



Air Atlas have three DC-4s, one of which is seen at the company's base at Marakech, Casablanca, one of the finest airports in North Africa.

MOROCCO-BOUND

The Story of Air Atlas

By FRANK ILLINGWORTH

AIR Atlas—Air Maroc—has launched a drive to increase passenger traffic between Morocco and Spain, France, Western Germany and Switzerland.

The main cities of the new kingdom of Morocco are plastered with Air Atlas posters advertising holidays in Western Europe, and the company is shortly to embark on a come-to-Morocco campaign in Europe. This airline of mixed private French and Moroccan State ownership, though small, is alert for possibilities and is calculated to take at least some passenger traffic that would otherwise have fallen to B.E.A.

The B.E.A. drive to use Gibraltar as a stepping-stone not only for the south of Spain but for the International Zone of Tangier gained considerable momentum during the summer. One sees scores of B.E.A. come-to-Britain pamphlets and posters in Morocco and Tangier; and in Britain, Spain, France and Switzerland potential holidaymakers are being charged to fly to Morocco *via* Gibraltar.

B.E.A. carried 12,000 passengers to the Rock this last twelve-month, and in Gibraltar itself preparations have been made for an expected increase in visitors during this autumn and winter. But Air Atlas has at least some advantage in that its Europe-Morocco services do not entail a change at Gibraltar.

For my recent month's flying tour of Morocco I chose the Gibraltar route, joining Air Atlas at Tangier. This airline employs DC-4s on its schedules to Madrid, Paris and Geneva, and DC-3s on its internal routes and those to (for example) Algiers. It also uses DC-3s on its services Tangier-Valencia, -Perpignan, -Toulouse, -Marseilles, -Lyons and -Nice, and DC-4s on the Tangier-Nantes and -Bordeaux schedules introduced last year.

This is a considerable expansion of services compared with those offered by Air Atlas as recently as 1949, when its Morocco-Europe services were restricted to schedules from Tangier to Valencia, Perpignan and Toulouse.

I was informed (privately, not by Air Atlas) that this line is considering extending its services east-and-north to Malta and Rome, when political conditions settle down in "this new Sultanate of Maroc," and possibly southwards to French West Africa and "other points south."

Of course, Air Atlas maintains regular schedules between all the main cities of Morocco: Tangier-Rabat-Casablanca, linking with the Tangier-Meknes-Fez triangle, in turn linking with Algeria and with the southern half of Morocco-Casablanca-

Marrakech-Agadir, and runs charter flights for tourists who want to visit the oases of the Moroccan Sahara.

Tourism features considerably in the company's reckonings, but the main demand on its seats is by the French in Morocco, and French and Spanish on the Morocco-Europe schedules.

Fares and freight charges on the Morocco-Europe runs are, of course, comparable to other similar services. As for internal services, Air Atlas is obliged by the Moroccan Government to keep these low (receiving a subsidy against losses) "in order to promote air travel here." The result is a £4 fare for the Tangier-Rabat service (one hour), and £3 for the Casablanca-Marrakech service (a little under 1 hour).

The latter schedule is among the more interesting, for it spans patch-work plains dotted with walled villages (seen from 2,000ft, they resemble models in ochre-yellow Plasticine), crosses a range of desert-like mountains (outriders to the High Atlas, which rear in broken rock to 13,000ft) and ends on the French military airfield at Marrakech, a centre for air force training and a kingpin in the defence of Southern Morocco and Southern Algeria.

Seen from the air Marrakech itself is as pink as Sir Winston Churchill portrayed it; in the setting sun its buildings are almost red, its Shell fuel-storage tanks (normally metal-white) suffused with "alpine glow."

Aircrew who made forced landings hereabouts during the early



The Sultan of Morocco, H.M. Sidi Ben Yussif, disembarks from an Air Atlas DC-4 at Rabat Airport, Morocco.