



Unlike some of the photographs published at the time, this is a genuine view of the little monoplane as it crossed the sand-dunes at Les Baraques and headed out across the Channel. The next photograph, reproduced above, was taken 37 minutes later, as Bleriot crossed the coast near Dover.

“Where is Dover?”

written his machine off, though he himself escaped injury. Then Hubert Latham, who flew always with such abandon that one French journalist wrote that every time he went up he had “death at his elbow,” had made a first bid for the prize, in his big Antoinette monoplane, only to be brought down in mid-Channel by damp affecting the ignition system of his engine. Fortunately the sea was calm, and Latham made a good pancake landing. And there his monoplane floated while he himself, tucking his feet up to avoid the water that was seeping into his cockpit, smoked a cigarette while he waited for an escorting torpedo-boat to pick him up. His monoplane was badly damaged while being salvaged, and he sent an urgent message to Paris for a reserve machine. It quickly arrived, and both he and Bleriot were ready for a Channel flight on the morning of which I am writing.

Bleriot had been staying at the Terminus Hotel on the quay at Calais, where I myself had a room. Latham was at a little hotel just below Blanc Nez, not far along the coast. On going to bed, on the night prior to the 25th, Latham had asked some of his friends, who were also at this hotel, to get up early on the following morning to see what flying prospects were like. They did so and, finding a gusty wind already blowing, with the probability that it would freshen as the morning advanced, they decided that there was no likelihood of flying that day, and so made up their minds not to call Latham, who was still asleep.

Rival's Misjudgment

Even when news reached them that Bleriot, whose camp was a mile or so away, had just brought out his machine, they reckoned he was only going to make a short trial flight, and that the wind would prove too much for him. But here they reckoned without the determination of this formidable rival. On landing from his trial, and after a brief consultation with his friend Leblanc, Bleriot decided there was just time for him to get across to Dover before the wind rose to any really troublesome extent. So he decided, there and then, to make a dash for it.

There was one moment, just before Bleriot took off, that needs recalling.

Standing up in his cockpit, and peering out across the Channel, he bent down to Leblanc, who was standing just beside his machine, and asked somewhat anxiously:

“Where is Dover?”

Leblanc waved an arm in approximately the right direction, and a moment or so later Bleriot was airborne, flying out low above a road running along the coast. He had neither map nor compass, and just steered in what he

reckoned the right direction, while after him, steaming at full speed, went an escorting French torpedo-boat.

The airman soon lost sight of this vessel, and just went on flying out towards mid-Channel, with no ship or guiding craft of any kind in sight. Before long he had a fresh anxiety. That little motor of his had never before run for more than about 20 minutes without getting overheated and losing power. But on his Channel crossing he knew he would have to be in the air for half an hour at least. And sure enough, just when he was nearing mid-Channel, his engine did begin to show the familiar symptoms, and the monoplane started to lose altitude, the waves of the Channel drawing unpleasantly close below. But Bleriot's luck, as a pioneer, had always been proverbial. He had emerged safely from crash after crash in experimental machines. And on that epic Channel flight good-fortune certainly came to his aid again. Just when things were looking really serious a rainstorm swept up the Channel, and the colder rain helped to cool the overheated little engine. It picked up again and Bleriot was able to fly on till he sighted the English coast.

Gusty Landfall

He then found he had been steering rather wide of the mark, and was approaching St. Margaret's Bay. Turning and flying up the coast, he spotted an opening in the cliffs and swung in to land. But the wind had been rising all the time, and was now blowing in heavy gusts. One of these caught Bleriot just as he was landing, and he came down rather heavily, damaging his undercarriage and breaking his airscrew. And there he sat in his cockpit, just below Dover Castle, first man to cross the Channel by aeroplane. Overhead seagulls wheeled, and presently a policeman came running from a neighbouring cliff road; after which a car dashed up from Dover. Bleriot had made the Channel crossing in 37 minutes.

When the airman came back to Calais that evening in the torpedo-boat which had followed him across Channel I had a long talk with him. I remember him saying how amused he had been when, soon after he landed at Dover, a decidedly worried-looking Customs officer had appeared on the scene, complete with a big batch of official forms. He wanted to make certain Bleriot had not brought any contraband goods across the Channel with him by air, and among the forms the airman was called upon to sign was one to the effect that his “vessel,” of which he was described as the “master,” was free from anything in the nature of infectious disease.

Bleriot's famous flight had a profound influence on public opinion throughout the world. To our British public it certainly came as a shock, because it showed them that our Navy could not be expected to protect them from any