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Use of Gander Airport by U.S. Civil Reserve Air Fleet in event of war

46. The Secretary of State for External Affairs said the U.S. government had requested, on behalf of the U.S. Air Force, the use in wartime of Gander Airport by the Civil Reserve Air Fleet as a major refueling stop on trans-Atlantic routes. The fleet consisted of civil aircraft, operated by the U.S. commercial airlines, which would be put under charter to the U.S. Military Air Transport Service in the event of war. If these aircraft were to be employed most effectively, a staging base in the Newfoundland area would be required, and Gander would be the most suitable base as other stations in the Island would be saturated with military traffic. It was estimated that 8,000 refueling stops would be made in the first 90 days of hostilities, with the subsequent level of traffic being not quite so great but considerably higher than in peacetime. To make this use of Gander possible, the U.S.A.F. had proposed establishing there, at U.S. expense, additional fuel capacity to the extent of 500,000 barrels. Other facilities for longer stopovers would also be required.

Basic facilities at Gander were being progressively improved, but if runways, taxi-ways and other traffic-handling facilities were to be adequate to handle an operation the size of this Civil Reserve Air Fleet proposal, another \$900,000 would have to be spent by Canada on them. The Department of Transport was now demolishing old buildings as new accommodation in Gander became available. It was planned to construct in 1955, a large terminal building and aircraft parking area, but this would necessitate the demolition of many old buildings and wartime hangars which would have the effect of reducing the amount of accommodation which could be made available to C.R.A.F. in an emergency that took place in the near future. However, when the terminal project was completed in 1956 the present terminal area could be held in reserve for this purpose. If, however, U.S. planning required accommodation reserved immediately, new construction might become necessary and consideration would have to be given as to how the expense could be met. Furthermore, C.R.A.F. operations would mean a substantial expansion by the Department of Transport of its meteorological, communications and maintenance personnel.

In informal conversations with the U.S. authorities, it had been assumed, without making any commitment, that the government would probably wish to permit C.R.A.F. to use Gander in the event of war. It had also been assumed that the operational control of the airport would remain with the Department of Transport and that any facilities constructed would be paid for by the U.S. but that title to them would remain vested in a Canadian entity. With these conditions in mind,

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