

JOHN WESTON, "GRANDFATHER OF AVIATION IN SOUTH AFRICA"

Introduction

In "Militaria" 2/1 (1970) mention was made of M. J. L. Weston, D.Sc., F.R.G.S., F.R.S.A., A.I.E.E. in relation to the training of our first military aircraft pilots and the proposed establishment of a South African Air Force as well as a South African Flying School (p. 14 *et seq*). He was a consulting engineer and one of the foremost stalwarts in the field of civil and military aviation and the manufacture of aircraft in our country. Dr. Weston directed a request at the beginning of 1913, as mentioned in this publication, to the then Under Secretary for Defence, with a view to acquiring the authority to train military aircraft pilots, but without success.

Dr. Weston, as can be gathered from the foregoing, was indeed in the forefront in regard to the encouragement of aviation in our land. More than one researcher/author has directed his attention to Weston's career, his activities, and outstanding merit. One of these is Mr. J. J. Oberholzer, M.Sc., Director of the National Museum in Bloemfontein.

Mr. Oberholzer has undoubtedly succeeded both in word and in deed, in answering a large number of outstanding questions relating to Dr. Weston's life and work. He has at the same time, when and where necessary, critically examined earlier historical references to Dr. Weston to rectify the errors apparently made by his predecessors.

In this way an invaluable overall picture has emerged which, thanks to the author's sanction allowing for the publication of his findings in "Militaria", can now be presented to its readers.

Research in the same direction in the Archives of the South African Defence Force has, unfortunately, only produced minimal results. For the sake of comprehensiveness, however, these are included hereunder: On a reference card the following details are recorded.

Name: Weston J. L. (John Ludwick).
Rank and No.: Lieutenant — 6/2/15.
Regiment: South African Aviation Corps.
Next-of-kin: Mrs. E. Weston (wife).
Brandfort, O.F.S.
Reference 6/2/15 — 31/7/15.
Embarked per SS "Erna Woermann" for Northern France 21/3/15.
See S.A. Aviation Corps for Star.

On another record card the following appears —

Name: Weston — John Ludwick.
Commission Issued: 15/9/16.
First Appointment: Temporary 6/2/15 Supernumerary.

On the reverse side of the latter card, the following is noted —

Attached and Appointed to	Date		Authority	Nature of attachment on appointment
	From	To		
Supernumerary List	6/2/15		GO26	Appointed
SA Aviation Corps	6/2/15		429 GO26	Temporarily attached for duty
	31/7/15		429 GO4273	Released from Service

NB. At the foot of the same card is recorded —

Temp [orary] Comm[ission] relinquished.

Date non-effective 10/1/20 GO.4274.

As the reader will notice, notwithstanding Mr. Oberholzer's most detailed researches, a number of questions relating to the date, year and place of birth of Dr. Weston remain unanswered. Neither do the South African Defence Force Archives provide the answers to these questions.

The hope is nevertheless expressed here, that these and other questions may yet be answered with the passage of time.

But in spite of the questions which remain open, Mr. Oberholzer's contribution provides so many new facets that his findings which follow, can be regarded as quite priceless !

Mr. Arthur Blake was also good enough to allow his copy of Brig Gen. Guy Livingston's work **Hot Air in Cold Blood**, [London, 1933] to be studied by the writer of this introduction.

Brig. Gen. Livingstone, just as in the case of Dr. Weston, was a pionier in the field of aviation in our land and pp. 52-53 of his publication refer to his meeting with Dr. Weston, recording inter alia that —

Not long after my arrival I received a visit from a South African named Weston, who had built his own machine at Bloemfontein and who had made a number of short flights, but found, as is so often the case, that no man was a prophet in his own country

Mr. Oberholzer produces in his findings, ample evidence of the prophetic vision of Dr. Weston, of his successes and reverses, but above all, of his steadfast belief in the case he propounded.

Like other stalwarts who played a role in our history, so Dr. Weston will remain one of the torchbearers who will continue to inspire future generations.

Were it only for the role he played in the propagation of the establishment of our own military aviation and the active service he rendered as an officer of the **South African Aviation Corps (S.A.A.C.)** in the South-West African Campaign, he would undoubtedly earn the right to a proud niche in "Militaria."

To Mr. Oberholzer once again a sincere 'thank you' for so commendably placing at the disposal of our periodical, the ample harvest of his painstaking researches.

Jan Ploeger.



John Weston during the Anglo-Boer War, 1901.

Photograph: Mrs. E. Weston/C Doc S

Chapter 1

Early Years

a. Date and place of birth

Maximilian John Ludwick Weston was born in an ox-wagon in Northern Natal, South Africa, in the 1870's. He was the son of a Scottish geologist who came from Edinburgh and Anna MacDougal, who came from Reading, England. Although it is known that he was born in Edinburgh, the father's christian names have unfortunately been forgotten and cannot be traced.

During the course of research on Weston's life, quite a few controversial statements on his own date and place of his birth, as well as the nationalities of his parents, have been encountered. Although some reports mention that he was born in Zululand during the 1870's, there is no record of this in the registers of the Registrar of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in Pretoria for the years 1868 to 1880.

According to the records of the Ministry of Defence, London, Weston was born in 1872. At the time of his death in 1950 his age was given as 70 years by various newspapers. This makes his year of birth 1870.

When applying for the Aviator's Certificate of the French Aero Club, which he obtained on February 3rd, 1911, he gave 17.6.1874 as the date and Zululand as his place of birth.

In his application for membership of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, London, filed in January, 1902, he possibly correctly gave his age as 29 years. This is consistent with his stipulation on marrying Miss Elizabeth Roux in the Bloemfontein Magistrate's Court on August 10th, 1906, that he was 33 years of age.

The Royal Aero Club in London have in their collection a very early handwritten register of holders of airship pilot's, and aeronaut's certificates and in this book there are pasted

two prints of the same photograph of John L. Weston that was later used on his advertising poster. Against one of these photographs there appears this note: "Zululand 17th June, 1873."

According to Rosenthal [1965], Weston was the son of a Zululand pioneer and both **The Rand Daily Mail** and **The Sunday Chronicle** of April 13th, 1911, remarked that he was born in Zululand, and came of West American stock. But the **Daily Dispatch** of July 26th, 1950, reported that according to his daughter [Weston had two daughters] he was born in Scotland. This information was also used by Driffield [1965].

In July, 1950, the correspondent of **The Sunday Times** at Harrismith says of him:

"So far I have been unable to ascertain definitely where he was born, the date of his birth, or even whether 'John Weston' was his correct name.

"Reports have appeared that he was born in Natal, others that he was born in the Free State, and yet he himself once told me that he was born in Scotland of Scots-American parents."

Weston himself apparently also got mixed up with his date of birth. His eldest daughter remembers that he frequently stated that he was born in an ox-wagon at or near Fort Marshall in Zululand and "in his typical way he could give the exact bearings of this spot in degrees and minutes longitude and latitude in the Vryheid area." Fort Marshall was one of a series of forts constructed by the British during the Zulu War and Morris [1966] states that Fort Marshall was established in June, 1879, at Isipezi Hill which is situated between Isandhlwana and Babanango. Although Weston was born six years prior to the estab-

lishment of this fort it is logical that he could later have used its name to describe his place of birth.

Thus, the available evidence leads one to conclude that Maximilian John Ludwick Weston [whose first name was given after that of Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, a good friend of his father's] was born on June 17th, 1873, in an ox-wagon at Fort Marshall in northern Natal, some 80 km to the south of the town of Vryheid.

b. The first years of his life

Very little is known about Weston's parents and his early life; and what little was known before has been reproduced and elaborated upon by various authors who in their accounts have given on the whole very little attention to verifiable facts.

In his book, Klein [1955] began the chapter which was devoted to "The Flying Admiral" as follows:

"While ox waggons were still plodding across the veld and long transport teams were dragging plant and equipment from the coast to the new Transvaal gold-fields; while the postcart and stage coach were carrying South African mails on routes ahead of the spreading railway systems, another young South African, John Weston, was dreaming his dreams of the conquest of the air.

"The keen atmosphere of the uplands of Natal must have had a stimulating effect on would-be aviators, because John Weston, too, a little after Goodman Household, [sic!] started his aeronautical experiments in Natal. This short, stocky youth, who was to make an important contribution to South African aviation, had no contact with Goodman Household [sic!] and it is doubtful whether at the time he had heard at all of the Karkloof gliding experiments.

"Working on lines of his own approach to the problem of flight Weston first experimented with kites and gas-filled balloons and later with a primitive glider of his own design. Although he was convinced of the feasibility of heavier-than-air flight his preliminary experiments in Natal were not very successful."

In the book **Personalities in South African Motoring and Aviation** [1941] it was also stated that Weston was born in Natal "and it was in this country that his experiments in weight lifting kites were made," while Murray [1941] maintained that Weston was first heard of in aviation as having been engaged in conducting experiments with weight-lifting kites in 1879. Since Weston was only born in 1873 this last date is obviously incorrect and there are absolutely no grounds for speculation that he actually conducted flying experiments in Natal!

He did apparently spend the first few years of his life in South Africa, for a younger brother of his, by the name of Frederick, was killed by a stray bullet in Natal at the age of three; but when Weston was seven years old, the family was in Somaliland where his father was engaged in training the Somalis to resist the onslaughts of the notorious slave trader, Hamed ben Mohammed, also known as Tippoo Tib. Weston later recalled that he handled a gun at that early age.

c. From Somaliland to America

It is not known how long the family — which consisted of his parents, himself and a younger sister Lucy — stayed in Somaliland, or whether they returned directly to South Africa at all. When the young Weston was ten years old the family went to America. By this time John had become interested in electricity and had built a working model of an electric dynamo into which he incorporated his mother's knitting needles as parts. This model dynamo remained with members of the family in Denver, Colorado, from where he apparently re-acquired it some years later, and subsequently demonstrated it to his son-in-law, Mr. Walker, in South Africa.

d. The wanderlust takes hold of Weston

When the young Weston was about twelve years old his father died, and it is not known exactly what Weston did during the following three years of his life. From what little has been recorded and from photographs which form part of the collection of his late wife, it can be assumed that the wanderlust took hold of him and that he travelled extensively while working his passage as a sailor before the mast. It has even been reported that: "As a young man he took part in nearly every war

and fought in several revolutions in South America" [**The Friend**, November 3rd, 1961]. From his known occupations and from what he told a reporter of **The Cape Argus** [March 8th, 1911], it is evident that during the years between the ages of 12 and 15, as well as later when he worked in Belgium and in England [1888 to 1902], he used every opportunity for globe-trotting, trying his hand at every possible or impossible job.

It is known that he was engineer and cook on the yacht of a friend, an officer of a Nicaraguan ship, a coxswain on a life-boat at Birkenhead, England, a whaler, a cod fisherman on the Newfoundland banks, a marine engineer, a diver, an explorer and a big game hunter, and that he also at one time spliced metal hawsers in California in order to obtain pocket-money.

e. His technical studies. Experimenting

Rosenthal [1965] relates that Weston himself had once told him that while he studied engineering in America in the nineties he became acquainted with, and also helped, the well-known American aviation pioneer Octave Chanute with his experiments with gliders. Chanute's classic biplane glider was flown in 1896 and it seems possible that Weston could have been in America at the time.

Although there seems to be no doubt that Weston did in fact obtain a D.Sc. degree, probably in civil engineering, the present author has not been able to ascertain where he obtained this degree. Enquiries directed to both American and European universities have yielded no information in this connection. Although there is a story that he studied engineering in California, all efforts have not been able to confirm this.

In a list of his qualifications and experience compiled by himself in 1902 [see page 7], it will be seen that Weston pursued his technical studies during the period 1888 - 1894, and that he was also working in Belgium at the same time.

Klein [1955] and previous authors mention that Weston experimented with gas-filled bags in 1888. It is not known whether any significant results were obtained from these experiments, but it must be approximately at this time that John Weston for the first time experienced the "rapture of leaving the ground," as he subsequently described his

first successful balloon flight to a reporter. Klein [**op. cit.**] maintains that it was during this period that he developed the knowledge of balloons and the high degree of skill that made him one of the expert balloonists of the First World War.

Although he was interested in kites at a very early age it seems possible that it was the success of Chanute and Lilienthal which gave rise to Weston's desire to study the intricate problems of heavier-than-air flight. It was during a visit to Pretoria in 1911 that Weston told reporters that he had his "first glide" in 1892 in America "where he was educated," and added that he himself built the glider in which this flight was conducted [**The Rand Daily Mail**, April 13th, 1911].

While watching aerial activities at Baragwanath Aerodrome in 1930, Weston again told a reporter of **The Rand Daily Mail** about his experiments with gliders in California, and that he attained "... fair success, though in comparison with results obtained today the early efforts could be classed as comparative failures."

He added: "In those days gliders were taken up by a balloon arrangement to a height of 4,000 to 5,000 feet and released. We used to come down in a sort of spiral fashion, but did not travel any great distance forward. I have paid dearly in physical pain for my experiments in aeroplaning and gliding."

With the kind consent of Mrs. Walker, John Weston's elder daughter, the Institution of Electrical Engineers has agreed to a request by the author to make an exception to their practice and to grant permission for certain normally confidential information to be reproduced. This information [produced below] is contained in a document and letter in which Weston supplied details about his qualifications and experiences prior to being proposed as a member of the Institution and sheds light on a very important and hitherto unknown aspect of Weston's career. It is thus of obvious historical value.

The one document came into existence when two full members of the Institution of Electrical Engineers proposed on January 17th, 1902, that: "Maximilian J. L. Weston of 5 Holly Bank Road, Birkenhead, being 29 years of age" be elected as an Associate.

On this document it was also stated in what probably is the handwriting of the secretary,



The Weston dwelling, Brandfort, as it is to-day.

Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein/C Doc S

that "Mr. Weston received his technical training in Belgium and has since held responsible positions in both Belgium and this country." In his own handwriting, Weston summarised his qualifications and experience as follows:

"Education. Under the tuition of M'Albert De Puydt, who obtained his degree of Civil Mechanical Engineer with the greatest distinction, at the University of Liège, Belgium in 1880.

"The higher Mathematics and Mechanical an Electrical Engineering equivalent to instruction received in continental universities — Mr. A. De Puydt being at the time technical manager and chief Engineer of the firm 'J. Jaspar' of Liège, Belgium.¹

"Present Appointment or Occupation:

Partner and technical representative of the firm: A. de Puydt and M. Poncin of Liège, Belgium.

Principal Partner and Managing Director of the firm: M. Weston & Co., of Liège, Birkenhead, etc.

Previous Experience:

From 1888 to 1889, outdoor foreman, with J. Jaspar of Liège, Belgium.

From 1889 to 1890, Assistant Installation Engineer."

From 1890 to 1894, chief installation engineer with J. Jaspar and with De Puydt and Poncin, of Liège, Belgium, during which he superintended over one hundred lighting and power plants in different countries.

[During this time (1888 — 1894) he pursued his technical studies.] From 1894 to 1895, Designer of Electrical Generators and other machinery, under Mr. A. de Puydt.

From 1859 to 1902, Partner and Technical advisor with De Puydt and Poncin of Liège, Belgium, and M. Weston & Co. of Liège, Belgium, and Birkenhead etc., England.

f. Additional Information offered by the Candidate in support of his application:

Some of his inventions, which have been patented in the U.K. and which present distinctly original features:

Patent No. 16792, 1895 relating to arc lamps.

Patent No. 19839, 1859 relating to Dynamos & Motors.

Patent No. 24098, 1895 relating to so-called 3 pole Generators and Motors.

Patent No. 17951, 1895 relating to commutatorless continuous current Dynamos for Electrometallurgy.

Patent No. 19251, 1895 relating to arc lamps.

Patent No. (not yet applied for) relating to "Physical Rheostat."

On January 18th, 1902, the Secretary of the Institution of Electrical Engineers apparently wrote to Weston and asked for more information. Using a letterhead belonging to the firm M. Weston & Co., with the inscription W. E. Branch, Marion Street, Birkenhead, England, he replied as follows on the 20th of the same month:

"Dear Sir,

In answer to your favour of the 18th inst. I beg to say that: 'De Puydt' are manufacturers of Electric Generators, motors and other machinery in connection with me: that they manufacture several machines invented by me; that I am one of the partners, their consulting engineer and English representative. 'Weston & Co'. is a company floated by me some time ago, to take over the manufacture of light electrical apparatus, formerly a part of De Puydt & Poncin's business, and also to manufacture on a large scale, the arc lamp (Patent 19251 — 1900) and its accessories; that I am the principal partner, the managing director and engineer.

On the Continent this latter firm is known as: 'Manufacture de la Lampe arc 1900' (Société Anonyme). The registered office being No. 2 rue de Iborlly, Liège, Belgium.

I am,

Yours very truly,

M. J. L. WESTON"

g. Weston elected an Associate of the Institution of Electrical Engineers

On the strength of the information supplied, Weston was elected an Associate of the Institution of Electrical Engineers on February 5th, 1903.²

h. Trips abroad

During frequent trips abroad to do electrical maintenance work Weston kept in touch with the development of aeronautics in the main aviation centres of the world. Weston also claimed that it was he who installed the first electric lighting in the Paris Opera House.

Unfortunately it cannot be ascertained exactly when and why Weston gave up his electrical concerns in England and Britain, although this is known to have occurred prior to his temporary return to South Africa.

On the back of a photograph in the collection of the late Mrs. Lily Weston there is an inscription which states that Weston was back in South Africa in 1902. Another photograph taken in this same year shows Weston during the Anglo-Boer War when he fought on the Boer side against Britain.

There is yet another photograph of Weston that was taken in the Netherlands in 1902. By this time he must have been on his way to Russia, where he apparently went to build bridges. At the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 he escaped through Port Arthur and returned to South Africa. He was photographed in Mombasa in East Africa on December 8th, 1905, and was in Cape Town early in 1906.

In 1903 Weston was elected a Member of the Society of Arts, which later became the Royal Society of Arts, when all members became Fellows. He remained a member of this Society until November, 1915.³

i. "Thoughts on responsibility"

In November 1903 a philosophically-minded Weston published a little pocket-book "printed as a memento for presentation to the many friends I have made, and hope to make during my wanderings about the world."

Fourteen pages of this little book was devoted to an essay called "Thoughts on Human Responsibility." Although his initials M. J. L. W. and a photograph of himself appear in the preface to his essay, both the outer cover and the heading of the actual text state only that the booklet was written "by an engineer." He is obviously influenced by mechanistic and deterministic philosophies of his time which had not been influenced by the subtleties of the quantum theory.

He believed for instance, that "the laws of mechanics being immutable, the trajectories of all the atoms of the Universe are consequently determined in advance to the end of time."

The conclusion to which this view of the Universe leads him in this essay, in which his object was "to offer an example of the bent of philosophical thought engendered by his training, in the mind of an engineer, and of the rudiments of philosophy based upon deductions which at least are not contrary to scientific knowledge," is that —

"anything which promotes the final state of equilibrium of the atoms in movement is moral, in other words an aid to nature, i.e., to produce to oneself and to the whole of humanity the maximum of happiness compatible with our present state, constitutes morality.

"It therefore follows that the best constituted brain is that which procures the maximum of happiness to its proprietor and the whole of humanity, for by so doing it practises morality . . . , and that fatally.

"If it considers that it can find happiness by opposing nature, it is badly constituted, in other words its proprietor is mad to a more or less advanced degree."

In this same booklet he also stated what could possibly be considered to be the credo of his life, namely: "Never allow human conventionality to interfere with the dictates of your conscience; in other words, do right and fear not."

j. "The Philosophy of a Mechanical Engineer"

Hastings [1947] mentions that Weston had set down what was evidently the crystallisation of his mental experiences in a pamphlet called "The Philosophy of a Mechanical Engineer." "In general it expounded the idea that the absolute, or ultimate aim of things, was just equilibrium. Everything that tended towards equilibrium was good. Everything that led away from it was evil. Further, it was plain that in Weston's view automatic stability was the true aim of aircraft designers and that to the trained vision automatic stability and moral value were much the same thing."

k. Back to South Africa

On September 17th, 1904, John Weston completed a certificate for election as Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and on this form gave his address as c/o Mr. Papendorf, Somerset East, Cape of Good Hope, S. Africa. It was also specified that this would be his address after January 3rd, 1905, his address before that time being Poste Restante, Guillemins, Liège, Belgium. On December 12th, 1904, Weston was elected a Fellow of the Society.

The addresses and dates quoted above lead one to conclude that Weston returned to South Africa in January, 1905.

On December 17th, 1903, the world's imagination was stirred by the news of the success achieved by the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk. It seems evident that this flight, and subsequent success in the field of powered flight, must have fired Weston's mind and awoken compelling interest in the subject.

In the biographical note on Weston published in "Personalities in South Africa Motoring and Aviation" [1941], it is stated that his experiments with problems of heavier-than-air flight "were conducted not only in South Africa, but also in several other countries to which the necessity of earning a livelihood took him in pursuit of materially profitable fields of engineering. This is probably why his work at this period is not better known, and that more information concerning it is not available."



John Weston in the uniform of the South African Aviation Corps photographed at Hendon, England, on September 14th, 1915, shortly after the German South West-African Campaign. Note the S.A.A.C. wings.

Photograph: Mrs. E. Weston/C Doc S

Chapter 2

Weston's second stay in South Africa

a. His marriage

Back in South Africa in 1906 he advertised an idea of his for arranging a mule cart expedition to Central Africa. Among the applicants who wished to take part in the proposed expedition were two brothers, Charlie and Polly Roux of the farm Rustenburg [now known as Stellenrust] at the foot of the Helderberg Mountains, near Stellenbosch in the Cape. Weston went to Stellenbosch to discuss the expedition with the two Roux boys and while he was there, their father suffered a heart attack and died.

When she heard of his death, his daughter, Elizabeth Maria Jacoba ['Lily'] Roux, who was a school teacher to a private family at Koffiefontein in the Southern Orange Free State, came down to Stellenbosch for the funeral. Here she met John Weston.

Due to their father's unexpected death the Roux boys could not take part in Weston's mule cart expedition. Weston therefore also abandoned the idea and returned to the north-western Orange Free State, where he had apparently rented the farm Doornpoort 335, near the present village of Bultfontein, and begun farming.

In August 1906 Weston went to Koffiefontein, apparently covering the distance of some 150

miles by bicycle. From Koffiefontein he and Miss Lily Roux bicycled a further 100 odd miles to Bloemfontein. Weston's bride-to-be was dressed in morning clothes and he himself in khaki breeches. On approaching their destination they were caught in a thunder-shower, and in their still damp clothes were married by Magistrate J. A. Ashburum of the Bloemfontein Magistrate Court. This was on August 10th, 1906. John Weston was 33 years of age and his bride 31.

From Bloemfontein the Westons went to their farm in the district of Hoopstad. Apart from his own farming practices Weston also had a threshing machine with which he travelled from farm to farm as an itinerant thresher of mealies.

b. Caught in a veld fire

Their eldest daughter Anna Weston was born on February 6th, 1908. Later in the year the family was on trek with the threshing machine when their slow moving convoy got caught in a devastating veld fire. Weston immediately ordered the native driver to lash the horses and buggy in which his wife and baby were travelling to escape the fire which was slowly but surely herding them towards a series of deep dongas that could have spelt

disaster for them. Risking his own life Weston turned back to the natives who were travelling with the threshing machine a mile or more to their rear. Mrs. Anna Walker still has in her possession Weston's badly scorched watch and an envelope on which he himself wrote: "Watch I was wearing when caught in the great veld fire on the Vet River in 1908, in which several of my boys lost their lives and in which Lily his wife and Anna the only 1 year old, nearly lost theirs." A number of oxen were also killed by the fire. The threshing machine was completely destroyed and people from the vicinity later visited this spot on the farm John's Gift, near Brandfort and carried pieces of scorched machinery away with them as souvenirs of the great fire.

c. The first aeroplane constructed

Various authors have stated that Weston built the first aeroplane ever to be constructed on the African Continent, at Brandfort, between 1907 and 1909. In the collection of photographs of his late wife there is indeed one of a bearded Weston standing in front of a shed and on the back of this photograph Weston himself wrote: "Building first successful aeroplane 1907/08." Unfortunately he did not state exactly where he had begun building this aeroplane, but to a certain extent this can be deduced.

For instance, it is known that this name appears on the list of registered voters for the Magisterial District of Hoopstad which was published on October 7th, 1907. The address given is Doornpoort 335, P.O. Bultfontein, and his occupation that of farmer. As his name does not appear on the Land Register as owner of Doornpoort it can be concluded that he rented this farm. On October 26th, 1907, Weston became the holder of mortgage bond no. 13176 on the farm Kalkdam 152 in the district of Hoopstad. This bond of £300 which he gave the owner of Kalkdam, Dr. A. J. Tonkin, a medical practitioner of Bultfontein, apparently entitled Weston to rent this farm. On January 21st, 1910, this mortgage bond was cancelled by the Registrar of Deeds.

Then, on May 3rd, 1909, "Maximilian John Ludwick Weston, gentleman residing at Kalk-

dam, district Hoopstad bought from one Matthys Gerhardus Smith of Brandfort certain remaining portion of Erf 6a Block G. extent forty six square roods one hundred and twenty six square feet" for the sum of £300 [Deed of Transfer 27615 of 1909]. The present number of the erf, on which the Weston dwelling is still to be seen, is no. 509 and is situated on the corner of Loop Street and Watervoor Street in Brandfort.

On the voters' list for Brandfort published in 1909 Weston's name also appears and his occupation is listed as 'engineer.'

In view of the above information it seems unlikely that the Weston family settled at Brandfort earlier than May 1909, and as John Weston himself stated that he built the first aeroplane during 1907 and 1908, it must be concluded that he designed and began constructing it while staying on the farm Kalkdam in what was then the district of Hoopstad. This farm, which is situated only a few miles from the town of Bultfontein, today falls under the magisterial district of Bultfontein.

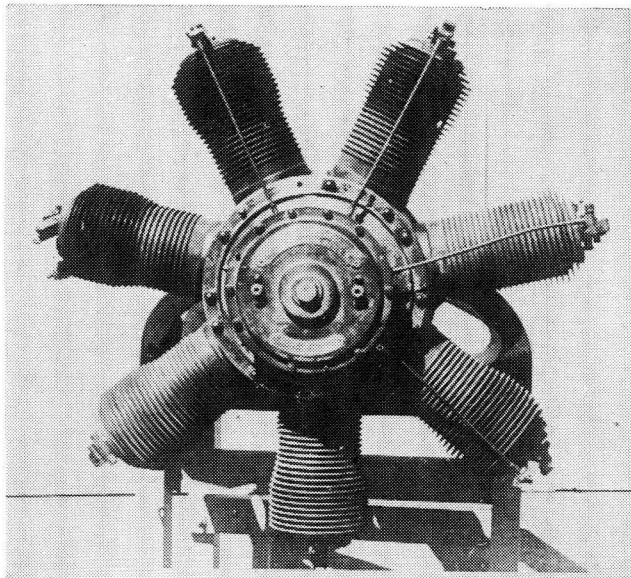
It is evident, however, that Weston was still working on this aeroplane in 1909 while staying at Brandfort where he had a well-equipped workshop. It seems therefore, that Rosenthal [1965] was far out when he stated that South Africa's first aeroplane was built in 1912.

In personal Communications Mr. Charles Howard Gibbs-Smith, the noted aviation historian attached to the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, has supplied me with valuable data supplementary to that in his books [1960, 1966] on the chronological sequence of some relevant aviation events. From this is evident that various errors in the chronological order of events in the life-history of John Weston were made by authors such as Murray [1941], Klein [1955], De Lange [1964], Rosenthal [1966], Van der Spuy [1966], Blake [1966] and De Freitas [1968]. While Rosenthal maintains that in about 1904 Weston worked with Farman in Paris, and Murray, Klein and De Lange hold that Weston returned to South Africa in 1907 or earlier, after having worked with the Farman brothers in Paris, De Freitas expresses the opinion that Weston's aeroplane was modified and

rebuilt at the Farman works in France in 1908; and van der Spuy states that: "He had, as early as 1907, begun the construction of an aeroplane, fashioned after a Farman biplane" while Blake implies the same. But according to Gibbs-Smith, Henri Farman first entered aviation in 1907, when he bought a Voisin which he proceeded to modify. Farman was first airborne in his life at Issy on September 30th, 1907, in a Voisin, flying a distance of thirty metres. He used this Voisin until 1909 and in April or May of that year he began designing and building his own aircraft on the Camp de Châlons.

The first aeroplane to be built on the African continent must have been adapted from already developed principles with modifications of Weston's own, and under the influence of the designs of flying machines of the day such as the Flyers of the Wrights and the Voisins which he could have seen on his frequent trips abroad.

According to Murray [1941] this aeroplane of Weston's was fitted with a 30 h.p., four-cylinder, water-cooled Panhard engine. The first Panhard-Levassor aero-engines appear to have been made in 1909, but Weston may well have used an earlier Panhard car engine [Gibbs-Smith, personal communication].



Rear view of the 50 H.P. seven-cylinder air cooled rotary engine of the Gnome type, donated to the National Museum, Bloemfontein, by John Weston about 1929. Being the oldest aero-engine of its kind in the Republic of South Africa it has been declared a National Monument.

Photograph: National Museum, Bloemfontein/C Doc S

The first machine of his own design was the Henry Farman III [the I and II were Voisins]. Maurice Farman did not start flying until February 1st, 1909, at Buc. Thus the earliest date on which Weston could have attended the Farman school would have been during the autumn of 1909.

It is thus evident that the aircraft which Weston designed and built at Kalkdam and Brandfort between 1907 and 1909 could not have been based on a Farman-type, as no such thing was in existence at the time.

As far as can be ascertained there are no longer any photographs, sketches or plans of the original Weston aeroplane in existence, and a detailed description can likewise not be found. What is known, however, is that Weston believed that a dihedral angle on the lower planes gives an aeroplane greater stability as well as a better lifting capacity, and that he incorporated this principle into his machine. In the 1911 Henri Farman's, as well as in various other aeroplanes, builders tried out this dihedral principle.

Murray [1941], Klein [1955] and others further elaborated on Weston's activities in the period prior to the actual construction of the first South African built aeroplane. The claim that Weston was awarded a certificate by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale, and qualified as a balloonist, airship pilot and aeroplane pilot was also wrongly ascribed to the period before 1907. The true facts, however, are that none of these qualifications were obtained before the dates given in appropriate paragraphs below, and in every instance, the relevant certificates were after 1909, but no F.A.I. certificate was issued in his name [Gibbs-Smith, personal communication].

From the available evidence it can thus be concluded that John Weston having designed and built an aeroplane between 1907 and 1909 on established lines, but modified largely by his own conceptions, and finding that the 30 h.p. 4-cylinder water-cooled Panhard engine which he had installed in it was underpowered, decided to take this machine overseas in order to find the solution to his problems at the aeroplaning centres in England and Europe.

d. Weston's departure for Europe

The date of his departure for Europe cannot be pinpointed exactly. Various authors already referred to, accept that he left for Europe during 1908 or earlier. But in the minutes of the Town Council of Brandfort [**The Friend**, December 11th, 1909], it was noted that: "A letter from Mr. M. J. L. Weston, dated 2nd December, was read, giving further information to his claiming a refund to rates on erf No. 6, block A . . .," and that he had complained about his water account. So that the fact that he bought the Brandfort property in May and complained about his tax and water account in December of the same year leads one to believe that he did not leave for Europe before the end of 1909.

There is ample proof that Weston actually was in France in 1910, for on April 13th, 1911, the now defunct South African newspaper **The Sunday Chronicle** reported that:

"In a chat yesterday Mr. Weston said that he was constantly making small

models and when he arrived in France in July last [July, 1910] he got his ideas put into practical shape and indulged in larger machines. For six months he flew nearly every day and on one occasion he covered fifty miles and could have gone further had he been participating in any competition. In all he has made some hundreds of flights and has never hurt himself in his machines."

Weston later told a reporter of **The Rand Daily Mail** [June 30th, 1911] that he had learnt his aviation at the Plane de la Beauce — between Paris and Orleans.

The journal **L'Aero** of January 1st, 1911, reported that Weston made a solo flight at Étampes on December 30th, 1910, and that he flew in a straight line. The same journal, on January 8th, 1911, reported that he had passed his certificate test with ease on January 5th, and was granted Aviator's Certificate No. 357 by the French Aero Club, on February 3rd, 1911. According to the Curator, Musée de l'Air, the discrepancy in these dates, indicating a lapse between the passing of the test and the issuing of the certificates, is quite normal.

A further clue as to the actual year in which Weston took his aeroplane to France comes from the type of engine fitted.

In the biographical section of "Personalities in South African Motoring and Aviation" [1914] it is stated that:

"In 1908 this machine was taken to Europe and modified; later it was fitted with one of the first 50 h.p. Gnome engines."

But the first Gnome engine to power an aeroplane in the air was fitted on Paulhan's standard Voisin in June, 1909. The next one was fitted to Cockburn's Henry Farman III in July, 1909, and the one after that to Farman's own III at the Rheims meeting in August, 1909, when he received official permission to install it in place of the unsatisfactory Vivinus in mid-meeting [Gibbs-Smith, 1966].

"The Gnome Engine, invented by the Sequin brothers in France, was aircooled and rotary with a stationary crankshaft and seven air-cooled cylinders revolving round it. One of the advantages of the 50 h.p. Gnome with its 35 h.p. development was its lightness. The early pioneers used Gnome engines extensively including the 50, 70, 100, 140, and 160 h.p. Of course, like any other engine, the Gnome had a number of defects. To gain force it had to be opened to its total capacity. It burned as much oil as petrol. Should the inlet valve break the Gnome flared up in a fiery sheet. Even so, it was the best available at the time." [Oughton, 1961].

Among the pamphlets in the Weston collection in the National Museum, there is one published by the "Société des Moteurs Gnome" of 49, Rue Lafitte, Paris, giving full specifications for both the 50 and 100 h.p. engines. It is stated in this pamphlet that: "The number of revolutions can vary from 200 to 1300. The consumption of oil is about 2 litres an hour, and the consumption of petrol of 300 grammes per H.P. and per hour."

NOTES:

1. It may be mentioned that the firm J. Jaspar, now J. Jaspar & Co. was first to manufacture Dynamos; it is by that firm that M. Gramme had his first machine made.
2. As a namesake of John Weston's, Dr. Edward Weston, the renowned electrician, designer and manufacturer of electrical equipment and measuring instruments (e.g. the Weston light

meter), was very active in the field of electrical engineering at about the same time, the equipment produced by them can easily be confused. Thus, "Weston's Dynamomachine" pictured in Meyers Konversations-Lexicon [Vol. 11, pp. 78, 1890] as well as the Weston electrical equipment, cadmium cell, measuring instruments and centrifugal machine, of which descriptions and illustrations may be seen in the older issues of "The Encyclopaedia Britannica and other sources certainly were some of the patents of Edward Weston, who is believed to have been a cousin of John Weston. What is known, however, is that John Weston repeatedly spoke of the Weston differential pulley block as his own design. In Volume 32 [pp. 92] of the tenth edition of the Britannica [1902] it is stated that this "very effective pulley tackle . . . depends for its efficiency on the mechanical principle involved in the old Chinese windlass . . ." and that "This pulley block is largely used in factories and workshops, and generally for lifting loads of a few tons."

3. According to information supplied by the secretary of the Society, Weston after 1908 could thus have added the letters M.R.S.A. and after 1914, 'F.R.S.A.' to his name. In Weston's publication on "Heinze's Patent Airship" which was published in 1911, however, and also on his stationery and advertising material published between 1911 and 1913, the abbreviation F.R.S.A. was used by him.

One of the Gnome engines used by Weston is exhibited in the National Museum. The inscription on two yellow copper plates riveted onto the rear surface of this engine reads as follows:

"Société des Moteurs Gnome
49, Rue Lafitte, Paris." and
"Moteur Gnome
Type No. 358 3438."

On the engine block, between cylinders 1 and 2, there appears the inscription.

"No. 354
Moteur BTE S.G.D."

The relatively high series numbers of this engine, 354 and 358, lead one to believe that this engine was not the one installed in Weston's South African-built aeroplane, and that the present engine was made up of parts of at least two engines. This engine was salvaged from the ashes of the Brandford workshop after the devastating fire of 1913, and could have been used in one of the Bristol biplanes, or, as Weston had the local agency for these engines, it could even have been a new or reconditioned one. Gordon [1935] stated that half-a-dozen Gnome engines were completely gutted by this fire.

Chapter 3

From the Weston Farman to the founding of the "John Weston aviation company"

a. The Weston-Farman

Weston called his aeroplane, which was modified on Farman lines, the Weston-Farman biplane, and on returning to Brandfort in 1911 he staged a spectacular re-entry into South African aviation.

The Weston-Farman was apparently only used in his first flying demonstration in South Africa, namely, at Kimberley in June, 1911. From the photographs [taken at Kimberley at the time] it can be seen that this modified aeroplane closely resembled the Bristol and Farman types. It is believed however, that the Weston-Farman was a larger aeroplane than contemporary models and incorporated slightly upward angled and curved lower planes.¹

Although the Bloemfontein morning paper, **The Friend**, published numerous news items on aviation prior to 1911, no reference of any kind can be found to the construction or unsuccessful trials of Weston's first aeroplane before that date. Brandfort is situated only thirty-four miles to the north of Bloemfontein and it still remains an enigma why the first item about the pioneering work done in aeronautics by John Weston was only published in **The Friend** on February 17th, 1911. It was then announced under the headline "Clever invention by Free State Engineer" that:

"The South African Engineer, John Weston of Brandfort, district, O.F.S., who was reported last week² as having been in Europe for a considerable length of time, experimenting with devices having for object a greater safety in aerial navigation, has succeeded in producing an aeroplane easy to drive, even in winds of 50 feet per second, and specially adapted to South African conditions, capable of flying in a high altitude as

that of the O.F.S. and Southern Transvaal, very robust to stand landing upon rough ground, easy to take to pieces and to transport by roads and rails.

"The difficulties to be overcome are greater than might appear to non-technical persons, for the altitude affects an aeroplane in several manners:

(1) the power of the motor, as is the case with all internal combustion engines, decreases 4 per cent for every thousand feet above sea-level; it follows that the power of an engine capable of developing 50 horse power at sea-level will be reduced to 38 horse power in Johannesburg.

(2) the efficiency of the propeller is greatly diminished and so is the sustaining power of the planes. It is doubtful whether 50 horse power would give as much lifting power in Johannesburg as 25 horse power in Cape Town, the aeroplane being the same at both places.

"It is to be noticed that no aeroplane carrying more than the pilot has ever reached an altitude exceeding four thousand feet, notwithstanding that it is easier to reach that altitude, starting from low lands, than to quit the ground at the same number of feet above sea-level; this is due to the fact that an aeroplane is capable of attaining a greater speed once in the air, than when rolling upon the ground.

"For touring and military purposes it is necessary that an aeroplane should be capable of carrying, not only a good supply of petrol and oil, but at least one person in addition to the pilot; the second person, map in hand, should direct the pilot in the course to be pursued, for the latter's attention is to a great extent engaged in the manipulation of his

levers. For military purposes, the passenger would have in addition to note the position and strength of the enemy, the configuration of the country traversed, etc.

"Mr. Weston is convinced that after having demonstrated that a well understood flying machine can be manipulated as easily and without greater danger than a motor car, a great demand will spring up for them. For war purposes in a country possessing few railways and bad or no roads like South Africa, aeroplanes will be invaluable and even in native outbreaks would be a most precious contrivance for sparing lives.

"Mr. Weston is now on his way back to South Africa with material for building aeroplanes in this country, where, in order to demonstrate their efficiency, he will fly in all important centres."

The French magazine **L'Aerophile** of April 15th, 1911, reported that J. Weston, after a period of training at the Châlons camp, had left for South Africa, taking several machines with him.

b. Weston interviewed

Shortly after Weston's arrival in Cape Town he was interviewed by a reporter. The following article headed as "Special to the Cape Argus" was subsequently published on March 7th, 1911, under the title: "To Storm the Skies. Mr. Weston, Air Pilot. First South African Aviator."

"A few days back the Argus was visited by the first South African aviator, namely, Mr. John L. Weston, C.E., D.Sc., F.R.G.S., F.R.S.A., A.I.E.E. Born in Zululand Natal, Mr. Weston comes of Western American stock [**sic.**] but is a real South African by birth and upbringing and further by his happy marriage to Miss Roux of Rustenburg, Stellenbosch. "Still in the prime of life, Mr. Weston has found time to be scientifically educated in America. The Aero magazine for February 1 says of him:- 'The first genuine South African pilot is now on his way home after receiving his training at the Farman School at Étampes.

He is an engineer of rare ability, and has seen most of the countries in the world, having been a sailor before the mast, a whaler, a cod fisher on the Newfoundland banks, a marine engineer, a diver, an explorer, a big game hunter, and now an aviator. Yet all the time remaining a thinker, an inventor and an experimenter. He has been really interested in aviation for something over fifteen years, but has only now had the opportunity of realising his ambition."

"In the course of the interview, Mr. Weston said he returned to South Africa on the 18th of last month, after a six months' trip to Europe to study aviation. "'But', he said, 'I first 'glided' in 1900 in America. I have since made flights and made my own machinery and incidentally have spent several thousand pounds on aviation. Lately four months' experimenting cost me £1,600. At present I have a machine in Europe ready to be sent. My personal ambition is to go in for further experiments in aviation, but to do that you must have money. I therefore intend giving a series of exhibition flights all over the country.

Afterwards I shall start a school for aviators and make machines in this country. Although the engines, of course, must be imported from France, South African wood will, however, be excellent material. Ash is used abroad, as being tough and flexible. I expect to visit Knysna in quest of suitable wood. "'Yes, I have made hundreds of flights over country, and have been, say, for eighty minutes in the air. But, of course, I have looked on flying from technical, not from an aerobatic point of view.

" 'Do you feel nervous while flying ?'

" 'I feel absolutely nothing. The moment I felt something I wouldn't fly any more.

" 'But there is another thing. I have always been a practical teetotaler — not a professional one. Abstinence from smoking, tea, coffee and alcohol have a lot to do with my lack of 'nerves'. Then again, having been a sailor, I am accustomed to uncanny heights.

" 'Yes, flying is exhilarating, even more so than yachting, especially in a gusty wind. You feel you are floating in the air, and the speed is so high.

“‘I feel certain that many South Africans, once they have their sporting instincts roused, will take to flying. It is not so dangerous as it seems.

“‘No, Mrs. Weston has not yet made an ascent but [true daughter of Africa] she is very keen on doing so. When I have a good machine, suitable ground, and fine weather, I would readily take her and our little child as well.

“‘As to my adventures, well, once I was up a 45-mile wind, and landed backwards, but I have never been hurt nor damaged a machine’.

“‘All aeroplanes are based on the designs of the Wright brothers to a very great extent, but my own machine differs in detail. For instance, I have made the bottom plane curved instead of flat, which increases the stability. Still, if people prefer to use well-known makes I am agent for the Farman, Bleriot, Gnome-engine, Chavière propellers, and other products of the best in France.

“‘Kimmerling, [*sic.*] who visited this country, had results, but then he had a very crude machine. As to the other disabilities I cannot judge. For one thing, of course, you need an ‘aerodrome’ — a piece of land clear of all obstacles. At Brandfort, O.F.S., for instance, where I live, the anthreaps would play havoc with one’s aeroplane’.

“‘Yes, America and England are doing well in aviation, but France still leads. It is marvellous that South Africa alone has done nothing at all, and yet we have so many wealthy men.

“‘As regards the Union defence scheme, a corps of aviators will naturally be indispensable. In Europe all the armies are well equipped in this respect’.

“At the request of Mr. Hewitson, of the London Daily Mail, Henry Farman, the world-famed aviator and aeronautical engineer, wrote down what he thinks of Mr. John Weston:

‘During the time I stayed at Étampes i.e., November and December, 1910, I have had daily opportunities for appreciating Mr. John Weston’s rare quality as a pilot aviator. Any praise of his skill is fully deserved. He is a man of exceptional ability, possessing an inborn gift

for aviation; his understanding of everything appertaining to aeronautical science is astonishing. I am sure when he will be reduced in his South African solitudes to reckoning only on his own ability he will never be embarrassed. In short, Mr. Weston will astonish the world of airmen!

“Mr. Weston holds aviator’s certificates from the Royal Aero Club of England and the Aero Club de France.

“It is to be hoped Mr. Weston will succeed in his worthy ambition to interest South Africa in the coming conquest of the air.

“Certainly thousands of pounds are daily spent on other pursuits of much less sporting interest and national importance.

“The South African Automobile Club are likely to lend him every encouragement, associated as they are with the Aviation Leagues of Great Britain. On Monday Mr. Weston hopes to visit Mr. Mansell, of Somerset West, and will, if practicable, fly on the aeroplane possessed by that gentleman. All letters and inquiries for Mr. Weston sent to the Cape Argus office will be duly forwarded to him.”

c. Back in Brandfort

In late February or early March, 1911, John Weston was back in Brandfort. Gordon [1935] pictures the situation thus:

“... He returned to South Africa with a machine modified to his own design and the agency for Gnome engines — the engines that made early aviation possible. Back to Brandfort, of all places, in the Orange Free State. There with his wife and young family he occupies an unremarkable cottage with a workshop at the back and yard full of bits and pieces of threshing machines and such like. There was something remarkable, however, about this unpretentious house with its narrow passage and the ‘eetkamer’ and ‘slaapkamers’ dining room and bedrooms leading off. The room on the right was furnished with an enormous draughtman’s desk and littered with blueprints. The walls were plastered

with them, and as for the floor one steps gingerly amongst strut sections, wing skeletons, propellers blades and odds and ends of engine parts, incongruous in a 'dorp' dwelling. And the unforgettable man himself; short and thickset, dressed in shapeless pants and 'veld-schoens' but — with a personality. The face with its trimmed beard was almost saintly the eyes alight and alive. Soft spoken, Weston was fluent in Afrikaans, English and French, and his quietly rapid utterance and his originality of thought and expression marked the enthusiast especially when he got amongst his plans and drawings. He used to call himself a 'boer' scientist, because he explained, he was a 'boer' farmer and could put 'Dr.' to his name."

Hastings (1947), writing about Weston at about this same time states that:

"... even in a country crammed full of notable or exceptional personalities, Weston was a character. And a fine one. Physically his appearance was that of a sailor, and no wonder, for he had been a merchant seaman. He was deeply bronzed, had a short brown beard, was about the middle height, and I suppose about 36 or 37 years old. The keynote of the man was selfreliance — I have never known anyone so independent of others' assistance. He wrote his name on South African Aviation history, for it can now be said that he was completely successful and showed South Africa for the first time [*sic!*] the astonishing picture of a piloted plane in actual flight. He was his own mechanic throughout his tour of Africa. He allowed no one to touch his plane but himself, and usually slept with it. He had learned to do that, he told me, in his experiences with Farman at the time of the Gordon-Bennet Races, when it appeared that there was no kind of nefarious trick that you could not expect from rivals in the competition, particularly those from South America. Given the slightest chance, they would saw half-through your stay wires, sand your petrol, or hocus your engine . . . But these various adventures in many parts of the world

had not made Weston communicative. He had, indeed, an astonishing and sometimes embarrassing gift for silence. Weston carried his rather rigid mechanistic views of life to the extent of insisting that his little daughter should be dressed in dungarees, and giving her nothing but bolts and nuts to play with. But I am glad to say that when he was away Mrs. Weston would tear these unseemly garments off the child, and bring her to tea sumptuously clad in silk and muslins."

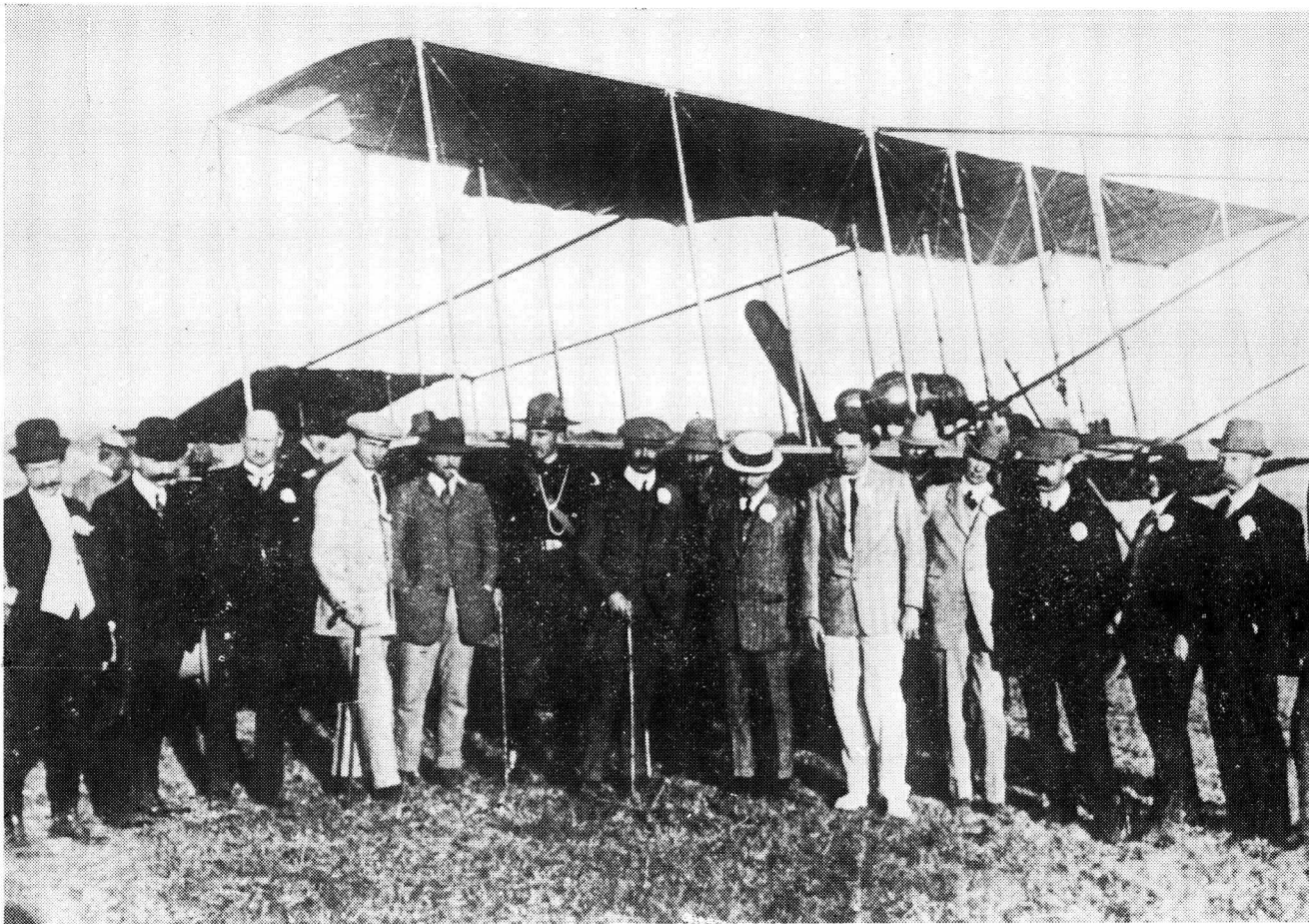
d. **Weston and the founding of the Aeronautical Society of South Africa**

Klein [1955] and various other authors have claimed that it was largely through the enthusiasm and drive of John Weston that the Aeronautical Society of South Africa was founded on March 17th, 1911, and under its auspices John Weston staged his re-entry into the arena of South African aviation.

On May 9th, 1911, **The Friend** reported that the newly-formed Aeronautical Society of South Africa "has so far got about 100 members on the roll . . . and applications from any of the Free State public desirous of furthering the cause of flight in this Province should be sent to Mr. Weston, Brandfort." Murray, writing in 1941 states:

"Weston had long meditated the establishment in South Africa of a School of Aeronautics operated in conjunction with a Permanent Aerodrome, where he would be able to continue his own investigations for the solution of aeronautical problems. Then, as always, considerations of finance had cut across the realisation of any such project. But, with the sudden spurt which the early years of the second decade of the century witnessed in aerial development, he was quick to see that there was a possibility of laying the foundation of an institution on the lines he had already sketched out.

"With this end in view he succeeded in obtaining sufficient financial support from certain of his friends for the formation of an organisation registered as the John Weston Aviation Company, Ltd."



Some members of the working committee responsible for organising Weston's demonstration in Bloemfontein in September, 1911. L. to r.: Mr. French, Dr. Flockman (Weston's first passenger in the O.F.S.), Mr. Smethand, 4....., 5....., 6....., Scoutmaster Shaw, 7. Mr. George Stewart, City Engineer, 8....., 9....., 10. Mr. Arthur Fichardt, 11 , 12....., 13....., 14. Mr. H. Daubney, 15....., 16....., 17..... The bearded man in the back ground attending to the tail could possibly be Weston himself.

Photograph: Fray, Bloemfontein/C Doc S

This company, a non-profit organisation founded early in 1911, made arrangements for a series of public flights under the auspices of the Aeronautical Society of South Africa and the Patronage of General the Honourable Louis Botha, P.C., and Field-Marshal the Right Honourable Lord P. S. Methuen, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., C.M.G. The purpose of this series of flights was both to make South Africa air conscious and to raise funds.³

NOTES:

1. Descriptions of various Farman aeroplanes have been given by Gibbs-Smith [1966].
2. The article referred to cannot be traced.
3. According to the records of the Registrar of Companies, Pretoria, the file of the John Weston Aviation Company, Ltd., was destroyed some years ago together with other "useless documents."

Weston received little practical support from Defence or Government quarters, Brig. General C. F. Beyers, Commandant General of the Active Citizen Force, displayed keen interest in the proposed training school, but apart from giving his personal support and advising Weston to create a public interest through such demonstration flights, there was little of practical value he could do in his official capacity [Klein, 1955].

Chapter 4

Weston's pamphlets and aeroplanes

a. Pamphlets on aviation

To publicise his aims the Honorary Secretary of the John Weston Aviation Company, Mr. F. B. Amery, certainly not without Weston's help, compiled a series of pamphlets on aviation which were printed and distributed to the Press, local authorities and persons likely to give financial support to the projected School of Aeronautics.

In one of these pamphlets it was stated, among other things, that:

"There are few subjects more fascinating to the engineer, the scientist, and the man in the street than aviation. Its possibilities are so tremendous, and its active pursuit so perilous. It is bound to revolutionise many spheres of activity, and to play a great part in scientific research, and to affect — how seriously no one yet realises — international intercourse and politics. Navies and armies will have to reckon with this new power, and to adapt themselves accordingly; fiscal arrangements will be disturbed; custom fences will be futile; travel will be simplified, and with quicker means of transportation will surely follow great development of trade . . .

"At the cost of large sums of money and lives, the solution to many difficulties which hampered progress has now

been found, and the foundation of the new science has been well and truly laid. Much, however, remains to be done, and South Africa offers a field of investigation peculiarly her own.

"The high altitude of some of her plateaus offers to the investigator a unique opportunity for contributing to the science of aerodynamics, and for meteorological observations of great import to the art of aviation — alas! Aeronautical experiments are exceedingly expensive and, therefore, open only to the very few.

"Dr. M. John L. Weston, C.E., D.Sc., F.R.G.S., F.R.S.A., A.I.E.E., etc. Pilot Aviator of the Aero clubs of Great Britain and France, is probably the only South African engineer who has consistently and successfully worked at the solution of aeronautic problems, and who, as is now well known, spent the major portion of his modest fortune in the interest of Aerial Navigation. However, being a married man, he is not justified in encroaching any further upon his private means, for should he become disabled or be killed, his wife and family would be left inadequately provided for.

"To assist Dr. Weston to establish in South Africa his long-projected Permanent Experimental Aerodrome and School of Aeronautics, and pursue his investigations, his friends formed the John Weston Aviation Co. Ltd., the

Company deriving no pecuniary benefit from its operations, and devoting the whole of any profit to the above project."

There then follows a call for the mayor or some prominent citizen to call a meeting of leading men in the town or district to form a committee to work up a local interest, to enlist the assistance of the authorities, sporting societies, merchants, etc., to advertise the aviation display, and to control and regulate the sale of tickets. It was also stressed that "under the Local Government Board Ordinance, municipalities are empowered to vote moneys for the encouragement of educational exhibitions, and that mechanical flight undoubtedly comes under that head."

Subscription tickets of 5s. and 10s. 6d. entitled the holders to free admission to reserved seats at one aviation demonstration by Dr. John Weston anywhere in South Africa, within one year of the date of issue; 21s. tickets allowed free admission to the highest priced enclosure on the basis, while 5 to 100 guinea tickets entitled holders to the same privileges as those holding 21s. tickets, with, in addition, a flight in one of the Company's aeroplanes, the importance of the flight to be proportional to the value of the ticket.

In addition the following special tickets were issued:-

"To young persons from 12 to 18, at half prices.

To children from 6 to 12, at one shilling. Under 5, children admitted free.

To soldiers and sailors in uniform at one shilling.

To natives at one shilling."

All tickets were issued on the "no service, no pay" principle, i.e. should it ultimately be found impracticable to arrange a flight, ticketholders would be entitled to a refund of their money within a month from the date at which the idea of an aviation display had been abandoned and the public duly notified of the fact. All the moneys accrued from the sale of tickets remained under the control of the local committee until the day following the display. If no flight took place, after one month after the public had been notified of the fact any unclaimed sum in

the hands of the committee became due to the John Weston Aviation Co. Ltd.

b. Number of aeroplanes

At this stage of affairs the first South African Aviation Company seems to have owned two flying machines, the first one being the Weston-Farman biplane. The biographical section of "Personalities in South African Motoring and Aviation" [1941] states [page 272] that after Weston had settled at Brandfort, having brought the Weston-Farman machine back with him and having acquired the agency for the Gnome engines, he bought a Farman biplane in order to secure also the agency for these machines. The John Weston Aviation Company did in fact have this agency, as can be seen on their advertising material. It thus seems likely that he brought the Weston-Farman and Farman over from France when he returned to South Africa early in 1911. The paragraph previously quoted from *l'Aérophile* of April 15th of that year, which stated that Weston left for South Africa "taking several machines with him" as well as the earlier quotation from *The Friend* of February 17th, to the effect that Weston was on his way back with material for building aeroplanes in this country, and his statement in April 1911 that he had a machine of his own which he had not used in South Africa as yet, supports the conclusion that there was at least more than one machine. It is doubtful, however, that there were more than two machines.

But in *The Rand Daily Mail* of September 29th, 1964, the eldest Weston daughter is quoted as having said that her father had five, and not only two, aeroplanes at Brandfort when his workshops were gutted by fire in 1913. This larger number is explained by the fact that, apart from the two aeroplanes mentioned above, John Weston later bought three Bristol biplanes from the visiting Belgian aviator, Joseph Christiaens, in June, 1911, as was related in an earlier paragraph. This thus again supports the conclusion that there were only two aircraft in the first instance.

There is other information which only makes the problem more confusing, however. In "Personalities in South African Motoring and Aviation" it is mentioned that: "At the

end of the following year another machine was built and flown at some of the demonstration flights, but owing to a severe smash and the necessity of fulfilling other agreements for demonstration flights in the Union and Moçambique, a Bristol machine that happened to be available had to be acquired." The date implied is 1909. No other reference to, or information on, the building of a second plane at Brandfort at that time can be found. In an interview with a reporter of **The Friend** in August 1911, Weston stated that: "I have four machines in my possession, and they are all in good condition. I bought three Bristol machines from Mr. Christiaan [*sic.*] and I have a machine of my own, which I have not used in South Africa as yet."

The latter machine could have been the same one referred to in "Personalities in South African Motoring and Aviation" or it could have been the Farman which had apparently been purchased in order to obtain the South African agency for these machines.

In Weston's letter to Dr. Engelenburg [March 26th, 1912] quoted in later paragraphs, he stated that: "I have four school machines ready and have in hand a 'baby' Biplane and a very fast Monoplane."¹

On March 14th, 1913, after the disastrous fire had destroyed his workshops, Weston wrote to C. Compton Paterson saying that: "In addition to the machine I have in hand I shall be in a position of having 4 more school machines within 6 to 8 weeks."

In a telegram sent to the Festival Show Committee in Pretoria Weston also mentioned the arrival of one of his aeroplanes in East London on May 10th, 1911. It seems evident that the aeroplane referred to was the Weston-Farman which was being shipped from France. On June 6th, 1911, **The Star** reported that owing to an accident to the steamship "Calician" in the English Channel, the Coronation Gala Committee of Kimberley had concluded negotiations with Mr. Joseph Christiaens for a series of flights on the racecourse on the 22nd and 24th of June. The Weston-Farman did, however, arrive in time for the Kimberley Gala as is described later on.

c. List of aeroplanes

After careful scrutiny of all the available data, the following list of aeroplanes which

belonged to John Weston or to the John Weston Aviation Co. Ltd., during the period of its existence, can be compiled:

1. One Weston-Farman, originally designed and built by Weston at Kalkdam, Hoopstad in 1907/08 and completed at Brandfort in 1909, and taken to France, where it was modified, fitted with a Gnome engine, brought back to Brandfort, in 1911, and used in Weston's first demonstration at Kimberley in June, 1911.
2. Three Bristol Biplanes bought from Joseph Christiaens in July, 1911, and ultimately used in aviation displays at various centres in South Africa and Moçambique. See reference to Barnes' [1964] statement to the effect that Christiaens only sold Bristol Boxkite No. 28 to John Weston in the relevant section on Christiaens.
3. One Farman biplane, bought from the French factory in order to obtain their agency in South Africa. It seems possible that the single reference to a second aeroplane built at Brandfort, quoted above, could have dealt with the reassembling of this dismantled Farman.
4. The 'baby' biplane and very fast Monoplane which Weston claimed to "have in hand" were apparently never constructed, and the four school machines which he visualised were never acquired. The only other reference to a monoplane in Weston's possession is to be seen in an article in **The Star** of May 6th, 1911, in which it was stated that it was hoped that Weston would give exhibition flights in his monoplane during Festival Week in Pretoria. Although the John Weston Aviation Company did have the South African agency for Bleriot monoplanes there is no information to substantiate the assertion that it did in fact have one of these or any monoplanes at all. The present author feels that the article in **The Star** can be classified as a lapsus calami. It thus seems likely that the company owned five aeroplanes altogether during the period of its existence, namely, one Weston-Farman, three Bristols and one Farman.

Thus, to summarise, Weston had the agency for Bleriot monoplanes, Gnome engines, Farman and Bristol biplanes and for Chauviere propellers. Sheds, tents, tools and all fittings for aeroplanes were also advertised on the leaflets and pamphlets distributed by the Company.

Mr. M. J. van Aswegen, retired school master of the Brandfort High School, who was a youngster at the time of the construction of the first aeroplane, clearly remembers the corrugated iron workshop in which Weston

worked. In the afternoons and evenings he often played handyman to Weston and had to "hand over glue," or "bring the bolts and nuts."

NOTES:

1. Commandant F. W. Carnell, Honorary Secretary of the Southern Africa Division of the Royal Aeronautical Society, has suggested that Weston's phrase "have in hand" could mean that he was in the process of designing these planes, not that they had actually been built; for this kind of terminology is very reminiscent of the way designers talk about their drawing-board projects.

Chapter 5

Aviation demonstrations

a. Kimberley

Weston's first aviation demonstration was scheduled to take place at the Coronation Gala to be held on the racecourse at Kimberley in the Northern Cape Province, some hundred miles to the west of Brandfort.

Weston wrote some "Notes on the Science of Aviation" which were incorporated into the 1911 Coronation Souvenir Programme. This short article is quoted below:

"Although it may still be said that in the matter of aerial navigation we are in the stone age, yet it must be admitted that from that point of view, the best aeroplanes are already very serviceable implements, and at the rate of progress that has characterised the last two years, only a short space of time will bring us to the steel age of aviation.

"In 1908 a short hop was reported in the world's press as a wonderful achievement; today a flight of 100 miles is hardly noticed. This fact alone will suffice to convince the general public that crude as the Flying Machine is even to-day, it is undoubtedly the forerunner of the future Aerial Liner, and only short-sighted individuals will persist in considering the aeroplane as a mere expensive toy or an acrobatical appliance of no importance to the human race.

"An aeroplane must not be confused with an aerostar or balloon; the latter floats in the air, whereas the aeroplane is wholly dependent, for support, upon its velocity through the air.

"If the air was perfectly still, it would be possible to design aeroplanes that could travel with safety at low speeds; the air, however, is a very turbulent fluid, and it is to a great extent, owing to this fact, that to be safe aeroplanes must travel at relatively high speeds.

"Although aeroplanes have been up in winds of 40 to 50 miles per hour; it is decidedly dangerous to venture out when the wind's velocity exceeds 20 miles, and a prudent beginner should not attempt a flight in a wind exceeding 10 miles per hour.

"Gusty and irregular winds are always dangerous to an aeroplane; that explains why it is safer to fly at a great altitude above ground and over flat unsheltered country rather than close to the ground or near mountains and other large obstacles which cause eddies and irregularities in the vicinity of the air. Aeroplanes cannot ascend vertically nor even at a very steep angle.

"When an aeroplane turns to the right or left it loses some of its velocity. This causes it to fall; the smaller the radius

of the circumference described by the aeroplane, the greater the fall. Barometrical pressure, and therefore altitudes above sea-level affect the flying properties of aeroplanes to an enormous extent. The power of Petrol Engines decreases about 4% for every thousand feet of altitude, so that at Johannesburg, for instance, Petrol Engines will only develop 3—4 ths of their power at sea-level.

“Regarding the loss of efficiency of propellers, and of sustaining power of the planes, no physicist has yet given us any reliable formula and no experiments have so far been undertaken at any great altitude. The writer will thus have one of the earliest opportunities of conducting systematical tests at various altitudes up to 6 000 feet, the altitude of our highveld above sea-level.

“An aviator making his first ascent in a country situated several thousand feet above sea-level exercises the greatest care, for he will have to deal with atmospheric conditions vastly different from those prevailing at low altitudes. For instance, whereas at or near sea-level he might be able to clear the tops of trees situated in his line of flight, say 200 yards away at the great altitude of our highveld he will have to allow several times that distance; again, if when describing a circle of, say 100 yards radius the aeroplane falls 10 feet at or near sea-level, the fall will be much greater at a high altitude. The only means of minimizing the drop is to increase the radius.

“In connection with the aviation displays taking place during Coronation Week in Kimberley, it is desired that the public of Kimberley should be in a position to follow intelligently the flights and methods of control of the biplane, and with that object the following brief details have been transmitted for publication. These it is hoped, will enable everyone on the Course to appreciate the movements.

“The direction of an aeroplane is controlled by rudders on the same principle as ships, but whereas a ship need only turn to right or left, an aeroplane must in addition be able to travel upwards or downwards; therefore two rudders set at right

angles with each other are required. The rudder of vertical direction is called an ‘elevator.’

“Means must also be provided to keep lateral balance without which aeroplanes could not travel any distance in a straight line without coming to grief.”

Although lateral balance is obtained by various methods, the principle is always the same; it consists in increasing at the aviator’s will, the bearing power of the wings; hence if the right wing, for instance, is carried downwards by an eddy or any other cause, the aviator will by means of a lever or otherwise, increase its bearing power until it has regained the same level as the left wing, i.e., until it has regained its normal position.

“During the racecourse displays on the Kimberley Turf Club ground on Thursday and Saturday in Coronation week, the items enumerated below will form the basis of the programme:-

- “1. Preliminary run on the ground to ascertain whether the controlling gears and the engine are working satisfactory. (an aviator should leave nothing to chance; before ascending he should be absolutely certain that his machine is in perfect a state as it can possibly be).
- “2. Leaving the Ground by a Safe Method. — The aeroplane rises evenly and gently from the ground.
 “Ascending by a Safe Method. — After leaving the ground the machine ascends gradually, travelling skywards during a few moments, then horizontally for a short space of time, then again ascending a few yards to regain its horizontal position shortly after, and so on until the maximum altitude desired has been reached. The object of ascending in ‘steps’ is to guard against unduly reducing the speed of the aeroplane, as might be the case if an uninterrupted ascent was attempted. Under a certain minimum speed the aeroplane would become unmanageable.
 “In flight: Demonstrating Vertical Control. — The machine, in answer to the ‘elevator’ (horizontal rudder), pitches gracefully.

“Landing: A Safe Method. — The aviator brings his machine in full flight very close to the ground, waiting for the running wheels to come in contact with the soil before stopping the engine.

- “3. Leaving the Ground: An Unsafe Method. — The aeroplane after gathering speed on the ground abruptly shoots upwards. A beginner should guard against rising in this fashion, because he might fail to regain a horizontal position before the speed of the aeroplane had been so reduced that it will no longer answer to the ‘elevator’. in that case a bad fall would be practically inevitable. With learners this is a common cause of accidents.

“In Flight: Demonstrations of Lateral Balance Control. In answer to the motion of the **ailerons** or horizontal rudders, situated at the tips of the wings, the machine rocks from side to side.

“Landing: ‘Vol Plané, or Gliding Back to Earth with Engine Stopped — When coming down in this manner, the aviator must exercise great care lest he should descend too slowly, for without sufficient speed the aeroplane would become unmanageable, and the consequences would be disastrous.

- “4. Carrying Passengers. — Only a very limited number of passengers will be carried; the tickets will be sold by auction, but the aviator does not bind himself to accept any bid.

“Spectators at the Aviation Displays during Coronation week are warned to keep clear of the course, particularly at the times of ascent and descent. It has occasionally happened that excited onlookers at flying displays have impetuously rushed forward to meet the machine at the moment of descent, with disastrous consequences both to themselves and the Aviator.”

The Rand Daily Mail reported on June 20th, that Weston made two superb trial flights in semi-darkness on Sunday evening the 18th. “He was warmly congratulated by Mr. Chris-

tiaens, who was present and took great interest in the proceedings.” Before sundown on Monday evening he made another successful flight to the delight of the Mayor and Mayoress.

Klein [1955] described how a group of Boy Scouts wheeled the Weston-Farman biplane from its specially constructed hangar on the afternoon of June 22nd, 1911. The pilot took his seat at the controls and when satisfied that everything was in order he gave the all clear signal and the machine started away.

After a long run Weston gradually lifted it from the ground and, to the plaudits of the crowd, flew down the race track at a height of about fifty feet. A second attempt to get off the ground failed, but later in the afternoon Weston made another successful flight and did a complete circuit of the racecourse at a height of 200 feet above ground level. Harris [1953] gave the maximum height attained by the Weston-Farman as approximately 208 feet. [Kimberley is situated about 4 000 feet above sea-level]. Enthusiastic crowds surged round him when he landed and made further displays that afternoon impossible.

Two days later, as part of the grand finale of the Coronation festivities, Weston planned to establish a South African record flight. A high wind, however, ruled out the possibility in the early part of the afternoon, and a large portion of the crowd that had gathered for the occasion, tired of waiting for better weather conditions, drifted away. Late in the afternoon, the wind dropped and Weston took to the air to create the first South African record non-stop flight of eight-and-a-half minutes!

During his demonstration at Kimberley Weston donated an “Intergrale” propeller to Mr. A. J. Beet, Town Clerk of the diamond city as a memento of his flights. This propeller which is at present housed in the Alexander McGregor Museum, is exactly 102 inches in length and is made of laminated wood. The only possible reason that could have induced Weston to donate such an expensive piece of aeronautical equipment to the city in which he gave his first demonstration flights in South Africa, must have been the fact that this particular propeller was inefficient when compared with the Chauvière propellers, for

which he obtained the local agency while in France in 1910.

Provided that atmospheric conditions were favourable the early flying machines could maintain flight at an altitude of 4 500 to 5 000 feet. In discussing these flying conditions Weston once expressed the opinion that the conditions prevailing up country were very treacherous, but not, however, more so that at sea-level. He maintained that there appeared to be very little buoyancy which provided little power to the aeronaut, and when that power was wanting a downward "detraction" was caused and the aviator was then at the mercy of the elements [**The Friend**, August 24th, 1911].

b. Pretoria

Early in April, 1911, newspapers both on the Rand and in Pretoria announced that "Mr. Weston, the South African-born aviator has sent a message to the secretary of the Gala Week to the effect that he will visit Pretoria in the course of a few days to see if it is possible to fly here. His machine has just arrived from Home" [**Pretoria News** April 17th, 1911]. **The Rand Daily Mail** of April 8th explained that the committee responsible for the Festival and Agricultural Show Week had been "in hand communication with a gentleman in Holland who had secured for himself a reputation as an aviator", but that no reply had been received from this gentleman and that the committee consequently had been in touch with Mr. Weston, of Brandfort, who had just returned from Europe, and that this aviator would be seen in Pretoria during the Gala week. A letter by Henri Farman [quoted elsewhere] was quoted by this paper as proof of Mr. Weston's outstanding abilities as an aviator.

The paper added that the Secretary of the Arrangements Committee had received the following telegram from Mr. Weston, who was at Worcester on the northward bound train at the time: "Aeroplane due East London, May 10. Will inspect ground and see you next Wednesday." [This telegram referred to the Weston-Farman discussed earlier].

On April 10th, **The Pretoria News** again described the chief attractions of the Festival Week and added that a cable had been received from the famous "Hollands aviator named

Wynfaalen," that he would only accept the offer on condition that he received 40 000 guilders [\pm £3 300], and that such remuneration would be out of the question for the organizing Committee.

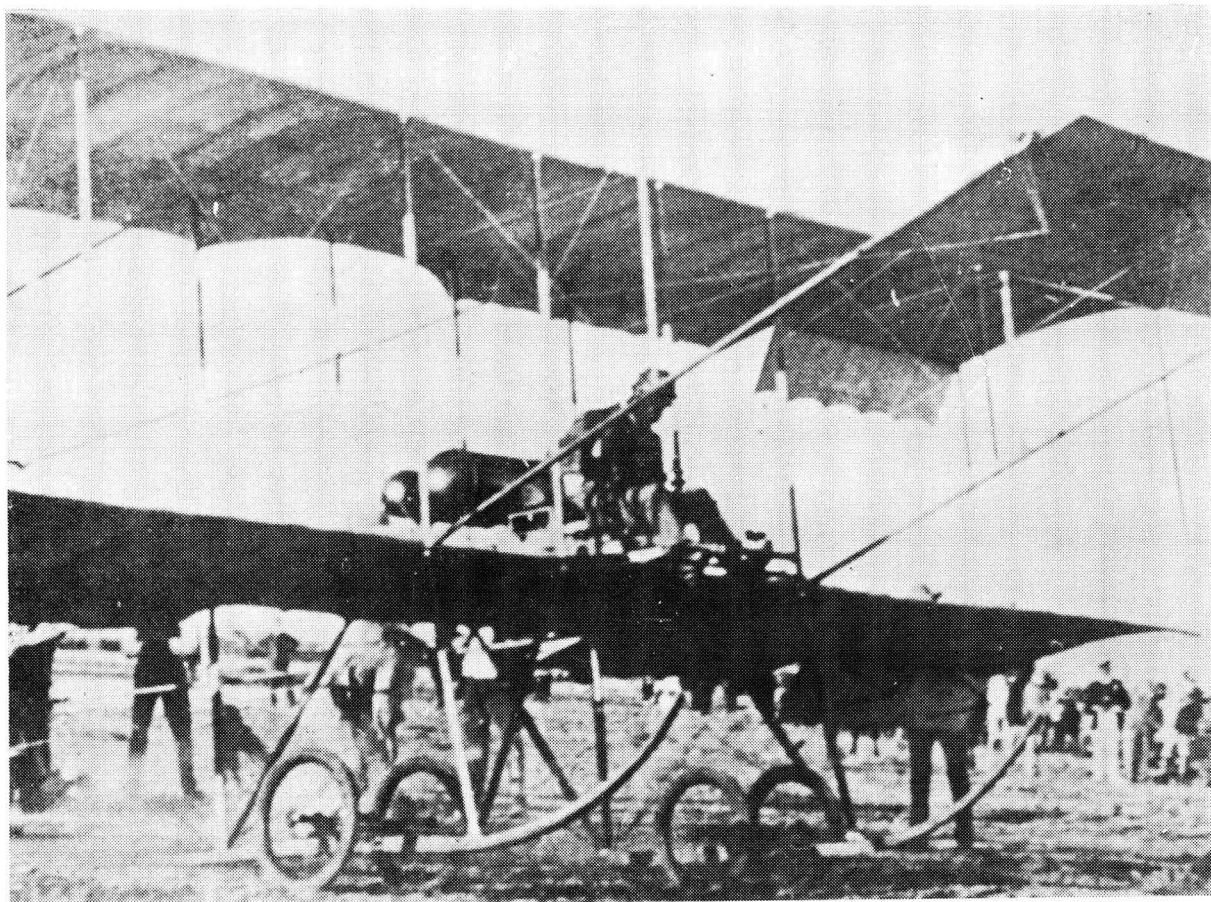
Both the newspapers mentioned above and **The Sunday Chronicle** published interesting impressions of, and interviews with, Weston. The following are a few extracts:

"Yesterday morning, a quiet bearded man with the appearance of a farmer was guided to the office of this paper He had in no way the appearance of a bird; there was nothing peculiar about his eyes except that they were clear and suggested resolution and nerve." [**The Pretoria News**, April 8th, 1911]

"A man of medium stature, Mr. John Weston, the recently-discovered South African aviator, strikes one as being capable of fully carrying out all that is expected of him. He has a decidedly clear eye and a most business-like attitude about him. An emphatic teetotalter and non-smoker, Mr. Weston says that he has to say in a few words, yet at the same time indicates that he is not seeking anything of the notoriety order, least of all of the cheap variety. He is in deadly earnest about this flying business of his and is the type of man who will carry out whatever he promises to do, providing, naturally, that Providence in charge of the elements is not dead against him. . . .

"He has come back to South Africa with the idea of developing a taste for aviation in this country. His original idea had been to give a series of free flights in South Africa from an educative point of view, provided he could obtain the assistance of some of South Africa's wealthy men, but nary a pennyworth of financial support could Mr. Weston obtain." [**The Sunday Chronicle**, April 13th, 1911].

"He maintains that there is as much to do on the ground or close to it as in flying high in the air and he will go through a variety of evolutions, some of them fraught with considerable danger, low down in order to demonstrate to the spectators that the art of flying is not



John Weston at the Kimberley Course where the first flights of the rebuilt version of his locally constructed aeroplane took place in June, 1911.

Photograph: The Star/C Doc S

merely confined to the capability to soar." [**The Rand Daily Mail**, April 13th, 1911].

"He calls his machine a military biplane and explained that there was a difference in the bottom planes as compared to others in use in Europe. In his machine the bottom planes are curved slightly upwards and this, he considers, gives the machine greater stability and also a better lifting capacity. Therefore of course the bottom plane is not parallel to the top plane. The motive power is a fifty horse-power Gnome engine. The machine which he is to use in Pretoria was built under his direction in France, the home of aviation and is not merely an experimental machine, but one with which he has made innumerable flights." [**The Sunday Chronicle**, April 13th, 1911].¹

On May 16th, 1911, **The Rand Daily Mail** published a programme which Weston had forwarded to the Secretary of the Festival Committee and remarked that the "programme which he proposes to carry out . . . should be the means of swelling the number of visitors to Pretoria most considerably." This programme was similar to that described for his Kimberley display.

The Rand Daily Mail also reported that the Mayor of Pretoria, the well-known Sir Johannes van Boeschoten, had telegraphed John Weston, asking him if he would be willing to take a message from him by aeroplane to the Mayor of Johannesburg during Festival Week, for a prize of £100; and he added that "it must be remembered that 36 miles is a long flight and the man who attempts it virtually carries his life in his hands." Nothing apparently came of this offer and no cross country flight took place at the time.

As was described earlier, the Belgian aviator, Joseph Christiaens also arrived in South Africa in May, 1911, to demonstrate during the Festival Week in Pretoria. He made some successful flights at that centre, and it was then reported that he would also fly at the Turffontein Race Course in Johannesburg early in July.

Negotiations were also begun to arrange a cross country flight, but before they could be satisfactorily concluded Christiaens sold "the whole outfit" to John Weston. But Christiaens did apparently also fly at Turffontein on July 2nd.

The article quoted below was based on an interview with Weston [**The Rand Daily Mail**, June, 30th, 1911] shortly after he had purchased the Bristol aeroplane from Christiaens and this may serve to illustrate Weston's enthusiasm and farsightedness in regard to aviation.

"Shortly before sunset yesterday a 'Rand Daily Mail' representative went out to Turffontein racecourse to interview John Weston, D.Sc., F.R.G.S., F.R.S.A., and A.I.E.E., the South African aviator, who has come from the flying fields of Europe to show the way to South Africa in the matter of the usefulness of aviation — which means taking the air with a machine which, like a bird, depends upon its velocity for support.

"Our interviewer expected to find a grave, parchment-faced, be-spectacled person who made his body suffer by study, but instead of that he found a bearded, middle-sized man, who was quietly turning a steak in a pan over a quick fire. When the reporter asked this homely individual for Mr. Weston he expected the reply 'Ik is 'n boer,' and instead of that came the reply 'Yes, what do you want of me?' and then one began to understand something of the scientific enthusiast who would not come before the public unless he could possibly help it. It is just as well to say at the outset that Mr. Weston has spent a very fair competence upon aviation experiments, and that while he has never striven to make records he has taken a biplane to a height of 4 100 feet above the land and flown sixty miles in a slow-moving machine in eighty minutes. Also he

is the Weston who assisted Mr. Farman in producing the Farman-Weston biplane, which has been adopted by the British authorities for military purposes. The great point of pride to South Africans is that he was born in Zululand, not far from Vryheid, and though he was educated in the United States and learnt his aviation at the Plane de la Beauce — between Paris and Orleans — he has come back to the land of his birth to make himself useful to his people.

The clear-cut, intellectual face distinguishes him from the mere Boer of the context, but in habits he is just as grandly simple. To make himself the more fit for his difficult work he leaves out tobacco, drink and heavy feeding. He looks the picture of resolute healthiness, and has something of that idealist touch in his appearance which marks the man who works for scientific advancement rather than money and the power and luxuries it gives.

"Mr. Weston has not come to South Africa until he knows his work well. Henry Farman said of him: 'He is to my mind, a man of unusual capacity who has an innate gift for aviation. He has understood and grasped everything which concerns the science in an astonishing fashion, and I am sure that when he will be reduced in South African solitudes to reckoning only on his own ability he will never be embarrassed. In a word I shall be astonished if Mr. Weston does not in the future astonish the world of aviation by his deeds!

"This is a big word, coming as it does from one of the first men in aviation, but in listening to Weston himself one gathers that he looks slightly upon the things he has done and only worries his scientific soul as to what will be done by inventors in the future. He speaks quite confidently for instance of the great air liner which will soon be taking us from here to London in a day or two.

"'It will not take generations to make aviation practical and necessary,' he said to our reporter, 'but it may take two or three generations before we have big liners to take us to England. It is a very

imperfect vehicle at present. There are lots of improvements to come in the engine. Another trouble is that we are unable to modify the area of the planes for the purpose of reducing speed. At present we have only one speed in the air, and when we are landing we come down at full speed. The whole thing is in its infancy, and every man who takes it seriously is striving to improve upon a magnificent idea!

“Mr. Weston is at present superintending and assisting in the erection of a Bristol bi-plane with which he will attempt a flight on Saturday afternoon — weather permitting. He has four bi-planes with him, three Bristols and one Farman-Weston machine, the latter being the one with which he will do his serious experimental work in the neighbourhood, where the air is rare and difficult of aviation. He will make his attempts under the auspices of the Aeronautical Society of South Africa and afterwards he will endeavour to establish an aerodrome and prove the commercial value of aviation in South Africa. Following upon the lines of Graham White he will take notable people for flights and continue to demonstrate that, with certain mechanical improvements, air travelling is safer than land travelling.

“‘I would like to make it understood,’ said Weston, ‘that I am not a circus man. That is not my idea. I have lost my little fortune in experiments. I have tried to make people interested, but they have not taken it up, and now I have to become a circus man or give it up. And I don’t mean to give it up’.

“In the vast tent in which the interview took place, Mr. Weston had the planes of a handy little Bristol machine ready for mounting. The Bristol is new to this country in the sense that it has adjustable flaps on the two main planes which restore the balance and enable the aviator to keep the course which he desires. He uses both feet and the right hand for the management of the planes while the left hand is free for the regulation of the petrol.

“The arrangement for Saturday is that Mr. Weston shall circle the racecourse

three times before he descends. He looks upon the course as difficult because all courses which are windguarded by trees are deceptive. An open plateau even though it be wind-blown, is better than any enclosed place.”

It was the morning of July 1st, 1911, that Weston in “brown overhauls and strong leather helmet bequeathed him by M. Christiaens . . . climbed into his place. The French mechanic started the propeller, its wind casting turf and tanbark in the faces of the watchers. ‘Yega’, [let go] yelled Mr. Schwartzii, and the ‘Bristol’ ran swiftly forward. In two hundred yards it had risen and a thrill was felt by all as it sailed aloft smoothly and beautifully. Sometimes it dipped suddenly in the wavering currents, but the aviator’s skill was adequate.

“A team of mules following their daily task of harrowing the tracks were aware of a bird-like monster swooping towards their devoted heads. They whinnied, plunged and dragged harrow and boy for a feverish half mile.” [**The Star**, July 1st 1911].

Weston circled the course a few times and after landing declared himself willing to take up passengers on straight flights. Mr. H. Lezard of the John Weston Aviation Co. Ltd, announced that the highest bidder would be taken up first. “The seat was knocked down at £22 to Mr. Lionel Cohen,” who had to sign a declaration exempting the company of any responsibility in case of an accident. A Cape Town pressman, Mr. W. R. Burns was also taken for a similar straight flight.

On July 5th, it was announced in the press that Mr. Weston proposed to tempt the facts by taking aloft Mrs. Weston and the baby, thereby demonstrating that aviation is not after all a deadly peril. To this the correspondent of **The Rand Daily Mail** added that:

“The real difficulty comes in making a circular flight on a small course. In that respect the rarified atmosphere of the highveld is a great handicap. Where-as at the coastal level the aviator could easily rise to 30 feet within a space of 500 yards, much greater distance, say 3 000 yards, is here required. Mr. Wes-

ton's own machine now at Brandfort, will, however, achieve, it is expected, much more success than the Bristol biplane. This Farman-Weston biplane indeed holds the world's record for sustained flight, having made an unbroken journey of 8 hours 12 minutes in the air. A broken oil pipe was the trifling cause of the descent, otherwise the petrol would have held out for 12 hours. It is probably the biggest machine ever made, and Mr. Weston received many compliments from the French experts, after his many flights on the continent."

d. Comments by passengers

On July 5th, Weston made several short flights and carried several passengers among whom was Miss Cressie Leonard, who was a well-known pantomime actress at the Standard Theatre at the time.

Miss Leonard afterwards described her first flight from a truly feminine point of view to readers of the **Sunday Post** and said:

"I had dressed for the part in a close fitting jersey costume, with no motor scarves to vex the propeller. I was, in fact, as much like a footballer as possible, and was dying to see in a mirror what sort of figure o'fun I looked. At last, as sunset waned and the photographers began to cease from troubling, I ascended to the chair of execution.

"A kind friend whose manful humour had been a great standby called out as Mr. Weston passed me a blue document to sign 'of course you know you are signing your death warrant, Cressie!' I smiled response, and a tremulous signature indemnified Mr. Weston against blame should I have to appear at the Standard Theatre that evening with a broken nose or other disability! The kindly aviator now prevailed on me to wear his leather mask, and this I did, feeling like a British warrior Queen who needed an outsize in hauberks.

"Behind me I heard the French machinist chiding the essential Kafir in the Parisian 'taal', much to my delight

"The crowd roared, and I could hear distant clapping from the stand, like rust-

ling leaves. The biplane quivered with terrific energy; at last, bursting its bonds, it dashed forward and away. A rushing mighty wind, a feeling of entire mental detachment from everything mundane — that is what I felt. The rapture of foxhunting and boat sailing seemed wrapped into one, and I have never in all my life felt such a feeling of mental exaltation. It seemed as though we were first that ever burst into this limitless ocean, cold air that for a million years had awaited its conquerer "I should like to say how much I admire the care and skill of Mr. Weston, for, thanks to him I had not a nervous moment . . . I feel proud to have been aloft, even in a tiny flight with Mr. Weston, and I wish for him all the splendid success he deserves in his research work. Aviation is worth living for — yes, and worth dying for."

The comments of Miss Leonard, Mr. Lionel ("S.O.S.") Cohen, and Mr. W. R. Burns, a Cape Town pressman, as well as that of a Lourenco Marques newsman, Mr. W. Urquhart, were later published by John Weston Aviation Co. Ltd., as an advertising leaflet under the title "How it Feels to Fly" and this was offered for sale at threepence a copy. Here are a few extracts from some of the comments made. Cohen stated that:

"Mr. Weston is a wonderful man for inspiring confidence in a passenger. You feel that you are in the hands of a skillful and competent man. That feeling of course went a long way towards making the trip so delightful." Incidentally, this was the same Mr. Cohen who was, in 1911, involved in a humorous if dangerous balloon incident with the Swiss balloonist Captain Spelterini, described by Anthony Richardson [1952].

Burns added the following:

"It may be asked if the cumbrous passenger had a moment of fear. Certainly not, for I know Mr. Weston of old. Somehow to know him is to trust his airmanship to an unlimited extent. He is no poseur; aviation is part of his nature. He has not read it in modern text-books, because growing up with the science, he has followed hard on the steps of all its pioneers, testing for himself each theory

and fresh contrivance. One may not hesitate to call him a great aviator, and to remember his South African birth gives you a glow of pride."

Mr. Urquhart was so thrilled by his first flight that he wondered "why everyone on the course does not go up in the biplane, even if it means starving for a month afterwards," and continued:

" 'Beautiful,' 'Delightful,' — the words seem too trite and colourless to convey those feelings of wonderful exhilaration of lonely aerial supremacy, of victory over the air, for so many aeons invincible. The passenger has complete confidence, not in himself — he is a passenger in the fullest sense of the word—but in the pilot, whose eye is hardly off the oil pipes, which would warn him if anything went wrong with the engine, whose hand grasps the lever which controls the 'ailerons,' whose feet are constantly shifting the horizontal rudders. If any man has to be cool, and have his mind concentrated on his work surely it is the air pilot. Let him hesitate a second when a gust of wind strikes his machine, let him turn the lever the wrong way, and the pilot and passenger and machine will tumble like a stone . . ."

"Presently the machine drops like a stone for about forty feet. It seems that the earth is coming up to engulf you. The man in front vigorously works the levers with hand and foot, and again you continue your aerial progress. Subsequently you learn that as you were turning eastwards a current of air blowing at right angles to the wind which hitherto has been at your back has struck the machine, shifted the centre of pressure, temporarily withdraw all support, and caused you to drop . . ."

After the Turffontein demonstrations Weston, when interviewed by newspapermen said: "You need to realise that flying on a race-course is not much better than doing it on a handkerchief," and pointed out that when in the air the 50 h.p. Bristol biplane did four complete circuits of the course at an average rate of two minutes per circuit. He added that it may thus be grasped that a little wing room is needed for use of an aeroplane.²

e. **Mocambique**

From Johannesburg Weston travelled to Mocambique where he gave two aviation displays on July 31st and August 6th, 1911. Leaflets advertising these displays were printed both in Portuguese and in English and on Sunday [August 6th, 1911] he "accomplished a South African record" by making five flights of about three to four minutes each, "carrying a passenger each time round the circular course." [**The Friend**, August 8th, 1911].

The Guardian reported at the time that after a stay of precisely four weeks in Lourenco Marques Weston left for Baberton with the hope of arranging a flight at that centre. This paper also recorded that the trip to Lourenco Marques was not a financial success, and supplied some interesting figures in this regard:

Railway fares and freights alone amounted to £65. Then there is the wear and tear of the machine to be considered. The life of an engine which costs £700 in this country after paying duty is 500 hours. It could be made to last 1 000 hours, but the repairs in that period would cost as much as a new engine. The price of an aeroplane is £1 500 here; in England it is £1 120. The element of risk is, of course, considerable, and as no part of the machine can be insured an accident would mean heavy financial loss."

On his way back from Lourenco Marques Weston tried to arrange a flying demonstration at Potchefstroom, but this did not materialise.

On August 24th, 1911, **The Friend** announced that: Bloemfontein is at last to be permitted to see a real aeroplane in full flight, that is, of course, if the curiosity, not to mention the educational value, of seeing a modern aeroplane is sufficiently enterprising and keen to furnish the necessary guarantee, without which the flight, or flights, cannot naturally be made.

"Mr John Weston, the well-known South African aviator, left Bloemfontein yesterday afternoon en route for Brandfort, which is his residence. His visit to Bloemfontein was made principally with a view of arranging a series of flights in the Free State capital; and it is under-

stood that his efforts in that direction have been successful. A syndicate has been formed which will raise the necessary guarantee, this being an absurdly low one."

This reporter continued as follows:

"In these advanced days of flying machines and flying men, the imagined appearance of the genuine aeronaut is generally a distorted one, and Mr. Weston's appearance was, candidly speaking very disappointing to one's previous conceptions. Of medium size, sturdily built and of that quiet unassuming demeanour which so often stamps the man of intellect, Mr. Weston looked very much like the ordinary well-to-do, progressive farmer . . . "It must not however, be thought that 'money grubbing' is Mr. Weston's one and only object; he is too keen an exponent of his craft to principally and primarily consider how much money can be made from his exhibition flights . . . Being asked what sort of a time Mr. Weston had, had during his travels through South Africa, he stated quite a good time, but the 'flying' had by no means been a financial success."

The working Committee in connection with the aviation demonstration in Bloemfontein scheduled for September consisted of the following prominent Bloemfontein gentlemen: Messrs. A. E. Fichardt, French, Mace, Daubney, Butt, Botha, Evans, Nicolai, Ruffel, Smetham, Clayton, Beamish, Dr. De Kock, together with Colonel Coombe, Colonel Chapman, Colonel Thring, Major Broadrick, Major Wright and Captain Dickey. [**The Friend**, September 2nd, 1911].

The proposed aviation demonstration which was to take place on the Bloemfontein Race Course to the West of the town, where the present suburb of Universitas is situated, can doubtlessly be classed as one of the top events ever to "create a public interest" in the Orange Free State.

Extracts from a letter published in **The Friend** on the day scheduled for the first flights give an idea of the interest created in aviation. The writer of this letter lived in Dewetsdorp, a small town some forty miles South-East of Bloemfontein. The South African Railways had apparently refused a request to defer the leaving of the train to Jammersberg Drift, which passed through Dewetsdorp, from

9 am. to late in the evening of September 13th, so that people travelling on this train to Bloemfontein on Tuesday 12th to attend the aviation demonstration on Wednesday would have to stay over in town until Friday 15th. "A Malcontent" complained that:

"The writer wishes it to be understood that we do not expect the Government to run a special train for us for every little thing that may be going on in Bloemfontein, but as this occasion is certainly an important one and deserving the attention of everyone we thought that we should not really be considered unreasonable when we ask not in point of fact for a special train, but only that the time be a little deferred for the ordinary train leaving Bloemfontein for the Drift on Wednesday.

"The reason why I bring this matter to your notice and I hope to the notice of the Railway Department is that when there was a small race meeting at 'The Meadows' the department had no hesitation to defer the leaving of the train from 2 pm. to 5.15 pm. from Dewetsdorp. This happened on the 27th July last by which train I was a passenger and urgent public business had to be delayed accordingly for the sake of a small race meeting. Again, during the Coronation a special train was arranged for and granted to a certain section of the community. I understood there were only about half dozen passengers with that special train. Now what is good for the goose, is good for the gander and, therefore, I consider that it is manifestly unfair that our request in the above case should have been refused when special trains were on previous occasions allowed for matters of much more minor importance than the occasion above referred to (excepting the Coronation, of course.)"

On September 14th, 1911, the day after the flight, **The Friend** published a lengthy leader and report on "The Conquest of the Air" and "Mr Weston's fine flight in Bloemfontein." This report gives an interesting eye-witness account of the whole adventure.

"Bloemfontein emptied itself with a vengeance yesterday afternoon. Sporting fixtures and bioscope matinees were, for the time being, forgotten, and a perfect aviation craze seemed to possess all

and sundry. From two o' clock onwards a continual stream of cabs, motors, private carriages, buses, bicycles and pedestrians surged along Park Road in a dense mass, wending its way across the veld until swallowed up out of sight beyond the racecourse. Two special trains brought hundreds of sightseers, and when three o' clock came there must have been a record attendance of spectators such as has seldom been seen at functions which have taken place in Bloemfontein. And still the road leading from town presented an animated, if dusty, appearance, for there seemed no end to the vehicular and pedestrian traffic. By four o'clock there must have been considerably over 5 000 spectators present on the racecourse, and thanks to the excellent arrangements made by the committee who were responsible for a considerable part of the day's success, everything passed off without a hitch. A troublesome gusty wind had been blowing the whole morning, which was particularly noticeable on the flat expanse of the racecourse, but as the afternoon progressed it gradually dropped and by the time Mr. Weston made his ascent there was a perfect calm.

"The grand stand enclosure presented an animated appearance and in many respects reminded one of 'Appy' Ampstead. In the event of the grand stand spectators' finer feelings suffering material danger by the comparison, it is necessary to state that the aforesaid comparison only applies to the outer precincts of the enclosure, where the side shows, etc., which had been erected, gave a smattering flavour of the doings and attributes incidental to the popular London Bank Holiday resort. The huge crowd, which, by the way, included numerous country visitors, was being handled with the greatest expedition through the main gate, and it was not long before seating accommodation in the grand stand was completely filled up and thousands had to be content with standing room in the enclosure below. Here the full band of the Cameronians under Bandmaster Birmingham was in attendance, and during the afternoon rendered a popular and much-appreciated musical pro-

gramme. Unfortunately, no notification had been visibly displayed inside the grand stand enclosure to the effect that Mr. Weston's aeroplane was on view in its tent. But once it became known that such was the case a continuous stream of sightseers wended its way to the huge tent where the machine was housed. Close on 600 people inspected the machine preparatory to the flight . . ."

Apart from the band, the crowd were entertained with tentpegging competitions, a vaulting display and Highland and sword dances:

"In the intervals between the various items on the programme, there was plenty of time for refreshments, and the bars and tea rooms which had been established within easy reach of everybody, were well patronised.

"The time was now drawing near for the principal item on the day's programme and attention soon became riveted upon Mr. Weston's canvas workshop which was rapidly being arranged in such manner as to permit its contents being exposed to public view, and for the first time since its arrival in Bloemfontein hauled into the air. The machine had, whilst within the narrow limits of its temporary shelter, appeared of unusual dimensions, but once it was dragged by a number of willing helpers into the glaring sunlight, its hitherto pretentious appearance vanished and it looked more like a fragile and daintily-constructed toy of unusual size. It was dragged across the track on to the inside arena of the racecourse. Mr. Weston appeared shortly afterwards looking very business-like in his aviator's headgear. After a cursory examination of the machinery and the steering gear, he mounted his pilot's seat. His assistant stood ready at the propeller to give the necessary motive power for the engine to do its work, while a number of willing helpers manned the body of the machine to act as an anchor after the machine had been started. Mr. Weston gave the signal and his assistant laboriously gave the impetus to the compact 50 horsepower engine. Eventually the engine started, and with a rasping, shrieking and unearthly noise, the propellers were being revolved at about 1 600 revolutions a minute. Ano-



The charred remains of Weston's workshops, aeroplanes and threshing machine after the devastating Brandfort fire in February, 1913.

Photograph: Mrs. E. Weston/C Doc S

ther signal was given by Mr. Weston and those who had been holding the aeroplane let go. A quick pull at a lever, the engines slackened down slightly, and the whole structure was hopping and running like some enormous and peculiarly-proportioned animal across the veld. Its speed became faster and after having gone for about a couple of hundred yards it gently rose from the ground, made an inward curve, rose higher and higher, and describing a huge circle, continuing to rise, approached the grand stand. Mr. Weston received a splendid ovation and smilingly acknowledged the plaudits by waving his hand. He sailed slowly past the grand stand, the thousands of spectators watching him in breathless silence until he had once more passed when tumultuous applause broke out. Once again Mr. Weston described a huge circle and on approaching the grand stand he had attained a yet higher altitude. It was a fascinating sight to watch from below, and how much more

so to experience in reality! The machine was responding to every touch of its pilot and was sailing majestically like some huge aibatross. After passing the grand stand the biplane dropped gracefully to a lower level and on turning the southern corner it seemed to be just hovering above the ground, but it gradually rose again and once more passed in front of the grand stand. On getting nearer the southern corner of the circuit, Mr. Weston sharply turned his machine inwards and appeared to attempt what seemed to be a figure eight. He had his machine under marvellous control and after some fascinating turns and dips he resumed his flight in a narrower circle finally landing gracefully in the middle of the course, after having been in the air for about five minutes, and having attained an altitude of 150 feet. Thus the first flight in the Free State was a thing of the past."

"He then stated his willingness to take passengers, and the first chance to go

up was put to action. Mr. A. E. Fichardt who was the auctioneer, temptingly started at £50, but there were no bidders. Commencing at £5, however, bidding became fairly brisk and the privilege of being the first passenger on an aeroplane in the Free State was knocked down to Dr. Flockeman at £13. The next bid only reached £8 and also fell to Dr. Flockeman, but Mr. Allen Fraser prevailed on the doctor to transfer his chance, which was agreed to. Captain and Mrs. Sadler also made arrangements to secure third and fourth options for flights and there were also numerous other applications."

"Before Mr. Weston proceeded to take passengers, he once more started on an experimental flight, but had to descend before he had got very far owing to the petrol pipe on the engine breaking. The damage was, however, quickly repaired, and once again the machine was seen in action. On returning to terra firma, Dr. Flockeman mounted the aeroplane and took his seat just behind the pilot's seat. He was subjected to a brief cross examination by Mr. Weston, was requested to leave his hat and gloves behind, and ensure that there was no loose articles in his pockets which might, through the reverberations of the propeller, jump out and cause disruption of the machinery, thus necessitating an unexpectedly speedy but uncomfortable descent. Finally he had to sign an indemnity form, exonerating Mr. Weston from any loss of life should such happen. The doctor's flight was not void of interest, although the ground was closely hugged on several occasions, and what might be described as huge jumps principally indulged in. Three times Mr. Weston went round the large enclosure, occasionally reaching a height of about 30 to 40 feet. The machine, whether on the ground or in the air, was going at a good 'lick', and the experience undoubtedly teemed with exciting moments.

"The flight came to an abrupt conclusion owing to one of the wheels supporting the chassis becoming buckled and there was consequently no hope of further passenger flights, besides darkness was setting in rapidly. The damaged wheel was fixed up as well as possible, and the

machine hauled back to its shelter for the night.

"There can be little doubt that the huge crowd which assembled went away thoroughly satisfied and pleased with what they had seen. From a layman's point of view the flight was an entirely satisfactory one, although Mr. Weston in a few minutes' chat at the close of the day, while being immensely pleased at the reception given him, expressed himself disappointed with his performance. The fact of his not having been able to test and adjust his machine thoroughly before today's flight was a considerable grievance with him, especially in view of the high altitude in which he had to fly. Today Mr. Weston will make no flights, but will repair and adjust his machine. It is understood that if the necessary arrangements can be made he will undertake a succession of passenger flights on Friday, providing of course the atmospheric conditions permit.

"There is little doubt that the financial aspect of yesterday's undertaking will prove entirely satisfactory. The sum of £170 was taken in hard cash at the main entrance yesterday and £30 was netted by inspection of the biplane before the flight. Had the large number of sightseers who preferred viewing the display from afar contributed their quota to the day's entertainment they would no doubt have been the means of handing over a considerable sum to the local charities. Still, even at the expense of charity, they must have found the entertainment well worth watching. As to the success of the day, the military, the local police, and the Boy Scouts deserve special mention, especially the Boy Scouts. Under their Chief Scoutmaster they did inestimable work and earned the gratitude of Mr. John Weston and the members of the working committee. Throughout the whole afternoon they were indefatigable and are really becoming more and more indispensable at all public functions. Mr. Arthur E. Fichardt, the chairman of the committee, got through an unusual amount of work yesterday afternoon, and each and every working member of the committee did

everything possible to make the day the success it undoubtedly was.

"It is interesting to note that Mr. John Weston, in his experience as aeronaut has reached an altitude of 4,100 feet, and has undertaken over 1,000 passenger flights without a single accident."

Mrs. Weston and her child accompanied the airman to Bloemfontein for the demonstration. The guarantee required by John Weston for this display was £250.

Between October 9th and 12th, 1911, Weston conducted a number of experimental flights on the Bloemfontein racecourse and took up several passengers for straight flights. He used one of the Bristol biplanes in these displays. [**The Friend**, October 10th, 1911]. It was also announced in the press that "the interesting and useful pamphlet 'How it flies,' which explains the working of the machine . . . will be on sale in the aviator's tent."

In this pamphlet John Weston explained to the laymen such concepts as why a plane lifts, 'air-speed' and 'land-speed' steering and control, air currents, general aeroplane construction, the shape of planes [wings] and principles of propulsion, and a few paragraphs on aeroplane fatalities were also added.

Among the details given were that:

"The military Weston biplane, complete, but without pilot, weighs about 1,100 lbs. With pilot, observer and full supply of petrol and oil, about 2,000 lbs. . . . The Weston-Biplane consists of two main planes for altering the flying angle, the whole forced into the wind by the propulsive effort of a Chauvière propeller, driven by a 50 h.p. Gnome Motor."

After comparing an aeroplane with a kite anchored to the ground by means of a string he continued as follows:

"Now if one builds a large plane and fits it with a power-driven propeller, which will push it into the wind with sufficient force, the effect is the same as that of anchoring the plane to the ground, as we do the kite, by a string or cable and allowing the wind to push it upwards. And this is the modern aeroplane in brief. When we have found the best shape of plane, the best engine will give big power for low weight, the best shape and size of propeller and the best place to put it, the best way to steer the

plane both horizontally and vertically, and best way to keep it from capsizing — then we shall have the perfect airship. No one has discovered the absolute best of all these things. Meantime we are improving."

It is also of interest to record Weston's opinion that "once we have become reasonably expert and our machines have become reasonably stable and free from breakages, we shall by choice fly at an altitude of a thousand feet or so, where we shall be comparatively free from odd air-currents and cross gusts, caused by obstruction or irregularities on the earth's surface, and we will have plenty of room to manoeuvre in case of temporary derangements of gear." He also quoted a scientist who considered "that 90 miles an hour appears theoretically to be the safe speed of the machine of the future."

f. Cape Town

Weston's next demonstrations took place at Cape Town in December, 1911, when it was announced in the daily press that three different types of flying machine were on view, namely Weston's Bristol biplane, Paterson's biplane, and Driver's Bleriot monoplane.

On December 7th, Weston gave the first of a series of public flights at Kenilworth Race Course "before a crowd of some 1,500 spectators. The aviator made four circular flights round the course, the longest one being one of $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles, accomplished in 1 min. 45 secs. at the rate of 60 miles an hour on three occasions" [**The Friend**, December 7th, 1911].

for relatives, acquaintances and Weston's former passengers to come forward and assist in the research which has culminated in the present publication, a most interesting following an appeal made through the press letter was sent to the author by Mr. D. Zuckerman, of Cape Town, giving the following description of the aeronautical expert's visit to the Mother City.

"Weston brought his 'Flying Machine' here in November, 1911, and placed it in the Good Hope Hall, which is situated at the very top of Parliament Street. [For several years past this hall has been — and still is being — used for the Government Stationery Stores]. The

machine was tucked away in a corner of that big hall and was screened by a kind of large tent.

"It was announced that the Machine would be on view to the public on payment of one shilling. As Capetonians had only heard of, but never seen a structure that, they were assured, could fly, large numbers of people — including myself — flocked to the hall, paid their shillings and satisfied their curiosity. I am not prepared to say how many of those people were convinced of its ability to fly.

"The machine was on show for a few days and then Weston removed it to the Kenilworth Race Course and announced that he would be giving flying exhibitions and that, weather permitting, he was also prepared to take up passengers — for a fee.

"November is generally a period when the South Easter blows frequently and hard, and November 1911, was no exception. For several successive days the Race Course had crowds of people who went in the hope of seeing a man aided by some bits of wood, iron, wire, rope, etc. — rise in the air like a bird. Among the crowds there were also several prospective passengers. To their extreme disappointment the wind kept Weston and his plane firmly on the ground.

The people's patience was, however, rewarded when one day the wind abated and Weston felt it was safe to go up. He first went up by himself and then made three flights, each with one passenger. The plane rose just above the trees, went round the Course and descended, each operation taking about 3 minutes.

"The passengers were as follows and in this order:-

1. Mr. Fred Darling, a well known and highly respected citizen, the owner of a large Bakery, a Town Councillor and a great sportsman. He died several years ago.
2. Miss E. M. Woods, a journalist then of the staff of the Cape Argus. I understood that she is still alive and is in some Home for the Aged, but my efforts to ascertain her present

abode have been unsuccessful. She is now about 93 years old.³

3. My younger brother Samuel Zuckerman, who had lived for some years in the U.S.A. and had arrived in Cape Town a few weeks earlier on a visit to the family. He, too was a budding journalist and being of an adventurous temperament was determined to find out what it was like being up in the air. For this privilege he paid £5.5.0 which in those far-off days was a large sum.

"By the time the third passenger flight was completed a strong South Easter sprang up again and Weston refused to risk taking up any more passengers. By this time, too, Weston felt that he had had enough of the 'Cape Doctor' and decided to move on to new fields, where the elements might be kinder to him. "One of the reasons why I remember Weston's visit so clearly is because it gave me several sleepless nights. When my brother had made up his mind to be one of Weston's passengers, I was the only one of a large family whom he took into his confidence, but foreswore me to secrecy. Having seen the Flying Machine I was terrified at the thought of anyone risking his life in, what to me, looked like a 'Heath Robinson' contraption. My relief was immense when my brother walked into my office beaming triumphantly. I at once knew that he had been up and survived."

During Weston's visit to Cape Town a **Cape Argus** man was told that he [Weston] had already spent £8,000 of his own money in experimenting and that so far he had met with little success in his efforts to make South Africa air conscious. Weston also added that on his return from Europe he had nursed the idea of establishing a school for aviation near Pretoria in the Transvaal, and that influential support was accorded to him but the formidable financial difficulty could not yet be surmounted.

On Monday, December 9th, 1911, the aviation display at Kenilworth came to an abrupt end with an accident which smashed Weston's biplane. In response to the request of a crowd of about 2,000 people he decided to essay a flight in gusty weather conditions much against his better judgement.

"From the take-off he was in difficulties. The machine swayed and dipped in the treacherous breeze, but the airman hung on gallantly, and although several times he looked like coming down, he struggled round until he came to the last turn for home, when a violent gust struck the machine, which was about 100 feet high, and bore it down with a rush. The airman struggled hard to elevate his planes, but only partially succeeded in breaking the fall, and the machine struck the ground with a crash which drove the runners right through the planes and smashed the propeller blades to matchwood.

"The officials on the course rushed to the assistance of the aviator, expecting to find him at least badly hurt, but the runners had fortunately passed through on either side of him, and as the fall was into soft sand, he was unhurt. The damage to the machine amounts to £200, and much sympathy is felt for Mr. Weston, who has already spent over £5,000 in experimental aviation, with very little return.

"The machine will be mended in time for the East London flights, but Mr. Weston does not expect to be able to make any further flights in Cape Town." — [**The Friend**, December 11th, 1911].

Speaking of his experiences in South Africa, Mr. Weston told a **Cape Times** man that: "so far there had not been any great rush on the part of people to learn soaring. They were not exactly bashful, but with the exception of one here and there people did not seem particularly anxious to learn how to start a machine, how to manoeuvre it in the air, and how to bring it back to earth. So far, therefore, he has met with little success."

Weston remained hopeful however, and though he felt that progress was too slow he was still confident that greater strides would be made in the immediate future and he clung to his belief: "It is bound to come."

g. East London

Mr. H. H. Driffield of East London has given the author details additional to those in his published account on Weston's flights in

that centre [Driffield, 1965]. The first flight took place on December 26th, 1911, in the presence of about 2 500 people. After three short flights over the Show Ground he continued for about one and a half miles in one direction at a height of between fifty and sixty feet until he had almost reached the nearer bank of the Blind River, and then returned successfully.

On December 28th, Mr. Weston made four flights in his biplane. In the first three he attained a height of between 250 and 300 feet and in the fourth flight stayed in the air for close on five minutes, covering a distance of nearly four miles.

Unfavourable weather conditions prohibited further flying demonstrations until Tuesday, January 2nd, 1912, when he made a couple of "long jumps" over the length of the Show Ground. He also took two passengers on these "long jumps," the first being a prominent businessman Mr. R. Dumaresq, and the second Mrs. Ronald Douglas, wife of the East London Town Treasurer. Mrs. Douglas thus became the first woman to exchange terra firma for the air in East London. The weather put an end to all further attempts at flying.

h. King William's Town

On March 19th, 1912, John Weston made some six flights at King William's Town. The advertising poster used by the "large and influential committee of local gentlemen" who arranged this display is reproduced elsewhere in this publication. An enterprising photographer at King William's Town, a Mr. Betts even sold postcards with an inscribed photograph of "Dr. Weston in the 'Air', King Wm Town 19.3.1912."

In the collection of the Kaffrarian Museum in King William's Town there are quite a few photographs and some interesting handwritten notes on early aviation. On the back of one such postcard in the collection is a note to the effect that only one citizen dared to go up in a flight. He was Mr. B. O. Schonegevel who paid £5 for his flip of 400 to 500 yards. Schonegevel later gave a description of this flight in his autobiography [1959]. From King William's Town John Weston returned to Brandfort.

NOTES:

1. 'Modified' would be a better word to use in this sentence. Although France could possibly be considered one of the main centres of development during later years, this was definitely not the case before 1908. As was pointed out by Mr. Gibbs-Smith in a personal communication with the author, the French ~~had~~ ^{had} along and actually reproached themselves with an "inexcusable torpor." The best flight-hop in France in 1906 was 220 metres in 21 1/5 seconds. It was not until November, 1907 that anyone could fly for a full minute, and not until January, 1909, that the first full circle was flown.
2. At about this time Weston also commented on a fellow-inventor's design. In the Engelenburg Collection, housed in the State Archives in Pretoria, there is a copy of a publication entitled: "Heinze's Patent Airship," by Mr. John L. Weston, published in Johannesburg on July 3rd, 1911. In this publication which consists only of two smallish pages, Weston comments on a drawing of and specifications for, an aerial vessel of the rigid type invented by Mr. G. A. Heinze of Pretoria. He apparently designed an airship that could land on water or on land and which incorporated new ideas for the arrangement of the "propulsive organs" together with a novel combination of airfoils and gas bags. Weston believed that this design was a great advance on existing airship designs. As far as can be ascertained nothing more was ever heard about this airship.

3. As was pointed out in an earlier paragraph Van der Spuy (1966) erroneously stated that Miss Edith Woods, South Africa's first woman reporter, became the first woman in South Africa to fly when she went up in Weston's machine at Kenilworth. I am glad to say that Miss Woods was traced and at the present author's request Mr. Zuckerman had a discussion with her in September, 1967. He reported that:

"... her recollection of the thrill of her air flight is very clear indeed. [Naturally, I got her to tell me all she remembered of the episode before I disclosed what I had written to you]. She remembers Weston. She remembers the Flying Machine, which she says she named 'The Grasshopper' — a very apt description. She remembers a Zuckerman as a fellow passenger — she does not remember Barling — she remembers that the flight took about 3 minutes, and she remembers that Weston demanded £5, but being a Press representative she refused to pay — and got away with it.

"Her version differs from mine in one respect only. I said he 'went round the course'. She says he only flew from one end of the course to the other. She remembers this well, because she walked back to the starting point and all along the route she was cheered by the crowd that was there watching the air display. I have no doubt she is right. When I asked her why there was no photographic record of so important an event, she replied that in those days the Press was not picture-minded."

Chapter 6

Misfortunes seldom come singly

The letter quoted below was written by Weston to Dr. F. V. Engelenburg on March 26th, 1912, Dr. Engelenburg being a well-known personality in Pretoria at the time and also a member of the Council of the recently founded Aeronautical Society of South Africa. This letter forms part of the Engelenburg collection, a photocopy being kindly supplied by the State Archives.

It reads:

"Dear Dr Engelenburg,
I have this day written to General Smuts asking him to record my application for the position of aeronautical expert in connection with the Aeronautical Department which sooner or later must be grafted upon the General's scheme of National defence, and I would be very glad, if when occasion arises, you would kindly piece a word in my favour.

"I know that some considerable time will probably elapse before we have our aerial corps, but I think it prudent to be first to apply.

"I suggested that we should have our own Govt. School of Aeronautics and

Aviation, and also Govt. works for the construction of military aeroplanes.

"In manufacturing our own military machines, much public money would be saved, our pupil pilots could be taught not merely to fly, but to make, tune and repair machines, and we could have a permanent staff of properly trained mechanics, an absolute necessity if we wish to maintain an efficient corps during a period of warfare when the wastage of machines is bound to be considerable.

"Although I have not yet started a school of aviation the demand not warranting it so far, I am open to take pupils if they will come to Brandfort where the conditions for flying are most ideal.

"I have four school's machines ready and to prove that machines just as efficient as imported ones can be made here, I have in hand a "baby" Biplane and a very fast Monoplane.

With kindest regards,
Yours sincerely,
M. John L. Weston."

b. **Weston's attempts to generate air consciousness**

Weston's attempts, though deserving of better success, to generate air consciousness in South Africa were unhappily still premature. The demonstrations had eventually to be abandoned, and with them the cherished dream of an institution for the promotion of aeronautical research.

As was reported in **The Friend** of April 23rd, 1912, "catering for the public who are desirous of experiencing what flying is like, is not always remunerative or even conducive to one's belief in mankind generally, as can be testified by Mr. John Weston, the Free State Aviator."

During the month in question Weston brought his Bristol biplane to Bloemfontein to be exhibited at the Central Agricultural show. A number of businessmen of this city had apparently promised that they would pay Weston for the privilege of sampling the delights of aerial flight on the Sunday after the show.

"On Saturday Weston flew his machine, ordered an extra supply of special petrol from Johannesburg and everything was ready on Sunday morning. Weston waited a considerable time but as no one turned up, he had to dismantle his machine and go home."

Apart from two letters written by Weston to the press [**The Friend**, September 26th, and October 2nd, 1912] in which he reprimanded a fellow resident of Brandfort for making certain allegations about the interpretation and application of the law in a law-suit in which the fellow resident was engaged concerning a gate, nothing more was reported about Weston's activities during the rest of this year.

Although Weston lived in Brandfort he apparently never flew one of his aeroplanes there. In January 1913, however, arrangements were made for a flying demonstration at that centre. **The Friend** of January 13th reported that the scheduled aviation display had not taken place. A large crowd had assembled on the racecourse in the afternoon when a terrific dust storm sprang up and blew the whole tent structure down with the aeroplane inside it. The aeroplane was damaged to the extent of £150, and the tent was torn to shreds. The paper also added

that this was the third time in a year that Mr. Weston had sustained similar damage.

c. **Three articles on military aviation**

On January 18th, February 8th, and March 15th, **The Friend** published a series of three articles written by Weston. In these, topics such as the training of aerial scouts for purposes of defence, a suitable site for an aerodrome, and the founding of a "Military Aviation School" were discussed.

The Friend of February 8th, 1913, in its "The Country Day by Day" column published the following notice:

"Mr. John Weston, C.E., the O.F.S. aviator, desires publicity be given to the following — I am desirous that the gentlemen to whom circular letters were addressed re formation of a permanent aviation committee should know that I intend proceeding with my scheme notwithstanding the loss of my aeroplanes, etc. That the holders of aviation tickets, dated 15th January, 1913, may claim refund for their money at Mr. Fourie's store, Brandfort."

On March 12th, 1913 it was reported that John Weston Aviation Company was suing Mr. Lionel Cohen, a well-known member of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, for £11 in respect of services rendered.

Seven days later a letter by Weston was published in which he explained the reason for this claim which was that payment for a flip had not been made, and stated that Mr. Cohen had agreed to settle the claim and pay all costs. Mr. Cohen, who later became a Wing Commander and earned a D.F.C., was introduced to the air by John Weston at Turfontein, Johannesburg, in July, 1911.

d. **A devastating fire**

It was not before February 24th, 1913, however, that **The Friend** published a report on the devastating fire which had destroyed Weston's workshops, aeroplanes, and, to a great extent, his aeronautical ideals. It must have been about the 5th or 6th of February when the fire gutted the Brandfort workshop. The exact date cannot be ascertained. Although it can possibly be ascribed to the poor



Honorary Rear-Admiral John Weston, wearing an unofficial uniform. Note the cap badge of the R.N.A.S.

Photograph: Mrs. E. Weston/C Doc S

communication between South African towns at that stage in our history, it is still incomprehensible that **The Friend** did not splash the story of the fire at the time, but was merely satisfied to hide the following version of the disaster in the "Country Day by Day" column some three weeks after the fire.

"News is scarce at present. Hence the silence of the local correspondent. Two weeks ago there was considerable excitement, when at about ten o'clock at night Mr. John Weston's shed in which aeroplane and threshing machine are housed suddenly stood ablaze. It was a magnificent sight as well as fearful to behold. The fire did its work of destruction in a marvellously short time. When the fire engine came to the scene of devastation there was nothing left to rescue. In fact the flames had subsided and all that was combustible was laid in ashes. The thing occurred while Mr. Weston was attending a bioscope, and Mrs. Weston and her little children were inside the house, a short distance away from the shed. Who set fire to the place is a mystery for the present. The concern was insured — some say for £9,000 — but we shall not have a flying exhibition for some time to come. The warning given by the recent fire had induced the Town Fathers to take steps to organise a proper fire brigade."

Earlier in the evening Mr. Chalmers, who was scheduled to give a cinematograph show at Brandfort, had sent for John Weston as he was having trouble with his projection machine. Anna, the eldest Weston daughter, who was five years old at the time, remembers that her mother, on noticing the sudden and unexpected flaring up of flames from the workshops, also saw two young men running away from the scene. A back door of the corrugated iron shed was apparently broken down and petrol sprinkled over the contents of the workshops before it was set alight. The Searle family, living directly across the street, helped Mrs. Weston to get Anna and baby Kathleen, then only four months old, out of the house to safety.

As was stated in previous paragraphs, it can be deduced from the available information that there were five aeroplanes as well as half a dozen Gnome engines and other parts, in the workshops at the time of the fire.¹

e. **C. Compton Paterson and Weston**

On February 13th, 1913, Cecil Compton Paterson, who was at that time engaged in giving a series of demonstration flights at Cape Town with his hydroplane, prior to the actual formation of the Paterson Aviation Syndicate, wrote the following letter [now housed in the McGregor Museum, Kimberley] to John Weston:

"I am really sorry to hear you have had your place burned down and sincerely hope your insurance will cover you well. "I don't know but it is quite possible I may be leaving for England shortly and thought you might like to purchase my machine which at the present is giving Hydro Aeroplane displays from Table Bay. It has proved most successful and General Beyers expressed his opinions favourable after his flight.

"I should really like to have a chat with you soon as there are one or two things I should like to place before you which will lead to big business in future."

On February 15th, a bitterly distressed Weston replied as follows:

"I thank you for your favour of the 1st inst. and beg to say that the disaster is crippling me to such an extent that it will be a few weeks before I can consider your proposal. I shall be in Cape Town the first week next month, when we can have a chat."

From the contents of another letter of Weston's as quoted below, it is apparent that Paterson must have made him some kind of an offer, the true nature of which one can only guess at. It was on March 14th, 1913, that Weston wrote the following:

"I am sorry that I had to leave in a hurry and could not see you again. I thought also that I would return to Cape Town this week, but owing to circumstances unforeseen at the time, I have postponed my departure for Europe. I am therefore writing to say that I fail to perceive any inducement in the scheme you submitted to me. As I said unless I can do a thing well I prefer to leave it alone, and to start a school with one machine or even with two, I would not do. Moreover, on my return here, I found that a consignment of work which I had ordered 9 months

ago had arrived, so that, in addition to the machine I have now in hand, I shall be in a position of having 4 more school machines within 6 to 8 weeks. I have also cabled assurance from a reliable Engineer friend, that several Engines can be had immediately at bargain prices; it follows therefore that the only inducement your proposal appears to contain is the agency for the Paterson Machine, but as I have explained, I see no secret either in the designs or construction of any aeroplane extant since the publication of Mr. Driffel's researches any engineer can design a machine, which, as far as lift, minimum and maximum speeds and rate of climbing are concerned will fulfil exactly the conditions set down; as to stability any experienced aeronautical Engineer can design machines at least as good as any in existence.

"I also hear on very good authority, that it is definitely decided that the Govt. are not to acquire any machines for another 15 months, and that as far as the training of scouts during this year is concerned, the chance of carrying it out here is remote.

"Should you have any other proposal to put before me I shall probably be in Cape Town on the 20th inst."

On July 1st, 1913, the Paterson Aviation Syndicate was registered in Kimberley and on September 10th, Paterson and the Union Government entered into an agreement concerning the training of the first South African pilots. John Weston's dream of the establishment of a Flying School in South Africa, thus became fact — but without his participation.

f. The "Letter from Mr. Weston"

A Kimberley Newspaper, **The Diamond Fields Advertiser** of October 15th, 1913, published the following article under the heading "Letter from Mr. Weston" [which had been sent from England]:

"In a letter which I received today from John Weston, the South African aviator, reference is made to the school recently established in Kimberley. He writes: You know the school at Kimberley is an accomplished fact. I warned the Bloemfontein people that unless they woke up they would lose the school. To me it is very galling, because had they accepted

my offer the chances are I would not have had to suffer such disaster as the loss of the whole of my equipment. Moreover I could have had the backing of De Beers had I agreed to go to Kimberley, but I would not do so for reasons easy to understand. Here I am experimenting but I do not yet care to say in what direction. At the same time as I am conducting my experiments, I work a few hours daily with Willow's Aircraft Company, Ltd., builders of military dirigibles, I recognise that under certain circumstances two or three small dirigibles are essential for military purposes. I do not know when I shall return to Africa, but when I do so I shall work hard to bring the Government school to Bloemfontein. The Kimberley school is a private concern, which cannot exist without Government support."

"Weston left South Africa for Europe last June, after suffering an extraordinary run of bad luck. The dictum that misfortunes seldom come singly was rudely emphasised in his case. Most of his life he has been engaged in aviation research. He accomplished considerable spadework and collected valuable data as to local conditions. A chapter of accidents culminated in his workshop being destroyed by fire, which checked his progress. He had bought £8,000 worth of machines, tools &c., with a view to establishing an aviation school in Bloemfontein, but as he could not raise the £1,000 required for a building his project was postponed. The municipality granted a piece of ground, but declined to fall in with Mr. Weston's suggestion that they should erect a school-building, and retain possession. I learn from the Mayor that he was officially informed that an aviation school would be established in Bloemfontein in conjunction with the Defence Force organisation, and that no notification that the Government had decided to abandon their original intention had been received by him."

NOTES:

1. In later years Weston told Eric Rosenthal [Rosenthal, 1965] that he believed that German sabotage was responsible for the destruction of his planes. South-West Africa was still a German territory at the time and as they were expecting a war it was appreciated that the South African Government could use his planes for military purposes.

Chapter 7

Two world wars and after

a. Lt. Weston in German South-West Africa

It is evident that Weston also spent some time overseas in 1914, for on February 3rd of that year he was granted the British Aeronaut Certificate No. 38 as well as the Airship Pilot's Certificate No. 23.

On Weston's stationery which he used at Brandfort were listed all his qualifications, including the statement that he was an "Airship Pilot and Aeronaut of the International Aeronautical Federation". The Federation did not draft any pilot's certificate regulations until October, 1910 [Gibbs-Smith, personal communication], and it cannot be determined exactly when Weston obtained his F.A.I. [Fédération Aéronautique Internationale] certificate. In the pamphlets and advertising leaflets of the John Weston Aviation Company compiled by their secretary in 1911, as was discussed above, all Weston's titles, fellowships, etc., were quoted but no mention made of his having an F.A.I. certificate at the time.

On the outbreak of war Weston joined the South African Forces and was appointed ground officer in charge of landing grounds in South Africa. Gordon [1935], whose description of the Weston home and drawing-room has been quoted earlier, met Weston for the second time "... under such romantic circumstances as were typical of the man. It was somewhere in the middle of South-West Africa during the campaign; and it was a cleanshaven Weston who appeared out of the blue and shattered saintly memories by calling for a smoke and a drink. He was in the uniform of a lieutenant of the Royal Naval Air Services, very much on his own, with a lorry or so mapping out advanced aerodromes. In fact, we had stalked him as a German convoy."

Weston, however, was in fact in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

Maj.-Gen. K. R. van der Spuy [1966] had mentioned that prior to the arrival of the South African Aviation Corps in South-West Africa in March, 1915, two large steel hangars, work-

shops and an aerodrome had been made ready at Walvis Bay by the pioneer airman John Weston.

At the time Weston was ground officer in charge of landing grounds and had to keep the coastal force landing strips in order. Weston one day accompanied Van der Spuy as passenger when he took his all-steel Henri Farman up on a trial flight. He was told by Weston that it was the first time in his life that Weston had been a passenger in an aircraft. A sudden coastal mist completely blotted out the aerodrome on their return and Van der Spuy had to make a blind landing, which he did without mishap.

On May 9th, 1915, while at Hermanus in the Cape, Mrs. Lily Weston gave birth to a son, who was named Maximilian after his father's first name.

b. Further information in respect of his military career

After the South-West African campaign Weston was transferred to the Royal Naval Air Service and underwent further training at Hendon, England. His wartime record is rather obscure but it is known that he served with distinction on many fronts as a balloonist and aeroplane pilot [Klein, 1955]. He did aerial mapping for the British in France and was present at the battle of Verdun.

From Admiralty records it appears that "John Weston [he did not apparently use his other christian names] was a Temporary Sub-Lieutenant, R.N.V.R., of seniority 1 July, 1916. [Most of his service was passed in the acting rank of Lieutenant R.N.V.R.] He is shown as belonging to No. 3 Wing, with which, about the middle of 1917, he was serving in Egypt. Before the end of the year he went to No. 2 Wing [Mediterranean Squadron] and at the beginning of 1918, still in No. 2 Wing, he is shown as being at the Repairs Base at Mudros where he seems to have remained until he disappears from the Navy after the issue for April 1918."

At the request of the Southern African Division of the Royal Aeronautical Society, the London office of the Society obtained the following additional information from the librarian of the Ministry of Defence:

"He was transferred to the Royal Air Force on 1st April, 1918, with the rank of Lieutenant. He was promoted to the rank of Major (substantive) on 1st January, 1919, and was permitted to retain this rank when he relinquished his temporary commission on ceasing to be employed on 22nd November, 1923.

"Maj. Weston was awarded the Cross of Officer of the Royal Hellenic Order of the Redeemer, and notification of this award was published in the London Gazette of 15th July, 1919.

"This officer was promoted Vice-Admiral in the Royal Hellenic Navy for services rendered to the Ministry of Marine whilst serving as a member of the Mission to Greece."

Weston's eldest daughter recalls that he became a Commander of the R.N.A.S., and later Head of the Technical Section of the British Naval Mission in Athens, Greece, for four years after the World War I.

Bridges [1953] states that Weston served mostly in balloons during the war. Klein [1955] in addition to mentioning that he served with distinction on many fronts as a balloonist and aeroplane pilot, as already stated, says that at one stage of the war he was posted for service with the Greek Navy and was ultimately given the honorary rank of Rear-Admiral in that service, a title which he proudly used until his death. After the war he was on special Admiralty service in the Near East [*The Star*, July 12th, 1924]. An official visit took him to the United States in 1920 where a new love took hold of John Weston, that of motor caravaning, and before long he was to become a caravaner of world repute.

c. A caravaner of world repute

In the same newspaper quoted above, Weston explained the reasons why he undertook these comprehensive world tours with his family:

"My idea is this, that our system of education is altogether wrong. I look upon our schools as "degree factories", as they have been called. Children are crammed to become glorious gramophones, and end in being failures in life because they cannot think. This leads to all kinds of evils, including war. Then in our schools there is the tendency to develop nationalism. This may have been necessary in former time, but now I think there should be a much broader view. As far as my children are concerned, I do not want them to develop the jingo idea but to be people of the world. So, in trying to devise a system of education which answers my views, I hit upon this idea of visiting all the countries of the world, and getting into touch with all the peoples of the world — not by the way of hotels, which give only a one-sided view, but by coming into touch with the peasants and all classes of the population in all the different countries. By caravan you have to go out of the beaten track, and you see what you could never see otherwise."

According to newspaper reports Weston served for a year on the personal staff of King Constantine of Greece in 1921. During a prolonged visit to Russia he also became a friend of Lenin, with whom he corresponded for some years.

For twelve years after the war he travelled in a caravan accompanied by his wife, two daughters and son.

He also told a reporter that after visiting America in 1920, the family went across to England and the Continent, visiting various parts of Great Britain and Belgium, and added that "we wandered away to all the western and southern countries until we reached Asia Minor, where we were caught in the Greek retreat from Asia Minor and nearly lost our caravan in the struggle and stampede. In many places we had to mend bridges in order to get along. It was indeed a terrible scene". In September, 1923, the family had a narrow escape in Bulgaria when they got into the thick of the Communist rebellion and again nearly lost their caravan. In Czechoslovakia they were also snowed up for six weeks. At the time of the interview referred to, they had just arrived in Durban from Antwerp.

In 1928 Weston's mother and sister Lucy died from cholera in China where they were doing relief work. John went over to China to wind up their affairs and at the same time took photographs of some typical Chinese executions.

On April 26th, Weston's property at Brandfort was sold by public auction and was acquired by Mrs. Melanie Hofmann, the wife of a Brandfort accountant, for the sum of £775 [deed of transfer 829 of 1931].

In June, 1931, **The Star** reported that the Weston family had arrived in Johannesburg by motor caravan en route to Cairo, and continued:

"The caravan to be used on the African trip has been made by the Weston family themselves. Even the girls are handy mechanics. The result has been a neat and compact arrangement of luggage, folding beds, etc., all of which can be removed from the chassis proper with the minimum of trouble . . . It is interesting to find that the old body of the Weston family's motor land yacht "Suid-Afrika" has been replaced entirely by this new and lighter bodywork of the "Prairie schooner" in order to negotiate the bridges of Central Africa, which cannot take a weight of more than 5,000 lbs. The body can be taken off the chassis in ten minutes.

"The naval discipline of Admiral Weston had caused him to organise even the smallest job, so that every man and girl knows his or her duty and does it immediately . . . After fifteen months spent in caravanning from Cape Town to London **The Star** in October, 1932, reported that the Westons had arrived back in Cape Town on a short business trip. During the caravanning trip they had suffered misfortunes in the Southern Sudan when the rains broke later than usual. Weston broke a bone in his foot and the two daughters were laid up with injuries. They also visited Palestine, Arabia, Persia, Turkey, France and Spain and left their children at school in England.

On the family's caravan trips Weston used to fly the South African blue ensign from a long bamboo pole. On the sides of his motor-land-yacht "Suid-Afrika", as he called the second

caravan conversion of his Commer truck, the following inscription was painted:

"Our mansion: seven by fourteen feet.
Our field: the whole world.
Our family: mankind."

On letterheads and visiting cards printed both in English and German which were used during these travels, Weston added the name J. van Storm-Roux-Weston to the caption used. This combination of names was derived from the fact that a Hollander, Admiral Van Storm, was an ancestor of Miss Lily Roux, Weston's wife.

d. Adm. Weston becomes a farmer

In June, 1933, the farms Newcastle 2378, Kilburn 2466 and subdivision A of Dotteril 7814 in the district of Bergville, Natal, were purchased by Weston for a sum of £5 500. These three farms were managed as a unit under the name of "Admiralty's Estate".

As was stated earlier, the press often called Rear-Admiral John Weston a "man of mystery" and the statement has often been made that even his relatives knew very little of his life history. It was a very common belief that "old Weston was a spy" and it was even claimed that he worked for the Russians. His retiring manner and apparent financial independence no doubt added to this impression. For example, in a personal communication with the present author, the Reverend L. L. N. Botha, who was minister of the Dutch Reformed congregation of Ladysmith, Natal in 1932, clearly recalled passing by the Weston homestead on numerous occasions when he visited one of the elders of his church on the farm adjoining "Admiralty's Estate", and seeing no lands under cultivation and very few domestic animals, about the house and out-buildings were numerous fully assembled and neatly stacked parts of farm implements and machinery, mostly painted red, and apparently unused.

The natives in the vicinity greatly feared him. Not even the neighbours were welcomed to the farm, and people in the vicinity described Weston as a surly old man; and it was here that the story went about that he was a Russian spy with high seniority in the Communist Army. His frequent trips abroad as well as his reticence greatly added to this belief.

e. During the Second World War

Mr. F. H. Flanter of Camps Bay near Cape Town is an old acquaintance of Weston and has given a most interesting account in a personal communication of several meetings with the late Rear-Admiral:

"The Admiral was one of the most colourful men in our country and research into his life and adventures would produce a most fascinating book. During the First World War he was one of the three most famous master spies, the other ones being Trebitsch-Lincoln and Wickham Steed. For his services along these lines in the Aegean war theatre, the Greek Government of the day made him an honours admiral, as a result of which he would be piped aboard any warship, the Royal Navy included. He was a personal friend of Stalin, Chiang Kai Shek, F. D. Roosevelt, Churchill and many others. During the last war he was still engaged on some strange errands . . .

"I saw him somewhere around 1942 here in Cape Town. A few days later, a Royal Navy officer, Cmdr. Bennett, mentioned to me a most unusual visitor being piped aboard to have lunch with what I think was the Duke of Gloucester in Simons-town Docks. From his description this turned out to be the Admiral.

"I met the Admiral some time around 1938 when he came to see me in connection with some radio equipment (I am an electronics engineer by profession) for a caravan he was then building. In this he set out eventually across Africa, Palestine, Turkey, Afghanistan to Peking . . .

"There the Second World War must have caught up with him. During 1938 he came in to see me repeatedly, always immaculately dressed in a white Tussore suit. He was a short, powerfully built man with a goatee beard and I was always struck by his personality. I was then much younger and very impressed by his undoubted extended travels and knowledge.

"The next time he came to see me about 1941. He looked very old and drawn and told me a rambling story of having been involved in a bombing raid and being

wounded. This all sounded very incoherent and I thought that old age had by now caught up with him. The next time must have been around 1942/43. He arrived hale and hearty and in very good shape. He must have taken a liking to me because he never failed to look me up whenever he was in Cape Town. By now I had told my wife quite a lot about him and I took heart asking him to tea one evening . . . I took him up to the house and, naturally, the talk turned to the war.

Stalin's name came up and he said: "A very, very wily man. I should know. I have met him often enough." My wife and I looked at each other, which he must have noticed. He opened the little suitcase and after some rummaging produced a faded photograph of Stalin, some more Russians, and the Admiral, quite unmistakably.

"A little while later the talk turned to Churchill. "Now there is a great man, and his wife the most charming of women," said the Admiral. Some more scratching and up came a picture of him with Mr. and Mrs. Chiang-Kaishek in a boat on the Yangtse river, then Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt.

"By that time we were very shaken, but there was no doubt about the veracity of his stories. He then told us how he was spying during the First World War for the British and that he had an appointment to meet Trebitsch-Lincoln and Wickham Steed at some forlorn railway station in Siberia. Only the three were so well disguised that they did not recognise each other.

"I know all this must sound fantastic, yet there can be no doubt that it is fact. The Greek Admiral title was given to him as a reward for his activities in the Aegean . . .

"The First World War activities can hardly be covered by official secrets any longer, and the War Office in London might be willing to help with their records. If they do, it should make James Bond look very old-fashioned."

Another of Weston's old acquaintances, Mr. T. Bear, also clearly recalls Weston's flights at East London and travelling by train with Weston after this display. Some time

during 1932 Weston and his family visited Bear at his native trading shop near Maclear in the Eastern Cape Province, the Westons being on their way to Durban by caravan. They spent a few days with him, during which time they had "very intimate talks", and Mr. Bear was told that Weston was in the employ of the British Secret Service and that he was now on a mission to China.

Enquiries directed to various British Government Departments have not revealed any evidence of Weston's supposed association with the British Intelligence Service and no factual proof of the theory that Dr. Weston may have been some sort of super-spy has up to the present been unearthed.

One of his Second World War activities is known only from a story which he told his family, that he was taken up in an aeroplane in an advisory capacity during the Battle of Britain.

f. The tragic end

On Friday night July 21st, 1950, Weston and his wife were in the dining room of the farmhouse of "Admiralty's Estate" when a scratching noise on the gauze of the back door was heard. On opening the door Weston was assaulted by three masked natives, one of whom rushed into the house and attacked Mrs. Weston. She regained consciousness three days later in the Harrismith Hospital.

Weston partially regained consciousness, was operated on for head injuries sustained, but on July 24th, 1950, the very same day he had intended to leave on an overseas trip, Rear-Admiral Maximilian John Ludwick Weston, C.E., D.Sc., F.R.G.S., F.R.S.A., A.I.E.E., Member of the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain, Airship Pilot and Aeronaut of the International Aeronautical Federation, went on his last mission. It was his wish that his funeral should be quiet and simple. His body was cremated in Johannesburg on the 27th July. Apart from the undertaker, not a single person was present when the coffin passed through the brass doors and out of the Chapel of the Braamfontein Crematorium. No service was held and no last word spoken.

All three of the attackers were subsequently apprehended. The motive behind the assault was found to be money. It was too well known a fact that Weston kept rather large

sums of money in a strong box in the house. A magazine illustration depicting masked robbers in action, found in the house of one of the attackers, probably gave them the idea of masked robbery with violence.

Fred Mzimela (40), a butcher, Mpondo Zondo (30), a police constable, and Msolwa Zondo (18), labourer and brother of Mpondo, were found guilty of first degree murder in the High Court in Ladysmith. Msolwa Zondo's sentence was later committed to one of imprisonment with hard labour for life.

At the time of his death Weston's estate amounted to £73 785.

Mrs. Elizabeth Maria Jacoba Weston (née Roux), a direct descendant of Adam Tas, recovered from the attack although certain permanent injuries persisted until she passed away on April 14th, 1967, at the age of 92.

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During 1969 the South African Broadcasting Corporation broadcast a series of fifteen short early morning talks written by the present author and dealing with the pioneers of aviation on both its Afrikaans and English programmes. As a result of these broadcasts the author obtained various bits of previously hidden information and was able to get into touch with children, relatives and friends of some of the pioneer aviators. This greatly contributed towards the present publication. During 1969 Mrs. Winearls, daughter of the late Cecil Compton Paterson donated a collec-

tion of documents, photographs and newscuttings which had been collected by her father to the Alexander McGregor Memorial Museum in Kimberley. The director of this museum kindly allowed the author to make a thorough study of this valuable collection and to incorporate information from it into the present publication, a gesture which is sincerely appreciated.

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V L I E G E N

Demonstratie van Mechanies Vliegen in Zuid Afrika

1910

Mnr. JOHN WESTON, C.E.,

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Luchtvaartkundig Ingenieur, Vliegtuigen, Bestuurder van de Aero Klubs van Groot Britannië en Frankrijk.

Onder bescherming van Het Luchtvaart Genootschap van Z.A.

Generaal De Ed. LOUIS BÖTHA, P.E.,

**

Gen. de WeEd. Lord P. S. METHUEN,

C.B., C.V.O., C.M.G.

Deel... die hebben tijds te brengen voor het oprichten in Zuid Afrika van een Nationaal Proef Vliegplaats en school voor Luchtvaarders.



KENNISGEVING AAN HET PUBLIEK.

Het plaatselijk Comité wenst aan het publiek bekend te maken dat de uitgaven en het gewone onderhoud van vliegen zeer groot van en dat het daarom noodzakelijk is dat een zeker aantal kaartjes worden verkocht, waar dat er enige regelingen kunnen worden getroffen voor een derg. vertoning door de heer Weston. **het volgt hier uit dat tenzij 'edereen die het kan betalen van te voren een kaartje koopt, er geen vliegerij op deze plek zal plaats hebben.**

Vliegen is een zeer wondervol ding - het is als 't ware zo wondervol, dat het publiek zich zelf gemakkelijk mag beschouwen van de gelegenheid te hebben tegenwoordig te zijn bij de vlucht van een vliegtuig, door een slecht vlieger bestuurd. Het plaatselijk Comité dringt er daarom op iedereen op aan om zo spoedig mogelijk een kaartje te kopen.

Zodra een voldoende aantal kaartjes zijn verkocht, **zal de datum waarop het vliegen zal plaats vinden, behoorlijk worden bekend gemaakt, ten minste twee weken voor het zal plaats hebben.**

Wanneer onvoorziene omstandigheden het comité zouden doen besluiten het denkbeeld van een vertoning op deze plek te doen opgeven, **zal al het geld voor kaartjes betaald weer terug worden gegeven op vertoon van de kaartjes.**

One of Weston's Posters.

Photograph: C Doc S

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NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES.

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Die Volkstem	Pretoria-Johannesburg
Flight International	London
Grocotts Penny Mail	Grahamstown
L'Aéro	Paris
L'Aérophile	Paris
South Africa	London
The Bulawayo Chronicle	Bulawayo
the Cape Argus	Cape Town
The Cape Times	Cape Town
The Daily Dispatch	East London.
The Diamond Fields Advertiser	Kimberley
The Friend	Bloemfontein
The Guardian	Cape Town
The Natal Advertiser	Pietermaritzburg
The Pretoria News	Pretoria
The Outspan	Bloemfontein.
The Rand Daily Mail	Johannesburg
The Rhodesia Herald	Salisbury
The Star	Johannesburg
The Sunday Chronicle	Johannesburg
The Sunday Post	Johannesburg
The Sunday Times	Johannesburg
The Transvaal Leader	Johannesburg
The Transvaal Weekly Illustrated	Johannesburg
Wings Over Africa.	Johannesburg

SOME SOUTH AFRICAN FIRSTS IN AERIAL FLIGHT

Ballooning:

First true balloon flight:

Mr. Coussy of Cape Town sent up a cat in a balloon 35 feet long with a circumference of 75 feet on December 18th, 1816.

First manned balloon flight:

Undertaken by Major Elsdale at Mafeking, Northern Cape, on April 7th, 1885. He reached a height of 600 feet above ground level.

First ballooning fatality:

"Professor" Harry Goodall got killed at Jagersfontein in the Orange Free State when his balloon, the "Cloud Queen" collided with a hill in September 1892.

First "Female balloon ascent and parachute descent"

Miss K. Cameron jumped from "Professor" Price's balloon at Johannesburg on Sunday April 2nd, 1893.

First usage of balloons in warfare:

The British Army used balloons in Bechuanaland [Botswana] in 1884.

Heavier than air flight:

First manned flight in an heavier than air contraption:

John ["Jack"] Goodman Household conducted a series of glider flights over the grassy slopes of the Karkloof near Howick, Natal, round about 1875. [Although previous authors have recorded this date as 1871 recent research shows 1875 as being a more probable date].

Note:

John Goodman Household was definitely not the first man ever to undertake a successful glider flight. A little boy un-

dertook the first such flight in the glider of the Yorkshire baronet, Sir George Caley. During this flight the glider was tethered to the ground by means of a rope.

The first man-carrying free flight was undertaken by Sir George's reluctant coachman [in England] in 1853.

First imported aircraft:

Ralph S. Mansel's glider, built by Voisin Frères of Billancourt, France, arrived in the Cape Town Docks aboard the "Varzin" on October 20th, 1908. Trial flights with this glider were largely unsuccessful.

The Voisin single-sea engine powered pusher bi-plane of the visiting French aviator M. Albert Kimmerling was off-loaded from the "Kenilworth Castle" at East London on Saturday, December 18th, 1909.

First aeroplanes constructed:

First:

In 1907 Dr. John Weston designed and began the construction of the first true South African-built aeroplane on the farm Kalkdam in the district of Hoopstad near the present village of Bultfontein, in the Orange Free State. He completed this aeroplane at Brandfort, O.F.S. in 1909. Powered by a 30 h.p. water-cooled Panhard engine this aeroplane could not fly. In 1910 Weston took it with him to France where it was modified, fitted with a seven-cylinder 50h.p. Gnome rotary engine, and flown. The first flight of the modified Weston-Farman in South Africa took place at Kimberley on June 18th, 1911.

Second:

On August 22nd, 1908, Harry Cutting, Jimmy Cloughly, Ernest Miles and Sammy Samuels started the construction of a Wright-type biplane at Baragwanath,

Johannesburg. Powered by a 12 h.p. three-cylinder air-cooled J.A.P. V engine driving a locally manufactured aluminium propeller, this aeroplane never flew.

flying debut at Highlands North, Johannesburg on May 2nd, 1911, piloted by Bredell.

Third:

The first successful S.A.-built aeroplane was a Bleriot-type monoplane built by a French immigrant Alfred Raison for Cecil Bredell. Completed early in 1911 and powered by a J.A.P. V engine it made its

Fourth:

The second successful S.A.-built aeroplane was built and flown by another Frenchman, Adolph Brunett.

This was a Farman-type biplane, powered by a 50 h.p. Gnome which lifted it off the ground at Rosebank, Johannesburg, on May 20th, 1911.

First pilots to undertake successful power-driven flights.

Name	Nationality	Aeroplane	Place of flight	Date of first flight
Albert Kimmerling	French	Voisin. 50 h.p. Gnome	Nahoon, East London	28.12.1909
Cecil Bredell	South African	S.A. built Bleriot type J.A.P. V	Highlands North, Johannesburg.	30.4.1911
M. L. Webster	South African	Bredell's aeroplane	Johannesburg.	1911
Adolph Brunett	French	S.A.-built Farman type 50 h.p. Gnome	Rosebank, Johannesburg.	20.5.1911
Joseph Christiaens	Belgain	Bristol. 50 h.p. Gnome	Pretoria.	29.5.1911
John Weston	South African	S.A. built French modified. Weston-Farman 50 h.p. Gnome	Kimberley	18.6.1911
Cecil Compton Paterson	British	Paterson Biplane 50 h.p. Gnome.	Cape Town	22.12.1911
Evelyn ("Bok") Driver	South African	Bleriot monoplane 50 h.p. Gnome	Cape Town	22.12.1911

First air mail:

Carried by S.A. born Evelyn Frederick ("Bok") Driver in his Bleriot monoplane between Kenilworth Race Course and Oldham's field near Muizenberg, a distance of approximately eight miles, on December 27th, 1911. Flying time: seven and a half minutes.

Second:

- (a) Mrs. Matt Lohead, wife of the Secretary of the Festival Committee taken up by Joseph Christiaens in his Bristol at Pretoria, June 5th, 1911.
- (b) Miss Cressie Leonard taken as passenger by John Weston at Turffontein, Johannesburg, June 5th, 1911.

First air passengers:

Male:

Mr. Thomas Thornton taken up by Albert Kimmerling in his Voisin biplane at Johannesburg, March 19th, 1910.

Third:

Mrs. Glennon of Worcester taken up by Joseph Christiaens at Pretoria, June, 10th, 1911.

Female: First:

Julia Hyde Stansfield ["Dadge"], social editress of **The Rand Daily Mail** and **The Sunday Times**, presumably taken up by Albert Kimmerling at Johannesburg during 1910.

Fourth:

Could probably be Miss Edith Woods, South Africa's first woman reporter who was taken as passenger by John Weston at Kenilworth, Cape Town, November/December, 1911.

First female trainee pilot:

Miss A. M. Bocciarelli attended the Flying School of the Paterson Aviation Syndicate at Alexanderfontein, Kimberley, during 1913.

First cross-country flight:

Undertaken by Cecil Compton Paterson in April 1912, over a distance of some 210 miles between Kimberley and Klerksdorp with six intermediate stops. Flying time 4 hours 42 minutes.

First Hydro-aeroplane:

Cecil Compton Paterson's Paterson No. 2 biplane fitted with floats and flown by him from Table Bay December 1912/January 1913.

First aeroplane purchased by S.A. Government:

Paterson biplane constructed at Alexandersfontein, Kimberley.

First air fatality:

Edward Wallace Cheeseman, pilot instructor to the Paterson Flying School, Kimberley died in hospital on October 15th, 1913 due to the combined effect from a broken leg suffered in a crash a few days earlier and complications which set in earlier due to his taking quinine to combat malaria.

First Flying School:

Established at Alexandersfontein, Kimberley by "The Paterson Aviation Syndicate" during 1913.

First ten pupil trainee pilots:

K. R. van der Spuy, B. H. Turner, G. S. Creed, G. Clisdal, E. C. Emmett, G. P.

Wallace, M. S. Williams, Hopkins, Solomon, M. van Coller.

First six trained aviators to undertake further training overseas, as pilots of the South African Defence Force:

K. R. van der Spuy, — qualified June 2nd, 1914; E. C. Emmett — qualified June 9th, 1914; G. P. Wallace, G. S. Creed and B. H. Turner qualified some two weeks later. M. S. Williams also qualified.

First pilots of the South African Aviation Corps.:

K. R. van der Spuy, G. S. Creed, B. H. Turner, G. P. Wallace.

First action by S.A. Aviation Corps.:

On May 6th, 1915, Lt Kenneth R. van der Spuy conducted the first official reconnaissance flight over the area around Walfisch Bay, South-West Africa in one of the Corps' six all-steel Henri Farmans, powered by a 150 h.p. Canton-Unne engine.

First aeroplane in South West Africa:

Bruna Buchner's Pfalz biplane arrived during May 1914. The other two German aeroplanes used in the S.W.A. Campaign were an Aviatik P-14, piloted by Lt Freiherr Von Scheele, and a L.F.G.-Roland piloted by Lt R. Fiedler.

First hostile aeroplane over South African soil:

The L.F.G.-Roland flown by Lt R. Fiedler could have crossed the border between S.W.A. and the Union of South Africa.

LIST OF DOCUMENTS ON EARLY AVIATION IN THE COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, BLOEMFONTEIN

1. "How it flies. 'The Weston' Biplane." Pamphlet of 16 pages, published by the John Weston Co. Ltd. of S. Africa. Price 6d.
2. "Re Aviation Demonstration." Leaflet of 4 pages, in the form of a letter by F. B. Amery, Hon. Secretary, and published by the John Weston Aviation Co., Ltd., Brandfort.
3. "How it Feels to Fly. Passenger's Impressions by Miss Cressie Leonard, Mr. W. R. Burns, Mr. W. Urquhart, Mr. Lionel Cohen." Leaflet of 4 pages published by the John Weston Aviation Co., Ltd. Price 3d.
4. Poster, 12½x20", advertising Weston's aviation demonstration at King William's Town. Text in English.
5. Poster, 12½x20", advertising aviation and the conditions under which Weston was willing to give demonstrations. Text in Dutch.
6. Poster, 10x12" with the caption: Aviation Tickets Sold Here." John Weston Aviation Co.
7. Leaflet advertising the "Final Aviation Display" by John Weston on Sunday, August 6th, 1911, at Lourenco Marques. In Portuguese and English.
8. Notebook with essay by John Weston "Thoughts on Human Responsibility." 18 pages, published 1903.
9. Visiting cards of John Weston in German. Two different versions.
10. Stationery: A blue letterhead and envelope of the John Weston Aviation Co., Ltd., Brandfort." A white letterhead with the inscription "John Weston, consulting aeronautical engineer, Brandfort, O.F.S., South Africa," on which is listed his qualifications, fellowships, etc. A light grey envelope, of "John Weston & Co., Brandfort, O.F.S., South Africa." Photocopy of a letterhead "Round the world by Motor-land-yacht 'Suid Afrika'."
11. Photocopy of an article written by John Weston on "Heinze's Patent Airship," 2 pages, published 1911. Original housed in the State Archives, Pretoria.
12. Leaflet of 4 pages on: " 'Gnome' Aviation Motors," published by Société des Moteurs Gnome, Paris
13. Pamphlet of 24 pages on: "Moteurs d'Aviation 'Gnome'," published by the same firm as above, giving descriptions and specifications of their workshops and engines and a list of aviation records for 1909 and 1910.
14. Pamphlet of 7 pages entitled: "Rules of the Aeronautical Society of South Africa. Pretoria." Printed in 1911.
15. Photocopies of numerous newspaper and magazine articles dealing with early aviation.