

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
9 February 1983

U.S. Pilot's Jail Stay In Angola Irks Him And Stirs Questions

Is Florida Ferrying Outfit
Unlucky, or Is It Engaged
In Risky CIA-Style Jobs?

By STEVE MUFSON

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

As pilot Geoffrey Tyler tells it, he was on a routine flight from the U.S. to South Africa, delivering a small plane to a businessman there. On the night of Feb. 4, 1981, he was on what was to be the longest leg of that journey, the 16-hour trip from Abidjan, Ivory Coast, to Windhoek, Namibia.

As it happened, the trip took about 21 months longer than expected. A forced landing, Mr. Tyler says, accidentally put him down along Angola's southern border, where South African troops and rebel Angolan forces have periodically staged attacks against the Soviet-backed Angolan government. Upon landing, Mr. Tyler was met by 250 Angolan government soldiers, who surrounded him and tied him up face down in the dirt.

The Angolans had reason to be wary of Mr. Tyler. An active U.S. military reserve officer, he was the third U.S. pilot to land "accidentally" in Angola in a year. Moreover, all three worked for the same small airplane-ferrying concern, Globe Aero Ltd. of Lakeland, Fla. After Mr. Tyler's capture, a magazine in Mozambique quoted Angolan sources who claimed that the company was a front for the Central Intelligence Agency, which had unsuccessfully supported anti-government rebels during the 1975-76 Angolan civil war.

Freed in Exchange

After nearly two years in Angolan jails, Mr. Tyler was freed last November as part of an intricate prisoner exchange between the U.S., the Soviet Union, South Africa, Cuba, Angola and a rebel faction. Now back in Lakeland undergoing flight retraining, the 33-year-old pilot views the mishap as simply an unfortunate accident that resulted in a tedious, Kafkaesque incarceration.

In a larger context, however, Mr. Tyler's misadventure thrust him into the center of a controversy over U.S. aid to Angolan insurgents. And, in drawing attention to the obscure aircraft-ferrying business, it raised questions about the ethics and advisability of exporting aircraft and other equipment abroad when their end use is uncertain.

In response to congressional inquiries, the State Department has denied any connection between Mr. Tyler or Globe Aero and the U.S. government. Mr. Tyler's colleagues at Globe Aero dismiss any suggestion that the company has ties to the CIA. A reporter's questioning along these lines is deflected with wisecracks: "To us, CIA means cash in advance," says Phil Waldman, a former Globe Aero pilot who bought out the company's former owners in 1975.



Geoffrey Tyler

Mr. Waldman pulls out an article from the magazine *Covert Action*, published by a Washington-based group that attempts to expose CIA activities. Across the article, which suggests that Globe Aero aids insurgents, he has scrawled, "Communist propaganda."

Only about a half-dozen companies and between 25 and 50 pilots make it their business to deliver small planes from manufacturers to customers in far corners of the globe. Most operate on shoestring budgets from runways near small-aircraft plants in the U.S. Typically, ferrying companies act as an agent between buyer and manufacturer; the buyer pays a flat delivery fee to the ferrying company, plus the pilot's salary and trip expenses.

On uneventful flights it is lonely, quiet work. "You feel content when things are going well," Mr. Tyler says. "You feel as if your destiny is in your hands. The sun comes up and you feel as if it is yours." But the solitary flights also entail occasional life-or-death crises and risky landings in places even less hospitable than Angola. The pilots travel up to 18 hours at a stretch, often over faceless oceans that release no prisoners. Most pilots work only three or four years before switching to a different line of work.

The job attracts mavericks and loners, according to David Collogan, the editor of *Business Aviation* magazine. The pilots, he says, are "a bit of a different breed; they're flying over 3,000 or 4,000 miles with nobody to talk to, not a damn thing to look at except the ocean, and if something goes wrong, their options are limited."

Mr. Tyler is typical of many ferry pilots. Rootless and restless, he learned to fly as a teen-ager. He attended the Citadel, a military college in South Carolina, joined the Army and spent seven years in South Korea, Colorado and Iran. While in Iran, he man-

aged supplies for a 25-bed American hospital. He left in 1978 after two years, weary of what he regarded as a dull desk job. Returning to the U.S., he separated from his wife and moved to Florida to become a flight instructor. In 1979 he joined Globe Aero.

The ferry business then, unlike now, was booming. Gold prices were soaring, and in places like South Africa and Australia demand was strong for such luxuries as small private aircraft. In 1981 Globe Aero employed 25 pilots—it now has eight—who delivered 450 planes. The company had captured most of the South African market.

Globe Aero charges a buyer between \$500 and \$1,000 per delivery to South Africa. Its unsalaried pilots certify each plane as fit to fly and receive \$2,000 per trip. The buyer also picks up expenses of \$5,000 to \$12,000—depending on weather conditions and fuel prices. On these flights Globe Aero pilots often cut costs by skipping an optional stop in Gabon.

Unlucky Route

The Lakeland-to-South Africa run is an ill-starred one for Globe Aero. On April 22, 1979, one of its pilots came down in Angola and was held for three weeks. A year later to the day, another pilot made an emergency landing in Angola and was held for six months. On Sept. 30, 1980, a Globe Aero pilot landed just southeast of Angola in a remote desert in Botswana; he was eventually rescued. And on Dec. 10, 1980, another pilot en route to South Africa crashed in Maryland and was killed.

Mr. Tyler had down the South Africa route 25 times when he took off from Lakeland on Jan. 29, 1981. He flew the usual route north to Newfoundland, over the Atlantic and down the west coast of Africa. The journey was uneventful until the night of Feb. 4 when, on the 2,000-mile leg to Windhoek, Mr. Tyler says, his electric primer pump jammed and began flooding the engine. He says he had to turn off his cabin electrical system to keep from stalling.

By morning, he says, heavy fog along the coast forced him to head inland. Spotting a dirt road between the clouds, he landed. He says he knew he was near the Angolan border but was unaware that he had actually crossed inside the country.

As he climbed out of the plane, he was greeted by the Angolan soldiers, who noticed the American flags on his flight suit. A search of the plane yielded nothing, Mr. Tyler says. Bound and blindfolded, he was flown to Cuango Cubango, the provincial capital. There he was kept in a room adorned with large pictures of Marx, Lenin and Castro—a scene, he recalls, "out of a movie set." After questioning he was moved to Luanda, Angola's capital.

CONTINUED