

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF 44 GROUP RAF : OCT 1940 TO NOV 1944

FROM PRO AIR.38/227 DATED NOVEMBER, 1944
PRO AIR.29/472 (OAMCU)

At the end of 1940, to speed up the delivery of American aircraft it was decided to attempt to fly the aircraft across the North Atlantic from Newfoundland to Northern Ireland.

After the initial flights were completed by the Atlantic Ferry Organisation (ATFERO), it was seen that a ground organisation was required, with a meteorological service and with en-route radio communications.

It was decided to use the Air Ministry W/T radio station at Birdlip, near Gloucester and in October 1940, a Group HQ was set up nearby, to administer an Overseas Air Movement Control Unit (OAMCU). It was closely connected with the Ministry of Aircraft Production (MAP), but administered by 41 Group Maintenance Command. Aircraft on arrival were delivered by the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) to 41 Group, Maintenance Command for preparation for operational flying.

The OAMCU comprised a control room, met forecast section, cypher and teleprinter rooms. Telephone lines linked the control room to the W/T and D/F service at Birdlip and to 9 and 10 Group HQ, Fighter Command. Birdlip was equipped with four, R.1084 Receivers and antennae, with two, SWB8B transmitters, keyed by landline. These facilities shared with 15 Group (Coastal Command). Access was also to the Butser HF D/F receiver channel. Improved teleprinter traffic to the OAMCU was over GPO speech lines.

Responsibilities were to control,

- a) Trans-atlantic delivery flights of american-built aircraft to the RAF,
- b) Re-equip and re-enforce flights to RAF overseas commands,
- c) RAF mail service to the Middle East via Malta,
- d) All long-distance flights by civil aircraft, except the regular airmail service to Northern Ireland, Eire and the trans-atlantic mail between Botwood and Foynes (TASSO)

In Newfoundland, the departure airfield of Gander was administered by Montreal.

The first aircraft to be controlled by the OAMCU was an RAF Catalina AM258 "Guba", flown from Botwood to Stranraer on October 25, 1940. By the close of 1940, less than 30 aircraft had been handled, including Wellington and Blenheim bombers to the Middle East.

The flow of aircraft from North American so increased that by June 1941, 250/month were being controlled and the following month, ATFERO became RAF Ferry Command, with HQ at St. Hubert in Montreal, with ACM Sir Frederick Bowhill in command. The HQ was later to be moved to a new base at Dorval.

In August 1941, 44 Group was formed to control all non-operational flights outside the U.K. It absorbed the OAMCU and was responsible for;

- a) all deliveries of aircraft from overseas,
- b) the preparation and despatch of aircraft to war zones overseas, and
- c) to maintain passenger and freight air services to overseas theatres of war.

To control the increasing number of aircraft using air routes terminating in the North, 44 Group formed a Transatlantic Air Control (TAC) Centre at Prestwick which was operational by November 1941. An Overseas Air Control Centre (OAC) continued at Gloucester for the non-operational air routes to the South.

The TAC at Prestwick controlled air traffic North of 5230N and East of 30W, including flights from Bermuda, Iceland and to Russia. Terminal airfields were Aldergrove, Prestwick and Ayr/Heathfield. The OAC at Gloucester, controlled flights South of 5230N and Gibraltar, flights from 40N or to 43N for flights to Malta and North Africa. OAC used Valley and Nutts Corner as terminal airfields. From October 1943, air routes via the Azores were open.

From April 1942, OAC controlled "shuttle" flights from the UK - Gibraltar - Malta and return.

A combined RAF/USAAF team at OAC, controlled the movement of aircraft for operation "Torch", the invasion of North Africa. From November 1942, a total of 254 RAF, 491 USAAF and 85 replacement aircraft were dispatched.

The total numbers of aircraft controlled by the combined RAF/USAAF control teams at TAC and OAC are stated as; Total

OAMCU Oct 1940 to Oct 1941 1,518 inc 423 Del.

	OAC	TAC	Joint	
Nov to Dec 1941	252	73	0	325
Jan to Dec 1942	3,105	2,419	8	5,532
Jan to Dec 1943	7,700	5,865	965	14,530
Jan to Nov 1944	11,735	12,831	1,508	26,074
	<u>22,792</u>	<u>21,188</u>	<u>2,481</u>	<u>46,461*</u>

En-route losses were noted as less than 1% of the total number (*), one research shows **381** losses.

The RAF/USAAF team at 44 Group note the number of RAF aircraft delivered to the U.K. from North America, Oct 1940 to Nov 19, 1944 as 4,231, but only list,

RAF	Hudson	819		
	Liberator	672		
	Catalina	541		
	Fortress	149		
	Mosquito	195	=	3,592
	Mitchell	558		
	Dakota	516		
	Lancaster	142		
	Liberator RFS	1,287	trans-atlantic flights.	1,287
USAAF	B-17	6,628		
	B-24	2,254		
	C-47	632	=	9,819
	P-38	194		
	B-25	111		
	C-54	6,838	trans-atlantic flights	6,838 = 21,536

Air Routings from October 1940 to Nov 19, 1944 are noted as;

Direct NAT (inc Bermuda)	10,371}	
Via Greenland/iceland	11,236}	
Via Greenland	255}	= 22,820
Via the Azores	958}	

In addition, the number of flights via the Southern Route, Natal, Brazil to West Africa, then St. Mawgan, Valley and Prestwick via Marrakech under OAC or Joint OAC/.TAC to Nov 19, 1944 = 4,486. This number included 3,889 by US ferry crews and 397 by US operational crews (=4,286).

These flights included;

B-24	1,788	
B-17	361	= 4,104
C-47	1,208	
B-26	747	

Peter Berry, MRAeS

end