



BEERY'S CAPITAL ADVENTURE!

BAGHDAD TO TEHRAN BY NINAK, 1923



MAIN PICTURE Powered by its 400 h.p. Liberty engine, a No 8 Sqn D.H.9A – affectionately referred to as the “Ninak” or “Ninack” by those who operated the type – threads its way through the rugged Zagros mountains in north-eastern Iraq (now Kurdistan) in June 1924. The unit moved to Hinaidi, near Baghdad, in December 1921, remaining there until it moved to Khormaksar in Aden in early 1927.

VIC FLINTHAM COLLECTION

In 1923 the Commanding Officer of the RAF's No 8 Sqn, **Gp Capt GEOFFREY H. “BEERY” BOWMAN**, undertook a navigationally challenging flight between Baghdad and Tehran, linking the capitals of Iraq and Iran respectively by air for the first time, using a pair of the squadron's stalwart D.H.9A “Ninaks”. And then did the whole thing again a few days later. He recalled the episode in 1951, as presented here with additional information from **ANDREW THOMAS**

THE FIRST DIRECT flight between the capital cities of any two countries, however short the distance, must be a milestone in the aviation history of those countries, and therefore worthy of record. The fact that the first direct flight between Baghdad in Iraq and Tehran in Iran was undertaken by British personnel and aircraft is an additional reason. As the first flight between these two capitals, it is perhaps unique in that it was not undertaken with that as its main object; it was a normal duty flight for a specific purpose and was in itself entirely devoid of incident. The reasons for the flight, the navigational problems and the ground organisation that had to be laid on, were so much a part of the flight that they should all be described, in order that the conditions under which one worked in those days should be fully appreciated; they may also be of some historic interest as they describe the difficulties to be overcome, the type of work performed and its attendant recompenses.

AN UNUSUAL REQUEST

In 1923 I was commanding No 8 Sqn RAF in Iraq. The squadron was equipped with D.H.9As and stationed at Hinaidi, the Baghdad aerodrome. To enable longer flights to be undertaken than was possible for the standard D.H.9As, some machines were fitted with 30 Imp gal (136lit) gravity tanks under the inner bay of the upper port wing. As No 8 Sqn was the only D.H.9A squadron in Iraq to be fitted with these extra tanks, all flights above the normal range of the D.H.9A came to us.

About the middle of July I was sent for by Sir John Salmond, Air Officer Commanding in central Iraq, who asked if I could get to Tehran. The distance, from the small-scale maps available, appeared to be about 450 miles (725km). On replying “Yes”, I was told that I could not start until a landing ground had been prepared at Tehran and aviation petrol for my return journey had been sent up from railhead to Tehran by RAF three-ton lorries. I was to bring back to Baghdad Sir Percy Loraine, the British Minister Plenipotentiary to Iran, based in Tehran. Two machines would be taken, the second to carry wireless.

After receiving these instructions I went to the Map Room at Air HQ. East of the Iraq frontier the only maps that were produced were of a scale of one over an infinite number of noughts, showing practically no detail whatsoever. On complaining to the map officer I was told that those were the only maps available, and that the fact that no detail was shown should not matter as he understood that no detail existed on the ground east of Hamadan anyway. I realised that normal navigational methods alone would not get me to Tehran.

From the existing maps I saw that Hamadan was almost on