

Wardair in Manitoba- An AMEs Viewpoint

There are many untold stories about Aircraft Maintenance Engineers and aviation in Manitoba. Some are related to well known Manitoba based companies and individuals and some are based on companies and personnel who supported aviation in Manitoba. This account falls into the latter type of story. Part of this stems from the fact that AMEs as a group are not normally very much into writing or detailing their work life. I guess I do not fit that model so here goes. A short note on some of my early working experiences in Manitoba when I worked for Wardair.

I joined Wardair in early 1969 after leaving 434 Squadron at Cold Lake Alberta. I left the new Armed Forces Mobile Command (Army with an air element) for three reasons, one was the pay, and two was the merging of the services, Royal Canadian Air Force, Royal Canadian Army and Royal Canadian Navy into the Canadian Armed Forces, third was I could not be a pilot because of my eyesight. 434 Squadron operated CF-5 Freedom fighters in support of the new Mobile Command, the Army, I was not too happy to possibly be sent to infantry school. I was mainly employed as an avionics technician and I joined Wardair as one. Avionics at Wardair was anything using electricity. I had a steep learning curve to climb as I needed to be versatile in all aircraft systems. Learn I did from very talented AMEs and avionics techs and soon was comfortable in the civilian maintenance world of heavy aircraft.

Wardair was a small company operating one Boeing 727, one Boeing 707 and in the process of getting a second 707. They also had a Northern Division operating the DHC-3, Single Otter, DHC-6 Twin Otters

and others I may have forgotten. Joining Wardair was the best thing after joining the Air Force for my career. It was a small company full of dedicated and hard working people. I was fortunate to work with such people as George Bell, Director of Maintenance and Engineering, Guenther Moellenbeck, Maintenance Manager and Dan McNiven, Supt of Maintenance. My immediate supervisor was Bob Garrett, avionics shop. I soon found out that I was expected to do everything on the aircraft. This was totally different from the Air Force where I worked under a trade structure and in crews. Fortunately I had a lead hand Don Dent who was a first rate man. He showed me the ropes and with the assistance of manuals, helpful AMEs and technicians backed up by my solid Air Force technical training I soon mastered most tasks. The work was hard and long, and substantial overtime was worked. For me this was a blessing as I had a young family and needed to start buying things like houses, furniture and cars.

So how does all this relate to Manitoba? Well as Wardair expanded its fleet and served more cities in Canada, Winnipeg became one of its marketing and operating points. Wardairs main base was in Edmonton at that time so flights either positioned to Winnipeg or were routed through it to complete the aircraft load. I recall Wardair flew mostly full aircraft, one of their operational strengths. Another was their legendary service standards. I still meet people today who recall their Wardair flights. It was not all roses, only after I read Max Wards book did I understand fully the battles he waged and the chances he took to build the airline.

Wardair Boeing 727 and 707 aircraft carried Flight Engineers who were all Department of Transport (Transport Canada) Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineers (AMEs). Their duty was to maintain the aircraft

in an airworthy condition as well as carry out their flight crew responsibilities during flight. Needless to say they were highly qualified and technically competent personnel. I relied on them a lot for good data whenever I had to troubleshoot the aircraft systems.

I became very qualified on the aircraft but because avionics was not then a Licensed AME category I had to have my work certified by an "A" Category Licensed AME. This meant that when I worked alone on turnaround the Flight engineer had to inspect and certify my work. I would end up in Winnipeg either as part of a crew or solo.

Winnipeg is a challenging operating place, one thing is the weather. I did not worry about the weather as far as storms but I did as far as temperature. Working in Winnipeg in the winter was tough. I recall loading and unloading passengers and cargo in minus 30 degree Celsius or 40 degree Celsius weather. The blowing snow and cold remains in my mind until today. There was a not hanger or passenger ramp in those days. The cold was a challenge in winter and in summer it was the heat. It is a continental climate and poses problems for aircraft operations and maintenance. . In those days there were no gates so passengers walked across the ramp and entered via air stairs. Great fun in January and in summer thunderstorms.

One summer turn around I remember well. I had just departed the Boeing 727, just me and the Flight engineer, who had left with the aircraft. I had just arrived back at what I believe was the Airliner Hotel, the one with a Beech aircraft in the bar, when I was called. Remember this was before pager, cell phones and even VCRs!!! Somehow the company flight watch contacted me and informed me the aircraft was on its way back after a bird strike. The aircraft landed and I met it. In

discussing the strike with the flight engineer it became apparent it may have entered an engine, number three, I believe. I had to do an engine inspection a found that the bird had not caused any damage except to itself. After carefully checking everything and doing an engine run we departed the aircraft for England.

People sometimes forget the amount of work it takes on behalf of Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineers and technicians to allow aircraft to operate a various bases. Lots of detailed organization and logistics are required. Trained personnel are need as well as technical manuals, parts and other supplies. It is a tribute to all Wardair staff and Winnipeg airport personnel at the time that such operations were successfully.

In my case the wheel turned full circle from Wardair turnarounds to living full time in Manitoba.

Monday, February-01-10

Roger Beebe