

Flight To Manila

by CLARENCE DOUCET

New Orleans group has 12-day vacation in a Twin Bonanza.

They reach Philippines by traveling Aleutian route from Alaska, and by skirting the Russian frontier for 1,200 miles

What makes a vacation flight from Los Angeles to Manila so unusual?

Consider this: Pilots John Brock (AOPA 167470) and C. J. Leonard made the trip with their nonpilot wives in a twin-engine model C50 (1956) *Twin Bonanza*. They each carried one piece of small luggage — containing mostly summer clothes — and their travel itinerary included Anchorage, Cold Bay and Adak, Alaska, as well as Shemiya, one of the most northern U. S. outposts in the Aleutian Island chain. Their vacation flight required 60 hours in the air attained over a 12-day period.

During one dramatic 1,700-mile leg of their flight they traveled more than 1,200 miles along the Russian frontier without a single positive fix—and met this ordeal only 5° and 25 miles off course! Making this particular jaunt more impressive is that 90% of the leg was spent flying on top of an overcast over the chilly waters of the north

Pacific.

At times their flight reads as fiction.

John Brock, 42, is chief pilot for Southern Airways in New Orleans. His wife, Julie, was born and reared in the Philippines. One objective of the trip, in addition to the taking of a vacation, was a visit for Julie with her relatives in the islands. The Brocks live in Laplace, La., a small community near New Orleans. They have four children.

C. J. Leonard, 41, has been a pilot for Southern Airways for three years. He and his wife, Betty, 39, live in suburban Jefferson Parish, and have three children with their fourth due in mid-December.

Both Brock and Leonard are veteran flyers. They were pilots during World War II; Brock was in the Army Air Corps, and Leonard was in the Navy. Both have served as executive as well as commercial airline pilots. They are also businessmen. With a third friend,

John W. Brock (second from left) and C. J. Leonard (right) were pilots of the *Twin Bonanza* on the flight to Manila. Standing between them is Mrs. Brock, who with Mrs. Leonard, completed the vacation group. At the left is Charles Bonaudi, who located the twin that Brock purchased before the trip. The plane in the background is another *Twin Bonanza*—Brock's aircraft was left in the care of a friend in Manila



Chuck Bonaudi, Brock and Leonard are the men behind the initials in BBL, Ltd., a diversified business operation.

Although the trip started with merely lighthearted talk, it became serious when Bonaudi, on a business trip, located the "right" *Twin Bonanza*, N-3758B, and assisted in arranging the sale through Doug Black at Hillsboro, Ore., near Portland.

Brock and Leonard claim their vacation plans got "real firm" the night of July 25, 1963—two nights before it actually began. That night there were two big questions to be answered before the two couples could go ahead with their plans: What about the question of interim wills in the event of an accident, and who would take care of their seven children while the parents were on vacation?

Bonaudi, a bachelor, figured prominently in the interim wills. Both couples left their children to him. "We thought no one would be better as a beneficiary than Chuck, a bachelor," Brock explained. "If we had gone down, we knew that a bachelor who had just inherited seven children would go out of his way and never stop until he found us."

Victor "Bill" Scott, another Southern Airways pilot, and his wife, Bobbie, served as "interim parents" for the seven children, and since the Scotts have four children of their own, the Brock's four-bedroom home—where the Scotts moved for the duration—was somewhat crowded for two weeks.

With the final arrangements at home made, the vacation could begin.

Part of the purchase agreement of the *Twin Bonanza* was that Black would have it flown to the Torrance, Calif., airport where special gas tanks were to be installed. N3758B was to carry a newly developed type of rubberized fully collapsible gas tank. Six of them were installed at Torrance by Marty Price, their creator.

Each tank has a 34-gallon capacity, and when full, weighs approximately the same as the average size combat trooper with full pack. The tanks expand as they are being filled and will withstand a pressure of 49 G's. As fuel is used the tanks collapse so that when a tank is empty it lies flat.

An added feature is a "bladder" device in each tank capable of holding four gallons of oil for use with engines with an excessive oil consumption. However, the "bladders" were not used. Each of the collapsible tanks was also equipped with quick-disconnect mechanisms permitting them to be used in various series.

Also installed at Torrance were three 30-gallon pumps. Two were hooked in series to the electrical bus with an "off-on" switch. The third had a plug that would fit into the cigarette lighter on the panel. The series set-up provided an hourly pumping capacity of 60-gallons, and with the third, an overall capacity of 90-gallons an hour.

Brock and Leonard left New Orleans for Los Angeles by commercial flight Sunday morning, July 28, and went to nearby Torrance to assist in the in-

stallation operations. By 6 p.m. they were winging their way to Hillsboro in their newly outfitted N3758B and getting their first feel of her controls.

The wives left New Orleans by commercial flight later the same day bound for San Francisco where they remained overnight. Monday morning, July 29, Julie and Betty flew West Coast Airlines to Seattle, and during a 20-minute stopover in Portland, Ore., they exchanged pleasantries with their husbands and were brought up to date on how their helterskelter travel plans were progressing.

According to plan the wives departed from Seattle at 9 p.m., en route to Anchorage. Also, according to plan they were to be joined by their husbands later that night at Anchorage, and the four would begin their trip immediately, but these plans hit a snag. Brock and Leonard were unable to clear Flight Craft until Tuesday morning—and the trip suddenly was one day behind schedule.

N3758B, when purchased, was already equipped with all the overseas radio equipment. This included a five-channel crystal control transmitter; a four-channel control tunable receiver; a 36-channel transceiver VHF; a five-channel standby VHF transmitter; a 180-channel VHF receiver; a tunable loop-antenna receiver for 200 to 550 kc's, and an executive Lear Bird Dog three-channel from 400 to 1710 kc's. The only radio work done was to change the domestic crystals on the VHF systems to international frequencies.

Survival equipment carried included four lifejackets, two liferafts, and a two-weeks supply of rations. For comfort, they brought along two pillows and two blankets.

They returned to Hillsboro Tuesday morning and within hours had filled their tanks with a 17½-hour supply of fuel and were airborne en route to Anchorage. The weather was clear, and after passing Seattle they moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, and then moved out to sea taking the water route in order to test their radio equipment and fuel and pumping systems. This was their first long-range trip in the plane—1,425 miles—and gas and oil consumption was good; the collapsible tanks operated well and the radio equipment checked out fine.

The plane arrived at Anchorage at midnight — 24-hours behind planned schedule—and Brock and Leonard, unable to get fuel because of the late hour, did the next best thing. They called the Westward Hotel, where their wives were staying, only to learn there were no rooms available. Fortunately, there were four single beds in the room rented by Julie and Betty and the immediate problem was quickly solved.

Serviced by the fixed-base operator at Anchorage, Sea Air Motive, Wednesday morning, July 31, the two pilots and their wives had planned to fly to Adak and then Shemiya, having obtained government clearances in advance.

They had filed a 10-hour flight plan

for the hop to Adak, but a low pressure area had moved over Adak and Shemiya. Making a quick change of plan, they headed for Cold Bay, a six-hour hop from Anchorage.

Cold Bay, which is half-way down the Aleutian chain between Anchorage and Shemiya, was once the site of an Air Force installation, but has since been turned over to the Federal Aviation Agency for use as a weather station. Reeve Aleutian Airways, the local service line in Alaska, has a fuel dump there, and it is also used as an alternate stop for military flights across the north Pacific.

They arrived at Cold Bay about 4 p.m. and took advantage of their two-hour stop to refuel and obtain the names of stations they could contact for position fixes as they moved on to Shemiya. They now planned to bypass Adak.

Airborne again, they continued winging their way over the Aleutian wilderness, receiving radar fixes at intervals, and protected from the chilly northern air by the comfortable heater in the plane.

But the hopeful picture changed quickly when they were a little over three hours from Adak. They started hitting turbulent weather, driving right into a low pressure area of 80-knot winds. Ground speed was reduced considerably, to 60 knots. Making radio contact with Adak, they heard more bad news: the only lighted runway at Shemiya was experiencing 45-knot winds with 90° crosswinds and gusts of up to 60-knots—and getting worse. To cinch the matter, a supply shed at Shemiya was aflame and all fire fighting and emergency equipment was at the scene.

And so, at 10:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 31, the trim *Twin Bonanza* prepared to approach the runway at Adak. Although the Pentagon had provided clearance for two pilots and two passengers, Brock and Leonard recall the twinge of apparent sudden awareness in the voice from Operations that asked as the wheels of N3758B skimmed across the runway:

"Those two passengers aren't females are they?"

The reason for the question, posed in a tone that suggested "Please don't let them be females," was the lack of quarters for ladies. The Navy, though, rose to the situation, and within minutes after their arrival, Julie and Betty were billeted in the VIP Room at Bachelor Officers' Quarters—with a private bath—while C. J. and John were assigned across the hall where they shared a bath with two Navy officers.

The four had hoped they could continue their trip the following morning, Thursday, Aug. 1, and move on to Shemya preparatory to their leap across the Pacific. But there was more bad news awaiting Leonard when he checked Operations. The low pressure area at Shemya was stationary and winds were intensifying to 70 to 80 knots.

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Leonard is commanding officer of a Naval Reserve transport squadron, VR 822, and one of his main concerns was arriving at Manila on schedule, so he could return to New Orleans in time to join his outfit for their two weeks of annual summer training. He learned that the Operations officer and he had a mutual friend, but the weather remained bad.

In keeping with the hospitality shown the wives, the Navy provided breakfast—in their room, and later that morning the two couples visited the Administration Building where they met Adak's commanding officer.

The weather Friday morning, Aug. 2, had improved sufficiently to permit N3758B and its four passengers to leave Adak a happy memory and make their bid for Shemya. The weather was clear at their 8 a.m. takeoff. The winds was about 25 knots and visibility was about 15 miles.

However, nature continued to play havoc with their plans as they moved closer to Shemya. The good weather began deteriorating, slowly at first, but progressively worse. But even the turbulent weather outside the plane was of value in developing a finer appreciation of the plane. Throughout the rough

weather the twin-engine craft "was as smooth as an airliner," the passengers recall.

As they readied for their landing about 11:30 a.m. at Shemya the ceiling had closed to 200 feet and visibility was reduced to a half-mile. Minutes after they landed the field was closed and the ceiling and visibility diminished to zero.

Shemya plans called for the taking on of 19 hours of fuel for the flight to Tokyo. Their flight plan estimated total air time at 16 hours and five minutes.

A critical decision of sorts was also made at Shemya.

Now, N3758B does not have toilet facilities, and the decision concerned an invitation the commanding officer had extended to the four to have lunch with him. The Brocks and the Leonards stayed up late Thursday, had taken off early Friday, and it was now about noon—and they were confronted with a 16-hour trip. The decision wasn't too difficult. They would have lunch—and they are happy they did.

Joining Col. Lowell, the commander, at the Officers' Mess they were served a meal they say would have delighted an epicurean's taste. "Terrific," "fantastic," are the words they use to describe the meal.

That afternoon, about four-thirty, there was a break in the weather that lasted long enough for the *Twin Bon-*

anza to streak down the runway and start for Tokyo.

Brock and Leonard had no information about the Russian islands they would pass, and it was doubtful they would get any. A request before they left New Orleans to the Russian Embassy in Washington seeking permission to land on one of the islands received an expected refusal. Military officials were in no position to provide information, they told the group. What data they might have, they said, was classified. They were unable to obtain the frequencies of any of the U.S.S.R. radio stations. There were no up-to-date and detailed charts available; there would be no one to contact for 12 hours.

Forty-five minutes after taking off from Shemya they received their last positive fix, and then they were on their own. To top off matters, the plane's heater went out—and the ground temperature at Shemya was in the mid-40's.

Two hours out, Brock and Leonard began picking up radio signals from two powerful stations which they assumed were Russian. Based on their time in flight, and approximating other details, they began operating on the assumption that one of the stations was Yelizovo, on the Kamchatka Peninsula. The northern point of this peninsula is near the eastern point of Si-

beria. The other signal they assumed was coming from Vasilyeva on Onnekotanto Island.

Four hours out they contacted Shemiya and asked for any available information on these two locations—Shemiya regretted none was available.

They continued navigating according to their assumptions and, after some five hours, forwarded a new estimated time of arrival to Tokyo—revising their trip time to 14 hours and 30 minutes. For seven more tense hours the pilots busied themselves with plotting, studying charts and maintaining their course while their wives huddled beneath the two blankets. Modified plans had them arriving in Tokyo early Sunday, since they lost Saturday crossing the International Date Line.

Two hours before arriving in Tokyo they received their first positive fix in more than 12 hours from a friendly station. They learned to their complete satisfaction that they had covered the Russian frontier in remarkable fashion and their navigation required only a 5° change of course from 245° to 240°.

They arrived in Tokyo at 1:30 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 4—only five minutes off their revised estimated time of arrival made seven hours earlier.

Their arrival created a great deal of excitement, and it took a considerable amount of calm explaining before Japanese officials were convinced the four were tourists who had actually flown the *Twin Bonanza* non-stop from United States territory. After clearance, the tired travelers moved to the Nikkatsu Hotel for a well deserved night of sleep.

Breakfast Sunday morning was a treat. They broke out the bottle of champagne they had reserved for breakfast in Tokyo, and in the existing state of conviviality there was little resistance to the idea of emptying a second bottle, originally earmarked for breakfast in Hong Kong.

But breakfast was not only a liquid meal. It also consisted of a lavish setting of salmon steaks, delicious Spanish omelets and healthy portions of French fried potatoes.

Enjoying their holiday while N3758B was being serviced, the Brocks and Leonards joined in a tour of the city, visited the Tokyo Tower, and had dinner at Shiyvo's Restaurant.

During the meal there was a small difficulty—an earthquake.

Brock, who spent nine years with Philippine Air Lines following the war, is familiar with that section of the world and rates the eruption as only a "minor" quake, worth scarcely more than the raising of an eyebrow. In fact, had Leonard and his wife looked around they would have noticed most persons continued with their meals. But, as it was Leonard's first earthquake, it lasted a long 30 seconds and says C. J., "I was about to bail out the fifth story window."

Although still two full days behind their schedule, they decided to remain in Tokyo through Monday, Aug. 5, and make up a day by flying all night Mon-

day and arriving in Hong Kong Tuesday morning, only a day off schedule. And that is what they did.

They took off from Tokyo at 10 p.m. Monday; arrived in Hong Kong about 10 a.m. Tuesday, and remained there until Thursday, Aug. 8.

In Hong Kong, they visited the border of Communist China at the Chunchow River; took the tramway ride to the top of Victoria Island for an unmatched view of Hong Kong harbor; and had a memorable meal aboard the Sea Palace, a stern wheeler converted to a floating restaurant. They traveled to the Sea Palace in a sampan, although there are those who reach it in a motorized yacht. And while the husbands attended to the professional aspects of the trip, the wives shopped and shopped.

Thursday morning they filed their flight plan for Manila, and shortly be-

fore noon arrived at their destination.

C. J., who had to return for reserve training, left Manila by commercial flight on Saturday, Aug. 10. Betty and Brock returned the same way a week later, and Julie, paying a long-awaited visit to her homeland, remained still another week. N3758B was left in the care of a close friend, W. H. Rohling.

Lessons learned on the 12-day trip were numerous and there were several problems.

When they wanted to gas their plane, something they could do themselves, the international airports—accustomed to giant jet airliners—usually provided 15 or more people to assist in the job. International-type credit cards, such as Shell, Esso, Carte Blanche, Diners' International, proved at times more valuable than currency.

Communications were a drawback. Before leaving the United States they cabled both Hong Kong and Tokyo of their arrival plans. Again, leaving Shemiya they communicated with Tokyo. Yet at both places their arrival came as a surprise to local authorities.

Still they were completely satisfied. So satisfied, in fact, that Brock and Leonard, upon their return and after consulting with their business partner, announced BBL, Ltd., was expanding into the ferrying service and consulting service.

Their four-word summation of the trip—"We had a ball!"

THE AUTHOR

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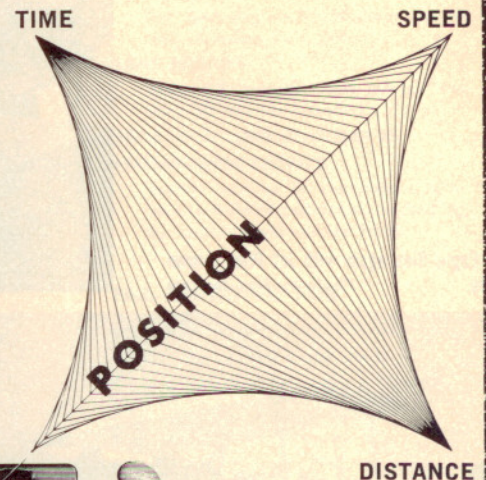
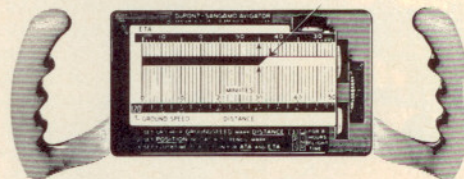
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