

## Airline Profile / NUMBER FOUR IN THE SERIES

## Bahamas Airways

By the Air Transport Editor



**Y**OU see that place down there? That's Paradise Island—it belongs to an American called Huntington Hartford. He threw a party there the other day that cost £70,000." Awed, I craned forward in the jump seat of the Bahamas Airways DC-3 to have a look. "They say the fireworks alone cost £15,000," the pilot added. "And you see that lighthouse? It's owned by a Bahamian called Fane Solomon, who always wanted to live in a lighthouse, so he built himself one. He likes lighthouses."

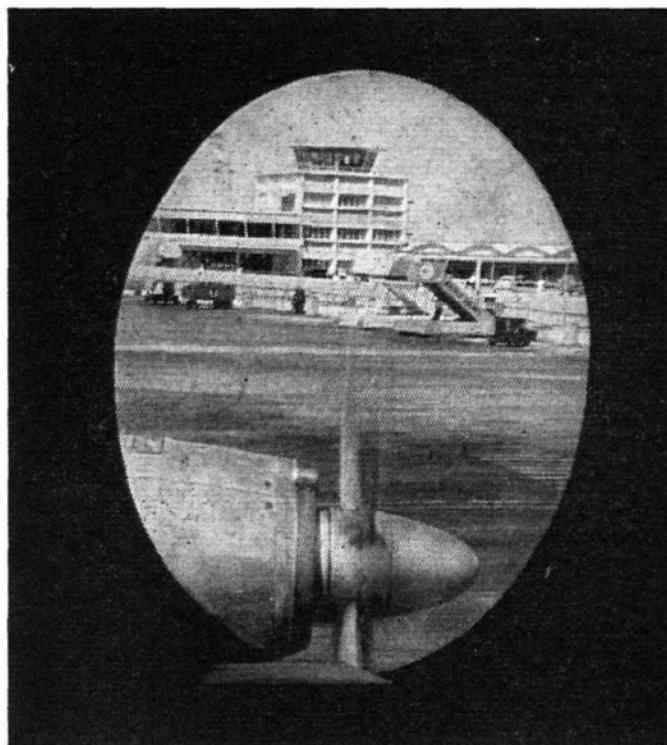
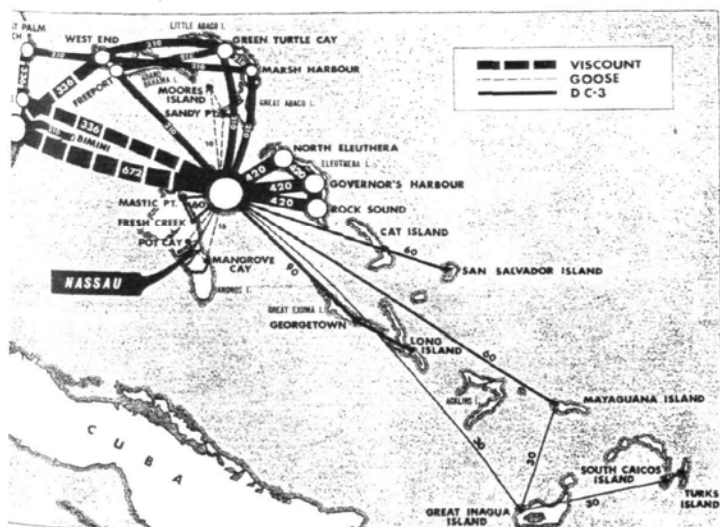
Mr Huntington Hartford and Mr Solomon are not, so far as I know, connected with Bahamas Airways; but their investments in Britain's rich colony are typical of a prosperity which so far has eluded the local airline, now BOAC's most financially burdensome associate.

Later, at Mastic Point, I saw a wrecked B-17 by the side of the runway, where it has remained since the day two years ago when it tried to take off with 19,000lb of cucumbers on board. I suppose the wreck *could* be regarded as a monument to those who have tried to get more out of Bahamas air transport than they have put in; but perhaps this is stretching a point. It's just a good story, especially as only the cucumbers were bruised. I am still wondering how anybody managed to get 19,000lb of this vegetable on board a B-17.

A couple of mornings spent island-hopping in Bahamas Airways DC-3s, with aphorism-rich pilots who seem to be experts in the commercial, social and political history of the place, do not make one an expert in the problems of the airline. But the experience does help to verify some of the answers to the question so often asked about Bahamas Airways: Why is the airline of this prosperous colony, where prodigious amounts of money are invested in business and squandered on pleasure, such a burden on BOAC?

Sitting up front in a Bahamas Airways DC-3, flying at 1,000ft with the side windows wide open for natural air conditioning, you can contemplate the mesmeric beauty and romance of the beaches, coves and reefs, and appreciate the reason why nearly 370,000 people visited the Bahamas Islands last year. Each island of the Exuma chain, for example, is a variation on one's basic conception of where the *Hispaniola* might have anchored. The beaches, of pink or white coral sand, are lapped by an emerald sea of unimaginable clarity. "People come here," I was told, "for all the Ss—

Traffic density on BAL's route network is indicated approximately by thickness of line. The figures indicate the number of one-way seats scheduled per month in the peak season (December 15-April 15). Revenue rates are about a shilling a mile north of a line roughly drawn Miami-Nassau-Rock Sound (resort area) and about 8d south of the line (social-service area)



Windsor Field, Nassau, home of Bahamas Airways Ltd—BAL for short

ILLUSTRATED BY "FLIGHT INTERNATIONAL" PHOTOGRAPHS

sunshine, sand, sea, sailing, surfing, skin-diving, and so on—not necessarily in that order."

So they come, mostly Americans, more and more every year. Many of them fly into Nassau, the capital of the colony on New Providence Island, where more than half of the 100,000 population lives. From Florida alone last year 60,000 were flown in by Pan American, 30,000 by Mackey, 30,000 by Cunard Eagle, and 18,000 by Bahamas Airways. It is pretty obvious that BAL have tough competition on their international routes.

On the domestic island routes the DC-3s do a fine job, and they are acceptable enough to the Bahamians who use them to move between Nassau and the Out Islands. But for how much longer will they be acceptable to jet-conscious Americans? And for how much longer will they be acceptable to American businessmen and investors visiting Freeport, Mr Groves' big new Customs-free industrial enterprise in Grand Bahama? Executives of the US Steel Corporation, who are building a \$38m new factory at Freeport, and who operate their own Viscounts, can scarcely regard the DC-3 as the mostest in transportation. Freeport services alone provide BAL with a strong compulsion to offer something better than DC-3s.

This could be one of the reasons why BAL's chairman, Air Cdre G. J. Powell, is negotiating to lease, with an option to purchase, three, and perhaps four, ex-Avensa Fairchild Friendships from a Miami company (April 26 issue, page 643). The F-27's FAA maintenance schedule, BAL hope, will be endorsed by the ARB to enable these aircraft to be maintained by Airwork International in Miami as well as by Bahamas Airways at Nassau. This novel concept of dual maintenance nationality will enable the F-27s to be scheduled Florida-Nassau (BAL's present international



Chief engineer of Bahamas Airways is Mr Jack Blitz (right), seen here at Nassau with one of the airline's two Viscount 702s. With him is Mr David Walker, Vickers' technical representative in Washington

## BAHAMAS AIRWAYS...



BAL operate five DC-3s on island services, and two others belonging to a Miami firm are operated in BAL colours (US-registered) by contract pilots on services from Florida to Freeport. One of the five BAL aircraft will be sold if the Friendship deal goes through. This picture was taken at Andros Town

The Goose never laid any golden eggs for BAL. Ironically enough, one of the first decisions of Air Cdre Powell—an ex-flying boat skipper—was to dispose of two of BAL's three boats. They were too costly to operate and maintain—corrosion being one of the biggest problems



axis) and Florida-Freeport (the up-and-coming international axis) with complete flexibility.

At present twice-daily BAL DC-3 shuttles link Freeport with the three Florida fountainheads of its future wealth—Miami, Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach. These services are still in the development stage, with load factors not yet touching the fifties. They are operated by two US-registered DC-3s in BAL colours chartered from Dupont, maintained by Airwork International in Miami, and flown by contract pilots in BAL uniform. This unusual though apparently quite successful arrangement may be continued, perhaps with more BAL emphasis, with the Friendships. Traffic on the Florida - Freeport route has, reports Air Cdre Powell, been a great success—"the services have achieved results I never thought possible."

It will mean goodbye to the two Viscount 702s chartered in July 1961 from BOAC Associated Companies to replace the hopelessly uncompetitive Hermes introduced during the period of BAL's control by private enterprise in 1960. The Viscounts did much to restore BAL's morale and competitive position on the Florida route. But they proved to be economically beyond the company's as yet inadequate engineering organization; and, furthermore, they

are both coming up for the expensive spar-boom changes necessary on early production Viscount aircraft. Friendships, if the proposed maintenance arrangement is ARB-approved, will provide BAL with a highly competitive aeroplane capable of both bush flying in and out of the rough airstrips in the Out Islands and of meeting heavy quality competition on the routes to Florida. In the conflicting demands of these different operations lies one of the main reasons for BAL's high costs.

From the cockpit of the DC-3, in the course of some fairly concentrated island-hopping, I saw something of what I had heard about the Out Islands operations of Bahamas Airways. Every half hour, it seemed, I had to move my legs so that the co-pilot could get at the flap and undercarriage selectors. Average sector time is, in fact, just about half an hour, and average sector length only 72 miles. One co-pilot said he had done 146 take-offs and 146 landings in a recent 17-day period. "When I was with Airwork and Eagle," he said, "mostly on long-haul charter flying, I didn't do that many landings in six months."

Of the 19 captains and six first officers, three—including the chief pilot, Capt P. E. Farrington—are Bahamian; six are British, and the rest are Canadian, American and Australian. Captains earn up to £4,000 and co-pilots up to £2,575, with allowances for a car (£2 15s a week) and meals (about £3 a day). The pilots do an average of five hours' flying and eight landings a day, and they feel strongly that their utilization is as high as it could reasonably be considering the conditions. Significantly, the rate of pilot turnover is low, and the chief pilot's file of applications is thick. A Bahamas Airways pilot works hard (to an observably high standard); and he enjoys life in the Bahamas. He is not, it appears, one of the airline's big problems.

Not, at any rate, as big a problem as the limited number of hours available for earning revenue. Only eight of the 23 Out Island strips have lighting, and the revenue-earning day is effectively limited to 10 hours—believed to be one of the lowest of any airline in the world. When we taxied in at Nassau, trundling after our long shadow from the setting sun, the skipper pointed to the four DC-3s, two Aero Commanders, one Goose and two Viscounts on the ramp and said: "Well there we are—the fleet's in port."

Not surprisingly, fleet utilization is low—about 1,000hr a year per DC-3 and Viscount. It could be higher, but only with night-shift overtime in the engineering department. "You want to

