

CHAPTER 13 – JET PROPELLED AGAIN – BUT ONLY BRIEFLY

Early in 1978 Tradewinds bought three Boeing 707-323C's from American Airlines, part of the deal being that AA would train all the crews who were to fly them. Consequently at the end of July 1978 I did my last flights in a CL44, before I went off to Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas to start a course at the American Airlines Academy feeling greatly excited at the prospect of flying jets once more. It was a splendid experience in all respects bar one – the temperature in Dallas in July, August and September is just too hot. Even the Texans think so and the many I've met in the years since I went there all expressed their sympathy at my badly timed visit to their State.

I flew from Gatwick to New York on a 747 of a now defunct airline, and there transferred to an American Airlines Boeing 727 for the flight to DFW. As soon as I stepped aboard this flight I knew I was going to enjoy myself with AA when I was handed a gin and tonic practically before my bottom touched the seat and long before we took off. Refills appeared as if by magic making the flight all too short. Soon I was installed in a motel at Arlington, half way between Dallas and Fort Worth and quite close to the Flight Academy and from where we were shuttled to and fro by a limousine service.

During my stay I cooked for myself except on the rare occasion when I went out for a meal. It was on one of these visits to a local 'eatery' that I made the mistake of ordering some catfish. I am particularly fond of fish and I have eaten many varieties in many different parts of the world practically all of which have been delicious. Catfish however proved the exception to the rule – it was like having a mouthful of mud – quite disgusting. YCNSTWLEM!

For provisions I went to a local supermarket called Skaggs that was open 24 hours, 7 days a week. No matter what time of day you shopped there, even at 3am, there was always somebody to pack your goods into the ubiquitous American brown paper sack. I think the packers were all students paying their way through college of one sort or another.

The course was arguably the best organised and most enjoyable of any in my entire career. We were picked up at the motel each morning, or whatever time we were going on duty since we quite often started in the simulator at 4 o'clock in the morning or some other equally ungodly hour. On arrival at the operations desk at the academy one first had to collect the computer sheet for the day that told one where to be and at what time.

Collecting my sheet one morning I was suddenly aware of a tall man staring curiously at me from the other end of the counter. I looked at my zip to see if I had a problem in that direction, (you know the sort of thing XYZ – examine your zip, ABC – all been checked) but all was well, so I went to speak to him. He knew my name, which was quite a surprise, as I didn't recognise him at all, although I could tell he was English by his accent. He turned out to be an old colleague from my days at Swinderby instructing on Vampires. In those days he had been quite a tubby chap, but due to illness he had lost a vast amount of weight and that was why I failed to recognise him. He had emigrated to the USA, was married to an American girl and had a job with American Airlines and of course he wanted to know what I was doing in Texas. We met later for a drink and caught up with each other's lives since we last met. It's a small world, and getting smaller all the time!

The technical part of the course was fully automated and when the instructor asked a question all one had to do was press the button on the desk to pick the correct

multi-choice answer provided. As long as one wasn't asleep this was, I found, all too easy and once we (myself, the first officer and flight engineer) had completed the initial sections of the course we started the flying training, which was almost all in a simulator. The only time we actually got airborne in 'the real thing' was two flights to finish the course.

Our instructor, Captain Peter Singleton, was a great fan of antique cars and his pride and joy was an ancient Oldsmobile he had lovingly restored. He brought it along one day and drove the first officer and myself down to the airport in it, apologising for the fact that it only had 4/50 air conditioning. Naturally we had to ask what in the world 4/50 air conditioning was only to hear the reply, "4 windows open, 50 miles an hour!" YCNSTWLEM!

I got back to the UK in the middle of September for some welcome leave before starting my route training with a long trip from Gatwick to Athens, Djibouti, Mogadishu, Madras, Bahrain, and Rome. The landing at Rome Fiumicino was at night in the some of the most appalling weather conditions I've ever encountered, causing the training captain to remark along the lines of, "if you can cope with that you can cope with anything!" I'm not certain to this day how I did manage to get the thing on the ground, sort of 'by guess and by God' and an innate sense of self preservation that often gets one out of difficulty. Some people refer to it as 'experience'. That landing was certainly an 'experience'!

In November Air France were having an industrial dispute with their pilots so Tradewinds were contracted to do a series of flights from Paris, Charles de Gaulle to Point-a-Pitre. One of these flights enabled me to see at first hand the accuracy of our Inertial Navigation System (INS). From Paris to Guadeloupe was around 4000 nautical miles, practically entirely over the sea with no opportunity to update the system, and at the end of the flight the INS had only a 1-mile error! At that time this was a very accurate system of gyroscopes and accelerometers, but nowadays



superseded by the Global Positioning System. On the left is the view from the cockpit window that we had at Point-a-Pitre.

Operating for Air France was quite delightful from the point of view of the catering they provided for their crews. In the first place they provided napkins with a buttonhole in one corner enabling it to be attached to the top button of one's shirt

thus preventing of bits of food staining one's uniform and secondly each crew member was given a small of a bottle red wine to wash down the excellent food. All very civilised and if you are scandalised by the thought of aircrew drinking on duty, think of the wine, always rouge, as a preventative medicine against heart disease!

I went to Chicago O'Hare for the one and only time of my life in February 1979 on the day after the unfortunate disaster of the DC10 crashing when one of its engines fell off. The place was covered in some three feet of snow, and although it had been cleared from runways and taxiways the indicator boards at the side of the latter were not visible thus making it difficult to know where you were on the airfield. At one point I had to admit to ATC that I was lost, making me feel a right idiot, but I was somewhat mollified when a pilot from United Airlines, who was presumably familiar with the place, admitted that he too was lost!

Landing at Gander one winter's day I managed to give myself, and I daresay the rest of the crew, something of a scare when I found myself hurtling down an ice covered runway that was downhill towards the lake at the end. Even with full reverse thrust and anti-skid brakes it seemed to be touch and go whether the aircraft with 45 tonnes of freight would stop without sliding off the end. It did but it was definitely another of what we pilots describe as a sixpence, half-crown, dustbin lid occasions.

Speaking of going off the runway reminds me of the time when Pan American Airways, or Pandemonium Scareways as they were affectionately known in flying circles, were taxiing out at Heathrow during the period when they were having financial difficulties. They had been running a prolonged advertising campaign in which they described themselves as 'the world's most experienced airline'. On this occasion their 707 had turned too sharply and one main wheel bogie had gone off the tarmac taxiway onto the very wet grass and sunk up to its axle. Whilst they were stuck the captain of another aircraft taxiing past announced to his passengers, "Ladies and Gentlemen, Captain speaking, if you look out of your left hand window you can see the world's most experienced airline – having one of their experiences!" It was the sort of repartee I would love to have come out with except that I would have thought of it about a week later!

Twenty one years to the day after my contretemps with a Vampire T11 at Swinderby I became, yet again, a training captain. Could it be that 5th December is my lucky day? Who knows, but thereafter I spent many of my trips either training new pilots or checking ones who were already qualified.

In the middle of February 1981 I did something that should qualify me for an entry in the Guinness Book of Records. One of our 707's was needed at our engineering base at Lasham, between Basingstoke and Alton, for some urgent maintenance, but due to my late arrival back from a trip to Nairobi, Djibouti and Cairo it was after dark and the regulations did not allow a 707 to land at Lasham, a gliding centre with a short runway, except in daylight. Management asked me if I would be kind enough to have a go. It was stressed that they could not authorise me to do it, but that they would be very pleased if I would. It was one of those situations that happen now and again where you're damned if you do and damned if you don't, but anyway off I went after Lasham had agreed to lay out a 'wartime' type flare path with 'goose neck' flares. The landing was no big deal, but those people I've spoken to who have done gliding courses at Lasham seemed suitably impressed!

Although I didn't know it at the time I did my last flight in a 707 and for that matter, any aircraft, on 5th April 1981. Having got back from Khartoum and Larnaca I went for my six-monthly medical as required by the CAA and to my complete and utter surprise I was informed that I had had a heart attack during the six months since my last medical. As I had not felt anything untoward during the past six months I thought it must have been a mistake, but an angiogram at Kings College Hospital confirmed it and that brought my flying career to a very abrupt and unexpected halt. YCNSTWLEM! Interestingly the only ill effects I felt from my heart attack occurred after I had my angiogram when I suffered attacks of angina for a short period. Psychosomatic?

During my 29 year flying career I amassed 11,538 hours, landed at 251 airports in some 74 different countries and travelled just under 4.5 million miles, about the same distance as 9 round trips to the moon. Looking back I realise I have had a pretty good run for my money with only one major accident in all that time, but I was still quite sad that it all had to come to an end.

Question was – what to do next?