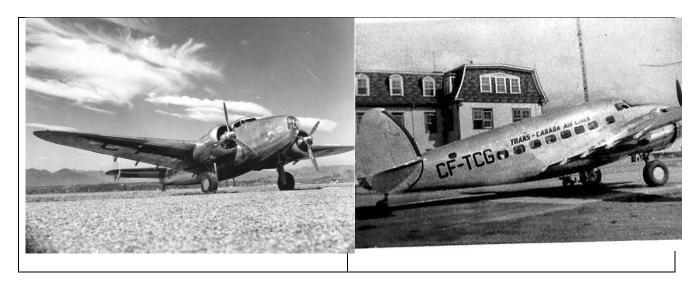
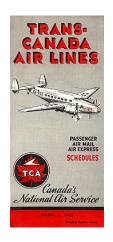
TCA in early Gander Operations and First Day Covers

(version2, by Robert G Pelley 2016/08/31)

Trans-Canada Air Lines (now Air Canada) was the first airline to fly into Gander on a civilian basis. Other civilian airlines went through Gander during the 2nd World War, but their fights were all related to military ferry operations.

The carriage of passengers on the Maritimes (NB, NS and PEI) started on Feb 15, 1940, and the first aircraft was the Lockheed 14 Super Electra (of which TCA had sixteen). Below are two photos of CF-TCG and a timetable from the same period showing the same type airplane.





Those familiar with the history of Gander will have no problem visualizing a Lockheed 14H-2 Super Electra because it was the basic platform for the famous Lockheed Hudson, which made the first ferry flights. In passing, one of the reasons why the Hudson was used is because the promoter of the idea, Lord Beaverbrook, was aware of the flights made by Amelia Earnhardt in the earlier version, the Lockheed 10 Electra.

The sales of the model 14 Super Electra were relatively disappointing, so Lockheed decided to stretch the aircraft's fuselage by 5 feet 6 inches (1.68 m), allowing an extra two rows of seats to be fitted. This became the model 18-08A Lodestar, the most familiar TCA airplane seen in Gander in that era. TCA had fifteen total.



As far as Newfoundland was concerned, treaty arrangements were completed between the Government of Canada and the Newfoundland Government and TCA service between Moncton, Gander, Sydney and St. Johns was inaugurated on 01 May 1942.

The cost per ticket for inter-airport flight, for example, Moncton-Gander, Moncton-St.John's, Sydney-Gander or Sydney-St. John's was 8\$.

During the war period, TCA operated from the old Administration Building, built in the late 30s.



The above photo, circa 1946-47, shows visitors of the WJD Strong family as they return to the "mainland". From left to right are Mabel Mitchell (Mrs Leah Strong's sister), Pearl Oakley (Mr Strong's sister), son Jim, Hazel Russell (Mr Strong's mother's sister) with daughter Elizabeth in her arms, daughter Pearl, Mrs Leah (Lee) Strong. The photo was likely taken by Mr Strong, a pioneer of pre-war, wartime and post-war aviation-related telecommunications.

The photos of the Gander TCA staff below, from 1942 and 1944, can be found in the TCA Magazine "Between Ourselves".



1942 : Harry Bowering, Myron Zegarchuk, Harry Beardsell Pete Majdonik, Art Balfour, Ron James, Bill Anders



1944: in front - Harry Bowering, Steve Glavine

Standing – Frank Lukeman, Art Balfour, Ralph Wilcox.

Ian Edwards, Bruce Bettison, Brian Kemp,

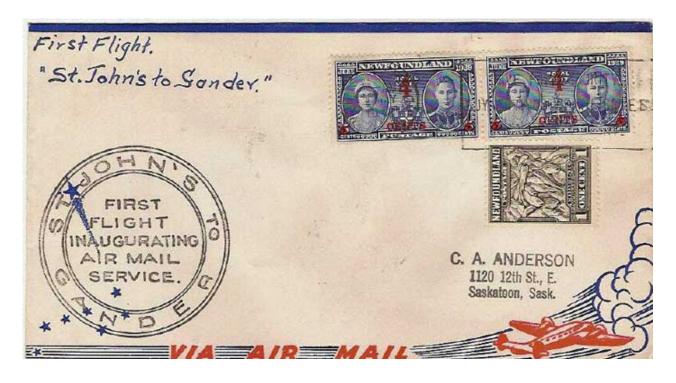
Dave Weir, Bill Stanley, Cec Burton

TCA aircraft carried not only passengers but mail as well. Below are four First Day Covers issued on 01 May 1942, when operations started through Gander.

Gander- St John's

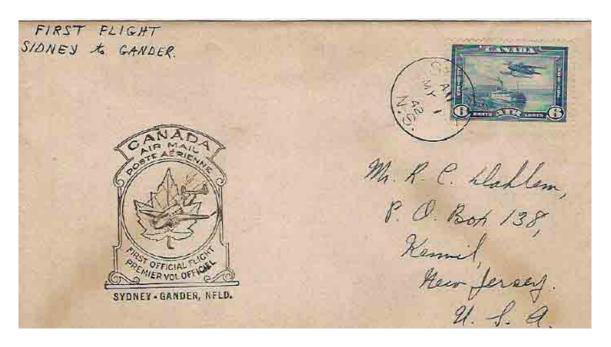


St.John's - Gander





Sidney - Gander



But TCA activity in Gander in the 1940s was not limited to these civilian operations. During 1943-1947 TCA operated the Canadian Government Trans-Atlantic Air Service (CGTAS) to provide trans-Atlantic VIP passenger and postal delivery service, using Avro Lancastrians aircraft.



In 1943, Canada's Victory Aircraft converted a Lancaster X bomber for civil transport duties with TCA. (After the war Victory Aircraft was purchased by what became Avro Canada). This conversion was a success, resulting in eight additional Lancaster Xs being converted.

These Lancastrian "specials" were powered by Packard-built Merlin 38 engines and featured a lengthened, streamlined nose and tail cone and increased range. The first of these flights went through Gander on July 22, 1943.

Below is a photo of three crewmembers of these CGTAS flights through Gander, which highlights the training they had before flying these missions and the experience they gained by doing it. All of them had over 100 trans-Atlantic hops to their credit when this photo taken, probably in autumn 1944.



On the left is Capt George B Lothian who made his first flight as a Hudson pilot in 1941. In the center is Flt-Lieut Harold F Thomas, navigator, whose first flight was a B-25. Discharged from the RCAF, he was with TCA since the start of Atlantic operations. On the right is Alan J Blackwood, radio op, joined TCA when started up and also gained experience on loan to BOAC. The average crossing was about 13 1/2 hours.

After the war, the Lancastrians became part of TCA and carried paying civilian passengers until Douglas DC-3 and DC-4 aircraft replaced them. Below is a photo of a TCA DC-3 on the ramp waiting refuelling. Refuelling of TCA in Gander was done by Shell up to the early 1950s, when they lost the contract to Imperial-Esso.

This photo is interesting also because it was taken from fairly closely to the area where Ganderites would park in the 40s and 50s to watch the airplanes come and go.



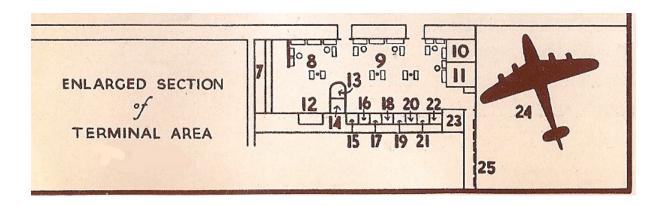
These Douglas DC-3 aircraft were soon replaced by North Stars which was a 1940s Canadian development of the Douglas C-54 / DC-4 aircraft. The main change was that instead of radial piston engines found on the Douglas design, Canadair used Rolls-Royce Merlin engines to achieve a faster cruising speed. The photo below of a North Star is taken at a rare angle, from the SE corner of the roof of hanger 22. (My thanks to Carol Walsh)



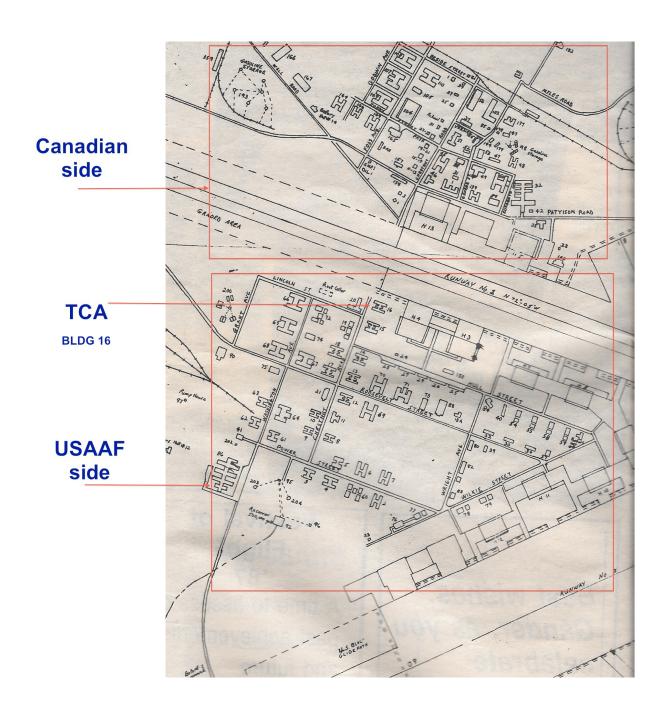
These TCA airplanes were replaced in the 1950s by another airplane, well known in Gander, the Vickers Viscount. The Viscount below is apparently flying over Newfoundland, en route to Gander.



At the end of the war, TCA moved out of the Administration Building and went to the terminal in the old RAF area. The TCA ticket counter is shown at position number 22, the first one after customs as one entered the concourse, after leaving the ramp (number 24).



On this Department of Transport map below from 1950, TCA employees and families lived on the "Air Force side" in a converted military building, identified as bldg 16.



Ah yes, the days when flying was actually fun!

(Special thanks to Terry Baker of the Air Canada retirees' NetLetter and to Jim Strong, a former Gander resident, for their aid.)