

THROUGH CUBA TO OBLIVION



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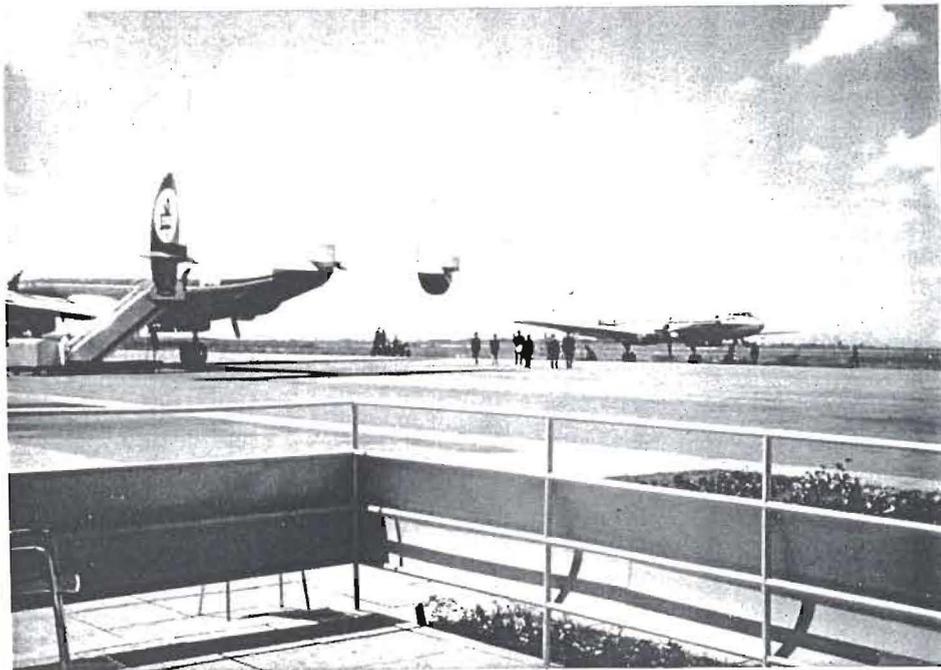
I rationalized that perhaps nervous tension, loss of sleep and cold sweats are the price of success.

On the night of July 26/27 we made our own *Ad Astra - Journey to the Stars* when all three of our Connies were in the air simultaneously. It went like this:

- RNR- crewed by Captain McIntyre, F/O Lowry, S/O Fitzsimmons, F/E Vanderaa and Nav. Bayliss was westbound out of Shannon for Gander after picking up a load of Dutch people at Amsterdam.
- WWH- crewed by Captain Dugan, F/O Schmidt, S/O Heugan, F/E Mathers, and Nav. Nunney had left Gander with a load of Hungarians bound for Vienna.
- PXX- crewed by Captain Nicol, F/O Long, S/O Paton, F/E Rankin and Nav. Hutchinson had refueled at Shannon and were now on their way to Zagreb, Yugoslavia.

As I inspected our operations board I felt both pride and renewed hope. We'd make it after all!

We were the first Canadian aircraft to land in Yugoslavia since the end of World-War Two. The contrast between our sleek Connie and the roughly finished but sturdy Russian built aircraft was very apparent.



-PXX and a Russian Aeroflot Anotov AN10 'Ukrania' at Zagreb airport, Yugoslavia, July 28, 1965.

As jet-powered aircraft became increasingly popular, high-grade 130/145 octane gas for pistons was becoming increasingly hard to get. Zagreb had none, but Nicol and Rankin had planned to have plenty in -PXX's tanks on arrival from Shannon. So she had more than enough for a daylight flight across the Alps to Frankfort for refueling, which gave the camera bugs in the crew plenty of good shots. She had been nicknamed 'Pixie' by the stewardesses, and somehow the name fitted her because she had turned out to be a great aircraft.

In the meanwhile, -WWH, which had not attracted a nickname, used her late model Wright 'EA' model engines to complete her trips with just a few delays. Dugan now proceeded to fly her from Vienna west to Amsterdam for a returning flight of Dutch people from Amsterdam to Toronto.

At the same time, -RNR, which the stews referred to as 'Rock'n'Roll' had just completed her eighth Atlantic crossing after being re-licenced. But on the afternoon of July 27th McIntyre had brought her into Toronto with one engine feathered. It turned out to be a catastrophic failure requiring a replacement. I thought bitterly that this one aircraft which Rankin said had been a bit of a 'hangar queen' with TCA, had done her best to 'Rock'n'Roll' us right out of business.

The next day, after McIntyre had ferried her to Dorval on three engines I watched sadly while my mechanics removed her tip tanks so she would fit into the hangar.