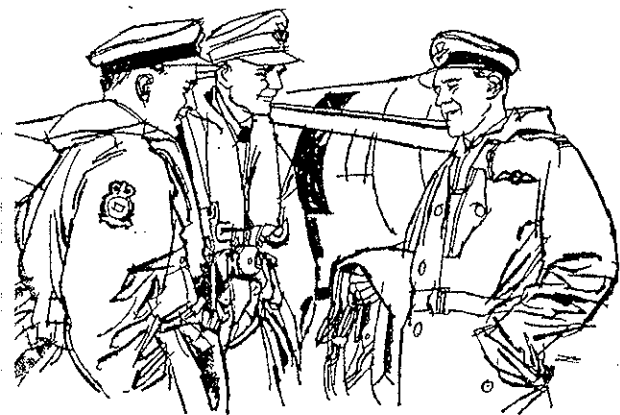




COMET TRANSPORT CREW

WE ARE A COMET CREW OF No. 216 Squadron and though we are based at Lynham, in Wiltshire, most of our working life is spent flying the air routes that link the Commonwealth and its Allies. We have been together as a crew now for about a year and have logged nearly 400 hours in that time. Most of it has been flown *Eastabout*, that is, from the UK out to Singapore and Australia and back, rather than *Westabout* via the United States and Christmas Island. Our primary job in life is to be ready to fly men of the UK Strategic Reserve to overseas trouble spots but in spite of the daily tale of woes in the newspapers, in fact this forms but a small part of our actual work. More often than not our passengers are men and women of the three Services going to join their overseas units or returning home on leave.

Whatever the reason though, whilst they are our passengers it is our job to get them to wherever they are going, on schedule, in safety and with a modicum of comfort. This last is relatively easy in the Comet and it is part of the job of our airquartermaster to see that it is so.

It is only of recent years that airquartermasters have been carried and to this day there are many misconceptions as to what their duties are. Ours is a regular Sergeant in the Women's Royal Air Force and whilst she is with us, she is as much part of the crew as the Flight Engineer. To those who think her duties are merely decorative it may come as something of a surprise to know that she is responsible to the Captain for the safe loading of the aircraft, for all documentation, provisioning and for all the hundred and one items, big and small, which make the difference between a happy load of passengers and ones who, in the sheer boredom of smooth and comfortable travel, tend to overlook the fact that they are being carried farther, faster and safer than military passengers have ever been moved before.

Our engineer and signaller are both Master Aircrew and between them they have logged over 10,000 hours, 2,000 of them in Comets. Mention the romance of travel to them and, if you are not dismissed as a mental case, as likely as not you'll be treated to a dissertation on the relative merits of Tiger Beer and Keo Brandy or the pros and cons of night life in Hong Kong with the more prosaic pleasures of Saturday night in the local at home. Route flying to them is all of a piece. The problems vary but the pattern is the same. They will grumble when trying to unfreeze a galley water pipe in the bitter night of a Canadian winter, and grumble even more when tracing some obscure radio snag in the sizzling heat of Aden, but neither would change places for any other job in the Service.

Our navigator is probably as hard worked as any one in the crew. When you are travelling at 500 mph, six or seven miles up and on a leg which may include 1,000 miles of ocean, you cannot afford to let minutes slip by gazing at the scenery or the clouds. The Comet can carry over 20 tons of fuel and it can swallow this at a prodigious rate. In the old days a pilot could well look after his own fuel/distance problem and fly the aircraft as well but with the jet, the sums get so complicated that the navigator has a large share in fuel management as well as the navigation of the aircraft. In many ways, however, jet navigation is easier than in a slower aircraft flying low down. Except for the effect of jet streams, there is surprisingly little variation in leg times round the year and, as much of the navigation is monitored on radio beacons, tremendous benefits accrue from flying at jet cruising levels.

Our co-pilot is probably the least envied and the most frustrated man in the crew. He is, in effect, serving his apprenticeship and in due course will be promoted to Captain. Until a year ago he was flying Hunters, but since then has learned that there is more to flying than a fast break and racking turn. It took him some time to

adjust himself to what was, for him, a new kind of flying, but now he enjoys it and is impatient for the day when he will have a crew of his own. Meantime, he is busy enough. On route, he flies leg and leg about with the Captain, and of course, they relieve each other on the flightdeck. When not actually flying the aircraft, he has a mass of paperwork to see to and more often than not operates the R/T as well. To anyone not used to Airways flying this may sound simple enough, but anyone who has listened in to the R/T involved in a complicated traffic pattern into one of the world's busier airports, will readily appreciate that it is not so.

Mamfe to Kano by Twin Pioneer



Our Captain has been flying now for nearly twenty years and graduated to the Comet via a long line of heavy aircraft starting with the Lancaster bomber of World War II. He is apt to be somewhat impatient with folk who still regard the heavy jet as something impossibly difficult to fly and gets even more irritated with those who declare that it's all too easy! As always, the truth lies somewhere in between. As an aeroplane, it is easy and safe to handle but the efficient operation of it over the air routes of the world requires much painstaking study in the classroom and a fund of practical experience on which to draw, if safe decisions are to be made on the multitude of tactical problems that crop up.

As a crew, we are but one of many, but once we have been detailed for a particular flight, it becomes virtually a self-contained unit under a detachment commander, our Captain. To him falls the responsibility for supervising us, our work and the operation of the aeroplane for the whole time we are away, which can be anything up to a

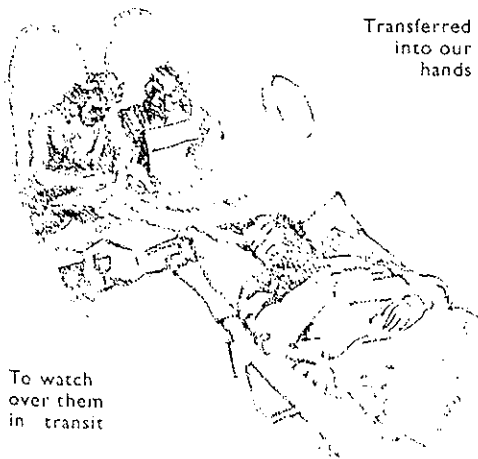
Written and Illustrated by
Wg Cdr N E Hoad, AFC, OC 216 Sqn

The sheer boredom of smooth and comfortable travel



month at a time. More often than not the hardest part of route flying is not the flying itself but the co-ordination of all the ground activities that must be completed both before and after flight. On average, most crews go through a three-hour routine before take-off, and then fly a couple of four or five-hour legs with a one and a half-hour flag stop in between; and end the day with a two-hour run-down period at the night stop staging post. In such a day's work a crew will either lose or gain about four hours clock time, and after three or four days of this, the individual crew member's bodily functions are entirely out of step with local time. If the route is then flown in reverse, by the time we get back to Lyneham, our stomachs are either prepared to accept any food in any order at any time or have given up entirely and refuse to function at all. In the Comet, the indivisibility of speed, distance and time is a practical phenomenon and not a mathematical abstraction!

Quite the most satisfying aspect of our work is the part we play in the Aeromedical Service. A man can fall desperately ill in the most remote corner of the territories garrisoned by British Forces and be, within hours, under expert care in the most modern



Transferred
into our
hands

To watch
over them
in transit

and fully equipped hospital. Transport Command and the Overseas Commands deploy, between them, all those elements of Air Power which make these mercy operations possible. From the ubiquitous helicopter and light aircraft in the forward areas, through a variety of medium range transports operating within overseas theatres, to the long-range strategic transports operating from the United Kingdom. All these forces are immediately and constantly available for the swift transport of the sick, together with trained teams of nursing sisters and medical orderlies to watch over them in transit. The sketches illustrate a typical but routine *Casevac* operation. Private 'X' (No. 1287651), a British Army driver, fell seriously ill some-

where in the British Cameroons, was flown from Mamfe to Kano in Nigeria by Twin Pioneer and there transferred into our hands. Five hours later he was under the vital specialist care and attention that was not available in that out of the way corner of Africa.

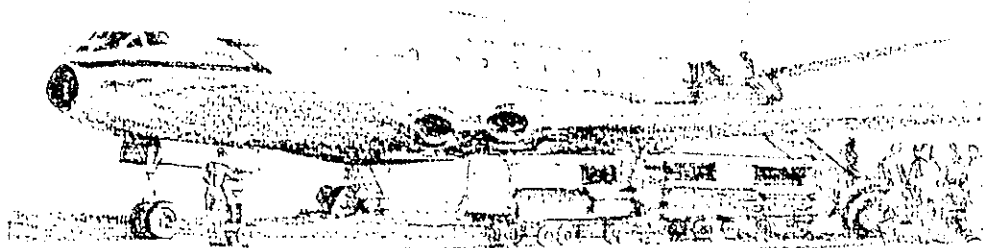
On return to base, we are normally allowed a stand-down for three days, partly to compensate for missed weekends and partly to catch up on sleep. Though our families are normally glad enough to see us, 'route grant' usually means overtime for our long-suffering wives with the washing machine to get us ready for our next spell of living out of a suitcase.

After stand-down there is much routine



work to go through at base and right at the top of the list is training in all its forms. No matter how much flying we do on route, each month we must fly a regular schedule of exercises, designed to keep us on the top line and to improve on our all round proficiency as a crew team. It is no exaggeration to say that the Command Safety record stems directly from this insistence on training and stringent regard for its value. However, we have a shorter term aim in view. If, as a crew, we can practise, learn and study hard, we will soon be able to qualify as competent to fly VIPs and so begin to participate in this field of the Squadron activities. Though such work is onerous, and at times rather worrying, there are compensations to be had. However, this is not for us yet. Finally, and though an outsider might find it hard to understand, the strange thing about route flying is that though we are always glad to get back to base, after a few days we begin to get the urge to be off again! It doesn't really matter much where to, but if it should turn out to be somewhere where the food is good and sun warm, so much the better.

The hardest part of route flying



PUNCH WITH WINGS

*a cartoon history
of the Royal Air Force*

edited by

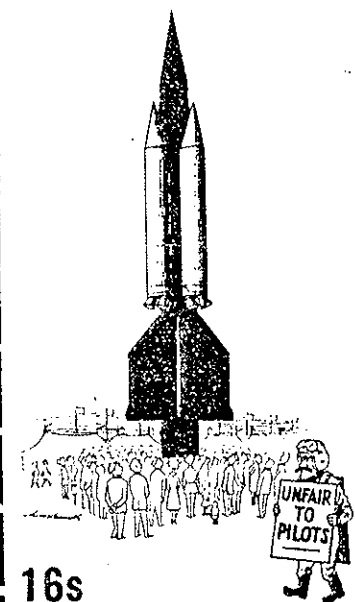
DAVID LANGDON

with a foreword by

Marshal of the RAF

SIR DERMOT BOYLE

GCB, KCVO, KBE



16s

ARTHUR BARKER

ROYALTIES TO THE RAF BENEVOLENT FUND

Five Hours Later

