

TRN/AVI/2#12

PUBLICITY.

(WEEKLY NEWS ETC.)

Acc No: 2023/006.

Article for "The World" magazine. 2.xii.'53.

"The World's Smallest Colony."

Among Britain's most remote Colonial possessions are the windswept Falkland Islands, lying in the South Atlantic some 350 miles to the eastward of the entrance to the Strait of Magellan. The group consists of two main islands & more than a hundred islets & rocks covering an area roughly equal to that of Wales. The total population of the Colony is only 2400, mostly of English & Scottish origin, although descendants of settlers from practically every European country are to be found there. Nearly half the total inhabitants live in the capital, Port Stanley, which is the only town of the islands, situated at the easternmost extremity of the group. The remainder live on the forty sheep stations scattered throughout the islands, which vary

in size from a small farm run by a man & his wife, to the biggest holding in the British Empire, one section of which has 130 people living on it.

The livelihood of the islanders is entirely dependent upon sheep farming, the main product being wool, backed by a certain amount of mutton from a recently established freezer. With the exception of meat, vegetables & a small amount of dairy produce, every necessity of life has to be imported, mostly from the United Kingdom via Montevideo. The only regular connection the Colony has with the outside world is a small cargo/pasenger vessel of some 850 tons, the R.M.S. "Gitzroy", owned by the Falkland Islands Company. Once a month, across some of the stormiest seas in the world, this little ship makes the 1000 mile voyage northwards to Montevideo laden with wool, returning with the mails & general cargo for the islands.

Internal communications around the islands are equally difficult, for the peaty terrain, interspersed with patches of rock, has precluded the construction of roads between the capital & the farms. Prior to the last war, communication with the settlements was made by the "Tirzay", which sailed on a coasting voyage between her visits to Montevideo, & by several small sailing ships plying their trade around the Colony. These cutters & schooners gradually declined in number owing to the high cost of replacement, & it became obvious during the immediate post-war period that some other & faster means of transport would have to be devised, particularly for the care & attention of sick persons on the farms who had to be brought to Port Stanley for hospital treatment.

This necessity was the origin of the Falkland Islands Government Air Service,

which was started in 1948 by the Governor, Lt. G. Sir Miles Clifford, K.B.E., C.M.G., E.D., who introduced the necessary legislation to initiate an experimental air ambulance service, using two second-hand Custer V's for the purpose. It was also intended to improve mail deliveries to the farms by carrying out 'drops' whenever opportunity permitted.

The original staff consisted of an ex-Sleek Air Arm pilot, Mr V.H. Spencer, assisted by anyone he could persuade to help him! In Port Stanley a hangar was built on the race course which was used as a landing strip, while at the farms any suitable field near the settlement was used. None of these were ideal - that in Stanley was narrow, short & uneven, & could only be used with a westerly or easterly wind, & while some of the settlement landing grounds were better, at many the grass was too long or the ground too soft for comfort. Nevertheless,

despite these difficulties, the Air Service was a great success from the start, the life of a small girl being saved during the first month of operation, & several other urgent sick cases being brought into hospital during the first year. Much of this initial success can be attributed to the enthusiasm of the pilot, for he had not only poor landing grounds, lack of skilled maintenance & few safety devices to contend with, but also the weather conditions, which were far from ideal for the operation of light aircraft. The area is almost continuously swept by strong winds which reach gale force one day in five on an average.

During the second year a big improvement was made with the employment of a qualified engineer & a changeover from landplanes to seaplanes. As there are no roads in the Colony, all the farms have been built near the sea to facilitate delivery of supplies by

ship, & most possess a good harbour. In consequence, it was always obvious that seaplanes would be the best type of aircraft to use in the Falklands, but unfortunately the initial capital expenditure involved in establishing these was more than the Colony could afford when the Air Service was started. This difficulty was solved by the arrival in Port Stanley of a Canadian Norseman V seaplane & an Austin V seaplane, both of which had been used in relieving a scientific survey party whose based base could not be reached by the supply ship, R.R.S. "John Biscoe" owing to very severe ice conditions in 1949. These aircraft were the property of the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, a Government expedition responsible for the investigation & administration of the Dependencies of the Falkland Islands, a vast sector of the Antarctic continent, stretching to the pole itself. After their mission was completed they were made available to the Air

7

Service, and were soon operating with marked success in the Colony. A hangar and a slipway were soon constructed on the shores of Stanley Harbour, and a larger ground staff was established since the Air Service was now undertaking passenger flights in addition to its previous duties.

Considering the fact that two years before many people in the islands had never seen an aircraft, the demand for flights was amazing, & has always been greater than the payload limitations of the aircraft & the number of flying days can satisfy. It is but rarely that the seaplanes fly without a maximum load, either on the outward or the return journeys. Young & old alike climb into the aircraft & are carried in a matter of hours between their homestead & the town - a journey that a few years ago would have meant many uncomfortable hours on horseback or in a small boat. At the end of their visit they are flown

back to their settlement once more, where they stay for perhaps a year before making another flight. In all, during five years of operation, 2700 passengers have been flown, which must make the Falklands one of the most air-minded communities in the world by proportion to the size of the population.

Let us follow a typical day's operation by the Air Service, starting in the morning when the Meteorological Office in Stanley receives weather reports by R/T from many of the farms. A flight forecast is composed from these reports & is passed to the pilot while the ground staff are launching the aircraft. Passengers selected for the day's flights are alerted by a town relay system, most households possessing a speaker. By the time the passengers have assembled on the jetty & their baggage has been weighed (a free allowance of 30 lbs per head is allowed) the Beaver, which has recently replaced the Norseman, is taxiing down the harbour

to the mooring buoy where the passengers are transferred from the crash tender.

After an amazingly short run the Beaver takes off & climbs up over the surrounding ring of hills until its cruising altitude of about 2000 feet is reached, when course is set for our first stop, Darwin. This settlement is only 45 miles from Stanley, but it is probably, from the passengers point of view, the most uncomfortable part of the flight, as the wind sweeping over the high mountains in the centre of the East Falkland make conditions very bumpy. However, we are soon at our destination & the aircraft alights on a fine harbour with a settlement on its shore. The most prominent building is the wool shed, the second largest wool shed in the world. A rowing boat is out to meet us, the pilot's R/T conversation with the office having been overheard & the aircraft's E.T.A. at the settlement discovered. Two passengers

disembark, returning to their homes after a holiday in town, & a shepherd who has broken his arm through a fall from a horse is taken aboard, bound for the hospital in Stanley.

The next stop is Fox Bay, the largest settlement on the West Falkland of some twenty minutes flying time further on. The harbour at Fox Bay is more open than Darwin's, the approach being made between two prominent headlands: often a heavy swell runs right up to the jetty here, but today we are lucky & with very little delay two more passengers and some mail are off loaded into the waiting boat.

So the flight progresses, from a few farms being visited during the day. In the afternoon the Beaver returns to Stanley, where, after disembarking the incoming passengers, it is cleaned, washed down to eliminate the corrosive effects of salt spray, & serviced ready for the next day's flying.

Meanwhile the Auster has also been out, transferring the dentist from one farm to another + bringing in a young boy suffering from acute appendicitis.

This brief description may give you some idea of what a flying day is like in the Falklands - I will not try to describe a non-flying day - a day when the harbour is covered with white-capped waves & hail squalls sweep down the hill sides. You can perhaps picture us with our faces turned to the window, watching for the break that will allow us to start flying!

During the five years flying so far carried out much has been learned by the Air Service concerning this type of operation. Improvement & expansion has been considerable: two pilots are now employed - one of them combining these duties with those of Harbour Master: two ground engineers, an apprentice mechanic & a coxswain for the crash tender.

make up the ground staff, while the office work & R/T communications are attended by a clerk. Two aircraft are at present in service, a new DH(c) 2 Beaver seaplane & one of the old Austin V landplanes converted to floats. A second Austin seaplane is expected to be brought back into service during 1954.

It appears that the Air Service has expanded to its greatest possible extent, & its flying is now limited solely by the weather conditions, the prevailing strong winds limiting flying to one day out of two. As larger aircraft, better able to cope with the gusts & choppy seas would be economically impossible, any future improvement must be in better flight planning & utilisation of existing opportunities. As it is, the target figure of 1000 passengers per year, which represents nearly half the Colony's total population, will be quite an achievement for an organisation employing only six men.

2000 words.

To be included in the above article a sketch map of the Colony & 3 photographs of the Air Service. Also following letter:-

Dear Sir,

I thank you for your letter of October 23rd, asking for information about the Falkland Islands Government Air Service for inclusion as an article in your magazine.

I have done the best I can for you by writing an account of the Air Service's activities in the Colony in what, I hope, will be a presentable form - unfortunately you did not indicate what length of article was proposed, so I have made this account longer than you probably require to allow you to cut - but please do not alter the sense of any of the passages.

I have also included two sketch maps, which may be used to illustrate the text, & 3 negatives of photographs which

have been taken locally. In this connection, I should perhaps mention that photographs of our Norseman in the Antarctic may be available from the Director, F.I.D.S. Scientific Bureau, Rooms 42-44, 5th Floor, Queen Anne's Chambers, Broadway, London, S.W.1. As this use of the norseman is mentioned in the text & these photographs are particularly impressive, you may wish to insert one.

Dr Sachs, the Director, would, I am sure, be willing to provide you with a suitable caption for the selected photograph.

I would be very grateful if you could return the enclosed negatives to me after you have finished with them - they are on loan to me.

On the hopes that these particulars will enable you to produce your article,

Yours very truly,

Weekly News

4. XII. 53

Harbour Department. "Philomel" has been in port all this week & her crew have been engaged in moving a large oil-tank from the old power station to the end of the Government Jetty, where it will be used as a fuel store. This tank was once fitted in the "Kelly", which was wrecked in Port William or what are known now as Kelly Rocks. After being salvaged for Estate Louis Williams it was purchased by the Government and established near the old power station where it has been for many years.

A wireless mast has been erected on the jetty for the R/T set in the harbour master's office - the building of this is almost completed, and the Marine Fitting Shop & the "Philomel" store have already been moved down onto the jetty.

The Air Service have only been able to fly one day this week - that was today -

owing to the fact that some routine maintenance work was necessary to clean corrosion off the Beaver. Settlements visited today were: - Lively Island, Narwhal, Bleaker Island, Speechwell Island, Port Howard & Ajax Bay, twelve passengers in all travelling.

Weekly News.

II. XII. '53.

of the Air Service has had a good week's flying, the Beaver having been out on five days. On Saturday Mr Devrell visited Salvador, North Arm & Seal Inlet, & Dr Dillenbrand was carried on a routine medical visit to the North Camps settlements at the same time. Monday's flight included stops at Cigax Bay, Port Howard, San Carlos & Port San Carlos. No flying was carried out on Tuesday owing to the public holidays, but on Wednesday, after disembarking Government officials visiting the new power house at Fox Bay, Mr Devrell carried on with Dr Szely to visit patients at Weddell & Pebble Islands, dropping mail at some of the settlements on the West on the way. After returning with Dr Szely to Fox Bay, the Beaver returned to Stanley with the passengers from there. Yesterday Salvador, Darwin & Hill Cove were visited & the mail drop to

insert end.

Settlements on the West was completed. In all 26 passengers were flown during these five days.

The M/V "Philomel" sailed from Stanley yesterday morning bound for Darwin, Bleaker Is., Sea Lion Is., North Arm, Speedwell Is. & Albemarle carrying the Xmas mails for these parts. The object of this voyage was to ensure that all settlements in the islands are visited by a ship before Xmas - most of them are of course covered by the itineraries of the "Tidzong" & the "Martin S."

When I went down to collect the Harbour Department news today, I had to visit the new office on the Government Jetty & so had a chance to see around the new building. The office is at the western end of the jetty, with a fine view over the harbour in all directions. It is much more spacious & comfortable than their previous room, & Mr Stucke assures me that it is more convenient than the old office, although

whether people going to pay their bills on a stormy day will think so I rather doubt!

In the same building is a warehouse for "Polaris" freights - there was very little cargo in there today as "Polaris" has just sailed, but I did see the new engine for the "Alert" which arrived by the fast "Sitznay". This is a hister diesel, & looks very smart & tidy - it is more powerful than the old engine which was in service for 27 years, & so should give the "Alert" an improved performance. I am told that it is exactly the same engine as used in the "Polaris" which & that the spare parts are interchangeable which is a great asset.

A workshop & a store have also been incorporated in the building, & seem to me to be very handy for the boats. Mr O'Huckle says that the credit for getting the building finished so quickly ought to go to Mr Eric Lupton & his assistant, Mr Summers. It was only two months ago that they commenced dismantling at the cannery, & in

addition to the re-erection, they had a large number of alterations to make.

The jetty is also finished now - a hand rail has been put along the side leading to the office, so no one need be frightened of slipping into the water. And in addition to the crane for unloading heavy equipment from ships using this berth, a large oil storage tank has been put there for re-fuelling the "Pichonel" & "Alert". A good deal of clearing up remains to be done, but when this is completed the jetty will look very fine indeed.

Inset:- Today Pat San Carlos & Caja Bay were visited, two passengers travelling out & five in.

Weekly News.

18. XII. '53.

The M/V "Philomel" returned to Stanley on Monday evening from her fast camp voyage, and today she visited settlements in Berkeley Sound. "Philomel" is not expected to sail again until after Christmas.

The Air Service has only been active on two days this week, but I understand that these flights have been sufficient to clear off all but one of the waiting passengers & that in consequence if there are two good flying days next week all the passengers with Christmas flight bookings will be satisfied. Altogether thirteen passengers were carried during the week, Speedwell Island, Darwin, Fitzroy, San Carlos, Douglas Station, Lijas Bay, Seal Islet & North Cun being visited.

Weekly News.

25. XII. '53.

The Air Service has had a good week's flying which allowed them to complete all the Christmas passenger bookings in good time - There was only one slight disappointment - on Wednesday a booking was received for a flight from Hill Cove to Port Howard, but owing to the strong wind this was impossible & the flight had to be cancelled. Settlements visited during the week were Salvador, Walker Creek, Fox Bay, Ajax Bay, Port San Carlos, Douglas Station, Teal Inlet, Ochignay, Hill Cove, & Goose Green.

The Custer reappeared in the air again on Monday after its overhaul & was used for passengers on Tuesday & Wednesday. I have not seen this aircraft myself since it started flying again, but I understand that the interior has been made more comfortable for passengers & certainly looks better than it used to. On Wednesday morning we in Stanley were surprised

to hear the Custer flying at 6 o'clock in the morning - & it arrived at Goose Green in time to see the cows being milked, so I expect the people there were surprised too! This flight was to fetch in two lambs which Darwin Farm very kindly gave to the patients in the hospital for dinner today. And as a matter of interest I understand that it will be quite a common thing for us to see the Custer early like this during the next few weeks as photographs of every settlement are to be taken for a Gazetteer of the islands - mainly for use of future pilots. Members of the Boys Brigade have kindly offered to assist by acting as Photographers during these flights.

Weekly News

1. 1. '54.

The Air Service have had a very good week flying, & up to today a total of ~~34~~ 35 passengers had been carried in three days, ~~+ a further~~ were carried today. December proved to be one of the best months the Air Service has ever had, a total of 111 passengers being carried during the month with a revenue of approximately £395. Previous best months were June 1950, with 123 passengers and £390 revenue, & November 1951, with 105 passengers & £500 revenue.

* Insertion.

The M/V "Phelan" has remained in harbour all the week, there being no call for her services in the camp. I understand that the "Phelan" will shortly be altered internally to take the chest specialist on a camp voyage to visit all settlements; alterations will include the construction of an x-ray room, a dark room & 2 dressing

rooms in what is now the hold, & the establishment of a generator on deck to provide the necessary electric power for the x-ray machine. Of course, all these alterations will be of a temporary nature, & can be quickly removed after the voyage is completed, but it is hoped that by making these arrangements those campers who are unable to visit the specialist in Stanley will have the opportunity of seeing him at their own farm under conditions almost as good as they would expect in the hospital.

There is a late news item about the "Philomel" which has been received since this was written. She was called away this morning from Stanley to fetch in a case from Pat Louis settlement. I'm afraid I have no further details at present.

* Insertion:- Settlements visited by the aircraft were:- Seal Inlet, Fitzroy, Walker Creek, Pat Stephens, New Island, Fox Bay, Cijax Bay, Weddel Island, Salvada, P.S.C., Douglas Station, & Pat Louis.

Weekly News.

8. 1. '54.

The M/V "Philemon" sailed from Agas Bay on Tuesday, returning to Stanley yesterday with a compressor which is on loan to the Colonial Government from the C.D.C. It will be used to prepare the engine beds for new generators in the power station I believe. Some passengers sailed with the "Philemon" to Agas Bay - Messrs H. Biggs, T. Petersen, C. Jacobsen & R. Aldridge, while Mr Northwood made the round trip.

The "Cleat" was refloated from the Government slipway on Monday evening after the completion of the new engine bed by Mr George Bowles. The engine was put into the boat yesterday & she should be ready for trials fairly soon, as there is only the plumbing left to be done.

With both planes active on three days

The Air Service have had a good week's flying, a total of 46 passengers being carried. Settlements visited were Port Howard, Pebble Island, Fox Bay, Hill Cove, Charlies, Speedwell Island, Bleaker Island, North Arm, Port San Carlos, Ajax Bay, San Carlos, Salvada, Rincon Grande, Johnsons Harbour, Darwin & Bluff Cove.

On Wednesday morning the Auster left Stanley early with Mrs Osborne & child bound for Bleaker Island. After taking off again from Bleaker, the Gullie ran into a strong head wind on the way to Darwin & arrived there to pick up Mr Young with barely enough petrol left for the return flight to Stanley. Over Port Harriet his tank was practically empty, & rather than risk an engine failure over Lappers Hill he put down near Port Harriet house & waited for more petrol to be sent out from Stanley. This may dispel some of the rumours that were soon heard in Stanley when

-this aircraft did not arrive on time.

Since Christmas 81 passengers have been flown by the Air Service, but I am told that there are still 36 passengers awaiting flights immediately & there are at least another 25 bookings after that to be flown before the end of the month, so if the Air Service have any luck at all with the weather this should prove to be another record month.

Weekly News.

15. 1. '54.

Weather during the latter part of this week restricted flying to three days, during which the Air Service carried 33 passengers, the following settlements being visited - Seal Inlet, Douglas Station, Johnsons Harbour, Hill Cover, Charles, Fox Bay, New Island, Weddell Island, Port San Carlos, San Carlos, Ajax Bay, Lively Island, Speedwell Island, & Darwin. Altogether the Air Service has carried 113 passengers since the Christmas holidays.

Weekly News.

22. 1. '54

The M/V "Phibmel" sailed from Stanley yesterday morning bound for Ajax Bay, where she arrived at noon today, & thence on around the West Island. She carried four passengers on the first stage of her voyage, Messers G. Boyd, E. Brewster & 2 men from the F.I.C., who I believe are going there to assist in the erection of a skinning shed.

The Air Service have had another good week flying despite the poor weather, & fifty passengers have been flown. This is really too many to read out on this broadcast, so their names & those of the settlements visited are being omitted this week.

Weekly News.

29. 1. '54

The Civil Service has been hampered this week by the strong winds which have limited flying to two days, & in consequence the number of passengers carried has fallen to 18 for the week. Mr O'Stuckle has asked me to express his regrets to those people on the West who were suddenly dropped from the flight at the beginning of the week owing to the necessity of making a flight with the police to fetch a man ^{Stanley} into answer a charge of assault. Quite obviously such cases have to have priority, however undeserving the individual in himself may be.

BEAVER

The M/V "Phidias" is now at ~~Bleaker~~ Island where she has been beached for the inspection of her stem gland. She still has Weddell Island, Port Stephens & Fox Bay to visit before returning to Stanley.

Outline of Colonial Office Annual Pamphlet.

Internal Communications

The peaty terrain, interspersed with patches of rock, has precluded the construction of roads or railways between Stanley & the settlements & internal communications within the Colony are therefore dependent upon sea or air travel, or upon riding on horseback, which is still the most commonly used method of travelling in the islands.

Sea connections between Stanley & the settlements are maintained by the S.S. "Sir George" & the charter vessels mentioned earlier, backed up by three small coasting vessels of from 40 to 120 tons. Two of these are privately owned while the third is operated by the Government. Most settlements are visited by a ship once every six to eight weeks, although some of the smaller farms may have

to wait for three months between visits.

An Air Service, operated by the Government, was started in 1948 - to improve communications between the capital & the settlements, and particularly to assist the treatment of sick persons. To start with an Auster landplane was used, but with an increasing demand for the service, a change was made to the more easily operated seaplane & the service now possesses a Canadian De Havilland "Beaver" seaplane & an Auster seaplane, while a second Auster is expected to be brought into service during 1954.

The vital statistics of this Air Service are well illustrated in the graph.

Long rides on horseback are still made in the Falklands between the farms & into town. Over the rough & virtually trackless countryside these require a high degree of endurance & knowledge of the local ground, since slight deviations from the accepted

route may result in the loss of one horse in a bog. Few rides require less than five hours to complete, & in consequence it is hardly surprising that many people in the islands are now abandoning the horse in favour of the aircraft as a means of transport.

Heavy lorries, tractors & tracked vehicles (Bren gun carriers) are used on the farms to move fencing & heavy equipment about, most of this work being done in the summer months while the ground is dry & hard.

Telephones, R/T & W/T as in previous articles.

Weekly News.5. 11. '54.
⁽²⁾

The M/V "Phelan" returned to Stanley last night from her voyage around the West. She brought the following passengers into town:- Bishop Evans, Miss Halliday, Miss Davis, Mr Frank Gleadell, Mr Ramsay, Master Benaten, & Mr Stannard.

The Air Service has been flying on four days this week & moved a total of forty passengers. Despite indifferent flying weather, last month proved to be the best. The Air Service has ever had, a total of 155 passengers being carried & £602 of revenue being earned.

Weekly News

12. 2. '54.

The Cun Service have operated on six days during the past week, only Sunday being missed & have carried a total of forty passengers - as is usual nowadays, the list is too long to give individual names. This brings the number of passengers carried during February to Seventy, so with any luck at all the total for this month should again exceed a hundred, especially as there are already another fifty bookings to be carried out before the 28th. The staff of the Cun Service must have had a very busy time during this week, because on three mornings the Custer has left Stanley before six o'clock in the morning & twice the Beaver has returned as late as eight o'clock in the evening. However, the results certainly appear to justify these efforts.



