

CAPTAIN DOUG HOLLAND
(The way we were)

This little anecdote tells about an incident that probably most people might think of as petty or inconsequential, and that may be true, but I remember the flight and the people on the plane and I'll tell you about it to let you know the type of people who made the airline into a world class organization.

I was the Purser on that trip in the mid-fifties, my co-worker Stewardess Beatrice Kin R.N., Doug Holland was the Captain, I cannot recall who the Navigator or the First Officer was. The plane was a North Star and carried forty four passengers. That day we were flying from Montreal to Port of Spain, Trinidad; stopping at Bermuda, Antigua and Barbadoes. The crew layover was in the Pan-Am guest House at Piarco Airport Trinidad, at the Pan Am Guest House.

We checked in with crew scheduling, read our mail, checked with the Passenger Agent regarding the passengers then boarded the plane. Bea was about my age, a small trim lady with a quiet and very pleasant nature. She loved her work and went out of her way to please the customers.

The first leg of the flight was scheduled to be nearly five hours. The service offered was a hot beverage

and a cookie; bar service followed by a hot meal and beverages.

We boarded the passengers, a full load as I recall. We completed all of our pre-flight duties and I closed the cabin door and reported to the captain that we and the passengers were ready to go. We passed a few friendly moments and I returned to the cabin to do my last duty before the plane actually left the ground, that was to brief the passengers in emergency and ditching procedures. There was no public address system on the North Star So I would have to give the briefing four or five times throughout the cabin to make sure everyone was briefed according to the law.

Doug was one of those people who in his own quiet way inspired confidence. When he was at the controls everything was just fine. He was an average sized man with fair skin, and blue eyes; he had a very pleasant manner and seemed to be by nature the type of man who was able to include others into his conversation. When I gave him the passenger count he advised me that the weather was forecast to be pretty nasty on the later part of our first leg. Even though there was no P/A the cockpit and cabin crew could keep in touch by interphone. During the flight we would take a break from the passengers by taking a cup of tea or coffee to the cockpit crew and socialize for a few minutes. These

were very pleasant breaks and we all became quite good friends.

We were at about eighteen thousand feet and the flight progressing normally. As the meals took about an hour to prepare we served the pilots ahead of the passengers. Picking up the meal trays from the cockpit the captain once more advised us that the tail end of a nasty weather system was north of Bermuda and other flights had reported severe turbulence; Doug said he would try to avoid as much as he could. We continued our flight and served the passengers their meals and beverages and tidied up the cabin.

Checking with the pilots a bit later I noticed out of the front cockpit window maybe fifty miles ahead, an enormous blanket of almost black cloud, from this distance it seemed to be about the same altitude as our own. Doug said "no Trev that cloud is way higher than we can fly." He told me we had about fifteen minutes to secure the passengers and cabin. Bea and I advised the customers that it would be bumpy ahead and to fasten their seatbelts.

Before long we began to feel the first tremors of unstable air, we grabbed our jump-seat and fastened our belt just as the cabin seemed to go black, we entered the cloud and the first real turbulence began. The plane started to act like a giant hand was flapping the aircraft up and down. Then suddenly

it would turn on its side and seem to drop. Then come to a stop in its gyration with a loud THRUMP, then soar in an upward motion as if weightless for several seconds then down again and all the while the aircraft skin being peppered by great hailstones sounding like machine gun fire. Then we'd be out of the blackness with comparable peace and quiet, but not for long, back into the dark cloud and once more the hammering and thumping, yawing and bumping. All the while the passengers frightened and vomiting and ringing their call-buttons for help. Up until now Bea and I unable to help as we were also stuck in our seats as no-one could stand in that awful turbulence. Now a lull in the rough air and quickly we undid our seat-belts and rushed into the cabin to help as much as we could. Several of the passengers looked awful, pale and sweating and the smell of vomit added to the general unpleasant atmosphere. We handed out fresh sick bags, wet towels, and to the sickest we gave oxygen to try to make them feel better. Only an hour more and we'd be in Bermuda and this hell would be over. Suddenly once more we were in the cloud and again the turbulence, this time even worse than before. Bea and I were unable to get back to our seats and were forced to sit with the passengers clinging to their chairs to prevent ourselves from

being thrown around. Bea being small and light could be protected to some extent by a passenger, but I was nearly six feet and 180 pounds, fortunately I was able to hook one arm through some-ones seat belt until we were again flying through a lull in the storm.

I had been in turbulence before, it was never pleasant but never lasts forever. Looking at my watch I realized that we had been in the soup for forty minutes. Only thirty more minutes, and the peace and tranquility of Bermuda. We seemed to be descending now and the bumpiness seemed to be lessening. We stayed in the cabin trying to tidy everyone up in preparation for arrival when once more as if to try again to beat us down, the awful jolting and bumping started, then suddenly we broke clear of the cloud and there ahead just a few miles away, the beautiful pastel island welcoming us.

When our wheels bit into the concrete runway a cheer came from our exhausted passengers. We taxied to the gate and we de-planed the passengers, a gang of groomers came on board to tidy up. Doug advised me that there would be a delay of an hour in order that a turbulence check could be done on our plane.

Several of our passengers had told me they were not going to go on to Trinidad with us, I asked The Captain if he could arrange an extra “passenger comfort delay” and treat the passengers to a few drinks in the lounge to let them get over the effects of the nasty flight. This we did and the captain mingled with the passengers re-assuring them that the next leg of the flight would not be turbulent. I might add that Bea and I appreciated the re-assurance too.

Most of our senior pilots seemed to have had the magical quality of leadership, ordinary men, who through years of command, seemed to have developed a certain charisma, an aura of self assurance and competence, qualities of real importance when flying a big commercial airliner. We had been having coffee with the front end crew and as the captain got up to go to the plane the rest of the crew automatically followed him out to prepare for the next flight leg in perfect confidence everything would be fine.

Trev Trower