

Pan American Airways, the Pacific Challenge

Edited by Ed Martin

In 1927 Pan American Airways was awarded an air mail contract from Key West, Fla., to Havana, Cuba. Following the success of these flights and later expansion into the Caribbean and South America, Juan Trippe, President of Pan American Airways, turned his thoughts to conquering the vast expanses of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. The shorter distance from the U.S. to Europe across the Atlantic Ocean was an attractive challenge with many obstacles, particularly weather. The Pacific was a more viable alternative. However, no aircraft then existed capable of flying the long distances involved; but Trippe decided to accept the challenge.

The following events are referenced from the John B. Russell Collection Vol. 2 of newspaper clippings, published by United Press International (UPI) and Associated Press (AP) in the *Miami Herald* and *Miami Tribune*, as received via Pan American Airways' radio, during the initial flight of the *China Clipper* from Alameda, Calif., to Manila, Philippines, on November 22, 1935.

Technical difficulties involved were monumental the distance from the west coast of the U.S. to China was over 8,000 miles. Extensive research would be necessary to determine if this route was feasible. Suitable aircraft would need developing, navigation requirements, weather and wind variations, landing and refueling bases, personnel and passenger accommodation and, where necessary, government approvals would all be required. In 1931, Pan American Airways issued specifications for an aircraft that could accomplish the task of flying 2,500 miles to Hawaii with a suitable payload. A year later the Sikorsky Co., and Glenn L. Martin Co, submitted acceptable proposals for flying boats. In late 1932 Pan American Airways placed orders for three Sikorsky S-42 and three Martin M-130 flying boats.

Another major consideration was where to originate-terminate such a flight from the U.S. A great deal of consideration was given to flying the northern route to Alaska and over Siberia to China for which Pan American Airways acquired an interest in Pacific Alaska Airways.

Charles Lindbergh, a Pan American Airways technical advisor, and his wife Anne (Morrow) Lindbergh, surveyed this route to China for Pan American. After much research it



Sikorsky S-42, NC822M, at Dinner Key, PAA Miami Base. (Postcard from the editor's collection)

was determined that cooperation from the Russian government would not be obtained, which determined that the route be across the Pacific Ocean.

Alameda Airport in San Francisco Bay would be the origination point and Hong Kong across the Pacific as the termination with stops at Hawaii and Manila along the way. The Pacific islands of Midway, Wake and Guam would serve as intermediate rest and refueling bases. Fortunately, these small islands were U.S. possessions with Midway Island approximately 1,400 miles from Honolulu, and Wake Island was another 1,300 miles westwards with Guam a further 1,400 miles of flying. Manila in the Philippines was the initial termination point completing the journey of over 8,000 miles pending Hong Kong approval from China. "Establishing the bases at these locations became the challenge, Midway Island was only a cable station and Wake Island was a small uninhabited Pacific atoll whereas Guam was well established and populated."

With aircraft now on order and Pacific route decisions completed, Mr. Trippe was also seeking government approval for establishing en route bases.

In November 1934, the first Sikorsky S-42, weighing 19 tons with a wingspan of 114ft 2in and a length of 70 feet, was completed and delivered to Pan American Airways in



Pan American Airways Pan American Clipper, NC823M, c/n 4201, on takeoff in Miami, Florida. (Photo from the editor's collection)

Baltimore and christened *Pan American Clipper*. It was then flown to Dinner Key, PAA base in Miami, Fla., for test flights in preparation for the Pacific route. "Each plane carries a 200lb anchor sufficient to hold a moderate size yacht. After several flights the S-42 required modifications and later models were identified as the S-42B. In March 1935, the S-42 flew from Miami to Acapulco, Mexico, then on to San Diego before terminating at Alameda Airport across the bay from San Francisco."

In April 1935, the Sikorsky S-42 began the first survey flight on the Pacific route to Hawaii. Stops at Midway Island, Wake Island and Guam were also accomplished, followed by a return flight to San Francisco. Tests included navigation, weather forecasting, radio equipment, and crew responsibilities. Results and necessary modifications were incorporated in the larger Martin M-130 flying boat that was delivered to Pan American Airways in Baltimore on October 9, 1935, designated the *China Clipper*. It made its first flight that day followed by a series of test flights amassing 60 to 70 hours.

"On October 26, 1935, the *China Clipper*, America's largest flying boat, left for the Pan American Miami Base at Dinner Key. Piloting the 25 ton Flying Boat on its seven hour 1,200 mile flight was PAA Chief Pilot Capt. Edwin Musick who also flew the first scheduled PAA plane from Key West to Havana, Cuba, October 28, 1927. Besides Captain Musick, members of the crew, all Miamians, were, Capt. Ralph Dahlstrom, senior flight officer; Samuel P. Crago, junior flight officer; Chauncey Wright, engineering officer and Thomas Runnells, communications officer. Capt. Musick said 'they will be in charge of a series of training flights before departing Miami for San Francisco via Mexico.' Captain Musick also stated 'the new *Clipper* responded to the controls as easily as do the present clipper ships although it dwarfs

them by six tons.' He said 'vibration at the average speed of 150 mph was negligible and five passengers aboard the aircraft agreed.' 'I left a cup of coffee on the arm of my chair,' said George F. McLaughlin, editor of *Aero Digest*, 'with never a thought it would spill. I came back in a couple of minutes and it hadn't.' Other passengers aboard the *Clipper* were John Leslie, PAA Supervision Engineer Pacific Division, Dan Sayre, Editor of *Aviation Magazine*, Harold P. See, of the National Broadcasting Co., and L.C. McCarty of the Glenn L. Martin Co."

"Meanwhile, plans were immediately implemented to obtain all necessary personnel and supplies for shipment to the Pacific locations to establish necessary flying boat bases and passenger accommodations. In particular, Midway and Wake Island would require extensive development. Many months were committed in achieving those goals and on March 27, 1935, the vessel *North Haven* sailed from San Francisco loaded with thousands of items, including fuel, needed to construct



Survey flight cover, San Francisco to Hawaii & return to San Francisco. (From the editor's collection)

necessary accommodations and facilities in support of the flying boat operations. Honolulu was the first stop, then onwards arriving at Midway Island at the end of April. Half of the construction supplies and crews remained here, the others continuing on to Wake Island where she arrived on May 9, 1935.

“Back at the Miami base, the *China Clipper* conducted additional tests of 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 miles nonstop of load and distance flights. November 3, 1935, a long range 3,500-4,000 mile flight, longer than any segment of the Pacific route was conducted to calibrate air speed, fuel consumption and range while flying at altitudes of 8,000 to 10,000 feet. This test flight was terminated at 2,400 miles due to ‘an engine not functioning to suit him,’ Captain Musick reported in his radio message that engineers aboard had accumulated sufficient data concerning gasoline and oil consumption to warrant abandoning the flight at 2,400 miles, 1,100 miles less than the scheduled 3,500 miles. Within hours of landing back at Miami the *China Clipper* was dispatched to Jamaica to avoid damage from an approaching storm.

According to newspaper articles from the John Russell collection, Vol. 2, “tests established by the contracts for the *China Clipper* set 27 new World and American records and set five records in categories where no marks exist.” Following the tests, the *China Clipper* was hauled out of the water for careful inspection of the hull and pontoons.

“November 8, 1935, the *China Clipper*, was scheduled to fly from Miami Dinner Key base to Alameda Airport in San Francisco Bay via Acapulco, Mexico, and San Diego, California. With Captain Musick on the *China Clipper* will be a marine crew from the Caribbean Division who has been flying *Clipper* ships to South America for the past three years, including George King, junior flight officer; F.S.K. Lewis, junior flight officer; Chauncey Wright, engineering officer; Thomas R. Runnells, radio officer and Judd Ingram, navigation officer. Passengers onboard include John C. Leslie, engineer of PAA Pacific Division, P.D. Doran motor engineer, L.C. McCarty, engineer from the Martin factory, Burke Miller, night program director, Harold See, engineer of the National Broadcasting Co. and Arthur E. Curtis, PAA Public Relations. Mr. See will broadcast a national program from the *China Clipper* on the trip over Mexico and later on the initial flight to the Philippines. The *Clipper* will carry a gross weight of 50,000 lbs including 4,000 gallons of gasoline weighing 12 tons and 200 gallons or 1,500 lbs of lubricating oil.” “Capt. Musick reported it might seem like a trip to some, Miami to the Pacific coast in a day, but it was just another day of flying for us. We followed regular ocean air transport procedure and utilized the ferry trip for crew training and engineering checks. At Miami, I gave the *Clipper* the throttle at 50,800 lbs of load and climbed by easy stages to 2,000 feet where we could see the sun not yet risen. Then I swung on the course for the southern point of the gulf all over water. A light wind was blowing from the Atlantic.”

“At 6:30 a.m. EST, (takeoff was at 6:11 a.m.) I turned the controls over to F.S.K. Lewis, junior flight officer, who was on



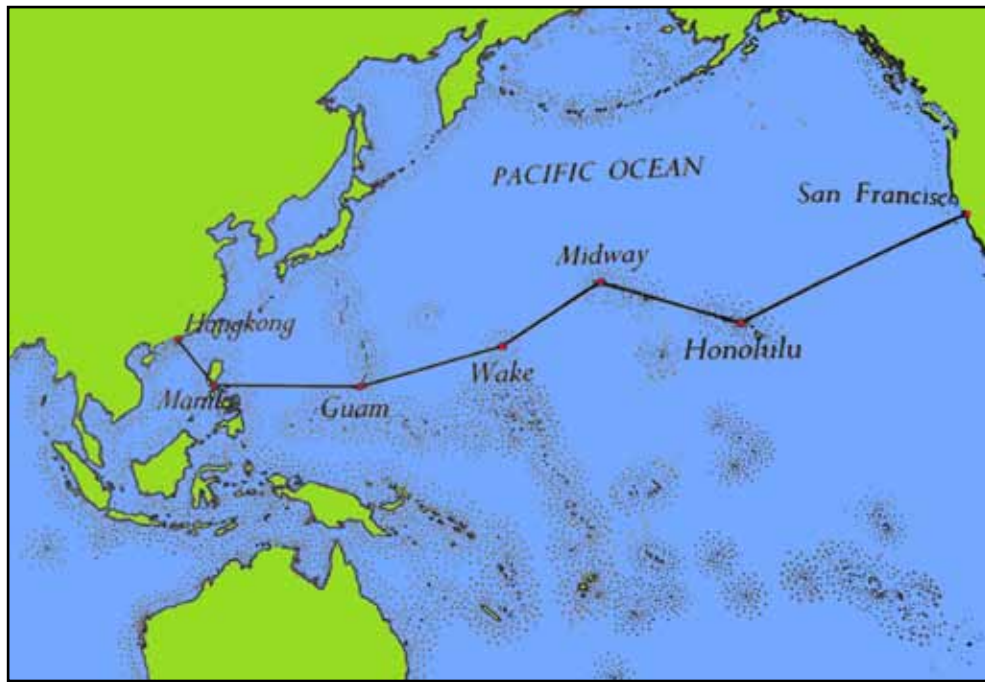
Martin M-130 China Clipper at the landing dock. (Postcard from the editor's collection)

the first rotating watches that followed with pilot George King, first junior flight officer, and myself throughout the day. We used the automatic pilot very little as we wished the men to build up experience in handling the ship under all conditions. About 400 miles out we ran into a headwind and one small squall, which hardly caused a bump as the ship was heavy and steady. The sun shone again as we watched the white fantastically formed coast and jungle of the Yucatan peninsula slip by to our left and watched sharks playing in the sunlit waters far below. A tail wind helped along through a little thick weather to Puerto, Mexico, where we turned inland. We flew most of the course at 2,000-3,000 feet, but climbed to 6,000 feet at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Mexico.”

“With a bright afternoon over the Pacific Ocean, we turned up the coast about 500 miles with high mountains on the east and the open blue ocean to the west we came over the harbor of Acapulco, surrounded by mountains. We circled to north and south to land at 5:13 p.m. PST, as local boats came out to greet us.”

“November 8, 5:13 p.m. the *China Clipper* landed at Acapulco and tasted Pacific water for the first time, after an 11hr 3min 1,503 mile flight from Miami. Capt. Musick alternated flying with copilots George King, junior flight officer, and F.S. K Lewis junior flight officer. Six passengers and observers found life pleasant and comfortable in the luxurious interior of the *Clipper* built to carry 18 sleeping passengers on a 2,410 mile hop overnight from San Francisco to Honolulu. They read and dozed. Lunch was served at the five tables in the lounge from the spic and span tuckaway galley producing hot bouillon, fried chicken and fruit.

“November 9, 1935, at 6:25 a.m. today, the heavily loaded *China Clipper* roared off this mountain guarded harbor and lifted off for San Diego 1,600 miles to the north. Leaving Acapulco, Mexico, the big liner hummed northward with her four 800 horse-power engines at full throttle and made an easy landing on San Diego Bay completing a 3,100 mile one stop flight from Miami. The elapsed time for the second leg of the trip was



Pan American Airways, China Clipper route map. (From the editor's collection)

12 hours and two minutes. Next stop will be at the *Clipper's* base Alameda Airport, on San Francisco Bay. After two weeks of inspections and preliminaries the *China Clipper* will depart on November 22, for the initial flight to the Philippines. Mail alone will be carried on the first five trips, after that passenger and cargo service will be inaugurated.

"November 11, 1935, at Alameda Airport, San Francisco Bay, America's largest flying boat, the *China Clipper* seaplane, arrived in preparation for initiating transpacific service. The silver-streamed airliner, which will carry passengers, mail and express over the 8,000 mile route to the Orient skimmed gracefully onto the San Francisco base at 2:20 p.m. PST."

"Capt. Edwin Musick and his crew of five brought the 25 ton *Clipper* up the coast from San Diego on the last hop of a flight from Miami, Fla., in four hours and ten minutes. The ship carried 19 passengers. During the leisurely flight "Capt. Musick carried on a radio conversation with the stratosphere balloon Explorer II floating high over the mid-west."

"The *China Clipper* Martin M-130 will replace the smaller Sikorsky S-42 for the initial flight to Manila. The Sikorsky S-42 had recently completed the final experimental survey flight as far as Guam. In October 1935 Pan American was awarded a U.S Post Office contract for the carriage of Trans Pacific Mail, known as FAM 14 (Foreign Air Mail route 14)."

"November 18, 1935, "The *China Clipper* conducted off-shore tests out of Alameda Bay, San Francisco prior to the scheduled November 22 departure for the Philippines. The huge *China Clipper* was turned over to mechanics for final adjustments before starting the transpacific flight to Manila. Capt. E.C. Musick reported, 'the behavior of the flying boat satisfactory after a 1,000 mile test flight.'"

"Capt. Edwin 'Ed' Musick who will take the *China Clipper*, America's greatest airliner on the initial flight from San Francisco across the Pacific to Manila, is a firm believer in *Safety First* after 18 years [of] service with all types of aircraft.

This quite conservative man who builds a new "clipper tradition" has spent nearly five years of his life aloft flying winged craft ranging from ancient *Jennys* to the new ultra modern *China Clipper*."

Much has been written about the transpacific air service scheduled to begin from San Francisco but comparatively little concerning the man upon who devolves final responsibility for the success of the history making flight.

"On the street, Edwin C. Musick would likely be taken for a successful merchant or possibly a banker, on the flight deck in dark blue uniform and white cap he is nothing else but a naval officer. If 'Old Man Musick' as he is affectionately known to airmen has any fetish it is unswerving allegiance to "Safety First" as opposed to "Take a Chance."

"It mattered not at all to him that the president of Brazil and other dignitaries awaited the arrival of the *Brazilian Clipper* at Rio de Janeiro last summer, on the maiden flight that moved South America's trade centers two days nearer the U.S. Aboard the *Brazilian Clipper* were 30 prominent newspaper executives.

"Within a few miles of the city after a 1,000 mile flight that day Musick set the big plane down on a safe harbor, laconically explained "weather thickening ahead." The president of Brazil just had to wait until the next day to greet the *Clipper*.

Born in St. Louis, Mo., in 1894 he began his flying career as a student in the Army Air Corps at San Diego in 1917. Two years later, he was teaching others to fly.

After the war he piloted flying boats from Miami to Nassau. From that period comes one of the best known stories about Ed Musick, one that reveals his insistence that all about him be kept spotlessly clean. A native had fallen into the Nassau harbor where Musick had parked his flying boat, with thoughts of sharks uppermost in his mind the native promptly headed for the tail of the plane, Musick watching shouted, "Hey, if you climb up there, darn it, don't mar the paint."

"His pet peeve is shaving. Despite his stubborn brunette beard, Musick is always clean cut, as meticulous about his personal appearance as he is about the planes he flies. Woe to any member of his crew who fails to adhere to the letter of Pan American regulations concerning uniforms. Charles A. Lorber, now a Pan American pilot served as a mechanic in 1921 when Musick was piloting those early vintage flying boats to Nassau and Havana."

"Ed always had a grin and a philosophical word no matter how things went," recalled Lorber. "Nothing in the world ever bothered him, he never got excited: in fact he had about as much nervousness as a turtle. Because he was so particular and thorough about the way things got done he never got into any jam or flying trouble. He seemed to smell any trouble before it happened and stayed out of it."

"Although the initial Trans-Pacific flight will only carry mail, a bumper crop of 912 passengers have applied for tickets for the first passenger flight which will not take place until a much later date."

"The late Will Rogers was the first to make application and was given ticket #1 a short time before he and Wiley Post crashed to their death in Alaska.

"A motion picture star, finding herself, far down the list telegraphed PAA officials an offer to charter the huge plane for its inaugural first Trans-Pacific passenger flight; the company declined and refused to give out her name.

"The *China Clipper's* first load will consist of about 100,000 letters, eight crew members, and will require about 10 days for the return trip. Later, when joined by her sister ships the *Hawaiian Clipper* and the *Philippine Clipper*, there will be weekly service both ways. With a full load each plane can fly 3,500 miles. The longest leg of the Trans-Pacific route is the 2,400 miles, from San Francisco to Honolulu. Fares will be approximately twice that of first class steamship routes, or about \$450.00 to Honolulu and \$900.00 to Manila. Travel will be much like that in a railroad Pullman car. The berths accommodating 18 passengers are slightly larger than Pullman sleeping quarters. They are cared for by a steward who also presides over the plane's buffet.

"November 22, 1935, the planning and work of five years comes to fruition, as the Martin M-130 *China Clipper* sits at anchor by the take-off ramp at Alameda Airport, on San Francisco Bay.

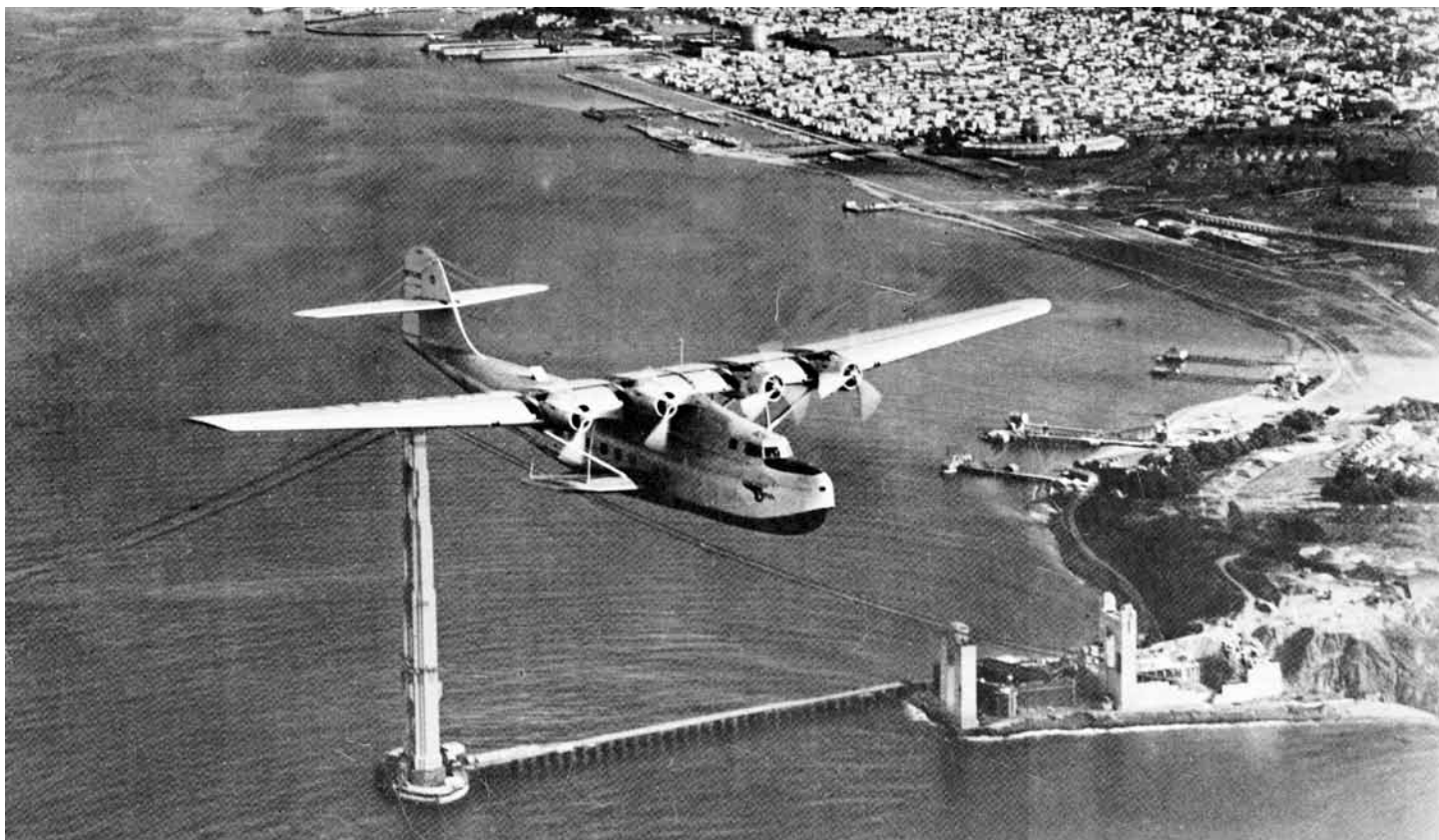
"Aboard were seven men, Capt. Edwin Musick, first officer, R.O.D. Sullivan, second officer, George King, first engineer,

C.D. Wright, second engineer, V.A. Wright, navigation officer, Frederick A. Noonan, radio operator, W.T. Jarboe.

"As stated by Jon Krupnick, in *Pacific Pioneers*, there were over 125, 000 people lining the shore and with a nationwide radio hookup literally millions of people listened to the departure of the *China Clipper*."

In contrast to the newest mail carrier, an old mail stage coach played its part in the initial flight occasion by delivering mail pouches to the *Clipper* for its first transpacific flight to the Orient. Postmaster General James A. Farley, took a personal hand in loading pouches of the first Air Mail on transpacific service to Manila shortly before the takeoff of the huge Pan American Airways *Clipper* on its first lap to Hawaii. Mail pouches contained 100,000 mostly first flight covers and one with a \$250.000 Money Order from a San Francisco Bank to a bank in Manila. Farley, also placed aboard a letter from President Roosevelt to President Manuel Quezon of the Philippines. Pan American had intended to carry a crew of nine on the initial flight but due to the interest in flight covers the weight of the mail bags forced them to reduce the crew by two men, Max Weber and Thomas Runnells. No passengers will be carried on the flight.

Gov. Frank F. Merriam, of California opened the official departure ceremony from a flag draped speaker's stand, directly in front of the *Clipper* by extending a greeting to the crowd watching the historic event. He stated "by this air service from the U.S.A to the Philippines we remove the barrier of time and distance between these nations. The spirit of mutual understanding will be advanced and the means of commercial trade will be improved."



China Clipper flying over unfinished Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. (Photo from the editor's collection)

The best wishes of President Franklin D. Roosevelt were conveyed by Postmaster General James Farley: "Please convey to the people of the Pacific coast the deep interest and heartfelt congratulations of an air minded sailor. Even at this distance (Washington, D.C.) I thrill to the wonder of it all"

"They tell me that the inauguration of the transpacific sky mail also celebrates the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the first clipper ship in San Francisco. The years between the two events mark a century of progress that is without parallel, and it is our just pride that America and Americans have played no minor part in the blazing of new trails. There can be no higher hope than that this heritage of courage, daring initiative and enterprise will be conserved & intensified." (From *Pioneers of the Pacific* page 147, 148)

Pan American President, Juan Trippe, then stated, "*China Clipper* are you ready?" Captain Musick replied "Pan American Airways *China Clipper* is standing by for orders, Sir." Trippe stated, "stand by, Captain Musick for station reports." When Honolulu, Midway, Wake, Guam and Manila all replied in the affirmative, Juan Trippe stated, "Stand by, all stations. Post Master General Farley, I have the honor to report, Sir, that the Transpacific Airway is ready to inaugurate mail service of the United States Post Office from the mainland across the Pacific to the Philippines by way of Hawaii, Midway, Wake and Guam islands".

By Postmaster Farley, "Mr. Trippe, it is an honor and a privilege for me as Postmaster General of the United States of America, to hereby order the inauguration of the first scheduled service on foreign air mail route #14 at 3:28 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, on this date which will forever mark a new chapter in the glorious history of our nation, a new era in the world of transportation, a new and binding bond that will link for the first time in history the peoples of the east and west"

Juan Trippe stated "Captain Musick, you have your sailing orders. Cast off and depart for Manila in accordance therewith."

John B. Russell scrapbook United Press clippings noted,

A band played "The Star Spangled Banner" as the Pan American Airways bid for commercial air supremacy in the Pacific drew away on a scheduled 8,000 mile flight. Honolulu is the first stop.

Her four motors humming a song of magnificent conquest over time and space, the *China Clipper* took off at 3:46 p.m. Pacific Standard Time to inaugurate transpacific air mail service. Grey hull gleaming, a snowy trail of foam bubbling in her wake, the 25-ton ship lifted into the air with ease and headed towards the unfinished Oakland Bay Bridge.

As noted in *Pioneers of the Pacific* (page 151) Captain Musick realized he could not gain enough altitude to clear the bridge, so he dropped the *Clipper* back towards the water in a desperate attempt to avoid the maze of wires hanging from the unfinished structure. Somehow he found a clear path and avoided catastrophe. The small planes, that were following the *Clipper's* take off, believed that Musick's maneuver was intentional; therefore, they also followed the *Clipper* under the

bridge.

The takeoff, accompanied by a tremendous fanfare of ceremony and speech making, offered a particularly impressive contrast to the leave taking of the sailing ships, first of which left Boston 100 years earlier. The exact moment of take off was marked by simultaneous darkening of lights at post offices at Boston, New York, Miami and Washington.

Greetings were broadcast to the *Clipper's* crew from President Manuel Quezon of the Philippines Commonwealth, speaking from Manila, and from Gov. Joseph Poindexter of Hawaii speaking from Honolulu. Senator William Gibbs McAdoo, sent a message from Los Angeles.

"The first leg of their trip will require between 17 and 18 hours over 2,410 miles of open water. Guiding the *Clipper* will be powerful beam stations at Alameda and Honolulu, whose control over the ship's course has been proved almost infallible by the past test flights. In Honolulu the *Clipper* will pick up 14 passengers for Pan American's Midway and Wake Island bases. With 21 persons aboard she will have the largest number of aerial voyagers ever carried across the Pacific."

According to the United Press, *China Clipper* first officer, Captain R.O.D. Sullivan wrote the following report:

Aboard the *China Clipper* nearing Honolulu, over fields of broken clouds through which the Pacific Ocean appeared only as solid black, the *China Clipper* speeded on through the night, two miles above the sea, bearing south and swinging constantly westward towards its Hawaii goal.

Above us the skies were unobscured except for occasional islands of clouds being driven steadily eastward by strong contrary winds high overhead. Navigation officer, Frederick A. Noonan, checking over the radio compass bearings with celestial observations obtained in a clear sky dotted with stars, fixed our position at 1500 Greenwich Mean Time (10 a.m. Eastern Standard Time) two thirds of the way across about 850 miles off Honolulu. The *China Clipper* crossed the half-way mark at 1000 Greenwich Mean Time (5 a.m. Eastern Standard Time) 10 hours out of San Francisco.

Steady head winds, stronger than 15 mph, through the night retarded the ships already leisurely speed at half of throttle to 120 miles per hour.

The course was set this morning a little more toward the west. At 7 o'clock Pacific Coast Time we were 200 miles south of the great circle course — with all steam vessels well to the north of us, since this is the old track of the clipper ships and other sailing vessels of the last century.

Remaining well up in the higher altitudes, the *China Clipper* flew all night between 8,000 and 10,000 feet to take advantage of the less unfavorable winds at these levels.

Despite the altitude, this proved to be the warmest of all our *Clipper* crossings. (Captain Sullivan, made all four Pacific Survey flights of the *Pan American Clipper*, and was commanding officer on all, except the first).



Pan American Airways Martin 130 moored at Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, Hawaii. (Photo from the editor's collection)

The thermometer was seldom lower than 45 degrees Fahrenheit outside while it was warm and comfortable inside.

Already the operation of the *China Clipper* has become a matter of routine. Members of the crew have each fourth hour off duty, and even this morning the crew members were learning to use that fourth hour for sleep. Such is the ocean transport service on the San Francisco-to Manila route.

The only scheduled and individual performance aboard is the matter of meals. Each man takes his food bit by bit during each off-watch period.

At 13:30 Greenwich Mean Time (8:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time) everything was clear, above, below and ahead. Navigator Noonan took advantage of this to drop a flare to secure the drift from sight observation. The flare a splotch of brightness in the blackness took four minutes to drop to the ocean's surface and vanish.

In 12 hours due to the enormous appetite of the *Clipper's* 14-cylinder engines, our load of fuel was cut by more than 4 tons. It lessened steadily through the night at the rate of 10 pounds a minute. The lighter loads mean lessening speed, and this was the reason for the more southerly course in search of those still elusive tail winds.

The head winds, however, were not a matter of real concern. The *China Clipper* is capable of flying not only to Honolulu but nearly to Midway with the fuel load carried for the first crossing of this new airliner.

If the head winds do not seriously increase Capt. Edwin C. Musick said at 7 a.m. Pacific Coast Time, "the *Clipper* should make Honolulu on schedule — as usual.

According to the United Press, Honolulu, November 23, 1935, reports,

Thousands Welcome Inaugural Air Mail Flight in Honolulu

The *China Clipper*, Pan American's great transpacific mail and passenger plane landed on the smooth waters of Pearl Harbor at 12:50 p.m. completing the first leg of an epochal air mail flight to the Far East. The silver-bodied four-motored craft, its propellers gleaming in the tropic sunshine arrived over Diamond Head, at 12:35 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. Fifteen minutes later, Captain Musick sent the 25-ton plane with its 100,000 pieces of air mail and crew of seven down to the water.

The *Clipper*, bucking head winds as strong as 15 and 20 mph, flew the 2,410 miles from Alameda, Calif., in 21 hours and four minutes at an altitude varying from 7,500 to 10,000 feet. The speed average was approximately two miles a minute along a carefully charted aerial highway.

The big seaplane, pride of the Pan American Air fleet, circled the city of Honolulu several time before she landed.

Smoothly shaven, and appearing perfectly rested, Captain Musick and the six members of his crew were pictures of sartorial neatness as they climbed out of their ship to receive the acclaim of thousands on shore and have Hawaiian lei's placed around their shoulders.

Among the thousands gathered at Pan American's new base to witness the landing were army and navy officers, Honolulu civic officials and hundreds of women.

Sixty army and three navy planes had escorted the *Clipper* from Diamond Head to Pearl Harbor, hovering overhead while the ship made a graceful landing. The welcoming committee included Governor Poindexter, Stanley Kennedy, president of the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce, and the Japanese and Chinese Consuls General.

November 24, 1935, the *China Clipper* departs Honolulu for Midway Island and according to the United Press, Editor's Note, the following account of the flight of the *China Clipper* from Honolulu to Midway Island was written for the Associated Press by Captain R.O.D. Sullivan, first officer on the big flying boat.

By Capt. R.O.D. Sullivan, Midway Island, (via Pan American Airways radio) Nov. 25.

It is less than 20 minutes after daybreak as we lift the *China Clipper* from the waters of Pearl Harbor and start for Midway Island, 1,333 miles away as we commence the second lap of our 8,000 mile flight from Alameda to Manila."

"Aboard the *Clipper* besides the crew are turkeys and other 'Thanksgiving' delicacies for the men at



Gooney birds (*Laysan albatross*) on Midway Island. (Photo from the editor's collection)



Pan American Airways, Wake Island base. (Photo from the editor's collection)

the isolated posts of Midway and Wake islands, 1,653 pounds of mail and 14 passengers. Ten of the passengers are replacements for the staff at Midway and Wake. The other four are Chinese cooks and mess boys who will serve the men on Wake. A little more than an hour out and we are passing over Niihwa, last of the Sandwich Islands, at an altitude of 2,000 feet. The dazzling sunshine contrasts sharply with the black night and unfriendly winds we met in flying through a tunnel of fog almost 2,400 miles long on the trip from Alameda to Honolulu."

"Only a few clouds are visible, but already we have been warned that 900 miles out lies a "cold front," that means rains, squalls, shifting winds, and clouds. Our base at Midway reports it has clear weather and we hope to alight on schedule at two o'clock in the afternoon."

"We're 150 miles out now, after balancing our load we spank along with a tail wind of 15 miles an hour."

"We have just reached the volcanic island of Kayai. All of the passengers have their faces glued to the windows looking down into the miniature Colorado canyon visible through a jagged gash in the south side of the island."

"That is all the passengers except the Chinese, who are sitting very quietly without saying a word in one corner of the rear passenger compartment. Don't believe they have moved an inch since they were put there just before we took off."

"Off the starboard beam is that stretch of gleaming sand called barking sands, where gallant Kingsford-Smith and his companions of the Southern Cross took off on the first flight to Australia."

"Another hour and Nihoa Island lies abeam to port."

"It is said the natives here live untouched by civilization and wear no clothes, but they're invisible today."

"This stretch of the Pacific is filled with lovely sights, with volcanic islands jutting out of the sea. Others hide in long swells. They pop into view almost directly below us then vanish just as quickly as they appear."

"It is warm and pleasant up here the temperature is 72 degrees."

"But the weather changes, sure enough the predicted "cold front" shows up. We enter a thick wall of clouds."

"We're in a heavy rain, but it doesn't last long. For two hours though we buck heavy squalls with a complete change of wind."

"Midway our base flashes into sight suddenly. We give its staff a salute as we circle it before landing in the sheltered lagoon. It's just 2:01 p.m. We are one minute behind schedule."

Captain Edwin C. Musick and his crew of six were the first ashore. Then followed by its passengers, the first to make a transpacific flight. A ton of cargo was unloaded from the craft. Foodstuffs, replacement machine parts and other equipment needed were brought ashore. The greatest scramble was for five pounds of mail and late United States and Honolulu papers.

The famous Midway gooney birds were visible everywhere.

The *Clipper's* arrival brought reunion for a number of persons who have been separated since working together at Pan American's South American & Caribbean bases.

The original Midway staff here nine months, will initiate the newcomers in the business of operating an isolated ocean air base. Then when the *Clipper* returns toward the mainland from Manila they will board the ship and return to civilization.

Midway Island, United Press reports:

Clipper roars on in flight to Philippines

Wake next stop for Fast Flying Queen of the Skies.

November 26, (by way of Pan American Airways radio).
By Captain R.O.D. Sullivan, Aboard the *China Clipper*.

"A peculiar sensation this, skimming over a vast unbroken expanse of water, hour after hour with nothing visible on the surface. Though whipped by strong wind, the movement of the water below was scarcely discernible. We quickly left behind hundreds of gooneys



Pan American Airways, Wake Island accommodations under construction. (Photo from the editor's collection)

which escorted us from the lagoon. Only an occasional break in the clouds gave a view of the blue sky. This condition added to the navigation problem of finding tiny Wake Island with all of Navigation Officer, Noonan's computations based on dead reckoning. But like signposts on a well marked highway, radio compass bearings from stations at Midway behind and Wake ahead came every 10 minutes."

"The uncanny logging of our progress by the island stations, with Honolulu and Guam sending supplemental bearings until fair weather is reached, guarded against the plane deviating from its course."

"We entered the clouds three minutes after taking off from Midway's lagoon and head winds of 12 mph increased to gale force higher up."

"Captain Musick, elected to fly at sea level until we reached the wind shift line promised 600 miles out from Midway."

"Five of our nine passengers who remained up late for welcoming festivities at Midway were soon asleep in cabin berths. The four Chinese going to station duty at Wake remained wide-eyed however."

"They just huddled in their seats, just as they had done all the way from Honolulu to Midway, until they were up to prepare lunch."

"The Chinese mess boys also looked after 25 canary birds being taken to Wake to liven up things for the station personnel. In addition to mail, fuel and passengers, we carried 25 pounds of bird seed for the canaries."

"We crossed the International Date Line and found our calendar suddenly changed from Monday to Tuesday. A short time later we broke through the clouds, picked up the promised tail wind and saw clear sailing ahead."

"We saw a smudge on the horizon 36 miles distant, which rapidly took shape as a steamer westbound, the first ship encountered on the flight. In 16 minutes we overtook her and could easily read from our low altitude the name President Lincoln on the stern. We exchanged radio greetings with Capt. C.D. Hansen and dipped our wings in salute. The steamer responded with three blasts



Pan American Airways, Wake Island, Fuel storage. (Photo from the editor's collection)

from her whistle, which to us with our motors drowning out other sounds came as three plumes of steam."

"Passengers on the steamer, bound from San Francisco to Yokohama, crowded the deck rails to wave us greetings."

Wake Island, November 26, (via Pan American Airways, radio.)

Airmail sped across another stretch of the vast Pacific when the *China Clipper* landed after a swift flight from Midway.

The mighty seaplane glided easily to a landing at 1:40 p.m. (9:40 p.m. Monday, Eastern Standard Time). It required eight hours and twenty eight minutes for the flight, an average of about 125 miles an hour. Captain E.C. Musick, commander of the 25-ton craft, had estimated 10 hours would be required.

Mail and supplies for the Wake station arrived aboard the seaplane which also brought nine employees to be stationed here.

Present schedule calls for the voyage to Guam tomorrow Nov. 27, and to Manila on Nov. 28. The entire trip which takes a month by the fastest liner is expected to be completed in 60 hours actual flying time, and about five days elapsed time.

The *China Clipper* has 1,500 pounds of airmail for Manila. Most of it came from United States stamp collectors anxious to save the stamps and first flight covers from the first transpacific airmail flight.

November 27, Wake Island.

China Clipper makes hop to Guam (by Associated Press)

The *China Clipper* sped towards Guam 1,560 miles to the west after an early take off from this atoll station. The big flying boat scheduled to complete the 8,000 mile flight in Manila, was on its fourth day out of Alameda, California. As the *Clipper* skimmed away from the lagoon at 6:04 a.m. she has 38 and a half hours flying



Wake Island, Pan American Airways, China Clipper ready for departure. (Photo from the editor's collection)

behind her. Nine Pan American employees carried on the *Clipper* from Honolulu remained here. It had transferred 15 other passengers from Honolulu to Midway Island.

Captain Musick, carried in his pocket a personal letter from President Roosevelt to President Manuel Quezon of the new Philippine Commonwealth government.

After a flight of 10 hours 11 mins, maintaining an average speed of 154.4 mph, the *Clipper* landed at Guam's Apra Airport.

November 28,

***China Clipper* will lay over one day at Guam** (By UPI)

Captain Musick and crew had their Thanksgiving dinner then a long sleep before starting the last leg of the trip.

November 29,

U.S Marines see *Clipper* depart from Guam

The *China Clipper* headed along the final stretch of the first transpacific airmail flight, hopping from the harbor here at 6:06 a.m. for Manila 1,606 miles distant. Several thousand bronze skinned natives turned out at dawn to wave goodbye to Capt. Musick and his men as their big ship rose from the waters of the bay. They shouted excitedly and waved their arms.

Governor George A. Alexander and a detachment of Marines also looked on. There was a 15 mph, quartering tail wind on the surface and at an elevation of 8,000 feet it was blowing 25 to 30 miles per hour. Reports from Manila were fair with a few scattered clouds. The *Clipper* is scheduled to reach Manila at 4 p.m. local time.

Excited crowds gathered near the landing dock prepared for the *China Clipper*, pioneering transpacific mail plane. Approximately two hours after the *Clipper* took off from Guam, Captain Musick radioed "his position as 300 miles out from that island." An area 150 yards long was fenced off for occupation by the official party to welcome the *Clipper*. Two arches of trees and

flowers are built over the landing enclosure. Inscribed on them are the words

"The Filipino people welcome the *China Clipper* as the dove of peace and good will."

Opposite is a sign 25 feet by 50 feet shaped like a gridiron scoreboard. On it is a small model plane which is moved to show the position of the *Clipper* as it passed every 50 miles along its course between Guam and Manila.

Completing its journey to Manila the *Clipper* was four minutes late. This was no fault of Captain Musick and his crew or the big ship. The

Clipper was circling over Manila waiting for the cheering crowds to make room for a safe landing. A swarm of fighter planes flew overhead in salute.

Hundreds of small launches escorted the *Clipper* to her landing barge.

Captain Musick and his crew walked through the flowered arches to a tumultuous reception and Captain Musick presented a letter to President Quezon.

Then a motor parade followed, with a banquet and reception.

Captain Musick was asked to describe the flight: "without incident" he replied.

The Pacific challenge was met, and overcome. →

Bibliography

John B. Russell collection Vol.2 of newspaper clippings from the Miami Herald and Miami Tribune as received by the United Press, and Associated Press via Pan American Airways radio.

Jon Krupnick, Pan American's, Pacific Pioneers, The Rest of the Story, pp 149, 150 and 151.

China Clipper route map, from *China Clipper*, by Robert L. Gandt.

Photo's and survey flight cover from the Ed Martin collection.

About the Author

Ed Martin was born in Dublin, Ireland, and educated by the Christian Brothers. A strong interest in commercial aviation from an early age caused him, his wife Kathleen & two young sons, to leave Ireland in search of his dream, to work for a commercial airline. In 1965, Western Airlines opened that door, in 1966 a transfer to American Airlines followed where he spent the next 37 years living his dream. Ed retired from American Airlines in 2003, as the Western Area & European Manager for Materials Management. He became a member of AAHS with the encouragement of former Director Kase Dekker and his family.

