



Roger Casement Branch of Óglaigh Náisiúnta na hEireann Teoranta (ONET)



The Link

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Honorary Branch President: James Nolan



L/R, Finnbar Lyons, Richard Murphy, Paddy Goodman, Frank Donnelly, Mick Delaney (Chairman), Denis Barry.

Upcoming Events

Thursday December 5th Annual Christmas Lunch West County Hotel, Chapelizod @1300hrs.

Sunday December 8th at 1400hrs.

Limerick. Annual commemoration Service for the 3 Air Corps personnel who lost their lives in a tragic road accident in 1940. The service is arranged by the Patrick Sarsfield Branch. Venue, Old Dublin Rd. Limerick. Assembly at Herberts Pub at 1345 hrs.

Branch AGM: Thursday January 16th, 2020.

NCO'S Mess Casement Aerodrome at 2000hrs.

All members invited to attend.



CUIMHNIMIS ~ Let us remember those who have died. ~

Nick Cummins
Alec Crosse
J.Griffin

James Mortell
Paddy Martin
Thomas Keaveney

Brendan O'Sullivan
Andy Kelly

Frank Quinn
Denis O'Riordan

Branch Annual Mass.

The annual Mass for deceased members was held in Casement Aerodrome on Sunday October 13th. The Newcastle Church Choir was in attendance and the salute was played by Piper John Brennan.

The GOC Air Corps was represented by Col. Dave Corcoran. There was a good attendance from other ONE Branch's and from the RAF Association. Due to the inclement weather the wreath laying ceremony was held inside the Church.

Tea and refreshments were available in the catering centre after the Mass. It was announced that in future years the Branch Annual Mass will be held on the second Sunday of May.



THE AIR CORP'S FERMOY CONNECTION . . .

By Paddy O'Meara

I recently visited Fermoy to meet James Lysaght of the Avondhu Press who had previously given me great assistance in arranging for Derek Piggott to revisit the famous railway bridge. Derek flew under two arches of the Bridge in excess of 30 times during the making of the Blue Max Movie and expressed a desire to revisit the site during his visit to Baldonnell in 2008

Fermoy was an extensive Garrison town during the 19th and early 20th century and the remains of the various military barracks and cemeteries are to be seen. An aerodrome was also established by the RFC. This Aerodrome located on the high ground on the north side of the town was taken over by the Free State and became operational when the Air Corps located aircraft at the base in 1923 and 1924. A full account of the Fermoy Aerodrome and Air Corps Base is included in Military Aviation in Ireland 1921-45 by retired Air Corps officer Lt-Col Michael O'Malley.

Three aircraft are recorded as having crashed in Fermoy including two with fatalities.

Many of our members will recall the tragic crash of Percival Provost 182 in January 1957 when Fermoy native Lt. Michael O'Flynn and his passenger A/M Thomas Breslin were killed. The Crash site is located in the town near the lower end of Richmond Hill in a place known as Spillanes Field on the south side of the River Blackwater.

A Vickers type 193 Vespa 1V.Ser.V1. crashed and was written off in Fermoy on 6/7/1934. The exact location is unknown, there were no fatalities (crew Lt Stapleton, Pte Young). The aerodrome which was vacated by the Air Corps in 1924 was reopened by the Cork Aero Club in 1934 and it is recorded that a Sqdn of Air Corps aircraft visited the Aerodrome annually for the Air Firing exercises which were held on the Kilworth Camp ranges.

The crash of Airco DH.9 Serial D1. Occurred on 25/06/1923 when the aircraft was seen spinning over Fermoy and subsequently crashed near the upper end of Richmond Hill. The two crew Lt.McCullagh and his Observer Lt K.M.McDonagh were seriously injured. Regrettably Lt.McDonagh died the following day. He lived in Red Cow, Clondalkin and his remains are buried in Esker cemetery Lucan. He was the first Air Corps member to be killed in an air accident.

A photo of the crash scene taken shortly after the accident appeared in the Avondhu Press. I also discovered on the internet a statement which was provided to the Board of Inquiry by the NCO in charge in Fermoy which provided graphic details of the flight of the aircraft prior to the crash. He reported his observations to his Squadron Commander, Capt. James Fitzmaurice (later OC Air Corps and of Bremen fame).

(right) Copy of the statement given to the Board of Inquiry by Sgt. Johnny Maher.

(below) Statement issued by the Board of Inquiry

The NCO in charge in Fermoy at the time will be well known to many of our older members, he was the legendary Sgt. Johnny Maher.

Cpl. J. Maher is amongst the list of NCO's in service on 18 October 1922 (Military Aviation In Ireland) and was the Sgt in charge of the aircraft in the Fermoy Base in 1923/24.

He continued to serve with the Air Corps and subsequently joined the new start-up Irish Airline, Aer Lingus and signed out the aircraft for the Airline's first commercial flight which operated between Baldonnell and Bristol in 1936. He continued to serve with Aer Lingus for many years as Chief Engineer. He retired in the early 60's but remarkably returned to Baldonnell in 1965 when he was appointed Chief Engineer for the Blue Max and subsequent films. I was part of the Air Corps team of pilots and technicians assigned each season to assist with the maintenance and operation of the fleet of WW1 replica aircraft. This annual detachment extended until 1969 and during this period we had a great opportunity to get to know the legendary Johnny Maher who was part of the foundation of both the Air Corps and Aer Lingus.

The Court having assembled at 9.30 A.M. proceeded to take evidence

1st. Witness :- No 11874 Sgt. Maher J.R. I.A.S. Detachment Fermoy is duly sworn and states :-

On the evening of the 25th. of June 1923 at 5.10 P.M. I was on the landing ground of the Fermoy Aerodrome. Lieut. McCulloch's machine (Aeroplane D.H.9 D.1) was coming down in a slow spiral, he flattened out and flew level over the town of Fermoy. He was flying at about 1,000 ft. when he flattened out. He started to spiral again when he was about 500 ft. of the ground, the machine on her nose and down into a spin.

She made four complete turns in a spin, when she had completed four turns she went out of my sight, below the level of some trees. I then knew that she could not get out of the spin, and that the machine must eventually crash. I informed Lieut. Hardy who had just landed, I then proceeded to the Squadron Office to inform Capt. Fitzmaurice the Squadron Commander of the incident.

I am N.C.O. in charge of rigging on the Aerodrome, I inspected the machine (D.H.9 D.1.) before she left the ground, and found that the machine was in perfect flying order and fit for the air. I witnessed the Pilot Lieut. McCulloch testing the machine on the ground before taking off, he reported that every-thing was correct.

Cross-examined by the Court

1st. question :-

Are you of the Opinion that Lieut. McCulloch's machine went into accidentally?

"Answer"

"Yes" as it is very easy to get into a spin when doing a spiral. I have flown with Lieut. McCulloch numerous times and he never attempted to spin this particular machine on any occasion. He often told me that he would not attempt to spin one of these machines. These machines are not supposed to spin or stunt in any way at all.

The Court having duly considered the evidence finds that:-

The deceased 2/Lieut. McDonagh met his death through the accident to Aeroplane (D.H.9 D.1) piloted by Lieut. McCulloch which was purely accidental, and exonerate the pilot Lieut. McCulloch from all blame, and further find that death was in accordance with Medical evidence submitted.

The Court viewed the body before taking the evidence.

Lieut. McCulloch, owing to injuries was not in a fit state to attend the Court or submit evidence.

That

The Court wish to add the following :- A doctor and Staff be appointed and stationed at the Aerodrome Fermoy, as accidents of this kind are liable to occur at any time, as it is impossible to have the M.O. of the 40th. Batta. always on the spot.



Picture taken at the crash site shortly after the incident in Fermoy in 1923.

Air Corps News

FR172H Stand Down 04 October 2019 *by Lt. Eoin Blake*

On the 4th of October the Air Corps retired the last of its remaining Reims Rocket FR172H aircraft. A familiar sight in the skies over Ireland, the fleet has completed just under sixty-four thousand hours of flying over forty-seven years of unwavering service to the state.

Based on the Model 172 aircraft, originally manufactured by Cessna Aircraft Co, the Reims Rocket was constructed under license by Reims Aviation for delivery throughout Europe and the Middle East. Although originally developed for civilian flying, the Reims version of the 172 was without a doubt a capable and adaptable multi-role military platform. Powered by its 210hp Continental engine, the Reims Rocket boasted a higher cruise speed, higher fuel capacity and other modifications compared to earlier models developed in the United States. Notably, the Reims Rocket featured a strengthened hard-point under each wing. Both hard-points were capable of carrying a Matra rocket pod, each of which housed twelve 37mm unguided air-to-ground explosive projectiles.

The original eight aircraft were ordered by the Department of Defence in response to rising tensions and activity in Northern Ireland throughout 1970. Four aircraft were delivered on the 4th of October 1972, with four more arriving within nine days. The aircraft were registered 203-210 respectively. Initially, all aircraft were assigned to the Advanced Flying Training School, Casement Aerodrome, but were posted to Air Station Gormanston in 1973 to replace the aging de Havilland Chipmunks.

It was in Gormanston that the aircraft began to really prove their worth. A new pilot training syllabus was developed with Army cooperation at the forefront of operations. From their base in Gormanston the fleet became renowned for their roles in border patrol, Garda cooperation and regular escorts of cash, explosives and prisoners.

In addition, the Reims Rockets were utilised in a target-towing role for ground-to-air firing by the Army and Naval Service which would take place in the air-firing range, off the coast of Gormanston. A large orange drogue was towed on a 1,500 metre cable behind the aircraft with the tow winch and control unit installed in the rear of the cabin. An electronically-operated Missed Distance Indicator which was attached to the cable could show the operator how close a round had passed to its target. This information could then be relayed by the air crew to personnel on the ground or on a naval vessel, who were involved in the firing exercise. Many military personnel also had the opportunity over the years to engage in parachute training courses, finding themselves jumping out of some of the Reims Rockets. The aircraft could be prepared for parachuting by removing the front right-hand and rear seats. The right-hand control column was also removed and a special rear-facing seat was installed in lieu of the front right-hand crew seat. Lightweight seats were fitted in the rear of the aircraft and the right-hand door would be removed. A small platform fitted on the right-hand main landing gear strut allowed for parachutists to position themselves outside the aircraft, while ensuring that the starboard wheel was adequately covered so as not to prove hazardous.

Of course, the fleets' roles were many and the aircraft built a strong reputation for their reliability and operational capability. By the time the aircraft were re-posted to Casement Aerodrome following a structural reorganisation of the Air Corps in 2001, they had become well-known around the country by military personnel and civilians alike.

Unfortunately however, the 172's career was not without its mishaps. Four aircraft were written off in separate accidents between 1978 and 2004. On 20th September 1978 aircraft 204 crashed into the Shannon estuary while conducting a wildlife survey. Both occupants survived with minor injuries. On 1st March 1990 aircraft 207 was forced to land in the sea off the coast of Gormanston following an engine failure. Although

the crew was luckily uninjured, the aircraft suffered considerable salt water corrosion, which proved uneconomical to repair. Aircraft 209 was written off following a hard landing in Finner Camp, Co. Donegal, which resulted in extensive damage to the wing, undercarriage and propeller on 10th November 1993. On 6th May 2004 aircraft 243, originally an attrition replacement, was lost in an accident at Clonbullogue airfield, Co. Offaly. The pilot, our colleague Second Lieutenant Raymond Heery, had been conducting parachuting operations in the area and was departing the airfield to return to Casement Aerodrome. Following takeoff, Second Lieutenant Heery lost control of the aircraft which came down close to the runway, sadly resulting in the first and only fatality throughout the Reims Rocket's esteemed career.

Many pilots, air crew, technicians, air traffic controllers and various other support personnel will look back fondly on the memories they have of operating the fleet, whether from Gormanston and Finner Camps or Casement Aerodrome. The aircraft proved an excellent platform for pilot training and myriad of operational roles throughout their lifetime. During the ceremony overseen by GOC Air Corps, Brigadier General Rory O'Connor on 4th October, past and present members reminisced of their time spent alongside these iconic aircraft. One last formation flight was conducted by the two remaining airworthy 172s before the five airframes than remain in Casement Aerodrome were hangared and inspected for the final time. It is hoped that at least one of these exemplary aircraft will remain flying outside the Air Corps.

Early in 2020 the Air Corps is due to take delivery of three modern Pilatus PC-12 NG Spectre aircraft. These state-of-the-art multi-role aircraft will bring a new level of capability to the organisation as a whole and will be primarily deployed in the roles of ISR, Air Ambulance and Logistics.

