

BEHIND THE SCENES ON A CHARTER FLIGHT

How many people when boarding a flight, or seeing friends and relatives off at an airport really look around, or know what goes on behind the scenes for flight preparations? I think too often we take things for granted especially when things run smoothly. In this article, which I enjoyed doing, you will get some insight on the meticulous preparation. The people who were involved in giving me this information, were wonderful as their co-operation was outstanding.

On this particular occasion a charter plane had just completed a flight from London England, bringing holidayers back to Regina. The large plane was under the capable guidance of Captain A. Bell.



When I requested an interview with him he was most obliging, in spite of his eight and a half hour trip across the Atlantic Ocean.

It was interesting to note, from all the information he had given me, that his aviation career began here in our province, as a flying instructor, during the Second World War, with postings at such points as Davidson, Saskatoon and many other centres across Canada. While we chatted about his fascinating career, he told me that he had been flying since 1937, this rather surprised me as he did not look old enough to be flying for that length of time. Perhaps flying does keep one youthful! Along with all the training he had received when he embarked on a jet pilots career, he was sent to Australia for two months of stringent

training, where he obtained his present status as a jet pilot. Since it has been about seven years, there are many countries he has visited, such as England, Japan, Holland, Norway, West Indies and many others including a 30 days round the world charter. In the statements he made I knew he had a sterling record indeed, but he was much too modest to admit to the fact. Another outstanding feature about this gentleman I noticed while conversing with him was, his relaxed attitude and quiet personality. He didn't have the slightest air of being superior. A quality most of us would like to possess, and should have in any aspect of work we are in. Anyone lucky enough to afford such a trip could be assured, of a top notch pilot at the controls of the Boeing 707, piloted by Captain Bell.

In the meantime I went back to the airport, the plane was being readied for its flight back to London. There were at least 200 people in the building, the passengers were running about checking luggage and getting boarding passes in order, it was a bustling sea of humanity. Really it made one feel and wish they were going along instead of being a mere spectator. You could easily distinguish the groups of people who had flown before from the ones having their first crack at it.

While I waited with eager anticipation for a tour of the huge giant, sitting in its taxing position on the runway, I observed some of the reactions of the passengers. One young couple, who had not ventured on such a trip before, displayed their nervousness by shifting bags here

and there, getting up, walking around and chain smoking. This type I defined as being apprehensive.

In another corner sat a sweet and regal looking old lady, her lovely white hair was curled to perfection and her smart business suit was quite in vogue. She looked to be in her mid seventies, and acted very chipper for her age. Seemingly unconcerned about the flight, I noticed her hand luggage was beside her untouched, where she had first deposited it, prior to being seated. However, I overheard her giving her daughter, a verbal scolding, because she had forgotten to bring her overcoat. At that moment, I walked her son-in-law with her coat on his arm. It was amusing to see the expression on her face, for it was one of sheepishness and sheer determination. I couldn't help but think to myself, ("No wonder all the mother-in-law jokes".) I was really enjoying every minute of this and getting quite an education from it all.

Another amusing incident involved a gentleman, who seemed overwrought with nervous emotion. This was his first flight and anyone within a few yards of him knew it, as he made his caricature movements, from the seat to the window. Undisputedly he seemed reluctant to go, and had anyone suggested he stay behind, I'm sure he would have without any hesitation whatsoever. Along with the silly gestures he was going through I heard him exclaim, "My goodness that's a big brute, (referring to the plane), how will it ever get off the ground, and besides it probably hasn't got enough fuel to get us there either." I'm sure Captain Bell would have agreed with me, that, this man would never make it as a pilot.

The small children were milling about, seemingly very restless at this state as it was well past their bedtime. The designated time of departure was 2 A.M. The adults knew they had a good eight hours flying time ahead of them and seemed very fatigued from all the excitement. Possibly, they would feel more relaxed when, each one was settled in their seats and the plane was air borne. Some tried to restrain their emotions, as the waiting was far worse than the apprehensions of the flight.

How little we know about the quiet efficiency that goes on behind the scenes for this long trip. I thought of this as Captain R. Scott came along to take me on a first hand tour of the plane. He would be piloting the aircraft on its out going trip. When we entered the plane, I saw two rows of seats, three abreast on either side of the aisle. The colors were most attractive in shades of green, orange and brown. It somewhat resembled a cozy living room and the décor would have pleased anyone. After being introduced to the stewardesses, the captain left us, so they could point out their duties to me. All crew members were busy at least two hours before flight time going through stringent checking routines. Firstly the girls readied their small medical first aid kits, then deposited pillows on each seat. Further on they took a check to the washrooms, three were at the rear door of the plane, and one in the front section, and everything was spotless. A most impressionable sight for anyone getting aboard. They explained to me the procedures that they took regarding the feeding of the passengers were routine. They had some 160 odd dinners to prepare and serve shortly after take-off. Meals were all precooked in Vancouver, then put in storage compartments, on dry ice, until such time that they would be taken to the ovens in the galley of the plane, and there the cooking process would be finished.

That night, all passengers would be treated to a steak dinner, with all the trimmings, plus the wine, the only thing they would not get was romantic candle-light, however the stars, would serve that purpose well. The meal itself was a gourmet's delight. Later on during the flight the passengers would enjoy cocktails too. I asked the girls who would be helping them with this enormous task. It would have surely puzzled even the most experienced chef, to serve that

amount of people in such limited quarters, such as they had to cope with. Never-the-less they reassured me that, they had the capable help of the purser and the steward.

By this time Captain Scott was through checking his flight plan, and we proceeded to the flight deck. Upon my first visual contact with this strange looking section of the plane, I was overwhelmed, by the amount of technical apparatus. There was so much to see, for instance the crescent shaped wheels, instruments of all types, dials, tape-recorders, gauges and radar scope, it seemed to me, it might have even baffled a professor. I tried hard to visualize how anyone could comprehend the functioning procedures of the 707. When I told the captain it looked confusing, he explained that learning to fly the planes was relatively easy, and that he could probably teach me the basics in just one hour. I said I would consent to the short instructional program, providing he informed the passengers, that, I was going to pilot the plane overseas, with just one hour of instruction. Surely he would not have had anyone to go aboard, after this information was let out to all concerned, why even the crew would have probably deserted us. (This brought a chuckle from the other members of his crew in the cockpit.) Situated in there was a first officer, navigator and flight engineer, these four men working together with meticulous precision, would assure the passengers of a safe and comfortable journey. Safety was the keynote, stressed by both captains I talked with.

By now everything was readied for take-off, so I gave my thanks to the crew members, especially to the Captains, for affording me this grand opportunity. As I made my way back to the building and entered the gateway, I recognized a gentleman, who was on his way to London for a vacation. It was a member of the S.P.C. Mickey Callow, a chap most people know, around head office.

I enquired about his trip, and he told me that this was his fourth trip over to Britain, his home, he said that each time he made the trip it was always more and more enjoyable. In his estimation, it was the only way to travel, as it was comfortable, fast, also the safest mode of travel in this, the jet age.

As I watched the imposing jet lift its way skyward, like a giant bird, I remembered some of the statistics Captain Bell gave me, the air speed of the jet would be 560 miles per hour, at an altitude of 31,000 feet, in some cases 41,000 feet, depending on weather conditions. There would be one stopover, in Iceland for refueling, then on to Gatwick England, destination of the flight.

An interesting fact about this trip was how economical it is, the return fare was approximately \$250.00, a very reasonable figure for anyone's pocket book.

The Boeing 707 was from Pacific Western Airlines, an airline with an outstanding safety record. They enjoy flying people anywhere, back home to Britain or the continent. It is the fastest fun filled first class transportation to take you to any of the sun capitals of the world. If you belong to a properly constituted organization, that is devoted to purposes other than travel, your group can charter P.W.A. Boeing Fan Jet to almost any destination. Perhaps, one day we can say with pride, "I flew P.W.A. to the continent," wouldn't it be a wonderful and an unusual experience for anyone?

A trip you would remember for many years.



By Betty Draper