

The Story

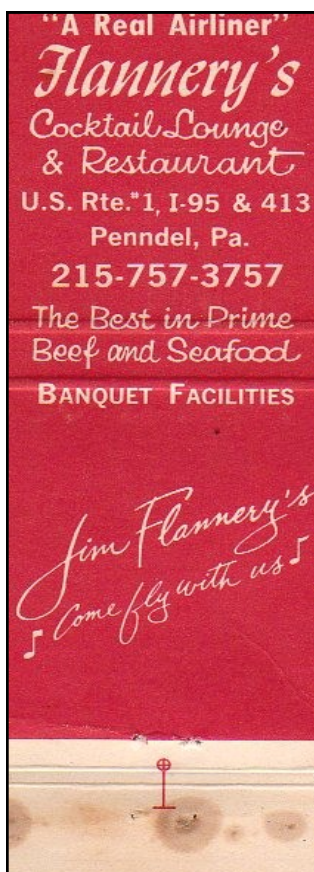
There is the story of “Connie”...a Super Constellation plane that managed, through a series of unusual circumstances, to avoid the ignoble demise suffered by most of her peers: deteriorating into a pile of rust while sitting forlornly at a desert holding depot or, worse, simply going to the junk yard.

The Lockheed Constellation was a propeller-driven airliner powered by four 18-cylinder radial Wright R-3350 engines. It was built by Lockheed between 1943 and 1958 at its Burbank, California facility. A total of 856 aircraft were produced in numerous models, all distinguished by a triple-tail design and dolphin-shaped fuselage. The Constellation was used as a civilian airliner and as a U.S. military air transport, seeing service in the Berlin Airlift. It was the presidential aircraft for U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The advent of jet airliners, with the de Havilland Comet, Boeing 707, Douglas DC-8 and Convair 880, rendered the piston-engined Constellation obsolete. The first routes lost to jets were the long overseas routes, but Constellations continued to fly domestic routes. The last scheduled passenger flight in the 48 states was made by a TWA L749 on May 11, 1967 from Philadelphia to Kansas City, Missouri. However, Constellations remained in freight service for years to come, and were used on backup sections of Eastern Airlines' shuttle service between New York, Washington, and Boston until 1968. An EAL Constellation to date still holds the record for a New York to Washington flight from lift off to touch-down in just over 30 minutes. The record was set prior to speed restriction by the FAA below 10,000 ft.

Our Connie was originally ordered by the Norwegian airline, Braathens SAFE, but never delivered. She was instead delivered to Cubana, who operated her for a few years in the mid-1950's. From 1956 to 1964, she was owned by Seaboard World Airlines who leased her to a number of airlines including BOAC, Eastern Airlines, Irish Airlines and Intercontinental US. She was leased to Capitol Airways in 1965, sold to them in 1966, but by mid-1967 had been withdrawn from service and stored at Newcastle Airport in Wilmington, Delaware.

Enter Jim Flannery's Constellation Lounge on US Route 1 in Pennndel, Pennsylvania! Jim bought the Super Constellation from Capitol Airways in August 1967 and had it dismantled and trucked from Wilmington, Delaware, to its new home above his restaurant. Its passenger interior was removed and converted into a cocktail lounge, complete with thick pile carpeting on the walls, a parquet wood dance floor and a functioning wet bar. And there she proudly soared for almost the next 30 years.



of Connie

But, it couldn't last forever, and, by September 1996, the old girl was once more in danger of disappearing all together. The September 1996 issue of *Airliners* magazine announced that the Amoco Corporation had purchased the restaurant and property and was planning to build a gas station. The article went on to say that a number of museums had expressed interest in obtaining Connie, but the cost of moving the aircraft was proving to be a significant obstacle, and it looked as if it was the end of the line for our heroine.

But, our story has a happy ending, for Connie eventually was moved to her new home at the Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover AFB in Delaware, which planned on restoring it as a C-121 military transport. Amoco Corporation donated the airplane to the museum when it would have been easier, and more profitable, to have sold it for scrap.

Arriving at the museum in late 1997, Connie was stored, waiting her turn for restoration. Ahead of her in the queue were four other planes, each waiting their own turn at restoration and...perhaps...immortality. Connie's restoration began two or three years later and took about one to two years to complete.

Now completely restored, Connie majestically sits amidst her peers on the tarmac at Dover Air Force Base, visited by thousands of wide-eyed onlookers every year. Her survival can directly be attributed to Jim Flannery, Amoco Corporation, and the Air Mobility Command Museum. Thanks to them, Connie is one of the fewer than 17 Constellations left in the world today. [http://www.conniesurvivors.com/1-pennndel_super_connie.htm; http://amcmuseum.org/exhibits_and_planes/c-121.php]



Photo by J. Roger Bentley