

Excerpted from "On Wings of Eagles" - Ken Follet

T. J. dialed the number of Harry McKillop, a Braniff vice-president who lived in Paris. McKillop was out.

T. J. called Perot and confessed failure.

Perot had an idea. He seemed to remember that Sol Rogers, the president of Texas State Optical Company down in Beaumont, had either a BAC 111 or a Boeing 727, he was not sure which. Nor did he have the phone number.

T. J. called information. The number was unlisted. He called Margot. She had the number. He called Rogers. He had sold his plane.

Rogers knew of an outfit called Omni International, in Washington, which leased planes. He gave T. J. the home phone numbers of the president and vice-president.

T. J. called the president. He was out.

He called the vice-president. He was in.

"Do you have a transatlantic jet?" T. J. asked.

"Sure. We have two."

T. J. breathed a sigh of relief.

"We have a 707 and a 727," the man went on.

"Where?"

"The 707 is at Meachem Field in Fort Worth—"

"Why, that's right here!" said T. J. "Now tell me, does it have a single-sideband radio?"

"Sure does."

T. J. could hardly believe his luck.

"This plane is rather luxuriously fitted out," the vice-president said. "It was done for a Kuwaiti prince who backed out."

T. J. was not interested in the decor. He asked about the price. The vice-president said the president would have to make the final decision. He was out for the evening, but T. J. could call him first thing in the morning.

T. J. had the plane checked out by Jeff Heller, an EDS vice-president and former Vietnam pilot, and two of Heller's friends, one an American Airlines pilot and the other a flight engineer. Heller reported that the plane seemed to be in good shape, as far as they could tell without flying it. The decor was kind of overripe, he said with a smile.

At seven-thirty the following morning T. J. called the president of Omni and got him out of the shower. The president had talked to his vice-president and he was sure they could do business.

"Good," said T. J. "Now what about crew, ground facilities, insurance—"

"We don't charter planes," said the president. "We lease them."

"What's the difference?"

"It's like the difference between taking a cab and renting a car. Our planes are for rent."

"Look, we're in the computer business, we know nothing about airlines," said

T. J. "Even though you normally don't do it, will you make a deal with us where you supply all the extras, crew and so on? We'll pay you for it."

"It'll be complicated. The insurance alone..."

"But you'll do it?"

"Yes, we'll do it."

It was complicated, T. J. learned during the course of the day. The unusual nature of the deal did not appeal to the insurance companies, who also hated to be hurried. It was hard to figure out which regulations EDS needed to comply with, since they were not an airline. Omni required a deposit of sixty thousand dollars in an offshore branch of a U.S. bank. The problems were solved by EDS executive Gary Fernandes in Washington and EDS house lawyer Claude Chappellear in Dallas: the contract, which was executed at the end of the day, was a sales demonstration lease. Omni found a crew in California and sent them to Dallas to pick up the plane and fly it on to Washington.

By midnight on Monday the plane, the crew, the extra pilots, and the remnants of the rescue team were all in Washington with Ross Perot.

T. J. had worked a miracle.

That was why it took so long.

