

MUSEUM PIECES

07-21-2014 by Harry Zirkelbach

The Airline I worked for after the second World War, had recently established a national Flight Training Center in Denver on the northwest corner of Stapleton Airfield.

I had been with United Airline since discharge from the Navy in 1946. It was a coincidence that when establishing the dedicated Flight Training Center later, many on those new hires had also been Navy Reservists at NAS Denver. To provide a dedicated, professional Training Staff, United Air Lines discontinued the existing Airline-wide policy, moving pilots from active flight crews to temporarily operate in Training, those pilots always returning to seniority as line pilots.

Now Flight Training pilots would not be evaluating fellow individuals from Unionized Flight crews.

Training improved, was less expensive, consistent. Veteran pilots were no longer given a pass on retraining, flight checks, or as equipment began to upgrade from piston to jet aircraft.

The first jet aircraft United bought was the French Caravelle VI-R. United's Flight Training Director selected a cadre of men to send to France for Flight Training. I was chosen for that team. I had flight time in jet aircraft from the Navy Reserve, and was one of the few United Pilots occasionally rotating between Line pilot and Flight Training.

Aviators for this unusual training had their first sight of Europe,. Each a Navy veteran, whose view of the world had meant a great deal of Pacific Ocean, ships, and various very small islands.

Flight Training for these selectees was given Toulouse, France; some ground training in Stockholm Sweden; and miscellaneous bits from Paris, France.

Training was near completion on this particularly splendid Parisian night. Behind, the tedium of learning all things about an aircraft each agreed was the onset for something really big in aviation, the first small commercial jet aircraft. I joined the others that evening exploring central Paris, renowned for brilliant lighting. This near final day of intimacy with the Caravelle, we walked on the Rue de Rivoli adjacent to the Louvre Museum, each disclosing their ignorance of everything French. Plenty of laughter, a night on the town, a job well done.

Suddenly from inside the Louvre's wrought iron fenced wall comes this greeting
"Jean, Jean Reno. Hallo Jean."

Well, how many John Reno's are there in the world; and we had one. John and the Frenchman meet at the iron fenced wall, after John recognizes his friend Pierre.

A more jovial a greeting is hard to imagine. Introductions were made, camaraderie and laughter abound through the iron grill.

Then Pierre invites all for a private tour and viewing of the Louvre.

Other guards are introduced, entry is given, and for three hours, we Caravelle instructors, became avid American tourists;
a delight unimaginable at the onset of this training.

Not only were we late in retiring that evening, but the comparison of sights seen those hours excited our memories of antiquity, because our pal John Reno of United Air Line Training had met a young Frenchman before the war in some athletic competition, each making an indelible impression on the other.

This would be my only visit to the Louvre.

Then onto many hours of Denver Flight Training in this beautiful commercial jet,
the Caravelle,
now a museum piece too.

