PHIL BLOWN FLIES INTO ETERNITY AT 96

Captain Blown and wife Bunty-Australia

The following e-mail came to hand a few days ago. It was brief and to the point recalling an event that made newspaper headlines over half a century ago.

"My hero, my dashing, gallant Captain Blown has flown West....at age 96.

About a month ago...it was discovered he had bowl cancer.

He went quickly and was not in pain. His funeral will be Friday Aug 14th your time at 2pm.

How odd that his funeral will be on the same date my Mother and I left HK to return to the US 55 years ago. Valerie"

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That 23 July 1954 began as C.S.V.U. – clear sky visibility unlimited. It was a day when even the most restless soul found tranquillity. However, as the minutes ticked by, aerial murder would reduce it to another day in infamy. The dramatic change began when a breathless radio operator handed a message to *Pip* Pickering, the Kai Tak Duty Controller. It read:

MAYDAY! MAYDAY! VR-HEU GOING DOWN, ENGINE ON FIRE

Cathay Pacific Airways DC4 Skymastcr VR-HEU. Hong Kong Island forms the background 1 July 1954

However, even as *Pip* read the message, Cathay Pacific's Skymaster had slipped beneath the restless waves of the China Sea, a flaming pyre, the victim of an attack by Chinese Communist fighter planes operating from San Ya (Yaxian). This is a military aerodrome at the southern extremity of Hainan Island.

The story begins at Bangkok when a new Cathay Pacific Airway crew of took over. The aircraft was CX's plush DC-4 Skymaster carrying the registation VR-HEU. The crew was Capt. Phil Blown, his second in command was Capt. Ced Carlton, Stephen Wong was his radio officer, and George Cattanach was supernumary engineer. The cabin crew was Flight Hostesses Esther Law and Rose Chen.

The flight was incident free until R/O Wong transmitted his last position as a mortal at 08:30 LST (local standard time). That position was a mandatory checkpoint at 18º N: 110º E height 9,000 feet. A minute later Capt. Blown gently wound the autopilot knob to the left and changed the heading from 070º to 045º. That brought the airliner on a course paralleling the East Coast of Hainan Island fifteen and twenty miles to port.

About three minutes later Cedric Carlton excitedly reported a Chinese marked low wing aircraft closing in fast from above. Phil Blown looked through his side-window and saw another fighter diving towards his command. As he disengaged the autopilot both fighters opened up with machine-gun and cannon fire. The noise was nerve racking. The initial bursts set No. 1 and No. 4 engines on fire. Other bullets ruptured the fuel tanks in the starboard wing which a searing mass of flame. The skipper hurled the Skymaster into a dive. His evasive action, first to port, then to starboard, drew increased fire from the killer plane on the side he turned. If he maintained straight and level flight there was no possible evasion for his doomed civilian airliner- he had to risk a high speed dive – he thrust the nose down.

Speed in the dive now exceeded 350 miles per hour, a full 100mph above the design speed for the wing. He prayed that the wing would remain attached to the fuselage. He hoped the speed would suck out much of the burning fuel from the gaping tanks. Perhaps, the speed would dampen the fire that enveloped the whole starboard wing. *What a lot of hopes and maybes, he thought!*

Capt. Philip Blown.

The No. 4 engine screamed as it ran wild. The flight deck was a pit of hellish chaos. With superhuman strengh, Phil fought the vibrating controls as Cedric reduced power on the run-away engine utill he could feather its propeller and the terrifying nerve shattering of tortured metal abated. He pushed CO2 discharge button. This smothered the fire in the No. 4 engine. But there was no way of fighting the blaze in the starboard wing.

Throughout, the Communist murderers poured continuous fire into the doomed airliner, and many passengers had died by bullet and shell blast. Phil and Cedric found themselves cringing as projectiles screamed up main aisle. They ducked as glass shards from boost and fuel gauges threatened their eyes. Meanwhile, the cabin crew was handling their duties with a calmness that reflected both dedication and first-class training. Radio Officer Steve Wong was upholding the highest traditions of his craft. Although Hong Kong had acknowledged his distress signal he continued transmitting. Unbeknown to him his latter messages were stillborn, as his aerials had

been blasted away.

Realising that a calamitous ditching lay just moments away, Cathay's Bangkok station engineer George Cattanach put a flotation vest on an injured passenger. As he turned to see what else he could do he saw hostess Rose Chen take a shell blast that tore her slight frame to shreds. As he scrambled towards her he joined her in eternity. Meanwhile, Esther Law had scrambled along the bullet ridden aisle to investigate a loud sucking noise. She threw open the toilet-door and saw a gaping hole in the roof. At that moment the *John* disappeared through the hole – she hastily slammed the door. Mr Peter S. Thatcher saw his friend Leonard L Parrish kiss his two sons, Laurence 4, and two year old Phillip. He gently laid his massive frame over them as protection.

Capt. Cedric Carlton.

Time seemed to stand still with no panic or hysteria. At 5000 feet the rudder controls were shot away. At 3000 feet a bullet tore away the starboard aileron control but the gallant skipper felt some response from the port aileron. That moment of relief ended when the plane corkscrewed to the right. He controlled this by throttling back his two left engines and increasing his No. 3 engine to maximum power. Gradually he reduced his speed to 160 miles an hour, but anything below this caused his starboard wing to stall out. He accepted this speed and prepared to hit the water. With super-human strength he broke the descent as the doomed *Skymaster* skimmed the crest of a wave and the starboard wing tore off between its two engines. The pilots knew that the next impact would decide death or survival. The cockpit ploughed into a fifteen-foot swell about a quarter of the way from the crest. The severe deceleration snapped their safety harnesses hurling them against the rubber crash guards above the instrument panel. The water stove in the co-pilot's cabin window and the skipper's hinged clear-vision screen as a torrent of green water surged into the flight deck. After several false starts the pilots managed to assist each other in a miraculous escape.

From the moment the airliner came under attack until it slammed into the sea just two minutes had elapsed. When Cedric surfaced he saw a few survivors. He swam around telling them to grab mailbags and anything to help them float. Suddenly a Mae West bobbed up right in front of him. He struggled into it. Then he swam to help Peter Thatcher support a woman. She had a deep gash across her throat. It was not bleeding and she looked very grey. He could find no life in her, but slipped a Mae West onto her before going to help others. He had a moment of hope and joyously yelled *you little beauty*. As he saw Mrs Thorburn grimly grasping a twenty-man dinghy. He continues, *I was a bit concerned that if I inflated it too soon it might blow away. So I gathered everyone round it and then pulled the inflation cord. Within a few minutes all survivors were aboard'* - Cedric's watch showed it was 09:00 hours.

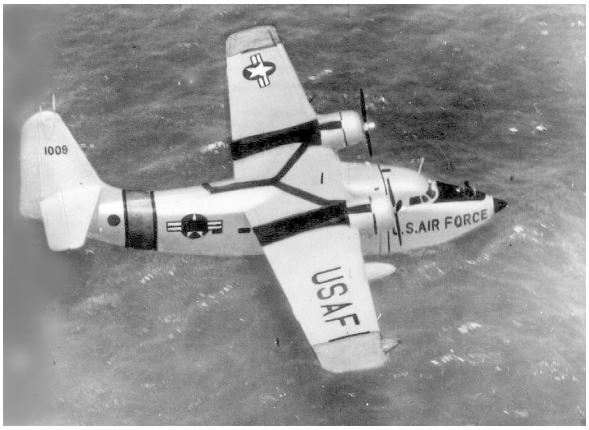
As Captain Blown trod water he watched the burning wing slip slowly beneath the waves. The fuselage and finally the tail followed it. Then he gathered five white canvas cases and inflated the Mae Wests they contained. Pushing them ahead of him he found Peter Thatcher holding a woman. He told Peter the woman was beyond help and asked him to help check the area for survivors. They found three lifeless bodies and identified them as Mrs Finlay, Miss Rose Chen and one of the Parrish boys. Meanwhile Cedric had inflated the dinghy and pulled aboard survivors. Once aboard Phil assumed command. There were nine survivors, some with injuries. Three had bullet and shrapnel wounds and one had a broken thigh.

Concerned that the fighters would attempt to conceal their murderous deed he ordered they continue to wear their Mae Wests. They should jump into the water if strafing began. As the fighters turned for San ya they erected the dinghy's weather awning and closed the entry flap. This would give the appearance of an empty raft.

In Hong Kong *Pip* Pickering calculated the wreck site from the *Skymaster's* last reported point. He

scrambled the two RAF *Hornets* assigned for search and rescue duties, and the position he gave the *Hornets* proved to be less than two miles in error. At 11:25 hours two RAF *Hornets* flew over at 5000 feet but did not see them. Five minutes later a RAF *Valetta* crew spotted them and recalled the *Hornets* for protection. About an hour later a flying boat turned up but high seas prevented it landing. Shortly after, a RAF *York,* an Air Vietnam *Skymaster* and a French *Privateer* joined the queue. Phil's bloodied little band rejoiced that the recently murderous sky had become crammed with friends.

The 31st Air Rescue Squadron was then based at the U.S. Clarke Air Base, 50 miles north of Manila. The duty officer read *Pip's* dramatic message that a British airliner had reported it was going down on fire. *Pip* calculated its position as 18.36N: 110.28E just to the south east of Hainan Island. The duty officer logged the message at 08:35 hours Philippine time – 09:35 hours Hong Kong time – and scrambled his two SA-16 amphibious Grumman *Albatross* planes.



Captain Jack Thompson Woodyard's SA-16 Grumman Albatross AF 1009 churning through 10 foot swells.

Grumman AF-1009, commanded by Captain Jack Thompson Woodyard, was airborne 21 minutes after the Rescue Control Centre received the signal, and the second, AF-1018, under the command of Captain Dale R. Baker quickly followed.Captain Woodyard's crew comprised co-pilot Captain Tommy B. Arnold, and Navigator-Captain Albert F. Smith. Engineer Staff-Sergeant Douglas F. Blair, Radio Operator Laurence F. Rodriguez and Aero Medical Specialist Cecil R. Smith in support. Rodriguez and Smith were designated A/3C and A/2C respectively but there were no second or third class airmen on that crew that day, more like first-class plus.

Navigator Smith calculated a heading to bring the *Albatross* to a point midway between the last position and Hong Kong. When Kai Tak advised no further messages he revised his intercept 50 miles North East of the *Skymaster's* last reported position. Captain Woodyard instructed Radio Operator Rodriguez to advise Captain Baker in *2 Dumbo 46* of the course alteration. Shortly afterwards Hong Kong advised that survivors were in a dinghy, and his original position would be close to the mark.

At 13:00 hours Rodriguez copied a message from Hong Kong, relayed from the Chinese People's Government. The text prohibited any military aircraft from approaching the scene of the accident and to remain well clear of Hainan Island. Captain Woodyard told Rodriguez merely to acknowledge the message. About 75 miles from the dinghy's reported position Rodriguez established radio communication with a French *Privateer* aircraft on 121.5 mc. Its skipper reported he had clear visual contact with the dinghy and could provide full rescue gear if required. The Frenchman had received the distress call in Tourane (now Da Nang) and responded.

Captain Woodyard descended to 1500 feet to stay below a layer of broken cloud, but at that height he could not spot the bobbing dinghy. The efficient Frenchman saw his dilemma and marked the dinghy with a drift signal and the *Albatross* crew saw it from about four miles away.

The calculation Woodyard had to make before the touchdown was complex. His landing must be so precise that the reversible propellers could bring the *Albatross* to a complete stop by the time the next wave-crest arrived. That day there was exactly 180 feet between crests. His report follows.

The sea appeared fairly rough, and confused by a groundswell system running 60 to 70 degrees to the main flow. I estimated eight to ten foot seas were running and the wind was southerly at twelve to fifteen knots.

We dropped two Mark 5-drift signals at the dinghy's position. I positioned my plane to land three

miles north of the dinghy off the southeast coast at Tai Chou Tau Island. In that area the ground-swell system was dampened.

We made the normal rough water landing heading 240 degrees. The ground swell crests were barely touched before stalling on the swell crest. This eliminated any problem from the ground swell. The sea conditions were close to my evaluation. However, after clearing the protection of the island taxiing was slowed considerably and on occasions the wing floats and pedestals were completely submerged. During periods of extreme roll when the props hit the water it became necessary to use idle reverse position to avoid straining or killing the engines.

The French Privateer guided me to the dinghy. As we approached it the engineer, posted in the bow, readied a throw-line. Meanwhile, the radio operator and the medic were stationed at the rear hatch with a throw-line and boathook. We circled to check the condition of the survivors and if they were capable of helping themselves. We made a successful single engine approach cutting the port engine before reaching the dinghy so that the prop would stop and position correctly.

We assisted 9 survivors aboard. The captain of the downed Skymaster came to the flight deck and stated 'We were shot down. Watch out for yourselves. There may be other fighters in the area.' I immediately called Captain Baker in 2 Dumbo 46, advised him of the number of survivors, and asked him to cross to the rescue frequency. When he established contact I cautioned him to watch out for bandits.

I continued taxiing to where we landed. Meanwhile, Captain Arnold and airman Rodriguez were struggling to hang the Jato (jet assisted take off) units. After much exertion they got the port Jato into position but couldn't manage the bulky starboard one. Captain Arnold came to the flight deck and advised they had to have a short rest. As he panted our cover aircraft reported the approach of a formation of unidentified planes. With an oath he rushed away and positioned the massive bottle unaided.

As we neared the shoreline uniformed men could be seen running for berthed fishing boats. I turned into wind about a hundred yards from them. With the additional weight I needed all the smoother water available.

We had no difficulty with the take-off, gently easing 110 degrees to port during the first part of the run. This gave us full effective power on both engines by the time the aircraft straightened out on heading. Control and attitude response was obtained before firing the Jato units. I nursed the plane over three major crests before we could climb away. Safely in the air, we learned the approaching formation was friendly U.S.N. Skyraiders.

Captain Woodyard follows the Marshall's bats at Kai Tak Airport.

At precisely 17:15 hours by Cedric Carlton's robust watch, Captain Woodyard feathered the Albatross onto Kai Tak's runway. Their joy in a safe arrival was tempered with sorrow for those who had lost their lives. Miss Rita Cheung had died within sight of Hong Kong and now lay in a tiny rag-doll bundle covered with the medic's flying jacket.

Although Rodriguez had transmitted a list of survivors, only a handful of those gathered at the airport knew who they were. The cries were heart-rending when Captain Woodyard announced, with a sob in his voice, there was nobody else.

Capt. Jack Woodyard carries six-year-old Valerie Parish from Albatsoss AF1009.

Clarke Air Force Base, Philippine Islands 26 August 1954.Maj.Gen. John W. Sessumus Jr., pins the Distinguished Flying Cross on Captain Jack T. Woodyard for his part in rescuing nine survivors from a Cathay Pacific Airliner near Hainan Island on 23 July, 1954. The General's aide, Capt. Frank Rohan, looks on.

Captains Courageous

On 15 June 1955, His Excellency the Governor, Sir Alexander Grantham pinned the Badge of the Queen's Commendation For Valuable Service in the Air on Captains Philip Blown and Cedric Windas Carlton.

Above picture shows, left to right, Capt. Ced Carlton, His Excellency, Miss Irene Ross, Cedric's fiancee, and Mrs Bunty Blown and Capt. Phil Blown.

If Roses Grow in Heaven

From Valerie

Today I was told...

My beloved hero Captain Blown has gone away...
Flown West into eternal rest...
I went outside and walked among the roses...
And felt the gentle breeze upon my face
The wind came up...
And blew away my tears...
I realized it was him...
He had stopped by
On his way West

To give me a hug...
A soft embrace...
To wipe away a tear...
To tell me good bye...
I looked up...
And saw....
A plane flies by...
And thought of that day...
So many years ago....
When my hero...my Captain Blown
Was put to test....
Through no fault of his own....
Silver Wings...CPA's VR-HUE was shot from the sky
Wounded, on fire, and out of control
She splashed and crash landed on to the sea below...
In tears we saw her sink....
Beneath the South China Sea
It broke our hearts...
For she did not go alone.....
A part of us went with her
We wanted her to stay...
But that was not meant to be...

Lord....

If roses grow in Heaven...
Please pick a bunch for me...
And lay them in his arms...
And some orchids too...
He loved them so...
Hold him in your arms...
And hug him...
Like he did me...
The scared and frightened child...
Of so long ago...
So comforting were his strong and protective arms...
Whisper in his ear...
The little girl aboard VR-HUE...
Who knows of his skill and courage...
Sends her love...
And when he turns and smiles...
Tell him...
He lives in the hearts and minds of those he's ever touched...
For nothing loved is ever lost...
Nothing but sadness can really pass away...
My hero...my Captain Blown.

Love

Valerie