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Flying Handyman

Into the select group of scheduled international airlines last week flew a brash, tough newcomer. Transocean Air Lines, Inc., whose home field is Oakland, Calif., made a deal with Venezuela to operate a twice-a-week service between Caracas and Rome. Transocean was no pin feathered newcomer to flying; it is already the biggest contract carrier in the world. More remarkable, in the money-losing flying business, it has made money ever since it started 2½ years ago. To do so, it has become a jack of all airline trades and a master of several. Some of its deals:

¶ Starting an airline for Pakistan between Karachi, Colombo, London and Singapore. Transocean is buying the planes in the U.S., training Pakistan crews at Oakland, and, while they are getting airborne, will fly the routes with its own planes and pilots. Transocean's fee: \$1,000,000.

¶ Running a flying school and the all-weather experimental landing field at Arcata, Calif. (TIME, Oct. 18).

¶ Repairing planes for other airlines on 16 maintenance bases in Europe and on Pacific islands, and overhauling some of the Air Force's Berlin airlift planes.

¶ Constructing airfields anywhere in the world.

Sit & Think. The boss who watches over all these trades plus 1,700 employees and 16 air transports is Orvis Nelson, 41, a brawny airman who flew United Air Lines planes for twelve years. Nelson, an imaginative Minnesotan who writes short stories in his spare time, says: "You don't just sit the re and fly. You think." Flying for United, Nelson thought the airlines were overlooking too much contract business. After the war (in which he served as civilian pilot in the Air Transport Command), he and 14 other pilots rented twelve surplus Army planes and later raised \$140,000 to form Transocean. Nelson still spends most of his time piloting Transocean planes (his wife, a former United Air Lines stewardess, still occasionally flies with him, as stewardess). On his flights he keeps a sharp eye out for new business; so do his pilots. One recently took off with a load of Army supplies for Germany. In Paris he loaded up with Jewish emigrants bound for Australia, in Australia he drummed up a cargo of meat for Guam; from Guam he carried furloughed workers to Oakland, Calif., where Transocean headquarters sent him back to Windsor Locks, Conn., his starting point, with airplane parts. Transocean got its first big contract—ferrying 7,000 British immigrants to Canada (TIME, April 19)—when one of its navigators in Rome heard about the need for transportation and tipped off Nelson.

Cash & Carry. Such hard selling accounts for Transocean's gross of \$800,000 every month and net of \$268,746 so far this year. It has also given Transocean a black mark with the Civil Aeronautics Board. CAB thinks that Transocean has stepped up its domestic and transatlantic flights to a point where it is in direct passenger competition with the hard-pressed scheduled lines. CAB will shortly hold hearings to see if Transocean should reduce its services.

Transocean thinks there is a different remedy. It feels that the scheduled lines could get more business if they knew how to go after it. Says Nelson: "We have the know-how, [that's why] we have more business than we can handle."