

Richard Bentley

Born 1897. Pioneering aviator.

Life story by his niece, Roma Part.

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This life story was contributed to Lives Retold in 2021 by Anthony Thorpe. Anthony Thorpe is the nephew of Dick Bentley, and the brother of the author, Roma Part.

1. Acknowledgements

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Roma Part.

Niece of Dick Bentley.

Newbury 2005.

Editor's Note: The passages in this life story written by Roma Part are in italics. The text in roman is by Richard ('Dick') Bentley.

2. Early Teens to First World War

This is the story of one who preferred to live in the open, rather than within the confines of a London office, a condition that has beset the lives of millions of worthy but less fortunate people. For there is no doubt that I have been very lucky. As a lad I had no burning desire to become notable in any particular sphere and so my life has been an unplanned affair. I never dreamed that it might be mainly from aviation that I would make a living. And yet there was something which psychologically could have given a hint of this.

Recurring Dreams

From the age of about six through to and beyond adolescence I had two recurring dreams. Firstly, that if I became bored with walking or was suddenly faced by an unpleasant situation I would stretch out my arms, take off, and skim over the house tops.

Secondly, I'd look for a precipice to jump over, to fall feet first to a soft landing. Well, I did fly aircraft and I never damaged one by a hard landing!!!

3. Silly Beggar for Luck

Many of you acquainted with the above title might be tempted to spell the second word differently but to the writer's way of thinking it is the final word that dominates in this story. Trying to decide just when in the past a story about oneself begins is somewhat perplexing.

Should it be during one's childhood or later, when in one's early "teens"? I think in my case during the latter period would be the best. One of my earliest recollections is of spending much time with Messums River Rowing Boat Builders and Hirers. At weekends my father took Mother and me on the Thames in a Messum pair scull skiff.

My Mother's Death

I lost my mother when I was twelve due to the doctor's wrong diagnosis of appendicitis as severe gastritis. By the time a second opinion was sought fatal peritonitis had set in. This meant that my father and I had to leave our flat in Sheen Gate Mansions which overlooked the main London to Richmond-on-Thames road and move to Forest Hill, S.E. London where we lived in a boarding house.

I did not then recognise that my father was a broken man due to the loss of my mother. One of my boyish delights at weekends had been to stand at the window of the main living room and watch the "four-in-hand" horse-drawn coaches roll briskly by and listen to the coach trumpeters blow fanfares on their long straight instruments.

My Uncle Fred lived about four miles away. Uncle was married with two children, my cousins Jack and Joan, both a year or two younger than me. After a couple of days the news of my mother's death came through and for a while my little world fell apart. For a few weeks my father and I stayed with friends: one of them was a Dr. Thornton who was the surgeon who had carried out the operation on my mother. We had accommodation over his consulting room at New Cross, another unlovely London suburb. My limited education was finished off at St. Dunstan's College near Catford, at which my Uncle Fred Bentley was Science Master.

Office Coal Fires

After spending two or three terms there I was found a job with a friend of my Uncle, a Mr. Rolandson who was a wholesale paper merchant. His office was on the second floor in Ludgate Circus, London, E.C. You can readily imagine the murkiness of the atmosphere, especially in wintertime, in those days of office coal fires. The office building formed the southwestern segment of the Circus, so that one could look eastward up

Ludgate Hill towards St. Paul's or northwards a little way up Farringdon Street.

Six Shillings a Week

As the wage was only six shillings a week, the cheapest means of transport had to be used - the old L.C.C. Tramway and its "Workman's Return Fare" of under a shilling. There were two types of tram: the longer double bogey undulated comfortably along the track, while the shorter four-wheelers waggled along stubbornly over the same route.

The double tramway took off from Forest Hill railway station and climbed the steep north-heading hill. On its crest and to the right stood Horniman's Museum. Among its exhibits was a torture chair of the Spanish Inquisition equipped with gadgets for pulling out tongues and fingernails. From the hilltop the route lost height then a little way beyond the lowest point lay the sports fields of Dulwich College to which well-to-do parents of that area sent their male offspring for worldly enlightenment. Then on to more earthy Camberwell Green, then Elephant and Castle. A short run to St. George's Circus, then a longer straight including Blackfriar's Bridge to the local terminus, just short of Ludgate Circus.

Playing Whist on the Train

The journey could be very boring especially in the wet weather, but one generally managed to avoid the tedium by joining up with a small party of regular tram commuters to play a very informal type of whist for a farthing a point. Gains or losses were, therefore, minimal which meant that at lunch time one either did or did not have a penny sugar bun to augment the packed lunch of beef dripping sandwiches.

Dick was not happy working in an office and it was arranged for him to emigrate to Canada.

About May to June - 1912. Aged fourteen and a half, and under the protection of the Canadian Immigration Authority I sailed by Anchor Line from Liverpool to Montreal, a journey that was to take ten days. My father died shortly after I arrived in Canada. Miss Weir (who had looked after me when my mother died) wrote to tell me. I was placed with a farmer named Sparling, living at Forest, Southern Ontario, about five miles from the south-eastern shores of Lake Huron, one of the Great Lakes.

Shooting Rabbits for Dinner

Here Dick learnt to use a gun. The farmer sent him out to shoot rabbits for dinner. Enough shot for two rabbits. Miss the rabbit = no dinner. He also learned to use a bow and arrow. As arrows were re-useable this avoided the need to buy more shot. Dick also told me that he used to hitch several

different pieces of farm equipment to the horse, thus having a 'combined harvester' and saving himself and the horse from extra work. He continued to work as a farm hand until about October 1915.



Reproduced from an Anchor Line brochure of 1912.

4. First World War

The note below, in Dick Bentley's own hand, shows all the types of aircraft he flew in the First World War. He could not recall damaging any of them!

October 1915. When the 1914-18 war had been going on for a year I joined the 34th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force at Carlings Heights, London, Ontario. I was seventeen years and ten months. We crossed to England in November 1915, and landed at Devonport, and I was posted to Bramshot Camp, near Liphook, Hampshire.

After having my appendix removed in the Canadian Military Hospital (a two-week stay), I was transferred to the Canadian Machine Gun School. I was sent on a machine gun instructor's course, and passed. Promoted to Sergeant/Instructor. A new posting to the Machine Gun School, Sandgate, Kent, followed. Mid July 1916. One weekend I went to the nearby Royal Flying Corps (R.F.C.) Station at Lympne to watch the flying. Liking what I saw I decided to apply to be a pilot in the R.F.C.

A handwritten note on lined paper, titled "1st (1917-19) WORLD WAR." with "1914-18" written below the title. The note lists several aircraft types, each on a separate line and underlined. The list includes: MORRIS FARNHAM SHORTHORN, AVRO 504 J's (rotary), B. E. 2 C's, ARMSTRONG WHITWORTH, R. E. 8., SOPWITH PUPS (rotary), " CAMELS. ", " DOLPHINS (rotary) with small handwritten notes "200hp" and "Hispano" next to it, " SNIPES. (rotary), and BRISTOL FIGHTER.

Dick was on leave at Bournemouth and went to a 'fair' where a Lucky Number ticket would win a free flight. When the number was announced one of the two pretty girls in front of Dick was not happy to realise she had won! Dick offered to buy her ticket, and so was able to have his first flight in a Caudron. Truly a joy ride. Dick wrote the following information in note form.

A response to my flying application came through in about six weeks. Ordered to Folkestone for a stiff medical. Hearing test with buzzer in ears. Passed, and was sent to Officers' Training Corps at Denham, Middlesex as a cadet on a discipline course and instruction in becoming an officer and temporary gent. That lasted for one month. Then to Magdalen College, Oxford, for theory-of-flight training, bomb aiming, artillery fire direction, Morse code (six words a minute) for about six weeks.

Managed to pass the R.F.C. examination and was given a one pip commission. And so to Gieves on Savile Row for my uniform: "Maternity

jacket”, riding breeches, sword and all!! I can’t remember exactly when each of the foregoing stages happened, but I can say that it was during the autumn of 1916.

Flying Training School

January 1917. In January I was posted to Flying Training School at Thetford, Norfolk. Went solo after 4 hours 10 minutes flying training, which was slow compared to some other pupils. I was trained on a Maurice Farham “Shorthorn” or “Rumpety”. After a few more hours solo experience I was posted to Narborough for flying experience on service type Avro 504 J’s, and R.E.8’s, and practical artillery observation, and aerial photography, and bombing. The R.E.8 was a bi-plane especially designed for artillery co-operation and aerial photography in which the pilot sat in front and the observer gunner behind - his cockpit was equipped with a rotating mounting carrying a Lewis machine gun fed by 97 rounds of .303 tracer and armour piercing bullets.

The pilot’s armament was a Vickers machine gun fixed to the port side of the aircraft within the pilot’s reach - which fired through a disc of the propeller - being hydraulically timed to miss the four blades of the propeller. The pilot pressed a button on the joy-stick to fire it.

Normally a pilot had the same observer flying with him all the time and we had complete confidence in each other. I was very lucky in totalling 50 hours flying before being posted to France. Many pilots, especially fighters, arrived at squadrons with only about 10 hours total flying experience.

Posted to France

June 1917. I was posted to 59 Squadron at Mons-en-Chaussee, situated on the Amiens - St. Quentin road. A squadron consisted of 18 machines - three flights of six aircraft and their crews. This was an artillery observation and photographic squadron. Our job was to get information and bring it back for Brigade Headquarters when it would be passed on to our batteries and troop commanders.

After a few months I was made squadron photographic officer and my aircraft equipped with an aerial camera having a better lens than the others. It was a German Zeiss Tessar giving superior definition. The camera was mounted to take photographs through a hole in the floor. Consequently I was allotted specialist photographic jobs of important targets.

Incidentally in 1967 Anne and I returned to Mons-en-Chaussee and stayed with Abbé Jaques, and were entertained by the Dick Bentley – Pioneering Spirit Page 3 of 32 Mayor after the Service of Remembrance to mark the

50th Anniversary of the Battle of the Marne. We also visited Tiepval (600,000 dead) and Delville Woods (300,000 Canadians dead).

The Battle of Cambrai

November 1917. The Battle of Cambrai. For this 59 Squadron moved to Languevain, an advanced landing ground nearer the intended point of attack. The recently developed tank weapon was to be employed in strength. They had been tried out unsuccessfully in the quagmire conditions produced by heavy bombardment on the battlefields east of Arras. There they had sunk inextricably in the deep sticky mud, only to be shot to pieces by Hun field-gun fire.

In planning the attack on Cambrai the Army High Command had decided that at the crack of dawn artillery should put down a light bombardment which would not break up the area over which the tanks would have to advance. Surprise element - during the ten days preparation, when the large number of tanks and troops were moving up to the starting lines, low unbroken cloud at around 100 feet, and thick mist covered the whole of the Cambrai attack area. This meant, therefore, that the Germans were denied aerial observation of what was going on.

At first light on 20th November 1917 we saw that our own good luck still held. The attack - again the weather conditions favoured us, the mist cleared and the clouds ceiling still held at about 150 feet, just sufficient for my aircraft, an R.E.8., to go out on "contact" patrol.

A Klaxon Horn and a Weighted Message Bag

This observation was carried out by our aircraft being fitted with a powerful klaxon horn, and the ground troops displaying 6-inch diameter yellow discs when they heard a prearranged klaxon signal from our aircraft flying immediately overhead. The observed position of the troops would be plotted on a large scale map of the battle area by the observers, the map folded and placed in a weighted message bag, to be dropped on Brigade Headquarters about a mile to the rear.

Since Major Egerton, the 59 Squadron C.O., considered that as I knew the lie of the land as well as any other pilot, and because of the limited visibility (it was too hazardous to allow more than one aircraft at a time to be airborne) the first patrol at dawn was allotted to me. We flew three or four patrols in an aircraft armed with a Lewis gun (gas operated) with a double drum with about ninety-seven rounds. Several drums were stowed in the rear cockpit.

My Twentieth Birthday

Incidentally, it was my twentieth birthday, and my rear gunner, Second/Lt. Nathan, (a South African) was nineteen years of age. The first hazard we encountered was when crossing over our own artillery line from which a “creeping barrage” was being lobbed, the shells landing about 200 yards ahead of the slowly advancing tanks. As one approached this line one was careful to fly over a gap between individual batteries to avoid, as far as possible, being hit by a rising 6” howitzer shell. Once through that rising barrage - in a few seconds - one was comparatively safe since the trajectory of a 6” howitzer shell for a range of 3,500 yards would be high enough for us to fly around under an umbrella of missiles.

Believe it or not, a few artillery observation pilots state that when doing a shoot with a 12” howitzer battery they have actually seen the big shell at the moment it reached the apex of its trajectory, just before it began to descend towards its target.

Our Troops Waving as they Walked Behind the Ironclads

We spent about an hour criss-crossing the battle area observing the progress of the tanks and troops. The latter were walking in small bunches right behind the lumbering ironclads, looking up and waving as we flew over them. (We were flying at an air speed of approx. 60-70 m.p.h. at approx. 100 feet). The Hun must have made himself scarce upon seeing the mass of tanks snorting towards them, for we couldn’t see that any resistance was being put up.

But if we flew forward as far as our creeping barrage would permit, one became aware of sporadic hostile machine gun fire. We had with us detailed prints of the attack area on which at intervals of fifteen minutes the shape of our advancing line was traced. Each print was folded and tucked into a weighted two-tailed message-dropping bag, which was dropped on Army Headquarters. Eventually another of 59’s aircraft arrived to take over from us, so we returned to Squadron base.

Good Show Chaps

As we reported to the intelligence officer for debriefing we were met by a smiling C.O. Major Egerton who said “Good show, chaps. We were getting anxious. I’m recommending you both for a Military Cross.” We made another patrol later in the day, by which time flying conditions had improved considerably. One could see that our forces had broken through the Hun lines. There had been a few tank casualties, due mainly to their lack of speed and awkwardness in manoeuvre. This made them easy targets for the German 88mm field guns. But there was no doubt that the initial attack had been successful.

Home for Two Weeks Leave

A few days later I was sent home for two weeks leave - my first. When I returned to the Squadron I learned that the Germans had counter attacked and won back most of the captured territory. A little later the Squadron moved to the new aerodrome further north at Courcelles. We spent Christmas there.

A Dangerous Bet

1918. Early in the New Year after a few weeks there our C.O. Major Egerton was killed, together with our best observer while trying to win a bet that an R.E.8 could be dived at 200 m.p.h. with the upper plane extension folded back. The crash had occurred just as I was returning from a special photographic mission. The pile up was right in the middle of the landing area. We all thought a great deal of Egerton.

Shortly after the new C.O. arrived I was posted to No. 12 Squadron (they also flew R.E.8's) as a Flight Commander which meant a Captaincy. Pleasing though this was I regretted leaving 59 and had I known what was to follow I would have sought permission to remain with 59 and forego promotion.

Qualifying as an Instructor

The C.O. of 12 Squadron was not half the man the late C.O. had been. Consequently a poor relationship developed between us. This state of affairs came to a head in May 1918, and I was posted to England to become a flying instructor. To qualify as an instructor I was sent to Major Smith-Barry's Flying Instructors School at Gosport, near Portsmouth. The Royal Naval Air Service (R.N.A.S.) and R.F.C. by this time had combined as the R.A.F. There one was taught to fly entirely by one's senses. With the exception of an oil pulsator and an altimeter there were no instruments in the pilot's cockpit of the two-seater Avro 504 J's (100 m.p.h. monosoupape) the only training type used.

Apart from the superior flying technique implanted, the judgement and ability to make a forced landing and take-off in incredibly small fields was developed. This meant missing the enclosing hedges by one foot both on arriving and leaving. And if one muffed the approach by undershooting, necessitating power assistance, one abandoned that attempt and went round again! I managed to pass A.1. I was then posted to Fighter Training School at Hooton, Wirral, Cheshire.

This seemed somewhat strange for one who was erstwhile an observation pilot. However, as by that time the Avro 504 J's and K.8's had become the initial flying training aircraft and I had just qualified as a flying instructor

on the same I supposed that factor was not important. Moreover, since the service type on which trainees had to qualify was the Sopwith “Dolphin” a single seat fighter (as was the intermediate aircraft - the Sopwith “Pup”) one could only give pupils a longer and very thorough training on the dual-control Avro 504. Thereafter they had to be sent solo on the intermediate and final types without any dual instruction. So far as I can remember there were no casualties due to this deficiency.

Armistice and Wild Jollification

I remained at Hooton until the Armistice was signed on 11th November 1918. I remember the wild jollification when we formed for a crazy raid on Liverpool that night, letting off Very lights in front of the Adelphi Theatre and on Lime Street! Shortly after this I was posted to 79 Dolphin Squadron stationed at Denain, France, for patrol duties until the signing of the final Peace Treaty.

1919. Early in the year the Squadron was disbanded and I flew to England in my Dolphin, nearly making a ‘forced landing’ in the Channel through a defect in the pressurised fuel system. I rectified the situation by using the hand pump. Demobilisation came later in the year. After waiting for months at Lopcomb Corner, Salisbury Plain, for the Air Ministry’s negative decision on a permanent commission I hung around in London trying to get a job without any luck, like hundreds of other demobs.

5. Africa

As I didn't want to return to Canada I decided to try Rhodesia. I had managed to hang on to most of my £400 gratuity and got a Government assisted passage on a Union Castle Ship to Cape Town. During the voyage I met the Chief Engineer of the Beira, Mashonaland and Rhodesian Railways which was to stand me in good stead later on.

A Leisurely Train to Bulawayo

Africa 1920. The 1200 miles train journey from the Cape to Bulawayo was a marvellous experience, passing through Kimberley and Mafeking. Historic names of the Boer War which was going on when I was a toddler. The railway journey was leisurely - average 20 m.p.h. and took about sixty hours. The water-stops were sometimes sited at or near small villages, where natives stood alongside the train in shimmering heat and one heard the tinkling notes of a kaffir piano, which was held in both hands while the thumbs twitched out a plaintive ten-note phrase in timeless repetition.

Falling Under Africa's Spell

It was during that journey that I, being something of a romantic, began to fall under Africa's spell. Arrived at Bulawayo (4,000 feet) in much need of a bath! The wide sunlit streets lined with jacaranda trees festooned with their pendulous clusters of mauve blossoms gave me a feeling that things were going to be alright. I was twenty-two and a half, and had already had three big adventures - Canada, a war and learning to fly aircraft. In some ways Canada had been similar to England. It was north of the Equator, the seasons were in the same order although they were more stable, more intense; summers were hotter, winters much colder, but drier and more snow! But Africa - Rhodesia - Oh! how different! South of the Equator the seasons, dry and rainy, where the sun blazed down with pitiless heat day after day, week after week, until the rains came to slake the thirst of the arid earth, arriving almost always within the same week of each year.

Defence Against Leopard or Snake

A country, where in my time, if one was wise, one never walked alone in the bush unless carrying a shotgun charged with buckshot; the best close quarter defence against leopard or snake. Just then I felt that life in Rhodesia would sometimes be exciting. After spending the night in Bulawayo I travelled on to Hartley, a small settlement on the Salisbury line.

By previous arrangements (contacts in England) I was to join a Mr. John D.L. Nimmo, Chartered Accountant, as manager of his farm. His wife was

a rather faded little woman who had a collection of fine old lace with which she was wont to bedeck herself. Thank goodness her cook boy was fairly skilful so that the menu was not too monotonous.

A Round Hut Made of Sun-baked Bricks

My quarters were in a rondavel, a round hut of about fifteen feet internal diameter. The wall about ten feet high by fifteen inches thick, made of sun-baked bricks composed of trodden ant-heap toughened with veldt grass, each about fifteen inches long by eight inches square. A door and four windows set equidistant around its circumference, the whole covered by a conical thatched roof and whitewashed within and without. It was sparsely furnished with a table, two chairs, a chest of drawers, a wardrobe, wash basin and jug, iron bedstead overhung by a mosquito net; the latter was the most important item of furniture, not only because it kept out the whining pest but also the large beetles which fell off the thatch at night from time to time!

A Pole Hut with no Windows

After a few months with Nimmo I tired of his irascible temper and, since the remuneration was poor, we parted company. I then teamed up with a chap named Maitland who ran the only general store in the village of Hartley. He had some land and some cattle about two miles out, so I had to move out with the six negro farm boys who built me a pole hut, cut from bush timber and thatch. The hut was about 14 feet by 10 feet in area. There was a door at one end but no windows. Sufficient light came through the chinks between the closely packed poles.

For quite a long time I lived in the jungle. Fortunately I had brought my army camp kit from England with me, so I had a bed, blankets, mosquito net, canvas wash basin, some wooden boxes for storage and a Winchester repeater rifle and shot gun.

Eating Venison, Guinea Fowl and Porcupine

These two pieces of hardware were to provide my meat in the form of venison and wild guinea fowl. Porcupine, roasted in hot stones with quills on was delicious. For water there was a small cave-like fault which went downwards at an angle of about 30 degrees through a low outcrop of rock which held a constant supply of cool, clear water at about 10 feet below ground level. I sent a boy twice a week into Hartley for bread and groceries paid for by my dwindling gratuity. We ploughed land for a maize crop with an ox team.

Dysentery Decimates the Herd

Dysentery decimated the herd of cattle, and we had to move the living site to an unaffected area. We had to guard the maize against baboons. I realised after a couple of months that the profit on the maize, even if good, would not yield both Maitland and myself much reward, but felt under an obligation to stay with it until the crop was gathered. The apprehension about small profit was justified, and the cattle sold. So it was necessary to dissolve the partnership with Maitland.

Working on the Railway

I then went to Catoona, a small town in the gold mining area of several rich small-holdings. I got a job as assistant with the local assayer. Very interesting, but poorly paid and without prospect of much improvement. I wrote to Chase, the Rhodesian Railway engineer in Bulawayo, enquiring after a job on the railway. He replied telling me to come. So I went, and the Chases very kindly invited me to stay with them for several weeks. In fact I stayed with them a little longer. It wasn't long before I was offered a job in the carriage and wagon repair yard. The work could be quite heavy, being concerned with the repair of running gear, i.e. fitting new bearings, changing complete axles, complete bogies, repairs to vacuum brakes, etc. We had one native assistant.

Seeing Sixty Miles

After about nine months I was sent out on the line to a watering station called Dett, located at the north west end of sixty miles of a dead straight section of rail track. This was part of the route from Bulawayo to Rhodesia's coal mines at Wankie, Livingstone (Victoria Falls) and Elizabethville in the Belgian Congo (Zaire). At night, if one stood on the track at about 8.00 p.m. and looked southwards, one could suddenly see the big headlight on the American-type locomotive drawing a freight train as it entered the other end of that straight, sixty miles away to the south, so clear was the atmosphere. At that moment one knew that, all being well, in a little over two hours the train would arrive in Dett.

Bathing in Crocodile Waters

My next post on the railway was a three-month period at Livingstone - Victoria Falls, Devil's Cataract, bathing in crocodile waters, rowing double pair-oar racing shells. I left there for a stint at Salisbury, not dreaming of how I would next visit Livingstone. While I was in Salisbury I took part in an amateur show "The Lilac Domino" and also did a turn at training as a dental mechanic with a friendly dentist.

Back to Flying

Then back to Bulawayo. I saw an advertisement in the Johannesburg Sunday Times for pilots for the South African Air Force (S.A.A.F) and I sent an application to attend a refresher course. In the meantime I was chosen for the King's Club rugby team to make a tour of South Africa. While at Pretoria I called at Swartkop Headquarters of S.A.A.F. and was invited to attend a refresher course in two months time. On my return to Bulawayo I found written confirmation awaiting.

I had an interview with Hodson, the General Manager, to explain the opportunity which was offered; he was very understanding and said "Go for the course; if it fails this job is still open." Four weeks at Swartkop; I went solo after half an hour dual thanks to Redcar. Was successful and invited to stay as a flying instructor rank of Lieutenant. Whoopee!!! Back on a job I really knew.

The aircraft flown were Avro 504s, D.H. 9As, and S.E. 5A. I had four marvellous years. In the dry season we started at 6.00 a.m. and finished at 9.00 a.m. for breakfast. The air was too bumpy for flying for the remainder of the day. Then we had studies on ancillary subjects; military law, map reading, navigation and machine gun maintenance, aerial photography. Also theory and practice at bomb dropping. Care and maintenance of aircraft were left to the riggers. We finished at 13.00 hours.

Dancing and Rugger

After lunch many played tennis, but down in Pretoria was a lovely swimming pool set amid lawns and rose beds. That was my weakness. Back to base for dinner unless one was dining with friends. Dancing once almost every week. Also played rugger for S.A.A.F. 1st team. A knee injury following a motor bike accident eventually put pay to that career. What a contrast to the previous three years!

But it couldn't last forever. Periods of service were for a series of three years, which terminated for a lieutenant at the end of the period during which he reached thirty five years; for a captain forty years with a gratuity only; for a major permanent with a pension. As it was a small force promotion was slow and most of us worried at the prospect of having to look for other work in early middle age.

Not Permitted to Marry

Also we were not permitted to marry until we reached the rank of captain. I began exploring the possibilities in the car business, and during two weeks leave experimented as a motor car salesman with Harper's Garage in Johannesburg. Too competitive and too dicey.

Why Not a London to Cape Town Flight?

During this period we did a postal run between Durban and Cape Town. Late in 1926 The English Aviation Press reported the appearance of the de Havilland Moth light aeroplane, heralding it as the practical answer to club and private owner flying. A little later came a report of two 1st World War pilots flying two Moths in company from London to Karachi. I instantly had the idea “Why shouldn’t I fly one from London to Cape Town?”

Immediately I wrote to de Havilland at Stag Lane (near Edgware) about my idea. I then learned from a flying pupil named Veasey that his father was de Havilland’s South African agent in Johannesburg; so I went to Jo’burg (37 miles away) to put the proposition to Veasey Senior; for the supply of a 60X Moth with auxiliary long distance tank. Veasey immediately cabled de Havilland.

Raising £400 to Buy a Tiger Moth

Two days later came the reply. They would supply the aircraft at cost, complete for £400. (Retail price was £600). I hadn’t that kind of money, so I asked Rod Douglas, one of my air force reserve refresher course pupils and Chairman of the Johannesburg Light Plane Club, if, having successfully flown out the Moth from England to the Cape, they would buy it from me for £600? “Most certainly” said he.

In the hope of raising the funds I called on the Editor of The Johannesburg Star, Argus South African Press, and suggested that The Star should finance me in return for exclusive publicity. The only risk to them would be the loss of the cost of insuring the aircraft (£100 for the flight) and my expenses. The basis of the proposition was: Cost of Aircraft £400; Insurance £100; Expenses £100; £600 Resale to the Johannesburg Flying Club if the flight was OK = £600. Well, he seemed very impressed but said “I’ll have to discuss it with my co-directors; I’ll contact you in a few days. I certainly like the idea but I can’t consent just on my own.”

He didn’t contact me until we met again about ten days later at the first South African Aviation Club meeting organised by The Johannesburg Flying Club. The South African Air Force was assisting by sending several aircraft to give various kinds of display items; the aerobatics being allocated to me on an S.E.5 A, one of the latest single-seater fighter types used in the 1914-18 War. When my turn came I got into the air and pulled out “all the stops” for ten minutes. Having landed I was walking away from the aircraft when the Editor came towards me, fell in beside me and said “I have just seen how you can handle an aircraft, I shall have no hesitation in strongly recommending that we back you.”

6. First London to Cape Town Flight

Unpaid Leave and a Mauser Pistol

I immediately asked Sir Pierre Van Ryneveld, our Commanding Officer, if I could have two and a half months unpaid leave to carry out my project. He agreed and lent me his Mauser pistol for protection should I survive a forced landing in the bush; a most generous gesture. All these arrangements were concluded in the first week in June 1927.

I phoned the Union Castle Steamship Line agent in Jo'burg and arranged a 3rd class passage to England on the third Friday of that month and caught the train to arrive in Cape Town with a day to spare. On going aboard I found that I was sharing a four-berth cabin with a very nice old gentleman of 76 years and had a very pleasant seventeen day voyage.

Made in Edgware

As soon as I arrived in London I went out to the de Havilland Works at Stag Lane, Edgware. The Johannesburg Star's Moth, registration G-EBSO would not be ready for two weeks. This did not matter as I had to make arrangements for maps, insurance, fuel and oil. The D.H. management entertained me to a dinner or two and the theatre (The Colosseum - Nervo and Knox!).

First Solo Flight from London to Cape Town

I took delivery of the aircraft on 16th August 1927. A 25-gallon auxiliary petrol tank was fitted into the passenger seat and final preparations were made to start on 1st September 1927. Having said goodbye to the de Havilland staff I took off for Paris at 10.15 hours. I was on my way! The start of the 1st solo flight in a light aircraft from England to Cape Town. The aircraft was a de Havilland 60x Moth with a Cirrus II engine.

Dick dictated the following 'padded' version while reading from his log-book recording of his historical flight.

2nd September 1927 Paris to Lyons Uneventful; overnight stop.

An Airstrip Belonging to a Cafe

3rd September 1927 Lyons to Nice Landing strip twixt seashore and the road. The strip was the property of the owner of the cafe on the other side of the road; he was also the possessor of an old crate of an aircraft which he pulled out of a rickety old hanger to make room for my Moth. He was so pleased that I had landed on his strip that he took off for a solo celebration

rattle in his old aerial banger. He put me in the spare room in his cafe, enabling me to take off early in the morning.

A Quick Look at the Leaning Tower of Pisa

4th September 1927 Nice to Naples With a short stop at Pisa for a quick look at the Leaning Tower. Naples had the dirtiest suburbs I have ever seen.

5th September 1927 Naples to Catania, Sicily. Vesuvius was still asleep as we flew by and Etna was already drowsy - thank goodness, when we arrived at Catania at 18.00 hours.

6th September 1927 Catania to Malta Stayed here for two nights as guest of the Royal Air Force.



A tea break for Dick on one of his cross Africa trips.

Right Across the Mediterranean

8th September 1927 Malta to Carabulli to Homs Took off for the 200 miles flight across the Mediterranean to Homs in Tripolitania in North Africa. The R.A.F. kindly provided an escorting seaplane for the first 100 miles. I tensely listened to every small change in engine note across the second 100 miles. I deliberately steered a course to the west of my destination.

An Enthusiastic Welcome

Arriving over Tripolitania (Italian) coast I caught sight of a Beau Geste-like fort with a small landing ground alongside so I decided to land and see

what was what. I was given an enthusiastic welcome by the small Italian garrison who entertained me to lunch(?) and tried, with only partial success, to get me tiddly on chianti.

Took off from Carabulli at 14.30 hours and landed at Homs at 15.00 hours. After landing, in error I taxied over to a remote guard post on the opposite side of the aerodrome - the desert side. I was welcomed by a young Italian Air Force corporal who was in sole charge of the lonely post. He almost begged me to stay with him to which I agreed.

A Good Night's Sleep

A little later, the Orderly Officer appeared having heard the young man's report, and tore him off a strip for his presumptuousness; this annoyed me so much that I declined his invitation to the Officer's Quarters, preferring to take supper with the Corporal at a little cafe in Homs. We both returned to the guard post for the night and slept very well indeed.

9th September 1927 Homs to Sirte to Benghazi. I got away early for Sirte and Benghazi. Met a 20 miles-per-hour headwind which lengthened flying time. The air was hot and bumpy due to low altitude, maintained to avoid the stronger wind.

Capitano Morabita Pushes the Boat Out in Benghazi

Capitano Morabita, Officer Commanding, Italian Air Force, Benghazi, was quite a lad and pushed the boat out in quite a big way that evening. However, this revelry didn't prevent me from flying on to Sollum albeit with a somewhat later take off. Visibility hazy - or was it?

10th September 1927 Benghazi to Sollum Departure 11.15 hours - arrived Sollum 15.15 hours.

11th September 1927 Sollum to Cairo Left Sollum at 06.30 hours and reached Cairo without incident following the coast all the way. To port was the blue Mediterranean, to starboard the yellow desert as far as one could see. Little did I know that fourteen years later the land I was then flying over would be the scene of gruelling sweltering and gritty strife. I stayed in Cairo for two nights as a guest of the R.A.F.

Up the Nile

13th September 1927 Cairo to Wadi-Halfa Left Cairo at 06.00 hours southwards. Up the Nile, for Khartoum via Wadi-Halfa. I flew at 3,000 feet at which altitude the air was cool and calm, but the visibility was only fair due to the heat and the still suspended dust of a recent sand storm. But what did that matter, there was no navigation problem! I just followed the river and realised how it had been sustenance for Egypt.

A Lofty View of the Pyramids

One perforce had a somewhat lofty view of all the famous and historical landmarks - the Pyramids, the Sphinx, the Step Pyramid, Temples at Luxor, The Valley of the Kings and Abu Simbel - how the sound of that last name fascinated me. I flew back and forth several times to look at it. This wonderful monument was moved for the Aswan Dam so as not to drown it. At Wadi-Halfa, six hundred miles from Cairo, I dined with the District Commissioner and his lady.

Nearly Dipping my Nose in the Soup

After the hot day's flying I was very very drowsy at their table and to my great embarrassment, and no doubt to theirs, I sleepily and gently sagged forward nearly dipping my nose in my soup, jerking myself upright only just in time. My hosts were most understanding and accepted my shamefaced apology graciously. So as soon as the meal was over I proffered my thanks and asked to be excused so that I could go to sleep in a cabin berth arranged for me in a Nile "trip" steamer moored at the quayside. Wadi-Halfa is the furthest point up the Nile navigable from Cairo.

Following the Single Line Railway to Khartoum

14th September 1927 Wadi-Halfa to Khartoum. Over the next six hundred miles to Khartoum, capital of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, the course followed the single line railway, which threads its way across the desert. It was prudent to follow its trend since, in the event of engine failure, one could land alongside the track, with a better chance of being rescued. Incidentally I always carried a 3-pint porous canvas water bag, which kept its contents cool by evaporation, hanging in the cockpit. Reached Khartoum that day - fourteen days from the start. So far the flight had been trouble free, as indeed it remained throughout the flight.

An Ominous Sound

15th September 1927 Khartoum to Jebelin It was I, who two hours after leaving Khartoum began to suffer from a fancy! That ominous sound I could faintly hear above the general noise of engine and propeller - a blend of knock and slap - where was it coming from and what was causing it? Clearly I must land and investigate, before the defect became really serious and I was further from available help.

I was 3,000 feet above the White Nile, which flowed through level semi-desert, thinly covered with scrub. From an altitude of about 150 feet I began to look for somewhere to land. Luck was with me for I soon spotted a scrub-free strip long enough and sufficiently wide, so I descended to

about twenty feet then flew slowly along the strip to examine closely the surface. It looked good, so I flew on for a minute gaining a safe height and as there was no wind turned about, shut off and landed. As I taxied towards the neat whitewashed and neatly thatched building standing alongside the strip, a white-robed tarbooshed crowned figure emerged. I switched off the engine and jumped out.

A Sudanese Approached

The man, a Sudanese, approached and salaamed. "Can I help you, Effendi?" he said. I offered my hand, he gripped and shook it with a smile that displayed a perfect set of teeth. "What is the name of this place?" "Jebelin" he replied. "And the house?" I asked. "A rest house for white hunters" was his answer. "Are you in charge?" was my next question. "Yes, Effendi" he said, "I am also the cook and can make meals for you if you wish." I explained why I had landed and that I would probably have to stay overnight. "That is O.K. There is a nice clean bed, I show you."

I accompanied him the few yards over to the house and saw that what he had said was true. The next thing was to tether the aircraft by the wings and tail to prevent it being blown on to its nose by a sudden puff of wind. As the time was only 10.00 hours I could start investigating the imaginary trouble before the noonday sun necessitated a siesta.

Might Be the Gudgeon Pin

I started the engine and allowed it to idle while I tracked down that slap knock. It seemed to come from No: 2 cylinder. Obviously from its sound it could not be the big end, so it might be the gudgeon pin. I must be sure, so the cylinder would have to come off. Worked on it until noon, and then took a rest until 17.00 hours.

Took number 2 cylinder off and found nothing wrong with the gudgeon pin or piston. So I decided that the noise must be due to slightly abnormal "piston slap", a condition not unknown with aluminium pistons working in cast iron air-cooled cylinders. By nightfall the engine was running smoothly again and ready for an early start. Accommodation and meal were about £2.00.

Another Comfortable Rest House

16th September 1927 Jebelin to Kosti I knew from forward information that there was a landing ground at Kosti about thirty minutes flying time away over country of similar character. If, during that half-hour flight, the engine behaved itself I wouldn't worry any more. Well, the engine did behave itself. But I landed at Kosti, nevertheless, because I thought a complete oil change and topping up of fuel tanks advisable. Shell would

have arranged for a supply of aviation grade fuel to be there. Having landed and refuelled I decided to remain there for the day. The aircraft could do with a clean up and the flying controls could be checked. Anyway, by that time, the sun was hotting up the air to a bumpy state, and there was another comfortable rest house in which to spend the night. From Kosti to Cape Town there were no further mechanical “incidents” to cause alarm!

Still Following the Nile

17th September 1927 Kosti to Malakal Left Kosti early for the four-hour flight to Malakal, still following the Nile over reasonably safe terrain. On arrival, filled up petrol and oil tanks and checked over the engine. Tomorrow the three-hundred-mile course would be over hostile swampland! I fell asleep that night to the sound of drums beating, coming from the native boma about a quarter of a mile outside the village.

18th September 1927 Malakal to Mongalla. At 06.45 hours took off for Mongalla while the air was still cool and calm. The cruising height for today was to be 3,000 feet, high enough to remain free of heat bumps. As we climbed I could see how the course of the Nile came towards Malakal from the distant west after threading its way for 300 miles through the centre of the vast Sud area which is at least a hundred and fifty miles wide. Nearly the whole of the great shallow lake is covered by a vigorous growing lily, which lives entirely on the surface of the water drawing nourishment from its roots.

A Tremendously Spongy Floating Platform

A very long time ago the roots of individual plants must have entwined, eventually to form a tremendously spongy floating platform covered with a compost of dead lily blossoms and leaves. The seeds of the papyrus reed found their way onto this fertile bed and sprouted mightily. The result - a vast, almost impenetrable, floating thicket, ten to twelve feet tall.

My course lay over the eastern edge of the Sud over higher ground named Duk Ridge. It was submerged under water - a foot, perhaps, after the monsoon period. A forced landing would be uncomfortable owing to the mosquitoes and leeches. Mongalla lies at the southern limit of the Sud. I was received by Captain Moysey, C.O. of the local company of Sudan Defence Force. (I was to meet him three times again).

19th September 1927 Mongalla to Kisumu. Elgon Mountain. Left Mongalla for Kisumu, Kenya. The aerodrome is located close to Lake Victoria Nyanza at about 3,500 feet. 2

0th September 1927 I spent the day changing oil and generally cleaning the aircraft.

Noisy Lions and Hyenas

21st September 1927 Kisumu to Tabora To Tabora, Tanganyika, (now Tanzania). Beginning of the jungle. Jungle noises at night, lion and hyena.

22nd September 1927 Tabora to Abercorn Just over the Northern Rhodesian border (now Zambia) surrounded by a vast area of thick forest, and difficult to find if the visibility was poor. Steered a course for the southern end of the 400-mile long Lake Tanganyika.

23rd September 1927 Abercorn to Broken Hill Also in thick forest but served by the Beira, Mashonaland and Rhodesian Railway, so not difficult to find.

24th September 1927 Broken Hill to Livingstone Close by Livingstone the marvellous sight of the great Victoria Falls on the Zambesi. Wonderful from 250 feet, with the shadow of the aircraft on the spray and completely surrounded by rainbow. Dinner with the Governor, who was surprised when I told him that I had worked there on the railway four years ago!

25th September 1927 Livingstone to Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia At Bulawayo I dined with the Mayor, who kindly offered me a room at a hotel. But I preferred to spend the night at the same old boarding house with old railway friends.

Johannesburg and Rendezvous with Dorys

26th September 1927 Bulawayo to Johannesburg Arriving at Johannesburg I was met by my fiancée Dorys Oldfield. The Johannesburg Flying Club gave us a marvellous party, lots of friends attended.

27th September 1927 Johannesburg to Victoria West. Left Johannesburg and made a stop at Kimberley (the great South African diamond mining centre) for refuelling. 28th September 1927 Victoria West to Wynberg, Cape Town Left Victoria West at 8.00 hours for Wynberg aerodrome, Cape Town, the final destination three hundred miles away.

I had planned to arrive there at 12.30 hours but after three and a half hours flying and having climbed to 4,000 feet to cross the Wittebergen Mountain group, I realised that a strong NNW wind was blowing me off course in a SSE direction. A late arrival was now certain. It would be later still if I persisted on the same compass bearing. There was nothing for it but to get down out of that wind and in on the leeward, southern side of the mountains. It wouldn't be too bumpy if we kept well away from the range, even out to sea a little if necessary.

A Giant Fang of Rock

About a hundred miles from Cape Town stands Babylon's Totem, a giant fang of rock about three hundred feet tall which stands erect, inshore, and about two miles from the coastline. Flying at 250 feet above sea level we passed it half a mile away. There is always turbulence in the air on the leeward side of mountains below the ridge when a strong wind is blowing across it.

The Aircraft Fell Vertically Like a Stone

I was expecting a spot of turbulence, when suddenly the aircraft fell vertically like a stone - 100 feet. The engine spluttered and I would have been left up in the air if the safety belt had not held me in. Two seconds later there came a sickening creaking thud as the aircraft shot out of that plunging down draught to hit stable air.

For a split instant I thought that the wings were coming off. But they didn't, so my little Moth and I, somewhat shaken, flew on to Wynberg, arriving nearly two hours late.

A Patiently Waiting Crowd

To the patiently waiting crowd I appeared from a surprising direction - from the east instead of from the north. Despite this I was given an enthusiastic and warm welcome. Thus ended a "demonstration" of one of the many capabilities of a light aircraft.

28th September 1927 Arrival at Cape Town I was received by the Mayor of Cape Town, the Defence Corps Officers, a representative of the Commander-in-Chief, Africa Station, and the President of the Cape Town Flying Club. Stayed for a couple of days to see friends and to be wined and dined; then back to my home station at Pretoria, stopping overnight at Port Elizabeth, then via East London (left at 18.00 hours - head wind, phosphorous waves, and car lights) and Durban.

Giving Me the Tiger Moth to Keep!

A day or two after arriving home I flew to Johannesburg in the Moth to hand it over to the Johannesburg Star so that they might sell it to the Jo'burg Flying Club as previously arranged. I was sad to say goodbye to G-EBSO. The Managing Director said that they were not going to do that - but they were giving it to me to keep. Little did I ever dream that I should possess an aircraft of my own! This enabled me to have three more wonderful African flights.

7. The Britannia Trophy



At a dinner at the Royal Aero Club, Dick received a small replica of the Britannia Trophy from the Duke of Edinburgh.

The Royal Aero Club's Premier Award was presented to the Club in 1911 by Horatio Barber (b. 1875). It is awarded annually to the British aviator who, in the opinion of the Committee, has accomplished the most meritorious performance in the air during the preceding year. In 1927 it was awarded to Lt. Richard Reid Bentley, M.C. for his flight from London to Cape Town in the de Havilland 60x Moth, G-EBSO (85 bhp. A.D.C. Cirrus II) obtained partly with the assistance of the "Johannesburg Star". The 7,250 mile flight from Stag Lane left at 10.25 G.M.T. on September 1st 1927 and finished twenty eight days later in Cape Town at 14.20. The flight was the longest solo flight in a single engine aircraft to date. In February 1953, The Duke of Edinburgh presented replicas to the early winners of the award as they had received no trophy as the time. Dick said that he was awarded the Air Force Cross for meritorious service to aviation, and it was presented by the Earl of Athlone in Pretoria.

He resigned from the S.A.A.F. to marry Dorys Oldfield.

8. The Second Flight across Africa

Being the owner now of G-EBSO meant that Dick could still earn his living flying. He became a taxi-pilot, ferrying passengers on business or pleasure, and handled all sorts of odd flying jobs, including flying aerial adverts.

18th February 1928. Following their marriage Dick and Dorys started on their leisurely honeymoon flight to England. A week later while at Livingstone he flew five “joy rides” enabling tourists to see the Victoria Falls. Dick said that one can always get a thrill from viewing the Falls from the air. Flying over them at high noon, one’s enjoyment is increased by the rainbow which floats beneath for practically the full width of the gorge, and the dignity and the grandeur of the whole feature is in no way lessened by looking down on it. This meant that the honeymoon was resumed after a week.

Then the next interruption followed shortly. Before they left Jo’burg they had met a young lady, Sophie Pierce (she became Lady Heath) who was intending to fly solo from the Cape to Cairo, the first woman to do so, in her Avro Avian III aircraft. The Sudan authorities had recently refused to allow women to fly over the country in the belief that flying was on the increase and it was an unsafe area for women. Dick, Dorys and Sophie met again in Uganda and she asked him to assist her by escorting her as far as Khartoum. She then flew on to Cairo, while Dick’s services were again needed - to escort Lady Mary Bailey south on her historic first solo round trip flight between England and South Africa in a Cirrus II Moth. From Mongalla Dick accompanied her to Nimule; he did not land there but returned to Mongalla, then continued in stages to Khartoum to rendezvous with Dorys.

Before leaving for Cairo, via Albara, Wadi-Halfa, and Luxor the maintenance check on SO included “Wings dismantled and centre section tuned up. Machine re-rigged and all diagonals tested. Found correct”. They journeyed on by way of Abu-Kir, Sollum, Benghazi, Sirte, Tripoli, Sfax, across to Catania and then to Rome. On leaving Rome for Nice the first forced landing occurred. “A broken rocker arm No: 2 cyl. Also the push rod.” These were replaced from spares on the spot. Three days later they arrived at Stag Lane on 12th May 1928. At the end of May G-EBSO was taken to Stag Lane again to be dismantled and overhauled.

In July Dick worked as a Flying Instructor with the Liverpool and District Aero Club, based at Hooton Park, Cheshire. He flew their Avro Avian registration no G-EBXX, followed by G-EBXY and G-EBWY. In September he resumed flying in his Moth around the United Kingdom.

9. The Third Flight across Africa

Towards the end of October 1928 the return flight to South Africa began. His third long flight, and the outward flight of Second Round Trip. This time their route was to take them to Cologne, Nuremburg, Vienna, Budapest, Sofia, Constantinople, Konya, Rayak, and Cairo. While there Dick received an unusual request.

Captain S.S. Halse was a pilot in the S.A.A.F. Reserve and, like several others, came to Swartkop for two weeks every year on a Refresher Course. He and his wife had gone to England by sea voyage - Union Castle Line - some time in the late spring of 1928. Being quite well-to-do he bought a D.H. Gipsy 1 Moth, a similar air plane to mine, but powered with the new D.H. Gipsy 1 motor, a little more powerful than my A.D.C. Cirrus II. The Gipsy proved to be a very reliable engine.

Unbeknown to me - and why not - he decided to fly back to South Africa with his wife as passenger. Seemingly they had left Cairo about eight days before Dorys and I landed there. Apparently all had gone well with them until alighting at Mongalla near the southern border of the Sud area. Unfortunately his final approach to this somewhat small airfield was just a little too high so that his aircraft ran out of rolling space onto rough terrain where, coming to an abrupt stop, it tipped onto its nose and caused irreparable damage to the propeller. This meant that they were stuck there until a new prop could be sent.

Wandering Herds of Elephants

This would involve a very long wait - at the very least a month - before a replacement could arrive. The only available communication from this isolated point was by land-line telephone. The reliability of this was extremely chancy, since it was frequently damaged either by wandering herds of elephants, or when a native of the Dinka tribe wanted a length of handy copper wire with which to bind up crude structures. However, on this occasion good luck was with them. Captain Moysey, whom I have mentioned earlier, managed on the land-line, to contact the Government Office in Khartoum which relayed the message on to Cairo.

A Generous Offer of a Spare Propellor

Again good fortune appeared in the form of Jacque de Sibour by name, also a private owner of a Gipsy I Moth, who was making a prolonged stay with his beautiful American wife. The Vicomte and Vicomtesse de Sibour were en route to India and not to South Africa. As soon as he heard of Halse's plight he very generously offered his spare propeller for me to "ferry"

down to Mongalla. Naturally I was quite willing to do this providing the propeller could be stowed on G-EBSO satisfactorily. So we sought advice from the Chief Engineer, R.A.F. at Heliopolis.

The Risk of Tail Heaviness

It was obvious that the propeller could not be stowed within the aircraft's fuselage due to obstruction of cross bracing struts aft of the pilot's seat. But, even if such had been possible, the rearward shift of the centre of gravity would have made S.O. impossible to fly due to "tail heaviness". It was therefore agreed that the propeller would have to be bolted through its hub to the underside of the fuselage, to lie fore and aft, with its forward tip located 6" aft of the aircraft engine bulkhead. This position should not, we thought, upset the fore and aft trim to an uncomfortable extent.

A ten-minute test flight entirely allayed our fears. Finally a protective envelope of canvas enclosed the propeller to prevent it suffering possible damage from small stones kicked up during take-off and landing. It also ensured that this precious aid to forward motion did not shift out of streamline. At 10.00 a.m. 6th November 1928 Dorys and I left Heliopolis for Luxor, a somewhat late start.

The De Sibours had driven out from Cairo to see us off. I keenly felt that I should do my utmost to reward Jacque's great generosity by safely "ferrying" his propeller to Halse. Our late start involved us in the usual discomfort of climbing through the heated bumpy air to the calmer altitude at 2,500 - 3,000 feet. The added weight of the propeller, say about forty pounds, and the slight additional drag slowed S.O. down for a lot of air miles on her second flight to the south over Africa.

The hotel at Luxor was quite comfortable, the food was quite good. As this happened so long ago I cannot remember if I looked at the great temple at Karnak nearby; possibly we did for it was a great spectacle and, I imagine, still is. Anyway, after quite an evening meal we slept soundly on a double bed under a really serviceable mosquito net.

Next morning we were away early, intending to reach Wadi-Halfa, the border town with the Sudan. But it was unlikely it would be achieved in one hop for we might have to land at Atbarah to top up the fuel. We arrived over Atbarah after four hours in the air, so wanting to make sure of reaching Khartoum without mishap I decided to land there and top up. Flying thence to the Sudan capital took another two hours. Our length of stay here was intended to be for one night only, but this was not to be.

The authorities thought that my wife should not fly as passenger in a single-engined aircraft along the course between Malakal and Mongalla which lay along the eastern edge of the Sud, over the Duk Ridge, for a little

over three hundred miles. And this was despite the fact that my trustworthy little aircraft had safely flown over that course twice before, the latter with Dorys as passenger on the outward north-going flying honeymoon in May of that year.

This put us in a quandary since it meant that I would have to fly on solo to deliver Halse's propeller and then sit in Mongalla for maybe two weeks awaiting my wife's arrival on the small stern-wheel steamer! Then once again our luck was in. News came through from Cairo that a certain Commander Glen Kidston, R.N. was flying south in a tri-motor Fokker monoplane piloted by a Captain Donald Drew of Imperial Airways. There was also a flight engineer and a photographer.

A Flying Hunting Safari

Kidston's idea was a flying hunting safari on which the aircraft would transport the party to hunting grounds on the northern area of the Serengeti Plateau on which, according to local information adequate landing grounds could be found. It was thought by the afore-said Sudan authorities that the Commander would willingly agree to carrying another passenger who weighed only 112 lbs. That the thinking was sound was confirmed by Kidston's immediate agreement soon after his arrival at Khartoum forty-eight hours later.

Dorys and I took off for Malakal located at the north eastern corner of the vast Sud area roughly three hundred miles square, with rounded corners, of swamp formed by the Nile coming down from its source. The ancient river spreads itself into a widespread pool of varying depth of not more than six feet. The vast plateau of rolling compost which provided a germination bed for wind-blown seeds of the eight to ten feet tall coarse papyrus grass.

An Impenetrable Swaying Mass

It was through this almost impenetrable swaying mass that a three hundred mile channel had to be maintained to permit the two-way passage of the small stern-wheel steamer boats between Khartoum and Juba, a few miles upstream from Mongalla. This involved the employment of many small gangs of men drawn from the area's Dinka tribes. These gangs of six to eight natives lived on small "atolls" of firm land scattered around in the swamp, fed by a food allowance from the Sudan Government supplemented by locally caught fish and birds.

Snow White Garments

On one of the two days that we had to wait for Kidston we were taken over to Amdurman on the West Bank of the White Nile populated by a wholly black community of several races; Arabs, Nubians, Abyssinians. Their

striking appearance in snow-white garments seemed to make the darkness of their limbs and faces even darker by contrast.

A Sumptuous Ivory-mounted Ostrich Fan

I made only one purchase while there - a lovely ivory-mounted ostrich feather fan for Dorys. One or two of the feathers were slightly grey near their roots but this did not seriously mar the fan's sumptuous appearance. It cost me a fiver! After the visit to the "market" we were taken up-stream to a beautiful little Egyptian temple built B.C. in honour of Queen Nefertiti. A delicate portrait in profile of this beautiful woman was painted on one of the inside walls in colours, which appeared to have kept their freshness but no doubt retouching may have assisted.

The building was designed and orientated so that direct sunlight could never fall upon the painting. At 7.00. hours I took off in S.O. with Dorys as passenger, for Malakal, to be followed shortly by Kidston and company in the Fokker. The terrain southwards to that day's destination was mainly firm and level desert and thinly scattered scrub which presented little hazard to a safe forced landing. This section of the White Nile flows northwards in a course almost free of any large bends offering useful guidance when there is poor visibility after a dust storm. The distance to be flown was about four hundred miles and the Fokker landed 10-15 minutes ahead since its cruising speed was somewhat higher than S.O.'s.

We had been airborne for about five hours, which meant that our arrival at Malakal would be at high noon and a temperature (shade) of around 110° F. So, having tied down the two aircraft we all sought what cool could be found in the rest huts. After a wash and a light meal we rested until about 1500 hours before emerging to refill fuel tanks and check over the engines after the temperature had fallen a few degrees.

Rhythmic Muttering of Drums

There was, as I have mentioned in earlier accounts of African flights, a small white administrative unit there who welcomed these flying visits as a break in their monotonous duties and they did their best to entertain us for the one evening of our brief stay. There was another "party" going on in the native compound, about five hundred yards away as the locals celebrated a traditional rite. The rhythmic muttering of their drums, which accompanied the heel stamping, dancing, and the repetitive monotony of chanting voices lulled us to much needed sleep.

Next morning, S.O. and I took off to fly solo to Mongalla, shortly followed by the Fokker with Dorys aboard. I fervently hoped that nothing would prevent us from meeting again at Mongalla. So, once again, and for the fifth time, EBSO was being headed along the same south going track as she

had been a little over a year ago in September 1928, my dislike of this particular section having in no way decreased.

The so-called Duk Ridge was, after the heavy monsoon rains, thinly covered with water. Flying at 3,000 feet one could see the broken reflection of the sun as it flickered upwards through the densely standing elephant grass. Four hours plus had been the average time to fly over this featureless hazardous section. In the early morning, skies were generally clear with good visibility. The southerly course meant a steady compass and the calm air made frequent checks for drift unnecessary. But it was the note of the single engine that kept one from drowsing, the lack of turbulence in the unheated air giving a steady reading on the revolution indicator dial and reminding one of how faultlessly that comparatively small motor – in aviation terms - had performed.

So why did there always lurk that mite of apprehension that something untoward just might happen? Who was getting cold feet! But one had better return to the story. The Fokker and S.O. were in formation together climbing to 3,000 feet. I could see Dorys' smiling face as she waved a hand to me from behind one of the Fokker's cabin port holes; I replied with forearm wave from the Moth's open cockpit. Having reached the desired altitude we maintained pre-arranged positions, the Fokker leading and the Moth stationed about 30 feet to port and about 20 feet aft, a position which permitted both pilots to see each other. Thus we cruised for about four hours, and both aircraft's crews were getting just a little bored; well, I was. So I signalled to Donald to push on a bit faster if he wanted to since he had very considerably flown below the Fokker's normal cruising speed so that I could keep "station" with him.

Also, by then, we were not very far from Mongalla and the Sud area had finished ten miles behind. From this point tree growth begins to appear, albeit somewhat stunted. By this time the Fokker was nearly a mile ahead but good visibility enabled me to keep him in sight; until he disappeared behind a lazily rising column of smoke from a small bush fire.

Five Hundred Elephants

In six to seven minutes we too had flown through that smoke but did not sight the Fokker, no doubt due to my catching sight of another more dramatic view of the famous Jonglei five hundred strong herd of elephants which was crashing its way through the bush in a S.E. direction. No doubt it had been disturbed and frightened by the Fokker which, as I learned later, had rapidly lost height to view this marvellous spectacle. As the herd crashed through the bush the bulls pointed their trunks skywards as they trumpeted defiance against this huge noisy threat from above. The cows

were frantically stowing the young under their bellies to shelter them from the airborne monster.

I too lost height to look at something I might never see again. But I went no lower than five hundred feet fearing that the presence of another huge “bird” might increase the herd’s alarm and bring the hazard to the smallest calves of being trampled to death more likely. Climbing away I headed for Mongalla reckoning to be within sight of the landing ground in about fifteen minutes.

Where Was the Other Aircraft?

There I should find Halse’s propeller-less Moth and the Fokker perhaps with its engines stopped. Well, my flying time estimate was nearly right and as I made the customary anti-clockwise circuit I scanned the landing ground. There was the propeller-less Moth and its owner looking intently at S.O. as he tried to discern where the replacement propeller was stowed. But where was the Fokker? Why wasn’t it there? What ever could have happened? I eased the spiral descent into a flatter wider circuit searching the adjacent air space; there was no sign of it. A forced landing seemed to be the only answer.

Having landed I taxied over and stopped close to Halse’s Moth. “Your replacement propeller is hanging under S.O.s belly” I said. “Please get it off carefully as soon as you can. I may have to go hunting as soon as my bus’s tanks are refilled.” By this time Captain Moysey had appeared. To my anxious enquiry, he said Malakal had reported, about two hours ago, that we had taken off at 0700 hours, after which they had lost sight of us. In my somewhat uneasy state of mind I could only reply that it was lucky that the telephone land-line was intact.

At his suggestion I accompanied him over to his living quarters where a most welcome snack and a drink was produced by his native cook. Then back to S.O. to refill fuel tanks and top-up engine lubricating oil. Before taking off I asked the Captain for a strong envelope on which I wrote just two words “Help Coming”, weighting it with a stone before sealing it.

Great Relief

Airborne, we climbed to five hundred feet and headed North. Keeping close to the river I could clearly see up to half-a-mile across thinly covered scrub country and after about twenty-five minutes spotted the Fokker. To my great relief I saw that it was right side up, resting on a green strip close to the river. Losing height quickly in a fairly tight spiral I saw Dorys and the four male crew waving vigorously; they were standing on firm ground, the edge of which was just under the Fokker’s port wing tip. Squeezing

through the pilot's cockpit they had crawled out along the wing tip, each of them with assistance lowering himself onto dry land.

Dropping a Weighted Message

Dorys had been handed as carefully as possible. I was to learn just why several hours later but just at that moment I was happy to see that she was alive and apparently well. Directing SO in the down stream - northward - direction we flew for about half-a-mile then making yet another 180° turn we flew back as low and as slowly as I dared, and dropped the weighted message. Turning again I saw that they had got it - they acknowledged with a wave. Making the final turn southwards I headed for Mongalla; the whole search operation had taken fifty-five minutes.

A Rescue Operation

On my reporting to Captain Moysey he immediately decided that we should call on the Governor, Southern Sudan, to tell him what had happened. The latter immediately agreed that we should have the loan of his government "stern-wheeler", a miniature of the big Mississippi steam-boats. It was between 50-60 feet in length, about 15-feet beam, and with a draught of about 3 feet, not more because of the Nile's shallowness in this huge area. Freeboard was around two feet, which made rolling hazardous as the "top hamper" or above main deck structure was considerable, rising at least sixteen feet. The stern paddle wheel steam engine and boiler were housed on this deck along with a smaller auxiliary electric unit for lighting. The native skipper's quarters were also on this deck.

An Open Barge Lashed Alongside

The upper deck contained the white official's accommodation; forward of which were the bridge and the helm. No compass was necessary! To preserve the stern wheeler's lateral stability, an open barge about forty feet long and twelve feet beam was lashed securely along the starboard giving an overall beam of seventeen feet. The ship's wood fuel was stowed and the native crew of about eight took shelter under a Thames-punt-like awning draped around with mosquito netting. The discovery of the site of the forced landing had not taken place until around midday and the raising of steam had taken some time.

Whooping and Splashing to Frighten the Crocodiles

Necessary provisions had to be put aboard, so it was nearly dusk (which is comparatively short in those equatorial latitudes) before we, Captain Moysey and I, steamed northward. It was shortly after this that the need for such a large crew became apparent. Between Mongalla and the forced landing site were two sharp bends. These presented the hazard of stranding

on the sandbank formed on the bank of the turn. Every time a downstream voyage was made at least a couple of strandings could be expected. As soon as the “combination” came to a halt the eight deck hands jumped into the water whooping and splashing to frighten the crocodiles, of which there were plenty, push the craft clear then scramble aboard again; further crocodile deterrents were the two powerful flood lights which illuminated the scene.

Large Airborne Beetles Crash Against the Headlight

This procedure was repeated about half an hour later. Thereafter we almost drifted downstream using just sufficient power to give “steerage way”. The powerful headlight mounted on the roof just above the helmsman’s head lit up the river and river bank, and large airborne beetles crashed against it, fascinated into a sticky end. Moysey and I sat in the small lounge-cum-dining room, stripped to our khaki shorts, sweating in the humid heat, sipping water-bag cooled water medicated with not too much whisky.

For a while we discussed possible causes of the Fokker forced landing. Later we slept soundly - knowing that the early morning watch would awaken us if anything unusual developed. So far as the little ship’s crew was concerned, it was only normal cruising duties regardless of the reason. We had reckoned from the time it had taken me to fly out and back on the search, that the forced landing point must be about twenty-five miles down river, which would mean that we would reach the site at the crack of dawn. Accordingly we got up, washed and put a shirt, as well as the shorts, on.

A Brilliant Red Star Shoots Fifty Feet into the Air

Sunrise is a quick affair in that part of the world; strength of light grows rapidly. Moysey had instructed the helmsman to start making two short blasts on the ship’s steam whistle every two minutes to warn the stranded aircrew of our approach. About fifteen minutes later a brilliant red star, fired from a Very Pistol, shot fifty feet into the air, to be acknowledged by two longer blasts from the ship’s whistle. Fortunately there was firm ground right up to the river’s eastern edge and not very far to the south of the landing site making it fairly easy for Dorys and the four crew to embark over a light gang plank connecting shore and ship.

The ship’s crew helped to transfer firearms and ammunition and any other easily moveable gear, and at about 1100 hours the little ship cast off and we headed upstream to Mongalla. We were much relieved that, so far as we then knew, none of the occupants of the Fokker had suffered grievous bodily harm. It was as we steamed slowly up stream and all were sipping drinks in the small saloon that Donald Drew, the air pilot, related the sequence of the forced landing.

All Three Engines Had Sputtered and Stopped

He had flown through the smoke cloud, spotted the Jonglei elephants, lost height to have a closer look and give the photographer a chance of getting a few shots through a port-hole. This required him to make several steep turns around past the herd. Just after he had finished this ploy and was beginning to climb away all three engines spluttered and stopped, giving him only seconds to select a suitable landing place. The long narrow strip along the riverbank caught his eye; it looked too green to be really firm but was the only landing place on which to set down with any degree of safety to the passengers!

At that moment he hadn't a clue as to why it had happened; that could only be revealed after a thorough investigation. It was highly unlikely that simultaneous mechanical failure of all three engines could have taken place. Information that I now have suggests that this type of Fokker was a FV11b built in 1925/6, having a range of seven hundred miles, slightly more than twice the distance it had flown that day. Providing tanks had been filled at Malakal there should have been no shortage of fuel as the manner of power failure seemed to suggest. At the end of the previous paragraph I stated that none of the passengers had received bodily harm; unhappily this was not entirely so.

Dorys Suffered a Stunning Blow on the Skull

Immediately a forced landing became apparent the menfolk gathered around Dorys to protect her. But as the aircraft pulled up with a jerk as the wheels sank into the soggy ground a rifle was thrown off a shelf just above the level of their heads, giving Dorys a stunning blow on her skull. The effect of this had apparently passed when I had flown over and spotted them. I have said "apparently" because twenty years later - we had parted in 1938 - in 1948 she died in America of a haemorrhage of the brain. Could that blow received in 1928 have been the root cause of her demise?

The Banks Strewn with Crocodiles

Mongalla was reached shortly before sundown on the day of the rescue. The passage was unhindered because steering upstream gave greater steering control for negotiating the bends, and its banks were strewn with crocodiles, which splashed into the water whenever a rifle was fired. As soon as the Governor heard of the mishap to Dorys he insisted that she should stay in his more commodious quarters where she could rest more comfortably for forty-eight hours. He was kindness itself; he even opened a bottle of his precious champagne as a tonic for her. It was now 16th November 1928. Halse and his wife had taken off early that morning having spent the day before fitting the replacement propeller to his aircraft.

He managed to get to his home in South Africa without further trouble. I did contact him again a few years later, but that is another story.

During the forty-eight hours Dorys spent recuperating from her shock, I spent several hours thoroughly checking the engine and the flying controls. After completing the inspection I made a short test flight taking Captain Moysey as passenger so that he might have a sight at the terrain surrounding Mongalla covering a radius of five miles. He was very interested to observe the appearance of small native settlements from the air. Mongalla, like all other African outposts, had its native compounds a few hundred yards away and invariably one was lulled to sleep by the soft muttering of the native drumming.

A Family of Hippos Slosh and Yawn

After her fortyeight hour rest Dorys declared that she felt fit to continue the flight southwards so we gave our very sincere thanks to all concerned for their most generous hospitality. We took off on a five-hour return flight to Jinja in Uganda. If anybody were now to ask me where in Africa I would like to re-visit I would without hesitation reply "Jinja". Sixtyone years ago it was a sizeable Anglo-African village. A short distance offshore from its southerly edge, which sloped fairly sharply to the water, was a deep pool where a small family of hippos had made its home. They made fascinating watching as the adults sloshed, yawned and grunted in their watery habitat. At the northern end of the pool the lake spilled over the Ripon Falls to become the White Nile.

Luminous Fireflies in the Banana Grove

There was one store run by a charming Englishman and several by Indians. To me it was its location that was so attractive. Sited at about the centre of the northern perimeter of Lake Victoria Nyanza (surface height 3,700 ft, distance to southern perimeter 200 miles) over-looked a small bay. The village stood among trees on land that rose gently from the lake shore, the bungalows each with their own generous compounds. A little above the lake shore level and to the westward was a banana grove of about two acres; if one walked through it at dusk the luminous trails of hovering fireflies made constantly changing patterns as they weaved about amongst the plants. Beyond the banana grove lay the grass covered landing ground its surface about ten feet above the level of the lake.

It might appear that, in my wish to explain my liking for Jinja, I had forgotten about the Fokker. It was decided by Kidston's party that, while nothing could be done about the airframe, the three engines would be worth salvaging, since they could be carried to a railhead by native porters.

Creating a New Airfield at Entebbe

We might not have stayed in Jinja for more than two nights but for the desire of Sir William Gower that I should help him create a safe landing ground at a place named Entebbe, a few miles to the west of Jinja. Sir William was the Lieutenant Governor of Uganda at that time. I was only too willing to help develop aviation facilities in Africa so it was arranged that I should be transported by taxi to the site, which lay some ten to fifteen miles to the westward of Jinja, during the morning of the third day. The ride was somewhat bumpy, since the road, or rather track, was very uneven and either very dusty, as it was at that time, or very slushy, according to whether it was the dry or the wet season. For obvious reasons the cruising speed had to be kept low so the journey took a full hour.

On arrival, I was met by Sir William, who was accompanied by the colony's white engineer. They had been driven in his official car from Kampala, the only town, and the seat of Government. The site looked promising being some seven hundred yards long by about two hundred and fifty yards in width. The surface was good and level throughout its length and lay roughly in a NW / SE direction

Termite Ant Heaps

Also there were just sufficient three to four foot high ant or termite (white ant) heaps to make complete obstructions to any size of aircraft landing. These heaps, or hills, are excavated by the termite colony's thousands of workers biting off crumbs of earth with their powerful jaws bringing it to the surface and dumping it. As they do not like being exposed to sun-light they endeavour to keep the base of the heap as small as possible as they hollow out a cavern in which the colony can live along with their queen, who eventually supplies replacements. So, undisturbed, the ant colony will increase its cavern beneath, and its height above, the ground at the same time. But if such a site is being cleared to make a landing ground it is no good just knocking the ant heaps to pieces and carting it away to a dump; that would leave the landing area with potential lethal potholes scattered about its surface.

Flattening the Ant Heaps

To remove any such hazard to aircraft the ant heaps had to be broken down on the spot by around a dozen white folk, to large walnut-sized pieces and pounded down hard into the cavity whence it came. Thus it was that the surface would become firm enough to bear the weight of quite large aircraft, a point I pressed strongly on Sir William and the engineer. When His Excellency asked later how long this operation would take, the answer was, with a full native workforce concentrated on the job, three days. This

work thereon would begin on the following morning. Sir William then asked if I would mind waiting at Jinja for a phone call on the morning of the fourth day confirming that the job had been completed and would I then fly over to test the new landing ground thus being the first to land at Entebbe.

Back to Pretoria

It was time to fly back to Pretoria. The monsoon period in the Sudan was now over, the black cotton soil landing grounds would have lost their stickiness and would be above the level of the lake. We now continued our travels and returned to Pretoria on 20th December 1928.

Cape Town's First Air Derby – 19th January 1929

The "Argus" newspaper decided to hold a £100 Air Race from Young's Field at Wynberg. This was to be over a course of one hundred miles over the Cape Peninsula, and the eight entrants were handicapped according to the speed of their aircraft. According to a report at the time "the starting flag dropped at 2.40 p.m. and the two slowest machines, safe, steady, war-time Avros, with rotary engines piloted by Captain Davenport (12 minutes handicap) and Mr. Don (12 minutes handicap) pushed forward".

Captain Davenport experienced a little engine trouble but was soon in the air. Meanwhile, mechanics were working feverishly to fit a new wheel for Mr. Williamson's Bolton & Paul machine, one wheel having been punctured just before the start. Mr. Kurtz (7 minutes) in his Moth, started at 2.45 p.m. and began by steering straight for Maarnberg, the first turning point in the race. Captain Swart (6 minutes) in the Shell "Avian" was the next to leave the ground. He climbed steeply and was soon out of sight, followed after a minute by Mr. Penny (5 minutes) in the Cape Town Flying Club's "Avian".

Mr. Williamson (2 minutes) was ready when the signal to go was given. He pulled his mended machine off the ground in a hair-raising climb. Captain Bentley (scratch) in the Star "Moth" and Captain Black (scratch) in Mr. Blake's "Avian" tore off the ground together twelve minutes after the start. Just before the last two machines had left the two "Avros" were seen returning, making full speed for the motor show at Paarden Island. The force of the South-Easter at their altitude was estimated at from 40-60 miles an hour.

Mr. Don, leading Captain Davenport by about 30 seconds, was the first to pass over the aerodrome. Mr. Kurtz followed shortly afterwards; two minutes passed before the next pair of planes came into sight. This pair was just disappearing in the direction of Paarden Island when Captain Bentley, his machine going well, swung over the aerodrome. Following

him, with his engine humming vigorously, was Captain Black, the other scratch starter.

On completing the first lap Captain Davenport retired owing to engine trouble. He landed safely at the aerodrome. Mr. Don retired during the second lap. At the end of this lap the race had become a keen struggle between Kurtz in the lead, and Bentley who seemed to be coming up steadily. Swart was not far behind, but Williamson, Penny & Black had dropped back.

The wind had freshened and could be heard shrieking through the wires as each machine passed over the aerodrome. As the machines approached the aerodrome at the end of the third lap thousands of people crowded at the wire fence, straining their eyes to read the letters of the silver wings of the leading plane. "Bentley" they shouted as the speeding "Moth" shot overhead.

Bentley's engine was spluttering as he wheeled round the aerodrome, banking steeply and knifing through the air on the last stages of the long race. Three times he went round, experienced observers expecting every moment to see him make a forced landing owing to petrol shortage.

Then he zoomed down triumphantly across the starting line to win the race. Mrs. Bentley, who had been watching anxiously from start to finish, ran forward and was the first to congratulate him.

Bentley had crossed the line at 4.09 p.m. Kurtz was second at 4.11p.m. He told a representative of The Argus "The wind was terrific. I was nearly thrown out of the cockpit once - the nearest squeak I have had". Swart came third at 4.12p.m. The other three competitors were not timed, but they all completed the course.

Captain Bentley, just after he had clambered from his cockpit and was still circled by the crowd, said he had a very bumpy passage. "My plane was bumping so much that it was throwing my petrol out. The spirit was getting so low that I had to throttle down, I was flying on my left wing. Even so she burnt much more petrol than I expected. I only had eight gallons in the tank". Captain Black told The Argus representative that the result showed that the system of handicapping adopted was excellent. After the race, there was a display of aerial fighting, and a machine fitted with a wireless receiver dipped and flew according to instructions from the ground.

10. The Bushman's Paradise

Shortly after the air race, a syndicate chartered Dick and his aeroplane to search for "The Bushman's Paradise". Legend had it that in the deserts of South-West Africa there is a hidden place where diamonds could be picked up by the handful. Many prospectors failed to survive their adventures. The strange thing about the legend was that it was current in S.W. Africa for many years before the official discovery of diamonds in 1908. Several previous expeditions had searched and failed, but this was to be the first by air.

A Mr. Green was flown to Vereukpan, a magnificent natural airfield and south of the Orange River. Dick then flew to Kalkfontein to collect a Mr. Neilson, who was to be his observer. Dick reported that "he flew over yellow and brown waste land with a farmhouse every twenty-five miles or so. He climbed the mountains along the river with no signs of habitation. It was wicked country for flying. The jagged mountains looked blue and fascinating but with nowhere to make a forced landing. Through a welter of rock flowed a muddy river.

To the north lay the ghastly Kalahari desert with dried-up water courses marking the sand". He landed a long way north of the river and talked to the member of the syndicate responsible for the search. They wanted between the Aughrabies Falls and the sea surveyed, an unknown area of mountains, but he was disinclined to do this in a small single-engined aircraft. On the return flight he kept a sharp look-out for a crater or pool but only barren mountains were seen. You could fly for a month without spotting anything. The diamonds were to remain in "Paradise" for a long time!

In April 1929, Dick was employed by the Argus Newspapers to cover Malcolm Cambell's speed record on the Verneuk Pan, near Cathcart. He flew the photographs of the attempt back to Cape Town in time for the evening printing at the Argus Press. He knew exactly the time needed to complete the journey before dark. The Press Camp was about ten miles from the Campbell Camp and one night, as it was clear, a reporter by the name of Green persuaded him to fly low over the Campbell Camp and land nearby. They walked into the Campbell camp and obtained a very good story. Returning to Maitland, Dick, the reliable taxi-pilot, continued to fly aerial adverts and joy riders again. With aviation still in its infancy these flights were popular. He then went back to Pretoria and Blomfontein, and was chartered for photography and cross-country surveying flights, as well as joy rides. Seeking new landing grounds was also undertaken.

10. The Fourth Flight Across Africa

Aviation was beginning to see its first business-men needing to save both time and money - services that aviation was always trying to accomplish. Dick wrote the following account of his last long distance flight from South Africa for publication in 1927.

A few weeks ago my D.H. Moth, G-EBSO, landed at Croydon Aerodrome on the conclusion of her fourth flight across Africa, thus completing a total air mileage of 51,652, and all with the same Cirrus engine.

My first flight from London to Cape Town, in September, 1927, was just a demonstration of one on the many capabilities of a light aircraft; the second, in 1928 - Cape Town to London, completing the first round trip - was a honeymoon flight of the utmost importance to Mrs. Bentley and myself, but purely a pleasure flight. Likewise the third also in 1928 - the outward flight of the second round trip, which took us to South Africa for Christmas. But this fourth flight, from the point of view of aviation in general, has definitely been the most useful in that it has saved a certain individual both time and money; services that aviation is always trying to accomplish.

Mr. Filsinger of the Royal Baking Powder Company

Early in July Mr. Ernest B. Filsinger, Vice-President of the Royal Baking Powder Company of New York, was in Johannesburg on his company's business. In the same interest he had planned a tour during which he would visit the most important business towns of S. and W. Rhodesia, Belgian Congo, Tanganyika, Kenya, Egypt, Turkey, the Balkans, Italy, Austria and Germany. He desired to do this for two reasons; to get into personal touch with the representatives of his organization and, at the same time, to see the wonders of the African Continent.

But alas for his plans! A telegram from New York required his presence in Berlin by August 22nd, and as careful perusal of train time-tables and steamship sailing lists revealed that such a tour would take at the very least four months, it seemed certain of abandonment. Naturally, his mind turned to flying as the most feasible way of overcoming his present difficulty. Therefore, after enquiries, he got into touch with me, asking if I would take on the job of flying him to Berlin.

Only One Suitcase for Both of Us

I at once agreed to make the flight, but warned Mr. Filsinger that it might have to finish at Nairobi owing to the difficulty with landing grounds in the

Sudan during the rainy season. It was agreed that kit would have to be limited - that only one suitcase could be carried for both of us; that he, as the important person of the outfit, would be the one to wear the 'glad rags,' while I would confine myself to a change of linen and khaki, this stringency being necessitated by the rather large amount of engine spares and fuel we were compelled to carry on such a long flight. Before commencing the flight it was thought that a top overhaul would save a certain amount of maintenance work en route, and was therefore carried out.

A Full Set of Spares

The spares carried for the Cirrus Mark 111 engine were: 1 cylinder head completely assembled except for rocker arms and pins; 1 complete set of rocker arms and fulcrum pins; 2 each inlet and exhaust push rods; 1 spare set of plugs.

An Pioneering Business Flight

At 9.30 on the morning of July 10th we were at Baragwanath, ready for the long flight, but there was the usual delay for the saying of good-byes and Press photography. Therefore at 10 a.m. we left the ground, and, there being quite a fresh head wind, one realised that Mr. Filsinger would have a somewhat long stay in the front seat, which for him, being long of limb, would be somewhat tiresome, especially on the first 'hop.' But he stuck out the five hours and thirty minutes without complaint, which was a good show and reassuring to me.

A Large Gross Weight

Here it would be as well to state that the little craft must have been pretty well up to maximum load, carrying as she was: pilot, 165 lbs; passenger, 170 lbs; fuel, 265 lbs; oil, 20 lbs; tools and spares, 75 lbs; tare weight, 882 lbs. - thus giving a gross weight of 1,568 lbs. And such a weight becomes something to think about when taking off from small landing grounds at 4,000 feet and over, above sea level.

The Victoria Falls

The flights from Johannesburg to Bulawayo and Victoria Falls were without incident or scenes of unusual interest. One can always get a thrill from viewing the Falls from the air. Flying over them at high noon, one's enjoyment is increased by the rainbow which floats beneath for practically the full width of the gorge, and the dignity and grandeur of the whole feature is in no way lessened by looking down on it.

Here we stayed for a long week-end, while Mr. Filsinger revelled in the beauty of the place. Then we went to Salisbury via Bulawayo, because the country between Livingstone and Salisbury is definitely bad in the event of a forced landing. Furthermore, the prevailing winds, blowing strongly from the east, would have made the flight tedious - how tedious can be gathered from the fact that the flight to Bulawayo took four and a half hours for a distance of 224 miles in a south-easterly direction, and it was very bumpy. The colouring of the veldt was remarkable - the rich golden of the thick grass, the blue tinge imparted by the smoky atmosphere to the green of the scattered bush, and to the distant bush-clad kopjes (small hills), making a striking contrast of tints that compelled admiration.

At Salisbury we were met by a party of air enthusiasts, who were in the throes of forming a light aeroplane club. They are to receive a subsidy of £750 for the first year, and £1000 for the second and ensuing years, from the Rhodesian Government. This subsidy has been comparatively easy to obtain - a fortunate contrast to the Government of South Africa. The Aero Club of South Africa has, for numerous years, been endeavouring to impress upon that body the absolute necessity for a subsidy, and has only just been able to make a slight impression.

Mighty Scenery

Salisbury to Broken Hill, 288 miles, was new country to G-EBSO, and therefore interesting. For about 100 miles the route lay over flat country populated by European farmers. After that, bush appeared, increasing in density, and the ground became broken, developing finally into a rugged range of mountains that, falling away in a steep escarpment, guards the wide flats through which the Zambesi flows below its confluence with the Kafue River. Mighty scenery this, for the most part thickly bush-covered, the river looking somewhat like the Nile in the Southern Sudan just before the latter enters the Sud country.

We crossed it thirty miles below the junction, and almost immediately were faced with another guardian escarpment, rising 2,000 feet on the north-western banks. Fifteen minutes over this humpy bit, and then flat open grassy plain, interspersed with clumps of thick bush right on to Broken Hill. Arriving there, we enjoyed the charming hospitality of Mr. Stevens, an American, and the manager of the Anglo-American zinc and lead mine.

No Map so Follow the Railway

The next day saw us to Elizabethville, in the Belgian Congo, again new ground of which I possessed no map. Therefore the trend of the Katanga Railway was followed over thickly bush-clad country. To the south of the line, and when flying at 3000 feet, always within gliding distance are a series of open grassy spaces, which were reassuring. Near Elizabethville,

one looks down and sees enormous antheaps, thirty to forty feet in diameter and just about as high, with single trees or small clumps of scrub growing from the tops thereof.

On the ground one discovered that roads were cut through them and that they go about thirty to the acre! Elizabethville landing-ground is a strip 1800 by 100 yards, lying in an east-westerly direction into the prevailing easterly wind. On it was a large corrugated iron hangar, which contained at the time a three-engined Handley-Page, one of the eight owned by Belgian S.A.B.E.N.A., who operate a regular mail and passenger service. Monsieur Jean van Opstal, the pilot, indicated that the services of their mechanics were at my disposal, a welcome courtesy, as the day was hot and our throats parched.

Fires Fill the Air with Smoke

Arriving in the town, we were driven to a delightful cafe with tables and chairs placed outside under a wide awning, and beer! Over it, and with the usual fraternal ease of airmen, van Opstal and I discussed the possibility of the French air line across the Sahara, via Colourt Beshar and Lake Tehad, linking up with S.A.B.E.N.A., who were endeavouring to arrange matters to operate as far south as Bulawayo. The flight thence to Abercorn had to be made through conditions of, for Africa, extremely bad visibility owing to the grass and forest fires filling the air with smoke.

As far as Kasenga on the Luapula River one had a road, well marked through the forest, to guide one, but after that the route lay over featureless terrain thickly afforested. Abercorn being very small and thus easily missed if one was at all off the course, in such a smoky atmosphere it was thought better to steer for the southern end Lake Tanganyika. How wise this measure turned out to be was revealed when we arrived right over the 3000 ft. escarpment forming the shore of the lake before it became visible, so dense was the smoke.

A stay of two days was made here as the guests of Mr. Venning, District Commissioner, whose excellent hospitality I had enjoyed on two former occasions. The first afternoon was spent in driving twenty-two miles to the great lake, and the evening in festive manner aboard one of the Tanganyika Railway steamers, which was making its fortnightly call at Mpulungu. The next day my passenger enjoyed himself visiting native villages and watching a native dance.

The Kalambo Falls Drop Two Thousand Feet

The matter of native education was of the greatest interest to him throughout the flight. The following morning saw us on our way to Tabora, a distance of 280 miles over somewhat mountainous and bushcovered

country. A slight deviation was made in order to look at the Kalambo Falls, about twenty miles away, which drop a total height of 2000 feet down the escarpment into the S.E. end of the lake. The river is not a large one, so that the water breaks up into a band of fine spray in the first drop of some 500 feet. Much of the beauty of it was lost owing to our altitude - about 2000 feet above it - but it was necessary to climb steadily from the moment we left the ground in order to surmount the high ridges farther on.

Below us was elephant country, but no herds moved across the yellow open spaces and the bush gave too effective head cover for us to see where they might lurk. One felt that the native villages, made up of tightly snuggling mud and grass huts, were easy prey to their depredations. Ahead the country piled up and up until an altitude of 10,000 feet above sea level was reached, then suddenly there came another escarpment which abruptly fell away for a drop of 3000 feet, its steep slopes bushcovered and looking as though giant hands had clawed deep furrows thereon from top to bottom.

Down on the right the dried-up floor of the Rukwa Swamp stretched away off into the south-east, its limits obscured by the dust-laden air that hurried across its surface. Here, at this season, was a landing ground, dead smooth and of a vastness that would have gratified the pupil with a penchant for overshooting; in the rainy season, a sheet of water with a disgusting green growth on its surface - a mosquito's paradise. On the northern side of this 32-miles-wide valley another but lower escarpment, formed by a jumble of high hills, bush-clad and rocky, then flat country with occasional mbugas (swampy open spaces) in the all-pervading bush, and the crooked beds of almost-dried-up rivers straggling through it; at intervals stagnant pools - all that was left of the swiftly-running water of the past rainy season. No native habitations are here - the tsetse fly has flung its 50-miles wide belt east and west across the course for many miles.

An hour and a half of this, and then the neat little town of Tabora lay below, its white Government buildings and European residences laid out with the neat precision beloved by the more leisured official stationed in these enervating outposts of the Empire. Once the junction of Arab slaving trading routes, it is now the junction of the Tanganyika Central Railway. An excellent aerodrome here, large and of good surface, complete with wind-socking. In one corner a shelter for light aircraft with wings folded, built especially for the Department of Survey's Moth, flown by Captain Gethin.

Mr. Filsinger Goes Sightseeing

We were met by Colonel Atkin, Commanding Officer, King's African Rifles, who, with his usual courteous hospitality, took us to the Mess for lunch. Afterwards he took Mr. Filsinger for a sight-seeing drive, while I

returned to the aerodrome to refuel and inspect the engine. This done, back to the rather indifferent Railway Hotel, a bath and clean khaki, then round to the club for a 'sundowner.' That night, lying on the bed, all doors and windows wide open, I looked out on to a landscape flooded with brilliant silver light, and upwards to a blue-grey heaven, where the stars shone but faintly beside the radiance of the full moon.

The Weird and Mournful Howl of the Hyena

The date palms in the hotel garden stood blackly silhouetted against the luminous sky, their shadows clean-cut and dark upon the dusty earth. No movement of sumbrous silence that held the wisdom of centuries and a menace, as it were, broken by the weird and mournful howl of the hyena. One thought of the slinking, preying things out in the bush, and knew that the night saw more activity there than did the day. At moments such as this the fascination of Africa is very strong.

Early the next morning saw us on our way to Nairobi, a distance of 376 miles. This stage was to be the most interesting of the whole flight, taking us for the most part along the Great African Rift. At first there was the monotony of bush, broken by wide belts of Indian cultivation, and the smoke of many fires made the visibility very poor. Later the Indian habitations dwindled and disappeared, and soon the bush thinned out as we approached the Serengeti Plains. Here and there were small native villages with their protecting walls of thorn scrub, their only shield against marauding lion and leopard.

A Big Herd of Wildebeest

And then, 3000 feet below, a vast dried-up pan with perfect landing surface and not an obstruction anywhere within its limits except, to one side, things that moved and made a dust. What were they? The throttle came back and down we went, and in a minute saw that they were wildebeest - a big herd of them. Their movement ceased as they stood listening, suspicious of the humming wires of the machine. Then when we were right above them, and the engine had to be opened up, they scattered in headlong flight, only to herd together again after the aircraft had passed and stand and gaze in frightened wonder at this strange and monstrous bird as it disappeared, uttering a peculiar, unceasing cry.

Mr. Filsinger Spots Giraffes

Having a large cabin machine, how easy it would have been to land, done a little shooting, hauled one's bag into it and carried on to Nairobi! Thereafter we kept low, flying across grassy plains with thin bush and scattered palm trees. 'Giraffe on the right' came from my passenger, Mr. Filsinger, and there they were - three of them - standing listening,

motionless until the Moth was right over them. Then they broke into 'slow motion' gallop moving in the same direction as the machine. After, there followed in quick succession, glimpses of buck of various kinds, ostrich, more giraffe, multitudes of wildebeest. Seeing them there, in their natural environment, gave one a distinct thrill. Now the ground started to rise; grassy plain gave way to broken rocky terrain; trees struggled upwards from between the crevices.

Dried Up Soda Lakes

Soon the machine seemed to be making slow progress, and looking down one saw that the few trees were bending before a strong wind. A short distance in front was a stony ridge, the top of the western escarpment of the Rift Valley, but how long it took to cross over it! Below, the escarpment dropped sheer to the edge of Lake Eyase, the southernmost of the soda lakes in the Rift. Completely dried up, the streaks of alkaline deposit gleamed white across the sandy surface of its bed. Clouds of dust skidded before the wind in an absolutely contrary direction, and I began to wonder if the fuel would last out if it meant butting into this wind all the way to Nairobi. I had hoped that we might get out of the wind in the bottom of the valley, but the indications decided that higher altitudes must be tried.

An Extinct Volcanic Crater Fifteen Miles Wide

Furthermore, the broken character of the floor of the Rift, lying to the north-east of the lake, would have made flying uncomfortably bumpy in that breeze. Dimly in the distance ahead was the Ngorogoro group of mountains, forming the highest of many high points in the western wall of the Rift; and the valley was seen to narrow considerably as it passed between this group and the eastern wall, formed by a less impressive chain of rugged hills. This mountain group is composed of four extinct volcanoes arranged so that they, and the saddles connecting them, form a rectangle. Within the hollow thus made lies the Great Ngorogoro crater, roughly 15 miles in diameter and containing a small lake in its centre.

Buck in their Thousands

What a haven for game! Buck of various kinds can be seen in their thousands, and of a surprising tameness. Man penetrates with comparative infrequency into this natural refuge, situated many thousands of feet above sea level, thus the animals are almost without fear. We had hoped to fly over and look down into this wonderful place, but on approaching the group and climbing away from the floor of the lake, we saw that the four peaks and the rim of that vast basin were covered in cloud. There was nothing for it but to fly to the east of the mountain mass, and follow the Rift Valley that continued north east from Lake Eyase.

So up we went to 5000 feet above ground level to avoid the bumps from the foot hills that lay about the floor of the Valley. The yellow of the bed of the lake changed to the rich green of the grass that covered them and the lower slopes of the mountains, long grass with elephant tracks winding through it, some into the depths of the mighty tangled forest that clothed the upper slopes and escarpments, extending nearly to the summit of the four peaks. Here, indeed, was scenery that lost nothing by being looked down upon. So big it was and so magnificent, one felt that the aerial aspect was absolutely necessary the better to appreciate the wonder of it all. At 5000 feet the contrary wind eased off considerably, and progress becoming more rapid, a safe arrival at Nairobi was assured.

By this time the Ngorogoro group was dropping behind, and we saw, just to the north east of it, another extinct volcano, Lengai by name. Standing isolated in the valley, almost perfectly conical in shape, its grey mass gleamed in the sunlight which began to break through the cloud covering. It seemed that not a tree, not a blade of grass grew out from its lava-encrusted slopes; it stood out in sharp relief against the greenness of the surrounding terrain.

Dust Devils Whirl in All Directions

Now the clouds had thoroughly come apart and the heat was getting through to the barer floor of the valley. 'Dust devils' whirled their way in all directions, and bumps began their pranks even at that height. Another mountain; its great length lying parallel with the course, and halfway along it the bed of a river that rose in its slopes. And coming down from those slopes, one saw a great number of tracks all converging to a point on the river crossing it, and radiating again towards the mountain. Elephant paths, perhaps; and just on the thought we saw several black masses adjacent to each other, moving slowly and kicking up a prodigious dust. There was not much doubt as to their being elephants, high as we were above them.

Pink Soda Lakes

Fifty miles further on, the pink soda lakes, Magadi and Natrow, from which a considerable tonnage is taken early. Then over the eastern side of the valley and the Athi Plains, where more wildebeest were to be seen. In fact, a small herd was loafing across the Nairobi aerodrome, when we arrived there at noon. They trotted off quite unconcernedly as the machine landed, soon stopping to turn and gaze with lazy curiosity as we pulled our kit out of the locker. The most important thing to be found out was whether we were going to finish our flight there in Nairobi, or whether we were going on to Berlin, this being dependent on the weather and the state of aerodromes in the Sudan.

Mr. Filsinger Does Business in Nairobi

A cable was sent off as soon as possible, enquiring as to the condition of Mongalla and Malakal aerodromes, and two days later we received the gratifying wire that both were fit, but reminding us that both were likely to become unfit within twenty-four hours. A stay of one week at Nairobi was found necessary by Mr. Filsinger for the execution of business, therefore I took the opportunity of having a look round my Cirrus engine. The inspection revealed that it was standing up to the job quite sturdily, and that we stood every chance of getting through without trouble. This was indeed encouraging, for the country from Jinja to Uganda, to Khartoum was some of the most inconvenient to fly over on the whole route. Business finished, we set out for Cairo, pushing on as quickly as comfortably possible, spending but one night at Jinja, Mongalla, Malakal, Khartoum, Wadi Halfa and Luxor. This portion of the flight was without any incident of outstanding interest, except that we were favoured by fine, dry weather all the way across the Sudan, a thing most unusual for that time of the year, when the rains are heaviest. There was a small shower at Malakal after we arrived, which made refuelling rather a sticky business, as our feet seemed by both weight and sight to get larger and larger, until kicking out would rid them of chunks of tenacious, black, cotton soil. T

A Dust Storm

The night spent at Wadi Halfa, held some excitement for our kind host, the Acting Governor, and myself, in the shape of a dust storm. As it was very hot there - 120 in the shade during the day - he and I slept out on the terrace at the back of his house overlooking the Nile. At some small hour of the morning, I was awakened by the falling of twigs and the sting of sand on the cheeks. A young and healthy gale was giving the date palms bending exercises, and my thoughts went immediately to the aircraft that was not staked down, standing, I judged, broadside to the wind. Then Mine Host, also awakened by the storm, said: 'Let's hook our beds on to the verandah, this may soon blow over.' 'So may my 'bus,' I coughed, muddily. 'We'd better go out and see,' came the reply.

So donning dressing gowns and slippers, and grabbing an electric torch, we barged out into the breeze and got it right in the eyes, ears, nose and throat, dithering across to the transport shed. The Government Ford was pulled out, started up, and we lumbered off in search of the aircraft, which was difficult to find as the visibility was about five yards. Our way lay through the native village - mud huts standing in the sand - and some of the dormant natives were nearly run over as they lay sleeping out in the open with just a bit of cloth covering their heads, utterly oblivious to the racing sand that was forming drifts on the windward side of their bodies. Once through the villages and out in the open, navigation became difficult.

Mine Host steered in what he thought was the right direction, while I leaned forward, endeavouring to shield his eyes from the sand which was being driven across us almost at right angles. After ploughing along for nearly ten minutes, we decided that something was wrong with the course steered, so doubled back on the wheel tracks to the village and started out afresh.

This time he luckily spotted a landmark, and then another, and in a few minutes we sighted the petrol dump and the aircraft. It was rocking a bit, but was otherwise all right, so we immediately lugged it round to the other side of the building out of the wind and sand's way. Next morning, when we started for Luxor, the visibility was rotten.

Dust Suspended in the Air up to 6,000 Feet

The finer and lighter particles of dust were still suspended in the air up to a height of 6000 feet, and it wasn't until Assuan was reached that it cleared, just in time to give a decent view of the Barrage. On arrival at Luxor landing ground, Ahmed Walarous - or something like it- nearly wept with welcome; it was the third time he had looked after G-EBSO. He pulled out a rumpled photograph of my wife and myself that he had scrounged somewhere in the town.

The taxi that we had telegraphed for, however, did not appear. After waiting about three-quarters of an hour in the blazing sun, we asked Ahmed about it. He suggested that we should accompany him to the house of his father, the village headman, from whence he would telephone for another 'tax.' Thither we went, with a small horde of dusty urchins trailing noisily behind. The privilege of carrying our baggage had been battled for lustily by some of the bigger ones, until I had intervened and conferred the honour on a chosen one.

Arriving somewhat parched at the house of the head-man, we were treated by him to the utmost kindness, being plied in quick succession with cafe a la Turque, sickly sweet mint tea, some other sweet beverage that looked like lemonade - but didn't taste that way- and, lastly, what we needed most, water. Courtesy forbade that we should indicate the more desirable order of drinks! The head-man was about the most jolly looking mass of coffee-coloured fatness that I've ever seen. Shortly he called in his grandson, who, he laboriously explained, with much gesticulation, could speak a little English.

When this descendant, about seventeen years of age, arrived a chair was placed for him, and his grandpa very graciously bade him be seated. But the grandson humbly protested. Much argument ensued, in which more or less all present joined, finally siding with the fat grandparent. Ultimately, the youth sat gingerly on the edge of the chair, and was off it again as soon

as attention was elsewhere. He was told to sit again, and there was more argument on this. This performance happened several times, till I became curious, and enquired of him the reason of his reluctance to comply with the old man's wishes. He explained that with them, the grandson never sits in the presence of his grandfather!

Luxor Hotel and Beer!

At last a taxi arrived, the driver of which explained that a taxi had been sent to meet us in accordance with the wire, but that it had broken a wheel; and that he had been so long because he had had a puncture. Having reached the Luxor Palace Hotel, the only word we could think of was one of four letters - beer! Cairo was reached the next day, and there was quite a jolly little crowd to meet us, including the American Commercial Attaché, whose guest we were during our stay there.

The important thing to find out was if we were permitted to fly through Turkey. I anticipated difficulty in this matter, as in October last year (1928), when returning with Mrs. Bentley to South Africa, I had been foolish enough to show an unsealed Pathe Baby Cine camera to an officer at Konia. The consequent rumpus raised by the Turk made one somewhat unpopular with the Foreign Office and so I had doubts - which were justified - as the Foreign Office did not give the Turk the chance of turning our application down.

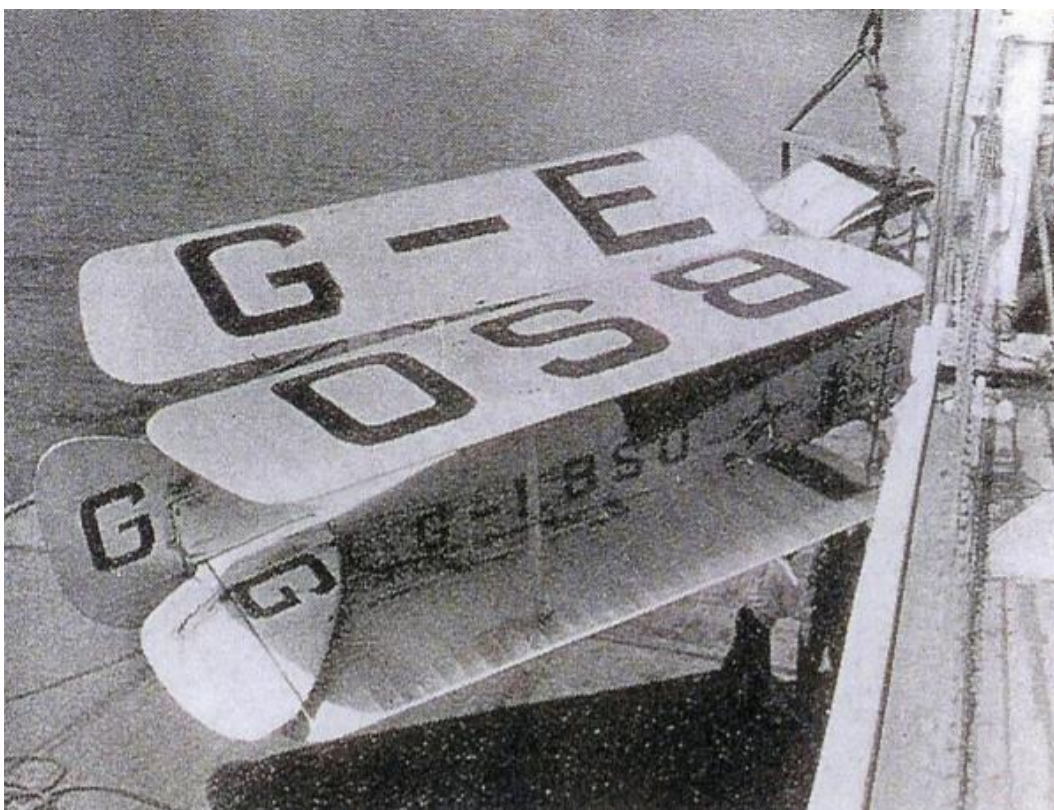
Putting the Aircraft on a Ship

Mr. Filsinger was very disappointed at this, as he wanted to go to Constantinople on business. Knowing this, I suggested that we should fly to Alexandria, ship ourselves and the aircraft across to Athens, from whence he could travel by an Italian flying-boat to Constantinople, joining me again at Sofia via Cidna line. I gave him to understand that I should bear the cost of shipping G-EBSO and myself across, because it was entirely my fault that he had been placed at inconvenience.

After staying in Cairo for four days, we carried on to Alexandria and there the R.A.F. transported the aircraft into the docks efficiently and at low cost, and assisted in the loading of her aboard the s.s. Romania. After the amount of jabbering argument on the part of the Egyptian stevedores during this operation, one trembled to think of what might happen at Athens without the R.A.F.'s help. Mr. Filsinger had telegraphed to his agent in Athens, who had got into touch with the de Havilland representative there.

On arrival at the quayside at Piraeus, a wordy battle-royal ensued between his two men and the agents of the shipping company, while the chief officer and myself stood watching and waiting for them to come to terms. It was fortunate that this officer was a sensible man; if it had not been for his

understanding help things would have been more difficult. The de Havilland agent's man won the day, so they took over the work of off-loading the aircraft and getting it to Tatoi, the military aerodrome about seven miles north of Athens.



Offloading the Gypsy Moth at Piraeus on one of his return flights.

The Grecian military aviation authorities were most kind and helpful, doing what repairs were necessary for me with the greatest courtesy and willingness.

Mr. Filsinger Leaves by Flying Boat for Constantinople

On the same morning that Mr. Filsinger left for Constantinople, I left for Salonika, flying past that great and majestic feature of Greek mythology, Mount Olympus. At Salonika I was received with every courtesy, and by way of appreciation gave a little dinner party to some of the officers of the Flying Training School at which I had landed. On the morrow, one of their machines accompanied me, showing me a route by which I saved many miles of unnecessary flying.

The route to Sofia lay over some magnificent country, rugged and full of colour, making one appreciate the why and the wherefore of the physique that one hears the Balkan folk possess. Nor was it dangerous, for one followed a valley wherein there were few parts at which a forced landing could not have been made. Arriving at Sofia, one again enjoyed courtesy and hospitality, also a warm welcome because 'SO' had been there before.

Captain Stephen Mandeff, Aerodrome Chief, did all he could to make things easy, accompanying me into Sofia, some twelve kilometres distant, to indicate which was the best hotel, etc.

Mr. Filsinger is Happy, Fresh, and Oily

As we both understood French - he more than I - we managed to have a very pleasant little luncheon together at the restaurant in the courtyard of the Hotel Bulgaria, which I can recommend to anyone travelling that way. The following day Mr. Filsinger stepped out of a Spad looking quite happy and fresh. It was only when he turned round that I noticed a big oily patch on the seat of his trousers, which had apparently been on the chair before he sat thereon. Some careless mechanic no doubt had forgotten to wipe the cushion after picking up his greasy tools.

Rough Country Between Yugoslavia and Italy

The next stop was Belgrade, where we met Sir Sefton Brancker out on an interviewing tour in his Gipsy-Moth coupe. The following day saw us on the way to Venice, flying along the beautiful flat Save Valley. There was, however, some pretty rough country crossing the border between Yugoslavia and Italy.

Two Days in Venice

Venice was a new experience for me, and a fascinating one too, but it seemed that a definitely discordant note was struck by the noisy, swift motor-boats and launches that swept through the Grand Canal, churning up waves and making the poor old gondolas bob helplessly. It was with extreme relief that we were rowed along the narrower side canals between high buildings. Here, in the quietness, it was easy to conjure up mental pictures of what one thought happened in Venice in the past. Two days in Venice and then to Vienna.

A Tricky Route over the Italian Alps

As the way lay across the Italian Alps, we did not start out until weather reports indicated that the weather was clear. Before starting, one of the Lufta Hausa pilots of a single-engine Junkers machine said that if we would rendezvous with him at the entrance of the river gorge, through which it was safest to fly, he would guide us, as the route might prove somewhat tricky for the first time to me, as a stranger.

This he did well and truly. Whenever his superior speed drew him ahead, he would circle and wait for us until we came up with him. Being very grateful for his courteous and helpful behaviour, I landed, as he did, fifteen minutes later, at Klagenfurt expressly to thank him for his service. From

Klagenfurt we carried on alone, running into some pretty thick weather over the Packsattel, as a certain piece of high ground is named. A few minutes later and the clouds would have shut right down, forcing us to return to Klagenfurt. After this the going was good for about seventy-five miles, and then visibility became very poor, necessitating entire reliance on the compass. Vienna was reached eventually, the Danube making an unmistakable landmark, even under such conditions.

Women, Music and Dancing in Vienna

One is not going to waste time in attempting to eulogise this beautiful city, except to say that it is well and truly worth visiting. We were taken to a revue in the evening, and although there was the difficulty of the language, the women, music and dancing were distinctly attractive. Afterwards, we went along to a beer house outside the town where one was sung to, doubtless of romance, while one partook of unromantic schnitzel and pilsener!

A Sudden Decision by Mr. Filsinger

Until about 2 p.m. the next day it was thought that we were to remain in Vienna, but a sudden decision on Mr. Filsinger's part sent us on our way to Dresden at 4 p.m., with a slight wind against us. I knew that not much daylight would be left by the time we reached our destination. There was Prague to land at, but we anticipated difficulties in Czecho-Slovakia that would be unlikely to arise in Germany. As ill luck would have it, we ran into low clouds over some hills and much time was lost in two or three attempts to get through. When we did get out of the mist, it was to find ourselves many miles from Dresden.

The failing light made the possibility of landing in Czecho-Slovakia more imminent, and visions of being late at Tempelhof on the morrow arose, determining me to get to Dresden even if it meant landing in the dark, which we eventually did without trouble, official or otherwise.

The end of the flight was very near now, to-morrow at 11 o'clock we were to arrive at Tempelhof, where Mr. Filsinger was to be welcomed by the Berlin representative of his company. We thought that 9.30 would be the best time to leave the ground, because although we might arrive within sight of the aerodrome before time, we could hang about for a bit, which would be better than being late through unforeseen conditions.

Right on Time

Accordingly, we arrived right on time on August 22nd, which conformed to the timetable we had laid down in Johannesburg. While making the customary left-hand circuit, one noticed that the three flags, British,

American and German, were dipped simultaneously in salute; a very charming gesture on the part of the Chief of the Airport.

Lunch is Served

As we taxied on to the tarmac a battery of cinema and still cameras started to shoot, but I'm afraid I spoilt the picture by, immediately the engine was switched off, jumping out to greet my wife, who had flown over from London the day before. After the welcoming was over the whole party moved into the airport restaurant, where lunch was served and the inevitable things were said.

Later my wife and I concluded my fourth flight across Africa by flying home to Croydon via Cologne.

11. Shell-Mex



In the autumn of 1921 Captain Henry Shaw (Jerry to all who knew him) late of the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force was seeking work. He felt that air transport had a future, and as he had his Commercial Pilot's Licence he was used to aerodromes and flight operations. His job with Basil S. Foster, a company who ran a car hire company at the new Croydon aerodrome, was to be Jerry's entry into the world of Commercial Aviation.

Jerry Shaw approached the head of the Shell-Mex Ltd Company, F.L. Halford, with a view to supplying aviation fuel on a regular and expanding basis. Instead he became responsible for setting up and running the Shell-Mex Ltd aviation department.

In the March of 1927 a gold-painted DH Cirrus Moth G-EBQE was delivered to the Aviation Department and the delivery was believed to be the first time an aeroplane had been accepted for business purposes. By the autumn of 1929 with the aviation department becoming increasingly busy Jerry Shaw decided that he needed an assistant. The next paragraphs are extracts from Hugh Scanlan's book "Winged Shell", reproduced by kind permission of the publisher, Alison Hodge of Penzance.

“One of the long-distance fliers for whom the Aviation Manager had arranged fuel supplies was Lt. R.R. Bentley of the South African Air Force, a Royal Flying Corps veteran with an MC and an AFC. Although seeking no speed records, Bentley was the first to fly a light aircraft solo from London to the Cape and back, a feat he had performed twice in a Cirrus II Moth. He had created a great impression at Stag Lane by turning up from the first of these odysseys, quietly and without fanfare, amid the workaday

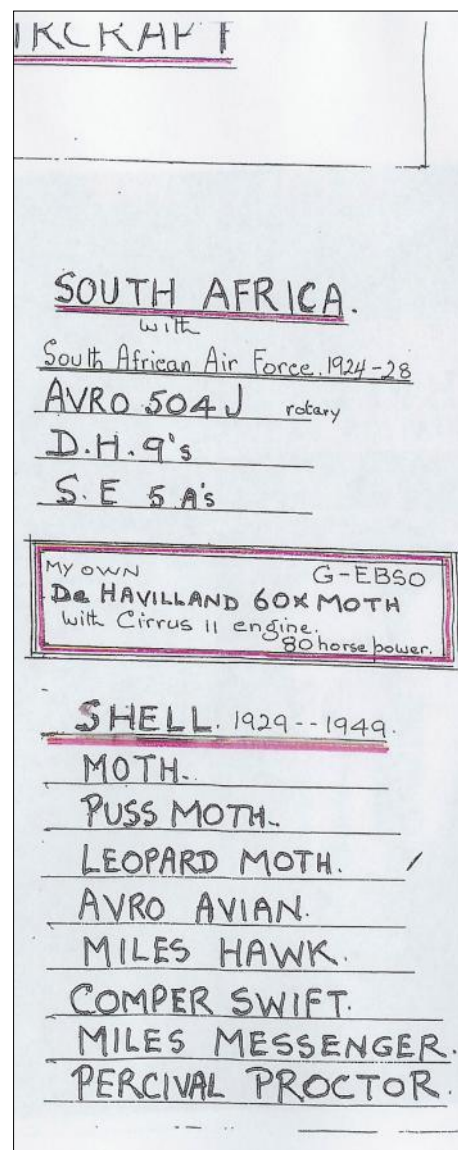
testing of new machines and the circuits of London Aeroplane Club members.

Joining in the Harum Scarum Adventures of Customers

The note on the right, in Dick's own hand, records his recollection of the planes he flew in South Africa and while with Shell-Mex.

"Here, reckoned Shaw, was the man for the job. And indeed Dick Bentley soon became a ubiquitous figure of the civil aviation scene. Popular, energetic, resourceful, he was as indifferent to the weather as to the day of the week, joining in the harum-scarum adventures of customers, welcome everywhere."

"Early in February 1930 a cheery party was held at Croydon to celebrate the end of the brain-work (a short petroleum course for the new-comers) and to receive the good wishes of Sir Sefton Brancker, Director of Aviation, whose ebullience and enthusiasm were always refreshing. Three of the new aeroplanes had been brought over the day before – Bill Barrington-Mason promptly christened his Genet-engined Avro Avian 'the Flying Mushroom' on account of its red above, yellow below livery – and they organized a 'young sort of fly-past' with Bill Rimmer in Gipsy Moth VT-ABL for India and the South African Moth ZS-ABT. Dick Bentley was there with Shell-Mex's Moth to take the number four 'box' position in the formation."



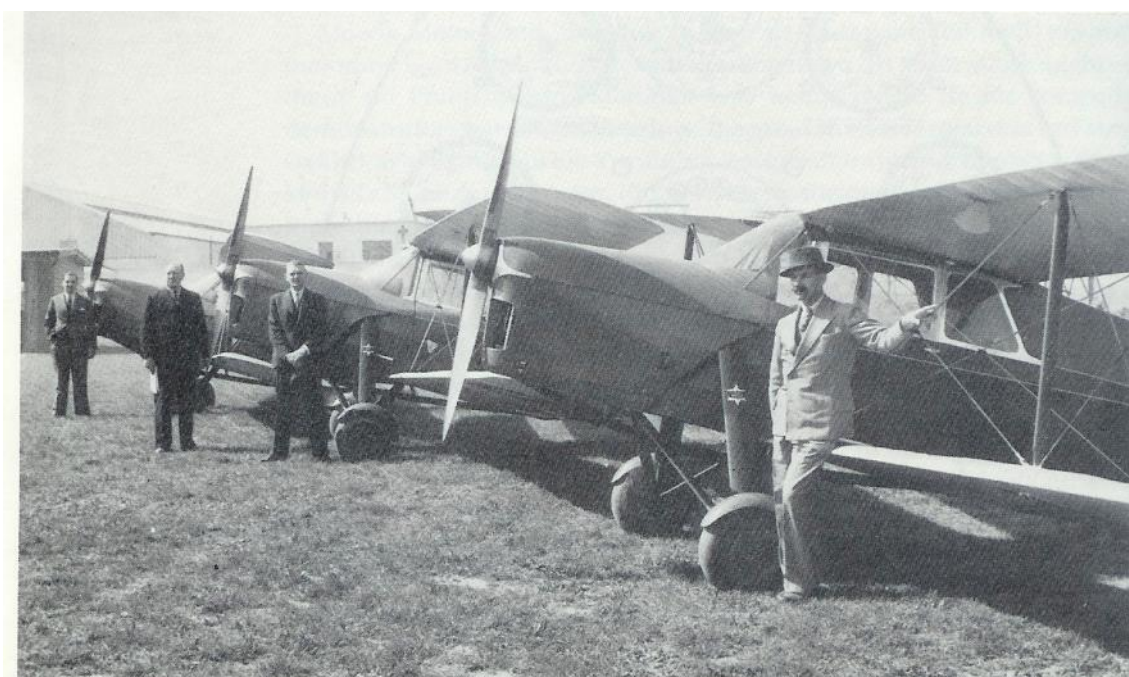
Flying Was the Most Sociable Activity on Earth

"By now there were aero clubs all over Britain. Flying was the most sociable activity on earth. Any good club pilot trained by a CFS instructor could have managed an RAF squadron aeroplane. Airmanship, like horsemanship, was universal. Such was the cheery, co-operative combative, racketsy democracy that Shell-BP's people knew so well. They circulated among the stars of race and rally and they sought out flying club secretaries and hard-working engineers in the backs of hangars. They

conferred with industry's senior men in drawing offices, beside test-beds and on windy aerodromes.

A Joyful Life

Their activities belonged essentially in the field far from stuffy London offices and the roar of traffic in the Strand. Taylor and Dick Bentley – joined later by S.C.W. Ellstrom and F.R. Bradford – would work out their own timetables, drive straight from home to where their machines were hangared, and fly off to call on customers. Often George Guillermin or Fred Taylor, his successor as Shell-BP's ground engineer, would go too to provide technical expertise. It was a joyful life. No controlled airspace, no radio, few restrictions. England was still the immemorial patchwork of hedgerow and spinney.”



Shell Company Aviation Fuel Sales Team; Dick Bentley on the right.

Dick's Aerobatic Displays Still Remembered

“The flying world grew steadily and Dick was a part of it. Clubs and trade events, race meetings and displays formed part of his regular daily life. Dick had never been an “office” person so the outdoor “office” life suited him perfectly. “The little racing Swift was an excellent image builder for Shell-BP. Dick Bentley’s aerobatic displays with it are still remembered. During 1933, G-ABUS made 224 business flights in 212 hours, many of them across the widest part of the Irish Sea.

Golf Clubs Had to Face Forwards

It could hold a bag of golf clubs – heads forward, to get the centre of gravity right – and there was just enough locker space for a dinner-jacket

and a spare boiled shirt. Unfolding a map in the open cockpit could be tricky. However, Shell-BP pilots quickly came to know by heart all the hundred-odd most commonly used compass headings round the country, plus the important landmarks, and they judged drift subconsciously.”

Wheel Spats Sent On by Rail

“Reliability was good. In almost three years Bentley had just one problem when the master rod of the 135lb, 75hp Pobjoy R radial snapped after take-off from Shoreham. Later, having visited Exeter to arrange fuel for a barn-stormer with Clerget Avros, he was compelled to shed the Swift’s wheel spats before he could accelerate in the foot-high grass. The local Shell-BP manager obligingly sent them on by rail.”

“A couple of months after the disposal of the Swift and the second Avian, Philip Gordon-Marshall gave Dick Bentley a lift from Heston to Reading to collect a new Miles Hawk Major. This was registered G-ADCF in salutation to the Aviation Department’s manager Cecil Field.

The Aircraft Shone Like a Jewel

Kept scrupulously washed and waxed it shone like a jewel beside work-worn club trainers on numerous aerodromes.” “G-ADCF, flown for the first time by Dick Bentley on 3rd April 1935 with the ever-supportive George Wilson a passenger, was equipped with thirty-three gallon long range tanks and a Fairey Reed metal propeller. But it had another unique feature. To allow practical research into fuel combustion and lubrication, Phillips and Powis had substituted a complete panel of thermometers for the standard flight controls and instruments in the red leather-upholstered front cockpit, with sensors in and around the engine bay. An observer could study the temperatures at oil inlet and outlet, in the fuel tank and the induction manifold, and in cylinder heads and barrels.”

“At first it was all very secret. When G-ADCF was delivered to Brooklands for its annual Certificate of Airworthiness overhaul, the various elements of the special ‘laboratory’ were speedily packed away in boxes and driven off in a plain van before anybody was allowed near.”

“When flown solo, the Hawk Major’s front cockpit was faired over with the windscreen detached. This is how it generally appeared, for Bentley was far too busy with it up and down the country for the scientists to have their way for long. One day’s business flying took in Carlisle, Rippon, Hull and home to Heston – a total of six hours ten minutes airborne. On another day, Leicester to Newtownards and back took only three and a half hours. Dick Bentley attributed the Hawk Major’s speed partly to its widely gapped landing gear being out of the way of the propeller slipstream.”

In December 1989 Aeroplane Monthly magazine published an article written by Dick which was ready for inclusion in his memoirs, and it is included here with their kind permission.

In 1933 my wife and I spent our summer holiday at a farmhouse in pleasant Portscatho, on the Roseland Peninsula in Cornwall. Directly this was over I was due to attend a flying meeting at Dublin. The previous summer I had found a field near the farm with a good surface, large enough to take a Comper Swift; so this time I persuaded my chief, Cecil Field, the company's aviation manager, to let me fly down to Portscatho in our Shell-BP G-ABUS.

(At this period Shell-Mex & BP Ltd also operated Puss Moth G-AAXY and two Avro Sport Avians, G-ABIB and G-ABIM. G-ABUS was the author's favourite, and his aerobatic displays with this machine at the flying events of the day are still remembered - Ed.)

My wife motored thither in her Riley Nine and was there to greet me when I landed. For two weeks 'ABUS sat staked down in a corner of the field, with its wings folded and engine and cockpit covered. No livestock were let in. Early in the morning after my leave ended we went out to the field and prepared the little 'BUS for the light to Dublin. After circling and wing-rocking a farewell to everyone who had turned out to see me off, G-ABUS climbed steadily to 10,000ft. By the time we had reached that height we were, as planned, over Fishguard.

Survival Over the Irish Sea Somewhat Dubious

Thereupon a course was made for Rosslare Point, a distance of about 40 miles. Fortunately there was little wind. In case of engine failure the Pobjoy Swift could glide one mile per thousand feet. Therefore, at ten miles from either shore we stood a chance of survival; but if failure occurred within the 20 mile gap between those points, survival became somewhat dubious - a little less so if there was some shipping about. I do not remember seeing any! During periods like this a pilot becomes intensely interested in the sound of the aircraft's single engine.

Malt Whisky in Moderation

The flight to Baldonnell, Dublin, took just over 2hr. Having telegraphed my ETA the evening before, I was met by Mr. Hugh St John Harpur, manager of Irish Shell, my host for the two-day visit during which I was to "represent" at the local aero club's annual air meeting. It was there and then that I developed my preference for malt whiskey - with moderation, of course! Next morning, visiting aircraft began to fly in, the time limit for arrival being 1400hr since the show starting time was 1430hr. There was

quite a big crowd of onlookers because this was the first event of its kind to be held in Dublin.

Aerial Bombing with Flour Bags and Pylon Races

The flying programme contained the usual items - formation flying, aerial bombing with flour bags, aerobatics (not the author) and two pylon races. The Irish Army Air Corps performed the formation flying with Fairey III's, powered by Napier Lions.

A Wizard Prang

Later on, one of their number competed in the flour bag bombing. It was the last machine to go, and unhappily its pilot made a "wizard prang" which crushed one leg of the landing gear. The abrupt halt caused the III's tail to rise about 40 degrees, whence it fell back, but not quite to ground level. There was immediate movement by the crew who, fearful of fire, struggled out of their harness and out of the sorry wreck.

A Mob of Souvenir Hunters

No consuming fire ensued. But another destructive force immediately developed in the minds of the spectators ... souvenirs! They began to surge over the flimsy barrier - a rope threaded through screwed iron pickets - advanced upon the poor pranged aircraft, probably with pocket-knives at the ready to cut out squares of doped Irish linen! At that precise moment I happened to be near Capt. Russell, the organiser, who was viewing the developing crisis with intense alarm. Quickly turning to me he said, "Dick, for heaven's sake get into the air, try to divert those blighters somehow!"

Into the Air

"With pleasure", I said. "Come and give us a start". Together we doubled over to 'ABUS, me checking the switches as I slid into the seat. I was sure the Pobjoy would start immediately since it had been run up about half an hour earlier, so it still had some warmth. Having fastened the safety harness while Russell rotated the prop to a handy compression I called "Contact", and the Pobjoy fired right away. The chocks were pulled clear and I checked magnetos as we taxied out. The noise of the engine momentarily halted the raiders. Since there was very little wind we disregarded it and took off roughly in the direction of their nearer flank. To some of them this seemed a threat and they turned back ... others flopped prone. We flew over their frontage, climbing to 300ft to a point where we could Immelmann-turn and swoop back down it at a height of not less than 10ft.

The Raiders Flee

As the raiders saw 'ABUS rushing towards them behind the roaring Pobjoy and the whirling propeller disc they halted, irresolute. Then, as we came closer and lower, a few began to hurry back to where they should have remained. The more windy among them stayed down as 'ABUS shot overhead. Reaching the end of the line in a very few seconds, we zoomed up high, Immelmanned and dived again. Again some of the figures were hurrying back to the rope. The slightly bolder ones had risen and advanced a few yards towards the Fairey IID, but as soon as they realised that we would be at them again they flopped.

We went through this performance several times more, giving the captain sufficient time to muster several aircraft hands and a squad of Garda to surround the "prang" and officially restrain any vandalism. Thereafter the rest of the afternoon's programme ran without further ado. T

A Slap-up Dinner

That evening we all went to a slap-up dinner at the Gresham. Next morning (Sunday), not having much of a hang-over, I decided to return to base. So out I went to Baldonnell at about 1000hr where, in response to my telephoned request, I found 'ABUS awaiting me on the tarmac, fuel and oil tanks topped up. Putting my suitcase into the small luggage compartment I donned my helmet, goggles and warm flying jacket, and checked oil pressure and magnetos.

Lunch at the Liverpool & District Flying Club

Then it was chocks away, take-off, beat-up dive and zoom away onto a northerly heading for Newtownards and the short sea crossing between Donaghadee and Portpatrick, Scotland. Thence I flew eastwards along the Scottish coast, climbing to 3,000ft to make a wide bend to starboard over the Solway Firth and settling on a southerly course to Hooton, Wirral, for lunch at the Liverpool & District Flying Club. I knew Hooton pretty well, having been a flying instructor there during the First World War.

Later, between Cape flights while the black soil of the Sudan landing strips was impassable in the monsoon, I had become the Liverpool & District Flying Club's first instructor - to fill in time and earn our keep. Having seen that 'ABUS also had some liquid nourishment, we set off for Hanworth, the Swift's home base, landing at about 1700hr.

I had many happy hours flying with G-ABUS on Shell-Mex & BP business, from its purchase by the company in March 1932 until its replacement by a Miles Hawk Major early in 1935. My chief generally preferred the Puss Moth (exchanged for a new DH Leopard Moth, G-

ACLY, in 1933 - Ed) for his visits to customers, so I practically had the Swift to myself. It was not very comfortable in cold weather - but who worried in those distant days? It left me with a grateful memory. The Pobjoy was a lovely little engine, even though it did not have a very high ceiling.

The Pobjoy Got Me into Trouble

Once it got me into trouble. I had taken off from Shoreham, when all of a sudden there was a hell of a commotion in front, the engine shook violently and stopped responding to the throttle although the propeller kept windmilling. Fortunately I had sufficient height to land back on the aerodrome. What had happened was that, in seeking to keep things as light as possible, Pobjoy had drilled out holes in the webbing of the master rod. This had broken right across the largest hole near the main bearing, and the sudden pulling-up of the engine had caused the propeller shaft to snap through.

Another Scrape

I do remember one scrape which was as much due to lack of good judgement on my part as to anything else.

The time was autumn and the days were shortening. I was at Nottingham, and it was latish in the afternoon. Unwisely I decided to make for base. I reckoned we could find Hanworth by its position relative to the loops in the Thames. What I did not allow for was that the gentle south-westerly breeze we took off into might increase in strength. And that was what happened. The breeze lost its gentleness and veered west-south-west, slowing us down and causing an easterly drift. An oncoming overcast did not help. So when our ETA arrived the situation was somewhat sticky.

The Flourescent Light Tower of Croydon Airport

Loss of light had masked the river, denying me a sight of the adjacent loop and making the aerodrome impossible to locate. There we were, at 1000ft over the southern suburbs of London, Banstead perhaps, desperately wondering what to do next. I decided to lose a little height, but even as my left hand moved towards the throttle I suddenly became aware from the corner of my left eye of a pale red glow, which had not been there a moment earlier.

Turning to port a little I saw something that caused a great burst of relief to surge through me - it was the slightly conical flourescent light tower of Croydon Airport, Heathrow's predecessor before the war. Thankfully I made straight for it, flew a left-hand circuit and landed, taxiing up to the main building.

There I switched off, and immediately went up to the control room to thank the duty officer for his help. “We heard you go by,” he replied, “and thought you might be in trouble. But” - with a grin - “You really shouldn’t be flying at this hour without navigation lights!”

12. Second World War



Dick Bentley in RAF uniform during the Second World War.

In February 1939 Dick decided to deal with the injury to his right knee that he had sustained in a motor cycle accident in Pretoria in the mid-1920s. So on 27th February at Stanmore National Orthopaedic Hospital he underwent surgery. Eight days later the stitches were out and he was allowed to exercise his thigh muscles provided he did not bend his knee!

With war looming he contacted the Air Ministry and received an acknowledgement of application for Enrolment in RAF Officers Emergency Reserve. "Further communication sometime...." On August 28th 1939 he received instruction from the RAF Volunteer Reserve Command at Hendon to provide himself with a Service Type Respirator from the RAF VR Recruiting Depot. These were much more efficient than civilian ones. While awaiting this 'further contact' he had continued to work for Shell, although he now had digs at the Lensbury Club at Teddington.

August 29th 1939 was probably his last day flying in the Company's aircraft. Unfortunately during the Blitz of London the flat he was renting

was hit, and almost all of Dick's souvenirs and photographs from his time in Africa, and his reminiscences of his earlier life were lost. The following sketchy information was obtained from correspondence that survived, and from talking to him. His early war service saw Dick as a Ferry Pilot, based at Filton RAF Station.

“Three weeks ago we were happily spending time together. And now the claws of wanton destruction are hovering over our country and the countries of other humans who ask little else but happiness in this brief life.”

As a twenty year old during, and on active service in, the First World War he had experienced sights and situations which had left him with a life-long sadness of fighting. In September 1939

“The Department of Personnel ruled that officers who had been admitted to the Administration and Special Duties Branch, but who are commercial or civil pilots of considerable current experience are, if willing and fit (and under forty-eight) to be transferred to the General Duties Branch for flying duties e.g. to fill instructor posts etc. I felt you would like this better than either navigation or armament, so you will receive official intimation of the offer in a day or two.”

In November he was told that he was among those who had been selected to go the Central Flying School for a special course on twin-engine aircraft which was a very good thing as CFS instruction is very thorough. But no flying meant no chance of making that extra 4/- subsistence allowance which can be termed “expenses”. He duly qualified a D.o.P. instructor, signed by H.T. Derbyshire.

All Types of Aircraft

“Our job is to collect all types of aircraft from manufacturers and deliver them to units. Consequently I'm likely to be flying anything from the heaviest bomber to the lightest speed fighter which undoubtedly will be grand fun. Most of the officers here are youngsters and the majority of them are Colonials. Several Canadians, two Rhodesians and two New Zealanders. They are all very courteous. Yesterday the lad in charge of the Ferry Pool let me act as second pilot on an Anson and a Wellington. It's a serious business flying aircraft worth about £18,000 about in the sky!”

“Today I had the thrill of flying a Gladiator – took it to 3000ft and did some loops and slow rolls. It responded so sweetly, but alas I had part with it all too soon. Then this afternoon I flew a Wellersley, the type that broke the long distance record about a year ago. Didn't have any dual on either because the first, a single seater, and the other are very easy to fly anyway. It's all fun.”

“Finished work earlier today but I had another thrill this morning in flying a Gauntlet, a high performance single seater. It was beautifully easy to control and I played in the sky for a while which was fun.”

M.C.; A.F.C.;

2nd WORLD WAR. 1939-45.

ANSON	engines 2	HAMPDEN	engines 2	OXFORD	engines 2
AUDAX	1	HART	1	PROCTOR	1
AVENGER I	1	HARROW	2	ROC	1
ALBEMARLE	2	HAVOC	2	RELIANT	1
BATTLE	1	HENLEY	1	SPITFIRE	1
BEAUFORT	2	HEREFORD	2	STIRLING	4
BLENHEIM	2	HORNET	1	SUNDERLAND	FLYING BOAT 4
BOMBAY	2	HUDSON	2	SWORDFISH	1
BOTHA	2	HURRICANE	1	TOMAHAWK	1
BREWSTER	1	HARVARD	1	VENTURA	2
BUFFALO	1	HALIFAX	4	WELLESLEY	
BOSTON	2	LEOPARD (MOTH)	1	WELLINGTON	2
BEAUFIGHTER	2	LYSANDER	1	WHITLEY	2
CORSAIR	1	MAGISTER	1	WHITLEY V	2
GAUNTLET	1	MARYLAND	2	WILDCAT	1
GLADIATOR	1	MASTERS	1		
GRUMANN	1	ME 108	1		
GLEN MARTIN	2	MOSQUITO	2		

A note, in Dick Bentley's own hand, of all the types of aircraft he recalled flying during the Second World War.

Their Mission is Havoc and Death

“Didn’t do much flying yesterday. Only one Lysander, quite slow at a mere 130 m.p.h.! But they give one a delightful push in the back when taking

off. They literally screw their way up into the air. And I hope sometime this week to fly a Spitfire, the fastest thing we've got! But while I'm flying three wizard aircraft I sadly think that for all their beauty of line and enthralling speed their mission is nought but havoc and death. When methinks upon what all this colossal expenditure and effort is for – just to turn the world into a shambles one realizes how much in vain has been the development of science and knowledge. Those who want to merely live peacefully, amidst the beauty with which nature has surrounded us, cannot - the whole of mankind being in bondage to selfishness and pride.

Hitler seems to be in the focal point of all these rotten developments, the personality expressing all the brutality and meanness which Humanity can sink to. The words of the great teachers are indeed as pearls which have been cast before swine.”

“Yesterday I had a chance to go into London, being flown to Croydon in one of the Ansons and bring another aircraft back this morning. Had an awful lot to do... Today's flying was rather dulling; flew a D.H. Rapide for the first time – very slow. Cruised at only 130 m.p.h. Motors were very smooth though it was like sitting between two sewing machines. The Anson seemed so rough afterwards.”

Plenty of Good Dugouts to Disappear Into

“It's thought that bomb raids may start and I dare say there will be some over this way because of the Bristol aeroplane factory which is on the other side of the aerodrome. But we've got plenty of good dugouts to disappear into and I expect old Jerry will get a hot reception whenever he does come.” “Today while trundling along on the Anson I suddenly had a vivid picture of the time in France during the last war when during the big Hun push in May 1918 I was one day flying at about 250ft over the ground over which the Jerrys were advancing. Spotted a platoon of them in an old gun pit. Called my back gunner's attention to them and while I circled round he emptied a 100 rounds from his Lewis machine gun into them.

What a Beastly Thing War Is

As I saw again those wounded and writhing bodies below I felt suddenly a little sick. Oh what a beastly thing war is. I wonder why it should be a necessary occurrence in the scheme of human life.”

“This morning I ferried a Lysander from the makers to Filton and this afternoon I shall be taking it on perhaps to its final destination, or someone else will. I shall fly a Spitfire to somewhere else.”

Flying a Spitfire

“Flying has been slack for the last day or two and consequently the number of aircraft to clear away has increased considerably. The weather seems to be very treacherous these days so we are only able to snatch an hour or two here and there and get our work done in dribbles. I had a big thrill on Friday flying a Spitfire. The acceleration on taking off is tremendous and one finds oneself in the air in an amazingly short time. I’m feeling much more at home in the fast fellows these days although I had but 4.30 hours on Hurricanes and about two on Spits. The journeys one has to do on them are over so quickly that it takes many moves to work up hourage on them. Flying does make the world small!”

“Have been awfully busy flying these last few days and it is an effort to get aircraft cleared away. Have been in charge of the flight also.”

Leading a Flight of Aircraft to France

“I am waiting in the Flight Commander’s office while the flight of aircraft I am leading to France is being got ready. I don’t know if we shall get away today as we are still awaiting one to complete the flight. I am taking with me a South African and a Rhodesian as members of the flight so we ought to have an amusing time on the return journey. Think it will be cold on the other side. Well, we haven’t managed to get away yet nor shall we go today as it is too late. The other aircraft took an awfully long time to turn up. As it’s my birthday the others have insisted that I should go to the skating rink with them tonight.”

“We haven’t gone as expected. Persistent fog has prevented it and I now have the feeling that we shall not go for several days. It’s a little disappointing not to go when one has made preparations and is all keyed up so to speak. It makes a nice break to get away for a couple of days like a small spot of leave in fact.”

Sitting in a Bar in Amiens

“Amiens. I am sitting in a bar here, this my playground of the last war. I sit listening to the chatter of four French officers. I am in charge of a bunch of youngsters, three Canadians, one Rhodesian, one South African and two Englishmen. Their efforts at the native tongue are my complete undoing! All but two of us are having their first experience of France and of her drinks and her women. We arrived here in the afternoon too late to go on to our destination so we had to stay. This morning when we got to the aerodrome the weather report indicated that conditions were still too bad for us to proceed, so here we’ve had to stay.

“It rained all day Monday preventing us from leaving Amiens so it wasn’t until yesterday that I was able to complete the delivery which incidentally was to the same squadron as the last time. The C.O. sent us back to Reims in the Squadron’s ambulance – no we didn’t break anything! I left this morning and the pilot of the Lockheed Electra aircraft was a Rhodesian – Veasey by name. His father was the de Havilland agent in Johannesburg in 1927; who made the arrangements about the Moth on which I made my flight to Cape Town.”

“Had some baddish luck today – nobody was hurt. The morning was lovely, giving promise of lots of work getting done. But as the Anson was taxiing out - Sgt. S... at the control – the port wheel sank into a collapsed drain and crack! The compression legs twisted off at the main fittings, down went the port wing and the aircraft came to a stop causing us all to lurch forward in our seats with the suddenness of it. Out we all hopped to inspect the damage. The pilot being most disconsolate since it was the first time anything like that had happened with him in charge – in 1000 hours flying. I ordered out another aircraft and told him to fly it, but the delay cost us a precious four hours so that we couldn’t carry out the second part of our programme. So annoying when we don’t often get a chance to really get on with the job. Only hope it’s fine tomorrow.”

During 1941 Dick was based at Kemble and in 1943 at Hullavington. His second job was as a flying instructor on single and twin engine aircraft, and then finally he was a test pilot for single, twin and four engine aircraft.

13. 1945 – 1990 - Retirement

In July 1945 Dick left the Dispersal Centre and then had to renew his civil pilots licence. It took him until September for his pilot's civil 'A' licence (medical category A.1.B) came through. He returned to work for Shell until 1949 when he had decided that as he was now over fifty it was time to retire from the aviation world he knew so well, and which had given him so much pleasure.

He knew his flying days were coming to an end and office work still had not appeal. There were also many new pilots seeking work after the war. He had found himself ideally suited to his work with Shell, but now was the time to say goodbye. He moved to the Isle of Man with his wife Anne.

First Helicopter Flight at the Age of 83

In 1981 Dick was very flattered to be invited to the inauguration of the Memorial to the Pioneers of Aviation at Kimberley in South Africa. He was reunited with a few friends from his SAAF days and a flight in a helicopter was arranged. Dick had never had a chance to fly in a helicopter and at the age of eighty-three he was not going to say no! It was an experience he valued for being around the new younger generation of airmen as well as the modern technology.

In 1982 Dick had joined the South African Re-union Club and in the summer of 1983 was invited to be their guest of honour and spend a day in London. In his own words.

“The reception was at the South African Wine Centre. The President opened the celebration and then I was asked to speak. Two of the company I must mention are the South African Airways and the British Airways captains. They both marvelled at my good fortune in being able to make four trouble free trans African flights on the same small aircraft, behind an air-cooled engine of under 100 h.p. But, despite the extreme disparity in our ages and the aircraft flown, the mutual respect that exists between airmen made it easy for us to talk together without any feeling of diffidence.

A Flight Simulator at Heathrow

All too soon it was time for the party to come to an end, but the day's adventures were not yet over. A test in a Flight Simulator at Heathrow had been arranged for me!! This certainly was a surprise since I had never in the whole of my flying life done “blind” or purely instrument flying. However one was willing to have a go at any non-hazardous operation which did not require great physical effort. We arrived at the Flight

Simulator building and were met by the charming Simulator Instructor and Manager, and the Simulator Engineer.

Inside was an absolute duplicate of the flight deck of a Tri Star. I had been privileged to spend considerable time on the flight decks of the SAA's 747s which had flown me to Cape Town, and so I was not so surprised at what I saw. It is only when one sits in either of the first or second pilot's seats that one feels the full impact of one's immediate environments and what a feat of memory the flying crew have constantly to exercise. One also realizes how lengthy and thorough an airline pilot's training must be to fit him for the human responsibilities of his profession.

The Instructor touched a switch and there were the lights of a runway stretching away ahead of the black screen in front of us. The black screen would normally be the pilot's front window. He next pointed out the few instruments that would concern us during this short exercises. I had already recognised the gyro turn and bank indicator and gyro horizon, also the airspeed and altitude indicators so the instruction period was not a lengthy one. Our short flight was to take off, climb to 9000ft make turns to port and starboard and then make an approach and landing.

Well – I managed to take off satisfactorily; holding the control column with the right hand and feet on the rudder bar as of old – as one pushes the three engine controls forward with the left hand the simulated power of the three jets increases. Then apparently the aircraft begins to roll forward; the illusion being created by the runway lights on the screen appearing to move towards the aircraft with increasing speed. At a speed of 163 knots the Captain said “Rotate” which meant that I had to pull the control column towards me causing the aircraft to “unstuck” (become airborne?)! Having reached cruising height the engineer introduced some “air turbulence --- just to make you feel more at home!”

The turning manoeuvres were then carried out calling for my strict attention to the turn and bank indicator. “Not bad” said the Captain, “Now we will try an approach landing”. TRY was a significant word! So power off, lose height, apply 15 degrees of wing flap and reduce speed. Next a gentle 90 degrees turn to port and there at a fair distance ahead lie the foreshortened lines of the runway lights. Then lower landing gear; full flap and a few moments later hold final approach speed at 150 knots. The foreshortened lines of runway are now extending and expanding to their correct distances and it is now that my difficulties begin.

Hitherto all the various types of aircraft I have flown – including two types of four engine bombers – have had approach attitudes which permitted the pilot to see ahead to the exact point of the runway onto which the aircraft was descending. But – the Tri Star in common with most other modern airlines assumed a “nose up” attitude which denied me this facility. This

was my undoing; the final approach degenerated into a side to side wallow until the Captain, out of pity, took over and landed the Tri Star safely.”

In 1984 Dick was invited by British Airways to be a passenger of the first direct flight to Cape Town for fifty years. The Boeing 747 flew on 28th September 1984 arriving at Cape Town in fourteen hours almost to the day of Dick’s flight which had taken him twenty-eight days! Unfortunately age was catching up with Dick always regrettably he was unable to make one more flight to South Africa.



The photo on the right was taken during this trip.

A Lone Hawk Dips its Wings in Memory of the Fallen

In 1987, Dick was invited by the Mayor of Cambrai to attend the 70th Anniversary of the Battle of Cambrai. Unfortunately at 90 years of age his health did not permit such a long journey. So a lone Hawk was sent from R.A.F. Valley to the Isle of Man. It flew over the Port St Mary Garden of Remembrance during a Memorial Service dipping its wings in memory of the fallen.

The photo on the right shows Dick [wearing his Royal Flying Corps tie] on his 90th Birthday in 1987 with his great-niece Charlotte Thorpe. She was soon to qualify as a British Airways pilot and embark on a career flying jet airliners for the company.



He did have another flight which he enjoyed immensely. Most people would not regard leaving their island home to travel to hospital for specialist care a treat but once an airman always and airman and Dick was thrilled His return flight was greeted with equal joy. It was to be his last flight. He died in May 1990, aged 93 years.

14. Appendix: Dick Bentley's Citation for Military Cross

BENTLEY, 2nd Lieutenant Richard Reed - Military Cross- awarded as per London Gazette dated 18 January 1918; citation with account of deed in London Gazette dated 25 June 1918. Born in England; enlisted in 34th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, Sarnia, Ontario, August 1915. Seconded as Lance-Corporal to RFC, 5 April 1917; appointed 2nd Lieutenant, 23 July 1917; Acting Captain, 1 April 1918.

When information was urgently required during an attack, and several attempts to obtain it had been unsuccessful owing to exceptionally bad weather conditions, he went out and succeeded in gaining the necessary information, flying at a height of about 50 feet under heavy rifle and machine gun fire. He had already made a flight under similar conditions on the same day. His pluck and determination were a fine example to his squadron.

NOTE: Public Record Office Air 1/1515 has recommendation submitted by Headquarters, 3 Brigade, Royal Flying Corps to Headquarters, Royal Flying Corps on 24 November 1917; this identifies his unit clearly as No. 59 Squadron.

For skill and gallantry.

On November 20th information was urgently required as to the position of our troops and the condition of certain bridges. Several attempts had been made to get this information, but had been unsuccessful owing to the exceptionally bad weather conditions. Finally 2nd Lieutenant Bentley went out at 2.30 p.m. and in spite of the fact that the clouds and mist were only at 50 feet he succeeded in obtaining the information required, in the course of a flight lasting one hour, and in the face of very heavy machine gun and rifle fire. This was the second occasion on which this officer had completed a successful reconnaissance that day, the first being carried out in the morning under very similar weather conditions. This officer again carried out a successful contact patrol on the 21st instant, also under very bad weather conditions. His pluck and determination have been a fine example to his squadron.
