

11 Saved in Plane Fire, Laud TCA Stewardess

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Sydney, N.S., Aug. 12 (CP).—A big Trans-Canada Airlines plane was destroyed by fire just after landing here early today, but passengers and crew escaped without injury and will continue their journey to Scotland tonight.

The 11 passengers and six crew members filed to safety through the landing exit as the four-engined North Star went up in flames on the runway in about 20 minutes.

Airlines spokesmen said that as the giant ship slid in for a normal landing, the right landing wheel bumped a mound of earth about 20 feet from the edge of runway, where excavation for installation of airfield lights was in progress.

The terrific impact sent the undercarriage leg up through the fuselage, puncturing a gas tank, and as the craft came to rest nearly a mile down the runway the right wing burst into flames, quickly igniting a long trail of spilled fuel in its wake.

Escape of passengers and crew was orderly, largely due to the heroism of dark-haired Rita Meyer of Kitchener, Ont., 23-year-old stewardess.

Several ambulances clanged to the airport, 14 miles from here, and a number of doctors hurried to the scene of the fire. Only person to receive medical attention, however, was a North Sydney woman who was to have boarded the ill-fated ship at Reserve.

Standing on the ramp watching the ship as it came to a landing and broke into flames, she screamed to an airport attendant: "My God. Is that the plane I'm supposed to take?"

The attendant replied: "Yes, ma'am." She promptly collapsed. When revived, she asked to have her reservation to Scotland postponed to a later date.

Passengers and crew were eager to continue their flight to Prestwick aboard another North Star, brought here from Montreal. The flight was scheduled to take-off at 9:30 p.m., ADT.

Only passenger not continuing the trip immediately is 26-year-old David Thompson of Montreal and



Heroine of Aircraft Fire.

Rita Meyer, Kitchener-born TCA stewardess, who led 11 passengers of a flaming North Star aircraft to safety at Sydney, N.S., yesterday. "Everything happened so fast, we didn't have a chance to get nervous," she said.

Toronto, bound for Newcastle to visit his parents. He was held over because his immigration papers were in luggage lost in the fire.

It was the first major peacetime mishap at the sprawling Reserve airport near here and also the first in the history of Trans-Canada Air Lines' trans-ocean service.

Reserve is a normal stop for ocean-hopping aircraft and the crew reported no difficulties before the landing was attempted.

As flames swept up from the right wing of the sleek North Star, the

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Save Eleven in Crash Of Trans-Canada Liner

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Crew sounded a warning to passengers, who were quickly shepherded one by one to the landing exit by the trim and attractive Miss Meyer.

Even as the flames rushed through the cabin she stood by her post and the last passenger to be assisted from the ship was an 84-year-old Lancashireman, William Dennison, returning to his English home after visiting his son, Robert W. Dennison in Toronto.

As Dennison hobbled from the smoke-filled airliner, Pilot Doug Holland of Montreal and the four other members of the crew followed Miss Meyer to safety and were assisted to the ground by Purser-Steward Jack Twiggs, also of Montreal, who did yeoman work in the rescue.

Members of the plane's crew besides Triggs, Holland and Miss Meyer were: Flying Officer Bob Penrose; Navigation Officer Gill Evans and Radio Officer Bob Wright, all of Montreal.

Within 20 minutes the \$800,000 machine was completely gutted. Destruction was hastened by the exploding gas tanks. Fire-fighting crews at the airport were practically helpless in their efforts to salvage the aircraft.

Transport department officials were cautious in their comments on the accident. A spokesman, who declined use of his name, remarked that "the enquiry will iron out all the angles."

One angle expected to come in for close attention is whether the mounds of earth at the excavation were marked with lights or warning signals.

Despite the harrowing experience and the close brush with death, the passengers soon recovered and spent the latter part of the day shopping to replace clothing and other articles lost in the blaze.

Murray Harting of Toronto, bound for his native Dumfries, Scotland, nonchalantly told reporters he was seated midway in the plane.

"It was remarkable the way the passengers acted in that situation," said Harting. "I never witnessed such an exhibition of mental co-operation in emergency. There was no panic except, of course, several screams.

"But no helter-skelter attempt to escape. The stewardess prepared us for the landing and we jumped to the pavement from the exit."

Displaying a swollen left ankle, suffered when she landed heavily on the pavement, Mrs. Horace Bosworth, on her way back home to Yorkshire, very proudly answered reporters: "Am I going to continue the trip by plane? I certainly am. What is an experience like this compared to what the Nazis and their bombings did to us in the blitz?"

Mrs. Bosworth was accompanied by her husband, and seated near her was Miss Hanna B. Johnston

of Toronto, en route to visit Old Country relatives.

The elderly Dennison only had one lament and that was about the loss of his suitcase. In his thick Lancashire brogue, he muttered, "I should have gone back to get it."

In fact, he attempted to get back into the flaming craft, and only persuasion and efforts of Purser Triggs and other passengers prevented him.

The last passenger to leave the plane, Dennison was inconsolable about the loss of his suitcase, but he brightened up as he recalled with a smile, "I got my brief case though."

And he certainly did, but stumbled on the floor of the cabin in doing so, to be quickly picked up by Stewardess Meyer and hastily escorted to the exit landing.

Asked how he got out of the plane, he replied: "Oh, I guess I stumbled out, but it was a marvelous escape."

Showing some effects of shock, Mrs. Helen Cameron, homeward bound to Pitlochry, Scotland, said she "practically fell out" at the exit.

Disappointed over the loss of his visa and other immigration papers, David Thompson returned to Montreal late today. He had planned a few weeks visit in Newcastle, England.

Escape from a plane in an emergency was nothing new to Thompson who served in the RCAF in the Second Great War. "I've bailed out before," he said, but added with a smile, "It is a bit better bailing out at 15 feet than 1,500 feet."

F. H. Edmunds, professor of geology at the University of Saskatoon, said he was sitting at the very back of the cabin, and his wife occupied a seat nearby. Both were bound for North Wales to visit relatives.

"I very definitely felt the bump," said Prof. Edmunds. "The second shock was more or less like an explosion. My first thought and reaction was that we were done. Flames and smoke poured in after the second bump.

J. Waterhouse of Guelph, Ont., accountant for Arnco Drainage and Metal Products Company, had a well-seasoned intuition that "something was wrong" because he served as a parachutist in the Second Great War. His back is still incased in steel brace because of injuries sustained in a landing overseas.

"As soon as I felt the bump, I knew all was not well, and figured that we blew a tire." Waterhouse and his wife were sitting up front in the cabin. "As we jumped up with the rest, flames were bursting out around the plane outside, and when we reached the exit somebody ordered us to jump and we did."

Waterhouse's left leg showed the effects of the impact on striking the pavement. It was badly swollen.

Kitchener, Aug. 12 (Special).—Miss Rita Meyer, 27, Kitchener-born airline stewardess heroine, who led 11 passengers of a flaming TCA aircraft to safety at Sydney, N.S., early today, had her flight schedule advanced five days in order to meet a Waterloo cousin in Montreal next Monday.

The attractive graduate of St. Mary's School of Nursing, Kitchener, one of a family of 10, told Harold Schnitzler, Waterloo relative, in a letter yesterday she would be back in Montreal by Aug. 16 if she took the flight Aug. 12.

Schnitzler said it always was Miss Meyer's ambition to be an airline stewardess. She was never unstable, he added. Her most recent visit to Kitchener was in June, when she attended the wedding of her brother Gordon.

Miss Meyer spent her childhood on her parents' farm at Centreville, three miles east of Kitchener. She attended school at Centreville and later the K-W Collegiate.

Graduating from St. Mary's in 1942, she nursed in Kitchener until the following year, when she went to the Florence Crittington Hospital in Detroit, where she remained for a year. In 1944 she went to Ottawa and nursed there until joining the TCA. She is engaged to a Montreal man.

Miss Meyer's father, Gregory, farms east of Kitchener. Her mother is dead. She has three brothers in Kitchener, a brother and sister in Ottawa, two brothers in Toronto, one in Montreal, and a sister, a VON nurse, at Chatham.