



Loading a Bio-Containment Unit in a B-747



Secretary Michael Pompeo

Long Island Early Fliers Education Foundation

May, June 2020 Newsletter

Editor: Fred Coste

Volume 5, Issue 3

Editor's Note:

The world has changed a great deal since our last newsletter. There isn't anyone who has not been touched in some way by loneliness, selfishness, sickness or death. While some are focused on the hoarding of toilet paper, others are fearing financial failure being just around the corner. Even worse, there are many experiencing the anxiety of waiting for a loved one to die, not being able to spend just a few more moments when you can't even visit them in their last days or hours; then the sadness of not being able to honor their lives with a funeral, knowing they will be buried in the hospital gown they died in.

We have also seen a new appreciation of those who walk among us while quietly giving their love and attention to trying to help people recover. Gandhi once said: "When you are fighting in a just cause, people seem to pop up, right out of the pavement. Even when it's dangerous."

Police, First Responders, so many others in the health care field have risen to the challenge and are realized for the heroes they are. However there are others and in

addition to being in the aviation profession, they are members of the Long Island Early Fliers. I am both pleased and honored to share their story.

Last year we featured LIEF member Randy Davis, Chief Counsel and pilot for Phoenix Air Group, Inc., in Cartersville, Georgia.

Earlier this month, during a White House briefing, I heard Secretary of State Mike Pompeo describe how the Department of State is actively involved in the rescue of Americans worldwide, but there was one daring rescue that was probably the most difficult rescue ever performed.



Randy Davis

I emailed Randy immediately to tell him that I thought Mike Pompeo was talking about Phoenix Air. While he was not aware of the White House briefing, he said he would check on it. The following story is related by Dent Thompson, Senior Vice President of

Phoenix Air Group, Inc. starting with excerpts from his email to employees:

From: Dent
Sent: Thursday, April 16, 2020 10:08 AM
To: All Employees
Subject: Paro, Bhutan Air Ambulance Story

As all of you know, our aircraft and employees are operating at 110% right now responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only do we have three and sometimes four of our Gulfstreams out around the world, we are also subcontracting another four Gulfstreams from another company, one Boeing B-747, two B-777's, two B-787's, and three B-767's from Part 121 operators supporting our work for our Government. Our operating theater has been worldwide - all of Africa, most of the Middle East and throughout the Pacific basin to include Australia.



The 747 used to fly cruise ship passengers home – contracted by Phoenix Air

While the majority of American citizens stranded around the world will be back home by early next week, and our use of large passenger airliners will slow, the Part 135 portion of our operations will increase in tempo as we switch to resupplying U.S. Embassies and Consuls around the world, cut-off from their normal resupply chains.

Back in mid-March, we operated what is being called one of the most complex medical evacuations in history. The back story is so “typically Phoenix Air” that we want every employee and family member to better understand how this went down.

As a bonus, the crew had a video camera aimed out the front windshield. Below are two links to the approach into Paro Airport in Bhutan and the departure from Paro Airport. If you Google Paro, Bhutan you will see it listed as one of the five most dangerous airports in the world. Our crew took it on and it’s an amazing ride. Also remember that the internet is very slow these days due to the enormous usage, so there may be some lag time and buffering when you download the videos.

Once again, every employee at Phoenix Air has stepped up and we’re doing things never done before.

[Click these links to view the video:](#)
(turn up the sound)

<https://phoenixair.sharefile.com/d-s4ef9dd523ce44c29>

<https://phoenixair.sharefile.com/d-s3095ca8de4d4bc0a>

The story of the rescue from Bhutan.



U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo stood before the Washington Press Corps on Tuesday morning, March 31, to brief reporters gathered in the White House Press Room on activities which the State Department was undertaking at the end of March. Top of his agenda was the State Department’s efforts to bring Americans home from around the world in the face of the growing COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Secretary Pompeo highlighted one mission by stating...

“In Bhutan, no easy place to get to, an American was critically ill from the

virus, intubated on a ventilator, and frankly expected to die in a country located in one of the most remote corners of the world. But we came to the rescue. Our team arranged a biocontainment transport from Bhutan to an intensive care unit in Baltimore, Maryland, a distance of nearly 8,000 miles. To fly through Kathmandu, there's about 12 pilots who can make that flight. It was one of the most complex medical evacuations in history, and the State Department pulled it off."



The Biomedical Containment tent

This is a story worth telling, and telling in detail, an air ambulance mission which against all odds overcame obstacle after obstacle and kept the patient alive and delivered him into advanced medical care in the United States. For privacy reasons, few details on the patient are contained in this story, just details of how Phoenix Air Group and its cadre of highly skilled pilots, medical staff and trip planners successfully completed what is truly

one of the most complex medical evacuations in aviation history.

It started midday on Tuesday, March 10, when Dr. William Walters, Deputy Chief Medical Officer at the U.S. State Department, called into Phoenix Air's Charter Department in Cartersville, GA wanting to explore the viability of operating an air ambulance flight into Paro, Bhutan to bring out a critically ill American citizen. The patient was himself a physician, in Bhutan advising their government, when he became sick with COVID-19 and was rapidly deteriorating. He was in a local hospital intubated on a ventilator with poor vital signs. It was a Hail Mary throw...putting together a team and getting into one of the most dangerous airports in the world, then crossing European airspace which was systematically being restricted due to the growing pandemic...all this with a highly contagious patient onboard on full life support.



The Kingdom of Bhutan is also not just around the corner, it's a small nation in the Eastern Himalayas between Tibet and India, just a bit east of Kathmandu, Nepal best known for its towering Mt. Everest.

Dr. Walters and Phoenix Air's medical director Dr. Michael Flueckiger discussed the patient's prognosis, which was not good, but let's do this. At that moment, it was Game On.



Phoenix's Bio-Medical Containment System

The closest Phoenix Air medevac jet equipped with the company's proprietary Aeromedical Biological Containment System (ABCS) capable of transporting a contagious patient was stationed in Nairobi, Kenya under contract to the State Department's Office of Operational Medicine, which Dr. Walters manages.

Darrin Benton, Phoenix Air's Assistant Director of Operations, looked at the



pilot roster in Nairobi for that week. He and Director of Operations George Crim had studied Paro Airport in Bhutan and it was not going to be easy, in fact various sites on the internet label it as one of the five most difficult airport approaches in the world, so dangerous that aircraft must have a licensed and specially trained "Navigator" onboard talking the pilots through the procedures. The runway is deep in a Himalayan valley along a river, only 7,431-feet long at an altitude of 7,333-feet – that's over 2,000-feet higher than Denver's Airport and half its length. This was not going to be easy.

As Darrin looked at the crew roster, he saw that his most experienced captain in the region was Cheyenne Foote, who had completed his multi-week deployment to Nairobi and was already at Nairobi International Airport waiting to catch a commercial flight home. Darrin called Cheyenne on his cell

phone, described the mission in detail, getting in and out of Paro, Bhutan with snow coming in three-days, the patient's condition, is he interested?

Cheyenne's answer was immediate. He grabbed his suitcase back from the airline check-in desk and headed back to the local hotel to start planning the mission to Bhutan. Flight Crew One would be Capt. Cheyenne Foote and First Officer Greg McPherson.

Phoenix Air's two medical directors, Dr. Mike Flueckiger and Dr. Doug Olson, along with manager of Phoenix Air's medical division Vance Ferebee, RN began briefing the medical team currently assigned to the Phoenix Air base in Nairobi. On the other end of the phone was registered nurse Rick McKinstry and paramedic Ernie DeWitt. They would be the medical team in back with the patient, who himself would be housed in full biocontainment inside the ABCS tent for the long trip to Baltimore, MD where an intensive care unit bed was waiting.

Due to FAA regulations on the length of time pilots can be in the cockpit, two more teams of pilots would have to be stationed along the long route home between Bhutan and Baltimore. So, Phoenix Air's Charter Department staff

dug in and started route planning...and most importantly...trying to locate one of only 12 elusive Paro Navigators available for this short-fuse mission. Snow was predicted for the mountain valleys in Bhutan starting Friday evening and the patient's vital signs were continuing to deteriorate. In and out in no more than 72-hours from now, or the mission would be postponed, and the patient would likely succumb to the virus.

After a search for a licensed Navigator, a Bhutanese Navigator was located in Calcutta, India willing to go, but it would be a one-way flight into Paro Airport where he was born and wanted to stay a while, the flight crew needed to pay close attention to his instructions and reverse their way back out on their own. This was really stacking up to be no easy day.

Phoenix Air Captain Larry Bostrom and First Officer Kyle Houghton were also in Nairobi, Kenya that week and were sent by airlines to Dubai where they staged to take over the cockpit duties when the Gulfstream jet landed with the patient onboard. They would become Flight Crew Two. Phoenix Air captain Dan Harris and First Officer Brandon Banks along with registered nurse Kortney Yarborough scrambled to catch a commercial flight out of Atlanta

to Paris where they would become Flight Crew Three.



Because none of the crewmembers would be allowed off the aircraft once it was underway with a highly contagious COVID-19 patient onboard, the jet would never stop moving except to add more pilots and refuel. Flight Crew One would move into the passenger compartment just forward of the biocontainment unit housing the patient when Flight Crew Two boarded in Dubai, then both flight crews were in the back when Flight Crew Three boarded in Paris. Things continued stacking up as their first no easy day turned into two not-so-easy days. An unknown factor was whether the patient would expire on the way home, a very real possibility based on early vital signs from the Paro hospital. The clock was ticking, it was now Tuesday night in Cartersville, GA and departure was scheduled out of Nairobi Thursday morning.

Phoenix Air's Charter Department was deep into the planning cycle and submitting overflight and landing documents, made more complicated by the hour as different countries started closing or restricting their airspace. Being designated a humanitarian air ambulance flight helped a little, but it would still be an incredibly difficult task routing the aircraft from Paro, Bhutan to Baltimore, MD.

Then Thursday morning Nairobi time arrived – middle of the night in Cartersville – but the Charter Department was up and working. Snow was still predicted for Friday evening in Bhutan, the train needed to pull out of the station on time to land at Paro at 12 noon their time on Friday. One hour on the ground at Paro Airport was scheduled, grab some fuel and upload the patient, get out of the deep Himalayan valley alongside the river before the weather closed in, and get up to 40,000 feet where the Gulfstream jet likes to cruise.

First stop Calcutta, India to board the Bhutanese Navigator. Payment for his services had been agreed to and the flight crew was ready to cover this cost. But once the Navigator learned that this was an air ambulance mission to bring out a physician in his country helping his government, he refused

payment – this became “his” duty to see through to the end.

So, he settled in a jump seat between the two Phoenix Air pilots and soon began talking them through the slow descent into the towering mountain peaks and down towards the river snaking through the deep valley below. Before long navigational instruments were shut off, this was now pure piloting skills by visual sight, stick and rudder control. Then the jet bottomed out a few hundred feet above the river and began banking along its curves. “Aim for the house’s green roof top over there” the Navigator can be heard telling the pilots, all captured on a Go Pro camera they sat on the panel aimed out the front windshield. In the background, the Ground Proximity Warning System’s mechanical voice can be heard saying over and over “Terrain ahead, pull up, pull up.”

Then around one more bend in the river and the runway appears ahead looking more like an aircraft carrier deck than a seven-thousand-foot runway. Landing gear down, full flaps, spoilers deployed and powering onto the runway, then instantaneous maximum braking and thrust reversers deployed, slowing the 70,000 lbs. aircraft to a stop just before the end of the runway.



On final to Paro Airport, Bhutan

After parking on the ramp, an ambulance from the local hospital arrives with the patient onboard. One of the Phoenix Air medical crewmembers in full personal protection equipment (PPE’s) goes out to meet the ambulance and using sign language and pantomime, he gets the patient onto a backboard carried by six Bhutanese medical attendants over to the Gulfstream and hefted up into the aircraft’s cargo-door where he is moved off the backboard and into the ABCS biocontainment tent, and transferred onto the aircraft’s life support equipment. He’s still alive, a good sign, but his vital signs are still in the tank.



The cargo door used for loading the patient

Snow was a few hours away, it's time to go.

The Navigator headed across the ramp towards home, the cargo-door was closed, and the two Rolls Royce jet engines spool up. The Angel Flight is off at max speed and soon winding down the river valley with Cheyenne and Greg as newly minted "navigators" on their own, climbing out from beneath the mountain peaks up to cruise altitude. In the back, medical teammates Rick and Ernie are busy doing final tweaking on life support equipment, fluids and medications which they hope will keep their patient alive for the long trip home.



From Paro they fly back to Calcutta to refuel, then to Dubai where pilots Larry Bostrom and Kyle Houghton are waiting. After fueling in Dubai, Cheyenne and Greg are done and move to the back, time now for Larry and Kyle to take over in the cockpit. There's a fast refuel on the island of Crete, then on to Paris. In Paris, pilots Dan Harris and Brandon Banks board

along with flight nurse Kortney Yarbrough who joins her medical colleagues taking care of the patient.

Then it's off again headed across the Atlantic Ocean to Gander, Newfoundland for their final fuel stop before Baltimore. On the ground in Gander the med crew calls in, the patient is amazingly stable considering all. Time to press on to Baltimore.

Landing at Baltimore occurred on Saturday, March 14, at 9:00 a.m. local time. The patient remained stable and was handed off to a ground ambulance crew for the ride to his bed in a local intensive care unit.



Difficult? In the extreme. Obstacles? Almost too many. Only 72-hours to plan, needed to locate one of only 12 licensed Navigators half-way around the world, snow coming in 72-hours, needed to put two additional flight crews into Dubai and Paris, then of course navigate in and land at one of the most difficult airports in the world.

Patient has falling vital signs, intubated and on full life support, and highly contagious. Then fly half-way around the world to Baltimore through highly restricted airspace.

In the end, it took 30.5 hours from departing Paro, Bhutan Friday to landing at Baltimore Saturday, the skills of six pilots and three medical crewmembers, no easy day-and-a-half for sure, but the Phoenix Air employees undertook what Secretary of State Pompeo called “One of the most complex medical evacuations in history” – and all of us at Phoenix Air Group are certainly not going to argue with that statement.”



As told by Dent Thompson, Senior Vice President and Chief Operations Officer for Phoenix Air Group, Inc.

On behalf of LIEF members and Americans everywhere, Thank you, to the employees of Phoenix Air!

Editor’s note: I couldn’t let the story end there and made a follow up contact –

“The physician is an older gentleman who did have some preexisting medical conditions placing him in the danger zone for CV-19 complications. By the time we picked him up in Bhutan, his vital signs were so bad that all of the doctors involved doubted our flight would have a good outcome. He did well on the flight and was handed off to the hospital in Baltimore. We kept in touch and are happy to report that he recovered and is now resting at home; actually up and getting exercise. What started as a Hail Mary pass is now a Home Run.” - Dent

*******LIEFC News*******

We are hopeful that our members, who are spread across the globe, are all healthy and safe during the COVID-19 pandemic and always.

We have done several things to comply with government suggested guidelines, which include:

- 1). Our monthly meetings for April and May have been cancelled.
- 2). The Wednesday work crew is at the hangar only at the option of each individual. There is plenty of social distancing space for the workers, however we have not been working in an official capacity for few weeks.

Hopefully, we'll be back soon to continue the progress!

3). We have postponed our Bus Trip to the Piper Museum and Eagles Mere Air Museum in Pennsylvania. With any luck, we will be able to carry out the trip later in the year. Frankly, the postponement may open other opportunities when we reschedule this trip.

In addition, we have started planning our next bus trip. Details will be provided at the appropriate time and we look forward to that announcement as well as a return to the normal group activities for the Early Fliers.

Member Donations:

We are grateful for the donations that have continued to flow in recently. Without the financial generosity to offset the canceled activities that keep us in the black, we would soon be struggling to meet our expenses and so we acknowledge the generosity of the following members:

Rob Lamanna	\$ 15.00
Wally Gordon-Tennant	\$ 50.00
Jason McMunn	\$ 100.00
Jerry Monacchio	\$ 65.00
Jefferson Family Charitable Foundation- Gordon Lamb	\$1000.00

Thank you all for your generosity!!

We are still looking for donations of life size mannequins!!!

To that end, we thank Paul Kern for his donation of a female mannequin. As soon as she was brought her into the hangar, Tom Alferman wrapped her in a sheet because she looked cold! We have many uniforms, both military and civilian that we would like to place on public display. It would be best to use full body mannequins, including heads, that we can place helmets or hats on, however partial body forms could also be useful. Can you help us with this request? Think of it as a great way to clean out the basement or attic!

Time to smile.....

In case you lost track,
today is March 97th

**What's the difference
between Wuhan and
Las Vegas? What
happens in Vegas,
stays in Vegas.**

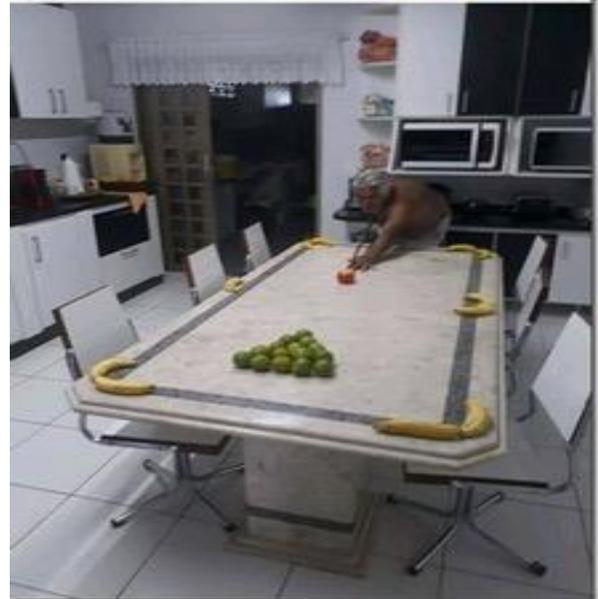
Day 7 at home and the dog is looking at me like, "See? This is why I chew the furniture."

The drop in petrol price during the lockdown is like a bald man winning a hairbrush

*Day 7 of the quarantine
My wife took up gardening but won't tell what she's going to plant*



Day 9 quarantine.... 🤔 🤔 🤔 🤔



Does anyone know if we can take showers yet or should we just keep washing our hands ??



QUARANTINE DAY 20:
TODAY, I MELTED AN
ICE CUBE WITH MY
MIND JUST BY STARING
AT IT. IT TOOK A LOT
LONGER THAN I
THOUGHT IT WOULD.

Duct Tape is **NOT** the solution
to **EVERY** problem!



Hormel made their first
batch of SPAM in 1937. The
company has just announced
that due to hoarding by
consumers, they are going to
make a second batch.

Remember when we
were little
and had underwear
with the days of the
week on them?
Yah. Those would be
helpful right now.



IN WUHAN THIS MEANS
YOUR DINNER IS READY

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The LONG ISLAND
Early Fliers Club

Long Island Early Fliers Club, Inc. is a non-profit organization founded in 1956 and Chartered by the New York State Education Department. We are dedicated to aviation education and preserving Long Island's aviation heritage. Volunteers who want to help educate and preserve our history are always welcome. Annual Membership in our organization is \$35.00 for individuals; \$50.00 for families.

Donations of aviation memorabilia, aircraft and aircraft parts, aviation clothing, display quality models and items of historic significance are always welcome and greatly appreciated. Cash donations, as well as artifact donations are tax deductible. You may visit our facility at Bayport Aerodrome, Vitamin Drive, Bayport New York most Wednesdays between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Appointments are necessary as airports are secure locations and can also be arranged at other times for your convenience. Contact us at: L.I.E.F.C., P.O. Box 43, Holbrook, NY, 11741 or call (631)-523-5407 (Fred Coste) or fax: 631-588-2147

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