

hijack hijinks!

In the spring of 1978 Britannia Airways pilot ED WILD was on loan to Tradewinds Airways, then operating a small fleet of Boeing 707 freighters from Gatwick. He recalls how all was proceeding as normal during a routine cargo lift to Somalia when, at 28,000ft over the Gulf of Aden, the cockpit door suddenly crashed open . . .

IT WAS MARCH 1978. This particular flight had started with a telephone call from Tradewinds Airways Operations at Gatwick: "Hello skipper, we'd like you to do a 707 trip for us tomorrow — empty ferry to Dubai, pick up a full load and then on to Mogadishu and overnight; back into Gatwick the following day".

It would be interesting to see Somalia again. The last time I had been there was in 1960, when I had flown a Hunting Aerosurveys DC-3 while undertaking an aerial survey for Agip, the Italian oil company. Now I was working on loan to Tradewinds, seconded from my regular employer Britannia Airways, the latter having recently disposed of its own 707s. I was pleased to be doing something interesting while waiting to be reabsorbed into Britannia's package holiday operation on 737s.

Tiny Rowland, the new owner of Tradewinds and a shrewd dealmaker, had, overnight, acquired four 707 freighters in order to support his African interests, and he wanted them earning money. I never knew whether or not he realised that three of the aircraft — N5772T, N7555A and N7556A — were on the American register, and would need American-licensed

crews to operate them. [The latter two would be put on the UK register as G-WIND and G-SAIL respectively by the end of 1978 — Ed.]

With insufficient time to train its own pilots, Tradewinds needed ready-trained and current 707 operating crews with American Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) licences. Not a man to be thwarted by officialdom, Tiny arranged to have FAA licences issued to all of the temporarily hired crews, which were already familiar with the aircraft of course.

This was achieved in record time. I received an American Air Transport Pilot Licence (ATPL) within days, already endorsed for the Boeing 707. The licence was the standard American type for the time, comprising a small grey folded card somewhat less imposing than my Luton library card. It carried one telling restriction: "Not valid for flights within the contiguous United States".

Good to go

Events moved quickly after this. An old friend, Jan Leibers, a happy, positive individual known to all as the "Flying Dutchman", took on the task of 707 Training Manager and set about making the operation legal. After



Boeing 707-323C G-BFEO (c/n 18691) was leased to Tradewinds in October 1977, previously having operated with Simba Air Cargo as 5X-UWM from 1975, before which it served with American Airlines as N7557A. It was in G-BFEO that the author had the unexpectedly exciting flight in March 1978 that he describes in this article.

TOM SINGFIELD