

Rita Baines - Air Hostess

In January 1946 Rita was at home in Trentham when she read a national news story about her friend and former ATA pilot, Mary Guthrie. The news was that Mary was to become an air hostess for the new British South American Airways (BSAA). After reading this, Rita jumped on the next train to London, found her way to the BSAA office and convinced them that with her ATA experience and language skills she was suitably qualified to join Mary Guthrie as an air hostess. The BSAA air hostesses would become known as the "Star Girls".

Rita returned to Trentham to give her parents the news that she was to be hostess on the first passenger carrying aircraft to leave Heathrow after the end of the war.

After a frantic ten days of uniform fittings, instruction in the preparation of frozen meals and shopping for crockery and cutlery, the first passenger carrying Lancastrian named "Star Dust" left Heathrow carrying thirteen passengers and a crew of eight which included one air hostess - Rita.

Flights to South America took thirty three hours travelling via Lisbon, The Gambia, Brazil and onwards to Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Rita described each stopover as "an exciting event" where they were met with much hospitality but were forbidden from speaking to the press.

However, life as an air hostess did not turn out quite as Rita expected. Rita later wrote of this time "the arrangements put in place for subsequent flights, baggage handling, hotel accommodation and ground staff were sketchy."

After a tiring flight negotiating a cramped galley, on landing she was then required to empty the Elsan toilet and clean the whole plane single-handedly before heading to her hotel. Her wages were £4 a week.

To quote from what Rita wrote about this time: "Best bit was the food - after five years of wartime austerity, bananas and pineapples. Hospitality and warmth of welcome everywhere. Other side of coin - no running water in galley, exhausting work, wearing a divided skirt, sketchy ground staff and poor accommodation."

Rita only made three flights as an air hostess for BSAA but she made many friends.

On 30 March 1946 on a stopover in The Gambia, Rita was invited to a dance at Fajara by a young pilot, named David Colby. The couple announced their engagement in September 1946.



Rita boarding for the first flight on Star Dust ©Daily Mail



Fajara Beach 1946



The wedding group at Trentham Church, November 1946

They were married in November 1946 at Trentham Church.

They made their home in Northwood Middlesex.

David Colby continued to pilot planes for BSAA, which would have tragic results just over a year later in January 1948.



"Star Girl No. 1," MISS MARY GUTHRIE (r.), displaying the pineapples she brought from South America in "Star Light" to "Star Girl No. 2," MISS RITA BAINES, who is making the flight in "Star Dust."

Trentham Girl As Air Hostess

OCEAN FLIGHT NEXT WEEK

After serving for two years in the Aircraft Transport Auxilliary—during which time she piloted all types of single-seater fighter and twin-engined planes, and even a four-engined bomber—a 24-years-old Stoke-on-Trent young lady starts next Monday upon a new and enchanting career in the sphere of civil aviation, as transocean passenger air liner hostess.

She is Miss Rita P. Baines, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. C. J. Baines, of The Woodlands, Trentham, who has been appointed No. 2 Air Hostess by British and South American Airways, Ltd., operators of a new super-Lancastrian transport plane service, which aims at placing Britain in the forefront of world civil aviation.

The firm's pioneer plane, Starlight, returned to Heath Row airport, London, yesterday, after completing a 14,400 miles survey flight to South America. Starlight's chief pilot, Air Vice-Marshal D. C. T. Bennett, of R.A.F. Pathfinders, paid a high tribute to the plane's performance, stating that the trip out to Buenos Aires, at an average cruising speed of 240 m.p.h. was the fastest ever accomplished. He believed that Britain "held all the civil aviation cards."

Off Next Monday

Starlight's sister plane, Stardust, is due to take off from Heath Row on the same route next Monday—and Miss Baines will have the distinction of being hostess-in-charge on the first passenger flight to Buenos Aires.



Miss Rita Baines



40th anniversary reunion of the "Star Girls", BSAA air hostesses, in 1986, Rita is circled