



## South American Rentrée

BOAC RETURNS TO THE SOUTH ATLANTIC

By ALASTAIR PUGH

**M**EANWHILE, the immediate challenge of the Comet's loss had to be met by rapid improvisations; the utilization of aircraft in the fleet stepped up; Hermes were recalled to service for a brief period; and the corporation's Commonwealth partners provided an increased share of the capacity on the Australian and South African routes. The South American services had to be temporarily suspended."

That, in the terse phrases of the BOAC annual report for the year ended March 31, 1955, was the situation nearly six years ago; the Comet had been withdrawn from service in April 1954 and as a direct result the twice-weekly first-class Argonaut services on the South Atlantic route to Santiago ceased shortly afterwards, so that the hard-pressed corporation could find additional capacity for its other services.

Now—as from January 25—BOAC is back on its traditional route to the South Atlantic, and back with the finest equipment in its fleets—the de Havilland Comet 4. What are the corporation's chances of achieving commercial success on the route across the equator from Dakar to Brazil, down to Montevideo on the sun-splashed shores of Uruguay, and west to Buenos Aires and across the high Andes to Santiago? And why has January 1960 been chosen as the date for re-introducing this particular service?

Neither of these questions can be fairly answered in a word. The South Atlantic route is one of the most difficult in the world on which to operate at a profit, and to judge the wisdom or otherwise of the corporation's decision a good number of facts and trends must be marshalled and weighed in the balance. The obvious view is that with nine carriers already on this route,

IN offices with views as diverse as London's rain-washed roofs, Recife's palm-fringed waterfront, Buenos Aires' wide avenues, or the snow-tipped mountains which look down upon lofty, heat-soaked skyscrapers of Santiago, final preparations are being made for the re-opening of BOAC services to South America. After a lapse of five years—in which the traffic over this route has almost doubled, yet only a caretaker staff has remained to safeguard BOAC's interests—the task of becoming successfully re-established ahead of other jet competition is enormous. Seemingly endless political arrangements have had to be negotiated, there has been a thorough new market survey, station staffs have been expanded and managers appointed, and finally there have been three pre-service Comet proving flights down the route. This article, written after the third of these 14,000-mile flights from London to Santiago de Chile and back, discusses the commercial background to BOAC's return to South America.

offering low-frequency services and achieving generally inadequate load factors, it must be commercial folly for BOAC to come back to a route that was the first to be dropped during the difficult period of 1954. This is the view forcibly expressed in the December issue of *The Log*, the journal of the British Air Line Pilots' Association:—

"It would be interesting to know from the start [Mr Sandys'] opinion on the resumption of BOAC services to Rio and Santiago. This is an expansion: Britain's showiest aircraft will try to skim the cream of traffic down to South America; a good boost for British trade. But absolutely certain to lose money for BOAC over the next five years. Nor is it likely that a more efficient airline would make any profit on this run; it is a cut-throat route with already more seats offered for sale than there are passengers to fill them."

Yet BOAC do not agree, and in the last analysis it is the cor-

Comparison of the South Atlantic routes operated by BSAA in 1948 (left) and by BOAC in 1960. In the heading: the Andes crossing

