

When now, after thirteen years, and against the background of the great wars that are raging in Europe and Asia, I recall our peaceful discussions in Berlin, I am only too sadly conscious of the changes for the worse that have since taken place all over the world. We dreamed of rapid and easy communications between peoples and continents; we thought that we should meet with understanding, and that people would realize that our efforts were directed towards peace and brotherhood between countries and kingdoms — nothing, it seemed, could be easier than to translate our thoroughly thought-out intentions into action. If we had had any idea of the resistance and the mistrust with which we were afterwards met in various quarters, we should undoubtedly have drawn up the plan for the entire enterprise in a very different way. It would have been better if the way had been first paved for us along diplomatic channels. As it was, the negotiations with the Chinese Government were left until the whole heavy apparatus of the expedition had already been set in motion. It might also perhaps have been better to have begun from the west, from Kulja and Urumchi, and to have made the preliminary expedition with a more mobile caravan and fewer participants. But it would then have been impossible to leave observers behind at the four meteorological stations. Above all, it was considered fitting and necessary that an enterprise of such dimensions should set out from the capital of the country and under the protection of the Government, which at that time had its seat in North China. We did not even consider any other alternatives, and when we afterwards found ourselves actually at grips with the difficulties there was nothing for it but to try and overcome them. The fact of the matter was, that during the discussions in Berlin we saw the situation in much too optimistic a light. We calculated that the stay in Peking would last only a couple of months, that the preliminary caravan journey could be accomplished in six months, and the first flight be undertaken in the autumn of 1927. At the turn of the year, 1927—1928, the whole program was to have been completed.

We had not reckoned, however, with the slowness of the negotiations in China; though the cautiousness of the authorities was perfectly natural, especially in connection with such an important and radical innovation as the introduction of aeroplanes into Central Asia and the establishing of air-lines in China.

Little did we then suspect that it would take six years, or till the end of June 1933, before the first flights through innermost Asia could be carried out, by flight-captains LUTZ and Count SCHACK. And even these remained, for the time, the first and only ones. Four more years were to elapse before, in the late summer of 1937, one of Lufthansa's planes was flown from Berlin to Sian. As the Russian route was at this time closed, this bold flight under Baron VON GABLENZ was directed over Baghdad, Teheran and Qabul, the Hindukush, the Pamir and southern Eastern Turkistan. In May 1938 the route between Berlin and Qabul was opened.