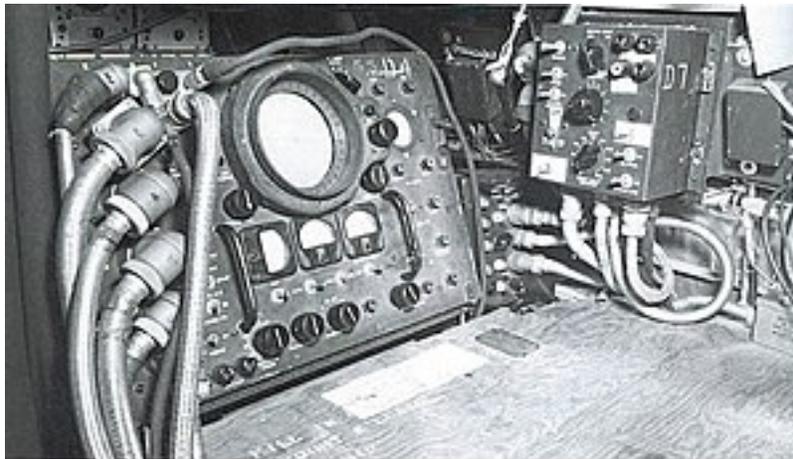


A B-17 Flying Fortress revisits Gander

(Robert G Pelley 2018-11-27)
<http://bobsganderhistory.com>

On 11 July 1943, a Boeing-17F heavy bomber, made under contract by the Douglas Aircraft Company, was delivered to the United States Army Air Force in Denver, Colorado. Roughly a month later this airplane was to be found at Grenier Air Base in New Hampshire, enroute to the 812 Bomb Squadron of the 482 Bomb Group in Alconbury, England.

This airplane had the tail number 42-3490, with an additional designator Mi-F. It was one the aircraft using a H2X ground scanning radar system used for blind bombing. This H2X was known familiarly as "Mickey", hence the Mi-F. These so-equipped airplanes were used as "Pathfinders", who led the other bombers on their mission.

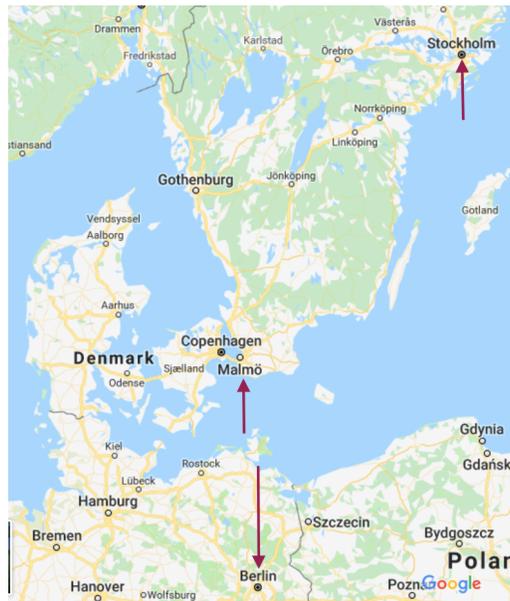


B-17 n° 42-3490 flew across the Atlantic from Gander on 19 August 1943. Given wartime statistics, the expectations at the time were most likely that at some point or other during the war, it would run into trouble. Not many would have bet on its chances of it flying back home through Gander at the end of the war, whenever that might be.

And run into trouble it did!

In March 1944, it was transferred to the 385th bombardment group. On June 21, 1944, it was part of the lead group out to bomb a ball-bearing factory complex near Berlin, very highly covered by heavy-duty anti-aircraft guns. This "flak" knocked out three of its engines. Knowing he would never make it back to Britain, the pilot Matt Totter headed to the safest place he could find in the circumstances - the coast of neutral Sweden.

He had a forced landing at Malmo-Bulltofta, almost directly north of Berlin, where he, the crew and the plane were promptly interned. (It is curious to note that German Luftwaffe planes also used Sweden as a safe-haven where they too were interned, though in separate camps.) Bomber 42-3490 was then made serviceable and flown to Stockholm where foreign aircraft were parked. Sweden soon had nine airworthy B-17's to play with.



By November 1944, it was clear that the war would not go on for much longer and that Germany would be the loser. Sweden also knew that at the end of the war, civilian aircraft routes would soon open up. It needed modern aircraft to get started - and it had B-17's they had a eye on converting. The aircraft 42-3490 was traded to the Swedish

government along with eight other B-17's - for \$1 and the release of American airmen interned in Sweden.

Eight of these planes were modified with proper windows, interior appointments and 13 or 14 seats. The nose windows were removed and the length of the nose was increased in order to make room for more passengers.



This photo from Stockholm shows 42-3490 in its new civilian colours:



There may be some evidence of SILA crossing the Atlantic as early as June 1945 via Iceland and Goose or Mingan, QC. In the case of Gander, the RCAF Gander Daily diary has the following entry on 02 November 1945: "The first two Swedish Airlines ships – SEBAO and SEBAK – arrived today." A Pan American World Airways from same month reports that SILA was making six round trips monthly between Stockholm and New York.

The following is a Shell Newfoundland photo of 42-3490 / SE-BAN in Gander in the winter of 1945-46. The Gander Tower Log shows SE-BAN going through Gander at least as late as February 1946.



A zoom of this photo give the impression that the person on the wing of the plane could very possibly be Calvin J Pelley, a Shell employee at the time.

In August 1946, SILA became part of SAS, the Scandinavian Airlines System and later that year DC-4 airplanes (converted military C-54) began operating on trans-Atlantic routes. SE-BAN was officially taken out of service in October 1948 and scrapped in 1950.

It was a case of swords to plowshares at least for a few years of its life.

Much thanks to Darrell Hillier for some of his research results. Other bits of info from different websites, notably the [Warbirds Resource Group](#).

