



EPA'S DART-HERALDS PROVIDE EASY ACCESS TO ISLAND

Major Maritime airline got start in bush league

On a bleak March day in 1949, a Norseman aircraft, F-GPM, appeared out of a grey sky and landed on a frozen pond at one of Newfoundland's many outports. To the watching inhabitants of the lonely settlement the airplane was a welcome sight. It meant the end of winter isolation and the delivery of mail and supplies from the outside. The plane belonged to the newly formed Eastern Provincial Airways, a small bush company that has been started in January of that year by Eric Blackwood, an adventurous bush pilot, and C.A. (Ches) Crosbie, a St. John's business man.

Actually, Blackwood, upon his discharge from the RCAF in 1946, had started another aviation company, Newfoundland Aero Sales and Service Limited, with financial backing from a group of St. John's business men.

However, the group sold out their interests to C.F. Burke of Charlottetown, who formed a new outfit called Newfoundland Airways. Blackwood was reluctant to sell out his interest in NASCO because he could see a great potential for aviation in Newfoundland. When his backers sold the company to Burke, Blackwood immediately began looking around for new capital and founded Eastern Provincial Airways early in 1949.

Eastern Provincial and Newfoundland Airways competed with each other from 1949 to 1951, when Burke's outfit retired from the scene and sold its small fleet of Norseman aircraft to Queen Charlotte Airlines of Vancouver. EPA had received the bulk of the mail and government contracts necessary to keep it alive during those early years while Newfoundland Airways' business gradually dwindled as a result of the local competition.

It is interesting to note that Blackwood himself left the province in 1951. He attempted to enter politics, later sold out his interest in EPA to Crosbie, and migrated to Ontario where he is

still actively flying for Georgian Bay Airways.

After Blackwood's departure, Ches Crosbie appointed Marsh Jones and Bill Harris, two of the original members of the company, to run the bush airline. Geological and geodetic surveys were carried out for the federal government, an air ambulance service was organized to serve Newfoundland's outports, and during winters when navigation was closed to shipping, mail flights were operated along the coast as far north as Hebron in Labrador. By this time the construction phase of the Pine Tree Radar Chain was well in progress and this activity in Labrador gave impetus to the growth and stability of the fledgling airline from Newfoundland.

EPA purchased its first PBV Canso late in 1953 and used it on general charter work as well as the movement of equipment and supplies into Labrador.

HEADQUARTERS MOVED

In 1954 EPA moved its headquarters from St. John's to Gander in order to set up more centralized facilities for service to both Northern Newfoundland and Labrador. Gander had developed into a large international airport by this time and was ideal for the new hangar facilities that the company had chased on the field. In the same year, A.J. Lewington, an ex-Group Captain from the RCAF joined the organization as general manager.

During 1955 and 1956 EPA moved into larger aircraft and expanded its passenger and mail services on the island. The first DC's and Lockheed 10's were purchased and the company commenced regular passenger service between St. John's, Gander and Deer Lake (Corrèe Brook).

Summer schedules were also operated between St. Pierre-Miquelon and the Mainland, as well as secondary flights to other Newfoundland centers such as Frenchman's Cove. This service was terminating after a short period of operation due to

lack of facilities at Deer Lake and Frenchman's Cove. The organization also flew Cansos on the Mid-Canada Radar Line and obtained re-supply contracts for the completed Pine Tree Radar Chain stretching along the coastline of Labrador. One of the more important facets of EPA's operation through the years has been its winter mail service throughout the province. The big delivery begins each year when the coastal boat services are discontinued for the period of freeze-up. This usually takes place in mid-November for Labrador and in early December for Northern Newfoundland. Using Otter, Beaver and Cessna aircraft, as well as helicopters, the job is to fly mail to and from dozens of small communities in the Provinces.

Flying is often done under severe conditions and requires highly skilled bush pilots. EPA schedules hundreds of mail flights during a typical winter season and deliveries run to hundreds of thousands of pounds. Peak year for the mail service was 1959 when the Company served as many as 47 outposts and distributed over 80,000 lbs of mail.

EPA's air ambulance service is another interesting and very essential facet of the company's diversified operation. The service is operated in conjunction with the Provincial Department of Health and the International Grenfell Association. Thousands of patients are carried from the outport settlements each year by plane to the hospitals in the larger centers.

The company's on-the-spot turnout for all emergency calls has actually saved hundreds of lives during the years. In most cases the patient is transported by air to the nearest hospital, but in some instances doctors and nurses have been rushed to out-of-the-way settlements for emergency service. More than one expectant mother has given birth to a little Newfoundlander while flying high above the rocky coastline on the way to hospital.

FIRE FIGHTING

Fire is the greatest threat to the forests of Newfoundland and Labrador, and it is in the sphere of fire fighting that EPA plays a major role. The company has a continuing contract with the local government under which it operates PBV Canso Water

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