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AIRLIFT ON ROOF OF THE WORLD

Over Kashmir's mighty peaks

AIRMEN of half-a-dozen nationalities are maintaining an airlift into one of the world's most inaccessible corners, in the mountains of Kashmir.

They are the pilots of the Gilgit Airlift—two Britons, two Australians, a New Zealander, a Pole, and one or two others. Day after day they fly over the tops of mountains that soar more than 20,000 feet, carrying much-needed supplies for the two remote villages of Gilgit and Skardu.

On the wings of these men's Dakotas rests the wellbeing of a mountain-dwelling people in a largely unexplored region about the size of Western Europe.

"The wartime airlift over the Hump between Burma and China was child's play compared with flying on the Gilgit Airlift," says Captain Peter J. Massey, formerly of the R.A.F. and now one of the two British pilots.

There is no such thing on this airlift as "flying on a beam." The pilots just "feel" their way along the tortuous valleys.

"The weather can change from 'fine' to 'impossible' in a few moments," says Captain Massey. "Time and again blizzards have forced me to forsake the valleys and take a short cut over ridges rising to 20,000 feet and more. Once I had to go up to 22,000 feet—without oxygen!"

VIOLENT DRAUGHTS

On one occasion Captain Massey had to scrape the ice from inside the windshield with a razor blade so that he could see his way along the valley route to Gilgit.

On another flight the up-draughts and down-draughts were so violent that three 2000-lb. drums of steel wire broke loose and threatened to crash through the side of the aircraft. But Captain Massey landed safely, and took off for the return trip to Peshawar, his base.

The makeshift airstrips at Gilgit and Skardu lack even so much as fuel tanks and meteorological equipment.

The Gilgit Airlift has been in operation since India and Pakistan agreed on the Cease Fire Line through Kashmir.

In the past Gilgit and Skardu, key points on a network of tracks serving an area of many thousand square miles, received their supplies by mule and yak caravan along tracks from India, the Soviet Union, and China. Two of the tracks were closed some time ago for political reasons, and the Cease Fire Line cut across the track from India.

This severing of links with the outside world was serious for the people of Gilgit and Skardu, and for those in the area for which these two settlements are distribution-points. The only way to get supplies to them was by air.

DIFFICULT LANDINGS

The airlift opened with the arrival of construction engineers at Gilgit and Skardu. Their job was far from easy. For the only areas flat enough to make an airstrip were two narrow pieces about 900 yards long. Both of these strips of land were hemmed in with mountains which made it impossible for a pilot who failed to make a landing to "come round again." The men of the airlift could not afford to miss their first attempt in putting down.

At Skardu, which is 7000 feet up, the only flat ground was the cemetery, and at first the local people refused to allow it to be disturbed. However, after some argument they agreed that the airstrip could be laid over the cemetery, and in due course the first plane arrived.

The inhabitants crowded around it in wonder, and murmured incredulously when a jeep was man-handled onto the runway. Asked

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*Hail,
Smiling
Spring!*

A radiant young lady with sheaves of golden daffodils gathered from a field in Cornwall



ENGLISH JOHN OF MANITOBA

This is the remarkable story of English John, the recognised leader of the fur-trappers in Manitoba.

He has lived with the Indians as one of their own since he was a boy, although there is not a drop of Indian blood in his bush-hardened body. He speaks their language better than many of them do themselves. He thinks like an Indian and in conversation makes constant references to the "white man."

His real name is John Henry

Thomas, but he is so well known locally that the nearest bank in his part of Manitoba will cash cheques made out to English John.

He was born somewhere in Cornwall about 64 years ago. His father was a doctor, but he died when John was very young, and at the age of six the lad ran away from home because he did not get along with his stepfather.

He ended up in one of Dr. Barnardo's Homes and later was sent to Canada, where his first job was dish-washing in Winnipeg. One day he wandered off and slept all winter in haylofts or straw-stacks. In the spring a Saulteaux Indian took pity on the boy and adopted him.

That kindly Indian went to "the happy hunting grounds" some years ago, but English John still traps on the same line, as he has been doing for most of the 50 years or so since he first went into the interior country with the Indians.

STICKY JOB

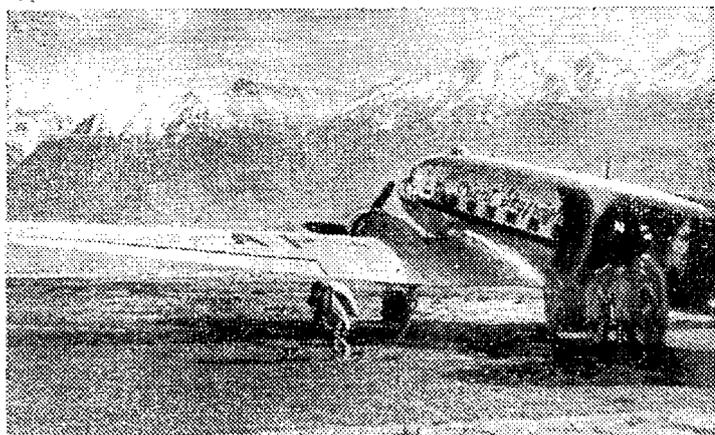
A leading sweet-maker found that one of the longest operations in the manufacture of a certain type of toffee was cutting the 50-foot long and three-foot wide slabs into the small sizes suitable for packaging.

This work all had to be done by hand, although the rest of the toffee-making process was mechanical.

The solution he hit upon was to install power-driven saws to cut up the toffee—the same type of saws, in fact, that are used for cutting metals in making aircraft.

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A transport plane at Skardu airstrip amid towering peaks