



Speedbird: The Complete History of BOAC

Robin Higham

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Between 1939 and 1946 BOAC (the British Overseas Airways Corporation) was the nationalised airline of Great Britain – and between 1946 and 1974 as such it exclusively operated all long-haul British flights.

With its iconic ‘Speedbird’ logo and its central role in the glamorous ‘jet age’ of the 1950s and 1960s, BOAC achieved a near cult-status with admirers around the globe. Yet, to date there has been no comprehensive history of the organisation, covering its structure, fleet and the role it played in the critical events of the age – from World War II to the end of empire, a period when BOAC played a pivotal part in projecting British political power, even as that power was waning. During World War II, BOAC operated a limited wartime service and prepared for the return of commercial flight in the post-war era. But it was in the service of Britain’s colonies - and latterly the process of decolonisation - that BOAC achieved its most pivotal role. The development of flight technology enabled much faster connections between Britain and her imperial possessions - as the colonies prepared for independence BOAC ferried diplomats, politicians and colonial administrators between London and the far-flung corners of Africa and Asia in much faster times than had previously been possible.

In this book, acclaimed historian Robin Higham presents a unique comprehensive study of BOAC from the early jet travel of the de Havilland Comet and the Vickers VC10 to the dawn of supersonic passenger aviation. Highly illustrated and meticulously researched using previously-unseen sources, this book will be essential reading for all aviation enthusiasts and anyone interested in the history of modern Britain.



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