

On May 24, 'On the Fly,' a reality TV series about the day-to-day doings at Southwest Airlines debuts on TLC. For three months, film crews crisscrossed the concourses of some of the nation's most bustling airports. A lot of what they found makes for eye-popping TV. And a lot of what they went through to capture it was really, really...

RUNWAY PROJECT

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8 A.M. CHICAGO. WINTER. TODAY'S ASSIGNMENT: REPORT A STORY FOR 'SPIRIT' MAGAZINE ABOUT THE REALITY OF MAKING REALITY TV. SOME HALF DOZEN YEARS AGO, 'AIRLINE,' ANOTHER REALITY SHOW ABOUT SOUTHWEST, RAN SOME PRETTY CRAZY STORIES ABOUT TIPSY PASSENGERS, MID-FLIGHT MARRIAGE PROPOSALS, AIRPORT POWER OUTAGES, EVEN A COUPLE OF PENGUINS NAMED PETE AND PENNY. MAYBE WE'LL FIND MORE REALITY-TV GOLD TODAY. I'M OFF TO MEET THE CREW AT MIDWAY!

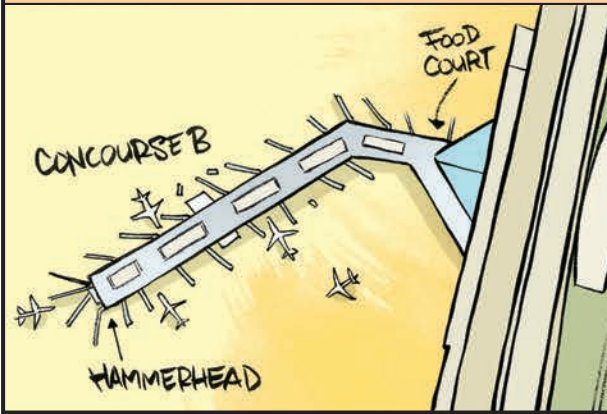
PRODUCER/CAMERA OPERATOR BRIAN HEADS UP THE FILM CREW AT CHICAGO MIDWAY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, SOUTHWEST'S BUSIEST HUB. HE'S A CHARMER WITH AN INSATIABLE APPETITE FOR CHEESEBURGERS.

HEY JOHN! WELCOME! YOU'VE PICKED A REALLY GOOD DAY TO BE HERE.

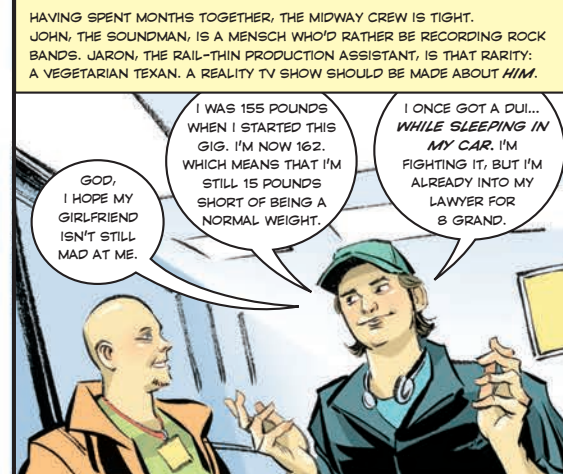
WELL, UH, SATURDAYS CAN BE A LITTLE SLOW. BUT LET'S GO GATE-SIDE AND SEE WHAT WE CAN FIND.



FOR THE CREW AT MIDWAY, A TYPICAL DAY INVOLVES HOURS OF ROAMING THE AIRPORT'S CONCOURSES IN SEARCH OF STORIES. THE DISTANCE FROM THE FOOD COURT TO THE CONCOURSE B 'HAMMERHEAD' IS ALONE A QUARTER OF A MILE. THE CREW MAKES THIS GRUELING TREK A MINIMUM OF 20 TIMES A DAY.



ONE WAY OF SUSSING OUT POTENTIAL SCENES -- THE MORE CALAMITOUS THE BETTER FOR REALITY TV -- IS TO SCAN THE ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE BOARD FOR DELAYED OR CANCELED FLIGHTS. BRIAN AND JAMES, A FORMER SOUTHWEST EMPLOYEE WHO ACTS AS CREW LIAISON, DO THIS REGULARLY.



WEEKS EARLIER, THE 'ON THE FLY' CREW GRABBED FOOTAGE OF A VERY PREGNANT SOUTHWEST EMPLOYEE NAMED SHADIA SORTING OUT A VERY TENSE SITUATION AT ONE OF THE MIDWAY GATES.





TO MONITOR EMERGENCY SITUATIONS THAT CROP UP AROUND THE TERMINAL, JAMES CARRIES A 'CUSTOMER SERVICE WALKIE.'

KRRSHHH!
WE'VE GOT A DOG LOOSE ON AN INBOUND FROM DETROIT. CAN I GET A SUPERVISOR TO B21 ASAP?

THE SUPERVISOR EXPLAINS THE RULES OF TRAVELING WITH ANIMALS.

PETS HAVE TO REMAIN IN THEIR CARRIERS AT ALL TIMES WHILE IN THE GATE AREA, DURING BOARDING AND DEPLANING, AND FOR THE DURATION OF THE FLIGHT.



MOST OF THE SOUTHWEST EMPLOYEES ARE WILLING AND HAPPY PARTICIPANTS IN 'ON THE FLY.'

OTHERS, EH, NOT SO MUCH.



BETWEEN SHOOTING PICK-UPS AND GATE-SIDE INCIDENTS, AND TROLLING FOR FILMABLE ACTION, THE CREW SATES ITSELF WITH SNACKS...

...AND TRIES TO BLOCK OUT THE MIDWAY PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM ANNOUNCEMENTS AND THE NONSTOP SOUNDTRACK OF CHICAGO BLUES.



YO, YO, YO!
DR. DRE'S HEADPHONES ARE HERE AT GATE B21. IF THEY BELONG TO YOU, COME AWWN DOWN.



NOTHING.

LUNCH?

THE FOOD COURT. AGAIN!

GUESS SO.

BY THE TIME THE 'ON THE FLY' SHOOT WRAPS, THE CREW WILL HAVE SPENT CLOSE TO 75 DAYS AT MIDWAY. THAT MEANS 75 LUNCH HOURS PASSED AT THE AIRPORT FOOD COURT.



JARON, HOW DOES A VEGETARIAN SURVIVE IN THIS PLACE?

HERE'S WHAT YOU DO: YOU GET THE FALAFEL FROM THE PLACE CALLED GOLD COAST, STICK IT INTO THE PITA FROM PEGASUS, AND TOP IT WITH THE HUMMUS FROM THE ITALIAN JOINT.



AND THE PIZZA CRUST. YEAH, THAT'S SOMETHING YOU'LL WANT TO LOOK OUT FOR.

ON HIS LAPTOP, JAMES IS ABLE TO DETERMINE THE NUMBER OF FLIGHTS GOING INTO AND OUT OF MIDWAY AT EACH HOUR OF THE DAY. THE MORE PASSENGERS, THE LIKELIER THERE'LL BE SOMETHING GOOD TO FILM. SATURDAYS, AGAIN, CAN BE SLOW.



AT 5, IT'S 31.

AT 6, IT'S 37.

GOOD.

AT 7 O'CLOCK IT'S BACK DOWN TO 28.

GRRR.

TOTAL FLIGHTS AT 4 O'CLOCK IS 22.

BETTER.

HMM.



LET'S POST UP AT THE HAMMERHEAD.



THESE FALLOW PERIODS BETWEEN FILMING FRUSTRATE THE CREW, AND NO ONE MORE THAN BRIAN, WHO HAS THE ULTIMATE PRESSURE OF DELIVERING THE GOODS.

AH, WHERE'S THE WEATHER? GIVE ME SOME WEATHER!

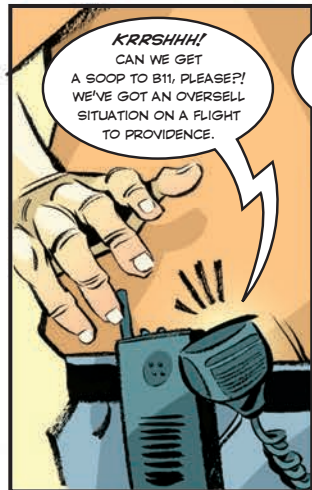


THROUGH IT ALL, HE SOMEHOW MAINTAINS HIS SENSE OF HUMOR.

DO YOU FEEL COMPETITIVE WITH THE 'ON THE FLY' CREWS WORKING TO GATHER FOOTAGE AT OTHER AIRPORTS?

I WANT THE ARTERIES OF THE SHOW TO BE CLOGGED WITH BRIAN CHOLESTEROL!

THERE ARE 13 EPISODES, AND I WANT THEM ALL TO BE... 'THE BRIAN SHOW'!



KRRSHHH!
CAN WE GET A SOOP TO B11, PLEASE?! WE'VE GOT AN OVERSELL SITUATION ON A FLIGHT TO PROVIDENCE.

MAY I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR ONE VOLUNTEER WILLING TO GIVE UP THEIR SEAT. WE ARE OFFERING FREE ACCOMMODATIONS HERE IN CHICAGO FOR THE NIGHT, AND A SOUTHWEST LUV VOUCHER VALID FOR ONE YEAR

HELLO. IF I TAKE YOUR OFFER, WOULD I BE ALLOWED TO FLY OUT ON MONDAY INSTEAD OF TOMORROW? THIS WAY, I'D GET TO SPEND ANOTHER DAY WITH MY GRANDCHILDREN.

OF COURSE. THAT'S A WIN-WIN, FOR SURE. SO CAN I GO AHEAD AND MAKE THIS CHANGE?

YES, PLEASE.

A SCENE SO RIFE WITH POTENTIAL FOR REALITY-TV DRAMATICS HAS ONCE AGAIN BEEN FOILED BY A SOUTHWEST GATE AGENT'S RESOURCEFULNESS. BRIAN SARCASTICALLY DISAPPROVES.

YOU GUYS SHOULDN'T HAVE HELPED HER OUT! IT'S RIDICULOUS! THESE PEOPLE, THEY SHOULD TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES!



A DAY THAT STARTED AT 10 A.M. IS ABOUT TO END 10 HOURS LATER. TOMORROW BRINGS THE PROMISE OF MORE PRIMETIME-WORTHY REALITY TV MOMENTS AND BRIAN'S DREAM 'GET': A FRANTIC EMERGENCY BIRTH IN THE HAMMERHEAD!

ON THE WAY THROUGH THE TERMINAL TO THEIR MAKESHIFT PRODUCTION OFFICES IN THE BOWELS OF MIDWAY, THE CREW PASS GATE AFTER GATE OF SMILING FACES -- SOUTHWEST EMPLOYEES WHO, OVER THE COURSE OF THE 'ON THE FLY' SHOOT, HAVE BECOME THEIR CHEERLEADERS AND PALS.



THAT'S OUR TEN. LET'S WRAP IT UP AND GET OUT OF HERE.



PEOPLE LIKE BRANDON, WHO CHUCKLES EVERY TIME JOHN WIRES HIM WITH A MIC AND WHO MOONLIGHTS AS A LOCAL CUPCAKE MAGNATE.



WHAT'S THE NAME OF YOUR COMPANY AGAIN?

FORBIDDEN CUPCAKES.

AS IN, BITTEN BEFORE? LIKE FORE BITTEN?

NO, NOT LIKE BITTEN BEFORE!



IT'S A CLASSIC!



FILM CREW.

WHERE TO, FELLAS?



HOW ABOUT TWO TICKETS TO LAS VEGAS?

NOW THERE YOU'D FIND SOMETHING TO FILM.

END!