

SPEECH BY MR. SEAN F. LEMASS, T.D., MINISTER FOR INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE, WHEN HE UNVEILED A MEMORIAL AT CLIFDEN, CO. GALWAY, TO ALCOCK AND BROWN ON 15th JUNE, 1959.

On the roll of pioneers in aviation, from Orville Wright who first took an aeroplane off the ground, to those who are now training to journey into outer space, are the names of many very brave and enterprising men, and amongst them those of John Alcock and Arthur Whitten-Brown stand out in special prominence - the first men to fly an aeroplane non-stop across the Atlantic.

It is fitting that their great enterprise should be marked by an enduring monument at this spot where, on this day forty years ago, they completed their epic journey. This monument with the completion of which Mr. Seamus Murphy, the Cork Sculptor, has been associated is not unworthy of the event.

Now, when great aeroplanes fly on regular schedules, over all the wide oceans of the world, it may not be very easy to appreciate the magnitude of the adventure on which Alcock and Brown engaged or measure the great courage for which it called, or even to remember clearly ourselves the great upsurge of pride which was felt by all men everywhere, when the news of their accomplishment was transmitted around the earth.

Before they started their flight from Newfoundland, two other daring groups had attempted the hazardous enterprise but had failed. Whatever confidence Alcock and Brown may have expressed, they could not in their hearts have rated their chance of succeeding very highly, but they were not deterred. They had committed themselves to the adventure and were not to be turned from it.

They had none of the aids which make safe the air journeys of to-day, no radio navigational equipment, no weather ships, no automatic pilot, and even no protection from the weather in their open cockpit. When ice formed, Brown had, six times, to climb out on the wings to hack it away.

Yet they navigated with such remarkable precision, that sixteen hours and twenty-seven minutes after leaving Newfoundland they brought their aeroplane down safely here near Clifden - the first men in history - as Lord Brabazon of Tara said - who landed on a European shore and were able to say "yesterday when I was in America -"

While this monument has been built in the perpetual honour of Alcock and Brown, and it is primarily their courage and achievement it is designed to commemorate, we must on this occasion pay due tribute also to those who made their venture possible.

The phrase "the man from the Daily Mail" has a particular connotation in Ireland, sometimes humorous and sometimes sardonic, but we would be lacking in generosity if we failed to mention the part of Lord Northcliffe, proprietor of the Daily Mail, in the enterprise here commemorated, and indeed in the development of civil aviation generally. By offering prizes for specific first achievements - £10,000 for a first flight from London to Manchester completed within a day - for a first flight across the English

channel - for the first crossing of the Atlantic - always raising the target as the development of aeroplanes made possible new accomplishments, Lord Northcliffe stimulated the ambition of all those daring men whose pioneer flights have made possible the great network of services which now criss-crosses the air map of the world.

We in Ireland are very proud of the place our country had in the conquest of the North Atlantic air routes - of the first flight of Alcock and Brown which ended here, of the first successful Westward flight which started from Baldonnel on the other side of Ireland, of the first trans-Atlantic civil air operations which began at Foynes on the Shannon. These events highlighted for us the important part which air transport would play in our country's future, and I think we can say that we have not failed to learn and apply the lesson.

John Alcock died in a flying accident only a very short few months after he landed here. Arthur Whitten-Brown died in 1948. Wherever the great achievements of men throughout the centuries are recounted, their story shall be told over and over again, and their names shall be remembered with honour. Although the men whom we commemorate have passed on, we have to-day, amongst those gathered around this spot, two of John Alcock's brothers, one a famous pilot in his own right. We have also the Ambassadors of Britain and Canada, representatives of Church, State and the local administration, and of air companies and air associations and societies. We welcome Alderman Regan, Chairman of

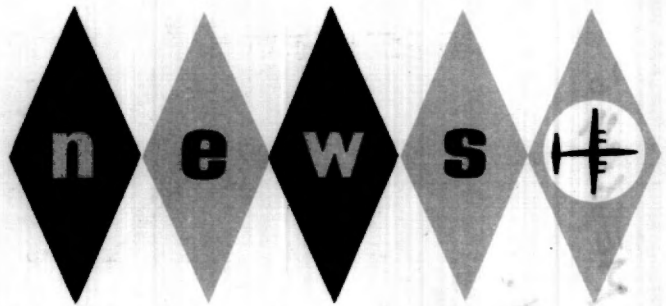
Manchester Airport Committee, from the city in which Alcock and Brown grew up. We welcome Lord Kindersley, Chairman of Rolls-Royce, and Sir George Edwards, Managing Director of Vickers, the two great firms which combined to produce the Vimy aircraft which Alcock and Brown flew and which have since made such enormous contributions to the development of aviation. We have men who themselves helped and others who represent organisations which contributed to the Alcock and Brown flight. We have the citizens of Clifden in whose custody this monument will remain.

Particularly I want to mention three of the great pioneers in aviation who are of our own race, of whom we are rightly very proud, and who are here to pay their personal tributes. There is Colonel Fitzmaurice who with Kohl and Von Huenfeld made the first east to west transatlantic crossing on April 12th 1928. There is Captain Saul who was navigator to Kingsfort Smith on his Westbound transatlantic flight on June 24th 1930, and Johnny Maher, now Chief Line Service Engineer of Aer Lingus, who was a member of the crew of the airship R.9 and later of the famous R.33.

This monument will not only perpetuate the memory of the brave men whose names it bears but also, throughout the years to come, serve as a stimulus and an encouragement to others to show in their day, in great enterprises which we can now only dimly visualise, the same love of high adventure, the same determination to succeed where others had failed, the same ambition to make a contribution to human progress, with all the gay courage and determination, and the same success, as John Alcock and Arthur Brown. May their souls rest in peace.



AER LINGUS
IRISH AIR LINES



The Flight of Alcock and Brown

Today (June 15th), is the fortieth anniversary of the historic flight of Alcock and Brown, the first men to fly the Atlantic non-stop. This afternoon Ireland will honour their achievement when a memorial to the two airmen is unveiled at Clifden, Co. Galway, by Mr. Lemass, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Industry and Commerce.

The flight of John Alcock and Arthur Whitten-Brown across the Atlantic in June 1919 was the true beginning of a revolution which completely altered the whole pattern of world transport. For Ireland, the country in which the flight ended, it had an additional significance. It was the beginning of the end of isolation on the edge of Europe.

The memorial at Clifden has been erected by Aer Lingus - Irish Air Lines with the co-operation of Clifden Town Improvements Committee.

The 14-foot memorial, in Carlow limestone, takes the general shape of an aircraft fin. The design, evolved in consultation with Mr. Seamus Murphy, R.H.A., is simple yet dignified. It is symbolic of flight, and intended to honour all those who contributed to the achievement, as well as the men who flew the aircraft. As the soft ground at the actual landing spot would not support a permanent structure, the memorial has been erected one and a half miles away on high ground overlooking the point where the aircraft landed. A cairn has been erected on the edge of the bog near the point of landing.

June 15th, 1919, is a date that stands out in the lives of many men and women, for on that day they found themselves part of history, either quite unexpectedly or with possible foreknowledge. The flight of Alcock and Brown not only crossed the Atlantic but crossed the lives of many people from all walks of life on both sides of the Atlantic. It brought them into a relationship which will be relived at today's ceremony.

=END=

15th June, 1959.



June 15, *Al* *Logan*

THE FIRST NON-STOP TRANS-ATLANTIC
FLIGHT

by ALAN TOMKINS

14th - 15th June 1919

Reluctantly, slowly, the black night began to yield to the first faint light of dawn. Thick cloud hid the moon. Heavy rain drummed on the fabric of the big biplane, spattering the two half-frozen aviators, hunched side by side in the open cockpit. They were cramped, exhausted and deafened after eleven hours in the air.

At 4,000 feet above the Atlantic, the plane, a Vickers Vimy bomber, roared out of the blinding vapour into momentarily clear air, then plunged into a great wall of thunder-cloud. The vapour thickened, sometimes hiding the wing tips. Hail slashed the men and the sturdy machine, which quivered as it was flung about in the storm.

Lightning flashed. The Vimy was weirdly outlined by dancing, rolling balls of St. Elmo's Fire.

The pilot contrived for a time to keep right side up. The air speed indicator failed. The bubble of the artificial horizon vanished. And at the height of the storm the tired men were so dazzled by almost continual electric flashes that they could not read the other instruments.

Suddenly the Vimy fell off in a spin. The two Rolls-Royce Eagles screamed and shook, before the pilot could throttle them back. He fought to centralise control column and rudder, but failed, unable to check the whirling machine against any kind of horizon.

Through the sombre mass of cumulo-nimbus they spiralled... 3,000 feet ... the pilot lost all sense of balance...2,000 feet... would they glimpse the cruel Atlantic or smash blindly into the water?...1,000 feet...the navigator loosened his safety-belt and took hold of his log-book, wondering how long they would float.

Then they fell through the base of the cloud, but the sea was not spread out level below the cockpit. It was on its edge, almost vertical, dizzily rotating only 250 feet away.

In a flash, the great pilot centralised controls and opened throttles. The Eagles swelled into life-giving song. The Vimy levelled, but sank so close to the angry clutching waves that the twin undercarriages and lower wing flew through the spray.

x x x x x x x x x x

This was but one of many ordeals on that first direct Atlantic crossing, from Newfoundland to Ireland, in 1919.

The pilot was John Alcock, 26, Manchester-born, and Arthur Whitten Brown, 32, Glasgow-born, was the navigator. The only son of an American engineer, Brown became British in order to enlist in 1914.

Both were commissioned in 1915, Brown in the Army and Alcock in the Royal Naval Air Service. Both crashed, after gallant service, and became prisoners-of-war.

Brown's left leg was severely injured, leaving a permanent limp. Peace came and, with it, - for Brown - unemployment.

In 1918 the Daily Mail restated its 1913 offer of £10,000 for the first non-stop Atlantic flight.

At Weybridge, Vickers began to prepare a Vimy specially for the contest. It was 42.7 feet long and its wings spanned 68 feet. Empty, it weighed 7,000 lbs; fully laden, almost twice as much. The range was 2,440 miles. Cruising speed was 90 m.p.h. The two 360 h.p. Rolls-Royce Eagle engines each drove a four-bladed wooden propeller.

Alcock was demobilised on March 10, 1919, and fixed up with Vickers the next day. Meantime, poor Brown had been limping round, hunting in vain for a job as engineer.

Towards the end of March he applied to Vickers. His prospects were not bright till he spoke casually of navigation. He was quickly examined on his knowledge and views.

He was led to the erection shed and presented to the Vimy - and Alcock. The two men hit it off from the first moment. Within minutes they were eagerly discussing plans for the Atlantic.

At St. John's, Newfoundland, where three rival machines were already based, Alcock and Brown had much trouble in finding an airfield. Hawker and Raynham offered the use of their fields, at Glendenning's Farm and Quidi Vidi, but only after they had departed.

A Handley Page bomber was at Harbour Grace, 60 miles away.

Hawker and his navigator, Mackenzie-Grieve, took off, to vanish from mortal ken for a week. They were safe, having been forced down and rescued by a ship which had no wireless. Raynham and Morgan crashed during take-off, and Lt.-Cdr. A.C. Read flew the Atlantic in stages, in an American Navy flying boat.

The Vimy was assembled at Quidi Vidi, then flown to a longer field, which gave a 400 yard run on a slight slope.

At the new field, (Lester's Field) it was found that the petrol reserves were useless, the rubber compound which lined the steel containers having dissolved. The chivalrous Raynham handed over his fuel: it would be a long time before his aircraft was ready for flight.

On June 13 the Vimy was being fully laden with 870 gallons of petrol for the start when a shock absorber on an axle broke. Engineers worked through the night and, at 4.13 p.m., Greenwich mean time, on June 14, 1919, Alcock took off, uphill, but into the wind. He cleared the boundary dike by inches.

In England, that evening, men in the pubs talked of the row between General Smith Dorrien and Field Marshal French and of the German peace treaty. Londoners could see the Maid of the Mountains, with José Collins, or Cyrano, played by the actor-airman, Robert Loraine. The silent screen offered Mary Pickford in Less than the Dust and Charlie Chaplin in Shoulder Arms.

Charles Augustus Lindbergh was 17, and unaware that, eight years later, he would make a solo flight to Paris, which for three decades

and more, most Americans, and far too many British people, would regards as the first non-stop crossing.

The Vimy made good time at first, over an ocean dotted with ice floes. Within an hour it was in fog. Brown's wireless transmitter went dead. The little propeller driving the dynamo had sheared off.

Next came a terrible clatter as part of the exhaust pipe of the starboard engine split, rattled and disintegrated, leaving a bank of six cylinders exhausting direct into the air. Fortunately the streamer of flame did not imperil the structure, but the noise was fearful. Then the electric heating of the flying suits failed.

After midnight, in a brief spell in clear air, Brown was able to check his position by the stars. Half-way across, they celebrated with sandwiches, coffee and whisky.

Climbing after their terrifying spin, the Vimy became caked with ice, and snow drove into the cockpit. Brown several times climbed on to the wings, holding the struts which braced the engines, and chipped ice from the engine gauges and the air intakes. After fifteen hours they broke clear of the storm at 11,000 feet. Brown, checking with his sextant, estimated that they were eighty miles from Ireland. As they let down through the clouds again, the radiator shutters froze and the water temperature rose dangerously. Alcock closed the throttles and glided through the turbulence. They came into clear air 500 feet above the sea. The Eagles fired perfectly and the controls, which had been partly frozen, moved freely.

They crossed the Galway coast near Clifden wireless station, and Alcock selected a bright green stretch for landing. It was, unfortunately, a bog. The wheels sank in the soft ground and the Vimy tipped over on its nose. It was 8.40 a.m. on June 15, 1919. They had flown 1,890 miles in 16 hours, 27 minutes, averaging 111.5 m.p.h.

Alcock and Brown were knighted. They received prize money amounting to £13,100, and were lionised.

Six months later, Alcock was dead, killed in a crash near Rouen.

Brown withdrew from flying, but for many years, on the anniversary of the Atlantic flight, he would limp into the Science Museum in London and stand looking quietly at the Vimy, in its place of honour. Saddened by the death of his only son at Arnhem, he died in 1948.