

WRITTEN IN THE AIR TRAVELLING
FROM U.K. TO U.S.A. by LANCASTER
BOMBER:

FROM PRESTWICK TO CANADA
DECEMBER 31st, 1944 - JAN. 1ST 1945.

Thought it would be interesting to have a few notes during this trip while buzzing through the Air in this massive ship of the skies. As you know, we arrived in Scotland very early Sunday morning, December 31st, and after breakfast we prepared for the journey getting out our flying kit and gas masks, also "Mae West". While doing this, we learned that the weather was very bad across the Atlantic, and a plane had been lost the day before while on the journey from Montreal. It was hinted that we may be take the Southern route; this would probably mean the Azores and Bermuda, but not too certain on Bermuda, because if the weather cleared we might go direct from the Azores to Montreal.

We took off from Scotland at 11 a.m. in a rather bright cold morning for the Azores, 1653 miles, and were soon 1000 feet above the clouds and in the clouds. Along the Irish Sea and around Cornwall and over the Scilly Isles, and then into no-man's-land. Below a very rough sea is running and there is no desire to drop into this as it looks most uninviting.

Leaving all sight of land, we pass through the clouds and then for the next 5 hours just fly over what appears to be a beautiful expanse of clear white snow, clouds with no break in them and beautiful warm sunshine coming through the windows. The sky is a perfect blue, and much more pleasant to look at than what has been seen during my visit to England. Here we now sit with nothing to see but clouds, clouds, clouds, and more clouds. This lovely picture cannot be described, and these clouds are so immense and perfectly still. There is a crew of 4 on the plane and 4 passengers, I being the only civilian; the other three are Canadians, a Colonel from Italy and 2 Majors, all quite nice fellows. As I sit here the position is humorous. Piled up in front of me are bags and suit cases of all shapes and sizes, together with mail bags. On the left are 8 luncheon boxes containing our lunches, and 4 big Thermos flasks of hot coffee. We have not put on our flying suits, but just lolling in our overcoats and soon will be getting ready to devour the contents of the lunch boxes. Now its 1.30 p.m. and we are starting our lunch plate of tongue and salad, cup of grape fruit juice, piece of cake, slab of cheese and two buttered biscuits and pot of mixed fruit salad also four lumps of sugar for our coffee. The meal is over and very nice too, and now for a sleep.

Slept for 2 hours, and still in the clouds and 3 more hours before we reach the Azores.

We are speeding at over 220 miles per hour, and very smooth running, but of course, very uninteresting. It is now 5.45 p.m. and we can see the Azores from our windows, all beautiful and green, just such another scene as when on our way to Africa we first saw Maderia. We have fastened our seat belts and now down/

we go after flying over the Air Field once and out to sea again and descend correctly. Bump, bump, and those are the wheels of the undercarriage contacting Mother Earth again.

Out we get, with our night-kit, at exactly 6.00 p.m. or 3.00 p.m. local time, having done the trip of 1570 miles in 7 hours, averaging 225 miles per hour. As we step out into the beautiful fresh air of the Azores it is just about like an afternoon in England around September, rather warm and sunny.

We are on the Island of Praia, all Portugese. Off to the officers' ^{quarters} for a wash and some food. These quarters are occupied by many Americans, R.A.F. and Canadian Air Force. Now we learn that we are not going on as the weather is bad to Montreal, so we are going to stay the night and then on to Bermuda tomorrow if conditions are favourable. Now we are lumbering with our bags and the crew into an Army wagon to be taken to our sleeping quarters for the night. These sleeping quarters consist of wooden huts with four bunks in each compartment; the crew had one compartment and we had the other. I had decided to sleep on the lower one. Very rough and ready and quite Army regulations. Concrete floors and no chairs or hooks or drawers to accommodate one - just the beds. To wash and shave, and other purposes, one had to cross the yard and the lavatory basins consisted of one long trough with a number of taps, hot water and several mirrors. Must supply own soap and towel. The "other place" just as open, except that each pan was separate, but exposed to full view of the wide wide world! Such were the arrangements for the night and our orders were to be up at 4.30 a.m. next day ready for "off" at 7.00 a.m. All this settled, we all decided (crew as well) to go to town, which is about 5 miles away from Camp. After about 40 minutes' walk to the camp gates we receive a pass which will admit us up to 11.59 p.m. Outside the camp gates are many dirty looking individuals with buggies and poor ill-fed horses. We park our bodies in these buggies, 3 in each, and jolt our way over the very rough roads to town. At times we are nearly thrown out due to the rough roads and badly designed buggies. We arrive at very typical Portugese café, and here sat for 3 hours drinking cheap champagne, port wine, and tasting several liquors. Felt none too clever at the end of the evening when we drove back over the same rough roads to camp. Bed by 10.00 p.m. and up again at 4.30 a.m. Breakfast over at 6.00 a.m. we learned that the weather was still very bad over Canada and that we should take off at 7.30 a.m. for Bermuda.

A beautiful warm morning when we took off at 7.30 a.m. for 2275 miles hop. First 3 hours flying at 8000 feet, and through some very heavy clouds which while flying through were just like a dirty London fog and very bumpy at times. The weather became worse by 12.00 noon and we rose to 15000 feet and had to put on gas masks and take in oxygen. This lasted for 1 hour and after flying through some nasty weather and over rain storms down we came to 8000 feet again and had lunch of chicken sandwiches, fruit salad and coffee. Now over the clouds again and nothing interesting but an occasional view of the rough sea running.

At 4.30 p.m. we see the first ships on the ocean, several war ships and others - Bermuda appears in sight with the beautiful calm blue sea below. We arrived at 5.00 p.m. or 3.00 p.m. local time, having made the trip from the Azores to Bermuda (2235 miles) in 9½ hours, an average of 235 miles per hour.

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At Bermuda, after a wash and a meal, we learn that the weather is still bad over Montreal and that other aircraft have been waiting to take off over the last 48 hours. So we are all set for staying the night with the hope of taking off early next morning. Away we go, crew as well, to the Belmont Manor Hotel, where I have stayed before. We are jolted along over the very poor roads for 12 miles from the Air Port to the Belmont Manor Hotel in the town of Hamilton. This is a very nice residential Hotel, in fact the one in the town. After getting our rooms, 2 in each room, we roam around to the bar and after several drinks and dinner, then off to bed - hot bath at 9.30 p.m. The Weather on Bermuda was simply grand, around 75°. This is winter and just about the same as South Africa. The red pointsettias, mauve bourganvilles and the several colours of violets are all looking their best. There are also Paw-Paws and bananas on the trees. The whole atmosphere is so peaceful and one longs to stay for a few days. Up at 7.15 a.m. and day light and then a bribe of a shilling to a coloured waiter to get a pot of tea with plenty of sugar as there was no breakfast till 8.00 a.m. A walk around the gardens in a beautiful warm air and everywhere looking so fresh and free from the horrible affects of War and neglect.

Breakfast over we learn that the weather over Montreal has somewhat cleared, although very cold at 20 degrees below Zero, and that we shall be taking off again at 11.00 a.m. This gave us time, after breakfast, to catch an Overseas Airways motor launch to the town (20 minutes sail) so that we could just have a look around till 10.15 a.m. at which time we were told to be ready for the 12 mile jolt back to the Air Port. While in the town, as usual, we spent like millionaires, keeping strictly to the old saying that "fools and their money are soon parted". I purchased strings of coloured beads made from berries of the plant "Pride of India", which grows out here. Also obtained a small bottle of perfume, Coty's "Chepri" and one or two pins made from local woods. Adding to my folly of spending money foolishly, I bought a doll made from Banana leaves and pine wood, this latter will be the best dust collector we have in our collection of curios.

All this over, we now mount the "stage coach" and are bumped back to the Air Port to prepare for the last hop. Weather is beautiful and warm. At 12.00 noon we ferry along to the take-off, and are soon in the air again. Having added 3 more passengers, one R.A.F. flying officer and his wife, and another R.A.F. officer. We soon rise to 8000 feet and leave Bermuda behind for a flight to Montreal 900 miles. In the clouds once again with strong head winds and I have just been invited by the Captain to the cock-pit to see the "works." After climbing on my hands and knees over mail and baggage the control is reached and what a playground it is. All knobs, levers and clock faces. There the crew of 4 sit in very cramped circumstances, Captain, Observer, Navigator, and Radio Officer. I was scared to Hell in case I touched a button or lever accidentally and might be blamed for wrecking the ship. Back I crawl over the mail and sit down to lunch, ham sandwiches, fruit salad and coffee, and then a sleep before passing over Boston, Mass:

A little later, we see below the first signs of snow and as we proceed to Canada we can see below a real Canadian winter with several feet of snow and much ice, all rivers and lakes frozen over.

After a very nasty spell through some very heavy clouds Montreal appears in sight and down we drop at 5.00 p.m. the journey from Bermuda to here taking just 5 hours. Was it cold?? We were hastily passed through the immigration and

So ended a very interesting return once again to