

# ANTILLES AIR BOATS



## 15 Years Of Serving The Virgin Islands

### The Dream of Captain Charles F. Blair

In 1963 Captain Charles F. Blair, already a famed aviator, put \$10,000 down on a Grumman Goose, hired five employees and started an airline. With that modest investment and a dream about convenient, economical downtown-to-downtown air service, Capt. Blair built Antilles Air Boats into the largest seaplane service in the world and the mainstay of inter-island air transportation for Virgin Islanders.

Just a few months ago, Antilles Air Boats celebrated its 15th anniversary, making it the oldest airline in continuous service to the people of the Virgin Islands. During those 15 years, Antilles logged 378,492 flights, carried over 2.7 million passengers; its annual cargo load now totals 2 million pounds a year. That original investment of \$10,000 skyrocketed until today Antilles is valued at \$4 million in real estate and equipment. The airline employs 132 with a payroll that will come close to the \$2 million mark by 1980.

Antilles Air Boats contributions to the Virgin Islands economy go well beyond its impact as an employer, however. Its convenient downtown-to-downtown service has made it the major transportation link among the islands. Inter-island business trips that once consumed at least a full day in travel time now can be completed in under an hour, round trip. Cargo — including everything from important documents weighing only a few ounces to machinery — reach their destinations quickly. Tourists and residents alike can spend the morning shopping in Charlotte Amalie and be in Christiansted or Road Town in time for lunch. It is this kind of quick, convenient, reliable service that promotes commerce, facilitates business and encourages inter-island pleasure travel. In short, it allows the Virgin Islands to function as a community of islands.

As precious as the time saved, however, is the land and environment protected. Because seaplanes use water

as their runway, they require no large tracts of valuable real estate. And, at the same time, they can still provide that all-important downtown-to-downtown service. In the Virgin Islands where land for development is at a premium, Antilles Air Boats economical use of land is an advantage that's difficult to over-estimate.

With 15 years under its belt, the "Goose" as Antilles Air Boats has so long been affectionately known to Virgin Islanders, is ready to launch a new era of even bigger and better service. Five 15-passenger Grumman Mallards have already replaced the Gooses as the backbone of the daily air service and new, larger aircraft are scheduled to be added to the fleet in the near future. Daily flights to various destinations served will be added to meet increasing needs. After 15 years, the "Goose" is still getting bigger and better every day, in every way. And it all began with one man, one Goose and a dream of what could be.



GOVERNMENT HOUSE  
CHARLOTTE AMALIE, ST. THOMAS  
VIRGIN ISLANDS

April 29, 1979

Mrs. Maureen O'Hara Blair,  
President  
Antilles Air Boats  
West Seaplane Ramp  
Christiansted, St. Croix, V.I. 00820

Dear Mrs. Blair:

On behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands, I would like to offer my heartiest congratulations to Antilles Air Boats for 15 years of continued service to these islands.

We are proud to share in the observance of this significant milestone in the history of a Virgin Islands firm which has made many meaningful contributions to the lives of all of us.

Antilles Air Boats has carried 2.7 million passengers, delivered tons of cargo, and provided employment opportunities. It has provided a beneficial connection enabling the residents of all three islands to come together and permitting visitors to experience inter-island life.

On this historic occasion, I salute Antilles Air Boats and earnestly wish this airline success in its future endeavors.

Best wishes,  
*Juan Luis*  
JUAN LUIS  
Governor



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 3, 1979

Mrs. Charles F. Blair,  
President  
Antilles Air Boats  
West Seaplane Ramp  
Christiansted, St. Croix  
U. S. Virgin Islands 00820

Dear Mrs. Blair:

It is a great pleasure to offer heartiest congratulations to Antilles Air Boats on the observance of your 15th anniversary of service to the Virgin Islands community.

Antilles Air Boats, under the leadership of the late Captain Charles F. Blair, has played an integral role in the economical development of the Virgin Islands by providing a fast and efficient transportation service for residents as well as tourists.

Business, government, and medical services were enhanced greatly by the availability of inter-island connections.

I wish Antilles Air Boats every success in its continuing effort to expand what is already an outstanding record of service to all of us.

Sincerely,  
*Melvin H. Evans*  
Melvin H. Evans,  
M.C.

MHE:lm

St. Thomas  
374-0888  
374-4710

Telephone  
Communications Department  
Business and Public Affairs  
Law Offices  
Committee on Tourism and Planning

ELMO D. ROEBUCK  
Member, House of St. Thomas, St. John  
Thirteenth Legislature of the Virgin Islands  
Christiansted, V.I.

P.O. Box 437

February 21, 1979

Mrs. Charles Blair, President  
Antilles Air Boat, Inc.  
West Seaplane Ramp  
Christiansted, St. Croix, V. I.

Dear Mrs. Blair:

On behalf of the members of the Thirteenth Legislature, I am delighted to congratulate you on the fifteenth anniversary of Antilles Air Boats and to wish you every success for the future.

Antilles Air Boats pioneered a unique service in the Virgin Islands and forged a new link between our islands that has been invaluable to our commerce and tourism industry. Even more importantly, Antilles Air Boats has been an outstanding corporate citizen, and this community is grateful to you and your late husband for your civic spirit and for your enthusiastic promotion of our islands in your travels throughout the world.

Our celebration of this anniversary is only marred by the absence of Captain Blair, but his spirit and his love of the airline lives on through your efforts. We are proud to have counted him as a citizen of the Virgin Islands, and equally proud of your courage and your dedication in carrying on this vital service for the people of the Virgin Islands.

You have our wholehearted support and our sincerest best wishes for your continued success.

Sincerely,

*Elmo D. Roebuck*  
Elmo D. Roebuck  
President  
Thirteenth Legislature

# Spirited Irish Actress Takes On Most Demanding Role

One of the hazards of being a film star is that people expect the private person to be just like the characters they portray on the big screen. In the case of Maureen O'Hara Blair, however, the public is not to be disappointed. She is just as out-spoken and strong-willed in real life as she ever was in dealing with the likes of John Wayne.

Today, Mrs. Blair has abandoned her film career in favor of a new one as president of Antilles Air Boats. At an age when she could sit back on her laurels and enjoy nothing more strenuous than being a grandmother, Mrs. Blair has chosen the difficult task of running an airline, which is about the only thing she never did in her 55 films in which she played everything from a pirate to the mother of an unmanageable brood of kids.

In those films she succeeded in out-maneuvering Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., out-talking Wayne,

and out-talking the likes of Hollywood's most talkative Irishman, Barry Fitzgerald. That she too is Irish didn't hurt, of course. Today, she runs Antilles Air Boats' operations with the same in-the-thick-of-things attitude that made her a favorite among her co-stars and film crews. Never one to sit on the sidelines, she is involved in every major decision affecting Antilles. That is to be expected from the actress who rarely used a double for such stunts as diving head first into the mud, swinging from the yardarm of a pirate ship or jumping three stories into a haystack.

In an article in *Films and Filming*, writer Julian Fox recounts how, on one occasion, Mrs. Blair leapt from the battlements of a movie set and began fencing upon impact with three stuntmen who promptly dropped to their knees in homage to her daring and agility. These days, however, she's gone from

fencing to tackling the tough problems associated with running an efficient and growing airline. Although she has been president of Antilles less than a year, she's as much in the middle of the seaplane operations as she ever was on the screen.

## NO NEWCOMER

Actually Mrs. Blair is no newcomer to the Antilles operations. She's been an active participant at the management level almost since the day she married its founder, the late Capt. Charles Blair, in 1968. After serving as a member of the board of directors, she became vice-president and, then, after Capt. Blair's death, succeeded him as president.

Early in their marriage she managed to keep two careers going although she restricted her filmmaking to one movie per year. Proud of her success, Capt. Blair never discouraged her; in fact, he accompanied her on location and, while she filmed, he concentrated on his writing. Nevertheless, he was the first to admit he wasn't about to watch her movie love scenes even on late-night TV. In deference to him, she refused roles requiring her to "romance" the leading man.

As her involvement with Antilles grew, Mrs. Blair eventually began to accept fewer and fewer films. "The roles for women - really good, family-type roles, I mean - got fewer and fewer," she explained. "I just lost interest. Besides I was so busy here in St. Croix, and then Charlie and I did a good deal of travelling, too."

For someone who once caused the pilot to consider an emergency landing because she was so air-sick,



Mrs. Blair consults with Charles Freehling, chief inspector in Antilles maintenance department. In her role as president of the company, Mrs. Blair actively participates in all phases of the Antilles' operation. She is a familiar figure to employees and passengers alike at the airlines' St. Croix terminal headquarters.

Mrs. Blair adjusted quickly to being the wife of one of the world's most travelled pilots. After flying all over the world with Capt. Blair and working with him at Antilles, she came to share his enthusiasm for seaplanes and his conviction that they are the "commuters" of the future. That interest led her to considerable research. Today she is one of the most knowledgeable and articulate spokespersons for seaplanes and their potential in commercial service (see her article on the future of the seaplane on page 12).

As president of Antilles, she spends a busy work week in the book-lined, memento-filled office that was her husband's. Between consultants with her management team and an ever-ringing telephone, she talked about her career.

## PLEASE THE PUBLIC

"There's really very little difference between my 'other' career and this one. Before, I

sold seats in movie theatres. Now I sell seats in seaplanes. Both involve pleasing the public; both require performing my job so well that people return again and again."

That she is among the elite number of women to serve as chief executive of an airline is a fact that Mrs. Blair accepts - and promptly dismisses in favor of another related subject. "Do you realize," she asked, "that women hold several key positions with Antilles that are held almost exclusively by men in other scheduled airlines?" AAB's director of traffic and sales, its mager of sales and manager of traffic are all women who worked their way up the ranks. Did Mrs. Blair ever use her influence to promote the role of women in the Antilles operation? "No indeed," she emphasized. "They got where they are because of hard work and competence. Charlie hired women in top positions from day one. Mary

(Continued on Page 10)



AAB President Maureen O'Hara Blair, shown here with her husband, the late Capt. Charles F. Blair, founder of the airline. Like him, she has come to love seaplanes and the Virgin Islands and plans see that Antilles grows bigger and better.

# IT ALL BEGAN WITH ONE PILOT, ONE PLANE AND FIVE EMPLOYEES

Capt. Charles Blair didn't come to the Virgin Islands with the idea of starting an airline. It just happened one day when he got tired of the inconvenience of trying to get from St. Croix to St. Thomas without spending half a day in the effort.

When he moved to St. Croix in 1961, the only air transportation between the islands was limited, at best. Inadequate service and out-of-the-way airports often made the distance between the two islands seem more like 400 miles instead of just 45. At that time, Capt. Blair was still chief pilot for Pan American Airlines (for more details of his impressive career (see story on page 5) and commuted regularly from the Virgin Islands to the origination points for his around-the-world flights. And he was accustomed to getting from here to there by the quickest, most convenient routes.

After a while, his impatience gave birth to an idea. One day while enjoying the view of Christiansted harbor from his home above the town, Capt. Blair decided to buy himself a seaplane. Why not, he thought, use the calm and convenient waters of Christiansted and Charlotte Amalie harbors to fly downtown-to-downtown?

Experienced in every type of aircraft including seaplanes, Capt. Blair knew exactly the kind of aircraft for his needs - a Grumman Goose. Capt. Blair chose the Goose for some very special reasons. It was small, only one pilot and 10 passengers, as well as sturdy and reliable. Used by the Navy as an air patrol in World War II, the Goose was well-tested by time and duty. What's more, it could cruise with ease into and out of almost any sheltered stretch of water. No more hassles for Capt. Blair, he simply flew from downtown-to-downtown whenever he had occasion to travel between the two islands.

It didn't take people long to catch on to a good thing and soon he was flying with a cabin full of passengers. Then on a "flying" vacation from Pan Am, he made it official with five employees and turned the Goose into a bona fide airline he called Antilles Air Boats. That was February 5, 1964.

Between his stints with Pan Am, Capt. Blair returned home to look after his airline and to fly the Goose. It was in those early days that Virgin Islanders dubbed Antilles Air Boats simply "The Goose," an affectionate nickname that has stuck throughout the years.

At the end of its first year of operation, the little airline was firmly established. It had flown a total of 10,000 passengers between St. Thomas and St. Croix and plans were underway to add a St. Thomas-San Juan run to the schedule. At the heart of the

airlines growth was the convenience of downtown-to-downtown service. No taxis, no airport rush, no long delays on runways.

All profit from the operations were plowed back into the company, a practice that continues today. Blair did not initiate airline service as a personal money-making scheme. It grew from the desire to make inter-island commuting easier, into a dream of turning the Virgin Islands into a single community of islands, joined by efficient, convenient and economical service. It was a dream that would persist and grow.

## THE EARLY YEARS

It wasn't all convenience in those early days but it was fun even with the Boston Whalers which, before the ramps were built, carried some 65,000 people to and from the Goose. It required precise timing - and often a good sense of humor - to embark and disembark without loss of dignity as the little boats bobbed in the waves besides the waiting seaplanes. Fortunately, amphibians like the Goose can manage quite well with a small ramp or even a groomed beach and, with a few years, the seaplanes were taxiing straight through their water landings onto the terra firma and passengers were using stairways instead of whalers to board the planes.

Among the first ramps constructed was one Capt. Blair laughingly called the "smallest airport in the



Excilibur VII, one of a total of eight aircraft flown by Blair to bear the name, was AAB's first plane. Above, Capt. Marius Lodeesen (left) and Capt. Blair check the aircraft out.

world," a 67 x 100 foot ramp in Christiansted. Prior to its construction Antilles landed at the end of what is now known as Pan Am Alley in Christiansted.

Another development of the first years was mail transport. It actually began in an off-handed manner when people with urgent letters or small packages began to ask Antilles captains to carry an occasional item between the islands. That informal and modest beginning soon mushroomed into a legitimate mail service.

Like any new, growing business,

AAB was a boon to the local economy. "Antilles brought the islands together," airline President Maureen O'Hara Blair commented. "It created a stimulus for business, and tourism. Hotels were being built, tourists could move easily from island to island. Swift travel also was provided for cargo as well as people, and for papers such as bank documents. For instance, the computer operation which later served the bulk of the payrolls in the Virgin Islands had-and still has - its key punch operation in St. Thomas and its computers in St. Croix. Materials

must pass back and forth quickly and efficiently: Antilles provides that service."

The impact on the islands was impossible to measure in dollars and cents alone. Business people who had previously limited their inter-island contact with associates to letters, unreliable telephone connections and an occasional trip, were travelling back and forth regularly in the course of a business day. While tourists also used the airlines, it was Virgin Islanders who dominated the manifests. The islands' business areas, once 45 miles and often hours apart, were at last within a few minutes commuting time. In fact, with the Goose, it took (and still takes) less time to fly between St. Thomas and St. Croix than it does to drive across either.

## THE GROWING YEARS

Over the next several years AAB grew. Capt. Blair retired from Pan Am, and, at the age of 60, began to devote full time to running the airline. At his right hand was an able helper, his wife and Antilles' executive vice president, Maureen O'Hara Blair. She, too, began to share his far-sighted dream of downtown-to-downtown service not only in the Virgin Islands but between such major metropolitan areas as New York and Boston where airports are so far from the business areas that taxi-time exceeds air-time.

(Continued on page 6)

## Several Flew Over the Goose's Nest

*The Heretofore Unpublished Memoirs of an Ex-Ticket Agent.*

By Liz Wilson

Put two former Antilles Air Boats employees together - any two - and it's memory time right away. But more than that, once you have worked for the Air Boats, you automatically become a member of the family and those ties are binding no matter where you may be presently.

Take Bunny Olsen, for example. Her claim to fame is that she holds the first ticket ever issued by the company back in February 1964 and of course she was on board the Mallard at this year's birthday celebration when that first flight was re-enacted. A blonde blue-eyed dazler, Bunny first met Capt. Charles F. Blair when he flew Pan Am props into Bermuda many years ago. After moving to St. Croix it was only natural she would want to climb aboard that inaugural flight to St. Thomas.

The first office for the new airline (which consisted of exactly one plane-N95467) was in Wendy Hilty's Kings Alley Hotel office and the passengers were loaded by rowboat into the aircraft which was anchored in the harbor. Bunny also recalls landing in St. Thomas in front of the old Carousel Bar and

being met by boatman Fred Romney who today is the veteran employee of the company.

Each year to commemorate that occasion, no matter where she happens to be (and she lives part time in the Azores), Bunny sends flowers and other appropriate tributes to the airline which she calls "the finest and most fun anywhere in the world." It was Bunny, too, who designed the handsome gold "Goose" charm worn by so many loyal Air Boats ladies today.

For ticket agents in the early days there were almost no limits on what we were called upon to do since all of us had to handle the four "p's" - passengers, pilots, planes and packages - at one time or another. You might add another "p" to the list too, since "people" of all kinds have always been a part of the rich Air Boats spectrum.

St. Croix's Maggie Hart ran the old ticket office on St. Thomas back in 1965 when it was nothing but a red and white wooden shanty near the old lumber yard on Veteran's Drive. She remembers one colorful character who was overly fond of indulging in alcoholic spirits. Each morning he would take up his station next to

the office wearing battered top hat and full dress formal "tails," greeting startled passersby and loudly declaiming passages from Shakespeare.

Maggie, in those days, lived a hazardous life, since at times when Romney was busy with the aircraft she had to stagger across the highway dodging traffic as she lugged cargo and suitcases for some passengers who were used to big time amenities such as Red Caps when they travelled.

She recalls too, that many lady tourists in those days dressed most properly for travel in white gloves, hats and patent leather shoes. They presented an odd sight, she says, as they bobbed out to the Goose in the rowboats, straddling their luggage which was then loaded by the pilot into the nose of the plane.

Maggie says it wasn't at all uncommon for passengers of prestige to pitch in and help when she was tied up on the teletype. She remembers several occasions when then-First Lady Bert Paiewonsky would pick up the jangling phone, saying in her most official voice "Antilles Air Boats. May I help you?"

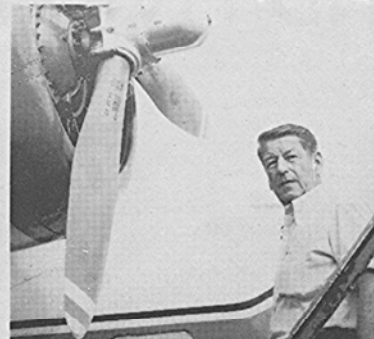
The St. Croix ramp too attracted its share of interesting personages, both local and from afar. On one

occasion I was engaged in conversation with an elderly gentleman who was watching the arriving and departing planes with some curiosity. He told me he was from Frederiksted and it was his first visit to Christiansted in 20 years. I expressed surprise and asked him why he visited so infrequently. His response was a shrug of the shoulder as he said "Why should I? There was no need to leave Frederiksted."

In 1966 a new ramp had been built at the end of the recently completed Pan Am Pavilion and a modern ticket office replaced the small wood building which then became our first full-fledged cargo office. Prior to that time the area had been a lumber yard. Across the access road which was unpaved there was an ice house where the Caravelle Arcade is now and each morning the construction trucks lined the road to fill up with ice for the many crews engaged in the building boom of the sixties.

Right next door to our office an island institution popular to this day soon opened. Sir Aubrey's Pig's Ear quickly became known as the Air Boats Annex and billed itself as "The World's Largest Airport Terminal Restaurant - Serving a Thousand People (10 at a time)." (Continued on Page 8)

# Meet Some of the Folks Who Keep Antilles Flying



Helping make Antilles fly (clockwise from upper left): Paul Holt, vice-president, finance; John Wagner, new director of maintenance; Robert DeLugo, St. Croix scheduling manager; Juan Murphy, San Juan sales manager; and Noreen Gillies, traffic manager and St. Thomas station manager. Three of AAB's senior pilots also hold administrative positions, Captains Brian Lincoln, Ronald Gillies, and Robert Scott.

Left to right, AAB's Ginny Angus and Julie Rasmussen with President Maureen O'Hara Blair. Mrs. Angus is director of sales and traffic and Mrs. Rasmussen is manager of sales.



## Resorts International Antilles New Owners

On April 23, James M. Crosby, chairman of the board of Resorts International, Inc. acquired approximately 97% of the outstanding common stock of Antilles Air Boats, in exchange for 63,300 shares of its Class A Common Stock.

The corporation had acquired approximately 97% of the outstanding common stock of Antilles Air Boats in exchange for

63,300 shares of its Class A Common Stock

In a joint statement he and Antilles Air Boats president Maureen O'Hara Blair said that there will be no change in management or operation of the Virgin Islands airline.

"I will remain as president. And all of our employees and I look forward to fulfilling the plans and dreams of Capt. Charles F.

(Continued on Page 9)

# The Most Professional Gang in the Caribbean

Capt. Blair once described his pilots as the "most professional gang in the Caribbean." When he made that statement, he most certainly had in mind the six men who today are Antilles Air Boats' senior pilots -- Captains William Mable, Ronald Gillies, Donald McDermott, Robert Scott, George Ruddell and Brian Lincoln. With an average of over 35 years flying experience each, in just about everything with wings, Antilles' senior pilots are indeed an impressive group. Following is a brief synopsis of each pilot's career:

### WILLIAM MABLE

Capt. Mable had his first flying experiences in gliders. It wasn't until he was sixteen that he started flying powered aircraft. At the age

of 21, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force, then was called back to the U.S. as an instructor in a glider program designed to assist in airlifting cargo and troops to Europe. Jets were next on his list of aircraft and during World War II he flew with the 4th Fighter Group out of England. After a brief hiatus from the military, he returned to serve with a defense squadron in Japan which flew missions over Korea. Once back in the U.S., he was assigned to a rescue squadron flying the Grumman Albatross (Antilles has four of these aircraft). Later he joined Bell Aircraft as an engineering test pilot to test air-to-surface missiles, launched by pilot controlled F-80 jets. Before joining Antilles, he worked with Bell on an automatic landing system for the Navy and Air Force.

### RONALD GILLIES

An Australian Air Force veteran, Capt. Gillies came by his love of flying naturally as son of one of the founding members of the Australian Air Force. During World War II, he commanded an Australian squadron, which was attached to the Royal Air Force. He was in charge of 400 men who flew the Sunderlands, the military version of the Sandringham. During the war, his squadron's duty was to hunt German U Boats. He later became senior controller of the Southern Coastal Command based at Plymouth, then returned to Australia. After the war, Capt. Gillies and his brother started a maintenance operation. He later joined Ansett Airlines which originally owned the two Sandringhams now in the Antilles fleet.

Capt. Gillies a Vice-President.

### DONALD McDERMOTT

Capt. Don McDermott is the youngest of the Antilles senior pilots at 35 years of age. Son of a Pan American pilot and colleague of Capt. Blair's, he soloed at age 20. He first became interested in seaplanes during a brief stint as co-pilot with Antilles following his graduation from flight school in 1964. During the following few years he instructed in New York and New Jersey and then flew air-taxi service in New Jersey. Ten years ago he rejoined Antilles Air Boats as a pilot-in-command. Capt. McDermott has 13,500 flying hours to his credit and prefers seaplanes to other commercial aircraft because "It's real flying... and fun."

Also a veteran of World War II, Korea and Vietnam, Capt. Scott flew more than 300 combat missions. He later commanded the 510th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia. During that period, he set an official U.S. transcontinental speed record in a F-84 Thunderbolt.

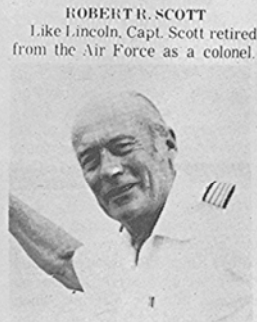
(Continued on Page 9)



Capt. Brian Lincoln



Captains George Ruddell, Ronald Gillies and Bob Scott.



Capt. William Mable



Capt. Donald McDermott

CAPT. CHARLES F. BLAIR

# THE MAN WHO LOVED TO FLY

The old adage that "the times make the man" has the ring of truth. Except that every now and then, someone comes along who so influences the times that he proves another old maxim: that it is the exception that makes the rule. Capt. Charles F. Blair was such a man.

To local residents he was most popularly known as the man who brought easy, convenient air transportation -- and Maureen O'Hara -- to the Virgin Islands. He was the man who owned and operated Antilles Air Boats and frequently the pilot who welcomed them aboard their flights; the tall, lean man with the easy smile and soft-spoken ways. That he also was

*"The prospect of acclaim is...dazzling to the uninitiated but I've been around long enough to be wary of it."*

— RED BALL IN THE SKY

the first person to fly solo over the North Pole, holder of a still unequalled transatlantic air speed record, a consultant to the Pentagon and NATO on top secret defense matters, an Air Force Brigadier General and chief pilot for Pan American Airlines never kept people from calling him simply "Cap'n Blair." He preferred Charlie.

For all his legendary aviation feats -- and they are legion -- Capt. Blair was an unassuming man whose passion was flying. He first soloed at the age of 18 at the Ryan Flying School in San Diego, California. In 1931, after earning a B.S. degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Vermont, Capt. Blair entered the Naval Flying School at Pensacola, Florida. With a year flying patrol for the Navy under his belt, Capt. Blair joined United Air Lines and for several years flew primarily between Cheyenne and San Francisco, moving up from first officer to pilot-in-command in three years.

In 1940, at the age of 31, Blair joined American Export Airlines (AEA) as chief pilot, a position he held continuously until his retirement nearly 30 years later from

Pan American Airlines which merged with American Overseas Airlines (AEA was renamed American Overseas in 1945). During World War II, AEA was under contract to the Navy to provide transport. Blair was intimately involved in all phases of the airlines operations, including training pilots and surveying opening up the overseas routes. At that time Pan American was the only other airline flying overseas.

Never a man to be satisfied with just one task, Capt. Blair's "down" time between flights was filled with a myriad of endeavors. In early 1942, AEA loaned him to Voight Sikorsky Aircrafts to help develop and flight test the transatlantic VS-44 flying boat which Sikorsky was making specifically for AEA. Not only did Capt. Blair fly every flight from the original factory test through certification of the VS-44 but, before the year was out, piloted the new aircraft to an historic record as the first airliner to fly nonstop across the Atlantic carrying mail and passengers.

It was his first record of note and one he described as a "record of necessity." When Capt. Blair set out on the flight, he had no intentions of speeding westward from Ireland to New York in pursuit of a record. But rugged weather interfered with schedule stops and he bypassed one, then another, intermediate landing. Faced with continuing heavy weather, Capt. Blair calculated his fuel and selected the speeds and altitudes which made the most efficient use of every ounce. When Capt. Blair landed the big Sikorsky in New York Harbor, he had a skimpy 95 gallons of fuel left in the 100-gallon reserve tank. And he was nearly one full day ahead of schedule.

As World War II escalated, Capt. Blair's AEA overseas operations increased. Capt. Blair commanded all survey and first scheduled flights to North and West Africa and South America (he'd already gotten the routes set between the U.S. and the British Isles). Shortly after the North African invasion, he commanded the first Naval air

transport aircraft to land in North Africa at Port Lyautey, French Morocco. He also regularly flew the critical routes between the neutral ports of Foynes, Ireland and Lisbon. On one of those flights with Capt. Blair in command, the passengers included Humphrey Bogart who was enroute home from entertaining the troops. The two men formed a bond of friendship that was to last until Bogart's death nearly 20 years later.

Even with the pressure of his flying schedule and executive duties as chief pilot, Capt. Blair found time to fly the production test flights for the Grumman F6F, F7F, and F8F Navy flights, test the original Martin Mars flying boat, and to propose and fly the first North Atlantic winter airline operations between the United States and the British Isles, including another non-stop trip in the VS-44 Sikorsky, this time from New York to Foynes.

*"One way to catch a tiger by the tail is to start a small airline on your own."*

— RED BALL IN THE SKY

After the end of the war, Capt. Blair found something else to keep him busy between his regular schedule -- his own airline. Called Associated Air Transport, Inc., his airline consisted most of the time of a single, personally owned C-46 which he used for non-scheduled flights from New York to as far away as the Mid-East and South America.

In 1950, Capt. Blair sold his airline. He had another more adventurous project in mind: setting an around the world speed record -- and a solo trip across the North Pole. For this he searched out a P-51 Mustang. Hollywood stuntflyer Paul Mantz already had converted two for civilian purposes and had won the Bendix race from Los Angeles to Cleveland in 1946 and 1947. After some negotiations, Capt. Blair purchased N1202. It was an aircraft number that was to go down in history. To Mantz's modifications, he added his own -- more fuel tanks (called "wet wings") and a 16-hour oxygen supply.

However, his dream of an around the world speed record skidded to an abrupt stop one day when news reached him of the invasion of South Korea. Although he had planned to fly eastward across Red China without benefit of clearance from that nation (after dark, of course), the outbreak of a war in that part of the world gave him serious second thoughts. First of all, a fighter plane flying over international borders in times of hostilities could invite problems. Second, Blair decided that the around the world speed record set in times of peace was one thing, but it took on a note of frivolity now that nations were pitted against nations again.



A tired Charlie Blair rested briefly in the cockpit of his Mustang single engine aircraft Excalibur III after flying non-stop alone over the North Pole, then on to New York. It was a navigation feat that was to change the course of aviation, both military and commercial.

While Capt. Blair had never shouted his patriotism, those who knew him well knew the intensity of his feelings. "He could be a bore about the United States," Mrs. Blair recalls with a smile. "Wherever Charlie was, there was always an American flag nearby." So, when the war clouds consumed his dream of an around the world record, Capt. Blair began searching his mind for a project that would have some military value. And he came up with one immediately: a solo flight over the Arctic and the North Pole, with emphasis on the word "solo." He wouldn't be the first to fly in the Arctic region -- a number of military flights had flown the area before, each with a crew that included a full complement of navigators. It was commonly accepted that it was impossible for a man alone to navigate the compass-defying Polar region. Commonly accepted by everybody except Capt. Blair.

He began immediately to test his aircraft with the polar flight in mind. Irritating problem after problem cropped up and was solved. At one point, somewhat discouraged, Capt. Blair -- a pilot by profession and an engineer by education -- showed a rarely glimpsed side of his logical, practical thought process. The P-51 still carried the name "Stormy Petrel" given it by Mantz. The stormy petrel is a long-distance flying bird and, in that sense, suited the tiny fighter aircraft which had a 4,000-mile flying range. However, the stormy petrel also is legendary among sailors as a harbinger of ill-fortune. Capt. Blair renamed the craft Excalibur III, successor to the Sikorsky and other aircraft which he had loved and had flown time and time again. After the name-change, all went well. "Maybe there is something in

a name," Capt. Blair speculated. Capt. Blair also decided that prior to the Polar attempt, he would fly the Atlantic seeking a speed record for a single engine aircraft. It would be his final "warm-up" before heading north.

Early on the icy cold morning of January 31, 1951, Capt. Blair boarded his crowded little cockpit and set out across the Atlantic. Off the coast of Newfoundland, Blair encountered his one and only serious problem when the oxygen mask slipped from his face. For a few precarious moments, precious life-oxygen escaped from the mask

*"This was the heady moment...of triumph. But it was fleeting. The action that leads to victory... leaves the more indelible recollections."*

— RED BALL IN THE SKY

sending Blair into near unconsciousness and plunging the plane several thousand feet earthward. Capt. Blair managed, struggling through an oxygen starved haze, to refit the mask and clear his head and soon Excalibur III was back on course. A few hours later, the bright red little aircraft sped to a fast landing at the London Airport, exactly seven hours and 48 minutes, and one world's record -- after takeoff from New York.

One of Capt. Blair's favorite stories about that trip actually took place when he returned to New York a few days later aboard a Pan Am Stratocruiser. He was stopped in the aisle by a passenger who told him, "Captain, I hear a Pan Am pilot just flew across here on one engine -- all by himself -- you know, solo. Must be crazy."

"Must be," Blair replied, no doubt struggling to keep a grin in check. After all, it wouldn't do to let a passenger know that crazy man was the pilot-in-command.

(Continued on page 7)



Capt. Blair loved airplanes, all kinds, and he flew them all, from sturdy little Goose to Stratocruisers and supersonic fighter jets. He soloed at the age of 18 and, during his flying lifetime, accumulated well over 45,000 hours behind the controls.

# Fifteen Years and Growing

(continued from page 3)

As Antilles grew, Capt. Blair sought out more and more pilots to captain his growing number of Gooses. With thousands of hours of flying time to his credit, not to mention a handful of aviation records, Capt. Blair set high standards for those who wanted to pilot the Goose. Most of the pilots recruited in the early years were retired military men who preferred manning the controls of an airplane to sitting behind a desk or roaming a golf course. Since most of those first pilots were retired military, it wasn't unusual for an Antilles captain to have 20,000 or more flying hours to his credit in everything from sophisticated fighter jets to single engine

mail. While the 43-passenger plane helped meet the mounting needs for awhile, Capt. Blair retired it a year later when a needed overhaul proved economically impossible.

On December 12, 1969, just a few weeks after adding a new St. Croix-San Juan route, AAB flew its 500,000 passenger, Mrs. Robert Ellison, wife of the then Virgin Islands Public Safety Commissioner. That a local resident should cop the honor was to be expected. Of the 175,000 passengers who flew Antilles that year, over 60 per cent were Virgin Islanders.

The tiny airline that had started with one plane, one pilot and five employees, by 1971, had grown to a full-fledged, busy airline with 19 captains. In addition to 14 Gooses

communities it served. Among those practices were reduced fares for students and special island familiarization tours. Because of Capt. Blair's special interest in youngsters, the airline always actively supports such groups as the Boy Scout Camp Arawak, Boys Club, Girls Club, and Air Explorer Post 108.

Although his responsibilities as president of the airlines kept Capt. Blair at his desk much of the time, he still found time to fly and frequently scheduled himself as pilot on regular flights. He loved planes and people and, when flying a passenger he could indulge in the company of both. And whenever he travelled to other parts of the world, it was always with an eye for turning up another amphibian suitable for passenger service in the Virgin Islands. After adding the Mallard to the Antilles fleet in 1974, the next aircraft to capture his attention was the Grumman G-111 Albatross, a 28-30 passenger plane.

Although the aircraft was not yet certified for the U.S. airlines use, Capt. Blair recognized the plane's potential contributions to Antilles services and acquired four. As with his other Grummans, it enjoyed an excellent reputation from its years as a military aircraft and could land and take-off from a regular runway or the water. Also like the other Grummans, it seemed to be made to order for the Virgin Islands and, with a few modifications required for certification, would be a significant asset to Antilles.

Perhaps the most exciting planes in the Antilles fleet were added in 1974 when Antilles bought two Sandringhams, the civilized version of the Suderland which won its fame as the flying "fuel tank" of World War II. Sandringhams already had been widely used in commercial passenger service. One of the more famous of the breed was BOAC's China Clipper.

The Blairs had found two Sandringhams on a trip to Australia not long after their marriage in 1968. At that time, however, the Sandringhams were in regular service between Sydney and Lord Howe Island. The Blairs were treated to a ride, and fell in love with the big seaplanes. When an airstrip was built on Lord Howe Island and the Sandringhams were put up for sale, Capt. Blair took options on both and a year later ferried one, renamed the Excalibur VIII, from Sydney to St. Croix; the second ship, renamed Southern Cross, followed a few weeks later. The Southern Cross, piloted by Capt. Blair, in 1977 became the first seaplane to land at Foynes, Ireland since the end of World War II when the Irish seaport had been a neutral and vital transportation link.

## THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

Today, at the age of 15, Antilles Air Boats is still on the move. But not without some changes. For one thing, Mrs. Blair is now president

of the company having assumed that position following Capt. Blair's death in September 1978. So long active in the airline, she quickly showed herself to be a bold chief executive.

One of her first major actions as president was to pull all Gooses off-line for complete overhauls. At the same time, in cooperation with the FAA, she doubled the number of required engine inspections for all aircraft. The Mallard became the backbone of the fleet with the Gooses temporarily out of service. Without the smaller aircraft, the number of daily flights had to be reduced. Business suffered, of course, but not for long. The difficult task of rebuilding began immediately with the goal of slow and steady progress.

The maintenance crew recently was increased by 10 people to keep pace with the addition of new and the return of older aircraft to the fleet. Many passengers who tried other airlines during Antilles reorganization period have returned to the convenience of the Goose. At present, AAB is flying almost as many as were flown during any previous peak period. As of May 1 this year, Antilles had flown a total of 2,717,687 passengers. Regular daily flights now stands at

The mail transport service that began years ago as an incidental envelope carried in the captain's pocket today is a cargo-mail service that keeps seven agents busy fulltime handling 300-400 pieces of mail and parcels daily.

Mrs. Blair credits much of the successful rebuilding to the Antilles' employees. "Their loyalty and hard work cannot be over-estimated," Mrs. Blair said. "Many have been with us for years and have grown with the airline. But it doesn't seem to matter whether they've been here one year or 10; every single Antilles' employee has shown a



The view is always great from an Antilles Air Boats seaplane landing.

professional attitude and willingness to work that, I can assure you, eases the burden of management. I am grateful to have such good people in every phase of our operation."

Mrs. Blair is a president with plans, too. Her immediate goals include increasing the fleet to a minimum of six Gooses and six Mallards. While the Mallard has replaced the Goose as the airlines' workhorse, the smaller plane is still necessary for servicing such ports as Road Town, Tortola, and Fajardo, Puerto Rico. She also hopes to have a minimum of two 28-passenger Grumman G-111 in service just as quickly as certification is official.

The Sandringhams, stored for the time being in Puerto Rico, are a little further down the road in Antilles' future. They are best suited for charter services (the luxurious aircraft carries 43 passengers in complete comfort of separate cabins and is manned by a crew of five). Mrs. Blair plans to



Pan Am Alley in Christiansted once was the site of the Antilles Air Boats Ramp. Capt. Blair later built what he called the "smallest airport in the world" a short distance away.

antiques. Although Capt. Blair liked to joke about his "Virgin Islands Air Force," there was truth to his humor. With many of those first pilots still on the roster, Antilles could even now put a pretty impressive team of combat veterans into action if the need ever arose.

Not a single pilot, no matter how experienced, escaped Capt. Blair's strict requirements for 200 landings and takeoffs in local waters before flying a single Antilles passenger. As Capt. Blair frequently explained, a seaplane pilot has to "make" the runway. Judging the wind velocity, the speed and direction of the current and using both to the seaplane's advantage is a skill never to be taken for granted no matter how qualified the pilot.

Quite a few pilots faced the Blair test in the late 1960s as Antilles attempted to keep pace with the spiraling demand for services. In 1967, AAB added St. Thomas-West End, Tortola to its schedule and 191,551 took a phenomenal leap as the number of passengers topped 157,000, a 50 per cent increase over the three previous years combined.

The Goose, at that time, was flying 60 daily flights, 50 of them between St. Thomas and St. Croix. To cope with the airlines' growth, Capt. Blair added the big Sikorsky VS-44, the aircraft in which he had made the first non-stop transatlantic flight with passengers and

AAB had added two PBV Super Catalinas which were used primarily for the St. Thomas-St. Croix route. The 28-passenger PBVs together were making a total of 33 round trips daily between the two islands in response to the increasing demands for service.

The number of destinations had multiplied, too, to include St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John; both West End and Road Town on Tortola; San Juan, Fajardo and Ponce in Puerto Rico and St. Martin. All totalled, Antilles had flown three-quarters of a million passengers in some 100,000 regularly scheduled flights by the end of 1971.

By the time 1974 and AAB's 10th anniversary rolled around there was good cause for celebration -- 18 Gooses, 145 employees, and a new aircraft properly known as the Grumman Mallard and more popularly as "Big Goose." It had taken, Capt. Blair figured, roughly one million work hours to fly the 1,439,981 passengers and 191,551 flights of the airlines' first decade. Captain Blair even had a good idea who was the most travelled of his regular passengers -- Melvin Evans, former governor and current VI delegate to Washington.

From its beginning, AAB had proved a community-minded organization. During its first 10 years, Antilles had introduced a number of practices designed to benefit the

## Antilles Air Boats--Serving the



SAN JUAN  
PUERTO RICO

# Blair's Remarkable Career

(continued from page 5)

After the successful transatlantic record flight, Blair looked forward to the Pole crossing. Although an unassuming man with little interest in personal publicity, Capt. Blair was also a man who jumped at a challenge particularly when it came to flying. In his book, *Red Ball in the Sky*, he admits that his desire to fly over the Pole was fed by a conversation with some Air Force brass who told him matter-of-factly that it was impossible for anyone to fly alone over the Pole. Military aircraft normally had a minimum of four navigators all of whom were kept busy, even with sophisticated navigation equipment, just to get safely across the Arctic's magnetic morass of ice and snow. It just couldn't be done they had said, not knowing that their absolute confidence in the limits of man's ability had just convinced Blair he would prove them wrong.

In late May 1951, Capt. Blair flew his red Mustang to Duborpass, Norway. Armed with three wrist-watches, a \$12.95 sun compass and a sextant, and dressed in an ordinary business suit, Capt. Blair set off on his historic flight across the North Pole to Fairbanks, Alaska. All in all, it turned out to be an uneventful trip except for a nosebleed which, in itself can be dangerous and difficult to stop. But Blair got the nosebleed under control and followed the "red ball in the sky" across the top of the world, consulting his watches, sextant and compass with a calm eye and calculating mind that comes only with careful planning and experience.

The most dangerous moment of the flight actually was to come as he approached Ladd Air Force Base in Fairbanks, a tiny bright red and strangely marked fighter aircraft whizzing out of the forbidding northland. In his approach to Fairbanks, his historic flight almost at its end, he didn't

notice the two fighter jets flying rear escort. It was years later that he learned that the two fighter jets had been armed and ready -- just in case the aircraft proved to be other than Excalibur III.

Perhaps nothing says more about Capt. Blair than his description of his feelings the moment he landed in Fairbanks that day, the first man to fly solo over the Pole: "This was a heady moment in an hour of triumph," his book reads "But it was a fleeting moment. The action that leads to victory -- when the result is still in suspense -- leaves the more indelible recollections."

But success was not so heady to prevent Capt. Blair, even after 10 hours and 27 minutes in the air, from beginning the second leg of his trip to New York -- which he also flew in record time -- to deliver the first transpolar mail pouch, on which he had sat the entire way. That pouch carried letters to be sold to benefit the Cancer Society. Only one piece of mail didn't make the full trip -- a letter from Capt. Blair's son to Santa Claus. Capt. Blair dropped that one out the window as he crossed the Pole.

For his achievement, Capt. Blair received the coveted Harmond International Trophy.

While flying the Pole in a single engine aircraft was feat enough, navigating the Pole was the real accomplishment of the journey. His solo navigation, with only the most modest and simple equipment, was the beginning of a new era of aviation, particularly for the military. Not only did his flight open the way for transpolar airliner service, he proved once and for all that it was within the realm of possibility to deploy fighter aircraft across the Arctic.

During all this time, he had continued his administrative and flying assignment duties as Pan Am's chief pilot. Along the line, he had retired from the Navy and joined the Air Force (although he was in the reserves, he operated almost exclusively within the regular branch of the service). And, as his achievements mounted, he moved up the ranks to Brigadier General.

In the years that followed, Capt. Blair became the authority on pole navigation. As a special Pentagon consultant Capt. Blair -- dressed as usual in a business suit -- tested and evaluated navigation equipment and procedures too complicated for the layperson to imagine.

In 1956 he was back into uniform to command the benchmark Operation Sharkbait in which he three F-84 TAC fighters from New Jersey to England utilizing a single in-flight refueling. Capt. Blair navigated the entire operation without reference to ground-based navigation aids in a critical test of star-tracking equipment and light weight doppler. Throughout the flight his navigational equipment was "wired" closed, the wire to be cut only in an emergency situation. The following year he began a three-year assignment to NATO on

low altitude strike fighter operations; and in 1959 he commanded another military test, "Operation Julius Caesar," in which a pair of F-100's flew non-stop from England to Alaska in nine and a half hours with three in-flight refuelings, again testing navigation equipment and deployment possibilities.

That same year, 1959, Capt. Blair received the Thurlow Award, the Institute of Navigation's annual international award for outstanding contributions to the science of navigation.

When outer space became a chief concern for the nation, he was tapped by NASA as a consultant on operational and navigational problems relating to the proposed

that people remember quite well. After moving his home to the Virgin Islands in the early 1960's, he started Antilles Air Boats which provided the first regularly scheduled convenient air transportation in the Virgin Islands. A few years later, in 1968, he married famous film star Maureen O'Hara who, like him, quickly became intimately involved in the operations of his airline. The Goose, as all came to affectionately call the airline, received his full attention after his retirement from Pan Am in 1969.

"Retirement" was hardly a word that suited Charlie Blair. In addition to running the airline as its President and Chairman of the



Operation Sharkbait, planned and commanded by Capt. Blair, was a milestone for the U.S. Air Force. The operation involved an in-flight refueling and navigational test.

supersonic transports, many of which only recently have been declassified. Not the least of his assignments during this period were those dealing with missile deliveries.

Capt. Walter W. Estridge, director of flight training for American Airlines, summed up this phase of Blair's career most succinctly in a letter to Mrs. Blair following the captain's death last year:

"History has already recorded some of Charlie's great contributions to aviation and space. I doubt, however, if many people fully realize the significance of his accomplishment in overwater and polar navigation and the overwater refueling program development. While no regular military people seemed to recognize the great potential for moving a fighter strike force to a strategic location overnight, Charlie, as a civilian airline pilot-military reservist, did the original thinking which eventually gave his nation and the free world a protective mobile strike force, through overwater navigation and refueling techniques. It could well be that twenty-five years from now, historians will realize that his contribution provided the one deterrent to global conflict. I am personally convinced that it did."

While some of Blair's accomplishments may not yet have the proper or due recognition, he filled his "spare" time with lots of feats

Board, he flew on regularly scheduled flights. While most said he flew the Goose "occasionally," Mrs. Blair's probably more accurate report is "about once a day." Nothing it seems, especially not age which showed only in the deepening laugh lines of his face, diminished his love of flying.

When the Blairs bought two Sandringhams -- the big luxury liner of air boats -- in the early 1970s, he ferried one home from Australia himself. In 1976, the Blairs made a historic flight to Foynes, Ireland in one of the Sandringhams which became the first seaplane to land at that port since it was closed after World War II. When the big seaplane landed at Foynes, a lightly surprised Charlie Blair faced an enthusiastic crowd who well-remembered the rangy, smiling pilot who had also flown the last air boat out of that port 31 years earlier. The people of Foynes later erected a monument to Blair which reads: "The last to leave and the first to come back."

While Capt. Charles Blair's contributions to aviation history and the contributions of his Goose to the growth of the Virgin Islands are "on the record," they do not take the full measure of the man. Among the thousands of letters that poured in after his death are countless ones recalling small, personal incidents that have left the mark on the lives of so many: the Pan Am New York dispatcher who remembered how everyone

(continued on page 9)



seaplane as it approaches the downtown area over Old San Juan toward its harbor

delay their use until she is fully satisfied that the daily passenger demands on regular routes are being met to her satisfaction.

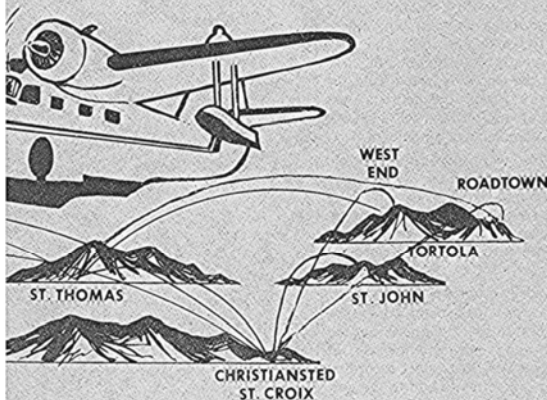
Increasing services isn't as simple as choosing a destination and adding an aircraft to service it,

however, Mrs. Blair pointed out. Service and maintenance personnel, equipment and many other auxiliary but essential requirements must increase at an even pace with added aircraft and destinations, she explained.

Growing rapidly is not as important as growing steadily in an orderly and well-considered manner that results in reliable timetables, top-notch service and careful maintenance, she emphasized.

"Antilles Air Boats is the biggest seaplane service in the world," she continued. "That is important, of course, but not as important as being the best seaplane service in the world. That was Charlie's dream. Now it's mine."

## Virgin Islands Is Our Business



## Ticket Agent Recalls AAB's Good Old Days

(Continued from page 3)

Many colorful personalities frequented the Pig's Ear, among them a man from the states who had recently taken up residence on the island, evidently on the advice of his hometown doctor. Most of the time he kept to himself, pattering around with carpenter's tools and doing odd jobs for Sir Aubrey. One day, for some reason, the loud roar of the airplane engines seemed to provoke him unduly, and after watching one Goose lumber up out of the water he could stand no more. Grabbing a spray can of red paint, he ran out shouting "Get out of here!" and commenced to attack the aircraft by spraying red paint on the fuselage until he was persuaded the plane meant him no harm.

Sales Supervisor Helen Mattice, better known as "Helen of Croix," remembers another visitor who told her his name was "Jesus Christ." He was so insistent that there was nothing she could do but write the name on his ticket. Later when she called the flight, he mounted the plane steps, threw wide his arms and gave a benediction, blessing everyone in sight.

In those early days of Antilles Air Boats the operation was



St. Thomas Ramp agent Fred Romney in the Boston Whaler he used to ferry people to and from the Goose. Mr. Romney is one of AAB's first employees.

definitely informal. It wasn't at all unusual to discover at flight time, particularly in late afternoon, that all of the passengers were enjoying themselves in Sir Aubrey's emporium. This meant that we often had to walk into the restaurant to announce the flight as loudly as possible and then personally cajole the passengers, usually our sister St. Thomians, to board their aircraft for the flight home. If we didn't, the telephone wires would have been sizzling that night and we didn't feel up to explaining to families 45 miles away where their errant relatives were.

The informality extended to animals as well as people and in the initial days of the airline residents were allowed to board the plane accompanied by their dogs -- if they promised to behave. However, since some passengers preferred animals at a distance we soon devised a chain gate to fit across the aft cargo area thus allowing dogs and owners to see each other during the flight.

Prior to that time however, I would have given anything to have had a camera when I was on duty one Sunday morning. A dog show was being held in St. Thomas that afternoon and one plane was booked by dog fanciers from St. Croix who had all been instructed to keep their pets on tight rein. The passenger list had an unusual flavor with such names as Rob of Trelawney and Tolkien's Lord Strider. I never found out if it was by design or mere happenstance but after I had gone aboard to see that everyone was safely buckled in and under control I stood to one side of the tarmac to watch as the Goose trundled down the ramp for take-off.

I did a double take, not believing my eyes. Each window on the starboard side clearly showed its occupant inside -- one a collie, another a shepherd and the third a large poodle. They say that dogs often resemble their owners and I concur. That day those dogs looked as natural as any human about to fly to St. Thomas. Of course, that was 13 years ago but I'll never forget those doggies in the windows and the fact that the pilot later reported they were among the best behaved passengers he ever had!

Speaking of dogs, one illustrious wife of a local VIP often travelled with her tiny poodle in a basket which she placed on the ticket counter as she checked in. I usually gave the dog a pat as I went about my business and one day I absentmindedly reached my hand inside the basket but quickly withdrew it in some embarrassment. I was patting a wig, not a cute little poodle. Hopefully, she did not notice my error since we chatted on as if nothing unusual had occurred.

Senior pilot Capt. Bill Mable reminisced recently about one unusual cargo load he carried when he was flying to St. Croix without passengers on board. Several large gunny sacks containing what he was told were "barbecue pigs" had been placed in the rear of the plane and "iggie," as he is known to everyone, says he was just flying along minding his own business, when there was a sudden commotion behind him. The gunny sacks were rolling around the aisle with legs and small snouts poking out as several young pigs attempted to extricate themselves from confinement. The ramp agents had neglected to inform him that his "barbecue pigs" had not yet been barbecued!



Mary Simpson, (left) and Fran Smith chat with Capt. Blair. Ms. Simpson, a member of the AAB board of directors, once took an unexpected ride in a Boston Whaler. Both she and Ms. Smith were employed in top positions in the airlines early days.

Another time, a former St. Thomas pilot reported he felt very foolish one day after giving orders that two young caged baboons should be loaded into the nose hold of the plane. It seems he later saw them walking around the cargo office on their hands, their long arms struck through the bars and carrying their cages on their backs. As he reflected, he might have had a real start if they had reached up into the cockpit and tickled his toes while he was flying.

It wasn't at all unusual for poultry to fly the Goose, particularly on weekends when cock fighting aficionados came through from Vieques or Fajardo on the way to the big bout. One time a man insisted on showing me his prize rooster, removing it from a burlap bag on the counter as he checked in. The handsome creature seemed a bit confused at first and then, perhaps thinking the enemy was nearby, he started flapping his wings, jumping, scuffling and pecking away at all the tickets and manifests until the place was in an uproar with papers flying and everyone scurrying for cover. I never heard if he won his fight but he should have.

Another occasion which should have been dignified but turned out quite the opposite was the inaugural flight to San Juan. There were large ground swells in the harbor that day and aircraft 901 was perched on the ramp ready for the historic take-off when several large waves churned up onto the ramp. When they receded they also took the chocks blocking the wheels right out to sea.

You guessed it. The plane, with no one aboard, started to slide down the incline into the water. Capt. Mable grabbed the plane to retard its departure but just then another wave flowed in and down the ramp went Mable, still desperately tugging at the sea born plane. Meanwhile, dignitaries and special guests were engaged elsewhere and did not notice the sudden pilotless departure of their aircraft or the fact that Mable by this time was swimming to keep up with it!

Somehow he managed to climb aboard, start the engines and bring the errant aircraft back onto the apron. Later after the inaugural flight proceeded without further mishap, Capt. Blair remarked that he simply could not understand why the pilot's seat was filled with water.

Mary Simpson, our boss lady and to this day a member of AAB's board of directors, was always quick to react to any sudden "outside duty." One late afternoon, again during heavy seas, the planes were being switched around on the tiny Pan Am Pavilion air drome and Mary was in the Boston whaler with a line tied to the rear of good old 40 Romeo helping to keep the aircraft to one side of the approach while other planes maneuvered up the ramp.

Unfortunately, when it came time to take 40 Romeo ashore to park it for the night, Mary neglected to tell the pilot she was still tied onto the aircraft. Up the ramp he roared and right behind him was Mary zooming across the concrete in the Boston whaler.

Antilles Air Boats passengers often seemed to prefer calling the seaplane anything but a Goose and former public relations head Fran Smith remembers one New Yorker asking "When does the next duck leave?" Another island visitor asked Helen of Croix "Where does the frog take off from?" And when she gently reminded her inquirer that the Goose departed from the nearby ramp, the tourists were heard to mutter "Oh well, I knew it was some kind of amphibian."

Those were indeed the good old days for many of us -- those years in the mid-sixties when something of a frontier charted by visionary Charles F. Blair lay before us -- and we were very much a part of it all.

And I could regale you with stories on into the night, but maybe it's best to stop right here. Let the new and younger employees at Antilles Air Boats start recording their memories to add to the now published memoirs of a former AAB ticket agent.

## AAB Maintains High Standards For All Pilots

Anyone who wants to sit at the controls of an Antilles Air Boat had better be prepared to present a pretty impressive set of credentials -- and then pass some strenuous tests, to boot.

"We require about 5,000 hours flying time in heavy aircraft and 20 years experience as an aviator," explained Capt. Bob Scott, a vice president and chief pilot for Antilles. "We also favor former military pilots because we feel the discipline and judgment developed during military service is a distinct plus in commercial aviation."

In addition, captains must have an airline transport pilot rating, as well as multi-engine land and multi-engine sea ratings. With those credentials in hand, a new pilot then enters the Antilles training program.

"We have a very rigorous and vigorous training program for the new pilot under the instruction of one of Antilles' six senior pilots," Capt. Scott continued. That program concludes with the 200 landings which must be carried out to the complete satisfaction of the instructor. Only then does the pilot qualify as an Antilles Air Boats' pilot-in-command.

As of a few weeks ago, Antilles' 16 captains had an average of 12,906 flying hours each. It takes a long time to build up those hours, too, since a captain averages a maximum of only 85 hours per month. Pilots-in-command of a Goose fly a maximum of eight hours in any one day and can be on duty (including air and ground time between flights) no more than 14 hours per day. Mallard pilots and co-pilots can fly no more than 10 hours per day and can be on duty no more than 14 hours. All pilots, both pilots-in-command and co-pilots must have a minimum of 10 hours rest between duty periods.

The qualifications for co-pilots are somewhat different. Although a co-pilot must be fully capable and qualified to take over command of an aircraft at any time, it is his or

(Continued on page 9)

### ANTILLES AIR BOATS SPECIAL SECTION

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## "First" Passenger

## Was It Patti--Or Bunny?

One February 4, 1963 Charlie Blair took some friends on a pre-opening flight for his new company Antilles Air Boats. Among the passengers was Mrs. Patti Armstrong. On Feb. 5, AAB made its first official flight with Capt. Blair at the controls and six passengers in the cabin. Among them was Mrs. Brenda (Bunny) Olsen. Ever since these two "first" flights, Mrs. Armstrong and Mrs. Olsen have carried on a good-natured debate about who was the first Antilles passenger. Debate or not, both have remained loyal Antilles' supporters to this very day. Following is each's recollection of her "first flight" and the growth of the Goose since that memorable two-flight inaugural.

## PATTI ARMSTRONG

"I was in the right place at the right time," Mrs. Armstrong recalled of that first flight on the new Antilles airline 15 years ago. "I was on St. Thomas and ran into Charlie Blair on the street," she continued. "I asked when the airline would begin operation and he said, 'We can start today. Want to fly to St. John and back home to St. Croix with us?'"

Mrs. Armstrong accepted the offer gladly and has been flying Antilles ever since. A 19-year resident of St. Croix, Mrs. Armstrong has watched the growth of Antilles since that February afternoon 15 years ago.

She also remembers too well the days before AAB when "we

had to sit at the airport for hours" waiting for a flight, if one materialized at all. She also firmly believes that Antilles has changed Virgin Islanders' life-style and greatly broadened their horizons. That once "horrible" trip between St. Croix and St. Thomas is so easy and quick today," she said.

As for that debate over who was the first passenger, Mrs. Armstrong had this to say:

"Let me put everyone's minds at ease. Bunny was the first official passenger. She has the first ticket and made the first official flight. I just happened to come along the day before and run into Charlie and got a ride home. But it was nevertheless a very special trip for me and I'll always remember with pleasure the day I flew the Goose for the first time."

## BUNNY OLSEN

When the Goose took off for its first official flight, Mrs. Bunny Olsen was the passenger with ticket number one. Today, she's still Antilles Air Boats' number one fan.

"I've flown the Goose so many times, I couldn't possibly keep count," she said. But she does remember that first flight very well indeed; she still even has the "number one" ticket tucked safely away in her summer home in the Azores.

Among the passengers on that flight was her good friend, former St. Croix resident Mrs. Chessy Cates. "Chessy dresses beau-

tifully, everything just perfect. In those days we had to board from a boat and you had to get a little boost up. I remember Chessy flashed a lot of fancy lacey lingerie boarding the Goose that day," Mrs. Olsen recalled with a chuckle.

Bunny Olsen laughs a good deal. It's her nature. A candid lady with a sassy sense of humor, she is nothing if not forthright. Of her 15-year running disagreement with Mrs. Armstrong over who was the first AAB passenger, she stated flatly: "What disagreement? There's nothing to disagree about. I was the first passenger and I have the ticket to prove it."

Mrs. Olsen's loyalty to Antilles is not limited to mere tales of the old days, however. Several years ago, she designed a tiny replica of the Goose as a charm and had a New York jeweler make them in gold. The Gooses sold quickly, over 500 of them she estimated. She still wears her



The first official Antilles flight was recreated for the airlines' 15th anniversary party in February 1979. The flight went from St. Croix to St. Thomas with (left to right) Mrs. Brenda "Bunny" Olsen, Mrs. Blair and Mrs. Patti Armstrong aboard. Mrs. Olsen still holds the very first ticket AAB ever sold.

original Goose and prides herself that the replicas that followed never achieved the quite the grace of her own Goose-in-flight design.

Mrs. Olsen, who just celebrated her 31st year as a Cruzan (born in Bermuda, she refers to herself as a "Bermuda Onion"). It was

when she lived in Bermuda that she first met Capt. Blair years ago.

"He was a wonderful man and a good friend. He made Antilles a family affair for those of us who were around when it all began," she concluded.

## Capt. Blair Made His Times

(Continued from Page 7)

looked forward to the days when Charlie Blair came sauntering in with a joke and a smile; the veteran pilot who remembers how Blair gave him his first chance to fly a commercial airline; the young air force pilot who remembered the day Capt. Blair shared the controls and "showed me what flying is really all about," the old flying buddy who went to work for the Civil Aeronautic Administration and recalled one of his first assignments was to route-check Capt. Blair, "...you can imagine that. He was the best pilot I'd ever flown with;" the young girl who struck up a conversation with Capt. Blair one day when she flew the Goose with him, only to later find out that "he was probably the most famous pilot in the world -- and I just walked right up to him. He had one of those faces, you know, the kind of person you knew was going to be nice." But it perhaps is the letter from a former World War II pilot that says it best:

## PILOTS: HIGH STANDARDS

(Continued from page 8)

her hours of flying in the "right-hand" seat that provides the co-pilot with the very necessary experience that leads to a pilot-in-command position.

Antilles requires that a co-pilot (also referred to as first officer) have a commercial pilot and instrument rating, as well as multi-engine sea and multi-engine land ratings.

Prior military flying experience is not a must for co-pilots, however, "we look for young people with the proper credentials and an avowed interest in aviation," Capt. Scott explained. Younger, properly trained and qualified co-pilots, along with the older, more experienced pilots is the balance we seek, he concluded.

"Every guy who ever flew an airplane looked up to Charlie Blair as one of the great pioneers in

aviation. I was a young man in the Eighth Air Force in the summer of 1944 just after D-Day when my squadron commander asked me to fly to London on a stand down day to pick up a friend of his by the name of Blair. I flew to London and coming back to Bungay, Charlie flew in the right seat and I flew in the left seat. He had never been in a B-24 before. I asked him if he wanted to land and he said yes...he flew upwind over the landing runway then made a sweeping 360-degree turn to a perfect power-on landing that was a marvel of precision and technique.

"The next day Charlie got up early with the combat crews and flew over occupied France with our group. We chatted the night in the officers' club" Charlie never talked about his vast experiences--only asking us questions of formation flying and AA defensive tactics. He made us feel important.

"He was a role model of the young men of our generation, and it was an exciting day when he flew with us...I will always remember the tall, calm guy who told us we were great pilots."

There's little doubt that Charles F. Blair will be remembered for a long, long time to come. Added to his list of aviation "first" and his contributions to the nation's military defense are such awesome statistics as 1,600 crossings of the Atlantic in everything from a single engine aircraft to a giant airliner to the most sophisticated of fighter jets. During his flying career, he amassed a total of well over 45,000 hours of flying time which translates into about five years at the controls of an aircraft. When he retired from the military, he had served a total of 34 years in

the Navy and Air Force. All totaled, he flew well over 10 million air miles. And he made friends every mile of the way.

In short, Charles F. Blair lived the kind of life most people only dream of living, and he did it with unflinching grace.

## RESORTS INTERNATIONAL

(Continued from page 4)

Blair in expanding and improving the downtown-to-downtown service among our beautiful islands," Mrs. Blair said.

Terming Mrs. Blair "capable, courageous and energetic," Crosby said that Resorts is "delighted that Mrs. Blair will continue on as president of Antilles Air Boats."

Mrs. Blair who has served as president since the death of her husband, Capt. Charles F. Blair, founder of the airlines, also voiced her pleasure at the new arrangement. "It was Captain Blair's policy to reinvest all profit into the company", she explained, "which is the reason the company has been able to grow steadily over the years."

Pointing out that airlines are a capital intensive business, she said that the infusion of new funding would permit Antilles to keep ahead of the ever-increasing demands for services and to retain its leadership role in the development of the islands.

Resorts International, which is principally engaged in the ownership, development and operation of tourist and resort facilities, including casinos, in New Jersey and the Bahamas, also owns Chalk's International Airline, Inc. Chalk's, also a seaplane operation, provides scheduled and charter amphibious service from downtown Miami, Florida, to Bimini, Cat Cay and Paradise Island in the Bahamas.

## Antilles Pilots Fly 'em All--Smallest to Biggest

(Continued from Page 4)

streak. Active in the F-105 development program from its outset, Capt. Scott was the official test pilot for the F-105 and F-107 flight test programs. He later commanded the Air Force's first operational F-105 squadron. He holds two degrees in aeronautical engineering and received many decorations for his combat service including the Distinguished Flying Cross with five Oak Leaf Clusters, the Air medal with fifteen Oak Leaf Clusters and the national Defense Service Medal with one Bronze Service Star. Capt. Scott is a vice-president of Antilles.

## GEORGE RUDDELL

Capt. Ruddell also began his flying career about the time World War II started. He, too, is a veteran of numerous combat missions with many Silver Stars and Distinguished Flying Crosses to his credit. He also received a Soldier's Medal after he and another man pulled a pilot from a crash. After World War II Capt. Ruddell joined the first jet group in the U.S. to fly P-80s and then commanded a squadron of F-84s. He volunteered for Korea where he flew F-84s in

combat and later commanded a F-104 wing. After his tour of duty in Vietnam, Capt. Ruddell was made assistant director of operations at the headquarters of the 9th Air Force in South Carolina. He, too, is a retired Air Force colonel.

## BRIAN LINCOLN

A former colonel, Capt. Lincoln retired from the Air Force two years early to join the Antilles Air Boats flight staff. Veteran of well over 100 combat missions in Korea, Capt. Lincoln later served as air advisor to the South Vietnamese.

After Vietnam he served at the Pentagon as a special military advisor on the Middle East. His particular duty was to advise senior staff up to and including the President on Mideast hot-spots.

The Pentagon desk job limited his flying to weekends, however, so he requested a transfer, after two years and ultimately became director of operations for the Fifth Air Force in Japan. Capt. Lincoln flew just about every aircraft the Air Force had to offer, including the F-105, before joining Antilles Air Boats. Capt. Lincoln is now a vice-president of the company.

# Mrs. Blair Follows in Husband's Footsteps

(Continued from page 2)  
Simpson and Fran Smith held the top sales and traffic positions long before I became active in Antilles."

Her pride in these women's accomplishments has little to do with the women's liberation movement, however. Mention of women's liberation is enough to get her "Irish up." "All you have

to do is look around you to discover that women run things anyway," she said, and it's apparent she doesn't mean from behind the scenes either.

"I guess I just don't understand all the uproar. The way I look at it, we're all in this life together, men and women alike. If each of use does the things we do best and enjoy most, what does it matter? To my way of thinking,

there are very few jobs that are strictly 'his or strictly hers; they are anyone's who can do the job well."

## IRISH BORN

Born Maureen FitzSimons in Dublin, Ireland, Mrs. Blair is one of six children in a theatre-loving family. All of her three sisters and two brothers won acting awards as she did. She, in fact, won every dramatic competition she ever

entered, ranging from light comedy to Shakespearean tragedy. After her first stage appearance at the age of six, she entered Burke School of Elocution and later was accepted into the prestigious Abbey Theatre School. She recalls one competition in which she received 100 percent and the judge remarked that she would have given her 100 more if possible. "I saved that (newspaper) clipping for years," Mrs. Blair said. "I don't know where it is now, buried somewhere under mounds of clippings about pirates, cowboys and harems, I suspect."

Mrs. Blair also danced ("badly") in Dublin Operatic Society productions and later sang. A lyric soprano, Mrs. Blair "finally convinced Hollywood I had a voice," after several singing appearances on television. She now has three record albums to her credit. It's worth noting, too, that Mrs. Blair starred in all of her 55 films (never second billing) and also appeared on Broadway and in so many live television appearances that she lost count along the way.

During her long movie career, Mrs. Blair collected quite a few awards for her performances. And, her own favorite films rank high on the list of favorites for most movie goers, films like "The Quiet Man," "Miracle on 34th Street," "Sitting Pretty," "The Foxes of Harrow," "Rio Grande," "The Long Gray Line," "Wings of Eagles," "McClintock," "Mr. Hobbs Takes a Vacation," "Parent Trap," "Spencers Mountain," and "How Green Was My Valley."

Her list of leading men reads like Who's Who in Hollywood—besides her favorite, John Wayne there's Errol Flynn, Jimmy Stewart, Charles Laughton, John Garfield, Roddy McDowell, Tyrone Power, Paul Henreid, Anthony Quinn, Rex Harrison, Richard Boone, Alec Guinness, John Payne and Brian Keith—to name a few.

"I worked with many of my leading men several times—five times with Duke (Wayne), three times each with Tony Quinn Tyrone Power, Brian Keith, and John Payne and at least twice with many others including Jimmy Stewart. Nobody ever said, 'I don't want to work with her again,' she recalled with some satisfaction.

After sharing her professional life with some of the world's most glamorous men, what led her to choose to share her personal life with Charlie Blair? "Many of those 'glamorous' men were and still are my good friends," Mrs. Blair acknowledged. "But Charlie was something very special. He was very family-oriented, just as I am. Even though he was very easy-going, he was an exciting man to be around. He was always thinking, always reading to try something new and interesting. And he had a great sense of humor. As far as I'm concerned, he had everything."

## FAMILY ORIENTED

There's no need for Mrs. Blair to mention family to know that she's family-oriented. The presence of her cousin Sam Cole who came from England to assist her with such difficult tasks as sorting out Blair's wealth of personal papers; an affection-filled conversation with daughter Bronwyn (her daughter by a previous marriage and mother of Mrs. Blair's grandson); her freely-expressed love and respect for her late husband—all reflect her strong sense of family.

Even when Mrs. Blair was constantly in the public eye as an actress, she managed to keep her private life just that—private. But the public and private Maureen O'Hara Blair are not, as is so often the case, two very different people. One reason may be that while under studio contract, Mrs. Blair



John Wayne, Mrs. Blair's favorite leading man and good friend, visited the Blairs in St. Croix several times. Mr. Wayne once said of her, "I've had my friends and I prefer the company of men. Except for Maureen O'Hara."

found herself with scripts which bore little resemblance to the parts she played at Abbey Theatre. She recalled reading more than one script and thinking, "Good Lord, now what am I going to do with this?" She found a solution, too. "When there was no character to play, I just played myself."

Although Mrs. Blair became a U.S. citizen in 1946 (when she made history with U.S. Immigrations by refusing to allow them to list her, an Irishwoman as a British subject), there's no mistaking that Ireland is the place of her birth. The lilt of the Emerald Isle still flavors her speech and the famous Irish auburn hair and green eyes still make it impossible for her to walk down the street without being recognized.

But Mrs. Blair doesn't mind being recognized; in fact, she feels her visibility is an asset in running an airline. If the name Maureen O'Hara Blair helps catch people's attention, all the better, she explained, because she intends to keep their attention by running "the best airline in the Caribbean."

## Serving you in St. Croix...

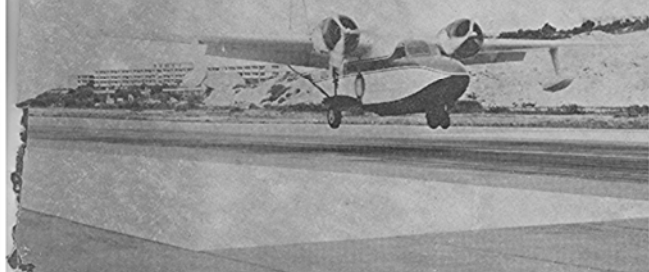


St. Croix employees include (left to right) front row: Gordon Watson, Geri Cryan, Michaela Farrell, Linda Antonie, Betty McCook, and Louis Bollenberg. Second Row: Richard Esdaille, Claude Auston, Neil Coalston, Wade Vianney, Capt. Don McDermott, Desmond Burroughs, Linroy Benjamin, Maureen O'Hara Blair, Pat Loftus, Kathy Totten, Julie Rasmussen, Robert DeLugo, Tom Ausewicz and Charlie Freehling. Third row: Albelardo Gomez, Ginny Angus, Milton Riveria, Ralph Fuller, Garfield Humphreys and Norma Dennis. Back row: Alpha Omega Stevens, Raymond Francis, Albert Thomas, Kevin Murphy, Garfield Humphrey and John Payne.

## ...and in St. Thomas



St. Thomas employees include, (left to right), kneeling: James Mannix, Noreen Gillies, Molly Morris (and Elvin) and Vincent Davis. Second row: Steve Lawrence, Lucuis Aguste, Charlie Pondt, Alyn Huggins, Capt. Dick Gilber, Joshua Herbert, Malcolm Dacent, Loreen Frances and Jerry Riveria. Back row: Jackie Landis, Maurice Charles, LeRoy Robinson, Tricia Sessa, Ted Peifer, Fred Romney, Clarise Kuntz, John Baboolal and Austin Burnett.



The Grumman Mallard is an evolution of the Goose. Sleeker and larger, it has features the Goose doesn't such as tri-cycle landing gear and extra fuel tanks in the wingtip floats. The "Big Goose" carries two pilots and 15 passengers and is an amphibian.



The Sandringham is the grand duchess of the Antilles fleet. Designed to accommodate more than 40 passengers in complete comfort and luxury, the Sandringham carries a flight crew of five and has separate compartments for its passengers.

## Is a Seaplane a Flying Boat-Or the Other Way Around?

Know the difference between an air boat and an amphibious aircraft? If not, rest assured that you're not alone. Many confuse the terms air boat, seaplane, hydrofoil and even flying boat or amphibian when, actually a hydrofoil is a boat and so is an air boat.

Still confused? Don't be. A hydrofoil is a boat that goes very fast but doesn't fly. The air boat rises on a cushion of

air and rides along. The term seaplane takes in all aircraft that can land on, or take-off from water. Seaplanes include (1) the flying boat which uses only water for a runway, and (2) the amphibian which uses either land or water. And, while a flying boat must "moor" in the water or at a dock the amphibian, with landing gear down, can taxi onto a ramp or beach or touchdown on any conventional runway.

The Antilles Air Boats fleet includes both flying boats and amphibians. To be specific, the Grumman Gooses, Mallards and Albatrosses are amphibians, capable of landing and taking off from regular runways as well as water. The Sandringhams are the only flying boats currently in the Antilles fleet.

Two other aircraft once

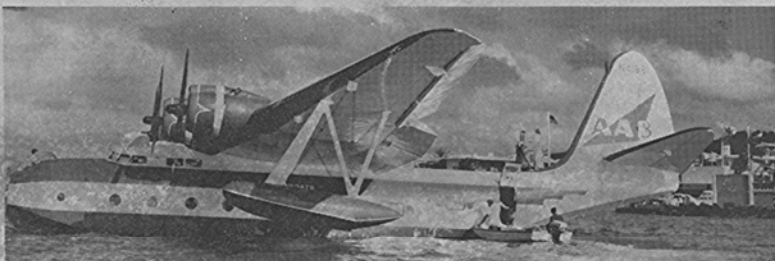
used extensively by Antilles, were the Super Catalina PBY and the Sikorsky VS-44. The former was an amphibian and the latter a flying boat.

Why, when most of its aircraft are amphibious does Antilles use them only for water take-offs and landings? Because that is the secret to convenient downtown-to-downtown service.

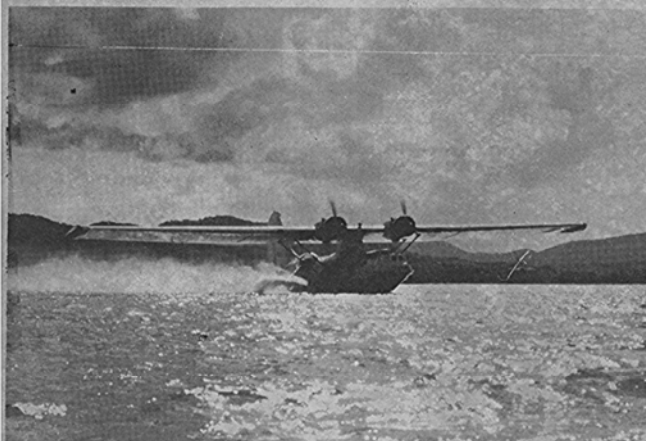
Only one final question now remains. If "air boat" is a technically incorrect term for a seaplane of any kind, why is the airline named Antilles Air Boats? No one really seems to know exactly how AAB got its name, but one thing is certain. After 15 years of being called Antilles Air Boats, nobody is about to change the name!



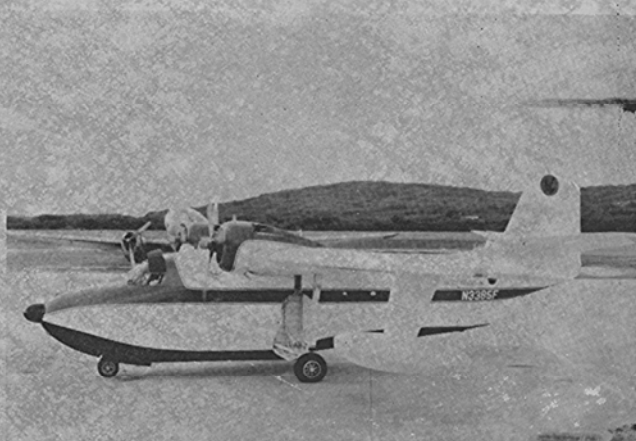
This is the plane (at left) that started the airline—the Grumman Goose. Unlike most aircraft it has one passenger seat that might be called the best in the house. It's the one up front with the pilot.



Capt. Blair and the VS-44 Sikorsky (above) went back a lot of years, right to the drawing board. Not only did he flight test the plane, he set a record flying it non-stop across the Atlantic, the first airliner with passenger and mail to do so. Antilles later leased, then bought a VS-44 Sikorsky for the fleet. Just two years ago, Capt. Blair donated the historic craft to the Navy for its Naval Air Museum at Pensacola Florida.

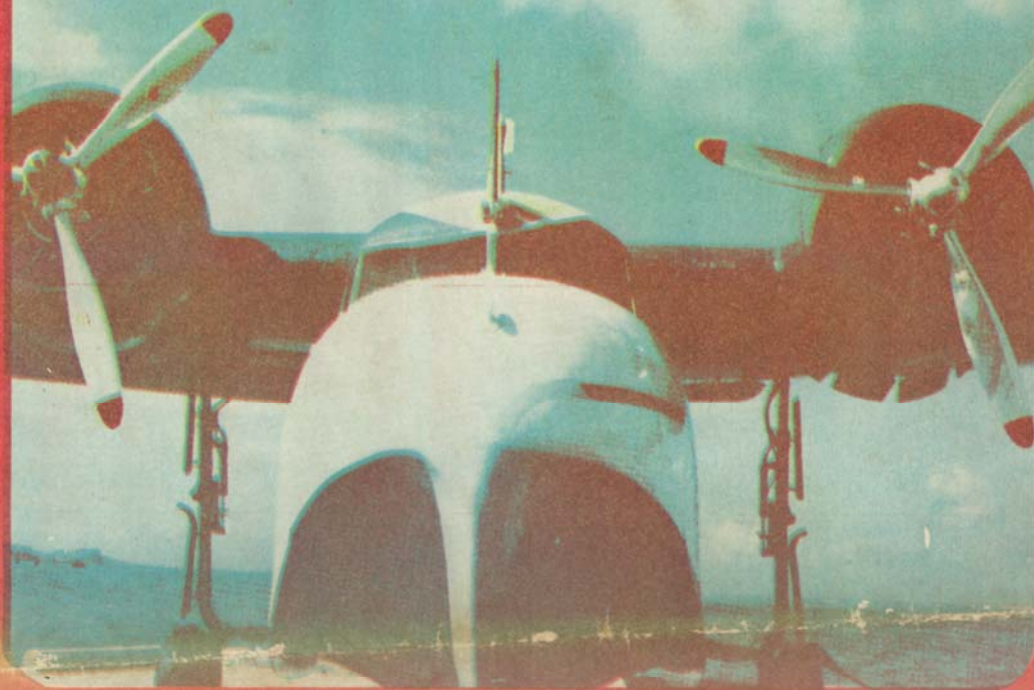


The Super Catalina PBY was used by Antilles for some time to carry what the Goose could not during heavily travelled morning and afternoon commuter hours. An amphibian, the Catalina wrote aviation history as an air-sea rescue craft in the open sea.



It's "Super Goose" as the Grumman Albatross G-111 is known around Antilles. Used extensively for air-sea and rescue by the Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard, the G-111 is expected to be certified for commercial use in the U.S. by the end of the year. Antilles own four and will put them into service upon certification.

# THE MALLARD "Big Goose"



The Grumman Mallard, developed at the same time as the Boeing 707, carries 15 passengers and two pilots. The Mallard, called the "Big Goose" locally, was first certified for airline use in 1947, immediately after it first came off the production line. It has tricycle landing gear and fuel tanks in the wingtip floats. Like the Goose, the Mallard is an amphibian; it can take-off and land on either water or land.



## Seaplanes the Commuters of the Future

By MAUREEN O'HARA BLAIR  
President, Antilles Air Boats Inc.

Seventy-five percent of the world's surface is water. We can and should use it. Why not for airports?

The greatest land gobbling monsters in the world are airports. Their rapid expansion since World War II has taken over some of the finest lands. Since they usually are built at staggering cost in remote areas outside cities, they also have increased city-to-airport traffic congestion. The congestion is accompanied by attendant increases in use of energy and consequent pollution.

Then why should airline service not be provided closer in — downtown to downtown — without the purchase and use of expensive large parcels of land? Why shouldn't that service be environmentally clean?

The world's major population centers are on the water or close to it. It seems logical we should turn to this God-given natural resource.

Foresighted brains in the aviation world believe amphibious transport is the answer to this problem.

The water is there. So are the "runways." Water runways are omnidirectional. They literally are paved in all directions. They are self-sealing. It is unnecessary to repave them — no concrete mixers nor brigades of men with shovels. Oceans and lakes have no pot holes or cracks. They cost nothing to maintain.

The leader of this belief — that flying boats will again be a significant factor as population mover — is the giant Shin Meiwa Co. of Japan. Its aviation department currently produces four-engine, turbine-powered flying boats for Japanese coastal patrol.

But there are much bigger plans on the Shin Meiwa drawing boards.

The largest of its family of proposed flying boats, Model GS, would seat 1,200 passengers on three decks. It would be capable of flying 4,000 miles nonstop at 600 miles per hour.

This flying boat would have short distance take-off and landing capability to allow for minimum noise pollution in downtown harbors.

Their model MA would be a medium size STOL (Short Takeoff and Landing), amphibian, powered by four 29,700 pound thrust turbofans, designed to carry about 300 passengers.

Another model, MS, would be a scaled-down version of GS, powered by four 31,500 pound thrust turbofans to carry 400 passengers.

Although the long range capabilities of these Shin Meiwa designs would give them trans-ocean capabilities, the principal purpose of these huge aircraft would be for operations between large population centers such as the communities of Tokyo and Osaka, both of which boast fine harbors.

The experts would have no trouble proving that all-weather landings and take-off capabilities are easier to achieve and safer to operate with seaplanes than with land planes.

The smaller amphibians would be ideal for shuttle service between downtown areas such as in New York at the Battery, Boston in mid-town, Washington on the Potomac River, Chicago's lakefront, the Mississippi River at New Orleans and St. Louis, the Houston Ship Canal, San Diego Bay, Lake Minnetka in Minneapolis, Los Angeles — each area with navigable bodies of water.

Japan may be followed by Germany as a chief exporter of water-borne aircraft.

The famous Dornier Co., a giant in the aviation field and in space and all its support systems and logistics, is returning to the flying boat scene.

Dornier created the huge DO-X, the 12-engine flying boat of the Thirties, which was destroyed by fire in the Azores. It also produced the DO-335 fighter, the world's fastest piston-engined aircraft.

Dornier plans a 500-ton cargo-carrier design, as well as smaller amphibians for commuter services. Their DO-24-72 incorporates the latest advances in high-lift aerodynamics and is powered with three turbo-prop engines. It will carry 400 passengers.

The Spanish Ministry of Aviation has assigned Construcciones Aeronauticas, S.A. (CASA), which is participating in the A-300 Airbus program, to join in develop-

ment of the Dornier project.

Other German and Italian companies, such as Poeschel Aircraft and Partenavia, are building smaller amphibians.

DeHavilland Canada has the DPH-52 Sea Otter, powered by two PT 64-41 engines. It will seat 10 passengers, which is the capacity of the Grumman Goose used so extensively by Antilles Airboats.

Lockheed in the USA has been making efforts to re-engineer its well-known C-130 Hercules for water operations. The four-engine Hercules Amphibian will carry 70 passengers. A stretch version would seat 82.

Grumman Aircraft Co. — which built a thousand amphibians in the Goose, Mallard and Albatross class — has gone back to the drawing board. It has compiled and printed a "Survey for the Next Generation Amphibians." They have four new designs under study. Two of them are single engine turboprops, and two are piston-engined planes.

The principal reason behind the newly-aroused interests in flying boats is to bring travel terminals back to downtown — where they belong — to key harbor, lake and navigable river areas of the world.

Such a decision in Tokyo might have eliminated the horrendous problem at Narita, that city's distant new airport, an outlandishly expensive installation which aroused such an enormous community protest. The protests threaten to curtail utilization of the airport.

Unfortunately, except for Lockheed and Grumman, the United States apparently is resting on its landplane laurels.

There is only one location in the world where flying boats, as a principal transportation concept, are kept alive. It is here in the Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico area with Antilles Air Boats. The airline's founder, the late Charles F. Blair, was recognized as one of the world's foremost flying boat experts. Technicians from Japan, Germany, Lockheed and Grumman have visited the Virgin Islands to see the operation.

They consulted with Blair to gain ideas and advice to help shape their designs for the 1980s. Those designs will include amphibians meeting the requirements of Antilles Air Boats and the islands which it serves.