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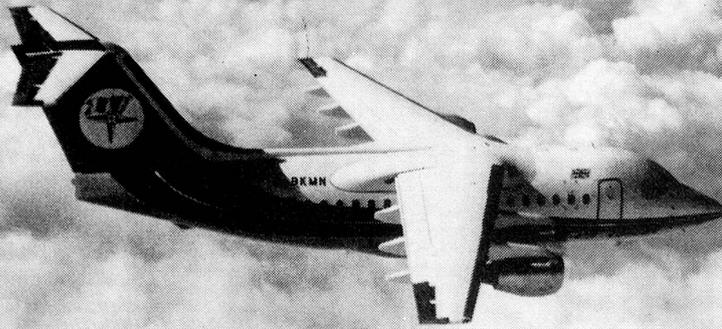
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Anglo - Swiss



A Dan-Air BAe146 in flight

THE three major Swiss airports – Zurich, Geneva and Basle – are well known to travellers to and from London. Not so the airfield of the Swiss capital.

Berne's attitude to aviation has always been rather conservative, balanced between foresight and prudence.

The first balloon ascents of the brothers Montgolfier caught the imagination of the Swiss, and in 1784, 30 unmanned flights took place in Switzerland. Not all were successful. The first one to rise in Berne was a failure and caused much ridicule. The Berne burghers and councillors immediately decreed hot-air balloons illegal.

After the decline of the Old Berne, the cartwright and artillery man Samuel Johann Pauli (1766-1820) started on a project

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link is strengthened

First jet aircraft lands in Berne

of a dirigible airship which would fly from Berne to London.

The plan did not materialise, but he had success in Paris and London where he and his compatriot, Urs Egg, an armourer in the service of King George III, received a licence from the king in 1815 for the sole privilege of running a passenger airship, "Dolphin", to the continent.

Failure was inevitable, and it took another 130 years before air connections between Berne and London became a reality.

In 1901, the Swiss Aeroclub was founded under the motto "Lighter than Air". Development of aviation continued. The first Berne Aviation Days, October 8-10 1910, gave a picture of technical achievements.

Taddeoli was awarded two first prizes, one for a flight of up to 600m and one for the longest duration, of 32 min 1 sec. The cup for the longest total flying time of 58 min 17 sec went to Failloubaz.

Berne and its Beundenfeld achieved a certain aeronautical importance by the historic alpine, and other, flights by Oscar Bider, and also as the station of the newly formed Swiss Air Force in 1914.

Aviation made great strides after the First World War, and by 1925 eight air connections with airports abroad were established. The federal capital, however, had no proper landing ground.

A Berne travel office organised flights to Basle in open Caudrons whence – by changing in Paris – a passenger with a small suitcase was able to reach London the same day.

A commission in Berne was given leave to study the possibility of an airfield, but years went by before the Belpmoos was ready.

The initial project was accepted by the local electors in 1928, and the following year Alpar was founded. Flying from Berne began in earnest.

The federal authorities agreed to a subsidy, provided the airfield Belpmoos would at all times serve the Confederation (diplomats, officials, control flights, etc). This commitment was undertaken by the town of Berne and is still observed.

The main use of the airfield was for sports aviators, and for obvious reasons there were no profits for Alpar. In 1942, a comprehensive civil aviation concept was worked out for Switzerland. Utzenstorf was the first choice for an international airport, but in 1945 Zurich Kloten was chosen.

The Belpmoos project as an international airport was rejected

by the electorate in 1947, and it was not until seven years later that the runway was improved and a control tower erected. A hard tarmac was installed in 1959. Agricultural circles were still opposed.

Swissair, after many political ups and downs, ran the first London flights (flying DC-3s) three times weekly but they were as short-lived as those run a few years later.

Salvation came when Dan-Air took an interest and began regular scheduled flights from London to Berne in 1972. The 44-seater Hawker-Siddeley 748 turbo-propeller planes brought advantages above all to British holidaymakers in spite of the 2½-hour flight.

Although conditions were difficult, Dan-Air managed an

annual traffic volume of 15,000 passengers – a great boom for Berne and its hinterland.

The Story of Dan-Air

Davies and Newman Holdings is a long-established firm of shipping brokers in the City of London. The company's two initials Da and N gave the name to the small independent airline which registered in May 1953.

Its fleet consisted of G-AMSV, a solitary twin-engined Dakota (DC-3) left over from the thousands of deservedly famous aircraft produced during the war.

Its first flight was a charter from Southend via Manchester to Shannon Airport, followed by a second "little" Berlin airlift. The company grew, and from Southend it moved to Blackbushe, then in 1960 to its present home at

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All aboard for Berne! British holidaymakers and businessmen bound for Switzerland go aboard the new Dan-Air 146-100 jetliner.

Dan-Air's PRO, George Gesman (right), with journalists at Berne Airport before returning to Gatwick on the first commercial jet flight to the Swiss capital



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Gatwick airport. Its ramifications were intensified, its fleet increased, and its reputation grew worldwide.

Today, Dan-Air, a fully independent British airline, can look back on 30 years of growth. With a fleet of around 50, a staff of 3,000 and a turnover last year of £184 million (net profit £3.2 million) it may be justly proud of its achievements.

In May this year, Dan-Air became the first airline in the world to operate Britain's newest short-haul jet, the BAe 146. This aircraft is the result of the skills and experience of almost a generation of designers, aerodynamicists, engineers and many others at British Aerospace at Hatfield.

It was at de Havilland's, makers of the famous Comet (the first passenger aircraft with jet propulsion), in 1959 that the idea was born for a short-haul airliner seating some 30 passengers.

The project was not popular, for it was the era of the turboprop engines. Yet the idea was developed, and when the American Avco Lycoming ALF 502 came on the market progress was swift.

The 146 (HS146) was launched in August 1973 but the fuel crisis brought new problems of cost and more doubts. Yet it was clear that the world needed short-haul jet airliners.

In 1977 all British aviation works were nationalised and

combined under British Aerospace, which launched the BAe 146 in July, 1978 as a private venture project – a brave decision.

Today, thanks to Dan-Air among others, the BAe 146, Britain's first new jet for 18 years, brings reliable and quiet jet service to routes previously flown only by propeller aircraft. Economy, efficiency and quietness are its hallmark.

Red-Letter Day

And so, on May 27, a new era in commercial aviation opened with the arrival at Berne airport of the world's latest and quietest jet airliner on its first revenue-earning flight.

The stubby, four-engined red, white and blue BAe 146-100 flew from Gatwick with passengers and cargo just four days after being delivered to Dan-Air from the manufacturers.

Our flight DA852 took off from Gatwick at midday. Apart from the first fare-paying passengers, a number of journalists went on this historic flight, accompanied by Dan-Air's PR chief, George Yeaman. It was a most comfortable trip on this 88-seater, one-class plane, with its seats arranged twice three abreast.

We were well looked after by a friendly and attentive cabin crew. A tasty cold lunch and free drinks were served, and soon we were cruising at 29,000 ft. In 1¼ hours we were ready to land, and what a

landing – smooth, practically on a postage stamp!

Berne Belpmoos is such a lovely airfield, surrounded by tilled land, meadows and green hills. Quite a few journalists and travel agents were there to greet the "Whispering Jet". We were given a good reception by the Berne representatives of Dan-Air and other officials.

The arrival of the BAe 146 was certainly most impressive, and even the cautious Bernese had to admit that the new jet was living up to its name, "Flüsterjet".

They had not been enthusiastic about accepting it, but after some persuasion they agreed, and there is no doubt that Berne will benefit.

With a daily service, flying time reduced by one hour and double the seating capacity of the old turboprop plane, it will be a boon for diplomats and businessmen making for the capital, but above all for British tourists en route for the Bernese Oberland.

There will be coach services to Spiez, Thun and Interlaken stations.

Soon after the first flight, Dan-Air offered an opportunity of trying out the new aircraft and of visiting British Aerospace to a 14-strong delegation from Berne,

led by the President of the Council, René Baertschi, and his predecessor in office, Paul Gfeller.

During our flying visit, Berne was at its loveliest. Its newest four-star hotel, the Hotel Bern in the Zeughausgasse, offered us excellent hospitality, and the bears in the famous pit were at their most obliging, dancing and cajoling.

The return flight for us was in the afternoon of the next day. We took off in brilliant sunshine, all set for another comfortable flight – a repeat performance in every way with comfort, efficient service, smooth flying and a perfect landing back at Gatwick.

The difference could not have been more marked. Gatwick, ranking as the fourth busiest airport in the world in terms of international flight traffic, already handles about 11 million passengers a year and will soon increase its capacity to 25 million.

Berne, quiet and unhurried and peaceful, has cows grazing along the side of the runway and a few little sports planes taking off or landing on the grass.

The two have grown closer, thanks to Dan-Air and its new BAe 146. Ad multos annos!

Mariann Meier