



# NEW GIRLS AND GOONEY BIRDS

**F**LYING THE DC-3, "Dak" or "Gooney Bird" around Southern Africa in the 1950s induced an almost pioneering spirit in those fortunate enough to have done so, for radio beacons were few and far between, and VOR/DME were unheard of at the time.

Radio communication beyond VHF range was achieved by means of Morse code requiring the inclusion of a specialist radio operator in the crew, while airport facilities at all but the major terminals, were primitive if existent at all.

In this atmosphere, since most of the air hostesses did their first "solo" or unsupervised flights on the Dakota, it was common practice to play some sort of prank on the poor lasses by way of initiation.

These varied from the sublime to the ridiculous, but one or two are worth recounting, particularly that devised by one "Bill", an extrovert radio operator who was a compulsive practical joker possessed of a great sense of humour.

The first time I witnessed this was on the short – even by Dak standards – hop from Beaufort West to Victoria West. Bill

concealed himself behind suitcases in the baggage compartment just aft of the cockpit during our brief stop at Beaufort.

## "WHERE'S BILL?"

Shortly after takeoff, the captain rang for the hostess, and as she presented her lovely, sweet, innocent self, he demanded belligerently: "Where the hell is Bill?"

Taken completely aback, she stammered: "I thought he was here. I'll go and check the toilet."

She returned ashen faced, to report that the toilet was unoccupied, whereupon the captain growled: "You know that you are supposed to do a head count of passengers and crew before the door is closed. Now we've left him behind and I'm damned if I'm turning back!"

"But captain....," came the plaintive reply.

"But captain nothing, my girl. You have dropped us both here. How the hell are you ever going to explain this when we get back?"

Looking distinctly pale around the gills, the stricken lass looked beseechingly at me, but I merely shrugged my shoulders and stared out of the side window.

After landing at Victoria West, the still visibly shaken hostess accompanied the passengers to the shack which served as a terminal.

Bill, meanwhile, extricated himself from the baggage, and hastened to the toilet where he pulled out his shirt tails, dishevelled his normally immaculate grooming, doused himself liberally with water and hid behind the empennage on the side away from the terminal shack.

As the distressed, unsuspecting lass emerged, Bill, putting on a superb act, came stumbling around the tail, gasping for breath, with dripping brow and wet shirt, wheezing, "Hell what a bloody

run," gasp, gasp, "Never thought I'd, gasp, "make it."

A myriad different expressions, ranging from sheer incredulity to relief to anger swept across that pretty face in moments, evincing a roar of laughter from the captain, while Bill retained enough energy to dodge the hand bag which was swung at him at the end of its long strap.

## AIRLINE LUNCH

Another of the captains, instead of eating the pre-packed cold meat and salad lunch normally served on board, would, instead, surreptitiously scrape it into a sick bag which he would then place on the floor on the outboard side of the seat.

Some time later, he would ring for the hostess, and as she appeared, would launch into a series of convincing pre-retching convulsions and gasp for a sick bag. When this was produced with consummate alacrity, he would give another convincing demonstration of the honks, heaves, bellows and roars of the puke, whereupon, if she didn't disappear immediately, I would motion her to leave him alone.

When she returned to retrieve the bag, he would make as if to hand it to her, but then retrieving; it, would peer inside saying, "Hell, we can't waste this stuff," and would then proceed to stuff a few morsels into his mouth and begin to chew with relish.

Invariably this would invoke a quick departure by the lass grabbing a sick bag from the nearest seat as she headed for the toilet.

But word of this soon got around and the last time I saw him practice the stunt, the worldly wise hostess calmly reached into the bag herself saying: "Captain, I'm sure you won't mind sharing it with me!" →