

A non-stop trans-Atlantic passenger flight in 1947 :
Unbelievable, but true

While it is common knowledge that jet aircraft did not need to stop in Gander, few realize that prop aircraft were also crossing the Atlantic non-stop by the mid 50s, for example an Air France from Paris to Montreal in 1955, without the usual stop for fuel.

In fact, on at least one occasion a civilian aircraft overflew Gander many years before this Air France flight. As explained in a Kansas City ACME news report dated 01 September 1947, an airplane flew nonstop from Washington, DC to Shannon, Ireland.

The news report states: “Lola Marie Dryer, 21, of Kansas City, MO, en route home to Newfoundland from a weekend shopping in Washington, DC, got a free plane ride to Eire, when bad weather forced the plane to pass up a landing at Gander Field, Newfoundland. The airline carried her free of charge to Shannon Airport, Eire. Her husband, John A Dryer Jr, is an Army Air Forces Lt stationed at a Newfoundland air base.”



The aircraft was not identified. To anyone familiar with Gander history, the idea of a non-stop crossing of the Atlantic in 1947 by any airplane does seem a bit farfetched. So let's look at the possibilities for a non-stop trip of about 1305 miles from Washington to Gander, plus 1981 from Gander to Shannon. This total of about 3300 miles would not have changed even if the pilot learned early on during the

flight that Gander was socked in, as he would still have had to fly the “Great Circle Route” which, from Washington, goes overhead Gander. We do not know however if this aircraft was carrying a full load of cargo and passengers, nor what was the weight proportion of cargo/passengers to fuel.

Possible Aircraft Type	Remarks (note that the data given by the sources consulted varies widely. The figures below should be considered only as good estimates)
DC-4	Range with a full load 2500 miles
DC-6	Range with max load 3200 miles. However in 1947 it was used over the Atlantic only by KLM, SAS and Sabena. Pan Am started the DC-6b on the Atlantic route only in 1952. It is unlikely that a US military dependant would have used a non-US carrier.
DC-7	Had the range but was not used on the Atlantic route until 1953
Constellation	The model L-749 came out in March 1947 and was used both by TWA and Pan Am. The range with max fuel is given as 4995 miles
Stratocruiser	Had the range but was not introduced until 1949

The most likely candidate would seem be a Constellation. There are hard-to-read markings on the back of the photo which may appear to say TWA.

In any case, If the Eastern seaboard suddenly closed down while he was approaching Gander, the pilot may have had no other choice. As he approached Ireland the airplane was probably running on vapour. But a good jet stream tail wind would certainly make the pilot sweat a bit less!

Funny though that her hubby’s base is not directly identified. The news information still seemed in secrecy mode, two years after the war’s end.