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INTERVIEW WITH JIM MCLEOD (1) - 3RD FEBRUARY 1990

Side A:

Q: To refresh your memory, in case you need them, I've brought the manuals for the plane.

A: I have one old manual. This one looks a little more complete than mine.

Q: Now my story's going to start with the plane landing at Southampton on the westward flight and then most of the story takes place, sorry, on the eastward flight. So the landing at Southampton, and then most of the story will take place on the return journey. From Southampton all the way back to Port Washington. So let me ask you first of all. Cast your mind back, if you can, to being on that plane and approaching Southampton, ready to land. Tell me if you can what, first of all what your duties were?

A: Well, I was ...

Q: Junior Officer ?

A: Yeah, which on that particular flight meant that I was at the bottom of the pilot list. I was the low man on the pilot list on that flight. They were on board, several captains for familiarisation with the route. They were already captains and were on their familiarisation trips. Gray was the captain. Harold Gray. And we had ..., I have a thing in there that has a crew list on it, but as I recall, Gray and two other captains plus another pilot who was the navigator, and I think one other junior officer, and I brought up the rear. And my duties on that particular flight were, weight and balances, we used to call it. That is handling the weight control, balance, that is fluid distribution you see. And to serve a trick in the cockpit in regular order that the watches would set up. And do some of the navigation. I was at that point just ready to what we call check out in navigation. In other words I stayed, and before I was transferred to New York, and Gray wanted

somebody on the flight who was about ready for check out in navigation, because they were a little bit short of navigators. So he put me on that flight for that reason. At least that was what I understood. So on the flight from Port Washington to Shediac, so Gray had me navigate that leg. Then Elsie who was the.., his title on this flight was second officer, he was the navigator. He was another of my contemporary pilots. Elsie as I recall took the Shediac to Botwood leg and he was in control of the Botwood to Foynes leg, the long leg. But Gray had told him that he wanted me to navigate a four hour period out in the middle of this leg, this long leg somewhere. He wanted me to learn more about the procedures peculiar to the Atlantic division and practice and he also wanted to see how I did. Whether I did or did not cut the mustard.

Q: And how did you do?

A: Well, I must have done all right. I did the same thing on the return flight.

Q: And that was old fashioned navigation by the stars, wasn't it?

A: That was celestial navigation. We used radio direction finding but not anything like what we consider radio direction finding now and we had no loran of course.

Q: What's that?

A: That's a long name, that's navigation scheme that uses lower frequencies and it's useful over very long distances. You can see the loran co-ordinates plotted on all sorts of charts nowadays.

Q: But it didn't exist then.

A: We didn't have it. It was on the drawing boards and in experimental stages and we had none of it.

Q: Could you use radio direction finding in mid-Atlantic?

A: No. You could get bearings but they would vary all over the place, the variations. And you couldn't always get them. You couldn't always know a point down. I don't know where you'd familiar it.

Q: So the celestial method would be the best?

A: So celestial was our basic control of our position and we, we always did a form of dead reckoning of course because we were often without being able to see the stars. Especially on the north Atlantic. You would sometimes spend hours on end without seeing anything to shoot. Any stars. And when you're faced with that, out towards the middle of the leg, you simply had to dead reckon. And as the basis of your dead reckoning you used the weather information the meteorologists were able to provide you with and that was pretty good until the war started in Europe. But once Germany invaded Poland, all the information from ships at sea shut down. Everybody was keeping silent out there. I say everybody, nearly everybody. So after that, we would have some pretty wild times, trying to hold a track, and sometimes we weren't able to hold it too well. But as we approached the shore line we were able to pick up some radio signals with direction finding with sufficient accuracy. We'd get a pretty good idea and we used that to home in, but you always hoped that after a period of dead reckoning, you always hoped you get a shot at a star, and usually you would eventually, but we couldn't see the surface of course, there was no lights out there, just a black ocean. Sometimes you could see a strip of moonlight if the moon was shining. And we had one indication of drift which we couldn't rely on very well, that involved what we called carbide bombs. They were little canisters of carbide composition, we toss out through a opening in the lower side of the wing. When it hit the water it would ignite and you could look over the tail from this, your goal, we had a turret up in the crew area, back there and you could sight over that with a pelorus on this little flare and tell what your drift was.

Well, if you had a lot of drift, you could tell which way you were drifting, but as unsteady as airplanes were, there was always a certain amount of hunting in airplanes, most of them, and every little ripple in the air of course, would cause the tail to wobble and that meant that you could never get a very accurate, well in no way accurate reading on drift by that method of looking at the flare over the tail.

Q: It would be very approximate.

A: Very approximate, and if your drift was not strong enough, you couldn't even be sure what side it was on. That's what made it difficult. I just mentioned that 'cause somebody thought of doing this and occasionally we'd try it out. At least I would just for the hell of it. And sometimes when I'd get worried, after a long period of dead reckoning, I'd heave one of those things over and hope that I could find something. It was unusual to find anything you'd consider really useful, but nevertheless it was there. The direction finders; usually we'd rely on a loop arrangement in the airplane that the radio operator would handle. He would tune in his station and turn his loop until he hit the nod, the point where the signal fades out. That being the sharpest indicator. And he would read the bearing of this station, relay it to the nose of the airplane. His loop was calibrated with the nose of the airplane, so with that information and our heading, we could figure what the bearing to the station was, but you had to be within, oh it varied considerably, but a couple of 300 miles, you could do pretty well with those things. Anything further than that you couldn't very well rely on. Over a long stretch of ocean sometimes we could pick up signals from Greenland and there was another station out there in the Straits Belare, out south of Labrador, out somewhere, I think it was in the Strait of Belare. Sometimes we could pick up signals from them, pretty far out and over a long stretch of a number of bearings it would kind of show you in a general sort of way what your progress was along the track. But

this was all supplemental to the celestial navigation.

Q: I suppose once you, if you went far wrong, you would find out as you approached the Canadian coast?

A: Canadian, or in the other case, the Irish.

Q: And then you would just have to correct.

A: Yes, just as an example. On one westbound flight, this was after the war began in Europe, I had, I don't remember exactly how much, it must have been seven or eight hours of dead reckoning, in a condition we call between layers, lower cloud underneath us and higher cloud above us. So you couldn't see anything, surface or stars. And that was a long period, seven or eight hours, almost from the time we departed, and I was naturally worried, as the meteorologists were really not sure what was going on out in the middle there.

Q: Let me interrupt you there. You would be getting weather reports over the radio, from where?

A: From both coasts. Whichever coast the radio operator could be in contact with at that time. And of course these shore stations would relay information between themselves, but the difficulty was getting the information on the space between these perimeter stations, you might call them, like Foynes, Iceland, Greenland, Labrador, Canada. It had a pretty good ring around it but nothing in the middle. Once in a while the meteorologist would get a ship report through some sort of coded system, that would help them out some. But frequently they had very little idea out there. And over a distance of 2,000 miles, 1750 nautical between Botwood and Foynes that's a lot of space. On this particular trip, I had that situation, with a long spell of dead reckoning. I knew we were about to approach the coast, that is the coast of England and I kept close watch to see if I could find myself a star to zero in on. Finally I saw a gomar in the north and got my gear ready, my opten and so forth and

took a sight on it as soon as it stayed out long enough for me to shoot. I felt quite certain that it was Polaris, the north star. Of course I had no way of confirming it, I couldn't really see enough other stars around it to be sure. But I had a reasonable degree of certainty that it was. So I took it. That gives you a line of position, a line of latitude. And sure enough that showed me 125 miles north of the track. We were still quite a bit off shore. And as soon as that, I hauled out, that is I changed course southward to correct, back to Botwood.

Q: Is that a long way out to be ?

A: Yeah, way way out. Yes that's a big miss. So I was in a sort of a hassle there. But I laid that on the chart, hauled the course down, and of course told whoever was on duty in the cockpit what had happened, and what I'd done; the reason I'd made the big change in course. So he held on that and shortly after, I got another star over in the South, but not exactly on the meridian, but close enough to give me a line of position which approximated, which was almost parallel to the latitudes, so I shot that one right quick and laid it in. And it fell right in where I expected it would with the Polaris shot. It turned out to be Polaris. Because there is another bright star that can screw you up something awful, Kotiac, it's called. But this turned out to be alright. So shortly thereafter we began to pick up the F bearings off one of the shore stations. I don't remember which one. Of course we were home easy then. But that was the sort of thing that happens to you.

Q: Now that was over the Atlantic. On the other legs of the journey, you would navigate. It would be daylight, and of course, you would be over land or near land more of the time, so you could see most of the time, plus you would have more radio?

A: Yes, all sorts of radio help when you were that close.

Q: Direction finding, radio beacons, plus you could use the commercial stations if you knew where they were located?

A: If you could positively identify them, yes. And on those legs, we just dead reckoned. Just a regular. You take your weather information, you know what your track is supposed to be from Foynes to Southampton. I forget what the landfall was but it would be Southampton Water or something like that.

Q: Hythe. There was hangar at Hythe wasn't there?

A: Yes, stayed over there one night. We stayed, now let's see. I was in Southampton three times I think before the war shut us out and one time, we went over and stayed in Hythe. In a little hotel of some sort.

Q: Remember the name of the hotel? I believe it may have been called something Lawn. Lansdowne Lawn?

A: I can't remember. I know it was a very nice place.

Q: Kind of like a country mansion?

A: Yes that's right. And there was some RAF people there. Pilots. And we were standing at a desk talking to a couple of them. Poor buggers, they were just waiting for their orders to go to Singapore. And I often wondered how they ever fared out there.

Q: What made you say it was a pleasant stay. Tell me what you remember about staying at that place.

A: For one thing, I like that kind of accommodation. It was a hotel, and you get a kind of a feeling of a home around it in some fashion. It's hard to describe. It's just a kind of easy, pleasant, soft sort of a living that appeals to me. And the people were very pleasant. The people that worked there. The maids, the people behind the desk. All very pleasant.

Q: They must have had quite a lot of people staying there who

were at Hythe to use the flying boat terminal facility. That was British, facility for British planes as well.

A: Yes, Imperial Airways. And on the ramp there at Hythe, that time, we had a look at that piggy-back airplane that Britain had developed.

Q: There was a small plane on top of a large plane.

A: They had a big boat, with a small four engine, it was a small plane, fast, and the idea was to load it with mail, take the whole thing off. And after the boat had gotten along the track some distance or other it would launch this thing. I guess the war and land plane development probably shut that down. They were getting ready for land planes, while they were still locked into that run up there. We got in early at Botwood one night with a head wind, and we came in well before daylight. Well, we couldn't land in the dark. We didn't have night facilities so we just cruised around waiting for daylight. And the station manager asked us if we would like to have a look at Gander, the airport at Gander which had been under construction. So we told him we'd love to. So we flew down to Gander. They'd just finished the light installation on the place, and I'd never seen so many lights in my life. The runways were lit and that had some approach lights on a large curve into the end of the runway. It was a beaut in those days. But there weren't any land planes that could make use of it, but they saw it coming.

Q: Going back to Hythe for a minute. Tell me what you remember about the facility there. The flying boat facility. What were the buildings like and the jetty and so on?

A: Well, I'm pretty hazy on some of them. I remember that we landed in Southampton Water and we would disembark passengers at a terminal. I think we had to take them off on a launch. As I recall we didn't have a dock that we could tie it to at Southampton. You will have to check me on this, if you have some way, because I'm pretty hazy on

it. But I think we had to disembark the passengers by a launch. Then to that terminal which was also a railroad terminal. They went through customs and everything there and they could get right on a train to London. I remember that because I did that one time. I never had been to London. And on one of these trips we had enough time scheduled in layover so that I could get up to London, spend a day and get back in time. That's how I happen to remember that. The boats I think were taken over to Hythe for service and all. Over there they had the Imperial facilities. Now check me on that too, there again I'm very hazy on that. One reason I'm hazy is that on these flights, I was still junior officer. Although some of them I was navigator. But I was not in the cockpit on these approaches. So my picture of the layout is somewhat hazy from looking out the window.

Q: So your recollection is that the plane would come down near the railroad terminal. And there would be a jetty, but that, was the facility of Hythe some distance from the jetty where the passengers got off?

A: Yes, the way I recall it, they would disembark the passengers and after all the passengers and cargo were clear, they would haul the boat over to Hythe. Now I'm sure there are people that can tell you about this. I tell you who would be a big help, would be one of the flight engineers on this sort of thing. Have you talked to any of them?

Q: Yes, I talked to Stan Zedalis. Now his recollection.., he remembered Hythe quite clearly. But what you said to me, that he didn't ... the other guys had not recollected a rail link between Hythe and London. But what you've said may explain. It maybe that there was a rail link at Southampton and the passengers would get off at Southampton and get on to the train. But the plane would then go to Hythe for its service, and would go to the flying boat

facility at Hythe. That would explain it.

A: This is the way I would recollect it. But I do know that on the Southampton side, you could go right through the customs area as we got off the ship or launch. As I recall there was no little dock to tie up to. I think we had to take a launch from the airplane to the dock. But there again, I'm not sure. But there was a rail connection there in that Southampton terminal.

Q: Do you recall there being regular boats docking in the same area. Or was it just for the flying boat?

A: Are you talking about Southampton?

Q: Yes.

A: I remember there were big boats there, big ships. But just where they were located

Side B:

A: He worked primarily in the station there, in some function. I don't remember what and he asked us out to his home at Hamble. That's to the west of Southampton. He was very nice to us but I can't recall his name. He worked for Imperial and we met him there in the course of our duties and whatnot. And he was good enough to ask us out one evening. It was very nice of him. I wish I could remember his name.

Q: Tell me what it was like to land, or come down in the water on one of those planes?

A: Well, it depended a good deal of course, almost entirely on the condition of the water. Smooth water, you could just fly your airplane right in. You didn't stall on it but flew it in so that you landed on your step and doing it that way you would just grease it on. If it were done exactly right you would hardly notice anything. You would hear a little water sound. If you were a little bit nose down, you'd hear the water sound like it was tearing into your nose plates.

A kind of zzz, zzz, sort of like paper tearing. But when you heard that, you were a little bit low nose, but you could still get in all right. In choppy water you would feel some jolts, (clapping ?)

Q: As it hit the tops of the waves?

A: As you get up on the step, until you got up on the step you wouldn't feel anything much except a little roll and pitching like any boat. But as you got up on the step as you had to do before you took off, you would jump from wave to hear, you would feel just a little choppiness like driving crossways on a ruddy road. If you had bad sea conditions, you had entirely different problems and different feelings. The biggest difficulty was swells or in some cases, which was rather unusual, just big waves, not the long weather induced swells, but just rough waves, then you wanted to land slow as you could. You didn't want to land fast, you didn't want to try to grease it on the step, like you did on smooth water. You would bring it down as close as you dared and then tried to, just about stalling it, just before you touched the water. In other words put it on at the slowest possible speed. That's without falling out.

Q: Now let me see if I've got this right. Coming in slow, you would come in more level?

A: No, the slower you were in the ordinary course of things, the slower you were the higher the nose would be. So you increase the angle of tack of your wings. That means that by, you need a certain amount of lift to stay there, or you descend constant. You need a certain amount of lift. You can get it either by putting your nose down and a little more speed or you can slow your speed and increase your angle of attack. You get the same resultant lift, but at a slower speed, but you had to watch out for the limits, stalling and so forth.

Q: But the idea of coming in slowly, would be that instead of keeping hitting those tops of the waves, you would get the whole of the hull into the water as quickly as possible?

A: That became particularly noticeable in swells. Swells might be induced by a storm system miles away. They might be very smooth on top, but they might be five or six foot in height. But those things, you had to be very particular and had to try and choose the spot to land in. If you landed on a face of a wave with the side coming towards you, if you touched into that, you could get thrown into the air, but you would have lost your airspeed and would be liable to smack the next one real hard. So you had to be very careful. That was a tricky condition and we had various limits on swell conditions that we were allowed to operate in.

Q: Swells were more dangerous than ordinary waves?

A: Yes, unless you were in a (UNINTELLIGIBLE 177) condition where the waves are running say six feet, five or six feet, with a wave length of perhaps thirty or forty feet. Then they could cause you trouble. Then they could cause you trouble, the wave action was usually close enough together so your impacts were, like that, with a swell you'd beat and then you'd be liable to back in the air for a matter of seconds before you smacked down again, but meanwhile that one touchdown plus the attitude of the airplane, would have cost you a lot of airspeed. And you wouldn't be able to hold it in the air, you could come back in more or less in an uncontrolled position.

Q: So next time you'd hit real hard?

A: You'd hit real hard, yeah.

Q: Almost like a crash landing really.

A: Yes that's right. That happened occasionally.

Q: Because the pilot would have lost control because he had lost air speed?

A: Usually that would have been the reason, because you would have lost so much speed and without time enough for your power to take on, to regain it before you touched down again.

Q: So that would be a really bumpy landing?

A: What it would amount to would be a full speed landing and frequently against a face of a swell, that meant you smacked in there pretty hard. It did happen occasionally. We stove in the bottom, every once in a while, not very often. We didn't run into very much of that difficulty on that northern route. On the Southampton to Port Washington. Most of our landings were pretty well protected on that route, Southampton Water, Shannon, at Botwood the harbour was well protected, the same at Shediac and of course Port Washington in Manhazit Bay, all protected water and we didn't have much of a problem with rough water. Through the Azores.....

Q: What do you remember of Foynes.

A: The place, the buildings. You better check me on this too. My recollection on the first of these trips, the first one or two anyway, we had to tie up to a buoy out in the Shannon. Now as I recall, Foynes, is kind of a harbour like with a little slosh of water, anyway not on the map to a great deal. But I think on the first one or two trips we couldn't (UNINTELLIGIBLE 251/2) we had to tie up to a mooring out in the Shannon and go in a launch into the dock at Foynes. And there was a little building, right on the dock, close by where this launch took us out, that served as immigration office. There again I wish I could remember that man's name, who was I think Customs and Immigration official, and Customs and Immigration were a real mess because the International Civil Aviation Organisation as it was at that time, had just recently decided on some immigration and customs forms to be used in international airtravel, so it was new stuff, and these folks didn't have any of these forms, never had seen them.

Same in Canada. Incidentally that was another one of my chores, handling that damn stuff, and that floored me a lot worse than navigation. But this little fellow at Foynes did the very best he could with these forms. We also on this first flight had a great big tremendous manifest that were used on ships, liners. Big passenger manifest, a couple of feet on its side. I had to fill that in on this flight too. The only reason, - that none of these stations had been supplied with the new forms and they knew nothing about it; that was just an incidental thing.

Q: So there was a small building that was Customs and Immigration.

A: Yes, and there was a little office and I used to talk to this little fellow in there. And then up the street a little piece, I hesitate to say how far, probably no more than a couple of hundred feet or so, a hundred yards maybe, was the operations building and we had to go up there to look at the weather charts, and to make our flight plans and all that sort of thing.

Q: Now somebody told me that, that building was the harbour master's office. Do you recall that?

A: No, I don't know, it could very well have been, because as far as I know this was the only air activity there, all the rest of it was ships, what ships served Foynes at that time.

Q: What would the passengers do while you were getting the weather reports and so on and while the plane was refuelling.

A: What they did in detail, I don't know. I do know the station people or the Irish station people or Imperial as the case might be, took the passengers under their wing, and in effect entertained them. Another thing to remember about the very first flights was a political flight, with politicians and whatnot on board. The second flight was press, mainly press. The third flight I think was

passengers. Of course the first flight covers all went on over on their first flight and back on their first westbound. But the passengers were taken under somebody's wing, and entertained. They'd have tea or a night show or whatever was appropriate. When we landed in Foynes on the eastbound, we used to go up to a what appeared to be big country house, not far from Foynes, they used to drive us up there for breakfast. Best damned breakfast I ever came across 'cause we were always famished after banging away all night and in the case of the navigator with no sleep. I don't remember the names of those people either, but it was one of those big old stone houses with a great big dining room, a big sort of a living room with a fireplace and everything, it was a wonderful looking place.

Q: Was it a hotel?

A: No it was a private residence as I recall. They no doubt had some sort of accommodation arranged with the local station people there, but I don't know. I never got involved in that, I just enjoyed it.

Q: But nobody would visit that place on the west bound flight?

A: No, on the westbound we would go from Southampton to Foynes where we had to fuel the airplane and do all our flight plans and whatnot and just stay right at the dock area in Foynes until we were ready to take off.

Q: It was a little fishing village type place, Foynes?

A: Yes, it was a small village, nice people.

Q: What about Botwood. What do you recall of Botwood?

A: The only thing I saw of Botwood was the dock, the bay where we landed, the dock, and the operations building and customs and all that stuff was in that same building as I recall.

Q: Do you remember what sort of a building it was?

A: Only in the vaguest sort of way. The only thing I remember is that the dock was right along and by the time you reached

the shoreward end of the dock, you didn't have very far to go to reach that building. It was pretty close to there as I recall. And I think we had to go upstairs to look at the weather maps.

Q: Any facilities there for the passengers?

A: Yes, but I don't know what they were, I never did see them.

Q: Do you recall the passengers getting off at Botwood?

A: Well, I can't say positively that I did see them get off, but I think they did. I think so because we didn't like to leave them on board during re-fuelling operations and all that sort of thing you know. So I think it likely that they went ashore. We were getting pretty close to home then, we had time, usually it was right around daylight or shortly after so we had a full day ahead of us. And of course this was summer time, long days, so...

Q: Apart from the operations building, was there much else at Botwood, hotels, houses?

A: I think not. I don't remember seeing Botwood really. The town I mean, the town of Botwood. One reason is, of course looking out the airplane you could see clusters of huts but I don't remember what it looked like. I was usually concerned with looking at the water, or the dock, or seeing where the wind was and all that sort of thing, and I simply don't recall that much about it. Here again one of the reasons is, in addition to poor memory, the fact that I was practically always down below looking out of a window during these approaches for these particular flights.

Q: Because you were the junior officer?

A: Yes. You see ordinarily for takes offs and landings the captain and the first officer would be in the cockpit. The navigator would in a seat just aft of his station up on the flight deck and the flight engineer at his station on the flight deck. All the rest of us, the junior officers, in

other words anyone not on watch was in a compartment down below, the most forward lower compartments were obviously used as crew rest and that's where we used to be. So we were rather like passengers. On these three flights I was always on that low side of the order you see, and I was always down below.

Q: Where did you eat, when the crew ate?

A: We ate in that same compartment, that lower forward compartment. I don't know if you noticed, they could set a table in between the forward seats and aft seats, and they set a table there. And we ate very well too.

Q: Presumably you had the same food as the passengers.

A: Yes, the same stuff.

Q: About the best food that the airlines could provide in those days.

A: Yes. I don't know who provided us out of Southampton, but out of New York, it was one of the famous restaurants, somebody Longchamp, so one of those real well known restaurants. It was pretty fancy stuff a lot of the time.

Q: What about Shediac. What do you remember about the dock and the terminal and so on there?

A: I remember something about Shediac, 'cause I've been back there since. Well, I've been to Foynes so it didn't look like I remembered. But at Shediac, as I said there was protected water, there was a pier, part causeway, part pier that ran out from the shore about..

Q: How far?

A: Oh, about, it must have been about 100/150 yards I guess, something like that. But it wasn't just a pier, it was sort of a promontory with lobster canneries. And the direction, I'm a little confused, but I think that in a sort of a easterly or perhaps north easterly, this straight area went out and then turned, and there were lobster canneries down

here and in that building a little operations building was out near this corner, not quite to the corner. That's 150 yards or so out from where this promontory left the shore.

Q: So there's a promontory and a causeway and the causeway is angled so that would make a protected harbour?

A: As I remember it the..., as I say I've forgotten what the directions were, but I think that if this is North, there was a shoreline around more or less like this, and then this straight shoot out to where the lobster canneries were and our little building. And this is the water we used to use for take-off and landing out here. And it was all protected. I can't remember just what was over here, but something was here to protect this area and we used to..., - there again we couldn't tie up at a dock, there was no dock to tie up to, so we used to pick up a mooring just off shore near the little building of ours. And the re-fuelling had to be done. Incidentally, talking about re-fuelling at Foynes on the first couple of trips we couldn't come into the little bay and tie up at the dock, so that they had to refuel the plane from launches in the Shannon, tied up to the mooring. I don't know whether Zedalis mentioned that. Zedalis would know more about that than I do. But they had a launch with fuel and oil on board and they would string a hose into the tank and pump it in, tied up to the mooring. The same situation at Shediac. Although we didn't have as much to cook there of course...

Q: You didn't need as much?

A: We didn't need so much to go Botwood. We'd tie up to that mooring it was just a little short trip into our operations shack there, where we did all our flight planning and all that sort of thing.

Q: Weather reports again?

A: Yes weather reports.

Q: What about the town of Shediac? Now I understand that's a bigger place than either than Botwood or Foynes.

A: Yes, Shediac is a pretty big town. Without remembering too much in detail on that first flight we were hung up there for a couple of days by fog in Botwood, on the first trip over. We were hung up in Shediac, I think it was for two days and that gave us a chance to look around for a bit. It was a pretty good size town, and of course, just up river from there the Caddice River, there's a pretty big town called Monkton. But ordinarily we didn't go to Monkton, we never got away from Shediac except this time when we had to lay over.

Q: But Shediac must have had shops and bars, and didn't it have a hotel?

A: They did. I had to overnight there another time when we blew a starter.

Q: Presumably while you were refuelling, the passengers would go to the hotel? If they wanted a drink or ?

A: Yes, they were always taken care of, probably in a hotel, I really don't know. I tried to find that hotel. My wife and I went to Shediac, Oh, before I was transferred back here from New York. In the early seventies I took a trip up through there and I went up to take a look at that place where I stayed one night. But I never could locate it. But it was a nice place though.

Q: The place has changed.

A: Yes. Has anybody mentioned to you the way we used to report positions and so on. In a general sort of way, when you left a place, say Foynes on the westbound trip. Of course it weren't so important from Southampton to Foynes, because of the dead reckoning and it weren't no great involvement. Even so when you left a point you always took departure from a particular point from a light or a promontory or something specific with a definite position. You did the same thing

at the end when you tried to make your landfall, that's what you aimed for. When you would take departure you would note that of course, and write out your departure message and give it to the radio operator and he would transmit it to the ground stations. Ordinarily, somebody can check me on this, we used to send reports, position reports, every half hour, and a position report, we'd a great long form, of course it gave time and position and how you'd determine that position, fixed, land position or whatever, how'd you determine it. And then a report on your heading and your speed and all that sort of thing. Then a lot of spaces for recording weather encountered, the current weather, and you could always add things in if you had something to come in, it wasn't current of this report but it happened after 20 mins, maybe a wind shift, you could make special reports. But ordinarily we sent those every half hour.

Q: So the navigator would write it and the radio operator would send it. And he would send it in morse code?

A: Yes, all morse. We did have voice radio on these ships but they were only good within close range of stations, you couldn't use it for communication except when you got close in.

Q: How close?

A: About 25/30 miles maybe. It depended, they were a little
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INTERVIEW WITH JIM MCLEOD (2) - 3RD FEBRUARY 1990

A: The would amuse some of the guys flying now, I think.

Q: Why was that.

A: Because there was so much detail in 'em you know, and how you determined you fix and all that sort of thing.

Q: What was I going to ask you about next, whether...

Now did you sleep on the plane? What was it like to sleep on the plane?

A: Except the navigator. Er, well it was like sleeping any place, those were very comfortable bunks.

Q: Were they. What about the noise?

A: Well, I would have a little trouble. Depending on how things were going. If I had something bugging me, I would be a little prone to lying there, figuring it out, you know. But ordinarily, when you got your four hours off, you would go down, and a lot of us smoked in those days, and we'd have a coffee and a smoke and climb into bunk and usually get some sleep. In that forward compartment for crew rest, we usually had four bunks. They were a forward ship on the right side, two on the forward bulkhead and two on the aft bulkhead. And the passengers had arrangements of bunks in different ways, depending on what compartment they were in. There was no problem sleeping except lots of passengers wouldn't go to bed. They'd stay up all night sitting in that lounge area. Frequently when I was navigating, I'd go down there, take a bowl, smoke or have some coffee. There was almost always two or three passengers down there, nothing much to see, except blackness of course.

Q: What would they be doing? Reading?

A: Once in a while, one would play cards, some would read, but a lot of them were sort of waiting to talk to somebody, because whenever I went down there they always wanted to talk.

Q: What kind of things would they talk about? They'd ask you about the flight I suppose.

A: Yes, they'd ask you about the flight and how's the weather and when are we going to get there, and when would it be daylight and all sorts of questions. And sometimes they'd just talk about themselves. You know, I live in so and so, and I have this many children. Just like somebody you'd meet on a train.

Q: Would they be drinking, cocktails and stuff?

A: If they wanted them, then sometimes they were. Sometimes you'd go down, some people would invariably, I mean once the flight got underway, and you'd only be down a couple of times, you'd invariably see a person with a drink. I don't remember ever seeing anybody drunk on those things. I've seen people drunk on aeroplanes, in other aeroplanes, in other situations, but on those flights I don't ever recall seeing a drunk. Some of them I think did drink quite a lot overnight. But there never seemed to a problem or cause any difficulty, as far as I could tell. Passengers were usually pretty easy to get along with in those days. Well, I say those days, on those flights anyway. But of course there weren't a whole lot of passengers. We couldn't haul too many.

Q: Very different from modern flying

A: Oh yes, Oh yes, quite different. Nothing like these things that fly now. At that time, that was the biggest plane, I think in commercial operation. Maybe in any operation.

Q: I think it was the biggest ever built

A: I think it started off around 84,000 pounds gross. I think they later upped to a couple of more thousand to around 86,000 something..if I remember right, but I don't think there was anything bigger at that time. That was the last aeroplane I held a rating on.

Q: What does that mean?

A: Well, you get to fly an aeroplane under our regulations, you have to be rated ahead to be rated on that aeroplane, or that class of aeroplane. This of course was called a Class 5, multi-engine being in the highest gross rate category with more than one engine. And when we were still based in Baltimore, they made us, I was about to become first officer at that time. And we had to take our rating rides on that. It turned out that the inspector on my rating ride, there was about three I was checking out that day, and the inspector by the name of Nicholson, I had known in the Air Corps earlier and at National Air Transport when I worked out there once, and we went through our paces. We had to go out and do certain types of air work, and then come in and show them the landings. So he pointed out a channel marker, this was in Baltimore harbour and said, "Land by that marker, touch down by that marker" and so I made my approach and made my touchdown. By God I did it right smack, right alongside the marker. I looked over at him and said "How's that " and he said "I think that was a mistake, you better do another one". So the fellow made me do another one. Well he passed me. - Well that's what I meant by rating.

Q: Well, I think I've asked you all my questions..

A: Well I hope it's not been a waste of time..

Q: Absolutely not, quite the contrary

A: Well, it's not often we get to tell, as I told Starr, usually bunk flying with something that's really interested in , - usually you just bore the hell out of people, not to mention my wife. She's heard all of my stories, I have to be careful when she's here

Q: Well may I ring you if anything else occurs to me. I'm going to be year or so writing this and I'm certainly going to Foynes and I may have to go to Shediac and Botwood as well. They may be so changed that there's no point my going there, but we'll see.

A: Well I'm sure they've changed. Botwood I don't know about, I have no idea, I'm sure that....

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