

Chapter 2

The Journey, January 29 to February 7, 1949

Grimmett left London for Glasgow by night train on Saturday evening January 29, 1949. The sleepers were fully booked, and he had to sit up all night and only occasionally dozed off. Arriving in Glasgow on Sunday morning, he took a bus to Prestwick airport close to the town of Troon on the west coast of Scotland where, he wrote his wife, was a famous golf course.¹

Transatlantic air travel was still developing in the late 1940s after the war, and the flights were along the old military routes. Prestwick airport was the main airport used during the war for military planes flying between North America and Great Britain. He boarded a BOAC (British Overseas Airways Company) flight to New York, which took off at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday January 30. But there were strong head winds in the North Atlantic, and soon after take-off, the plane was diverted to Keflavik airport in Iceland, arriving 4 h later. Keflavik airport had been built, in 1943, by the United States as a military air base for the war effort and in 1949 was operated by American civilian companies. The air terminal was situated in the middle of the base, and civilian air travelers had to enter military check points to reach their flights. Grimmett's passport has a stamp by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service of the Justice department that simply says, "Admitted 1/30/49." It is the last dated entry related to travel, in his passport. Apparently, this was all he needed when he eventually entered the continental USA. Finally getting clearance, the plane took off again for Gander in Newfoundland. The temperature in Gander, when they arrived, was -10° F, and he reported that it was the coldest he had ever been. The plane had trouble with its tail plane or as he called it, the rudder, and it took two hours to fix.

Once again they took off and this time made it to Montreal by Monday afternoon, where BOAC put the passengers up in the Laurentien Hotel. The weather over North America was now so bad that all the US airports in the northeast had been closed, and the passengers had to take the train to New York. Leaving

¹ He was referring to the Royal Troon Golf Club. The British Open Championship had been played there in 1923 and was scheduled to be the site of the 1950 British Open Championship the following year.

Montreal at 8:30 p.m. Monday evening, they arrived in New York at 8:00 a.m. Tuesday morning February 1.

Wednesday February 2, he took the train to Boston to meet with John Trump, Head of the High Voltage Research Laboratory at MIT and the technical director of the High-Voltage Engineering Corporation, builders of Van de Graaff accelerators. Grimmatt was very interested in the comparison between the Van de Graaff accelerator and the betatron for radiotherapy purposes. He had built a Van de Graaff accelerator for the Medical Research Unit at Hammersmith Hospital in London several years previously but had never had the opportunity to completely test it. Even though the train journey to Boston took 5 h each way, he thought the trip worthwhile and told his wife what a lovely time he had there. He left New York the next afternoon, Thursday February 3, for Washington D.C. where he stayed at the historic Willard Hotel.

Friday February 4, he spent in Washington, renewing acquaintances with several friends and colleagues from UNESCO. He left for Houston on Saturday February 5. He had now been traveling for a week and had not yet reached his final destination. He arrived in Houston Monday afternoon February 7, 1949, and went straight to the M.D. Anderson Hospital housed in the “Oaks”, the old Baker estate, at 2310 Baldwin Street. What he found greatly shocked him!

He wrote his wife the next day:

And the hospital! Well, words fail me! Its (*sic*) true that they told me it was in sheds, but I wasn't prepared for anything so primitive [25].

Cobalt Blues

The Story of Leonard Grimmett, the Man Behind the
First Cobalt-60 Unit in the United States

Almond, P.R.

2013, XVIII, 158 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4614-4923-2