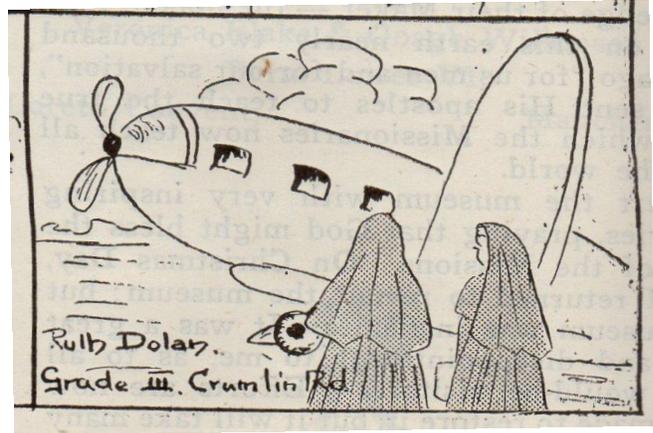
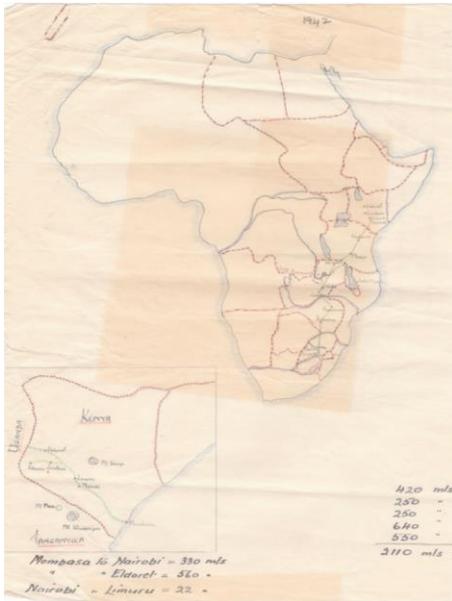


Loreto Pioneers in Aviation



This is the story of the first Loreto Sisters to take flight, Loreto Pioneers in Aviation.

M. Teresa Ball had watched with a heavy heart, from *Bullock Harbour, Dalkey* as a group of eight Sisters set sail for the first foreign mission in India. In 1841 M. Delpine Hart and her companions were Loreto Pioneers in maritime and foreign travel, and this departure launched *Loreto as a missionary order*.

Over one hundred years later, by 1943 foreign travel and missionary work had become a feature of Loreto life - Sisters travelled by sea, wagon and foot to establish and re-enforce communities, schools, colleges and missions.

The world's first successful manned airplane flight took place in December 1903; it was forty years later before the first Loreto Sisters took to the skies. In 1943 the world was in the grip of the Second World War, and aviation travel had quickly become a feasible, although highly expensive option for civilian travel.

The Loreto Foundation in Kenya had been formally established in 1921, when a group of six pioneers led by M. Borgia O'Shaughnessy travelled from *[India, Australia and South Africa]* to establish a community and school in *Nairobi*.

By 1942, Loreto communities and schools had been established across Kenya in **Nairobi, Msongari, Eldoret, Limuru and Mombasa**. By 1942, *Kenya was a participant in the Second World War, and the war effort brought unprecedented economic activity* to the country, and brought a dramatic increase in urban populations. ***It is estimated that the populations of Mombasa and Nairobi grew by as much as 50% during the war.***

Kenya was an English colony, and during the Second World War the British Army **commandeered the Loreto convent and school in Msongari. It was decided that the school and students were to be evacuated to Lumbwa, and the children would board there. Many parents were reluctant to send their daughters to Lumbwa and requested, that instead, a temporary (day) school be opened in Nairobi for the duration of the war. This ‘temporary’ school was opened at Valley Road, but became such a success that it has never closed.**

This opening of this *new* school at Valley Road, demanded more personnel; more Sisters were required. Thus in January 1942, an appeal was sent to the nearby South African Provincial Superior (M. Cecilia Cummins) to provide Sisters for the Kenyan mission - M. Consiglio Ryan and M. Dorothea Atkins, were selected to join the East African mission. The war, hostilities and attendant dangers in travelling by conventional means resulted in the *groundbreaking* decision to travel from South Africa to Kenya by air. The first Loreto Sisters were about to take flight! M. Dorothea Atkins, a native of Johannesburg, South Africa and an enthusiastic teacher of Geography kept a vivid and detailed diary of this *first Loreto venture into aviation*. Her account of the journey was sent to *M. Gertrude Kennedy, Superior General* and is part of the collection in the Institute Archives.



M. Dorothea Atkins IBVM

It is worth bearing in mind, as we present M. Dorothea’s journey that air travel in the 1940’s was dramatically different *from what we know now*. The flight, as you will hear, from South Africa to Kenya, was lengthy and although more comfortable than travelling by land and over water, was not without its discomforts. The small 6 seater plane was cramped, aircraft were not pressurised as they are now, and planes flew at low altitude, with the result that many flights were *exposed to strong turbulence*. One contemporary pilot surmised flying at

this time as a **very noisy, smelly, cold and generally not very pleasant experience**¹. For M. Dorothea, these detractions did not impinge on her sense of adventure, and the first Loreto introduction to air travel was an adventure in every sense.

This is her account of that journey from South Africa to Kenya

On 1 January, 1942 a momentous cable was received from Mother General which was to set Mother Provincial’s brain working and eventually to shake two of her subjects out of their complacency and seeming security. The startling news it contained was that two nuns were required, as soon as possible, for the new day-school to be opened in Nairobi The ... choice was to fall on M.M.Consiglio Ryan of Hillcrest and former pioneer and Superior of our native mission in Glen Cowie, and myself of Lydenburg. Within a fortnight of being told the staggering news we had our white habits, etc. made and our trunks packed and our passage booked for our passage Northwards. Then came the calamity of the fall of Singapore and the resultant sinkings off the East Coast. A sea voyage had become impossible. For me this meant marking time in Pretoria until Providence should provide a means of travel.

¹ <https://airandspace.si.edu/exhibitions/america-by-air/online/innovation/innovation14.cfm> on 14/10/2014

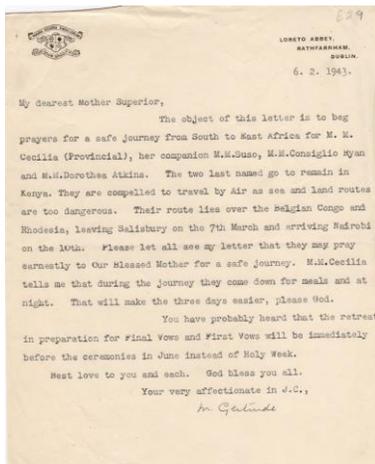
After much negotiation, an overland route by train through Central Africa was found possible. It would take at least 18 days by train, lake and river steamer. This, to me, seemed luring and adventurous but it was considered to be too risky on account of excessive heat and fever. So once again the journey was postponed.

Finally, as the need for nuns in Kenya was becoming more and more acute it was eventually settled that the only means to reach our distressed brethren in Christ was by air. These same holy brethren it seems were storming heaven, making Novena after Novena for the arrival of reinforcements. So it was that four adventurous Loreto Nuns; M.M.Suso of Sea Point making a fourth to act as companion to Mother Provincial, were to undertake the historical flight across Africa and to be the pioneers of Loreto in aviation.

As soon as Mother General's permission was obtained preparations went on apace. Seats were booked for the 5th and 7th March—exactly a year since the contemplated sea voyage. Our party had to be divided as far as Salisbury as four seats in either plane were unavailable. M.M.Consiglio and I were to blaze the trail while Mother Provincial and M.M.Suso were to follow on the 7th.

During the month of waiting much had to be done. Five permits had to be secured—an exit permit to leave S. Africa”, a permit “to enter Kenya Colony”, a permit “to be allowed to take money out of the Union”, a permit “to send our heavy luggage which was sent by sea in February, and arrived in Nairobi on 26 March, only 44 lbs being allowed to be taken on the plane, and a fifth” permit “to be injected against Yellow Fever.”

We leave M. Dorothea's account for just a moment.



As the Sisters began their preparations for their travel, M. Gertrude Kennedy, Superior General wrote to each (local/Provincial) Superior across the Institute, requesting prayers for their safe travel. She begged prayers “for a safe journey from South to East Africa for M.M. Cecilia (Provincial), her companion M.M. Suso, M.M. Consiglio Ryan and M.M. Dorothea Atkins....” M. Gertrude gave an insight into their journey writing, “They are compelled to travel by Air as sea and land routes are too dangerous. Please let all see my letter that they may pray earnestly to Our Blessed Mother for a safe journey. M.M. Cecilia tells me that during the journey they **come down for meals and at night**. That will make the three days easier, please God.”

We resume with M. Dorothea's account:

At length the day for departure dawned with a heavy sky laden with rain which was not long in falling. After a most fatiguing time of packing and unpacking and weighing and trying to get the regulation weight of 44 lbs amid the rain and slush and mud, farewells at length arrived. Our train for Johannesburg left at 6.05 p.m. and we arrived there at 7.05 being met by Miss A. Quinlan, an old

Lydenburg friend of M.M. Consiglio's, and Rev. Fr. Kelly a family friend of ours, who drove us in his car to the Victoria Hotel.

M.M.Consiglio was worried about being called in time in the morning so made enquiries at the office. The attendant was a comical-looking fellow who seemed to have a glass eye and smiled from ear to ear, apparently enjoying us hugely, while we in turn enjoyed him. "It is quite all right", he assured us" No need to worry! The attendant will call you at five in the morning and the car will be ready at six. You see, two air-pilots sleep in the hotel, so you can sleep well as you won't be left behind!"- with a broad grin "Yes there are two pilots, one for the passenger plane and the other for the mail. They sleep here three nights a week, so no need to worry!" With this comforting assurance we were able to retire in peace of mind.

Friday 5th (March) At five o'clock the attendant brought us coffee which we duly enjoyed. The morning was dark, cold and looked like rain. At six the airport car arrived. We had evidently got into it unnoticed by one of the pilots for we suddenly heard a voice on the steps of the hotel call out: "Where are those two girls?" We chuckled within. Then a head peered in and the driver said: "It is no use going until the pilot arrives". No fear then of missing the plane. At long last he appeared and we discovered we had a gentle man passenger who, we learned, was also going to Nairobi. As we moved off only a few people whose work brought them out at that early hour, were to be seen. It was pitch dark as we drove along the silent streets and to us it seemed like midnight. We were greatly excited by this time for we were really on the way to the big experience of our lives. The possibility of flying had seemed so unreal that all the time we felt that this means of travelling would never come off. But here we were at last on the way to the aerodrome. We were soon out of the city and speeding along with mine dumps looking out of the darkness as we passed the mining areas. How thankful we were that our driver knew the way so well. It was only afterwards that we learned that Mother Provincial and M.M.Suso had not the same comfortable assurance. They drove straight from Pretoria—having risen at 4.30 a.m. for it is an hour's journey by car—and found great difficulty in finding the aerodrome in the darkness, their driver being unfamiliar with those environs.

As we approached Germiston, which is nine miles from Johannesburg, and near the aerodrome, dawn began to break and send streaks of light across the Eastern sky. We passed the sentry safely with our luggage and alighted with our luggage which was taken to the weighing room. **Each of us was weighed as well as the luggage.** What a sigh of relief we gave when our small attache cases which we held on to tightly were not asked for! Then forms were filled in and we were asked what money we had with us and if we carried cameras or letters. Fortunately, we had been warned well beforehand to omit such from our personal effects.

Other passengers began to arrive and to go through the same formula as ourselves. We had a long wait so had time to view our surroundings. There were many planes outside, some small and others bigger. We wondered which we would travel in, and were quite sure it was not the very small one, However it turned out that it was and we had only one passenger besides ourselves. You can imagine how thrilled we were when we climbed into our places and saw the pilot in front of us. I was dreadfully keen to ask the pilot to fly over the Convent so asked the passenger in front of me to put my request to the pilot. But he discouraged me by replying that the Pilot could not go from his scheduled route. I was to regret later my timidity in not putting my request to the pilot personally.



At about 7.10 am the engines started. Our little Dragon Rapide vibrated and seemed to awaken from sleep. Then the brakes being put on she ran lightly along the ground for about four minutes and gently lifted herself into the air. She flew low for sometime, seemingly just skimming over the fields and houses. We got a beautiful view of Germiston and the outlying districts. Then she seemed to rise by leaps and bounds as though she were a horse vaulting a fence; then to sag a bit as though one were in a lift. She sped on towards Pretoria. The plane was so steady that it occurred to me I should be writing my experiences and sensations as I flew. So I promptly took out my notebook and pen and was charmed to find a little table which folded out so that I was able to write in comfort. Now, I am going to quote from my book and give my experiences as they occurred.

Am actually writing in the plane. Am all of a thrill. We are over Pretoria! I can see the station! the City Hall!!! the Convent!!! It is 25 to 8. I wonder can the nuns see or hear us—but they are at Meditation. We are quite low and can make out the landmarks distinctly. There are only three passengers—our third a very nice gentleman who has offered us some barley-sugar; it is supposed to be good when travelling. He has also given us the Daily Mail to read—we notice a shocking accident in London where a great number of people have been killed in an air-raid shelter. The noise is not too great and the sensation is delightful. Altogether it is a lovely airy feeling as though one were floating on the clouds! We are flying through mist, though I can still see the country below which is very bushy. The pilot is quite unconcerned and is reading his “Daily Mail”. We are floating above the clouds now, which are billowing away beneath us. I can see a lovely little rainbow to the left of me. The plane sways to the left and right, though not sickening.

We are now flying over Warmbaths—a very scattered looking place. The country is very hilly round about here. I seem to have a ferocious appetite for barley sugar with which our kind friend has supplied us! Paper bags are convenient, but D.G. not necessary. Our seats are beautifully comfy; the backs are adjustable and one can recline back as far as one likes, almost to a lying position. The pace is remarkably steady, it hardly seems as though it were moving at all. The only motion is a gentle dipping from side to side now and again. This gentle motion and the monotonous droning of the engine certainly are conducive to sleep. I could easily fall off to slumber-land were I not so busy writing.

The pilot has just offered us some peppermint chewing gum! We accept gratefully! In return we have shared our butterscotch! We are all on the best of terms! I am becoming very sleepy so I shall stop a while.

We are expected to arrive at Bulawayo at 10.30 a.m. We are travelling at about 140 m.p.h. We are quite above the clouds now, no land is visible; it is like an enormous snow field beneath us stretching out on all sides.

5 to 10 We have just crossed the Limpopo River, so we are now in S.Rhodesia. The river is broad and muddy winding like a snake from west to east. Another river is wending its way down from the north to join it. There are squares and ovals of vegetation down below looking like a patchwork quilt interspersed as they are among the thick woody thorn growth. The patches all seem to be surrounded by a border of thorn trees or mud wall. These patches of cultivation extend for miles northward as we fly. They probably belong to the natives. The country here is very flat, quite a contrast to the hilly region around Pietersburg. It looks very hot down below. I am glad I am high up!

I can see circular kraals, the huts look like ant-hills. These clearings are exceedingly numerous. The Great North Road stretches out like a ribbon before us. The country is becoming much more hilly as we approach Bulawayo. The hills rise up suddenly from the plain, all have a rounded, dome-like rock foundation, probably the action of former glaciation. I have just realised they are the Matopo Hills among which **Cecil Rhodes lies buried.**

1.30 we alighted at Bulawayo. The Immigration Officer came to meet us and handed us forms to fill in. There is a small rest room here where an appetising breakfast awaited us. Conditions are rather primitive here but building is going on, so perhaps in due time there will be an improvement. We partook of breakfast in the company of the Pilot who is a pleasant sort of fellow. He warned us not to judge all flights as pleasant as ours—the weather we were experiencing being superb, that we would not have been able to take off this morning had the weather been bad, and that the plane can be very bumpy when passing through clouds. So all the good prayers that are being said for our safety are being heard. We lost our pleasant passenger at Bulawayo—the town 9 miles from the aerodrome—and received two others instead. The plane can hold only 6 passengers—the mails took up the sixth seat. I much regret not having asked the Pilot to fly low over the Convent when flying over Pretoria. He said he would have done so and have dipped a salute. Think of the thrill it would have given to the nuns and children! We are nearing Salisbury. It is becoming rather chilly up in the clouds—we seem to be rather high—I am glad I have my shawl.

Near Salisbury we happened to bump into an air-pocket. It is one of the queerest experiences to have. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, the plane seemed to drop straight down perpendicularly some hundreds of yards, as though the bottom had fallen out of it. The sudden jerk sent me rolling off my seat and my little case which I happened to be strapping up flew on to the floor with the contents thrown out. The passenger in front kindly helped me to rescue them. M.M.Consiglio was rather shaken up a bit. The Pilot looked round to see if we were still there! The 'plane at this stage was flying rather high trying to avoid the clouds and became somewhat bumpy. On nearing Salisbury this bumpiness became more frequent due to heat-waves rising up. As we were landing we flew low over gardens and fields covered with cosmos. The country is beautifully green and rich looking—there seems to have been a great deal of rain.

Salisbury 1.30 We were a bit giddy on landing and found it difficult to find our land legs. Rev. Fr. Beisley, S.J.—the Jesuit Provincial—introduced himself to us and took us to his waiting car. How thankful we were to be saved the trouble of getting a conveyance to drive us to Nazareth House, where we were to stay. Fr. Beisley was graciousness and kindness itself. He drove the longest way

round to the town—which is 2 miles from the aerodrome—so that we could see the sights of Salisbury, and pointed out the different places of interest as we went along. My impression of Salisbury is that it is an extremely pretty town—though rather scattered. It has wide streets—planned originally to accommodate the ox-wagons when they came to town—lined with beautiful flowering trees. One kind was a relative of the South African Kaffirboom (Kaffir Tree) but far more elegant and stately. Unlike its S.African cousin whose bright red flowers appear in Spring before the leaves unfold, these flowers open after the leaves, and make a flashy red glow among the green foliage. They are in bloom now and a lovely sight they made as we drove along. Another street was lined with Cassia bushes, their bright yellow forming a pleasing contrast to the flaming red. The gardens were all bright with Poinsettia, Golden Shower and Bougainvillia. Father asked us where we would like to go, so we suggested the Post Office where we sent off some telegrams to allay the anxious fears of all who were following our flight in spirit. Then we came to the Cathedral where we alighted to make our fervent thanksgiving for our safe and pleasant journey. After a short thanksgiving we proceeded to Nazareth House, which is 4 miles out of town.

We received a royal welcome on our arrival at Nazareth House from the whole community of eight. They all had delightfully fresh bright Irish faces.

(The Sisters remained in Nazareth House until Monday, and enjoyed tours of Salisbury.....)



(Sunday) At 11.30 kind Fr Beisley again appeared with his indispensable car to take us to meet Mother Provincial and M.M. Suso who were to arrive at 12 o'clock. We had just barely arrived at the aerodrome when the 'plane came in – so quietly, it was a few minutes before we realised it was there. With great joy we saw Mother and her companion alight. Soon we had both in the car, and after a good dinner at Nazareth Mother was prevailed to go to bed for the rest of the day.

(Monday) At 2.30 we were again ready for the road, Fr Beisley allowing no one but himself to take us to the aerodrome. On this eighth time of traversing the road to the town I could not help but be struck by.....the number of bicycles we encountered, ridden chiefly by natives. We were forever dodging them and narrowly escaping collisions. It brought home to me very forcibly the comfort and superiority of the aeroplane. It simply sailed or rather flew majestically, entirely unconcerned about dodging traffic in swerving round corners or bumping over rough roads.

Monday 8th. Left Salisbury at 3.5pm – old time, as Rhodesia is too superior to keep with the Union! I felt quite a pang on leaving – people had been so kind to us and we had had such an enjoyable time. My memories of Salisbury will always be very happy and grateful ones. It is an extraordinarily fertile place, this fact being brought home in greater force when up in the air. Rich, luscious grass and cosmos in every field. This fertility continued all the way from Salisbury – so different to the environs of Bulawayo which seemed so much drier – their rains were late, I believe. This fertility is well evidenced by the numerous streams and rivers. It is no wonder it is a great cattle and maize country. The farming possibilities must be untold. It should have a most promising future.

As we took off from Salisbury another plane seemed to follow us and come very close. Our new passenger, a soldier belonging to the K.A.R., turned round excitedly and said: "This is my brother in law; he is seeing me off!" We were now five passengers. I was rather disappointed as I thought we would have the 'plane to ourselves, however our passenger was very quiet and unassuming.

4.25 This flight is being a real Geographic lesson to me, for I can now see clearly how valleys, gorges, and ports (to the uninitiated, the South African term for an opening in a ridge made by a river having worn its way through) are formed. All are in the process of formation on the plateau we have just left. The plain is thickly wooded and marshy; the Zambesi is getting nearer. Certainly it is the biggest stretch of flowing water I have yet seen. I find the atmosphere getting chilly, so have put on shawl; we are flying higher to avoid the clouds. We are flying right over the Great North Road which seems to be well made. Unfortunately a wave of cloud is obstructing my view – I am quite irritated as I want to get a close view of the Zambesi. D.G. the cloud is moving aside. We are just passing over the road bridge built where the river is narrowest. We are now in Northern Rhodesia! The river is exceedingly broad and dotted with numerous islands and sandbanks – they look as though they could be crocodile-infested. I



can just imagine some of them lying stretched flat on the sand like lifeless rocks ready to snap their cruel jaws upon some unsuspecting animal come to drink. The river is a beautiful expanse of water and stretches away into the distance like an enormous silver band. Another is flowing from the north to meet it. There is lowland area on the northern side as well, also very marshy. In other words the Zambesi lies on a vast lowveld area carved out of the highland region. A number of streams run down from an escarpment which is rising up into folds of mountains. The panorama is exceedingly beautiful. The rivers wind in and out of the mountains, while the land is covered with thick bush. We have just flown into a rain storm – the plane is swaying a bit. I am enchanted with the beauty of the scene; mountains upon mountains to the left. I can see the Zambesi shining and sparkling in the sunshine over the tops of them in the far distance to the left. Mountains also stretch away to the right. A long range spreads out northwards. It is a thrilling sight! The country is still very green, but is becoming flatter. We are flying fairly low – the type of tree beneath us is the Msasa, umbrella-shaped but not thorny and has fairly broad leaf. We are nearing Lusaka.

Lusaka 5pm We seemed to arrive very suddenly and came down quite quickly. They seem to have had a good deal of rain judging by the puddles all over the place. The Immigration Office took a long time over our passports – he must have thought we were Nazi Spies disguised as nuns! Mother Provincial kept very well, D.G., but was rather giddy on landing. The aerodrome is two miles from the town. The airport car conveyed us thither to the Lusaka Hotel where we got two single rooms and a double one.

Tuesday 9th Set off again at 7am. Dull heavy morning rained during the night and ground sodden. Mother Provincial called us at 20 to six – M.M. Consiglio and myself both being fast asleep. She did not sleep well herself – too much noise and hilarity late into the night in her vicinity and then roused in the early hours by an inconsiderate young cockrel's early matins! M.M. Susa still as well as ever. One virtue Lusaka has is good aerodrome with a pleasant rest-room. Mother Provincial was greatly amused by the way the plane taxied round to the front as though it were a motor-car. It looked like a great clumsy awkward duck waddling along.

In this plane – different to the one in which we flew to Salisbury- are dear little grey curtains to keep out the sun and the backs of the seats can be adjusted so that the backs can move far back and one can almost lie down. It is slightly chilly. We seem to be very high up.

We are about 10 mins. from Ndola. We have come down from the clouds. The tree growth is very much thicker, all umbrella-shaped – not thorny – forming a continuous canopy of dark foliage over which we are flying very low. Tree ferns are now in evidence. They hang so gracefully beside the upright Msasa which seem to be taller than those round about Salisbury. Tree ferns are becoming more numerous. Ground is swampy.

Ndola 8.30am Town much larger than I expected. I always imagine these places to consist of only a few houses, whereas Ndola must contain about 500 inhabitants. A large compound was noticeable from the air, little white-washed houses each surrounded by a small plot of ground, all orderly laid out in rows. The guest-room is very small, tea kept in flasks. The Pilot informed us we were flying 2,000 ft. above the land or 7,000 above sea level and our rate was 120 m.p.h. A second plane landed shortly after us and took off just before us – 9am- also bound for Kenya. Our passenger and Pilot are not as friendly as those on first trip to Salisbury. The country is extraordinarily flat and extremely swampy with streams in all directions and indeed country to the right of me seems to be flooded forming shallow lakes. The country is becoming more and more swampy, is one vast vast stretch of water. The Passenger has very kindly shown us the Pilot's map which he had been studying. From the map I learn that on the left of the Lake is a mission, St Joseph's, and on the right another, Santa Maria. Numerous channels and rivers flow out from the Lake, one being Chisili Channel and Chambesi River. The swamp is covered with forbidding green slime. Far away to the right in a south-westerly direction I see a blue stretch, I am not sure whether it is sky or water, but I think it must be water and water on a vast scale to make it so blue – for the same illusion is not seen in any other direction. I am inclined to think it is the Northern point of Lake Nyasa. I wish I could get a closer view of it!

Kasama. Arrived at 11.30. This is a very small place. Had tea and very nice sandwiches – all white bread since we left the Union. The rest house is a small thatched hut with a rustic seat around and a rustic table in the centre. As were refreshing ourselves in arrived another and larger plane. I think it is a Kitty Hawk, a rather ugly grey and yellow thing. Its passengers – twelve stalwart soldiers entered the hut and soon made the sandwiches disappear! Their plane is faster than ours and it left Lusaka an hour after us and they intended reaching Kenya that night. In half-an-hour's time we were off again.

5 to 1 The flat land has given place to grass-covered hilly country. Hundreds of small native kraals are to be seen, also European farms and a great deal of cultivation, the land is still extremely fertile. The most beautiful mountainous country has come into view with delightful valleys. No rocky heights, but gently rounded and covered with rich green grass and trees – many copper-coloured trees to be seen interspersed with the others. We are approaching Mbeya. The land is extensively cultivated, seemingly on more scientific lines not the usual crude circlets and ovals but huge rectangles. The crop seems to be rice. The town is rather small, but a great number of native huts. It is most enchantingly set at the foot of the mountains round which the clouds are circling. The richness of the grass takes my breath away.

Mbeya. Landed at 1.20 which is really 12.20 for the rest of East Africa keeps new time. We are now in Tanganyika Territory and again were handed immigration forms to be filled in and submitted at Nairobi. The atmosphere quite chilly and was blowy on landing, quite a difference to the heaviness of Lusaka. The hotel is up on the side of the hill – it is low and rambling and has a pretty garden with English flowers such as roses, violets, forget-me-nots. It is a cosy lounge and dining room with a huge log fire blazing in open fire-place. It seems very homely. After dinner we went for a walk. We asked a little native boy where the Catholic Church was. At once he seemed to understand and directed us up the hill. We followed him as he led the way hoping he would prove more reliable than our acquaintance at Lusaka. All the natives here speak Swahili – so did they at Lusaka- and any we met we greeted with “Jambo” all the Swahili any of us knew. The youngsters in addition to the return greeting always gave a deferential curtsy which was truly charming in these children of the African wilds. As we approached the golf course a group of urchins with golf sticks in their hands decided to attach themselves to us and walked triumphantly along with our guide.

Mbeya is truly a beautiful place. It is tucked away in the fold of grass-covered mountains-very much like Ireland, so my Irish companions declared. The road is very good and at times seemed to wind through a grove of trees. M.M. Suso and I were much interested in the flowers that grew along the roadside, the banks of which were covered with moss. We came across a number of lucky-bean trees and promptly we gathered a few which were strewn upon the ground. We passed the customs house fronted by neat lawns and poinsettia buses. Finally a little further on – across a most beautiful stream which gurgles noisily over stones and the steep banks of which ran riot with all kinds of creepers – we came to a village and a Church which proved to be a Catholic one this time. The Church – a very poor miserable one. The Blessed Sacrament was not reserved, but there were Stations on the wall, so we all took the opportunity of making the Way of the Cross. We strolled back to the hotel, had tea and sat quietly chatting on the step until supper time.

We retired early as we had another early start in the morning.

Wednesday 5 to 7 Left Mbeya. Mother Provincial again acted caller, but this time two sleepy heads were up. It was pitch dark when we went to the lounge for our coffee. Morning cloudy but beautifully fresh. We had an additional passenger – a lady who accompanied us in the airport car from the hotel. This is her first air-trip too, so she is all of a thrill as well! We are now seven in the plane – including the Pilot- its full capacity. Hills continue from Mbeya, a long range of mountains stretch to left and right, beautifully corrugated with woody ravines. The fields below are flooded, I have come to the conclusion they are rice fields. The Pilot said that the Bangwuela region could supply the whole of the British Empire with rice if cultivated – it was a dreary area. We have left the mountains behind; flat country stretches out before us, the trees are quite different to those we have left to the South, more low and bushlike, spread out untidily- this is the elephant country, so I am keeping an eye open to see some when not writing this.



The sun is rising – a rosy tint is flushing Eastern clouds. The country is extremely flat and marshy, many native rice fields noticeable. Elephants have been pointed out to me,

but I cannot see them. The Pilot is obligingly flying very low. At last rewarded! A fairly large herd, about ten – led by a huge bull – is dashing into the bush – a baby one bringing up the rear – the noise of the plane terrifies them – another two; one also a baby – are dashing away for dear life. A few minutes later – another great sight – a herd of zebra and eland are galloping in terror into the bush. We are all excitement trying to spot more game.

After a quarter of an hour's flying taller trees give place to low scraggly bush, but not more game to be seen. Mountains loom to left and right and far distant North, but we are still flying over the plain. The plane is flying higher now so excitement of seeing more game is over. There is a stretch of grassy meadowland and I seem to see animals grazing on it, but can't make out what kind.

5 to 9. The country is becoming slightly hilly, less green grass and more red sand. I can see the Great North Road winding below and can see a convoy of lorries travelling southwards. This then is Dodoma. We are landing.

Dodoma 10.35 A pleasant canteen and rest room here, the most comfortable and civilised of any we have yet been to. It receives many military visitors from the North. The one at the Bulawayo aerodrome was the most primitive. We had a tasty breakfast, preceded by a slice of paw-paw and lemon. Mother Provincial's fare was slight but she wisely prefers to be safe than sorry.

Here we left our lady passenger from Mbeya; she is to take a train on Friday to Dar-es-Salaam. We have learnt that our soldier passenger is a Canadian; is proceeding to Gil-Gil in Kenya. He has been on a month's leave to his wife in Southern Rhodesia. He has a baby son. He seems very lonely, poor fellow.

Some miles from Dodoma passed over a very mountainous region. This is the country that once belonged to the Germans and where much fighting took place during the last war. Dodoma and Koudoa Irangi –further North, are familiar names from tales told by my father who campaigned for two years in East Africa. We are flying rather high now, only bits of cotton wool of clouds are floating around. The country has regained its freshness and fertility.

11.25 We seem to be passing a thickly populated area. To the left lies the village of Arusha (pronounced Aroosha) while beneath are hundreds and thousands of neat native Kraals. There are also many large farms which seem to be European with good houses. A high mountain rises up sharply, its slopes thickly wooded. It is Mt. Meru 14,953 ft.



high. As the plane comes round it, its nature becomes evident. It is an extinct volcano, one side of the crater focusing us either been blown away by the force of volcanic action or worn away by weathering. Inside the crater a subsidiary cone arises with lava streams down its side looking as fresh as though of recent action, though of course it is thousands of years old. It is a most interesting features and the first real volcano I have seen. Up its Northern slopes one sees terraced cultivation, obviously the soil is very rich to attract such high climbing. At the foot of the peak are a few small lakes the water of which is a bright green. The sides of crater facing us and of subsidiary cone are devoid of vegetation, but the lower slopes of larger cone are thickly covered with trees.



The greater wonder lies to the right. A half an hour before we approach it Mt Kilimanjaro – 19,324 ft in height, looms up in the distance in all its majesty. Its crown is encircled by clouds, almost like a necklace, as though it were some awful divinity jealously guarding its secrets. The peak, however, mantled in snow, as though curious to know what is going on in the plain below peers above the clouds in cool and commanding dignity. The sun has caught its snowy crown and makes His Majesty glisten more inspiringly. That view is from the South side. From the North the cloud necklace is broken (we have flown three quarters round it) as though the clasp were loosened. But the snowy crown, as hoard as Father Neptune's, looks down on the plain more majestically and less mysteriously. The mountain god seems to be seated in mighty dignity on his exalted throne with right hand upraised – a smaller and lower peak – with sceptre held on high in the act of issuing some fearful command. As I look at him now in the receding distance the necklace seems to form a kind of halo behind him while smaller cloudlets in slow procession pass in humble obeisance at his feet. It is an awe-inspiring and thrilling sight.

The curious thing about the plain to the North of the mighty peak is that it is bare and arid, almost like a desert, except for some stunted and scattered trees. From the perpendicular shadows cast by the umbrella shaped trees on the red earth I would conclude the time to be noon – on consulting my watch it is 12.15. Across this arid waste winds a white road tortuously. What a journey that must be by car!

12.30 I think we have just passed into Kenya for a curious line running from East to West seems to be a boundary line. There is some kind of mine to the left. All roads appear to lead to it – except the Great Road, which keeps its Northwards course unconcernedly. I have never seen anything like the aridness of the country over which we are flying – it even beats the Karroo – not a blade of grass or shrub to be discerned anywhere – just a hardbaked dark-brownish surface as far as the eye can see. (I have since learnt that this is the Nyiri Desert.)

The Mountain God on Kilimanjaro has donned the blue mantle of mystery and is preparing, as we fly further from him, to wrap himself up entirely in the cold mists of oblivion – as if to say- “You have seen enough of me to-day.” He does seem though, at some time in the far distant past when roused to a mighty wrath, to have cast a fearful spell on this blighted countryside.

I can see Nairobi in the distance, we are approaching it very quickly. I can hardly believe we are nearing our journey's end. I am really sorry it is over; it has been so pleasant. I have almost become attached to the 'plane and I feel I could go flying in it for ever!

Nairobi We landed at 12.30 old time. The plane was exceedingly bumpy while landing. The Pilot apologised and said it was due again to the heat waves rising up. He also said that we had had an exceptionally good flight. Our hearts are filled with deep gratitude that our journey has terminated so safely and pleasantly – gratitude to the goodness of our dear Lord in hearing the multitude of

prayers that have been ascending on High from all our Convents and friends in Ireland and Africa. He wants us here in East Africa and He has made it possible to get here – in ease and comfort. Perhaps it is just the strengthening consolation before the trials come! Pessimist! I can hear rising up from all directions. No, it is not pessimism, but just that experience has proved that Providence usually works along those lines! Time will tell! But you who are reading will never know!

We were to have quite an adventure, however, before arriving at our destination, for our Native driver did not know where our new Day School in Valley Road was situated and moreover could not speak English! We entrusted ourselves blindly to his care for a while, when Mother Provincial realised he was taking us to the Old Convent which had been evacuated and was now occupied. As we came to the Avenue, Mother stopped him and said: “No, no; Valley Road!” the fellow stared uncomprehendingly and rattled off some Swahili to which Mother again explained in English that we wanted to go to Valley Road. For a few minutes this unintelligible dialogue continued to the uncontrollable merriment of the rest of the party, when the fellow was at length prevailed upon to return the four miles to town. Arrived there we tried vainly to get him to stop to enquire of some European our way to Valley Road. We felt utterly helpless! Just think of our predicament – driving round a strange town with a native driver who couldn’t understand us and didn’t know where to take us! At long last after having seemingly to us (who were feverishly anxious to have the car stopped) to have traversed all the streets in the town he had the intelligence himself to pull up and make some enquiries. His information was evidently correct for we eventually came to Valley Road and at length saw the welcome sign board: “Loreto Convent Day School.” Up the drive we drove – 2.30 – to receive a hearty welcome from nuns and children.

Thus ends our interesting and in the annals of Loreto, perhaps epoch-making journey from S. Africa to Kenya.

Áine Mc Hugh
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