

## Mechanical brain guides a plane across the Atlantic

(Robert G Pelley, February 2018-02-02)  
<http://bobsganderhistory.com>

It is hard to decide if the most interesting part of this article is the story itself or where it came from.

It is a story printed the Argus, 24 September, 1947, in Melbourne, Australia. The Argus was a morning daily newspaper established in 1846 and closed down in 1957. They got this story via the London office of the Australian Associated Press (AAP)

In a world of "recently-invented" pilotless drones, it is very interesting to hear about a pilotless airplane leaving Gander in the fall of 1947! The aircraft in question would probably have looked like this:



Here is the article:

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Guided by a "mechanical brain", a USAF Skymaster made the first completely automatic crossing of the Atlantic.

It covered the 2,400 miles from Gander, Newfoundland, to Brize Norton, Oxfordshire, in 10 hours 55 minutes. The plane was commanded by Colonel J. M. Gillespie, and carried a crew of nine, and five observers, including two R.A.F. officers.

Colonel Gillespie said that the controls of the Skymaster were not touched from the time the button was pressed to send the machine off until it taxied into the hangar at Brize Norton.

The navigation was fully automatic throughout the crossing, and those in the plane could have slept all the way. Two ships in the Atlantic emitted radar beams. These did not exercise any actual control, but the plane was geared to the beams they sent out.

The aircraft's mechanism directed it on to the beam emitted from the first ship, and when the plane reached that ship the radio frequency was automatically shifted over to the beam from the second ship.

A lorry stationed on the runway and mounting radio beam equipment guided the plane into its landing at Brize Norton. Colonel Gillespie added that it was possible that he would return to USA in the same manner in about a fortnight.

British Air Force authorities described the experiment as a practical demonstration of the possibility of "push-button" flying. It meant that in warfare pilotless aircraft, loaded could be sent over a target.

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The Second World War had hardly finished and an airplane flying out of Gander was already was already thinking it was a Cruise missile.