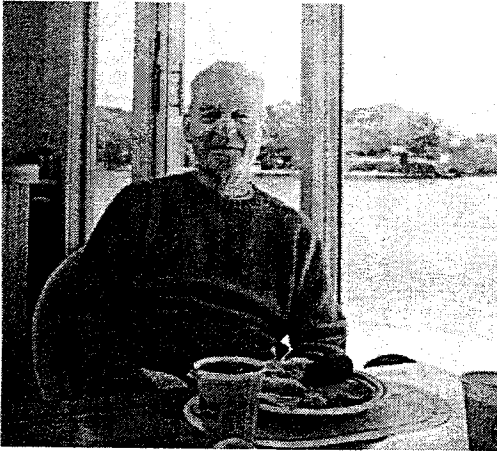


FUN AT THE TIME - AND SINCE

Fife Symington



Fife Symington, welcome newcomer to the reunion set, at The Tides Inn.

A few stand-out recollections have enlivened an otherwise inconsequential career. I would like to share them with my classmates as indicative of the enjoyment I have had doing whatever was the center of my attention at the time.

As a student pilot in late 1933, I wanted very much to show off my skills to a swimming party, girls of course, about five miles from the Curtiss Wright Airport. My regular instructor had been succeeded by a very nice fellow from whom I asked permission to accomplish this mission. He knew that I had had all of four hours of solo time, but did not know that I had never made a forced landing off the field. In any event, permission was given provided I stayed at 2000 feet and paid attention to business. On reaching 2000 feet I leveled off and was busy watching a freight train northbound to Harrisburg. With no warning other than a tremendous noise from the Aeronica's three cylinder engine as it burned up in situ, I was astonished to see the propeller arc over the left wing-tip and circle gracefully to earth leaving me at 1800 feet. The prop landed in a field near the swimming party while the pilot brought his motorless plane down in full view of the swimmers, taking five feet off a wing-tip due to a tree that happened to be at the end of the landing run. The pilot climbed out, terrified, and is still running! So much for trying to be a "heap big pilot"!!

As part of my employment agreement, as the first student chosen by Pan American Airways, I had to do three things: 1) learn to fly, 2) take a three months aerial inspection trip over the PAA system in the Caribbean, Central and South America, at my expense!, and 3) work for six months as a

mechanic at the Glenn L. Martin plant outside Baltimore. Martin was in the process of building twin engine bombers (YB 10's) for the French government and had just completed four-engine flying boats which conquered the Pacific and put the American flag way out in front of other international carriers. While working at the metal bench in the tool and die branch, it was my assignment to pound out a large piece of stainless steel over a template supported by a fifty pound chunk of steel secured in a vice. The foreman sent me to a tool shed for a left-handed monkey wrench! Thinking of my Princeton BA and what a fine mechanic I would become, I followed orders much to the amusement of my excellent mechanic colleagues — and to top off this display of ignorance — I loosened my vice as the quitting bell rang letting the block of steel land on my big toe, smashing it to smithereens. My foreman later told me that I was the dumbest mechanic he had ever had on the metal bench!

With this short introduction to the technical side of aviation, there followed 14 years of assignments to Pan American operations and sales positions in Brazil, the Argentine, Baltimore, Port Washington, London. I was Pan American's first representative to the British Government. After World War II, the U. S. State Department took over all contractual relations between U. S. airlines and foreign governments. These experiences helped me to land in the executive department of Pan American in the Atlantic Division, and ultimately at Headquarters in New York.

With a good speaking knowledge of French and Spanish, Pan American first sent me to Brazil! Rio! Where I sat on a stool and sold stamps for four months in the Brazilian Post Office. We were agents of the Brazilian P.O. at our Avenida Rio Brabco office in Rio. Of course I had to learn Portuguese "on the double", which was accomplished by living with a Brazilian family who spoke no English. I eventually worked my way into more responsibility.

In those days it took eight days (no night flying) for the Clipper flying boats to reach Buenos Aires from Miami. On returning to B. A. after my sister Leith's wedding to Ben Griswold, it happened that Bob Fatt (chief pilot of the Latin American Division) was in command of the Miami-San Juan flight, where we were due to "overnight". Fatt loved to hear himself talk and delighted to come into the cabin and tell the passengers how much experience he had, leaving the impression that if there was any emergency he knew how to

handle it. Well, as we were making our descent into San Juan Harbor, Fatt misjudged the lowness of the tide which left a sizable sand bar at the end of the landing area. As the Clipper came off the step and was settling in the water there was quite a jolt and the great captain ran us firmly aground on this bar with the keel firmly entrenched in the mud. A chastened Captain Fatt came back to the cabin and, shamefacedly, advised the passengers we would be taken off the Clipper by launch while he waited for the tide to refloat the ship! His friends never let him forget that one!

In those days Pan American's subsidiary, Pan Air do Brazil, operated nearly all the local Brazilian air services with twin engine consolidated seaplanes and Sikorsky S 38 twin engine amphibians Belém to Manaus. A great Southern California football hero, Steve Bancroft, was in charge of operations up the Amazon. Manaus was a grueling 90 MPH all day flight from Belém (boat traffic took anywhere from 3 days to a week). Steve, as captain on this weekly flight, had quickly become a local legend.

There was always a lurking danger of a forced landing in the jungles southeast of Belém because headhunters were still active. Bancroft dismissed any thought of such an occurrence but kept a selection of shrivelled heads in his quarters to show any new "pioneers" what might become of them!

One flight I made with him was the normal six stops to leave mail, pick up an occasional passenger and make much of the local Brazilian "Jefe". At Santarém, confluence of the Amazon and Tapajoz Rivers as well as the main refueling port half way to Manaus, Bancroft was greeted by the bespectacled "mayor" in a dugout canoe. This official, with great formality, signed all the necessary paperwork while a crew of his men loaded five gallon cans of gasoline to the top of the plane's wing for the co-pilot to funnel the gas into the wing tanks. After the "mayor" had departed, Steve gave me a big grin and told me that the "Mayor" couldn't read or write!

While in Argentina it was my good fortune to get to know many wonderful people. One lady friend in particular was a frequent companion at her hacienda in the country — well chaperoned of course. On returning to B. A., after a great weekend, I asked her for an evening date. We succeeded in eluding chaperones and took a long taxi ride in the park bordering the Plate River. While parking for moment to watch the moon glowing on the Rio de la Plata, the park police showed up and arrested us for breaking a law known as Actos Immorales. This was plenty serious from both of our standpoints! We were hauled off to the police station and

given a thorough dressing down. After considerable persuasion from both of us, expressing complete ignorance of the law and the "innocence" of children, the chief of police read us the "Actos Immorales". He then took pity on the young lady, potentially in trouble with her prominent family, and let us go free. We never parked anywhere after that.

Life in Argentina (1937, pre-Peron) was full of opportunity. British, German, Swiss and Italian interests were everywhere in evidence. U. S. investments, headed by National City Bank, Bank of Boston and Armour were beginning to compete.

Things moved quickly for me after returning to run sales and traffic in Baltimore and Port Washington for the inaugural Baltimore-Bermuda four engine Clipper flights. These were preparation for the planned transatlantic flying boat service. After a promotion to London just prior to the start of World War II, government relations began to fall to my lot. When Britain declared war on the Nazis, my then superior wired me to leave London immediately. He fled to the U. S. on the first boat. At that point I wired President Juan Trippe suggesting that Pan American should have a continuing representation at the seat of the British Empire and that, despite my orders, I would like to carry on in London. Fortunately for me, he agreed, which gave me a great educational opportunity and a chance to do service for the US. We were the only airline capable of flying a payload across the North and South Atlantic (passengers and mail). Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt moved Pan Am's Atlantic and Pacific divisions into the Navy so that our expertise could be held together for the benefit of the Naval Air Transport Service (NATS) and the absolutely essential transoceanic communications of the Allies. Most of us were commissioned JGs but could not wear uniforms because of operations through neutral countries.

The lack of a uniform created an amusing problem for me and Jerry Roscoe, Yale '36, (manager of our Alaska operations for the Navy) when we arrived in Kodiak on an inspection trip over the NATS Lines. The admiral in command sent word to us to leave the base immediately because we were not in uniform. Pan Am had a communications station in Kodiak and we wired Trippe to advise the Chief of Naval Operations of this ridiculous situation. Within two hours the admiral was censored and he came to us offering his private plane for any destination we desired! He was later court-martialed for flying cow manure from Seattle in Navy planes for his garden at Kodiak!

During the early part of U. S. participation in the war, it

I decided, after consultation with my staff, and particularly my CIA assistant, that American lives were at risk and that the present government should be supported. Accordingly, I phoned the President, who originally had told me to be a strong ambassador, and asked him to send the fleet, i.e. the aircraft carrier Guadalcanal with its complement of marine helicopters to remain off the Trinidad coast available to me. At the same time General Haig, the President's National Security Advisor, sent at my request two fully loaded C5s with enough firepower aboard to give the local police force overwhelming arms superiority. In the meantime things were pretty chaotic in Port of Spain. The Prime Minister begged me to land the marines. He later changed his mind. We were ready to evacuate American, British and other whites if necessary. But when the revolutionaries heard of the fleet's arrival and the C5s cargo of munitions they started a week's long process of surrender and subsequently went to prison. (There is a complete account of these doings in "situation reports" from my office to the State Department). Prompt action on the part of the White House preserved American lives, kept a stable government in power and showed the rest of the Caribbean that the U. S. would not stand for Castroism in "our lake".

Since 1971 life has been kind to me, and my political ambitions have been vicariously realized through my son's career as two-term governor of Arizona. A great deal of fox hunting, salmon fishing, shooting and world travel have kept me busy and physically active. During these years I have tried to be of service to my state in matters of conservation — three terms on the Governor's Wildlife Advisory Commission, President and Director of Maryland Association for Wildlife Conservation, and a long association with the Museum and Library of Maryland History (Maryland Historical Society).



Ben Griswold, Field Master of the Elkridge-Harford Hunt, hosting his brother-in-law, Fife, MFH of neighboring Greenspring Hunt, who as a visitor, is wearing a black coat.

became apparent that a land plane refueling base in the Azores was essential for the DC4s to reach North Africa and Europe. Roosevelt and Trippe, under Pan American's contract with the Portuguese government, arranged a secret contract whereby two generals and 250 Corps of Engineers construction personnel were put in Pan American uniform and sent to the Azores to build the great Santa Maria Base under the direction of our Portuguese expert Harry Snowden Yale '34. Because of my knowledge of Portuguese, I assisted in negotiations in Lisbon between Pan American, George Kennan of the Embassy and later father of the Marshall Plan, and Prime Minister Salazar, leading to the fulfillment of the Azores construction. Until the DC4s were operational, all transoceanic commercial flights were by Pan American Seaplanes (Boeing 314s). The Boeing Clippers carried every important passenger to and from Europe and Africa, including Churchill and Roosevelt.

When war concluded I left the company and in 1958 embarked on a political career. There followed three unsuccessful campaigns for congress from Maryland's 2nd Congressional District (registration 5 to 1 against me). My Goldwater platform was a bit ahead of those principles which Reagan and now Gingrich espouse. Because of that GOP service and local efforts for the party, President Nixon sent me to Trinidad as Ambassador Plenipotentiary for the United States.

This was a very fascinating assignment. I had worked with blacks in South America and in Africa, and was basically a southerner, and the job proved rewarding. Prime Minister Eric Williams hated the U. S. and Americans in general. There was a warrant for his arrest in Miami for non-support of a divorced wife, and he would not set foot in the Embassy. Thanks to my then wife, who called on his seventeen year old daughter whom he adored while I presented my credentials, Eric Williams became a friend and never missed an opportunity to come to our home.

Five months after our arrival in Trinidad the army revolted against the government of Eric Williams. Four officers, all graduates of Sandhurst and of a post graduate course in Communism in Moscow, led the Castro-influenced black power threat to the peace in Trinidad and the Caribbean. The local police force remained loyal to the government, but had only side arms. The revolutionaries held the old American naval base with British weapons left over from W. W. II, and were threatening to kill members of the government and all whites on the island. An American has one over-riding responsibility — protection of the lives of American citizens.