

SIR PETER WILKINSON

in due course we got to London. It felt like midnight, but was I suppose about teatime. It was, I suppose - aeroplanes flew very slowly in those days - about twelve hours after we had set off. And the only postscript was, of course, who should pay for the taxis? This followed me round for the next nine or ten months of the war, because it was an unauthorized expenditure. I think in the end it was eventually debited to the Anglo-Polish debt. And that's the story, roughly speaking, of how Sikorski and the General Staff arrived in England.

I've no particular reason to think that the withdrawal and evacuation of Polish troops from France was mishandled. I think that the Polish authorities... I mean, obviously things could have been done better with the benefit of hindsight. Chaps got left behind who shouldn't have been left behind, and this was true of the evacuation of all the Allies. But I think that the Polish General Staff was very conscious, as indeed was General Alanbrooke, that we were all of us - Poles and British alike - under French command, and that you couldn't just disengage yourself and walk away, without incurring a good deal of military odium. General Alanbrooke, for example, describes very clearly how he had to get permission from London, who promised to square it with the French, before he did it; he couldn't just push off. And I'm sure that the Poles were not as well-placed as the British were to secure this sort of dispensation - and I don't think the French would have given it to them, quite frankly. I should have been very surprised if the French would have let Prugar-Ketling off, for example, until it was very late in the day and he was entirely surrounded - although of course, he marched into Switzerland.

But, all right - I mean, there are numerous criticisms - there are probably grounds for criticism in several respects - but the Poles were very loyal to their Allies, and I think this must have weighed very heavily both with the General Staff and with individual officers who could otherwise have pushed off.

# Sikorski Accident Report

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ROYAL AIR FORCE R.A.F. Form 412

## PROCEEDINGS OF COURT OF INQUIRY

### OR INVESTIGATION

opened on (date) *7th July 1943*

at (place) *RAF Station, Turnberry*  
 by order of *Mr. Macgregor, C.O., Turnberry*  
 at (place) *RAF Station, Turnberry*  
 here report by *Mr. Macgregor, C.O., Turnberry*  
 (1) To establish the facts and to determine the cause of the accident.  
 (2) To determine the responsibility of any person concerned (see R.A.F. A.C.I., para. 138 (b), and (c)).  
 (3) To advise on any points of law.

R.A.F. Form 412

COMPOSITION OF THE COURT (OR NAME OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER)	
Rank	Name
President	<i>Group Captain J. J. Allen, D.F.C., A.F.C. R.A.F. Station, Turnberry</i>
Members (a)	<i>Wing Commander A. S. Gray H.Q. Coastal Command</i>
	<i>Squadron Leader G. M. Williams, D.F.C. A.R.C. Gibraltar</i>
	<i>Wing Commander S. S. Macgregor H.Q. Transport Command</i>
In attendance (a)	<i>Wing Commander S. S. Macgregor H.Q. Transport Command, P.O. Box 100</i>

  

LIST OF WITNESSES				
Rank	Name	Rank	Name	Unit (if civilian say so)
<i>2nd Lt.</i>	<i>E. H. Probst</i>	<i>5th Sqn.</i>	<i>Imperial</i>	<i>R. I. (Observer)</i>
<i>Group Captain</i>	<i>J. A. Belland</i>	<i>A.R.C. Gibraltar</i>	<i>A.R.C.</i>	<i>571 Sqn.</i>
<i>Captain</i>	<i>J. L. Williams</i>	<i>RAF Station</i>	<i>RAF Station</i>	<i>27 A.R.C.</i>
<i>Sergeant</i>	<i>A. J. Moore</i>	<i>RAF Station</i>	<i>RAF Station</i>	<i>27 A.R.C.</i>
<i>Corporal</i>	<i>W. E. Brown</i>	<i>RAF Station</i>	<i>RAF Station</i>	<i>RAF Station</i>
<i>2nd Lt.</i>	<i>H. B. Clarke</i>	<i>5th Sqn.</i>	<i>Imperial</i>	<i>RAF Station</i>

  

FINDINGS (b) OF THE COURT OR INVESTIGATING OFFICER																																																									
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NOTES: (a) If present by reason of operative qualification, service of hours to be stated. (b) R.A.F. A.C.I. 3.1, para. 138 (b), (c). (c) If present by reason of operative qualification, service of hours to be stated. (d) If present by reason of operative qualification, service of hours to be stated. (e) If present by reason of operative qualification, service of hours to be stated. (f) If present by reason of operative qualification, service of hours to be stated.

H. M. Stationery Office  
 Current ref. AIR 2/19734 8806

ROYAL AIR FORCE  
**PROCEEDINGS OF COURT OF INQUIRY**  
 OR INVESTIGATION

at (place) *RAF Hemsworth, Yorkshire*  
 by order of *His Majesty the King*  
 at (place) *RAF Hemsworth, Yorkshire*  
 on (date) *7th July 1945*

opened on (date) *7th July 1945*  
 to inquire into the flying accident on (date) *4th July 1945*  
 at (place) *RAF Hemsworth, Yorkshire*  
 in which (name of aircraft) *Liberator A-523*  
 was involved.

**COMPOSITION OF THE COURT (OR NAME OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER)**

Rank	Name	Unit
Group Captain	J. J. Allen, D.F.C., A.F.C.	RAF Station, Bomber Command
Wing Commander	A. W. Day	H.Q. Bomber Command
Squadron Leader	G. M. Williams, D.F.C.	A.H.Q. Bomber Command
Wing Commander	B. M. S. Nicholl	H.Q. Bomber Command
Wing Commander	S. G. G. G. G.	Supernumerary Ground, RAF Hemsworth

**IN ATTENDANCE**

1st Lt	R. B. Cooper	L.A.C.	W. T. Worthington	37 ABR.
2nd Lt	S. P. Simpson	Private	F. C. Callow	Kings Regt.
L.A.C.	H. D. Tisdale	Corporal	T. Tomlinson	High Regt.
L.A.C.	E. R. Haines	2nd Lt	F. E. B. Gilling	RAF Station, Bomber Command
1st Lt	A. M. Pargate	Squadron Leader	J. F. Sack	RAF Station, Bomber Command
2nd Lt	I. P. Fraser	Wing Commander	D. Ganning	RAF Station, Bomber Command
		Wing Commander	A. M. Stevens	RAF Station, Bomber Command

**FINDINGS (D) OF THE COURT OR INVESTIGATING OFFICER**  
 (NOTE—THE COURT OR INVESTIGATING OFFICER MUST REFER TO A.P. BY SECTION 5.)

Type and Mark	Description of aircraft	Damage to Airframe (g)	Engine(s) Type and Serial	Engine Number(s) A.P. No.	Placard No.	Damage to Engine(s) (g)	Whether aircraft was fit for the flight
Liberator II	Serial 606	606	Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp	1. 8637/204970 2. 5570/141579		606	fit
W. Sikorski	gen. Pilot/Gen. passenger	"	"	"	"	"	fatally
M. Szwed	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
M. Szwed	"	"	"	"	"	"	"
V. Capart	Col. Brit Army	"	"	"	"	"	"
J. P. Whiteley	Brig. Pilot/Gen. passenger	"	"	"	"	"	"
P. Kowalski	Lieut. Pilot/Gen. passenger	"	"	"	"	"	missing
M. Kowalski	Mr. Pilot/Gen. passenger	"	"	"	"	"	"
Lack	Mr. Pilot/Gen. passenger	"	"	"	"	"	fatally
P. Szwed	Mr. Pilot/Gen. passenger	"	"	"	"	"	missing
L. Szwed	Mr. Pilot/Gen. passenger	"	"	"	"	"	fatally
L. Szwed	Mr. Pilot/Gen. passenger	"	"	"	"	"	missing
L. Szwed	Mr. Pilot/Gen. passenger	"	"	"	"	"	fatally

**3. The purpose of and instructions for the flight(s) were as follows:**

(1) Who authorized the flight(s)? (2) For what purpose? (3) Essential instructions (if any). (4) Was it a "one-way" flight? If so, by whom?  
 (1) O.C. 51 Squadron  
 (2) Carrying important passengers to Middle East and return, via Gibraltar;  
 (3) No.  
 (4) No.

**4. The aircraft took off as follows:**

Aircraft Type and Number	Time	Place (from which and place of take-off)	Weather conditions (including strength and direction of surface wind) at the time
Liberator A-523	1507 B	North Front	Wind easterly, 5 m.p.h. fine, no cloud. Visibility 10 miles.

**5. The accident occurred at the place and on the date set forth on the front page of this Form. Further details are as follows:**

Time	Exact location of crash, including height (if where relevant)	Weather conditions (including strength and direction of surface wind) at the time and place of accident.
2307 B	Approximately 700 yards due east of eastern end of runway, North Front.	Wind easterly, 5 m.p.h. fine, no cloud. Visibility 10 miles.

**6. The flying experience of the pilot prior to this flight was:**

PILOTS: (A)

Name and where trained	Hours flown (hours to nearest hour)				Total solo (Day and Night)	Tests solo (Night) (g)	By how many (g)	Hour on Force (g)
	Type of aircraft (specify in para. 1)	Day and Night	Solo	Dual				
Pechak	Liberator	11.25	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gyebelschka	Liberator	—	292.10	—	171.20	362.50	347.20	305.50
RAF Flying Instructor - "Keep Dressed"	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Perrin	Yankee	—	86.25	—	14.00	—	—	—
Mr. T. G. P. S.	Mustang	—	3.35	—	—	—	—	—
Mr. G. F. S.	Mustang	—	64.00	—	7.15	—	—	—
Mr. G. F. S.	Mustang	—	36.15	1.30	15.00	—	—	—
RAF Flying Instructor - "Keep Dressed"	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
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NOTES—(1) Give (a) height above sea level of ground at scene of accident; (b) height above ground of any obstacle struck by aircraft; (c) direction of surface wind at scene of accident; (d) direction of surface wind at time of take-off; (e) direction of surface wind at time of crash; (f) and (g) Only to be quoted if accident occurred at night; (h) Give only if found or known to be covered by wreckage, or in bed stability-recessing instrument flying or white (i) being suitably blind.



reported to me that all the passengers were properly seated. There were eleven passengers, five of whom were in the bomb bay and six in the fuselage. This was one more than when we took off from Cairo, the extra passenger being seated in the bomb bay. The all up weight was approximately 52,000 lbs. I was quite satisfied with the disposal of the load. I started my engines and warmed them up, and then proceeded to the end of the runway where I ran them up and did the normal cockpit check. Everything was satisfactory. I received the "green" signal at 2310 hours and commenced to take off. At about 130 m.p.h. I was airborne. When I was at about 150 feet I eased the control column forward to gather speed. My speed built up to 165 m.p.h. I wanted to climb again so attempted to pull back the control column but I could not do so. The control column was definitely locked. I told my second pilot over the inter-communication to check over the controls quickly. At this time the under-carriage was fully up and the flaps half-down, that is normal take off position. When I found I was unable to move the control column I put on trim in an endeavour to gain height, but nothing happened. All this time I was pulling back on the control column but could not move it backwards. I got no reply from the second pilot over the inter-communication and the aircraft was rapidly approaching the water. I then shouted out "crash landing" to the crew and closed the throttles. The aircraft immediately hit the water and I remember no more.

(Signed) E.M. PRCHAL. F/Lt.  
8th July 1943

*Question 1.* Roughly how many hours have you flown on Liberators as Captain?

*Answer.* Nearly 500 hours.

*Question 2.* Have you ever experienced controls becoming locked in flight on a Liberator before?

*Answer.* Yes, once with Squadron Leader McPhail when taking off from Lyneham. Squadron Leader McPhail was second pilot and had unlocked the controls prior to take off, and when nearly airborne I found I could not move the rudders and realised the controls had been

re-locked. I shouted over the inter-communication to him to unlock them; he did so, and I was able to complete the take-off although I had swung off the runway a little as a result. I reported this to my Flight Commander and to the remaining pilots in the Squadron.

*Question 3.* How long had you known your second pilot, Squadron Leader Herring?

*Answer.* Not long. He had been with me as second pilot since leaving England on this trip and he had not flown with me before. On the two take-offs on this trip, at Lyneham and Cairo, one carried out at night and one by day in fog, he had carried out the drill quite normally.

*Question 4.* Who operates the flap control?

*Answer.* The second pilot, but on my instructions only, which I would not give until we had reached 1,000 feet.

*Question 5.* Did the control column feel that it wanted to go forward?

*Answer.* I cannot say, but if I had been higher I would have tried it.

*Question 6.* Can you remember whether the control column was rigid or whether there was any play at all?

*Answer.* I cannot remember.

*Question 7.* Were you satisfied that the rudders, ailerons and elevators were functioning correctly when the aircraft became airborne?

*Answer.* Yes, definitely.

*Question 8.* What were the weather conditions like at take-off?

*Answer.* Perfect, calm, visibility 15-20 miles. I was able to see the horizon clearly.

(Signed) E.M. PRCHAL. F/Lt.

*2ND WITNESS.* Group Captain Guy Alfred Bolland, R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar, states: -

I am the Officer Commanding, North Front. The security organisation at my Station is as follows: -

By day all entrances to the camp are guarded by Gibraltar Security Police who check the passes of all civilians. The east and west beaches and also the Spanish frontier fence are patrolled, by British Soldiers. There is also a roving patrol in that part of the aerodrome where freight and passenger aircraft are parked. Between 0530B hours and 2230B hours this day organisation is in force, but this is overlapped by the night organisation which commences at 2130B hours and finishes at sunrise which is now approximately at 0720B hours.

By night the aerodrome is guarded by 6 officers and 100 senior N.C.O's and men with a reserve of 40 for use in any emergency. These soldiers are divided up into various patrols who guard all the entrances to the camp and are assisted by dogs at Eastern Beach and the western extension to the runway.

In the case of Liberator A.L. 523 the following additional precautions were taken. One British sentry was posted to guard the aircraft and was given a list of the names of the airmen who were likely to work on it. He was also instructed that personnel of A.D.R.U. could also board the aircraft. In addition a Corporal of 511 Squadron slept in the aircraft the night of 3rd/4th July. Special guards are only provided for aircraft carrying most important passengers, at the pilot's request because he is carrying special freight, or because the aircraft is fitted with exceptionally secret equipment.

As an additional security measure the entire airfield is flood lit during the hours of darkness except when aircraft are landing or taking off, or when "no lights" is requested by the Navy. It is under the control of Flying Control.

The sea rescue arrangements at Gibraltar are as follows. Three H.S.L's are based on the Flying Boat Station on the western side of the Rock. These craft are controlled by Area Combined Headquarters who are in direct telephonic communication with Flying Control, North Front. In the event of an aircraft crashing into the sea, Flying Control inform A.C.H.Q. by telephone who then give the orders to the launch. The launch is also in R/T communication with Flying Control. In addition there is also a small rowing dinghy

kept at instant readiness on a launching cradle at the extreme eastern end of the runway, which is continuously manned by day. The dinghy on this occasion, although the crash occurred by night was launched and reached the scene of the accident within about eight minutes. Further sea rescue facilities can be provided by light naval forces, which are continually patrolling the waters in the vicinity of the Rock, when operational commitments permit. On this occasion one of these craft reached the scene of the crash within a short space of time.

(Signed) G.A. BOLLAND. GROUP CAPTAIN.

#### Question 1.

In view of the fact that the only road connecting Spain with the fortress passes across the airfield what precautions are taken to prevent unauthorised persons from deviating from this road?

#### Answer.

All gaps in the wire fence along this road are guarded by day and night by either Gibraltar Security Police and/or British soldiers.

(Signed) G.A. BOLLAND. Group Captain.  
8/7/43.

#### 3RD WITNESS.

Captain Jack Llewellyn Williams. Independent Company, King's Regiment, Gibraltar states: -

I am Officer i/c No.2 Platoon, Independent Company, and on 3rd and 4th July I was in charge of the Frontier guards at North Front and of the guard provided for Liberator A.L. 523. The guard mounted duty on the Liberator at 1630B hours on 3rd July and remained on guard until the aircraft left at approximately 2300B hours on 4th July. The sentry consisted of one man who was relieved every two hours by the duty N.C.O. and replaced by another. The following orders were given the sentry on taking over duty on the aircraft: - "No one, excepting personnel in possession of the aerodrome special maintenance pass are to be allowed near the aircraft". The R.A.F. provided a list of personnel to be allowed near the plane. The guard was instructed that any other persons approaching would have to be identified by Corporal Alexander of the R.A.F. who was on duty the whole time except when he was relieved for meals. During these periods his relief would identify personnel who wished to ap-

proach. During the whole period of the guard no reports were received from the guard commander that any unauthorised person had attempted to approach the aircraft. The guards were inspected from time to time by officers of the Independent Company, who all reported that the aircraft was being properly guarded.

(Signed) J. L. WILLIAMS. Capt. Indept. Coy.  
8/7/43.

**4TH WITNESS.** No. 567194 Sergeant Moore, Norman John. Fitter II, R.A.F. Station, Lyneham, states: -

I am a sergeant in 511 Squadron i/c Maintenance detached to R.A.F. Station, North Front, and I am responsible for servicing 511 Sqdn. aircraft at Gibraltar. On July 3rd at 1650 hours Liberator A.L. 523 landed at Gibraltar. I was waiting with my personnel, consisting of ten airmen, to service the aircraft. I approached the Flight Engineer, Sgt. Kelly, and asked him about the aircraft's serviceability. He replied that it was perfect. The Pilot also stated to me that the aircraft was serviceable. I then ordered Corporal Davies, senior corporal of my maintenance party, to put a guard on the aircraft immediately. This he did, and this airman remained on guard until relieved by a military armed guard. I then instructed Corporal Davies that an airman must remain on the aircraft throughout the hours of darkness in close proximity to the door, and Corporal Hopgood was the airman detailed. Approximately between 2100B hours and 2130B hours I spoke to the armed military guard enquiring whether he had a list of people permitted aboard the aircraft. His answer was no. I then gave him a list of airmen of my maintenance party and stated that these airmen would vouch for any other persons allowed to board the aircraft. The following morning between 0700B hours and 0800B hours I saw Corporal Davies and asked him who had been on guard. He said Corporal Hopgood and that he had gone off to breakfast. I received no report of any unusual incident from either Cpl. Davies or Cpl. Hopgood, and I concluded that everything was in order. I saw the aircraft from time to time during the day and was present when it left. Throughout this period I received no adverse report either about security or maintenance from any member of my party.

(Signed) N.J. MOORE. Sgt.

**4th WITNESS** *continued.*  
I personally checked the Travelling Form 700 and saw that it was completely signed up for a daily inspection before the aircraft left. I carried out this final check at about 2200B hours and signed as N.C.O. i/c Maintenance Party, and I am absolutely convinced that the aircraft was serviceable.

(Signed) N.J. MOORE. Sergeant.

**3rd WITNESS** *recalled.*  
Captain Jack Llewellyn Williams questioned by the Court.

**Question 1.**  
Who gave you the name of the R.A.F. Corporal who was on duty the night of 3rd/4th July?

**Answer**  
The N.C.O. i/c of the Military guard on the aircraft. I understood that this was obtained from the list of names provided by the Sergeant in charge of Maintenance.

**Question 2.**  
Who told you that Corporal Alexander of the R.A.F. was on duty during the whole period, except for meal times, that Liberator A.L.523 was on the airfield?

**Answer**  
Sgt. Moore. R.A.F. informed the duty N.C.O. i/c Guard who in turn informed me.

**Question 3.**  
What is "the special maintenance pass" to which you refer?

**Answer**  
This consisted of a piece of paper on which Sgt. Moore had listed all names of the personnel who were allowed to approach the aircraft, the individuals concerned establishing their identity by producing their identity card.

(Signed) J. L. WILLIAMS. Captain.  
Indept. Coy. 9.7.43.

**5th WITNESS.**  
No. 924542 Corporal Davis. William, Arthur, Leonard, Fitter IIE. R.A.F. Station, Lyneham, states: -

I am a corporal in 511 Squadron and the senior corporal of the Maintenance Flight attached to R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar. On July, 3rd 1943 at approximately 1630B hours just after Liberator A.L.523 had landed from Cairo I was standing by the aircraft when Sergeant Moore gave me the following

instructions. He detailed me to have the aircraft guarded continuously by one of our maintenance detachment, and stated further that one of them would have to sleep in the aircraft at night. I drew up a list of the airmen who were to guard the aircraft and told each man how long he was to be on guard, when he was on guard, and who was relieving him. I periodically checked up that the guards were performing their duties. I was with Corporal Hopgood when he mounted guard at about 2200B hours and I was also with him when he came off guard at about 0730B hours on the morning of the 4th July. Neither Corporal Hopgood nor any of the other airmen I detailed for the guard reported any unusual occurrence to me.

(Signed) L. DAVIS.  
9.7.43.

6th WITNESS.

No. 918902 Corporal Hopgood, Francis, Edmund, Electrician. R.A.F. Station, Lyneham, states: —

I am a corporal in 511 Squadron and am in the maintenance flight attached to R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar. On July 3rd 1943 at about 1700B hours I was instructed by Corporal Davis to act as guard on Liberator A.L.523 during the hours of darkness and was to report for duty at 2230B hours. I was to sleep in the aircraft and to remain on guard until relieved the following morning at 0730B hours. I slept on the floor by the rear hatch and I am convinced no one unauthorised entered the aircraft while I was on duty. When I left the aircraft at 0730 hours airmen of my detachment were engaged on servicing the aircraft. At approximately 0700B hours an airman whom I recognised as belonging to Air Despatch and Reception Unit took a package from the bomb compartment.

(Signed) F. E. HOPGOOD

7th WITNESS.

No. 1425803 L.A.C. Gibbs. Harold, David. Fitter IIA. R.A.F. Station, Lyneham, states: —

I am a Fitter IIA in 511 Squadron and am in the maintenance flight attached to R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar. At about 0930B hours on 4th July 1943 I was instructed by Sergeant Moore to carry out a daily inspection of the airframe of Liberator A.L.523. I had been informed by Sergeant Moore the

previous evening that there were no snags with the aircraft. I carried out the inspection in accordance with section 1A, Part 2 of the Maintenance Schedule XX for Liberator II aeroplane, and everything was in order. I signed the Travelling Copy of Form 700 to that effect. When I carried out my inspection I observed that all control cables were free of any obstruction, but I was informed later by L.A.C. Miles that additional baggage had been loaded on the aircraft before departure. As far as I know this was passengers personal baggage being replaced.

(Signed) H. D. GIBBS.

8th WITNESS.

No. 646930 Corporal Alexander. Keith, Trelfa. Instrument Repairer I, R.A.F. Station, Lyneham, states: —

I am a corporal in 511 Squadron and am in the maintenance flight attached to R.A.F. Station, North Front Gibraltar. On 4th July 1943 at about 1100B hours I carried out a daily inspection, in accordance with section IC Part 2 of the Maintenance Schedule for Liberator II aeroplane, on Liberator A.L.523, as applicable to this aircraft. No snags had been reported either by the Flight Engineer or Pilot, and after my inspection I was quite satisfied that everything was in order. I signed the Travelling Copy of Form 700 to that effect.

(Signed) K. ALEXANDER. Corporal.

9th WITNESS.

No. 1215765 L.A.C. Miles, Jabez, Frank. Fitter IIA, R.A.F. Station. Lyneham, states: —

I am a Fitter IIA in 511 Squadron and am in the Maintenance flight attached to R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar. On 4th July 1943 at between about 2230B hours and 2245B hours I stowed about twelve pieces of personal luggage in the bomb bay of Liberator A.L.523, on both sides of the forward portion. I am experienced in stowing baggage in Liberator aircraft and am well aware of the importance of ensuring that neither control cables, nor various accessories of the hydraulic system are fouled. In this instance I lashed all the baggage down and was quite satisfied that everything was properly stowed.

(Signed) J. F. MILES. L.A.C.

*10th WITNESS.* Pilot Officer Harold Vernon Briggs, R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar states: -

I am an embarkation officer in No. 27 A.D.R.U. and in the morning of 4th July was on duty at North Front. I received a telephone call from Government House asking whether an additional passenger could be carried in Liberator A.L.523 due to depart that evening. I spoke to the captain of the aircraft on the telephone and he agreed that this passenger could be carried and later signed Form 1256 to that effect, which Form I now produce.

(Signed) H. V. BRIGGS. P/O.  
9th July, 1943

*Question 1.* Can you produce a copy of the manifest for this aircraft Liberator A.L.523?

*Answer.* No. The only copy available was that retained by the pilot which I saw. As far as I can remember the total pay load on arrival at Gibraltar was 5,540 lbs. We never receive a copy of the manifest on aircraft arriving from Cairo, although it is laid down in the distribution instructions on Form 1256 that we should receive one. Furthermore it is considered essential to have a copy and we have applied for one on several occasions without success.

(Signed) H. V. BRIGGS. P/O.  
9th July, 1943

*11th WITNESS.* Flight Lieutenant Reginald Stanley Coleman, Air Headquarters, Royal Air Force, Gibraltar, states: -

I am an embarkation officer in No. 27 A.D.R.U. On the evening of the 4th July I was on duty at North Front with Pilot Officer Briggs. At about 2200B hours two passengers, Mr. Pinder and Mr. Lock, who were to travel on Liberator A.K.L.523 reported at the office. Of the eleven passengers due to emplane on Liberator A.L.523 that evening these were the only two passengers whom I checked onto the aircraft, as the remainder were taken direct to the aircraft by the Government House party. I spoke to both Major Quayle and Flight Lieutenant Perry, A.D.C.s to the Governor, who stated that all their party was present.

\* *Exhibit "B"* I produce a list \* of the eleven passengers who were due to emplane on Liberator A.L.523 that night.

(Signed) R. S. COLEMAN. F/Lt.  
9th July, 1943

*Question 1.* Can you state, apart from Mr. Lock and Mr. Pinder, whether or not the other passengers on the list which you have produced did in fact emplane on Liberator A.L.523?

*Answer.* No, because except for Mr. Lock and Mr. Pinder, the remainder were taken direct to the aircraft.

*Question 2.* Is it customary for passengers to emplane without first reporting to the A.D.R.U.?

*Answer.* No, but certain very important passengers are sometimes taken direct to the aircraft as happened in this instance.

(Signed) R. S. COLEMAN. F/Lt.  
9th July, 1943

*12th WITNESS.* Flight Lieutenant Arthur John Perry, Air Headquarters. R.A.F. Gibraltar, states: -

I am A.D.C. to H.E. the Governor of Gibraltar and on 4th July, 1943 at about 2215B hours I proceeded to North Front airfield with Col. Cazalet and Lieutenant Pomikiewski. At about 2245B hours I saw all the eleven passengers named on Exhibit "B", shown to me by the Court, emplane on Liberator A.L.523.

(Signed) A. J. PERRY. F/Lt.

*13th WITNESS.* Wing Commander Claude Dunkerley, R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar, states: -

I am Officer Commanding, Transit Squadron, North Front, and am responsible for the warning and despatch of communication aircraft. Liberator A.L. 523 was duly warned to Lyneham at 1150B hours on 4th July, 1943 but departure signal was not sent as the aircraft crashed on take-off. A signal was sent to this effect instead.

(Signed) C. DUNKERLEY. W/Cdr.

*11th WITNESS*  
*recalled*

Group Captain Bolland states: -

On the 5th July the duty officer, Flying Control, reported to me that a gunner on duty at the gun sight on the western end of the runway had picked up a mail bag on the western end of the runway which he handed in to Flying Control. Subsequent enquiries from A.D.R.U. revealed the fact that this mail bag was part of the freight of Liberator A.L.523.

(Signed) G. A. BOLLAND. Group Captain.

*Question 1.* Were you present when Liberator A.L.523 taxied out to take off on the night of the 4th July, 1943?

*Answer.* Yes.

*Question 2.* Did you notice whether or not the rear hatch was closed?

*Answer.* No, but I am convinced I should have noticed if it had not been.

(Signed) G. A. BOLLAND. Group Captain.

*14th WITNESS.* No. 1638146 Gunner Miller, William Joseph. 9th Light A.A. Battery, 3rd Light A.A. Regiment. R.A., states: -

I was on duty at my gun post, which is sited on the north side of the runway about 400 yards from the west end, when at about 0140B hours on 5th July I saw an object lying on the runway close by. On investigation I found it to be a mail bag weighing about 15 lbs. As soon as my duty was finished at 0200B hours I took the bag to Flying Control and handed it over to the officer on duty.

(Signed) W. J. MILLER.

*15th WITNESS.* Flight Lieutenant Renalt Bernard Capes, Air Headquarters, R.A.F. Gibraltar, states: -

I am a Flying Control officer and on the evening of the 4th July 1943 I was on duty in the Watch Tower on North Front airfield. At approximately 2307B hours I saw Liberator A.L.523 taking off. The aircraft became airborne at about No. 12 flare which gave the pilot a take off run of about 1,150 yards. The aircraft

became airborne at about No. 12 flare which gave the pilot a take off run of about 1,150 yards. The aircraft appeared to climb normally and had reached a height of about 30 feet when 100 yards past the Watch Tower. The aircraft then appeared to level off, flew for a short distance straight and level and then lost height steadily until it hit the sea. In my opinion all four engines were under full power until the aircraft crashed, and there was no suggestion of a stall. The flare path at the time of take off of Liberator A.L.523 consisted of a double row of electric flares spaced at 100 yard intervals, the flare path being 50 yards wide. Approximately 100 yards beyond the the last flares a row of red glim lamps indicated the end of the runway.

(Signed) R. BERNARD CAPES. F/Lt.  
10th July, 1943.

*Question 1.* Have you had any flying experience?

*Answer.* Yes, about 7,000 hours as a pilot.

*Question 2.* In view of the fact that there was no moon how were you able to follow the path of the aircraft so clearly?

*Answer.* By the navigation lights.

(Signed) R. BERNARD CAPES. F/Lt.  
10th July, 1943.

*16th WITNESS.* Air Commodore Sturley Philip Simpson, Air Headquarters, Gibraltar, states,

I am the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.F. Gibraltar. On the evening of the 4th July I proceeded to North Front airfield to say good-bye to General Sikorski. The passengers embarked and the engines were started normally. Liberator A.L.523 then taxied out to the west end of the runway where, after a considerable pause, it turned into wind and took off. I was standing on the north side of the runway about 200 yards east of the Spanish Road. The aircraft became airborne about 100 yards past where I was standing. The aircraft climbed steadily in a perfectly normal manner and all four engines appeared to be functioning properly. I should judge it was over the east end of the runway at about 100 feet when it ceased to climb and

appeared to sink slowly towards the sea. Owing to the darkness it was not possible to gauge the altitude of the aircraft. Whilst the aircraft was losing height there was no change in the note of the engines and all four were showing the same steady blue exhaust flame that they were showing while climbing. The aircraft disappeared from my view below the sea wall and there was a loud crash.

(Signed) S. P. SIMPSON. Air Commodore.

*Question 1.*

Did you notice whether or not the rear hatch was closed before Liberator A.L.523 taxied out to take off?

*Answer.*

I did not actually see it being closed but I am quite certain I should have noticed it had it been left open.

*Question 2.*

Is it customary for very important passengers to emplane at Gibraltar without first passing through A.D.R.U.?

*Answer.*

In very special cases this is sometimes done as happened in this instance.

*Question 3.*

In these cases who ensures that all passengers emplane?

*Answer.*

In this particular case the Governor and myself, but in future I shall ensure that a responsible embarkation officer checks all passengers, v.i.p. or otherwise, into the aircraft.

(Signed) S. P. SIMPSON. Air Commodore.

*17th WITNESS.*

No. 1547087 A.C.1 Qualtrough. Derek. Wireless Mechanic, R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar, states: -

I am a wireless mechanic in 179 Squadron and on the evening of the 4th July, 1943, 2310B hours I was waiting to cross the east end of the runway while an aircraft was taking off. It was just airborne and was climbing when it passed me, and immediately it had gone by I commenced to cross the runway. My attention was suddenly drawn to the aircraft by the fact that the engines had stopped, and it appeared to be about 100 feet high and descending towards the sea. I

realised it was going to crash and I started to run to the rescue dinghy boathouse. I am a member of the dinghy crew but I was not on duty at the time. I was accompanied by two other airmen at the time. I did not hear the aircraft crash as I was running. When we arrived at the boathouse other airmen were there and whilst six of us climbed into the dinghy another airman operated the winch and launched us. We arrived at the scene of the crash in about five minutes, and we were hailed by someone in the water whom we at once pulled on board. He was wearing an inflated Mae West and was quite conscious although unable to speak. Searchlights from the Rock began to come on and we started to search amongst the wreckage for more survivors. The aircraft itself had sunk. We next picked up a few minutes later the body of a man who was not wearing a Mae West. He was floating with his head under water and I considered he was dead. About 15 to 20 minutes after we arrived at the scene of the crash a small naval craft appeared. The crew informed us that they had no facilities aboard for dealing with survivors but that the R.A.F. rescue launch was just arriving. We then noticed the launch, hailed it, and transferred the survivor and the body to it. By this time other small craft had appeared and one had recovered a body which we transferred to the rescue launch. We continued to search for about another half an hour amongst the wreckage which by then had drifted about 1/2 mile south. Finding nothing more we returned to the shore.

(Signed) A.C.1 D.QUALTROUGH.  
10.7.43

*Question 1.*

How long elapsed after the crash before the searchlights of the Rock illuminated the wreckage?

*Answer.*

I should say about ten minutes.

*Question 2.*

Where exactly were you standing on the runway when the aircraft was taking off?

*Answer.*

On the south side of the pedestrian crossing near Flying Control.

(Signed) D. QUALTROUGH.  
10.7.43.

*18th WITNESS.* No. R.101031 L.A.C. Tisdale. Herbert David R.D.F. M/R, R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar, states: —

I am an airman in 179 Squadron and on the evening of the 4th July, 1943 at about 2300B hours I was proceeding along the Spanish Frontier Road to the ablutions when I heard a Liberator taking off from west to east. When I was at a point about 25 yards north of the shooting range the noise suddenly ceased. I stopped and turned around to look for the aircraft. After a couple of glances towards the end of the runway I heard a crash. I immediately ran to the boat-house as I realised that the aircraft must be in the sea. There was an appreciable length of time between the stopping of the engine noise and the sound of the crash.

(Signed) H. D. TISDALE.  
10.7.43.

*19th WITNESS.* No. 1235676 L.A.C. Howes. Eric Ronald, R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar, states: —

I am an electrician in the Special Erection Party. At about 2305B hours on the 4th July I was coming out of my billet, which is situated at the extreme end of the Frontier Road about 100 yards from the eastern end of the runway, when I saw a Liberator taking off from west to east. I turned to go to the lavatory and as I did so I heard the engines cut. A second or two later I heard a loud crash and immediately started to run to the beach to see what had happened. I could see the aircraft floating in the water and immediately ran to the rescue dinghy which I helped to launch. As we were rowing towards the aircraft I saw it sink. I estimate that about six to eight minutes elapsed between the time I heard the crash and the aircraft sank.

(Signed) E. R. HOWES.  
11.7.43

*20th WITNESS.* Flight Lieutenant Albert Morris Posgate, R.A.F. Station, New Camp, Gibraltar, states: —

I am the officer commanding No. 71 Air/Sea Rescue Unit, and I am responsible for the Air/Sea Rescue organisation in the Gibraltar area. My unit consists of three high speed launches of which, two are kept at

immediate notice. In day time they are moored inside the harbour and during the night, from 2000 hours to 0800 hours the next morning they are moored outside the harbour at Commercial Anchorage. In the event of an aircraft crashing into the sea off the runway the officer on duty in the H.S.L. received a message over R/T from the [...] [copy torn] New Camp. This message has been passed by telephone from [...] the Controller, New Camp, who in turn has notified the [...] telephone. A.C.H.Q. receives notification of the crash from [...] Control, North Front, or from any other witness of the [...] receipt of the message by R/T in the duty H.S.L. The launch [...] way within 30 seconds. Of the three H.S.L.'s two can reach the eastern extremity of the runway, North Front, in approximately [...] minutes and the third, a slower launch, takes about nine minutes. On the night of the 4th July, 1943 on the occasion of [...] Liberator A.L.523 the message was received at 2310B [...] launch, being the slow one, took nine minutes to reach [...] the crash. The second launch, of which I was in command [...] orders to proceed at 2320B hours and reached the scene [...] in six minutes. Both launches continued to search for [...] survivors until recalled at 0420B hours. During this period the pilot, who was alive, and four bodies were recovered. We also recovered about thirty mail bags, diplomatic papers, money, etc. The pilot was wearing a Mae West but no parachute harness. Three of the four bodies recovered were fully clothed and one, that of Colonel Cazalet, was fully clothed and still strapped to his chair. In my opinion Colonel Cazalet could not have been wearing a Mae West or parachute harness at the time of the crash. Four watches taken off the bodies had all stopped between 2306 hours and 2307 hours.

(Signed) A. M. POSGATE. F/Lt.

*Question 1.*

Did you subsequently recover any more bodies and how were they clothed?

*Answer.*

Yes. On the morning of the 6th July I recovered two bodies; one was the Navigator and the other the Flight Engineer. Both were fully clothed and neither were wearing a Mae West or parachute harness. On the morning of the 7th July I recovered the body of a W.O.P/A.G. He was fully clothed but not wearing a

Mae West or parachute harness. On the 8th July I recovered the body of a Polish officer who was also fully dressed but without a Mae West or parachute harness.

*Question 2.* Did you observe any Mae Wests floating amongst the wreckage?

*Answer.* Yes, I picked up three or four in quite good condition.

*Question 3.* Were you present during the salvage operations?

*Answer.* Yes, the whole time.

*Question 4.* How long did they take?

*Answer.* The Naval Dockyard commenced operations on Tuesday 6th July at about 0830B hours and by 1930B hours on the 9th July, when weather stopped operations, the main planes, centre section, and three engines were in shallow water off eastern beach. The tail unit part of the fuselage and one engine were taken to the dockyard.

*Question 5.* Do you know the depth of the water where the aircraft crashed?

*Answer.* Yes, between five and six fathoms.

*Question 6.* Did you see the aircraft brought to the surface?

*Answer.* Yes, I saw the main planes, centre section and three engines, brought to the surface three times. The first and second time it was lowered again into the same position and the third time it was lowered into shallow water off eastern beach.

(Signed) A. M. POSGATE. F/Lt.

*21st WITNESS.* Flight Lieutenant Ian Petrie Fraser, R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar, states: —

I am a flying control officer at North Front, and was duty officer in the Flying Control Office on the night of the 4th/5th July. Liberator A.L.523 crashed into the sea at 2307B hours on 4th July, 1943.

(Signed) IAN P. FRASER. F/Lt.

*22nd WITNESS.* No. 1203940 L.A.C. Titterington, Walter, R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar, states: —

I am an equipment assistant in No. 27 A.D.R.U. It is the responsibility of my unit to remove certain diplomatic mail from R.A.F. aircraft arriving from the Middle East for transfer to B.O.A.C. aircraft. On the occasion of the arrival of Liberator A.L.523 at 1630B hours on the 3rd July, 1943 I had been instructed that there were a number of diplomatic mail bags on this aircraft which were to be transferred. At about 1730B hours on the 3rd July I removed five mail bags from the forward bomb bay. And again at about 0700B hours on 4th July I removed a further two bags from the forward bomb bay. On the first occasion I was not challenged by the military guard, nor did I see one. There were a lot of airmen about and it is quite possible I should have missed him. I carried a pass signed by O.C. No. 27 A.D.R.U. On the second occasion, at 0700 hours on the 4th July, when I visited the aircraft I definitely did not see any military guard nor was I challenged. I entered the aircraft by the rear hatch and in doing so woke up Corporal Hopgood who allowed me to pass as he knew who I was. On leaving the aircraft with the bags a minute or two later I still saw no guard nor was I challenged.

(Signed) W. TITTERINGTON. L.A.C.  
July 13th 1943.

*23rd WITNESS.* No. 3777106 Private Callow, Frederick Christian, Independent Company, King's Regiment, states: —

I was posted as guard on Liberator A.L.523 at 0600B hours on 4th July. My instructions were to guard the aircraft and to allow no one to approach or enter it unless their name was on the list I had been given by the guard commander. I was relieved from guard at 0800B hours on 4th July and during my guard no one approached, entered, or left the aircraft.

(Signed) F. C. CALLOW. Pte.  
July 13th 1943.

*Question 1.* Are you quite certain you were guarding Liberator A.L.523?

*Answer.* Yes, I saw the number near the tail.

*Question 2.*

When you stated that no one approached Liberator A.L.523 during your guard from 0600B hours to 0800B hours on the 4th July did you mean that no unauthorised person approached the aircraft?

*Answer.*

I meant no one at all approached the aircraft.

(Signed) F. C. CALLOW. Pte.  
July 13th 1943.

*24th WITNESS.*

No. 3777049 Corporal Tomlinson, Thomas, Independent Company, King's Regiment, states: —

On the night of 3rd/4th July, 1943 I was N.C.O. i/c Reliefs for Guards posted on Liberator A.L.523. At 0600B hours on 4th July I posted Private Callow on this aircraft. At 0800B hours on 4th July I posted his relief. During the two hours he was on guard I visited Private Callow three or four times and neither these times nor when I relieved him did he report that anything unusual had happened.

(Signed) T. TOMLINSON.  
13.7.43.

*6th WITNESS recalled.*

No. 918902 Corporal Hopgood recalled.

*Question 1.*

Are you quite certain that airmen were working on Liberator A.L.523 when you left at 0730B hours on the 4th July?

*Answer.*

No, I am not certain. Another Liberator had landed at about 0710B hours and had parked close to A.L.523 on its port side. I went to meet this aircraft, and other airmen of my detachment arrived shortly after. I cannot therefore remember definitely whether airmen were working on A.L.523 or the newly arrived Liberator.

*Question 2.*

Where was the military guard for Liberator A.L.523 positioned when you left to meet the newly arrived Liberator?

*Answer.*

I did not see a military guard and was not aware that one had been detailed. I did however see two or three military guard the rear of Liberator A.L.523 near

some Mosquitos, and I presumed they were guarding the Mosquitos.

(Signed) F. E. HOPGOOD.

*25th WITNESS.*

Lieutenant Colonel Francis Edward Buller Girling, G.S.O.1 Fortress Headquarters, Gibraltar, states: —

I am, as General Staff Officer, responsible for issuing orders to military formations, regarding the security precautions necessary in Gibraltar. I produce a map (Exhibit C) showing the guards and patrols provided by the military to safeguard North Front airfield and R.A.F. installations and aircraft against attempts at sabotage. The guards by day are found by the Independent Company and by night by the Independent Company plus three officers and eighty of an infantry battalion. In addition to these guards there are four Gibraltar Special Police posts, two on Devil's Lower Road and two on the road to Spain, in addition to the police posts at Four Corners. Off the western end of the runway there is a motor boat patrol manned by the Independent Company which carries out the in-shore patrol and also patrols the commercial anchorage. The following area is a protected area under the defence regulations: — "The area bounded by the south east side of the Catalonian Canal, Devil's Dyke, North Face of the Rock, southern edge of Cross Ditch thence in a direct line to western beach". The road to Spain is exempt from this order. To the best of my knowledge there have been no cases of sabotage or attempted sabotage of aircraft on the airfield.

(Signed) F. E. B. GIRLING. Lt. Col. G.S.

*26th WITNESS.*

Squadron Leader Jack Frederick Sach, R.A.F. Station, Lyneham, states: —

I am "A" Flight Commander in 511 Squadron. Flight Lieutenant Prchal is a pilot in my flight. I have known him personally since he was posted to the squadron in November, 1942. His flying ability has always been outstanding and exceptional and he has never been known to leave anything, no matter how slight to chance. He exercises good discipline with his crew and his general bearing has at all times been of a high order. He has always been very interested in his work and I should regard him as being the most valued captain in the Squadron.

(Signed) J.F. SACH. Squadron Leader.

*Question 1.*

What is your experience on Liberators?

*Answer.*

About 800 hours as captain gained over the past 20 months, all in 1425 Flight and 511 Squadron.

*Question 2.*

Is it possible for a mail bag, which had been stowed in the port forward bomb bay, to fall out?

*Answer.*

The port forward bomb door is the only one used for the crew to get into their positions and for loading freight in the bomb bay on Liberator A.L.523, and it is possible, if the bomb door were slightly open as a result of putting on flap or any other reason, that this bag might fall out. This would only occur if the hydraulic system were not properly primed.

*Question 3.*

Can you give any reason why a Liberator pilot should want to lock the controls during take off?

*Answer.*

There is no reason whatsoever once the aircraft is into wind.

*Question 4.*

Did you hear of the incident at Lyneham when Squadron Leader McPhail was second pilot to Flight Lieutenant Prchal and locked the controls during take-off?

*Answer.*

No, I did not.

*Question 5.*

What is your opinion of Flight Lieutenant Prchal's ability on instrument flying?

*Answer.*

Flight Lieutenant Prchal's instrument flying ability was exceptional. On one occasion he put a Hudson down at Gibraltar at night in a fog without blind approach facilities.

*Question 6.*

The loading of the aircraft was as follows: Nose 1543 lbs, forward bomb bay 1793 lbs, rear bomb bay 827 lbs, tail 1161 lbs when the aircraft left Cairo. In addition an extra passenger boarded the aircraft at Gibraltar and was seated in one of the bomb bays. What is your opinion of this distribution of load?

*Answer.*

This load would tend to make the aircraft tail heavy and if half-flap were used, would most probably cause the pilot to push his control column fairly well forward

to prevent the nose from rising too high immediately after take off.

*Question 7.*

Have you noticed any tendency to relax regulations when carrying very important passengers?

*Answer.*

Yes, there have been occasions within my experience when v.i.p.'s have refused to conform with regulations.

(Signed) J. F. SACH. Squadron Leader.

*27th WITNESS.*

Squadron Leader Canning, Daniel, R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar, states: -

I am senior medical officer at R.A.F. Station, North Front. The bodies of the following persons recovered from the crash involving Liberator A.L.523 have been examined by me: General Sikorski, Maj. Gen. Klimecki, Colonel Marecki, Colonel Cazalet. Lieut. Pontikewski, Brigadier Whiteley, Mr. Pinder, Colonel Gralewski, Warrant Officer Zalsberg, Sergeant Kelly and F/Sgt. Gerrie. My examination of all these bodies showed head injuries and multiple injuries, the degree of violence in my opinion suggesting that the time of death approximated to the time of the accident. The following bodies have not yet been recovered: Mr. Kulakowski, Mme. Lesniowska, Mr. Lock, Sqn. Ldr. Herring and Ft/Sgt. Hunter. My examination of Fit. Lt. Prchal after the crash showed him to be suffering from shock, lacerations of the face, and fracture of the right ankle.

(Signed) D. CANNING. S/Ldr.  
19.7.43

*1st WITNESS.*

Flight Lieutenant Prchal recalled.

*Question 1.* Was the bomb door on Liberator A.L. 523 connected to the hydraulic system?

*Answer.*

I don't think so, but I am not certain as this was my first trip on this aircraft.

*Question 2.*

Is the interior of the bomb compartment lighted?

*Answer.*

Yes, all the time.

*Question 3.*

Is it possible that the Flight Engineer would have

failed to observe whether either the inside door or the bomb door were not shut?

*Answer.*

No, it is not possible because after running up engines and before taking off he walked up and down the fuselage before reporting to me that everything was all right.

*Question 4.*

Have you ever heard of a mail bag or other article falling out of a Liberator when taxiing or during flight?

*Answer.*

No, but if it were loaded in the nose it is possible for an article to fall out through the nose wheel aperture if not secured.

*Question 5.*

Did you cut your main switches before the crash?

*Answer.*

No, I cannot reach them.

*Question 6.*

Do you think the 2nd Pilot switched them off before you crashed?

*Answer.*

I do not know, but the engines were running perfectly normally until I closed the throttles.

*Question 7.*

What did you mean when you stated in your evidence that you told the 2nd Pilot to "check over the controls"?

*Answer.*

I meant "unlock the controls", and I think that is what I said, because I thought he had locked them with the locking lever.

*Question 8.*

Do you normally push the stick forward to build up speed after take off?

*Answer.*

Yes, always.

*Question 9.*

In this instance do you consider that you would have pushed the control column as far forward as the locking position?

*Answer.*

Yes, I think I did, in fact I might even have pushed it beyond that position.

*Question 10.*

Did you look at your altimeter after you had taken off?

*Answer.*

Yes, I certainly did and it indicated 150 feet. It was set at zero before take off.

*Question 11.*

What is the cock pit drill for your second pilot on take off?

*Answer.*

Before taking off: 1/2 flaps down, gills closed, booster pumps on, unlock controls, rich mixture. In taking off: I open throttles to 40 inches boost, 2nd Pilot takes over throttles opening them on my instructions to 48 inches. At about 200 feet I then give him instructions to switch booster pumps off, but I had not reached that stage in this instance.

(Signed) E. M. PRCHAL. F/Lt.

28th WITNESS.

Wing Commander Arthur Montague Stevens, Air Headquarters, Gibraltar, states: -

I am the Chief Technical Officer at Gibraltar and I was present during the salvage operations of Liberator A.L. 523. The first portion of the aeroplane to be lifted out of the water was the tail unit complete with elevators, fins, and rudders. This had broken off the fuselage just forward of the leading edge of the tail plane. I first inspected the elevator trimming tabs which I found to be almost in the neutral position. The elevators were free to move except for some damage on one end to the skin which prevented total movement up and down. The main planes and centre section complete with all four engines, but severely damaged forward of the navigator's position, was next hoisted up. The fuselage aft of the trailing edge of the main plane was missing as was all the bomb compartment from the navigator's seat back. The flaps were comparatively undamaged and were approximately fully down. The starboard plane [...] were [...] [illegible] pending further investigation of the actual site where the rest of the wreckage lay. The next item to be lifted up was the badly damaged fuselage shell. This consisted of that portion aft of the bomb bay down to just forward of the tail plane. No flooring was left intact, only the roof and sides being recovered. The propellers and reduction gear housings had

come off all four engines and only two could be seen in subsequent diving operations, of which only one has been salvaged. Finally all major wreckage was recovered and taken to the Naval Dockyard, where it was examined by the A.I.B. Inspector. Owing to the dock being urgently required the main plane had to be cut up and removed to the salvage unit where detailed examination occurred.

The tail plane had been examined some time prior to this, however, and the elevator and rudder locking control pulley spindle was found to be sheared. This locking device can be seen in the sketch of the control locking system which I produce herewith, marked exhibit "D". The sliding pinions, which engage respectively in holes in the rudder control tube and a block situated in brackets coming off the ends of the elevator cross shaft, bore no signs of having been subjected to a shear load, which if they had been engaged some signs might have been expected. The whole rudder and elevator locking unit was removed from the tail plane by the A.I.B. Inspector and despatched to U.K. for examination by Farnborough. Information has recently been received that the operating spindle sheared due to a torsional stress, caused possibly in the crash.

Examination of the throttle pedestal showed the throttle levers to be in the nearly closed positions, the actual throttle positions on the carburettor being as follows:—

No. 1 Engine. — almost closed.  
 No. 2 " — 1/3rd open.  
 No. 3 " — wide open.  
 No. 4 " — half open.

All cooling gills were right closed. The 1st Pilot's control column was badly jammed by sand in the fully forward position, but, on removal of the sand, was found to be perfectly free and in turn this freed the 2nd Pilot's column.

Both main engine ignition switches were found off. The aeroplane was so badly damaged around the pilots cockpit and forward of the centre section that the final positions of any controls operated by cables might be very misleading.

The control column sprockets and chains were found to be in good condition superficially but I have not carried out any minute examination for any signs of foreign bodies having been jammed between the teeth and chain rollers.

The petrol cocks were found to be in the following positions:

No. 1 Engine. — on.  
 No. 2 " — partly off due to broken lever.  
 No. 3 " — on.  
 No. 4 " — on.

The propeller pitch control switches on the control pedestal were all in the neutral position. Owing to the loss of the reduction gear housings off two engines only two pitch control units are available for inspection. This has revealed that the propellers of Nos. 3 and 4 engines were in fine pitch.

From an examination of the undercarriage it would appear that it was fairly well up at the time of impact with the water as the locks, both up and down positions, are undamaged as are the tyres and wheel fairings.

(Sgd) A. M. STEVENS. W/Cdr.

*Question 1.* To what extent are the control cables covered in their passage through the fuselage in this mark of Liberator?

*Answer.* They are protected by a semi-circular metal shield running longitudinally down the port and starboard sides of the bomb bay, whence they pass through the bulk head under pulleys. Aft of this bulk head they are unprotected for the remainder of their travel to the tail unit.

*Question 2.* Is it possible for these control cables to be jammed or obstructed by baggage or passengers in the fuselage?

*Answer.* In my opinion, no. I have carried out tests in which I have attempted to restrict all movement of the pilot's control to the elevators. This consisted of clutching the elevator control cables, lying against them and stuffing pieces of rag hard between the cable and its pulleys, all of which had no effect whatsoever. I also attempted by holding the elevator and rudder controls in the neutral position to engage the locking control mechanisms by pulling down on the locking control cables. I was unable to exert sufficient pull on the cable to rotate the actuating pulley.

*Question 3.* Can you state from examination of the propellers to

what extent the engines were under power at the moment of impact?

*Answer.*

I would not care to give any definite answer as there is only one propeller salvaged which has been examined. From its appearance I would not say it was under much power at impact.

(Sgd) A.M. STEVENS. W/Cdr.

*20th WITNESS.*

Flight Lieutenant Posgate recalled states: -

Whilst I was engaged in searching for survivors from Liberator A.L. 523 in my H.S.L. I received a message over the R/T stating that aircraft would co-operate and drop flares. I replied that there was a lot of petrol floating on the water. Subsequently a number of flares was dropped over a period of about 20 minutes. They were of little value and all were extinguished before entering the water.

(Sgd) A.M. POSGATE. F/Lt.

Re-opening of the Court of Inquiry on 3rd August. 1943 at Headquarters Coastal Command by order of Air Marshal Sir J.C. Slessor, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., to enquire further into the Flying Accident on 4th July, 1943 at North Front, Gibraltar involving Liberator AL.523.

*1st Witness*

Flight Lieutenant Prchal recalled.

*Question 1.*

When you entered Liberator AL.523 on the night of the 4th July, 1943 at North Front Gibraltar, prior to starting up, were the flying controls locked?

*Answer.*

Yes.

*Question 2.*

How were they locked?

*Answer.*

By the locking strap, one end of which held the locking control lever up and the other end, the top of the loop formed where the strap divides, being hooked over the throttle friction nut at the mixture control end.

*Question 3.*

Were they locked when you taxied out to take off?

*Answer.* Yes, by the strap in the same way.

*Question 4.*

Who unlocked the controls when you stopped to carry out your cockpit drill at the end of the runway?

*Answer.*

The 2nd Pilot on my instructions.

*Question 5.*

When you carried out your cockpit drill on the runway prior to taking off on this occasion, what exactly did you do?

*Answer.*

I ran up my engines; Flight Engineer was sitting in 2nd Pilot's seat looking at the instruments. I opened the engines one at a time up to 30 inches boost, and tested the pitch control. I then opened each engine to 48 inches and throttled back to 2000 r.p.m. in fine pitch, at which figure the Flight Engineer tested the magneto switches and I tested the two speed superchargers. The engines were satisfactory.

(2) I then sent my Flight Engineer to the bomb bay to switch the hydraulic booster pump on, check up the petrol cocks to ensure they were fully open, and to ensure that the bomb doors were closed. The Flight Engineer reported that all was in order.

(3) The 2nd Pilot took up position in the 2nd Pilot's seat and I checked the automatic pilot. The three oil cut-off valves were off, and the main switch off.

(4) I trimmed the aircraft for take off. The elevator trim was zero, rudder trim four divisions to the right, and ailerons one and a half to the right.

(5) I uncaged directional gyro and artificial horizon of the automatic pilot. The directional gyro was set to the compass reading and the artificial horizon assumed a horizontal position. The artificial horizon on the instrument panel was of the free type and this had already assumed a horizontal position. I set altimeter to read zero.

(6) I then instructed the 2nd Pilot to carry out his cockpit drill which I checked as he did it. He put flaps half down, closed the gills, switched on fuel booster pumps, unlocked the flying controls and put mixture controls in rich.

(7) I then tested the elevators, ailerons and rudders for complete freedom of movement to the limit of their range. They were completely free.

(8) I instructed the wireless operator to switch on generators.

(9) I then released the parking brake, turned into position and took off.

*Question 6.*

Did you see the 2nd Pilot release the flying controls locking lever strap?

*Answer.*

Yes.

*Question 7.*

How did he release the strap?

*Answer.*

He slipped it off the friction nut and I saw the locking lever go into the fully down position.

*Question 8.*

What happened to the strap?

*Answer.*

I don't know in this instance, but generally it is left lying on the floor.

*Question 9.*

How was the cockpit lighted?

*Answer.*

The lights were fully on and the cockpit was well illuminated while the cockpit drill was being carried out, but I turned them down for take-off.

*Question 10.*

Was the Aldis lamp used for signalling before take-off?

*Answer.*

No.

*Question 11.*

Where was it stowed?

*Answer.*

In the navigator's compartment.

*Question 12.*

How did you get permission to take-off?

*Answer.*

By a green light from the Airfield Controller.

*Question 13.*

How did you keep Liberator AL.523 straight during its take off run on this occasion?

*Answer.*

By throttles first and then rudders.

*Question 14.*

Can you state how much rudder you used?

*Answer.*

A very slight amount.

*Question 15.*

In previous evidence you stated that rudders, ailerons and elevators were definitely functioning correctly

when the aircraft became airborne. Why are you so certain of this?

*Answer.*

First of all I had to pull the aircraft off the runway by a considerable movement of the control column backwards, and secondly, although I cannot actually remember operating the aileron or rudders in the air, I am certain I should have known if they had not been free.

*Question 16.*

Did you take off by instruments?

*Answer.*

No, because there was good visibility and a good horizon, but I glanced at my airspeed indicator and altimeter from time to time.

*Question 17.*

Why did you not feel for the control locking lever if you thought the controls were locked?

*Answer.*

Because if I had bent down to do that, I would not have been able to see the horizon.

*Question 18.*

In what attitude was the aircraft when it struck the sea?

*Answer.*

Laterally level, about 15° - 20° nose down.

*Question 19.*

Do you know what is the maximum permissible speed with flaps down for a Liberator Mk.II?

*Answer.*

155 m.p.h. with flaps fully down.

*Question 20.*

In previous evidence, you stated that your speed built up to 165 m.p.h. with flaps half down. Why did you do this?

*Answer.*

Normally I would allow my speed to build up to 155 m.p.h. but in this instance, as I could not pull the control column back, my speed built up to 165 m.p.h. before crashing.

*Question 21.*

When you eased the control column forward to build up speed, did you notice the nose go down?

*Answer.*

Yes.

*Question 22.*

Can you state whether there was any play in the controls of Liberator AL.523 (a) locked (b) unlocked?

*Answer.*

(a) I cannot remember. (b) I do not know, the controls of this aircraft were very heavy, and in view of this I think I should have noticed if there had been any play.

*Question 23.*

Who raised the undercarriage on this occasion?

*Answer.*

I did.

*Question 24.*

Is there an appreciable increase in speed when the undercarriage goes up in Mark II Liberators?

*Answer.*

While it is going up there is no increase, but when it is up there is an appreciable increase.

*Question 25.*

What type of Automatic Pilot was fitted to Liberator AL.523?

*Answer.*

Sperry.

*Question 26.*

In previous evidence, you stated that you were quite satisfied with the disposal of load prior to taking off on the night of the 4th July, 1943. Why were you satisfied?

*Answer.*

Firstly, because I had flown Liberator AL.523 from Cairo and the load was the same from Gibraltar with the exception that one additional passenger and his luggage was in the bomb bay, and this additional load made no difference because it was near the centre of gravity of the aircraft; and secondly, when taxiing, the aircraft was well balanced on its main wheels. If there is too much load in the nose she tends to ride on her nose wheel, and if there is too much load aft she tends to drop her tail.

*Question 27.*

How do you know that the flying controls were in fact locked, when you entered the aircraft prior to starting up, or during taxiing?

*Answer.*

First of all because when I got into the aircraft, I helped myself into the seat with the control column and it did not move. All the time I was taxiing I had my left hand on the control column and it was quite rigid. Also whilst taxiing and using the brakes I should have noticed at once if the rudders had not been locked, since the brake pedal is hinged to the toe end of the rudder pedal.

*Question 28.*

Before entering Liberator AL.523 on the night of the 4th July, 1943 prior to starting up did you check over the exterior of the aircraft?

*Answer.*

Yes, I always do.

*Question 29.*

Were any covers on or near the aircraft?

*Answer.*

I am positive when I examined the aircraft on this occasion, there were no covers of any description on or near the aircraft.

*Question 30.*

Do you normally satisfy yourself that the occupants of the aircraft wear Mae Wests and/or parachute harnesses?

*Answer.*

Yes, normally I do.

*Question 31.*

What action did you take on this occasion to satisfy yourself that the occupants of Liberator AL.523 were wearing Mae Wests?

*Answer.*

None.

*Question 32.*

Who provides Mae Wests and parachutes for the passengers and instructs them in their use?

*Answer.*

A.D.R.U.

*Question 33.*

Were you wearing a Mae West on this occasion?

*Answer.*

No. I had my Mae West behind my back where I normally carry it.

*Question 34.*

What is the maximum play in the controls of any Liberator you have flown?

*Answer.*

In elevators less than an inch movement in the control column, but in ailerons I can recollect no instance of play. In rudders, slight play when locked, but none when unlocked.

Signed Prchal F/Lt.

5th August, 1943

*29th Witness.*

Flight Lieutenant John Willis Buck, Acc.I, Branch, Air Ministry by special arrangement with the Chief Inspector of Accidents, states: —

I am an Inspector of Accidents and was detailed to investigate the accident to Liberator AL.523. I examined in detail the wreckage of the aircraft during the salvage operations and after it was brought ashore. The aircraft was salvaged in three portions, the tail unit, aft part of the fuselage and the main planes including the wreckage of the cockpit and all four engines.

I examined the tail plane, elevators and rudders. There was no evidence of any jamming in the elevators and rudders. All damage was consistent with impact or subsequent salvage operations. The elevator and rudder control surfaces and hinge lines were particularly examined for jamming by some external body. There was no evidence of this having occurred. The entire operating mechanism of the control surfaces were examined and no defect found which could not be attributed to the crash or salvage. The cables had parted under severe tension.

An examination of the pilot's flying controls was made. All sprockets and chains were subjected to a detailed examination. This examination showed no damage to the teeth or walls, of the sprockets. An examination of the chains showed them to be in good condition, there being no signs of over-riding or jamming on any of the links. Both chains were broken at the connecting link, but this was due to the impact of the crash. A complete examination of the control system showed no signs of any jamming previous to the crash.

An examination of the controls locking mechanism showed that all locking pins were disengaged. There was no evidence to show that the locks had been engaged at the moment of impact. Both dinghies were properly stowed in their housings.

Signed, J. W. Buck.

*Question 1.* If the locking pins had been engaged at the moment of impact, what would you have expected to find?

*Answer.*

Signs of shearing or bending of the locking pins.

*Question 2.*

Have you ever heard of a case in which a Liberator attempted to take off or took off with the flying controls locked?

*Answer.*

Yes, in one case where a Liberator attempted to take off with locked controls but never left the ground. The aircraft ran the full length of the aerodrome and crashed into a hangar at high speed.

Signed J. W. Buck  
5.8.43

*30th Witness*

Squadron Leader Roland John Falk R.A.E., Farnborough, states: —

I am Chief Test Pilot at the R.A.E., Farnborough and have carried out test flights at various loads including a long distance flight of eleven hours on all marks of Liberator aircraft. My total experience on the type is approximately 60 hours, and total flying experience approximately 4,800 hours.

Signed Roland Falk.

*Question 1.*

With a correctly disposed load, do you consider a Liberator Mark II, with all up weight 54,600 lbs, could leave the ground with its flying controls locked?

*Answer.*

It would be possible for a Liberator to take off with the controls locked provided that it reached a sufficiently high indicated speed. As this indicated speed is, however, in the neighbourhood of 180 m.p.h. a take off under these conditions is probably only a theoretical consideration.

*Question 2.*

Would it be possible so to dispose the load that a Liberator aircraft with locked controls could take off in approximately 1100 yards in calm conditions?

*Answer.*

Yes, but in my opinion, if the e.g. was aft to this extent, the aircraft would be unmanageable in any case. If it took off in this condition with the controls locked it would immediately assume a steep climbing attitude and stall. In my opinion this is not a practical possibility.

*Question 3.*

Would it be possible to take a Liberator off with rudders only locked?

*Answer.*

Yes. The steering on the initial stage of the run is done by manipulation of the throttle, and it is quite possible to meet conditions in which there would be no subsequent swing, and therefore there would be no need for rudder correction.

*Question 4.*

Would it be possible for a pilot to hold the control column fully back without realising it had reached the end of its travel?

*Answer.*

No. The travel is so great that the pilot would not possibly fail to realise it.

*Question 5.*

Can you tell whether or not the load on a Liberator is correctly disposed whilst taxiing?

*Answer.*

You cannot tell whether it is correctly disposed but an experienced Liberator pilot would know if it were dangerously disposed.

*Question 6.*

If a Liberator aircraft were so loaded that it could take off in 1100 yds with all the flying controls locked, would this fact be obvious to the pilot when taxiing?

*Answer.*

Yes.

*Question 7.*

What is the altimeter position error correction on Liberators Mk.II?

*Answer.*

At 140 m.p.h. A.S.I. at ground level the correction to be applied to the altimeter reading is - 33 ft. This would not vary appreciably up to 500 ft.

Signed Roland Falk.

*31st Witness.*

Flight Lieutenant Wallace Lynton Watson, R.A.F. Station, Lyneham, states: -

I am 'A' Flight Commander in 511 Squadron, and have just taken over the Flight from Squadron Leader Sach. I am also the Squadron instructor on Liberators and instructed Flight Lieutenant Prchal on Liberators by day and night. He went solo after 50 mins instruction by day and 20 mins by night. In my opinion he was an exceptional pupil and of over 50 pilots which I have converted to Liberators, Flight Lieutenant Prchal was easily the best.

Signed Lynton Watson, F/Lt.

*Question 1.*

How do you interpret the flight limitation that flaps should not be down at speeds exceeding 155 m.p.h.?

*Answer.*

This applies to full flaps only and I have often exceeded the figure with half flaps on when making a circuit prior to coming in to land. When taking off with a heavy load, I always build up my speed to at least 165 m.p.h. before taking off any flap.

*Question 2*

What was the seating accommodation for passengers in Liberator AL.523?

*Answer.*

When I flew it on the previous trip to the fatal one, there were six seats in the fuselage behind the bomb bay bulkhead. The balance of the passengers would be put in the bomb bay on mattresses.

*Question 3.*

What method was there for securing passengers in Liberator AL.523?

*Answer.*

Safety belts on the six seats, none in the bomb bay.  
Signed Lynton Watson. F/Lt.  
5.8.43.

*1st Witness.*

Flight Lieutenant Prchal recalled.

*Question 1.*

Are you aware of the altimeter position error on Liberator II aircraft?

*Answer.*

Yes, I know about it but I never allow for it, because it is so small, except when doing blind landings.

*Question 2.*

What is the position error?

*Answer.*

I think it is about 20ft. That is the reading on Liberator AL.616 which is my own aircraft.

Signed Prchal, F/Lt.

Additional conclusions as a result of the re-opening of the Inquiry into the accident involving Liberator AL.523 at Gibraltar on the 4th July, 1943.

The Court, accompanied by Flight Lieutenant Buck, A.I.B. representative, Wing Commander Dudziński, Wing Commander Russell and Squadron Leader

Everest, Liberator Conversion Unit, Beaulieu, visited the R.A.F. Station, Lyneham for the purpose of exploring the possibilities of the flying controls becoming jammed by the raising of the nose wheel.

A Liberator Mk. II, which O.C. 511 Squadron stated was similar to Liberator AL.523, was jacked up, and the undercarriage system was retracted several times and the nose wheel mechanism carefully examined, both from inside and outside the aircraft, at every stage of its retraction.

At the conclusion of these tests the Court decided that such jamming of the flying controls by the nose wheel and/or nose wheel retracting mechanism was extremely unlikely and could not be considered as a possible cause of the accident.

The additional evidence of the 1st Witness, Flight Lieutenant Prchal, Squadron Leader Falk, Chief Test Pilot R.A.F. Farnborough and Flight Lieutenant Buck, A.I.B. Inspector, has confirmed the opinion of the Court that the elevator controls were jammed by some means other than the flying controls locking mechanism, but that there is no further evidence to show how this jamming occurred. Furthermore, this additional evidence shows that it is not a practical possibility for a Liberator aircraft to leave the ground with the flying controls locked in the normal position under the conditions obtaining at the time of the accident. The Court consider that Flight Lieutenant Prchal was in no way to blame for the accident.

The all-up weight of Liberator AL.523 at take off from Cairo on 3rd July, 1943 was 54,313 lbs and this load was distributed as shown in exhibit E. One additional passenger only Col. Gralowski was taken up at Gibraltar, as stated by the 10th Witness. He was seated in the bomb bay as stated by the 1st Witness.

The despatching organisation at R.A.F. Station, Lyneham, was examined by the Court and is as follows: -

On arrival, passengers are taken to the A.D.R.U. reception room where they are issued with a parachute and harness, flying clothing, two blankets and Mae

West and parachute bag. The Captain of the aircraft instructs them in abandonment and dinghy drill and they are then weighed with their kit. They are next briefed by the Intelligence, Customs, Security and Medical Officers. Finally they are taken to the aircraft and placed in their allotted positions by the duty officer of A.D.R.U.

This organisation is considered to be satisfactory and it is recommended that it should be carried out by all A.D.R. Units.

Attention is drawn to the fact that there is no method of securing passengers in the bomb bay of converted Liberator aircraft.

Group Captain P.G. Teedie, Deputy Chief Investigation (Accidents) was present during the taking of the evidence of Flight Lieutenant Prchal recalled, Squadron Leader Falk, Flight Lieutenant Buck, A.I.B. and Flight Lieutenant Watson at Headquarters, Coastal Command.

President V.G. ELTON. Group Captain  
Member A.W. Kay, Wing Commander.  
Member D.M. Wellings, Squadron Leader.

Exhibit E attached.

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