

AUGUST 03, 1945 10H11

THE PAN AMERICAN AIRWAYS SEAPLANE SINKS IN FORT-DE-FRANCE

FLIGHT 216

Sikorsky S 43 B

10 survivors, 4 missing

PILOT: CAPTAIN SHERRILL TAFT SHAW
CO-PILOT: CHARLES THOMAS HAWKINS
RADIO OPERATOR: VASILESKI
STEWARD: MIGUEL
DR. A. MAC DONALD
MRS. H. MAC DONALD
MRS J. HASKILL
D. MINDES (BABY)
MR ROBERT WILSON
MR. H. KEYSER ANDRÉ

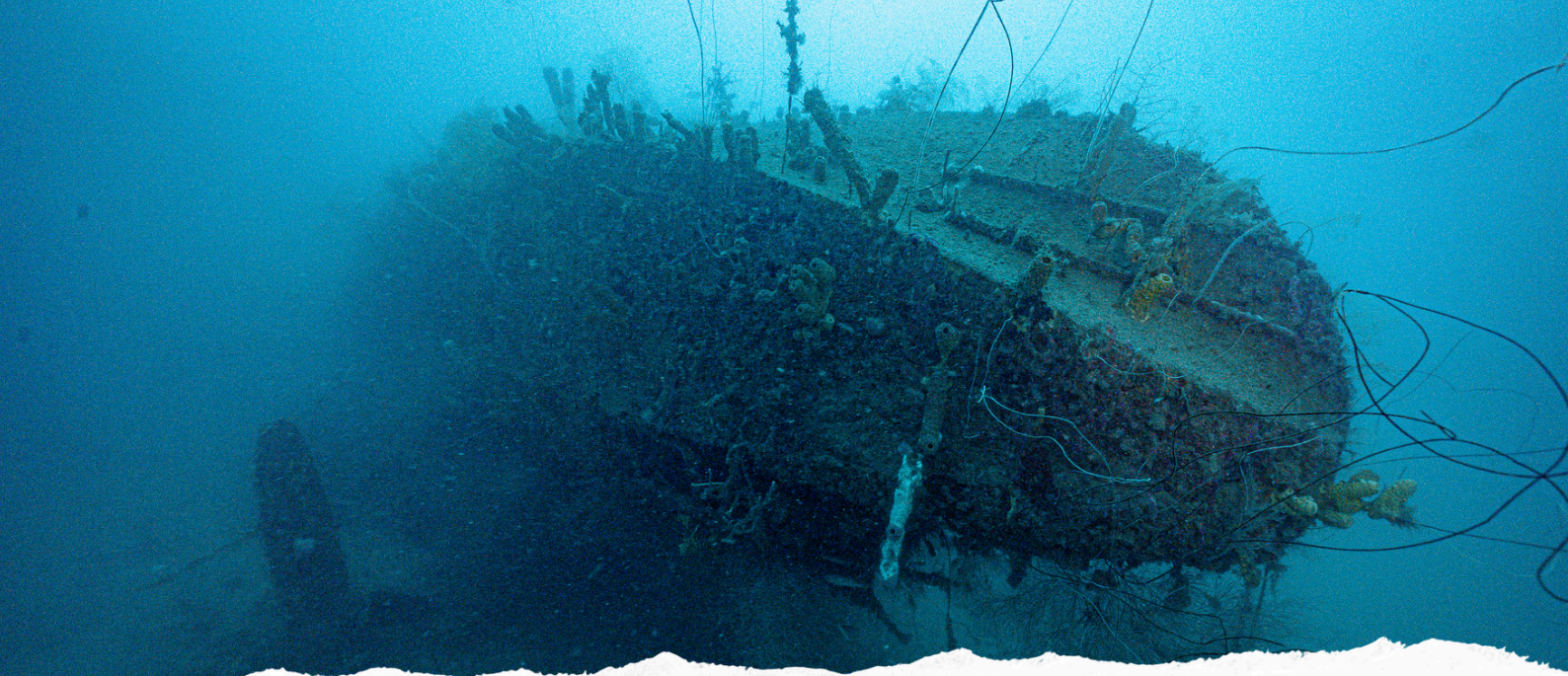
MRS S. MINDES
JOHN MINDES (2 YEARS OLD)
MR CYRIL JOHN
MRS JUDITH JOHN



Passengers boarding the NC15066 / Photo: Sikorsky Historical Archives - Document found by Pascal COMTE-BELLEMEN



Pascal COMTE-BELLEMEN



The nose of the Sikorsky, upside down on the seabed. ©André PiedPalmé



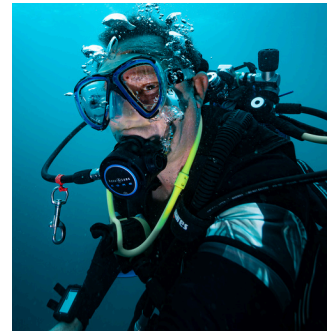
Our surface dive support vessel

Rediscovering Martinique through its forgotten wrecks

Back in Martinique in March 2026, I feel the need to continue what has driven me for a long time: exploring, documenting and photographing Martinican wrecks that are still rarely visited, sometimes almost forgotten. Sites that belong to my heritage, and that tell a different story from the well-known major wrecks like the **Roraima** or the **Nahoon**. For several years, I have been following the work carried out around underwater archaeological heritage in Martinique, notably by **DRASSM**, **DELTA Oceanology** and **CRESSMA**, a club to which I remain attached since it is also where I completed my discovery course. A way, for me, to return to the origins of my own story with diving.



Franck DOLIQUE



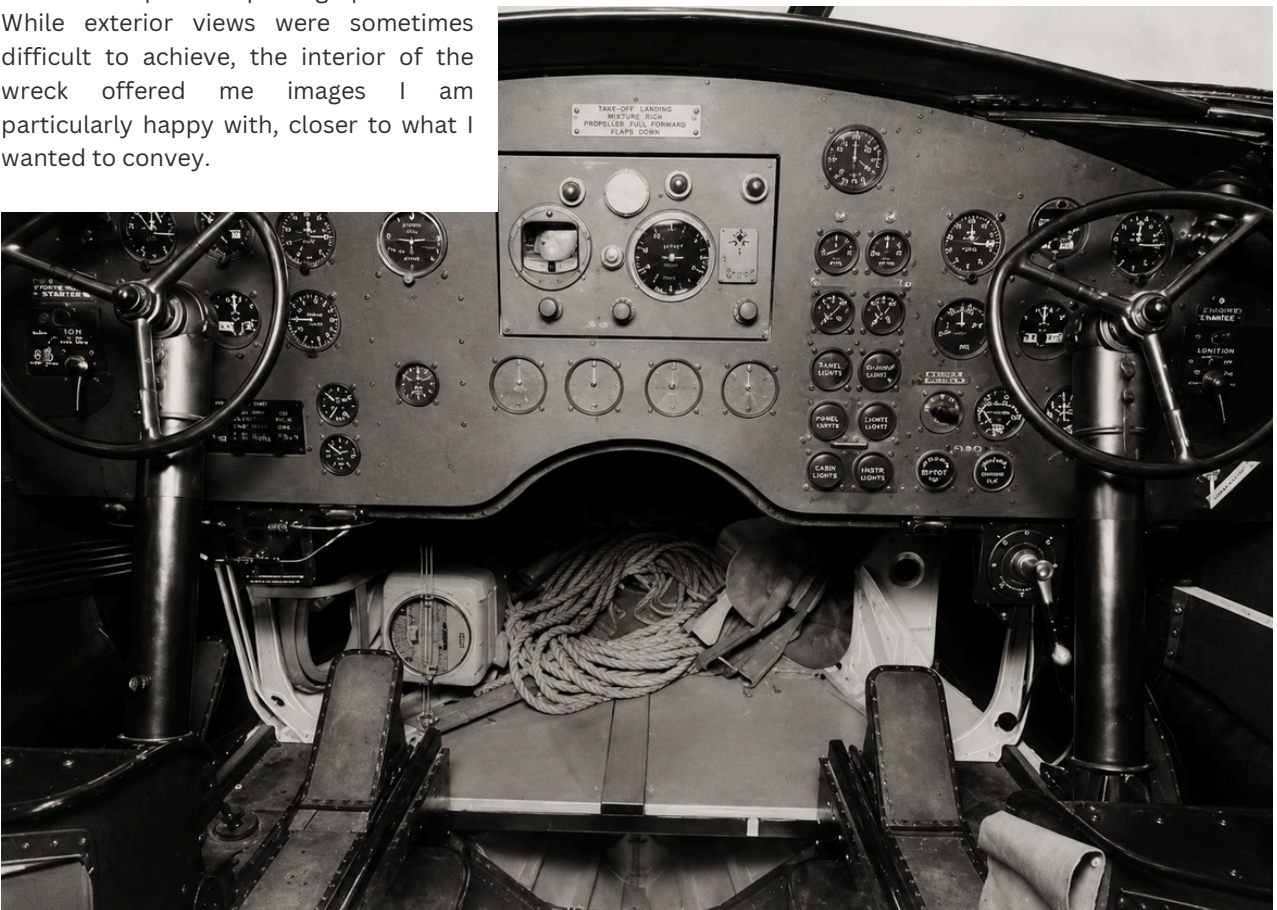
Pascal COMTE-BELLEMIN

The Sikorsky, a meeting around a heritage to be told

It is through this journey that I came to know **Franck DOLIQUE**. A university professor specializing in geosciences of tropical coastal and marine environments, he is also the founder of **DELTA Oceanology**, whose research and outreach work I admire. Above all, I discovered a passionate lover of the underwater world, deeply attached to wrecks. The Sikorsky wreck naturally became our meeting ground. Alongside us, **Pascal COMTE-BELLEMIN**, also passionate about underwater archaeology, joined the exploration. His research on the wreck, conducted through archives, exchanges with Sikorsky's historical collections and several field campaigns, was essential. Without him and Franck, we would neither have located the site with such precision, nor been able to repeat the dives, nor produced the first photographs and photogrammetry.

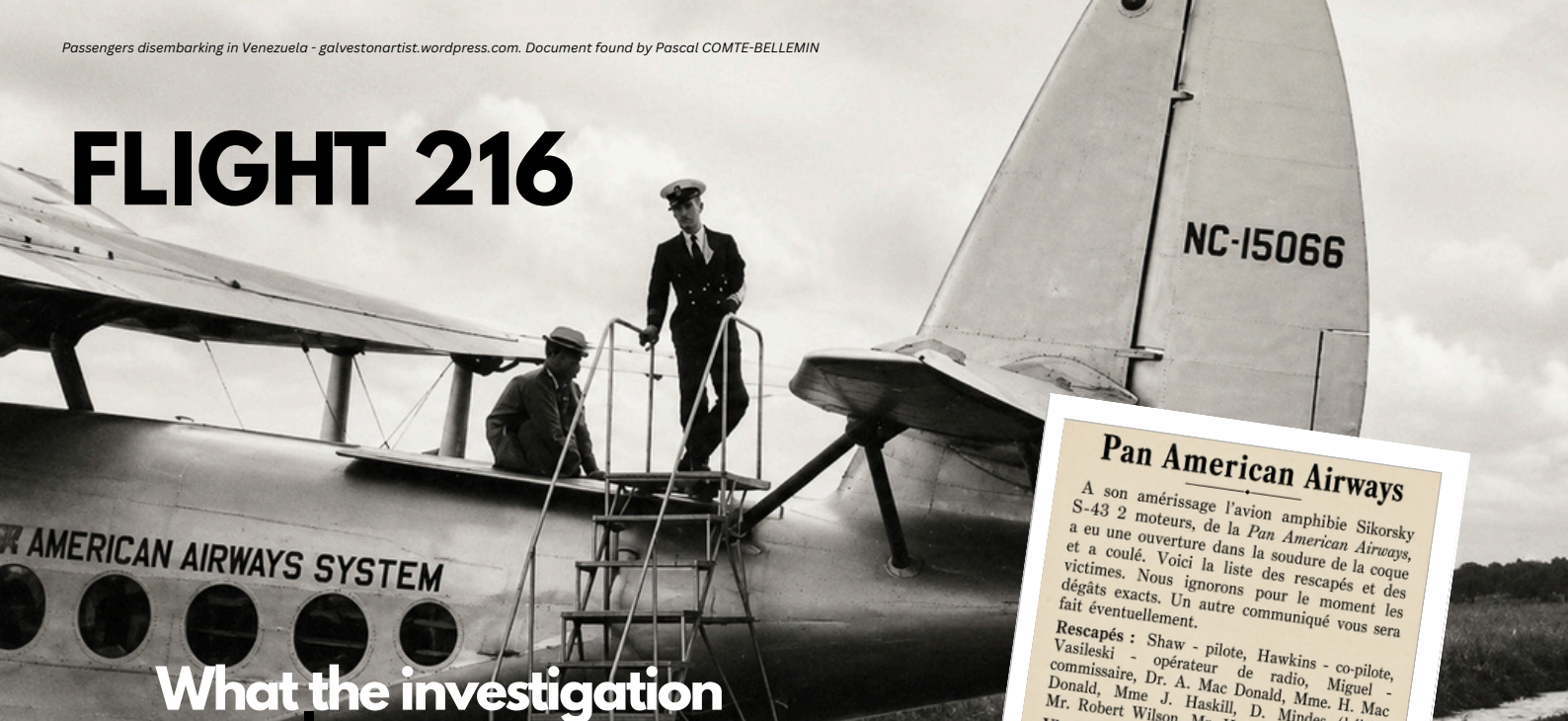


Resting at approximately 35 meters depth, right in the navigation path of the shuttles connecting Fort-de-France to Trois-Îlets, the Sikorsky demands rigorous logistics and constant surface vigilance. The often average visibility further complicates photographic work. While exterior views were sometimes difficult to achieve, the interior of the wreck offered me images I am particularly happy with, closer to what I wanted to convey.



Dashboard of a Sikorsky - Sikorsky Historical Archives. Document found by Pascal COMTE-BELLEMEN

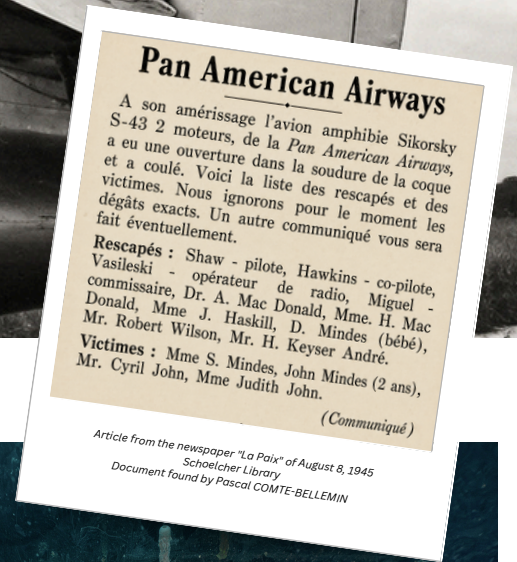
FLIGHT 216



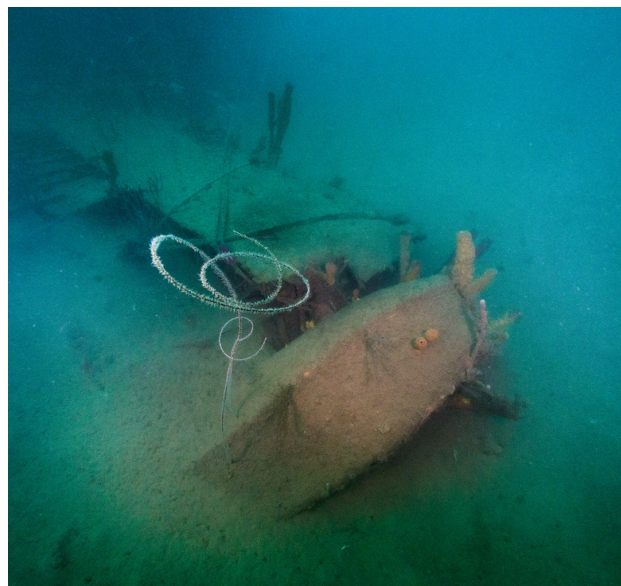
What the investigation reveals

On August 3, 1945, Pan American Airways Flight 216 approached Martinique in increasingly hostile weather. Departing from Trinidad bound for Puerto Rico, the amphibious Sikorsky S-43 B was scheduled to stop in Fort-de-France. On board were ten passengers and four crew members.

The report shows that the accident was not the result of a single event, but of an accumulation of unfavorable factors. The flight took place in unstable weather, behind a tropical depression. Approaching Martinique, the captain encountered turbulence, very poor visibility and heavy showers. The conditions actually observed in Fort-de-France were significantly worse than those communicated by radio just minutes earlier.



Article from the newspaper "La Paix" of August 8, 1945
Schoelcher Library
Document found by Pascal COMTE-BELLEMIN



Located at the tip of the partially broken left wing, one of the Sikorsky's floats.
©André PiedPalmé

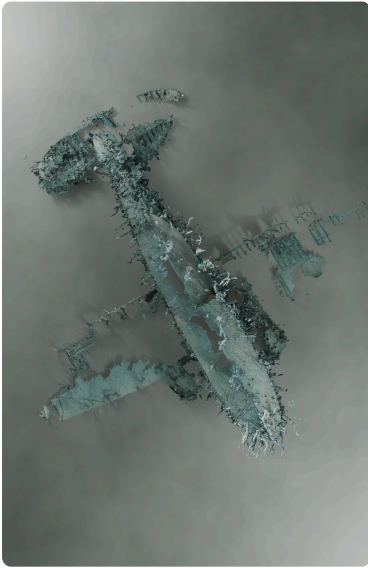


The left engine of the Sikorsky. ©André PiedPalmé

At the same time, the pilot had reason to worry about the reliability of his left engine. A few days before the accident, this engine had been heavily stressed after a failure of the right engine on another flight. During the approach, the captain again noticed abnormal behavior from the left engine. Fearing he could not safely continue to the alternate airport in Saint Lucia, he decided to land on water despite weather conditions exceeding the required maximums.

Land on water or risk worse

The water landing was attempted in a rarely used area of the port, under rain so dense that the pilot could only see the water surface at the last moment by opening a side window of the cockpit. The aircraft hit the crest of a 1.20 to 1.80 meter swell. The pilot immediately tried to apply full throttle, but the left engine did not respond. The nose plunged, the plane yawed, a wing float broke off and the Sikorsky flipped upside down before sinking.

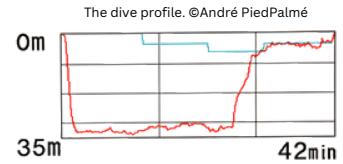


The Sikorsky reconstructed in 3D ©André PiedPalmé

Reconstructing the Sikorsky, differently.

This first image marks a first in my work: the complete photogrammetric reconstruction of a wreck. It is an approach I had long wanted to explore, inspired notably by the work of **Gatien Cosendey**, whose achievements in this field have greatly impressed me. The result does not yet reach the precision I hoped for, particularly

in the rendering of textures, but it already allows one to embrace the Sikorsky as a whole, as no single photograph could. To achieve this, an entire dive had to be dedicated to this sole mission: 42 minutes at 35 meters, 877 photographs, nearly 20 GB of data, and three complete circuits of the wreck at three different heights to cover its volumes as best as possible.

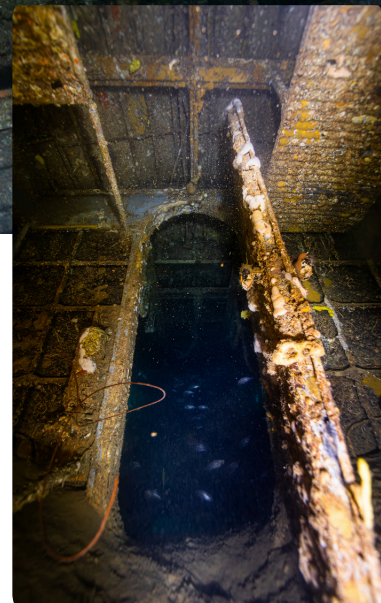


In the intimacy of an upside-down world



The cabin interior, seats and portholes still intact ©André PiedPalmé

Inside, the Sikorsky offers a striking vision of an upside-down world: the aircraft rests on its back, and the seats are still suspended from the ceiling. Access is through two openings located beneath the wreck; the archives later taught me that the larger one corresponded precisely to the panel through which passengers once boarded. It can be seen notably in the period images presented on the cover and on page 4. The space is narrow, fragile, and the wreck could one day collapse upon itself, permanently sealing these almost ephemeral access points.



A door separating the main cabin interior from the luggage compartments. ©André PiedPalmé

Acknowledgments

Thank you to **Franck DOLIQUE** and **Pascal COMTE-BELLEMIN** for their trust and the precious sharing of their research on the site; to my father, captain of the support vessel; to Télissa for her presence by my side; as well as to my partners and friends: **Diving Factory** who supports me with the precious **Bigblue Dive Light Europe** lighting, **LowCar Garage**, and to all of you who continue to follow our adventures with wonder.