Travel.

E PERICOLOSO SPORGERSI.

JODHPUR TO CROYDON.

BY MAJOR-GENERAL D. S. SKELTON, D.S.O., V.H.S.

Flight from England to India is no longer a novelty, and, what is more, there are some who maintain that it has no interest. But, to the soldier, with only two months privilege leave at his disposal, there is no question that, financial considerations apart, there is only one way for him to travel and that is by air. Using this means of transportation he will get some fifty days leave at home, instead of a miserable thirty-two. As to cost: a serving soldier is allowed a 10 per cent discount on his passage money and a further 10 per cent is taken off the return fare if he travels both ways. The present return fare for a serving soldier, Croydon to Karachi, amounts to less than £150. That includes every sort of service. There is nothing else to pay: no tips; no hotel bills; no porters; nothing but drinks to settle, and on that item not much can be spent, as, on account of weight, “the bar” carries only a limited amount. I suggest, therefore, that air travel to India and back costs less than first-class packet, which by the fast liners in moderate comfort costs £139 10s. return.

The next point that causes anxiety is luggage. Well, you are put on to the scales with your baggage and camera and everything except a rug and a coat and you are allowed about 221 pounds free. If you want to take a lot of things home with you, you ought to send them by sea two or three weeks beforehand, and that is not a very expensive item in the leave budget.

The final consideration which holds up many would-be passengers is whether one is certain and bound to be air-sick. My answer is that in normal conditions it must be difficult to be ill on the India route. There is so much flight over water, where air conditions are stable, that a smooth passage should be the rule and I do not think there is much need for anxiety on anyone’s part.

My personal experience in a recent India-to-Croydon flight may be of slight interest to readers who have not yet done the trip. An apology is due for the form of my story: an hour to hour log, from which extracts have been made. On the other hand, possibly this method gives a more complete idea of one’s reactions than a more formal and literary description would do. For instance:—

April 2, 1935.


“Aurora” arrived on Jodhpur aerodrome at 1815, having left Calcutta that morning and Singapore two days previously. She carried two
passengers from the Straits, including one lady. The machine is one of the faster of the Atalanta type, carrying two pilots, wireless telegraph operator, and on this trip nine passengers, but no steward. Was weighed, and chose a seat on the starboard side. Left the ground at 1920. Did a tremendous run right into the setting sun and rose quickly without a turn to 1,500 feet. Just getting dark. Whole city lighted up down below. "Blood line" on all round the drome, just as at Lympne. By eight o'clock it was quite dark. No moon, and could see no stars from the cabin. Machine riding on a nice flat keel; no bumps and very comfy. Rather a loud drumming noise, but think I shall get used to it.

2015: altitude 4,500, a little more bumpy, but only like a big car going over bridges. It is still rather hot, and even up here am sitting in shirt sleeves with collar open. As a first experience of night-flying, there is nothing in it. It's just like being in a rather noisy train, that's all. You look out of the window into outer darkness. Down below there is a light or two. A few red sparks from the exhausts hurl past; a few blue sparks show up from "shorts," and one of the near-by cylinders has a nice red glow to it.

2037: The Captain has just told me he makes Karachi with aid of directional wireless and that now they have some new gadget there, which makes navigation bone-easy. Smoking not allowed; that doesn't worry me.

2039: altitude 4,600; a little cooler and a little more bumpy.

2129: Should be somewhere near Hyderabad (Sind), but can see no lights yet.

2150: Here we are—passing over what seems to be a vast city. Signs of lots of life down there. Valley of the Indus all about here, I suppose. Astonishing how the machine maintains a constant altitude. A twenty-five feet rise and fall seems all it means to do. Lying back comfortably in one's wicker chair, one can feel something of that enormous surge of power that lifts us up and hurls us onward.

2303: Karachi now in view: losing height fast. Seem to be over the sea: "blood line" out all round the 'drome.

2312: A perfect landing of course—384 miles since we left Jodhpur. Thank Heaven to have escaped the Sind desert railway. Hotel fairly comfortable. And I remember now that I had had breakfast in Nasirabad this morning.

April 3.

Embarked in "Hanno." Have two seats on port side to myself. "Hanno" is a tortoise compared with "Aurora." He is a two-wing machine, which affects the view and we all have to sit in the after compartment to get weight right.

0900: Rose and straight out to sea. Karachi not very attractive from the air. At 2,000 feet ran into light cloud.
1005: Might be in mid-Atlantic. Altitude 1,500 feet. Mist and a gentle ripple on the sea. Nothing in sight and nothing to note. We are seven now. Our lady is teaching us how to play "Jutland." Machine is steady and quiet, but has a finer vibration than "Aurora." Dense cloud now. No holes in it.

1045: An island appeared below out of the mist. No desire to buy it. A few palm trees and a little village backed by 1,000 feet cliffs. Probably the hottest place on earth. Coast line of Baluchistan faintly starboard. Unfriendly looking area.

1200: The beer is cold and very good. The sea now is only 400 feet below and is probably warm. Visibility not more than about five miles. Shoal of porpoises, easy to watch.

![Image of airplane and people]

**Fig. 1.—Gwadar.**

1215: Arrived Gwadar and landed to refuel. Tea—and this, surely, is the world's worst and most desolate spot. We drink up 110 gallons of fuel an hour. The approach to the 'drome was over some curious shaped hills, characteristic of Baluchistan: air currents equally eccentric and we got thrown about considerably.

1315: The land over there has surely dried up. It is one of the empty spaces in the world. It is a land of mad, fantastic shapes, a land of sandstone castles and carvings: very senior officers' landing ground though!

1320: Iran is about ten miles away and she is welcome to all I can see of it.

1415: Excellent lunch. Altitude 400. Sun shining, but it's nice and cool. Beer has run out, otherwise all comfortable. Coast line of Iran begins as 300 feet cliff and behind that there seems to be one vast waste. No signs of life or habitation. The land looks utterly desolate and yet if we forced-landed, we should no doubt be surrounded in no time. Folk
spring from nowhere in The Empty Spaces. Machine just speeds along as smoothly as a Rolls-Royce. Flying over the sea like this is just like sitting on the deck of a liner. You look out and the water slides slowly and lazily past you and yet we are moving over it at a speed of nearly two miles a minute, that is, not far from thirty yards a second. The navigation room door is open to let a little draught through and you see the Captain and the Pilot officer sitting at their wheels and the wireless telegraph man with his earphones on, and one feels drowsy and decides it is time for a "snurge." We are now crossing the 246 miles of open Gulf. I leave the Persian side with no regrets. Our girl passenger is asleep. Two others are asleep. One is playing patience and the sea, now 1,000 feet below, passes by.

![Image of airplane and sea](image)

**Fig. 2.—At Sharjah in Arabia.**

1715 : Rising to 5,000 feet, I think the cold woke me up. This is preparatory to slipping across the Oman Peninsula and not just to get us out of range of some Trucial Arab anxious for a little target practice.

1725 : Here we are—here is Arabia, bounded by a line of white surf—a yellow beach and dark rocky mountains beyond. At the edge of the surf the sea is as green as a fine lawn and passes, with its shallows, from turquoise to sapphire—a grand sight.

But oh—what a bump!

1740 : At 5,500 feet we are thrown about like a leaf in a March wind. And down below lies something like Waziristan or any other—"stan"—that is rocky and beastly: just jagged, nasty-looking, rocky mountains. We seem to be getting over the worst of it now. There is a river-bed down there, but no water in it. Wonder if it has rained in these parts since the Deluge. I have sailed around this Peninsula two or three times, and then always thought it was flat and plain-like. Now I know it is not. Towards the northern end the mountains top 8,000 feet, and the Captain tells me
that to-day we have crossed Oman at one of its lowest levels. Thank goodness for that then.

1815: Arrived Sharjah, but the time is corrected to 1640. Clocks in air-travel move hours at a time, not just a paltry twenty minutes, as does ship’s time.

Sharjah is straight out of one of P. C. Wren’s Foreign Legion books. A square fortress in the desert—loop-holed, with strong points at the corners. The whole is surrounded by a barbed-wire apron, of which part is on rails and rolls back to allow aircraft to be parked in safety? Our guard is of the Army of Imperial Airways: rather like the Arab Levies of Mesopotamia in the early days. I went for a walk outside the wire, but was not allowed to go far, when I was fetched back by a couple of our kassadars.

But it’s a modern fort: searchlights, wireless, and a D. F. station of the latest type. Everything ready for passengers. Hot baths, tea, drinks, dinner, and a comfy bed.

April 4.

Called at 0500: a dark, cold desert morning. “Rose” punctually at 0600 according to operation orders issued night before to all passengers. Busy now reading up Vol. I of Mesopotamia operations, as to-day we should see all that mesuage. Bahrain is 284 miles from Sharjah and is our first intended stop.

0802: Cold must have wakened me: altitude 4,900 feet. Terribly misty. Wonder what is going on. Everyone else seems to be asleep. Nothing like these early mornings for inducing a later sleep.
0807: Still climbing. Imagine we want to clear the mist. Altitude 5,600 feet. Barometer 24 inches.

0900: Arrival of steward with hot Bovril—more than welcome. All sleepers wake up instantly.

0940: Just arrived over the Qurah Peninsula immediately south of Ras Rankan. At 2,000 feet we are in thick mist, little can be made out below. Feeling to some slight extent effect of compression on ear drums, can hardly hear anything on coming down fairly fast to more bumpy levels. Sea down below so green, shallow and clear in spite of the mist, that can almost see the pearls in the oysters!

1016: Over Bahrein Island. Captain tells me D.F. apparatus not functioning and so as not to miss the north point of the Island in the mist, he made for the middle of it and is following the coast line up to the aerodrome. Altitude 500 feet. Passing over a large village. Women rush violently into their houses. Fear, not modesty at the back of this movement.

Over Bahrein city now: a big place, built on several islands. Landed at 1035. The outward machine which we should have met here, left an hour ago, and with a 40 miles per hour gale behind her may do the hop, Baghdad to Karachi in the day!! Bahrein air station consists for the moment of a few E. P. tents and a reed hut on the sand. Much attempted selling of cultured pearls at about Rs. 2 each. Rose at 1130 without pearls.

1515: Clock went back three-quarters of an hour. Interferes considerably with luncheon hour, but had an excellent meal on the aircraft. Nothing much to see in Saudi Arabia, except a few miserable black tents, a few goats, and a camel or two. There appears to be about one family every fifty miles.

1525: Landed at Koweit after all and got away again at 1600. From the air, it looks a large, clean city. One house in the middle of it had a cement or hard sand tennis court. There is a large port full of dhow-craft, all inhabitants fast asleep though.

1710: Hell of a dust storm on. This is not usual, as these storms generally fade out towards evening. Just coming down on the Shaiba (Basra) aerodrome. Tea here with gramophone entertainment. I got a bit mixed over meals, as either (or all) lunch, tea or dinner seemed to be on. However, soup and a whisky and soda made an excellent “tea.”

1754: Visibility about 200 yards. Flying at 50 to 60 feet. Local time is 1655. We are now over the Muntafiq country, if this lake and marsh may be called country. And it is the only way from which to see it. It is a vast extent of marsh with here and there a little islet sticking slightly out of the water. On the island, which may have a diameter of ten yards, lives a family. The house is of reed and non-insurable, in it dwells the family and the more anterior portions of the family cattle, as there is not room inside for more than about a quarter of the animal. Other occupants of
the marsh are countless duck, teal, etc., and a multitude of pig. As the plane roars over the marsh every pig in the neighbourhood swims or bounds about. All pig, all humans are amphibian. If a Muntafiq wants a constitutional he takes it by canoe. He pays no taxes, for the obvious reason that no one can call or even attempt to collect them. That any portion of the human race can survive under Muntafiq conditions is a scientific marvel. If we get our feet wet, we get rheumatism; if the Muntafiq ever had dry feet they would possibly succumb to gout.

2010: We have just crossed the Hai river, about ten miles south of Kut. Sorry not to have seen it all again by daylight.

2040: Altitude 3,000 feet and very cold.

2130: Landed at Baghdad West. Have done about seventeen hours flying to-day and would like to go on. The dust storm has blown itself out. Every time I revisit Baghdad, it seems to get more and more dirty and untidy. The oil subsidy seems sufficient to maintain the entire urban population in idleness. But Baghdad West has been improved. There is a fine statue to Feisal, approached by a creditable avenue or arterial road. Stayed in the Tigris Palace Hotel (the old Carlton); the Maude, no better. The old Residency appeared to be "to let." Many memories of that March day in 1916, in which we occupied the city. I still maintain the first British flag to fly over the city was the little one belonging to a "section" of the 39th Field Ambulance (13th Division) which we hoisted to the mast on the roof of the Residency.

April 5.

Called at 0415 and left the new and imposing aerodrome at 0600. Kept at 500 feet for some time. Marvellously cool and fresh. Visibility 100 per cent good.

0615: Passed right over Khan Dukta, where Leachman was murdered. Could see the hut out of which he pulled the Sheikh by the beard. It is an Iraqi Police Post now.

0625: Over Ramadi and the Euphrates. Last saw this spot from the Nairn motor after a night dash across the desert from Damascus in 1925. Not changed, according to local gossip, since the days of Sargon, B.C. several thousands.

0655: The desert looks grand from 1,000 feet, which is more than it does in July from the ground. But at this season it looks clean and washed. There seem to be car tracks everywhere: possibly every collection of "hema" has its "flivver," and inter-section visits among the Shammar tribe the order of the day. We have climbed to 3,000 feet; the ground level gets to that altitude about half way across. But it's much flatter up here than it was lower down. The trans-desert trip can be terribly bumpy, I am told.

0900: Rutbah Wells and breakfast. Found former Assyrian Levy-corporal installed here as mess steward. His recognition of me cost me the last of my Indian rupee notes!
1115: Came down at H4—a pumping station on the new pipe line. Not the cheeriest place on earth, but two quite lovely ladies appeared from nowhere to watch us land and depart after fuelling. Brave women and a brave life to live out here.

My Wog friend opposite, who claims to be French, has been removed to the baggage room to lie down, and there be as sick as he likes. He shied at breakfast. We have been having rather a bad time this last hour.

1215: altitude 7,000 feet. Have just passed over a great area of black volcanic rock. Used to be called the "Bay of Biscay," this, when the Nairn motor route was driven south in the time of the Druse rebellion, the northern route then being unsafe. But it's a nasty country in which to spend forty years awandering. One can have no conception, except when seen from the air, of how horrible it really is. It is a marvellous day. Visibility still 100 per cent good. The pipe line is below us again, and away to starboard, perhaps 60 to 100 miles off. I can see the snow on distant Mount Gilead.

There is the French section of the pipe line going off north-west whilst ours goes straight on. No need for aircraft now to follow the ploughed "furrow" which a tractor plough made in the early twenties for service aircraft.

1240: The snows look grand standing out above the dust and mist of the horizon.

1250: Over there is the upper valley of Jordan and Galilee glinting under the skyline and here is Es Salt on its plateau, then the hill country and clouds over Lebanon.

1310: Altitude 7,100 feet. Jordan Valley just coming in.

1320: Altitude 7,600 feet. Over the Dead Sea. Down there to the right is Jericho and the road to Es Salt, the same one that the raiders took that awful night in March, 1917. And there, a bit further on, is the Hill of Temptation. The motor road from Jericho to Jerusalem is as plainly marked as a white ribbon.

1329: Bethlehem.

1330: Altitude 4,500 feet. Jerusalem. No one in the plane speaks. Every feature can be made out. Simply marvellous and unforgettable.

1340: Just now, Palestine looks a green-quilted, prosperous land. The sea is ahead of us again and the Jaffa road on our right. Between the sea and the town is a play of colours—blue, yellow and green edging to the grey sandstone and l ine of the hills.

1400: Gaza. But before landing could make out the line Allenby held from Gaza eastward and there at the end of it is Beersheba. It looks so easy from up here to have mopped it up.

1500: Depart Gaza. The sick man goes back to his kennel in the baggage room.

1555: About ten miles out to sea, cutting off the Asia-Africa angle. To port you can make out the sea-inundation, extending for twenty to thirty miles inland with only a narrow sand strip for a bund.
1620: The line of the Canal can be made out from the sea to the Bitter Lakes.

1628: Altitude 3,000 feet and right over Port Said. A big mailboat lying against the pontoon looks like a toy steamer. I think there are six ships in the Canal between here and Ismailia.

1650: Egypt. At least the Nile Delta, which is a geometric figure of cultivated, irrigated land. I always hated Euclid.

1805: Arrived Alexandria.

April 6.

Up at the usual and ghastly hour of 0445, and away an hour later. We are now consigned to a flying boat. Passengers sit amidships. Very comfortable seats. Glass windows, which can be opened a little. Alexandria harbour fairly full. The German cruiser, "Emden," is ahead of us. A workmanlike looking craft. The old yacht "Mahroussa" is still opposite the Palace steps. Incredible waste of money. She became a yacht in 1865 after having done service as a Thames steamboat. In 1910 she ventured out as far as Berbera, I remember. I doubt if she has moved since.

It is a real thrill leaving the water in a seaplane. You are wasting your pocket money to make a trip in a speed boat. I do not know at what speed sea-craft leave the water, but the wave on the beam is a young mountain and then up you go and lie aloft at 100 feet or so as smoothly as can be.

It is 372 land miles to Crete, which is our next landfall.

0915: Approaching Crete. Altitude 2,000 feet, and very bumpy indeed.

0921: Over land now. Crete has too much limestone and too few trees to attract me. The north coast, with its steep cliffs, is the more imposing. You need a ceiling of 9,000 feet to clear the Island's high spot, and I would prefer not to do it in a flying boat. My impressions of Crete are that it seems a poor place in which to hatch revolutions or in which to take refuge from their effects. The island seemed to be uninhabited—anyway from the air—and the whole place seems just a dot in the ocean. It took about seven minutes to cross our bit, and then we followed the coastline for a while, to land in Mirabella Bay, a calm and pretty little spot. Taken off to Imperial Airways Yacht whilst machine refuels. Again a very unpopulated looking spot.

1015: In the air again, after some hedge-hopping: 216 miles to go to Athens.

1105: In or among the Archipelago. These apparently deserted and uninhabited rocks are, I suppose, the Isles of Greece, where burning Sappho carried on and all that. I can only hope that the Island of Lesbos is more attractive than this stuff, if not, can well understand why the cult faded. Nowadays, these islands are certainly the home of all the super-bumps and air pockets into which a seaplane may perform acrobatics. As soon as you clear them life is calm and comfy again and my notes legible.
1205: Our usual landing place in the neighbourhood of Piraeus had been well mined recently by the Government during their last revolution, or, may be, the one before; but anyway, the miners had forgotten where they had dropped their goods. The bay, therefore, is rightly regarded as unhealthy for seacraft and we were invited to come to surface level in some remote bay called Ruphti on the east side of the Peninsula. There is no doubt that coming to water surface in a seaplane is not the least of the pleasures to be got. The perfect landing seems to consist of a swish and a wave with none of the bumps and scraping of a landing on a bumpy aerodrome.

1250: Off again and straight across the Peninsula. Altitude 2,500 feet. Several good-looking roads down below, but no traffic on them: no white lines, beacons, or limit. We have actually got two windows slightly open to our relief. Getting a little bumpy as we hedge-hop some of these hills.

1310: Abreast of Athens. Flight over the city not allowed. The main road from Piraeus to the capital looks very wide and straight, as indeed it is. Last time I motored along this track, I arrived in the Piccadilly Circus of Athens, that is at Constantine's Palace, with the speedometer at 80 m.p.h. All the landmarks of this lovely city easily to be made out; most impressive and beautiful.

1318: In the Bay of Salamis: Mount Parnes (4,300 feet) looks down on the still blue waters of the Bay. The Corinth canal looks like a little ditch. A good part of it fell in not so long ago, but they have cleared the debris away. One can now realize more easily how the old Greeks were able to man-handle their ships across the Isthmus. The coast-line in its colouring is very lovely. Mount Parnassus, rightly, has its snow-clad summit hidden in the pearl clouds. The gods could not favour a seaplane passing by: anyhow, we should meet with a cold reception if we went too near. Lunch time: this constant eating with no exercise recalls why and how the Italians sometimes describe us as il popolo dei cinque pasti: real five-mealers.

1402: Approaching the Greek Alps. Snow almost down to Patras: most lovely scenery, with the blue of the Bay, the gleam of the glaciers and the green of the lower fields.

1415: We have just started to cut across the hills. The scene on either side is magnificent, a whole range of snow-clad Alps lies ahead. We are now doing some minor operations in aerobatics. Away to port, though first hidden by the hills, lies Missolonghi; and it is almost a hundred years ago, to the day, since Byron made that little Greek village famous for all time. Pilot-captain in conversation mentions there are a few lakes about if we had to force-land. The one below us now is another lovely edition of Como.

1437: The sea is visible again and to starboard are the snow-covered mountains of Albania. This section alone has made the trip worth while.
Ithaca lies to port and we are just coming on to the Gulf of Arta. How I wish I remembered more of my Greek.

1500: Pilot crossed Palio Preveza at 1,000 feet in order to give us a good view of the Roman remains, amphitheatre and city walls and all that was and is left.

1530: Passing over Corfu. It looks even more attractive from the air than it does from the surface. Isola Bella (I call it) with its convent is a little jewel. Some snotties landed there not long ago and bathed, as a man should bathe in this lovely sea. But, surprisingly, the holy nuns made an awful song and dance about this incident, which apologies have only just appeased. Isola Bella—Isola Santa, too, it seems. In the woods lies Wilhelm’s Achillesion, with its beautiful gardens. The whole estate has now been appropriated by the Greek Government and the mansion converted into a museum. Did the Government pay him for it? I wonder!

1545: Good-bye to this Dream Island. 146 miles to go. We can see Albania and Italy and later on, on the map, can pin-point our position as we pass from the sharp green edge of the shoal to the violet of the 100-fathom line.

1700: Arrived in Brindisi harbour exactly on time. From here to Paris the journey is made by train. Each passenger has his own compartment on the Wagon-Lit. All most comfortable and an excellent meal.

Nothing much to note about the land journey. There is a short stop in Milan, time enough to go to the Duomo. It is evening as Stresa is passed. But light enough to see the real Isola Bella, which looks more lovely than ever. As night falls, and the train climbs the Simplon Pass, the snows come lower. Plum, apple, pear, almond, prunus are all in bloom, pink or white against a ghostly background.

During the night, the train movement is more pronounced and more disagreeably uncomfortable than at any period of the air passage.

April 8.

1130: There is little more to be said. It was blowing a first-class gale in the Channel, but we, at 6,000 feet had a blue ceiling and a flat keel. Half an hour later, I made the mistake of my life—I mistook London for Tunbridge Wells. It was high time I got out. But the next day I went back to the office and bought my return ticket to Delhi by Imperial Airways.