

PAUL J. IOANNIDIS

In the first days of 1943, Paul Ioannidis, aged 18, joined Force 133, an allied military unit acting in the Greek mountains against the German occupation. In June 1944, in compliance with the orders of the Middle Eastern Allied Command, he and two British officers escaped from Greece and reached Cairo via Turkey.

When the war was over, King George VI honored him with the King's Medal for Courage (K.M.C.) of the British Empire for bravery during the war. He was also awarded with an honorary diploma by the British Field Marshall Lord Alexander. As an action of protest, he returned these distinctions to Charles Peake, the British Ambassador in Athens, on May 10, 1956, the day the Cypriot fighters of EOKA, Karaolis and Dimitriou were hanged in Cyprus. He stated that these distinctions had no value for him when those Cypriots were executed for fighting to liberate their country just like he himself had done for Greece.

He received his training as a fighter pilot at the then South Rhodesia RAF Training Centre and later on he served in the Royal Hellenic Air Force until 1947. Then, discharged, he was employed by the Greek national carrier TAE, consequently turned into Olympic Airways (OA), when Aristotle Onassis acquired the company in 1957. In Olympic, he offered his services as Instructor, Chief Flight Instructor, Chief Pilot, Flight Operation Director and finally as Director General till December 1974 when Onassis denounced the contract and turned the company back to the Greek State.

By his will, published in December 1975 Aristotle Onassis established the "Alexander S. Onassis" Foundation and appointed Paul Ioannidis a lifetime member of the Board. Ioannidis continued with OA flying as Captain of BOEING 747 aircraft till February 1984 when he retired. During his career in the civil aviation he has flown as Captain and Instructor various fixed wing planes and helicopters logging approximately 24.000 hrs. For 12 years he was flying the Royal Family of Greece on civil and military airplanes.

In the same period (1975-1984), he was in parallel involved with the business activities of the Onassis Foundation where he finally undertook the duties of Chief Executive Officer of Shipping and Commercial Operations as well as Vice President of the Foundation's Public Benefit Activities.

Since the mid-50s, it was well known within the Airline Industry, that the main contributing factor leading to an accident not only in the field of transportation (land, sea and air) but in every field where a human being is involved, is the "weakness" of the "Human Factor". This serious "Human Weakness" cannot be eliminated altogether but can definitely be reduced to the minimum possible. This was eventually faced within the Airline Industry quite successfully by proper initial and recurrent training which included but was not limited to: planning ahead, strict compliance with procedures according to manuals and/or checklists, with National and International Regulations, teamwork and co-ordination, briefing, de-briefing, developing right mentality and becoming self-disciplined. This was the so called by the industry "Airline Concept".

Nevertheless, the degree of reduction of this serious weakness, in order to improve safety also depends on the willingness and commitment of each individual to strictly comply with all the above.

With a deep knowledge of the Airline's philosophy and a long experience as Instructor, he decided to implement the "Airline Concept" to shipping where he was actively involved since April 1977.

He organised in-house four day training seminars on various subjects, mainly affecting safety, the duration of which eventually increased to ten days, for deck and engine officers. At the same time, a new Ship's Operation Manual was issued to cover in detail the philosophy and the mentality of the "Airline Concept".

As from October 1979, he initiated Bridge Simulator Training by sending Masters and Chief Officers to the Southampton College of Nautical Studies in England. After a preparatory period of more than 4 years, in October 1982, he implemented the "Airline Concept" to the Tanker and Dry Cargo fleet of the Onassis Group very successfully. This was a worldwide pioneering step taken by the Group, in an effort to improve safety aboard vessels and protect the marine environment.

This was not an easy task. It took considerable time and effort, mainly due to the need of changing the prevailing mentality of the seafarers coupled with a high cost involved, but it was a must.

It is to be noted that, since the early '90s, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the US Coastguard and other organisations started studying how the "weakness" of the "Human Factor" affects safety, specifically at sea. Consequently, IMO's recognition of the negative role of the "Human Weakness", through the implementation of the International Ship Management (ISM) Code in 1998 and the 1995 amendments to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping of seafarers (STCW) were all very positive contributors towards enhancing safe operations, coming 15 years after the Onassis Group's initiative to apply the "Airline Concept" in shipping.

He served as President of all the companies the late Christina Onassis owned as well as one of the executors of her will and member of the committee set up to manage the property of her under age daughter Athina. Furthermore, he was:

- Member of the Board of the Union of Greek Shipowners (UGS) for 21 years (1979-2000), Vice President for 6 years, member and eventually President of the UGS Training Committee for 14 years. When he stepped down he was granted the title of Member Emeritus.
- Member of the Board of HELMEPA for 9 years, Vice President for 1 year and President of the Training Committee throughout his term at the Board. He decisively contributed to the organization of HELMEPA Training Programs as well as the publication of a Ship's Operation Manual for its Members. When he stepped down he was granted the title of Member Emeritus and was awarded the Association's silver medal for his contribution to the training of the seafarers.
- Lifetime member of the American Bureau of Shipping (ABS), Member of the ABS Council since 1990 and Member of its Board for 10 years up to April 2004. President of the Greek National Committee of ABS for about 10 years. Following his stepping down he was named Council Emeritus.
- Member of the UK Protection and Indemnity Mutual Club for 8 years up until February 1994.

Paul Ioannidis, as a lifetime member, continues to participate at the Board of the Onassis Foundation. He is a Member of the Advisory Committee of the Foundation and he bears the title of Vice President Emeritus for the services he has rendered to it.

He wrote his biography titled "*And if you are not, you will become...*" which was published by the publishing house A.A. Livanis in December 2007.

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