

Stewardess on an Air-liner

THE newest career in the world—and the strangest.

Stewardess on an air-liner. Every trip is an adventure into the unknown, and she must be as capable, self-reliant, and resourceful as her lineal ancestress, the pioneer woman following in a covered wagon a trail where skeletons make the milestones.

Breath-taking it is sometimes, for it has happened that the lives of the passengers depend on the wit of the stewardess. A bad guess on her part—well, it's a long way down, and after that one has his own pair of wings if he deserves them.

A very-interesting story of the new job for women Francis Vivian Drake tells in *The Atlantic Monthly*. He has had experience in the air himself. He served with distinction in the Royal Flying Corps. Wounded in action in 1917, he was sent to America as a loan from the British Government to teach in Army flying-schools. After that he remained in America, and is now on an air tour of South America

THE air-liner is on her way, engines thundering a lullaby. Read:

It is dark. The lights of Salt Lake City have fallen away. The trimotor is laboring up, all engines wide open, headed at a black wall that towers seven thousand feet high—the Rockies. Chicago, early next morning. Mid-afternoon, New York.

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The great rampart, dark and mysterious, looms in the distance. The ship roars through Immigration Pass, into a thousand miles of desolation.

The young stewardess looks vigilantly up the aisle from her seat aft. The long cabin is suffused with an unearthly illumination from the engine exhausts. The shaded reading-lamps are all switched off, some of the window blinds are down. She can make out the twin line of white pillows on the tipped-back seats, the blanketed forms, most of them asleep.

Ahead, out of sight around the mail compartment, are the pilots; but the cabin, with its freight of passengers—that is her own responsibility. She has tucked them in, made them comfortable for the night, had checked over the coffee and hot food in the ship's galley. Now she must keep watch.

An eighth of an inch from her elbow, on the other side of the glass, the air is beating past at two miles a minute, and outside the heated cabin it is fifteen below zero. No towns, no houses; only sheer wilderness and the spaced flash of the airway beacons. . . .

Number 8, the one with the baby, is asleep already, altho she protested that she could not close her eyes. Poor thing, she needs all the sleep she can get. The baby is to be operated on to-morrow in Detroit.

The stewardess walks up and peers for a minute. Just so, nearly a century ago, stood her great-grandmother, shielding the flickering candlelight from an ailing child inside a covered wagon

The old Overland Trail ribbons below . . . and Number 5—at last he has put his cards up. All the way from Oakland he was playing solitaire—shuffle, cut, deal, seven hours at a stretch, his face expressionless.

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But on the outcome of this transcontinental dash is balanced the future of a gigantic plant, the welfare of thousands of employees. Now he is hunched up in his seat, eyes closed, mouth drawn in a hard straight line. He might be asleep, too, but the straining muscles of his hands betray him. . . . Number 3, the one with the cough, is giving his tired throat a rest. He sleeps. . . .

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BACK to the rear seat again—and a cup of hot coffee. Always ceaseless vigilance.

Twenty-five air-stewardesses work in relays on the transcontinental run from Chicago to Oakland. "As the ship crosses the continent, guided by the elaborate road-bed of a great airway—teletype circuits from Pacific to Atlantic, radiophones, airway lighthouses, radio-range beacons, government weather-stations, emergency fields, incessant radio reports, incessant inspections—the stewardesses come and go."

No job on earth is so attractive, as 5,000 applicants testify. But less than one per cent. give the necessary qualifications. About one candidate in every 250, says Mr. Drake, passes on all points. Every applicant for a job on a line on which Mr. Drake had just traveled must be a trained nurse, a graduate from some big hospital. They must be nurses, because nurses are trained to hard work and discipline, and to a

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sense of responsibility. The stewardesses on this line are between twenty and twenty-seven; their average height is five feet four, average weight 125 pounds. Excess baggage is detrimental.

The duties of an air-stewardess are elastic, as we read on:

Normally her job is this. First, she has charge of the ship's papers, and of the company inter-airport mail. She has to take tickets and check baggage-slips.

There is a lot of paper work in running an air-liner—have you ever noticed the two fat wallets of papers carried by train conductors? She has to keep track of equipment such as blankets, pillows, and silver. Kleptomania is not entirely unknown among passengers.

She has to adjust ventilators—shut out drafts, let in more air—and she must keep her clientele supplied with magazines, writing materials, maps, soaps, towels, aspirin, ash-trays or matches, gum for air-sickness, cotton-wool for noise—whatever their fancy may happen to demand, short of pulling rabbits out of hats.

She dispatches telegrams and radios. She is thoroughly drilled in the geography of the country over which her ship flies, and points out the noteworthy features. Three air-passengers out of every four are not unmindful of an expectant audience waiting at the journey's end, so far be it from them to miss a thing.

Moreover, this historic West that slides away beneath them is not a mere movie or a book, but the actual thing.

If that patch five thousand feet below happens to be the spot where Colonel Lindbergh once alighted in a parachute, they want to know about it; and, anyway, which of those funny little ridges over to the left was where the Indians fell upon a train of covered wagons on the seventeenth of March, 1851?