

FLYING THE OCEANS

A Pilot's Story of Pan Am

1935-1955

BY HORACE BROCK

THE STINEHOUR PRESS

LUNENBURG · VERMONT

1978

New Orleans, arriving at Baltimore on February 24, 1939. Bob Fordyce was the first officer and I was second, being junior to him. There were about ten others in the crew including flight engineers and radio operators. Bob was a close friend of mine on the Pacific and we planned to live together in Baltimore.

CHAPTER IV

Pan American Airways, Atlantic Division, Baltimore, Maryland

FEBRUARY 1939 - APRIL 1940

I ARRIVED in Baltimore February 24, 1939 with Captain Gray on a ferry flight of the first B-314 from San Francisco. "Dutch" Schildhauer was the operations manager of the Atlantic run—as he had been of the Pacific when it was being organized—and it was now operating three times a week to Bermuda with an S-42B.

Soon after arrival Bob Fordyce and I found a two-room apartment in a new development in Dundalk, a section of Baltimore. Its only recommendations were its cheapness and proximity to our base which was a rented hangar on Logan Field, the Baltimore Municipal Airport. Bob and I were unfamiliar with Baltimore, but I had some cousins, the Robert Garretts, and a great-aunt, Mrs. Robert Johnson, living there; my cousins, the Garrett boys and girls, were very kind to us and I was soon exposed to the very real charms of Baltimore and its inhabitants. One never forgets the crab meat and mint juleps. Soon I knew most of the people in the famous Green Spring Valley starting with the Jack Symingtons who were old friends of my mother and father, and the Curzon Hoffmans who were also. The Symington's son, Fife, was our Pan Am traffic and sales manager; Harry Snowdon, a huge Adonis from Yale was our station manager. Trippe's family came from Baltimore. Even the Governor of Maryland thought of Trippe as a Baltimorean who had based the Transatlantic Flying Service in Baltimore out of loyalty—which was not exactly correct.

Bob Fordyce and I lived in Dundalk most of 1939—until he left me to marry Dorothy McElree in Westchester, Pa. I then found a new non-Pan Am friend, Eno de Buys, a young gentleman from New Orleans, employed by a local trust company, also looking for a place to live, and we got an apartment at 4327 Marble Hall Road in the city. It was through Eno that I met the girl I was to marry, Hope Distler, as told a little further along, and it was through her and her family that I was to become familiar with the *Preakness* and the *Maryland Hunt Cup*.

Now that the B-314, the Super Clipper, had arrived, there was a big push to get it into service across the Atlantic. On March 13th we took it to Port Washington, Long Island, to show it off to the New York office and distinguished visitors. Such occasions produced a cloud of beautiful girls, mostly Powers' models for fashion magazines. Our vice-president of traffic and sales, Vic Chenea, believed in photogenic females as the best kind of publicity.

The B-314 was the largest flying boat and perhaps the largest airplane in the world at that time. The main deck consisted of compartments which made up into upper and lower berths. Forward of the passengers was a galley, then a small stairway or companionway up to the flight deck. The latter was very roomy by aircraft standards—the pilot and co-pilot seats behind the instrument panel were all the way forward, the radio operator's station was right behind the co-pilot and consisted of a table with the radios and an upholstered swivel armchair; next, behind the radio on the starboard side, was the flight engineer's station with a similar chair by a table backed by a huge instrument panel and various engine controls extending up over his head. Across the way, behind the captain and extending the length of the port side, was the navigator's table and chart cases. The entire flight deck was high enough to stand up in comfortably and had two comfortable seats at the rear for extra crew.

At that time our flying boats used a float with a runway to it from the edge of Logan Field on Baltimore Harbor. Our transatlantic passenger service was to be from New York to Europe, but there was no suitable place around Manhattan for an operating base

for a giant Clipper. A float and runway from a small building on shore had been arranged at Port Washington which was to be the New York passenger terminal for several years. For every Bermuda flight we flew the empty plane from Baltimore to Port Washington where the passengers were loaded outbound, and unloaded on the return trips.

I made my initial trip to Bermuda as first officer with Captain Charles Lorber, and in Bermuda we used a facility on Darrell's Island in the Great Sound as our base. We shared it with Imperial Airways which used our terminal at Port Washington and our main base at Baltimore. In those days there were no cars on Bermuda; only horses, buggies and bicycles. Royal cedars covered the islands. All the roads were shady, and the islands were even more beautiful then than they are today. It seemed as though every available acre of land was planted with onions or lilies—export crops of which we carried as much as we could on the planes. Before Easter, every cubic inch of space not occupied by passengers would be loaded with cut lilies for the trip back to New York.

After my first trip to Bermuda the next week was spent in training and practice flights on the B-314. We had received a second one from Boeing, and Captain Gray was soon to take off on a B-314 survey flight for the coming passenger service across the Atlantic. Captain Gray, with Bill Masland as first officer, had surveyed the Atlantic routes to Horta and Lisbon the year before. Now, several flights would have to be made with the B-314 before the CAA would approve the carriage of passengers. The first would be called a survey flight and would carry only Pan Am personnel. If all went well and the ground stations appeared ready to go, the second flight would carry the first airmail and some CAA inspectors. After that several more proving flights might be made with mail and cargo until the CAA certified the service for the carriage of passengers.

On the 26th we left from Baltimore with Gray in command after a one day delay awaiting Portuguese and French permissions. Captain Mike LaPorte was an alternate captain being checked out on the route by Captain Gray. The second officer was Kalkowski; my friend Jimmy Walker was navigator and third officer and I was

the fourth. Chan Wright, Ray Comish and Shelby Kritser were the flight engineers, and Bob Dutton and Addison Beideman were the flight radio officers.

Harold Gray was of medium height, lean, athletic and very blond. Normally he was smiling and very pleasant, but a steel will was discernible in his personality. He was an aggressive winner at almost anything; later when we passed our time during long delays in Bermuda waiting for the Horta swells to subside, we would play ping-pong. Although not very good at it, Gray always won. You couldn't beat him.

We went straight for Horta in the Azores, skipping Port Washington and Bermuda. Horta is a very small harbor on the Island of Fayal providing good shelter behind a seawall. Fayal is the next most westerly of the Azores. None of the islands provided any stretch of smooth water, sheltered and large enough for our seaplane operations, and we lacked the range to go to Lisbon.

We were met and guided to our mooring by the Pan Am launch. It, like the Pacific island ones, was built by Matthews and was an exceptionally seaworthy boat. In accordance with Portuguese custom, the skipper of the launch—any motor craft—could not speak to the "engineer". All orders were by bells which he rang; one for ahead, two for stop and three for reverse. These commands were executed by the engineer who was also the deckhand and who stood in the cockpit right beside the skipper.

The non-stop flight from Baltimore had taken 18 hours, and we spent two days at the comfortable hotel at Horta while Gray surveyed the facilities and discussed the very real problems of open sea operations with the local weathermen and seamen. I remember learning how to design a mooring which would have ample scope on its anchors to hold and would still stay in place, as there was barely enough room in the harbor for the Clipper to swing around in its own length. By using three anchors, equally spaced apart, the buoy would shift very little with the tide, just up and down in the same place.

Horta was enchanting. Almost all of the local islanders spoke English, having spent much of their lives at New Bedford, ship-

ping out on whalers. When they made enough money they went back home to the Azores.

The food was good and we especially enjoyed the "melao", or Portuguese melons grown on the islands. These were shipped all over the world, picked green and each one packed in its own little basket woven around it. The melons hung in their baskets from the ceilings in local food shops throughout the Portuguese Empire. They ripened, maybe months after shipment, into the most delicious fruit, similar to but better than Persian melons.

A monk, head of the local monastery, made the most exquisitely carved sailboats out of the pith of some local fig tree. It was pure white, very soft, and very, very light. The remarkably delicate little ship models could be bought and, in exchange for a donation to the monastery, I got one which I treasured for many years. It was destroyed 35 years later in a fire. On the way back we picked up and brought home quite a large model in a glass case as a present from the monastery to President Roosevelt.

It was on this layover that Captain Gray calculated that the critical wave height for takeoff was three feet. There is a relationship between the height of waves and their length, theoretically. The relationship is affected by the depth of the water, winds and any conflicting swells. Gray prescribed that three-foot swells or greater at Horta meant "no go" at Bermuda or Lisbon when bound for Horta, and similarly for any plane at Horta. We did not worry too much about landings. When you got to Horta there was nothing to do but land, so land we did regardless of the sea. The problem was takeoff with the heavily loaded seaplane, and there was no good reason to leave Bermuda or Lisbon for Horta if you could not take off again and were going to be stuck there. In the future we would only clear for Horta with a forecast of swells less than three feet.

By way of explanation I might say that a takeoff in a heavy chop posed no problem. You just bounced off successive waves, faster and faster, until you were finally airborne. After each bounce you were going a little faster. But as the waves increased in height, they became farther apart, and, as you hit each one, the bounces got

harder and harder until they were so severe that each bounce knocked off the air speed gained since the last bounce. You could never get enough speed to be airborne. That was the critical wave height and it worked out to three feet. Of course, long swells were quite different. With very long swells, which might be 20 feet or more in height, one could land crosswise parallel with the crests, or even in a trough, but it was only done in an emergency. A very thin-skinned flying boat is certainly not designed for rough water, and a more unseaworthy boat would be hard to imagine.

Leaving Horta on March 30th, we had a smooth takeoff and arrived at Lisbon in 7 hours and 48 minutes. The river Tagus (Tejo) is narrow, deep and swift where the city of Lisbon is built. Just above the city, however, it widens out into a large, smooth area where we landed. The current ran several knots and we could not taxi up to the float, so we went to a mooring and unloaded the passengers and cargo into large rowboats which took them to the float.

Our terminal building was at Cabo Ruiivo. It was a small, very old stone building at the head of the gangway from the float. As the sun set and darkness fell, one weak electric light bulb provided the only light, and the four-foot thick stone walls made it easy to imagine oneself back 400 years ago. A couple of old taxis took us down dark, quiet streets, past cavernous wine cellars which smelled of the fermenting grapes, to the mid-town Avenida Palace Hotel.

We spent two days in Lisbon while Gray checked the facilities and directed the setting up of equipment and methods for handling the Clippers; and we stood by to learn what we could, or we went sightseeing.

The operations office had been looking for an alternate in case our European seacoast terminals were fogged in. One might assume that if one's departure-point weather was good enough for takeoff, one could always come back if destination weather got bad. But too often, with a deteriorating departure-point weather and good destination weather, one may have both ends close down while in flight. We had lived without weather alternates in Latin

America and on the Pacific, but now we were entering Europe with quite a different weather situation.

A large lake in France used by some of the big French flying boats had been selected as a possible alternate. It was at Biscarosse, about 35 miles southwest of Bordeaux. We had planned to fly from Lisbon to Marseilles, but the weather was very bad and so we flew out the Tagus and up the coast past Cape Finisterre, along the lovely north coast of Spain (always staying over water), past enchanting little landlocked harbors, past Biarritz where Bob For-dyce had grown up and Johnny Potter, our San Francisco friend, had played tennis with Borotra, and on to Biscarosse. The lake was an ideal operating area, large, unobstructed, free from swells and approachable from any direction.

We stayed in my first "relais" or small, French, country hotel. It was quite cold and, after a wonderful dinner, we took a walk through the town where all the local girls, under their mothers' watchful eyes, came up to practice their English and ask us to send them back some American *jazz disques*. In the hotel the beds were very thick feather ones, with china hot water bottles, coarse linen sheets and peculiar small comforters which only covered one's middle. We never saw Biscarosse again, as it was not equipped for nor ever used as an alternate.

From Biscarosse we went across France to Marseilles where we landed and moored at Marignane, the seaplane base on the Etang de Berre, about 15 miles west of Marseilles. This was to be the terminus of our mid-Atlantic route from Port Washington to Bermuda, Horta, Lisbon and Marseilles.

It had only been a three hour flight from Biscarosse to Marseilles and the base at Marignane was well set up with station manager, mechanics, radio and weather stations. Gray gave us the rest of the day off. Jimmy Walker and I promptly found an Air France flight to Cannes and we got a ride in the cockpit with the pilot. We flew on a DeVoitine, flown by one pilot and a mechanic. The cockpit was very wide with a co-pilot seat usually occupied by the mechanic, but now by one of us, and a jump seat which the other

occupied. The mechanic crouched on the floor. The pilot nonchalantly drank champagne (we accepted all offers) and smoked, something never done in any Pan Am cockpit. When the pilot finished a cigarette, he flipped it casually over his shoulder and the mechanic would leap to get the butt and put it out. The cockpit was not clean of spilled gas, oil and fumes.

At Cannes we headed for the Negresco bar where the best looking cocottes in all France congregated to be picked up by the remarkably sinister looking Balkan millionaires who also congregated there, looking for them. Early in the evening we went back to Marseilles on a super-train which ran at 160 kilometers an hour.

That night I was assigned to stay on the plane as guard. Although it was April, it was bitterly cold and I learned how cold it can be on the water in a metal hull. The wind often blows down the valley of the Rhone at gale force. Such wind is called a "mistral". I was to start two engines if the mistral came up, to take the strain off the mooring. It didn't, but even wrapped up in blankets I couldn't sleep for the cold.

Our North Atlantic route would also go to Ireland and England, but still with flying boats, the only aircraft that could cross the Atlantic. We were denied Paris and London because there was no place to land. Pan Am had considered, I believe, Cherbourg, Le Havre and other places, but all were operationally unsuitable. Now we were to check our facilities at Southampton and Foynes.

Next day we left for Southampton, a five hour flight. Captain Gray had found our takeoff performance unsatisfactory and the takeoff pitch setting had been changed to a flatter pitch at Marseilles. There were, however, only two settings: "Takeoff" and "cruise". The takeoff setting was a flat pitch and gave a high r.p.m. and the cruise setting gave an increased pitch and a slower r.p.m.

On the takeoff from Marignane, Gray found the takeoff performance improved—we leapt into the air—but then the plane would not accelerate. At full throttle we staggered through the air at takeoff speed, and there the speed stayed. If the props had been changed to cruise pitch at stall speed, we would have gone down. So we sat and prayed. There was not enough speed to climb and we were

going across the countryside at maybe 50 feet and full throttle. There was a steep escarpment straight ahead and we would hit it as we were going. Very, very gradually Gray made a turn and we climbed slowly until he could change to cruise; then we were on our way to Southampton. It had been a close call flying through a 90 degree turn at 50 feet and at stall speed. Gray was not a particularly smooth nor good pilot by Army standards, but with a mind like a computer and probably faster, there was no one we would rather have had flying us on this hazardous flight. It was an engineer's nightmare.

The area below Southampton, past Portsmouth, is called the Solent and the channel goes both ways around the Isle of Wight and out into the English Channel. Where we landed was between Southampton and Hythe across the river. The *Queen Mary* was berthed across from Hythe which was also the home of British Power Boats Ltd. We could watch their small torpedo boats on trials running at 40 to 50 knots up and down the river Test. They were the precursors of the British E boats and our PT boats.

We stayed at an old inn, the Langdown Lawn Hotel, at Hythe. Imperial Airways' main base was near there, and all the famous English transatlantic pilots came there to talk to Gray. I remember Kelly Rogers, later to be the president of Air Lingus as Gray was to be of Pan Am, Wilcockson and Don Bennett of the *Mercury* which was a piggyback¹ plane flying mail between Ireland and Canada. Bennett flew solo, navigating with pre-computed altitude curves and a cylindrical slide rule in his lap.

Imperial Airways had several Short Sunderland Flying Boats nearby and each had a kerosene stove on board for the watch at night. Gray very kindly allowed us to borrow a stove that night when I stood watch on board, although it was strictly against Company regulations to have a fire of any sort. It was bitterly cold.

On April 5th we left for Foynes on the river Shannon which was to be a stop on the soon-to-start North Atlantic service, but we returned due to a violent storm en route and deteriorating weather at Foynes. We spent the next five days at Hythe keeping one of the crew on watch day and night at the mooring. On April 11th

we left for Foynes again. When we left the delightful little inn at Hythe, the proprietor, a very proper Englishman who had gotten used to the noisy Americans, made the mistake of pointing out that the beautiful oak on the lawn was over 600 years old. His comment only provoked ridicule from a Californian in our crew who asked, "When is it going to grow up?", and then explained that our Sequoias were well over 1000 years old. I think the innkeeper was glad to see the last of us.

Foynes on the river Shannon is about 20 miles downstream from Limerick, on the south bank. The river is very wide and Shannon Airport was yet to be built on the north bank almost opposite Foynes. Foynes was to be the first European stop for our seaplane route across the North Atlantic. The town consisted of only a few small stone houses along each side of the road to Limerick. At least half of them seemed to be pubs. Gray landed smoothly on the river and we secured to a mooring in midstream. The station manager approached in a small power boat to take us to a dock, but Gray was uncertain about the security of the mooring and sent me back in a rowboat to run a line from the bow to the shore as an extra precaution. I secured a one inch line to the bow and was taken ashore to where a huge old oak grew near the water. As I was putting a second half hitch around the tree, the door of a nearby house opened and out came the owner of the house and the tree. He was bright red in the face, proceeded most unsteadily on his feet, and carried a double-barrelled shotgun pointed right at me. I spoke quickly before he might think I was an Englishman. "Thank you, sir, very much, for allowing us to secure to this beautiful tree. We don't trust our mooring in the river and the current is strong". "Who said you could do that?" he replied rather thickly but threateningly. Not deigning to reply I quickly inquired, "Perhaps we could buy you a drink?" "Perhaps", he said; and, leaving the gun on the lawn, he staggered on farther and we helped him into the boat where the oarsman, who knew him, rowed us back and left us at the riverside rear door of the nearest pub. Mr. Fitzgerald, as he was named, happily consumed most of a bottle of John Jamieson's best, and so we made a friend to say nothing of an armed

guard for the Clipper. We spent one night at Foynes, nearby at the Dunraven Arms run by a Miss O'Callahan. It was part of the Earl of Dunraven's estate, and the whole crew was invited to tea at the castle to meet the Earl and his son, Dickie Adare, who was married to a lovely American girl named Nancy Yuille.

It was bitterly cold, and while the Arms had hot water, there was no other heat except a very small grate in the living room to which, if she favored you, Miss O'Callahan would occasionally add a lump of peat. For those who are not familiar with peat fires, let me say that peat is the only known combustible which gives out almost no heat whatsoever when burning.

The next day we returned to Southampton in three hours, staying overnight there; then to Lisbon in nine hours, staying overnight again; then straight to Bermuda with a short stop at Horta for fuel; an overnight at Bermuda after 27 hours of flying; and then home to Baltimore the next day.

I carried with me on the first B-314 survey flight, two envelopes, one addressed to myself at Hythe, England and one to myself at Baltimore. At each overnight stop I took the appropriate envelope to the post office, bought and affixed a stamp and got the postmaster to cancel it, and then took it back and kept it. By International Postal Union regulations, international mail had to be sent through the post office. We were often asked to carry letters from Bermuda to the States to expedite delivery in the States, but we would firmly refuse.

For the balance of April, while preparations were going on for the second transatlantic trip, captains were being checked out on the B-314 instead of the usual S-42. During the first part of May there was intense training at Baltimore on the B-314 and Captains Sullivan, Blackmore, Ford and Winston were being checked out. They had been operating the S-42 to Bermuda since June 18, 1937.

I remember Sullivan making practice landings at Baltimore. Sully was one of the most experienced seaplane pilots. I was standing on the dock with Gray watching. There was a strong wind across the harbor. As we watched, Sully bounced on one landing. It was a high bounce. The B-314 hit a second time and bounced again,

higher. Sully applied full power. In a full power stall the plane sank again and hit the water, bounced again, but by now the water had given out and the next bounce would be over land. This was the "porpoising" tendency, feared by all seaplane pilots. The plane could become completely out of control, bouncing higher and higher till it crashed, regardless of whether it was with power off or with full power on all engines. Now Sully was settling under full power into a freight yard, clearly in sight across the harbor. But this time, with just enough air speed, the keel seemed to skid along on the ground. Sully was able to drop the nose a very, very little, pick up just enough air speed to stay in the air, and then to climb out, barely missing the rolling stock in the yard.

Seaplane pilots would talk far into the night about the causes and prevention of porpoising. It appeared evident that it was a fault in the hull design, the length or height of the "step".² The Sikorsky had a slight hook in the aft step. The Commodore was the most stable hull on the water and therefore easy to land. The S-42 was very difficult to land safely.

I talked at length to Gray who probably had a better understanding of the forces involved than anyone. Much work was being done, he said, in the tow tank at the Stevens Institute in Hoboken, N.J., but that was the only tow tank in the world that could handle the high speeds of seaplane hulls. Whatever was being learned in the Stevens tow tank didn't filter down to us. Gray explained to us that the angle of trim upon contact with the water was critical. A little bit too low down and the bow would be sucked further down—the aerodynamic controls would not hold it up—and then the plane would do a "water loop",³ caused by the center of pressure on the hull moving ahead of the center of gravity. But why did it move ahead when the pilot was trying to keep the bow up? Much more complex were the hull forces that resulted in porpoising when one landed with the bow too high. But why? No one knew.

Gray was giving the problem a great deal of thought. To start with, elementary aerodynamics taught us all the importance of the location of the plane's center of gravity. It had to be within design

limits and stay there no matter how the plane was loaded, or control would be lost. With light planes and even with most twin-engine transports, the C.G. stayed within limits no matter where the passengers sat and no matter how the cargo was loaded. But now, with our much bigger planes and with the extremely critical angle of trim on seaplanes, the C.G. had to be computed and the plane loaded for precise C.G. location before any takeoff or landing. The Boeing Company had furnished us with circular slide rules as C.G. calculators for the B-314. Gray promptly designed for Boeing and for us a much simpler, smaller and easier to use slip-stick slide rule.

It would be more than two years before we or the designers began to learn much about seaplane hulls, and by then seaplanes were on the way out. Gray had also designed and proposed an averaging device to go on the octants so we could read the average of ten sights by visual inspection, thus eliminating troublesome addition and division. This device was built into bubble octants subsequently, but Loran and now Inertial Navigation have made bubble octants all but obsolete.

May 20, 1939 rolled around and we were scheduled for the second B-314 Atlantic crossing on the 12th anniversary of Lindbergh's flight. I was going out with Captain Mike LaPorte who had been checked out on the trip before by Gray. This was to be the first flight to carry the mail. It also carried Army, Navy, Coast Guard and CAA personnel. The mail would be mostly first-flight covers, bags and bags of them.

We ferried the plane up from Baltimore, and left the same day from Port Washington, amid a crowd of celebrities, including the Postmaster General and Mr. Trippe. We went straight to Horta arriving there in about 13 and a half hours. We all went ashore at Horta with many sacks containing two kinds of mail. The first was mail cancelled in New York for delivery in the Azores, stamped there to show delivery and resacked to be taken back to New York for collectors. The second mail was for mailing in the Azores, to be cancelled and stamped with a cachet showing "First Transatlantic Air Mail—Azores to New York". I think the cachet stamps

sights. These often worked out to show unbelievably high winds at low altitudes even though the surface appeared smooth and calm. Again, Gray told me that on one trip the wind had been over 40 knots, swinging through all 360 degrees of the compass. No such winds had appeared at any point on the forecast. It kept the navigator on his toes. Sailors who have gone in the Bermuda Races tell of some horrifying experiences with the winds en route, but these races are held only every other year and only in the good-weather summer months.

In July (1939) I went out on my third mid-Atlantic trip with Captain Bill Winston, earlier referred to as "the pilot who taught Lindbergh's instructor how to fly". When he was a young man, he was not much liked, so, one day he decided to improve his personality and be popular. He did so overnight. He had an inexhaustible fund of very funny stories, could do enough sleight-of-hand tricks to qualify as a professional magician, could play any card game well, and could play the piano quite well, anything from jazz to Beethoven.

By now we were staying at the Estoril Palacio Hotel at Estoril, a seaside resort outside of Lisbon. We would go up to the casino next door to the hotel and play roulette after dinner. Sometimes we would go swimming on the beach in the morning, but we would have to rent a bathing suit top as one would be arrested for appearing topless—either man or woman.

I was assigned next on July 26th, to a ferry flight with LaPorte to bring a third B-314 from San Francisco to Baltimore. We took domestic airlines to the coast, Pennsylvania Central to Cleveland connecting with United at 12:40 A.M. which got us into San Francisco at 2:41 P.M. the day after we left Baltimore. It was fun to see the west coast again, and the new Pan Am base on Treasure Island where the World's Fair was just opening. We ferried the new Clipper back via San Diego and New Orleans.

In the summer of 1939, a North Atlantic run to England was started, to parallel the mid-Atlantic which went to Marseilles. On August 4th I went out with LaPorte from Baltimore/Port Washington with the first stop at Shediac, a little town in New Bruns-

PAN AMERICAN AIRWAYS SYSTEM

TRANS-ATLANTIC FLIGHT

NEW YORK TO SOUTHAMPTON

AUGUST 5, 1939

CREW LIST

CAPTAIN A. E. LA PORTE
Commander
HORACE BROCK
First Officer
J. NORMAN GENTRY
Junior Flight Officer
WILLARD B. BIGGERS
Junior Flight Officer
CAPTAIN AUDREY D. DURST
Junior Flight Officer
GARRETT T. MACEWAN
Engineer Officer
STEPHEN H. KITCHELL
Assistant Engineer Officer
ADDISON W. BEIDEMAN
Radio Officer
HARRY L. DRAKE
Assistant Radio Officer
JOSEPH RAVIOL
Steward
ALBERT A. TUINMAN
Steward

PASSENGER LIST

COL. A. M. HITCH
MISS ROSA PACKARD LAIRD
MRS. FRANK ANDERLINE
MISS SOPHIE SHOUMATOFF
MR. C. M. HOSKINS
MR. HARRY F. McLEAN
MISS JENNIE GOUGHAN
MR. OWEN J. KEENAN
MRS. RICHARD WALLACE GOODE
MR. W. R. HEROD
MRS. L. H. McCOURTIE
MR. WENDELL H. M. McCOURTIE, JR.
MR. FRANCIS OGILVY
MR. LEO JACOBSON
LORD CHARLES CAVENDISH
MR. HOWARD ERIC
MRS. MARGUERITE ERIC
MR. JAMES PAUL MILLS
MR. PEMERTON BILLINGS
MR. CYRUS EATON
MR. WALTER STARK
MR. HENRY O'NEIL
MRS. GEORGE L. RIHL

During the first years of transatlantic flights, we always issued passenger lists to all passengers.

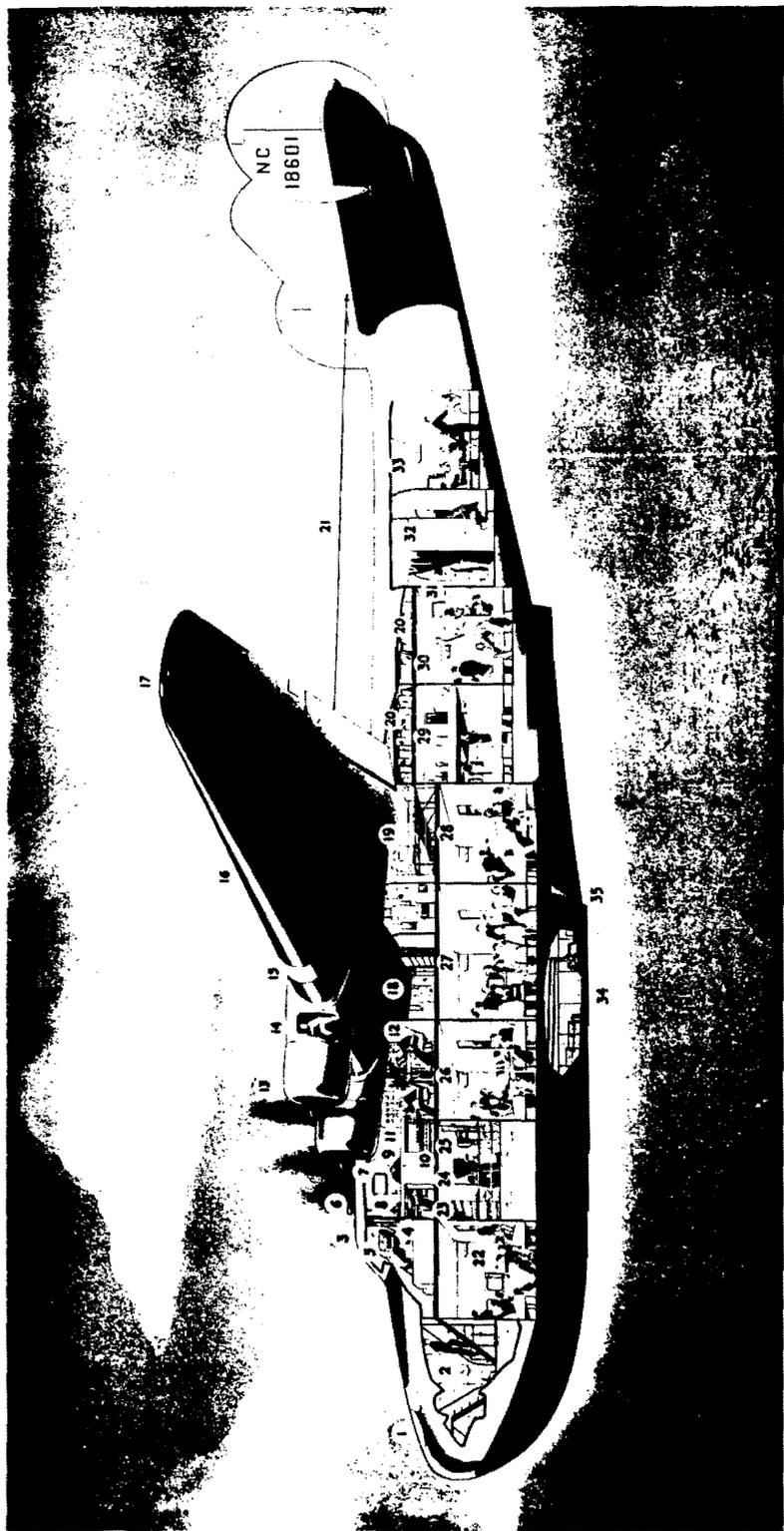
wick, Canada, about 15 miles northeast of Moncton on Northumberland Strait which separates New Brunswick from Prince Edward Island. We stopped there just to take on fuel and went ashore for lunch. We had lobsters, there was nothing else.

There was only one business in town, a lobster cannery; and there were only two occupations, catching lobsters and canning them. The catch was dropped daily into lobster "cars" which hung under long floats in front of the cannery. In the early morning a whistle blew and the whole town, all who were not out in boats, women, children and the elderly, tramped down to the cannery and spent the rest of the day boiling the lobsters, opening the shells and removing, canning and packing the meat. They were the best! I never knew why we stopped at Shediac for it was only about four and a half hours from New York and only about three hours from the next stop at Botwood.

Botwood was on the north coast of Newfoundland and was an old coaling station for steamers on their way into the St. Lawrence basin. Here we made a quick stop to top off our tanks: it was our departure point for the North Atlantic crossing to Foynes which would take 11 to 12 hours going over and 16 to 17 coming back. Botwood served no purpose except the temporary one of a seaplane terminus for the North Atlantic which would vanish with the advent of landplanes and the opening of the great airport then being built at Gander Lake.

Navigation would be tricky in these northern latitudes and much more so on the North Atlantic than on the North Pacific because the north magnetic pole is closer to the North Atlantic, and compasses do not work very well near the magnetic pole. They just seem to wander back and forth, and the directional gyros of those days drifted off a few degrees every minute. Besides, we would be on instruments most of the time without celestial sights or surface drift sights. With more than usual concentration on navigation and with slowly improving radio bearings, we had no real problems on the North Atlantic and soon we made the expected landfall at the mouth of the River Shannon. Foynes hadn't changed and we had a pleasant overnight at the Dunraven Arms.

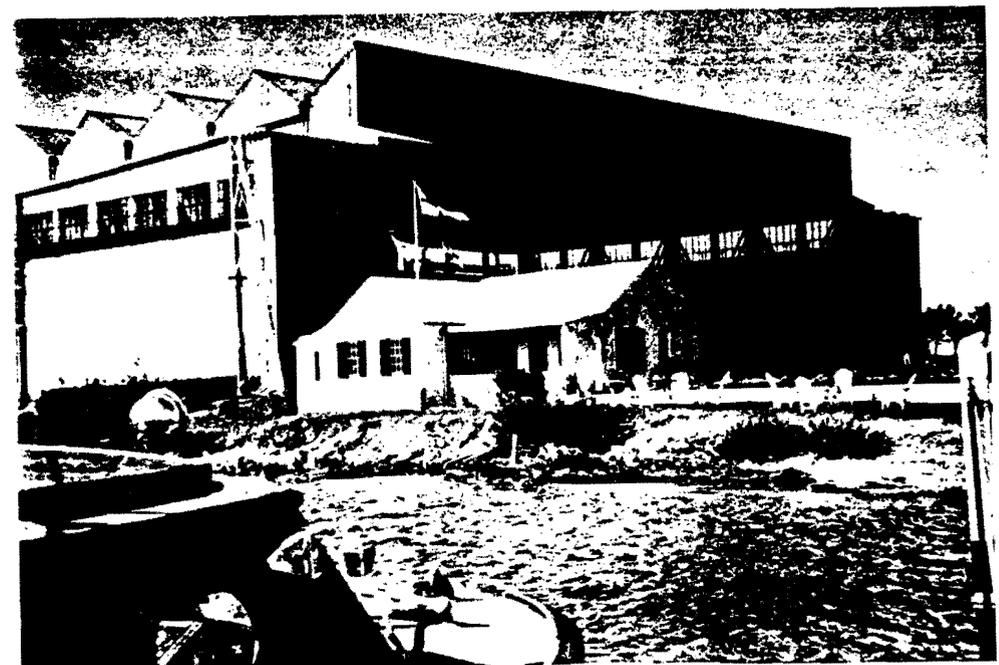




Boeing B-314: 1. Bow hatch 2. Forward compartment 3. Cockpit 4. Captain 5. First Officer (far side) 6. Radio loop 7. Radio Officer (far side) 8. Radio equipment 9. Navigation Officer 10. Charts 11. Flight Engineering Officer 12. Extra crew 13. 1500 HP Wright Cyclone engine 14. Space in nacelle for in-flight engine repairs accessible through wing to control deck 15. Landing light 16. Wing span 162 ft. 17. Wing tip light 18. Cargo hold 19. Crew sleeping quarters in wing center section 20. Luggage holds 21. Radio antenna 22. Forward passenger compartment 23. Spiral stairway to control deck 24. Men's room 25. Galley 26, 27, 28. Passenger compartments 29, 30, 31. Same with berths made up 32. Ladies' lounge 33. Rear passenger compartment 34. Cargo hold 35. Step (for planing on water)



Bermuda ferry, Captain Winston and Goyette



Darrell's Island, Bermuda



Southampton store, 1939



Southampton shelter, 1939

PLA...ACD...-...-...-...



WEATHER REPORT

TELEPHONED
TO
BY
TIME
CHECK

2255 GMT

BROADCAST FROM BRITISH COASTAL RADIO GCK:

BRITISH SHIPPING BOUND MEDITERRANEAN FROM ATLANTIC CALL AT GIBRALTER AND AWAIT ORDERS --- SHIPS IN THE RED SEA PROCEED TO SUEZ OR ADEN --- SHIPS BOUND FOR RED SEA FROM INDIAN OCEAN PROCEED TO ADEN AND AWAIT ORDERS --- NO SHIPS ARE TO VISIT ITALIAN PORTS--- SHIPS IN BLACK SEA REMAIN IN SEA OF MARMORA.

39:09 NORTH 21:30WEST

"SS ASHBURY" SIGHTED SUBMARINE 1455

45:57N 14:35W SS AGAIN CHASED BY SUBMARINE 0051GMT

COASTAL RADIO GCK

ALL BRITISH MERCHANT VESSELS ARE TO CONTINUE ON THEIR VOYAGES EXCEPT THOSE BOUND FOR THE BALTIC SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR SUCH VESSELS WILL BE ISSUED--- VESSELS IN PORT SHOULD CONSULT BRITISH NAVAL REPRESENTATIVE OR CONSULAR OFFICER BEFORE SAILING ---SHIPS AT SEA SHOULD AVOID FOCAL AREAS AND PROMINENT LANDFALLS AND SHOULD MAKE A LARGE DIVERGENCE FROM THE TRACK NORMALLY FOLLOWED---SHIPS AT SEA IN OR SUBSEQUENTLY ENTERING AREAS NOS 1,2,3,4A,5A, 6,7 OR 9 IN ADMIRALTY NOTICE TO MARINERS NO 3 SHOULD DIM NAVIGATION LIGHTS AT NIGHT AND EXTINGUISH ANY OTHER LIGHTS WHICH SHOW OUTBOARD THEY SHOULD TRY TO ARRIVE OFF PORTS AT DAYBREAK.....

0840 GMT

Radio traffic picked up on my last North Atlantic trip, August 27, 1939



WEATHER REPORT

TELEPHONED

 TO.....
 BY.....
 TIME.....
 CHECK.....

ADMIRALTY MESSAGE

ANNOUNCE FOLLOWING ARRANGEMENTS FOR PROTECTION OF HOMEWARD BOUND BRITISH MERCHANT VESSELS HOMEWARD BOUND VESSELS OF LESS THAN 15 KNOTS IF BOUND FOR BRISTOL CHANNEL OR IRISH SEA SHOULD PASS THROUGH RENDEZVOUS LAT 51 DEGREES AND 10 MINUTES NORTH LONG 7 DEGREES 58 MINUTES WEST BETWEEN 0500 AND 0700 7TH SEPTEMBER THEN STEER 060 DEGREES AT 10 KNOTS IF POSSIBLE AFTER DARK OR ON APPROACHING THE SMALLS VESSELS SHOULD PROCEED AT FULL SPEED TO THEIR DESTINATION ALL VESSELS APPROACHING RENDEZVOUS SHOULD BURN DIM NAVIGATION LIGHTS IN ORDER TO MAKE A RENDEZVOUS VESSELS SHOULD ZIGZAG OR REDUCE SPEED BUT SPEED MUST NOT BE REDUCED BELOW 8 KNOTS VESSELS WHICH HAVE ALREADY PASSED THIS RENDEZVOUS BY 0500 7TH SEPT ALSO VESSELS BOUND ROUND NORTH IRELAND AND ALL VESSELS OVER 15 KNOTS SHOULD ZIG ZAG AND PROCEED TO THEIR DESTINATION AT FULL SPEED KEEPING WELL CLEAR OF THE RENDEZVOUS AND ROUTE MENTIONED IN THIS MESSAGE FURTHER RENDEZVOUS WILL BE PROMULGATED DAILY VESSELS BOUND FOR ENGLISH CHANNEL FROM OVERSEAS ARE TO PROCEED ON THEIR VOYAGES UNLESS THEY RECEIVE SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS 1626 / 5

The next day we flew over to Southampton, conscious of the strong westerly winds which would take us over in two and a half hours while it would take four hours to come back from Southampton to Foynes.

War was in the air. We had three days at Southampton before we started back. I remember air raid shelters being dug all over the parks and the store windows full of gas masks. The return trip to New York and Baltimore was uneventful and we found no realization in the United States that war in Europe might break out at any moment.

The trip back over the North Atlantic was uneventful except that, on the last leg down from Botwood to New York, a great wind blew up from the northwest. There was no sign of it on our weather map, but the sea got very rough. We went down to about 100 feet to look at the sea, flying generally to the southwest. Soon we had a drift of about 45 degrees meaning a wind of over 100 knots. Huge seas built up in the Bay of Fundy and as the gale increased, it blew the waves flat. The surface became totally covered with foam. Soon, as Cape Cod came up on the horizon, the wind abated and the mainland had no sign of a gale.

I was scheduled on another flight to Bermuda on August 19th-20th; then I was to leave on the 25th for another North Atlantic with Captain LaPorte. This time we spent the night at Shediac. I remember lobsters for lunch, dinner and breakfast. Lobsters and nothing else. Very good!

On the 27th, with a short stop at Botwood, we were off on the great circle to Foynes again, but this time the radio was crackling with general alerts to all shipping. The radio operator would copy all of these and hand them up to the cockpit. Most were from the British Admiralty directing all British ships on the North Atlantic to head for the nearest neutral port. I remember many ships were being ordered into Cork on the south coast of Ireland. Again we spent the night at the Dunraven Arms and the next day went to Southampton where the river Test was alive with speedboats from British Power Boats Ltd. and with more Imperial Airways seaplanes at their moorings than we had ever seen before.

More radio traffic