

# TROOPING BY AIR

*How the Independent Operators are Performing a Valuable National Service*

SOON after the close of the last war, shipowners were very quick to realize the many advantages held by the aeroplane in the economical transportation of ships' crews between the ports of the world. It gradually became appreciated that if it were cheaper for one user of valuable manpower to employ the aeroplane as a definite saver of time and money, it would be equally beneficial for other large employers—such as the War Office—to adopt the same methods. Airwork, Ltd., were among the first to advocate—in 1949—the carrying of troops by air and, in 1950, they became the first of many British independent air transport operators to supplement the work of the troopship. Since that time the several companies concerned have greatly expanded their trooping business while, for some, it has become their bread-and-butter activity. The purpose of this review is to examine briefly the parts played by individual operators participating in this highly organized and very successful new branch of commercial aviation, which is at present responsible for troop transportation at the rate of more than 120,000 a year.

Partly due to their taking over many of Airwork's flights because of the temporary withdrawal of this company's three Hermes for engine modifications, Skyways of London are currently handling almost half the trooping business, flying Servicemen and their families at the rate of over 50,000 a year. In their own words, Skyways have established a "moving air belt" between the U.K. and the Middle East. They first started trooping in September 1951 with one York—the first civil "trooplane," incidentally, to have backward-facing seats. Now Skyways have six to eight 43-seat Yorks continuously in service on trooping flights and completing more than 50 round trips each month to the Middle East alone.

Since Skyways started these flights only twelve months ago they have carried 30,000 Servicemen and their dependents and continue to do so at the rate of 4,500 a month. On July 2nd, 1952, 36-seat Skyways Yorks began to fly troops to and from Jamaica. Flying from Stansted (the company recently moved to this new base from Bovingdon), via Keflavik, Gander and Bermuda, the Yorks take 27 hours flying time and make three or four trips each month. It is expected in charter circles that Skyways will be the

*Modern troopship: this attractively marked Viking 1A of Crewsair Ltd., is one of the several types of aircraft used by British independent companies on trooping flights; others include the Hermes (Airwork), York (Skyways and Eagle), and Solent (Aquila). Vikings are also used by Airwork and Hunting.*



successful tenderer for a new trooping service across the North Atlantic to Dorval.

Another very big share of the trooping business goes to Airwork, who normally fly to the Middle East and to Singapore with Hermes. While these aircraft are out of service, however, the work is being undertaken by other independent companies. Airwork's other big job is performed by Vikings based at Malta and Fayid; carrying 20,000 military personnel each year, these aircraft have largely replaced those of Transport Command and the corvettes of the Royal Navy in Mediterranean and Middle East communications work. To replace the Vikings, Airwork are currently giving serious consideration to the Vickers Viscount 700. For other possible work they are taking a good look at the projected civil Valiant, the Britannia (in particular), and both the Comet Series II and III; naturally, however, they are thinking in terms of 1956 and after.

Not necessarily in Airwork's case, but among the independents in general, finance is the greatest barrier facing the purchase of replacement aircraft. Whereas, for example, two new troopships are now being constructed for owners who receive a ten-year operating contract almost automatically, airlines are only able to seek finance for new trooping aircraft on the basis of a two-year contract and, in some cases, no contract at all; naturally, potential backers want more guarantee than this.

Hunting Air Travel fly about 30,000 troops and dependents each year between the U.K. and Gibraltar and Malta. Vickers Vikings are used exclusively.

Eagle Aviation arrived on the scene in the summer of 1951, making four trips a month to Singapore with 45-seat Yorks. These flights continued for six months and then, early in 1952, the company began to fly to Livingstone at a frequency of six trips a month. In August of this year they tendered successfully for three flights a month to Singapore; now, with five Yorks in service, they are flying troops and their families at the rate of 10,000 a year.

Newcomers to the trooping business, Aquila Airways began to operate a single 53-seat Short Solent flying-boat from Southampton to Singapore at the end of August, travelling via Malta, Beirut, Bahrain and Ceylon. They hold but a short-term initial contract but already it is being realized that the spacious Solent has more to offer the family, and especially the children, on such a long journey. Consequently, the present arrangement is for the troops to travel by Yorks and for their dependents to recline in the extra luxury of the Solent. Aquila say they are looking forward to the day of the Princess and that from operating figures available the giant flying-boat appears very attractive for trooping.

From the operational point of view, Crewsair, who operate the West African trooping service to Accra (and sometimes on to Freetown), have probably the most difficult route of all. They started their present contract in April 1952 and with their four 27-seat Vikings have completed 35 round trips to date. Flying via Bordeaux, Gibraltar (night-stop), Gao, Kano (night-stop) and Lagos, Crewsair complete each 7,000-mile round-trip in four to seven days, depending on the maintenance requirement. The present frequency of this West African service is about seven trips a month, corresponding to 4,500 passengers a year. A recent V.I.P. passenger coming home on leave was the G.O.C. West African Command, Lt. Gen. Whistler.

It is generally believed in air-trooping circles that the business has only just begun and that there will be substantial increases in the number of troops carried in the relatively near future. These opinions, which are based on fact, are heavily underlined by the quite rapid build-up of business during the last three months.

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