

British War Missions had been established in America long before their entry into the war on Friday 6 April 1917. Lt-Col L.W.B. Rees, V.C., M.C., who had been representing the Air Ministry on the Mission at the time, was attached to the Aviation Division of the U.S Signal Corps as Liaison Officer. It soon became apparent that American military aviation, such as it was, would be able to make a more rapid contribution to the war with assistance from her experienced Allies, and they requested from Britain an Aviation Mission to advise and assist in the latest training methods.

The British Aviation Mission was thus established, under the command of Brig-Gen Charles Frederick Lee and the first group of instructors arrived at Washington in November 1917. By this time the U.S Department of Military Aeronautics were under extreme pressure and requested from General Lee, practical help in the form of experienced RFC Officer and NCO instructors to be stationed at U.S based training aerodromes.

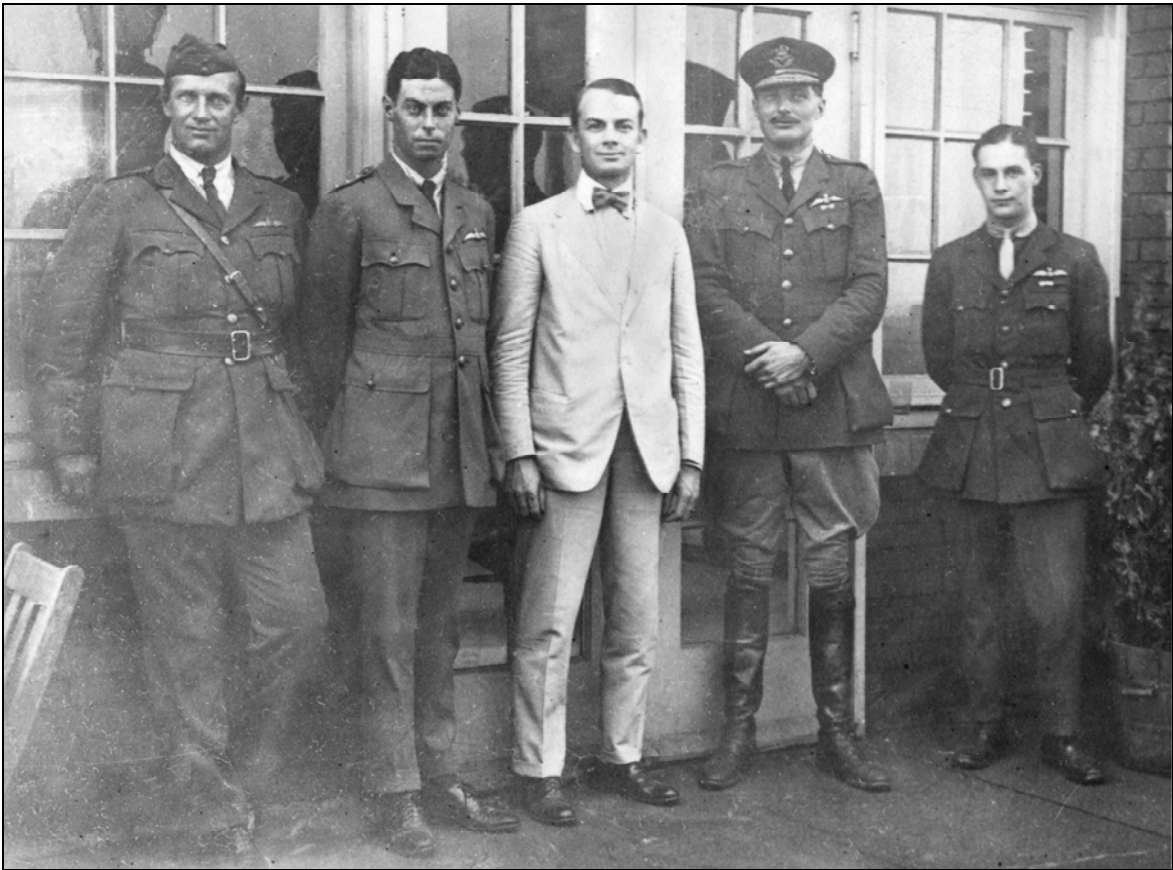
Volume 8 Number 4 of the *Cross and Cockade (GB)* Journal for 1977 had a photo on page 190 of Charles Lee, standing in front of an Avro 504J with a request from then *Fabric* editor, Des Furze for information on this officer. Well, better late than never Des.

Charles Frederick Lee was a Yorkshire man, born at Grove Hall, Knottingley, on 2 July 1887. Educated at Eton, he was commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant with the Kings Royal Rifle Corps on 4 February 1909. As Capt C.F. Lee, he was appointed adjutant of the 2nd Battalion KRRC on 17 May 1911, a position he held until he retired from the Rifle Corps in 1912.

An all round sportsman, a keen rider to hounds and a polo player, he joined the Somerset Yeomanry, but transferred to the RFC at the outbreak of war in August 1914, as he had in the meantime also become an aviator, qualifying for his Royal Aero Club certificate, No.431 in a Bristol biplane at Brooklands aerodrome, on 18 February 1913.

With the RFC in France, he served as adjutant to Lt-Col Hugh Trenchard, commanding a Wing at the time.

It is obvious that 29 year old Charles Lee, who was appointed Staff Officer 1st Class with promotion to temporary Lieutenant Colonel by July 1916, was a most capable staff officer. The Director General of Military Aviation, Sir John Salmond had no reservations about sending Lee to America in Command of the British Aviation Mission, where he did very valuable work in organizing liaison between the RFC and USAS for which he was promoted acting Brigadier-General.



*Four members of the British Aviation Mission to America with the Mayor of Indianapolis, Indiana in 1918. From left to right: Capt J.J. Hammond, an unidentified pilot, the Mayor, Brig-Gen C.F. Lee and Capt J. Fitz-morris.* the late Merle Olmsted



*Mrs Tefft and Hammond pose for a photo in the Bristol. It is not known if 'Dare Devil Joe' lived up to his reputation and actually took the ladies for joy rides as well as their influential husbands.* the late Merle Olmsted



*Avro 504J C4443 of the British Aviation Mission, was the star performer at an 'Air Circus' held at Riverside Park in August 1918, when flown by Hammond who performed 'hair raising stunts' according to the local press.* the late Merle Olmsted



*The Avro landing at Indianapolis, the Curtiss Jennies in foreground are part of the 821st Aero Squadron that operated an Aviation Repair Depot at the speedway aerodrome.* the late Merle Olmsted



*Another Curtiss Jenny, 4420, with a distinctive animal insignia painted on the fuselage. Can anyone identify this?* the late Merle Olmsted

Charles Lee was a first class pilot with aerobatic skills that impressed the U.S Air Service and public alike, but as an Eton educated Staff Officer he found some American business methods difficult to come to terms with, as this extract from his desk diary dated 27 March 1918 shows,-

*“The Dayton Wright Company are patriots and enthusiasts with plenty of money, plenty of drive and are ‘white men’. The Government Experimental Branch at McCook Field are exactly the reverse. They are ‘motor touts’ out for their own hands and what is worse, think other people are like themselves. Honestly it really puts the wind up me to go there.”*

Ironically, at McCook Field General Lee was criticized for taking up members of the U.S Senate and Congress as passengers in an Avro biplane while in Washington DC, and accused of being an agent for the Avro Company. As business men, they considered it unnecessary to give such publicity to one aeroplane, unless one had financial interests in it.

As head of the British Aviation Mission, he was very critical of the U.S training methods, where hours in the air were considered more important than specialized training. He was also concerned about the poor quality gasoline issued to U.S aviation schools and aware of possible sabotage by German sympathizers. On occasions when visiting by air, he had his mechanic, usually Cpl Webster, sleep over night with their machine as a precaution.

Before his return to England at the end of April 1918, he wrote the following in his diary. *“I think at last they are beginning to wake up to the fact that it is necessary to train people on modern machines.”* He considered the Curtiss JN4 inferior to the Avro 504 as a training machine.

Having survived the Great War unscathed, Charles Lee died of injuries sustained in a flying accident within a year of the Armistice. He had retired from the Royal Air Force in 1919, taking charge of the recently formed Transportation Civil Flying Section of the A.V. Roe Company.

It was attempting to land G-EAGM, a joy riding Avro 536 at Sands aerodrome, Weston-Super-Mare, on the evening of Monday 1 September the same year that the fatal accident occurred. The biplane stalled on making a turn at two hundred feet and crashed to the ground after the Bentley B.R.1 rotary engine had cut out. Lee, the pilot, was badly injured and died before medical assistance arrived. His two passengers, Roderick Smith from Gloucestershire and Pte Allen Andrews of the London Regiment, both escaped with minor injuries and shock.

Maj-Gen W.S. Brancker had taken over command of the Aviation Mission in America from Charles Lee in the spring of 1918. Among his team of instructors at this period were Capt W.J. Sheppard, a wireless expert, Capt J.A. Sully, from the Special Flying School, to introduce the Gosport training system, and flying instructors Capt J.F. Morris and Capt J.J. Hammond. Both Morris and Hammond were also destined to be killed in flying accidents, but unlike Brig-Gen Lee they were killed serving with the British Aviation Mission to America during the war.

Capt James Fitz-Morris, F. Morris, Fitzmorris, or even Fitzmaurice, depending on the orderly room clerk at the time, had been born in Falkirk, Stirlingshire, Scotland on 6 April 1897. Having been educated at Polmont School, he was employed as an apprentice motor mechanic when Britain went to war in August 1914. Like so many brave lads of his generation, being under age to enlist in the Royal Engineers, he told the recruiting officer he was 19 years old, not 17, and gave his year of birth as 1895.

Corporal Morris was posted ‘over there’ in June 1915 and served in France as a motorcycle despatch rider with the Indian Division, until promoted to 2nd Lieutenant with the Highland Light Infantry in November that year. He had previously applied for a transfer to the RFC and in December he was seconded to No.11 Squadron, based at Bertangles and equipped with Vickers F.B.5 ‘Gunbus’ machines, where he saw action as an observer.

Returning to Home Establishment the following Spring, James fulfilled an ambition when he qualified as a pilot on 12 July 1916 and joined No.1 Squadron at Bailleul, flying a mixed bag of Morane and Nieuport machines. He was very badly concussed and suffered a broken nose in a crash on 5 August. It was almost a year later before he was once more fit enough for action.



*One of the British mechanics with two local ladies, in front of one of the Bristol F2bs. Of interest in this sharp print of the Bristol Fighter, is the tree in front of the hanger!*

the late Merle Olmsted

*Three RFC enlisted men holding the Union Jack flag.*

the late Merle Olmsted



*The wives of local dignitaries are displaying the flag for this group of 'other ranks' attached to the British Aviation Mission at Indianapolis.* the late Merle Olmsted

James then received a posting to Auchel, reporting to No.25 Squadron, just fully re-equipped with the sturdy DH4 two-seat bomber on the first day of July 1917. Between 7 July and 15 August, he teamed up with a Canadian observer, Lt David L. Burgess. During that time they were credited with four enemy aircraft destroyed and three more out-of-control. The Albatros DV they shot down out-of-control on 7 July was the first enemy aircraft claim by a DH4 crew of 25 Squadron.

Both James and his observer, six years his senior, were awarded the Military Cross for this period, the details of James' award, promulgated in the *London Gazette* in January 1918, read as follows-

*"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on photographic and offensive patrols. On at least four occasions he had displayed great dash and courage in attacking hostile machines."*

Promotion followed and Capt James Fitz-Morris became a Flight Commander with No.23 Squadron base at Matigny, in March 1918. During an eventful month, in more ways than one, he accounted for another seven enemy aircraft, before he was shot up and slightly wounded on the 24th. He had another narrow escape on the 30th, when his propeller was shattered by ground fire, forcing him to land just behind the front line, where he set fire to B6879, before returning to his squadron.

No doubt therefore, James' attachment to the British Aviation Mission was very welcome, knowing he had already used more than his fair share of luck over the enemy lines.

On 22 June 1918, a bar to his MC was announced in the *London Gazette* with the following citation:

*"For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. During operations he carried out many reconnaissance's at a low altitude and obtained valuable information. On one occasion while on a bombing patrol, he saw an enemy machine attacking our troops with machine gun fire from 500 feet and at once attacked it and drove it to the ground. He then attacked seven enemy scouts, one of which he drove down in flames. He has also destroyed five other enemy machines and driven down two others out of control. He has always set a magnificent example of dash and determination."*

This experienced and gallant officer was killed in a crash while giving an exhibition flight at Cincinnati after taking off from Indianapolis on Wednesday 14 August 1918, in Sopwith Camel F1341. The Court of Inquiry found no evidence that anything was at fault with the airframe or engine. How much flying experience had the pilot with the rotary-engined scout? Very little I suspect, and the Sopwith Camel was not by nature a stable machine. Capt James Fitz-Morris had become another casualty of the vices that the Camel was notorious for.

At the insistence of his Father, the body of the twenty one year old warrior was returned home to his native Stirlingshire and laid to rest in the Churchyard at Polmont.

On one occasion Capt Fitz-Morris accompanied the head of the British Aviation Mission, Gen Lee, on a night flight from Dayton to Indianapolis. This nocturnal flight appears to have attracted as much newspaper coverage as his fatal crash. It was however the crash involving 'Dare Devil Joe' Hammond and two Americans the following month that really made the headlines.



*Capt James Fitz-Morris*

Born on 19 July 1886 in Feilding, New Zealand, Joseph Joel Hammond was the youngest son of Joseph and Mary Hammond. A free spirit, he was not destined to become a farmer as were his father and elder brother Cornelius, although he inherited their skill in horsemanship.



He acquired a reputation as a fearless teenager, rejoicing in the nickname of "Dare Devil Joe" in the three years he spent at St. Patrick's College, Silverstream.

On returning to the family farm at Killymoon his adventurous spirit spent a restless period trying to settle down, so his family and friends were not surprised when in 1906, at twenty years of age, Joe, lured by the excitement of prospecting for gold in the Klondyke, packed his bag and made his farewells and set off for Canada. However, he finished up trapping for a living in Alaska, before working his way south via ranches to North America.

In Arizona, by accident or design, Joe met up with William Frederick Cody and with his talent for horse riding became part of the famous touring 'Buffalo Bill Wild West Show'. It was during a tour of Europe with the Wild West Show that Joe had his first sight and smell of flying machines and it is recorded that in September 1909 with only ten days of instruction at Rheims he became an aviator.

During a visit to England the same year, Joe met and courted Ethelwyn Wilkinson, the daughter of a Sussex builder. The couple were married at Seaford on 19 November 1909.

Still in England, a year later Joe Hammond became the first qualified New Zealand born aviator, when he was awarded RAeC No.32 after successfully completing his course at Larkhill Flying School in a Bristol Boxkite, on 22 November 1910. Joe however was not destined to be the first man to fly in New Zealand, as this distinction belongs to Leo Walsh, who flew a Howard Wright biplane at Papakura on 10 February 1911.

Joe Hammond then became an employee of the expanding British and Colonial Aeroplane Co Ltd, first as a flying instructor, where he quickly gained a reputation, leading to promotion as test pilot and chief flight demonstrator for the Company. It was in the latter capacity that the Company sent Joe Hammond, accompanied by Leslie F. Macdonald, with two 'Boxkites' to Perth on a promotional tour of Australia.

On his very first flight down under, Hammond made a headline grabbing flight across Perth harbour at an altitude of 2000 feet and on 20 February 1911, he made the first recorded cross-country flight; a distance of 42 miles in 35 minutes. Three days later Joe carried the first airborne passenger, his wife Ethelwyn, on a flight in Australia.

In May 1911 after a very successful tour, Joe returned to New Zealand for a holiday, introducing his young wife to family and friends. The holiday almost ended in tragedy when Joe was admitted to hospital, first with appendicitis, followed by a bout of pneumonia and then blood poisoning in the leg. It was six months before he was well enough to travel back to England.

Joe reorganized the flying instruction at Eastbourne aerodrome. With the aid of a Bristol 'Boxkite' he further embellished his reputation by putting the Eastbourne Aeroplane Club on the map during 1913, with twelve successful pupils being awarded their Royal Aero Club Certificates.

Returning to New Zealand again early in 1914, where the Imperial Air Fleet Committee had presented the New Zealand Government with a Bleriot XI monoplane, previously owned by Gustav Hamel, Hammond, who had been entrusted to fly the Bleriot, was accompanied by J.W.H Scotland with a 45hp Caudron. Their intention was to form the New Zealand Aviation Co Ltd. It appears to have been an ill-fated venture, as Scotland wrote off his Caudron on his second flight and Hammond was dismissed by his employers after giving a beautiful blonde girl from the local vaudeville theatre a joyride in the Bleriot before a Government official, who had harboured the ambition to be the first aeroplane passenger in New Zealand.

Joe Hammond has been credited as flying with the RFC in France during the early days of the war, but this has still to be confirmed. Existing records indicate that he was posted from 1 Reserve Aeroplane Squadron to France with the Expeditionary Force on 26 February 1915. Less than two months later, on 21 April, he returned to 1 RAS. He also spent another two weeks in France before a posting to 4 RAS in May 1915, although what action he saw during these periods and after is open to speculation.

Hammond had been involved in the test flying and ferrying machines to France, when he was ordered to America with the British Aviation Mission. There is a note in the desk diary of Brig-Gen Lee, dated Thursday 18 April 1918, in which he said that Hammond had been disgruntled when informed he would be expected to give exhibition flights, and retorted he had left behind a better job in England!

Hammond had a narrow escape the following month, when he was invited to fly and evaluate a U.S designed aircraft, the single seat Standard M-Defence (prototype for the Standard E-1). The machine had previously been test flown at Mineola, New York on 21 May by a member of the French Military Mission, Lt. C.F Soulier, who suggested several minor modifications be made to the aircraft.

When the modifications had been carried out, Hammond attempted to fly the machine from Mineola Field to Washington D.C. He apparently took off without checking the oil and the rotary engine seized, resulting in a very spectacular crash in New Jersey. Hammond walked away from the wreck, reputedly '*rolled up into a little ball*' with minor injuries. An investigation later found that Hammond's flight had not been officially authorized and should not have been made, so perhaps General Lee's suspicion of possible sabotage attempts were not unfounded.

All the photographs accompanying this article are by the courtesy of the late Merle Olmsted and were taken at the home of the famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which had closed for the duration of the war. The aerodrome there however, established in 1910, was occupied by the 821<sup>st</sup> Aero Squadron, USAS, when a detachment from the British Aviation Mission including Capt Hammond and Capt J.F. Morris arrived.

Hammond's death made the headlines in the U.S.A., as not only had he acquired a 'Wild Colonial Boy' image compared with the more staid British officers of the Mission but, tragically, an American civilian passenger had died and a U.S serviceman was badly injured in the accident.

As can be seen by the photographs the officers and men of the British Aviation Mission were very well received by the American public and every effort was made by the men to repay their hospitality. This was the reason why Hammond had given many 'joy rides' to local dignitaries and accepted an invitation to support a Liberty War Bond Drive at Greenfield, twenty miles east of Indianapolis, on Sunday 22 September 1918.

The day had gone well initially. Hammond had been met on landing the Bristol Fighter at Greenfield by a local man, Lt Roy Pickett, who was serving with the USAS but was then home on leave. Pickett had volunteered to escort Hammond during his visit. It was to have been just another flying display for Hammond, who in a press interview during the day claimed to have already flown more than 6,000 hours.

The War Bond Drive had been well attended and Hammond, having shown his Allies what the F2b was capable of in the hands of a Bristol test pilot, invited Lt Pickett and John Kinder, a local business man, to accompany him back to the aerodrome at Indianapolis in return for the hospitality he had received. Fate, however, caught up with 'Dare Devil Joe' and his unfortunate passengers that afternoon.

Capt E. Laughlin, USAS, in charge of the Indianapolis airfield, told an *Indianapolis Star* reporter, "*When about half a mile to the east of the field and flying about 600 feet, the machine seemed to nose into a tail spin. Apparently Capt Hammond's efforts to save the machine were futile as it crashed into a tree which crushed the left wing and brought it down on its nose.*"

Another eye witness, listed as Sgt Mercer, "*chief of the British mechanics at the Speedway*", when describing the accident, said Capt Hammond had tried to land in the tree to break the fall, when he saw the plane could not be righted before hitting the ground. Both Capt Hammond and his civilian passenger John Lawrence Kinder were killed. The second passenger, Lt Roy Pickett, escaped with a broken right leg and a lacerated jaw and shock.

There are two omissions on the RAF Casualty Card for the accident, the civilian, John Kinder is not mentioned, and neither is the serial number of the Bristol F2b in which they crashed.



Headlines in *The Indianapolis Star* for Monday 23 September 1918 read:

**'BRITISH ROYAL BIRDMAN FALLS NEAR SPEEDWAY'**

A Court of Inquiry found that, "*The machine got into a right hand spin and struck a tree as a result of an error of judgment on the part of the pilot Capt. J.J. Hammond.*"

'Dare Devil Joe's' funeral attracted as big a crowd as had his flying displays. The Bishop of Indianapolis paid the following tribute to the airman when he told the congregation, "*We bury him not as a stranger, but as one of our own and by taking part in these services the people of Indianapolis are forging one more link in the chain that is binding closer together the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race.*"

Laid to rest with full military honours at Crown Hill Cemetery, Indianapolis, it is said that a monument in memory of Capt Joseph Joel Hammond of the British Aviation Mission was erected at Chesapeake Bay, Annapolis, Maryland. This is just one of the mysteries surrounding 'Dare Devil Joe'. Perhaps one of our American cousins can explain the reason why his monument was erected over 500 miles from the accident site at Indianapolis?

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*The Avro 504 taxiing at Indianapolis aerodrome.* the late Merle Olmsted