, together with maintenance scheduling. This he carried out to the satisfaction of all concerned.

During the period following the death of Captain Blair, he applied himself intelligently to a large number of existing problems and was of invaluable assistance to the writer.

Thomas Anusewicz is one of a very few people responsible for the survival of this Company.

I have no hesitation in recommending him to any future employer.

Sincerely yours,

R. N. Gillies
Vice President
Chief of Maintenance