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NEW WINGS

for IRAQI AIRWAYS

Bob Shane and Sebastian Schmitz visit Amman in Jordan to find out how the temporarily displaced Iraqi Airways has restarted its services

After a 14-year hiatus, scheduled commercial airline services - operated by its national airline - returned to the skies over Iraq in September 2004. This historical event was the result of the patriotic spirit of Sheik Hussain Al-Khawam, the Iraqi-born Chairman of Teebah Airlines, an aircraft leasing company based in Amman, Jordan. Hamilton Aerospace Technologies, a commercial air transport maintenance, repair and overhaul facility located at the Tucson International Airport in Arizona, was selected by Teebah to refurbish Boeing 737s and B767s destined for Iraqi Airways. The aircraft are wet-leased by Teebah to the Iraqi national airline.

The first Boeing 767-200 for Iraqi Airways is seen flying over Arizona on a flight between Goodyear and Tucson in December 2004.



An Iraqi Airways Boeing 727 (YI-AGK), its colours faded, sits on the ramp in Amman, Jordan, where it has been parked for 14 years. A number of the airline's aircraft were moved to locations within the Middle East before the start of the first Gulf War, but it is unlikely that any of them will see further service with the airline due to their long period of storage.

GROUNDING IN THE DESERT

Founded in 1945, Iraqi Airways was the international airline of Iraq. Its fleet of 13 passenger aircraft served a route structure that covered the Middle East, Africa and Europe. In the 1970s, the carrier operated services to John F Kennedy (JFK) International Airport in New York. Then in 1991, as a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War that followed, the United Nations imposed sanc-

tions on Iraq that effectively grounded the carrier. The aircraft were moved out of Iraq to a number of then 'secret' locations around the Middle East (Jordan, Iran and Tunisia) and there they languished for 14 years, their paint fading under the desert sun. While the airline was permitted to fly domestically, the practicality of such flights was severely hampered by the rules imposed by the 'No Fly Zones' and very little official flying took place.





The first Boeing 737-200, N239US c/n 22354, in Iraqi Airways colours, to be refurbished by Hamilton Aerospace Technologies, in Tucson, Arizona, prior to its departure for the Middle East in October 2004. (All photos Bob Shane unless stated)

IRAQI AIRWAYS RETURNS TO THE SKY

International flights from Baghdad on Iraqi Airways were resumed on September 19, 2004, when a B737-200 landed from Amman. While it was a joyous occasion for the Iraqis, commercial airline flights in and out of Baghdad are not without risk. Four weeks prior to the historic flight, a surface-to-air missile narrowly missed a Royal Jordanian aircraft departing Baghdad. Then there was

the spectacular incident on November 22, 2003, when a DHL Airbus A300 Freighter was actually hit by a missile soon after it took off from the airport. The aircraft had been airborne for just over three minutes at an altitude of 8,000ft when an explosion was heard on the flight deck, immediately followed by a multitude of alarms and visual warning displays popping up on the aircraft's instrument panel. The flight controls became non-

functional and the three-man crew quickly joined the pilots of the 1989 United Airlines Douglas DC-10 accident in Sioux City, Iowa, as the second crew to fly a transport category aircraft by using thrust alone. With the wing on fire, the DHL crew managed to get the crippled jet back on the ground. For their exceptional actions, each crewmember received the Hugh Gordon-Burge Memorial Award. (See International News January 2005 issue.)

The threat of a shoulder-launched missile or rocket attack on a commercial airliner operating out of Baghdad is an ever-present danger. In an effort to evade a missile attack, departing airliners perform a climb-out, which follows a corkscrew pattern within what is deemed a safe area around the airport until the aircraft reaches a safe altitude and can continue on its planned route.

Left • An Iraqi Airways B727 (9L-LEL) is seen prior to push-back at Queen Alia International Airport in Amman, Jordan. The aircraft was acquired by Teebah and is ex-Delta Air Lines. It had been in use by Kam Air of Afghanistan from August 2004, but has now adopted Iraqi Airways titles.





Boeing 767-200 N526PH was reregistered 9L-LFF shortly after its arrival in Jordan.

A LONG TRADITION

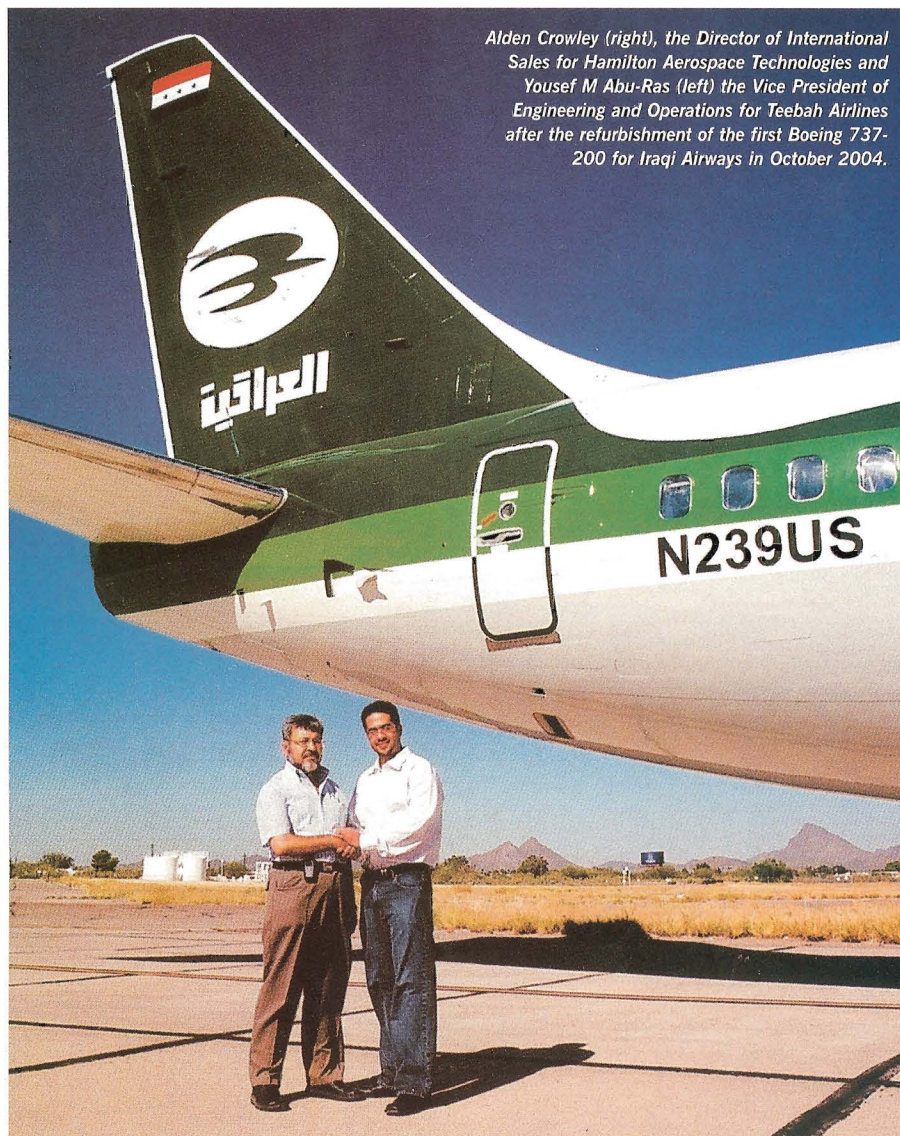
Hamilton Aerospace Technologies, of Tucson, Arizona, is the company refurbishing the aircraft that are rebuilding the Iraqi airline. It can trace its origins back to the many accomplishments of Gordon B Hamilton. A true aviation pioneer, Hamilton took his first aircraft flight in 1936 at the age of 14. Within five years, he was operating his own flying service at Van Nuys, California. 'Hams Cub Club' offered prospective aviators a chance to solo for \$42.50. His flying operation was located next to the hangar where Howard Hughes kept

his 'Racer' aircraft. In 1942 Hamilton worked for Lockheed in Burbank, California, where he learned aeronautical design from Kelly Johnson, the founder of the secret Lockheed 'Skunk Works'. While at Lockheed, Hamilton worked on the Constellation airliner and was the crew chief on the P-38 Lightning fighter flown by Lockheed's test pilot Tony Le Vire.

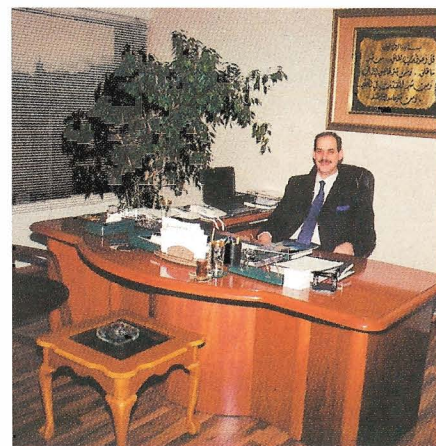
After participating in the military's Carousel Program, overhauling and modifying C-54s at Morrison Field, Florida, Hamilton moved to Tucson. In 1946, he established a Civil Aviation Authority approved repair and over-

haul station which became Hamilton Aviation. His new company specialised in converting Twin Beeches to turbine power. Over time, Hamilton developed almost 100 Supplemental Type Certificates (STCs) for modification of various aircraft types. Following his death in 1997, his sons Clayton and Gordon D 'Dito' Hamilton took over the operation of Hamilton Aviation.

In April 2002, Hamilton Aviation was acquired by new owners, Hamilton Aerospace Technologies. Its President John B Sawyer has been eagerly pursuing international business.



Alden Crowley (right), the Director of International Sales for Hamilton Aerospace Technologies and Yousef M Abu-Ras (left) the Vice President of Engineering and Operations for Teebah Airlines after the refurbishment of the first Boeing 737-200 for Iraqi Airways in October 2004.



Sheik Hussain Al-Khawam, Chairman of Teebah Airlines, in his office in Amman. The Chairman is from a prominent Iraqi family whose involvement in the country's history dates back to the revolution in the early part of the last Century.

FIRST B767 DELIVERY

Following the application of a new green and white livery, and the completion of the requisite maintenance and refurbishment at Hamilton's Tucson facility, a former Air Canada B767, N526PH c/n 22526 (now 9L-LFF), was ready for delivery to the Middle East. Piloted by Charles Gebhardt and Roy Palmer, the wide-bodied airliner departed Tucson on December 21, 2004. After an overnight stop in Toronto, Canada, to pick up new interior galley equipment, the airliner headed towards its refuelling stop in Shannon, Ireland, landing at 3am local time.

The only other activity at the airport at the time was an American Trans Air Lockheed L1011 TriStar, transporting troops to Iraq on behalf of the US military. After a ground time of some 90 minutes, the aircraft was airborne

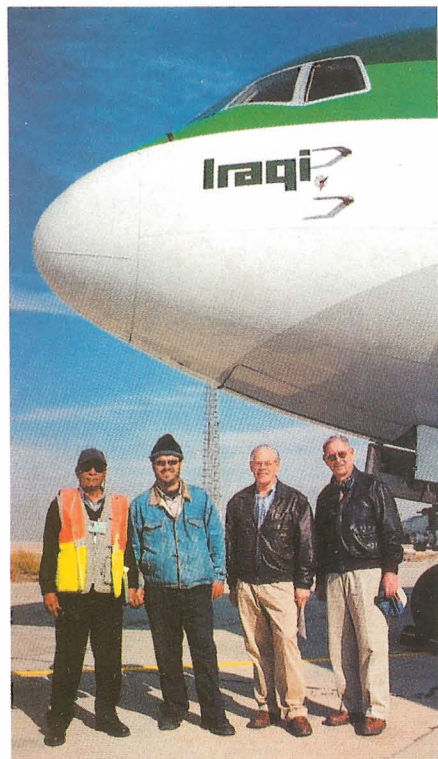
on the last leg of its flight to Amman, Jordan, arriving at the Queen Alia International Airport at noon on December 23, 2004. There it was delivered safely to Teebah's personnel.

IRAQI AIRWAYS – STATUS QUO

The author met Abdulrazzek Saleh, Regional Manager of Iraqi Airways, for a brief conversation in the airline's Amman office, where much of the administration and operational planning for the carrier now takes place – Baghdad still being regarded as a very fragile and quite dangerous place. Some of the airline's former fleet is still in storage at Amman's airport and this includes B727s YI-AGK, YI-AGL and YI-AGQ. In addition to



Two Iraqi Airways Boeing 707s (YI-AGE and YI-AGF) remain in storage in Amman. According to Abdulrazzek Saleh, Regional Manager of Iraqi Airways, they are “going to die”, so will never fly again. (Sebastian Schmitz)



Teebah's aircraft maintenance personnel (left to right) M A Mateen and Anwar Abu Ras, were on hand to greet pilots Charles Gebhardt and Roy Palmer upon arrival of the Boeing 767 in Amman.

those, two B707s (YI-AGE and YI-AGF) have been in storage here for a long time now. According to Mr Saleh, they are “going to die”, so will never fly again.

The current operational fleet of Iraqi Airways consists of three B737-200s – all registered in Sierra Leone and formerly in service with US Airways – and the single B767-200, plus a couple of Sierra Leone-registered B727s in an all-white scheme with Iraqi Airways' titles. Whilst the Boeing 737s are currently used for the airline's daily flight between Amman and the Iraqi capital, as well as between Baghdad and Damascus, the B767 will be introduced on a new route from Amman to Baghdad and Dubai. New destinations planned for the near future are Istanbul and Cairo.

Another major Iraqi airport, Basra in the south of the country, is due to reopen for civil traffic in July and flights will start there as well. All the aircraft are operated by Iraqi Airways' crews. Asked about the plans for the future, Mr Saleh says that it all depends on the situation in Iraq. The operational base is likely to remain in Amman for some time, but with conditions in Iraq hopefully changing for the better, a move back to Baghdad is not impossible in the future. Iraqi Airways could once again become a strong carrier for the region and plans are already being made for future acquisitions. These might include Next Generation B737s and the B777.

MAKING AVIATION HISTORY IN IRAQ

The person chiefly responsible for the resurrection of Iraqi Airways is Teebah's Chairman, Sheik Hussain Al-Khawam. Operating from his office in Amman, Jordan, he formed the leasing company specifically to support Iraqi Airways. Its fleet has now grown to six aircraft and there are plans to add another B767 shortly.

The Chairman is from a prominent Iraqi family whose involvement in the country's history dates back to the Revolution of the early part of the last Century. This conflict was the first step in the forging of an Iraqi nation state. Speaking as an Iraqi, Sheik Hussain Al-Khawam asserts that: “It is my duty to help rebuild the country of Iraq. I must help my country.”

The airline's daily flights from Amman to Baghdad have reportedly been operating with a high passenger load factor as there is still a great deal of work to be undertaken by Iraqi businessmen. Passengers using the air service include foreign contractors, Iraqi businessmen and government officials. Having their own national flag carrier has become a source of pride for Iraqi citizens.

While there are still security issues when flying into Baghdad, they don't seem to be hurting the demand for flights. As one Iraqi put it, “it is safer than travelling on Iraq's notorious roads.”

Once delivery was completed, B737-200 N239US was re-registered 9L-LFA and is seen on the ramp in Amman, Jordan, in December 2004.

