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Gil Minorgan, TCA's Prestwick Station Manager, gives the "inside" story of how our first overseas port of call grew during the war from a grass airfield to a major international airline terminal. Story of Prestwick, TCA's Scottish port of call, has its beginnings a good many years ago—in fact long before the first heavier-than-air craft fluttered its wings in precarious flight. The original terminal-hotel building, to which has been added many extensions, was a private residence called "Orangefield," built in 1690.

During the lifetime of the Scottish poet, Robert Burns, it was owned by General McCrae, retired Governor of Madras. Robert Burns spent many happy hours in this house, and to this day, above the front door of the old building are inscribed the words "A pleasant spot near the Scottish Wilds," taken from his poem "The Vision."

"Orangefield," through the passing years, remained a private residence until 1934, when it was purchased and converted into a small private hotel.

During the summer of 1935, the grounds surrounding "Orangefield" were turned into an airport and Scottish Aviation Ltd. commenced the operation of a flying training school, turning out short-term commission pilots for the R.A.F. Group-Captain D. F. McIntyre was then Director and Chief Instructor, and to this day Managing Director of Scottish Aviation Ltd. and Scottish Airlines, a subsidiary company.

In 1938, the school commenced training navigators, for which purpose three multi-engined Fokkers were purchased from K.L.M. Royal Dutch Airlines. A total of 390 Navigators graduated from the school up to the inception of the British Commonwealth Training Scheme in Canada and South Africa.

On September 29, 1940 a lonely bomber Hudson slipped down upon the lush grass runways of Prestwick, to herald the arrival of the first ferried aircraft from Canada. From that time, until the cessation of hostilities, 40,000 aircraft were to follow, Liberators, Boston's, Mitchell's, Fortresses, Dakotas, Curtiss Commandos, Canadian built Lancaster's and Mosquitoes, famous names in the annals of World War II.

During the early spring of 1941, the return ferry service, "ATFERO" was conceived and commenced operations, the Canadian terminus was operated by CPA and Prestwick by Scottish Aviation. During June, 1, 1941, a run called the "Arnold Service" commenced operations between Washington and Prestwick, using Liberators. Named after General Arnold, USAAF, its primary purpose was to give experience and train American crews in trans-Atlantic flying.

In the spring of 1942, a return ferry service commenced operations, run by TWA and North East Airlines, American Airlines later replacing NEA. This service used Strato-Liners and DC-3's over the North Atlantic via Iceland.

Hard surface runways were opened up in 1941 and aircraft arrivals rose to a peak of 300 per day, forming a veritable bridge across the Atlantic, indeed the original Air Lift. Through Prestwick passed the entire Eighth and part of the Ninth U.S. Army Air Forces.

And so the momentum grew as the war progressed. During the winter of 1943-44, the United States, ATC operated 13 daily flights in each direction across the "pond."

In 1944, the USAAF established an evacuation hospital at Prestwick for the seriously wounded.

In the early days of the war, the Engineering Palace at the Glasgow Exhibition was dismantled and moved to Prestwick. In this building, 1400 fighter aircraft and 1600 Liberators and Fortresses were repaired and modified for active service.

It was during the "Battle of Britain" days that many fighter squadrons came north to Prestwick for rest and reforming. Among the many pilots who knew Prestwick in those days was one Squadron Leader Gordon R. McGregor, D.F.C. We have been given to understand that one day he playfully "shot-up" the airport. Unfortunately, his keen skill in maneuvering the latest type aircraft about the sky was not entirely appreciated by certain airport authorities, a fact of which he later became aware.

In 1944 the famous No. 168 Squadron RCAF, commenced operations to Prestwick carrying Canadian mail, at which time the main Post Office for our troops in the United Kingdom and beyond was established here.

Early in 1943, TCA were asked by the Government to organize a North Atlantic service for the purpose of carrying official and Canadian Army mails and a very limited number of Government passengers.

Service was commenced in July of that year 1943, the first flight leaving Dorval Airport for Prestwick on the 23rd. At that moment, only one aircraft was available, a converted Lancaster bomber. Within six months, the service, which was known as the Canadian Government Trans-Atlantic Air Service, (CGTAS) was being operated by a fleet of five converted Lancaster's and later on four more were added. C. S. Hewett and A. P. Stewart went over to Prestwick on the first flight, to act as Liaison Officer and Chief Mechanic, respectively. They remained .in Prestwick throughout the war and returned to Canada after three years' service overseas.

Six senior TCA Captains were selected to pioneer the Service. They were Jock Barclay, Lindy Rood, Bob Smith, George Lothian, Art Rankin and Kelly Edmison. At the time, Prestwick was the most important airport in the United Kingdom. Nearly all Trans-Atlantic ferry flights originated or terminated there.

During the Ardennes offensive, one of the strangest cargoes of the war arrived in Prestwick when 250 Huskies were flown in. Great consternation prevailed upon receipt of a signal that "sleigh dog teams" were arriving. Thinking the term a coding for VIP's, operation "Red Carpet" was initiated. But much to everyone's chagrin it was found that there actually were "sleigh dog teams" on board.

Throughout the war period, many notables passed through Prestwick. To name a few, the late King George of Greece, King Peter of Yugoslavia, Queen Wilhelmina of Holland with Prince Bernhardt and Princess Juliana, Prince Olaf of Norway, the late Duke of Kent, Prime Minister McKenzie King, General McNaughton, General Crerar, Air Marshals Breadner and Bishop, Eleanor Roosevelt, Admiral King, General Arnold and General Patton, along with numerous others.

One day, a Russian aircraft stopped by enroute to Washington carrying Russian Ministers Molotov and Maisky. It was claimed that this aircraft had bombed Berlin two nights previous to leaving Moscow and that it had been built in 1936. It did in fact fly direct from Prestwick to Washington, non-stop.

Few of us realize the great part that was played at Prestwick during the years 1939-45. A total of 2,392 return Ferry flights left there. One day 74 four-engined bombers landed in an hour—more than one per minute. Throughout the month of October, 1945, BOAC Liberators alone operated 62 return ferry flights to Montreal, as compared with a total of 7 in October, 1941.

Small wonder that we of TCA and all Scotland look with pride and a great sense of satisfaction to Prestwick and the part it will play in the future of air travel in this section of the world.