

On tour with Brent & Sid

by Bengt Collin

In the cabin of X-Line 123

"I don't like sitting this far back in the cabin", Brent complained. He and his best mate Sid were returning home after a week in Spain. "But everything worked out well, it's been a fantastic week Sid", he continued with a loud optimistic-sounding voice while he carefully studied the cabin safety instructions. "I Agree, it's been a jolly good time Brent", Sid replied. "In your opinion Brent, what was the highlight of the week", Sid asked. "Me dancing Flamenco", Brent replied instantly with a big smile on his face. Sid remembered far too vividly how Brent, under the influence of a jug of Sangria, the last evening dancing and singing at their local bar. "Viva España"!



Bengt Collin

worked at EUROCONTROL

HQ as a Senior Expert

involved in operational ATC safety activities.
Bengt has a long background as Tower and
Approach controller at Stockholm-Arlanda
Airport, Sweden

"I'm dying for some more orange juice", Brent moaned. "Press the button over your head", Sid replied. "Really?", Brent didn't sound too convinced. "Sure, just press the button". Brent lifted the plastic cup to the panel above his head. "I mean press the button to call the cabin crew"; Sid was looking straight ahead, another two hours to arrival.

In a meeting room at the Centre

The representatives from the company in charge of the software update arrived 15 minutes late. Bert escorted them to the meeting room located

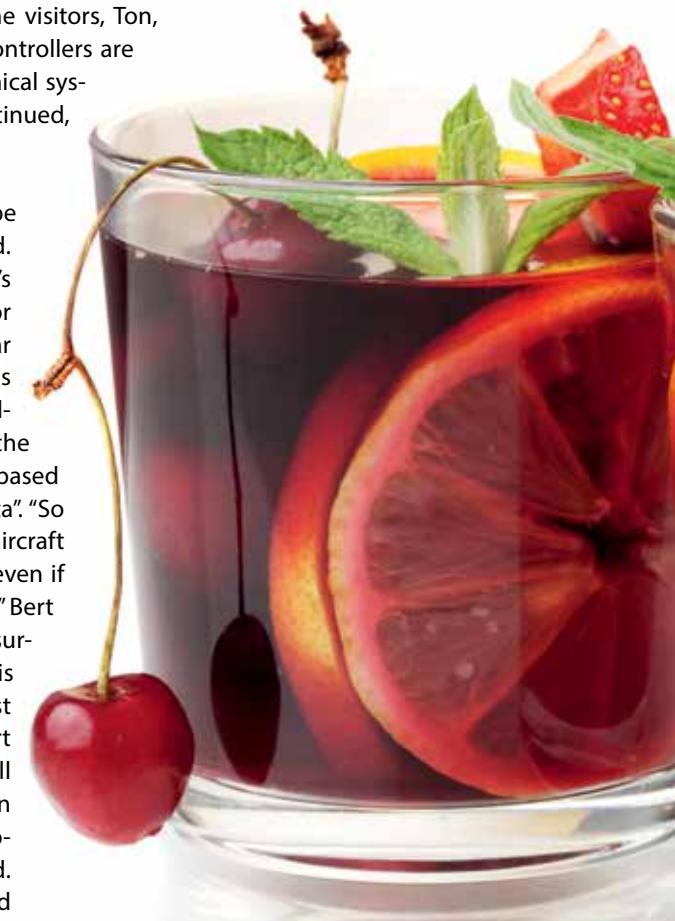
at the ground floor. It was a standard sized room with a large table in the middle. At the far end of the table, together with the usual dry biscuits, coffee and tea was served. Bert remembered the taste of the biscuits only too well.

"We have just installed the new automatic back-up system for the upper airspace radar positions", one of the visiting software engineers named Anthony stated. "We were late so this time we did not involve any operational people in the process" he continued. "We believe it's more important to get the system up and running" another of the visitors, Ton, added. "Besides, the controllers are not interested in technical systems anyhow", he continued, smiling.

"Can you please describe the update", Bert asked. Anthony explained "it's relatively simple; if for any reason the radar data disappears, this system will automatically continue to show the position of the aircraft based on their flight plan data". "So the symbols for the aircraft will continue moving even if the radar data is gone?" Bert asked, sounding a bit surprised. "No problem, this is only installed to assist the controllers, an alert on what happened will immediately be shown at the supervisor's position" Ton responded. "The supervisor should take action as soon as it happens".

On the flight deck of X-line 123

"What are your plans for this weekend" Dirk, the Captain asked his First Officer Paul. "I take the Vespa out to the stables and do some horse riding, later I'll take a ride on my BMW motor cycle, finally I plan to play some golf" Paul answered. And you? "My wife hasn't decided yet, we'll probably continue renovating our new house". "Why not ask for a direct route to BABLA?" Dirk asked Paul in a quiet respectful way.



At the centre

"X-line one two three, fly direct BABLA", Ann looked at her radar screen while replying to X-line's request. Almost two hours in position, she was tired. She was just about to coordinate the direct routing with the next sector when Alexander arrived to release her. From experience she knew it would be no problem even if she should formally have asked first before giving the direct route to the pilots. "I have the full picture Ann, very little traffic" Alexander said, plugging in his headset to the right of her. Ann unplugged hers and headed

for a coffee and a cigarette outside the building. "X-line one two three contact control on one one eight decimal two" Alexander instructed. "One one eight decimal two, X-line one two three".

In the cabin of X-line 123

"They don't serve Sangria Sid, I ordered a double whisky with Campari for each of us instead" Brent explained when Sid returned from the toilet. "Thanks Brent, but you can have mine too".

"Okay Sid and whilst finishing my drinks I'll look out of the window to see if I can see any other aircraft".

At the centre

Stan was reading the morning paper as he normally did before lunch time. The only problem was that he did it while actively working at the centre. "X-line one two three on your frequency"..."X-line one two three radar contact", he returned to his paper.

The supervisor was sitting in the sun together with Ann, also smoking a cigarette and drinking a black coffee. "It's terrible that I can't smoke in position anymore, I spend more time outside the operations room than in position these days" he continued. Ann just lit her

second fag; the sun was shining and the birds were singing. "It will be a nice summer!" she said.

On the flight deck of X-line 123

"OK, direct BABLA is set, it'll save three minutes". "Time for the 'Descent' check list". Both Dirk and Paul looked at their checklists although they knew them by heart.

At the centre

Alexander was looking at the radar screen, he got the impression that the picture froze for a second, then started moving again. Nothing to worry about, it was off peak traffic flows. Stan had just started reading the football results. At this time of the day his work was really boring. They should try some training on how to avoid being bored, he thought to himself and smiled. "X-line one two three TCAS descent". Stan was fully alert in fragments of a second; his newspaper fell to the floor. "X-line one two three copied, there should be no other aircraft near you". He had only two aircraft on the radar screen, X-line just passing PUTTE turning west for BABLA plus another aircraft eight miles south of X-line, heading east. At the supervisor position a red light was flashing. According to information the investigators later received from the software company, the aural warning should be available later during the year.

In the cabin of X-line 123

"Sid, I just saw another aircraft passing over us rather close" Brent was excited, he was in a good mood, having just finished his second drink. "Please don't have any more Brent, or suddenly you'll start dancing Flamenco again"; Sid looked straight ahead and closed his eyes, he needed another holiday. 