

## BOAC's NEW CHAIRMAN

*Sir Giles Guthrie, OBE, DSC*



**B**OAC's chairman-designate, Sir Giles Guthrie, is virtually unknown in the airline world, although he has been a member of the BEA board since 1959. He has taken much more than a passing interest in that corporation's activities, but to most of his future colleagues in BOAC, and to the leaders of the world's airlines with whom he will have to parley in the years ahead, he is—as he has said himself—a new boy.

Sir Giles is 47 and he learned to fly on Tiger Moths at the age of 16, when at Eton, with Hillmans Airways, qualifying for his private pilot's licence on his seventeenth birthday. He flew a good deal with Whitney Straight's school at Ipswich, mostly on Redwings; and in 1936, when he was at Cambridge, he wrote to Edgar Percival to say that he was interested in buying a Vega Gull. Apparently Mr Percival was so impressed with his letter, which indicated that his potential customer, though youthful, knew exactly what he wanted, that he took it perhaps more seriously than he would have done similar letters from young undergraduates in those days. The deal was done and Sir Connop Guthrie bought the Vega Gull for his son, who flew it a great deal in the years 1936 and 1937.

His most notable flight was when, with C. W. A. Scott (of Scott and Campbell-Black D.H. Comet Racer fame), he won an England-South Africa race (*Flight*, October 8, 1936). He was then aged 20. He flew his Vega Gull in King's Cup air races (winning the 1936 race), Isle of Man races, Croydon-Brussels dawn patrol flights, and he also took it to the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

In 1937 he went to AST at Hamble, exchanged his Vega Gull for a Mew Gull and qualified for his commercial pilot's licence (B licence in those days). He then joined British Airways, the forerunner of BEA, and trained in the traffic department. His ability to speak French and German resulted in his being sent to the Paris and later to the Hamburg offices of British Airways, where he worked for the commercial department. In 1938 he was appointed British Airways' man in Warsaw where he remained until 48hr before the fateful date of September 1, 1939.

### War Record

He enlisted in the Fleet Air Arm and, after initial training at Eastleigh, was posted to Castletown, Caithness, in Scotland, flying Fulmars. Later his squadron, 808, was posted to HMS *Ark Royal*. Guthrie served on this carrier which, based on Gibraltar, operated in the Mediterranean theatre and also in the North and South Atlantic. He won his DSC in the Mediterranean when a small number of *Ark Royal* fighters took on a rather large number of Italian and German bombers which, escorted by fighters, were attacking one of the great Malta convoys. For a time also he flew Hurricanes based on Gibraltar, mostly night patrol operations for the island's protection from German and Italian raiders. When the "unsinkable" *Ark Royal* was finally sunk Guthrie (who was on board at the time) returned to the UK to join the Naval Air Fighting Development Unit at RAF Duxford, working alongside the RAF AFDU equivalent. There he flew all sorts of different new aircraft on development and service acceptance trials before they were released to squadrons. He flew pretty well every type of single-engined, and some twin-engined, aircraft that went into FAA service during the war. He was also the pilot who did the development trials, mostly in Seafires, of the Franks g-suit.

He did not return to combat operations, being retained as No 2 to Cmdr Brian Rendall at NAFDU developing new aircraft types. For these services, during which he rose to the rank of Lieutenant Commander, he was awarded the OBE.

On demobilization he had the opportunity to join BOAC; but on the death of his father, Sir Connop Guthrie, in 1945 he had to look after the family interests, mainly merchant banking. For a time he owned a Chrislea Ace and a Stinson Reliant, flying these until about 1953 from Gatwick near his home. When Gatwick started to expand and as his business activities increased "some of the gilt went off the private flying gingerbread," he has said, and he let his licence lapse.

To become chairman of BOAC Sir Giles Guthrie takes a drop in salary of about £5,000, although it is believed he is a rich man in his own right. Those who know him best speak warmly of his gay and friendly personality and of his unflappability even when hardest pressed. He is apparently bursting with energy and drive, and has a great urge to get things done. He is married and has two sons of 21 and 19. The Guthries have two houses in the country and one in town.

### Man for the Pru?

Sir Giles is recently believed to have been on the point of being made chairman of the Prudential, nowadays the most illustrious of City of London jobs. His time has been largely taken up with the affairs of Brown Shipley & Co, the merchant bankers of which he is managing director. He is also a director of Radio Rentals Ltd. The deputy chairman of this company, Mr Charles Hardie, a distinguished accountant, is also joining the BOAC board on the forthcoming routine retirement of Mr K. H. Staple. Sir Giles is also deputy chairman of North Central Finance. All these posts he will now relinquish.

Sir Giles is unlikely to take up his new appointment until January 1 at the earliest. He has not given many interviews though in the *Daily Express* he is quoted as having said: "Since I have worked on the BEA board [since 1959] I have devoted one day a week and visited every station and department. Whether you are running an airline or any other commercial business the principle remains the same, to achieve revenue and watch overheads. . . . If we were to find that operating South American services were totally uncommercial [for example] we would say to the Minister that this was so. Should he then say 'go ahead all the same' then he must pay for it. What I am undertaking is not a Beeching operation. . . . It is a question of having a new look at the co-operation with BEA under changed circumstances. . . . What I want to do to begin with is to have a look at every department. I don't want to give the idea I am fussing around needlessly. . . . I am not a believer in the hire-and-fire technique."

Asked on BBC Television whether he thought that BOAC's £80m deficit ought to be written off, he said: "Yes, I think it should be." The Minister of Aviation, Mr Julian Amery, has said that Sir Giles Guthrie will be shown "the relevant portions" of the Corbett report. No doubt Sir Giles will be intrigued to know what the irrelevant portions contain.

There were newspaper reports last weekend of a BOAC board "revolt," with Lord Rennell, Mr L. Poole and Lord Tweedsmuir refusing to resign before Sir Giles Guthrie takes office. These three men are due for reappointment in, respectively, November 1964 and in June 1964 (two). Deputy chairman Sir Wilfred Neden is, however, resigning; he was due to be reappointed in June. Mr Kenneth Staple, secretary, advised the Minister last March that he would be retiring next January.