ARCTIC EMPIRES . .

air bases in Iceland and Greenland, and its position overlooking the sea route to Murmansk, key to the Russian Arctic.

Spitzbergen's tundra, permanently frozen to a depth of 1,300 feet, is ideal for the construction of airfields. In winter its fjords offer landing strips for ski-planes, and in summer they would prove ideal for seaplane and flying-boat bases. In addition, they are deep enough to accommodate ships up to the size of destroyers.

When we steamed into Advent Bay, harbour to the Norwegian coal mining community of Longyear, we appeared to have reached the ultimate in desolation, for the little mining community was barely visible against mountains shoulder-high in ice-fields.

But the desolation was even more marked at Green Harbour (a harbour in name only), further up the coast towards the Ice Barrier. The only signs of civilisation were those of past failures in the utilisation of these islands—an old whaling station; the lonely grave of a sailor; a collection of Arctic equipment that originally belonged to a polar expedition; the wreck of a sealing vessel with flanks torn by the grinding action of winter ice floes; and the wreck of a meteorological station.

King's Bay confirms the conviction that Man's hold on the Arctic is uncertain.

This riven inlet was the starting point for the early race to reach the North Pole by air, beginning with the crazy notion of Andrée to balloon across the Pole (1887). I found on the flat, frozen tundra the great iron framework of the hangar erected for the Ellsworth-Amundsen flight across "The Great Ice" from Spitzbergen to Alaska. Amundsen used King's Bay for his polar flight of 1925; and it was the base for Admiral Richard Byrd's Arctic adventure, and for the ill-fated Nobile expedition. Littering the edge of the Bay are dozens of petrol tins and food crates used by the expedition that tried to reach Nobile's crashed airship 200 miles across the ice from Spitzbergen.

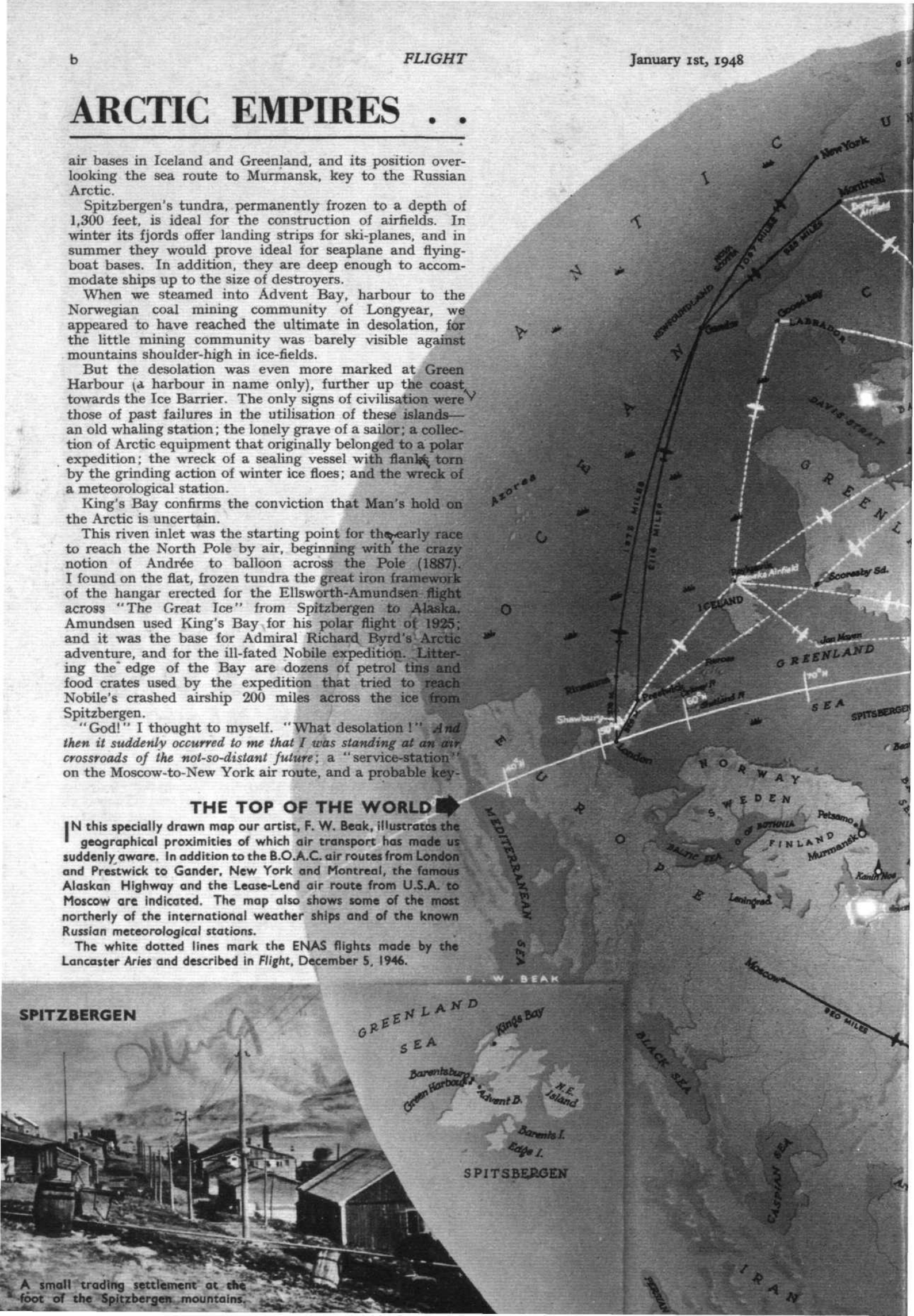
"God!" I thought to myself. "What desolation!" *And then it suddenly occurred to me that I was standing at an air crossroads of the not-so-distant future*; a "service-station" on the Moscow-to-New York air route, and a probable key-

THE TOP OF THE WORLD

IN this specially drawn map our artist, F. W. Beak, illustrates the geographical proximities of which air transport has made us suddenly aware. In addition to the B.O.A.C. air routes from London and Prestwick to Gander, New York and Montreal, the famous Alaskan Highway and the Lease-Lend air route from U.S.A. to Moscow are indicated. The map also shows some of the most northerly of the international weather ships and of the known Russian meteorological stations.

The white dotted lines mark the ENAS flights made by the Lancaster *Aries* and described in *Flight*, December 5, 1946.

F. W. BEAK



A small trading settlement at the foot of the Spitzbergen mountains.