



PART ONE

AN INVESTIGATION
INTO WHO ACTUALLY
COMPLETED THE FIRST
AROUND-THE-WORLD
COMMERCIAL AIRCRAFT FLIGHT

MASLAND VERSUS

Captain
William M.
Masland.

BY M.D. KLAAS

FORD

Captain
Robert
Ford.



Regularly scheduled international air mail and passenger service on a grand scale was first accomplished by Pan American Airways' Glenn L. Martin-designed M-130 flying boats *China* and *Hawaii Clippers* across the Pacific and return in 1935 and 1936. In June 1939, the Atlantic was commercially conquered by the bigger Boeing-built B-314 Clippers which, in turn, eventually led to the inevitable first commercial world-circling flight by a heavier-than-air airplane. This is the story of that wonderful achievement.

Exactly one year to the day when Ford arrived back in the US from New Zealand, Master of Ocean Flying Boats Capt. Howard M. Cone, Jr., and Capt. Richard ("Dick") Vinal secretly departed New York's Clipper base for Miami where, unbeknownst to them, they were to pick up President Franklin D. Roosevelt and party and fly the group to and from Morocco on "SM Nos. 70 & 71" aboard the 314s *Atlantic* and *Dixie Clippers* for the historic Casablanca Conference. (See *Air Classics* December 1992.)

Earlier the same day when Cone and Vinal departed for Miami, Capt. Masland, scheduled to take out the next SM flight, was ordered by Pan Am's Atlantic Division operations to board a night train from New York to Washington, DC, where by noon the next day he was to report directly to a Col. Milton Arnold in the Pentagon. Upon his arrival at the colonel's office, Masland was met by the airline's Air Security Chief, J. M. Van Law of Coding, and the Atlantic Division's Communication's Specialist Bob Dutton. Charted maps of the Indian Ocean were unrolled on a table by Arnold for all to view. The colonel then asked if a flight, with a fuel stop at the Keeling Islands, could be safely executed from the Royal Air Force base at Trincomalee to Port Redland on the northeast shores of Australia.

Masland, who was told by Arnold the mission was planned to transport a 1000-pound cargo load, needed time to calculate such a trip based on a 314's capabilities. Up until that time no such flight had ever been attempted. In turn, the air commander informed Arnold that if such a journey was to be conducted under his authority as a captain, he would refuse to stop at the Keelings for refueling because he (Masland) believed the islands to be under Japanese control. Arnold then gave the men 24 hours for a yes or no answer for such a proposed flight, a SM so well guarded by the Pentagon and Pan Am that just the mention of the trip was not released to the public until 15 December 1944, and the purpose of which was kept secret until long after war's end.

On the train back to New York the same day, the three Pan Am men discussed the unusual request. It would be up to Masland for the go or not to go decision, Masland was one of the best skippers within the elite group under Pan Am's flag of operations. Respected by his colleagues, Masland was born in Philadelphia a few years after the turn of the century to an affluent and enterprising family that manufactured textiles, pottery, glass and early forms of plastic. Fascinated by flight at a young age, he was eventually graduated from Haverford College where he had constructed a wind tunnel to test an airfoil. After learning to fly at a roughly hewed-out nearby field, Masland became determined to make a career in aviation. He soon joined the US Navy for air training that eventually led him through stringent Pan Am doors in February 1934, from whence his livelihood escalated to where by late 1941 he had become a full-fledged Clipper captain.

When the train reached New York, Masland went directly to the airline's hydrographic office, library and navigation chart room within the Marine Air Terminal where he spent the rest of the day and night researching all available Indian Ocean climatology material to chart a somewhat feasible route that required precise navigation, some knowledge of northeast and southeast trade winds, an exact study of a 314's flight variables based on weight carried versus aircraft weight as calculated by the ship's fuel consumption curves as projected along the trek to Australia. Only after plotting a 314's lift against its drag characteristics and settling for a stripped Clipper to cruise at a 7-1/2-degree attitude with 50 percent power to conserve fuel, was Masland convinced that a nonstop flight across the Indian Ocean was possible. Nearly one-half of the crossing would be made at 1000 feet, then up to 8000 for nearly the rest of the voyage until a gradual descent into Port Hedland was to be executed. Arnold, who came to New York, was given the go to set plans into motion. Out one of the terminal's south-facing windows that overlooked the 314 maintenance beaching ramp, Masland noticed the last Boeing Clipper to be built coming in for service. It was the *Capetown Clipper*, NC 18612 (NC-12). He hoped it wouldn't be his assigned aircraft as he had experienced poor power climb performance with what he called the "clunker" during an earlier round-trip flight to and from Africa. Within minutes, Masland was promised another 314, the *Anzac Clipper*, NC 18611 (NC-II), that he could use out of Ceylon. But in the meantime the captain had no choice but to begin the upcoming trip with NC-12.

The SM to be was disguised as a regular commercial operation as far as Fisherman's Lake in Liberia on the west coast of Africa. There, NC-12 was to be stripped for the mission to Ceylon. A stop was to be made at Miami while en route to pick up a spare 314 engine and other possibly needed spare parts in the event of an emergency. At Ceylon, Masland and his selected crew were to switch to NC-II for the "SM No. 72" flight while NC-11's crew returned NC-12 to New York. As for the 1000-pound secret load, Arnold only told Masland that it consisted of three VIPs and their personal gear, and that three seats, one berth and lounge luxuries, were all that would remain aboard the otherwise stripped Clipper.

When Masland asked who should prioritize the berth, Arnold, in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, told Masland he would know when he saw his passengers. The low-key captain thought immediately of President Roosevelt and how very dangerous and ridiculous such a trip could be for the chief executive. At the time Masland, like everyone else, was unaware of the pending conference in Casablanca.

With two Pan Am engine mechanics aboard, and not knowing the full extent of "SM No. 72," the master pilot climbed NC-12 off Rykers Island Channel on 14 January with First Officer John Auten, a reputable and reliable pilot, at his side plus ten other crewmen aboard. All except Masland believed they were off for a

routine flight to and from West Africa and had told their wives they would be home in about 18 days. At Miami, US Army personnel loaded the plane with 314 parts and then it was off to Natal, via Trinidad and a night air cruise to Belem on the east coast of Brazil north of Natal, during which time the pilot had the navigators practice their charting without using radio fixes. Passengers, one an Indian woman in sari, were taken on at Natal for the darkened crossing of the South Atlantic to Fisherman's Lake following an ignition and cylinder change to engines No. 2 and 3 that had run loud and rough out of Belem.

Before departing Liberia the next evening for Lagos, Nigeria, Arnold had ordered Masland and men to change into Army kaki uniforms while base personnel painted out the line's logo and Clipper name and marked the rear fuselage with two large USAAF insignias. The *Capetown Clipper*, although camouflaged in war paint after America entered the war, had, with the new markings, been turned into an Army Air Transport Command (ATC) plane, the change of which was highly deplored by Masland when said application automatically gave the military full credit to an SM planned and operated by Pan Am airmen.

Without the use of buoyed water lights on Fisherman's Lake cloaked by heavy fog, NC-12 roared away in darkness for an eight-hour flight south to Lagos with engines running full power, Incorrect signals were, upon arrival, flashed to the Clipper's crew for port entrance, Unable to correct the matter while circling off shore, Masland gambled and came into Lagos over armed batteries. Fortunately, no shots were fired. After a night's stay at a British Overseas Airways' cottage, and an incoherent ATC briefing of land airports to be used along the way to Khartoum, of which Masland couldn't comprehend and ignored, the crew got a weather forecast and headed the Clipper east into the heart of Africa. In less than a 10-knot wind against a 91-degree Fahrenheit surface, takeoff was registered as poor and one likened to be made under similar conditions out of Ceylon's tricky China Bay. It took Masland 4600 feet to get the "clunker" on step and into the air for a slow climb that took 12,000 feet to reach an altitude of only 250 feet, Masland didn't like NC-12!

During the long 15-hour flight north, the chief pilot briefed his men on the mission's general destination but left the supposition of carrying Roosevelt and the two unmentionables to himself. The men were drilled to calibrate the ship's performance by practicing different climbs (altitude step-climbing) and airspeeds without using too much fuel. The territory to Khartoum was new to the crew; they, including Masland, had never been so far inside the Dark Continent. It was extremely warm in the cabin. Masland ordered the bridge's side windows opened for fresh air. Then, to the horror of everyone on the flight deck, the fourth officer, seated next to Masland on first officer watch, and studying the navigator's prime and only major map of the area, accidentally lost his grip of the chart to let it blow out the opened porthole! The ship flew on.

Khartoum was reached at the crack of dawn. Throughout the flight, NC-12's engines and instruments had given the men problems. Codes and cyphers had also perplexed the crew in that they never matched with ground station codes. Once anchored at a place called Gordon's Tree, a continuous watch was posted until the next morning's departure. Meanwhile, Masland toiled with military officials on security matters, part of which was to synchronize codes, radio frequencies and to collect any available weather data. With new maps, a Very pistol and shells to be used to shoot code signals to ground stations along the way, the refueled NC-12 was lifted off the Nile to head northeast for Bahrein, one of the main British protectorate bases in the Persian Gulf, that took the flying boat directly over the Nubian Desert, Red Sea and Arabia.

Before leaving Khartoum, Masland received a message from Saudi Arabia's King Ibn Saud, via the US State Department, giving authorization for Clipper clearance across the Arabian Desert. Holy cities had to be avoided, and if for any reason NC-12 - or NC-11 to follow - had to force-land, King Saud would disclaim all knowledge of his note. Arabia, at the time, played a double diplomatic role with the US and Germany in selling its oil and while trying not to become embroiled over such minor incidences as Clipper downings or overflights.

Masland was three days ahead of schedule when he plunked the Clipper down at stormy Bahrein. Not until the 28th, did an extremely late US Army liaison officer team show up to further confer about the special flight. Special radio watches were manned on NC-12 for word of NC-11's arrival. Finally, on 27 January, at 1:40 pm local time, Capt. Charles S. Vaughn and his crew of eleven came into port with the *Anzac Clipper*. Vaughn, a former Manila-to-Hong Kong Pan Am skipper, had been delayed three days leaving New York due to engine problems and bad weather. Throughout his flight, however, NC-11 performed exceedingly well which pleased and mentally relieved Masland in that the ship he was to take across the uncharted route to Australia was, according to Vaughn, up to its calculated performance standards.

The next day, a US Army captain informed Masland and his stunned crew that they were to fly Roosevelt, England's Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill and Russia's Premier Joseph Stalin to Australia following the Casablanca Conference for a meeting with China's Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. In preparation for the long trip, NC-11's engines were run every 48 hours while both crews awaited further orders. Familiarization courses in rope knot-tying, emergency procedures and equipment and radio ground station schedule checks were conducted and hashed over. Refresher classes in celestial navigation were also conducted every evening atop a roof. The two stewards assigned to the SM were even instructed by engineers on how to start the Clipper's engines. Nothing was left to chance.

It wasn't until 28 January when Masland and Vaughn met with US Army Lt. Col. John Steele, a former Pan Am employee, and Lt. Gil Kerlin who flew in from

Cairo on a Lockheed Lodestar. Steele was to fly ahead to Trincomalee to clear NC-11's arrival and departure while Kerlin's job was to accompany Masland into port as the onboard liaison officer.

Days passed. Both crews and port officials were unaware that Roosevelt was already back in the US hard at work when word came to them on 9 February to move on to Trincomalee's China Bay, the rendezvous port to pick up the three world leaders. Whisking eastward the following afternoon, both 314s arrived safely after flying through a heavy squall on the morning of the 11th at British Airways' Malay Cove moorings on mountain-encircled China Bay. There Steele told Masland that a communiqué from Col. Arnold (who had flown to Australia from San Francisco on a military aircraft to await the arrival) revealed a destination change from Port Hedland to Exmouth Gulf farther west. The next morning, NC-11 was taken on a practice takeoff run from China Bay followed by another coded report that stated the special 1000-pound human cargo load was canceled. Security violations prevented the connection when ATC's liaison representative efforts were forced to dissolve the SM.

"They changed their minds," Masland wrote, "because the Japanese got wind of it. I have never known whether the Prime Minister knew of the project. In one of his books describing the Casablanca Conference he makes oblique reference to it. In the years that have followed, it was my plan at some suitable moment to write to him and request a meeting in order to clear up this point. My object in writing would have been both simple and obvious; to talk with a man whom I had long admired, occasionally seen, but never met..."

"It was obvious that President Roosevelt knew of the project. On his return to the States after the conference, he made a radio report to the nation. In this broadcast he said how pleased he had been to have had the opportunity to visit some of the troops in the North African area, and how disappointed he had been to have missed the chance to visit the forces in the Southwest Pacific.

"Of Marshal Stalin, I have no knowledge. It is my recollection that it was his *nyet* that canceled the trip, at least as far as the three leaders were concerned. Somewhere, perhaps in the East, the security was broken. Enemy interceptors patrolled the routes leading to our intended destination, Port Hedland."

In his coded message, Col. Arnold had also told Masland to hold back until he received word on improved weather conditions around northeast Australia. What Arnold did not encrypt to Masland was the fact that enemy interceptors were reported flying about the planned Indian Ocean route the day the SM was to have begun! Not wanting to worry or frighten the Pan Am skipper, the ATC's regional command covered up the takeoff delay by falsifying a poor weather front until better security could be recouped in order to advance "SM No. 72." Masland noted later that if he had known of the true reason for the postponement he would have, as a civilian captain, authorized an abort for safety of crew and ship. But, militarily, he was kept in the dark, and during the course of cancellation was

requested to replace the "big three" by flying a high-ranking general and two aides plus their 900 pounds of luggage.

At 8:58 am Trincomalee time, 14 February, Masland and crew lifted the *Anzac Clipper* away with two Army majors and Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer, Southeast Asia's deputy chief of staff, who, in 1944, became Chiang Kai-shek's chief of staff. While boarding, one major asked Masland if 500 extra pounds of canned food could be taken aboard. Quickly analyzing his long-prepared load limitations, Masland flatly said "no."

Stabilizing the Clipper into its required flying attitude and cruise control took extreme effort. Liftoff was good for the dead-reckoned flight. Airspeed was set once achieving 1000 feet and engines were pulled back to minimum power. Flying the 314 by hand at the calculated airspeed did not keep the ship up and the Clipper slipped downward in 40 minutes to a scary 240-foot altitude. Masland was worried. Then slowly, ever so slowly, the Clipper climbed back to 1000 feet but it took six hours to do so! Three hours past sunset, and without a weather forecast out of Ceylon, NC-II reached 8000 feet. Back at Malay Cove, Capt. Vaughn and his crew made plans to return NC-12 to New York, via the route through Africa, across the South Atlantic to South America and north to the US.

Radio silence and the darkness of night were the only guardians that concealed NC-II from searching enemy aircraft, Masland piloted the lightless Clipper 360 miles east of Sumatra, 365 miles east of Java and Bali and 200 miles east of Japanese-occupied Christmas Island at midnight. Not far away in New Guinea, US and Australian forces were engaged in heavy combat with the Japanese on Buna and Gona Islands.

After a long and frustrating night working with Syke code machine cards, NC-11's automatic pilot brought the Clipper over Australia's Norwegian Bay, across green hills and over Exmouth Gulf where Masland set the boat down next to the prearranged anchored fueling tender USS *Childs*. Col. Arnold was waiting with Pan Am's representative Charles Ruegg and a naval officer to instruct Masland to fly 600 miles down coast to Perth to discharge Wedemeyer and aides and to pick up a Pan Am radio operator and some 314 parts and then return to New York from whence they came. Perth, yes, but to return across the Indian Ocean, absolutely not!

A heated argument ensued between Masland and Arnold with the skipper winning out. According to Masland it was he, the captain of a ship, who would determine where to take his Clipper and men, not Arnold or anyone in the Pentagon's hierarchy. NC-II was due for an overhaul and had already passed the 200-air-hour flight time requirement. Besides, the US was closer to where they were than it was to fly west again. Also, the already flown Indian Ocean route was, in Masland's estimation, too dangerous and another crossing would

definitely place both men and Clipper in jeopardy.

With gas tanks filled by means of a floating tender line, it was off to Perth where, on the afternoon of 16 February, the Clipper took on a new load of passengers - 26 Navy officers bound for the US. Arnold, Wedemeyer and the two aides disembarked. From Perth, NC-II was flown southeast across Australia for a night flight to Brisbane where Masland took aboard Pan Am Capt. Art Peters who brought with him Pacific island security clearance papers. Lining up with the prewar-established Pan Am South Pacific route, Masland flew the Boeing onward to Noumea, Suva, submarine-shelled Canton Island, and into Honolulu four days later. Following a festive evening at Waikiki's old but elegant Moanna Hotel with its beach closed by curled strands of barbed wire, the 314 was then flown eastward for San Francisco only to return to Pearl City an hour into the flight when an engine broke down. Greeting Masland upon his return was a peremptory message ordering him to the island's ATC commander who raged over the crew's seemingly easy coming and going in wartime and for not supposedly reporting the flight upon the Clipper's first arrival the day before. Masland responded by telling the fired-up general that the landing had been reported.

Without further conversation, the skilled aviator pulled from his uniform pocket a clearance letter he had carried since leaving New York for just such a predicament. It was addressed to all ATC port officials informing them of the fact Masland was on an SM and to assist him in any way possible. It was signed by Maj. Gen. H.L. George, ATC's senior commander stationed in Washington, DC. Without further argument or delay, NC-II was immediately cleared for departure late in the afternoon for an overnight flight to the city by the bay whereupon the victorious crew occupied two rooms at the St. Francis Hotel the following night for a mere \$18.

The next day, after wives had been wired of the pending homecoming, and takeoff clearance given, Masland again took NC-II aloft and flew it some 20 hours nonstop to New York, a course that lumbered the Clipper south over California's San Bernardino mountains, southeast across Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, north of Atlanta, to swing northeast for New Jersey's Cape May, upward along the eastern seaboard to pass Atlantic City, Asbury Park, Sandy Hook, and finally along New York's East River to alight off LaGuardia Field at 9:20 am EST, 23 February, 16 hours after Vaughn had brought in NC-12. To Masland's dismay only one Pan Am official, E.W. McVitty, was on hand as the liner came to rest. There were no \$100 checks for the gallant airmen as had been for Ford and his men.

As successful as the trip was, it had taken a toll on the exhausted crew. Along the way an engineer and steward were hospitalized with malaria while others suffered from an impacted wisdom tooth to skin irritations, diarrhea and dysentery. Masland too had a bout with malaria. There was, however, a lighter note during the daring escapade when a large pile of wet laundry had to be

taken aboard at Trincomalee that had not had time to dry before departure time. It was hung by stewards on the plane's inner wingribbing for water evaporation by means of the radiating engine heat.

Most astounding was the fact that the 30,000-mile trip had marked the first commercial airplane flight around the globe in addition to being the first to fly nonstop across the Indian Ocean between Asia and Australia in accordance with a scheduled operation. Pan Am later agreed that "SM No. 72" was their most outstanding war flight, yet their three-divisioned public relations department remained closemouthed, and were believed ordered to do so. To the end of his days, Masland was miffed about the squelching of such an important aviation feat - that possibly the voiding stemmed from Col. Arnold's tempered argument with him or, for some unexplained reason, nullified by a higher Pentagon authority to insure an ATC claim-to-fame mission. To be sure, someone or some group stole Pan Am's and Masland's parade.

"From a strictly technical point of view," Masland stated, "this was the first around-the-world flight. Bob Ford flew from San Francisco westward to New York after Pearl Harbor. The ship he flew had once been in New York, so this was a complete circumnavigation for the ship ... But ours, for what it is worth, was the first time ship and crew had made a complete circumnavigation. Incidentally, we did it the long way with four crossings of the equator. " In essence, Ford and his men lacked the mileage jaunt across the US and back into San Francisco to score for a complete globe circling record.

In late 1986, a Pan Am *Clipper* article mentioning Capt. Ford's highly publicized flight was published in a popular US magazine followed later by a published letter to the editor from Capt. Masland who once more asserted, "Without in the least belittling Bob Ford's superb flight..., it was not the first around-the-world...

"The first flight completely around the world was in February 1943, under my command."

The facts are recorded, the record needs to be changed!