

VISITING THE MAYAN RUINS-1963-64

Method of travel: Aero-Commander 680-F; N-6198X
Inclusive dates: 20 Diciembre 1963 to 6 Enero 1964
Passengers aboard: Joseph Ferderber; Vice Pres. Hughes Aircraft Company.
Georgia Ferderber; Wife of the Vice President.
Julie Ann Ferderber; Age 14, Student Palos Verdes High.
Michael James Ferderber; Age 11, Student Rolling Hills
Grammar School.
Piloto: Robert L. Wall; Transport Pilot, Hughes Aircraft Co.
Culver City California.

After three weeks of preparations which included many hours of planning, drawing lines on World Aeronautical Charts, purchasing the necessary survival items such as a rifle-shotgun combination, insect repellants, mosquito netting, emergency signal flares, a machette and many other items considered necessary in the event our airplane had to make an emergency landing in the jungles of Guatemala the time had finally come to ~~the~~ begin. The weather forecast for the morning of the 20th for the Los Angeles area was zero zero with fog but clearing by 9 AM. Inasmuch as my passengers were to be picked up at the Torrance Airport at 7:00 AM it was necessary to fly the aircraft down to Torrance late Thursday afternoon the day before. A new right engine had been installed on the aircraft the week before the trip and plans for flying the aircraft for at least ten hours prior to our trip didn't materialize. This was because the maintenance crews underestimated the length of time it would take to make the initial maintenance flight. As it turned out the first air time on the new engine took place on Tuesday the 17th of Dec. On Thursday the 19th trouble developed in the right magneto and this required some last minute maintenance and a rebuilt magneto was installed in the right engine just prior to my delivering the aircraft to Torrance. So instead of having a comfortable ten hours on the right engine only a total of five hours had been flown on it and a long flight into Latin America about to begin. Having flown into Mexico before I was thoroughly familiar with the problems we ~~we~~ might have to face in the event engine troubles developed. Unless you are at a large well known airport such as Mexico City where you can find professional help you are pretty much on your own. I had some spare spark plugs stored in the aircraft as well as the necessary socket wrenches to install them but if something major happened we would be forced to just sit and wait somewhere until major parts and help arrived.

I awoke about ten minutes before the alarm clock sounded. I had set the alarm for 5:30 AM. Celia had packed my suitcase with enough ~~####~~ clothing for two and a half weeks. This was done the night before. All I had to do was grab a little breakfast and wait for the taxi to arrive by six fifteen to drive me down to the Torrance Airport. Pat woke up a few minutes later and got up to see me off but the two younger ones, Mike and Roberta didn't hear us up stirring about so they slept on. The taxi arrived on schedule and the hardest part of the trip was about to take place; that being saying goodbye to my family for two and a half weeks and right before Christmas!!! As I said my goodbys and turned to walk to the taxicab I had some mighty big butterflies in my stomach and a huge lump in my throat. The taxi cab driver was a colored man and very pleasant to talk to. He hadn't gone far before he realized I was heading on a long trip and was very sympathetic when he learned I was to not be with my family over the holidays. But we hadn't gone too far when all of a sudden we ran smack dab into the fog. You couldn't see much farther than the front bumper of the taxi and we crept very slowly the rest of the way, stopping occasionally to see what street we were crossing. But finally by 6:45 we arrived at the airport. Dick Cloward, one of the mechanics at Hughes had arrived ten minutes earlier and was busy preparing the air-

craft for take off. He had drained the sumps and was wiping the moisture off the windows and generally checking the ship over. I went to the phone and called Mr. Ferderber and told him they might just as well not hurry as we wouldn't be getting off on schedule. As soon as the sun came up it really didn't take long to begin burning off the fog. The Ferderbers arrived by 7:20 AM and we piled their luggage aboard and actually got airborne by 7:30, only 30 minutes behind schedule. We headed south past Long Beach, Oceanside and cut over to Julian, then southeast past Calexico and entered Mexico at Mexicali but continued the flight until we arrived at Hermosillo where we landed for clearing with Mexican Customs. The first leg was 2 hours and 30 minutes. We landed just ahead of a Mexican airline DC-6B and before we could get started clearing with customs and immigration we were told that the people on the airline were to be served first. As it turned out we were on the ground for a total of two hours. By the time we finally got our papers all in order and a copy of the General Declaration for the aircraft all signed and sealed I still had the job of supervising the servicing of the aircraft. This is where two pilots would have come in handy. It didn't take long to take on a full load of 100 octane and pay the bill once they got around to helping us and then we climbed aboard and took off for Guadalajara. The second leg was very close to being four hours in the air. When we landed at Guadalajara we'd been in the blue for six hours and 20 minutes. We'd also lost two hours by the sun and were now in Central time zone. It was late afternoon; close to 5:30 PM. We parked in front of the administration bldg. The Ferderbers took a cab into the city and checked into the Motel de las Americas. The airport is 15 miles south of Guadalajara and the Motel is 5 miles northwest of the city. So it was quite a drive. I stayed at the airport and told them I'd see them later; that I wanted to get the plane serviced and ready for the next days flight. I didn't realize the delays I was about to encounter. It so happened that the only 100 octane pit on the field was located in front of the administration bldg. and in order to get fuel I'd have to wait until the airlines got out of the way. There was a DC-6B sitting on the ramp, due to leave in 20 minutes and another one to follow. So after an hour the pit was free and I taxied the plane over to the pit. They got the main tank full when a Mexican Jet came in and landed and I was told to get my plane off the ramp right away. By this time I was getting a bit hungry and slightly perturbed. So while waiting for the third passenger plane to get out of the way I went into the bar and had a couple fast beers which seemed to fill up the empty spot. I didn't ~~want~~ want to take a chance on the food at the airport for fear of getting sick. It didn't look too good anyway. Finally I got my chance at the gas pits once more and this time they managed to fill the two ~~auxiliary~~ auxiliary tanks and even check the oil before the next airliner arrived but just barely. I managed to get out of the way just in the nick of time. After parking the ship for the night a young pilot worshiper, a Mexican lad of 14 named Jimmy who couldn't speak many words of English finally got me to break down and let him wash the airplane during the night for 30 pesos. He wanted 50 pesos at the beginning and I kept saying no. But when he finally dropped his price I told him to go ahead and then I took a taxi into town and to the Motel. It was a 30 minute taxi ride to the Motel but I got to see most of the main part of the city as we went thru. It was well lighted and from what I could see it was a very beautiful and different city than I'd ever seen before. I got in just in time to eat dinner. The restaurant closes at 9 PM. I had fried shrimp and a beer. The shrimp was LOUSY. Then I inquired as to how to go about making a phone call to Celia. They said there were no phones at the motel and the best I could do was take a taxi back into town and send a cablegram. After what I'd been thru the first day I decided to get to bed as soon as possible so abandoned any idea of notifying home that we'd reached Guadalajara safely.

Mr. Ferderber had been watching for me all evening and he finally spotted me having my shrimp dinner in the dining room. He wondered why it took me so long at the airport and I gave him the story. He told me they wanted to get underway at 9:00AM the next morning (Sat.) He also told me he'd bang on my door when they got up so that I wouldn't have to unpack my alarm clock. I slept like a log, heard his bang on my door about 7:00AM and got up and met them in the dining room for breakfast. We had scrambled eggs and bacon and toast and then grabbed a taxi for a 30 minute ride to the airport. Jimmy, the Mexican boy was there and I paid him his 30 pesos ~~###~~ (\$2.40) for the nice job he had done on the aircraft. He had gone over the entire skin surfaces with a wet rag—just using plain water and lots of elbe grease and ole 98X looked like a factory job again. We loaded our luggage, filed flight plan for Vera Cruz and checked the weather. The reports on the weather looked encouraging and we got airborne by 9:00AM. We headed south-east out of Guadalajara past the small town of Ocotlan on the northeast corner of Lake Chapala. This huge ~~##~~ clear blue lake sits on the Central Plateau of Mexico some 4900 feet above sea level; is some 50 miles long and about 20 miles across at it's widest point. About 30 minutes later we passed over the city of Morelia. The terrain below us was rising fast, flying at 10,000 feet mean sea level the mountain ranges and peaks in this area looked pretty close so I started a gradual climb to 15,500 feet where we leveled off to stay. We all donned oxygen masks so nobody got to do any talking for the next hour but we sure did some looking around. About an hour out of Guadalajara we passed Mexico City. We were only about 8000 feet actual altitude above the city even though our altimeter read 15,500 feet as Mexico City is quite high; the airport elevation there is close to 7500 feet. The city looked very large and spralled out, a thin layer of smoke and haze covered the city ~~####~~ (looked like smog) but you could make out the main landmarks just the same. We continued on east not to see Mexico City again until our return trip along about the 4th of January. East of Mexico City are some pretty high mountains. I have never seen the likes of these before. Off to our left at co-altitude was a snow covered peak and off to our right about 20 miles away towered Volcan Popocatepetl also snow capped and towering to a height of better than 18,000 feet. We were looking up from our altitude to see the peak of Popocatepetl. But the highest mountain yet still was 50 miles east and to our right, Mount Orizaba which towers some 18,700 feet above sea level. They look like huge ice cream cones sitting upside down with ice cream on the points. An undercast of clouds was now forming on the eastern slopes of the central plateau and soon we were flying over a solid overcast. The high mountains slipped behind us and we were now flying over lowlands between Jalapa and Vera Cruz, however there were no breaks in the clouds below us and we now began to pick up the radio beacon at Vera Cruz and I got out the approach plate in the Jeppesen Airway Manual and began studying the instrument let down procedure for a landing at Vera Cruz. Passing over the station I called the tower and a man in very poor English came back with a clearance that we were cleared to let down by instruments and to call when we were contact with the ground or in other words could see the ground. Soon we broke out and got our first glimpse of Vera Cruz, a most beautiful city from the air on the Gulf of Mexico or Bay of Campeche as it is also referred to. The wind was blowing about 30 knots out of the north as I sat the Commander down on a very nice black top runway and we taxied up to the administration bldg. Getting out the air felt very damp and the temperature was very hot ~~###~~ even in spite of the dark overcast. It wasn't too long before we had the airplane serviced and filed our flight plan for the next leg to Merida, Yucatan. A direct flight from Vera Cruz to Merida would have been over the Bay of Campeche so rather than to take a chance I elected to follow the north shore around even though it would take much much longer. There were rain showers in all quadrants as we departed Vera Cruz. Many

times I had to detour a few miles south of course in order to stay out of the heavy rain. Our altitude for the first hour out of Vera Cruz ranged ~~anywhere~~ anywhere from 500 feet to 1000 feet but we sure got a birds eye view of the countryside. You could see from the air that the people in the farms in this area raise lots of bannanas, pineapples and coconuts. It is very green and lush looking, lots of water, lakes and swamps. Swinging along the coast line in an arc we passed over Minatitlan, Villahermosa, Ciudad Del Carmen and Campeche. Passing Campeche I noticed that Julie looked kind of green around the gills. We had been trying desperately to locate the Ruins of LaVenta north of Agua Dulce but even though we circled the area where they were shown on the map we never did see them. It was this circling at low altitude coupled with the rough air that had crept up on Julie and she informed me she thought she was going to upchuck pretty soon so I climbed back up to 6000 feet and we remained there in smooth air above broken clouds below us until she felt better. I had cut inland onto the Yucatan peninsula after passing Campeche and again the weather turned clear and the clouds disapated entirely. We now settled down in earnest looking for Mayan Ruins. I spotted an unusual spot on the horizon several miles ahead and slightly to our left so we started a let down toward it and a few minutes later saw our first Ruins. It was the Ruins of EDZNA. We circled it a couple of times taking movies and still shots with our cameras and finally continued the last 20 minutes on into Merida. It was fortunate all along, everytime I called a tower there was always someone who could speak English well enough to understand what runway they were using, the wind and whether we were cleared to land. It was very hot in Merida, humid too. The Ferderbers had a Hertz car waiting for them when we arrived. They had reserved it some weeks ago. We got them on their way into town, bag and baggage and then I, with the help of an English speaking Mexican got the plane refueled and taxied it over to an area south of the administration where it would stay for the next six days. I also arranged to have the plane washed again. Then I went into the dispatchers office of Mexicana de Aviacion (a subsidiary of Pan American Airlines) and asked how I could make a phone call to the United States. I wanted to call Hughes Company to let them know where we were and I also wanted to call home. The answer I got was it was possible via Radio telephone by contacting the Marine Radio Operator in Miami by radio and thense by telephone circuits to Los Angeles. The main problem was it would be a long delay getting a connection and very expensive. I had nothing but time at this point so decided to stay at the airport until I had made both calls. It took an hour of waiting for the first call to the plant and an hour and a half more to contact Celia. Both calls cost a little over 12.00 dollars each. Man it seemed good to hear the voices on the other end. I even got a chance to talk to the kids too. There are two brothers who operate a flying service at Merida Airport. One named Raymundo Barrea is a pilot and his brother is not but handles the paper work and collects the money. It was at their place of business where I put the airplane to rest for the next six days. Raymundo drove me into town in his pick up truck and the tower operator who I had talked to over the air that afternoon rode in with us. He had just gotten off duty. His name was Sr.Carlos Sobrino Canto and could speak English but Raymundo couldn't. It was now dark as we drove into the city but from what I saw it looked very clean and very old. We passed a Coca Cola factory and out in front was a stage and lots of people were standing in front watching a play. Raymundo slowed down so we could see some of it and what was going on was a re-enactment of a most familiar scene. The birth of Christ. The three wise men were riding up on camels and in the manger you could see the Blessed Mother and Joseph and Jesus in the Crib. It was very beautifully done and very colorful indeed. We then drove on into town further and finally reached the Pan Americana Hotel where I was to make my headquarters for the next six days. I wanted to pay these two fellows for the ride into town as I would have had to take a cab

if they hadn't happened to offer me the ride. They refused to accept any money but I insisted they should have the same as cab fare and after insisting long and hard on my part they accepted 15 pesos (\$1.20). My room AT the Pan Americana was located on the 5th floor; the sixth floor being as high as you can go. My window faced north and I certainly had a panorama of that part of the city. It was a very beautiful hotel indeed, one that would put the Beverly Hilton to shame. I took a shower and shaved, changed clothes and joined the Ferderbers in the dining room for dinner. After dinner Joe and his son Mike and myself took a walk around the main part of town. It was a Sat. evening and a large crowd of people everywhere you could look. We took a look at the big Cathedral, village square, there were lots and lots of Christmas lights and decorations everywhere just like in the United States. Even the trees in the village square were covered with lights of all colors. Joe and I noticed a crowd of people standing around a pool table so ventured inside for a look see. Little Mike stayed outside as children weren't allowed inside. We witnessed a championship pool match between two local sharpies and I never saw anyone shoot pool like these two guys. One fellow jumped his cue ball over a ball lying in the way to hit his ball and sink the one he was aiming for. After the walk we went back to the hotel when we turned in. I first took care of some paper work; got caught up on the records and forms and log for the aircraft. Next morning I awoke to the noise of turkey gobblers and roosters and I had my first daylight view of the city from my window on the 5th floor. It wasn't too long before I saw where the noise of the farm was coming from. Right below my window it looked like the people living next to the hotel had a menagerie in their back yard. There are no restrictions in Latin America on having animals in town. It took a lot of getting used to hearing the boosters crow sometimes during the night. They don't always wait until sunrise. This city is loaded with churches. I never saw a protestant church anywhere. And many of the churches were only a block apart. Churches, churches and more churches and windmills. Yes, everywhere you looked in all directions there were hundreds and hundreds of windmills pumping water from the underground rivers. There are no rivers above ground in Yucatan. There is only about 6 inches of topsoil on the entire peninsula and underneath the subsoil is solid limestone that varies in depth from a few feet to 25 to 30 feet. If you scraped the top soil all off Yucatan you'd have one big huge paved country. I found out that there was a mass at the church just one block east of the hotel so I went to mass at 7:00 AM. At 8 O'clock when I came back to the hotel the Ferderbers were just getting back from a trip to the museum. We all had breakfast together and at 9:30 in the morning we took the Hertz car and drove north out of Merida to the Ruins of DZIBILCHALTAN. This is where we spent the better part of the day. I had my cameras along and of course took several pictures. It was very hot and muggy. It had rained while I was attending mass that morning but the sun had come out and the air was very humid. Later in the afternoon we drove on further north to the little town of PROGRESO, a sea port town on the northern tip of Yucatan. Mike and Julie went wading in the surf and they also gathered many sea shells. Many of these shells were fairly large and beautiful. I wish my three kids could have been along as they sure like to roam along the beach. The water along side the pier and along the coast looked very dirty and cloudy. It had a light green cloudy effect. We didn't stay there too long, Mike and Julie wanted to stay longer but their folks wanted to get back to Merida. When we arrived back in the city Mrs. Ferderber and the two kids went for a swim in the hotel pool while Joe and myself walked around and investigated some of the curio shops in quest of ideas of what to buy. I got a lot of ideas but decided to wait until later to purchase any items. Besides I might find a better buy somewhere else. After we had our dinner in the dining room Mrs. Ferderber suggested we all drive over to the east part of the city and have a drink at a famous night club called Los Tulipanes. It is a dining and dancing place and if one is so

inclined he may also take a dip in the natural lake 30 feet underground. The lake, called a Cenote, is reached by a flight of steps and is lighted and furnished with dressing rooms. No one was swimming while we were there. As we had descended the last step to the brink of the Cenote a rather large sea turtle and many funny looking fish came swimming up toward us and in the ~~the~~ dim light looking into this eerie pool it rather disbelled any idea any of us had about swimming there. Yes, this certainly was an interesting place as 16 the whole city of Merida for that matter. The city has many horse drawn carriages for the tourists to ride if they would like something different than a taxi and the fare anywhere in the city is only 15 pesos for one hour. Our plans for the day were to drive our rental car some 60 miles south of Merida to the ~~the~~ Ruins of UXMAL. By the time we got started on the way it began to rain and it rained harder & harder along the way. The first town we came upon was a little village of UMAN, the next little village was called MUNA. Both have very large & very old Spanish churches. Mrs. F. wanted to go inside the church at UMAN and asked me to accompany her. The Ferderbers are of the Unitarian faith and they knowing I am Catholica she asked me several questions about what we were looking at and I tried my best to describe everything to her the best I knew how. One of the side altars in this church had a very large crucifix with a life like statue of Christ recessed back inside a large framed box with glass in front. From a distance it looked 3 dimensional. The head of Christ had black hair which looked like human hair hanging down to the shoulders. It was very impressive and very beautiful. I would have liked to have taken pictures but it was very dark inside. We continued driving in the rain further south till we reached UXMAL. This is a very famous Mayan Ruins. It has been restored during recent years and the buildings are very beautiful. Although it was very dark and we were all able to take many pictures. Here it stopped raining and gloomy around the place I think we probably got some good pictures just the same. The most impressive building was the pyramid type building called the House of the Sorcerer. Other famous ruins. All dates on the house of the Turtles and many other famous ruins. All dates on the carvings and buildings showed that this area was flourishing with Mayan culture somewhere around the stone age and had been occupied by the Indians as late as the 17th century. The house of the Sorcerer has 118 steps to the top. I counted them in my climb. The view you get from the top is quite breathtaking. However all you can see is miles and miles of trees. It reminded me a lot of looking over the rolling hills of Minnesota from one of the forrest rangers lookout towers. Lots of green trees as far as one could see. At noon we all had lunch at the hotel near the ~~the~~ ruins. The hotel is operated by a man named Barbachano who operates a travel service in Yucatan. The food was excellent though rather expensive. The noon lunch cost us each 4.00 dollars per person but we probably ate the tastiest meal we ate the whole time we were gone. The menu consisted of old fashioned Pigs in a Blanket and was it ever good. In the afternoon we drove back to the ruins, a matter of two or three minutes by auto and continued climbing in and around these ancient buildings. About three o'clock we decided to drive back to Merida. Going back thru the two little towns of Uman and Muna we noticed how close to the roads the people build their homes. All houses built of adobe and mud huts all had thatch roofs. The fields in the farmlands grow mostly Henequen which is cut and taken into the factories nearby and made into Sisal. And from the sisal of course is where our rope comes from. The chief export of Yucatan used to be Sisal with the United States being the chief customer. However, during ~~the~~ recent years this export has fallen off quite drastically due to our country using more and more nylon for rope. Yucatan's ~~the~~ most important crop now is tomatoes.

We arrived back in Merida late in the afternoon and as we drove into the city the traffic was moving very slowly; lots of intersections in the city were flooded due to the heavy rains that had fallen during the day. As we sat in the car trying to make our way slowly to the Pan Americana hotel my mind was ~~reminding~~ reminding the things I'd seen during the day. One of the sights other than the famous ruins of UXMAL were the little old towns we'd driven thru going and coming from UXMAL and the people. It made my heart sick to ~~see~~ have seen so much poverty. Little children underfed, dirty and running around with nothing more than a shirt to cover their bodies and bare from the waist down. I would have liked to have taken pictures of them but am sure that by doing so would have been in poor taste and abandoned the idea for fear I would be offending them. We had car trouble which at UXMAL ~~was~~ prior to returning to Merida. Joe Ferderber noticed that he was unable to shift into low gear. He had to start by shifting into second gear and we just barely got the car going. However, he was able to coax it back to the city and when we arrived at the hotel Mrs. F. and the two children went up to the room and Joe and I took the car back to Hertz where he was fortunate to turn it in for another car. They planned on driving over to CHICHEN-ITZA the following morning and spending Christmas eve, Christmas day and returning to Merida on Thursday afternoon the 26th. They wanted me to go along with them too. However, I thought it over and decided it would be better if I stayed in Merida as there were certain things I wanted to do such as go out to the airport and make inquiries about questions on the next leg of our flight. I wanted to know if it were necessary to get permission to overfly British Honduras on our way to Guatemala; the procedures in clearing out of Mex. and see if anyone knew how the airport at COPAN Honduras was and whether or not it was suitable for an Aero Commander. Also, I hadn't as yet done any shopping for Burios and I had a list that Celia had given me and wanted to start acquiring some of these things to take home. Besides, there were parts of Merida I still hadn't seen. So after weighing all these things I advised the Ferderbers that I'd much rather stay in Merida and when they got back Thurs. afternoon we'd be all set for our next flight and there wouldn't be the last minute rush if I'd stay in Merida. They were sorry I wasn't going to get to see the Ruins at Chichenitza but agreed it might be better after they heard my explanation of why I did not think I should go with them. After we had dinner Tuesday evening I went to my room and started writing a letter home. A knock on the door interrupted me momentarily and I opened the door and Mrs. Ferderber said "Golly, we are so sorry that you aren't going with us tomorrow". She was holding in her hand a small but neatly wrapped Christmas present and as she handed it to me her eyes began to fill with tears. She told me that when they set this trip up some months ago that she assumed that the Company would be sending a single man along as pilot. "When we found out that you were a married man with three small children the first day we left the USA we felt just terrible". I told her that I was enjoying the trip very much and not to get too sentimental about this thing and to try to forget it and for them to go on over to Chichenitza and have a good time. I didn't open the Christmas gift then, rather I put it away and planned on opening it on Christmas eve the day following. The Ferderbers got underway the following morning and when I waved goodbye to them about 10:00 AM I then hired a taxi and went out to the airport. It was a beautiful clear morning and the sun was starting to dry up the puddles throughout the city from the rains of the day before. Raymundo and his brother greeted me at the airport. I noticed that they had washed the airplane and it looked very nice. We talked about many things all pilots do when they get together-Hanger flying as we call it. They were interested in the cost of such an airplane, its performance figures etc. We talked about the procedures of flying in Mexico vs the procedures in my country. Raymundo didn't understand what I was saying but his brother

who spoke good English and Spanish as well would tell his brother what I had said. They were both very nice to me and I certainly did enjoy the little talk we had. I took some pictures of them and found out that there is really no problem clearing out of Mexico. Just have to turn in the tourist cards and the General Declaration on the aircraft and by filing a flight plan from Merida to Puerto Barrios, Guatemala I was actually legal in overflying British Honduras and didn't need an approval from that country so long as I didn't land there. The weather forecast for Friday also looked good and I was relieved to hear this too. I ran up the airplane, checked the mags and it sounded real good-I could almost hear it telling me it was ready to leave as it was getting tired just sitting at an airport. Raymundo drove me back into Merida early in the afternoon and I had lunch at the hotel and then walked downtown and did some shopping. Must have gone in and out of a dozen Curio shops and managed to pick up a few items on Celia's list. I had my cameras along and shot some pictures whenever I saw anything worth shooting. When I got back to the hotel in the late afternoon I noticed a sign saying that all guests of the Pan Americana were welcome to take part in the Christmas party planned for that evening. An orchestra was going to be on hand, there would be dancing and entertainment beginning at 8 PM and lasting until 1AM. The idea didn't strike me as being much fun but I thought as long as I was here I might take a look at it later just the same. After dinner I went out for a walk and saw a tavern called the Pan American Bar just about three blocks away from the hotel. There was lots of noise and whooping it up going on in there and being curious thought I'd take a chance and walk in for a beer. The place was loaded with Mexicans, many of them had just stopped in for a beer like myself and many of them like in bars all over the world had been there too long and were feeling no pain. However, all of them noticed right away that here was an Americano in their midst and I could feel the eyes staring at me from all directions. Just by sheer co-incidence standing there at the bar was Sr. Carlos Sobrino, the tower operator at the Merida Airport who I had met the evening of the 21st. He had been in the pick up truck along with ~~Raymundo~~ Raymundo the first night I was driven in from the airport. He recognized me right away and told me to put my money away. He was buying and said my money wasn't any good as long as he was there. We had a few together and talked and talked. Time went on and finally he asked me where my passengers were and I told him they'd driven over to Chichenitza and wouldn't be back until the day after Christmas. He asked me what I was doing in the bar and why wasn't I staying over at the Pan Americana hotel and sharing Christmas in this country with other Americanos? I told him that I thought it would be more fun to get out and meet the people of his country. Well, I guess he noticed my sincerity as he then asked me how I'd like to spend a Mexican Christmas eve with his family. I told him I'd be most honored. So he described his plans for the evening and told me if I so desired I could come along. First, he hadn't seen his mother for at least a year and wanted to drive out into the country and give her a little present. Then he said we'll go out to his Uncle's place and finally over to his home and we'd have a little beer here and a little beer there and finally some food. So we walked out of the tavern and he hailed a taxi and we drove out to his mother's home in the outskirts of Merida. She met us at the door and his mother and sisters and brothers and all the little nephews and nieces all seemed so happy I was with him. None of them could speak any English but he told them I was an Americano pilot and Carlos said "My Mother and brothers and sisters say-Their house is your house tonight". They really meant it too. He showed me all the antique furniture his mother had in the house. He said that one time an antique dealer had offered her as much as \$15,000 for all of it but she would not sell. The house itself was built of adobe brick and looked like a wreck from the outside but inside it was very clean. The white square tile floor pieces were so clean you could have had eaten dinner off the floor.

A short while later Carlos brother who is a doctor of surgery and has his office in Merida arrived. He was a very young fellow about 35 years of age and very well dressed. He had a car and Carlos asked him to drive us up to his uncle's place in Merida. So we climbed in and waved farewell to his mother and all the other relatives and took off. Seeing that it was Christmas eve I wanted to be able to give Carlos a gift and I remembered that in my hotel room I had an extra bottle of Jack Daniels bourbon that I'd brought along for the passengers for this flight. They had enough for the entire trip and this was an extra bottle that I was sure would never be used anyway so I told them to stop at the Pan Americana hotel for just a few minutes as I wanted to get something for him. I'm glad I did as this was a gift that he not only kept himself but shared it with his relatives wherever we stopped and they were thrilled to try it. I never use the stuff myself so when they offered me some I told them I'd rather have Cerveza (beer) if it was all right with them. This they had lots of. Carlos uncle lived in a very nice house right in the heart of Merida. He had many luxuries that the average American has; including Hi Fi set and television. It was an extremely clean place. Everyone was dressed in their best clothes and again I was told that their house was my house this evening. Never have I felt so welcome anywhere, it is so hard to explain how I felt but it was a good feeling. All the people in this part of Mexico are so little. The average man stands only 5 feet 5 in tall and the average woman 5 feet 3 inches. I am not a very tall man by present U.S. standards being only five feet 11 inches tall but I felt like a giant all the time I was in Yucatan. One of their customs when greeting each other is the handshake followed by the embrace. Men embrace men, women embrace women and men and women embrace. It is a mild hug you might say. But not to hurt their feelings I tried to show my appreciation and thanks for being with them that I would watch them embrace and do likewise. It was the proper thing to do all right as by doing so it showed that I really was sincere and you could see in their faces they approved of my behavior. The party started to break up around 11:30 PM and about that time Carlos wanted me to visit some more relatives but I felt that I'd feel too lousy the next day if I carried on with him and that I thought it would be to my advantage to get back to the hotel and get to bed. So he arranged for a taxi to pick me up and bring me back to the hotel where I went to bed and slept like a log. The roosters and turkeys below my window woke me up by 8 AM and I showered and shaved and made my way on foot six blocks to the large Cathedral where I attended mass. It was Christmas day, nice and warm in the sunshine. The city was very crowded with people. In front of the cathedral many poor old ladies sat with outstretched hands for a peso while inside you could hear the beautiful hymns of the choir singing the familiar religious Christmas carols in Spanish. The large organ playing was booming and vibrating and it was reverberating so loud that you could feel the vibration inside your chest. The mass was beautiful. I suddenly felt very lonely and went back to the hotel to call my family but was told that there were eight hours delay on completing a long distance call. So I decided to do some more walking and took my camera along and took more pictures. It was a nice day to be outside. Christmas night I decided I'd like to try eating at a different restaurant for a change and the telephone operator at the Pan Americana recommended a nice place about 15 minutes away so I walked down and ate there. While I was sitting by myself in the corner at a table an American, Stanford University student recognized me as an American and asked me to join him at his table. We ate together and visited. He was working on his law degree and was also compiling a thesis on Economics of Latin America and had left his family at Palo Alto, Calif for the Christmas holidays and had come down to Merida on Pan American Airlines and was going to be leaving for the states in the next few days. He was quite a talker and it seemed good to be able

to talk with an American again. We must have sat in that restaurant for about three hours talking. He had spent last year in Bolivia during the Christmas holidays and told me of some of his experiences there. I ventured back to the Pan Americana hotel about 9 PM and the telephone operator had told me that while I was gone she was able to get a circuit to Los Angeles but couldn't find me anywhere. She seemed quite disturbed that I had missed talking with my family after all the trouble she'd gone thru trying to get through. I apologized and asked her to try again. It only took an hour this time and I took the call in my room and talked for about 5 minutes with Celia and the kids. It was nice to hear their voices and to hear that they were all OK. On Thursday morning the animals outside my window again woke me early. After breakfast in the dining room I took camera and walked down to the municipal market in search of more curios and pictures. I was the only American in the huge market place and no one could speak any English. However, with the use of sign language I was able to purchase two Mayan dresses for my wife and daughter and some wood carvings of the Tula statues and some small pieces of pottery. I found the market quite a filthy place indeed. Freshly slaughtered beef hanging out in the open, people buying pieces of steaks and flies all over the meats and foods. It wasn't a pretty sight but one everyone should see so that they can more readily appreciate the clean supermarkets back home. While I'm on the subject of thankfulness I would also like to say that I'll never ever complain of having to pay taxes. Rather, I will from now henceforth be delighted indeed for the privilege of being able to pay taxes just for the privilege of living in the United States of America. It is so easy for one who hasn't had the opportunity of venturing far from his normal environment to be lulled into a sense of believing that the rest of the world must be a lot like it is in the United States but what a rude awakening is in store for those who think this way. I am guilty of this sin and can honestly say I can't help being a better, more appreciative American in the future after having seen just how unfortunate these people are. Around 2 PM Thursday the Ferderbers arrived back in Merida. They enjoyed seeing the Ruins of Chichenitza but said that their accommodations and the food were very bad and after hearing all this I was happy that I'd decided to remain in Merida. I told them all about the Mexican Christmas I'd had and they seemed so happy that I enjoyed myself. They were worried that I was having a very lonely time in Merida. Friday morning I got up early and had breakfast alone then took a taxi out to the Merida airport. Had told my passengers that when they arrived by 9 AM that I'd have the airplane all ready and waiting to go. By the time they arrived I had completed all the necessary paper work and all they had to do was turn in their tourist cards. We then loaded the airplane with luggage and taxied out for take off. My buddy Carlos was in the tower so I thanked him again for a most memorable Christmas eve and told him I sure hoped that someday he could come to my country and visit us. We took off and headed east, circling Chichenitza at low altitude and took some aerial pictures. Then we continued east bound over the flat green covered Yucatan peninsula to the Island of Cozumel. The coastline is beautiful along eastern Yucatan, the water along shore has an Ebony hue and the coral near the shore line stands out due to the very clear water. We circled the airport at Cozumel and then proceeded south over the territory of Quintana Roo and spotted the Ruins of TULUM adjacent to the coast approximately 20 miles south west of the Island of Cozumel. I circled these ruins so my passengers could get some pictures. The weather was beautiful. I stayed at low altitude so we could all take in the scenery. Soon we came upon the town of Chetumal which is in Mexico but on the northern boundary of British Honduras. The next part of our flight was along the eastern seaboard of British Honduras, we passed over the city of ~~Belize~~ Belize which is the capital of this little country. I called the tower and got a weather report for Puerto Barrios and it was favorable. As we neared the southern boundary of British Honduras we observed

many ~~##~~ square miles of bare land where the countryside had been stripped bare of trees. At one time this was a huge forest of pine and mahogany but now it resembled a network of dirt roads criss-crossing the area. The roads had been used for hauling out the timber. As the coast line of southern British Honduras arced off to the right in a southwesterly direction I continued straight ahead across a section of the Gulf of Honduras approximately 30 miles homing in on the Puerto Barrios, Guatemala radio beacon. I called the tower at Puerto Barrios but got no response. The runway down below us looked rather average but there was no sign of any flying in the area although our Jeppesen Airway manual listed this airport as a port of entry. We spotted a green light from the tower which means we are cleared to land so proceeded to drop the gear and flaps and prepared to land. The runway was quite rough; it had been paved at one time but the black top was broken in many places and filled in with loose gravel. We taxied up to the administration building and parked in front of a military DC-3. It had the markings of the Guatemala Air Force. Two Guatemala soldiers walked up to the airplane each toting a rifle and ready to use it if necessary. From the looks of their eyes they showed they meant business. I asked them if either one could speak English and they indicated that they could not. Soon a tall rangy dark haired man who looked like he hadn't taken a bath or had a shave in many days walked up to the aircraft and in English asked what we wanted there. The fact that he could understand and speak English immediately took away any fears we might have. We told him we wanted to clear into Guatemala, had landed here as it was listed as a port of entry and we also needed 100 octane fuel for the airplane. He advised us that this was a military base and that it would have been more advantageous for us had we landed at Guatemala City. So we advised him we would be more than happy if we could take off right then and there and proceed over to Guatemala City as we had enough fuel. But he said he was sorry, the Guatemala Army stationed there informed him we would not be able to leave until they got an OK from the army at Guatemala City via radio. Our English speaking friend introduced himself as Constantine Taylor. His voice ~~####~~ sounded like rough gravel whenever he spoke and it made you want to give him a cough drop if we had one. He worked for the government and had been there for many years. He told us he'd learned to speak English when his folks had sent him to school years ago at Belize, Br. Hond. Our problems however were far from being solved. It so happens that the customs officials ~~##~~ located downtown in Puerto Barrios were having ~~##~~ their siesta and wouldn't be out to the airport until 2 PM. It was now 12:45 PM. Also, it would be at least 2 or 2 thirty until anyone would be able to bring fuel out from the town. We told him the ladies had to go to the bathroom and at first the Guatemala soldiers said that we'd have to stay at the aircraft until Customs had looked at our passports and checked our luggage, a mere matter of an hour and a half from then. When we told him to tell them we couldn't hold it that long he persuaded the soldiers to let us get to the toilet ~~##~~ and with reservations they let us go to the toilet. The reservations being they would accompany us to the bathroom and stand guard lest we wander about the place. Then we were taken to a wooden bench alongside the administration and told to stay there until customs arrived which we did. We had a long wait. It wasn't until 2:20 PM that a taxi arrived at the military base with three customs officials. None could speak English so our friend Constantine acted as our interpreter and it was at this point that we experienced some anxious moments. Aboard the airplane in a long box marked "Survival Equipment" (written in Spanish) was our shotgun-rifle combination to be used solely for the purpose of survival. However, carrying a weapon such as this into Guatemala is illegal and we wondered if they would open the box to see what was inside. They started examining just about everything we had even went so far as to take out the box with the rifle and when asked what was in it we told our interpreter to tell them it was nothing but the bare necessities for survival. Fishing gear, chocolate bars, rations etc.

Nevertheless they were quite facinated by the survival box and kept shaking ~~##~~ it and fingering everything; finally they put it back in the aircraft accompanied by some undetected sighs of relief on our part. About this time the gas arrived. It was a truck with two 50 gallon drums. They attached a pump on top of the barrel, connected a hose and hand pumped the 50 gallons of fuel into the main tank. They also had a funnel over which I insisted they tie a ~~####~~ chamois skin I had taken along for the purpose of filtering out any water and dirt that might be in the fuel. This precedure took a long time but it was worth the wait knowing we were filtering out any contamination that might be in the fuel. When they finished the first 50 gallon drum they opened the other and finally we got the main tank which holds 156 gallons filled. I then had sufficient fuel to fly on to Tikal and back to San Pedro Sula so decided it would take too long to fill the outboard auxiliary tanks so told them it would be enough. After customs had finished with us and the fuel was in the ship and the bills paid we still couldn't get clearance to take off. The radio circuit from this military base to Guatemala City was tied up and when they finally did get ahold of the government in the city the story was they couldn't find any record whereby we had requested permission to land at Puerto Barrios. Apparently it had been pigeonholed somewhere. About 30 minutes later and about 3 hours after we had originally landed the happy news came over the radio that they had found our cablegram and that we could take off for Tikal. The Guatemala Army boys who had been standing around watching this fracas for the past three hours now broke out into broad smiles as if to say everything is now in order and they turned their backs on us and proceeded back to camp toting their rifles. We felt relieved and got the heck out of that place in a hurry but not before we shook the hand of Constantine Taylor real hard as he had really been our lifesaver at this spot. Without his help and patience we'd probably still be there. The next leg of our flight; although only scheduled for 45 minutes was to be over one of the most treacherous routes we'd yet flown. That being the dense tropical rain forest of Peten and trying to find a little airstrip hacked out of the jungle right in the heart of this forest. We hadn't gone but 15 minutes from Puerto Barrios on a heading of 300 degrees when the radio compass signals faded out and from here on to Tikal it was strickly navigating by map. The map didn't coincide with what we saw on the ground either to make matters worse. But I knew that this heading would take us pretty close to a large lake called lake Peten. If I could spot this lake then a slight right turn to about 355 degrees should take us to the airport at Tikal. Looking down into the jungle from an altitude of about 2000 feet there wasn't anything else to see but dense jungle and trees as far as the human eye could see. No roads, just trees and more trees. The tops of these trees shot up out of the jungle to a height of 150 feet or more. No place for a forced landing. I soon spotted the lake and made my slight right turn and a few minutes later I could see the ruins coming into view. The map explained that the ruins of Tikal are reported 229 feet above the ground level. And sure enough there were the ruins. I circled over the runway at the jungle lodge and it looked pretty good from the air. The wind sock was limp so rather than land into the west against the sun I chose to come in over the high ruins and land to the east. It was a good landing, but my, what a rough runway. It felt like the airplane was going to be shaken apart. I'm too used to having it ~~####~~ easy and landing on smooth hard surfaced runways. We takied up to the jungle lodge and were greeted by the owner and his wife and children of this jungle lodge; a man named Antonio Ortiz who is a an ex Chiclero (one who taps Chicle trees for the sap) and who also is a descendant of the Mayas himself. He had all the features of a Maya descendant by being very short, round head and very dark eyes and white teeth. He helped us load our luggage into the back end of a truck and drove us up to the lodge where he showed us to our jungle huts where we'd be staying for the next three nights and two days to follow.

Now, I'd like to say that at the present time there is only one way in which one can reach Tikal and that is by air. The other people staying at Tikal arrived by DC-3 from Guatemala City on an airline called Aviateca. There are normally three flights a week into Tikal (Mon., Wed. & Fri) by Aviateca, the Guatemalan National Airline. We were the only people staying there who had arrived by private airplane. The Aero Commander looked pretty sitting out there in the little clearing adjacent to the airfield. Many people went out and looked at it like they'd never seen an airplane before. Our jungle huts were quite comfortable. They had thatch roofs, screened windows (no glass) covered with drapes. The ceiling was a solid screen to keep out the insects and any snake from crawling up and into the hut. The floors were wood and we had running water, a toilet and shower but no hot water. One desiring a shower had to do so during the heat of the day and even then it was very cold standing under that shower. Behind the main office Antonio had a generator that supplied enough power to turn on the lights between the hours of 6 PM and 9 PM. After 9 PM if you were still up you had a kerosene lamp in the room you could light if you so desired. Antonio had built the jungle lodge himself with the help of three other men. It must have taken him a long time to build it. All the buildings were put together without any nails. All rafters and bracing were tied together with rope but the entire place was built strong enough to withstand a hurricane. That night at dinner Mr. Ferderber mentioned he certainly wished there was some way we could clear out of Guatemala for Honduras without going back to Puerto Barrios where we had encountered so much trouble that afternoon. I suggested that I would be willing to take all our passports to Guatemala City the next morning and see if it would be possible to depart from Tikal and fly direct to San Pedro Sula in Honduras on Monday the 30th. He thought it was worth a try. I also told him I would like to see Guatemala City anyway as there were a few items I wanted to pick up for my wife and daughter; namely Guatemala skirts. He said it was OK with him. We had a very nice meal in the dining room at the lodge in Tikal that night and after sitting around and visiting for awhile we retired and slept like logs. The air turned quite cool at night; lots of humidity and the next morning lots of ground fog. But as soon as the sun came up the ground fog disappeared and after breakfast I cranked up the Commander and took off for Guatemala City carrying the passports and hoping I could pull a deal with customs down there. As I approached Lake Peten a solid layer of clouds began forming below me. It was apparent that for the next hour or so I'd have to navigate solely by heading as there was no possible way to get a radio beacon signal from anywhere. The cloud tops began to grow higher and higher and soon I found that in order to stay on top I had to climb to 10,000 feet. About 45 minutes after taking off from Tikal I got a faint signal from Guatemala City on the ADF receiver and the radio compass needle showed that I was pretty well on course and hadn't drifted too far although I was slightly off to the right of course a few miles. I had the tower frequency tuned in and soon heard one of the Pan American Airlines Jets calling Guatemala City Tower and when he finished his call I called him to find out what the Guatemala City weather was. He informed me it was clear weather there. About 30 miles before I reached the city the ~~clouds~~ clouds begin to dissipate below me and I got a beautiful panorama of the countryside. I was flying over a mountain range and to the south of the range and sloping down to Guatemala City you could see hilly terrain. It looked like this hilly terrain was cultivated with corn mainly. I landed at the airport and immediately got a glimpse of an ESSO gas truck coming up to meet me in the parking area. It was a pleasure to be able to tell them to fill er up with 100 ~~octane~~ octane and not worry about it taking all day and not worrying about getting contaminated fuel. The service was almost as good as being in the USA. I made my way to customs and immigration and much to my joy found out that it is possible to clear out of their country from Tikal.

The customs authorities took the passports and stamped them with the date we were going to leave the country, charged me a nominal fee and filled out a paper which I was to turn over to the customs officials when we reached Honduras. Everything was moving like clockwork. I was able to run over to a Curio shop and I was fortunate to find just exactly the right size and right type of Guatemala skirts that Celia had wanted me to pick up for her and Roberta. I sent some post cards, made out a cablegram at the airport which I wanted sent to Celia telling her where we were and that all was OK and then had myself a lunch. I was starving by then. About two hours was all the time I needed to complete my mission there so paid for the gas, filed a flight plan to Tikal and took off for the jungle lodge. I was hoping the weather over the tropical rain forest of Peten had cleared by then and luck was with me. As I passed northbound over the mountain ranges north of Guatemala City I could see that the route ahead looked much better than when I had departed earlier that morning. The view that had been covered completely by ~~####~~ clouds this morning was finally open for me to see what I had missed. Looking down and far out on the horizon in a horizontal ~~####~~ plane the view is filled by a bed of endless, green vegetation. One is able to distinguish a variety of tropical trees, from the palm to the towering mahogany. No roads, only occasional tropical rivers cut through the dense growth. Once in awhile you may be able to spot a lonesome Indian hut, where a descendent of the ancient Maya, out off from the rest of the world, has burned off a strip of jungle for his corn and beans, fighting for his existence against the fast growing forest and the predatory animals. The flight from Guatemala City to Tikal is only slightly over one hour via Aero Commander (a little over 2 hours flying time round trip) and soon I spotted the famous ruins jutting up on the horizon. It was much easier spotting it today as I knew what to look for this time. I put the Commander in a shallow dive with full power and came screaming over the jungle lodge doing about 245 mph indicated and then pulled up into a chandelle and when the air speed bled off to 180 indicated I dropped the ~~####~~ landing gear; slowed down more to 130 and dropped the flaps and came on in and landed. This was the first time I had a chance to fly alone since we'd left the states and I felt like having a little fun for a change. These types of maneuvers are not permitted when passengers are aboard. Julie and Mike Ferderber ran down to the airstrip to meet me and said "Gee, why don't you fly like that when we're aboard?" I told them I didn't think their mother would appreciate it. They also told me that a young fellow named Nate Ginsberg whom they had met that afternoon had missed the Aviateca flight return trip to Guatemala City. He had arrived on the airline that morning and went off into the jungle to visit the ruins thinking he'd be back in plenty of time to catch the afternoon plane back to the city. But he got out too far and his plane had come and gone before he could get back in time. To make matters worse he had left all his luggage in Guatemala City and all he had with him was a tooth brush, a camera with film and the dirty clothes he was wearing. Furthermore it was Saturday and there wouldn't be another flight into Tikal until the following Tuesday. I met him a few minutes later and this Jewish boy was mighty shook up. He was visibly shaken as he'd been crying and he was still shaking. But he had a sense of humor too and soon forgot about his troubles and finally decided as long as he was here he'd make the best of it just the same. We became good friends. He ~~####~~ works for the Navy Department in Wash. D.C. Has been with the federal Govt. for about 15 years and was taking his 26 days annual leave to tour the Mayan Ruins. He also knew a lot of history about these Ruins and we all learned a lot from him; He was an interesting fellow to talk to and very intelligent. That evening as we had dinner, The Berderbers, Nate Ginsberg and myself, he lectured about the Mayan history of Tikal and we all learned a lot.

Here then are some of the things we learned. When the ancestors of the Maya began practicing agriculture (about 2,500 B.C.) permanent settlements grew up in the valleys and hills of the Guatemalan highlands, soon spread out along the banks of rivers and lakes, and finally penetrated deep into the jungle where the Maya civilization was destined to reach it's cultural peak. Among these scattered farm communities, ceremonial centers were erected to which the people gathered for civic and religious ceremonies, games, dances, theatrical performances and markets. Tikal was once such a center. The archaeological staff here comprises 14 men sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania and Guatemalan Gov't. jointly. At present it is not yet possible to state precisely when Tikal was erected. The excavations made this far are in structures built around Christ's time and later. But there has been found around the gravel and grounds pottery chips which can be compared with others found in the Guatemalan highlands, dated around 2,000 B.C. Hundreds of important bldgs. ~~###~~ were erected here, four of which reached the equivalent height of a 20 story bldg. Great plazas, ~~###~~ ball courts, causeways and reservoirs were constructed. Sculptured and painted stelae (stone shafts) were erected. The ancient Maya must have been accomplished mathematical and ~~#####~~ astronomical genius' as well as artists for unbelievably advanced studies in mathematics and astronomy were made, ~~####~~ proof of this is shown in their hieroglyphic writing in which they had calculated the orbit of the planet Venus to be 584 days and our modern precision instruments calculate the same at 583.92 days. Unbelievable! But True!

One of the bigger mysteries being just what happened to this flourishing civilization. Many ~~#####~~ theories and causes have been suggested but no one is quite sure. Whatever records have been kept were all destroyed by the Spaniards years later or I should say centuries later. All ~~###~~ that is left is information showing time but nothing to indicate why their civilization suddenly stopped. One also wonders at how they built these beautiful places. How was their labor contracted? Was it contracted? Or was it by conscription, slavery, taxes? It is known that metal in those days was non existant; no tools, not even the simple wheel was yet invented. I had made arrangements to go on a tour of the Tikal Ruins with Antonio Ortiz along with other tourists on Sunday. I found that though no fault of my own it would be impossible to attend mass on Sunday in this remote area of the jungle so I was legally excused for this reason. After a big breakfast of ham and eggs our party boarded the excursion car; a rather big jeep with a long open section in the back that seated about ten people facing each other. We wound our way up thru the jungle only stopping at an occasional point of interest while our guide pointed out important places. The tour lasted until noon at which time we returned to the camp for lunch. I had made mental notes on the places I wanted to walk back and see the following ~~#####~~ morning. The Ferderbers had other plans for the afternoon. After lunch they wanted to fly over to see another Ruins at UAXACTUN. A mere 5 minute flight from TIKAL. The airport was no worse than the one at TIKAL but from what I heard about the strip a pilot had to be cautious not to land and hit an animal such as a cow or horse or mule; yes even pigs as they were running wild all over this strip; In addition to the four Ferderbers we also brought Nate Ginsberg and Antonio Ortiz along and Antonio's little four year old boy who he held on his lap for the flight over. My first pass at the runway convinced me the rumors about animals on the runway was fact; in fact I had to abandon my first approach as a male strolled out in front of the aircraft just as I was crossing the boundary so I applied full power, retracted the landing gear and flaps and came around for another try at it. The second attempt was most successful and the airplane came to a stop before I reached the end of the runway but the gravel and strip was rough and it sounded like our Commander was taking a heck of a beating. I taxied up in front of a warehouse and soon many of the natives who lived around the field came milling around the airplane. A short ~~###~~ little man dressed like a

Keystone cop was trying to keep the natives back away from the airplane. I asked Antonio if he could tell this little man to guard the airplane for a few hours until we could get back from the ruins and he said he'd keep the children from touching the ship although it looked like he was going to have his hands full. As we walked across the runway and headed in the direction of the Ruins I turned to take a picture of the airstrip with all the livestock grazing thereon and began to wonder just what kind of problems we'd encounter on our takeoff. This airstrip belongs to P.K.Wrigley the chewing gum manufacturer. The area around Uaxactun has the greatest amount of chicle and all the people in this area make their living as Chicleaeros. They bring the sap into the little factory there and cook it. When it has been cooked it turns into gum and the gum, while still liquid and cooked, is poured into cubes made of wood and about the size of salt licks. The cooked chicle then hardens and when it is cool it is taken out of the wooden cubes and piled in the warehouse and there it awaits an Aviateca DC-3 to fly it to Belize, British Honduras where it then goes aboard a boat and is shipped to the eastern United States where it processed at one of Wrigleys Chewing Gum factories. We all got to cut off a hunk of chicle and chew it. It is gum without flavor. All the natives chew it constantly. I brought some home for my kids to try. They spit it out before they gave it half a chance. The ruins at Uaxactun are deep in the jungle and only a small ~~path~~ path or trail leads to them. In some places the jungle growth gets so thick that our Guatemala friends up ahead had to use a machette to cut through the growth so we could follow them. It was explained to us when we reached the sight that some 20 years ago the Carnegie Institute had restored this Ruins and when their work was finished and they left the area it wasn't long before the jungle swallowed it up once more. The mosquitos were bad in there and it was hot and sultry. We went back to the airplane and the Ferderbers went north to see some more ruins; I begged off on this part and told them I'd just as soon sit and wait at the aircraft until they returned. Julie wanted to stay too so she and I sat down on the steps of the warehouse and waited. I noticed a native reading a Western novel in Spanish and suddenly had an idea. In the airplane we had several copies of Look Magazine and Life Magazine and knowing that they couldn't read English thought they might enjoy looking at the pictures anyway. This turned out to be a very good idea. Soon about 10 men all crowded around the fellow trying to get a glimpse of the pictures. One of the Life magazines had the picture story of President Kennedy's ~~burial~~ burial in Arlington Cemetery and you could tell from their expressions and remarks although in Spanish that they did understand what they ~~were~~ were looking at. We left the magazines with them and only wished we had more that we could have given them. Soon the Ferderbers and Antonio came back to the plane and said they were ready to go. We got in and taxied out and the natives kept chasing the horses and cows and pigs off the runway. When it all looked clear I poured the coal to 98X and we lifted off that strip in great style and I thanked my lucky stars we didn't hit any animals. We headed back to Tikal and before we were there Mr. Ferderber ~~asked~~ asked Antonio if we could buy some beer at Flores which is a little town located on the southwest tip of Lake Peten. Antonio had run out of beer at Tikal and said yes he knew of a place at Flores where we could pick up a case. So Flores is only about 15 minutes flying time from Tikal we flew on over and landed there. We were minus one passenger however, Nate Ginsberg. He found out while we all were at Uaxactun that on Monday morning the following day an Aviateca DC-3 was to stop there and so he elected to stay overnight even if he had to sleep propped up against a tree as this way he'd be sure of getting back to Guatemala City a day early. The only thing he'd left at Tikal was his toothbrush and a rollof 35 mm film which Mr. Ferderber said he'd mail to him when we got back to the states.

As we crossed the jungle for this short flight to Flores Antonio asked me to stay to the north side of Lake Peten as he wanted to show us a hotel he is having constructed on the northwest shore of the lake. It looked like it was nearing completion. Someday Antonio will be in the chips. He was so sold on the flight that he suddenly saw the advantage of owning an airplane himself and learning to fly. An airplane wouldn't really be a luxury in that area but more of a necessity. We landed on a small dirt strip at The little town of Flores on the edge of Lake Peten and were greeted by throngs of the local native citizenry as we did at every stop. These people had never seen an Aero Commander before and were quite fascinated by it. I managed to keep the kids off the airplane for the few minutes it took for Antonio and Joe Ferderber to walk a few blocks where they purchased a case of Guatemala Beer. The beer in Guatemala is very good but is more expensive than the beer in Mexico. We had to pay 50 cents a bottle here compared to 8 cents in Mexico or 12½ cents at the most expensive places. The sun was setting on the horizon while we were at Flores and I said I'll like to get off and back to Tikal before dark so we took off and headed back to our jungle lodge. Once more things were much brighter at the lodge. Antonio had beer to sell and we weren't the only ones who like to relax with a cold bottle of beer after a hard days work.

Monday morning I awoke at sunrise and dressed and went for a walk with my camera. I wanted to take a picture of the beautiful golden sunrise as the trees were bathing in this golden light and I wanted to capture it before the sun got up over the horizon and spoiled the whole thing. After a bit the whole camp came alive, people getting up and walking over to the dining hall for breakfast. I planned on hiking up to the temples and taking more pictures. Mr. Ferderber set 2 PM as take off time and wanted everyone to be packed and ready to leap off for Honduras by that time. I headed up thru the ~~####~~ jungle with my camera and climbed up Temple No. 1. and took several shots of the other temples from the top of ~~###.###~~ No. 1. I looked at the map and thought I'd have time to hike down the causeway to the Temple of the Inscriptions so headed off in that direction. It turned out that the temple of the inscriptions was a bit farther than it showed on the map and I found myself way out deep in the jungle by myself following an old trail that didn't look like it had been very heavily traveled. I was thinking of some of the stories I'd heard around camp about the predatory animals nearby and every once in awhile I'd hear a noise and the goose bumps would rise on my skin but I kept plodding along. Finally I was shaken by a crashing sound only a few feet away. Then nothing but silence. This was enough for me so I made a 180 degree turn and forgot about ever getting down to the temple of the inscriptions and headed back. About this time a noisy group of parrots landed in a tree above my head and they were really chattering away so I stopped to watch them. Then a couple of beautiful Toucans landed in a tree and I had to stop and look at them. The light was too poor to get a picture even though it was 11:30 in the morning and approaching high noon there wasn't sufficient light to get a good picture. A monkey in one of the Ramon trees near the trail had torn off a large nut and thrown it down at me and it landed near my feet. He looked like a spider monkey and was really whooping it up. Didn't seem too happy that a human being was trespassing in his private jungle so I decided to give it back to him and get the heck out of there. As I neared the main path that leads back to the lodge I notice a DC-3 with Military markings of the Guatemalan Air Force passing over the ~~#~~ jungle trees. It made a pass at the airstrip and then went around again. I couldn't see what was happening, just could tell from the sound of his engines that he was intent on making a landing. By the time I got back to the lodge the DC-3 had landed and just taxied in and parked next to the Aero Commander. A load of civilian people were climbing out and making their way to the lodge. I got to the lodge about the same time they did and upon inquiring from these people learned that they were government

people from the United States and United Kingdom who were making the rounds of all Guatemalan ruins not especially for Archeology purposes but for the sole purpose of studying the forestry in this area. They admitted that as long as they were in Tikal they most certainly would visit the ruins but were more interested in studying the types of trees grew in this area. One man was a graduate of the University of Calif. at Berkeley and had been working in Guatemala for the United States Govet. for the past six months. Some of the men had their wives and children aboard. I talked to the pilot of the DC-3. His name was Mertins and on his left ~~###~~ pocket of his uniform he was wearing the wings of an Air Force Pilot of the U.S.A. On his right shirt pocket he was wearing the wings of the Guatemalan Air Force. He was a loud ~~###~~ sort of fellow who seemed to know all the answers and when I told him we were ~~###~~ leaving that afternoon for Copan Honduras and planned on landing there he went into a disertation on just how he'd land an airplane at that strip. It sounded hairy as the devil and I had visions of finding it pretty rough. He did nothing but put a lot of doubt into my mind that we could even get the Commander into Copan. Mr. Ferderber had been listening to Mertins hairy tales and I could tell he was somewhat concerned with the information we were getting from this Hot Rock. Later Mr. F. took me aside and asked me what I thought of the situation. All I could say was lets us go take a look see for ourselves and if it doesn't look good not to worry, I wouldn't attempt a landing. Mertins also advised us the weather out in that direction was real good so that was one thing he did say that was reassuring. However, that proved to be a false statement as I'll elaborate on shortly. We all were ready to leave Tikal by 2 PM. We said our goodbys to Antonio and his wife and kids and some of the other tourists we'd met and got aboard our ship and left shortly after 2 PM. The weather was good to Puerto Barrios but the mountain range separating Guatemala and Honduras was socked in and it was raining below us. I climbed to 10,000 feet and crossed over the range and finally got a radio beacon signal and the ADF pointed at San Pedro Sula dead ahead. Thru breaks in the clouds I was able to see the city below us and got clearance from San Pedro Sula tower to let down thru the breaks in the clouds. They had no other aircraft traffic in the area at the time fortunately. Here finally was the first hard surfaced runway I'd seen for several days and the landing was like shooting fish in a barrel instead of the usual sweat of the rougher runways of the past few days. We landed a little after 3 PM CST and taxied up in front of the terminal where we were met by the Honduras customs officials. One of the men spoke good English and was very nice. He took the clearance we'd received from Guatemala and filed it, then looked at our passports and in a few minutes went out to the airplane and asked us to pull all our luggage out of the aircraft as they wanted to look it all over. Again we started to get uneasy as they'd no doubt wonder what we had in the survival box. But they didn't get as sticky as the customs official at Puerto Barrios and soon we were able to pile everything back in the ship. I went up to the control tower and filed a local flight plan to go down to Copan and circle the airfield and see if it was OK for us to land there the next day. The weather didn't look too sharp either in that direction. Copan is located about 90 miles southwest of San Pedro Sula and is close to the border of Guatemala and El Salvador. It is also located in a canyon 1800 feet above sea level and no radio aids in the area. Here again it would be strictly a job of navigating by use of charts. We took on some extra fuel and soon were on our way. Due to the low clouds hugging the mountain range to the north of our course and also the range to the south we were forced to follow the canyon at low altitude occasionally zigzagging back and forth trying to identify towns. This proved rather ~~disappointing~~ disappointing as many towns we were looking at weren't even shown on our chart. Finally we came to a town that by referring to the map I was able to positively identify as the city of ZACAPA. We had overflown slightly past Copan so reversed course and climbed out

of that canyon and hopped over another range and then suddenly up ahead I spot what resembled a runway about 5 miles distant. When we got over the field I knew we had found the right place as right next to the airport as big as life stood the ruins of COPAN. The airfield didn't look any worse than those we'd landed on at TIKAL, UAXACTUN or FLORES so I told the Ferderbers we could make this field ok. They said that as long as we were here we might just as well go on and land and stay at the hotel in town. So I cautiously made my approach; having made so many approaches and landings on these short rough runways this one appeared to look no better or worse. The landing was smooth but the airplane lurched and rumbled along on the rough terrain until I finally got it stopped near the end of the runway. We taxied back and parked the ship on a grassy slope next to a tall group of trees. Here again we see two military soldiers of the ~~Honduras~~ Honduras Army approaching. It seems that no matter where you land in Latin America there are always some soldiers around. These two boys looked friendly and were but neither one could speak English. In a few minutes a Volkswagon bus appeared on the scene and on the side of the bus written in English was advertising of the Hotel in Copan; the Hotel Marina. The driver had seen us fly over town and although we had no reservations at this hotel he had come out to take us in. The Hotel Marina is the only hotel in Copan so we had no other choice. We unloaded our luggage, locked the aircraft and put all our luggage aboard the bus and drove west along a dusty, rough winding road, past tobacco fields and across a small river and bridge until we came into the tiny little town of Copan, Honduras. The streets in this town are really rough. Large rocks are placed together to make a roadbed and although it beats just plain dirt it is rough on tires and shakes up those who must ride over the rough streets. The ~~Marina~~ Marina Hotel didn't look very inviting. It was typically Spanish, all rooms on one floor and in the center of the building was an open patio with flowers planted. There was a trellis in the middle with bouganville growing profusely and climbing all over the place. Our rooms resembled a prison, only a high window, very small up near the ceiling in the back of the room and the window had bars on it. A ~~shower~~ shower in each room and a toilet. The room had one bed, iron bed posts and plain ~~old fashioned~~ old fashioned spring mattress not very thick. We were told the city generator wouldn't be turned on until 6 PM and at that time we'd have lights. They would also have hot water after 7 PM. Mr. F. and his two children and myself went out for a walk and I wanted to close out my local flight plan which I'd filed at San Pedro Sula and notify them that we'd landed at Copan. The only way to do this was to send a cablegram. Fortunately, one man in town could speak English and we accidentally met him on the street corner. His English wasn't very good but adequate enough to take us to the telegraph operator who was in the court house a block away and help me draft a short notice to the airport at San Pedro Sula. After paying him a dollar for the cablegram and getting his assurance it would be sent out right away we continued to walk around viewing this very small town. The total population must not have been over 1000 people. The streets were pretty deserted. We also learned that a lady who operated a combination dry goods store, grocery, stationery and Drug store up the street could speak English too so we went up to see her. Her store was loaded with imported Japanese Silk and she said that a lot of people from Guatemala drive over to Copan and buy her silk as it's much cheaper in Honduras. It isn't color fast however but she sells a tremendous lot of it and this is the one big item she had in the store. We told her that none of the people in the hotel, including the operators could speak English and we asked her if she could help us tell the cook at the hotel what we wanted to eat. So she sent her son down to give them the word. Mainly we wanted the cook to know that Mrs. F. is allergic to eggs and cheese. The rest of us really didn't care what we got to eat as long as it was tasty and clean.

By the time we got back to the Marina Hotel after our brief walk around the center of the little town of Copan Mr. Ferderber and I decided it was time for a beer. In the corner of our hotel the proprietors had a small bar. In the refrigerator behind the bar they had several kinds of beer and it was all expensive. 50 cents a bottle but mighty tasty. The Honduras beer is quite dark and heavy. Our favorite brand was "Nacional". Soon two ~~young~~ young fellows appeared in the tavern; they looked like Americans so we asked if they were and the tall fellow named Mike informed us that he was British but his partner was American. Mike spoke with the typical British accent and it was really a pleasure to talk to him. His partner Rex was from Winston Salem, N.C. USA and both were employed by the British American Tobacco Co. of San Pedro Sula. Copan being an area rich in tobacco fields ~~these~~ these two men buy tobacco for their company, follow through on it's curing and drying and sorting then see that it is shipped to San Pedro Sula, Honduras where it is put into the finished product. Their best tobacco goes into the Viceroy. Their inferior grades go into brands named Palidan, Buffalo and Dorados in that order. We were given samples of all brands and am glad I had enough of my own brand, Camels to last me through the trip as these things were pretty bad. Mike and Rex were offered a Camel by the way and you should have seen their eyes light up with anxiety; they hadn't had such a ~~luxurious~~ luxurious treat in a long time. Both boys live in San Pedro Sula but only see that city on week-ends. Rex is married and has a family but Mike is single. They drive over to Copan on the dusty rough and winding road every Monday and spend the week getting their tobacco and then return to San Pedro Sula on Friday eve. It is only 90 miles but that drive takes them 5 1/2 hours one way they tell us. During the ~~rainy~~ rainy season it takes much longer. Our dinner that evening in the dining room wasn't much to brag about. We had some form of roast beef and fried beans and bread and everyone had enough but it sure wasn't anything to ~~write~~ write home about. After dinner Mike and Rex asked Mr. Ferderber and myself if we'd be interested in seeing the tobacco warehouse just a block away. We went with him and took a look at it and were quite impressed. Honduras girls are employed in the warehouse by day to sort out the various tobacco leaves. It is then baled and shipped to San Pedro Sula from this warehouse. The people employed in this place would be most fortunate if their homes were as neat and clean as this place was. It seemed rather ironical that the people who grow it and sort it. The typical parts fare better than the people who grow and harvest in these home is made of adobe brick ~~the~~ mortered together by mud and the floors are just plain dirt. Most homes don't even have electric lights. But the warehouse is painted white on the outside; has clean windows; ample and retired rather early as the next day we planned on touring the Ruins of Copan. We were not very happy with our accommodations but I slept OK. I found a lot of bites on my body the next morning but didn't say anything about it as I was ashamed to, figuring it might be bed bugs. No one else had said anything either so I tried to forget it. We were picked up by the Volkswagen bus right after ~~breakfast~~ breakfast and were driven to the Ruins. As we passed over the bridge we noticed it was laundry day; several of the local women of the area had brought their wash down to the river bank and were scrubbing clothes and hanging them out to dry on the nearby trees and rocks. It was an unusual sight to behold. On the way to the ruins we see several Stela (stone shafts) and altars along side the main ruins of Copan have been standing for 1500 years and are part of the religious center we were about to see. Copan is the archeological city located farthest south of the whole geographic area developed by the Maya and it is said that this is where the Great Mayan Civilization developed and flourished. Of all the Ruins in Latin America, Copan has been ~~restored~~ restored to be the most beautiful of them all. One can more readily visualize how their civilization lived

and you are not forced to try your imagination as much as in other places we visited. It also afforded a camera bug many intriguing spots in which he might employ his camera in order to capture some of the magnitude of this tremendous place. Mrs. F. had a booklet on Copan explaining all the buildings, temples and the ball court. We would go from one sight to another as she read to us what took place there nearly 2000 years ago. I found it very facinating. The weather wasn't so hot, it was ## cloudy most of the time with the sun occasionally breaking thru then later to go back under a cloud. It was hard to judge the appropriate lens opening for my cameras and I kept my fingers crossed that I was getting good pictures. The wind came up later in the morning and some of the leaves on the cieba trees started falling and blowing around the plaza and thru the ruins. The wind had a peculiar sound as it whistled thru the ancient buildings which lent an eerie feeling among all of us. Mrs. F. said that she had hoped and prayed that we'd ## not miss seeing this place. It was the one Ruins that she had hoped to see more than any of the others but added that it was the only place we'd been that gave her the creeps. After the Mayans had mysteriously abandoned their religious center in Copan around 900 AD and pushed north to relocate in Guatemala and Yucatan with new centers it lay for several centuries unnoticed to the world. In the year 1576 a Dr. Don Diego Garcia del Palacios, Member of the Royal Audience of Guatemala and his party accidentally stumbled onto the ruins while on an expedition. He wrote several pages on his discovery and sent his find in the form of a letter to Philip II of Spain. No one ventured there again until 1834 when Col. Juan Galindo, who at that time was in the service of the Central American Govt. arrived at the scene and brought the Ruins to public notice by means of several articles which he published in American, English and French newspapers. Five years later, in 1839 a famous American diplomat, John L. Stephens visited Copan. He wrote several accounts of the archeological marvels there but unfortunately he contracted Yellow Fever and died before he had accomplished any of the things he'd set out to do. His grave is on the north end of the ceremonial court. Since that time many noted archeologists have visited Copan but it wasn't until the year 1935 that excavation work started as a joint effort between the Honduras Govt. and the Carnegie Institute of Washington, D.C. As in all Mayan Ruins, many treasures were unearthed, dates interpreted from the various Stela and hieroglyphics but no indication of just why these tremendous centers were suddenly and without any apparent slow decadence of their society, mysteriously abandoned. It was late afternoon when we had obtained just about all we could out of this ## historical place and all decided to go back into the little town of Copan. Mr. F. and the kids and myself took our cameras and wandered about the streets taking shots of animals and people and we also visited the museum of Mayan Archeology in town. Here we saw some of the treasures that have been unearthed to date and several skeletons of the ancient people with jade inlays in the teeth. Very impressive. That evening as we were sitting in the dining room having dinner and contemplating our visit of the Copan Ruins that day it ocured to us that this was Dec. 31st and wondered just what kind of New Years eve celebrations this town was planning. Our friends Mike and Rex had left that noon for San Pedro Sula to see the new year in and then drive back to Copan on Thurs. There just wasn't any other tourists at the hotel, no one could ## speak English except us and it was an unusual feeling. I planned on going to my room as soon as the electricity came on and would occupy my time and mind by writing letters. About 8PM as I was writing a letter to Celia ## and the kids I heard some strange music, sounded like several Xylophones playing and the music was different than anything I'd heard before. I figured it might be someone playing records nearby but it was very loud. Mr. F. soon appeared at my door and said "Why don't you put that letter away for awhile and come with me, I want to show you something across the street". He had been over to investigate where the music had been coming from.

Across the street was the town court house. It was a long building with no doors or glass in the windows. Above the court house on the second floor was a balcony. In order to get up to the balcony we had to walk thru the court house and up a crude flight of wooden stairs and came upon what looked like the village dance hall. Out on the balcony was the largest Xylophone I've ever seen in my life. It was so large that six men could play it all at the same time, each man having a section or octave to himself. In addition to the six men playing the Xylophone they also had for accompaniment a drummer but most pleasant music I'd ever heard. I did recall one piece they played later, that being "Begin the Beguine". All other selections were typical Honduras overtures. People began to gather and by 9 PM it seemed like the whole town had turned out for a gala celebration. Even the Honduras military, officers and noncoms were up on the dance floor. We looked out on the village square, a plot of ground across the street from the court house and several women had gathered and had a bonfire going. They also had a pot of brew cooking on the fire so Mr. F. and I decided to go investigate. We find that they are brewing a potent kind of brew for the New Years Eve celebration; seeing that we could not communicate with any of these people at all we never did find out just what kind of drink it was. However, it must have been wild as the local citizenry who were partaking of the substance were soon getting kinda wild themselves. In back of the court house was a jail and in the jail were two men. We had noticed them there that same afternoon. The jail looked like something you'd see at Knotts Berry Farm. But as the evening wore on the local police along with the help of some of the non drinker local public were adding a few more souls to the small and overcrowded jail. No doubt the home brew was the cause of this. I noticed that some of the musicians who were playing the Xylophone were men who I had photographed that same afternoon when we'd been driven out to examine a tobacco plantation. We arrived at this plantation during the mens Siesta and they were all lying around relaxing and taking naps. Soon the siesta was over and a group of them went across the road and cut some fresh tobacco leaves and piled them on a long wagon and then pushed the wagon back across the road where they began unloading each leaf by hand and tying the individual leaves to a long stick. When the stick was completely filled with this beautiful green tobacco they took it inside a rather large tall building and hung it up to dry and to cure. To expedite this process the building was heated with a uniform heat by burning wood in ovens underneath one end of the place and the heat would be transferred by long pipes about the size of a stove pipe throughout the dirt floor of the building. The heat would rise to the ceiling and after several days the tobacco was then ready to be transported into the little town of Copan where it ended up in the warehouse and there it would be sorted and placed in bales ready for the factory. I got some very good pictures of this process. Rather than just shooting a scene of a building or a ruin I now had some action to record on my 8mm movie film. Getting back to New Years Eve---after we had our fill of the local citizenry whooping it up we decided to turn in as the next morning we all planned on leaving Copan at 9 AM and start our next journey. I was rather concerned about the weather as it looked like rain so as I turned in for the night I had a hard time getting to sleep as the music from the dance across the street was quite loud and I was wondering just what kind of troubles we'd have on our next leg. Soon I got to sleep and about midnight I was awakened by the loudest noises of merry making, firecrackers and more firecrackers. It was Jan. 1st now and then I had a hard time going back to sleep again. I felt a bite and got up and turned on the light and killed my first bed bug. I felt sick. And to make matters worse I'd forgotten to bring in the can of bug spray. I'd brought along for just such a purpose. It was out in the airplane. I'd lugged it everywhere but had forgot to bring it in where I needed it most.

I finally dropped off to sleep and awoke early. The roosters outside my window saw to that. I got my stuff packed and boy while I was dressing I saw the blotches where the ~~###~~ bed bugs had been feasting. I was glad we were leaving this place today. My first concern though was the weather. Looking out the door and up at the sky the dark clouds were still hanging around and although it wasn't raining it looked like it was about to. We had a quick breakfast and the Volkswagen bus took us to the airport and we gave the soldier boys who had been standing guard over our ship for the past two nights some packs of American cigarettes. They really appeared to appreciate this. The wind was starting to blow again and from the wrong direction. It was right out of the north about an estimated 10 knots and the short dirt strip was uphill toward the north. With our heavy load I judged that it would be safer to takeoff downhill with a 10 knot tail wind and trust that the supercharged engines on our AeroCommander would ~~#####~~ compensate for the tail wind effect and besides we'd gather added speed downhill. I checked Mr. F. out on the use of flaps as he'd have to be the co-pilot on this takeoff. I needed both of my hands for adding the power and retracting the gear. Besides I didn't want him to drop half flaps until we'd reached at least 80 mph on the airspeed indicator. Believe me when I say, I have nothing but the greatest respect for this type of airplane. We had the model that could do the trick and it got out of that field like a bomb. All my anxiety had been in vain but on the otherhand we'd planned this takeoff well too and I'm sure that we'd never got off the ground if we'd tried it uphill. This is something that you never do with an airplane anyway; never takeoff uphill or land downhill on a short strip under normal conditions. We circled the town and then pointed our ship northeast toward San Pedro Sula a ~~###~~ mere 90 miles away. The weather started getting worse. Layers of clouds began to form; no way to climb up on top, dark rain clouds ahead and soon clouds forming below our altitude. There was an out however, to the north out past the coast line and over the Caribbean Sea I could make out that the sun was shining. This indicated there must be breaks in the clouds and even though it would take us an extra half hour to get to San Pedro Sula we could get there OK if we vector-ed north of course over Puerto Barrios and came around the corner of the Mountain range separating Honduras from Guatemala. By following the coast line we could then cut south when we reached the river Chamelecan and follow the river on into San Pedro Sula. I had attempted to tune in the homing beacon at San Pedro Sula shortly after takeoff from Copan but it wasn't possible to receive the beacon for some reason; I found out the reason after landing at San Pedro Sula. The homing beacon is operated by the United Fruit Company in that city. They had just simply forgotten to turn it on that morning. It had been raining in San Pedro Sula but had stopped about an hour before we arrived although the skies were still leaden and the mountains were soaked in to the west. I wondered just whatkind of a ~~###~~ trick I could pull next in order to clear out of there on top of the clouds for our next leg to Tapachula, Mexico. After landing we were happy to see our friends Mike and Rex at the airport waiting to help us clear with Customs and Immigration. Boy, both these fellows were of extreme help as they could talk Spanish and made what would have been a rough go turn into a smooth operation. It being a holiday we were obliged to pay a \$10.00 fee for having Customs come out from town and to clear us out of Honduras. Normally, during the working days and during the normal hours of operation with the ~~###~~ exception of week-ends and holidays there is no charge for this service. While Rex helped the Customs officer make out the necessary papers for clearing out of Honduras and checking our passports Mike and I went upto the control tower where I checked the weather at Guatemala City and Tapachula. Both places were reporting clear at that time. The tower operator toldme I could climb out of San Pedro Sula on a north heading staying away from the mountains and climb right on up through the clouds as they had no traffic and they didn't expect any in that day anyway. To save time Mr. F. helped supervise the refueling of the aircraft.

While we were in the control tower I offered Mike a cigarette and he turned it down. Said he made a new years resolution to quit smoking. Bay, he sure looked like he'd been on a bender the night before. It was a wonder that he could even get up and meet us at the airport. He said it wasn't easy but that he'd go back to bed and sleep the rest of the day. So finally, we were all set, we'd paid our bills and so everyone shook hands and we got aboard and cranked up the ship and taxied out and got off. I headed north and got on top at 10,000 feet, then turned back south and picked ~~###~~ up our heading of 220 degrees after intercepting the outbound bearing about 20 miles southwest of San Pedro Sula. Thank goodness the United Fruit Co. didn't turn off the radio beacon until I got a signal I could home in on from Guatemala City. By the time we got over Guatemala City an hour out of Honduras the weather began to break and we got a good look at the city as we passed over. It was beautiful. I stayed just to the left of the high mountain ranges which run east and west from Guatemala City to the Mexican border. To our left further to the south you could see the Pacific Ocean. Off to our right and towering some 13,000 feet above sea level is an active volcano. It looked so strange that I had to get my camera out and took some shots. To the west of the volcano is a large lake nestled down in a canyon and reported to be the most beautiful lake in the world. It's name is Lake Atitlan and is every bit as beautiful as advertised. We started a gradual let down at this point as I kept the mountains to our right and the Pacific to our left and turned to a heading of 270 degrees and got a weak signal from the Tapachula, Mexico radio beacon and continued to home in on it until we ~~####~~ spotted the field. The airport is at sea level and the view of the city and airport is one of ~~#####~~ lushious green. It had tropical trees of ~~#####~~ various kinds surrounding the airport and city. For once, in what seemed like a long time the flying suddenly started to become easy as no longer were we confronted with bad weather and I was beginning to feel like I had this whole thing all wrapped and ready for delivery if you know what I mean. But one should be wary of such feelings and not let down as this is about the time that other troubles begin to develop and develop they did but I'll get into that a little bit later. Right then and there we were about to land in Mexico again, it was warm and clear and the plane was purring like a kitten. Even though we were still a long way from home we were pointed in that direction and were on the return portion. As we taxied up to the administration building and cut the engines once again there were the usual curious men, women and children standing around ~~####~~ watching. I was able to communicate with one of the airport workers that we would not need fuel although he couldn't speak English he understood. Customs were waiting for us as on my flight plan out of San Pedro Sula I'd indicated we required customs and this information had been passed along via cablegram. They also had to make a special trip out from town on a holiday but their fees were only \$7.50 instead of the \$10.00 charged by Honduras customs. I filed a flight plan for Palenque which is straight north of Tapachula, up and over the mountain range. They did not have any weather information available for the Palenque area but said it would probably be good. Famous last words. But in due time all the necessary paper work had been completed, the usual inspection of the airplane had been done and it was time to get airborne once again. We climbed on out of Tapachula on the 360 outbound heading using the radio beacon to help guide me on course. The mountain range comes up quite suddenly but by the time we got near it our altimeter had gone from sea level to 11,000 feet. However, for added safety and to be able to clear the highest peaks ahead I figured on going to 12,000 feet and then level off and later to start descending on the north side toward Palenque. I figured an hour would be our flying time from Tapachula to Palenque. I had just leveled off at 12000 feet and noted that to the north of the mountain range it was ~~#####~~ completely socked in. And this is when things started getting exciting.

There is an old story, familiar to all those pilots who make their livelihood driving these flying machines and it goes something like this: "Flying is^a routine and monotonous profession with many hours of boredom, occasionally interrupted by moments of sheer terror!" No sooner than I had leveled off at 12,000 feet the right engine suddenly and loudly gave out with a loud backfire and immediately started shaking and sputtering like it was going to come un-glued from the wing. Immediately I put the ship into a 180 turn and started descending back down to Tapachula from where we'd just departed some 10 minutes ago. By retarding the power on the right engine it appeared to help it smooth out considerably. As soon as I'd apply a little power it would go ape some more. So the first thing that flashed thru my mind was the Right Magneto. But by process of elimination this proved a wrong guess. I checked the mags at 2200 RPM as we were descending and on the right mag I got a 250 RPM drop. If the mag had been dead as I first suspected it would have shown nothing at all when I ~~##~~ checked it with the switch. So then I figured it must be spark plug trouble. All the time this was going on there wasn't a sound from any of the passengers. When I turned around to tell them that we must go back and check this thing out they all nodded their silent agreement. Fortunately I found a mechanic at the field who helped me remove the upper right and lower left spark plugs (the plugs which are fired by the right magneto for that engine) and replace six plugs with spares I had brought along for just such an occasion. Two of the old plugs looked pretty bad, one had shorted out and the other was wet from unburned fuel. In about 30 minutes we were ready to go once more. The mechanic charged me \$20.00 for his labor but at this stage of the game I was happy to pay it and get the heck out of there. So we climbed back on course again and when I reached the same spot that the trouble occurred before I whispered softly under my breath to the ship "Old gal, if you're going to give me any more trouble do it right now and not after I get any further!" But she behaved well and we continued. My next concern was the weather ahead. It was nice and clear up where we were flying but down below those ~~###~~ clouds it was raining and there were no breaks anywhere to be seen. Palenque has nothing but a dirt strip according to the map and no radio beacon, the closest radio beacon in the area of Palenque would be at Villahermosa which is located about 30 minutes flying time northwest of Palenque. So I figured I was within range of the Villahermosa beacon and cranked it in on the ADF. Nothing happened. So here again was a situation where I had to rely directly to the plain old magnetic compass and hold the right heading until I started getting some sort of signal on the ADF. Even the ~~#####~~ commercial broadcast stations which you can use in a pinch for navigation purposes, even though they don't transmit much in the way of power, were even off the air. This was New Year's Day and a holiday. Soon the ADF swung around and pointed at the 12 O'clock position so I knew it had something; by listening very carefully I managed to hear very faintly the identification VSA in morse code. I felt relieved; we continued on toward the station looking all over for holes below but ~~###~~ none anywhere. Just as I came up over the beacon at Villahermosa I notice lots of holes to the north. I'd called the tower for a clearance to let down by instruments but they too were closed. So I managed to let down thru some rather nice holes north of the city and we came on in and landed. I wanted to take on some extra fuel but we were advised that because of the holidays the gas man wouldn't be out until the next day. My fuel gauge showed we had 60 gallons of fuel left in the main tank which normally holds 156 gallons. The two outboard or auxiliary tanks which hold 33.5 gallons each were dry. I had used them up on our flight from San Pedro Sula to Tapachula. But we did have sufficient fuel to proceed under the clouds over to Palenque and enough to get back to Villahermosa the following day or day after whatever the case may be and still have 20 gallons left by the time I got back to Villahermosa.

We didn't waste any time; took off and stayed at about 1000 feet flying in a southeasterly direction toward Palenque. I noticed on the map that a winding railroad bed would lead us into Palenque so when I finally spotted the railroad a few minutes later we used that for our guide. It led us to the field, the airport is located just south of the train depot, the runway running parallel to the tracks. The little town of Palenque being about 4 miles south of the airport and the Ruins of Palenque are another three miles south of town. I circled the field once to take a look at it and see what condition the runway was in as it appeared to have been raining in that area for awhile. The approach end of the runway looked firm enough but the east end looked like it might be a bit soft. In all respects, other than being a bit wet looking down there it didn't look any more serious than any of the hazards I met, challenged and successfully defeated in the past week or so and decided I'd give it a go. I came in ~~much~~ mighty slow, hanging the ship on the prop as we say and touched down right on the west end of the runway. It was soft but the ship seemed to be staying up OK and not sinking down too deep into the mud. By the time I reached the end of the runway though I was sorry that we'd even tried it; as we hit the low spots on the runway the sudden impact of the tires threw mud up and doused the ship from stem to stern. Couldn't even see out of the windshield. I was working the brakes pretty hard but the soft ground was slowing me to a stop before I got to the end of the 1800 foot strip. I turned the airplane around and taxied back up to the parking area which was a sea of mud. I had to apply lots of power in order to keep moving. The crazy people who had been standing back and watching the whole proceedings then came running out to the airplane in the mud and it reminded me of when I saw the movie of Lindbergh arriving in Paris in 1927 how they swarmed onto the field to greet him. I was trying to see out of the side window and trying to keep from hitting some people with the props and trying ~~hard~~ to keep from getting stuck in the mud all at the same time. Just to the right of the approach end of the Runway I spots an area a bit higher than the runway, it looked like a patch of worn grass so I pulled enough power to make the spot and then after getting on this shallow incline finally I cut the gun. Well, we had made it but I felt lousy. A man from the Hotel Palenque was waiting to drive us into town; we had to get out and walk thru the mud and also get our luggage out of the baggage compartment and into the ~~taxi~~ taxi cab over on drier ground about 40 feet away. This had been the most trying day so far. To make matters still worse no body could speak a word of English; there was lots of jabbering going on and one Mexican who looked like he wanted to take charge of watching the airplane and also cleaning it kept getting into my way. I was so mad I could have hit him. From the odor of his breath he'd been celebrating the new year in. Finally a large heavy set fellow with a sheriffs badge arrived on the scene. He spoke English very well, was wearing a revolver in a holster on his hip. He said that the little Mexican fellow who appeared to have too much drink was really a trustworthy fellow and not for us to fear any; let him guard the ship and keep the children around there off from it and he also said the little guy would also wash the plane. But not until tomorrow. So with that reassuring news we climbed aboard the taxi and drove into town. Mud was caked on our shoes about an inch or two ~~thick~~ thick. The hotel was right in town on the main street, muddy street in front and beautiful exterior and tile floor to walk into with muddy feet but they expect us to do this and no complaints. We find out that the hotel is brand new, had just opened the day before and we were to be the first guests at the place. I wanted to take a hot shower so bad I could taste it but they said that they hadn't connected up their water heaters yet but we could take all the cold showers we wanted to. I decided to wait for two more days until we got into Mexico City.

After everyone unpacked their luggage in their respective rooms we inquired around for a good place to eat. The cab driver who had driven us in from the airport was still waiting out front for ~~#####~~ a call to go somewhere else. It didn't appear like he was going to be busy at all. He said he'd drive us to a good spot to eat. So all climbed aboard the taxi and he went around the block to the next street, about the shortest taxi ride I'd ever taken but we'd never made it on foot anyway as the mud in the streets was pretty thick. No sidewalks. The restaurant looked from the outside like ~~##~~ a barn and ~~###~~ running from the mud down a slight slope to the entrance of the barn like restaurant was several pieces of board that one can use steps. If you should happen to slip off one of the boards you'd end up in mud so we ~~###~~ were extremely careful. We had a nice meal, Steaks, and even though it wasn't too well prepared it ~~####~~ really tasted good. We hadn't had much to eat since breakfast except a few Fritos we had in the plane. I suggested to Mr. F. while we were eating that instead of going out with them in the morning to see the Ruins of Palenque I'd take a cab out to the airport and see if I couldn't get someone to help me fill in some of these bad low spots on the runway and besides I wanted to check up on the aircraft and see how our little friend was doing. Mrs. Ferderber, during our course of conversation that evening mentioned something that broke the ice so to speak. She was complaining of bites all over her legs and how they itched and then Mike said he had lots of them too and then I didn't feel so bad as I told them I was suffering from the same problem so we all began to talk openly about our bites. Mrs. F. wondered what might be causing it and I said "If you'll excuse the expression I'll tell you what it is, it's BEG BUGS". Then I described how I had killed a ~~#####~~ bed bug in Honduras at the Merida Hotel and it was at the same hotel that she'd first noticed being bitten by something. So it finally came out and we all felt better knowing what our problems were but it didn't help the ~~##~~ darn itching. Man, Sand Fleas are mild compared to ~~###~~ bed bugs. Thursday morning I awoke by the sounds of a dull church bell. The mission or little church was located across the street from the hotel and the bell sounded like someone had put a clapper inside an old rusty pail. Nevertheless it got the job done. I looked out the window and noticed several souls filing inside the church for morning mass. I decided to get up and go over myself. I had a few prayers of thanksgiving I wanted to get off my chest; namely that we'd made it so far and were all in one ~~#~~ fairly good piece in spite of the hardships, muddy runways, lousy weather, bed bug bites. And I also wanted to start a few healthy prayers started toward the skies and beg the good father to help us get our airplane off that muddy strip now that we had that problem facing us. The little church had been built many centuries ago I learn; at one time it was destroyed by a band of Spanish savages and left in a bad state of affairs for quite some time. It is of recent years that a missionary Padre came into Palenque and got the help of some of the local people to help him rebuild the church. It has a beautiful altar, is so peaceful inside that you feel closer to God than any church you've ever been inside. The floor is plain dirt or bare ground, the kneeling benches are two by fours and the benches are crudely nailed together pieces of various shapes and odds and ends of discarded lumber---but it is the beautiful altar with the flowers and large white cloth hanging down from the ceiling behind the crucifix that holds your respect. You don't notice the dirt on the kneeling benches when you kneel down. After I'd paid my respects I met the Ferderbers and we walked over to breakfast for a change. Some of the mud of the night before had caked sufficiently so that it didn't stick to our shoes and this was a good omen. I figured with a little luck and no rain that day and none that night that maybe that runway would dry out by the time ~~##~~ we would be ready to go. The sun was beginning to get hot even as early as 8 O'clock in the morning and it looked like the rains would be over for sure. After breakfast the Ferderbers took a cab to the Ruins and I took a cab out to the airport.

What I find going on out there makes me almost jump for joy. Our little Mexican friend who had been so obnoxious the day before was now sober and he was washing the airplane. He had a pail of water and a rag and could only clean a section at a time, then retreat about two block to a pump and bring another pail of water back and continue his work. I could see he had a project that would keep him busy the remainder of the day. Also, out on the runway I could see some activity. Two Mexican men with wheelbarrows were hauling crushed gravel from the railroad railbeds and dumping it into the low spots and muddy spots on the runway. I walked down the runway to see how they were doing, neither one could speak English but they could see from the look on my face that I was happy to see that this work was being done. When I got back to the plane a heavy set Mexican fellow who could speak English told me these men worked for him and that he'd see that they worked until I was satisfied with the condition of the strip. I asked him how much I should pay and he said the man who was washing the plane and who's job it was to guard it for two nights expected 100 pesos which amounts to \$8.00. The two men fixing up the runway would be satisfied with 20 ~~pesos~~ pesos apiece which would amount to \$1.60. Man, that is cheap labor. I told him I thought it wasn't enough and he said "These men work for me, if you give them any more it will spoil them". Nevertheless I still felt chintzy when I paid the bill and wish I would have been ~~###~~ allowed to give them more. By two PM I saw that everything was under control and decided I'd take a cab back into town. The sun was baking the ground good and no rain was forecast for the next day or two. There are no official paid forecasters in this area; on the contrary, all the people know when it is going to rain and when it is not and I was assured they are always right. By the time I got back to the hotel the Ferderbers had just arrived ahead of me. They were sorry I didn't get to visit the ruins with them but were pleased to hear that the airplane and runway were now in shape for our departure to Mexico City the following morning. I planned on landing at Villahermosa on the way to Mexico City and fill up the bird with 100 octane as we were down to 40 gallons but how happy I was we didn't have much more fuel than we did as I wanted to be as light as possible getting out of Palenque. One little Mexican boy wanted a peso for shining my boots (flying boots) and he did such a good job that I gave him two pesos. Mr. F. and Mike and myself took a walk late in the afternoon, it was nice and warm and clear and as we walked past the drug store we noticed a barber giving a Mexican boy a haircut on the sidewalk a few doors down. I had a pretty good beard, hadn't shaved for two days and neither had Mr. F. I asked the barber how much for a shave ~~#####~~ by stroking my beard and he said one peso. (8cents). So when he was thru with the boy I climbed aboard his crude barber chair which didn't tilt back and got a shave sitting up with a dull razor and he had to lather three times and by the time he got thru and put some witch hazel on my face I about took off like a helicopter. It wasn't worth 8 cents really but I paid him 16 cents just the same. (2 Pesos) Mr. F. being game and seeing that I was brave enough to try it had a shave too. We both took pictures of each other getting the ~~###~~ treatment. We all had steaks again at the local restaurant and sorta hashed over our plans for the next day. It was cool when the sun went down but stayed clear all night. I didn't sleep very well that night. I'd wake up several times thinking about that take off roll we'd soon be making out of Palenque I rehearsed it over and over in my mind and tried to visualize just where we'd finally break ground. Again I was up ahead of all the rest, packed my luggage and walked across the street when I attended mass and shot a few more requests skyward. By the time mass was over the Ferderbers were ready for breakfast and we walked over to the restaurant and all had scrambled eggs. I was hungry in spite of the butterflies in the pit of my stomach. I had to eat a little more in order to fill the butterflies appetite too. We then got aboard a taxi and lumbered down the rough dirt road to the airport. The plane was sitting there, clean and ready to fly.

Having been told that we were the first and only Aero Commander (big aircraft) to land at Palenque many local people had turned out to see us take off or attempt one. The largest airplane ever to land here prior to us was a Cessna 172; four place single engine machine. I asked Mr. F. if he'd ~~###~~ ~~###~~ act as co-pilot again with the operation of the flaps. He said he'd be glad to. After we'd loaded all our luggage aboard the ship I told the passengers I'd like to walk the full length of the runway for one last inspection. Mr. F. said he'd accompany me. I was very happy to find that all the soft spots were now firmly packed with gravel and I knew then that we'd have no trouble. We walked back to the ship, shook hands with many of our friends we'd made in the past two days then climbed in, started up the engines and warmed them right where we sat. There was no other place to taxi the plane for a warm up and engine check out. When I was satisfied that she was ready to fly I got a signal from one of our friends that it was clear to take off so without any further ado I threw on full power, 47 inches of ~~#####~~ manifold pressure (right up to the red line) and we started bouncing down that rough patch. Soon as we hit 80 mph indicated I called for half flaps and then hauled back on the yoke and the bird leaped into the air like it was a homesick angel. We even had runway to spare, not much but enough to at least know we wouldn't have had to be too concerned. I immediately leveled off at 1000 feet and came back on the mixtures to conserve fuel and we headed straight for Villahermosa and landed. Here again we were confronted with the inadequate means of servicing airplanes in Latin America. All the 100 octane fuel is stored in 50 gallon drums and it is an extremely slow and hazardous job to get fuel. Hazardous because you must insist and supervise that they Chamois every drop of fuel in order that you don't get fuel contamination from water and impurities. These barrels had been sitting around the airport for an awfully long time. Condensation inside the barrels had formed rust and the rust had gotten ~~###~~ into the fuel. It was possible to distinguish it was 100 octane from the green color but was certainly very well camouflaged by the dirty brown color of the rust. It looked more like coffee. When we got two barrels into our main tank which gave me 120 gallons and enough to get into Mexico City we ~~###~~ told them we had enough and paid our bill and got out of there. The flight to Mexico City was rough, we ~~#####~~ stayed below the overcast and above the mountain peaks but the air was very turbulent. About the time we passed Mr. Papacatapetl I radioed Vera Cruz tower and asked them to get me the Mexico City weather. Vera Cruz came ~~##~~ right back and said it was clear. But up ahead it appeared anything but clear. We continued on and at no time did the ceilings drop down too low to give us any problem. It was apparent we were bucking a strong head wind along with the very turbulent conditions. About 30 minutes out of Mexico City I noticed that the fuel pressure on the right engine was down to the red line on the gauge. I turned on the boost pump and the pressure went up some but not much. It started gradually dropping again. I hoped we'd be able to make it the rest of the way on two engines but prepared to shut it down and feather the propeller if it dropped below the red line. It held ok and we went on in and landed and the passengers took a taxi into ~~#####~~ the city right away. I stayed behind and told them I'd see them later in the afternoon but first I wanted to get someone on the right engine and see why my fuel pressure was running so low and also make arrangements for the airplane to get a good checking over now that we were at a field where I knew there were people who are familiar with this type of aircraft. Mr. F. said they had reservations at the Majestic Hotel downtown and they'd see me later. I checked with the Mexico City control tower and told them I'd like to have them direct me ~~#~~ to the AeroCommander distributor on the field and that I was unfamiliar with the airport. The tower operators speak both Spanish and English and directed me to the ~~###~~ west side of the airport.

They had directed me to right hanger ok but it didn't appear to be a very active place. The place looked like they'd locked up for the day and I told them so. Just about that time I see a young Mexican fellow driving a Chrysler coming down the ramp between a row of parked aircraft. He looked over at me and I waved at him so he stopped his car and walked over to the ship. I told him who I was, what I was looking for and I could see he was understanding everything I was saying and I also detected through mental telepathy that he was doing some mental figuring as to how much my request would run in U.S. dollars and he seemed to get more and more interested by the minute. Then he said, follow me and he climbed back in his car and I slowly taxied my ship behind his car up through a row of parked aircraft to the spot he told me to chop the engines. I crawled out and he put a form into my hands and a pen and said now write down all the information you gave me and we'll see that you are taken care of as soon as possible. I indicated that I wanted all the spark plugs on both engines taken out and cleaned and put back in; fuel pressure problems looked into, aircraft cleaned inside and out and thoroughly checked over. He said ~~##~~ they'd get at it first thing in the morning and so he told me he'd drive me back to the other side of the field where I could grab a taxi and get into the city. So I unloaded my gear, turned over the key to him and without any further delays he sped me over to the terminal where he found an English speaking cab driver and assured me not to worry about the ship, that it was in good hands and that he'd call me at the majestic hotel that evening and let me know what the charges would be and what they found out about the fuel pressure. The cab driver was a nice fellow, he spoke good English and showed me some of the sights on the way into the ~~##~~ city. We had lots of time for skylarking (looking around) as we got into one of the gosh awful traffic jams I've ever been in. Busses and cars and trucks crawling along on these darn narrow streets, nobody in a hurry, ~~##~~ that is nobody but me who was dying for a hot shower and a cold beer about that time. It took us nearly an hour to get to the hotel, the cab fare was 15 pesos but I gave him 5 peso tip for all his troubles and courtesy. The Majestic Hotel is located on the great square of Zocalo at the center of the city. Surrounding the Zocalo on all four sides are the great public buildings-----the National Palace, the Municipal Palace, the huge cathedral and the arcade of Tradesmen. All these were built shortly after the Spanish conquest. The conquest took place in the 16th century under Hernan Cortes. Mexico City as you know was built on a lake centuries ago. The present cathedral now sits on the exact site of an ancient Aztec temple. Slowly the Aztecs filled the lake little by little until it was completely covered. The city, unfortunately got started and many large buildings were erected before they realized the serious consequences that they were up against. The big problem is settling. There is an absense of tall buildings in Mexico City with the exception of one skyscraper because of the constant problems they have of buildings sinking. The large cathedral is very beautiful but when you look down one city block long isle at the huge columns they appear to be leaning to the right at the altar side of the church and leaning to the left on the front entrance side. It not only appears this way but it is this way. The Majestic Hotel doesn't look like much on the outside but the interior is very nice. Huge lobby and the building has 7 floors. The 7th floor is the restaurant and one can sit next to the large windows while dining and look out onto the great square. At night it is all lit up with yellow lights, coupled with the dirty color of the buildings it gives it a golden hue---most unusual sight to behold. I got into my room and unpacked and the first thing I did was hit the telephone and got a quick connection to Los Angeles and talked to Celia. She hadn't heard from me since I'd called her from Merida on Dec. 25th and outside of one letter and a cablegram I'd sent from Guatemala City on Dec. 28 nothing but silence. Guess she was getting kinda worried. ~~But~~

But I reassured her that I was OK, lost a little weight, was lonesome and homesick and was bitten by bed bugs. Maybe I shouldn't have been so truthful ~~###~~ but I wanted to unload onto someone. I then called the Hughes Company and they were glad to hear we were all OK. They thought it would be a simple thing to just grab a telephone anywhere we went in Latin America and keep them informed as to our whereabouts at all times and couldn't quite understand that this was IMPOSSIBLE at some of our stops. When I talked to Celia I told her we hadn't heard any news from the United States since we'd left on Dec. 20th but the thing I was most interested in other than how my wife and kids were was how did the Rose Bowl game turn out. Found out that Illinois had won it 17-7. After completing my phone calls I couldn't wait any longer to eat so went up on the 7th floor and had a sandwich and a bottle of beer. Man it tasted good; then back to the room where I'd take a hot shower finally; first one since Merida on the 27th. I did take some cold showers in the jungle of Guatemala however. But that hot water took all the kinks out of the system and then I dressed in my suit which I'd been toting all over Mexico and Latin America and had been saving just for Mexico City. I went out for a walk on the busy streets and man was the traffic heavy and the people crowding around. It was hard to walk anywhere for the crowds. I found a day old Chicago Tribune and bought it so's to read all about the Rose Bowl game and then cashed a travelers Check and headed back to the hotel. We all ate in the dining room and being Friday I had fish; Red Snapper to be exact and it wasn't too good. Now that it is all over I find out that I could have eaten meat on Friday in Mexico. Had I known this before it would have made it more simple as I don't care much for fish anyway and when I think back about the lousy shrimp I had to eat at Guadalajara the first night out it makes me sick. After dinner Mr. Ferderber said he'd like to take a walk around the square and we started outside but turned back. It was beginning to rain and it came down in buckets later on that evening. It rained all that night and when I awoke at 6 AM Saturday morning the 4th of January and looked out the window it was still raining. I had planned on taking a tour of the city on Sat. and if it was going to continue to rain it would make a very unpleasant affair of the whole thing. But after breakfast it stopped raining and the sun broke thru and started to clear up. I was on my own, the Ferderbers had been in Mexico City before and had seen some of the places I wanted to go; besides they wanted to go out and buy some furniture to be shipped back to their home in Rolling Hills. I inquired around about getting a tour and was told that if I wanted to have an English speaking cab driver for the whole day I could for the price of 14.00 U.S.dollars. That sounded reasonable enough, especially for the places I wanted to see and after I told him I wanted to drive out to the pyramids of the sun and moon, also the ~~#####~~ Basillica of the shrine of our Lady of Guadalupe and to go to the airport and check on the airplane he said we could do all this for 14 bucks I said "Lets go". First, we drove up to the Basillica. Mike Wall, asked me to be sure to visit the Shrine and take pictures as he was studying about this place in school. I spent an hour there, looking and taking pictures. It is really something to watch the very religious Mexican people who have ~~##~~ traveled many great distances on their knees up to the shrine. They don't care if it is wet or not, or cold nor rough on their knees. Many ladies knees are bleeding by the time they reach the Shrine. I saw the original Tilma (garment) over the main altar that in the year 1531 ~~#####~~ was transformed from a simple Tilma as such it was into the beautiful ~~#####~~ portrait of the Blessed Virgin. A simple Indian convert named Juan Diego was passing by this very hill upon which now stands this tremendous ~~#####~~ Basillica; at that time there was nothing there but a hill and very barren. As Juan Diego passed the hill the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him and requested he proceed to the dwelling of the Bishop of Mexico and tell him she wanted a Shrine be built on that very spot.

He did as he was instructed and of course his story was not believed by the Bishop. But after several other visions Juan Diego was instructed by the Mexican Bishop to bring him a sign if it be true. So the Blessed Mother requested Juan Diego to climb up the hill and he would find many flowers blooming which he was to cut and to bring to Her. Juan Diego did as he was told although on this stony summit no flowers had ever bloomed before. He found a miraculous garden of roses which he cut as Our Lady had asked, and took them to her. She arranged them in his Tilma (Mantle or garment) telling him to take them to the Bishop, this would be the sign. When Juan Diego, radiantly happy, stood before the Bishop and told him of his fourth encounter with the Blessed Virgin, he opened his Tilma to show him the sign as the flowers cascaded to the floor. To the astonishment of the Bishop and his companions, there appeared the Virgin Mary's portrait marvelously painted in the most exquisite colors, upon the coarse fabric of the Indian's Tilma, just as he had described her previously. The mantle or tilma on which the portrait of the Blessed Virgin is imprinted is handwoven from the fibers of the maguey cactus, a fabric of which the ordinary life span is twenty years. It is six and a half feet long by forty-two inches wide with a seam running down the middle. Directly on this rough material is the exquisitely delicate figure of Our Lady, four feet eight inches in height. This image of the Virgin Mary, her only authentic portrait, has remained fresh and lovely for more than four centuries. It can be seen to this day as I was fortunate enough to see it at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, where it occupies the place of honor above the high altar. Several shrines were built on the hill immediately following Juan Diego's encounter with the Blessed Mother but the present Basilica was not completed until the year 1709. From here we motored by taxi about 35 miles north of the city where we came upon the familiar Aztec ruins and the ~~pyramids~~ pyramids of the Sun and Moon. It was here that I took several pictures and was able to purchase my best curios for the best price yet. I got Celia two large ~~Onyx~~ Onyx book-ends and a large Obsidian statue. These are her favorites of all the gifts I brought home from Mexico. One ~~humorous~~ humorous thing I saw on the way was at a roadstand souvenir place. There were two mules tied to a maguey cactus plant. The cab driver said if I wanted to get a humorous movie shot to stand by. He went inside and soon appeared with a bottle of Coca Cola. He then asked me which mule I'd like to have the Coke so I pointed at the small skinny one. He said to get ready with the camera and stuck the bottle, which had been opened, in the mule's mouth. The mule held the bottle firmly in his teeth, lifted his head toward the sky and ~~guzzled~~ guzzled the whole bottle. It turned out to be one of my better shots and the kids laugh like crazy every time they view this scene. We then drove back into Mexico City and the driver took me out to the airport where I checked over the ship. It had been cleaned thoroughly and my Mexican mechanic friend and local pilot told me they had found both fuel pumps pretty well clogged with sludge. It was no surprise with all the lousy fuel we'd been burning. But he had done a good job on the ship and she was ready for the flight Sunday morning on to Mazatlan and Guaymas. The bill for full fuel, oil change and all the mechanical work came to 127.00 dollars (U.S. type) but it was worth it. Saturday night I turned in early; was up at 5:30 AM, went to 6 O'Clock mass at the Cathedral. It was still dark when mass was over. Then I grabbed a cab and went to the field. Wanted to move the ship over to the parking area near the terminal and get some coffee to take along, etc. The cab driver couldn't speak English and to make matters worse we ran into zero zero conditions before we reached the airport. It gets foggy there too at times. This was no time for things to start going sour again but really it had been par for the course you might say. We groped our way to the field, finally found the airplane and then my Mexican friend the mechanic showed up to give me an assist. His name was Chano and for all his courtesy I gave him an orange flying suit that I'd brought along from the Company as a souvenir.

I had lugged it along just in case I needed to do some work on the engine and to save my good clothes in that event. I never had to use it and this was something that he really wanted. They pass them out at work like they are going out of style so it wasn't any great loss or sacrifice on my part. I called the Ferderbers at the hotel and told them not to hurry. It would be at least 10 or 10:30 AM before we could expect to get out of Mexico City. The main terminal was jammed with ~~####~~ people awaiting for the fog to lift so they could get going aboard their grounded airliners. About 9:30 the Ferderbers arrived, we packed the ship with luggage and by 10 AM the fog started burning off. Then the whole airport came ~~####~~ alive, jets started cranking up as did the recipes and so did we and then it was a matter of sitting and waiting our turn to get airborne. We sat for 45 minutes, the airlines seemed to get preference, I would occasionally call the tower to let them know I was still there and we were ready to go but they said they were doing their best to get us out and to standby. By 10:45 we got our clearance for takeoff. Headed west up over the high terrain; the air was very rough again and several big Cumulus buildups were forming. Instead of sitting around below the bases of these clouds I started climbing; at 10,000 feet we went on oxygen and I still kept on climbing. This supercharged model Commander is great; we finally leveled off at 17,000 well on top of everything where the air was smooth. I could have gone well above 20,000 feet if I'd had to. We passed over Guadalajara an hour after takeoff from Mexico City and two hours later we touched down at Mazatlan. We bought the last bit of 100 octane fuel they had at this field but it was enough to fill our main tank and enough to get us to Guaymas and to Hermosillo the following day where we knew they had plenty of 100 octane. We were on the ground only 30 minutes at Mazatlan and were on our way again. Two hours later we touched down on a nice wide dirt runway near the La Posada Inn about 13 miles northwest of the city of Guaymas. A Volks bus ~~###~~ met us and took us to the Inn located on this very picturesque bay. I wanted to call home and have Celia notify the plant that we'd arrived at Guaymas. They had no phone at the Inn and the closest one was in town 13 miles away but a bus would be going into town at 5:30 Pm so I hopped the bus and rode in with one of the employees at the Inn who had finished his shift for the day. He helped me place a long distance call to Celia. She said they were all fine and anxiously waiting for my arrival back home the following day. Boy, they weren't any more anxious than I was. I caught a taxi back to the La Posada, had dinner and hit the sack early. We were up early next morning; airborne by 7:30 ~~###~~ CS and in an hour landed at Hermosillo and quickly took on full fuel, cleared with Mexican Customs in clearing our of their country and then took off for the U.S.A. We landed at Calexico by 11:00 AM and the officer on duty at U.S. Customs was such a Santa Claus that he didn't even ask to look at our luggage or inspect our purchases. He didn't even want to see if we had our small pox vaccination cards; just took our word for it. We got off by 11:30 AM and in one hour and 15 minutes after circling the Ferderbers house in Rolling Hills at the request of the two kids we touched down at Torrance Airport. In another 15 minutes I was back at Culver City and one of the pilots took a company station wagon and helped me load my gear aboard and a few minutes later I was walking up our driveway. This was one of the happiest moments of my life-----and we DID have our Christmas that very evening just like the Mexicans as it was January 6th; the Feast of the Three Kings.