Margaret Beatrice Page

The Royal Empire Society

Essay Competition

Class B

Name: David B Laughlin

Date of Birth: [redacted]

Address: Helmer St, Larnaca, New Zealand.

School: Britahi Boys High School

Larnaca

New Zealand

Round the British Commonwealth by air: an imaginary journey.

Zoom - the engines roared, and we dropped back in our seats, as the Tasman Empire Airways Flying Boat slid forward. Slowly the Harbour receded, a panorama of Auckland came into view: morning sunlight on a patchwork of red and green roofs, gardens, trees, Waitemata Harbour and miniature ships on sparkling blue. The city passed behind, farmland and bushland hills disappeared; the coast passed and faded from view. Before us lay only the rolling waves of the Tasman Sea.
We were really off on our great adventure—round the Empire by air and thrilled as I thought of it. There was so much to see, and to remember, and to hope for. Around us floated a few fleecy clouds. Below lay the broad ocean Tsman had sailed on his voyage of discovery, lapped by the wind—withers and tradewinds. As we followed, emigrant ships struggling on in their slow voyages—steamers, troopships—a line. The last seemed a pageant passing before my eyes. It would be so all the way, Sydney, Malaya, India. So missing I did not feel the journey long. I remembered how Drake's voyage had been three years of hardship, danger and disease, even now liners could take eighty days to sail round the world. And at last. In the horizon the smoke of a steamer rose. Below the Wellington was arriving from Wellington. Round Sydney took shape widespread around its wonderful harbour, spanned by the bridge. Tall buildings lined its network of streets, filled with traffic. Crowds thronged the beaches. The Flying Boat dropped to water, and rather buckled, we stepped out into the bustle of the Empire's largest southern city.

At 10.30 on Saturday night our plane, a Constellation Speedbird, slid out of the airport. There, below lay the twinkling lights of the great city. For
miles and miles terrestrial stars bade us farewell. Then they faded out behind, and a dim landscape in which the moon shed a pale light, stretched beneath. The Blue Mountains spread ahead, and passed, the moonlit faces contrasting with the dark hollows. The great Australian grasslands came into view. Miles of flat and rolling country eerie in the moonlight, too pale to see after they changed to daylight. Then everything faded away, and I was wrapped in slumber. Visions of explorers crossing the desert arose in my brain. I dreamt of them searching for water, and finding none. When I woke we were in Darwin, the capital of Northern Australia. In a field to my right a shuttlecock twinkling reminded me the tennis court outside.

In less than two hours we were again in the air en route to Singapore, passing over the Dutch East Indies, till at a little that they were the centre of so much turmoil.

Now Singapore came into full view, the great cosmopolitan, meeting place for all nations, Indians, Chinese, Burmese, and Malays. The naval base lay on the north of the island, beyond that Malaya. The sticky heat almost overwhelmed me. That a diplomat had to wait three days for the plane to Colombo, however the interesting sights and the pineapple, consolled me. Unfortunately the time was not opportune for visiting rubber plantation, tin mines. Those Communitists were rather formidable, I thought. Holes of rice—well the Chinese were welcome to it!
At 7.30 Thursday morning our plane flew over the Straits of Malacca, where a heavy rainfall met us. Thence we flew north through, now above dense clouds, over the Indian Ocean until near Colombo.

At 2.45 P.M. we landed into the Colombo Airport. Immediately we were thronged by crowds — souvenir-sellers, but shocking them off we set out to see the city, a strange medley of natives and European buildings. A most delightful ride in the cool evening through palm avenues, bamboo groves and paddy fields, left one with unforgettable memories of the "Garden of the East."

Next morning, the naval base and high, covered, hills passed from view. Soon India, another new Dominion, lay below us. I turned from watching rugged hills and thickly populated palkees, to pondering about the future of this great country. A land of great possibilities, of problems; land of contrasts, great wealth and abject poverty, of great ability and deepest ignorance.

Bohdiya at last. Below stretched a panorama of the second city of India. I wondered at the bustle of the streets and shops, crowded with people. Here was the centre of the great cotton industry, a rival to that of Lancashire.

Our afternoon flight brought us to Karachi, capital of Pakistan, India's Muslim Sister state. Ships lay at anchor, loading wheat and cotton. Bullock carts crept along crowded thoroughfares. Here as at Bombay were the strange sights and smells of the East; beggars, sheris and pharruns.
After an uneasy night I was glad to set off again at 4.30 a.m. for Cairo. Breakfasting at Aswan and watching advance as Arabs stumped down hats into the holds of their ships, away from the river the country lay pitted and desert. It was relief at last to see the Suez Canal and Cairo. The domes of the city flashed in the sun and shadows lay black in the narrow streets.

On Monday midday I left Cairo in a York Steamship. Dinner was far too late as we could be. Hours after hour, by story and stables, a cloudless sky, and intense heat. Only the Nile, lined with palm trees, gave relief to the eye. Evening brought us to Khartoum, capital of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. As we landed, we scanned the city: there was the Gordon College, and there a train crossing the great bridge. Next morning we left the desert. More fertile country opened out into the great Sudanese regions stretching far and wide, broken only here and there by high bush-clad mountains. Evening again and darkness. An ancient Ford rattled along, overflowing with natives, it seemed, a woman carrying a water-jar on her head, steered weightily across the streets: an English child playing nearby raced to meet the train. Six-thirty saw us off to Johannesburg. Eagerly waiting do we cross the same reserve: we see little but at last a herd of giraffes very small, so far below move across a clearing, scarcely I lay back and closed my eyes. The day was only
long. At last Johannesburg came into view. Here we were at last. The largest city and capital of the Transvaal spread before us. Modern buildings and sky-scrapers lined the streets so different from most other African cities.

On Saturday morning in our SAN shipyard we bade farewell to the gold centre of Johannesburg, and savannah, grasslands, again spread out beneath us, while flying along the thought of the African peoples I had seen. I considered the future of the hundred and fifty million natives who need guidance and education. A settlement—Kisilma, right in the heart of Africa’s grasslands. Desert—again—four hours to Khartoum, how they dragged on, and how tired I felt. Khartoum behind us, desert—beneath, the night slowly deepened. Wearily I sank back asleep. Dreams of desert warfare disturbed my brain. Visions of tanks, armoured lorries and long-range guns, appeared before me. Suddenly I awoke. We were at Tripoli, the last stopping place before London.

As the morning advanced, I could only see the Mediterranean below. Here and there an island. Far to the right lay Malta, the George Cross Island. Then the sea passed behind, while beneath the morning sun bathed France in golden splendour. Parks spread below. The wind swept across the ile de la cite. There lay the Channel, the most of England, which has so often saved her from invasion, the white cliffs of
Dover, the orchards of Kent. There London in
the heart of the Empire, shone in the
afternoon sun – the Thames, the Tower Bridge.
We stepped out, scarcely able to believe our
eyes.

One month later I was again in the
air, on route to Canada. Eagerly I watched
the farewell London and cozy English countryside.
After Glasgow at 10-15 pm heart fully I chose
the last of Britain tightly feeding. How
so we were out on the Atlantic, the
night dark put Barry. Strange, shine
to me, the Great Bear, the Polar Star.

During my month at Home, I had visited
mountain, mount, mountain, vale and landscape.
and cities; the countryside much gentler than
our rugged New Zealand scenery, and yet their
city life much sterile than ours. It seemed as
if all history came alive in the heart of the
Empire. I had been an ancient Briton, watching
the Roman land, a Magpie at Hastings, had
fought the Spaniards with Drake, and scanned
the channel for sight of Napoleon. The spirit
of those days, was surely still alive in England.
Only a few years ago she had stood alone
against the enemy, refusing defeat, and
she had triumphed. And how against heavy
odds, she is fighting hard to
decover from
the effects of the war she won.

Land to The rugged coast of
Canada, the great St. Lawrence estuary,
speared beneath us iander. Posedly,
over firmly dear be came into view, and made
Montreal loomed below and the plane
touched down. Here we were in the larg.
Canadian City, one thousand miles up the St Lawrence. But our stay must be short, for next morning Montreal disappeared behind, and we passed out over the Great Canadian Shield. There, far beneath, hills, valleys, forest and clearings came and went; far to the south glittered Lake Superior. Beneath spread Winnipeg and the Lake. Soon the type of country changed; flat prairies stretched far to the west. Here and there a clump of woodland or the silver thread of a stream, here the great wheatlands of Canada. The country rose, the landscape became more rugged, hills and mountains towered around. High peaks appeared on the right, glittering snow, spreading down their slopes. Valleys dark in the shadows, were clothed with conifers. Clouds gathered around; headstones dashed the skyline. The sun reappeared; below lay the low lands of British Columbia. Vancouver appeared confidently far ahead. I could see Vancouver Island. Our great Trans Canadian Journey was at an end. We were glad to stretch our legs before flying to San Francisco.

Twenty-two hours to cock and we seemed almost home. I watched the coast of America fading from my heels, the rolling Pacific below. Fluffy, feathery clouds arched up, now glimpses of blue water beneath. Suddenly at last, we watched the beautiful beaches, the surf running up.
the shores. Out to see were surf riders racing over the breakers. Again the island Pacific stretched below Canton Island appeared ahead, administered jointly by Britain and America. At 6.30 on Tuesday morning we set off again for Fiji, in the South Pacific, the dateline a day lost. We saw land widening before us, the only British Crown Colony in the Pacific. On Ouvard we were warmly welcomed by the frizzy-haired natives. Near by could be seen a native village, the flat-topped huts walls of the houses overhung with thatched grass roofs.

One thousand miles to Auckland how quickly the time passed! Three Kings Island Chitt for to my right. Napier Cape Neadley the sun disappeared. Watched by Waitangi, far to west, to the west Great Barrier Island. Home again. The city of Auckland rose before me. Glittering harbours in the morning sun. The plane circled the city and landed gently into the runway of the Whanganui Airport.

Home at last. I had seen the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the African grasslands, the Blue Mediterranean, the patchwork quilt of English Farmlands, the Rockies of Canada, the world stretches of Pacific Ocean, here and there the steamers’ puff of smoke. I remember the variety of peoples and customs so different in their ways of life, and yet all the Empire bound together by loyalty to one democratic ideal, truly a Commonwealth of Nations.
Books Consulted

National Geographics
Geographic Magazine
Encyclopedia
Geography Book
Winged Journey
Lasseter's Last Ride

A B.O.A.C. Timetable
A Pacific Time Table