

# Pan Am, 727's, and 1977 ...

Mark Zee

27 September, 2016



This afternoon I took a boat across the river to the Jersey side and looked back at New York City; amongst the skyscrapers in Midtown one stood out – the MetLife building. It seemed familiar – and I wondered why. I realised it was once the **PanAm building**; in a different era, this was the headquarters of Pan American World Airways.



Most interestingly, there was once a helicopter service, operated by PanAm in 1977, that connected downtown Manhattan with JFK, if you had a First or 'Clipper Class' ticket on a PanAm flight. The helicopter transfer, from the helipad on the roof of the PanAm building, took about 7 minutes - compare this to the 1 hour and 7 minutes it takes to get out to JFK these days - if you're lucky.



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Today, a couple of blocks west of the former PanAm building sits a lonely Concorde beside the Hudson, another nod to a time when aviation seems to have offered more convenience and speed than it does today.

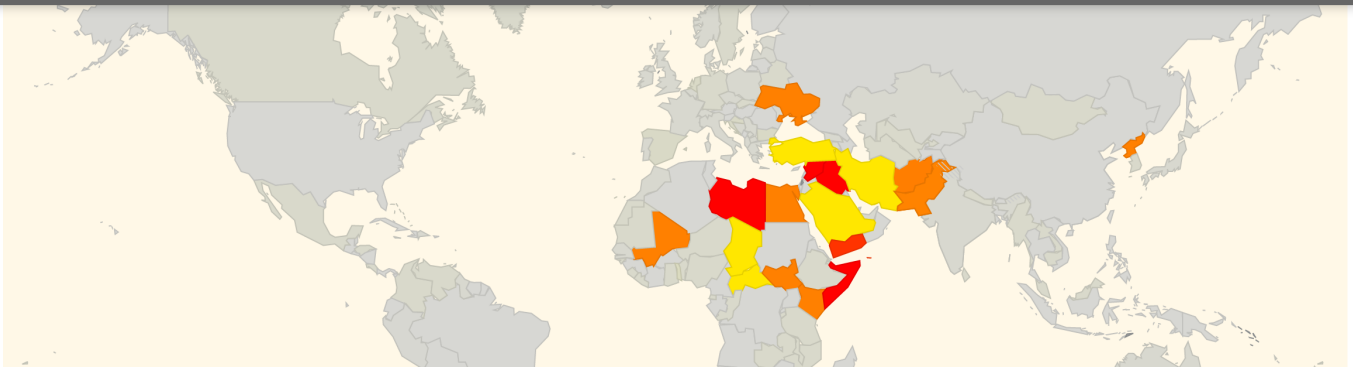


So, the question is whether this is nothing more than nostalgia, or whether things were indeed, in some way, better back then. Everyone will have their own answer to that – we’ve lost Tristars with elevators, DC-8’s with their chrome and diesel and smoke and crackle, 727’s and Bac 1-11’s with their rear airstairs – and what have we gained? The newest arrivals – the C Series, the A350, the 787 – are sleek, fuel efficient, and open up new routes that weren’t possible before – but are pretty unspectacular.

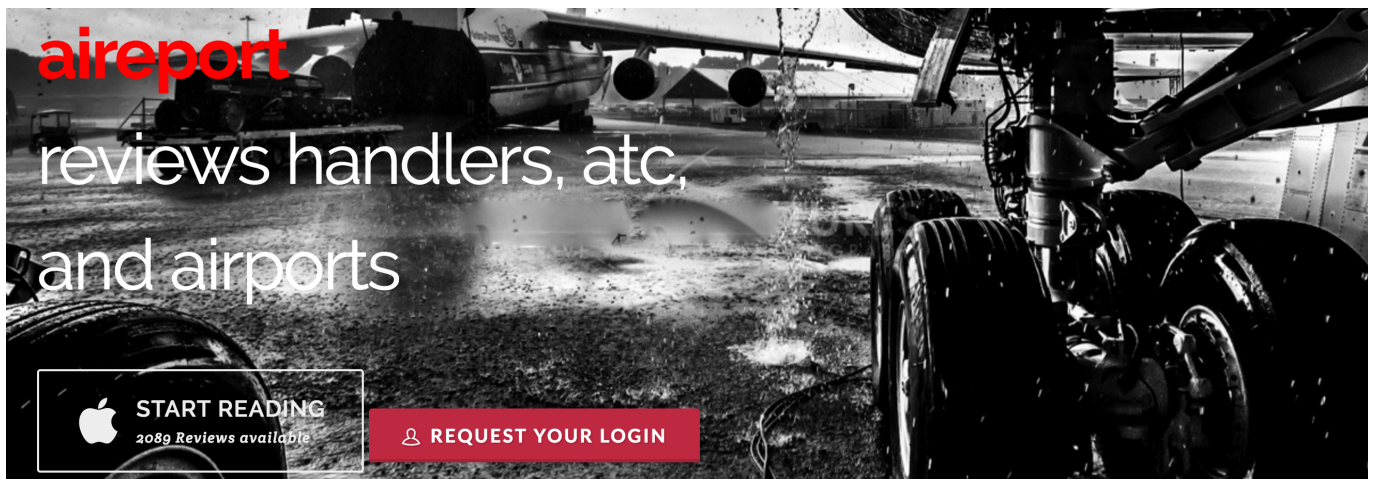
No doubt though, the generation that got to fly and operate these aircraft looked back on the days of Flying Boats and DC-3 with equal fondness. I wonder whether the aircraft coming off the production lines today will evoke the same thoughts.

In **International Flight Operations**, though, it must be said that things are much improved. Compared to the era that spans the 70’s to the 90s, we’ve now got vastly improved flight planning systems, more direct routes, much better navigation systems, and we’ve largely moved from SITA, phone calls and fax machines to email when it comes to organising those flights. For the Dispatcher and Planner, there is no doubt that life is far easier. Even ten years ago, trying to arrange handling anywhere outside the US and Europe would take days to set up – now, the same trip can be arranged in 30 minutes.

We do have some new challenges. **Airspace safety** – and the risk to our aircraft overflying unstable regions, is of more concern now than at any time in history. Since MH17 two years ago, there have been many new areas to avoid. But how to know where, and why? Through The Airline Cooperative and OPSGROUP, we’ve worked as **groups of Dispatchers, Controllers, and Pilots** to share information so that when one person becomes aware of new information, **everyone gets to hear about it**. Our shared map shows the current status at **[safeairspace.net](http://safeairspace.net)**.



As a group, we've also been creating some new tools that help us – **Aireport** is our shared review site, where we can let each other know about good and bad experiences with Handlers, Airports, and ATC – whether it's service, procedures, changes, or avoiding a fuel stop that's going to cost you a fortune.



Maybe the biggest problem with all this new access to information is the overload one – **the internet is the equivalent of a Shannon to Singapore NOTAM briefing**. 80 pages of crap with a couple of important things stuck in the middle. Sometimes those **important things** are good to know, sometimes it's critical information.

So how do you find those couple of critical things on the internet? You won't have any trouble finding Aviation sites, but if you are managing an International Flight Operation of any sort – whether you're the pilot, the dispatcher, the controller, the regulator, the ramp agent – whoever: how do you find out what's new that will **affect your flight**.

That's the question that bothers us at FSB every day of the week. We literally work on this every single day – and every day it becomes a little easier. Every Wednesday, we squeeze and condense the things that we've discovered this week into our weekly **International Ops Bulletin** – removing as much as possible until you're left with only the critical stuff. The biggest source, and greatest help – is our amazing group of people in OPSGROUP.

Anyhow, I digress. Back to PanAm ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0umWIPCPd4>