

## Pan Am Association - Aloha Chapter

Wednesday, April 26, 2023

Tom Anusewicz

### A Historical Website of Charlie Blair & Maureen O'Hara / Antilles Air Boats and my forty years at Hawaii Airports



260 pages with links to over three thousand documents, photos, videos and related websites

<https://www.antillesairboats.com>



**Charles F. Blair Jr.** was born in Buffalo, New York in 1909. He learned to fly in San Diego and made his first solo flight at the age of 19. In 1931, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Vermont, and the following year was commissioned an Ensign as a naval aviator and served in the Naval Reserve, attaining the rank of Lieutenant while serving a tour as a fighter pilot. He remained in the Naval Reserve in the prewar years while taking jobs as a pilot. He flew for Boeing Air Transport and stayed with Boeing for seven years. In 1940, Blair became a chief pilot at American Export Airlines, later renamed American Overseas Airlines, where he trained the pilots.

When America entered World War II, Blair was called into active duty and flew with the Naval Air Transport Service, reaching the rank of captain. He also did work with the Air Transport Command, as well as serving as a test pilot for Grumman Aircraft. With the Naval Transport Service he flew flying boats across the Atlantic to Foynes, Ireland. On one return trip, flying the Sikorsky VS-44, he passed up his refueling station on Newfoundland and continued on to New York. Arriving there after 25 hours and 45 minutes in the air, he was the first to carry passengers and mail on a non-stop flight across the Atlantic Ocean in a flying boat.

As a Grumman test pilot he worked on projects that became the Grumman F6F Hellcat, Grumman F7F Tigercat, Grumman F8F Bearcat and the Martin Mars flying boat. Following the war, Blair was placed in charge of flight testing the Lockheed Constellation and the Boeing Stratocruiser airliners for American Overseas Airlines, and he oversaw their introduction on the new transatlantic routes. While working for American he started his own small transport service, flying personnel and material on special request flights to areas in need. He called the air service Associated Air Transport, Inc. In 1950 American Overseas Airlines merged with Pan American World Airways. Blair was hired on as a Chief Pilot at Pan Am. In 1950 Pan American World Airways purchased a P-51 Mustang to allow Blair a chance to attempt a new long-distance record. A P-51C equipped with long-range internal fuel tanks. Rechristening the plane "Stormy Petrel" and then "Excalibur III", Blair began setting records. On January 31, 1951, Blair flew nonstop from New York to London to test the jetstream, traveling 3,478 miles at an average speed of 446 miles per hour in seven hours and 48 minutes, setting a record for a piston engine plane. On May 29 of the same year he flew from Bardufoss, Norway, to Fairbanks, Alaska, flying 3260 nonstop miles across the North Pole. Captain Blair was awarded the Harmon Trophy from President Truman. That same year he was also awarded the Gold Medal of the Norwegian Aero Club. The Excalibur III is now on display at the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center. Blair resigned his naval commission in 1952. Attracted by his pioneering work in long-range flights, the Air Force invited him to act as a consultant. In April 1953, he accepted a commission in the Air Force Reserve with the rank of colonel. For the next 15 years he split his time flying between Pan Am and the Air Force. In 1956 Blair led three F-84s in a flight across the Atlantic Ocean, using in-air refueling. In 1959 he was promoted to brigadier general. Two weeks after his promotion he led a flight of two F-100 Super Sabres in a nonstop flight from England to Alaska, routing the flight over the North Pole. Blair was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross

Brigadier General Blair became a consultant to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in 1962. In 1963 he founded Antilles Air Boats, which provided transport between St Thomas and St Croix in the US Virgin Islands as well as San Juan, Puerto Rico. Six years later he retired from Pan Am. He slowly built Antilles Air Boats up until it operated 27 aircraft, all propeller-driven flying boats from the war years which were well suited to the short hops over water the airline specialized in. In 1974 Blair purchased two Sandringham flying boats from Ansett Airlines that had serviced the Sydney-to-Lord Howe Island route. In 1967 he also acquired the last Sikorsky VS-44 "Excambian" that Antilles operated until it was damaged in 1969. That same year, Blair retires from Pan American Airways after 19 years as a senior pilot.

On September 2, 1978, Blair was piloting a Grumman G21 "Goose" on Antilles Air Boats Flight 941, a routine passenger flight traveling north from St. Croix to St. Thomas and lost an engine and could not maintain altitude and crashed in the sea. Blair died along with three passengers.




Honolulu Star-Bulletin -  
July 16, 1969

**ONE COUPLE, TWO CAREERS** — Retiring senior Pan Am pilot Charles Blair and his actress-wife Maureen O'Hara, passed through here yesterday on Blair's aloha flight. They left today for San Francisco on Blair's last 3,000 miles as a pilot with the airline. They will retire to the Caribbean where Blair has a small airline. Miss O'Hara will continue acting.—Pan Am photo.



The bottom of the home page goes beyond AAB and details my career and Hawaii airports




★ **Tom Anusewicz**

*website designer and editor / more about other aviation entities during my 50 years in this incredible industry*

★ Honolulu / South Ramp - Lagoon Drive

★ Hawaii / DOT-Airports

*Another work in progress. I will continue to add to the Hawaii pages with new articles and images.*

Visitor Page Count **147,702** 

Every **RED STAR** indicates a link to another page or document



**Tom Anusewicz**

*2020 marked my 52nd year in aviation. You don't travel through five decades without your share of obstacles and adversities. I have always enjoyed the challenges and accepted each to allow positive growth for each company, fellow team member as well as for myself. Over the years, airlines have come and gone, jobs changed but it added to the adventure called career.*

1967 - 1973  
**U.S. Coast Guard**  
USCG Air Station - San Juan, PR  
USCG Air Station - Salem, MA (reserves)  
USCG Air Station - Cape Cod, MA (reserves)

1973 - 1975  
**Barnstable Municipal Airport**  
Hyannis, MA.  
Airport Operations Supervisor  
Aircraft refueling / parking  
Aircraft Crash Rescue

1975-1980  
**Antilles Air Boats**  
Christiansted, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Isla  
Mechanic, Assistant Director of Maintenance  
Supervisor of Maintenance Planning & Stores

1980-1982  
**Coral Air**  
Alexander Hamilton Airport, St. Croix, U.S.V.I.  
Director of Maintenance - Pt. 135

1982-1982  
**Air Hawaii / Hawaii Land Air**  
Honolulu, Hawaii  
Chief Inspector - Pt. 135

1982-1983

★ **U.S. Coast Guard**

★ **Barnstable Municipal Airport**

★ **Antilles Air Boats**

★ *and a little more...*

★ **Estate North Star- St. Croix**

★ **Coral Air - STX**

★ **Air Hawaii / Hawaii Landair**

★ **Islands Air Hawaii**

★ **Rainbow Islands Cargo**

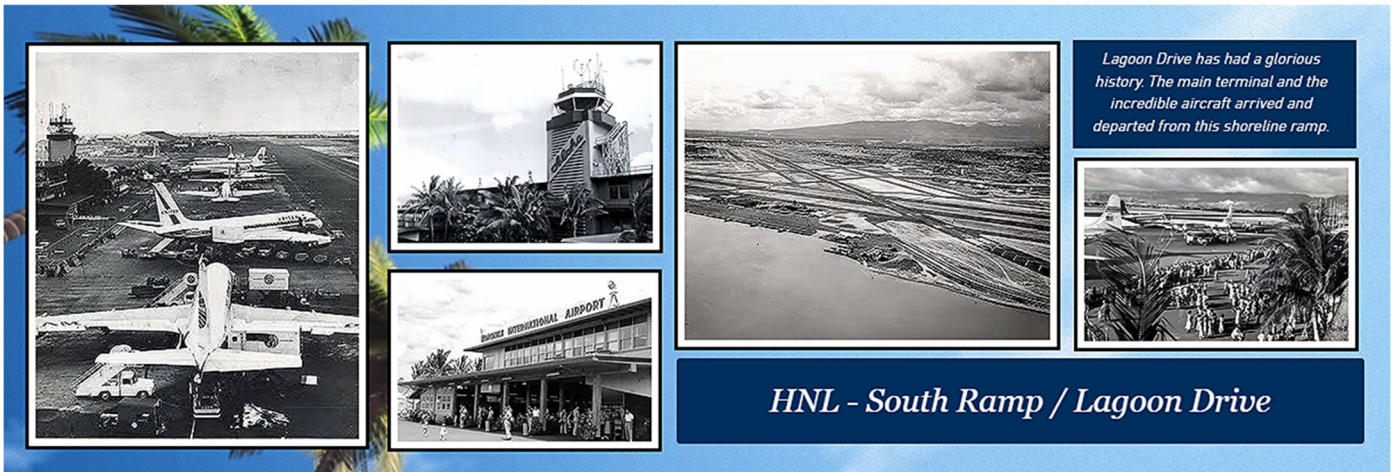
★ **Seagull Air Hawaii**

★ **South Pacific Island Airways**

★ **Hemmeter Aviation** **FBO**







Details Lagoon Drive aviation businesses past and present.

Many pages on inter-island airlines that have come and gone



Royal Hawaiian Air Service, Mid-Pacific Airlines, Discovery, Mahalo, Go and more.

I also comment of my 40 years of working with the State of Hawaii, Department of Transportation, Airports Division and the challenges of doing business at our airports.

HI AIRPORTS

"I thought I would share some comments and opinions of my 40 years at the state airports and working with the DOT-Airports Division"

Tom Anusewicz

**State of Hawaii / Department of Transportation - Airports Division**

*This not a State of Hawaii - DOT site / My personal design, comments and opinions.*

various links to State of Hawaii Department of Transportation website pages and documents

**Deputy Director**

Owen Miyamoto  
1969-1996

During my 40 years of operating at the airports in Hawaii, the state leadership had many faces. I operated under the direction of 6 Governors, 11 Directors of Transportation, 6 Deputy Directors and 21 District Airport Managers. With the various agendas and levels of expertise, it was not always easy to navigate. My intent is not to disparage any individual but to make comments on specific events, and decisions and how they effected our business.

As of January 2022, I am retired. I have enjoyed my years in this industry, but I must say working with the State of Hawaii government was a challenge. I will share my personal comments from the many interactions over the years and supplement with various news articles of days gone by.

★ red star indicates additional link / info.

*Mahalo!*