



Flying Tiger Line Observes Anniversary After Battling Overwhelming Odds

By ROBERT J. SERLING
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Washington - (UPI) - Just 18 years ago, a group of fighter pilots started an airline.

Their chances of succeeding were roughly akin to Slippery Rock beating the Green Bay Packers. But this was no ordinary group of pilots and they started no ordinary airline.

Today, it carries the name "The Flying Tiger Line." The 11 men who founded it in June, 1945, were members of the original Flying Tigers who chewed up the Japanese Air Force before and during World War II. Eight still are with the company—five as senior captains, two in top management and the eight, Robert W. Prescott, as president.

Prescott and his 10 buddies raised \$90,000 to start the airline. Three Los Angeles businessmen chipped in another \$90,000. With \$180,000 in the till, the Tigers put a down payment on 14 Budd "Conestoga" Airfreighters and began operations out of Long Beach, Calif.

Original company was known as National Skyway Freight Corp., but two years later Prescott changed

this to the Flying Tigers Line—a smart as well as sentimental move because the name carried connotations of the old Tigers' reputation for "can do" in face of any odds.

And the odds against commercial success were just about as heavy as those the Tigers' ancient P40's faced when they tackled Zeroes. There were more than 300 airfreight operators in the cargo business after the war, trying to survive in a jungle of competition with worn-out surplus aircraft and shoe-string resources.

Prescott thought he had a head start with his clumsy but huge Budds, a twin-engine plane specifically designed for hauling cargo. But the "Conestogas" were incredibly expensive to fly and Prescott, after only one year, abandoned them in favor of DC3's and later C46's.

The Tigers just managed to keep airborne in the early stages but got a break in 1946 that kept the infant firm in business for keeps. It was awarded a contract to supply Gen. Douglas MacArthur's occupation forces in Japan.

Prescott didn't have the planes to do the job, but he managed to lease 42 DC4's and for the next year the

Tigers operated flights daily between the United States and Tokyo with a perfect performance and safety record.

Today, the "Tiger" is the world's largest all-cargo airline. It flies eight Lockheed Super-G Constellations and 10 new CL44's—a cargo version of the prop-jet, British-built Britannia. The 44 boasts an unusual "swingtail"—a hinge in the rear fuselage that permits fast and efficient loading. It also carries up to 65,000 pounds of freight at speeds of more than 400 miles an hour—at an operational cost roughly 40 per cent less than older equipment.

The loudly-painted CL44 (its color scheme makes a circus wagon seem conservative) is the Tigers' hope for a bright future. Thanks to the new plane, the Tiger line netted a modest profit last year (\$313,800). Prescott himself says the CL44 in its first year doubled the company's volume and claims it may be another 15 to 20 years before a more efficient and economical airfreighter will be developed.

Prescott is the first to admit that all-cargo lines like his own plus Slick, Riddle and

Seaboard World face tough competitive going.

The major airlines have finally recognized that the air cargo business is in for a period of expansion that may dwarf the growth of passenger operations. American Trans World, United and Pan Am all have ordered or already placed in service new pure jets—707's and DC8's designed to carry freight.

But Prescott believes the potential traffic is big enough for an all-cargo carrier to survive. The Tiger line now runs eight transcontinental flights daily plus scores of other schedules, and also has integrated its own operations with those of trucking firms to provide fast air-truck service to nearly 1,500 cities in the U. S. alone.

The company still relies heavily on passenger charter operations, including military charters, for much of its business. It was the Flying Tiger line that introduced special low-cost tourist rates for Europeans wanting to visit the U. S. last year—a highly successful program that won official government praise.

In August, 1982, there was an apparent sabotage of a Tiger Constellation over the Pacific while carrying key military personnel to Viet Nam.

Today, Tiger officials have been taking a frank look at

their crew training program to make sure all procedures have been modernized. A ditching in the Atlantic last year, which resulted in some fatalities, bought criticism of both flight deck and cabin at-

tendant emergency training. But the Tigers have come through adversity before. It is an airline with proud roots in the past and to the sentimental world of aviation, pride is a practical weapon.

← FREIGHT CARRIERS—Members of the Flying Tiger Line air freighters are shown at top in a 1945 picture. In the bottom picture, one of the airline's swing-tail cargo planes, a Canadair CL44, is shown on a runway ramp. (UPI)

Syncom II Launch Delayed

Cape Canaveral - (UPI) - The scheduled launching today of the Syncom II communications satellite was postponed because of technical difficulties in the spacecraft's antenna, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration announced.

A NASA spokesman did not elaborate on the nature of the antenna difficulties which delayed the launching. The shot will be postponed for at least 24 hours.

The first Syncom satellite was launched Feb. 14 and achieved a successful orbit, but radio contact was later lost. The trouble was believed to have stemmed from either an electrical or nitrogen tank failure.

As a result, the Syncom II has been extensively modified. If successful, it will be capable of two-way telephone, teletype and facsimile transmissions.

The Syncom shot had been set for mid-morning.

Scientists plan to place Syncom II into a so-called synchronous orbit 22,300

miles above the earth. In synchronous orbit a satellite would appear to hang stationary over one spot on earth because it revolves at the same speed the earth rotates on its axis.

Spencer Tracy Steadily Improves

Los Angeles - (UPI) - Actor Spencer Tracy was reported in steadily improving health today at St. Vincent's hospital where he is recuperating from pulmonary edema—fluid on the lungs.

The 63-year-old actor was taken to the hospital after he collapsed Sunday at actress Katherine Hepburn's Malibu Beach home where they were preparing to go on a picnic.

Attendants at the hospital said he spent a comfortable night and was eating well.

Mobile, Ala. - (UPI) - Mary Reisch said she considered her 100th birthday Tuesday a milestone because "after 99, I think a woman can relax."

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