

Clipper Glamour



Clipper Glamour: Alice Lemieux

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And that was rarely equaled among other airlines' personnel..."*

Pan Am was first in a myriad of ways, justly famed as commercial aviation's pioneer and pathfinder over the world's trackless jungles, deserts, and, of course, its oceans. Those who flew and worked for Pan American felt a distinction and esprit de corps, rarely equaled among other airlines' personnel. They called it "Clipper Glory" and pride at working for Pan Am - sometimes - stood in place of greater remuneration. This was particularly true before World War II, when the airline was almost alone in pioneering intercontinental routes, and doing so in the face of global financial depression. It was about exploring frontiers, adventure, romance, and sometimes danger.

After the war, the world began to wake up to a new reality wrought by changes in technology and political conditions. Deferred dreams were dusted off and tried on for size. Wartime regimentation and privation gave way to thoughts of happier pursuits, self-fulfillment, and fun.

The airline business was at the tip of that spear. People had money to spend, the wide world was a lot less mysterious, and getting around it was a lot easier (and cheaper) in big four engine land planes that could cross oceans flying 5 miles a minute. Matching the potential to travel was a much more sophisticated population inspired by the movies they saw and the magazines they read, and had dreams about the glamour and excitement they might partake in themselves.

Pan Am was eager to capitalize on the new consciousness. On the practical front, the airline invested in new equipment like Lockheed Constellations, Boeing Stratocruisers, and the evolving family of Douglas prop-liners. No less importantly, thanks to Juan Trippe, the airline pushed for and succeeded in lowering international airfares so average people could travel to distant lands by air, despite opposition by the International Air Transport Association.

With the world learning to fly in a big way, "Clipper Glory" wasn't really the point. Now it was about excitement and sophistication. You could call it "Clipper Glamour."

Perhaps no one person came to personify "Clipper Glamour" better than a young woman named Alice Lemieux. Hailing from a small Maine town, she spoke French thanks to her French Canadian father. During the war, she went to work for Pratt & Whitney in Hartford, and developed a desire to pursue work in the aviation field, which led to a job on the ground in New York at American Airlines. It wasn't long before she learned about openings at Pan American World Airways, which was looking to hire multi-lingual stewardesses. Alice certainly had that in her favor, but she was also extremely personable, smart, and resembled Hollywood star Hedy Lamarr to boot. Pan Am hired her immediately. It was January 1946.

For the next 18 months, Alice proved her competence and capability on the job. She was a natural too as regards public relations. She was quick to smile, photogenic, and

enjoyed interacting with all sorts of people. It wasn't hard to see why Pan Am decided she would be a good choice for the crew of the first commercial flight around the world.



The route around the world: 21,000 miles in 13 days.

Long a dream of Juan Trippe, the idea was to launch a round-the-world air service, with Pan Am flights circling the globe in both directions. Trippe and his wife Betty had done their own global circumnavigation by air in 1936, when they flew across the Pacific on Pan Am's Philippine Clipper, then across Asia to Europe on European lines, across the Atlantic on the zeppelin Hindenburg to Brazil, and back to the U.S. on Pan Am. But in 1947, Pan Am would make it possible to fly around the world solely on Pan American planes. (Excepting the flight across the U.S., which at the time, Pan Am was not allowed to do, thanks to restrictions by the Civil Aeronautics Board.)



***Clipper America* departs amid fanfare: June 17, 1947. Alice is at the top of the stairs.**

The first global flight was planned for June 17th, 1947. The aircraft was the Lockheed Constellation "Clipper America." She would carry a crew of two pilots (both Pan Am captains), a navigator, one flight radio officer, two flight engineers, an assistant pilot, a purser, and one stewardess - Alice Lemieux. The plan called for a 13-day journey, covering over 21,000 miles, to be flown in 93 flight hours. The passenger list was an exclusive group, mostly publishers who would be happy to spread the word about the exhilarating and important service. On the way they would be meeting with important officials from all the countries they would be visiting. It would be a public relations bonanza for Pan American. The event had implications of national import, and Army and Navy fighters provided an escort for the initial 150 miles of the flight.



Clipper America lifts off, 2:17 p.m.

For Alice and her male counterpart, veteran purser Ray Tunstall, the trip would demand stamina, aplomb, and the utmost in diplomatic skills. Alice spent days preparing for the experience, learning the names and backgrounds of her 21 passengers. Although the "Clipper America" departed New York's LaGuardia Airport with 400 pounds of food aboard, most of the service provided would be to provide amenities and drinks, as the passengers would be amply feted at all of the stops. Alice and Ray would be working and on their feet most of the hours in the air, during the nighttime flights to the next stop, managing the requests and needs of their pampered charges. Sleep was a matter of catch as catch can, on the ground. Throughout the journey, when out in public, Alice had to maintain a fresh and alert attitude and appearance.



Alice was prepared.

She had to prepare herself for the two-week trip without a chance to adequately wash her clothes. This aspect of the trip was of great interest to the public. One of the many publicity photos that Alice appears in shows her displaying the many white blouses she was bringing along.

The trip was a triumph for Pan Am. For Alice, it opened up new opportunities on the ground and in the air. She was recruited to lend her name and glamorous image to help sell expensive clothes and even cigarettes, and it was no surprise when Pan Am turned to her again to crew on subsequent first flights. She and her husband, who was a Pan Am captain, eventually retired to Arizona in the 1970's.



Alice Lemieux in a Camel ad. Clipper Glamour proved an effective sales tool.

Alice was a pathfinder. On a personal level, she led the way for three of her seven siblings who also became Pan Am stewardesses. With her combination of natural grace and consummate capabilities aloft she helped lead the way for the cohort of women that would follow a few years later, when Pan Am introduced jet travel and a new generation of stewardesses became the focus of attention as they flew around the world, imbued with "clipper glamour."



PAA Post-war Postcard: Preview of Tomorrow's Flying Clippers

*All photos in this article were generously provided by Alice Lemieux's daughter,
Kathy Jacobsen.*

MORE ABOUT THE CONSTELLATION



June 29, 1947-Lockheed Constellation, Watercolor by John T. McCoy from the First Flight Series:

Lockheed Constellation Clipper America arrives over San Francisco, completing the first commercial 'Round-the-World passenger flight. The flight, from New York LaGuardia to San Francisco International, was completed in 92 hours, 43 minutes. In 13 days, the aircraft landed in ten countries and 17 cities on its 20,000-mile trip. From that point on, Pan Am scheduled both eastbound and westbound flights weekly

Courtesy of SFO Museum, Gift of Pan Am Historical Foundation

Link to a [clip of a 1947 trip to Ireland on a Pan Am Constellation](#),

from the PAA production, *Wings to Ireland*, uploaded on Youtube by mcdonnell220