BRITAIN'S ROLE IN ASIAN AIR TRANSPORT

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(*Address given to the Royal Central Asian Society on April 7, 1964.*)

MY story starts in 1911, when Asia witnessed within her boundaries an important first achievement in the history of civil aviation. On February 18 of that year a French pilot, M. Henri Pequet, flew the first successful official air mail flight in the world. He flew from the United Provinces Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition at Allahabad in India to Naini Junction, about five to six miles away. Some 6,500 letters and postcards were delivered in 13 minutes.

Another milestone in the history of air transport in Asia was reached in 1918, when the first direct flight to India from another continent took place. The credit of this achievement went to the Royal Air Force, who operated a flight from Cairo to Calcutta with a World War I Handley Page 0/400 bomber. It took fifty-nine hours' flying time extended over seventeen days for the 4,090 miles journey. Great crowds gathered at the Calcutta race-course on December 17, 1918, to welcome the aircraft and its R.A.F. pioneers, who had flown from Cairo via Damascus, Baghdad, Bushire, Bandar Abbas, Chahbar, Karachi, Delhi and Allahabad.

The same aircraft had been flown out three months earlier from England to Cairo in 36 hours 13 minutes flying time spread over ten days. This aircraft can therefore take its place in history as having operated the first through-flight from the United Kingdom to India.

It was again the R.A.F. who operated the first regular air link between Asia and its neighbouring continent of Africa. In March, 1921, the R.A.F. was given full responsibility for keeping the peace in Iraq. Communications on the ground were very difficult. The old-established caravan route which linked Damascus with the Euphrates passed through territory which was not wholly under British control. It was therefore decided that the R.A.F. should be asked to inaugurate a regular air mail and supply service between Cairo and Baghdad. Because of the lack of landmarks in the desert and the rudimentary navigational aids of the day, a track was laid across the Syrian Desert. Two convoys of cars escorted by aeroplanes set out from Amman and Baghdad and met at El Jid. Where the tracks from the cars were not sufficiently visible from the air, a Fordson tractor with a plough made a deeper mark. Pilots flew along these tracks and if they happened to make any false landings they could quickly be found as long as they were "on track".

This R.A.F. service was inaugurated in June, 1921, with single-engined

DH9A and twin-engined DH10 bombers. Later, twin-engined Vickers Vimy bombers and Vernon transports were operated along the route and maintained the service until a commercial service took over in January, 1927. Thus it was Britain who forged Asia's first regular air link with the outside world. The air service cut the journey time for mail from England to Baghdad from twenty-eight to nine days. The net result was that Baghdad moved some nineteen days closer to England in journey time.

Those who attended the Imperial Conference of 1922 had the vision and the foresight to realize that air transport could play an important part in bringing the widely scattered territories of the Commonwealth closer to each other and to the Mother Country. On April 1, 1924, Imperial Airways Ltd. came into existence as the result of a merger of four earlier British airlines which had operated cross-Channel services to Europe. The new company first turned its energies to consolidating and improving those short-haul cross-Channel hops. However it very soon began to scan a wider horizon and to prepare plans for pioneering the long-distance Commonwealth services implied by its name. Perhaps it was spurred on by the thought that long-haul services would probably prove more profitable—or, rather, less unprofitable—than the short-haul services across the English Channel. On those latter services the slow old First World War converted aircraft had to compete with an efficient network of surface transport. In 1925 the Air Ministry made an agreement with Imperial Airways for the latter to establish and operate a service between India and Egypt. The company was to receive a subsidy of £93,000 annually for a period of five years.

Survey parties in 1925 and 1926 laid the foundation for the inauguration of a service between Cairo and Karachi. As I have said, an R.A.F. service between Cairo and Baghdad was there for the taking over. Imperial Airways ordered five aircraft from the de Havilland Company. They were specially designed for this forging of the first link in what was to become a chain of long-distance Empire air services. Experience with the aircraft then being used in Europe had proved that their standards of reliability were not high enough. The new airliner—the DH66 Hercules—was therefore fitted with three engines and had a five-hour endurance. Although it could carry up to fourteen passengers, only seven seats were usually fitted in order to make room for loads of mail.

On December 26, 1926, a Hercules airliner left Croydon Airport on a flight right through to India. Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for Air, Lady Maud Hoare and Sir Geoffrey Salmond, Air Officer Commanding India, were among the passengers. The route followed was Croydon-Dijon-Marseilles-Pisa-Naples-Malta - Homs - Benghazi - Sollum - Aboukir-Gaza-Ziza-Rutbah Wells-Baghdad-Basra-Bushire-Lingeh - Jask - Chahbar - Pasni-Karachi-Delhi. Karachi was reached on January 6, 1927, and Delhi on January 8. On January 10 the aircraft was officially named " City of Delhi " by Lady Irwin, wife of the Viceroy.

This flight notched up several " firsts ". It was the first flight ever made by a commercial airliner between the United Kingdom and India. It was the first occasion on which a British Cabinet Minister had arrived in India by air. It was the first time that a woman had undertaken a long air jour-

ney and Lady Hoare was the first woman to arrive in India by air. King George V sent a message to the Hoares on their arrival in India: "My hearty congratulations on your safe arrival in India after your most successful and enterprising flight. I hope that you and Lady Maud enjoyed your journey. . . ." Another tribute came from the Khan of Kalat, who offered Sir Samuel and Lady Hoare "a carpet as a symbol of your conquest of the air—a conquest such as King Solomon's when he flew over these regions on his magic carpet".

Imperial Airways planned to inaugurate a regular service between Cairo and Basra in January, 1927, and to extend it to Karachi in April. The first part of the operation went as planned. Cairo-Basra services were operated during January, and for the first time in her history Asia was linked to the outside world by a regular commercial air service. It is interesting to note that the track across the Syrian Desert had by then been marked continuously throughout its length by a furrow ploughed in the sand. This must still hold a record for the longest furrow ever ploughed. It was some 600 miles long.

The second part of Imperial Airways' plan—the extension of the service to India—was delayed for two years by Persia. That country refused to implement an agreement previously made with Imperial Airways and would not allow the company's aircraft to fly across Southern Persia or to land in the country itself.

Imperial Airways was not at that time willing to consider transferring operations to the southern shores of the Gulf. A private telegraph company, on good terms with the airline, controlled communications on the northern shores and had cable stations at the places at which Imperial Airways planned to call. There were no such facilities on the south side of the Gulf. As the DH66, like other aircraft of its vintage, had a very short range by modern standards, Persia's action made it impossible for a regular service to be started.

However, negotiations with Persia continued and in the autumn of 1928 it was announced that she had agreed to allow Imperial Airways to operate a service along her southern coast for three years from January, 1929. Because airfields at the chosen stopping-places were not ready until then, the first service did not in fact reach India until the beginning of April. By that time Imperial Airways was also ready to open the extension at the other end of the route between London and Cairo. Thus the first regular service to India was also the first through-service from the United Kingdom.

The route was as follows: London (Croydon)-Paris-Basle flown by Argosy airliner; Basle-Genoa by train; Genoa-Rome (Ostia)-Naples-Corfu-Athens-Crete-Tobruk-Alexandria flown by Calcutta flying-boat; Alexandria-Gaza-Rutbah Wells-Baghdad-Basra-Bushire - Lingeh - Jask - Gwadar-Karachi flown by DH66 airliner. It was unfortunate that this through-service linking the United Kingdom and India was not an all-air service as had been intended. The reason for the train journey between Basle and Genoa provides another early and striking example of the way in which the natural development of air transport services has been obstructed and bedevilled by politics throughout its history. Mussolini would not allow

British aircraft to enter Italy from France. A regular air service across the Alps was not at that time considered a practical proposition. And so surface transport had to come to the rescue and play a part in the first really long-distance air service ever to be operated from the United Kingdom.

It could rightly be claimed that this service gave the aeroplane a real chance to show its paces and to demonstrate what it could do in slashing journey times between different parts of the Commonwealth. The journey time from Karachi to London was reduced to seven days, giving an indication of the way in which long-range aircraft could reduce journey times from weeks to days and days to hours. It foreshadowed the time when air transport would shrink the globe to less than half its size in time of travel. Even so, few people at the time could foresee the situation today, when Karachi is a mere nine hours from London and when we are already thinking of the age of supersonic travel when Australia will be thirteen hours from Great Britain in flying time.

The new air link between Britain and India did not only mean shorter journey times for people who had to travel anyway. It made travel possible for people who could not or would not otherwise have been able to spare the time involved. Government officials in Britain were now able to attend conferences on the spot and to see things for themselves without being away too long from their desks in Whitehall. Those in India could be recalled more often for consultation. Businessmen could find it worth while to spend days in travel when they could not afford weeks. British expatriates in India could spend more time at home on leave. Since that time, air transport has continued to make its influence even more widely felt. It is no exaggeration to say that the airliner has immeasurably speeded up the whole tempo of modern life for better or for worse. It is indeed difficult for us to look back and to imagine what life was like before Prime Ministers on different sides of the Atlantic could meet and consult in a few hours, through the medium of the jet airliner.

Air mail has played a very important part in this quickening-up process. The impact of that first air mail service to India was all the greater because long-range telecommunication facilities were not of course what they are today. An airmail surcharge of sixpence was made and on the first service the mail load carried amounted to 364 lb. During the first three months of the service the mail carried totalled 12,000 lb. Of this total 4,700 lb. went outbound to India and 7,300 lb. was inbound to the United Kingdom.

Asia was now directly linked with Europe and Africa by air. The next task was to push the trunk route further eastwards and eventually to link Asia with a third continent—Australia. The first extension of the route across India was opened on December 20, 1929, from Karachi to Jodhpur and later in the same month a further link from Jodhpur to Delhi was added. This extension between Karachi and Delhi was operated by Imperial Airways under a charter arrangement with the Indian Government. Politics prevented the opening of the comparatively short extension beyond Delhi to Calcutta for three and a half years. Britain and her self-governing Dominion of India could not agree on satisfactory arrangements for the operation of regular air services across the sub-continent. India could not

make up her mind whether she wished to operate the services herself or not. When the charter arrangement with Imperial Airways ran out in December, 1931, the mails were carried for a time between Karachi and Delhi by the Delhi Flying Club, using tiny Puss Moth aeroplanes. As the route ground facilities and communications had been withdrawn, these little aircraft reported their positions by flying over railway stations. The latter telegraphed the news ahead. The only untoward incident reported on this makeshift service was the case of a pilot who came off worse after colliding with a vulture and had to make a forced landing.

During 1931 two experimental mail services were operated right through to Australia from the United Kingdom. The first was an extension of the normal service from London to Delhi which left Croydon on April 4 and arrived at Karachi on April 12. On April 13 the Imperial Airways' DH66 G-EBMW "City of Cairo" (Captains R. P. Mollard and H. W. C. Alger) departed from Karachi and flew on via Jodhpur, Delhi, Allahabad, Calcutta, Akyab, Rangoon, Victoria Point (in Burma), Singapore, Muntok, Batavia, Semarang, Sourabaya, Rambang to Koepang. It crashed there on April 19. Charles Kingsford Smith and G. U. Allan of Australian National Airways flew to Koepang from Sydney in a Fokker aircraft named "Southern Cross" on a charter flight to pick up the mail. They left Koepang on April 25 and flew the mail to Darwin. Captain R. B. Tapp of Q.A.N.T.A.S. (Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd.) carried the mail from Darwin to Brisbane in a DH61 airliner named "Apollo". Australian National Airways took over the mail for the remaining destinations and flew the Brisbane-Sydney sector on April 29 in an Avro Ten airliner named "Southern Sun". Mail to Melbourne was flown through from Sydney on the same day in another Avro Ten. And so the first through commercial air mail consignment from England to Australia reached Sydney in twenty-five days after many vicissitudes and having travelled in an assortment of aircraft operated by a variety of companies. The return mail from Australia left Melbourne on April 23 and Sydney the following day. It reached London on May 14 and also travelled in a number of different aircraft. The second U.K./Australia experimental air mail service was also operated in both directions during the months of April and May.

While the Indian Government was making up its mind as to who should operate the air service across its territory under the Empire flag, it allowed foreign companies—the Dutch K.L.M. and French Air Orient—to operate. This naturally caused eyebrows to be raised, back in England. In 1933 the British and Indian Governments managed to reach agreement on arrangements for extending the trunk air route from Karachi to Calcutta and Singapore. In June of that year an Indian company—Indian Trans-Continental Airways—was formed to operate the Karachi-Singapore sector in partnership with Imperial Airways. Just over half the capital of the new company—51 per cent.—was allotted to Imperial Airways, and the balance was held by the Government of India and a new Indian airline called Indian National Airways.

The formation of Indian Trans-Continental Airways provides the first example in Asia of a way in which Britain was to make a major contribu-

tion to air transport in that continent. I refer to help given in the formation and operation of regional and local airlines. This help has taken and still takes a number of forms. These include the provision of capital, of aircraft and equipment, the secondment of personnel, the supply of technical know-how and advice and the actual operation of services for and in the names of the companies concerned.

Although some services were operated under the Indian flag and in the name of Indian Trans-Continental Airways, it was in fact Imperial Airways who provided the crews, management, and all technical services. But the formation of the company enabled a unity of purpose to be reached between the British and Indian Governments and the way was now open for the trunk route to continue its eastwards march. Less than two weeks after the new company had come into existence, the London-Karachi service was extended to Calcutta on July 1, 1933. In September it reached Rangoon and on December 9 Singapore became its eastern terminus.

The vision of a regular air service betwen Britain and Australia was now no longer a pipe-dream. On January 18, 1934, Imperial Airways participated in the formation of another new company. Its name was Qantas Empire Airways Ltd. and it was formed to operate the Australia-Singapore section of the England to Australia route in association with Imperial Airways. Today, Qantas operates along the whole route in equal partnership with BOAC. The capital of the new company was owned equally by Imperial Airways and the Australian airline Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd., but all the shares were purchased by the Australian Government after the war.

On December 8, 1934, a regular weekly mail service was inaugurated between England and Australia. Imperial Airways was responsible for the London-Karachi sector, Imperial Airways and Indian Trans-Continental Airways jointly for the Karachi-Singapore sector and Qantas Empire Airways for the Singapore-Brisbane sector. Because Qantas had not received the DH86 aircraft which it had ordered for its end of the route, Imperial Airways operated initially right through to Darwin until Qantas was ready to take over. The route was officially opened at Croydon by the Secretary of State for Air, the Marquess of Londonderry, K.G., M.V.O., and the Postmaster-General, Sir Kingsley Wood. The mail included letters from King George V, Queen Mary and the Prince of Wales and was received on behalf of Imperial Airways by the company's Chairman, Sir Eric Geddes. It reached Brisbane on December 21.

The first mail for the United Kingdom left Brisbane on December 10 and reached Croydon on December 24. This westbound mail service was inaugurated by the Duke of Gloucester at a ceremony at Brisbane.

Passengers did not follow where the mails had led until April 13, 1935. On that date the 12,754 mile route between London and Brisbane was opened for passengers. The single fare was £195 and the journey time 12½ days. There were so many sector bookings on the first service that no through passengers were carried. The first two hardy passengers to go right through to Brisbane were on the service which left London on April 20. This service operated twice weekly. The first westbound service from Brisbane to London left Australia on April 17.

An important spur route was opened in March, 1936. This ran from Penang north-eastwards to Hong Kong via Saigon and Tourane. In the following year the route was altered to branch off from the trunk route at Bangkok and reached Hong Kong via Udorn, Hanoi and Fort Bayard.

At the same time that Imperial Airways was pioneering the route through to Australia, it was developing a route down the length of Africa. A regular passenger service through to Cape Town was inaugurated in April, 1932. And so in the years between the two World Wars Imperial Airways had set about the task of translating into reality the vision of those who had attended the Imperial Conference in 1922 and realized the part which air transport could play in bringing the scattered territories of the Empire closer together. The measure of the airline's success is shown by the fact that in 1936 London, Cape Town, Hong Kong and Brisbane were all linked together by regular air services.

There were various changes of aircraft types, stopping places, etc., on the trunk route through Asia in the years which remained before the war started. The most important change was the switch-over from landplanes to flying-boats which was linked with the introduction of the Empire Air Mail Scheme. The latter was a bold experiment and was described at the time as the most revolutionary step forward in the history of the British Post Office since the introduction of the penny post by Rowland Hill in 1840. It provided for the carriage of all first-class mail automatically by air between those countries and territories of the British Commonwealth which participated in the scheme. It swept away postal surcharges and the need to decide whether mail should be carried by surface or air transport. It introduced an era when the standard British 1½d. postal stamp was enough to ensure the carriage of a letter by air almost anywhere within the British Commonwealth.

The "all-up" mail decision was taken in 1934. It gave Imperial Airways its first opportunity to order a large fleet of new aircraft which would be necessary to carry the heavy loads of mail which were envisaged. It was considered that the available airfields—most of them primitive by modern standards—would not be adequate. Moreover, considered as a pattern, they did not offer the flexibility which the mail services would demand. Accordingly, the switch-over was made to flying-boats. Imperial Airways took the then unprecedented step of ordering twenty-eight Short "C" class flying-boats off the drawing board. These were the famous Empire flying-boats. They set new standards of comfort and performance. A feature which was very popular with passengers was the promenade deck in which passengers could stretch their legs. The Empire flying-boat weighed some 18½ tons, and carried 24 passengers at a cruising speed of 145 m.p.h. This aircraft provides one of the rare cases in history of a civil transport aircraft giving birth to a military aeroplane, as the R.A.F. Sunderland flying-boat was developed from the civil Empire class boat.

And so when war broke out in September, 1939, Imperial Airways was operating flying-boats right across Asia with a spur operated by landplanes running up from the main trunk route. An additional landplane service was still in operation across India between Calcutta and Karachi. Passengers travelling westwards from Karachi transferred to flying-boats.

Britain's role in Asian air transport had been confined to that of a pioneer of long-distance trunk routes. She had also acted as foster-parent in the birth of two regional companies, but her motive in each case was purely to enable the trunk route from England to be extended. During the war years her task as far as civil air transport was concerned was to keep open the vital lines of air communications. The mantle of this role fell on BOAC, which came into existence at the end of 1939 and on April 1, 1940, officially took over the undertakings of Imperial Airways and another British Airline, British Airways Ltd.

When the Mediterranean route from England to the Middle East was cut by the entry of Italy into the war in 1940, BOAC put into operation the famous Horseshoe Route. It was operated by Empire flying-boats which were based at Durban. From Durban the route ran northwards to Cairo and then eastwards and south-eastwards along the traditional trunk route to Sydney. The Sydney-Singapore section was operated by Qantas Empire Airways. After the Japanese had entered the war and had overrun Singapore and Burma, the eastern terminus of the Horseshoe Route was set at Calcutta. The air link with Australia was later re-established with the introduction of a service from Ceylon to Perth. England was linked to the Horseshoe Route—and thus to Asia—by a flying-boat service to West Africa and a landplane service across Africa to Khartoum.

It was found that the flying-boats on the Horseshoe Route could not cope adequately with the task of supplying India from the west. Fortunately an alternative route along the southern shores of Arabia—the Hadramaut route—had already been surveyed. In 1941 the abortive revolt of Rashid Ali in Iraq had threatened the safety of BOAC's trunk route from Cairo to Karachi along the Persian Gulf. It was decided by the British and Indian Governments that an alternative route must be provided for use in the case of emergency.

From surveys made by the R.A.F. and BOAC it was quickly found that the Hadramaut route was not suitable for flying-boat operations. During the monsoons the whole coast was unapproachable from the sea and there were no inland stretches of water.

It was decided that the route should run from Aden eastwards through Riyan, Salala, Masira Island, Ras el Hadd (at the eastern cape of Oman) to Jiwani in Baluchistan. There it linked up with the Horseshoe Route. The R.A.F. accepted responsibility for Aden and Riyan and the Indian Government was to construct the other airfields with advice and assistance from BOAC who were to provide the ground staff and organization. The Corporation's chief task was to establish bases at Salala and Masira Island. The work entailed was tremendous. Wireless stations and prefabricated buildings had to be transported and erected, runways built and wells dug. Hangars had to be put up and sleeping quarters for staff and passengers improvised. Because of the shortage of fresh water along the coast, a distillation plant had to be set up on Masira Island as a reserve. The tasks had to be completed between September and May because only at that time of the year could shipping approach the coast at all. The situation at Salala was made much easier because the Sultan of Muscat, in whose domain it lay, gave his willing co-operation. He did however draw up a few local

rules which were to be observed by the men at the camp. Some of the rules were: Nobody was to leave the camp after dark except on duty. No flag of any sort was to be flown. There was to be no smoking in the bazaar. Any party going into the town was to be accompanied by one of his guards. The small trees in the camp garden were to be daily tended. There was to be no music or noise for half an hour after sunset. During the summer monsoons the only communication with the outside world was a messenger who travelled between Salala and Muscat once a month and took twenty-five days to do the journey.

BOAC started to operate a regular service with landplanes along the route in May, 1942. By October the United States Air Transport Corps was pouring military reinforcements and supplies along it to India. The Southern Arabian Route, originally conceived as an emergency stand-by, became an important strategic link used not only by BOAC and the R.A.F. but also by America as part of her supply line on the east-about route to China.

The First World War acted as a forcing-house for the development of aviation and the aeroplane, and history repeated itself in World War II. Funds which are difficult to obtain in peace-time become readily available when they are required to serve the needs of war. After the outbreak of war in the Far East, many new airfields were built in Asia and existing runways were both lengthened and strengthened. Some of these airfields were in the front line of war. Others were on the supply lines to theatres of war and there were at these airfields often many more aircraft movements in a day than there had been in a week during days of peace. Ground installations and equipment at airfields and *en route* navigational aids were also improved. These facilities and improvements were there ready to serve commercial air transport when the war clouds had dispersed.

Imperial Airways' role as the operator of British trunk commercial air services across Asia to the Far East and to Australia was taken over by BOAC after war had ceased. The Australian route continued to be operated jointly with Qantas Empire Airways. The story of the trunk routes now follows the usual commercial pattern. Frequencies were gradually increased and service was extended to more points as the traffic grew and expanded. Full use was made of new aircraft and ground equipment to improve the quality and efficiency of service. Journey times were steadily reduced as the new and faster aircraft went into service.

BOAC has one very proud claim to make as far as reducing journey times is concerned. On May 2, 1952, it ushered the world into the modern age of high-speed, high altitude jet travel and thereby shrunk the globe to half its size in journey times. On that date BOAC put into service the world's first jetliner, the Comet I, between London and Johannesburg. In August of the same year Asia entered the jet age when a Comet service to Ceylon was inaugurated by BOAC. The Comet I had later to be withdrawn from service, but its descendant, the Comet 4, is still in service and operating across Asia with BOAC today.

Let us go back for a moment before the beginning of the jet age to take a brief look at two rather special operations which were carried out by BOAC in Asia. They were emergency operations and outside the normal

run of business, but they were of vital importance, and many lives were saved by them. They both took place in 1947 and one closely followed the other.

At the end of August, 1947, BOAC received an SOS from the Government of newly-created Pakistan. It needed help and needed it quickly. The task was to move some 7,000 Pakistan Government officials with their families and servants from Delhi to Karachi. Because of serious disturbances on the India-Pakistan frontier and the complete disruption of rail services, they could not be moved by surface transport. But moved they had to be—and without delay. BOAC responded at once and the late Air Commodore H. G. Brackley, who was then Assistant to the Chairman and later became Chief Executive of British South American Airways, flew to Karachi to organize "Operation Pakistan". Three British charter companies were asked to help and supplied aircraft with crews and maintenance staff. At Palam Airport, New Delhi, hundreds of evacuees patiently waited with everything which they possessed beside them. When their turn came to fly, they looked down on burning villages and other signs of mob violence. They also saw the roads lined with refugees who had not their good fortune.

The whole operation was completed in eleven days, by which time the aircraft engaged on it had flown some 330,000 miles and had carried in addition to their passengers over 50 tons of food, nearly half a ton of medical supplies for Delhi and large quantities of vaccine for Lahore. It had been the largest air charter in the history of civil aviation, although it very quickly lost that claim to the second special operation of the year—"Operation India".

By October, 1947, civil disturbances were at their height in India and Pakistan. The Indian Government decided that emergency repatriation measures were necessary and it followed the earlier example of Pakistan and turned to BOAC for help. Once again Air Commodore Brackley was put in overall command. BOAC laid down one stipulation, which was that none of its world-wide regular services should in any way be affected by this new emergency task. British charter airlines were therefore asked to make a greater contribution than in the case of the earlier "Operation Pakistan". Seven of those companies responded to the call and worked under the direction of BOAC and alongside the State airline's men and machines.

Palam Airport was selected as the main base for the operation. From there the aircraft flew to a widely scattered assortment of landing strips to pick up their human cargoes. Some of these landing grounds were small, remote, practically unknown and difficult to identify from the air. They had remained almost forgotten since the R.A.F. had left India. Many of the strips were overgrown with grass. They were marked with a windsock hanging in tatters and an empty control tower with nothing but broken glass in its windows. Some of the signals which were received at the Palam Operations Room were reminiscent of wartime conditions. One captain was grounded by the authorities at Quetta because he had not got the necessary landing permit. His signal read: "Impounded. No Fuel. No Heat. No Money. No Hope. Robertson." Perhaps I should explain

that at the time Quetta was expecting snow. Needless to say, Captain Robertson did not remain grounded for very long.

The refugees were of course no ordinary passengers. Most of them were terror-stricken and in fear for their lives. Immediately after an aircraft had landed at a " pick-up " strip, and even before its engines had stopped, the refugees surged forward and completely surrounded it. In some cases it was utterly impossible to open the doors to allow anybody in or out. Baggage too was a big problem. The official allowance was 44 lb. per person. But when you are surrounded by all that you possess in the world, it is hard to leave anything behind—especially when you know that you will never see it again. Some aircraft were stacked so high with baggage that nobody could squeeze in. In others, baggage and refugees so filled the aircraft that the crews could not get through to their flight decks. Even when the aircraft were taxiing out to take off, refugees often continued to run after them and to try to open the doors. On one occasion a little girl ran after a taxiing aircraft crying bitterly. Her parents had got on board but the child had somehow got lost in the crowd.

In spite of all the difficulties the operation was successfully completed. Some 35,000 people were transferred between Pakistan and India in a two-way flow, together with over 1½ million lb. of personal baggage and belongings. The aircraft flew over 800,000 miles during the operation. The following message was received from the Prime Minister of India: " The operation on which the BOAC have been engaged for some time on behalf of the Government of India for the transport of refugees across the borders of India and Pakistan concluded today. I am happy to learn from my Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation that these operations have been conducted smoothly and efficiently and to the entire satisfaction of that Ministry. I would like to convey my appreciation to all the BOAC officers and men concerned in this work. The task, which they have just concluded, arose out of a very unhappy chapter in the history of India. That chapter is closing and we shall soon be embarking on constructive endeavour. I am quite sure that in this constructive task there is much scope for friendly co-operation between India and the United Kingdom."

This brings me to the present day, when air transport has become one of the threads woven into the very fabric of Asian civilization. Her cities are now linked not only with those of Europe and Africa but also with those of the new world both to the west across the Atlantic and to the east across the Pacific.

Where Britain has led, others have followed. Before the war, Imperial Airways faced very limited competition from one or two European airlines. Today all the main airlines of western Europe and the United States criss-cross Asia with frequent jet services, and they have been joined by the flag carriers of several leading nations in Asia itself, the most notable being Air-India, Pakistan International Airlines and Japan Air Lines. The Russian Aeroflot has also entered the race and has added to its extensive network of services across the vast areas of Siberia and China routes into the rest of the continent.

In addition to the main trunk routes, Asia is now well served by a network of short-haul services. Some of these are regional in nature, others

domestic and purely local. In this way the benefits of air transport have been widely extended and in many cases travel is made possible to places which are virtually inaccessible except by long and difficult journeys through jungles and swamps and over mountains and water. These services illustrate the supreme power which the aeroplane possesses of ignoring the difficulties of terrain, and an outstanding example is the helicopter network recently introduced by Pakistan International Airlines in East Pakistan. BOAC itself has done much to assist many of these local airlines, both with capital and expertise, notably in the areas of the Middle East and of South-east Asia.

Britain can look back on the role she has created in Asian air transport from the early days of Imperial Airways and before with a sense of satisfaction and achievement. She may no longer dominate the scene, but her place is still well in the forefront and will, I am confident, remain there.