

ORIGINAL

BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY 1913-21
BURO STAIRÉ MILEATA 1913-21
No. W.S. 641

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BUREAU OF MILITARY HISTORY, 1913-21.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS

DOCUMENT NO. W.S. 641

Witness

Emmet Dalton,
Suite 27,
25 Jermyn St.,
London, S.W.1.

Identity.

Director of Training, Irish Army, 1921;
Chief Liaison Officer during Anglo-Irish
Truce, 1921.

Subject.

Purchase of air-plane in London, 1921, to
take Michael Collins and other plenipotentiaries
back to Dublin if Treaty negotiations broke down.

Conditions, if any, Stipulated by Witness.

Nil

File No. ...S.497.....

Form B.S.M. 2

Military Archives Cathal Brugha
BKs Rathmines Dublin 6

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*True
Certified copy of original
W. J. Keane
1.2.52*

EMMET DALTON.

Suite 27,
25, Jermyn Street,
London, S. W. 1.

ED/NJP

23rd October, 1951.

Lt. Col. W. J. Keane,
Headquarters,
The Air Corps,
Baldonnel Aerodrome,
CO. DUBLIN.

Dear Col. Keane,

I was somewhat surprised to receive your letter of the 16th October, and was interested to note that your Corps are putting together a collection of documents of historic interest. Naturally, I would be anxious to help in any way I can because way back in 1921 I accidentally gave birth to the first Irish Flying Unit.

Roughly, this is the way things happened:

In the Autumn of 1921 General Shaun McKeown was a prisoner in Mountjoy Jail. Michael Collins conceived the idea of attempting a rescue and after studying the various possibilities it was finally decided to make an attempt to capture a British Armoured car and use it to obtain entrance to the prison with the hope of effecting a rescue. The armoured car in question was a Peerless double-turreted machine, and the two turret guns were Hotchkiss, which was a type of machine-gun principally used by the British Cavalry in World War One.

Since I was to control and lead the attempted rescue, I had to make a search amongst the Dublin Volunteers to see if I could locate two men who would be capable of using the Hotchkiss machine gun. I knew a fellow named Jack McSweeney who had been a pilot in the British Air Force. Having consulted him, I found that he had a working knowledge of the gun, and, more important still, his national outlook was sound. Not having a specimen gun available, McSweeney accompanied me to a meeting with the two Volunteers who were to go as gunners

and instruct them in the intricacies of the gun with the aid of blackboard diagrams. You will appreciate that this is not the best method of instruction, but under the circumstances it was all that could be done.

It was as a result of this that when the truce was declared and it was decided by the Dail that Michael Collins was to cross as one of the Irish Plenipotentiaries accompanied by less important people that the General Headquarters Staff were gravely concerned about his safety, being conscious that should the Treaty negotiations break down whilst Collins was in London, the entire Irish Army position would be jeopardised.

At this time I was Chief Liason Officer and also Director of Training to the Army. I had discussions with Michael Collins, and together we put before the General Staff the idea formulated by me that we should purchase an air-plane in London and have it standing in readiness to fly Collins and one or two others back to Dublin in the event that the negotiations broke down. This scheme was adopted and Collins authorised me to make my plans accordingly. I got in touch with McSweeney and as a result of enquiries made throughout the Dublin Brigade Commandant Dowling of the 4th Battalion was put in touch with one ex-British Air Force Officer named Charlie Russell. I called these two young men together, had a long conversation with them, became convinced of their loyalty, and sent them to England to examine the possibilities of purchasing a suitable aircraft. Russell, who had spent some time in Canada, was to act as if he were making the purchase of a suitable machine for a Canadian Forestry Department.

I attach - Marked (1), the first report I received from these two officers, and Marked (2) you will find a letter explaining that they had completed their purchase of the Martynside plane and that they were both having trial flights to make themselves familiar with the machine. The letter also explains the arrangements they required should they have to fly it to Dublin.

From this beginning grew what is now known as the Irish Air Force.

Plans and suggestions were drawn up by McSweeney and Russell in what was known as the Aviation Dept. in Beggars Bush Barracks - this Aviation Dept. came into being as a subsidiary Dept. to my Branch Training.

You may or may not have some copies of the enclosed documents, and if you have, I would appreciate the return of mine. On receipt of these documents, will you please let me know if they are helpful and if you think there is anything more I can do please do not hesitate to call upon me.

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) ~~EMMET DALTON~~

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INVESTIGATION INTO AIR-CRAFT AVAILABLE
IN ENGLAND FOR PURPOSES WHICH ARE AS HEREUNDER.

1. Machine capable of direct flight
 - (a) for passengers,
 - (b) freight.
2. Machine suitable for military undertaking, i.e. bombing in Ireland.
3. Machine Sea-Plane suitable for transporting freight from ship in home waters to base in Ireland.

The following Manufacturers of Air-Craft have been interviewed, and we attach hereunder quotations from each.

Avro & Co.
Martinsyde & Co.
Short Bros.
Vickers Ltd.
De Havilland & Co.

The machine to our mind which is suitable for purpose (1) is the "Martinsyde", Type A., mark 2, 4-seater Bi-plane. This machine is fitted with a Rolls-Royce engine, and is complete with floats or land under-carriage, and is quoted to us at a price of £2600. It has a range of 550 miles at cruising speed of 100 miles per hour. Delivery could be made within twenty-eight days. (Photographs of this machine are enclosed).

With regard to (2) we have been quoted £175 for a machine suitable for this purpose. The machine is a 110 h.p. le Rhone "Avro", dual control, two-seater (the English Army standard training machine). We have experience of this machine being loaded with a total load of 288 lbs.

The De H. 9 machine would also be suitable for this purpose, the price, however, being £1000 which is exorbitant except for permanent use. The difference between these two machines will be noted as follows:-

Avro..... Rotary engine 110 H.P.
Cruising speed..... 78 miles per hour.
Range..... 230 miles.
Useful Load..... 600 lbs.
Seating capacity 2.

De H. 9. Stationary Engine 220 H.P.
Cruising speed..... 95 miles per hour.
Range 250 miles.
Useful Load..... 600 lbs.
Seating capacity..... 4.

The De H. 9 machine was used during the European War as a "long" bombing machine and was found to be very suitable as such.

The Machine spoken of for purpose 3 at our last meeting was the "Shrimp" Sea-plane, as supplied by Messrs. Short Bros. The qualities of this Machine, however, do not justify its consideration having regard to the weight carrying capacity and range. The machine quoted for purpose (1) is capable of being used for this purpose, as is also the "Avro" machine.

The Vickers "Viking" which was considered to be the machine to meet all requirements, having Amphibian qualities, is, we consider, out of the question at the price quoted - £4675. Delivery will be noted as quoted for three months from date of receipt of order. In addition, reports as to alighting qualities on land are disappointing. This machine however as a flying boat is suitable for operations on water having a "useful load" of 1250 lbs. and a range of 400 miles. The advantage it would have over the Martinsyde would be greater stability in water under bad weather conditions.

Inasmuch as the Avro Triplane is a machine of distinctive appearance it would be in our opinion unsuitable for any work to which its qualifications limit it. The machine has a light loading capacity but the engine has neither the power, range nor reliability of that installed in the Martinsyde Type A. mark 2.

Copy.

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2.

21st October.

To: C/S.

We have succeeded in purchasing a Martynside Aeroplane which can carry ten passengers or 16,000 pounds weight of munitions. We intend that this shall serve several purposes - it can be used, if necessary, in the event of a break of the present negotiations. I have the Pilot over here and the machine will be ready for flight within two weeks. In the event of this necessity arising we will take the following course :

London,
Reading,
Bristol,
Greenore,

then follow the D. S. E. Rly. as far as Leopardstown race course.

The following arrangements would be necessary to be made on your side and for this purpose I have also a first class Air Pilot in Dublin with whom I can put you in touch who would understand and look after the following arrangements.

As the flight would probably take place during daytime it would be necessary first to have six men on the approved landing place, i.e., a flat part of the Race Course. It would also be necessary to have two Motor Cars convenient, sixty gallons of 1st grade Aero Petrol (this can be purchased from Lemass of "L. S. E." Motor Company) and 2ft. square of Chamois cloth, five gallons of water, and white cloth signal, which would correspond to attached diagram.

It should be possible to obtain one Air Mechanic in Dublin who would understand the Rolls Royce Aero Engine; also a man understanding the rigging of aeroplanes would be necessary - they are known as Riggers. The other four men need not necessarily have Aero qualifications. McSweeney would be able to give all instructions for the landing, but it must be clearly understood that the two men who are to catch the wings and rear struts make sure not to catch the edges of the wings. If it so happens that they misjudge the distance it must be impressed upon them to fall flat to the ground and let the aeroplane pass over.

In the event of our having to cross at night it would be necessary for our people over there to mark out an "L" shaped figure upon the landing ground - this should be done by means of four Petrol Tin fires or flares at intervals of sixty yards (see diagram). The fourth flare would be placed in order to indicate the direction of the wind - the remaining three placed accordingly. The cloth signal to be used by daylight is also a wind signal. The triangular piece would be placed indicating the direction in which the wind is blowing.

2.

I will be able to notify you fully the time at which departure would take place, and the journey is calculated to take between $3\frac{1}{2}$ and $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours - this, I think, would be sufficient notice to get things moving.

There will be no need to make any arrangements at present other than getting the Mechanic and Rigger.

