

An American magazine explains Gander - Saturday Evening Post, 1950-12-16

Robert G Pelley 2019-07-12
Bobsganderhistory.com

Note to readers:

Reproducing the original text of the following article from the Saturday Evening Post was not an easy task. I therefore would like to thank a friend of mine, Mr René Martel, for helping me get a decent copy of it.

Even then, because the age of the original text and the printing methods in the 1950s, it was hard at times to produce something legible. You may need to use your computer's zoom function on occasion.

I should also mention that while this text was written after the author's 2-week stay in Gander, it may still have inaccuracies. For example, he says that Gander did not have a newspaper.

A bigger error concerns the first flight of Hudson bombers across the Atlantic in November 1940. He writes that eight left but one crashed with the lives of all on board. In fact they were on seven and all got across safely.

However, by and large, this article gives perhaps the best view around of what went on in Gander in the early 50s.

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It was not a surprise to people in Gander. In fact it had already been announced in an article in the Gander Traveller, Gander's newspaper of the time, dated 10 November 1950.

Gander Featured In Sat. Eve. Post

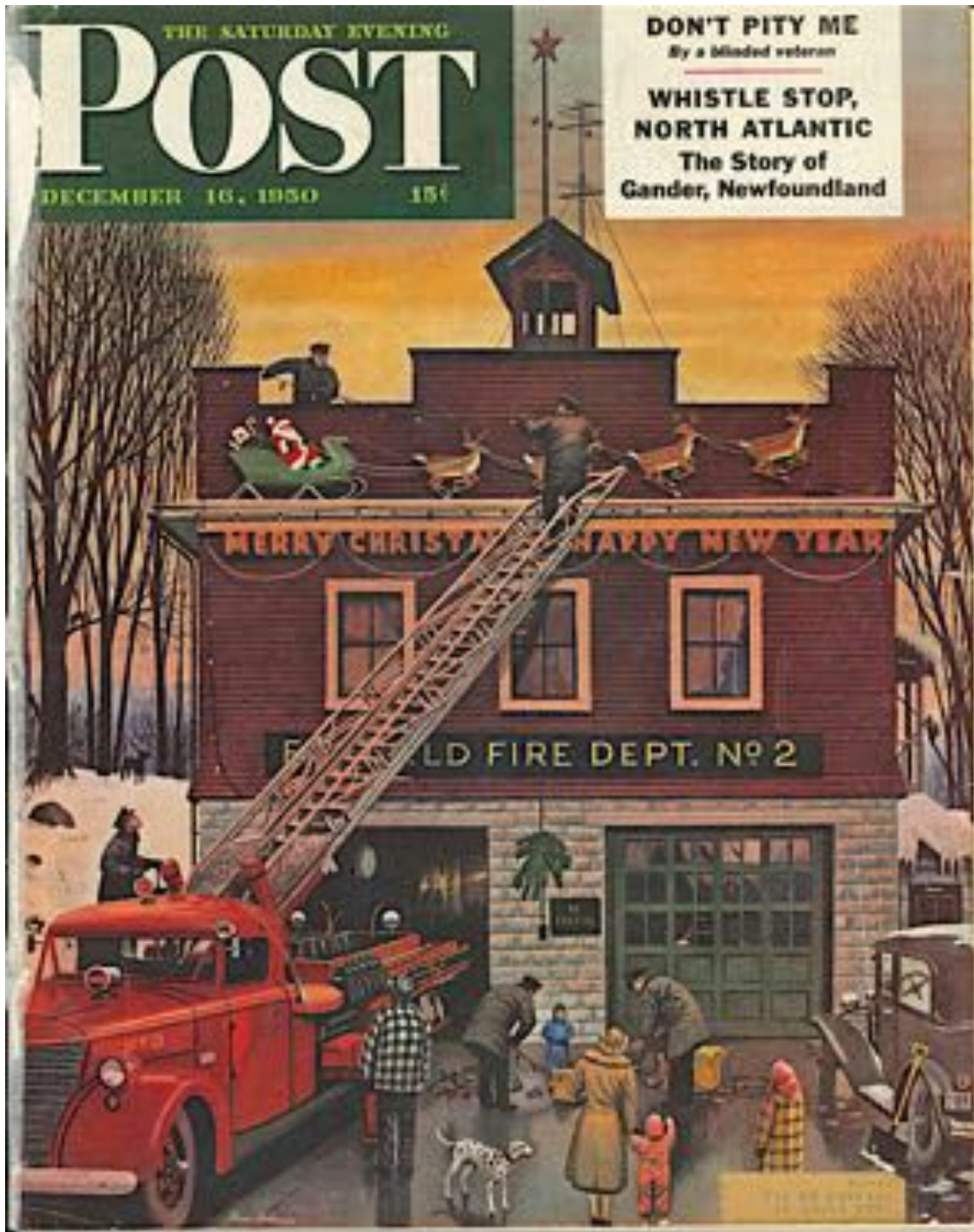
An article about Gander, the crossroads of the world, will soon be published in the internationally famous "Saturday Evening Post". The article has been written by Mr. Wolfgang Langewiesche, who has done other such articles for the magazine, and is generally regarded as one of the leading aviation writers in North America.

Mr. and Mrs. Langewiesche spent two weeks in Gander during the latter part of June and the early part of July, gathering material for the article. It will be the most comprehensive piece yet written about the huge airport, and will be illustrated by pictures taken by Harry Saltzman, the photographer who does a great deal of the publication work. He recently illustrated the well written series of articles called "Man-hunt".

Both the Langewiesches and Mr. Saltzman stayed at the Jupiter Hotel, and stated that they enjoyed their visit a great deal.

Wolfgang Langewiesche flies his own airplane, and made the trip from New York to Gander and back in same. At present he and his wife are touring Europe and Africa in the airplane, doing another series of articles. He is a versatile writer, doing a series for House-Beautiful on building homes according to the climate of the area in which various homes are being constructed.

Gander was described simply in the upper right corner of the cover as a “whistle stop”.



Whistle Stop, North Atlantic

By **WOLFGANG LANGEWIESCHE**

This is how 3500 people live in the middle of nowhere, cut off from the world except for planes that pause with glamorous international travelers. Gander, Newfoundland, is the city of the 30-minute love affair, where the pay is wonderful—and there's nothing to spend it on.

GANDER, NEWFOUNDLAND. This is a place to put on your map. One would hardly call it a town. It's merely an airport, all by itself, deep in the north woods. Three long runways, a dozen hangars and a war-surplus Army camp—that's all. But this airport is one of the key points of the world. It is the great jumping-off place for transatlantic flying. Here, at the eastern end of North America, the airliners stop to gas up before they go out across The Drink. And here they make their American landfall, and are glad of it, after the long, tough crossing from Europe against the winds.

Some fifty Constellations, Stratocruisers, DC-4's and 6's drop in here every day; most of them en route from or to New York. Every day a couple

thousand passengers troop in and out of this lobby. They stretch their legs and have a cup of coffee while their airplane is being gassed up. Actresses and ambassadors, businessmen and ballet dancers, cardinals and comely models, DP's and VIP's. Stick around the Gander lobby for a while, and you see, in the parade of human beings, all that's cooking in the Western world.

Here are a couple of Greek Air Force officers, sun-burned and tough, returning from some mission in the United States. A group of German industrialists and their ladies, all tweedy in new clothes, going to New York, mission not announced. There are some fifty homeless Polish soldiers, still, after all these years, in uniform. They are being taken from some



Passengers leave the airport building to resume their trip to Europe aboard a Stratocruiser.

(a photo showing what was often called the "sheep run".)

camp in Europe to some place in South America where they are to settle. They are no longer the boys they were in '39; the years and the camps have left their mark. They sit erect, disciplined, stony-faced, hiding what goes on inside, not caring what goes on around them. There's Sir Rudyard X en route from London to Montreal—a high official, you would guess. A quiet man, quietly dressed to that British formula—you can't remember afterward what he wore. He looks bemused at the unceasing, restless stream of life that pours through here out of the States—the growly neckties; the student who wears his sports shirt outside his pants; the Texas boots of an oilman en route to Arabia.

Most of the passengers are, of course, just plain, camera-toting tourists; by no means the rich and elegant. This is perhaps the biggest thing about transatlantic flying, in the long run. It's for the average guy, with his two-week vacation, that it has abolished the Atlantic and opened up the world. Nobody knows, as yet, what that will do to American ideas and attitudes. But one effect you can already see. In every airplane load there are usually some first-generation Americans. They are going to see the old country or they are coming back from such a visit. And more often than not, when they come back, they have a clearer head and a freer heart. The old country did not seem as sweet as they had remembered it, and they have discovered that they have really become Americans.

"Anybody special?" you ask a passenger agent as you sneak a look over his shoulder at a ship's passenger manifest. Well, it says here Montgomery, Robert.

"You mean the?"

None enough, there he stands, overcoat over his arm, talking to an air-line hostess . . . and does he know how to make a woman's face light up! Oh, yes, and the other night, Frank Sinatra went across. He sang from high over the middle of the Atlantic down to the men at sea. He was accompanied by—get this!—a piano, carried for the occasion in a Stratocruiser's—get this—downstairs lounge. Lindbergh, look what has happened to your ocean.

Gander sees the passenger all right. But the passenger does not see much of Gander, or of the ocean, or of ocean flying. The air lines don't believe in showing him too much. He must not see too much of the vast, gray, lonely ocean. He must not notice, even, the close, keen attention that gets him across safely. Even the safety measures and precautions might only worry him—the life rafts, for example, are stowed away out of sight. He must be waited. So they wrap him in cotton; soundproofed walls, pres-

curtained cabin, a wing that cuts off most of the view. They wallop him right off with a supercocktail. They beguile him with beautiful girls—of his two hostesses, one is a nurse, the other a linguist, and both of them lookers. They fluff him up a pillow and dim the lights and take him across while he sleeps.

The rumbling of the wheels on the runway jolts him awake. This is Gander. We'll have an hour here. As he steps out he gets perhaps a whiff of the northern air, a smell of the woods. But he sees nothing but a grant hangar and a desert of asphalt. And then he is promptly shooed into this lobby that might as well be in Minneapolis or Calcutta—a waiting room with a lunch counter. He's now a bit adrift. He's lost in space; he doesn't know where this place Gander really is on the earth's surface. Nor does he care. His mind is half in Paris, half in New York.

They Don't Even Know What Time It Is

HE'S lost in time too. The clock in the Gander lobby is masked with paper. Newfoundland has its own time. It runs on the offbeat, an hour and a half ahead of New York, three and a half hours behind Europe. So a clock would only confuse the passengers and make them ask questions. Time is especially confusing for the passenger who has just crossed from Europe. He left Paris in the dark. He fell asleep. He had a sort of breakfast at Shannon. Instead, sometime in the small hours of the night. He rode a long time and fell asleep again. Now his watch shows perhaps nine in the morning. But here at Gander it is still night. Yet again it seems time for another breakfast. For the passenger, Gander is a Nothing, located in a Nowhere; a breakfast between two sleeps. Ask anybody who's been through here, and you get the same answer: "Gander? That place? You can have it!"

Well, 1500 people have it, willy-nilly. They live here. That seems like quite a crew, just to gas up fifty airplanes a day. But it takes more than gas men to keep the traffic flowing. It takes weathermen, radar and radio men, dispatchers, mechanics, control-tower men—every job in quadruplicate, because the place runs day and night. Somebody has to run the snowplows, keep up the pavements and maintain the runway lights. It takes passenger agents to receive the passengers, snack-bar girls to feed them. Then, as always where people do a job, it takes a second set of people to keep the first set on the job—bus drivers, accountants, cooks, managers, secretaries, file clerks, dormitory matrons for the snack-bar girls. Plus wives and children; plus teachers, pillowmen, doctors, postmen, grocery clerks,



Spitter from the control tower watches a Stratocruiser glide in for a landing. Since the airport must be kept open day and night, four people are needed to fill each job, from weatherman to snack-bar girl.



MAP BY WILLIAM H. CAMPBELL

Newfoundland, closest point to Europe in America, lies on the New York-to-Paris air route.

ministers. First thing you know, you have quite a cluster.

Actually, Gander ranks perhaps No. 5 among the settlements of Newfoundland. Gander has everything: general store, tavern, Lions Club, three grocery stores, two movies—one of them with one neon sign—six taxi companies with eighteen cabs, six of them radio-controlled. It has its own broadcasting station, with one local live talent—the Lullaby Lady. She works for Oceanic Air Traffic Control and does a Children's Hour on the side. It has a well-bred little night club—run by and for the British air-line people, but open to other Ganderites by invitation—bar, dance floor, music by phonograph. Gander has a whole string of hotels, the Jupiter, the Saturn, the Mars, the Mercury. If weather or mechanical trouble should ever disrupt the service, the air lines could throw 500 passengers into bed at an hour's notice. Gander has schools and churches, sewing circles, bridge clubs, a little ball park, lots of baby carriages and plenty of diapers on the line.

But it still isn't a town. It still is only a camp, hastily slapped together for the war. All its life is squeezed into army barracks. The same three, four types of temporary housing repeat ever and over, drab green and yellow, up and down bleak, treeless streets. The Jupiter Hotel is simply a former bachelor officers' quarters with a front desk added; the Catholic church, a mess hall with a cross over the door. Take a fifty-man barracks and write on it "Groceries," and that's what it is. Paint fairy-tale pictures on its windows and you have the school. Put some gold lettering on the outside and a safe inside, and it's a branch of The Royal Bank of Canada. The Protestant church did get built as a church in the first place. But it is one of those military jobs that used to be Catholic at one end and Protestant at the other; you used to change denominations simply by switching the seat backs around, structural fashion.

You can't buy or build here. Canada's Department of Transport owns every building and all the land. You can't even live here if the DOT doesn't assign you a place to live. You can't do business here except by special license. There is no local paper. There is no city council, no mayor—the DOT's airport director runs the show. The DOT runs the hotels and dormitories and snack bars, cooks the meals, washes the shirts, makes the beds, runs the bus. The DOT also heats your rooms from central steam plants. Big, heavily insulated steam pipes run overhead on poles all over the camp, the way electric wires do elsewhere. It's practical and cheap, it avoids freeze-thaw troubles, but it gives the Gander scene a grotesque, unlovely touch.

Gander is more a camp than a town. The streets are bleak and treeless, the banks, stores and schools are converted barracks. A picket fence tries to draw the eye away from steam pipes running overhead.



Frankly, Gander is on the dreary side for you and me. But it is Hollywood and New York rolled into one to some of the kids here. This you discover with a shock. It goes perhaps like this: you sit at the snack bar, your head still aching with all the wilderness you've just flown over.

Idly, you ask the girl behind the counter, "And how do you like it here?"—meaning: a good-looking gal in these wild woods, on this utter outpost?

"Oh," she says, "I like it in the city."

City! Where she comes from, life is so hard, so sparse, so lonesome that Gander is indeed the big time. She is a fisherman's daughter from one of the outposts—those tiny settlements that dot the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador. Incredibly tiny settlements—just a few houses stuck between a barren land and a cold sea. The sea is frozen much of the year, the land impassable. Hardly a footpath leads from some of these settlements into the interior. Only an occasional coastwise motor vessel breaks the isolation. It is too cold for farming. Fishing is tough, and the markets are far away. The diet is poor—bread and fish. Bad teeth, full of terrible holes, are a curse along this coast. The tiny houses, crowding large families close together, breed tuberculosis. Much has been done to keep these people from going under—by the Grenfell missions and by the Newfoundland Government: floating dental clinics and X-ray labs; a law that all flour brought into Newfoundland must be vitamin-enriched—that sort of thing. But at best they are barely hanging on. Isolation and poverty have made them in some respects similar to some of our own back-hill folk, odd of speech, shy in their ways, ignorant of many things a New Yorker thinks important.

There's Nothing Like This City Life

TO a boy or girl born into this life, Gander means a great deal. Nothing like this has opened up here since the London newspapers built their paper mills in Newfoundland a generation ago. And so they come, all the most live, ambitious young Newfies, from Heart's Delight and Heart's Content, from Boy's Arm and Barr'd Harbour, from Various Tickle and Little Seldom—girls to work in the snack bars and hotels and shops, men to get jobs around the airport. Driving a great sweepster down the runway is more fun than

*... rolling in a dory
on the Banks of New-Found Land,
rolling in a dory
with a codfish in my hand.*

Gander offers them everything they haven't had. Company to break the terrible island isolation. Real money and a choice of things to spend it on. Fresh vegetables at least once in a while. Clothes. Sometimes, first thing, a girl has all her teeth pulled and gets a set of false ones. There is a dance on Saturday nights at The Log Cabin down on Dead Man's Pond—the former Officers' Club. Three guitars are the orchestra, it's rear-view only, but the atmosphere is charged with romance and the excitement of living. There is one Newfie phrase that has become a sort of small coin of everybody's talk at Gander: "I find I like it."

Newfoundland owes this new industry to luck—a double-barreled sort of luck. It lies closer to Europe than does any other American point—that alone would attract the traffic. But at the same time, Newfoundland also lies smack on the most direct route from New York to Paris. Lindbergh himself flew over Newfoundland on his way to Paris. So, to get to the spot where the Atlantic is narrowest, the air lines don't even have to make a detour. More luck: the same Newfoundland route also takes you to practically all other places on the other side, to Rome, for instance, to Cairo, to Jerusalem. To the Middle East oil fields the straight route from New York goes via Newfoundland. That sounds wrong, and an ordinary map doesn't show it that way. But it's true. It feels wrong when you do it. When you fly "down" the coast of Maine and it gets cooler and cooler, you certainly don't feel you are headed for Mexico. But you are, straight. Try it with a string on a globe. (Continued on Page 68)

Travelers from abroad, hurrying to continue their flight to New York, pass an Air France plane which will soon be taking off in the opposite direction.



So that's the idea of Gander. You take off from New York, bound for someplace on the other side. You fly direct. And then, when you are already a third of the way to Ireland, here is this last piece of America, a last airport, a last chance to top off your tanks. The air lines can't afford to pass that up.

It's not a matter of safety. All those big airplanes can fly nonstop from New York to Paris, and then some. It's a matter of money. The air lines don't fly the ocean for sport. They want to haul pay load, not gasoline. In round figures, a four-engined ocean airplane burns 150 gallons of gas to fly 100 miles. That much gas weighs 900 pounds. That's about the same as four pay passengers plus baggage. So, for every 100 miles you can shorten the ocean hop, you can carry four more pay passengers. For every 100 miles you lengthen the ocean hop, you have to leave four pay passengers standing on the ramp. If there were no Gander and the air lines had to fly nonstop between Ireland and, say, Bangor, Maine, trans-

atlantic flying would not be a business. If there were no Gander it would immediately have to be built.

Gander was built just in time to be swallowed up by military secrecy. The pavement went on the runways in August of 1939; on September third the war started. One night that winter, eight Lockheed bombers took off for England, and thus began the great ocean-ferry service. Nobody had then ever flown the North Atlantic in winter. So nobody knew that night what winds there might be, what icing clouds, what a cold front might be like if you ran into one somewhere south of Greenland. Of those eight pioneers, one turned back. He crashed and all aboard died. The rest got across, followed by dozens, hundreds, thousands; the ocean-ferry service became a giant school of ocean flying. Not only for the British and Canadians; many American pilots flocked to that glamorous service. Many a Kansas boy, reared on the farm, suddenly found himself a sort of sea captain.

Soon came the next daring step: to speed up deliveries to Britain, the ferry pilots were themselves air-ferried back to Gander. And so the tough westward trip, too, became commonplace. Finally the American Air Force started mov-

ing through — Fortresses and Liberators by the thousands. Old Ganderites still talk about those times when the bombers took off at four-minute intervals all night long.

It looks like a marvel of British foresight that Gander should have got finished just in time for all this. Did Whitehall know exactly what was coming, and exactly when?

"No," says H. A. L. Pattison, the jolly, former RAF squadron leader who is Gander's director. "It was our luck."

He ought to know. He is not only Gander's boss but also, in terms of service, its oldest living inhabitant. He was in charge in 1937 when the first stroke of the first ax sounded in the forest. In fact, he was with Gander when it was still only a gleam in the British air minister's eye, back in the middle '30's. At that time the flying boat was the favorite long-distance airplane. Pan American was weaving its long routes all over the world with boats; the British, too, were linking their commonwealth together with boats.

The thing that made the flying boat so attractive was not, primarily, that it can make a safe forced landing on the open sea. Air lines don't work that way. If forced landings were a serious possibility, they wouldn't be flying. No, the

(Continued from Page 48)

route from New York to Europe crosses the Newfoundland Railroad. This railroad is only a narrow-gauge affair. It is not enough of a railroad to spoil the deep-in-the-woods feeling of Gander. But it is an important part of the Gander idea. You see, there is a joker in air geography: you can always put your finger on the map and say, "We need a field here." But without heavy ground transport, how do you build it? And how do you haul in the gas? Gander takes a whole trainload of gas every single day. And the present traffic is, after all, only a trickle, compared with things to come.

"Will Gander ever become unnecessary?" we asked Pattison.

"Possible," he said, "but not probable. Of course, the air lines sometimes overfly us right now, and go from New York nonstop to Europe. But that is mostly during the winter season, when heavy pay load does not offer. At that time of year, too, the west winds over the ocean are very strong and help push

them across. But even then, it's Gander that makes those flights possible . . . just by being here, as a place to return to in case of trouble. Like an emergency exit. And a flight from Europe to America can very rarely pass up Gander at any season."

"Will the jet liner need Gander?" we asked him.

"Probably yes," he said. "Just now, in fact, cruising range is perhaps the main problem of the jet airplane. They are fast, but they are not yet capable of extreme long-range flight. Of course, that may change. Frankly, nobody knows enough yet about the technical possibilities of the jet airplane; we might be surprised. But at any rate, it makes no difference what kind of engine you imagine—jet or piston or turbine propeller. What counts is the weight of the fuel—those six pounds per gallon. Until someone discovers a much lighter fuel, it simply won't pay to make your hops too long. Your fuel load will always cut too much into your pay load. It pays to stop someplace,



and this is the place. No," he continued, looking fondly at his asphalt desert, "I don't think the forest will grow back here very soon."

For the Americans who work here, life isn't bad. You live, of course, on an island. Your car has to be shipped in on the railroad. Gander has a road system of its own, but no connection with the outside world. Gander speech reflects the island feeling: you live "on," not "in," Gander; some even say, "on the Gander." You draw "isolation pay." If you stay long enough, you get "Ganderized." This means not only do you know everybody's business and they yours; you don't even mind. "There are no secrets on Gander." You meet everybody you know every day, and you know just about everybody. You know who was out with whom, and who got drunk, and all he said.

But with all that, life is almost aggressively normal. Having a good time, U. S. style, is serious business. Parties go on all the time. A wife can't get along without an evening dress. The Gander crowd is gay and personable—the air lines pick 'em that way. Everybody has been everywhere—Paris, Bombay, places like that—and after his spell here, the company will perhaps send him to Bermuda or Rio. Meanwhile, Gander has one big advantage—you get good pay and you can't spend much; there isn't much to spend it on.

Married people live in apartments that are a surprise. You drive up to one of those dismal barracks. You have to jump across a drainage ditch and walk up a strictly GI staircase, but then you step into a perfectly standard apartment, with hardwood floors, good furniture, electric kitchen, tiled bath, hot water all the time. The various air lines have leased the buildings from the DOT, have done the civilian-conversion job, and rent them to their employees. Rents are about on United States city level, but so are the comforts. Only the shopping is a bit lean. "Fresh vegetables" pop up in Gander conversation almost as often as "the three esses" of the air-line business—sex, salary, security.

If you are single, you live, most likely, at the Air-lines Hotel, a DOT dormitory, and eat DOT meals. The meals get to be sort of dull, but life does not. There is no shortage of girls. Some of the air lines work on the lay-over system—"slip crew" if you are British. A crew gets off to rest twenty-four hours, while a rested crew takes over the flight. So there are always hostesses about, and the lay-over romance is a feature of Gander life. The girl comes through on her way to Europe, and you talk for thirty minutes. If you are lucky, they have to change a spark plug on the airplane, and she stays for two hours. Three days later she comes in at daybreak, dead-beat, lugging her little satchel, and puts up at the Jupiter. That afternoon you take her sun-bathing at Dead Man's Pond. That evening the little satchel produces a big dress, and you take her dancing at the BOAC club. That night at four a.m., in uniform again, she goes on.

But even more dangerous for bachelors are the girls of Newfoundland upper-crust families who work here as secretaries and passenger agents or whose brothers work here. They are charming in a style that is half American, half European. First thing you know, you find you like it. "He married a Newf" is another Gander phrase, and such has been the fate of many a sturdy bachelor.

If the Newfies don't get you, Newfoundland will. It is a beautiful coun-

try, with 100-mile views of rolling blue-green forest. The rivers sparkle, the salmon jump. Right within walking distance of the Gander lobby the beavers build their dams. Caribou and moose abound. Why, only last year a taxicab was wrecked by an ill-humored moose. The moose attacked and sledge-hammered the car with his hoofs. If you don't believe it, ask the Gander police. Down at Dead Man's Pond there is a bush-flying service, Canadian-Alaskan style. They fly the doctors and nurses and police about in small seaplanes, and they will fly you too. In ten minutes you can be on a lake where nobody has fished for ten years.

The sense of wilderness comes to you even through your radio. You sit down after dinner in your comfortable, American-style living room. For a while you get the usual stuff. But then the program suddenly changes to a most powerful travolague: a message service, sponsored by the J. H. Doyle Drug Company. Then, for a few minutes, you are really beuthum with those people who are holding out there, so close to the northern limit of civilization, on a sort of permanent frontier. It goes like this:

To Harby Spence, Cul de Sac West: From Nurse Dursford, Hancock West: Was immediately your symptoms. Arrange for transportation for me from Cape.

To Robert Rose, Barracroy Cove: From Jonas Rogman: Would prefer to have sheep alive.

To Malcolm Stone, Healey Harbour: From Joan: Had X ray. Finding fine. Coming by ship Kyle.

To the People of Ming's Right: from Pastor J. Wicken: Will be at Ming's Right Sunday for evangelistic meeting, weather permitting.

To Frank Young, Gray River: from Len Coar. Burgess: Your engine here. Come for it any time.

But through it all, every hour or so, you hear a mighty roar as another big ship lifts off Gander airport for another trip across. That is what makes life good on Gander—the local industry, ocean flying, is one a man is bound to take an interest in. They talk an awful lot of shop. Their jobs are always on their minds. The young fellow who sprucls there so relaxed, wisecracking to a girl—he knows that tomorrow at dawn he will use the same quick mind, the same easy voice, as he looks into a rubber-scope and talks a Constellation down through a 300-foot ceiling right onto the runway. The bridge player here—even as he makes his bid—knows that at this moment an airplane is making its way to the Azores, through all sorts of weather, on a clever flight plan which, as a dispatcher, he figured out. The man who stands in the river, casting for salmon—he is a weatherman, and he throws a quick look at the sky. Yes, it is doing exactly what, four hours ago, he forecast it would do. A dozen liners, now out over the water, who get his forecast that Gander would stay open will find it open.

In all the scheduled flying the air lines have done over the North Atlantic, not a single passenger has ever got his feet wet, let alone lost his life at sea. It is much safer to spend a night crossing the Atlantic than to spend a day crossing the streets of New York City. Credit for that goes to many people, and especially to the captains. But if you worked at Gander you would have a hand in it too. That is the spice of life on Gander: think of a big airplane, fifty souls on board, out over the wild, cold waters. Well, if you worked here, you would often feel as if you held that airplane in the hollow of your hand. THE END