

DISCUSSION OF AVIATION

Later that day BURKHAN came back and I had a long conversation with him on the subject of flying over the desert tracts that were not accessible by camel. He became very interested, and promised to support my application for a permit, which, as usual in such cases, should go through the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

When BURKHAN had explained my desire in detail to the governor himself I was requested on March 20th to present myself together with SIU to FAN, the Foreign Minister.

In his soft and urbane voice and with much bowing FAN informed us that he had that same day had a long conversation with YANG and received his instructions. About a year previously the Foreign Office in Peking had informed YANG of my desires and stated that for its own part the government had refused permission to fly. It left YANG free, however, to come to his own decision as regards Sinkiang. For political reasons the Governor-General was unfortunately obliged to refuse my request. China's domestic affairs must first be put in order. FAN offered a thousand apologies, but pointed out that it would be necessary, until further orders, to await the course of events.

The idea of flying thus had to be shelved, and it was small consolation that FAN had been commissioned to ask me on YANG's behalf to take out in Sinkiang-liang the whole sum of sixty thousand silver dollars that we needed for our stations and expeditions. This was a sign of great confidence on his part, for we had not yet been in a position to pay in this sum to YANG's son-in-law WANG in Peking.

That evening a raging storm broke loose. It went shrieking over the roof and whined and whistled round the house. The next day we had a heavy snowfall and the dirty town became quite white — except for the slushy bog in the streets, that now became worse than before.

We were without reliable news from the outside world, although there was wireless communication with Mukden and Tientsin. There was also a telegraph line over Suchow and Lanchow, but it was very slow. One line went over Chuguchaq, joining up with the Russian telegraph system. Owing to the spring weather the roads were in such a state that neither motor-cars nor carts could make the trip between the Russian frontier and Urumchi, so that for long periods we were frozen in, so to speak, like Polar explorers, without news.

FOREIGNERS IN URUMCHI

The quarter in which our house lay was called the Russian Concession or Yanghang, for this, the southernmost suburb, had been thrown open to the three hundred white-Russian refugees who had sought refuge in Urumchi. The majority of them