

LIMA AIRPORT  
AIRPORT REVIEW

CHICAGO & SOUTHERN AIR LINES  
AIRWAYS HISTORY

THE KING OF THE SKIES  
AIRMAN'S CORNER

# Airways®

JULY 2023

## Fly In, Fly Wow: Nolinor's big plans.

By LIAM FUNNELL  
Photography by  
NOLINOR AVIATION



USA \$8.99 | CANADA \$8.99



AIRWAYS FEATURE

The 'Salmon Thirty Salmon'  
Swims Upstream  
One Last Time



# THE 'SALMON THIRTY SALMON' SWIMS UPSTREAM ONE LAST TIME

**STORY** *Brandon Farris*  
**PHOTOS** *Author, unless noted.*



**ON MONDAY, APRIL 17,** Alaska Airlines (AS) held a special ceremonial send-off flight, celebrating the history of the world's largest fish. The iconic 'Salmon Thirty Salmon' livery, which was part of the history of the airline, is no more.

Once it was revealed, in late February, that the latest incarnation of the Salmon Thirty Salmon was going to be retired, aviation enthusiasts flocked to social media. Some to book a seat on the ceremonial sendoff flight. Others to start petitions to try and save the flying fish from its fate.

#### **A WHOPPER OF A FISH TALE**

As told by Mac Af Uhr in his story, 'Salmon Three Salmon' (*Airways*, September 2005), on the morning of Monday, March 30, 1987, Alaska Airlines Flight AS61 arrived in Juneau (JNU) from Seattle (SEA). After landing, the two Pilots assisted the ground crew in unloading two large cargo pallets from the forward main cargo door. Operating in a combi

configuration, with two pallet positions up front and 72 passenger seats in the back, the Boeing 737-200QC was ideal for serving the smaller Alaskan communities on the airline's route map.

With no road access between the Alaskan mainland and Juneau, aviation plays a vital role for the city. Even today, Flight AS61 is a regularly scheduled milk run through the state's southeast. After departing from Juneau that day in 1987, the flight would continue to Yakutat (YAK), then on to Cordova (CDV) before terminating in Anchorage (ANC), Alaska's largest city and de facto capital.

Captain Bill Morin was in command of the flight that beautiful morning, one of those perfect and elusive days seen mostly on postcards. Morin was then a commander with seven years of flying experience. Assisting him in the right seat was First Officer Bill Johnson, who had been with the airline a little over three years, having previously worked for Boeing as a Flight Instructor on the 737.

↑ N559AS sits at C9 on a glorious Seattle morning.

Flight AS61 had thus far been uneventful and routine. After a quick coffee during the brief Juneau stop, the crew returned to the aircraft. There, they were joined by a certain Mr. C., a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Air Carrier Inspector from the Seattle Flight Standards District Office (FSDO). He was to ride all the way to Anchorage with the crew. Mr. C.'s duties included monitoring the crew's performance, administering an *en-route* check ride, and observing the two Pilots' aircraft handling, communications, and air traffic control procedures. After briefing Mr. C. about what was expected of him, including assisting with scanning for traffic, the crew prepared for departure.

They took off on Runway 26, their flight path heading

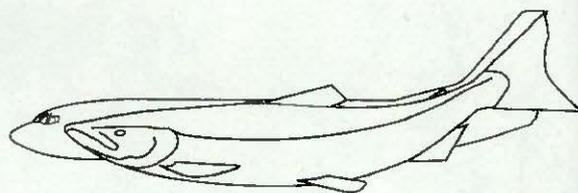
northwest toward Yakutat. While taxiing away from Juneau's terminal, they noticed several large bald eagles circling to the south of the runway down toward Douglas Island. Eagles are a common sight in most of Alaska. The majestic birds soar effortlessly on their powerful wings while searching for prey.

Morin had flown the leg into Juneau. So, adhering to the established protocol of Pilots operating alternate sectors, Johnson briefed the departure from Juneau and took the expected, immediate left turn toward the famous Juneau cut—a narrow valley in the hills immediately to the west of the airport.

With maximum thrust power from its two JT8D engines,



2 AIRWAYS PHOTO ARCHIVE COLLECTION



3 DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION COPYRIGHT 2023 MARK BOYLE



4 DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION COPYRIGHT 2023 MARK BOYLE



5 KENTARO IEMOTO • SEA



CHRIS SLOAN 6

the 737-200 thundered down the runway before rotating smoothly about halfway along the available length. As the gear retracted into the wells, Johnson banked smoothly toward the cut and settled into the climb. The flightdeck occupants noticed a large bald eagle approaching from their left. The three men quickly surmised, with some relief, that they would pass beneath the eagle with plenty of separation. Hitting a large and heavy eagle at 200mph (320kph) can seriously damage a jet aircraft.

That the eagle had sighted the fast-approaching Boeing jet was equally obvious, as it spread its huge wings out fully and literally stopped in the air. Only then did the two Pilots realize that the big bird's breakfast hunt had been successful because it carried a decent-size fish in its powerful talons.

Apparently deciding that discretion is the better part of valor—or believing that the Boeing was a much larger bird intent on poaching its catch—the eagle smartly executed a sharp U-turn and headed back south. In the process, the eagle either voluntarily released its meal or the rapid turn ripped it out of its claws. The bird's timing and the trajectory of its drop would go for the most famous 'You have got to be kidding me' moment in aviation history as both Pilots watched the fish fall toward the aircraft as if in slow motion.

Bill Morin would later estimate that the fish was 12 to 18 inches (31 to 46cm) long and, based on the fact that they were running at the time, that it may have been a Dolly Varden. Alaska Airlines' Juneau customer service manager thought it might have been a cod. Whatever the fish very much out of water was, it hit the aircraft with an almighty thump just behind the last cockpit window on the Captain's side.

After a short, somewhat stunned and silent interlude—while the Pilots tried to comprehend what had just transpired—the engine instruments were scanned for signs of damage while Bill Johnson conducted a quick check of the flight controls. Having determined that all controls and indications were normal, Bill Morin let out a low chuckle and asked, "Did we just hit what I think we hit?"

Agreeing that they had in fact collided with a fish, the crew contacted the airline's dispatch and maintenance control for instructions. A consultation with all involved parties produced the decision that the flight should continue to Yakutat—which it reached uneventfully.

2 The Pilots of AS61, Captain Bill Morin (left) and First Officer Bill Johnson.

3 An original concept by Mark Boyle, who drew it on a napkin while thinking about a salmon scheme.

4 A different version of 559 that was initially proposed by Mark Boyle.

5 The original Salmon-Thirty-Salmon on N792AS

6 Onboard N792AS. Note the overhead compartments showing off the different sea creatures found in Alaska.



**7** DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION COPYRIGHT 2023 MARK BOYLE

As they approached Yakutat, the crew of Flight AS61 was advised that the aircraft would need to be inspected. As there was no personnel qualified for the task in Yakutat, a mechanic would have to be flown in from Juneau. The airline promptly chartered a small Piper Cherokee Six and did so.

Meanwhile, as the Boeing taxied up to the ramp next to the terminal building, the crew found that almost all the townsfolk were waiting for them, news of their airborne adventure having traveled at the speed of the radio waves.

After shutting down, the Pilots and FAA inspector left their seats to go out and inspect the damage. There was not much to see after the 45-minute flight from Juneau. Apart from a small dent, all that remained was a greasy spot, a trail of blood, and some fish scales.



**8** DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION COPYRIGHT 2023 MARK BOYLE

FAA's Mr. C. recalled the event somewhat more dramatically. When interviewed for the August 1987 edition of *FAA World* (the official FAA employee publication), he had this to say: "When the mechanics arrived and inspected the airplane their jaws—along with ours—nearly hit the pavement. What they found was the remains of a three-to-four-pound (1.3 to 1.8kg) salmon wedged in near the forward door and the wing root."

While waiting for the mechanic to arrive from Juneau, Morin made a PA announcement asking the passengers to wait

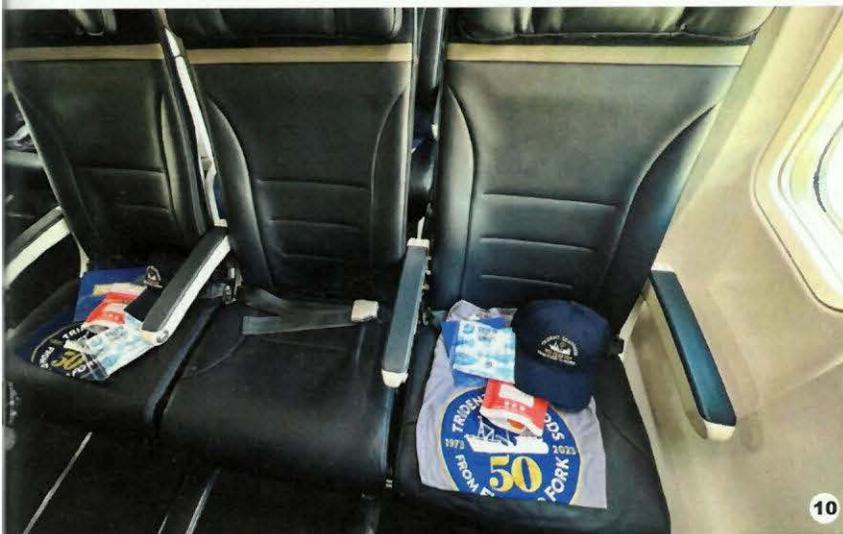
inside the small terminal where it would be more comfortable. He explained what had happened and what the problem was. Several passengers refused to believe it. They thought he was telling them an elaborate lie to cover a much more severe mechanical problem.

The subsequent inspection proved very much a non-event, and after the passengers re-boarded, the flight continued to Cordova and Anchorage as scheduled.

But the news of the incident overtook the Boeing, reaching



9



10

attracted three uninvited guests courtesy of Southwest Airlines (WN), which at that time had three Orca-themed aircraft as part of a cross-promotion with Sea World. WN dispatchers shuffled the fleet to ensure that all three Shamu planes made a cheeky visit to Seattle that day—because, after all, Orcas eat salmon.

This iteration of the livery lasted on N792AS until 2011, when the aircraft was repainted back to the standard AS livery of the time. But the scaly livery survived. AS put it on a second aircraft, a Boeing 737-890(WL) (N559AS · MSN 35178 · LN 2026), which landed in Seattle on October 5, 2012.

There were not too many differences between the older livery and the newer one. The concept remained the same. The most noticeable changes were scales on the winglets and the ‘Alaska’ name in a salmon color, not the white of the previous design.

Alaska Airlines boasted that the livery made that 737 “the most intricately painted commercial aircraft in the world.” The design made use of four gallons of Mylar paint to create an iridescent sparkle over nearly 3,500 fish scales. Crews worked 27 days straight and used 21 unique colors to get the revised livery completed.

After more than a decade of soaring the skies honoring a myth that had become a legend, rumors began swirling last year as to the fate of the cherished Salmon Thirty Salmon livery. A revised version to better suit the airline’s latest corporate image? A larger rendition painted on a Boeing 737-990(ER) or 737-9

7 With the 737-800 being so much larger, an idea of maybe using two salmon on it was thrown out before the final design was ultimately selected. Mark Boyle.

8 When Wild Alaska seafood first approached AS, one of the early concept designs was actually a Wild Alaska King Crab 737-400. Designed by Mark Boyle.

9 Some Trident employees posing with 559 in Seattle before the final flight.

10 Swag giveaways onboard the ceremonial flight, plus a flight coupon for future use.

rapidly across the Alaska Airlines system. By the time the crew arrived in Anchorage—an hour or so late—the fish had grown to become a King Salmon, at least 5ft (1.5m) long and weighing 20lb (9kg). The crew soon became minor celebrities. And that 737 acquired a nickname, a piscine pun: Salmon Thirty Salmon.

**THE BIGGEST FLYING FISH**

Alaska Airlines couldn’t resist keeping the story alive. The next rendition of the Salmon Thirty Salmon came in 2005 when the airline and the Alaska Seafood

Marketing Institute unveiled the livery on a Boeing 737-490 (N792AS · MSN 28887 · LN 2903). The design, created by Seattle-based wildlife artist Mark Boyle and executed by 30 aircraft painters over 24 days, depicted a detailed Alaska king salmon with shiny scales, a dorsal fin, and gills. Besides the stunning exterior, the passenger cabin had a special plaque, and the overhead compartments were decorated with the different species of Pacific salmon found in Alaska.

The unveiling ceremony of the first Salmon Thirty Salmon

MAX? Aviation enthusiasts hoped that the flying salmon would stay flying for years to come.

But no. Without revealing much of a reason, other than to say that the livery was past its due date and the aircraft ready for repainting, Alaska Airlines announced in March that it was putting the beloved salmon image on ice.

“Salmon has a special meaning and significance in the state of Alaska and the Pacific Northwest,” said Marilyn Romano, AS regional VP in the state of Alaska, in an internal company release. “Though we’ll miss the world’s largest flying fish, we’re already looking for ways to honor the culture and history of our namesake state and our connection to communities across the West Coast. We’ll unveil a new livery design in the coming months that does just that.”

## ONE LAST SALMON RUN

To send off this special scheme, Alaska Airlines decided to operate a flight similar to that

of the Boeing 737-200QC, which had become part of the history of the airline. However, instead of AS61, the very same flight of the 1987 incident, the airline bade farewell to its salmon jet on Flight AS65 from Seattle to Anchorage with stops in Ketchikan (KTN), Wrangell (WRG), Petersburg (PSG), and Juneau.

Prior to the festivities inside the terminal in Seattle, Alaska Airlines invited *Airways* to go out airside and walk around the Salmon Thirty Salmon. Instead of the typical Seattle gloom, the light was amazing. Astonishingly, it presented an opportunity to recreate a shot of the original Salmon Thirty Salmon that the author of this story took in 2010 when he worked on the ramp in the airport.

After the gate celebrations, where people danced along with a DJ doing the cha-cha slide—with one person dancing as a salmon swimming upstream—it was time to board the world’s largest flying fish.



Boarding was seamless. There was a small gift bag at each seat to celebrate the aircraft and Alaska’s partnership with Trident Seafoods. Salmon fish oil pills, a pin, a hat, and a shirt were among the presents. Alaska Airlines also gave all passengers certificates for a free or heavily discounted flight to anywhere in the airline’s network as part of its Alaska Delight Flights.

But, just like fishing in real life, the fish was not going down without a fight on its ceremonial celebration flight. Due to a technical glitch, the flight was slightly delayed on pushback as the ground agents



13



14



15

had to manually count the cargo and bags loaded in the belly of the aircraft.

For the first leg, we departed for Ketchikan Alaska. We pushed back at 0829 from Gate C9 at SEA, 24 minutes behind schedule, but managed to make up most of the delay and land only 12 minutes late, parking at the gate at 0925 local time. This was the longest leg of the flight, scheduled at two hours and 14 minutes, and the only one that included a full beverage service.

After 47 minutes on the ground, it was time to push back and blast off for Wrangell. This time, we were just 11 minutes behind schedule, and the flight was scheduled to last 45 minutes. The crew did its best to complete it in 36 minutes, cutting the delay to just two.

Wrangell, much like Ketchikan, is right on the water. Surrounded by low-lying mountains and water, the small city presents a very beautiful approach. For this airport, you actually pull onto the ramp and park parallel to the terminal. There, Alaska Airlines staff allowed us to deplane and get some photos of the aircraft. With the flight being so short, a quick water service was offered on the ground before the next leg. After the new passengers had boarded and the cargo had been loaded, we were ready to fly to Petersburg on the shortest leg of them all.

The flight from Wrangell to Petersburg is one of the quickest flights operated by a Boeing 737 in the world. With just 30 miles and a scheduled flight time of 24 minutes, it felt like spending more time taxiing around on the ground than actually flying on this very scenic leg.

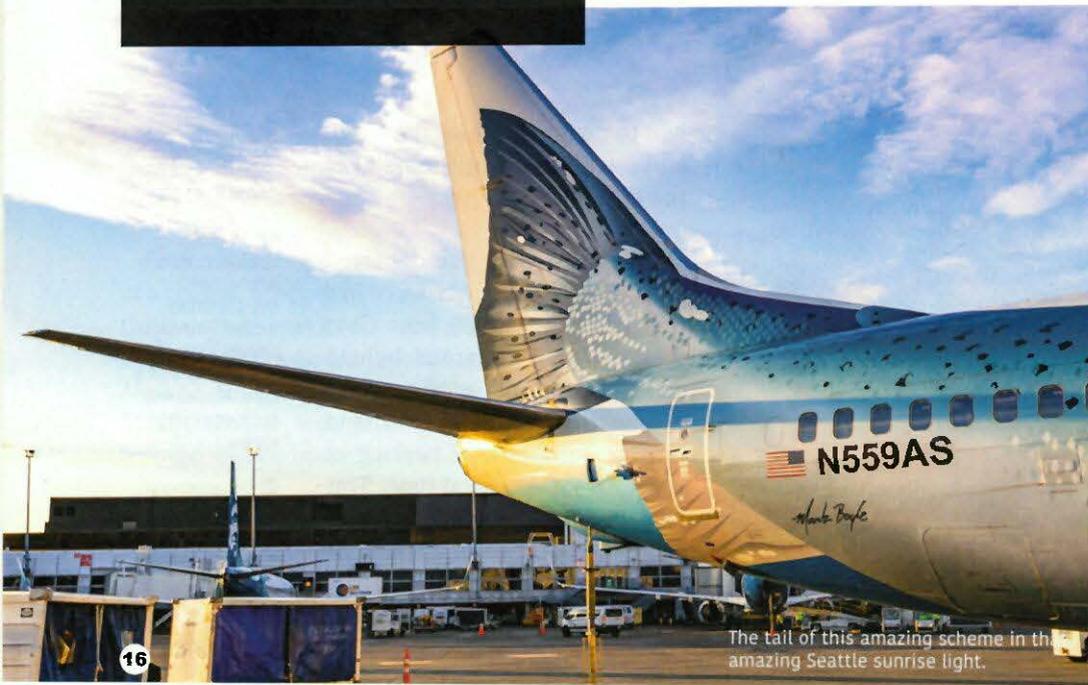
11 On the ramp in Ketchikan next to an Alaska Airlines Cargo 737-700.

12 On the approach into Anchorage, the stunning Salmon winglet posing with the mountains and a lake. Alaska has such stunning views.

13 On approach to Wrangell Alaska, this flight provided plenty of breath-taking views.

14 The First Officer holding a model of the Salmon Thirty Salmon II while the Alaska Airlines social media team records a brief video clip.

15 A reflection of the Salmon one last time on the ground in Wrangell.

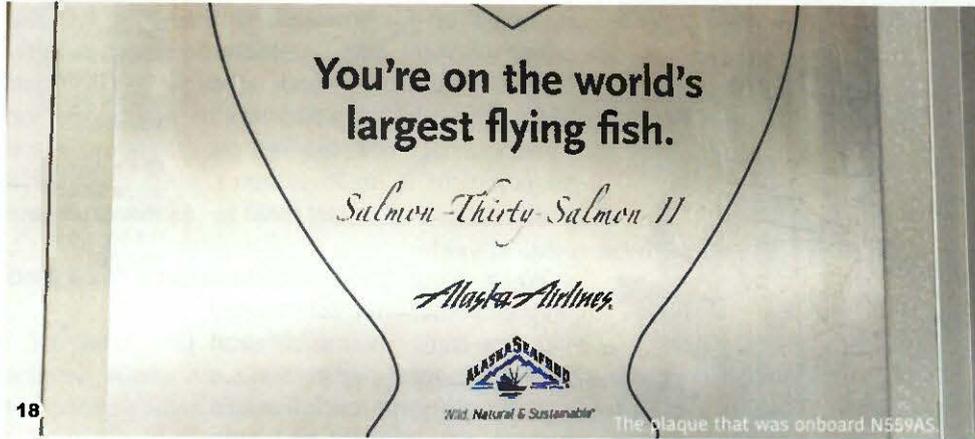


The tail of this amazing scheme in the amazing Seattle sunrise light.

16



17



The plaque that was onboard N559AS.

18



20



In flight shortly after taking off from Seattle.

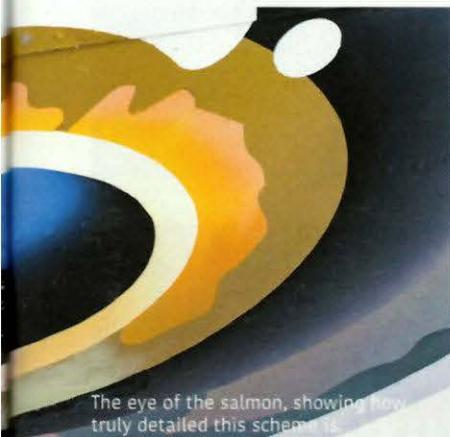
19



The First Officer gives us a wave while we take some final shots on the ground before heading back into the terminal.



21



The eye of the salmon, showing how truly detailed this scheme is.

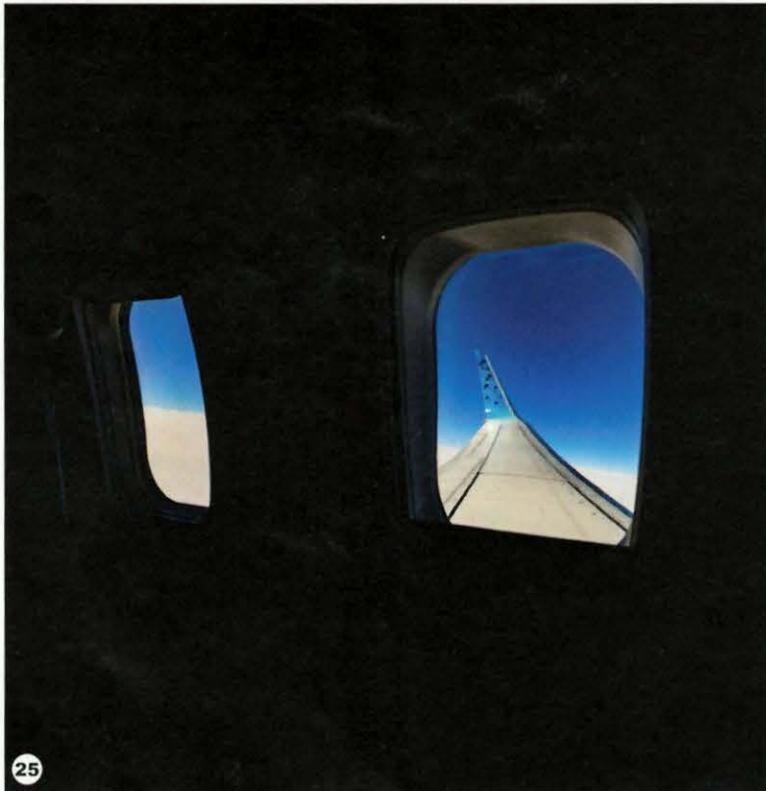


22



The last aircraft to feature the icicles branding.

23



For the approach to Petersburg, we began to see more and more snow-capped mountains as the temperatures got cooler the further north we got. The views were absolutely breathtaking. Once again, a water service was offered on the ground.

The total ground time in Petersburg was 45 minutes, this being a major cargo loading spot, and, like Wrangell, freshly caught fish was loaded into the belly of the Salmon-Thirty-Salmon. After this, we were off to Juneau, which, in my opinion, has one of the most stunning approaches in all of aviation. You come down through the cut between Douglas Island and the mainland of Alaska, and then, on a very short final, the aircraft turns left

to line up with Runway 26, the same runway from which the original Salmon Thirty Salmon had departed to become history on a clear, cold morning in 1987.

Juneau has a large terminal, so the airline gave everyone the chance to deplane if they liked and stretch out their legs before getting back on for the 90-minute flight up to Anchorage. Many of those who had got on in Seattle and were onboard just to fly on the ceremonial flight actually got off here.

Anchorage provides another stunning approach as you come through another channel surrounded by mountains on both sides. Once on the ground in Anchorage, the local time was 1539, nine hours and 10 minutes after the departure from Seattle.

Like most good fishing stories about the big one that got away, the tale of the Salmon Thirty Salmon has grown even taller with the passage of time. Now, it is part of the history of Alaska Airlines, and a legend remembered as a flying companion to all those who had flown with it. 🍷

24 Overview of the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport.

25 A unique view of this scaly winglet.

26 A look at Petersburg. One of the five stops on AS65.

27 On approach into Wrangel.

28 Salmon as seen from the terminal as the sun rises.

29 Close up of the full salmon on the fuselage of 559.



We wish to thank Mark Boyle's contributions in the making of this story, and we invite you to visit <https://www.markboyle.com> where, you'll find a comprehensive portfolio of Mark's work, accolades and his personal blog.