



The Captain's Log

The Journal Of The World Airline Historical Society, Inc.

Winter 2006 - Issue 31-3



*Air-India Boeing 747-212B VT-ENQ September 1992
Photograph From www.air72.com Collection*

India And Her Airlines



India And Her Airlines

By Joop Gerritsma

Captain's Log Feature Editor ~ f27f28@hotmail.com

One would think that the first official government airmail flight in the world did take place in North America or Western Europe. Not so! It took place in India. On February 18, 1911 the French flyer Henri Piquet carried mail six miles from the grounds of the United Provinces Exhibition to Naini Junction in his Humber biplane. The flight took 13 minutes.



India Boeing 707-337C at London Heathrow, 1968 (Joop Gerritsma)

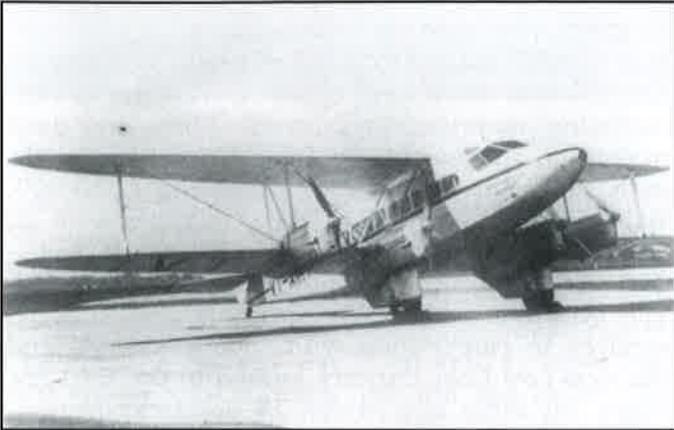
Yes, in 1911, just over seven years after Orville Wright made the first heavier-than-air powered flight in history and nearly three years before Tony Jannus flew the world's first scheduled passenger service between St. Petersburg and Tampa in Florida. (India is only one part of the former British India. The other parts are Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar [Burma].

British India with its large population seemed ideal for air transport. It measured nearly 1.8 million square miles, about half the size of the United States. In a straight line from north to south it was 2,000 miles and some 3,000 miles across from the northwest to the southeast. The main cities were separated by hundreds of miles. But already in the 1920s railways connected the major cities and there was no major airline activity in the decade. The Royal Air Force flew a mail service in 1920. It connected with the mail ships in Karachi (Pakistan) and expedited the mail to the important commercial city of Bombay (Mumbai, India), but it lasted only six weeks, from Jan. 24 to March 9. On April 6, 1929 Imperial Airways inaugurated service from London to Karachi. The Dutch airline KLM made several route proving flights via India in 1928-29 on the way to Batavia in the Dutch East

Indies (now Jakarta, Indonesia). Scheduled bi-weekly service began on Sept. 25, 1930, but India was just a rest and refueling stop. In December 1929 Imperial Airways extended its weekly London Karachi service to Jodhpur and Delhi (both in present India) under charter to the government's Indian State Air Service. In 1931 the latter ordered three Avro Tens (Fokker F.VIIb trimotors built in England) for a service between Karachi and Calcutta, but nothing came of it. One Avro was transferred to the use of the Viceroy and the others were sold to the Egyptian Air Force. The Imperial Airways contract for the Karachi - Jodhpur - Delhi service ended on Dec. 29, 1931. It was continued until July 5, 1933 by the Delhi Flying Club with a two-seat de Havilland Gipsy Moth. In that time the club operated 153 of the 158 scheduled flights on the 700-mile route. It carried 15,641 pounds of mail and eight passengers a total distance of 108,720 miles.

On Oct. 15, 1932 the large trading firm of Tata Sons in Bombay began flying from Karachi to Madras (on the south-east coast) via Ahmadabad, Bombay and Bellary. Flown by a single-engine three-seat de Havilland Puss Moth, the service connected with Imperial Airways at Karachi. This

is considered the beginning of commercial air transport in India. Bellary was replaced by Hyderabad in January 1935 to collect an annual subsidy of 20,000 rupies from the local ruler, the Nizam of Hyderabad. The service continued until the outbreak of the war. In 1937 10 WACO YQC-6 four-seaters were added and on Christmas Day the



D.H.86 of Tata Sons of Bombay. (Studio Favourite, Bombay).

route was extended to Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The aviation department of Tata Sons became Tata Air Lines in 1937 and it introduced three twin-engine, eight-passenger de Havilland D.H.89A. In 1938 two four-engine D.H.86 for 12 passengers were acquired from QANTAS to add capacity to the Imperial Air Mail Scheme. In the summer of 1941 Tata bought five Stinson A trimotors from Marquette Airways in the U.S.A. and on Nov. 1 it began non-scheduled service between Karachi and Baghdad with five Douglas DC-2s owned by the government. Despite the war on its eastern borders, British India maintained scheduled domestic services throughout 1941-1945. Tata was even able to acquire DC-3s in 1944 from the government for the weekly Bombay - Calcutta and the twice-weekly Bombay - Karachi routes. Indian Trans-Continental Airways (ITC) began weekly Karachi - Jodhpur - Delhi - Cawnpore - Allahabad - Calcutta service jointly with Imperial Airways on July 7, 1933, each flying the route in alternate weeks. The first service was operated by an Armstrong Whitworth Atalanta of ITC, a four-engined aircraft for nine passengers. It connected at Karachi with the Imperial Airways service from London. The route was extended to Rangoon (Burma) later that year. In early 1939 the fleet included six Atalantas. These Imperial Airways and ITC services were mainly for mail, although passengers were carried. Indian National Airways began weekly multi-stop feeder operations for ITC between Lahore and Karachi on Dec. 4, 1934. Delhi was added a year later and Calcutta in 1940. The frequency was five times a week in 1939 as part of the Empire Air Mail Scheme. The fleet included an

Avro Ten trimotor, two de Havilland D.H.84 Dragons and four single-engine aircraft. Air Services of India was founded in November 1937 and operated from Bombay with four single-engine aircraft.

Two other pre-war operators were Madras Air Taxi Service (1933-34) and Himalayan Air Transport and Service (1934-35). Neither operated any major routes during their short existence. In Burma, Irrawady Flotilla and Airways started north-south service along the Irrawady River between Mandalay and Rangoon via Yenangyuang in June 1936 with a single-engine D.H. Fox Moth biplane for four passengers. Three four-engine Short Scion Seniors floatplanes for 10 passengers were delivered later in the year, but operations ceased in October 1937.

AFTER THE WAR

In 1947 British India was partitioned between mainly Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. Pakistan included West Pakistan and East Pakistan, separated by India. Buddhist Burma, in the south-east was a province of India, but became independent in 1948. East Pakistan declared itself independent in 1971 under the name Bangladesh. Burma changed its name to Myanmar in 1989. Ceylon was a separate British colony. It became independent in 1948 and in 1972 adopted the name Sri Lanka.



Short Scion Senior of Irrawady Flotilla and Airways. (Short Brothers)

Today India is covered by a dense network of air services reaching hundreds of communities. "The Airline Encyclopedia 1919-2000" (Myron J. Smith, 2002) lists 53 post-war airlines in India. The "jp airline fleets 2006-2007" shows 39 active airlines, from tiny Aerial Services with one Beech King Air to Air India with 60 Boeing and Airbus aircraft and Indian Airlines with a fleet of 46 Boeings and Airbus types. This history looks of necessity only at the major post-war airlines in what is now the Republic of India.

AIR INDIA



Air India L-1049G Super Constellation

Tata Air Lines introduced twelve DC-3s/C-47s on an expanded domestic network in 1945 and on July 29, 1946 it adopted the name Air India. Four Vickers Vikings joined in 1947 and three Lockheed L-749 Constellations in 1948. On March 8, 1948 Air India was designated the national flag carrier for overseas services and officially became Air India International. A weekly Constellation service from Bombay to London via Cairo and Geneva began on June 8. After four L-749As were delivered in 1949-50, an express service to London was started with a stop only at Cairo. By 1953 there were four flights a week to London from Calcutta (via Bombay) and two from Bombay. Two L-1049C Super Constellations were delivered in mid-1954, followed by four "E" and five "G" models in the next four years.

The L-749As inaugurated a new service to Singapore and Hong Kong on Aug. 14, 1954. Jakarta was added once a week in 1958, followed by Sydney and Moscow. On Jan. 22, 1960 Air India became the first Asian airline to fly to the U.S. East Coast, when it started non-stop L-1046G London-New York service. The Boeing 707 replaced the Super Connie in 1960 and the last passenger service to London with "G" was in July. Two "G" were converted to freighters for services to Europe under the name "The Flying Sherpa." The last nine Super Connies were sold to the Indian Air Force in May 1962 for use as long-range patrol aircraft. Air In-



Air India Boeing 747-237B. (Forward Studio, Bombay)

dia had ordered two long-range Comet 3 jetliners in 1953 for delivery in 1957. The order was cancelled after the Comet 1 accidents in 1954. But in 1962-63 a BOAC Comet 4 was chartered for the Madras-Singapore service. They also flew to Jakarta and Kuwait. In 1967 two 747-100 were ordered to begin replacing the nine 707 Intercontinentals. Air India would buy 18 B747s, including 12 Dash 400s and one -400 Combi. The first Airbus A300B2 arrived in October 1976. A total of 41 A300B2 and A310 have operated with the carrier, including several leased ones. They are used mainly on the Asian and East African routes. In early 2007 the airline had 19 Airbus A310-300, sixteen 747 and four 777-200. On order were 22 Boeing 737-800, twenty-three 777-200LR and -300 ER and 27 Boeing 787-8 Dreamliners. The 737-800s will boost domestic and regional services in competition with Indian Airlines and the new Low Cost Carriers formed in the past few years. Air India now serves 14 domestic destinations and 36 international ones, including Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Newark, San Francisco and Toronto in North America.

INDIAN AIRLINES



Indian Airlines Fokker F27 Friendship. (Fokker)

On May 28, 1953 the Indian Government nationalized the country's seven private airlines. Air India was given responsibility for all overseas air services. The former private carriers all became "lines" of a new carrier, Indian Airlines, which also took over the domestic services of Air India. It also received authority for Karachi (Pakistan), Rangoon (Burma), Kabul (Afghanistan) and Colombo (Ceylon). The fleet included 74 DC-3s, 12 Vickers Vikings and three DC-4s. Operations began Aug. 8. Fleet modernization saw the arrival of eight 17-passenger de Havilland Herons in 1955 for low-density feeder routes. By the end of the year Indian Airlines served 32 domestic destinations and 571,106 passengers were carried that year. The first of 10 Vickers Viscount propjets went into service in August 1957. They first went on the services to Karachi, Rangoon, New Delhi and Co-



Indian Airlines Boeing 737-2A8. (Boeing)

lombo. In 1961 the fleet included 10 Viscounts, 12 Vikings, five DC-4s, 54 DC-3s and 13 Herons. Fifteen Fokker F27 Friendships replaced the Herons and several DC-3s from 1963 on. Indian Airlines bought 12 Sud Aviation Caravelles from France. The first five entered service on Feb. 1, 1964. The first service was between Calcutta and Delhi. The first of 23 Hawker Siddeley (AVRO) HS 748 assembled in India by Hindustan Aeronautics entered service in late 1967 to unimproved airports that the F27 cannot use. As deliveries ramped up, the 23 remaining DC-3s were phased out. In January 1970 seven 737-200s were ordered to begin replacing the Caravelles and remaining Viscounts on trunk routes. In the late 1970s Indian Airlines added 10 Airbus A300 for services that had outgrown the 737. It started international services to countries in SE Asia and the Middle East in the 1990s, but it remained primarily a domestic airline. The 1988 fleet included 10 A300, 25 B737 and 10 F27/HS748. An order for 12 Boeing 757s placed in 1984 was cancelled the following year and replaced by a letter of intent for 31 Airbus A320/321. The first ones entered service in 1989. Services to the Far East, Russia and the Persian Gulf region began in 1988. Today, Indian Airlines flies to 18 international destinations in SE Asia and the Middle East, and 55 domestic ones. The fleet includes 42 Airbus A320-200, four Airbus A300B, 11 B737-200. Twenty A321 are on order and 21 A319 are in the process of delivery.

VAYUDOOT

Vayudoot was formed by Indian Airlines in 1981 to operate to smaller destinations with two F27s. Three HS748s were added the following year and 10 Dornier DO-228 propjets for 16 passengers arrived in 1984-85. Eighty-four communities were served. By 1981 the fleet stood and eight Dorniers, one F27 and eight HS748s. In late 1994 Vayudoot was integrated back into Indian Airlines.

ALLIANCE AIR

Established on April 1, 1996 Alliance Air is a low-cost subsidiary of Indian Airlines. Services started on June 21, 1996 with a 737. Today the airline has eleven 737s and four ATR-42 propjets and serves 44 domestic destinations.

DEREGULATION

Following deregulation of the airline industry in 1994, several privately-owned airlines have started operations. We can mention only the main ones in the space available. Jet Airways began operations on May 5, 1993 with four Boeing 737-300s. The carrier was classified as an air taxi operator under the Air Corporations Act of 1953. This act restricted scheduled operations to government-owned Air India and Indian Airlines. It was repealed in January 1994 and Jet Airways was granted scheduled airline status. Three A340, 42 B737 of various models and eight ATR 72 fly to five international (including London) and 43 domestic destinations. On order are 10 A330, 13 B737-800 and 10 B777-300ER.



Air Deccan Airbus A320. (Air Deccan)

Air Deccan is a low-cost carrier that started flying in August 2003. It operates to 44 domestic destinations with seven A320 and 15 ATR-42/72. On order are 63 A320 and 27 ATR-72.

Air Sahara was founded in 1991 under the name Sahara Indian Airlines. Services started on Dec. 3, 1993 with two leased 737-200 linking Delhi with Calcutta and Bangalore. Bombay was added later. In 2000 the airline changed its name to Sahara Airlines, but there already was a carrier by this name in Algeria (North Africa). The name was changed again, this time to Air Sahara. Eighteen 737 of various models, one 767-300ER, one Boeing Business Jet (BBJ) and four Bombardier CRJ200LR operate to three foreign and 23 domestic destinations.

(Continued on page 11)

Classic Photographs From India

All Photographs From The Dacre Watson Collection



Air-India Lockheed Constellation L-749 VT-DED



Air-India Lockheed Constellation L-1049 VT-DHN



Air Works India Douglas DC-4 VT-CZW at Delhi 1956



Bharat Airways Douglas DC-4 VT-CZT



Indian Airlines Douglas DC-4 VT-CZT



Indian Airlines Fokker F-27 VT-DMD