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September Newsletter

Running Out of Puff

On a recent trip from Florida to Indonesia we encountered some weather as we left New Mexico USA which caused us to climb to 22,000ft in a non-pressurized aircraft.

When approaching weather there's always that decision to be made, do you go over or under? Inevitably there are occasions when you wish you'd made the other choice.

On this occasion we decided to go over and we had some problems with the oxygen system. We got into a situation where one of us was moving about the cabin without oxygen, and the outcome could have been deadly serious.

It all started in sunny Florida when we arrived to pick up a Shorts 360-300 that had been refurbished. The aircraft had been purchased by PT Deraya in Indonesia and we were summoned to deliver the aircraft as quickly as humanly possible.

After spending two days in Fort Lauderdale (Florida), completing the acceptance stage of the process, we headed for Milwaukee Wisconsin where we installed several fuel tanks and other associated ferry equipment.

I know it's a long way out of our way, but we had an entire Shorts 360 ferry system sitting on the hangar floor in Milwaukee, ready to go. It was a huge time saver.



Shorts 360 – 300 in Fort Lauderdale

After spending a couple of days installing ferry equipment, and getting FAA approval, we headed towards Albuquerque rather than direct to California to avoid weather. At some point we would have to cross the infamous Rocky Mountains, but the further south we got the higher the freezing level would be.

After an overnight in Albuquerque New Mexico we headed west towards southern California.

It was Trevor Stalhuts' turn to play captain and he climbed into the left hand seat and we departed from Albuquerque. The day looked perfect for our flight, although we'd been briefed about some weather ahead.

An hour later we approached the weather and after a brief discussion Trevor decided to climb to 12 or 14 thousand feet to go over the top of the weather.

We dragged the oxygen masks over our head as we got to 14,000ft and saw that we'd need to continue our climb to top the weather.

Twenty minutes later we arrived at 22,000ft and it looked as though we would sail over the top. Now the only questions was how long would it take.

By this time we'd started checking our oxygen bottles regularly and discovered that Trevor's bottle was defective, it had been leaking from the regulator and he was running dangerously low.

He decided it was time to attach his second bottle (his last), and so he twisted around in the seat and managed to change the bottles that were attached to the centre panel behind him on the floor.

Seconds after he turned to face the front again, I noticed that he was having trouble breathing and he started tapping my left arm in a gesture that something had gone terribly wrong.

At this point Trevor was sucking heavily on the mask which caused it to collapse onto his face every time he took a breath, he was losing color in his face and had a concerned look on his face.

Realizing that something had to be done quickly I turned my oxygen mask off and walked around behind the captain's seat to inspect the bottle. The quick release attachment had not made it all the way into the connector and it wasn't supplying air to the captain. One twist and it was quickly fixed. Trevor gives the thumbs up, as he breaths a sigh of relief.

There's another bottle in the hostesses compartment down the back and so I made a quick dash for the bottle. After reaching the area I grabbed the bottle and headed for the cockpit as quickly as I could. The fuel tanks were now a treacherous obstacle course.

All the time mindful of the symptoms of altitude sickness, however, I didn't feel happy or experience euphoria, it was all about staying calm and fixing the problem.

Thankfully I made it back to the cockpit and dragged the mask over my head as I wound the valve open.

Trevor looked over at me as I clambered into the seat and we both knew that we were making this trip much harder than it should be. A mutual decision was made simultaneously. Trevor looked over and said we've got to get out of here, and I agreed whole heartedly.

We were approaching Prescott, a quick check confirmed they had an ILS approach, we asked for a descent and headed straight for the runway.

After landing safely and without further incident it all seemed so trivial, but we'd already made a decision to overnight and let the weather clear before continuing, rather than take to the airways again that day.

We awoke the next day to find blue skies and absolutely no cloud.

After climbing out of Prescott we headed for Castle air Force base were we'd depart the following day.

We departed at day light, the runway is 10,000ft long and the old Shorts gets airborne within 3,000ft, with a blatant disregard for the fuel load.

After an overnight in Hilo, we departed again very early in the morning for Majuro, in the Marshall Islands.



A picturesque Majuro (Marshall Islands)

After a night in the resort on Majuro we headed for Palau, Via Chuuk island. This island is sometimes shown on maps as Truck Island and it was the momentous site of some bitter battles between the Japanese and Americans during WWII.

Numerous Japanese ships were sunk around the island, these days the wrecks provide great scenery for under water diving.

A word of warning for anyone visiting this pristine part of the world, the diving is good but the locals are used to receiving tips from foreigners and they are not shy when demanding them.

I'd been through here before, but it was Trevor's first time. As we approached the island I told Trevor to put \$250USD in small notes in his pockets.

It's about midday and we want to make Palau before sunset. Absolutely nothing happened for the first hour until those who demanded a few dollars started to get paid.

The re-fueller wanted some cash, so did the security guard, so did customs etc, etc. A few hundred dollars later we were on our way to Palau. A little shaken due to the vigor displayed by the locals demanding bribes.

We land at Palau and after clearing customs and immigration etc we're driven to our accommodation.

This island is surrounded by pristine blue waters and the climate is quiet temperate. The locals tell us that the island is mostly lime based and that during heavy rain there's no dirt or mud washed into the sea. This makes the island an ideal snorkeling and diving destination. Taking of the next day we noticed that you could see through the water several hundred metres from the islands edge where the water is reasonably deep.

After landing in Jakarta we quickly recovered our fittings and radios etc, and headed for the accommodation.

The new Shorts owners provided a car and driver, so we could experience "Traffic Jam", Jakarta style. Absolute chaos, several lanes all stopped and when they did move, the cars, vans, trucks and motor bikes changed lanes with literally centremetres between them whilst going as fast as they could continually honking their horn. What an experience.

By now we'd forgotten all about our oxygen worries, it was definitely more dangerous taking a car ride in Jakarta.

Old Ferry Pilots Never Die - You know the rest

Australian Air Ferry had Duane Switzer along to fly the second Cirrus on the latest deliver flight.

Duane is in his 70s and he still flies crop-dusters in Colorado, near Denver during the summer season. The seasons coming to an end and he decided that it was time to visit family and friends in Australia. What better way to get there than in a brand new Cirrus SR20.



Duane must be living proof that you can teach old dogs new tricks, he's accumulated 23,000 flying hours (mainly in crop dusters) in his long and prosperous carrier. And yet he was able to fly one of the most modern aircraft on the market today.



Duane Switzer on Norfolk Island

Duane has completed 35 ferries and admits that they were all done some time ago. Before they invented GPS and had reliable HF radios.

Missing Hawaii by 150nm or missing sea station November (the half-way point California – Hawaii) by 100nm, were all part of ferrying in the 60s Duane says.

These days with GPS there's never a second that you don't know exactly where you are, and the weather briefings are usually spot on.

Anyway, several days after leaving the Cirrus factory we arrived in Brisbane to hand over two brand new aircraft to Sunland Aviation.

The latest aircraft from Cirrus have Terrain Avoidance as standard equipment, Rosen screens standard equipment, air-bag seatbelts standard and although there all mostly white, the new color schemes are fresh and eye-catching.

Palau



Palau Island Airport

The Palau Islands are located west of the Micronesian Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Not counting the SouthWest Islands, Palau is composed of five islands, namely Babeldaob (Ochalcute), Koror, Peliliu, Angaur, Kayangel, and at least 200 small islands known as "rock islands".

Made of limestone coral reefs lifted above sea level and undercut by ocean currents which over time have notched the basis so that from the air they look like giant mushrooms, the Republic of Palau, in Micronesia, is truly nature at its most majestic.

Apart from Kayangel, Ngeruangel and Angaur all the islands are inside a single barrier reef. Only eight islands are inhabited, for the entire population is 17,235 with the majority of them living in the provisional capital of Koror. There are an additional 2,500 foreigners mostly Filipino labourers.

The Spaniards named the group Los Palos (the native name is Belau) and laid claim to them in 1898, selling them to Germany a year later. In 1946, Palau became one of the trust territories of the Pacific islands under the governance of the U.S.A. In 1994, it gained its independence and was admitted to the United Nations as its 185th member.

The island group is divided into 16 states each maintaining the traditional clan system with English and Palauan the official languages. The people are warm, hospitable and, though they look more American than other Micronesians, they continue to follow their old matrilineal culture.

Koror, the capital, has breathtaking views of the islands, Japanese stone lanterns and the only Shinto Shrine outside Japan, a reminder of Japanese occupation during the war.

There is a national museum founded in 1955 which displays a bounty of island treasure and on special occasions you can see young Palauan women dressed in grass skirts covered in coconut oil and turmeric perform ancient native dances on the museum's grass.



Snorkelling on Palau outer islands

Three ocean currents converge on Palau and bring with them marine life that is four times as rich as that in the Caribbean. There are over 1,000 species of fish and more than 700 species of coral. Divers can scale the 60 foot vertical drop-offs including the Ngemelis Wall descending some 1,000 feet to a dazzling array of multicoloured sponges and fish, black coral whips and soft corals. Giant clams sit on the reefs and moray eels hover nearby as do sharks who appear to be too well fed to be interested in you.

Kayangel, the northernmost island, is the only true coral atoll in the group and Melekeok, the future capital, has a deep water port and five "stone face" monoliths, while on the northern tip of the island a further 37 monoliths stand in two rows on prehistoric terraces.

Palau is rated as one of the Seven Under Water Wonders of the World by CEDAM International. This is not surprising when you can stand atop a reef edge in knee deep water and see it drop away to 320 metres vertically. It is believed that there are more than 50 WW2 wrecks sunk in the lagoon.

Surplus Equipment

We have a 406 Mhz (digital) PLB locator beacon for sale, this is the latest in search and rescue niceties, it transmits your lat/long via satellite to NOAA every few minutes for 24 hours. We'll sell it near-new to you for \$950 Australian dollars and you can register it to your own person / organization. A must have for bush walkers and outback Australia flights.

We also have a black and white Lowrance 1000 GPS available for \$950 Australian. They're equipped with a pacific international database, and have seen very little service. We've also got a six-man life raft that has all sorts of inclusions, never used. Talk to Darren Gibson about these items.



FastFind 406 ELT With GPS



Lowrance GPS

AirMap 1000 GPS
Australian Air-Ferry
Kempsey NSW Australia

Darren Gibson
PO Box 495
Kempsey NSW 2440
Ph: +61 2 6563 1406 BH
Ph: +61 2 6562 1861 AH
Fax: +61 2 6562 3064
Mobile: 0417 446 521

aaf@dodo.com.au

Australian Air-Ferry
Brisbane, Qld Australia

Garry Mitchell

Ph: 61 7 55477692
Fax: 61 2 6562 3064
Mobile: 0412 457727
US Cell: + 1 562 8815919

gazza@acenet.net.au