

From uniform to suit : Gander becomes "civilized"

This British magazine from 29 August 1946 came out roughly one year after the end of the war against Japan and 18 months after the defeat of German forces. The text therefore describes Gander as it started on its journey towards becoming a civilian airport.



The text and graphic below present several interesting points. A first one is that in 1946, the former military hanger shown as point E on the map was used as temporary facilities for American Airlines. This in fact was hanger 12, which later became the first hockey rink.

Directly below this hanger can be seen the point A, for long time known as Caledonia Camp, which had been taken over by the British Overseas Airlines Corporation. BOAC was the British state-owned airline created in 1940 by the merger of Imperial Airways and British Airways Ltd. On 31 March 1974, BOAC merged with BEA forming today's British Airways.

BOAC played an important role in Gander history. It was the recently retired general manager of Imperial Airways, Woods Humphery who, in 1940, assured Lord Beaverbrook that trans-Atlantic flying was feasible. Even more, it was largely with a team of Imperial Airways pilots that the first ferry flights were made. Less than one year after the first ferry flight to Britain, on 24 September 1941, BOAC started its North Atlantic Return Ferry Service using modified non-armed B-24 Liberators. The first flight was made by Captain CP Jones. On 07 September 1944, BOAC had completed its 1000th return ferry run.

As mentioned in this article, BOAC went through a quiet period in Gander in 1946 “since the temporary suspension of Constellation services”. What the article does not say is that basically speaking, the UK government wanted to use airplanes made in Britain rather than American planes – though the Brits really didn't have an equivalent.

It was finally on 15 April 1947 that Gander started to become busy with BOAC activity, with a weekly Constellation flight from London to Montreal via Prestwick and Gander. A busier Europe to North America operation was soon to follow.



Sometime later BOAC used on its trans-Atlantic flights the Stratocruiser, which was basically a modified B-29 bomber like the ones that dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The first Stratocruiser registered to BOAC was the G-AKGH, named Caledonia, which was the same name as the BOAC Gander site.



Another interesting fact according to the article is that apparently Gander's population in 1946 went down to a low of about 800, compared to over 7000 during the war. While these statistics are not necessarily the same as on other sites, it does point out that over a one-year period, Gander's population melted and aviation practically ground to a halt. A bit like today, Gander had to re-invent itself.

It is also interesting that in the diagram, the Army side is not shown. The most likely reason for this is that the article discusses primarily aviation-related activity and the Army side really was more of an anti-aircraft artillery camp and would have just taken up scarce space on the page.

Gander Airport

Notes on the Newfoundland Stage for North Atlantic Airlines

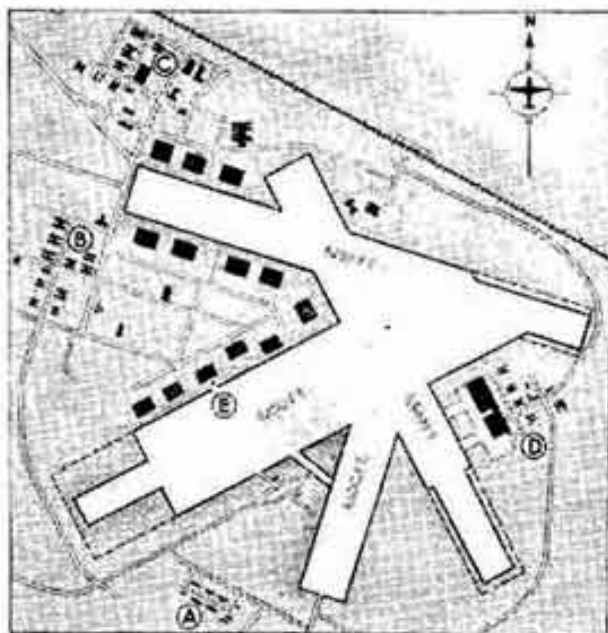
ACCORDING to the circumstances of one's first introduction to Gander, the name may bring to mind a picture akin either to Paradise or Purgatory. There were those who first saw a great expanse of wild, untouched country which, through their labours, was to become an airport; those in uniform who, during the war, heard the dreaded words "posted to Gander," which were regarded as somewhat synonymous with "sent to Alcatraz"; those who with relief saw Gander as *terra firma* after the long Atlantic crossing, or who rather apprehensively saw it as a last foothold before the West-to-East Atlantic flight; finally, there are those who think of it as a peaceful, remote sanctuary and fisherman's paradise.

Situated as it is on the Newfoundland coast, it is certainly isolated and wild in winter time, hence the R.A.F. and R.C.A.F. wartime impression. The country round about has a rugged beauty in all seasons.

After long service as an air transport and ferrying base, it has now become a most important link in the North Atlantic airlines' passenger route. It is in regular use by B.O.A.C., Pan American, American Airlines, T.W.A., Air France, K.L.M., S.I.L.A., and is served also by T.C.A., who fly a twice-daily Lockheed 14 schedule from Dorval via Moncton and Torbay. By rail it takes as much as twenty hours to reach St. Johns, which direct (by air) is only 150 miles away.

Gander, which has now been handed over to the Newfoundland Government, is still under development, as an airline transit airport. Accommodation and runways are adequate, and equipment, which includes radio range, will shortly profit by the addition of S.C.S.51.

In wartime the population was 7,000, but this has now fallen to about 800. In the illustration only the principal buildings are included. "A" indicates the new quarters taken over by B.O.A.C. for their staff. "B" is the present airport hotel group, which will shortly be used only by American and other airlines as their quarters. "C" is the site occupied by Newfoundland Government employees. "D" indicates the new reception, hotel and restaurant



First built as a base for transatlantic ferry services for delivery of military aircraft, Gander has now become an important link in the North Atlantic airline route. A key to the lettering is given in the text.

buildings for airline passengers, and the tarmac which is used by B.O.A.C. The hangars at this position are large enough to take eight Constellations or Skymasters, and in addition to give office space. "E" is the hangar at present used by American Airlines. Their temporary offices are also here, but the hangars are not large enough to take a Constellation.

Many of the improvements in handling and organization have been the work of Mr. D. O. Bustard, B.O.A.C. station superintendent. Since the temporary cessation of Constellation services, Gander has had a fairly quiet spell, but this will soon be changed as a result of the declaration that Constellations are fundamentally sound. B.O.A.C. expect to resume their services almost immediately and to commence using the new passenger accommodation at Gander.