

Ending An Era

Flight 803 Retires Piedmont's Martins

How to say good-bye to a person or a place is not too unusual a problem. But how do you say good-bye to an airplane? Especially when its last day of scheduled operation is also Valentine's Day!

Considered, but rejected, were ideas like re-naming it the Valentine Pacemaker and having real "hearts and flowers" send-offs from all the stops along the line. But the timing wasn't right and besides, it was a happy occasion because on February 15th Piedmont would become an all jet-powered airline.

It was an event more to be celebrated than sentimentalized. And so really the only way to say good-bye was to spend the day with the Martin, watching it do what it had done so well every day since it first flew in Piedmont colors in 1962.

Veteran Crew

It was a veteran flight crew that took the last trip, Captain W. C. "Curley" Bowden, First Officer Jerry Tate and Flight Attendant Roger Dietz. Captain Bowden described "the old girl as being like an old pair of shoes that fit so good you hate to see 'em go."

The Sand Hills Pacemaker, N40413, had the final honors. She was sparkling clean for the more than usual number of snapshot takers along the route.

Flight 803 marked more than just the end of an era for Piedmont. It also was the last commercially scheduled piston-powered flight from Washington's National Airport.

Quiet Flight

After all the picture taking and fond farewells, the final passengers were boarded and N40413 taxied out a snow covered runway and headed home. It was a quiet flight though relatively full for a Saturday night.

For those who didn't already know the significance of the occasion, Captain Bowden explained that they were a part of some memorable moments. For the most part they seemed delighted to be flying home at 265 very comfortable miles an hour, as if they knew that the next time they traveled

that route might be a lot faster, but it wouldn't be the same, ever again.

The landing at Wilmington pointed out a lot of contrasts. It was a mild 55 degrees. The snowballs would last just long enough for a good laugh. The Martin had completed, on schedule, its last trip and Valentine's Day was almost over.

History of the Martin

Piedmont bought its first group of 17 Martin 404's from TWA. A small group of maintenance, operations and local (INT) FAA personnel went to Trans World at Kansas City for maintenance and flight training. From this nucleus was developed one of the best fleet operations Piedmont has ever had.

The Martin 404 was the successor to the Martin 202, 202A and 303. The prototype Martin 404 was called the Martin 204. This was the aircraft, N40400 that sat in front of INT Fixed Base for a long time.

The Martin 404 was built for TWA and Eastern. The Coast Guard bought two and Howard Hughs bought one. Eastern ordered 60 and TWA 40, for a total of 103. The N numbers for TWA were N40401 through N40441. The Eastern N numbers were N440A through N499A. The Coast Guard aircraft were 14290 and 14291.

Differences

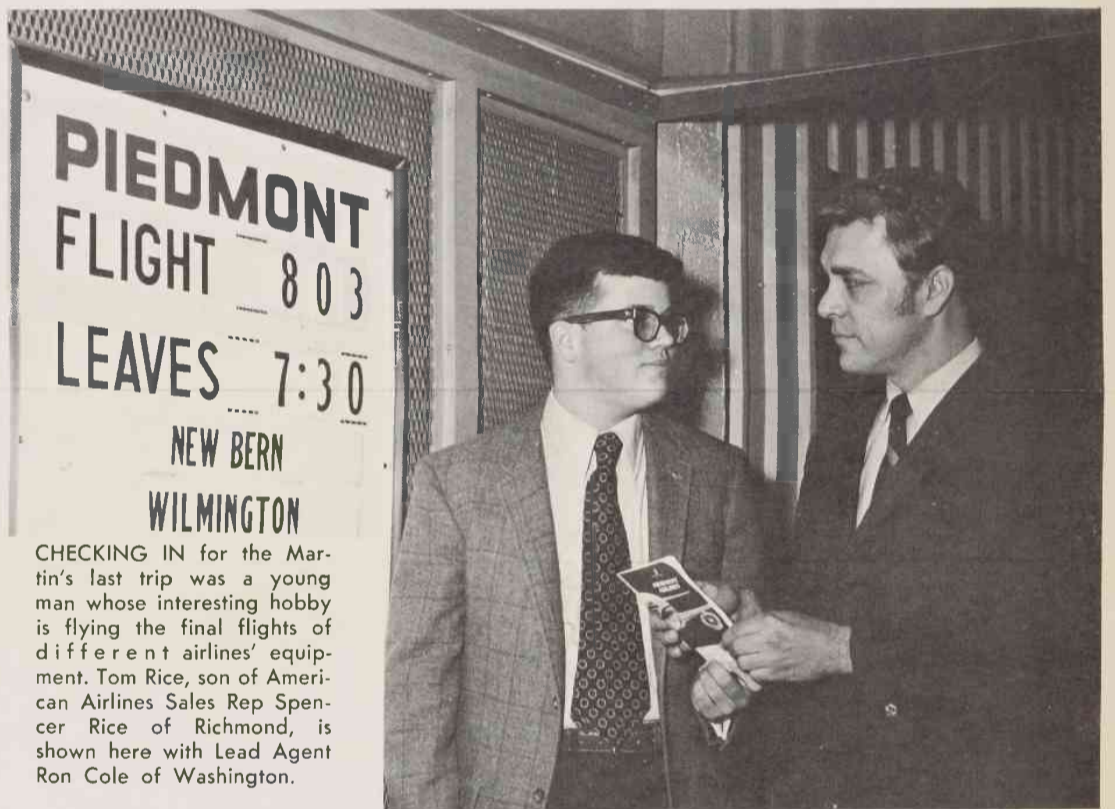
The TWA aircraft were different from the Eastern types in many ways. The TWA aircraft had engines for high altitude operation (R-2800-CB-16). The TWA type had two rotating beacons. EAL had one. The Eastern aircraft were heavier mostly due to aluminum flap castings (TWA used magnesium) and heavier landing gear.

The Martin 404 was an advanced aircraft for its day. The ventral stair, variable horizontal stabilizer, walking strut on the landing gear, heated wing for de-icing, two speed cabin supercharger, spring tabs for Flight Controls to lower stick forces, automatic feathering reversible propellers, ground cooling and adequate cabin heat, all found

(Continued on Page Two)



POINTING OUT the Farewell Flight were Washington Customer Service Agent Carol Andrew, at left, and Chief Agent Jeanne Dial who came out just to say good-bye.



CHECKING IN for the Martin's last trip was a young man whose interesting hobby is flying the final flights of different airlines' equipment. Tom Rice, son of American Airlines Sales Rep Spencer Rice of Richmond, is shown here with Lead Agent Ron Cole of Washington.



THE CONGRESSMAN GOES HOME aboard the Martin's last scheduled trip. David N. Henderson of North Carolina's Third District, second from left, had a first class send-off with lights cameras and all the action. Agent Carol Andrew gave him a flight bag to use

on his many Piedmont trips and the entire crew was on hand for the festivities. Captain W. C. "Curley" Bowden, First Officer J. L. Tate and Flight Attendant Roger Dietz made up the farewell crew. They are based in ILM.



SENDING SNOWBALLS SOUTH just so Wilmington would appreciate its nice, at least compared to Washington, weather. F/O Tate, Captain Bowden

and DCA Operations Agents Carl Harr and David Shaw load a few sample snowballs on Flight 803.