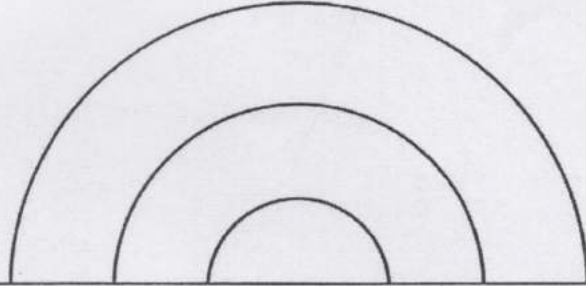


Chapter 15



Across the Pacific by China Clipper

One of the most dramatic days of my Philippine experience was the 28th of November, 1935. This was the date of the arrival in Manila of the first Pan American Clipper to cross the Pacific, a miracle, it seemed to us at the time. The first Martin 130 had been christened the "China Clipper," and on November 22nd, 1935 this pioneer seaplane departed on its initial air mail flight across the Pacific. Governor Frank Merriam of California had proclaimed the day officially as "Pan American Airways Day." Prominent among the 125,000 or more citizens present at this historic take-off from San Francisco was Postmaster James A. Farley, out from Washington to witness what he characterized as "The beginning of the greatest and most significant achievement in the marvelous and fascinating development of air transportation."

Code signals were flashed from Pan American Airways bases at Honolulu, Midway, Wake, Guam, and Manila that all was in readiness. Twenty-one hours after her take-off from San Francisco, the China Clipper landed in Honolulu, and six days later it came to anchor in Manila Bay, having made the

trip in 59 hours, 48 minutes flying time. Today, that time has been drastically reduced by the non-stop jets.

We had been invited to be present in the reserved park at Admiral's Landing, near the Manila Hotel, to welcome Captain Musick and his crew upon their arrival. There were perhaps forty or fifty persons waiting in this roped-off area, where a few chairs had been provided. However, when at last the plane was heard in the distance, we were all too excited to remain seated. We ran about, craning our necks for a glimpse of that wonderful Clipper which had suddenly cut the time between us and our homeland from three to four weeks of ocean travel, to five or six days via air. When that gleaming silver bird came in sight and circled over the city that every man, woman, and child might have an opportunity to see it, we were speechless with emotion. I remember climbing onto a chair, clutching my husband around the neck, and weeping from sheer excitement. I doubt if there was a dry eye in all that crowd.

Presently the plane settled gently down on the calm water of Admiral's Landing, and Captain Musick and his splendid crew came ashore, tired-looking men, who passed quickly through our welcoming group to the waiting motor cars outside, and were taken at once to the Manila Hotel and a much-needed rest. They had proved the feasibility of trans-Pacific air travel. However, the Pan American Company were not yet ready to inaugurate regular passenger service; that event came almost a year later, on October 21, 1936.

Pilots in the Far East lived dangerously in those days. To cite one example: in the summer of 1937, Captain Cecil Sellers, who, with Captain Musick was to be lost a few months later in the Pago Pago disaster, was pursued by Japanese planes while flying over China. To escape their gunfire, he chose what seemed to be the lesser of two evils; he fled into a thunderstorm, a very real danger which he would normally have made every effort to avoid. As it was, his time had not yet come, and he lived to report the incident. Thereafter the order was given for American flags to be painted on the sides

of all American planes flying in the Orient, to insure that they would not be fired upon by mistake.

Captain Musick might be said to have been a Commodore of the Pan American fleet. He did not pilot passenger flights. Always the pioneer, his was the venturesome task, of exploring and proving new air routes. It was on such a flight, the object of which was to determine safe and profitable stop-over locations for Pan American's contemplated air expansion, namely a passenger route to Australia, that he met disaster at Pago Pago. This happened about January 11, 1938. Something went wrong just after he had taken off for New Zealand. Almost immediately came a radio message to the ground operator at Pago Pago, "oil leak in number four engine, am turning back to Pago Pago—Musick." A second message a few minutes later said that the Clipper had had to be lightened by jettisoning some of the fuel load. That was the last message. A fisherman in the vicinity heard and saw an explosion. Later, an American cruiser went to the scene of the disaster and picked up pieces of wreckage. All persons on that historic China Clipper, including the co-pilot, Captain Cecil Sellers, were Pan American personnel. All were lost and their bodies never recovered.

On the 29th of July, a few months after the Musick tragedy, Manila received another shock. The Hawaii Clipper, Manila-bound from San Francisco, was lost with all on board somewhere between Guam and Manila, possibly in the vicinity of the Mindanao Deep. The last radio report from the plane had come from a point 585 miles due east of Manila. The Clipper radioman had reported that all was going well in spite of rather stormy weather, and that they expected to reach Manila in about two hours. After that nothing! No trace of the plane, its five passengers, or crew was ever found.

Among the victims of this second disaster was a friend of ours, Dr. McKinley of the Rockefeller Foundation. He and his family had been in the Philippines several months, where he was working on a cure for leprosy. The doctor had left his wife at the Manila Hotel, and their two children at the Brent

School in Baguio, while he made a hurried trip to the United States to procure some equipment important to the furtherance of his work at the Culion Leper Colony. Also on that ill-fated flight was a Chinese patriot, returning to his country with a million dollars in gold, which he had collected in the United States for the Nationalist war chest. Since Japanese activities in China at that time had created a tense political atmosphere in the Far East, some persons were inclined to suspect Japan of sabotage. They figured that planes from Formosa—at that time held by Japan—could have turned the trick. However, this seems unlikely, since Formosa was far off the flight route of the Hawaii Clipper. The disaster might just as easily have been credited to the Chinese Communists, who were fully as interested in preventing that million dollars from reaching Nationalist hands. In spite of such wild speculation, the affair remains, so far as I know, an unsolved mystery.

In 1938, nothing daunted by the Musick tragedy, we determined to go forward with our plans to fly to Honolulu on the first lap of our trip around the world. To do this would give us an extra three weeks in Europe. Moreover, I suspect we both had a secret yen to experience the adventure of a flight across the Pacific.

Our neighbors, Mary and Eno LeJeune, had announced their intention to take us to the airport and watch our take-off. Accordingly, they called for us about nine o'clock that last evening of February 1938 and took us to dine on the roof garden terrace of the four-storey University Club.

The view of Manila Bay from that terrace was an ever changing vision of beauty, whether one saw it bathed in a galaxy of sunset colorings, a shimmering cloak of silver moonlight, or as on this quiet evening, when a cobalt blue, star-studded heaven formed a glittering canopy for a substantial portion of Uncle Sam's Asiatic Fleet, at their winter anchorage just outside the breakwater. The twinkling lights of those ships blinking unimportant peacetime messages to one another, while their sleek motor launches dashed back and forth on purely social errands, to the Army and Navy Club, or

ran the shore-leave sailors on pleasure bent, to Admiral's Landing, lent a touch of gaiety to the waterfront scene.

In the immediate foreground lay the Luneta, the Manila Hotel, the Elks' Club, the municipal golf course backed by the ancient walls and church domes of Intramuros. This terrace was a favorite rendezvous at the cocktail hour. Often the Club's excellent cuisine tempted us to stay on for dinner.

An unforgettable pageant which we watched from that terrace was a colorful, spectacular church procession, which required more than two hours to pass in review; the occasion, the Eucharistic Congress held in Manila in 1937. Every sacred image in the Islands must have been brought into Manila to grace that procession. Each image of the Blessed Virgin had been lovingly decked in all her best finery and glittering jewels, and mounted on palanquins carried by devoted acolytes and altar boys. There were numerous effigies of the Savior, as well as "High Altars," to remind the faithful of the most sacred moment of the Catholic service—the elevation of the Host. Both local and visiting dignitaries of the church, clad in their colorful vestments, were in the procession, as were also the uniformed students of both convents and monasteries. And I think almost to a man our local Spanish tycoons joined the marchers on that long hot trek down the length of Dewey Boulevard at the risk of heart seizure and heat prostration. Naturally the majority of the participants were Filipinos. I can't recall having seen any of our American Catholics on that march.

But to return to our Pacific flight: passengers had been told to be at the Cavite Airport at 1:30 A.M. However, though we arrived on time, it was 2:30 before we were weighed into the plane and all was in readiness to take off. Right here I may as well confess to having had a distressingly fluttery sensation in that region where intestinal fortitude is supposed to reside. I had urgent need to dwell upon one of the rare and most cherished compliments ever paid me by my husband. It had been called forth while we were discussing this hazardous flight. I had said, "You know, darling, I am a wretched

coward." His reply had been, "That is not true, kiddo; you simply possess the intelligence and the imagination which always renders you aware of danger; what is really important, from somewhere in your inner self, you invariably draw firm courage to meet the current emergency; in my book, that is the reliable brand of courage."

The take-off from this makeshift base was the most difficult and tricky of the entire flight; here, too, the gasoline load must be extra heavy, to make the 14-hour flight to our next stop, Guam, the longest stretch of the entire trip. The mile or more of open, calm water essential for the surface warm-up was here beset with many obstacles, such as water hyacinth, fish traps, small fishing craft, and driftwood, not to mention the hulls of the Spanish fleet wrecked in 1898 by Admiral Dewey. Naturally, the Pan American service crews endeavored to render this narrow strip of water as safe as was humanly possible by means of flares, pilot boats, and signals. Nevertheless, everyone on board breathed a fervent prayer of thanksgiving when, after two tense false starts, we finally made it into the blessed air. Glamorous Manila lay spread out beneath us, its vast expanse of neon lights creating a magic carpet. Above, a lapis blue sky, thickly studded with trillions of twinkling stars, beckoned us onward and upward. The trip to Guam was blissfully uneventful. I even slept a few hours in spite of the stuffy, narrow, uncomfortable berth and the chill which we felt at intervals, when our pilot had occasion to seek higher altitudes. The small seaplanes of those pioneer days were a far cry from the giant luxury cruisers of today's trans-ocean travel.

Through the courtesy of the current Commander of the Asiatic Fleet, a few hours out of Guam, we received a wireless from Captain Alexander, U.S. Commandant of the island, inviting us to dine with him and Mrs. Alexander at the Commandancia. Upon our arrival his aide would meet us with his motor car and convey us, dressed as we were in travel clothes, to his residence at Agana, the capital of Guam, where we would dine early and be returned at 9:30 to the airport

near Sumay. There, a comfortable hotel had been erected by Pan American to accommodate its passengers. We were expected to retire early as we would be called at two o'clock the next morning, for a hasty breakfast and a three o'clock take-off for our next stop, Wake Island.

It was a twenty-minute drive through a beautiful tropical forest to the palatial Commandancia, formerly the residence of the Spanish governors of the island. This formal, elegant old palacio had been constructed of staunch native hardwoods, and finished in highly polished, selected woods, probably imported from the Philippines. The living rooms, to which heavy, elaborately carved furniture, crystal chandeliers, and many long crystal mirrors gave an atmosphere of dignity and richness, were all on the second floor, a good sixteen feet above the *entra-suelo* or ground floor, where the office and storerooms were situated. Off those spacious high-ceilinged rooms of the second floor were side balconies which, when need arose, could be shuttered against sun, wind, or rain. It must be admitted that the early Spanish architects planned well to insure a maximum of comfortable living in tropical climates. This wide-fronted, imposing building stood on the upper side of a typical Spanish plaza where music, dancing, and courting had been, and were still, wont to take place. From a flagpole in the center of the plaza, where once had fluttered the Spanish flag, now floated the Stars and Stripes.

Guam is the largest of the Marianas group; it was discovered by Magellan in 1521 and occupied by the Spanish in 1688 and held by them until captured by the American cruiser *Charleston* in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. At the ensuing Treaty of Paris, Guam was ceded to the United States. Thereafter it was administered by the American Navy until it was captured by the Japanese in the early days of the Second World War. In spite of urgent recommendations by the Navy, Washington had flatly refused to fortify Guam. Nevertheless the island's small detachment of Marines gave a splendid account of themselves when the Japanese attacked during that fateful week in December, 1941. That gallant little

band of Marines under the command of Colonel McNulty held out heroically for three terrible days and nights, until, vastly outnumbered, they were overwhelmed and taken captive. The remnant of survivors, including their brave Colonel, spent the remainder of the war in a prison camp in Japan.

On America's triumphal campaign back from the South Pacific, Guam was retaken and subsequently placed under American civil administration. In 1950 the people of Guam were granted United States citizenship and accorded limited self-government under the supervision of the Department of the Interior.

Those pre-war years under the administration of the American Navy appear to have been a happy period both for the natives of the island and for the personnel of the Navy who had the luck to serve on Guam. The natives, known as Chamorros, were of Indonesian stock, but during more than 200 years of Spanish domination, they had become largely infiltrated with Philippine and Spanish blood. As of now, few of the original dark, full-blooded Chamorros remain on the island.

At the time the United States took Guam from the Spanish, the native islanders were found to be desperately poor, illiterate, and a prey to many physical ills. The American Navy came to them, bringing schools, hospitals, sanitation, justice, and a higher standard of living. Is it any wonder they felt a real affection for Uncle Sam and the American Navy in particular?

The Navy wives, whom we met that night at dinner in the huge, high-ceilinged, old Commandancia, expressed themselves as being pleased with their tour on the island, even though their social contact with the outside world was limited to infrequent occasions, such as we were now enjoying. One girl expressed the unanimous feeling of the others when she said, "You know it is really a wonderful break for us to live here for two years, where we can be with our husbands, and have no need, or even the opportunity to spend money. Moreover, the island is beautiful, and, as you see, we can decorate

our dinner tables 'for free' with long sprays of gorgeous orchids, the climate is agreeable, we have controlled the mosquitoes and the natives are friendly. For amusement we have tennis, golf, swimming, and good hunting and fishing; who worries about the rainy season, occasional light earthquakes and typhoons? Isn't Nature prone to indulge in temperamental sprees now and then in most parts of her domain—the world?"

Personally, I listened to her enthusiastic recital of the advantages to be enjoyed as residents of Guam with just a little skepticism on at least one point, namely, typhoons, for during my nearly twenty-eight years of residence in the Philippine Islands, I seemed to recall that many of our most destructive typhoons were said to come to us via Guam, and that Pan American planes were frequently put off their time schedules by such storms. Those typhoons were usually born, it was said, within a radius of two to four hundred miles of Guam.

From the air the next afternoon, as we approached it, Wake Island appeared to be no bigger than a postage stamp. As we drew nearer, the island took on the shape of a horseshoe, which enclosed on three sides a lagoon. In the curve of that lagoon we would have ample space to make a safe, smooth landing. A perfect natural harbor this—for seaplanes. Actually, I believe Wake is formed by three small coral islands separated by very narrow straits. Together they form the horseshoe basin just mentioned.

Here at Wake Island, Pan American had erected another of their comfortable hotels, an exact replica, even to the furnishings, of the first one at Guam. One wing of these buildings was reserved for the pilots and crews of the planes. They were permitted no contact with the passengers. Here at Wake, envisioning it as a vacation spot for their personnel, the company had provided a gymnasium, tennis courts, and facilities for deep-sea fishing as relaxation for the pilots and crews to keep them in top physical condition for their great responsibility when in flight. We also noted that the plane was turned over to a maintenance crew immediately upon landing. The pilots

and crew were soon seen on their fenced-off tennis courts; all these provisions for the health of the pilots and crews, and the meticulous care of the plane, gave us renewed confidence. It was reassuring to see that Pan American was doing everything possible to insure the safety of its passengers and personnel.

Wake Island is a coral atoll on which no vegetation grows amid the endless sand dunes save sand moss and beach scrub. In spite of this, there are several types of birds on the island, known as terns. One of these, the rail, does not fly; it resembles a half-grown chicken. Another, the tern love-bird—about the size of a small pigeon—is snow-white and lays its egg on the branch of a scrub tree. A third type, the clumsy, web-footed boson bird, flies thousands of miles out to sea on fishing excursions. It has eighteen-inch tail feathers, but cannot walk, just rolls and flops on the ground until it takes off into the air. Still another is the high-flying, large black pirate, the frigate bird. It has a large pouch, which turns red when the bird is angry. This gangster of the tern family swoops down suddenly from a great height, and steals and caches in his pouch fish from the hard-working boson birds. Less pleasant denizens of Wake were the rats, which once swarmed over this island; these were gradually exterminated through the determined efforts of the manager of the hotel.

We were called at three o'clock the next morning, and were in the air an hour later. It was a glorious dawn. We rose as smoothly as a bird from the lagoon and headed into the lovely delicate pink clouds of early morn. Those clouds formed ever-changing, enchanting vistas of fairy castles and dream cities. About one hour out, the steward came to us with the startling information that we were turning back to Wake. The order had come by radio from the flight control tower at Alameda, California, that weather conditions would not be good that afternoon at our next stop, Midway. Landing conditions, never too good at that port, became impossible under even mildly unfavorable circumstances. So back we went to Wake Island. I have always been grateful for that day on Wake. It gave us

the opportunity to stroll about over the sand dunes, to watch the birds and the lazy roll of the surf on the coral reefs. A five-minute walk from the hotel and we almost felt like a Robinson Crusoe on his desert island. The stillness was intense, broken only by the screech of terns and the soul-stirring music of that restless, resistless power—the timeless, rhythmic detonation of breaking surf.

Upon our return to the hotel, the manager offered to show us something which he said we had probably never seen in operation—a chemical vegetable garden. This experimental project financed by the Pan-American Company was producing luscious tomatoes, strawberries, lettuce, and other items of use to the hotel. Eager to see this plant, we were escorted to a glassed-in building a few yards distant from the hotel. There we were introduced to a tall, handsome young graduate of the Agricultural College of the University of California. Laumister, I believe, was his name. He was delighted to see us and to have someone with whom to talk about his absorbing interest, chemical gardening. Growing in tubs of chemical water were large rosy tomatoes, strawberries, and several other flourishing plants. I asked if he had attempted to raise chickens. His face lost its glow of enthusiasm. He said he had indeed, tried the raising of poultry, but had been defeated by hungry rats. However, if and when the rats were exterminated, he would try again. Frank and I often thought of that earnest young scientist and wondered where the war found him. I have recently learned that he was no longer on the island. Pan American had found chemical gardening to be an expensive luxury; however luscious the tomatoes and strawberries thus produced, at one dollar per, it seemed prudent to discontinue the experiment.

On December 8, Wake Island time, December 7, Pearl Harbor time, the Japanese attacked Wake Island. During the preceding two years the United States had made a few hurried efforts to fortify the island; the results were pitifully inadequate, and the garrison a mere handful of Marines. In spite of this too little and too late preparation, the heroic stand made

by those expendable Marines and their leader, Colonel Devereaux, against overwhelming forces of the enemy, in which they held off the attackers for sixteen days, until in fact, their ammunition and rations were exhausted, and their number decimated, deserves a place alongside every epic battle of history.

On that fatal morning of the Japanese attack, the Pan American Clipper, Hawaii, enroute to Manila from San Francisco, had just taken off from Wake when the pilot, Captain John Hamilton, received a radio message advising him of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and instructing him to return to Wake, pick up all Pan American personnel, and fly them back to Hawaii.

This was a staggering order, for there were some forty-odd Pan American men on the island; to crowd them into that little plane, together with the erstwhile Manila-bound passengers, was seriously to overload it, and incur a grave risk of disaster in taking off. However they made it on the third attempt, and none too soon, for they were already being fired upon from a Japanese ship. That brave little Clipper won her Purple Heart, for she received three bullet holes as souvenirs of this harrowing experience. Nor was the danger yet over; they reached Midway that night just after it had been attacked from the sea, and were obliged to land in a black lagoon without lights; burning buildings on the island furnished the only landmarks for Captain Hamilton. He refueled and continued on to Hawaii, where he landed safely, to turn in the laconic report "Mission accomplished."

Since the United States recovered Wake, it has remained under the administration of the Marine Corps. Now, having air strips for land-based planes, it has become an important refueling station for the powerful long-distance commercial planes, as well as for the giant aircraft of the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Landing that afternoon at Midway, our plane, for which by this time we had developed a tender sentiment, had to

take a sound spanking from a choppy sea, and we ourselves received our first splashing while disembarking.

I have always thought it a privilege to have seen Midway. It was just another coral island, but with one difference, a few good sized pine trees growing in soil which had been shipped from Australia. This grove of pine trees had been planted many years before in the hope of developing a little shade by the men who laid the Pacific cable and who had made this island their headquarters. Once a month a Coast Guard ship visited them, bringing supplies and mail. Otherwise, prior to the advent of Pan American installations, those people had been utterly alone so far as human companionship went. However, every year between November and the following June, the Gony birds, known as the Laysan albatross, come from some undiscovered point in the Aleutian Islands to this favored island, Midway, to carry on the serious business of their lives, i.e., mating, laying, and hatching of their eggs. On that early March day of our visit, those feathered travelers had long since arrived in great numbers. A large, black-footed, white bird with dark marking somewhat resembling a domestic goose, they stood about in pairs. Oblivious to humans, they went right on with their courting by clicking their long bills against those of the lady birds of their choice. The incessant sound of that click, click, clicking continued all through the day and night.

We strolled about the island before dinner, and often stepped off the board walks to avoid bumping into those obsessed, bill-clicking lovers. It is said that since the war, plans to establish airstrips on the island for land-based planes have been greatly curtailed because of those stubborn Gony birds. Neither the arrival of man or plane will cause them to give way or interrupt their love-making. In consequence, Midway is usually bypassed by the big man-made birds of the air in favor of Wake Island, which in any case enjoys a more practical geographical location for refueling, and is not a rendezvous for the Gony pests. Now and then we saw one of the large

Gony eggs lying in the sand, and occasionally we ran across a newly hatched gangling baby bird. These strange Gonyes are said to be monogamous. Should their mate be killed, they do not take another and are thereafter seen leaving and returning to the island alone. How many humans can match that degree of devotion? The parent birds share the task of hatching the single egg and also divide the chore of fishing for food and feeding their offspring. Papa or mama goes out on a fishing expedition, while the other remains on guard. The returning hunter feeds the infant bird, by the simple method of regurgitating the fish from its bill into the expectant bill of the ever hungry baby.

Gonyes probably chose Midway for the important function of their lives, because of its clean white sand and its singular freedom from rats and other menacing creatures.

The sand on Midway is certainly as fine and white as any to be found in the world. The perfect bathing beach was greatly enjoyed by Pan American personnel.

We took off the next morning at daybreak. Stepping out of the hotel, we found ourselves in a white world, and the air really cold; sweaters and heavy topcoats which had heretofore been a burden, now became a boon. Frank told me that I had just lost a day right out of my life, for here we were a little north of the Tropic of Cancer and on the International Date Line. Personally, I am never quite able to understand that arbitrary loss or gain of a day, by merely crossing an imaginary date line. Naturally, I suspect it is some kind of a deal cooked up between Old Man Sun and Old Lady Earth. I must just leave it at that.

All about us fine white sand had drifted over the paths; the island had become white during the night. We experienced the illusion, to which the chill morning air of early March lent reality, of going out into snow.

About two years before the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, the United States decided to establish a chain of naval bases in the Pacific. Workers began feverishly to make Midway an arsenal of defense. The harbor was opened up,

enlarged, and dredged. Fortifications were installed which included both shore and anti-aircraft guns. The former sea-plane base was improved and an airstrip created for land-based planes. Also work was begun on a submarine base. Though these projects were still incomplete on the day of attack, December 7, 1941, they were in sufficient strength to repulse the attacking Japanese destroyers and to be of assistance to the United States fleet, during the Battle of Midway.

To Americans waiting anxiously here at home, the Battle of Midway constituted the first ray of sunshine to come from the Pacific theater of operations. It was here that the hitherto victorious Japanese Navy suffered its first setback. They are said to have lost six aircraft carriers, many planes and some of their best fliers in failing to accomplish their objective—the conquest of Midway.

Midway has now become an important United States submarine base, but the long-range commercial planes of today have no need to make the island a port of call.

Our take-off that morning in 1938 was easier than had been the landing of the previous afternoon, and, once in the air, we had a brisk tail wind all the way to Honolulu, where we arrived in mid-afternoon, ahead of schedule. We landed in a calm basin at Pearl Harbor, and after a brief session with customs officials, were taken to the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, where Frank had reserved a delightful suite overlooking the stage and dance floor. Flying is not restful and we suddenly felt exhausted, much too tired to bother to dress for dinner downstairs. It was pleasant to relax on our lanai, from which we could see and hear all that went on beneath us, while comfortable in dressing gowns, we enjoyed an excellent dinner, to the soft lazy strains of the lovely native music. A delightful "curtain" to our interesting, happy Pacific flight.