

INTERVIEW WITH ROGER WOLIN - 3RD FEBRUARY 1990

Side A.

Q: Now you were.. - you flew this flight as a passenger?

A: I was a Public Relations person for Pan Am. I ran their Public Relations around the world in my last job with Pan Am about ten years. Before that ... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 010/014) ... I was running Latin American Public Relations. I'm a former newspaper man. I was a.. - I made the jump from being an honest man to a PR.

Q: Now, everybody else I've interviewed has been crew on the plane. Pilots and engineers.

A: You talked to a real good person, I would say, in Lew Lindsey.

Q: Yes, I talked to him earlier today, earlier this afternoon. He was great.

A: Your man in the New York Star told me that you were going to talk to him prior to coming here. And Lew is really very knowledgeable about what you're trying to get at. If you tell me what you're pursuing, I might be able to be more helpful.

Q: OK. What I'd like to do is to try and reconstruct a westward flight from the point of view of the passenger.

A: From New York westbound?

Q: No. From Southampton to New York. I have a lot of information from the point of the crew and what I'd like to get from you, - you're the only person really who flew as a passenger. So let's start off with how the passengers got to Southampton. Before they boarded the plane. Because I understand that they were shepherded from London. If they were staying in London they would have been taken by a Pan Am person, taken by train...

A: Yes, there was an operation. Unfortunately I usually made

my way to Southampton. And I didn't make the flight a lot of times, I was trying to remember if I made once or twice. But being a company person, somebody usually took me out, if we had business to do, and somehow I got to Southampton. But you're right the Pan Am organised people in London. I don't remember if it was done at a ..(UNINTELLIGIBLE 089/090) ... it seems to me it was done in the area of the district sales office. But I don't remember.

Q: That's all right. There will be lots of details that no one remembers. We'll just get whatever we can. Do you recall...

A: And they did go by train not to Southampton but ..(UNINTELLIGIBLE 104).. by the time they got to Southampton, everybody - that was one of the things about the flight early in the days of transatlantic flight... background there is. You know we had been flying the Pacific for quite some time before that. We actually wanted to fly the Atlantic first. The aircraft that were available, were much better suited for flying the Atlantic than they were for the much longer haul on the Pacific. From San Francisco to Hawaii which was at that time, and remained for many many years, the longest over water hop in existence for aircraft. And the aircraft were much better suited for flying the Atlantic; and we had it all plotted to do it just as the 314 did it but the British weren't ready, and they weren't about to give us permission to do it. Nobody blamed them, but it was the first choice that Pan Am had for using the aircraft at that time and there was a hell of a lot more business between New York and England, New York and London, or the United States and England than there was between the United States and the Pacific. There was a greater market. But the British weren't ready. As I remember it they didn't have the flying boat, they didn't have the aircraft. I think the best they had was a Sunderland, which was later, and it didn't have the capability. I think when the Sunderland came along it may have had, - but what they did have didn't have the

capability for doing it and somehow, the Sunderland sticks in my craw, the Sunderland may have been the first aircraft that was capable of doing it... (UNINTELLIGIBLE 176) .. but I just mention that in passing. By just trying to offer what little I know as I go along, it may fit, I don't know what you're trying to get at.

Q: Now, presumably the pier that you used at Southampton. Was that near the railway station? Could they get off the train and get right on the

A: It wasn't very far from it. You know how the trains operate today going down right adjacent to the ships and the harbour we were landing in was similar. It was actually, wherever we went, we were using ships harbours because they were the protected harbours for landing and you wouldn't be landing with a lot of waves, and the problems with weather when there were weather problems....

Q: Do you recall...

A: and we laid out an actual runway with lights in the Southampton harbour so that the pilots got a lighted runway so to speak.., for guidance purposes and giving him.., the runways would be laid out as they are today with land runways, would be laid out with the prevailing winds that you needed. You see you always need a wind, as you probably know by this time, for flying into the wind for takeoff and so the prevailing wind would be .., the runway would be laid out...

Q: In the direction of the prevailing wind ..?

A: .. with lights, just as you have a lighted runway today. But they were in the water, there were boeys, in the water laid out in a straight line, and it was.., the crews in those days all flew together. They were large crews. There was a captain.., did Lew Lindsey tell you this, did somebody tell you about the crew size? They were large size crews, going down to a navigator and so on, and his only job was to navigate that thing. They flew with a science called

avigation, which Pan American invented, created, it was an adaptation of seafaring navigation to be done in the air. There was a bubble section, where the navigator would take his readings with a sextant. But even the sextants were adapted for this kind of thing. And there was a viewer down through the floor, the hull of the aircraft, where the navigator would take a reading of the kind of water he was viewing. In other words he would view, like he did with the sextant up above, he would view the water below for waves, height of waves, direction of waves and so on, which gave him wind direction and a bunch of other stuff, and also gave them conditions which they read, .. of course they would have ground crews which would give them the kind of information they'd want about the water, the wind direction and everything. But as they were coming into those areas, he would make these sea observations. But basically those were not for the sea itself, for landing, but they were to give him the kinds of winds that they were going to be.....

Q: I understand that. But with you I want to concentrate on what it was like for a passenger..

A: I started to say, the camaraderie would start on the train. People would begin to talk to each other and they would have refreshments on the train. If it was early in the morning there would be breakfast served on the train, and everybody would get talking to each other. Everybody was anxious talking to each other, but it was a real big adventure. Most of these people were first time flyers. There were a lot of businessmen who were using it; there were a lot of people who were first time flyers on the Atlantic They may have flown elsewhere, but this was the first time for them. And coming across the Atlantic was a real pioneering experience, every passenger felt like a Lindberg.

Q: So they would leave London in the morning and take the train down to Southampton. They would get off.... I suppose it would be..... formalities and so on could be dealt with on the train. Maybe even before they got on the train.

Boarding passes, did they have boarding passes in those days?

A: Yes they did. It was part of the ticket.

Q: So they would go down to Southampton on the train. Take off from Southampton was supposed to be two o'clock in the afternoon. So I suppose they'd probably have lunch on the train?

A: Yes, there was a meal served on the train. Depending when the departure was...

Q: And when they got to Southampton it would be just a question of getting off the train and walking a short distance to the plane?

A: I was trying to remember. I think a lot of the, a good deal of the clearances were done in London, at the first gathering, because the papers were all put together in London. There was very little..., all the last minute stuff., a lot of the stuff at Southampton, the passenger stuff I'm talking about, was put together in London.

Q: So they would check their bags in London. And present their tickets.

A: When they got off in Southampton, they just rolled out onto the Clipper.

Q: Was the Clipper parked at the jetty or did they need to take a launch out.

A: No, it was parked at the jetty. Parked at the pier.

Q: Would that be a Pan Am pier or..?

A: It was a Pan Am pier.

Q: So they would get on board. They'd go down the jetty. There would be some kind of a gang plank over to the plane, they would step off the gangplank onto the seawing, and then inside the aircraft.

A: Actually it wasn't on the sea wing, it was right into the

aircraft. There was a door, a big door, there was a gangplank went right into the aircraft and you walked right into the aircraft.

Q: Did they have assigned seating or could they sit anywhere? When you got on the plane did you have an assigned seat?

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A: Oh yes. Everything was assigned. Everything was assigned all the way around. I think I told your man, that in the rear of the plane was a very fine suite, sometimes referred to as the Presidential Suite. On the morning of the inaugural flight of the Boeing 314, which was not to London, it had previously flown to Portugal, because we were not ready to..., we didn't have permission yet to fly to London. Bob ? from Columbia broadcasting system was on board describing in a radio broadcast the aircraft and going out as they did in those days, and he got to the rear of the aircraft where there was this lovely suite, and it was called the Honeymoon suite. And he said this is a magnificent suite as fine as you'll find in any of the luxury hotels you can be in and it's in the tail of the airplane. About which a lot of people kidded him about.

Q: Now, do you remember how much it cost to fly in that suite? The regular round trip fare was ...(UNINTELLIGIBLE 398).. Somebody told me it wasn't much used, that suite?

A: I would not., that was not in my area, domain

Q: So you would get on board the plane now, you would sit down...

A: Let me say this, it depended on the period in which that airplane was flying. If they needed seats, if they needed space to accommodate people, the suite was broken up and used. It depended on..., it may not have been used totally as a Presidential Suite or a Honeymoon suite, in all instances, but it depended on the period in which you may be talking. You know as we got close to war, there wasn't any part of any airplane that wasn't being used going to London. We got....

Q: But before the war actually started, when the plane was being used more normally. You would board, you would take your seats, put on your safety belt and the doors would be closed. You would take off and then....

A: Take-off was always beautiful, romantic, inspiring, awesome, occasionally. If you did it once or you did it a hundred times. It was a boat taking off until it became an airplane. And every time you did it, every time you experienced it, and every time you saw it, if you were only observing it, it was an inspiring sight. It was a great experience.

Q: What did it feel like then?

A: Well it felt like.., here you are on a boat and you take-off slowly of course, like any boat, and then all of a sudden you're speeding along and come to speeds of 170, 150, close to 200 miles an hour, and all of a sudden you're out of the water and you're a bird taking off, like a duck. Fabulous experience. You feel as though you're doing it. Being in the airplane you kinda feel like you're doing it..

Q: And then what would happen? You would take off, cocktails?

A: You're airborne. Cocktails.

Q: Canapes?

A: Ah, yes. Caviar. The service was as luxurious as could be found. It was as luxurious as you would have in any luxury hotel in London or Paris. Anything you would find on that scene.

Q: Champagne?

A: Champagne. You could have anything you want. Any hard liquor you wanted. Everything was aboard. After dinner liqueurs were there, all there, there would be no liqueur that wasn't available. And wines were served. Different wines.., each course was served individually. The linens were the best you could buy. The finest linens. The silver

was silver. Everything was magnificent. The food, Pan Am had created their own kitchens to serve this aircraft, but everything was the best you could buy and the best you could find. It was a luxury service all the way. The food, service everything. And of course the attendants were all male; there were no females ...

Q: Once you'd taken off and people were having drinks and canapes and so on, did people move about the aircraft.

A: Oh, yes, it was one big party. Decorous. You're talking about people with a lot of money, generally speaking. People, well nobody else could afford it. And Government people of the highest calibre only; ambassadors...

Q: So they would move around quite freely, as if they..

A: Very freely..

Q: As if they were at a party?

A: By our present portents, it was a small aircraft so to speak. It was large for that time. It was the largest aircraft in existence at the time.

Q: But even by today's standards it was spacious?

A: It was very spacious, and very comfortable. It was a much more spacious arrangement than you have today. Leg room, seating and everything else.

Q: Now the first leg was from Southampton to Foynes. And as I understand it the trip to Foynes was about two and a half hours from Southampton. And you would come down at Foynes. Now at Foynes, if my information is right, you could not take the plane up to the jetty. You had to take a launch. Now what would the passengers do when they got off at Foynes?

A: Some of them would go to the bar. Foynes.., in the later development though not much later, Foynes quickly became a place where the Irish came and sold lace, Waterford, in a very small way, it became what later developed into Shannon,

a shopping, duty free shopping. But Foynes developed that... there were these people standing around with nothing to do except...,

Q: Rich people with nothing to do....

A: Nothing to do and looking for something to buy. You know they weren't going to be in Ireland, so there were little Waterford things first, little Waterford crystal things and so on. Very soon the business developed. It became a.., at first they were sort of peddling them out of their pocket so to speak. But later they developed into a counter operation and that sort of thing and almost from.., I don't remember them selling any whisky, early in the days, it may have been, out at the bar, somebody may have bought a bottle of whisky to take home, a bottle of Irish whisky or something like that. But I don't remember that particularly until later.

Q: Then they would get back on the plane?

A: The whole duty free concept which came all over the world, originated in Foynes.

Q: So they would come back to the jetty, they would get on the launch, they would go back out to the plane, they would take off again from Foynes and then dinner would be served.

A: That's right. Again the service was always.., they'd take aboard new linens, clean silverware and everything, leave the old at Foynes, where they would re-furbish all the supplies and pick up dinner, or they might have picked, sometimes with only three and a half hours, they might have picked up dinner at Southampton, I'm not sure. But later they certainly would have picked it up at Foynes.

Q: Now there must have been more than one sitting at dinner, because the dining room held fourteen and you might have had more passengers than that?

A: Oh, yes, much more than that.

Q: Presumably the stewards would ask people if they want to eat right away, or later?

A: Nobody was saddled with a sitting. They would ask if you were ready for dinner, and some would say they'd like to eat now or later.

Q: And wine was served with dinner?

A: Red wine or white wine, and there was always champagne available. And you could have a drink anytime you wanted to.

Q: Just call the steward.

A: That's right. They were always at the back, working the aircraft, keeping it neat, asking people what they needed. The service was..., you know somebody was right on top all the time, you needed it.

Q: And then when everybody had had dinner, some people would start to get ready for bed. So they would go into the men's room or the ladies' room and put on their pyjamas.

A: That's right.

Q: Meanwhile, the stewards would pull down the bunks. Do you remember where they kept the blankets and sheets?

A: As I remember the blankets and sheets were kept in the bunks. The bunks were made up, already made up. They didn't have to make them up. And they pulled down all made up. Have you ever ridden in an American Pullman carriage.

Q: No. I've been on the Orient Express in Europe, and I imagine

A: And I haven't so I can't tell you, but the bunks made up when all the steward has to do is pull them down.

Q: They're not made up with sheets and blankets, no.

A: Well, these were.

Q: What you have on the Orient Express is something like this.

And at night this is hinged so, they pull this out like this, except it's higher, and that gives you a bed here, and a bed there.

A: This was different. This had ..., it was built into the aircraft so to speak, and you'd pull it down.

Q: And the bottom, the lower bunk as well..

A: The lower bunk was.., the lower bunk had to be made up.

..... INTERRUPTION

Q: Now some people wouldn't go to sleep.

A: Oh, there were always some who stayed up. There were always the bridge players and

Side B

Q: We're on the last leg of the journey now. Take off from Shediac.

A: This was always a kind of er..., Oh boy, here we go, this is the last leg, with a feeling of hope and you get your spirits up again. And it was always the longest part of the journey. For returning Americans or people planning to go New York, planning .., who had programmes or plans for New York and so on, you were now looking forward to finishing. And it was always the longest part of the journey, the last let, and that was a long flight.

Q: Mostly down the east coast of the United States I imagine?

A: Right. Mostly over water.

Q: Would land be in sight most of the time?

A: Sometimes, depending on the way the coastline went. Sometimes. Ah,...

Q: And it would be much easier to navigate now, because they've got radio beacons and they can see landmarks when they are close to land, and it's light...

A: I can't tell you about that. I know they continued to do the navigation just as though they were still flying the Atlantic. Because there was a straight line shot. There weren't any heading around to look at the land or anything, it was a straight line shot. But I would check that out with Lew Lindsey again. But as I remember it was no deviation from the same pattern of flight. The navigator and the .., set the pattern, setting the course.

Q: So, now finally you land at Port Washington, New York. Now what was it like to land, what was it like to come down in this plane.

A: It was Port Washington. Well it was a typical Long Island, again ... harbour, lots of sail boats, that sort of thing. It was an attractive part of the island. When you landed as at all the other places you landed which I haven't mentioned, there were always two standby boats which had all kinds of emergency equipment in case of a problem with landing. They had ..

Q: Fire fighting equipment?

A: Some fire fighting equipment. Extra, enough life vests for everybody aboard. Even though that kind of equipment was on board the aircraft. This was a duplicate in case of an accident on landing. Now this happened everywhere. This was emergency standby procedure that Pan Am maintained everywhere the flying boats landed. Again, boeys had been laid out for the runway. They wouldn't be out there all the time. They would be laid out for landings. And same kind of instructions you get today, from the control tower, would all be going through with the crews. Now I started to say to you in the beginning, the crews all flew together. They knew each reflexes. It's not like crews today, you might have a co-pilot or two flying with you, or you might not have one, or what have you. But these crews all flew as a unit.

Q: They were a team

A: A team. They knew each other's reflexes. They knew what their jobs were. They collaborated, they were friendly. It was like just one big scientific family. And the crew was always a unit. And the captain was a captain. He commanded the ship. It was in the tradition of a captain aboard a vessel, aboard a ship. And discipline, and the coordination of the crew was something to see.

Q: Finally, at Port Washington. There was a jetty I presume? Did it approach the jetty under its own power. Or was it towed in?

A: It approached a boeey. As I remember it approached the boeey and tied up to the boeey. And the standby ships, boats like a large Chriscraft, would tow it in, the Boeing to the dock.

Q: The passengers would get off the plane onto the dock and that was it.

A: Now, I'm maybe mixing history here. I think by the time the Boeing came along, as I remember, the Boeing pilot would taxi up to a boeey adjacent to the jetty, and it was pulled in. There was no motor boat.

Q: It didn't have to be juggled in.

A: No, it was very close to the jetty.

Q: Taxi up to the buoy and then it would just have to be pulled up to be moored, I think.

A: That was just to the, the final mooring.

Q: That's it. We've done it. Reconstructed the whole flight.

A: Hope I've been helpful. A lot of years have gone by. I've tried to make sure that what I was telling you was correct so that if there's been some lapses in my memory that I have been careful to tell you that I don't remember so that I wouldn't mislead you on something, get somebody else to do some research on it.