



# FLIGHT-WATCH



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## **CAPT. LOYD FLORENCE RECALLS FLYING THE BOEING 314 PAN AMERICAN “CLIPPER”**

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Captain Loyd Florence flew the Boeing 314 American “Clipper” during World War Two. He gave a presentation on his exploits to the Aviation Section of the State Bar of Georgia on January 16, 2004. Discussed below are some of the items revealed from the talk by Captain Florence.

The Boeing 314 Flying Boat operated by Pan American Airlines was known as the “Clipper.” The Boeing 314 was the brainchild of an aeronautical engineer who took the initiative to consider employing a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress wing and grafting that onto a fuselage of a flying boat. By today’s standards, the accommodations in the aircraft appear to have been spacious. Sleeping berths were available. Meals were served in shifts in a dining area where people ate from china using silverware, as opposed to today’s plastic spoons and forks. There were two crews, i.e., two captains and two first officers, in addition to navigators. The senior captain would perform the

take-offs and landings, while the junior captain would fly the aircraft *en route* and the senior captain would “administer” the operation.

Instrument approaches appear to have been an adventure. The aircraft was equipped with an automatic direction finder (“ADF”). The aircraft would home to a non-directional beacon (“NDB”) on a boat or motor launch. The launch was sitting in the water, and you were letting down through the clouds in a flying boat over the water towards the launch with its NDB. If after breaking out, the ocean swells were too high, you would divert to an adjoining lake or river, land your aircraft, and then engage in a high-speed water taxi to your originally intended point of arrival.

Captain Florence also talked about having to land the aircraft in confined areas when one would approach over a peninsula or isthmus at a low airspeed and high sink rate to insure landing in the distance of water available.



Captain Florence was a member of the United States Navy. However, he was on reserve status. When flying to neutral ports such as Lisbon, he would see Japanese, Italian and German pilots and personnel in bars and restaurants. It is hard to imagine how that must have felt for an American pilot when his nation was at war with the countries represented by the other airmen. Captain Florence and the other crewmembers wore civilian uniforms of Pan American Airlines. Upon arriving in a neutral port, their passports would be collected by Pan American officials and they would be given passes or some form of identification to show police or military officials.

Accompanying the flight crew in the Pan American Clippers was a special agent employed by the Office of Special Services ("OSS"), which was forerunner of the CIA. The OSS agent had served in the military and was charged with transporting sensitive materials. Sometimes these were secret documents involving communications between the American government and foreign governments. Other times, cash or gold was transported in

the aircraft in payment of economic obligations of America to foreign countries, such as the price of building airfields.

On one occasion, the OSS agent was a Marine who had served in the Pacific. The OSS agent and flight crew members appeared in a bar, only to see Japanese playing backgammon at a table. The OSS agent went berserk. Captain Florence and the other Pan American pilots had to restrain the OSS agent and remove him from the bar as quickly as possible.

Navigating the Pan American Clipper involved dead-reckoning navigation and celestial navigation. Periodically, the navigator would take a two-star fix and then a three-star fix. Obviously, the three-star fix was more accurate. If the weather was bad and you were flying beneath a cloud layer and could not see the stars, you could estimate your drift with a wind-drift sight on the side of the airplane. A smoke pot or flair was dropped from the aircraft to measure the degree of drift. Who among us today can imag-





ine flying an airplane for thousands of miles without reference to a ground-based navigational fix?

Captain Florence also had with him charts on which he had plotted flights across the Atlantic. He could look at the chart and tell you where a two-star fix had been taken and where a three-star fix had been taken. He relayed one incident in which they were flying over Africa, and the most reliable map they could find for their flight was a Rand-McNally Road Atlas.



It was very interesting to hear about the old days of romance in the sky during the Second World War from a pilot who flew the Pan American Clipper.



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