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Across the Pacific 1965 Style

By Fred Parkin

So much has been written about the first flight across the Pacific by Pan Am in 1935 that I had to reflect on one I made in 1965 during the Vietnam War.

After the successful test at Fort Benning, Georgia of the 11th Air Assault Division (Air Mobile) concept and its renaming as the 1st Air Cavalry Division the need to get a lot of aircraft to Vietnam was apparent.

One plane was the DeHavilland Caribou, a twin engine transport about the size of a DC3 that could carry 30 people or two jeeps and take off and land in 1000 feet. Designed to supply special forces in rugged bush pilot situations, it had a range of about 1000 miles at 180 MPH and an effective ceiling about 8 to 10,000 feet.

Early attempts to ferry the planes eastbound overland through Europe and Asia proved difficult with the need for visas and approvals during what was becoming a increasingly politicized war. The solution was a route westbound using only American territory.

Picture 18 Caribous and crews at Fort Sill, Oklahoma in the fall of 1965, preparing for the 2400 mile overwater flight from San Francisco to Honolulu. We created a "ferry configuration" by putting two 500 gallon rubber bladders in the cargo compartment for extra fuel and an oil pump to keep the engines

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Across the Pacific 1965 Style

(continued from previous page)

supplied. The theory was as we'd burn down the wing tanks we'd refill them with avgas pumped from the bladders.

One of the many issues was that with that weight loading no Army airfield runway was long enough. So once the planes were outfitted we had to fly with bladders empty from Fort Sill, with its 5000 foot runway, to Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas with its 10,000 runway.

The squadron was commanded by Major Weldon C. Britton, a WW II P-51 pilot, and he said we'd file a MARSA flight plan for our 2400 mile confidence building test flight to Hamilton Air Force Base just north of San Francisco. To replicate the distance to Honolulu, we'd take off, fly east overhead Atlanta and turn west for San Francisco. No one had any idea what MARSA meant (Military Assumes Responsibility for Separation of Aircraft), but around 6 PM in early December 1965 3 flights of 6 aircraft took off. On a clear cloudless night with about a ½ mile aircraft separation, and a mile between flights, we made a 180 degree turn over Atlanta and headed west.

Unfortunately, by the time we all got back over Texas, the weather worsened and a frantic request to Phoenix Center requesting 18 instrument clearances caused mayhem there at 4 in the morning.

Now we were spread out all over the southwest. No one made it to San Francisco !

I made it Fort Ord in Monterey, refueled, and finally got to Hamilton Air Force Base where the FAA wanted to know why Lieutenant Parkin signed a MARSA flight plan. I pointed to Major Britton and went to bed, not exactly brimming with confidence.

With the 17 hour 2400 mile over water ahead of us, navigation became an issue. Too proud to put Air Force navigators on the flight, we all went to LORAN School at NAS Corpus Christi, Texas for a two day course and every 3rd aircraft had one installed. Ahead were a lot of radio calls "Do you think that's a one or two hop "e" skywave ?" It was remarkable we found the Hawaiian islands !

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Keep the good stories comin'!

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.

Bank balance as of August 28, 2025 was \$8,023.12. The opportunity to renew your membership with your donation is on a form on page 8 of this newsletter, which will go toward continuing forward. It's time to renew if you haven't already! Be sure to clip and send in your check if you'd like to continue to receive the newsletter. Thank you!

Across the Pacific 1965 Style

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We had to wait three days for reduced headwinds at 8 thousand feet, but finally around 6 PM in mid December 1965, we took off from Hamilton, turned right over the Golden Gate Bridge and headed for the last land, the Farallon Islands. Seventeen hours later all 18 aircraft landed safely at Hickam Air Base Hawaii.

Now the Pan Am part of the story begins, because for the next week our route took us to Midway, Wake, Guam, the Philippines and finally Vung Tau, Vietnam. The same route as the original China Clipper. The tower asked the first plane to land in Vung Tau if they were going to remain over night, The reply was, "No, we'll be here for a year" !

It never entered my mind at the time that three years later I'd be going around the world once a month on Pan Am's Flight One.

To this day I've never met anyone but Army Caribou pilots who duplicated the speed and altitude of the early Pacific flights of those Clippers.

Belem, Brazil

by Bill Nash

Belem, Brazil, at the Amazon's mouth, is a fascinating town.

My first flight there was as third officer on Pan Am's trans-ocean Boeing 314 flying boat. The company had discovered that local authorities required a million papers and all-day tropical time to refuel and clear through this initial Brazil entry point en route to Natal, Brazil. (From Natal, our next stop was Liberia, Africa.)

To save time, Pan Am never "landed" there, but instead bought two large barges and anchored them far out in the Para River, the Southern branch of the Amazon. After landing in the river passengers who were destined for Belem would be taken ashore in boats to grind through official complications. Those continuing south with us would be taken to one of the barges which was a floating screened in dining room. The lunches were fabulous, including a huge selection of tropical fruits laid out on a long table, many of which the people had never seen before.

The other barge was a fueling station. Boats with soft bumpers on their gunwales pushed the airplane to a ramp on this barge for fuel, oil, water, and inspection. The flight engineers didn't get to enjoy the dining barge. They were given sandwiches and fruit as they supervised this operation.

An hour and a half after putting down in the Para River our deluxe boat with wings was on the way to Natal.

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Belem, Brazil

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Pan American began its all-cargo plane operation out of Miami, Florida, with ten fat-bellied Curtis C-46 twin engine cargo planes fresh from moth-balled military storage in a western desert. Some of these planes had been used to fly “the hump” by the Flying Tigers to help China before we were at war with Japan.

On four-day layovers in Belem, some pilots spent their time playing poker and bitching about the dull locale.

I found Belem to be exotic and ventured forth from the Hotel Grande to see what trouble I could get into.

Belem featured a busy river waterfront with rows of commercial and fishing sailing vessels moored against the docks. Native sailors repaired nets and rigging. Fishwives screamed out their wares. Marine and sail-making shops and others lined the walk across from the water. I bought a muzzle-loading rifle there, with a Damascus wire-wound barrel that could only survive lack powder. This is the only gun Brazil would sell to river Indians to hunt birds and monkeys. Modern gun-powder would blow the barrel to pieces. The Brazilian government demonstrated this feature of the rifles to the Indians to deter thoughts of revolt with powerful guns.

Visiting with the crews of the Amazon River trade boats, I found that they often brought fascinating wild animals down the river. Henry Dumond, owner of “Monkey Jungle” in Miami was a friend, and when I told him about the animals he asked me to ship him some. Rather than ship them, I brought them with me on Northbound trips, which always had space aboard.

Some of the creatures I brought in were Tapirs, Ocelots, snakes, Jaguars, and once I transported a miniature Golden Sloth. I had it in a small cage in my Puerto Rico hotel room, and in the morning there were two of them, a momma and a baby.

Also, I populated Miami with many kinds of monkeys, including Rhesus, Capuchin, Squirrel monkeys, Howler monkeys, Marmosets, and my favorite monkey, the Wooly monkey. The Brazilian Portuguese name was Barriguodo, meaning “big belly.” The Woolys were very valuable because they were easy to train. They had soft gray or brown fur, comical faces, and sported prehensile tails. I could take one by

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Don't forget to check out our website at: www.clipperpioneers.com

If you enjoy reading the Clipper Pioneers newsletter, and would like to see it continue, please send in your renewal if you haven't already, for 2025. Funds are dropping, and we may not have enough to continue without your help! Form is on page 8.

Belem, Brazil

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the hand and walk down Belem streets. When I stopped for anything, he would lean back on that tail.

Prior to taking animals aboard, Henry told me they would have to have shots and isolation. I found a man in Belem, whom everyone just called “the Russian”, who had a personal zoo. He made cages for me, picked up my orders of animals at the waterfront, and held them for me.

We talked to professional animal hunters. They told us they captured monkeys in at least two ways. They drilled holes in coconuts which were large enough for a monkey’s arm to fit through, then they attached a chain to the coconut and a stake or a tree. A piece of hard candy was dropped into the coconut. Monkeys would reach in and grab the candy. Their clenched fist would not fit back through the hole and they would not let go of the candy.

The other way was to moor a small barge against a river bank in the jungle and load it with meal soaked in alcohol. The hunters tied tree branches down to the barge. Monkeys, smelling the fragrance, climbed into the barge and had a party, getting roaring drunk. The barge was then towed to port.

Writer seeks Pan Am pilots to interview

My name is Jason Ross. I am a writer who is attempting to speak with former Pan Am pilots who went on to fly with United, following the purchase of the Pacific routes in 1986. I'm looking to interview several pilots for the writing of a potential book focusing on United's purchase of the Pacific.

A little about myself. I grew up fascinated with aviation and especially aviation history. Influenced by family members who worked for Pan Am and served in the Air Force, I started my career as an Air Force officer. Over time I became passionate about organizations' cultures and how they have led to success or failure, and everything in between. Ultimately, this led to my interest in the acquisition of Pan Am's Pacific routes and individuals' experiences with the acquisition.

If you are interested in sharing your experience, I can be reached at jason.r.ross@gmail.com. Thank you again for your help.

Best regards,
Jason Ross

Health Tip

As the health industry continues to change, it’s a good idea to investigate and educate ourselves about how to keep ourselves healthy and content. There are many excellent websites that will help us as we become more mature. It’s also good mental exercise to read about and learn how we can take better care of ourselves. We’ll continue to posts tips in future issues.

Thank You for the Stories You’re Sending In! Keep ‘em coming!!

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 or cblayd@aol.com

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

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.

Flying Somewhere? Useful Tip for Air Traffic

FlightAware is a free flight tracker that will change what you think about live flight tracking and aviation data.

Layovers for Pan Am

Check out Pan American layovers at www.paacrewlayover.com, where some 81 cities and over 161 hotels are shown in photos.

Check Out the Lockerbie Website

A website has been created for Lockerbie. It can be viewed at 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*

Enjoy Listening to the Pan Am Podcasts

Now in the third season, The Pan Am Podcast brings the history of Pan American World Airways to life through engaging storytelling and insightful interviews with Pan Am employees, passengers, authors, and aviation enthusiasts. <https://podcast.thepanammuseum.org/>

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

*...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 to report this month.

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. Know of someone from Pan Am who has passed? Email the obit to Sue Forde at sue@clipperpioneers.com, or mail to: Clipper Pioneers, attn: Sue Forde, c/o P. O. Box 3457, Sequim, WA 98382.

The Pan Am Podcast, Ep. 56: "From the CIA to the Pan Am Board Room and Changing the World Through Music" - Now Streaming

CIA Veteran Donald DeVito worked for the Pan Am board of directors from the early 1960s until the end of the airline. Also, joining us is his son, Dr. Donald DeVito, a renowned musical educator.

The senior DeVito will share stories working for the Central Intelligence Agency in the 1950s and being hired by Pan Am in the early 1960s to work for the corporate board of directors and founder Juan T. Trippe.

Don's son, the junior Dr. Donald DeVito, will share his memories of traveling around the world as a Pan Am kid and how that shaped his career in education. Dr. Don is a music educator at the Rawlings Elementary Center for Fine Arts since 2018 and is an adjunct instructor in the University of Florida Online Masters in Music Education program.

The family have a rescue horse that lives on their farm affectionally named "Clipper" in honor of Pan Am!

Now in the fifth season with 56 episodes and counting, The Pan Am Podcast brings the history of Pan American World Airways to life through engaging storytelling and insightful interviews with Pan Am employees, passengers, authors, and aviation enthusiasts.

Available on: Apple, Spotify, Amazon, Audible, and more!

Places to Visit

Foynes Flying Boat Museum, in Foynes, Ireland – features a full scale replica of the Boeing B314 "Yankee Clipper". This replica was created for the museum from detailed plans by a team specialising in movie sets. Check it out at www.flyingboatmuseum.com Enjoy images from Pan Am here: <http://www.timetableimages.com/ttimages/ao1.htm>

If you haven't paid your dues yet, please fill out the form on page 8 and send them in. We'd like to continue sending out the newsletter - and this is how we can do it - with your donations!

Save the Date ~ Pan Am Lunch/Lecture December 6 2025

It's time again to mark your calendars for our annual lunch/lecture reunion at Michaels at Shoreline in Mt View, CA

Our speaker is not yet confirmed and we are hopeful that our invitation to the President of World Wings International will be accepted. After a long storied history of camaraderie and philanthropy, World Wings International will be merged with the Pan Am Museum Foundation at the end of 2024, and we look forward to hearing about the history and future of World Wings International.

Alfred Gilbert
(415) 516 0359
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Stranded in the Sky: Untold Story

Philip Jett is the author of STRANDED IN THE SKY: The Untold Story of Pan Am Luxury Airliners Trapped on the Day of Infamy, which combined the stories of the Anzac, Hong Kong, Pacific, and Philippine Clippers, with a great deal of original research. The book debuted before a large group of Pan Am clipper families on Treasure Island in San Francisco in May of 2023. He may be available to speak to Pan Am groups or associations without charge. If interested, you may visit his website at www.philipjett.com and email him at philip@philipjett.com. His book is available in hardback, paperback, and eBook.

Please Send Us Your Stories

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

RENEW TODAY!

In order to keep the newsletter and website going for the Clipper Pioneers, it's time for renewal dues of \$50 00 (or more if you wish to donate extra to help keep us going!). If you haven't already, please send it to: Clipper Pioneers, P. O. Box 3457, Sequim, WA 98382. Thank you!

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