

CORRESPONDENCE

AVIATION PROSPECTS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

To the Editors of the AERONAUTICAL JOURNAL

SIRS,—I am sorry that through press of work I was unable to reply sooner to the query *re* aerial navigation in Northern Nigeria. Nothing in this direction has been done in Northern Nigeria so far.

As regards the suitability of the climate the period of heavy rains is from June to September. This period is preceded and followed by about three weeks during which severe tornadoes are likely to arrive with very little warning. Thus, say, from May to October extended flights would be inadvisable. From December to March is the Harmattan, a steady north-easterly wind accompanied by a more or less dense haze. It is the most agreeable time of the year and I doubt if the haze would interfere with the otherwise apparently favourable conditions. The temperature varies from 60°—115° in the shade, and during the Harmattan the air is very dry.

The surface of the country is varied. It is on the whole gently sloping, with occasional abrupt hills rarely exceeding 400 feet in height above the surrounding country. At low water, March to June, along the River Niger, which is about one mile broad, the numerous sandbanks might afford suitable starting places for practice flights along the river, if loose dry sand is considered a suitable surface. The wind generally blows up or down. The main banks are densely wooded. There would be some difficulty in getting to the machine unless one arranged to start from the main land. A fall in the water would possess the additional element of excitement furnished by the presence of numerous crocodiles.

The country round Baro is covered with fairly dense bush except when under cultivation, and even the large areas under cultivation are dotted closely with Shea trees spared for their valuable fruit. The preparation of the ground for cultivation generally leaves it in hummocks like ant heaps about a foot high and three or four feet apart—not a suitable surface I should say for starting from. The whole country is covered with grass or crops up to 10 feet in height from July to December, when the grass is burnt down and the harvest commences. Of course there are some cleared and fairly level places which might be selected beforehand for possible descents, and further north the country is more open and the grass shorter.

I should say that when further developed, an aeroplane would be a most valuable method of progression to minimise the existing handicap to efficient supervision over vast areas provided at present with the most rudimentary means of communication, which limit one's progress to some 15 to 20 miles a day at the most, except on the newly constructed railway.

There remains the difficulty of kit (rarely less than 10 carrier loads = 5 cwt., for even a short journey) and native servants, interpreter, etc.—all indispensable when camping away from headquarters. But the necessity for camping in the bush would be lessened and special arrangements might be made when travelling between European centres.

It must be remembered that except on the railway there are absolutely no facilities for the repair of machines, or for replenishing the supply of petrol and stores, and that the hangars would be of the most primitive materials and workmanship except at the more important centres. Moreover, the corrosive and rotting action of the climate, not to mention the depredations of white ants and other pests, would necessitate special vigilance in the care of the machines.

H. O. MANCE,
Captain, R.E.

MEMORIAL TO P. S. PILCHER

SIRS,—It has been proposed to erect a pillar as a memorial to the late Percy Pilcher, a pioneer of aviation. It would, perhaps, be correct to say *the* pioneer of aviation, for it was Pilcher who thought out and put into practice the project of gliding through the air with rigid wings, and he had the intention of propelling with a motor the machine he had made.

Pilcher was the first Englishman to be killed in the cause of aviation, his fatal fall in Stanford Park, Market Harborough, taking place on September 30, 1899.

Many who knew him and appreciated his self-devotion and zeal in promoting aviation may like to contribute to the proposed memorial near the spot where he fell.

Subscriptions should be sent to the Pilcher Memorial Fund, Messrs. Barelay and Co. (Gosling Branch), 19, Fleet Street, E.C.

BRAYE
FRANK HEDGES BUTLER

[The late P. S. Pilcher, who carried on the work begun by Lilienthal, was a member of the Aeronautical Society, and at the time of his death a Member of the Council.—EDS.]