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Notes on Daily Mail sponsored newspaper deliveries

and parachute jumps, at Alexandra Park, Manchester, 1919

1.5.1919

First transport flight (in UK) from London to Manchester by converted Handley Page O/400 bomber (first civil conversion) D8350/G-EAAE (fourth British aircraft allocated permanent civil registration) (last of a batch of 50 assembled at Cricklewood under the works designation/ HP Transport Company fleet number HP16, from parts made by the British Caudron Company, Cricklewood).

Handley Page had formed an associate company, Handley Page Transport, to enter the commercial aviation field as soon as possible after the war. For this purpose 16 x O/400 bombers were purchased back from the Government at slightly below cost (D8530, F5417, F5414, F5418 were already built and thus underwent minor modifications : very basic seating for up to seven passengers inside the fuselage was provided for and aft of the normal 'bomb bay', plus one or two seats in the open nose cockpit. The bomb cell section was modified from a 16-cell to a six-cell structure, fitted for carriage and release of bundles of newspapers via parachute. All four aircraft were completed by early April 1919.

Thus the aircraft were available to give Government sanctioned 30-minute joyrides April 18-21. 800 passengers were carried. Boyden and 'Professor' Newall both demonstrated the Guardian Angel parachute from 1 200 feet).

These aircraft were converted to carry newspapers on the former bomb racks. This was a cargo that demanded fast delivery but did not impinge on the Post Office monopoly. Flew from Cricklewood to Alexandra Park.

Piloted by Lt Col **William Sholto Douglas** MC (Chief Pilot of Handley Page Ltd following demobilisation, holder of commercial licence No.4 received 1.5.1919, former wartime CO of 43 and 84 Squadrons).

Took off from Cricklewood with 11 passengers on first leg of tour arranged by Daily Mail. Flight time was 3 hours 40 minutes, against a strong head wind.

Sylvia Boyden parachuted from O/400 at 1 200 feet as a publicity stunt ('daring demonstration') organised by Handley Page.

2.5.1919

Douglas planned to fly on early in morning. After a short flight (100 miles) he returned and landed due to bad weather. During the day he took the Deputy Mayor and newspaper reporters for local flights and made preparations to leave for Aberdeen the next day.

3.5.1919

O/400 was wheeled out of hangar. Narrowly avoided disaster when a DH9A piloted by F/Sgt **RT Perry** AFM stalled and crashed nearby. 21 year-old Major **Hans Orde Lees**, a parachute expert from the Air Ministry who was accompanying Douglas, was burned attempting to rescue Parry. Parry died later in hospital.

Orde Lees had been brought on the flight to assist in the delivery of bundles of Daily Mail newspapers. These were to be dropped on golf courses along the route. The system used was a combination of Guardian Angel parachutes and converted internal bomb racks, the operation of which was Orde Lees' responsibility.

Orde Lees was well enough to join Douglas when the latter left later in the day. As Douglas reached the vicinity of Burnley (over Shap) he was again forced back by the weather.

The site chosen for the drop was The Sauceries; a relatively small area of ground sandwiched between the walls of Carlisle Castle and the River Eden and enclosed by trees (now known as Bitts Park). Possibly this site was chosen because the castle offered an excellent landmark. Large crowds gathered, but were disappointed.

Major **Leslie Foot** flew a round trip of 170 miles, with 8 assistants aboard to sort and release the newspapers, from Hounslow, over Brighton, Eastbourne, Hastings and St Leonards, returning to Cricklewood after a flight of 2¼ hours without landing (in F5417 ?).

5.5.1919

Douglas made the flight to <st1:country-region w:st="on">Scotland</st1:country-region>. He took off at 5:20 am carrying 1 500lbs of newspapers, and reached Carlisle just after 7 am. Reached Carlisle just after 7:00 am. Orde-Lees aimed at a white calico cross on the Sauceries. The parcel hit the target, even though the O/400 did not deviate from its path. D8530 reached Aberdeen 1 hour and 40 minutes later. 10 passengers in the aircraft including Orde-Lees who was dropped by parachute on the golf course at Aberdeen. He narrowly missed landing in the sea. Douglas landed at Turnhouse (Edinburgh) after a non-stop flight of 370 miles. Newspapers were dropped at Carlisle, Dundee, Aberdeen and Montrose.

6.5.1919

D8530 returned to Manchester. Douglas was accompanied by Mr **Blackwood**, Edinburgh publisher of *Blackwood's Magazine*. Encountered a snowstorm over Beattock. Passed low over Carlisle just before 1:00 pm, in deteriorating visibility. Halfway to Penrith the ground was almost obscured by low-lying mist. Douglas continued to Shap but, finding no better conditions there, returned to Penrith where slightly better conditions allowed him to land in a small field to the west of Penrith railway station. Conditions improved later in the day and, after a number of attempts, Douglas finally took off to continue the flight to Manchester.

Foot flew 310 miles in just under 5 hours to deliver newspapers to Bristol, Exeter and Plymouth (in F5417 ?).

8.5.1919

(Thursday) Just before 7:00 am another O/400 arrived over Carlisle. It had flown from Alexandra Park and was en route to <st1:country-region w:st="on">Scotland</st1:country-region>, both aircraft dropping copies of the Daily Mail en route. It was flying at a much greater height and so the newspapers landed some distance from the calico cross. The O/400 continued on its way to Glasgow via Edinburgh and Dundee.

(Robinson suggests that this was F5414 piloted by Captain **WHN Shakespeare** MC DFC. It had flown from Alexandria Park and was en route to <st1:country-region w:st="on">Scotland</st1:country-region>), both aircraft dropping copies of the Daily Mail en route.

9.5.1919

Foot delivered newspapers to Southampton, Bournemouth, Isle of Wight and Portsmouth. Lt **Walker** delivered newspapers to South Wales and Filton.

10.5.1919

Douglas was back at Alexandria Park. Pleasure flights were available at £2 each. Orde Lee's assistant, Miss Sylvia Boyden, parachuted into a ploughed field at the junction of Wilbraham Road and Princess Road South. Lt Walker delivered newspapers to Southend and Clacton.

11.5.1919

Walker delivered newspapers to Norwich, Cromer and Great Yarmouth.

12.5.1919

Douglas delivered newspapers to Castle Bromwich via Nottigham, Northampton and Lichfield, returning to Cricklewood the same day.

Due to bad weather, the next delivery of newspapers was not until Monday (12 May). F5414/G-EAAF arrived over Carlisle at 6:45 am having flown from Manchester. Passing Penrith at 6:30 am, Shakespeare began to experience problems with one of the aircraft's engines. On reaching Carlisle he made a wide circuit of the city, informing Orde Lees to release two parcels instead of one. Continuing northwards Shakespeare continued to struggle to gain sufficient height to clear the high ground ahead, and while climbing over Teviotdale the main wheels came within 10 feet of the ground twice.

By the time Hawick was reached the situation had become desperate, and after consultation with Orde Lees, Shakespeare decided to turn back. (Also on board were : Miss Silvia Boyden (sic) a 19 year-old protégé of Order Lees – who had made her sixth parachute jump from F5414 the previous Saturday over Didsbury, Bill Crisp (fitter) and George Marchment (rigger). While attempting to reach Carlisle, Shakespeare noticed a meadow close to Harker railway station near the Carlisle to Gretna road, 3 miles north of the city, and elected to land.

On the final approach he realised too late that the field was too small. Unable to risk overshooting with a failing engine, he scraped over the hedge and managed to stop just before running into the opposite boundary. Assisted by Marchant, Crisp repaired the fault in the offending engine and by midday preparations were made to take-off. The remaining parcels of newspapers were removed from the aircraft that was then manhandled to the southwest corner of the field with the aid of the many spectators.

Orde Lees took his place in the open front gunners' position while Miss Boyden shared the pilot's cockpit. Crisp inserted the handcrank and started both engines. The ground proved to be too small to allow take-off. The wheels of the aircraft caught the top of the hedge causing the Handley Page to nose dive into the adjoining field. Orde Lees was thrown clear before the nose hit, and was lucky to escape with shock and bruises. Miss Boyden was flung forward, injuring her face and losing several teeth. Shakespeare was found

later pinned under the wreckage. After he was rescued, with some difficulty, it was discovered that he had suffered a broken rib and a 'crushed' lung. Crisp and Marchant, sitting in the rear half of the fuselage, escaped with only minor injuries.

RW Bell, a solicitor of *Glenesk*, Longtown, witnessed the crash and drove to the Munitions factory at Gretna for help. He returned with Dr Mawick, followed by an ambulance. Meanwhile, Dr CW Graham had arrived from Carlisle and was giving first-aid to the injured, assisted by C Balfour-Paul (who ran a nursing home at Stanwix, Carlisle) and Dr Al Sheppard-Walwyn. Shakespeare was taken by ambulance to Miss Ella Grieve's private nursing home at 16 Spencer Street, Carlisle. Orde Lees and Boyden were taken by car to Fusehill Military Hospital.

The undamaged rear fuselage and tail of G-EAAF was salvaged and returned to Cricklewood, where it was later incorporated into a new build Handley Page 0/7.

11.7.1919

Orde Lees, Boyden (and chaperone !) and a Lt Caldwell had gone to <st1:country-region w:st="on">America</st1:country-region> to demonstrate and promote Calthorp's Guardian Angel parachute. On 4 July the American Leslie Leroy Irvin had demonstrated his A-type parachute at Atlantic City. On 11 July the Guardian Angel team moved to McCook Field with the intention of proving the superiority of their design of parachute.

Orde Lees was the first to jump from an AirCo DH9 biplane. His parachute was slow to open and rapid in its descent and he landed in the Miami River, which bordered the field. Boyden jumped next, and made a reasonable descent. Then it was Caldwell's turn. He jumped from the aircraft when the DH9 was at 600 feet. Unfortunately Caldwell's parachute did not open, and the spectators watched in horror for a full 5 seconds before Caldwell's body hit the ground. In launching himself from the cockpit of the DH9 Caldwell had fouled the static line of his parachute around the rocker arm of the elevator control. The trapped line tightened and snapped under the sudden shock-load, leaving the parachute in its container and the jumper to his death. This accident not only spelled the end of all hopes that the Americans would adopt the Guardian Angel; it also led to general scepticism about the viability of parachutes.

3.7.1920

Sylvia Boyden parachuted from a Handley Page V/1500 at the RAF Aerial Pageant, at Hendon. Boyden's parachute was red, white and blue.

'Flight' magazine reported :

"As one of the Handley Pages approached over the enclosure, Miss Sylvia Boyden, with knees tucked well under her chin, dived head-first from her seat near the tail, followed by a red and white Guardian Angel parachute, which opened with its usual exceptional quickness, and brought the diver swaying violently, but gracefully, to the ground. After releasing herself from the harness and gathering in the parachute, Miss Boyden, who is but twenty-one, and pretty at that, there and then celebrated her thirteenth descent, in true aviator's style, with a cigarette, and then faced the ordeal of being photographed and filmed."

Eyewitness account by William Sholto Douglas:

“Later that first day upon which commercial flying became officially recognised in this country I made what has been described as the first transport flight between London and Manchester. Using one of our Handley Page O/400 aircraft, I flew eleven “passengers for hire or reward”. This trip took me three hours and forty minutes flying in the face of a vicious head wind; and that day’s work alone, I should think, entitles me to claim that I was perhaps the very first to participate actively in civil aviation as it has since become known in this country. During the next few days I made several other flights with passengers, going as far afield as Carlisle and Montrose and Aberdeen.

Flying those large Handley Page O/400s loaded with passengers and freight was very different from the livelier work that I had done for so long... Our aircraft were large enough to provide for a cabin which could hold fourteen passengers, and they were the best commercial transport aircraft of that time. We were all enthusiastic about our work and keenly interested in finding out for ourselves how things could be done, and more often than not all the experimenting and making do with the limited facilities that were provided suited us very much better than mere dull routine.

A great deal of our flying during 1919 was on charter work, and in this we made the first use of the air for the distribution of newspapers+, dropping them by parachute. The Daily Mail people – who have always been staunch supporters of new ventures in the air – asked us to fly bundles of their newspaper from Manchester to Dundee and Aberdeen. It was a newspaper stunt, but it was an imaginative one, and we dropped the bundles on to local golf courses. The expert responsible for the use of the parachutes came along with me on our first trip, bringing with him his secretary, a young woman. On our arrival over Aberdeen he dropped by parachute on to the golf course, intending to visit some friends, and we watched with delight the comical spectacle he presented as he floated down to earth with a small suitcase in one hand and an umbrella in the other.

It had been planned that we should indulge in yet another publicity stunt when we arrived back over Manchester, and that the secretary should make an exhibition jump with a parachute over Alexandra Park. At the last moment the poor girl got cold feet, and she hesitated about jumping. While the arguments were going on behind me I had to circle around, but eventually she was helped to make up her own mind by what has been described as a wink from me to her helpers, and down she went.”

+This is not so. Newspapers had been carried by aircraft before the Great War. This was relatively easy to do, and did not infringe upon the Post Office’s monopoly for the delivery of mail, as had the carrying of postcards by the ‘Daily Mail Airmen’ in 1912.

The Guardian Angel Parachute

This was developed by Everard Calthorp, a former railway engineer. It was a complex system, incorporating a silk canopy packed between metal discs stowed in a canvas container that was attached to the aircraft. The deployment was initiated by the falling weight of the jumper and controlled by a series of break-ties. In order to demonstrate the ‘positive opening’ characteristics of the system

Hans Orde Lees

Calthorp sponsored a display on Tower Bridge on 11 November 1917. In front of an invited audience of reporters, Major Orde Lees and the Hon Lt AE Bowen leapt from the upper parapet of the bridge only 150 feet above the Thames. Orde Lees decided to make the jump headfirst. The parachutes opened just before Orde Lees and Bowen hit the water. This was the lowest parachute jump to date, by several hundred feet.

Orde Lees became a regular demonstrator of Calthorp's system, in the <st1:country-region w:st="on">UK</st1:country-region> and abroad, including a number of descents from aircraft below 300 feet.

Orde Lees was a very unpopular man. He was disliked for his exhibitionism at school, and was a widely disliked Royal Marines officer. He was one of the members of Shackleton's 1914 Expedition, which were stranded in Antarctica. As they awaited rescue other members of the party agreed that if they had to resort to cannibalism Orde Lees would be the first to go !

Orde Lees was Secretary of the Air Board's Parachute Committee.

In May 1925 Orde Lees publicly renounced his championship of the Guardian Angel by writing to 'The Times' advocating the adoption of rip-cord free-fall parachutes by the RAF, in preference to the static-line Guardian Angel type.

Sylvia Boyden

According to Hearn, the seventeen year old Sylvia Boyden turned up at Richmond park one day in 1919, where the Guardian Angel was being tested, and asked if she could have a go. According to Lucas, Orde Lees met Boyden on an aero-engineering course at Chatham. She claimed to be twenty-one. Her real name was not Sylvia Boyden, which was the name of her grandmother, adopted so that her parents would not discover what she was doing and try to stop her.

'Sylvia Boyden' made some 150 jumps at airshows and in front of military observers. She demonstrated the Guardian Angel in <st1:country-region w:st="on">America</st1:country-region> in 1919 and in <st1:country-region w:st="on">Denmark</st1:country-region> in 1920. She jumped at Copenhagen in a wind of 60 mph.

Boyden was not the first woman to parachute from an aeroplane; this was the American Tiny Broadwick who first performed the feat in 1913.

William Newall

'Professor' William Newall, a professional showjumper since 1912, also demonstrated the Guardian Angel in the 1920s. Newall had been the first to jump from an aeroplane in <st1:country-region w:st="on">England</st1:country-region> when he leapt from a Grahame White biplane at Hendon in 1914, using a bundled parachute and trapeze ring in traditional style, and with the assistance of Frank Gooden's foot to help him off the improvised seat attached to the skid of the aircraft. Newall died in <st1:country-region w:st="on">Denmark</st1:country-region> in 1922 when his Guardian Angel 'hung up' and left him

dangling beneath the aircraft. Although Newall managed to extricate himself from the harness, and fall into the water 60 feet below, he was found to be dead when recovered by a boat.

Sources

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(Photos of crash of G-EAAF – Templeton Collection credit)

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