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## Turning Finals: The Long Way Home

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*by John A. Marshall*

There was another, unspoken factor to the equation, one that lingered in the far recesses of the minds of the crew: The Boeing 314 was a flying boat, designed to takeoff and land on water, to fly to and from the port cities of the world. Now the Pacific Clipper would be asked to traverse nearly 3,000 miles of hostile desert and jungle, across Queensland and the Northern Territory to Port Darwin, over which the largest body of water was a river which would in all probability have little water in it anyway. Should they develop any sort of engine trouble, there would be nowhere to safely land the flying boat. She would become a hulk, a forgotten relic lost somewhere in the great Australian wilderness. It was a sobering thought.

The next morning the Boeing lifted gently from the waters of Gladstone Harbor and pointed her nose to the northwest. They leveled off at ten thousand feet and held their breath while the fuel tanks were reconfigured.

The engines adapted to their strange new diet with surprisingly little protest, coughing slightly at first, and then with a sigh of relief they settled into the long flight. They flew over some of the most inhospitable country any of them had ever seen, and some of the most beautiful. They traversed the south shore of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and over the stark green jungle of Arnhem Land in northern Australia. Great unbroken stretches of spindly desert and then endless green jungle passed beneath. It was a unique contrast to the unbroken blue of the oceans over which they normally flew. After eleven hours they reached Port Darwin, which was surrounded by thunderstorms, flashing angrily from horizon to horizon. It was a spectacular display of pyrotechnics. After the long flight the crew would have welcomed weather a little more benign. They found Darwin a city on a war footing. Women and children were to be evacuated the following day, and the scene was something out of a wild west movie. Every other establishment was a saloon or a cafe; drunken bodies

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### No Password Needed for Members Only Section of the Website

Please note - we have changed the access to the online newsletters so that you will no longer need a password to access them. GO TO OUR WEBSITE AT: [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com). To request a current membership list, email [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com) with your request. Click on the "Members Only" button on the righthand side to access the current and previous newsletters.

## Turning Finals - The Long Way Home

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littered the sidewalks. Exhausted, the crew found lodging in what had until very recently been an Australian army brothel. The next morning they refueled and took off for Surabaya, in the Dutch East Indies.

The eight hour and forty minute flight was uneventful until the crew sighted the harbor at Surabaya. It was a magnificent sight; a goodly portion of the United States naval fleet was anchored there, headed by the battle cruiser Houston. Ford lined up the Boeing with the outer edge of the harbor and prepared to land.

Suddenly, without warning, a Dutch fighter plane appeared off the Clipper's wing, and the airwaves were filled with anxious, hurried conversation between the fighter and its ground controller.

Ground: "What is she?"

Pilot: "I don't know, but she's a big one...might be German, or Japanese...wait a minute, I think I see part of an American flag on the fuselage."

Ground: "Doesn't mean a thing. Anyone can paint a flag on an airplane."

Pilot: "What do you want me to do? It looks like he's trying to land."

Ground: "Stay on her tail. If she makes one false move, shoot her out of the sky."

Through a quirk of the radio setup and the frequencies in use at the time, the Clipper crew was able to hear every word of the conversation between the fighter and his controller, but was unable to transmit itself. In a moment the lone fighter was joined by three others; together they stitched a woven pattern around the helpless flying boat. The casual patter between the pilots and the controller was unsettling, to say the least. Ford made a gingerly let down and landed in the choppy waters just out side the harbor. As the Pacific Clipper settled into the wallowing swells, they noticed a patrol boat setting out from shore to lead them in, and they sat with engines idling for their escort. Curiously, the boat would come just within hailing distance, and no closer. In the bow of the boat the flyers could see the tiny figure of a signalman, waving them on. They taxied slowly into the inner harbor, and not until they were safely docked did they learn that they had landed squarely in the midst of a mine field.

The crew spent the following day in Surabaya, conferring with the US naval commanders aboard the Houston. They had not received an update on the war situation since leaving Auckland. They learned that the Japanese were making serious inroads in Southeast Asia, and the sooner they were able to make their way west the better off they would be.

Once again fuel was a problem, with the limited stocks of aviation gas reserved for the military. Ford pleaded with the Dutch authorities, and even asked the American commanders to intervene, but to no avail. The Clipper's hi-bred engines would have to exist once again on a sub-standard diet of automobile gas.

On the advice of the military commanders in Java, Ford and the crew had selected Trincomalee, on the

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**We'd like to have more stories to share! If you have a story you'd like to send, please send it in sooner rather than later! We appreciate you and the interesting stories you send in for all to enjoy! Email to: [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com).**

**Don't forget to check out our website at: [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com)**

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island of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) as their next stop. It offered a number of advantages, not the least of which was the fact that it was probably the finest deep-water port in South Asia, and home to most of the British fleet in the Far East. It would be a difficult flight of over twenty hours, with little margin for error. A mistake in navigation, an error of only a few degrees, and the Pacific Clipper could miss the Indian subcontinent altogether, and fly on into the vastness of the Indian Ocean until they ran out of fuel, lost forever.

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## A Sleeping Prince

*by Captain Robert Lee Bragg, Pan American and United, edited by Dorothy A. Boyd-Bragg, Ph.D*

In the good-old, bad-old days, during the early presidency of Jimmy Carter, during the late 1970s, when I was a Pam Am first officer on the B-707, we waited in Brasilia (BSB) on the ramp in the early evening for clearance, both start and taxi. The tower frequency was dead. We had tried to make contact with the ATC several times - without success. Finally, the captain asked me to get out and check the tower situation for myself. In a very laid-back way, he made it clear that both he and the passengers had been waiting long enough. It was time to take action. I headed for the tower. Today, this wouldn't even be a possibility!

I entered the tower and mounted the stairs with no trouble at all. When I got to the top of the stairs, I found the controller stretched out on his bunk, sound asleep. There was no one else in the vicinity. I woke him with some difficulty and explained that we needed a start clearance and an ATC clearance. He said, "OK. You have them." Then he rolled over and went back to sleep.

Shaking my head in disbelief, I returned to the ramp, and we started the engines and were Rio (GIG) bound in short order. It's hard to imagine anything proving more clearly that times have changed! And, in this case, they have definitely changed for the better.

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## This One's for the Birds

*by Captain Robert Lee Bragg, Pan American and United, edited by Dorothy A. Boyd-Bragg, Ph.D*

As I recall it was in 1980. I was flying a B-747SP, at the time the only plane capable of flying non-stop from New York (JFK) to Tokyo (NRT) without refueling, departing from JFK on Runway 4 Right, which requires a turn after about one hundred feet. In the process, I obviously and unbeknown to me disturbed a big flock of seagulls which flew into the plane and were ingested by our number three engine. It happened very fast.

Our only initial indication that something was wrong came from the number three engine indicators. They were erratic. As we were at takeoff, we were at full power when we ingested the gulls. The plane shook noticeably - very noticeably. I reached up and pulled the number three throttle from full power to idle. The vibration ceased.

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**Pan Am Historical Society has a Facebook page. You can view it here:**  
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pan-Am-Historical-Foundation/226994925218>

## This One's for the Birds

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It was clear that something major was wrong. As a result, the decision was made to shut down the number three engine and return to JFK after dumping our fuel. In all, the dumping took approximately forty-five minutes as we had to dump about 200,000 pounds of fuel. The B-747SP dumps fuel at the rate of about 6,000 pounds per minute.

When we finally landed at JFK, the number three engine looked like it had been shot with a shotgun or worse. It was riddled with holes, blood, and feathers. It was clearly beyond repair. I was always grateful that only one of our engines had "feasted" on the gulls.

Needless to say, the flight was subsequently canceled, and we were soon deadheading to Tokyo on another flight. The sobering thought was and is that you can never tell when birds will be a problem. We were certainly not unique in ingesting birds of various kinds. Many aircraft have done so and still do it annually. Unfortunately, some have more than one damaged engine.

I couldn't help but think of an Eastern flight in the early 1950s. It was a Lockheed L-188 Electra, a turboprop, which is akin to the C-130E, and it ingested a number of seagulls in all four engines and descended quickly, very quickly. Many died. At the same time, I also thought of another kind of bird I'd personally encountered in the 1960s.

While in the Air Force flying a C-130E (Hercules) from Albrook Air Force Base in Panama to Ramey Air Force Base in San Juan, Puerto Rico, at 22,000 feet on autopilot, I heard a mighty thud. Something big had hit the window with a very big bang. Blood and feathers made visibility a challenge. Upon arrival at Ramey, I checked with the weather officer and learned that at 22,000 feet in that part of the Caribbean, it had to be a condor, catching a ride in the jet stream to South America. I later learned that a South American condor, a fancy name for a vulture, can weigh about thirty some pounds and have a wing span of ten feet or more. Thank goodness the condor didn't fly into the engine and only hit the window.

Unfortunately, things continued to deteriorate as we deadheaded to Tokyo. While we did not encounter any more gulls, about halfway to Tokyo, a passenger had a heart attack. The captain asked if there was a doctor on board. Fortunately, an Air Force doctor was available and ready to assist. Via the high frequency single sideband radio (SSB), we were able to contact United Headquarters and phone patch with the passenger's doctor.

The doctor on board talked at some length on the SSB with the stricken passenger's doctor who confirmed that his patient had a history of serious heart problems. The air force doctor subsequently recommended that the captain divert and land to get immediate help for the passenger. The captain did so readily.

He was able to put down on an Aleutian island in the general vicinity. Namely, the captain opted to land on Shemya. Thanks to having been a former SAC base, after being constructed during World War II during the height of the Pacific campaign, the runway was more than adequate and fuel was readily available. In fact, we were the first B-747 to ever land at Shemya.

Unfortunately, one of the flight attendants was more than a little annoyed that the captain didn't cancel the flight since she perceived it was a crew overtime issue and was no longer a non-stop flight. In her estimation, to continue with the flight was a violation of Pan Am's contract with the flight attendants.

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## This One's for the Birds

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The captain patiently explained that there were no available hotels on Shemya for the crew and passengers and that they would all be forced to rest on the plane. She was angry that she had been overridden and even after the captain went on to point out that the contract had a clause in it that allowed for continuing on in cases with extenuating circumstances, She was not convinced.

During the remainder of the flight, she threatened more than once to write the captain up for failure to abide by her conception of the contract. Whether she did so or not, I can't say. I never heard anything more about the incident. I was just glad finally to get to Tokyo. It had been a very long flight for a variety of reasons – not just because of the birds.

Flying back from Tokyo to New York the next day, we checked with the authorities on Shemya and sadly learned that the stricken passenger had died on the island after we departed. From start to finish, it was a flight that we all rather wished we had missed.

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## A Documentary Series about Pan American Airways on PBS

When Pan Am's M-130 flying boat "China Clipper" took off for the first scheduled flight to Manila on November 22, 1935, it riveted the attention of people around the world. At that moment Pan Am vaulted to a commanding position and the world changed forever as a result. That's the story brought to life in "Across the Pacific." Newly unearthed archival motion pictures, photographs, and original sound recordings as well as stunning graphics, help bring this history back to life.

The film by Moreno/Lyons Productions tells the epic story of how Pan American Airways became the first to bridge the mighty Pacific - the first airline to cross any ocean. Focusing in particular on the contributions of Pan Am's visionary leader Juan Trippe, aircraft designer Igor Sikorsky, and radio engineer Hugo Leuteritz, the three-part program is currently broadcast on PBS. "Across the Pacific" premiered on VPM PBS in Richmond Virginia May/June 2020. You can watch each episode on the home page of the Clipper Pioneers website ([www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com))

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## Flying Boat Reunion clip now available for viewing

A 15-minute special that aired April 27, 2016 on Ireland's popular RTE TV show "Nationwide" is now available for viewing. China Clipper First Officer Robert Hicks (94); Merry Barton, daughter of Folger Athearn (Pan Am's station manager in Noumea, New Caledonia in 1941); Director of the Foynes Flying Boat Museum Margaret O'Shaughnessy; Ed Trippe and Mary Lou Bigelow were interviewed during the Foynes Flying Boat reunion. <http://www.rte.ie/player/us/show/nationwide-21/10566026/>

**Bank balance as of Jan. 31, 2022 is \$7,979.26.** With the current balance, we can print about six more months of the Clipper Pioneers. We will be including the opportunity in future issues to renew your membership, which will go toward continuing forward. Thank you to the many who have mailed in your donations to keep this newsletter going! If you'd like to contribute to keep the Clipper Pioneers going, please send your check payable to: Clipper Pioneers, P. O. Box 3457, Sequim WA 98382.



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## Pan Am Philadelphia Area Pilots (PAPAP)

We meet the second Tuesday of every quarter at the Continental Inn in Yardley, PA at 1200 for a bit of BS before going to our private conference room upstairs for lunch.

Been going on since 1992 and it's a great way to stay together. Contact: Chris Blaydon [215 757 6229](tel:2157576229) or [cblayd@aol.com](mailto:cblayd@aol.com)

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## Come Join the Santa Rosa Breakfast Group!

The Santa Rosa Breakfast group meets about every six weeks. They have 17 pilots, FA's and FEO's that get together to discuss the old days. Anyone in the Sonoma, Napa, and Marin county areas north of San Francisco who would like to join them should email Dave Criley at [davecriley@comcast.net](mailto:davecriley@comcast.net), and send your email contact. They started out with 5 and have grown to 17. ~from Dave Criley

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## Do You Know About Events that are Upcoming?

There are many events and get-togethers that may be of interest to our readers. If you know about one, or have a group that gets together on a regular basis - or even once in awhile - please let us know so we can share with our readers! :)

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## Layovers for Pan Am

Check out Pan American layovers at [www.paacrewlayover.com](http://www.paacrewlayover.com), where some 81 cities and over 161 hotels are shown in photos.

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## Check Out the Lockerbie Website

A website has been created for Lockerbie. It can be viewed at [www.lockerbie103.com](http://www.lockerbie103.com). It might be a worthwhile site to check out, especially for those who plan on visiting Lockerbie. Be sure to enter the web address in the browser (not Google Search, etc.) with the www. Otherwise, they will get hundreds of Lockerbies and 103s and may not find the web site after 15 pages. ~Claude Hudspeth

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## Pan Am -- Personal Tributes to A Global Aviation Pioneer

The Pan Am Historical Foundation recently published the highly acclaimed *Pan Am -- Personal Tributes to a Global Aviation Pioneer*, a book that caught the attention of Pan Amers and aviation enthusiasts around the world. Visit <https://www.panam.org/shop/669-panam90-book> to order.

### Thank You for the Stories You're Sending In! Keep 'em coming!!

We've been getting some good stories about memories of your times with Pan Am, and we want you to know we appreciate it! Keep them coming, and you will see them in the upcoming issues! Are there memories you've written down that you'd like to share with us in this newsletter - short or long? Have you come across an interesting article that you'd like to share with us? Would you share pieces from a book you've written? Send them to [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com).

*...and God will lift you up on Eagle's Wings, bear you on the breath of dawn,  
make you to shine like the sun and hold you in the palm of His hand.*

## IN MEMORIAM

**There are no obituaries for this issue. If you know of someone who has passed, please forward the information, so we can share it with the Clipper Pioneers members.**

**For more information and full obituaries about each of these friends who will be missed, click on "In Memory Of..." at our website: [www.clipperpioneers.com](http://www.clipperpioneers.com). Know of someone from Pan Am who has passed? Email the obit to Sue Forde at [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com), or mail to: Sue Forde, P. O. Box 3457, Sequim, WA 98382**

## Prevention Safety Tips

Prevent unnecessary falls and improve your safety by making yourself aware of environmental hazards. Take action to remove fall risks from your home by:

- ◆ Install secure handrails and bright lights with switches at the top and bottom of stairways.
- ◆ Repair loose or uneven steps. Check stairs for worn or loose carpeting and install anti-slip treads.
- ◆ Always wear shoes with traction and make sure throw rugs have non-skid backing.
- ◆ Install grab bars for the toilet, bathtub and/or shower, and use non-slip mats or decals on ceramic surfaces both inside and outside the tub.
- ◆ Install nightlights in areas you frequent at night. Also, consider keeping a flashlight near your bed.
- ◆ Store frequently-used items on lower shelves in the kitchen to limit the use of stools or step-ladders.  
If you must use a step stool, use one with a bar to hold onto.

## Safety Tips at Home

- ◆ Focus on balance. Exercise regularly to maintain strength, and rise slowly after eating, sitting or lying down to help avoid dizziness and loss of balance.
- ◆ Medicate safely. Improper use and handling of medication can create serious safety concerns. Check medication expiration dates on all prescription and over-the-counter medications – and follow all directions.
- ◆ Store medications safely. Medicine is best kept in its original container, but if you must transfer medication to a new container, clearly label it with the medication name, dose, and expiration date.
- ◆ Have easy access to emergency numbers. Post National Poison Control Hotline and other emergency numbers next to all phones. Be sure to add emergency numbers as contacts on your mobile phone as well.
- ◆ Wear an alarm device. Consider wearing an alarm device in case you fall and cannot get up on your own.
- ◆ Get annual eye exams. Ensure your glasses or contacts prescription is up to date and that you do not have any conditions that limit your vision.
- ◆ Handle driving with respect and honesty. If you or your loved one has declining driving abilities, consider alternate forms of transportation. The decision, while difficult, can save lives.

## Keep yourself and your identity and resources safe on the internet

In this day and age, there are so many bad actors around the world who are looking for ways to grab your identity or pull you into a scam of one kind or another. Here are some tips from Privacy Sharks that may help protect you:

- (1) Always have antivirus software on your computer. Many computers come with this preinstalled, but if you're not sure you have it protecting you, check with someone who can help. This will help protect your computer from "malware" - which can damage your computer and cause you to lose what's on it; will block access to malicious websites and will block suspicious incoming network traffic with a "firewall".
- (2) Get a password manager - a great tool which will also alert you if any of your account information has appeared in a data leak or on the "dark web", so you can change your password sooner rather than later.
- (3) Use a VPN (Virtual Private Network). It ensures that your internet traffic is secure and private.
- (4) Use sites that begin with an "HTTPS" or have a green padlock icon or other lock type icon in front of the website address. It offers another layer of security on the particular website you are visiting, and your activity is encrypted and protected while you are visiting that website.
- (5) Never click on suspicious links or respond to an email that looks suspect - for instance, with misspelled words or poor grammar. These may be "phishing" links - and cybercriminals use them to gather information about you.
- (6) Don't share personal information online. I've seen questions on social media asking what my first car was - and frequently, banks use this as one of their security questions, so it's a way criminals can gather that kind of information. Never reveal your date of birth, email address or phone number to people you don't know on the internet or in social media. And if you are on social media, be sure that your information is set to "private", so you aren't sharing your information with the world at large, but are limiting it only to your approved "friends".
- (7) Avoid public wi-fi networks - hotspots - unless you have a VPN to use on your phone or other device.
- (8) If you are doing any online dating, be sure to thoroughly vet the person before you meet in person.

Reference: <https://www.privacysharks.com/top-10-tips-for-staying-safe-online/>

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## Share the Memories...

You are a part of this wonderful "family." Are there memories you've written down that you'd like to share with us in this newsletter? Please send them to Sue by email to: [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com). Have you come across an interesting article that you'd like to share with us? Send that along, so others can enjoy! We'd love to hear from you!

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***Please update your email address and phone number if it's been changed!***

***Email or write to: Clipper Pioneers, c/o Sue Forde, P. O. Box 3457, Sequim WA 98382 or email to: [sue@clipperpioneers.com](mailto:sue@clipperpioneers.com)***

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