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## Midnight Sun – Report #66

*By Richard Van Gemert*

*As printed in Business & Commercial Aviation, Nov. 2009*

***Statistically, we  
had no chance of  
surviving.***

To most people Flying Boats mean majestic Pan Am Clippers, silver tea service with crumpets, and South Sea island girls wrapped in sarongs, waving. But to me they're cramped, hard-used machines, tepid coffee from a thermos washing down bologna sandwiches. As for island girls, there was Ms. "Cerlette the Cat" on Kodiak who could do amazing things on a saloon stage, but if she waved a come hither, it was best to run for the door.

My flying boats were jammed with vacuum tubed radios, sonobuoys, depth charges, and black magic stuff I still can't reveal. Back in 1962, our mission was to find the Soviet subs coursing south along the Santa Barbara Channel.

We boat aviators alternated among several positions. On this particular night mission, I was on the middle deck of our Martin P5M serving as technical coordinator, essentially overseeing everything except flying or navigating. Before launching from Whidbey Island NAS, we got a full briefing during which, among other things, we learned that the weather would be lousy -low ceilings, rain, fog, strong winds, and 12-foot seas.

Once on patrol the first officer, who was the plane commander, advanced RPMs on both props. This was SOP to help the electronics operator identify anomalies transmitted from the sonobuoys we'd deployed. However, this time the port prop kept advancing until it was screaming. A runaway. It roared past 4,000 rpm, its redline.

I could hear the pilots proceeding to shut down the engine and try to feather the prop, but without success. Evidently the thing had gone beyond the low-pitch stop and was actually heading towards reverse pitch. We were in a bad way.

The U.S. Navy, as a matter of technical policy, did not require that its twin-engine flying boats maintain flight on one engine. The thinking was to load the aircraft with as much as it could carry on two, and if one failed, so be it; the runway was everywhere and infinitely long. The flaw in that premise was the runway undulated, and once the sun set, and especially if moonlight was blocked, it disappeared from view. Essentially, there was no such thing as a successful night ditching.

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When our left prop went beyond the stops we were cruising at 2,500 feet, and we immediately started down at 800 fpm. Something unpleasant was going to happen and quickly.

“Ditching stations!” I shouted to all who could hear. There were 13 officers and enlisted on board that night. Everyone knew the drill, for we had practiced again and again. We cinched our harnesses and secured our stations. Long seconds later came the impact. Whoomp!

We were airborne again. Nothing seemed broken. Nobody screamed. And again, Whoomp! the jarring, and we were airborne a third time. Briefly.

Then Whaam! We were stopped. I looked around. The aircraft was whole. We were rising in the swells. The lights were on. No one shouted. There was no alarm. I began to move. “We’re OK back here,” I hollered towards the flight deck as I scrambled to check the situation aft.

Reaching the ladder to the lower deck, I saw water coming up. I quickly confirmed all the watertight doors were locked tight, and concluded that some part of the fuselage aft of the step must have been cracked in the hard landing. Whatever, we were going down.

I scrambled through the flight deck’s overhead, joining the forward crew on the wing. Someone launched our life raft in front of the wing, and it was immediately snared under it. At the same time, the crewmen in back launched their raft successfully, so we on the wing jumped into the water and swam to it. Now there were 13 of us we’d all survived uninjured - clinging to a seven-person raft.

As the Martin Marlin settled its T-tail began descending upon us. One sailor pulled out a knife, cut our tether, and we drifted clear just as the airplane disappeared in a chorus of bubbles and explosions of mini depth charges used for target range locating. Seconds later we were utterly alone, half of us immersed in 53 degree water, 150 miles from land, and evidently without any near likelihood of rescue since no one had successfully transmitted an SOS before splashdown.

As we began to chill, assess, and worry, an impossibly bright light appeared in front of us. Only those who have spent nights on a blackened sea can fully appreciate just how dark dark can be. It was one of those utterly black nights in which your hands disappeared before your eyes. And yet we were suddenly bathed in light as if from the sun. Then came the voice of God:

“This is the USS Sea Dragon on patrol in United States waters. Identify yourselves.”

We had managed to come to grief in the exact place and time our Navy’s second nuclear submarine was surfacing after completing some trials en route to Hawaii. It had spotted our lights as we were impacting the sea. Had we come down just aft of the submarine, it may not have seen us at all. Instead of dying of hypothermia or drowning, we were all presented with bottles of brandy, which we gladly consumed as our clothes dried in the reactor room. The next night, the Navy had us back in the air on another mission.

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You can now access the mailing and phone list of your fellow Clipper Pioneers. Go to the Clipper Pioneer website - [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com) - and scroll down to the bottom of the home page. Click on “Members Only” - when the password box pops up, type in user name & password in print edition of this newsletter. You will be able to access the current list of names, address, phone #s, and email addresses there.

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I've thought about that night often and learned that you can improve your odds by being prepared - every crew member did exactly what he had been trained to do to optimize his chance of survival and working together under stress. Beyond that, it's really helpful to be lucky, which I was that night.

So, knowing how important that can be, I wish all of you some really good luck when you need it most.

## Interesting History: Preparing for Daily Raids Against Germany in WWII

forwarded by Jack Smith -  
Author Unknown

*Comments: Here is something that is a great read, even if you aren't a military buff. Get a cup of coffee or a soda and set down and take the time to read and visualize the drama of those long ago times. If you have ever flown you will find imagination creating an almost ballet in slow motion vision of the action. Quiet remarkable.....Red*

*Guys, this is a neat little "read". This was forwarded to me and I do not know the author. I am saving this because the folks that lived these stories won't be around forever. - "VD"*

Of all the stories that have been written, and movies that have been shown, about the 8th Air Force, very little attention has been given to what was involved in assembling 1200 B-17's and B-24's each day, to get them in formation to carry out a strike against Germany.

Certainly showing bombers under attack by fighters, or encountering heavy flak, was a reality, and are interesting to watch. Also, stories about some of the rougher missions make interesting reading. But what was going on over England, each morning, could get just as scary to the crews as the time spent over some of the targets. The planning, and coordination, that had to be accomplished during the night, by the operations planners of each Group, so that the crews could be briefed, was unbelievable.

If the planners had failed to do their jobs properly, there would have been a free-for-all among Bomb Groups, in the skies over England.

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**To those of you who haven't paid your dues for this year, THIS IS THE LAST ISSUE THAT YOU WILL RECEIVE.**

There are almost 100 of you as of this date.

**DUES ALERT!**

Look on the envelope this newsletter was mailed in for the renewal year. If it says "2009" after your name, you owe dues - 'nuf said!

Dues are \$20 per year - or save by sending in \$80 for 5 years.

You are now getting 12 issues per year, so there isn't much of a slush fund to send it to the ones who don't pay.

**MAIL TO: CLIPPER PIONEERS  
192 FOURSOME DR, SEQUIM WA  
98382 Phone: 360-681-0567**

Jerry

## Raids Against Germany in WWII

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The rendezvous points, altitude, and times had to be precise, and known by all of the crews, before the Eighth Air Force could get in formation. The success of the planners, in accomplishing their mission, enabled the Eighth Air Force to become the most powerful air armada ever assembled. In my view, how this was accomplished is one of the major untold stories of the war.

I was a pilot in the 95th Bomb Group, in late 1944 and early 1945, and what follows is a typical mission, as I remember it, from a crew member's perspective.

Early in the evening, our Squadron Operations would post the names of the crews that were scheduled to fly the following day. There were two ways we could be notified if the Group had been alerted to fly. One was by means of lights on the front of the orderly room, and the other with raising of colored flags. If a green light was on, the Group was alerted, if a red light was on we would fly, and if a white light was on, the Group would stand down.

The light was monitored frequently throughout the evening to learn our status and, normally, we would know before going to bed if we would be flying the next day.

On the morning of a mission, the CQ (charge of quarters) would awaken the crews about four or five o'clock, depending on takeoff time. The questions we always asked were, "What is the fuel load?" and, "What is the bomb load?" If his answer was, "full Tokyo tanks," we knew we would be going deep into Germany. Shortly after being awakened, "6-by" trucks would start shuttling us to the mess hall.

We always had all the fresh eggs we could eat, when flying a mission. After breakfast, the trucks carried us to the briefing room. All of the crew members attended the main briefing, and then the Navigators, Bombardiers and Radio operators went to a specialized briefing.

At the main briefing, in addition to the target information—anti-aircraft guns, fighter escort and route in—we received a sheet showing our location in the formation, the call signs for the day and all the information we would need to assemble our Group and get into the bomber stream.

After briefing, we got into our flight gear, drew our parachutes and loaded onto the trucks for a ride to our plane. We were now guided by the time on our daily briefing sheet. We started engines at a given time and watched for the airplane we would be flying in formation with to taxi past, then we would taxi behind him. We were following strict radio silence.

We were now parked, nose to tail around the perimeter, on both sides of the active runway, and extremely vulnerable to a fighter strafing attack. At the designated takeoff time, a green flare would be fired and takeoff would begin. Every thirty seconds an airplane started takeoff roll. We were lined up on the perimeter so that the 12 airplanes of the high squadron would take off first, followed by the lead and then the low squadron.

Each Group had a pattern for the airplanes to fly during climb to assembly altitude. Some would fly a triangle, some a rectangle and our Group flew a circle, using a "Buncher" (a low frequency radio station) which was located on our station.

The patterns for each Group fit together like a jig saw puzzle. Unfortunately, strong winds aloft would destroy the integrity of the patterns, and there would be considerable over running of each other's patterns.

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## Raids Against Germany in WWII

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Many of our takeoffs were made before daylight, during the winter of '44 and '45, when I was there, so it was not uncommon to climb through several thousand feet of cloud overcast. Also it was not uncommon to experience one or two near misses while climbing through the clouds, although you would never see the other airplane. You knew you had just had a near miss, when suddenly the airplane would shake violently as it hit the prop wash of another plane. It was a wonderful feeling to break out on top, so you could watch for other planes, to keep from running into each other.

To add to the congestion we were creating, the Royal Air Force Lancasters, Halifaxes, and Wimpys would be returning from their night missions, and flying through our formations. Needless to say, pilots had to keep their heads on a swivel and their eyes out of the cockpit.

After take off, the squadron lead would fire a flare every 30 seconds, so that we could keep him located and enable us to get into formation quicker. The color of our Group flare was red-green. The first thing you would see, when breaking out of the clouds, was a sky filled with pyrotechnics, so you had to search the sky for the Group flare, which would identify the lead airplane of your Squadron. Once you had it located, you could adjust your pattern to climb more quickly into formation with him. As each airplane pulled into formation, they would also fire a flare, with the lead plane, making it much easier for the following aircraft to keep him in sight.

I think most crew members would probably agree that the pyrotechnic show, in the skies over England, in the morning when the Eighth was assembling, was a rare sight to behold.

The order of progression for assembling the Eighth Air Force was to first assemble the Flight elements, the Squadrons, the Groups, the Combat wings, the Divisions and, finally, the Air Force.

As soon as the four Squadron elements were formed, the high, low and second elements would take up their positions on the lead element, to form a Squadron. When the three Squadrons had completed assembly, it was necessary to get into Group formation.

~ to be continued in next issue

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## Problems/Solutions - a Little Humor Included...

P: Left inside main tire almost needs replacement.

S: Almost replaced left inside main tire.

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P: Test flight OK, except auto-land very rough.

S: Auto-land not installed on this aircraft.

\*

P: Something loose in cockpit

S: Something tightened in cockpit

\*

P: Dead bugs on windshield.

S: Live bugs on back-order.

\*

P: Auto pilot in altitude-hold mode produces a 200 feet per minute descent...

S: Cannot reproduce problem on ground.

P: Evidence of leak on right main landing gear.

S: Evidence removed...

\*

P: DME volume unbelievably loud..

S: DME volume set to more believable level.

\*

P: Friction locks cause throttle levers to stick.

S: That's what friction locks are for.

\*

P: IFF inoperative in OFF mode.

S: IFF always inoperative in OFF mode.

# Pan Am Reunion Cruise



**ms. VEENDAM**  
**Cruise to Bermuda r/t New York**  
**May 9, – May 16, 2010**

Dear Pan Amers:

We are pleased to announce our 2010 Pan Am reunion. Interline Travels, Inc. and Holland America would like to invite you aboard the beautiful luxury liner MS Veendam. Many of you have already sampled its awards and accolades on the Aug.30, 1998 sailing of the Clipper Pioneers cruise reunion to Canada and New England. What a great opportunity to join up with your old buddies and take a stroll down memory lane. Both Interline Travels and Holland America are honored to be serving the Pan Am family once again. With five star luxury dining to white glove service - you've got some pampering coming your way.

Bermuda is an enchanting island with British flair. The proper attire is Bermuda shorts, cricket is the national Sport and high tea goes without saying. From Historic St. George, a charming UNESCO World Heritage Site to Hamilton, with pastel-colored storefronts, there is something for everyone. Onboard you will enjoy endless activities, Vega style shows, gourmet dining, private complimentary cocktail parties with slide show presentations and much more. This invitation is open to all family & friends of Pan Am. Unfortunately, many will be left out for lack of knowledge; so, if you know any ex employees we urge you to inform them of this invitation so they attend this cruise and/or may be kept current of all Pan Am functions in the future.

## Cabin Prices (from)

Inside <b>\$499</b> .M (\$529.L - \$549.K - \$569.J - \$589. I)	Outside <b>\$729</b> . EE (\$749.E - \$769.DA - \$789.D)	Balcony <b>\$1659</b> . B (\$1759.A) <b>\$2559</b> S Suite
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Rates are per person, plus the port charges/taxes of \$359.05 each. These cabins are the starting prices for our group and do not reflect the lowest categories. Once our allotment is gone we will have to resort to the higher categories for a few dollars more. Hurry and lock in you rates; book early before the general public takes the cabins we want for you. More information (cancellations, insurance, etc.) with your invoice. Deposit is \$250 per person; checks preferred but major credit cards are accepted. Advise us if you've sailed on HAL before.

Miami **(305) 598-0363** or **1-888-592-7245** Toll Free

**INTERLINE TRAVELS,**

**9401 SW 79th Ave.,**

**MIAMI , FL 33156**

**Email:PanAmRetirees@yahoo.com**

## **NOTES ABOUT UPCOMING CRUISE....**

**Come and join us on this Clipper Pioneer sponsored Reunion Cruise May 9- May 16. There are still some cabins available. Just contact Carmen at Interline Travels inc 305-598-0363 or 1-888-592-7245. Please pass this on to all your friends. ~ Stu Archer**

*...and God will lift you up on Eagle's Wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,  
make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of His hand.*

## IN MEMORIAM

**William Louis Hussman** passed away peacefully at his home in Minden on February 4, 2010 at the age of 88. He instructed military pilots when the war broke out and then was hired by Pan American Airways in 1943, retiring after 35 years in 1978. His career began aboard the early Pan Am Clipper flying boats based at Treasure Island and ended with a smooth landing in San Francisco as captain aboard the Boeing 747. He was highly regarded as a pilot by the company and his fellow employees and considered a real gentleman and an all around good guy by all.

Retired Pan Am Switchboard Operator, **Ann M. Jurasek**, age 82, of 3017 Fortesque Avenue, Oceanside, New York, a former resident of Banner Elk, North Carolina and Tampa, Florida, died Tuesday, February 2, 2010, at South Nassau Communities Hospital in Oceanside.

**Connie Mazzarella**, former JFK flight attendant, advises that Capt. Al Berry passed away on December 12 in New Milford, CT.

**For more information about each of these friends who will be missed, click on "In Memory Of..." at our website: [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com). Know of someone from Pan Am who has passed? Email the obit to Jerry Holmes at [jerry747@copper.net](mailto:jerry747@copper.net)**

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## "Navigators of the First Global Air Force"

From *On Celestial Wings* by Col Ed Whitcomb

November 1995

Pages 1 - 11

The University of Miami band blared its music through the majestic Biltmore Hotel as 44 khaki-clad cadets marched onto the stage of the big ballroom. It was a historic occasion because we were first graduating class of professional aerial navigators for the United States' military services. We were to become known as the Class of 40-A. On stage with the 44 of us were representatives of the University of Miami at Coral Gables, Florida, the United States Army Air Corps, and Pan American Airways – the organizations that had put together America's first navigation training program. It was among the first programs of World War II in which business, military, and university personnel combined efforts in the interest of national defense.

The date was 12 November 1940. World War II had been raging in Europe for more than a year, and Adolph Hitler had sent his troops into Poland, Norway, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Fighting, death, and destruction were far away from US shores. America was enjoying peace with a president named Franklin Delano Roosevelt who had vowed that he would never send an American boy to die on foreign soil. Congress had passed laws enacting the draft, but the men on the platform in Coral Gables were not concerned about that. There were all volunteers who anticipated one thing: to fly!

*Read the full article starting in the May issue...*

**Check out the wonderful photos of the Pan Am Reunion at our website:  
[www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com)!**

## Health Tips - How to Avoid Fraud

### Some Tips to Avoiding Counterfeit Prescription Drugs

- Be mindful of appearance. Closely examine the packaging and lot numbers of prescription drugs and be alert of any changes from one prescription to the next.
- Consult your pharmacist or physician if your prescription drug looks suspicious.
- Alert your pharmacist and physician immediately if your medication causes adverse side effects or if your condition does not improve.
- Use caution when purchasing drugs on the Internet. Do not purchase medications from unlicensed online distributors or those who sell medications without a prescription. Reputable online pharmacies will have a seal of approval called the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Site (VIPPS), provided by the Association of Boards of Pharmacy in the United States.
- Product promotions or cost reductions and other "special deals" may be associated with counterfeit product promotion.

### Some Tips to Avoiding Funeral and Cemetery Fraud

- Be an informed consumer. Take time to call and shop around before making a purchase. Take a friend with you who may offer some perspective to help make difficult decisions. Funeral homes are required to provide detailed general price lists over the phone or in writing.
- Educate yourself fully about caskets before you buy one and understand that caskets are not required for direct cremations.
- Understand the difference between funeral home basic fees for professional services and any fees for additional services.
- You should know that embalming rules are governed by state law and that embalming is not legally required for direct cremations.
- Carefully read all contracts and purchasing agreements before signing and make certain that all of your requirements have been put in writing.
- Make sure you understand all contract cancellation and refund terms, as well as your portability options for transferring your contract to other funeral homes.
- Before you consider prepaying, make sure you are well informed. When you do make a plan for yourself, share your specific wishes with those close to you.
- And, as a general rule governing all of your interactions as a consumer, do not allow yourself to be pressured by vendors into making purchases, signing contracts, or committing funds. These decisions are yours and yours alone.

If you are a victim of this type of fraud and want to file a complaint, please submit information through our [electronic tip line](https://tips.fbi.gov/) at <https://tips.fbi.gov/> or through [your local FBI office \(List can be found here: http://www.fbi.gov/contact/fo/fo.htm\)](http://www.fbi.gov/contact/fo/fo.htm). You may also file a complaint with HUD-OIG at [www.hud.gov/complaints/fraud\\_waste.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/complaints/fraud_waste.cfm) or by calling HUD's Hotline at 1-800-347-3735.

***Having trouble viewing the membership list online?*** When you open the list, go to the top of your screen - you should see that it is set at a percentage. Click on that to make it larger.

***Don't forget to check out our website at: [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com)***

**For a really neat look at Pan Am in action, go to: [www.panamva.com/](http://www.panamva.com/) on the internet.**