

Hi, have been looking thro the PWA website and noticed the item on the DC-6 nose in Finland. Have sent an email to Pekka with some info on the aircraft and thought others may be interested as well. Are you the right person to see that this gets posted? Couldn't see a link to post it directly on the website. Did I miss one?

Hopefully this will spur some others to post their memories of those 'old days' in the north.

Thanks

Vic Bentley

Pekka,

I have read your information on the DC-6 nose section on the PWA website. It is of interest to me as I have been associated with that aircraft for over 50 years!

As background, I grew up in New Zealand and spent 5 years as an engineering apprentice with TEAL/Air New Zealand. During this time I worked on the three DC-6s for TEAL when they were being maintained for the RNZAF. Then I moved to Canada in the 1960s and worked as an aircraft mechanic for PWA in Edmonton. While working on a DC-6 (PWA had 4 of them) I noticed that the centre of the control wheel had a small disc inscribed BGC. That triggered some memories and I found out that the aircraft had flown in NZ and indeed was ZK-BGC, and was now fleet #604, CF-PWQ. Its sister ship was also in the fleet as #603, CF-PWP. There were also 2 DC-6B (#601 CF-PWA and #602 CF-PWF); these were the stretched version with higher gross weight and easily identified by the prop spinners.

Later I joined Flight Operations as a Second Officer and flew the four DC-6/6Bs. Here's a sample from my logbook of some of my flights on PWQ; 19 Feb 1969, Captain Harvey: Edmonton - Fort Smith - Yellowknife - Norman Wells - Inuvik - Norman Wells - Yellowknife - Fort Smith - Edmonton. These fights were from the Edmonton Municipal Airport in downtown Edmonton and took off at 7am and arrived back at about 11pm. This one was 12.9 hours flying time. The weather in Arctic Canada in February was brutal for someone from a temperate climate, but I found it exciting to see it all - temperatures of minus 40C and every airport shrouded in ice fog.

21 Feb 1969, Captain Ralphs: Edmonton - Fort McMurray - Fort Chipewyan - Uranium City - Fort Chipewyan - Fort McMurray - Edmonton; 5.4 hours.

In PWA service the aircraft were used extensively on the Edmonton – Calgary run (known as the 'Airbus') that ran every hour all day long. As well they were used throughout the northern towns. In the northern winter aircraft engines would freeze up quite quickly, so all the aircraft were fitted with an oil dilution system. As the aircraft taxied up to the terminal switches would be operated that would pump gasoline into the crankcase of each engine, thus diluting the oil. As soon as the engines were stopped ground crew would fit large wooden 'nose boards' around the front of the cylinders to keep the heat in - they were the last thing to be removed before the engine was started. By the time the engine had warmed up and was ready for takeoff the gasoline would have dissipated and would not affect the normal lubrication of the engine.

There is quite a bit of information on the DC-6 on the internet - search for DC-6 serial number 43126, 43127 and 43128 (PWQ). The aircraft, together with a sister ship 43125 were originally to go to Sweden, but that fell through and the aircraft went to British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines (BCPA) in New Zealand. This was a joint-government airline owned by the British, Australian and New Zealand government to counter the threat by the powerful Pan American Airways flying across the Pacific from the USA. The aircraft were transferred to TEAL (Tasman Empire Airways Ltd. - they loved long official sounding airline names!) when BCPA was dissolved. One of the aircraft - 43125 - was lost in a crash in San Francisco in 1953, so TEAL got three aircraft to replace their old Short Solent flying boats on the New Zealand - Australia - Fiji runs. The DC-6s were replaced by the Lockheed Electra by about 1959 and were in storage until sold to the air force.

There were lots of stories at PWA about the unreliable engines on PWP and PWQ when they were first in service. However, it turns out that the sales agency sold the airline a quantity of Pratt & Whitney R-2800 engines that

were war surplus, replacing the original engines (R-2800 CB16) with a military R-2800-43 used in transport aircraft. P&W declined any service or warranty, so the airline had to send them to a third party overhaul source for major work. The original engines were reliable and were overhauled by TEAL in their own workshops - there was lots of accountability with this as the aircraft were always on long over-water flights where reliability was very important.

Memories of doing maintenance work on the DC-6. The aircraft flying locally would fly for the first half of the day and often have a break at Edmonton in the early afternoon. We would take the oil truck and top up the 40-gallon oil tank in each nacelle with about 20 gallons. In the evening another 20-30 gallons of oil would be added to each engine. Over wing fuelling of the aircraft was not a pleasant job in the winter - the fuel hose would be very stiff with the cold and after being unrolled from the tender would want to return to a curved shape. If you were fuelling one of the outer wing main tanks on the sleek, slippery upper wing surface it was essential to get the hose laid out straight, otherwise it could flick over and almost catapult you several metres onto the ground. Changing a cylinder on the 18-cylinder engines was a fairly regular happening. Pulling off the engine cowls, removing the baffles, intake and exhausts and using the special wrenches to undo the cylinder hold down nuts, then reassembling it all was something that some of the experienced mechanics could do in a shift.

The only engine failure I had in almost 40 years of airline flying was on sister ship PWP. After takeoff the oil temperature was climbing and the oil pressure was falling on one engine. A check of the ignition analyzer (an oscilloscope reading each spark plug) showed one cylinder to be misfiring badly. So the engine was shut down and the prop feathered with us continuing on to the next landing point not far away. Passengers and cabin crew were disembarked and we did a 3-engine ferry flight back to main base. Thank you for taking the time and making the huge effort to get this old piece of aircraft back to 'flying' condition. A much better finish than derelict sister ship PWP used as a fire training aircraft in South Africa.

***Vic Bentley***

CF-PWQ as it was with TEAL in the early 1960s.

