

Planes were missing; But Piedmont people Made LAX a winner

Putting together a new transcontinental inaugural service under the best of conditions is tough and demanding. What happened to Piedmont people the last week of March was anything but the best of conditions.

To begin with, less than 72 hours before the Charlotte and Dayton inaugural flights, there were a few things missing. Nothing serious, mind you, just:

- Two advanced Boeing 727-200 long range aircraft.
 - Galleys for preparing transcontinental meals.
 - And one working altimeter.
- That's all.

What became most important were some things and people that weren't missing. Most of all, an attitude that meant Piedmont was going to get this job done.

Here's how it came about.

Early in the week before April 1, Boeing informed us that there were problems on the modification line. One aircraft probably wouldn't be available. The other, while behind schedule, was still expected to be here in time for the inaugural.

As the modification problems worsened, plans were developed for what to do "just in case." By mid-week, it was clear that the best we could hope for was one advanced B727-200 to outfit for transcon service.

Dayton-Los Angeles, as we have since proved, can be flown nonstop with the conventional "200." Charlotte-Los Angeles can work,

but only under optimum conditions. Nevertheless, half a loaf (or fleet, in this case) seemed better than nothing, and a B727-200 was ferried to INT for modification.

First class seats, a bulkhead between the first class and coach sections, and new aisle runners were installed by Friday. That was the good news. The bad news was that the second advanced aircraft was not going to be ready, either.

Purchasing found a truck to bring the first class seats Boeing had already installed back to INT. AOCC isolated a second conventional "200" and had it brought to INT. Production planning and engineering people went to work on new weight calculations and to redevelop load charts. (A supplemental type certificate had already been obtained on the first of the conventional "200's.")

At 1:30 a.m. Saturday, the truck from Wichita arrived with the first class seats, and a dozen or so mechanics went to work installing the seats, bulkhead, and carpet runners.

The galleys could not be replaced. But Pete Van Duser's people weren't fazed. They were, instead, working on new menus. It was an around-the-clock effort to abandon in-flight, first class service plans and start over with a service that could be done in conventional galleys.

But, what about the altimeter?

As if a week already marked by the hijacking of a Piedmont jet to



Some of the maintenance employees who modified the two 727-200s in time for our startup of LAX service are: (foreground, l to r) Art Newman, Charlie McCullough, Homer Vaughn, Bob Jaworski, Gene Motsinger,

Greg Spainhour, Mike Hancock, and Bob Eggleston; (on steps, bottom to top) Bob Burke, Jerry Anderson, Vernon Basham, Roger Webb, and Joe Christenbury.

Havana, which diverted a lot of badly-needed attention from the transcontinental projects, hadn't been enough, another blip occurred on the B727-200 ferry flight — first class seats and all — from INT to Grand Rapids. Everything went well until, in-flight, one altimeter failed.

It was already well into the night, but nobody quit. A new altimeter was found. By midnight, a general aviation pilot was located, and the equipment and technicians were boarded on a light aircraft bound for GRR.

The result of all this extra effort? Two B727-200's, complete with first class seats, departed GRR and GSO on-time Sunday morning for our hubs in Charlotte and Dayton where hundreds of guests were gathering for the transcontinental sendoffs.

A newspaper in Torrance, Calif., earlier that week had referred to Piedmont as "a little airline that can."

Were they ever right!



Winston-Salem Mayor Wayne Corpening (left) joins President Bill Howard in loading the final bags on Flight 1 April 1. Representatives from the news media recorded the event along with other highlights of the day for their evening news programs.



T.H. Davis, Piedmont's founder who retired as chairman of the board and chief executive officer last year, was among the passengers on Flight 1. Upon arrival at LAX, Davis greets Bill Kyle, the captain on the first flight from CLT.