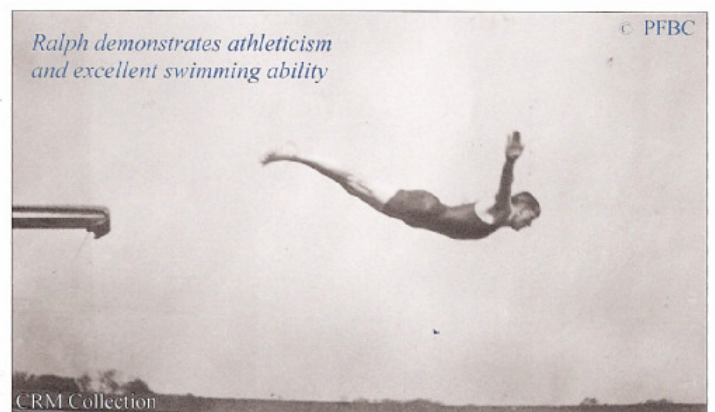


PFBC Archive: *Our Charity is committed to developing & maintaining its Public-Access Archive... For the purpose of this website a brief selection of items together with information have been provided where references in blue indicate further material is available.* Á

Part Seven: *'Capt. Ralph Mountain: Extraordinary Deeds - a legend in his lifetime'* © PFBC

Born in Battersea on 5th. July 1906, perhaps the young Ralph Mountain later, when a pupil at Westminster City School became inspired by the [Royal Flying Corps](#), and then the fledgling [RAF](#) during the War Years, in intense aerial combat. [Zeppelin](#) bombing raids were initiated from January 1915, and the Kaiser authorised direct attacks on London from May. Aircraft from the [Royal Navy Air Stations](#) tried to intercept and destroy [Zeppelins](#) approaching the coast & the Thames, whilst the [Royal Flying Corps](#) took over responsibilities when these crossed the coast heading for their bombing targets. After a struggle, by 1917 the anti-aircraft gun defences had become stronger so the threat of raids gradually diminished. Teenage boys learned about their heroes in action over the skies of London, with many other industrial cities and ports. Aerial dog-fights over the trenches in N. France also featured in popular comics & magazines such as *Boys Own Paper*.



The [RAF](#) came into being in April 1918 through the merging of the [Royal Flying Corps](#) & the [Royal Naval Air Service](#). To the south of London was a small but key military airfield of [Beddington Aerodrome](#) which was opened in December 1915 as one of the series of airfields ringing London, to counter the threat of the German bombers and the [Zeppelin](#) raids. [Beddington](#) continued to operate postwar until March 1920, by such time it had become a flying training establishment. Across the A23 from [Beddington](#), was [Waddon Aerodrome](#) that was opened as a test flying ground for military aircraft for a government-owned [National Aircraft Factory No.1](#) which was closed with conclusion of the Great War hostilities: These aerodromes were shortly to become the forerunner of [Croydon Airport](#) replacing the civil airfields of [Hounslow Heath](#) and [Cricklewood](#). At first known as the [Croydon Aerodrome](#), this facility officially opened on 29th March 1920, and as [Croydon Airport](#), when home to newly formed [Imperial Airways Ltd.](#) after amalgamation of our airlines in 1924.

[Imperial Airways Ltd. \(IAL\)](#) was destined to play such a significant part in Ralph's career in aviation from March 1936. Developments in both aircraft and flying techniques progressed so rapidly to captivate new generations of enthusiasts... Ralph Mountain was one of those inspired by an interest in flying with the prospect of a sought-after career in aviation. To the south of [Croydon](#) is [Kenley Common](#) where another airfield was constructed in the Great War for the assembling and the testing of those aircraft designated for supply to the various [Royal Flying Corps](#) Squadrons operating in France. With the formation of the [RAF](#), the [Kenley](#) establishment became a permanent [Royal Air Force Station](#) as [RAF Kenley](#). This was to continue as a significant base for the training of [RAF](#) personnel right up to its eventual closure during 1959.

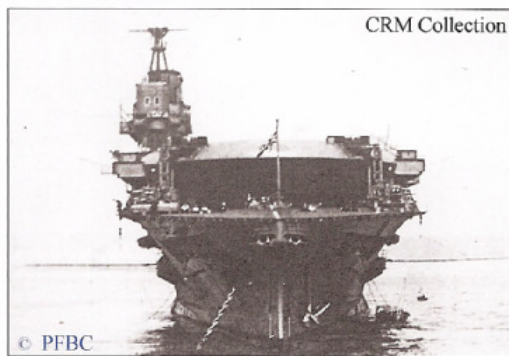
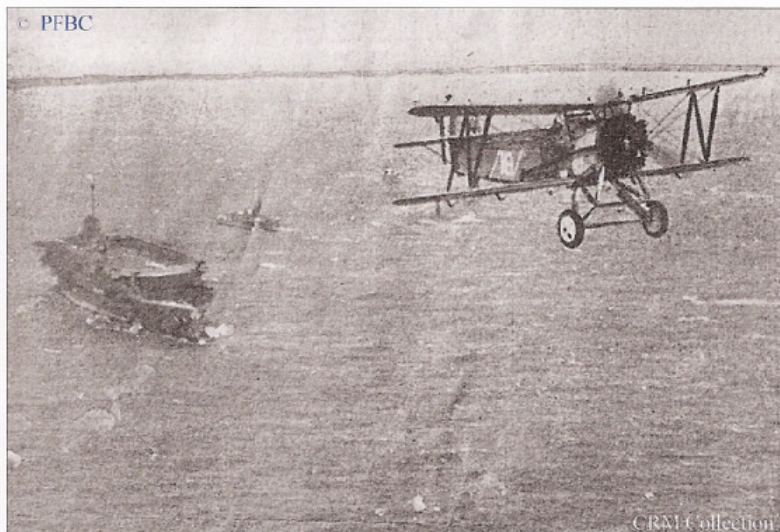
In leaving Westminster City School, Ralph Mountain studied at the College of Estate Management, London University. Then in March 1928 he enrolled on a [Short Service Commission](#) in the [RAF](#) to attain a rank of [Flying Officer](#) by 1933.



Ralph's keen interest in flying influenced him to enrol on a [Short Service Commission](#) in the [RAF](#) in 1928 at the age of 22 which took him around the UK to various bases in England, N. Wales & Scotland, also served on board [HMS Courageous](#)



Following induction at RAF Sealand in Flintshire, he was able to train much nearer home at **RAF Kenley** during 1929. Then further afield again ~ in Scotland at **RAF Leuchars** near St. Andrews, and at **RAF Donibristle** also located in Fife; ~ next heading to **RAF North Weald** in May 1930, before being posted to **HMS Courageous** to pilot **Fairey Flycatchers**.



The Aircraft Carrier **HMS Courageous** (left) lying off Spithead with Ralph's small **Fairey Flycatcher** soaring away; (above) showing detail of twin decks

HMS Courageous was a former Light Cruiser from the Great War, which had been converted at Devonport from 1924 to be an aircraft carrier that was re-commissioned in 1928. One month after joining the carrier from 7th. October 1930, Ralph was able to experience life at sea - and in the air ! Followed by 2 Mediterranean cruises in January 1931 & 1932. *[HMS Courageous was to become the victim of a U-Boat just a fortnight into WW2, when sunk off the coast of Ireland.]*



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Flying Officer Ralph Mountain at **RAF Kenley** ~ seated in front row, third from the left

Back on shore in November 1932, at **RAF Martlesham Heath** in Suffolk, Ralph concluded his active service in the RAF with a rank of **Flying Officer** & transferred to the **Reserve of Air Force Officers**, entering employment in Autumn 1933. Thereon he joined the **United Africa Company** as an Engineer and Trader, then sailed for West Africa on 14th. October. This was destined to be the first of his significant associations with Africa: in Nigeria, at Durban, and finally Cyrenaica.

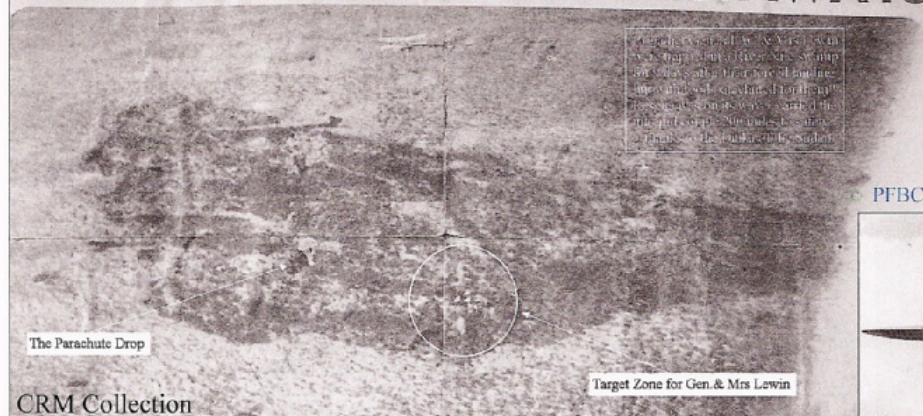
Subsequently, in 1934 Ralph returned to the UK, in August joining the **Power Petroleum Co.** as Area Rep. for Cheshire. Yet ambitions lay elsewhere with a career in aviation which was achieved in March 1936 when he was engaged by **IAL**.

His first appointment with **IAL** was as a **Probationary First Officer**, and so Ralph entered a period of **extensive training**, that encompassed the **Air Navigator 2nd. Class**, together with the **Wireless Telegraphy (W/T) Air Operator's Licences**, and extension to **Ground Engineer's Licence**. This was significantly then followed by a **Flying Boat Conversion Course**. Therefore from his initial training undertaken at Croydon, Ralph was now receiving experience at **IAL's** base at Hythe, and he was posted to **Empire Flying Boat operations** in September 1937, having been confirmed as **First Officer** in June.

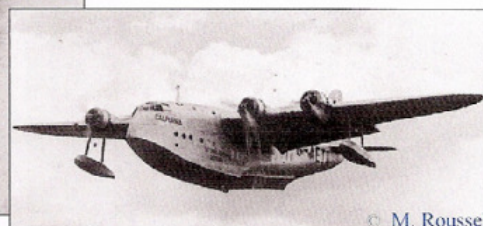
In this capacity, his first long distance round trip by Flying Boat was on 14th. September to **Khartoum** - with the return flight departing on the 20th... By 7th. October he passed along this route again and took time out to write to his parents from a night stop at its **Grand Hotel**, where he recorded his experience (heading for **Kisumu** with other letters on 19th.):

" It is 100°F in the shade - my luggage has been delayed for a while & I am sitting in a very dirty, smelly uniform... I am now in a boat named Calpurnia - Captain Travers commanding. He's very difficult to please... but I don't dislike him even though he does ignore me when ashore ! However he's very senior & I want to do my best to please him. I've been flying all day over the desert and it is most depressing - however tomorrow we hope to see 'big game' on our road to Kisumu. We are going to try to find General Lewin & drop some food for him. Apparently he is right in the Bush & will have to walk 200 miles before he can get any comfort or much assistance. - A terrible ordeal for an old man & his missus. I'll try to let you know what happens then, when I'm at Kisumu... I still have the same old urge to be at home: I hope I'll never lose it. I must end now - but if I can I will write again."

FOOD FOR SWAMPLAND CASTAWAYS

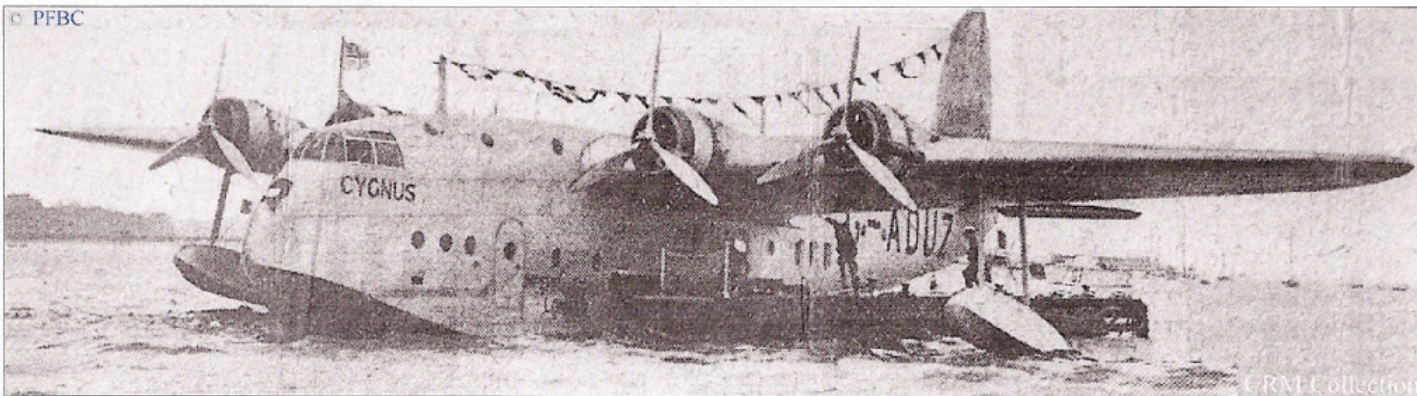


Just a year later in Nov. 1938 IAL's G-AETW Calpurnia crashed Lake Ramadi, 20km short of Habbaniyah, when landing during a sandstorm with just 2 survivors located



Home back in Chelsea must have been particularly alluring - and romance had been truly in the air when he had married Betty at St. Peters Church Cranley Gdns, Chelsea on 13th. February 1937: Daughter Tessa was born 11th. August 1938. In this interim period though, life had changed dramatically for Ralph & his family, as he had become a national figure !

Precisely at 08.30 on 5th. December 1937, IAL's G-ADUZ Cygnus had been taking off from Brindisi Harbour in Italy... Despite calm sea conditions with only a slight swell, also with a 'nice take-off wind' blowing, 'enough to stir the flags', when at about 500m from the shore it started to porpoise and then there was an dreadful crash at a speed of 50/55 knots. Much of the nose and the forepart of the Flying Boat was staved in, and it began to immediately sink low into the water; though at first, the air trapped inside just about kept the fuselage buoyant for a short period of time in over 5m of water ! As First Officer on Cygnus, Ralph had been sitting behind the 2 pilots Captain R.P Mollard & Acting Capt. F.U Hollins and was thrown forward through the shattered cockpit windscreen along with his colleague Second Officer E.C Barnes.



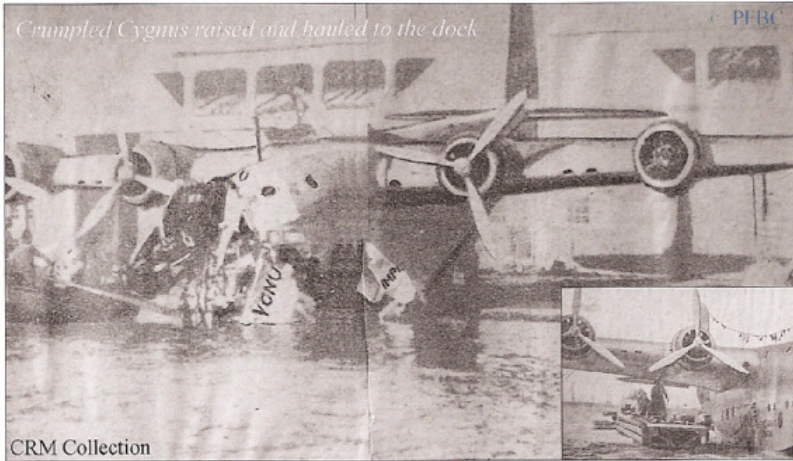
IAL's G-ADUZ Cygnus launched 4 months earlier than Calpurnia in March 1937, pictured after a successful first flight

Of 18 passengers and 2 further crew members Radio Officer F.G Hanscombe and Flight Clerk (Steward) F.L Stoppani, the impact had tragically killed Captain William MacDonald-Farquhar of Melbourne, Australia and Frederick Stoppani. They had almost certainly died instantaneously, whilst various of the passengers & the crew had been seriously injured: This included Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Salmond & Robert Lutyens the only son of Sir Edward Lutyens - he was the only passenger who had survived that now refused to go to hospital and instead chose to travel on to Rome. *" It was reported that Mr. Lutyens on reaching Rome, drove to an hotel and received medical attention, his injuries being specially treated to prevent infection from aluminium paint which is used extensively on aircraft..."*

When he surfaced, Ralph was badly dazed with cuts and bruises, but did not head to a rescue boat which was arriving ! His courageous actions took him back to Cygnus which he soon reached in being an excellent swimmer & accessed via the forward hatchway where 3 passengers had already climbed out onto the fuselage. He overruled advice of colleagues and entered the aircraft in diving down on 3 separate occasions to search for survivors who might still be trapped inside. He did so without regard to his own safety as he made his way through much luggage & debris to the rear compartment.

Then he located 3 survivors including Mrs Ritchie the sister of Capt. MacDonald who had perished (+ was searching), and a man who was unconscious... So Ralph was quick-thinking to prop his head on a luggage rack above rising waters.

One after another, Ralph moved these 3 to a position just under the main hatchway, holding the last man's head upright. For he realised that there would be only one opportunity to open this - and for all to get out before the waters rushed in! This happened & the quartet were hauled aboard a rescue boat just as *Cygnus* sank below the surface into deeper water. It was a remarkable act of bravery which would thrust the somewhat shy & unassuming Ralph into the public spotlight! His heroic deed would be recognised by the Royal Humane Society in 1938 with the award of the Stanhope Gold Medal citing the commendation for conspicuous gallantry, which acknowledged it was the bravest act of a Briton for the year!



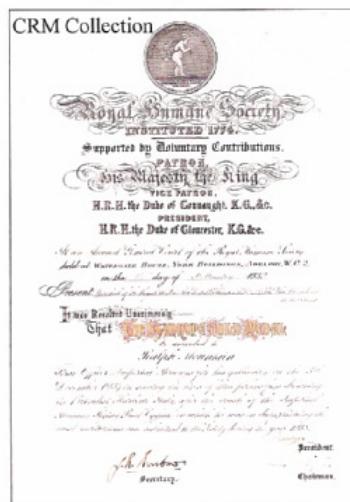
*Bravest Act 1937:
Ralph Mountain
as First Officer,
with Imperial's
Coat of Arms
on his cap badge*



In due course *Cygnus* was raised when lying in 10m of water, and brought on to the quayside at Brindisi to be scrapped. However, post bags which were on board bringing mail from NZ, Australia, Malaya and India to the UK were salvaged. *Cygnus* had been homebound on the leg from India via Bahrein etc., Habbaniyah, Basra, Alexandria, Athens & Brindisi. The Chief Inspector of Accidents at the Air Ministry on 27th. August 1938 issued his report, in which it was concluded: There were no defects to the aircraft, also that it was carrying less than a max. load and this was distributed correctly, so that incorrect setting of the flaps during take-off was the cause of the accident where prompt rescue averted disaster. The First Officer showed great courage in making his way into the rear cabin thereby enabling 3 passengers to escape.

When approached by reporters from the Daily Express about his award of the Silver Medal by the Royal Humane Soc., which had gone forward (in 1939) for the final selection of the Stanhope Gold Medal for the 'Bravest Person in Britain', Ralph was absolutely shocked, and at first thought that this to be an elaborate leg-pull... when he replied unassumingly: "Gold Medal? Can't believe it... Excuse me I've a train to catch... Off to Alexandria tomorrow in the Caledonia!"

Presentation of the Stanhope Gold Medal was by H.R.H. Duke of Gloucester on 29th. March 1939 at St. James Palace... Exactly a year on Ralph achieved his Captaincy and in June 1940 he took Command of his first Flying Boat at Durban!



Ralph and Betty photographed when heading for St. James Palace and the Award Ceremony of the Stanhope Gold Medal + Certificate on 14th. Feb. 1939 (right)... Ralph's Passport details with his signature



He was part of the contingent relocated to Durban, with fledgling BOAC quickly developing its base at Congella Basin to operate services on the so-called Horseshoe Route, in anticipation of the Mediterranean link to the UK being severed. Preparations were well-advanced, when the inevitable happened - with the entry of Italy into the war as part of the Axis. Along with the majority of IAL's Fleet of Flying Boats, Ralph had been briefly based at Poole from the start of WW2...

Capt. Ralph was soon involved in piloting various of the 15 Empire C-Class which were now operating out of Durban:~ *G-ADHM Caledonia, G-ADUV Cambria, G-AEUE Cameronian, G-AEUB Camilla, G-ADHL Canopus, VH-ABA then later as G-AFBJ Carpentaria, G-ADUW Castor, G-AETX Ceres, G-AETZ Circe, G-AFRA Cleopatra, G-AFPZ Clifton, VH-ABE then later (Nov. 1940) as G-AEUI Coorong, G-AEUC Corinna, G-AETV Coriolanus and G-ADVB Corsair*...

Then a shipful of essential spares, together with personnel on [Capetown Castle](#) landed safely in Durban from Liverpool, arriving early August with part of the manifest very precious to Ralph - as in included [his wife Betty & daughter Tessa](#) !



Ralph with Betty, and Tessa soon settled in at Durban within the closely knit community of ex-Pats with BOAC



Capt. Ralph essentially operated between Durban & Cairo, and through to Karachi, also on the Congo link to W.Africa occasionally (pioneered by a transfer of *G-ADUX Cassiopeia*, *VH-ABF* later as *G-AFBL Cooe* & *G-AEUF Corinthian* as reinforcements from Poole Sept./Oct. 1940) which had been initiated Kisumu to Lagos by *Cassiopeia* 4th. July 1941.

It was during such a flight *via* Cairo that Captain Ralph became involved in the relatively brief, yet [legendary action](#) by the crews of *Cambria* and *Coorong* in the evacuation of key personnel from Suda Bay on the north-west coast of Crete ! In WW2 the strategic island of Crete had been prepared by the British and Allies for a sterling defence against invasion. This was apparently strengthened by the influx of 25,000 men, when British and Commonwealth troops withdrew from Greece in April 1941, which fell to German forces. These then threatened Crete + Suda with *Operation Merkur* in May. The airborne attack instigated by the Luftwaffe was followed by a paratrooper assault which should have been repulsed, but these took Maleme airfield, so gaining an important toe-hold on the island where waves of reinforcements prevailed.

Prior to this catastrophe where this battle was the first essentially of an airborne invasion, which ensued for just 10 days, it was agreed to undertake an audacious shuttle to evacuate from Suda Bay (the Med's largest natural harbour) to Egypt: With the threats from the Luftwaffe ever-present, and the collapse of Greece almost certain - the decision was taken for *Coorong* with Capt. Davys & *Cambria* with Capt. Foy to divert from Cairo, and Horseshoe Duties, to begin evacuation. To counter those obvious dangers to unarmed aircraft, these were painted with camouflage to the waterline to somewhat resemble the RAF Sunderlands, which had earned a fine reputation feared by the Luftwaffe as '*the Flying Porcupines*' ! There was also the challenge of Suda, that had one time been used by IAL for a cross Mediterranean route from Athens but other than a pier, had very sparse facilities which made the potential refuelling of the Flying Boats a significant task.

Captains Davys & Foy were subsequently relieved by Alcock, Bellin, Upton + Woodhouse as well as [Ralph Mountain](#), and the original brave air crews involved also received well-deserved fresh reserves to continue the quick turn-arounds. With the initiation of evacuation by *Coorong* on the afternoon of 22nd. April, the last flight was completed on 5th. May. In total, 469 personnel were rescued during the 13 round-trips: *Coorong* with 7 and *Cambria* successfully completing 6. Meanwhile this action caused negligible disruption to Horseshoe services which were proving to be splendidly durable !

For his '*acuations*' in the evacuation of Crete, also in Malaya, Ralph was recommended for an Air Force Cross in 1942. His latest Confidential Report described him as [a very capable pilot](#), interested in all forms of Technical Development ! The period of Ralph being stationed at Durban with his family (*at 293 Currie Road*) was drawing to [a tragic conclusion](#).

Sunderland Mk.III Flying Boat *G-AGIB* operated by BOAC, took off from Rod-el-Farag a little down-river from Cairo, at 21.45 on 5th. November 1943 bound for the UK. This aircraft constructed as *ML729* had been delivered in September + prepared by the stripping of military fittings to allow for conversion at Hythe with rudimentary seating for passengers. Subsequently, *G-AGIB* made 2 successful round-trips from the UK down to West Africa, on the Poole to Lagos Service. The next journey was out to Cairo, with its return leg to be undertaken following one night's stop-over at Rod-el-Farag.

In command was the very experienced pilot [Captain J.S. Shakespeare](#), who had served on Flying Boats since 1937, and also previously for a couple of years on the landplanes of Imperial Airways Ltd. deployed on its routes through to India. [*In 1940 with Captain Kelly Rogers he flew G-ADVB Corsair back to the UK, when salvaged from its R. Dungu swamp: Famously the pair linked up again with G-AGCA Berwick bringing PM Winston Churchill from Bermuda to Plymouth in a Transatlantic Flight of 3,365 miles 16-17th. January 1942, with his safe delivery, before then flying on to Poole.*]

[Ralph Mountain](#) in WW2, was also another senior captain with BOAC, and travelling as a supernumerary with *G-AGIB* being relocated from its Durban base *en route* to duties associated with the growing fleet of Sunderlands [based at Poole](#).

After a successful take-off, with 9 crew members & 10 notable passengers bound for the UK, *G-AGIB* turned westward and headed out towards the Libyan desert 100 miles south of Tobruk, as the shortest route to the refuelling stop at Jerba. This first stage of the journey was from Egypt across Cyrenaica (Eastern Libya), to Jerba island off the coast of Tunisia.



G-AGIA Haslemere as a Hythe Class photographed here at Poole Harbour in the postwar era on those moorings near the Marine Terminal at Salterns with Brownsea Is. in the background. As Sunderland Mk III (ML728) this had been delivered as a sister aircraft to G-AGIB (ML729) built at Rochester.

At 22.20 the *ETA* for Jerba was given as 03.45 on the following day of 6th. November, then this was revised to 05.30... When *G-AGIB* became overdue beyond the potential point of the depletion of all its fuel on board a search was ordered. Routine radio signals had stopped at 22.45, about such time that an explosion on the ground of great force was reported by [Captain Needham](#) who was piloting a similar Flying Boat - concurrently travelling to Cairo in the opposite direction.

Other than contact with Jerba no other radio station had responded: Also there was no SOS, nor Fire Alarm transmitted. An initial search was conducted by the RAF with a Wellington of [Desert Air Rescue](#) and located the probable crash site, but at the time incorrectly reported the location as being some 6 miles distant from where this had actually taken place ! However, on the following day a BOAC aircraft piloted by Capt. Tagart found the remains of *G-AGIB* in a remote area, which was recorded as 75 miles SSW of [Sollum](#) within a desolate part of the Libyan desert, 25 miles due west of Egypt. From observation, it was palpably clear that there were no survivors, and that the destruction of *G-AGIB* had been total.

At 10.15 on the 6th., [Flying Boat Control HQs Middle East](#) decided upon 'a full distress action on behalf of 216 Group' as the immediate area was no longer a theatre of war. A Meeting was held at which it was agreed to send out [Mr. Wade](#) (Asst. Regional Traffic Superintendent), [Mr. Dykes](#) (Technical Asst.) and [Mr. Barton](#) (Senior Section Inspector, Cairo). This group was conveyed to the crash site by a BOAC [Lodestar](#), which landed safely close to those remains of *G-AGIB*. Christopher Dykes & H.A. Barton remained there, in order to *rendez-vous* with a 5 vehicle convoy which was due soon. Meanwhile Mr. Wade returned in the [Lodestar](#) to Cairo with any mail bags which could be retrieved from the crash site.

A convoy which arrived was of the long range desert group & lead by [Bimbashi Stevenson](#) of the Sudan Defence Force. The British Officers & soldiers buried the bodies with appropriate ceremony, and then fired a volley over the interment. After a day at the location (precisely recorded as 24°19E + 30°22N), the contingent returned to base at Tobruk, with as much evidence as could be accounted for - before Dykes and Barton then flew back to Cairo from the El Adem Airport. It was noted that the site was free from obstruction at 530' above sea level, and lay just a mile south of the plotted route.

Discussions ensued with [Commander Cummings](#) of the Accident Investigation Section (Middle East), with the outcome that no further on site investigation was required there - and that the charred wreckage of *G-AGIB* would be left *in situ*. Therefore, the subsequent report was based upon the findings regarded as being conclusive, determined at the crash site: It was stated that 3 of the 4 aircraft's Pegasus engines had been newly constructed, whilst a fourth as the Port Inner (PI) had been comprehensively overhauled before allocation, and that these had worked well on the 2 W.Africa round-trips ! Despite the distances involved over the duration of these journeys, relatively few other minor snags had been reported. Modifications carried out at BOAC's Hythe Base included the fitting of [Flowmeters](#) to support the consumption of fuel. *G-AGIB* had then been thoroughly inspected and deemed to be technically sound, and issued with its Safety Certificate.

Of the 2 captains present at the time of the loss of *G-AGIB*, both were considered to be experienced & competent pilots: [Captain Shakespeare](#) in command, had a total flying time of 5660 hours ~ with 721 of these in charge of Flying Boats... mostly on the Empire C-Class, but also including the [Boeing 314As](#)...though this was his first command of a S.25 type. [Captain Mountain](#) as the supernumerary, was marginally senior with 6818 hours ~ but with much greater experience on Flying Boats amounting to 3482 hours in command on Empire C-Class when based at Durban on the [Horseshoe Route](#). It was also his first trip on the S.25 type which was so similar to the Empires being the direct descendant of their design. [*His Technical Knowledge of Flying Boats was reputed by others such as Capt. James Peers to have been outstanding.*]

[Captain Shakespeare](#) piloted *G-AGIB* from the lefthand cockpit seat, and [Captain Mountain](#) sitting in the righthand one, with good progress being made in fine weather, on a clear night with visibility providing for excellent flying conditions. Likewise air conditions in general were most likely to have been calm; the moon was in its first quarter and had just set. Plenty of the 100 octane fuel had been stored on board, and only the centre tanks had been utilised so far accordingly... 72 gallons would have been present in the tanks. Moreover 2 main tanks each with 529 gallons were yet to be accessed.

The sequence of tragic /irrevocable events leading to destruction had taken place within a relatively short span of time: The Accident Inspection determined that the start of the fire had been located behind the Starboard Outer (SO) Engine. This had caused a much larger conflagration by burning through a [Superflexit](#) line which had acted like a flamethrower - for this would have been carrying fuel under pressure which would have sprayed out and then ignited with devastation ! The seat of the blaze was likely on the flap shroud behind the 2 rear petrol tanks and would have produced sooty flames. With *G-AGIB* almost certainly in an irretrievable dive, the starboard wing (- outboard of the SO Engine) had broken off approximately at which point the [Starboard Float](#) had become detached to subsequently land separated from the aircraft.

Separation of this float testified to the excessive heat of intense internal fire which had caused it to become 'embrittled'.

Significantly it was recorded there had been no other area of conflagration nor failure before the impact with the terrain. All of the 4 Engines had been functioning normally without hindrance, and firing regularly before the devastating crash. The investigation also took into account recent inspections of similar Sunderlands - which had revealed leakage past the flowmeter rotor upper spindle at the vent chamber. Also it was noted that there was an absence of lateral drainage holes throughout the entire wing section so as to leave pockets where fuel might potentially accumulate to be a serious threat! Further revelations included that hand torches which were supplied as standard issue, were not of a flameproof pattern... and most importantly, it was acknowledged that the Superflexit lines had been known to develop pinholes and cracking.

It was concluded, that at the time of the crash G-AGIB was being flown by Capt. Shakespeare, and that the first signs of fire would have been noticed by either of the 2 Engineer Officers D.G. Potter and J.W. Cope, or Radio Officer P. Estall (all with BOAC) or the second Radio Officer J. Blackshaw who along with Navigation Officer T.R.J. Harrild was RAF, having been seconded to BOAC from RAF duties. The remaining 2 crew were First Officers J.M. Burch and R.E. John. Prompt action would have been taken to tackle the fire once it was discovered, but there was no evidence that any crew member had taken a hand torch with an extinguisher into the wing, for neither item nor a charred body was found there.

Capt. Shakespeare probably put G-AGIB into a steep dive as a side step to port in order to blow out the furious flames... also to prepare for a forced landing. The rate descent would have been 2,000ft.per min., increasing to 20 seconds for the final 1,000ft. The 10 passengers on board would have been instructed to strap themselves in and they then remained so.

The passengers were:~

Brigadier H.C. Elton D.S.O.	...	Commands & Staff
Commander R.A.E. (Ras) Luard	...	R.N.V.R.
Colonel A.J. Kingsley-Heath	...	Kenya Police
Lt. Col. C.T. Milnes-Gaskell	...	Coldstream Guards
Admiral R.H.C. Hallifax	...	Royal Navy
Sub-Lieut. J.E. Bass-Thomson	...	Royal Navy
Captain A.T. Boddam Whetham	...	Highland Light Infantry
Lieut. H.E.W. Gordon-Brown M.C.	...	Royal Northumberland Fusiliers
F/Lieut. P.R. Taylor	...	Attached H.Q. R.A.F. M.E.
1293327 F/Sgt. C.R. Esbrooke	...	38 Squadron R.A.F.

Various other factors were considered + subsequently ruled out as not being relevant to the findings of the investigation. These encompassed any possibility of sabotage or for enemy action - even the potential for damage due to friendly fire.

A range of recommendations were made which appeared in the Report as endorsed by the Aircraft Investigation Section. In particular, at the head of the list of recommendations was importantly the Flowmeter Transmitter Head Terminal Box identified as being significant to the initiation of the sequence of tragic events, which led-up to a devastating explosion!

The recommendations were as follows:~

- (i) *Immediate removal of the Flowmeter Transmitter Terminal Box to a position remote from the fuel lines*
- (ii) *Immediate provision of lateral drainage holes in the bottom corner of every ribstiffener panel throughout the wing*
- (iii) *Immediate provision of flameproof torches*
- (iv) *An improvement in the installation of Superflexit petrol lines particularly as regards provision against chafing*
- (v) *Eventual replacement of every Terminal Box connecting thin wires by properly installed plugs and sockets*
- (vi) *Provision of flame arrester gauzes at the end of jettison pipes*

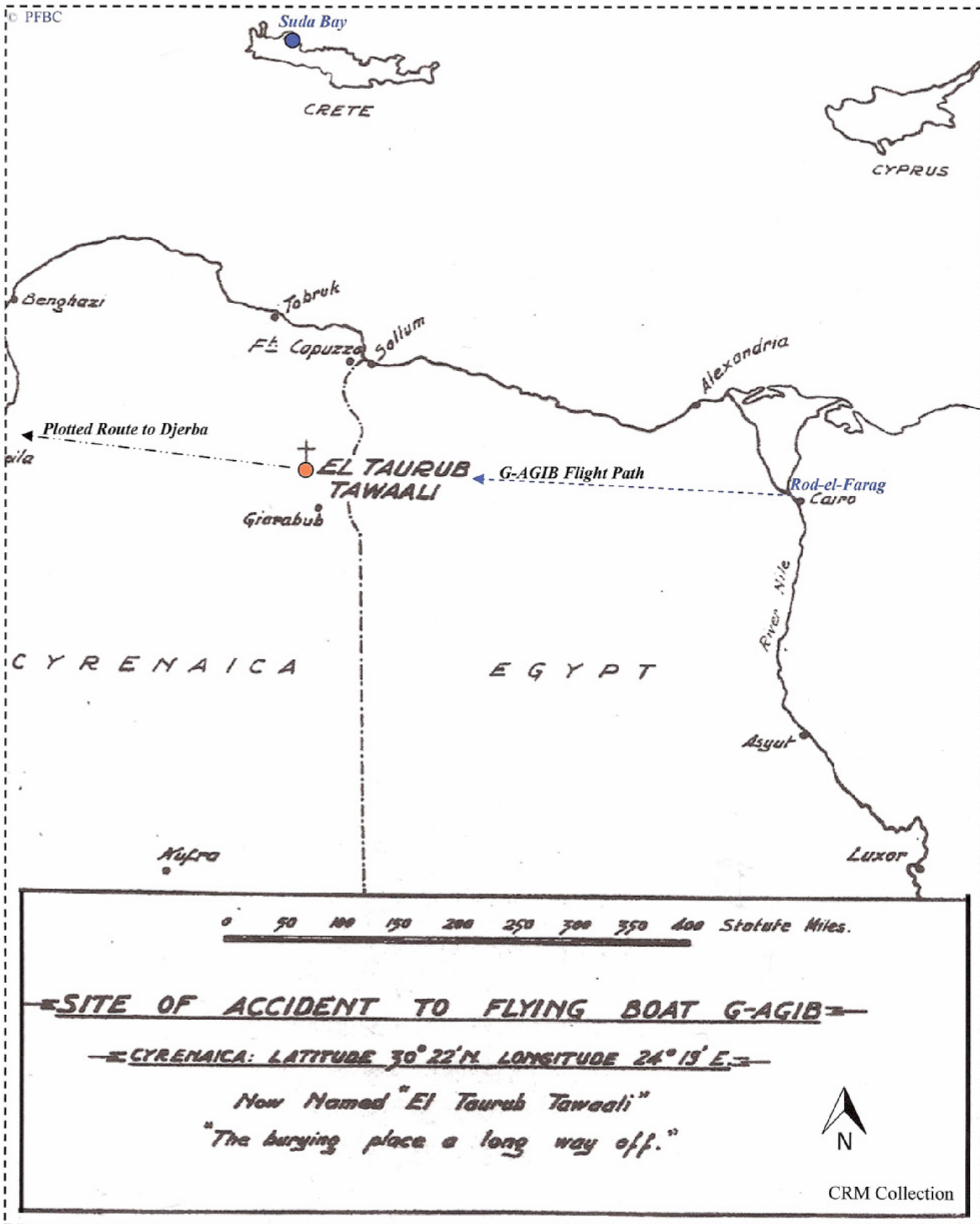
A build-up of fumes & fuel leaks had resulted in a fire sparked from an electrical fault which could not be extinguished. The aircraft had been side stepped to blow out flames, but in doing so the wing tip had broken off condemning G-AGIB.

At first the bodies were buried at the site which became known as El Taurub Tawaali: 'The burial place a long way off', then later re-interred after notification of next of kin at the Halfaya Sollum War Graves Cemetery on 17th. March 1944.



CRM Collection





The crash of *G-AGIB* took the life of Captain Ralph Mountain, along with those of Captain Shakespeare and his 7 crew, together with 10 illustrious passengers on board, all of whom had been certainly looking forward to returning to the UK.

If Captain Ralph Mountain had not been lost in the crash of *G-AGIB* then it is almost certain that he would have enjoyed a further significant association with Poole and a glittering peacetime career with BOAC on Flying Boats & Landplanes. Whilst it is essentially a question of what might have been, it is also recognition of an action-packed life + great courage!

Aimée - with due acknowledgement to Tessa McIntyre who makes this dedication to her father Captain Ralph Mountain:

The Archive of Poole Flying Boats Celebration with Tessa, would greatly welcome any further information about Ralph.