Nairobi's New Airport

INAUGURATION OF A £2.5m GATEWAY TO KENYA

FROM A. T. Pugh of "Flight" staff comes this first-hand report from Kenya about Embakasi Airport, opened last Sunday by the Governor, Sir Evelyn Baring. Regrettably the Queen Mother, who was to have performed the ceremony, had to do so owing to technical trouble which delayed her Qantas Super Constellation on route from Australia.

It was a bitter disappointment to Kenya that the arrival of Her Majesty the Queen Mother at Embakasi should have had to be cancelled—owing to an engine failure en route from Australia—when the country waited en fête to greet her. In the event, with a ceremony for which so many had worked so hard, Nairobi's new airport was inaugurated on Sunday, March 9, by the Governor of Kenya, Sir Evelyn Baring.

For Kenya, Embakasi airport represents more than concrete and bitumen evidence of the country's stake, and firm belief, in civil aviation; it is a symbol also of economic resurrection from the dark days of an African rebellion that has been described by Sir Evelyn as "tantamount to civil war."

Few Europeans, it seems, appreciate the scale of the bloodshed in which the contractors were flailed (the figures were quoted without distinction for colour or race, although the majority were, in fact, Mau Mau terrorists). The analogy of Embakasi airport rising from the ashes of rebellion comes to the mind when it is realized that the runway was almost entirely hand-built by large squads of Mau Mau undergoing "corrective" labour. And just as the achievement of a positive programme can supplant moral degeneration by firing the imagination (as was cynically intended by the Governor of the Kenya Colony when he was manoeuvring for the de-indoctrinated Mau Mau convicts asked to stay on—as convicts)—until the task was completed. It had only been intended to open the airport before the "long rains" in August 1958. During these rains (there is also a short rainy season) the old international airport at Eastleigh can become unusable. Plans were drawn up in 1953, work started in 1954, but the approach was very midway in 1958. The decision was taken that the airport could be opened by the Queen Mother.

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