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In transatlantic flight - putkey.

IMPRESSIONS OF PASSENGERS ABOARD FIRST TRANSATLANTIC FLIGHT,
FIFTY YEARS AGO

NEW YORK -- Fifty years ago, on June 28, 1939, the first commercial transatlantic passenger flight, from New York to Marseilles, with stopovers in the Azores and Lisbon, aboard a 42-ton Boeing-built Pan Am Clipper named the Dixie Clipper, carried a distinguished group of passengers who dictated their personal observations for a commemorative journal of the historic journey.

Among them was Mrs. Juan Trippe, wife of the airline's founder and first chairman, who observed, "There are many at home who think us either fools or pioneers to make this trip, but with the great advances in scientific knowledge, we are neither.

"Actually," she loyally pointed out, "it is a much less hazardous trip than those made in the old sailing clippers years ago, when one was at the complete mercy of the elements and out of touch with the rest of the world for weeks on end.

"Constant radio communication, radio bearings, celestial navigation, dead reckoning by drift sights--in addition to the years of experience and training on the part of the flight officers--inspire complete confidence of all passengers."

Veteran traveler Russell Sabor, speeding along at 160 miles and hour, 7,000 feet above the waves, compared the trip favorable with remembered luxury voyages on the great liners:

"Life aboard the plane has settled down as much as one would settle down on the Normandie or the Queen Mary, and people are getting acquainted. Menus and passenger lists are being passed around for the various autographs.

"I wish you were here to see the exquisite appointments of the various cabins," Sabor went on. "The public rooms and the upholstery are works of art of the decorators' guild. The ship is perfectly vibrationless, and is insulated to the point where you can speak in an ordinary voice. A couple of bridge games are in progress. We have a couple of boys who like to play chess, and the letter writing, of course, is about as popular as ever.

"At 7 o'clock, dinner was served, and what a dinner it was. We had a six-course affair, with breast of chicken, asparagus, strawberry shortcake and, of course, after-dinner coffee."

"The passengers are gradually retiring. It is now about 10 o'clock, and they have been retiring since about 9. Of course, the beds, bedrooms, and berths are about as fine as the best hotels could afford; white, fluffy, soft, down; dressing rooms that would be the envy of many a fine hotel. The ship seems to continue on an even level, never swerving one inch sideways."

But, as Sabor reported, the Clipper's seeming isolation from the rest of the world was only an illusion:

"Word has just come through by wireless that Louis knocked out his opponent (Tony Galento) in the fourth round, which, you see, gives us about the same news that one would get if one were on terra firma."

Some accounts, such as that of Clara Adams, a veteran air traveler who had been aboard the maiden voyage of the German dirigible, the Graf Zeppelin, were cognizant of the journey's significance as a milestone:

"Today marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Atlantic travel, with great ships of the air, swift, steady, spacious, carrying passengers on a schedule of a day and a night between the United States and Europe. Only a dozen years have passed since the days of Lindbergh, of Chamberlin, of Byrd, yet by an amazing development in plane design, in engine power, in operating technique and in the magic of radio protection, we have come to...an airborne ship riding high above the storm, in touch with the coast 2,000 miles away, able as it speeds at three miles a minute to converse with water-bound liners creeping at one-sixth its pace upon the surface below."

Other accounts, such as that of Mrs. Sherman Haight, were downright poetic:

"We flew over a carpet of cotton wool clouds, and as the holes closed up, they appeared more and more like the snow fields of the Arctic. It was hard to believe that below it was the Atlantic Ocean, probably covered with a leaden sky. The beds are very comfortable, and the Clipper so steady and the hum of the motors so reassuring that it would have been easy to be lulled to sleep, but the full moon on the clouds was so indescribably beautiful that it was impossible not to watch the ever-changing glory of it."

Another passenger, Captain Forkild Rieber, chairman of the Texas Company, also waxed rhapsodic, but for somewhat different reasons:

"What a trip! What a ship!...

"This Pan American Airways Company is something. Starting about 12 years ago, it has made the West Indies, Mexico, Central America seem just around the corner, and all little South American countries are today in travel time as near to New York as were our southern states at the time Pan American was formed. For more than four years, it has given us mail and de luxe passenger service to the Far East, and now it is making us think of Europe in the terms of a weekend.

"Do we realize and appreciate what this organization has accomplished, not for themselves but for civilization? Think of all the remote and primitive people who have in a few years been given advantages which for hundreds of years they have not been able to create for themselves, and the revenue in trade and commerce, and good will to us exceeds by far all the accomplishments of every convention and junket on record. The Pan American Airways, Inc., deserves the wholehearted financial and moral support of our government and our people."

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