British Air Ace, Sir Alan Cobham, Out Travels the Famous Lindeburgh

Knowledge of Flying Together With Careful Thought and Attention to Details Overcomes the Usual Dangers

STUPENDUOUS DISTANCE

National Geographic Magazine Carries Wonderful Story

While the American press is full of the exploits of Col. Charles Lindburgh it is interesting to read in the current number of the National Geographic Magazine an article from the pen of Sir Alan J. Cobham, England's peerless air pioneer, who at present is circumnavigating the African continent to plan air routes for England. Sir Alan is accompanied by his wife, Lady Cobham, and four assistants, in an all steel sea plane and is blazing new and progressive air paths which will forerun the establishment of permanent air coommunications with the vast British possessions in the "Dark" continent. His article tells the story of air development in part as follows:

In the course of my work during the past five or six years I have seen many parts of the world.

My wanderings have taken me over every capital in Europe and over the length and breadth of the great African continent.

More than once I have traveled over the great Syrian Desert to India, Burma and back, and only recently I journeyed all the way to Australia and return via Rangoon, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies.

Yet with all these wanderings it was not until a few months ago that I made my first steamship voyage, when I crossed from Southampton to New York.

Hitherto my journeys had been made in the air, and my mode of transport was an airplane or seaplane and when I reflect on my various exploits, somehow I feel that my memories and impressions of the countries I have visited are far more vivid and realistic than are the memories of the individual who has traveled by steamship, train, or motor car.

Studying Archeology By Air.

Early in 1923 I made a circular tour, covering about 12,000 miles, over Europe, Egypt, Palestine, Algeria, Morocco, and Spain. My passenger was an old friend whose greatest hobbies were travel and the study of ancient civilizations.

We had flown many thousands of miles together on previous occasions, but this trip was a little more ambitious. From London we flew to Paris, through France, along the Riviera then over the Mediterranean to Africa coast line, across Italy to Greece, and and Egypt.

Then, for the first time in history, we flew across the whole breadth of Africa, from Egypt to Morocco, after which we crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and by way of Spain and France returned to London.

The final stage of our journey, from Madrid to London, was made in one day. We breakfasted in Madrid, had lunch in Bordeaux, sipped afternoon tea on the airdrome of Lympne, thus completing with a wartime machine a tour of more than 12,000 miles with out any preliminary organization or set route.

Planning a Flight to India.

In the autumn of 1924, Air Vice-Marshal Sir Sefton Brancker had to make a journey to India in connection with the allotting of a port of call and the building of a mooring mast for the future airship service that may eventually run through to Australia.

As Director of British Civil Aviation, Sir Sefton Branckner maintained that he ought to fly to his destination; but the Treasury urged that Government officials should travel by the cheapeest route, and as the cost of a special airplane to fly to India and back was far in excess of the cost of a first-class steamship passage and return, the Treasury could not see its way clear to grant the sum of money necessary. However, on learning that the aviation industry was willing to support the flight, the Treasury became more lenient and a good portion of the expense of the journey was allotted.

The Director decided that, as we were going to fly to India, and possibly beyond to Rangoon, in Burma, he would make it a flight of survey and would endeavor to ascertain the best air route.

We had a depressing and tedious journey through Europe in the wintertime, for we left London in November, and it was not until the Persian Gulf was reached that we met the sunshine. I was greatly impressed by the many weird and wonderful rock formations along the hundreds of miles of forbidding coast line from Iraq down the Persian Gulf, then over the Gulf of Oman to India.

It was winter in India and the weather was perfect. As Sir Sefton Brancker wished to visit one or two places where it would be impossible to land an airplane, he went on by train from Karachi, which was our first port of call in India. Here a big mooring mast is being erected for the future airship service, and this port is also the terminus of the air line that is now in operation between Egypt and India.

Our flight from Karachi to Delhi was via the Thar, or Indian, Desert and Jodhpur. On the first day we successfully crossed the desert, a journey of several hundred miles, and, having lovated a big river, I began to look ahead for the town of Jodhpur.

Monkeys of Datia Developed a Breed of Expert Marksmen.

On our homeward journey through India we were the guests of the Maharaja of Datia, where we stayed a few days. The Prime Minister told us that, when he had arrived in Datia some years before, he had found the place infested with monkeys, which were rapidly destroying the roofs of all the buildings. These cunning creatures were addicted to the delightful pastime of tearing heavy tiles off the roofs of the houses and throwing them down on the passers-by in the streets, sometimes with fatal results. In the course of time they had developed a breed of monkey marksmen who seldom missed.

Now Datia is a Hindu state, and the followers of this religion have a tenet which forbids the taking of life of any sort; so the monkeys were left unmolested. The new Prime Minister decided that something must be done, and so he advised the Maharaja to offer 5 rupees as reward for every monkey captured and brought alive to the cages outside the palace.

The news of this drastic action spread all over the countryside and was strongly condemned by the Maharaja or a neighboring state. The critic even went so far as to say that he was fond of monkeys, and that they were allowed to roam about his domain unmolested.

In the meantime at Datia hundreds monkeys were being captured daily, and very soon there was not a simian left roaming free. The Prime Minister was now faced with the problem of disposing of them. He hit upon the bright idea of having them packed in baskets and loaded on board a special train which was dispatched to the neighboring state of the Maharaja who professed a liking for monkeys. When the train arrived in the chief town, several hundred miles from Datia, the animals were unloaded and let loose as a special gift to the potentate.

It was a huge practical joke, and was talked of all over India. The poor Maharaja who had condemned Datia's action could say nothing, although inwardly he must have been furious.

A Longitudinal Survey of Africa By Air.

After more than three months away from home I landed on the Croydon airdrome in the early spring, completing the first of a series of three big flights of survey of Empire Air Routes.

Our next big flight was from London to Cape Town and back. For this trip I selected the identical De Havilland type 50 plane that had taken us to Rangoon and back, but instead of the old-type engine, we installed a Jaguar. In order to negotiate easily the high-altitude airdromes in the Tropics, where the atmosphere is much rarefied, it was necessary to have the extra horsepower.

We had traveled nearly 3,000 miles up the River Nile from the Mediterranean coast, yet at Mongalla we were only about 1,000 feet above sea level. In the next two or three hundred miles, however, the ground rose suddenly, and at Jinja, on the shores of Lake Victoria, we found ourselves on the high plateau of central Africa, more than 4,000 feet above sea level.

Owing to the heat, the altitude and other local conditions, the density of the atmosphere was very different from that of northern Europe. At times the air in central Africa on some of the landing grounds was equivalent to the atmosphere at 10,000 feet in England, and it was here that we found the need for our extra horsepower in order to take off and climb away on the rarefied air.

Near Jinja we saw the Ripon Falls, the source of the White Nile ,and the only outlet to the great Lake Victoria.

Flying Through the Mists of Victoria Falls 50 Feet Above the Brink.

Of our journeys through Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia there is no space to tell in this article. But we cannot pass by the Victoria Falls without describing how the Zambezi, which is a mile and a quarter wide at this point, flows gently on its way and when seen from an airplane seems suddenly to disappear into a crack in the earth.

This great African river falls for 360 to 400 feet into a narrow chasm. In the center of this cleft is the only outlet, a narrow gorge through which all the mighty waters have to escape.

On this flight to Cape Town I had with me a professional cinematographer, Emmott, in addition to my engineer of the England-to-India trip, and while Emmott took the motion pictures, Elliott used to try to take the still pictures. When we had flown beyond the falls the sight was so magnificent that we decided to come down low and take a close-up picture of the brink.

This manoeuvre was interfered with by the continual banks of spray, which kept rising and completely enveloped our machine in heavy clouds of mist as we skimmed along only 50 feet above the brink.

While we were flying at this low altitude over this perilous country, our engine faltered and started to splutter. Elliott and I both realized what had happened: the spray was so heavy that water had entered the carburetor.

It was an unpleasant moment, for beneath us was the deep chasm and the turmoil of waters, while on the one side we had the River Zambezi flowing toward the brink, and on the other a dense forest jungle; and for miles around no earthly chance of finding a cleared space on which to land.

I gave the engine full throttle, and while it banged and spluttered we climbed away and headed for our airdrome at Livingstone. Fortunately the carburetor cleared itself of the drops of water, and once more our motor began to purr smoothly.

All the way through Africa we surveyed the possibilities for air routes, and finally reached Cape Town with the first airplane to make the cross-continent flight. Then , after a brief overhaul of the motor, we turned about and flew home, making the return trip in 15 days.

It was barely three months later when we again set out on another long flight of survey. This time it was to be Australia and return, but instead of going with an airplane we decided to do the job with a seaplane.

A Fight to Australia With the Engine That Flew to the Cape.

This meant very little alteration in our outfit, however, for all we did was to take our identical De Havilland type 50, that had already done the Rangoon and Cape flights, and fit it out with a pair of Shorts' duralumin all-metal floats. Using the same Siddeeley Jaguar engine that had done the Cape flight, we took off from the River Medway at Rochester, 33 miles east of London, on our 28,000-mile cruise to Australia and back.

It was difficult to get pictures on the Australian flight, because we had purposely chosen to fly through the dry weather period—that is, the hot weather in Iraq and India, combined with the monsoon in India, Burma, and the Malay Peninsula. We wanted to find out whether it would be possible to fly through the torrential rains of the Burma coast, thus making our survey report all the more sound.

Tragedy Mars the Australian Flight.

The Australian flight was marred by disaster. Arthur Elliott, my capable and ever loyal engineer, lost his life, dying in the hospital at Barsa, in Iraq.

For some unknown reason, possibly the result of overwork in preparing for the flight, I had been suffering from depression, both mental and physical, ever since the start at Rochester. Elliott, on the other hand, had been most cheerful.

We took off from Baghdad in the early morning, with the intention of following the course of the Euphrates to Basra—near the head of the Persian Gulf. I had not felt fit to start at the early hour of 5 a.m. Elliott and several of the Air Force boys had been looking over the machine while I endeavored to pull myself together. By 8 o'clock I was able to climb into the ship, but was feeling very weak.

We headed southward from the River Tigris, seeking the Euphrates.

It was fair weather when we started, but after we had gone about 150 miles we ran into a dust storm, which became worse and worse as we proceeded. Finally, in order to find my way, I was forced to come down to within a few feet of the river bank.

We flew for many miles in this fashion, skimming low over the river and taking our direction from the bank, which showed up a little more clearly than anything else through the dust-laden air.

Dust Storm Forces a River Landing.

At last, the air got so thick that I decided to land on the river and wait for a little while with the hope that the storm might clear. As soon as we alighted, I turned the machine towarl the bank and beached it in the soft mud. I shall always remember Elliott's enthusiasm for the seaplane at that moment, because, as he remarked, it was so practical and safe; we could take refuge at any moment on the water beneath us.

There was a police hut near by and the native sergeant in charge, after putting a guard in our machine, took us inside where, sheltered from the dust, we rested on native beds that were quickly put up for us.

He then sent a horseman off, with the note that I gave him, to the nearest telegraph station, so that the authorities would know of our whereabouts and progress. After this we slept from 9.30 to noon, then enjoyed a refreshing meal of tea and melon. At about 2 o'clock the storm had cleared somewhat, so we decided to make another attempt.

Sky and Water Melt Into One.

We took off safely and continued down the Euphrates, but after about 50 miles we ran into another bad dust storm. As we neared the head of the great Hammar Lake I could see that it was going to be most difficult for me to find my way, especially if I went over the open water. The air above me, owing to the sand storm, was a dirty mud color, and the water beneath was the same. In fact, all around there was sand and one could not see more than 100 yards ahead.

An Explosion in the Cabin.

With this poor visibility, it was most difficult to fly ,especially as we were traveling at about 100 miles an hour. I felt that if I went out over the open lake I might run the risk of flying into the water, owing to the similarity of color in every direction and the absence of any visible horizon. Under these conditions it was necessary for me to hug the swampy shore line of the lake, so that I might have a view of some sort of land that would give me my equilibrium.

And so we found ourselves zigzagging in and out along this swampy shore, feeling our way around the southern edge of the lake in an endeavor to get through that dust storm and hoping there would be clear air beyond.

We had been zigzagging over the swamp for some time and were nearing the more or less definite southern coast when, while flying at a height of about 20 feet from the water, we passed over a low strip of land that jutted out into the lake. At that moment there was a violent explosion in the cabin!

Instantly I thought of fire and surmised that, owing to the great heat in which we were flying, one of the cartridges for our rocket pistol had exploded. This would be very serious, for it would most certainly have set us on fire.

I yelled through the connecting window from my cockpit to Elliot and asked him if we were on fire. He shouted back:

"No, but a gas pipe has burst and hit me on the arm."

I could see that he looked very pale and it was difficult to shout above the noise of the engine, which I could not shut off to glide, as I was flying only 20 feet from the earth's surface, I handed him a pencil and paper. He handed me back a message written in a shaky hand to say the gas pipe had burst and hit him in the arm and that he was bleeding a pot of blood.

"What's Best for Elliot.."

I had to decide what to do. If I landed to render him first aid I ran great risks: first, of getting stuck in the mud, in which case we should be unable to get off again; second, of being unable to start the engine single-handed, owing to the terrific heat of the district.

I could see that if I landed in this wild and desolate spot, scores of miles from any sort of habitattion, it would be a very serious matter if I were unable to start up and get away from it again. I could not look around me. I had to concentrate every second while I was flying, owing to the density of the dust storm.

I decided the best thing I could do would be to race on to Basra, which was about 100 miles farther on, where I knew there would be hospitals, white people, and proper organization. Soon after this we got through the storm and I was able to give the engine full throttle, so that we covered that 100 miles in about 45 minutes.

When I arrived at Basra I searched for a mud bank where I might beach the machine without damaging the floats, but I knew that it was going to be a one-man job.

I spotted a place, came down, and the moment I touched the water I made straight for this bank and ran my floats high and dry on the shore.

Elliot, Mortally Hurt, Thinks First of the Engine.

I climbed out of the cockpit and lifted the lid of the cabin.

Elliot was in a terrible condition. He sat huddled in the corner, so pale that he was almost green. He could hardly speak. He just murmured to me that he was sure that he had a hole in his side from which he was breathing.

I managed to lift him in my arms out of the cabin, then on to the wings and so down to the floats.

There is one little episode which I shall never forget; it goes to prove how devoted Elliot was to his job.

It so happened that, with our air-cooled engine, the bottom cylinders were upside down In order to prevent the oil from draining into them when the engine wasn't running it was necessary to turn the oil off immediately the engine stopped. Therefore, one of Elliot's jobs on landing was to turn the oil off when the motor stopped. As I had him in my arms, staggering down on the floats, he turned to me and said, "Don't forget to turn the oil off."

Here was a man, suffering agonies, hardly able to breathe and yet he could remember to tell me to perform the routine necessary to maintain that aircraft!

I had to lay Elliot down on the mud bank and get him some cotton wool from our first-aid bag. I did what I could to dress his wounds. There was a hole in his left side beneath the arm, as well as in the arm itself.

I wanted to get a stretcher and ran to a house where the natives closed the door in my face. Just at that moment a launch came along and in it were some officials of the Anglo-Persian Oil Co.

Quickly we went to another native house, and this time I put my foot in the door and took the first bed that I could find.

I think the natives were frightened at the sight of blood, as we had difficulty in getting them to help us. Very soon we had lifted Elliot on to the improvised stretcher and had him on board the launch, and ten minutes later he was inside the manager's bungalow, with cool air and all hands working.

The doctor arrived and all that could be done was done. It could not have been more than an hour and a half after the accident that Elliot was in the hospital and all help possible was being rendered. Then I turned to my machine, which had been towed up into a backwater near the Air Force depot in Basra.

The Mystery Solved—A Bullet.

The commanding officer asked me to relate the experience and I told him exactly what had happened, and beforel finished my story two young officers left the room. Soon they returned and asked me to follow them down to the machine.

"First," they asked, "why should a gas pipe, with no pressure in it whatever burst?"

I couldn't imagine how it had occurred.

Then they pointed to a hole in the side of the cabin and told me to look inside, and when I climbed on board and inspected the inside wall I pulled out a mail bag and a dispatch case each of which had been drilled by a missile.

It suddenly dawned upon me that we had been shot at and that it was not a burst gas pipe that had wounded Elliot. A bullet had passed through the dispatch case, right through the gas pipe, then had entered Elliot's left arm, shattering the bone, passed on into his left side, pierced both lobes of the left lung and finally buried itself in his back.

We had been shot at by an Arab and the noise of the explosion that we had heard had been the firing of the gun at close range.

I received an order from the Air Force directing me to go out to the airdrome, about 20 miles away, so that on the following morning, at dawn, I could lead a squadron of airplanes to the place where the tragedy had occurred.

About twelve o'clock that night there was a telephone call from the hospital. When I answered it I could not understand, or, at least, could not believe what the operator was telling me, and so handed the receiver over to the commanding officer, who slowly repeated the words: "Elliot passed away at 11.45."

The news was a terrible shock to me, for I had no idea that he would succumb to the wounds.

The Arab Assassin is Captured.

I waited until 4 a.m., and then, as dawn came, we took off, and by retracing my route of the previous day I came to the spot where I felt sure the gun had been fired.

One of the officers, who was in another machine, on a signal from the commanding officer, landed. He ascertained from a local encampment that tribes had been there the previous day. That started the investigation which resulted in the ultimate capture of the culprit, who later confessed, his only excuse being that he wouldn't have committed the crime if he had had any idea that he was going to be found out.

Some of these tribes have been in the habit of raiding the villages in that part of the world for centuries, but recently they have had their activities curtailed by the Royal Air Force. Thus many have no love for airplanes, and this, I suppose, was the animus back of the action.

After this terrible tragedy, which meant the loss of one of the world's finest aircraft-maintenance engineers, I did not want to continue the flight, but cables received from England, especially those from Sir Samuel Hoare, Sir Charles Wakefield, and from my wife, all expressing sympathy, urged me to proceed. I decided that I would complete the job.

The Air Force sent me a substitute mechanic, Sergeant Ward, of the Royal Air Force, who was serving with his squadron near Basra. And so, a fortnight later, we continued the journey.

Owing to the lack of sunshine beyond Iraq, we found it difficult to get any aerial pictures on the Australian flight, and it was not until we arrived in Java that we met with regular sunshine.

I shall always have a vivid memory of our arrival in Melbourne, where more than 150,000 people had gathered to meet us. It was with difficulty that we could find space enough to get down on the airdrome, for we had changed over from a seaplane to wheels on arrival at Darwin, in northern Australia.

If it had not been for the police and the Australian Air Force I shudder to think of what might have been our fate had the enthusiastic crowd got hold of us.

Torrential Rains Impede Return to London.

The homeward journey, when our craft was once more converted back to a seaplane, was beset with difficulties, especially when we were caught in the monsoon storms in the region of Victoria Point. Here the rain fell five inches a day, and at times it was impossible to see more than 20 yards ahead. Whereas the rainfall in England averages about 30 inches over the twelve months, the annual rainfall along the Burma coast, where it all comes within a period of about five months, is anything up to 300 inches!

At last we got back to London, and ended our 28,000-mile flight of survey by landing on the Thames opposite the Houses of Parliament.

I look forward to the day when it will be possible for all mankind to enjoy the delights of flying such as have been my privilege during the past seven years.

THE MAKER OF SOUTH AFRICA

The new statue of Cecil Rhodes upon which John Tweed has worked for months in England. It will be erected in Salisbury, Rhodesia, South Africa.

Home Accident Deaths Exceed Motor Car Toll

More people are killed and injured by falls, burns, suffocation and poisons in their homes every year than suffer death or injury in automobile accidents, according to figures compiled by the National Safety Council. This was especially emphasized last January, when a total of 1,760 persons were killed by and in automobiles in the United States and 2,020 met their deaths in home accidents, according the council's figures.

Both Audience and Stage To Revolve in Theatre

Berlin—The theatre of the future will have not only a revolving stage, but a revolving audience as well, in the opinion of Walter Gropius, noted architect of Dessau. He is at work devising a new type of theatre for Edwin Piscator, of Berlin, director of the only Communist theatre in Germany.

Gropius plans to build a theatre in which the parquet, with its audience, can be turned at an angle of 180 degrees. The spectators will thus suddenly find themselves transported to another part of the round theatre, where they will see a different stage setting from that upon which they gazed at the previous angle.