

New York Times 1939 - thoughts on Gander

(Robert G Pelley 2017-01-14)

In 1939, Gander was known variously as Hatties Camp, Newfoundland Airport and Gander Field. As no planes were yet able to fly the Atlantic on a regular basis, many people didn't know what to make of it. But as World War Two progressed, it was expected that Gander would eventually play a much more important role. This is what the New York Times had to say on 30 November 1939.

MAY FLY ATLANTIC VIA NEWFOUNDLAND

**Allies' Bombers, Purchased in
United States, Could Use the
Base Near Botwood**

CALLED LARGEST AIRPORT

**Only 1,900 Miles of Open
Water Separates Field From
the British Isles**

By FREDERICK GRAHAM

While the German submarine and mine campaign in the North Sea and the North Atlantic grows increasingly dangerous and costly to shipping, the possibility that American-built bombers purchased by France and England may be flown across the Atlantic for delivery appears more likely.

In line with this supposition is the activity reported at the huge airbase at Hattie's Camp, near Botwood, Newfoundland. The field, which is said to be the world's largest airport when estimated by the amount of paved runways, would serve as an excellent jumping-off point for planes headed toward England.

Only 1,900 miles of open water separate it from the British Isles and prevailing winds would be favorable to craft flying from west to east.

The field is located about three miles from Gander Lake and about thirty miles from Botwood, where transatlantic commercial airliners stop on flights between the United States and Europe. Work was started on it more than three years ago and in July it was completed and turned over to the Air Ministry. It is said to be ready for service.

The airport itself is a mile square and was hewn out of the forest and brush. It is said to have cost between \$4,000,000 and \$5,00,000 and to be one of the most complete existing air terminals as regards areas, approaches, and radio and lighting facilities.

The British Air Ministry, through the Royal Commission chartered with the administration of Newfoundland, directed the construction. At the peak of work, according to re-

liable sources, as many as 10,000 men were employed at one time.

There are four paved runways, one measuring 4,800 feet in length and 1,200 feet in width. The other three range between 4,500 and 4,800 feet in length and 600 feet in width. The approaches to the runways have been cleared of trees for about a mile, giving ample room for ordinary landings and permitting the use of radio beams for blind landings.

In radio facilities, the field is said to be far ahead of the average commercial airport. It is understood that eleven radio frequencies are used and that forty radio technicians are employed. The lighting, all of which is indirect, is also said to be of the best. It is also understood that the field was designed and built for twenty-four-hour daily, year-round service. Radio installations were supervised by the British Royal Air Force and the Marconi Company.

Weather data are handled by a large staff of trained and experienced meteorologists, compiling weather reports from many sources. A hangar measuring 152 feet by 132 feet, and having a door clearance of 150 feet by 30 feet, is completed as is a \$300,000 administration building and control tower.

Despite rumors that American-built planes would be flown to England have been denied, there is reason to believe that Hattie's Camp will in the future see many such planes start across the Atlantic from there. The likelihood of such flights has been questioned on the ground that bombers ordered by France and Britain do not have the

range for such a long ocean flight and that Winter weather conditions over the northern Great Circle route would preclude the attempt, even if such craft could cover the distance.

The flight from Hattie's Camp would be many miles shorter than from any other point in this country or Canada, and the fact that the field's runways are so wide and long seems to indicate that blind landings in bad weather are planned.
