

The Flying Hotel that went to war

By Don McCrea Marshall

Part 3

My own love affair with the Boeing 314 Flying Boat Pan Am Clippers started on April 8th, 1943, when I boarded the Dixie Clipper, which almost four years before that had made the first scheduled Trans-Atlantic flight and three months ago had carried President Roosevelt to North Africa for an historic summit with Churchill and Stalin.

It was custom then to do a "Pre-departure" flight of long enough duration to check out all the aircraft and navigation systems, usually the day before the scheduled flight, and it was

this type of exercise in which I was participating. When the Captain "put the coals" to the four 1600 horsepower engines there was at first a "settling" feeling in the water, then suddenly we were rushing across Flushing Bay in Long Island Sound, got up "on the step," lifting off for a 2-1/2 hour flight. I was not yet 20 years old and had to think to myself, "You've come a long way, baby!" as we passed over the New York City apartments area where not many years before I was hustling deposit bottles from basements and dumbwaiters,

delivering newspapers and jerking sodas at one of the local store fountains to get spending money. Now, here I was preparing to join the most famous flight teams in the world, the Pan Am Clipper crews!

My first scheduled flight was aboard "The Anzac Clipper," captained by Master of Ocean Flying Boats Charles S. (Chilie) Vaughn, for whom I flew a few times as Navigator and who figured prominently in the administration of Pan Am's Atlantic Division later in my career. Chilie had been an ex-Army pilot and in 1930 joined CNAC (China National Airways Corporation) where, the story goes, the name "Chilie" derived out of the fact

that when Chinese saw his airplane on the way into various airports they'd say "here comes Chilie!" not being able to pronounce "Charlie." He was an engaging, handsome man, mustachioed with a great sense of humor. (He was also an avid fisherman, loving to fish Newfoundland, Labrador and Icelandic waters for the Atlantic salmon.) He was held in high esteem by fellow pilots for his flying ability, and equally so by his flight crew for his leadership abilities. He was Chiang Kai-Shek's and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek's personal pilot while in China. One of Chilie's China experiences is told in the book *Flying The Oceans* by Horace Brock,

another Pan Am Captain and later top executive (published by the Stinehour Press, Lunenburg, Vermont). Captain Vaughn told Captain Brock, "When I was at Shasi on the Yangtze en route to Chungking, I and my co-pilot observed a coolie woman fall into the river from a float upstream from where we were. Her head kept bobbing up and down as she swept by our float. I asked the co-pilot to pull her out but he said 'No, you get her, my watch isn't waterproof.' So I dove in and pulled her out. She appeared dead but we held her upside down until water ran out of her mouth and then laid her down and administered artificial respiration

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LEE VALLEY HARBOUR



The Flight Deck of the double-decked Clipper showing the pilot compartment in the background, Radio Officer's station top right foreground, Flight Engineer right foreground, Navigator's position to the left. The flying boat normally carried four pilots, two engineers, two radio operators, a navigator (sometimes two) and two passenger stewards. (Photo courtesy Pan American World Airways).

... were needed around the world. We have barely scratched the surface of the airplane's and her flight crews' experiences and exploits in this series.

Suffice it to say that these dynamite dozen aircraft cut a swath in aviation history that will always be remembered by those who had anything to do with them in the air, in the hangars, and, of course, on the water.

The Flying Hotel
(Continued from page 36)
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The Flying Hotel—

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by the classical method. Finally, she gasped and resumed breathing. When she stood up, we observed for the first time that she was pregnant, nine months or more by appearance. So I quickly

got a rickshaw and sent her to the hospital at the Seventh Day Adventist Mission. The Mission doctor gave her an aspirin, sent her home and sent me a bill for \$4.15."

This proclivity for action was noted by us once when swimming in Bermuda from a float. Chile

challenged the rest of us to play "follow the leader." The rest of us figured we'd humor the "old man" and agreed if he'd be the leader. Whereupon he immediately did a double somersault off the float and turned around for us all to follow. We turned around all right, but it was

to swim in the opposite direction away from this monumental bluff caller!

My second scheduled flight, which was routed south to South America, then to Africa, up to Lisbon and back across the middle Atlantic, was under the command of John M. Mattis, a small, quiet man, who, it turned out, was a sculptor of national repute in addition to being a skilled pilot. (It was not un-typical to find amongst our pilot group, men of fine intellect, curious and inventive minds). This mission presented us with steady flying from June 23rd, 1943, to July 2nd, when we landed back on Flushing Bay. We flew 96 hours during that span, an amount which exceeds by almost a-third what today's crews are allowed to put in in a month.

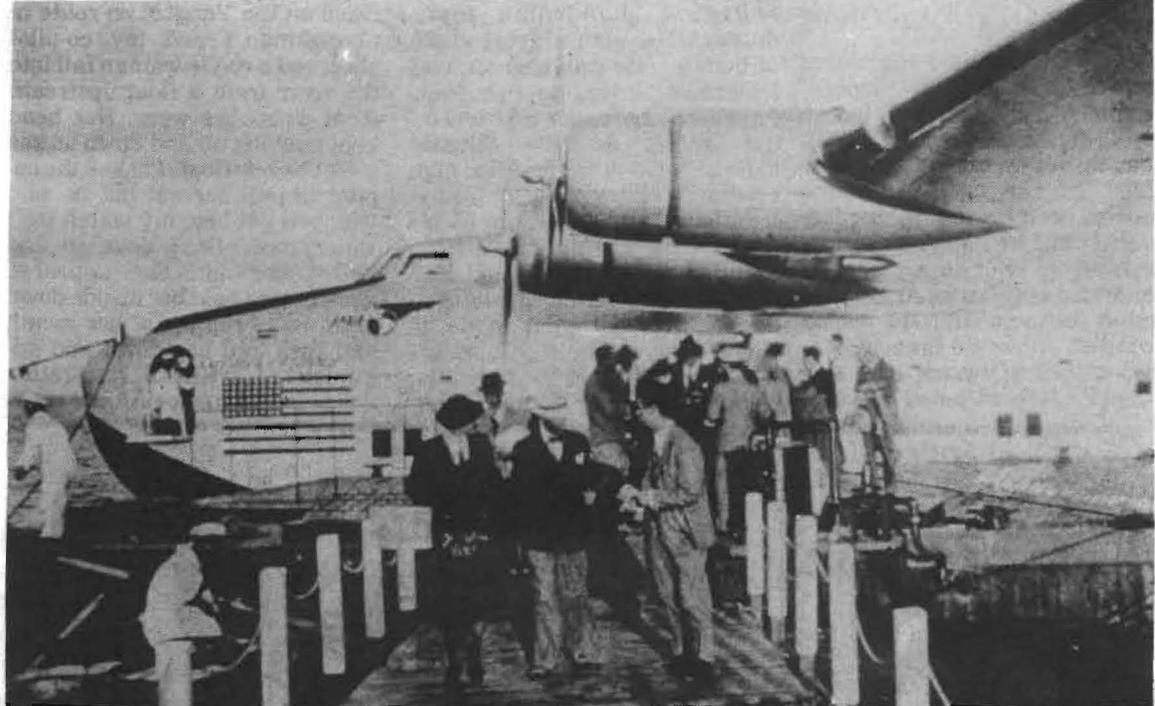
That kind of trip gave ample opportunity to use celestial and dead reckoning navigation. At that time, we were still using a single shot Pioneer octant, taking ten observations on a celestial body, doing that on two, three or four stars or planets, getting average altitudes manually and plotting them on our charts. The process took about half an hour to get a multi-star fix. We also used a Coston water light to ascertain the drift of the airplane. This particular device was used by pulling tabs at each end

simultaneously, and dropping them through a small wing hatch to the ocean. These would light up about half the time. Later we were to get the Mark IV drift bomb, a torpedo shaped missile, which was a lot more reliable when dead reckoning with the wind forecast and drift sights.

It was while we were on this mission that the Germans shot down a flight 777, operated by Dutch crews between Lisbon and England. The Germans apparently had information that Winston Churchill was "out and about" and thought he might be on that airplane. At first they followed the aircraft, six or eight Focke Wulffs as I recall, and then shot it down. It was not carrying Winston Churchill, but was carrying the famous and beloved British actor, Leslie Howard.

It was not uncommon in those days to come out of Lisbon, and be "escorted" by German fighters, one on each wing. Normally, however, their mission seemed to be just to let you know that they knew you were around, because they'd peel off and disappear. Portugal was a neutral nation, thus Lisbon was a beehive of international activity. I remember one time being in the casino at Estoril (we were staying at the glamorous Palacio Hotel during a crew rest period)

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Passengers disembark from the "American Clipper" after crossing the Atlantic from Europe to New York 50 years ago. The first regularly scheduled Atlantic flight was made by one of these Pan Am Clippers 50 years ago, June 28th, 1939. (Photo courtesy Pan American World Airways).



Hotel—

protectiveness accorded
 Clipper crews was exhibited by
 the manager. He noticed me eye-
 ing a gorgeous blonde girl with
 something other than platonic in-
 tentions and sidled over to me
 saying "No, no, son, that's the
 German Ambassador's
 daughter!" Enough said.

This interest of famous hotel
 managements wanting Clipper
 crews to use their facility for
 crew rest periods was a
 phenomenon which followed us
 for years. I remember when
 opening up Pan Am's routes to
 Europe from Chicago in 1954,
 having no trouble negotiating a
 super deal with the Del Prado
 Hotel, then one of Chicago's
 finest hostelries. And, two years
 ago my wife, Pat, and I re-visited
 some of the former flying boat
 bases, in Ireland staying at the
 same wonderful place we used in

the early Forties, the Dunraven
 Arms Hotel in Adare, near Shan-
 non and Foynes. There, we notic-
 ed that even today, their promo-
 tional literature refers to it as
 having been the place where the
 Pan Am Clipper crews stayed
 during the flying boat days.

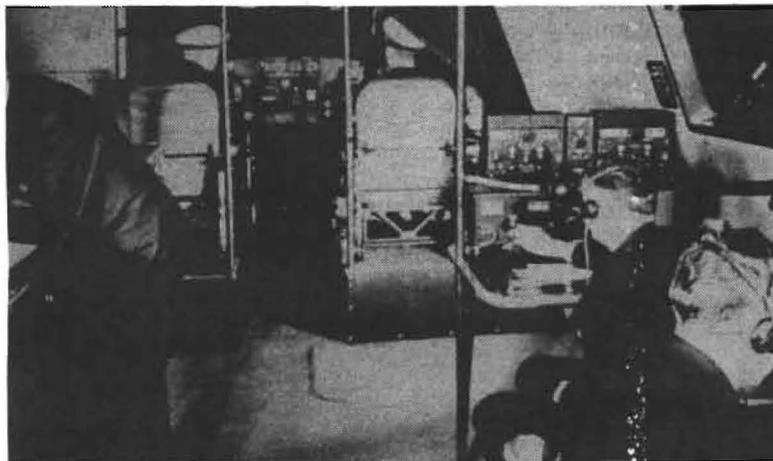
Getting back to 1943, later that
 year I flew on the Clipper
 American under the command of
 Captain Joe Hart (later killed in
 an accident on a Constellation in
 the India/Pakistan region where
 his skill saved many lives but not
 his own) between Lisbon and
 Foynes, a seven and a-half hour
 flight. During this time, I was
 taking a drift sight and heard a
 noise behind me as I crouched
 over the drift sight hatch in the
 wing. Later, maintenance crews
 were to find a hole caused, they
 thought, by an anti-aircraft shell.
 Military de-briefing people were
 puzzled by this because they said
 the only submarine or ship they
 knew of in the area and at the

time of the incident was
 American. In any event, the
 Leslie Howard thing still being in
 the air around us on that par-
 ticular route, it was not calming
 on the nerves.

The fact that military person-
 nel only knew of an American
 ship being in particular waters
 was not a great comfort. I had
 two older brothers, one a gunnery
 officer on a Destroyer Escort,
 another the Master of an
 American Export freighter, who
 told me and another brother (who
 was also a Pan Am Navigator)
 that if *anything* flew over them
 without identifying itself, ship
 convoy participants shot first and
 asked questions later. This was
 amply demonstrated to me on
 another flight from the Azores to
 Lisbon, when we broke out from
 cloud cover smack dab over a
 North African-bound Allied con-
 voy and the anti-aircraft flak was
 put up immediately and lasted
 for what seemed like hours but
 was only a minute or so until we
 identified ourselves with the cod-
 ed flare for the day.

And so things were with "The
 Flying Hotel That Went To War"
 (thanks for the title to Boeing,
 who used it on their material
 commemorating the 50th anni-
 versary of the start of schedul-
 ed service on the Atlantic). Start-
 ing out as a glamour vehicle, the
 aircraft became a mainstay for
 getting men and war materials
 where they were needed around
 the world. We have barely scratch-
 ed the surface of the airplane's
 and her flight crews' experiences
 and exploits in this series.

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13th, 1989

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