

Ron Gillies Letters

Ron Gillies and I became close friends over the course of my employment at Antilles Air Boats and Coral Air. I left St. Croix in 1982 and relocated to Honolulu. Ron's wife Noreen passed away of cancer just months before my departure. Ron lost his best friend in life and of course was devastated. Ron decided to return to Australia to be closer to family.

Ron and I corresponded over the years and even though I'm sure I will find additional letters I have included a few below.

I was adjusting to Honolulu life and the various work projects that came my way. When a group was talking about Convair CV440 aircraft I called Ron. He was hoping that it was going to be yet another chapter in his incredible career in aviation. It came close but never materialized.

2 February 1984

Tom,

I am, and am sure you are, disappointed that your project has come to a standstill. Let us hope it is only a temporary hold-up.

If the business is there, and I am sure you have made a satisfactory survey, then it should not be difficult to raise the necessary money. It may not be available in the U.S., but I am sure you would find Japs who would be interested. If that doesn't appeal to you, then there is always this place. There seems to be an awful lot of money around here, which could be put to good use. It would be interesting to see what an advertisement in the local business newspaper would bring forth.

Subject to your approval, I could make enquiries about raising \$500,000, which should be sufficient to cover two aircraft, and minimum spares. Alternatively, we could short term lease the aircraft, until such time as we could show sufficient profit, or potential, to attract the right type of investors. Every time I think of Coral Air I get a little upset - that was a lesson in how not to start an airline!

I presume you have obtained current operating costs, for the CV440, from two or three recent operators. Using the waist of these figures, we need to calculate the break-even load factor.

We would need to have this info, together with a realistic estimate of initial business available, for presentation to prospective investors and ourselves. The CV440 is an expensive aircraft to operate unless you have well trained crews, flight and maintenance, and a healthy load factor. Do you know anything about the operating costs of the YS-11? Its Darts should have an extremely high T.B.O. by this stage of their lives. It might be worth a comparison.

If you believe I could be of help to you, I will come up there for three or four months, to see what we can organise. I could probably find a satisfactory boarding house, at a reasonable price.

I have a friend, who is very anxious that he and I should visit Honolulu this month. He is reasonably wealthy himself, and, I believe, could arouse some interest in a reasonable proposition.

It would be very unfortunate if all your efforts went for nought, because of a nervous partner.

Apart from all other factors I want to move to one or other of the islands, buy myself a small house and spend the rest of my days there.

Let me know what you think - I don't want to get involved in something else while there is a possibility we can get a worthwhile airline started.



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Dear Jan,

many thanks for the Christmas card which arrived on time, which was surprising as we had been having a postal strike for about four weeks.

I was very surprised to hear that you are still in Hawaii - I felt sure you would be back on the mainland by now.

I have resigned myself to remaining in Australia, as I am now too old for any one to consider employing. Also, I have, at long last, got a job of sorts, working for my brother. We are buying and selling aircraft parts - mainly engine parts.

This business could be a gold mine if you had the right source of supply. I believe we need to buy in quantity in the States, and ship by surface transport, to keep the unit cost to a minimum.

maybe we can both operate a profitable side-line, if you can locate repairable parts, which I can sell out here. There is quite an incredible business going on in used crank cases. I had no idea that the crank cases of all the flat engines crack like crazy in a very few hours. The most needed are the Continental 520's and Lycoming 540's, particularly the J series of the latter, with dowel-less bearings. Runouts of just about all types are also in demand for parting out.

If you find any good bargains around the island
I feel confident I can find the cash to buy them.

I was very pleased to hear that you have
yourself a steady job and that Ann has
found something worthy of her interest.

I will keep you advised of my progress here,
and hopefully I will have this apartment
furnished in a modest way in about four
months. Then maybe we can arrange for you
to spend several weeks holiday here.

Hoping to hear from you again soon.

All the best to you both for the new year.

Con.

14.11.94.

Dear Thomas,

I haven't heard from yourself, or young Jim since our initial contact, so have been wondering whether you are both OK. I was hoping to hear something more of your operation, which sounds like a very interesting thing you have going there! Above all you chose a very nice area to do it in. When I first went to the VI I expected to see something like the Hawaiian islands, but was rather disappointed - At what I found.

Have just had a mechanical with this bloody typewriter which has decided to tear up the paper.

My Brother and I have finally quit rebuilding ancient aircraft and go our separate ways. I have found that I do not work so well on the shop floor these days, particularly in winter when the tools and everything you touch is frozen. I have decided to move to a warmer climate where hopefully I can enjoy the time I have left. The area where my son lives is very pleasant and is the most progressive part of Australia these days. He has his home and business about 130 Kms North of Brisbane. His Helicopter school is doing very well these days, after a long spell in the doldrums. They are a wierd and wonderful piece of machinery, particularly from the flying point of view. I have only done one hour on a Bell 47, and that convinced me that I was not very good at it. Several years ago we were going to buy a Robinson R22, but fortunately didn't do so as they are now having lots of problems out here. I think the main problem is that they are too powerful for their weight, and as they are used mainly for training and cattle mustering they are being abused. One of the problems is that the rotor mast is being pulled clean out of the fuselage. This of course can be very embarrassing. Every time I look at one of them I wonder how the rotor stays on at all.

You may at some time in the future meet up with a nephew of mine, Paul Gillies, who flies an HS125 for Home Depot, a US hardware Company based in Atlanta.

I am about to write to young Flanagan, to see what he is up to these days

REGARDS

REN G.