



U.S.C.G Air Station San Juan - Puerto Rico

April 21, 1969 / HU-16E Albatross Training Flight

My duty at the Air Station was primarily maintaining the aircraft as a structural mechanic. Our station was on 4 day duty sections, so every fourth day as a qualified HU16E aircraft crewmember I would be standing by for search and rescue as well as for training flights. Training flights were primarily for the pilots but crew could get some time for drills as well.

This particular day was not unlike most days in Puerto Rico... beautiful sun shiny day. A great day for flying around the Caribbean. Out of San Juan, heading in a southwesterly direction put us going over Mona Island off the west coast of Puerto Rico. Flying over always made me want to go to Mona Island to explore the many intriguing aspects of this small island. Not long after flying over the island we changed course to an easterly direction for continued training.

We were out for about 2 hours when the radioman received a broken message over his equipment. He thought it may have been a distress call but it was broken and interrupted. He transmitted "Transmission broken, say again your last" but heard nothing.

The pilot decided to swing back and see if there was any visual while the radioman continued to transmit and wait for a response that didn't come. As we headed back to the southwest, we picked up a visual on the horizon. As we came close we observed a freighter heading north to the Mona Passage. (strait that separates the islands of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico)

We descended and positioned to fly over the bow to observe if any assistance was required. As we did so, crew members seemed to be casually waving as if they were agreeing that it was indeed another beautiful sun shiny day in Puerto Rico. We turned and made another pass and received the same interpretation. We could have felt comfortable that if there were any concerns about the broken transmission it didn't come from this vessel. It was decided that we would make one more pass to be sure.

On the third pass someone on the vessel fired a few rifle rounds at the big white bird with the stripes on the front. It wasn't immediately known due to the noise of the aircraft engines and the speed we were traveling over the vessel at low altitude but the bullet holes in the cabin fuselage was a good indicator. Surprise was indeed the first reaction. No one was hit, the aircraft had no serious damage (mental note: flush patch repair on fuselage skin tomorrow) so we flew out of range, circled the freighter and radioed back to base for assistance. **USCGC Courageous** on its way with its OTO Melara 76 mm gun up front with the added 2 - 50 caliber machine guns.

We continued to circle the freighter until we were relieved by another aircraft and crew. Our training flight did not include for the extra fuel for observation circling. Training complete with yet another box to check...mutiny interrupted. *Semper Paratus ... Always Ready!*

USCGC Courageous arrived and boarded without any resistance and returned to San Juan with the German Freighter, Helga Witt and crew. The vessel sat in San Juan Harbor for a few days while authority's sorted out the situation. It was determined that the Helga Witt would return to Germany under the authority of its Captain to turn over the five mutineers to German courts.

The scuttlebutt was the company had lucrative contracts between San Juan and South America and were making the round trips well beyond what the crew signed up for. Some of the crew had not seen their families for over a year. Just getting off the boat in San Juan and go home had its own problems being German nationals without proper papers in their possession. They decided to take over the vessel and just go home. The ship's radio guy got off a partial message of the mutiny but was cut short. Firing a shot at the Coast Guard dumb.

No charges were brought locally. Maybe hearing their story, it was determined that the individuals wanting to go home should go home even though it probably won't be a sun shiny day when they get there.

Flush patch completed.

The San Juan Star had more info on this but have not been able to obtain to date. Will update when available.