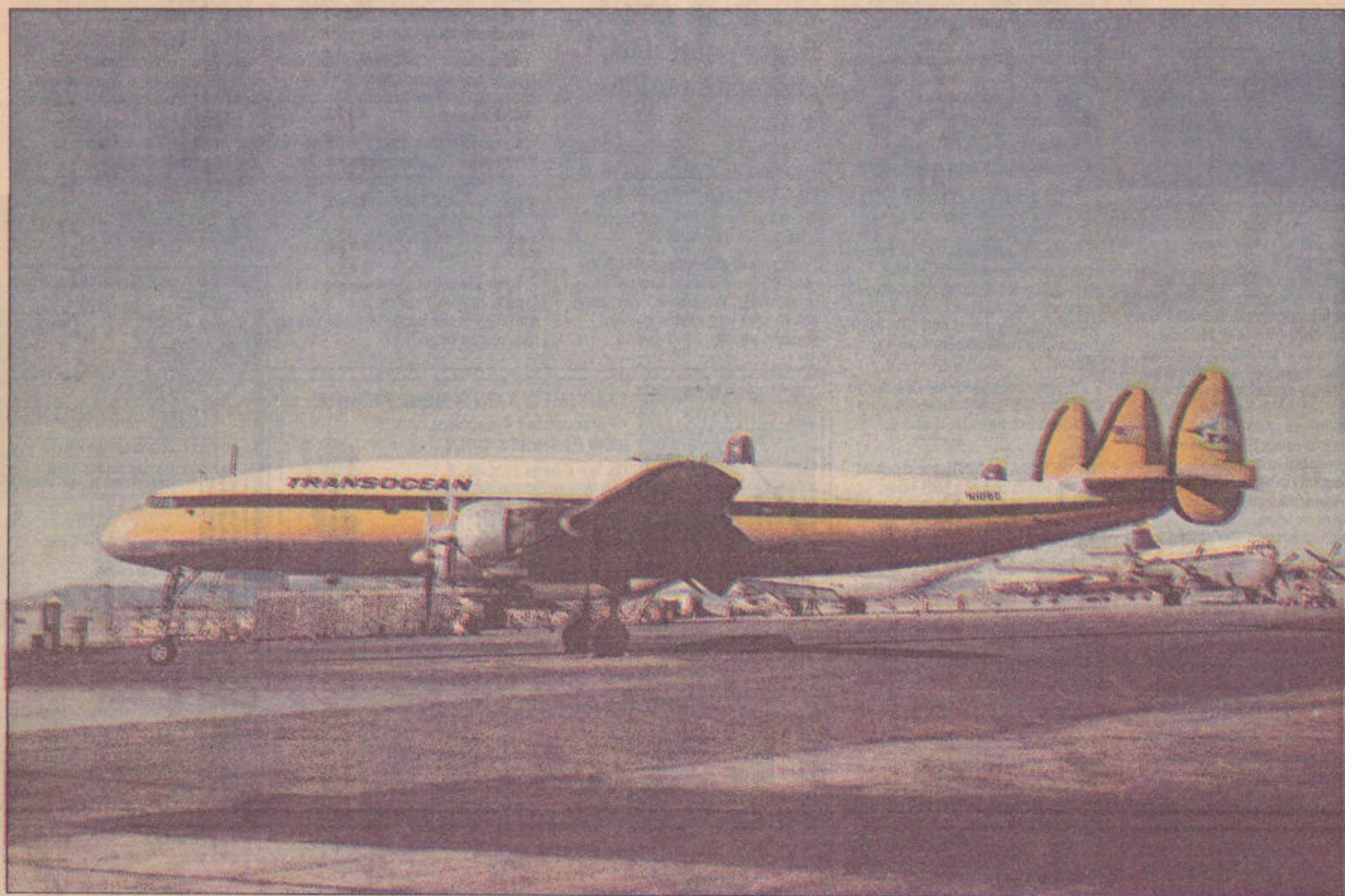


Cover Story

The Weekly

Part 2

When commercial flying soared



During the years that Transocean Air Lines operated out of Hangar 5 at the Oakland Airport, flying planes like this Constellation, the company motto was, 'We'll fly anything, anywhere, anytime.' And so they did. People, freight, animals. Refugees, war brides, \$6.2 million in gold bars, Muslim pilgrims going to Mecca. Now, a book by an East Bay woman recalls the glory days of aviation. Story on Page 6.



Blunt-nose aircraft is a TAL Stratocruiser

The glory days of flying high with Transocean Air

Book recalls when aviation was fun

By Robin Worthington Mercury News Staff Writer

Back after World War II — when flying was glamorous, when men were pilots and women were stewardesses — a maverick pilot named Orvis Nelson started an air transport company on nerve and a few dollars.

From 1946 until its demise in 1960, Transocean Air Lines reflected Nelson's personality — feisty and adventuresome.

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And so they did. People, freight, animals. Refugees, war brides, \$6.2 million in gold bars, Muslim pilgrims going to Mecca. In the '40s and '50s, Transocean crisscrossed the globe to Bora Bora, Auckland, Rio, Berlin, Saudi Arabia, Alaska, Guam. In its prime, Transocean was the largest supplemental air carrier in the world, employing 6,700 workers at some 57 bases around the globe.

Transocean folded in 1960, unable to make the transition to the jet age. It was defeated, say its supporters, by a closed-shop combination of airline industry and bureaucratic forces in Washington — including the Civil Aeronautics Board.

The latter was run like a "soci-



Arue Szura ... Author of history

ety of privileged aristocrats," according to R.E.G. Davies, curator of the Air Transport Division of the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution. Davies wrote the foreword to a new book, "Folded Wings: A History of Transocean Air Lines." (Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., \$12.95.)

Arue Szura, author of the anecdotal history book, has credentials that are down to earth. The Castro Valley author began

her aviation career in 1948 at age 18 as a junior secretary at Transocean. Years later, she still loves the memories of the magical, maverick airline. Szura edits the Taloo (the company's cable name) Newsletter for 500 loyal alumni of Transocean and its subsidiaries.

As Szura gathered newsletter reminiscences, contributions came from former employees — flight crews, janitors, secretaries, mechanics and guards — all over the world, who remember the glory days.

Five years ago, the idea of a book began to emerge. Szura interviewed more alumni, sifted through envelopes of photographs, dragged her tape recorder to reunions and faced such tasks of the oral historian as trying to document who really was pilot when the baby was delivered in flight to Honolulu.

"Little did I know what I was taking on," she said.

In the line of duty, she prowled through a cache of memorabilia and photographs in a San Ramon chicken coop belonging to the late H.G. "Red" Emery, once station manager at Transocean's Wake Island base.

The result is a nostalgic family history, augmented by pictures of pilots striking Steven Canyon poses, aircraft in exotic lands, flight attendants in white gloves and stu-



Special to the Mercury News

Stewardess Dee Wheeler, with help from Edward Yamaguchi, welcomes aboard a pig bound for a Wake Island barbecue at Christmas, 1952.

dents from the Taloo Academy of Aeronautics (a bleak-looking portable building) practicing ditching drills in San Francisco Bay.

Called gypsies and carpetbaggers of the skies by competitors, Transocean crews flew DC-3s, DC-4s, DC-6s, Stratocruisers and Super Constellations. The hard-driving Nelson was in constant flight himself, lining up new contracts.

Szura wrote of Transocean's free-form operational style. "... a crew once left Oakland for Formosa in a DC-4 loaded with 12,000 pounds of gunpowder for Gen. Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Chinese Army, then ferried the airplane to Hong Kong to pick up a load of Chinese cedar chests and fly them west to Rome, Italy. Within hours of the delivery of the

cedar chests, the airplane departed New York to rendezvous with an ocean freighter."

Other highlights: Transocean was one of the airlines helping to fly 8,000 tons of food and medical supplies a day into Berlin during Stalin's 1948 blockade of the city.

Two books by Transocean pilot Ernest Gann became movies. "Island in the Sky" starred John Wayne, and "The High and the Mighty," one of the most successful films of the '50s.

Chartered "Diaper Specials" carried war brides back to Europe to show off the grandchildren to relatives in France and England. One of five DC-4s sold to the



Special to the Mercury News

Employees guard gold shipment from Japan to U.S., 1948



Special to the Mercury News

'Cloud Cradle' flight took war brides and offspring home to Europe for visits

TAL terminal, left, is on Guam, in photo take in 1948. Below center, S.A. Nichols, Transocean vice president, shakes hands with crew member of last of Berlin airlift flights.



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