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(i.e. FOR SUNDAY PAPERS) ON
SUNDAY, AUGUST 16, 1942

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Air Ministry News Service

Air Ministry Bulletin No. 7807

"EVERYDAY JOB" - CRASHING AIRCRAFT INTO BALLOON BARRAGE

WIRES

Deliberately crashing his aircraft into the wires of a barrage balloon used to be an everyday job for Wing Commander Arthur Edmond Clouston, A.F.C. and Bar, one of the "back room boys" of experimental R.A.F. flying.

Well-known before the war for his record-breaking flights to the Cape and New Zealand, W/Cdr. Clouston is now helping the development of night fighters.

When Britain was perfecting defences against the bomber, W/Cdr. Clouston was one of the men chosen for the hazardous task of flying into various types of balloon cable to determine which was the most effective. It was the only satisfactory test.

"When the wooden wing of the first aircraft we used came in contact with the wire", he recalls, "the machine was swung round and down. At the same time, the cable, being drawn across the wing, started cutting it through. You could smell the burning caused by the friction of the cable being drawn across the wing at terrific speed.

"We found that a cable of a certain kind and a certain length would saw the wing half-way through; another cable would saw three-quarters of the way through, and so on. From these facts we worked out how to cut a raider's wing right off."

W/Cdr. Clouston experimented with a loose cable hanging from a tethered balloon. Had he run into the cable which actually held the balloon down, a new balloon would have been required for each test.

When the wire caught in the propellor, as it sometimes did during the experiments, it whipped round the fuselage of the aircraft with sufficient force to behead a man. To guard against this, W/Cdr. Clouston wore a crash helmet like a racing motor cyclist's and had his cockpit covered in with steel mesh.

He also carried out experiments to prevent aircraft icing up. Once he visited Germany and inspected their latest devices. "They were several years behind us in this work," he says.

During this time, W/Cdr. Clouston was a pilot, in civilian suit, at a Royal Air Force experimental station. Earlier he had entered the R.A.F. on a short-service commission and when war was declared he put on uniform again and continued his experimental work.

He made his record-breaking flights to the Cape and to New Zealand in the De Havilland Comet with which Scott and Black won the Melbourne centenary air race. In neither case did he interrupt his work for the R.A.F., but flew during his periods of leave.

He was back in England, nine days after taking off for New Zealand and he needed only a few days for his Capetown "trip."

He tells an amusing story of the New Zealand flight. Having breakfast under the palm trees at Penang on the way out, after several days without sleep, he was suddenly confronted by two frogs which stood, or rather squatted, nearly two feet high. The Wing Commander thought he must be delirious. But the frogs were there - they were the pets of the airport.

To-day, at 34, W/Cdr. Clouston is still one of the "back room" flying boys. After a period with the Ministry of Aircraft Production, he went back to operational and experimental flying with Fighter Command.

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