RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

# So Disdained

Nevil Shute

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# About the Book

When Peter Moran picks up a man on the roadside while driving through a bitter rainy night on the South Downs, he embarks upon an adventure that will lead him into treasonous international plots, flying adventures and tests of both his bravery and his loyalty.

# About the Author

Nevil Shute Norway was born on 17 January 1899 in Ealing, London. After attending the Dragon School and Shrewsbury School, he studied Engineering Science at Balliol College, Oxford. He worked as an aeronautical engineer and published his first novel, *Marazan,* in 1926. In 1931 he married Frances Mary Heaton and they went on to have two daughters. During the Second World War he joined the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve where he worked on developing secret weapons. After the war he continued to write and settled in Australia where he lived until his death on 12 January 1960. His most celebrated novels include *Pied Piper* (1942), *No Highway* (1948), *A Town Like Alice* (1950) and *On the Beach* (1957).

OTHER WORKS BY NEVIL SHUTE

Novels

*Marazan*
*Lonely Road*
*Ruined City*
*What Happened to the Corbetts*
*An Old Captivity*
*Landfall*
*Pied Piper*
*Pastoral*
*Most Secret*
*The Chequer Board*
*No Highway*
*A Town Like Alice*
*Round the Bend*
*The Far Country*
*In the Wet*
*Requiem for a Wren*
*Beyond the Black Stump*
*On the Beach*
*The Rainbow and the Rose*
*Trustee from the Toolroom*
*Stephen Morris and Pilotage*

Autobiography

*Slide Rule*

# So Disdained

Nevil Shute

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

# AUTHOR’S NOTE

This was the second of my books to be published, twenty-three years ago. It took me nearly three years to write, because I was working as an engineer on the construction of an airship and I wrote only in the evenings in the intervals of more important technical work. It was written through from start to finish twice, and some of it three times.

Clearly, I was still obsessed with standard subjects as a source of drama—spying, detection, and murder, so seldom encountered by real people in real life. Perhaps I was beginning to break loose from these constraints: the reader must judge that for himself.

In revising the book for re-issue I have altered half a dozen outmoded pieces of slang, but I have made no other changes. The book achieved publication in the United States under the somewhat uninspiring title *The Mysterious Aviator*.

NEVIL SHUTE

1951

# PREFACE

The greater part of this book is based upon my written statement to the Foreign Secretary, dated April 6th, 1927. Reference has also been made to the official notes of my evidence before the Italian Secret Police given through the British Vice-Consul at San Remo on March 26th, 1927, and to the deposition sworn before the Italian civil authorities by Captain Philip Stenning, D.S.O., M.C., upon the same day. I am indebted to the Foreign Office for permission to re-draft the less confidential portions of these documents, and to Lord Arner for permission to detail certain personal events without which this account would hardly be complete.

These are the dry bones of my story, and it may well be urged that the time has not yet come when they can be brought to life unbiased. But memory is short; in this book—and before my recollections have grown dim—with the great assistance of my wife, I have tried to set down something of the history of that great pilot and most involuntary adventurer who came to me in the night, stayed with me for five days, and went.

PETER L. MORAN

THE OLD HALL
UNDER
SUSSEX

*And then none shall be unto them so odious and disdained as the traitours . . . who have solde their countrie to a straunger and forsaken their faith and obedience contrarie to nature or religion; and contrarie to that humane and generall honour not onely of Christians but of heathen and irreligious nations, who have always sustained what labour soever and embraced even death itself for their countrie, prince, and commonwealth.*

*—Sir Walter Raleigh*

# CHAPTER ONE

AS I HAVE said, this matter started in the night. I was agent to Lord Arner at that time; steward and agent, for most of the family affairs passed through my hands, and I ran the outdoor business of the house itself. I lived by myself in the Steward's House at Under Hall, about a couple of miles from the little town of Under, in West Sussex. I live there still.

Very late, on the night of which I am writing, I was driving home over the South Downs, after a dinner in Winchester. I forget for the moment what that dinner was about; I do not think it can have been connected with my old school; because I was driving home in a very bad temper, and so I think it must have been the Corn Association. They tell me that I am reactionary. Very likely they are right, but they should give a man a better dinner than that before they tell him so.

In any case, all that is beside the point. I started home to drive the forty odd miles from Winchester to Under at about half-past eleven that night. It was March; a fine night with a pack of loose cloud in front of the moon that gradually turned to rain. I was in a dinner-jacket, but the hood of my old Morris is pretty watertight. I could take the rain phlegmatically, and so I set the wiper going, jammed my foot down a bit harder, and wished I was in bed with a fire in my bedroom instead of bucketing along at forty miles an hour over the black country roads.

Now, on that run from Winchester to Under, you pass over give-and-take sort of country for most of the way, but about ten miles from Under the road gets up on to the high ground by Leventer, and runs along the top for a couple of miles.

That two miles runs with a fairly good surface straight over the unfenced down. You can let a car out there in the daytime, but at night you have to be careful, because of the cattle.

It was about half-past twelve when I came swinging up over that bit of down that night, doing about forty and keeping a sharp look-out for sheep. The night was as black as the pit. By that time the rain was coming down pretty hard. There was no traffic on the road at that time of night; I sat there sucking my dead pipe and thinking no evil, watched the rain beat against the windscreen, watching the wiper flick it off again, and thanked my lucky stars that I wasn't out in it.

About half-way along that stretch of down I passed a man on the road.

He was walking along in the direction of Under. I didn't see very much of him as I passed, because the rain blurred the windscreen except just where the wiper caught it, and I was going at a fair pace. He seemed to be a tallish well-set-up fellow in a leather coat, but without a hat. The water was fairly streaming and glistening off him in my headlights. I drove past. Then it struck me that it was a pretty rotten trick to drive by and leave a man out on the road in a night like that. I jammed both feet hard down, and we stopped with a squeal about twenty yards beyond him.

I stuck my pipe in my pocket, switched on the dashboard light, leaned over, and opened the door.

"Want a lift into Under?" I called.

On a night like that I should have expected to hear his footsteps squelching along at the side of the road. When I didn't, I turned and looked out of the little window at the back. He seemed to have stopped dead. I fancied that I could see him dimly in the rain, standing by the side of the road in the red light of my tail lamp.

The rain came beating steadily against the car, with little patterings. To put it frankly, I thought it was our local idiot.

In a job like mine one gets to know the look of those chaps and the way they wander about the country in the worst weather, often with no hat on. We have a good few naturals about my part of the world, and they don’t come to much harm. Their people seem to like to have them about the place, and they’re good with animals.

In any case, it was a rotten night for an idiot to be out. It didn’t much matter to me what time I got to bed now, and I had a fancy to collect this chap and see him safely home. His people live at a farm about five miles off that road, more or less on the way to Under.

I thought that he was frightened at the sudden stopping of the car, and so I slid along the seat and stuck my head out of the door to reassure him.

“All right, Ben,” I said. They call him Ben. “I’m Mr. Moran from Under Hall. I’ll take you back home in the car if you’ll come with me. It’s a rotten wet night for walking. That’s right. Stay where you are, and I’ll bring the car back to you. Then you can come in out of the wet.”

I slipped the gear into reverse and ran the car back along the road to him. He was still standing motionless by the grass; I could see him in the gleam of the tail lamp through the little window. I stopped the car when he was opposite the door.

“Come on in,” I said. “It’s all wet out there. You know me—Mr. Moran.”

He moved at last, and stooped towards the door. “It’s very good of you,” he said. “It’s not much of a night for walking.”

I knew he wasn’t an idiot as soon as I heard his voice, of course. And while I was wondering why he had held back from accepting a lift upon a night like that, he stuck his head in under the hood and followed it with his body.

He settled himself into his seat and turned to face me. “I’m going as far as Under,” he said quietly. “If you could put me down at the station I’d be very grateful.”

He had a lean, tanned face, which he was wiping with a khaki handkerchief; his hair was straight and black, and fell down wetly over his forehead towards his eyes. In the road the rain dripped monotonously from the car in little liquid notes that mingled with the purring of the engine. I stared at him for a minute. He returned my stare unmoved.

"My name is Moran," I said at last. "Aren't you Maurice Lenden? We met in the Flying Corps. In Ninety-two Squadron, in 1917. About June or July. I remember you quite well now." I paused, and eyed him curiously. "It's funny how one runs across people."

He avoided my eyes. "You must be mixing me up with someone else," he said uncertainly. "My name is James."

From the way he spoke I knew that he was lying. But apart from that, I never forget a face. If I wasn't pretty good that way I shouldn't have been agent to Lord Arner. I knew as certainly as I was sitting there that he was Lenden. I remembered that I had met him since the war at a reunion dinner—in 1922 or '23. I remembered that somebody had told me that he was still flying, as a civilian aeroplane pilot. And there was something else that I had heard about him in gossip with some old Flying Corps men in Town, quite recently—divorce, or something of the sort. At the moment I couldn't bring that to mind.

I wrinkled my brows and glanced at him again, and for the first time I noticed his clothes. It was probably the clothes which brought him to my mind so readily at first. Damn it, the man was dressed for flying. He had no hat, but he wore a long, heavy leather coat with pockets at the knee. There was a map sticking out of one of these, all sodden with the rain. He had altered very little; in those clothes he might have come walking into the Mess, in 1917, when I used to play that game myself. Below the coat he was wearing sheepskin thigh-boots reaching high above the knee, with the fur inside.

I was so positive that I smiled. “James or Lenden,” I said, “I’m damn glad to see you again. Been flying?”

I suppose I was a bit riled at his refusal to know me. I was watching him as I spoke, and I saw his lips tighten irritably. But all he said was:

“I should be very grateful for a lift into Under, if you’re going that way.”

The rain streamed down into the headlights, and the wiper flicked uneasily upon the windscreen. “You won’t get a train from Under tonight,” I said, “and you’ll have your work cut out to wake them at the pub. It’s a rotten hole. If you’re Lenden, you’d better come along back with me. There’s a spare room in my place that you can have. Dare say I can fix you up with a pair of pyjamas, too.”

He was about to say something, but hesitated. And then: “It’s very good of you,” he muttered. “But I’d rather go on.”

I sat there staring at him in perplexity. He was hugging a little square, black case in the crook of his arm, but at the moment it didn’t strike me what that was. I couldn’t understand why he had given me a false name. And then it struck me that he’d made a damn poor show of it if he wanted to get away unnoticed, and that I could have done it very much better myself. But that was in keeping with the man as I remembered him. He was a simple soul, and quite incapable of any sustained deception.

“Look here,” I said at last. “Purely as a matter of general interest—where have you come from? You’ve been flying, haven’t you? I see you’re in flying kit.”

He didn’t answer for a minute, but then: “I had a forced landing,” he said.

“Here?”

He jerked his head towards the down. “Just over there.”

I wrinkled my brows. “How long ago?”

“About an hour. Hour and a half perhaps. Just before the rain came.”

I leaned forward on the wheel and stared at him. I couldn't make out for the moment whether to believe a word of what he said. There was something wrong about him, and I didn't know what it was. He wasn't drunk. I thought it might be drugs. He didn't sound natural. His talk about a forced landing seemed to me to be all nonsense. I've been a pilot myself, and I know. When one is in sole charge of a machine worth several thousand pounds, and one has just put it down very suddenly and unexpectedly and hard—one doesn't just go off and leave it. Especially on a night like that.

The rain drummed steadily upon the fabric of the hood.

"You are Lenden, aren't you?" I inquired.

He laughed shortly, and a little self-consciously. "Yes, I'm Lenden," he said. "Just my infernal luck, running up against a man like you. I've been a regular Jonah lately." And he laughed again.

"Thanks," I said dryly.

He stirred uneasily in his seat. "Let's get on," he muttered.

"Right you are," I said, and slipped in the gear. I didn't want to go ferreting about in his affairs if he wanted to keep them to himself. "You weren't speaking the truth, by any chance, when you said you'd had a forced landing?"

That stung him up a bit.

"You'll know in the morning, I suppose," he replied. "They'll find the machine."

I slipped it out again. "Damn it," I said. "Do you mean you've got an aeroplane out there?"

He nodded.

"Did you crash her?"

"No, she's all right, but for the oil pressure. It was that that brought me down."

I could make nothing of his way of treating the affair.

"What have you done with her?" I asked. "There's a barn about half a mile down the hill over there. Did you get her

under the lee of that?”

He looked embarrassed. “I just left her where she was.”

I gazed at him blankly, hardly able to believe my ears. It was the sort of thing a novice might have said—not a pilot of his experience. After all, one expects a man to do his best for the machine.

“Do you mean she isn’t pegged down, or anything?”

He shook his head. “I just left her.”

I leaned forward and switched off the engine of the car. “But damn it all,” I said, “she’ll blow away!”

He didn’t stir.

“Let her,” he said.

I knew then that it must be drugs.

“We can’t do that,” I said irritably. “She’ll be blowing about all over the country, on a night like this.” It riled me that I should have to get out of the car into the rain in my dinner-jacket to go and tie up this man’s aeroplane, but there seemed to be nothing for it. I reached out and took an electric torch from the dashboard pocket, and nudged him.

“Come on,” I said. “Get out. We’re going to peg her down. Get on with it.”

He didn’t move. I paused for a moment.

He seemed to make something of an effort. “Look here, Moran,” he said. “Let’s get going to Under. That machine’s all right where she is.”

“Leaving her loose?” I asked.

He nodded. “That’s right. Leave her loose. Look here, I don’t want to bother about her. Just take me along to Under and drop me at the station.”

Well, drugs are the devil.

“Can’t do that, old boy,” I said cheerfully. “She’s on our land—Lord Arner’s land. It might cost us a couple of pounds if she blew through a hedge, leaving her loose like that. More, perhaps.”

I shoved him towards the door. “Come on. Let’s go and have a look at her.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “If you like.”

I had a couple of garden forks and a hank of cord in the back of the car, as luck would have it, that I’d got in Winchester for the house. There was a strap in the dickey, too. I took the lot out, wrapped my raincoat closely round me, swore a little, and set out with Lenden across the down.

It was infernally dark. The lights of the car behind us gave us a direction and prevented us from wandering in circles on the slopes. Lenden didn’t know where he had left the machine, but thought that he had walked for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour before it hit the road. We went stumbling on into the darkness for a bit, flashing my torch in every direction.

Presently I stopped. It was pretty hopeless to go on groping for her that way on a night like that.

“Did you land into wind?” I asked.

He nodded. “It was pure guesswork, of course. The wind must have been a bit under the starboard wing, because she went down to port as I touched. Still, I got her up again, so she can’t have been far wrong.”

“Right,” said I. “Now, did you land uphill or down?”

He considered for a moment. “Uphill, by the feel of it,” he said vaguely. “She pulled up pretty quickly. Yes, I’m sure it was uphill. Not much of a slope, though.”

“You had lights to land by?”

“Wing-tip flares. They burnt out as soon as I was on the ground, so I couldn’t see much.” He hesitated. “I say, let’s leave the ruddy thing.”

I disregarded that, and stood thinking about it for a minute. If he had landed uphill and into wind it localised the machine pretty well, especially as it was only ten minutes’ walk from the road. I bore round to the right, and began to traverse the only uphill slope that faced into the wind.

We found her at the top of the down, where the slope was gentle. I heard her before we got the light on her, a series of drumming crashes as the loose rudder flicked over from

hard-a-port to hard-a-starboard, and then to port again. I switched the light in that direction, and there she was, facing more or less into wind with the controls slamming free. He hadn't even troubled to drop the belt around the stick.

"Damn fine way to leave a machine," I muttered. If he heard, Lenden did not reply.

That was a very big aeroplane. I hadn't flown myself since 1917, when I went down with a bullet through my chest to spend the remainder of the war in Germany. I thought that I had forgotten all about that game. But now I am inclined to regard it as one of those things that no man ever really forgets; an old pilot will always linger a little over the photographs of aeroplanes on the back page of the *Daily Mail*. That is the only way in which I can account for the fact that I knew that machine by sight. The French had been doing a number of record-breaking long-distance flights upon the type; I stood there in the rain for a minute playing the torch upon the wings and fuselage, and wondered what on earth Lenden was doing with a French high-speed bomber.

"Where d'you get the Breguet from, Lenden?" I asked.

He hesitated for a moment. "I've been doing a job on her," he said vaguely.

There was no point in standing there in the rain questioning a man who didn't want to talk. The first thing was to stop those controls slamming about; I made him get up into the cockpit and tighten the belt around the stick. He obeyed me quietly. Then we set about pegging her down for the night.

In a quarter of an hour it was done. We'd buried the garden forks beneath each wing-tip and stamped the sods down over them, lashing the wing loosely to them with the cord. That was the best that we could do in the circumstances. It was a pretty rotten job when it was done,

but it only had to hold till daylight. I didn't think it was going to blow hard.

I went all round before we left to have a final look that everything was shipshape. The wind went sighing through the wires in the darkness, and the rain beat and drummed most desolately upon the fabric of the wings. Flashing my light under the fuselage I saw a sort of blunt snout four or five inches in diameter sticking out down below the clean lines of the body. I stooped curiously, and ran my fingers over the bottom of it. There was a lens.

"All right," said Lenden from the darkness behind me. "It's a camera."

I straightened up and thought of the black packet that he had left in the car. But I had had enough of asking questions.

"Let's get along back to Under," I said, and turned towards the lights of the car. "Unless you're staying here?"

He shook his head, and we went stumbling through the rain over the down towards the car. I was thoroughly wet by the time we got there, and not in the best of tempers. I'd done my best to help the man for the sake of old times, but I couldn't help feeling a bit hurt at the way that he had received the assistance I had given him. And it was a funny business, too. I didn't see what he was doing with a Breguet XIX in England, and I didn't see what had brought him to make a forced landing with it in the middle of the night. And it was very evident that he didn't want to tell me.

We reached the car in silence, and bundled in out of the wet. I paused for a moment before pressing the starter.

"You'd better come along back with me to my place," I suggested.

He seemed embarrassed at that. "It's very good of you," he said diffidently. "But I'd rather go straight to the station. I'm . . . in a hurry."

"You won't do much good at the station at this time of night," I remarked. "There isn't a train till twenty past

seven.”

I considered for a moment, and added: “You’d better come along with me and sleep on the sofa if you want to catch that train. There’ll be a fire to sleep by, which is more than you’ll find at the station.” I eyed him thoughtfully. “There’s nobody else in the house. I’m a bachelor.” I don’t quite know why I added that.

He hesitated again, and gave in. “All right,” he said at last. “I’d like to very much.”

We were about five miles from Under Hall. I lived there, in the Steward’s House, just across the stable-yard from the mansion. It had been the most convenient arrangement in every way. Arner himself was over seventy years old, and too busy a man to occupy himself with the management of his estate; his only son was in Persia.

It was no great shakes as a job, but—it suited me. The screw wasn’t much to boast about, but I had a small income of my own that was getting gradually larger with judicious nursing, and the family treated me as an equal. It’s the sort of job that I’m cut out for. I was articled to a solicitor some years before the war, though I was country-bred. I tried it again for a year after the Armistice, and then I gave it up. I should have made a rotten lawyer.

I drove into the stable-yard at about a quarter-past two that night, left the car in the coach-house, and walked across to my own place with Lenden. The Steward’s House at Under is built into the grey stone wall that separates the gardens from the stable-yard, and the one big living-room has rather a pleasant outlook on the right side of the wall. There are three little bedrooms and a kitchen. It suited me to live there.

They had banked up the fire for me, and left a cold meal on the table with a jug of beer standing in the grate. There was a cold pie, I remember, and a potato salad. I threw off my coat, kicked the fire into a blaze, gave Lenden the use of

my room for a wash, and settled down with him for a late supper.

I didn't eat much at that time in the morning, but Lenden seemed hungry and made quite a heavy meal. I lit my pipe and sat there lazily with my back to the fire, waiting and smoking till he had finished. Between the mouthfuls he talked in a desultory manner about the war. The Squadron was re-equipped late in 1917, after I was shot down. With Bristol Fighters. I had heard that. Later they got moved to a place near Abbeville. He got shot through the thigh soon after that, and his observer was killed in the same fight, and he crashed in our support trenches. He became an instructor at Stamford when he came out of hospital. And afterwards at Netheravon. Yes, he supposed he'd been luckier than most.

"Damn sight better off than if you'd been in Germany," I said shortly. "You didn't stay on at all after the war?" I paused. "Someone told me that Standish had gone back," I said, and watched the smoke curl into the darkness above the lamp. "Short-service commission, or something. I forget who it was."

He nodded. "He did. But I came straight out at Armistice." He glanced at me darkly across the table. "I was married. Got married in August, 1918, an' I wanted to be out of it. Make a home for my girl, an' all that sort of thing." He grinned without laughing. "Like hell."

I nodded absently.

Lenden had finished eating. "Went joy-riding with a fellow from Twenty-one Squadron that summer," he said. "Early summer of 1919, just after the war. We had an Avro seaplane." He mused over it for a minute. "My God, we'd got a lot to learn in those days. We took our wives with us, for one thing. . . ."

He leaned his head upon his hands and began to tell me about this joy-riding concern. They spent practically the whole of their savings and gratuity upon this seaplane, and

they started in with it to tour the South Coast towns, giving joy-rides at a guinea a head. In the prevailing optimism of those days they thought that they could make it pay.

Perhaps, if they had had a land machine they might have got away with it, in spite of their total lack of business experience. Lenden, with the knowledge that he had gained in later years, had no illusions on that point. But he himself put down their failure to the difficulty of operating the machine from the beach of a crowded seaside resort, and he talked for a long time about that.

“Handling the machine on to the beach. That’s what did us in—properly. Damn it, it took the hell of a time. Days when there was a sea breeze I’d come in to land over the town, sideslipping down over the houses and the promenade. We were always getting pulled up for flying too low over the promenade. They didn’t think about our having a living to get out of their ruddy town.”

He stared morosely at the table-cloth. “The sea breeze was hell. I’d land a couple of hundred yards out, and then turn to taxi in to the beach. Then the fun began, and we’d come taxi-ing in to the beach with a twenty-mile wind behind, blowing us straight on to the sand. We hit the beach like that once or twice when we were new to the game, an’ stove in a float each time. When we got sick of patching floats I used to try and swing her round into the wind again at the last moment, to check her way. Often as not I’d get outside the stretch of shore the Council had roped off for us in doing that, and go driving in among the bathers. That meant stopping the prop for fear of hitting them, and blowing ashore on to the beach. And there was always a row about it afterwards.

“We never got more than three ten-minute joy-rides done in the hour,” he said. “And the engine running the whole time. It meant that we had to make the charge thirty shillings a flight.”

And so it came to an end. They began operations in May at Brighton; by July they were in difficulties, and in September they gave up. They were lucky in that they were able to sell the machine, and in that way they realised sufficient of their capital to pay off most of the bills and to leave them with about fifty pounds each in hand.

"I sent my wife back to her people for a bit," said Lenden. "That was the first time."

He relapsed into silence, and sat there brooding over the table. And when he spoke again, I was suddenly sorry for the man. "It's ruddy good fun having to do that," he said quietly. "Especially when it's the first time."

He went on to tell me that he had been out of a job then for about two months, hanging about the aerodromes and living on what he could pick up. He bought and sold one or two old cars at a profit; in those days there was ready money to be made that way. And so he eked out his little means until he got a job at Hounslow with A.T. and T.

I raised my head inquiringly.

"Aircraft Transport and Travel," he replied. "On the Paris route. We used to fly Nines and Sixteens from Hounslow to Le Bourget, and get through as best you could. Later on we moved to Croydon."

I nodded. "I crossed that way once. They gave us paper bags to be sick into."

"Dare say. It was all right while the fine weather lasted, but in the winter . . . it was rotten. Rotten. No ground organisation to help you—no wireless or weather reports in those days. Days when it was too thick to see the trees beyond the aerodrome we used to ring up the harbour-master at Folkestone and get a weather report from him. But we didn't do that much.

"And people used to pay to come with us," he said slowly. "On days like that."

He rested his chin upon one hand and stared across the white table into the shadows of the room. "I've taken a

Sixteen off from Hounslow with a full load of passengers when the clouds were right down to the ground," he said, "and flown all the way to the coast without ever getting more than two hundred feet up. Time and again. Jerking her nose up into a zoom when you came to a tree or a church, and letting her down again the other side so's you could see the ground again. At over a hundred miles an hour. Crossing the Channel like that—ten minutes in a cold sweat, praying to God that your compass was right, and your engine would stick it out, and you'd see the cliffs the other side before you hit. And then, at the end of it all, to have to land in a field half-way between the coast and Le Bourget because it was getting too thick for safety." He paused. "It was wicked," he said.

They used to carry the much advertised Air Mails. That meant that the machines had to fly whether there were passengers to be carried or not. It was left to the discretion of the pilot whether or not the flight should be cancelled in bad weather; the pilots were dead keen and went on flying in the most impossible conditions.

"Sanderson got killed that way," he said. "At Douinville. An' all he had in the machine was a couple of picture postcards from trippers in Paris, sent to their families in England as a curiosity. That was the Air Mail. No passengers or anything—just the Mail." He thought for a little. "Now that was a funny thing," he said quietly. "Sanderson hit a tree on top of a little cliff, and he died about a week later. An' all the time in the hospital he was explaining to the nurse how he'd put his machine in through the roof of the Coliseum and what a pity it was, because there was a damn good show going on at the time and he'd gone and spoilt it all. And presently he died.

"We got a bit more careful after that," he said.

For Lenden that had been a good job. He told me that he had been making about nine hundred a year while it lasted.

He took a little flat in Croydon and lived there with his wife for twelve months or so.

"That was a fine time," he said. "The best I've ever had. We'd got plenty of money for the first time since we were married. An' Mollie liked the flat all right, and she made it simply great. We thought we was going on for ever, an' we were beginning to make plans to get into a house with a bit of garden where we could have fruit trees and things. And we were going to have a pack o' kids—two or three of them, as soon as we got settled."

There was silence in the room for a minute. "You can't run a show like that without a subsidy," he said at last. "Or you couldn't in those days, with the equipment we had. It lasted on into the winter of 1920. Then Aircraft Transport and Travel—it was a damn good name, that—they packed up. And that was the end of that."

He was staring into the shadows at the far end of the room, and speaking in a very quiet voice. I had heard something of that early failure in the heroic period of aviation, but this was the first time that I had heard a personal account.

This time he was longer out of a job. The flat in Croydon was broken up and his wife went back again to her people, while Lenden went wandering around the south of England in his search for flying work. The time had gone by when motor-cars could be bought and sold at a profit by those outside the trade, and I gathered that by the end of four months his wife's parents were financing him. In the end he found a job again in his own line of business, as pilot for an aerial survey to be made in Honduras.

"D'you ever meet Sam Robertson?" he inquired. "He was an observer in the war, and he got this contract for a survey for the Development Trust. Raked round in the city and got it all off his own bat. And he got me in on it to do the flying for him.