

Information
from

AIR FRANCE

HEAD OFFICE FOR BRITISH ISLES: 52-3-4, HAYMARKET, LONDON, S.W.1.



WHITEHALL 4455

Wednesday, 3 February
1954

Dear Mr McFarville

AIR FRANCE CELEBRATES 35 YEARS ON THE LONDON-PARIS ROUTE

You are cordially invited to be present at London Airport (at the D.C.A.C. restaurant at 12 noon) for a fork lunch on Monday, 8 February, when Air France will be celebrating the 35th anniversary of the first international civil passenger flight in the world, which took place on Saturday, 8 February, 1919 between Paris and London.

The occasion will be marked by the arrival from Paris at 12.25 on the Epicurean Viscount service of an official party of celebration. The guests of honour will include M. Lucien BOSSOUTROT, who flew the first service with a Farman Goliath in 1919, M. and Mme. Henri FARIAN, the designer, builder and owner of the aircraft used, and a number of other personalities associated with the early days of the line. There will also be on board a representative bearing a message from the President du Conseil Municipal of Paris to the Lord Mayor of London marking the occasion, a representative of M. Devinat, the French Minister of Transport, and an Air France delegation headed by General Henri Ziegler, Director-General of Air France.

On the arrival of the Viscount at London Airport, there will be a ceremony which will include the presentation of a model of the Viscount by Mr. R.P.H. Yapp, a director of Vickers-Armstrong, to M. Bossoutrot. Present at the reception will be Mr. W.T. Boston, O.B.E. The Swordbearer and First Esquire to the Lord Mayor, who will be flying to Paris to deliver a message from the Lord Mayor of London to the Mayor of Paris; M. Emil Boudcrie, who has just retired as Operations Manager for the U.K. of Air France, after over 33 years service in this country; and Mr. Jack Bamford, General Agent in the U.K. for Air France, who has spent 32 years in the service of French aviation in England.

You will shortly receive a history of the London-Paris line flown by Air France and its predecessors, and an account of the first flight, written by one of the passengers who took part in it.

We look forward to seeing you on Monday if you can be there, and would welcome your representative if this proves impossible. In the latter case, would you kindly let us know - drop us a line, or ring WH 4455 ext. 133.

Yours sincerely,

David Bamford
David Bamford,
Press Officer.

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WHITEHALL 4455

NOT FOR RELEASE BEFORE 2pm, MONDAY 8 FEBRUARY, 1954

AIR FRANCE COMMEMORATES 35 YEARS ON THE LONDON-PARIS ROUTE

The story of the first flight

A few weeks after the armistice in 1918, the Farman brothers announced that they were going to open a passenger air service between London and Paris and vice versa. However, since technically until the signing of the peace treaty there still existed a state of war, it was forbidden by the British government to fly civil passengers over British territory. Farmans therefore decided that until they could operate commercially, they would run a series of demonstration flights for military passengers, and the first of these was fixed for Saturday, 8 February, 1919.

Some confusion seems to exist over the number of passengers carried on the first service, figures varying between 11 and 15 being printed in papers and journals of the time; however, it is certain that the machine, a converted bomber which had been built too late to see service, the Farman "Goliath", was piloted by M. Lucien Bossoutrot with a M. LHOMDE as mechanic. The following details of the flight are taken from an article written by one of the passengers, which appeared in the contemporary French journal, "L'Aérophile".

"Each passenger was issued with a small overnight bag for his night stop in London. A tool kit in case of forced landing, and a hamper of provisions for lunch en route were loaded, and the weight of baggage and stores totalled 10 kilos for each passenger.

"The Goliath took off from Toussus-le-Noble airfield, near Paris, at 12 noon. It was very cold, and the countryside below was covered with snow. The flight was made at between 2000 and 4000 feet, and visibility was excellent, the sky being blue and cloudless. There was a good south-easterly tailwind from Boulogne onwards. The route followed was Toussus - Buc - Versailles - Paris - Amiens (reached at 1 pm) - Le Crotoy - along coast from the mouth of the Somme to Boulogne (1.37) - Folkestone (1.57) - then along main railway to London as far as Kenley Aerodrome (2.30). On landing, the passengers were taken to the local RAF mess, comfortably installed in a local cottage, and from there in officers' cars up to London to stay the night.

"Since the Goliath was too large to go into the hangars, it was firmly tethered down, the radiators were emptied, and the fuel tanks were filled to avoid condensation.

A glowing account of the comfort on board was written: "No more mufflers, no more fur-lined flying clothing, or paper underclothing. Some of us were only wearing our uniform tunics without greatcoats. One can talk easily in the cabin, much better than in an ordinary aeroplane; that is to say, that the noise of the engines is not too deafening. As for the portholes, they are placed in such a manner that visibility is perfect. (A front passenger cabin occupied the nose of the aircraft.)

"Comfort is such that, on the way, above the Channel, we were able to lunch and to open the bottles of champagne with which the machine had been stocked; thus drinking the first glasses of champagne ever to be swilled in an aerial bus above the Channel.

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Games of poker were played, while other passengers peacefully read the papers and smoked cigarettes

"In all, it was a marvellous demonstration which marks an important date in the history of flying. It was, one can say, the first real trial of commercial air transport, and after this demonstration, the people who, like me, took part in it, are quite sure of the certain success and the development of regular air transport companies."

The following day, Sunday 9 February 1919, the Goliath took off from Kenley at 12.20pm to return to Paris, landing at Toussus at 3.30pm.

A few details of the Goliath would be appropriate. The Farman F.60 version used was powered by 2 Salmson engines of 260hp each, giving a maximum speed of 99.4 mph, and a climb to 6,500 feet of 22 minutes. There was passenger accommodation for 8 - 15, and they sat in cane basket chairs in two cabins, one forward of the pilot and one aft. The pilot himself sat with his mechanic in an open cockpit. There was no heating or lighting, and the cabin sides were merely plywood-covered, which gave little protection from noise or cold. The loaded weight of the Goliath was 9,964 lbs, and the unloaded weight 4,409 lbs; the span was 91'10", the overall length 50'10", and the cabin length approximately 20'3".

A brief history of the line

The Goliath used for the first flight was owned by Henri Farman, its constructor; and a few months later was formed the "Lignes Aériennes Farman", to operate services from France to Belgium, Holland and Scandinavia. The L.A.F. did not, eventually, persevere with the Paris-London route, but left it to two other French companies, the "Compagnie des Messageries Aériennes" and the "Compagnie des Grands Express Aériens" to run. Both these companies were formed in 1919, and both operated Farman Goliaths to London, the CGEA to Croydon, and the CMA to Hounslow and Cricklewood, in association with Handley Page. They were bitter competitors, both between themselves and with the British airlines springing up at the time.

In January 1923, by the merger of CGEA and CMA with a third company, the Cie. Aéronavale, Air Union was formed. Air Union continued to fly the London-Paris route, and also specialised in Paris-Marseilles, and Lyons-Geneva. A number of different types were taken over by Air Union at its formation, and some of those used on the London service will be found listed at the end of this release.

During the period from 1923 to 1933, a great deal of progress was made by Air Union on the London-Paris service. An important stage was reached when on the 30th July, 1927, the "Golden Ray" service was introduced. The LeO 21 and Blériot 165 machines used for this service had cabin lighting and heating fitted; basket chairs gave way to luxurious moleskin-covered seats; and for the first time, the mechanic, who when not watching his engines spent his time dispensing tea and biscuits, gave way to a trained steward - the first of whom were waiters recruited from London hotels - who served complete meals in the air. Another advance was made on the 9th April 1929, when Air Union introduced a night service on the route.

The London-Paris route was the first air route in the world to have a daily service, and also a more-than-once-daily service, flown over it. From the sporadic services of the early 1920s, when one flight in five force-landed en route, by 1933, there were four flights daily in each direction being operated by Air Union between London and Paris.

The old Lignes Aériennes Farman of 1919 had been re-named in 1920 the Société Générale de Transports Aériens, and by 1927, only this company, Air Union and three other smaller concerns were still in existence. In 1930, the French authorities began to study the whole question of civil aviation, with particular reference to the strong competition being met with from the national airlines of other European countries. After some study, it was decided with government backing to form a national company, Air France, from the five companies still in existence, with Air Union as its backbone.

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Air France was officially set up on the 30th August, 1933, and inherited from its predecessors a total of 259 aircraft, of no fewer than 35 different types; Of these 259, 172 were single-engined machines. Very shortly after its formation, Air France introduced a new airliner to the London-Paris route, the Wibault 282. This was a three engine low-wing monoplane, carrying ten passengers, which replaced the old 90mph LeO21s, and flew almost twice as fast as them. In 13 years, the flying time on the route had been cut from $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours to 2 hours.

Between 1933 and 1938, the Wibault flew the "Golden Clipper" service with increasing service frequency each year. Four daily became five, then six; and on the 16th June 1939, Air France started daily "every hour, on the hour" flights - ten of them in each direction each day between Croydon and Le Bourget. 1938 saw the introduction on the route of a very fast - for those days - twin-engine low wing monoplane, the Bloch 220. The Bloch was similar in appearance to the Douglas DC-3, also a newcomer in those days, and carried 16 passengers at 212 mph, bringing the time for the route down to an hour-and-a-quarter.

The outbreak of war in 1939 was followed shortly afterwards by a pool agreement between Air France and Imperial Airways, and Air France's offices at 52 Haymarket were closed for the duration, a skeleton staff moving to little office in the Dorchester Hotel, which was also used as a departure station. And in 1940, for obvious reasons, services ceased altogether.

The end of the war saw Air France in very poor shape. Its personnel scattered, its aircraft missing, and its Le Bourget base completely wrecked, Air France set off bravely again in 1945 under the title of the R.L.A.F., or French Air Network; and one of the first routes to be re-opened was to London, when on the 11th October 1945, a captured Junkers 52 - the entire fleet of the R.L.A.F. consisted of these machines, the only material readily available - landed at Croydon.

Air France regained its old name on the 2nd January 1946, and by the end of that year had managed to purchase a number of war-surplus Douglas Dakotas and Skymasters; had building for delivery in 1947 some Lockheed Constellations; and was shortly to receive the first of a number of SE-161 Languedocs, four engine developments of the pre-war Bloch 220.

The Languedoc replaced the DC-3 on the London- Paris route in 1947, increasing the available passenger-load per flight from 21 to 33, and being the first French four-engined airliner on the route since the Bleriot 155 of 1926. The Languedoc was in its turn replaced by the Douglas DC-4 between 1950 and 1952, putting the capacity up from 33 to 44 passengers per flight.

An important development on the route came in 1949 when Air France and B.E.A. together introduced off-peak services to the route, cutting the London-Paris return fare to £10 for passengers willing to travel before 8am or after 8pm. The measure was very successful, but a contrast was provided the next year when Air France introduced the Epicurean service.

Widely advertised as "the finest champagne lunch between London and Paris", the meal served on this flight was, and still is, a masterpiece of French cuisine. Accompanied by aperitifs, champagnes, wines and liqueurs, the Epicurean meal soon had an imitator. Competition between the two is still keen, Air France having taken the latest step by putting the Vickers Viscount on this luxury lunchtime flight.

Air France has come a long way, since the London-Paris route was inaugurated 35 years ago. In that year, its ancestors carried 942 passengers altogether; in 1933, when Air France itself came into existence, 12,800 passengers were flown from London to Paris; in 1938, there were 31,800 passengers flown; in 1946, 35,700; in 1949, there were over 82,000; and this year, 1954, Air France should carry over 100,000 people over the route.

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List of aircraft used by Air France or its predecessors on the London-Paris route
1919 - 1954

<u>maker</u>	<u>type name or no.</u>	<u>no. of engines</u>	<u>pass. carried</u>	<u>speed</u>	<u>date</u>
Farman	F.60 Goliath	two	8 - 15	99mph	1919-30
Breguet	XIV	one	3 - 4	85 mph	1919-21
Bleriot	Spad Berline 33	one	2 - 3	110 mph	1919-23
Bleriot	165 "Golden Ray"	two	16	120 mph	1927 -33
LeO	21 "Golden Ray"	two	12	120 mph	1927 -31
Breguet	Wibault 282-T12 "Golden Clipper"	three	10	150 mph	1933 -37
Bloch	220	two	16	212 mph	1938 -39
Douglas DC-3	Dakota	two	21	185 mph.	1946 -47
SE 161	Languedoc	four	33	220 mph	1947 -52
Douglas DC-4	Skymaster	four	44 - 60	240 mph	1950 -
Vickers Viscount	V.708	four	44 - 49	315 mph	1953 -

This list is not complete, but includes the major types in use for the last 35 years.

With the compliments of the Public Relations Department, Air France London

David Bamford,
Press Officer.

Handwritten notes:
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