

AIRBASE ON ASCENSION ISLAND

*Exchange of telegram and letter at London January 27 and February 7,
1942*

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*The Secretary of State to the American Ambassador*¹

WASHINGTON, January 26, 1942—10 p. m.

As you know, the United States Army Air Corps Ferrying Command is operating delivery service across the South Atlantic, both with its own personnel and through the medium of a contract with Pan American Airways. These activities are carried out under a directive from the President, dated November 19, last.

In view of the impending delivery to the Middle East of large quantities of short-range bombers, which cannot safely cross the South Atlantic in one hop, and the need for an alternative or secondary route across the South Atlantic from Brazil to West Africa, the Government of the United States feels that it is necessary to construct an intermediate airport on Ascension Island. It feels that the delivery service of all aircraft will be expedited and that of shorter range aircraft made possible over this alternative route, and it is therefore desired that the necessary permission from the British Government be obtained to build an airport and establish all the necessary operating facilities on what is known as the southwest plain of Ascension Island.

The United States proposes to construct a complete airdrome having a surfaced runway of approximately 6,000 feet by 1000 feet on Ascension Island. The United States will require, therefore, the necessary consent and cooperation of the British Government in the matter of importing machinery, personnel and equipment, the establishment of a water supply with the necessary tankage, gas storage and handling facilities, and the construction of the necessary buildings, power plants and other equipment. The United States will desire to load and unload this equipment at whatever point is most advantageous and to use the most convenient means of transport over any avail-

¹ The American Ambassador delivered a copy of the Secretary's telegram to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs at London Jan. 27, 1942.

able route to or from Ascension Island. The United States will, of course, take the necessary steps to prevent damage to existing cable lines.

The proposed installations on Ascension Island are in the opinion of this Government necessary, even though the expense and construction problems will be considerable. The United States is prepared to undertake the necessary construction at once and to provide all of the funds necessary for that purpose. Since the facilities and installations will be of a permanent character, the Government of the United States feels that American commercial aircraft should have the right to utilize these facilities on Ascension Island in the post-war period on such terms as the American Government might prescribe. We are confident that the British Government will agree to this at once in view of our willingness to construct this airport at the expense of the United States Government. Details in connection with the use of this airport by commercial planes in the post-war period can be discussed between the two governments at their convenience and settled in an exchange of notes. Arrangements for the local defense of the airport during the present emergency will be made by the combined Chiefs of Staff (British-United States).

Please take up this question with the British Government at the earliest possible moment and endeavor to obtain a favorable reply. You are authorized to take up the matter in the first instance with the Prime Minister if you consider it desirable.

HULL

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the American Ambassador

FEBRUARY 7, 1942

On the 27th January, Your Excellency left with me a copy of a telegram from the State Department requesting that the permission of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom might be obtained to enable the United States Government to establish an air base in Ascension Island for the purpose of using this island as a staging point for the delivery of short range bombers across the South Atlantic Ocean. The hope was also expressed that His Majesty's Government would be prepared to cooperate with the United States Government in the matter of importing the machinery, personnel, equipment and other facilities for this purpose.

2. It was further suggested that American commercial aircraft should in the post-war period have the right to utilize the airport and that discussions should proceed between the United States and British Governments for the purpose of settling the details of this question. The State Department's telegram concluded by stating that it was proposed that arrangements for the local defence of the airport during the present emergency should be made by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

3. I now have the honor to inform you that His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom welcome the proposals of the United States Government and are in full agreement as to the importance of Ascension Island for the purposes described above in connection with the war. They agree, therefore, to accord all facilities to enable the United States Government to establish the proposal staging point as quickly as possible. His Majesty's Government note that the United States authorities will take the necessary steps to prevent damage to existing cable lines. They would point out, however, that the landing and other facilities on the island are under the control of Cable and Wireless Limited, who, apart from the military garrison, are the only other occupiers of Ascension. His Majesty's Government expect, therefore, that the occupational rights of Cable and Wireless Limited will be safeguarded as far as possible and the company's local manager Rupert consulted by the officer in charge of the construction party. His Majesty's Government would wish to be informed as soon as possible of the date on which the construction party will leave for Ascension Island.

4. His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom further recognize that the United States Government will desire to share in the post-war use of the island for commercial aviation and are ready to join in discussions with the United States Government with a view to reaching a reasonable settlement of the question of the commercial uses of the airport in the post-war period. In view of the importance of completing the airport with a minimum of delay, His Majesty's Government would not wish discussion of the question of commercial user to delay the constructional and other necessary work on the airport and they are willing to agree to this being started immediately leaving the discussions on the question of post-war user to be undertaken as soon as is mutually convenient. His Majesty's Government feel, however, that the airport should not be used by commercial aircraft during the war save in emergency or for purely military purposes otherwise than by agreement between His Majesty's Government and the United States Government.

5. His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom agree that arrangements for the local defense of the airport during the present emergency should be made by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

ANTHONY EDEN