



The first of 30 Super VC10s for BOAC takes shape at the Vickers Weybridge factory of British Aircraft Corporation. First flight is scheduled for early 1964. The section shown in the join-up jig incorporates a 75in fuselage extension—at the first three passenger windows, aft of the forward galley service door. A further 81in fuselage extension is located aft of the wing

## AIR COMMERCE...

### Establish and Publish

By the Air Transport Editor

**O**N the night of January 25, 1961, a BOAC Comet 4 hit treetops in Viterbo during what the pilots presumed to be an instrument approach to Rome Fiumicino Airport. Now published by the Ministry of Aviation is the report of the Italian Ministry of Defence-Air inquiry into the accident. The report is summarized on this and the next page.

The accident, so nearly a major disaster, was not due to a mis-judged approach, but to the fact that the Comet was 60 miles from where it should have been.

The most remarkable thing about this report is not the evidence that comes to light, remarkable though this is. For example, the crew had not been exercised in the Fiumicino approach procedures, even though neither pilot had ever flown into the airport. BOAC say that the crew were disciplined and the commander deprived of seniority; yet the fact that the two pilots had not, in the opinion of the Italians, been adequately familiarized with Fiumicino gives rise to concern—not for the first time—about interpretation of the law (*Flight*, September 7, 1961, page 401) regarding route-competence.

The most remarkable thing about this report is the fact that it has been published at all. If the accident had happened one month before nothing more might ever have been heard of it (just as nothing has ever been heard of why a BOAC Comet left its under-carriage on a hilltop near Madrid in 1960). One month before, it may be recalled, the Cairns committee on accident investigation submitted its report to the Minister; this committee recommended that henceforth all accident reports should be published. The Ministry of Aviation, in its white paper on safety last April, agreed with this recommendation.

The Ministry's safety people have been as good as their word in the white paper—though for some inexplicable reason they have been sitting on this report, which was completed by a very high-powered Italian commission in November 1961, for more than a year. Four months would be excessive, as it was in the case of the French report on the Perpignan accident, bearing in mind that the Ministry always has a representative on the foreign commission

enjoying, as representative of the State of registry, all the courtesies of consultation. Why, for instance, is the English translation punctuated with footling translator's queries? Could not the Ministry have asked their Italian colleagues 13 months ago whether (page 24) "flight plan" meant "navigation log"? This is straightforward technical Italian, not an inscription on a Pharaoh's tomb, and the authors are presumably only too willing to render every assistance. Because statistically speaking 70 per cent of all accidents to British public transport aircraft are in the hands of foreign investigators, these and other questions about consultation arrangements need thinking about.

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Why, it might be asked, drag up all the details of this accident two years after the event? The pilots have presumably suffered enough professional anguish as well as company discipline; BOAC have no doubt tightened up their already very scrupulous route-competence checks; and the Italians have doubtless done something about wireless interference with the Fiumicino NDB. So why open old wounds?

Because in principle it is in the interests of safety that serious narrow squeaks should get the same careful investigation and publicity as the actual killers; because it is *not* in the interests of safety that near-disasters should be hushed up, and that sins of omission (including those of governments) should be perpetrated in privacy; and because public accountability can in itself foster the attainment of high safety standards.

The Italians, the integrity of whose ATC system was under some suspicion, put a strong team on this investigation, and they have produced what appears—in the absence of nine of the 15 appendices from the English version—to be a competent report. Particularly praiseworthy is the inclusion at the end of recommendations, which would, whenever possible, be a welcome addition to British reports.

## THE VITERBO ACCIDENT

**S**OME time between 2033hr and 2035hr on January 25, 1961, BOAC Comet 4 G-APDM struck the tops of some trees at a height of 1,740ft in the locality of Case Nuove, San Martino al Cimino, province of Viterbo, during what the pilots thought was the final approach to the newly opened Fiumicino Airport, Rome. Though damaged, with one flap sheared into two pieces and tree branches in the compressor inlets of three engines, the aircraft landed safely. None of the 44 passengers, who included Mr Duncan Sandys, or crew was hurt. The accident was caused by the fact that the aircraft was some 60 miles away from Fiumicino, not on finals,

and this was due, according to the Italian official report just published by the Ministry of Aviation,\* to seven causes:—

- (1) The fact that exercises for familiarization (as recommended by ICAO) with the approach procedure for Fiumicino were not carried out, which exercises were all the more necessary in that it was the first time that the crew had flown to that airport.
- (2) The fact that the aircraft did not fly over NR and did not follow a QDR between 115° and 122° from NR (Note No 2 on Instrument Approach Chart No 036/2).

\* Report of the Commission appointed by the Ministry of Defence-Air, Italian Republic, MoA, CAP 185, HM Stationery Office, price 4s.