

# Shooting Spotters at DUS

*story & photography by Rand Peck*



*Ship 5637 on the DUS ramp while passengers boarded.*

Flying Northwest Airlines NW93 from Düsseldorf, Germany (IATA: DUS/ICAO: EDDL), to Detroit, Michigan (DTW/KDTW), on July 14, 2008, I noticed an unusually large crowd of aircraft spotters assembled near the end of Runway 23L. Others had congregated atop the terminal building adjacent to our gate to record our push-back. Since my airline sadly announced its plan to abandon this market, more European photographers it seems are anxious to acquire images of our winglet-equipped Boeing 757-200s. We operate eight such airplanes, with a MGTOW (maximum gross takeoff weight) of 255,000lb (115,690kg), to Düsseldorf, Amsterdam, and London. (Our non-winglet, ETOPS (Extended Range Operations)-capable 757-300s

ply the Pacific to Honolulu, Kona, and Maui, Hawai'i.) No doubt the 757 is a beautiful airplane, as the 8ft 2in (2.50m)-high Aviation Partners Boeing blended winglets have only added to both its charms and efficiency.

If you were among this group of enthusiasts on that Monday, thanks for waving back. We taxied past you in N537US, company fleet number 5637, manufacturer's serial number 26484, fuselage number 697, completed on February 20, 1996. Thirty-four of its original 194 seats were removed to provide greater pitch for these lengthy trans-Atlantic flights. In fact, today's westbound 3,827nm (7,090km) journey is flight planned for 8hr 49min, with 76,300lb (34,615kg) of fuel. That's a \$50,000 fuel bill that divides out to \$311 per seat.



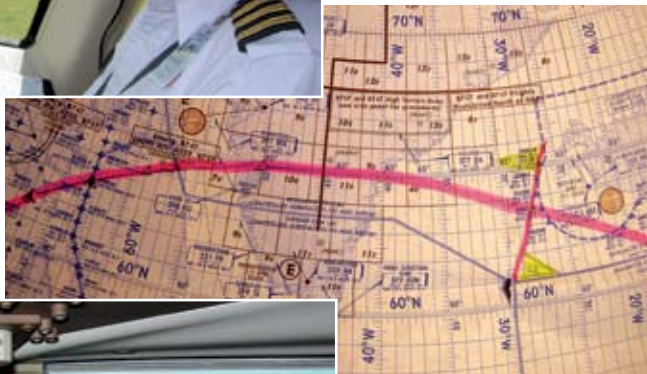
*This is how Runway 23L appeared from 5637 when we arrived on July 13.*



*Aircraft spotters atop a remote terminal building near the end of 23L, as an Airbus approaches. I'd never seen this many aircraft spotters here on a weekday.*



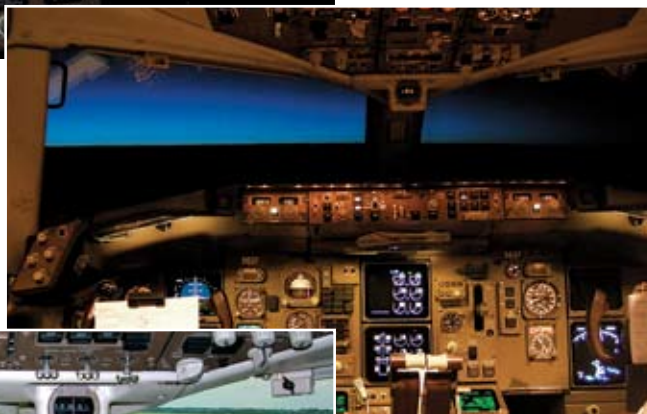
*FO Duncan Cooper with DUS spotters in the background.*



*Our North Atlantic route on July 14, 2008, in ship 5637.*



*Is this breathtaking or what? The entire crew shuffled through the cockpit to witness this sight. Our windscreens and side windows were covered with nose prints by the time everyone left.*



*The same aircraft a day earlier, as we travelled eastbound at 37,000ft. At this latitude during the northern summer the sun doesn't completely set and at least a light blue horizon will be visible.*



*Auf wiedersehen! This is how 23L appears as we await takeoff clearance (sorry, this is not ship 5637).*

After fading from your view via the SONUB Departure, we entered oceanic airspace near the Sea of Hebrides and followed a random track over Greenland at 65° North latitude. North American landfall occurred over a very desolate Baffin Island and Frobisher Bay. After lunch and a snack, and approaching via the POLAR2 Arrival, we touched down at Detroit Metro at 1630 Eastern, Monday afternoon. By then Tuesday morning was rapidly encroaching upon Düsseldorf. This trip is the farthest north I've ventured over our globe, and the most spectacularly beautiful flight that I've yet flown.

Aircraft spotters range from casual observers to those who collect photos, record registration numbers, and share information via the Internet. Some are valued contributors to Airways. There are hundreds of blogs and photo sites, many very sophisticated, informative, and fun to read, some of which I use to exchange information with enthusiastic spotters. One such enthusiast sent me a picture of myself, taxiing in at Honolulu as our company's last McDonnell Douglas DC-10 flight taxied out (*Airways*, February 2007). That was a thrill!

So, if you're an aircraft spotter who has your camera trained on us, remember, in this new digital world, many of us are shooting back. ➔