

From the booklet "A Place Called Pointe du Chene"

by J.E. Belliveau

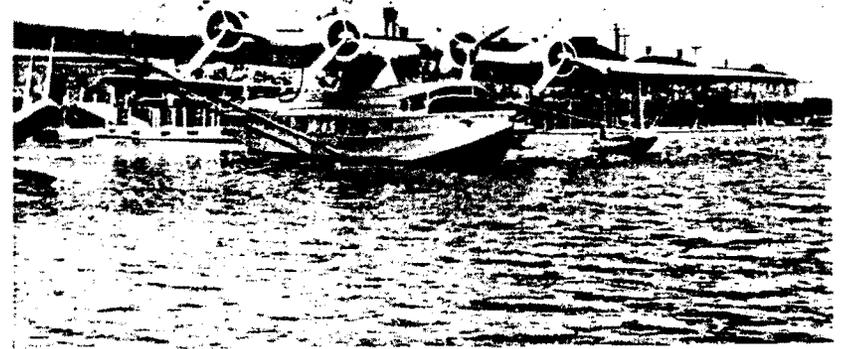
BALBO'S ARMADA

Among Pointe du Chene's most noted historical events was the arrival in its cove, between the wharf and the Shediac Yacht club of Marshal Italo Balbo's Italian armada of 24 seaplanes which flew the Atlantic in the first massed trans-ocean flight ever attempted. They had come from Rome by way of the Azores and Cartwright, Nfld., landing on Shediac Bay on July 13, 1933. Balbo stayed at the home of the late Dr. J. Clarence Webster (sold by William Webster to Louis Landry of Shediac in 1974) and from there telephoned II Duce Benito Mussolini, Italy's dictator leader, to describe the crossing on the way to the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago.

When Pan American Airways decided in the 1930's to establish an Atlantic terminus at Pointe du Chene and set up a radio direction-finding station and other facilities on the wharf, the old port and railway terminus rejoiced that it was coming back into its own. Flying boats were then the thing and it was not anticipated that faster aircraft, which would not need to land on water, would soon be leaping the ocean far faster and more conveniently. It would be a summer base, since ice prohibited landings in winter when the flying boats went the southern route via the Azores to Lisbon.

Shediac Bay is in The Great Circle Route, the line being to Botwood, Nfld., thence to Foynes Ireland, or Lisbon, Portugal. The Pan-Am aircraft came to Shediac from Port Washington, Long Island, N. Y. Flights also were made from the Azores to New York via Shediac because, oddly, it is shorter than going via Bermuda. The first Atlantic Clipper to fly into Pointe du Chene was piloted by First Officer DeLima in 1937.

Trans-Canada Air Lines, the predecessor of Air Canada, had planned to send its passengers to Europe and Britain by way of Pointe du Chene, after they had flown them into Moncton from



Pan-American Clipper flying boat, Yankee Clipper at Pt. du Chene Wharf, 1938. (Courtesy Harold Reid).

various ports in the United States and Canada. The Department of Transport put in meteorological and radio equipment, but the fog-free harbor never made it into the big leagues. Bigger aircraft which would take longer leaps, then total jumps of the ocean, in the jet age, left the lumbering flying boats far behind.

But, while they lasted, the wharf at Pointe du Chene had its celebrities. Even Bob Hope was there, and Queen Wilhelmina of Holland, Ray Milland the movie actor, Rear Admiral Leahy of the U. S. navy; movie actor Edward G. Robinson, and of course Juan Terry Trippe, president of Pan American, and many others.

(The first aircraft to come down on Shediac Bay landed on the ice, on skis, in 1927. In 1929, two air force seaplanes based on a lake near Sackville, next dropped down on the bay. The discovery of the bay as an air base was made accidentally by Squadron Leader James Ashton, R.C.A.F., in the mid-twenties when flying from Halifax to Montreal. It was planned as a non-stop flight, a great feat in the Twenties. Fog dogged him from Halifax but disappeared "mysteriously" over Shediac Bay. So he reported to the Air Force, which studied the bay and decided it was ideal for seaplanes on floats or skis).

transport, and said: "Today we are making history". Others who spoke were Ald. F.J. Robidoux, Hon. F.C. Squires, leader of the New Brunswick Opposition, and Hon. H.R. Emmerson, M.P. for Westmorland who commented that "this was not a stunt flight and it will put Shediac on the map". However, Dr. J. Clarence Webster proved to be prophetic. He referred to a rumor that the Shediac airbase's days would be numbered as soon as land planes replaced seaplanes on ocean routes. Still, he said, Shediac could be proud of the place it had played in the development of aviation.

W.B. King, an engineer for Pan American, was stationed at Shediac to set up a base and this was done on the Pointe du Chene wharf where the airline established facilities. Flying boats came to Shediac from Port Washington, Long Island, and the first regular clipper was piloted by First Officer DeLima. During two year of operation, many celebrities stepped onto the wharf and into the waiting room during stopovers. Among them were Queen Wilhelmina of The Netherlands, Bob Hope, Edward G. Robinson, Rear Admiral Leahy of U.S. Navy and many others including Juan Terry Trippe, the first president and founder of Pan American.

The first transatlantic airmail from Canada went out of Shediac via Foynes, near Shannon, in Eire. The first letter was stamped at Shediac and addressed to Mrs. Alfred Scott of North Gainsboro, Lincolnshire, England. It left at 11 a.m., on June 24, 1939; postage cost 30 cents but the sender is unknown (at least to this writer).

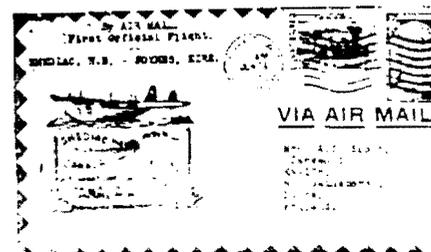
Trans-Canada Airlines, the predecessor to Air Canada, had planned a passenger service to Europe and Great Britain from Shediac in these heady day of commercial aerial development. The idea was to have land flights reach the Moncton airport from central Canada and the United States, to connect with the flying boats in Shediac. Meteorological and radio equipment was installed on the fog-free bay but nothing ever came of the scheme. In 1939, the Nazis marched



Pan American Clipper being pulled in close after landing at wharf, Shediac, (Pointe du Chene)



Front view Clipper at wharf 1938.



First Transatlantic airmail, stamped at Shediac post office, sent to North Gainsboro, Lancashire, England, June 24, 1939. Flight went from Shediac to Foynes, Eire.



Aerial shot Pan-American Airways seaplane base at Pointe du Chene (Shediac Bay) 1938.