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S. 741

Flying Accident

Precis of Proceedings of Court of Inquiry

16 MA 1942



Date	Unit	Place of Accident	Pilot's and Passengers' Names	Injuries to Personnel	Type of Aircraft	Damage to Aircraft
1.9.41.	-	Auchanhoan Mr. Campbeltown	Capt. K.D. Carden Pilot Mr. G. Lefain Mr. R.W. Sydenham Crew Mr. C. Spence Mr. Eric Taylor Dr. Mark Benjamin Prof. Salmon Col. Wragham (R.M.) Capt. Licking (U.S. Navy) Count Guy de Bailliet Letour	Fatally " " " "	Liberator A.M.915	Totally damaged A.M.915

Short Account of the Accident

At 2226 hrs. Q.D.T. on 31/8/41, Liberator A.M.915 took off from Montreal. The purpose of the flight, which was authorised by HQ Ferry Command and Canada, was to ferry the passengers to Great Britain. It is not known if Campbell Kinsella USAFAT precise instructions were given for the flight in Canada. Later, the Duty Controller, R.A.F. Station Prestwick was informed that the aircraft had left Newfoundland for Ayr Q.D.T. At 0759 hrs. on 1/9/41 and he accepted control.

Contact was established with the aircraft at 0535 hrs., P/Lt. Ruffel being the Duty Controller at that time. Thereafter bearings and routine weather reports were passed to the aircraft. At 0600 hrs., P/Lt. Ruffel went off watch and P/O. McFarlane took over as Duty Controller. At that time weather conditions at Prestwick were cloud 9/10 at 2,000 ft., visibility 12 miles.

Shortly after this, the D/F. Station reported to the Duty Controller that they had passed the aircraft a Q.D.M. 067° and (a few seconds later) that they had heard it pass overhead above cloud.

The method of approach adopted at Prestwick for homing an aircraft under cloud conditions was, first to let it fly over the aerodrome and go on in an easterly direction for 2 or 3 minutes at a safe height and then to home it again and send it out on a bearing of 250° for about 3 minutes (according to strength of wind) to enable the pilot to take up position on the safe-bearing line of 75°, break cloud and approach Prestwick.

P/O. McFarlane states that he intended to follow this procedure but a message was received from the aircraft asking for weather conditions at Squires Gate. He asked the Met. Officer for the weather at Squires Gate but was informed that the routine weather report (received by teleprinter) at Squires Gate was corrupt. He informed the aircraft that the weather at Squires Gate could not be given at the moment but the weather at Prestwick was alright. At 0630 hrs. the D/F station informed him that the aircraft was ignoring their bearings and demanding urgently "weather at Squires Gate" and, later, that it was asking Squires Gate direct and it soon became apparent that the pilot had decided to go to Squires Gate.

/At 0835

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ASKING FOR a weather report, on receipt of which the aircraft was told the strength of his signal and asked to repeat. The aircraft replied that the receive signals were Strength 2 and said he was troubled by atmospherics. This message was acknowledged by Squires Gate at 0837 hrs. There was some delay in obtaining the report and passing it to the aircraft (due partly to the fact that there is no tie-line between the Control Room and the Trans. G.A.T. D/F Station), but at 0900 hrs, the following message was sent to the aircraft AT FERO code, "1/9, 0845, visibility 6,000 yds. height of low cloud 6,000 ft., speed of upper wind 5 m.p.h."

Meanwhile O.A.M.C.U. Gloucester had taken control.

At 0830 hrs, GLoucester communicated with the movement Liaison Officer, 9 Group, who informed them that Squires Gate was practically unserviceable. The L.O.O. says that he had just been talking to the Operations Room of the School of General Reconnaissance at Squires Gate in connection with the departure of a Defiant and had been told that the observer could not see across the aerodrome. This information was passed to Prestwick who, at 0857 hrs, informed the aircraft that Squires Gate was unfit and suggested that it should return to Ayr. This message was also repeated to the aircraft by Gloucester. Shortly after this, Gloucester advised the aircraft that Silloth was fit. At 0920 hrs, Prestwick asked the aircraft "Where are you making for?" and the reply was "I am making for

After this, bearings were taken of the aircraft's position and these showed that, at 0936 hrs, it was travelling in a N.E. direction towards the Mull of Kintyre. 10 Q.D.H.'s, were passed to the aircraft by Prestwick but after this no further communications could be established with the aircraft, IN SPITE OF frequent attempts by Prestwick to get it to reply to their carry command SIGN W.H.C. n what

Later, it was found that the aircraft had struck high ground near Cambelltown, left the point of impact with the ground was about 900 ft. above sea level. The aircraft was totally destroyed and the wreckage spread over a distance of about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile. The clock had stopped at 10.10 hrs.

Findings of the Court

The pilot was guided to, and passed over in the vicinity of, Ayr.

He was given indication that he had passed and correct procedure followed to guide him back, but he ignored this.

He had been given a favourable weather report, and his operator was probably decoding this at the very time he was overhead.

Nevertheless, he decided to make for Squires Gate.

This last-minute, and seemingly unnecessary, change in plan threw a strain on the ground organisation which reveals weaknesses in communication, meteorological and control organisation. Considered that communication between ground and air was satisfactory until attempts were made to communicate direct with Squires Gate when the aircraft was near Prestwick and that direct communication between Prestwick and the aircraft broke down when the aircraft left this vicinity and flew south.

The question of CONTROL falls into the following phases:-

1st Phase

The aircraft was accepted by PRESTWICK and correct action was taken to attempt to land the aircraft, which, for some reason not established, and for which blame cannot be attached to ground staff, proceeded to SQUIRES GATE.

2nd Phase

1. SQUIRES GATE was prepared to accept aircraft, although the aircraft was not originally expected there. There was delay in giving a weather report, due to the time taken to establish wireless communication, which in turn is due to aircraft calling from range.

From long ago,

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