108 FLIGHT

CIVIL AVIATION
ELBA ACCIDENT DEVELOPMENTS

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HE circumstances of the accident in which B.O.A.C. Comet
G-ALYP was lost off the island of Elba on January
10th have caused widespread speculation. As we recorded last week, all Comets in service with the Corporation were imme-diately recalled to London for "minute and unhurried" inspection. Comets operated by Air France and U.A.T. were also grounded for inspection, but the R.C.A.F., which operates two Series lAs, announced that they saw no reason to follow suit.
Three B.O.A.C. Comets were abroad when the inspections were begun. Two returned home from Singapore and Johannes-burg on January 13th and the third arrived from Tokyo on January 15th, their passengers having been transferred to other aircraft. The inspection, which involved the complete stripping of two of the aircraft, had, up till the time of going to press, provided no indication of any fault or weakness. Last Monday, B.O.A.C. resumed normal crew-training and familiarization flights with Comets, but no passengers were to be carried until the technical examination was completed.

Four lines of investigation are being pursued: examination of the remaining Comets, the attempted recovery, by the Royal Navy, of G-ALYP's wreckage from the sea, medical examination of the 15 bodies recovered, and the investigation of the possibility of sabotage. Admiral Lord Mountbatten is co-ordinating the search for the wreckage, which is believed to be lying at a depth of 450ft or more in the position 10° 16' 55" E, 42° 31' 31" N. Since this is outside Italian territorial waters, investigation has now become a British responsibility. Mr. Lennox-Boyd, Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation (who announced that a public inquiry would be held in Britain), flew to Italy on January 17th to supervise the proceedings. Four Naval vessels were ordered to proceed to the scene of the accident to salvage the wreckage; the frigate Wrangler, the dan-layer (marker-buoy vessel) Sursay, the salvage ship Sea Salvor, and the boom defence vessel Barhill. An underwater television camera was flown out to Rome from England, as well as deep-diving gear.
Professor Folco Domenici, head of the Institute of Forensic Medicine at Pisa, carried out provisional autopsies on the 15 bodies. On January 16th, Sir Harold Whittingham, B.O.A.C.'s Director of Medical Services, and G/C. W. K. Stewart, of the R.A.F. Medical Establishment at Famborough, flew to Italy to continue the examination.
Despite a series of rumours, investigations had so far provided no concrete evidence. Evidence of explosion reported to have been found on the bodies was not generally confirmed, and the similarity between the Comet and Philippine Airlines DC-6 accidents was rapidly dissolving as definite statements were pub-lished. For instance, it was learned from Beirut on January 16th that the Lebanon Directorate of Civil Aviation had stated that the Comet reached Beirut at 0500 hr, local time, on January 10th. It left the airport at 0720—2 hr 20 min later. The accident occurred 8 hr after touch-down at Beirut and 5 hr 35 min after take-off. The length of the stay at Beirut was due to fuel pump repairs, which were effected by the company's engineers, who did not leave the aircraft throughout its stay at Beirut. Cargo put on board there included a parcel for Rome, weighing 10.5 kg, a parcel for London, weighing 32 kg, and a parcel of powdered phosphate samples, weighing 2 kg. The Philippine Airlines DC-6 reached Beirut on January 14th at 0627 hr, local time, and took off at 0747 hr, this being the time required for refuelling, which was carried out under the joint supervision of the aircraft crew, the company's staff and Beirut airport officials. The sub-sequent accident took place 7 hr and 18 min after landing at Beirut, and 5 hr 58 min after take-off. The DC-6 took on no cargo.
After the weekend, the possibility of sabotage was still offi-cially "not excluded," but neither was there definite reason to suspect it. It has been noted that in both last year's Comet accident at Calcutta and in the most recent accident the large centre-section fuel tank of the aircraft was empty, and that kerosine vapour will in certain critical conditions form a poten-tially explosive mixture. It does, on the other hand, appear mostly unlikely that structural or other failure in the engines was to blame. Hydraulic fluid as a possible source of danger has been discussed, but this again has no definite evidence in support. Every effort was being made to salvage the wreckage, although this was known to be an extremely difficult task owing to the sea conditions and the depth and nature of the sea bed. But until this is achieved it appears unlikely that the cause of the accident can be established with any certainty.
Last Monday B.O.A.C. stated that hours flown in commercial service by their own Comets totalled 25,000; of this number, 3,500 hours had (as reported last week) been accumulated by G-ALYP. The first Comet, its flying completed, is meanwhile undergoing routine structural tests at R.A.E., Farnborough.

NO SUCCESSOR FOR DR. PLESMAN

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N indication of the great authority vested in the late Dr. Albert Plesman as president of K.L.M. is the announcement that
the company's directors, after consultation with the board of control, have decided not to appoint a successor for the time being. Their official statement added that: "In accordance with the articles of association, the management of the company there-fore remains in the hands of the executive vice-presidents, Messrs. F. von Balluseck, F. Besancon and M. J. van der Ploeg. Dr. L. H. Slotemaker, executive vice-president foreign relations, remains in charge of the executive duties in connection with foreign relations."

INDIAN ORDERS

SIX Beechcraft twins seating seven or eight passengers have

been ordered for the feeder routes of Indian Airlines Corporation. An equal number of Viscounts or Convair 340s will also be ordered shortly. A report from Bombay says that the final choice was to have been at a meeting of Corporation executives "late this month."

VISCOUNT'S LONDON-PARIS RECORD

ON January 10th a Viscount of Air France flew from London

Airport to Orly in the exceptionally short time of 44 minutes.
The great-circle distance between the two airports is 227 miles, so that the average speed works out at 309 m.p.h. This is the first recorded occasion on which a passenger-carrying airliner has flown between the two capitals at over 300 m.p.h. Traffic procedures normally make it impossible for a pilot to take the shortest route, so the Viscount's cruising speed must have been considerably higher than the figure quoted.
Apart from record flights by jet fighters, the fastest journey between London and Paris was made on July 25th, 1948, by the experimental Nene-Viking, which flew 222 miles from L.A.P. to Villacoublay in 34 min—equivalent to over 390 m.p.h.

PHDLD7PINE DC-6 LOST

ONE of the three DC-6s operated by Philippine Airlines

crashed while approaching Ciampino Airport, Rome,
on January 14th. It was totally destroyed and the crew of nine and seven passengers lost their lives. The aircraft, registered PI-C294, which was on a scheduled flight from Manila to London, had taken off from Beirut and was due to make its last refuelling stop at Ciampino when the accident occurred. Eye-witness accounts are contradictory, but it appears that the aircraft dived from a height of 6,500ft and narrowly missed some buildings before crashing in a field close to the airfield. Some reports stated that two engines were on fire, but it is not certain whether the aircraft blew up just before or immediately after contact with the ground.

ON THE DOTTED LINE: Directors of Fred Olsen Airtransport, the Norwegian independent company, signed a contract for two Viscount
700s on January 14th. Firm orders for the Viscount thus cover a total
of 88 aircraft—47 for overseas operators. Pictured as the contract was
signed are Mr. T. E. R. Hill (standing), manager of Vickers-Armstrongs' contracts department; Mr. E. J. Waddingtom, Vickers-Armstrongs director; Mr. P. Hegnar and Mr. R. Rynning, directors of Fred Olsen.