

Alpha-Omega Club

Newsletter

April 2009

Hi Folks,

We, south of the Equator are entering the Autumn season. It is a welcome break from the Summer just experienced here in Australia.

2009 Annual Conference:

The 64th Annual Conference was held in Auckland, New Zealand from the 20 – 24 March 2009. The following is some news from the Conference.

During the 24 March Plenary Session the Ukraine ALPA was voted into Membership of IFALPA. The Ukraine ALPA represents 294 pilots and was formed in September of 2008.

In the final session of the Conference Capt. Carlos Limon of ASPA de Mexico was re-elected as IFALPA President for an other two-year term. Capt. Limon an A320 pilot with Mexicana Airlines has served as the Federation's President since 2007. In the same session Capt. Hans-Peder Tanderup was re-elected Executive Vice President Administration & Finance for a two-year term. Also elected were Capt. Stefan Wolf who will serve as Chairman of the Aircraft Design & Operation Committee, succeeding Capt. Frank Mueller-Nalbach who has stood down ahead of his retirement from active flying and Capt. Nico Voorbach who was elected Chairman of the Security Committee succeeding Capt. Jo Puff who is also retiring. Re-elected were Capt. Bob Perkins Chairman of the Aerodrome and Ground Environment Committee and Capt. Glenn Christiansen who was re-elected as Helicopter Committee Chairman. At earlier regional meetings Capt. German Diaz Barriega was elected Executive Vice President Caribbean & South America, Capt. Diaz Barriega flies 737NG's for AeroMexico. In the Europe and Asia Pacific regional meetings Capt. Henk de Vries and Capt. Stu Julian were re-elected as Executive Vice Presidents for their respective regions.

Presidential Citation: Although well known in among the pilots of NZALPA as an esteemed colleague and former President Capt. Gordon Vette first became to wider prominence when in December of 1978 Jay Prochnow a pilot flying a Cessna 188 Ag Cat found himself lost and overdue for landing at Norfolk island with a failed ADF and poor communications. Capt. Vette in command of an Air New Zealand DC-10 was contacted by Auckland ATC to help in the search for Prochnow, displaying the innovative thinking and determination for which he

would later become famous, Capt. Vette, a qualified navigator, contacted Prochnow and asked him to head toward the Sun and to report his magnetic heading. Prochnow pointed his Cessna towards the Sun and reported his magnetic heading as 274 degrees as Capt Vette steered his DC-10 toward the Sun and read his magnetic heading as 270 degrees. Next, Capt. Vette instructed Prochnow to determine the elevation angle of the Sun above the horizon using his partially outstretched arm and fingers as a sextant. Prochnow established the elevation of the Sun as two fingers. Capt. Vette estimated the Cessna was about 240-250 nm (each finger was slightly more than 2 degrees with each degree worth 60 nm) from the DC-10. Capt. Vette was then able to get within VHF boxing range of Prochnow in seven or eight minutes. Prochnow was directed to fly east toward the DC-10. The Sun began to set. Norfolk Island and Prochnow were both instructed to note the time that the upper limb of the Sun sank below the horizon. With this information, the results of VHF radio reception (contact/loss) and the time of sunset comparison observed Island and the Cessna, the Cessna position was determined to be within 290 miles of its destination. Rendezvous over a towed ocean rig refined the position and Prochnow then was directed to a heading intercept Norfolk Island where he landed safely.

The Flight 901 investigation begins 11 months later. Capt. Vette was on a layover in Honolulu when he heard about the crash of Flight 901 onto Mt Erebus. As the initial reports of the accident began to unfold Capt. Vette increasingly felt there was a disconnect between the knowledge of the crew that he had – the cadre of Dc-10 pilots at Air New Zealand was a small one, and in his role as a training Captain, he had flown with all the crew members a number of times and he could not accept the official line that pilot error was the sole reason for the accident. And so began his quest to find out why an experienced crew would fly into a mountain in good visibility. Working as a specialist advisor to Judge Mahon, Capt. Vette tirelessly researched the facts and found managerial deficiencies in the design and operating stages of the aviation system were important contributing factors. His investigations also revealed new aspects of human visual disorientation that could cause pilots to fly into an obstacle in apparent clear visibility, fooled by an optical illusion called sector whiteout. It is thanks to his work with The Hon. Peter Mahon that crash investigators take an organisational approach, scrutinising systems under which pilots operate, to improve flight safety rather than just apportion blame. Capt. Vette's work formed the basis of Justice Mahon's report, which was finally tabled in the New Zealand Parliament in 1999 and was hailed as vindication for the pilots. After the Erebus inquiry, Capt. Vette continued research crashes into terrain, developing and enhancing ground-proximity warning systems. He also wrote a book, Impact Erebus, which was followed by a video/DVD of the same name and an updated version of the book. All proceeds of the books and film go to a flight safety trust fund, which Capt. Vette established to help prospective aviation safety investigators and researchers.

Jim Collins Award: During the last Plenary Session the Hon. Justice Mahon was posthumously presented with New Zealand ALPA's Jim Collins Award – The Jim Collins award, which was created, by NZALPA and the family of Capt. Jim Collins commander of Flt.901 is designed to recognise those who have made a significant contribution to the advancement of air safety. It was thought that in this 30th anniversary year of the Erebus accident there could be no finer recipient than Justice Mahon.

It is hard to overstate the effect that the crash of Flight 901 had on the population of New Zealand. In a country with a population of just over 4 million almost every person in the land had some connection with one of the 257 victims of the tragedy. In the wake of the findings of the Chippendale report into the loss of Flight 901 a public outcry forced the formation of a Royal Commission of Inquiry into the accident.

The Royal Commission which consisted solely of Justice Mahon began its investigation established that the findings of Chief Investigator Ron Chippendale which laid the blame for the crash squarely on the shoulders of Capt. Jim Collins and his crew were simplistic and flawed.

Rejecting the Chippendale findings Justice Mahon set about attempting to establish why a highly experienced crew would fly a modern aircraft into terrain on a clear day. Or as he put it on his report of April 1981 “found themselves in a trap from which they could not escape”. Crucially for the cause of flight safety improvement, his investigation set out to find out why the accident happened rather than simple apportion blame. Looking into the systemic failures he found that the primary cause for the accident was a reprogramming of the aircraft's navigation computers, which the crew was not, notified about and thus their fate and the fate of their passengers was sealed. The publication of the report was not without controversy. You can find out more about the enquiry in his account “Verdict on Erebus” which won the New Zealand Book Award Prize for non-fiction in 1985.

Thanks to the integrity of Justice Mahon the course of air accident investigation changed and that as a result many thousands of lives have been saved as a result of improved safety in air transport brought about by a focus on a search for the reasons for the accident rather than the blame. His steadfastness, in the face of pressure from the government of the day made him hero among his countrymen and so it was no surprise that at the time of his death was regarded as one of the most admired New Zealanders.

Member's news –

There were very bad bushfires here in Australia in the State of Victoria, my home State. They were located just outside Melbourne, the State's capital where I live. To the best of my knowledge only one retired pilot, Alec Johnson was burnt out. Unfortunately his wife suffered a heart attack at the same time, but she is now well on the road to recovery.

Smile Time

Question: Why are retirees so slow to clean out the basement, attic or garage?

Answer: They know that as soon as they do, one of their adult kids will want to store stuff there.

Until the next Newsletter – keep well.

Warm Regards

Gary