

# COMMERCIAL AVIATION

— AIRLINES — AIRPORTS —

## THE WEEK AT CROYDON

### *The Week's Disaster and a Controversial Letter : American Comings and Goings*

**L**AST week at Croydon was a gloomy enough one in all conscience, and in more than one sense—the national crisis, virtually constant QBI, and the K.L.M. tragedy.

Perhaps, before commenting on these and less serious subjects, it is appropriate that I should disillusion my readers; this is *not* the familiar cynical *critique* of "A. Viator" that you read, but the garbled jottings of "T. A. R. Mac," who has been known to deputise for the Croydon maestro in the past, and who now once again steps into a breach, this time caused by "A. Viator's" unavoidable absence (absences are always unavoidable) on business.

Of the national crisis much has been written and overmuch said, but so far as Croydon is—or was—concerned, the week's upheaval has emphasised to our many friends among foreign pilots that we English are a strange people!

Despite the QBI conditions, Wednesday of last week might have been recorded very much as a normal day's work had it not been marred by the tragic accident to the K.L.M. Douglas piloted by Commander Hautzmayer.

#### Normal Procedure

It is not for us at Croydon to opine as to the cause of this disaster, though our sympathy is extended to K.L.M. and those bereaved by the accident, but it would appear to be generally felt that, with such an experienced pilot and the extreme caution characteristic of the company, something of an extremely unusual nature must have been the *raison d'être* for this fatality. It is all the more lamentable, therefore, to find individuals unfamiliar with the routine procedure of QBI control and the ensuing "white-line" take-offs, rushing into print before first acquainting themselves with the safety or otherwise of the regulations promulgated after the careful deliberations of men experienced in safe air travel under adverse weather conditions. It is surprising to the denizens of this airport that Lt.-Col. Moore-Brabazon, M.P., who was once an aviator of some repute, should have subscribed himself to a letter so lacking in accuracy as that published in Monday's *Morning Post*. He says "... it will surprise the air-travelling public to learn that over one of the most important points—namely, whether conditions are such as to permit flying at all, such as occur in fog—no Government control exists.

"I am aware that this was a foreign machine, and therefore rules governing it are difficult, but the idea that one may fly in conditions involving risks and get through *with the advertisement accruing therefrom, while another line of aircraft more prudent stays on the ground*, introduces a competitive spirit in danger to the public of a mischievous type, which must result in general harm to *all* operating companies." (The italics are mine.)

In short, Lt.-Col. Moore-Brabazon would have the control officers at state-controlled aerodromes, and possibly all leading aerodromes, armed with the necessary authority to ban all flying operations under fog or other conditions detrimental to the safe departure of aircraft.

This question has been the subject of much deliberation in the past, and the fact that no decision one way or the other has so far been reached is in itself an indication that opinion is—and is apparently likely to remain—divided for some time, alike among the Powers-that-Be, pilots and operating companies.

In the face of Wednesday's weather conditions and the

operations carried out before *and after* the K.L.M. calamity, one is prompted to question not only whether the power to ban flying operations is indeed necessary, but where the "advertisement" or "competitive spirit" referred to by Lt.-Col. Moore-Brabazon bears on the subject, while we at Croydon are still diligently searching for that "prudent company."

In these circumstances, and remembering that the visibility on Wednesday morning was fluctuating upwards and downwards of .50 metres, it is of more than passing interest to find that between 7.30 a.m. and lunch-time, *nine* "white-line" departures were booked out from Croydon as follows: Sabena, Air France Luft-Hansa and Swissair one each; Imperial Airways, two; and K.L.M. three, including that of Hautzmayer. Furthermore, the Swissair departure was made in the same type of machine and in a normal and routine manner only twenty-five minutes ahead of the unfortunate K.L.M. aircraft, while the 12.30 midday Imperial's service—the next out—was made without trouble in even lower visibility.

It is not, perhaps, so widely appreciated as it should be, that even *after* the white line finishes, there is still sufficient landing space for an aircraft to put down or slow up safely should the pilot be suddenly confronted with circumstances which warrant his making such a lightning decision; and I am told that there have been instances, either with a particular type of aircraft, or by a pilot in such abnormal conditions of visibility that the white line is momentarily lost, that a machine has throttled down, braked and returned or been led back to the beginning of the white line for a further attempt.

I have dealt with this rather controversial subject in some detail in an effort to establish—if that be needed—that the system used at Croydon for taking-off in limited conditions of visibility is, and has proved to be, practical in every way for experienced pilots in aircraft equipped for instrument flying and, of course, fitted with radio. To condemn its efficacy because its use has in one instance resulted in an accident is unfair to those who instituted it, use it and are successfully guided by it. As one operator put it, "It's akin to saying that because I drive down Purley Way in fog, and my left front wheel comes off and I go through the hedge, no cars should be allowed to use that road under those conditions!"

A cheering aspect of this accident was that, surrounded by flowers and sweets, Miss Bongertman, the plucky Dutch stewardess who survived the ordeal, went back to Holland on the 10 o'clock K.L.M. service on Saturday—her one desire being to resume her flying duties.

During the week, Olley's had charters to Paris and Bournemouth respectively, while Wrightways' daily Continental newspaper activities were supplemented by inland deliveries to Cardiff and Birmingham. Surrey Flying Services, Ltd., have been busy erecting Mr. C. E. Gardner's new Beechcraft and their own Porterfield, both of which arrived from America last week.

Talking of America, I hear that Captains Olley and Lynch-Blosse—respectively of Olley Air Service and British Airways—were last week seen aboard the *Queen Mary*, bound on a mission which is of considerable import to the organisations mentioned—and *should* be to those British constructors who deprecate such mundane "goings on"!

T. A. R. MAC.