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And many, many other kind Americans

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MIAMI, FLA. 14:20
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Dear Friends of the Trust,

This is not turning out to be a good summer.

I'm writing this in Miami where I am in court facing a multi-million dollar civil lawsuit. As some of you know, I am being sued for several million dollars in damages by lawyers representing Eugene Hasenfus, a highly skilled and brave load-master who worked on the Contra airlift.

Earlier this year I thought that there was finally light at the end of the tunnel and that Iran-Contra was fading into history.

Of course, our tax dollars are still financing the Special Prosecutor and his activities but apparently he is now focusing on the role President Reagan and George Bush played in the Iran-Contra affair.

I had hoped that during this summer I would have some peace and quiet and time to try and patch my life back together, get a job and start work on some other projects. That was not to be.

You may remember that in October 1986, some months before the newspapers revealed details of the secret Contra resupply operations a C-123 aircraft was shot down in Nicaragua.

The lone survivor from the crash was Eugene Hasenfus, the load-master or "cargo kicker".

The load-master's job is to rig the parachutes used on the cargo and, once given clearance by the pilot, eject the load from the aircraft as it passes over the drop zone.

The aircraft was hit by a Soviet made SA7 missile. This is a shoulder fired, heat seeking missile. Mr. Hasenfus was wearing a parachute and, luckily, was standing near a door and was able to bail out without injury.

He was quickly captured by the Sandinistas and, though he was

treated fairly well by them, he apparently talked in detail about the resupply operation, the equipment we were using, our bases, etc. In direct violation of operational procedures he also carried with him various documents which gave Sandinista intelligence more valuable information.

He was given a quick show trial, sentenced to 30 years in prison and released some weeks later. My understanding is that he is currently unemployed and living in Wisconsin where he is writing a film script about his adventures.

This is where things get interesting.

A lawyer solicited Hasenfus many months ago and tried to sue me and others including Southern Air Transport, the air-cargo company from which the resupply operation was buying various services needed to support the Contra airlift project.

The case was thrown out of court in California and in the District of Columbia. Not put off by the rejection of two Judges the attorney still smells money and has filed the case in Miami where a Judge agreed to hear it.

The lawyer has also convinced the wife of one on the other crew members (a flier by the name of "Buz" Sawyer who tragically died in the crash) to join in the suit.

The lawyer for Hasenfus has brought a number of charges, which lawyers will do. But the key charge against me is that I somehow contributed to the shooting down of the aircraft through negligence and that I misled Hasenfus as to the dangers involved in the operation.

This is absurd.

I never talked to, wrote to or had personal contact with these individuals -- their contact was entirely with the personnel responsible for the operational details of the airlift. In fact, at the time I was in Europe negotiating the release of two hostages.

Hasenfus and the other air-crew were well aware of the risks involved in the operation from personal experience (Hasenfus had made around 40 clandestine drops in Nicaragua). He, like the other air and ground crews involved in the airlift had a contract spelling out the risks, death benefits, etc.

These were experienced combat air-crews who had flown in various conflicts in various parts of the world. They knew full well that the occupational hazard of flying resupply missions is that sometimes you get shot at. That's war.

They also knew of specific dangers from CIA conducted briefings where they received the latest satellite information on Sandinista activities.

In fact, they received a briefing from a CIA officer, complete with photographs of the area, minutes before they took off. In addition, they had flown into the same area of Nicaragua many times.

Hasenfus had previously flown these kind of resupply missions in South East Asia and knew that as "mercenary" he risked his life. He was paid \$3,000 a month, \$750 a flight and all food and lodging expenses. Fact is, he was making a decent living doing what he had done for many years.

With regard to negligence, the aircraft were equipped with sophisticated radar and new LORAN and OMEGA systems that allowed the crew to navigate with pinpoint accuracy.

Since this was a civilian operation he was not under military discipline and could not be ordered to fly. He could easily have refused to fly, quit or walked away from the base at any time.

I felt and still feel badly for the families of the men who died on the flight; they were lovers of freedom and men of action and commitment. I feel the same way for others who died during Iran-Contra. However, it is a fact that we were in a war zone and people get killed in wars.

But it is a sad commentary on our legal system that lawyers can hunt for a court in an effort to sue on behalf of a man who suffered no injury, who was well paid and knew exactly what he was getting into.

Frankly I blame the lawyers, not Hasenfus himself.

We make jokes about "ambulance chasing" lawyers but I hope you never find yourself the victim of a frivolous lawsuit.

The costs are enormous and the drain on my time is both frustrating and costly. I assume that Hasenfus and his lawyer are looking for an out-of-court settlement before the trial since they must know they cannot win and hope we will want to avoid the cost, publicity, etc.

I had tried to represent myself in this case up until one month before the trial but realized I was setting the stage for a courtroom disaster.

At this time, Tom Spencer has agreed to represent me and since then has worked 16 hours a day and seven days a week on my defense.

You may remember Tom as the attorney who represented Gen. Singlaub and the rest of us in the infamous Christic case. (Which is not yet over and which is another example of how a cunning lawyer can use the system to terrorize his victim.)

Tom took on the case knowing that I do not have the money to pay for my defense. As you no doubt know, the costs of taking

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depositions, traveling to meet witnesses, court filing fees, stenographer fees -- not to mention attorney fees -- add up quickly.

If I lose this case, I don't know what Hasenfus expects to gain from me -- I have little left for him to take -- except debts.

At this writing, I still have \$300,000 in unpaid bills resulting from the Iran/Contra trial. I had hoped the Trust could make a \$50,000 spring payment and we did indeed come close which was good news.

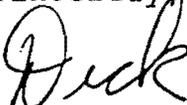
Once again, I am indebted to those who helped.

But this added burden of the Hasenfus case requires I ask my friends if they will help the Trust again.

Will you help with a contribution?

I am not going to ask for a specific amount, I'll leave that to you. But the Trust has set a goal of raising \$25,000 to pay the costs of my defense in this case.

I've enclosed the usual envelope and if you can help with a check I'd deeply appreciate it.

Sincerely,


Richard V. Secord

Postscript: We are approaching the third week of the trial with three weeks left to go.

To those who contributed to the last appeal made by the Trust I want to apologize for not thanking you before now. With this new trial I have been staying in Miami and spending my days with the lawyers in preparation for this trial and have not been able to attend to this and many other matters. Let me take this opportunity to offer my sincere thanks and appreciation for your help.

The plaintiffs seem to have an army of lawyers lined up against us here in Miami. So far, the Trust has been able to advance \$16,000 to Tom Spencer and the lawyers who are helping him defend me in this legally complex case. I would like to make an additional payment of \$5,000 by August 20th. Can I count on you to make a contribution before then?