



AIRLINE HISTORY No. 7

British Eagle

by Roy Allen

ONE HAS TO go back fifteen years to the time of the Berlin Airlift to recall a period that was significant to the development of British air transport. The "Bloodless Battle", as Cyril Ray was subsequently to call it, grew out of an emergency whose ramifications were to be widespread, and it doubtless marked *finis* to the possibility of any real affinity between East and West in the then uncertain future; but it did some good also, for it brought into being at least two of Britain's independent airlines.

In 1948 the Russians sealed off the surface routes to the German capital and there remained but one way of reaching and servicing the city—by air. Political difficulties had led to this situation but it was important that the Western powers stay put, and in order to fulfil obligations to Berlin the Airlift was begun.

From the start there were problems, not the least of which was the unsatisfactory position with regard to capacity, for to feed, supply with fuel, and generally keep running, Berlin required 13,500 tons of provisions *a day*. A seemingly impossible task was to be attempted with a lot of dating aeroplanes, and as usual the Americans were better equipped for the air transport operation, with their quantitatively superior aircraft.

Where Britain was concerned there were many volunteers ready to offer their services, and one of these was Harold Bamberg, who was a flyer and who wanted to fly. As had happened at the close of the 1914-18 war, many men finished World

War II wanting to start airlines. Bamberg in 1948 found himself with technical ability, enthusiasm and moral support, but few other ingredients for conducting a successful airline. He did have an aeroplane, however, a converted Halifax bomber.

The requirements of the Berlin Airlift were simple and clear: "Use transport aeroplanes to succour the city"—and if you had an aeroplane that could carry a decent load of food or coal and were prepared to offer your services in 1948, then you were in business.

The converted Halifax (G-ALEF), which was to bear many valued loads to the beleaguered city during the ten-month period of the airlift was named "Red Eagle", and emblazoned with the words "Eagle Aviation Ltd., London" and a fancy cheat line and wing motif.

With the termination of the Airlift on 12th May 1949 Eagle found themselves in business as a charter air carrier; but by now a proper transport aeroplane was a necessity, and in 1950 Eagle became the operators of a York. The reputation of the company was growing, and with a flair that was to characterise his moves in later years, Mr. Harold Bamberg, the founder,

G-APOM was one of a pair of DC-6s purchased from Slick Airways. Its sister, G-APON, is still in service

was piloting the airline to an even better reputation.

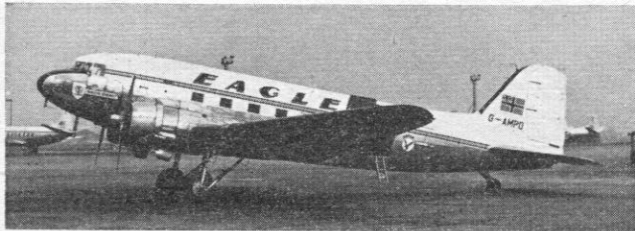
The next three years cannot be put on record for any particular developments for the events of those years have never been chronicled. Up until June 1953, when Eagle Aviation inaugurated its first scheduled services between London and Belgrade, the first years of the 'fifties are remembered best by people in the airline today as "years of hard work". The numbers of passengers carried or the freight loads transported to particular places cannot be detailed because these figures were not kept.

Eagle's London-Belgrade service was the first to operate for post-war British aviation with a direct link to the Yugoslav capital. A few months after opening the 1,065-mile Belgrade route in June 1953, Eagle opened a second international service, this time from London to Aalborg in Denmark and Gothenberg in Sweden. Plans were made to extend the route beyond Sweden to Helsinki, Finland, but the Scandinavian service was suspended about six months later, on 1st July 1954.

From the start of scheduled operations on 6th June until the end of 1953 Eagle carried 357 passengers for a total of about 334,000 revenue passenger miles. Load factor on the 66,200 miles of service equalled 18.6 per cent. Some improvement in load factor was experienced in 1954 but not sufficiently to continue the Belgrade service throughout the winter as in the



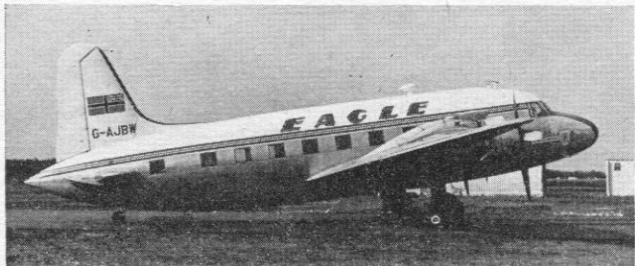
"Red Eagle", the converted Halifax 8, G-ALEF, used by Eagle Aviation on the Berlin Airlift. Intensive operations during that time got Eagle off to a good start



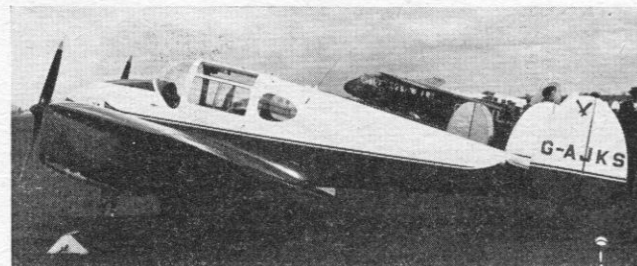
Dakota 4 G-AMPO "Sir Richard Kempfenfelt"
(Photo: B. N. Stainer)



Bristol 170 Mk. 21 G-AIMA, one of two owned previously



Viking 1B G-AJBW "Sir William Cornwallis" (Photo: B.N.S.)



Miscellaneous types included this Gemini 1A (Photo: B.N.S.)



Viscount 707 VR-BB7, also operated as G-ARKH
(Photo: B.N.S.)



Heron 1B G-APKW, ex-Uruguayan CX-AOV
(Photo: B.N.S.)



Viscount 805 G-APDW, later VR-BAX of Eagle (Bermuda)



DC-6B VR-BBQ, alias G-ARW7, arrives with "E"
reversed (Photo: B.N.S.)

previous year. At this point in time the airline also held authorisation to operate an all-cargo route from Birmingham to Dusseldorf or Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Stavanger, Oslo, Stockholm and Gothenberg.

Fleet growth

One thing that always signifies an airline's progress is its fleet development, and by 1955 Eagle Aviation was operating ten Vickers Vikings and two DC-3s. These aircraft were used both for scheduled and charter work, and the Vikings in particular were to perform sterling work for Eagle; by 1959 a total of thirteen Vikings was being operated by the Eagle companies, who also had two Valettas. The Vikings were initially Mark 1B or V610 models, but with some modification and performance improvements they were reclassified as Viking 3s.

In 1955 Harold Bamberg still had ambitious plans for the future of his now flourishing airline, but he was given much more than moral support now by men like Major-General Greaves, E. Hanks, G. W. Pitt, W. Hodgson and H. Watkins, whose enthusiasm had been fired by Bamberg, who was, as he is today, the chairman and managing director. In the face of difficulties posed by a still-vacillating government deliberating over a British air transport policy, these men, and others in the airline, worked towards building this British independent air organisation.

People are not quite sure when first it "all seemed to be worth while", but in 1958 things looked good. The airline had moved from its Clarges Street, W.1 address to an imposing new office suite at Marble Arch. There was more than the one company carrying the Eagle emblem now: an associate company, Eagle Airways (Ber-

muda) Ltd. had been formed in 1957, and generally things were moving well.

In 1958 the company ordered Douglas DC-6s and in the same year announced the "V L F" or Very Low Fares challenge. The idea here was to make available fares at reduced rates on cabotage routes. The necessary sanction for the introduction of these services was in the hands of the Government. Not only was the airline now becoming better equipped to widen its scope of operations but it was also extending the routes in its growth.

In 1959 Eagle flew 171,023 passengers on flights representing a total of 223,144,967 passenger seat-miles. Five Eagle companies had now been formed, and the activities of these, together with the trooping contracts carried out on behalf of the Government, added up to a sizeable work-load for the airline generally. The five companies in the Eagle Group

British Eagle . . .

were: Eagle Aviation Ltd., the charter and inclusive tour operator (which also performed the trooping); Eagle Airways Ltd., which operated the international scheduled services in Europe; Eagle Airways (Bermuda) Ltd.; Eagle Airways (Bahamas) Ltd., which operated a daily service between Nassau and Miami; and Eagle Aircraft Services Ltd., the engineering and maintenance company.

Then in 1960 the Minister of Aviation outlined his policy regarding future British air trade, indicating that it was his intention to ensure that British operators were given an opportunity to take part in the expansion of traffic that lay ahead. He also announced that certain British independent airlines would be co-operating with the Corporations in operating over British cabotage routes, and Eagle proposed to operate in parallel with BOAC to Bermuda and the Bahamas in the autumn.

With this plan the idea of separate operations with a new "V L F" fare structure was made meaningless, and so abandoned. Ministry approval was given for Eagle to operate from 1st October 1960 from London to Bermuda and Nassau, and a weekly service was planned with a first-class and economy-class arrangement, and additionally a monthly coach class service. The aircraft fleet now comprised twelve Viking 1Bs, two Viscounts, three DC-6s, a Britannia 318 and two Herons.

Further services

Eagle was now operating regular services to Pisa and Rimini in Italy, to the Austrian Tyrol airport of Innsbruck, to Dinard and La Baule, to Luxembourg, to Ostend from Manchester, as well as London to Majorca, and to Jersey, as well as Bermuda and the Bahamas as noted.

The airline had always had an eye on the Atlantic route, however, and in that same year Eagle joined forces with the Cunard Steam-Ship Company to become "Cunard Eagle Airways" and with the aim of operating a North Atlantic service between London and New York. Application was made for a licence to operate this route, and after long deliberation the Air Transport Licensing Board granted approval for a licence. BOAC strongly appealed against this, however, and the

Delivered as VR-BBW, this Boeing 707-465 later became G-ARWD, as shown here



Aircraft owned by Eagle and Associated Companies, 1948-64

Compiled by Frank Hudson and David Cotterell

G-AGNG	Dakota 4	G-AJSL	Dragon Rapide
G-AGNM	York	G-AJXB	Dragon Rapide
G-AGNW	York	G-AJXH	Consul
G-AGNY	York	G-AKBN	Viking 1B "Sir Henry Morgan", converted to 3B
G-AGNZ	York	G-AKBR	Halifax 8
G-AGOB	York	G-AKOB	Dragon Rapide
G-AGON	Viking 1	G-AKPL	Hawk Trainer 3
G-AGRR	Viking 1	G-ALVC	Lancaster 7
G-AGRS	Viking 1 "Lord Charles Beresford"	G-ALEF*	Halifax 8 "Red Eagle"
G-AGRT	Viking 1	G-AMGG	Viking 1B "Sir Robert Calder"
G-AGXH	Autocrat	G-AMGI	Viking 1B "Sir Henry Harwood"
G-AGYZ	Dakota 4	G-AMGJ	Viking 1B
G-AHCT	Dakota 4	G-AMGK	York
G-AHES	Proctor 1	G-AMGL	York
G-AHJD	Bristol 170 Mk. 21	G-AMNR	Viking 1B "Lord Charles Beresford" (2nd)
G-AHKS	Dragon Rapide	G-AMNX	Viking 1B "Sir Philip Brooke"
G-AHOS	Viking 1 "Sir John Warren"	G-AMPO	Dakota 4 "Sir Richard Kempenfelt"
G-AHOT	Viking 1	G-AMPS	Dakota 4
G-AHOW	Viking 1	G-AMPT	Dakota 4
G-AHOZ	Viking 1	G-AMSO	Dakota 4
G-AHPF	Viking 1	G-AMVA	Dakota 3
G-AHPH	Viking 1	G-AMYB	Dakota 4
G-AHPL	Viking 1B	G-AMZZ	Dakota 3
G-AHPM	Viking 1B "Lord Rodney", converted to 3B	G-AOCB	Viscount 755, also operated as VR-BBL
G-AHPO	Viking 1B "Lord Dundonald"	G-AOCC	Viscount 755, also operated as VR-BBM
G-AHPP	Viking 1B	G-AOJI	Dakota
G-AIAG	Proctor 5	G-AOVB	Britannia 312 "Endeavour"
G-AIAP*	Halifax 8	G-AOVT	Britannia 312 "Enterprise"
G-AIGM	Autocrat	G-AOYE	Dakota 4
G-AIHA	Viking 1B "Sir Richard Kempenfelt", converted to 3B	G-APAT	Viking 2 "Lord Hood"
G-AIJI	Autocrat	G-APDV	Viscount 805, also operated as VR-BAX
G-AIMA	Bristol 170 Mk. 21	G-APDX	Viscount 805, also operated as VR-BAY
G-AIVB	Viking 1B "Robert Blake"	G-APII	Valetta, not converted
G-AIVC	Viking 1B "Lord Collingwood"	G-APIJ	Valetta, not converted
G-AIVH	Viking 1B "Lord Howe"	G-APKT	Heron 1B
G-AIVL	Viking 1B "Lord Hawke", converted to 3B	G-APKU	Heron 1B
G-AIVO	Viking 1B "Edward Vernon", converted to 3B	G-APKV	Heron 1B
G-AJBA	Anson 1	G-APOM	DC-6A
G-AJBL*	Halifax 8	G-APON	DC-6A
G-AJBN	Viking 1B "Lord Nelson"	G-APSA	DC-6A
G-AJBO	Viking 1B "John Benbow"	G-APYY	Britannia 318
G-AJBP	Viking 1B "Sir Edward Hughes"	G-ARKA	Britannia 324 "Good Fortune"
G-AJBV	Viking 1B	G-ARKB	Britannia 324 "Resolution"
G-AJBW	Viking 1B "Sir William Cornwallis"	G-ARKH	Viscount 707, also operated as VR-BBJ
G-AJBX	Viking 1B "Sir Edward Hughes" (2nd of that name)	G-ARKI	Viscount 707, also operated as VR-BBH
G-AJCD	Viking 1B "Lord Barham", converted to 3B	G-ARMY	DC-6C, also operated as VR-BBP
G-AJCE	Viking 1B	G-ARWJ	DC-6B, also as VR-BBQ } chartered
G-AJCG	Halifax 8	G-ARZO	DC-6B
G-AJCS	Halifax 8	VR-BBW	Boeing 707-465, now G-ARWD
G-AJKS	Gemini 1A	VR-BBZ	Boeing 707-465, now G-ARWE, delivered direct to B.O.A.C.-Cunard
G-AJPH	Viking 1B "Lord Dundonald" (2nd), converted to 3B		* Served on Berlin Airlift.

then Minister of Aviation upheld this appeal on the grounds that there was an excess of capacity on the route anyway. The licence was revoked, and the Boeing 707 jets that had been ordered were in jeopardy of being cancelled before they even carried the Cunard Eagle colour scheme, but the airline took delivery of the first 707 and formulated a plan for operation of the aircraft over the "mid-Atlantic" route from Bermuda to London.

The aircraft was registered in Bermuda and did not, therefore, need a British Government licence to ply between the U.K. and Bermuda as an additional Atlantic carrier. Two Boeing 707-465s

were ordered for the route (and probable use elsewhere) and a third was "contemplated". Thus, once-tiny Eagle was now a jet operator.

Before the order for a third 707 was placed, however, there came the surprise of 1962 with the announcement of the formation of "BOAC-Cunard", which was a new company formed by the joining forces of the Cunard Steam-Ship Company—which held the majority shares in Cunard Eagle—and British Overseas Airways Corporation. The avowed purpose of this arrangement was to make for closer co-operation between the British land and sea carriers over the Atlantic routes and eliminate wasteful duplication of effort. The intention was for BOAC-Cunard to take over Cunard Eagle's mid-Atlantic services, and to this end the two Eagle companies operating in the western hemisphere, Cunard Eagle Airways (Bermuda) Ltd. and Cunard Eagle Airways (Bahamas) Ltd., became direct subsidiaries of BOAC-Cunard, and their operations were transferred to BOAC.

Mr. Bamberg was never happy about this arrangement—it was said by many in aviation circles that the position was one akin to his being "sold up the river"—and on 14th February 1963 he announced that he had signed an agreement with the

(continued opposite)



An Otter (left) and a Caribou of No. 134 Air Transport Unit, R.C.A.F., which is now supporting United Nations ground forces in the Yemen

With the R.C.A.F. in the Yemen

SINCE JUNE LAST year some fifty R.C.A.F. officers and men from No. 134 Air Transport Unit have been assigned to the Yemen as the aerial contingent of an eight-nation United Nations observer team. Using Otters and Caribous, they have been patrolling the somewhat vague border separating Saudi Arabia and the Yemen, and providing logistic support for the ground forces of the U.N. mission.

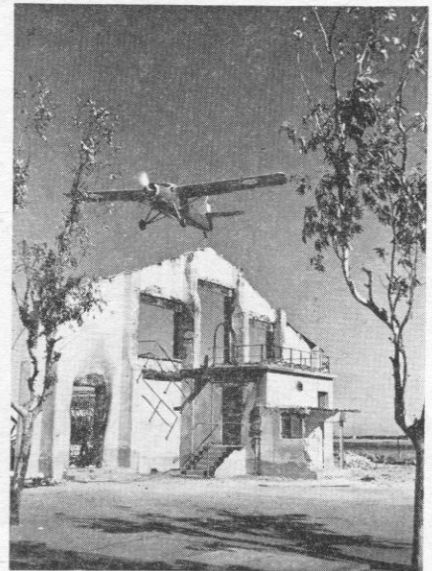
Situated on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, between Saudi Arabia and Aden, the Yemen has an area of about 74,000 square miles and a population of four million, who are still embroiled in civil war.

The trouble started in October 1962 when a republican group in the Yemen, supported by Egypt, revolted against the Imam and his royalist followers. The

rebels formed a republican government, while the ousted royalists formed a government in exile and, with the support of Saudi Arabia, began military operations to regain control.

Last June the United Nations secured an agreement from the warring factions to "disengage" while negotiations were carried out, and sent an observer group to the Yemen. Although both sides agreed to the U.N. proposal, neither has shown much inclination to implement it and fighting continues.

The Yemeni Air Force received some Yak-11 trainers from the Soviet Union some time ago, but they do not appear to be in use now; Russian pilots, however, have been flying Mi-4 helicopters for the republicans.



Another R.C.A.F. Otter, from No. 115 Comms. Flight, seen near Abu Sueir, Egypt, during an earlier U.N. mission

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Cunard Steam-Ship Company to purchase from them a 60 per cent share of Cunard Eagle Airways. This agreement came into effect on 1st March 1963. While somewhat complicated, this meant that once again Harold Bamberg was in complete charge of the management of the airline he had founded fifteen years earlier. It was the British company he now owned again, having lost claim to the associate com-

panies in the western hemisphere. The fleet then consisted of two Britannias, two Viscounts, and three DC-6s.

On 16th September the company's name was changed to British Eagle International Airlines Ltd. and soon after that, on 3rd November, the new company inaugurated a daily service from London to Glasgow using Britannias. The very next day, 4th November, daily services started on routes linking London with Edinburgh and Belfast. The DC-6s are currently used

for freighting and charter work, and for Air Ministry contract work; but it is expected that British Eagle, who recently acquired two Britannia 312s from BOAC, will standardise on the latter, having a requirement for up to ten of these large-capacity (101-seat) aircraft.

At London Airport the British Eagle facilities are available for engineering and maintenance of all the company's aircraft, which is performed together with maintenance work for Ghana Airways and BOAC. This is the headquarters base of what is now a somewhat smaller but nonetheless active "Eagle", and which is now re-establishing itself as a forward-thinking and industrious British independent airline.

One of British Eagle's current fleet of Britannias, G-ARKA is here seen at Guildford Airpori, Western Australia (Photo: Alistair Coutts)



Present fleet

- Britannia 324 G-ARKA "Good Fortune".
- Britannia 324 G-ARKB "Resolution".
- Britannia 312 G-AOVB "Endeavour".
- Britannia 312 G-AOVT "Enterprise".
- Viscount V755 G-AOCB.
- Viscount V755 G-AOCC.
- DC-6C G-APON.
- DC-6C G-APSA.
- DC-6C G-ARMY.