

Trans-Atlantic Air Service

The spur given to the development of a transatlantic flying service by trade rivalry and national prestige in pre-war days was mild in effect compared to the overpowering demand of war emergency. Under the 1935 Air Agreement, the United Kingdom, was proceeding with what, at that time appeared to be a vigorous policy of flying-boat construction to link Europe and America by transatlantic air service. Canada, under that Agreement, had assumed responsibility for meteorological services in Newfoundland. It is only now, in the light of the accomplished fact, that it is realized how much essential material was missing then for the successful operation of such a service. Weather reports were scant and inadequate for present day needs; aids to air navigation were almost non-existent; communication facilities were sketchy in the extreme; added to all this, the flying boats could, so far as the northern routes were concerned, operate only during the summer months.

The wartime necessity for the speedy delivery of aircraft in Europe introduced in the matter of a few months, changes which in the normal course of events would probably have taken as many years. A large airport was constructed at Goose Bay, Labrador. The Gander Airport in Newfoundland was greatly improved. Long-distance aids to navigation were installed wherever possible and were inter-linked by radio-communication facilities with each other and with centres on the mainland on both sides of the Atlantic. Weather stations were established not only at Continental points but in Iceland and Greenland; and a fleet of weather ships cruised continuously in more or less fixed areas in the Atlantic to give accurate weather data at frequent intervals.

While these services were still in process of development it became apparent that the maintenance of morale of the Canadian troops in Britain could be greatly improved if a rapid and reliable system of mail delivery could be established. The British Government placed a converted Lancaster bomber at the disposal of the Canadian Department of Transport, which in turn, turned it over to Trans-Canada Air Lines for the operation of the Canadian Government Trans-Atlantic Air Service. Six similar aircraft were added to this Service in the course of the next few months as they became available from the assembly line at Malton, Ont.

The first flight of the Canadian Government Trans-Atlantic Air Service between Canada and the United Kingdom took place on July 22, 1943. From then until Mar. 31, 1947, this Service had carried 8,370 passengers, 215,000 lb. of goods and 2,403,500 lb. of mail between Canada and Great Britain.

Changed conditions at the end of the Second World War made it necessary to drop the 1935 Agreement, whereby, the former Trans-Atlantic Air Service was to have been operated by the United Kingdom with assistance, by way of money contributions, from Ireland and Canada. The vast contribution that Canada made towards aerial warfare in the Second World War left her with a large and vigorous transatlantic commercial air service. This introduced a factor into Empire relations which made it unnecessary to continue the 1935 Agreement as it no longer accurately reflected the position of Canada as an operator of world air routes.

Trans-Canada Air Lines (Atlantic) Limited.—On May 1, 1947, Trans-Canada Air Lines (Atlantic) Limited, assumed responsibility for the operation previously provided by the Canadian Government Trans-Atlantic Air Service.