

The Canadian Invasion of Juneau, Alaska

This is a 63-year-old memory of a charter flight to Juneau from Prince George, B.C. Flight was from May 4 to May 7, 1958 on a Canadian Pacific Convair 240, 40 passenger aircraft.

Crew consisted of Captain Chuck Wilson, myself as First Officer, a Stewardess, and Mechanic. We carried 40 members of the Prince George Pipe Band with Pipers and Drummers. It was quite noisy and merry in-flight as pipers did renditions, while the stewardess valiantly served food and drinks.

Weather at JNU was below IFR limits so we did an IFR approach at Sisters Island, established VFR conditions and proceeded to JNU at low level in rain to our landing at JNU.

The band and crew proceeded to the famous Baranof Hotel for our stay. Juneau was more of a town than a city and is on a narrow strip of land with a sheer mountain on the north side and water on the south. Juneau had none of the bustle of cruise ships seen today. It did have occasional small ships that carried tourists but few and far between and none while we were there. Therefore, the arrival of the Pipe Band caused the locals to welcome us with open arms and to augment our group, four Canadian Navy minesweepers happened to make a visit at the same time with over 100 sailors.

Banks, stores and restaurants even accepted Canadian money at par. Of course, the fact that our dollar was trading at 10 cents higher than US might have had something to do with that.

Chuck and I were invited to attend a Rotary Club luncheon that had the Pipe Major attending, and he played a tune on the pipes. After, he asked if there were any requests. One of the members asked if he would play "Scotland the Brae." I remember him turning red in the face and trying to get words out of his mouth. At last he said in embarrassment "I just played it" which brought the house down in laughter.

The most memorable night was one when, after the band had played a concert, we all retired to the famous Red Dog Saloon from gold rush days. It had sawdust on the floor and was littered with peanut shells. Here we met up with the Canadian sailors who were on port leave. Everyone mixed and we had great time with pipes and drums being played at various times.

As you can imagine some liberal drinking occurred seeing we had the band and sailors mixed. Chuck and I being the exception. Sometime after midnight the saloon was closing, and someone suggested we go and find something to eat. A great number of Canadians and a few locals guiding us proceeded about three blocks to a restaurant. I don't know how it happened, but someone talked with the owner, and we gained entrance even though he had no idea what was going on.

Now we are not talking about a few people as there were probably 40 or 50 of us including band members with instruments and we packed the place. Some of our contingent went behind the counter and started making sandwiches. The owner who was Chinese got a little excited for some reason, worrying about all this food and drinks going out with him having no control. He was assured he would be paid and when we left a hat was passed around and he was very happy indeed with what he received.

Now it's 2 o'clock in the morning with this very boisterous mob so how do we get back to our hotel and ships. Someone suggested we march back. So, we formed up in columns of three with the pipes and drums at the front and marched back downtown. The echo from the mountain immediately to our right, of the band playing, doubled the sound of the pipes and drums which combined with cadence of sailors' boots hitting the pavement sounded like a major parade.

Remember this is 2 o'clock in the morning. Pretty soon we could see a police car up ahead on the right, but no fear, the officers are standing outside the car killing themselves laughing. They must have been ex-military as they snapped to attention when they heard commands from our ranks "Eyes right, Present arms." They solemnly returned our salute.

The rest of the way downtown we were greeted with people hanging out their windows cheering and clapping. Juneau in those days still had the Wild West feeling and they were certainly gracious to the 'Canadian Invasion' of their city.

Now if you're old enough, you might remember the saying, "Beware of the Yankee trader".

Well maybe. I had purchased a substantial amount of cheap 90 cent US dollars before leaving Vancouver, in anticipation of purchasing something in Alaska. Not finding anything to spend it on, I went to the bank and bought all the Canadian dollars back at par they had. Then went to a couple of stores and cleaned them out of their intake. Net gain 10%. They were all happy because it saved the bank shipping costs to US exchange facilities in New York.

When we departed, we gave them a wing wagging, low level fly past, both ways, to show our appreciation. So ended my first charter flight.

Ralph Quick