

Brian Sullivan's Affair with CASI - Sullivan  
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By: Brian Sullivan

In 1972 I was midway thru my 3 1/2 year tour with ALCOA/ALCAN as, construction cost accountant, on the "Boke Project". A from the bottom up development of a bauxite mine, RR, processing facility, ocean export port, plus two complete town sites, roads, infrastructure to support the works, etc. on the northern border of Guinea, West Africa where it joins to then Portuguese Guinea. At that time the ruler of Guinea was President Sekou Torre, pro-communist to say the least, and there were Cuban military advisors in the country using second hand Russian equipment to wage nominal war on the border just 30 miles to the north of the Project. The Cubans were a piece of work, whenever they could they would slip down the roads we were putting in; driving that soviet light amphibious tank, the PT-76, park in front of our club and mess hall, buy a cola, and talk about baseball in broken English. All that is not the point.

My contract was married status and was old fashioned in the liberal annual leave benefits. I had a month year, plus travel time, and a ticket to anywhere in the world I wished to go.

Sometime immediately before my home leave segment I got a message from my mother, at home of record, Long Beach, LINY that Continental Airlines wanted to talk to me about a position. I told her to tell them I was overseas but would be returning Continental US soon and would talk to them.

I did about 4 weeks later. It wasn't CAL it was CASI. Over the telephone CASI LAX described a slot they had for me at VTE and they wanted to talk to me face to face about it. On leave anyway, I said; "OK but if I was coming to California I had a stop to make in Sacramento on family business first." No problem your return tickets are on the way. Next day the tickets were there JFK SAC LAX JFK.

The first leg was no problem, spent two days with the USAF family that was taking care of our stepson while Lan and I were in Africa. On boarding the Air Cal for the leg to LAX I got taken aside because I fit the hijacker's profile, eventually after almost a strip search I was allowed to proceed.

At LAX CASI sent a pickup auto for me and it seemed we never left the confines of the airport over to their 4-6 story office building on the south side. There I met a white haired, and harried man with a brilliant red face [who could have doubled for a bartender of 40 years] named MacBride. Since I was already 2-3 hours behind because of the delay in Sacramento he spent like 20 minutes talking to me. Then hands me tickets saying your flight leaves in two hours for HNL, the car will take you to the terminal.

Of the 20 minutes he spent talking to me 5 minutes were blowing his horn about how HE had gotten ME first class tickets to HNL! My head was spinning as I left there. I thought I was coming for a job interview, and this executive was shipping me out like frozen fish. Stranger things had happened to me up to that time, so why not.

The first glitch came in at check-in for the B747 for HNL The F-class tickets I was holding were not honored. Still there at LAX I made a local call back to high rolling MacBride and said what gives, and got a lot of double talk. OK, off to HNL, get in late, booked into some CAL crew motel, with an early wake up (5 AM) to get hustled off to the 6 AM departure of CAL's then new spin off Air Micronesia. This part of the story is really why I am putting it all to record. It was a memorable experience.

In 1972 CAL had launched this experiment; B727 service to the islands between HNL and Guam with a specially prepared B727. It had INS long-range tanks, and special underside fender protection for landings on non-concrete airfields.

So off I go out to predawn darkness at HNL myself and a small group are walked out to this B727. On boarding I can see it is a 727 QC, with a cargo door and the, front half of the aircraft is cargo pallets. Smiling stewardess, NO WAY. We were greeted by the onboard flight mechanic who directed the some 20 pax to commissary boxes of box lunches and cold sodas. The pax seats were on floor-indexed pallets, no rugs no nothing.

The first of 12 stops was Johnston Island or was it Wake, after 30 years it is hard to remember. I remember old empty hangars and myself wandering around exploring, looking at the gooney birds. Then this flap when a US military man drove up saying get in they are looking for you to take off! After that it was Midway, then southeast to Kaiwulien, then Ponapei, then Truk, then Naimo Island, which was northern most of the Australian trust territories.

With the exception of islands that had been US military bases all the other landings were on crushed coral landing strips, uncontrolled airfields to say the least. The procedure was to drag the field, circle and land. It was pretty exciting to me as a first time pax to sit in a B727 and blow over a landing field below the palm tree level at 120 knots for the length of the field, then climb, turn and go into a tight VFR circular landing pattern. At the Naimo Island stop there was a delay because the twin engine Aussie jet servicing the island chain from south to north was late with the mail and the CAL/Air Micron that I was on was contracted to carry the mail north to Guam. More wandering around. The runway was right next to the water, grass huts, etc. Kids, fish, etc. Something out of National Geographic.

About stop six or seven we ran out of soft drinks, at stop nine we ran out of drinking water. People were coming and going on and off like a city bus, and the flight mechanic was handling everything, cargo, pax, preflight inspection, tickets, at each stop. It was hot as hell. Insects and birds got into the cabin. It was an experience.

We kept falling further & further behind the schedule, and now looking back with all the recent attention about crew duty hours in 24, you have to wonder how the hell they got away with it! I think the toilet overflowed about stop 9 or 10 and was taped shut by the flight mechanic.

Saipan was the last stop before Guam and by my watch set on HNL time we had been on duty some 14 hours, and still had another 30 minutes to Guam, to end a very long day. Again, some shuttle to a CAL crew motel. Six hours of sleep and a knock to heave myself up for the TWA round the world flight to BKK. There may have been a stop from Guam to BKK but I can't remember. I was exhausted! I arrived in Bangkok, and entered the Dusit Thani Hotel [CASI paying the freight all the way]. I was zonked, with maybe 12 hours of rest, due to the time zone change, who really knows.

Mid afternoon, the phone rings, it is "Dutch Brongersma. Now, you have to realize I have no idea who this man is. That he was a pilot for CAT in 1954 at Dien Bien Phu etc. It seemed he had orders from CASI to facilitate my movement to VTE.

So, we meet in the lobby of the Dusit Thani and over a couple of beers he hands me my ongoing tickets, BKK VTE. We get to talking, and since I am so proud of my now 5-6 year old but never used US FAA commercial pilot, inst., and multi-license, I wax (beer does that) about what a hot pilot I am. Not at the time, since I was so tired, but looking back, I recall he quietly listened, and became very red faced, and squirming uncomfortable. In fact, with my

maturity now, I realize he could have had a damn stroke! Some of the old timers that read this know what I mean. Simply, I had no idea who he was. I figured some admin-man, and we were killing time over some beers.

Then, off to VTE, via an Electra, Royal Air Laos, American crew. Another you wouldn't read about operation. I got dumped on the tarmac, no one to meet me, have no idea where to go. Dragging my suitcase toward the STOL aircraft with CASI colors I made contact. The operations types stared at me in disbelief. Who are you, and what are you doing here?

Eventually, I was billeted at the CASI compound and the next day I met the VTE CASI Station Accountant, one each Mr. Don Petach [or Petchak]. He spent the first half hour telling me that he was a career CAL employee with re-employment rights to the CAL system and all these other people were not. Further, that he had exercised his CAL option rights and was getting out now. The next half hour he outlined his plans for the vacation for he and his wife to the Marshall highlands of Malaysia before he went back to the States. As zonked as I was after all this travel, I believe I said; "what do I do?", and I think he said take over!

The next day he was GONE. The whole atmosphere of the CASI Station in VTE was paper shredding. I needed a meal so I went over to the AAM mess hall behind the CASI building and ran into the former Taipei Asst. Treasurer, Jim McElroy, who I knew personally, then running the mess hall. I thought woe is me, things have really changed since 1965-66.

I went back to the CASI Office and sat in the chair wondering, what happens next? Nobody paid any attention to me. I couldn't figure out who the Station Manager was. I asked a few questions of people going by and nobody had anything solid to say. The only-est thing I could think of is, the last plane OUT!

Therefore, I went back to the CASI BOQ, stayed there drinking beer and eating sandwiches for about five days. Nobody contacted me I just sat. Hell, I had no contract, I had a firm other job, and was on leave. They had trucked me like freight around the world and my contact man had disappeared. On leave, giving me the firm impression that the floor was about to buckle under our feet as he did so.

About day five, late in the PM, I am in CASI's air-conditioned club; half in the bag watching a pool game, and with a full head of steam in comes McBride from CASI LAX. His face is beet red and he looks like he spent 48 hours in his clothes. He just about punched me in the mouth he was so mad.

When he calmed down, which was several hours and drinks later, it came out that somehow they had thought that I was going to take over from Don Petchak. Where this came from I don't know. I told him that it was my impression that I was only interviewing for the job, a possibility. Further, I said to him: "hey, I really want no part of this because from what I've been able to find out as long as you people run second string to Air America, that is good enough, sorry, not for me. I want a 1st cabin outfit. End of story.

Postscript. If I had been smart I would have re-routed the tickets from BKK directly back to the Africa job, possibly thru Moscow which was a big option then out of Bangkok and would have had many miles left over. I didn't and dragged back to LAX & JFK with no assist from CASI. Blew my whole leave from Africa, but the trip around the islands of the Pacific was worth it.