

"SILVER WINGS TO EUROPE"

On the 24th of May I was all ready to go to Europe, all packed, reservations in hand, passport in order, and it looked like everything was in readiness. One question was in doubt for this was the day the railroad strike was on, and whether or not the government would seize all plane transportation was a particularly disturbing factor. But, I was ready and any other elements were beyond my control, so I was not exactly troubled.

Through the courtesy of Lois McNear, a South Bend Tribune correspondent, the Press was there to take my picture, since I was the first Gold Star Mother from this area to go to Europe on the mission to see a grave of a soldier. After my picture and of my travel companion, Mrs. Mildred Rockwell of Pennsylvania, was taken, they took the entire group--why, I never found out. Earlier, the T.W.A. had distributed corsages of pink carnations to all the ladies that were leaving--I believe there were seven ladies. I had a lovely corsage my husband had given me of white roses and also one presented to me by my Aunt, Uncle, and cousins of Hammond and it was a beautiful one of red roses. I later had it put in the refrigerator on the plane, and it was in excellent shape when I reached Paris, where I put it on. But I am getting ahead of my story, so back again to the Chicago airport.

There were 31 passengers and six crew members; pilot, co-pilot, navigator, radio operator, steward, and hostess aboard. I found a seat on the aisle side, and my seat companion was I. J. Casaday, a Chicago banker traveling to Paris. The plane was a D.C. 4 of the Skymaster type, and had been used very successfully during the war and after as transport planes.

About one hour after we had said our "goodbyes" the plane roared its motors, slowly moved out to the end of the runway, stood posed like a giant bird, (orders were given to tighten our seat belts) and it moved down the runway, gaining speed every moment. Here's where your heart races with excitement, and this is the moment that I closed my eyes, silently uttering a prayer each and every time we took off or landed. My prayer was simple in form, usually this "Lord, God, put your hand upon the Pilots, guide his hand, Put your Hand under the plane and lift it higher, higher, higher. Be with this crew, these passengers. Amen!" When we had gained our altitude, you could feel the ship lift, lift, and we chewed gum frantically to relieve the head pressure, the gum had been passed out as we left the field.

We now had the thrill of looking out over greater Chicago, it was night of course, and one can't imagine what a sight it is to look down on the millions of twinkling lights. We thought that we saw my husband's car lights blink on and off several times as we sailed low over the parking lots telling us farewell and good flying!

We all settled down to being comfortable and getting acquainted and it wasn't long before we began to know who was who and where some were going. There was a lady going to South Africa to take care of a sick sister, two florists going to Luxembourg to see their aged parents, a St. Louis grocerman going to Italy to see his parents, a young Greek going back to Greece to be married, a banker, several salesmen, one young Czechoslovakian girl returning to her homeland after being stranded here for four years during the war, Mrs. Rockwell, and I, who were the first Gold Star mothers to go to Europe to see where our sons fought and died and were buried.

Soon it was lunch time, served around midnight over Montreal or Mobbe Tronroto. We had coffee, several kinds of sandwiches, fruit, and candy bars. Then we slept--if you could. I couldn't because my sinuses decided to make a miserable night for me, and I just about had one of my worst attacks. The hostess was kind, putting cold towels on my head which is my best remedy.

Pretty soon, the first rays of dawn shone, and if you ever saw or experienced a beautiful sight, it is sun rise while flying into the sun. It is a near heavenly feeling I am sure. By now we were getting close to Newfoundland and Gander Field, and we could see land now and then through the clouds. Soon our plane began losing altitude, we'd been flying at 6,000 and 7,000 feet. You can tell you are coming down because your ears give a quick pain now and then, and the pilot works his brakes because there is a peculiar whining sound. Someone told us that was the brakes.

When someone said "There's the field", we all began to try to spot it, and usually couldn't because the plane circles coming in lower. Then the order "Tighten your belts" comes and you sit tense and again I believe all of us prayed as I did, and I am sure the rest were no less conscious of the need of "Higher" help than I. You hold your breath, the wheels touch the ground ever so lightly, and we all chorused, "We're Down!"

Gander, Newfoundland is a desolate looking place and as we stepped off it was plenty chilly. A bus was standing by to take us to the place we were to have breakfast at. It was maybe eight or ten blocks away. We had a warm breakfast, sent telegrams, letters, and cards, and rested while the plane refueled for the long hop over the Atlantic.

Mrs. Rockwell found a piano and entertained beautifully. Everyone enjoyed her playing as she was a professional player. I think it gave all of us a tremendous lift for the next twelve hours were to be long ones.

We left Gander Field around 11:00 A.M. out over the ocean we flew, into the clouds, and we stayed above them most of the way over, with an occasional peek through. Then we saw the ripply ocean. It looked very calm, but still we could see little white flakes all over. These must of been white caps, and I think if we had been down there, they would have looked very high.

Lunch was served two or three times, but not a heavy meal going over. Near midnight, twelve or thirteen hours later, the dear isle of Ireland, where some 125 years ago my ancestors come from, was spotted. I had an almost belonging feeling too. Our expert pilot made a graceful landing on Shanon Field and the T.W.A. officer of Shanon came aboard. He was a slight, dark haired Irish lad about 20 years old. He made the most charming speech in his pleasing dialect. He said, "You now are in Ireland! Your stop will be one hour and 45 minutes. Please keep your seats till the Captain leaves the plane." Then the Captain came striding down the aisle with a resounding foot step that sounded like "Thumper The Rabbit". Time and time again I noticed when the crew members of planes walked it sounded like that and you really sit up and take notice when one of those tall, straight, handsome officers walk in or through a room.

We left the plane most of us saying "So this is Ireland", but as it was dark, we hastened to the dining room where we were served a hot meal. We had meat, potatoes, gravy, a vegetable, and tea. No bread or butter, but the beautiful dining room made up for that. It was elegant. The furniture was upholstered in red plush. The drapes were red wool, and the carpet a deeper

red. Every table had fine white linen table cloths and beautiful silverware. I noted, too, that the tables all had flowers on them. They seemed to know that flowers lended the most welcoming hospitality to their guests. The service was the best and all the waiters spoke perfect English with a delightful brogue.

After our supper we wandered around the lounge which was about 75 feet long with davenport, low tables, and even basinet for the babies who happened to be traveling. It was very chilly and unpleasant. The air seemed to have a damp feeling as this airport is very near the ocean and there were no cheering fires to warm by either.

About 3 A.M. they announced the plane would be grounded for the rest of the night and they would take us to a hotel as soon as they could find one that would take 31 people. They called Lemerich, and several places. Finally they found a hotel in Tipperary, about 20 miles from Shannon. So they loaded us on a motor bus with our little Irish T.W.A. officer in charge, and we rattled off down the narrow road, on the left side too, for a number of miles and we all began to believe the song, "Its a Long Way to Tipperary" was true, and we started to sing it. Our officer and bus driver smiled their approval and by this time I was getting real excited about my flight and just being in Ireland must of had some thing to do with it, for, as I said before, some 125 years ago my grandmother and grandfather had come from this Little Emerald Isle, and maybe it was a little of "granny" that made me feel like that.

Finally we arrived in Tipperary, and were greeted at the door of the hotel, which looked like a quaint old stone house, by a motherly Irish woman. She showed us into a small library where there was a fire burning in the fireplace. Then they began to sort us out, those that would share rooms and those that were alone. Of course Mrs. Rockwell and I shared a large room with two beds with immense feather mattresses on them and very comfy wool blankets. It didn't take us long to prepare for bed for it was so damp and chilly and we were glad to crawl in those feather beds.

Next morning we were awakened by the kind Irish lady and told that breakfast was being served in the dining room down stairs. This was Sunday morning May 26 and first thing we did was to look out the window and to see the hills of Ireland just as green as all the poets and song writers say they are too.

The dining room was very old fashioned, fire place, high mantels, and stone floors. We had eggs for breakfast, tea and toast. Then we were loaded in a bus for our trip back to the air port. As we passed out to the bus, small children gathered around all saying "Penny, Mister"? These children were pathetic looking, ragged, barefooted on this cold frosty morning. At first I didn't understand them and I stopped to listen. When our officer becoming embarassed said to me, "Don't pay any attention to them. It's such a pity, there are so many poor children here." By that time I and the rest of the passengers were digging down for all the pennies we had. The children were delighted and scampered away.

As our bus pulled away, small groups of people were watching, as if they don't too often see Americans.

This was our chance to see a bit of Ireland by day, a chance we hadn't expected either, and guests of the T.W.A. all expenses paid by them as we still were their charges, and had tickets - to Paris. On the way back, as we speeded towards Shannon, (on the left side of the road), I mention this left

handed side driving because it annoyed us all so. We saw many people dressed in their best, usually black, going to church. The women wore tam shaped hats and the fashions were not just to our notion of fashions, but rather on the old fashioned order. They rode in nearly every kind of a vehicle, horse drawn, oxen drawn, and bicycles--single and those built for two. I don't believe I saw any driving cars and the people we passed looked at us in wonder, so I am of the opinion that not too many buses were even seen on the country roads.

Back at the airport we soon were put aboard, counted as usual, and we took off for Paris. We skirted the edges of England or South Wales and out over the Channel crossing at the widest point. The trip began to get rough and as we came closer to Paris it was quite bouncy, and I didn't like it but "old travelers" said I needn't worry as this was mild to what it could be so the old phrase "it could be worse" eased my mind.

Paris came in view and we all stretched our necks to peek out of the little round windows. We had passed over hedge grove country side where every field is laid out in methodical order and it gives one the idea of patch quilt from the air view.

Paris is a large city either to fly over it or travel through it by car, I found. We circled Effiel tower and points of interest were cited by the ones better acquainted with the land mark to ones of lesser knowledge. Orley field is about ten or fifteen miles outside of Paris and hundreds of Army planes stood on the field. We came lower and lower and our plane hit the runway lightly and majestically rolled to a stop and at last we were at Rainbow's End, Paris!