

The Convair Story - 1967 - 1978 - by Ruth Cowan

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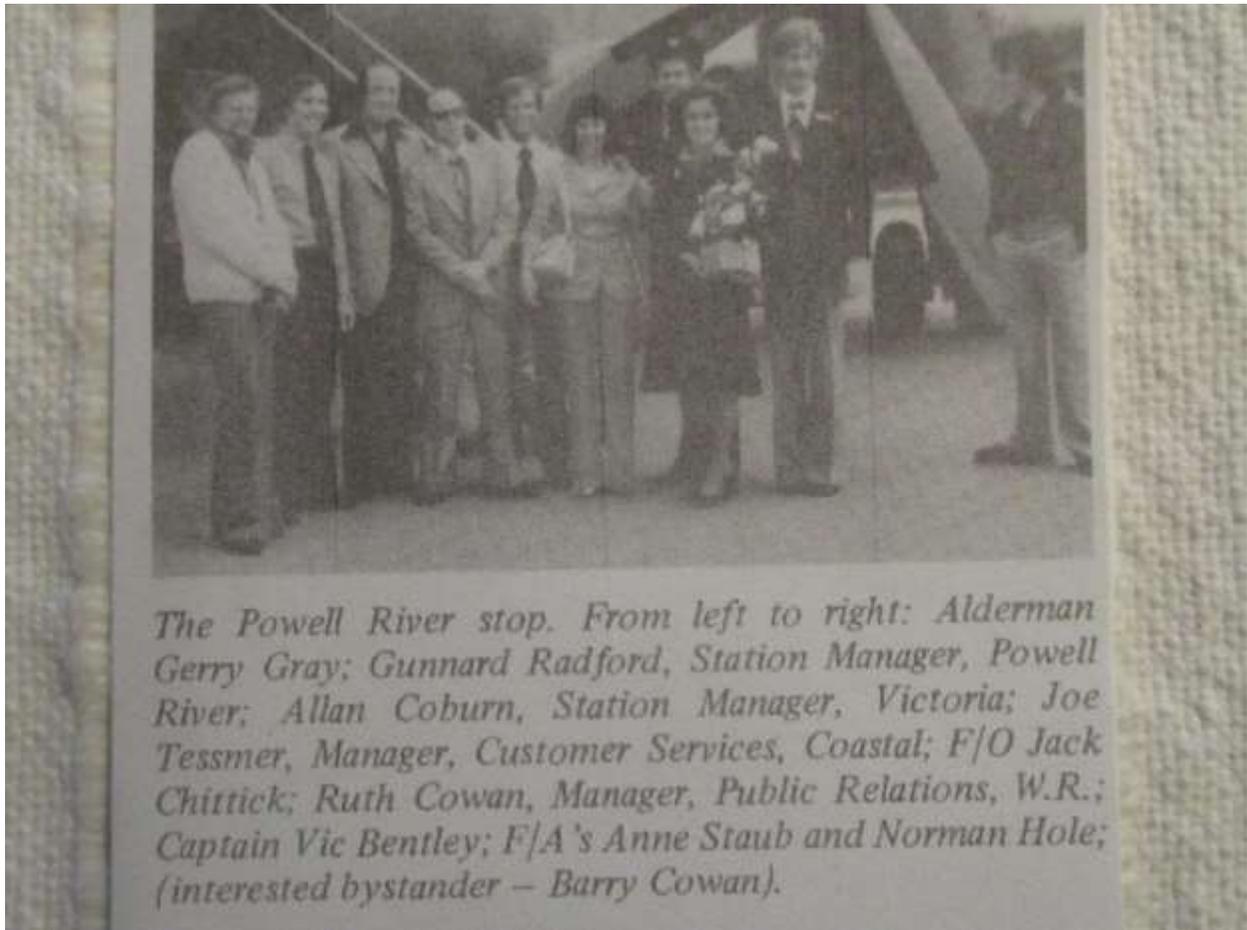
It was in October 1966 that the Board of Directors held a meeting in Calgary and made what was to be a most significant decision for Pacific Western Airlines. They decided to enter the Jet-Age. At that time, our Company's net worth was approximately \$12,000,000 and the Board accepted Management's recommendation and made a decision to purchase \$30,000,000 worth of aircraft which included four Convairs modified to the 640 type; two 737's; one 707 - 138B and one Hercules aircraft, a total of eight aircraft in all.

Just to keep the archivists happy, here are some facts of historical note: early in 1967, we acquired aircraft #641, 642 and 643 from General Dynamics Convair Division in San Diego. In 1969 we acquired Convair 644 from Hawaiian Airlines and later in the same year we acquired aircraft 645 from General Dynamics. For those of you who are interested in facts and statistics, aircraft #641, 642 and 644 were the last three to be sold, Gateway Aviation in Edmonton bought 641, and Worldways in Toronto bought 642 and 643, aircraft #644 was sold to Aero Trades Western in Winnipeg. The total Convair fleet flying hours over Pacific Western's routes was 75,538 hours with 122,263 landings.

The Senior Corporate staff had taken about two years of study to settle on the best aircraft type suited for our routes and operation, and then, there was four months of intensive preparation to make the final preparation to the Board of Directors as mentioned in the Fall of 1966. Based on that submission, it was calculated then that we could expect six to eight years useful service from the Convairs, anything over that would put us well ahead of the game. It should be borne to mind that the Board were committing approximately 2 1/2 times its net worth to purchase equipment -- a pretty courageous gamble. It was after the decision had been made and ratified by the Board of Directors, by co-incidence that the same day, the Federal Government announced a regional air policy for the first time.

It was then with some degree of nostalgia that June 10th, 1978, saw the final scheduled Convair flight leaving Vancouver at 3:30, aircraft #642, C-FPWU for stops in Powell River and Campbell River then back to Vancouver. The flight crew who did such a memorable job, was headed up by Captain Vic Bentley, First Officer John Chittick, Purser Maureen Griffin, Flight Attendants Annie Staub and Norman Hole. We had a full load out of Vancouver and after take-off each lady passenger was presented with a red rose followed by complimentary champagne and hors d'oeuvres served to all passengers. By the time we were airborne the weather decided to cooperate beautifully. Prior to boarding in Vancouver, your intrepid editor wondered if we were going to head into what had been forecast as monsoon type rains, however, our fears were groundless the weather was almost perfect. We had Seyer Hansen on board acting as

official photographer and we were to be met in Powell River by the Mayor, Jim Court. Unfortunately, Mr. & Mrs. Court were not available and we were met instead by Alderman Gerry Gray and his wife. His wife was presented with a bouquet of flowers in company colours, red, white and blue. Question: Have you ever tried to find blue carnations? Answer: There's no such an animal, you have them tinted. Alderman Gray was presented with a small Pacific Western pin as a memento, and although the station stop was relatively brief, it was much appreciated by all those travelling, and by the Station Manager, Gunnard Radford and his staff, who, our spies informed us, was having a private staff celebration later in the evening!



We were now airborne again with more champagne for everyone enroute to Campbell River where we were met by Mayor Barnett and Mrs. Barnett. Once again, we lined everyone up for more picture taking, then presented Mrs. Barnett with a bouquet and the Mayor with a pin as a memento. The Station Manager, Larry Filipek had arranged for the Campbell River Courier "fotog". Since the load was quite light out of Campbell River, we took a few extra minutes to take more pictures of crew and ground personnel, then once again we were "flying" and last time, Seyer took some pictures of ground personnel in Vancouver, and a historic day in our Company's operation was officially over.



The final Convair station stop at Campbell River. From left to right: Mayor Barnett and Mrs. Barnett; Larry Filipek, Campbell River Station Manager; F/O John Chittick; F/A Norm Hale; F/A Anne Staub; Purser Maureen Griffin; Captain Vic Bentley; and Ruth Cowan.

Yours truly, would like to express sincere appreciation to everyone concerned with the planning of the last Convair flight, and the group actually working the flight who did such an outstanding job. Also, one name that cannot go unmentioned is Seyer Hansen from Vancouver Ramp, our most capable photographer, who is credited with all the Convair photos shown here. Without pictures it would only be half a story. I'm sure it's a day that most of us will recall with fond memories for a long, long time.

Re-created: Neil Burton - 25 May 2020.