

FIRST FLIGHT AS COPILOT

Being excerpts from a letter giving impressions gathered by Tom Terrill, '33, during his first flight as copilot from Brownsville, Texas, to the Canal Zone.

Having returned from my first trip as a copilot with Pan American Airways, Western Division, I find the information fund bubbling over with all the sights, sounds, and smells gathered and experienced during a five day trip from here to Panama and back. The flight was intensely interesting, all the story book and moving picture fable about the Tropics popping to life before my eyes: native women in colorful garb running along the streets of Guatemala City, barefooted and carrying great baskets of fruit and other foodstuffs on their head; gigantic volcanos rising ten to twelve thousand feet in the air, smoke pouring from their mouths, black slashes of cold lava tearing scars into the thick green growth on their sides; tremendous lakes of clear blue water filling extinct volcanic craters; oxen yoked with crude timber harness pulling crude little carts with solid wooden wheels; a terrain dotted with grass huts housing natives not far removed from savage habits; tremendous banana plantations; and thousands of square miles of unfathomable jungle.

The first hop is from here to Mexico City, making one stop at Tampico. Between here and Tampico, which is on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, the country is flat and marshy. Its one outstanding feature is the tremendous amount of bird life in the marshes—ducks, geese, and a myriad of other species. Tampico itself is an oil center. Directly on the course and some forty miles north of Tampico lies an old tramp steamer on the shore.

Leaving Tampico, we climb steadily to ten thousand feet, even then barely maintaining a few thousand feet above the ground, because the country rises so steeply as we approach Mexico City. A good landmark is a lake which has been dubbed "Step-In" Lake by the pilots, because it bears a rather rough resemblance to that particular item of feminine undergarmentry.

Approaching Mexico City, which appeared to be a rather large establishment, I was particularly impressed by the giant "Sleeping Lad" and "Popo" (which is a contraction of its real name, this being a tongue twister of the first water). In the distance stands Orizaba, all three bearing snow on their summits which rise seven to eight and more thousands of feet above the Mexican plateau which, in itself, is around eight thousand feet high.

At Mexico City I went into the routine which is required of copilots all the way down and back at each stop. Pulling up to the passenger platform, the pilot sets the brake and leaves the ship, the copilot stopping the engines and noting the time of arrival. Then he takes the measuring stick, crawls up on the wings and measures the amount of fuel in each tank. Consulting his dope sheet, he determines what the required minimum amount of fuel is for takeoff to the next station, supervises the refueling, measures each tank again

to be certain that he has enough for the hop. By that time the pilot has completed the necessary ritual and the ship is ready to depart, whereupon the copilot rushes back into the ship, all in a lather and wondering what was the use of stopping anyway on account of he did nothing but work all the time he was on the ground.

The run from Mexico City south to Tapachula is the longest single hop on the trip. It takes about three hours, the course carrying the plane out over the Pacific a bit. As we got further south, the vegetation became thicker, greener. Rivers became more in evidence and the whole picture slowly shifted to a tropical setting. Thatched huts dotted the terrain, banana plantations appeared, tall palm trees are seen lining the shores of the many lagoons, swamps cover much of the land near the ocean. Roads are a curiosity, trails the rule.

Descending for a landing at Tapachula, we noticed the air becoming sticky and hot as we lost altitude. On the ground it was stifling. One has to have a hardy constitution to withstand the rigors of perspiring freely on the ground and flying through icy air in ten minutes after take off.

The last leg of the first day's flying is from Tapachula to Guatemala City, which requires climbing to ten thousand feet and playing hide and go seek with a dozen volcanos, one of which, Santa Maria, is belching forth clouds of steam and smoke. Descending into Guatemala Valley one is met by the sight of a rich and beautiful country. Studded with volcanic peaks, the valley is some 4000 feet above sea level. Here lies Guatemala City, the capital of the country. Here I found a thousand police on duty (part of the army), passed under an aqueduct carrying water although it was built by the Spanish in 1550, beheld modern buildings featuring glass block windows and neon signs, observed oxen tugging at wooden wheeled carts, saw smartly dressed women rubbing elbows with barefooted natives, expressed amazement at the tile sidewalks and the beautiful air terminal built of colored tile, attended a fair which offered rides on roller coasters and all the old line attractions of any American beach town, saw smartly uniformed cadets strutting with their girls, listened to a friend bewail the 50 cent fine that had been thrust upon him for jay walking, had the humiliating experience of being turned down by a native peddler who refused to part with a box of matches for two American pennies (they won't accept our money, insist on their own even though the exchange rate is one to one), listened to rhumba and also the American jazz rendered by marimba bands, noted a considerable number of Germans in the populace, drooled at the mouth when I saw a beautiful hand made saddle with inlaid work finished off with leopard skin for the grand sum of 35 dollars.

Next day and in the air at 7:30 down to San Salvador, capital of Salvador, past a mountain where lies the wreck of a Douglas in which three men died, gliding down over a lake in a volcanic crater for the approach to the field which lies on the very edge of the lake, checking gas and watching two or three military training planes practicing landings. Over the mountains and into Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Here is the greatest collection of skygoing junk I've ever beheld. I believe I have found the graveyard of old airplanes. That is, they were old when they left the United States but are still being used by Central and South American airlines. Fords by the dozens. Old Ryans, Hamiltons, Condors, and even a tri-motored Fokker. What a collection of junk! Which brings to mind the story of one Chuck Stanton who left Los Angeles some three months ago to fly for an outfit in Costa Rica. On his first flight he disappeared and has never been found. Army outfits from Panama looked for him for two weeks, don't think he'll ever be found. They say the jungle is two hundred feet deep in places, will close in behind a plane and literally swallow it up.

From Tegucigalpa on down to Managua, the capital of Nicaragua. Into the air and climbing over Lake Managua, a huge body of water out of which rises a great volcano "Omotepe." Next stop is San Jose, capital of San Jose. This city is said to be another beautiful spot much the same as Guatemala City. It lies in a verdant valley, cut with gorges and rushing mountain streams, truly a beautiful place. On our return trip we picked up a shipment of bar gold at San Jose, alleged to be some 15,000 dollars worth. Incidentally, we flew a shipment of live chicks to Guatemala City. The shipping of chicks into South America and Central America has become quite a business.

Next hop is to David in north Panama. Here again we were at sea level in heavy, sticky air. The pilot let me land the ship here, both on the south and northbound trips. None of these fields are very large. Pan Am had to build most of them at its own expense. I wish some of the boys in the states who are griping about small fields could get a load of some of them on this run! A classmate of mine at Albrook Field, Canal Zone, told me about a swell mess of red bugs he picked up at David. They are worse than fleas, causing larger welts and much more annoying bites. We have to be very careful about eating and drinking. Some of the native farmers practice the charming custom of fertilizing their plants with their own excreta, thus creating an affliction known as amoebic dysentery. The water is used with caution, too.

Thence to Balboa and Albrook Field (Atlantic side, Panama Canal) and over to the end of the second day's run at France Field, Cristobal (Pacific side). I didn't fly the third day, the company sending another man down to Medellin, Colombia, and back for orientation purposes. I took the Ford hop back to Balboa and spent the day with a classmate who showed me Miguel Locks, where we watched a steamer pass through, Panama City with its thousands of blacks (Panamanians), the fortified islands, and the many military

establishments. All blacks in the Canal Zones are referred to as Silver Employees. Whites are called Gold Employees. This dates back to the days of the canal construction when blacks from Jamaica were brought in as laborers. Offered gold pay, they spurned it, insisted on silver.

What I mean it's something to see a black talking Spanish or talking English with a Spanish accent. Also to hear Chinese or Hindus speaking Spanish. They say the Jamaican blacks speak like genuine cockneys from jolly old England.

I'm leaving again tomorrow (Monday) for a trip to Panama and back. The company is opening a new run in South America from Panama to La Guaria and to several intermediate points. Also is making several changes in schedules as well as putting the three new DC-3's into service. Thus everything is in an uproar and is highly interesting.

For now I must sign off. More at an early date.

Tom Terrill

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LOREN BLAKELEY, '23, who was the faithful editor of those alumni news items that one used to find in the California Tech of a few years ago, is now Chief Engineer of the Santa Ana Valley Irrigation Company. This company serves irrigation water to 17,000 acres on the east side of the Santa Ana River between Olive, Santa Ana, and Tustin.

Mr. Blakeley and his family have taken up their residence in Santa Ana.

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The 1938 Volume of the Technical Bulletin of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences listing productions between September 1 and December 31, 1937, has just come from the press. Gordon S. Mitchell, ex '30 is Manager of the Academy Technical Bureau. Given individual technical credits in the above mentioned volume are: Louis H. Mesenkop, '27, who is Chief Dubbing Mixer for the Paramount Studios. Rerecording and Effects Mixer in "Angel" and "Ebb Tide."

Edward Dmytryk, ex '30, Film Editor in "Hold 'Em Navy," a Paramount Picture.

ALUMNI CALENDAR

March 5th and 6th	—	Tech Seminar Week-end
To be announced	—	Alumni Dance
April 8th and 9th	—	Exhibit Day
To be announced	—	Stag Field Day
June 10th	—	Commencement Banquet

Members of the Alumni Association will receive full details and reservation cards of these meetings by mail.