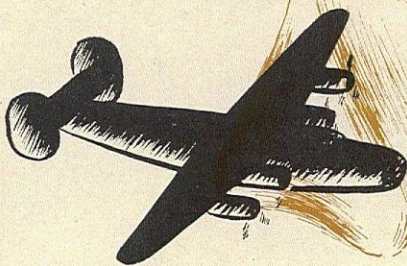


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SCANDINAVIAN CARPETBAGGER



An account of the most sought-after and dangerous airline in battle-torn Europe: from Scotland to Sweden, via ATC

Berlin-bound passengers at Bromma Airport near Stockholm were just boarding their JU52 transport when a B-24 sailed down through the early morning fog and rolled to a stop at a far corner of the field. Swedish officials did not seem to pay much attention but the air and press attaches from the German Embassy who happened to be at the airport watched suspiciously. Obviously, this was not another American combat plane making an emergency landing on neutral soil. The Liberator was painted green and there were no identifying markings on its fuselage. The two Nazis also thought it odd that no one stepped from the plane until the JU52 had roared down the runway and headed off in the direction of Germany. And when nine men finally emerged attired in civilian clothes the Germans were convinced this was a case for investigation by the Gestapo.

The date was March 31, 1944, and in neutral Stockholm the arrival of a mysterious airplane could mean many things. In this atmosphere of espionage and intrigue, jittery Nazis were on the alert for any portent of the coming Allied invasion of the West and there was little doubt in their minds that the nine men from the Liberator were linked to events of magnitude.

Enemy suspicion reached fever pitch when one of the civilian passengers was identified as Bernt Balchen, a Norwegian by birth and now a colonel in the American Air Forces. Balchen, the Germans well knew, was one of the world's foremost authorities on Scandinavia and the Arctic. It was Balchen who had been chosen by General Arnold early in the war to establish vitally important outposts in

Greenland and along the polar regions so that the AAF could open a new aerial highway to Great Britain. To the Germans, his sudden appearance in Sweden was a matter of great significance.

Nazi undercover agents had no difficulty in trailing the Liberator's crew to a suite at the Grand Hotel in Stockholm. By assiduous surveillance, the Germans learned that Balchen and his men held several meetings with American diplomats and representatives of the Swedish and Norwegian governments. After a week, during which the Gestapo seldom let them out of sight, the Germans deduced generally what was afoot.

Balchen was in Stockholm to evacuate 2,000 Norwegian military trainees from Sweden to Great Britain where they would be absorbed by the great Allied armies that were massing for D-day. He was also canvassing the possibility of repatriating some 1,500 American pilots and crew members who had been interned after making emergency landings in Sweden. Plans for these undertakings had been discussed at the American Embassy in London a month before and Balchen, as an officer of the Air Transport Command, was to establish a secret airline running between the British Isles and Sweden.

General Spaatz already had agreed to turn over a handful of war-weary B-24s and seven bomber crews



who had finished their combat tours with the 8th Air Force. Balchen insisted that the Liberators carry civilian airline markings and that their crews comply with Sweden's commercial air regulations. The Swedes, in turn, promised their AA batteries would not fire on the American planes provided they flew over certain areas reserved for commercial traffic. This would call for exacting navigation since these areas were only 20 miles wide.

For his British terminus, Balchen selected a remote air-drome at Leuchars, near the eastern coast of Scotland. The next problem was to plot the safest route across enemy-occupied Norway.

Allied intelligence knew the Germans had at least 250 night fighters based in southern Norway near Bergen, Stavanger, Oslo, Gossen and Trondheim. The enemy's coastal emplacements were formidable. And it was necessary to assume the Gestapo's intensive sleuthing in Stockholm had given the Nazi defenses ample warning of the impending operations.

Operations got underway in April, 1944, and during this month, Maj. David Schreiner made seven flights between Scotland and Stockholm. First passengers were the Norwegian trainees and Schreiner packed nearly 40 of them into his Liberator on each trip.

"It was anything but a luxury ride for those boys," Schreiner recalled. "I just packed them in like sardines. But nobody complained. They had been waiting for two years to get out."

The Germans, of course, increased their vigilance over Norway and sent up numerous patrols in an effort to intercept the B-24s. On several occasions, British detectors picked up enemy aircraft circling the route but each time the Liberators escaped by taking refuge over the Shetland Islands. The British also provided night fighter escort on some of the runs and during the entire evacuation operation the Germans failed to bag a single American plane.

Word spread to other Allied governments that the Air

Transport Command's secret airline was operating into Sweden. Applications for passenger space poured into the American Embassy in London from all parts of Europe. Somehow space was found to fill part of these requests and by the end of June a large assortment of American, British and Russian officials were ferried over the route. Once the airline even transported the entire refugee government of Norway.

One day in July Balchen received an urgent summons from U. S. officials in London. A desperate plea for help had come from the underground in Norway: unless supplies were furnished immediately the resistance movement in that country would collapse.

Officials explained the situation to Balchen. They told him that for the moment not a single plane could be spared to help the Norwegian patriots. They also hoped to drop Allied spies into Norway because our intelligence about German military movements in the area was far from complete. They asked Balchen if his organization would be willing to use its transports for these operations.

Balchen quickly calculated the risks. It was one thing to parachute men and equipment onto the comparatively rolling terrain of France and the Low Countries during hours of darkness. Norway, however, was something else again. Here there were mountains and rough weather and the missions would have to be carried out in daylight. Moreover, Norway was well patrolled by the Luftwaffe and there would be few spots available for forced landings if anything went wrong.

After a brief consultation with Lt. Col. Keith M. Allen, one of his aides, Schreiner and Capt. Robert C. Durham, another of his veteran pilots, Balchen gave his decision.

"We'll do it," he said.

Work started immediately to prepare one of the Liberators for the new job. In the air forces these sorties to aid the underground were known as carpetbagger missions and some modification in the aircraft was necessary. Into the bomb bays went twelve 350-pound containers packed full with machine guns, ammunition, explosives and other material necessary for sabotage. Packages of food and clothing were stowed in the waist. The aperture normally covered by the belly turret, and known as the Joe Hole, would be used to release the packages and any individuals parachuting down to join the underground.

The first mission to supply the Norwegian patriots was flown on July 17, 1944. In the Liberator were Balchen, Schreiner, Durham and other veterans of the secret airline, including 1st Lt. Robert Withrow and Sgts. Albert Sage, William Jespersen, Joel Williamson, Wilford Bollinger and Neil Richards. Briefing for the mission had been exacting. Courses had been planned painstakingly to avoid interception and flak positions. The route selected was believed the safest one possible and if the Liberator remained on course the chance for success was good.

The run from Scotland to the rendezvous point was negotiated with clocklike precision. The Liberator skirted every ground battery and lookout post. The signal was received from the ground party and the supplies fell squarely on the target. Quickly the Liberator circled and pointed its nose for home. The navigator was just giving the plot when Balchen shouted to Schreiner:

"Go north!"

There was a loud chorus of protests.

"Go north!" Balchen insisted.

Reluctantly, Schreiner swung the Liberator about and headed deeper into Norway.

Ten minutes later, Balchen pointed excitedly at a towering mountain peak.

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Stockholm's Bromma airport from which Col. Bernt Balchen conducted AAF airline into Great Britain. Photo was taken in 1936.



SCANDINAVIAN CARPETBAGGER

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"There it is!" he yelled. "The highest mountain in Norway. I wanted all of you to see it."

Encouraged by the success of the first mission, Balchen's airline strove to fly carpetbagger operations whenever weather conditions were favorable. Increasing quantities of supplies went down to the patriots and word came back the resistance forces were using them to good advantage. Balchen's men had great admiration for the patriots and they took to writing them notes of encouragement. They also enclosed cigarettes and copies of American magazines in the packages. The patriots delighted in taunting the Gestapo by leaving the magazines in the lobbies of Norway's principal hotels.

During the course of these missions, the Liberators also dropped Allied secret agents and soon a highly efficient intelligence network was established. Liberator crews also brought back considerable information about the enemy's northern defenses. On one occasion they spotted a hidden airfield harboring new types of jet planes. Another crew discovered installations that were identified as V bomb sites.

Late in the summer of 1944, the British were informed that one of Germany's highly secret V-2 rockets had fallen into Swedish territory. The rocket failed to explode and was almost intact when the Swedes found it. The Swedish government was willing to give it to British scientists but the problem was how to transport it to military laboratories in the south of England.

Inevitably, the British called on Balchen. Would he bring back the rocket? Balchen said he would. A message was sent to Stockholm. Load the rocket on a Liberator and bring it down at once. A reply came back in a few hours. The rocket weighed 8,000 pounds. It was dismantled and crated and the crates wouldn't fit into the Liberator.

Balchen went into a huddle with Allen. They decided the only way to bring that rocket back to England was in a C-47. Allen agreed to try it.

He flew over to Prestwick immediately to borrow a C-47 but the only one available was a battered airliner known around the base as "The Bug." Its magnetic compass was faulty and the radio compass didn't work at all. Operations refused to take responsibility when Allen told them what he intended to do.

Quickly the blue and black invasion stripes were painted over and commercial airline markings stenciled on the wings. Allen took off for Stockholm with Durham. Withrow and a Norwegian radio operator named Engeland. When they landed in Sweden, "The Bug" did not have enough gas left in its tanks to taxi to the hangar. After the crates were loaded aboard, Allen was told that all flights over Norway had been cancelled because of the lack of cloud cover. He decided to risk it and "The Bug" took off with its heavy load, barely clearing a pile of rocks at the end of the runway. In the bright daylight over Nor-

way, the transport would have had little chance if spotted by enemy fighters but luck was with it and it reached the North Sea without detection. German shore batteries took some shots at "The Bug" as it roared across the coastline but their aim was poor. At seven the following morning the rocket was in the hands of the British.

Having demonstrated that nothing was too difficult for it to handle, Balchen's secret airline soon was asked to undertake another seemingly impossible job.

For a long time, Allied air forces had been trying to sink the German battleship Tirpitz, but as of September, 1944, the vessel was still afloat at her anchorage at Altenfjord, Norway. Except for photo reconnaissance pictures, intelligence had little information regarding the condition of the warship or about the antiaircraft defenses protecting the harbor approaches. The only way to find out was to drop spies in the area with the hope that they could send out reports by portable transmitters.

Allen and Schreiner agreed to fly two Allied secret agents as close to Altenfjord as possible and a B-24 quickly was modified to permit installation of additional gasoline tanks in the bomb bay.

The flight from Britain to the drop zone and return covered more than 2,600 miles and took 16½ hours. It was probably the longest combat mission ever flown in the ETO. The two agents parachuted down close to the harbor and within a day had established contact with England.

On Sept. 21, 1944, Allen and the old reliable—Schreiner, Durham, Jespersen, Sage, Bollinger, Krasevac, Schick, Neil and Richards—took off to drop several spies in a heavily-defended region of Norway. The secret agents came down successfully but one of the Liberator's engines suddenly went out. Allen decided to head northeast to Murmansk for an emergency landing rather than risk the long return flight to Britain. The plane was just passing over the outskirts of Murmansk when it was coned in the searchlights of the harbor defenses. Antiaircraft batteries from the Soviet battleship Archangel let loose a heavy barrage.

The Liberator shuddered under the impact of a direct hit and Allen ordered his men to bail out. He kept flying level until all had gone over the side and then prepared to follow. But another shell tore through the wounded bomber. The Liberator faltered and then plunged into the water, a flaming mass of wreckage.

The Russians deeply regretted the tragedy which nevertheless was excusable for there had been no opportunity to alert the warships and harbor defenses that a friendly airplane was approaching.

Allen was buried with military honors at Murmansk and to the small wooden cross over his grave was affixed the simple inscription:

"In performance of duty."

It was a grievous loss to Balchen and the others who had performed so valiantly in all the Scandinavian operations. But their work continued. And it was not until victory came that the exploits of these men could at last be heralded to the world. ☆

progress report on eggbeaters

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stretcher cases were strapped to the outside of the fuselage and evacuated successfully.

The scale of tactical use of helicopters increases daily as new aircraft—the R-6A particularly—are delivered to overseas theaters. The Coast Guard—flying Army designed helicopters—has already performed several dramatic rescues at sea and on thawing ice with the eggbeaters; shortly the windmills will be at work with ground troops as artillery spotters, liaison craft, and wire layers.

Now being produced in addition to the R-6 is another Sikorsky design, the R-5, which is a much heavier helicopter powered with a 450 horsepower Pratt and Whitney engine. At the same time "Y" and "X" craft like the Kellett XR-8 Synchropter, the Platt-LePage XR-1A and others are being tested, improved, and readied for production. Drawing boards all over the country are covered with "revolutionary" helicopter designs.

Beyond a doubt the future of the craft is enormous—but we mustn't let speculation about the helicopter of tomorrow make us forget that there's a helicopter today; already at work, already frightening cows and chickens as it hedgehops across the U. S. or gathering crowds at places like Iwo Jima and Guam when it lands on or near an airfield. Recently 17 helicopters of the Helicopter School flew cross country from Chanute Field, Ill., to Sheppard Field, Texas—the largest and longest mass flight of "eggbeaters" ever—and at one point got lost, landing near the town of Ringling, Okla., for gas and directions. A woman who stood on the porch of her farmhouse and watched the things cover her cornfield like a swarm of locusts summed up the current progress of the AAF helicopter. "My God," she said, "Horoscopes! And I thought we'd have to wait 'til the next war to see any horoscopes!" ☆

Answers to Quiz on Page 46

1. (B) Getting longitude and latitude from the stars
2. (A) Floater
3. B-19
4. (B) South African
5. (B) C-47
6. (A) James H. Doolittle
7. CG-10A
8. (C) OA-10
9. (C) DDT
10. (D) Glide-skip
11. (A) True
12. (D) 120 days
13. (A) 1918
14. (B) Single-place Army plane
15. (D) The Southern Cross
16. (C) Divine Wind
17. (C) A nose light goes on
18. (C) Five
19. (B) Aluminum
20. Jap Tony