



The Bleriot monoplane, with its maker standing in the cockpit, is wheeled to the starting-point. A few minutes later he asked the question below

“Where is Dover?”

—asked Louis Bleriot at Calais 40 years ago : A Personal Recollection of an Epoch-making Flight

By HARRY HARPER

IT was on a windy summer's morning, just 40 years ago, that I found myself perched somewhat precariously on the roof of a building not far from Calais. In my hand I held a portable telephone.

The line communicated with a room below in which was an operator of the Marconi Company with all his gear, while just outside, on the cliff, stood a tall pole carrying an aerial. This wireless station on the French coast—for the erection of which we had to gain the special permission of the French Government—and a similar one in the Lord Warden Hotel, Dover, were the first to be operated in connection with a pioneer aeroplane flight.

Below me on the sand-dunes, adjoining the little village of Les Baraques, was a tent from which a small monoplane was being towed, and into this machine, as I watched, climbed the Frenchman who, within the next hour, was to write his name on history by what, as one newspaper put it dramatically, was “the flight that changed the world.”

That small aircraft on which I was looking down was none other than the famous little 24 h.p. monoplane in

BLERIOT'S monoplane was the 11th of the series he had built. Leading dimensions were : span, 28ft. ; chord, 6ft. ; length, 25ft. ; all-up weight, 715 lb ; wing loading, 3.9 lb/sq.ft. Control was by wing-warping, an orthodox rudder, and “elevating tips” at the tailplane ends.

Its 24 h.p. “fan-type” three-cylinder air-cooled Anzani engine had automatic inlet valves and mechanical exhaust valves supplemented by auxiliary exhaust ports.

The crossing was made at a speed of about 45 m.p.h., in a wind of variable direction which blew initially at about 10kt, fell light in mid-Channel (where the pilot was out of sight of land) and gusted to 20kt at Dover.

The author of this article justifiably claims to be “the first air-news reporter”.

which its designer, constructor and pilot, the redoubtable Louis Bleriot, was just about to set off on the then perilous adventure of an attempt to cross the Channel by aeroplane between Calais and Dover.

From my vantage-point, on that never-to-be-forgotten morning of July 25th, 1909, I 'phoned down to the Marconi man below brief word-pictures of the scene I was watching—how Bleriot was now seated in his cockpit; how his little three-cylinder air-cooled Anzani motor was being run up, and how the airman was now just taking-off on a trial flight.

Actually, what I did up there (although I did not realize it at the time) was to give the first of

all outside wireless broadcasts, for what I was saying was immediately wirelessly across to Dover, and from there went straight on by 'phone to newspaper offices in London.

I had been five weeks on the French coast prior to that history-making morning. Three competitors had entered the field in attempts to win the £1,000 prize Lord Northcliffe had offered for the first heavier-than-air craft to cross the Channel. The Comte de Lambert, coming to Wissant with a Wright biplane, had crashed in a trial flight and