

The rotary engine can be likened to a waggon wheel, the spokes being the nine cylinders and the hub the crank shaft into which petrol and castor oil are run - castor oil for oiling cylinders because it does not mix with the petrol - to feed the cylinders. The two bladed propeller is attached to this wheel and the whole structure rotates. There was also a stationary engine in some machines such as the S.E.5 (Sopworth Experimental 5) - The wings were of some material stretched over a frame and these kept in place by wires called landing and flying wires. On the dash board you had a speedometer - altimeter for height - and a petrol gauge. Nothing like the present day machine dash boards. To start the engine one switched on - ordinary house switch - and then the mechanic, after having turned the prop several times to suck in petrol to the cylinders. The next command or order was contact and then the mechanic gave the propeller one mighty swing and hoped the damn thing would fire, start. Today, of course, they have self starters. You ran the engine for a while and then waved to the mechanic and he pulled the chocks away from the wheels and off you went down the run way. The wheels of the under carriage were not retracted as today.

The training wings here were 28, 74 and 84. The O.C. of 28 was Pierre van Ryneveld late Sir Pierre who after the war flew from England to S.A. taking about a month for the trip. He was, of course, supposed to be doing a survey of a possible Cape to Cairo air route.

To diverge for a while and as a matter of interest while I think of it in mentioning van Ryneveld. While I was on leave in Serowe after the war a Major Holthause and Colonel Courtreat arrived and spent a few days with us at Serowe. They were doing a survey of sites for possible dromes on the route and had decided that there should be one at Palapye Road near Serowe. In the course of conversation one day, Courtreat, knowing I had served with the airforce, asked if I would consider supervising the construction of two dromes in the Protectorate and later take charge. I thought the matter over but at the time thought there was no future for air traffic. It must be remembered that at that time all planes were Biplanes and were small and not capable of carrying big loads. Today of course as we all know the aeroplanes carry all sorts of freight and passengers to which there is apparently now no limit. They also travel at such terrific speed. Well, Courtreat, eventually, motored from Cape to Cairo and Holthause became director of Civil Aviation in this country - a Government job - and van Rynaveld, of course, became General and Chief of Staff. Well, perhaps, I missed a good job, but I am quite satisfied with my life which I have enjoyed, every minute of it.

Well, to get on with my story as an airman. We had to be on the drome on call at certain hours but on account of the shortage of machines and instructors, as I have already mentioned, it was going to be some time before we became airmen. In those days, even with the delays it took less time to train a man than today when it takes a couple of years. We were supposed to do about four hours dual with an instructor and then five or six hours solo before being pushed onto a fighter machine as the S.E.5 or Sopworth Camel etc. for up to say eight to ten hours by which time you were considered ready for the firing line. You had of course gone through a course of gunnery learning to use the Vickers and Lewis machine guns. While waiting our turn to fly there were many other duties, learn something of the rigging and construction of a machine, navigation. We spent quite a lot of time in the hangars watching mechanics repairing machines, rigging engines, guns and so on.

As a matter of interest I have just been checking my records and Log Book and find that I joined the R.F.C. on the 7th November 1917 and was only posted to a training school, Castle Bromwich, on the 25th January 1918 which gives some idea, two and a half months, it took to train a man from the recruit stage to be fully trained. We should, having had training in two campaigns, have been posted straight to a training squadron for flying as were the many men who were allowed to transfer from an infantry Unit to the Flying Corps and posted straight away to a flying School. It was not for us to tell them what to do. The Imperial Military Authorities seemed to know of no short cut but just stuck to the old book on training/