

AIR TRANSPORT

SERVING THE NEW GUINEA GOLDFIELDS

THERE is no other air service in the world of such vital necessity to the districts served, or one which transports freight daily in such huge quantities."

This opinion has been expressed by authorities who have studied the work of the air lines which serve the goldfields in New Guinea, and the facts to hand show that the praise is well deserved.

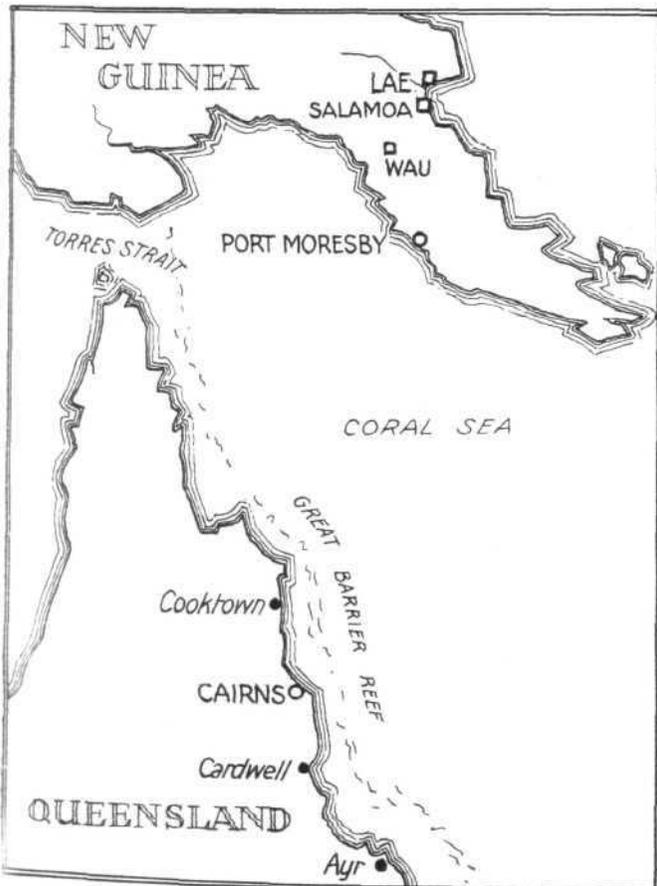
The gold mines, of which the foremost is worked by the mining company known as Guinea Gold (No Liability), are situated near Edie Creek in New Guinea. The only seaport which can serve the goldfields is at Salamao, 70 miles away. The position is made clear by the maps which accompany this article. The track which connects Salamao and Edie Creek is a very rough track. It goes through dense tropical jungle, climbs up and down precipitous ravines, and crosses swamps and rivers. Sometimes there are primitive bamboo bridges across the rivers, but sometimes the porters have to wade.

The fields are in constant need of supplies, both food and other necessities for the miners, and machinery and plant for the works. Four years ago these goods had to be brought up from the coast on the heads of native porters. The Government laid it down that the legal load for a porter must not exceed 50 lb. including his own rations. The return journey took 14 days, for the march from the port to the fields with the loads took eight days, and the return took six days. So the rations for the double trip weighed 20 lb., leaving 30 lb. of goods for the miners. But this 30 lb. did not always arrive intact. Pilfering accounted for a certain amount. Damage by water further reduced the amount, for sometimes the stuff would be spoilt by rain and sometimes loads would be dropped into rivers or swamps, to the detriment of perishable goods. Sometimes loads were lost entirely. One might have expected danger from the very wild inhabitants of the New Guinea forests, who cannot have long abandoned their cannibal habits, but cases of

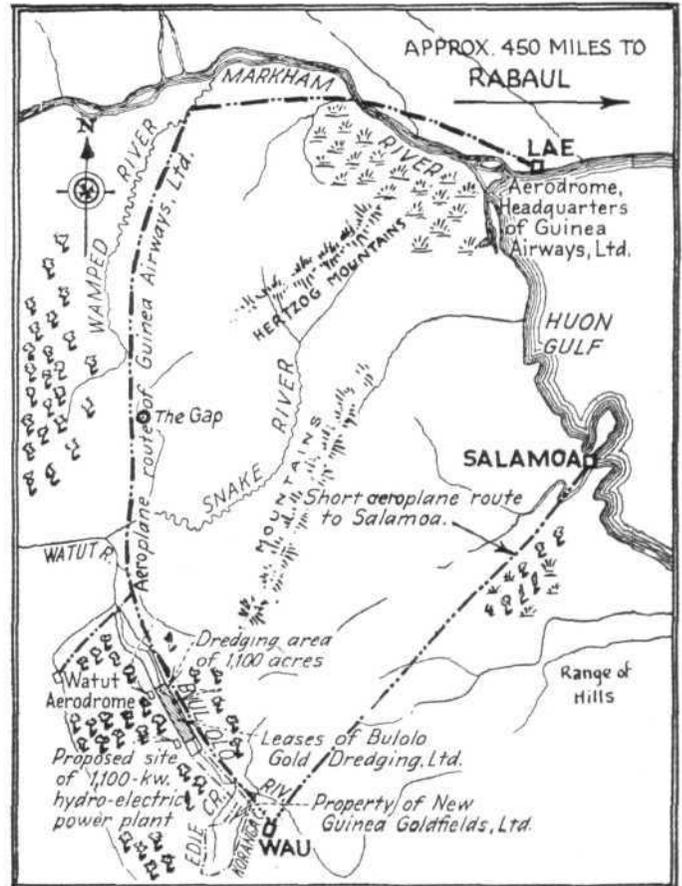
banditry are not reported to have been common. Probably the whole district was interested in the business, on account of the money earned by the porters, and did not want to kill the goose which laid the golden egg. But when everything had been taken into consideration, it was reckoned that the average cost of a pound of goods transported to the fields was 1s. 6d. To this should be added the inconvenience of the slow transport, which must have represented a certain sum of money, though the amount is not easy to compute.

The position was one of those which sometimes occur—and they are now occurring with ever-increasing frequency—when aircraft appear like the good fairies in the pantomime, or the *deus ex machina* in ancient Athenian dramas, and solve a problem which had begun to seem insoluble. By the end of 1926 the regular airways in Australia had impressed the public with the potentialities of aircraft for providing communications where and when it was not possible to provide railways or motor roads between two places. The Guinea Gold company determined to try aircraft. They acquired a D.H.37 with "Puma" engine and engaged an Australian pilot named Mustard to inaugurate the service. This aeroplane had a pay-load of about 600 lb.

Of course, aerodromes had to be laid out. At first there was no aerodrome at Salamao, and apparently it was not thought practicable to make one there. So a site was chosen at Lae, on the other side of the bay, 18 miles away from the landing beach. The goods had to be taken from the steamer by lighter across to the aerodrome, and there they were loaded into the aeroplane. At the goldfield end of the route a landing ground was prepared at Wau. It was one of the most extraordinary aerodromes in the world. The altitude was 3,700 ft. above sea level. The landing area was small, and the slope of the ground was about 1 in 4. It was, however, almost always sheltered from the wind, and the machine could land up-hill and take off down-hill. After



Map of parts of New Guinea and Queensland. An air service from Cairns to the island is under consideration.



Map of the goldfields of New Guinea, with the port of Salamao and the aerodromes.