



The Sikorsky S-43 “Baby Clipper”

by Juan L. Riera

In 1931 Pan American Airways put out a request for proposals for a long range flying boat which would meet certain requirements. This resulted in the development of the Sikorsky S-42 that first flew in late March 1934. Ten were produced and used primarily by Pan Am. The S-42 also became known as the “Flying Clipper” and the “Pan Am Clipper”. Almost immediately Pan American Airways put out a request for proposals for a smaller version of the S-42 flying boat that was intended to operate along Pan Am river routes along the Amazon and Yangtze.

The first proposal came from the Fairchild Aircraft Corporation and was the Fairchild 91 A-942 that came to be

known as the Fairchild 91 Baby Clipper. Alfred Gassner designed this single-engine eight-passenger flying boat airliner. Unfortunately, before the prototype was completed, Pan Am no longer needed the plane for use in China, so Fairchild made the necessary adjustment for use in tropical Brazil. The first flight of this plane was on April 5th, 1935 and seven planes were built. Two were delivered to Pan Am for use by Panair do Brazil- one wrecked in Belem in 1941 and the other was scrapped in 1945. Pan Am cancelled the order for the remaining four airplanes, considering two to be sufficient for their needs along the Amazon.

The prototype was sold to the

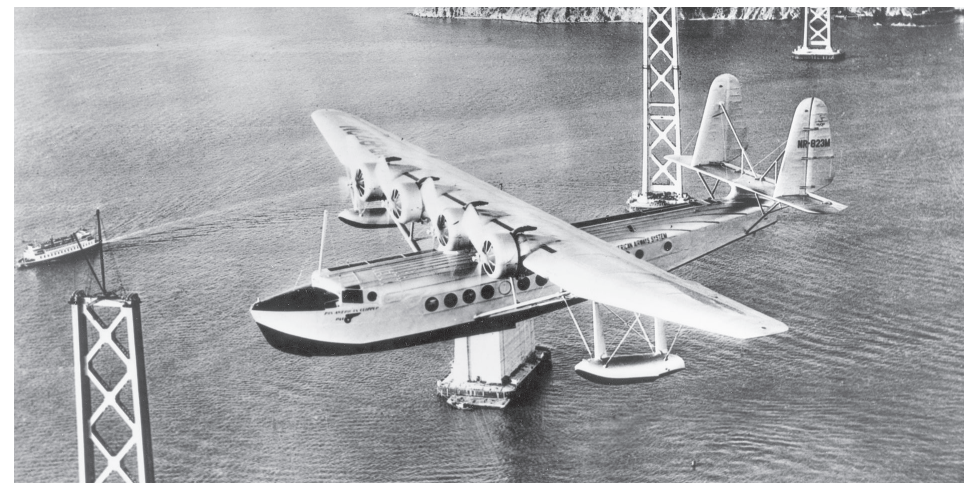


Figure 1 (top): The Sikorsky S-42 “Flying Clipper” over the Oakland Bay Bridge (courtesy National Air and Space Museum).

Figure 2 (bottom): The Sikorsky S-43 “Baby Clipper” in West Africa (courtesy AirHistory.net Photo Archive).

Spanish Republican Air Force, but the ship carrying it was captured by the Nationalists, who named it Virgen de Chamorro and scrapped it in 1941. One was purchased by the Imperial Japanese Air Service for evaluation, wrecking shortly after delivery in 1937. This caused the Japanese to purchase a second that wrecked in Nanking, China in 1939. Industrialist Garfield Wood

bought a Fairchild Clipper that he sold to the British American Ambulance Corps before being transferred to the Royal Air Force that used it in Egypt for air-sea rescue. Interestingly Fairchild specially designed and built for the American Museum of Natural History to be used by naturalist Richard Archbold for his second expedition to Papua New Guinea in 1936-1937.

The second proposal was from Sikorsky Aircraft, the S-43 Baby Clipper. This twin-engine flying boat airliner could accommodate between 18 and 25 passengers (although data shows that the limit was usually 19 passengers) with a separate two-crew forward cockpit, was designed by Igor Sikorsky. 53 planes were built with Pan American Airways being the primary user in conjunction with Inter-Island Airways of Hawaii- the airline changed its name to Hawaiian Airlines in 1941. Pan Am would fly passengers to Honolulu in Sikorsky S-42 "Flying Clippers" from the continental U.S. and Inter-Island Airways would operate four S-43's to ferry Pan Am passengers and local residents from Honolulu throughout the Hawaiian Islands. Panair do Brasil (a Pan American Airway affiliate) operated seven S-43's, French Aeromaritime

used 5 Baby Clippers on a colonial airway between Senegal and Congo, a few were used by miscellaneous companies in Alaska, KLM used one- presumably in the Caribbean, and Pan American used the majority of the S-43 Baby Clippers (including in affiliate PANAGRA) throughout Cuba and Latin America- Including the Panama Canal Zone. As a matter of fact, a Pan American-Grace Airways S-43B crashed in the vicinity of Coco Solo, Panama Canal Zone, on August 2nd, 1937. Unfortunately all 14 on board died.

In conclusion, the Sikorsky S-43 "Baby Clipper" was used in and throughout Cuba, Hawaii, and the Panama Canal Zone for the carrying of mail and passengers from the mid-1930s to mid-1940s due to the request for proposals put out by Pan American Airways. □



Figure 3: Cabin of the Sikorsky S-43 "Baby Clipper" operated by Pan American Airways, ca. 1936 (courtesy National Air and Space Museum).

Canadian Air Mail Notes: A Comprehensive History of Canadian Air Mail to 1945

by Chris Hargreaves

When I started this column eleven years ago, it began with a brief introduction to Canadian airmail: **The Development of Canadian Air Mail 1912-1930** (March 2013) and **Further Developments 1931-1939** (June 2013).

The columns since then have looked at many different aspects of Canadian aerophilately, and when the topics are arranged in chronological order, they give a comprehensive history of Canadian airmail.

There's been discussion from time to time as to which item should be regarded as Canada's "first airmail"? The candidates include a letter "carried by a paper kite" in 1848; the silk messages dropped from balloons during the search for the Franklin expedition in the 1850s (**Figure 1**); covers addressed to Canada which were carried on the 1911 Coronation Air Mail flights in

the United Kingdom; postcards for the proposed flight by Thomas McGoey during the Manitoba Air Circus River Park in Winnipeg in May 1912; and Capt. Brian Peck's flight from Montreal to Toronto on June 24, 1918 (**Figure 2**). These items were described in **Canada's Earliest Airmails, 1848-1918** (September 2019).

There was also an unsuccessful attempt in the 1890's to develop a pigeon post service from Sable Island: **Pigeon Post in Canada** (March 2023).

Captain Brian Peck's flight is generally recognized as the First Air Mail Flight in Canada. The second successful flight was by Katherine Stinson from Calgary to Edmonton on July 9, 1918. Both flights were described in **Canadian Air Mail Centenaries 1918-2018: Capt. Peck & Katherine Stinson** (March 2018).

They were followed by the three: