

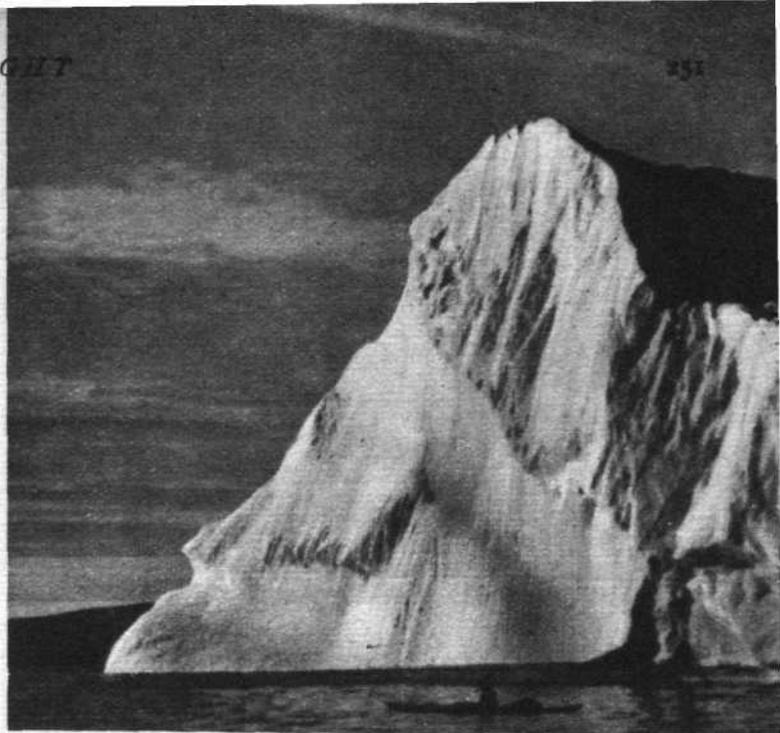
ICEBERG CORRIDOR

*A Radio-range Let-down
with an Odd Ending*

A SINGLE titanic process of the physical world which may take months to occur can often be grasped in its entirety when viewed from the air, because so many phases are revealed within a single scene. An example of this is provided when one approaches Greenland in fine weather during the summer. From a distance of eighty or even a hundred miles, in the conditions of unlimited visibility which are possible at this season, one has a remarkable view of the country which is only limited by the horizon towards the eerie north. This land, which rises here from four thousand to nine thousand feet, is covered by a permanent ice-cap, often so tinted at this distance as to resemble a cloth of gold. The true ruggedness of the land beneath this smooth covering will never be seen by man; but at the coastline, where the mountains and valleys are revealed as deep indentations, the icefield is divided into a thousand glaciers like a frayed edge of cloth, and these are fed through deep fjords into the warm summer sea. The very breadth of this vast panorama, however, can foster a detachment as dangerous as complete unawareness; it is hard to grasp the significance of those white shapes floating gracefully off the coast which seem such tiny fragments of that great ice-field which is Greenland itself.

We were ferrying a Mosquito from the United Kingdom to a West Indian republic, and had good reason to congratulate ourselves upon the happy landfall described above, because the briefing room at Reykjavik had informed us that the radio-range signals from Prince Christian Sound, upon which we were to rely, might be reversed near the coast, and the weather ship which lies on that track had been unable to give us a radar fix. Nevertheless, a certain anxiety was again felt when crossing the low mountains to the south of Prince Christian Sound, some twenty minutes later, for there appeared to be a belt of low stratus stretching up the west coast for

Resembling a rocky coastline—another iceberg formation.



A typical iceberg—500 feet in height—off the Greenland coast.

as far as the eye could see, and it had penetrated into all the fjords. Our destination was the American airstrip known as "Bluie West One," which is situated at the foot of a glacier forty miles from the coast. The fjord in which it lies must normally be entered from seaward, because, unless the country is very well known to a pilot, he can identify that particular inlet only by homing on to the radio-range station called "Bluie West Three," which is situated on an island near the entrance. One leg of this range is projected down the west coast on a QDM of 360 degrees (the variation, incidentally, is 40 west in this area), and it provides a let-down over the sea with no fear whatsoever of striking the land during descent.

We had not been able to raise "Bluie West One" for the weather on W/T, but, as the flight plan provided for such action, I decided to let down through the cloud. Before entering cloud at 2,000ft, the altimeter was set to the forecast QFF for that area, obtained from the weather ship 300 miles away, and I decided not to fly below an indicated height of 300ft unless the cloud had broken. The milkiness, however, eventually gave way to patches of dark grey and, by observing the white caps on the water, I was able to judge height visually, and get right under the cloud. To do so I had to fly very close to the water under a 200ft base in visibility of about two miles—a prospect which was not in itself alarming, so long as we could hold the radio-range leg; but I was not fully prepared for a new peril which now beset us from the surrounding gloom, and for the awful sight which met our eyes. Giant icebergs, most of them high enough to project into the cloud, were passing swiftly by on either side! Owing to our high speed we had to fly around and between them in the most alarming fashion, although they would have been sufficiently far apart for a slower aircraft like a Sunderland to have avoided them without difficulty.

After the initial scare had subsided it became easier for me to take the necessary avoiding action, and we even found time to look out for polar bears, and to notice the extraordinary blue glint which looms from the hollows in large masses of ice. How different the bergs looked now from the white specks in a blue sea which we had seen from 10,000ft! We had trusted the radio range to separate "let-down" from "landfall," but here was a country which was able to plant portions of itself along the flight-path of a safety aid.

Our one concern now was whether the Bluie West fjord would be clear enough to enter, but W/T communication was impossible whilst we needed the M.F. receiver for the beam, so it was with intense relief that we found a clearance ten miles south of the radio-range station, and were then able to appreciate the beauty rather than the anxiety of that long, narrow approach to "Bluie West One" itself.

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