

China & Hawaii Clippers

By ROBERT H. SCHEPPLER

The historical record of the M-130s spans a period of ten years from 1935 to 1945, beginning with the initial acceptance of the China Clipper on October 9, 1935, the Philippine Clipper on November 14, 1935, and the Hawaii Clipper in late November 1935, and ending with the eventual loss of the China Clipper on January 8, 1945.

Ironically, the China Clipper was the first of the three accepted, flew more hours than either of the others, and was the last to be lost. The ten year period was one filled with great achievements throughout the aeronautical world as it covered both the buildup and development period prior to World War II, as well as the accelerated period of development during the War.

So many famous flights and records were made by the M-130s during their lifetime that it would be impossible to completely chronicle them. Certain highlights stand out, such as the early Pacific crossings, wartime service, and final flights of each plane.

The first and probably the most famous commercial flight of these planes was the San Francisco to Manila and return flight of the China Clipper inaugurating trans-Pacific Air Mail. This took place between November 22, 1935 and December 6, 1935. A summary based on the Log of the China Clipper and various newspaper accounts follows.

Final checkout and blind flight tests were completed November 21, 1935. On the afternoon of November 22, 1935 elaborate ceremonies were held at San Francisco to inaugurate Air Mail service in the Pacific. Many dignitaries expressed their feelings, climaxed by Postmaster General James Farley stating, "Captain Musick, you have your sailing orders. Cast off and depart for Manila in accordance therewith."

With a crowd of 25,000 cheering, aerial bombs bursting, whistles and sirens screaming and 30 planes overhead, Captain Musick and a crew of six taxied the China Clipper into San Francisco Bay and took off at 3:46 P.M., Pacific Standard Time, heading for Honolulu. In the cargo hold of the China Clipper were 110,000 letters totaling 1,879 lbs. Part of this load had been ceremoniously delivered to the Clipper by stagecoach and part had been flown from the east by United Air Lines and Transcontinental and Western Air Lines. Original plans called for a crew of nine but last minute changes forced a reduction to seven. Crew members were: Captain Edwin Musick, First Officer R. O. D. Sullivan, Second Officer George King, First Engineering Officer O. D. Wright, Second Engineering Officer V. A. Wright, Navigator Fred Noonan and First Radio Officer W. T. Jarboe.

Most of these veteran officers were making their

ninth Pacific crossing except for Second Officer George King and First Engineering Officer O. D. Wright, who were newer crew members. They were aboard primarily for training. (It should be noted that O. D. Wright and V. A. Wright were not brothers). Second Radio Officer T. R. Runnells and Second Junior Flight Officer Max Werber were the two crew members forced to remain at San Francisco. On this flight and some of the following flights, no revenue passengers were carried.

After takeoff, the Clipper flew beneath the cables of the San Francisco Oakland Bay bridge, then under construction. It then leisurely climbed below a solid bank of clouds. Eight hours later the plane was flying 1,200 miles out over the Pacific through a clear night. The crew had excellent radio contact with Pan American stations at Alameda, Los Angeles, Honolulu and Midway. They contacted the Coast Guard Cutter Itasca, the Norwegian Motorship Roseville and the U.S.S. Wright. Approximately 300 miles from Honolulu clouds started to form and at 200 miles they sighted Mount Molokai and smoke from the erupting volcano. They landed at 10:19 A.M. (Honolulu time) Saturday morning, November 23rd.

The China Clipper was fueled, checked and loaded during the night in preparation for a dawn takeoff. On Sunday, November 24th, pleasure craft carrying several hundred visitors, assembled to watch the takeoff. Twenty-one crates of food including vegetables, turkeys, cranberries, sweet potatoes and mincemeat were loaded to provide the first Thanksgiving dinners in the history of the colonies on Midway and Wake Island. Additional mail and 14 non-revenue passengers were also loaded. These passengers represented two complete base staffs to replace those on Midway and Wake, plus four Chinese cooks and a waiter for Wake Island. Takeoff was at 6:35 A.M. local time, into a light four-knot wind. After 700 miles of clear weather they entered a cold front and a few line squalls. They cruised most of the distance at 2,000 feet to stay beneath the clouds. Before reaching Midway, the Clipper emerged into clear skies. At 2:00 P.M. it circled the Midway base at an altitude of 500 feet and landed at 2:01 P.M. local time, one minute behind schedule.

By daylight, November 25th, the Clipper was loaded and checked out. Carrying nine non-revenue passengers, three tons of cargo and six tons of fuel, it was airborne at 12 minutes after dawn, or 6:12 A.M.

The China Clipper crossed the International Date Line 203 miles out of Midway and contacted a Matson Liner, S.S. President Lincoln, shortly thereafter. Flying through clouds and variable winds at about 2400 feet altitude, most of the distance to Wake Island was covered on instruments. Wake Island radioed that they sighted the China Clipper two minutes before the crew sighted the island and at 1:38 P.M. local time Tuesday, November 26, they landed, five minutes ahead of schedule.

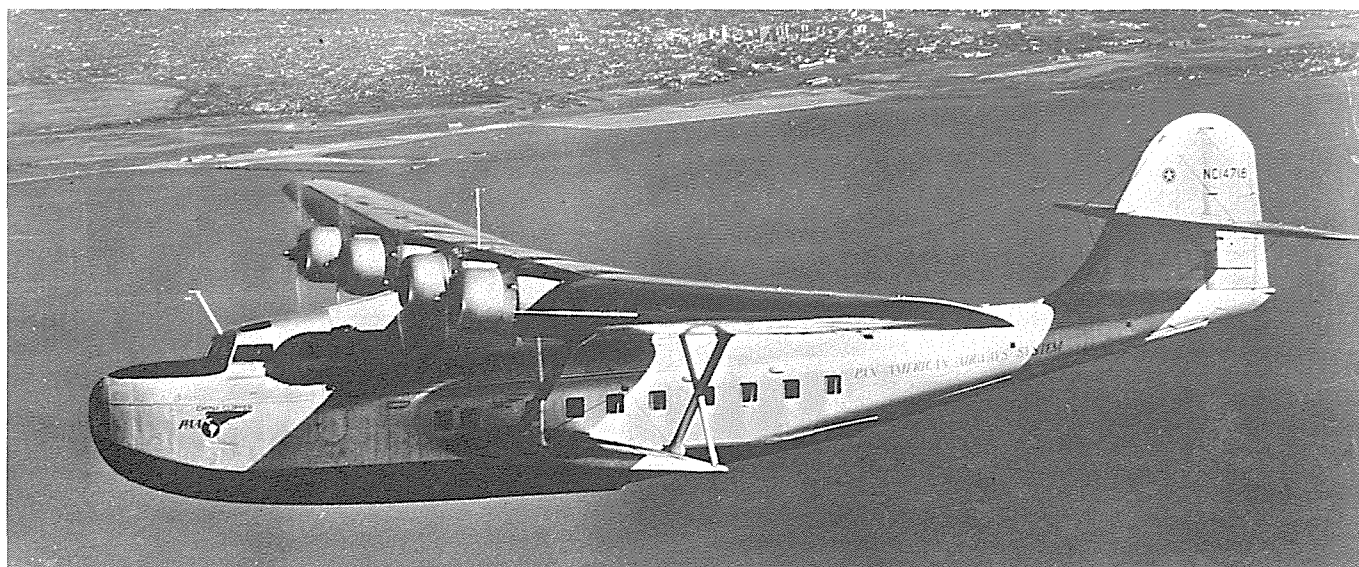
At one minute before sunrise, 6:01 A.M. local time, November 27th, the Clipper and crew took off from Wake



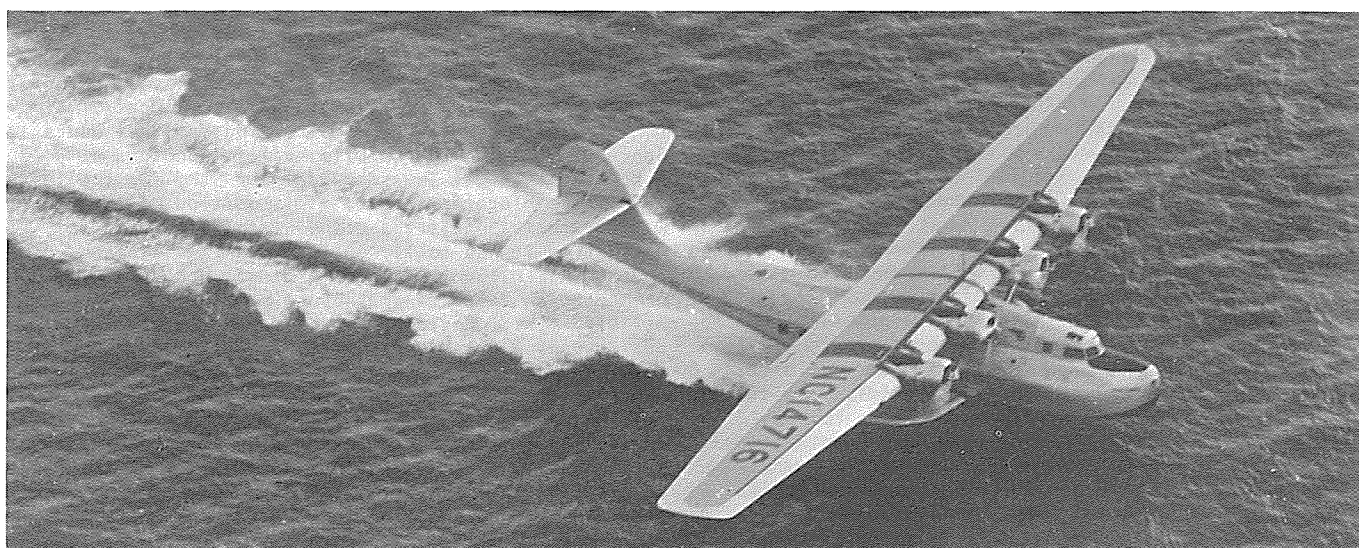
NC 14716 being rolled out for delivery to Pan American Airways at Middle River, October 9, 1935. (Martin Co.)



Already named China Clipper on October 9, 1935, the big flying boat enters the water. (Photo - Martin Company)



The China Clipper in flight near Alameda, California probably just before first trans-Pacific flight. (M. Mayborn)



On the step and racing for takeoff is the China Clipper sometime in 1936. (Photo - Pan American - Mitch Mayborn)



China Clipper, 1939. In the late thirties the clippers carried American flags painted on their bows. (W. Larkins)



Close-up of the nose of the China Clipper as she appeared during 1935 and her first Pacific crossing. (Pan Am)



The China Clipper eight years later as she appeared with a wartime camouflage paint finish. (Photo - Pan Am)

Island. Cloud level was 2,000 feet and they flew for the first three hours at 1200 feet. The day was so pleasant that all windows were opened wide. Shortly after leaving Wake they overtook the U.S.S. Chester. Later they climbed to 3000 feet and remained above the cloud level. At 3:05 P.M. they landed at Guam. Here they remained a complete day in order to stay on the original schedule. Three weeks before the flight started, November 2, 1935, Postal officials in the Philippines had been advised that the Clipper would arrive at 3:30 P.M. November 29th.

In a comparatively rough sea the China Clipper taxied out and took off at 6:12 A.M. on the last leg of its flight to the Philippines. They climbed above the clouds to 6,000 feet where a 35 mile per hour wind, which boosted their ground speed to 200 mph, was encountered. After remaining between 6,000 and 8,000 feet most of the day, they landed at Manila at 3:32 P.M., November 29th, two minutes late.

The entire westward crossing of 8,210 miles was completed in 59 hours, 48 minutes flying time and was scheduled as 60 hours.

The China Clipper spent two days in Manila being checked and prepared for its return trip, while the crew relaxed, received numerous messages of congratulations, and prepared for the return flight to San Francisco.

At 2:53 A.M. Monday, December 2nd, the Clipper left Manila, flying at a 300 foot altitude due to the heavy load and to minimize the effect of a 21 knot crosswind. It gradually climbed to a 3,000 foot cruising altitude and landed at Guam at 6:41 P.M.

Takeoff from Guam was at 6:11 A.M., December 3rd. A short distance out of Guam the crew got their first taste of a Pacific typhoon which was centered approximately 150 miles off their course. They rode out the storm, which was moderately rough, through most of the Guam-Wake Island leg. Altitude varied, sometimes being as low as 600 feet, and they passed through many rain squalls. In one particular hour period, they passed through eight separate squalls. The force of the storm gradually lessened until they landed at Wake Island at 8:57 P.M.

The next day, at 6:45 A.M. local time, the China Clipper left Wake Island and had a comparatively smooth and easy flight in contrast to the typhoon weather of the day before. They crossed the International Date Line and thus gained a day, landing at Midway Island at 4:49 P.M. Tuesday, December 3rd.

At the break of dawn, Wednesday December 4th, the China Clipper left Midway at 6:11 A.M. For this leg of the flight it carried 18 Pan American employees as passengers including a group of Chinese returning to Honolulu. The flight was uneventful with much of the time

spent over the cloud cover. However, the Clipper frequently dropped below the clouds to allow the crew to check wind drift and to pick out points of interest, such as Perouse Pinnacle and the French Frigate Shoals, which rise abruptly out of the sea between Midway and Honolulu. They landed at Pearl Harbor at 5:27 P.M. local time.

In order to insure arrival during daylight hours at San Francisco, the China Clipper left Honolulu at 3:02 A.M. Hawaii time, Thursday December 5th, for the last leg of its historic flight. This portion of the trip was uneventful until the plane neared San Francisco, at which time it had to fly on instruments due to the cloud cover. After 17 hours and one minute, the China Clipper completed an instrument landing in the San Francisco Bay at 10:36 A.M., considerably ahead of schedule. This was due to unusual wind shifts which resulted in favorable tail winds. The entire eastward crossing of 8,210 miles was completed in 63 hours, 24 minutes.

The round trip of 16,420 miles was completed in 123 hours, 12 minutes at a speed of 133.2 mph. The original schedule was 130 hours. Nineteen world records were set on this trip. At no time was the airplane pushed to better the schedule and at no time were there any delays due to weather or maintenance. One interesting point is brought out in almost all the newspaper and magazine accounts of the flight, and that is the tremendous credit given to the crew members, especially to Flight Engineers Victor and Chan Wright. These men averaged less than four hours sleep nightly and only left the plane at two stations, Honolulu and Manila. At other landing points, their time was spent checking the aircraft and the cargo loading. In most cases they slept a few hours on board prior to each takeoff.

While the China Clipper was making history in the Pacific, the remaining two Clippers were being readied to join her on future scheduled flights. The Philippine Clipper was scheduled to follow the China Clipper into San Francisco-Manila service on December 8, 1935 but was delayed one day to December 9, 1935. The Hawaii Clipper was accepted by Pan American late in November 1935. Initial flights at the Martin plant carried many prominent passengers including 16 Congressmen; Juan Trippe, President of Pan American; and Mrs. Minta Martin, mother of Glenn L. Martin. This Clipper was delivered to Alameda approximately December 24, 1935, and went into service May 2, 1936. During its first service flight, it was christened "Hawaii Clipper" at Honolulu May 3, 1936.

Thus, by early 1936, all three M-130 Clippers were in active service in the Pacific in what could be termed an aerial shuttle service between California and the Orient, but fame and public acclaim continued to follow the Clippers.

On October 21, 1936, passenger service from California



NC 14714, the Hawaii Clipper, as she looked on entering service with Pan American Airways in 1936. (Photo-Pan Am)

to Manila was inaugurated. This was the Hawaii Clipper's chance to perform and perform she did, without a hitch. The first passenger list was: Mr. and Mrs. C. V. Whitney (Chairman, Pan American), Mr. R. F. Bradley (Standard Oil of California), Mr. Wilbur May (Los Angeles), Mr. Thomas Fortune Ryan III, Col. Chas. Bartley (Chicago), Mr. Alfred Bennett (Highstown, N.J.), Mrs. Zetta Averill (Aberdeen, Washington) and Mrs. Clara Adams (Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania). The flight arrived in Manila October 27, 1936 without incident.

On July 28, 1938, the Hawaii Clipper again made headlines, but this time because of tragedy. The plane was lost without trace between Guam and Manila. In its last radio contact, it reported its position as 300 miles off the Philippine coast and 560 miles from Manila, enroute from Guam to Manila with six passengers, mail and express aboard. Passengers included Mr. E. E. Wyman, former assistant to J. Trippe; Mr. K. A. Kennedy, Traffic Manager, Pan American Pacific-Alaska Division; Dr. Fred A. Meir, Framingham and Washington, D.C.; Dr. Earl B. McKinley, George Washington University. The crew consisted of Captain Leo Terletzky, First Officer M. A. Walker, Second Officer George Davis, Third Officer J. M. Saucedo, Flight Engineer J. W. Jewelt, Flight Engineer H. L. Cox, Flight Engineer Brooks T. Tatum and Stewards William McCarty and Ivan H. Parker, Jr.

Sixteen surface vessels and ten aircraft searched 160,000 square miles of ocean without success. No trace of the plane was ever found. Even while search efforts were being carried out, the two other Clippers continued to complete their scheduled flights.

As the Clippers continued to perform what had become routine flights, they were constantly refitted and modernized with the latest equipment. In 1938 Hamilton Hydromatic propellers and slightly larger engines were installed and the latest navigational instruments were added. In 1938 the Clippers sported large American flags painted on their bows and wings as a precaution against inadvertent attack by Chinese or Japanese planes in the Orient. Early in 1942, with the U. S. having entered World War II, the two M-130 Clippers, China and Philippine, were turned over to the Navy. They were overhauled, given a coat of war paint and operated by Pan American crews. The China Clipper continued to carry its name on the bow and the name "Pan American Airways System" on the hull while under Navy control. Both were used during 1942 for regular shuttle service between Honolulu and San Francisco.

The Philippine Clipper was lost on January 21, 1942, but the China Clipper continued in Navy service until October 13, 1943, when it was returned to Pan American

and repainted in its original colors. It was then removed from the Pacific run, flown across the United States to Miami where it started on a series of flights from Miami to Leopoldville, Africa.

Then, on January 8, 1945 on Flight 161 from Miami to Leopoldville while making a routine landing at Port of Spain, Trinidad, the China Clipper hit an unidentified object, ruptured the hull at approximately the center of No. 2 compartment, three feet aft of the hull step, and rapidly sank in 30 feet of water. Nine of the 12 crew members and 14 of the 18 passengers were lost.

Crew members were: Captain Cyril Gayette (survived), acting First Officer (Capt.) Leonard Cramer, Junior Pilot Eldred Kerry, Navigator Allen Moore, Third Officer S. K. George (survived), Flight Engineer J. W. Morse (survived), Flight Engineer William Koser, Flight Engineer Hiram Folsom, Radio Operator Thomas Fleming, Radio Operator Oscar Olsen, Steward Adelio Reyes, Steward Jayne de Azeude.

Captain Cramer was flying the aircraft at 9:16 P.M. Eastern War Time at an indicated 250 foot altitude and 100 knot speed when it hit the water. The official accident investigation gives the probable cause as "failure to realize his proximity to the water and to correct his altitude for a normal landing and lack of adequate supervision by the Captain during the landing, resulting in the inadvertent flight into the water at excessive landing speed in a nose down attitude." No mention is made of hitting an unidentified object in the report. However, it has been frequently stated in unofficial versions of the accident that China Clipper hit some object, possibly a small boat. It is assumed that the surviving



The Hawaii Clipper at Alameda shortly before being lost in July 1938 flying between Guam and Manila. (W. Comer)

crew members voiced that opinion as a direct result of the terrific force with which the China Clipper struck the water.

Thus ended the saga of the Martin Clippers. Their contribution to aerial navigation and development of blind flight and navigation equipment can never be stressed enough. Through operation of these aircraft, Pan American gained the knowledge and experience that enabled them to set up the world's longest airline.

The exploits of the Clippers, especially during the 1935 to 1938 period, probably did more to stimulate aircraft development and public acceptance than any other event since Lindbergh landed at Paris. Yet, all this was done by three airplanes in a daily routine fashion without the fanfare usually associated with noteworthy aviation events. Even their final ends, though spectacular and tragic, went almost unnoticed by the world. From the courageous captains who directed their many flights throughout the world, to the little girl who used to row out to the China Clipper in Middle River, Maryland to bring ham sandwiches to the ground crews, no one will ever forget their Royal Highnesses, the real Queen of the Skies, "Sweet 16" China Clipper and her princesses, Philippine and Hawaii Clippers.

Philippine Clipper

By CHARLES E. ANDERSON

The Philippine Clipper was accepted by Pan American on November 14, 1935 and set off for Alameda, California with Captain Ralph A. Dahlstrom in command on November 22, 1935. The flight was via Miami to Acapulco, Mexico, to San Diego and then to Alameda where it arrived at 12:35 on the 24th. Plans were immediately made to dispatch her to Manila.

Captain John "Dad" Tilton was to command the Philippine Clipper on this and many subsequent flights, so he took her up for the first time on November 29th for a checkout. He had first flown the China Clipper on November 17th, just before her departure for Manila, and did not have too much time in the M-130s, so he spent several hours after the 29th in the Philippine Clipper building up time in the San Francisco area.

Following her first Pacific crossing, the China Clipper arrived back in Alameda on December 6th and Captain Musick had time to work with Captain Tilton and Captain Dahlstrom (who was to be First Officer) and bring them up to date on conditions at the various bases in the Pacific. Even though this was Captain Tilton's first trans-Pacific flight in a Martin, he was familiar with the Pacific route and had first flown a Sikorsky S-42, the Pan American Clipper, NC 823M, to Guam on August 1, 1935.

The day of departure arrived December 9, 1935, and mail, cargo and fuel were loaded, after which the nine crew members and three passengers went aboard. Hatches were closed, mooring lines cast off and the engines started. Captain Tilton maneuvered the aircraft into the Alameda estuary and at 3:17 P.M., Pacific Standard Time, the Philippine Clipper became airborne and headed out through the Golden Gate toward Hawaii.

Five days later, after 58 hours and 37 minutes flying time, the Clipper landed on Manila Bay. In spite of the fact that this was the second visit of a Martin M-130, the reception at Manila was enthusiastic as it had also been at Honolulu. A two day stay was planned, but a typhoon in the vicinity of Guam lengthened the stay and it was not until 2:43 A.M. on December 23rd that the flying boat lifted from Manila Bay and headed east for the first time. The takeoff was not without incident, for a sailboat had cut across the Clipper's takeoff path, and only a slackening of the engines and a swerve avoided a collision in the darkness.

The flight to Hawaii was routine, but a few minutes

after takeoff from Hawaii for the trip to Alameda one engine started to act up, and Captain Tilton was forced to dump fuel and return to the base. The trouble was minor, and soon the airplane was refueled and airborne again. This leg of the flight was destined to be troublesome, for about 800 miles off the California coast, the outboard left engine had to be shut down for the rest of the flight. Captain Tilton would one day, much later, near Manila, wish his troubles were as simple as these. On December 26th, after 58 hours and 43 minutes of flying, the Philippine Clipper was home again.

Thus, her life pattern was set until a December morning in 1941.

Captain Tilton looked upon the Philippine Clipper as his plane, and his log book shows that a good deal of his flying in the years of 1935-1938 was done in her. He was number three in seniority in the division, and later he became chief pilot after the death of Captain Musick in the Samoan Clipper on January 11, 1938, and the transfer of Captain Sullivan.

Many of the men who knew the Captain in those days remember him as a dashing, handsome man, and if you meet him today in his Atherton, California home you still see a dashing, handsome man at 71 years of age. He earned the nickname "Dad" at an early age because of his habit of addressing everyone, regardless of age, as "son".

He and his log book tell many tales. One entry reads, "October 14, November 2, 1936, NC 14715, Alameda-Hong Kong and return--156 hours". When the plans for a route across the Pacific were first drawn up they included a route segment past Manila on to Hong Kong and eventually to Shanghai. Pan Am bought half interest in a Chinese airline which would carry passengers from Hong Kong to Shanghai, and Pan Am's trans-Pacific route would terminate at Hong Kong. Quite early in the operation, Captain Musick had advised against taking the Martins past Manila, for the Martins required service at Manila, and if they went to Hong Kong, maintenance would be cut dangerously low in order to keep schedules. He recommended that a Sikorsky S-42A be ordered and kept at Manila for the Hong Kong shuttle. However, prior to the delivery of the S-42 and prior to the start of scheduled passenger service on October 21, 1936, Captain Tilton took the Philippine Clipper to Hong Kong and noted the incident with the simple entry in his log noted previously. Captain Tilton says he thought it only natural that the China Clipper made the first flight to the Philippines and the Philippine Clipper made the first flight to China.

He also tells the story of a flight to Manila when he lost an engine just past the halfway point between Guam and Manila. The loss didn't particularly bother him, but he got a little nervous when the second engine quit while he was still a few hundred miles off the coast of Luzon. He really got upset when the third engine quite just as he crossed the mountains East of Manila Bay, but the lone good engine stretched the glide enough to reach the Bay. While still a few hundred feet up, the fourth engine quit.

As the crews grew familiar with both the routes and the aircraft, the runs settled down to a fairly routine operation. The average flying time between Alameda and Manila and Alameda was about 120-125 hours, and the weekly schedules were kept with a fair degree of regularity. Tragedy came with the loss of the Hawaii Clipper on July 28, 1938 between Guam and Manila, but the two remaining Martins carried on until the war.

As tension increased between Japan and the United States, sealed orders which, told exactly what action was to be taken if war broke out, were given to the Captains and carried on each flight.

At 7:00 A.M. on December 8, 1941 the Philippine Clipper left Wake Island on a scheduled flight to Guam with eight crew members and five passengers. Shortly after takeoff word came via radio of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the airport manager, John Cooke, called the Clipper back via radio telephone to Wake Island. (1) By 7:30 she was moored at her dock at the end of a long narrow pier, and by 11:30 A.M. a ground crew had removed all