

December 1917 – Avoidable Accidents

With interest in World War I peaking during 2015, *Vector* thought readers might be intrigued by figures for avoidable accidents gleaned from history.

The following monthly summary of accidents was dredged from the December 1917 records of the Royal Flying Corps.

It appears here exactly as it was produced almost 98 years ago.

Resume of Accidents

Avoidable Accidents

There were 6 avoidable accidents:-

- (a) The pilot of a Shorthorn, with over 7 hours experience, seriously damaged the undercarriage on landing. He had failed to land at as fast a speed as possible, as recommended in the Aviation Pocket Handbook.
- (b) A B.E.2. stalled and crashed during an artillery exercise. The pilot had been struck on the head by the semaphore of his observer who was signalling to the gunners.
- (c) Another pilot in a B.E.2. failed to get airborne. By error of judgement he was attempting to fly at mid-day instead of during the recommended best lift periods i.e. just after dawn and just before sunset.

(d) A Longhorn pilot lost control and crashed in a bog near Chipping Sodbury. An error of skill on the part of the pilot in not being able to control a machine with a wide speed band of 10 m.p.h. between top speed and stalling speed.

(e) Whilst low flying in a Shorthorn the pilot crashed into the top deck of a horse drawn bus, near Stonehenge.

(f) A B.E.2. pilot was seen to be attempting a banked turn at a constant height before he crashed. A grave error by an experienced aviator.

Unavoidable Accidents

There were 29 unavoidable accidents:-

- (a) The top wing of a Camel fell off due to fatigue failure of the flying wires. A successful emergency landing was carried out.
- (b) Sixteen B.E.2s. and 9 Shorthorns had complete engine failures. A marked improvement over November's figures.
- (c) Pigeons destroyed a Camel and two Longhorns after mid-air strikes.

COST OF ACCIDENTS

Accidents during the last three months of 1917 cost £317.10.6 – money down the drain and sufficient to buy new gaiters and spurs for each and every pilot and observer in the Service.

From the records at the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon, North London. With thanks to (Ret) Captain Brian Dunn. ■

The de Havilland BE2 first flew in 1912. The two-seater became one of the longest serving aircraft of World War I. It was also one of the most multi-functional, used for artillery spotting, reconnaissance, bombing missions, anti-Zeppelin attacks, and transport. At least eight variants were created.



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