

Air Mail Magazine

# My Flight Down Africa

## 10 - 13 February 1936

by

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With acknowledgements to 'The Cape Argus', 'Cape Times' and  
Messrs. C. C. Wakefield & Co., Ltd.

I landed at Cape Town as fresh as a daisy despite a series of adventures during my record flight from England, unequally by anything in my twenty-one years' flying experience. At least three times during the past three days I felt that all was up with me, and that so far from breaking the record I should break my neck. Over the Mediterranean, in the Soudan, and again in Rhodesia, I went through adventures which I do not want to endure again. In these days of safe and easy flying I scarcely feel inclined to tell the full story of them for fear that my friends might think I was "shooting a line of tripe."

And I realised then that I could not have succeeded but for the marvellous support of my machine and engine, considering the really terrible weather conditions that I encountered at various stages of the flight.

Horriying weather on Saturday evening, just about twenty-four hours before I reached Cape Town, made me certain that my flight was prematurely ended. Here came the greatest adventure of the trip.

Darkness was descending, I was trying to creep into Salisbury, disappointed that I was not then, as I had hoped, reaching Cape Town. A barricade of tropical storms barred my way to the town. I changed course and tried to fly around the downpours that I saw ahead of me and to cut into Salisbury from the back.

But the storm caught me. It was an astonishing experience. My tanks, which hold 111 gallons when full, were at least two-thirds empty and so the machine was light. My Gipsy Six Engine had every chance of showing the fine climbing power it could give, but even at full throttle I could not maintain height.

I was literally beaten down to the ground by the force of the cloud-burst. No one who does not know Rhodesia can realise the astonishing weight of water that came hammering down on me.

And this was where astonishing good luck for at least the second time of the flight made possible the achievement of a record, to say nothing of letting me get away with it.

When the machine could be held in the air no longer an open space in the bush appeared below me. It seemed as though it had opened up at the crucial second for my sake. At full throttle still, the machine landed in the open space undamaged.

**I spent the night on a ranch.**

At dawn I attempted to take off again for Salisbury, but owing to the high altitude – almost 5,000 feet – this was a matter of the greatest difficulty. Although at the outside my petrol was only one-third of the maximum, the machine was not air-borne by the time it reached the end of the stretch of smooth ground, which was about four hundred yards in length.

Then it struck the shrubs and anthills. At least twenty times the bus smacked down on anthills, until I suspected that my undercarriage was pulverised. As I flew on to Salisbury I thought again of my bad luck on my previous flight to the Cape, when an anthill at Palapye Road broke the undercarriage of the machine I was flying then.

Eventually I just staggered over the tree tops with a couple of feet to spare. When I landed at Salisbury, at about six o'clock in the morning, I found that the only damage was a split fairing. I “tanked” up again and got off by 8 a.m. The weather was still, to use the only possible word, “lousy”.

These tropical deluges – I had struck the worst of the Rhodesian rains – barred my way again to Bulawayo. I could not get through, so at the end I altered course and tried to circle round the side of the storm. I must have gone at least fifty miles out of my way, and at one time I felt that I was irrevocably lost over uninhabited country.

Again I found my petrol running lower than I liked, a trouble that has upset my schedule several times during these three tough days. I set a course for Mafeking and went down there, a fact which does not seem to have been reported anywhere and illustrates the lack of communication in Africa, particularly on a Sunday.

Nobody seemed to see me arrive expect an Air Force pilot from whom luckily I was able to borrow twelve gallons of petrol. This enabled me to carry on to Kimberley.

I landed there at four o'clock in the afternoon, left after twenty five minutes and had an uneventful flight through decent weather to Cape Town.

The desperate experience in Rhodesia which I recounted followed another alarming adventure near Wadi Haifa. I had left Cairo just after midnight (on Friday morning) for Khartoum. The full moon was up and gave me just enough light to fly by.

But before dawn I grew worried. I detected an overwhelming smell of petrol in the cabin where, in order to bring my range up to about 1,650 miles an extra tank containing 75 gallons was fitted. Next I found the floor was flooded with petrol.

Owing to the extreme danger of fire an immediate landing was imperative. But it was dark and I could not see the country below me. As soon as the first light made the ground visible I attempted to land. It was desolate, volcanic, humpbacked country.

Imagine an apparently endless series of hilly undulations of lava only three hundred yards long and you will know what the prospect was below. If I overshot the summit of one of these slopes there was no telling what might happen.

The machine was landed up the slope of a hump, and fortunately she stopped right on top. I was considerably relieved, because I knew full well that had my machine been damaged it would never have been found owing to the unusual course I had risked taking in order to clip a few miles off the route. I was at least fifty miles from the nearest hut or from water.

I am certain that my machine cast the first shade ever known in this desert region.