

FLIGHT OF THE PURPLE PRINCESS

AN ILL-CONCEIVED PLAN TO FLY THE ATLANTIC FROM EAST TO WEST ENDED IN DISASTER FOR AN ECCENTRIC PRINCESS AND HER PILOTS

BY HOWARD CARTER

As the 19th Century turned into the 20th Century, Britain had large numbers of "royalty" and many lived in a vacuum that encompassed the life styles of the very rich. Visiting each other's country estates, participating in fox hunts, collecting massive amounts of art and antiquities, while also scheming to marry off eligible daughters occupied their time. For those that had fallen on "difficult" financial straits, attempting to find suitable American husbands amongst the new generation of colonial millionaires was a way of bolstering sagging fortunes. For those that remained wealthy, then there was a complex pattern of courtship that saw English daughters paired off with European royalty.

Lady Anne Savile fit into the last category. She was born on 25 May 1864 and her father was John Savile, 4th Earl of Mexborough, and he had amassed a large fortune while also being known as an eccentric. As an adult, Lady Anne enjoyed the constant whirl of royal social life but she apparently felt something was missing in her life.

At age 33 she was married (she was

considered quite old for a first marriage, which appears to have been arranged) to Prince Ludwig of Lowenstein-Wertheim-Freudenberg, Germany. This family apparently had little money but held numerous royal titles. According to a newspaper column written by the Marquise de Fontenoy on 1 September 1898, Ludwig had come to Germany in search of an heiress, where he "applied for an introduction to society to a man of an aristocratic family, but who is possessed of neither money nor scruples. This 'blue-blood' undertook to introduce the Prince [EDITOR'S NOTE: In one of those strange bits of royal history,

apparently people such as the Prince had to pay a considerable fee to be introduced into English society] to those particular houses where he was most likely to meet with an heiress suitable for marriage. Following her 1897 wedding vows, Anne decided to become a German citizen. However, the Prince failed to pay the price for his introduction or "the commission due upon her dowry." Legal proceedings were instituted against the Prince in London. The Earl of Mexborough could have easily paid the amount but he was, "heartily sick of his German son-in-law and was not inclined to move a foot to help him." He was never in favor of the match and disliked the Prince "on general principles but likewise for his un-English manners."

The Prince was known to be quite a high roller in London society and was a couple months younger than his wife. It seems that for about a year, the Prince and Princess were

seen at many royal venues then something very strange happened. The Prince simply disappeared.

His friends were so concerned about his mysterious absence that they took out ads in all the London papers as they tried to find out what happened to him. Whether his wife knew, or even cared, about his whereabouts is open to debate.

As they say, truth is stranger than fiction and it transpired that Ludwig was in, of all places, the Philippines. A telegram was published in the March 1899 issues of the London papers and it turns out he had been in the Philippines for many months and had been present when the Spanish fleet was destroyed by the US Navy. It was suspected that he was a "confidential agent" of the German government and it appears he traveled with ease between Spanish and insurgent lines as each side regarded him as friendly.

Ludwig was among several civilians observing the progress of the Battle of Calocan, which was fought between the insurgents and the Oregon Volunteers of the US Army. The men were warned about the danger of their position and an insurgent orderly addressed Ludwig directly: "I am speaking to you particularly. You have already given us some trouble by hanging around the firing line and we will have no more of it." C.S. Bradford of the *New York Times* was among the group and he wrote down the exchange. The men then went into a nearby forest but that area soon turned into a battle zone and they took refuge in a house. A bullet fired by an Oregonian volunteer hit Ludwig and he was killed instantly. Bradford would cover the whole sad affair for his newspaper.

Back home, it is unclear how the Princess took the news of the Prince's passing but she soon resumed her



Lady Anne Savile became known for her unusual fashions and for wearing large portions of her fabulous collection of jewelry.

society functions. Merging into the new century, the Princess began to wearing daring fashions that highlighted her fortune in jewels. She also became interested in automobiles and, following the Wright Brothers' 1903 flight, in aeronautics. This interest in flying became

a passion and with her vast fortune there were no boundaries.

As soon as she was able, she began taking hops in the primitive aircraft of the time period. She also traveled extensively back and forth to the USA and even invented an "anti-sea sickness" bed, which she took with her on the various ocean



The Fokker F.VIIa St. Raphael registered G-EBTQ. Captain Hamilton and Lt. Col. Minchin stand by the rear fuselage. The aircraft had seen service with KLM before being purchased by the Purple Princess and overhauled by Fokker with the addition of extra fuel tanks in the fuselage.