

INTERVIEW WITH BOB FORDYCE - 29TH JANUARY 1990

Bob Fordyce's Address: 39 East 72nd Street  
New York, New York, 10020

Side A.

A: ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 016/018) .. is quite old but it's the most recent one I have.

Q: What I'd like to do is take you through and just see, you just tell me what you remember of a flight on the Boeing 314. Where I would like to start, if you could cast your mind back, - because you flew from Port Washington to Southampton on the 314..

A: Well, there were varied routes, but yes, that was one of them.

Q: OK. The one I'm interested in is the one, the flight between Port Washington and Southampton. And where I'd like to start, - I'm more interested in the return flight on that route. So where I'd like to start, see if you can think of coming into land at Southampton. Let's try and start there. So you would have crossed the Atlantic, you would have landed in Ireland, refuelled at Foynes, taken off again. It would probably be a Sunday morning, you would take off again from Foynes and then you would come down at Southampton. That's where my story starts with the plane coming down in Southampton. So that's where I'd like to start. Now first of all were you the engineer.

A: No, they had a rather complicated crew set up here. Actually they had a double crew on those longish flights so they could get some rest.

Q: So tell me everybody who would have been in the crew.

A: Well, that's what I was looking for this morning... but anyway one of them would be the Captain, first officer, the

so called second officer who was actually the navigator and that was a full time job because there was one navigator for the whole flight..

Q: OK, and one captain for the whole flight or two?

A: One. There was a...

Q: The second officer was the navigator.

A: Yeah, he was the full time navigator; actually normally it was a pilot, also the co-pilot who..

Q: But the first officer and the co-pilot pilot would be doubled. There would two of each?

A: No. The captain and the first officer, one of each. The first officer would relieve the captain for rests.

Q: The second officer?

A: The second officer and the navigator, that was the specialised one, he was normally the pilot, co-pilot pilot. And there wasn't much navigating except across the ocean. There was a third officer who served as co-pilot pilot for either the captain or the first officer.. If there was a fourth officer, there may have been on some...

Q: The fourth officer would have been a co-pilot?

A: Yeah. Actually everybody except the captain is a co-pilot so to speak..... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 120/125).... and there were two engineers. First engineer and second engineer..

Q: And they relieved one another?

A: They relieved one another. It has changed since then in recent years... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 131)

Q: It's the set up in 1939 that I'm interested in.

A: The rest were flight service..

Q: Sorry..

A: The rest of the crew were flight service. Both stewards and stewardesses ... I don't know whether they concern you or not, it's your book.

Q: There were two stewards normally weren't there. No?

A: At that time there were stewards. I don't think they yet had females. There were three to four.

Q: Did they work shifts? They must have had shifts. They couldn't have worked twenty four hours could they?

A: Yeah, they had shifts. But I don't exactly how they worked.

Q: There would have been two of them on duty at any one time?

A: I would think so.

Q: Let me show you,.. let's see if we've got a plan of the flight deck here...

A: How did you happen to get interested in this?

Q: Well, I was at the marine terminal at La Guardia in the summer and they had a little exhibition there showing it. And it just struck me that it would be good background for one of my stories.

A: I was very much intrigued with your .. (UNINTELLIGIBLE 173) I thought it was wonderful. Quite a character you had in that girl.

Q: This is the plan of the flight deck..

A: Yeah, well, here's the pilot and the co-pilot. The stairwell coming here; the navigator is here, the flight engineer is here and this is the ....

Q: This is baggage..

A: Yes, that's probably... yeah, sure. ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 185/7).. big open space and everything.

Q: Really? Would there be bags in these..

A: No, it would be outside the wings. I think.

Q: These are baggage. 4S and 4P are baggage compartments in the wings. And these are baggage compartments that I understand are accessible from inside the plane..

A: Yes, that's right. But they were rarely used, at the least the flights I had. We used to use them, oddly enough, for dropping what we called drift bombs, which were either flares at night or a flask container about this big, full of powdered aluminium and you used to drop them through a hole about here. Then we'd follow them with a ... bottom of the glass was hinged onto the deck so we could see where the plane was drifting to the left or the right. It was helpful for dead reckoning. In other words dead reckoning was not very good. Flare direction finding was not very good.

Q: Let me get this straight. So within these luggage compartments, there was a door to the exterior?

A: Yeah. These luggage compartments were part of the wing.

Q: And would that be on the deck, underneath you, this door?

A: Yeah, it would be on the deck, about where you feet are.

Q: So you could open it. This was when you were on the water...

A: No, it's when you are in the air. You see we didn't have the kind of navigational equipment we have now, by any means, so we were dependant on sun sights, star sights and dead reckoning. Well, this little gadget here, it was called a drift sight, drifting to the left and right, so you could measure the angle which presumably the wind was blowing you from the course you were steering. And with a .. (UNINTELLIGIBLE 249) ... you were drifting either left or right. As an aid to navigation. Your ..(UNINTELLIGIBLE 252).... would say ten degrees drift ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE

Q: Now how big is this door?

A: Oh it's ..(UNINTELLIGIBLE 255)

Q: About a foot square?

A: Yeah.

Q: About a foot square. There was.. - the navigator had an observation dome didn't he?

A: Yes, he had, ...(UNINTELLIGIBLE 259) ... it was about here. Maybe it was there. I don't remember.

Q: Maybe in the middle of these compartments?

A: It could have been there, Yes.

Q: Was there anything, was there a wall or curtain separating these three berths at the back on the flight deck. Were there doors along here, or curtains?

A: I don't think these berths were ever used, ever set up. We used to use the forward compartment down here for the crew rest.

Q: The crew must have slept on these flights.

A: Oh sure.

Q: How long did you work on and off? Was it four hours on, fours off, eight hours on?

A: No I think it was about two and two.

Q: Two hours on and two hours off?

A: Yeah. Well, you had two hours in the cockpit and you had two hours in the bunk down here. It was an optional thing. If you had a ....., it was just optional, partly they way that everybody felt.

Q: No hard and fast rules?

A: No.

Q: Now then what was your role?

A: That one, I must have been third officer.

Q: Third officer serves as co-pilot for the captain or the first officer. So you would have been a co-pilot. Now if you had been... - what would you have been doing when the plane landed at Southampton?

A: Well generally, normally it depended on how much experience everybody had. Normally it would have been the captain and the first officer. And either the captain was back for the landing or in Southampton where we didn't land very often, or the first officer ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 304/8) ... and the Captain asked you sometimes to take over to the First Officer otherwise everybody's never going to learn.

Q: Can you remember landing at Southampton? You must have landed at so many places.

A: Well, Southampton we landed rarely, extremely rarely. I forget how many flights there were a week. Say two a week, three a week, something like that. By the time we came here next time .... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 317/8)... more frequently we went to Foynes. So although I remember one or two landings in Southampton, ...

Q: See, I think what happened was, originally the plane went from Foynes to Southampton. But then when war broke out they stopped at Foynes.

A: Yes, that's right. If you hadn't brought it up, I wouldn't have thought of it.

Q: Yes, I think that must be the explanation of why you didn't see so many landings at Southampton. What were the ... - was

if difficult to land a flying boat?

A: No not really because I got my training in the Navy and they taught us originally on seaplanes.. (UNINTELLIGIBLE 335/7) landing a large seaplane is the same as landing one of these little things. It is a matter of estimating, as pilots do now on land, estimating you angle of the plane for landing.

Q: What kind of problems would you come across landing a big flying boats in a swell for example?

A: Well, if the swells are small, you land into them, land into the wind, which is not necessarily the same direction as the swells. If they are large, you try to land near the top of the swell, unless you get a cross wind..

Q: That must have been quite difficult, landing in a swell?

A: Not really, if the swell is too damn big ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 358/365)... it's incomprehensible what he did. .. (UNINTELLIGIBLE 367) ... for twenty minutes in Norfolk. I don't know what the coastal weather was, but he had plenty of time to land in Norfolk and refuel. If he refuelled and got way beyond his landing, doesn't really make any distance. It's a theoretical thing. He could have dumped fuel before he landed. .... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 374/5) ... Now I was down there for a little less than a year. They were very pleased about that .... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 379) pilot; first time they'd ever had a ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 380) ...pilot, so I didn't think it was very good. So I wanted to fire him, and they wouldn't let me fire him, so I quit. .. (UNINTELLIGIBLE 385)... by coincidence, I brought two Americans down there with me. One of the Americans ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 388/397)... of course Norfolk may have been closed in, I haven't seen the weather reports.

Q: Now what would you do.. - the turnaround was quite long I gather for this plane. You must have had some sort of...

A: From Southampton?

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh, we changed crew at Southampton, so the crew would come over, well depending on the frequencies - three times a week, you can't have a crew waiting three days for this thing.

Q: Do you remember where you would stay?

A: In Southampton? Oh God no.

Q: You must have stayed in a lot of places?

A: I would absolutely have no idea. I got the feeling I stayed in Southampton once. Do you have a bunch of names of people here to talk to.

Q: Yeah. I have four people here in New York and three more in Miami. Let's have a look. Wolin?

A: Yeah. He used to be in Port Washington. He may still be. I very highly recommend him mostly because he's a very nice guy. A very bright guy and a very vocal guy. He'd be an easy guy to talk to. He's a little younger than I am but that doesn't make any difference. He couldn't tell you anything about this flight. But I would certainly consider him. Who else do you have down there for here?

Q: I have er... right after I've talked to you I'm going to see Stan Zedalis. Tomorrow I have States Mead and Madeleine Cuniff. I have Jim Echeson in North Carolina. Steven Catchell in Florida. Gilbert Blackmore, Chuck Bassett, Duke Campbell, Bill Weatherspoon, Max Weber, Larry Birchill, Dorothy Bahana, Ed McGoven. I'm either going to see them or talk to them on the phone. It depends on where they live. So I have quite a lot of people. But everybody remembers different things. Some forget some things, and some people forget others, so .. Now one of the things I want to do in the story is, on the return flight I want the plane to be forced down off the coast of Maine. What I want to happen

is

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something to go wrong with the engines. I don't want it to crash, but I want it to be forced to land on the water before they get to Port Washington. Now what could cause that?

A: Well, the loss of two engines.

Q: If they lost two engines they would have to come down?

A: Yeah. And if they lost one engine, it would depend on what they lost where,

Q: It would be between Shediac and Port Washington.

A: Of course the logical place would be Boston, if you could make it. Pan Am has facilities there and so on. It's a nice harbour.... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 469/472) ... you'd want some place closer to Botwood don't you?

Q: Well, I was thinking they might, .. it would be so bad that they would have to come down immediately.

A: Immediately. Well, the route runs pretty close to the coast. So practically any place along the coast is ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 479/482

Q: Well, let's see. If it's on schedule, then it's daytime.

A: Well, daytime's fairly easy. It's like sailing in a bay.

Q: What would cause them though. Is there something that could go wrong with the fuel supply?

A: It could be the fuel pump ....

Q: .... so they would have to land immediately?

A: Well, with one engine you don't have to land immediately.

Q: Really. They could fly on one engine?

A: Well, one engine out.

Q: There would separate fuel pumps to each engine? I'm trying to think of something, one thing that could go wrong. Maybe somebody could sabotage the plane, make one thing go wrong

that it's got to come down at a certain point.

A: Talk to your engineer.

Q: What did it feel like landing and taking off on the water? Is it noisy? Did you get shaken up?

A: Yes. But the noise that you are accustomed to, so you know what the noise is going to like. You know it's really what you're listening for perhaps would be anything that differs from the normal noise. As you do in a car for example. Yes, if you have a lot of cross waves, even small ones in a bay, you feel a certain amount of bumpiness, yes.

Q: What do you mean by cross waves?

A: I meant the way that, ... crest to crest was about the cross wave, about the width of this room. It's just a guess.

Q: I see. So you would be taking off against the flow of the waves then?

A: Yeah. And that would be a little bumpy, sure.

Q: This noise, the regular noise, I'm looking at it from the point of view of a passenger now, is the regular noise, is that the engine or the sound of the water.

A: It's primarily the engine. Because they make a hell of a noise.... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 531)

Q: So it could be bumpy, it could be very noisy. Would people have to shout to speak to on another?

A: Yeah, probably. It isn't a very good time to speak to each other even if you're sitting side by side.

Q: Was there much of a sensation of speed as this plane took off.

A: Not really no. To get a sensation of speed, say you're a passenger, you have to look down at the water, then you'd definitely get one. But that's not normally where you'd look.

Q: Was there a lot of spray?

A: Yes, but it tended to be pretty close to the plane. This plane had..., they were not called pontoons, I've forgotten what they were called, but to balance it sort of laterally, they had sort of baby wings on each side. Stump wings I think they were called. So they had a certain amount of spray from the passenger, and you couldn't see any from the cockpit anyway.

Q: If the plane landed on the water, did it land with a bump?

A: Well, you hope not.

Q: So it could be smooth could it?

A: Oh yes, very smooth.

Q: As smooth as landing on a concrete runway with wheels.

A: Oh yeah.

Q: You'd think there would be a terrific splash.

A: No. Don't forget the plane was out at an angle like this for the hull, let's say an angle like that, part of the hull would touch first back here

Q: The back end?

A: So it .. (UNINTELLIGIBLE 564) ... very gently and it tilts forward

Q: Would you mingle with the passengers at all on the flight.

A: Oh sure. We were supposed to.

Q: You were supposed to?

A: Yeah, there was always a little question on that. The FAA was always objecting to the Captain being out of the cockpit ... but it was taken for granted that you were.... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 574)..

Q: On these transatlantic flights of course, not all the seats were occupied because it would take fewer passengers

A: That's right. I think probably what it shows you in there is what would have been in place between New York and Bermuda. Actually they were very comfortable.

Q: Of course the passengers could go to bed in the middle of the flight, which is one of the intriguing things, because that never happens now.

A: No it doesn't, does it. What time did you get in here yesterday.

Q: I got in yesterday at six o'clock. I came on the Concorde.

A: Oh, that's very de luxe.

Q: Well, it's the modern equivalent of the Boeing 314 isn't it. It's the luxury plane, the fast plane.

A: They had quite a quibble over when they were going to start that damn thing over to Europe. The British were running a little behind the Americans on that... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 597)...

Q: Now let me show you another layout plan. Here at the front, is that a ladder there?

A: No, that was a ...

Q: This is the crew day compartment in the bow here. This is the passenger deck..

A: Yeah, here's the galley and washroom

Q: Here are the stairs up to the flight deck... but this here, there was a forward staircase to get to the, ... you could get down into the crew dayroom in the bow of the airship from the flight deck, couldn't you?

A: No.

Q: Oh, you couldn't, you had to

A: Well, it's conceivable that you might. Yes, ..... - that I don't remember. That would have to be an indentation in the instrument panel.

Q: You see, it shows on one of these pictures,... this picture here, it seems to show a crew member going upstairs from the day room to the flight deck.

A: Oh yes, that's an error.

Q: It wasn't like that?

A: I don't think there was any stairwell there.

Q: Now this is a different picture showing a slightly different arrangement This shows a regular ladder.

A: That's more like it.

Q: And it seems to come down; obviously it must come down from the flight deck somehow....

Side B.

Q: Do you remember much about Foynes?

A: Not a hell of a lot, no. It was just a largish river with a landing space and ..., well this is fifty years ago.

Q: I realise it's a long way back..

A: Perhaps the other guys will have a better recollection. So I'll go back to the 314. It was a wonderful airplane. It had to be worth your time and effort because it was a very exotic airplane..

Q: Yes, that's what appeals to me about it. Very romantic, glamorous.../

A: Yes, no question it was.

Q: What was it like when all the passengers went to bed. They kind of closed themselves up behind their curtains. Did people wander around in their pyjamas and talk to one another.

A: No more than they might in hotel.

Q: Was it a comfortable plane to sleep on.

A: Oh sure. As comfortable as any plane. I mean there's always the damn roar of the engines .... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 039/47)....

Q: If the plane stopped, would the passengers disembark and go into the air terminal, or would they stay on board the plane?

A: They almost always disembarked. I mean for intermediate stops such as Foynes... no, they practically always disembarked. As a matter of fact I think probably the Immigration would require that they disembark so that they could check ...(UNINTELLIGIBLE 058/60) ... even the terminal was a little less dull than the interior of a stationary airplane.

Q: What kind of facilities would there be at these terminals? Would there be phones that they could use?

A: Oh, yes. There would be telephones, there'd be washrooms, very much like the present terminals except a little smaller.

Q: Really. They could buy newspapers and stuff. So they weren't ... - I imagine they'd be rather primitive these terminals, but obviously not.

A: Oh, no. Foynes was a... they had a bunch of stands selling practically everything you could buy in Ireland except cattle. But ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 082/88)

Q: What about Botwood? Is that the same?

A: No. Botwood was not because that was only a summer stop.

It was not open year round. That was rather primitive.

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Q: There must have phones there, I guess. But not as pleasant as Foynes?

A: I mean there were no shops around. Shops are about the only things that make a passenger terminal different one from the other.

Q: What about Shediac?

A: It was about the same as Botwood. They were just really summer terminals and they were only used for I think less than half the year.

Q: But still the passengers would get off.

A: Yeah. I think they were ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 113/5)... it's more relaxing to get off the plane and wander around.

Q: Did you take on more food and stuff at these stops?

A: ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 118/21)... I would say probably. But I can't actually say...

Q: It would make sense to take on fresh supplies.

A: It would make sense so they probably did.

Q: I read in one of the articles that Irish coffee was invented at Foynes. Sounds a rather Irish story.

A: Well, it might well be.

Q: Did you say you had been in the Navy first.

A: Yeah. Most of the ones of my age were either in the Navy or the Air Force. We went in as soon as we finished college and ...

Q: Tell me, what would the date of that been. Tell me, when did you graduate college.

A: '32

Q: 1932. What did you do at college?

A: Nothing very exciting.

Q: What did you study?

A: Oh. Essentially, more or less classical a programme, except that I did a lot of extra courses.

Q: What was your major?

A: .... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 158)... it was in science and engineering. That was the not normal one. The Navy took in forty of us...

Q: .... as ensign and then you transferred to the west coast. So that would take you to 1933 sometime. And what did you do in the Navy. Did you work on flying boats in the Navy.

A: No. The thing that everybody wanted was fighter planes. I got a torpedo plane, which is not as desirable, but anyway it was on the carrier and so on...

Q: You were a pilot?

A: Yeah. And so it was fun. It was sort of exciting, it was something very new...

Q: When did you leave the Navy? You graduated in '32

A: It would be '34 I guess something like that.

Q: So you would have had two years in the Navy?

A: Yeah. It was supposed to be two years but they ran out of money. So they had to cut it by several months..

Q: Then you went to work for Pan Am

A: Yeah. I went to work for Pan Am about six months after finishing the Navy. I finished the Navy in the summer... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 195/6) ... me two jobs .. (UNINTELLIGIBLE 197)... which was very good for me, I learned a lot. ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 199/200) ... I spent a year there and they transferred me to San Francisco as assistant to the ..

(UNINTELLIGIBLE 202) ... manager covering the trans Pacific operation. San Francisco to .... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 206) ... well you see he didn't need an assistant. So he said why don't you try a little flying a while. So I said what ....incidentally was named for another job in the executive recruiting area. So it doesn't apply to Pan Am. It doesn't cover the executive recruiting area either because I only sent to people who would probably know me.....

Q: What kind of people were the stewards. What was their background?

A: Well, it's rather stupid of me. But I don't really know. They were ... guys who might have worked in the travel business or not at all. Stewardesses didn't come along until after the Boeing had a pretty varied background.... a pretty small percentage of them were girls that ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 233/38)..

Q: What about the passengers, what kind of people used the plane?

A: Everything you can think of.

Q: Roosevelt used the plane?

A: They tended to be people with fairly good jobs....(UNINTELLIGIBLE 246)...

Q: I gather the plane was often late. Do you recall that? Because of the weather and ...

A: Well, of course there are an awful lot of reasons to delay planes. The weather was an obvious one .... there are always mechanical things that can go wrong ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 254)...

Q: Now these planes flew a lot lower than modern planes, didn't they. About 8,000 ft I gather was the normal. So it must

have been bumpier?

A: It might have been ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 263/266) ... probably a hell of a lot bumpier than the plane you came over here on. Is that pretty good?

Q: Well, the main thing about it is that it's fast. It's a small plane and so you don't have much more room than in economy on a regular flight. You don't have the big seats and all the leg room you'd get in the first class cabin in the 747. It's much smaller than that. But that's OK because you're only on the plane for just under four hours. So you can put up with that. The food is very good and the service is very good. And the wine isn't bad

A: I imagine they make quite an effort on that

ride  
Q: Yeah they do. It's actually... The 747 is actually more pleasant to arrive in. You can walk around on the 747. You really can't walk around on Concorde as there's just the one aisle up and down and if there's a food cart in the aisle you can't get to the bathroom.

A: Well, I wonder if they're going to build any more Concordes?

Q: Well I think I've asked you all I need to ask you. Why don't we do this. I have a car is going to take me to my next interview which is out in Douglas Dale... so shall I drive you home.. you're eleven blocks.

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