

## **Blue Wing Airlines: jungle flying in Surinam**

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Blue Wing Airlines was established in 2002 and is actually the successor of Inter Tropical Aviation (ITA). ITA operated Cessna 206 Stationairs, Islanders, a LET 410, an Antonov 28 and (briefly) a Convair 440 on domestic routes in Surinam.

ITA entered the competition with SLM and KLM on the trans-Atlantic route by starting flights between Paramaribo and Brussels (Belgium) using aircraft from the Belgian airliner CityBird and (later on) the Greece airliner Electra Airlines. Late August 2001, around 800 passengers stranded at Paramaribo after ITA was not able to pay for the Electra Airlines DC-10 they leased. Eventually, the stranded passengers were taken to Amsterdam by SLM and KLM flights, for some with 3 weeks delay, and for own cost of the stranded passengers. Late October 2001, ITA was formally declared bankrupt on request of Dutch ABN-AMRO bank. The licenses for both domestic and trans-Atlantic flights were already withdrawn earlier.

At that time, the managing direction of Inter Tropical Aviation, Amichand Jhauw, was already working on the establishment of a new domestic carrier. During the last tumultuous weeks of ITA, major shareholder S. Guptar acted as spokesman. Amichand Jhauw explicitly stayed on the background causing Guptar to be the “face” of ITA and been seen as the person guilty on the collapse of ITA. The ITA fleet, during the bankruptcy consisting of Cessna U206G Stationair PZ-TGQ and Antonov 28 PZ-TGW, was bought by Guptar during a public sale. During the bankruptcy process was already noticed that there were gaps in the ITA book-keeping, and that according the cashbooks money was withdrawn from the company.

PZ-TGQ and PZ-TGW became the first aircraft of Blue Wing Airlines (named after the Blue Wing, a local bird). Per January 2002, Blue Wing started operations from Zorg en Hoop airfield in Paramaribo with managing director Jhauw. It was started with domestic operations to the many small strips Surinam is owing to mining activities. In the mean time also scheduled services to neighbor Guyana and French Guyana are offered. During 2004 and 2005, four Antonov 28s were added to the fleet. Earlier another former ITA Cessna U206G was put into service. In May 2006, the Antonovs were the only aircraft capable to operate from the inland strips during the severe flooding and were extensively used for relief flights.

Shortly after, the Antonovs caused a lot of commotion in Surinam after Blue Wing was put on the European Union black list of unsafe airliners. The French aviation authority established that “specific safety rules, as recorded in the Chicago Treaty, were not fulfilled” and that “there was no adequate reaction on a query regarding safety issues”. It appeared that the absence of Ground Proximity Warning Systems (GPWS) on board of the Blue Wing aircraft caused the problems. Since 2006, GPWS was already obliged in France, but from 2010 on worldwide. Because Blue Wing received permission to operate on French Guyana, the French insist on putting Blue Wing on the list. It appeared that members of the French diplomacy were advised earlier not to travel with Blue Wing. Late 2007 Blue Wing was removed from the list after GPWS was purchased.

Meanwhile, local newspapers and other media speculated about the safety of the Antonovs. Probably under influence of this negative media attention, new types were gradually introduced into the Blue Wing fleet. During 2007, a Cessna 208 Caravan I was added to the fleet, while at the end of this year the first DHC.6 was purchased.

On April 3, 2008, destiny strikes. During a go-around at the Benzdorp strip, Surinam, Antonov 28 PZ-TSO was lost. The aircraft crashed into the jungle about 150 m next to the strip and burst into flames. All 19 occupants were killed. Among the victims was pilot Soeriani Verkuijl, wife of Amichand Jhauw. Only late October 2008 the Flight Data Recorder was discovered during a

reconstruction of the wreck. The investigation into the accident is not finished yet. The crash again attracted attention to the safety of the Antonov 28. Also was focused on the awkward infrastructure of the (not certificated) inland strips, of which several are privately owned.

From late 2008 on the effects of the economical crisis were felt due to decrease of the mining activities and dropping tourism. Also, on the local market, prices for fuel increased sharp. The scheduled services appear as yet lucrative enough to survive. On last October 15 a second Antonov 28 was lost. PZ-TST broke into two pieces after a hard landing on the Kwamalasamuta strip in the South of Surinam. Luckily all 4 occupants remain uninjured. During November again a new type was added to the fleet when a Reims/Cessna F406 Caravan II arrived. This aircraft will be operated as “executive transport”. Furthermore, a few weeks later, a second DHC.6 was purchased in Australia.

### **The Blue Wing Airlines fleet**

PZ-TLV Cessna U206G Stationair II

PZ-TSA Antonov 28 (former Inter Tropical Aviation PZ-TGW)

PZ-TSB Cessna 208 Caravan I

PZ-TSC Cessna U206G Stationair 6 (former Inter Tropical Aviation PZ-TGQ)

PZ-TSD de Havilland Canada DHC.6-100 Twin Otter

PZ-TSE Cessna U206G Stationair (former Inter Tropical Aviation PZ-TGP)

PZ-TSF Reims/Cessna F406 Caravan II

PZ-TSN Antonov 28

PZ-TSO Antonov 28 (destroyed April 3, 2008 Benzdorp, Surinam)

PZ-TST Antonov 28 (crashed October 15, 2009 Kwamalasamutu, Surinam)

PZ-TSV Antonov 28

December 2009 a second de Havilland Canada DHC.6-100 was acquired.

### **Sources**

- Newspapers De Nieuwe Tijd, Dagblad Suriname and Waterkant.net blog.
- Official European publication “list of air carriers of which all operations are subject to a ban within the community”, June 20, 2006
- Public report of bankruptcy of Inter Tropical Aviation NV