

FLIGHT

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The Croydon Tragedy

WE wish to offer our deepest sympathy to the Air France company, as well as to the relatives of the victims, on the terrible tragedy which has happened at Croydon. As the daily papers have told everyone, the newspaper machine from Croydon for Paris took off about 5 a.m. on May 31 in foggy weather and one of its wings hit the wireless beacon mast which stood almost directly in the line of the take-off. The machine crashed between two houses and the pilot, Capt. Raymond Defives, and the wireless operator, M. Roger L'Huillier, were killed.

For months past our Croydon correspondent has been drawing attention to the danger caused by the position of this mast. He has asked whether we wanted a fatal crash at our very doors before this mast was moved or lowered. The wisdom of his warning has now been most terribly justified. On the aerodrome there is a white line to guide pilots when taking off in conditions of bad visibility, and this mast was not at a safe distance out of the direction of this line. Protests had been made to the proper department of the Air Ministry by companies which make regular use of Croydon aerodrome, but they had produced no result. So long ago as last January the Air Ministry authorities called a meeting of the parties concerned to discuss the results of the working of this wireless beacon, and at the meeting the question of the danger which it caused was raised. A resolution was passed, calling either for its removal to another situation or else that it should be shortened to the height of the neighbouring houses. No action has been taken on this resolution, and now, as a result of this inaction, a French aeroplane has been destroyed and two valuable lives have been lost. The tragedy is a disgrace to the airport of the capital city of the British Empire, and to those who boasted that the terminal aero-

drome of London was a model of what an airport ought to be.

Of course there were reasons why the beacon was placed where it was, and of course there were reasons why it was not promptly moved or lowered when the attention of the authorities was called to the danger. We are not concerned with those reasons. In organised flying on air routes there is one supreme rule, and that is "Safety First." No sort or number of reasons concerning expense or technical difficulties have any weight at all when opposed to the question of safety to life. We do not suppose or suggest that the delay in taking action on the resolution passed last January was due to mere dila-toriness, with which all Government offices are popularly supposed to be badly infected. That files pass slowly through the official channels of communication is true enough, but the Air Ministry is no dormitory for lethargic bureaucrats, and action can be taken very promptly when important issues are at stake. In this case the most important issue in civil flying was at stake, namely the lives of those who fly. We take it for granted that there was some reason for the failure to take action, but, as we said before, no reason was or could be adequate. The warning had been given, and the warning was well justified. A very heavy responsibility rests upon those who should have acted upon that warning and who failed to act.

Fighters or Bombers?

A RUMOUR is afloat, which the Air Ministry will neither confirm nor deny, that some of the squadrons of the Auxiliary Air Force are to exchange their "Hart" day-bombers for "Demon" two-seater fighters. One can rather understand the reluctance of the Air Ministry to open their hearts to the public if the matter is actually under consideration because the