

Part 5: Foynes goes to War

Sound Effects: BBC Home Service Interval Signal: Big Ben chimes followed by *Bow Bells*

BBC Announcer: This is London. You will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister.

Archive - Neville Chamberlain: This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final note stating that, unless we hear from them by 11 o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.

Narrator: Appeasement had failed. On 3rd September 1939 the war that had threatened since the German Nazi takeover finally came. Many of the British seaplanes and their crews were called to military service, though BOAC remained a civilian air service. The American airlines also stayed on, as the US didn't enter the war until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941. The Irish government maintained a somewhat ambiguous neutrality throughout the conflict. British aircrew continued to work in Foynes.

Restrictions like rationing were introduced on the citizens of the Irish Republic, but Foynes still had the flying boats coming in and did not suffer many hardships for the duration.

Frank Buckley: The war was costing Britain £10 million per day. Well, Foynes got a good bit of that! In Ireland, there was rationing bread...- the bread was brown, butter was very scarce as well, tea - impossible to get.

Naturally enough, with the passage of time, you became exceptionally friendly with some of the crew members. This guy, Johnny King, was the flight steward on the aircraft. Now, the aircraft would come in, and there'd be everything inside of it - cooked chickens, tea, coffee, more than what they needed. Well, I was never short of tea during the war years, because my friend Johnny King used to get it for me.

But most of all, I'd say, it was an enjoyable time for working. There might be no plane today, so... BOAC staff, they loved fishing. They had America at home here, you know. Just picture it, their brothers and friends were in the Army and here they were in a neutral country enjoying the fruits of everything, you see. The head man, a Mr. Stewart Shaw, he'd say 'Well Mr. Buckley, will we go for a day's fishing?'

We'd go down the river then with our launches and our nets and everything else and catch plenty of fish. And, a big party on board. There'd be drink, as much drink as you'd want, the best of food, it was America at home. It was really great.

Oh you had to be available at all times... take for instance, tomorrow morning - the plane was due in at, say, 8.00am. I'd be lying there in my bed. The next thing was - do you know Margaret Shaughnessy there in the Museum below? Well, Margaret's grandfather was the 'call-out man'. I'd have allocated the crews for the plane due in the morning at 7.00am. Milo

McMahon - Milo McMahon was this man's name - he was on night duty. He was below in a hut on night duty. And he'd be advised the plane is now due in at 6.00am - no one to meet it, you see.

So Milo would come up on his pony, gallop around, he'd call me "Frankie, Frankie, she's coming in early, she's coming in at six o'clock." It was so much in my brain, I could allocate the crews and the men to contact: "Go up and tell Gerry Barron, tell Mike Lane" - all different fellas - tell them the plane is due in, I want them on duty at five o'clock. Five o'clock in the morning. Calling out the people there at night-time, you know...

The plane might take off from Foynes going to Botwood. There might be enemy air activity in or out. The plane would come back. And people wouldn't be in bed two hours and poor Milo would come to me, he'd say "Frankie, Frankie, she's coming back! She's coming back! Who will I call out?" And I had to think then: "Call out so-and-so, this fella and that fellow" and Milo would go away and call them. Passenger boats, tow boats, the ferry boats; the necessary boats were called out then, and they were all out there for the plane when she landed. It was a great service you know.