

Following the Bournemouth Centenary Air Show in July 1910

Tuesday 19th July: William McArdle and J Armstrong Drexel, owners of the New Forest Aviation School at East Boldre near Beaulieu, decided to fly back to their New Forest School from the air show site at Wick, between Southbourne and Hengistbury Head.

This was considered a very newsworthy occurrence at that time as most aviators would pack their machines up for transport by road to the next point of demonstration. Drexel's trip was especially noteworthy, as he had purchased the Frenchman Morane's double seated Bleriot monoplane and decided to carry Harry Delacombe, a well known newspaper correspondent, as passenger. This report of his appeared in the 'Morning Post' next day:-

" at 4.30 p.m. there was a nasty gust) wind blowing, and Mr. McArdle, considering the conditions quite unsuitable for our attempt to fly over the sea and forest to Beaulieu, suggested postponing the start, hoping the wind might drop. Mr. Drexel thought, on the contrary, that it might become more blustery and was most anxious to be off. It had been arranged that he and I in the double-seated Bleriot monoplane should start first, followed after a few minutes by Mr. McArdle on the single-seater, as the latter, with only one person to carry, was sure to travel the faster, and probably overtake us en route. There was also the possibility that either machine might drop into the sea (where there was no cordon of motor boats and steam yachts as arranged for the over-sea flights to the Needles last week), be perceived by the other, and perhaps be reached sooner from the definite information it could carry to land. As no change in the weather appeared likely at 6 p.m., we decided to set out. Mr. Drexel thought our safety lay in rising about 1,000 ft. before making the journey, and said it would probably be necessary to encircle the aerodrome two or three times to attain this altitude. A single circuit only enabled us to climb to 350 ft. So round we went again, rising rapidly as we faced the wind, but having great difficulty in keeping our height with the wind astern, the 'lift' being enormously decreased and the position of our machine becoming somewhat like that of a kangaroo sitting on its tail. Mr. Drexel's idea in flying high was: first, the hope of escaping gusts and finding a steadier wind than prevailed below; and, secondly, if the motor should perchance stop, the better chance of gliding down either into one of the few small open spaces among the almost endless trees, or else turning about and planing down for the sea. where we had a far better chance than if descending involuntarily among trees, houses, or marshy land.

"Satisfied at last as to our height, he steered direct from Hengistbury Head towards the Needles, which seemed almost below-us though really some two miles distant. We could see Mr Lorraine's aeroplane with people surrounding it very distinctly on the high land over Alum Bay and as we turned to the left over the promontory of Hurst Castle the view up the Solent as far as Southampton on the left and Cowes on the right was clearly mapped out underneath. All this time the wind had been dead astern, and Mr Drexel had a hard tussle to preserve our altitude to his liking. Once when he asked me if I could see anything of 'Mac' following I turned round, distinguished the aerodrome, but saw no machine aloft. I did however, see that our tail, instead of being horizontal, was horribly out of the level, and momentary thoughts of head resistance and a backward fall flashed through my mind. The placid smile and cool behaviour of my companion would, however, have reassured the most timid, and I was happy in the sensation of unlimited power conveyed by the regular throbbing of the motor and the mighty beats of our propeller-blades as we soared steadily ahead. Suddenly I heard 'Look! there's old Beaulieu!' Following the direction in which he was gazing, I could distinguish nothing but apparently black forest. A winding road and a peculiar shaped patch of water however, I guessed were his landing marks, and it was with a feeling rather of regret that I saw we were turning sharply to the left, and leaving the friendly sea behind, to fly over country which, from a height of 1,500 ft., looked everywhere literally unapproachable for our frail craft. With a nudge and a grin Drexel put forward the cloche, (sic) and we headed downwards till he was almost standing on his foot tiller, and my feet were pressed against the front part of our little cock-pit. Then at last I realised how much we had been leaning backwards during the flight, for we were rushing through the air at about 80 miles an hour at a bigger angle probably than we had previously assumed in the other direction.

At once I could make out the road and hangars of the Aviation School to our right, and could see a small crowd of black dots running out on what I had just before mistaken for another patch of murky forest. In three minutes we had glided more than 1,500 ft. downwards, and then came the end of my novel experience, for we landed, and were

surrounded by friends, to one of whom I gave the notes I had scribbled on leaves of my pocket-book, signed as blank pages by other friends just before we left the ground at Southbourne.

"Throughout the run I was entrusted with a rubber ball, by squeezing which a constant pressure is maintained in the feed, and I also constantly leant forward and peeped over our bows to keep Drexel informed of our whereabouts. These minor duties, however, did not prevent me from carrying out my cherished hope of proving the practicability of writing legibly during a flight, and my scribbled log of the trip is sufficiently legible to prove beyond any question that trained officers or men could easily do surveying work of the utmost importance and utility at far greater heights than we reached, for with binoculars and a clearer atmosphere I could have distinguished every necessary detail, and transmitted my impressions to paper with explanatory notes in perfect comfort by stooping below the backwash of our propeller and the ordinary rush of air as we raced along."

McArdle's epic flight back to East Boldre from Southbourne on Sea on that same Tuesday.

"Tuesday, July 19th, three days after the close of the first International aviation week held at Bournemouth, I decided to fly our Bleriot monoplane — the same machine which I flew to Bournemouth the day previous to the opening of the meeting — back to Beaulieu to the school ground. The distance as the crow flies is about 20 miles, but to avoid rather bad forest ground we prefer the sea route, which is about 6 or 8 miles longer. Glancing at the watch strapped in front of me, I noticed it was 6.15 p.m., and setting my motor (Gnome) to run 1,200 revs, per minute, I rose steadily from the aerodrome. Drexel had left just 8 minutes before, accompanied by Harry Delacombe. Before leaving the ground I could easily see them in the distance making for the same place as I intended. I at once went up to 500 feet. Unlike our big machine I had no occasion to circle the aerodrome, as I reached this altitude before passing Hengistbury Head, although the machine did not rise as quick as usual owing to a following wind of about 15 miles an hour. Banks of mist at once loomed ominously ahead, and looking towards the land I noticed the mist was much worse than over the sea. I determined therefore to head direct for Hurst Lighthouse. Flying over the sea the whole way, and rising up to 1,000 ft., on my way, I passed through several banks of mist. I thought it rather strange that these banks of mist should linger idly about, especially considering that it had been blowing fairly hard all day, but the air has a lot of secrets yet to be discovered.

"Passing over Hurst Castle I saw it was 6.25. By that it is evident I was travelling more than a mile a minute, the wind being directly behind. At the moment though I did not think much about pace, except that I appeared to be travelling rather slowly than the reverse. Looking below at Hurst I thought how easy it would be to take a 'snap' of the place, and for a foreigner to disclose some of our naval secrets, should any be visible from above.

"Leaving Hurst behind about three miles, I turned over the mainland direct for our Beaulieu school-ground, on which I calculated I ought to have landed in a few minutes. To the right I saw Southampton, and such a thing as losing my way never occurred to me for a moment, as the whole of the forest and the surrounding country is so entirely familiar to me from having motored over it for the past ten years. Again glancing at my clock I saw it was sixteen minutes to seven. I at once realised that I must have passed my destination. It seemed incredible that I could do this, as the flying grounds are nearly 5,000 acres, I believe, in extent. What height could I be up to have done this? Referring to my recorder I found it registered 1,200 feet, from which height I should have seen it easily. However, facts are facts, so I decided to drop down a little and circle round to pick up a bearing. The third circle brought me into a white cloud of mist which enveloped me for a minute or so, thus completing my mystification. After this nothing appeared familiar that might have helped me out of my quandary, although even then I felt I would find my way. So I dropped low enough to follow a road, which I felt sure would give me a clue. But in this I was disappointed. Road after road I picked out and followed with the same result. Small villages that I must have motored through dozens of times were all alike, unrecognisable. Not until 7.30 did I give up hope of getting to Beaulieu. As a last resource, why not try to find the sea, I thought? I had found it very easy to distinguish water from land at almost any height within sight. So I determined I would mount up, spy out the sea, and return to Bournemouth. After steadily rising to over 2,000 ft. or so, I had, however, to give up this idea, as glancing at my petrol and oil, I found it was nearly all gone. Then and not before did I really realise the distance I must have travelled to have used 10 gals, of petrol and 41 gals, of oil. I quickly made up my mind to find a landing spot. Descending at once to a low level I found I was over the heart of the forest, whereas before my final effort to discover the sea I had noticed plenty of possible decent landing places, had I wished to regain terra firma. Now flying straight on in as direct a line as possible, in a very few minutes I was over fields and a small town. The fields, although very small, at least offered fairly safe landing, and selecting what appeared to be the largest. I was forced to switch off my motor and do a vol plane. Levelling my machine up just before reaching the earth. I let her fall flat, the tail slightly low. Unfortunately my

propeller had stopped in an upright position and stuck in the earth, causing the machine to heel up. Alighting from the front instead of the usual back way, I caught hold of the tail and pulled her down straight, when I found the two front cross-pieces, top and bottom, were damaged. The propeller had a split from the boss down to about a foot from the end. Previous to landing I saw a lot of people, who now rushed up. One of the locals demanded 'Who be 'e?' To which I replied. 'I hardly know myself. Where am I?' 'Thee be about a mile from Fordingbridge'. came the prompt reply. And it was then about ten minutes to eight, one hour and thirty-five minutes since I left Bournemouth. I must, therefore, have travelled, circles and straight, something over 70 miles. Dismantling my machine, I proceeded at best speed by motor, hired in the village, to Beaulieu to relieve the anxiety of my wife and friends who were following me by cars. I arrived at 10 p.m. but so difficult a course to follow had I flown that poor Drexel, Grace, Delacombe and Spottiswood hunted the Forest till five o'clock next morning before locating the place of my descent. Hearing at last that I was safe, they at once turned for Beaulieu and rest after nearly nine hours' search. They told me afterwards that I passed right over the ground and sheds — in fact, clean over the machine which Drexel and Delacombe came in. I was then about eight or ten hundred feet high. Believing I was making for Southampton they did not worry about me until it began to get dark. My wife, who was present, assured them I knew the Forest too well to lose myself; I must, therefore, have comedown somewhere, owing to motor or other troubles. That I had lost my way never entered anybody's mind.

"Now the real cause of my losing my way was due to my motor not being sufficiently guarded to restrain the oil from flying in my face. Almost impossible as it may be to believe, this formed a film right over my eyes without my being aware of the fact! The consequence of this was that I thought I was in a dense mist until I bathed my face in hot water. After which the mist disappeared, as if by magic, thus accounting for my passing over the school ground and sheds without seeing them. Upon reflection my route must have been as follows:- Bournemouth direct to 3 or 4 miles beyond Hurst, up the Solent, across Beaulieu Heath and village, Hythe, Sowley, across the railway at Lyndhurst Road direct for Lyndhurst. circled over part of the Forest in the direction of Cadnam, back over the Lyndhurst Road Station, turned again near Totton direct for Salisbury, finally circling over Fordingbridge, and landing in an oatfield one mile out."