

## **A Point in Space and Time**

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Debbie McCarthy and Karen Borzewski, both 29 and best friends, flew together more often than not.

Both were high on PSA's flight attendant seniority list (Debbie No. 90, Karen No. 132) and usually got the flight blocs for which they bid.

Debbie would "bid down" to get in Karen's blocs. But that wasn't the case with Block 78 of Bid Period 10, one of the better assignments. The bloc's first sequence ended Saturday morning, and they didn't check in again until late Sunday afternoon, Sept. 24, for the second sequence, No. 435.

That sequence began with a deadhead flight from San Diego to Los Angeles. From there, the stews - McCarthy, Borzewski, Dee Young and Kate Fons - took Flight 829 to San Francisco, turned around with Flight 724 back to Los Angeles, and finished the evening's work with Flight 983, to Sacramento.

It was after 10:30 when Capt. Jim McFeron banked 983 sharply in the clear warm night and settled the tri-jet 727-200 onto the runway of the new Sacramento Metropolitan Airport.

McFeron and his crew members - first officer Bob Fox, 38, and flight engineer Martin Wahne (pronounced "Wayne"), 44 - also were on this bloc as a result of their own bidding system that keeps the same flight crew together throughout the 28-day scheduling cycle.

It was a good crew, a senior one. McFeron, 42, had 17 years with PSA. A born pilot, they said of him; he always seemed to be two heartbeats ahead of the situation. Fox, a nine-year veteran, was due for upgrading to captain and was looking forward to starting the necessary training. Wahne had manned the engineer's console along the righthand wall of the flight deck - which is why flight engineers are said to "fly sideways" - for 11 years.

Among them, McFeron, Fox and Wahne totaled 35,000 hours of flight experience most of it with a company that had not lost an aircraft in its 29-year history.

The Metropolitan Airport is miles from town - "surrounded by rice paddies," the locals crack - and there's not much to do if you're overnighing there except go to the new International Host motel across the street and get some sleep.

That was fine with the crew walking away from Flight 983. Check-in time was before sunup the next morning for the last leg of the sequence, a 7 a.m. hop to Los Angeles and San Diego.

The stews knew it would be a busy flight. It always was, with state employees and other businessmen eager to get the jump on a full day's work in L.A. or San Diego. Around the capital, the flight was called "the red-eye special," or simply, "182."

It had the comfortable familiarity of a car pool. Invariably, the same faces filed past Toni Steinbrecher, working airport security at the top of the escalator, between the ticket counters and PSA's boarding area, Gates 22, 24 and 26. She knew some of them by name, a lot of them by face.

And of course many knew each other.

When state Sen. Newt Russell stepped up to the Gate 24 counter to get his boarding pass, he saw Pacific Telephone lobbyist Jack Irwin already in line to board the plane.

"Hi, how're you doing?" smiled Irwin.

"Fine," said Russell, adding rhetorically, "You goin' south?"

Like Russell, most of the passengers were bound for Los Angeles; that was usual. Of the 130 boarding Flight 182, only 28 were ticketed through to San Diego. Irwin was among them. He was going to a public affairs meeting, and he had spoken by phone with his father, in Solana Beach, about having lunch.

It was not a very lively queue, waiting to board. Paul Ward, president of the California Hospital Association, yawned. He had arisen at 4:30 to give himself plenty of time to make the plane. No one lived close to the airport, yet when McFeron and McCarthy and the others walked through the lobby at 6, some of 182's customers were already there. By 6:30, the boarding area was crowded. Ward thought the stews looked fresher than the passengers.

Assemblyman Art Torres was surprised, in fact, by the vitality of one of them whose name he couldn't recall, who, as the passengers filed on board, busied herself making them comfortable and handing out newspapers and magazines. So bouncy, for such an hour, he thought.

Ward made for his regular seat, opposite the forward bulkhead, where he had room to stretch his long legs.

He noted the seat was lumpy, as it had been on another 182 trip recently.

"I'm gonna put an 'X' on this seat," he told Jack Kirkpatrick, the CHA vice president, flying with him, "so that next time I can tell if I'm on the same plane."

It might have been easier to check the aircraft number, painted in black on the nosewheel doors: 206.

No. 206 could be forgiven a lumpy seat or two. Since joining the fleet in 1968, it had logged 24,000 hours of service. It was a good airplane, with 8 or 10 years of service left in it.

PSA's fleet of 727-200s has a standard configuration of three-abreast seating on either side of the aisle, with a capacity of 159. They all look alike, even to frequent passengers, but there are subtle differences, such as galley arrangement. The stews adapt to it as soon as they know which "equipment" (as they call the airplanes), they'll be flying.

The cabin, with its absence of dividers (used on a first class-coach configuration), is an extraordinarily bright space when the early morning sun slants through the windows, and it becomes rather warm. The passengers on 182 this morning, incidentally, were prepared for it. Sunday had been a scorcher – 94 degrees – in Sacramento, and the forecasts spoke of record-breaking heat on Monday in Southern California. The commuters had dressed for it. The stews, on hot days, favored blouses (especially a new short-sleeved version of PSA's colorful signature swirl) and the plum skirts.

As usual, Debbie McCarthy's spiel about oxygen and exits was generally ignored; heads, lowered into newspapers, bobbed as the jet bounced out to the end of the runway. PSA puts about 20 copies each of The Wall Street Journal and the local morning paper on its early-bird flights. Interest this morning was divided between business news and

Sunday's pro football scores. Too, the Dodgers had clinched the National League West championship, beating the Padres 4-0 at Chavez Ravine.

McCarthy, as the lead stew on the flight, handled the cabin public address system, and she did the manifest paperwork. Borzewski, also a lead stew, would be in the aft cabin for the first hop. For variety, the two would switch for the L.A.-San Diego segment.

McCarthy was also a "check" stew, sort of an in-flight instructor, who would keep an eye on Kate Fons, at 20 the crew's junior member and a summer graduate of flight attendants school.

And, it was Debbie's responsibility, as the senior stew, to coordinate cabin preparations for any sort of an emergency landing.

It was 7:20 when McFeron swung the 727's nose around, pointed it due south down the runway, and opened the throttles.

In the terminal, a man with a German accent turned away from the PSA counter in frustration. He'd started late from the house, and then his young daughter had wanted to drive. Now he'd have to wait until 9:30 and catch 984. He wouldn't be in San Diego until 11:30.

Flight 182 accelerated in a steady climb toward its 510 miles per hour cruising speed. Seven hundred miles ahead, David Boswell was also tooling south, at about 60 mph, down Interstate 5 from his home in Oceanside.

Boswell, 35, an experienced pilot, was taking a week's leave from the Marines – he was a gunnery sergeant stationed at Camp Pendleton – to give more time to his instruction in flying a plane "on instruments." He was due at Montgomery Field about 8 to meet his instructor at Gibbs Flying Service.

Photographer Hans Wendt also had an early assignment, so instead of checking in first at the county's public affairs office where he worked, he drove straight from his Encinitas home down Intestates 5 and 805 to North Park. He was to shoot a demonstration of a gasoline vapor recovery system at a service station on the corner of University and Boundary. One of his cameras – a Nikkormat EL – was loaded with color film.

It didn't strike Wendt as too thrilling an assignment, but it was likely to be the most excitement North Park had that day. Television minicams would be there, and Lucille Moore, chairwoman of the county Board of Supervisors.

Only the hum of traffic from I-805, a block to the east, disturbed the lazy calm along Dwight Street. Before she took her son to school and went to work, San Diego Union receptionist Carol Casey walked next door, as she did every morning, to her mother's side of their duplex, at 3361 Dwight.

Amy Bolick was sitting in her living room, drinking coffee. "It's so hot," Carol said, "why don't you go see Muriel today?" Muriel was Amy's sister. "Well, I don't know," said Amy. She was still undecided when Carol left her.

Lela Todd, 82, had lived for years at 3377 Dwight, the house on the other side of the Casey duplex. She had been visiting her daughter in Poway but came home Sunday night. She couldn't get around too well anymore, so the neighbors didn't see much of her. But sometimes she came out later in the morning, about 9, to tend to her flowers. Her front yard was alive with beautiful flowers; people would stop to take pictures of it.

Lela's daughter and son-in-law lived in a duplex behind the house and helped her with shopping and chores, but now they were away on vacation, in Idaho.

At the other end of the block were two younger families, newcomers since August to the neighborhood. Nancy and Harold Stout, a Navy man, had moved into the corner house, 3604 Nile, with their son Robert, 4, and Candace, 6. Ed Watkins, a machinist, and wife Darlene and daughter Tracy, 8, had rented the house next door, 3380 Dwight.

The Stouts were adopting Candace, and had thought she would have to miss school Monday so they could keep a court appointment. But the appointment had been postponed. Candy went to school and Harold to work. It was Nancy's 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday; they would celebrate it in the evening.

This morning, Robert would have some company when Sherry Walker of Clairemont dropped off young son Derek, 3. Both the Walkers worked, and Nancy had been keeping Derek during the day for about a week. Sherry usually dropped him off about 9, to be at work – she was a waitress at The Windsock restaurant near Lindbergh Field – by 9:30.

Next door, Darlene Watkins had also thought of keeping Tracy home from school, because of the stifling heat. But she changed her mind. Monday was the one day Darlene closed her hairstyling shop, over on 30<sup>th</sup> Street, and she had some things to get done around the house. She also planned to meet a girlfriend for lunch. Tracy and Ed were out the door early, as always. Darlene usually left soon after, by 8:15, when the shop was open. This morning, though, as the 8 o'clock news spoke of the heat wave, she was busy gathering up laundry.

Jim McFeron, watching the San Gabriel Mountains fall away to the great stucco carpet of Los Angeles, was gathering his thoughts for another landing. He put the plane into a gentle right-hand glide, and in the cabin briefcases started to snap shut.

Dr. William Bronston of the state Health Department had been busy with some dictation and preparation for an L.A. conference, and the flight had passed quickly; more quickly than he realized. The flight had left 20 minutes late, but was back on time as it descended toward L.A. International. It was the only uncommon thing about this flight, which was why the airplane made such a good office. No distractions.

Not everyone was in a business mood. Pamela Metcalf, 26, Dr. Bronston's assistant, found her other seatmate unusually jovial. He said indeed he was. It was his kid's first birthday, and they were going to have a big party that night back in Sacramento.

The plane touched down, braked and rolled onto a taxiway. The crew, through the open cockpit door, seemed to the passengers happy and relaxed. Hans Wendt coasted up the University Avenue off ramp from I-805, as David Boswell nosed his car into a space at Gibbs Flying Service and went to find Martin Kazy.

The hour was earlier than Kazy, 32, might have liked. Most of the Gibbs instructors schedule their first lessons at a later hour, when the fog has burned off. But it was clear today, and warming quickly.

Besides, Kazy told fiancé and fellow instructor Jennifer Lefler as they drove to work, Boswell had been coming along very well with his training, and he had taken a week's leave to concentrate on it. Enthusiasm is infectious, among pilots.

Too, Kazy had reason to be in a perpetual good mood. He was engaged; he and Jennifer were planning a vacation in Hawaii next month, he had a job offer at triple his salary from another company to be its director of flight operations, a job that would

require him to fly all over the country; and on the new job, Jennifer would be his co-pilot. His life had blossomed in the year since he'd relocated to California from his native Ohio.

Together, Kazy and Boswell checked the aircraft, a yellow-and-white Cessna 172, and – Boswell in the left seat – climbed aboard.

At Los Angeles, 102 passengers got up and filed off flight 182. As was his habit, Paul Ward scanned the line of people waiting to board; usually he sees someone he knows. He didn't this morning, though his friend Jack Dumas, a hospital planning consultant, was among the 100.

So was Valerie Kantor. Art Torres caught her eye and they waved "Hello."

Kantor, and other attorneys with the L.A. firm Wyman, Bautzer, Rothman and Kuchel, had become 182 regulars since the matter of C. Arnholt Smith's crumbling Westgate-California empire became a fixture on court dockets. They represent the corporation's trustees. Valerie's husband Mickey was campaign manager of Gov. Brown's 1976 presidential bid, and she also was active in political circles.

The flight, this morning with 31 empty seats, took on even more of a commuter air on the L.A.-San Diego leg. Its 9 a.m. arrival allowed many businessmen to live in, say, Malibu, like developer Andrew Martin, and still be on his Otay Mesa site before the doughnut wagon arrived.

Martin was particularly eager to get to work this morning. He had just reached agreement with a Wall Street firm to underwrite his massive La Fronteras residential development near the Mexican border.

Maxine Thweatt, Paula Blake and Andrea Jacobson caught 182 every Monday morning, 52 weeks a year, to attend buyers' meetings at the San Diego headquarters of a chain of specialty clothing shops.

Jacobson never liked flying, never became used to it, in spite of all the Monday commutes. But it didn't bend her enthusiasm for the trip she and Thweatt and Blake were to make in October, on a buying assignment overseas. This flight would be their last to San Diego before their departure for Europe on Oct. 1.

Dr. Leo Reeder, professor of public health at UCLA, was coming down for the day to address a workshop meeting of the American Cancer Society at Hotel del Coronado. He planned to return home, to Pacific Palisades, in time for supper.

Charles Bren, of the Donald L. Bren Co., a prestigious residential development firm in L.A., was coming from Westwood to check on projects in La Jolla. And there were others: Palos Verdes attorney Mike Haggart; L.A. county school official Richard Horne (brother of Metropolitan Opera star Marilyn Horne); Alan Tetelman, authority in the prevention of aviation accidents due to metal fatigue or mechanical failure.

But the largest single body of commuters were employees of the airline itself – 30 in all. Six pilots, 12 stews, and a dozen others, including new personnel manager Robert Benner, just turned 32. Benner and his wife Sue, also aboard, had just bought a house in San Diego and wanted some time Monday sizing it up for the furniture. She would come for the day because their 11-year-old son was at school in Thousand Oaks.

The aircraft personnel – pilots and stews – were off duty for the most part and deadheading home. Capt. Roger Walsh and his crew, for example, had terminated a sequence in L.A. late Sunday night. Walsh had thought he'd take a later flight Monday to San Diego, but he decided to get an early start on the day and caught 182.

Steward Alancio Elizaga Jr., the "singing steward," who often offered impromptu in-flight sing-alongs with his ukulele, was going fishing after he got home. Wilhelmina Mottola, a stewardess, was returning to her husband, Joseph, in Scripps Clinic recuperating from surgery.

Stews Marla Scavia and Colleen Kepler were going home to their Point Loma condominium. They were roommates, colleagues and best friends, but until today they had never flown together.

And of course the working crew members would be off after they landed. Dee Young, 26, was going to an interior design class to pick up pointers on decorating the home she and husband Lee (a PSA pilot) had bought in El Cajon. They had worked long and hard on it since January, when they moved in; it was their dream home.

Karen Borzewski had a 10 a.m. appointment with a carpet cleaner, and she was anxious, as always, about her dogs, Patches and Gidget, and her plants. She was nurturing the start of a wild rose she'd brought from her parents' garden in Illinois.

They settled into the airplane with the bright banter of a group of employees about to be off for the day.

Other passengers were about their own business. Rosalie Lococo, returning home after visiting her fisherman husband in Santa Cruz; Louise Martin, a founder of the University of San Diego Auxiliary, returning from three weeks in Europe; USD freshman Kirk Smith, returning to classes from his Palo Alto home; Azmi Taha, 16, returning to Vista High classes after visiting L.A. friends; Dan Urdahl, city lifeguard and San Diego State student; Bob Levine, bartender at the Bombay Bicycle Club.

Whatever their origin or purpose, these new passengers on 182 shared the common difficulty of penetrating L.A. traffic at an early hour to reach the airport. There had been no time for anything else. So again, as at Sacramento, newspapers popped up over seatbacks as McFeron taxied out to the runway. The front page featured the Israeli Cabinet's endorsement of the Camp David framework for Middle East peace; a story on the heat; a feature about an 11-year-old boy who, having apparently beaten leukemia, was guest of honor at a "celebration-of-life" party, and a photo from a big aircraft display in Burbank.

The Dodgers were news, of course, and the Rams had nipped the Oilers. San Diegans on the plane grumped about the Chargers' loss to Green Bay.

At 8:30, McFeron gunned 182 down the runway and climbed west, over the Pacific, as were Boswell and Kazy a hundred miles to the south.

Boswell, because of a bonnet-like hood he wore, could see only the instrument panel before him, and by it he was flying the Cessna in response to directional information from radio beacons – VORTACs – on the ground. The principal such beacon in the county is on a small island in Mission Bay, a hundred yards off Fiesta Island toward Crown Point.

Boswell and Kazy flew over the beacon and out to sea toward a point called Sargo, where two directional beams intersect. Turning back toward Lindbergh Field, Boswell aligned his instruments on another point called Gatto, which would take him straight onto the runway.

Kazy, tutoring Boswell and keeping an eye out for other traffic, was methodical about it and had little time to note the view, which was smog-free thus far, and spectacular. They practiced following the beacons as 182 banked south out of L.A.

Passengers on the left side of the 727 could see the coastline far below. Passengers on the right were treated to Catalina and the varying hues of the ocean.

McFeron and his crew had company on the flight deck; nothing unusual about that. Deadheading captains regularly chose one of two flight deck jumpseats instead of a seat in the cabin.

One of the two visitors was senior even to McFeron; indeed, to most of the PSA pilots. Capt. Spencer Nelson, 57, had been with the company for 26 years and had more than 28,000 hours in his logbook. He had been a student pilot at Gibbs after World War II, and later was a flight instructor for Gibbs before joining PSA in 1952.

For years, Nelson had devoted his spare energy to collecting and flying antique airplanes. At one point, he took a leave from PSA and barnstormed about the country in an open-cockpit biplane, a rare 1929 Travelair.

But the antique planes were stored now, and today he was going home to family and farm, a 13-acre avocado grove near Escondido.

The familiar bump of La Jolla rolled up from the horizon. They would be only a couple of minutes late getting to the gate. There were never many people waiting to greet someone off 182, but then again, there were always a few.

At 8:57, 182 was due west of La Jolla and seven or eight miles offshore, flying southeast. Bob Fox was at the controls this leg, and McFeron was handling the radio. He keyed the mike and called Miramar approach control.

At 3363 Dwight, Amy Bolick's phone rang. She answered it; it was her sister.

Sherry Walker angled off I-805 and up onto Boundary Street. The second left turn was Dwight.

Darlene Watkins was visiting with her brother, Sam Rush, who had stopped by on his way to work. The phone rang. "See you later," he said, as she answered it. He got in his car and drove away. Darlene finished her conversation and headed for the shower.

David Boswell, his eyes glued to the instruments, didn't know the Cessna was gliding over Ocean Beach Park, descending from 1,000 feet, dead on course for Lindbergh's runway 9.

Flight 182 came ashore above Pacific Beach; passengers on either side had a postcard panorama below them. McFeron was advised by Miramar of traffic, a Cessna, north of the airport.

Boswell broke off his approach at the prescribed time and, turning left above the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, began to gain altitude. He asked for and was given permission to fly east, to make the approach from that end of the runway. He turned right and climbed, over Old Town and Mission Hills.

Miramar told 182 again of the Cessna, "three miles, 12 o'clock." McFeron and Fox were scanning the skies as 182 flew directly over the VORTAC and into the mouth of Mission Valley. Miramar, wishing the pilot a nice day, handed off control of 182 to the Lindbergh Tower.

The Cessna, climbing, passed above Highway 163, which was still rather busy with morning traffic. Boswell's airspeed indicator read 110 knots; about 120 mph.

The crew of 182 looked up and down the valley when Lindbergh advised of traffic, one mile, straight ahead. Someone thought it had passed off to the right.

Sherry Walker drove slowly up Dwight toward Nile and the Stouts' house. Lela Todd was not yet in her yard; there was no one on the street. Amy Bolick was still on the phone with her sister; they chatted like this daily.

Pedestrians on Idaho Street heard the Cessna, engine roaring as it climbed, pass overhead. To the west an airliner was coming, gear down, nose up slightly.

Passengers on the right side were looking up 163 to Balboa Park when the tower gave 182 clearance to land. It continued to descend, from 3,000 feet, at 175 mph. Flight 182 was gaining on Boswell and Kazy at the rate of a mile a minute.

The stadium was coming up on the left; Balboa Park lay off to the right. The stewards were picking up cups. Briefcases were snapping shut. Boswell watched his instruments. Kazy, beneath the 172's overhead wing, watched the sky.

At Miramar, an alarm, a "Conflict Alert," went off. It reverberated, contained, off the windowless walls of the approach control blockhouse.

Radios silent, Flight 182 and the Cessna thrummed on. The immense sky shrank between them, closing, until it became a point in space and time.

Hans Wendt heard a bang, and the shriek of an engine in distress, and looked up. As the airliner – the only plane he saw – spiraled down, he had only seconds to twist his lens focus to infinity and snap twice.

Flames from the right wing glinted against the windows of the aft cabin. The aileron on the left wing was bolt upright, signaling the efforts of McFeron and Fox, their thousands of hours of flight slipping away, to regain control.

On Dwight Street, the shriek from above grew louder, and the calm, with its last breath, kissed the pretty flowers in Lela Todd's yard.