

# Captain Pipe: enjoying retirement

"Try my Guadeloupe punch," says Jose Dormoy, appearing from his kitchen with a glass in his hand. He seemingly has inexhaustible supplies of multiple flavours of his favourite drink, which he says he sacrifices for by not drinking any other alcohol. The moment one glass is empty, he returns with another, set to make sure you taste every flavour while visiting his comfortable Statia home. Thirteen years after making his final Winair flight, the pilot who became a legend during his lifetime is enjoying his retirement. He and his wife Eli (Elisabeth) made sure they sold off some of their business, so they would not have too much to do. Now he fills his days working in his woodshop, playing jeu de boules with Sunday's visitors, flying his Apache from time to time and being a wonderful host to the occasional journalist that visits. Meanwhile puffing his trademark pipe, which landed him the name "Captain Pipe" that most people know him by.

## Premature Baby

Of course there are the unmistakable stories of the good old days. "Once I had to be in San Juan to pick up Rockefeller at 7:00am. That would mean that I would have to sleep there, which I didn't want to do, so instead of going there, I went to Statia. We were sleeping when I heard a knock on the door. "Who's there," I asked. The person said doctor so and so...I forgot his name." He was looking for Captain Pipe. I said "I'm not here," but he insisted. He had a woman who was giving birth to a premature baby and she needed to get to the hospital in St. Maarten a.s.a.p., and of course I couldn't let her die. Someone shined the headlights of his car at the beginning of the runway and another person was at the end with his taillights and we took off. We landed in St. Maarten and the airport was closed, so we couldn't get out. The doctor climbed over the fence, stopped the first car that he saw coming and we hoisted the woman over the fence into the car and they took her to the hospital. And there I was then, like an a.s.h., with an airplane at a pitch-dark airport at 2:00am and I still had to make my 7:00am appointment in San Juan," he recalls.

## Raft and pipe

He remembers the time he was flying, when he suddenly heard screaming in the cabin. As he looked around, he saw people pushing up something and that same thing thrusting him in the back. "There was a life raft under the seat in the plane and someone had inflated it. And this thing was bigger than the volume of the aircraft. So I took my knife and ~~rip~~, he said, making the movement of cutting over his shoulder and then grabbing the steering wheel again. "And we continued like nothing happened."

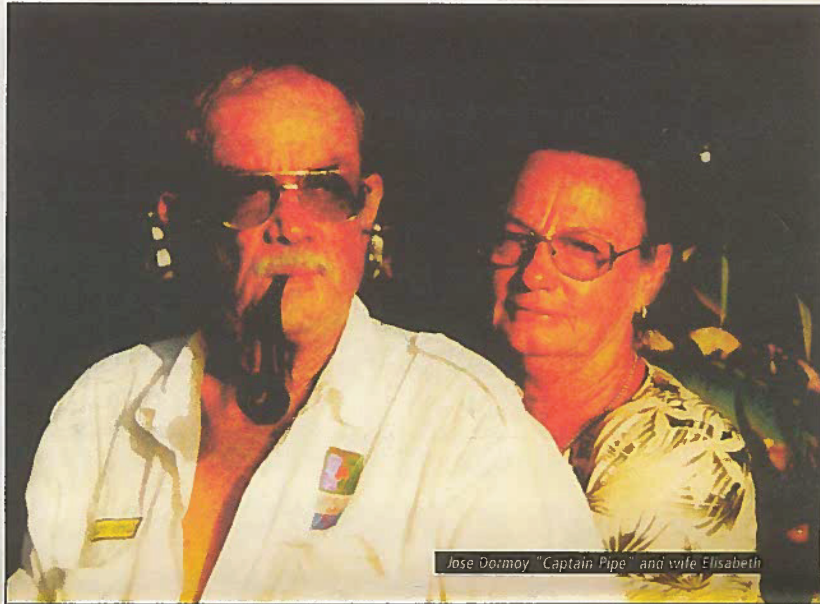
His trademark pipe was also the source of some stories. "Once someone asked me how I could smoke in the plane, being the captain, with the no-smoking signs," he says. "So I took him to the cockpit and asked him if he could see any no-smoking signs there. He couldn't."

## Flying

Born in Guadeloupe on September 18, 1925, Captain Pipe made his way to the US during World War II to learn how to fly and join General de Gaulle and free France from the Nazi's. With his two cousins, Raymond and Saindongo, he sailed out of Vichy-controlled Guadeloupe to Dominica when he was 17, eventually reaching the US, where, lying about his age, he enrolled at the air force flight school. By the time he was ready for battle, however, the end of the war was in sight, so he never really came face-to-face with any German fighter pilots in the air. He reached back home (Guadeloupe) through France when he was 21, where he immediately was offered work by the pioneer who started Compagnie Aérienne Antillaise, which operated from Tintamarre (Flat Island). When that operation ceased to exist years later, he had lost his cousins who he had joined the air force with, to it.

Left without a job, he returned to Guadeloupe, where he ran his own operation with his own plane for a while, until he was asked to fly a plane from Florida to French Guiana. A trip that was supposed to last two weeks kept him in South America for ten years, flying for gold mines.

Then, in 1963, the founders of Windward Islands Airways



Jose Dormoy "Captain Pipe" and wife Elisabeth

International offered him a place in their two-year-old airline and he became its first fully employed pilot. Over the years he would spend an average of 150 hours per month in the air, which may have landed him the informal record flying time of 37,000 hours, 18,000 of which in Twin Otters.

## Distinction

His experience made him the only one during his time with whom Dutch Queen Juliana and later her daughter Princess (now Queen) Beatrix dared fly to Saba. Queen Juliana even decorated him with the Order of Oranje Nassau, which is an exception, as this order is only given to people of Dutch origin, whereas his accent reveals that he is French.

That he deserved this distinction is not something anyone would dare doubt, as the many lives he saved during his service to the Windward Islands are no secret. He could always be called upon, day or night, in case of an emergency. And, he says, as if to underline my thoughts at the end of the day when my own mistake has me seeing my plane back to St. Maarten leaving without me and an obstinate ground handler refuses to start up her computer so I could still make the flight: "If I was still flying, you would have left. I would have radioed St. Maarten that I would be a couple of minutes late, because there was a passenger who was late. But whatever."

