

PILOT FOR HIRE

... Begin cortex news feed for June 12th, 2514

SENATOR WEATHERBY DEAD

Although details are still coming in at this time, we can confirm that Senator Alexander Weatherby is missing and presumed dead. Senator Weatherby was the senior Member of Parliament from Persephone and served in that position for over 15 years. The Senator is better known throughout the system as the 'Voice of the Browncoats.' It was Senator Weatherby who successfully led the campaign to grant clemency to all the independent soldiers who fought against the Alliance in the War of Unification. It is ironic that the Senator was fulfilling the promise he made, in his recent Unification Day speech, to visit the outer planets at the time of his death.

Sources in the military tell us that Alliance Lieutenant Edward Blake, who was in command of the Senator's transport, is being questioned in the affair. However, it is too early to know if the Lieutenant will face any kind of court martial.

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OUTER PLANETS IN UPROAR AFTER SENATOR WEATHERBY DEATH RULED ACCIDENTAL

More information has come to light about the mysterious events preceding the disappearance of Senator Alexander Weatherby. It appears that Alliance Lieutenant Edward Blake, the commander of the Senator's transport, admitted to ejecting the transport's third passenger module after coming under attack by unknown aggressors.

The Lieutenant believed that Senator Weatherby was in his stateroom, located in the middle (or second) passenger section, but the Senator was instead giving interviews to the press corps in the rear compartment. By dropping one of the three cargo modules, Lieutenant

Blake was able to evade the attacker and save the rest of his unarmed transport.

Although the identity of the attacker is still unknown, our sources in the military have completely discounted the rumors that it was done by so-called "reavers." In the words of one high level official: "Poppycock! Reavers only exist in the tall tales of men who have been in space too long."

Key Members of Parliament are calling for a further investigation to clear up two questions that still remain unanswered at this time: first, why was the armed escort ship assigned to the Senator's transport delayed; and second, what happened to the visual records from the Senator's transport that could have confirmed Lieutenant Blake's story. Lieutenant Blake, who was decorated for exemplary service during the war, remains unavailable for comment at this time.

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BUTCHER BLAKE ALLOWED TO GO FREE

In an unprecedented miscarriage of justice, Lieutenant Edward Blake was allowed to leave the Alliance Space Service to avoid punishment for his part in the death of Senator Alexander Weatherby. "It is an outrage . . . there were twenty-seven of our kids in that passenger pod," was the reaction of Walter Hicks, Managing Editor of the Alliance News Network.

Alliance Space Command has stated that no further information is available and the matter is closed. However, Blake is not completely off the hook. "The families of Blake's victims will not rest until he is brought to some kind of justice. If the criminal courts will not give them satisfaction, we will have to use the Civil Courts," said a spokesman from the law firm of Baker, Chan, and Wu.

EDWARD "NED" HANCOCK BLAKE [Call Sign: "Mother"]

Agi d10 **Str** d6 **Vit** d8 **Ale** d10 **Int** d6 **Wil** d8; **LP** 16; **Init** d10+d10

Traits Born Behind the Wheel (Major Asset), Talented: Pilot (Major Asset), Branded (Major Complication), Dead Broke (Minor Complication), Things Don't Go Smooth (Minor Complication)

Skills Athletics d6, Discipline d4, Guns d6, Pilot d6/Aerial Navigation d8/Astrogration d8/Mid Bulk Transport d12/Patrol Vessel d10/Short Range Shuttle d12, Unarmed Combat d6

Equipment Pistol (8 rounds, ROF 3, d6 W), change of clothes

Description First child of Martin McCall Blake and Deidre Marie Hancock Blake. Born 23rd September 2482, Westfield City on Beaumonde, where his father was an upwardly mobile junior executive in DynaCorp, a manufacturing corporation. [Bought out by Blue Sun in 2499.]

Blake's parents and infant brother (Armand Kendrick Blake) were killed in a shuttle crash while on vacation on Bellerophon, 10 July 2487; Ned survived with only minor injuries. His maternal grandparents Ulysses Marlborough Hancock (age 48; a colonel in the Alliance military) and Marjorie Winifred Taylor Hancock (age 47) took him in.

He was raised on a number of Alliance military bases where the Colonel (later General) was stationed. A member of the Alliance Youth at the age of thirteen, Blake joined the Alliance army at seventeen and transferred to Alliance Aerospace Corps at nineteen after displaying superior talent as a pilot.

When the Unification War began in April 2506, Blake was serving as a Lieutenant, Junior Grade, with the 222nd Tactical Transport Squadron attached to the 7th Space Wing.

Blake was promoted to Lieutenant and decorated (equivalent of Silver Star) during the recapture of Boros in Feb. 2507. The delivery of ammunition to a brigade under heavy fire allowed the unit to resist a determined Independent assault and repulse it with catastrophic loss to the enemy.

Blake's grandfather was killed in action leading his division (24th Mechanized Air Assault: "Black Eagles") at the Battle of Greenleaf on 3 July 2508, a major Alliance victory. He was posthumously decorated (equivalent of Medal of Honor).

In February of 2511, Blake was flying troops and supplies in the Hera Campaign and was decorated (equivalent of Navy Cross) at

Serenity Valley when he used a transport to lift in the 11th Commando Battalion to Hill 642, a dominant position on the Independent left flank, in a maneuver which led to the breaking of their last MLR. He flew 23 sorties in 72 hours to keep the 11th supplied and to evacuate wounded. (Also received equivalent of Purple Heart and a Presidential Unit Citation).

In August of 2512 he was promoted to Lt. Commander and attached to Alliance Fleet HQ. His new assignment was to the 1st Special Executive Transport Squadron, "The Golden Ducks," all of who are pilots of politicians, dignitaries, and the affluent elite.

Recent Events On January 2514 Blake was assigned as primary pilot to Senator Alexander Weatherby, a former Independent general and hero of the Battles of Verbena and Three Hills (major Alliance defeats). Senator Weatherby was now a symbol of the unification of old enemies and a figurehead of the cooperation of former Independent Border worlds with the Alliance Core planets. His ship, *Samaritan*, is a converted ore carrier with three separate in-line pods for passenger transport. Though underpowered, it is a sturdy vessel quite capable of long flights.

On Friday 13 April 2514, the *Samaritan* was scheduled for a flight from Ariel to Three Hills where Senator Weatherby was to speak to a large gathering of Independent veterans, extolling the virtues of the Alliance. A mysterious system failure warning light grounded one of the two escorting Lightning HF's while the other was detached to "aid in the apprehension of a smuggler's transport." Senator Weatherby, not wanting to be late for his scheduled speeches, ordered the *Samaritan* to fly unescorted. At 2342 AST, nearly eighteen hours out from Ariel, a Reaver ship appeared out of nowhere and attacked the *Samaritan*. Attempting to outrun the Reavers proved impossible; only superior maneuvering kept them from securing grapples. Blake, making quick calculations with the help of co-pilot Lt. David Chang, decided upon a harsh solution: by jettisoning the aft-most passenger pod, the *Samaritan* would be able to outrun the Reaver ship. The third pod was chosen as it had the fewest occupants (27 members of the Press Corps), was best located for trim of the ship, and was in the best position to theoretically crash into the closely following Reaver. The pod was jettisoned, striking the pursuing vessel a glancing blow. The *Samaritan* outran the Reaver, who turned back to grapple the pod. The ship and the remaining 78 passengers and crew

were saved. Unfortunately, Senator Weatherby, without informing the flight deck, had gone back to the press pod to give interviews.

Aftermath The resulting political firestorm was of Biblical proportions. Former Independents angrily decried the “murder” of their favorite son; the Press, who had lost quite a few well known personalities, broadcast hours of indignant rants against the injustice done to members of the Fifth Estate and even shot a few jabs at the military’s inability to protect space lanes; and the Alliance was forced to perform hurried damage control. A scapegoat was needed and the pilot of the vessel looked ideal. Blake was court-martialed, found guilty, stripped of rank, had his decorations rescinded, and was dishonorably discharged with extreme prejudice in record time.

In another lightning fast series of civil trials, all of Blake’s savings and holdings were confiscated as payment to grieving relatives of the “sacrificed” reporters. Ironically, 11 of the 27 were multimillionaires at the time of their death; the others were all far better paid than a Lt. Commander. The excoriation continued unabated for months; all major networks spent hours with bits on “Butcher Blake,” “Leave ‘em behind Blake,” “Reaver Blake,” “Blake the

Bolter,” and “Baby-Killer Blake” [the youngest victim actually was 25, but all possible images of Weatherby kissing and holding babies were dredged up. The popular public perception became that there was a large kindergarten on the jettisoned pod. It was so badly received that a common space slang term of “do a Blake” or “make like Blake” has come to mean dropping cargo to evade capture (“Make like Blake and get us outta’ here before that gorram Fed catches us!”).

A small independent film company rapidly produced a hagiography of Weatherby (and quite a few reporters who took on Christ-like nobility in the story) called “The Great Betrayal.” Blake was portrayed by a black-clad Rasputin lookalike with implications of being a drug-addicted child-molesting cannibal. The movie went on to win several prestigious film awards.

Where is He Now Blake, with nowhere to go (his grandmother had died in Nov. 2513), no hope for employment as a pilot for any reputable firm or even criminal gang, and no money, eventually ended up on Persephone doing odd jobs at Eavesdown Docks.

CREDITS

Writers

Mitch Williams, Eugene Murrell

Content Editor

Cam Banks

Layout

Digger Hayes

