

## **Gander - The World's Richest Airport**

Forget the glamorous airports around the world, those near Hollywood or the Pyramids, those near the great metropolises or the ones in oil and resource rich countries.

Most know of Gander as the Crossroads of the World – but very few know that for a short time, it was also the richest airport on the planet.

Before the 2nd World War, France became increasing wary of Hitler's designs on Europe. As a result, all the French (and some Polish) gold was removed from Paris and hidden in secret locations close to the French coast. Before World War II, the French had amassed a phenomenal hoard of gold – 2,226 tons of pure gold ingots, as well as sacks full of rare and valuable coins.

At that time the U.S. was officially neutral, so the French could not send their gold directly to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. By November 1939 the French government knew that Hitler was soon to attack them. As a result, the gold was loaded on ships and sent to Canada. One of the ships involved, the cruiser Jeanne d'Arc made the largest single shipment of gold ever undertaken in the entire history of the world. This gold was put on trains for the US.

After war, due the threat of a communist takeover in Europe, there was great hesitancy to return the gold to France. But some got through.

Shortly after the war, in 1947 or 48, one or more very heavily loaded civilian DC-4 aircraft landed in Gander and

offloaded a hefty cargo. It was piled in a very orderly fashion in the center of Hanger 21, which still exists today. It was quickly understood by people working in the area that this was a shipment of gold ingots to France. This shipment stayed in the center of the hangar for a good week or 10 days until other aircraft, believed to be from American Overseas Airlines, flew it across the Atlantic.

This cargo occupied a volume of perhaps 30ft by 10ft by 4ft in the center of the hangar. This comes out to 1200 cubic feet but if we assume one-third loss due to crating and the space between ingots, we would therefore have perhaps 900 cubic feet of pure gold.

One cubic foot of gold contains approximately 17,571 troy ounces. The whole shebang would therefore have contained 21,085,320 ounces of the finest grade gold. The price of gold in that period was a shade over 34\$ US so we are looking at roughly 720 million dollars lying – unprotected - on the hangar floor. In today's prices, this would be around 32 billion dollars!!

The people working in hangar took all this in stride. The employees from Esso and Shell Oil who left their crew rooms to go refuel the aircraft on the ramp walked by all day long and soon never gave it a second thought. Nobody ever tried to get any closer to this obvious fortune or to try to make off with part of it. Quite simply, unlike the situation in airports of today, in Gander at the time, no protection was needed.

I wonder if a better title of this article might not be "The most honest people in the world" !

*(Much thanks to my father, Calvin J Pelley, for the info concerning the hanger, as an eyewitness to all this activity.)*

